



& Workers' Liberty

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 506 15 May 2019 50p/£1

Climate emergency program needed:



SOCIALISM!

By Mike Zubrowski

On 2 May, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) published official advice on the UK's emissions' reductions, *Net Zero*. It argues that the UK should aim to reach "net-zero" emissions by 2050.

CCC, a government-appointed body, mostly of academics, notes

that the government is seriously failing in 15 of 18 areas, and set to miss its current, more conservative, targets.

CCC's proposed targets themselves aren't ambitious enough, but they point in the right direction and are worth unpacking. Inadvertently, they indicate the need for democratic planning of the economy.

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A stand for “two states”

By Martin Thomas

Activists from Workers' Liberty, the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan, and others, held a protest for “Two nations, two states” in Israel-Palestine alongside the Palestine Solidarity Campaign demonstration in London on 11 May.

We displayed banners and placards, distributed leaflets, sold papers and pamphlets, and sought discussions.

Quite a few PSC demonstrators stopped to photograph our banner and placards as the only ones around clearly demanding “two states”, and expressed agreement with us. Their response to the official slogans of the official PSC demonstration was generally a shrug — they saw the demonstration as a generic effort to draw attention to the plight of the Palestinians.

Others didn't agree with us, but stopped to discuss. Those who were hostile generally refused to take leaflets or discuss.

The official PSC demonstration was maybe 5000 strong, drawn largely from the old constituency of the “Stop The War” campaign.

“Right of Return” was the main official slogan. The PSC itself had only “Free Palestine” placards (presumably from stock), and the official slogan was left to placards from the Muslim Association of Britain (offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood).

“Return” is the demand to respond to the suffering of Palestinians who were driven out or fled from what is now Israel in the 1947-9 wars by having a *different* group of people — largely, the grandchildren of those refugees — repossess territory which is geographically the same but economically, politically, and in human terms *different*.

The meaning was made clear enough by the chief chants on the march — “From the river to the sea” — meaning a demand to repossess all of pre-1948 Palestine as “Arab land”. It was in effect (even though many marchers didn't want that) a march of support for



Part of the “Two nations, two states” protest on 11 May. Our banner reads “End the occupation: an independent Palestine alongside Israel, now!”

Hamas. The “river to sea” program is impossible in any near term because of Israel's military strength and will to resist conquest, and thus offers no near-term hope to the Palestinians.

And if the military balance of forces should change sufficiently to

allow Arab or Islamic states to conquer Israel, that would not be a step forward. It would be disastrous for the Israeli Jewish nation.

And, judging by the experience of Palestinians living in Arab states since 1948, no advantage for the Palestinians.

Trump set to move against “two states”

By Rhodri Evans

According to an Israeli TV news channel on Sunday 12 May, the plan for Israel-Palestine due to be announced by the Trump administration in early June will provide for all Israeli settlements in the West Bank to remain under Israeli rule permanently.

The report also said that the Trump administration will not oppose all West Bank settlements being integrated into the Israeli state immediately, whether that is part of an overall deal or not.

About 400,000 Jewish settlers live in settlements planted in the West

Bank since 1967, among about 2.9 million Palestinians, and another 200,000 in areas of East Jerusalem annexed by Israel in 1967.

A number of the settlements are well inside the West Bank, not near the Israeli border. Integrating them into the Israeli state will also mean, at least de facto, integrating the roads which connect them to Israel.

De facto, it means declaring integration into Israel of all or most of “Area C”, an area defined under the Oslo Accords to include little of the Palestinian population of the West Bank but over 60% of the land area.

“Area C” surrounds each of the over 160 patches of land — cities,

towns, villages — which make up “Areas A and B”, in which the Palestinian Authority has some autonomous authority, though to do little more than police the population and administer aid money from the EU and Arab states and tax revenues passed on by Israel.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, just before the 9 April Israeli general election that he won, said that he planned to annex the area of the settlements.

This move will create a major extra obstacle to a “two states” deal, giving the Palestinians the right to a real independent state in contiguous territory alongside Israel, because it means that such

deal will require Israel to withdraw from places which it has annexed as part of its own state territory.

A majority of public opinion in Israel is against annexation. That public opinion will not stop annexation unless we can also rouse a wide international protest against the Trump-Netanyahu plan.

The Netanyahu government has also announced plans to build two new roads to connect more remote West Bank settlements, and to allow the Israeli parliament and government to ignore rulings of the High Court of Justice in administrative matters and in cases where it strikes down legislation as contradictory to basic law.

The movements would permit the annulment of a High Court decision to allow prosecution of Netanyahu on corruption charges, sought by the Israeli police and outgoing attorney-general, to proceed.



A large billboard protesting Israel's occupation of the West Bank, on the road from the airport to Eurovision in Tel Aviv. Breaking the Silence are an NGO of Israeli veterans who have served in the occupied territories, working to end the occupation by exposing the reality of. For most of Eurovision, they are holding daily six hour tours to educate visitors. The tour is of Hebron, the West Bank's second largest city, “and the only Palestinian city with an Israeli settlement in the heart of it.”

On 14 May a demonstration “End the siege – for the sake of us all” took place, backed by fourteen different organisations, calling for “Israel's new government [to] change its policy concerning Gaza [— to] recognize its responsibility and obligations towards the civilian population, remove the blockade and respect the rights of the people of Gaza: freedom of movement, freedom of profession, the right to protest, the right to health and above all, the right to live in dignity.”

Rather than not watching Eurovision or calling for cultural boycotts of Israel, socialists, and everyone concerned with ending the plight of Palestinians, should seek to make links with such organisations and movements.



Curdled

By Rosalind Robson

One of the speakers at the Palestine Solidarity Campaign demo on 11 May was Glyn Secker, the secretary of Jewish Voice for Labour.

His speech has been widely condemned on social and other media (e.g. the *Jewish Chronicle*) for containing antisemitic tropes.

Superficially, there was nothing wrong with the main thrust of Secker's speech — condemning the Jewish communal leadership for standing aside from the rise of the far right and the actions of the (hard-right) Israeli government (“When will they condemn the IDF slaughter of the unarmed at Gaza? When will they join the anti-fascist movement against Yaxley-Lennon aka Robinson?”)

Maybe it was that general message that the crowd heard when they applauded Secker.

However, a closer reading of Secker's speech is merited. Firstly, it was constructed around deliberate slippage. Secker said that the Zionist Federation *as an entity* “embraces” the English Defence League. Not so! One very marginal individual in the Zionist Federation, Jonathan Hoffman, a few others perhaps, have linked up with the EDL, but there is no evidence of a wider “conspiracy” between the two groups.

Secker's speech displayed the standard Manichean world view of the kitsch left, on the conflict in Israel-Palestine as on other international issues. Here schematic connections are drawn between the (local) reactionary policies of the Israeli government, other events around the world, and global political trends (the shift to the right). In such a mindset, allegations of antisemitism in Labour *have to be* a right-wing conspiracy.

And so Secker's observations were curdled with hyperbole, paranoia, lack of self-awareness and refusal to be affected by the evidence — in this case, of antisemitism in Labour.

In fact, Secker added to such evidence, saying Labour Friends of Israel were a “fifth column” in Labour! Does he not realise that phrase would be inescapably offensive to many Jewish people?

The posture seems much easier than engaging with the increasing evidence of antisemitism from Labour members, going beyond the conspiracy theory and false flag posts being shared and liked on social media. Or empathising with someone like Luciana Berger, who experienced appalling antisemitism and then accused of “playing victim” by Labour activists.

The best that can be said of Secker's left milieu is that it is extremely obtuse and crude in its political-intellectual approach.

Yet it is not hard to critically assess evidence of antisemitism in and around Labour and the PSC, and at the same time criticise and oppose the actions of the Israeli government.

How to win “Net Zero”, and soon

Climate

... continued from front page.

Net Zero estimates that the direct government spending necessary for such a transition would be 1-2% of GDP. It emphasises the need for this to be coupled with stronger legislation.

Net Zero advocates electrification of all sectors — such as transport and heating — combined with a transition to green energy. It advocates Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) as part of this transition, at least temporarily, alongside huge expansion of renewables.

One possibility it explores is that “natural gas” — primarily methane — is still extracted, and then hydrogen is created from that, with carbon byproducts stored. Doing so is much more energy efficient than extracting hydrogen from water.

CCS and hydrogen extraction from natural gas should not be ruled out, but could only ever play a minor part in environmental transitions.

Net Zero advocate that homes be heated either by electricity or hydrogen, and made more efficient through insulation and the like. Retrofitting and new-building of this should be in part centrally funded.

They recognise that environmental transition of industry is not technically difficult, but introducing policy can be complex. They raise concerns to avoid carbon “offshoring”, a phenomenon as yet not evidenced, in which production of goods moves offshore, attracted by laxer environmental regulation in other countries. The socialist answer to that is workers’ control and nationalisation.

CCC also discuss transition in vehicles, farming — involving greater carbon sequestration — the food industry, diets, aviation, and shipping. Much of it could be fairly straightforwardly transitioned, given adequate funding and regulation.

Media reactions have focused on potential impacts on lifestyles. I’ll discuss those in a further article. But the report focusses more on economy-wide transformations, as what is needed, than changes in individual behaviour.

CCC’s model would, on their analysis, achieve 38% of the emissions reductions entirely through technological shifts, 53% through “measures with a combination of low-carbon technologies and societal/behavioural changes”, and just 9% through “largely societal or behavioural changes”.

Net Zero encourages individuals to use high efficiency appliances, reduce waste, buy good quality products that will last longer, repair commodities where possible rather than replace them, and share infrequently used items. A socialist society, democratically run by workers, would pursue such aims anyway.

One of many mind-boggling absurdities of capitalism is “planned obsolescence”, where goods are designed to break down or be superseded within a given time period, to encourage replacements to be bought.

