

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

## Defend and extend free movement



# AGAINST BREXIT! WORKERS' UNITY ACROSS BORDERS

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Student revolt grows against paying rent to study online.

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It'll be higher borders, more neoliberalism to woo investors.

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The decline and fall of a pioneer black nationalist movement.

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# Tell the truth: against Brexit!

## “” Editorial

As we go to press on 8 December, it seems to hang in the balance whether the Tories will conclude a post-Brexit trade deal with the EU. The Tory leadership is cultivating an image of being not too bothered either way.

We will have either “No Deal” (which means a lot of short-term disruption, followed by a scramble to get some sketchy deal in the next years) or a bodged Brexit deal. The bodged last-minute Tory deal will leave many issues to be resolved, but will include the closing of borders to free movement from Europe and probably license systematic reduction over time of social provision and rights in Britain below EU standards.

Either way we face further economic and social devastation, and in the midst of the pandemic.

All year, we have lived in a strange political atmosphere, with the country moving steadily towards disaster – but no large force willing to raise the alarm. Now, in a way, the contradiction is heightened. Every day brings multiple reports confirming that the chaos and regression after 31 December will be grim indeed:

“Builders run short of supplies as port holdups raise Brexit concerns... Toyota will not invest in electric cars till 2034... UK firms unclear about Brexit rules with one month to go... UK races to deport asylum seekers ahead of Brexit... Fears UK will not cope with Brexit and Covid vaccine rollout...”

Yet the political temperature remains remarkably low.

Central to this problem is surely the role played by the Labour Party, which has gone out of its way not to oppose the Tories on Brexit. Having first limited its message to “Get a deal done”, Starmer’s leadership is now leaning towards supporting whatever deal the Tories cook up with the EU leaders, if they do.

The media reports a split in the Shadow Cabinet and major unrest in the Labour Party establishment. For sure Starmer’s position will be disliked by large numbers of party members.

Labour movement activists should push for Labour at least to abstain in Parliament. Please sign and share the statement from Labour for a Socialist Europe: [bit.ly/dont-votewithtories](https://bit.ly/dont-votewithtories)

The problem is wider than one parliamentary vote. To take advantage of the disarray the Tories face next year, or certainly to do so in the name of any sort of even vaguely radical agenda, Labour must explain and indict what their

Brexit policy and their wider policy represent.

There is no sign of that. Starmer’s leadership do not want to promote left-wing policies, or distinguish themselves too much from even this hard-right Tory government. Their nervousness and weakness is still more pronounced when it comes to issues connected to nationalism and state power – military spending, “overseas operations”, “spycops”... and Brexit.

The problem is wider still. Paralysed by unwillingness to criticise Brexit, as well as a more general lack of fight, our trade unions are largely tailing Starmer. The big trade union Unite is actively promoting support for a Tory Brexit deal.

Most of the Labour left, even sections of it that previously opposed Brexit, is silent.

To prepare for an effective fight after new year, when the Tories and the bosses try to use the chaos to force even further sacrifices on the working class, requires disrupting the labour movement’s silence and quiescence. We need to reorganise, revive and promote the class-struggle, internationalist left in Labour and the unions.

Brexit is now happening – and it will be just as bad as we warned. The starting point is to say that clearly. □



## Our new online bookshop

Covid-distanced holidays make books, and books-as-presents, as important than ever. A deadly pandemic, economic crisis, Brexit, climate crises, and the rise of the nationalist right make socialist ideas more vital than ever. The dozens of socialist books and pamphlets that Workers’ Liberty publishes aim to arm us, the left, and the labour movement, with ideas needed to fight these challenges, and for a better world.

Thanks to funding from supporters we’ve been building – with professional help – a new and much improved online shop. Browse, basket, and buy books, pamphlets, and publication bundles – and find related resources, study guides and so on, from the same web page.

Additional features, products, and improvements will be added in the next weeks and months. But it’s more than ready for you to buy Xmas presents for friends and family, and Xmas reading for yourself. Every third publication half-price; 15% off over £50. □

• [workersliberty.org/publications](https://workersliberty.org/publications)



# A dozen or more rent strikes

By AWL students

In the last week of the first term, groups from more universities are joining the wave of rent strikes. They will withhold rent payments due in January 2021. Students at a dozen universities, possibly more, are now involved.

On Wednesday 2 December, a London demonstration, called by the cross-capital Liberate the University group and backed by the National Union of Students (NUS), was attended by 150 or more, with Goldsmiths, UAL (University of the Arts, London), and King's students leading the mobilisation. In Manchester, the same week, where there are two ongoing rent strikes at Manchester University and Manchester Metropolitan University, hundreds of students marched down Oxford Road to the city centre.

In both cases the student protests were heavily policed. The London demonstration was shut down after about an hour. The right to protest, and "cops off campus", must become demands of this growing movement.

A number of new activist groups are starting up in the wake of this movement. One of these groups, "9k4What?", has called a national meeting for Sunday 13 December. This group has focused on a tuition fee rebate on the grounds that degrees are "not value for money", but the message is broadening out: "When we ask '9k4What?', we're not just asking why we pay 9k for zoom classes, why we pay 9k to be fenced in to our accommodation, why we pay 9k for reduced access to libraries and services. We're asking, why should anyone be paying £9,000 to access higher education in the first place?"

The shift is good, but the focus is still potentially divisive. It could pit students' interests against those of staff delivering the education that has been designated "not value for money".

A non-means-tested government grant available to all students, including those with no recourse to public funds, immediately available and framed as "financial support" and not "compensation", would be preferable. That is the formulation preferred by NUS.

It is important this debate is pursued and argued out. Next term is likely to see action on a number of local industrial disputes. Staff and students need to be united –

demanding a national bailout of universities.

Extra governmental financial support at the institutional level would cover: rent rebates, grants, essential covid-distanced learning (such as lab work), no cuts and increased funding for student support services especially mental health services, degree extensions for all students who need them but especially research students and student carers, fee cuts and waivers for international students, no staff cuts, insourcing of cleaning staff, adequate PPE.

Many of the problems brought by the pandemic could have been mitigated by better management. One such issue now is about the academic setbacks caused by Covid – ranging from impacts on mental health to loss of lab time. Some groups of students are now pushing for extended "no disadvantage" policies: that mitigating circumstances on assessments be generously applied. If managements drag their heels on that or fail to offer fair policies, it could be a key battle next term. □



## Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom.

**Thursday 10 December, 8-9.30pm:** First session in a study group on Marx's "Grundrisse"

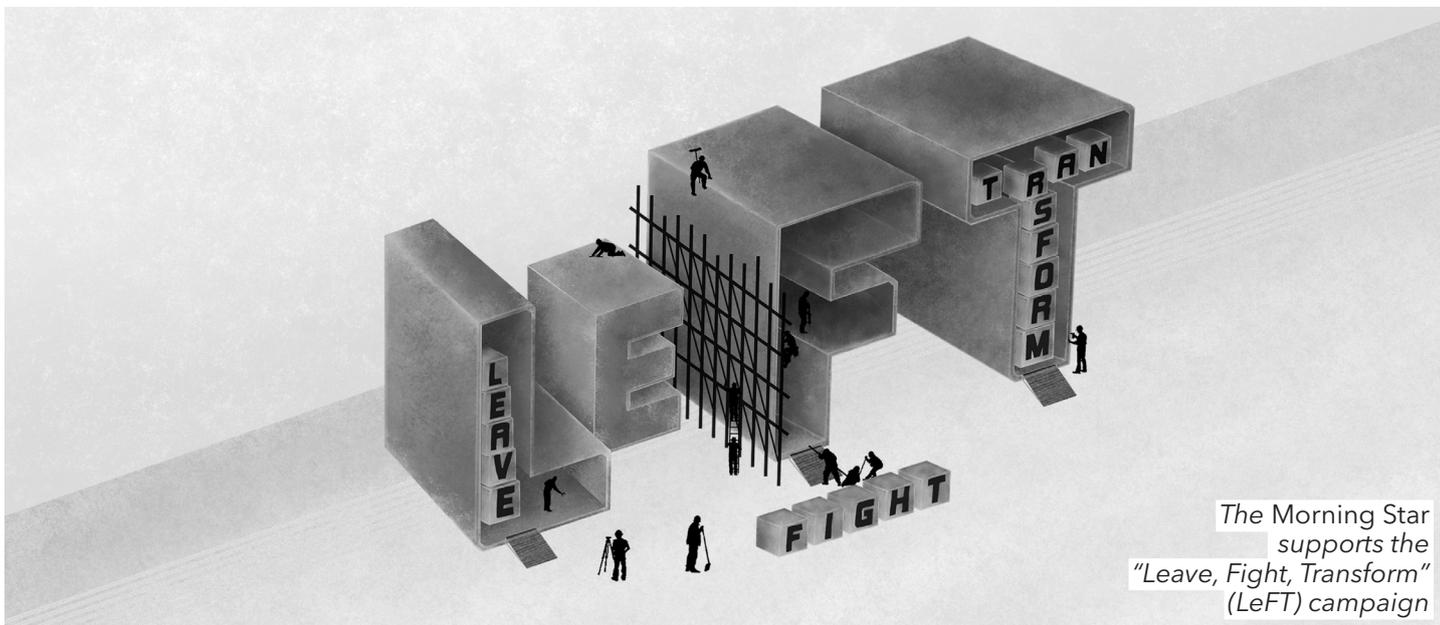
**Sunday 13 December, 6.30-8pm:** The politics of climate change – introducing "Climate Leviathan"

**Monday 14 December, 6-8.30pm:** AWL Civil Service branch – Solidarnosc and the mass working-class challenge to Stalinism

**Monday 14 December, 7:30-9pm:** North London AWL – A political history of hip hop

**Monday 14 December, 7:30-9pm:** Leeds AWL – Should we nationalise Christmas?

**Details in our calendars**, to browse or subscribe; full and updated details; zoom links; more meetings and resources – visit [workersliberty.org/meetings](https://workersliberty.org/meetings) □



# Johnson: not anti-EU enough?



## Antidoto

By Jim Denham

As the time runs out for a post-Brexit trade deal, the *Morning Star* is worried: Boris Johnson “is not ideologically anti-EU, let alone pro-No Deal” (all quotes from MS editorial, 5-6 Dec).

Yes, that’s the trouble with Johnson – he just can’t be trusted to take a hard line against Johnny Foreigner, even over fishing rights, which he “would sell... to France and Spain in order to ensure the City of London’s continuing unfettered access to Europe’s financial markets.”

Meanwhile, the “intransigent” EU claims to have “fears – whether bogus or not – that Britain could engage in unfair competition... by lowering labour, consumer or environmental standards.” Such fears are of course, unfounded, as “all EU labour, consumer and environmental minimum standards have already been incorporated into UK law.” And, to pre-empt what “Britain’s most pro-EU zealots” might say about that, the *Morning Star* has a ready answer: “Obviously there can be no guarantee that a Tory government will not legislate in future to lower various standards... But that should be a matter for the electors of Britain to deal with.” We may have rubbish standards in future – but they’ll be rubbish *British* standards!

Now, just in case any *Morning Star* reader might think all this sounds a bit like what you might expect from, say, the *Telegraph* or the *Mail*, we come to that old favourite, state aid. Here the editorial excels itself:

“The EU side has consistently demanded that any agreement must include a mechanism to enforce... EU rules banning state aid to industry in all but the most devastating, short-term, or exceptional circumstances.”

