



& Workers' Liberty

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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Tory “end austerity” promises are hollow **GET LABOUR ON THE STREETS!**

The fight inside Israel

In the run-up to the 27 Feb protest at the Israeli Embassy in London “for two states and equal rights”, Maisam Jaljuli speaks about campaigning in Israel against annexations and against the Trump Plan.

Page 9

Labour councils: making cuts

Labour-movement pressure makes Tower Hamlets council backs down from using anti-union laws against NEU; but council leaders still push for right-wing shift in Labour

Pages 7 and 15

US docks union under threat

West Coast dockers' union faces a \$93.6 million file under the US laws against union “secondary action”



Page 12

Inside Labour

Least-bad choices in the Labour leader contest?

Page 5



Photo: Gemma Short

➤➤ Rebuild the NHS
➤➤ Save schools and colleges
➤➤ Reverse cuts **See page 5**

Nevada: bump in the road?



Sanders campaign

By Eric Lee

Next Saturday (22 February) voters in Nevada will participate in caucuses to choose their 48 delegates to the Democratic National Convention.

Early voting has already begun. According to the latest poll, Sanders has a 7 point lead over Biden, with no other candidates reaching the 15% threshold required to win delegates. This represents a major shift, as Biden had been leading in all the polls in Nevada up until very recently.

A Sanders victory in Nevada would represent more than just a hat trick, following his victories in the popular vote in Iowa and New Hampshire. It would mean that he has demonstrated that he, unlike some of the other candidates, can do well in a state with a large im-

migrant and Latino population.

That's one thing to know about Nevada, but the other is perhaps more important: this is a state with powerful and influential trade unions.

As trade union density in the private sector in America has declined over decades, unions have managed to keep a foothold in the casinos, hotels and restaurants of Las Vegas and Reno. This gives Sanders an opportunity to demonstrate his strength among the organised working class.

Back in 2016, the little-known Sanders fought Hillary Clinton to a near-tie in Nevada. Today, as the front-runner in national polls, faced by a weak and divided opposition, Nevada is Bernie Sanders' state to lose. Sanders' rivals who emerged strongest from the New Hampshire primary, Buttigieg and Klobuchar, are barely registering at 10% in the polls. If Biden continues to fall in the polls, a possible result in Nevada is that none of the other candidates receive 15%. Were that

unlikely scenario to occur, Sanders would walk away with all the delegates.

But Sanders has run into an unforeseen obstacle on the road to victory in Nevada: the powerful Culinary Workers Union, Local 226 of UNITE-HERE. That union claims 60,000 members in the state, and represents nearly a quarter of the entire national membership of the union.

In a flyer produced in English and Spanish only a few days before the voting begins, the union branded Sanders' health care plan (Medicare for All) a disaster for union members. The argument ran something like this: our union worked long and hard to get our members great health care; Sanders' plan means the end of all that, as the government steps in to take over.

As if that wasn't bad enough, there were reports that some Sanders supporters went online to trash the union leaders (who are women), and not always politely.



The Culinary Workers Union Local 226 opposes Sanders Medicare for All policy

Sanders himself would have none of it, and praised the union for its great work over the years.

At least the union didn't then go on to endorse anyone else. That leaves open the possibility that many of its members, the majority of them being Latinos, will go on to vote for the candidate who best represents their interests, Bernie Sanders.

At the moment, there seems little danger that the attack by the Culinary Workers Union will cost Sanders Nevada. He still seems on track to win. But the risk is that the arguments the union made will resonate with other trade unionists, and that members of unions like

the United Auto Workers in states like Michigan may also feel that Sanders' proposed "government takeover" will mean the end of their negotiated private health care plans.

The Sanders campaign needs to make the case not only that health care is a human right, but that the only way to ensure that all Americans have decent health care is through his Medicare for All plan.

In Nevada next weekend, we will learn if that case was made well. □

• Eric Lee is convenor of "London for Bernie", writing here in a personal capacity.

Scottish deputy: a clear choice

By Ann Field

If only Scottish Labour could be as right-wing as it used to be, then people would vote for it again.

This pretty much sums up the platform of Jackie Baillie MSP in her bid to be elected Scottish Labour Deputy Leader. But as the hustings in Glasgow on 17 February confirmed, this involves a breathtaking ability to deny reality.

Baillie denied that housing legislation passed by the Labour-Lib-Dem Holyrood government (1999-2007) had extended the "right to buy" to Housing Association tenants. But it did.

Baillie boasted that the same Holyrood coalition government had initiated a massive housebuilding programme. But between 2002 and 2006 just 21 new council

houses were built in all of Scotland.

She talked of her commitment to "Team Labour" in Holyrood and her support for Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard – despite being known for briefing against him.

She denied the possibly irreparable damage done to Scottish Labour by its collaboration with the Tories in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, manifested in the collapse in Scottish Labour support in the 2015 general election. Baillie highlighted the fall in Scottish Labour support between 2015 and 2019 (omitting the marginal increase in 2017). But she made no mention of the linear decline in support for Scottish Labour in every Holyrood election since 1999 – rooted in her own brand of right-wing politics.

Baillie's "big idea" for reviving Scottish Labour's electoral fortunes is that the party should wrap itself in a Union Jack – bigging up opposition to independence and a second referendum on independence. Plus support for Trident renewal, and keep those submarines on the Clyde.

Standing against Baillie is Glasgow councillor and former Westminster candidate Matt Kerr:

"We need new approaches, new policies and a new culture that rids ourselves of harmful attacks on each other via briefing or online. We need a Party that challenges the establishment, not one that is seen as part of it."

His election material has highlighted the need for Scottish Labour to rebuild its roots in local communities and its links with

trade unions, and to develop "a new generation of activists who don't remember 1997 but know full well the struggles of 2020."

Highlighting the themes of grassroots revival, workers' rights (including industrial democracy) and fresh ideas, his election platform focuses on the areas crucial to Scottish Labour's survival.

It is not good that his election as Deputy Leader would mean a male-male Scottish Labour leadership team. But the support of the Scottish Labour right for a Starmer-Murray ticket at national level makes any criticism from their quarter on that count an exercise in hypocrisy.

The Scottish Deputy leadership contest is straightforward. Vote Baillie for political suicide, or Matt Kerr for hope. □



The cycle for socialism goes ahead

Thanks to all the contributors who have brought the total so far for Hannah Thompson's and Dan Rawnsley's sponsored bike ride from Sheffield to Manchester to £1035. Recent contributors include: Laura Woodhouse, £5; Eve Joy Wilson, £10; Nik Barstow, £20; Demaine Boocock, £10; Alex Marshall, £10; and donors who want to stay anonymous, £30, £10, £5, £20.

Hannah and Dan did the ride, in the event, on Friday 14 February, one day earlier than they'd promised, on 15 February. It's a difficult ride, with many steep climbs, but they did it in six hours.

You can still add your sponsorship: bit.ly/cycle4socialism. □

The best medicine

By Colin Foster

The Labour Party machine is hastening to "clean house". It announced at the end of January that it had expelled 45 members over antisemitism in 2019. Another 104 members voluntarily quit in 2019 while charges of antisemitism were pending.

In 2018, ten people were expelled and in 2017, one.

296 members were suspended over antisemitism complaints in 2019, compared with 98 suspended

in 2018. The numbers are still small compared to the many hundreds "auto-excluded" in 2015 and 2016 (without a hearing and often without precise charges), not for antisemitism but for left-wing associations, current or previous.

One expellee claimed that "Jews control everything", raged against "corrupt Jewish puppet bankers", and since being expelled has claimed that "Labour is ruled by Israel".

Clearing such ideas out of Labour discourse is good and necessary. And as yet we have no evi-

dence of anyone suspended or expelled for positive activity for Palestinian rights (as distinct from spreading "world Jewish conspiracy" theories targeted on Israel).

Cause for concern, though. National Executive Committee candidate Jo Bird was suspended during most of the NEC nominations period, and then had the suspension lifted with as little explanation as when it was imposed.

We won't be voting for Jo Bird, but we oppose this administrative "cancel-culture from above".

Ideas that success against anti-

semitism is measured by numbers of expulsions are generating a spillover towards an idea that the measure of trans rights is numbers of expulsions of claimed transphobes and bannings from debate of claimedly-transphobic motions.

The "house-cleaning" hits chiefly people who are gushing and garrulous on social media, and leaves swathes of more intricate anti-Jewish prejudice untouched.

The best medicine is open debate and education. □

From 14 February, build towards COP26



By Cathy Nugent

The latest round of climate strikes, on Friday 14 February, the first of 2020, marked a year since thousands of school students first walked out to protest at political inaction on climate change.

This round of walkouts was smaller, but the underlying political commitment is still strong. As the year progresses and in the run up to COP26 in Glasgow (9-19 November) the movement is likely to expand again.

Around 1000 people, a mix of older school students, parents with younger school students, and a range of other people attended a demonstration in London, marching through Parliament Square.

Elsewhere in the UK — in Leeds, Bristol, Leicester, Manchester, Norwich, Sheffield... — demonstrations were in the hundreds. In Cambridge comrades organised a stall to show solidarity and build solidarity between UCU strikes and the climate strikes.

In London the PCS union organised a trade union bloc. This is a good initiative, which should continue, but the left needs to get be-

hind it and seriously build it to make it more sizeable.

A comrade from Sheffield reports: "Left groups outnumbered student climate strikers at the start. But this changed quickly as a group of young (primary-age) children all from one school arrived with their teachers."

"The Uni students group enlivened the demonstration which followed what is now a usual route around town, with maybe 200-300 in total. Unfortunately there was no public representation from local Labour groups or unions."

"Speeches at an open mic on the Town Hall steps were generally good, anti-capitalist and focused on building links with the Trades Council and wider workers' movement." □

For workers' climate action: climate change, capitalism and working-class struggle



workersliberty.org/
climate-pamphlet

A collection of articles and reviews, produced by Workers' Liberty (£3)



Capitalavirus

Cartoon: George Newman
instagram.com/geowman

Class struggle environmentalism dayschool

**Saturday 14 March, 10.30am- 5.30pm
Park View School, London, N15 3QR**

Join this day of discussions and workshops! Buy tickets, or book a free space in the creche online.

The last two years have seen an upsurge of environmental activism: the youth climate strikes and Extinction Rebellion. Workers' Liberty activists have been involved in these actions, and in previous waves of climate activism.

Capitalism is the central driver of environmental crises. Class struggle environmentalism, and the ideas of Marxist ecology, are key to stopping climate catastrophes. Workers' Liberty has been developing, debating, and putting into practice these politics.

Save the date, book transport and tickets, invite everyone you know!

Early bird tickets end 14 February: £18 high waged, £8 low waged, £3 unwaged. £1 for school students. Tickets and creche can also be booked in person or over the phone. □

February/March 2020

UCU Strike Bulletin

Produced by members of Workers' Liberty active in the University and College Union

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The longer the picket line, the shorter the strike

An old labour movement saying goes, "the longer the picket line, the shorter the strike."

In other words, the more effective and impactful your action, and the more workers who are actively involved, the shorter any strike is likely to be, as your boss will back down more quickly.

That's the spirit with which we should approach our next round of strikes, beginning on 20 February. Picketing should be an empowering, and enjoyable, process, and picket lines should aim to actively convince anyone trying to cross them to change their mind. A strike is not just a "protest", it's not merely a symbolic action intended to express our displeasure at something our employer is doing (or not doing). It's a necessarily disruptive act, leveraging our power as workers over the production process to achieve our demands.

Striking is often a sacrifice, and local branches and the national union must ensure accessible hardship funds are available to guarantee that no-one, especially lower-paid workers, are forced to choose between their principles and putting food on the table.

Acknowledging that striking can be a sacrifice, however, is one thing; penning anonymous articles in the national press to bemoan the fact that, unfortunately, and of course with a terribly heavy heart you understand, you won't be able to participate in the strike, and does it have to be quite so long; and do we really need to be on strike at all, when it comes down to it? Such people also always seem to want a free pass, and demand that no-one makes them feel in the least

bit guilty or ashamed, or holds them to account for this attitude.

Scabs should be held to account. Actively choosing to work through a strike, undermining your colleagues, and weakening a dispute organised to improve your terms and conditions should indeed be a source of shame.

We're not striking for the sake of it; we're striking to win concrete concessions from our employers. The sooner we win those, the sooner the dispute will end. So anyone who wants to see it end sooner rather than later would do better to join their nearest picket line rather than walking across it.

There has been a debate more widely amongst the union membership about whether our two separate disputes, the USS pensions dispute and the wider dispute over pay and conditions, should be de-coupled, with proponents offering little more than technocratic reasons (e.g. the disputes may end at different times, or that they're being negotiated between different bodies).

None of these should convince us though, given what these strikes are about more fundamentally — an attack on the basic rights of workers in universities, a drive to marketise and privatise the higher education sector.

Without a long-term stable pension, university workers are being forced out of the sector through fear of poverty in retirement — and without a decent wage or a stable contract, there is little more convincing them to stay. Higher Education institutions have been using both of these battering rams to smash working conditions for decades; ignoring how these are rooted in the same attack would break the solidarity built between those involved in these struggles which have so far been taken together.

Basic class solidarity means it is our duty to fight the oppressive structures — that embed gender pay gaps, strip us of our pensions, and force us to work longer, with less, for less — all with equal force.

SEE THE "FOUR FIGHTS" THROUGH

There is a concerted effort by some on the right wing of the union to undermine the "Four Fights" (pay and conditions) dispute in particular, claiming it doesn't have clear objectives and asking what would be an acceptable deal.

This is extremely disingenuous because they know full well that in the past UCU has negotiated national framework agreements, e.g. on a single national pay spine in the early 2000s, and this is what the union is aiming for now. So far the employers have offered only "guidance" and a much-mocked "resource pack" which goes nowhere near addressing the substantive issues around casualisation, workload and equality. They have also made no improved offer on pay. Sticking with the strikes gives us the best chance yet to get employers signed up to a real commitment rather than recommendations they can wriggle out of. We know that some VCs are admitting to staff that the widespread use of fixed-term contracts could be reduced by creating pools of permanent researchers who rotate between projects.

