& Workers' Liberty

Solidarity

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A plan for Labour:

- STOP BREXIT
- DEFEND MIGRANTS
- FIGHT POVERTY

At its conference on 22-26 September Labour has the chance to galvanise its new and enthused activist layer into becoming a serious force against the Tories, and their disastrous policies for working-class people pushed through over eight years.

To do that Labour needs to overhaul its democracy and commit itself to a radical programme. Top of the kind of political shift Labour needs to make is on Brexit.

More page 5

Inside:

Back GRA reform!

Mike Zubrowski on the proposed amendments to the GRA.

See page 3

India and homosexuality

Camila Bassi discusses what the repeal of Section 377 means for India.

See page 6

In defence of Bolshevism

Find out about our new book. Available to order online now.

See page 9

Join Labour!

What should Labour say about Israel-Palestine?

See page 4

Labour movement gears up to fight Brexit

By Michael Elms

As it rolls closer, Brexit continues to embolden the right wing of society and promote a corrosive anti-migrant prejudice in political life.

Most fatally, the right-wing attitudes that have been boosted by Brexit are corrupting the Corbyn-led Labour Party. Recent policy announcements show the party collapsing backwards under the weight of Brexit, calling for more border guards, restricting freedom of movement to those migrants deemed "economically useful" and inflicting on us the woeful hashtag #FairReasonableManagedMigration (suggesting that there is something unfair, unreasonable, or out-of-control about the presence of foreigners in the UK).

But socialist labour movement activists are standing up against the slow poison of Brexit nationalism.

Of 272 motions submitted to Labour Party conference in 2018, around 150 of them are on Brexit — and 130 of them call on Labour to come out for a referendum on the deal with an option to remain, or to oppose Brexit outright.

Many stress the importance of defending migrant rights and free movement — most anti-Brexit motions are versions of the leftwing text supplied by Another Europe is Possible, with efforts by centrists to make the fight against Brexit a stick with which to beat the left floundering.

The constituency Labour Parties are leading the way in the labour movement. The statement from the TUC on Brexit was welcome, in that it raised the possibility of a mass trade union campaign against a bad deal, and said it was "open" to a referendum on Brexit. But it was a fudge, qualified by a desire not to tie the Labour or trade union leaders down to any particular course.

In a tough fight like the one we face now against the hard-right forces driving Brexit, only a clear, unambiguous policy can keep a movement from being blown on the wind. Shying away from bluntly demanding a referendum or a general election or giving the leadership the option of stepping back from the brink of a confrontation with the forces of Brexit is a recipe for defeat. So local Labour activists are right to demand that the party commit firmly to a strategy.

Internationalist courage and activism will be needed throughout society: not just at Labour Party conference. The many thousands of activists who have argued and voted for Labour to change direction need to start building a movement against Brexit nationalism in the streets and in workplaces.

That means winning over workers in Leave-voting areas with a programme that can offer genuine solutions to the hardships that inspired a large Brexit protest vote in 2016, and isolating hardcore rightwing demagogues within those communities. That work is already underway with listening exercises and initiatives like the "Brexitometers" being run by left activists in Leave areas.

It means an educational drive in workplaces, especially workplaces where trade union organisation is under threat from a split between native and migrant workers. Workplace activists have to go beyond the union leadership's demands for "a deal that protects jobs" and get to work rooting out prejudice and division.

And it means rallying the anti-Brexit constituency of the mostly-Remain-voting big cities around an inspiring programme based not in fear or support of the status quo, but an internationalist vision that says that the socialist and labour movements across the European continent and beyond are a better friend to British workers than the millionaire demagogues at the wheel of Brexit.

Trump hears that U.S. action in Puerto Rico has not been "unsung success".

Idlib, the next humanitarian disaster

With Russian support the proposed assault on the Syrian province of Idlib could be one of the bloodiest of the war.

Idlib is the last outpost of significant rebel control. It's 2.5 million civilians, many who are internally displaced, may face a determined regime campaign to conquer the territory no matter the outcome.

Idlib does not resemble an ordinary province, it has hundreds of thousands of people living in camps or out in the open, people who are already the victims of the regime, Iranian troops and Russian bombs.

As troops amassed on the border, civilians were advised to accept "reconciliation" or find themselves under heavy bombardment. Russia has now agreed to form a demilitarised zone with Turkey which will be policed by both Turkish and Russian troops. Russia has been able to make these arrangements with Turkey despite them being formally on opposite sides in the war.

Russia and Turkey want all rebels and their weaponry to leave the zone by 10 October. The likelihood of direct conflict between the two countries is now less likely but whether the zone will hold and if this will stop an outright assault on Idlib seems unlikely. Such a move will be welcomed internationally but the UN and Western leaders are paralysed over their attitude to the almost inevitable outcome — that Assad has won this war.

Idlib is under the control of different factions, the largest and best-organised being Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Syrian based Al-Qaeda aligned group. Turkey has lobbied heavily for the assault to focus solely on HTS, joining the UN and US in labelling them a terrorist organisation.

Turkey's motives here are clear — they provide direct support for the anti-HTS alliance, the National Liberation Front (NLF) which includes two of the other larger Islamist groups — Ahrar al-Sham and the Nour al-Din al-Zinki Brigades.

Idlib refugee camp

Idlib had previously been categorised as a de-escalation zone, a situation which suited Turkey. Idlib borders Turkey and the border was kept clear of both the regime and the Kurdish forces they have been so determined to drive out of Afrin. Turkey may now support a version of the assault on Idlib but what it really wants to stop is a further influx of refugees, adding to the 3.5 million Syrians that have fled already to Turkey.

Alongside the Iranian troops and Russian air support the regime may have another ally — the Kurdish PYD. They are keen to retake Afrin after the vicious Turkish assault which seized the territory and quickly moved to repress and destroy any semblance of Kurdish control. While the PYD may use the distraction of Turkish intervention in Idlib to retake Afrin, they may believe they will do damage to Turkey's support in Syria, if in the future they fight alongside the regime against Islamist rebels.

The de-escalation zone meant that Idlib was able to preserve some of the early gains of the uprisings in Syria for longer. Local councils existed and even now there are demonstrations against the regime's planned attack, although how far these are independent from various rebel factions is difficult to guage.

HTS can claim 10,000 fighters and is undoubtedly hostile to any form of secular governance. It has imposed itself on the area, taken over institutions and instituted its own Sharia courts, imposed strict dress codes and forced widows to live with male relatives. Leila al-Shami reports that a founder of an independent radio station suffered an attempted assassination as did Ghalya Rahal, founder of Mazaya, which ran women's centres.

But the situation in Idlib cannot be improved by a regime takeover. Forced conscription, executions and imprisonment will be used by the regime as they were in Ghouta and Daraa. As it is Islamists who control the guns and are the only capable force of defending against regime attacks, further assaults are likely to act as recruiting sergeants for the Islamists. Such a vicious cycle has meant that much of the humanitarian aid provided to Idlib is at risk, as the UN are uneasy over who will control it once it reaches Idlib.

As Assad has consolidated power the international focus has moved to reconstruction and because those powers believe reconstruction will only happen under the current regime.

What this means for Syrian civilians, refugees and the internally displaced is an ongoing humanitarian crisis supported by Russia and Iran.

Back GRA reform, but go further

By Mike Zubrowski

The government is consulting on changes which would allow people the right to change their legal gender through self-declaration, an important if limited step forward for trans, non-binary and intersex people.

The consultation is on the 2004 Gender Recognition Act (GRA), and proposed changes to this Act. It is open until 10 October.

