



**& Workers' Liberty**

# Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 461 7 February 2018 50p/£1

## Top 5% own 60% of financial wealth

# OUR AIM IS

# SOCIALISM

Across the world, resentment against inequality, insecurity, drabness, and toil is being channelled and exploited by right-wing nationalist demagogues, who offer a false sense of security in the form of reaffirmed "national identity" and scapegoating of migrants and other peoples.

In Britain, the Corbyn surge gives us a chance to break through to a real alternative: to a society based on solidarity, social ownership of the banks and industry, and democratic control of big economic decisions.

It can do that only if the new ferment in the labour movement becomes also a ferment in which explicit and full-scale socialist ideas are openly explored and debated, and in which the movement educates itself again in those ideas.

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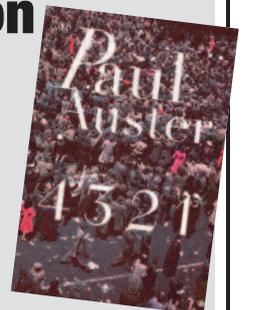
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# Open up Brexit debate in Labour

By Rhodri Evans

**The planned Labour Party leadership “away day” to reconsider policy on Brexit has been flagged up as coming in “early February”, so must be soon. May even have happened by the time this issue of Solidarity reaches readers.**

Sadly, Brexit and free-movement policy were denied debating time at Labour’s 2017 conference, partly thanks to a push by much of the Labour left to deny the issue prior-

ity votes. So Labour’s reconsideration is happening in exclusive conclaves rather than in broad debate.

It is still possible for pro-free-movement, pro-open-borders left-wingers to influence the debate by passing and sending in local resolutions.

The importance of doing so is underlined by Labour right-winger Chuka Umunna’s recent announcement that he has become the convener of a joint “grassroots coordinating group” to soften Brexit

together with some Tory MPs like Anna Soubry.

The right wing should not be allowed to use the issue to turn Labour people towards cooperation with the Tories. Those Tories — and the Labour right-wingers — pointedly do not speak out for free movement of people. Nor do they openly campaign to stop Brexit.

Their activity reflects a shift by big business to more vocal pressure on the Government. “Remaining a member of a customs union for as

long as it serves us to do so [which could well mean indefinitely] is consistent with the result of the referendum and would be good for EU firms too”, said Carolyn Fairbairn, chief of the CBI bosses’ federation, in January.

Brexit issues will bubble in the coming weeks. Hard-Brexiteers in the Tory party are mobilising. Theresa May is clashing with the EU over the rights of EU citizens who come to Britain in the two “transition” years set to follow

March 2019: she wants to deny them the citizen rights available to those who arrive before March 2019, and make them vulnerable to exclusion once the two years are up. Sadly, Labour made no vocal defence of those EU citizens’ rights.

**The European Commission is set to publish, within four weeks, a document interpreting the December deal on preventing a hard border in Ireland. That is likely to explode ambiguities in the deal, and exacerbate Tory divisions.**

## Nationalise big contractors!

By Colin Foster

**The share price of the outsourcing company Capita, after plunging on 30 January, has started recovering slightly as Solidarity goes to press.**

Capita has 73,000 employees, and enjoys contracts to run a vast and unwieldy range of public services, for which it has no special expertise, including in the NHS.

It looks like the Government will be willing and able to stop Capita following Carillion into collapse, and the Capita bosses have cancelled dividend payments rather than (like the Carillion bosses) shovelling money out of the door as quickly as possible as risks of collapse emerge.

The case remains for taking all the big outsourcing companies —

G4S, Serco, Mitie, and the others — into public ownership, and running the work they do in-house, with public service pay and conditions, and with democratic scrutiny and control.

A recent example of Capita’s operations in the NHS shows one reason why.

NHS England has recently found that tens of thousands of items of medical correspondence — test results, clinical notes and the like — sent to the wrong GPs have been redirected to Capita and are sitting in a pool of lost mail in Capita offices.

**In October 2016 Capita formally notified NHS England that it had received an estimated 580,000 items of “clinical notes”, and said blandly that “with hindsight... it believes it could have reported the backlog sooner”.**



Virgin Trains East Coast: who’s zooming who?

## East Coast Rail: nationalising the losses, privatising the profits

By Gerry Bates

**Virgin Trains East Coast, the consortium that runs the London to Edinburgh rail line which involves Stagecoach and Virgin Group, has admitted over-bidding for the contract to run the railway line.**

In other words, they made a promise to the government of £3.3bn in order to land the contract; and have now “discovered” that they can’t pay that much after all.

The government first proposed to salvage the private running of the line by ending the contract early, essentially letting Virgin Trains East Coast off the hook for £1bn.

This week the Tory transport minister Chris Grayling has admitted that even this farcical fix might not be enough to save the deal, and that the government might simply

renationalise the East Coast line.

Privatisation does not work. The chaos of the private sector only serves one end: profiteering. It is not a stable basis on which to run a socially-useful service. Even a government which is hell-bent on privatisation as a point of ideological principle has been forced to acknowledge that public ownership may be the only means of stabilising the service.

Of course, the Tories are determined to learn nothing themselves, and teach Virgin and Stagecoach that such profit-gouging behaviour will always be rewarded: instead of taking all their public contracts off the offenders, the government has awarded Virgin an extension on the lucrative contract for the InterCity West Coast service.

**Nationalise the railways!**



## Deaths from malnutrition on the rise

By Michael Elms

**In 2016, malnutrition was listed as a contributory factor in 351 deaths in the UK, and the main cause of death in 66 cases, up from 59 the previous year and the highest figures in a decade.**

Many of the cases in which malnutrition contributes to a death involve older people who are unable to feed themselves adequately due to frailty and social isolation. Caroline Abrahams, a director of Age UK, has reported that a third of elderly people admitted to hospital or care homes suffer from some degree of malnutrition.

Amid a global food surplus, the issue is not a shortage of food for people — but a system that fails to distribute food, or to care for the vulnerable.

Age UK estimates that in the last five years there has been a £160 million cut in spending on social care for the elderly. This comes alongside year-on-year cuts in local government spending, which have increased pressure on family members and unpaid carers, and left over a million over-65s without access to the care they need.

**A civilised society would use its wealth to care for the vulnerable and aged. Tax the rich to fund social care!**

## Sylvia Pankhurst: the Red Suffragette



**Workers’ Liberty London Forum**

**Friday 16 Feb, 7:30pm  
IoE, 20 Bedford Way WC1H 0AL  
Room 642**

“I am going to fight capitalism even if it kills me. It is wrong that people like you should be comfortable and well fed while all around you people are starving.”  
— Sylvia Pankhurst

**Socialist activist and writer Jill Mountford will speak on Sylvia Pankhurst, the Red Suffragette.**

## Oulton: Save our homes!

By Luke Hardy

**In Leeds an entire working class community are threatened with their homes being demolished and replaced by homes they can’t afford.**

The Wordsworth and Sugar Hill Estates on Oulton at the edge of Leeds are made up of 70 ex National Coal Board houses. After the privatisation of the coal industry these houses were handed over to the Pemberstone Group. They are seeking planning permission to evict the tenants, knock down the housing and replace it with expensive commuter properties for sale. Only 15% of which would be so called “affordable” homes. This will mean the loss of much needed truly affordable properties for rent and the almost certain displacement of the current tenants, who will be unable to find housing they can afford in the local area.

### CAMPAIGN

**The tenants have started a loud campaign against this called “LS26 Save Our Homes”.**

They have had a demo alongside the NUM and they have put together model motions for Labour and the unions calling on Leeds City Council to protect the residents of the estate, to take over the properties from Pemberstone Ltd and to turn the homes into Council Housing stock which can be let to existing and future tenants on long term secure tenancies.

**This campaign needs to support in every Labour Party branch and union branch in the area. Not just for the people affected, but because it’s part of the wider battle for decent housing for all, based on need not greed.**



## Marching for the NHS

On Saturday 3 February Health Campaigns Together and the People's Assembly organised a demonstration for the NHS in central London.

Despite pouring rain, the march drew tens of thousands from all over the UK, including organised delegations of hospital workers, and local NHS campaign groups, such as Fighting 4 Life Lincolnshire, which is working to save emergency healthcare services in Grantham. The march was lively, if damp, and addressed by various public figures and health sector trade unionists as well as John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn.

The demonstration should mark the start of a major and concerted campaign to save the NHS after a 2017-18 winter crisis of unprecedented severity.

Such a campaign should take as its starting point the good policy passed at Labour Party Conference 2016.

It called for, among other things, adequate funding for all services, reversing privatisation, PFI and debts, scrapping the Tories' austerity cap on pay-levels, and the repeal and reversal of the 2012 Act.

**The aim is to reinstate and reintegrate the NHS as a public service, publicly provided.**

## HDV: death of a sell-off

By Simon Nelson

The resignation of Claire Kober, the Blairite leader of Haringey Council, has left the Haringey Development Vehicle, the scheme her leadership had championed, in tatters.

It was a victory for the StopHDV campaign and the Labour activists who had systematically worked to select candidates for the May council election who opposed the sell-off of £2 billion of public land, the destruction of social housing, and a partnership with the blacklisting giant Lendlease.

The intervention of Labour's National Executive on this issue has led to thousands of column inches and multiple TV appearances for Kober. She has accused HDV opponents of bullying and sexism.

The decision to oppose and campaign against the HDV has nothing to do with Claire Kober as a person. She is unpopular for her politics, and among the majority of members in the two Haringey CLPs.

### SEXISM

**However, it would be wrong to completely dismiss allegations of sexism against her.**

Her reports of members of the public, possibly but not definitely Labour Party members, singing 'Every Breath You Take', the Police song about stalking, from the public gallery is alarming. In the context of the ongoing revelations of the problem of harassment across Westminster and within the Labour Party such allegations should be taken seriously, but not be allowed to detract from the important vic-

tory for the left and democracy in the Party.

