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For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 525 20 November 2019 50p/£1

“LABOUR FOR A SOCIALIST EUROPE” HITS THE STREETS



Vote Labour, Then Remain

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Photo: Gemma Short @g_for_gemma

Lebanon's revolt against oligarchic sects



Interview

By Joey Ayoub

The movement started on 17 October, hence it's being called "The 17 October Revolution".

That day was very much a straw that broke the camel's back; the consequences of some natural disasters, such as wildfires on 14 October, had piled social misery on a number of disastrous policies, and led to a widespread revolt.

More and more people have taken to the streets. The momentum has built up, and the movement now targets the entire political system.

The historical and political context to the movement is the settlement that ended the civil war, which took place from 1979-1990. That agreement institutionalised sectarianism, imposing quotas for political representation.

The president must be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister must be a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament must be a Shia Muslim. That has been how politics works in postwar Lebanon, and has defined an entire generation.

Everything is done according to sectarian priorities, and political and economic life is dominated by warlords and oligarchs who have enriched themselves in postwar reconstruction, which of course all took place within a neoliberal capitalism.

The oligarchs have had a power-sharing agreement amongst themselves. There is no real opposition within the political system.

Being able to name these people means you can put faces to this cor-

rupt establishment. That's why the focus of the protest movement is the overthrow of the entire political system.

The English translation of a frequently chanted slogan is, "all of them means all of them."

The largest protest has been of around 1.5 million people. In a country of five or six million, that is a significant proportion of the population. Every day there'll be hundreds or thousands of people in various areas, with larger mobilisations on weekends.

The most visible actions have been the street protests – huge marches and demonstrations. There have also been other forms of action, such as roadblocks. More recently we've seen strikes and workplace occupations, with doctors and lawyers striking and protesting.

There've also been sit-ins at power stations and telecoms workplaces, as well as protests at banks. The official unions are entirely co-opted by the oligarchs, so we've seen groups of workers including media workers and lawyers take steps towards forming independent unions.

The movement is leaderless and highly decentralised, which means the state is struggling to keep up.

Unlike previous movements, such as the protests in 2015, this movement is not Beirut-centric or top-down. It's extremely spontaneous; even now, I'm not necessarily aware of what's happening in other parts of the country.

It's much less dominated by the middle class than previous movements. It's highly organic, a vast swathe of the population responding to the social situation.

Within weeks of the movement beginning, the Prime Minister, and therefore the government, re-

signed, which was an achievement. But that doesn't mean the system is gone.

The movement's demand is for the entire government to resign, for good, and for none of them to govern again. We've seen resignations in the past, but people usually return and shuffle positions between themselves. This time the movement won't settle for anything less than the removal of the entire government.

People want an interim government made up of independents, and a new electoral system not based on sectarianism, so people are not forced to vote according to sect.

SECTARIANISM

Society in Lebanon is segregated by sectarianism. You can't marry someone from another sect or background, unless one of you converts. People often travel abroad to get civil marriages, for example in Cyprus, which the Lebanese government recognises, but even then, children must be registered in one sect, usually the father's.

The protest movement is assertively anti-sectarian and involves people from all backgrounds. There's been cross-communal solidarity between protests in different parts of the country, which has made it hard for the oligarchs to play on sectarian divides.

They are still attempting this, and the media platforms, which are linked to sectarian factions, are attempting to divide people – for example, Hezbollah's TV station Al Manar, and the FPM's OTV, have been trying to do this, but not as effectively as they would have liked.

Another key demand of the movement is for the return of public funds which have been looted.



Billions of dollars have been siphoned off from public money in the last several years, and stashed away in offshore tax havens. The government is waiting for \$11 billion of additional funds, agreed by the CEDRE Conference which took place in France in 2018, to be unlocked, in exchange for enacting certain reforms.

It's seen as a joke that so much of the political class is focusing on unlocking these \$11 billion dollars, when a far greater amount has been looted by the same oligarchs in or around power.

Discussions are taking place within the movement about longer-term political perspectives.

There have been some tentative attempts at independent, non-sectarian politics in the past, for example in the 2015 Beirut municipal elections. These forces exist, but not all have an organic relationship with the protest movement, and some are trying to ride the wave of the protests. However, there are a lot of people in the movement who are ready to run in elections.

No-one is naïve enough to think anything will change immediately. We know this will be a long fight. The hope is that those who are more focused on more official forms of political action will be in tune with the anger on the streets and represent that in parliament.

In the postwar era, there has never been a parliament with a significant percentage of independent MPs, only a handful at most. All the others are drawn from sectarian factions and come from the upper classes.

What we might see in the short to medium term, rather than the overthrow of the whole system, is a significant increase in the number of independent MPs. This would shatter the aura of untouchability that the sectarian warlords and oligarchs have created around themselves.

These people must be held to account, that's another common chant on the streets. If we elect more independents, we must pressure them to hold the sectarians accountable. That's something the warlords and oligarchs greatly fear.

In terms of what activists elsewhere can do to support the movement, there are places internationally where the oligarchs have assets. Many of the oligarchs are dual citizens, and they have offshore bank accounts.

How much of their money are in Swiss banks for example? These are questions that need answering. □

• Joey Ayoub, a Lebanese writer and participant in the protests, talked with Daniel Randall from *Solidarity*.

Sanders and Warren: What's the difference?



Sanders campaign

By Eric Lee

American politics has made a sharp turn to the left in recent years – a turn that few anticipated, but that underpins much of what is going on in the Democratic primary now underway.

The two leading progressive candidates, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, together represent a clear majority of Democratic voters. The party's "moderate" wing thought it had a winner in Joe Biden, but the implosion of his campaign has led to a search for viable alternatives to the two Democratic senators from New England.

Mayor Pete Buttigieg is emerging as the hope of that wing of the party as all the other candidates

struggle to show any support in recent polls.

Any of the Democratic candidates would be huge improvements over Trump, obviously. And of them all, Elizabeth Warren is far and away the most progressive – except for Bernie Sanders.

So where do they differ? Warren proudly calls herself a capitalist, and was a Republican party supporter until the mid-1990s. Sanders calls himself a democratic socialist, and has been active on the American left since the early 1960s when he was a member of the Young People's Socialist League. Unlike Warren, Sanders speaks the language of the socialist left. Speaking to trade unionists in Iowa recently, he said that "if there's going to be class warfare in this country, it's about time the working class won that war."

That difference also expresses itself in policies, where Sanders is

consistently somewhat to the left of Warren. This is even true with a proposal like Medicare for All, where the two candidates seem to be reading from the same page.

But the main difference between them is how they see social change happening in America. Warren has detailed plans to fix social problems one by one. Sanders sees a grassroots movement, and in particular a revitalised trade union movement, as central to turning his vision into reality.

ORGANISER-IN-CHIEF

Sanders says that if elected, he'll play the role of "organiser-in-chief" and is counting on mass popular support to pass his radical program of change. Warren says nothing of the sort.

He models himself somewhat on President Franklin Roosevelt, whose New Deal reforms were

made possible by the rise of a radicalised labour movement in the 1930s. And he grew up at a time of radical social change in 1960's, underpinned by the growth of increasingly left-wing civil rights and student movements.

Sanders is especially focussed on strengthening America's greatly weakened trade union movement. He has pledged to double the membership of unions during his first term in office. While other Democratic candidates have made similar pledges in the past – especially to reform labour law to allow unions to organise and grow – they have not followed through once elected. Sanders understands that there will be no real change in the country without massively stronger trade unions.

It would be best for American workers if Sanders is the Democratic nominee in 2020. But right now, he's in a tough fight to win

that nomination. In most polls, Warren is ahead of him.

If Warren wins the nomination, Sanders has already pledged to support her (or any other Democrat running against Trump).

Not all Sanders' supporters share his view. Three months ago, Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) voted at its national convention in Atlanta for a "Bernie or Bust" resolution – saying that if Sanders was not the party's nominee in 2020, they would not officially support anyone, not even Elizabeth Warren. Others, socialists among them, disagree.

Whether Sanders is the nominee or Warren, the Democrats will likely embrace the most radical platform any American political party has proposed since the 1930s.

But of those two candidates, it is Sanders who best understands what it takes to turn such a platform into reality. □

Building wider climate action for 29 November



Climate

By Misha Zubrowski

The next global youth climate strike is planned for Friday 29 November. In dozens of towns and cities across the UK, from hundreds of schools, and in hundreds of cities around the world, millions of school students and young people will be taking a stand against climate change.

It will be the first international climate strike since 20 September. There have been multiple strikes over the last year. On 20 September there was a call for workers to join students, and in several workplaces they did.

This was an important step towards the workplace environmental activism which we need. We need to build on that, on 29 November, and more broadly.

The initiative of *Solidarity* sup-

porters and UCU members in Cambridge, described on this page, is an important model.

Lambeth council workers and Unison members have created another.

Workplace and environmental activists demanded of the council that they take no punitive action and deduct no pay for participating in the climate strike: for holding a rally at lunchtime then marching to join a wider march. The council, under pressure, partly acquiesced.

The activists leafleted different sections of the council workforce in the run up to the climate strike. As a result of this, they got a turn out of perhaps fifty workers.

They formed a workplace climate committee and lobbied for it to be recognised by their employer, the council. They have even won facility time, time paid by their employer for members to work on the union climate committee rather than in their regular jobs.

The climate committee has been working on environmental de-



mands. Most employees work in one set of offices, which is a new-build and pretty energy efficient day-to-day.

However, the committee is pressuring the council to provide free meeting space and otherwise support environmental activists. It has,

seemingly with some success, made environmental demands around new council house-building.

One Lambeth council worker-activist told me that, largely due to the general election, they have not been able to mobilise as much for the 29 November as they did for 20 September, and do not expect so big a turnout. But they will use it to build for future strikes.

They will also be releasing a series of videos about the international impacts of climate change. Their workforce has a high proportion of migrants.

Many other actions took place on 20 September. One that struck me as a creative way of encouraging and amplifying engagement was a video that some transport workers or apprentices made, coupled with a small demonstration. See it at bit.ly/joe-cc.

If after all it looks like no collective action will take place on 29 November where you work, then there are lots of other important ways of supporting the development of these strikes! First of all,

take the day off work, where possible, and join the protests.

UCU strikes will be running from 25 November to 4 December at 60 universities. That includes 29 November. Get in contact with UCU branches and student strike-solidarity link-ups, as well as climate strikers. They generally welcome support and suggestions!

School students could come up to campuses and do rallies there.

Encourage UCU branches and student strike solidarity groups to hold banner making sessions specifically on this focus. They should plan to go down to the city-wide climate rallies from the picket lines.

In the last major UCU strikes many branches and solidarity groups collaborated and held "teach-outs". Socialist environmentalists should propose teach-outs themed on the environment, some featuring or led by school climate strikers.

These could be linked to education, to class-struggle environmentalism, and beyond. □

Lessons from Cambridge

By a Cambridge UCU member

Our advice to other workers, based on our experience in the 20 September climate strike, is:

1. Begin with a very low-stakes, but highly visible, action. In our case, this was simply a group photo in front of a banner during what would otherwise be most people's lunch break, taking advantage of the 20 minute walkout that the TUC had backed.

2. Go into workplaces and ask if you can put up posters/leave leaflets. This is perhaps easier on

the site we targeted as we had several university departments, a vet surgery, and a construction site all in close proximity.

3. If your union officially backs the climate strikes, then ask them to advertise your event via their own channels.

4. Have literature that you can hand to people on the day. We made a simple bulletin, which included a QR code linked to our email account for people who want to stay in touch.

For the November climate strike, we are adding to this strategy by contacting people in advance who can help us build for

the walkout so that more people feel invested in the campaign and by leafleting outside workplaces of industrial sectors with an especially high environmental impact (in our case, the nearby BP Institute). We also plan to distribute literature on the UCU picket lines, as we will be on strike on that day anyway.

Moreover, we have asked workers in other sectors who plan to perform actions for the climate strike to visit UCU picket lines, having explained to them that our UCU branch intends to have a climate change theme for its wider activity on that date. □

Use the election to campaign on climate!



Climate

By Misha Zubrowski

Climate change is a more prominent topic than ever before in this year's general election.

According to one poll, 27% of voters cited the environment as one of three top issues — behind Brexit and health, and on par with crime and the economy. Another poll found that 21% list environment and pollution, unprompted, when asked about the top issues "facing Britain" today — up from just 2% in 2012. Climate change is a particular concern for younger people, and another survey found that 70% of 18-24 year olds report that it will be "a factor when they cast their vote."

Youth climate strikes and Extinc-

tion Rebellion, in particular, can be credited for raising the profile and urgency of tackling climate change, over the last two years.

Self-reported prioritisation does not straightforwardly translate into voting. Apart from anything else, all the major parties now *claim* to be serious about tackling climate change.

The Green Party — the only to have released its full manifesto at the time of writing — is pledging to spend £100 billion a year to reach net zero by 2030. This promised spending is five times as high as the Lib Dems' pledge.

It is also four times as high as the last figure pledged by the Labour leadership, in *The Green Transformation*, one year ago. That said, there is good reason to think — and hope — that the figure in the coming manifesto will be higher. Labour's much needed "Warm Homes" plan

promises insulate the UK's nearly 27 million households, and to help with solar panels and heat pumps. The promised spending on this programme, alone, is equal to the total promised in *The Green Transformation*.

Labour have also made important promises on apprenticeships, wind farms, cars, and more.

The Tories' pledges are farcical. They say they aim for a 2050 net zero target, but their promised policies fall far short of even that. Those are: an unspecified proportion of a meagre increase in overall research budgets; increasing wind capacity by a third over a decade; planting tens of millions of trees (but billions are needed); and a temporary pause — not a ban — on fracking, a form of fossil-fuel extraction which they've up until now been celebrating and pushing.

The Conservatives' climate

record: as a party, as MPs, and of Boris Johnson, is abysmal. David Cameron promised the "greenest government ever". His actions went the opposite direction.

Back then, Johnson continued to cast doubt on whether climate change even existed or hurt the environment. Later he launched a so-called "think tank" with links to many anti-environmental groups (bit.ly/bj-cs).

Unsurprisingly, the Lib Dems' voting record of voting on environmental issues is also pretty bad. Modelling themselves as the party of business, they are avoiding promises which would confront fossil companies head on.

Labour's September conference passed radical environmental policies, far bolder and closer to that needed than the Greens'. Labour's leadership are yet to commit to the policies passed.

In fact, Barry Gardiner, Labour's shadow trade secretary — and a vocal supporter of the far-right anti-Muslim racist Modi, Prime Minister of India — has said that Labour will not aim for net zero by 2030. Instead, net zero by "well before 2050". This follows equivocation by Rebecca Long-Bailey, and pressure by GMB union and others.

