



For social ownership of the banks and industry

REORGANISE THE LABOUR LEFT!

» Regroup the internationalists

» Fight antisemitism

» Against tyranny, both
anti-US and pro-US

» Win party democracy

» Defend 2019 conference policies



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Reorganise the Labour left!



Editorial

The political and economic aftershocks of the coronavirus pandemic are likely to be severe. Johnson's government is already signalling that it will follow the 2008 script: yes, when disaster strikes you have to carry out a little "socialism" – state intervention, doling out money to bosses as much as you can and workers as much as you have to. But so that no-one gets the wrong idea, after this half-"socialism" the bill must be presented and paid through austerity.

When Johnson's Tories (if they are still with Johnson by then) come to implement their own austerity they will learn from David Cameron's Tory blitzkrieg methods of overwhelming opposition by cutting and sacking as quickly as possible. By his 2019 "prorogation" coup, Johnson signalled that he and his circle are happy to subvert democracy in a pinch to get their way.

Our side, too, needs to learn the lessons of the last ten years. Cameron was up against Ed Miliband, who mostly opted for a "small target" strategy, of saying as little as possible and looking "statesmanlike". Miliband accepted the government's assumptions. The deficit needed cutting, strikes were wrong – but the Tories were doing too much, too roughly, too fast. The message: swap me in for the Tories, and you'll get "normalcy", but those were and these are times when the "normal" looks unsustainable. Starmer is heading on a similar tack. First he wants to beat and demoralise the Corbynite left into submission.

Against both the Tories' plans and Starmer's "small-target" collusion with them, the left needs to present a coherent political alternative. But that alternative needs to be truly coherent. And we need to overcome some of the left's political defects which will make Starmer's job easier.

We can't give up the fight on party democracy. Against Starmer's "off-with-their-heads" regime of summary suspensions of leftwingers for even discussing "banned" topics, we need to assert party members' right to discuss politics openly, free from disciplinary threats – even where some party members' views are reactionary or objectionable.

We also need to assert that the left's representatives – be they left MPs or members of "left slates" for Young

Labour or the NEC – are not above criticism. The left-tribalist attitude, that being a leftwinger means deferring to "senior" left-wing figures, and that "loyalty" comes before politics, rots the brain.

One acid test for all "left" leaders is that of strikes. Workers who strike against a ruling-class offensive in the coming months must have the political support of Labour and its left. The left must hold our leaders to that standard rigorously.

No doubt some have picked up on complaints of antisemitism in a hypocritical, demagogic way. But they can get anywhere with only because the problem is real. The real enemy for the left is antisemitism itself, not the demagoguery of the Blairites, or the hypocrisy of Tory racists. We need a political drive against the antisemitism which does exist on the left – primarily and centrally, a drive of education and discussion.

Working class

In orienting in politics, anywhere in the world, our starting point must always be the working class and its freedom. To be coherent, consistent socialists and democrats means that the left must champion human freedom around the world: not back "left" politicians here and tyrants in other countries just because they oppose the US. Assad; the Chinese regime and its genocide against Uyghur Muslims; the Iranian regime: these are enemies of the left. What faith can a left inspire if it excuses such butchers and jailers?

Against the rise of poisonous nationalism and ever-more-murderous border regimes at home and abroad, we have to proclaim internationalism. Not – like Miliband and the Tories' cuts – accept nationalism in principle, but differ only in degree. There is no "left" nationalism any more than there was a "left" austerity. Nationalism isn't an electoral gimmick that clever leaders can pick up, use, and put back in its box. We have to oppose it with a thoroughgoing programme: organise the unorganised, tax the rich to provide for all, defend and extend the freedom of movement that the Brexiters inveigh against.

In short, a coherent, convincing political alternative in the period ahead needs to be an internationalist alternative. The politics of internationalism – of freedom of movement, of opposition to the Brexit agenda, of repealing the anti-union laws, of a socialist Green New Deal – dominated the agenda of the 2019 Labour Party conference. The internationalist left which largely won the day at that conference was always only thinly and loosely organised. It has been battered and demoralised by the year since then, during most of which (under pretext of lockdown) local Labour Parties have not even been able to have online decision-making meetings. But it is still there. We need to regroup the internationalists.

A regrouped internationalist left can and will ally with other "left" currents on the party, issue by issue, but first it must reassemble itself. □



Corrections

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine must be kept at –80C, not –20C as a slip made *Solidarity* 571's science column say. The report on the UWW care home dispute (also 571) should have said the workers are "all from ethnic minorities", not "all from an ethnic minority". □

Striking to win at Barnoldswick

Ross Quinn spoke to Daniel Randall

Workers at a Rolls Royce site in Barnoldswick began an initial three weeks of rolling strikes on 6 November, to resist the loss of 350 jobs. The strikes have now been extended to 23 December. Unite organiser Ross Quinn spoke to Daniel Randall about the dispute.

It's going really well. We've targeted specific areas in the factory. That's something we did at Cammell Laird [shipbuilder] two years ago, where there was only ever 20% of the workforce on strike at any one time, but no production was going on. We've used the same overall principle here.

The shop stewards know their workplace better than anyone, and they developed that idea of targeting specific areas to have the maximum impact on the employer whilst having the minimum impact on members. When shifts are changing over, people are coming out of work saying "nothing's moving at all", and yet 80% of people are in work and being paid.

Because of the collapse of engine flying hours due to the pandemic, Rolls Royce had announced redundancies. A lot of people actually volunteered for redundancy because of the good packages that were in place, but the company said there was still 50 jobs at risk of compulsory redundancy. The shop stewards drew a line over that, and got the buy-in from the shop floor to propose a shorter working week to maintain those 50 jobs. Whilst they were in negotiations over that, the bosses announced they were transferring 350 jobs to Singapore. The reps and members felt betrayed at that point. They were in negotiations with people who knew there were far more potential job losses coming than the 50 being talked about.

Taking inspiration

At the beginning of the dispute at Cammell Laird two years ago, I'd told the workers there they needed to take inspiration from workers at Rolls Royce. What I was referring to then was the well-organised strike fund members have at Rolls Royce, which every member pays into on top of their regular union dues... What forced that climbdown [at Cammell Laird] wasn't the threat of a protest, but the threat of targeted strikes, sustained by a strike fund, that would have really hurt the company.

There were no compulsory redundancies at Cammell Laird, there are more people employed there now than before the dispute, and the apprenticeship scheme has been restarted.

When the dispute kicked off here, we had a consultative ballot and mass meetings amongst Rolls Royce workers, and I told the same story – that two years ago, I'd been in the same position, standing in front of a group of workers telling them to take inspiration from the organisation of workers at Rolls Royce, and now it had come full circle.

The convenor and shop stewards they've got are outstanding. They're well connected, they've done a lot of hard work to try and change the company's position. But

ultimately we have to have the mindset of doing whatever it takes to win. Every member of the union in the workplace has to take responsibility for the campaign and look at what they're bringing to the table and how we can turn it round. If we do all of that and lose, because we could still lose, then everyone can look themselves in the mirror and say that at least we didn't go down without a fight.

For the first three weeks of action, we're taking those key groups of workers in key sections out. We had loads of threatening legal letters from the company, basically complaining about what we're doing and they way we're doing it. That just confirmed what we know, that this was really going to hurt them. We see those threats as a compliment. We've responded to the employer's legal threats by naming more action. There'll now be strikes right through until Christmas Eve, and a picket line every day between 6 November and 23 December.

This strike is not a protest. It's not about taking tokenistic action to say we don't like what the company is doing, it's about forcing them to change their decision. And the only way we're going to do that is by putting the maximum pressure on the employer. □

• Abridged. More at bit.ly/rr-bw and at twitter.com/UniteNorthWest



Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held on-line over zoom. **In November:**

Thursday 18 November, 4-6pm: Tubeworker / Off the Rails joint public meeting – Looking at the US election

Friday 20 November, 6:30-7.30pm: YLI – Jacobson: Socialists and the Third Camp

Saturday 21 November, 11am-12.30pm: Assessment, class and inequality- abolishing GCSEs and beyond

Monday 23 November, 6-7pm: AWL students – Solidarity with the Uyghurs!

Friday 27 November, 6:30-7.30pm: YLI – UN Campaign Against Gender-Based Violence

Monday 30 November, 6-7pm: AWL students – Why socialist feminism?

Monday 30 November, 7:30-9pm: Ta Thu Thâu, Ngô Văn Xuyet, and the Vietnamese Trotskyists

Plus

Every Monday, 6-7pm: Workers' Liberty Students on-line political discussions

Thursdays, 8-9pm: "Revolution Betrayed" study group

Our calendars of events: browse or subscribe! □

All online

For full and updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, visit workersliberty.org/meetings

Not a class act



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Last week three former shadow ministers, Laura Smith, John Trickett, and former party chair Ian Lavery, launched a report called *No Holding Back* (NHB).

It purports to be the result of a "listening exercise" amongst Labour members and trade unionists, with the aim of reconnecting Labour with its lost "red wall" voters, but contains few practical proposals beyond unspecified "strengthening trade union and workers' rights", taxing firms like Amazon more, creating a "cronyism watchdog" and adopting "progressive patriotism." On the issue of redundancies NHB says precisely nothing.

On one question, however, NHB has plenty to say. The authors want "A full throated apology" from Labour for not having supported Brexit and seeking a second referendum. That was, they say, a case of "putting liberalism above democracy and that cannot be allowed to happen again." The election, they say "should have been about putting a fair, hopeful and socialist vision for leaving the EU against a neoliberal Tory Brexit." What that "socialist" version of Brexit would have been is not explained.

No wonder the pro-Brexit *Morning Star* loves NHB, and last week sang its praises in an editorial and carried a lengthy and entirely uncritical interview with the three authors, in the course of which Lavery addresses the fact that what he and his friends are really saying is that Labour should have ignored the vast majority of its members on Brexit: "There was a huge difference between what the membership wanted and what the country wanted. This was complicated by the fact that two-thirds of the membership were in the south". (NHB itself, by the way, describes the "discourse of North versus South" as "unhelpful").

The report continually counterposes what it calls "hard-working communities in places like Mansfield" with "the urban middle classes in metropolitan centres like London" and the *Morning Star* described it as a "report on reasons for Labour's loss of support among working-class communities."

And yet, when it comes to class, NHB (like the *Morning Star*) has no clear or consistent definition. At one point, NHB states that the working class is "anyone who relies on a salary to pay their bills", yet throughout the report, class is defined in the sociological categories developed by marketing industry in the 1950s, with "C2DE voters" described as "working class voters" and "ABC1s" as "remainers, the South (inc London) and middle class voters."

