



& Workers' Liberty **Solidarity**

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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FIGHT THE TORIES' HARD BREXIT



Immigration controls are part of the means states use to construct and maintain their power.

When those states are administered by authoritarians and racists, as in the case of the current US administration, borders can be used to propagate and entrench their racist ideology, by directly applying controls to people from particular countries, of particular religions, or with brown skin. But in all cases, even when the nationalist ideology is less clear, borders and immigration controls are tools of division. They cannot be other than mechanisms for discriminating against people on the basis of their national origin.

This is why Workers' Liberty, and many other revolutionary socialists throughout history, oppose immigration controls and fight for open borders.

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WHY WE SAY "OPEN BORDERS"

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Four London cinemas will strike on 11 February

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The democracy of others



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Any future for the steel industry?

By John Cunningham

I was born in a steel town – Stocksbridge, about 9 miles west of Sheffield.

The steelworks were huge and employed at its peak 6,500 workers. The sirens which marked the start and end of shifts, the roar of furnaces, the clanging of shunting trains and machinery, were constant background noise to my early years.

However, as the poet W H Auden once wrote, “The past is another country”. On my infrequent returns to my birthplace I am always struck by how the place has changed. An eerie quiet hangs over everything now, and the river, which once had the colour of oxtail soup and an indescribably vile stench, is remarkably clean. Steel is still produced — although vast acres of the site (now part of the Tata group) stand empty and silent and only about 600 workers are employed in total.

I have been told that of the remaining workforce none actually come from Stocksbridge. They all travel in from outside. It is a story which can be repeated up and down the country.

In 1971 the steel industry employed 320,000. Today that figure stands at around 18,000. The recent closures at Redcar and the ongoing uncertainty about the future of steelmaking in Port Talbot are constant reminders, if any were needed, about the precarious position of what is left of the UK steel industry.

It is a depressing picture and it was therefore not with any great expectations that I opened the report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Steel and Related Metal Industries: ‘Steel 2020: Forging a Future for the British Steel industry’.

The report is certainly important reading for anyone concerned for the future of the steel industry and the steel communities’ remaining jobs, but there is a sense that we have been here before something that the use of irritatingly stupid jargon such as “catapult” centres and “reshoring” cannot disguise.

Central to the report is its condemnation of the dumping of Chinese steel in the UK. Put simply the Chinese produce so much steel that they cannot sell it via the usual market mechanisms. It is sold at a knockdown price so that Chinese producers get some kind of return.

The writers of the report wax indignant about this “illegal” policy (as if the Chinese authorities are going to lose any sleep over this!) and call for a “level playing field”. A more feeble and useless response couldn’t be imagined — one of the aims of all capitalist enterprises is precisely to create an uneven playing field and the Chinese with their state directed enterprises are no exception.

In the past the role of the Chinese was played by the Japanese. I remember well a steelworkers’ rally



Anti-Chinese dumping: response is unrealistic and a distraction

in Stocksbridge in the late 1970s when the Regional Secretary of the then Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW), George Caborn (father of former Labour MP Richard Caborn), thundered on in his inimitable Stalinist fashion about the “Japs” dumping their steel in the UK and calling for tariffs to protect “our” jobs. It went down well, in fact it raised the roof but the result was to deflect from the urgent need for the various steel unions and the plants up to unite in a single workers’ response to the threats of closure.

But the steel unions (notably the ISTC — Iron and Steel Trades Confederation — and the AUEW) never developed a united response and left each plant to fight individually against closure — a hopeless situation which led to inevitable defeat and demoralisation. On a smaller scale this is roughly what is happening today.

ENERGY

There are calls in the report for a much needed reduction in energy costs — steel production uses huge amounts of electricity.

On a wider point the UK does not have a national energy policy and the report wisely calls for a 10 year energy plan. A reduction in business rates is also advocated citing the case of Port Talbot, where £200 million was spent on a new blast furnace which resulted in business rates shooting up. The response of Tata was to lay off 400 workers.

Research and Development, as the Report states, lags behind many other steel producing countries and this has been a long-standing problem in the UK. Tata, it is noted, has centralised its research facilities in the Netherlands

Over everything hangs the spectre of Brexit. What, for example, happens to the European Emissions Trading Scheme? Currently

52% of the UK’s steel exports go to the EU. What is going to happen to this? Or what about the 12% that is exported to the USA; Trump’s protectionist inclinations may make this unsustainable. Although the drop in the value of the pound is good for exports, it has also raised the cost of raw materials: coal, coke, ore, and energy.

The report calls on the government to secure the best possible access to the Single Market, but the UK might not even be in it! The government is also urged to make steel a priority in future Brexit talks; But there is no indication that it is listening or that it gives a toss about the steel industry.

There is no mention of the rationalisation of the steel industry, although it is difficult to see how many of the measures advocated by the Report can be co-ordinated and implemented without it. Tata or Corus are interested in their profit margins and not much else.

In the late 70s and in the 80s there were attempts, some of them by militants in the steel industry associated with the forerunner of this newspaper, to formulate a workers’ response to the crisis in the steel industry (a National Action Committee was formed for a time).

Although it is late in the day, steelworkers in alliance with local people and Labour Party activists can still come together and try to work out a united, UK-wide workers response. This Report provides some much-needed information and some of its recommendations are desirable, but there is no strategy here.

As far as I am aware the government has yet to respond to the report and, I for one, am not holding my breath.

• The author worked at the British Steel Corporation, Corby [1969-71] and Hadfields, Sheffield [1976-78]

Unlike many other Parliamentarians Corbyn has been a consistent ally of LGBT people

LGBT rights: Corbyn’s critics are wrong

Q-NEWS

By Elizabeth Butterworth

At a recent LGBT History Month event, Jeremy Corbyn said that “Our defence of you is a defence of all of humanity and the right of people to practise the life they want to practise, rather than be criminalised, brutalised and murdered, simply because they chose to be gay, they chose to be lesbian, they were LGBT in any form.”

News outlets described this as a “gaffe” with some getting up in arms about the idea of homosexuality being a “choice” rather than something people are born with.

There is not enough scientific evidence either way regarding whether being homosexuality is something we are born with, although some geneticists suggest that we may soon discover a “gay gene” or something like it. Certainly homosexuality is not limited to humans and exists in a range of interesting and surprising forms among animals.

Critics have said that saying people “choose” to be gay or lesbian plays into the hands of the peddlers of “conversion therapies”. Surely, though, this only works if conversion therapy, and therefore straightness, is seen as something desirable and preferable to being LGBT+.

Zak Thomas writes in the *Independent* online, “Trying to promote some one-size-fits-all reasoning for our existence so straight people can understand it reinforces the idea that we have to socially manage ourselves to be accepted”. By criticising the idea that sexual orientation might be a choice, “we imply

that if given the option, we would choose to be straight”.

Unlike Milo Yiannopoulos, the Trump-supporting, self-proclaimed “dangerous faggot”, I do not wish I were straight, or see it as “aberrant” and I don’t think my fellow homos should “get back in the closet”.

But the liberal “born this way”, “love wins” rhetoric is also dangerous and ironically exclusionary of the “wrong type” of gays.

It’s great for those who want to lead a relatively conventional married or monogamous life, but not so much for gay men who cottage, HIV positive people in our community, LGBT sex workers, self-identifying queer or questioning people: roughly speaking, anyone whose existence lies outside that of what can be easily defined and measured according to straight standards.

In his speech, Corbyn also recounted how he had, as a councillor in the 1970s, worked with others to physically defend a Gay Centre from National Front fascists. His voting record on LGBT rights, unlike that of many MPs including Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron, speaks for itself.

I have no doubt that Corbyn “misspoke” when he said people “choose” to be gay or lesbian. But so what if we did? It may be a mix of nature, nurture and even (gasp!) choice, but that doesn’t make it illegitimate, it doesn’t mean LGBT people can’t be understood, accepted and equal to cisgendered straights.

If being a lesbian was a choice for me, or if I was influenced by those around me, then I still would’ve chosen it. I don’t want to be straight. And perhaps that kind of talk is what Corbyn’s critics are really afraid of.

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Alt-right threat opposed at Berkeley

By Simon Nelson

Milo Yiannopoulos is an editor at Breitbart, a news site of the so-called alt-right.

He is a self-described "super villain", a viciously right-wing internet troll who publicly attacks women, black people, Muslims, immigrants. Unsurprisingly he is a great supporter of Donald Trump. So bad is he, he is permanently banned from Twitter.

He is currently making a hugely controversial speaker tour, and hit the mainstream news when his planned appearance at UC Berkeley was cancelled due to the protests against it.

There is now a debate on whether this cancellation was an attack on free speech. The alt-right have gone into online overdrive, attacking their opponents for being unable to handle opposing views, calling "liberals" illiberal etc. But in the age of social media and Yiannopoulos's penchant for making YouTube videos, as well as the format of Breitbart itself, this is not so much a free speech restriction as a question of his access to certain platforms.

Media attention has focused on anarchist "black bloc" protestors as



the instigators of the cancelled appearance, their destruction of property and the violent response of the police. This ignores the fact that the black bloc was only "successful" because they were protected by a much larger and broader demonstration.