We must promote the much-needed environmental policies that Labour's conference passed at the same time as we campaign for Labour votes. □



Corrections

On the front pages of both *Solidarity* 523 and 524, we missed off the photographer credit: Gemma Short. Sorry.

Fight social-imperialism! Pass me my pay-off!



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star* has a problem: its political masters of the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) have stated that they advocate a Labour vote in every constituency – “including Derby North, despite the outrageous suspension of excellent sitting MP Chris Williamson”, to quote the CPB’s London district secretary Steve Johnson.

So what to do about the “excellent” comrade Williamson? After all, he’s an avid Brexiteer, sees complaints of antisemitism as all a plot by the Jewish Labour Movement, the Israeli embassy and the “Zionists”, supports Assad, and loves conspiracy theorists like Vanessa Beeley. All entirely in line with the politics of the CPB and *Morning Star*.

To square the circle of calling for a Labour vote everywhere and effectively supporting Williamson, the *Morning Star* gave him the best part of a page (9-10 Nov) in which to set out his stall. Under the heading “I resigned

from Labour to spend more time fighting for socialism”, Williamson claims to be “the most Corbyn-friendly candidate in the country” before going on to call for the Labour party to “stand aside in Derby North and allow its members to campaign for me.”

Is this man serious? He’s really demanding that the Labour Party should stand aside just for him? It would appear so: he says “Imposing a new candidate at this stage is unfair on CLP members and constituents alike.”

But this isn’t a case of overweening arrogance verging upon delusions of grandeur, you see: “If the party fields a candidate against me, it could split the left vote and potentially thrust a Conservative on the people of Derby North. This would be disastrous for our fight against austerity and our bid to transform the country.” One can only assume that the “our” in that last sentence refers to the Labour Party in alliance with the fearless socialist fighter and charismatic Man of Principle Chris Williamson.

And Fearless Comrade Williamson has some advice for Labour members outside Derby North: “This [i.e. “my”] fearlessness is what the Labour Party lacks today. As we head towards the election, it is essential that

socialists know what they’re fighting against. I encourage Labour Party members to stay in the party and fight for its soul, but you should not be under the illusion that it is a socialist party – yet.”

The Fearless Comrade then identifies the “two crucial barriers to socialism in the Labour Party: a lack of internal democracy and the threat of social imperialism.”

Yes, you read that right: “social imperialism”, the phrase that these days is used only by Maoists about the old Soviet Union (although Albanian leader Enver Hoxha went on to use the expression to condemn Mao’s Three Worlds Theory).

The Fearless Comrade explains: “Contrary to Jeremy’s wishes, if Labour wins this election, it would aim to be socialist in words and deeds at home but imperialist in words and deeds abroad.”

And who are the carriers of this social imperialist virus? The Fearless Comrade has identified some important “power blocs” – “some union officials and MPs”, and ...

“Momentum, too, has been a barrier to building an anti-imperialist, socialist movement. At the same time as organising activists, it is busily engaged in targeting

younger members with the inflammatory message that zionism and anti-zionism are morally equivalent. It deploys divisive and emotional arguments to suggest that zionism (an ideology that many Jewish socialists in our movement have honourably fought against) is essential to Jewish identity. In doing so, it is replicating a tactic used to crush the pro-Palestinian movement in Germany and criminalise Palestinian activism in France.”

But all is not lost in the battle against social imperialism and Zionism: the Fearless Anti-Zionist Comrade has “every confidence we can win this election”, but “we must do it as an outward-looking movement that takes inspiration from the success of socialist movements around the world. Onwards!”

The Fearless Anti-Zionist Comrade doesn’t, however, mention an interesting fact: if an MP stands down or retires, they lose their redundancy pay. But if they stand again, even as an independent, and lose, they will receive a big pay-off.

Well above the statutory minimum. Onwards! □

The “strategist-dilettantes”



Letters

Bernie Sanders’s poll ratings will be important in convincing those who argue that we should support the candidate most likely to beat Trump (see Eric Lee’s article *Can Sanders win?*, bit.ly/can-sanders).

But Sanders’s success will also require winning over the “anyone but Trump” tendency to more principled socialist politics.

The “anyone but X” tendency is a long-standing feature of left politics the world over. The argument that we should pick policies and personnel *solely* because they *appear* most likely to defeat the right is a corrosive force in working-class politics, and in recent years has been electorally disastrous.

Independent working-class politics requires policies and spokespeople that can build working-class power, not just win on any basis. Its a subtle distinction, but one that needs to be sharply drawn if we are to renew socialist politics.

In his autobiography, Trotsky describes how in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution the party became flooded with “strategist-dilettantism”. It is a neat phrase that describes a dominant trend of triangulation and vote-chasing within the left today. In Britain, it defines the political DNA of Blairism, but is also a powerful trend amongst Corbyn’s supporters.

Strategist-dilettantism elevates strategy above all political principles. Its unthinking assumptions are that principled working-class politics are unpopular; tactical manoeuvres, triangulating, and vote-chasing are more popular. This method implies it is not possible to win political arguments and change people’s minds (or at least our capacity to do this is limited).

The start and end of political wisdom is some ill-defined supernatural power to divine public opinion. Unsurprisingly, whichever strategist-dilettante you happen

to be talking to, it is they who possess this supernatural power. Political debate between these people is often simply competing claims about what “ordinary working-class people” think.

Corbyn and Sanders have had successes when they have ignored this tendency and argued for principled politics. In more recent years, the strategist-dilettantes in the Corbyn camp have got the upper hand, as evidenced in the triangulated position on Brexit and immigration.

Defenders of the leadership line only ever argue on the basis of strategy, never from political principles. There is no principled position that justifies Corbyn’s Brexit stance. Yet apparently, anything other than the leadership’s promises to negotiate a soft Brexit and increase immigration controls will lose votes.

There is an implicit acceptance that this approach is failing as Labour attempts to redefine the political terrain of this general election to talk about “anything but Brexit”. The fact that the same people who argued for the current Brexit position now argue we should shout about other things shows the vacuity of this strategist-dilettante method.

The experience of Labour’s policy on Brexit and more strikingly, the fate of many European social democratic parties, suggests that the strategist-dilettantist approach continues despite overwhelming evidence that it is failing. It seems likely that as parties slip further and further into electoral oblivion, the tendency hardens, as a dwindling number of activists scramble for the magic formula of popularity.

For socialists, strategist-dilettantism is a tricky tendency to confront. Those of us arguing for principled working-class internationalism can easily be portrayed as those who are least interested in winning power and least interested with the realities of working-class opinion.

It is difficult to argue with people whose can only justify their politics by repeated assertions that their politics are popular (often despite evidence). It is difficult to argue both



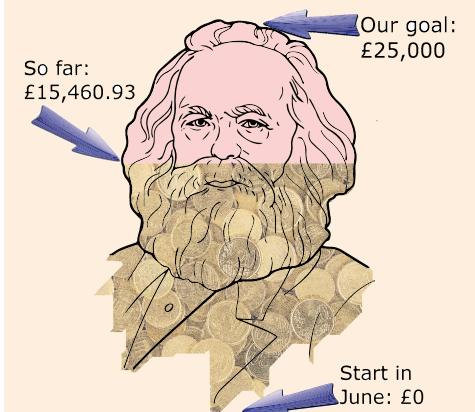
that triangulated politics are unpopular *and* that a political strategy that is purely about winning power, is the least likely to be successful.

A full-throated socialist message is likely to be more popular but *even if it was less popular* then it remains the only way of making socialism. It is not that socialists are indifferent political strategy, to mass political opinion or to winning power. It is that strategy should be secondary to politics, rather than vice versa.

We do not have a good description for this tendency which infects even the best militants at times and is a conduit for bourgeois politics into the workers’ movement. The old Marxist label of “opportunism” does not quite capture it. Trotsky’s phrase is clunky but may be worth reviving.

In the next few months in Britain and the USA, the left will be drawing up a balance sheet. It seems to me that we will be in a better shape if we can better define “strategist-dilettantism” and draw out the distinctions between this tendency and the politics that can rebuild working-class power. □

Stuart Jordan, London



Help us raise £25,000

Thanks this week to Ian Townson, £1,000, Linda and Harold Youd £50, and John Cunningham, £20. Their contributions bring our fund-drive total to £15,460.93.

We have another £9,539.07 to raise to reach our £25,000 target. Less than £10,000 to go!

Three comrades from Sheffield tell us they’re planning a sponsored bike ride. Since October’s sponsored bike ride, by a single rider, raised £1,250, we should have a good chance of raising several thousands from that.

We’ve already spent a lot of money on buying leaflets for the general election campaign from Labour for a Socialist Europe — and now stickers and posters too — and we’ll need a lot more to be as active as we need to be in this campaign. □

• Donate at workersliberty.org/donate.

The socialist left in the Labour campaign

Editorial

The Tory campaign for this general election has more money, but the Labour campaign has more people.

Tens of thousands of Labour volunteers are taking to the streets and the phone-banks.

As socialist internationalists, we are with those volunteers. The labour movement is our movement, and we want it to win in this election against the Tories and Lib Dems.

We also have more to do than adding our numbers to the general labour movement mobilisation. We have political tasks.

The road to socialism, in our view, fundamentally goes through working-class organisation and struggle in the workplaces and the neighbourhoods, and through the expansion and education of the labour movement, and not just through the election of well-meaning individuals to high office.

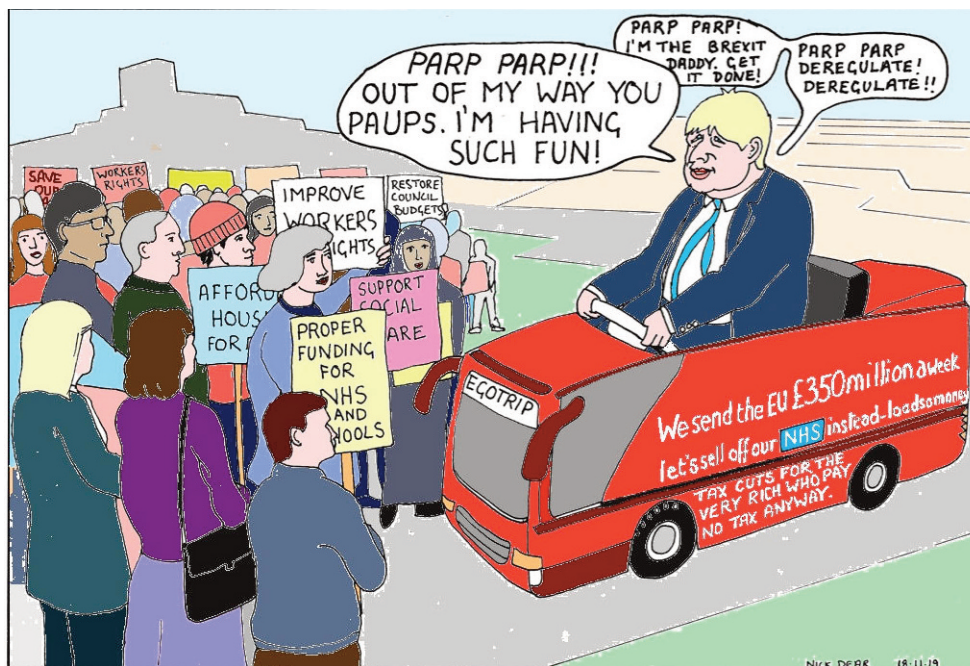
Working-class politics is not just about elections. It is about day-to-day agitation, education, and organisation, before elections and after elections as well as during them.

What we do in an election is the continuation of what we were doing before the election, and will help build the basis for what we do after the election.

In this election campaign, as well as contributing to the general Labour effort, we want to pull people round full-strength socialist policies, draw them into ongoing activity, and organise them.

As well as joining in local Labour Parties' canvassing efforts, we are helping to organise Labour for a Socialist Europe street stalls, with L4SE leaflets, posters, stickers, and briefings, and with our own newspapers and briefings in our hands too.

The measure of success, for us, will not just be the constituency voting totals on 12 December, but the numbers of people ready to continue discussion and activity with groups like Labour for a Socialist Europe, the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, the Student Left Network, and Workers' Liberty.



We have distinct ideas to argue within the Labour election campaign:

- For full-strength socialist politics. We need social ownership and democratic control of the banks and industry both to win social equality, and to tackle the climate emergency
- For support for the workers' struggles now under way, in the post, in the universities, etc., for the repeal of all the Thatcher anti-union laws as well as the 2016 Trade Union Act, and for positive rights to strike and to take solidarity action
- For "Remain and rebel" — build unions, not borders — build on the capitalist semi-integration of Europe to unite workers across the continent and go for a socialist united states of Europe
- Against antisemitism of all stripes. Support the Palestinians in their right to self-determination in a real independent state alongside Israel ("two states"), oppose the demonisation of Israel and "Zionists".

This is a more complicated election campaign than 2017. Then, the Tories proposed "strong and stable" continuation of cuts;

Labour proposed taxing the rich and well-off to restore social provision.

Seven years of agitation and demonstrations against cuts, since 2010, provided the fuel and the engine for Labour's rapid gains during the weeks of the election campaign.

This time, the Tories offer a moving target, with Johnson's demagoguery. And even if voters completely disbelieve Johnson's promises of more funds for the NHS and schools, they know that other issues are hot. Brexit. Climate change.

Labour's policy on Brexit is a mess. Remainers should vote Labour in order to get a referendum on any Brexit deal, but they should also join the battle within the Labour Party to commit Labour to support free movement and to lowering rather than raising borders.

Labour passed a good policy on climate change (though with gaps) at its September conference, but the signals are that the manifesto will have a pale and inadequate version of that policy. □

Where are the manifestos?

By Rhodri Evans

Labour's manifesto is due to be published on 21 November, almost halfway through the election campaign which started on 6 November and will end on 12 December.

The Tories will publish their manifesto around the end of November, more like two-thirds of the way through the campaign.

The Lib Dems, too, have not published their manifesto yet.

From all reports, the delay is not because of last-minute wrangling, but a deliberate ploy.

It seems common sense that parties should publish their manifestos at the start of the election campaign. The manifestos should be crisp summaries of what the parties have discussed, decided, and proposed over the previous months and years. That was the norm until recently.

In 1964, for example, when Labour won an election to end 13 continuous years of Tory rule, the Labour manifesto was, and was well-known to be, really a dressed-up new presentation of a (poor) policy document debated and voted through Labour Party conference three years earlier, in 1961.