They need to start acting on that.

About Workers' Liberty

This bulletin is produced by members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty active in the UCU. We are a socialist group active in the labour and student movements in Britain, fighting for a revolutionary alternative to capitalism and Stalinism based on common ownership and workers' democracy. To find out more about our ideas and activity, visit our website at workersliberty.org, or email awl@workersliberty.org

The bulletin for the UCU strikes (starting 20-21 February and escalating to 3,4 and then 5 days a week, to 13 March) calls for student solidarity and strong picket lines

Agenda

This next week, from 20 February, Workers' Liberty activists will be busy working with Student Strike Solidarity (bit.ly/stud-sup) and UCU (University and College Union) activists on the UCU picket lines.

We're distributing a strike bulletin written by Workers' Liberty people in UCU (bit.ly/ucu-b), discussing strategy for the struggle, selling *Solidarity*, and publicising our activities.

We'll also be continuing the distribution of the Workers' Liberty *Postalworker* bulletin (bit.ly/post-b) in the run-up to the new CWU union ballot in Royal Mail, starting 3 March.

In Labour Parties and trade union branches, we'll be putting motions advocating that Labour "get on the streets" against the Tory government (see page 5).

A reader from Leeds reports: "Even in the wind and rain about 30 people turned out [on 15 February] for the Leeds Keep Our NHS Public for a day of action on the NHS". There was action in many other cities and towns too.

Now we need the heavy machinery of the labour movement to turn to that sort of campaigning, and raise it to a much higher level.

Other ongoing and upcoming activities include a round of meetings to discuss our new book, *Sol-*

idarnosc: the workers' movement and the rebirth of Poland in 1980-1. The first of those meetings was in Lewisham, south London, on 11 February, drawing about 25 people, "a few Polish people, Labour lefties, students from Goldsmiths, and a couple of older blokes who'd been involved in solidarity work in the early 80s".

In London we're helping to build the "Against Occupation and Annexation: For Two States and Equal Rights" protest opposite the Israeli Embassy: 6pm, 27 February, Kensington Court, W8 5DL (bit.ly/2s-eq).

We're building the Free Our Unions campaign, focused against the Tories' plans for yet new anti-strike laws: bit.ly/model-fou.

The first leaflet for our 18-21 June 2020 summer school, Ideas for Freedom, is now in circulation: super-cheap tickets available at workersliberty.org/ideas up to 29 February.

Other dates for your diary (details of all these at workersliberty.org/events):

- 28 February: Workers' Liberty London Forum on Solidarnosc
- 14 March: Workers' Liberty day school on Class Struggle Environmentalism
- 16 May: Demonstration against deportations and detention centres at Heathrow
- 22-26 July: Workers' Liberty residential week school on Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* □

A strange love letter



By Jim Denham

It was a strange love letter, written in that coy, obscurantist language that *Morning Star* editorials invariably adopt when their message is a wee bit embarrassing. But it came on 14 February, and underneath the verbosity the message was clear: Boris Johnson is to be admired:

"The immediate past experience of, first, coalition government with the Lib Dems and then the disarray of the Theresa May administration has convinced the new Tory leadership of the need for Cabinet discipline, parliamentary good order and effective oversight of policy and performance."

It's easy to see why all that would appeal to people who admire the Chinese regime (and continue to insist it's doing a good job dealing with coronavirus). And the same editorial carried a warning to Johnson's critics:

"There is a tendency on the liberal left – perhaps the most pervasive of Labour's ideological trends – to conceive of Johnson as the personification of the most reactionary right..."

Wrong! Johnson is actually taking on "the more parasitic elements in Britain's notoriously skewed economy (especially the) financial sector." In fact Johnson represents a (ruling class) "tendency which sees both necessity and profit in a more balanced regional economy, greater investment in high-value technology, science and research, a more radical orientation to global markets and increased efforts to develop a more modern, diversified and productive economy."



Good for Burgon

Leeds East MP and deputy leadership candidate Richard Burgon's politics are, in general, close to those of the Stalinist *Morning Star*. So it is ironic that he has made eloquent arguments for Labour Party democracy that virtually no other prominent figure is making.

Interviewed on *Novara Media*, Burgon argues forcefully that Labour members must make Labour policy – including manifesto policy – through conference. He maintains and develops this argument for about ten minutes, defending it against persistent attempts by *Novara* interviewers Michael Walker and Aaron Bastani to talk him out of it. Bastani and Walker argue that conference policy cannot produce an effective, "strategic" manifesto or campaign, which must be left in the hands of the leadership, subject to conference "temperature checks", plus the ability to change the composition of the Parliamentary Labour Party through open selections.

Burgon insists that democratic policy-making, through conference, is essential, and the only alternative to policy-making, in effect, by the media. There's a transcript of the exchange and a link to the full interview on *The Clarion*, bit.ly/burgonconf. □

Lesley Baxter, London

As they say, what's not to like?

Similar adoration had been expressed by the Communist Party of Britain's Rob Griffiths, writing in the *Morning Star* of 1-2 February, his misty-eyed infatuation stemming from a source close to every Stalinist's heart: "If the recent declarations of Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Plaid Cymru leader Adam Price are anything to go by, it is tempting to exclaim: 'We're all Lexiteers now!' ... the Tory government's opening positions closely resemble longstanding policies promoted by the Eurosceptic left in Britain and – fisheries aside – in other European countries."

It must be a great consolation to comrade Griffiths to know that while his "left-wing" version of Brexit has been decisively rejected by the Labour party and most trade unions, it has been taken up by Boris Johnson.

And here's Nick Wright in the *Morning Star* of 6 February:

"Much of the left, especially the liberal left – and particularly that sliver that still smarts at the drubbing that Johnson's unerringly targeted Get Brexit Done tactic delivered – is consumed with outrage at Johnson's supposedly Trumpian political identity."

"But Johnson is a more complex character and an infinitely more nuanced politician than this simplistic rendering allows."

Note comrade Wright's breathless admiration for Johnson's "unerringly targeted" tactical skills plus the wide-eyed wonder at this "complex" and "nuanced" character... all combined with the obligatory Stalinist sneer at "the liberal left."

Wright continues: "... yet another hobgoblin is haunting liberal opinion. The figure of Dominic Cummings has assumed a Rasputin-like reputation. No accounts of Satanic ritual or the profane violation of the royal person has leached out but respectable

Is Boris Johnson carrying out the programme of the Communist Party?



opinion sees the chef du cabinet to Boris Johnson's Number 10 machine as an existential threat to the venerable traditions of the Civil Service.

"Cummings does cut an unusual figure in the upper reaches of the state apparatus. What is distinctive is his concentration on technocratic managerial and intellectually rigorous solutions to problems of public ad-

ministration..."

Comrade Wright does go on to note Cummings' "deeply reactionary notions" but the underlying message is one of simpering admiration for someone willing to take on the Civil Service, the force that Wright evidently considers the main threat to progressive advance in Britain today). □



Not much challenge



Continuing its tradition of crap videos, Momentum has put out one entitled "Leave voters challenge Rebecca Long-Bailey" (bit.ly/rlbvideo). It's naff all round: it's just two unnamed Salfordians having a very muted exchange with RLB before declaring she's the one for them after all, but it's billed as "some tough questions for Rebecca".

Two things jumped out from her answers: Asked about Momentum, RLB says: "It's good to have [different groups like Momentum and Progress], and it's good to have the arguments within the party, but my problem has always been that we [should] have these arguments in private, don't have these public

rows on television, and once we've agreed what we're going to do, we go out there and we unify behind the leader, whoever it is, whether you agree with them all the time or not."

If this is an argument against disruption by right-wing MPs, it is not well made. It seems likely to also be an argument against an open party democracy.

Asked about immigration and its alleged affect on hospitals and schools, RLB pivots to attacking the Tories, austerity, etc, but without challenging the anti-immigration premise. She says "You're right", as if the questioner had said something different.

Worse still, she finishes the answer with a call to ensure that "when the government is developing this immigration system, that it's fair". □

Kennedy Vickers, London

Audio of Solidarity

Many thanks to the volunteers who have enabled us to produce an audio version of the paper.

Links to the audio version are at workersliberty.org/audio, and can be found through many podcast providers: search "Workers' Liberty" or "Solidarity & More". Email awl@workersliberty.org for e-reader versions of *Solidarity*.



Two nations, two states

Socialists and Israel-Palestine

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

• Buy from workersliberty.org/2n2s

Get Labour on the streets!

6699 Editorial

Whenever the Budget emerges, and whatever the details, it won't keep Boris Johnson's promise to "end austerity".

That doesn't mean we have to wait until 2024. Even under the Thatcher and Major Tory governments, mass protest forced the end of the poll tax and a partial reversal of NHS cuts after 1990.

Solidarity urges Labour and trade-union activists to join with us in a campaign to get Labour on the streets to rebuild the NHS and save our schools, and to end austerity.

By "campaign" here we mean not a committee, a website, a grant from this or that foundation, a Twitter account, but a concerted drive of motions to Labour Party and trade union meetings, demanding that the Labour leaders call action, plus local initiatives where the local labour movement is strong enough.

It's been done before.

In November 1976 the Labour Party National Executive backed a big weekday demonstration against cuts — cuts made by the Labour government!

After the Tories won the 1979 election, the right-wing Labour Party leadership called an official Labour Party demonstration against Tory cuts, and 50,000 turned out a weekday.

The same right-wing leadership also supported a 15,000-strong demonstration in support of the steelworkers' strike on 28 January 1980.

A new more leftish Labour leadership, with Michael Foot, organised protests against unemployment: 150,000 in Liverpool on 29 November 1980, 50,000 in Glasgow on 21 February 1981.

The demonstrations expanded the movement, nourished the left-wing surge in the Labour Party in the early 1980s, laid the basis



Photo: Gemma Short

for the great network of miners' support groups which came within inches of helping the miners to victory in the 1984-5 strike.

There had to be, and there was, a battle of ideas within the movement. The opening for that battle of ideas to become lively was created by the mobilisation and energy of the big national demonstrations and the countless local protests which went along with them.

The movement then didn't defeat Thatcher. Even mass political strikes (or armed uprisings!) are not guaranteed success. But, unlike the mass strikes or armed uprisings, such demonstrations could be and were called at will by the movement as it was.

The wave of labour movement demonstra-

tions and campaigns against cuts from 2010 through to early 2017, often supported by the TUC and with Labour leaders on the platform, did not beat the Tories. But it generated the energy which got Jeremy Corbyn's leadership victory in 2015, and Labour's vote surge in 2017.

The decline of Labour support in 2017-9 was due not only to the mess over Brexit and antisemitism, but also to the decline of campaigning. To the relegation of policies to the status of announcements to be dropped on the electorate from on high just a few days or weeks before a general election.

The Labour Party, as it is now, with all its weaknesses, can be made to mobilise its members on the streets against the Tories and

austerity. The political basis will at first be blurred. It will evolve and (if the radical socialists do our job well) clarify as we're able to make the movement develop.

Health and education are key areas now, as they were in 2010-7. But as the movement grows it will not limit itself to that.

The roll-out of Universal Credit is due to restart in July 2020. If Labour has started building the campaign, then we can generate a challenge on that issue too.

As the momentum develops, we can put the Tory government — and local councils, both Tory and Labour — under pressure on issues like housing, too.

Get Labour on the streets! □

The ballot papers for Labour leader

By Martin Thomas

Many of us are minded to vote for Rebecca Long Bailey for Labour leader when balloting opens on 24 February.

In the nominations stage we backed none of the candidates.

We used that stage to challenge them on a charter of labour movement democracy, and on the need to get Labour on the streets to combat the Tories in the next months and years.

We supported interrogations put to them by groups like Free Our Unions, Labour Campaign for Free Movement, and Labour for a Socialist Europe, to back Labour conference policy for scrapping all anti-union laws and for defending and extending free movement.

None responded positively. All three leader candidates signal, in different blurred ways, that they will seek to tone down Labour's politics, but gradually.

How far they can do that — or whether, on the contrary, Boris Johnson's buffoonery spurs the labour movement to get on the streets in a way it has not done since 2015 —

remains to be seen.

The leadership ballot papers will arrive from 24 February. Now it is a matter less of challenges in meetings, more of conversations among Labour members and trade unionists about which box to tick.

Lisa Nandy's derision of "placard-waving", of "picking a side and shouting", and of "nationalising everything", has flagged her up as the candidate to rally the Labour right.

Keir Starmer's most telling comment has been his refusal to say he'd give Long Bailey and Nandy jobs in his Shadow Cabinet: Translate: there may be no job left that Long Bailey will accept after Starmer has allotted key posts to Yvette Cooper, Rachel Reeves, Hilary Benn, etc.

Asked to praise a Labour leader of the last 50 years, Starmer chose Harold Wilson as one who "united the party".

In 1956, Wilson sketched his approach in a private comment on then Tory prime minister Harold Macmillan: "You know, the man's a genius. He's holding up the banner of Suez [the failed British imperialist invasion of Egypt to stop Egypt taking over the Suez Canal] for the [Tory] party to follow, and he's

leading the party away from Suez.

"That's what I'd like to do with the Labour Party over nationalisation" [the key Labour-left demand of the day].

Long Bailey was set up well in advance as the "continuity candidate". The downside is the connections to the circles round Seumas Milne's "Leader's Office", and its Stalinistic and manipulative methods which blighted the last years of Corbyn, especially over Brexit and antisemitism.

Whether from conviction or from prudence, she has distanced herself a bit from that axis. She did that most clearly in her 13 February declaration that she supports Israel's right to exist alongside a Palestinian state, and in that sense is a "Zionist".