Yiannopoulos denies it, but in the build up to his appearance it was believed he would provide details of undocumented migrants studying at Berkeley. The college is one of many sanctuary campuses that has policies against the removal of undocumented migrants without a warrant and non-cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Whether Yiannopoulos intended to do this or not, he can be seen on video at previous talks displaying details for ICE and encouraging

people to, as he called it, protect "women and homosexuals." In the same talk, he shouts down several Muslim women who heckle him, tells them where the airport is and then jokes that actually that is the last place "we want you." He has previously named and projected pictures of a trans student who he mocked. And he incited his Twitter followers to harass the black actress Leslie Jones.

In this context, stopping his appearance was argued as a case where a direct threat was being made on students. That seems reasonable.

The US media has said this case in Berkeley was a travesty, due to its birthplace of the Free Speech Movement in the 1960s. That is wrongheaded.

As the International Socialist Organization have said, "this accepts the upside-down story of the free speech struggle sanctioned by the university administration that was opposed to the struggle."

"The fight for free speech at Berkeley was never about 'dialogue', but militant demonstrations and direct action to overcome the university's restrictions on civil rights activism."

A human slaughterhouse: inside Assad's Syria

By Gerry Bates

A report by Amnesty International released on 7 February 2017 says that between 5,000 and 13,000 people were murdered in a secret prison in Syria from 2011 to 2016.

Inmates at the prison were mostly civilians who supported the opposition to President Bashar al Assad. The information comes from interviews with 84 people who were former prisoners, guards, judges and doctors.

The report describes killing and torture on an industrial scale, "trials" lasting between one and three minutes, mass hangings of between 50 and 80 people that took place twice a week. The hangings were conducted extremely cruelly, with those who weighed less taking hours to die.

The beatings that took place were extremely severe, and psychological torture was also employed, including forcing prisoners to rape each other. Prisoners were also denied food and water. Many suffered from scabies, but were denied healthcare.

Amnesty says that it is likely that "thousands more" people have been murdered by the regime since 2016, as there is nothing to suggest that the practices have been stopped: the field court is still in operation and people are still being transferred to Saydnaya prison. A former guard stated in his interview: "Saydnaya is the end of life, the end of humanity." The accounts of Saydnaya are reminiscent of the accounts of survivors of Auschwitz.

This is not the first report of its kind on the practices of the Syrian regime. As the report notes, people have been arbitrarily arrested, tortured and "disappeared" since the 1980s under former President Hafez al Assad. Since the popular uprising in 2011, and as the crisis in Syria worsened "tens of thousands" of citizens have been arrested and detained.

Viewed in this context, the soft approach of much of the British

left to the Russian and Syrian governments' actions is both inexcusable and sickening.

In December last year, Peter Tatchell wrote in the *Independent*: "Stop the War Coalition has betrayed the Syrian people who protested peacefully for democracy in 2011 and have been massacred by Assad ever since. The principles of internationalist solidarity have been dumped. Responding to critics it its own ranks, the coalition belatedly, and somewhat mutedly, condemned the Assad and Putin bombing of civilians but has never organised a march against them."

"Indeed, although quick to demonstrate in opposition to any and all Western interventions, the coalition has failed to even once rally against the military intervention in Syria by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah."

STALINISED

Workers' Liberty have been a long-standing critic of the left's Stalinised "two-pole" view on imperialism.

Chris Nineham's response as Vice Chair of Stop the War Coalition was that the organisation had to "focus on what our government is doing" as protests wouldn't "make the blind bit of difference" to what Putin does to prop up Assad's regime. Yet STWC protests against Trump, another leader whom Brits do not have democratic control over.

Tatchell writes, "STWC has refused requests to have Syrian democrats and left-wingers opposed to Assad speak at its Syria events; but it has offered a platform to Syrians Issa Chaer and Mother Agnes, who have respectively defended the Damascus regime and claimed that allegations of chemical attacks by Assad's forces are fabricated."

The report from Amnesty shows the extent of the brutality of the Assad administration. The left should stand against this torture and murder of Syrians and not be silent.

Romanian anti-corruption battles

By Keith Road

The attempts by the Romanian government to weaken anti-corruption laws have been pushed back by mass protests.

A proposed decree would have lifted criminal sanctions from public officials including MPs who benefitted from abuse of office, if their gains were less than 200,000 Romanian leu (£38,000). The government said this was necessary to comply with anti-corruption court rulings. Opponents believe this will just legalise corruption up to that level. Romania is ranked as the fifth most corrupt country in the EU.

The Chief Prosecutor told the *Financial Times* that had the decree been passed, the fight against corruption would have become "irrelevant."

When Romania joined the EU in 2007 it was given specific conditions to deal with corruption; both the Romanian Direcția Națională Anticorupție (DNA), the anti-corruption agency responsible for indicting corrupt individuals, and the EU Commission believed there had been substantial progress made.

The Social Democratic Party (PSD) who govern Romania had something to gain from the decree. Their leader Liviu Dragnea, currently banned from holding a cabinet post but still allowed to be speaker of the lower house, is under investigation for corruption.

Protestors have been backed and joined on the streets by opposition



politicians, most notably Klaus Iohannis, the President and formerly a member of the National Liberal Party (his membership is suspended whilst he is in the Presidency).

DEMONSTRATIONS

Since the government announced its plans, hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets, with demonstrations in over 70 cities bringing almost half a million people out.

These are the largest public gatherings since the fall of Ceausescu and the collapse of Stalinism.

Frans Timmermans, vice-president of the European Commission said, "The efforts in Romania, I must underline this, are phenomenal, really very good progress. So why would you in the final metres of a marathon turn back and go the other way again?"

The Social Democrat government was elected at the end of December 2016. It had promised a raft of changes; tax cuts, public salary and pension increases, and spending promises. The average wage in Romania is the equivalent of about £5,000 and many young people leave the country to find work across the EU.

The decision to amend corruption law does indeed seem to have taken place at a time when Romania was successfully convicting corrupt public officials. In the first eight months of 2016 court cases took place involving 777 indicted defendants, including ministers, MPs, and judges.

DNA had indicted more officials from the PSD than any other party, and the party hierarchy has accused the DNA of political bias.

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Demonising the “hard left”

By Simon Nelson

Christine Shawcroft’s article ‘Just a Mo(mentum)!’ in the latest issue of *Labour Briefing* (the “original” *Briefing*, not the magazine of the same name put out by the LRC) is the first and only attempt to give political justification for the coup on 10 January in which a few people round the Momentum office declared all the organisation’s democratic structures abolished.

The coup-makers also imposed a new constitution in which Momentum members are now voting (through a voting system which enables the largest minority to sweep the board) only for 12 out of 28 or 32 places on a committee which will meet (or “meet”, electronically) maybe only four times a year, and much-talked-about online votes will be able to block office or committee decisions only in extreme cases.

Shawcroft’s argument is that from the very first Momentum National Committee meeting in February 2016, “ultra-left [elsewhere in that issue of *Briefing*, ‘hard left’] groups made it clear that while Corbynistas wanted to build support for Jeremy and his policies in the Party, they were only interested in building their own little group and wanted to use Momentum to do so.”

Since the only left groups involved in Momentum are Workers’ Liberty and Socialist Appeal, and Socialist Appeal has had a low profile, this comes down to saying that Momentum’s structures had to be destroyed in order to save the city from us.

BEHAVIOUR

Shawcroft cites nothing specific as amiss or unconstructive about the behaviour of our (few) comrades at the February 2016 NC, but describes December’s Momentum NC sarcastically as when we really “excelled ourselves”.

There were challenges over the agenda and about voting rights being given to various “organisations” which either did not back Momentum or were apparently not really organisations at all (these, for example, included Jon Lansman’s blog!) The challenges came from many more than us. I suspect Shawcroft’s real objection is not the procedural issues, but the fact that the NC voted, at last, to make definite arrangements for the Momentum conference agreed in principle at a May 2016 NC meeting (and cancelled by the 10 January coup).

Yes, we have our own ideas and we seek to convince activists to share those ideas and work with us to promote them. That helps, not hinders, the building of a broad, inclusive, and active Momentum. Our people have been among the initiators and best builders of some of the most active and regularly-meeting Momentum groups.

Shawcroft portrays everyone else in Momentum apart from us as “Corbynistas [who only] wanted to build support for Jeremy and his policies in the Party”. This faux-naïf picture of people who pledge never to have a thought about politics not previously approved by Jeremy Corbyn is untrue. Momentum, as you’d expect, includes a wide variety of political slants.

For example, in the first months of Momentum, we and others had to wage a battle (eventually successful) against people organised around the Momentum office for Momentum to be Labour-oriented rather than a diffuse “social movement”. Later, we had to wage a battle (in more-or-less alliance with

the office people that time, but with only partial success) for Momentum to distance itself from left antisemitism. As for procedural wrangling, the bulk of that, since the start, has come from the office faction. The same people repeatedly “sat on” or blocked committee decisions, and effectively resisted pressure from members, including us, for Momentum to organise a presence at 2016 Labour Party conference.

Shawcroft says that Momentum was set up in the “euphoria of victory” and something “new and different” was in the air. This seems to be shorthand for: Momentum should not have the democratic structures (meetings, votes, committees, conferences) that have been used in the labour movement and Labour Party since their foundation. Modern communication methods are good, but they should facilitate rather than trash the idea of a democratic grass-roots movement.

