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US-IRAN: See page 3

A CLASH OF IMPERIALISMS

>> For peace, equal rights for all nations, democracy

HK: one million on the streets

Chen Ying reports on new calls in the Hong Kong democracy movement for people to join trade unions

Page 2

Tackling the union bureaucracies

Bob Carnegie argues that fixing the labour movement's setbacks in recent decades requires drastic rethinking

Pages 8-9

The nature of left antisemitism

Angela Driver and others debate.



Pages 10-12

Inside Labour

Poor choices for Labour leader.



Page 6



HK protesters call for joining unions

By Chen Ying

The New Year started in Hong Kong with a million strong march, organised by the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF).

The huge turnout and strength of feeling of the protest marchers, from age 12 to people over 80, was a clear signal to the authorities that the protest movement still has plenty of fight and determination, despite the many thousand arrests since last June.

On the march there were many calls on people to join their trade union, which is a very positive development. So far in the six month protest, the only significant successful industrial action has been taken by air traffic controllers and Cathay Pacific aircrew on 5 August, when the airport had to close because of the thousands of people who called in sick on that day. This led to the sacking of Cathay's CEO

and a reign of white terror and sackings in the airline.

During the Christmas holidays, protesters occupied many shopping malls as a direct response to the arrests of four leaders of Spark Alliance, and the HSBC bank's decision to freeze their bank account established to provide support to protesters in financial need, alleging money laundering. HSBC branches quickly became attacked by Molotov cocktails, alongside Chinese banks.

The world-famous bronze lions outside HSBC's Hong Kong head office in Central were daubed with red paint and set alight after being doused with inflammable fluids.

£6 million in that bank account is not a large sum of money, compared to the gigantic sums involved in global money laundering by the criminal world or by corrupt Chinese Communist Party cadres. It represents the ongoing donations

by many ordinary citizens over the past seven months, people who are keen to ensure that the protesting youth were supplied with food, clothing, protective gear and overnight shelters in cases when they have been homeless after being disowned by parents.

The crowd-funding bank account was set up legally by the registered NGO, and is not a private personal bank account, to reassure donors that the money is properly accounted for. Yet HSBC, no doubt under pressure because of its banking interests in China, have colluded with the authorities.

Time and again, the authorities have chosen to step up the oppression instead of addressing the demands of the protest movement, principally a commission of inquiry and an amnesty for those arrested.

In December, the Government suffered a series of setbacks, including the landslide victory by pro-

democracy candidates in last month's District Council elections and the pro-Beijing DAB publicly lashing out at the Government for their whitewash in the elections. This was followed by the very public withdrawal of the panel of international experts hired by the Independent Police Complaints Commission, the HK police's own watchdog, on the grounds that it was not equipped to carry out a proper investigation.

Its invocation of emergency powers from HK's colonial past to ban protesters from wearing masks was then ruled out of order by the High Court.

Undeterred, the authorities moved to throttle the movement's financial support, and also to threaten school principals with the sack if they did not discipline the dozens of teachers who have been arrested or had been the subject of complaints for brainwashing

school students or supporting their protests.

The pro-democracy teachers' union, the PTU, organised a protest rally on the evening of Friday 3 January, but it has not yet decided to ballot its members to take industrial action.

On 5 January, Beijing abruptly replaced its top official in Hong Kong by bringing in a political heavy-weight with no previous track record in Hong Kong. There is no doubt that Beijing sees Hong Kong as a key arena in its ongoing conflict with the Trump administration, which will continue despite any trade deal about to be signed later this month.

The deeply rooted contradictions in a politically polarised city will ensure that there will continue to be ongoing conflict here in the year 2020.

6 January 2020. □

Sanders and Soleimani



Sanders campaign

By Eric Lee

The drone attack ordered by US President Donald Trump has shaken up the entire Middle East, raising fears of a regional conflict – or worse, a world war.

But it has also shaken up the Democratic primary, sharpening the differences between Senator Bernie Sanders and all the other candidates.

To the extent to which foreign policy has played a role in the Democratic contest so far, it has largely focussed on the past. Sanders is often quick to point out that he opposed the Iraq war, and voted against it, while Biden and other Democrats were cheering George W. Bush on. This echoes the

2016 race, when Sanders and Hillary Clinton clashed over the same issue and in the same way.

But now that debate has moved suddenly from the past to the present, as every candidate has to instantly respond to events.

And the result has been a triumph for Sanders and a body blow for interventionist Democrats like Biden.

Nearly all of them, Elizabeth Warren included, responded more or less in this way to the killing of Soleimani: While Soleimani was no doubt a very bad man whose death we do not mourn, we don't trust Trump and we worry that his ill-thought out actions could lead to disaster.

Sanders was different. He responded by saying nothing at all about Soleimani or the Islamist dictatorship in Iran. He condemned what Trump did, and a couple of days he later introduced legislation

in Congress to try to block a war on Iran.

His immediate reaction to the attack was not dissimilar to that offered up by Jeremy Corbyn.

The difference is that Sanders' views are likely to give him a big boost in the polls and on polling day. Here's why: Opposition to further US military intervention is, strangely enough, hugely popular among Trump supporters. On this issue, as on his attitude to most free trade deals, Sanders and Trump share a rare bit of common ground.

By threatening war on Iran, Trump has betrayed his own supporters, who were already beginning to lose faith in him (being the most corrupt president in American history has not helped). Those who were looking for a Democrat who could promise them no more pointless wars in the Middle East will only find one who fits the bill – Bernie Sanders.

And among Sanders own supporters, especially the young, his gut-level response to Trump's decision to take out Soleimani will be hugely popular. There is no appetite for a further war in the Middle East there either.

But here's the problem: Democratic socialists like Bernie Sanders get that the Islamist regime in Iran is an utterly reactionary and dangerous force. Its record on human rights – including workers' rights – is one of the worst in the world. And its proxy armies like Hezbollah in Lebanon are no better.

It is not a bad thing that Soleimani is dead; the man was a brutal murderer responsible for thousands of deaths, including many innocent civilians.

That's why the Left should adopt a smart position on what happened and what happens next by supporting neither Trump nor Ali Khamenei, and why the call for "no

war on Iran" must be coupled with a second one opposing the Islamist regime and supporting its overthrow.

The Left cannot be seen as supportive of the Iranian rulers not least because it will lose all credibility with the victims of Iranian fascism – both in Iran and elsewhere in the region. We must surely be on the side of those Iranians who regularly take to the streets to challenge the regime. We do not stand with the regime, but with its victims.

For those reasons and more, we must hope that Bernie Sanders will say not only the popular thing but the right thing too, and not be seen – as Corbyn was – as uncritical of the terrible regime Soleimani represented. □

• Eric Lee is the organiser of "London for Bernie", and writes this column in a personal capacity.

"No retreat, no truce!" Say French strikes

By Sacha Ismail

As we go to press, 7 January, the French government is sitting down with the various union federations to discuss the ongoing dispute over its pension "reforms".

The government hopes that a few limited or even cosmetic concessions will be enough to peel away some unions and begin to demobilise the mass strikes and protests that have swept France since early December.

It is standing firm on its central policy of changing how the level of

public-sector pensions is calculated and introducing disadvantages for those who won't retire later (64, as against 62 now). Many private sector pensions are also tied to those in the public sector.

Macron and co. are determined. But so are France's workers. 9 January will see a new day of strikes, opening three important days of mobilisation with a national demonstration on Saturday. After a relative lull over Christmas, activists are arguing "Pas de retrait, pas de trêve!" - "No retreat, no truce!"

These are the biggest mobilisa-

tions since the (mainly victorious) pensions struggle of 1995, and the longest strikes since the great, quarter-revolutionary wave of 1968.

However this is not a general strike – yet. The key industries are the railways and transport, and education. Strikes are mainly taking place in the public sector, though there are some important one in the private sector, including at oil refineries.

Students and school students have taken action in support.

There seem to be some large contingents, but also many smaller groups of strikers and mobilised

workers in many different places across the country.

French union leaders sound militant compared to their British counterparts, but they have a long and repetitive record of demobilising impressive struggles, including repeatedly over pensions since 1995. (When the unions won).

A better maintained culture of workplace militancy than in Britain, and the absence of anything like our anti-union laws, means it is easier for workers in France to take action, generate a substantial movement, and keep going despite inertia or pressure

from the top of their unions.

That doesn't mean union leaders' role is unimportant. Apart from anything else, they could have – but have not – helped by calling for it to bring many new groups of workers into the struggle.

As often with French strikes, this one has thrown up a wide scattering of rank-and-file organising and coordinating bodies. Socialist and militant trade union activists are discussing how to expand and extend these networks, to create genuine counter-power to the union hierarchies. □

Oppose Modi's anti-Muslim drive!

By Matt Cooper

Since winning power in India in 2014, Narendra Modi and the BJP have pursued a Hindu-chauvinist agenda.

On 12 December the Modi regime passed its Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), building on the National Register of Citizenship (NRC) in attempting to remove the rights of many Muslim Indians.

Since the CAA passed last month there have been protests across India, not only from Muslims but also from the left and other defenders of India's secular constitution. Following a ban on all protests in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh (ruled by the BJP but with a 40% Muslim minority), continued protests in late December were met with police brutality leaving at least fifteen dead, with schools closed and around a thousand activists arrested.

The internet has been shut down in the north-eastern state of Assam, with shorter outages in Delhi and elsewhere, to disrupt peaceful protests. In total at least twenty-five were killed in the first two weeks of protests, which continue, most no-

tably on Friday 3 January when over 100,000 demonstrated in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad despite a police ban.

The CAA seeks to grant fast-track citizenship status to migrants and refugees who are Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh or Christian, but not Muslims.

The target is not only Muslim refugees, be they Rohingya fleeing Bangladesh, persecuted Ahmadiyya from Pakistan, Hazara from Afghanistan, or even Uyghurs from China. The primary target of the legislation is India's Muslim population.

The CAA is wrapped up with the longer-standing National Register of Citizenship. This has its roots prior to Modi's election victory in 2014 in a long-running Hindu-chauvinist campaign in Assam, which borders Bangladesh.

There, Hindu-chauvinist politicians have portrayed Bengali-speaking Muslims as illegal migrants. The NRC aims to identify these "non-Indians", although much of Assam's Muslim population are descendents of those encouraged to move there under British rule and others legally settled in the 1960s. Assamese have been called, often repeatedly, to in-

terviews and tribunals often days travel from their homes. In a largely rural state, many have no evidence of their status.

The process led to 1.9 million of the 33 million Assamese being identified as "non-Indian". The problem for the Hindu-chauvinists was that over half of these would be aliens identified as Hindus.

Thus the BJP government created the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. This shuts out Muslim refugees (although it will do that) and gives a fast track to citizenship to Hindus identified as non-citizens by the NRC, while denying that route to Muslims.

A number of Muslims in Assam have already been declared stateless and a detention camp for 3,000 opened in Goalpara, with another ten planned. Since the Goalpara camp opened, twenty-nine of the nearly 1,000 interned have died. According to the local group Citizens for Justice and Peace, the process has been directly responsible for over a hundred deaths, including suicides. Meanwhile, the BJP has declared its intention of rolling the NRC out nationally.

Although at times Modi has denied that there is any anti-Muslim intention to the CAA, his true in-



tentions are clear – he is seeking to whip up anti-Muslim hatred in his Hindu electoral base. Last month rallying support for the BJP in local elections in the rural state of Jharkhand, he turned to the subject of "Muslim migrants", telling the crowd, "What are they, your hachure bah, your cousins? I assure you that before the national elec-

tion in 2024 I will throw them all out."

The demonstrations are set to continue. Although the CAA may be struck down by the Indian High Court, the NRC will not be, and Modi's right-wing Hindu-chauvinist policy will continue. The secular left and the working class movement must oppose it. □

Iranian and Iraqi left on the crisis

Responses (abridged here) by revolutionary socialist groups from Iran and Iraq to the US's killing of Qasem Soleimani and the new tensions between Iran and the USA

Morad Shirin, Iranian Revolutionary Marxist Tendency

Qasem Soleimani took part in the brutal suppression of Iran's Kurds in 1979. That was the beginning of his career as a Pasdar.

His rise to the top of the Quds Force has meant that he has been responsible for the deaths of many Iranians, Lebanese, Iraqis, Syrians and so on. He is a hated figure wherever he helped set up Shia militias that have slaughtered protesters....

At no point, and in no way, should the left or the labour movement of any country defend the Iranian regime: the most reactionary form of capitalist rule in the twenty-first century. They should defend the workers, women, national (and religious) minorities, youth and students, writers, artists, intellectuals, LGBT+ people and others who are not only denied their most basic rights but are gunned down when they peacefully demand these rights.

The workers of Haft Tappeh,

Vahed, HEPCO, the teachers, pensioners and so on are the ones who need solidarity – not the blood-soaked regime! The internationalist left should do whatever it can to help Iranian workers overthrow this regime and establish a revolutionary workers' republic in Iran.

Only such a republic can really oppose US imperialism and help the workers of other countries in the Middle East to also overthrow capitalism.

Worker-communist Party of Iran Hekmatist (Official Line)

Undoubtedly, the deaths of Soleimani, commanders of Hashd al-Sha'bi and any other criminal around the world, will only be met with joy from the freedom-seeking people of Iran, Iraq and the whole region.

Just as much, the bullish and self-righteous actions of Trump, Pentagon and the US Administration, and their intervention in any country as and when they desire, cannot but be met with anything but the abhorrence of the people of Iraq and the region.

The US-Iran tension and the infighting among the reactionary states in the Middle East along with all their open terrorism in the recent decades, have brought nothing

but misery, devastation and hundreds of thousands of deaths to this region. The workers and the suffering masses everywhere, and this region in particular, will again be the victims of such wars and these rulers.

The escalation of the tensions between the reactionary rulers in the US and Iran not only bears no benefits for the workers and the freedom-seeking people of these countries; but it makes their struggles for ridding themselves of these rulers harder.

Worker-communist Party of Iran Hekmatist

Soleimani is the symbol of Islamic terrorism and essence of the Islamic regime. He has been responsible for huge number of atrocities in the region and he has been the perpetrator of mass killings of people in Iraq, Iran and Syria.