Now it is the going wisdom in the political wonk-world — the little social sphere made up of politicians, advisers, lobbyists, think-tank people, etc. — that policies should be "announced" on a drip-feed during the election campaign, and all the better if they are "surprises" with little connection to the party's previous arguments.

This is good politics only if we see political progress as coming through giving power to clever people who will surprise us with the boons they cascade down to us.

But if we see change as being pushed through essentially by a movement built "from below", then that going wisdom is not good politics at all. □

The parties at the bosses' conference

By Colin Foster

On Monday 18 November the Tory, Labour, and Lib Dem leaders all spoke at the conference of the Confederation of British Industry, the main bosses' organisation.

Jo Swinson of the Lib Dems got the warmest applause. The Lib Dems, with their new ultra-neo-liberal pledge always to run a government budget surplus, are pitching to be considered the full-on party of big business.

According to the *Financial Times*, "many admitted, sometimes grudgingly, that the Conservatives would still probably get their vote".

Boris Johnson's policy of "taking the UK out of the EU as soon as possible... remains deeply unpopular among executives". CBI director-general Carolyn Fairbairn said that the Tories' new "obsession" with "wholesale deregulation of the UK" — cutting loose from EU standards, and aligning more with

Trump's USA — was "something that no business wanted".

Some businesses, in fact, do want wholesale deregulation. The bigger businesses generally don't. They reckon that the cost of the mild EU regulations is slight, and certainly less than the cost of the economic barriers which cutting loose will lead to.

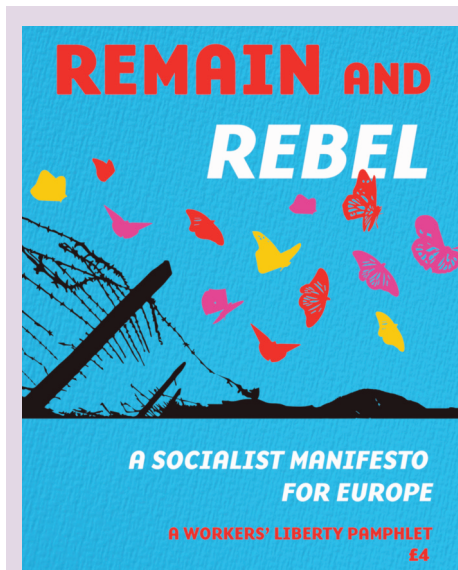
But they also have shrugged and settled for a soft-ish Brexit. They're happy enough to see migrant workers more insecure. And they guess that the deep historic ties between the Tory party and big business remain strong enough to pull Johnson back into line if his nationalist demagoguery wins the election.

Jeremy Corbyn told the assembled bosses that it is "complete nonsense" to think that Labour is "anti-business".

Labour wants a better minimum wage, and says "the largest corporations should pay their taxes just as smaller companies do", he protested; but the lords of industry and commerce could expect "more investment than you ever dreamt of", "the best educated workforce", and "full-fibre broadband".



The assembled bosses still weren't persuaded. In fact, they know as we do that socialist policies can be carried through only by taking ownership and control out of the hands of the ultra-wealthy minority, and establishing real economic democracy. □



This pamphlet summarises our arguments on Brexit, Europe, international solidarity, free movement, immigration, and how to build socialist politics cross-borders.

40 pages A4. Cover price £4. With postage — non-UK £6, UK £5. Cheaper in bulk.

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Doorstep comments

Definitely some persuading to do over Brexit. Leavers see Labour as having obstructed it; remainers see it as having failed to oppose it clearly enough. Suggests a strategy of uniting leavers and remainers has its limits.

We do need to unite leavers and remainers, but that has to be on the basis of persuading people to shift their views. A Labour government will give you both what you want is not a credible stance when one group wants Brexit immediately and the other doesn't want it at all. □

Daniel Randall, Islington

Our Tory MP, Nigel Huddleston is almost like the quintessential Tory MP, with a background in finance and big business and a perfect record of defending those sectors by imposing austerity on the working class and the poor.

We're presenting a strongly contrasting alternative, a trade unionist using the campaign to talk about trade union rights, workers' rights and a voice for workers.

My pledge to take only a worker's wage if elected and use the rest to support campaigns and social causes has caught activists' imagination and had a good response on the doorstep.

We're mobilising more people than we ever have before – old people, young people, established members and new joiners. □

Helen Russell, Labour candidate for Mid Worcestershire.

We've had loads of outside support from party activists coming from all over. People from Welwyn, St Albans, Cambridge, different parts of North London. And that is reflected in solid turnouts, like 60 or 70 people out canvassing at weekends.

It feels like we have a solid base of supporters too, but what we haven't done yet is swung people over or pull in the undecideds. That takes all kinds of forms, from people who don't like Corbyn because they want Brexit to people who are thinking of voting Lib Dem for the opposite reason, even though it's clearly a two-horse race in Stevenage.

Our candidate Jill [Borcherds] is a great asset, she's a local teacher and people see her really positively. She's also very persuasive

and really wins people over, particularly on education and the environment.

In contrast to Jill our MP Stephen McPartland is seen absent, hard to get hold of and distant from people's lives.

I'm not sure we're cutting through yet. I hope the manifesto will be the turning point for that; that whether or not it has everything we want, we'll see the kind of same dynamic unleashed that we saw in 2017. □

Abbie Clark, Stevenage CLP

As a frontline firefighter I've led with a strong message that after losing thousands of firefighters, thousands of police, thousands of NHS workers, with huge cuts to all our emergency services, our whole society is less safe. Only a Labour government will deal with those very immediate, pressing problems.

More broadly we have a maybe once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to vote for significant steps forward in changing society – not least a radical Green New Deal to tackle the climate emergency. Here in Suffolk Coastal those climate policies have been received well among people who've voted all kinds of ways in the past.

Labour's position is the only legitimate one on Brexit – a second referendum, taking a people-focussed deal back to the people, based on the six tests outlined by Labour and put against Remain as the other option. That, combined with our transformative policies, can cut through. It's not a conversation you can have in soundbites – you have to explain things properly. I'd personally like to see if possible any campaign for Remain also discuss how we might want Remain and Reform to progress, not just leave things as they are.

The campaign here's been very good, with more activity and passion than in 2017. □

Cameron Matthews, Labour candidate for Suffolk Coastal.

Cutting an extremely tedious and extended story short, I've ended up as the campaign manager in a tight Tory-held marginal.

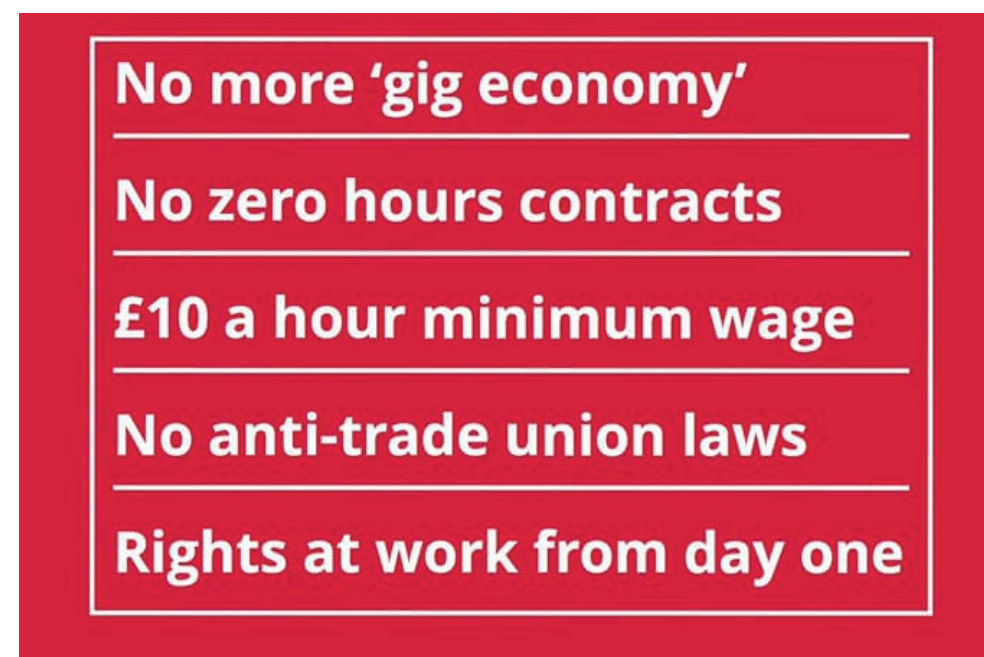
Historically, Labour has formed a government only when it has won our seat.

The campaign manager job therefore relentless and all-encompassing. I write this warning to my future self and others who

comprising almost all the cities and villages where the West Bank's overwhelming Palestinian majority lives. Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in caretaker mode now pending long wrangles about forming a new government coalition, has promised to annex Area C.

Day-to-day, annexation of Area C will change nothing on the ground. The same is true of Pompeo's announcement about the settlements, and the Trump regime's earlier declaration that it recognises Israel as sovereign over the Golan Heights and its move of the US embassy to Jerusalem.

The USA's vote in the UN on 15 November against renewing the mandate for UNRWA (the UN agency which provides health care, schools, and housing for Palestinian refugees and descendants) was symbolic (no other state voted against renewal, other than Israel). Its cutting of funds to UNRWA in 2018



Best campaigning moment so far yesterday. We were handing this out on a stall in Edinburgh. A woman took one, read it as she walked away. Turned around, came back and asked more about it. She told me she worked in a nearby fast food place. She is now a Labour voter and will be telling her fellow workers which party they should vote for!

Katrina Faccenda, Edinburgh

could end up in a similar situation: this is a deeply de-politicising role.

When your main tasks are to ensure data is collected, events and visits run to time, and with near-impossible deadlines for those with full-time day jobs, it quickly becomes clear why your focus is diverted away from the quality and variety of conversations and campaigning styles – away from political agitation and towards mundane (albeit necessary) organisational tasks of an election campaign.

Replacing Marxist political organising with the managerial tasks of a highly bureaucratic machine reserves little time or energy for fighting for our core political objectives (not least the transformation of the Labour Party itself). It is the opposite of what revolutionaries should focus on over the next four weeks.

I look forward to having time once the GE is over to write more on this topic, but in short this should be seen as a warning to Marxists against taking on full-time jobs in the Labour Party. □

Eric James, southern England

At the start of November, the two Co-Chairs of Durham University Labour Club (DULC) were suspended pending investigation because they had used the club's Face-

book page to host a canvassing event later in the month for the general election.

The decision was made by Gareth Hughes and Jamie Caress, the CEO and Opportunities Manager respectively of Durham Student Union. They claimed the Facebook posting was a breach of the charity law to which the SU and its affiliated societies have been subject since 2014.

The Labour Club has held two emergency meetings at which interim Co-Chairs have been elected and the situation has explained to the membership.

The suspended Co-Chairs have explained that they are undergoing a disciplinary process, the consequences of which could range from having the Club's funds confiscated, all the way through to the dissolution of the Club entirely.

The student sabbatical officers at the Student Union have remained silent on the issue, despite not having participated in the original decision to suspend the Co-Chairs.

DULC's official position is to take a diplomatic approach to this process. Leading people in the Club have advised that people do not comment openly about the SU or the sabbs until the disciplinary process has been completed. □

David Bullock, Durham student

Trump pushes against Palestinian rights

By Martin Thomas

Donald Trump's US administration moved a step nearer pushing a "one-state" solution for the Israel-Palestine conflict on Monday 18 November. Trump's Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, announced that the USA no longer considers the Israeli settlements in the West Bank illegal.

Partly under US pressure, Israel dismantled its settlements in Gaza in 2005, and in Sinai in 1982.

Pompeo's announcement green-lights the next Israeli government – when it's formed – formally to annex to Israel all or most of "Area C", the over-60% of the West Bank including the settlements and the Israeli road system connecting them.

"Area C" is already under direct Israeli control, and completely surrounds the 165 distinct patches of "Area A" and "Area B",

has been partly (only partly) offset by increased funding from the Gulf states and the EU.

But in impact on potential for a democratic settlement, these moves add up. They accumulate obstacles to Palestinian self-determination in a real independent state alongside Israel (a "two states" settlement), and push towards Israel gradually taking over the whole territory west of the Jordan and marginalising the Palestinians into a scattering of minorities with few rights.

Some on the left talk about "one state" as a better outcome than "two states". In reality the only "one state" variant now in play is the noxious Trump-Netanyahu one. The reverse "one-state" variant, Arab conquest of Israel and suppression and marginalisation of the Jewish population, is unrealistic in anything like the current balance of forces, as well as also being noxious.

The deadline for Netanyahu's "centre-right" rival Benny Gantz to form a government coalition expires 20 November, and Israel may well face a third general election.

That gives us more time to build international agitation against annexation and for Palestinian rights. □

**Two nations,
two states**

Socialists and Israel-Palstine

A Workers' Liberty pamphlet, third edition, 2016. Cover price £3.50

• Buy from workersliberty.org/2n2s



Yes to publicly-owned free broadband!

By Cathy Nugent

Labour's policy on part-nationalising BT (its infrastructure arm Openreach, and a few other sections) has pushed a long-held union policy written by the left in the Communication Workers Union into the limelight.

The union has in fact been pushing for the full renationalisation of BT. Even though there could have been much more of a genuine collaboration by Labour with the union, and the detail published so far does not go far enough, this policy is both radical and interesting.

All over the world governments are pushing for the replacement of copper wiring in "The Last Mile" of phone/broadband networks with fibre optic cables. The Tories have promised £5 billion government investment to help with this. Labour's policy promises £20 billion, and the new nationalised company as the main vehicle for getting there.

The promise of free broadband is underpinned by the idea that a communication net-

work should be just like a road network, something that everyone can access and use. Swapping fibre for copper is analogous to replacing a country lane with a motorway.

A fixed broadband network is the infrastructure of infrastructures these days. It seems likely that a fully fibre network will be needed to underpin the 5G mobile broadband (although how 5G will combine with fibre broadband and improved WiFi is not yet clear). A bigger and more urgent question might be whether and how it could underpin greener energy use.

Unsurprisingly the promise has sent the bosses of BT and other telecoms companies into a spin.

Leaving aside the scare stories, there are gaps and questions. The entire project of introducing fibre to the UK will cost much more than £20 billion (current guesstimates are £30-40 billion). It may be that Labour envisages Virgin will be other main infrastructure company filling in the gaps. But what will Labour do to ensure Virgin plays ball

and collaborates on building a comprehensive network that will be free at the point of use? And what will Labour do about Virgin's hostility to the union?

