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For true liberation of LGBTQI people in China

31 May 2023, by [Yong-hui Hong](#)

The center is neither the first nor the largest organization for sexual minorities in China. But it represented China's LGBTQI movement in the political, economic and cultural center of the country. The center continued to advocate rights for LGBTQI people, including same-sex marriage even after a nationwide crackdown on human rights lawyers and activists that began in 2015.

On the other hand, its activities had been scaled back in the past few years. In recent years, Xi Jinping has seen the rights of LGBTQI people as "western values" and has detained activists. The oppressions are in stark contrast to neighboring Taiwan, which became the first country in Asia to recognize same-sex marriage in 2019. [1]

Past oppression of LGBTQI people

Originally, LGBTQI people in China has never been explicitly protected from discrimination. Also, the Chinese government had shown an ambivalent and fickle attitude toward the topic. The Constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for equality under the law. But this is no explicit mention of sexual orientation or gender identity. And there is no anti-discrimination provision for sexual orientation or gender identity under Chinese labor law. It was not

something that happened just recently. And the ambivalent and fickle attitude of the government sometimes had changed to full disapproval.

Oppression of LGBTQI people has escalated since Xi Jinping was elected president of China by the National People's Congress in 2013. Three months after the election of Xi Jinping, officials were arrested at the Beijing Queer Film Festival. And two months later, the Beijing Independent Film Festival was obstructed by Chinese authorities and canceled. The Independent Film Festival, then in its 11th year, had been obstructed by the authorities before. However, it was the first time that it was forced to be cancelled. In 2020, Shanghai PRIDE was forced to end its activities. It is one of the longest-running gay pride groups in China and had been operating for about 11 years. The [official website of the Beijing Queer Choir](#) existed around October last year. But it is closed at the time of writing. The Beijing Queer Choir was founded in 2008, the same year that the Beijing LGBT Center was founded. It was as if Xi Jinping has been in line with Putin's policies. Since last year, Putin has repeatedly made discriminatory remarks that appear to be aimed at sexual minorities in speeches related to the invasion of Ukraine. Russia and China currently stand together against the "common enemies".

Xi Jinping wary of "western values"

The "common enemies" of Chinese and Russian dictators are "western values". In China, tightened surveillance and censorship of the people have forced multiple LGBTQI-related organizations to shut down and the events to cancel under the pretext of "national security". [2] And political pressure also extended to social media. In July 2021, many WeChat accounts associated with LGBTQI movements attended by university students were blocked and then deleted without warning. The accounts were deleted unilaterally while the students were exercising their right to freedom of expression and freedom of speech. [3] Social networking services such as LINE, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, which are commonly used in other countries, cannot be used or strictly restricted in China except when using overseas roaming or VPN services. It is due to the very strict internet censorship system known as the "Great Firewall". In effect, people in China are being forced to use WeChat, Weibo, Renrenwan, and Oasis instead of LINE, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram respectively. State surveillance and intelligence gathering by Chinese authorities are conducted not only in mainland China but also in other countries. When a friend of the

present writer who lives in the country other than China criticized the Chinese government on WeChat, he received a warning call from a Chinese public security officer the next day.

The only way to win true liberation

The Chinese government has achieved certain results in "people control" aiming at "national security". In recent years, the Chinese government has succeeded in monitoring the conversations, behavior, and purchase history of all Chinese citizens by using exclusive Chinese social media. It shows Xi Jinping's strong sense of unease, which is overly wary of the influence and values of foreign countries. At the same time, there is a "consideration of what Xi Jinping wants" in the name of loyalty by the "national security faction" that increases power and interests within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Especially during the pandemic, the Chinese government has continued privatization of public social services. [4] It has exposed women and other marginalized groups to further precarious conditions and exploitation. Against this, feminist and LGBTQI activists have led local and overseas struggles against gender-based violence. Also, the people in China launched a massive struggle across the country.