Strange, then, isn’t it, that the UK spends considerably less on state aid than most other EU countries? In 2016 the UK spent 0.36% of GDP on state aid compared to 0.65% in France and 1.31% in Germany (and those figures exclude railways, which are nationalised in both France and Germany). Only five EU countries spent less than the UK.

And if we look at Scandinavian countries, which are all in the Single Market and almost all in the EU, we see that there is no inconsistency between the state aid rules and such things as regional aid, investment aid for small- and medium-sized companies, research and innovation aid, and support for broadband and local infrastructure.

Does all this sound like the EU “banning state aid... in all but the most... exceptional circumstances”?

Is the author of the *Morning Star*’s editorial simply ignorant, or a liar? (Probably both).

And when it comes to honesty, one other thing the *Morning Star* doesn’t make clear to its readers (though it occasionally hints at it) is the fact that, like its political masters, the Communist Party of Britain, it positively supports No Deal and Britain trading on WTO rules (which place very similar restrictions on state aid to those of the EU!).

Seeing as not being “ideologically” anti-EU and pro No Deal is Johnson’s great failing, you’d think the *Morning Star* would make more of the fact that it – and its political masters – are exactly that. But then, the unions who subsidise the *Morning Star* (all of whom are bitterly opposed to No Deal) wouldn’t like that, would they? □

## Shapurji Saklatvala

Six articles on Shapurji Saklatvala, revolutionary socialist, anti-colonial freedom fighter and the first Labour MP of colour: [bit.ly/sakarticles](http://bit.ly/sakarticles) □

# A socialist-feminist take on Xmas films



## Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

It's my last column of the year, so time for our socialist feminist Christmas film review.

*Muppets Christmas Carol*: Like many Muppets movies this shows the Muppets experiencing and expressing the misery of capitalism. This is ameliorated not by working-class struggle but by benevolent capitalism, which had been faced with its own horrific reflection. This is the most liberal of the Muppets movies.

The Muppet canon contains working class resistance to capitalism whilst ultimately accommodating to the power of capital. Why? In part due to the leadership of Kermit, who constantly curtails the radicalism and action of the Muppets, compromising between the needs of the Muppets and the demands of capital. The answer is not simply to replace Kermit with Animal, though this would clearly be a step forward, but *democratic* transformation of the Muppets.

*It's a Wonderful Life* is a terrible film. A celebration of family values and Keynesianism. Take the scene where we see George Bailey's wife Mary in an alternative reality where he'd never existed. His wife now wears glasses and works in a library – how terrible! Hoover's Communist-hunting agents were wrong to see it as anti-American propaganda. The only socialist-feminist reading of this film is as a cautionary tale about marriage robbing Mary of a better life. In our alternative world where she escaped her patriarch, she becomes an avid reader, realising in the process she is long-sighted and getting glasses. She gets a job as a librarian. She becomes a socialist activist fighting unemployment with the Farmer-Labor Party.

*Netflix Christmas rom-coms*: With exclusion of the teen movies which are much better, all Netflix Christmas rom-coms can be lumped together. I will call this Netflix-composite *A Christmas Royal Wedding in Snowy Falls*. The movies are deeply formulaic, ticking off every rom-com trope, which gives the feel of film-by-algorithm.

Philosopher Henry Cavell wrote: the classic comedies of remarriage (the rom-com golden age) constitute a body of philosophical thought showing that happiness can be achieved "by a combination of self-knowledge, luck and grace" developing our true self through dialogue. When we watch Katherine Hepburn and Cary Grant we get lots of talking and language. Literary culture is the route to a more meaningful life.

Though modern rom-coms contain many tropes of the classics (clumsy women, arguing as a sign you fancy each other) they are essentially very different. The central desire threaded through twenty-first century rom-coms is less sexual or philosophical, more economic for job stability and professional accomplishment – running a cupcake shop, getting a big account, or becoming a hot-shot



architect.

Netflix Christmas movies move beyond pedestrian millennial desire for individual fulfilment through a nice middle-class job. These characters take it to the next level – inheriting large corporations, becoming royalty, being rescued by an actual knight or risking a promotion in Washington to save a US military base. Throw in the innate goodness of rural life and a hearty dose of family knows best, and we get a profoundly reactionary take on the genre.

They are so oddly conservative in outlook that in the LGBT Netflix special, *A New York Christmas Wedding*, the lead learns to accept her queer identity through Catholicism. These films are so shallow and draped in fairy tale elements, they are like an unintentional satire on the rom-com genre.

*The Snowman*: The saddest of the bunch. I assume you think the snowman just melted. No, sadly not. In the final scene, the snowman has gone but the rest of the snow hasn't melted. It can't be fresh snow because the snowman's hat is at the top of the little pile where he used to be. There is only one probable explanation. His parents got up in the middle of the night and kicked the snowman to death because they would not accept this transgressive bond their son had outside the family.

This is a sinister tale of a child growing up in a toxic environment. A feminist masterpiece on the family as expressed by Michèle Barrett, embodying "the principle of selfishness, exclusion and pursuit of private interest".

Finally – enjoy your Christmas movies, comrades! It's ok to watch the *Christmas Chronicles* without asking why the kids are trying to save Christmas instead of helping the elves seize the means of production! ☐

## More online

### Socialist Worker on "The Lobby": half a step forward

The SWP says blaming the "Israel Lobby" "leads down some very dark paths". But its "brighter" path isn't so bright.

[bit.ly/i-lobby](https://bit.ly/i-lobby)

### Lockdowns and "life against life"

Why there's more to virus control than just "shut more down, for longer".

[bit.ly/life-vs](https://bit.ly/life-vs)

# Vaccination and the frontline workers



## Science

By Andi Brookes

Following the approval of the first Covid-19 vaccine last week came the announcement that the government will be rolling out a vaccination programme for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to care home residents and healthcare workers first, followed by tiers according to age and vulnerability.

Mass vaccination roll outs are intended to get the pandemic under control, prevent deaths, hospitalisations and infections. But each of these come with trade-offs in terms of who is vaccinated first, so which should be prioritised when considering public health vaccination strategies?

Currently, the government is signalling that it's starting with "prevent deaths". Care home residents are extraordinarily vulnerable to Covid-19 infections, and it's well documented that the subsequent risk of dying significantly increases with both age and the presence of other conditions.

But this strategy doesn't necessarily help to control the pandemic. Care home residents themselves don't sustain infection rates in our communities. While they're vulnerable to care staff and visitors bringing the infection to the care home, residents aren't regularly going to schools, gigs, and pubs where they might pass the infection on to the general public.

Given this, it's not clear that vaccinating according to age as opposed to other characteristics will have a meaningful impact on overall infection rates. In fact, this approach may not even be effective at minimising mortality in the long term, if it leaves transmission rates high in younger groups.

Instead, in choosing to vaccinate care home residents and the elderly first, the government is leaving large numbers of frontline workers: transport staff, retail workers, teachers, and hospitality staff, vulnerable. People in these roles interact with a higher than average number of strangers during the course of the day, and can act as a significant point of transmission if they're infected.

While it's true that age correlates with the likelihood of death from Covid-19, cases such as that of Belly Mujinga, a transport worker who died of Covid-19 after being spat at by a passenger, and the thousands of people experiencing "long Covid" symptoms for months after their initial infection, show that this infection can be life-changing,

no matter your age.

Vaccinating frontline workers as a priority could not only save the lives of people vaccinated, but also reduce the risk of onward spread by these workers to the public, including vulnerable individuals. Even if the vaccines don't completely prevent infection, study data has shown that they reduce symptomatic infection, and separate studies have also demonstrated that asymptomatic people are less infectious, slowing transmission.

Choosing not to vaccinate people according to their relative likelihood of infection and transmission means that it may be some time before we see the impact of vaccination on rates of infections in the UK. Restrictions on socialising and daily life are expected to continue well into the spring to keep infection rates low. So, while care homes first may be a sensible strategy to prevent deaths and NHS overwhelm in the short term, in the mid-term it means the pandemic will likely smoulder on, and may even get worse if people get fed up with winter restrictions and are lulled into a false sense of security by the availability of a vaccine.

Vaccination strategies are not straightforward. There are plenty of other factors public health officials will have considered such as the unknown long-term safety of the available mRNA vaccines, the need for booster shots in the future, and the logistical issues caused by the looming Brexit deadline. There are no simple answers.

But at the very least, frontline workers should be much further up the priority list than they currently are, if the government really wants to both "control the virus" and "save lives". □

### WHY SOCIALIST FEMINISM?

**WOMEN IN WORKERS' LIBERTY**

#### Featured book

As revolutionary socialists fighting for a society based on human need not profit, Workers' Liberty makes class struggle and radical social change central to our feminism. We are socialist feminists. This book explores what "socialist feminism" might mean today. 102 pages, £5. □

[workersliberty.org/books](https://workersliberty.org/books)

# Racism behind deportations

By Sade Sawyers

On Wednesday 2 December a charter flight intended to deport 50 Jamaican nationals from the UK back to Jamaica went ahead, though with thirteen rather than 50.

There had been a campaign with many high-profile celebrities such as Naomi Campbell fronting it. Home Secretary Priti Patel was heavily critically of the Labour MPs and celebrities such as Thandie Newton who protested, referring to them as “do-gooders”. She claimed people seeking to halt the deportation risked the safety of British people by allowing criminals to reside on British soil.

To what extent are “British” people in danger from these “criminals”, who have resided in the UK for many years, and many of whom have never returned to Jamaica since their arrival in the UK?

Many of the activists who fought and campaigned against the deportation flight argued that essentially these individuals are more British than Jamaican, and so that “returning” them to Jamaica could be seen as an unlawful act.

By deporting these people back, the government and the Home Office in particular could risk wrongfully removing many, as has happened in many cases before, revealed in the Windrush scandal of 2018.

In the Windrush scandal, the Home Office was found to have gone ahead with the unlawful deportation of people from Commonwealth countries who at the time of their arrival in the UK would have been considered British nationals. They were wrongfully told they were illegal immigrants.

Campaigners asked the question: do these recent deportations to Jamaica, like the Windrush scandal, have ties with institutional racism?

All of the 13 deported back to their birth country of Jamaica had little or no current ties to Jamaica (so campaigners argued) and many are fathers to British-national

children, now left fatherless. The mothers of those children pointed out the financial devastation they face when having to provide for those children as new-found single mothers.

According to Jamaica’s High Commissioner in London, Seth Ramocan, there was a secret deal between the British government and Jamaican authorities not to deport anyone back to Jamaica who had arrived in the UK at the age of 12 or under.

Such backdoor deals by the British government confirm the confusions of Britishness. By sneaking in such a deal, does the British government recognise the Britishness of those who arrived young, or is it just biding its time?

The ongoing story of deportations of individuals who have lived most of their lives in Britain raises a question: when are they British criminals? Or is it the case that they will always be seen as Jamaican criminals, even if they have spent a lifetime in Britain? □

## No longer hating Brexit?

By Sacha Ismail

A group of Labour MPs previously associated with the “Love Socialism Hate Brexit” project have relaunched it as “Love Socialism”. They argue for a left that is “green, internationalist and democratic” and seeks to advance “pluralism”. (See the article by Clive Lewis, Rachael Maskell, Lloyd Russell-Moyle and Alex Sobel at [bit.ly/lovesocialism](https://bit.ly/lovesocialism), and [@lovesocialism](https://twitter.com/lovesocialism))

Yet the new Love Socialism is saying nothing at all about Brexit! What happened to internationalism?

Love Socialism also does not promote “socialism” in the sense of a new society to replace capitalism, based on collective ownership and democracy. It does not, and seems unlikely to, fight for the labour movement to pursue radically anti-capitalist policies.

