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International pressure fails to halt Chechen tortures

Q-NEWS

By Mike Zubrowski

Despite international pressure, the detention and torture of suspected gay men by the Chechen since late March has continued, and more secret concentration-camp style prisons have been discovered.

A journalist who helped expose the brutal persecution has gone into hiding after threats from Chechen state officials and Chechen Muslim clerics.

Putin and the Kremlin in Russia has been cynically turning a blind eye, and the Russian police have detained LGBT activists campaigning against this on Mayday in St. Petersburg. But after international pressure the Kremlin reluctantly opened an investigation into the situation.

Four more secret prisons have been discovered — there are six in total — with over 100 men detained, three people confirmed killed, and twenty suspected dead. Those men who have been released have often been released because police believe their family will kill them. Police and Kadyrov — the Chechen leader — have encouraged such “honour killings”.

Chechnya is a republic in southern Russia with a conservative and deeply homophobic society and an increasingly authoritarian state. Very few people are openly gay, and much of the torture aims to find the identity of other gay men.

JOURNALISTS

Novaya Gazeta, the Moscow-based newspaper which first reported this brutal violence has faced serious threats and one reporter has gone into hiding.

An adviser to Kadyrov and a group of Chechen Muslim clerics called for retribution against the newspaper. It wasn't allegations of the secret prisons or the torture that affronted them, rather the claim that there were gay men in Chechnya. Kadyrov's spokesperson described the report as a lie on this basis, and others in his office have demanded apologies.

Six of the newspaper's journalists have been killed or died in suspicious circumstances since the publication started 24 years ago. Two — Anna Politkovskaya and Natalia Estemirova — were shot dead over investigations of human rights abuses in Chechnya. So when the newspaper received two envelopes of a mysterious white powder in recent weeks, they were not taking these threats lightly. Elena Milashina, one of the reporters, has fled Russia over these latest threats.

The Kremlin has continued to turn a blind eye, as with anti-LGBT violence across Russia, encourag-



Russian solidarity protest was suppressed by police

ing victims to report abuse to Chechen authorities. Furthermore, Putin's spokesperson states that since no one has publicly come out as a victim, the Kremlin has no reason to disbelieve Kadyrov's denials.

Seventeen young LGBT activists have been arrested and detained by Russian police for protesting against the persecution in Chechnya, joining a May Day march in St Petersburg. Some were lying on the road playing dead, smeared with fake blood and covered with Chechen and rainbow flags, whilst others held placards calling for Kadyrov to be tried in The International Court of Justice.

INTERNATIONAL

Protests around the world, and several international bodies have called for an end to these human rights violations, and for the central Russian government to intervene.

This has pressured the Kremlin at least to open an investigation into the situation and to condemn threats to journalists. The international pressure is an important, limited, brake on the Chechnyan authorities, and it should be increased. However, there are dangers.

Homophobia in Chechnya is linked both to political and conservative Islam, and to nationalism, and has been strengthened by national and ethnic conflicts. Kadyrov has already responded demagogically to the international “attack... attempt[ing] ... to blacken our society, lifestyle, traditions and customs.”

There is a risk that international pressure will be manipulated to further feed nationalism, positioning Kadyrov as a protector of Chechen society, and gay rights as something foreign actors are attempting to impose from outside. This would further strengthen Kadyrov's authoritarian leadership, and further harm LGBT people as they are used as a political football.

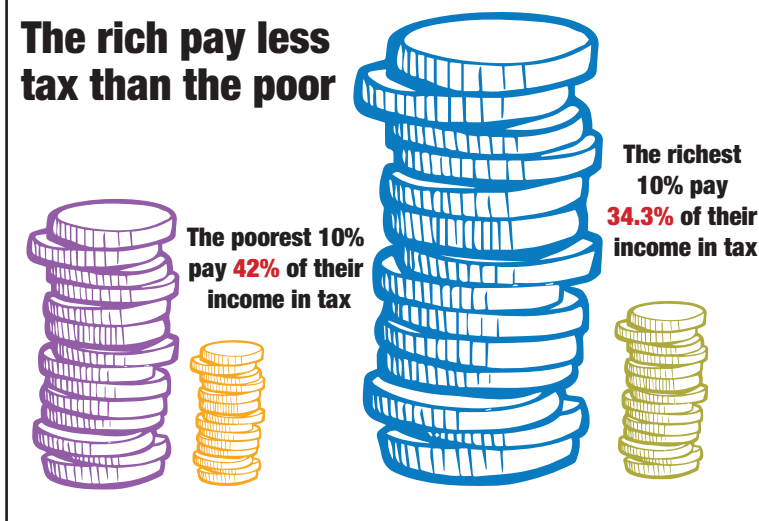
The Russian LGBT Network is helping to evacuate and assist those persecuted in Chechnya, and there have been calls for the UN to implement a similar program. They

have been in contact with around 60 people so far, successfully supporting half of them.

To tackle the root of the problem requires ending the pervasive homophobia in Chechen society and the authoritarianism of the Chechen state. We also need to offer practical solidarity to those fighting for LGBT rights, and for human rights against state repression in Chechnya. To the extent that groups are doing this, they are operating underground and are small. Finding, contacting them and supporting them is far from straightforward.

We should support those in Chechnya and Russia pushing for secularism and for an internationalist perspective that respects the Chechen right to national self-determination, whilst fighting both Chechen and Russian nationalism, with all the conservative ideas they bring.

The rich pay less tax than the poor



Corbyn must be clearer on Assad

By Simon Nelson

Jeremy Corbyn was attacked in the press last week for his refusal to talk about Syria at a press conference. He said he would address the issue in other interviews.

Though the outrage was faux, Corbyn's stance on Syria, and indeed Labour's as a whole, is contradictory, unclear and tainted with the Stalinist complaisance towards Assad that infects the “anti-war movement”.

In response to the US airstrikes and Boris Johnson's commitment to help the US with further strikes, without a vote in Parliament, Corbyn called for a political solution;

“Let's get the Geneva process going quickly.”

“In the meantime, no more strikes. Have the UN investigation into the war crime of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and take it on from there.”

“I want us to say ‘Listen, let's get people around the table quickly’. A way of achieving that — suspend the strikes? Possibly. The point has to be to bring about a political solution.”

Corbyn is not a defender of Daesh, as some of his opponents claim, but he shares a weakness of much of the anti-war movement in refusing to explicitly condemn Assad and to recognise that the regime is directly responsible for attacks against its own citizens including with chemical weapons.

Corbyn has previously expressed support for Kurdish self-determination and spoken out against UK arms sales to Saudia Arabia, something that will now apparently be a part of Labour's manifesto. That's good.

He must however be clear that Assad, Russia and Iran are the primary reason for millions of displaced people and hundreds of thousands of Syrian dead.

Macron and Le Pen woo strikers

By Gemma Short

On Wednesday 26 April far-right French Presidential candidate Marine Le Pen tried to position herself as the candidate for working-class people by visiting the picket line of striking workers in Amiens, northern France.

The strike is against the closure of a Whirlpool washing machine factory.

Emmanuel Macron, the other presidential candidate had hoped to prove he understood the workers by meeting with union representatives; however he told them he wouldn't keep the factory open if he won but would argue for “good terms for the closure”.

On the other hand Le Pen said, “Everyone knows what side Emmanuel Macron is on — he is on the side of the corporations. I am on the workers' side, here in the car park, not in restaurants in Amiens. He's showing disdain for workers, so I've come to see them.”

That Le Pen, a millionaire by in-



heritance, can position herself as the friend of the working class is vile. The same Le Pen who accuses Macron of being part of the establishment has hidden behind parliamentary immunity to avoid investigations over misuse of public funds.

Le Pen is clearly trying to position herself as the defender of the working-class against the rich, the establishment, and globalisation. It is dangerous. Pitting French workers against workers from

other countries won't keep factories open.

Around 250,000 people marched in Paris on May Day against Le Pen and the Front National. The demonstration was not, however, a display of support for Macron, with slogans such as “neither Le Pen the racist nor Macron the banker”.

Latest polling has Macron on 59% and Le Pen on 41%. The second round of the election is on Sunday 7 May.

“Anti-left” grouping gains among students

By Ruaraidh Anderson

A well organised coalition of aggrieved and right-leaning candidates prevailed against the left at this year's conference of the National Union of Students (25-28 April).

After three years of substantial shifts to the left on policy in the student movement, the mood of left delegates was, at times, one of exasperation and sadness.

The political tone was set during the earliest debates, when liberal arguments for free education prevailed against left wing counter-arguments. Conference was asked to vote for free education on the grounds that it would be “good for the economy” (i.e. big business) and be more appealing to those in power.

In elections to the National Executive Shakira Martin, standing on an apolitical platform (“listening, learning, leading”) ousted Malia Bouattia as President. Bouattia's presidency, despite weaknesses, brought about a tangible leftward shift in NUS.

Similar candidates won other full-time positions — VP Welfare (Izzy Lenga), VP Further Education (Emily Chapman), VP Higher Education (Amatey Doku) and VP Society and Citizenship (Robbie Young).

Although left candidate Ali Milani won the final full-time position, VP Union Development, he positioned himself as a centrist. While we should avoid centring our analysis in an individualistic way around the winning candidates, this is a concerning outcome.

How did this new grouping achieve success?

