



MOST STRIKES FOR 30 YEARS

Strike committees—how we can organise from below >>Pages 10&11

Post battle at crucial stage as union leaders wobble >>Pages 4&5

NHS strikes—nurse speaks out on need to step up the action >>Page 6

Socialist Worker

£1 | No 2842 | 15 - 21 February 2023 | socialistworker.co.uk

AFTER RACISTS LAUNCH ASSAULT IN LIVERPOOL...



Tories' hate speech...



leads to racist violence



...and a boost for Nazis

STOP THE ATTACKS ON REFUGEES

WE CAN BEAT BACK THE RACIST THREAT >>PAGES 3,5 and 17

STRIKES

University workers are on front line of the pay fight

AROUND 70,000 university workers were set to strike on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of this week.

At Liverpool, Bristol, Cambridge, Liverpool and Imperial College in west London workers are beginning to organise strike committees. This kind of organising is vital for the future of the dispute.

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FRANCE



Mass pension strikes show the power to win

AROUND 2.5 million people across France marched last Saturday against the government's attempt to raise the pension age.

Rank and file structures have been crucial to the pressure to escalate the strikes and mass protests.

Last week workers closed the port city of Le Havre.

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ROYAL MAIL

Stepping up and winning the fight matters to all

THE RESULTS of a new strike ballot by Royal Mail workers were set to be announced on Thursday of this week.

The vote comes as workers' fight over pay and the future of their jobs is in a critical state. Will union leaders call action—or hold off for talks?

>>Pages 4&5



THE THINGS THEY SAY

‘Nobody has ever committed a crime after being executed. You know that, don’t you? There’s a 100 percent success rate’

Lee Anderson, the deputy leader of the Tory party, likes the idea of killing people

‘We’ve got generation after generation who cannot cook properly. They can’t cook a meal from scratch. They cannot budget’

Anderson isn’t that fond of the constituents he doesn’t want to kill either

‘Aliens? I will let the intel community and the counter-intelligence services figure that one out. I haven’t ruled out anything’

US general Glen VanHerck isn’t sure whether the Chinese or aliens are in the sky and need to be shot down



Did the US navy carry out a terror attack on a pipeline?

THE WRECKING last year of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline between Russia and Germany was a deliberate terror attack carried out by the US Navy, says famed journalist Seymour Hersh.

Hersh exposed the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War, helped to expose the Watergate affair and contributed to revealing prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib.

He says that under the cover of a Nato military training exercise known as Baltops 22 in June 2022, the US Navy placed explosives on the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines, which were then remotely detonated in September.

The pipeline attack caused damage valued at £15 billion and led to the single largest



US NAVY picture of a diver taking part in a ‘research’ operation during the Baltops 22 war game

spill of methane gas ever. It spewed out the equivalent of 14.5 million tons of CO2, with a major climate impact. It also reinforced the increase in energy prices globally.

Hersh alleges that preparations for the bombing began in December 2021, several months before the

Russian invasion of Ukraine. Hersh said, “From its earliest days, Nord Stream was seen by Washington and its anti-Russian Nato partners as a threat to Western dominance.”

On 7 February, president Joe Biden said, “If Russia invades Ukraine, there will be no longer a Nord Stream 2.

We will bring an end to it.” Hersh writes that Biden’s statements upset US military planners.

“It was like putting an atomic bomb on the ground in Tokyo and telling the Japanese that we are going to detonate it,” Hersh’s source said.

“The plan was for the options to be executed post invasion and not advertised publicly. Biden simply didn’t get it or ignored it.”

The White House said last week that Hersh’s claims are “utterly false and complete fiction”.

A month ago, US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said, “I think the administration is very gratified to know that Nord Stream 2 is now, as you like to say, a hunk of metal at the bottom of the sea.”

A MARINE charged with taking part in the attempt on 6 January 2021 to take over the US Capitol was transferred into a highly sensitive intelligence assignment at the headquarters of the National Security Agency. The Marine confessed to his role during a security clearance interview, but was not charged until last month. Sgt Joshua Abate, a communication analyst, was assigned to the Marine Cryptologic Support Battalion. The transfer into the liaison unit after the Capitol riot placed Abate inside one of the most secretive facilities in the US.

THE NATIONAL Crime Agency reported last week that “three people including a husband and wife have been arrested in an investigation linked to international PPE fraud. The male is suspected of setting up a UK company solely for running a fraudulent scheme that would allow him to profit from PPE shortages during the height of the coronavirus pandemic. His wife is suspected of helping to launder the proceeds.” Any Tory link we wonder?

Ofgem lets energy thieves off again

ENERGY watchdog Ofgem is dragging its feet over a £2.5 billion rip-off by power giants which are slapping extra charges on customers if they do not pay by direct debit.

The regulator has been under pressure to stop firms charging customers extra if they choose to pay their bill in cash, by cheque, or over the phone using a bank card.

But it says it will not clamp down on the practice for at least two years, meaning customers—many elderly or less well-off—will continue to pay through the nose.

Companies hoard billions of pounds of customers’ cash even when they have large credit balances. Those who



choose another payment route pay a heavy penalty.

The scale of the additional charges can be as much as £254 a year—almost £5 a week. The surcharge was previously capped at £79 a year.

But since 2021, the maximum that suppliers can charge customers has quietly been hiked to more than three times that figure.

Boris Johnson still making a fortune

BORIS Johnson has received £2.5 million as an advance for speeches.

That means he has received earnings, hospitality and donations worth more than £5 million over the last six months since leaving office.

The former prime minister has undertaken a lucrative tour of the global speaking circuit since exiting No 10, addressing investors in the technology behind cryptocurrency, insurers and investment bankers.

He has also grabbed more than £500,000 as an advance for a memoir.

Johnson has stayed on in what is supposed to be his main job as MP for Uxbridge and South Ruislip.

He has also accepted a donation of more than £1 million from Christopher Harborne, an investor in crypto based in Thailand who previously donated £6 million to the Brexit Party.

Johnson has also been taking £13,500 a month in donated accommodation from the Conservative financial backer Lord Bamford and his wife.

This includes a London townhouse and use of a property in the Cotswolds.

Cop on trial for child rape

A POLICE officer in Scotland raped a girl when she was about six years old, a court heard last week.

The child, who cannot be named for legal reasons, gave evidence to the high court in Edinburgh, alleging that Martyn Coulter raped her in 2014. She said she did not tell anybody at the time because Coulter threatened her, telling her he would “beat her black and blue” if she told anyone.

Coulter, who is suspended from Police Scotland, is accused of raping a woman and assaulting her three times between June 2013 and November 2014, and is also accused of being threatening towards her.

He is further charged with raping, sexually assaulting and threatening a girl under 13. Coulter denies all charges against him.

Cop charged with rape

A SERVING Metropolitan Police officer has been charged with the rape of a woman 14 years ago.

PC Jordan Pascal is accused of the incident in Southend in 2009. Essex Police said he worked for the force at the time but joined the Met in 2012.

Cops called officer ‘The Rapist’

AN OFFICER investigating sex offences in a Met Police unit was nicknamed “The Rapist”, a documentary has claimed.

And after a damning report revealed vile WhatsApp messages being shared among colleagues, a senior officer allegedly told staff to delete anything incriminating.

Women & The Police also includes claims that one officer joked killer PC Wayne Couzens would not have had the money for the fuel to burn the body of Sarah Everard.

One former Met officer “Rachel”—not her real name—claimed male colleague “The Rapist” worked for the Serious Sexual Offences Unit.

Meanwhile, serving West Mercia officer “Faye” claimed a senior officer sexually assaulted her at a party and was later promoted, despite her making a formal complaint.

She said he kissed her neck and texted saying, “Pretty girl do you want to come back with me to the hotel.”

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Liverpool anti-refugee riot is a terrible warning to all

by ISABEL RINGROSE

THERE WAS a warning of what the far right is capable of last Friday as several hundred fascists and racists rioted outside a refugee hotel in Knowsley, Liverpool.

Around 450 thugs gathered around the Suites hotel shouting racist abuse. Some were armed with petrol bombs and set a police van on fire.

Given the opportunity, the protesters would have gladly physically attacked the refugees inside the hotel, and perhaps killed people. This shows how dangerous the far right can be.

Some 100 activists rallied by Stand Up To Racism, Care4Calais and other anti-racist groups called a counter-protest. Their presence was very important. But this wasn't enough to counter the fascists' numbers.

After breaking through police lines, sections of the racists blocked counter-protesters' exits. Fascists launched fireworks at the hotel and counter-protesters.

While organised fascist groups showed support for the riot online, Patriotic Alternative denied any involvement.

That doesn't make the events any less dangerous. It shows the threat "concerned locals" who claim not to be far right carry when they organise against refugees.

The violence in Liverpool follows several other protests outside refugee hotels—and more are planned. The far right is presently a small minority, but it can grow if anti-racists don't mobilise.

The far right is benefiting from the Tories' relentless assaults on refugees.

Stand Up To Racism said the attack was "the bitter fruits of Rishi Sunak and Suella Braverman's scapegoating of refugees which gives space to the racists and the far right." Support from some Tory MPs for those who

THE ATTACK in Knowsley terrified refugees

attack refugee accommodation legitimises the racist hatred.

Counter-protester Tristan told Socialist Worker, "We could see people in the windows watching and they saw the scenes unfold. The hotel was blocked off to the fascists because of where we stood."

Solidarity

"But seeing the violence the fascists are capable of makes it even more important for us to come together and show solidarity with people who are no doubt terrified."

The racist protest was called on Instagram and Twitter after groups

circulated videos of men, who they say live in the hotels, talking to young girls. Those who attended knew it was to show racist hostility to refugees. They chanted, "Get them", "Rats" and held signs saying, "This is our city".

Bill Kimm is the RMT union Liverpool Five branch secretary.

Speaking from the counter-protest, he told Socialist Worker, "These people are using refugees as scapegoats."

"If you've got a family and they're in a war-torn country, wouldn't you want to get out of that place and take your children and elderly parents with you into a safe environment?"

The people here tonight use 'child safety' to hide and deflect what type of people they really are.

"The Tories want working people fighting each other. While we're doing that, we're taking our eyes off what they're doing, like bringing in anti-trade union laws. We've got more in common with each other as working class people than with the Tories."

● For more on combating the anti-refugee protests, turn to page 17

Rotherham anti-racist counter-protest, Sat 18 Feb, 1pm, Holiday Inn, Rotherham, S63 7EQ. **Merseyside** Anti Racists Unite, Refugees Welcome Here rally, Sat 18 Feb, 12 noon, St George's Hall, Liverpool L1 1JJ

Racist school attack sees protests and arrests

A BLACK pupil was racially attacked at a school in Surrey last week. Now protesters are calling for the headteacher to be sacked.

Videos have been shared online of a group of girls punching and kicking a 15-year-old girl outside Thomas Knyvett College in Ashford last Monday. Nine braids were pulled out of her head.

Police arrested a 39-year-old woman, a 16-year-old girl and two 11-year-old girls on suspicion of attempted racially-aggravated grievous bodily harm.

The woman and a 43-year-old man have also been arrested on suspicion of assisting an offence.

Bystanders and school staff looked on as the girl was set upon. Around 150 anti-racists joined a protest at the school last week.

Protesters oppose the attack

Headteacher Richard Beeson was "unavailable" and did not attend.

The victim said, "Nobody helped me, they were laughing at me. One of the teachers laughed at me with my braids on the floor."

Previously at the school, an Asian pupil's hijab was ripped off by pupils, and the girl who was attacked had reported being called the N-word to teachers.

There are claims that the group who attacked the girl were Travellers.

A statement from The Traveller Movement said, "We are extremely concerned and saddened by distressing footage and reports of a violent attack outside a school in Ashford."

"This is an extremely traumatic experience for the victim, her family, and the wider community and we would like to express our solidarity and support."

All forms of racism must be confronted and tackled as soon as they appear to stop divisions among ordinary people.

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Labour fails to tackle racists

THE LABOUR Party is no shield against the racist threat. Its leaders have let the Tories push on with their assaults, and even called for quicker refugee decisions to keep refugees out.

Knowsley's Labour MP George Howarth has said the racist protesters "do not represent this community" who otherwise welcome refugees. But Labour would never support welcoming all refugees.

And Howarth ignores that there certainly are some racists in Liverpool—and always have been.

Anti-racists must mobilise against all anti-refugee protests—whether they

are called by hard-core fascist groups or racists who paint themselves as "concerned locals".

And anti-racism and support for refugees must be at the core of the strike movement.

Strikes that focus solely on pay and conditions aren't enough. Fighting racism has to be at the centre of every working class battle.

Labour's Keir Starmer



Stepping up Royal Mail fight should matter to everyone

by NICK CLARK

WHAT HAPPENS in the Royal Mail fight for pay and jobs is important for workers beyond the post. If Royal Mail workers win, it will show strikes can beat even the most ruthless bosses.

If they lose, the sense could take hold across the union movement that a real victory—securing a proper, above inflation pay rise, holding on to core working conditions—isn't possible.

And of course, it matters most to Royal Mail's 160,000 workers. Their jobs stand to be changed for the worse almost beyond recognition. That's if they get to keep their jobs at all.

Yet—with the results of a new strike ballot set to be announced on Thursday of this week—the dispute is in a critical state.

Royal Mail CEO Simon Thompson and the rest of the board haven't backed down. In some ways, they've furthered their assault with threats of job cuts since the dispute began.

Despite this, CWU general secretary Dave Ward insists that a deal to end the dispute could be close.