Worker-communist Party of Iran - Hekmatist sees the terrorist tension between American government and Islamic Republic as an attempt against the revolutionary struggle of the workers and people of the region and the world. We call upon people of Iran, Iraq and the world to oppose the terrorist groups and governments.

Overcoming terrorism in Iran and Iraq and achieving freedom

and liberation is only possible by revolutionary overthrow of the ruling powers and establishment of a free and equal society where safe conditions are made possible for peaceful solidarity for the people of the region.

Organisation of the Communist Alternative in Iraq

Every now and then, in a show of power, military clashes occur in Iraq between America on the one hand, and Iran through its militias in Iraq on the other hand. These clashes climaxed [on 3 January] when America assassinated Qasem Soleimani, Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, and others in an aerial bombardment at Baghdad International Airport.

The history of American imperialist practices and policies in Iraq is the history of war crimes, destruction and occupation... This latest American arrogance is another of the crimes that it has practiced inside Iraq for years and is a flagrant violation of the so-called independent sovereignty of Iraq within the contexts of the bourgeois world order.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, which represents the regime of executions, killings and slavery, the regime of counter-revolution that

has been oppressing the masses for more than four decades, is the bulwark of political Islam in the Middle East region and one of its most powerful terrorist forces. The crimes of this regime and its forces, and the crimes of the "Quds Force" that was led by Qasem Soleimani against the masses in Iran, Iraq and the region are countless.

The attempts of the Iran-linked Iraqi militia forces to exploit the situation and attack US military positions, are extensions of those reactionary policies and the objectives of the Iranian regime. Similarly, these are the objectives of the Iraqi militia forces in order to stifle the uprising...

Among the main goals of this uprising [in Iraq is] the end of the interference of these two states [Iran and USA] and other regional states in the political life of Iraq...

The Organisation of the Communist Alternative in Iraq (OCAI)... fights with great determination and strength to advance the uprising and organise its forces and the forces of the masses in Iraq in the revolutionary mass councils.

The way to get rid of all the current conditions is to move towards the victory of the uprising and achieve its social and political goals of well-being, freedom, work and equality for all. □

• Full texts bit.ly/11j

A weather-vane not a signpost



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Any socialist who didn't feel sick to the stomach on the morning of 13 December has something seriously wrong with them.

But the reaction of the *Morning Star* and its political masters, the Communist Party of Britain went beyond that and verged upon grief and hysteria.

Instead of studying the polling evidence for the reasons, they lashed out at the only (supposed) "cause" of defeat they could countenance — Labour Remainers. Their hysteria even involved an element of perverse gloating. The 14-15 December *Morning Star* used its front page to crow (in large block capitals) that "Remain is Over", quoting two union leaders (Dave Ward of the CWU and Kevin Courtney of the NEU), neither of whom has any noticeable record of actually campaigning for Brexit/"Lexit" within the labour movement.

The same paper's editorial bleated that "Labour's leader was the first to call for Article 50 to be triggered after the referendum result in 2016, and long resisted the efforts to trap his party in a Remain box. Had Labour paid more attention to its leader, it might not have suffered such devastating losses this week."

But perhaps the most bizarre rant came in

an article ("Labour's Brexit position was the decisive issue", MS 23 December) by Daniel Kebede (an NEU union official), who raged that "some people central to this defeat need to go", naming John McDonnell as the chief culprit, followed by ... "the Alliance for Workers Liberty and Blairites, with a handful in between."

Kebede went on to name "Michael Chesium, Another Europe is Possible, the AWL etc. — basically all those who branded Leave voters as little England racists — [and who] have no interest in building unity or solidarity."

We'll leave aside, for the moment, the repeated claim by "left" Leavers that Remainers have branded all Leave voters "racists", and ask Mr Kebede and his Stalinist friends, to explain how all those who were willing to vote for the Tories and Brexit Party could be won to a Labour Brexit that would, in any case have been denounced as "Brexit in name only"?

And what about the 68% of Labour's voters, including those in the Midlands and North of England (the so-called "red wall" areas) who voted to Remain? How could Leave have ever become party policy when the overwhelming majority of Labour members support Remain?

The answer, of course, is that it couldn't. And because it couldn't it wasn't, although this did not prevent the likes of the CPB, the Star and Mr Kebede declaring the need for the impossible — open Labour support for Brexit.

It's worth noting, by the way, that these



people never fought openly within the party for Leave, relying instead upon bleatings in the *Morning Star*, the dishonest "LeFT" campaign (that dared not spell out its true "no-deal" position) and bureaucratic manoeuvrings at the 2019 Labour conference, landing us with an unsatisfactory compromise that convinced almost no-one.

POSTURE

The bitter truth, that the *Star* and most other pro-Brexit "leftists" cannot face, is that (to the best of my knowledge) not a single CLP put a pro-Brexit motion to Labour conference, and neither of the two pro-Brexit affiliated unions (Aslef and BFAWU) ever proposed such a policy. Nor did Len McCluskey, for all his "Brexit" posturing in the *Star* and elsewhere. These people had no confidence

whatsoever in their own ideas.

The idea that there was an otherwise-politically-neutral pro-Brexit electoral constituency waiting to be corralled by either left or right is plainly nonsense. Most people who were committed to Brexit as their overriding concern were not going to vote for a "Labour Brexit". They wanted the fully leaded version.

Otherwise-Labour-aligned people who backed Leave should have been treated with respect and given honest arguments. They knew that Labour had been pushed, bit by bit — by steady rank-and-file pressure on the reluctant leadership — into a de facto Remain position. All the evidence is that trying to appease pro-Leave voters did no good. In fact, it only served to bring Labour into contempt when, in heavily-Leave constituencies, Labour (known to be pro-Remain) said: "Just for you, we can sing a different song".

Arguing the issues honestly is not a magic answer. But it is the only answer compatible with serious politics: the only answer compatible with building a movement that wins trust and the right to a hearing.

One *Morning Star* contributor, (Alex Birch, December 17) in an otherwise unimpressive article entitled "Lexit would have won it" used the memorable phrase "any social democratic project must be a signpost, not a weather-vane".

What a pity that Alex Birch, like the rest of the people in and around the *Star* and the CPB, don't seem to understand the essential difference between signposts and weather-vanes. □

Revolution by stealth?



Letters

I'm surprised that Katy Dollar's report on the 14 December Labour Transformed conference (*Solidarity* 529) does not mention the repeated, unpleasant attempts of the organisers to prevent Workers' Liberty members selling our materials and running a small stall in a corridor.

I'm surprised, also, that the report does not mention the organisers' comments to our members that AWL supporters would not be welcome in the organisation they were setting up, or their silly attempts to demagogically label us as the people who are members of the "democratic centralist organisation in the room."

It is also true, is it not, that the little clique which was running the event was actually trying to set up a "democratic centralist" organisation themselves by manoeuvring the audience into it without telling them what they were doing. Now, that's a very weird business.

They offered no program (a few little planks like "abolish the anti union laws" is not a programme of a socialist group), and held no serious programmatic discussion, while actively avoiding the key dividing issues of Brexit and antisemitism.

No doubt plenty of the people at the event were perfectly reasonable, and were there to discuss a left-wing, Labour response to the election defeat. We're not going to help those people by not being straightforward and

clear about the strange little group manipulating the event.

A follow-up email from this group states, "As this is an attempt to build a new organisation, (our) next meeting will not be open to members of pre-existing democratic-centralist revolutionary organisations."

I.e. they have confirmed that AWL will not be allowed in. Therefore reducing the chance of any difficult discussions taking place or awkward questions being asked.

In a coy sort of way it is also an admission that they intend to declare a "revolutionary democratic centralist organisation." As if such an organisation can simply be wished into existence without a solid political basis. □

Mark Osborn, Lewisham

Military aid to Israel

Eric Lee is right in his article "Sanders, Corbyn and anti-Semitism" (*Solidarity* 529) that Bernie Sanders compares well to Jeremy Corbyn on being clear on his personal support for an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

However, Sanders is wrong to support continued military aid to Israel and it is a positive if he is changing his mind. It is not a concession to BDS to be opposed to such an embargo, for example, very minimally until Israel makes moves to end the occupation of the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza. □

Stephen Wood, Haringey

Mainstream science not always right



Letters

Angela Driver ("The Placebo Effect", *Solidarity* 529 p16) correctly endorses the healing potential of some complementary and alternative medical therapies and even placebo.

However, several clinical trials (and systematic reviews) — on human and other animals (veterinary science) — have shown that homoeopathy is more effective than placebo. There is also some basic scientific understanding of the biochemical mechanisms of micro-diluted remedies (although research funding has been hard to sustain in the recent hostile climate).

Most importantly, practical experience with homoeopathy shows us that well-trained and regulated homeopaths, practising appropriately, produce impressively favourable results, often in combination with "conventional" medical interventions.

I think life-long socialists should be able to discuss the promotion of human welfare, including the development and provision of medical technology, with mutual compassion and comradeship. Let us recall that mainstream science has not always been, and will not always be, right. Let us also be careful to protect non-oppressive minority views.

I would urge the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Martin Goodman ("Scientific Testing Should Decide", *Solidarity* 529 p16) to recognise that scientific learning and democratic working-class flourishing and emancipation are turbulent dialectical processes, which de-



mand and deserve impartial, sensitive and careful scrutiny.

A senior orthodox medical scientist wrote, in 2002, that "human beings are unbelievably complex organisms about which we understand very little. I suspect that the fruits of the genome project will take years to unravel and it will be even longer before we understand how the human brain works and how it can influence organic disease elsewhere in the body."

"Though I do believe passionately in scientific medicine, I have not got to the stage of being so blinkered that I cannot believe that at least some aspects of the more complementary approach to medicine may have a lot to offer" (Sir David Weatherall FRS, Regius Professor of Medicine at the University of Oxford, and author of a major World Health Organisation report on genomics for global health). □

Richard Shield, Wallasey

New year, new sponsorships?

This week we have promises of some sizeable donations soon, and on the strength of them we've taken up a this-time-only offer from an equipment supplier of a replacement printing machine (for printing leaflets, bulletins, and so on) at 36% discount on the usual price.

Our existing machine has done great service over the years, but over the last year has developed a fault (meaning impaired, streaky, output, rather than no output) which would cost more to fix than the new machine.

However, none of that is in the can yet, so we can't detail it this week. Actually in this week: £20 from Dylan Lewis, and £1069.07 from a miscellany of anonymous donations.

On top of that, £10 in new sponsorship money for Hannah Thompson and Dan Rawnsley's sponsored bike ride from Sheffield to Manchester, set for 15 February.

As labour movement activity revives in the new year, we hope to see a lot more in those sponsorships. Add your contribution at bit.ly/cycle4socialism!

Our target is £25,000 by 19 January. £17,465 so far. Another £7,535 to go. □



US-Iran: a clash of imperialisms

The conflict between the USA and Iran in the Middle East which has now flared hot again is a conflict between two imperialisms.

They are two different sorts of imperialism. The USA is a world power, Iran, a regional power.

The sway of the Iranian state over the oppressed nations within its own borders (Kurds, Azerbaijanis, Baluchis, etc.) is directly political and military.

Its less direct sway in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, etc. is also politico-military. Being much less strong economically than US capital, Iranian capital has to rely on such politico-military methods.

The USA, for decades now, does not seek direct political rule over other countries. It regards that as expensive and unworkable.

It seeks to have countries integrated into the rules of the capitalist world market, what the Marxist writer Ellen Wood called "the empire of capital", with the assumption that, most of the time, US-based capital, as the strongest and most advanced sector of world capital, can then do well.

It maintains huge military forces to police that "empire of capital".

The states in conflict are not symmetrical. But each is predatory, domineering, imperi-

alist in the generic sense.

The conflict is not about either centre seeking to conquer the other, but about the rival drives of both to dominate other peoples.

Obviously Iran cannot conquer the USA. Even Trump's circle in the USA know that there is no chance of the USA conquering Iran, a state much bigger and better-armed than Saddam Hussein's Iraq was, and where the regime's political base of support is stronger than Saddam's was by 2003.

The architects of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, drunk on imperial over-confidence gained since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, thought they could transform Iraq into a prosperous, compliant, more or less bourgeois-democratic state.

The US strategists feared (accurately) that the "old regimes" in the Middle East (Mubarak, Ben Ali, Gaddafi, Assad, etc.) would soon crumble. They hoped "their" Iraq would serve as a "pole of attraction" for creating cooperative new regimes, instead of Islamists dominating the succession.

ARROGANCE

The imperial arrogance - and incompetence generated by arrogance - of their actions in Iraq wrecked their strategy.

In 2008 the Bush administration tried to get a "State of Forces Agreement" which would have made the US a virtual parallel government in Iraq. It failed. The Iraqi government had become dominated by pro-Iranian politicians with links to pro-Iranian militias.

Bush had to agree to withdraw all US troops. They were all out by 2011. Small numbers, mostly as trainers, have been invited back since 2014 to help combat Daesh (at times alongside Iranian forces led by Soleimani).

The Iraqi oil and gas industry's contracts

are dominated by non-US firms. US firms hold only two out of 23 contracts. Iraqi politics are dominated by Iran.

When the Arab Spring erupted in 2011, the USA had little leverage in the outcome. Syria has ended up with an Iranian military presence to which the big counterweight is not US but Russian influence.

The USA, in uneasy alliance with Saudi Arabia and other powers, has been trying to push back Iranian influence.

Trump, in some ways, is less keen on military ventures than Bush or even Obama: he has withdrawn troops from Syria, and is seriously trying to pull out from Afghanistan.

But he also has the imperial arrogance of the Bush strategists. Thus his apparently off-hand decision to kill Soleimani, and his threat to bomb cultural sites in Iraq, an echo of such brutish 19th century imperialism as the 1860 revenge destruction by British troops of the Chinese Emperor's ancient Summer Palace during the Second Opium War.

The USA's general strategic aim is to hem in and push back Iran. Whether Trump's decision to kill Soleimani actually helps that aim is unclear. So far it has prompted the Iranian government to renounce most of its remaining restrictions under Obama's nuclear deal, and the Iraqi government to call for the removal of all US troops in Iraq.

The US made an announcement suggesting it will withdraw, and then disavowed it. Experts predict some fudged deal on this between the Iraqi government (still worried about the Daesh threat) and the USA.

The Soleimani killing was part of a tit-for-tat series of slaps between the US and Iran. The tit-for-tat will now escalate. How far that will go, we don't know. That neither side wants full-scale war, as of now, does not exclude that both sides will engage into bigger

conflict than they intended.