As a matter of fact, C1s and Bs (teachers, social workers, many civil service and local government workers) are the core of the working class in Britain today, 52% of the population, and predominantly the younger sections of the working class. And, overwhelmingly, they voted Remain in the 2016 referendum.

Moreover, what NHB and the *Morning Star* fail to grasp is class has always been politically constituted – the working class is a class *in* itself, as Marx put it, with the shared experience of capitalist exploitation; but it only becomes a class *for* itself, to any degree self-conscious and united, with political education, organisation and struggle. The core of the organised working class is certainly C1 and B. What defines workers is their relation to capital.

But elementary Marxism is clearly beyond the *Morning Star*, just as a grasp of what class actually means is beyond the ignorant, philistine, nationalist authors of the wretched little report calling itself No Holding Back. □

• For full details of how Lavery abused the funds of the Northumberland Area NUM to pay off his mortgage and trouser a specious "redundancy" payment, together totalling £165,387, see the Certification Officer's report: bit.ly/co-il

Priorities against Trump



Letters

I find a lot I agree with in Barrie Hardy's [article](#) in *Solidarity* 571, but I think on one point his emphasis is wrong. I'm not against Trump or any of his administration being dragged up before a judge on some legitimate criminal charges, but I'm not convinced the left should be pressing Biden to pursue that. This is not about trying to prevent martyrs to Trumpism, but focusing our energy where it is needed.

The organised left in the USA is not in a good way. Its priority must be to assert itself, independent from the machinations going on in Washington. If the left gets tied up pushing Biden to undertake federal prosecutions, it will do more for his credibility than theirs. □

Stephen Wood, Southwark

13 murdered working-class women



Women's Fightback

By Jean Lane

The death of the killer of thirteen women has elicited an [apology](#) from the police for the methods and the language they used during their investigation. The role of the press and the way that they portrayed the victims has also come in for some heavy criticism.

Which is right. When you hear their language in the context of today, it is shocking. But in the context of the time it was happening, the police and press fitted right in with the culture that affected all women.

Those who had the advantage of class and money had at least some protection from the effect of sexist attitudes on their psyche, their sense of self-worth. Working-class women had no protection at all – except perhaps the best kind: each other. But women isolated at home or those in male-dominated jobs had very little. For women reduced to sex work to augment their meagre incomes, their lives were beset by the attitudes of the day in the most direct way imaginable, and the fact that thirteen women who were murdered by a toxic man were afforded no respect from the rest of society is a glaring proof of how women were regarded in those times.

One man did the killing. Many more did the sneering, the insulting, the dismissing and the judging.

I was working in Coventry Head Post Office at that time and was a rep for the Union of Postal Workers. For a while I was the only female rep on the branch committee despite there being many women workers (walkers, sorters and canteen staff). The most memorable personal and anecdotal experience of male toxicity, and there were many, came on one day when I sat in a branch committee meeting with my fellow reps.

We were discussing attempts by management to speed up the work which we were unanimously resolved to fight. Mail bags that came into the building from the vans would be hooked onto a moving belt which travelled throughout the building, eventually dropping onto a great slide from where they were lifted by workers and emptied of their contents onto sorting tables. Managers would stand at the slide where the bags were dropped and chivy workers to empty them faster.

Everybody was fed up with this and the union was planning some action. The meeting was going well until one particularly unpleasant rep interjected with a great self-satisfied smile: "Bag dropping, that's the Yorkshire Ripper's job isn't it!". The other reps and officers either laughed, smirked or looked embarrassed but said nothing.



I left the room. The murders were in the news every day. The details of the trial were there for all to read. It was considered a joke, an entertainment, at least in my union committee room.

But you knew it was not confined to that room. You could go to the annual union conference and be whistled at as you walked to the podium to speak. Each region of the union had a social evening at conference which often had a comedian telling sexist jokes in their act. If you attempted to stop it you were derided and jeered at. This was no isolated incident. This was the norm.

The things that would change this situation were just beginning to gather: the Employment Protection Act; the Sex Discrimination Act; the formation of the National Abortion Campaign; the Domestic Violence Act enabling court orders against violent husbands; the conferences of the Women's Liberation Movement; Reclaim The Night; Rape Crisis; Women's Aid; all this was in its infancy when those thirteen women lost their lives.

Those, and the battles that working class women led such as the Grunwick strike, which forced the labour movement to change their attitudes to women in the most direct way, began the shift in culture in which the police and the press were operating.

Violent men continue to attack and kill women. The social context in which this occurs and the way that society responds to it is also what matters. The fact that the police today have felt it necessary to apologise for their behaviour forty years ago is an indication of the changes that have happened in that time.

However, it is not enough to just note or even celebrate the changes that women have fought for. You can lose what you win unless you keep it up.

Rape convictions, even getting rape cases into court, today are at an all time low. The police can say sorry. The press may have learned how to speak better. The labour movement may have better policies. But these can be a cover for the actual living reality of the lives of working-class women.

Societal change has to match the words. □

New move on electric cars



Environment

By Zack Muddle

The UK government is [predicted](#) to set a date for the banning of the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030. This brings it forward from 2035; before February it was set at 2040. They will likely put half a billion pounds towards charging infrastructure from next year.

This has been expected alongside several other green plans, whose announcement continues to be delayed as the Treasury is [reportedly](#) reluctant to fund much of it. Even despite this, the government's climate ambitions – to date and predicted – remain far too low, with those that do exist lacking the funding to make them happen.

Bringing the planned ban forward is good, but is too little for too late a target. It brings it roughly in line with the [promise](#) that the Corbyn-led Labour Party made in late 2019, to *aim* to end “new sales of combustion engine vehicles” by 2030.

Labour's commitments, however, included to a much greater extent, concrete policies to make such transitions work. They promised investments in “electric community car clubs”, “a vehicle scrappage scheme and clean air zones”. Plus, wider funding towards public transport – which would be *partially* restored to public ownership – and towards walking and cycling.

We criticised Labour at the time for being too timid in its commitments in these areas, and for watering the radical environmental [policy](#) passed at the 2019 conference.

“The timescale shows a characteristic lack of ambition. Sale of new fossil-fuel powered cars should be phased out much quicker than 2030, and the construction of

them terminated immediately on Labour taking power. Cars currently have an average life of 14 years, so if fossil-fuel cars are still sold up until 2030, that locks us into fossil dependency until well beyond a 2030 target.

“A scheme to scrap and recycle, or – where workable – to convert fossil-powered vehicles to electric is a necessary part of this transition. Necessary, too, is a huge investment in public transport and cycling infrastructure.”

Such criticisms ring triply true of the current Conservative government – a government led by someone who has spent much of the last decade dabbling with [climate scepticism](#).

As far as possible, car use should be reduced, with policies encouraging walking and cycling, and [green public transport](#) – electric trains, trams, buses, and the like. Electric cars, while not directly emitting greenhouse gases, are much less efficient in terms of energy used and in the environmental costs of production.

Where they must still be used, electric car clubs rather than private ownership minimises the net environmental production costs, and environmental costs in ensuring they remain as efficient as contemporary technology makes workable.

Charging infrastructure should not be designed *simply* for on-demand charging, analogous to contemporary petrol stations. Instead – as with many electrical appliances – charging should be responsive to the availability of electricity, rather than supply simply being adjusted to arbitrary demand. In practice, this means charging overnight. □

Defend the right to protest!

The civil rights group Liberty has [reported](#) that in the legislation for the new lockdown (5 Nov to 2 Dec), the Tories have quietly deleted the exception previously made, in the ban on public gatherings, for political protests done with due care.

On 6 November, some 200 people were arrested on a anti-lockdown demonstration in London.

The Netherlands, for example, explicitly makes political protests the one high-profile exception to its second-lockdown ban on public gatherings. The right to protest (with due care) is an essential service.

However, the government has conceded on picket lines (see page 23). And Liberty has launched a [legal case](#) against the Metropolitan Police over its banning of a 5 September trans rights protest. □



Activist agenda

As Bakers' Union president Ian Hodson has commented, when Boris Johnson is self-isolating for the virus: “Unlike millions of workers he will not lose any pay or have to try to feed a family, pay his fuel or rent on SSP of £95pw. We need to end the punishment of working people who fall ill or isolate on paltry SSP and ensure all can afford to do the right thing”.

Proper isolation pay has been won in, on latest figures, 40% of care homes, among Tube cleaners, and in other areas. But there still remain many areas, even hospitals, where workers (especially casual and contracted-out workers) don't have isolation pay. Safe and Equal is campaigning on the issue.

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement continues to campaign against Osime Brown's deportation. After a first victory when Osime was released from jail to home (though the deportation order still stands), the timescale for forcing a further decision is unclear. Keeping up the pressure, however long it takes, is vital.

• Campaign info, and suggested wording for labour movement motions, at workersliberty.org/agenda □

The harm from social media



Documentary review

By Matt Cooper

Since it was released in early September, the Netflix documentary *The Social Dilemma* has attracted much attention (Netflix/Exposure Labs: Dir: Jeff Orlowski 2020).

It was for a time the top streaming film on Netflix. It argues that social media such as Facebook and Instagram, along with Google and other digital platforms, have turned smartphones into attention seeking devices, leading to mental illness, undermining democracy, and eroding the truth through disseminating fake news. The *Social Dilemma* makes this case strongly since those who argue the case are former senior social media staff, many of whom shaped these platforms.

Modern social media are unlike the earliest internet social media of the 1980s, not simply through their ubiquity but because they have used psychological techniques to modify people's behaviour. Notably they use intermittent positive reinforcement, the same basis on which slot machines relieve people of their money.

Straightforward positive reinforcement would not work with a slot machine. If you won each play, it would become dull and the behaviour would not be reinforced. Intermittent reinforcement gets around that by not rewarding every instance of the desired behaviour, thus creating lows (associated with losing, or no reward) to make the highs (winning, and reward) greater.

Social media platforms consciously use this technique through intermittent likes, shares, notifications and other rewards of social recognition, acceptance, feeling wanted and liked.

Some call the resulting pattern of behaviour "internet addiction", although the usefulness of such a term is debatable. More importantly, intermittent rewards lead to stress and anxiety when behaviour is not rewarded which can (at least) exacerbate mental illness.

Research from the Comprehensive Clinical Trials Unit at UCL has shown an increase in rates of clinically identified anxiety, particularly in 18-24 year olds. Rates in the UK trebled in the 10 years from 2008 (the year after the iPhone was introduced) although they had been stable for the ten years prior to that. The UCL researchers suggest that this may be caused by growing inequality, austerity, Brexit or climate change. However, similar trends are found in the USA and elsewhere and there is a clear explanation as to why social media might have this effect.