In a rationally organised society, less rather than more necessary work is better. Products would be constructed to be high-quality and enduring, and as modular as possible, that is, subdivisible into separate parts that can be independently created and swapped in. If my bike’s brakepads wear out, or I want an additional bottle-cage, newer tyres, or different pedals, I can swap those components without getting a whole new bike. Commodities are increasingly designed to be less modular, but the same principles could apply to smartphones or furniture.

As well as reducing frustration and work, and being environmentally better, modularity allows individuals more control over the tools we are using, and by allowing us to more easily understand and mend them, a less alienating existence.

NET ZERO BY WHEN?

Net Zero’s proposals are for meeting the 2015 Paris Agreement’s targets, on the “1.5° pathway”.

This pathway would involve severe and damaging climatic changes, some of which may trigger feedback mechanisms, and so further warming — only, less than pathways which would lead to higher levels of warming.

More ambitious reductions, globally, are technologically and socially possible and desirable. Many

environmentalists have called for a much-sooner target of net-zero emissions than CCC’s 2050. Extinction Rebellion calls for 2025, many others call for 2030. The recent UN IPCC report on climate change called for a global reduction of at least 50% by 2030.

Targets or demands for reductions by 2030 are necessary, even if not necessarily for 100%, because a reduction to zero by 2050 will be less possible, and less effective, if a big part of the reduction has not been made earlier.

Net Zero states that “Delivering net-zero GHGs by 2050 is technically feasible but highly challenging. In assessing whether reaching net-zero GHG emissions is feasible we also consider realistic time frames for the transition. Achieving net-zero emissions domestically prior to 2050 does not currently appear credible for the UK as a whole.”

Socialists should be concerned with the truth, with reality as it is, and should demand only things which are technologically feasible. We should not pretend to be experts, or draw more confident or detailed conclusions than our research supports.

In Net Zero however, as would be expected, the CCC is being extremely conservative. As it notes, UK’s 2017 emissions were down 42% from 1990 levels. That reduction came from governments only responding in minimal ways to the crisis.

The 2014 report *Zero Carbon Britain: Rethinking the Future* documented how the UK could go achieve net zero by 2030, while maintaining a modern standard of living. In 2019, we have a 5-year handicap on that, but we also have slightly better technology, and need not avoid nuclear power, as ZCB does.

The key limit on the speed of most of the changes necessary in any such transition is, to first approximation, the resources thrown at it. CCC’s report estimates a cost of 1-2% of the UK’s GDP in direct spending, reducing to under 1% of GDP by 2050. With a GDP of a bit over £2 trillion, 1% amounts to £20 billion. Even on conservative estimates, this is considerably less than the quantity of money lost through tax evasion alone — and that’s before even talking about increasing taxes!

To give other figures for comparison, total central and local government spending is predicted to be around £800 billion, Shell’s 2018 revenue was £240 billion, the richest 1,000 people in the UK had a combined wealth of over £700 billion in May 2018.

Expropriating the banks and the wealth of the rich can free up significantly more than 1-2% of GDP per year to be thrown into the most serious existential threat facing humanity. Zero net emissions by 2030 is three times as fast as by 2050, by 2025 almost six times as fast.

CAPITALISM KILLS



KILL CAPITALISM!

Stephanie McMillan

Faster transitions likely cost more than the same transition over a longer time-period. However, as a rough indicator of scale, six times CCC’s proposed £20-40 billion/year is £120-240 billion/year, 6-12% of the UK’s GDP. Much of the expenditure would be into infrastructure, and so once net zero emissions had been achieved, it would not need to remain so high.

SOCIALISM

The costs of many of the transitions on CCC’s estimation is significantly higher than necessary because of goods and services being run by for-profit companies.

Taking the key industries into public ownership and democratic control would reduce costs.

Having them directly under democratic control also avoids additional difficulties in transitioning them, compared to having to influence them at arm’s length through government regulations and incentives. The production cost of many technologies will decrease with the economies of scale of a full-throttle transition.

With a socialist transformation of society, there are other important things we would want to spend our collective resources on, besides reducing carbon emissions. But tackling climate change is a central priority, and reaching net zero three or six times as fast would roughly mean, to first order, a third or a sixth of the total emissions ending

up in the atmosphere.

Additional complexity is added, secondarily, by the emissions costs of implementing the transition itself, and, third, of constructing sufficient tools to do this at a given pace.

How short a transition has to be before such factors become comparable to the everyday emissions which they are reducing I do not know. I would be surprised if this length of time was anything near the 10 ½ years which would take us to 2030, or even the 5½ until 2025.

Mobilising the resources to achieve net zero by 2030 is technically possible. What will decide the real possibility is social and political issues: how soon we can mobilise the labour movement to press governments into immediate measures, and how soon we can win a workers’ government which enables the necessary democratic and social control of industry.

It is a target worth aiming for.

Short of a more detailed calculation suggesting it is not possible, I would not quibble with a 2025 demand either.

Upcoming climate events

UK Youth Strike for Climate, next national strike, Fri 24 May. See local events: bit.ly/ys4c-24

Momentum and People & Planet’s “Bankrupt Climate Change” second national day of action, Sat 25 May

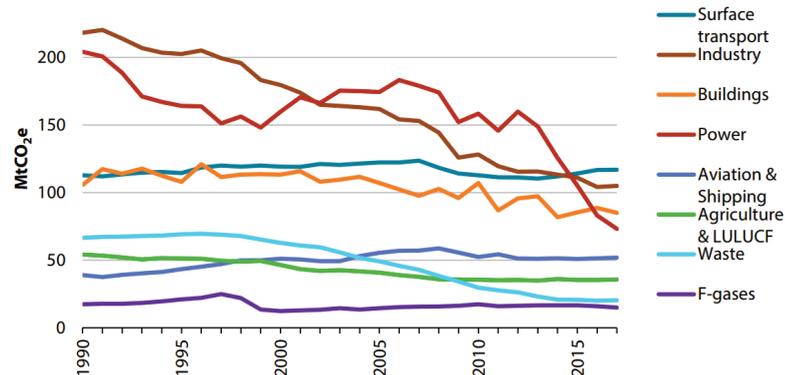


Fig. 5.2 in Net Zero estimates UK’s emissions in megatons of CO₂ equivalent

The story of the St. George ribbon



Antidoto

By Shamsuddin Effendi

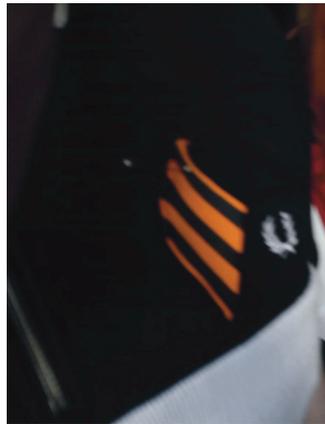
At the AGM of the official Momentum group in Lewisham (south London) on 7 May, several people were proudly wearing, and handing out for others to wear, Russian military insignia: the ribbon of St. George.

This isn't the first time Stalinoid elements within the left have worn this symbol of Russian militarism. On this page is a picture of Eddie Dempsey (an RMT member who declared as a platform speaker at a "Full Brexit" event that the working class hated, and was right to hate, "the liberal left") wearing it while visiting pro-Russian gangsters in Eastern Ukraine.

Nor the last. A few days after the AGM, London Young Labour put out a tweet with an image of the ribbon. The tweet was deleted a few hours later.

Before trying to understand why loads of people who bragged about their anti-imperialism thought wearing the military St. George ribbon was a good idea, we should start with the history of the ribbon.

First designed in 1769, under Catherine the Great, the ribbon was used for the Order of St George, a Tsarist military award. There are many who claim that the colours come from



Left to right: attendee at Lewisham Momentum, Eddie Dempsey in Ukraine, Tsar Nicholas II

the Romanov coat of arms which, given that it consists of a double-headed black eagle on a golden background, with an image of St. George at its centre, is fairly likely.

After the October Revolution in 1917 it was banned alongside all other Tsarist awards. It was revived by Stalin during World War Two and named "the Order of Glory" (while the Soviet Union created some military orders named after Tsarist generals, even Stalin didn't go as far as naming any orders after saints).

It wasn't particularly used as a symbol for Russian or Soviet patriotism again until the Putin era revived it, especially after the Euromaidan events in Ukraine. Currently the

symbol is hugely controversial in Ukraine and considered clearly a sign of pro-Putin sentiment.

During the Lewisham Momentum AGM one person declared that they chose to wear it in order to praise the role of the Russian people who fought bravely against Nazism.

Putting aside that loads of non-Russian nationalities also fought bravely (including Belarusians, Ukrainians, Georgians etc.), praising the role of people who fought, Russian and non-Russian, should not mean wearing militarist emblems, and certainly not emblems that have been revived by Russian chauvinists to enhance nationalist sentiment in Russia.

The St. George Ribbon was also worn by Russians who collaborated with Nazi Germany, such as members of the "Russian Liberation Army", as well as White-Cossacks such as Peter Krasnov!

The ribbon-wearers are either very ignorant of history, or willing to go along with the Putin-ist interpretation of World War Two, in which the Soviet Union was a wonderful force of anti-fascism and modern Russia is its inheritor in the role.

The Stalinist government infamously spent a third of World War Two in a virtual alliance with Nazi Germany, signing a peace treaty with it which included a secret protocol that divided Eastern Europe between them. It invaded and partitioned Poland jointly with the Nazis.

It held joint NKVD-Gestapo military exercises. It even held talks to discuss possibly joining the war on the side of the Axis (talks that were broken off by the Nazis).

War crimes (such as the Katyn massacre, the execution of an estimated 22,000 people, including the Polish intelligentsia), committed in full knowledge of the Stalinist government, have never even been acknowledged let alone apologised for. Putin himself has declared that the Nazi-Soviet Pact was a good and necessary treaty.

It is appalling to see self-proclaimed leftists thinking that there is no better way to oppose fascism than to wear a symbol of Russian militarism and become "useful idiots" for Putin's revanchist foreign policy.