The GRA allows successful applicants to get new birth certificates in the gender they have transitioned to. These are used for some pension provisions, marriages, and a few other things, while gender on passports and elsewhere is changed independently.

The current process is difficult, invasive and degrading. It costs £140 and requires medical reports, a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, evidence of having socially transitioned for two years, and submission of evidence to a panel. Since 2004 less than 2.5% of the UK's trans population of 200,000-500,000 have successfully acquired a Gender Recognition Certificate, while a large majority would like one.

Trans people experience widespread and severe discrimination, harassment and social exclusion. 40% of UK trans and non-binary people reported experiencing hate crimes in the previous year and 14% do not feel safe where they live. In the USA at least, transphobic violence is increasing.

Many trans and non-binary people experience difficulties in being socially recognised in their desired gender, and often struggle to access much needed medical and other support. Due largely to these factors 84% of young trans people in the UK have self-harmed and 45% have attempted suicide.

Preliminary proposals suggest that to change legal gender individuals will need to make a statutory declaration of their intention to "live in the preferred gender" until death, with most other obstacles removed.

Statutory declarations are made in front of a solicitor or similar, and false declarations carry heavy penalties. No changes have been proposed to the Equalities Act, which allows exclusion of individual trans people in rare situation, such as occasionally from women only refuges.

Some issues being consulted on have not been proposed as imminent amendments, such as non-binary inclusion or changes to privacy protections. Several countries have moved toward comparable self-declaration, such as Denmark, Argentina and Ireland. Doing so has benefited trans people and in none of them have the "concerns" voiced by people who oppose gender self-declaration materialised.

Self-declaration helps trans people by removing some difficulties in social recognition of their identities, helping to counteract their marginalisation. The GRA should be amended to require only self-declaration of people's gender identities.

It should also permit non-binary legal gender identities, have a process available for people under 18, and remove the requirement that married people must either get their spouse's approval or annul their marriage. Gender neutrality could help trans people, from bank cards to toilets. This is a different issue from self-declaration.

The government's consultation and proposals are limited by the superficial nature of their desire to help trans, non-binary and intersex people. Some Conservatives may genuinely want to help trans people, but the proposed changes tackle only one important issue. The Conservative's wider politics

prevent them from confronting many others.

Capitalism feeds trans oppression as part of an oppressive gender order. For class-societies to reproduce themselves they need to maintain and replace workers, and creating new generations involves biological reproduction. Individuals' abilities to perform other types of labour decreases in late pregnancy, while their needs don't. Only some people have the biological capacity to get pregnant. Maintaining and replacing workers takes both time and money which could otherwise be used to create profit for the ruling class.

Division of labour organised by gender and through families helps keep costs low. Gender differentiation makes use of differences in reproductive biology on a society wide level, dividing individuals into "men" and "women" based on *assumed* ability to get pregnant. Men perform more labour that directly makes profit for the ruling class, while women perform more labour that replaces and maintains the exploited class.

Men therefore directly acquire more money or goods, and women less. This has generally been regulated through men oppressing women, supported by institutional oppression of women. Where women demand more, this indirectly demands some of the ruling class's profit.

BINARIES

In capitalism the ruling class's drive for profit encourages it to directly organise workers under its own control.

This strengthens divisions between domestic labour and wage labour: organised through different institutions, in different places, functioning at different times, and experienced in different ways. This generates powerful ideologies of "seperate spheres": family and work, private and public, women and men. This idea of two opposing and incompatible genders marginalises and oppresses non-binary, intersex and many other people.

To maintain the gender order, genders are treated as innate and reducible to biology. This marginalises and oppresses trans people. People who transgress the gender order are demonised and oppressed for doing so, which reinforces it.

On the other hand, capitalism has opened up the possibilities for limited steps towards equality, which can and must be fought for to be realised.

The consultation [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reform-of-the-gender-recognition-act-2004] is open to all, and is worth completing as it may inform important changes immediately, and will likely influence the success of future campaigns. There are broader issues we must also campaign on.

We must campaign for better provision of holistic gender identity services and trans healthcare, which are currently seriously underfunded and inaccessible.

Doing so must be part of taking the NHS back into public ownership, with adequate funding and under democratic control. Unions, the Labour Party and the labour movement must organise to tackle transphobia, sexism and harassment at work and in wider society. Refuges for trans and non-trans victims of domestic violence are insufficient and profoundly underfunded. A much shorter working week and broader public services would help undercut the basis of the gender binary.

Ultimately, we must transform the labour movement to overthrow capitalism. Fighting for all of these issues and more would help trans, non-binary and intersex people, and also women and the working-class.

A minority on the left argue that self-declaration, a limited step to help a small number of oppressed people, is a threat to women's rights. They completely

Tories accommodate soft-fascism

By Rosalind Robson

Even right-wing media outlets like the *Spectator* have denounced the Tory MEPs who recently voted against or abstained on the European Parliament initiating Article 7 proceedings against Hungary.

That procedure allows MEPs to refer a member-state to the Europe Council to determine if it does not respect human rights, democracy, rule of law and so on.

But this is hardly news! Since being elected in 2010 the Fidesz government of Viktor Orbán has:

• Rewritten the constitution so that key checks and balances (including judicial ones) on executive powers were removed.

• Bought up the media. This media now pumps out propaganda demonising Muslims and refugees.

• Curtailed freedom of speech in others ways, for example, by banning oppositional journalists from parliament.

Orbán will be delighted by this move in the European Parliament — bolstering his stance as the defender of Hungary against foreign interference. Gove seemed to be defending Orbán's stance when he justified the Tory failure to condemn Hungary, saying that Tories do not believe in interfering in the democracy of another country.

Hungary's democracy is increasingly a facade. Fidesz even puts up bogus opposition parties to split the anti-Fidesz vote.

Fidesz is of course part of a constellation of right-wing governments across the world — in the richer countries those of Trump, Netenayu, Putin and Silvani. That is one other reason to take a stand. Another is the vile racism of Fidesz.

In 2016 the government called a referendum to stop the acceptance of an EU quota of 1,294 refugees, stirring up anti-migrant feeling. It then built a huge barbed wire fence at its Serbian border to keep out refugees.

Orbán has described Miklós Horthy, Hungary's wartime leader, as an "exceptional statesman". Horthy was a vicious antisemite even before the Nazis came to power and collaborated with the mass deportation of Jews.

The Tories have shown themselves willing to accommodate to soft fascism. This is a dangerous road.

Help us raise £15,000

Workers' Liberty has launched a new fundraising appeal to raise £15,000 between now and June 2019.

Among other things the money will help us produce more literature and this week we have published a new book, *In Defence of Bolshevism* (see page 9) and a pamphlet about left antisemitism (see page 7).

Workers' Liberty exists to build support for the argument that capitalism must be replaced by collective ownership and sustainable planing for people's needs – socialism. Please help us amplify our voice.

We have no big money backers. We rely on contributions from readers! So please consider doing one of the following things to help us out.

So far we have raised £1605.

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US socialists debate electoral strategy

By Eduardo Tovar

In the US, self-described socialists running on Democrat ballot lines have produced shock electoral successes.

The successes include Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's victory over Democratic Caucus Chair Joe Crowley in the Democratic primary in New York's 14th congressional district and, more recently, Julia Salazar's victory over incumbent New York State Senator Martin Malave Dilan to become the Democratic nominee for the 18th district.

These successes have revived a long-running debate on how the American left should approach elections.

Much of the current debate centres on a "blueprint for a new party" put forward by Jacobin's Seth Ackerman in November 2016.