The attention machine is not an end in itself, but creates the audience and data allowing the platforms to make money. Social media adverts can be directed at very specific groups (say, those who have shared anti-vaxxer posts). The platforms gather a raft of behavioural data on their users to create models of how users act (user with char-

acteristic X behaves in way Y) including whether they react to particular adverts. Machine learning and the resulting algorithms mean that advertising is honed to a degree that it is more akin to behavioural modification (creating a precise environment to encourage clicking through on an advert) than traditional advertising.

This business model is not simply a layer placed on top of an unadulterated social media feed. It determines that feed. What a user is presented with is driven by the corporate needs of the social media company to maximise attention and condition the user's behaviour in line with the advertiser's requirements.

One of the techie talking heads who drive the film's analysis, Jaron Lanier, makes a good point about the impact of this by comparison with Wikipedia. When someone looks at Wikipedia they see the same pages as everyone else, material that Wikipedia moderates for accuracy. Wikipedia is crowd-funded and carries no adverts, so its users are its customers.

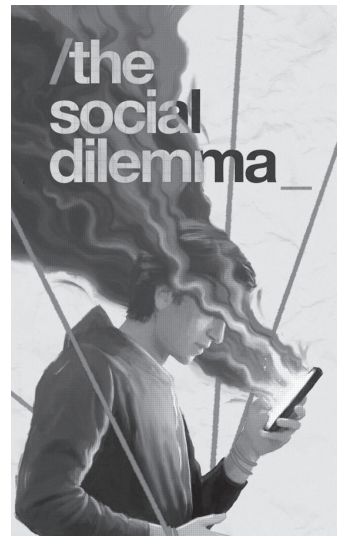
Now imagine that Wikipedia was funded by advertisers. In order to maximise revenue Wikipedia might present different versions of a page to different users, one that (based on a mass of data on that and other users and their past behaviour) nudges them towards the outcome the advertiser was paying for. What is seen on this commercialised Wikipedia page would not be shaped by Wikipedia's belief in accuracy but would be driven by third party funding.

You do not have to imagine this. It is called Facebook.

A further important issue is that the film does not place social media into any broader social context. For example, it holds social media responsible for the rise of right-wing populism. But there are many examples of the rise of social media being coincident with changes but not the cause of them: Danah Boyd writes in *It's Complicated* (2014) of young people in the USA turning to social networking as public spaces became increasingly inaccessible and parents more unwilling to allow younger teens freedom to go out.

Ultimately a socialist answer would be based on collectively owned services under the democratic control of its workers and, more particularly, its users (but certainly not state-run social media, as proposed by Jeremy Corbyn when leader of the Labour Party). Reflecting the free-market libertarianism of the tech sector, even the critical wing of it represented here, *The Social Dilemma* suggests no move in this direction, nor any form of radically democratic answer. □

• Abridged. More at bit.ly/mc-sn



Chile votes for a new constitution

By Victoria Rivera Ugarte

On 25 October in Chile, around 7.5 million people voted in a historic referendum on whether to write a new constitution to replace the current one – enacted in 1980 during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet – and on the democratic mechanism to write this new constitution.

The option of crafting a new constitution won, with an overwhelming majority of nearly 80%. A similar percentage supported a constitutional convention – a group completely composed of citizens democratically elected for this purpose – as the mechanism to write the new constitution.

This new scenario brings chances to change the neoliberal model dominant in the country, and which has stirred protests during this last year. It also opens new challenges.

The referendum is an outcome of the intense period of uprisings and protest movements from October 2019. Beyond the institutional achievements, that process has been marked by strong repression from the government, by the police forces.

One ongoing demand is to resolve the situation of people who were put in prison in the context of the protests. The Institute of Human Rights of Chile has confirmed that more than 11,300 people were arrested and 2,500 imprisoned between October 2019 and March 2020. The lawyer Nicolás Toro says such arrests have been used as “an instrument of political repression destined to contain all kinds of dissent or protest”.

The Institute for Human Rights has presented 2,520 lawsuits for violations of human rights in the context of the protests. Protesters have often suffered eye trauma, which has affected 163 people, 32 of whom have lost their vision.

Amnesty International says that Chile has an excessive use of force and human rights violation, not just during these demonstrations, but as a “constant and historical pattern that highlights the need for a thorough structural reform of the Chilean National Police”.

The context of the pandemic has brought new challenges for the protest movement in organising actions and keeping up a public presence. With such measures as lockdown and curfews, new specific demands for economic and social support have been added to the historical ones, and the police repression has been reinforced.

Challenges

As regards the further political process coming through the referendum, there are also some challenges. The referendum was favourable for the big majority who supported the structural changes pursued by the protest movement. In this context, gender parity is a condition already guaranteed by the political agreement on the new constitutional process, making this new constitution the first to be crafted by an equal number of women and men.

The demands for representation of diverse groups of the population are not finished. The representation of indigenous peoples through reserved seats is still being discussed.

Representation of autonomous citizens not depending on political parties, the feminist movement, and LGBTQ+ and environmental movements among others, is an ongoing struggle that citizens have to consider in the definition of the members to be elected for the constitutional convention.

Without strong pressure from social movements, political parties can see an opportunity to co-opt this political process, by imposing candidates who represents their interests. In that case, citizens could lose their leading role in shaping the political agenda.

The action and pressure of the citizenry, as an actor that can influence the agenda, outside of the formal constitutional process, is essential. In that sense, the constituent process does not begin and end with the constituent assembly to be elected next April 2021. Recognition of the diverse expressions of popular organisation that citizens have autonomously organised since October 2019 – such as local councils, assemblies and neighbours’ meetings – is essential.

As the Coordinadora de Asambleas Territoriales (CAT) stated at the beginning of this year “the Coordination should contribute to strengthen the development and autonomy of the assemblies, articulate the mobilization, unite our demands from the local to the national and move towards a Popular Constituent Assembly so a change of the Constitution in Chile responds to the broader popular leadership”. □

French teachers strike

By Martin Thomas

School teachers in France struck on 10 November to demand better virus controls in schools. Their demands included:

- Rota systems, with students in school half-time, to allow half-size classes
- More staff, again to facilitate smaller classes
- Better ventilation and cleaning
- Free masks. (Masks are compulsory in French schools).

Unions report a 45% turnout for the strike from junior high schools and 20% from primary. In some areas students blockaded senior high schools in the days before the strike as an act of solidarity.

On 5 Nov the government tried to deflect the strike by authorising 50% rota systems for senior high schools.

The unions stress that they aim to avoid a new closure of schools, and pledge further action if the government won't budge.

With a new lockdown from 30 October, there are (from 8 Nov) tentative signs of infections decreasing in France. Future battles in schools may, for now, depend on whether that decrease solidifies. □

Poor peace for Armenia

By Michael Elms

On 6 November the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan ended with the capitulation of the Armenian side. A Russian-brokered treaty will see Russian and Turkish peacekeepers deployed to the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) region, and the key strategic points of Shusha and Lacin ceded to Azerbaijan. Approximately half the (Armenian) population of Nagorno-Karabakh has already been displaced and few are likely to return.

This summer, Azerbaijan launched an invasion of the Republic of Artsakh, a self-governing Armenian-majority enclave within the territory of Azerbaijan. In the 1990s, Armenian fighters had staved off a likely-genocidal Azerbaijani invasion of the enclave.

Azerbaijan won this new war, overturning successive defeats in 1994 and 2016, by using its vast oil wealth to purchase highly effective drone technology, including the Israeli Harop drone. These "loitering munitions" and "suicide-diving" aerial weapons overwhelmed Armenian defences and permitted unprecedented Azerbaijani advances to the very edge of Stepanakert. Azerbaijan also enjoyed strong support from Erdogan's Turkey, which sent military assistance including alleged Daesh fighters from Syria.

Given this background, the presence of Turkish troops on the borders of this Armenian enclave is unlikely to result in peace being kept. Indirectly, via Turkey, NATO has underwritten this war. The US State Department has long been keen to establish the closest possible alliance with Baku in order to get a slice of their oil wealth.

Nationalist Azeri demonstrations have broken out across Iran; demonstrations sponsored by both the Aliyev regime and its opponents greeted the taking of Shusha; and in Armenia, President Nigol Pashinyan has found himself besieged by furious protesters demanding the war continue.

While the Republic of Artsakh will continue to exist, Azerbaijan now controls key heights from which repeated invasions can be launched. Aliyev has stated his intention to continue his drive against the self-rule of Artsakh, and should his regime run into political trouble in future, a renewed offensive into Nagorno-Karabakh may save his skin.

Armenia, by far the weaker power, threatened by powerful neighbours, is right to fear sequels to the Armenian Genocide. □

Orban targets LGBT people

By Luca Brusco

On 10 November, Hungary's Minister of Justice Judit Varga unveiled a bill that will almost certainly become the ninth modification to the Basic Law of Hungary adopted in 2011.

This reactionary piece of legislation adds to the already shameful article which defines the state's conception of "the family" that "the mother is a woman, and the father is a man".

A further amendment proclaims that "Hungary protects children's right to identify as the sex they were born with, and ensures their upbringing based on our national self-identification and Christian culture".

The Hungarian language does not differentiate between "gender" and "sex", and uses the same word for both. Since we're witnessing prime minister Orbán's newest display of piety, it's also worth noting that it also has just one word for both "crime" and "sin".

The amendment also contains modifications perhaps more important to Orbán's ruling clique than the defence of Christian values: it narrows the definition of public funds. This means that various foundations and corporations receiving government funds may not have to disclose how they spent that money.

Another modification further cements their grip on various foundations dealing with public interests – such as the one managing Corvinus University, and SZFE – by requiring a two-thirds majority to make any meaningful decisions about them. This way, even if they are voted out, they retain economic and cultural power.

That the demonisation of transgender people and sexual minorities is a cynical ploy to distract the population from what the ruling Fidesz party is doing should be obvious to everyone. Since Orbán has a lot on his plate with Covid, and the looming economic crisis caused by it, unfortunately we can expect more posturing in the future. □



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Suspended just for discussing

By Zack Muddle

The chair, co-secretary, and various other members of Bristol West CLP have been suspended for allowing a motion to be heard condemning the suspension of Jeremy Corbyn.

After one branch passed the motion, the unelected regional director of the Party advised the chair against the motion being heard at the CLP. The chair nonetheless called a meeting which first voted to hear the motion, by 94 to 59, and then passed the motion 99 to 80. No debate was heard on the motion, reportedly to ensure the Equality and Human Rights Commission report on Labour and antisemitism itself could not be discussed or challenged.

TUSC embraces Williamson

By Keith Road

Earlier this year the Socialist Party confirmed they would be preparing their electoral front, TUSC, operating since 2010 but mostly dormant since 2015, to stand once again in elections.