Inequality and the super-ego



Letters

If my review of *The Inner Level* (bit.ly/i-l-th) left readers thinking that it presented a narrow, economic view of mental illness, then I apologise for writing a poor review.

Thanks to Ian Townson (workersliberty.org/ian-mh) for prompting me to write this correction.

Wilkinson and Pickett stress that their research is not a "theory of everything" and do not claim that income inequality is the only driver of mental distress. They describe a broad statistical trend within which our human drama plays out.

There are outliers in the data where there must be powerful countervailing factors. For

example, Italy has a similar level of inequality to Britain but without the high rates of mental illness. There are a multitude of factors that affect mental health.

However, their robust statistical analysis discovers some hard facts. It is a fact that income inequality correlates strongly to rates of mental illness by many different measures, including status anxiety. It is a fact that the poorest suffer the greatest mental distress. It is a fact that social mobility, cross class mixing, child welfare and civic participation decrease and child bullying and antisocial attitudes increase with greater inequality.

Through the discovery of these facts, the authors have discovered a deep structure of our psycho-social world that invites interpretation.

Wilkinson and Pickett's own interpretation of these facts is that as inequality increases, we judge each other and ourselves more

harshly and are much more worried about those judgements. They back this up by drawing on the speculative social sciences.

Ian says that anxiety about income status was not an immediate driving force of his earlier distress. Probably this is also subjectively true of the many millions of people suffering depression. A core belief of status anxiety is not "people think I am poor", but rather "people think I am inadequate/weird/boring/ugly/insecure/a pervert/etc".

Everyone's mental distress involves the harsh judgements of self and others, and the accompanying emotions: fear, guilt and shame.

In psychoanalytic theory, the bit of our psyche that judges ourselves is called the super-ego. It develops as our young minds internalise the judgements and strictures of our parents and wider culture, or in Ian's words, the "twisted and contradictory parental signals on how to live a normal and respectable life".

As well as being fiercely egalitarian, hunter-gatherers societies practice extremely permissive parenting with children being raised by the whole tribe rather than nuclear family: but today's society is different.

In his essay *Against Self-Criticism* psychoanalyst Adam Phillips describes the super-ego as "the inner critic, the unrelenting fault-finder". It is "remarkably narrow-minded; it has an unusually impoverished vocabulary; and it is... relentlessly repetitive. It is cruelly intimidating... and it never brings us any news about ourselves... by definition, it under-interprets [our] experience.. It is the part of our mind that makes us lose our minds, the moralist that prevents us from evolving a personal, more complex and subtle morality."

It is the super-ego's project is to make us

"so self-mortified, so loathsome, so inadequate, so isolated, so self-obsessed, so boring and bored, so guilty that no one could possibly love or desire [us]."

The Inner Level suggests that as inequality increases so do these "internal soliloquies of self-reproach". Inequality shuts down the human connections that might allow us different perspectives to challenge the narrow-minded viewpoint of our own internal critic. In other words inequality strengthens the super-ego and narrows our scope for exploring alternative perspectives, and gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world.

Capitalist inequality appears to be an important lens with which to understand "the solitary modern individual and his Freudian super-ego, a master and a slave in a world of their own."

Phillips argues that insights into how to maintain our own mental health should apply to how we attempt to interpret reality more generally: "You can only understand anything that matters – dreams, neurotic symptoms, people, literature – by over-interpreting it; by seeing it, from different aspects, as the product of multiple impulses. Over-interpretation, here, means not settling for a single interpretation, however apparently compelling..."

"Over-interpretation means not being stopped in your tracks by what you are most persuaded by; to believe in a single interpretation is radically to misunderstand the object one is interpreting, and interpretation itself."

Wilkinson and Pickett have revealed a deep structure of our psycho-social world, a powerful new interpretation of our reality.

In the light of our reading and lived experience, we should continue to "over-interpret" it.

Todd Hamer, London

False comparison

In *Workers' Liberty* 67 Sean Matgamna makes a reasonable point when contrasting the demand for freedom of movement and the Palestinian "Right of Return" to what is now Israel.

He says: "...suppose the proposal were to organise a collective immigration to Britain of forty million people, two-thirds of the population of the UK now? That would be a qualitatively different issue from all the current arguments about immigration to Britain and similar countries."

There is however a danger here of giving too much ground to our opponents who want to equate the Right of Return with the free movement of people.

The Right of Return is not about an ongoing policy of free movement to Israel by Palestinian refugees or their descendants. It is quite deliberately a policy of collective displacement and replacing the existing population.

If its advocates talk about returning to "their" homes, then the logic is that some others have to leave.

Freedom of movement is internationalist, the Right of Return is revanchist. It has nothing in common with the idea of freedom of movement.

We should be clear to our opponents that the comparator is simply false.

Stephen Wood, north London

A letter to a Lib-Dem-voting friend

You texted me saying "I am seriously considering voting Lib Dem in the European Elections. Can't believe I'm writing this. Am I mad?"

My first response was "Yes". However I recognise that there are many people like you — life-long Labour voters and people who supported Corbyn in the leadership elections — who are angry about Labour's failure to support a remain position and a referendum on Brexit and find it unacceptable that Labour can enter European elections with no clear position on this key issue.

Many, like you, are wondering whether they can support Labour "this time".

Why not vote for the Lib Dems? They are still the Lib Dems. The party without whom austerity would not have been possible. They are trying to use Europe to recover from the consequences of that and rebuild a base for centrist politics.

There has been no break from neo-liberalism or the politics of austerity and, of course, they are notoriously opportunist and make commitments they don't keep. Also they are liberals, not socialists, and their MEPs would sit in the Liberal bloc in the European Parliament.

This is now important because the Socialist group of which Labour is part, is hoping to win control of the European Commission and is planning to implement a Europe-wide minimum wage.

The Lib-Dems' support for Remain is also uncritical of precisely those aspects of the EU that most need challenging.

The impact of these European elections will go beyond European issues and will be taken as an indicator of where politics in Britain are at. There is generally no good time for a random protest vote, but this time especially a low vote for Labour will have a negative impact for many reasons.

Firstly, Labour alone can prevent Farage's party coming first in the poll. In the North West we need to prevent "Tommy Robinson" getting elected. It's necessary to go beyond the "Don't vote Nazi" line of the SWP to put a positive alternative.

And there are positive reasons to vote Labour. The Labour manifesto contains much you will support along the lines of the 2017 election manifesto. (There is also a strange contradiction — there are phrases like "Labour will work across the EU to deliver an ambitious equality plan", which only make sense if Britain remains in the EU!)

A bad result would be negative in the Labour Party where it will strengthen the anti-Corbyn right. Similarly a good result for the Lib Dems would help reinvigorate the idea that politics in Britain has to be located in the centre.

Whatever you think of Corbyn on this issue, or in general, the shift in the Labour Party since 2015 has opened a lot of new possibilities for the left, not least of a government that will break with austerity.

I can understand why you feel the way you do. The Labour leadership's attitude to Brexit has been terrible from the start. I and many others in the Labour Party will be fighting to change that. But I don't think a Lib Dem vote will do anything to help that or promote the goals we share.

Bruce Robinson

Labour for a Socialist Europe campaigns: Against Farage, for Labour, against Brexit

Over 80 people turned out for a "Love Socialism Hate Brexit" meeting in Nottingham on 8 May, despite the Euro-election campaign being already underway.

Many were students from the Nottingham Trent University, where the meeting was held.

Every speaker from the platform, and almost every speaker from the floor, stressed their support for the post-2015 anti-austerity direction of the Labour Party, but deep concerned about fragmentation of Labour votes and Labour's failure over Brexit to campaign against rampant nationalism.

Further "Love Socialism, Hate Brexit" meetings are planned in Streatham (south London), Beckenham, and other areas.

Labour for a Socialist Europe (L4SE) supporters have been out doing stalls on the streets with leaflets produced by L4SE arguing for a Labour vote on 23 May combined with a fight within the Labour Party for opposition to Brexit and support for a new public vote.

Labour's official Euro-manifesto is poor. It talks of support for a new public vote only if the Tories push through a "bad" Brexit deal (as if the public shouldn't be able to decide on whether the deal is "bad" or "good"), and is bland on other issues. But many Labour Euro-candidates are clearly anti-Brexit.

The aim of the L4SE stalls is both to rally Labour votes against the threat from Nigel Farage's Brexit party, and to identify and draw in people who will continue the fight within Labour for lower borders; free movement; and social, economic, and environmental levelling-up across Europe.

L4SE supporters are also using the L4SE leaflets in regular Labour canvassing. Electoral law says that any organisation can campaign for or against a party in an election. As long as this is done without coordination with the party, this does not have to be declared as party expenditure.

The organisation itself does not have to register with the Electoral Commission unless it reaches a certain level of expenditure which (sadly) L4SE falls short of.

The secretary of a ward branch or constituency Labour Party can't advertise that she or he is using the leaflets at a canvassing session without a laborious, and in the timescale impossible, process of getting approval by the party machine.

But if activists turn up with L4SE leaflets to a session, and choose to use them, that is up to them — no problem with electoral law.

That activity, too, can help identify and draw in new people.

Despite the limits of L4SE's resources, it is possible to make an impact, partly for the bad reason that generally Euro-election campaigning is at a low level.

A large proportion of Tory activists are set to vote for Farage's Brexit Party, but the Brexit Party has no established local organisations.

In many areas official Labour campaigning is poor because activists are "Lexiters" ("left-



London MEP candidate Laura Parker (left) with L4SE campaigners

Brexit" supporters) and opt out, or just because the activists, like the big majority of Labour members and supporters, are anti-Brexit and dismayed by the Labour leaders' triangulation.

In some areas members have quit, or become inactive, over the Brexit issue. In Tooting CLP in south London, for example, there were 500 members pre-Corbyn. The figure went up to 2500 during the 2017 general election. Now it is going down again. 400 members have left this year.