In brief, Ackerman's argument is that the US electoral system poses distinct obstacles because third parties have to petition to get onto the ballot, satisfying such demanding requirements as collecting high numbers of signatures, whereas the Democrats and Republicans get automatic ballot access.

In Ackerman's view, such regulatory obstacles mean that the present task of creating a workers' party in the US is not directly analogous to such famous historical examples as the founding of the UK Labour Party in 1900, which successfully split the voter base of the Liberal Party and provided a distinct political front for the labour movement in Britain, without significant worries over ballot status.

Accordingly, Ackerman sees value in socialists standing for election on the Democrats' ballot line if they demonstrate clear political distance from the Democratic Party itself, thereby building a distinct, institutional identity that can break away to form a viable labour or socialist party in its own right. This strategy is often described a "dirty break" from the Democrats, as opposed to the "clean break" of only campaigning on independent third party ballot lines.

Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez's victory shocked the democratic establishment

The International Socialist Organization (ISO) has helpfully facilitated the debate with a series of articles in its newspaper *Socialist Worker* (unrelated to the British newspaper of the same name produced by the Socialist Workers' Party), offering various standpoints on Ackerman's proposal.

Some common objections to a "dirty break" strategy are that running on the ballot line of one of capital's parties necessarily means conceding to the two-party system and that it might even strengthen the Democratic Party, since candidates' electoral successes will be attributed to their ballot-line party rather than their proto-party.

It is worth stressing that one should not read "dirty break" proposals as ones of realignment; that is, of transforming the Democratic Party itself into a workers' party, as Michael Harrington and Max Shachtman unsuccessfully attempted historically.

All sides of this debate agree that realigning the Democratic Party itself is impossible because the main political parties in the US are not voluntary associations funded by and (at least somewhat) democratically accountable to a mass membership.

In short, the major American parties are not "parties" as understood anywhere else in the developed world.

I stress this because, as a comrade of mine in the US socialist group Solidarity puts it, Ackerman's article is something of a "Rorschach test", with many reading the proposal as much more of a realignment-style intervention than intended. It is simply a strategic or tactical question of whether it is worth using Democrat ballot lines, as well as whether it is worth endorsing left-wing candidates who run on Democrat ballot lines.

Many Third Campists here in the Boston area instead focus on the questions of candidate accountability and of building a viable political economy on which to base a third party. In the context of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), we have already encountered the real problem of endorsing left-wing candidates who become wholly unanswerable to DSA itself after gaining their place on the ballot. Indeed, there is a risk of reaching a stage where DSA in practice simply backs anyone who professes to be a "socialist".

As for issues of political economy, funding and trade union affiliation are crucial factors. As the American left learned from the experience of the 1996 Labor Party, one cannot expect the national unions to break away quickly from establishment Democrats. That is why many Boston leftists who identify with Hal Draper's "socialism from below" emphasise the need to transform the unions from within in order to provide the social and financial base of a new workers' party; a project one might begin in the large statewide unions via a rank-and-file strategy.

Since this debate will not conclude anytime soon, I encourage readers of *Solidarity* to continue it in our pages. Is it worth running or endorsing socialists on Democrat ballot lines? Or is a winning a place on a Democrat ticket always a poisoned chalice? Now that we know the relevant issues, please let us know your thoughts!

• Ackerman's 2016 Jacobin article: bit.ly/2fVrV43

• Debate hosted by Socialist Worker (US): bit.ly/2NSqhkP

Labour and Israel-Palestine

By Shamsuddin Effendi

Over the past decade the situation for the Palestinians has gone from bad to worse.

Continued occupation, continued settlement expansion in the West Bank, no end to the conflict, the US moving their embassy to Jerusalem (undermining the widely held view that Jerusalem should be shared as a city after a settlement between Israelis and Palestinians) and now Trump has pledged to withdraw all US funding for the UN's refugee agency for Palestinians UNWRA, while also closing down the PLO's offices in Washington DC.

But the election of a Labour government in Britain could be some small boost for the Palestinians but only if Labour are serious about being allies to both the Palestinians and the Israeli left and working class.

Corbyn has made many mistakes on the Israel-Palestine conflict during his political career (who can forget warm attitudes to leaders Hamas and Hezbollah?) However his long-term support for the rights of the Palestinian people and support for a two-state settlement should be recognised.

And it is good that Corbyn has stated that a Labour government would officially recognise the State of Palestine, joining countries like Sweden and Colombia who have done the same over the past few years. Given how the Palestinians see themselves as having fewer and fewer allies in their continued struggle for freedom and independence, to see the former colonial power in the region recognise their statehood would surely be a powerful symbolic move.

The Israeli right have gained political prestige from symbolic moves from their allies. Netanyahu, who increasingly sees groups like the EU as his geo-political opponents, has worked hard to foster alliances with far-right and nationalist politicians from Viktor Orban in Hungary to Donald Trump in America. That is just another reason why a left-wing Labour government must work hard to ally with progressive forces in Israel, as well as in Palestine, given how increasingly beleaguered and marginalised those forces are.

This means going beyond a traditional Labour alliance with the increasingly left-wing-in-name-only Israeli Labour Party. Better to work with parties like Meretz (a fellow member of the Socialist International), whose MKs are far more outspoken about talking to the Palestinians and achieving a two-state settlement, and the Joint List, most of whose MKs are Arabs and increasingly spend much of their time fighting against the racist and undemocratic policies of the Netanyahu government.

From social movements like "Standing Together" to working-class organisations like Wac-Ma'an, Labour could easily make closer links with organisations fighting not just against the occupation but for more workers' rights and democratic rights in the state of Israel.

But a British government under Corbyn's Labour could do even more to put an end to the conflict and to further the rights of the Palestinians.

They could push for aid to replace the aid lost by Trump's cruel and vindictive withdrawal of funding.

They could push for more talks between Israeli left-wing MKs and Palestinian representatives.

They could insist on an arms embargo until Israel made minimal moves to end the occupation of the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza.

A generalised boycott of Israel would be unlikely to achieve much to end the conflict. It may even play into the hands of the Israeli right-wing and the siege mentality they sell to the Israeli population. However an end to arm sales to Israel as long as Israel spends so much of its military capability on continuing a wholly unjust occupation of land inhabited by people with no real self-determination, would surely be just.

The Israel-Palestine conflict cannot be ended except by Israeli and Palestinian workers themselves, when united under a programme of ending the occupation and mutual recognition of national rights. But a Labour government in Britain should be there as a radical ally to progressive forces advocating, unity, an end to the occupation and two states for the two peoples.

Stop Brexit! Fight poverty!

At its conference on 22-26 September Labour has the chance to galvanise its new and enthused activist layer into becoming a serious force against the Tories, their disastrous policies for working-class people pushed through over eight years.

To do that Labour needs to overhaul its democracy and commit itself to a radical programme. Top of the kind of political shift Labour needs to make is on Brexit.

With over 100 motions submitted by local Labour parties, it is likely that t full debate on Brexit and the demand for another referendum or "People's Vote" will be aired at the conference.

Potentially a majority of delegates, including delegates from unions, will be able to win a commitment to a referendum vote on the final deal.

Brexit is therefore likely to dominate the headlines generated by Labour conference, but it must also be fairly debated.

Labour should and can commit to stopping Brexit and hand in hand with that defending free movement and migrants rights.

MIGRATION

Policy on migration is another key debate. Unfortunately in the build up to conference, Labour's leadership seems to have shifted sharply to the right on the issue migration.

While Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott is right to criticise the Tories for attempting to control immigration based on an arbitrary figure, Labour's alternative is hardly much better. Abbot's announcement talks repeatedly about having a "fair" and "managed" migration system and prioritising skilled migrants. Attacks on the Tories for not being able to stick to a figure and implying that Labour will in fact be tougher does nothing but concede ground to the right.