As a result, the people won their first battle against long-term pandemic policies of the country last year. The struggle across China made the Xi Jinping regime back down from its dictatorial policies to some extent. The oppressed proletariat has no country. We socialists should strongly support and empower their struggles for their basic human rights of the oppressed. Our horizon is international solidarity to overthrow the Chinese bureaucratic capitalist system and also to abolition of Xi Jinping's dictatorial rule from which the political regime draws its power. [5] We are the class that does the work of the world, and can revolutionize it. We can win true liberation. [6] It is the only way to fulfill the demands of oppressed people joining ongoing struggles for democratic reforms and revolutionary socialism.

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Footnotes

[1] In Taiwan at the time, not only democratic movements but also the feminist movements, labor movements, and social movements were growing nationwide, which allowed abolition of the traditional constraints of then-Taiwan society.

[2] At the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party of October 2022, Xi Jinping used

"security" 91 times and "national security" 29 times in his political report. On the other hand, "reform" which has been used frequently in the past political speeches of the CCP was only 51 times. China has shifted from the era of "reform and opening up" to the era of "national security."

[3] Because of WeChat's popularity, the Chinese government uses the application as a data source to conduct mass surveillance in China.

[4] Fourth International Bureau, 22 December 2022, "[Solidarity with the mass movement for democracy in China](#)".

[5] After Beijing Sitong Bridge protest of October 2022 "[Courage at Sitong Bridge](#)", protesters wearing full-body protective gear organized an action with the slogans of the Sitong Bridge protest (following) in front of the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo:

We don't want nucleic acid testing, we want food to eat.

We don't want lockdowns, we want freedom.

We don't want Cultural Revolution, we want reform.

We don't want dictatorial leaders.

[6] Quoted from the end of Leslie Feinberg's book *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*, (1992).

Khan Against the Generals

29 May 2023, by Tariq Ali

This marks a dramatic escalation of the political war between the PTI and the Army, along with its favoured politicians and the government it manoeuvred into place after removing Khan from office last April. The new administration is essentially a coalition of Pakistan's dynastic parties led by Bhutto-Zardari and the Sharif family. Since it was installed, Khan has repeatedly accused the US of orchestrating the congressional coup

against him - motivated by his refusal to support their interventions in Afghanistan and Ukraine. Large numbers of anti-American protesters have taken to the streets, demanding his reinstatement.

Usually, Pakistani leaders can only be forcibly removed from office once they have lost some degree of popular support. If they haven't, the choices are limited: exile abroad or judicial murder. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was

executed after a 4-3 vote in the Supreme Court; Nawaz Sharif was whisked off to exile in Saudi Arabia; Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in mysterious circumstances at the start of an election campaign. But Khan? Every opinion poll shows him sweeping the country at the next general election. On 8 May, a nervous Army leadership - by no means unified - and a Sharif government fearing a political wipeout, took the decision to

arrest Khan by sending in a team of Rangers while he was in the High Court dealing with an old corruption case. He was immediately dragged off to a squalid prison.

Before long, the Chief Justice ordered his release and reprimanded those who ordered the raid. But what happened on 9 May was dramatic. PTI supporters in their thousands launched frontal assault on the Army, invading cantonments in Lahore and Rawalpindi and destroying a model plane in Mianwali. The residence of the Lahore Corp Commander was firebombed. According to police, the leader of the attack was 34-year-old Khadija Shah: one of the most fashionable clothes designers in Lahore (daughter of a former Finance Minister, and granddaughter of Asif Nawaz, a former Army Chief of Staff) who has become something of an icon for the masses of women participating in the recent demonstrations.

In Mardan, an old town in Pakhtunkhwa province, there was another event that stunned the nation. At a huge public meeting demanding the immediate release of the PTI leader, a mullah took to the platform and described Khan as a 'paighamber' - or 'prophet'. This was blasphemy of the highest order. Every Believer, regardless of sect, accepts the Prophet Muhammed as the final Messenger of God. Was the poor mullah overcome by emotion, or was it a deliberate provocation? We shall never know. The microphone was switched off; the anguished crowd began to chant 'death, death, death'. The others on the platform seized the mullah and he was hacked to death. Problem solved?

