



Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 499 20 March 2019 50p/£1

Workers' unity! Bring down borders!

SOCIALISTS OPPOSE BREXIT

We don't know what will happen over Brexit in the next weeks or months. Neither does anyone else.

The ruling class is divided several ways on the issue. That creates an opportunity for the left and the labour movement to change outcomes.

Unlike many issues on which the ruling class divides, this is one where the labour movement and socialists have much to win or lose.

We can win or lose the free movement within Europe which has brought 3.8 million citizens of the EU27 countries to enrich our culture and our labour movement.

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LABOUR: CALL A SPECIAL CONFERENCE!



Bigger crises than Brexit

Alan Simpson, p.6



New Zealand massacre

Riki Lane reports on the Australian far-right breeding ground for the Christchurch mosque murderers

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Debate on antisemitism

Socialist Resistance slams us, and Camila Bassi and Martin Thomas discuss issues

See pages 8-9

Renew Labour

**L4SE in left bloc on
23 March anti-
Brexit demo: 11am
Stanhope Gate**

Iran: free jailed worker activists!

Esmail Bakhshi, a leader of the workers at the big Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane complex in south west Iran, has been in jail since 20 January.

His family says he is ill and not getting medical care. They fear for his life.

Sepideh Gholian, an activist and journalist who supported the sugar cane workers in a long-running series of strikes demanding unpaid wages and workers' control over the enterprise, has also been jailed since 20 January.

Bakhshi and Gholian were jailed previously on 18 November last year, and released on 12 (Bakhshi) and 18 (Gholian) December. Several other Haft Tappeh workers were also jailed for varying periods, as were over 40 steelworkers in dispute in Ahvaz, also in south-west Iran.

Jail — and sometimes death in jail through ill-treatment and lack of medical care — is a standard response of the Iranian government to strikes and workers' protests.

The most famous case is that of Mansoor Ossanloo, a Tehran bus workers' leader, who was eventually freed and allowed to go into exile in 2013, after years of repeated jail terms and mistreatment which cost him the sight of one eye.

Other notable worker activists like Shahrokh Zamani have died in jail.

Iran is currently going through a new surge of worker protests in the run-up to the Iranian New Year on 21 March, when new budgets and a new minimum wage are set, and when workers are used to expecting a New Year's bonus.

Many worker protests are about months of arrears of unpaid wages, in an economic climate where food prices are rising at over 50% a year.

Iranian school teachers staged a three-day sit-in strike at the start of March. Their demands included the release from jail of teachers jailed for their trade-union activity:

Mohammad Habibi, Esmail Abdi, Mahmoud Beheshti, Ruhollah Mardani, Abdolreza Ghanbari, Mohammad Sani and Bakhtiar Arefi.

More: shahrokhzamani.com

Fight ban on the “unskilled”

Ben Tausz

The government's Immigration Bill has emerged from Committee stage without amendments and is set to return to the House of Commons.

We do not yet know when this will be, but the date is likely to be set soon because the Tories want to get their basic Brexit legislation through before 29 March.

The Bill will end free movement for EU citizens and hand over a blank cheque for Ministers to write a new immigration regime themselves — so-called “Henry VIII” powers.

A White Paper in December 2018 indicated their intentions. The Conservatives want to class all migrant workers earning under £30,000 as “unskilled” and restrict their right to stay in the country to one year, with no possibility to extend this or switch to another visa, and with a ban on re-applying for a further year.

This is a racist charter for exploitative bosses, ensuring that lower-waged migrant workers are trapped in precarity and less able to settle, integrate and organise in the trade union movement.

At the Bill's Second Reading on 28 January, the Labour leadership was forced from abstention into opposition at the last minute by an angry outcry from the left-wing Labour grassroots, but it was by



then too late even to get a good turnout of Labour MPs voting against the Bill.

DAY OF ACTION

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement organised a day of action on 1 March in which supporters came out in communities from Brixton to Birmingham under the slogans “Kill the Immigration Bill”, “Migrants Welcome” and “Defend and Extend Free Movement”.

Actions ranged from rallies and stunts to high-street stalls, and were organised by supportive trade union branches, Momentum groups, local Labour parties, local migrant rights' groups, and local left-wing anti-Brexit groups.

Labour-left MPs such as Lloyd Russell-Moyle wrote in support of the day of action, and the Bakers'

Union President — a “Lexit” supporter — also issued an endorsement.

Other Lexiteers who say they oppose closing the borders should be pressed to follow suit.

We must demand the Labour leadership and MPs are forthright, unambiguous and tightly whipped in opposing the Bill — not merely tweaking it.

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement and other migrant rights groups will be planning further action as we hear about the Bill's timetable, and are asking supporters to write to MPs (a template email can be found at bit.ly/lcfm-em).

Activists can also propose that their local Labour parties and trade union branches state their opposition.

Audio and e-reader versions of *Solidarity*

Many thanks to the volunteers who have enabled us to produce an audio version of the paper. Links to the audio version on SoundCloud are at www.workersliberty.org/audio.

To be sent our e-reader version of *Solidarity*, email awl@workersliberty.org.

This may be helpful for dyslexic readers. E-readers enable you to choose the font, type size, and line-spacing you prefer, in a completely uncluttered layout.

Please give feedback so that we can find out whether these efforts are worthwhile, and, if they are, improve them.

The GMB and the “Zionist plot” story

By Dale Street

Shop steward Peter Gregson's appeal against expulsion from the GMB trade union was rejected on Wednesday 6 March.

Last year a GMB disciplinary hearing had concluded that Gregson had:

- Written and promoted anti-semitic materials which were racist in nature, including claims that Israel “exaggerated” the Holocaust.

- Made “utterly unacceptable and frankly sinister attacks” on GMB organiser Rhea Wolfson, describing her as “a raving Zionist, an “ambitious Zionist zealot” and “a liability” (to the GMB).

- Targeted Wolfson for “deeply disturbing, sinister and antisemitic attacks ... because she is Jewish”; these attacks “betrayed misogynistic intent” and were “evidence of misogyny on your part.”

- Accused the GMB of “totally supporting a racist regime” and “indirectly supporting apartheid” by adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition and guidelines on antisemitism.

The findings of the disciplinary hearing also referred to a document

which Gregson had written and circulated, entitled: “My GMB Grief: Rhea Wolfson.” According to the document:

“Wolfson and (Jon) Lansman together, within Momentum and the Labour Party, have set themselves the task of preventing a Corbyn-led government from ever imposing sanctions on Israel...”

“That Wolfson, an avowed Zionist, was allowed to chair the recent Labour Conference session debating the oppression of Palestinians shows us how strong a grip the Zionists have on Labour.”

In his 22 pages of appeal against the disciplinary hearing's conclusions, Gregson spent much time arguing that the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) antisemitism definition was at odds with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights.

He complained that Israel is “over-exaggerating or overstating [the Holocaust's] importance in relation to acts of genocide today (e.g. Rohingya).”

In any case: “The racism that Jews suffered during the war is now practised by Israeli Jews themselves. ... But it's wrong to trans-

plant one Holocaust for another.”

Gregson continued: “Our language around semitism has been hi-jacked by Nakba-deniers: a racist foreign power, in a distant land. ... Netanyahu appears to have rewritten the GMB Rulebook, along with everyone else's.”

(In case any reader has forgotten: This is Gregson's *defence* against accusations of antisemitism.)

Gregson concluded: “Does the Central Executive Council really want the GMB to be known as the Zionist union? I assure you, there are precious few members to be found in those Zionist quarters...”

“That the GMB continues to shelter and protect Zionists such as Wolfson should be a concern for all members.”

Behind her actions are “Israel's efforts to destabilise Corbyn and prevent him becoming our next Prime Minister.”

The usual this-is-not-antisemitism-but-only-legitimate-criticism-of-Israel apologists for left (and not particularly left) antisemitism rallied to Gregson's defence.

According to Labour Against the Witch-hunt (LAW): “Peter is clearly not antisemitic. ... We understand from his statement that his suspen-

sion was motivated by former Labour NEC member and GMB official Rhea Wolfson — an open Zionist, a member of the JLM, and a supporter of Israel as a Jewish state.”

LAW did concede that some of Gregson's formulations might be less than perfect, such as: “The Jews have so much leverage here (in the UK).” But this was only because he had “internalised the racism of Zionist ideology.”

Scottish Friends of Palestine, Scottish Jews Against Zionism, Ken Loach, the Scottish “The National” newspaper, and Mike Cushman (for Free Speech on Israel) have also backed Gregson.

Their basic argument is:

The IHRA definition is a tool to stifle criticism of Israel; anyone alleged to have breached it must therefore be a victim of Zionist targeting; that person must be defended against “the Zionists”; what that person said or did is irrelevant in the light of the greater goal of defeating the IHRA.

For those who share Gregson's politics, this argument provides them with a licence to defend, and to promote, the indefensible in the name of “anti-Zionism”.



Advanced earlybird tickets for our summer school, Ideas for Freedom, are now available until 21 April: £30 waged, £17 low-waged and students, £7 unwaged.

Prices will increase in steps until the event, around 22-23 June.

The 22-23 June weekend agenda will include presentations and debates on issues around Brexit, anti-semitism, climate change, 1919, 1989, and more. We are continuing to add speakers and events in the run up to the event.

There'll be a walking tour on

Thursday 20 June looking at "Queer Brixton" and an evening debate on Friday 21 June between Workers' Liberty and Paul Embury of the Fire Brigades Union on socialists views on Brexit.

Venue: Camden School for Girls, Sandall Road, London NW5 2DB.

Free creche. Overnight accommodation will also be available free. Contact awl@workersliberty.org for further details.

www.workersliberty.org/ideas



Labour for a Socialist Europe went on the UN Anti-Racism Day demonstration in London on 16 March with the new L4SE banner.