Openreach and BT are unlike Virgin because of their roots in a state-owned post and telephone operation, once the model for delivering communications in all countries around the world. They retain a fully comprehensive communications network in the UK and are best placed to do the complex renovation work.

Market mechanisms will not "take care" of this project. For some years it has made more "business sense" for BT and Virgin to "sweat" their copper networks, to introduce bolt-on technologies that make that technology perform better, while building modest amounts of "fibre to the home" in some areas, for example, in new-build housing projects.

In the last few years new small telecom companies and existing specialised one (such as City Fibre) have been rewiring parts of the UK, some cities and towns and, paradoxically,

some rural areas. All of this activity is about "cherry picking" geographical areas and markets where it is easy to build and where profits can be quickly made.

Consequently there is already some "over-build" in urban areas (multiple providers operating in the same area), and "underbuild" elsewhere. This is inefficient and wasteful.

Once a fibre network has been built, one provider's fibre is as good as another. There are no substantial extra costs involved in an internet provider delivering 100Mbps download speeds over 30Mbps. Competition between providers on speed is phoney.

Yes, a Labour government should organise a single institutional effort to rewire the UK and provide free internet access.

Labour's policy should be welcomed and discussed throughout the labour movement. □

• For background see the CWU Greater London Combined branch pamphlet: bit.ly/cwu-bb

Tell McCluskey: solidarity, not borders!

By Mark Boothroyd

Len McCluskey's intervention in the debate over freedom of movement is aiding the Tories, and promoting myths about immigration that the trade union movement should be dismantling.

On 13 November McCluskey [general secretary of the Unite trade union] criticised the policy voted for at Labour Party conference, of defending and extending freedom of movement for all migrants. McCluskey said "It's wrong in my view to have any greater free movement of labour unless you get stricter labour market regulation."

What does stricter labour market regulation mean? If McCluskey means more rights for trade unions and stronger collective bargaining agreements to strengthen workers organising against the employers, then as a socialist and trade unionist I heartily agree. But that has nothing to do with freedom of movement. In fact, opposing freedom of movement, and the equal rights that accompany it, will only weaken unions. When workers' immigration status is tied to their boss through visas or work permits, they are more vulnerable to exploitative employers who can have them arrested and deported at

a whim.

One of the better ways to ensure "stricter labour market regulation", would be to grant all workers the same rights and protections, regardless of their immigration status. This is what proponents of freedom of movement want, equal rights for all, with the right to live and work wherever we choose. In the same interview McCluskey shows he could make these arguments, but instead he panders to a nationalist and xenophobic worldview.

BREXIT

Commenting on the Brexit vote and why people voted Leave, McCluskey stated; "The other reason was migrant labour coming to the UK from Europe.

If you don't understand those concerns, you fail to grasp the divisions that exist. Migrant workers are to blame for absolutely nothing in this country. They are just trying to better their lives and the lives of their families. It's the greedy bosses that are using them to undercut pay and conditions.

"If we don't deal with the issues and concerns, we will create a vacuum that will be filled by a far right seeking to become the voice of the white working class."

In the same breath, McCluskey says migrant workers are to blame for nothing in this country, but then states they are the reason working-class people voted leave, and that issues and concerns over migration must be dealt with, or working class people will flock to the far-right.

McCluskey is completely right that migrant workers are not to blame, and it is greedy bosses that seek to undercut pay and conditions. Then why should freedom of movement be a problem? We will always have migration, its a natural part of the human condition. As long as bosses exist they will be greedy and seek to increase their profits at our expense, through any means, including pitting workers against each other for scarce resources. Its infinitely better that people be able to migrate knowing they have full social and legal rights, than have them be treated as second class citizens, and made more vulnerable by dint of their immigration status.

The solution to inequality is never to raise borders higher, or deprive workers of their rights, but to organise and unionise all workers to fight together for higher wages and better conditions, to cut across the nationalist and racial divisions that the bosses try and

create with their borders and unjust immigration controls.

The "issues and concerns" people have with migration is because migrants are scapegoated for the social ills of capitalism; for lack of housing, problems with the health service and low wages. We do not deal with these "issues and concerns" by spreading the idea that controls on migration benefit workers, that just feeds the bosses racist, nationalist narratives. We strengthen our side and deal with people's grievances by patiently explaining that it is not migrants, but the system that is to blame, and by engaging in practical organising of workers and communities across national and racial lines to fight together for the benefit of all.

It is solidarity between workers that wins struggles, and McCluskey's message undermines that solidarity, and helps our employers and the Tories pit workers against each other. He should stop criticising freedom of movement, and start promoting it, alongside calling for international solidarity between all workers against the bosses and their capitalist system. □

• From the Labour for a Socialist Europe website, labourforasocialisteurope.org

Labour dumps Kashmir policy

By Sacha Ismail

Labour chair Ian Lavery has written a letter to Indian-background voters in the UK saying that "Labour is opposed to external interference in the political affairs of any other country".

Lavery does nod towards the right of the Kashmiri people "to have a say in their own future", but insists that "Kashmir is a bilateral matter for India and Pakistan to resolve together". "Labour will not take a pro-Indian or pro-Pakistan stance on Kashmir".

Lavery's statement is a mass of evasions — denouncing "external interference" in such a way as to rule out international solidarity, and dismissing the Kashmiris' human rights

and democracy as something for the Indian and Pakistani states to sort out between them.

Worse still, he says: "We recognise that the language used in the emergency motion has caused offence in some sections of the India diaspora and in India itself". As the South Asia Solidarity Group comments (bit.ly/37j7G8e), this assertion "is particularly dangerous because it appears to accept the Hindu fascist claim that any criticism of the current Indian government and its actions is an attack on India and Indians."

Solidarity readers should see the article about Kashmir by Nadia Whittome, now the Labour candidate in Nottingham East, in *The Clarion* in August: bit.ly/lp-km.

The background to Lavery's retreat is a campaign orchestrated by supporters of India's governing Hindu nationalist party, the BJP, and associated organisations even further to its right. This constellation is explicitly campaigning for a Tory victory in the UK general election, and using Labour conference's stand on Kashmir as its hook, plus ranting about the "far left" and "Islamic terrorism".

COMMUNALISM

Polling suggests a majority of Indian-background voters voted Labour in 2017. The Hindu nationalists want to swing those voters to the Tories by appealing to communalism.

The problem is made worse by sympathisers of the Hindu right in the Labour Party. Retiring MP Keith Vaz is a strong Modi supporter. So is born-again-Corbynite Barry Gardiner. The latter is involved in the recently relaunched "Labour Friends of India", which welcomed Lavery's letter and attacked the conference motion.

The Labour Friends of India statement (bit.ly/33ZDIV1) claims that only one Indian background candidate has been selected in a winnable seat. It ignores Nadia Whittome, presumably because Nadia's background is Indian but not Hindu and because she is a vocal supporter of Kashmir. □

Facts and figures of the elec

By Sacha Ismail

The Tories have condemned Labour's plans as "eye-watering", "wild", "reckless", "unaffordable" and set to "bankrupt the country", with much of the press singing in tune.

Just after Labour's 2017 election manifesto came out, Solidarity estimated that its proposals would "take some tens of billions of pounds — John McDonnell estimates £50-odd billion — out of the £1,000 billion a year which currently goes to the rich and the very well-off, or to enterprises under their control" (bit.ly/2r4YrYY).

The 2019 manifesto isn't out until Thursday 21 November, but the indications are it will be a similar document to 2017 in terms of social spending. Some of Labour's high-profile plans, for instance on broadband and climate change, as well as on public services, are focused around capital spending rather than year-to-year spending on services themselves.

McDonnell summarises the plans as a promise to "tax the rich to pay for things everyone needs" and "use the power of the state to invest to grow our economy, create good jobs in every region and nation and tackle the climate emergency." Very welcome after the Blair and Tory years, but begging the question of whether capitalism can really be transformed into "our" economy without taking ownership and control away from the profiteer class.

The Tories feel vulnerable on the NHS, but really they are only recycling an announcement from Theresa May that funding for NHS services go up an average of 3.4% a year over the next five years, perhaps enough for the health service to stand still after years of real-terms cuts.

In addition to more money for NHS capital spending, training and education and public health promotion, Labour is promising an extra £6bn a year on NHS services, a rise of 3.9% a year — about the average between 1955 and 2019, but much less than the 6% a year under New Labour.

Under the Blairites, a growing chunk of the money disappeared into PFI payments and the profits of private companies taking over

NHS services. That process has accelerated since the start of the Tory-Lib-Dem coalition in 2010, and despite assertions that "the NHS is not for sale" the Tories plan to continue it.

Despite its anti-privatisation rhetoric and pressure from NHS campaigners, Labour remains vague on reversing privatisation, but is committed to repeal the Tory-Lib-Dem 2012 Health and Social Care Act which is the current charter for increased marketisation.

Labour has also promised £6bn to fund free social care for over 65s — but, unfortunately, not for everyone — and nodded towards encouraging "direct provision" by local authorities, but remains unclear on that too. Following their fiasco over the issue in 2017, the Tories are currently very quiet on the subject.

Without increased national spending on social care, local government faces further disaster, as social care will make up a rapidly growing proportion of council budgets. Councils have borne a heavy brunt of the cuts since 2010, losing *more than half* of their central government funding, and under the Tories there is more to come. In the summer one in five councils said they were on the verge of bankruptcy, while another third said that within three years they would be unable to meet their legal obligations to provide adult social care and child protection.

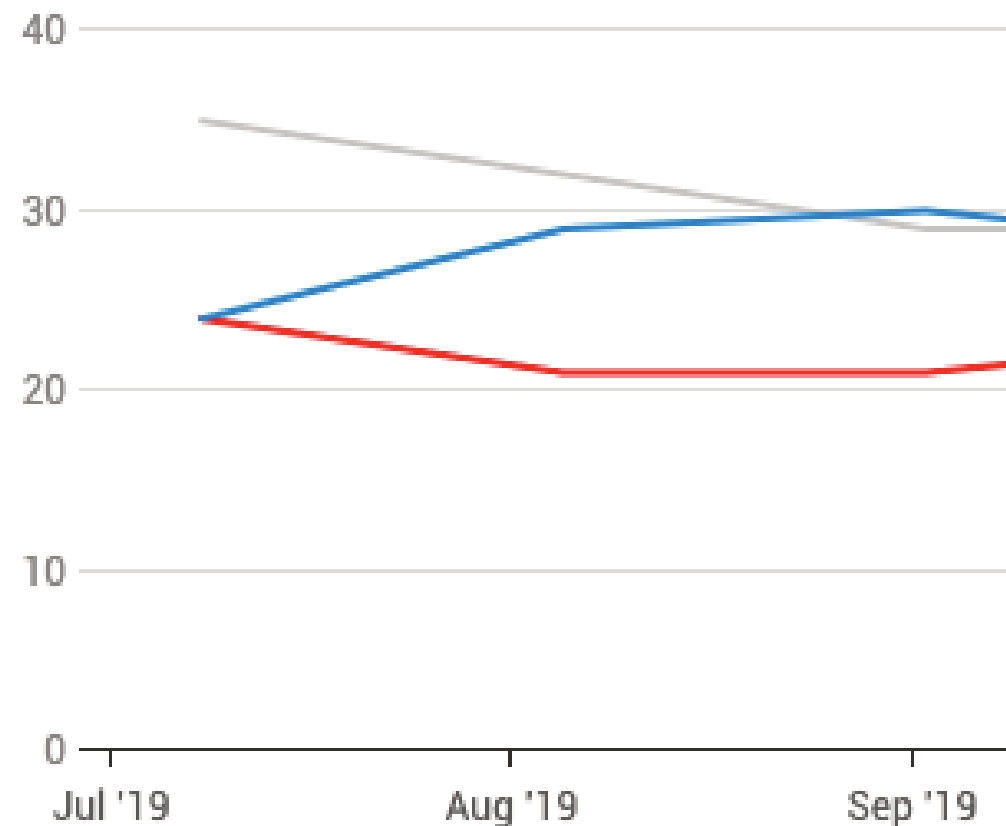
CUTS

The record of Labour councils in resisting these attacks has been terrible — passive and defeatist and sometimes worse — but in fact the mostly right-wing dominated Labour councils have set out a clear position for the election than the party's more left-wing leadership. 120 Labour council leaders and mayors have written to the party calling for a pledge to reverse all cuts within the life of one Parliament.

Labour's local government spokesperson Andrew Gwynne has responded positively to their call for emergency increases in funding but evades the central demand to reverse all cuts. He says nothing about restoring council's powers and autonomy either. (bit.ly/2KBorBW.) However, the difference between even this evasion and the Tories is huge.

The Tories are cynically trumpeting an in-

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crease in school funding by £7.1bn over three years — but at best this will make up the 8% real-terms fall in per-pupil funding they have imposed over the last decade (£6,537 per-pupil in England in 2009 to £5,994 in 2018). Labour will cut class sizes and give free meals to all primary school children. To its promises to scrap university tuition fees and restore student grants and the Education Maintenance Allowance, it has added a pledge to provide every individual with six free years of adult learning. That is a very important break from the drastic rundown of adult education under the Tories (and Lib-Dems) since 2010.

Labour is also promising to scrap primary school SATS, stop the creation of academies and free schools and open the door to returning schools to council control. There is speculation Labour may go further towards its conference policies of reversing academisation and at least restricting private schools.

Next year the Tories promise to end the freeze on the level of benefits — i.e. yearly real-terms cuts — they introduced in 2016. This policy has cost the poorest seven million families in the UK something like £550 a year each on average, and an increase next year, even if above inflation, will not undo the damage of a 6% real cut in income, let alone increase living standards. The Tories do not plan to remove the limit on benefits to only two children, or the cap on overall amount of benefits that can be claimed, policies which have been equally damaging.

Labour has promised changes in the opposite direction, replacing the current system of Universal Credit into which the Tories are merging most benefits.

This includes reducing and phasing out delays for the first UC payment and scrapping the two-child limit and the overall cap. Labour will also scrap the "bedroom tax" rule reducing housing benefit for council or housing association tenants with a spare room or rooms and abolish the "sanctions" regime which has increasingly functioned to bully and impoverish claimants.

The £3bn Labour is promising to invest in welfare is only a fraction of what has been stripped out from benefits over many years. Labour argues it will save more money by boosting jobs and living standards and so reducing the need for benefits in various ways.

On housing, the Tories' policy appears to amount to encouraging more private sector house-building — as if the issue was lack of building, rather than lack of quality and really affordable homes. The failure of the market to provide for housing needs is shown by the government's failure to get a single one (!) of its 200,000 projected "starter homes" for first time buyers under 40 built. One goal it is achieving is running down the UK's council housing stock.