NEW VOTE

Labour Brexit front-bencher Keir Starmer said on 13 May that he would not be afraid to end the talks with the Tories this week if they do not budge on Theresa May's so-called red lines.

And he declared: "A significant number, probably 120 if not 150 [Labour MPs], would not back a deal if it hasn't got a confirmatory vote", i.e a new public vote.

That is an important move towards Labour breaking off its discreditable haggling with the Tories — done as if Tory Brexit would be acceptable with just a bit of tweaking on tariff regimes — and coming out plainly for a new public vote.

But the outcome still depends on pressure and counter-pressure at the top of the Labour Party. Seamus Milne, the chief figure in Corbyn's "Leader's Office" and a long-standing Stalinist, is pro-Brexit. And, as Stephen Bush of the *New Statesman* puts it: "Corbyn relies on Milne heavily — in meetings with the other opposition parties, the Labour leader tends to give a brief preamble and to leave the detail to his aide".

L4SE is working to mobilise pressure from the base to tip the decision away from a deal with the Tories and towards support for a new public vote and opposition to Brexit.

We need that to counter Nigel Farage's new Brexit party, which now leads in the

Euro-election polls.

Farage is a far-right Tory. He himself says there is no difference of policy between his Brexit party and Ukip, only a difference of personnel and presentation.

Ukip's coming top in the 2014 Euro-election was the political jolt which set going this whole sordid story of immigrant-baiting, nationalist recidivism, and Brexitting. Just on 25 April, an official report summarised the statistics: "Racially or religiously aggravated public fear, alarm or distress" rose 6% in 2018, 19% in 2017, and 17% in 2016.

Organise to stop Farage pushing us another turn down that spiral!

Change UK = unchanged Tory

The group around Chuka Umunna, Change UK, had its start with seven MPs who split from the Labour Party in February.

Some might think of it as a more anti-Brexit, clearer-against-antisemitism version of Labour politics, even if rightward-leaning.

In the European Parliament elections, however, it is aligned with the "European People's Party", the main alliance of right-wing, Tory-type parties across Europe.

The EPP includes France's Les Républicains, Germany's CDU and CSU, Italy's Forza Italia, and Spain's Partido Popular.

The British Tory Party was long a member of the EPP, until David Cameron pulled it out in 2009 as a sop to the Brexit-minded Tory right.

Change UK's one sitting MEP, Richard Ashworth, who is standing again, is an ex-Tory and a member of the EPP.



When left-wingers say: “be normal”

By Janine Booth

This is an article about the “autistic screeching” image on this page, posted on Twitter. It is not an article about how the image is “offensive”.

That wouldn't need an article. It's pretty much self-evident to anyone who considers the feelings of others.

The problem here is not so much the image as the politics behind it — a political outlook that sees autistic people and others as fair game for mockery, that lionises a stereotypical “normal” and weaponises it against people who dissent or diverge.

That's what this article is about. It's an appeal to take this shit seriously and to oppose it.

RIGHT WING

This image derives from two popular memes. One uses a still from the 2014 film *The Babadook*, in which the main character, an exasperated mother, turns to her distressed child in the back of the car and yells “Why can't you just be normal?”.

The second is the “autistic screeching” meme, in which a character screeches while crouching next to two other characters who are shaking hands.

Both are popular with right-wingers, as is the image I am discussing here, which brings together elements of both. It is a pretty straightforward right-wing attack on the left.

And yet, people who claim to be left-wing are using it too. I came across it in a tweet posted in support of RMT activist Eddie Dempsey when he came under fire for a speech he made at a “Full Brexit” rally in which he said that people who go on Tommy Robinson marches are right to hate the “liberal left”.

It also seems that the Stalin-admiring online cult “Red London” — which has abused autistic people both online and in real life — has also circulated this image, or versions of it.

So, people who purport to be on the left, and to be champions of the working class, are using right-wing material to attack others on the left. These people have gone so far wrong that they have met and coincided with the right.

TYRANNY OF NORMALISATION

The demand to be normal is deeply oppressive.

“Why can't you just be normal?” is the phrase on the lips of many a bully before they land a blow. Weirdo, oddball, freak, fruitloop... Words do hurt, and they don't always stop at words. There is a tragic roll call of names of people attacked, even killed, for being “not normal”, including autistic people, trans people, gay people, disabled people, people of a different colour or creed, even people who wear clothes or like music that is “not normal”.

The drive to normalisation is also the theory behind abusive interventions and “therapies”. In the past, schools tied left-handed kids' left arms behind their backs to make



them write “normally”. Gay people were given drugs and “aversion therapies” to make them “normal”.

The thinking behind these practices informs the actions today of those “therapists” who punish autistic children for harmless eccentricities, suppress their ways of regulating their emotions, and reward them for acting “normal”.

If you are chiming in with this, you are on very harmful, and not very left-wing, ground.

Lesbian novelist Jeanette Winterson's religious adoptive mother once said to her, “Why be happy when you could be normal?” We might expect that from the political right, but is this also the advice that this normal-left gives to people striving for the freedom to be themselves?

There is good reason for socialists to renounce the straitjacket of “normality”, good reason why many campaigners already do, and why Francesca Martinez's book, *What the **** is Normal?*, is such a good read.

STRESSORS AND AUTISM

Not all autistic people screech. And not all people who screech are autistic.

But yes, sometimes autistic people screech. This can be when we are overwhelmed, afraid, exhausted, bewildered, misunderstood, uncomfortable, bullied or otherwise in unbearable pain that can only be relieved by screeching.

These are the results of external stressors: not of autism alone, but of the autistic person's interaction with their environment. Perhaps excess sensory input has over-

whelmed an autistic person. Or the strange way in which non-autistic people communicate has bewildered him. Or a person has bullied her. Screeching is a response to distressing and hostile actions in an oppressive society.

If something has made an autistic person screech, then the compassionate side to be on is that of the autistic person, not of the thing that has distressed them. This image takes the wrong side.

FLAWS OF THE LEFT

I have spent my life on the left, and I willingly accept that it has plentiful flaws. Large among these is its disconnection from working-class people and communities. But is this really an issue of the left not being “normal”?

Certainly, the left often does not come across as part of the working class. It often does not put class at the centre of its politics, and even shies away from talking about class at all. When it does, it tends to be as one of a list of oppressions and/or identities rather than as the fundamental structure of society.

On the too-infrequent occasions on which the left mentions socialism, it usually does so as a kind of moral imperative, a policy of niceness, rather than as working-class self-liberation.

The left tends to not spend enough time with working-class people or be involved in day-to-day working-class struggles, and separates itself off into bureaucracies and bubbles. The left sometimes speaks in its own distinct vocabulary.

But none of this is the same as not being

normal, is it?

The solution to these flaws is for the left to focus its activity around working-class struggles — in communities and workplaces — and to bring the experiences, insights and talents of these struggles into its own ranks. It is not to chime in with the oppressive, suffocating, intolerant demand that people be “normal”.

NOT LIKE US

There is a justified hostility to politicians and leaders who do not appear to be “one of us”, including those ostensibly on the left. But the confusion of ‘one of us’ with “normal” is what Ken Clarke or Nigel Farage exploit when they think that supping a pint of beer makes you a man of the people.

Where MPs, MEPs etc are “not one of us”, it is because they and/or their backers are rich, privileged, paid-up members and representatives of the ruling class, not because they are “not normal”. Stephen Yaxley-Lennon's normal, right? Or at least he became more normal when he changed his name to Tommy Robinson.

“Normal” is a code. Normal men and normal women with normal kids live in normal family units in normal houses, go to normal jobs wearing normal clothes and pursue normal hobbies. Everyone outside that normal is not one of us.

This is not the working class. It is not even the majority of the working class. It is a myth that there is a huge army of solid ranks of utterly conventional, “normal” working-class people counterposed to these weird lefties. Why would anyone who claims to support working-class interests go along with this superficial stereotyping?

Remember where I saw this image. It was deployed as a weapon against a black socialist (Clive Lewis MP) who expressed concern that a trade unionist siding with right-wingers who hate the “liberal left” was an inroad for racism into the left. It was a response to criticism that discussing “the working class” and “ethnic minorities” as two separate entities was to deny both the ethnic diversity of the working class and class division among ethnic minorities. “Why can't you just be normal?” is a weapon to push away working-class people who are inconveniently unconventional, who do not — whether through choice or not — fit the stereotype of “normal”.

It is also a weapon to shut down challenge. There is a tendency — which has recently seen Eddie Dempsey as one of its figureheads — of people who deploy the stereotypical “normal” working-class person against any left-winger who dares to dissent from any aspect of their politics. Is this the response we can expect from them? Instead of discussing the issue, you will be rubbished with a meme, portrayed as “not normal” and even as an autistic screecher?

So, is the working class really yelling at the left to “just be normal”? I don't think so. To be more relevant — yes. More accessible, more present, more effective, more relatable, yes. But more normal? No.

al!"



Really not "one of us".

And why not? Because those people who get bullied for not being normal, who get pressed and squeezed into a conformity that isn't who they are, who couldn't be "normal" even if they wanted to be... You know what? Most of them are working-class. And if you add their friends and allies too, that's a hell of a lot of people who are not crying out for this holy grail of normality.

It seems to me that most working-class people are rather more tolerant, more supportive, more welcoming of diversity than some of their self-declared champions. And if there is a section of the working class that wants the left, and people in general, to be more "normal", then it is a more reactionary section. It is the left's job to challenge reactionary views within our class, not to champion them or give ground to them.