Khan's criticism of the Army and its constant interference in Pakistani politics (of which he himself took advantage not so long ago) has sparked a serious crisis. Those in uniform have been humiliated. The last taboo has been broken. Even in previously ultra-loyal areas like Punjab province, activists have been marching on the barracks. The Army has responded with mass arrests and announced that political prisoners will be tried in military courts. This draconian move is backed by much of the government, which - stupid and short-sighted as ever - has tried to

expel PTI parliamentarians, a decision revoked by the Supreme Court. Sentences for dissenters are likely to be stiff: possibly a few hangings of those without elite connections in the hope of deterring future offenders.

Whatever anyone might think of him, Khan is the first political leader in the country who has publicly denounced the Army and insulted its Generals, going so far as to name the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officer who allegedly organised the effort to assassinate him. How will the military respond to this unprecedented challenge? General Zia offered Bhutto exile, which he contemptuously refused, before Supreme Court judges ordered his hanging. Khan, too, may be offered exile or a military trial. The temptation to accept the former will be strong (his two sons already live in London with their mother), but a lot will depend on the advice of his current wife, Bushra Bibi, who masquerades as a spiritual leader of sufi persuasion, but is as proficient as any other politician at taking 'gifts' from billionaires. The most notorious of these is like a character from a Mohsin Hamid novel: Riaz Malik, a self-made man who has bribed every major politician and General in the land. This is hardly a secret, and Khan's own dealings with him are the subject of a High Court trial, currently suspended. This involves the Qadir Trust, of which Imran and Bushra are the key trustees, and which, it is alleged, was set up with Malik's laundered money: millions of pounds were uncovered by Britain's National Crime Agency and returned to Pakistan. It was, some say, handed back to Malik, who provided a much larger sum, much of it earmarked for a 'spiritual' Sufi university in London and Allah alone knows what else. Did the entire PTI cabinet sign off on this project without being allowed to open 'the sealed envelope' containing the details? I honestly don't know. (How long do we have to wait for a Netflix series?)

The function of a military court, meanwhile, would be to bar Khan from politics forever. The judges would probably refrain from executing him; not for moral reasons, but because it would risk unleashing a civil war of sorts. Khan remains popular among a

layer of officers, junior and senior, which combined with his mass support means his opponents must tread carefully. At this stage, the military leadership cannot restore order by falling back on traditional sacralisations of the Army. Its legitimacy crisis runs too deep.

Throughout this century, and half of the previous one, political life in Pakistan has displayed all the characteristics of a permanently diseased organism. Commercial capitalism, foreign aid handouts, state-backed industrial monopolies, illegal import-export deals and money-laundering schemes: together, they have created a continuous crisis. Predators fight for the spoils of power and refuse to accept bureaucratic impositions such as paying tax. Every mainstream politician works hard to cultivate the art of clientelism, gathering around them a following of loyal dependents. The latter can make various offerings to those lower down the ladder, often by skimming public funds off elephantine military budgets. Percentage commissions remain hugely popular within the ruling elite.

Old-style corruption still rules the roost, but the emergence of the internet has made life a lot easier by eliminating paper transactions and allowing the rich to conceal their hidden spoils. Not that too much is hidden these days. People can see what's going on, and have lost hope in politicians and their cronies. Khan is the exception for three reasons. He is no longer the incumbent; he is enough of a foreign policy maverick to deny the US the total subordination it demands; and he has capitalized on the country's dire economic conditions. Pakistan is now hopelessly dependent on the IMF, experiencing non-stop inflation, and suffering from a corrupted and useless education system that weaponizes religion to prevent children from learning anything useful (the polar opposite of medieval Islam, which produced countless scholars, astronomers, mathematicians and scientists).