We leafleted for the Left Bloc on the 23 March anti-Brexit demonstration and collected signatures on L4SE's petition for Labour to oppose Brexit. We got a good response. It seemed that a solid majority of demonstrators were anti-Brexit, despite the main organisers being Lexiters.

There were maybe five to ten thousand there, but a large number of union banners. The post and telecom union CWU turned out many hundreds of its members to march together.

After Christchurch, organise against far right

By Riki Lane

Friday 15 March was a day of contrast in both Australia and New Zealand – exuberance and militant action by students striking for climate action in both Australia; followed immediately by immense sadness, horror and anger at the mass murder by a fascist at a mosque in Christchurch.

The apparent attacker, an Australian, made it clear in his manifesto that the murders were inspired by white supremacist neo-Nazi ideology. He was on no police or security service list, nor known to socialist or anarchist anti-fascists who monitor the right's social media and other publicity. Apparently he was active on an anonymous white nationalist social-media group, The Dingoes.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has been very impressive for a left-liberal social democrat, with strong language of inclusion for the victims, stressing

diversity and tolerance. She called the attack out as terrorism immediately. That description has become dominant in media coverage, unlike with some other white-supremacist attacks in the past.

NZ gun laws were significantly looser than Australian, so the attacker was able to access military style weapons. Ardern responded by tightening those laws in 72 hours.

Australia's right-wing PM Scott Morrison is notorious for a brutal policy against asylum-seekers. His response after the attack was better than I would have expected, taking up Ardern's description of the atrocity as extreme right-wing terrorism.

However, Morrison's history is haunting him. For example, popular TV personality Waleed Aly – the main public face of a left-liberal Islam in Australia – has revived discussion of a 2008 cabinet meeting where Morrison reportedly advocated using opposition to Muslim immigration to help the

right-wing coalition win a federal election.

Maverick ultra-right senator Fraser Anning has provoked a huge backlash with his victim blaming comments: "The real cause of the bloodshed on New Zealand streets today is the immigration program which allowed Muslim fanatics to migrate to New Zealand in the first place."

PROTEST

When Anning spoke to a group of white supremacists in Melbourne on 16 March, anti-fascists protested outside, but 17 year old Will Connolly got in and broke an egg on Anning's head, becoming a hero to many as "Egg-boy".

Canning was then punched twice by Anning and assaulted by right wing thugs. Police arrested Canning but released him without charge, and are reportedly investigating charges against Anning and the thugs for assault.

What Anning highlights is the

way explicit fascist ideology has worked its way into mainstream political debate.

He comes from a long family history of brutal racism by his colonial ancestors toward indigenous Australians.

He was an accidental senator. Third on the One Nation ("soft" far-right) ticket in Queensland, he got only 19 votes in the 2016 election, but gained a Senate seat in November 2017 when the second on the ticket was ruled out for dual citizenship.

He was then quickly dropped by One Nation. Katter's Australian Party took Anning into membership in June 2018, but had to drop him by October 2018. In 2012 the Queensland Council of Unions had supported KAP (along with Labor and the Greens), because KAP had some left-populist policies within its general right-nationalist drift. The Anning experience should confirm how mistaken that was.

Anning has used his position since expulsion from KAP to be-

come the spokesperson for the far right, blaming Muslim immigration for causing division. The thugs who attacked Connolly are well known neo-Nazis from the United Patriots' Front and other fascist groups. Those groups have been more active on the streets in Melbourne since about 2016, but have been met by large counter-demonstrations.

An online change.org petition has 1.3 million (and rising) signatures calling for Anning's removal from parliament. This is by far the largest online petition ever in Australia, and larger than the largest signed petition to the federal parliament.

While now is certainly a time for tears and compassion for the victims of this fascist terror, this mass response provides the basis for attracting many more people into anti-fascist activism, and building on recent increases in support from the union movement.

We can mourn, and we need to organise.

Hamas batons Gaza revolt

By Gerry Bates

On Saturday 17 March, hundreds of people in Gaza were picked off the streets and jailed by Hamas police as they used live fire into the air, clubs, metal rods, and pepper spray to disperse a growing wave of demonstrations.

The demonstrations were sparked by tax increases on basic goods imposed by the Hamas administration.

Hamas, a clerical-fascist movement, have claimed that the protests were "pushed from the outside", "controlled by Israel and the PA intelligence", and want to bring down the "Palestinian armed resistance."

Muhammad Shehada (a Palestinian from Gaza currently working in Sweden), writing in the Israeli liberal newspaper *Haaretz*, reports the demonstrators stress that they also oppose the Fatah-run Palestinian Authority's economic sanctions on Gaza, and Israel's blockade.

Hamas has further denounced the demonstrators as suicidal,

junkies, traitors and drug-addicts, and their "accomplices" in human rights organisations as pawns of outsiders.

As Shehada says, "Israel's blockade, the PA's sanctions and Hamas' ruthless totalitarian rule all create a uniquely insufferable abyss where two million Gazans, the majority of whom are children, have been subject to unparalleled brutalities over

the last 12 years with no way to escape or end their nightmare".

The only way out is democratic self-determination for the Palestinians: a two-states settlement offering an authentically independent Palestinian state in contiguous territory, alongside Israel.

Stalinists “under siege”?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star* ought to be feeling well pleased with itself.

After all, it has a former contributor who remains a public supporter leading the Labour Party. It has at least two political supporters (S. Milne and A. Murray) in the most powerful positions of influence within the Leader's Office.

Its pro-Brexit stance appears to have helped a (so far) effective effort to discourage Labour from enacting agreed conference policy regarding a second referendum.

And yet, despite all this, the paper is full of self-pity and paranoia. It even claims to be “under siege”. It's not clear by whom. After all, even under Brown and Blair, being a supporter of the *Morning Star* never caused you problems within the Labour party.

In a strange article last week (13 March) entitled “The bid to mark communists as illegitimate, sinister forces is a bid to isolate the Labour left”, editor Ben Chacko claims that:

“Hundreds of thousands of predominantly young people wishing to get involved in politics for the first time have been met by powerful Establishment insiders with ridicule and slander”.

He doesn't actually mean young first-time-in-politics people. His concern is for the ageing cohorts of the Communist Party of Britain and its allies.

“More recently attacks have focused on whether Corbyn is a Marxist and which of his allies can be accused of being communists.

“To state the obvious: the anti-capitalist left in the form of the Communist Party and various other socialist parties has not been large enough in the recent past to have significantly infiltrated Labour or be responsible for either of Corbyn's victories. And yes, some allies of Corbyn who are now in Labour have come from those traditions.”



Socialists protesting the Chinese minister Ma Hui speaking at the Marx Memorial Library's annual oration at Marx's grave, on 17 March, with the banner “China: State Tyranny is not socialism”

And who might they be? Comrades Milne and Murray, perhaps? They prospered before their current posts (Milne as a top journalist on the *Guardian*, Murray as “chief of staff” of the big union Unite), and there is little evidence to suggest that, under the present Labour regime, the well-paid, unelected positions that they now have in the Leader's Office are in any danger. The worst they have to put up with is some ineffectual baiting from the *Daily Mail* and the *Spectator*.

Both Murray and Milne are frequently referred to in the bourgeois press as “Stalinists”. Some comrades may be inclined to dismiss this charge as right-wing slander. But both are on record defending Josef Stalin. Here's comrade Murray in the *Morning Star* of 17 December 1999 (yes, a while back, but there's no evidence that he's changed his opinion since):

“Next Tuesday is the 120th anniversary of the birth of Josef Stalin... you are still left paying your money and taking your choice. A socialist system embracing a third of the world and the defeat of Nazi Germany on the one hand. On the other, all accompanied by harsh measures imposed by a one-party regime.

“Nevertheless, if you believe that the worst crimes visited on humanity this century, from

colonialism to Hiroshima and from concentration camps to mass poverty and unemployment have been caused by imperialism, then [Stalin's birthday] might at least be a moment to ponder why the authors of those crimes and their hack propagandists abominate the name of Stalin beyond all others. It was, after all, Stalin's best-known critic, Nikita Khrushchev, who remarked in 1956 that ‘against imperialists, we are all Stalinists’.”

But Comrade Chacko needn't feel quite so isolated. In the same day's editorial (in fact, printed right alongside his article), the paper identifies where its real allies within the Labour Party are to be found:

“The reconfiguring of Labour's politics that has seen long-standing critics of the EU joined by right-wing MPs from strongly leave constituencies suggests that electoral realism has the capacity to drive a new kind of unity.”

Ah yes! Those right-wing, pro-Brexit MPs are the kind of allies the *Morning Star* really values: no need for all that whingeing about being “under siege” after all, is there, Ben?

•With thanks to Andrew Coates. Chacko's article can be read at bit.ly/ms-pity.

Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx



Letters

“Essence” is the English translation of Aristotle's phrase to ti ên einai, literally “the what it was to be” for a thing.

The “essence” of a living thing, for example, for Aristotle, is its “soul”.

“Dialectic”, for Aristotle, was not a process of development of real things, but an art of argument, in particular argument which would take widely-held but disputable statements and dissect them.

For Hegel, it was different. Dialectics was not an art, but the actual process through which reality differentiated and developed. With the twist that for Hegel, “finite” things were relatively unreal, “Reason” was real, and so reality was the unfolding of Reason.

He took it to be “proved by speculative cognition that... [the] ‘Idea’ or ‘Reason’ is the True, the Eternal, the absolutely powerful essence; that it reveals itself in the World, and that in that World nothing else is revealed but this...”

A partial approximation to Hegel can be found in Aristotle, in the picture of things changing through their “what it was to be” evolving. But this is what Hegel called “speculative cognition”: a sort of super-science, or “science above science” proceeding by observation of “middle-sized” things, such as are directly perceptible to us, and “speculatively” constructing general schemes into which to fit their development. That can be called dialectics, too. But it is pre-scientific, not super-scientific. Marx in his dialectics was particularly emphatic about rejecting “teleology” (the idea of a predetermined goal inherent in things’ “essences”).