Position

At several points during the dispute Ward suggested that the mood in talks has changed or that they're moving towards the union's position.

Thompson always responds by trashing his promises, and by saying publicly that he hasn't dropped his plans at all.

Royal Mail workers have supported every strike solidly.

They've caused big problems for Royal Mail at points—with major backlogs across the entire network in December. They've shown how they could win.

But, lasting 24 or 48 hours at a time, Thompson and his corporate henchmen—backed by the government—have been able to ride the strikes out.

Thompson then uses the following periods of talks to delay more action and clear the backlogs.

BACK STORY

Workers in the Royal Mail have struck for a few days at a time for more than six months

● Workers began voting in a new strike ballot last month which ended on Thursday this week

! Union leaders called off a strike due to a legal challenge. This sort of retreat encourages bosses to use the anti-union laws more in the future

Now Ward has argued that a strong ballot result will be enough to get a good deal. But with Thompson steaming ahead—determined to smash up Royal Mail and the CWU with it—there's very little reason to believe that.

Adam, who works at Stanstead Airport in Essex, is prepared for harder action—and he doesn't want union leaders to pin their hopes on getting a deal after the ballot.

"They've bet the whole house on getting this deal," he told Socialist Worker.

"But how can we say the talks are going well when around the country managers are bullying members, sacking members and imposing revisions?"

He added, "The strikes got to a point last year when the network was completely jammed. But then they let Royal Mail catch up during negotiations."

"There comes a point where you have to say, right let's have a fight now."

Adam says if the union calls action he knows his workmates will "go again."

So does collections worker in Coventry, Surjit. But he thinks strikes of just one or two days won't be enough. "They just absorb it—they clear the mail the next day," he said. "I think we're still standing firm."

"But now sometimes I think we need to up the ante."



STRIKING POSTAL workers rallied in December last year

PICTURES: GUY SMALLMAN

Bully bosses are trying to force devastating changes in conditions

SIMON THOMPSON'S plans are about destroying workers' jobs and livelihoods for the sake of profit. He wants a "flexible" workforce that works later, longer and cheaper.

Some of the most far reaching attacks include introducing owner-drivers into Royal Mail deliveries.

These are workers who own their own vans and work on bogus self-employment contracts without the same sick pay or holiday entitlement as the core Royal Mail workforce.

This has already begun—as have longer hours and

lower hourly pay for new staters directly employed by Royal Mail.

Bosses also want to introduce "flexi hours". This involves making workers stay beyond their contracted hours if they can't complete their deliveries within them.

Larger parcel deliveries are being moved to hundreds of specialised "parcel hubs"—already operating—where Sunday working and later hours are the norm.

Replicate

It's an attempt to replicate the harsh terms and conditions that are common at "gig-economy" parcel couriers like Evri. And it will cut work—and therefore jobs—from delivery offices.

Thompson wants to slash at least 10,000 jobs to see his plans through.

Now, managers have already begun forcing through "revisions" to delivery and collections duties—merging and extending routes.

They've ditched the usual negotiations with CWU reps—

and in many cases begun bullying and pressuring workers to take on the extra work.

Adam says that in delivery offices, "There are people with anxiety, being bullied, resigning."

And a collections worker at Bristol Mail centre told Socialist Worker, "It's the thought of this that's costing people sleep."

"I woke up in the middle of the night worrying about it and wondering why am I thinking about this now?"

None of this is about creating a better service—it's about maximising profits. It's something that Royal Mail bosses have wanted for years.

But they can't do it without destroying workers' jobs. That's why there can't be a deal or compromise. Concessions would mean giving up jobs, pay and rights in order to boost bosses' profits—and opening the door to more attacks in the future.

After the ballot announcement this week there has to be a shift in the union's strategy. Only an all-out strike can deliver sufficient pressure on the bosses.



Hated Royal Mail boss Simon Thompson

Break the law to win

WAGING AN effective fight at Royal Mail also means being prepared to confront the law. Twice in this fight, bosses have used the threat of legal action to push union leaders to call off strikes.

Most recently, union leaders decided to call off a 24-hour strike even though they thought they could beat a bosses' legal challenge in the courts.

In fear of the law, union leaders have also told workers to stick to picket lines of six "official" pickets and not to stop agency scabs going in.

Meanwhile, Royal Mail has suspended up to 200 CWU reps and members, supposedly for strike-related activity. One of them—Dai Thomas—was sacked last week after 39 years in the job.

Until very recently Royal Mail workers had a tradition of defending workmates and standing up to bullying managers with unofficial walkouts. They were quick and effective—and often won the backing of union leaders.

One of the best examples happened in Merseyside in 2019. CWU members in a delivery office in Bootle walked out after a manager directed racist comments at a Muslim worker.

The strike spread to the Warrington mail centre after drivers were suspended for rightly refusing to cross the picket line. The workers at Warrington went back after the drivers were reinstated.

Injunction

But those at Bootle stayed out until they were told to go back in after Royal Mail got a high court injunction against them.

Bosses then targeted 21 one of them with disciplinary action—sacking two of them.

Workers won some concessions by threatening an official strike. But since then, union leaders have been careful to discourage unofficial action.

They say if the law was used against them, it could threaten the whole dispute. But if the threat of the law is

pushing union leaders to limit action, then it already has.

One collections worker at Bristol Mail Centre told Socialist Worker that, when bosses tried to push through route changes, workers sat down in the canteen and refused to do them.

But, he said, "The rep baulked at it, and said the national dispute was more important."

"That could have been quite good—it could have been a moment."

He added, "Everyone involved in the union as an activist is twitchy about taking action that might be unofficial. I understand that because people are worried about their livelihoods."

"But if you don't go on strike and support the action you won't have your job, you won't have your conditions."

"There's an adherence to these anti-union laws, and we've been beaten by them. At some point someone has to break the law to get rid of the law."



Workers like these in central London have stood firm

What demands can win?

SIMON Thompson is ruthless and determined to destroy Royal Mail and people's jobs. Workers have to be equally determined and ruthless to stop him. They should demand—

● No pay deal below inflation—and pay not to be linked to worsening terms and conditions

● No to a "no-strike" agreement
● No compulsory redundancies
● No owner-drivers, self-employed workers or increased use of agencies
● No one forced to accept later hours, seasonal hours or Sunday working
● The same pay and conditions for new starters

● No use of technology to monitor or intensify work
● No changes to the attendance management procedure
● No attack on ill-health retirement provisions
● All workers sacked or suspended during the dispute be reinstated

Socialist Worker WHAT WE THINK

BUILD STRIKES AND FIGHT RACISM AT THE SAME TIME

WORKERS IN Britain are involved in the most strikes for more than 30 years. But the Liverpool anti-refugee attack last week showed the dangers of the growth of toxic racism.

Social turmoil and rising workers' resistance don't automatically sideline the far right and racism. They can grow at the same time.

Official figures released on Tuesday showed that between June and December 2022 there were 2,471,000 strike days—with 843,000 in December alone.

That's the highest number of strike days since 1989, and it's a cause for celebration and determination to do more.

One reason for the surge is clear. The figures show that real terms pay, after inflation is taken into account, fell by 3.6 percent in the three months to December.

And these statistics use the bosses' preferred CPI inflation rate. Using the more accurate RPI measure, the fall is more than 6 percent. Meanwhile, the Tory Party remains deeply unpopular and has no solutions except to

ramp up repression and to try and demonise strikers.

They turn to racism, and scapegoating of groups such as refugees, to deflect attention from their own crimes and in an effort to split workers.

This gives a platform to the hard right and fascists who take matters into their own hands, as seen in the attack at the hotel housing refugees in Liverpool. Tories Suella Braverman and Rishi Sunak provide the rhetoric and state clampdowns, other forces act on the streets.

A central part of the solution is the class unity that comes from strikes. They show that workers have an interest in coming together

**“
Now we urgently
need socialist
politics, not just
narrow trade
union politics**

against the bosses and the Tories. But it has never been the case that the act of striking automatically does away with the divisions that capitalist society and the government push so strongly.

At the same time as building strikes, activists have to argue against racism, transphobia and everything that separates us off from one another.

The defence of oppressed people has to go hand in hand with increasing workers' struggle.

We should aim for workers to be able to act directly over wages and conditions, but also over racism. It would have been powerful if workers in Knowsley and Liverpool had stopped work, even for 15 minutes, as a sign of rejection of the anti-refugee attacks.

We need socialist politics over narrow trade union politics.

Fighting to escalate the strikes and to build rank and file resistance has to go alongside active opposition to assaults on refugees.

Big strikes on 15 March must include anti-racist politics and workers should join the anti-racist demonstrations in London, Cardiff, and Glasgow on 18 March.

LABOUR OFFERS TO END STRIKES

STRIKES KEEP getting called off in Wales—and it's not because they're winning.

The teachers' strikes are the latest casualty. The NEU union postponed a planned day of action after a pay offer from the Welsh Labour government (see page 19).

That comes little more than a week after NHS unions the RCN and GMB suspended nurses' and ambulance strikes in the Welsh health service.

Both of the offers are very similar—and neither of them are

any good. They're just a meagre 3 percent extra this year, only half of which stays on in workers' pay packets.

But the Labour Party is very proud of this—and uses it as a stick to beat the Tory government in Westminster.

What a difference a Labour government makes, it says. While workers in England are striking under a Tory government, Labour in Wales is keeping things calm.

The union leaders of the trade unions are only too happy to play their part. They flaunt

their willingness to stop fighting because of a government that lets them sit around and talk.

That message doesn't promise much to workers. But it does promise something to the bosses who wish the strikes would go away.

It tells them that Labour, with its unique connection to the union leaders, might be a better choice for them.

For all this, we still can't rely on Labour to support our strikes. But we can count on it to scupper them.

Breakfast in

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Our website brings together stories of struggles the mainstream won't report. It helps you find socialist meetings, protests and strikes—and the Marxist ideas and activism to change the world

ANALYSIS

ISABEL RINGROSE



Prevent review is an attack on Muslims

THE TORIES' review into the racist Prevent strategy calls for a state crackdown on Muslims. The review, led by Islamophobe William Shawcross, claims the scheme "is not doing enough to counter non-violent Islamist extremism."

Home secretary Suella Braverman said that the strategy needs "major reform" because of "an institutional hesitancy to tackle Islamism". The state says Prevent is a counter-terrorism strategy used in public bodies to identify people who may turn to extremism. In reality it's a state tool to survey people it sees as a threat.

Human rights organisation Cage said, "The Review avoids any analysis of lessons learned, but instead focuses on the artificial case for more surveillance and policing. It is no surprise, therefore, that critics are labelled as 'extreme' in order to blacklist them to deflect attention from valid criticism."

Anas Mustapha is head of public advocacy at Cage. He told Socialist Worker, "The review's architects are the most rabid right wing Islamophobic elements in the British political sphere—Shawcross represents that."

The Home Office handpicked Shawcross in January 2021 to carry out the review. As former chairman of the Charity Commission, he said that Europe's relationship with Islam was "one of the greatest, most terrifying problems of our future."

"I think all European countries have vastly, very quickly growing Islamic populations," he went on. He had also defended the use of torture techniques, including waterboarding, as well as the US's detention centre at Guantanamo Bay.

Shawcross finds in the review that there is a "culture of timidity" when it comes to tackling Muslims. In fact Prevent has repeatedly rushed to make vicious judgments about Muslims who are against British imperialism.

Now the policing of thought crime will be intensified. And there will be more examples like the Prevent investigation of the eight-year-old taken to a pro-Palestinian rally by his parents.

Anas added, "The Home Office has been run for the past five years by some of the more hardened elements of the Tory party with uncompromised views about Muslims. They climb to heights of power by targeting and stigmatising Muslims."

Anti-woke

"Donald Trump in the US and Boris Johnson here have done this. Islamophobia is not a hindrance to their political career—rather, it amplifies it and shows they're not politically correct and anti-woke."

The review's 34 recommendations have all been accepted by Braverman, who said she would implement them by next year.

"The review is unflinching. Prevent needs major reform," she said. "Prevent has shown cultural timidity and an institutional hesitancy to tackle Islamism for fear of the charge of Islamophobia. Prevent's focus must be solely on security, not political correctness."

More than 450 Islamic organisations boycotted the review. Despite the attack on Muslims, from April 2021 to March 2022 referrals to Prevent relating to far-right extremism were the highest for the second year running.

Shawcross thinks the examination of the far right has gone too far. Anas slammed the review as "thin on anything policy-wise". "You can't even call it a review of policy—it's an ideological exercise front to push the idea that Muslims are extremists."

Prevent's role "is to control and manage political debate—it's a critical tool of the state," he added. "All sorts of campaigns fall under Prevent—it could be used on a number of left campaigns that the state doesn't like."

"We've consistently called for the abolition of Prevent. It is counterproductive and doesn't serve what they propose it is serving. We encourage everyone to push for the abolishment of Prevent and work towards a framework that rejects state securitisation as the starting point."

Amnesty International dismissed the report as "riddled with biased thinking, errors and plain anti-Muslim prejudice". The Tories have shown what the true meaning behind Prevent is—to survey, crackdown and intimidate Muslims. The review and its recommendations only serve to fuel state racism.

The government's clampdown on rights—from anti-union laws to intimidating and arresting protesters and now to targeting Muslims further—needs to be opposed as a whole.



ON THE picket line at St George's hospital in south London last month

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

Nurses' union calls stronger strikes as anger builds below

By YURI PRASAD

PRESSURE FROM below has forced leaders of the nurses' RCN union to announce that they will step up their pay strikes.