A huge diversity of people had to be drawn into activity: on that we agree. The MPs who were the initial sponsors “under pressure” agreed to call a national committee. Shawcroft does not mention this, but the original plan was for a committee made up by co-option from the office. There was a small but significant rebellion in Momentum groups — and amongst those volunteering in the Momentum office — and hastily-arranged regional meetings elected delegates to this National Committee.

That NC, in February 2016, elected a Steering Committee to oversee the day to day work of the organisation. The plan was that the National Committee should meet regularly and a conference should be scheduled.

Shawcroft says that all those structures were temporary, and that no membership existed at this point. (Why? Not because of us, but because the office had set up Momentum in October 2015 without creating any way for people to join it, or any plan for democratic structures).

Indeed, those initial structures were temporary and inadequate. So we were in favour of a conference for Momentum which would

have voted on a constitution and some basic policy and campaign priorities. From that we would have had a properly functioning organisation and would have been able to move forward and help to transform the Labour Party and argue for socialist politics.

We were never dogmatic about the details of the conference or the constitution, but the discussion was quickly obstructed by people around the Momentum office who opposed any conference which would take votes, and argued that Momentum should never debate or vote on policy. They claimed to stand for decision-making via online one-member-one-vote. We always accepted some online voting, and the imposed constitution, which gives only minimal powers to online voting, makes clear that was never the real issue.

VOTES

Shawcroft, however, argues that “the usual suspects”, the “ultra-left groups”, opposed e-democracy because we can only win votes in small meetings and have no appeal beyond a supposedly unrepresentative minority of members.

Of course, being on the Labour Party NEC and an already well-known figure on the Labour Left makes it easier for Christine Shawcroft to win in an online election than new young activists who lack access to the media.

A good thing about the article is that it states (where the imposed constitution is ambiguous) that those unjustly expelled, suspended or auto-excluded from the Labour Party will not be expelled from Momentum.

Seemingly unironically, the article ends by stating that: “the days of a small clique grabbing hold of the steering wheel are over.” Given that Momentum will now operate day-to-day as a limited company in the hands of its directors, including Christine Shawcroft, this appears to be far from the truth.

The scare-mongering in the article is all along the lines that everything would be fine if not for the “ultra-left”, the “hard left”, or the “Trotskyists”. It seeks to “criminalise” all those who argue for greater debate, for more



A Redbridge Momentum members’ meeting

say for members, and for argued for strategy and campaigning that does not merely mirror support for the Labour leadership.

The arguments are not new, and Christine Shawcroft knows this. She herself was around at the time that Michael Foot debated Sean Matgamna of *Socialist Organiser* about democracy and the class struggle. Matgamna’s words about the witch-hunt of the left in the early 1980s are relevant now.

“The Trotskyists are the enemy of democracy” is — perhaps predictably — the political standard under which Labour’s right and soft left are trying to rally forces for a counter-offensive against the serious left.

“The direct target is the revolutionary left. But the main target is the much bigger serious reformist left... The obvious intention is to confuse and divide the left which, when united, secured victories and which, if it can restore its unity, can still stop and beat back the present right-wing offensive...”

“Today, the Labour right has the union leaderships and the help of the media, but it is very weak among the rank and file of the Labour Party... so the possibility of carrying through a purge of the Labour Party which will not gut it and immobilise it as an electoral force for years ahead depends on splitting the left.”

“The right want to isolate and drive out the Marxists, selectively purge the fighting reformist left, and intimidate the rest of the left.”

Nuclear: not the answer

LETTER

In *Solidarity* 428 “Copeland, Corbyn, and the future of nuclear”, Luke Hardy reminds us that “socialists should deal with facts”.

True, but socialists should deal with all the relevant facts; and in the case of nuclear power, some facts point in one direction, others in another. Hardy highlights many important points, but overlooks other crucial facts.

It is simply not true that we cannot meet our energy needs with green and renewable energy generation, and without nuclear. Reports have been made that detail exactly how it can be done (bit.ly/2ljT8wr). “Smart grid” technology significantly reduces the baseline electricity level needed, and biomass can provide electricity when the sun isn’t shining and the wind isn’t blowing.

Whilst the danger is overplayed especially compared to fossil fuels, we must recognise even with the minimised risks of workers’ control, mistakes do happen and should be factored in.

A crucial often overlooked problem with nuclear fission is that uranium ore is finite. A transition away from fossil fuels which relied heavily on fission will deplete reserves faster. At best, nuclear fission could be a stop-gap during the urgent transition from fossil fuels to renewable. In practice, capitalist governments are using nuclear to avoid proper development of renewable energy, rather than as such a stop-gap. Nuclear fusion in the future would not have this issue, or most others, as the fuel could be extracted from water.

Furthermore, nuclear energy creates more carbon dioxide per unit energy than hydro-electric or large wind turbines, although at current technological levels less than most solar-electric (bit.ly/2ljTcMH). This must be one of the central considerations when planning a transition to green energy.

There is no shortage of money in our society — there is huge wealth in the banks of the rich — so the small differences in cost are insignificant compared to environmental, safety and sustainability questions. Estimates put solar and onshore wind turbines slightly cheaper than nuclear, and offshore slightly



more expensive (bit.ly/2kDIBNH).

Recognition that nuclear fission is better than many on the left see it as does not mean we should necessarily support new nuclear power stations. A democratically planned transition would aim to rapidly move away from fossil fuels with a minimal use of fission, with an aim to ending that as soon as possible.

It seems unlikely that construction of a whole new generation of nuclear power stations would be part of that transition.

Neil Laker and Mike Zubrowski



Why we say “open borders”

Those of us who took to the streets to protest Donald Trump’s “Muslim ban”, a racist restriction on the freedom of movement of people from seven majority-Muslim countries, were protesting against immigration controls.

Not all of us necessarily saw what we were doing in those terms. Many of us were mobilised by something more visceral and instinctive: a raw opposition to the obvious prejudice and injustice implied by the ban, and by many other of Trump’s policies.

That reflexive opposition to injustice is the beginning of much political wisdom, in this and other cases. Our activity can have the best and most effective impact if it extends beyond that to become a movement of political and practical solidarity with migrants and refugees, that opposes deportations and border controls, not just in America but globally – and, in the first place, where we are, in Britain.

Immigration controls are part of the means states use to construct and maintain their power. When those states are administered by authoritarians and racists, as in the case of the current US administration, borders can be used to propagate and entrench their racist ideology, by directly applying controls to people from particular countries, of particular religions, or with brown skin. But in all cases, even when the nationalist ideology is less clear, borders and immigration controls are tools of division. They cannot be other than mechanisms for discriminating against people on the basis of their national origin.

This is why Workers’ Liberty, and many other revolutionary socialists throughout history, oppose immigration controls and fight for open borders. We say that no human being is “illegal”, and that, in a world where the wealth workers create is increasingly free to travel uninhibited across the globe, with no regard for borders, then workers deserve that same freedom.

Limited freedom of movement already exists between some states, and within most. People who live in Sunderland are free to move to London to seek work. No-one in the British labour movement argues that the pressure of migration from the north should

be blamed for pay, terms, and conditions of workers in the south.

Freedom of movement also exists between EU member states. The UK government seems certain to end Britain’s participation in the freedom of movement arrangement as part of the process of withdrawing from the EU. While EU freedom of movement is limited (and, necessarily, defined in a way that privileges European people at the expense of migrants from non-EU countries), throwing up hard borders between European countries would be a victory only for nationalism, and would do nothing to advance the freedoms of non-EU migrants and refugees.

UTOPIAN

Winning genuinely free movement seems a far off and in some ways utopian demand. It challenges much that has become accepted common sense around the issue of immigration, for example the idea that migrants take jobs from, and drive down wages for, local workers.

This “common sense” is endlessly recycled by politicians of all parties, and the media. In a recent speech, Labour MP Lisa Nandy said that free movement between EU member states had “allowed a skilled and mobile population across Europe to gain advantage at the expense of the rest of us.” This is a dressed-up way of saying “they’re coming over here and taking our jobs”.

No evidence supports this. Repeated academic studies show that immigration has an only very minor effect on wages, and that migrants are net contributors to the economy, paying more in taxes than they receive in benefits.

But more than reference to academic data is necessary. What is required is a popular movement, rooted in workplaces and communities, that can confront nationalist arguments around immigration and persuade people of a different world-view: that they have more in common with working-class people of other nations than they do with the rulers of their own nation, and that the right to migrate and live where one likes is a human right. The protests against Trump’s

“Muslim ban” can be the start of such of a movement.

Trumpism, along with the rise of Ukip in the UK and Marine Le Pen’s Front National in France, is a symptom of a particularly vicious tendency within ruling-class ideology, which aims to confiscate popular disaffection with aspects of capitalism and mobilise it for a model of capitalism that retains the hard-nosed profiteering and private-sector-dominance of neo-liberalism, allying it to a backwards-looking, nationalist-racist world-view. In response, much mainstream ruling-class political discourse and activity has lurched rightwards in accommodation. Both Trumpism and more mainstream, “respectable” forms of right-wing capitalist politics involve a morally-obscene indifference to the fate of refugees fleeing war, or economic migrants fleeing poverty.