For the Socialist Party the drift of the Labour party to the right under Starmer confirms the view they've taken ever since quitting Labour in the years after the Liverpool council fiasco in 1985-6 that Labour is a dead end.

For Chris Williamson, Labour wasn't a dead end. It got him a lucrative career as leader of Derby City Council where he governed in coalition with the Tories, cut services and was pro-PFI. It also got him two stints as an MP (now left-ish) on a handsome salary.

After Labour suspended him for antisemitism, or rather under the much-too-flexible "bringing the party into disrepute" clause, he quit and set up a proto-party now branded as the Resistance Movement.

The leading people attracted to it are defined by the belief that a "false antisemitism witch hunt" dominates politics, a belief which, by branding all who complain about antisemitism as agents of a supposed ultra-powerful "Zionist lobby" seen as the axis of everything right-wing, is effectively antisemitic itself. Thus: Sally Eason, *The Word* newspaper, and Sian Bloor.

TUSC has now welcomed Chris Williamson and Sian Bloor onto their steering committee. For a political group that is meant to champion a message against cuts and privatisation, this strikes a false note.

And why is the SP embracing individuals with a history of antisemitism and conspiracy theories? The RMT, the one national union that backs TUSC and is represented on its steering committee, should question the Socialist Party on this. And any socialist understandably disillusioned with Labour and attracted by TUSC should think again. □

• More info: • Chris Williamson bit.ly/rc-cw • Sally Eason it.ly/se-rc • The Word Newspaper bit.ly/tw-np • Sian Bloor bit.ly/sb-di

The motion, like Corbyn's initial statement, reveals a serious blind-spot on antisemitism on the Labour left. It is good that Corbyn has partly rowed back (on 17 November), saying that "concerns about antisemitism are neither 'exaggerated' nor 'overstated'."

Nonetheless, we opposed Corbyn's expulsion, and authoritarian and anti-democratic shutting down of discussion is wrong, and does not solve the problem. Members need the right to discuss important political issues, including disciplinary injustices and the politics of big issues like antisemitism. □

Four points from NEC poll

By Colin Foster

Four points to take away from the Labour Party National Executive (NEC) election results announced on 13 November.

- The balance between broadly-left and broadly-right in the membership is not much changed. The left slate (not a good left slate, in our view, but the left slate) did better than it expected, winning five constituency seats. The "old" right won three, and the ninth place was taken by Ann Black, an NEC member on the "centre-left" slate from 2000 to 2018 but now seen as definitely "centre".

- Keir Starmer has a stronger majority on the Executive, because of the change to electing the constituency seats to STV. Still, it is narrow, and relies on him keeping the support of GMB and Unison.

- The turnout, at 27%, was only slightly down on previous elections (except when they coincided with leadership elections). Stories that many thousands of ballot papers had been ruled invalid seem thin: more likely, some voters voted in only one section and had their ballots recorded as "blank" in others.

- The "official" left won Young Labour heavily. But the turnout there was only 8,000 votes. The YL "official" left is even more Stalinoid-Brexit-leaning than the older "official" left, and YL under its rule is probably even weaker than it was with right-wing rule. "Alternative" left candidates failed to get onto the ballot paper because the lack of political life in YL made it hard even to contact people to ask for nominations. Labour Students was disbanded in September 2019 and there are no signs yet of relaunch. □

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“Pluralist” is not “bipartisan”



Book review

By Rhodri Evans

To shun “partisanship” – that, according to a new book, is the way to success for Labour. And the proof is Joe Biden’s win in the US presidential election.

The Dark Knight and the Puppet Master, by Chris Clarke, is published by Penguin and has been puffed on [Labour-List](#). The author is the son of Charles Clarke, who was Neil Kinnock’s chief of staff in the 1980s, then a minister under Blair. The book was first published (under another title) by a think-tank led by Peter Mandelson.

The author tells us he is a sort of ultimate antithesis to the “Corbyn surge”. He grew up Labour-by-default, never attended Labour meetings, but worked as press officer for a couple of Labour candidates. Then Corbyn’s success in the 2017 general election prompted him to quit Labour, just as tens of thousands of others were joining.

But maybe some people will see the “bipartisan” line as a way for Starmer to move forward from his “small target” tactics of this year (say as little as possible) and map out a “new way”.

Some objections are obvious. Considering the discredit Trump had brought on himself by his blather in the pandemic, and the increased turnout on 3 Nov, Biden did badly, not well.

Some voters said they’d backed Trump because of talk by some Democrats about socialism, or about “defunding the police”. But they stuck that to Biden despite him saying nothing of the sort: a candidate who argued positively for socialism, or for police reform, might have convinced some of them.

“Bipartisan” politics in the USA belonged to the long era in which Democrat and Republican party labels overlapped a lot ideologically (many Republicans were to the left of many Democrats), and legislation (good or bad) was done by issue-coalitions in Congress. It has little grip today or in Britain.

The “Dark Knight” of the book title is about left-wingers allegedly attributing social evils to morally-bad individuals; the “Puppet Master”, about us seeing social life being decided by behind-the-scenes plots and conspiracies.

The book charges us with a third bad habit: setting aims in terms of restoring a past “Golden Era”. Clarke seems to see that mostly in pro-Brexit, “anti-globalisation” left-wingers.

It’s odd to hear calls for pluralism, respect and patience in debate, and so on, from an admirer of the notoriously “control-freak” and bullying Labour regime of Tony Blair and Alastair Campbell, or from a probable supporter of the current regime of suspending members just because they have *discussed* other suspensions.

But the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci argued that in polemic we must rise above knocking down “the stupid-

est and most mediocre of one’s opponents or... the least essential and the most occasional of their opinions”. “One must be fair to one’s enemies”, in the sense of tackling their arguments at their *strongest*. At least “if the end proposed is that of raising the intellectual level of one’s followers and not creating a desert around oneself”.

Likewise [Pierre Broué](#) notes of Lenin that in polemic he fought always “to convince”, not to advertise virtue, or to shout down, or to “come across well”.

A Marxist who is a workplace rep, for example, learns to deal respectfully with right-wing workmates. We even learn how to negotiate with bosses politely (though militantly).

Marx himself wrote in a preface to *Capital*: “I do not by any means depict the capitalist and the landowner in rosy colours... [But] my [historical materialist] standpoint... can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains”.

Bosses act badly in class struggle because of capitalist *structures*, not because they are personally “bad people”. Seeing capitalism as a matter of “bad” individuals does indeed lead to diversionary conspiracy theories.

Some on the left could learn from Gramsci and Marx in the way they dispute. And especially on social media. Possibly Clarke’s picture of the left as all demagogic shriekers is genuinely picked up from knowing the left only from social media, not from meetings or in workplaces.

But the bottom line in Clarke’s argument, always assumed, never argued, is that now we are out of the “era where conflict [was] the route by which most change took place”, or when there was “divide... between the workers and the ‘boss class’”; that the “days of picket lines” are gone; that “appetite for struggle” is outdated; etc.

Trump knows we haven’t entered an age of general conciliation. So do the Tories. And our employers. And the Labour right wing. We must fight political battles on as “high ground” as we can reach, but we must fight them no less vigorously. □

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What happened in L



Interviews

By Michael Chessum

Michael Chessum, organiser of Another Europe Is Possible, talked (in a personal capacity) with Sacha Ismail

You've written an [article](#) on openDemocracy, arguing that the anti-Brexit Left made a serious mistake at 2018 Labour Party conference. What's your thinking?

We're in this period of mopping up after Corbynism, and I wanted to challenge myself to reflect about what we might have got wrong, rather than what others got wrong. I don't conclude we were wrong in any of the politics we advocated. What I conclude is that we began determined not to have a split in the [Brexit] composite [in 2018].

We wanted to be able to say we've won and Labour is on the right road. We saw the prize as being able to spin a narrative out of it as we went into and came out of conference. Going into conference the narrative was that anti-Brexit is a left-wing thing, it's not controlled by the Blairites, and then afterwards Labour is on the road to backing a referendum. And there was a certain amount of linguistic skulduggery we used to spin that, citing this and that phrase in the composite.

Underneath it all I think we were terrified of having a moment of confrontation where we went for a vote out.

In case we lost?

We knew we would lose, but the key point is that it felt like it would be the end of the world. We felt like it would have been a disaster because that would have given the opponents of a referendum within the Corbyn project a clear opportunity to turn round and say that's been rejected. It was a mistake because the fudge was as good as losing. We got our narrative to spin but the leadership got the room for manoeuvre it wanted and in the end it continued to behave as if we had lost the vote.

Better to have split the composite and had our own motion, even if we'd been a minority. There was a fog, a lack of clarity and no clear lines.

From a purely electoralist perspective Labour might have been better off going clearly either way. Looking back on 2018 it was the last chance for Labour to pick a clear position.

If we'd lost, there would still have been a fudge, but at least it would have pushed things towards clarity.

Yes, the leadership actually wanted a fudge, they wanted an ambiguous position they could present as they wanted. If we'd had a vote out, they could have said "You lost", but we could have said "This is a fudge, we need clarity".



Do you think the rank-and-file delegates weren't up for a fight?

No, they were. We absolutely prepared all the delegates for a fight. They were prepared to fight over every line, and we briefed them with the red lines. We had a working group of six or seven key delegates and were in constant touch. The issue is we didn't want to split the composite. There were certain things we would have split over, like a positive commitment to deliver Brexit! The point is we set our red lines way too far back.

And can you remember, in 2018, were there any significant arguments about all this? I remember at conference AWL largely went along with the "step forward" line you're criticising, but within a few days after the conference we started criticising it.

There was no audible voice as we were going into conference. We had 150 delegates preparing for the compositing meetings and there was no audible voice in the room, there was no one saying let's press the button. At that stage no one within Another Europe, including your comrades, was arguing a different line.

Can you remember at what point the anti-Brexit left started arguing to try to reverse Brexit?

Another Europe always said there should be a confirmatory vote on the outcome of negotiations. At that stage, back in 2017, we didn't push that argument in Labour. It just didn't have any legs. We focused on a soft Brexit and defending free movement. It was in early 2018 we began to talk about "The Left Against Brexit". Labour for a Socialist Europe wasn't set up until what, January 2019. Should we have been quicker off the mark and bolder about reorienting?

What's your response to the argument that Labour lost the 2019 election because it was too anti-Brexit?

Well, in 2019 we lost. The policy that won was written by the leader's office and their allies. They did not adopt the

Labour on Brexit



policy that we wanted and that was needed. It's true that they had to argue for a second referendum because we'd won that point. Some of them would have wanted an unambiguously pro-Brexit position, but that wasn't possible. If they'd put that forward at conference they would have lost.