It says nothing much about the dramatic crises we face, or struggles and demands to tackle them. Class, working-class organisation, workers’ struggles hardly feature in how it describes the movement it wants.

Love Socialism criticises Labour as “top-down”, but appears to be a top-down initiative itself. It is a group for MPs, with no obvious role for anyone else.

Despite calling for “radical constitutional reform” and “deepening our democracy, expanding it, extending power”, it has little concrete to say about the first a step of democratising the Labour Party.

Of the four MPs who fronted up the relaunch, two (Alex Sobel and Rachael Maskell) are members of Keir Starmer’s frontbench. They went along with his decision to abstain on the Tories’ “overseas operations” and “spycops” bills. □

• Abridged from Momentum Internationalists [bit.ly/milovesocialism](https://bit.ly/milovesocialism)



## Our audio!

Listen, download or subscribe to Workers’ Liberty audio recordings of our paper, other publications, and many meetings. **Playlists include:**

- *Solidarity* Newspaper
- Pamphlets, publications beyond *Solidarity*
- Public meetings
- Fighting racism: pamphlets and more
- Solidarność: The workers’ movement and the re-birth of Poland in 1980-81
- Environmental pamphlet and meetings

See [workersliberty.org/audio](https://workersliberty.org/audio) for all episodes, and for information on using podcasts. All recent episodes can be found through most podcast providers: search “Workers’ Liberty” or “Solidarity & More”. □

# Belarus revolt: stalled, but will revive

By Pete Radcliff

At the beginning of 2020, Belarus was in a different crisis. Then, it was about oil and President Lukashenko's relationship with Putin.

During that crisis from January to March of this year, oil supplies to Belarus from Rosneft, one of the two giant Russian oil companies, were reduced to a trickle. Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin thought Russia was not getting enough for the heavily subsidised oil provided to Lukashenko.

Sechin is not just an oil oligarch. He is a leading figure in a circle close to Putin, the Siloviki, with roots in the former KGB. He is considered Russia's second most powerful person.

After three months of negotiations, oil supplies were re-established. As Belarus approached the 9 August presidential election, Lukashenko posed as the man who defies Russia, an oft-repeated show by him.

However when he first took power in 1994, Lukashenko was very close to the oligarchs around then Russian President Boris Yeltsin. He signed up to Yeltsin's "Union State of Russia and Belarus" in 1996 – intended to merge the two states again after the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

Lukashenko hoped to be Yeltsin's successor, and rule over a reunited Russia and Belarus. However Putin replaced Yeltsin in 1999, and Lukashenko took a Belarus-nationalist tack, trying to block the development of the "Union State" towards a common market and currency.

Elections in Belarus over the last 26 years have been increasingly obviously rigged – with candidates banned, intimidation, arrests of activists, Lukashenko using his media and "exit polls" to deter voters, and opaque arithmetic in the count.

Before 2020, the biggest protest around any of Lukashenko's five re-elections was in 2010. Lukashenko had reneged on promises made in 2001 to allow sections of the Belarus state economy to be bought up by Russian oligarchs, and Putin was no longer prepared to subsidise social measures for Lukashenko to buy him popularity. Russian Finance Minister Kudrin claimed that over 15 years through oil subsidies Russia had given Lukashenko's government £50 billion. No more!

Russia demanded that Lukashenko agree to a "Single Economic Space", a de facto common market. Lukashenko said no.

Gazprom, Russia's other hydrocarbon giant, paid for a documentary to be produced about Lukashenko. Titled *The Nation's* [i.e. Belarus's] *Godfather*, it accused Lukashenko of murdering a number of his opponents in 1999-2000, smuggling, and admiring Hitler.

Lukashenko retaliated by having Belarus state media publish an account of Putin's corruption by former Russian Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemstov. Nemstov would be assassinated five years later.

Just nine days before the December 2010 presidential election, Russia's gas and oil subsidies to Belarus were restored. Lukashenko's agreement to the customs union and single market was not announced until January, after the election.

Yet on the night when the clearly fraudulent election results were announced, 30,000 demonstrated in Minsk. Cops assaulted demonstrators, inflicted semi-public beatings on prominent oppositionists, and raided oppositional centres.

The opposition was squashed, for the time being. But in 2010 it had lasted a few days. This year, it has continued for over three months since August.

In 2010 the opposition was mostly limited to students and "professionals" in Minsk. This year large sections of Belarus's industrial workers, the MTZ and MATZ vehicle factories, the Grodno Azot chemical workers, the Belaruskali miners, have rebelled.

In none of those areas has the majority of workers yet been mobilised. A national strike committee was declared but never functioned. Leading militants were sacked and fled to exile.

Yet independent unions have grown dramatically in their reach, despite mostly having to work underground.

Many workers have made the connections between the corruption they see in the workplace, the lack of workers' rights, the passivity of the state-controlled union leaders, and the corruption in government. They will have seen at least a hint of the solidarity possible.

The revolt in Belarus has stalled for now, partly because of the cold weather and because since early November Covid deaths have soared well above their previous peak in July. Arrests continue. But unlike in 2010, repression is likely to lead to fresh defiance.

Lukashenko, having closed his channels to the EU, is now totally dependent on Putin.

Putin has wanted a degree of pluralism in Belarus since 2010, in order to allow alternatives that are reliable for Russia's interests to surface. He probably wants Lukashenko replaced, but that is not easy.

Some leading oppositionists lean towards Russia, like Babariko or Kalesnikava, but the street protesters and the workers who have struck will not allow them an easy pro-Putin ride. □

## “Anti-racist resources

We have compiled various anti-racist resources to learn about anti-racist movements, and arm yourself with ideas to beat back racism: readings and pamphlets, video and audio.

See [workersliberty.org/anti-racist-resources](https://workersliberty.org/anti-racist-resources) □

# GCSE chaos: abolish the grading!

By Mark Osborn

Across the UK different regional governments have taken different approaches to the sitting and grading of school exams in the summer term of 2021.

In Scotland the National 5 (GCSE equivalent) exams have been cancelled and grades will be determined by "teacher judgement supported by assessment". Scotland Education Secretary John Swinney declared that going ahead with exams was unfair given Covid-related disruption in schools.

In Wales the Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, has announced that GCSEs and A-level exams are to be cancelled, with grades based on classroom assessments. However, this is not quite as it seems, as those teacher assessments will be based on tests that have been externally set and marked.

Northern Ireland's Children's Commissioner urged the devolved government to scrap school exams but the Education Minister, Peter Weir, said the tests will go ahead and are the "fairest way of judging students". Which begs the question: why should 16 year-olds be "judged"?

GCSE exams are unfair, pointless, staggeringly stressful, and unnecessary. They should be scrapped, and the £2bn they cost should be spent on useful education. Young people should be allowed to take A Levels, vocational or other courses, or apprenticeships, as they choose.

On Thursday 3 December the Westminster government announced exams would go ahead in England. Grading will be "generous" and in line with the levels of summer 2020. The risible Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, the man responsible for the exam chaos last summer, stated that, "I know students are facing unprecedented disruption to their learning," before drawing the conclu-

sion that it is "so important" exams go ahead, "fairly".

The current group of Year 11 students (15-16 years old, due to face GCSEs in summer 2021) have faced enormous – and ongoing – disruption to their education. This has impacted on working-class kids particularly badly as they are more likely than children from well-off families to lack internet access, laptops, and quiet study space.

Labour's Wes Streeting, Shadow Minister for Schools, has provided no alternative, stating in the House of Commons: "We all agree that exams would be the fairest and best way to assess pupils this year... exams [must] go ahead in a way that is fair to all pupils".

Streeting is useless. The mental health of our young people is suffering. A recent PISA report suggests about 10% of British teenagers "always feel sad". In British schools there is an epidemic of suffering from depression and anxiety. A big part of the problem is the distress caused by the absurd fixation successive governments have had with school testing and exam grading. □



## Democracy in the labour movement

On 7 December the Labour Party National Executive (NEC) adopted a "draft plan" in response to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) report of 29 October finding that Labour had dealt with antisemitism inadequately.

The vote, according to LabourList, was unanimous. The draft plan will not be published: only, after some time, the plan finally agreed with the EHRC.

The plan is likely to set out new disciplinary processes for Labour. They can hardly be worse than the present mess.

The plan won't include a political offensive, through debate and education, against the antisemitism in the Party which goes under cover of the idea that "the Israel Lobby" is the main racist, imperialist, and right-wing power worldwide. Remonstrations against antisemitism are then taken to be machinations of that "Lobby", and to dismiss them is deemed an "anti-racist" act.

Nor will it include a solid restoration of democracy and freedom of debate, a reversing of the rules under which even allowing debate on previous suspensions or disciplinary actions can get you suspended.

The left must go for both a political offensive against antisemitism, and a regime where disciplinary action comes only after due process and for clear and defined breaches of elementary labour-movement solidarity. □

• Suggested wording for motions on this and other issues: [bit.ly/mo-pe](https://bit.ly/mo-pe)

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# Debating the Swedish Model



## Letters

Apsi Witana writes ([Solidarity 572](#)): “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.”

Many prostitutes have to deal with this anyway. It sounds like what the Swedish model does is make the minority of high-class prostitutes who have *chosen* their line of work have to deal with what the vast majority of prostitutes who are already desperate have always had to deal with. Boo hoo. The countless women who are victimized by being coerced or steered this line of work because of misfortune shouldn’t have to pay for the tiny minority’s choice of preferred profession.

Not to mention, there will always be a call for cheap, unprotected sex, just the way the client likes it. This is the case with *any* commodity. Customers want to pay less and get more. There will always be prostitutes stuck at the bottom of this hierarchy, whose bodies end up being the “low quality” product. Legalising the entirety of sex work socially destigmatises men using other human bodies in this way, and will increase the demand for all prostitution, while legitimising prostitution as a profession for (mostly) girls to enter. This will also create a greater reason to coerce girls into this line of work. Both the demand and the supply will go up, and pricing will become a competitive market for who can do the most, cheapest.

The Swedish model could definitely be tweaked, for example, to not push eviction onto prostitutes and to better

guard against police harassment, but that doesn’t mean throwing out the whole caboodle is the right answer.

And this is a crappy analogy: “Similar punitive approaches have backfired in the ‘war on drugs’ and in the huge human cost of criminalising abortion.”

“The War on Drugs” *heavily* penalised, with extensive jail time, the *victims* of drug use – those with addictions. Doing drugs was illegal, having drugs on you was illegal, and selling drugs was illegal. Comparing johns to drug purchasers is inaccurate. Drug users/addicts are often victims of society – chemically dependent, emotionally troubled, stuck in the lower castes of society and unable to dig themselves out of the situation they’re in.

Are we really going to label Johns (especially those paying for high-priced prostitutes (as we’re hoping all prostitutes will be paid well) as “victims of society?” *Prostitutes* on the other hand, often *are* victims. They also frequently use and are addicted to drugs. If you want to compare drug purchasers/users to prostitutes, sure, but then The War on Drugs analogy makes no sense, since the Swedish Model decriminalises the victim of society – the prostitute.

The abortion analogy is inaccurate for similar reasons. Women having abortions in secret were often the victims of their circumstance. Again – Johns aren’t victims.

New Zealand’s model hasn’t lowered levels of prostitution. The Swedish model has. And there are controversies as to whether NZ’s less than great results are even accurate. Things could be worse than reported. Underage prostitution is technically legal, and therefore able to be taken advantage of. There’s unforeseen complications, such as in Manukau.