Although Israel had no part in that tit-for-tat or in the killing of Soleimani, Israel will be a likely target for Iranian retaliations, executed through its allies Hamas or Hezbollah. The force that Soleimani commanded, the Quds Force, is so-named because its stated grand objective is to conquer Jerusalem (al-Quds).

OPPRESSED

Whatever the Iranian regime says, such Iranian action against Israel is not a blow for liberation or a help for the oppressed Palestinians.

It is imperialist aggression. It should be opposed and denounced. Israel has a right to defend itself. That general right does not imply endorsing whatever specific actions Netanyahu may order, especially if they make the Palestinians pay the price for Iran's misdeeds in a ricochet effect.

Another effect of the tit-for-tat is probably welcome both to Iran's rulers and to the USA. Religious reactionaries both in Iran and Iraq have been able to mobilise millions on the streets to mourn Soleimani and curse the USA - and thus to push aside (for a while, anyway) the swelling social protests in Iran and in Iraq.

It is in those social protests that the "third camp" can be found which can win a way out of the tunnel of simmering war: peace, equal rights for all nations, democracy, socialism. □

Solidarity 531 and 532

Solidarity 531, 15 February, will be another special magazine issue, in the same format as our Cable Street special, no.528.

Then we will skip a week (because of the Workers' Liberty conference on 18-19 January), and *Solidarity* 532 will be out on 29 January. □

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Poor choices for Labour leader

By Sacha Ismail

Labour's National Executive Committee has set a short timetable for the leadership election. MPs and MEPs have one week to nominate candidates (7-13 January).

Constituency Labour Party [CLPs] and affiliates have one month (15 January-14 February). Voting will run a month and a bit (21 February-4 April).

New members can vote if they join by 20 January. There will be a registered supporters system, in addition to affiliate supporters (eg people registered through their unions). For more, see [LabourList bit.ly/39Cx8a2](http://LabourList.bit.ly/39Cx8a2)

To get on the ballot, candidates need 10% of Labour MPs and MEPs (22), and then either 5% of constituency parties (33) or 5% of affiliated organisations by conference voting strength, two of which must be unions.

Six leadership candidates have now announced themselves. The absence of open debate at the top levels of the Labour Party in recent years, other than on Brexit and antisemitism, creates unusual difficulties in judging their records, but some outlines are clear.

Keir Starmer, who seems to be emerging as the frontrunner, has a soft-right record (abstained on Tory Welfare Reform in 2015, backed moves to dump Corbyn in 2016), but is talking left for the contest.

Rebecca Long-Bailey is the Leader's Office continuity candidate. Her new twist is to talk about "progressive patriotism". She has been associated with Alex Halligan, a Stalinist of a more vituperative stripe than Seamus Milne and Andrew Murray, as her back-office person for some time.

Emily Thornberry is similar to Starmer but soft-left rather than soft-right, and, so far, less successful.

Lisa Nandy was once a "rising star" of the soft left, then backed the moves to dump Corbyn in 2016 and voted for Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement at Second Reading. Her special pitch now is nationalism as a way to win back lost voters in small towns.

Jess Phillips is a right-winger with a record defined by self-promotion and militant hostility to the left.

Clive Lewis, founder of the left anti-Brexit group of MPs Love Socialism Hate Brexit, has a record superior to all the other candidates. However, his campaign has not put him to the left of other candidates, even on his own previous strong points like Brexit and free movement, party democracy, and antisemitism. Moreover, he has responded inadequately to allegations about sexism arising from an interview he gave to *Huck* magazine. He has not yet given convincing reasons to support him.

His supporters urge us to wait for him to develop his program further, but it's getting late for that now that the contest is underway and a crucial stage of it ends in only a few days' time.

Socialists will use the election to argue and organise for a campaigning, democratic Labour Party, for socialist policies and politics, and for migrants' rights, free movement and internationalism. As yet, sadly, we don't have a candidate on whom to "hook" that argument. □

Challenging the candidates

Solidarity proposes this text as a basis for discussion on the questions activists should raise during the leadership contest.

We want to make the leadership contest an opportunity to raise the level of political discussion on the left. We call on members and affiliates to press the candidates for clear commitments on continuing the party's democratisation, above all making conference sovereign; on defending, developing and crucially campaigning for left-wing, pro-working class policies; and on standing up for free movement and migrants' rights.

We reject moves to the right, however they are dressed up. What we're looking for is not a leader who will hand down left-wing policies from above, but one who will help create a democratic party in which the membership decides the policy.

Labour has failed to convince people we are serious and reliable about our policies, because we didn't debate and argue for those policies over months and years – rather than just days – and left them as a catalogue of good ideas instead of tying them together into a socialist message. Because we haven't taken the opportunity since 2015 to begin to rebuild the labour movement and its support on the streets, in workplaces and communities; or used our support among young people to build active youth and student movements. And more immediately because we have come across as unclear and evasive on hot questions like Brexit and antisemitism.

We want:

A democratic, campaigning, working-class-based party

1. Maintain existing democratisation, including to conference (more motions, abolition of the "contemporary" rule) and disciplinary due process (the suspension of auto-exclusions should be made permanent).

2. Extend democracy. A sovereign conference which actually decides policy and direction. Governance by elected bodies and officers, not unelected officials. (The Leader's Office, dominated by Stalinists, needs reorganising and restaffing.) Open selections for MPs.

3. A democratic Young Labour movement with its own constitution; central support for building a regularly-meeting YL group in every constituency. A democratic Labour Students movement.

4. The party should organise demonstrations and visible campaigning on issues like the NHS, housing and Universal Credit. Active support for workers' struggles and building unions. Defeat Johnson's new anti-strike law; demand repeal of all anti-union laws, in line with conference. A real campaign to reverse council cuts.

5. Make the union link a living force once again, particularly at local level.

A socialist party

6. Labour should argue for the goal of replacing capitalism with a new society based on democratic collective ownership — socialism. Radical policies should be steps on this road.

7. The climate crisis makes this even more necessary and urgent. Minimally, campaign for conference's "Socialist Green New Deal" policy in full — including net-zero by 2030.

8. Labour should adopt TUC Congress 2019's unanimous policy for democratic public ownership of banking and finance.

An internationalist, pro-liberation party

9. Brexit will likely happen, but there is no obligation for Labour to deny Remain would be better, facilitate the Tories' plans, or fail to take advantage of their difficulties.

10. Unequivocally advocate defence and extension of free movement and migrants' rights, in line with conference. "Build unions, not borders". Advocate cross-border labour solidarity, and a united, democratic, socialist Europe.

11. A strong stance against all bigotry and oppression — including Islamophobia, antisemitism, anti-gypsy, Roma and traveller racism, and transphobia. A strong stance for women's liberation. Extend abortion rights.

12. To sort out the mess on antisemitism, we need a leadership which knows what it is talking about, and serious political education. This must include discussing antisemitic reactionary anticapitalism, and the implications of demonising Israel and "Zionists" and offhandedly dismissing complaints as right-wing or Israeli conspiracies — which, also, hurts rather than aids the Palestinians. Actively campaign for the party's position of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. □

Response to "regrouping the left"



By Ralph Leonard

I commend Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL) for broaching the difficult, yet important question of how the socialist movement can revive and reinvent itself and offer a genuine alternative to global capitalism against the false choice between neoliberal centrism and right wing ultra-nationalist populism.

As the recent general election in the UK has demonstrated there is still a long way to go before anything that resembles a revolutionary movement comes to the fore. Despite the failures of Labour and Syriza, I still think a space is still possible for a new and truly revolutionary left.

I agree with the AWL on the need to promote "consistent democracy and internationalism" as well as being committed to "class struggle, and a culture of critical inquiry and democratic debate." as well as defending the rights of oppressed peoples around the world such as the Uyghurs and the Rohingya.

While there have encouraging protest movements around the world recently in places like Hong Kong, Chile, Lebanon, Iraq and Sudan struggling for greater democracy, freedom and better living conditions, all of which socialists should undoubtedly support. There is still a long way to go before this energy can be converted into a revolutionary consciousness that could transform society on a global scale towards a socialist future.

The revolutionary socialist movement at

the moment is weak and much of it is befallen to various dreadful beliefs such as the "anti-imperialism of fools". Much of it has fragmented into isolated sectarian cults that have almost no social basis upon which they can enact any real political influence.

However, the core problem, I believe, with the socialist movement and the left more generally is that it has forgotten its founding values and principles. Socialism as I understand it was formulated by three broad insights:

Firstly, that the problems facing humanity are social in nature rather than natural. For centuries, politicians, priests and kings argued problems such as poverty, racism, war and other forms of oppression were simply an expression of the natural order, they were because of limits nature and God had imposed on mankind. Or it was because of human greed and decadence.

Socialism argues that humanity's problems aren't natural or divinely ordained, they are social, in other words man made, caused by the way society is organised, therefore it is subject to social transformation.

Secondly, socialism argued that human beings were capable of determining their own destinies, of running their own lives, of liberating themselves without requiring the guidance of a king, a lord or a state. Socialism believed that it is through human agency that the working class could overthrow capitalism and in a new system, truly create the conditions in which the humans could fulfil their true potential.

Thirdly, socialism believed that the only way to overcome scarcity and poverty was to create a world of plenty and material super abundance. Through using science and technology liberated from the fetters of capitalism fuelled by human ingenuity and imagination

we can free humanity from want and desperation.

"Socialism means plenty for all", proclaimed Sylvia Pankhurst in 1922, "we do not preach a gospel of want and scarcity, but of abundance". Under a misguided and bourgeois influenced form of environmentalism, some radicals out of an understandable concern for the ecological question have become hostile to this vision because it promotes a culture of "consumerism" and promotes "techno fixes".

Undergirding all these insights is the vision of unlimited human freedom, something that the socialist movement should unapologetically recover and stand for again. The ultimate goal of socialism should be the ultimate realisation of human freedom, but a richer and deeper kind of freedom of which is not possible under capitalism — in fact capitalism limits it.

The freedom of human beings to become what they potentially can be rather than simply the freedom to be what they already are and stay that way. In this sense, socialists should be committed to freedom of expression, freedom from religion, freedom from racism and other forms of social oppression, and sexual liberation to its fullest extent.

Fundamentally, if socialism is to make a serious return on the political stage and prevent the potential regression of civilisation into barbarism, it should recover what are its core values and principles and then restate them in a new way appropriate for the 21st century. □

• This is one of the responses which we'll be publishing to our editorial, "Regrouping the Left", in *Solidarity* 524: bit.ly/L-gp

Make Labour councils resist!

By Janine Booth

In the cacophony of post mortems of Labour's defeat, the role of Labour councils is being overlooked or at least understated.

I think that a significant contributor to the erosion of Labour's base has been councils which cut services, do the bidding of developers, and are generally bureaucratic, unresponsive and inaccessible to working-class people. They are seen as the establishment and are the first political institution that people see affecting their lives negatively.

This has contributed to the alienation of Labour from working-class communities, to a loss of the idea that by electing Labour, you put the local working class into power. I reflected on this on 2 January, when I sat in my council's Customer Service Centre. It does a good job, but when did I become a "customer" of my local Labour council?

Unfortunately, the left leadership of the Labour party did not tackle the inadequacy and managerialism of Labour in local government effectively over its four years in post. Local government has remained largely unchanged. Labour activists have found themselves campaigning against their "own" councils: for example in Leeds, against the Council's eviction of tenants and support for airport expansion.

Many Labour councils have done one or more of the following:

- collaborating with developers to the detriment of genuinely affordable public housing
- joining in the disturbing and inhuman trend towards driving out and criminalising homeless people
- acting like private-sector employers, paying fat-cat salaries to senior managers while keeping low pay and insecure conditions for council workers
- failing to campaign effectively against the Tory funding cuts, but instead passing on those cuts to residents.

The throttling of Labour Party democracy

LRC shame

Over recent times, and recent weeks especially, the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), once a relatively lively and open group of the Labour left, has descended into little more than a Jackie Walker fan club, a cult dedicated to the denial of antisemitism.

Over the weekend 4-5 January, it has crossed the line. Its Facebook account, having previously posted conspiratorial crap and posts about violent, right-wing Jew-hate being the only "real" antisemitism, shared content by Laura Stuart, a far-right activist who has circulated racist material including from David Duke of the Ku Klux Klan.

When challenged, LRC took down the post but then denied ever posting it and accused those who called them out of fabricating it.

On 6 January LRC issued an apology, but although it claims that the offending posts have been taken down, several are still there. The apology is weak and inadequate, arguing that this was a mistake that came about because their more sensible people were on holiday.

Activists are calling for John McDonnell, who still holds the post of president of the LRC, to break that connection. □

BREAKING POINT

LABOUR COUNCILLORS FIGHTING AUSTERITY

over recent decades has left councils unaccountable to the local labour movement. For example, when both CLPs in my borough voted for the Labour council to not cut Special Education Needs and Disabilities funding, it did so regardless. The "Local Campaign Forums" are not effective forums for local campaigning.

Local councils are tied up by Tory laws against them doing many of the things that we would want them to. The Tories knew what they were doing in the 1980s when they passed legislation to shackle two bastions of working-class power: trade unions and local government. However, councils can do more within the law than many of them do, and they can help build a movement that becomes ready to take on the law.

As we face five years of Tory attacks, and starting as we are from defeat and demoralisation, I think we can help to rebuild by calling on Labour councils to become centres of resistance as well as providers of services. Councils designating their areas 'sanctuary cities' (or 'sanctuary boroughs') that welcome refugees and migrants is a useful step in the right direction.

Further measures could include:

- making council facilities e.g. meeting rooms, available to local campaigns, trade unions, welfare projects and residents' groups
- refusing to collaborate with immigration checks
- providing advice, representation and support to vulnerable people such as migrants and homeless people
- not installing anti-homeless architecture, e.g. spikes

- being accountable to the local labour movement (reforming the Local Campaign Forum structure)

- ending fat-cat CEO posts, scrapping directly-elected Mayors and the Cabinet system
- not increasing council tax or rents (or, similarly, reducing relief for the low-paid)
- ... and of course, not making cuts.

While efforts have been made to get more left-wingers elected as Labour councillors, this has too often been without much discussion on what it means to be a left-wing councillor or what strategy Labour and its left will pursue.