Abbott also focused on Labour doing more to prevent "illegal immigration" confirming that 500 extra border guards are planned. Labour will also make sure that foreign nationals who serve prisons sentences in the UK are more quickly deported — "from prison to the airport" they say.

The announcement comes at the time when hostility to migration is on the rise.

A survey by ICM says that 40% of British people believe "multiculturalism" has undermined British culture and that migrants fails to integrate. This goes hand in hand with believing the politicians repeatedly lie about migration. 85% of people believe it is managed badly. 50% of respondents said they would like to see immigration reduced in the case of low-skilled workers.

While the majority of people were still in favour of some levels of migration, believing that it benefits the economy these trends reflect increasing pessimism about the direction of an increasingly diverse society. The attitudes are more hostile to migrants in smaller towns and in rural areas. Whereas in cities attitudes are generally more positive despite their being greater pressure on public services.

It is good that delegates at Labour conference will be able to vote to commit to Labour to shutting down detention centres — such a move would be a much needed antidote to the leadership's rhetoric — but Labour members need to push for more.

Labour is playing a dangerous game by conceding to anti-migrant attitudes rather than challenging them. A radical and campaigning Labour Party would be commit to restore cuts in the NHS, to drive private health care out of the NHS, restore funding cuts in local government, build millions of council homes and a completely overhaul of the welfare system. These things should be at forefront of what it does.

Working-class people are desperate for change, they need Labour to fight for these things. The release of a new metric to measure poverty suggests that under the New Labour governments child poverty did not go down and shows 14 million people, including 4.5 million children and 60% of disabled people, are living in poverty

Apart from isolated campaign days, the campaigning ambitions of the Corbyn Labour Party have so differed very little from those under Blair; they have mostly been exercises in getting the vote out. Labour delegates have the opportunity to shape the future of the party and challenge some of the weaker aspects of the Corbyn leadership, they take that opportunity.

A genuinely transformative Labour Party could reverse the appalling poverty statistics, while defending migrants, and stopping the economic and social disaster of Brexit.

Democracy review in danger?

As we go to press (17 September) the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Labour Party is finalising the Party's Democracy Review which will be voted on at conference. Both Momentum and the press have jumped on rumours that the unions will attempt a "power grab" for the selection of leader.

The five biggest unions have apparently come to a compromise position on the election of Leader in the case of a vacancy. According to the *Guardian* the change would stop someone from both the far left of the Parliamentary Party and from the right being able to stand. A proposed increase in the threshold of MP support to get on the ballot from the 10% compromise put forward by Momentum last year is likely to be shoe horned into the review.

The two proposals which have previously been floated are that candidates may get nominations of 10% of local parties plus at least 5% of MPs, or from at least three trade unions comprising 10% of affiliated trade union membership plus 5% of the MPs. The third option is 10% of MPs alone.

The new union-backed option is that an MP would only make it onto the ballot paper if they had secured the backing of 10% of MPs, 5% of local parties, and at least three Labour affiliates — with at least two are trade unions making up 5% of the affiliated membership.

One NEC member quoted anonymously said. "For the past three years, members have fought tooth and nail for a more democratic party only to be rebuffed time and again.

"The democracy review was supposed to represent the desires of members, thousands of whom spent their evenings attending meetings and writing in submissions. If all that effort is wasted and the democracy review ends up making the party less democratic, the members will be in open revolt."

There are justifiably concerns about what is being missed by the review and what may be kicked into the long grass, including reform of the selection procedure. Despite a very professional and strong campaign by Labour International for "Open Selections" for MPs, it looks increasingly likely that movers of the motion will be advised to remit it rather than risk losing the vote due to the strength of union votes.

But NEC member Darren Williams told *Solidarity*, "Last year's conference took an important decision to embark on a Democracy Review to engage our massively increased membership and give force to Jeremy Corbyn's pledge to put members at the heart of decision-making.

"Some really important proposals have come out of that Review, which could boost democratic accountability in such areas as leadership elections, local government structures and policy-making. I hope that conference will adopt some of these key proposals and also introduce long-overdue reform of our parliamentary selections process."

Delegates should ensure that as soon as the review is released they take the time to scrutinise and discuss the proposals. Whatever the outcome, much more will need to be done to democratise Labour.

The next issue of Solidarity (no. 480) will go to press after Labour Party conference and will printed on Wednesday 3 October.

The repeal of Section 377 and human emancipation

By Camila Bassi

In 1861, during British colonial rule, Section 377 was introduced into the Indian Penal Code: a law with origins in England's Buggery Act of 1533. This marked, in Victorian language, India's criminalisation of homosexuality. With the independence of India in 1947, Section 377 survived.

In 2009 the Delhi High Court, in response to a petition by the Naz Foundation, ruled that Section 377's references to homosexual sex were unconstitutional, thus effectively decriminalising homosexuality. Various petitions attempted to challenge this ruling, one of which made it to the Supreme Court of India — who, in 2013, overturned the decision of the Delhi High Court, stating that only parliament, not the judiciary, can make such a judgement. Once again, homosexuality in India was criminalised. The latest Supreme Court ruling on 6th September 2018, the result of six petitions by gay professionals and activists, has decreed that the parts of Section 377 referring to homosexual sex between adults are unconstitutional. India has (once again) decriminalised homosexuality.

Writing in the *New Yorker* on this historic ruling on gay rights, Samanth Subramanian makes two astute points in the context of those who pitch this legal victory as one of an authentic, sexually liberal India over an antiquated, sexually illiberal British colonialism. He states:

Old Hindu myths, like Greek ones, are propelled by the sexual needs of gods and goddesses, and the stories placidly accept the fluidity of gender, lust, and love. As a result, some critics of Section 377 like to argue that opposing homosexuality is foreign to India—that a restrained approach to sex arrived here in the baggage of other religions. It's a strange and dangerous argument: using ancient yarns to justify a liberty is just a beat away from using them to justify a bias or a constraint. Regardless, since 1947, when India became independent, its society has stayed conservative enough to look on homosexuality with disfavor, and striking Section 377 from the penal code has never been a political priority. "We believe that homosexuality is an unnatural act and cannot be supported," Rajnath Singh, now India's Home Minister, said in 2013, months before his party came to power.

On the actual reality of the ruling, Subramanian cautions:

A country decolonises itself slowly. The Supreme Court's decision on Section 377 snips away one more tether binding India to its colonial past. But the verdict resembles a strong beam of light only because it pierces through the stormy, illiberal weather around it. The other problems besetting India - a hideous right-wing Hindu nationalism; unpunished violence against minorities and lower castes; political corruption; arrests of civic activists under trumped-up accusations; yawning disparities of wealth; the spoiling, perishing environment — are all homemade. They cannot be blamed on anyone else; that heaviness of responsibility is part of the compact of growing up. For allowing these dysfunctions to flare, and for failing to stamp them out, India will be able

to blame no one but herself.

Of relevance here is Karl Marx's essay 'On "The Jewish Question"' (1843), in particular, his exploration of the relationship of political to human emancipation. Marx insists on a critique of political emancipation in order to expose the relationship of political emancipation to human emancipation. He acknowledges the "great […] real, practical" progress of political emancipation, but on its limits he argues that while the capitalist state abolishes in its own way the distinctions of class, birth, profession, and education, by declaring them "to be unpolitical differences", it allows them "to have an effect in their own manner. Hence humankind leads a twofold existence: "a heavenly one and an earthy one"; the former as communal beings in political community and the latter as private, alienated, egoistic individuals in civil society:

Man [sic] was […] not freed from religion; he received freedom of religion. He was not freed from property; he received freedom of property. He was not freed from the egoism of trade; he received freedom to trade.