There’s no perfect solution, but full legalisation isn’t anywhere close to it. □

Amy, [web comment](#)

# The marginalised suffer



## Letters

Amy, I think you’ve misinterpreted a lot here. What I’ve written does not pertain to protecting clients in any way – their treatment is inconsequential in the fight for sex workers’ rights, and calls for decriminalisation (note – decriminalisation, not legalisation) should not be focused on them.

I agree with you, clients are not victims, nor should they ever be treated as such. Our concerns lie with the knock-on effects of criminalising them, namely violence towards sex workers at the hands of dangerous clients

and police.

Your point about “high-class prostitutes” is sadly the complete opposite of the reality of this law in practice – the few sex workers who support the Nordic model are the “high-class” workers you speak of who are able to charge far more by creating a niche in an underground market; it is the most marginalised workers who suffer the most under any form of criminalisation. Those who are coerced or pressured into sex work because of financial struggles are criminalised by proxy, fined and charged for brothel-keeping when simply working together for safety; and migrant workers face deportation when their working flats are raided. □

Apsi Witana

# High Court rules against trans youth

By Natalia Cassidy

On 1 December the High Court released its judgment in the case brought forward by Keira Bell, a woman who underwent hormone blockers followed by hormone replacement therapy as well as a gender-affirming double mastectomy (commonly referred to as top surgery) before deciding to detransition to her birth-assigned sex, as well as an anonymous claimant against the Tavistock Gender Identity Clinic (GIC).

Bell claimed that she was unable to give informed consent when she was prescribed hormone blockers (medication given to inhibit puberty that is used as an initial and reversible treatment for gender dysphoria in trans teenagers) because of her age at the time. She argues that she was unable to fully weigh the long term impact that it may have on her body.

This seems disingenuous, given she was over the age of 18 when she made the decision to undergo hormone replacement therapy (HRT), the first part of the medical treatment that would eventually lead to irreversible effects on her physical development. The implication is to cast doubt on the general adult population's ability to give informed consent to potentially irreversible treatment.

The case of Bell is one of someone who earnestly believes themselves to be transgender and later regrets the decision to transition. That is a very real and very difficult situation for a person to find themselves in, and they are deserving of support and solidarity. It would be irresponsible to legislate under the assumption that trans people are going to detransition, in the same way that it would be wrong to ban access to abortion on the basis of some people later regretting their decision.

Would those on the left now acting as cheerleaders for the crackdown on the rights of young trans people to access healthcare be so eagerly cheering on a similar decision if it were a 15 year old girl being forced to carry to term? I should hope not.

The jump from this case to one where a 15 year old is not deemed fit to make her own decision and is forced to carry to term is much less than the transphobic left may like to admit. This case is a blow to the idea of "[Gillick](#)



[competence](#)": that people under 16 should be able to consent to their own medical care as long as they understand what is involved.

The outcome of this case has been cheered on by Christian fundamentalists and anti-abortion campaigners, who know full well that this opens up space for them to make the argument against young people being able to access reproductive healthcare. This of course undermines reproductive freedoms in general and gives momentum to those wishing to further crack down on the rights of women.

There is a mental health epidemic amongst trans people. [Stonewall](#) found that 48% of trans people in the UK had attempted suicide and 84% had thought about it. Hormone blockers play a key role in easing the mental health burden on trans youth. [Turban et al. \(2020\)](#) found that treatment on hormone blockers during adolescence heavily reduced the risk of suicidal thoughts later on. Hormone blockers are an essential and life-saving element of the already limited healthcare provision that trans people can access.

Trans people are currently facing a protracted attack on rights, dignities and freedoms, with people calling for rollbacks of these across the political spectrum. Socialists have a duty to stand up on behalf of the oppressed in society. Trans people should be no exception. □

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# The last years of

By Stephen Wood

Stephen Wood concludes his account of the pioneer black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey. Parts 1 and 2 of the story were in *Solidarity* 573, [bit.ly-gvy-1](https://bit.ly/gvy-1), and 574, [bit.ly-gvy2](https://bit.ly-gvy2)

The last years of Garvey's life, 1935-40, sitting in Kensington, London, with declining influence and declining funds, were in marked contrast to the high point of his Universal Negro Improvement Association [UNIA] in the 1920s. His arrest for mail fraud in 1922 and his deportation from the United States to Jamaica in 1927 marked the end of his high influence.

For all their increasing political differences at the time of his deportation, Garvey might have hoped he could draw on support from the left. Mistakenly in this writer's view, the black left in Harlem actually supported his deportation. Garvey had given them good ammunition to do so in 1922 when he went to Atlanta to speak to the assistant Grand Wizard of the Klu Klux Klan, which like UNIA was growing fast.

Garvey defended that action partly as tactics to defend the position of UNIA branches in the South, but he was also forthright in saying that black nationalists and white supremacists had something in common, and that he looked to whomever could help achieve that something in common.

He had asked the Iranian delegation to the League of Nations to appeal on the UNIA's behalf for him to be given control of the German colonies in Africa, surrendered to the League at the end of World War 1. He got the Southern racist and segregationist Senator Bilbo to sponsor a bill to repatriate blacks to Africa.

The left rightly opposed Garvey for acting as if he was important and clever enough that he could gain benefit from collaboration with those who wanted black people dead or at best kept as second class citizens. They also argued that Garvey was an obstacle to civil rights in the USA. If Garvey could persuade American public opinion and the state that black people just wanted to return to Africa, then why would they need legal equality?

To the derision for his plans for repatriation to Africa, Garvey replied: "It does not mean that all Negroes must leave America and the West Indies, and go to Africa to establish a government. It did not take all the white people of Europe to come over to America to lay the foundation of the great republic... The UNIA is not teaching Negroes to discard and throw away opportunities that may be beneficial to them locally..."

"To the contrary, we say... seize all opportunities that come to you, but remember that our success, educationally, industrially and politically, is ultimately based upon the protection of a nation formed by ourselves. And that nation can be nowhere else but in Africa."

The closest Garvey got to repatriation was his deal in 1924 with the President of Liberia for 500 square miles of land for him to colonise with UNIA supporters. The deal never came to fruition. He was beaten by the Firestone Tyre Corporation in the competition for that patch of land. Firestone intended to extract rubber from it.

*The Messenger*, the publication of A Philip Randolph, allied with the Socialist Party, and *The Crusader* of Cyril Briggs and the African Blood Brotherhood, both criticised Garvey, but in different terms

Briggs had tried to work within the UNIA. He wanted to change the course of the movement and get its members to see that the anti-imperialist worldview the UNIA said it embraced could best be sustained by allying with Bolshevik Russia. *The Crusader's* appraisal was driven more by a criticism of Garvey's pomposity, hectoring, and pageantry than of his movement, or even of the fact that he was a black capitalist.

## Critiquing aims

Randolph and the Socialist Party were more wary of Garvey from the beginning. Their critique was more of the UNIA's stated aims. Randolph wrote in *The Messenger* "If we find, upon examination, that the Garvey Movement is opposed to the interests, or that it does not advance the interests of working people, and that 98 percent of Negroes are working people, it is certainly beyond the realm of debate that the said movement is not a promise but a definite menace to Negroes".

Garvey felt he provided for the membership of the UNIA. It had its own welfare services, it employed at least a thousand people through its businesses. It briefly had its own militia. And at its top was the Black Star Line. It always struggled. That it was black-owned and managed made the venture more difficult. The weight of opposition to it would eventually lead to its collapse, financial and political.

At the time of Garvey's downfall in the USA, 35,000 people had bought stock in his venture. It was over supposed "mail fraud" – offering for sale shares in a ship which the Black Star Line did not actually own – that Garvey would end up jailed. Whether or not there was some dodgy trading is somewhat beside the point. Garvey was almost certainly stitched up. The FBI of J. Edgar Hoover had been after him for some time.

He had a growing conflict with the left, but it was the bourgeois media and the mainstream political leadership that really tore into him as "the most dangerous man in America". His opponents in the Socialist Party, the African Blood Brotherhood and the Communist Party, themselves all feeling the heat of the FBI, chose not to protest his arrest. Instead they joined in with the condemnation of Garvey as the megalomaniac fraudster who was a danger to organised labour and black civil rights.

# f Marcus Garvey

On his release from prison he was deported in 1927. The NAACP under W E B Du Bois helped to lead the charge to deport Garvey. *The Messenger* joined in. *The Crusader* never backed deportation (Briggs, after all, was also an immigrant from the Caribbean), but it kept up its attacks on Garvey and did not oppose his imprisonment.

Briggs had now developed a personal feud with Garvey, mostly because of Garvey continuing to accuse Briggs of being a white man, masquerading as black to trick his followers. *The Messenger's* critique was more thoroughgoing, but Chandler Owen in particular went all out to champion Garvey's deportation, contacting black academics and thinkers to try and put together a symposium in *The Messenger* supporting his deportation.

To arguments that backing Garvey's removal ran against socialist principles, Owen replied only "deportation for the expression of political and class war opinions" could be flatly opposed. Randolph never directly challenged Owen in print over support for deportation, but instead wrote a four part series "The Only Way to Redeem Africa" laying out a political critique of Garveyism.

The hostility to Garvey from the black left in Harlem was not universal among other socialists and communists.

## Tribute

Communist Party leader Robert Minor wrote this tribute to Garvey in the *Daily Worker* in 1924. It serves as a response to those supporting his deportation. It is politically weak on Garveyism itself, but makes a valid case as to why chiming in with the US government was a mistake.

"I am obliged to look beyond the details [of DuBois' criticisms] at the apparent fact that a government that hates and despises the Negro masses, a government that hates the working classes, and which has never been unforgiving to grafting schemes, that such a government does not find: a friend in Garvey.

"And above it all towers the fact that the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the largest organisation of Negroes in the world, is made up almost entirely of the working class. I am waiting for some Negro leader who has organised more Negroes than Marcus Garvey has organised, to criticise Garvey, and I frankly confess that if such a leader is given a longer term in Leavenworth than Garvey received, I will listen to him more attentively.

"The lickspittles of capitalism in Washington do not love Marcus Garvey. This alone ought to make the working class think twice about condemning the man. His enemies say the government condemns Garvey for using questionable financial methods for the purpose of fleecing the masses of uneducated Negro workers. But I don't think the Teapot Domers at Washington have any objection to fleecing the Negro masses.

"I think their solicitude is based on something else: the fact that Garvey has organised many thousands of Ne-

groes of the class that is destined to take over the earth, and makes a militant demand for a sweeping international liberation of colonial peoples".

Isolated and unsuccessful in Jamaica after 1927, Garvey moved to London in 1935 and died there in 1940. In an [obituary](#) in the heterodox-Trotskyist *Labor Action*, C L R James would compare Garvey's demagogic *methods* to Hitler (pre-Holocaust), while also insisting on the progressive element in his *movement*.

"The first thing to note is that he burst into prominence in the post-war period, when revolution was raging in Europe and the workers were on the move everywhere. The Negro masses felt the stir of the period, and it was that which made Garvey... Why? Garvey was a reactionary. He used fierce words but he was opposed to the labor movement and counseled subservience to bosses. One reason for his success was that his movement was strictly a class movement. He appealed to the black Negroes against the mulattoes. Thus at one strike he excluded the Negro middle class, which is very largely of mixed blood. He deliberately aimed at the poorest, most down-trodden and humiliated Negroes.

"The millions who followed him, the devotion and the money they contributed, show where we can find the deepest strength of the working-class movement, the coiled springs of power which lie there waiting for the party which can unloose them.

"Garvey, however, was a race fanatic. His appeal was to black against white. He wanted purity of race. A great part of his propaganda was based on the past achievements of blacks, their present misery, their future greatness.