SCIENCE

Science has shown that the invalidity of the scheme by which all things (or most things? — Paul Cooper's letter, *Solidarity* 498) develop through an inner “essence” pursuing “lawful” stages of development.

Quarks, as far as we know, do not go through “stages of development” in the way that solar systems, newts, or societies do. Neither do numbers: the number represented by 1729 in Arabic numerals or, say, MDCCXXIX in Roman numerals, is what it was, will be what it is.

And the question of whether humanity will destroy those conditions of Earth's ecosystem which make human life possible on this planet cannot be resolved by “speculative cognition” of a human “essence”.

“In return”, so to speak, science has educated us about “emergent” patterns of development of very large systems of things and interactions, patterns which cannot be read back onto and then read out from any “essence” or smaller elements of those systems.

Martin Thomas, London

Dyslexia and brain wiring



Letters

Janine Booth (*Solidarity* 494) writes that “[t]he brain wiring that is now called dyslexia has probably existed for thousands of years, but it did not become a problem and was not labelled “dyslexia” until written language became widespread.”

She does acknowledge that this “so-called impairment, [this] disability, is constructed by something that has developed socially i.e. the form that language takes.”

I'm not convinced that dyslexia can be reduced to a “brain wiring”, nor that particular “wirings” are given, that just the problem and label arise from social factors.

I have been diagnosed with mild dyslexia with suggestions of dyspraxic traits. The diagnosis, and the traits I exhibited which led to me seeking an assessment, were on the basis of a complex interaction between me and the environment. No-one's looked at my

brain or suggested doing so.

Evidence does suggest that certain characteristics in the brain *can* cause or make more likely dyslexia, but this statement would be a meaningless tautology if we didn't recognise dyslexia in terms of certain characteristics independent of brain structure — namely, certain language abilities and behaviour compared to that individual's overall abilities.

Furthermore, individuals' brain structures don't develop independently of society. A study in 2000 showed that London taxi drivers have significantly larger posterior hippocampi than non-taxi-drivers. This isn't, at least primarily, because they innately have this brain structure.

Our brain structures develop through a complex interaction between genes and environment. What and how we do activities such as navigation or linguistic interactions effects them significantly.

Dyslexia has been seen across many different cultures which use written languages, but is believed to have environmental as well

as genetic factors. People can develop dyslexia from, for example, brain injuries.

Sometimes attempts to relate certain conditions to environmental factors has led to discriminatory ideas and practices, such as with attempts to “cure” left-handed or autistic people. In part following the oppressive practices of Stalinist states, discrimination has sometimes been promoted by professed socialists on comparable bases, for example treating LGBTQ people as having a defect based on bad environments growing up.

While steering clear of these ideas, it is possible and important to recognise social as well as genetic factors in human diversity, without simplistically reducing it to either. It is important, too, to distinguish between the causes of individual traits and how we respond to them.

Responses to homophobia with “I didn't choose to be gay” miss the point in that even if people do or did choose minority sexual practices, that's fine.

Mark Zimmer, London



Are plants commodities?



Mike Zubrowski's article on climate change (*Solidarity* 498) makes some valuable points.

But... his assertion that "Growing plants in hotter, more suitable climates and then transporting them to the UK sometimes produces less greenhouse gasses than using greenhouses or other technologies to grow equivalent plants in the UK" needs a bit of un-picking.

Capitalism treats crop plants as commodities rather than as our sources of sustenance, and indeed under their rule they are. But agribusiness does massive damage to sustainable production and local food security.

The concentration on growing cash crops like cocoa, bananas, coffee beans and tea in "hotter more suitable climates" dates back to the age of European empires. It means farmers in much of Africa, South America, the Caribbean and elsewhere are tied to one-crop production, forced to import basic foodstuffs, and at risk of destitution if crop prices fall or new diseases hit.

This domination of agriculture and horticulture carries its own pathogen – the concentration of production on a tiny range of plant varieties. The threat to human life of this approach was clear in the Potato Famine of 1845-9 in Ireland. The pathogen that caused "late season blight" (from North America) particularly affected the "Lumper", almost the only potato variety grown in Ireland.

Today the movement of plant material around the world has led to threats from insect pests, fungal infections and plant viruses on a huge scale. These, of course can be devastating if there are only a few plant varieties grown that lack resistance.

There are two answers to the impending catastrophe in food security, theirs or ours:

Theirs, the capitalists', is to produce new seeds. With these "F1" varieties farmers and horticulturalists can't produce new plants from the seeds the plant produces and are dependent on nutrient inputs, fungicides and herbicides.

That's the "business model" that is making the tie up between Monsanto (seed producers) and Bayer (chemicals) the biggest ever corporate merger ever seen.

Our answer should be sustainable production through having a wide variety of plant varieties in cultivation, governments spending real money on bio-diversity, and the end of multi-national corporations' control of the food supply.

As for greenhouses — today, with the use of red and blue spectrum LED lights, it is pretty cheap and easy to start crops like tomatoes, aubergines, okra and squashes in northern Britain in January, ready to plant out after last frosts.

Technology offers an opportunity, but we need it under our control. "Grow your own" or "dig for Brexit" is no real answer to the food shortages looming... but it isn't the worst idea in the world.

Nik Barstow, Manchester



Socialists oppose Brexit

from page one

We can win or lose the economic integration across outdated borders which provides a higher platform for our battles for social and democratic levelling-up.

We can win or lose the openings to win Europe-wide democratic mechanisms. Those could generate some real countervailing power against global capitalist market constraints and for environmental rationality: it's much more difficult for small countries.

The ruling-class minority which supports Remain (the majority having swung to backing something like Theresa May's formula) sees the risk of the left going on from an anti-Brexit victory to further Europe-wide democratic and social gains as remote.

It depends on the will, energy, and stamina of the rival forces. Like the immediate Brexit issues — yes or no, "no deal" or May's deal, etc. The outcome is unpredictable because the will, energy, and stamina of the rival forces is decided by what we do rather than what we "predict".

"Labour for a Socialist Europe" was set up in December, with the support of "Another Europe Is Possible", but as a specifically-Labour group autonomous from the "cross-party" AEIP.

It is campaigning for a Labour Party special conference. Discontent with the Labour leaders' equivocation is spreading in the labour movement.

Is Labour for a new public vote and Remain? or for Theresa May's deal, only tweaked to add a permanent customs union? or for "Norway Plus"?

The equivocation means that the Tories, despite their impasse and disarray, have been

well ahead in almost all opinion polls since late January.

Quite likely Labour will be contesting Euro-elections in May. Quite possibly Labour will be contesting an early general election.

What will Labour say about Brexit? A fudge like the one in the 2017 manifesto will not serve this time.

Labour for a Socialist Europe is fighting to swing Labour against Brexit, and, if we can't swing the whole party machine, to establish a clear anti-Brexit voice within the Labour campaign.

Labour for a Socialist Europe is also fighting for left-wing and socialist policies. LASE's conference on 9 March voted almost unanimously to support public ownership of the banks and high finance, and for links with the left across Europe. (The same public-ownership policy was voted down at the Another Europe Is Possible conference in December 2018).

Workers' Liberty, *Solidarity*, and our comrades in Labour for a Socialist Europe face four big obstacles in the weeks ahead.

First, the fact that the majority of the would-be radical left are pro-Brexit. Embarrassed, they are doing their best to ignore the issue now, talk about something else, and hope it goes away.

Second, that the *Morning Star*, paper of the old-style Communist Party of Britain, carries influence in the "upper" ranks of the labour movement, and is pro-Brexit.

Third, that sections of the Labour and trade-union rank and file beyond those influenced by the "don't mention Brexit" radical left, or by the pro-Brexit *Morning Star*, still defer to Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour leadership, and are reluctant to speak out against



equivocation.

Fourth, that there is widespread "Brexit-weariness".

The activist left of the coming years will be shaped by those with the will and energy to break those obstacles.

Leon Trotsky wrote about the French left in the late 1920s:

"Comrades who are capable of such initiative and such personal sacrifice are revolutionaries, or can become such, because it is in this way... that revolutionaries are formed. You can have revolutionaries both wise and ignorant, intelligent or mediocre.

"But you can't have revolutionaries who lack the willingness to smash obstacles..."

And so it is today.

The ship that turned away

By Alan Simpson

Sometimes the starkest warnings come from events that don't take place.

In this case, the warning came from Honda's decision to turn back a ship destined for the UK. It was the arrival that never happened. But its significance runs far beyond Honda's current vehicle production in Swindon, Nissan's plans for manufacturing in Sunderland, Toyota's plant in Derbyshire or BMW's production of the new Mini at Cowley, Oxford.

Honda's ship was loaded with equipment needed for the next generation of electric vehicles. What turned away amounts to a bleak warning about post-Brexit Britain. It made a mockery of Tory claims that the UK will "lead" the shift into clean (EV) vehicle production; phasing out fossil fuel vehicles by 2040... Ha! The game will be well over by then.

Honda has already said that by 2025 100% of its European vehicles will be EV's. Other manufacturers will do the same... They just won't be made in Britain.

Britain's motor manufacturing is essentially European in character. Much depends on "frictionless trade" — the free flow of component parts — across the European vehicle sector. Theresa May could deliver this — within a customs union — but she won't. Instead, her Britain will hang on to a Reliant Robin manufacturing mentality when (metaphorically) others have already turned over a new Leaf.

May's free-trade fanatics, locked into delusions of an imperial past, would turn Britain into a Trump plaything; "free" only to be furtled, fondled and fully chlorinated in the interests of corporate America. It would be Britain's road to Hell.

The bigger issue, however, is not just about motor manufacturing. Sony, Panasonic, Unilever, Barclays, Diageo, HSBC, Bank of America, Panasonic, Schaeffler, Dyson, Philips, UBS and Hitachi all offer similar warnings. So you have to ask where "Made in Britain" figures in Tory thinking? This is a critical question because, in a world where low carbon economics will soon shove everything else out of the way, "low carbon miles" (local production) will become ever more important.