Labour has now committed to abolishing the "right to buy" policy which has helped run down the council housing stock. It has also promised a significant council house-building program. Having promised three-year tenancies in 2017, the party is now committed to "indefinite" tenancies for private renters. The rest is still unclear.

Labour is also promising an increase in free childcare hours (though still quite limited and still provided through the private sector) and free travel for under 25s.

Labour promises a £10 legally-mandated

Liberals out Tory the Tories

The Lib Dems have proposed rules mandating a 1% surplus on current spending — meaning the day-to-day costs of public services would have to be lower than the amount raised in taxes.

This is quite something. It is not done even by "fiscally conservative" governments elsewhere. It is more draconian than the approach taken by George Osborne when he was chancellor, suggesting Lib Dem support for even deeper austerity.

And in fact when he announced the budget surplus policy, Lib Dem deputy leader Ed Davey condemned not only Labour's but the Tories' plans public spending plans as making "Santa Claus seem like Scrooge".

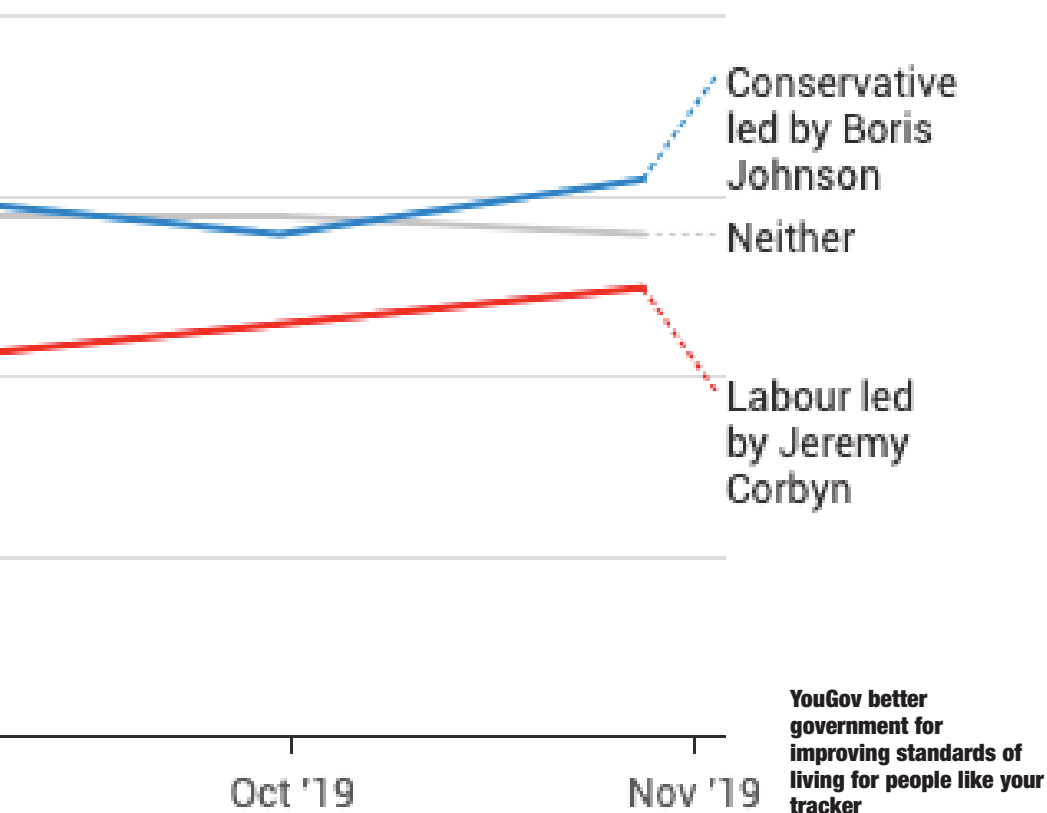
In the same week, Jo Swinson made a similar argument to the conference of the bosses' federation the CBI, pitching the Lib Dems as the real "party of business".

The Lib Dems' let-out argument is that staying in the EU will shore up public finances and allow them to avoid cuts. Their response to every Labour policy is a spokesperson popping up to say the real issue is Brexit.

Yes, Brexit may well be an economic disaster. But staying in the EU will not automatically prevent austerity or make society fairer or more equal, certainly not with right-wing neo-liberal policies like the Lib Dems'. □

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minimum wage by next year – without lower youth rates (it's not clear if occupation exemptions will also scrapped or narrowed). That would represent the biggest ever increase in the National Minimum Wage and give the UK one of the highest minimum wages in the world, measured against median hourly earnings. The Tories are also promising some increase.

On all historical experience, a strong trade union movement is necessary to make sure Labour promises are stuck to and not nullified by pushback from capitalists.

ANTI-UNION LAWS

The Tories will keep all anti-union laws and want a further decline in the strength of workers' organisation.

Labour is committed to reintroducing and expanding collective bargaining between employers and unions across the economy, to drive up wages and conditions and strengthen unions. It will scrap the 2016 Trade Union Act, which further limited workers' and unions' right to organise industrial action. It implies various other changes to make industrial action easier, for instance allowing workplace as well as postal balloting for strikes. Labour conference policy is for repeal of all the laws from Thatcher's time outlawing solidarity strikes, political strikes, quick-response strikes and effective picketing, but the signs are that the manifesto will leave that out.

Labour proposes new higher tax rates of 45% for those on over £80,000 a year and 50% over £123,000 – both lower than the top tax rate under Thatcher. And to restore corporation tax to 26pc, lower than it was throughout

the New Labour governments and much lower than it was under Thatcher.

We will see what's in the Labour manifesto, but what we said in 2017 surely remains relevant:

"The proposed clawback from the rich is moderate. In simple arithmetic, they could afford it easily – some tens of billions out of hundreds of billions of value which they siphon away each year. But the rich do not get rich, in a capitalist society, by being generous and easy. They get rich by being the people most ruthless in pursuit of greed, exploitation, trampling down and squeezing the working class.

"What they say now, while they are still confident of a Tory victory, about Labour's policies being 'wild', 'ruinous', 'disastrous', and 'illegal', is a pale anticipation of how they will react if Labour wins. They have a hundred levers of sabotage of an elected government – from 'strikes' of capital, through top officials, to the Labour right – and they will use them.

"Even the moderate rebalancing proposed by Labour's manifesto can be implemented thoroughly and securely only by a labour movement ready and willing to take economic power out of the hands of the ultra-rich, by workers' control and social ownership across industry.

"The movement will become strong enough to do that only by uniting, now, to create and organisation in every workplace and working-class street capable of winning a majority for the manifesto and fighting the battles needed to implement it." □



Right wing on the rampage in Bolivia

By Luiza Xavier

After two weeks of protests Evo Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president, in power for the last 14 years, has been forced by the armed forces to resign his post.

The unrest was a result of accusations of electoral fraud in Morales's latest election (October 2019), as well as the Supreme Court (November 2017) overruling the referendum result which denied Morales the right to run for his fourth re-election.

There has been some controversy on whether the last presidential election was in fact rigged. Following the accusation, Morales himself asked the Organisation of American States (OAS) to audit the election. The OAS's report found evidence of electoral data manipulation. However, the polls had predicted a win for Morales, and other independent organisations reported no evidence of electoral misconduct.

Whatever the truth about that, it is important to recognise the largely reactionary character of the anti-government demonstrations. Morales' resignation was a result of a coup led by the military and the sections of the Bolivian ruling class as a reaction to social-democratic reforms and pro-indigenous affirmation promoted by Morales's government in the last 14 years.

The left has plenty of reasons to criticise Morales's government, including most recently his failure to combat domestic violence and his gross mishandling of forest fires. The recent demonstrations, overall, did not reflect a left-wing critique, perhaps because of the lack of an organised left opposition. Anti-government demonstrators were openly anti-indigenous and anti-worker: burning the Wiphala (the flag of the Andes indigenous people) at several occasions during protests, and tying the radio director of the peasants' union to a tree while trashing the union building.

In midst of the civil unrest, the police mutinied and the armed forces "suggested" that Morales resign. The president and vice-

president of the Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE) were arrested and paraded on television, and Morales's house was violently invaded by the armed forces.

Morales resigned on 10 November, seeking asylum in Mexico. The opposition deputy leader of the Senate, Jeanine Áñez, has taken over as Interim President because the leaders of the senate and lower house also resigned. She declared: "The Bible has re-entered the government palace".

Morales's resignation and the establishment of a new government did not calm the situation. Mass protests of Morales' supporters, many of them indigenous people and coca farmers, are now taking to the streets. (Over 40% of Bolivia's population are of peoples predating Spanish colonisation, mostly Aymara and Quechua. Other Latin American countries except Peru and Guatemala have much smaller percentages of indigenous peoples).

Protests have been met heavy-handedly by the police, and 23 protesters have died in the clashes so far. Pro-Morales and anti-coup protesters have blocked roads to the main cities, causing a shortage of food and fuel. Coca-grower farmer unions have given the interim president until late today to step down.

It is undeniable that Bolivian democracy is at great risk. In Latin America's turn to the right over the last year, this is perhaps the greatest threat to the bourgeois democracy which gained a precarious and thin spread right across the continent in the 1990s.

The establishment of a permanent military-authoritarian government in Bolivia would be massively harmful to the working class, women and indigenous people, not only in Bolivia, but in the whole of South America. The Bolivian coup will certainly entrench authoritarian moves by the right in the rest of the continent.

We must unapologetically oppose the coup in Bolivia, call for the end to the persecution of left wing leaders (regardless of the quality of their politics), and for new free elections. □

Hong Kong: the crackdown and the future

By Chen Ying

The conflict in Hong Kong has further escalated and has reached a critical point as I write on 19 November.

The escalation began last week with the first casualty of the protest, a university student falling fatally from a multi-story car park in a conflict zone. Since then, policeman have fired live rounds seriously injuring a number of protesters, a man was doused in petrol and set alight by protesters, a pro-Beijing legislator was stabbed, a pro-democracy legislator had his ear bitten off, and there have been many other individual violent acts.

A woman has launched a legal case after being gang-raped and made pregnant by police in a police station. The overall level of police brutality has kept increasing and tear gas canister use has reached the 10,000 mark.

Right now, the Polytechnic University campus has been under siege for three days. Police have blocked all exits and planning to wear down the protesters and make mass arrests. There are an estimated 100 secondary school students inside who, as I write, are only now being allowed to leave without being arrested, after intervention by a former chair of Legco and several legislators, and only if escorted by their school principal.

The Poly U campus has a pedestrian bridge over the main cross-harbour tunnel's entrance and protesters have been able to block traffic flow between Kowloon peninsula and Hong Kong island by throwing objects onto the road below. With the under-16s removed, the police are likely to storm the campus tomorrow.

Earlier in the week, the police also succeeded in driving protesters out of the cam-

pus of the Chinese University, which also has a bridge over Tolo Highway, the main road connecting the border with China proper in the north to Kowloon in the south. The highway has been closed for days by protesters throwing obstacles onto the highway. There have been horrific clashes between riot police and the protest crowds, which consisted of university students reinforced by street militants.

Protesters decided to retreat, and melted away under cover of night leaving an empty and wrecked campus.

Road blockages and damage to railway lines and stations have been part of a strategy to bring Hong Kong to a halt. Traffic was brought to a standstill and schools were closed, but the call on the working population to go on strike did not resonate at all.

I've discussed recently with a couple of veteran leftists here, YC and KH. Both indicated that Hong Kong's very weak trade union movement, with two federations split along political lines, has not had much of a track record of successful strike action. The last successful mass strikes occurred in the 1920s.

SPONTANEOUS

Both also indicated that the protest movement, whilst massive with two million in support, and steadfastly refusing for months to break ranks with its militant minority, has been a spontaneous movement not rooted in anything more substantial other than five basic demands which are all reforms within the Basic Law framework, Hong Kong's mini-constitution.

The partial victory of the wharf workers in 2013 over long working hours and access to toilet and meal breaks was a rare exception to the picture of trade-union weakness, and that occurred before the 2014 umbrella movement. The spontaneous "call in sick" day of the air traffic controllers last June was another exceptional small example. This weakness of militancy and low class consciousness is very hard to overcome and has limited the expectations and tactical options of the current protest movement.

The pro-Beijing union federation was quite active in the days before the 1997 handover, but at the level of negotiating wage increases, without the capacity to cause the colonial administration much trouble other than the 1967 riots inspired by Mao's Cultural Revolution. Since 1997, its inactivity and loyalty to Beijing has given scope for the rival anti-Beijing union federation to gain some membership, especially in the service sector – health, education, lower-grade civil servants. This rival federation has broadly aligned with the pan-democratic camp, and its members have taken part in the large mass rallies at the early stages of this protest movement, but no strikes have called either in the 2014 umbrella movement nor this time round.

In KH's view, the protesters have responded by narrowing down to a single tactic – create more and more stoppage of traffic and interruption to city life through destruction of facilities and street protests until the West steps in and moves against China. YC added that protesters may have little illusions in the West, but yet feel this is all they have in terms of leverage.

Given the recent decline of the organised trade union movement in the west, KH takes the view that the movement here had precious little tradition of working class militancy to draw upon. One aspect of its protest, against the most recent Putonghua-speaking migrants from China, he considers reac-



tionary, comparing it with rightwing Brexiters.

Hong Kong's population of over seven million includes around a million such migrants who came into Hong Kong since 1997, and the protest movement's "restoring the glory of Hong Kong" for many means returning to the few years after the British departure in 1997 but before the arrival of mainland Chinese in large numbers, especially after 2003.

As the level of complaints about police brutality continues to rise, the international panel of experts called into Hong Kong to support the work of the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC) had issued a report last week after five months' work, stating that the Council does not have sufficient powers to gather evidence or summon witnesses to conduct the work it has been asked to do. They have called for the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry.

This is one of the five key demands of the protest movement, who stated months ago that the IPCC is essentially the police investigating itself and lacks credibility and accountability, as well as being narrowly confined to police operational abuses without being able to investigate the wider background factors which ignited the protests in the first place.

POLICE AND VIOLENCE

Meanwhile, President Xi has met and endorsed HK Chief Executive Carrie Lam last week, following the Financial Times article claiming that she is about to be replaced this coming March.

It is a real concern that the ultra-confrontational tactics of the street activists have begun to alienate a section of the millions of largely peaceful protesters. Communal violence endangering the lives of unarmed people holding opposing views is testing the patience of the mass protest movement to the limit.