"With that disregard of facts which characterize the born demagogue, he proclaimed there were 400 million Negroes in the world, when there are certainly not half as many. Who does all this remind us of? Who but Adolf Hitler? The similarity between the two movements does not end there. The Negroes were too few in America for Garvey to give them excitement by means of baiting whites as Hitler baited the Jews. But his program had a nebulosity similar to the the Nazi program.

"Was this the reason that long before Hitler, he anticipated the Nazi leader in his emphasis on uniforms, parades, military guards, in short, the dramatic and the spectacular? Stupid people saw in all this merely the antics of backward Negroes. Recent events should give them an opportunity to revise their judgements..."

To qualify his condemnations, James wrote: "No revolution is ever made except when the masses... see a vision of a new society. That is what Garvey gave [African-Americans]..."

"More than in all the theses of the Comintern, a basis for the building of a real mass movement among the Negroes lies in a thorough study of this first great eruption of the Negro people". □

# Bosnia-Herzegovina: 2

By Len Glover

There is a film nowadays rarely seen which was once, perhaps surprisingly, the most popular foreign film ever shown in China: *Walter Defends Sarajevo* (directed by Hajruin Krvavac in 1972) is a Yugoslav film, set in the Second World War, telling the story of the Nazis' attempts to eliminate the mysterious Walter – based on a real person – who is the leader of the Sarajevo Partisans and a master at disguise and intrigue.

No-one, even his own fighters, know what this Balkan Scarlet Pimpernel looks like. Despite bringing in the infamous Colonel von Dietrich and sending an agent to infiltrate the ranks of the Partisans the Nazis fail to capture or kill Walter as they are constantly thwarted and ultimately defeated by the Partisans. At the end of the film von Dietrich stands on a hill overlooking the city and says "Sehen Sie diese Stadt? Das ist Walter" ("You see that city? That's Walter!"). The city's inhabitants are as one, regardless of ethnicity or religion, united in struggle and they ultimately prevail. It was a film metaphor not just for Sarajevo but for Yugoslavia and over the years has become a cult film in the region and beyond. In the very early days of the Balkan war there were some unity demonstrations in Sarajevo and people were heard to shout – alas to no avail – "We are all Walter!"

Fast forward to 2006 and another film, *Grbavica* (director Jasmila Žbanić – the title comes from a district of Sarajevo), captures a very different Sarajevo, where a traumatised Muslim mother hides a terrible secret from her daughter – her father, who she thinks died a hero's death in the siege of Sarajevo, is actually a Serb militiaman who raped her mother. From a city once united against fascism Sarajevo is now in ruins, bitterly divided, crime-riddled, with many rape victims and thousands dead or missing. The "two" Sarajevos and, by extension Yugoslavia (by now defunct), are totally different places: where once unity and a sense of community prevailed now there is only discord and division.

The war in Bosnia, the centre-piece of Europe's most bloody conflict since World War Two, was brought to an end – twenty five years ago – on 21 November 1995. That was followed by the pomp and circumstance of the obligatory ceremonial signing on 14 December in the Ballroom of the Élysée Palace in Paris, when the leaders of all the main governments involved – Croatia (Franjo Tudjman), Bosnia-Herzegovina (Ilija Izetbegović), and the Federation of Yugoslavia (Slobodan Milošević; in reality the Federation was just Serbia and Montenegro) – signed a peace agreement devoted to solving the question of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH as it is now called): where its boundaries should be drawn, its governmental structures, implementation schedule and so on. The outline of the peace agreement was actually decided beforehand in the White House and then thrashed out in the unlikely setting of the Wright-Patterson Airforce Base in Dayton, Ohio. The 21 days of negotiation were presided over by US

diplomat Richard Holbrooke, once described by Henry Kissinger as "... the most viperous character I know" (well, it takes one to know one), and the agreement has henceforth been known as the Dayton Peace Accord (DPA).

The DPA has been hailed either as an utter failure or a great diplomatic success – and everything in between. However, before discussing the DPA we need to go back, briefly, in history (for further analysis of the historical background see the interview with Sarah Correia in [Solidarity 562, 9 September 2020](#)).

Josip Broz "Tito", Communist Party President and the "strongman" of Yugoslavia, died on 4 May 1980. In the years immediately following, the Yugoslav Federation rapidly fell apart. Under Tito, Yugoslavia successfully (for a time at least) brought together the patchwork quilt of disparate groups of Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Jews, Magyars, Kosovo Albanians and Muslims in the Balkans into one state. However we may assess Tito's politics, this was a major achievement.

World War Two had found Yugoslavia deeply divided. Tito's multi-ethnic Partisans pitted themselves against the Nazi occupiers but also had to fight the Chetniks (right wing nationalists who favoured a return to the monarchy) and the Ustashe (Croatian fascists), while some Bosnian Muslims fought with the Nazis. For the peoples of the Balkan peninsula the Second World War was a war of anti-fascist resistance and a civil war and a killing field.

All sides committed atrocities during and after the war. According to the Hungarian Tibor Cseres (an eyewitness), Tito's Partisans killed 34,491 ethnic Hungarians around

## Memories of Tito

In 2008 I visited a Slovenian friend, Igor, who was the director of the Slovenian Film Academy in the capital, Ljubljana. During my time there we drove out to the countryside to visit his mother. During dinner, which in true Balkan fashion consisted of huge quantities of meat, vodka and wine, she took a framed photo from the sideboard and showed it to me.

It was Tito, and there was a message from him and his signature in one corner. With tears in her eyes she recounted – Igor translated – how as a young girl she had been a messenger for the Partisans. This was dangerous work, moving across the countryside taking messages from one Partisan group to another (presumably there was a danger radio messages would be intercepted). It was obvious she adored him.

Tito had died over twenty years ago but, she told me, hundreds of people still congregated outside the Ljubljana hospital where he died on the anniversary of his death and on his birthday chanting "Tito, Tito, Tito!" endlessly as if it were some kind of ritual. Of the present leaders of the now long-gone Yugoslavia she had little if anything to say. □

# 5 years after Dayton

the town of Novi Sad in reprisal for atrocities committed by Hungarian troops in 1941. Fatalities at concentration camps run by Croatian Ustashe, such as the notorious Jasenovac complex, were appalling. Anything between 750,000 and 1,000,000 Jews, Gypsies and Serbs were killed. To his dying day Franjo Tudjman, President of Croatia, denied the scale of the killing.

To create a workable federation out of this butcher's block was a remarkable achievement, even though Tito's hands were hardly free from blood. Such was the strength of his Partisan movement that Tito was able to resist incorporation into the Stalinist eastern bloc and its military alliance, the Warsaw Pact. Later on Tito established the "non-aligned" movement along with Ethiopia and Indonesia.

The state that was created after World War 2 actually bears some resemblance to the state of BiH created by the DPA. It was heavily decentralised (in some ways the most decentralised state in the world at the time) and strenuous efforts – complex and often convoluted – were made to ensure that no one ethnic group was overrepresented in the governmental structure. Chairs of government bodies and presidencies etc. were regularly rotated and there was a considerable degree of autonomy for the six Republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia) and the two so-called Autonomous Provinces (Vojvodina and Kosovo – both within the boundaries of Serbia).

That looks very neat and tidy but the lines drawn on maps hide a complex reality. In many areas of the former Yugoslavia, Serbs, Croats, Bosnian Muslims and others lived in mixed communities where, very often, close neighbours were from different ethnic groups or religious persuasions. Tito's dominant personality was, in part, responsible for the relative peace that prevailed in Yugoslavia, but, although Tito stood up to Stalin he was not averse to borrowing his methods when so inclined. The notorious labour camps at Goli Otok and Mitrovica, to just name two, were rarely short of inmates. Tito, of course, made sure his position was never rotated.

One concern of Tito (who was of Croatian and Slovenian descent) was to prevent the dominance of Serbia in the new Republic. Hence the complicated rotating of key political and civil positions and his particular attention to the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), where Serbs tended to dominate the officer caste.

After Tito's death it was primarily a resurgence of Serb chauvinism and nationalism that led eventually to war and the break-up of Yugoslavia. It is a complex story probably best told in Branka Magaš' book *The Destruction of Yugoslavia* (first published in 1993) and Misha Glenny's *The Fall of Yugoslavia* (third edition 1996).

There are a couple of key dates. The first was April 1981, when Kosovo, with its large ethnic Albanian (Muslim) population was placed under martial law, the first time that had happened in Yugoslavia since the end of WW2. During the clampdown, which lasted about two months,



*The Kosovo Maiden*

twelve Albanians were killed and over 150 wounded. (Those are the official figures. The real totals are almost certainly higher). Another key date is 27 April 1987, when Slobodan Milošević made an infamous Serbian-chauvinist speech at Kosovo Polje (Kosovo Field).

Leon Trotsky, at the time a war-correspondent for a Vienna-based newspaper, recounts how, while marching with the Serbian army in 1913, he noticed that the soldiers became agitated and started talking among themselves. On enquiring he discovered that the column was approaching Kosovo Polje, the site of a major battle between a Balkan Christian army and the invading army of the Ottoman empire back in 1389. The Christian armies were routed. The battle has, over the years, become part of a history which has defined the region and its resistance to Ottoman rule. Today, the legend has been shaped in such a way that the resistance to the Ottomans is seen as a solely Serbian struggle, but that is not true.

Kosovo Polje is now identified with Serb nationalism and shamelessly exploited by Serb nationalists, none more so than Slobodan Milošević. The painting, *The Kosovo Maiden*, for example, typifies the romanticised image of sacrifice in the service of nationhood.

All nation states have their myths which play a role in defining them. They may be found on canvas (Washington Crossing the Delaware) or in drama (Shakespeare's *Henry the Fifth*) or in the glorification or even deification of certain individuals (Joan of Arc, Simon Bolivar). Literature and even films can play a role in this process.

Whether or not the myths are true is not so important as the fact that they are often believed and become dangerous and threatening – as opposed to a mere curiosity – when politicians exploit the often latent feelings that these images and narratives evoke. Slobodan Milošević proved himself to be a past-master at this dark art, aided and abetted by the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Kosovo Polje is in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo, home to a large Albanian majority (1,277,000 compared to 210,000 Serbs: 1982 figures). After the death of Tito tensions between Serbs and Albanians increased as Mi-

*continued page 16*

# Bosnia-Herzegovina: 2

from page 15

lošević's government in Belgrade began to increase pressures on the Albanians, who had long standing grievances over their lack of democratic rights and cultural freedoms. As tension turned into violence, Serbs started to move out of the province. Fears increased and Milošević seized his opportunity to play the nationalist card. The 28 June 1989 commemoration of the 600 year old battle turned into a stage-managed jamboree of Serb chauvinism.<sup>at</sup>

Something like one million people, almost all of them Serbs, attended the rally. Although Milošević was careful to couch his language in terms of unity and peace, the dreary rhetoric always used by party leaders, his theme was, in effect, "Serbia first". "Six centuries later, now we are being again engaged in battles and facing battles. They are not armed battles although such things cannot be excluded yet."

Many commentators noted how Milošević's stress – however controlled or muted – on nationalist ideology was a decisive break with the past of Tito. The appeals for unity (a sham unity – he was really talking about Serb unity) could not help but be contrasted with the harsh treatment being meted out to the Kosovo Albanians. Kosovo would become the next flashpoint after Dayton as the Serbs fought to keep the province within their control. After war which claimed 13,000 lives, Kosovo broke away and eventually declared its independence in 2008, although it has never been recognised by Serbia.