The PTI was complicit in all these failures, but it has the advantage of no longer being in office. At present, two of its factions are preparing for Khan's departure from frontline politics. One

is led by Shah Mehmood Qureshi, who has served in virtually every government over the last few decades and would be the safest bet for the Army; the other by Jehangir Tareen, who was once a marginally more radical figure and retains a strong middle-class power base. Whether the PTI can exist without Khan remains an

open question. The Army hopes that things will revert to business-as-usual once they've dealt with him, and the governing parties will no doubt open their doors to defectors. It must be stressed that none of Pakistan's political outfits, let alone its military, aims for even a modest change in

social relations. They're not in the business of creating a new society. When people take to the streets to demand one, their only response is repression.

22 May 2023

Source NLR [Sidecar](#).

Schrodinger's Fascism and The Brown Feast

28 May 2023, by [Onur Danaci](#)

This trend started with war in Syria, crystallized in political bombings killing our comrades, and cemented after a self-coup succeeding a failed military-coup. It found its perfect expression in a regime where capitalists and their state execute their overt crimes under day light and in plain sight. Analysing the ongoing elections suffers from the same bipolar fate.

In one hand, there is apparent voting fraud and voter suppression in an election made under an authoritarian regime right after a massive earthquake. It seems voting irregularities could swing vote shares 2-3% in each direction (5%!). It would be disrespectful to thousands of political activists who organize a campaign to become electoral observers against this ongoing fraud not to mention them. They scream at the top of their lungs about the crimes they're witnessing while being physically attacked - especially out of big cities - and call for a recount. In such circumstances it is impossible to use the voting data as given, and construct a proper Marxist analysis. Despite the global far-right, as a boy who cried wolf, keep using similar concerns as a main talking point. These obviously lead to a mass demoralization in the ranks of the opposition. This was exemplified by a high-schooler committing suicide in Istanbul subway with a note stating she couldn't survive under this misogyny and poverty, and elections were her last hope.

On the other hand, the promises by the main opposition of a rose garden without thorns didn't materialize.

Their material analysis of the Turkish society and the state were unfounded, and their polls showing Kilicdaroglu leading Erdogan by a 52+% margin were unfounded. Their ship has holes on the main body and is slowly sinking. In an act of despair, at the moment, they are negotiating with the Devil (far-right nationalists having 5.3% of the presidential votes and enjoying the king-maker statue), while pleading to Kurdish & Turkish socialists to come to their rescue with their organizational capacity - especially in the ballot box. I will try to summarize the fallout of the parliamentary election, and the first round of the presidential election leading to runoff, and the actors in both sides in a few points.

First, the ruling party (now "party-state") of AKP has always been an intra- and inter-class coalition materially, politically, and in cadres of the state bureaucracy. Although having a vague islamist ideology and agenda, it has always been a pragmatic and plastic force. The 2001 economic crisis led to the demise of the previous ruling coalition of center-left (DSP, predecessor of main opposition CHP), center-right (ANAP), and far-right (MHP), despite erecting the spine of neoliberal orthodoxy (to be used by AKP) to mitigate the crisis. AKP, splintered from the traditional islamist-nationalist Refah party, rode the wave of the small-business owners' protests to get the 68% of the parliamentary seats despite having 34% of the votes in Nov. '02. It had the following coalition actors 2002 - early 2010s: conservative small and large business owners seeking to