In the absence of an authoritative leadership voice within the mass movement these vengeful retaliations continue unchecked and could eventually undermine the solidarity and effectiveness of the whole protest movement. Utterly alienating workers on the Mass Transit Rail system by smashing up stations is a clear case in point.

On the contrary, had the MTR workers been won over in the early days of the protest, their strike action would truly have brought the city to a halt without damaging what many Hong Kongers consider as a world-class transport infrastructure.

The paradox is that there are no key differences in political demands between the thousands of ultra-militant street activists and the

millions of people protesting against the government. The five key demands, now with a sixth demand to disband and reconstitute the police force, do not essentially aim to challenge Beijing's overall control of Hong Kong, merely to strive for a genuinely high degree of local autonomy as "guaranteed" under the fifty year One Country Two Systems arrangement agreed between Britain and China in 1984.

The fear and hatred of the totalitarian one-party regime in Beijing is deep rooted, but otherwise most of the 35+ population see themselves as ethnically, linguistically and culturally Chinese, not the pioneer citizens of a new country called Hong Kong. A million people in the city are either practising Catholics or Protestants, and this stems from the fact that the Catholic, Anglican and Methodist Churches run virtually all the top schools, and the religious voluntary sector runs three quarters of the schools. Many consider that the Vatican has sold the underground Catholic Church down the river.

The UK legacy of Common Law, a largely free press, and freedoms of religious belief and free speech, plus an increasingly visible LGBT community, make Hong Kong quite difficult to integrate into the People's Republic. Yet numerous social surveys conducted so far indicate little support for self-determination or independence, compared to Catalonia and Scotland. Class consciousness is quite under-developed: little of the anger and militancy being directed at the handful of mega-rich family dynasties that has such a stranglehold over Hong Kong's economy, and there is tacit acceptance of neo-liberal Government policy.

The Hong Kong Government may well be set to succeed for now in terms of defeating the protest movement by sheer brutal policing. However it has totally lost credibility and will meet passive resistance at every turn. There is now a whole generation of radicalised youth who, even if they are about to be defeated, are not bowed, and at a future time will be open to working class socialist politics.

There are District Council elections next Sunday, 24th, and the protest movement aims to convert its momentum into winning a very large number of seats. Nearly 200 seats out of the 1200 that make up the electoral college to elect the Chief Executive goes to District Councillors, so Beijing must realise that Hong Kong will become harder to govern in the coming years while it has to ponder what to do to replace the One Country Two Systems in less than 30 years' time in 2047. □

The Split in SDS



In the late 1960s, Students for a Democratic Society, in the USA, became an energetic movement of some 30,000 people which considered itself revolutionary socialist.

But in June 1969 it split spectacularly between different flavours of Stalinism: RYM I, which became the Weathermen, a sort of urban guerrillas; Progressive Labor Party, a more sober "workerist" variant; and RYM II, a Maoist group intermediate between those two poles.

All were political dead-ends: it was the Trotskyist groups, smaller at the time, which built something which lasted, though they too later lurched and floundered.

New on workersliberty.org: a thorough account of the history and politics of the SDS split, written at the time by heterodox Trotskyists. bit.ly/sds-split □

Populism: a dead end for the left

By Eduardo Tovar

In recent decades, there has been much discussion of “populism” as newly significant form of political movement. Some on the left even say we should embrace it.

Admittedly, there are major conceptual difficulties when discussing “populism”. Even if we limit ourselves to examples on the ostensibly left, movements labelled “populist” can be so different in their substantive politics and theoretical groundings that they conflict directly.

On the one hand, there is Chantal Mouffe’s highly pluralistic and heterogenous “left-populism”, which is very much oriented towards liberation politics such as black liberation and women’s liberation. On the other hand, there is the deeply nationalist and socially conservative populism of the Blue Labour faction of the UK Labour Party, which is generally hostile to liberation politics.

Other conceptual difficulties arise in another way. Although some variants of populism identify as either “left-wing” or “right-wing”, populist movements often adopt the rhetoric of overcoming or transcending the left/right divide.

In my view, the key tenet of populism is a central opposition in society between “the people” and “the elites”. This tenet is well expressed in the Occupy Movement’s famous slogans about the “1%” and the “99%”. In Marxist class analysis, the opposition between “the working class” and “the capitalist class” is based on an exploitative relationship of surplus value extraction, but the populist opposition between “the people” and “the elites” is different.

I submit that all forms of “populism”, including those with the most progressive political content, are a dead end for socialists. I will illustrate this with two very different political parties regarded as both “left-wing” and “populist”: Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s La France Insoumise and Podemos in Spain.

My case is that, although these parties vary significantly in their substantive politics, the deficiencies they have shown in practice all stem from an inherent theoretical weakness in populism itself: the displacement of class. Here I understand class as a material position in relation to the productive forces in society, as opposed to a cultural category or just a

matter of relative incomes.

In other words, the central problem of populism is that it has “the people” as its master concept instead of “the working class”. “The people” as a category obscures class distinctions, especially between (i) the working class; (ii) the traditional petty bourgeoisie (that is, independent traders and artisans who sell the products of their labour without employing others as wage-workers), and (iii) small capitalists.

Accordingly, any turn to populism only makes us lose sight of why we as socialists turn to the working class as the key agent of social change, and why we need to build independent and democratic bodies for organised labour.

In short, to adopt populism is to step away from the central task of socialist politics: the self-emancipation of the working class.

LA FRANCE INSOUMISE

led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, formerly a long-serving member of the French Socialist Party, La France Insoumise is a self-styled “movement” founded in 2016. Mélenchon saw some success in the 2017 French Presidential election, where he won 19.58% of the vote in the first round, but in this year’s European Parliament elections La France Insoumise picked up only 6.3% of the vote in France. It has seen major figures defect to other parties.

One such defector, Andréa Kotarac, a former regional adviser to Mélenchon, has gone so far as to back Marine Le Pen’s far-right Rassemblement National as a means of stopping President Emmanuel Macron’s *En Marche*.

Despite offering redistributive policies, Mélenchon’s political programme is essentially nationalist populism with a left-wing veneer. The central pillar of Mélenchon’s project is French national sovereignty. His rhetoric often plays up anti-German and anti-EU themes rather than united class struggle against the national and international bourgeoisie alike.

For example, in his 2015 book *Le Hareng de Bismarck*, he denounces “the German poison” imposed on Europe. Mélenchon also nationalistically denies any French responsibility for the anti-Jewish action of the Vichy regime during World War 2. Vichy ruled southern France by agreement with Nazi Germany, which occupied the north of the country.

Despite previously saying that migration was not a problem, Mélenchon now openly advocates tighter border controls. He repeatedly describes immigration as means of putting “pressure on wages and social gains” and expresses hostility towards freedom of movement and residence. He has even gone so far as to adopt far-right rhetoric about migrants “stealing bread”.

Mélenchon’s placement of national sovereignty over class solidarity and his consequent pandering to xenophobia obscure France’s internal class exploitation and divide workers on lines of nationality. They also make starkly apparent why a high-profile La France Insoumise member should have found it so easy to defect to the far right.

La France Insoumise lacks of internal democracy. Although the party has a “conference”, 60% of the conference delegates are chosen by lot from online members who have expressed interest. As they were never elected, these are delegates are not even ostensibly accountable to the rest of the party.

In practice, most decision-making power lies with Mélenchon’s inner circle because they can deliberately set a limited conference

agenda. Consequently, La France Insoumise has no meaningful and open debates over its political positions.

Indeed, in his speech at the left-wing festival *The World Transformed* in 2018, Mélenchon took pride in how the absence of a membership structure in La France Insoumise means it has “no internal power struggles”.

La France Insoumise’s hollow shell of party democracy and Mélenchon’s contemptuous attitude towards internal political struggle are antithetical to the socialist project of building the working class’s own capacity to take leadership over society.

In other words, if we take seriously the idea of working-class agency, then we must allow the rank-and-file of the organised labour movement to put forward and debate its own proposals on a transparent, political basis.

As such, in both its embrace of nationalism and its top-down, monolithic structure, La France Insoumise’s “left-wing” populism is no model for socialists.

PODEMOS

Pablo Iglesias founded Podemos in 2014 in the aftermath of the Spanish anti-austerity protests in Spain, as a left-wing movement targeting unemployment or inequality.

Podemos has seen political success. It is the second largest party in Spain by membership, and currently holds 30 out of 350 seats in the Spanish Parliament’s lower house, the Congress of Deputies, and 2 out of 265 seats in the upper house, the Senate. On 12 November, it signed a coalition government deal with the social-democratic PSOE, written, so the Madrid daily *El País* reports, “in such broad terms that it could contemplate any sort of measure”.

Overall, Podemos is much less nationalist than La France Insoumise. It also has much more internal political life and features formal mechanisms for submitting proposals to the national bodies.

Despite Podemos’ commendable strengths relative to other left-populist parties, its politics have serious weaknesses. Its adoption of an “electoral war machine” strategy has come at the expense of the street movements that made Podemos notable in the first place.

Like much of the 21st century left, Podemos has something of an obsession with “e-democracy”. Whilst online votes might seem appealing on grounds of accessibility, reliance on them squeezes out deliberation and debate.

Members often vote alone, from home, without a chance to hear the proposals being debated fully and transparently. That benefits those actors with most control over the organisation’s internal communications. E-democracy can easily become a tool for the organisation’s leadership to gain plebiscitary approval for its positions rather than a means of critically discussing and deciding between proposals from the membership.

Despite Podemos’ impressive democratic structures on paper, in practice Iglesias’ personal leadership is the central stem of the party. This follows a broader trend of left-wing populist movements coming to resemble Bonapartism because of their ideology of being in direct communication with “the people” as an undifferentiated mass.

In other words, because populism rests upon the notion of a unifying common sense that overcomes the internal fractures of “the people”, including class conflict, populist movements tend to revolve around a leader figure who can embody that unifying com-

mon sense.

In the case of Podemos, the ideology of direct communication with “the people” has even gone as far as basing decisions solely on polling data, as if simply reflecting the existing beliefs of “ordinary citizens” is an adequate or desirable substitute for fighting to change those beliefs through a democratically decided programme.

Podemos’s hopes that the populist division of “the people” versus “the elites” would create a new, unified left have proved false. After a rapid but brief rise in 2014-5, its electoral performance has been poor. After years of heated disagreement between Iglesias and fellow Podemos founder Íñigo Errejón, the party has now split. Errejón argued more strongly in favour of a “neither left nor right” politics that emphasises patriotic unity against “the caste”. He now leads his own party, *Más País*, based on this platform.

All this speaks to the underlying problem with populism: for all its talk of constructing a new social alliance that transcends the traditional left/right dichotomy, one cannot simply articulate away material interests divided along class lines. As long as it is rooted in the idea of building such an alliance, Podemos will remain an inadequate vehicle for the left.

THE PROLETARIAT, NOT “THE PEOPLE”

All this brings me to the classic question posed by the great American socialist Hal Draper: “Why the working class?”

We Marxists do not place the working class at the centre of our politics because we believe that workers are inherently virtuous people or because we believe that all forms of oppression in society are reducible to class conflict.

We do so because, as the wealth-producing class in capitalist society, the working class is uniquely positioned to challenge capitalism from within. In other words, the fact that capitalist wealth production stems directly from the extraction of surplus value from our labour means we have a distinct economic leverage within the capitalist system.

Moreover, because it is a universal class — because the global spread of capitalism creates wage labour across all nations — the working class has a unique capacity to unite people around the world based on their common interest in ending their economic exploitation.

Far from being merely one of many constituent elements of “the people”, the labour movement and its organised bodies are distinctly vital to the left precisely because material class interests provide an objective basis for uniting most of capitalist society against its rulers and a means of overcoming capitalism from within.

No matter how generously one interprets “the people” as a category, it can never provide the truly worldwide basis for united struggle that the working class provides. □

After the General Election: What Next?

Workers’ Liberty forum.

Whatever the outcome of the general election, the struggle for socialist transformation continues.

7:30pm, Tue December 17.

YMCA Indian Student Hostel, 41 Fitzroy Square, London, W1T 6AQ



**Workers’ Liberty conference
18-19 January**

Because of the general election on 12 December, we have postponed our annual Workers’ Liberty conference from 7-8 December to 18-19 January.

Our planned 2-5 January week school on Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* has been postponed to 22-27 July, because we’ll have to use the weekend 4-5 January for pre-conference discussion meetings. □

1919

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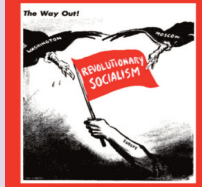
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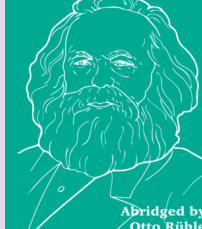
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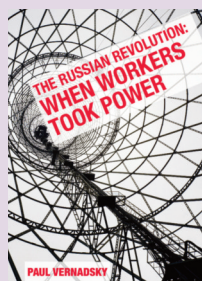


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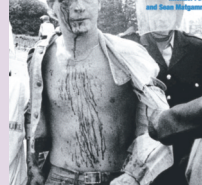
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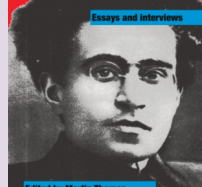
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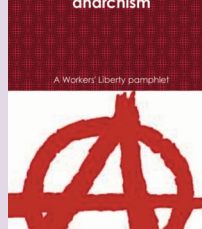


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Working-class politics and anarchism

A Workers' Liberty pamphlet



www.workersliberty.org/books

You'll probably deserve it?



Diary

By Emma Rickman

On Mondays my cohort attends college. The building is made of slick modern metal and glass, and built on the site of the battle of Orgreave.

The *Economist* magazine described its construction as "a promising attempt... to tackle an ancient and ridiculous class divide" by getting Boeing and Rolls Royce to invest in working-class children's education (econ.st/37FYy4u). Over the road is the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre, hosting buildings dedicated to factory automation and nuclear research.

My class is twelve men and three women, aged 17-30. Our Health and Safety Trainer is a 30-40 year old Brummy called "P". As he enters the room he sighs.

Me "Bad weekend?"

P shakes his head "You have no idea – stuck inside all weekend, can't get out because the Missus is breastfeeding. 'I'm bored!' she says, but we can't do anything – and of course I'm not allowed to go out! And she's complaining though it was her idea to have kids –"

He starts talking to the lads at the far end of the class about all the films he's missed because of his six-month-old daughter. J, W and M are all about twenty; their chats are a combination of one-liners and put-downs that tread a fine line between hilarious and maddening. Later, J starts with:

"Corbyn's literally a fucking nutcase."