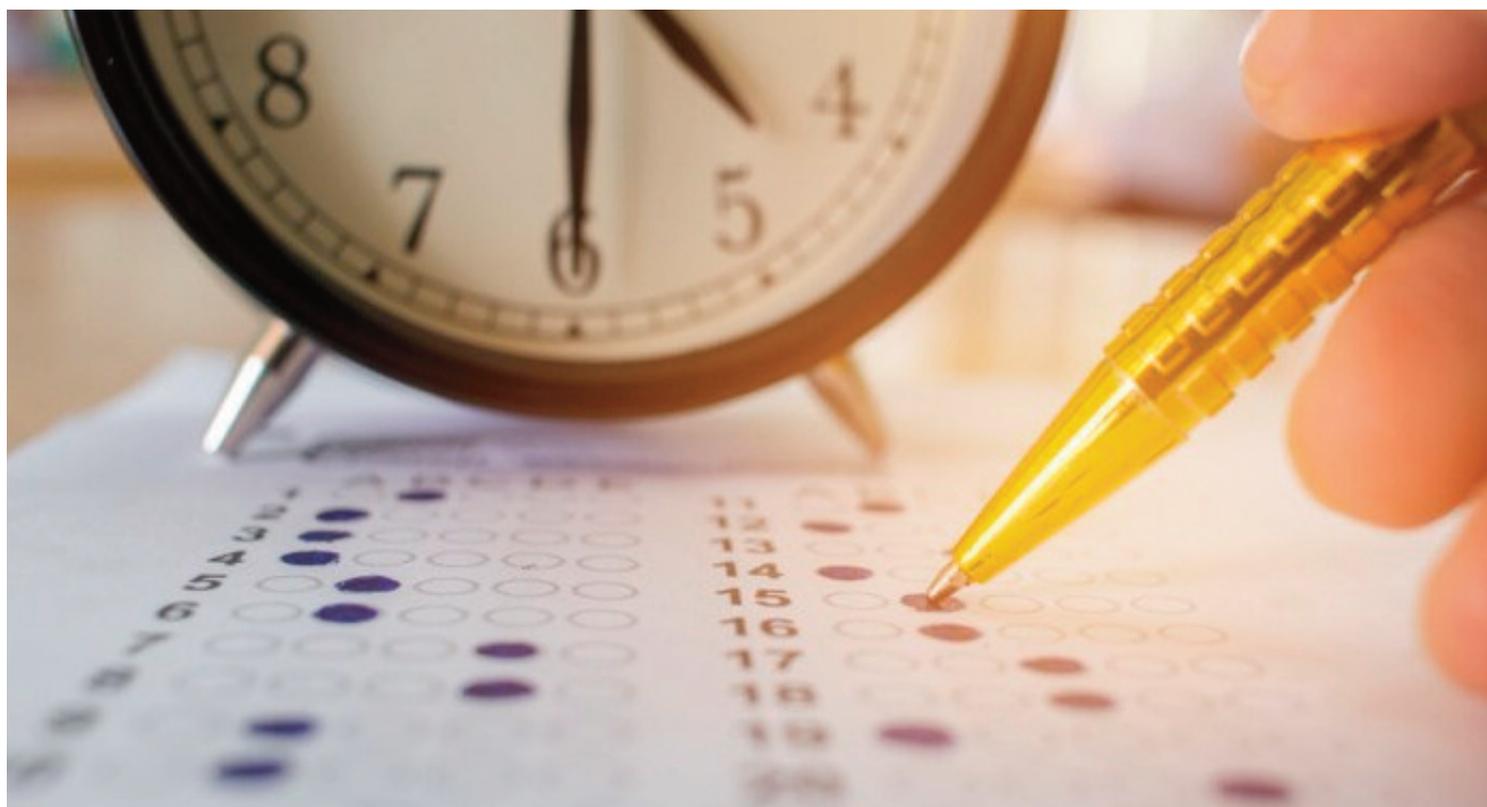
IS THE FUTURE NORMAL?

This demand for normality makes me wonder what these people's ideal society would look like.

The socialism that I fight for will be a festival of diversity, where our collective ownership and sharing of resources will enable a blossoming of human individuality never seen before. It will bring a new world of creativity, of difference, of freedom. The word "normal" may even quietly slip out of use.

But for fans of this image, in the ideal future everyone would presumably be normal. For the right wing, that sounds like their idealistic view of God-fearing Middle America or a very British and very mythical 1950s. For the normal-loving section of the left, it sounds like the authoritarian avowedly (but not really) "socialist" states that they admire.

You see, the "reds" who circulate this stuff are fans of Stalin. And that really isn't normal.



Back school tests boycott!

By Patrick Yarker

The National Education Union has called for a boycott of high stakes summative testing [1] in primary schools. Good!

These tests serve no educational purpose. In fact, they damage education.

Summative high stakes tests make it impossible for teachers not to narrow the content of the curriculum for pupils facing the tests. Teaching-to-the-test, or test-readying, replaces ordinary productive teaching and learning for weeks at a time.

Pupils study only material expected to appear in the tests. Teachers make increased use of teaching methods which leave no room for pupils to have their say or choose how work might be accomplished. This saps everyone's motivation.

The tests unhelpfully constrain how pupils can work and think. Success at the tests requires pupils to answer in ways which conform to narrowly-drawn assessment criteria.

On the whole, the tests are designed to elicit very short responses. So they tend to reward shallower thinking and the presentation of compartmentalised bits of knowledge, at the expense of grounded understanding, connected awareness, and originality of mind.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment is intrinsic to the work of teaching.

Teachers assess their pupils' learning continually in many ways, including by testing. Informed by daily experience with the pupil, and by observation and reflection, a teacher's assessment of a pupil's learning at the end of a course will be multi-faceted and nuanced.

Educationally-speaking, this is far more valuable than the information contained in a stand-alone summative test score.

And yet it is this score which carries weight in a system increasingly prone to what has been called "datafication".

Datafication assumes anyone's educational development proceeds in a simply linear way (rather than, say, being complexly recursive). It also assumes such development is precisely trackable by periodic standardised measurement. Scores generated by such measurements are held to reveal something necessary to know about the pupil, while what is not measured is rendered much less significant, or overlooked entirely.

As a result, thinking about the pupil "in the round" is made more difficult. It becomes harder to educate "the whole child". The work of teaching is diminished.

The Education Secretary recently claimed that summative high stakes tests are not intended to check up on pupils. But a pupil receives his or her test score as a judgement on the self. The score shapes how pupils perceive themselves as learners.

Pupils are further encouraged in this by the pervasive discourse of "ability", which prompts the labelling of each individual as a certain kind of pupil, with consequences for how that pupil is responded to in school. Test-scores are carried forward within the school system, shaping the ways in which pupils are regarded, grouped and taught.

A degree of nervousness on the part of pupils may be inevitable in the face of any test, and not necessarily something which harms. But for a proportion, undertaking high stakes summative tests inflicts more anxiety than can be considered acceptable.

Some pupils become very distressed. Since the tests do them no good educationally, this is unconscionable.

ACCOUNTABILITY

A system of high stakes summative testing exerts pressure on schools in the name of public accountability.

A school's failure to meet externally-imposed attainment targets or maintain results can have grave consequences for the institution. In such circumstances, where accounta-

bility is felt as punitive, attempts may be made to "game" the system.

This is one way in which the testing system erodes teaching as a moral practice. It coerces teachers to act against deeply-held educational principles, for example by making them teach-to-the-test. In a small number of cases, it prompts teachers to act fraudulently in respect of the testing-process.

It is right that a publicly-maintained education service be accountable. But high stakes summative testing is the wrong mechanism for this. The tests provide so reductive and partial a picture of what a school does, and distort the educational process so profoundly, that another basis must be devised on which schools can be held to account.

The prime responsibility of teachers is to their pupils' learning. Not to policy which sidelines this responsibility in favour of checking up on the system, or compiling performance league tables, or raising narrowly-defined attainment scores. Recognising this, teachers are right to call for an end to the current system of high stakes summative testing in primary schools.

Profound issues are in play to do with the purpose and nature of pupil assessment and how best to make the maintained school system accountable. Current policy in these areas must be re-thought, and changed. Back the NEU boycott call!

A statement couched in terms similar to this article is attracting support from academics. It will be sent to the Education Secretary, and copied to the NEU. Further details from: P.Yarker@uea.ac.uk

[1] A "summative" test is an end-of-period test designed to give a summary score for learning over that period. By contrast, a "formative" test is a within-period test designed to help teachers and students assess how they're going and where to go next. "High-stakes" means that the test result determines a grading for the student, the teacher, or the school, of substantial weight for their future prospects.

Why the working class needs libraries

By Simon Nelson

Close to 650 libraries have closed in the UK since 2010. Some that remain “open” rely on volunteers, have no paid staff, and need grants and donations to run.

In 2018 alone 130 libraries were shut down. More than 700 staff lost their jobs; the number of volunteers is now over 50,000.

The concept of the public library, free at the point of use, was pushed by The Free Library Movement, Victorian philanthropists aided by sections of the Chartist movement who worked for “improvement of the public”.

The Libraries Act of 1850, put forward by Liberal MPs and backed by a free libraries pioneer Edward Edwards, set up the first public libraries run by boroughs and with government funding. The Liberals had a strong patrician streak, wanting to raise standards within limits, and seeing access to books, particularly religious texts, as one way of doing that.

Only boroughs with a population over 10,000 were able to open libraries, only after a local referendum of ratepayers, and with the proviso that the money taken from tax could not be used to pay for books.

Two years later, however, the first public library was opened, in Manchester. By the turn of the 20th century there were almost 300 public libraries.

After World War One, libraries were handed from boroughs to County Councils, and they could build libraries without referendums. Libraries could now be built in smaller working class communities as well as in larger cities.

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 is supposed to put a duty on local authorities to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service”. But as early as the year 2000 only 15 libraries were open across

the UK for more than 60 hours. Evening and weekend hours are cut first: the time when more workers are likely to be able to get to libraries.

Many middle class former library users think that access to books and information on their smartphones, tablets, and Kindles makes libraries redundant. “I don’t need libraries, that stuff is all on my iPad now”, said one council leader.

But libraries provide a system of support for working class people well beyond their formal remit. Since the destruction of local government under the Tory/Lib Dem coalition in 2010 the services and informal functions of libraries have increased.