Marx deplores the debasement of theory, art, history, nature, and human relations itself by religion, property, commodities, and commerce, and concludes that our liberation is contingent not merely on political emancipation but on human emancipation too.

The recent repeal of key parts of Section 377 is hugely significant progress for gay rights in India, demonstrating (paraphrasing Marx) the great, real, and practical progress of political emancipation. However, the current conditions of existence in India are such that gay sexuality will continue to be shamed and oppressed by dominant relations and forces of power, but now without the use of this law.

Political emancipation is one decisive step forward, what's next is the fight for human emancipation which, in India today, involves a struggle against religious patriarchy fused with capitalist social relations.

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The roots of antisem

The second part of John Cunningham's evaluation of *The Jewish Question in Hungary After 1944*, by István Bibó (1911-1979).

In the last part of this article I looked at how Bibó analysed the historical background of antisemitism in Hungary. But on a more general level what makes an anti-semite "tick"? Bibó begins by considering the personal experiences of anti-semites,

"[…] anyone who knows anti-semites even a little, knows that they base their claims about Jews on very personal experiences, presented in honest and passionate form. It would be incorrect to claim that they invent their experiences because of their shared prejudices, interests and ideologies; there are indications that the reverse is the case. It is the emotional intensity of their experiences that makes them believe obtuse prejudices and foggy ideologies, which appear to them as explanations and clarifications."

Bibó elaborates on this,

"The anti-semitic statement is not the one that claims that Jews are among the causes for anti-semitism, but the one that asserts that anti-semitic emotions and actions are justified and called for as replies to everyone's experience with Jews, forgetting the fact that the experience of Gentiles with Jews has been countered and indeed preceded by the experience of Jews with their surroundings."

There follows an involved discussion of what constitutes real experience between Jews and non-Jews. Keeping this as short as possible Bibó argues that in certain social situations (he cites as an example that between a servant and their employer) despite their being real experiences between them there is no meaningful knowledge of the other's "being" because the relationship is structured in such a way that they only experience each other's negative traits.

This is "…due to the false and contradictory nature of the conditions of social organisation within which they face each other."

He suggests that this can be extended to the Jewish experience, "We should attempt to use the same method in our search for contradictory and misleading conditions which are at the basis of the structured relationship between Jews and their social environment, and which resulted in the ceaseless flood of negative mutual experiences."

Whatever the "structured" nature of the relationship Bibó makes the forceful point that, "When it comes to the experience of Jews and non-Jews about each other, primacy must be accorded to the experience of Jews,…"

The author beside the statue of Istvan Bibó on the embankment of the River Danube in Budapest in 2009.

This is important because it imparts an important, vital historical dimension to anti-semitism: "…Jews and non-Jews seldom establish personal relations with each other primarily as Jews and non-Jews, and therefore much of their encounters remain impersonal, inhuman and de-humanized." Therefore, to maintain that a Jew's complaint about non-Jewish behaviour is on the same level as the non-Jew's complaint about Jews, again ignores this historical aspect where dehumanisation of Jewry is deeply entrenched and has existed for centuries.

Is disliking Jews the same as actively persecuting them? Bibó puts it this way,

"Everyone who dislikes Jews does not have to be called an antisemite, but neither does it suffice to regard as antisemites only those who promote or participate in, the persecution of Jews. We should apply the term to those who possess an integrated and set image of the Jews' dangerous traits, their greedy and deceitful stride toward enrichment, their political and moral destructiveness, and their penchant for being vengeful and domineering. In this sense an antisemite may well be an honourable person or a scoundrel, gentle or cruel, an innocent being or a criminal. The important matter is that anti-semitism is applicable to individuals or groups who carry in them a consistently distorted image about a segment of social reality."

Bibó refers back on a number of occasions

Finding the text

Unfortunately, anyone wanting to consult the original text in its entirety, which I highly recommend, may have some searching to do. The text referred to in this article was published in the USA in the series 'Atlantic Studies on Society in Change No. 69', (Boulder Colorado, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1991). It contains other important essays by Bibó including 'The Crisis of Hungarian Democracy' (1946) which evoked a critical response from none other than György Lukács. The Atlantic Studies edition is difficult to get hold of, having been out of print for a number of years. I don't know of anywhere else it has been published in English and as far as I can see it is not available online. A good book search service may be able to help.

nitism in Hungary

Jews being rounded up into Budapest municipal theatre, October 1944

to the history of Hungary and stresses the way its limited economic and social development proved a breeding ground for a widespread anti-semitism. In particular, Hungary and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe did not experience a bourgeois revolution in the way that say France or England did. The change to a bourgeois form of society was stunted and contained many feudal hangovers, not least in the countryside,

"In these countries [i.e. Central and Eastern Europe] the feudal-aristocratic social structure remained relatively intact and strong, and societies were only superficially and formalistically restructured to resemble those of modern capitalism and modern bourgeois democracy. Following several failures and half-successes, the bourgeoisie of these countries became intimidated and gradually gave up the idea of defeating the feudal-aristocratic forces. Thus capitalism east of the Rhine was not based on overthrowing or weakening feudalism but on exploiting feudal social conditions in a capitalistic manner, worsening them even further to the point of inhumane colonial exploitation.

"Under these circumstances, modern social criticism attacked and undermined society's feudal-aristocratic authorities, instincts and beliefs, but since it was unable — except in Russia — to overthrow its feudal-aristocratic structure, it gradually became an internally fermenting process which, instead of initiating action, drowned in dogmatism, irrationality, and the manufacturing of false political formulas."

Within this history it is a fact that many Jews supported the socialist movement, a phenomenon hardly confined to Hungary. In the 1919 revolutionary government of Workers Councils the majority of the leading cadre were of Jewish origin (e.g György Lukács) and this only added fuel to the fire of anti-semitic prejudice in the twenties and thirties.

Socialism and Communism were equated in the mind of the antisemite with Jewry. In light of all these negative developments a country which once had been considered safe for Jews became its opposite. Assimilation proved to be built on flimsy foundations and anti-semitism became part and parcel of the anti-democratic, anti-socialist, nationalistic political discourse which dominated Hungary from 1919 to the end of World War Two.

"[…] perhaps in no other Central European country was the inner world of the assimilator community as disharmonious, and the cause of Jewish assimilation so burdened by falsehoods and contradictions as in Hungary. One might say that from the earliest times Hungarian society carried on, or promised assimilation under unprincipled and dishonest conditions, thereby deceiving itself as well as those who had assimilated."

ISRAEL

Bibó wrote his essay in 1948, the same year as the founding of the state of Israel (in May). Because assimilation had been so influential, Zionism was never particularly strong in Hungary, despite some of Zionism's leading figures being of Hungarian origin.

After 1945 many Jews felt that their position in society would be guarded by the Hungarian Communist Party (it was, but at the cost of suppressing any meaningful discussion of anti-semitism — despite Bibó's efforts to the contrary) and this too worked against any strong inclination to migrate to the new state.

UN figures quoted by Bibó in an endnote show that only 14,700 Hungarian Jews migrated to Israel between 1945-9. It is difficult to gauge and analyse something as complex as a new nation state particularly when that state is only a few months old; Bibó therefore, understandably, exercises some caution in his analysis,

"Jewish consciousness does not necessarily mean a desire to emigrate to Palestine, nor does it imply the assumption of a decisive Zionist point of view, or approval of a Jewish state from a distance. One can imagine Jewish minority communities without a Jewish state, just as the creation of such a state does compel every Jew to become a member of an ethnic minority. It is certain, however, that a desire to establish a Jewish state plays a decisive stimulating role in the development of a separate Jewish consciousness and the growth of Jewish communities toward an ethnic community. Without such a desire, a great deal of community impetus and pathos would be missing from the consciousness of Jews.