For the first time in a very long time, the left candidates — Bouattia



The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts has campaign solidly throughout the year on free education and workers' rights. Here: supporting the Picturehouse cinema workers' strike.

alongside left-backed candidates for VP Welfare (Shelly Asquith) and VP Higher Education (Sorana Vieru) — were equated with the *mainstream* of NUS. Opposition to them came from many areas.

For some, it was a clear political opposition to the left-wing leadership — either as opposition to left politics or from a desire for an “apolitical” NUS.

For some, it was an organisational dissatisfaction with the way the left leadership had operated in a cliquey way and had failed to be effective at reaching out to lots of campuses outside of its own bubble.

For some, it was legitimate con-

cerns over the left antisemitism existing in parts of our movement.

For some, it was overt or subtle Islamophobia directed towards Bouattia and others that led a drive to oust her.

Through speeches which talked about bringing a change to NUS, the anti-left candidates were able to channel dissatisfaction into winning hundreds of votes in each election for one set, or slate, of candidates.

Part of the reason they were successful undoubtedly lies in the fact that a string of disaffiliation campaigns from right-wing student unions have taken place during this year. These campaigns brought to-

gether various dissatisfied groups and unified them behind a single “No to NUS” campaign, which registered dissatisfaction with the left NUS mainstream.

While many right-wing officers campaigned for students' unions to stay in NUS, they also openly and honestly made their opposition to the left in NUS well known. By the time of conference, the right was pushing for change in NUS, and a model of dissatisfied groups lining up together with the aim of kicking out a left establishment, had already been practised across the country.

The left understandably feels deflated, but the situation is not as dire as it seems. Before Bouattia and for over a decade, a right-wing (led by Blairite Labour students) successfully argued for a graduate tax against free education in NUS. Those forces are now politically weak. The new anti-NUS coalition has not politically won over its supporters to anything like these politics, nor does it look likely to do so.

FREE EDUCATION

Policies in favour of free education, in support of universal living grants, of nationalising the big six energy companies and free movement all passed. A motion saying that all protests should be peaceful and non-disruptive was voted down.

The new president, Shakira Martin, is an advocate of free education; the new VP Higher Education not only supports free education, but ran a respectable NSS boycott campaign on his campus this year and voted for Corbyn in the Labour leadership elections.

The point is not that we should expect this group to do left-wing things — we should not — but that

the political territory that they felt they needed to compete in was vastly to the left of previous years.

The left has many problems — from antisemitism to a cliquey and top down way of organising. Our poor results prove we need to change our game.

We should not try to retreat into secret and informal cliques but should drive forward uncompromisingly for democratic organising and a mass movement, as the only effective alternative to the new leadership of the student movement, and the only effective way of defeating the Tory government.

A left which focusses on building grassroots campaigns and organising through democratic structures, which has genuine political debate, is a left which will grow and become more and more politically sharp. This has to be our project for the upcoming year: to help spark local activism and bring in new activists and link them up with workers' struggles.

We need to build a coherent national movement against the Higher Education reforms which have now become law and for free education in spite of the political shift in NUS.

We need to convince people of socialist politics and recruit students and campus workers to the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

In the first place Workers' Liberty students will be campaigning hard for a Labour vote from students (see back page).

Free schools poor value for money

By Charlotte Zalens

The government's free schools programme has been condemned as “incoherent and too often poor value for money” by MPs on the Public Accounts Committee.

The committee's recent report says that the Department for Education is spending “over the odds” on unsuitable sites and building free schools in areas where extra places are not always needed. On the other hand, 60% of state schools are more than 40 years old and in need of essential repairs amounting to an estimated £7 billion.

The Department of Education spent £863 million on 175 free school sites between 2011 and 2016. 24 of the sites cost more than £10 million and four cost more than £30 million. It is plans to spend a further £2.5 billion on land for schools from 2016-22.

Despite all the money spent, many of free schools have inadequate premises and lack on-site playgrounds or sports facilities.

Student union rights under attack over BDS campaigns

By Ben Tausz

The Charity Commission is investigating a number of student unions for their policies on boycotting Israel and may take action against them, amid right-wing calls for such boycotts to be banned.

Successive governments, keen to head off organised opposition to their policies, have eroded students' rights to take political action through their unions.

Most student unions have been converted to charities, subject to regulation by the Charity Commission (in England) and to laws banning them from carrying out political campaigning that the Commission does not regard as furthering their “charitable objectives” — even if their own members vote for this campaigning.

There has recently been much agitation against the BDS campaign

(Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel), including from the Conservative government which has banned local authorities from taking political considerations into account in purchasing decisions.

In March, two University of Manchester students faced disciplinary action for dropping a banner reading “Stop Arming Israel”.

Workers' Liberty fights to end the occupation of Palestinian territory and the repression of Palestinians, and for a free, independent Palestine alongside Israel. We believe that consumer, cultural and academic boycotts are not the right tactics for socialists to use in pursuit of Palestinian liberation.

Even though supporting BDS does not make a person racist, problems of both explicit and implicit antisemitism need tackling within the pro-Palestine movement and can be fed by BDS.

Nevertheless, we are opposed to

the Charity Commission's interference, which is an affront to basic freedom of organisation — and deeply hypocritical from right-wingers who claim to be concerned about union democracy, free speech and political freedoms on campuses. It must be up to a union's members to decide, through democratic debate, what issues are in its remit.

Much of the student union movement's establishment and bureaucracy — especially the Trustee Boards brought in with the shift to charity status, and the unelected non-students and professionalised sabbatical officers who sit on them — has internalised the anti-political, service-provider model of student unions pushed on them from above, and has taken up the role of ensuring aggressive self-censorship.

Even before these latest moves by the Charity Commission, last

summer saw UCLU's own (partially unelected) Trustee Board strike down a vote for BDS by its democratically elected Union Council, citing concerns that this would cause trouble with the Commission. In fact, the Board ruled that even raising awareness of the repression of Palestinians was unacceptably political.

This is not just a matter for the BDS movement: it is the thin end of the wedge for all political organisation. What begins with BDS could spread to suppressing all sorts of political activity, from international solidarity, to climate change activism, to campaigns over the NHS and local public services — anything that can be construed to fall outside a narrow, blinkered definition of what affects students solely in their capacity as students.

Whatever your stance on BDS, we must all defend student unions' democratic rights.

Scottish Labour and the two nationalist squeezes

SCOTLAND

By Dale Street

Scottish Labour candidates need to fight the forthcoming general election on the basis of policies which challenge the inequalities of wealth and power inherent in capitalism, and which will mobilise the labour movement not just to vote Labour but to fight for those policies whatever the outcome of the election.

All Labour candidates throughout the UK should be campaigning on that basis. But the importance of such an election campaign is all the greater where specifically labour-movement and class-based politics have been squeezed out by competing nationalisms.

And that is the case in Scotland, where opinion polls show the SNP on 41% (50% in 2015), the Tories on 28% (13% in 2015), and Labour on 18% (24% in 2015, and 42% in 2010).

Based on a now largely discredited and disowned White Paper, the SNP's pro-independence campaign in 2014 polarised the Scottish electorate around national identities and attitudes to independence.

The momentum from that initial polarisation carried over into the 2015 general election. The SNP ran a straightforward nationalist campaign, promising to "make Scotland stronger" in Westminster etc.

Despite having lost the 2014 referendum, the SNP consolidated the bulk of "Yes" voters into its electoral base. Aided by the first-past-the-post system, it won 56 of Scotland's 59 Westminster constituencies.

The same momentum and the same polarisation also helped the SNP win the Holyrood elections of 2016, even if it lost its previous absolute majority there.

At the same time, British nationalism began to consolidate its own political base, in

the form of a boost in electoral support for the Tories. Pitching themselves as the foremost champions of the Union, the Tories increased their representation at Holyrood in 2016 from 15 to 31.

As the nationalist polarisation of politics in Scotland intensified and day-to-day politics increasingly degenerated into a permanent referendum campaign, Labour was squeezed remorselessly between the two competing nationalisms.

Despite standing on an election manifesto with a clear focus on social and economic issues, and one which advocated policies well to the left of the SNP, the 2016 Holyrood election saw the number of Labour MSPs collapse 37 to 24, leaving the Tories as the official opposition.

Sturgeon's announcement in March that she wanted to secure a Westminster section 30 Order, to allow a second referendum to be held on Scottish independence, added a further boost to political polarisation around national identities.

Scottish nationalists, only too happy to ignore the SNP's actual record during its ten years of power at Holyrood and whose sole political purpose in life is to secure Scottish independence, were given a fresh lease of life.

Inevitably, the SNP's demand for another referendum, backed in breach of their manifesto commitments by Green MSPs, triggered a fresh surge of support for the Tories. Winning between eight and ten seats in the forthcoming general election is now a real possibility for the Tories.

It suits both the SNP and the Tories to transform the general election in Scotland into a referendum on a second referendum.

Whereas Scottish Labour backs federalism and Corbyn would not oppose a second referendum, the Tories are standing as the most reliable opponents of independence and another referendum.

This conveniently diverts attention away

from the Tories' actual record in power in Westminster since 2010, and also away from the policies which the Tories are fighting this general election.

The SNP initially wobbled on how to present the general election, before falling in line behind Alex Salmond and treating the election as a referendum on a second referendum.