The Tories don't get this. As others race into smart, lean and clean, Theresa May would saddle Britain with the dumb, dirty and out-dated. This is where Brexit would take us. And as "decision day" approaches, "hovering" Labour MPs should ask themselves how cheaply they would sell Britain down the Swanee River in exchange for May's cheap trinket bribes.

The government's Stronger Towns Fund is a grotesque embarrassment not a lifeline. Even the BBC recognised that the pinnacles it offers are dwarfed by the loss of EU funding, in every region of the country. And this is before you add in the Tory "austerity" cuts to local authority spending.

Theresa May's is a government that would steal your shoes, offer you new laces, and call on the nation to "Rejoice". She doesn't add the word "Suckers", but it would apply to



every Labour MP who helped shoehorn her Dodgy Brexit Deal through parliament.

Those claiming it is the only way of avoiding a "No Deal" alternative are admitting to cowardice not calculated judgment. May's brinkmanship relies on support from "weak Labour". But at its core her tactical interests are those of the Tory Party not the wellbeing of the nation.

Labour's job is to sink the Tories, not save them: far better to have a parliamentary gridlock than supine surrender. Then, at least, the public can demand the final say.

Labour's real problems, however, lie in the difficulties it has had in setting out a clear alternative.

Some of this comes from the ruthless press pursuit of internal divisions (real or manufactured) within the Labour Party. Some comes from a Party reluctance to embrace the transformative changes Corbyn, McDonnell and the "climate emergency" movements all call for. And some has to be put down to the shambolic mess Labour has made of internal messaging.

Labour support for a Second Referendum looked momentarily clear. Then "staff gossip" allowed the press to turn a clear Shadow Cabinet decision into a shady tactical ploy which, in any case, might never have to be delivered. The process degenerated into exchanges about whether Shadow Ministers had "misspoken" or been mislead. What a farce. Historically, New Labour was never even my "last ditch" preference, but I found it hard to imagine Alastair Campbell tolerating such a cock up. Within minutes, bodies would have been strewn across the floor. The press would have been left in no doubt what "the line" was. Clarity (like it or not) would reign supreme. Instead, those now charged with promoting clear Leadership end up undermining it.

The Right love this confusion, but it leaves the rest of the movement — especially those who live beyond the parliamentary playground — in various states of confusion or despair. Prime Minister's Questions only adds to the confusion. The half-empty benches on both sides of the House testify to

a ritualised event of predictable questions and Shout-Your-Weight machine replies. The outcome leaves Labour struggling to command a lead in the opinion polls when May can't even command a majority from her own benches. Labour has to shift the terms of debate.

CRISIS

The latest edition of the *New Statesman* warns that "Economic dangers are now apparent at every turn: a new global debt crisis, trade wars between great powers and a Chinese slowdown." Bigger crises than Brexit are heading our way.

Put this alongside Aviva's warnings that \$13 trillion of insurance assets could be wiped out by accelerating climate breakdown, and you have a measure of why "systems change", not piecemeal change, is our only choice. This must become Labour's offer. It is the message America's "Green New Deal" movement grasps, but which Labour hasn't.

There will be no new era of buccaneering free-trade deals. The next crisis will be avoided by an economics that treads more lightly, delivers more inclusively and sources more locally, than anything we have now. Everything we do will be judged by the carbon footprint it carries with it.

What does that mean? Well, instead of arguing against Climate Change Committee recommendations that future housing developments should not be connected to the gas grid, we should ask "how is Denmark already doing this?" We should ask too, what skill-sets Britain's workforce will need to do so, and how the jobs can be properly unionised.

It means offering secure investment spaces (for people's pension and insurance savings) in the development of tomorrow's "clean" transport infrastructures. It means making zero-carbon homes (and eco-house refurbishment) the benchmark for housing renewal ... with a huge skills programme to underpin it. It means making long-term food security the centrepiece of our commitments to sustainable agriculture. And it means writing a dif-

ferent economics that puts back more than it takes out.

I've tended to say that the easiest place to start on "payback economics" is in planting trees. It is something that can be planned and delivered in localities across the land. We can do so in ways that link generations and bind communities. But at a recent meeting I got pulled up by an Extinction Rebellion member saying "Too slow. Too slow!"

The objection wasn't to trees, but the need to address the more urgent prospect of "insect Armageddon". "Plant flowers," I was told "everywhere we possibly can. It's the only way to protect pollinators that are at the heart of everything." These must also be part of Labour's Green revolution.

In the centre of Paris, the Musée du Quai Branly has a green wall made up of 15,000 plants across 800 square metres. By 2020 Anne Hidalgo, Paris' Mayor, plans to have 100 hectares of "vertical gardens" adorning buildings in the city. She isn't alone.

Milan is tackling some of its air pollution problems by pioneering the concept of vertical forests ("Bosco Verticale") that wrap around residential high-rises. The city's Porto Nuovo district has a pair of apartment towers where 800 trees and 15,000 plants are rooted over the towers' 111-metre and 76-metre heights. It creates a 20,000 square metre area of foliage that is home to local species of birds, butterflies and insects.

There are similar projects in the pipeline for Switzerland and the Netherlands. And an even more majestic version, the Liuzhou Forest City in China, will have a 342-acre neighbourhood covered in 40,000 trees and nearly a million plants.

The point about this is that all parts of Britain could own such a vision; putting beauty at the heart of recovery. That's what Labour has to reach out to. Rescuing this parliament's "green benches" may be beyond Labour's reach. Greening everyone else's must not be.

• Alan Simpson is an environmental adviser to John McDonnell, and former Labour MP for Nottingham South.

George Orwell, Spain, and revolution

By George Chance

In his 1947 essay, “Why I Write”, George Orwell explained:

“The Spanish war and other events in 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood. Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it...”

Homage to Catalonia, in which Orwell bore witness to the murder of the Spanish Revolution, was the product of this defining period of Orwell’s life, at least the literary and political equal of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

In the February 1936 Spanish elections the Socialist, Communist and bourgeois republican parties, grouped together in a so-called People’s Front, won an outright majority of the Cortes, the Spanish parliament. They formed a Government on a fairly mild programme.

It was still a step too far for the Spanish ruling class. On 17 July 1936 the Spanish military rose against the Popular Front government.

As Orwell would relate in *Homage*: “The one step that could save the immediate situation, the arming of the workers, was only taken unwillingly and in response to violent popular clamour. However, the arms were distributed...”

In Barcelona “...the Fascists were defeated by a huge effort, mainly of the Spanish working class, aided by some of the armed forces (Assault Guards, etc.) who had remained loyal. It was the kind of effort that could probably only be made by people who were fighting with a revolutionary intention — i.e., believed they were fighting for something better than the status quo”.

In this spirit, the armed resistance began to grow into a revolutionary war: “...the Spanish working class did not...resist Franco in the name of ‘democracy’ and the status quo; their resistance was accompanied by — one might almost say it consisted of — a definite revolutionary outbreak...”.

Capturing the pent up feelings of millions, Orwell remarked, “when the fighting broke out on 18 July it is probable that every anti-fascist in Europe felt a thrill of hope. For here at last, apparently, was democracy standing up to Fascism”. He resolved to go to Spain, where he learned that just being anti-fascist was insufficient — you had to be for something.

Orwell arrived in Barcelona in late December 1936 with Independent Labour Party (ILP) papers addressed to its Barcelona representative John McNair. He had obtained these papers only after Harry Pollitt of the Communist Party had turned down an earlier request.

As the ILP was linked to the POUM, Orwell joined the POUM Militia (but not the political party itself). He did so not as an expression of political preference but in accidental consequence of arriving in Barcelona with ILP papers. As yet Orwell “did not realise that there were serious differences between the political parties”.

And at first he preferred the Stalinist line.



George Orwell (second right) with the POUM militia in Aragon

“The Communists had a definite practical policy...” When “more politically educated comrades told me that one could not take a purely military attitude towards the war, and that the choice lay between revolution and Fascism, I was inclined to laugh at them”.

Yet “when one came straight from England the aspect of Barcelona was something startling and overwhelming. It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle”. Perhaps the talk of revolution was practical after all.

Sent to the Aragon front in early January Orwell was bored and frustrated at the lack of military action. He spent much of his time gathering firewood and food, and suffering from lice, dirt, privations and occasional danger.

“At the time this period seemed to me to have been one of the most futile of my whole life. I had joined the militia in order to fight against fascism, and as yet I had scarcely fought at all... But now... I can see... those first three or four months... in the line... taught me things that I could not have learned in any other way...”

“The essential point is that I had been isolated...among people who could roughly but not too inaccurately be described as revolutionaries. This was the result of the militia-system... The workers’ militias had the effect of canalising into one place all the most revolutionary sentiment in the country.

“I had dropped more or less by chance into the only community of any size in Western Europe where political consciousness and disbelief in capitalism were more normal than their opposites. Up here in Aragon one was among tens of thousands of people, mainly though not entirely of working class origin, all living at the same level and mingling on terms of equality...”

“‘Comrade’ stood for comradeship and not... humbug... The Spanish militias, while they lasted, were a sort of microcosm of a classless society... one got, perhaps a crude foretaste of what the opening stages of Socialism might be like. And, after all, instead of disillusioning me it deeply attracted me.”

Orwell was later to write to his friend Cyril Connolly, “I have seen wonderful things and at last really believe in socialism, which I never did before.”

Returning to Barcelona on leave in April 1937, Orwell found a city that had gone into

reverse. “Once again it was an ordinary city, a little pinched and chipped by war, but with no outward sign of working class predominance...”

“The militia uniform and the blue overall had disappeared...Fat prosperous men, elegant women, and sleek cars were everywhere... The normal division of society into rich and poor...was reasserting itself...”

Underneath all this was “... an unmistakable and horrible feeling of political rivalry and hatred... It was the antagonism between those who wanted the revolution to go forward and those who wished to check or prevent it...”