At the 2019 conference we did what we should have done in 2018, we went for it. We split the unions, we peeled off Unison and USDAW and we may well have won a majority of CLP delegates, but of course we'll never know as they didn't allow a card vote.

However, even if we'd won, it was too late. The prolonged ambiguity had badly damaged Labour's credibility on all sides. If Labour had shifted further towards delivering Brexit, I think it would have faced even worse electoral melt-down.

But by 2019 I don't think a clear remain policy would have worked magic either. Even the 2018 conference was very late.

What Labour needed to do was go out to the country and fight to convince people of a clear, comprehensible policy. Much more time and consistency and conviction were needed. If you judge it from a purely electoralist point of view, that could have been a whole range of different positions.

Politically, what was needed was argument about what the context of Brexit represented. We couldn't defeat or significantly mitigate the Tories' Brexit project, in one way or another, without acknowledging and explaining what the whole thing was aiming to do. We should have counterposed class politics to nationalism aggressively. Ambiguity couldn't work when the issues were so salient.

In the 2017 election it seemed like we could evade the issue but that soufflé wasn't going to rise twice.

It seems like there was an argument along the lines of don't push this issue and endanger the project, as if we could just get on with building the left while ignoring the rise of the nationalist right...

Yes, which is bizarre – until you remember that many on the left were actually in favour of Brexit. There were the people at the top, Andrew Murray and Seamus Milne, who come from a Communist Party tradition on this. Ironically I don't think Corbyn himself really shared those views. We know he was personally very cut up when Labour abandoned free movement, and Diane Abbott too.

Ok, so what was going on there, with Corbyn and Abbott and McDonnell?

Before 2017 there's a real sense of depression within the Corbyn project, it was limping along. Then the election happens and everyone's asking "Who gave Corbyn the magic beans?" The people who can stake that claim are the people running his office and so you get a real head of steam behind the leadership and its bureaucracy, its close advisers. Two things came together, a nationalistic version of Lexit and a straightforward move to the right on immigration. The two fitted together well and reinforced each other. You've got this "socialism" in one country stuff, closing down the borders, but let's not forget there is also just a basic shift to the right.

What now?

We need to say to people on the left, regardless of their view on Brexit as such, they need to oppose the Tories' agenda, in the same way they've opposed the spycops bill and the overseas operations bill and so on. Nadia Whittome and Dan Carden and others were right to take a stand on those things. It's a problem that when it comes to Brexit people suddenly become reticent about fighting things they would normally be opposed to. Another Europe is campaigning for EU citizens' right to stay, all the other opposition parties are signed up to it but Labour hasn't. We've got a Labour leader who says nothing about issues which he previously claimed he would die in a ditch for. But where is the noise on the left? The left is against attacks on migrants, against deregulation and so on – well that's what Brexit is. Why the silence?

An extreme case was a Momentum person who recently argued to me that the Stop the Coup campaign [in summer 2019], which Momentum actually worked on with Another Europe, was a mistake, because it just played into Johnson's hands. Well yes, in a sense. In a sense BLM played into Trump's hands. Smashing up Millbank was music to David Cameron's ears, in one sense.

Militant strikes in the 70s did actually help pave the way for Thatcher.

Yes, all these things point in two different directions, depending on a struggle. That level of understanding is not there about a lot of Corbynites. The idea of political confrontation and political struggle is something I think a lot of the Labour left hasn't got its head around. □

• For the debate in 2018, see bit.ly/2018-mc

Gangster Rap! Lenin and Joe Colombo

“As we were saying

By Sean Matgamna

The story of Joe Colombo, the Mafia boss who briefly turned ethnic politician, is one of the most frightening stories I've come across. An instructive story, too. It says a lot about the "rebel" element in Trumpism.

Perhaps significantly, the year is 1970. In the USA there is a huge anti-Vietnam-war movement. The USA has also experienced the black civil rights movement and the black ghetto uprisings. It is a highly political period in American history.

When the gangster Joe Colombo, boss of one of the Mafia "families", feels the pursuing FBI breathing down his neck, he reacts "politically". He starts the "Italian-American Civil Rights League" (IACRL) to campaign against the FBI's "harassment" of Italian-Americans!

IACRL's message is simple and clear-cut, the lie big and direct. The Mafia does not exist. There is no such thing as the Mafia. There never was. The Mafia is a myth invented by a racist police force less concerned with justice or with fighting real criminals than with self-publicity. The FBI has invented the Mafia and thus stigmatised and smeared the entire Italian-American community.

The Mafia myth is a burden and an affliction for every Italian-American, and it is time to fight back, says the mafioso Joe Colombo. The Italian-American Civil Rights League exists, with Joe Colombo as its leading personality, to fight for justice, truth, and the Italian-American way. It slots easily into the American system of ethnic politics, and it mushrooms into a powerful movement able to get tens of thousands to demonstrate on the streets.

They boldly picket the FBI, demanding that it should stop victimising and persecuting good Italian-Americans like Joe Colombo. They demand such things as more public recognition that it was an Italian who first discovered America for Europe, Christopher Columbus. The image of the Italian-American has to be changed.

Politicians, judges, entertainers, flock to get a piece of Colombo's action. At \$10 per member, the Italian American Civil Rights League becomes a nice little earner for Joe Colombo and his Mafia friends.

The IACRL is a political force for about a year, and then one day in 1971, just as Joe Colombo is starting to speak to a big audience of thousands of demonstrating Italian-Americans, to tell them once again that the mafia does not exist, a mafia gunman shoots him in the head, blowing part of his brain away. The gunman is immediately killed by Colombo's Mafioso bodyguards.

You see, the other Mafiosi hadn't had Joe Colombo's faith in the power of the big bold lie to protect them. Colombo had broken their traditional *modus operandi* of anonymous, background manipulation, and as little publicity as possible. They thought Colombo's political oper-

ation would only get the FBI to intensify the heat on them. So they had him shot.

They didn't quite kill Joe Colombo outright: he survived for seven years, incapacitated. What they did kill was the Italian American Civil Rights League.

One irony of this strange all-American tale is that what Colombo said – the mafia is a myth – was what FBI Chief J Edgar Hoover had said for decades, until the late 50s. Hoover hadn't wanted to admit that there were criminals and a criminal network too big for the FBI to bring down.

Joe Colombo would be the basis of one of the characters in Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather Part 3* (1990) He had, it seems, paid a visit to the producer of the first of the three *Godfather* films, to threaten him out of too-close an identification of the film's characters with their Italian background.

The story of Joe Colombo and his Italian-American Civil Rights League illustrates the ease with which politics can be faked and vast numbers of people fooled and led by their noses – the power of pseudo-political demagoguery to drum up unreasoning movements around real grievances.

Marx said truly that ideas become a material force when they grip the masses. A big problem for socialists and people concerned to promote rational politics in general is that all sorts of ideas can grip the masses.

There are no political or ideological vacuums: it has to be either the ideas of the ruling class, even if in some "wild" variant like Colombo's, or the ideas of Marxism, that prevail.

More than that: the emotion of resentment and rebellion can be hooked to many different ideas about the world in general – about what's wrong with it and what needs to be done about that.

Democratic political processes are routinely corrupted and perverted not only by ruling-class political machines, but also by radical and pseudo-radical demagogues. Isn't that what fascism – with its pretend anti-capitalism and its vicious scapegoating of Jews, black people, Muslims (in Britain now) and others – is all about: focusing the resentment of poor and ignorant people on nationalist and racist and cultural myths, and in binding them to the status quo by way of political mysticism and irrational leader cults?

Isn't that what Stalinism was, with its reduction of the Marxist critique of bourgeois society to mere negativism, to "absolute anti-capitalism", and its substitution for the democratic socialist Marxist alternative to the capitalism it criticised of advocacy for the totalitarian Russian Stalinist system?

Isn't that what we see now in the bizarre combination by the SWP kitsch-left of Marxist critique of bourgeois society with – to put it at its mildest – softness towards Islamist clerical-fascism?

One thing the Joe Colombo episode shows is the way that the expansion of democracy has separated the techniques of mass agitation and organisation from any

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Fighting Trumpism: the next four years



Debate

By Martin Thomas

Donald Trump's press secretary claimed a million "Stop the Steal" protesters on the streets of Washington on 14 November to block Biden becoming US president.

It was more like 10,000-20,000, organised by far-right activists, but supported, tacitly or explicitly, by Republican Congress people.

It looks harder and harder for Trump to pull any sort of "coup" between now and 20 January, but that 86% of his voters believe his denunciation of the election count bodes ill for the next four years.

Although Biden won on 3 November, Trump got more votes than in 2016.

The Republican Senate and Supreme Court will block the mildest reforms Biden attempts, and to make it difficult for him even to appoint a Cabinet. On the basis, then, of indicting a "do-nothing" (and, they'll say, illegitimate) administration, the Trump faction can continue to build its right-wing base.

If the coming years promised boom and prosperity, the right-wing agitation might well die away, as McCarthyism died away after 1954. Instead they promise economic chaos.

The fewness and timidity of the Republicans differentiating from Trump even now shows a big, and long-brewing, shift in US politics.

Until recently, and since the early 20th century at least, ideologically, Democrats and Republicans overlapped heavily. The Democrats were broadly considered more to the left; but "liberal Republicans" would be to the left of the Southern Democrats (the "Dixiecrats"), and fascists found space in the Democratic Party, like Frank Hague in New Jersey.

The US Republican and Democratic parties have been less like two political parties on the European model, more like two electoral structures between which individual politicians can choose for making their careers, often more on the basis of geography and connections than of ideology.

The "two-party" character of the system is structured by law (ballot access, primaries, and in a stricter way since the 1970s), in a way that Tory-Labour "two-partyism" in Britain between 1950 and 1974 wasn't.

Big new laws have rarely been pushed through Con-

gress without both Democrat and Republican support. The Social Security Act of 1935 passed with only six Republicans voting against it in the Senate, and the Wagner Act for trade union rights the same year with only 12 out of 25 against.

The Republican Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, winding back those rights, overrode the Democratic President's veto by the majority of Democrats in Congress voting for it. The Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959, winding back further, was a joint Democrat-Republican initiative. So was the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was initiated by a Democrat President, but got through a Senate filibuster by racist Democrats only with Republican support.

Making law expeditiously often depends on decree: via the Supreme Court (as on abortion rights, with the Roe-Wade judgement of 1972, or in its judgements weakening the Voting Rights Act), or via Presidents' executive orders and proclamations, to which courts rather than Congress set the limits.

The right-wing surge in the Republican party dates back to the 1970s at least, and has rolled on through the decades. Until Trump, it promoted conventional right-wingers as presidential candidates, and they had limited control of Republicans in Congress.