M "But that Boris isn't great either. I dunno who I'd vote for but I wouldn't vote for him."

J "I mean £10 per hour would be pretty

good..."

I miss some of the chat but it's about pay, cars, savings and holidays. P then says with teacher's authority:

"You're not paid much now, but in a few years time you'll be earning good money. More than I get here. Your salary – it won't be a problem."

J "Thing is we're kind of in the middle us. We're not working class and we're not middle class. Neither party's for us."

P "I'm torn, I used to be a Labour voter, but Corbyn –"

J "Terrorist sympathiser."

P "I mean he's anti-military, got no fucking clue."

J "And all these promises Labour are making; how are they going to pay for them? Tax big companies so they all leave – that'll do it."

P "And the thing about this NHS stuff – Labour were the ones who started privatising it in the first place! Just google 'Labour 2003', just do it."

J "What about you P?"

P "I really don't know. I'm not gonna vote Tory. If Corbyn wasn't there it'd be Labour. I just don't know."

I've finished my work and am looking at Acorn's voter registration campaign page. Of course P peers over my shoulder.

"You're registering to vote?"

Me "No, this is a campaign to get people to vote who wouldn't normally. Marginalised communities, that sort of thing."

P "I was gonna say, you don't seem like the sort of person..." he peers at the photos of people at street stalls.

"I think people should have an IQ test before they're allowed to vote," he says to me – conspiratorially.

I don't respond, and he moves on

J and M have accidentally told P his nick-

name — "Al" from *Toy Story 3*. They do a few rounds of the *Toy Story* jingle, then P starts talking about his weight – by deflecting.

"I used to have a colleague who sued her workplace."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah she got shit for it though. Thing is, she was a fat bitch; I mean *really*, twice the size of me. And she wore these precarious, really unsuitable heels for work. Not just bad for her teaching job, but not good for her weight."

M "So what happened then?"

P "The school didn't have a lift to the top floor and she had to climb two storeys in these stupid shoes. One day – and it was because of the shoes, it was obvious – she had a fall, and sued the school on the basis they 'hadn't informed her about the kind of footwear that would be suitable.' But then they got her – they made her life hell, made her walk all over the grounds to do lunch duty..."

Our class is finishing assignments about the health and safety responsibilities of employers and consequences of failing to obey the law. Here is P, explaining why suing your employer will come back to bite you – and that you'll probably deserve it.

My friend G says to me "My girlfriend had a colleague she used to tell me about in the office – she didn't seem to do any work, she just ate all day."

Me, grimacing, "That's not something you do when you're happy, is it? She probably has an eating disorder."

Over the noise, P says again "She was a fat bitch. I hated her, she was horrible to me." □

• Emma Rickman is an engineering apprentice at a Combined Heat and Power plant in Sheffield.

The Unwomanly Face of War



Film review

By Justine Kennedy

Kantemir Balagov's *Beanpole* follows two female ex-Red Army soldiers working in a hospital in Leningrad after the siege, painting a striking and intimate picture of the febrile lives of Russians after WWII.

The film's titular character is Iya, nicknamed "Beanpole" for her long and lanky build. She is awkward and quiet and periodically suffers from fits of catatonic shock. Early in the film, her friend Masha returns from the front to join her working in the hospital.

In the beginning, there are flickers of happiness for the two women, until a horrific incident pushes them to face the tragic situation around them. They spend the rest of the film hopelessly and frantically trying to undo the effects of this incident and of the whole war.

The film presents differing ways young women in an unstable and misogynistic society relate to men. Iya seems repelled by and almost afraid of men her age, feeling only comfortable with the fatherly hospital administrator and the severely wounded sol-

diers she looks after. Masha on the other hand seems at ease with the company of men, replicating her experience on the front by using her relationships with men for protection and food in Leningrad.

Beanpole avoids a sensationalist narrative, allowing a sensitive depiction of Iya and Masha's PTSD and opening the viewer to the varied ways in which trauma presented itself to Russians in 1945. Simply showing the intimate parts of life after the siege, when life was supposed to be getting easier, focuses the viewer's attention on the psychology of the characters rather than theatrical warfare scenes.

A secondary storyline is that of Masha's relationship with a bureaucrat's son, Sasha, which is a damning depiction of the privileged class. When Sasha and his mother visit the hospital, they give the dying and grievously wounded soldiers small, meagre presents. Their entire visit proves to be an empty gesture. The mother makes a speech thanking them for the efforts in the war, however, is interrupted when a wounded soldier becomes confused and wildly claps during her speech. The bizarre act is clearly a result of his wartime injuries. However, the mother looks on with annoyance at the soldier she was moments before thanking, showing little compassion for him as he's led away by nurses. The mother later belittles Masha as



she retells her tales of being at the front. In this scene we see a glimpse of the bureaucrat family's large house, with plentiful food and housed with servants.

The parallels of these two groups, the well off bureaucrats and the starved soldiers driven mad by the war, cuts to the core of the film's misery. While a fictional story, the film was inspired by Svetlana Alexievich's book *The Unwomanly Face of War*, a collection of first-person accounts of women who served in the Red Army.

Iya and Masha represent the million Russian women who sacrificed everything on the front, only to be greeted at home with hollow praise and to return to life under an authoritarian bureaucracy. □

Regrouping the far left in Italy



Interview

By Roberto Luzzi

What is SI Cobas? How was it created?

SI Cobas is an Italian militant workers' union. It was established in 2010, by about a hundred workers who left SLAI Cobas, another union.

Now it has about 20,000 members in most of Italy's regions, and it is still growing. It organises mainly immigrant workers, in the logistics sector, where it has become the strongest union, but also increasingly in other sectors: transport, food and meatpacking, engineering, hotels, cleaners, carers and others.

It is organising most of the strikes occurring in Italy, winning better wages and conditions for workers, respect for immigrants, previously treated like slaves. Most times workers have to face police repression.

Gains won become the advertisement that spreads through different communities bringing new workers to ask to join the union.

What groups were represented at the meeting on 29 September?

At the 29 September meeting in Naples many different groups were represented, from several cities: from two associations of the unemployed from Naples to organisations of homeless squatters in Rome, environmental associations – including Fridays For Future – and feminist groups, students, and a few left political organisations.

What were the goals for the meeting on September 29th?

The goal of the meeting was to work for the formation of an anti-capitalist front, with the

participation of all organisations and associations, which stand for working-class struggle against capitalism, and carry on mobilisations and struggles against the government's policies and the bosses, from a working-class perspective.

The meeting decided to participate in a general strike called for 25 October by SI Cobas and other alternative unions (CUB, SGB, USI-CIT, ADL Cobas), and organise a demonstration on 26 October in Rome. It was also agreed to follow up with initiatives in the different cities.

How many workers and sectors joined the general strike on October 25? What are the demands of the strike?

Strikers were only in the tens of thousands, as expected, but SI Cobas, with ADL Cobas, blocked the transport of goods at the big logistic companies like GLS, FedEx-TNT, DHL, SDA, BRT, Fercam and others. Local and railway transport and public service were also affected in several cities and regions.

Our demands are:

- wage increases after many years of diminishing purchasing power, and the introduction of a decent minimum wage, also for the unemployed, as there is no minimum wage in Italy
- working time reduction to fight unemployment and face new labour saving technologies
- shifting taxation from workers to the rich, through a wealth tax for the richest 10 percent
- equal rights for immigrants
- cancellation of the law giving employers freedom to use temporary employment and to dismiss workers of the previous PD [Democratic Party] governments
- cancellation of the "security decrees" of the previous government (against immigrants and social struggles)
- plus environmental measures, cutting military expenditure, and withdrawing



Participants at the 29 September anticapitalist assembly in Milan

Italy's military from abroad.

What are the prospects for the Italian revolutionary left after the change of government?

The Italian revolutionary Left is very weak and fragmented, with small groups having no actual influence in society. Some of the self-proclaimed revolutionaries are actually nationalists. (The new name used in Italy is "sovereignism", something like left-wing Brexiteers in Britain, i.e. saying that Italy should leave the euro and the EU, this way they replace class struggle with the bourgeois struggle between nations, and shift from international working-class unity to national collaboration, i.e. submission, of workers to the bourgeoisie).

The change of government, with the ousting of the far-right League and the entrance of the Democratic Party and of the Free and Equal (LEU) party, has not brought about any substantial change in policies (Giuseppe Conte remains as prime minister!). This change has caused a narrowing of the opposition area, with the exit of most reformists.

This helps political clarification, as we can tell everybody that the problem is not just Salvini, it is the whole bourgeois establish-

ment and capitalism. I hope that the initiative launched in Naples will help to bring revolutionaries together on the basis of a common platform of struggle and favour their putting roots in society.

Myself, I am part of a collective editing the journal *Pagine Marxiste*, and we are working with other groups to form an internationalist revolutionary tendency, in order to start reversing the extreme fragmentation of revolutionaries in Italy.

We want to work for the formation of a revolutionary party in Italy, but there are already too many organisations that misuse both the term "communist" and "party". Only those who practise the motto "Proletarians of all countries, unite!" can call themselves communist.

And only an organisation with a real mass influence in the working class can be called a party. The task is huge, and to be carried out in close contact with the masses and their struggles. □

•Roberto Luzzi, an activist in the SI Cobas union movement in Italy, talked to Justine Canady from *Solidarity* at a 29 September "anticapitalist assembly" in Naples.

Read Rosa!



Book review

Elizabeth Butterworth reviews the Workers' Liberty pamphlet on The German Revolution

Around the anniversary of Rosa Luxemburg's brutal murder, I saw numerous posts on social media apparently celebrating Luxemburg's contribution to anti-fascism, Marxism and free thinking.

Luxemburg must be one of the most quoted Marxists on the internet. These two quotes are often shared: "Those who do not move do not notice their chains" and "Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently."

In my ten years on the left, I've seen Luxemburg being lauded by anarchists, right-wing social democrats, and everything in between.

Telling things as they were was the most important thing Luxemburg did, and was the thing she most valued too.

Before she died, Luxemburg was clear about the role of the SPD [Germany's Social Democratic Party] in ensuring bourgeois power. She was clear about how and why things can go wrong in a revolutionary movement, and, while she should not be seen as perfect or perfectly right, she was proven correct on many occasions.

Self-respecting revolutionaries should see it as our task to educate ourselves and others not only on share-able quotes for social media but on the lessons that our comrades paid for with their lives in the cause of our class.

We should situate the moving, scathing and often beautiful words of revolutionaries like Luxemburg into the time they were written and why.

Revolutionary history, and a wider revolutionary education, is the only way to understand ourselves, our struggle, the pitfalls and the potential victories.

Workers' Liberty's pamphlet on The German Revolution takes on this task, setting out selected writings of Luxemburg in a thoughtful manner and contextualising them for the reader.

Paul Vernadsky's introduction makes the

history of the German Revolution digestible and readable without being patronising.

Lenin was right that in the decades following a revolutionary's death – a century now for Luxemburg – their more radical aspects are dumbed down and their legacy is treated as open-season to tack on all sorts of dodgy ideas.

Some like to define Rosa as a brave, inspirational survivor of polio and a forthright woman in a man's world. Yes, she was. And more than that, she was a political refugee who made difficult and dangerous choices in order to live in Germany.

But she did not organise, educate and write so we could just admire her or see her as an icon of "girl power." She dedicated her life to making a workers' revolution.

It's why we have to really read and understand for ourselves. We cannot rely on captions or nice two-line quotes to do this for us.

Rosa was fiery, radical, sentimental, clinically analytical, serious, an intellectual, a left-wing extremist, a gifted writer and was occasionally very wrong. Don't believe me? Read this pamphlet to find out what I mean.

We don't have the luxury of suffering fools gladly, not when we have the urgent task of

rescuing the planet and ourselves from climate change and rampant, bloodsucking capital.

We don't have the luxury of making the same mistakes as our comrades did in the past – not if we want to change the world we live in now.

Rosa didn't suffer fools. She strove to tell the whole truth as a revolutionary principle. And more than a hundred years after her death, there's a hell of a lot we can learn from her. □



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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.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, 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!

More online at www.workersliberty.org  Workers' Liberty  @workersliberty



Lewisham to ballot for boycotting

By Duncan Morrison, Assistant Secretary Lewisham NEU

After a meeting with the National Education Union's Action Committee, school workers in Lewisham hope the committee will allow us to have another indicative ballot on boycotting high stakes testing in primary schools in December.

That should be followed by a formal ballot in January. We hope to be boycotting the preparation for the tests by the beginning of March. We hope other Districts will follow our lead.

In the national indicative ballot on boycotting, in June, of National Education Union, members over whether to boycott high stakes testing in primary schools, around 12 Districts beat the anti-union law turnout thresholds, suggesting they

could also beat them in a formal ballot.

Another 10 or so were within striking distance.

Shortly after the indicative ballot closed, the National Executive agreed to consult with Districts who had met or got close to the thresholds. In fact that consultation was risible — one email to District Secretaries from an unknown employee entitled "Assessment campaign — message from the Joint General Secretaries".

The email focussed on the difficulty of getting head teachers and Year 6 teachers to support the boycott, despite the fact the boycott was deliberately constructed to include all school workers and all the tests. It was also designed to remove the veto of heads on a boycott (head teachers are the most conservative part of the union).

Unsurprisingly, only eight districts responded, and only

Lewisham responded saying we could get a boycott.

General Secretary, Kevin Courtney then wrote to Lewisham asking for a meeting to discuss the boycott. He wanted over one-third of our year 6 teachers present.

Lewisham District had already unanimously agreed to write to the Action Committee, asking to be balloted on a boycott. We had also unanimously agreed to write to the 20 districts with the highest vote in the indicative ballot. From our one email putting the case for the boycott we received four positive responses, rather shaming for the official consultation.

Lewisham school workers believe the only plausible way to force replacement of an assessment system which 97% of our members think is broken is to rely on our collective action and boycott it. □

Tube workers gear up for strikes

By Jay Dawkey

Tube union RMT will ballot its members across London Underground, after a reps' meeting on 7 November rejected LU bosses' latest pay offer.

Tube workers' current deal expired on 1 April 2019, and unions have been in negotiations to secure a new settlement since February. A central demand has been for a reduction in the working week, with unions citing scientific evidence that extreme shift working shortens life and demanding additional time off for workers.

LU's latest offer is for a four-year

deal, with RPI + 0.2% pay increases in years one and three, and 1.4% pay increases in years two and four, with a one-hour reduction in the working week, from 35 to 34, over the life of the deal, equating to six additional days off.