This likewise conveniently diverts attention away from the SNP's record as a party of government in Holyrood:

Literacy and numeracy standards have declined, child poverty has increased, FE teacher and student places have been decimated, relative poverty has increased, inequalities in access to HE have increased, the NHS has suffered from shortages of doctors, nurses and GPs, the gap between rich and poor has increased, and Scotland's economy now teeters on the brink of recession.

TRANSFORM

Scottish Labour candidates need to transform the terrain on which the general election is fought. But some candidates — all of whom were selected by a sub-committee of the Scottish Labour Executive Committee — seem to want to out-Tory the Tories.

According to the first election campaign leaflet from Blair McDougall, former Director of "Better Together" and now Labour candidate for East Renfrewshire, for example: "I ran the winning campaign against independence. Now I want your vote to say No to a second referendum. On 8th June Vote Labour and Say No to the SNP."

McDougall's electoral strategy is to win over Tory voters to voting Labour. But if they were unwilling to switch to voting Labour under Blair, they are even less likely to switch to voting Labour under Corbyn.

Support for Labour in Scotland can be built only by winning back Labour voters who

switched to the SNP.

To do that, Scottish Labour needs to tear off the "Red Tories" label which the SNP stuck on it after the "Better Together" campaign. McDougall, on the other hand, boasts of his role as "Better Together" Director.

Defining another referendum as the key issue in the election can only push ex-Labour voters further into the arms of the SNP, and also help boost support for Tory Unionists.

Scottish Labour candidates contesting seats in the general election includes members of the Campaign for Socialism/Momentum Scotland.

They have the opportunity to campaign by placing basic class issues and labour movement politics to the fore. And The ability of the labour movement in Scotland to continue to represent a political pole of attraction and an electoral force depends on how successful they will be in the coming weeks at doing that.

The pro-independence left, on the other hand, could do far worse than spend the election campaign working out how they could have got things so wrong.

They campaigned for a "Yes" vote in 2014, pretending that they were putting forward a socialist case for independence as opposed to functioning as no more than an echo chamber for the SNP.

They welcomed the defeat of labour movement politics by nationalism in 2015, deluding themselves into believing that it created a mass opening for socialist politics, only to be brutally disabused of such illusions when they stood candidates in 2016.

And now, because one nationalism begets another, they would find that the space for advocating socialist politics has narrowed even further — if it were not for the fact that they have now adopted support for a second referendum as a surrogate for fighting for socialist politics.

Macron: the more we see the less we like

LETTER

Emmanuel Macron is facing a huge problem. The more voters see him, the less they like him.

Macron's performance since winning his place to second round of the French Presidential election has been catastrophic.

Soon after winning 24% of the popular votes, Macron went to the very posh La Rotonde, a well-known restaurant in Paris, with his close friends and allies. Among them, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, soixante-huitard turned pillar of the Paris bien-pensant French liberals, and the pro-EU Jacques Attali, who believes that as long as him and his friends are living "la belle vie" nothing wrong can happen.

It looked like Nicolas Sarkozy's post-election party, which was savagely criticised by the French media after he won the presidency.

This a political mistake demonstrates the true nature of Macron. A candidate of the establishment, a political fraud who seems completely out of his depth in a battle to save France from fascism.

Macron's movement "En Marche" is nothing more than a "gigantic Facebook group" with no real membership and his own electors don't even trust him as 45% of them only voted for him to stop Le Pen.

His manifesto is also confusing.

Macron wants to give a massive tax-break

to pretty much everyone, whilst investing in the economy. Where the money will come from remains a mystery.

During the campaign, Macron managed to claim that he was "a socialist" and then claimed the opposite, which gives the impression of a man that has nothing to offer other than he isn't Le Pen.

France is experiencing one of its biggest political crisis in living memory and Macron is already exposed as the "political fraud" that he is. In a country where millions of people are unemployed and where poverty is rising, Macron appears to be the man who can't rebuild the country's confidence in a better future as 61% of his own voters don't believe he will make a positive impact.

On the other hand, the rise of the left-wing candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon has demonstrated that France is fed up with its establishment and many French people want something else. They want a new France, a country that works for them not for the establishment.

Macron's flashes of petulance and entitlement are unattractive for most of the seven million who voted for Mélenchon when he desperately need them to comfortably defeat the far-right.

Even worse for him, he seems unable to win over the other seven million who voted for the conservative candidate Francois Fillon. Around a third of the seven million who voted for the right-wing and conservative

candidate would prefer Le Pen over Macron as president.

For them, Macron is still a representative of the failed and hugely unpopular Francois Hollande's government. Macron is too liberal for them. They wanted a candidate that will undo gay marriage and put Catholic traditional family values back in the political agenda. Macron doesn't represent them, hence the temptation to vote for Le Pen.

CREDIBILITY

Elections are always won not in the centre, but on the political credibility of the candidate's manifesto. Therefore, what voters want to know is if their president will be able to solve France's economic problems.

Youth unemployment is a particular problem. Almost one in four of those aged under 25 are out of work, a much higher rate than in Germany. More than 85% of employment growth last year was for temporary jobs, and the vast majority of those hired were on contracts of less than a month.

So here is the problem for Macron: he can't appeal to both the left-wing and right-wing voters at the same time; he needs to find a common ground between all of them which will be impossible as the gulf that separates them is by far too high.

Macron behaves like he has already won the election, and ignores the polls that show him losing support for Le Pen. His "move-

ment" thinks that he is in the same spot than Jacques Chirac was in 2002. The fear of the far-right will be enough for Macron to win comfortably.

But the comparisons with 2002, when the FN founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen, knocked out the Socialist Party candidate, Lionel Jospin, in the first round of the presidential election, are misleading.

The 2002 result was a shock to France and the FN themselves. They had no credible programme and no real ambition to win the election. Thus, France voted massively for the conservative Chirac.

Today no one doubts Marine Le Pen wants to win and is more "experienced" than Macron in fighting election.

Latest polls suggest that Macron should win with [around 60%] of the votes. But the support for the FN will grow under Macron's presidency as he will not address the social issue that feed fascism in France.

Macron seems to be at best a temporary, very temporary alas, rampart against the Front National.

Whatever happens on Sunday 7 May, the crisis in France is so bad, so deep and the need for change so great that the country is at boiling point.

Macron's term as President will only help the crisis to grow.

Stéphane (French socialist now active in the Labour Party).

Make the rich pay!

Wages are the clearest measure of how well or badly workers are doing in capitalist society. Between 1979 and 2008 the share of national output (GDP) going on wages fell from 65% to around 54%. This represents a huge shift of wealth in favour of the profit system and the capitalist class who benefit from it.

Following an economic crisis in the 1970s, the capitalists set out to roll back the gains made by workers in the previous decades. Over thirty years global capitalism has reduced relative wages and fundamentally undermined the strong trade union organisation and workplace militancy which once set firmer limits on exploitation.

Labour's policies — a £10 living wage, stronger employment rights from day one in a job, ending zero hours contracts and ending the 1% pay cap for NHS workers, restoring collective bargaining in the public sector, reintroducing bursaries for training NHS workers — will all boost working-class living standards. Labour's £10 living wage (up from its current £9) will boost the incomes of more than 20% of the workforce. These steps will push back against almost 40 years of redistribution in favour of the rich!

For over six years, five million workers in our hospitals, schools, fire stations and a host of other essential services have been subject to a government-imposed pay freeze. Year after year pay rises for these workers have been capped at 1% regardless of the rising cost of living, the growth of productivity or the problems of recruitment and retention in their services. The effect has been that those workers have seen their living standards fall on average by 7%. We are just over half way through a planned ten year pay freeze, with four more years to go.

Re-electing the Tories means a continuation of institutionalised low pay and ever lowering living standards for millions of workers and their families. In public services it also means an acceleration in staffing shortages as demoralised and underpaid workers continue to drift out of jobs that don't pay their bills.



Those who hanker after a return to business as usual in the Labour Party should recall Labour's stance in 2012. Labour's then Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls accepted the Tory-Lib arguments on the public sector pay freeze and promised that it would continue even if Labour were re-elected in 2015. He said, "I understand the anger in the public and private sectors at that income squeeze, but the reality is, given the economy failing as it is, that that pay restraint is going to have to continue." Balls also said, "the priority has got to be getting people into jobs rather than people being paid more." The truth is Labour's support for the Tory-Lib coalition policy did nothing to get more people into

jobs, let alone decent, well-paid jobs.

A decade of low pay and real pay cuts on impacts on everything: how often we eat, where we can afford to live, how much time we spend with family and friends, whether one job is enough to survive on, whether a holiday can be afforded, and so much more.

POVERTY

In modern capitalist Britain the great majority of people on benefits are also in work.

Many are struggling with rent arrears and other debts, parents go without food so their children can eat, teachers bring food into schools to feed hungry children, nurses use food banks, young women school students cannot afford tampons,

For an elected representative of the Labour Party to respond to that set of circumstances as if the choice is between decent pay and jobs, rather than between low taxes and high profits for the rich and well-paid meaningful jobs and decent benefits and services for all, was and is a disgrace.

Worse still was the failure to make the obvious link between the relentless attack on pay and the morale and recruitment of people to who look after our sick and elderly, teach our children and provide social care for the most vulnerable. New Labour accepted the Tory presentation of public sector pay as a selfish "producer" interest when they could and should have transformed it into a debate about the sort of society we want to live in.