The instinctive solidarity shown with migrants and refugees by the thousands of people who have taken to the streets in protest against Trump suggest the foundations of a different world-view. To make that world-view – one based on internationalism, solidarity, anti-racism – hegemonic will require much patient work of arguing and discussing. In the meantime, direct action to protest deportations, to demand the closure of detention centres, to resist Tory attempts to restrict existing freedom of movement, are all also necessary.

Those who wish to defeat Trump should extend the instinctive solidarity and opposition to injustice that motivated them to demonstrate and protest into ongoing activism to build a movement that can win the arguments for open borders, and defeat the governments that seek to divide us.

Stop Trump!

As we go to press Donald Trump’s ban on people from seven majority-Muslim countries is still suspended, following a court order.

Protests against Trump’s state visit to the UK and in solidarity with migrants have been called for 20 February.

The London march assembles at 6pm in Parliament Square.

Against the Tories’ Brexit!

On Wednesday 8 February, just after Solidarity has gone to press, Parliament will vote on the third reading of the Tories’ Brexit bill.

Theresa May has made it clear that the Tories’ version of Brexit includes ending freedom of movement in Europe, quitting the “single market”, and largely quitting the loose EU “customs union”. She has signalled that she wants to pay for trade deals with Donald Trump’s USA by courting Trump.

Yet on the second reading (1 February), Jeremy Corbyn and the leadership of the Labour Party wrongly imposed a three-line whip on Labour MPs to vote with May. As we go to press, Labour List reports that they will impose another three-line whip to vote with May on 8 February.

On 1 February, three Shadow Cabinet members, not right-wingers, resigned and voted against May. Ten junior shadow ministers, three whips, and 34 other Labour MPs also voted against. Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott missed the vote, citing a migraine. Labour right-wingers are calling for Abbott to be sacked.

Shadow Business Secretary Clive Lewis, usually an ally of Corbyn’s, said on 7 February: “I am prepared to break the whip and I am prepared to walk from the Shadow Cabinet”.

In the Scottish Parliament on 7 February, Labour is set to vote against Article 50.

Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry said on the BBC (5 February): “We have said that we will not frustrate Brexit... There are many conversations going on now. We are speaking to Government, we are speaking to Tory backbenchers and we are trying to get a compromise that will work”. Translation: we hope the Tories will give us some sops to ease the dilemma.

Labour is putting amendments:

- to stay in the “single market” (which in fact means also keeping freedom of movement; but regrettably Corbyn has retreated from his explicit defences of freedom of movement)
 - to protect in British law all workers’ rights which originate from the EU
 - to guarantee legal rights for EU nationals now in the UK
 - to increase scrutiny of the negotiations.
- All the big amendments will probably fail.

Manuel Cortes, secretary of the TSSA union and a supporter of Corbyn, said on 6 February: “If Labour’s amendments fail, then the facts change and our Labour Party must whip our MPs into voting against an unamended Tory Brexit. If they don’t, then our MPs must do the right thing and vote against it anyway”.

Cortes is right. The damage to Corbyn’s leadership here is largely self-inflicted.

Despite the use of this row against Corbyn by a sub-section of the Labour right, opposition to the Tories’ Article 50 and support for freedom of movement is a left-wing issue, not a right-wing one.

Help us raise £20,000 to improve our website



We need to build a left that is open to debate and is serious about self-education.

Our website, including its extensive archive could help build a different kind of socialist culture — one where discussion and self-education are cherished.

From Trotskyist newspapers of the 1940s and 50s, to older Marxist classics, to discussion articles on feminism, national questions, religion and philosophy and resources such as guidelines for Marxist reading groups — it's all there on the Workers' Liberty website.

But to make our archive of real use we need professional help to make all content fully integrated, searchable by date and subject and optimised for mobile reading. We need to finance a website co-ordinator to ensure our news coverage is up to the minute and shared on social media. We want to raise £20,000 by our conference in November 2017. Any amount will help.

In the last week *Solidarity* readers have sent in £200, bringing our running total to £631.

- If you would like to donate by paypal go to www.workersliberty.org/donate
- Or set up an internet bank transfer to "AWL", account 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, Birmingham, 08-60-01 (please email awl@workersliberty.org to notify us of the payment and what it's for); or
- Send a cheque payable to "AWL" to AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, London SE1 3DG (with a note saying what it's for).

Take a look at www.workersliberty.org

The democracy of others

By Martin Thomas

"No-one combats freedom; at most they combat the freedom of others", wrote Karl Marx sarcastically, in an article defending the freedom of the press.

For a long time now, in politics, "democracy" has had the same status. No-one combats democracy. At most they insist on their version of democracy.

North Korea is officially the "Democratic People's Republic of Korea". The Iranian constitution insists on "the democratic character of the government".

On a less caricatural level, the 10 January coup in Momentum, Donald Trump's executive orders, and the Tory government's drive for a "hard Brexit" have all been defended as expressing democracy of some sort.

This article will argue that if democracy is really to be the rule of the people, of the rank-and-file, of the majority, then:

- it must provide for the continuous formation, disputation, revision, and re-formation of a collective majority opinion, within which minorities have their say, and always have channels of opportunity to change or reverse the majority opinion;
- it must be structured, mediated, delegate,

representative democracy, based on continuous organisation and discussion at every level, with free and adequate flows of information;

- it must include accountability and the right of recall at every level;
- and it must eliminate privileges for officials.

If those arguments are right, then British parliamentary democracy stands roundly condemned as a system of plutocratic semi-democracy or quarter-democracy. So it should. So should any "democracy" which retains the privileges of wealth, ownership of productive assets, and capacity to compel the majority to wage labour from which the privileged draw profits.

RADICAL DEMOCRACY

Marx and Engels, in the 1840s, started as enthusiastic democrats. Engels wrote: "Democracy nowadays is communism... All European Democrats are more or less clear communists".

Democracy meant the rule of the people. It meant the millions of the worse-off imposing their priorities on the wealthy few.

Karl Marx, a couple of years later, had declared: "Democracy is human existence,

while in the other political forms humanity has only legal existence. That is the fundamental difference of democracy" (*Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, 1843).

In the turmoil around the revolutions of 1848 Engels and Marx came to understand that a formal, merely-political democracy was possible, which would preserve the rule of profiteers and of profit in economic life.

In March 1850 they wrote that the "the... Democratic party..., far from wanting to transform the whole society in the interests of the revolutionary proletarians, only aspire to a change in social conditions which will make the existing society as tolerable and comfortable for themselves as possible... They require a democratic form of government, either constitutional or republican, which would give them and their peasant allies the majority...

"As far as the workers are concerned one thing, above all, is definite: they are to remain wage labourers as before... The workers... must... inform themselves of their own class interests, take up their independent political position as soon as possible..."

And universal suffrage could be separated from what had seemed its obvious social content, and be annexed by manipulative gov-

"The privilege of historic backwardness"

1917

We begin a series of extracts from Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, telling the story of 1917. This extract explains Russia's "combined and uneven" development how the country "skipped" historical "stages".

While the western barbarians settled in the ruins of Roman culture, where many an old stone lay ready as building material, the Slavs in the East found no inheritance upon their desolate plain: their predecessors had been on even a lower level of culture than they.

The western European peoples, soon finding their natural boundaries, created those economic and cultural clusters, the commercial cities. The population of the eastern plain, at the first sign of crowding, would go deeper into the forest or spread out over the steppe. The more aggressive and enterprising elements of the peasantry in the west became burghers, craftsmen, merchants. The more active and bold in the east became, some of them, traders, but most of them Cossacks, frontiersmen, pioneers. ...

The existence of feudal relations in Russia, denied by former historians, may be considered unconditionally established by later investigations. Furthermore, the fundamental elements of Russian feudalism were the same as in the west. But the mere fact that the existence of the feudal epoch had to be established by means of extended scientific

arguments sufficiently testifies to the incompleteness of Russian feudalism, its formlessness, its poverty of cultural monuments.

Although compelled to follow after the advanced countries, a backward country does not take things in the same order. The privilege of historic backwardness — and such a privilege exists — permits, or rather compels, the adoption of whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole series of intermediate stages. Savages throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without travelling the road which lay between those two weapons in the past.

The possibility of skipping over intermediate steps is of course by no means absolute. Its degree is determined in the long run by the economic and cultural capacities of the country. The backward nation, moreover, not infrequently debases the achievements borrowed from outside in the process of adapting them to its own more primitive culture. In this the very process of assimilation acquires a self-contradictory character. Thus the introduction of certain elements of Western technique and training, above all military and industrial, under Peter I, led to a strengthening of serfdom as the fundamental form of labour organisation.

The laws of history have nothing in common with a pedantic schematism. Unevenness, the most general law of the historic process, reveals itself most sharply and complexly in the destiny of the backward countries. Under the whip of external necessity their backward culture is compelled to make leaps. From the universal law of unevenness thus derives another law which, for the lack

of a better name, we may call the law of combined development — by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of the separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms. Without this law, to be taken of course, in its whole material content, it is impossible to understand the history of Russia, and indeed of any country of the second, third or tenth cultural class.