Kober has said she will not go forward with the HDV. It is now dead.

She has pursued a strategy of doing her utmost to ruin any last relations with local Labour members. With front page articles in the *Evening Standard*, interviews on the *Daily Politics*, Andrew Marr, the *Guardian* and the *Times*, she has given huge exposure to a successful campaign to stop social cleansing in a borough that desperately needs houses on social rents and the upgrading of its existing stock. It seems to already have had a knock-on effect with the delay (at least) by Southwark Council in their plans to destroy Elephant and Castle shopping centre and the Heygate estate.



A demonstration against the HDV in 2017

It was with this in mind that GC delegates from the two CLPs met on 4 February to discuss the potential contents of the local government manifesto.

The conference, a first of its kind, saw motions on a range of issues; from a wholly owned development vehicle to replace the HDV to planning a campaign to restore all the funding cut since 2010, discussed and voted on. The ideas from the conference had come from local branch meetings, with each branch able to submit three motions. They will now be put to the councillors who will put together the manifesto. They could in theory ignore everything discussed but they will be under increasing pressure to go forward with the things almost unanimously supported at the event.

### OUTCOME

**Whatever the outcome, council candidates have a strong mandate to run on the policies passed at this conference nonetheless.**

The democratic element here should serve as an inspiration to Labour party members elsewhere.

**Others should learn from this process and demand their own parties hold these meetings and write a programme that has the mass support and endorsement of the local party.**

## NUS: Unite the student left!

By Ruairaidh Anderson

**NUS Conference 2018 will be marked by a showdown between the left and the right.**

The left wing of conference will be made up of students whose politics centre on the Corbyn surge: supporters of the Labour left and socialism, however defined. The rightwing president Shakira Martin has distanced herself from this left, instead organising a high-profile review of Further Education with Vince Cable, the Lib-Dem bigwig whose party oversaw the tripling of tuition fees when it was last in government in 2009.

The urgent necessity is to unite the left to beat the resurgent right wing and create a national union capable of fighting the Government and winning. We need to

unite around a political programme that can inspire students, and make clear to delegates the differences between right and left at this conference.

Our collective aim should be to shift conference towards support for rent caps, living grants for all, expropriation of the banks, £10/hr wages and unionising students who work alongside their degree, free movement, Cops Off Campus, nationalisation of the big six energy companies, an end to marketisation in further and higher education, and an overall orientation towards democratising NUS and supporting the grassroots struggles being waged by students and workers on campuses. The NUS left should also be bolder about addressing broader, bigger issues that go beyond campuses – and in particular,

making a clear, bold call for socialism a central part of student politics. The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) is running candidates for NUS President and VP Higher Education to lead the fight for a radically different NUS. Both candidates are grassroots activists involved in the Labour Party.

NCAFC's presidential candidate Sahaya James has organised thousands strong free education marches and recently led an occupation against gentrification and social cleansing in London at the London College of Communication. She also launched UAL's Labour Society and sits as an elected member of Momentum's National Coordinating Group.

NCAFC's vice-president higher education candidate Ana Oppen-

heim has played a key role in winning NUS support for the NSS boycott to harm the government's HE reforms, as well as organising students to boycott on campuses across the country. She has organised for migrant solidarity, including organising student delegations to protests at Yarl's Wood detention centre and is a co-founder of the Labour Campaign for Free Movement. These candidates have already received widespread support from many sections of student politics and Labour.

**In the run up to conference, NCAFC has called for the left to unite around a programme for radically transforming NUS into a more democratic union that allies with students and workers to take on the government and win.**

# Who are the US “alt-right”?

## BRIEFING

By Ira Berkovic

**Much has been written about the so-called “alt-right”. The term has been used to describe quite different phenomena.**

Depending on whose analysis you support, the alt-right could be disaffected young white men resurrecting fascist politics on a foundation of social-media meme-culture irony. Or a PR ploy by classical fascists of various stripes pitching both for edginess and a mainstream platform. Or a meaningless epithet slapped, with little explanatory value, onto a scurrying cluster of various far-right fringe groups suddenly given prominence by a presidential regime which has seemingly adopted many of their policies.

Prominent fascist Richard Spencer, whose dress sense and haircut have made him the darling of the US media, much of which appears inexplicably obsessed with repeatedly interviewing him, claims to have coined the term.

Spencer’s fascism, by his own lights, is more “classical” than that of neo-Nazis, who he professes to disdain and who — so he claimed in an interview, moments before he was excellently punched by an anti-fascist activist — hate him.

He cites Italian fascist philosopher Julius Evola as a key influence, and asserts a “white ethno-state” as his aim. A wider survey of the claimed philosophical underpinnings of the more would-be “serious” alt-right figures would take in the “neo-reactionary”, “dark enlightenment” theories of Nick Land and Curtis Yarvin, who in turn draw on the work of the Russian fascist and Putin ally Aleksandr Dugin, who has helped bind Russia’s ultra-nationalist right to Putin’s political project.

Putin himself is an idol for many in Spencer’s milieu, as is Bashar al-Assad, who



“Alt-right” leader Richard Spencer

is venerated as a model authoritarian leader and bulwark against Islamic terrorism, held to be a singular epochal threat.

It is a worldview riddled with contradiction, professing an explicitly backward-looking hostility to modern society, and a pining for “traditional values”, while being profoundly rooted in contemporary communication technology and social media.

The American far right has always been wildly heterogeneous, encompassing Nazis; militant white-supremacist “churches”; and indigenous far-right traditions such as the Ku Klux Klan and nativist “sovereign citizen” militias. The presence in its front ranks of besuited men who claim to abhor swastika-sporting skinheads may appear novel; however, footage of Spencer croaking “hail Trump, hail our people, hail victory!” from the rostrum of a conference held shortly after the election, while members of the audience gave Nazi salutes, tells its own story.

The “alt-right” could be said to exist at the point of intersection between this neo-fascist milieu — its journals, “think tanks”, confer-

ences, and so on — and the internet activity of young white men tilting at what they see as the liberal, multicultural values of an America from which they feel increasingly excluded. Quite how hegemonic or deeply-embedded those values could be said to have been in a pre-Trump America which, despite its black president, was still deeply riven with racial inequality, is another question.

Matt McManus in *New Politics* argues that: “The alt-right emerged as the product of complex conditions in society, but its first instantiations were online. Individuals felt increasingly alienated in a society which no longer conformed to their expectations, often dealing with disappointment at their inability to live up to the American Dream in a climate of economic decline.” (Walter Benjamin and the Political Practises of the Alt-Right’, *New Politics*, 27 December 2017)

Attempting to extrapolate conclusions about a political phenomenon from the online behaviours of its adherents (as many people have criticised Angela Nagle for appearing to do in her recent book on the alt-right, *Kill All Normies*, which I will confess to not having read) would be facile.

Tumblr, 4Chan, and Reddit have not created a revival of far-right politics in America. But those already feeling some sense of social disaffection, and resentment at not having access to the opportunities to which they believe their racial and gender privilege should entitle them, may well find both an echo of and a means of expressing that disaffection in contemporary social media culture.

What is the relationship, then, between these politics and the Trump administration? Is Trump’s an “alt-right” regime? His former adviser Steve Bannon, like Spencer, openly cites Evola as an influence on his worldview. Under Bannon’s stewardship, the sensationalist right-wing news platform Breitbart explicitly promoted itself as a platform for the alt-right.

Although Trump has broken with Bannon, there is no doubt that Bannon was a key ar-

chitect of the political vision that animated the Trump campaign. The far right in the USA rallied round and was enthused by Donald Trump’s presidential campaign in a way perhaps never before seen for a candidate of one of America’s two mainstream parties. Not only Evola-loving neo-fascists like Spencer, but also more traditional far-right figures like Andrew Anglin, the editor of the neo-Nazi website *Daily Stormer*, and former KKK leader David Duke, rallied to Trump’s banner.

These are not abstract political phenomena. They have had measurable, and tragic, material expression. In the last year, murders by white supremacists in America more than doubled, to 20. The “Unite The Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017 brought hundreds of protestors, representing the gamut of far-right movements and sects, onto the streets, many of them armed. A socialist counter-protestor, Heather Heyer, was murdered when a fascist drove his car into a counter-demo. 19 others were injured.

A sense of historical perspective is helpful: the numbers that the fascists are capable of mobilising do not approach those of, for example, William Dudley Pelley’s Silver Legion of America (the Silver Shirts), perhaps America’s most “successful” fascist movement, which claimed 15,000 members at its height. This is almost certainly an exaggerated figure.

The Silver Shirts were still a force capable of mobilising in numbers that the contemporary far right do not yet command.

There is, however, no room for complacency. However we analyse the “alt-right”, the resurgence of the far right is real, and could accelerate. The US left and labour movement must rediscover its best traditions of anti-fascist direct action and working-class self-defence.

**The fight against a growing fascist threat must also be a fight to change the social conditions which have incubated it.**

## Young girls and the hijab

### LETTER

**I am writing in support of the original policy of St Stephen’s School in Newham to stop girls under eight wearing the hijab at school. (The school reversed the policy after a petition campaign).**

The head, Neena Lall, has received death threats. Muslim organisations and local councillors have protested, and the chair of the Board of Governors who supported her was been forced to resign.

I suspect most of the British left are on the wrong side in this argument. Desperate to prove themselves politically correct, they are abandoning young girls to reactionary restrictions.