The union says it will now run continuous 48-hour strikes involving day and nightshift workers. And, for the first time, it plans to hit new areas, such as intensive care and emergency departments.

Until now, the union has only run strikes on day shifts between 8am and 8pm.

It also allowed for some 5,000 "derogations"—staff and departments that unions and management agree to exempt from action.

Many nurses working on wards that should have only minimum cover on a strike day have instead found they have "the best staffing for years".

Strikers continue to tell Socialist Worker that to win, the union needs to "toughen up".

And, a large survey by the NursingNotes news website last month found 71 percent of respondents wanted to "withdraw all care except life-saving services".

Rob, a striking nurse in south London, thinks that most people on his picket lines want more action. "The



Physiotherapists on strike

RCN is a very conservative union, but the entrance of so many young people can really change things," he told Socialist Worker.

"And I think that's what's happening now—though we won't shift the whole union overnight."

"Everyone here is saying we have to hit more hospitals for longer. It's the only way to win."

While tougher action is necessary, Rob also thinks all the health unions need to coordinate their strikes so that everyone is out on the same days. "I really felt that

last Thursday when the physios were out but we weren't," he said. "We work with physios every day, so it's bad that we are separated when on strike."

Rob is correct to say the union must do more. Health union leaders initially convinced many that in this strike public opinion would be decisive.

But faced with Tory intransigence, and managers' attempts to undermine action, many strikers now think only really tough action can break through.

Rob is a pseudonym

NHS bosses try intimidation tactics

HOSPITAL bosses are using intimidation tactics in a bid to undermine the nurses' strikes.

And they particularly target migrant workers worried that taking action could lose them their work visas.

"Managers are very careful not to put anything in print or to openly say something in a ward WhatsApp group," says south London nurse, Rob.

"But it's clear they are trying to break the

strike this way—and that they particularly target those who might be worried about their immigration status."

Managers are desperate to maintain minimum of staffing levels so they can declare wards and clinics open. Wards that are derogated should be run with staffing equivalent to that on a night shift or bank holiday.

"Instead of this, we had a doctor come to our picket line last

week and tell us that on some wards, there are far more staff than on a typical working day.

"We have to put a stop to that. The union is collecting the details of these incidents, but I think we have to respond more quickly."

"We have to deal with these threats collectively."

"People are angry about what's been happening, and are pushing the RCN reps to act."



Profit system and imperialism behind the earthquake deaths

by SAMORD

OVER 33,000 people were confirmed dead at the start of this week after two earthquakes struck south Turkey and northern Syria. The final death toll will be far higher.

Desperate rescue attempts continue with those on the ground saying the disaster will have a “long tail”.

Alongside the injuries and deaths, disease is expected to spread and damaged infrastructure and supply routes will hit the most vulnerable hardest.

A 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck near Gaziantep in south Turkey, 30 miles from the Syrian border. It was soon followed by a 7.5 magnitude quake less than 100 miles north.

As Socialist Worker went to press, 29,605 people had died in Turkey and 3,574 in Syria. The rising death toll is a product of political negligence and giving profit priority over construction safety.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been in charge in Turkey for 20 years.

Throughout his rule the government has sold developers legal exemptions from building safety laws in return for a fee.

In the area hit by the earthquake up to 75,000 “construction amnesties” were handed out, according to the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects.

And a new law is awaiting parliamentary approval that would grant a further amnesty for recent construction work.

More than 6,000 buildings collapsed in the disaster zones. Regulations state that concrete has to be reinforced with steel bars, and vertical columns and horizontal beams have to be able to absorb the impact of tremors.

Damage

Had the regulations been followed the damage would’ve been confined to the beams. Instead, the columns gave way and the floors collapsed on top of each other.

One big question is what happened to the large sums collected through two “earthquake solidarity taxes” created after a 1999 quake.

The funds were meant to be used to make buildings resistant to future earthquakes.

Meanwhile Erdogan’s response to the disaster has been to increase repressive state powers. He has also tried to shift the blame onto victims, describing them as “whingers” and “looters”.

The huge rescue operation across ten of Turkey’s 81 provinces took

DESTRUCTION AND rubble in Turkey after buildings collapse

days to reach some villages due to damaged roads and access issues. But also because the resources employed are too small.

Turkey’s civil disaster authority now has the central role in the disaster relief, with a staff of just 15,000, assisted by non-government groups.

Several governments have promised to provide aid and support—but this will likely be restricted by budget cuts.

And they won’t readily open their doors to those that attempt to flee the wreckage and despair. Refugees from Kurdistan and Syria already face persecution across Europe.

The devastating death toll exposes the failures of a profit driven system. With natural disasters such as tsunamis, floods and drought increasing because of accelerating climate change, more deadly events can only be expected.

Read the International Socialist Tendency’s statement on the earthquake at bit.ly/ISTearthquake

US sanctions hit recovery

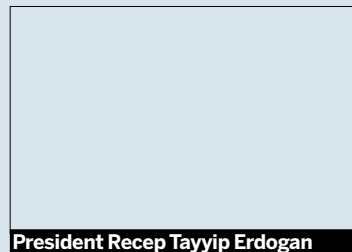
The US has issued a 180-day exemption for its sanctions on Syria, which applies to “all transactions related to earthquake relief efforts”.

The head of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent had detailed how US and other Western sanctions were impeding the relief effort.

And United Nations experts say more needs to be done to allow aid into Syria.

“While welcoming steps taken to suspend some sanctions on Syria,

“I call all sanctioning states to lift sanctions, to open all ways to deliver humanitarian aid and to ensure that no donor, bank or other actor is punished for humanitarian



President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

help to Syrians to avoid over-compliance,” said Alena Douhan, a UN official.

Even if the exemption successfully allows more relief efforts, US sanctions on Syria are specifically designed to prevent the country’s reconstruction.

This will hamper rebuilding after the earthquake.

IN BRIEF

Britain funds war but not aid

THE TORIES said they would give £8 million of support to Syria and Turkey. And they promised £3 million to volunteer organisations.

Meanwhile, a public appeal to help survivors has raised more than £60 million in its first three days. It included just £5 million from the government.

Britain halved the amount of aid to Syria from £180 million in 2020 to £90 million in 2021.

British bombs worsened the civil war in Syria, crushing infrastructure, health services and causing a reliance on aid.

Before the earthquakes, the UN said over 70 percent of Syria’s population relied on aid.

Kurds left with state repression

RECEP TAYYIP Erdogan has attacked Kurds in regions across Turkey and Syria throughout his reign. He has overseen repression against Kurdish journalists, activists, academics and sympathisers.

Those living in Kurdistan’s regions face the full force of the Turkish state, and now expect little aid.

Following the 2012 earthquake in Van, Turkey, the government blocked some aid to the region.

Now many are turning to community organising systems in response to being ignored by Erdogan’s regime.

Refugees face brutal borders

THE WORLD Health Organisation says about 26 million people across Syria and Turkey have been affected by the earthquake. In Syria alone, up to 5.3 million people may be homeless.

Erdogan has overseen the deportation of thousands of Syrian refugees. Many now homeless in Turkey will fear the same could happen to them.

Charities working in the region say refugee numbers are expected to soar.

But if they flee the area, almost all will be pushed back at the borders or forced to endure dangerous journeys to reach safety.

Workers in France show the power to beat Macron

Government attacks on pensions have met a militant workers' response, says Charlie Kimber

AROUND 2.5 million people marched last Saturday across France against the government's attempt to raise the pension age by two years.

The CGT union said that 500,000 people protested in Paris alone, higher than the 400,000 it counted on the last protest day on 7 February.

It's the third time in the last fortnight that 2 million or more have marched.

Helene, a teacher, told Socialist Worker, "Because it was a weekend there were people on the Paris march who have not been involved before."

"And I notice that there are lots of demands raised now about pay as well as pensions."

"We know strikes matter, but I hope the demonstration can spread the message and make everyone feel how strong we are together."

"President Macron thinks we will all go home after a bit and return to normal life. But it doesn't feel like that at the moment. It feels like something powerful has shifted."

Another day of protests and strikes was planned for Thursday this week. But the next major mobilisation is from 7 March.

Leaders of the eight union federations said they are "hardening" the struggle and will "bring France to a halt in all sectors" on 7 March.

Importantly some unions in rail, the Paris public transport system and the energy sector have pledged to continue renewable—potentially indefinite—strikes from that day onwards.

Such action will raise the possibility of an all-out strike but it won't solve it.

The leader of the generally more conservative CFDT federation, Laurent Berger, is openly hoping that the delay until 7 March will give time for the government to come forward with a deal that can be used to head off escalation. "We are not in the logic of the renewable strike," and "it is not a call for a general strike" insisted Berger last Saturday.

The CGT union leaders' rhetoric is

BACK STORY

Emmanuel Macron has staked his presidency on a vicious plan to make people work for years longer for their pensions

● He wants to raise the official retirement age from 62 to 64

● Macron demands people contribute for 43 years instead of 41.5 by 2027

● Millions will be forced to work longer and endure a shorter retirement, often in poor health

better, but they don't build for broad all-out action.

The most successful fight against attacks on workers in recent French history came in 1995.

Mass strikes, continuing strikes and rank and file networks saw the government of Alain Juppe roundly defeated. The street protests this time are much bigger than 1995, but the strikes are not so extended.

These methods could work again.

Visiting

In an article in the left wing magazine Contretemps, Remi Azemar highlights how "one of the strengths of 1995 was strikers visiting non-striking places."

"Union officials but also people who were on strike for the first time (which was even more effective) went to the workplaces of people they knew to convince them to strike."

"And when this visit was collective (more than five people), the results could sometimes be immediate."

These are the sort of actions that can now make the strikes reach their potential to defeat Macron.



HUGE NUMBERS have joined protests against pension age rises

PICTURE: O PHIL DES CONTRASTES

How action by rank and file workers shut down the port city of Le Havre

RANK AND file structures have been crucial to the pressure to escalate the strikes and mass protests in France.

There would have been no calls for an all-out strike from 7 March without organisation at the base.

At the top the heads of the eight union federations meet and work out what level of activity is acceptable to the most cautious and conservative elements.

But in some areas rank and file workers go for the most serious action they can win among the activists and militants.

Last week, during one of the national strike days, workers closed the port city of Le Havre. Cross-union structures and strike committees organised to block roundabouts and approach roads.

The local CGT union announced, "We blocked the industrial zone of Le Havre, Gonfreville l'Orcher and Oudalle thanks to the big union sections, the small sections, the non-unionists and some Yellow Vests. Kudos to those who move their asses."

The action was agreed at an open meeting which declared a follow-up meeting "open to all who share our views."

"We couldn't have achieved this just by going through the usual union ways of working," Laurent, a CGT union member from the area, told Socialist Worker. "For

one thing lots of workers aren't in a union.

"And then we have to link up between the refinery workers, the teachers, the industrial workers, the retirees."

"You can't do that with a single union meeting."

Success

"The inter-union meeting on 1 February was based on strike committees and was also open to others to come along. That's why we had a success."

Another trade unionist from Le Havre said, "We discuss ways to increase our strength as well as the strikes."

"Since 26 January, dockers have refused to do all overtime, and they don't volunteer to do shifts outside their usual ones."

That started a discussion about how other workers can do such things.

"None of this is a way of winning without the strikes and demonstrations. They are the most important thing. But as workers we can discuss different ways to involve people and fight every day."

"And we talk about how to get the renewable"—indefinite—"strikes, how to work together to push the unions at the top."

"There cannot be a national strike without the call from the union leaders. But it can't be left to them."

"Building big strikes and marches is the most important thing, but we won't get the action we want unless we organise ourselves—to push and push."

Dockers marched in Le Havre last week

Property swindles

THE NEWSPAPERS are full of terrified stories about house prices falling—and warnings of a “crash” in the property market.

One forecaster suggested prices could be slashed by 20 percent, and the biggest mortgage lender Halifax said it was expecting a fall of 8 percent this year.

On the face of it, a dramatic drop in house prices may seem like good news for those wanting to climb on the property ladder.

But the result isn't just cheaper houses.

A property market crash will mean that banks become much warier about agreeing mortgages to prospective buyers.

They fear they won't be able to claw back enough profit if someone's home sinks into negative equity—where it's “worth” less than the mortgage.

But this is the problem with reducing the human need for homes to the fluctuations of the market.

If the market is booming, ordinary people can't secure somewhere to live. And if economic crisis comes knocking, they're in the same situation.

We need a system of public housing that is based on need for the many and not profit for the few.

I want to see an end to all private renting—ordinary people deserve secure, good quality housing.

In the current system that's something reserved for the rich. For this to change it will take a much more fundamental shift than the ebb and flow of the bosses' market.

Morag Gillie
North London



ILLUSTRATION: TIM SANDERS

If we don't win pay battles the far right is sure to grow

IN NOTTINGHAM on 1 February there was an exuberant march of 2,000 striking trade unionists.

They were marching against the clampdown on pay, worsening of conditions across public services and attacks on the right to strike.

That day we showed what unity means.

Yet three days later a group of far right thugs, egged on by Tory MP Ben Bradley, protested against asylum seekers being housed in a Mansfield hotel.

They banged on the hotel windows shouting, “Out!, Out!, Out!” at frightened residents.

The action by the far right was one of a number that day seeking to blame refugees for the ills of

this government's failings. Two young asylum seekers in a nearby town were also kicked and punched by “young Englishmen” and had to go to hospital.

Last week, Tory MP Lee Anderson—and well known outspoken bigot for the neighbouring Ashfield constituency—was appointed vice chair of the Tory Party.