It's a measure of the progress made and the possibilities created by the election of Jeremy Corbyn that Labour goes into this election promising to change all this.

In the coming weeks of the election it is important these commitments are reinforced and expanded. For instance, a much bigger and more important way to ensure that we can protect our living standards would be to repeal the anti-union laws that have allowed the bosses to assert their power and enrich themselves so lavishly at our expense.

No progress in the Progressive Alliance

"Labour is fighting to win this election and will field candidates in every seat..."

This is Labour's response to a letter from Labour MPs, members and supporters calling on the Party to stand aside in Brighton Pavilion, the seat held by the Green MP, Caroline Lucas and, bizarrely, in the Isle of Wight, where in 2015 the Greens were second to the Tories, and 500 votes ahead of Labour. The letter says,

"...with the progressive vote split, the danger of a Tory landslide and all it means for our country now looms darkly on 8 June."

That's a real threat, right? But advocates of the so-called "progressive alliance" want the labour movement to shackle itself. Some even say that by voting Green in safe Labour seats Corbyn will be pushed into sticking to his more radical policies.

The best way to make sure Corbyn does that is to vote Labour and prepare to fight for Labour not to back down! Building a labour movement capable of asserting itself must be our priority, not propping up those who will only weaken the labour movement once elected.

The Greens' record in Parliament has never really been tested, as they have just one MP. But, in charge of Brighton Council, they unleashed appalling cuts to the terms and conditions of Brighton's bin workers. They have helped prop up a Tory /Lib Dem coalition in Leeds which undertook similar policies.

Those who have given up on the idea of a strong labour movement — or, with the likes of Polly Toynbee, who never wanted such a thing — are combining to weaken the left in the Labour Party.

Discussing the possibility of the Greens being able to affiliate to Labour is worthwhile. Then the Green Party, like the Co-Op Party, would have some autonomy but unite with Labour for elections. As it stands, it is better that the Greens stand down in every seat where they threaten the Labour vote.

Labour should stand in every seat!

The pay freeze should be ended across all services, and pay rises should be argued for explicitly as a measure of Labour's commitment to high quality effective public services for all.

The increase in Living Wage should be a start of further hikes and, future rises should be tied to the cost of living.

The Tories and their many friends and allies in the press will attack these policies as a hand-out to the unions who fund the party. That argument will have some sway unless we turn it into a debate about the sort of society we want and who it benefits.

It helps that Labour have said they will fund their NHS measures by reversing the reductions in corporation taxes introduced by the Tories. But Labour needs a comprehensive policy for redistributing income — including scrapping VAT on basic goods and raising taxes on those with the highest incomes.

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* sellers have increased standing orders and made donations, bringing £200.

- 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, 60-83-01 (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).

Tories seek mandate to incre

By Martin Thomas

"Mrs May", writes the Tory-leaning columnist of the *Financial Times*, Janan Ganesh, "could not survive an election campaign saying so little so often if people paid attention". Since so many don't, "the repetition of slogans in lieu of answers carries no cost".

Fraser Nelson, another Tory, comments in the *Spectator*: "She seems to think that, if you refuse to give the press anything, the public won't care. Worse, she seems to be right – for now, at least".

May's purpose, so Nelson writes, is not to "seek a mandate", but to evade one. "That's what this election is really about: a bonfire of these Cameron promises [from 2015]. From 9 June onwards: Theresa time!"

So far May's election pitch has been more about what she is not promising than about what she is promising. She will not rule out tax rises (i.e., she wants to free herself from the Tories' 2015 pledge not to increase taxes). She will not, unlike the Tories in 2015, commit to the "triple lock" which pushes pensions upwards.

On Brexit, having written a nasty bottom line — create a tight filter on immigrants to Britain from the EU — May has already secured parliamentary votes for her to negotiate the Brexit deal without accountability or control, or even to crash out of the EU without a deal if she wants to ("no deal is better than a bad deal").

The *Daily Mail* front page headline on 19 April summed up how she sees the election serving her Brexit drive: "Crush the saboteurs". That is, strengthen her position against all who ask questions, raise criticisms, demand information.

Probably the Tory manifesto, when it is

published on 8 May, will contain, at least for form's sake, a few gimmicks. The one most widely trailed is a voucher system to give tax breaks to people paying for care for elderly parents.

But the gist is that the Tories want authority for long enough to take them well past Brexit-point. They want a snap vote now:

- when the Brexit negotiations have not yet gone sticky, as they surely will at points even if overall they go well for the Tories
- when the after-effect of two years of (mild) increase in average real wages — after many years of slump, following 2008 — still holds, and before the new decline in real wages, already under way, hits harder
- when Labour's new left-wing leaders have not yet managed to reshape the party so it can efficiently convince voters that better things are possible
- just after the local government elections on 4 May, which are likely to give the Tories a boost
- before the scandal about Tory election expenses in 2015 spreads.

BREXIT

After the Brexit referendum of 23 June 2016 we pointed out that the one certain result of the referendum result was not the supposed £350 million a week extra for the NHS, or anything like that, but a more right-wing Tory government with the wind in its sails.

In March, before the election was called, the Resolution Foundation think-tank reported:

"If nothing is done to change [the] outlook... [2015-20] will go down as being the worst [period] on record for income growth in the bottom half of the income distribution. It will also represent the biggest rise in in-

equality since the end of the 1980s".

The Tories' election campaign is designed to strengthen them against any and all pressure to "change the outlook".

The toxic mix comes from low wage growth — which the government's own Office for Budgetary Responsibility predicts — and a great wave of pre-programmed cuts in working-age welfare benefits.

The percentage of children living in poverty, which soared from 18% to 33% in the Thatcher 1980s, then decreased from 34% to 27% in the Blair-Brown years, has been rising steadily since 2010 and is set to rise further. There are now three and a half million children in poverty. In some local authorities, that's around 40%. The worst-hit five are Tower Hamlets, at 43.5%; Manchester, 40.0%; Westminster, 37.7%; Islington, 37.7%; and Newham, 37.5%.

The latest figures from the Trussell Trust, the biggest network of foodbanks, show that in the year to 31 March 2017 they distributed 1,182,954 three-day emergency food packages. Of this number, 436,938 went to children.

Use of foodbanks was only 40,898 packages in 2009-10, went up to 913,138 in 2013-14, and continues to rise since then.

Meanwhile profits are high. Since 2014 the net rate of return for private non-financial corporations has been back to its pre-2007-8 rate of about 12.5%, a historic high. The *Sunday Times* gave its 2017 Rich List report the headline: "Boom time for billionaires", reporting that "London has more billionaires than any other city in the world".

On Wednesday 4 January, the High Pay Centre reported that after just two and a half days of the year Britain's top bosses had pocketed more money than the average UK worker would in the whole of 2017.

Number of emergency food packages distributed by Trussell Trust food banks

40,938

2010

The National Health Service is faltering under the pressure of cuts after cuts, and the siphoning-off of resources into private contractors and increased managerial overheads. Hospitals are jammed full, waiting lists get longer and longer, and death rates are rising.

Since 2010, £4.6 billion has been cut from social care budgets. Despite an ageing population, 400,000 fewer people are getting care funded by local authorities. 15% less money is being spent on nursing homes.

The Tories will continue on that path.

SCHOOLS

School funding cuts already programmed will by 2020 take £403, on average, per primary student, and £554 per secondary student.

Of the little money available, much will be diverted into starting new "free schools" — with no regulation of teacher qualifications or conditions — and new grammar schools.

As of March 2017, 69% of secondary schools were Academies or "free schools", and 23% of primaries. Since secondaries are mostly bigger than primaries, there are now more students in Academies or "free schools" than in local authority "community schools". Even "community schools" now get their budgets direct from the government, bypassing the local authority.

The Tories dropped a scheme to force all schools, by law, to become Academies, but continue a drive to squeeze out local democratic control of schools and replace it by control by central government and by pseudo-markets based on exam league-tables and competitive enrollment.

Already by 2015, the "adult skills budget", for "non-academic" education and training for those 19 or over, had been cut by 40% since 2010. Further education colleges continue to be cut drastically.

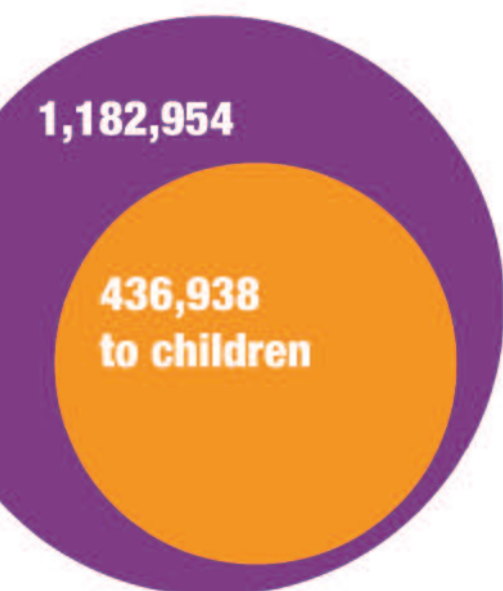
In universities, from 2017-18 onwards, the £9,250 fee cap will rise with inflation; maybe the Tories will decide to raise it even further.