Yet, in an article in the *Evening Standard*, Nimco Ali, declaring herself a feminist and a Muslim woman, wrote, “The hijab is meant to be worn to cover women in order to avoid tempting men... It is sexualised clothing. By covering up young girls, the implication is that they are sexual beings. In our attempt not to offend, those who believe this, we are limiting girls freedom.”

The tightening grip of conservative and reactionary religious ideas has gone hand-in-glove with a rise in racism, xenophobia and

anti-Muslim bigotry. Socialists need to defend minorities, but we can not afford to abandon secularism and support for women, girls, LGBT people and others from Muslim backgrounds who suffer from the reactionary ideas and the institutions of religion and family.

Girls from all backgrounds should find in school a secular space which gives them freedom to invent and reinvent themselves. I know women from many sorts of traditional backgrounds who found some of that at school, and it changed their lives for the better.

On the wider question of the hijab, Nimco Ali also makes an interesting observation. “I am the only adult woman in my family who does not wear the Islamic headscarf. And twenty years ago, that statement would have caused people, Muslim and non-Muslim, to ask why the rest were covering rather than why I was not.”

Sadly most of the British guilt-laden left would welcome this change as progress, a blow against imperialism or whatever. I agree with Nimco Ali.

**If you would like to know more, I recommend the book *Refusing the Veil* by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown.**

Mark Sandell, Brighton

## Why is the left in disarray?

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

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

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

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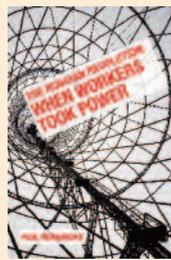
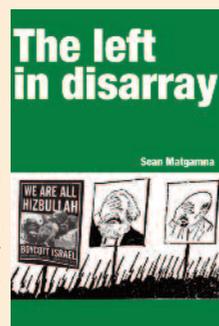
## The Russian Revolution: when workers took power

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

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

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## Our aim is socialism

**The top 5% in Britain own 60% of all financial wealth, that is, of the wealth that brings power.**

Wealth inequality has been increasing since the Thatcher years, and has jumped again in the last ten years. The Gini coefficient is a measure of inequality which ranges from 0 for complete equality to 1 for one person having the whole amount and the rest nothing.

For financial wealth in Britain, the Gini figure was 81% between 2006 and 2010; between 2010 and 2016 (which is when the latest official figures, published on 1 February, go up to), the Gini went up to 91%.

The overall figure for wealth inequality is bad enough, with the top 10% owning 44%. But that is misleading. It gives the wealth many workers may have, in the form of a house, a car, and a modest pension pot, equal weight with the society-mastering wealth of the plutocrats.

The overall figure, in fact, has remained steady because of the new law, from October 2012, mandating "auto-enrolment" of employees in private pension schemes, which has led to more employees paying into small pension pots.

The general tendency for wealth inequality to spiral is worldwide, and was documented in December 2017 by a big World Inequality Report produced by the French economist Thomas Piketty and his co-workers.

The tendency is endemic to the capitalist system of production for private profit. It was checked for a while between World War Two and the late 1970s by the relative strength of labour movements in that period. Since then it has spiralled again.

The distance between the top one per cent and the rest of us continued to in-



How the super-rich live

crease during the New Labour years, 1997-2010, even though the minimum wage and pension credits slightly eased income inequality at the lower end.

The increase in wealth inequality goes

together with escalating privatisation, marketisation, commodification, and squeezes on universal public services like the NHS. It goes together with an increase in the extent to which access to the means of enjoyment and even of life and health depends on your financial clout.

Conservatives brand socialism as a "religion of envy". It is not that at all. In a socialist society, A will be a better dancer than B, who in turn will sing better than C, who will be a better mathematician than D, who will be a better cook than E, who will have the good luck to live somewhere with a better view than F...

Socialist citizens will be less envious of those differences than are people in a capitalist society, indoctrinated to "get ahead" and to compete to outdo each other.

Socialists object not to diversity but to the overwhelming power which wealth in a capitalist society gives to the rich people at the top to impose drabness, insecurity, and draining, regulated, alienated toil on the big majority.

Across the world, resentment against that insecurity, drabness, and toil is currently, in many countries, being channelled and exploited by right-wing nationalist demagogues, who offer a false sense of security in the form of reaffirmed "national identity" and scapegoating of migrants and other peoples.

In Britain, the Corbyn surge gives us a chance to break through to a real alternative: to a society based on solidarity, social

ownership of the banks and industry, and democratic control of big economic decisions.

It can do that only if the new ferment in the labour movement becomes also a ferment in which explicit and full-scale socialist ideas are openly explored and debated, and in which the movement educates itself again in those ideas.

**Supporters of *Solidarity* will be doing our best to push that along by promoting and seeking discussion on our new booklet, *Socialism Makes Sense*.**

## Socialism makes sense

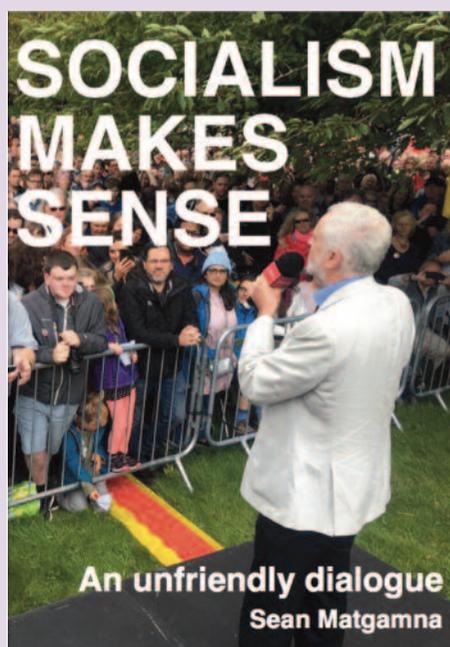
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## Marxists have a place in Labour

**"All of the shades of left — from your Marxists to your centre-left social democrats — should have a place in the Labour family", declared Labour right-winger Chuka Umunna on 29 January (ind.pn/2nG152I).**

The Stop the Labour Purge campaign ([bit.ly/stlp-cu](http://bit.ly/stlp-cu)) says it will be contacting Umunna to "ask for support for expelled comrades' fight for reinstatement — including in his constituency".

It would be good if the left-wing Labour leadership, or the left movement Momentum, would repeat Umunna's clear statement.

# “We, the democrats and feminists from Muslim backgrounds, have been deleted”

Anissa Hélie is an assistant professor at John Jay College in New York. Her articles include “Multiculturalist Liberalism and Harms to Women: Looking Through the Issue of the ‘Veil’” and “Policing gender, sexuality and ‘Muslimness’” in the book *Sexuality in Muslim Contexts: Resistance and Restrictions*, which she co-edited with Homa Hoodfar.

This interview was conducted by Andy Heintz, a freelance writer based in the US Mid West who writes about US foreign policy, universal rights, gender equality, and social movements. He has been published in progressive outlets like *Foreign Policy in Focus*, *The Wire*, *Common Dreams*, *CounterVortex*, *Muftah*, *Balkan Witness*, *Secularism is a Women’s Issue*, *Europe-Solidaire*, the *New Internationalist*, and *Culture Project*. He is compiling a book of interviews, entitled *Dissidents of the International Left*, that he hopes to have published by the end of 2018. This interview is republished with Andy’s permission.

## How important is it for people in the West to understand that issues like homosexuality and abortion are open to diverse interpretations in the Qur’an?

Along with other scholars and activists, I have pointed out that — contrary to claims that Muslim-majority nations’ treatment of social issues are primarily informed by their adherence to key Islamic sources such as the Qur’an — the broad cultural and political diversity of Muslim societies, as well as the variation in religious interpretation, cannot be overlooked. As a result of this diversity, and despite references to a “Muslim world” that is presumed to be homogeneous, legal approaches and national policies can be quite varied on a number of issues. Issues related to sexuality and women’s bodily rights (including same-sex behaviour and abortion) are no different, and are legislated in very different ways in various Muslim-majority societies.

For example, as I have shown with regard to abortion, data from 2009 related to 42 Muslim countries highlight the wide scope of legal approaches with regard to voluntary termination of pregnancy — ranging from complete prohibition, to abortion being allowed on a variety of grounds: either to preserve the woman’s physical health, or to preserve her mental health, or on the basis of socio-economic factors, or even without any restriction, i.e. on request.

Over 15 years ago, when I started writing on same-sex relations in Muslim contexts, 26 Muslim-majority countries condemned homosexuality as a criminal offence, with alleged “offenders” facing penalties ranging from forced medical procedures (e.g. anal testing) to imprisonment or even the death penalty. Aren’t such empirical examples

making clear enough the fact that “issues like homosexuality and abortion are open to different interpretations” in the legal arenas of various Muslim-majority societies?

Why, then, does it seem necessary to some commentators to frame this question with such an emphasis on the religious realm? Why is it relevant to focus on the Qur’an in relation to social issues such as sexuality or termination of pregnancy? Why is the religious text seen as so important in the early 21st century? And by whom is the Qur’an (or the Sunnah, or hadith) cast as paramount in defining citizens’ rights? By formulating this question in such a way, aren’t “people in the West” at risk of legitimising Muslim political actors (whether governments or other entities, including non-state actors) who tend to rely on religious claims when politically expedient, and often to secure their own power?

Drawing a parallel with non-Muslim contexts may help to drive the point home: do people routinely refer to the Bible when envisaging social issues relevant to modern societies with a Christian tradition (e.g. European or Latin American nations)? Or, do we systematically assume that the Torah necessarily impacts the life decisions of, e.g. (all and any) Jewish New Yorkers? I am afraid that the question itself reinforces an assumption about the primacy of Islam (and of Quranic interpretations) as an essential factor in the lives of “Muslims” — an assumption that most people do not hold with regard to Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Jains, etc.