There is a concerted plan by the Tories to defeat the demands of workers by trying to foster division.

The government is allowing the far right off the leash as a tactic to break public support for strikers, by blaming migrants for taking “our” resources.

With that is a hope to stave off defeat in local elections in just over two months' time, and then in the coming general election, especially in the “Red Wall” seats.

Our strikes are supported just as well outside the major cities and towns so we must support strikes with rallies and marches in areas like Mansfield.

We also must organise to oppose the far right wherever they threaten to appear.

To this end our local trades council, Stand Up to Racism and other groups last week organised a protest in Mansfield against the far right.

Richard Buckwell
Nottingham

1 February picketing was important in NEU

ON 1 February our union, the NEU, took the biggest step forward towards beating the government over pay and funding that we've seen in over a decade.

Readers may know that traditionally the teachers' predecessor union, the NUT, has not had a tradition of picket lines.

And for the first time in a very long time, we saw the emergence of a small layer of workers not on strike refusing to cross the picket line.

This reflected the growing mood for a generalised fight back against Tory rule. And it is precisely the solidarity we need to foster and build upon to take the strike movement forwards.

We hope to see more unions coming forwards with ballots. The fact that so many picket lines were respected last week can help to push that prospect further towards becoming a reality.

Jess Edwards and **Paul McGarr**
London

‘Special case’ myth divides workers

I READ your article about how union leaders argue the NHS strikes are a “special case” that separate them from other disputes, (Socialist Worker, 1 February).

The idea of a “special case” is an old idea used to divide us. Governments want us to think that some of us are “deserving” of help while others aren't.

It weakens us all and should have no place in the trade union movement.

We are all “special cases”—we all need to

Unity is strength

feed our kids and we are all getting hit by wage cuts and attacks on our jobs and conditions.

Health workers are part of our class and of the fight to stop these attacks

and for a decent level of pay for us all. If they are a “special case” then so is everyone else affected by wage and benefit cuts.

It is a pity that leaders are not arguing for unity in action instead of for division—which is an argument for defeat.

It was good to see health workers at the rallies on 1 February.

They showed more awareness of what needs to be done to win this fight than their trade union leaders.

Julia Richardson
Swansea

Just a thought...

Follow French gas example

I READ with interest that striking energy workers in France have been providing free gas and electricity to schools and low income households.

This is a terrific glimpse of the potential of our side's ability to distribute services or goods to those in need. People are easy prey to the big energy companies operating. They bully customers onto pre-payment meters with help from the courts.

Workers should be organised to refuse to undertake duties that only trigger misery on other working class people.

Jem Moore
South London

Ukraine has right to fight

I understand Socialist Worker is against the war in Ukraine.

I oppose imperialism, but I do believe in the right to resist as I did for Ireland.

Surely it's the right for any country that's being invaded to want to fight back?

I'm opposed to Nato and to US intervention I want people in Ukraine to stand up to Russian aggression and by any means necessary.

JJ Harkin
By email

Croydon tax hike scandal

I'M APOPLECTIC with rage that Croydon council has been given permission by central government to hike my council tax by 15 percent. The council is broke because it wasted its money on private ventures.

Now ordinary people are paying the price.

Betty Black
South London

Nurses need decent pay

I'VE JUST seen that applications to Scottish nursing courses have fallen by 24 percent.

Is there any surprise with the conditions that nurses are expected to work under? Hopefully nurses will win their strikes and more people will want to work in this essential role.

Audrey Morgan
Ayrshire

STRIKE COMMITTEES HOW TO ORGANISE FROM BELOW



STRIKERS AT Imperial College in west London listening to an activist from the NEU teachers' union on their picket line last week. Bringing union members together is vital to wresting control of strikes from the union head offices

Strikers can take control of disputes by forming their own decision-making bodies, argues **Charlie Kimber**

HUNDREDS OF thousands of workers in Britain are fighting back. It's a new era of resistance on a sustained level we haven't seen for more than 30 years.

But the Tories and bosses are standing firm against strikes—and union leaders are holding back the escalation we need to win. Workers need to seize more control of strikes and challenge their present direction.

And there are new opportunities—but also a pressing urgency about doing so. The opportunities are shown, for example, by the size of the strikes and demonstrations on 1 Feb and the support for the NHS walkouts on 6 and 7 February.

The urgency comes from the deadlock in many disputes and union leaders' willingness to call off strikes and push deals that would deliver much of what bosses and the government want.

Workers need to take charge of the

direction of their disputes. Strike committees, alongside regular mass meetings, are an important way to do that.

A strike committee involves people beyond the existing union structure discussing, running and taking forward a strike.

It can be just a way to spread the decisions of the union leaders. But it can also be an opportunity to push for militant action and to be able to organise independently of the union leaders. It's about doing, not just another forum to speak and exchange ideas.

They are often at their best when they emerge from struggles such as the unofficial strikes in the North Sea rigs. The absence of official support meant workers had to organise themselves.

Strike committees already exist in some UCU university union branches. That's partly because workers have been involved in four years of hard-fought action and have challenged the general secretary's control.

Workers are building more to sustain, boost and extend the 18-day strike programme that's scheduled.

Workers at four universities in Liverpool planned a joint strike committee this week.

After the enthusiastic response to the 1 February strikes, the NEU asked its local officers to "convene a strike committee in your district or branch."

It said this would "harness the energies of workplace reps, strike volunteers and the rank and file members who made their own placards and led their own chants at pickets and demos".



A huge meeting of the teachers' NEU union in south London last month. The influx of strike activists has to be tapped

What, in practice, should a strike committee do? There are three tasks that activists should be able to win every strike committee to adopt:

1 GIVE A democratic voice to people newly involved in strikes

On 1 February there were lots of new activists involved and generally there were younger people, more women and more black workers involved.

A report from Chesterfield about an excellent PCS union picket line said, "The retired PCS trades council delegate who has held things together for decades was blown away."

I've never seen him with such a big smile on his face. 'It's the new generation taking over,' he said." That new generation of enthusiastic strikers needs to be involved immediately—however good the existing branch structures are.

2 Organise the strikes—in a new way

Spreading beyond the existing reps and officers makes it possible to reach a wider group of strikers and seek to involve them actively. Bigger and stronger picketing and lively picket lines.

The PCS official report on 1 February records "More picket lines than ever before and in areas that have previously not had organised pickets." It quotes its members saying, "Strongest picket line we've had in branch history," "We had fun picketing and getting car drivers to toot to support us."

And, "Lots of new members. Diverse all ages and keen to get active," "Really good turnout, fantastic energy on the picket line, dancing, two members dressed as suffragettes on the picket line!"

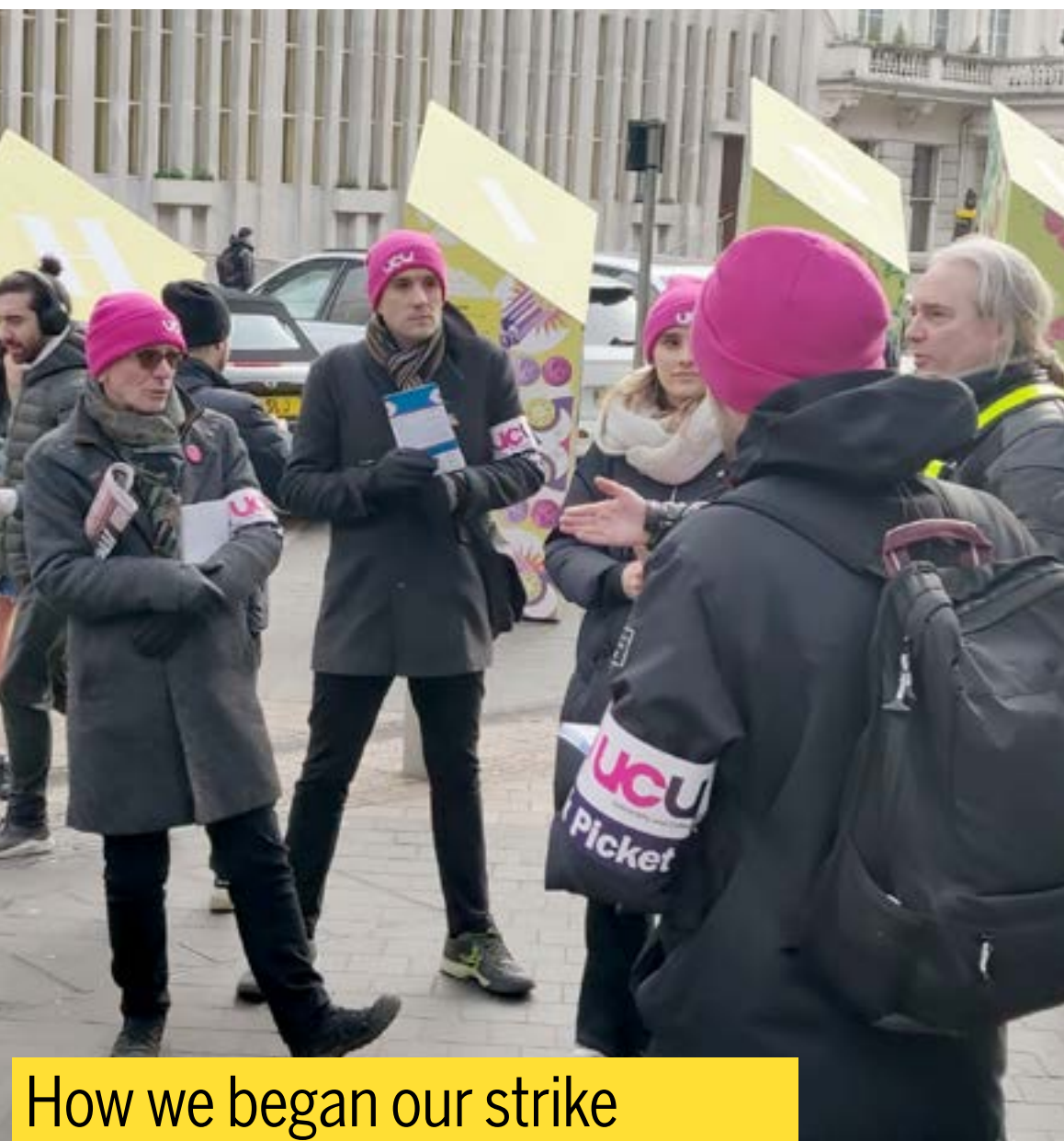
That mood has to mean shifts in organisation for future strikes and to stop any loss of momentum. Determined picketing can mean more examples of



There are tasks that we should be able to get every strike committee to back



Spreading beyond existing reps means reaching a wider group of strikers



Strike committees were key to workers' power in the 1970s

workers who have not been called out refusing to go into work—as happened at some schools on 1 February.

3 Coordination with other strikers, other workers and campaigners

This could mean organising joint demos on strike days, solidarity collections at work, sending out speakers to unions and campaigns, putting out joint appeals for support and funds.

This is very important so that strikers don't feel isolated and the sectors where workers take the most action aren't picked off by bosses and the Tories.

The sense of "we are not alone" is not being spread effectively by the union leaders.

There are also issues that revolutionaries argue for inside strike committees.

4 Debate and raise criticism of the lead from the top when it's lacking a strategy to win

A strike committee saying a strike should not have been called off—such as the ambulance and nurses' strikes in Wales—is more powerful than an individual complaint. And discussion in a strike committee is often freer than in the usual branch structures.

5 Highlight and popularise unofficial action

Decades without sustained workers' struggle in Britain have eradicated the memory of how workers can act outside the anti-union laws or without the direct agreement of union headquarters. But there is a long history of unofficial strikes—and everyone was lifted when Amazon workers walked out last year without a ballot or even being in a union. Strike committees can talk about multiplying such examples.

6 Push for escalation

Strike committees can debate what would be needed to win and put pressure on the union leaders.

In Cambridge on 1 February after a big demonstration and rally, the local UCU branch held an open strike committee. UCU member Anne Alexander reported, "The local PCS rep came with three striking PCS members, plus some NEU comrades plus a core of largely new UCU activists."

"There was serious discussion and a list of follow-up actions. They included getting speakers from unions with strike dates around meetings with unions that have mandates but no dates."

"We are working hard on using the energy from the UCU rank and file to help accelerate rebuilding the NEU rank and file."

Such moves can drive the pressure for strike escalation.

For example, as well as coordination of leaflets, twinning workplaces and

fundraising, the notes of the meeting say, "Bring up general strike at branch and local TUC level."

7 Organise independent action at a local level

The high point of a strike committee would be its ability to hold walkouts, marches and strikes. In a modest way, the aim is to follow in the tradition of the Clyde Workers Committee a century ago. It said, "We will support the officials just so long as they rightly represent the workers, but we will act independently immediately if they misrepresent them."

8 Organise independent action alongside others at a national level

In the 1970s this was possible through such bodies as the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions. Although tied to left union leaders and resistant to real rank and file action, it could call political strikes involving hundreds of thousands of workers on its own initiative.

9 Take politics into the heart of the strikes

Strike committees can kick off discussion about climate change or anti-racism or trans rights or what causes inflation for strikers. Often official union structures are slow or resistant to such "outside" discussion. But there's no reason for strike committees to have such barriers.

10 Be the basis to launch a rank and file movement

This happened during and after the First World War and in the 1970s. The International Socialists, the forerunners of the Socialist Workers Party, worked with others to build a national rank and file movement by calling a delegate conference in March 1974.

Around 500 delegates representing 270 trade union bodies attended and set up the National Rank and File Organising Committee.