FIGHTING

On 3 May open fighting broke out in Barcelona when the police and the Communist Party attempted to seize control of the Central Telephone Exchange from Anarchist CNT members (with workers striking in their support and the POUM offering their solidarity). Orwell served as a guard on the POUM offices.

The affair ended with the Government (in fact, the Communist Party) in full control of Barcelona, having drafted into the city thousands of well armed special police.

Orwell was to bitterly observe later, “a government which sends boys of fifteen to the front with rifles forty years old and keeps its biggest men and newest weapons in the rear, is manifestly more afraid of the revolution than of the fascists”.

Echoing the frame-up techniques of the Russian show trials, the Communist Party presented the May clash as instigated by the POUM — denounced as a “fifth column” fascist organisation — and demanded its pitiless extermination.

It was a claim taken up by the Communist press around the world and, to Orwell’s disgust, repeated in other British papers. In *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell demolished these libels line by line.

Orwell returned to the Aragon front, was wounded, returned to Barcelona on 20 June, and found that POUM members and militia were being arrested.

It is now known that a memorandum of the NKVD (Russian secret police), dated 13 July 1937, described Orwell and his wife Eileen O’Shaughnessy as “pronounced Trotskyites operating with clandestine creden-

tials and maintaining contact with opposition circles” (Hitchens, *Orwell’s Victory*).

Orwell and O’Shaughnessy evaded the police and left the country. Many of their friends and comrades were not so fortunate.

Orwell concluded that the “POUM were right, or at any rate righter than the Communists, [but] it was not altogether upon a point of theory. On paper the Communist case was a good one; the trouble was that their actual behaviour made it difficult to believe that they were advancing it in good faith.

“The oft-repeated slogan: ‘The war first and the revolution afterwards’, though honestly believed in by the average PSUC [Catalonian communist] militiaman...was eyewash. The thing for which the Communists were working was not to postpone the Spanish Revolution til a more suitable time, but to make sure it never happened.

“This became more and more obvious as time went on, as power was twisted more and more out of working class hands, and as more and more revolutionaries of every shade were flung into jail”.

In *Homage to Catalonia* Orwell argued the need to rally the support of the workers and peasants to the rear of the forces of the fascist leader Franco; to appeal to the Moroccans Franco had fighting for him by offering independence to Morocco (then a colony of Spain); to rouse up the workers’ in the democratic countries with the cry for a “revolutionary” rather than simply a democratic Spain; to oppose the denial of weapons to revolutionary militia people.

And the need of the Spanish working class for more than a return to the old inequalities if they were to stay mobilised, especially given the sheer difficulty of winning “an ordinary, non-revolutionary war — requiring limitless weapons — when Franco was being aided by Germany and Italy”.

Radical Readers: *Homage to Catalonia*

This month, Radical Readers in Space will be reading George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* on Thursday 28 March (and again on 4 April).

We’ll meet by Google Hangouts to discuss the book — details at bit.ly-rr-hc.

“Defend Corbyn against the AWL”

This comment on our debate is from Alan Davies of Socialist Resistance

Just as the latest round of witch hunting antisemitism allegations against Jeremy Corbyn has reached its crescendo something particularly vile has emerged from the woodwork – a 2400-word open letter to Corbyn from Sean Matgamna of the AWL (Alliance for Workers' Liberty), an organisation claiming to be on the radical left, arguing that Corbyn is guilty as charged.

The AWL has a proud thirty-year record of supporting Zionism and attacking anti-Zionist Jews. An article last year concluded that “AWL is a Zionist organisation, though it does not describe itself as such. Its commitment to Zionism cancels out its commitment to socialism and internationalism whenever the two conflict.”

Matgamna's letter is a torrent of pro-Israeli, anti-Palestinian, bile. Despite recognising the weaponisation of antisemitism against Corbyn, he argues that this is fully justified and should be supported.

He argues that the MPs who left the Labour party last week to form the Independent Group were “driven out of the party” by “possible future anti-Jewish pogromists” inspired by “five decades of political and moral ferment on the ostensibly ‘Trotskyist’ left in which absolute hostility to Israel, to ‘any’ Israel, has slowly built up in the political atmosphere like poisonous smog.”

He explains: “The ‘Corbyn surge’ that recreated a mass membership almost

overnight pulled into the new, new Labour Party a lot of people educated on the Middle East question in the kitsch left. With them they brought their political baggage, and a trolling and bullying culture. On a certain level, the Corbyn surge was also an anti-semitic surge.”

With Matgamna you can skip to the chase. The much-debated definitions of antisemitism — that antisemitism is hatred of or discrimination against Jewish people and not opposition to the Israeli Government or indeed Zionism — have little relevance. For him the main crime is exactly that – opposing the state of Israel or conversely supporting the Palestinians.

The biggest crime in his distorted world is to call for a single democratic secular state based on equal rights as an alternative to the current occupation and suppression of the Palestinian people by Israel and to support the right of return of the Palestinian refugees driven out in 1947-8.

Such people, he says, are “absolute anti-Zionists” and in the end they are racists who bring a “lethal poison” into the labour movement: They are “adamantly for a one-state solution, for an Arab and Islamic state incorporating the population of 1948-67 Israel, or those of the population whom it does not kill or drive out in conquering them.”

He goes on: “This ‘right of return’ implies, and is meant to imply, the displacement of the Jews of Israel. By what standards do the descendants of the people who lived in that territory decades ago have the right to do that?”

He accuses Corbyn of playing lip service to a two-state solution while tolerating “abso-



lute anti-Zionists” in the party. He calls for the witch hunt to be stepped up and the party to be re-educated. He calls for advocacy of the right of return and opposition to Zionism to be proscribed:

“As well as an educational drive in the party on this question – which includes a candid discussion of the politics of the leadership – the party should declare advocacy of the destruction of Israel, by Arab or Islamic states or whomever, incompatible with membership of the Labour Party. Encoded versions of that policy – via ‘right of return’ for example – should not be tolerated in the labour movement. Advocacy of measures that are code for driving Israel out of existence – ‘right of return’, ‘from the river to the sea’, etc. – should not be tolerated in a healthy labour movement...”

And this comes from a man who told a public meeting in the 1990s that Palestinians could not exercise their right of return because “No nation should be expected to ab-

sorb an immigration greater in size than the host community”. This racist nonsense is what should really not be tolerated in the labour movement.

No doubt this kind of vile divisive stuff works well for the AWL in hardening up a sect around outrageous positions that are rejected by the bulk of the left and building its organisation. But its wider effect is to support a campaign by the right that poses a real and direct threat to the whole Corbynite project, which is the most important development in Britain and indeed beyond for a very long time. The response to the witch hunt has been the emergence of Jewish Voice for Labour, which does a very important job,

It should be fully supported by the whole of the left in the Labour party that rejects the AWL line and seeks to build a healthy left inside the Labour Party to back up and defend the Corbyn leadership.

“Two states” and the Milne machine

By Martin Thomas

Theodor Adorno and other Jewish academic Marxists of the Frankfurt School fled to the USA after Hitler took power.

In the USA, they said, they found themselves more troubled by antisemitism than they had been in Germany, right up to 1933.

Germany had been one of the “best” countries in the world for Jews to integrate and prosper educationally and economically.

Likewise Thessaloniki, in Greece, for 400 years until after World War 1, was the only big city in the world with a Jewish majority. The Jews of Thessaloniki did not have equality. They had to pay extra taxes (to the Ottoman Empire). But it was possibly the “best” city in the world for Jews.

In the Arab world and Iran, again, for centuries, Jews did not have equality, but they did have more stable conditions than in Christian Europe. Since 1948, those countries have, by harassment, made themselves more “Jew-free” than even Nazi Germany managed.

Argentina was perhaps the “best” country in Latin America for Jews, with an open door for Jews until 1938. It still has a large Jewish minority. Yet in the early years of this century many Jews fled Argentina because of a surge of antisemitism there.

These experiences do not — and many Israeli Jews agree they do not — justify denial of national self-determination to the Palestinians (denial of “two states”). They do tell

us historical reasons why the Hebrew-speaking nation in Israel is obstinate about its national self-determination, and is likely to remain that way until socialist governments can show it a stable model of full democratic rights for minorities.

They tell us that there are motives other than “racism” or “exclusivism” for Israeli Jews to think that even the “best” “promise” of minority rights may not be not a secure replacement for their self-determination.

Davies's fanciful story of some unspecified meeting, some time between 20 and 30 years ago, in which Sean Matgamna supposedly spoke about immigration to Israel, shows only that Davies has missed the point. The “right of return” is not about immigration.

The migrant rights we argue for are not about “rights” of nations to “return” to ancestral land. We do not argue for Syrian refugees to be allowed into Britain, for example, on the grounds that they have an ancestral claim to this territory. We argue against “ancestral” claims.

We want free movement for individuals. No nation-state in the world has it. So then... all nations in the world must be kept under foreign rule until they give guarantees?

Whose foreign rule? For Israel, if for nowhere else, the answer is implicit: some combination of Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria. These are states which have not secured equal rights to Palestinians, or to religious minorities, in their own domains. This is not even a “best” offer of minority rights

for the Israeli Jews.

The problem is tacitly recognised when in Davies's article, and in much argument on the left these days, no positive alternative on the Israel-Palestine question is advocated. The “two-states” program is scorned, but mention of the old “secular democratic state” formula is rare — and where it occurs, as in Davies's article, mention falls short of advocacy. No wonder. Support for Hamas, Hezbollah, etc. scarcely fits with the “secular” requirement.

As a substitute for actual solidarity with Palestinian rights, and for a reality-based program for emancipation, Davies offers instead the fake “solidarity” of demonising Israel and trying to define away antisemitism.

The 2017 Labour manifesto clearly supported “two states”.