Hence, I am not sure that the constituency you refer to — i.e. “people in the West” — need to be further encouraged to look at Muslim-majority societies primarily through the prism of Islam. Instead, one issue that may be worth enquiring about would be why do so many Westerners, both scholars and lay people, display such an overwhelming interest in the Qur’an? Often, it is because they confuse and conflate the religious and social realms, attributing more impact of the former onto the latter than is wise to do.

Several experts — among them, French scholar of Islam Maxime Rodinson in the 1960s, or Columbia professor Mahmood Mamdani in the wake of 9/11 — have criticised this long-standing (and still widespread) Western tendency to apprehend most trends affecting Muslim communities with exclusive references to Islam. Rodinson is even credited to have coined the term “theologocentrism” to describe this phenomenon which, by privileging the religious, ignores other significant historical and social developments affecting Muslim-majority societies. Decades ago, Rodinson analysed and debunked the notion of a homo islamicus, an entity that was constructed as essentially different from the (imagined) Western man.

As he noted in the 1980s: “In the nineteenth century, [the Oriental] became something quite separate, sealed off in his own speci-



Anissa Hélie and Homa Hoodfar

ficity. This is the origin of the homo islamicus, a notion widely accepted even today. [S]cholars believed that they could deduce the characteristics of the “Muslim mind,” based on the assumption that all Muslims, from the rise of Islam until the present, were constrained to think and believe and act within the rigid limits set by the essential character of the civilisation to which they belonged.”

Yet, the issue may well be political, as noted by journalist Warda Mohamed: “It’s with great rigour and without any value judgement that Rodinson contradicts those who, by adopting an essentialist approach, look to Islam to offer an explanation for all the behaviours and actions of Muslims (...) In the same vein as during Rodinson’s times, we must ask ourselves why and, above all, who continue to analyse Muslim societies and the misdeeds of Muslims exclusively through the religious. And we must ask ourselves for which purpose are such questions instrumentalised. (...) How must we analyze the societies of the Muslim world? Does Islam offer an analytical tool to understand these societies’ development and their problems? To these questions, which are still being asked today, Maxime Rodinson attempted to provide answers about 50 years ago.”

Mohamed reminds us of Rodinson’s own words, a reminder that is timely: “It is not the Qur’an that moulds society — instead, it is society that draws from the Qur’an what can be matching it [what can correspond with/to it?].” Rodinson specifically emphasised socio-historical developments and economic structures as crucial factors, and believed these shape(d) Muslim-majority societies in more significant ways than religion. Other researchers have embraced Rodinson’s rejection of the dominant Western approach with regard to Muslim cultures (the “theologocentric school of thought”), and made similar observations with regard to gender and sexuality norms.

For example, twenty years ago, Lebanese-American professor As’ad AbuKhalil wondered: “How can Islam be used as a standard methodological yardstick when the diversity of Muslim lifestyles and interpretations are apparent to the researcher?” AbuKhalil also deplored the fact that “The tendency to attribute all manners of sociopolitical life and systems of thought to the Islamic theological worldview has for long been a staple of West-

ern studies of Islam.”

It is now clear this particular bias is no longer restricted to academia, but has spread among the public at large. The anecdote related by Mamdani regarding the 2001 spike in sales of the Qur’an, just after the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, is telling in this respect: “I was in New York when 9/11 happened. It surprised me when I saw the craze to buy copies of the Qur’an in America (...) They want[ed] to find the reasons for Muslims’ rage in the Qur’an.” But, he asks, “Why didn’t the Bible’s sales shoot up when America attacked Afghanistan and Iraq?” So, yes, the Qur’an may well provide key guidance to some believers; the sunna (i.e. post koranic tradition related to the life of prophet Muhammad, specifically his sayings and deeds as reported by his family and entourage) is a rather important source of guidance as well, also in terms of Muslim jurisprudence. But again, religion matters only for those to whom it matters (whether believers or cynical politicians).

And — as hinted in the interview question — the fact remains that interpretation of religious sources is key: all religious traditions can be understood as offering either a conservative, exclusionary, blueprint or, on the contrary, an emancipatory path to those who subscribe to any particular faith. Feminist theologians of the Qur’an (Muslim scholars such as Riffat Hassan in Pakistan, Amina Wadud in the United States, Siti Musdah Mulia in Indonesia, or Kecia Ali in South Africa) have struggled to promote interpretations that are grounded in religious texts while upholding, for example, the rights of women and of stigmatized sexual minorities.

## Do well-intentioned outside groups often make the mistake of taking stances and making demands in countries without first notifying feminists and LGBT activist groups within those countries of what they plan to do?

A range of seemingly “well-intentioned outside groups” dealing with human rights issues do indeed devise and adopt strategies that are ultimately detrimental to progressive groups — feminist and otherwise — working locally in other contexts. While I (still) recognise that some of these outside groups may simply be mistaken, the fact is that I’ve witnessed such mistakes being repeated over the span of close to three decades. I am therefore no longer sure that it is truly a matter of “making mistakes”, nor am I convinced that these groups are as well-intentioned as they portray, or imagine, themselves to be.

What motivates these outside groups not only to fail to “first notify” local progressive groups but also to repeatedly ignore their warnings and consistent feedbacks? Why should outside groups undermine the work undertaken by local human rights defenders who should clearly be seen as their allies — since, in the words of Algerian feminist

Louisa Ait-Hamou, they are the ones who “have fought fundamentalism and terrorism in isolation with our bare hands for a good number of years”?

Sadly, such a situation can only be explained at times by the arrogance displayed by various Left and human rights organisations based in the West. Instead of recognising the expertise developed — over years/decades and at great cost — by local human rights defenders, these outside organisations appear convinced, deep down — and whether they are aware of their biases or not — that they know better (than their brown little brothers and sisters?).

### Could you talk about Professor Homa Hoodfar's arrest by the Iranian government and the way that arrest was handled by the International Federation of Human Rights?

In 2016, Professor Homa Hoodfar, an Iranian-Irish-Canadian citizen living in Montreal, was arrested while travelling in Iran and held in Tehran at the notorious Evin prison for several months (she was in solitary and without access to medicines or a lawyer for most of that time). Following the lead of Homa's family and lawyers, campaigners seeking her release focused on Professor Hoodfar's academic credentials and downplayed any advocacy work, including her decades-long involvement with Women Under Muslim Laws International Solidarity Network (WLUMIL).

As one of the people working closely with Homa's family, I was contacted in June 2016 by Michelle Kissenkoetter, then director of Asia Desk at the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH). Initially, Ms. Kissenkoetter did the right thing: she consulted us — the people most affected by, and most involved in, the case, asking whether we would welcome a press release, or an urgent appeal issued by the FIDH. I wish to note here that while a fairly basic and logical step, this approach is far from being systematic. I welcomed her support, indicating our preference for a press release and explaining that: “In terms of issuing an urgent appeal, it seems best not to use that option at this stage — because the family “still doesn't think we want to frame [Homa's] work through that type of lens.” I also shared useful documents pertaining to the campaign, stressing that, because Homa's legal team “emphasises Homa's balanced academic research, and given the sensitivity of her case, we ask you to please make sure that your own letter sticks to the carefully worded message of the [family's] press release.”

Unfortunately, while the actual press release did rely on the data endorsed by Homa's legal team, which I had shared, the FIDH had added a short introductory paragraph that could be detrimental. I reacted promptly: “Despite trying to ensure, in part through our exchange, that the press release issued by the FIDH relies on information as confirmed on the Homa website, it appears that the FIDH press release refers to information that is in fact not helpful to Homa's case. The legal team working on Homa's case is requesting that I convey the following: “Could you please ask that FIDH to revise it on their website?” The reason being: “The FIDH statement references a Conservative Iranian media report about the charges that are rumors and pure speculation at this point [emphasis in my original email] until an official statement has been made. Dear Michelle, we would therefore appreciate if you could

delete the reference to the following sentence (...).”

Ms. Kissenkoetter did remove one specific reference from their website but, dismissing our full request, refused to delete the quote from the media report at stake...insisting she knew better: “In our decades of work on Iran and other countries, we have often cited such sources [and] (...) we are going to keep this quote in our statement,” she wrote back.

Furthermore, obviously missing the point, she also amended the FIDH press release in a way that made it worse: while Homa's legal team wanted NO mention of Women Living Under Muslim Laws, Ms. Kissenkoetter introduced further information pertaining to WLUMIL: “We have added a footnote within the quote which explains what the organisation ‘Women Living Under Muslim Laws’ is, and linking to their website. We have done this as a counter to the assertion made in the quote from Mashregh that WLUMIL is a ‘subversive organisation’. You can find the edited version of the statement here.” Worried that, in fact, this uncalled for modification would bring even more attention to Homa's association with WLUMIL, I wrote again, but received no reply.

A day later, Homa's niece (Ms. Ghahremani, who was at the forefront of campaigning efforts on behalf of her aunt) reached out to Ms. Kissenkoetter as well, explaining: “I believe it has been brought to your attention that we have been issuing very specific directives about language being used to describe Homa's situation. In your statement, you reference conservative Iranian media and their speculations about the charges. These charges have not been confirmed and circulating these rumours is actually more harmful to Homa's case. We need to ensure that the statements of solidarity will be beneficial to both her legal case and the publicity of her situation. As such, I would like to kindly ask that you remove the sentence that references and cites Mashreq, and that you also do not highlight WLUMIL and the organisation's link with Homa. We need to keep to very specific language about who she is as an academic and not play into the language and allegations that are being made unofficially in Iran. Furthermore, our family should be the one to make the decision about when the best time is to address these allegations. We are currently discussing this internally and would greatly appreciate the time and opportunity to do so without the allegations gaining traction internationally. (...).”

Homa's family never got even a courtesy response.