A second conference in November of the same year attracted delegates from a larger number of bodies, including 49 shop stewards' committees.

Unfortunately it was born just as the election of a Labour government saw the union leaders clamp down hard on any such initiative—and many activists went along with them.

Organising independent action on a broad scale will involve a much higher level of action than at the moment.

But everyone involved in a strike can launch a strike committee, beginning with a conversation among pickets and activists, or on a strikers' WhatsApp group or after a strike rally.

And this list isn't a set of stages workers have to go through. Proper democracy and involvement can lead swiftly to independent action. New opportunities are opening up, and it's time to test the strength of the argument for more systematic resistance.

How we began our strike committee at Imperial College

UCU MEMBER Roddy Slorach spoke about how workers set up a strike committee in their union and why they are important.

4 We urgently need to create strike committees. And on our picket lines, we agreed to form one on Thursday of last week.

I know some groups of workers have already done it, but I just wanted to say that this is a big step forward.

It was easy to get agreement, particularly as our first concern was how we get more people picketing.

We've shared our roles and responsibilities—for ring rounds, publicity, social media, arranging themed strike days, updating

the website, writing up strike questions and answers.

We also discussed solidarity and delegation work. We'll meet after picket lines on every strike day from now on.

We now have a dedicated group of the most enthusiastic members who see it as their job to help strengthen our actions.

Most of these members are young, and most are not reps.

Meetings will, of course, be open to anyone else who wants to help.

If you still need to form a strike committee in your branch, I strongly recommend doing so.

Members badly need to gain control of this dispute—locally and nationally.

Striking university workers last week gathered to listen to an Amazon worker. Learning from others in struggle is also a function of a strike committee (below, left) Physiotherapists on strike in Nottingham. A strike committee could bring together all the NHS strikes (below)



WHAT WE STAND FOR

These are the core politics of the Socialist Workers Party.

INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.

REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say.

It has to be overthrown. Capitalism systematically degrades the natural world. Ending environmental crisis means creating a new society.

THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls.

We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country.

In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism. In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties.

We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women.

We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

We oppose discrimination against disabled people including those who experience mental distress.

We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

To join us, turn to page 16 or go to www.swp.org.uk or phone 020 7840 5602

From Stonewall to Trans Pride—A radical history of fighting for LGBT+ liberation



BIG PROTESTS last month in defence of trans rights

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

BIRMINGHAM

Wed 22 Feb, 7pm
281-634-5938
Friends of the Earth
The Warehouse
54 Allison Street
B5 5TH

BRIGHTON & HOVE

Thu 23 Feb, 7pm
589-4176-7501
Friends Meeting House
Ship St, BN1 1AF

BRISTOL

Thu 23 Feb, 7.30pm
Palestine Museum
& Cultural Centre
27 Broad St,
BS1 2HG

DUDLEY

Wed 22 Feb, 7.30pm
869-514-7392

HASTINGS

Thu 23 Feb, 7pm
The White Rock Hotel
1-10 White Rock,
TN34 1JU

LEEDS

Thu 23 Feb, 7pm
The Swarthmore Education Centre
2-7 Woodhouse Square, LS3 1AD

LIVERPOOL

Wed 22 Feb, 7pm
493-925-5919
Friends Meeting House
22 School Ln, L1 3BT

LONDON: HACKNEY

Thu 23 Feb, 7.30pm
854-824-58715
Halkevi Center
31 Dalston Lane
E8 3DF

LONDON: HARINGEY

Wed 22 Feb, 7.30pm
Kurdish Community Centre
11 Portland Gardens
Harringay Ladder
N4 1HU

LONDON: NEWHAM

Wed 22 Feb, 7pm
288-098-8827
Stratford Advice arcade
107-109 The Grove
E15 1HP

LONDON: SOUTH

Wed 22 Feb, 7pm
859-6433-5114
Password: 820061
Vida Walsh Centre
2b Saltoun Rd
SW2 1EP

LONDON: SOUTH EAST

Thu 23 Feb, 7pm
529-913-6390
Deptford Lounge
9 Giffin St
SE8 4RH

MANCHESTER

Wed 22 Feb, 7pm
Friends Meeting House
6 Mount St
M2 5NS

BLACK COUNTRY, SHROPSHIRE & STAFFORDSHIRE

How can the war in Ukraine end?

Wed 1 Mar, 7.30pm
914-9548-1031
St Peters Cafe, Exchange St,
Wolverhampton, WV1 1TS

BRADFORD

Is China the biggest threat to the world?

Wed 22 Feb, 7pm
885-9187-7552

CAMBRIDGE

90 years since Hitler came to power—could the Nazis have been stopped?

Thu 23 Feb, 7pm
681-800-4408
Friends Meeting House
12 Jesus Ln,
CB5 8BA

CARDIFF

Solidarity, struggle and socialism—how can the strikes win?

Wed 22 Feb, 7.30pm
512-655-3689
Mackintosh Community Centre
Keppoch Street, CF24 3JW

CHESTERFIELD

How can the war in Ukraine end?

Thu 23 Feb, 7pm
828-532-8731 Room 2,
Chesterfield Library,
New Beetwell St, S40 1QN

COVENTRY

Women, life, freedom—revolt and resistance in Iran

Wed 22 Feb, 7.30pm
823-945-1917
Golden Cross, 8 Hay Ln,
CV1 5RF

DEVON AND EXETER
Where do right wing ideas come from?

Wed 22 Feb, 7.30pm
865-2972-2883
Climate action hub
40 Bedford St, EX1 1BW

DORSET

Police, violence, sexism and the state

Thu 23 Feb, 7.30pm
839-6672-6883
Centenary Club Weymouth
21 Jubilee Close, DT4 7BG

EAST MIDLANDS

How can the war in Ukraine end?

Thu 23 Feb, 7pm
354-874-4790
The Playwright,
38 Shakesphere St,
Nottingham, NG1 4FQ

EDINBURGH

Strikes are back—Marxism and the trade union bureaucracy

Wed 22 Feb, 7.30pm
Friends Meeting House
7 Victoria Terrace
Victoria St
EH1 2JL

GLASGOW

After Carrick—can the police be reformed?

Thu 23 Feb, 7pm
The Space
257 London Rd
G40 1PE

HARLOW

China—what's beyond the protests?

Thu 23 Feb, 7.30pm
New Hall, Moot House
CM20 3HB

HOME COUNTIES

How can workers build resistance to get rid of the Tories?

Thu 23 Feb, 6.30pm
8341-170-103

HUDDERSFIELD

After Carrick—can the police be reformed?

Wed 22 Feb, 6.30pm
The Mission
Lord St
HD1 1QA

KENT

Strikes are back—Marxism and the trade union bureaucracy

Thu 23 Feb, 7.30pm
434-623-8064
Sunlight Centre
Richmond Rd
Gillingham

ME7 1LX

LONDON: ISLINGTON

Escalating war in Ukraine—what do socialists say?

Thu 23 Feb, 7pm
Elizabeth House
2 Hurlock Street
N5 1ED

LONDON: TOWER HAMLETS
Was Marx right?

Wed 22 Feb, 7.30pm
St Pauls Church
St Stephen's Rd, E3 5JL

LONDON: WALTHAM FOREST
Socialists and the struggle for LGBT+ liberation

Wed 22 Feb, 7.30pm
543-023-057 William
Morris Centre
Greenleaf Road
E17 6QQ

LONDON: WEST AND NORTH WEST

Solidarity, struggle and socialism—how can the strikes win?

Thu 23 Feb, 7.30pm
868-3356-6032
Bay 20 Community Centre
71 St Marks Rd,
W10 6JG

LOWESTOFT

Solidarity, struggle and socialism—how can the strikes win?

Thurs 16 Jan, 7.30pm
The Grit, Old Nelson St,
NR32 1EQ

NEWCASTLE

How can the war in Ukraine end?

Thu 23 Feb, 7pm
The Labour Club
11 Leazes Park Rd
NE1 4PF

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND
Stop the War—20 years since the invasion of Iraq

Wed 22 Feb, 7pm
894-2628-7708
Dundee Volunteer and
Voluntary Action
10 Constitution Rd, DD1 1LL

NORWICH & EAST ANGLIA

How can the war in Ukraine end?

Wed 22 Feb, 7.30pm
906-652-5299
Wensum Sports Centre
169a King St, NR1 1QH

OXFORD & THAMES VALLEY
Can there be a united Ireland?

Wed 22 Feb, 7.15pm
861-2001-6477
Oxford Town Hall, St Aldates,
OX1 1BX

PORTSMOUTH

Police, violence, sexism and the state

Wed 22 Feb, 7.30pm
488-934-2809
Somerstown Community
Centre, River St,
Southsea, PO5 4EY

SHEFFIELD & SOUTH YORKSHIRE

How can the war in Ukraine end?

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Central United
Reformed Church
60 Norfolk Street S1 2JB

SWANSEA

Welsh NHS in crisis—who is to blame?

Thu 23 Feb, 7.30pm
902-964-963
Elysium Gallery
210 High St SA1 1PE

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Thu 23 Feb, 7.30pm
Pater Hall, Lewis St
Pembroke Dock SA72 6DH

WIGAN

90 Years since the Nazis came to power—could Hitler have been stopped?

Thu 23 Feb, 7pm
The Book Cycle Beech Hill
Buckley Street WN6 7PQ

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Brazil coup attempt—can Lula defeat the right and bring change?

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St Peters Cafe, Exchange
St, WV1 1TS

YORK & SCARBOROUGH

How can the war in Ukraine end?

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8274-897-492 Friends
Meeting House
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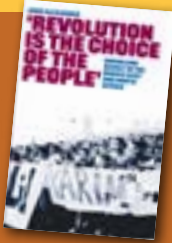
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Brink's Mat—where, crooks, cops and city bankers meet

A £26 million robbery fuelled a property boom and a global money laundering system—a story told well in BBC drama *The Gold*, writes **Simon Basketter**

THE GOLD is the latest dramatisation of the 1983 Brink's-Mat robbery and Kenneth Noye's and others' role in fencing £26 million of gold bullion.

The robbery at Heathrow airport saw six armed robbers attempt to steal £1 million in foreign currency. They ended up coming away with £26 million in gold bullion.

Over two-thirds of the loot has never been recovered. About a dozen killings were connected to the criminals who battled for control of it.

The Gold has sharp one-liners and a fresh take on the characters. It provides the excellent cast with plenty of fun in the 1980s re-enactment. Jack Lowden is great as the smarmy, crime lord-of-the-manor Noye.

It treats the crime as a study in the poisonous myth of 1980s social mobility. Noye and others feel a sense of injustice that the rich stay rich while the rest struggle. "That's how England is," he tells his wife. "That lot have it, us lot nick it."

Noye stabbed an undercover cop ten times in the grounds of his home. He was charged with murder but cleared by a jury.

Undercover

The Brink's-Mat loot fuelled the financial firestorm of the London Dockland property boom. Dealing with the cash boosted the creation of a global money laundering system that more traditional capitalists still use.

Some of the first files in the Panama Papers came from laundering the Brink's-Mat gold.

Noye says, "I want to do alright the way the other side of this country



SMARMY CRIME lord Kenneth Noyes

does alright. People who come from money, they don't think much about what's wrong or right when they want to make more of it."

The show points at what characters term "the system"—winks and secret

handshakes that bent high-ranking police officers and government officials offer. It captures well that the gangsters were proper Thatcherites.

The *Gold* nods to the movies *Sexy Beast* and *The Long Good Friday*.

This is both good and a relief after too much of the cringey, sub-Tarantino Guy Ritchie crap that infects British crime drama

The crooks are slightly smoothed out to make them more palatable. But so are the cops.

Despite the inevitable compression and fictionalisation of some of the characters it is well worth watching.

The intersection of crook and cops in south London meant the Stephen Lawrence and Daniel Morgan murder cases among many others were scarred by the fallout from the robbery. This is an element missing from the show.

Corrupting

The freemasonry the show points to as the corrupting link suits the theme about the strength of the establishment. But it treats it as a cause rather than a method.

Noye was a police informer who was protected by cops as well as him controlling them. So was John Palmer (Tom Cullen) who melted down the gold.

Two days after the robbery, a Somerset couple reported to the police that they saw a white-hot crucible operating in a garden shed. The shed wasn't raided until 14 months later. Palmer was cleared.

Years later when Palmer died in a different garden in 2015 the police said it was of natural causes. Six days later they revealed the natural causes were that he was shot in the chest six times.

Not a lot had changed in the intervening decades.

The Gold is on BBC1, Sundays at 9pm. All episodes available now on BBC iPlayer

The Lehman Trilogy tells a real-life capitalist fable

PLAY

THE LEHMAN TRILOGY

At the Gillian Drury Theatre, London, until 20 May. Tickets from £10 at nationaltheatre.org.uk

IN 1844 Henry Lehman and his brothers Emmanuel and Mayer—penniless immigrants—opened a small clothing store in Alabama.

That began a business dynasty. The family moved from small-time retailers, to brokers selling cotton from slave plantations, to commodity traders, to bankers helping to finance

America's spectacular industrial growth.

By the 21st century Lehman Brothers was the world's fourth largest investment bank. It made billions by consciously trading in "subprime" mortgages and other bad debts in a market worth £6.8 trillion by 2007.

That financial bubble finally burst in 2008, triggering a crisis that nearly brought down the international finance system and led to a global economic upheaval.