The number of public libraries has decreased by 632 since 2010

Campaigners estimate another 500 are under threat



Wage cuts, inequality, poverty



2017

The burden of repayments on student loans will rise steadily with inflation, since the Tories have frozen the nominal pay levels at which repayments start and at which higher interest rates kick in. Student maintenance grants have already been abolished, from 2016-7.

The Higher Education and Research Act, which became law on 2017, opens the way to make university education even more “marketised”.

By 2015-6, the number of public libraries had gone down by 632, or 14%, since 2009-10, to 3850. Campaigners reckon another 500 are under threat. Many operate with reduced hours or only volunteer staff. The Tories will cut libraries even further.

The Tories’ Trade Union Act, which restricts workers’ rights to collective action even more than the drastic laws of the Thatcher regime, had most of its clauses come into effect on 1 March 2017.

These include:

- 50% turnout requirement for ballots on industrial action
- 40% (of electorate) support requirement for industrial action ballots in public services
- two weeks’ notice to be given to employers of industrial action
- obligation on unions to supervise picketing
- opting in (not out) by union members on political funds.

These clauses promise to cripple national-scale industrial action by public sector unions, the sort of action which challenged the government’s pension cuts in 2011, and thus to protect the Tories’ policy of imposing a 1% limit on public sector money-wage rises at least until 2020 — with increasing inflation, year-by-year real-wage cuts. They also aim to strangle the Labour Party’s funding.

All those clauses will be enforced by the Tory government if it wins renewed office on 8 June.

The Tories will ease the way for the lurch

to low-paid, insecure work to continue. It has been a marked trend since 2008. Contrary to many claims, it is neither a universal rule, nor an inescapable result of the world market. It is a product of Tory policies and the weakening of trade unions.

Between 2011 and 2016, almost 40 per cent of the growth in employment (excluding the self-employed) was in insecure jobs, zero hours contracts or insecure temporary work. Low-paid “self-employment”, which is often in reality just wage-work with reduced employer obligations, has also risen fast. Almost half the self-employed today are low-paid.

If recent trends continue until 2022 — and the Tories’ aim in this election is exactly to make sure that they can continue those trends — by then three and a half million people will be in zero-hours contracts, temporary or agency work, or low-paid self-employment.

No-one knows what the Brexit negotiations will bring. The substantial voices in the ruling class who pushed for a “soft Brexit” — with Britain staying in the Single Market, or at least with “passporting” rights for British-based banks — have fallen back, reconciling themselves to worse because of the Tories’ immovable obsession with cutting immigration.

One certainty is this: Brexited Tories, seeking as ever to “sell” Britain as a site for global capital, will want to offer global bosses compensation for the disadvantage of the new barriers between Britain and the EU. Increased division between countries means increased competitive pressure on governments to court global capital. The compensation can only come in the form of reduced social overheads, that is, reduced standards for the working class.

TRADE

The weight of ruling-class interest both sides of the channel pushes for the Tories and the EU to make a deal that keeps trade restrictions manageably light and preserves areas of common regulatory standards.

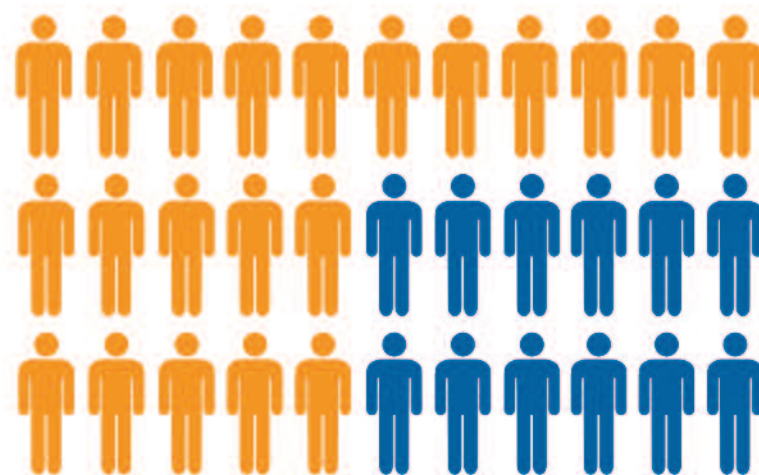
The Brexit Tories talked about compensating for EU barriers by seeking trade deals elsewhere, but there are no signs of that.

Despite Theresa May’s talk of a crash “no-deal” Brexit being an option, and despite some Tories positively favouring a path that makes up for trade barriers by offering Britain as a low-regulation offshore site with workers’ rights and wages slashed, a deal may well be made to limit the barriers. But not without glitches and crises. And the pressure for reduced social provision will only be limited, not reversed.

The Tories made Nissan bosses a secret offer to persuade them to keep car production in Britain. No similar offers or guarantees over Brexit for working-class people!

The best guess must be that the Nissan offer was for an arrangement to have production in certain sectors certified as complying with EU regulations and thus able to arrange

Social care cut £4.6bn since 2010



400,000 fewer people getting care

supply chains across the channel without crippling tariffs and paperwork.

The Tories’ drive against freedom of movement is a cultural and economic blow against the working class. Immigration helps not only the migrants, but also those already here, in terms of enriching culture and of a flow of keen young workers who pay much more into social budgets than they take out.

Without immigration my Further Mathematics classes at school would not exist. I do some Saturday sessions for the keenest Year 13 students across south east London. The best students are of Ukrainian, Romanian, Albanian origin.

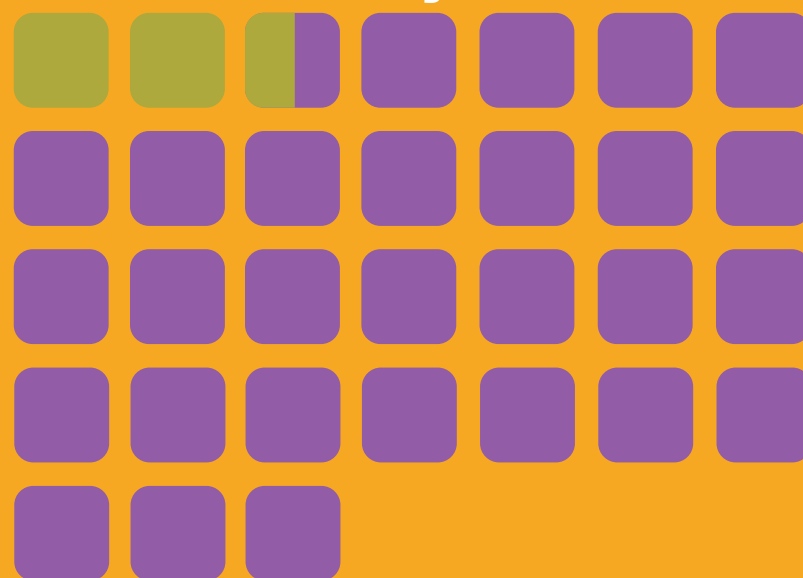
Cuts in immigration will increase pressure for social cuts, both by reducing governments’ tax revenue much more than they reduce demand on benefits and services, and by excluding workers on whom the public services would otherwise rely.

The Tories evidently think Britain can do without libraries, social care, and adult education. And without maths too?

The “strong and stable government” which the Tories promise is “strong and stable” pressure towards a narrower, meaner, nastier, bleaker, more marketised society. Our interest is in weakening and destabilising the Tories.

UK bosses take just two and a half days to earn the average worker’s yearly wage

January 2017



Politics, hope and organising for change

The surge in membership of the Labour Party after Corbyn's election shows that many, particularly young people are attracted to socialist politics going far beyond that of any Labour leader of the past 25 years.

Only the most sectarian on the left, at least in England and Wales, reject voting Labour now. This represents a big political shift.

In 1997 Tony Blair led the Labour Party, in the words of the Labour right, to "a historic landslide victory", a victory that Blair is still trying to cash in on. The huge vote to get rid of the Tories was an immense relief but it came at a large price. Blair would establish a consensus in Labour politics, where accepting Tory dogma and having faith in the market and capitalist competition were sacrosanct.

This editorial from 1997, written two weeks after the Labour victory, appeared in *Workers' Liberty* magazine. It takes a critical look at what the landslide represented and the challenges socialists would face. We campaigned for Labour to scrap Thatcher's anti-trade union laws.

It failed to do that.

In fact the New Labour leaders planned to break with the trade unions. They didn't get that far: formal links with the trade unions were maintained.

Without continuing the political and even more so the organisational transformation the Corbyn leadership has begun, the Labour Party can not yet say it is based on the trade unions or consistently represents working-class interests.

AS WE WERE SAYING

From *Workers' Liberty* 40, 15 May 1997

It is 2 May 1997, the day after the voters buried the Tories in a landslide of popular revulsion and gave New Labour an enormous and unprecedented majority in Parliament. A large crowd is standing in bright sunshine in and around Downing Street and down a sizeable stretch of Whitehall.

Everyone is exuberant, enthusiastic, happy, like people celebrating victory in a long and terrible war. Or people from whom a great weight has been lifted.

Some of it is orchestrated by New Labour apparatchiks. But nobody could generate or artificially concoct this crowd and this mood.

Supporters of *Workers' Liberty* are there in Whitehall to make a small demonstration in support of the demand that the new government restore free trade unionism in Britain. They unfurl an improvised banner calling for free trade unions. A sizeable crowd gathers around them and an impromptu meeting is held.