Under Milošević the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (as the Communist Party of Yugoslavia had been named since 1952), which he and his cronies dominated, began to exert pressure on other areas of the increasingly unstable and disintegrating Yugoslav Federation. In 1990 the LCY dissolved and most of its membership was absorbed by the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) with Milošević still at the helm.

In 1991 Slovenia became the first of the Republics to declare itself for multi-party elections, followed soon by Croatia. Both republics were operating totally within the constitutional framework of the Yugoslav Federation, which allowed a Republic to decide its own internal affairs, yet Milošević responded by sending in the Yugoslav National Army (JNA). A short war ensued (often referred to as the "Ten Day War") in which Slovenian forces held their ground against the JNA. After than, largely mono-ethnic Slovenia was left alone and played no further part in the drama that was to follow.

War ensued between Croatia and Serbia, with particularly fierce fighting around the Croatian towns of Vukovar and Osijek. Bosnia was pulled into war with Serbia after it voted for independence in 1992. The other Republics, Montenegro and Macedonia, managed to stay out of the fighting. In order to do that Macedonia had to agree to Serbia stripping its entire stock of military hardware. Montenegro became part of the so-called Federal Republic of Yugoslavia along with Serbia, a partnership for which

it displayed diminishing enthusiasm. Following a referendum it would eventually break away and declare independence in May 2006.

From June 1991 the region was plunged into a civil war which, including the 44 months of the siege of Sarajevo, lasted through to the DPA in November 1995.

The destruction was enormous. All the mosques in and around Banja Luka were destroyed and, in an act of cultural barbarism, the famous footbridge in Mostar, built during the days of the Ottoman Empire, was also obliterated. Far worse than any destruction of buildings was the human death toll. The human death toll is estimated by the Humanitarian Law Centre as, at least, 130,000 dead. There were horrific massacres, at Srebrenica in July 1995 (8,000 dead) and elsewhere, where unarmed Muslim boys and men were shot and then buried in mass graves.

## The pyramids of Bosnia

How many readers have heard of the pyramids of Bosnia? If you haven't you are not to blame, for the simple reason that they don't exist. Despite this, certain individuals in BiH and elsewhere (the main advocate is a Bosnian-American businessman, Sam Osmanagic, who is based in Houston, Texas) claim that there are pyramids in BiH, northwest of Sarajevo in the area around the small town of Visoko.

No sensible archaeologist or historian believes this nonsense. As any geologist will tell you, the sharp angular hills which bear a passing resemblance to pyramids (particularly if you have been imbibing too much of the local plum brandy) are a geological formation known as "flatirons" formed when volcanic activity thrusts up huge thick sheets of strata such as conglomerate making these well-defined geometrical features in the landscape. They can be found in other parts of the world such as Boulder, Colorado, Ethiopia, and Vladivostok, and are not in any sense exceptional.

The belief that they are pyramids is an example of what some historians have called the "Myth of Antiquitas" (in other words we were here first and everyone else is a Johnny-cum-lately). The "discoverers" of the pyramids claim they are 5,000 or more years old, making them older than the pyramids in Giza in Egypt and evidence that the descendants of Bosnian people have lived in this region for thousands of years (long before the Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins etc.). In this way the legitimacy of the Bosnians and the state of Bosnian Herzegovina is given a spurious precedence over others.

In fact, the ancestors of the Bosnians arrived in the region around 500 CE. The "pyramids" have been good for the local economy – as they are now visited by hundreds of New Age devotees – but not for much else. You don't have to be foolish to be a nationalist but it helps. □

# 5 years after Dayton

The UNHCR estimates that 12,000 women, mainly Muslim, were raped.

An uneasy ceasefire managed to hold after NATO airstrikes against Serb military positions in August 1995. Later the same year the Dayton talks produced the settlement and the map we have today.

What did the Dayton talks decide? Before considering this, it should be made clear that the DPA was hardly a victory for diplomacy over war.

Holbrooke was no angelic neutral arbitrator and was quite prepared to use force when he felt it necessary (and when he could persuade the sometimes reluctant US military to agree). In that he followed the advice of the early 20th Century US president Theodore Roosevelt – “speak softly and carry a big stick.” With a US aircraft carrier in the Adriatic and US bases in Italy and nearby Hungary, Holbrooke was not short of big sticks.

It was agreed that Bosnia was to be divided into two “entities”: the Republika Srpska (RS), mainly Serb, with its capital Pale in the south east (later moved to Banja Luka), and the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiHFed), mainly Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) or Croat, but with a minority of Serbs.

Both the BiHFed and RS are, in effect, highly autonomous. The curious term “entity” was employed to avoid any suggestion that Bosnia was being partitioned into separate states. A number of commentators have argued that really it was.

According to the 1991 census, that is before the war and four years before Dayton, Bosnia consisted of:

- 1,905,270 Bosniaks, 43.65% of the total population
- 1,369,883 Serbs, 31.39% of the total population
- 755,883 Croats, 17.32% of the total population

## War spilling over into Hungary?

There were a few close calls. A Yugoslav airforce bomber flew over Hungarian airspace and dropped its bombs on the small town of Barcs. Around the same time the Hungarian airforce nearly shot down a Yugoslav aircraft. The pilot had his finger on the button to launch his rockets and was a few seconds from doing so. It took the direct intervention of a high-ranking airforce commander to prevent him.

I heard all this, from the “horse’s mouth” as it were, as I taught an English language class to a group of Hungarian helicopter pilots and air traffic controllers who were always eager to impart any news or gossip they heard. The Hungarian army, in part or whole, mobilised at least once and reservists were called up. My landlady came round one evening and told me to destroy any letters addressed to her husband (I lived in her old flat) as they might be call-up papers. □



- 239,857 “Yugoslavs”, 5.5% of the total population – people who didn’t identify with any of the ethnic groups.

After the displacements of populations during the war those figures changed drastically.

The DPA did not envisage the two entities as separate states. The RS and the BiHFed were, supposedly, integrated. It was very different on the ground.

In order to achieve some level of integration the government structures of BiH were devised so that none of the three groups (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs) could gain ascendancy. Each entity has its own president, and a new president for BiH is elected every eight months, rotating between a Serb, a Croat and a Bosniak. Similar complex structures can be found in the judiciary, with the added complication that the Constitutional Court (the supreme legal body) has nine judges, three of whom are non-Bosnians appointed by the European Court of Human Rights.

This is an international arrangement, in effect, imposed on Bosnia, primarily by the USA, with the European Union running behind. The whole structure is topped by a High Representative (an official from an EU country) and a deputy (from the USA) with large powers.

Has the DPA succeeded or failed? This discussion revolves around the attitude you must take to either partition or integration. Should Bosnia have been partitioned, creating three independent states – one for each group of people? Then the Bosnian Croats would opt to join Croatia and the Bosnian Serbs would opt to join Serbia, thus leaving a rump Bosnia surrounded by a Croat state and a Serb state, with a great risk of conflict erupting again.

Many Croats and Serbs would find themselves adrift in the Bosnian Muslim state and would thus want to move out, and the same for the many Bosniaks who would themselves be in either the newly consolidated Serb state or the Croatian version. The result would be yet more displaced persons, and those would need to be protected, fed, re-housed and re-integrated. In an area with already high unemployment jobs would need to be found or created. It would, in effect, be a variant of ethnic cleansing all over again.

Partitions are sometimes just another way of saying that the people of a certain area should be free to separate from a larger unit they find oppressive, but there is no doubt that history provides us with many examples

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# Bosnia-Herzegovina: 2

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where they have been fraught with huge difficulties. The partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 led to widespread bloodshed (over 500,000 dead) and some of the largest population movements in a very short time ever seen in human history, over 16,000,000.

In 1923 the decision of the Lausanne Convention (approved by the League of Nations) to move the entire Greek population of Turkey to Greece and the, smaller, Turkish population from Greece to Turkey no doubt saved thousands of lives. However, those population exchanges did not resolve the territorial conflicts between Turkey and Greece which have flared up periodically over the years, most notably in the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus.

Romanian governments of the Second World War period devised a number of schemes to transfer sections of its multi-ethnic population of Magyars, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Russians and others in "exchange" for "ethnic" Romanians in neighbouring countries. Romanian Jews were a different consideration. They were brutally treated, although after the collapse of the fascist Antonescu dictatorship in 23 August 1943 their situation improved drastically.

These often highly complex schemes never produced meaningful outcomes. People sometimes just ignored the orders emanating from Bucharest or moved where the authorities didn't want them to. It was a total mess and brought to an abrupt end by the invasion of the Russian Army in August 1944. Often the people concerned had



little feeling for their supposed ethnicity and, not unrealistically, wanted to stay where they had been born.

Given the recent history of BiH and the complexity of the human geography involved, a policy which involved population movements would run enormous risks of even a small incident igniting a larger conflagration. It would also assume a degree of co-operation between the two entities and between neighbouring states which has, so far, been marked primarily by its absence. A policy of partition into three separate nation states would involve a negation and abandonment of the basic principles of internationalism and would solve nothing – the region would still be prey to a resurgence of nationalism and border disputes flaring up.

That has been the case with India and Pakistan. If anyone harboured the idea that once partition and the population displacements had finished then everything would settle down, they were to be sorely disappointed. Full-scale war between the two countries broke out in 1947-8, 1965, and 1971, with a more limited two month conflict in the disputed border region of Kashmir in 1999.

So there was a rationale to refusing partition. In any case, any movement now must start from the existing boundaries and governmental set-up, from what exists on the ground. That is the reality that has to be faced and cannot be wished away by a few slogans. There are a few signs that some progress is being made towards the integration of the two entities, though it is painfully slow.

At the time of the signing of the DPA there was a requirement that the armed forces of the BiHFed and the RS merge into one body. That was finally achieved in 2005. There have been no major confrontations between the three constituent groups in BiH. There have been some flare-ups, but brief and contained locally.

Some progress has been made in bringing war criminals to trial. By November 2017, 83 had been convicted, including sentences of life imprisonment for both Radovan Karadžić (President of RS) and Ratko Mladic (Chief of the General Staff of the RS army). Slobodan Milošević was also brought to trial, but died of a heart attack before that was concluded.

Last year the streets of Sarajevo echoed to very different slogans and new flags were seen. 8 September 2019 was

## Book launch in Slovenia

On a visit to Slovenia's capital Ljubljana I found myself, by chance, invited to attend what was referred to as a "launch" of the Slovenian President's latest book. I arrived, along with the person who invited me, to a glorious feast on a terrace overlooking the city. At some point in the proceedings I was approached by a tall, rather elegantly dressed man who began talking to me. It turned out he was the President. I asked about the subject of his book, expecting yet another paean of praise for the delights of the free market, standard fare in the publishing world of Central and Eastern Europe around this time. His reply rather floored me, "Oh, I'm a Buddhist, and my book is an introduction to Buddhism". I thought that was a typically Balkan paradox. Just a few miles away armies had been killing each other until fairly recently but here was a man, and the President to boot, who writes about Buddhism. Without causing too much embarrassment, I hope, I managed to evade procuring a copy. In another Balkan paradox I learned, much later, that the small Slovenian Buddhist community (all 200 of them) had been trying unsuccessfully for months to register with the authorities. □

# 5 years after Dayton

the first ever Pride March in the city. Unfortunately, the projected 2020 march was cancelled due to the Coronavirus epidemic, prompting the Imam of the central mosque in Sarajevo to claim that as God's judgment. Various online events have been organised instead. Another tiny "candle" was lit this year when the "Walter Defends Sarajevo Museum" opened its doors for the first time.