When I worked in a library in west London it was one of the only free, accessible and warm places in the area. While the stats show that book lending and borrowing are down (and when you aren’t getting new stock in, what would you expect?) libraries are the one place you can go to use a computer for free, borrow the “Life in the UK” handbook, or get newspapers in Punjabi, Urdu and Tamil.

Having libraries reliant on the community means finding their own source of funding, providing their own stock and only being open when volunteers are available. The volunteers who have the time and resources to keep the libraries running are not necessarily attuned to the actual needs of the areas they serve, or to some of the more difficult tasks that staffed and funded libraries are meant to do.

Volunteer-run libraries restrict access for children. A staffed library can have unaccompanied children from about the age of 11, but in one run by volunteers this is rarely the case.

The US communist and writer Richard Wright summed up the role of books he could access from a library like this; “It would have been impossible for me to have

told anyone what I derived from these novels, for it was nothing less than a sense of life itself...”

“It had been only through books — at best, no more than vicarious cultural transfusions — that I had managed to keep myself alive in a negatively vital way. Whenever my environment had failed to support or nourish me, I had clutched at books; consequently, my belief in books had risen more out of a sense of desperation than from any abiding conviction of their ultimate value.”

Low paid workers, travellers, homeless people all need access to the internet. Applying for Universal Credit, sending off documents to the Home Office, job applications often require being able to scan in documents or type out long bits of information. All of which is much easier in front of a desktop computer with a reliable internet connection than on a smartphone.

Libraries provide books in the languages of the communities in the area — Farsi, Punjabi,

Gujarati, Urdu, Arabic, Somali, whatever — and for elderly people who have come to the UK with their families, often with little to no English, the library is the place they could find novels that connected them with the places they left.

More and more people with complex needs, mental health problems and the vulnerable come to libraries, as they are one of the last places open that won’t move people on.

For older people, isolated and often alone, libraries and books can also help with issues such as dementia. Evidence suggests that reading can reduce the risk of dementia by 35%.

And, as a library worker, I saw a number of people whose only human contact (other than about their health, with carers for instance) was the conversation they would have in the library when coming and taking out a book.

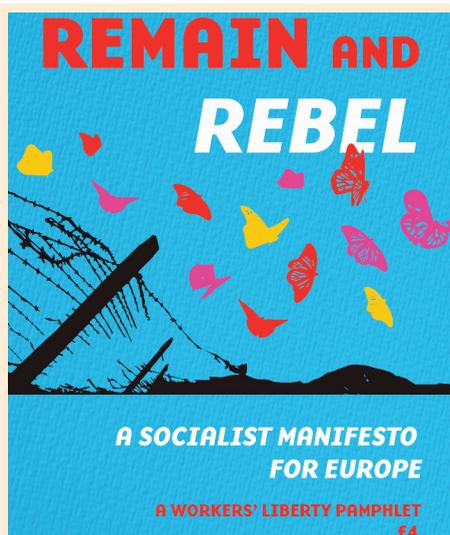
Audio and e-reader versions

Many thanks to the volunteers who have enabled us to produce an audio version of the paper. Links to the audio version are at www.workersliberty.org/audio.

To be sent our e-reader version of Solidarity, email awl@workersliberty.org.

This may be helpful for dyslexic readers. E-readers enable you to choose the font, type size, and line-spacing you prefer, in a completely uncluttered layout.

Please give feedback so that we can find out whether these efforts are worthwhile, and, if they are, improve them.



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Depths of denial



Review

By Simon Nelson

Keith Kahn Harris's book sets out to be a short analysis on what drives a lot of conspiracy theories: denial.

People deny climate change, the effectiveness of vaccines, or the Holocaust. Kahn Harris explains succinctly where some of these conspiracies are driven from — helplessness in a world that leads the less informed to believing the conspiracy of someone with an alternative agenda.

But the book is short in length and short on answers.

Kahn Harris makes a distinction. “Denial” is the act of denying something, for example, claiming that you can smoke just one more cigarette and quit easily. In “denialism”, cigarettes are neither dangerous nor addictive.

Kahn Harris believes that denial is often used as a veil to hide a worse or more unpalatable idea. Some businesses have good reason to deny the extent of climate change in order to maximise their profits. Some antisemites would rather deny or minimise the Holocaust than advocate the mass extermination of Jews.

With the rise of the internet, it is now far easier to spread “denialism”. Serious denialists can spread their myths, online anti-vaccination people for instance. Others wish to spread more tongue-in-cheek but still damaging “denials” — “Stalin did nothing wrong” memes for instance.

Kahn-Harris is right to say that it is often irrelevant whether the message put out is believed by its originator or not. He takes the example of Trump and his prolific Twitter output.

When Trump says the *New York Times* has terrible numbers, or a particular public figure is “failing”, he puts the message out and people can take what they want from it.

Kahn-Harris makes less of an impact with his solutions. He responds to Holocaust deniers that if they truly did want to exterminate the Jews, would they not find their lives unfulfilled by not having the Jews there to hate?

The rhetorical point hardly gets to the root of it. What we need to combat this “denialism”, conspiracy theory and fake news was summed up neatly in 1938:

“Face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones”.

If socialists follow that maxim, we will

be in a better place to confront the purveyors of denial.

DENIAL
The Unspeakable Truth

‘I want to show what denialism seeks to prevent: the exposure of dark desire. It is only when we look directly at this darkness that we can truly grasp why it is so unspeakable.’

Keith Kahn-Harris

A review of Keith Kahn-Harris's book *Denial: the unspeakable truth*

Say what is, then find your tactics

By Sean Matgamna

Daniel, Daniel — what a sloppy mud-pie of a polemic! You mix abuse with evasion, self-admiration, and demagoguery!

Most of what you have newly written (*Solidarity* 505, bit.ly/dr-505) is a senseless rant.

I asked someone if my earlier response to you (bit.ly/sm-504) was too fierce and impatient. He replied that it was out of key with the “sensibilities of the time”. Whatever about the sensibilities of the time, having read your new article I think I’ll manage to forgive myself.

Your second article has not a great deal to do with what we are arguing about, or what I have said about Israel-Palestine, or what I said about your previous arguments.

You slob about. You repeat what I commented on without replying to what I said against it. You float what you say in cheap demagoguery.

You praise your own record of fighting antisemitism. You say things that are common ground as if you can annex them.

I have always — and in many, many articles — distinguished between the antisemitism of the left and racism. I have insisted that the left’s antisemitism is *not* racist.

Plainly you are shocked and disoriented by what I say about the “racist” or “gene-ist” basis of the “Right of Return”. The decisive question is: is it true?

In the last nine months I have expounded my opinion on this in three pieces. One of the reasons for doing that is to test it against the responses of critics. In other areas that might be called “peer group review”.

In my reply to your previous piece, I pointed out that you had not even tried to pick holes in the argument. The same is true of your second, longer, polemic.

You do not analyse my reasoning, and point out what is wrong with it. You focus on what you think is the injustice likely to be done to young people with “Right of Return” views. Why do you not pick the argument apart, instead of baulking at the conclusion — that the idea is logically “gene-ist”, “racist” — and identifying yourselves with people for whom you say the argument’s conclusions are unjust, for reasons other than whether they are true or not, because their feelings about Israel and its “barbarism” are justified.

You shy away from the conclusion, but in two polemics you do not attempt to demolish the argument. Why am I not entitled to think you don’t because you can’t?

You set yourself up as the champion of the virtuous, innocent believers in the “Right of Return”, and to a large extent of their opinions, and as the advocate of an approach to the broader, non-left public. You counterpose that to my attempt to engage with the left.

But we have, for a very long time, produced literature aimed at the broad public about the Jewish-Arab conflict. You must have written some of it.

We have a sizeable pamphlet, *Two nations, two states*, in print for 18 years. It is now in its third edition. We have sold it on the streets, on demonstrations (and on demonstrations on Israel-Palestine), and at meetings.

I put that pamphlet together; I wrote most of it.

As I wrote (bit.ly/sm-504): “We have to say what is. Then, after that, we think of ways of influencing individuals by taking their motives as a starting point”.

The discussion did not begin with me trying to insist that we make no effort to talk

with people who reject “two states” and instead “beat them over the head”.

The discussion began with you attacking me for dissecting the logic of the “Right of Return”. In your attack, you counterposed (or seemed to) speculation about the different psychologies of different advocates of “two states” to the hard political definition which I said and say was the necessary starting point.

I did not reject an approach to different psychologies. You rejected the hard political definition, counterposing to it a desire to accommodate the “innocent” “Right of Returners”.

The idea that if we write sharp polemic, then we do not try to appeal to a broad range of opinion, is you reading yourself onto me. I didn’t counterpose the two. You do and did.

You radically misrepresent how things are with the advocates of “Right of Return” when you “excuse” the young people who are right to be indignant at Israel. They do not arrive at “Right of Return” or the destroy-Israel versions of spuriously pro-Palestinian sentiment spontaneously. They are fed those ideas by the kitsch left and groups like the Muslim Brotherhood’s Muslim Association of Britain. One of the crimes of the kitsch left is that they poison those young people. Because our voice is weaker, the young people don’t hear the radical criticisms of those views.

Your solution? Don’t confront the ideological poisoners, don’t point out the implications of “Right of Return”. Hide our sharp criticisms (because theirs is a reasonable response to Israeli misdeeds).

QUALIFICATIONS

Now, in all of the three pieces containing the idea that the “Right of Return” is logically “gene-ist” or “racist” — with different degrees of emphasis and detail, but in all of them — I have qualified what I’ve written, saying that proportions must be guarded and so on.

Certainly I have not used the idea in a jeering or dismissive way.

Misrepresenting me as wanting to “scream” at young people backing “Right of Return” that they are “racists” is a way of evading what I actually say. Why should I not take this as evidence that you feel you cannot refute the qualified and limited argument I actually made?