We talk to them about the need for free trade unions, and for the restoration of the welfare state. Speakers criticise Tony Blair, on trade union rights and the welfare state.

The crowd remains friendly. But not in agreement with the speakers. The dominant reaction is that they expect Blair to be better than his promises. Many of them don't seem to have paid too much attention to what Blair has actually been saying.

With them, as with vast numbers of people throughout the country, the weight of a hundred years of political tradition, of what "Labour" meant in politics for so long, out-



Blair betrayed the hopes of millions

weigh the bleak "New Labour" message Blair spent most of the campaign spelling out. They hold still to the image of Labour that Blair and his group have been working so hard to banish from public memory.

Good humouredly, a number of them say: "Give him a chance." Then one adds, to murmurs of assent from others: "And if you are right, then we'll see."

People who had long felt it in their bones, that after four general selection victories, the sleazy and vicious Tories simply could not be beaten, feel a correspondingly intense surge of joy and relief now that they have been thoroughly beaten.

The death of the Tory government has given birth to hope, and released much pent-up feeling. People want change. They expect change.

They have put their own interpretation on Blair's rhetoric. They have picked up the notes of sincere hostility to the ruling Tories in New Labour speeches and woven them into their own fiercely anti-Tory tune. It is not

Blair's tune.

They blame the Tories for doing to Britain things Blair has said explicitly he will not attempt to reverse. In an unfocused way, millions of people seem to want Blair to do what he spent much of the long election campaign telling them he would not do. Thus, an election which was democracy at rock bottom, where little of substance — except getting the Tories out — was put to the electorate, has produced a wild upsurge of hope and expectation — and attached it to the Tories' Blairite understudies!

The fall of the Tories has unleashed what is for the ruling class and the new government a dangerous mood of expectation.

Nobody has any reason to believe that Blair will prove untrue to his own nature and his own politics, and go on to satisfy the hopes of all those enthusiastic crowds celebrating the fall of the Tories. The release of hope is what is important here.

Those of us who have been paying attention to what Blair says and what he wants to do to the political labour movement may be in danger of missing the significance of what has happened. It is important that we do not miss it.

Hope is a commodity more precious than government promises, or, for that matter, government deeds. When those raised up now to unwarranted hope in the new government learn that they can't rely on Blair, they may carry that hope over into doing things for themselves and develop out of it a belief that it is possible for them to do things. A belief that many things, long thought impossible, really are possible now that the heavy tombstone of Tory rule has been shifted.

Hope will stimulate and liberate desire. Desire and hope will stimulate action.

How to think beyond and survive the exam season

A report on 2 May from the Health and Education Committee of MPs found that government cuts are pushing many schools to scrap or limit mental health help in schools. Daisy Thomas explains why that help is important.

There has been more recognition of the importance of mental health in the media lately.

From the Facebook Live video of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry, to the hugely successful 2017 London Marathon, the aim — to encourage more people to have conversations about mental health, as well as changing the way that these conversations can be had — is good.

Mental health is a spectrum, just like physical health. Some people may be at one end of the spectrum which is characterised by wellbeing and coping. At the other end of the spectrum people have trouble functioning in everyday life and have reduced coping and emotional resources. This may be when symptoms of depression and anxiety begin to reveal themselves.

The UK Mental Health Foundation defines depression as "a common mental disorder that causes people to experience depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy, and poor concentration"¹.

Anxiety is the second most common mental health condition. Anxiety is described as "a type of fear usually associated with the

thought of a threat or something going wrong in the future, but can also arise from something happening right now."¹

Adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable to symptoms of depression and anxiety. It is estimated that at least 50% of mental health issues manifest by mid-teens and 75% by mid-twenties¹.

Young Minds (the leading charity for youth mental health) is calling for government action, and pointing to how the education system exacerbates problems for young people. They say:

"The education system is fundamentally unbalanced, with an over-emphasis on exams and too little focus on student wellbeing. It is time to ensure that the wellbeing of students is as important as academic achievement in schools."²

Neglecting student wellbeing and over-emphasis on exam achievement can lead to a range of issues such as: poor concentration, memory issues, poor self-confidence, increased juvenile delinquency, reduced academic performance, poorer health, increased social difficulties or isolation, and reduced employment and further education opportunities.^{2,3}

So, what can be done? The good news is that schools can help promote student wellbeing, mental wellness, and resilience.

The first step is having a conversation about it and show that it's okay to talk about mental health. That can be done in a school assembly or in class.

In addition, increasing the visibility of stu-

dent support (e.g. school counsellors, chaplains, etc.) can help promote student engagement.

Schools can also help students through implementing mindfulness in the classroom. An evaluation of the Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) concluded that mindfulness interventions led to improvements in young peoples' mental, social, emotional, and physical health and wellbeing.

The intervention reduced stress, anxiety, reactivity, and disruptive behaviour. It also led to increases in sleep, self-esteem, calm, and relaxation.⁴

Some mindfulness techniques to incorporate at the beginning and/or end of classes, at home, as well as before exams can include:

Deep breathing exercises

Close eyes or focus softly on a neutral place

Inhale for 5 counts

Hold for 5 counts

Exhale for 5 counts

Bring back the mind to the breath if it wanders

Body scan

Close eyes or focus softly on a neutral place

Breathe deeply

Start to identify how different parts of the body feel

Work your way from your toes to your head

Bring your attention gently back if it wanders

Don't get caught up in trying to change anything

Progressive muscle relaxation

Close eyes or focus softly on a neutral place

Breathe deeply

Start to curl or clench the toes, holding for a

breath or two, and then releasing. Do this with the remaining muscle groups of your body, working your way up progressively

There are a range of wonderful mindfulness resources out there for adults and young people, such as Calm, Headspace, Smiling Mind.

Just remember, it doesn't take much to take a moment to really ask someone, one-on-one, how they have been going.

We can start to change the way that mental health is approached, especially with youth in schools, who can often be suffering the most.

Notes

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3. Owens, M., Stevenson, J., Hadwin, J.A., & Norgate, R. (2012). 'Anxiety and depression in academic performance: An exploration of the mediating factors of worry and working memory'. *School Psychology International*, 33(4), 433-449.

4. Weare, K. (2012). 'Evidence for the Impact of Mindfulness on Children and Young People. Exeter: Mindfulness in Schools Project'. From mindfulnessinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/MiSP-Research-Summary-2012.pdf.

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The Front National and fascism

By Martin Thomas

France's Front National, which now has a real though outside chance of gaining the country's powerful presidency, is not a fascist movement comparable to the Nazis or Mussolini's Fascist Party when they were on the eve of power in the 1920s and 30s.

Neither, however, is it a conventional hard-right party like UKIP or Germany's AfD. The makeover the FN has given itself since 2011 is a makeover.

When Jean-Marie Le Pen founded the FN in 1972, it took the Italian party claiming to represent Mussolini's heritage, the MSI, as a model. In the 1990s, the MSI renounced its fascist heritage, and eventually merged into a mainstream right party. The FN has not done that.

The FN still has a fascist core cadre and a fascist ideology. It functions as the electoral-political wing of a broader fascist current. It softens and dresses up its message to win votes, but it fits the characterisation of fascism outlined by Leon Trotsky in the 1930s: "a plebeian movement in origin, directed and financed by big capitalist powers. It issued forth from the petty bourgeoisie, the slum proletariat and even to a certain extent, from the proletarian masses... with its leaders employing a great deal of socialist demagoguery. This is necessary for the creation of the mass movement".

Fits it, except that it is still way short of being a mass movement. Its ideology is structured by characteristic themes of fascism:

- Exaltation of "the nation", against mysterious global elites and against individuals, as the guiding value of politics. Marine Le Pen denounces the legacy of France's great general strike and near-revolution of May-June 1968 in these terms: "May 68 promoted individualism. An individualism which has upended the foundations of our society". Her social demagoguery, pretending to stand up for the worse-off and for social provision, is tied into that exaltation of "the nation" and an insistence that social provision must first be for real French people.

- A leader cult. Both under Marine Le Pen, and under her father Jean-Marie, the FN has promoted its leader above all else, and given that leader absolute powers within the party.

- A cult of the state. In her closing speech at the FN congress where she was made leader, in 2011, Marine Le Pen declared: "Today, when globalisation rages and everything is collapsing, we still have the State... When things have to be regulated, protected, innovated, one naturally turns to the State".

Since its foundation the FN has operated in conditions of bourgeois democracy and capitalist economy more stable than in the 1930s, when Trotsky and other Marxists plausibly believed that political and economic collapse was certain, in one country after another, unless a socialist revolution could be made within a few years or so.

Its active base remains small compared to that of the 1920s and 30s fascist movements. It has 50,000-odd paid-up members, who function almost exclusively as electoral campaigners.

Its "stewarding squad", the DPS, had a fearsome reputation in the early years, but even then was cautious and weak compared to the street-fighting squads of 1920s and 30s fascism. Today the FN instead contracts out its stewarding to a commercial security firm, Colisée.

The Nazis at the start of 1933 had 1.5 million members in their party, and 425,000



The FN's founder Jean-Marie Le Pen (right) with Pierre Poujade

(some not party members) in their paramilitary SA. Mussolini's Fascist Party was formed from his "fighting squads" at the end of 1921, and then had 300,000 members.