With Trump, the Republican right has a leader of full authoritarian temper, and with an unprecedented hegemony. The miscellaneous militia groups, now estimated to organise over 100,000 people, originating in the mid-1990s but previously outside official Republican politics, have been pulled into the Trump coalition.

The elements of full-scale authoritarian politics are still neither coalesced, nor fully hegemonic. Large sections of the capitalist class backed Biden on 3 November, and the US's big cities and "mainstream" media are anti-Trump or critical of Trump.

But compare Mussolini in Italy. It was liberal governance's incapacity for expeditious action that brought him to power in 1922, not a calm decision by some capitalist conclave that they wanted to replace functioning liberal government by fascism.

In 1921 Mussolini's fascist movement was growing and violent, but patchy, unstable, and full of vague bluster. He declared: "We permit ourselves the luxury of being aristocratic and democratic, conservative and progressive, reactionary and revolutionary, accepting the law and going beyond it..."

The elderly Liberal prime minister Giovanni Giolitti brought the zigzagging fascists into a "National Bloc" co-

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Fighting Trumpism: the next four years

from page 15

alition with himself for the May 1921 election. In August, Mussolini signed a "pact of pacification" with the Socialist Party and the trade unions.

Unstable Liberal governments succeeded each other in 1921-2: Giolitti, Bonomi, Facta. The king called Mussolini to office in October 1922 after Facta resigned. No-one else was strong enough to rule against Mussolini (thought enough of the ruling class) – and bringing him in was the only way to get effective government.

In some new crisis, the complexity of the USA's constitutional "checks and balances" could accelerate a push to authoritarian government (as the only way to "get things done") as much as restrain it. The much-ballyhooed US constitution is little protection. It did nothing to stop the US South being a white-supremacist one-party (Democratic) regime from the 1880s through to the 1960s.

Trump's ability to expand his voter base does not come from a broad drift of opinion in the USA to the right. Contrast the huge George Floyd protests, the fall in support for organised religion, more favourable attitudes to immigration and to unions, and stable majority support for abortion rights. Rather, the Trump Republicans have been able to leverage diminishing right-wing sentiments to increasing political effect.

The evolution of the Democrats has helped them. The US passed federal anti-union laws earlier than other countries, in 1947 and 1959, and then industry improved on them from the 1960s by moving to Southern states with state laws more hostile to unions. Where unions were advancing in Europe in the 1970s, they were already on the retreat in the USA. "1968 radicals" played a big part in union life in Europe in the 1970s and 80s; much less in the USA.

The Democrats shed the Dixiecrats. Yet the unions have been beaten back further and further. The neoliberal "New Democrats" advanced. With changes in political campaign financing, more and more of most Democrat politicians' lives are focused on getting donations from the wealthy. The "end of welfare" and the prison-filling Crime Act of 1994 were pushed through by the Democratic president Bill Clinton (with the prominent help of Joe Biden). Democrats sought to make right-wing agendas "theirs", rather than the Republicans', then the Republicans went for yet more right-wing.

The Republicans have been transformed in large part from the bottom up (though also from above by big money like the Koch family). The Democratic transformation has been more from the top down, and so a "space" has remained for left politics in Democratic primaries.

In a strange twist, a new rise of socialist sympathies in the USA has wriggled through that gap. The Democratic Socialists of America, for long a small lacklustre group in Democrat "left field" (though not exactly or institutionally "in the Democratic Party"), has grown, mostly out of the Sanders campaigns, into an activist and much-wider-than-electoral movement of 80,000. Worker militancy, if not union membership, has had an uptick.

The pushback against the continuing Trump threat will depend on the ability of those activists to find a way to build a socialist movement able to take ideas directly to the sections of the working class seduced or cowed by Trump, and to leverage increasing left-wing sentiments to increasing political effect. □

Gangster Rap! Lenin and Joe Colombo

from page 16

necessary connection with serious politics or sincerely held ideas.

This deadly decadence of politics is nowhere more plain than in America, where politics is to a serious extent a branch of show business. In the years of Tony Blair's "presidential" premiership, Britain has taken giant strides in the wake of the USA.

When he was accused back in 1900 of exaggerating the power of socialist ideas to shape events, Lenin replied that the difference between the then Catholic trade unions of Italy and the class-conscious trade union movement of Germany was that in Italy the workers' instinctive drive to combine together and fight for better wages and conditions had been corrupted and taken over by priests, who, naturally, brought to that workers' movement, not the consciousness of socialists, but "the consciousness of priests".

One and the same instinctive drive could produce either a fighting socialist working-class movement, given "the consciousness of Marxists", or, given the consciousness of priests, a sectarian, class-collaborationist working-class-based movement. The decisive thing is the battle to make "the consciousness of Marxists" central to the labour movement and to movements of those – like many of the Italian-Americans who rallied to Colombo's fake League – who feel themselves to be oppressed.

Examples of Lenin's principle are very numerous. One is the emergence of the "revolutionary" Irish Republican movement, the Provisional IRA, which is now sinking into its natural place as part of the spectrum of Irish bourgeois nationalist politics.

If there had been a sizeable Marxist movement in Ireland in the late 60s, when the Provisional IRA began to emerge, the consciousness of traditional physical-force Republicans, which permeated the Northern Irish Catholic community, kept alive in legend, reminiscences, songs and popular verse, would not have dominated and shaped the Catholic revolt; and that revolt would not have entered the blind alley of the Provo-war on the Northern Irish Protestants and on Britain.

The existence and activity of a socialist group can make all the difference. The creation, education in authentic Marxism, and maintenance of such a force is the decisive immediate, practical question for serious socialists. □

• From [Solidarity 100](#), 20 October 2006.

No to the “Swedish Model”!

By Apsi Witana

The Scottish Government has launched a [consultation](#) on sex work legislation, closing on 10 December.

It follows a battle spearheaded by MSP Ash Denham, the government’s community safety minister, to introduce the criminalisation of the purchase of sex work (the “Nordic model”, or “Swedish model”, also implemented in France and Ireland). Currently in the UK, the purchase and selling of sex is legal, though various associated activities such as street work and workers operating from the same premises are not. National Ugly Mugs (an organisation that provides support and representation for workers seeking justice from dangerous clients) criticised the conflation of trafficking and sex work in Scottish MPs’ report, and highlighted how the threat of deportation for migrants creates vulnerability which in turn fuels trafficking.

On first glance, the concept of criminalising clients may seem a logical choice. Its proponents argue that the “victim” (the sex worker, or as Denham evocatively labels them, “the prostituted woman”) is not penalised and the law targets the perpetrator (the man buying sex). In practice however, sex workers report being criminalised themselves by proxy as well as being subjected to more risk, poverty and violence.

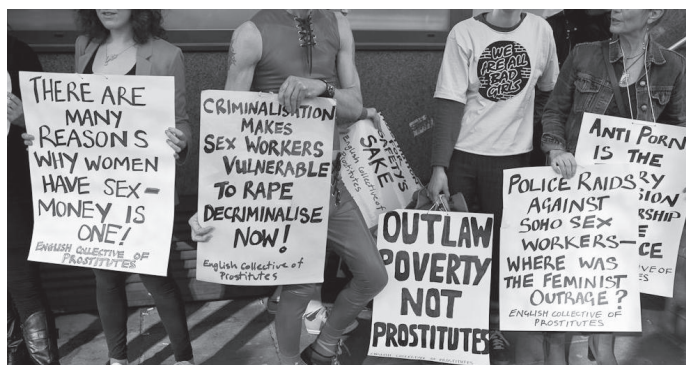
The Norwegian government published some data on Sweden in 2004, after the model was introduced. Workers told of their reliable and trusted clients disappearing due to fear of arrest. Instead they were faced with clients who were fearful of providing screening information, a tool often used by workers to keep them safe. As a result they would be forced to accept riskier clients.

Economic pressure and a reduced client pool also increased a client’s bargaining power – it meant they were now able to haggle for cheaper prices and demand unsafe practices or acts which a worker may have felt the need to accept out of desperation.

Due to the risk for both buyer and seller to be in direct contact with one another, the market opened for third parties and pimps, making it more difficult for police to investigate trafficking cases. Harassment and surveillance by police was also made far easier as police now had the authority to monitor sex workers and their homes under the guise of arresting clients. Landlords were legally allowed to evict sex workers, rendering them homeless.

One particularly damning quote from the head of Sweden’s anti-trafficking unit reveals its intended deterrent effects: “Of course the law has negative consequences for women in prostitution but that’s also some of the effect we want to achieve with the law”.

The desire for a utopia in which the sex industry is eradicated cannot be achieved by a short-sighted legal model which results in the industry being pushed underground and sex workers suffering collateral damage. Similar punitive approaches have backfired in the “war on drugs” and in the huge human cost of criminalising abortion. It is simply not possible to criminalise some things away, especially while continuing what creates and drives these



industries – economic hardship and poverty.

Instead, sex workers worldwide demand full decriminalisation, in which all laws surrounding sex work are lifted, leaving workers to retain full labour rights, including the ability to take their employers to court for workplace discrimination, or to seek legal recourse for dangerous clients without the fear of criminal implications for themselves. This position is shared by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and UNAIDS. This model is in place in New Zealand, and crucially was devised with the continual input of sex workers.

There is certainly a discussion to be had on the inherent exploitative nature of sex work and whether it should or will exist in a socialist future, though this cannot be had without analysing all forms of exploitative labour under capitalism.

Sex workers desperately need their voices heard in a climate where many would rather speak on their behalf, and their calls for decriminalisation should not be mischaracterised as “pro” the industry. Instead there needs to be an honest dialogue that sets aside moralism and instead focuses on human rights, protection from violence (including state violence) and the eradication of poverty. □

• “As we were saying”: bit.ly/swe-mo

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Schools: workers' control vs closure



Debate

By Martin Thomas

Ireland's second lockdown (21 Oct to 2 Dec), with schools open, has brought a [75% drop](#) in infections from around 19-25 Oct to 14 Nov. The Netherlands' (14 Oct, tightened from 4 Nov), with schools open, has brought a [45% drop](#) so far from a 31 Oct peak.

Wales's, 23 Oct to 9 Nov, with schools closed to 2 Nov, ended with rates no lower than 23 Oct but maybe a [third below](#) peak around 29 Oct. Northern Ireland's, 16 Oct to 13 Nov, with schools closed to 2 Nov, has got rates [50% down](#) from the 12-18 Oct peak. Belgium's (2 Nov for 6 weeks, with school half-terms extended by a week) has got them [60+% down](#) from a 28 Oct peak.

I don't know who the "SAGE scientists" are, cited by Patrick Murphy ([Solidarity 571](#)) as gung-ho for shutting (all) schools alternate weeks rather than shutting pubs, cafés, etc. But the *balance* from recent evidence (above), from the reopening of schools across most of Europe gradually from April, and of scientific opinion, is that shutting (all) schools would *probably* add little to the effectiveness of lockdown (see opinion from [France](#), [Spain](#), [Netherlands](#), [Germany](#), etc.)