I hope this article can help such a discussion take place. □

Corbyn and local government

Under Corbyn, Labour has done virtually nothing to campaign against council cuts, and still less for their reversal.

Oddly, in so far as any force beyond the left of which Solidarity and Workers' Liberty are part has made noise about this, it is right-wing Labour council leaders.

After years of saying nothing was possible, in 2018 the council leaders launched an initiative called "Breaking Point", with clear demands for an immediate end to cuts, £4bn in emergency funding, and restoration of 2010 funding levels within five years. Unfortunately, Breaking Point was barely a campaign.

Instead of jumping on this to amplify the noise and build a real fight, the leadership kept quiet, refused to demand the reversal of all cuts, and allowed its spokespeople to hint ambiguously in the press that a Labour government would not do this.

Campaigning proposals agreed at various levels, including the national and London regional conferences, produced – nothing.

Shortly after the 2019 election was called, 120 Labour council leaders and mayors wrote to the party pressing for a clear commitment on reversing cuts. Party local government spokesperson Andrew Gwynne replied with evasive waffle. (See bit.ly/37H7Bec)

And then, bizarrely, there was the demand, in the manifesto! Why on earth didn't the leadership start arguing and campaigning for this in 2015, or at least 2018? □

Tories: prepare the fightback!



Editorial

Boris Johnson has talked of ending austerity, bolstering public services and appealing to the working class, but on all the evidence so far that is a threadbare velvet glove on an iron hand.

NHS spending is set to increase, but by nothing anywhere near what is needed to fill the shortfall from its 2010-20 cuts. The tide of privatisation will continue to roll forward.

The NHS is probably the best protected part of the public sector. The Institute of Fiscal Studies estimates that by 2024, non-NHS spending will be 14% lower than in 2010.

The provisional local government funding settlement published in December includes a small real-terms increase, but it is minimal in the context of council budgets' collapse over the last decade. Councils will continue to have to make cuts.

The Tories have said virtually nothing about social care. They have said nothing significant about the housing crisis, quietly forgetting even their manifesto promise for a small surcharge when foreign buyers of homes in England pay stamp duty.

Nothing, either, about benefits. Under Theresa May the Tories paused the roll-out of Universal Credit. Sometime soon that rollout of Universal Credit will be restarted, going alongside a range of pre-programmed cuts in the substantive underlying benefits and hitting some of society's poorest people.

The government has also effectively dropped their "promise" of a £10.50 minimum wage even in 2024, inserting a note in the background material for the Queen's Speech saying "provided economic conditions allow". The much vaunted increase to the existing minimum wage sees it still falling well short of what George Osborn promised by 2020.

The Tories' Brexit policy, geared towards a hard and possibly No-Deal exit from the EU, is likely to sharpen the squeeze.

Johnson also talks of reshaping government in a more authoritarian direction.

The Queen's Speech promised a ban on all-out strikes in transport, curbing the right to strike for one of the groups of workers that has used it most over the last year.

We have had the trailing of measures to redistribute constituency boundaries in the Tories' favour, suppress voter turnout through new ID rules, and curb the BBC. There has been speculation about forms of attacks on universities and students' right to organise.

The Tory manifesto promised to review "broader aspects of our constitution", including "the relationship between the government, parliament and the courts", and an "update" of the Human Rights Act of and administrative law.

This is the context for Johnson's henchman Dominic Cummings' appeal on his personal website for "weirdos" to apply to him for jobs and form a special phalanx loyal to the project.

If waiting for a Labour government to sort out the problems was ever an answer, it isn't now. The labour movement should rally for a fight back. □

MORE ONLINE

Daniel Randall on Trotskyism and Stalinism in the Labour Party. bit.ly/trot-LP

Keir Starmer in Stevenage: Josh Lovell reports. bit.ly/st-KS

Dale Street on the "Scottish Labour Open Letter". bit.ly/sc-O-L

Letter: "a devastating critique of the European Union". bit.ly/an-EE

Tackling the union bur

By Bob Carnegie

Trade-union organisation has always tended to centre in the better-off sections of the working class. But that tendency has been sharpened in the neoliberal era by increased inequality *within* the working class, and union organisation receding into more limited "bastions".

In Australia - and in general - trade unions have been able to hold on to a degree in some strongholds, but in my working life, 45 years now, the influence of trade unions in society has markedly decreased.

Unions have become much more bureaucratic.

Most union leaders put the trends down to the anti-union laws which have been introduced, particularly in the English-speaking countries. But I think unions have to a degree been their own disaster-makers, particularly in the blue-collar area.

They've gone down paths like big amalgamations which have made unions not stronger but more bureaucratic and remote from the membership. The bigger the union, the harder it becomes to see a union representative.

In some areas unions have still been able to get good wage outcomes. Particularly in Australia, unions have gone along a path of increasing dues, increasing the size of the bureaucracy, and sustaining that by getting quite high wage outcomes in some small sectors.

That is mirrored in the United States. In some pockets you have quite dense unionism, but surrounded by a vast sea of non-union workers who are the big majority of the blue-collar workforce in most industries.

And I don't think that has been only because changes in the mode of work in blue-collar industries. Unions themselves have failed spectacularly to deal with changes. They've taken an easy path which has led to vast areas being de-unionised.

Take the coal industry in Australia. In the mid 80s it was 100% unionised, and today it's probably only about 40%.

Australian coastal shipping used to be virtually all unionised. Today it's almost all de-unionised.

Or take the construction unions.

They represent fewer than 10% of the people who work in construction. They are strong only on some big projects, mostly in the Central Business Districts (CBDs).

I live 4km from the CBD in Brisbane. There have been eleven big construction jobs in the area in the last five years, big enough to use tower cranes, and only one of them has been a union job.

Yet in Australia we have 35% more union officials, with only 15% of employees in union membership, than we had when there was over 50% union density. That's funded by higher union dues.

A wharfie [docker] on the highest wage bracket in Australia (which probably most of them are) pays about AU\$3000 a year in

union dues. Longshoremen on the East Coast of the USA pay 5% of their wages in dues, so about US\$5000 a year.

Q. Alongside the big and very bureaucratic unions, we now have, in Britain anyway, some smaller unions which are much less bureaucratic: IWGB, UVW... And there's RAFFWU [Retail and Fast Food Workers' Union] in Australia. In some ways they parallel the IWW of over 100 years ago, but there's also a big difference. A lot of their activity is working the legal system or the industrial relations system for their members, whereas the IWW refused even to sign collective agreements.

A. I don't think there's an equation between the IWW and those small unions of today.

The great strength of the IWW, particularly in the West of the USA, is that it organised "harvest stiffs", male itinerant workers who went from place to place for harvest times.

In Australia, RAFFWU has done some great legal work, but whether it will ever get recognised by Coles or Woolworths [the two big supermarket chains] is another question. It would have to organise on the job to get thousands of members; but that isn't its orientation.

I think the legal system of industrial relations may eventually eat up the small unions too. Especially in Australia, which has the most legally jacket-bound union movement in the world.

The good legal work that is being done by some unions in the UK and Australia will, if they're not careful, be picked up from them by a big law firm. In Australia at the present time, a big law firm and an international litigation funding firm are running massive wage-theft against labour-hire firms in the coal-mining industry.

Enterprise bargaining [a highly-regulated system of collective bargaining, partially replacing the old industry-wide "awards" system, introduced from 1991] has played a major role in bureaucratising unions in Australia. Particularly in the MUA [Maritime Union of Australia], union organisers spend most of their time not organising but tied up in EBA procedures.

So the bureaucracy continues to grow, while the membership declines. This makes the unions much more dependent on being under Labour Party or social-democratic umbrellas which mean money flowing to unions in various ways.

Despite all the neoliberal talk of "deregulation", the legal frameworks for industrial relations are still there. You can sometimes use certain laws to help organisation, but in the end those legal frameworks are there to constrain the working class.

Unions continue to tumble into reliance on the legal frameworks, because they're happier with those than open class struggle. The CFMMEU in Australia says it's "lawless", but it still pays all the fines when it breaks the laws.

The ruling class will not "deregulate" in-

dustrial relations, because then it would leave itself open to the sort of huge organising drive there was in the USA in the mid and late 1930s.

Some big employers who are concerned to have a stable workforce have a sort of paternalistic strategy. They have inflated HR departments which do deal with many individual cases and tone things down.

The coal mines in Australia were the highest-paid and most militant industry in the country. When the price of coal started collapsing in the late 90s, the mining companies had a HR strategy in new mines where they would employ no-one who had a mining background and the workers were all "fly-in-fly-out" and de-unionised.

They have de-unionised not to depress wages but to gain control of the workforce. Often that control is more important to employers than the wage level. They focus a lot on getting control in what they call "choke-points" in their set-ups.

We had 100% unionisation in towage at Port Hedland [an iron-ore port in Western Australia], which is one of the biggest ports in the world by tonnage. That was completely de-unionised by BHP with the use of "partnerships" [where each tugboat worker is not an employee but a member of a "partnership" as, for example, lawyers are].

BHP paid out \$35 million in redundancies. They gave the new non-union towage operator a \$650 million line of credit.

PARTNERSHIP

Now, even if we had the most left-wing Labor government elected and the best law to restrict partnerships, you can't unionise the area again, because the workers are earning a lot more from the "partnership" set-up than they would under any union agreement.

People on the left don't want to talk about these things, but we have to.

It's a sign of the times that I was the only official in the whole CFMMEU, out of 150 or 200, to speak out publicly against the Adani coal development. The union officials are getting further and further away from the trade-unionists of tomorrow, the young people. They are becoming cheerleaders for the multinationals in the steam coal industry.

In Australia now, only 4% of people under the age of 24 are joining a union.

There are some unions like the SEIU in USA who have a conscious policy of increasing the number of officials - but mostly by hiring organisers who don't do the legal stuff, who aren't particularly highly paid, but who focus on recruiting, often among low-paid workers.

That may seem like a break from the model I'm describing, and is presented that way, but it isn't sufficiently so.

Those unions target areas where there is a high turnover of workers. They may recruit numbers, but they aren't effective enough to build a lasting union presence, or to improve the conditions of their members.

I've worked for a while with the NUW [National Union of Workers] in Australia,

which is heavily influenced by the SEIU. Their line to organisers is that you only recruit, and all the rest is dealt with by industrial officers in call centres.

Some of these problems are not new. Unions have been bureaucratised for a long time. You can read Engels in the 19th century criticising the sectionalism and exclusiveness and conservatism of the engineers' union in Britain, which was the strongest union of the day.

There is also a history of unions based among better-paid workers, or sections of those unions, taking the initiative to help organise lower-paid workers.

In the USA, for example, the IWW owed a lot to support from the Western Federation of Miners and its leaders like Big Bill Haywood. They were relatively high-paid workers but rebelled against the approach of the American Federation of Labor under Gompers, who did not want to go anywhere near organising lower-paid workers.

The funding for the great CIO organising drive in the USA in the 1930s came in the main from the miners' union of John L Lewis, who was an arch-conservative but could see that if they didn't reach out, then his union too would eventually go under.

But today, what I see is that the better-paid workers, both in their union hierarchies and in their rank and file, have become more and more closed off from other sections of the working class. They look after their own, without the wider concerns that would often characterise the best-off sections of the working class.

For example, the left unions in Australia haven't supported RAFFWU.

The good wages that higher-paid workers have gained in Australia have caused some psychological damage to them. Their concerns have often narrowed to themselves in their little workplaces, and not the working class as a whole. That is not all of them, but that has become dominant. There's been a depoliticisation of workers in the traditionally better-organised and better-paid sections of the working class.

And there's an atomisation of the working class. Workers go to work for their work hours, but apart from that they're not part of a working-class community.

I was in Chicago a while back, and talking with the long-term workers at the big Ford factory there. They earn \$125,000 a year or more. I commented that houses were pretty cheap in the area near the factory.

"We don't live here", they told me. They drove 45 minutes or an hour to work, and lived in better-off communities.

I'm told that dock workers in Denmark come to work in Mercedes and BMWs. They don't own them, and they have big debts to pay down on them, but getting a car like that is a rite of passage.

Often the big money hasn't raised workers' living standards very much, but it has been effective in marrying them into capitalist debt. I know many high-paid blue-collar workers who still live week to week. The big

Bureaucracies

car gives them status, but when something goes awry they're in trouble very quickly.

I've seen it in the oil and gas industry in Australia, and on construction projects where workers were earning spectacular money. I'd say about 25% do better, about 45% do the same, and maybe 30% end up, after the big money finishes, worse off than when they started.

That's new. There have been sections of industry where there have been booms and very high wages, and you would think those workers would come out with a very high standard of living, but mostly they don't.

In previous eras, it wasn't possible for workers to get into the levels of debt they fall into now. There were pawn shops, but that was small-scale by comparison. Now you have workers who are trapped by capitalist consumerism and running into debt to get their cars and other consumer goods.

The MUA [Maritime Union of Australia] is having its conference again at the Jupiter's Casino on the Gold Coast. In the USA, unions have their conferences in Las Vegas.

During the Oaky North dispute, in Northern Queensland, the union paid the locked-out miners \$1500 a week, in the hand, for eight or nine months. As it happened, the employer, Glencore, didn't kick the workers out of their company houses, and they still could eat in the company mess.

Or the CUB dispute by the electricians and the metalworkers, which went on for 24 weeks - the workers were all on \$1400 a week strike pay.

You can sustain that sort of thing only for small and selected groups of workers. It's not a basis for any real class struggle.

AFFORD

And, oddly, today you're more likely to get workers saying they "can't afford" to go on strike, even for one-day strikes, than you were say 40 years ago. That's true even though the workers today are better off than the workers of 40 years ago, with more access to credit to cushion hard times, and probably more likely to have other earners in their household than them.

So many workers are drawn into the financial system in a way that means, even though they have high wages, they're constantly under pressure from their debts.

On the Brisbane ferries, where the workers are average-paid, the union offered \$40 or \$50 a day strike pay. And two-thirds of the union members were claiming it from day one.

When workers get more in strike pay than the average Australian earns in work, it becomes impossible to have a big strike for any length of time.

Unions are operating on the basis that everything is fixed up by money. But it's not. It's fixed up by politics. And they don't have any politics. Or just stupid Labor Party politics.