This play charts how the world got to that calamity. It owes much to the great

Marxist playwright Bertolt Brecht. The audience is not fed the illusion that it is watching a slice of life unfold. Three brilliant actors—Nigel Lindsay (Henry), Michael Balogun (Emmanuel) and Hadley Fraser (Mayer)—openly address the audience directly.

"We are not merchants", insists Emmanuel's son Philip. "We are businessmen." That "business", the compulsion to accumulate profit,



Nigel Lindsay as Henry Lehman

consumes everything the Lehman Brothers valued—family ties, traditions, and their religious faith.

The older generation falls away to be replaced by young innovators.

They in turn are left behind, struggling to understand the new world they have helped create.

When the play arrives at 2008, there are no more Lehman's at the bank. The institution seemed

to have a life of its own.

This is a great production of a fascinating, if flawed, play. It has a problem with structure and pacing.

The last act in particular, is overstuffed with events and ideas it doesn't have the time to explore.

And the victims of the system that rewarded the Lehmans so well—be they the cotton slaves of the 1840s or the 25,000 workers who lost their jobs in 2008—are hardly mentioned. Nevertheless, this is epic drama brilliantly played by its small, highly talented, cast. **Sasha Simic**

FILM

BLUE JEAN

Directed by Georgia Oakley
In cinemas now

TYNESIDE. 1988. Jean lives a tightly compartmentalised existence. By day, she is a firm but fair PE teacher, putting secondary school students through their paces.

At night, she socialises in a lesbian bar an hour away



Rosy McEwen as Jean

from her workplace.

The looming anti-LGBT+ Section 28 law encourages her to keep her life compartmentalised.

But the arrival of a new, awkward student threatens to crumble the separate worlds Jean has built for herself.

STREAMING

CLASS

Available on Netflix now

CLASS FOLLOWS three working class students who manage to bag scholarships to one of the most prestigious schools in the country.

However, their hopes are soon shattered when elitist classmates show contempt for them at every turn, with the situation soon escalating into murder.

The show explores themes such as the wealth gap, gender, sexuality and caste.

What's on at...

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● More info soon—go to our website or check our Facebook page, Bookmarks the socialist bookshop

bookmarksbookshop.co.uk

THE demand for profit at the heart of capitalism means profound and destructive effects on the environment. Now a group of scientists argue that the current geological epoch should be named the Anthropocene as human activity alters the state of the planet.

In recent years the world has seen a rise in the number of deadly cyclones and hurricanes. There have been devastating forest fires from the US to Greece and Australia and floods in Pakistan, Nigeria, Malaysia and elsewhere.

Last year was probably the hottest year on record in Britain. This year the temperature could soar even higher.

Under capitalism, agriculture has been developed in ways that expose us to more harmful pathogens, threatening health and lives.

Covid most likely made the jump from bats to humans as agriculture expanded into previously forested areas. Intensive farming of animals has meant repeated outbreaks of highly infectious viruses such as bird flu.

An influential group of scientists now argues that the current geological epoch should be called the Anthropocene.

This means they recognise that human activity is altering the state of the planet in many fundamental and interconnected ways.

Many of these changes can be traced to the middle of the 20th century.

At this time there was a "great acceleration" in human population, carbon emissions, deforestation and many other trends.

Evidence of this is visible in the geological record. So millions of years from now the layers of sedimentary rock that have been created would show when the Anthropocene began.

For example, a hundred years ago it would have been very rare to find pure aluminium in the soil.

It is usually found in the form of compounds or ores such as bauxite.

NOW THERE are deposits of aluminium spread throughout the planet as a result of humans mining these ores, extracting the metal and dumping it as waste.

Similarly, plastic waste has been found all over the world, even in the depths of ocean trenches. Plastic is a relatively recent invention, so it is remarkable how quickly it has spread.

The term Anthropocene has become increasingly widely adopted. But it is not officially recognised.

The current epoch is still called the Holocene. This

PLASTIC WASTE has spread all over the world

HOW DOES CAPITALISM SHAPE THE PLANET?

A group of scientists is pushing to officially recognise the current geological epoch as the Anthropocene. Camilla Royle explains how this term acknowledges the profound and destructive effects of capitalism on the planet

Scientist Mark Maslin

started around 11,700 years ago at the end of the last ice age.

In 2019, the Anthropocene Working Group of the International Commission on Stratigraphy decided that the Anthropocene is an appropriate term for the times we live in. They say it began in the middle of the 20th century.

This year the same group of scientists is meeting to place a golden spike where there is

“Human activity is altering the state of the planet in many interconnected ways

clear evidence of a shift from Holocene to Anthropocene.

The location chosen could be the layers of sediment at the bottom of a lake in China or the marine sediment in the Baltic Sea.

As these layers form, they trap residue such as radioactive particles, fly ash from the burning of coal and oil, and particles from fertiliser use.

Of more importance than the exact location of the golden

spike is what it tells us about the nature of human influence.

It can be sobering to think that there is no part of the world untouched by human activity.

But there is nothing unnatural about humans changing the world around us.

Humans first formed settled societies and practiced agriculture about 11,000 years ago, around the start of the Holocene epoch. The spread of agriculture led to the domestication of animal species.

As humans changed their environment, this in turn drove changes in society. The development of agriculture meant that people could settle in one place and produce a surplus of food rather than living as hunter-gatherers.

KARL MARX and Frederick Engels argued that this meant the development of societies divided by class as some people gathered more of the surplus as well as changing societal roles for men and women.

The middle of the 20th century, the proposed start of the Anthropocene, saw the end of the Second World War and the growing dominance of the US in the global economy. The US subsidised its own farmers to grow crops in vast monocultures and exported some of the produce and agricultural technology.

Intensive industrial farming methods were introduced in countries such as India and Mexico in what was called the Green Revolution.

Independence

Countries that had been colonised by Europe in Asia, the Caribbean and nearly all of Africa gained independence as people overthrew their colonisers.

Many of these newly independent states followed a model of highly industrialised development facilitated by funding and support from the US or the Soviet Union.

From the 1980s, neoliberal policies ripped through the fabric of societies.

One of the outcomes of these policies in terms of the environment was that countries in the Global South were encouraged to produce crops for export. This led to land degradation and food insecurity.

In the 21st century, more than half of the world's population live in cities. Because we live in a global, highly connected society, viral diseases such as Covid are able to rapidly spread.

But the benefits of increased opportunities to travel are not shared equally. In 2018 only about 4 percent of people took an international flight.

The point is that humans have always shaped the natural world. At times in history

there have been revolutionary changes in people's lives that have gone alongside equally dramatic changes in the environment.

Environmentalists rightly view the extraction of natural resources, mass species extinction and the pollution associated with capitalism with horror.

For some, the conclusion is that we should try to scale back human influence.

For example, biologist EO Wilson is associated with the idea that half of Earth's surface should be kept free of humans to preserve it for nature.

But Marx took a very different view of human nature. In his book *Capital* he argued that changing the planet is an essential part of what humans do.

Humans are not just dependent on nature but have a metabolic relationship with nature that means we transform it to survive.

It's impossible to disconnect humans from nature.

Wilson's plans would mean corralling people into smaller areas of the planet's surface including removing indigenous people from land that they have managed in a sustainable way for centuries.

It is unclear how this could take place without using force.

IT WOULD not be possible or desirable to stop humans from changing the planet. What matters is what kind of changes are brought about, in whose interests and at whose expense.

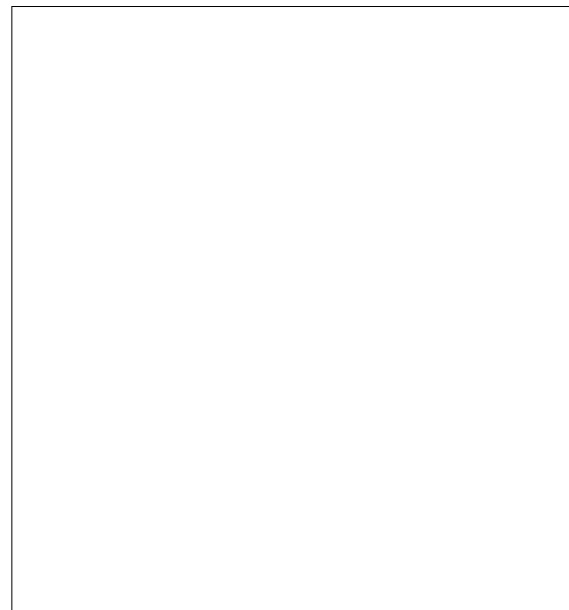
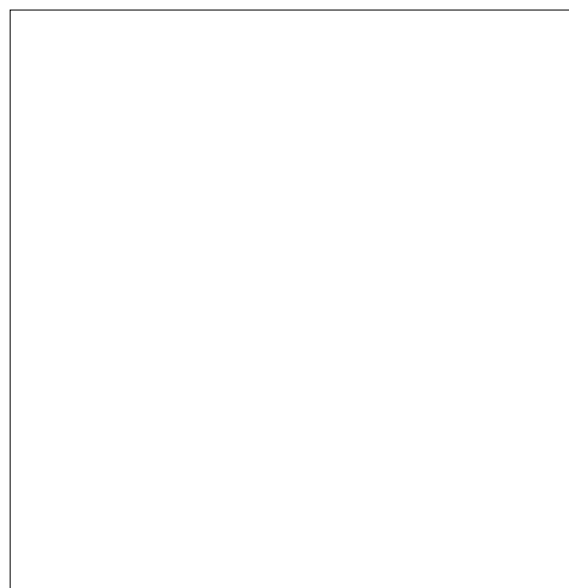
For example, fossil fuels could be replaced by renewable sources of energy. The problem is that the need for a small group of companies to make a profit is currently driving fossil fuel expansion.

The middle of the 20th century is very recent in terms of geological timescales.

This highlights how rapidly climate change is happening and how short a window of time there is to reduce emissions.

The Anthropocene designation also makes clear that the effects humans are having on the planet are numerous and that they are interconnected.

Although climate change is the most volatile symptom



In the past two decades, 10 percent of global wilderness has been lost (top) A layer of waste lies in the sediment near a former steel mill in Biskay, Spain (above)

of a changing planet, it is not the only way that humans are altering Earth's systems.

Climate scientist Mark Maslin points out that calling the current epoch the Anthropocene encourages us to take a holistic approach to issues such as climate change, pollution and the biodiversity crisis.

It doesn't treat them as separate.

Socialists can go further than that and point to the root cause of all these interlinked crises, a capitalist system that puts its hunger for profit before the needs of people and other species.

Recognising that we live in a world shaped by humans could be a wake-up call to us that if we want a safer planet we also need a different kind of society.



**FOCUS ON
BIG PHARMA**

Ozempic—how drug bosses profit from our insecurities

A new weight loss trend has skyrocketed demand for diabetes drug Ozempic. But with pharmaceutical bosses holding patents and a monopoly on production they only care about the money rolling in, argues **Sophie Squire**

A NEW weight loss trend is here, and it's called Ozempic.

Ozempic is a drug used to treat diabetes by lowering blood sugar levels and regulating insulin.

But supplies are falling short as many are using it as a quick way to lose as much as 15 percent of their body fat.

Demand for the drug skyrocketed last year, leading to a worldwide shortage. The Health Products Regulatory Authority says shortages could last for months to come.

Ozempic is the brand name for a drug that's main component is semaglutide. It can help those with type two diabetes treat their illness and reduce the risk of them suffering heart attacks and strokes.

The drug can also make users feel fuller for longer and cause their stomachs to empty slower, making it an effective drug for weight loss.

Higher doses of semaglutide have been approved to offer to patients in the US and Britain to treat obesity since 2021 under the brand name Wegovy.

After global shortages of Wegovy began in March of last year, Ozempic was increasingly used for its off-label use of weight loss.

Shortages of both drugs have been met with anger from those reliant on them to treat their illnesses.

Patient Caroline O'Connell wrote on Twitter, "There is now a global shortage of Ozempic due to people using it as a vanity weight loss drug rather than for type two diabetes or obesity."

"I've been prescribed an alternative that I have to inject every day instead

Diabetes patients use Ozempic

of once a week." Anger has mostly been levelled at individuals who want to use Ozempic to lose a few pounds, even when their weight isn't currently impacting their general health.

And, rightfully, people are angry that only the rich can now afford the soaring prices of these drugs.

A quick look online and you'll find 12 weeks' worth of Ozempic available for as much as £435.

But the rising demand for drugs like Ozempic doesn't come from nowhere.

It comes from the crushing pressure on all of us to conform to society's beauty ideals.

We are bombarded with images, videos and articles about glamorous celebrities and influencers.

The message is always that ordinary people should aspire to look like them—or condemn them if we don't fit rigid beauty ideals.

Their body types can become "trends" we feel compelled to follow. But getting their "perfect bodies"

is only possible if you buy the right products, whether that's a diet plan, gym membership or Ozempic.

And blaming individuals for shortages not only obscures why people might seek out this drug, but also lets the pharmaceutical industry off the hook.

Ozempic and Wegovy are made by the Danish company, Novo Nordisk.

The company currently has 25 patents on Ozempic and is the only company in the world that can manufacture semaglutide.

Control

This means that just one company has almost total control over the production of the drug.

If Novo Nordisk can't keep up with demand, then no other company can make up for it. If it wants to raise its prices, it can.

Monopolising the production of these drugs has helped the profits of Novo Nordisk accelerate in the last decade.

It recorded a \$38.93 billion net worth in 2010. In January of this year, that had soared to \$308.49 billion.

While Novo Nordisk has said it doesn't "promote, suggest, or encourage" off-label use of its medicines, the bosses don't really care about who gets their drugs as long as sales stay high.