Although Long Bailey does not have the same record as Nandy or Emily Thornberry of activity for Palestinian rights, she plainly doesn't mean a wish to support Israeli-Jewish rights *above* or *against* other rights.

Now, on 17 February Nandy was the only one of the three to say she'd vote to abolish the monarchy. Long Bailey and Starmer said they wouldn't. Nandy is still the only one to defend free movement between Britain and the EU. Long Bailey's campaign runs limp.

But, broadly, Long Bailey has a more leftish record than the others. On the whole a stronger vote for her — if accompanied by continued criticism and campaigning on the issues — will increase the chances of a real fight against Tory cuts and a continued relative opening-up of the Labour Party.

The deputy leadership is even more blurred. Some of us are minded to vote for Dawn Butler. She has been the most leftish of the deputy candidates, with warmer words on trade-union rights.

The most leftish, that is, other than Richard Burgon. Burgon has been good on some issues. But he writes frequently for the *Morning Star*, and describes Seumas Milne and Karie Murphy as "great people". He has been not at all left-wing as shadow Justice Secretary. A vote for him is a vote for continuity with the bad record on Brexit and antisemitism.

Others point to Butler's record as a loyalist under Brown and Blair, and doubt whether we can back anyone for deputy.

We'll be discussing in Workers' Liberty meetings, and deciding a majority view.

Everyone, I think, is agreed on voting for Lauren Townsend and Cecile Wright for the CLP places on the National Executive. □

How to beat transphobia

By Katy Dollar

The Labour Campaign for Trans Rights, founded by transgender and non-binary Labour members in order to advance trans liberation through the Labour Party, launched on 11 February with a set of pledges for leadership candidates.

The proposed reforms of the Gender Recognition Act were a step forward against trans oppression, but also began a debate which brought deeply reactionary views into the public discourse, including within the labour movement.

The comrades involved are right that trans liberation should be an aim of the Labour Party and that this will require fighting transphobia in our own ranks. Though I hold great personal sympathy for the aims of the pledges, their content is not the right way to achieve them.

In particular, the pledges call to support the National Executive Committee [NEC] striking down transphobic motions, and the expulsion from the Labour Party of those who express bigoted, transphobic views.

Bigotry and oppression within the Party cannot be eradicated primarily through administrative and disciplinary means. The presence of transphobia, highlighted by the passing of a Women's Place motion at Hornsey and Wood Green and Tottenham Labour Parties, must be faced with political education and discussion.

The liberation of LGBT people will involve convincing a hell of a lot of people who are currently have either inadequate or downright wrong politics. To persuade people is a far more tough and effective stance than mass expulsions, though it may seem "softer".

It is unlikely that any of the leadership can-

didates signed up to the pledge really believe that we should expel everyone who expresses bigoted views. The majority of Labour Party members probably give little thought to trans people (a problem in itself), but were the party machine to expel every member who ever expressed transphobic, racist, homophobic or sexist views, we would be expelling hundreds of thousands of people – a bit much even for the Compliance Unit, even if you assume that the officials

there are unerringly enlightened and perfectly skilled at detecting and punishing prejudices.

Of course, that doesn't mean there are no situations in which it is justifiable to expel transphobes – harassment and abuse, including deliberately misgendering and deadnaming trans activists, are a few possible examples.

Labour disciplinary procedures at present are deficient, helping neither complainants

nor those being disciplined. We've seen in the high-profile antisemitism scandal that complaints are ignored or disappear, and due process is the exception rather than the norm.

Likewise, motions which fall outside of Labour Party rules can be ruled out of order by CLP Chairs, but what is and isn't transphobic is contested political ground: those "gender critical feminists" whom I would call transphobes also claim to support trans rights. Encouraging the NEC to rule motions out of order would mean the stifling of debate, the failure to challenge views, and would hand enormous power to the Party leadership.

The launch of the pledges has sparked a backlash ranging from insensitive to horribly offensive. Whilst we may disagree with the wording of the pledges and on the best way to achieve trans liberation, we must stand in solidarity with the trans activists who wrote them against the hostility they face in our movement. This hostility has been picked up by the press, with many papers running stories about women who are "genuinely concerned" or "afraid" about the "loss of women's spaces".

I don't doubt much of the concern and fear is genuine, but fear and bigotry are not mutually exclusive. We must fight against the campaign of miseducation presenting our trans comrades as a threat to cis women or their rights. Socialists reject attempts to divide workers on the grounds of prejudice.

Class is our universalising identity. Our class has the potential to organise a great integrated movement of solidarity with minorities, bringing together the fights for all our liberations.

It will be messy and it will be hard work but, unlike bureaucratic shortcuts, it will work. □

The LCTR pledges

1. Accept the material reality that trans people are oppressed and discriminated against in British society, facing a rising risk of hate crime, and difficulty accessing public services, healthcare, housing and employment.
2. Believe that trans liberation must be an objective of the Labour Party, and that transphobia is antithetical to our collective aims.
3. Commit to respecting trans people as their self-declared gender, and to ensure that the Labour Party is an inclusive environment for trans people.
4. Accept that trans women are women, trans men are men, and non-binary people are non-binary.
5. Accept that there is no material conflict between trans rights and women's rights, and that all trans women are subject to misogyny and patriarchal oppression.
6. Listen to trans comrades on issues of transphobia and transmisogyny, allowing trans people to lead the way on our own liberation.
7. Support the work of trans members and

organisers within the Labour movement, including supporting motions on a local, regional and national level which are presented for the furthering of trans liberation.

8. Oppose transphobic motions which run contrary to our own party equalities policy, and support the NEC striking down such motions on this basis.

9. Organise and fight against transphobic organisations such as Woman's Place UK, LGB Alliance and other trans-exclusionist hate groups.

10. Support the expulsion from the Labour Party of those who express bigoted, transphobic views.

11. Support reform of the Gender Recognition Act to improve transgender rights, as well as supporting policies which would improve trans people's access to necessary healthcare, housing, and employment.

12. Organise against and oppose any further transphobic policy from our own party or any other. □

A Labour newspaper?

By Keith Road

Should the labour movement have its own newspaper? That is the question posed by Richard Burgon, currently running for Deputy Leader of the Labour Party.

Burgon, speaking to *Novara Media*, said that a Labour freesheet could mimic the *Evening Standard* or the *Metro*. The various editions of the *Metro* currently have a total circulation of 1.4m, and the *ES* has about 800,000 around London. That makes them two of the most-read newspapers in the UK.

Burgon was attacked by Ian Murray, the most right-wing of those standing for the deputy leadership: "We are a party aspiring to be in government, not a protest movement handing out newspapers outside train stations".

Solidarity supporters sell newspapers outside train stations as a way to help educate the working class to learn how to take political power. Ian Murray believes neither in newspapers to spread information and ideas, nor in working-class power.

Burgon's general idea of a labour movement paper is not a bad one, although insisting it be a freesheet would limit it. What a "tabloid" style newspaper would mean is open to debate. A newspaper can be accessi-



ble, informative and educational without being sensationalist or lowest-common-denominator. It should be open to genuine debate, unlike the *Morning Star*, a paper Burgon continues to write for and promote. It should be a lot livelier than *Labour Weekly*, which was the Labour Party's official paper from 1971 to 1988, but never motivated anyone to sell it outside a train station.

Better something like the *Daily Herald* when it was the official TUC daily paper, from 1922 to 1964, and it often championed the cause of striking workers and made at least some sort of case for socialism. Even better the *Daily Herald* of its earlier and more radical days. □



A festival of socialist ideas and leftwing discussion, hosted by Workers' Liberty, Ideas for Freedom is an opportunity to explore, through talks, film showings, workshops and debates, ideas about how our world works, and how we can fight for a better one.

This year's theme is: "Making the labour movement fit to win".

- Agenda info will be published as sessions are finalised. Tickets are super-cheap before 29 February and available at www.workersliberty.org/ideas

Rebecca Long-Bailey says she's Zionist

By Ira Berkovic

At a hustings organised by the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM) on 13 February, Labour leadership candidates were asked if they were a "Zionist". Three of the four said they were; Keir Starmer said that he wasn't, but was "supportive" of and sympathetic to Zionism.

In their answers, all candidates emphasised their support for the right of Israeli Jews to national self determination. Emily Thornberry, Lisa Nandy, and Rebecca Long-Bailey presented this as the basis of their "Zionism". Long-Bailey said: "I also agree with a secure Israel alongside a viable Palestinian state... I suppose that makes me a Zionist because I agree with Israel's right to exist and right to self-determine."

That all four candidates gave clear and unambiguous statements of support for Israeli Jews' right to self determination is positive.

In doing so, they were doing no more than affirming existing Labour Party policy, which is for a two-states settlement in Israel/Palestine; but their clear statements are high-profile rebuttals of the far-left common sense which contends that Israel must be done away with somehow, and that any expression of Israeli-Jewish national self determination is unsupportable. It is particularly significant in Long-Bailey's case, as some of her support is drawn from a far-left milieu where such politics predominate.

The clarity of her statement on the right of Israeli Jews to self-determine must reflect at least on some level the work done by individuals and groups on the Labour left, including Workers' Liberty, to assert a two-states position, to argue against the view that Israeli Jews should have no national rights, and to explain how that position tends logically in the direction of antisemitism.

Clearly, none of the candidates are supporters of Israel's oppression of the Palestinians. Lisa Nandy, whom JLM subsequently nominated, is chair of Labour Friends of



Palestine, and Emily Thornberry has spoken at Palestine Solidarity Campaign events. Their statements ought therefore to make it harder for those on the left who wish to argue that anyone who calls themselves a "Zionist" must be a supporter of the Israeli government; or that "Zionism" is synonymous with "racism", or even "fascism"; or that Zionists should be "no-platformed" and expelled from labour movement spaces. That too is to be welcomed.

Long-Bailey's formulation, that she is a Zionist if "Zionism" means supporting Israel's right to exist, is reasonable enough on its own terms, but without qualification it is limited and potentially reactionary. The question itself is unhelpful: one should not have to adopt the label of a particular nationalism — vicariously, in the case of the Labour leadership candidates — in order to express support for a national group's right to self-determine.

"Zionism" has meant many different things to many different people, at many different times. It is a label, and an ideology, that has borne immense internal contradictions. It

has been a radical politics of liberation from oppression, a response to stifling and murderous antisemitism, that asserted the right of Jewish people to self determination. There are explicitly left-wing, even Marxist, traditions within Zionism: Zionist brigades fought in the Bolsheviks' Red Army in the post-1917 civil war, organised by supporters from the left wing of Poale Zion, a socialist-Zionist party.

But Zionism has also impelled intense national chauvinism and bigotry towards Arabs. For many Palestinians, Zionism is the ideology that has driven their dispossession, ethnic cleansing, and ongoing national oppression.

The contemporary use of the term is hard to disentangle from antisemitism. In much far-right political writing, "Zionists" is a codeword for "Jews", within a conspiracy-theorist narrative that sees Jews as a shadowy, powerful elite controlling world affairs. Some far-left "anti-Zionism" shares a similar framework, massively over-inflating the power and influence of the Israeli state and "Zionism" in world politics.

For many Jews, self-describing as a "Zionist" is less an indication of a particular attitude to the policy of the Israeli state, which they may support or oppose, and more a way of expressing a diffuse affinity with Israel, the "liferaft state", in Isaac Deutscher's phrase, emerging from the wreckage of European antisemitism given industrialised form via the Holocaust. An "anti-Zionism" which is incapable of understanding distinctions between that type of "Zionism"; the "Zionism" of Poale Zion-affiliated supporters of the Bolsheviks; the "Zionism" of the far-right settler movement in Israel; and "Zionism"'s many other diverse expressions is of no explanatory value or political use.

But that doesn't mean leftists who support Israeli-Jewish self determination are required to give that support the label "Zionism".

Beyond "Zionism" and "anti-Zionism", there is a path to a consistently democratic politics of equal rights, that asserts the right of both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs to peace, justice, security, and self determination. □

Right-wing push from council leaders

By Josh Lovell

Nick Forbes, Labour's leader in the Local Government Association [LGA], has announced the results of a survey about the general election, responded to by only one in eight of Labour's councillors [bit.ly/2UUWLy3].

I admit to being one of the 87% who did not respond. Unhelpfully, it appears councillors haven't been sent the results. Nor can I find them published online.

We should take with a pinch of salt the conclusions drawn from any survey with a 13% response rate. We are told councillors believed that the two most significant factors in our loss were either dissatisfaction with Corbyn or the party's stance on Brexit.

More significantly though, the poll highlighted the deep divide between the party's membership and its local government representatives.

Whilst just 12% of Labour councillors felt our manifesto was "a vote-winner", party members were overwhelmingly supportive of it, and the best available evidence has so far suggested that the manifesto was far from

the cause of our loss.

LGA Labour poll results like this shouldn't shock us; the limited transformation of the party since 2015 has scarcely touched local government, with the machinery of selections, portfolio and Group Leader elections, and the methods of holding councillors to account (or not) being almost identical to those designed by Blair.

Whilst some left-wingers have been elected into local government, the political outlook of Labour councillors has largely remained static. For example, half the poll's respondents felt our manifesto didn't place enough emphasis on crime and anti-social behaviour — despite it promising 2000 more frontline police officers than Johnson's Tories, and that being one of Labour's core messages for the past two years.

In the same interview, Forbes referred to the financial contribution made to the central party through a mandatory levy on councillors. He said that nearly one councillor in three would be prepared to withhold it unless the party leadership "improved its relationship with local government".

Aside from more NEC and National Policy Forum roles reserved for Councillors, it isn't

clear precisely what Forbes expects from the party. It appears that Forbes sees the councillor levy as a lever to drive party democracy backwards.

It is right that councillors pay higher subs to the party, given the additional money we are provided as party representatives, but this shouldn't grant us any greater say in policy or political direction. This must be set by our membership — which many councillors seem to have forgotten they are also part of.