It's true that before the 1984-5 miners' strike in Britain, lots of people - including people on the left regretful about it - were saying that the miners would never again

have a long strike. Too many of them had big mortgages.

Then they did. They struck for a whole year. But the miners still lived in coal-mining communities, in strong working-class communities.

And the level of credit and indebtedness is much higher than 35 years ago.

On an abstract level financialisation might have a different impact. The extension of credit can also give workers more flexibility: if you don't pay your mortgage for a couple of months, you won't get evicted, whereas if you don't pay your rent, you may be.

It's the combination of financialisation and atomisation that's been deadly.

The other thing is that there is less pressure to be in unions. In Queensland up to the 1980s there was the "preference clause, where preference had to be given to union members for work. Now people know they can get the same benefits as a union member without being in the union.

In a lot of areas unions have become almost sect-like.

Unions have done relatively well with teachers and nurses, but in many blue-collar areas they have done very badly. The United Auto Workers tried to win recognition in a Volkswagen factory in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Volkswagen wasn't against having a union. And still the UAW lost (nyti.ms/33wSAJU). There's something horribly, horribly wrong there.

In this era of social media - even though people can get involved in demonstrations and so on quickly via social media - there's a sense of internalisation and atomisation and alienation. Anxiety levels have gone through the roof, especially for young people. That may be effect as much as cause of the downturn of the trade-union movement, but it's a fact.

Then there's the speed of restructuring industry. In the 1930s there were big and long lay-offs, but the big factories, like the Detroit car factories, were not closed down permanently. In the recent decades whole industrial areas have been shut down. Whole industries have disappeared from some countries, or been moved. There are as many car workers in the USA now as there were in 1979, but a lot of them now are in new factories in the South.

The United Auto Workers in the USA now has only 350,000 members in it. In 1972 it had 1.1 million. But unions today are more concerned about defending their bureaucracies than about expanding their base. That's the problem.

Another example: the Japanese seafarers' union. In the 1980s it agreed to the flagging-out of 1000 Japanese ships to the Panama flag as long as the union was paid US\$500 a year for every seafarer on those ships. Without a fight they gave away twenty or thirty thousand jobs, but the Japanese seafarers' union bureaucracy was saved, because the deal gave them an income.

Amalgamations have not been about making unions stronger or more receptive to the



rank and file. They have been about making sure the bureaucracies stay together.

The bureaucracies have tried to take certain sections of workers with them by two-tier deals.

Two-tier deals are common for pension arrangements. The unions made a two-tier pension deal in the public service in Australia in the 1980s. In the USA you get two-tier deals where some workers can be on \$10 or \$15 an hour less than a longer-established worker doing the same job. In the recent General Motors settlement, the workers who have been there a long time get an \$11,000 bonus, and the new hires only get \$4,500, and it's only a 1.4% pay rise. It's a lot cheaper for a corporation to pay workers a bonus than to pay you a straight pay rise which feeds forward into 20 or 30 years of your later working life.

On the Australian waterfront, up until about 1983-4, the difference between classifications were quite small, but it has increased hugely since then.

CONTRACTING-OUT

Unions have not dealt well at all with contracting-out. That creates a different sort of two-tier workforce. In Australia, it's common to hear people saying their agreement says that the worker from a labour-hire company has to be paid the same as the directly-employed worker. But the labour-hire company's employer is the labour-hire company, and their pay and conditions are determined by the agreement at the labour-hire company, not at the main business. The only answer is to get direct employment.

There's been a decay of the core of political activists in the unions. Where the Stalinists have retained a hold, they have become social-democrats, but their whole way of thinking and acting is still Stalinistic. That expresses itself in extreme forms of bureaucracy, and it means they're unable to move with the times. They're still talking in the language of the 1950s.

In Australia, there is not the same prevalence as in Britain or in the USA of union officials being recruited straight from university or from NGOs. A lot of them still come up from the shop floor, but they come up through the Labor Party or some channel like that. To become the general secretary of a teachers' union you have to have been a teacher, to become the general secretary of a nurses' union you have to have been a nurse.

There are some exceptions, like the Australian Workers' Union; and the National Union of Workers, a union which considers itself left-wing and oriented towards organising the unorganised, has lots of officials recruited from outside.

Unions are mostly not very democratic. You can't call Unite, in Britain, a democratic union, when the only official the members vote for is the general secretary.

But I've seen problems in long-term committees on job sites. Where the same people are elected again and again over many years, the committees become a law unto themselves. They become undemocratic. They get the trips, they get the union time off. The rank and file on the shop floor tend to end up feeling it's all too hard. The committee becomes a grey-hair brigade, often trained and shaped by decades of defeat. I believe issues should go to the shop floor and be decided there.

I've become sick and tired of hearing about yesterday. I hear wharfies and seafarers in the MUA talk about the struggles they have been through, but there hasn't been a major struggle on the Australian waterfront where people have lost wages, beyond a day's pay here and a day's pay there, for over 60 years. Even in the 1998 waterfront dispute [where a major port operator tried to sack its whole workforce and replace it by non-union labour], in the end all the wharfies were paid for the duration of the dispute. That was part of the settlement.

Many of the older delegates have almost atrophied as trade-unionists.

Bob Crow adapted the saying from Millwall Football Club: "Everybody hates us, we don't care". You're not going to build a mass movement on a position like that. The West Australian branch of the MUA run on that same line. The CFMMEU in Victoria have a t-shirt which says: "God may forgive, but we won't".

That sort of thing might work for a small, tight workforce, but it won't win over the mass of young people. Statements like that are exclusionary. □

• Bob Carnegie was secretary of the Queensland branch of the Maritime Union of Australia 2015-19, and has been a trade-union activist since the 1980s, in seafaring, construction, and other industries. He talked with Martin Thomas from *Solidarity*.

Left antisemitism is a form of racism



Debate

By Angela Driver

Left antisemitism has long used tropes popularised by Stalinist “anti-Zionist” campaigns against the Jews, where “Zionist” was a proxy for “Jewish”.

This commonly includes tropes about Jews being manipulative, powerful, and wealthy, saying Jewish people tend to be imperialist capitalists, and to associate and collaborate with Nazis and the far right. This language, these tropes, group Jewish people together as a group to be hated in the same way that other forms of racism do.

In our press we have examined whether the proposal for “one state” as a solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine is also left antisemitism, and concluded that it is, as the only way to achieve it in reality is the forced destruction of the state of Israel, which most Jews have an affinity with. It is therefore a slogan that is implicitly hostile to most Jews.

In reality campaigns around Palestinian rights in general are now commonly bound up with the Stalinist “anti-Zionist” tropes outlined above.

The proposal for ending of the Israel state is one of a number of ways in which Israel, and Zionism as a nationalist idea are exceptionalised. Things are demanded of Israel that are not demanded of any other state. The left doesn’t call for any other state to be dismantled, and it does not call for wide ranging boycotts of everyone from any other state. The movement for boycotting and divestment frequently not only results in boycott of things from the Israeli state but of Jewish people in general.

Since the election of Jeremy Corbyn as the leader of the Labour Party there has been a

large increase in discussion around anti-semitism both within the left and in the broader mainstream media. A common response to accusations of antisemitism in the Labour Party has been for the left to deny the accusations and assert that they are part of a right wing (or Jewish) smear against Jeremy Corbyn. The accusations of a smear campaign lead to accusations that the “Jewish” or “Israeli lobby” have too much power in the media and politics. The old Stalinist tropes quickly emerge.

The CST conducted research into twitter activity around these issues and found that twitter activity about antisemitism, smears, and lobbies were intertwined with twitter activity supporting the Labour Party in general. Many of the accounts that were tweeting frequently about antisemitism accusations being a smear also put out clear antisemitic messages including graphics featuring the star of David.

Left antisemitism as it actually exists on the left today enmeshes ideas about Israel and Palestine, with Stalinist antisemitic tropes. There is no clear separation between these “strands” of antisemitism. It is not possible to “sanitise” “left antisemitism” by separating out such strands, one leads to the other and draws from the other.

This left antisemitism groups Jews together on the basis of perceived shared unalterable characteristics – that Jews are wealthy, powerful, manipulative and controlling people who are or collaborate with imperialists and Nazis. They are hated and feared on the basis of these shared characteristics. There is an assumption that these Jews are all the same because they are Jews, their Jewishness is seen as a race. This is racism.

Two main counter-arguments have been made:

That antisemitism is different from racism as Jews can have varying ethnicity, that antisemitism assumes Jews are powerful, that antisemitism is older than racism. These are



arguments that apply to antisemitism as a whole – not left antisemitism in particular. Yet it is widely acknowledged that some antisemitism is racist. If “far right” antisemitism is racist, despite ethnic diversity, the historical background et cetera, then why would these same features mean that left antisemitism cannot be racist?

The second argument is that by calling “left antisemitism” racist, the debate cut short as it is too polarised. People on the left do not tend to see themselves as racist even when they are being antisemitic, but neither do they see themselves as antisemitic. Recent history has shown that the label of antisemitism is also extremely polarising.

Similarly, there are people who may be racist that are worth debating and discussing things with, that does not mean that the issue is no longer racism. In either example it is the job of socialists to “call things by their right names” and be clear.

There are differing levels of racism, different types of racism, and different reasons

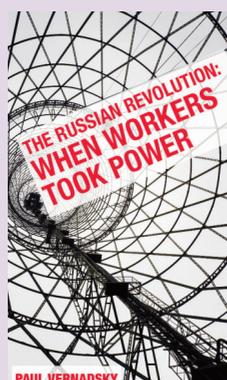
why people are racist, or behave in racist ways. It is important and useful to be aware of the complex factors around racism to engage properly and fully in the debate. Acknowledging these variations and identifying different things as racism does not stop us discussing these differences and how to deal with them.

Our press commonly repeats that “left antisemitism is not racism”. This has the effect of minimising or excusing this behaviour. We do not normally minimise prejudice in this way. We are not being clear. Left antisemitism is a cause of real distress to Jewish people in the labour movement, causing division in the class and discrediting the Labour Party. It is not our job to minimise this.

We should be clear in our press: Left antisemitism is no better than antisemitism in general, and it is racist. We need to call things by their proper names even if it causes offence among the left! □

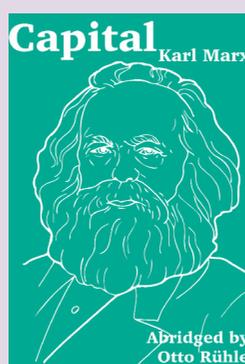


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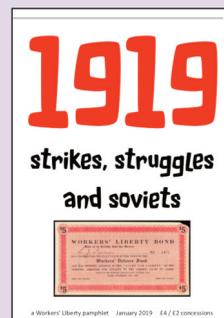
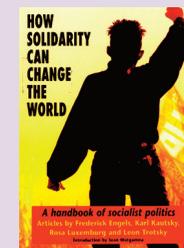
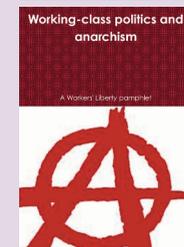
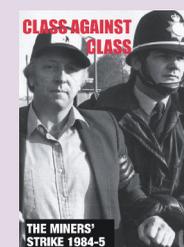
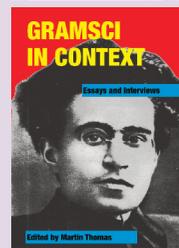
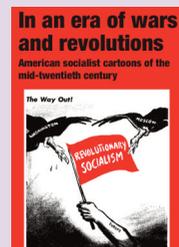
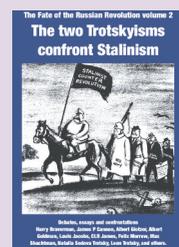
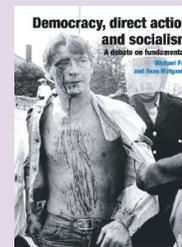
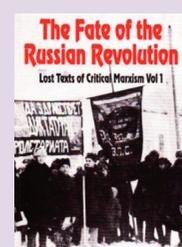


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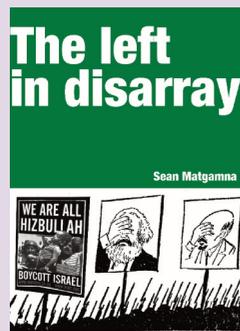
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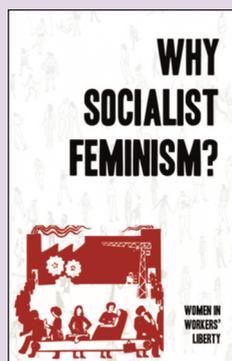
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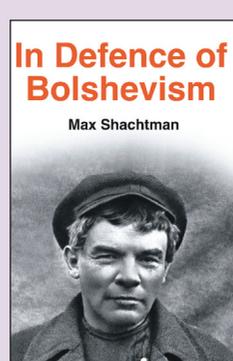


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Antisemitism as racism



Debate

By Eduardo Tovar

There is an ongoing debate in Workers' Liberty on whether political antisemitism is a form of racism. By "political antisemitism", comrades mean uncompromising hostility to any recognition of the Israeli Jews as bearers of national rights and to any Jewish communal or national sympathies with the nation state of Israel.

As Martin Thomas writes in *Solidarity* 454, "[m]odern political antisemitism consists in damning the very existence of the Israeli state (however modified) as inescapably racist and imperialist, and thus damning all Jews who fail to renounce connection to or sympathy with Israel (however critical) as agents of racism and imperialism".

Many Workers' Liberty comrades, including Thomas, argue that, whilst antisemitic, this is distinct from racist antisemitism in the sense of antipathy to Jews as a racialised ethnic group with supposedly hereditary characteristics: for example, the notion that Jews are inherently disruptive and manipulative.

To be clear, one should not take the statement that political antisemitism is not racist to mean that political antisemitism is "not as bad" as racism. After all, there are several systems or attitudes based on prejudice and discrimination that are not racism, such as homophobia and sexism, yet differentiating these from racism does not imply that they are less serious.

The main issue is conceptual: is it analytically correct or helpful to identify all forms of antisemitism as forms of racism? In other words, is antisemitism a subcategory of racism? At the risk of oversimplification, one side of the debate visualises the relationship between antisemitism and racism as a smaller circle (antisemitism) within a larger circle (racism), whilst the other side visualises the relationship as a Venn Diagram with two circles that overlap in part.