"From this point of view, the founding of the state of Israel represents a decisive turn, one that occurred at a crucial time. This development transformed the Israeli state from an ideal, surrounded by the halo of being unrealisable, to a real entity that would either flourish or disappear. This means that Jews face the task of obtaining — during time periods yet to come with costs to pay and tribulations to endure – the abilities, instincts and morals that are required in the course of founding and maintaining a state.

"Nor will this take place in a patient and benevolent milieu; in addition to the hostility of the immediate Arab environment, the new state will also face antagonistic interest and indifference by the majority of those powers that control its fate. […] it is likely that the cause of a Jewish state will face several periods of crisis in the future, and this will have its effect on the intensity of Jewish consciousness throughout the world. In the long run, however, this does not change the almost certain fact that, in one form or another, the independent Jewish state will become stabilised, and that a world-wide Jewish ethnic consciousness will maintain or establish its own definite characteristics."

Near the end of his essay Bibó puts forward this, all-embracing, argument which calls for a recognition of nation-wide responsibility for the persecution of Jews and the Holocaust and an acceptance that assimilation and separateness for the Jewish people are not diametrically opposed concepts — the two can live together,

"It is hopeless to seek a singular solution, a magic potion or an incantation to remedy this situation [i.e.antisemitism]. Rather we must deprive the circle of its momentum, change the fundamental conditions and humanise the atmosphere surrounding the issue. When it comes to the Hungarian situation our most urgent task is to formulate and disseminate an attitude of accepting responsibility for the persecution of Jews, and to create a public conception that takes the issue of responsibility and culpability seriously, while also clarifying the conditions, extent and limits of calling people to account.

"When it comes to the relationship between Jews and the community, we must recognise the reality and feasibility of both assimilation and a separate Jewish consciousness, create suitable clear conditions and a benevolent environment for both, and at the same time remove all generalisations, forced attitudes and demands from the entire issue of community identification."

It is tempting to end an article like this, which has attempted to summarise a work of 167 pages published 70 years ago, with some observations about the relevance of the essay today.

I find this rather difficult, mainly because, obviously, the time and context in which the original was written is so different to our own, whether we are talking about the situation in modern day Hungary or the UK.

Clearly Bibó's essay was written while the shadow of the Holocaust still hung over everything, in a country which, after successive right-wing governments and a short-lived period of fascism was just about to enter the dark night of Stalinism. I have therefore left such considerations as to how Bibó's ideas might apply elsewhere and to other times to the reader.

One thing that can be said clearly is that Bibó's serious and measured essay provides a model of how to discuss issues of anti-semitism and not descend, as unfortunately is now so often the case, into name-calling, entrenched dogmatic thinking and cliché.

I think that Bibó's text, probably the most important discussion of anti-semitism, to emerge from Eastern Europe in the twentieth century, is worthy of consideration and discussion; and if it throws any light on our discussions today then so much the better. It is in this spirit that I offer my article to the reader.

Orbán: no friend of Bibó's

One shocking feature of the contemporary reception of Bibó's work in his home country is the way that Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary and right-wing demagogue, has attempted to don his mantle and claim the Bibó "heritage" for himself.

The notion that this antisemitic, anti-democratic racist has anything in common with Bibó is as ludicrous as it is nauseating. Orbán even went so far in besmirching Bibó's memory by donating a portrait of him to the EU headquarters in Brussels. Further nausea — mixed with irony — comes from the discovery that Orbán first formed the idea of creating his party Fidesz (originally referred to the as the "Young Liberals") in the Bibó dormitory at Budapest's most prestigious university.

Left antisemitism: what it is and how to fight it

Since Jeremy Corbyn became leader of the Labour Party a number of political storms have taken place in which Corbyn and the wider left have been accused of antisemitism.

Some on the left contend such accusations are "smears", with no basis in reality, fabricated by right-wing forces to impede the rise of the left.

We disagree. We have argued for many years that certain aspects of the political common sense dominant on the far left, particularly in terms of how it views the Israel/Palestine conflict have antisemitic implications.

This pamphlet republishes a selection of articles written by members and supporters of Workers' Liberty, along with a interview with the late Marxist theorist Moise Postone, and an article by the Bolshevik revolutionary Leon Trotsky. It is a contribution to the political debate and education which we believe is necessary.

- **Available for £3 from www.workersliberty.org/as-pamphlet**
- **A further selection of articles can be found here: workersliberty.org/left-as**

The professor and the helicopter

Colin Foster reviews *Contemporary Trotskyism: Parties, Sects and Social Movements* in Britain by John Kelly.

People tried to construct flying machines for thousands of years before the first planes were built in the early 20th century, and the first regularly-produced helicopters from the 1930s.

Suppose a historian were to study all the documents she or he could find about that effort, prior to say 1900, but without registering that the purpose was to find a flying machine.

Maybe the historian would imagine that the purpose was just to find some way of getting from place to place, and would comment: why didn't they just walk?

John Kelly, an academic at Birkbeck University, structures his account of "Contemporary Trotskyism" rather like that. All the Trotskyist groups — and he strives to document them all, down to seven groups which he estimates at ten members or fewer — appear as eccentric collectives messing around with struts, wings, propellors, and so on, when they should just get from A to B by walking.

He places particular emphasis on the collectives whose assemblages are particularly risible, and whose bluster about being on the brink of rocket-like speed is loudest.

Kelly's political background was in the Communist Party in the 1980s. He declares that he still "share[s] Marx's critical analysis of capitalism".

As Marx himself put it: "The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses". What material "weapon" Kelly now believes will move us from contemplative criticism to practical overthrow, I don't know.

He does not denounce Trotskyists as wreckers who threaten to destroy a beautiful capitalist system, or a smoothly-evolving labour movement, sure of success if not disrupted by radicals.

He sees Trotskyists as having done good work sometimes in building single-issue campaigns, and sustaining and livening trade unions. Mildly and calmly, he just presents it as odd and "doctrinaire" that we don't just limit ourselves to that stuff. Why do we have all our theories and polemics and such, when obviously people aren't interested?

Marx and Engels wrote that: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas... The ruling class... rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch".

That is not all there is to it, or else there would never in history have been people who criticised the existing order of society. The capital-labour relation simultaneously drives workers to organise, to rebel, to develop solidarity, to demand in a distinctively working-class way the ideals promised by bourgeois society itself: freedom, equality, rights.

The way that happens is not steady, stable, and linear. Bourgeois society is different from previous societies in the degree to which it concentrates the basic exploited class together into large collectives, concedes its members individual rights, schools them, and draws them into political life. It is also different in its elasticity, in its ability to accommodate and deflect less-radical criticism.

Thus the left generally grows in surges — when an industrial working class is first being formed, or around large struggles — rather than linearly. Defeats can and do thrown us back for decades. So can failures to seize sudden openings. The Trotskyist groups in Britain live in the shade not only of the miners' defeat in 1985, but also of our shortcomings in the good times between 1968 and the mid 70s.

EDUCATE

There is nothing to be done about that other than to maintain and educate ourselves even in the dull times, and to prepare to do better the next time things open up.