And so the real winners in the Ozempic shortage are the bosses, who simultaneously profit off our insecurities and profit again when we get sick.

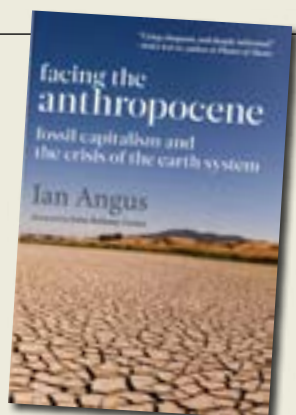
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by Ian Angus
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by Travis Holloway
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● **Capitalism in the Anthropocene: Ecological Ruin or Ecological Revolution**
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£25

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Look online and you'll find 12 weeks' worth of Ozempic available for as much as £435

Tories signal new route to extra rail profits

by SAM ORD

PRIVATISATION has destroyed Britain's railway network with delays, cancellations, overcrowding and constant attacks on workers.

But the Tories aren't backing off the private sector track, despite a national dispute to defend jobs and conditions.

Transport secretary Mark Harper last week outlined plans that will give train operators larger profits off the back of worsening working conditions and higher fares.

His plan is to "enhance the role of the private sector", according to the Financial Times newspaper.

Train operators will allegedly have more financial risk, allowing them to make greater profits if passenger numbers rise.

A new public sector organisation Great British Railway will be an "arm's length body" responsible for coordinating services and enhancing the private sector's role. The railway network has been in a constant crisis since

the privatisation and break up of British Railways in 1993.

The Tories hoped privatisation would reduce government funding by fragmenting the network and that companies would bid to operate services.

This was a huge failure. State funding rose. And privatisation led to bosses competing to chase profits, and to fare rises, poor running of

services and companies going bust. During the Covid pandemic, forced travel restrictions meant passenger numbers dropped by 93 percent.

Suddenly, rail firms decided the state was a good thing as the government stepped in to fund private companies.

Public funding of the rail increased by £10.4 billion in 2019-2020 to £16.9 billion the next year. Shareholders

still managed to grab around £38 million in dividends.

All franchises were scrapped, and the government assumed all financial risk by putting train companies on fixed management fees.

The private investors were able to profit when passenger numbers were high but were protected from losses by state intervention. The no-risk return on investment made

rail contracts very attractive, pushing up the overall industry cost as various companies bid for contracts.

But bosses pushed for these contracts to be replaced by a market-oriented model to incentivise the industry to grow passenger numbers—and profits. The new scheme is a part-return to the old model of bidding for franchises.

Outsource

Different contracts will apply for different routes with more commercial freedoms given to inter-city routes. And it will essentially outsource passenger services to private companies.

Harper has announced that London North Eastern Railway (LNER) will extend the trial of selling only single tickets. This could soon be extended to the rest of the network, likely bumping up prices.

There is also a trial of demand-based pricing on some LNER services—as seen on commercial flights—which means fares will inflate depending on how many tickets are sold. RMT

union general secretary Mick Lynch said, "Many rail services that are already in meltdown will suffer even more because of plans to cut thousands of rail jobs and jeopardise safety standards but all the government can offer is tinkering around the edges on passenger fares."

"Rail reform and a vision for the industry needs to have public ownership at its core and the goodwill of railway workers to make it happen."

"But with the government hellbent on rewarding the private sector and attacking the terms and conditions of rail staff, goodwill is in short supply."

Harper's changes will see an intensification in the attacks on rail workers.

They show that the Tories are bound to privatisation, regardless of how much it affects workers, while claiming it's to help passengers.

It makes the ongoing rail disputes even more important. Profit first, workers and passengers last, must be resisted with an escalated schedule of strikes.

LONDON NORTH Eastern Railway is bumping up ticket prices

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Stop the racist right targeting refugees

Refugees living in hotels are under threat. Isabel Ringrose reports on the growing anti-racist fightback

FASCISTS AND racists are targeting refugees kept in hotels across Britain.

This Saturday, fascist organisation Yorkshire Rose has called an anti-refugee protest outside one of two hotels in Rotherham, South Yorkshire.

Jill is an activist with the local Stand Up To Racism group, which, along with Rotherham Trades Council and Unite Against Fascism, has called a counter-protest against the mobilisation.

"The racist propaganda pushed constantly by the likes of home secretary Suella Braverman is a perfect mix with the situation here," Jill told Socialist Worker.

"Rotherham is an ex-mining community with nothing to replace those jobs. Opportunities for young people are diminishing all the time. The transport system is appalling.

"There's lots of stress and strains on schools, as they're often in areas of high deprivation where children are going in hungry or not clothed properly. And there are foodbanks everywhere."

Narrative

Jill says that the Tories work hard to put out a "horrible narrative that refugees are the problem". "But they're not," she explained.

"These poor people have the most appalling stories. Yet the Tories cynically use them to create division and deflect anger away from themselves and the absolute misery they've caused."

Life for refugees in Rotherham—and across Britain—is "horrendous".

"People think refugees are kept in five-star hotels—they're not. They're like prisons, and the food is crap," Jill said.

The hotels in Rotherham are run by Mears Group. Here refugees complain they even face racism from some of the staff.

Once inside the hotels, Jill says the refugees "languish with no understanding of when their papers are going to be processed. They

can be there for years. It's an utter disgrace."

A Rotherham newspaper published a story about young men hanging around outside their hotel.

"They wrote that a little girl was riding her bike in a car park nearby and felt threatened," Jill explained.

"It's absolute garbage, but it's sowing the seeds of racist ideas in society.

"We have to squeeze the oxygen out of all these racists and fascists."

Anti-refugee protests are sometimes called by fascist groups—such as Yorkshire Rose in Rotherham and Patriotic Alternative in Cannock, Staffordshire.

But in some areas its racist local groups that take the initiative. That's what happened in Erskine, in Scotland, recently.

Demonstrations

These organisations often describe themselves as "concerned locals", and sometimes suggest their demonstrations have been "hijacked" by the far right.

Some gatherings of "concerned locals" have welcomed the far right onto their demonstrations, while others have rejected Nazi involvement.

Whether the far right is present or not, every anti-refugee protest is racist and should be countered.

The fascists will continue to organise their own protests as well as attend other local ones to give themselves publicity and a platform to recruit.

But cloaking the rallies called separately from the hard-core fascists and treating their protesters as "not as bad" only legitimises racism.

No scapegoating and hatred towards refugees can be accepted—whether it's from organised Nazis or racist groups.

Join the counter-protest against the Yorkshire Rose fascists. Saturday 18 February, 1pm, Holiday Inn, Express Park, Manvers Way, Rotherham, S63 7EQ. Called by Rotherham Trades Council, Stand Up To Racism and Unite Against Fascism



FASCIST GROUP Patriotic Alternative in Cannock recently

PICTURE: BLACK COUNTRY STAND UP TO RACISM

Know your enemy—who are the fascist Patriotic Alternative?

PATRIOTIC ALTERNATIVE is a fascist, white-supremacist organisation. It has been involved in calling and supporting anti-refugee protests outside hotels in Erskine, Hull, Cannock and Skegness, as well as rallies outside Drag Queen Story Hour events.

Some of its members do Nazi salutes, carry weapons and don blackface.

They push racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia and homophobia online and through mass leafleting, banner drops and conferences.

Patriotic Alternative was founded in September 2019 by Nazi Mark Collett—a former leading British National Party member and chairman of its youth wing.

In 2002 he called Aids a "friendly disease because blacks, drug users and gays have it".

He's referred to refugees as "cockroaches" and said there's "no smoke without fire" when it comes to persecuting Jewish people.

Collett also asked whether Nazi party leader Adolf Hitler

was "such a bad guy?" Patriotic Alternative's other leading members are linked to fascists such as Tommy Robinson and some were activists in the banned Nazi group National Action.

Patriotic Alternative's website has a big countdown to 2066—when "native British people are set to become a minority".

It says it aims to raise awareness of "the demographic decline of native Britons"—an echo of the "great replacement" lie that fascists use globally.

These "patriots" attempt to organise regional groups across Britain with media and fitness officers.

Moral

Patriotic Alternative's 20-part plan of their vision includes an end to all immigration. It says Britain has "no legal or moral obligation" to take refugees from nations "that do not lie on her borders".

It would accept only white European nationals or people who can prove British ancestry.

Patriotic Alternative also pushes the racist myth that

social housing demands have risen because of "mass immigration and the birth rate of the immigrant population".

It also vows to protect family values—the "traditional nuclear family, which consists of a mother, father and children"—and "British jobs for British workers".

Welfare would only be available to fluent English speakers.

Schools wouldn't be able to mention "systemic racism". Employers could restrict "displays" of religious symbols, Christianity would be promoted, and places of worship funded by "foreign sources" would be shut.

Capital punishment would be reinstated, and national service would be reintroduced.

This is the world filled with the most extreme forms of hatred Patriotic Alternative wants to see.

These Nazis must be confronted wherever they appear to stop them spreading their propaganda and hate. They need to be kicked into the gutter where they belong.

IN BRIEF

Electric strike is way to win on pay

SOME 1,300 Unite union members who repair, maintain and administer electricity lines for London and the south east and east of England are voting on whether to strike over pay.

UK Power Networks had an average operating profit margin of over 50 percent between 2007 and 2021.

It has put forward a two year pay deal for 2022-23 and 2023-24. It includes an imposed 7 percent for the first year and an average of February 2023's RPI and CPI inflation rates for the second.

New Amazon strike days announced

AMAZON WORKERS have announced a series of strikes at one of the company's warehouses in a dispute over pay.

The GMB said more than 350 staff at the fulfilment centre in Coventry will walk out on 28 February, 2 March and from 13 to 17 March.

The union said its members made history last month by becoming the first Amazon workers in the Britain to strike in their campaign for a pay rate of £15 an hour.

Higher pay for 13 who stood their ground

WELWYN AND Hatfield ground maintenance workers have secured a 13 percent pay deal after striking since November.

The 13 Unite union members secured a pay rise, pay differentials and assurances that temporary agency staff wouldn't receive higher pay rates.

Pay will increase on 1 April from £10.12 an hour to £11.44.

GSK pay battle on the Firth of Clyde

ENGINEERING construction workers at the GSK plant in Irvine on the Firth of Clyde walked out over bonus pay.

Around 40 Unite union members employed by Kaefer Limited struck from Monday of last week to Monday of this week. The strike involved electricians, scaffolders, cable pullers and labourers.

They previously struck from 9 to 23 January. They want a bonus payment of £2.37 an hour—the maximum allowed under the National Agreement for the Engineering Consulting Industry.

Strikes to clean up at Royal Holloway

WORKERS AT Royal Holloway University were set to strike over pay this week. The Unite union members have rejected a 3 percent pay deal imposed by the University and Colleges Employers Association.

The cleaners, janitors, estates and staff and technicians planned to strike from Tuesday to Thursday of this week and next week.

FIREFIGHTERS



FBU UNION members marched in London as part of their campaign

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

Firefighters should say no to the new pay offer

by NICK CLARK

FIREFIGHTERS' UNION leaders have held back from calling strikes, instead recommending that workers accept a below inflation pay offer.

Leaders of the FBU union had warned that they could call strikes on Thursday of last week if bosses didn't improve a 5 percent pay increase for this financial year.

But after a long day of talks the Wednesday before, bosses offered only a slight improvement of 7 percent backdated to July last year and 5 percent from July this year.

With inflation at just over 13 percent, that's a real terms pay cut for two years running. But the union's executive council (EC) agreed unanimously to put it to a members' vote, with the recommendation to accept.

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack admitted to a BBC interview, "It is a below inflation pay rise. I don't think people will be jumping for joy. People have had 12 years of attacks on their pay. They won't be over the moon."

But in a following letter to members he said that, while the union wouldn't "sugar coat the offer" it was "only possible because of our overwhelming mandate for strike action."

Real

Wrack also said that, with inflation forecast to be lower next year, a 5 percent increase then "may amount to a slight increase in real terms pay."

That's a big gamble. And it doesn't make up for the 12 percent real terms pay cut firefighters have suffered since 2010. Some FBU activists also worry that it leave broader

issues—such as government funding for the fire service, and the threat of minimum service levels imposed by planned new laws—unfought.

Accepting the deal would take firefighters out of the wider fight over pay across the union movement.

And it would encourage other union leaders to dress up real-terms pay cuts as a victory.

Hours after the FBU announced the deal, the GMB—one of the striking ambulance workers' unions—celebrated it as an example of "what can happen when employers talk pay."

The ballot is set to run from Monday of next week until Monday 6 March.

The new offer shows what could be won if firefighters actually strike—they should vote to reject the deal and strike for better.

CIVIL SERVICE

PCS union backs 15 March, but nothing more nationally

WORKERS AT the British Museum, the Animal and Plant Health Agency, and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency all began strikes on Monday of this week.

They joined workers in jobcentres and benefits offices in Liverpool and Greater Manchester who had already been striking since Thursday of last week.

The action is part of a fight across the whole civil service over pay, pensions and jobs. Members of the PCS union have joined rolling, targeted action hitting different government departments and workplaces.

Closures

Jobcentre and other benefits workers also face office closures that could threaten jobs. In Stockport, Greater Manchester, striker, Alan, told Socialist Worker, "Our strike here is a microcosm of everything that's wrong in the civil service."

"It's also about the service we provide to the public. For example, there's still a threat of closure hanging over the important office in Hyde."