Underlying this debate is a disagreement over what racism is. Although all contributors to the debate seem to agree that the concept of racism has expanded considerably, such that it can include such phenomena as unconscious racial bias and institutional racism, some prefer not to extend it too far beyond the (scientifically false) notion that humanity is biologically divided into distinct, identifiable races.

In other words, some contributors to the debate believe that it is more analytically correct or helpful to identify as "racist" only those forms of antisemitism that posit or presuppose the existence of a Jewish "race" with hereditary traits.

Those arguing for conceptual separateness on grounds of accuracy and usefulness also point to the manners in which antisemitism operates differently from general racism. For

instance, the Christian antisemitism that sees Jews as "Christ killers" not only predates "scientific" race theory, but (unlike the race-theoretical version of antisemitism) considers it possible for Jews to "save" themselves through conversion to Christianity.

Moreover, antisemitism has what the Marxist theorist Moishe Postone terms a "pseudo-emancipatory" quality. That is, instead of "punching down" at a less powerful group seen as needing to stay in their socially inferior position (as is the case with anti-black racism), antisemites typically view themselves as "punching up" at a group that is already powerful. In other words, the recurring motif in antisemitism is that of the Jews as the shadowy puppet masters behind the scenes.

Related to, but distinct from, this conceptual issue is the issue of the political implications of classifying all antisemitism as racism. Several comrades have expressed concern that to do so would counterproductively label all people who hold politically antisemitic views, but not conscious racist or religious antipathy towards Jews, as "racists". This in turn would risk giving the impression that we are accusing them of a heinous crime and have the effect of closing down instead of opening conversations that could sway their views (or so the argument goes).

Increasingly, my view is that antisemitism, including its "political" version, is a form of racism, albeit a highly peculiar one, and that most issues people identify with this classification simply reflect the complexities of racism as a social phenomenon.

PRESCRIPTIVIST

Firstly, there is the simple problem of becoming unduly and unhelpfully prescriptivist.

Whilst biological racism was what most people understood to be racism several decades ago, this is no longer the case in either lay or social-scientific circles. As such, continuing to insist that attitudes and behaviour that we view as antisemitic are "not racist" unless they, by express words or strong implication, rest on the acceptance of race theory risks sounding antiquated at best or outright confusing at worst.

Secondly, even when "scientific" racial classifications enjoyed their widest mainstream acceptance, the idea of "race" was never wholly about supposed biological differences: there was always a strong cultural component to the drawn lines of distinction. Indeed, much of the later theorising of biological races served to justify pre-existing notions of civilisational hierarchy by ascribing a "biological" basis to the supposed cultural inferiority of other peoples.

One sees this complex interplay between the "hereditary" and cultural aspects of racism in how those in the UK arguing against European free movement tend to single out Central and Eastern European migrants (e.g. Poles, Bulgarians) as a threat. Whilst most people who express such views probably do not adhere to the notion of biological race, it is significant that they disproportionately demonise migrants from Slavic nations.

For many years, Slavs were viewed as racially inferior, including by the Nazis, and this race-theoretical sheen stemmed from (and served to give "scientific" justification for) much older notions of Slavic cultural inferiority. Whilst only a conscious bigot would today argue that the Slavic nations are inferior civilisations and invoke "biological" explanations for this ostensible inferiority, people's unconscious views of Slavic mi-

grants are still bound to be shaped at least in part by the legacy of anti-Slav racism. Moreover, wanting to introduce tighter border controls on such migrants inevitably means discriminating between people, often in a physically violent manner, based on their birthplace and descent. The position might not be racist in its intentions, but it is racist in its implications.

If in these circumstances we can accept in principle that a position has racist implications, even if the person who holds that position does not believe in biological "races", then I believe it is perfectly possible to adopt a similar stance on political antisemitism.

Ultimately, what makes political antisemitism objectionable is that, in its implications and consequences, it discriminates against an ethnic-national group by characterising their national self-determination and their feelings of national-communal belonging as uniquely illegitimate and wholly undeserving of sympathy.

To me, this is a form of racism. Nevertheless, it does not follow that, as a matter of approach, we would simply denounce people with politically antisemitic views as "racists".

Like with the example of border controls and Central and Eastern European migrants, we can patiently talk such people through the logical consequences of their lines of thought. If people already accept that they can have, for example, unconscious biases when dealing with black people despite a conscious moral-political commitment to black liberation, then in principle they can accept that they might have unconscious biases when dealing with matters pertaining to Israeli and/or Diaspora Jews even if they are sincere in their commitment to fighting antisemitism.

Likewise, I am ultimately not convinced that classifying antisemitism as a form of racism risks shutting down conversations prematurely because it means labelling people as "racists" when they would find such a label horrifying. After all, most people consider it no better to be labelled "an antisemite".

All this brings me to the broader analytical point about whether it is correct or helpful to consider antisemitism a form of racism, given the ways in which antisemitism tends to manifest differently from general racism or to proceed from different underlying assumptions. Whilst I understand why there would be concerns about obscuring the distinctive characteristics of antisemitism, I worry that maintaining the conceptual gap between antisemitism and general racism means obscuring important links between them.

Our comrade Robert Fine, who sadly passed away in June 2018, dedicated a large part of his later academic career to reestablishing what he felt were lost connections between the study of racism and the study of antisemitism. For this purpose, he co-founded the European Sociological Association's research network for "Ethnic Relations, Racism, and Antisemitism" in 2008.

In 2012, he and fellow sociologist Glyn Cousin co-authored an article in the scholarly journal *European Societies* called "A Common Cause".^[1] In this article, Fine outlined his belief that the tendency to keep the analysis of antisemitism and the analysis of racism separate (what he termed their "methodological separatism") has inclined us to overlook how the rise of the modern nation-state simultaneously entailed a new drive to classify non-European peoples as racially inferior on a "scientific" basis and a renewed drive to exclude Jews from the polity.

In other words, (a) the emergence of race-theoretical justifications for colonialism in the

early stages of the modern era and (b) a resumption of mass expulsions and forced conversions of Jews accompanied each other within the newly formed European nation states. In Fine's view, this is because the modern-era project of constructing homogenous nation states in Europe gave rise to new conditions of vulnerability for "aliens" to these nation states, both within and beyond their borders; in both the "core" and the "periphery" of the ascendant colonial empires.

It has also led us to miss how several influential theorists of racism, including WEB Du Bois and Frantz Fanon, reassessed their understandings of racism in light of the deep ethical and experiential connections they perceived between the Jewish struggle against antisemitism and their own immediate struggle against anti-black racism.

Indeed, Du Bois' visit to the Warsaw Ghetto directly prompted him "to deepen his understanding of racism as a form of 'human hate' capable of 'reaching all sorts of people' of all kinds of skin colours" (Cousin and Fine 2012: 170).

Lamentably, Fine passed away before he could come to anything resembling a complete standpoint on whether antisemitism is a particular form of racism or a distinct, but related, phenomenon. It would have been fascinating to hear him contribute to the current debate. Still, Fine's writings have made me far more conscious of the levels of understanding we might inadvertently hinder if we fail to reflect seriously on the family resemblance between antisemitism and general racism.

In my view, characterising antisemitism as a subcategory of racism does not necessarily mean obliterating all differences between them. A diverse group of phenomena can possess traits in common that justify us grouping them together whilst remaining conscious of their significant variations. The fact that we recognise both Siberian Tigers and domestic cats as felines does not render us unable to notice or appreciate their distinct characteristics. Nor does it render the category of "feline" unhelpful.

What matters is whether the characteristics the varied phenomena in question share can help us comprehend them. In the case of antisemitism and general racism, I believe they do. □

[1] Glynis Cousin and Robert Fine, "A Common Cause: Reconnecting the Study of Racism and Antisemitism", *European Societies*, vol. 14(2), 2012, pp. 166-185



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Unpicking “left antisemitism”



Debate

By Martin Thomas

Documentation such as that most recently collated by the Jewish Labour Movement shows that there is a lot of straightforward, old-fashioned, ethnic-prejudice antisemitism in the Labour Party, including in the left.

The substantive question in our debate here, though, is this: is there a strand of distinctively-left antisemitism generated from an “anti-imperialism of fools” rather than from ethnic prejudice? A distinctively-left antisemitism which ends up providing nourishment for ethnic prejudice, but is not the same thing?

My argument is that there is.

In previous writing I’ve said some of the trouble here is the meaning of the word “racism” becoming more and more diffuse. On reflection, that’s not quite right. Most people still use “racism” as defined, for example, in Merriam-Webster: “a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race... racial prejudice or discrimination”.

It is within the left that usage has changed. That has been by way of what was a fringe usage becoming more influential. The 1969 IS-USA dissection of the split in SDS recently dug out and republished on the Workers’ Liberty website, bit.ly/s-sds, shows fifty years ago a workerist-Maoist faction in SDS being denounced by its rivals (different-Maoist) as “racist” because it had a sectarian attitude to black nationalism.

What’s changed on the British left is that sort of Maoist usage becoming widespread in our little corner of society, to the point where almost all evils or imagined evils are targeted as “racism” rather than capitalism.

We have a choice whether to adopt that niche usage. Not adopting it enables us to speak more precisely and also more comprehensibly to a broader public.

Some have argued that we should call left antisemitism “racism” but explain that left antisemites aren’t necessarily “racists”.

The model, I think, for this “racism without racists” is what has come to be called “institutional racism”. An institution can discriminate against ethnic groups through neglects, passive accommodation to inherited social biases, etc., even apart from or independently of those who run the institution being individually, “ideologically”, racist.

It’s something like the gender pay gap continuing for structural reasons even when employers are not individually, “ideologically”, misogynistic or even sexist. Or immigration controls being functionally racist even when explicitly designed to be non-racist, like Canada’s. Or Brexit having racist consequences even though many pro-Brexiteers are not racist.

But that “racism without racists” cannot apply here. Left antisemitism is not about institutional mechanisms which deny Jews better-paid jobs, or get them disproportionately harassed by cops. It’s all about speeches, social-media posts, slogans - “ideological” stuff.

Gender pay gaps exist even where employers are not sexist, but someone who advocates, as an “ideological” stance, that women positively *should* be paid less than men for comparable work, *is* sexist.

To say “absolute anti-Zionism” or boy-

cotting Israel, are flat-out “forms of racism”, is to apply the term “racism” to *ideologies*.

There is no meaningful distinction, however subtle, between “advocate of an ideology which is racism” and “racist”.

Our general approach in polemics should be, as Gramsci advised, to take our opponents at their strongest rather than their weakest.

Take an SWPer, for example, who is convinced that her or his “absolute anti-Zionism” is just militant anti-racist opposition to an imperialistic political creed. We try to explain that their form of “absolute anti-Zionism” leads, like it or not, into comprehensive hostility to Jews on grounds of their historically-determined reflex identification (however critical) with Israel. We don’t deny the sincerity of their anti-racism.

DECEIVING THEMSELVES

In one of the earlier texts in our *Two Nations, Two States* pamphlet, we argued that SWP-type leftists were deceiving themselves.

“We are not Nazi-style racists, or any sort of racists; we are not against Jews; some of us are Jews, and would be or are persecuted by Nazi-style racists; and we are not Christian bigots hostile to Jews - ergo, we can’t be antisemites!”

“But you are comprehensively hostile to almost all Jews! You want to destroy the Israeli Jewish state and the Israeli Jewish nation. A sizeable part of the left considers Israel to be imperialist-racist evil incarnate, deserving of nothing but fire and sword in a holy war! The left now is in the same moral position vis-à-vis individual Jews as the medieval Christians who could say honestly that they wanted to save the Jews from themselves. They wanted to convert them.

“They loved and tried to save the sinners, while hating the sin. The obdurate sinners in the dungeons and fires of the persecution probably didn’t find that much compensation.

“The ‘anti-Zionist’ left thinks of itself not as persecuting but as the opposite; not as hate-mongering, but as promoting love and solidarity with the oppressed; not as murderous but a protest against murder and a crusade to stop it.

“And yet... and yet... at its heart it proposes policies which amount to the murder of a nation, a nation which arose out of the ashes of the greatest mass murder in recorded history. And yet it does preach hate for a whole people, for a nation and for its diaspora of supporters around the world who will not ‘see reason’. And yet, it does side with the potential oppressors of that nation.

“Honest and uninhibited people, like Uri Davis [a fervently anti-Israeli Israeli, sometime resident in Britain, who has now converted to Islam and joined Fatah], face this straight: they say that antisemitism does not matter now. Implicitly they say, as you do, what one of the world’s biggest neo-Trotskyist groupings (the “Morenists”) says explicitly: ‘Today Arab racism against Israel is progressive’. Implicitly, you say the same”.

(Open letter by Sean Matgamna to Tony Cliff, 1988).

This argument does not say there is a Chinese wall between political left antisemitism and racism. It doesn’t say flat-out that left antisemitism is “not racism”. Rather, it tries to show the SWP-types by reason that the political position they adopt out of sincere and fervent anti-racism produces conclusions bordering on or indistinguishable from racism.

It doesn’t say to political left antisemites:



we dislike your ideas, but they’re not that bad, they’re “not racism”. It says: we understand and accept your anti-racist commitment. But think about the logic...

It is possible to be sharp against left antisemitism while understanding the sincerity of the SWP-types’ anti-racism. Proof: we’ve done that for 35 years or more.

It’s odd that our polemics since the 1980s are now accused of being “soft” on left antisemitism. Over the decades, it’s been much more common for our people to complain that Sean Matgamna, in particular, who has written most on the issue, has been too harsh against the left antisemites. Weirdly, some of the comrades who now insist on a blanket label of “racism” for *all* left antisemitism have *also* objected to articles dissecting the “rights-through-genetic-inheritance” (or “racist-in-quote-marks”) logic of some core “absolute anti-Zionist” arguments as too harsh, exaggerated, etc.

It’s good that comrades are keen to be more argumentative against left antisemitism.

I worry, though, that the bland equation, left antisemitism is racism - especially when coupled with startled rejection of specific dissection of “racist” elements in standard “absolute anti-Zionist” arguments - will not lead to more assertive argument.

Instead it can lead to the opposite: us privately reassuring ourselves of our anti-racist virtue and telling ourselves that it’s hardly worth trying to argue with SWP-type left antisemites, that there’s no common ground or “good faith” to start from.