The main problems facing BiH are:

**Unemployment:** This is possibly the major problem. And being unemployed in Bosnia-Herzegovina leaves you vulnerable to exploitation by criminal gangs. At times the unemployment rate has been astronomical. In 2005 it was 35%. By 2019 it was down to 18.4% (World Bank data), but that figure hides more than it reveals: BiH has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world. Although legislation passed in 2003 outlaws workplace discrimination it can still be hard to find a job with the "wrong" ethnicity or religion.

Thousands of people have left BiH to work abroad. Accurate figures are hard to come by, but as much as 20% of the pre-war population could now be living and working abroad in Scandinavia, Germany, France or elsewhere. They return only briefly in the summer to visit their families. A UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) survey found that 62% of young Bosnians simply want to get out.

With its porous borders, the easy availability of arms, its central position in the Balkans, its record of corruption at many levels of society including government and the police, BiH has become a haven for criminal gangs, and is a key staging post for drug-running, money-laundering, gun-running and people trafficking.

If a new BMW disappears from the streets of Berlin or Paris it is likely to end up – with new number plates and documentation – somewhere in Bosnia. Organised crime in BiH is not just a post-war phenomenon, but the war and the dislocation that followed it have made the task of the criminal easier. For obvious reasons reliable figures are hard to come by.

Many people have tried to return to their old homes, having originally fled because of the fighting or hostility from neighbours. The war destroyed some 400,000 homes and displaced 2.3m of Bosnia's 4.4m citizens, of whom 1.3m became refugees outside Bosnia. Annex 7 of the DPA calls for the "right of return", but implementing it has not been easy. Returning to a pile of rubble is not an attractive proposition.

Up until July 2001 approximately 231,000 had returned to their original homes and there are schemes to help rebuilding such as contained in the Integrated Area Programme (IAP). Compared to the overall numbers involved this is a trickle, yet all moves to a more mixed population and a breaking down of entrenched ethnic enclaves must be welcome. More are essential if BiH is to become a viable functioning state. The number of returners from abroad has fallen over the years, which is only to be expected, and according to figures from the European

Council on Refugees and Exiles published in July 2019, just 2,680 returned to BiH in 2017.

Since the DPA there have been seven elections. The election results have usually been so close to the ethnic composition of BiH – Bosnian Serbs tend to vote for the Bosnian Serb nationalist party, etc. – that one commentator has suggested that adding up the votes for the various nationalist parties could remove the need for a census.

Bosniaks have tended to vote for the SDA (Muslim Party for Democratic Rights), Bosnian Serbs vote for the SDS (Serb Democratic Party), and Bosnian Croats tend to vote for HDZBiH (Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia-Herzegovina). There have been changes in voting habits, but often that is one nationalist party being ditched for another of more or less similar nationalist persuasions. In the 2014 elections the SDS was pushed out of top place in the SR by the emergent Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD, founded in 1996). Some western commentators saw this as a step forward, but the politics of the SNSD and its leader Milorad Dodik represent little improvement on those of its rival, the SDS.

Dodik has become increasingly nationalistic and separatist and has denied that ethnic cleansing ever took place during the war. He downplays the severity of the Srebrenica massacre, he has been implicated in various

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## A Hungarian ex-soldier

In the late 1990s I met a Hungarian from the Hungarian ethnic minority in Vojvodina. He had been conscripted into the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) and was stationed in Kosovo along with a group of other ethnic Hungarians. Unsurprisingly, neither he nor his mates were overly enthusiastic about their situation. None of them were prepared to get their heads blown off just for the sake of Slobodan Milošević's political ambitions.

Meeting in secret, they devised a plan that if they were sent into combat they would desert en masse and cross the border into Bulgaria and claim asylum. Although this has never received any publicity, as far as I know, this was a common tactic of disaffected soldiers in the JNA, particularly the Hungarians who felt that the conflict in Kosovo had nothing to do with them.

He never had to flee and having served his time in uniform went to live in Hungary. His parents still lived in Vojvodina so I never used his name. He spoke highly of the Albanians he met while in Kosovo, saying that the Serbs underestimated their intelligence and resilience, thinking of them only as ignorant peasants. He was sad however at the disappearance of his Yugoslav identity which he valued as much as his Hungarian identity.

To him life in the old Yugoslavia was something he valued and cherished and now it had simply disappeared, sentiments I encountered numerous times. □

# Bosnia-Herzegovina: 25 years after Dayton

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cases of corruption (in this respect he is hardly unique), and his assets in the USA have been frozen. In the 2014 elections the SNSD won 255,156 votes in the SR. In 2018 the party increased its vote to 368,210 (53.9% of total vote in the SR).

A full analysis of electoral trends in BiH is impossible here, given the complicated system that is used. Here are the basic figures for 2018, the last time presidential elections were held.

Presidency (3 elected, to hold office in rotations of 8 months)

Elections held on 7 Oct. 2018. 3,352,933 registered to vote. Turn out was 53.6% (slightly down on the previous election in 2014).

## **Bosniak**

**SDA, Šefik Džaferović**, 212,581, 36.6%  
SDPBiH, Denis Bećirović, 194,688, 33.5%

## **Croat**

**DF, Željko Komšić**, 225,500, 52.6%  
HDZBiH, Dragan Čović, 154,819, 36.1%

## **Serb**

**SNSD, Mlrad Dodik**, 368,210, 53.9%  
PDP, Mladen Ivanić, 292,065, 42.7%

The candidates in bold typeface were elected as the three presidents.

DF is the Democratic Front, one of the few parties which claims to be multi-ethnic, with "social liberal" politics. PDP, Party of Democratic Progress, established in Banja Luka in 1999, is national-conservative in outlook and claims to have good links with the British Conservative Party.

The 2018 election was controversial as Croats were outraged that a number of Bosniaks voted for the DF candidate in what appeared to be tactical voting, thus boosting DF at the expense of the nationalist HDZBiH. With the probable exception of that vote for the DF, the voting still tends to follow national-ethnic lines.

The political and economic prospects for BiH are daunting. Given the war and the attendant problems issuing from it, the workers' movement has had a hard time. Unemployment and privatisations, the lure of competing nationalisms, and the utter bankruptcy of the existing political parties have left "a power vacuum at the base of society" in BiH and much of the former Yugoslavia (to borrow a phrase from Branka Magaš).

Yet the region has a fighting history of working-class militancy. That has not simply evaporated. In the mid-1980s the whole of Yugoslavia was convulsed by strikes, rising from 696 in 1985 to 1,685 in 1987. In March 1991 there were mass demonstrations in Belgrade against the increasing hardline Milošević regime and media censorship. The demonstrators were met with the full panoply of state repression including tear gas, rubber bullets and then live ammunition – two demonstrators were killed.

Small farmers set up a camp in Sarajevo in 2004 protesting at food prices which were jeopardising their livelihoods. In February 2014, there were strikes and protests against privatisations, unpaid salaries and reductions in

pensions in Sarajevo, Zenica, Mostar, Bihać, Tuzla and Brčko (all in BiH) and protests in Banja Luka in RS.

More recently, in 2019 there were waves of protest manifesting a general discontent with the existing political status quo, particularly the widespread and increasing evidence of corruption, a teachers' strike, and a strike by medical workers over the lack of extra pay to cover the expanding workload due to Covid 19. Anger over corruption is growing, particularly in Montenegro where the President Milo Djukanic was secretly filmed receiving a "bung" from a business tycoon. That "envelope affair" provoked outrage and demonstrations.

This year in Belgrade there were attempts to storm the Parliament building as discontent at the President Aleksandar Vučić's handling of the Covid 19 crisis boiled over.

There is widespread discontent, yet without any political organisation that can articulate and channel this discontent there is every chance that the anger will dissipate. At the moment it is difficult to see where that organisation will come from. To gauge that you need to be "on the ground" talking to people and contacts, and I haven't been in Sarajevo since 2004. My last trip to the region, which took in Slovenia and Croatia, was in 2009.

A genuine workers' party needs to be built, one which can shake off the past, including any lingering Tito "legacy", resist the forces of the free market (which have wreaked so much economic havoc in the region and across the whole of Central and Eastern Europe) and create solid links across ethnic and religious lines, reversing the drift towards what some have called "Muslim communalism" in BiH. It would be presumptuous and arrogant to lay down what such a party's program should offer. Here are a few suggestions for discussion:

In order to deal with the unemployment problem there needs to be a programme of public works which would include: house and apartment building, road improvements, other work on infrastructure and training programmes for the young unemployed. These measures could partly be funded by money sequestered from convicted gang leaders who use BiH as their base.

At some point BiH needs to bring an end to foreign (e.g. UN) involvement in the country. There should be a timetable for this to happen and it must include the withdrawal of any remaining foreign troops and the termination of the Office of the High Representative, whose powers resemble those of the Viceroy of colonial India. While BiH still relies on outside control it can never really achieve self-determination and be truly independent.

It is of paramount importance that measures are put in place to ensure that women take a more active role in the political life of the country.

A secular approach to all aspects of society is essential, particularly in education, where the practice of "two schools under one roof" must be phased out.

Pension cuts to be restored, and wage levels pegged to inflation.

War veterans, regardless of which side they were on,

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# Municipal polls show some change

By Len Glover

As mentioned in [Solidarity 572](#), the BiH municipal elections of 15 November showed some changes from previous voting patterns. Now, with the exception of Mostar (elections on 20 December), all results are in and more details can be added.

There were elections for mayors and assemblies in 143 municipalities (the municipality is the smallest local government unit in BiH). A total of 425 mayoral candidates stood for election, of which only 29 were women – and of those only four were elected. Clearly, there is a long way to go before women achieve anything like equality in BiH.

Anger about corruption resulted in many established politicians being unseated. In these mayoral elections, the SDA (Party of Democratic Action), the main party claiming to represent Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) did badly, losing seven of its previous mayors and keeping 25. The party claiming to represent the Bosnian-Croat population, the Croatian Democratic Union of BiH (HDZBiH) gained one additional mayor but lost some key municipalities. The Serb nationalist SNSD (Alliance of Social Democrats) won a total of 41 mayors, but also suffered some major losses. It lost in Banja Luka to Drasko Stanivukovic of the PDP (Party of Democratic Progress), who is however as nationalistic as the SNSD.

As a very general observation, ethnically-based communalist parties held on to their rural votes but lost out elsewhere. In Sarajevo, the largest party is now People and Justice (Narodi i pravda), which took Sarajevo Centre and Novo Sarajevo from the SDA. It remains to be seen how different just its politics are from the SDA (from which it split on 12 March 2018). It describes itself as “centrist

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must receive a war pension sufficient to meet their needs.

A Workers’ Charter needs to be drawn up. This would include trade union rights and the right of unions to veto any further privatisations or takeovers.

There was a time when Bosnia was considered the “showcase” state in the former Yugoslavia, the place where all the various constituent groups of the Balkans’ ethnic tapestry lived in harmony. That can be rebuilt. If BiH disintegrates, for whatever reason, the consequences will be grim. □

## Suggested further reading:

Bose, Sumantra. *Nationalist Partition and International Intervention*. Hurst and Co. 2002.

Glenny, Misha. *The Fall of Yugoslavia*. Penguin Books, third edition 1996

Magaš, Branka. *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*. Verso, 1993.

West, Richard. *Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia*. Faber and Faber, 2009.

Kolstø, Pål. *Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe*. Hurst and Co. 2005.



Tuzla strikes and protests against job cuts and communalism, 2014

and conservative”.