Jeremy Corbyn himself has tacked on “right of return” (bit.ly/corb-rr). Maybe he (like many) sees the formula as “for show” but sure in actual “two states” negotiations (as in the unofficial Geneva Accord of 2003, bit.ly/gen-acc) to be commuted into compensation and rights in an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. As far as I know, he's explained nowhere (maybe not even to himself).

Corbyn's Leader's Office honcho Seamus Milne is more on the anti-Israel wavelength than Corbyn (even though all his Guardian articles I can find were as evasive as Davies's about actual program). Thus the attempt by the Leader's Office to add neutralising qual-

ifications to Labour's National Executive agreement that it is antisemitic to brand the very “existence of a state of Israel as a racist endeavour”.

The Leader's Office and its allies now have strong influence in the Labour machine, including in the Compliance Unit (now called “Governance and Legal”). Given the Stalinist leanings of Milne and others, the left must be wary.

However, to see the big danger now as a catch-all purge, by this actual machine, of fancied antisemites as well as real ones, is to miss the mark. They won't purge themselves.

To take our stand on “our Corbyn project, right or wrong” is equally mistaken. To oppose Tom Watson's moves is one thing; but a left which aligns itself with the Milne machine, to minimise and define away antisemitism, will only discredit itself and open the way sooner or later to be routed by a resurgent Labour right.

My basic difference with Camila Bassi (page 9) is on whether it is enlightening or helpful to stretch the term “racism” (which originally referred to theories about “race”) further, so that it describes a even wider range of prejudices or animosities around “cultural difference”.

To do so, I think, elides important differences about how “political” antisemitism works, and moves further towards making the term “racist” so catch-all that it becomes unusable for even halfway-precise political discourse.

Is political antisemitism a form of racism?

By Camila Bassi

In an exchange reprinted in the Workers' Liberty pamphlet on Left Antisemitism, www.workersliberty.org/as-pamphlet, I debated with Martin Thomas on the question of whether left-wing antisemitism should best be classed as a form of racism.

Central to Thomas's argument is that by identifying left antisemitism as anti-Jewish racism we curse well-meaning leftists who we wish to engage in a dialogue.

He consequently draws a distinction (but, he says, no Chinese wall) between a modern political antisemitism and a traditional racial antisemitism. His delineation and understanding of both is flawed.

Thomas gives five reasons to his desire to distance left antisemitism from the notion of anti-Jewish racism:

1. "Racism" has come to be associated with crimes and immoralities rather than ideologies. Nonetheless, racism is an ideology: a way of making sense of the world, albeit a nonsensical and reactionary sense of the world.

In a Gramscian sense, racism is common sense. Even if, in some contexts, racism is associated with immoralities rather than ideology, we should patiently explain that most people have a contradictory consciousness: made up of common sense and good sense.

The role of socialists is to challenge common sense and help develop good sense into a coherent and critical framework of thought and action.

2. Antisemitism is older than racism and operates differently from general racism.

Prior to the birth of racial science, the European hegemonic discourse of civilisation versus barbarism focused on the Islamic Other, and was used to justify conversion of populations outside of Europe to Christianity. So, in this vein, one could argue that anti-Muslim ideas also operate differently from

this so-called "general racism".

The key point here is that the scientific discourse of "race" did not replace earlier representations of the Other, such ideas predetermined this discourse and were reconstituted by it.

3. Thomas agrees that it is disorienting to identify racism as exclusively an offshoot of European colonialism and equally so as an offshoot of nationalism, but argues that political antisemitism has a different dynamic from nationalism and racism.

Following the academic Robert Miles (1989), the "articulation between the capitalist mode of production and the nation state, rather than between capitalism and colonialism" is central because "this maps the primary set of social relations within which racism had its origins and initial effects. Colonialism was an integral moment of this articulation, but racism was not an exclusive product of colonialism..."

"The theorisation of 'race' and 'nation' took place at a time of 'internal' European political and economic reorganisation and 'external' colonial expansion, in the course of which the range of human cultural and physiological variation became more widely known to a larger number of people."

In Europe there was a critical shift from religion to "race" in representations of the Other. In the case of Islam and Jewish people then, religion fused with the idea of "race".

In late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Europe, the inferior "races" were the Irish and the Jews. The Jewish "race" was deemed an alien presence and a threat to destroy civilised society through an international conspiracy.

Nazi Germany saw Jews as a degenerate, unproductive and criminal "race", and simultaneously a "race" of exploiters and revolutionaries. (It is worth noting here that Thomas gives as a reason why antisemitism operates differently to racism, the imaginary power given to the Jews; yet this is precisely a current of classic racial scientific thinking.)



There is no Chinese wall between currents of early racialised representations of Jewish people and so-called political antisemitism. Why? Contemporary racism entails seeing real and imagined somatic and / or cultural characteristics as signifying innate markers of difference. (Previously the Other has also been exclusively based on cultural characteristics, such as European representations of the Islamic Other in a Christian/heathen dichotomy.)

Left antisemitism marks out a group of people vis-à-vis Israel, which is Zionist, which is racist, which is a Jewish collective of world domineering and tyrannical power; left antisemitism offers salvation also, prove yourself an absolute anti-Zionist and you are assimilated as one of us.

4. High profile Jewish political anti-Semites are not self-hating Jews, says Thomas.

I have many members of my extended family who are British Indian and have racist ideas against Muslim people and contemporary immigrants. Personally I think in their desire to be assimilated as "good British people" there's an element of distancing themselves from their own biographies. One might call it self-hating.

5. If we abandon the distinction between political antisemitism and racism then we can no longer point out and denounce when people drift over the line?

Here, Thomas argues, the use of the term racism has widened and can be used to shut down critical discourse about ideas and cultures, for example, take a section of the Left vis-à-vis political Islam.

So when members of the SWP denounce members of the AWL as racist for criticising political Islam, is this the same as us pointing out that left antisemitism is logically anti-Jewish racism? No. Why? Given the colonial model of racism that dominates UK and US academia's understanding of what racism is, the legacy is that: one, racism is what white people do to black and brown people, and, two, Zionism is racism.

It would actually be beyond a general leftist's understanding that left antisemitism could indeed be a form of racism. What's more, pointing out to a well-meaning leftist that some of their ideas have a current of left antisemitism is no more likely to push them away from dialogue than patiently spelling out that such a current of left antisemitism is logically also a form of anti-Jewish racism.

Who in the AWL would behave as crassly and illegibly as members of the SWP shouting at us, "you're racist!"

Thomas states that most leftists with politically anti-Semitic views do not see Jews as a "race". Much contemporary racism doesn't rely on a biological delineation of "race" – it pivots on cultural difference implying an innate difference.

As Robert Miles states: "In so far as Marxism asserts that all social relationships are socially constructed and reproduced in specific historical circumstances, and that those relationships are therefore in principle alterable by human agency, then it should not have space for an ideological notion that implies, and often explicitly asserts, the opposite".

"They steal the roses from our cheeks"



Review

By Jill Mountford

A ten-week strike involving recently unionised women home-workers is the subject of Neil Gore's latest production.

"Rouse, Ye Women" is a folk-ballad opera telling the stirring story of the Chainmakers' Strike of 1910 through uplifting songs sung by Bryony Purdue as Mary MacArthur, and Rowan Godal as "Bird", a downtrodden chainmaker.

With only a guitar and banjolele, a simple but evocative set, and an imaginative use of lighting, the audience are quickly transported to a backyard outhouse in Cradley Heath.

This foot tapping, hand clapping, chorus sing-along performance is an inspiring play well worth taking part in. The lyrics resonate long after the play has ended. "They steal the roses from our cheeks" sums up the life sucking nature of wage slavery.

The stage is set as a terraced house backyard, like thousands in the area at the time. It was the place of work of isolated, non-

unionised women. Here they would slave away for 12-hour days, bent over raging furnace fires, hammering out 5000 links a week for a low and inconsistent piece-rate pay.

The work and materials the women got was at the "goodwill" of the "Fogger", the grubby, unscrupulous middle-man, who more or less on whim would decide rates of pay and how much work the women would get. He would fine them when his targets were not met or when he considered the women's work to be sub-standard.

These women were among the most downtrodden wage-slaves in Britain at that time. Rarely seeing daylight, hunched over their anvils with their faces aflame, they would, like sweatshop workers the world over, age prematurely.

There is one story recounted by a chainmaker's grown-up son of his mother starting work at seven am, giving birth around midday, and being back at anvil with hammer in hand by teatime. This woman had no superpowers — just the desperate need to feed her family and pay the rent.

Enter stage left Mary MacArthur, the inspiring organiser for the National Federation of Women Workers, ready to win these women to trade unionism and a significant pay rise, winning what is claimed to be the

first minimum wage victory.

Mustering support from all over Britain, Mary MacArthur pulled an ingenious stroke when she got the strike, in all its detail, onto newsreel and played in cinemas across the land before the main feature. She organised the women into small groups and they toured around speaking at meetings about their struggle and raising funds to keep the strike going.

So much money was raised, just under £4000, that after strike pay the surplus funds were used to create a lasting legacy of a workers' education institute. A beautiful red brick building in Arts and Crafts style was built and remains today. The strikers were led to a cracking victory where most women won a 100% pay rise.

Like many good strikes, that one achieved a lot more than its demands. It opened up a world of possibilities. It introduced and embedded the concept of solidarity and other big ideas to these downtrodden, poorly educated and unorganised women.

The oldest striker was Patience Round. At 79 years old, after 67 years a chainmaker, she took her first strike action and expressed the experience of workers the world over on finding their voice and discovering ideas that can turn the world upside down. "These

are wonderful times. I never thought that I should live to assert the rights of women. It has been the week of my life, three meetings and such beautiful talking".

Today there are millions of sweatshop workers around the world working in appallingly dangerous conditions, for long hours and subsistence pay, old before their time, dehumanised by the capitalist system. It is estimated that 85% of sweatshop workers are women and children.

The story of the women chainmakers should not be seen as a sentimental history lesson of downtrodden workers of the past but as a lesson for what we have to do now to build a different future for the working class.