Pickets also recalled other attacks. "They took 2 percent off the pension", said Julie. "That was even after we won a case against them in the courts."

Workers at the British Museum were set to strike until Sunday of this week.

The action at Animal and Plant Health Agency offices in Bristol and Carlisle was set to run until Friday of this week. So was a strike by some workers at a Driver



Picketing in Stockport

and Vehicle Licensing Agency office in Swansea.

It comes after the PCS union's leadership voted to call all its members with active strike votes on strike alongside teachers on Wednesday 15 March.

But they voted down a motion by Socialist Worker supporters on the national executive committee to join the teachers on 16 March too.

Up to 100,000 civil service workers struck together—along with other workers—during a day of strikes on 1 February. It showed widespread enthusiasm for action, especially among newer, younger members.

Together they're a powerful force. But the limited targeted action, punctuated by only single days of all-out strikes, leaves that power largely untapped.

Longer strikes—involving every civil service worker—have a much better chance of winning.

●For picket line details go to bit.ly/PCSFeb

Thanks to Mike Killian

ENVIRONMENT

'You can't mention climate'

JAILED environmental activists—who were sent down for mentioning the climate crisis in court—say state repression won't stop them from speaking out.

Insulate Britain activist and care worker David Nixon was jailed for eight weeks last week after disobeying a judge's instruction not to mention the climate crisis.

He was charged with contempt of court after he said taking direct action in 2021 was necessary to fight environmental destruction.

Judge Silas Reid had told the defendants not to refer to the climate crisis as their reason for blocking roads.

Nixon defied the court's rules—and, when Reid asked him to apologise, he refused twice.

Nixon's case is not the first where activists have

been barred from speaking about the climate crisis. Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil supporter Mark Coleman was on trial in the Crown Court in January along with three others.

Mark told Socialist Worker, "The judge was very clear in our trial because we were being charged with public nuisance. We could give no defence."

"But we were all shocked that we couldn't talk about our motivations. The judge even told us we weren't allowed to talk about our history."

During the trial fellow defendant Stephanie Aylett defied the ruling not to talk about the climate crisis and was charged with contempt of court.

●Read more at bit.ly/ClimateContempt

Sophie Squire

LONDON UNDERGROUND

Don't delay action any longer on the Tube—demos should not stop strikes

RMT UNION leaders had not called strikes on the London Underground at the start of this week, despite rumours of imminent action.

Workers face 600 job cuts that will put more pressure on remaining staff and threaten safety and passenger services.

The jobs facing the axe include people on the ticket gates and those who manage crowds on the platform—critical safety roles.

The 10,000 Underground workers have previously struck alongside other groups of workers including Underground staff in the

Unite union and 40,000 rail workers employed by train operating companies and Network Rail.

Many workers were expecting a call to strike for 48-hours including on 15 March, alongside members of the PCS and NEU unions.

But NEU officials allegedly wrote to the RMT asking them not to strike to allow their members to travel to a planned strike "carnival" in central London.

Another version suggests the initiative not to strike came from the RMT.

Whichever is true, it's a rotten suggestion that

the best way to deepen the power of united strikes is not to strike.

The Tube striking alongside other public sector workers would be a boost to the RMT fight and will increase the effectiveness of the teachers' action.

It is still possible to have a big demonstration in London on 15 March, and a Tube strike would add to the government's crisis.

Now Tube workers must demand more and longer strikes, coordinated with others when possible, to drive the dispute to victory over jobs and more.

TRANSPORT

Drivers feel ‘fooled’ after Unite ends Abellio strikes

by SAM ORD

AFTER MORE than 20 days of strikes Unite union leaders have cancelled the Abellio bus strike in south London.

But the deal is below their demand for £20 an hour, and the package as a whole, including overtime rates, will see pay rise less than inflation for many.

Workers, who rejected the deal two weeks ago, say that they have been “fooled” by the union. What was thought to be an indicative online survey on whether to accept it or to escalate strikes, turned out to be a ballot.

One driver said, “We balloted twice rejecting the offer, then Unite said there is a survey out which we need to vote for in order to work out how to progress with strikes, which turned out to be an official ballot. How can this happen?”

Another driver said, “I’m so upset right now about our result, as are the rest of the members.” Their colleague added it’s a “shambolic state of affairs”.

Abellio bosses sent a letter to drivers on Friday of last week before Unite officials left negotiations.

It said, “Following the successful ballot result today, accepting the 13.5 percent pay deal and other improvements to the schedules, the industrial dispute has come to an end and strikes concluded.

“As a result, rest day working is reinstated with immediate effect



UNION MEMBERSHIP grew during the strike

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

for all drivers. We look forward to working together to rebuild relationships and the business.”

Many workers are rightly angry at the union for playing fast and loose with their dispute.

Union membership among workers grew during the strike from 950 to almost 2,000.

Now many new members have been left feeling betrayed by the officials. The workers’ action did achieve

some further gains that will improve scheduling agreements within the next six months. There are further talks between the union and bosses on Monday.

New drivers’ pay has been boosted from £13.09 to £15.05 an hour. Those with over two years’ experience will receive £18, up from £15.22. Saturday and Sunday pay will be £15.47 and £18.80 respectively.

But the strike was weakened by

repeated undemocratic decisions by the Unite bureaucracy. Strikes were called off for ballots and for talks—even when no new deal had been presented.

And the delays between strikes started to have an effect with reports of over 60 percent of services running from two garages on the most recent strike day.

Escalating the strikes could have won a better, fairer pay deal.

IN BRIEF

Make bosses shell out over Easter

HEATHROW Airport workers are being balloted for strikes to coincide with Easter.

The 3,000 Unite union members, who work as security guards, engineers and firefighters, begin balloting on Friday of this week for a month.

They have rejected a 10 percent pay offer.

Rota fight at Petrofac rigs

SOME 80 workers at BP Petrofac—members of the Unite union—held a 48-hour strike from Wednesday of last week. Bosses at the offshore contractor want the workers to change from three on/three off rotation. More strikes are set until 3 March.

Union campaign bears fruit

WORKERS AT the Glasgow Apple store have become the first in Britain to unionise. The company has agreed to recognise the GMB union there.

Workers at the store can now appoint reps and negotiate with bosses.

Action tested bosses’ metal

SOME 50 metal workers in Hartlepool have gone back to work after six days of strikes.

Members of the GMB union at the Expanded Metal Company voted to call off the strikes for a 7.5 percent pay increase, a £600 lump sum and improved sick pay.

Striking meant that the bosses had to budge. But more strikes could have won an increase in line with inflation.

ANTI-FASCISM



Seeing off Patriotic Alternative

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

Nazis driven off in London

ANTI-FASCISTS HELD a counter-protest against Patriotic Alternative outside the Tate Britain in central London on Saturday.

The Nazi party, which mobilised against a Drag Queen Story Hour event at the gallery, mustered some 12 supporters.

Around 150 anti-fascists were on the counter-protest in response to calls by Stand Up To Racism and Trans Activism UK.

They chased Patriotic

Alternative away, up the main road towards Westminster. Another group of far right dregs—some six—had gone into the gallery in an attempt to find the Drag Queen Story Hour reading. They wandered around, and then came back out to be met by chants of “Nazi scum off our streets.”

This group joined another couple of far right supporters outside—and were seen off by chanting. **Tomáš Tengely-Evans**

EDUCATION

Reject poor pay offers for teachers from Scottish and Welsh governments

A NEW offer to end the Scottish teachers’ strikes could be on the table this week. It was very unlikely to be any significant improvement.

Councils were expecting an announcement of more money from the Scottish government to put forward a new pay deal.

Unions have said any new offer would need to be “significantly” improved to avoid further strikes.

Teachers have asked for a 10 percent rise, but the latest deal was worth around 5 percent. School workers have strongly backed a series of strikes since November.

But the action has been sporadic, and not enough to shift the government, headed by the Scottish National Party and the

Greens. The EIS, the main teachers’ union, has now announced strikes in schools within the constituencies of key decision makers within the Scottish Government and the Cosla local authorities’ body.

And there will be two days of national strikes on Tuesday 28 February and Wednesday 1 March.

There will be a further 20 days of rolling strikes, council by council, between 13 March and 21 April.

But all-out action would have a far better chance of success.

Meanwhile, union leaders have postponed teachers’ strikes across Wales after receiving a 6.5 percent pay offer with an additional 1.5 per cent one-off payment. NEU union members in Wales

were set to walk out Tuesday of next week in a national dispute over pay and school funding. They demand a government funded pay rise to beat the cost of living crisis.

The 6.5 percent offer falls way short of inflation meaning it’s a real terms pay cut. More strikes can force the Welsh government to give real pay rises to all teachers and support staff.

NEU joint general secretary Kevin Courtney said the offer in Wales “remains significantly below our members’ demands”.

The Wales-wide strike is now set for 2 March, with strikes across Britain on 15 March.

●Full details of the EIS strikes at eis.org.uk/campaigns/payattention

School students stage walkout

SOME 70 students walked out of classes at the Discovery Academy in Bentlille, Stoke on Trent, last week in protest against the closure of toilets during lessons.

The students said the move would hit girls and disabled students the hardest.

Dozens of parents protested outside the school on Monday of this week holding placards reading, “Basic human right,” and “No bars on toilets.”

The academy has offered to interview concerned students and hold a meeting with parents. But the protesters want the doors unlocked, and disciplinary measures on students eased.

UNIVERSITY WORKERS ON STRIKE FRONT LINE

by SOPHIE SQUIRE

AROUND 70,000 university workers were set to strike on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of this week.

The planned strikes by UCU union members will follow big picket lines on 1 February as well as on Thursday and Friday of last week.

Workers have begun a programme of 18 strike days in their battle over pensions, pay, conditions and equality.

This extended programme needs solidarity from other workers.

And UCU members have to turn their fight outwards to link up with others.

At the University of Greenwich, south London, last Thursday UCU co-chair Ruth told Socialist Worker, "University workers have seen at least a 25 percent pay cut in the last ten years.

And now, with the cost of living crisis, we're struggling to pay rent in places like Greenwich."

Antidote

But Ruth added that strikes and solidarity are the antidote. "The strikes and demonstrations on 1 February were fantastic," she said. "They gave workers confidence.

"It was great to be able to walk out with teachers. On the train home we had really valuable political discussions



UCU MEMBERS picket outside Queen Mary University in east London, last week

PICTURES GUY SMALLMAN

with each other. Whether we win depends on us.

"It matters how many people we have on picket lines. We need to show our power and scare the employers."

Spirits have been high on picket lines across Britain.

More than 45 strikers took to picket lines in York.

Pickets were lively and

noisy at Derby university and at Camberwell arts college. Around 250 turned out for the strike rally in Leeds.

Unison union members joined UCU strikes at UCL in central London, and in Brighton university strikers joined striking physiotherapists on their picket lines.

At the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, an opening

ceremony was cancelled due to the strikes. On many picket lines, students showed their support.

Students at Glasgow university and Newcastle university made banners to show their solidarity.

Workers in Liverpool planned a city-wide strike committee—involving four branches—after picketing

last week. In other cities, including Bristol, Cambridge and at Imperial College in west London, workers are beginning to organise strike committees (see pages 10&11).

It is this kind of organising that is vital for the future of this dispute.

Instead of building on the size and vibrancy of picket

lines, UCU general secretary Jo Grady and other leaders in the union are more interested in the rebalot later this year.

Activists have to organise in the here and now to make the strikes as hard-hitting as possible.

Calling more big rallies and organising solidarity with other striking unions is vital to keep the momentum going and raise strikers' confidence.

University workers must also fight for democracy within the union.

Democratic

The leadership of the UCU union has yet to call a branch delegates' meeting that will give members a full and democratic voice in the future of the strikes.

Strike committees give workers a voice, but they can also raise workers' confidence to challenge the bureaucracy.

Last week, Grady promised on a Twitter video that the union would not settle until there was a "rounded agreement on pay."

Workers must not accept a below-inflation pay rise. Strikes should not be paused for negotiations.

If bosses don't move, the only way forward is all-out indefinite action.

All workers should join the UCU solidarity meeting—**Strike together, march together: building united action to win.** Tue 21 Feb, 7pm on Zoom. Register at bit.ly/21FebUnited

Ambulance workers call for unity and escalation to win on pay and for NHS

AMBULANCE workers' strikes set for this week and next will pile more pressure on the Tories to reopen pay negotiations.

The Unite and GMB unions were set to walk out in some parts of England and Wales on Friday and Monday respectively. Their action follows strikes by the Unison union last week.

In all unions, there is a strong sense of strikers "digging in" for a long fight.

From a picket line in east London last week,



Ambulance workers picketing their station in south London

one Unison striker told Socialist Worker that the unions must now start thinking of new tactics because the government shows no sign of moving.

"The Tories are hoping they can string this out until April, when the new pay year starts," she said.

"That means we have to get serious coordination between all the health unions.

"It's no good us in Unison being out on one day in one part of the country, the GMB out on another, and

Unite on still another.

"All the unions have to coordinate to have an impact.

"And, I think all the health unions, including the nurses and the physios, should be out together as well."

Pickets in North Yorkshire echoed that.

"I think we need to build up our action and I think members want us to do more to hit the Tories," said one striker.

"Obviously, we still have to provide life and limb emergency cover. But

we can strike for more days—say, two or three days together. We can strike more often, and we can strike alongside other unions too.

"Unions are also re-balloting areas of the country where the union didn't meet the turnout threshold. So that should bring more people into action."

The strikers are right. Coordinating the strikes and ramping up the action is the only way to force the Tories to back down.

Yuri Prasad