peoples and nature of Anatolia via harsh labor discipline (monopolization of all human interactions), pro-EU large business owners (both conservative and secular), pro-EU liberals, remnants of center-right parties, and the cadres of the pro-US islamist cabal of Fethullah Gulen in the state bureaucracy (especially in security apparatus). This coalition used the economic boom of the neoliberal-orthodoxy erected by the previous coalition, the political aspirations of the masses (Turks equating EU with freedom and prosperity, Kurds demanding peace and collective rights), as well as the support of both EU and the US to leverage against the opposition and to purge the Turkish judiciary, bureaucracy from their rivals (nationalist, pro-Eurasian, secular). Meanwhile, they purged the organized labor via local networks of gangs and religious cults. This coalition came to a halt when EU aspirations failed, and the crisis of 2008 burst the bubble of neoliberal orthodoxy. This led the core of AKP to have its interests diverge from the rest, and seek a material basis elsewhere: extractivism, construction bubble (both condo gentrification and Herrenvolk autobahn infrastructure), arms manufacturing (aggressive foreign policy). When material interests diverged West leaning small & large business owners (both conservative and secular) and their liberals drifted one by one. Slow erasure of coalition and its base became more apparent by 2013 Gezi uprising, 2013 corruption trials (Gulenists), 2015 elections & dissolution of Kurdish peace process and 2016 coup attempt (Gulenists).

Second, the 2014 Kobane protests of Kurds and 2015 elections (Erdogan lost and Left-Kurdish alliance became 3rd biggest party) triggered a fault line in the warring capitalists and state, and formed an unholy political alliance in the far-right: gang of August 10 (as in gang of December 10 of Louis Bonaparte in 18 Brumaire). AKP now allying hitherto purged nationalists (different factions of Kemalist, pro-Eurasian, etc), far-right parties of MHP, and Hudapar; a fascist coalition giving life buoy to Erdogan, but also forcing him to surrender. The latter, aka Kurdish Hezbollah, not related to the one on Lebanon, is rather known as state's terror machine against Kurds in 1990s and holds a place in collective memory for their carnage against Kurds, women & children. This coalition kept Turkey and its ruling classes active in all foreign wars: de-facto invasion of Rojava and Northern Iraq, proxy wars in Libya, Caucasus, West Africa, Ethiopia and Sudan, a booming war industry (e.g, drones in Ukraine), aggressive oil drilling in Eastern Mediterranean and Black sea, arms & drug smuggling via affiliated mafia. Inside, this faction ensured the worst form of labor discipline: closed-circuit factories during Covid, replacing China in supply-chain crisis by currency manipulation and refugee exploitation (especially in labor intensive textile), and making sure it runs smoothly by surveilling a worker's each minute through a network of gangs and religious cults ('tariqat'). Making sure Kurdish municipalities are not governed by elected officials via regular purges. When this coalition led to 70% official (200% unofficial) inflation and the worst cost-of-living crisis since 1915s, it triggered a massive backlash in youth movement in big cities, the biggest strike-wave (both official and wildcat) since 1980s, and the biggest surge of socialist left since the 1990s. They didn't stick as Covid was a good cover, and the main opposition coalition had other plans.

Third, a coalition formed by CHP (Kemalist & social-liberal), Iyip (a splinter from far-right with center-right undertones), and Saadet (ex-Refah, islamist-nationalist with social undertones). They found a narrow window in 2019 local elections as the currency crisis ongoing since 2017 led to anger in populace in the big cities, and both the pull of this coalition within security bureaucracy and the hard-work of grass-roots electoral observants (OyVeOtesi) led to fairly less fraud comparing to 2018 election that was hacked. Erdogan's loss in Istanbul triggered renewal of election, and lost with an even higher margin. Through this, more Western leaning cadres dissociated from AKP, and two parties DEVA (liberal islam) & Gelecek came, and with the addition of another traditional center-right party (Democrat) they formed the notorious Table of Six (TOS). Instead of taking the initiative and keeping this political momentum TOS passively banked on slow erasure of party-state's electorate due to economic crisis. This erasure was slower in periphery comparing to the countryside (AKP strongholds) as the party-state was able to bribe the electorate through "election economy", and small concessions as bumping minimum wage. The party-state took its political lesson from 2019 election to make sure ongoing economical crisis didn't lead to mass unemployment, keeping voters at bay. On the ideological front, it consolidated its base through nationalist gestures such as opening Hagia Sophia as a mosque, and extravagant displays of military might with a message of "you can be hungry for a day, but you can't afford to lose your country". This could be countered by mass politics, but TOS sabotaged youth and labor movement's protests and direct-action, prescribing them to wait. Told them "they're going anyway" not to spook the capital & security apparatus cadres who can ensure a smooth transition (e.g, no electoral fraud). But that obviously failed, because the party-state was able to consolidate the security bureaucracy. They openly