Some years ago Cradley Heath council decided to build a bypass where the chainmakers' beautiful red brick building stood. After protests they agreed not to demolish it but rebuild it brick-by-brick elsewhere in the area.

Likewise the labour movement today needs to rebuild solidarity strike-by-strike, workplace-by-workplace, building a beautiful wall of workers' solidarity.

• On tour around Britain over the next few months. See www.townsendproductions.org.uk.

Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stitch-up in Labour Students

By Maisie Sanders

On paper, the Labour Party has 20,000 student members. But only 59 voting delegates attended Labour Students National Conference in Edinburgh on 24 February, representing a handful of Labour clubs.

The majority of the candidates on the unofficial "moderate" slate have been elected, despite the "Labour Students Left" slate, backed by Momentum, Open Labour and CLPD Youth, receiving many more nominations from clubs.

This year's National Officer elections were the first to be conducted by OMOV (One Member One Vote). Numerous members complained on social media about the delay in sending electronic ballots, with many claiming they did not receive their ballot at all.

No data have been released on the number of votes cast. Many on the left suspect it is likely to be little more than a couple of hundred. For an organisation supposedly representing tens of thousands of students, this is a damning indictment. Swathes of members were ex-

cluded from the vote and from conference due to a lack of information about how to affiliate their club to Labour Students. To apply for affiliation Labour Clubs must ask ten individual members to send proof of their club membership to Labour Students. Each club must reaffiliate each academic year.

Smaller clubs are barred from participating. Many larger clubs were unable to affiliate as they were not told about this requirement until the deadline had passed. Others have been disaffiliated for reasons include supposed breaches of the Labour Students constitution. Surrey Labour Students were disaffiliated in 2016 on the grounds they were affiliated to the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

In other words, National Officers gerrymander the system to bar left-dominated clubs. Five out of seven Scottish Labour clubs were barred from attending conference and voting, alongside many others including Leeds Beckett, Essex, Liverpool and Bath.

The position of North West rep remains unfilled as there are no affiliated Labour clubs in the region. The candidate for the Northern region could not get the required two

nominations, as Durham is the only affiliated club.

The left candidate for Yorkshire and the Humber lost to "Reopen Nominations", despite running unopposed. The right wing candidate for Vice Chair Campaigns and Policy beat the left candidate, despite receiving only six club nominations to the latter's thirty-one.

In the wake of these results, several Labour clubs have voted to disaffiliate. These clubs come from across the political spectrum, citing concerns with transparency and having no confidence in the organisation.

The anger is good. However, for as long as Labour Students is seen as the official voice of Labour in the student movement and in the NUS, left-wingers should stay and fight.

Left wing clubs should come together to form a national network and call a conference to make plans for joint campaigning and organising while ramping up the pressure for democracy in Labour Students.

Soft-left fails to fight shutting-down of democracy in National Union of Students: read more at bit.ly/s-l-nus

Germany's "left populists" collapse

By Ann Field

Sahra Wagenknecht has resigned as a member of the Executive Committee of Germany's "left-populist" movement Aufstehen (Rise Up) and as co-chair of the parliamentary fraction of Die Linke.

Rise Up is the German equivalent of Momentum. Die Linke has its origins in the post-DDR Communist Party, which subsequently merged with a breakaway from the SPD (German equivalent of the Labour Party).

Wagenknecht has cited health reasons for her double resignation. But more fundamental political considerations are also in play.

Rise Up was launched with great fanfare just six months ago. It would bring together members of Die Linke, the SPD and the German Greens. It would reach out to the alienated (read: right-wing voters). It would challenge austerity on the streets. It would inspire millions.

The movement was consciously designed as left-populist. But since left populism is a contradiction in terms, it was simply populist. With Wagenknecht as its figurehead, it took a decidedly anti-immigration and anti-refugee stance.

It also lacked democratic structures. Membership was free and involved no more than providing an e-mail address. Some 170,000 people did so. Thereafter it was steadily downhill.

The e-mail addresses were not

the property of the movement but of a separate legal entity, also called Rise Up. Local groups could not establish themselves without the permission of the legal entity. And they could e-mail their own members only through the legal entity, which was also the owner of the Rise Up Facebook page.

Although it was run by the founders of Rise Up, including Wagenknecht herself, that legal entity was not, and was designed not to be, accountable to Rise Up members.

Few "big names" joined Rise Up. Most of those who did were "big names" from the past. Rise Up got round this problem by arguing that it was first and foremost a grassroots movement of "ordinary people".

Rise Up garnered little support among Green and SPD activists, and only marginally more among Die Linke activists. It got round this problem by arguing that this showed just how out of touch the established political parties were with "ordinary people".

And it attracted little support for its public activities. In fact, as a top-down creation, it lacked a focus for any activities. Not even Rise Up could get round that problem.

The public face of Rise Up was always Wagenknecht. And the disappearance of that public face will almost certainly be followed by the disappearance of Rise Up. Some of its leading figures have already publicly written off any future for the organisation.

Others have appealed for local Rise Up groups to maintain their existence and act autonomously. (Given their inability to contact other local groups, this is making a virtue out of necessity.) But even they are clearly deeply demoralised.

The effective collapse of Rise Up will also impact on future political developments in Die Linke after Wagenknecht's resignation as the co-chair of its parliamentary fraction.

There has been a longstanding conflict between the Wagenknecht-Bartsch leadership of the parliamentary fraction and the Kipping-Riexinger party leadership. Wagenknecht's resignation has seriously weakened the former.

The collapse of Rise Up has weakened it even further. In its brief heyday Rise Up represented the threat of a new political party, primarily at the expense of Die Linke. But, like Wagenknecht herself, that threat has now gone.

Some Die Linke parliamentarians see the double resignation as an opportunity for revenge. According to Norbert Muller: "Rise Up has paralysed our party for a year and a half. Those responsible cannot simply creep away and pretend that nothing has happened."

What impact this will have on the future political orientation of Die Linke is as yet unclear. But with the European elections and three federal-state elections looming, the day of reckoning will not be long delayed.

Telling the truth about wars



Review

Simon Nelson reviews 'A Private War'

The career of the journalist Marie Colvin was fairly unique. She covered most of the major conflicts of the 1990s and 2000s up until her death in Homs, Syria in 2012.

Her articles in the *Sunday Times* brought across some of the horrors of war, not just the conflicts between political factions and leaders but the stories of mass graves in Fallujah, and the near starvation of internally displaced Tamils. Until her death she may be remembered as one of the last journalists to interview Colonel Gaddafi before he was killed in the Libyan conflict of 2011.

The film, based on a *Vanity Fair* article, "Marie Colvin's Private War", runs chronologically through Colvin's work. Despite the title it really goes into only sparse detail about what drove or motivated her.

Her suffering from PTSD, losing an eye in Sri Lanka, such things are all covered, but you get only a glimpse into what if anything was Colvin's own "private war". She self medicates with alcohol, and we see the awkward relationships she had with several men in her life.

HOMS

The film implies that her work was the downfall of her relationships.

Perhaps the men may also hold some blame? The film doesn't go into that.

Rosamund Pike as Colvin and Jamie Dornan as her photographer Paul Conroy hold the film together, and their performances sometimes make up for clichéd material and derivative dialogue. Do all journalists constantly relate to each other how important it is that people are aware of the reality of any given situation?

Nonetheless the scenes in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and finally Syria are very powerful. Her determination to stay in Homs, against all sensible advice, to document what was happening there, cannot be demonstrated more starkly than by the fact she also lost her life at the hands of the Assad regime. 30,000 others also died, but she was specifically targeted because of her reporting from the frontline.

Despite its shortcomings, 'A Private War' is worth seeing. It is a reminder that without journalists like Colvin many of the greatest crimes of dictators, armies and governments would go unreported and unseen by the eyes of the world.

Special-needs workers strike for pay

By Janine Booth

On Tuesday 19 March, Hackney's special-needs transport workers struck to demand shift allowances.

Two dozen strikers joined the picket line at the depot in Leyton, and were in good spirits despite the drizzle. Pickets included both passenger escorts and drivers, and the majority were black and ethnic minority women.

Only four workers had broken the strike, which was the first of six named days of action.

Hackney Labour Party activists attended the picket line and told strikers that although the Labour Council is frustrating them, rank-and-file members support them.

Labour members now plan to propose emergency motions to next week's Constituency Labour Party meetings calling on the Council to settle the dispute in favour of the workers' claim.

The workers provide the service that transports children with special educational needs and disabilities to school and other provision. They work "split shifts", with a long, unpaid break between the two halves of their working day.



Through their union, Unite, they are claiming compensation of £50 per week for doing this tiring and antisocial work pattern, which trade unionists have succeeded in scrapping elsewhere.

The Council is refusing the claim on the grounds that the workers are covered by the "Green Book" of nationally-negotiated local authority working conditions, but the union argues that allowances can be

awarded locally.

Council managers held a meeting with workers, but only to remind them that it gives them benefits such as theatre tickets and gym membership, as though these were an adequate substitute!

If the Council does not back down, there will be further strikes on 26, 27 and 28 March, and then on 2 and 4 April.

Deliveroo couriers plan April strikes

By Zack, Bristol Couriers' Network – IWGB

Deliveroo couriers in locations across the country are planning more strikes in April, demanding higher pay in a co-ordinated wave of "rolling strikes". This follows some very partial victories in a few places.

Couriers are falsely categorised as "self-employed independent contractors" rather than "self-employed limb (b) workers" or "employees", either of which would more accurately reflect our dependency on and relationship to Deliveroo. This miscategorisation allows Deliveroo to deprive us of basic workers' rights, including minimum wage. Pay is low, insecure, and in many places has been decreasing.

Since October we have struck five times in Bristol, three of those times in January and February. These strikes have increasingly inspired other places to organise and also strike, and both February strikes were timed to coincide with strikes in other places.