An RMT rep told *Solidarity*: "When negotiations began, the bosses were completely intransigent that they wouldn't even discuss reducing the working week. They've now budged from that position, but not nearly enough. Six extra days off over four years doesn't come anywhere near to meeting our aspirations for a radical improvement in work-life balance to

address issues around fatigue and the long-term health impact of the kind of shift working that many Tube workers do.

Our employers plead poverty, but they've found the money to give senior managers pay increases of up to 74% over the past few years. It's time to build for industrial action to increase the pressure on them."

No formal timetable for the RMT's ballot has been announced, but a union circular to members said it aimed to commence the ballot at the end of November. □



Vote Tracy in the NEU!

The election for the Support Staff sector seat on the executive of the NEU is now running and will close on 2 December.

The candidate for the rank-and-file Education Solidarity Network is Workers' Liberty supporter Tracy McGuire. She is supported by many militant support staff, including the Durham Teaching Assistants' Value Us campaign.

Tracy says:

- Support staff should be treated as equal citizens in our Union. That means the NEU fighting for the right to represent and negotiate on behalf of our support staff members at every level.

- The union should campaign for national pay arrangements for all support staff determined by collective bargaining with trade unions. This means a living wage for all, and a demand for an increase of £3 per hour across the board.

- Defend the rights of EU citizens working and learning in our schools and colleges, and free movement.

- Campaign to end the toxic High Stakes testing in our primary schools, including baseline testing for four year olds.

- End the funding crisis in schools, and undo the vicious cuts to SEND provision.

The union must campaign for a fully funded education system and an end to the slashing of support staff jobs. □

Anti-union laws stop cleaners strike

By Ollie Moore

Outsourced cleaners on London Underground have voted 98% in favour of strike action in a ballot closing on 19 November. But the turnout, at 48%, was just below the 50% demanded by the Tory Trade Union Act 2016, so they can't take lawful strike action.

The workers, who are members of the RMT union are aiming to win staff travel passes, company sick pay, and improved pension arrangements. It is disappointing not to make it over the line, but the campaign is not over!

Despite working at the same locations every day, in as permanent a way as directly-employed LU staff, outsourced cleaners have dramatically worse terms and conditions. □

Unis out from 25 November

By Dan Davison

Members of the University and College Union (UCU), the national union for academic staff in the UK, are set to strike at 60 universities for eight days between 25 November and 4 December 2019.

This follows a highly successful pair of strike ballots among UCU members in higher education: one on pensions, the other on pay, equality, casualisation, and workloads.

The pensions strike continues the long-running dispute over proposed cuts to the United Superannuation Scheme (USS), the main pension plan in the “pre-92” universities.

The pay dispute affects both the “pre-92” and “post-92” universities. In real terms, pay in higher education has dropped by 17% since 2009. By UCU’s own estimates, 46% of universities use zero-hour contracts for teaching and 68% of re-

search staff are precariously employed on fixed-term contracts.

On average, black academic staff are paid 14% less than their white colleagues and the gender pay gap in universities is 13.7%, which is significantly above the national average.

Although the new UCU general secretary, Jo Grady, is identified with the “new left” of the union that emerged from the events of 2018, UCU does not yet have a properly constituted rank and file caucus. There are overlapping networks, such as Branch Solidarity Network and UCU Rank and File, but that mainly exist online.

It is therefore important to use the upcoming strike to renew efforts to build a viable rank and file caucus in UCU. □

Student activists from Sheffield Hallam, Sussex, Imperial, LSE, Cambridge, Aston, and Reading universities have joined a Zoom

call to share what we’re planning on our campuses to support the UCU strike, the demands we are raising, what students’ unions are doing, and how we can link up these campaigns into a national movement.

This group will now:

- hold weekly zoom calls to discuss and coordinate on a national level throughout the strike and after
- hold a national meeting to coordinate across campuses and decide democratically how we want to link up as a national movement
- reach out to students at every striking uni to set up a student-worker solidarity group
- mobilise for big delegations to picket lines
- organise demos, occupy and blockade management buildings
- discuss coordinating actions across campuses
- publish reports, news, ideas and resources about the strike.

A possible national demo is also being discussed.

We want to help the UCU campaign for the university to not deduct staff pay during the action short of a strike which will follow the strike. And help fight for the demands on working conditions, workloads, casualisation and pay inequality.

As students we can link this with the way university managements are expanding student numbers without an expansion of accommodation, staff and other services.

For example some students have been left without adequate accommodation at the start of term, have to participate in huge seminars, and put up with no space in the library...

If you want to join this Student Left Network working group email studentleftnetwork@gmail.com. □

•Republished from Student Left Network

Three candidates, one rank and file

By a PCS activist

The election campaign for PCS general secretary has now started, and runs until 12 December.

Before it started, the union closed down the members’ Facebook page, leaving only the main union Facebook page, administered by head office staff. That page has churned out a weekly, sometimes daily, stream of videos of the current general secretary, Mark Serwotka, holding forth on various issues.

Closing down a potential forum for debate, and using the union’s official platforms for blatant electioneering, do not reflect well on Serwotka’s campaign for re-election.

Bev Laidlaw is standing as the candidate of the Independent Left. We’ve been leafleting outside civil service workplaces, and branches that nominated Bev are planning hustings and other meetings.

One of Bev’s key messages is that she is a rank-and-file candidate. Members want to vote for one of their own, someone who is connected to the shop floor. She has led disputes and stood up to the bosses. The other candidates represent two sides of the same coin.

Socialist View, the faction within PCS’s ruling Left Unity group formed by former members of the Socialist Party who have continued to back Mark Serwotka, has published a long article on the election. Its claims about Bev radically miss the point, accusing her of attempting to obscure or conceal her support for Labour Party affiliation and a Labour vote, something Bev has not done.

It does, however, score some points against Marion Lloyd, the Socialist Party candidate, who it rightly accuses of bending the truth about her circumstances to appear more proletarian.

Marion is a well-paid civil servant on 100% facility time. Bev is on 50% facility, spending the other 50% in a low-paid job on the front line of the industry, giving her a day-to-day experience much more in line with the vast majority of PCS members.

Bev has committed to taking no more than the average wage of a PCS member if elected; Marion, despite the Socialist Party’s policy that union officials should be on a “workers’ wage”, will continue to take her current salary. Although this is lower than the full amount Serwotka is currently paid, it is still a wage that gives her material conditions significantly removed from majority of the union’s rank-and-file. Socialist View apparently miss the irony in making these criticisms. Their own candidate – Mark Serwotka – is a 15-year union bureaucrat paid nearly £100,000 per year. □

UCL, LouLou’s, St Mary’s

By Ollie Moore

Outsourced workers at University College London struck on 19 November, after voting for industrial action by a 98% majority.

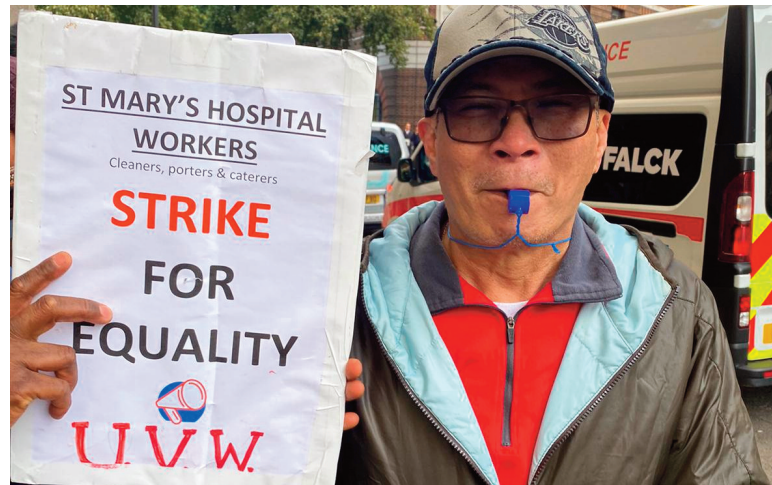
The workers, who include cleaners, porters, and security guards, are members of the Independent Workers’ union of Great Britain (IWGB), and are striking to demand equality with directly-employed staff.

IWGB members at “LouLou’s”, the exclusive celebrity members’ club in Mayfair, have also voted to strike. Their threat of industrial ac-

tion has already secured two of their three demands – the reversal of outsourcing and the London living wage. Workers are continuing to fight for full company sick pay.

“LouLou’s” is owned by the ultra-rich aristocrat Robin Birley, a prominent donor to numerous right-wing political causes including Ukip and Boris Johnson’s Tory leadership campaign.

Outsourced hospital workers in the United Voices of the World (UVW) union at St. Mary’s Hospital in Paddington, west London, struck for a sixth day on 13 November, demanding living wages and direct employment. □



Working with the “micro-unions”



John Moloney

PCS has been making efforts to develop links with United Voices of the World (UVW) and the Independent Workers’ Union of Great Britain (IWGB), small unions not affiliated to the TUC which organise mainly precarious and migrant workers.

Unlike some other TUC unions, we are not hostile to UVW and IWGB. We see them as an inspiration, and allies, rather a threat. They’ve done something the “mainstream” labour movement should have done, but hasn’t: organise precarious and outsourced workers and empower them to take direct action.

We fully support their disputes, and have been promoting them to PCS members. We encourage our branches to fundraise for their strike funds and attend their picket lines.

We’re in specific discussions with the UVW about their members in Ministry of Justice and in Royal Parks. Those are civil service workplaces where PCS also organises where UVW has organised outsourced workers and called strikes recently.

Our Royal Parks branch is already fundraising for the UVW strike fund. We’re looking at what we can do to best support and empower these workers, whether that might be taking them into PCS members, as we have far greater resources to support sustained strike action than UVW does, or a

dual-card arrangement, or something else.

Our Royal Parks branch has already committed to creating seats on their branch committee for the UVW’s elected stewards.

There’s a particular industrial logic to this collaboration, as OCS, the contractor with whom UVW is in dispute at the Ministry of Justice, has just been given another contract on the civil service estate, providing security guards at courts. Whatever formal arrangement we arrive at with UVW, we will continue to work with them and their members and look to coordinate strikes.

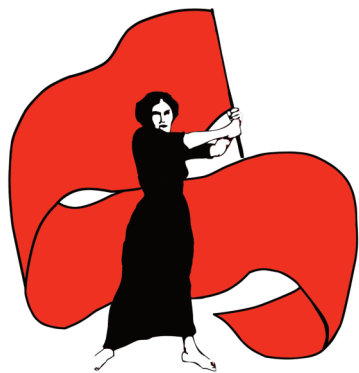
The most recent strikes of PCS members at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were very solid. We held a meeting on the picket line which voted unanimously for

a substantial escalation of the action in the new year if there’s no movement from Interserve, the outsourced contractor, or the F&CO itself, over the next month.

Our cleaner members in the HMRC in Merseyside are also planning further strikes, on 25-27 November and 2-4 December, demanding a living wage and other improvements to terms and conditions.

With the general election approaching, the union is campaigning for its position of a Labour vote in England and Wales.

We’ve sent literature arguing for this position to our members, and are targeting around 40 seats in particular where we’re seeking to mobilise members to campaign and canvas. □



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Photo credit: @CWUnews

Repeal all anti-union laws!

By Daniel Randall

The High Court injunction won by Royal Mail to block strikes by postal workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) highlights the undemocratic nature of Britain's anti-trade union laws, and the urgent need for the whole labour movement to renew our fight for their abolition.

Royal Mail claimed that the union's social media campaign, and its encouragement for members to bring ballot papers to work and write their votes there, breached the 1984 Trade Union Act, which requires that members be able to vote in ballots without

"interference" from the union.

The 1984 Act was one of a succession of anti-union laws imposed by the Thatcher and Major governments to criminalise effective workplace organisation and industrial action.

Even when unions clear the arbitrary turnout thresholds demanded by the 2016 Trade Union Act, as the CWU comfortably did in its recent ballot, the older legislation hands bosses an invaluable weapon to challenge the validity of any ballot. The law requires that unions submit balloting information to employers in advance of commencing any ballot, giving bosses time to scrutinise it for any minor inaccuracies or technicalities

people working to rule in response. Gate meetings are due to take place across the country on Thursday [21st] to continue discussions and get updates face to face.

"If we don't win the appeal, I feel like we should all work to rule across the Christmas period and then reballot as soon as possible."

□

with which they can run to the judges.

In 2010, Network Rail secured an injunction from the High Court to prevent a strike of signallers in the RMT, which found some inaccuracies in RMT's balloting data. The strike was called in response to Network Rail bosses deciding, unilaterally, without having balloting anyone, to cut 1500 jobs.

The High Court has also granted injunctions to Docklands Light Railway bosses (against the RMT in 2011); British Airways bosses (against Unite in 2010); and London and Birmingham Railway and Govia Thameslink Railway bosses (against Aslef in 2011 and 2016).

For the 2011 injunction against Aslef the case was that the union had balloted two people, from a total of 605, who were not entitled to vote. For the 2010 injunction granted to British Airways, it was Unite's failure to declare the number of spoilt ballots in its announcement of the ballot result to members, even though those had no bearing on the result.

The power that existing laws give employers to obstruct indus-

trial action should settle the debate ongoing within the labour movement about what attitude a future Labour government should take to the laws. Some have argued that a "public bonfire of the Thatcherite anti-union laws" is not required, and that Labour could subtly supersede them by passing new, positive legislation.

Despite overwhelming votes at three consecutive Labour Party conferences for policies demanding the repeal of all anti-union laws, Labour's leaders rarely publicly commit to more than the repeal of the most recent, the 2016 Trade Union Act. The reality is that, even if the 2016 Act were repealed, and even if a Labour government passed positive legislation giving unions more rights, unless the laws passed between 1980 and 1990 were also repealed, the legislation that gives bosses the ability to seek High Court injunctions against strikes would remain in effect.

The idea that the only mechanism necessary to approve a strike should be a majority vote of the workers involved in a workplace

meeting only appears radical because we toil under the weight of generations of defeat, prior to which those more direct and immediate forms of workplace democracy were the norm.

The CWU, with its practice of large "gate meetings" at sorting offices and depots and its members' retention of a culture of wildcat and unofficial action, which the union admirably refuses to disavow, has fared perhaps the best of all TUC-affiliated unions in retaining some of what the Tories sought to smash and repress.

That makes the Royal Mail dispute even more of a test case.

The full abolition of all anti-union laws, and their replacement with a positive bill of rights legislating for a full right to strike, are essential policies for any government which seeks, in John McDonnell's words, to achieve "an irreversible shift in wealth and power in favour of working people".

Without such a policy, the balance of power in workplaces will remain tilted massively in favour of employers. □

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Printed by Reach Plc