Earlier this year, many governments shut schools first because it was an easy and showy way to "do something", with costs to working-class students but almost none to profits. Since then arguments from scientists and medics have forced a wide consensus in Europe that schools are lower-risk than pubs, etc., and should be considered an "essential service" like non-emergency medical care.

In a "crash" lockdown (stay-at-home almost 24/7, curfews, borders closed, etc.) like Melbourne's from 5 August, schools close too, but even in Melbourne schools reopened from 12 October, some weeks before other sectors, and the curve kept going down.

New York City may soon close its schools because the city as a whole goes above a previously-agreed threshold of 3% positive return from virus tests, even though in schools themselves the rate is only [0.2% positive](#).

Bars, restaurants, gyms, churches, etc. remain open there, though from 13 Nov with a 10pm curfew. That is typical of US restrictions: New York City was the only large school district to reopen in September, and generally schools are first to shut, last to open.

Scientists in the USA, [epidemiologists](#) or [medics](#) or [as summarised](#) by serious journalists, seem to agree with European scientists. They have less weight in the public debate in the USA, perhaps because of a general culture of valuing profit-making above social provision.

Patrick's claims about cases in schools in England are contradicted by the Office of National Statistics. The [ONS figures](#) are not to be overrated. They are based on scrappy returns and methodology. But the rise they show

is from 0.0% (20 Jun to 3 Jul) through 0.2% (29 Aug to 11 Sep) to 1.2% (24 Oct to 6 Nov) among children from age 2 to year 6, and from 0.1% through 0.1% to 1.9% for years 7-11. No sudden drop with half-term.

There has been a big rise in infections generally, and especially among university-aged people. Infections have spread through adjacent age groups, as they do. The [ONS](#) suggests teachers have no higher infection rates than other trades.

There is transmission in schools, especially 6th forms; but the balance of evidence suggests that with workers' control to win rota-ing to thin out the school days, extra buildings, fixed-up ventilation, extra funding, masks, we could keep schools open, like other essential services, while broader measures reduce overall infection rates.

If I have it right, Patrick does not want schools closed indefinitely until the virus is at very low levels. That would be until (optimistic estimate) summer 2021. This generation of working-class children would lose over a year of education. (Meanwhile, they would not stay locked in for a whole year, so they might get and transmit more infections from private socialising than they would in school).

So, I suggest, the New York City example to draw inspiration from is not the coming closure of schools, but the threatened (illegal) teachers' strike in September which won a 50-point checklist monitored by committees.

Patrick suggests that the NEU leaders' call to close (all) schools could help schoolworkers' battles for such checklists. I think the opposite is true.

The NEU leaders have issued a [petition](#). That is a token substitute for action, not a stimulus for it. So school workers are diverted from putting any pressure on their bosses for a couple of weeks? And even if the petition magically "works" (which it won't), then everything restarts as before? As in Wales? The union has "got its way", but nothing is improved.

Look to the school workers' strikes or threatened strikes in France and the USA, I suggest, rather than to the US school closures. □



Featured book

Published in 2020 for the fortieth anniversary of the explosive birth of the Polish independent workers' movement, *Solidarność*. This book explains why the movement emerged when, where and how it did; and why it was eventually crushed by the anti-working-class Polish state. 116 pages, £5. □

workersliberty.org/books

Students: more battles brewing

By AWL students

In the week starting 16 Nov groups of students are organising workshops, banner drops, and email campaigns to highlight high rents, draconian lockdowns, and general lack of support at UK Universities. The National Union of Students (NUS) is promoting and encouraging local events, but has stopped short of calling for a national campaign of rent strikes.

From 12 Nov students at Manchester escalated their rent strike by occupying Owens Park Tower. The occupiers say: "We were lied to and brought onto unsafe campuses, forced to pay insane rent for facilities we can't even access. We've tried protests, we've withheld our rent and we're being ignored! ... we're occupying the tower until they respond to us."

The rent strike has been backed by a group of Manchester alumni, the University and College Union (UCU), and many other local activists.

Some Bristol University students are also on rent strike. Other groups are planning rent strikes for the New Year (e.g. at York). Edinburgh students are threatening strike action if the university does not agree to their demands: half rent for all students for the duration of hybrid learning, improved online service and free wifi, no victimisation of protesters.

Manchester and Bristol have both taken action this week; other groups include Liberate the University, Pause or Pay UK (art students demanding courses are paused or students compensated), and Unis Resist Border Controls.

It is not only undergraduates who are feeling cheated by their institutions and the government. This week UK Research and Innovation published guidance on how it will support the 22,000 PhD students it funds, many of whom have had to delay their research as a result of the pandemic. A cap of 2,800 students will be offered finance to extend their research time.

The pandemic has seen many have to put off lab work and field work; others have lost their jobs which top up income, including teaching jobs at Unis. A large meeting of Pandemic PGRs planned a UK-wide campaign to back up demands including that all research students should be financially supported and that the status of research students should change to that of employed staff, so they can access employment rights, proper expenses and the government furlough scheme.

Meanwhile in a bid to get students home for Christmas, the government have issued guidance for universities stipulating that students must travel between 3-9 December according to a schedule of staggered departure dates set by universities and including rapid testing. But the guidance doesn't work for students on placements, or who are working up to or over the Christmas period! In any case many students have already travelled home – and that's why there is an increasing pressure for students to get out of accommodation contracts.

With disputes against cuts building up at Goldsmiths

and University of East London and other disputes bringing results for lecturers at Heriot Watt and catering staff working for Sodexo at Sussex (both over job cuts), next term will be an interesting one for those of us defending the future of higher education and a difficult one for Unimangers and the government. □

- More • [@PandemicPGRs](#) • [@rentjusticeedi](#)

- [@rentstrikeUoM](#) • [@pauseorpayuk](#)



Losses for communalists in Bosnia

By John Cunningham

Municipal elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina, delayed because of Covid-19, took place on 14-15 Nov, and the earliest indications are that the parties based on ethnic groupings have fared badly amongst voter concerns over widespread corruption and what is seen by many as a disastrous response to the epidemic.

In Sarajevo, the SDA (Party of Democratic Action, the party claiming to represent Bosnian Muslims) lost out in three of four voting districts and in Banja Luka, opposition parties made important gains. The HDZBiH (Croat Democratic Union of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the party claiming to represent Croats), has also fared badly.

All the results are not yet in (elections in the important city of Mostar are scheduled for 20 December) and given the complex nature of the electoral system in Bosnia-Herzegovina a detailed analysis is not yet possible. Whether or not the success of the opposition parties, who formed a loose coalition, can be transformed into something more permanent remains to be seen.

At the moment what appears to hold them together is a, fully understandable, loathing of the main ethnic parties but not much else. In December, Solidarity will carry an analysis of the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina on the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords and that will include some further analysis of these important elections. □

NEU support staff call for rights

By Bill Davies

The main issue of contention at the support staff conference of the National Education Union (NEU: online, 14 November) was a composite motion which called for the NEU to seek bargaining rights and to find a way to be able to actively recruit support staff to the union.

The composite motion covered a lot of ground, including pay, conditions, funding, and collective representation. As well as addressing collective bargaining rights and active recruitment, it included calls for Living Wage campaigns for our lowest paid colleagues (e.g. cleaners, catering staff); for mobilising in support of a 10% pay claim; for nationally standard terms and conditions; for campaigning action against “job creep” (pressure to work beyond your job description); and for increased funding for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The conference voted by 85% to send the motion on to the full NEU annual conference next spring, despite the warnings from NEU joint general secretary Mary Bousted that it would be damaging to the union, and would be voted down in spring.

There are now more than 40,000 support staff members of the National Education Union. After Unison and GMB, the NEU is now the third largest union among education support staff. It is by far the biggest union across the board in schools, colleges, and nursery education workers, with teachers as well as support staff (teaching assistants, administrators, technicians, librarians, site managers, mealtime supervisors, cleaners, nursery nurses, catering workers etc.).

But so far the NEU has no right to negotiate collectively on behalf of its support staff members.

The wording of the composite was cautious. It placed the goal of winning bargaining rights in the context of approaching other education unions “seeking amicable joint work and cooperation, with the assistance of the TUC as appropriate” and also called on the union leadership to “seek, as a matter of urgency, a way to end the undertaking [to other unions] not to actively or knowingly recruit support staff”.

Mary Bousted was due to speak at the conference about covid-19, child poverty, and holiday hunger.

She also effectively took a speech against the composite motion, although officially stressing that it was up to

the conference to decide. The difficulties, as she said, are bound up with a TUC-brokered agreement, which includes the undertaking that “the NEU will not actively or knowingly recruit school support staff working in publicly funded schools” and that it “will not seek recognition and negotiating rights for support staff in publicly funded schools at local and national level.”

The TUC agreement identifies Unison, GMB and Unite as “the schools’ support staff unions” even though the NEU now has many more support staff members than Unite. In addition, the Local Government Association, whether Tory-controlled (because the NEU is more despised than most unions by Tory politicians) or Labour-controlled (because Unison, GMB and Unite are all affiliated to Labour), is unlikely to agree to give recognition to the NEU for support staff. And then the Central Arbitration Committee is likely to conclude that a voluntary recognition agreement already exists, so will not grant recognition to an additional union.

The difficulties and obstacles are clearly real. Against that is the determination and impatience of support staff in the union, who see no good reason why, if they join the same “industrial” union as others workers in their workplace, it should not be able to represent them.

Unison, GMB and (to a lesser extent, Unite) bureaucrats are worried that if the NEU can fully represent its support staff members, then their own support staff members will leave to join the NEU. Their concern is not for workers to have the most effective union representation, but for their organisations to have a stable and reliable income from membership subscriptions.

The concern of the NEU leadership is to not fall out with the bureaucrats of the general unions, and not to face complaints and censures within – and potentially expulsion from – the TUC.

The alternative, Mary Bousted suggested, is for the NEU to continue to grow our support staff membership (without “actively or knowingly” recruiting, of course). A number of 90,000 (roughly 10% of the workforce) was mentioned. That would indeed be an important achievement and serves as a useful target.

However, there is nothing in the TUC agreement that suggests reaching this target would change the position of the general union bureaucrats and it looks like the number was chosen as big enough to persuade support staff members to bide our time. □

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£2,583 over target

With under a week to go to our target date, 22 November, our fund total stands at £12,583, with thanks to Steve and Michael this week. Next week we’ll report on the final total which will also include the donation from our comrade in Trafford who has pledged to double everything received over our original £10,000 target by the 22nd. □



Court win for “gig” workers

By Michael Elms

The IWGB union has won a legal battle over the rights of gig-economy workers, and couriers especially, during the pandemic. A judgment issued on 13 November means that workers in the “gig economy” are entitled to the same EU-derived health and safety rights as employees. Key rights are:

- To be provided with Personal Protective Equipment by the business they are working for and
- The right to stop work in response to serious and im-

minent danger.