We know that the strikes have significantly impacted Deliveroo in Bristol and elsewhere. Likewise, almost all active riders recognise the problems with Deliveroo, and the large majority support the demands and strikes, with a majority having participated: either joining protests on the day or choosing to not work but stay at home.

On the three strikes this year, Deliveroo has offered pay "boosts" to try to tempt people to strikebreak, keeping them active for several

days afterwards – an immediate small win. We've forced longer-term concessions from them in Bristol. They seem to have more-or-less implemented a hiring freeze, one of our demands. Average pay per delivery seems to be slowly increasing again, no longer decreasing. Nottingham, who've also struck powerfully, had their minimum pay per delivery increased back to the level it had been at in Autumn.

By giving these small concessions, Deliveroo is hoping to placate couriers and prevent future strikes. We must not and will not be bought off so easily.

We are becoming increasingly co-ordinated nationally. Couriers in at least 14 different towns and cities have been organising, with strikes in at least 10 this year. Couriers from most of these places participated in a joint meeting in early March – almost all IWGB union members – and we've convened an IWGB national Deliveroo committee. Most places have very similar or identical core demands, deliberately.

We decided to experiment with a national programme of "rolling strikes", where different places would strike on different weeks. This means that Deliveroo is constantly being hit in one place or another, even without us yet escalating to weekly strikes anywhere. It also allows us to more easily support and attend each others' strikes. It's a flexible strategy, and some places closer to each other have discussed striking on joint dates. Multiple strikes are already planned for April.

In Bristol since mid-February we have been focussing on building and consolidating our central organisation and recruiting to the IWGB, doing phone banking and the like. We now have a significant and growing number of members, and are bringing in more organisers. On Wednesday 25th we will have our next big meeting to plan future waves of strike action, and to discuss the question of "worker status".

BCN-IWGB's core organisers and committee members – and the IWGB Couriers' and Logistics branch as a whole – recognise that our categorisation as non-workers is false and harmful. Indeed, IWGB is fighting ongoing legal battles over this, which if they win will automatically give us – at the least – holiday, sick and pension pay, and collective bargaining rights.

However, Deliveroo have waged a propaganda war, dishonestly claiming that if we were categorised as workers it would necessarily make us less "flexible". This need not be true. Unfortunately many couriers have been persuaded by and spread this, and previously even some people who have attempted to support courier organising.

For this reason it is an important discussion for us to have, and hopefully eventually we can include it in our core demands in Bristol and elsewhere.

We need money for our strike hardship fund, to support those most in need to be able to strike.

• **Strike fund:** bit.ly/deloo-s

Rail: disputes sidetracked?

By a Northern Rail driver

In early February, the long-running disputes between the rail union RMT and rail companies over Driver Only Operation (DOO) of trains seemed to be nearing victory.

They moved into negotiations on the principle that guards' jobs would be kept.

But, over a month on, all is quiet. There is little feedback from the union leadership to members.

At Merseyrail, the dispute went into negotiations on the principle of keeping guards' jobs as long ago as August 2018. We expected an actual settlement when a meeting was held recently between RMT negotiators and Merseyrail bosses under the auspices of the government arbitration service ACAS.

But not yet. For months now Merseyrail have had the RMT in talks with scant information filtering out, even though the RMT members in Merseyrail have been exceptionally strong and have had exceptional solidarity from ASLEF drivers.

The length of time that a deal is taking to finalise on Merseyrail suggests that the victory on safety-critical guards' jobs may come at a disappointingly heavy price.

At SWR, where strikes have also been suspended for talks, members have had no information from the

union on the progress of talks for over two weeks.

ACAS Chair Brendan Barber has invited RMT to talks with Northern Rail on the basis of "a conductor on every train", with discussion to cover "future modes of operation" and to include "other relevant stakeholders". The talks are ongoing, but little to no information is filtering out.

The danger in all these disputes is that momentum is lost and talks are dragged until weariness allows unacceptable settlements.

Rail companies are going to want the RMT to concede as much as possible, as the thin end of a wedge to be driven further later. The drivers' union ASLEF, on Northern Rail at least, appears to be trying to wear the face of a trade union publicly while privately positioning itself to co-operate with the employer in transferring parts of the guard's job to the driver in return for improved pay or conditions.

There are no strike dates currently scheduled at any of the franchises, nor — as far as anyone knows — have any deadlines been set for the talks to produce meaningful progress or risk triggering more strikes.

The stand of railworkers on this issue has been absolutely steadfast. So why are the union leaders being so "soft"?

Children's centres fight seeks link-up

By Katy Dollar

The campaign to save the children's centres in Lambeth, south London, continues despite the Labour council's vote to go ahead with closures.

The next step is a demonstration on Sunday 24 March, from 10.30 at Windrush Square, Brixton.

A recent report by the UK's "big five" charities has confirmed that our children's services are in crisis. Tory austerity is falling hardest on the country's poorest and most vulnerable families, at a time when demand for services is rising and more and more children need vital support in their early years.

Every one of the 1,000 children's centres that have been closed pro-

vided not just a lifeline to families, but a space for communities to develop.

The closure of children's centres — just like the closure of libraries — is part of a wider process of cuts which has seen the gradual elimination of public spaces and services in which people from various backgrounds can live and learn alongside each other. The result is entrenched social segregation, and, for many parents, social isolation.

Yet dozens of trade union branches and community campaigns are fighting back against cuts to children's services.

A meeting to discuss linking up local campaigns into a national fightback has been called for Wednesday 27 March, 6pm at Portcullis House: bit.ly/27-pc.

£13,476 so far. Closing in on target

This week we got two sizeable donations for our fund appeal — £1000 from Ian, £700 from Eddie.

Add in £107.40 collected by comrades handing over accumulations of small change and £10 from sales of our 1919 booklet. That brings our running total to £13,476, only £1,524 short of our £15,000 target.

We've been able to pay back the loan from a far-from-well-off supporter which financed the printing of our *Rosa Luxemburg* and *Remain and Rebel* pamphlets.

We're able to look at buying "new" (second-hand) computers

for the two members of our office staff who at present have to make do with "borrowing" the desk of someone else not in the office on a particular day, or bringing a laptop of their own.

And we'll be able to cover the bill for printing *Women's Fightback* as a pull-out inside *Solidarity* 498 without nerve-wracking financial juggling.

All that is good. Not enough, given the scale of what we need to do as pretty much the only revolutionary socialist organisation fighting to stop Brexit and to rally the left to purge itself of antisemitism.

Help us expand!
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For a workers' government

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Students go for system change, not climate change



Climate

By Workers' Liberty activists

The best guess is that one and half million students, in over 120 countries, struck on Friday 15 March to demand that their governments start emergency action on climate change.

In London, the central rally of school students in Parliament Square was 4,000 or more. Everyone we talked with said there was no ongoing organisation in their school for the walkout. They'd found out about it on social media and come with their friends.

There were also sizeable groups of university students at Parliament Square.

The National Union of Students had officially supported the action, but did nothing to push along the university mobilisation, which was all down to campus activists.

London Young Labour "officially" mobilised for 15 March on social media, but had no visible presence at Parliament Square as Young Labour — no banners, leaflets, sign-up sheets, stalls that we could see.

In Liverpool there were about 800 at the city-centre rally, with university students leading the chants but lots of school students.

Newcastle's rally had about 400. In Newcastle, a "student assembly" (called by an individual student) after the rally drew about 30

or 40. There was action in many smaller cities and towns — in Gloucester, 130 school students turned out for a rally, and an older sympathiser said it was the biggest demonstration in the city he'd seen since he was 17.

Gloucester students are in touch with the organisers of the Stroud and Cheltenham strikes to organise a county-wide meeting.

In Australia, the student protests were estimated to be ten times bigger than those in November which started this global wave of activity.

Turnouts were estimated at 40,000 in Melbourne and 30,000 in Sydney.

In Brisbane, Queen's Gardens in the city centre was full of student protesters — that's an area equal to Trafalgar Square in London, which is officially reckoned to hold 20,000 people.

Noticeable in Brisbane, and maybe in some other centres, was that the biggest contingents were from state schools with somewhat better-off catchments (Kenmore, The Gap, and the state's maths-specialist selective school). In Australia about 40% of secondary students are in fee-paying schools, and some of those turned out too.

There were more specific demands in Australia: stop the Adani coal mine in central Queensland, no new coal or gas, and 100% renewables by 2030.

Australian unions gave strong support to the student rallies.

"System change, not climate change", and more explicitly socialist politics, got a good reception in many areas.

The push towards climate disas-

ter comes from capitalists wanting to make the biggest, quickest profits from cheaper fossil-fuel energy sources.

To stop them we need democratic and social control over energy production and distribution and over strategic industries like transport.

And that needs socialism. And socialism needs organising.

Hugh Edwards adds a report from Italy:

Against the background of an Italy which had been rendered increasingly passive before the malodorous xenophobic and racist hatred of its coalition government, hundreds of thousands of school and university students along the peninsula marched on 15 March in militant protest on climate change.

A hundred thousand in Milan, 60,000 in Torino, 50,000 in Rome, Florence, 30,000 in Bologna and in Napoli, with thousands more in the streets and squares of the smaller towns up and down the country.

The first of the "stars" of the now-governing "Five Star" movement was meant to symbolise the environment and its protection. But as soon as the "government of change" assumed power, it reneged on commitments to abandon a vastly expensive and pollutant pipeline project in the gulf of Puglia, and to close the country's notoriously-polluting largest steelworks at Taranto.

(The promise was also to construct, under public ownership, a new pollution-free installation and to protecting the livelihoods of the



workforce).

This, in a country where, as its leading scientists have again and again pointed up, and its record of geological and hydrological disasters and tragedies underlines, is exceptionally vulnerable to climate change.

The young protesters' ebullient affirmation of international struggle against what the Italian government and its similars do and what they represent cannot but recharge the struggle for socialism in this present moment of political retreat.

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