We deny the plain fact, that those SWP-types are sincere anti-racists, who will be shocked if we can convince them that the arguments on Israel which they thought to be anti-racist actually have antisemitic implications, as we ourselves were shocked when we realised the same thing back in the mid-1980s.

What would make sense of the “left antisemitism is racism” argument, and make it more than a quarrel about words, is the view argued by some that the left-wing “absolute anti-Zionist” derive their hostility to Israel from an “ethnic” hostility to Jews, rather than vice versa.

History tells otherwise. Old-fashioned “ethnic” antisemitism still exists (including among people who think themselves “left”), but it has diminished since the 1940s. The recent surveys show antisemitism is stronger among the old than among the young. Re-

cently I talked with Dave Rich, an expert on antisemitism in Britain, after interviewing him for the paper. His picture was that until recently Jews in Britain had assumed that antisemitism was gradually becoming a marginal phenomenon of the far right (and some sections of the far left): what alarmed them was its apparent sudden re-emergence near the “top” of politics.

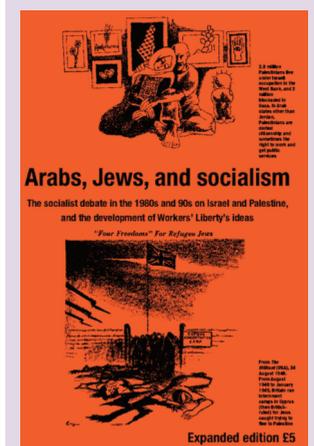
In the 1950s, 60s, and even 70s, being against antisemitism was a constitutive, elemental part of being “broadly” left-wing. It was taken for granted that “Zionist” groups like the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen were an important part of anti-fascist activity. From 1945 through to 1974, there were between 20 and 35 Jews among Labour MPs, and until 1970 none or almost none among Tory MPs.

Far-left root-and-branch hostility to Israel started to become a force in the 1970s, and escalated in the 1980s, at the same time as old-fashioned “ethnic” antisemitism was declining. The story is told in our book *The Left in Disarray*, pp.158-161 and pp.231-244.

Among the “returner” (from the 1980s) layer in the Labour Party, the antisemitic implications of that absolute anti-Zionism have worked themselves through and given new life to remnants of the old “ethnic” antisemitism.

That has been the sequence, historically. Not the other way round, with the old-fashioned, “domestic”, mostly-Tory ethnic prejudice against Jews surging within the British left and bit-by-bit spilling over into hostility to Israel. □

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The Crimean Tatars, Crimea, and Turkey



By Melek Maksodoglu



Melek Maksodoglu

Conditions are bad for the Crimean Tatar community in Crimea, under Russian rule since Putin annexed Crimea in 2014.

No Crimean Tatar organisations are able to operate. The sixteen Crimean Tatar language schools have all been closed. The Crimean Tatar library has been shut down. The Crimean Tatar university (Tavriva) has had to move to Kiev.

The Crimean Tatar TV channel has been taken over by the Russian authorities. Of the three Crimean Tatar newspapers, two have been shut down, and one is now run by the Russian authorities.

There have been lots of kidnappings and disappearances of activists. For example, three years ago Ervin Ivraginov, a member of the Crimean Tatar parliament which operated within Crimea when Crimea was part of Ukraine, had traffic police stop his car. He was dragged into a van and has not been heard of since.

Another Crimean Tatar activist was kidnapped at the time of the staged referendum in 2014, and his body was dumped, with the eyes gouged out, in the Crimean parliament building.

There are at least 183 Crimean Tatar political prisoners in jail, mostly still waiting for trial.

An organisation called "Our Children" campaigns for 186 Crimean Tatar children whose fathers are in jail or have disappeared.

The everyday religious practice of Islam

(most Crimean Tatars are Muslim) is now branded as terrorism.

Crimean Tatar monuments have been destroyed. The Crimean Tatar graveyards levelled by Stalin when he deported the entire Crimean Tatar population during World War 2, in May 1944, have been demolished again.

The Hansaray, or Khan's Palace, in Bakhceseray (between Sevastopol and Simferopol) is being "renovated" in a way which destroys it. Even Stalin left the Hansaray intact, because it was celebrated in a famous poem by Pushkin, "The Fountain of Bakhceseray".

Between 20,000 and 50,000 Crimean Tatars have fled, mostly to Kiev, and there are only about 300,000 left in Kiev. We estimate that maybe 500,000 Russians have been moved into Crimea, to change the demographic balance.

Putin is not deporting the Crimean Tatars as Stalin did in 1944, but he is forcing them to leave. Families are divided when young people are able to flee but leave the rest of their families behind.

The Crimean Tatars were allowed back into Crimea, after Stalin's deportation, only from 1989. From then until the mid-90s, many Crimean Tatars had to live in tents, aban-

doned shops, railway carriages, and similar. The Crimean Parliament was set up to negotiate with the Ukrainian government (after Ukraine separated from Russia in 1991) for re-housing, and on the whole that worked. Until Russia's annexation in 2014, conditions were improving.

About five million Crimean Tatars live in Turkey. The only other country with a comparable number is Romania. Those Crimean Tatar communities originate with people fleeing the expansion of the Tsarist empire in the 19th century, mostly first to Romania, and then some of them from Romania to Turkey.

In Turkey, the Crimean Tatar community is concentrated round big cities - Ankara, parts of Istanbul, and Eskişehir. Generally it is a community with above-average qualifications, and more secular than the average in Turkey. Eskişehir has two universities, one of them, through its distance courses, one of the largest universities in the entire world.

Most Crimean Tatars in Turkey speak only Turkish. A large part of the population of Turkey is minorities of one sort or another - Circassian, Bosnian, etc. - but we don't suffer discrimination as the Kurds do. I remember as a child at school having to declare that I was "proud to be Turkish", and in that I saw no contradiction with my Crimean Tatar identity.

The Crimean Tatar language is not available in schools in Turkey, but Crimean Tatar cultural associations, dances, food, and commemorations (taking black flowers to the Russian embassy on the anniversary of the mass deportation, displaying the Crimean Tatar flag on Flag Day, 26 June) flourish.

The new disadvantaged minority in Turkey is the Syrian refugees, officially three million of them, maybe in fact five million.

I remember returning to Turkey via Syria

after studying in Jordan, and then the whole Turkish-Syrian border was mined. The landmines have been cleared now, and refugees move freely.

At the start, many people welcomed the refugees and wanted to help them, but now there is a lot of hostility, and in fact more from secular people than from the religious.

The Turkish government provides food allowances and health care, and some accommodation in refugee camps, but not enough. But the refugees are banned from working.

They live mostly around Istanbul, in poor conditions, working illegally in construction, on farms, etc. There's high unemployment, and Turkish people, including Kurdish-Turkish people in Istanbul, are becoming increasingly resentful.

After five years in Turkey, the refugees can apply for Turkish citizenship. A good number must have their five years now. I don't know how many have applied for citizenship.

The government has started deporting some of the Syrian refugees to the areas of Syria which the Turkish army has taken.

The political parties are not saying much, partly because of the level of repression. The HDP [a leftish party backing Kurdish rights] spoke out well against the Turkish invasion of Syria, but since then many of its leaders have been jailed.

Ekrem İmamoğlu, a member of the CHP [the old Kemalist party, and the biggest anti-Erdogan party] won the mayoral election in Istanbul in June. But his attitude to the Syrian refugees is even worse than the government's. He has said they should all be sent back to Syria. □

• Melek Maksodoglu talked with Martin Thomas from *Solidarity*.

Again on the hijab in primary schools



By David Pendleton

I want to respond to Ben Tausz's contribution to the debate on whether to ban the hijab in primary schools (*Solidarity* 527).

He quotes me as saying "I do not think that you need to have a solution (of how a ban might be enforced) to support a ban".

The problem is, I didn't say that. I said that I didn't think you had to have an agreed solution to what the consequence of breaking the ban might be.

What, Ben, should the consequence be for those who resist our programme for renationalisation? What should the consequence be for those who avoid higher taxes on the rich? How would you enforce them?

I think it is possible to be in favour of those things without having an absolute blueprint of enforcement and sanctions which everyone agrees to. Despite this I have written more, much more, on how a ban in primary schools may be implemented than those who are arguing against it have written on the alternatives.

If they believe we are winning on this issue, or this issue doesn't need dealing with, then they should say so. If not, they have to do better than simply vacuous calls for cam-

paigning and education.

Next Tausz ventures that he doesn't think teachers instructing children to take off the hijab sounds very liberatory.

"Compulsion for one set of authority figures - parents - is simply added to with rival compulsion from another authority figure".

I am sorry if it hurts Tausz's sensibilities, but I use my authority as a primary teacher to counter all sort of reactionary views. Indeed, when I introduced the new Sex Education (RSE) programme to my school, many children came to me (almost certainly after discussions with their parents) to say they didn't want to attend. In Ben's world I shouldn't have forced the issue.

SANCTION

Further, I wonder what he thinks the sanction should be for children who are withdrawn from RSE? Maybe we shouldn't fight for compulsory RSE lessons until we can give a clear answer about to how to enforce it.

Tausz says in my proposal "the child is singled out for discipline" - despite him quoting from my letter where I wrote proposing additional lessons "because it was a sanction which didn't punish the child, but that the parents or community who were forcing the child to wear the hijab would likely be opposed to".

Then Ben throws in a red herring, wondering how we would enforce it if school uniforms were abolished. I presume that even he

would some guidelines on the clothes children could wear? Swastika t-shirt? Violent pornography hoodie? I would ban religious clothing that represent the subjugation and shaming of girls and women.

Tausz tells us "there simply is no quick or easy fix here". Sadly, he doesn't even give us a difficult and slow fix - unless you consider the phrase, "a long battle, conducted mainly on the ideological front" to be a solution.

Ironically for someone who is so keen to hear the precise details of how we would enforce the ban he gives no details at all of his "long battle, conducted mainly on the ideological front". Meanwhile, children as young as five years old wear symbols of their second-class status, lest they raise predatory sexual feelings of a man. We stand on the side lines whilst our sisters like Sadia Hameed (*Solidarity* 529) and Maryam Namazie (*Solidarity* 526) bravely raise the call for a ban.

Next, our ideological warrior says "Pendleton has responded that it is not him, but the religious reactionaries, who have chosen this terrain. This is straightforwardly false, unless Pendleton believes that there are no other prominent and serious examples of religious bigotry in society at present".

I respond what symbol and tool of religious bigotry is being inflicted on children, where they have no control over it, in such a widespread way? Which symbol of religious bigotry is a symbol of and assertion of oppression of girls and women? Which symbol sexualises children as young as five? It is also

apparent that the girls wearing the hijab are getting younger and the numbers are increasing. So, yes, I reassert that reactionaries have chosen the terrain.

Ben makes a most erroneous comparison with our approach to antisemitism and the Israeli state. The real analogy would be that, were we to follow Ben's advice, we would cede campaigning for a Palestinian state now for fear of chiming in with the antisemites. Instead of that proposal a long battle mainly on the ideological front would be indicated. I hope no-one follows this logic.

Tausz's final flourish is to claim that banning the hijab in primary school's "is politically anti-Muslim". I think not. I think it protects girls from Muslim backgrounds and refuses to allow them to be treated differently from other girls. It is anti-Islamic reaction, as we are anti the encroachment of any organised religion (particularly conservative variants) in to public spaces. I think anyone who delays addressing this issue to a non-specified "long battle on the ideological front" has given up on the immediate advocacy of women's rights and the protection of children. If you take that line you fatally undermined feminism, leaving it as an aspiration for a future, better world.

Worse you accept the treating of girls from Muslim background in this way, when you would not accept it for white girls from Christian backgrounds. That smacks of liberal white racism. □

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.

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- 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.
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- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

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Getting hold of the union



By Emma Rickman

During my first week at the plant I found GMB dispute letters laid out all over the control room desks. The letters summarised the national sickness absence dispute with Veolia and the proposed ballot for strike/action short of a strike taking place that month.

The Unite rep, R, stood on a step in front of the pit window, and everyone in the control room stopped work to listen to him.

"Me and the other union reps have discussed it. We're not happy with Veolia's national sickness policy — specifically the ability of HR to overrule the opinions of local line managers. There's no flexibility; genuine illness will mark you for disciplinary action, and there's nothing your manager can do about it."

"We're being punished for bad habits down in one depot," said G

After the briefing, I asked R which union I should join.

"We're Unite, but the fitters are all about to retire. Everyone's in GMB — you should join GMB." He had a very serious face on. "Also I didn't tell you that — it's against Veolia policy to do union recruitment

during working hours. Can only do it on your breaks — pah!"

A year later, I ring the regional office

"This is GMB region, how can I help?"

"Hello, I'm wondering if you can put me in touch with my rep and branch? I've been a member for over a year but had no contact from them — I give my name, rep's name and workplace details

"Ah that'll be MH's branch...I'll just find out when the branch is held, do you mind if I put you on hold for a minute?"

"No problem"

Music plays. I stand for five minutes, tapping my feet on the workshop floor.

"Hello?"

"Yes hi. Any luck?"

"I'm afraid I wasn't able to find out about your branch, but I tell you what I'll do — I'll send an email to you and MH asking him to get in touch with you, and he can send you the branch information. Can I just confirm your email address?"

She runs through the address and I confirm it.

"Before you go..." I interject "This is the third time I've rung asking for branch meeting details, and I've never received an email from you or MH — I'm sure you're very busy in your office, but I'd appreciate some communication from MH, in any form."

"Oh really? That's not good... I'll

look into it for you..."

"Thank you"

Later that month, I'm in the control room with N and G. The operations manager comes in with a woman dressed in office clothes, and introduces her to everyone.

"This is the new Domestic Waste manager at Lumley St."

In the chat with N and G, the new manager mentions that one of her goals is "to get some flexibility on this twenty-minute drop business."

"That's music to our ears," says N "If you can achieve it."

Once the managers have left, I ask them about it.

"The bin wagon drivers have an agreement with Veolia," says G "Negotiated by the unions, that they will only wait in line to tip at the ERF for twenty minutes, no longer. After that, they leave the site, whether the wagons are empty or not."

"They drive the wagons back to the depot full of waste, which can get left overnight — they'll be disciplined for that." N continues "Or the depot have to hire in temps, or drivers on overtime pay, just to empty wagons. The drivers are hired to do two tips, but they won't work past 2pm. If there's a queue at the ERF, we often can't get them through in time, even with OMs cleaning apron constantly."