This is not something new, or special to the Trotskyist movement today. Karl Marx himself was a member of a small "left group" between 1847 and 1852, and then involved in the First International (1864-72), though with a fairly small and unreliable group of close co-thinkers. The rest of his politically-active life, he lived in a Britain, where the left was very weak and fragmented.

What is special about the Trotskyist movement was that we emerged in combat with, and in the shadow of, a much bigger and more powerful movement which claimed the same revolutionary Marxist aims but in fact was anti-working-class: the Stalinist movement. The pressures of marginalisation, and seepage of ideas from the overbearing Stalinist neighbour, have mis-shaped the Trotskyist spectrum, and are the basic reason for many of the pathologies which infest it.

Kelly maps seven "families of Trotskyism".

The AWL the same as Counterfire? A Stop the War Coalition banner alongside Assadist flags

However, only one of those is delineated politically ("Third Camp"), rather than stylistically. *Solidarity* readers will find it odd to have us classified with the SWP, Counterfire, and RS21, on the grounds that all four groups have historically named the USSR as an exploiting class society. For near 20 years now the SWP and Counterfire have been among the most "second-camp"-ist of Trotskisant groups, siding with whoever (mostly various forces of political Islam) comes into conflict with the "first camp" of the USA and its allies.

For Kelly all the seven "families" are pretty much hopeless cases because they share the "foundation stone" of "party-building". He presents all the Trotskyist groups as wanting to build parties whose mission is the "destruction of the capitalist state".

He conflates all of us, more or less, with the more ranting and self-absorbed sects calling themselves Trotskyist, with their "penalties for dissent, including suspension and expulsion". I would guess his fundamental misunderstanding is informed by Kelly's time in the CP. The Yugoslav, Chinese, Vietnamese, etc. CPs did indeed put themselves, as militarised administrative machines, in place of the previous government machine.

The view of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and the rest was different: the work of dismantling the existing bourgeois hierarchies and replacing them by a new democratic form of rule is down to the mobilised working class, and the task of a revolutionary party is not to substitute but to help the working class gain clarity and organisation.

Kelly reads back the revolutionary Stalinist overthrows onto the October 1917 workers' revolution in Russia — where the old Tsarist state was destroyed and replaced by the soviets — and in an early chapter stresses "common features" between Bolshevism and Stalinism, as background to his broad-brush denunciation of all Trotskyist groups as would-be authoritarian sects.

Kelly seems frankly puzzled that a political group should devote as much energy to self-education and to arguing sometimes-unpopular ideas as Workers' Liberty does. His thought when surveying the admittedly poor record of electoral attempts by Trotskyist groups in the last 20 years or so seems to be: why don't we go for a softer sell?

Among the various Trotskyist strands, his tone is friendliest towards what he calls the "Mainstream" family, today represented by the small Mandelite group Socialist Resistance. Maybe this is mostly because SR constantly defers to whatever "left" ideas it sees as popular — in the last twenty years the group has drifted from being the SWP's sidekick in the Socialist Alliance, to immersion in Respect, to immersion in Green Left, to immersion in Left Unity, to an uneventful existence in the Labour left.

Revolutionary socialist groups are simply collectives of people who have decided — even in quiet times — to work at understanding and organising, and so can hope to educate ourselves sufficiently to be able to contribute when the big upheavals come, both by virtue of having sufficient education, and by virtue of having established ourselves enough that we can get a hearing.

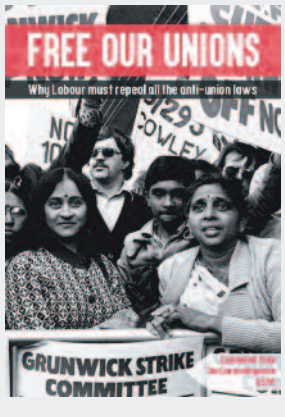
If no big upheavals are to come — if capitalism is going to be stable, and the working class is going to be docile, forever — then we are wasting our time. If they are to come, then to junk our theories and ideas in search of a few votes here or a friendlier reception there is like taking the bits which we hoped to make a helicopter from and turning them into a hut instead.

John Kelly has worked hard on the archives. Perhaps it is inevitable he'd get many details wrong, and he does. We discussed some of them at our summer school, Ideas for Freedom, on 23-24 June 2018. The interesting thing is that all the errors of factual detail run in a single direction — towards presenting the life of Trotskyist organisations in complete dissociation from our aims, and all the organisations without exception as censorious sects which develop our ideas not through a process of trying (well or badly) to understand events, but for capricious, incomprehensible, arbitrary reasons.

If a vertical take-off flying vehicle had been impossible, then of course all the efforts from 400BC to build helicopters would have been pointless, or at least any constructive outcome would have been different from the would-be inventor's purposes. But is replacing capitalism by a better society impossible?

Whether it is worth distinguishing among the would-be Trotskyist groups, and building up the more rational and enlightened against the more obscurantist or simply opportunist, or whether Kelly is right to dismiss us all, depends on that

Free our unions! New pamphlet from *The Clarion*



The 2016 Trade Union Act was the latest in a long line of laws introduced since 1980 to undermine the power and organising ability of unions and make most forms of workers' action illegal.

The 2015 and 2017 Labour Party conferences voted for clear policy to repeal all the anti-union laws, and replace them with positive legal workers' rights, including a strong right to strike. We need to ensure Labour actively campaigns for this and includes it in its next manifesto. For 13 years the last Labour government kept all the anti-union laws on the statute book – we must not repeat this experience.

This pamphlet discusses the issues involved and the kind of campaign we need to build.

Produced by *The Clarion* magazine. Available to order at: bit.ly/2pihiM1

In defence of Bolshevism

By Martin Thomas

Shachtman's polemic against Ernest Erber, which Workers' Liberty have reprinted, is one of the Marxist movement, like Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy* or Engels' *Anti-Dühring*.

Erber considered himself a socialist of sorts until his death, quite recently, at the age of 96. Mostly he gave his energies to the career he made after quitting, as a town planner, and to domestic life. He wrote occasionally for the reform-socialist journal *Dissent*.

There were lots of people slipping away from the revolutionary socialist movement around that time. In fact, in the USA the process had started with a contingent of New York intellectuals, some ex-Stalinists, who had sympathised with Trotsky in the 30s, but moved away at the end of that decade.

Some of those had by 1949 gone over to bourgeois liberalism, though usually of a left-ish sort. In his 1949 polemic Shachtman could trace the trajectory not only of Erber but of others who had gone earlier on his road, and sometimes further than Erber himself would ever go.

The polemic is thus also an answer to that sub-genre of "why I have quit the left" literature which does exist outside Tikhomirov's volume — the recriminations about the (Stalinist) "God That Failed" which reached a peak around the same time as Shachtman's exchange with Erber.

It has value as a crisp restatement of the need for intense, organised, explicitly revolutionary, explicitly socialist activism of which the Russian Marxists and the Bolsheviks gave an unparalleled example between the 1890s and 1917. It leaves not a thread of plausibility intact for the fashionable idea that it may be good to be a revolutionary socialist, but you'd best not be too intense or too explicit about it, and there's no need to organise together with others, or take on far-reaching commitments, in order to do it.

The introduction by Sean Matgamna defends the Bolshevism of the Russian revolution. It points out that by the time of "Bolshevisation" (a campaign run by Zinoviev's Communist International in 1924-5, as part of a more general campaign against "Trotskyism"), the model of "Bolshevism" exported to the eager-to-learn communists outside Russia was not the Bolshevism of the party that made the revolution, but the model of that party as forcibly hierarchalised by civil war and incipient Stalinism.

ORTHODOX

Over time, most of the Orthodox Trotskyists too adopted that Zinovievo-"Bolshevism".