### Can you talk about your experiences with Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International?

It is alarming to witness the fact, over and over, that the FIDH is not the only human rights organisation to act in such an arrogant way: many other powerful outside groups dismiss the grounded knowledge of local human rights defenders. For example, country reports issued by Human Rights Watch as well as Amnesty International in the 1990s pertaining to the situation in Algeria — a country then facing mass killings of civilians perpetrated overwhelmingly by Islamist armed groups — also displayed a systematic disregard of local activists' knowledge and priorities. In these reports, the emphasis is overwhelmingly on the Algerian government's violations of human rights, with very little acknowledgement of human rights violations perpetrated by Islamist armed



Amnesty International was criticised for its association with Moazzam Begg and “Cage Prisoners”. Gita Sahgal (then head of Amnesty's gender unit) lost her job for exposing Amnesty.

groups. I once did a word count... truly shameful, and fully biased.

Yet, at the very same time, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch relied on local contacts to obtain interviews with local activists. Once these activists had braved grave dangers to meet outside researchers (at a time when fundamentalist armed groups would randomly murder civilians using public transports), their testimonies would simply be ignored. Furthermore, when three early supporters of Amnesty's work in Algeria voiced their concerns about the biases in Amnesty's reporting (first internally, then, because they had received no answer, publicly), Amnesty simply terminated their membership — i.e. excluding them precisely when their country was facing a human rights crisis on a tremendous scale. Wasn't this a way to effectively assert that Amnesty knew better?

And in the late-1990s, when I confronted a team of Human Rights Watch researchers returning from a fact-finding mission in Algeria regarding their lack of documentation of the widespread violations of human rights perpetrated by non-state actors (in this case, Islamist armed groups such as the GIA. (Armed Islamic Group), I was told verbatim: “This was not part of our mandate”. Really? An estimated 100,000 to 200,000 civilians were murdered, mostly at the hand of armed jihadists, during the Bloody Decade of the 1990s and it's not the business of prominent human rights organisations to report these massacres? How “well-intentioned” are these outside groups and how many decades should we believe their biases are just a matter of “making mistakes”?

Indeed, such outside groups appear at times to simply privilege the strategies that are beneficial to themselves/ their nation, at the expense of the broader context and, at times, at the expense of victims of fundamentalist extreme violence.

### Can you talk about the controversy involving Gita Sahgal, Amnesty International and Moazzam Begg?

A case in point is the issue surrounding Moazzam Begg, a former detainee in Guantanamo, and the group he founded in Britain: “Cage Prisoners”. Gita Sahgal (then head of

Amnesty's gender unit) lost her job in 2010 precisely for having exposed Amnesty's collusion with Begg whom she qualifies, rightly, as “Britain's most famous supporter of the Taliban”. Meredith Tax describes the controversy most clearly in her 2013 book *Double Bind: The Muslim Right, the Anglo-American Left, and Universal Human Rights*, which I helped edit. Most importantly, Tax shows how various Left and human rights groups, both in the UK and the USA, end up “sanitising the Muslim Right”.

Their initial motivation is clear, and commendable: human rights groups, such as Amnesty or the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) or the ACLU in the USA, seek to close detention centres such as Guantanamo and ensure due process for all — nothing wrong with that. Such a goal strengthens democratic principles, promotes the interests of American citizens and of those held in custody in U.S. facilities: it serves to protect and promote human rights. But upholding human rights for all should not (let's be clear: should not-not-not) lead to sanitising promoters of human rights violations. While perpetrators and advocates of terrorism do have rights and should be defended — as a matter of basic human rights — it is an insult to the victims of their murderous ideology to legitimise them and portray them as democratic poster-boys.

While we are at it, why not ensure that more Americans — rightly alarmed by the anti-Muslim racism rising in their country — will see Begg not for what he is, both a victim of US extrajudicial detention and an advocate of Muslim fundamentalism and terrorism, but just as a simple victim. The CCR planned to sell copies of Begg's book at the film venue (a well-known alternative cinema downtown NYC) and even to have a few copies given away for free at raffle: isn't that cool? “First, do no harm” is a really good idea. Personally, I no longer try to talk to “well-intentioned” groups such as CCR, ACLU, Amnesty or the kind. It is sickening and simply, truly upsetting.

**While not-so well-intentioned groups continue to legitimise Islamists, we, the democrats and the feminists from Muslim backgrounds, have been deleted.**

# Conspiracy theories go international

By Dale Street

Over the last year or so Jackie Walker has campaigned to present Labour politics as a drama centred on the alleged “lynching” of herself.

In May 2016 she was suspended from the Labour Party for allegedly antisemitic comments on Facebook. She was reinstated, and then suspended again in October 2016 for new comments (in public) found to be prejudicial by Jewish Labour members. Despite talk about the issue being “free speech on Israel”, none of those comments were about Israel. Still less were any of them statements of support for Palestinian rights.

Like many, she remains suspended without a clear date for a hearing. We came out against her expulsion ([bit.ly/ja-walk](http://bit.ly/ja-walk)), and we argue for expeditious and prompt processes; but we have also indicted the unmistakable antisemitism around the counter-campaign by Walker and her friends ([bit.ly/ja-walk2](http://bit.ly/ja-walk2)).

Walker has a busy weekend ahead of her in Berlin on 9-10 February. On Friday she takes part in a Q&A session organised by Die Linke Internationals Group (non-Germans living in Berlin who are members or sympathisers of Die Linke political party). On Sunday she stars in her one-person play, “The Lynching”, in a performance organised by “Jewish Antifa and other organisations”.

On the Saturday (10 February) she is a platform speaker at an event entitled “In the Age of the Slanderers”, organised by the Project Critical Enlightenment (PKA).

The PKA, created in July of last year, describes itself as “a merger of Marxist left-wingers from Germany and Israel ... a counter-reaction to pro-imperialist tendencies and other leanings towards right-opportunism, above all on the German left.”

According to the PKA, “the collapse of real socialism in 1989/90” resulted in “the left, en masse, going from the side of the oppressed class to that of the oppressor class.”

This collapse of “real socialism”, says the PKA, allowed the ruling classes to instrumentalise the Holocaust to justify imperialism: “Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and perhaps Iran tomorrow, must be bombed not in spite of Auschwitz but because of it.”

“Critical Jews are subject to the wildest attacks. ... The grotesque definition of antisemitism adopted by the German government in September (2017) is aimed at criminalising Jewish Marxists and other left-wingers critical of capitalism.” (It was a definition similar to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s, which indicts as antisemitic the claim that the very “existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour” and says that “criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country [for wars, for oppression of other peoples, etc.] cannot be regarded as antisemitic”. See further [bit.ly/german-las](http://bit.ly/german-las)).

The 10 February event purports to explore how the ruling classes (especially in Israel, Germany and Britain) have instrumentalised “Jews, Jewishness and the Jewish Catastrophe” in order to pursue their own goals at home and abroad, with a section of the left falling in behind them.

It is sure to be an event at which Jackie Walker – along with Moshe Machover (also speaking at it) and Ken Loach (sending solidarity greetings) – will feel in her element.

In the publicity for the event Jackie Walker portrays herself as one of “thousands” of Labour Party members suspended or ex-



pelled because of bogus accusations of antisemitism:

“How can supporters of the Palestinians get our message across when access to the media and the political arena is becoming increasingly blocked? Thousands have been expelled and suspended from the Labour Party using false allegations of antisemitism, including Ken Livingstone and myself.”

In his contribution to the publicity for the event Moshe Machover dismisses the very suggestion that a current of contemporary “anti-Zionism” constitutes a form of antisemitism. Such an allegation is simply part of a Zionist conspiracy:

“The Zionist colonisation project and its settler state, Israel, are facing growing revulsion in progressive and left-wing public opinion. The Israeli propaganda machine is fighting back, and fighting dirty. It has invented a concept of ‘New Antisemitism’, which is directed against the left. ... It targets non-Jews, particularly Germans.”

Other speakers include:

- Ali Abunimah: Runs the Electronic Intifada website. Author of “One Country – A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse”.

- Avishai Ehrlich: Like Machover, a former member of Matzpen. Same politics as well: “They (‘the Zionists’) conflate antisemitism with anti-Zionism. Their definition of antisemitism is always subordinated to political expedience and they have no qualms about collaborating with racists, fascists, or even Nazis.”

- Moshe Zuckermann: Author of “Anti-Semite! An Accusation as an Instrument of Control”: “Never before has the construction of a connection between Zionism, Israel, Shoah, antisemitism and the Middle East been so fully instrumentalised, perfidiously enjoyed, and shamefully misused.”

- Rolf Becker: German equivalent of Ken Loach. Available to support such causes as the International Committee in Defence of Slobodan Milosevic and campaigns about Ukraine which make no mention of Russian aggression.

Becker, who laments the collapse of “the socialist states”, also rejects the possibility of resurgent fascism in Germany. As he explained in an interview of 2012: “After Stalingrad, they (German fascists) won’t be marching again. Defeated peoples are good learners.” Clearly a man with a lot to offer by way of “critical enlightenment”.

What best sums up the event’s politics is the poem which the PKA has chosen to include in the event’s title – “In the Age of the Slanderers” – and the politics of the author of that poem.

“In the Age of the Slanderers” was written by the Austrian Jew Erich Fried in the early

1980s. Along with other poems by the same author, it has enjoyed a veritable renaissance among the German “anti-Zionist” left in recent years.

“As early as the beginning of the 1980s the poet Erich Fried complained about the stigmatisation of Jewish left-wingers as ‘red anti-semites’ by ‘spokespersons for the West’. He described his times, characterised by the first stages of neo-liberal radicalised capitalism, as ‘the age of the slanderers’.