The political basis for more local government NEC places is flawed regardless of the political levy if you want a genuinely member-led party. Irrespective of your position as a representative, councillors should be participating in elections to our ruling body on an equal basis with all other members. Clearly Forbes' vision is for a more top-down, councillor-led democracy.

Furthermore, it would be ridiculous for the first national direct-action organised by LGA Labour to be a levy-strike against Labour, given that ten years of devastating cuts have not encouraged them to organise even one major political demonstration.

In June 2018 — during the Labour Party democracy review — Forbes was against local

parties selecting their council group leaders [bit.ly/2URBPrL]. Apparently it would be too divisive for members to have a direct say over these appointments? But the truth says otherwise.

With councils such as Tower Hamlets in London, who actively tried to use Tory anti-strike laws against local school staff, or the gentrification of the Latin Village by Haringey Council, it is clearly too divisive for our class if we don't directly elect our local leadership. This should be a basic democratic right. And, despite Forbes, it can be enacted without breaking local government law.

Although it would be easy to blame the political direction of the national party for an election defeat, Labour in local government must take its share of responsibility.

Far from the loss being a result of not involving councillors more in the party, the inability of Labour members to select and hold their local councillors to account has further disconnected party representatives from its members, and its core voting base. □

• Josh Lovell is an opposition Councillor in Stevenage, on Hertfordshire County Council

Barbarism or barbarism?



Film review

By Paul Cooper

The South Korean film *Parasite*, a satire of social and economic inequality, has made quite an impression on two major institutions of world cinema.

At the Cannes film festival it won the Palme d'Or, and then it won Best Film at the Oscars.

It is not difficult to satirise such things, especially when there is an appetite for such in the institutions and audiences of the bourgeoisie. These are feel-good films because they help maintain the myth that world cinema is in fine aesthetic and moral health.

In his previous works (*The Host*, *Mother*, *Snowpiercer*, and *Okja*) director Bong Jo-an-ho follows the great Spanish director Luis Bunuel in ferocious attacks on family and class oppression. As in Bunuel, a dark and surreal treatment of the living room and the bedroom, the nursery and the kitchen allow us to watch the inevitable unravelling of the myths which family and class create to hide the bad stuff.

The “bad stuff” includes workers getting other workers sacked as they infiltrate the rich family.

The “bad stuff” is like sewage. There is a lot of sewage in this film, and plumbing.

The working class family smell different to the rich family, they progressively infiltrate as “servants” of one sort or another. A lot of effort has to go in disguising their “proletar-

ian scent”.

The working class are occasionally “flushed away” and literally become part of the sewage system of Seoul, (as the poorest of the working class occupy the lowest part of the city, the destination of all the shit of the rich).

The main feature in the basement residence of the poor family is a white ceramic flush toilet. It is jammed into just below the ceiling and reached by a stone staircase. It's the only way they can get it plumbed into the city sewage system. Occasionally, like some perverse chocolate fountain you see at posh parties, it fountains shit all over the room.

This happens as things come to a head in the rich family during a rain storm. It is at this point that a change in tone emerges in the film.

There is a movement from comic ridicule to a grotesque rage as secrets hidden in the basement of the rich household result in a murderous collision between the working-class family and a previous servant, whose dismissal they had engineered.

To avoid a spoiler here, I must crudely summarise, but only so that I can suggest an issue with the story. The working poor turn on one another as well as turning on the the rich family.

The earlier ingenuity and audacity of the infiltration of the rich family ends in a bloody frenzy. It is one of those moments of barbarism that expels any emancipatory potential in the story.

One is left with a resolution which can only promise the re-uniting of the family on the basis of its survivors imitating the behaviour of the rich they have destroyed. There is a



truth to that, in the emotional “economy” of families fighting to survive in class societies — but it cannot stand as a metaphor for class fighting to transcend the barbarism of class society.

The resolution of the story does not sit comfortably with the solidarity shown between family members on the one hand, and its complete absence between the two working-class families. I think there is a lack of psychological truth in their being no compas-

sion shown by the young brother and sister, and their challenging their parents' hostility to the other family. Something closer to the actual dynamics of families would also have been more interesting in the development of the story.

Bong Jo-an-ho stares unflinchingly at that barbarism, but maybe has lost sight of those moments of solidarity when human hands are offered, and are grasped — and we are pulled into the future. □

Shedding the cloak of invisibility



Book review

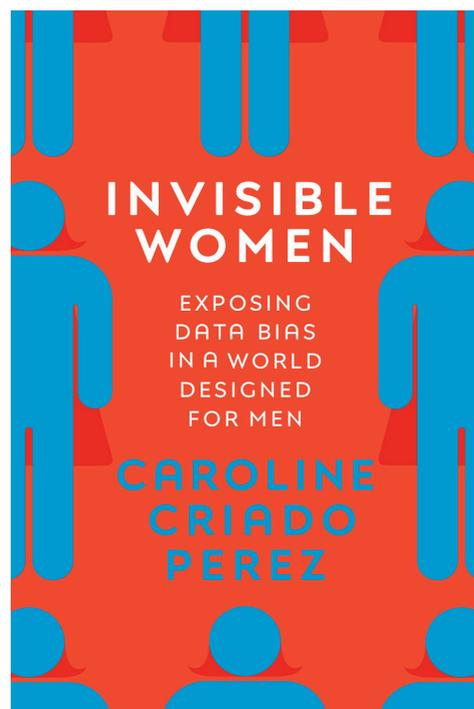
By Daisy Thomas

Analysing and discussing the gender data gaps across employment, transport, car manufacturing, homes, medicine, academic research, and more, in her book *Invisible Women: Exposing the Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, Caroline Criado Perez came to the conclusion that there are three themes that define women's relationship with the world at large.

First, the seeming invisibility of the female body and how that invisibility can result in architectural, technological, and medical design which fails to accommodate the needs of women. This can result in prescription of medication that hasn't been tested on female subjects or failing to account for sex-differences in illness markers, car design which fails to consider the differing positioning of male and female bodies when in the driver's seat, or job conditions that are not hospitable or are downright unhealthy and unsafe for female bodies.

Second, the hyper-visibility of the female body, and the fact that women are more vulnerable to experiencing violence from men than men are from women.

And finally, the trend of women being more likely to undertake unpaid care work.



That work needs to get done. But it is undervalued, frequently unseen, and gets in the way of women being able to participate in the paid workforce at the same rate as men (even men who have children).

Criado Perez explores the myriad structures and contexts in which women are not noticed or counted, and how they can make women sicker, more likely to die or get in-

jured, unable to gain or maintain paid employment, more reliant on public transport, less likely or able to pursue a profession in the public eye (including politics), and waste precious time yet again in the interminable line for the bathroom.

The book flags the idea that what we know about and for women is often unquantifiable (after all, we don't know how big the problem is if we aren't collecting data on it). We do know that ignoring the fact that there are differences in the way that men and women work, get sick, travel, raise a family, feel differences in temperature, experience basic reproductive and biological processes, get injured, and are perceived and reacted to by society and the media, means we ignore a wealth of information that could inform and improve society as a whole for women and for men.

Decisions made from good data are more likely to be sustained. Initiatives and policies can fail when they are based on faulty or missing data, and society as a whole suffers, but women are more likely to take the brunt of this failure as women typically undertake more of the invisible work (childcare, elder care, domestic work) underpinning society.

I've now read this book twice. The first time I read it, I was angry. I am lucky to be a white, relatively well-off woman with a supportive social network, a job I love (as a domestic violence counsellor), and access to sufficient resources, in a developed country. I wasn't angry for me. I was angry for all the

women across the world who had and who have less than me and are exposed to unsafe, unhealthy, and unsanitary conditions.

At least one person in my life (who has more knowledge of data analysis and statistics than I have, and whom I know to also be concerned for women's rights) remonstrated with me that some of Criado-Perez's comments and conclusions were hasty and inaccurate. I don't feel qualified to judge on that.

But the second time I read this book, I felt better able to absorb its content without being blinded by frustration and injustice. I'm still angry, but I feel better able to put my feelings into perspective. I feel more hopeful. More hard conversations about the world are happening. The media is putting out more stories about women, written by women, and for women. We are starting to crack open the door and let in some of the light.

When I finished this book — the second time — it didn't feel like an ending to me. It felt like the beginning. The beginning of a new enlightenment or renaissance where we start to explore more women's stories, stories of people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and stories of people of who identify as gender and sexually diverse. All stories matter.

In a culture that seeks to become more individualistic, commercialised, and privileges instant gratification, hearing diverse stories and voices is a way to rediscover empathy, connection, and our common humanity. □

In Israel, the fight against annexation



Interview with Maisam Jaljuli

Q: Can you tell us about the demonstration Standing Together organised on Saturday 1 February?

A: This was a large and impressive protest, in which some 2,000 Jews and Arabs came out to the streets after receiving only a few days' notice. The message was that we are against annexation and also against the transfer of Arab citizens in the "Triangle" region of Israel. Though not everyone noticed this detail, the Trump Plan actually stipulates that the Israeli citizenship of 300,000 citizens in this region, including myself, should be revoked.

Even merely flirting with the notion of revoking my citizenship, after I have dedicated myself to the good of all in our society through my work as a labour organiser and social activist, is incredibly insulting. Our protest proved that Jews and Arabs within Israel will not accept this plan, or any similar unilateral plan. This one in particular is riddled with hatred and endangers all of us with a future of endless warfare.

Q: Following this protest, what are the prospects for building a movement within Israeli society against annexation and occupation?

A: We now face a tremendous challenge: to convince citizens of Israel that this plan is not only harmful to Palestinians — in the occupied territories and within Israel — but also detrimental to Jews, a death sentence for everyone living here. Most unfortunately, the Blue and White party praised the plan. Even some politicians that are considered "soft left" equivocated and did not produce a clear statement of censure against Trump's plan.

That's why the burden of responsibility falls on us, citizen activists, who need to build a strong civil base of opposition. My vision is to create a big tent that will include all the different peace movements, all the different social movements, with our movement Standing Together taking a leadership role. It is important to act decisively in the short term, expressing loud, resolute opposition to Trump's plan, and exerting great pressure on centre-left political parties to walk away from this plan. This is what we are doing. We are purchasing big billboards, holding protests and smaller community events on this. But, we also need to think about the long term, which means bringing as many people as possible into this big tent, showing them that it is in their self-interest to join it.

Q: What are the practical implications of Netanyahu's aims, given a green light by the "Trump Plan", for Arab citizens of Israel?

A: For an entire decade, Netanyahu has been trying to delegitimise Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel. The first peak of this violent campaign came in 2015 when he tried to encourage Jewish voters to go to the polls by warning them that Arabs were "streaming to the voting booth" in large buses. The Nation State Law was, of course, the most acute expression of this project, a law that differentiates between first and second class citizens. Now, it seems like the Nation State Law was merely a warm up for the revocation of our citizenship, which is now proposed. This time, the policy also appears on a document signed by the most powerful nation in the



world, the United States. We face a material, immanent threat of forced transfer and loss of citizenship.

I'm speaking primarily about the threat that this plan poses to us, Palestinian citizens of Israel, since I feel it is a less known aspect of the plan. Of course, the threat of annexing large parts of the West Bank, and isolating Palestinians there in separate bantustans is equally dangerous. In fact, the two go hand in hand: They are two prongs of the same racist vision of dehumanizing Arabs, Palestinians, excluding us from the public sphere, controlling our ability to move, to influence, and live as we wish.

Q: The prospects in official/electoral politics in Israel seem bleak. Ahead of the next elections, what's your assessment of that?

A: Hands down, the most critical goal for this coming election is Arab voter turnout. We need to make the Joint List, under [left-wing MK Ayman] Odeh's leadership, the third largest party in the Knesset. I do think that we can get 15 parliamentary seats. If that's the case, we get to decide who will be the next Prime Minister.

Sadly, the Blue and White party has reversed many of its proclamations about equality and civil rights and has descended into right-wing positions, with regard to Palestinian Arabs. As a result, the Joint List will not be a part of any coalition. That's for sure. However, if we are big enough, we will be the ones to "tip the scale" between the parties and that will give us a window of influence. We would also have the chance to be leaders of the opposition and that would grant us power of a new sort.

Q: Some international commentators, especially on the left, claims that a genuine two-states settlement is now impossible, or that "the two-state solution is dead". This seems highly premature to us, as the shift in the balance of forces required to bring about some kind of unitary or post-national framework is far less feasible than the shift required to force Israel to concede a viable Palestinian state. What's your view on this?

A: I truly do not agree with this assessment. Declaring that "there is no two-state solution" actually comes from Netanyahu's rhetoric, which he espouses in order to attract even farther-right Messianic voters, who believe in a "Greater Israel" from the river to

the sea! He has convinced a great many people of this. The rhetoric is easy to say. But, if we are being realistic, we should face the fact that "one state" has one meaning, and that's an apartheid state. I still hold that a two-state solution is not only the fairest solution, it is also the only realistic solution.

Q: What campaigns is Standing Together currently working on, beyond building action against the threat of annexation?

A: Anyone who knows our movement (feel free to check out our website!) knows that we believe in combining the struggle for Israeli-Palestinian peace, with "domestic" struggles for racial and social equality.

So, on the "domestic" end, we have several ongoing campaigns. One is fighting the extreme day-to-day violence and crime within Arab society in Israel. Though people abroad are less aware of this issue, it is actually tearing us apart from the inside and it is something that our communities talk about a lot. Of course, the responsibility for our community's violence lies squarely with the government, which offers us next to nothing in terms of infrastructure, community support, and education. We cannot ask people to organise around larger, more abstract issues without addressing this immediate crisis. We literally walk out the door and fear for our lives and our children's lives. That is why Standing Together has taken on this issue, acting in partnership with Arab communities throughout the country, mobilising to speak up for their right to safety, dignity, public resources, and a gun-free society.