Under pressure from richer Europe the Russian state swallowed up a far greater relative part of the people's wealth than in the West, and thereby not only condemned the people to a twofold poverty, but also weakened the foundations of the possessing classes. Being at the same time in need of support from the latter, it forced and regimented their growth.

As a result the bureaucratised privileged classes never rose to their full height, and the Russian state thus still more approached an Asiatic despotism. The Byzantine autocracy, officially adopted by the Muscovite tsars at the beginning of the sixteenth century, subdued the feudal Boyars with the help of the nobility, and then gained the subjection of the nobility by making the peasantry their slaves, and upon this foundation created the St Petersburg imperial absolutism.

The backwardness of the whole process is sufficiently indicated in the fact that serfdom, born at the end of the sixteenth century, took form in the seventeenth, flowered in the eighteenth, was juridically annulled only in 1861.

• From Chapter 1.



EU referendum: atomised voting and manipulation of results

ernments ruling for the wealthy classes through entrenched state machines.

In December 1851 Louis Bonaparte, elected president of France but in conflict with the elected parliamentary assembly which had come out of the 1848 revolution, staged a coup, dissolving parliament and taking all power for himself.

He had previously reinstated universal male suffrage — effectively abolished by the parliament in 1849 requiring each voter to prove from tax records three years' residence at his current address — and now authorised his power by a referendum in which 92% approved his measures.

He continued to rule until 1870, keeping universal male suffrage, having (tame) legislatures elected, and calling four further plebiscites on chosen questions, which he won by majorities of between 83% and 99%.

Marx explained how the conservative majority of the peasantry had given Louis Bonaparte his majority:

"Insofar as millions of families live under conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class.

"Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests forms no community, no national bond, and no political organisation among them, they do not constitute a class. They are therefore incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them" (*The 18th Brumaire*).

The peasantry was atomised by economic fundamentals. Other classes can be atomised by political means. In the 1930s Trotsky

would describe Stalin's regime as borrowing Louis Bonaparte's techniques. "The democratic ritual of Bonapartism is the plebiscite. From time to time, the question is presented to the citizens: for or against the leader?"

In the early 1880s Marx wrote: "organisation must be pursued by all the means the proletariat has at its disposal, including universal suffrage which will thus [i.e. by organisation from below] be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation".

In earlier years Marx and Engels, like most democrats, had supported rules allowing citizens to initiate legislation by plebiscite, such as exist now in Switzerland and some US states. But when the German socialists included that idea in an 1875 program, Engels wrote sourly: "'legislation by the people' such as exists in Switzerland... does more harm than good".

PARIS COMMUNE

Marx and Engels saw expansive democracy in the Paris Commune of 1871: "The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors... chosen by universal suffrage, responsible and revocable in short terms... The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time..."

"The public service had to be done at workmen's wages..."

"The priests were sent back to the recesses of private life, there to feed upon the alms of the faithful... The whole of the educational institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of Church and State.

"Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people in Parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in communes..."

In the 1930s, Trotsky would put this idea that working-class democracy is centred in lively organisation, not in formal procedures handed down by the state, another way: "In the course of many decades, the workers have built up within the bourgeois democracy, by utilising it, by fighting against it, their own strongholds and bases of proletarian democracy: the trade unions, the political parties, the educational and sport clubs, the co-operatives, etc... These bulwarks of workers' democracy within the bourgeois state are absolutely essential for the [eventual] taking of the revolutionary road" (*What Next?*).

The details of procedures inside working-class parties and other voluntary organisations will differ from those appropriate for a state. But the principles are the same, if only because democracy in working-class state power can only be built from democracy in working-class civil society.

"Correct and timely information", wrote Trotsky, "is the basis of party democracy" (*It Is Time To Stop*, 1933). Why? Because it is the basis of continuous, informed, responsible discussion by members "constituted in communes", i.e. in active collective units.

In the Russian revolutionary movement, Lenin had berated the Mensheviks for seeking to take decisions by plebiscites. The Mensheviks had held a conference, he exclaimed in 1905 (*A Third Step Back*), and then "a [plebiscite] vote will be taken on the resolutions with no opportunity for the voters to offer proposals for changes or to have before them a complete record of the discussion of the resolutions... We have here the principle of Bonapartist plebiscites, as opposed to the principle of democratic representation..."

A little later, Lenin wrote an article appearing to call for a "referendum", but actually insisting that the party promote collective debate at "rank and file" level. "Socialists consider that the political consciousness of the masses is the main force... Only after this question has been openly discussed by all the Party members assembled is it possible for each one to adopt an intelligent and firm decision one way or the other. Only on the basis of

such a decision can the election of representatives to the conference be, not the result of clannishness, friendship, or force of habit ('We will elect our Nikolai Nikolayevich or Ivan Ivanovich!'), but the result of the considered decision of the 'rank and file' themselves..." (*The Social-Democrats and the Duma Elections*, January 1907).

There is in fact a mathematical theorem which proves that no consistent democratic voting system is possible if individual votes are considered as atomised, and if there are more than two alternatives to be voted on: Arrow's Theorem, formulated by the mathematical economist Kenneth Arrow, who was an anti-Stalinist socialist in his youth and remains a liberal social democrat. Arrow himself discusses improvements to voting systems to limit the problem: preferential and transferrable votes, rather than just first past the post, for example.

But the chief political conclusion is that only the thinnest democracy can come from plebiscite-type voting:

- in which each elector votes in an atomised way without reference to collective discussion
- in which there is no accountability and recallability of those elected
- and no control over the way that propositions voted for are interpreted and implemented by the established authorities
- and those authorities can manipulate and tailor the details of voting methods to suit themselves

A snap vote on an unamendable two-way choice is taken in an atomised way or even online. It is picked up by an entrenched elite group to authorise whatever interpretation or implementation they choose. They rule out amendment or further debate as undemocratic.

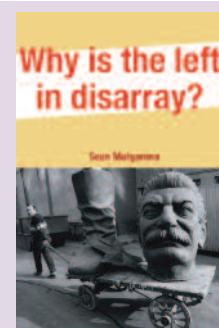
These typical procedures of plebiscitary democracy, exemplified by the Tories over Brexit or the Momentum hierarchy (or Blair in his day, in New Labour) is an example of how chosen species of voting can be used against all the generous, egalitarian, social impulses of democracy.

Why is the left in disarray?

With the Corbyn surge, the Sanders movement, and more, there is new life on the left. But the left's positive political ideas, slogans, arguments are still paler than the right's.

After decades of Stalinist domination and infection, and then of retreats, the left needs rigorous debate to renew itself. It argues through two issues in particular: the endorsement by much of the left of political Islam as a progressive "anti-imperialism"; and the spread within the left of an "absolute anti-Zionism", unwittingly informed by decades of Stalinist "anti-Zionist" campaigning after about 1949, which becomes effectively antisemitic.

The book concludes by criticising also the mechanical inverse on the left of the addled "anti-war" and "anti-imperialist" negativists: those who respond by going for an idealised bourgeois democracy.



The Russian Revolution: when workers took power

The 1917 Russian revolution was the greatest event in political history so far – the first time working-class people took political power and held it for several years. Yet the real history is buried under myths.

Since the 1960s, and especially since the opening of archives in Russia from the 1990s, much more is known about the Russian revolution. This book aims to bring original Marxist perspectives together with a wide range of scholarship. It is written from what Lenin and Trotsky called the "third camp" independent working class socialist perspective.



Both books coming soon. Available to pre-order now for £8
www.workersliberty.org/books

An argument against post-factual politics

Ann Field reviews 'Denial'

'Denial' is a dramatisation of the libel case brought by Holocaust denier and Hitler apologist David Irving against the American academic Deborah Lipstadt (author of *Denying the Holocaust*, in which Irving featured prominently) and Penguin Books (which published her book).

The film has received mixed reviews. Some critics have described it as "hammy", "stuffy and repetitive", and "a standard issue legal drama". The character of Lipstadt has also been criticised as "so predictable" and "an impassioned mouthpiece with no internal life."

And given the well-known result of the real-life trial — in 2000 a High Court judge found that Irving had knowingly distorted history and ruled in favour of Lipstadt and Penguin Books — the eventual outcome of the trial is not a source of tension in the film.

But the film is well worth seeing. Irving is such a truly repulsive character, and the contrast between him and Lipstadt so absolute, that the audience can only enjoy the wait for Irving's eventual defeat in court, and then relish the moment of his demise.

Irving does not look at people. He leers and scowls at them. When he speaks, his face twists into a grimace. He is full of his own bloated self-importance, but fawning and sycophantic towards the judge in court.

During the film Lipstadt and her legal team watch clips of Irving addressing neo-Nazi rallies, making racist "jokes", and denying the genocide of the Holocaust. The cheap and grainy quality of the clips helps emphasise the tawdry and seedy nature of the char-

acter they show.

Irving also excels in a poisonous anti-semitism-by-innuendo. "Who pays you to write your books?" asks Irvine when he "ambushes" Lipstadt in a lecture at the start of the film. According to his libel claim, Lipstadt is "part of a world conspiracy to destroy his reputation." And in one of the court scenes he refers to "those who funded her (Lipstadt) and guided her hand."

But, for all his bravado, Irving is also a pathetic figure. As Lipstadt's barrister points out, Irving wants to be seen as a great writer and historian and hankers after respect — "England is a club and he wants to be a member of it."