displayed how high the stakes are for both the TOS and Turkish/Kurdish left by soldiers randomly firing real bullets and gas canisters towards empty streets in the Kurdish cities. As Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair described the protests of Seattle 1999, a generation can surprise and overwhelm the capitalist state only once with the same tactics. State developed new methods for electoral fraud, especially in the countryside and Earth-quake hit area, in order not to be overwhelmed by grass-roots organizations such as OyVeOtesi again. Meanwhile TOS totally failed in electoral security. Now they have no option but to dismiss fraud allegations as 'conspiracy theory' in order to keep electoral turn-out stable while appealing to the same grass-roots organizers (whom they dismissed) to defend the ballots. At the same time, TOS has to cut a deal with the newly emerging (even more!) far-right forces (Ata coalition, Zafer party, Sinan Ogan and Umit Ozdag). These new forces have been instrumental for the party-state at deflecting the blame and anger in political crises triggered by Covid, cost-of-living, and lastly the earthquake towards the blameless refugees. They organized multiple pogroms with the help of the party-state's troll army.

To sum up, Turkish democracy is in peril, more so than ever. All the different hues of brown got the highest percentage of the votes in their history. This brown feast is served both to those in power and in opposition. It's as if the splintered far-right in Turkey is multiplying by mitosis cell division. The wait and see approach of TOS failed dramatically. Second round of presidential elections is precarious. Kilicdaroglu has to win, or at least not to lose with a small margin. But he is already in a rock (fascist coalition of AKP) and the hard place (fascist coalition of ATA). The Turkish and Kurdish left is holding their nose for now.

23 May 2023

What kind of trade unions do we need?

27 May 2023, by [Terry Conway](#)

This wave has involved members from a whole range of trade unions and many thousands of individual workers, overwhelmingly in the public or formerly public sector. There has been some limited activity elsewhere, most notably among Amazon workers in Coventry.

There are many positives about what has taken place. Strike action has brought many younger workers into action for the first time—people who have been sold trade unions as a route to cheap insurance rather than a place to organise collective action. And there is nothing like a dispute with your employer to create a cauldron of education about how capitalism actually works, destroying many of the myths people are sold day by day.

Despite sharp attacks from the mainstream media and politicians, the demands of different unions for decent pay increases to prevent so many workers from having to choose between heating and eating have been met with strong support from the public. Attacks on terms and conditions central to many of the disputes are also unpopular, especially when share holders and managers continue to celebrate rising profits ripped off the backs of workers.

This is no surprise when other sections of the working class, be they workers in unionised work places, those dependent on benefits, retired people, or students, can see that those who are striking are effectively fighting for us all. Everyone knows many other friends and family members who are struggling, including in jobs or industries where, not that long ago, this would not have been what people expected.

The launch of the very popular [“Enough is Enough”](#) campaign with the potential to link struggles around wider issues like housing and the right to food with strike solidarity seemed very positive towards the end of last summer. However, the initiative was effectively strangled at birth by its

primary movers, who, after organising a series of very impressive rallies and a mammoth mailing list, did nothing to allow local supporters to get in touch with each other and build on the ground.

And it’s not only “Enough is Enough” where the bureaucracy has tried to keep a tight rein on what does and does not happen. The disputes themselves have generally been run in a very top-down way, with stewards and workplace representatives often treated as stage armies rather than the subject of the action.