Simultaneously, we are working on health-care justice. Our public health care system is crashing and there are appalling gaps between what services citizens can obtain, based on where they live, which is a function of economic and social status. This year we will focus on a campaign to guarantee rights for the aged, equivalent to the minimum wage. This is about fighting for their dignity, especially for those who do not have pensions, and that is a great many.

In addition to these two overarching projects, all of which are organised and executed through Jewish-Arab partnership, we have campaigns on climate justice, public housing, and the integration of the Arabic language into the public sphere.

Q: What can activists elsewhere in the world do to support Standing Together, and other progressive forces attempting to build Jewish-Arab unity on the basis of socialist politics?

A: Right now, we are witnessing the rise of the extreme right all over the world. At the same time, there are also effective progressive movements sprouting up from the grass roots all over the world. We at Standing Together seek partners. We want to learn from you, from your experience, and from your knowledge, as a way to improve our struggle for justice in Israel. □

• Maisam Jaljuli, a Palestinian citizen of Israel and activist in the left-wing Jewish-Arab social movement Standing Together, spoke to Daniel Randall from *Solidarity* about their struggles against annexation, occupation, racism, and for workers' rights and social justice. For other interviews with Standing Together activists, see "Beyond co-existence to solidarity", an interview with Alon-Lee Green and Sally Abed, bit.ly/alg-sa, and "Jews and Arabs standing together", an interview with Hannah Pollin-Galay, bit.ly/hpg-st. Thanks for Hannah Pollin-Galay for translation.

Marxists and “left governments”

By Sacha Ismail

The outcome of the Irish general election, with a fall in support for right-wing parties Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil and a surge for Sinn Féin, has led to discussions about the formation of a “left government”. Leaders of Solidarity-People Before Profit, run by organisations linked or previously linked to the SWP and Socialist Party here, have taken it for granted they would support a coalition government with Sinn Féin if the parliamentary numbers were there (which they don’t seem to be).

More generally, much of the radical left – even the Marxist left – internationally has drifted into a more-or-less consensus that where socialists have a few seats in Parliament, and may hold the balance, they should form government coalitions or agreements with the soft, often extremely soft, left.

In extreme cases, self-described radical leftists have entered formal coalitions with right-wing social democratic parties, accepting ministries. In Italy’s 2006 election, Communist Refoundation ran as part of an alliance dominated by the neo-liberal Olive Tree party and then took positions in the second Prodi government.

After this year’s Spanish election, the left-populist Unidas Podemos alliance entered a coalition with the Socialists, Spain’s more right-wing equivalent of Labour.

In other cases, left-wing forces with parliamentary representation have supported soft-left governments from outside.

The drift towards a more “supportive” stance seems to have gained momentum since 2011, when the centre-left returned to power in Denmark. The more left-wing Socialist People’s Party (a 1950s left split from the Danish Communist Party) joined the government and the cabinet. The much more radical Red-Green Alliance, including many Trotskyists, declared its willingness to “compromise and reach agreements”. From 2011 to 2015 and again from 2019 it has supported Social Democratic governments from outside, declaring itself part of a “red bloc” committed to putting the “left” in office.

In 2015, Portugal’s Left Bloc and Communist Party concluded an agreement to support a minority government of the soft-left Socialist Party, without actually entering the government. After the 2019 election, this confidence agreement was renewed.

Whatever exactly would have happened if Sinn Féin had won more seats, the Irish far left’s stance should be seen in this context.

MARXIST DEBATES

There are debates in the history of the Marxist movement about support for and involvement in left-wing governments, the classic ones being state (regional) governments in Germany in 1923 (Saxony and Thuringia). Those debates took place on a very different basis.

The general and default assumption was that Marxists did not generically support, let alone become part of, “left” governments. The German cases were in the context of a collapse of bourgeois authority and very strong labour movements in particular regions, plausibly capable of sustaining “workers’ governments” which might allow the workers to arm and soon take power across Germany.

The conditions the German Communists placed on potential Social Democratic partners were very demanding. In Saxony the So-

“We are not a government party; we are the party of irreconcilable opposition... we realise not through the medium of bourgeois governments... but exclusively through the education of the masses through agitation, through explaining to the workers what they should defend and what they should overthrow. Such a “defence” cannot give immediate miraculous results. But we do not even pretend to be miracle workers. As things stand, we are a revolutionary minority. Our work must be directed so that the workers on whom we have influence should correctly appraise events, not permit themselves to be caught unawares, and prepare the general sentiment of their own class for the revolutionary solution of the tasks confronting us.”

Leon Trotsky, 1939

cial Democrats rejected making important government decisions subject to approval by a congress of factory councils – but accepted arming the workers, alongside a host of radical anti-capitalist measures.

The examples discussed here are all at or towards the opposite end of the spectrum. The Social Democratic parties involved are not radical even in the sense that Corbyn’s Labour has been radical. In general, they have continued neo-liberal policies, leftishly modified to a greater or less extent. Nor are they accountable in any real sense to the organised labour movement.

Before the next election in 2015, the Danish Social Democrats pushed out their Popular Socialist ministers in order to push through the sale of shares in a public energy company to Goldman Sachs. In 2019, when they had support to return to office from the Popular Socialists and the Red-Green Alliance, they stood on an essentially anti-immigration platform.

There has been excitement on the left about Portugal’s Socialist Party government winning again with an increased vote, and concessions extracted by the parties to its left. The same for the Socialist-Podemos coalition in Spain. But that excitement must reflect the left’s ambitions fading in the context of triumphant neo-liberalism and nationalism. Partially winding back austerity is not radical!

Even more misguided, I think, is the idea that Bernie Sanders and socialists in the US should support any Democratic nominee for President – including not just Hillary Clinton in 2016, but now also right-wing billionaire Michael Bloomberg. If today’s European social-democratic parties are distant from the SPD left wing in 1923 Germany, how much more distant is the US Democratic Party.

Revolutionaries should, of course, side with “soft-left” governments against military or fascistic coups, as the Bolsheviks sided with the Kerensky government against the attempted Kornilov coup in 1917 – but, as Lenin stressed at the time, without positively supporting Kerensky politically.

We should also side with liberal or even conservative bourgeois-democratic governments against militaristic radical-right attempts to overthrow them – though with a different political message than in cases



Pedro Sánchez (Socialist), Spanish prime minister, and Pablo Iglesias (Unidas Podemos), since January one of Sánchez’s deputy prime ministers in the left coalition government

where the government has some connection, however weak, to the labour movement.

There may be tactical issues around parliamentary votes, the details depending on each country – for instance, votes of confidence and no confidence in social-democratic governments. In 1931 the German Trotskyists denounced the Stalinists’ support for the Nazi campaign to oust Prussia’s Social-Democratic state government through a referendum, and so gave that government a sort of “support”.

There is no objection to supporting “left” governments on particular policies or conflicts, or ad hoc negotiations to try to win concessions.

The problem is rather that the whole debate, even among Trotskyists, has shifted towards the assumption of positive and general (to some extent) support. The context has been growing threats from the right – but the result has been to make the socialist left even more marginal and even less capable of shifting the political situation.

DISCREDITING

Very quickly after 2006, Italy’s Communist Refoundation, a party that had loomed large on the European left, destroyed itself as a result of its involvement in the Prodi government. Objecting only late in the day when it came to a crunch, Trotskyists were driven out of Refoundation by its leadership.

In Brazil in 2003 Miguel Rossetto, a member of the “Mandelite” Fourth International, became a minister in the genuinely reforming but indisputably bourgeois and neo-liberal Lula government. His comrades’ understanding attitude towards his adventure did not stop the Workers’ Party leadership attacking and driving out the far left.

Nor did it stop the eventual fiasco of the Workers’ Party regime leading to the rise of Bolsonaro. The idea that the revolutionary left must support soft-left coalitions for fear of the right gaining the advantage generally leads only to the right gaining a greater advantage later on, but now with the whole

“left coalition” discredited by its record in government.

If soft-left and mainstream-right are evenly balanced in Parliament, it does not follow that the revolutionary left making a coalition (formal or informal) with the soft left is the best option.

The parliamentary balance that would give that coalition the option of office also enables the revolutionary left, plus the soft left if enough pressure can be applied, to vote down the right and its measures, and thus pave the way for discrediting the right and the rise of working-class confidence, rather than the opposite.

Left-wing forces supporting soft-left governments often appeal to the idea of extra-parliamentary mobilisation. This does not resolve the problem. When the French Communist Party was in coalition governments with the Socialist Party in 1981-4 and 1997-2002, it said it would combine two levels of activity, one seeking the best deal within the government, and the other mobilising on the streets.

That included the CP supporting protests against policies pushed through by CP ministers, with the devious explanation that the CP ministers were doing the best they could on their level, and the CP rank and file must do the best it could on its level.

The result was an effectively neo-liberal government, a discrediting of left-wing ideas, and a demobilisation of the working class.

The job of the socialist left must always be to help the working class advance its class-consciousness and spirit of socialism and solidarity, including at the expense of social-democratic politics, and to develop workers’ struggles and organisation, against all capitalists and capitalist governments. The approach of routinely backing up as left a government as you can get is not compatible with those tasks. □

More rail? Yes. HS2? Maybe not

By Simon Nelson

More railway lines? Yes. HS2 in particular? Not really.

There are higher priorities: electrification of the railways, many of which are still running diesel trains; increasing capacity on intercity services; improving existing connections; reinvestment in branch lines; newer trains.

A well-staffed and free or cheap integrated rail and bus network is the sort of large-scale infrastructure project that should come before HS2.

Some of the arguments used against HS2 are weak. But there is also good reason to question the arguments made for HS2 as a way to create good jobs, as a way to help the North, and as a green alternative to short-distance flights.

"Time to get on with building HS2", was the headline on the GMB union's website the day before Boris Johnson announced that the government planned to do just that.

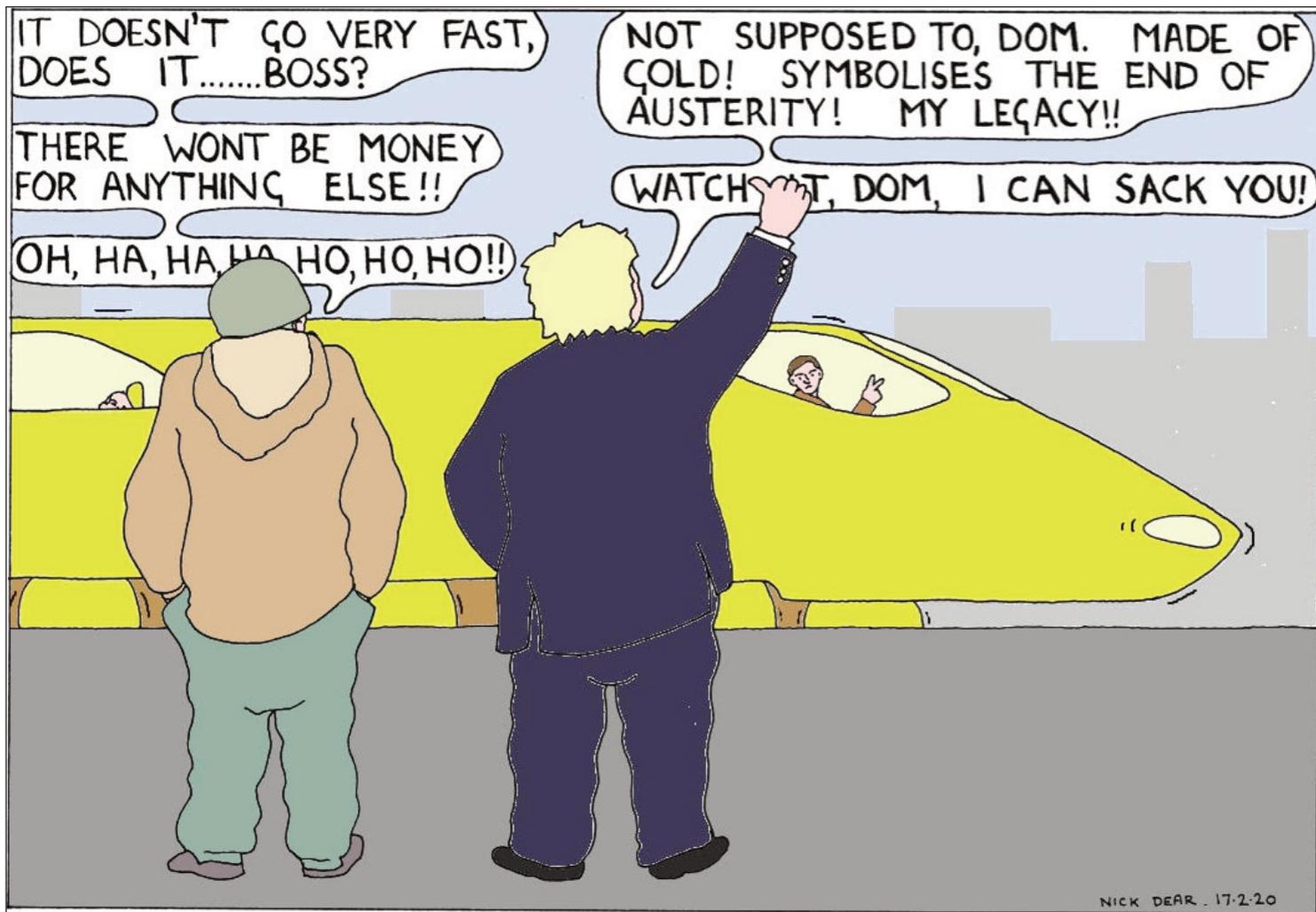
By the time the whole project is complete the *Financial Times* estimates it could have cost £106bn.¹ The GMB champions the jobs that will be created during its construction as well as asking, "Ministers [to] concentrate on making HS2 a model of good employment practice while making sure our members can get on with building world class infrastructure in the Midlands and the North."²

The GMB had presumably missed the fact that many of the companies that will be working on the project are former or current blacklists. 11 firms were originally chosen to undertake the initial building work from July 2017, some of them joint ventures. One which included Carillion got well over £1bn of contracts awarded, despite the government knowing that Carillion was on the verge of collapse.³ The former head of the infrastructure division of Carillion is now the head of a joint venture of Vinci and Balfour Beatty which was awarded £3.8bn in HS2 contracts.⁴

FRANCHISE

The trains themselves will be operated by a new franchise, the Westcoast Partnership, which will be responsible for the existing West Coast mainline intercity trains as well as the first phase of HS2. The previous government had already got three bidders who wanted to do it.