That makes Irving's defeat all the more complete and all the more enjoyable when it arrives.

He loses the trial, he is exposed as a charlatan rather than a historian, and when he tries to shake the hand of Lipstadt's barrister — as if the trial had been a public school sixth form debate — the latter abruptly turns his back on him.

Lipstadt, on the other hand, is built up into a champion of the oppressed. Her name, Deborah, she explains, means leader and defender of her people. She is a woman and a Jew, which is one reason why Irving is so intent on pursuing her. And she has no interest in negotiating, compromising or reaching an out-of-court settlement with Irving.

She also spells out the importance of the case in which she is the central figure: if Irving wins, then Holocaust denial receives a judicial stamp of approval as a legitimate opinion.

There is no face-to-face confrontation between Lipstadt and Irving in the film. But



there is a succession of dramatic confrontations between Lipstadt and her legal team.

Lipstadt wants to give evidence at the trial. Lipstadt wants Holocaust survivors to give evidence at the trial. Lipstadt promises a Holocaust survivor that the voices of those who did not survive will be heard at the trial.

But her legal team will have none of this. Almost to the point of caricature, they are hardheaded legal professionals who base their strategy solely on what is most likely to achieve victory in court.

When Lipstadt objects that if she does not testify in court people will call her a coward and that she would have to live with that for the rest of her life, her barrister responds: "That's the price to pay for winning."

Not that her barrister is portrayed unsympathetically: he seems to live off red wine (preferably drunk out of a plastic beaker rather than a glass), sandwiches and cigarettes.

There is the same element of caricature

about the High Court judge: apparently unaware of the invention of the computer, he writes his judgements with a fountain pen while drinking freshly made tea. And, without the assistance of a butler, he would surely never manage to put his wig on straight.

Although 'Denial' was completed before

Trump's election victory, the film's scriptwriter, David Hare, has emphasised that the film also has a more contemporary element: it takes a dig at Trump's brand of post-factual politics:

"[In this internet age] it is necessary to remind people that there are facts, there is scientific evidence and there is such a thing as proof. That was true with this court case and it's important to say it now. [Trump's politics] is a non-evidence-based approach to politics, what you might call Trumpery. It's terribly dangerous."

Cinema-goers whose idea of a good film is a five-hour-long adaptation of a novel by Proust, directed by Wim Wenders, and full of lengthy shots of dreary Swedish coastlines punctuated by endless internal monologues should steer well clear of 'Denial'.

But for those who like a film where the good guys win and the bad guys lose, 'Denial' is a must-see.

Making garish pantomime of the colonial imaginary

Ira Berkovic reviews 'Taboo' (BBC)

By the time of its fourth episode, the point at which this review was written, 'Taboo', which had occasionally teetered on the edge of greatness, had collapsed into rather grotesque pantomime.

The aloofness of Tom Hardy's performance, which in earlier episodes had given his character, James Delaney, a brooding malice, is petering out into ridiculousness, as he growls his way through a script peppered with faux-profound clichés ("There is business afoot tonight" he says, climbing into a carriage.)

The dark Other of the colonial imaginary looms large in the world of 'Taboo': Delaney begins the show having returned from a sojourn in Africa, where he has apparently learnt various occult arts, and become a cannibal. His nemesis, his brother-in-law, repeatedly calls him "nigger". There are not-yet-fully-explained flashbacks to the hold of slave ships, with their screaming cargo of enslaved humans, and a developing subplot reveals that Delaney's mother was a Native American.

What does it all mean? Whose story is it trying to tell, and why? If 'Taboo' wants to be a critical comment on the values of the period, it is unclear quite what critique it wishes to make.

And it is not even clear the comment is critical: in one, particularly gratuitous, scene, Delaney uses an occult ritual involving fire and incantations in an unintelligible lan-

guage to project his consciousness into the bedroom of his sleeping half-sister Zilpha, played by Oona Chaplin, who he then proceeds to rape. "You feel me when I break in, don't you?", he later snarls at her. Delaney is far from an entirely sympathetic character, but he is clearly the show's hero (much like similarly damaged, brooding sociopath Thomas Shelby in 'Taboo' co-creator Stephen Knight's 'Peaky Blinders'), taking on the twin forces of evil represented by the British crown and the East India Company. Are we supposed to root for him in his violent "courtship" of his half-sister?

The show's laudanum-dream surrealism is entertaining at points, and enough skill has gone into the world-building to suggest that this magical-realist Regency London might have some potential as a terrain for other stories. Stephen Knight brings his distinctive aesthetic, familiar to viewers of 'Peaky Blinders', playing, often compellingly, with fire, shadows, and spectrality. Jonathan Pryce takes a good turn as the comic-book bad guy Sir Stuart Strange, a senior East India Company official, and there are similarly strong performances from Jessie Buckley as Lorna Bow and the dependable Stephen Graham as Atticus.

At points in the fourth episode, 'Taboo' comes close to embracing and celebrating its status as garish pantomime. The introduction of Tom Hollander as a camp, lascivious mad-scientist figure, and the scenes of Delaney looking comically out of place at a Countess's lavish, hedonistic ball have promise, but a hammy climactic scene in which Delaney is

challenged to a duel seems to shout: "take this seriously!", and so rather spoils the effect.

Hardy is making a career playing psychopathically violent comic-book hard men (Bronson, Bane, Alfie Solomons in 'Peaky Blinders', and now James Delaney, to name a few), and he might be well advised to consider broadening his choices, lest his undeniable acting talent is allowed to dissolve into self-caricature.

There's a lot of texture in 'Taboo', but in a show so obviously concerned with weighty themes it needs a stronger framework to prevent it from collapsing into a gloopy mess. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to have one.

'Taboo' appears to be influenced by Susanna Clarke's 'Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell', another work of fantastical, and frequently dark, Regency-era magical-realism; setting the show in the same period and naming a main character "Strange" is unlikely coincidental, and we also get Ed Hogg, who played John Segundus in the BBC adaptation of Clarke's book, appearing as a cross-dressing East India Company clerk. 'Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell' also deals with themes of class, race, slavery, gender, and empire, and similarly figures magic as a potentially wild force that can subvert the social mores and ordered hierarchies of the 19th century. But where Clarke's work, and even the below-par TV adaptation, delights, amuses, comforts, and asks questions of an audience, as well as jolting them, 'Taboo' seems interested only in leering out of the shadows in an attempt to shock. A gratuitous

disembowelling scene is a case in point; it's almost as if Knight and Hardy have read 'Jonathan Strange' and decided it had potential, but what it really needed was more torture and rape.

If 'Taboo' has a message, it is perhaps that the proto-globalisation and empire-building of the 19th century unleashed (figuratively, but also, the show seems to suggest, literally) dark forces that threaten to disrupt the metropole, and perhaps that the society of the metropole was in many ways just as "savage" as they viewed their colonial subjects as being. Setting aside the question of whether these messages have much value (the former is, to say the least, "problematic"; the latter is more worthwhile but hardly original), they're lost in the morass of a show that has effectively bogged itself down — wallowing, as Emily Stephen's 'AV Club' review put it, in its own scandals.

Some sharp turns in its character development and narrative progression will be required if we're not to be left with a piece that goes halfway to creating an aesthetically arresting and intriguing world which it invites the viewer to explore but then, through its lack of a shaping framework, effectively abandons them in.

Undoubtedly this is deliberate: disorientation, misdirection, deception, disguise, and deceit are all themes of the story. That can be a gratifying experience as an audience member, but here, in a show that, at its darkest, seems to revel in sexual violence and racialised othering, the effect is rarely enjoyable.

Trump's "America First" means workers last

By Lance Selfa (US International Socialist Organization)*

Perhaps it's foolish to take anything Donald Trump says as an articulation of core principles or beliefs. But this passage from his inaugural address hit many like a bolt of lightning:

From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this moment on, it's going to be America First.

Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families. We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength.

I will fight for you with every breath in my body — and I will never, ever let you down. America will start winning again, winning like never before.

This appeal to economic nationalism is very much in line with his "Make America great again" campaign theme. But for those whose political memory goes back a little way, "America First" means something very specific and very problematic.

In the late 1930s, the Roosevelt administration was increasing its support for an interventionist foreign policy that would assert US power on a world level. After the Second World War started in 1939, the administration lent massive amounts of military aid to Britain, with the intention of drawing the US into the conflict.

From the late 1930s up to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in December 1941, a substantial sentiment against US intervention in the European war developed. While on the whole sincerely opposed to a repeat of the imperialist slaughter of the First World War, the anti-intervention mood also intersected with an isolationist, rather than internationalist, approach to the coming conflict.

So when a number of college students — including future Republican President Gerald Ford, future Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart and future Democratic vice presidential candidate Sargent Shriver — along with leading capitalists issued a call to form an "America First" committee to keep the US out of the European war, hundreds of thousands responded.

America First also called for a US military buildup to defend the continental US — a policy that came to be known as "Fortress America".

The banner of "America First" was also embraced by supporters of the anti-semitic "radio priest" Father Charles Coughlin, along with fascists and sympathisers with the Nazi regime in Germany. In speeches for the America First committee, the aviator Charles Lindbergh contended that Britain and Jews were the main advocates for US intervention in the war, and that the interventionists' main aim was to defeat Germany.