The twist, however, is that Colisée is not just any security firm. It was founded by Axel Loustau, a former cadre of the brazenly fascist student group GUD (Groupe Union Défense). Loustau also runs a printing company, Presses de France, which has produced the FN's publicity materials since another company, Riwal, run by Frédéric Chatillon, a former comrade of Loustau's in the GUD, was banned from doing so in a court case over political-finance laws.

Although Loustau and Chatillon have no high posts in the FN, they and other GUD-ers are among the closest advisers of Marine Le Pen. They also keep links with the GUD.

DIVISION OF LABOUR

The division of labour which FN leaders see between their caffe latte and a varying range of France's espresso fascist group-lets was candidly summed up by Jean-Marie Le Pen — become, at the age of 87, garrulous and reckless — in November 2015.

The Parti Nationaliste Français was being revived to regroup the members of L'Oeuvre Française, a brazenly fascist group active since 1968 but now banned by the government. Jean-Marie Le Pen wrote to the PNF conference:

"Jeune Nation and Oeuvre Française, behind their founder Pierre Sidos, have led an independent national struggle for several decades in parallel to the Front National of which I was president. We have the same goal: to save our homeland and its French people from a decadence which we know to be deadly.

"The tsunami of immigration calls for a general mobilisation of patriots and the coordination of all national movements. Each one of these movement should be stronger and stronger in its own sector".

How much Marine Le Pen can do if she

wins the presidency, we still don't know. A part of the mainstream right, led by Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, has rallied to her. Will others? If she wins, how will the FN do in the June legislative elections?

Mussolini, even with his 300,000 members and with an Italian ruling class anxious for revenge after the factory occupations in 1920, took four years to impose a full fascist regime. If details of history had turned differently, it might have been overthrown in that time.

Le Pen cannot move as fast as Mussolini. But it is entirely imaginable that she can do harm in France on the lines of what Putin, Erdogan, or Orban have been doing recently in Russia, Turkey, Hungary.

The FN's official line on the trade unions is that its desired changes in the law will make them bigger and better but needing fewer strikes. But Nazi leaders before 1933 such as Gregor Strasser declared: "We consider the organisation of workers into trade unions an absolute necessity... As a workers' party, National Socialism recognises the right to strike without restriction".

The FN's opinion of France's biggest union confederation, the CGT, is: "The CGT shows its true face: still the transmission belt for a far left which is moribund but still pseudo-revolutionary and often ultra-violent".

Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of the FN, first came into politics as a teenager in the late 1940s with Action Française. AF had been founded in 1899, as part of the agitation around the Dreyfus affair: monarchist, Catholic-traditionalist, obsessed with hostility to Freemasons, for whom it blamed such events as the French Revolution of 1789-94.

In 1956 he became an MP for the quasi-fascist Poujadist movement. He served in the French army in its colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria.

He did not join the Organisation Armée Secrète, a group of French army officers and Algerian settlers who sought by terrorism to stop France ceding independence to Algeria in 1962, and killed thousands in Algeria and some dozens in France; but in 1965 he was the campaign manager for the presidential campaign of Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour, a veteran fascist who denounced the "abandonment" of Algeria.

After May 1968, new fascist groups sprouted, like the GUD and L'Oeuvre Française, focused on fighting the left and "communism" rather than the older enemies. They were mainly student-based. What they did is illustrated by a May 1969 episode recounted in a left-wing pamphlet of the 1970s.

Some 40 fascists set out from their base in the law faculty in the rue d'Assas in Paris to leaflet a high school. They trashed the student union office. The students gathered in the school canteen and pelted the fascists with missiles. The fascists retaliated with a

hand-grenade. One school student had to have a hand amputated, but the fascists lost the battle.

They lost more battles than they won, and in 1972, some of the fascist groups decided to create an electoral wing. Le Pen, who had been running a small business, had the electoral experience to impose himself as leader.

The FN did poorly in the 1970s, but survived. In 1977 Le Pen inherited a palace and a large fortune from a plutocrat whom he had befriended. He kept the fortune for himself rather than ceding it to the FN, and it helped him raise himself as a political figure above the formal structures of the FN (which were authoritarian enough, explicitly modelled on those of the Stalinised Communist Party).

In 1983 the FN made a breakthrough, winning control of a small town in northern France in alliance with a section of the mainstream right. Some of the mainstream right excused their alliance with the FN by saying it was anyway not as bad as the then Socialist Party government including Communist Party ministers. The Socialist Party president, François Mitterrand, helped the FN get media coverage so as to make trouble for the mainstream right.

The FN has had ups and downs since then, and is still relatively weak in most of France's big cities — only 5% of the vote in Paris. But it has gained in smaller towns, particular in "rust-belts".

Since becoming FN leader in 2011, Marine Le Pen has publicly campaigned to "de-demonise" the FN. Some FN leaders are openly gay. One leader, Louis Aliot, Marine Le Pen's partner, boasts of his part-Jewish background.

That makes her a canny fascist, and one born in 1968 rather than focused on the battles of long-past decades.

Her father made most of the big shifts in the FN's profile — to try to distance it from lost causes of the past, and to align it to a broader electorate in an era when the threat of USSR "communism" no longer scares, when an increasing majority of France's Muslim population are French-born and French-speaking. Jean-Marie Le Pen went for the FN:

- describing itself as "neither left nor right" rather than "far right"

- defining itself as "republican" and "secular", and as respecting the heritage of the French Revolution

- coming out for social provision and welfare (for the French, not immigrants) rather than as hardline free-market, and making a specific pitch to workers

- accepting that a large chunk of the North-African-origin population is now French, and in France to stay

He deliberately installed Marine Le Pen as his successor, pushing aside the old-fascist, Catholic-traditionalist, Bruno Gollnisch, explaining it thus: "I am tied by solidarities which I can't break, from the [World] war... from my mates in [the colonial army] in Indochina and Algeria, from the pied-noirs... Marine is much more free".

He started a sustained attempt to build bridges to conservative Jews and to Israel. He blew it up with a notorious statement on TV about the gas chambers being only "a detail" of World War Two, but that may have been more off-hand garrulousness and stubborn refusal to apologise than deliberation.

Marine Le Pen's new focus on France being threatened by twin "totalitarian" dangers, "globalism" and the EU on one side, "islamisation" on the other, sharpens the fascist edge of FN ideology.

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 6 May

Croydon All Out to Stop the Fascists!
10am, Lunar House, 40 Wellesley Road, Croydon CR9 2BY
bit.ly/2oHIRxy

Saturday 13 May

Surround Yarlswood
1pm, Yarlswood immigration detention centre, Bedford MK44 1FD
bit.ly/2pByLOT

Tuesday 16 May

Haringey Radical Readers:
Light Shining in Buckinghamshire
7pm, The Big Green Bookshop
Brampton Park Road, London N22 6BG
bit.ly/2p4RmIf

Saturday 20 May

Momentum NHS national conference
11am, Unite the Union — London & Eastern, Moreland Street, London EC1V 8BB
bit.ly/2p1AV8A

Saturday 27 May

Stop school cuts Newcastle rally
12.30pm, Grey's Monument, Newcastle, NE1 6JG
bit.ly/2pBK21t

Have an event you want listing? Email:
solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

McDonald's scraps zero-hour contracts: next stop, £10 an hour and a union!

Fast food giant McDonald's recently announced it will scrap zero-hours contracts for its workers in the UK. *Solidarity* spoke to Gareth Lane, an organiser for the Bakers, Food, and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU), about this move, and his union's ongoing efforts to organise fast food workers.

The BFAWU has been organising fast food workers for nearly two years now.

Organising fast food workers is not easy to say the least. Economic hardships like extreme poverty and chaos caused by low income and insecure hours makes organising routines and communications among workers quite difficult.

Every day is a real slog for our members building a union within these fast food workplaces, often faced with aggressive and bullying management, difficult financial circumstances, poverty living conditions, and long hours.

Despite this, BFAWU members in McDonald's, KFC, and Burger King never fail to lift my spirits to improve my concentration, and determination to win a union in some of the most difficult circumstances to organise in the UK.

Our members have been taking McDonald's on for some time and winning victories in workplaces; they have been winning some of the less glamorous victories, the ones that the media will never report on, but the victories that are vital to winning a union.

Just over the last couple of weeks, our members have won specialist equipment for disabled workers; they have successfully raised the issue of bullying and ha-



BFAWU and Hungry for Justice campaigners outside McDonald's

arrassment and removed bullying managers; they have supported each other when management has refused to support workers when they have been harassed by customers.

So it was great news to hear our members have beaten McDonald's over the issue of zero-hour contracts. For over two years McDonald's workers have demonstrated, taken direct action, occupied stores, and spoken to thousands of workers around the country. Now 115,000 McDonald's employees will have the choice of whether to accept guaranteed hours or not.

VICTORY

This is a seminal victory for our union and our members.

This victory means that no longer can McDonald's managers use the threat of cutting our workplace activists' hours as a disincentive to being active trade unionists. No longer can the threat of poverty be used to frighten our members into silence.

As an organiser who spends the

bulk of my time talking to fast food workers, the significance of this victory is huge. We are now able to point to something big and solid that our union has won. We are able to say to workers, "if we can beat the biggest employer in the world, we can beat your employer too. You can win If you take action."