A central fact about the Israel-Palestine conflict is that anti-Israel slogans and feelings are not one and the same thing as pro-Palestinian ones. The most pro-Palestinian are not necessarily the same as the most anti-Israeli. Hostility to Israel, desire for its destruction, making its elimination central, is on the left (and among Arab nationalists and Islamists) not the same question as wanting the best for the Palestinians. It is an autonomous — not entirely separate, but autonomous — political reality, and with a logic of its own.

“Right of return”, meaning displacement, is a version of “destroy Israel”. Either you are in denial about that, or you accept or half-accept it.

On the left, anti-Israel feeling has become a cause in itself, perceived as merging with anti-imperialism and anti-racism.

Much of the agitation around misdeeds which we too condemn is packaged round a basic political message: Israel must be destroyed, not reformed, not changed, but eliminated.

“Right of return” is a variant of that. It is the negative anti-Israel stance expressed as the seemingly positive “right of return”. But

on every level it is a vicious nonsense.

One of our responsibilities is to portray all this honestly. Israel cannot be judged only by its brutality against the Palestinians and the imbalance in Israeli and Palestinian casualties. No other nation would have a death sentence served on it for “its” brutalities.

We counter that by the positive focus on two state, opposition to Israeli control of Gaza, etc.

Your basic error in your first polemic, as I pointed out, was to conflate the objective question of the meaning and implications of “Right of Return” with how it is understood by its different supporters. As an error in the basic rules of thinking, this is like getting wrong a bit of elementary mental arithmetic: 2+5=1.

In your second polemic, you ignore my criticism. You take the subjective aspect and multiply it in “concrete” examples, most of them senseless.

Central to what you say is the belief that the “Right of Return” is reasonable in the perception of young people. You separate yourself from them in words. In fact, however, at one remove, you make yourself, as their champion against the imagined threat of them being unjustly denounced by me as “racists”, a semi-defender of the view you think you reject. (The problem of politically-raw young people being shanghaied into positions like “Right of Return” has already been highlighted by, among others, me. For instance, I discuss it in *The Left in Disarray*).

What are you fighting against here, Daniel? You write a lot of demagogic nonsense to present what I say as intolerable and ineffective abuse of innocent “Right-of-Returners”. In fact, in our real situation, you are arguing against defining “Right of Return” according to its real meaning. I repeat: “We have to say what is. Then, after that, we think of ways of influencing individuals by taking their motives as a starting-point”.

Revolutionary socialists who stand against flaming indignation and thought-numbing enthusiasm, and those who argue with their peers (some of whose feelings and responses they share) that a situation is more complicated than they allow, of course feel their moral pressure. That is on a certain level healthy, and maybe even useful, as pain is useful in telling you that something is wrong somewhere.

But when all that is recognised, we have to think things through, deal with ideas, implications, overviews, and not raw feelings. We have to translate issues into rational politics. We have to do that, too, with groups and peoples who are oppressed and whom we support.

Basic here is the question of what AWL is. What is the prime function of a small-ish Marxist group if not honest definitions and efforts to enlighten ourselves and others? What is the point of writing about anything but to tell the truth as you see it? Then you look to honest critics, with their brains switched on properly, to correct you if you make mistakes. Thrashing around in a welter of confused politics is not that: it is the opposite.

I think the core political issue is that you shy away from our conclusion — “two states” — and are pushed into the orbit of those who conclude “destroy Israel”. Either or, Daniel. Either we are right to advocate “two states”, including Israel’s right to exist — this Israel, of which we have so many just criticisms to make. Or the anti-Israel demagogues are. You seem to be pulled in their

Continued on page 10

Where we stand

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

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

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- Independent working-class representation in politics.
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- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

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A protest by *Standing Together* — a left-wing Arab-Jewish campaigning group based in Israel — at the Bethlehem-Jerusalem Tunnels Checkpoint.

Continued from page 9

direction by indignation, justified indignation. But that is political, practical, and moral nonsense. You need to restore political reason to power inside your head

The remarkable thing is that despite a number of pitches of salesman prospectus, you do not actually spell out your non-sectarian, non-self-righteous alternative. Drawn by the salesman patter, you open the box, and there is nothing there.

Gush Shalom: the foolishness is yours, not mine. We are not in Israel. We do not relate to people who take Israel's right to exist for granted.

The "Right of Return" of Gush Shalom is not the "Right of Return" of the people we encounter on the left. Why would any of us object to a symbolic, or a wide actual, entry of agreed numbers of Palestinians to Israel? We are international socialists, not Israeli nationalists or chauvinists. It is not our business to object, and why for god's sake would we want to?

Whether or not what Gush Shalom proposes makes practical sense; whether in the circumstances calling it "the Right of Return", when in broad terms that formula delegitimises Israel, makes sense — that is another matter.

The point is, here you are substituting a "harmless" version of the "Right of Return" for the harmful one we have so far been discussing. Again, as with the objective and subjective meanings of "Right of Return", you muddle separate things together as if they were one.

You accuse me of "despair". I'm the one who wants to fight the "destroy Israel" people, confront them, Daniel! Defining things accurately is part of that. You are the one who looks to an easier future where the moral and political choices we face will be eased. You want to choose the irresponsible duck-out "option". Oh, we can do it next year — things will be easier then, when there is a big joint Israeli-Palestinian movement for justice to the Palestinians.

In your polemics you solve the problem by pushing them all into the future. "Right of return" can be refuted after the future "development of a substantial movement amongst both Israeli-Jews and Palestinians for a comprehensive policy of equal rights".

Daniel, we have to relate to the world we live in, and which we

must assume will exist more or less as it is for a little while longer. "Manana politics" is no politics, or wrong or evasive politics. It is the opposite of Marxist politics.

Lenin nailed that sort of nonsense once and for all with his comment on Karl Kautsky in *World War One*: "any number of promises to be a Marxist in another epoch, not now, not under present conditions, not in this epoch! Marxism on credit, Marxism in promises, Marxism tomorrow, a petty-bourgeois, opportunist theory — and not only a theory — of blunting contradictions today..."

I think that if we hold our ground we will eventually prevail. Truthful politics will ultimately win the argument.

In the old Marxist polemics — in Trotsky for instance — you often find mention of "loyal" and "disloyal" disputants. That means not loyalty to organisations, people, or collections of people, but to honest dealing.

You don't misrepresent your opponent's positions. You deal honestly with what is said against you and about what is in dispute. You do not evade the substantial issue. You don't concentrate on what are (or you think are) the weakest arguments against you: you deal with the strongest arguments. You don't hide facts, ideas, precedents, that are true but might favour your opponent. If you do any of those, you wind up confusing yourself as well as your trusting readers.

You say you almost feared being denounced as "left antisemite" — that I "stop short of straightforwardly accusing [you] of being a left antisemite, but who knows what joys *Solidarity* 506 may bring?"

Who else has any of us unjustly accused of being a left antisemite?

The unvoiced thought hovering in the back of what I said was not what you say.

It was that you in the piece I replied to (and your new contribution) display the characteristics of a political species much denounced by Trotsky and others: political evasion, inability to form and hold to a clear-cut opinion, inability to separate the objective from the subjective. See for instance Trotsky's *Centrism and the Fourth International* (1934).

Daniel, I have known clever but lazy-minded and facile people who drowned in their own superficiality.

Why students are depressed

Stuart Jordan

A recent survey of university students has found alarming rates of anxiety, self harm and substance abuse.

Of the 38,000 students surveyed by the Insight Network, 87.7% said they struggle with anxiety, 50.3% have thoughts of self-harm, and 44.7% use alcohol or drugs to deal with their problems. Rates of mental distress are highest among second and third year students.

There are some reasons that we can rule out as being the cause of this mental distress. Students are under pressure but not any more so than students in other countries. In fact, British universities tend to be generous with extensions, resits, repeats, as they are interested in getting their hands on the £9,250 a year fees. In France, by contrast, one third of students are thrown out after the first year. Also, unlike in most poorer countries, students do not flood into the courses most likely to yield jobs. Thousands study courses like English Literature, knowing well in advance that it will have no bearing on their future work.

It seems more likely that the cause lies in high levels of inequality within the UK. As described in the ground-breaking work of Richard Williamson and Kate Pickett (*The Inner Level*), there is now extensive evidence that shows that societies with high levels of inequality are psychologically toxic. Inequality generates status anxiety especially among the low paid, which in turn leads to a range of maladaptive coping strategies: social withdrawal, depression, self-harm and addiction. Today's students do not only face these problems but were raised by adults who also faced these problems.

How students perform in their academic studies and in the graduate jobs market are big factors in determining future income and their place in capitalism's pecking order — or at least it appears this way. The pressure to perform during these brief years can lead to a downward spiral where increased anxiety leads to poor focus, increased social awkwardness and depression. Fear of failure can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Research shows that people from low income families suffer the most status anxiety. Students from low income families are also three times more likely to live with their parents and commute to lectures. At some universities over 50% of students live at home. For these students, university must be stripped of its social content.

Universities are enormous institutions which gather together tens of thousands of strangers in a highly competitive ostensible-meritocracy. Nothing else in society is comparable. People who work in very large workplaces also have smaller units (workshops, offices, work teams) to anchor themselves in. Within the university there are almost no such smaller units. Some



courses define subgroups which might provide students with some potential social anchors, but within these subgroups students are then pitted against one another in intense competition. Other courses have students doing their studies on a "modular" basis on a very atomised basis.

There is research in the USA which suggests that smaller schools are not in fact better for mental health than big schools. However schools are not comparable. School children have many more social anchors within school and at home. Even if they don't like the way the teachers pay attention to them, they know that the teachers do pay attention. Life is not atomised.

It seems likely that marketisation of higher education has exacerbated an already rising trend of mental illness. Alongside the financial pressures that mean many students have to do paid employment alongside their studies, there has also been a powerful ideological shift in how we think about university education. The introduction of top-up fees was accompanied by a powerful bourgeois agitation linking university education to future earning potential. 60% of university students describe their courses as poor "value for money". The idea of "learning for learnings sake" has been pushed back in favour of a commodified version of education. Graduates are supposed to cash in their bachelor degrees for high paying jobs. From an early age we are taught that the primary goal of education is to earn more money.