Other mainstream political figures — like Joseph Kennedy, ambassador to Britain and father of future US President John F Kennedy — shared the "America First" outlook. He contended that Germany was too strong, and that Britain and US should make peace with the Nazis.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor



Trump has restarted Dakota Access Pipeline project, gaining praise of Teamsters leader

and the subsequent US intervention, America First organisations collapsed. The US emergence from the war as a global superpower marginalised support for the "American First" outlook of staying out of foreign entanglements while building a "Fortress America."

In the 1990s and 2000s, far right, antisemitic pundit and presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan carried the "America First" torch for a while. Then Trump came along.

GLOBALISATION RHETORIC

This brief history of "America First" politics provides a context for Trump's rhetoric. It also shows that, far from being a common sense advocacy for ordinary people in the US versus global elite, the slogan drags along more than its share of historical baggage.

It wasn't accidental that Trump's presidential proclamation on Holocaust Remembrance Day failed to mention the genocide of European Jewry.

Trump's America First policy asserts that "[e]very decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families."

That rhetoric sounds radical, especially when compared to that of the last generation's status quo, when most decisions on trade and foreign affairs did little for US workers and their families. For most of the last generation, politicians — both Democratic and Republican — have told us that global trade is like a force of nature, which the US economy can only adapt to, not control.

This notion of globalisation operating outside the influence of the world's most powerful government was always false. US state policy undergirded the bipartisan regime of free trade and the US global military projection. As that purveyor of "flat-world" banalities Thomas Friedman once put it, "McDonalds cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas."

If Trump's tumultuous first week showed anything, it showed just how much governmental action can shift the terms of engagement and debate on these questions.

Given that decades of corporate, governmental and institutional practices are invested in the neoliberal regime, it remains to be seen whether any or all of Trump's actions

will be sustained as new policies for the long run. But in the immediate term, they present our side with a tremendous set of challenges.

The first of these is assessing whether they are reality-based or not. Millions of people — among them supporters of Bernie Sanders — would agree with the sentiment of protecting "our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs," whether or not they agree with Trump's rhetoric.

Yet the empirical evidence that trade arrangements — like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) — are the main culprits in the decline of US manufacturing jobs and workers' standards of living is thin.

The liberal University of California-Berkeley economist J. Bradford DeLong calculates that of the decline in US manufacturing employment since 1971 that is greater than that experienced by other industrial powers undergoing similar structural economic shifts, only one-tenth of even this extra amount can be attributed to NAFTA and trade with China.

Nevertheless, we know that during the same period, living standards for workers in the US — and not just those in manufacturing — stagnated. In real terms, the median US household income is no higher than it was in the early 1970s.

Clearly something is wrong in the U.S. economy, and no amount of statistical modelling is going to convince people that they should just accept it. So when figures as diverse as Trump and Sanders point to global trade deals as the culprit for declining living standards, they at least have the merit of relating to people who know — unlike the Friedmans and the Clintons — that not all is right with the neoliberal world.

Trump promotes the notion that other countries are "ripping off" the US through unfair trade deals. But this inverts reality.

One drastic effect of NAFTA has been the destruction of small farming in Mexico when that sector was forced into unfair competition with US agribusiness. By some estimates, more than one million farmers have been driven from the land. Many of the victims moved to Mexican cities or crossed the border into the US without documents to find work.

"Free trade" agreements like NAFTA are

engineered for the benefit of US business, as levers to pry open sectors of other countries' economies to investment and services in the first instance.

Second, they allow for the free movement of capital across borders, but not the free movement of labour. In fact, the era of NAFTA coincided with a huge increase in "border security" and repression that produced a record number of deportations — more than two million — under the Democratic Obama administration.

That aspect of "Fortress America" — repression at the border — is already in place. Trump proposes to increase it. But the record should show that free trade policies didn't put out a welcome mat to immigrants, either.

Our side will continue to analyse the economic ramifications of Trump's policies, but we're faced today with what to do about the political challenges they represent.

In this case, there is a more complicated test for the left. Trump's protectionism and rhetoric about bringing manufacturing jobs back to the US have already won praise from union leaders like Teamsters President James Hoffa. Hoffa and other labour officials likewise hailed Trump's executive order aimed at restarting the Keystone XL and Dakota Access Pipeline projects that activism forced the Obama administration to shelve.

After a White House meeting with Trump, North American Building Union President Sean McGarvey declared, "We have a common bond with the president" and that "We come from the same industry. He understands the value of driving development, moving people to the middle class."

In speaking to reporters, McGarvey and Labourers President Terry Sullivan — whose unions both endorsed Hillary Clinton for president — pointed out that they had never been invited to a White House meeting in the eight years of Obama's presidency.

ALIBI

But there's something else besides the Democrats' neglect behind the labour leaders' cozying up to Trump and his America First program.

It gives them an alibi for their failures to do much of anything to reverse the long-term decline of their organisations and to protect their members from worsening conditions.

Those problems stem from anti-union U.S. employers and anti-labour US politicians, not overseas competitors or immigrants.

Hoffa, for example, has a long record of cooperating with employers while bargaining away the rights and benefits of rank-and-file Teamsters.

For the likes of Hoffa, it's much more convenient to blame international competition or Mexican truckers for eroding wages and conditions than to confront US employers even ones, like UPS, making record profits. Joining with Trump under the banner of "America First" won't change Hoffa's behaviour at all.

Labour leaders like Hoffa give Trump the cover to paint his economic program — which in reality is based on tax cuts for the rich, allowing corporations free reign, and selling the US as a low-wage economy — as "populist" and pro-worker. And they lend legitimacy to an administration intent on attacking whole sections of the working class, including immigrants and the undocumented.

Any labour union or worker who signs up with Trump's "America First" program will find out that — rhetoric aside — Trump will put them last.

* From socialistworker.org

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!

Events

Saturday 11 February

Iranian Embassy picket: Free all jailed workers!
5pm, Iranian Embassy, 16 Prince's Gate, London, SW7 1PT
bit.ly/2kLSrFp

Monday 13 February

Workers' Liberty Leeds public meeting: Socialism or the new barbarism
6.30pm, The Packhorse Pub, 208 Woodhouse Lane, Leeds, LS2 9DX
bit.ly/2kQh5eu

Tuesday 14 February

Show culture some love: day of action
11am, BBC, Portland Place, W1A 1AA
bit.ly/2lIHsdB

Thursday 16 February

Workers' Liberty London forum: Socialist ideas to stop Trump
7pm, Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, London, W1T 6AQ
bit.ly/2kOMKjJ

Monday 20 February

Mass lobby of Parliament for the rights of EU citizens in the UK
2.30pm, Parliament, London
bit.ly/2kLNbZC
Defend migrants, stop Trump
6pm, Parliament, London
bit.ly/2kIYbtU

Saturday 4 March

National demonstration for the NHS
12 noon, Tavistock square, London, WC1H 9HW
bit.ly/2h9wgBe

Got an event you want listing? solidarity@workersliberty.org

More online at www.workersliberty.org



Workers' Liberty



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McCluskey moves ahead, but not left

By Dale Street

In the election campaigning for the post of Unite the Union's General Secretary, the McCluskey election machine continues to deliver the goods.

With a while still to go before nominations close on 17 February, over 300 branches have nominated Len McCluskey, who has been general secretary since 2011 but has stood down early so he could run for a third term. A statement supporting McCluskey has been signed by 60 out of 64 Executive Council members and a similarly overwhelming majority on other top levels of the union.

McCluskey's election platform is a series of uncontroversial promises: better pay deals; protect jobs; defend union reps; more support for members in dispute; and "for power and against injustice".

Right-wing challenger Kevin Coyne has not — or not yet — knocked McCluskey's campaign off course. Even his attempts to highlight the scandal of the equity share deal whereby Unite paid £400,000 towards the cost of McCluskey's £700,000 central-London flat have failed to pick up traction. Left-wing challenger Ian Allinson has also failed to dent McCluskey's campaign.

When an internal Unite report revealing the extent of bullying suffered by Unite female full-timers was published by Allinson, female full-timers and female Executive Council members rallied round McCluskey and issued a public statement condemning Allinson for publishing the report:

"Through Len McCluskey's leadership we (women) are building our leadership in workplace activism. We are appalled that this report has been misrepresented and used as a political football by candidates in the election for the post of Unite general secretary."

But the slick campaign being run for McCluskey conceals a number



of problems, including the gap which separates McCluskey's election rhetoric from reality, and the gap between McCluskey's policies and the policies which Unite should be championing.

"I will continue to fight the pernicious Trade Union Act," McCluskey has declared. But a serious campaign against the Tories' anti-union laws is yet to be launched by Unite, never mind "continued".

A workers' plan of production which would reconcile non-renewal of Trident with protection of jobs and pay has disappeared off the radar. Instead McCluskey's line remains:

"Everyone would love the whole world to get rid of nuclear weapons. ... However, the most important thing for us is to protect jobs. In the absence of any credible alternative to protect jobs and high skills, we will vote against any anti-Trident resolution."

When McCluskey visited Barrow shipyards at the start of the election campaign he attacked the Tories not for squandering money on Trident but for "carelessness" and "point-scoring".