Our message is clear: if you work in McDonald's, KFC, or Burger King, join the BFAWU. Get in touch with us, take part in our organiser training and change your workplace for the better.

There is no use in us dreaming of the kind of economy we had in the 1970s, where everyone worked in well-paid union jobs. We have these jobs now, we should do like our grandparents and great grandparents did, and fight to make these bad jobs good jobs now.

If not us then who? If not now then when?

Victory to the Bectu members fighting the same battles in cinemas, victory to the BFAWU!

Next stop, £10 an hour and union recognition!

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Drivers crucial to DOO fight

By a railworker

RMT members on Northern rail struck again on 28 April.

The strike was every bit as solid as the previous two days' action, reducing the company's service to 40% of its usual level, with scab labour being provided by managers.

The union is yet to announce its next move. It will need to think carefully about what to do next, taking into account the various different situations at different Train Operating Companies around the country.

At Southern, talks have been held between RMT and the employer but no resolution is yet forthcoming. This is against a backdrop of RMT members starting to come back to work and the company being able to run around 95% of its usual service.

The drivers' union, Aslef, is still supposedly in talks with the company but no details are coming out. It is clear that rather than playing the decisive role it should be playing and taking its members out, Aslef is intent on settling the dispute at a loss to its members there, as a way of escaping the impending case the company has brought against them in the Supreme Court.

The deals it has been putting to its members amount to a surrender



of the Driver Only Operation issue there, and the tactic is to keep tweaking or rewording the deal until the members give up and vote yes.

At Virgin Trains East Coast, things look brighter. RMT had announced two days of strike action on this franchise on 28 and 29 April, coinciding with the day's action at Northern. However, this strike was pulled after talks appeared to produce the basis of an acceptable settlement, with the principle of a second Safety Critical member of staff on every train kept intact.

At Merseyrail, where RMT had taken its members out on strike with Northern and Southern members on 13 March and 8 April, talks took place that appear to have been a stalling tactic. By the time these talks broke down, the deadline had passed to give notice for 28 April. However, it is likely that Merseyrail

Guards will strike with those in Northern next time.

As this dispute rumbles on, the decisive role drivers can play in making industrial action in the rail industry as effective as possible is increasingly clear, and so is the cowardice of the leadership of their union, Aslef. If Northern and Southern drivers can follow the lead of their fellow Aslef members at Merseyrail and respect RMT picket lines in large numbers, this dispute can still be won in impressive fashion.

The necessary culture of solidarity required for that to happen does not yet exist other than at Merseyrail, but it can and should be built.

Aslef is clearly not in a state to be relied upon to protect the future of the industry so workers must do it without them.

Teachers turn up heat on council

By a Lewisham teacher

On Wednesday 3 May National Union of Teachers (NUT) members at Forest Hill school in Lewisham struck for the 7th time in their on-going dispute against a management proposed restructuring to deal with £1.3 million deficit.

The management's proposal sheds 15 teaching jobs, significantly increases teachers' workload, radically reduces the depth of the creative aspects of the curriculum, ends any specialist English as an Additional Language (EAL) support, and massively diminishes the

support for students with Special Educational Needs.

The strikes are part of a campaign to pressurise Lewisham's Labour Council to intervene to assist the school and protect education in the borough. After the strike on 3 May the teachers have announced a week's hiatus in their strikes to allow management to provide various documents to the teachers including an equality impact report (which they have to supply) and the detailed books (which are subject to a freedom of information request).

In addition the campaign will use the time to build for a public meeting on 11 May at Forest Hill

Methodist Church. Further strikes are planned, and the NUT group has now set a calendar of strikes through to the end of term. Beginning on Tuesday 16 May, they will be striking Tuesday one week and Wednesday-Thursday of the following week. The clear message to the council and the management is: we aren't going anywhere. There are increasing signs of splits within the Labour Group on the council.

We have heard reports that a lively discussion followed a representation from a Forest Hill teacher and another NUT member (both Party members) to the council group on Monday 24 April.

RMT protests at sweatshop-hotel

By Ollie Moore

Members of the RMT union protested at Liverpool's Adelphi Hotel, owned by the Britannia Group, in support of low-paid hotel workers, on Friday 28 April.

The protest, which saw a brief occupation of the hotel's lobby, aimed to draw attention to working conditions RMT reps have called "sweatshop-like".

RMT organises workers at the Adelphi, as the hotel was formerly owned by British Rail. The Britannia Group saw its profits more than

double to £33.3 million in 2016, up from £14.2 million the previous year. The Adelphi itself increased profits by 40%. Britannia Group shareholders received a £35 million dividend payout.

RMT says that, despite Britannia's soaring profits, workers at the hotel are paid less than a living wage. Many are on zero-hour contracts, and are subject to productivity-based speed-ups: chamber maids have recently had the time allocated to strip down and clean rooms after guests' departure from 25 to 20 minutes. Union reps re-

ports workers, many of whom are from migrant backgrounds, collapsing with exhaustion in the linen cupboards. Workers who drive to work are not provided with parking, and have to pay to use the hotel's car park. Many report facing bullying and harassment from bosses, as well as sexual harassment from guests.

RMT members at the hotel struck in December. The union says its campaign will continue until workers win living wages, secure employment, and decent working conditions.



Picturehouse can afford to pay!

By Gemma Short

Workers from five Picturehouse cinemas in London struck on Monday 1 May in a repeat of the largest cinema strike in UK labour movement history in April.

The strike takes the total number of strike days at Picturehouse cinemas in the last eight months to over 40.

Workers from the five sites, Ritzy in Brixton, Crouch End, East Dulwich, Hackney, and Picturehouse Central in Soho, joined the May Day march in central London before going to picket Picturehouse Central in the evening. Community campaigners and supporters held "community pickets" at Crouch End and East Dulwich which meant customers knew there was a strike on, and which turned away many cus-

tomers who would have otherwise used the cinemas.

Bectu, the workers' union, is now unfortunately conducting an unnecessary re-ballot of members before strikes continue, as they continue to interpret anti-union laws in the most extreme way.

A Bectu member from East Dulwich Picturehouse spoke at the closing rally of London May Day and said: "there is no question they can afford to pay us the Living Wage. They can afford to pay us sick pay, they can afford to give us maternity and paternity pay, but they choose not to. Cineworld made over £98 million in post-tax profits last year. CEO Mooky Greidinger personally took home £2.5 million last year."

"He alone could afford to pay Picturehouse workers the Living Wage and still take home £1 million."

Tube news round-up

By Ollie Moore

Uncertainty for ISS cleaners

Multinational cleaning contractor ISS, one of the two major companies to which London Underground outsources cleaning services, has informed its workers that its contract will not be renewed past the end of 2017.

It has sent all cleaners a letter informing them their employment will be transferred over to a new contractor under TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Earnings)) regulations. As yet there is no indication who the new employer will be, leaving thousands of workers in the dark as to who will be paying their wages come 2018.

The rank-and-file bulletin *Tube-worker* commented: "RMT reps have consistently pressed ISS, and LU, for info, and have been stonewalled. Cleaners are worried about who will be paying their wages come the new year.

"Of course, the question of who the cleaners' employer will be could be settled in a very simple, direct way if LU took cleaning services back in house."

London Bridge station staff to strike

Station staff at London Bridge Tube station will strike on 7-8 May, and conduct indefinite industrial action short of strikes thereafter, as they attempt to win the reinstatement of sacked colleague Lee Cornell.

Lee was dismissed after he intervened with a fare evader who pushed a pregnant colleague. Lee was then punched twice in the head, but rather than supporting an assaulted staff member, London Underground have sacked him for defending himself.

London Bridge workers' action-short-of-strikes will consist of refusing to service ticket machines, and refusing to challenge passengers about tickets.



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Why students and youth should vote Labour

By Rosalind Robson

If the opinion polls are correct, Labour is solidly ahead of the Tories among potential voters under 40 years old.

Among women under 40, 42 per cent favour Labour, against 27 per cent for the Tories. Unfortunately, these same people are less likely to vote.

What's going on? This generation has long-been identified as hostile to or alienated by politics and politicians. Not doubt, many still are. But what is attracting some of them to Labour?

In the first place, underlying and accumulated social changes which have badly affected this group are being directly and positively addressed by Labour's election manifesto. It is the same reason many joined Labour to vote Corbyn into the leadership.

To deal with a higher education system that has put hundreds of thousands of former students into a life-time of debt, Labour has promised to scrap tuition fees. This will be even more important for those who cannot yet vote, but it is still of tremendous symbolic importance for those who are now paying £9,000 and more every year for a degree when the prospect of any future job, let alone in their chosen field of study, is far from certain.



To sort out the profiteering and slum landlords who rent to "generation rent", Labour says it will introduce fines for unsafe and sub-standard accommodation.

To tackle job insecurity and low wages Labour will increase the "living wage" and introduce

rights at work from the first day of a job.

This is not a full socialist programme but it is a big step forward from the Tories' (and for that matter, the Blairite Labour Party's) couldn't-care-less attitude to young people over decades.

It is vital that Labour convinces younger people to register to vote and to vote. Students who support Labour have an important job to do in getting their fellow students to do the same. And moreover, to get involved in the labour movement.

Students should join their local Labour Party and get involved — in fights to save services, in building Labour's youth wing.

They will be repaid with a Labour Party which sticks to its policies and fights for a better world.

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Printed by Trinity Mirror