The ever-growing cost and the lack of oversight bothers some Tory MPs. One of the 2015 plans for HS2 included large swathes of property that would need to be purchased with no price given. Unforeseen delays or hiccups are likely to bring increases in cost, and for a project which on current estimates won't have trains running on it until 2028.



Crossrail, a comparatively much smaller project and one much nearer completion, is already delayed by nearly three years.

Several newer Tory MPs are in opposition to HS2. Some of their concerns are reasonable.

Public transport is poor in the North, and outside London more generally. And HS2 won't fix that.

HS2 will in the first instance only give a speedier non-stop journey between Birmingham and London. In the future it is due to have extensions to Leeds and Manchester. There is talk of a future high speed connection from Liverpool to Hull, the so-called Northern Powerhouse Rail.⁵ Some see that as dependent on HS2, some as an alternative.

Connections by bus or local train services between outlying towns and major centres like Manchester and Leeds are poor, and employers in those areas, as well as working-class people, are aware of that. The nationalisation of Northern Rail shows the government knows the problem, too.

Trains are currently only 9 kph faster between cities in the North like Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool or Newcastle than road. 500,000 people commute over 30km every day to work in London. Only 250,000 people commute those distances to the Liverpool, Manchester, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Leeds and Sheffield city regions. Outlying areas of Greater Manchester and Merseyside have poor connections to the city centres.

Business people in towns like Warrington or Wakefield are increasingly concerned that people working in Liverpool or Leeds who have poor train services and overcrowded and continually cut bus services, and won't or can't commute by car (only 63% of people aged 20-29 today have learned to drive: it was 75% in 1994⁶), will move to those cities and out of the outlying towns.

A report commissioned by the government and headed by Lord Oakervee, a former Chair of HS2, was always likely to favour continued construction. Supporters of HS2 argue that the new HS2 line will free capacity on existing lines to run more frequently-stopping services, and that it will shift journeys from air to rail.

Yet only a tiny proportion of journeys between London and Birmingham are by air, and not many between London and Manchester or Leeds. To replace internal flights, you need rail services from Birmingham and London to Exeter, and London to Aberdeen.

FASTER

Constructing high-speed rail lines for relatively short trips (like London-Birmingham) and in a relatively small, densely-populated country has a different calculus from constructing them in France or China.

The environmental argument *against* HS2 is also weak: some ancient woodland will be destroyed, but it is a tiny percentage (0.001%) of Britain's overall total, and no more than for

the construction of just 14 miles of new motorway for the Lower Thames Crossing.⁷

"Ancient woodland" is woodland that has existed continuously since 1600. It subsists in patches dotted around Britain. No new railway line of any length or route could avoid some ancient woodland. HS2 promises to replace the woodland destroyed and to increase the number of trees after its completion. But a much smaller investment could reduce the journey time between Leeds and Hull from an hour to less than 40 minutes and run twice the number of trains.

The *Financial Times* believes that despite the growing cost, the long term benefits of HS2 are worth the risk.⁸ The eastern extension of the Jubilee Line ran over budget, but is credited with facilitating over 100,000 new jobs in the London docklands, which had lost over 80,000 jobs in the 1960s.⁹

But really HS2 is focused on getting people to London quickly. As the dissenting voice, Lord Berkeley, said in the government's report in HS2: "Getting to London is secondary for most people except for MPs and the managing directors of companies."¹⁰ □

¹Britain's green light for HS2 is worth the risks <https://www.ft.com/content/b3c0a756-4cc3-11ea-95a0-43d18ec715f5>

²Time to get on with building HS2 <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/time-get-build-ing-hs2>

³HS2 signed 1.3 bn Carillion contracts after profit warning <https://www.newcivilengineer.com/latest/hs2-signed-1-3bn-carillion-contracts-after-profit-warning-07-06-2018/>

⁴Ex-Carillion boss to take over £2.5bn Balfour Beatty Vinci HS2 contracts <http://www.railtechnologymagazine.com/Rail-News/ex-carillion-boss-to-take-over-25bn-balfour-beatty-inci-hs2-contracts>

⁵Transport for the North <https://transport-forthenorth.com/northern-powerhouse-rail/>

⁶Are young people going cool on cars?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-44849381>

⁷"A remarkable achievement": the environmental case for building HS2 <https://www.citymetric.com/transport/remarkable-achievement-environmental-case-building-hs2-4887>

⁸Britain's green light for HS2 is worth the risks <https://www.ft.com/content/b3c0a756-4cc3-11ea-95a0-43d18ec715f5>

⁹HS2 will spark regeneration, say city leaders on the route <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/feb/03/hs2-will-spark-regeneration-say-city-leaders-on-the-route>

¹⁰HS2: parliament misled about true cost, says Labour peer <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jan/05/hs2-parliament-misled-about-true-cost-says-labour-peer>

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US West Coast dockers' union under threat

By Jack Heyman

A recent federal court decision in Portland, Oregon poses an immediate existential threat to the strongest union in the US today, the ILWU, and ultimately to the labour movement as a whole.

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), arguably one of the most militant unions in the US, has been hit with a union-busting \$93.6 million dollar court-imposed fine for a secondary boycott deemed illegal under the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act.

The plaintiff, International Container Terminal Services, Inc. (ICTSI) is owned by the third richest man in the Philippines, billionaire Enrique Razon Jr. and operates in 27 ports worldwide, mainly in poor, developing countries.

The maritime company claims it was run out of business in Portland because of a secondary boycott by the longshore union during a long-running dispute over two mechanics jobs which are presently done by another union, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). ICTSI argues the primary employer is the Port of Portland which hires the mechanics, so they claim the longshore union organised an "illegal" secondary boycott.

For the ILWU's part, it was a foolish top down campaign organised by the dubious Leal Sundet, then an ILWU Coast Committeeman, who had previously been an Oregon area executive for the employers' group, the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA).

This capital vs labour battle is due to be decided by a federal court judge. The response of the ILWU to the union-busting verdict should be to take the struggle out of the courts and onto the docks where our strength lies, as it did so many times in the past.

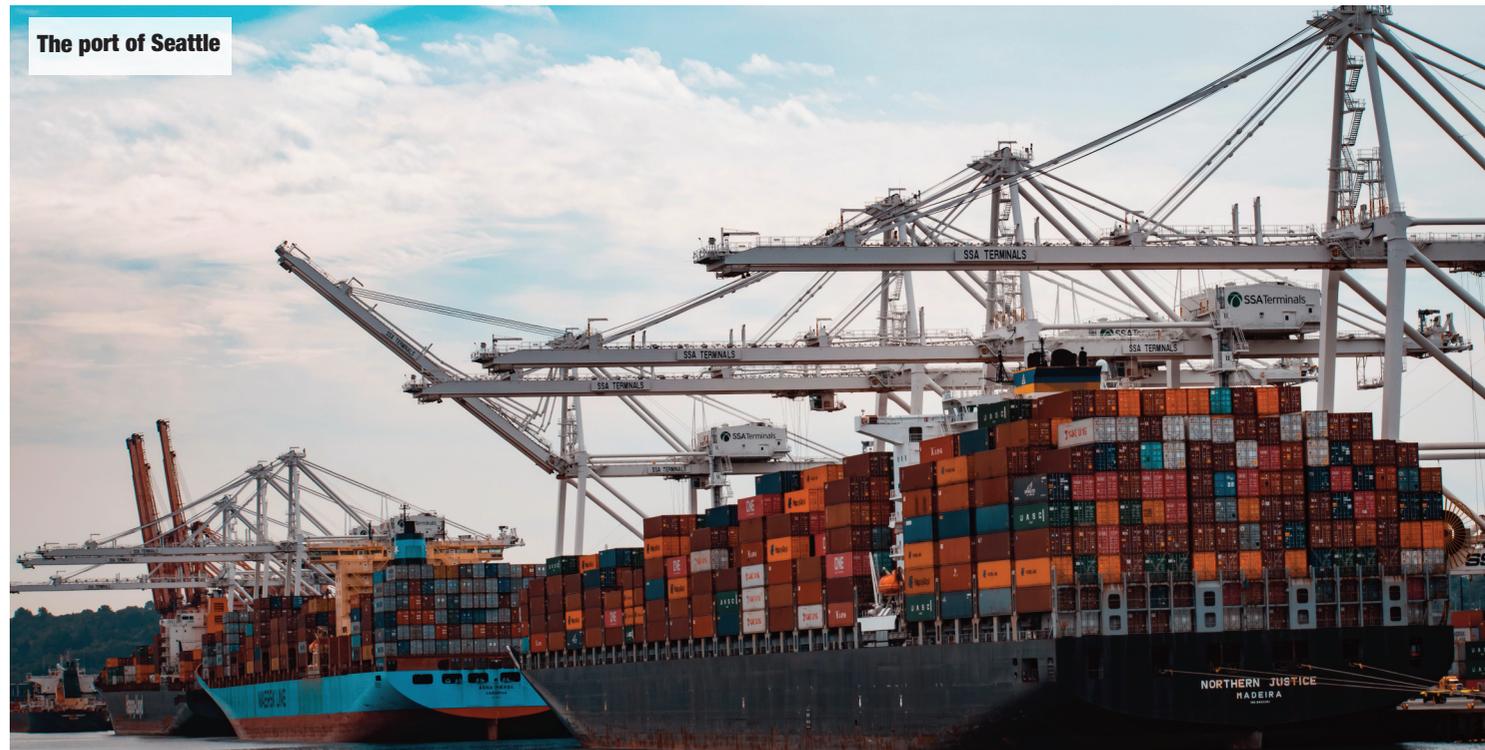
Otherwise the union leadership is agreeing to let this battle between labour and capital be decided by a capitalist judge. Some members don't want to declare bankruptcy, but that would mean an exorbitant assessment of all longshore workers. Others want to re-join the AFL-CIO but that doesn't necessarily mean real support for the ILWU. The main obstacle is that the leadership is offering no kind of active labour defense, only a deadly silence in the media.

Known as the slave labour act by the organised labour movement, the Taft-Hartley Act bans solidarity actions, or secondary boycotts as the government's National Labour Relations Board (NLRB) refers to an action not directed against the primary employer. But it was solidarity actions that built the labour movement.

This battle between ICTSI and the ILWU began in 2012, shortly after a year-long lock-out by the international grain conglomerate Export Grain Terminal (EGT) in Longview, Washington downriver from Portland. Longshore members did everything in their power to win that conflict — blocking grain trains on the tracks, and when they were slapped with injunctions their wives and daughters stood fast on the tracks.

They occupied the EGT facility, defended themselves against violent police attacks and went to jail for picketing. When ILWU President McEllrath was called to the front of a protest on the railroad tracks by members he was arrested. All Northwest ports shut down and marched on Longview the following day. That's the power the union wields.

Yet, the moment of truth came February 2012, as a scab grain ship was escorted by an armed Coast Guard cutter dispatched by President Obama. State and local police



The port of Seattle

forces were mustered. Faced with an all out fight on the docks with mass support to be mobilised in caravans committed by labour councils in Longview, Seattle, Portland and San Francisco and the burgeoning Occupy movement, the ILWU International President Bob McEllrath and Coast Committeeman Leal Sundet, fearful of a serious class battle, capitulated and forced local officials to sign the contract.

Longview union members were incensed by this betrayal. They were not even given the right to vote on the contract, which violates the ILWU Constitution but not capitalist law. The ILWU was able to maintain jurisdiction, but the loss in working and safety conditions was devastating. The union tops had snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

SOLIDARITY

Dan Coffman, Longview Local 21 President, and Byron Jacobs, Secretary-Treasurer, tried to call for a Longshore Caucus, an elected body representing all ports, at the start of the EGT struggle to build solidarity actions on the Coast. International Officers blocked that effort, stopped Local 10 from implementing solidarity actions and kept the locked out workers isolated from the major ports in California.

Moreover, union members like Longview Local 21's Byron Jacobs and others were arrested for picketing and left in jail for weeks without bail or union defense. Tragically Byron died two years ago while working on the Longview docks because of unsafe working conditions. Many were inspired by Byron's brave class struggle actions during that hard-fought battle.

Shortly after the EGT debacle was over, Sundet directed the "job trusting" campaign, actually union raiding, in Portland to get the two electrician jobs at ICTSI. Sundet, in an act of class collaboration, even got PMA to join the lawsuit jointly with the ILWU against ICTSI, but the employers bailed out later. The "slowdown" claimed by ICTSI only reduced container handling by 5-7 cans an hour. ICTSI said ILWU was gimmicking safety issues.

The truth is union members were being fined by Local 8 officials for raising safety beefs, shamefully doing diligent work for the employer. To top it off the judge wouldn't allow this scandalous discipline by union bureaucrats to be introduced in court! Many

members were frustrated by Sundet's long-running top down job action. In any case the capitalist courts shouldn't determine union jurisdiction.

JOB TRUST

A job trust is an employer-worker monopolistic scheme for the benefit of the employer and labour aristocrats. An all port workers' council should have been organised with longshoremen, electricians, mechanics, port truckers and other port workers to make the Portland waterfront 100% union and democratically decide jurisdictional disputes amongst the workers excluding the employers. Real class unity can challenge the employing class and even stop the fascist attacks in the Portland/Vancouver area.