McCluskey's election campaign backs continuing access to the EU Single Market but not freedom of movement of labour (even though, as McCluskey must know, it must be both or neither). McCluskey is explicit in his opposition to freedom of movement:

"The real-world impact of an EU-wide free market in labour has been a deterioration in wage rates and other conditions. I therefore welcome Labour's clear commitment that it is not 'wedded to free movement'."

Freedom of movement is caricatured by McCluskey as a right-wing policy: "We cannot embrace the neo-liberal dogma of free movement without safeguards — the approach championed by bad employers and Labour's right in the recent past."

The "safeguards" proposed by McCluskey are that only employers which recognise a trade union or engage in collective bargaining should be allowed to recruit outside of the UK. This would result in less migrant labour, says McCluskey, as employers would no longer have an incentive to employ them.

Coyne's promise to hand back control of Unite to its members is vacuous, populist demagoguery. But nothing in McCluskey's election material makes any linkage between McCluskey's re-election and a greater degree of real rank-and-file control of the union.

This underlines the need to couple campaigning for a vote for McCluskey with a reassertion of rank-and-file democracy against all versions of machine politics — both left and right.

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Picturehouse out on 11 Feb

By Gemma Short

Workers at four Picturehouse branches in London will strike on Saturday 11 February.

A new ballot including two new sites — Picturehouse Central and Crouch End Picturehouse — returned a 95% yes vote on a 75% turn out. The Bectu section of Prospect, the Picturehouse workers' union, had already balloted in January, but the ballot was challenged by bosses on a legal technicality. Individual workers have also been threatened with legal action over unfounded claims of intimidation and secondary picketing.

Picturehouse bosses continue to show that they would rather spend money on legal threats and busing in senior managers to run sites during strikes than pay their workers the living wage. Bosses' continued insistence that they will not recognise the union shows how much they fear their workers' continuing ability to collectively organise.



Picturehouse workers and their supporters will also be holding a demonstration on 25 February in central London. They will start at the Empire cinema, Leicester Square which Picturehouse has recently bought, before going on a tour of central London cinemas.

Workers will walk out from 2pm on Saturday 11 February and welcome supporters on their picket lines.

- Sign the petition: www.change.org/p/picturehouse-pay-proper
- Join a picket line from 2pm on Saturday 11 February in Brixton, Piccadilly Circus, Hackney central or Crouch End.
- Join the demonstration on the 25 February: bit.ly/2jXQsIU
- Donate to the strike fund: bit.ly/2fmmJmF

Tube staff win concessions

By Ollie Moore

Station staff on London Underground have secured significant concessions in their dispute over staffing levels.

A proposal from the company, which RMT negotiators accepted on Friday 3 February following discussion at a reps' meeting, will reinstate 325 jobs, and guarantee promotion for workers in the non-safety-critical, and lower paid, "CSA2" role into the "CSA1" grade, giving more safety-critical staff on stations.

RMT suspended strikes planned for 5-8 February and an overtime ban. The rank-and-file socialist bulletin *Tubeworker* argued that, while the concessions should be celebrated, it was wrong to suspend strikes as more could've been won: "There's no doubt that these concessions are big wins for us. When we began this dispute, the company was intransigent, insisting that not a single penny was available for a single additional job, and that the CSA2 issue was non-negotiable. After three months of a highly effective overtime ban, which led to over 100 station closures, and unprecedented strike action which shut down London on



8-9 January, we've forced the company to change its position [...]

"Could we have come away from this dispute with more? *Tubeworker* believes so. When the dispute was launched, members were told to prepare for a protracted battle, and the 8-9 January strike (which many reps and activists felt should have been longer) was presented as the opening salvo in an ongoing campaign of strikes. Station staff may, therefore, be bemused at being congratulated for a magnificent, solid action in one breath, but being told we're settling for something that falls short of our demands in the next. The strike was indeed solid

and magnificent: why, therefore, not maintain that pressure and momentum to push for more concessions?"

An RMT rep told *Solidarity*: "Although many of us feel more could've been won if the strikes had been kept on, there's no doubt that we've achieved a lot from this dispute. Significantly, we've also shattered the orthodoxy that had developed on the job — and, it must be said, within the RMT — that station staff have no industrial leverage or power.

"Our strike on 8-9 January blew that out of the water, and should embolden us for future battles."

LSE cleaners fight victimisation

By Peggy Carter

Cleaners at the London School of Economics are balloting for strikes in their dispute with cleaning contractor Noonan.

Cleaners do not currently get occupational sick pay or

parental/adoption leave, their pensions and annual leave allowances are significantly lower than directly employed staff, their workloads have been increasing and one cleaner, Alba Pasmino was unlawfully sacked after 12 years at LSE.

The workers' union UVW and

students who support the cleaners have been organising solidarity events on campus, including a strike solidarity breakfast.

- Find out more and support the strike: bit.ly/2jXRXqr

Southern: Reject this sell out!



By a rail worker

The "deal" that has come out of Aslef-Southern Rail talks at the TUC is possibly the worst sell-out of workers in recent memory.

Given that the RMT were excluded from the talks and the TUC's dismal record in intervening in disputes, many feared the worst. But what has come out of these highly secretive talks is mind-bogglingly awful.

It is hard to fathom how the ASLEF leadership is going to convince its members on Southern that this is acceptable. In reality it does almost nothing to protect drivers from having to run trains that would previously have required a guard. A list of agreed reasons why a train can be run without a guard event includes

things such as "lateness, sickness, and routine delays"; dispatching responsibilities have been transferred to the driver; there is no protection for drivers if a passenger comes to harm. Promises made in the deal are of the "jam tomorrow and/or pie in the sky" type.

This agreement goes back on everything Aslef has been saying about safe train dispatch.

It is not clear how Aslef will be able to sell this "deal" to its members in the referendum which runs until 16 February. Aslef members should reject the deal and demand that strikes are called alongside the RMT who remain in dispute.

- Find out more on the Off the Rails blog: www.workersliberty.org/otrblog

Public support Derby TAs

By Gemma Short

As previously reported in *Solidarity*, teaching assistants are striking against imposed contract changes which will see them lose up to 30% of their pay.

Teaching assistants have been gathering a lot of public support, and this weeks action will also include a "love in" for members of the public to show their support for the teaching assistants.

Teaching assistants have also received a message of support



from Jeremy Corbyn who said: "I'm on the side of the teaching assistants and the pupils and the parents. Let's get together and sort it out quickly."

- More information: derbycityunison.co.uk

Kinsley Three sacked

By Simon Nelson

The Kinsley Three are cleaners employed by C&D cleaning who struck for 68 days for union recognition and the living wage after their jobs were outsourced when the school took academy status.

The three women returned to work in December with a settle-

ment, but just before Christmas they were sacked on "trumped-up charges." The three are now taking part in an employment tribunal and continuing to protest and call for support against their dismissal.

Unison must provide national support for the workers and take the case up to show the realities of outsourcing and academisation.



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Nationalise the Big Six!

By an Npower worker

On 5 February, Npower, one of the Big Six energy suppliers, hiked their electricity price by 15% for electricity and 4.8% for gas for customers on their variable rates.

This is the largest single hike by any of the Big Six since at least 2013. If past experience is anything to go by, the rest of the Six will put their prices up too in the next few months.

Npower bosses argued this price rise was forced on them by the wholesale price of energy and "regulatory costs". However this has even been questioned by government regulator Ofgem, who last

month said there was "no justification" for a price hike. Indeed Npower made £67 million in the first half of 2016. At the same time they made a commitment to the markets to cut 2400 jobs at Npower and among outsourced workers.

There has been a rise in wholesale energy costs over the last six months, but that's from a relatively low base; and hardly any of the fall in energy prices in 2014-15 was passed on.

2014 is the last year we have complete Fuel Poverty Statistics. In 2014, the number of households in officially defined fuel poverty in England was estimated at 2.38 million, representing approximately 10.6 per cent of all English house-

holds. This was an increase from 2.35 million households in 2013. For the poorest the government's attacks on welfare such as the benefit cap and universal credit will just make the situation worse. For pensioners and the chronically ill, fuel poverty kills.

Caroline Abrahams from Age UK said last winter: "The UK has an appalling record on cold-related deaths, with one older person dying every seven minutes from the winter cold. Colder countries like Sweden are better at protecting older people from the cold. Many older people will be feeling anxious about the current cold snap, not least because high heating costs are prohibitive for many, resulting in large numbers of older

people finding it virtually impossible to stay adequately warm".

In response, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell condemned the increase but only talked about a price cap. Whilst a price cap would be welcome, it wouldn't resolve the fundamental issues. When Jeremy Corbyn stood for Labour leader in 2015 he argued – on and off – for the nationalisation of the energy sector. Labour has since gone quiet on this front. Sometimes it argues for a confused policy of promoting small-scale and municipal energy production, at other times not even that.

This is a mistake. There is an urgent need to sort out the byzantine energy sector. Heat and warmth are basic human needs that are



being denied to millions by the profiteering of the few.

Labour should commit itself to the democratic public ownership of the Big Six and the rest of the energy sector – reorganised as part of a plan to tackle climate change, save and improve jobs, and deal with fuel poverty.

Momentum grassroots networking conference



bit.ly/2jY44i8

Saturday 11 March 10-5 Venue TBC

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