The UK Government must now urgently take steps to ensure that workers have the same protection as employees.

Meanwhile, in Sheffield, couriers working for all three platforms are continuing to meet and campaign, building towards a city-wide all-out courier strike on 25 November. The workers are demanding increased pay, a hiring freeze, and a fair process around terminations, so as to end the present regime of arbitrary sackings with no hearing or right of appeal. □

Defend Cetin Avsar

By Ollie Moore

Security guard and union activist Cetin Avsar has been threatened with dismissal by his employer, Wilson James Ltd., who said in a letter that his opposition to outsourcing, and role in leading a strike for direct employment in his previous workplace, St. George's University of south London, represent a “conflict of interest”.

Cetin is currently working for Wilson James Ltd. on a contract at the Francis Crick Institute in King's Cross, London, but has been told his “conduct has not reached the required standards.” The only issue cited for discussion at his probation review meeting is his opposition to outsourcing and his record of activism in the United Voices of the World union (UVW).

The UVW has launched a campaign to support Cetin, arguing the employer's action violates Cetin's human rights. UVW is asking supporters to write letters of protest to Wilson James Ltd. bosses. □

• bit.ly/defend-cetin • [@uvwunion](https://twitter.com/uvwunion)

Second-hand books

Workers' Liberty is selling one hundred second hand books, on politics and many other topics. Visit bit.ly/2h-books for the full list, pricing, and to order them. **Featured this week:**

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- The Lacuna – Barbara Kingsolver
- They Knew Why They Fought – Bill Hunter
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A bonfire coming



Diary of a tubeworker

By Jay Dawkey

On the Tube, you don't really notice Lockdown 2 until the weekends and the late evenings. It's definitely quieter then, but throughout the day the flow of people seems about the same. How many people have returned to working from home is hard to gauge.

"We'll be back in lockdown January to March, won't we?" N says. "If furlough is on till March, that's what they'll do. "And in April, when they do the new accounts, they'll be getting rid of everyone won't they. I'm not sure people have seen it coming. It'll be a bonfire".

"In March we will see a lot of changes here. Got the mayoral election, the report, they'll be trying to change a lot at TfL [Transport for London] I think".

I add that those proposed adverse changes are down to us to stop. "Lot of pressure on the Mayor, though. He's being blamed by the government. I think Londoners will see through it. We know who got it into this mess. And it won't be Shaun Bailey that can get us out of it".

"Who?" C asks.

"Shaun Bailey is a black guy who is from London and a normal background, but he's the Conservative candidate for mayor".

"A black guy? I'd probably vote for him then. Hahahaha" C goes on. "You know what he said? He said stations should be renamed after businesses to raise money. He wants it all sponsored like football stadiums".

He's got no chance, I say. Stranger things have happened, but I think Khan [the sitting Labour Mayor] will win.

A train operator who knows the supervisor comes in to the office. They get chatting and start discussing their Christmas get together. "What we going to do for it?"

"We haven't got any options now, have we? Not like I can book tables anywhere".

"Ah, it will change for Christmas. Everyone will break the rules if they don't".

"Not sure we'll be able to get in anywhere. And how many of us will be allowed? I can't see it happening, mate. Hopefully next year". □

• "Jay Dawkey" is a Tube worker.

Right to picket

By Mohan Sen

On 6 November, the police dispersed a covid-distanced picket line over pay at the Optare bus factory in Sherburn-in-Elmet, near Selby in North Yorkshire. They warned strikers they would be issued with penalty notices for breaking lockdown rules if they returned.

But after a legal challenge from Unite the Union and the scheduling of a judicial review against the North Yorkshire Chief Constable and the Secretary of State for Health, the government conceded the right to picket should be upheld. It says it will issue guidance to all police forces that workers can undertake covid-distanced picketing.

As Unite rightly points out, employers have not suspended their struggle during the Covid crisis, but in many cases taken advantage of it to attack workers. Unite says the right to picket has been "secured". We must assert it on the ground. □

• More: bit.ly/right2picket



An "epidemic" film



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Time now for an "epidemic" film: *The Killer That Stalked New York* (1950, Earl McEvoy). On-the-run jewel thief Sheila Bennet (Evelyn Keyes) unknowingly has smallpox. As New Yorkers start dropping like flies, the police and medics begin a desperate woman-hunt. She is solely concerned to reach her (cheating) husband. The film ends on a ledge outside a hotel room. The husband plunges to his death, but Sheila lives long enough to help the medical services with "track and trace". The epidemic is defeated and a final credit pays tribute to "the men and women of Public Health – the first line of defence between mankind and disease". □

Worries on testing



John Moloney

By John Moloney

The Group Executive Committee for our members in the Department of Transport are preparing plans for a possible ballot of driving instructors. Instructors have been told they're expected to resume driving tests after lockdown, but we don't think that'll be safe. Similar discussions about a possible ballot are taking place amongst our members working in courts.

The government wants to roll out mass testing to workers across a number of government departments, including DWP and Home Office. We support an expansion of testing, but there's a lot that needs firming up. The tests they plan to use have a low accuracy rate, which could miss positive cases as well as generate false positives. We're also concerned that it will be used to force people back to work – if someone isolates with symptoms, takes a test and gets a negative result, but is still clearly unwell,

will that person be expected to resume work?

The risk of missing positive cases also means people could be forced back to work when they are in fact infectious. We don't want this to be a means for employers to force people back to the physical workplace before it is safe. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of the civil service workers' union PCS, writing here in a personal capacity.

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Scrap all GCSEs!

By Rhodri Evans

The Welsh government has [cancelled](#) GCSE and A level exams for 2021 in Wales.

This is good in that it increases pressure on the Tories to cancel them for England, too. The Welsh approach is not that good, though: the summer exams are to be replaced by a series of "externally" set and marked tests, plus teacher assessment (which puts pressure on school managements and teachers to compete to manipulate grades upwards because otherwise their students lose out compared to the next school's).

GCSEs should be scrapped outright, for good, and need no replacement. Breaking the whole "exam factory" system and replacing A levels requires bigger changes, but is desirable and possible: plenty of countries operate without anything like A levels. □

Step forward at Sodexo



Tubeworker

From Tubeworker

The RMT rail union has reported that Sodexo, the outsourcing giant which runs TfL [Transport for London] staff canteens, has backed down from its threat to make workers compulsorily redundant.

Sodexo was planning to slash 30 jobs on the contract as part of a restructure that will also see canteens move away from freshly-cooked food towards serving microwave meals.

Thanks for RMT pressure, that threat has been seen off. Sodexo has committed that no-one who wants to remain employed will be made redundant.

It's not a total victory, as Sodexo still plans to go ahead with its restructure. This means some jobs will be lost through voluntary redundancy, and others will be effectively "de-skilled". RMT is continuing to organise against that, and to demand firmer guarantees to protect and improve terms and conditions. But the no-compulsory-redundancies guarantee will be a huge relief for these – low-paid, mainly migrant – workers.

There are some important lessons here in how unions should fight job cuts. When Sodexo announced its cuts, RMT didn't set out to negotiate the terms of defeat by accepting cuts as inevitable, and simply aim to support workers through the redundancy consultation process. It declared a policy of opposition to the restructure as a whole, and organised members on that basis. When a formal industrial dispute was declared and ballot for strikes planned, it was because RMT activists had spoken to workers and built a mood for a fightback.

RMT also looked to apply additional leverage by organising amongst directly-employed TfL and London Underground staff who use the canteens. A mass petition campaign opposing the restructure has so far garnered over 600 signatures. □

Solidarity



For a workers' government



DAVID LAMMY IS RIGHT

By Sacha Ismail

Tottenham Labour MP and Shadow Justice Secretary David Lammy has broken ranks with Keir Starmer's leadership to call for a delay to Brexit.

On BBC Question Time on 12 November, Lammy described the chaos fast approaching and called for an extension to the Brexit transition period beyond 31 December (watch at bit.ly/lammybrexit).

Lammy's comments stand out because silence on Brexit is smothering the labour movement.

Few Labour MPs are saying anything about Brexit. The Love Socialism group of MPs (formerly Love Socialism Hate Brexit) has just restarted its social media – but says nothing about Brexit...

Trade unions have become quieter and quieter, despite what the coming crash will mean for jobs and workers' rights.

Liberal or right-wing Labour commentator Will Hutton reports in the *Observer* that "the Labour party, apparently, is even debating voting for Johnson's deal to show it has left Remain behind".

"It's a commentary on our times", writes Hutton, "that before a national emergency there is no sustained, high-profile effort to sound the tocsin." "Too many of the potential countervailing forces... are afraid of offering high-profile arguments for something better out of fear of being cast as undemocratic Remoaners."

Polls earlier this year showed a clear majority for extending the transition to deal with the Covid crisis. At the end of September, YouGov found 61% thought the government was handling Brexit badly (only 28% well) and a 50-39% majority saying Brexit was a mistake.

The pandemic, which created a majority for delay, has simultaneously distracted people from focusing on the

problem of Brexit. Political leadership was needed – but Labour and the unions abdicated completely.

Starmer's leadership has said as little as possible, to avoid being criticised on any side. It has helped the government drive towards a No Deal or hard Brexit with minimal fuss and scrutiny.

On 15 November Ireland's foreign minister Simon Coveney suggested there was something like a week or ten days left to avoid No Deal.

Anyone hoping that the departure of Lee Cain and Dominic Cummings from Downing Street will produce a sudden outbreak of rationality should stop hoping. Disagreements in the Tory hierarchy are within a narrow hard Brexit spectrum.

Reports indicate that Boris Johnson is "the hardest in the room" and "least willing to budge" in negotiations with the EU – and that a majority of cabinet members are willing to follow him if he goes for No Deal.

We face vast economic disruption, transport chaos, shortages of medicine, food and technologies, and aggressive attempts to make the working class pay for the crisis – if there is a deal. The likely hit to the economy from leaving the European single market with a deal is about 4% – on top of destruction from the pandemic's second wave. Without one, 6%.

Even now, we must rally as much of the labour movement and left as possible to demand Brexit is delayed, so the Tories' disastrous plans can be subjected to real scrutiny and debate.

The leaders of Labour and the unions should be held to account for their refusal to fight the Tories or expose what they are doing. We must demand Labour opposes a Tory Brexit deal, if they get one, and fights every aspect of their plans. □