At the start of the EGT campaign Sundet directed longshore workers to cross picket lines of AFL-CIO construction unions who were picketing the use of non-union labour to build the new EGT facility. Sundet's scabrous action made it difficult later to get unions to honor ILWU picket lines and to get resolutions passed at the Oregon and Washington state AFL-CIO organisations.

A couple years later during master longshore contract negotiations ILWU International Officers extended the expired agreement in order to help employers in Los Angeles quash a picket line of port truckers, mainly immigrant workers. That scam allowed the PMA arbitrator to rule it was an "illegal" action. Union officials then directed longshoremen to cross the truckers' picket line breaking the action. It was these kinds of traitorous acts that earned ILWU President McEllrath and PMA President McKenna a joint Connie Award from the maritime capitalists.

If ICTSI's owner billionaire Enrique Razon is successful in his court suit, it would be a body blow to labour's solidarity actions. Union bureaucrats, whether in ILWU or in any union, before taking any action will first consult with attorneys which means no action because of the fear of fines. Given the long history of ILWU's labour solidarity, often challenging Taft-Hartley, it's high time for other unions in the US and internationally to reciprocate even if the ILWU isn't at this time affiliated to the AFL-CIO. The old syndicalist motto must prevail, "An injury to one is an injury to all!"

Has the labour movement learned its lesson from the defeat of the 1981 PATCO strike? President Reagan attacked the striking air traffic controllers, shackling its union leaders and hauling them off to jail in front of TV cameras, Trump style. The AFL-CIO leadership remained criminally silent, refusing to lift a finger to support the strikers' picket lines and shut down the airports.

Reportedly, when ILWU President Jim Herman suggested to IAM President William Winpisinger that airports and seaports be shutdown in an act of solidarity he was rebuffed. The trade union movement has paid a heavy price for the betrayal of PATCO strikers. Union membership has atrophied for the last 40 years, peaking in 1979 with 21 million members and atrophying to less than half that figure today.

In 2011, when AFL-CIO President Trumka issued a call for unions to support the besieged Wisconsin state workers, only ILWU Local 10, again in defiance of Taft-Hartley and in the face of PMA employer threats, took on-the-job action and shut Bay Area ports down in a bold act of solidarity.

The S.E. Wisconsin AFL-CIO issued a letter stating: "Whether it's racist apartheid in South Africa, imperialist war in Iraq, or fascist plutocracy in Wisconsin, Local 10, over and over again, shows us 'What a Union [should] look like!!' Please convey our appreciation to your members and kick some PMA ass on April 25. In Solidarity, James A. Cavanaugh, President."

Now the survival of the ILWU is at stake. If the ranks follow ILWU's militant history, West Coast ports will be shut down against a union-busting, government-imposed fine. Other unions must join the fight. The ball is in the court of the working class, organised and unorganised. If [AFL-CIO president Rich] Trumka doesn't act in defense of the ILWU and call for solidarity actions, workers must pick up the cudgel.

This anti-labour court decision in Portland is a decisive moment for organised labour and all working people. □

• Abridged from the US magazine *Counterpunch*. Full text at bit.ly/ilwu-jh. Jack Heyman is a retired West Coast longshore worker and ILWU activist, and a longtime revolutionary socialist.

After 12 years of Tory misrule



By Barrie Hardy

Prolonged periods of Tory rule have a habit of ending in a tide of sleaze and scandal. John Major gained the largest Tory vote in history in 1992, but his party was brought to a historic low five years later, with their worst election result in 90 years.

A similar set of circumstances faced the Tories in 1964, after what Labour Party leader Harold Wilson famously called “thirteen years of Tory misrule”. On that occasion the most infamous scandal besetting them was “the Profumo Affair”. Today we are in a third long period of continuous Tory rule (from 2010), so BBC’s *The Trial of Christine Keeler* (now on iPlayer and DVD) offers a timely look at Tory undoing all those years ago.

The series, created by screenwriter Amanda Coe, concerns events surrounding the Profumo Affair of the early 1960s. Coe’s drama is keen to emphasise the experiences of the three most important women involved, who were in varying respects victims in the imbroglio.

For those on the brink of their teenage years at the time, this scandal in high places provided a first glimpse of corruption in the British ruling class establishment, as well as an opportunity to embarrass parents by asking them questions about sex.

The scandal became public in April 1963. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan — an Old Etonian, quelle surprise — and his cabinet were exclusively white and male. Capital punishment was in force, abortion illegal, homosexuality outlawed and racial discrimination perfectly legal. The second wave of feminism had yet to reach these shores.

One government department had an honest designation — namely, the Ministry of War — presided over by John Profumo. A scion of the establishment, Profumo was a product of Harrow, Oxford and the Bullingdon Club. He got entangled in scandal because of an extra-marital affair with a teenage girl, Christine Keeler, who’d also been in an relationship with Soviet naval attaché (i.e. spy) Yevgeny Ivanov at around the same time. Profumo lied to parliament about his association with Keeler and when the lie was exposed he resigned.

Profumo “redeemed himself” subsequently through charitable work a path chosen later on by Liberal leader and Old Etonian Jeremy Thorpe, who’d been embroiled in an even more extraordinary scandal in the late 1970s. However, no such get-out would be available to the two other most significant figure in the episode.

Much of the drama revolves around Stephen Ward — an osteopath who earned his living massaging the muscles of the upper classes — convincingly played by actor James Norton. Ward was a social climber who sought to ingratiate himself with the rich and powerful by procuring young women for their sexual gratification. He was motivated not by money, but a yearning to gain acceptance amongst a rich circle of friends.

Unfortunately for Ward, once Profumo resigned the powers that be sought scapegoats and he was number one fall guy. The Metropolitan Police were only too willing to oblige their superiors. They knew Ward was “kinky but not a ponce”. Nonetheless, he was



Christine Keeler, played by Sophie Cookson

charged with “living off immoral earnings”. Deserted by rich false friends like Lord Astor, whom he naively hoped would come forward as “character witnesses” at his trial, Ward was found guilty. He committed suicide rather than face jail time.

Christine Keeler, who is played by Sophie Cookson, is the shining star of the drama and its most sympathetic victim. The scene in which she is attacked and vilified by a mob as she makes her way into court highlights how traumatic her situation was.

ABUSE

Keeler had grown up in poverty and been subject to sexual abuse during adolescence. She would only come to recognise her period of “friendship” with Ward as exploitative grooming later on in life. Her fate at the hands of the establishment was nine months imprisonment for perjury, although she had committed the perjury so that an abusive boyfriend was put behind bars.

Keeler would never escape the undeserved notoriety for the rest of her life. She lived her later years in penury, and on one occasion got the sack as a school dinner lady when her bigoted employer realised who she was.

Other acting plaudits go to Ellie Bamber, playing Keeler’s friend Mandy Rice-Davies, and Emilia Fox as Profumo’s “wronged wife” Valerie. Bamber delivered with relish Rice-Davies’ famous courtroom answer: “Well he would, wouldn’t he” to Lord Astor’s denial he’d slept with her. It’s since made it into the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations and as an abbreviation on the internet: MRDA — Mandy Rice Davis Applies.

Fox as Valerie Profumo shows outrage not only at her husband’s infidelity as such, but also because it represented to her a form of class betrayal — her husband having slept with “a common little whore”. Fox appears to be a socially aware actor, unlike her idiot cousin Lawrence. She is a supporter of a human rights charity.

Too what degree has there been social change since those days? The grooming of teenagers for the sexual gratification of rich old men automatically brings Jeffrey Epstein to mind. Prince Andrew denies he participated in anything untoward, but then he would, wouldn’t he? Definitely MRDA!

The Profumo affair was a gift for the Labour Party and its new leader Harold Wil-

son. Wilson’s chief attack dog was George Wigg, MP for Dudley, who would later become Paymaster General and be given a baronetcy.

Wigg claimed to be pursuing Profumo “in the interests of national security” rather moral outrage, but Baron Wigg was not beyond disreputable behaviour himself. According to Profumo’s son David, Wigg “was in 1976 charged with kerb-crawling, using insulting behaviour, accosting women and endangering the peace. His defence before the magistrates was that he was endeavouring to purchase a newspaper. Just thought I would mention it.”

Macmillan quit the premiership, pleading ill-health, four months after Profumo resigned. In those days, the Tories didn’t elect their leader or involve the party membership at all when choosing one. That task fell to the mysterious Tory grandees, aka “men in grey suits”. They decided that the leadership mantle should fall on the shoulders of yet another product of Eton, Foreign Secretary Lord Home.

The last time a lord had been Prime Minister was in 1902. By 1963 even the Tories thought it would look bad for the head of government to sit in the Lords and not have to answer questions from elected representatives. Home therefore renounced his peerage, becoming plain old Sir Alec. For most of October 1963 he was PM despite not being an actual member of parliament.

Nevertheless, a safe seat was soon found for Home in Kinross and West Perthshire, those being days when the Tories still had ultra-safe seats in Scotland. Home only lasted a year in office. Labour won the 1964 general election by a narrow majority.

Labour’s victory was regarded as a rejection by the electorate of what Wilson satirised as “the grouse moor conception of political leadership.” Britain was being run by a bunch of decrepit aristocrats who got their kicks slaughtering defenceless birds on the Scottish moors. Wilson promised to replace the Edwardian age with the jet age.

The first Wilson administration lasted six years and enacted significant reforms, even if not comparable to the social reforms of the 1945-51 Attlee government — NHS and Welfare State. Abortion was legalised. Capital punishment abolished, “homosexual acts” significantly decriminalised, laws against racial discrimination passed.

Unsuccessful attempts at imposing statutory wage controls and anti-union laws, and new racist Immigration Acts were some of the notable negative sides. And the Wilson government failed entirely on its promise of a National (economic) Plan based on high technology.

“SOCIAL MOBILITY”

A key aspect of Wilson’s political project was the promotion of “social mobility” allied to the idea that the Labour Party needed to get away from “the cloth cap image” and appeal more to the aspiring middle classes. Dennis Potter’s two Nigel Barton plays satirised the “takeover” of the Labour Party by middle class careerists who didn’t know the words to The Red Flag, whilst academics such as Barry Hindess portrayed Labour in a similar vein (*The Decline of Working Class Politics*, 1969). Such were the precursors to “Mondeo man” of Blair’s era.

The Tories also made an effort to ditch their image as a party of toffs and aristos and present themselves as champions of middle class meritocracy. The next three Tory PMs — Heath, Thatcher, and Major — all played up that that were state-educated and from “modest” origins.

Cameron’s elevation to the top of the Tory tree witnessed the return of the Old Etonians with his Bullingdon pal Johnson succeeding him later as the 20th Prime Minister who’d been to that institution of entrenched white male upper class privilege.

Nowadays the Tory faithful aren’t particularly troubled by philandering at the top. Other types of scandal may lay in wait for them, but socialists can hang around for that to happen. Instead we must fight against more serious scandals such as homelessness, starvation wages and abject poverty, and bring down the capitalist system that perpetuates them. □

More online

The SWP and high-stakes testing
David Pendleton examines the record of the Socialist Workers’ Party in the National Education Union
• bit.ly/swp-hst

Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fight and a "bit of banter"



Diary

By Emma Rickman

In a previous entry I wrote about K, an industrial cleaner who was poisoned by ingesting lime. In the meantime a senior operator retired, leaving space for an assistant to step up, and a vacancy on the assistant's team. K interviewed for the assistant's job and (finally) got it. This left room for A, a new recruit, on the cleaning team.

A is loud, cheerful, hard-working, and has autism and ADHD. He takes to hoovering the plant and doing sandwich runs energetically. The problem, as well as the sighs and the stupid comments from some, is that his Dad works in the control room. This is a source of resentment.

The other sons-of-operators (there are three) feel they have to treat their Dads strictly as colleagues and work twice as hard to prove they've earned their jobs. A and his Dad aren't bothered by these worries; A doesn't filter out his comments to or about his Dad, and maintains a jovial and joking attitude through thick and thin.

I learn that K and A have nearly come to blows one afternoon in the cabin over an insult A threw at K: "Stupid old man" or something along those lines. K, who'd been trying to talk seriously, snaps "Don't talk to me like that or you're gonna get it!" "All right then!" A laughs. There are comments that A is being given special treatment because of his Dad; "I understand why it's important for these people to have jobs — but there has to be a

limit..." My colleague and apprentice, J, whose autism manifests in the opposite way to A's, sits in a corner of the fitters' office not making eye-contact, listening to these comments that the fitters assume just wash over him.

"The way they talk about A gets to me," he tells me one morning "because obviously we both have the same condition, and they don't seem to realise they're insulting me while I'm in the room."

A lot of the workers — including the maintenance manager, and the apprentice's mentor — have made up their minds that J is "mental" and weak. His monotone voice, dark humour, and lack of eye-contact is interpreted as lack of enthusiasm. He comes off his motorbike, is off sick for a while and comes back with a knee-brace and a doctor's note, but his fear of riding on ice and slow limp is considered pathetic and "put-on". I speculate that unlike most of the other men — especially the young ones — J feels no compulsion to act tough.

L is a young man finishing his apprenticeship a year ahead of us, and is the polar opposite of J. He prides himself on his physical strength and his ability to do "the things he knows" well. He's relentlessly critical of weakness or perceived injustice towards himself, from management or from apprentices. "Why would I work harder at this — I don't need it to pass! Only people who want to kiss ass would do more than that." An older fitter describes him as "always angry, furious. I've been trying to tell him to grab the opportunity, but you've got to be careful..."

L and a fitter are talking about race one day, and J sits in his corner uncomfortably

"They were calling people 'wogs'," he tells me later. "I don't like that kind of thing, it makes me feel uncomfortable, so I was just sitting trying not to get involved. And then [the fitter] asks me 'J — do you like black people, or not?' and I say well it's personality that matters, not colour, that doesn't matter to me, and he says with L 'Why can't you just admit it? Why can't you just say you like black people? At least I've got the balls to say that I don't!'" After the chat with J, I spend a lot of that week raging inwardly, wondering what the hell to do.