Yet in reality income inequality reduces social mobility. Graduates from low income families earn on average 8% less than graduates from better off families even when they achieve the same grades, in the same subjects from the same universities. Graduates who went to private school earn on average 45% more than graduates from state schools. As societies become more unequal, your parents wealth becomes the main determinant of future earnings, rather than your level of education.

The publication of this report has been accompanied by calls for better mental health support in universities. This is important and extra counselling provision may ameliorate some of the immediate distress felt by many young people. It may well save lives. However we now possess incontrovertible evidence that life in an unequal society is extremely bad for our mental health. There are undoubtedly particular pressure points such as the second and third years of university, where status anxiety is felt most acutely.

Only by tackling income inequality, and the root causes of income inequality, will we create an education system and a society where young people can flourish.

PCS: Independent Left wins against “status quo” left

From back page

Those are effective, and certainly must be part of any future campaigning. But the pay campaign didn't grip people as it could have done given the erosion of our members' standards of living. We have to ask why the genuine anger of members about that erosion was not translated into votes, and why we didn't get, not just 50.1%, but a 60% or 70% turnout.

In terms of organising, I take my inspiration from the Chicago teachers. It took them several years to build up their organisation. We don't have several years, but I don't see how we can bypass the sort of hard work on the ground that the Chicago teachers did.

Now the Chicago teachers rebuilt partly through local community campaigns. With us, mostly, the links are more overtly about general politics rather than community-oriented.

So work on more general politics, such as climate change, can help us rebuild the union as well as an emphasis on fairness, equality, and justice in the workplace.

Campaigns around local office closures and around benefit rights and Universal Credit though will also be important.

In some areas, PCS has developed young activists. In others, it hasn't. Clearly it is vital that across the union we recruit young mem-

bers and develop them into activists. We should also work to mobilise BAME members, members with disabilities, trans members, around messages of fairness, equality, and justice in the workplace.

I don't know what functions I'll be allocated as Assistant General Secretary. The union constitution says that I'm union treasurer, and a member of the National Disputes Committee and NEC, but beyond that it is silent. If I get the chance, I would love to have a major role in organising and campaigning.

Union support for local disputes will help us organise. There's a Universal Credit dispute which should be boosted by the union, and the cleaners' dispute. Start doing things, and see what happens!

GROUNDING

Whilst there is always a danger that winning positions such as AGS, particularly when at first you find yourself relatively isolated at union HQ, you can be lead astray I don't think that will happen to me.

I'm grounded in a rank-and-file organisation and happy to be so. I don't think I'm a superstar. I recognise that I'm part of a collective.

A quick test of that will be my wages. I am asking only to be paid as an EO on the DWP London pay minimum. This is the closest thing to a worker's wage (EO is the most common grade in the civil service,

DWP is the biggest part of the union, and I work in London).

It is more likely that I will be paid the full AGS rate of £91,000. If this happens, then I will take home the net EO pay and donate the rest to our fighting fund, where it will appear in the annual accounts. Of course paying me £91K will mean that the union will have to pay unnecessary taxes and NI. Better to pay me the EO wage!

The Independent Left is a small group of about 100 activists, which has been faced with a larger organisation called Left Unity, which probably has a 1000 members.

As said earlier, Left Unity is clearly in a state of flux around the AGS election. They first rejected the incumbent, Chris Baugh, as their candidate, and then selected him after a second vote.

So there may be realignments, and new alliances may be forged. But IL must keep on with its fundamental program to change the union, rather than transform itself into an electoral machine. There may be some place for horse-trading in a realignment, but it must not dominate.

We're hoping that if we can demonstrate that we are different, then it will be possible to draw new people into the Independent Left.

And if we can grow the union again, then we will have fertile ground to grow the left further and on a better basis.

Lambeth children's centres call for strike ballot

By Katy Dollar

On 10 May Lambeth Unison submitted an official request to the national union for a strike ballot of children's centres workers.

Lambeth council voted at its April Cabinet meeting to ignore protests by the local community press ahead with the closure of five of its 23 children's centres and cutting services at more.

Parents have vowed to continue with public campaigning and children's centres workers have returned an 84% yes vote in consultative ballot over industrial action.

Though Unison members have voted in that local ballot, according to the anti-union laws they will need to vote again in an official ballot.

A ballot for industrial action must be agreed by the national union and then carried out supervised by a qualified independent person (a "scrutineer" – usually from the Electoral Reform Society).

Ruth Cashman, Branch Secretary of Lambeth Unison, said

"We will keep linking up with campaigns across London and trying to bring Labour, in particular Labour councils into joint activity to fight Tory cuts to local government."

"Whilst we do that we know we need to step up our fight locally. Children's Centre workers in Uni-



son have voted to say they want to be balloted and will take strike action to stop the loss of jobs and services.

"At the same time parents are building campaign groups centre by centre as well as launching some very creative campaign ideas that we're excited to see in action.

"We are pleased that, though the council is currently pushing forward with the closures, the consultation on the restructure has been delayed. We have been protesting, recruiting new members and consulting. There is still a lot to do."

The move by Lambeth to close some of its children's centres came after figures by ITV News London showed a decrease of at least 29 per cent in the number of children's centres operating in the London area.

Brent, Ealing, Havering, Redbridge and Wandsworth are also consulting on children's centre closures.

Hitting dark kitchens

By Zack, IWGB National Deliveroo Committee chair

Deliveroo couriers struck in Cambridge on Sunday 5 May, targeting Deliveroo's "dark kitchens", storage units from which restaurant chains prepare food for a dedicated Deliveroo service.

We have not yet established contact with riders there, and do not know exactly why they are striking. The strike seems to have been organised by, and predominantly attended by, motorbike couriers.

They seem to have had good turnout. The weekend after, Friday 10 and Saturday 11 May, Deliveroo gave couriers increased pay all

evening.

In most places where we have got members of the IWGB, or are in contact with couriers, action has been a bit quieter this week. After the waves of action in these recent months, we've had some limited victories in various places. We have not given up, or been bought off, by these, and are — in some places at least — reaching out and agitating for future strikes.

Couriers for The Doctors' Laboratory, subcontracted by the NHS in London, will be striking within weeks. TDL and the union had been negotiating a pay rise following cuts and stagnation for over a year. TDL then withdrew that and are now trying to implement effective pay cuts, through moving couriers to being paid through PAYE, and forcing them to incur all expenses for bikes, petrol, and insurance — thousands per year.

TDL's dispute has different dynamics from the Deliveroo dispute, as couriers have previously won a whole range of major victories, including worker status and union recognition. With these, however, they are now shackled by anti-union legislation.

Deliveroo couriers will be supporting their picket lines.

Tube win against cuts

By Ollie Moore

Cuts had been planned by London Underground to train maintenance schedules, to reduce the frequency of train safety checks, from 24-hourly to 96-hourly, or up to monthly or more on some lines.

Fleet maintenance workers in the RMT union had set strikes for 17-20 May. RMT had also planned to demonstrate outside London's City Hall on 16 May, highlighting Labour mayor Sadiq Khan's failure to resist Tory cuts to Transport for London's budget.

RMT reported on 14 May that the maintenance schedule cuts

had been withdrawn, and has suspended action.

Union general secretary Mick Cash said: "We now expect London Underground to reverse the planned cuts to jobs [in engineering sectors] under their 'Transformation' programme".

Tube cleaners, employed by outsourced contractor ABM, are also gearing up for industrial action, as ABM has recently cut staffing levels.

Cleaners are also demanding free travel passes, company sick pay, and improved holiday and pensions arrangements, as part of a wider campaign to demand direct employment.

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PCS union: Independent Left wins against “status quo” left

By John Moloney

On Thursday 9 May the PCS civil service union announced that Independent Left candidate John Moloney had won the election for Assistant General Secretary.

John Moloney spoke to *Solidarity*.

I believe that standing on a worker's wage, rather than taking the on-offer wage of £91K, was of decisive weight in the outcome. Certainly many people said it was the reason why they voted for me.

Another thing that helped is that most of the voting took place during the strike ballot for pay, so reps were already taking to members. This might account for turnout in-

creasing from 8% to over 10% this time — though of course that is still poor.

The other two candidates — Chris Baugh, who was the incumbent, and Lynn Henderson, favoured by General Secretary Mark Serwotka — got more branch nominations than me. Despite that, they got a lower vote.

There was a lot of infighting between the supporters of Chris and Lynn, and it could be that people nominated a candidate through their branch but weren't motivated to campaign for them amongst the membership.

The branches supporting the Independent Left, by contrast, were all very positive.

Some branches supporting Left Unity do deliver high turnouts in



strike ballots, so they do have the capacity to reach out to the membership, but in this campaign they didn't work the membership as we

did in our branches.

In any case, either the “safe pair of hands” message of the two other candidates didn't resonate, or the activists supporting it couldn't get their vote out, whereas in our branches our “unsafe pair of hands” message did mobilise people.

The National Executive election results, announced on 10 May, give us three Independent Left comrades on the NEC. It would have been four if I hadn't been elected AGS. Despite that advance, though, on paper Left Unity still have a clear majority as before.

The Independent Left vote is now significantly closer to the Left Unity vote. Gradually, over time, our relative vote has gone up each year, and it went up more this year.

This coupled with the continuing fallout within Left Unity may lead to re-alignments on the left later this year.

At the union conference on 21-23 May the big issue will be the union's response to our failure to get a 50% turnout on the pay ballot. The leadership wants to go for a third ballot. I agree that this is needed but I think we first must have a fundamental rethink about how we structure and organise ourselves, and how we campaign.

The union has introduced new technologies for campaigning, like mass phone-banking, and the app which gives branch activists an electronic list of their members and enables them to check off who's voted.

Continued on page 11.

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