“What began at that time as angry polemics has now become a complex of character assassination and bans, initiated by the established political parties and the (far-right) AfD, neo-conservative ‘anti-Germans’ and ‘anti-nationals’, and Christian fundamentalists, and propagated by the hegemonic media.”

In his poem Fried bemoaned the fact that an undefined “they” denounce him as “a Jewish antisemite” and a “traitor to his people”. All he had done, he lamented, was to have criticised Israel’s repression of Palestinians and to have spoken out against Jews who had remained silent.

In fact, in his later years Fried consistently equated Israel with Nazi Germany, Zionism with Nazism, and Israel’s oppression of the Palestinians with the Holocaust.

According to Fried, Theodor Herzl’s *The Jewish State* provided the model for Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. Zionists, he wrote, “imitate Nazi patterns of behaviour”. What distinguished “the Israelis” from the Nazis was that the former “had not yet built any gas chambers”.

Zionists were responsible for the growth of antisemitism: “The mixing up of antisemitism and anti-Zionism is the fault of the Zionists. ... They themselves generate antisemitism in parts of Asia, the Americas and Africa where there has never been antisemitism.”

Fried also shared Ken Loach’s enthusiasm for Jim Allen’s antisemitic play ‘Perdition’ (1987: [bit.ly/perditn0](http://bit.ly/perditn0)). He was quoted in the letter Loach sent to the *Guardian* in defence of the play: “The writer Erich Fried, many of whose family were murdered by the Nazis, wrote: ‘I am envious I have not written this play myself. To accuse the play of faking history or anti-Jewish bias is monstrous.’”

According to Fried’s poem “Zionist Terror in Palestine”, Zionists were “Swastika apprentices”. “The Star of David on your flags” was morphing ever more quickly into “the cursed sign with the four feet, which you do not want to see, but whose path you are following today.”

In another poem (“A Jew to the Zionist Fighters”) Fried asked Zionists whether they really wanted to be “the new Gestapo, the new Wehrmacht, the new SA and SS, making Palestinians into the new Jews.” “Fascist murderers” (i.e. Zionists) were “murdering Palestinians just as Jews were murdered at that

time.”

“In the Age of the Slanderers” was written in the same vein. In its closing lines Fried looked forward to a time when Israel had been defeated. As had been the case with Germans after the defeat of Nazi Germany, “the Jews left over after this madness” would look for Jews who “did not co-operate but who warned.”

“More importantly”, the poem continued: “Would any Jews still be living in Palestine, escapees from the extermination, which they themselves helped bring about, through their injustice, in my age?”

Fried’s strident opposition to “Zionists” (which effortlessly elided into hostility to “the Israelis” and “Jews”) contrasted with his conciliatory attitude towards contemporary neo-Nazis.

When Michael Kuhnen, Germany’s then leading neo-Nazi, was awaiting trial in 1985, Fried visited him in prison and offered to appear in court as a character witness for him.

Kuhnen, wrote Fried, had made “a positive impression” on him. He had spoken up “in support of the SA but not in support of the SS.” It was “inconceivable that he should be branded a criminal.” Kuhnen “understood himself, at least subjectively, to be a social revolutionary.”

## ENTHUSIASTIC

Fried enthusiastically reported that Kuhnen had accepted that it was “possible” that mass murder had been in the Nazi concentration camps.

He was equally enthusiastic about the nuanced approach to antisemitic graffiti taken by Kuhnen’s organisation:

“Its members are banned from daubing swastikas on graves and places of worship. But in the case of synagogues, an exception is made for that part of the synagogue which is not the place of worship but the meeting room. Graffiti on the walls there is permitted.”

Kuhnen later explained:

“When we celebrate the 100th birthday of Adolf Hitler on 20 April 1989, we will bestow new glory on this clothing [i.e. uniforms]: the same material, the same brown as at that time. ... The basic principles of life should never be forgotten: Struggle, Selection, Power. ... We are not tolerant. National socialism excludes all other ideas. It is the only life-affirming philosophy.”

“Germans and Jews were at war with one another, because Jewry was just as much a world power intent on war. If that were to be finally and honestly accepted, then peace talks could be started and a just peace be concluded.”

“But as long as Jewry insists that it was an innocently persecuted religious community, there will be no reconciliation. Who is the victim, who is the perpetrator?”

Fried defined himself as “a better Jew than those chauvinists and Zionists.”

But his critics disagreed: he began a sentence with the words “as a Jew” only for the purpose of distancing himself from other Jews; he was “an alibi-Jew” and a “bonus-Jew”; and the leitmotif of his later “poetry” was the forerunner of contemporary antisemitic tropes.

Choosing an “anti-Zionist” poem by Erich Fried – and singling out his “In the Age of Slanderers” – for the title of this Saturday’s event therefore makes perfect sense: The politics of the poem and its author sum up the politics of the event.

# Stories of transition: the 2017 Booker novels

By Matt Kinsella

The 2017 shortlist for the Booker literary prize for novels contained three debut novels: Fiona Mozley's *Elmet*, Emily Fridlund's *History of Wolves*, and the eventual Booker winner, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, by George Saunders.

*Elmet*, *History of Wolves*, and Paul Auster's hefty 4321 are bildungsromane (coming-of-age stories). Auster, Fridlund, and Saunders deal with quintessentially American themes in the various mythologies around 60s counter-culture, the rugged terrain of the Midwest, and the life of Abraham Lincoln respectively.

Also on the shortlist were *Exit West*, by Mohsin Hamid, author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which explores migration and disjointedness in a tightly-constructed magical realist story, and Ali Smith's *Autumn*, described as the first "post-Brexit novel".

In *Autumn*, Elisabeth visits and reads to centenarian family friend Dan Gluck, dying in a nursing home. She recollects the lessons about culture he imparted to her as a girl. Their memories and experiences of time are contrasted. Discussions about 60s pop-art being discovered, then forgotten, then rediscovered, reflect the larger repeats of life-cycles.

One of the books Elisabeth reads to Dan is Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, and, referring to the Brexit referendum, Smith riffs on the famous opening lines ("it was the best of times, it was the worst of times"). "All across the country people felt it was the wrong thing. All across the country, people felt it was the right thing. All across the country, people felt they'd really lost. All across the country, people felt they'd really won".

Elisabeth's mother is shocked that the shooting of MP Jo Cox once "would have been a year's worth of news", but was quickly accepted as normal. After the vote, "go home" is painted on the door of a family in the village. Soon "half the village [was] not talking to the other half".

The novel is also filled with black humour: Elisabeth's interactions with the Post Office have the absurd bureaucratic quality of Dickens' Circumlocution Office (from *Little Dorrit*) or Kafka's courtroom.

*Elmet* deals with more foundational divides: between landless and landowner, and farmhand and farm-owner. The book is narrated by Daniel, who lives with his sister Cathy and father John (to his children he is only ever "Daddy"). Daddy declares "I won't work for any man ever again", and chooses to live off the land. He builds his own house in the middle of some woods. The family grow their own vegetables, keep their own chickens, and live off the fish and game of the land.

A conflict arises between Daddy, who nourishes, uses and respects the land, and its aristocratic landowner, who with the right piece of paper "can use it as he will, or not at all, and... can keep others off it".

The dispute extends to neighbouring villages. The same landlords who own all the houses are also farm-owners, who hyper-exploit the farm labourers. Daddy's involvement in their lives soon leads to talk of rent strikes and demands for wage increases. The final confrontation is full of suspense and unexpected revelations.

The book also examines Daniel's growing sexuality. The earthy, almost olfactory, descriptions of the Yorkshire countryside may lead to inevitable comparisons with *Wuther-*

*ing Heights*, and the choice of Cathy's name (the same as the heroine in *Wuthering Heights*) may be a conscious nod, but it is to Ted Hughes that Mozley owes a stylistic debt. Particularly to Hughes' collection *Remains of Elmet*, which celebrates and laments the land of "uninhabitable wilderness, a notorious refuge for criminals, a hide-out for refugees".

In *Exit West*, Saeed and Nadia are a young couple who find their unnamed city, somewhere in Iraq or Syria, descending into civil war. The couple choose to flee, and manage to escape through a series of magical doors that take them around the world. By focusing not on their journey, but on their sudden dislocation, the book powerfully describes the experience of uprooting one's life, to a refugee camp, to a safe country, and the cognitive dissonance it entails. In London, the couple try to create a community amongst other refugees, but also have to contend with nativist mobs armed with iron bars and knives. Meanwhile ominous 'holding camps' are being set up in the green belt.

The book describes how otherwise unimaginable horror becomes an everyday, normalised experience: mass sexual assault, truck bombs. Hamid does well to make Saeed and Nadia believable flawed characters. The book also considers how time changes neighbourhoods too: a woman in Palo Alto reflects that "When she went out it seemed to her that she too had migrated, that everyone migrates, even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives, because we can't help it. We are all migrants through time".

The end of the book is brave enough not to lionise Saeed's and Nadia's relationship or to positively resolve the traumatic things they have experienced.

## ABUSE

In Emily Fridlund's debut *History of Wolves*, Linda (Madeline to her parents, "freak" to her classmates) is involved in two stories of abuse.

The first involves her teacher Mr Grierson, and the rumours about his inappropriate relationship with schoolmate Lily.

Linda's speculations about her teacher, her pleasure at his attention and his special name for her, "Mattie", and her attempts to coax information out of him make for a compelling opening.

Fridlund then spends the bulk of the book exploring a second story, of Linda's relationship with Patra and her son Paul. This plot-line is meandering in parts. However, the courtroom finale is extraordinarily tense, and offers a damning indictment of so-called "Christian Science".

The book conveyed well Linda's sense of being between two worlds (of childhood and adulthood), of being between two families (her own, and Patra's), and of how her status as an outsider gifts her both keen insights about other people, but also how her inexperience blinds her to Paul's abuse, foreshadowed throughout the book. The book asks the question of her culpability.