The fact that Labour under Starmer has failed to back the strikes has also done nothing to strengthen the movement. There have been a small number of left constituency Labour Parties whose banners have appeared on the big demonstrations that have happened over these months and on some local picket lines, along with an equally small number of left MPs and doubtless many individual party members out on strike or involved in support work, but this is completely eclipsed by the fact that the Labour leader forbade members of his Shadow Cabinet from supporting workers in struggle. This, together with so many of Starmer’s pronouncements, makes clear that his only concern is not to garner popular support but to clearly position himself as a safe pair of hands for capital.

And none of this is helped by longer-term factors such as the fact that trade union organisation in Britain has not recovered from the massive defeats of the 1984-5 miners’ strike and the wave of deindustrialisation that followed, leaving trade unions and their workplace organisation of shop stewards networks demoralised and hollowed out.

The fact that Britain has the most developed and reactionary trade union laws in Europe—even before the Minimum Service Bill comes in—also completely shackles the trade unions. The depth of the economic and social

crisis in Britain was enough to win ballots for action for many unions last summer. Given all these factors, we are reaching a stage where some actions are stalling and others are in danger of leading to defeat.

Several unions have had to re-ballot as reactionary laws mean that mandates only last for six months. Even where these have been won, e.g., by rail unions, the lack of any apparent strategy to win from the leadership means that demoralisation could set in. In the civil service union PCS, one of the biggest and historically militant departments, the [Department for Work and Pensions just missed the threshold for further action](#).

Health worker action is fragmenting. It’s certainly true that the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has been transformed from an organisation that never took industrial action to one in which members rejected the government’s offer of a 5 percent pay rise—way below existing inflation—against the advice of their leaders. In the run-up to the RCN conference, General Secretary Pat Cullen said that only a double-digit offer can stem a campaign of strikes through Christmas, but the RCN needs to win another ballot before it can strike again.

Meanwhile, two other large unions, UNISON and GMB, which organise health workers across a number of different grades, have accepted the government’s offer, while Unite members have rejected it. There has also been action by junior doctors, whose previous dispute in 2015/16 was sold out by its then leadership and has been replaced by a more determined team.

In this context, the development of the [“Health Workers Say No”](#) campaign, bringing activists together across unions, is a small but significant step forward, but there needs to be a much wider discussion about arguing for industrial trade unionism as well as for grass-roots control of disputes.

For the struggles in the NHS as well as those in education, the question of funding for pay increases, as well as for the services more generally, is key. In this context, there is a weakness in the fact that most union leaderships, with the exception of the [National Education Union](#), are not taking up this question centrally.

The worst situation among workers who have taken sustained action is that faced by postal workers. These workers struck for 18 days in 2022, but now the supposedly left wing union leadership is recommending acceptance of a deal that is a complete disaster. It will significantly increase the amount of outdoor work, cut sick pay, and force people with caring responsibilities off the job—all for a 10 percent pay rise over 3 years.

And at least 400 union activists have

been suspended or dismissed by management during the dispute, and the union just claims that this will be 'reviewed' when members sign up for the deal. Historically, postal workers had a proud tradition of unofficial action—walking out or at least making a believable threat of doing so—to prevent worsening of terms and conditions and management bullying at the local level. But the last decade of privatisation - and the failure of the union to effectively fight this—has seen a serious undermining of the workplace strength on which such militancy depended.

But the CWU leadership has adopted a problematic approach all the way through the dispute, where much of their main focus in media interviews was about how badly 'the business' was being run by then Chief Executive Simon Thompson. There can be no doubt that Thompson was a hated

bully boy and that workers celebrated when he was forced to stand down. But there is no indication that with Thompson gone, the other negotiators changed tack at all. The victimisations and the revisions of duties—often involving unachievable delivery targets—imposed in December remain.

And if this rotten deal goes through, management will quickly come back for more. That's why the launch of a Postal Workers Say Vote No group is a very welcome step—but one with a hard job to do because it is also clear that to defeat these changes there would need to be a serious escalation of action—something rather unlikely to happen when not a single current member of the postal workers executive voted against recommending acceptance of the deal. The longer-term task, as a