As well as losing Sarajevo, the SDA lost in Tuzla (which has a Social Democratic Party mayor) and Zenica (an independent). The SDA still controls the largest number of municipalities in BiH, but it is now a largely rural party.

What will follow in the coming weeks is almost certainly a period of “horse-trading” as parties try to consolidate their positions. Although old communalist political loyalties appear to be unravelling, there is still no party which works to unite all communities on a radical socialist programme. □

## The inequality hit

By Rhodri Evans

Pandemic and lockdown (and Tory policies) have [increased income inequality](#). A new [report](#) from the Fabian Society shows inequality set to increase even more in the coming months.

Universal Credit was increased by £20 at the start of the spring lockdown. That increase is due to be withdrawn on 1 April 2021, at a time when more and more people are likely to be unemployed or on meagre part-time pay.

The report estimates 1.1 million more in poverty (including 400,000 children) even on the *most optimistic* guesses about 2021 unemployment, and 3.2 million (850,000 children) on more pessimistic guesses.

Of that estimated 1.1 million, nearly half (480,000) would be in households where someone is disabled.

Two other Tory measures will hit hard. Claimants who started on Universal Credit in March or April had a nine-month “grace period” from the benefit cap (which cuts their benefits if the household total rises above a certain level). That expires in December for tens of thousands who started on Universal Credit in March, and in January for tens of thousands more who started in April.

The Local Housing Allowance, a ceiling for housing benefit, was raised in March to the still-meagre level of the 30th-highest rent out of 100 for comparable homes in each area. The government plans to freeze it as from the 2021-2 financial year, meaning claimants will have to cover more and more rent out of the income allocated for food, utilities, etc. □

# Barnoldswick workers resist lock-out



## Interviews

Workers at Rolls Royce's plant in Barnoldswick in Lancashire have been striking since 6 November to prevent the offshoring of 350 jobs. Facing strikes through until Christmas, the company has now locked the workers out. Ross Quinn, a Unite organiser involved in the dispute, spoke to Daniel Randall from Solidarity.

The targeted action we've taken has put the company under huge pressure. The majority of workers were still coming into work, but nothing was moving, and nothing was getting done. The employer couldn't use the government furlough scheme, because the impact on work wasn't to do with Covid, it was because of industrial action. They would have furloughed everyone immediately if they could have gotten away with it.

When we notified them of the third wave of industrial action, the employer asked us if we'd give dispensation for some of the electricians, who were due to strike as part of that wave, to come into work. They said if we didn't, they'd have to shut down the site and furlough staff. We asked them: "what are you giving us in return? What will you do to demonstrate that you want to resolve the dispute?" The answer that came back was, essentially, "nothing." So we refused to modify or moderate the strike plan.

The employer then informed us they were putting workers on "company furlough." We responded immediately by asking, "what's company furlough?" This wasn't a scheme we agreed to or were ever made aware of. They didn't respond directly to that; they told workers they'd be paid 80% of their wage. Obviously we believe everyone not striking is entitled to 100% pay, and we've also challenged the legality of what Rolls Royce has done. The employer then told the workers they will pay 100% of wages for the first two weeks, and 80% for the week after that.

As far as we're concerned, this is a lock-out. That's how we've described it, and we're calling on the employer to resolve the dispute. Locking out workers won't resolve the dispute, only finding a future for the site will.

Our consistent belief has been that offshoring these jobs would be one phase in a process that would lead to the eventual closure of the site. We've always believed the company has had other plans they weren't being transparent about. We've demanded total transparency, asked them to put everything on the table, so we can make counter-proposals and look at what needs to happen to secure a future for the site. On Thursday 3 December, Rolls Royce announced that certain components from the site would be transferred to another company, called ITP, which is Rolls Royce-owned, from where they'll be sold off. This just confirmed everything we'd be saying all along.

The transfer of those components doesn't just affect Barnoldswick, it also affects the Rolls Royce site at Huck-

nall. There are other announcements that also affect sites in Scotland and at Ansty in Coventry. We're covered by our industrial action ballot until mid-late January, so we can name further action ourselves, but if the company don't offer serious concessions then they could be facing a national dispute and spreading industrial action, due to the wider impact of those announcements.

On 5 December, we organised a car rally to show support for the workers. It spread for miles, from Colne to Burnley, along three or four junctions down the motorway. That was a clear demonstration of how much support the workers have got in the local community, and was a real boost for them all.

Within Rolls Royce, there are a lot of different structures. Shop stewards, and regional and national officers, are interlinked through those structures. Although this phase of action at Barnoldswick has functioned somewhat independently, due to the specific attacks at this site, we're always having conversations with other union reps and officers elsewhere in the Rolls Royce structure and discussing how they can apply pressure. Senior convenors in national structures will be submitting counter-proposals to the company, and if those aren't accepted, there's a real prospect of a national dispute. □



## Alternative "Christmas special"



### Kino Eye

John Cunningham

For those of you who (like me) aren't that arsed about Christmas, here's a couple of films (available on DVD and online) chosen as an antidote to John Wayne reruns, *Mary Poppins*, or *The Sound of Music*. Let's start with Greek director Theodoros Angelopoulos' *The Travelling Players* (1975), an epic of Greek history from 1939 to 1952 seen through the eyes of an itinerant theatre group. At 3 hours 45 minutes the film takes in the turbulent politics of pre-war Greece, World War 2, and the civil war that followed. Second choice is Soviet director Sergei Bondarchuk's 1966 stunning version of Tolstoy's classic novel *War and Peace*. At 7 hours 11 minutes it is probably best seen in four parts, as the filmmakers originally intended. Don't get the inferior 1956 version by King Vidor. □

## Action on pay freeze



**John Moloney,  
PCS AGS**

The TUC General Council is due to meet shortly; one of the items under discussion will be possible coordinated action against a new public sector pay freeze. The case for coordinated action is obvious. It's something PCS will push for as hard as we can through the TUC, and via our bilateral relations with other public sector unions.

But we can't move at the pace of the slowest. We're still arguing for an active, fighting response within PCS, and that's not contingent on whether we can get coordinated action with other unions. Our own National Executive Committee will meet on 10 December, and that meeting will shape our initial strategy.

We have to be clear that one or two-day protest strikes won't cut it here. There's no point taking token action, we have to build a programme of action that's designed to win, based on democratic discussion within the union. That will likely involve a combination of all-out national strikes along with selective and rolling action, where workers strike in a way that'll have the maximum impact on the employer.

Although it's been announced as part of a one-year spending review, we're hearing rumours that the pay freeze may last more than a year, and that the government may launch a renewed offensive on public sector pensions. If the public sector pay freeze is consolidated, that will also put pressure on sectoral pay review bodies where they exist. All of that underlines the case for coordinated action that hits the bosses hard and fast. If the pay freeze is imposed with only minimal resistance, that will put workers on the back foot for the next few years. The industrial action ballot result from our outsourced worker members in the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) was a 94% majority for strike. They're demanding increased safety provision and to be accommodated away from the workplace, as their (majority white) directly-employed workmates have been. Driving examiner members will also ballot to resist being pushed back into conducting exams before it's safe. □

• John Moloney is Assistant General Secretary of the civil service workers' union PCS (personal capacity)

## No. 576 on 6 Jan

*Solidarity* will skip the issues which would be out on 16, 23, and 30 December, because of the difficulties of circulating the paper near Christmas and especially under virus restrictions. We'll still be covering events at [workersliberty.org](http://workersliberty.org). No. 576 will be out on 6 January. □

## BT workers ballot

By Ollie Moore

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) is conducting a consultative ballot of its members in the telecom giant BT, which could presage a formal ballot for action to resist what the union calls "a vicious programme of compulsory redundancies, site closures, and attacks on pay, terms and conditions." The consultative ballot closes on Thursday 10 December, and CWU reps and activists say they are confident of a huge vote in favour of action. Almost 50,000 workers are being balloted.

The CWU has also criticised BT management's "new-found disregard for longstanding agreements with the union that have underpinned decades of industrial peace." Hopefully the ballot, and the campaign surrounding it, signal a move away from an approach to trade unionism that sees "industrial peace" as a good thing in and of itself. □

## Second-hand books

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- Never A Yes Man: The Life and Politics of an Adopted Liverpudlian – Eric Heffer
- Fast Food Nation: What the All-American Meal is Doing to the World – Eric Schlosser
- Revolutionary Marxism and Social Reality in the 20th Century – Collected Essays of Ernest Mandel
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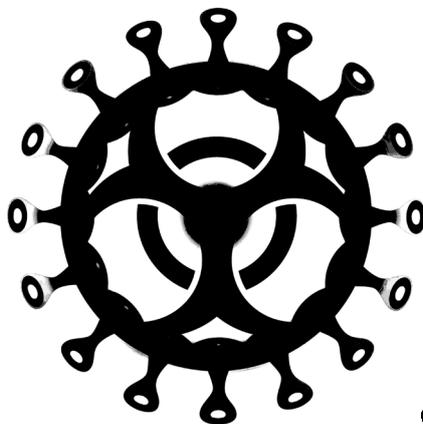


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# Solidarity



For a workers' government



## SOCIAL SOLIDARITY TO GET THROUGH THE PANDEMIC MONTHS

By Colin Foster

As of 7 December, the world Covid-19 death rate neared 150% of its previous peak in April (seven-day rolling average), and was rising sharply.

It will take months, maybe many months, for vaccination to slow that death rate decisively. Strict covid-distancing rules at one level or another will be needed for those months.

The 150% figure is not driven by US statistics, though the death rate there has been rising fast since mid-October and will soon pass the local April peak.

Nor by South America, where rates are still high but falling or levelling. Nor India, the same. Nor East Asia and Africa, which have generally kept rates low.

It is driven most by Eastern Europe and Russia, which had no real peaks in April but now see rapidly rising rates, and from Western Europe, which had a lull in July-August but is now nearing (or, in Germany, way above) April peaks.

Britain is over 50% of the April peak death rate. Its current downturn of deaths is likely to be small and short-lived, since the downturn of infections in the lockdown between 5 November and 2 December was small compared to other lockdowns (in France or Belgium or Ireland), and infection rates now look like rising again.

Mass testing is more a gimmick than a real quick-fix (Slovakia's cases are already rising steeply again), and even a proper public-health test-trace operation (in place of the Tories' current private-profit Serco-Deloitte-G4S mess) is unlikely to contribute much to turning down the curve until infections are at a lower level.

Lockdowns of one sort or another will be necessary.

But they will not work well, or be sustained adequately, without building *social solidarity* which convinces an adequate majority:

- that they will be supported when taking precautions
- that their precautions will effectively take care of others
- that their efforts won't be wasted by a government focused on stunts and fat profits for its cronies.

That requires:

- full isolation pay for all, and publicly-provided quarantine accommodation for those in crowded housing
- workers' control of workplace safety
- emergency public ownership to bring private hospital facilities into the NHS and social care into the public sector, and guarantee PPE supplies; pay rises for NHS and care workers
- funding for schools to reduce class sizes by rotas and extra buildings, to fix ventilation, to employ new regular staff.

On 2 December, Labour mostly abstained on the government's "tiers" plan, citing inadequacy of social support and furlough provision. 16 Labour MPs voted against the government's "tiers" plans. Richard Burgon gave a reasoned though limited case: that more lockdown, with pubs and non-essential shops still shut, was still needed to push the curve down. The others, mostly north-east MPs, a couple of other left-wingers, but also right-wingers like John Spellar? It's less clear.

It is good that Labour has started differentiating on the pandemic. We need now to make the differentiation clear, and focused on the needed measures of social solidarity. □