I considered *Lincoln in the Bardo* to be the weakest of the six. The premise was interesting: President Abraham Lincoln's grief for his son Willie, struck down by typhoid fever, causes him to visit the body in its crypt several times throughout the night.

And so his son's ghost lingers in the "bardo", the spiritual world between worlds, between death and rebirth, where his son must find some closure in order to "move on", or else remain trapped.

The book is written in an experimental

style, in part delivered like a play, in part written as a combination of quotations, both real and false, in part a blend of different literary styles. Unlike with, say, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, this experimentation was distracting, rather than fascinating. It was painfully self-aware. It read like Saunders had a good idea for a short story that he stretched into a whole novel, until it lost its shape.

When Paul Auster, author of *4321*, was 14 he witnessed one of the defining moments of his life: a friend of his was killed in a freak accident at a summer camp when a metal fence they were crawling under was struck by lightning. Had the lightning struck just a few seconds later, had the boys changed place, had the fence been a few feet further away, Auster would have died. He said "I've always been haunted by what happened, the utter randomness of it".

Contingency is the dominant theme of *4321*, which starts with young boy Archie Ferguson, and four iterations of his life.

Starting with the same parents, the same house, the same childhood, Auster takes those moments of chance and divergence to show us how Archie's adolescence progresses after differing experiences. In some versions, childhood friend Amy Schneiderman becomes his girlfriend; in others, it is an unrequited love.

In some versions, he makes it to college, in another, a brief flirtation with crime has a snowball effect on the rest of his education. In some versions his preciousness earns him loyal friends. In others it makes him a target for bullies. The different Archie Fergusons react to world events in surprising ways, from Vietnam, the shooting of Kennedy, and the civil rights movement.

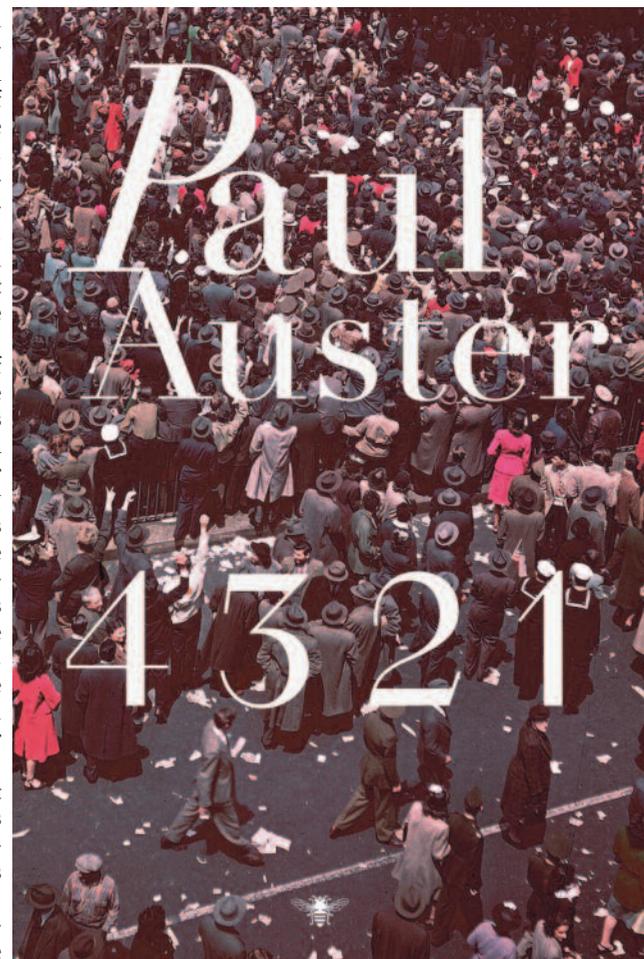
Each chapter leaps forward in time, not only describing the changes between the four different Fergusons, but referencing things we haven't encountered, allowing us to imagine for ourselves the different forks in Archie's past.

Archie's father owns an electronics store, but Archie's childhood experiences are dependent on his father's success, or conversely, whether he is cheated by his brothers. Archie's creativity and love of reading suggest he would always be a writer, but a journalist, a poet, or a novelist?

Archie lives a relatively privileged middle-class existence. I wonder how many opportunities would have been available to Archie if he were black, in rural Alabama in the 50s, or in a rundown deindustrialised city like Detroit in the 90s.) As Karl Marx put it, "people make their own history but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past".

Meta-reference, pastiche and postmodern style are common in Auster's writing, but *4321* is the most conventional of his works. Gone is the minimalist prose in favour of long, rolling sentences, gone are many of the literary allusions, except for the meticulously crafted reading lists in the book.

For its scale, its structure, its love of the



craft of writing, its mythologising of the immigrant experience in New York, this would have been my choice to win the Booker.

One outstanding book on the longlist which did not make the shortlist was Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*.

Its nameless narrator, born to a black autodidact activist mother and a white cockney postie father, struggles with her racial and cultural identity, like the characters in Smith's first book *White Teeth*.

The narrator soon becomes friends with Tracey, another mixed-heritage girl at her school, who has an absent father, and a tougher life of poverty: frozen ready-meals, and cheap Argos toys. While both girls dream of becoming professional dancers, only Tracey achieves the feat.

The narrative skips between their childhood friendship, and the narrator's adult life (in which Tracey barely features) as a PA for a thinly-veiled Madonna-type celebrity Aimee. The tension builds as we discover what led to the schism.

The novel probes the idea of community and belonging. The narrator doesn't find the instinctive sense of sisterhood she hoped she'd find in the west African country she travels to for work — there, she is considered to be white. She tries to be more political at uni, but is scorned by right-on boyfriend Rakim. She is ridiculed by her mother for her interest in dancing, but also by Tracey for her insufficient skill.

And yet it is dancing that comes the closest to providing a sense of connectedness between the narrator and the troubled people in her life. A subtle discussion of class, race, celebrity, internet culture, and international aid, the book is yet another triumph for Smith.

I would recommend both *Exit West* and *Elmet* for your commute, *Swing Time* for your holiday read, and *4321* the next time you break a leg, or have a long Christmas with the in-laws.

# Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

More online at [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org)  Workers' Liberty  @workersliberty

# London Young Labour shows dangers for the left

## LABOUR

**By a LYL delegate and Workers' Liberty supporter**

**On Saturday 3 February the AGM of London Young Labour took place at University College London.**

The conference was attended by about 250 young Labour members from across London, and passed good policy about defending free movement and working with the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, on social housing, and on creating the role of a trans officer on the committee.

The conference also discussed a motion relating to a recent anonymous claim of sexual assault on an ex-member of Workers' Liberty by another ex-member which took place in 2005 when the victim was 16. This is an issue which Workers' Liberty is treating seriously: details of the allegations and the process we have put in place to find out what happened then, to review our structures and to report publicly on our findings can be read at: [bit.ly/2GQ6gVV](http://bit.ly/2GQ6gVV).

The motion contained statements not made in the original claim, in relation to which we have received no further complaints or details. The motion also referred to Workers' Liberty as a "secretive, top down organisation". Yet the process we have set in motion — seeking outside assistance in applying standards of best practice on these issues, reporting publicly on our procedures and opening up this process to scrutiny from experienced labour movement representatives — is not the work of a "secretive and top down organisa-

tion"

This motion, and the method by which the issue was discussed at London Young Labour, was not a serious attempt to move forward with either how we or how the left and labour movement deals with sexual violence. Inevitably a debate lasting less than ten minutes, where most members' only information about the matter was in the short text of the motion, could not produce informed consideration of the issue.

## COMMUNICATED

**A mover of the motion, and a number of supporters of the motion, had communicated to us prior to the conference that the process we had put in place had addressed their entirely appropriate and reasonable concerns.**

But that was not said in the debate.

The motion's suggestion that Workers' Liberty activists should be excluded from London Young Labour inevitably tied up a discussion of responding to sexual violence on the left with factional machinations, regardless of the intentions of the movers of the motion.

The overall effect of the motion was to create an atmosphere of factionalised venom against Workers' Liberty members and people perceived to be connected with us, i.e. people who shared some of our ideas. That plays into the hands of factionalists who want to use intimidation, instead of debate, to settle political arguments, and who are happy to instrumentalise the issue of sexual violence to that end. At the worst end of this atmosphere was a smaller group of people who are conducting a witch hunt against

Workers' Liberty and they managed to set the tone. It was an atmosphere which made it harder, not easier, to discuss and address sexual violence on the left.

In the lead up to the conference and at the event young non-Workers' Liberty members who were standing on a slate with some Workers' Liberty members were subjected to a campaign of bullying and harassment. They were called "paedophiles" and "nonces" for associating with us. Some young activists were intimidated and harassed for merely talking to or associating with Workers' Liberty members.

The cynical use of this important issue, by some, ultimately is a means of silencing political opponents. It is a danger to the entire left. It will not end with Workers' Liberty. It can, and will, be used against anyone else seen not to have "the right line" on any number of issues. It creates a movement within which reasoned discussion of political differences becomes impossible.

Lastly, and importantly, it hinders creating any open or collective response to the issue of sexual violence.

We appeal to labour movement activists concerned about any bullying and harassment around Momentum, about political methods of silencing political opponents, to join us in standing up to it.

We also urge labour movement activists who are concerned about the issue of sexual violence in our movement to seriously engage with, discuss and criticise the process that we have undertaken.