The following day I come in early to help fit a motor. I slowly and clumsily wheel a pallet truck into position, and the same fitter that was giving J grief smiles to me "Women drivers eh?"

"Are you serious?" I frown at him, he laughs

"It's only a joke, don't worry about it."

"It's not funny though, is it?"

I feel like I'm in a Harry Enfield sketch, or an educational video about workplace "banter". A few weeks ago he'd joked that my bag was "just big enough to fit a small iron in" and before that "would I make him lunch?" (his kitchen's out of action.) Between these "jokes" he's taught me basic crane maintenance, worked relentlessly on the conveyor belts and welded chute flaps back into place — he's another very knowledgeable engineer who thinks he's "stupid" because his literacy isn't strong. We finish with the motor, go back to the office and for a few minutes are alone. He looks at his paper.

"D'you understand what I mean, about the sexist jokes?" I ask him gently, leaning forward and trying

to make eye contact. "D'you get it?"

His rolls up his paper and looks unhappy

"The thing is — I don't understand why you're pulling me up on this, when there are so many people on this plant who swear in front of women — who talk about sex. Filthy stuff — to me that's sexist, that's really offensive, but you don't say anything about that."

"I'm not bothered by that. I'm not offended by swearing or sex."

"To me that's what you should be offended by, not these little comments —"

I realise that I'm gripping my mug of tea hard and my hand is trembling slightly, so I put it down.

"Well, you and I have a difference of opinion on that —"

"It's not just me — it's most people —"

"But what I'm asking you is, can you not make the comments? Because it makes me feel like shit. I don't like it."

I can see L, who's come in, in the corner smiling at his colleague, silently agreeing with him and probably wondering if he'll say more of what he really feels.

"If I took it up with this lot every time they said something, we'd be rolling around outside every five minutes!" he laughs, slightly aiming the comment at L, away from me "You've got to be able to take a bit of banter."

He doesn't apologise of course, but he doesn't make any more directly sexist comments. In later weeks, we get to know each other a bit better — details to follow in later columns. □

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

Council pay: unions must move now

By Ed Whitby

The local government unions (Unison, GMB and Unite) have rejected a 2% offer in response to their claim for 10% and £10 per hour starting salary (as well as an extra day's leave, a two-hour reduction in the working week, and action on workplace stress).

The unions' claim is based on recognition that local government workers have lost 22% on real wages since 2009. The GMB on its website helpfully explains that since 2009, teaching assistants have lost £4000 a year on average, nursery workers £5900, refuse collectors £4800, social workers £9800.

But the claim was submitted on 24 July. How can it be acceptable to wait for months? Unison has had no update on the pay campaign page on its website since 24 July.

We are yet again in a situation that the employers have taken over six months to respond to our claim without any pay campaign being



launched by the national unions to demand they respond.

Council workers are desperate to receive the pay increase due in April, and only now find that the only offer is a less-than-inflation 2%.

Other groups in the sector have been offered better pay deals: teachers in England and local government workers in Scotland.

Unison, GMB and Unite members need to coordinate to force their leadership to fight for the 10%/ £10 minimum pay offer, to build a serious campaign, and to ballot for action now.

This fight seems quite a challenge in a union where turnouts in elections and strike ballots are historically low and getting worse. We

should take strength from the UCU strikes, from the strike ballots of postal workers, and from student climate strikers.

The leaders of our unions will lament the lack of interest from the grassroots, but they have offered little leadership in this fight over pay and over council cuts in the last 10 years.

Maybe some had illusions that a Labour government would have brushed aside 10 years of cuts and restored members' pay levels.

But now the hard work needs to start. Fight for a reversal of pay cuts, fight every job and service cut. Unions should ballot members now, alone or jointly, and demand Labour and Labour Councils give them full backing. □

UVW demo 20 February

The United Voices of the World Union (UVW) is planning a demonstration at St. George's University in Tooting, south London, on Thursday 20 February.

UVW members working as outsourced security guards at the university, which is linked to an NHS hospital, have been striking to win greater parity with directly employed staff. Their picket lines have been subject to repeated attempts by the police, working in obvious collusion with the NHS Trust and the workers' employer, Noonan, to break them up. UVW lawyer Franck Magennis was arrested, before being released without charge.

The demonstration on 20 February targets a university open day, and plans to draw attention to the exploitation of outsourced workers on which both the university and hospital rely to function. □

Tower Hamlets backs down

By Patrick Murphy

The National Education Union (NEU) in Tower Hamlets, East London, won an important success on 13 February.

Under pressure from the NEU and the wider labour movement, the local council withdrew a legal challenge aimed at derailing a strike ballot.

On 22 January NEU launched a formal strike ballot in opposition to plans by the council to impose detrimental changes to terms and conditions without consultation

with the union. Unison are also planning to ballot. The changes would significantly reduce redundancy payments for teachers and impose new contracts on support staff.

The NEU conducted an indicative ballot in December which achieved a 97% yes vote on 54% turnout. Most public sector employers would respond to a positive indicative ballot by entering into talks with the union.

Yet Tower Hamlets Labour council adopted an aggressive anti-union stance.

The council claims that it is not the employer of community school staff, and therefore the changes will not affect school workers.

At best this is sleight of hand. School unions negotiate with local authorities to establish employment policies for all community schools. Local authority school workers are employed both by the council and their school governing body. Where we reach collective agreements these policies usually apply to all schools.

It is possible for an individual school to adopt its own policy, but overnors would need to carry out their own consultation with unions and staff to depart from collective agreements between a local authority and the unions. That rarely happens.

Tower Hamlets council claimed that the ballot was illegal on the

grounds that they were not the employer. The challenge was an attempt to use the anti-union laws to intimidate the union.

The NEU stood firm, and the sight of a Labour council threatening a major union with the law generated a lot of anger across the broader movement. A campaign of petitioning and lobbying of the councillors switched the pressure back on the employer. The council backed down.

There was, unfortunately, a much less positive kind of trade unionism on display in the Tower Hamlets dispute.

The GMB made the decision not to ballot its members. Then it went much further with a statement which effectively supported the employers' arguments and legal case.

"The Tower Hamlets Management have stated these changes do not affect schools staff as it would be a decision for the Head Teacher and Governors to determine if they wish to implement these contractual changes.

"Should they decide to implement these changes then the Head Teacher would have to commence full consultation with school staff which would involve trade union representation. The GMB have taken legal advice on the above position. This has confirmed that Tower Rewards, as currently being implemented, does not directly af-

fect schools staff at this time.

"GMB are not able to ballot staff who are not directly affected by the proposals for industrial action and will not be balloting school staff at this time for this reason...

"GMB will not be balloting you for industrial action and has received legal advice that it would be wrong in law to do so" (emphasis added).

EXPOSED

Now that the legal threat has been withdrawn that position has been exposed. Even at the level of basic trade unionism, though, it was poor.

The choice, as outlined by the GMB itself, was between a collective defence of conditions across all council schools or a series of individual school-by-school battles after the fact. Obviously the first course would have a better chance of success.

To the credit of the local branch and the National Union, the NEU stood firm and refused to be bullied. The formal NEU strike ballot closed on 17 February, and the result was a thumping 95% vote for strike action on a 51.5% turnout. That's 48.7% of the membership voting YES, and it meets the punitive thresholds imposed by the anti-union laws. □

• Patrick Murphy is a member of the NEU National Executive, writing here in a personal capacity.

Lively pickets at FCO



John Moloney

The strike at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is rock solid. The strike will continue through to the end of February over our demand for union recognition.

There have been lively pickets every day, and we've had good support from those from other unions. The strike has become a significant feature on the labour movement map of London. Strikers from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office also attended the "Trade Union Bloc" on the 14 February youth climate strike, which was organised by our branch at the Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

Interserve, the outsourced contractor which employs our members who are striking at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, remains intransigent, but we're confident that the pressure of the ongoing strike will secure concessions.

In Merseyside, we're now re-balloting outsourced cleaners in HMRC offices in Liverpool and Bootle, who have already struck for 16 days across four strikes to win a £10/hour wage, and annual leave and sick pay entitlements equal to those of directly-employed civil servants.

They're employed by ISS, which has numerous contracts across the civil service, and we're now spreading that dispute to another civil service workplace in Birmingham. ISS workers there have joined PCS very much to become part of the dispute and take action. The ballot runs from 17 February to 2 March.

The union will also be launching a ballot of directly-employed HMRC workers in the Bootle contact centre, for strikes to win improvements to working conditions, which creates the possibility of coordinated action between directly-employed and outsourced civil service workers in Liverpool.

The union's national campaign on pay, pensions, and redundancies has now been formally launched. The task now is to energise the union around our demands on those issues. We want to form local committees, based on workplaces or groups of workplaces.

So, for example, where buildings or estates have multiple departments, which might have several PCS branches organising in them, we want a single campaign committee coordinating activity across that workplace, rather than three separate branches doing similar work in parallel. □

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

Aslef ballots on the Tube



Aslef has announced a ballot of its members on London Underground, over pay and conditions. The ballot opens on 28 February, and closes on 9 March.

Aslef is a minority union across LU as a whole, but a majority amongst drivers. One of its key demands in pay negotiations thus far has been for a driver-specific salary increase, to bring LU drivers' pay in line with that of mainline train drivers. Along with all other unions organising in LU, Aslef has also demanded a reduction in the working week.

An Aslef statement said that the union could not "accept a sub-standard offer that gives our members no guarantee of a pay rise for the next two years and does nothing to reduce the working week or close the pay gap with other train operating companies."

TSSA has already accepted LU's latest offer, for a RPI+0.2% pay increase each year from 2019-2023. RMT and Unite remain in dispute.

Aslef's ballot asks a pointed question of RMT, which has held back from balloting thus far. Tube-



worker believes RMT should have balloted months ago; delaying has only made the challenge of delivering ballot thresholds across a large membership harder. But that challenge must now be met.

RMT reps from across London Underground are meeting on Wednesday 26 February to discuss the way forward. Supporters of the Tubeworker bulletin will be arguing strongly for an immediate ballot. □

BAKERLOO STRIKE

Drivers on London Underground's Bakerloo Line are set to strike from 21-24 February, in a fight to improve working conditions.

Two strikes are due to take place across four days, from 21-22 and 22-24. The drivers, who are members of the RMT union, are demanding the replacement of a timetable which has seen times between trips become so tight that many drivers report not having enough time for a toilet break. □

A bulletin for Royal Mail workers by supporters of Workers' Liberty - February 2020

Build the ballot: We need national strikes

Resist anti-union laws!

Share and share alike?

Build rank-and-file democracy

Solidarity!

The bulletin produced by Workers' Liberty for postal workers as the new ballot for national strike action is launched

CWU reballots from 3 March

Postal workers' union CWU has announced it will ballot its members in Royal Mail from 3 to 17 March.

Over 100,000 workers were previously balloted last year, in a vote that returned a 97% majority for industrial action on a 75% turnout, unprecedentedly high for a national ballot. Royal Mail bosses succeeded in blocking strikes by obtaining a High Court injunction, invoking anti-union legislation to claim that the CWU had "inter-

ferred" with the balloting process. The dispute covers a range of issues, including Royal Mail's failure to honour a previous agreement to reduce the working week. Postal workers are also resisting the planned separation of Royal Mail into a courier-style parcel delivery service and a regular postal delivery service.

The planned restructure threatens jobs and conditions. □



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Refugees leave Idlib as the bombing and fighting increases in recent weeks

Horror in Idlib

By Pete Boggs

The violence of the Syrian civil war has resurged again, as fighting intensifies in, around, and for the city of Idlib.

According to the United Nations over 830,000 people have been displaced by the Syrian government's attack on Idlib since December, with 143,000 from the last few days. The severe lack of resources for overcrowded refugee camps has been made much worse by subfreezing weather, and breakdowns in food distribution.

For most of the civil war there has been a largely open border be-

tween Turkey and Syria, and millions of refugees managed to flee to Turkey with relative ease. Since the invasion of northern Syria and the beginning of a forced resettlement programme, this is no longer the case.

The area surrounding Idlib had previously been where many internal refugees had ended up. At the beginning of the war a million and a half people lived in Idlib, and now there are three million.

Outside of Turkey's occupation zone in formerly Kurdish-held northern Syria, Idlib is controlled by the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham-led (HTS) Syrian Salvation Government. This was formed by the uni-

fication of a number of Islamist groups, perhaps most notably the al-Nusra front, who had been fighting against the Syrian government, yet also opposed the main Syrian opposition, the Syrian Interim Government.

Despite the fractures and disagreements amongst the anti-Assad forces, as the war has continued some of these lines have become blurred. Turkey has designated HTS as a terrorist organisation, yet their relationship in the most recent batch of conflict seems unclear, and Turkish-backed rebels have fought alongside HTS.

There are now open clashes between the Turkish and Syrian gov-

ernments, as Turkey further involves its own forces rather than relying on its proxies. This is further complicated by the Russian support for the Syrian government, which includes carrying out airstrikes.

The situation in Syria parallels that in Libya. Russia and Turkey are supporting different sides in each civil war, yet have been working in concert, visibly being the parties to broker ceasefires and negotiations.

Turkey has put serious effort into endearing themselves to Russia after they mistakenly shot down a Russian fighter jet in 2015. Energy has formed the backbone of this re-

lationship. The two countries have built a joint gas pipeline, Turk-Stream, with the hope of giving Russian gas a route to Europe which bypasses Ukraine, and Russia's already top share of gas and oil exports to Turkey has increased since the renewed sanctions on Iran.

In Syria there is potential for a real rupture to develop between these two increasingly venture-some imperialist powers. For each, Syria is much more central to its aims, and the repercussions if its chosen side loses the civil war will be much greater than in Libya. □

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