"What are drivers paid?" I ask, "D'you know what time they start,

what contracts they're on?"

"I don't," G replies "I know that they've been on strike for this though. The thing is, if drivers strike, waste builds up all over the city. Most of them have second jobs now, they can't stay past 2pm because they've got other work to get to, kids to pick up, etc."

N "They have everyone over a barrel. It's like the rail unions, there's no flexibility."

G "That's partly why we're in a different union to them. The GMB was supposed to bring all the different branches together, stronger and unified and all that — but I don't want to be in a branch negotiating on the same terms as that lot. I'd be really happy to join if we could guarantee *separate* negotiations. Actually, just a conversation would be good. They've never actually sat down and talked to us — no-one can ever get hold of that MH."

Me "What union are you guys in? You'd probably have everyone over a barrel just threatening to strike."

N "Community. I don't think I could ever do that...we'd have plenty to negotiate with before it ever got to that stage. Don't think that'd be right." □

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

A letter to Labour Transformed

Dear Labour Transformed:

Your mailing on 21 December, after your first gathering on 14 December, told us: "The next meeting will take place on January 25... [it] will not be open to members of pre-existing democratic-centralist revolutionary organisations".

In plain English: you want to ban AWL members from the discussion.

Leave aside for now exactly how to define "democratic centralist". Stalinist abuse of that term has complicated debate.

Some of you have defined what you want LT to be as "democratic centralist". It's not the very idea of an all-weather, all-fronts, cohesive, effective socialist group, capable of prompt collective action, that you dislike: you just want your meeting, and your incipient group, to have no cohesive collective in it other than your inner circle.

You want to be able to draw in scattered individuals with whom you have contact through your work in the backrooms of The World Transformed, but who now may have interest in activist organisation (beyond TWT's efforts to organise debates and forums and so on), and make sure they find a single "faction" proposing worked-out ideas to them, namely yourselves.

All the statements so far from LT, including this one about excluding AWL, come from a shadowy inner circle, self-appointed and anonymous. It's an even worse form of "centralism" than in some bureaucratically-organised "left groups" where at least the members know who's imposing the decisions on them and usually have some right to vote on who should be that inner circle.

Most left-wing activists think that the left groups are too divided. And with some reason. AWL's response has been to seek collaboration with other left groups wherever we can, and dialogue where the disagreements are too big for us to work together.

We've had mergers with other groups, we helped initiate the Socialist Alliance of 1999-2002, we constantly have ad hoc collaborations. AWL exists as a separate group not because some inner circle first decided it wanted "its own" group, then worked out ways to justify the separation, but in large part because our forerunners were expelled from other groups.

You've put out a set of "Foundational Principles". We agree with the broad drift, but then they're so vague and skimpy that almost any leftist would agree with them.

(Apart, maybe, from the clause that says "we are Labour Party members". That's unclear. Does it mean an orientation to the Labour Party, or does it mean that leftists "auto-excluded" from Labour in 2015 and 2016, for being leftists, are excluded from LT too?)

We've heard from Labour for a Socialist Europe that it contacted you to ask if you'd back a protest at the French embassy to support the French strikes. You replied that you were "not in a position" to take a decision on that.

Your political basis is not enough to equip you to decide even on whether to back the French strikes — let alone to deal with tricky questions in the left like Brexit or anti-semitism or the current US-Iran conflict.

You talk grandly about "a mass-membership organisation, drawn from the rank and file of the Labour movement [with] a collective political vision". But to have a political vision you need... politics. You can develop adequate politics only by learning from the existing stock of ideas, and debating and discussing alternatives. Not by assuming that you have a miraculous ability to develop "new ideas" off the top of your heads if only you can erect solid enough shields against having to debate them with others.



On 14 December we made a proposal which could allow people from TWT to turn fruitfully to ongoing activism: to initiate a confederal organisation of the Labour left, enabling the various Labour-left "issue campaigns" (Labour Campaign for Free Movement, Free Our Unions, Labour for a Socialist Europe, Labour Homelessness Campaign, and others) to work together on a consensus basis to defend and improve left-wing policies from 2019 and push the Labour Party into action on them.

That would make sense. To bar the doors and telling your invitees: you are now a new "left group" with us as your leadership, follow us! — that makes no sense and is unlikely to "work" even in the most minimal way. □



SWR guards begin new ballot

By Ollie Moore

Rail union RMT has begun re-balloting its members on South Western Railway (SWR) for further industrial action to defend the role of the guard. SWR guards concluded a month-long strike on 1 January, and are now re-balloting

as the six-month mandate of their current ballot, stipulated by anti-trade union legislation, has now expired.

The new ballot closes on 23 January. If it returns a majority and meets the required thresholds, SWR guards could take further action. No direct negotiations have been held between SWR and RMT

since November.

Elsewhere, RMT members on the Tyne and Wear Metro struck on 20-21 December, in a dispute over rostering arrangements. Further strikes were planned for 6-7 January, but have been suspended after negotiations with Nexus, the company which operates the system, resumed. □

Preparing a counter-offensive

By John Moloney

The key thing the union must consider now, in light of the general election, is how we prepare against a likely onslaught against both unions in general, and our members specifically as government workers.

Dominic Cummings has talked about a “radical reshaping” of the civil service. Whatever the precise detail of that reshaping will be, it’s inevitable that it will impact on our members.

It’s common under new governments that some departments will merge, and new ones may form; that’s normal practice, but a restructure in the hands of a government like this, and led by someone like Cummings, will not be good for workers.

We need to meet any employers’ offensive with a counter-offensive.

Our National Executive Committee [NEC] meets next week, and will be discussing national strategy over a number of issues, including pay, our redundancy scheme, and pensions.

On pay, we have policy for a renewed dispute on this in 2020, so we’ll be discussing the best way to build towards that. On the redundancy scheme, the last government attempted to reform this but eventually backed off. If the new government makes a new attempt, that could also be a trigger for a dispute.

There may also be a new fight on pensions. Both the employer and the union is looking at the implications of the Fire Brigades Union’s legal victory, in which a court ruled that changes to the fire service pension scheme were discriminatory. Our scheme is currently “over-funded”, with more going in than is being taken out, which means the employers should reduce our em-

ployee contributions.

They had previously agreed to do so by 2%, effectively a 2% pay increase, but are now saying they may need the surplus funds to pay compensation based on the FBU victory. We are demanding they implement the reduction by 1 April. If they don’t that may also trigger a dispute.

Various campaigns and disputes involving outsourced workers are also continuing. In Merseyside, cleaners in HMRC offices in Liverpool and Bootle have been striking for living wages, and we’re looking to spread that dispute to other areas where the outsourced contractor ISS has contracts.

Over all these issues, our NEC needs to discuss how to move forward. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of PCS, writing in a personal capacity.

Uni workers look to spread strike

By Ollie Moore

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) at a total of 36 universities will vote on whether to take industrial action over pay, pensions, and working conditions, in a ballot that runs until 28 January. This includes institutions that failed to hit the required thresholds in a previous ballot, which led to workers at 60 universities striking for a week in November 2019.

In some areas, activists have been visiting other workplaces local to them to help with the ballot campaign.

A recent sectoral conference of

the union voted for a further two weeks of strikes, commencing on 20 February. If the new and rerun ballots meet the thresholds, workers at those institutions could join the strikes.

Negotiations between the UCU and the University and Colleges Employers Association continued on 17 December. Bosses have remained intransigent, particularly on pay, saying they have “no mandate to reopen discussions” on their pay offer.

Some rank-and-file activists in UCU are arguing for future negotiations to be conducted transparently, with live-streaming to all union members. Ensuring mass

democratic scrutiny over union officials during elections has often happened at high pitches of struggle, for example during the Solidarnosc movement when union leaders’ negotiations with the Polish Stalinist state were broadcast over tannoy to workers in the occupied Gdansk shipyard.

But even in moments of less intense struggle, there are precedents for open and transparent negotiations: in the USA, contract bargaining between university workers’ unions and university bosses often takes place in public forums that workers can attend and observe. □

Resist the Tories’ new anti-strike law!

By the Free Our Unions campaign

In his government’s first Queen’s Speech, Boris Johnson has announced that he plans to introduce new laws to restrict strikes. There could be little clearer indication of the class loyalties of his government than this. Despite his wildly hypocritical appeals to “anti-establishment” feeling, here his government shows its true colours, in attempting to further restrict the ability of working-class people to take action to improve our lives.

The law is designed to initially target the rail and transport industries, imposing a “minimum service requirement” which would effectively ban transport workers from taking all-out strike action. If the law is introduced and not quickly challenged, the Tories will undoubtedly propose extending it to other industries, such as the fire service, health, and education – all already designated as “essential services” requiring a double threshold under the terms of the 2016 Trade Union Act.

The entire labour movement, including the Labour Party, must respond immediately. The protest called outside Parliament by the RMT and others on 19 December must be the start of an ongoing campaign.

Unions should call meetings and protests at local and national levels, and the Labour Party and the TUC should call a national demonstration. Despite the election defeat, Labour and Momentum showed significant capacity in mobilising hundreds of people to canvas in marginal seats. That capacity must now be used to resist these attacks on our rights.

Although the immediate struggle is necessarily defensive, a counter-offensive stance is also necessary. Resisting the new law should not mean an accommodation with the status quo, where our right to strike is severely curtailed by arbitrary balloting thresholds; the prohibition on workplace ballots; bans on solidarity action and strikes over political issues; and restrictions on effective picketing. A movement of

resistance to the new law must also be a movement demanding the abolition of all anti-union laws.

If the law is imposed, we also need to confront that reality that, as with any unjust law, defeating it will require that it be broken. Against the backdrop of historically low levels of strikes, expecting mass unofficial action on a short-term timescale is unrealistic. But conversations must be had in workplaces and union branches, in the first instance in the industries being targeted, about rebuilding the confidence and organisation necessary.

Free Our Unions, a campaign initiated by Lambeth Union and now backed by the Fire Brigades Union, the RMT, and the IWGB nationally, as well as dozens of union branches, will be renewing our activity in 2020, and working with others across the labour movement to fight against anti-union laws.

To get in touch with the campaign and work with us on this, email freeourunions@gmail.com or tweet @freeourunions. The campaign has produced a model motion, below, for use in trade union branches: see bit.ly/fou-model □

Labour authorities

Unions and Labour Parties should demand that wherever a Labour authority is a transport employer (for example, the Labour-controlled Greater London Authority, which administers Transport for London), they commit to effectively defying any new anti-strike law by setting the “minimum service requirement” to zero.

In countries where similar laws exist, they often operate in practice by unions and employers agreeing a minimum service level between them. Although the detail of how the Tories’ proposal will work has yet to be drawn up, Labour authorities should commit in advance to defying it.



Class struggle environmentalism

Workers’ Liberty will be hosting a day of workshops and discussions on class struggle environmentalism, Marxism, ecology. Saturday, 14 March 2020, 10.30-5.30, Park View School, West Green Road, London, N15 3QR.



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Bushfires punch holes in climate change denial



Climate

By Janet Burstall and Riki Lane

The current fire season, and drought, in Australia are expected to continue for months.

When the fires do end, rainforests and animal habitats may never regenerate fully, and animal populations may never recover.

The seeds of a socialist political response to climate change might grow out of the opposition to the government, if climate activists can develop a clear set of demands, and broaden support for a just transition.

The world has seen the devastating bushfires in Australia, and the humiliation of Prime Minister Scott Morrison for his failures to lead a government response.

Lowlights for his public perception have been going on holiday to

Hawaii after the fires started and trying to force fire victims to shake his hand for the cameras. Derision for him on both social media and mass media has been extensive.

More significant for socialist politics is that Morrison, as a climate change sceptic, and along with Murdoch's media outlets, initially claimed that the same kind of bushfires had happened before. In reality the geographical scope, destruction of native animals (estimated at 500 million so far), early arrival in the summer season, and ongoing nature of these fires, are unprecedented, and clearly linked to climate change by scientists and fire services leaders.

Morrison has been exposed for rejecting requests in 2017 from the National Aerial Firefighting Centre for funding to increase its capability, and ignoring 2019 warnings from heads of state firefighting agencies.

He has been forced to change his position on a number of emergency measures. After rejecting

calls to compensate volunteer firefighters, he agreed in late December that the state governments did not need assistance from the armed forces, he announced on 4 January that military equipment and 3000 army reservists would be sent to fight fires, without first informing the heads of the state fire services.

Not only is the credibility of Morrison and the government going up in flames, so is the credibility of advocates for Australia's fossil fuel industries, as climate change is clearly implicated.

Morrison has rejected repeated calls from former emergency services leaders for a summit meeting on climate change mitigation strategies for fire hazards; opposition leader Albanese attended an independently organised meeting with them.

Some conservative politicians at federal and state level are rumbling against Morrison, with rumours of a challenge by the

hard-right Dutton, but they are stuck with Morrison for some time. In response to the revolving door of leaders since 2007, both major parties have rules which require much more than a simple majority to set off a change of leader.

In any case, no one in the Liberal party both could put forward a credible program on climate, the economy and the role of government and would remotely get party room backing.

When Scott Morrison's time as PM is over, this bushfire season will be seen as the beginning of that end. Some climate protestors shout for Morrison to go, but more importantly most of the protests organised by climate activists, school and uni students, trade unionists and the left are calling for climate action measures.

These include 100% renewable power by 2030, no new fossil fuel projects, and a just transition. They have also raised demands focussed on the bushfires, for reversing cuts to firefighting and increasing its

funding, health and safety rights in hazardous air, and adoption of indigenous land management practices.

Anthony Albanese, the Australian Labor Party leader, made early calls for some of the measures Morrison has finally taken, as well for a meeting of state and federal leaders to work out a strategy, which Morrison has specifically refused.

Albanese is reasserting his support for Australian coal exports, and lacks a clear climate action program. Letting Morrison fail publicly is not sufficient to make the change we need.

However, there are major opportunities for political activism from his public humiliation, and the sharp focus provided on bushfire-related climate change mitigation strategies. For example, there are possibilities to make links with farmers and rural firefighters who have traditionally supported the conservative parties. □

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020 7394 8923



solidarity@workersliberty.org



Write to us: 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG

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