**We will be writing to the new chair of London Young Labour to ask how we can work together on this matter.**

# Events

## Saturday 10 February

London Momentum groups meeting up  
2pm, Unite, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8TN  
[bit.ly/2novMJq](http://bit.ly/2novMJq)

## Thursday 15 February

Pamphlet launch: George & Minnie Lansbury and modern feminism  
6pm, Tower Hamlets Local History Library, 277 Bancroft Road, E1 4DQ London  
[bit.ly/2BFrdib](http://bit.ly/2BFrdib)

## Friday 16 February

The red suffragette: Sylvia Pankhurst  
7.30pm, Institute of Education  
20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL  
[bit.ly/redsylvia](http://bit.ly/redsylvia)

## 17-18 February

Student Feminist Conference  
10am, Institute of Education  
20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL  
[bit.ly/2FDYkpT](http://bit.ly/2FDYkpT)

## Wednesday 21 February

On New Terrain: With Kim Moody  
6.30pm, Bookmarks bookshop. 1 Bloomsbury Street, WC1B 3QE  
[bit.ly/2GVfC2i](http://bit.ly/2GVfC2i)

## Wednesday 28 February

Defend Education — march for pensions and pay  
12 noon, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY  
[bit.ly/2C0VyI9](http://bit.ly/2C0VyI9)

Have an event you want listing? Email: [solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

# SOCIALISM

# MAKES

# SENSE

**Ideas for Freedom 2018  
23-24 June, central London  
More details to be confirmed**

# Students support UCU strike

By Eduardo Tovar

On 22-23 February, campuses across the country will see the first of 14 days of strikes announced by the University and College Union (UCU).

These strikes follow the industrial action ballots results of 22 January, which saw an 88% vote for strike action, based on a turnout of 59% of eligible UCU members. These strikes will hit 61 universities, perhaps even more, with UCU members at seven institutions that failed to meet the 50% turnout requirement now being re-balloted.

The strikes are over proposed changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), the main pension scheme for “pre-92” universities. The employers’ consortium Universities UK (UUK) wants to change the USS from a “defined benefits scheme” to a “defined contributions scheme”. This would make final pensions depend on investment performance instead of workers’ contributions, effectively spelling the end of guaranteed pension benefits.

We cannot overstate the importance of either the ballot result or the industrial action. Thousands of workers have overwhelmingly shown their willingness to defend their rights by withholding their labour despite the obstacles posed by the Tories’ draconian trade union legislation. Moreover, when



one pension scheme is undermined, members of another scheme are soon told to accept cuts to their own because they are “unfairly” advantaged relative to the first. Put bluntly, a defeat for UCU now could easily mean the decimation of pensions across and beyond the entire sector.

For campuses to become bastions of resistance, students and workers must realise how their struggles connect intrinsically. Attacks on employment security in academic institutions, such as casual contracts and pension cuts, have risen alongside fee hikes, course closures, and an increasingly consumerist conceptualisation of students, prominently exemplified by the National Student Survey. All

this stems from the systematic effort to turn education into a commodity: in a word, marketisation.

This is why we call on students to stand with staff on picket lines. Pass supporting motions in your Students’ Unions. Make flyers, infographics, and videos to explain to students why, no matter the hardships they endure now, too much is at stake for UCU to lose the dispute. Organise occupations, sit-ins, and other disruptive actions demanding Vice-Chancellors to oppose the pension cuts. Raise money for UCU’s national Fighting Fund or branch-level hardship funds to reassure precariously employed staff that they can afford to strike.

**In short, “Students and workers of the world unite!”**

# Royal Mail deal put to members

By Gemma Short

The Communication Workers’ Union (CWU) Postal Executive has endorsed the agreement reached between CWU negotiators and Royal Mail, which will now be put to a vote of the membership.

The outline of the deal is: the creation of a new single pension scheme for all workers; extension of all current agreements and protections until 2022; two one-hour reductions in the working week (in October 2018 and October 2019)

without loss of pay; a later last delivery, but not as late as Royal Mail wanted; a three year pay deal which the CWU claims equates to 12.33% (with two basic pay rises totalling 7% plus the reduction of the working week without loss of pay).

The devil will be in the detail of the pension scheme, and close examination of the deal has not yet happened. The new scheme would replace the two-tier system in place at the moment, which includes both a Defined Benefit scheme and a Defined Contribution scheme, with a scheme described as giving a “wage in retirement” based on a

Collective Defined Benefit scheme. Such schemes are not currently legislated for in the UK. Implementation requires secondary legislation to be added to the Pensions Schemes Act 2015 before the scheme can be launched.

**Initial reaction from members seems to indicate unhappiness over any change to the last delivery time and disappointment over lack of progress over job security and culture at work.**

• The deal can be read in full here: [bit.ly/2E7sP6q](http://bit.ly/2E7sP6q)

# Hackney school cleaners deal on pay and holidays

By Peggy Carter

Cleaners at six schools in Hackney have called off strikes planned for 30 January to 2 February and on 5 February after reaching a deal with the employer.

Workers were due to strike over the outsourcing company’s refusal of to pay the London Living Wage (LLW); proposals to cut pay with new term-time-only contracts; and refusal to pay holiday pay in line

with legal obligations.

Strikes have been called off after Unite negotiated a deal with the cleaners current employer, OCS Group Ltd, and their new employer, Kier, who is taking over the branch.

According to Unite the deal includes: all current staff will remain on year-round contracts and will not be forced onto term-time-only contracts. Staff who were recruited on term time only contracts will be allowed to express a preference for a change to year-round contracts.

The company will consider the options once it is clear how many staff want to upgrade to a year-round contract. Staff who were recruited on all year round contracts but who were later misled into signing a new term time only contract, will be given the choice to revert to an year-round contract. The updated LLW, currently £10.20 an hour, will be applied from 10 February.

**Negotiations are still ongoing about exact details on contracts and ensuring those who want it get a year-round contract.**

# TfL “Transformation” threatens jobs

By Ollie Moore

Transport unions are planning a fight back against Transport for London’s “Transformation” programme, a cuts project which threatens admin jobs in TfL and subsidiary companies such as London Underground.

Workers who provide admin support to stations, train depots, and engineering and signalling projects within LU, as well as directly employed TfL admin staff, could see their jobs merged or deleted, leading to displacements and possible redundancies. The cuts could have a huge knock-on effect for the workers who the admin staff support: for example, with fewer admin assistants, station staff will find it much harder to request and change annual leave, order uniform, and book training courses.

Although there is currently no fixed timescale for the implementation of the “Transformation” plan, unions can not rely on a

strategy of attempting to slow the bosses down. The backdrop to the proposals is the Tories’ policy of reducing TfL’s central government subsidy to zero, making it the only major metropolitan transport system in the world which receives no subsidy.

With the total reduction due to come into effect in 2019, TfL and LU bosses will be looking to move rapidly to claw back their budget deficit by making cuts.

RMT and TSSA organisers addressed members at a joint meeting in London on 24 January. Both unions are committed to resisting “Transformation”, but currently have no plans to ballot their members in the affected areas, where union density and organisation tends to be weaker than in operational and engineering grades.

**Some rank-and-file activists are calling for a dispute that involves workers in other grades, mobilising them to oppose the cuts on the basis of the impact it will have on their own jobs.**



# Bus drivers 18th week of strikes

By Peggy Carter

Bus drivers at the Rusholme depot of First Buses in Manchester are on their 18th week of strikes over pay parity.

Drivers are now striking on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays on alternate weeks. They are paid up to £4,500 less a year than drivers at other First Bus depots, including one just a few miles down the road.

Drivers are currently paid £9.05 an hour and are demanding an increase to £10.50 with a guarantee of pay parity with other depots (some paid over £12 an hour) soon.

**Passengers and members of the local Labour Party have been supporting the strike. On 25 January they blockaded a nearby depot which is not on strike, and stopped buses moving for an hour and a half.**

# FE colleges balloted over pay

By Charlotte Zalens

UCU members in 16 FE colleges in London are being balloted for strikes over pay.

The Association of Colleges has recommended a 1% pay rise for its member colleges for 2017-18. The UCU had submitted a claim in August 2017 for RPI plus 3% —

equalling 6.9%, with a minimum uplift of £900 for the lowest paid workers.

The negotiations with the Association of Colleges are not however binding on the member colleges, and UCU is balloting in colleges where workers want to push college management for higher pay.

**UCU is hoping other branches will join the dispute as it progresses.**



# Solidarity

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## Afrin: Erdogan cracks down on Turkish dissent



Turkish cops arrest a street protestor

By Gemma Short

Eleven members of the Turkish Medical Association (TMA) were arrested on 30 January following the publication of a statement by the TMA condemning Turkey's military action in Afrin, Syria.

The statement called for an end to all hostilities and warned that war posed a threat to public health. The Turkish government, along

with Syrian rebels, launched an assault on Kurdish-controlled Afrin in Syria on 21 January. The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) are the dominant force there. Turkey insists the YPG are terrorist.

**TERRORIST REGIME**  
In fact Erdogan's government have long been terrorising Kurds in both Turkey and Syria. Human Rights Watch reports

Turkish border guards shooting at Syrian refugees fleeing fighting in Afrin and Idlib. The government has also repressed the wider population. Following a failed (pseudo) coup in July 2016 there were six months of emergency rule, nearly 90,000 civil servants were sacked and hundreds of media organisations were closed down.

All of those arrested were members of the TMA's central council. Three of the doctors were re-

leased under observation on 2 February after international pressure, and the rest were released under observation on 5 February.

The Turkish Interior Ministry says (5 February) that 573 people are currently in prison for criticising the invasion.

**CRACKDOWN**  
It is likely the government will still try and crack down on the

TMA.

Doctors have previously been arrested for providing medical care to political prisoners.

**Erdogan has accused the TMA of "treason" and threatened that the association should be closed down.**

• The British Medical Association has condemned the arrests: [bit.ly/2GU2pan](http://bit.ly/2GU2pan)

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