That is why so many activists around us believe that "Bolshevism" equates to organisational monolithism coupled with "apparatus politics".

Sean analyses the causes of the defeat of the "Bennite" surge of 1979-85, the British labour movement's last attempt to remake itself before the current Corbyn surge. He shows that this defeat led not just to the survival of a status quo, but to the victory of Thatcher, to the semi-destruction of the British labour movement as it had developed over centuries up to 1979, and thus to many of the difficulties we face today. He shows also that the Zinovievo-"Bolshevik" groups of 1979-85 played a negative, not a positive, role in that watershed time, because their Bolshevism was so misshaped.

The introduction also analyses the left we find around us today, the inadequacies in relation to it of the Zinovievo-"Bolshevik" groups, and the need for an intervention more worthy of the name Bolshevik.

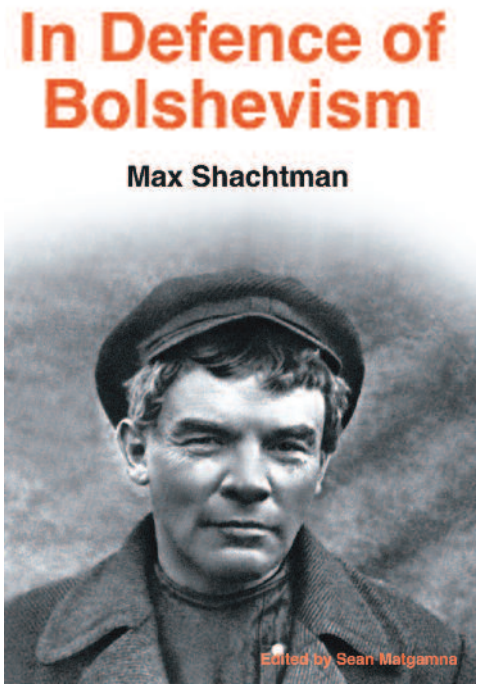
The rest of the book brings us some key texts by Shachtman and others on the party and on Bolshevism.

One of the issues they deal with is so-called "Luxemburgism". The term "Luxemburgism" originates in the period of "Bolshevisation", in 1924-5. The leaders of the German Communist Party sought to buttress their position by a campaign against so-called "Luxemburgist deviations".

Just previously, Paul Levi had published Luxemburg's unfinished and deliberately unpublished comments written in jail in 1918 about the Bolshevik revolution, as an artefact for polemic against the CP. Levi had been a close comrade of Luxemburg and secretary of the German CP for a while after her death, but had "lost his head" (as Lenin put it) in impatience with other CP leaders in 1921 and drifted over to the left wing of social democracy.

Later, a pro-Menshevik article of Luxemburg's from 1904 was dug out, despite the fact that Luxemburg had been publicly and decidedly with the Bolsheviks against the Mensheviks since 1906 at the latest.

Those two texts, from 1904 and 1918, were made the pillars for a self-described "Luxemburgism" from the 1930s, by people who showed little interest in studying Luxemburg's other writings, but who wanted a plausible halfway house, distant from Trotskyism as well as from Stalinism, but also able to show some difference from social democracy.



"He was also for something. He was for socialism"

Michael Johnson reviews *The James Connolly Reader* by Shaun Harkin (Haymarket).

Shaun Harkin has produced a timely and useful addition to the profuse and growing literature on James Connolly, the Irish revolutionary Marxist and socialist republican leader.

Published in May 2018 to mark the 150th anniversary of Connolly's birth in dire poverty to working-class Irish parents in Edinburgh, the book begins with a long introduction by Harkin, which sets out the context in which Connolly operated, how his politics were shaped by both his lifelong attachment to his class and his serious commitment to Marxist ideas.

Harkin highlights how Connolly, as a ceaseless fighter against exploitation and oppression, "was also for something. He was for socialism," defined democratically by Connolly not simply as state ownership and control but "the ownership by the state of all the lands and materials for labor, combined with the cooperative control by the workers…"

This is a lesson for a left all-too-often defined by a relentless negativism shorn of any positive vision of the future, and which has insufficiently cast off the deadweight of Stalinism that tarnished the name of socialism by associating it with viciously anti-working-class police states.

Harkin's introduction takes us briskly from Scotland, where Connolly started his socialist apprenticeship as a propagandist for the Socialist League in Dundee and the Scottish Socialist Federation in Edinburgh, to Dublin, where Connolly established the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896.

As Harkin correctly points out, though Marx and Engels had long been interested in Ireland, and supportive of the Fenian movement, from a working-class perspective their interest was primarily in Ireland as a lever for revolution in Britain. Connolly's concern, however, was to build a socialist working-class movement in Ireland itself.

Account is given, too, of Connolly's time in the United States, as an activist first in the De Leonite Socialist Labor Party, which he combined with his role as an organiser for the Industrial Workers of the World, and later in the left-wing of the more broadly-based Socialist Party of America.

ORGANISER

Upon returning to Ireland, Connolly worked as an organiser for the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in Belfast, and was instrumental in trying to prepare the labour movement politically (through the establishment in 1912 of the Irish Labour Party) for the prospect of a Home Rule parliament, which seemed a likely development in the years before the outbreak of war in 1914.

Harkin is a member of the US International Socialist Organization and the Irish Socialist Workers Network (formerly the Irish SWP) and its electoral project, People Before Profit, and it is this tradition which shapes the politics of the introduction.

His analysis of the Easter Rising is, understandably, closer to that of Kieran Allen's *The Politics of James Connolly* than the Stalinist orthodoxy of C Desmond Greaves, for whom the Rising fitted part of a "stages-theory", in which national liberation had to be won before, and separately, from the struggle for socialism, in alliance with an Irish "national bourgeoisie."

One could quibble with the extent to which, by contrast, Connolly's vision was a form of "permanent revolution" (it arguably lacked the depth of the materialist analysis of the social structure and class forces on which Trotsky's strategy for Tsarist Russia and semi-colonial formations such as China were based) but the phrase certainly captures the spirit of Connolly's approach more so than Greaves's Popular Front politics projected awkwardly and tendentiously backwards on to the past.

Harkin defends the Rising, I think rightly, on largely anti-imperialist grounds, while insisting that Connolly's "concessions to the type of republican conspiratorial militarism he had long counseled against" cannot be understood outside of the defeat of the ITGWU in the 1913 Dublin Lockout and the wider collapse of the Second International, which left Connolly "in uncharted theoretical, political and strategic territory." Connolly's sense of urgency lies in the opportunity provided by the war to strike at the British Empire, and his bitter awareness of past opportunities missed or squandered.

Harkin is forced to deal with some areas in a somewhat transitory fashion, and analysis is squeezed out by the imperatives of narrative. However, he provides a frame for reading the original works by Connolly which follow.

Connolly's writings should be read in the context in which they were written, as political interventions into the ideological and strategic questions facing the working-class movement of his day.

The collection contains a good balance of Connolly's longer works (*Erin's Hope: the Ends and Means*, *Labour in Irish History*, the semi-syndicalist *Socialism Made Easy* and a chapter on women's oppression from *The Reconquest of Ireland*) with shorter articles, covering everything from the Irish revolutionary tradition and anti-imperialism to industrial unionism and the Dublin Lockout, the Home Rule crisis and the Rising.

Presented largely in chronological order, the pieces allow the reader to chart the development of Connolly's thought over time. One gets a sense, too, of the different movements Connolly was involved in from the range of journals in which the articles originally appeared.

Though there is little new for those already closely acquainted with Connolly's works, this new Reader is welcome given that existing selections, such as those by P. Beresford Ellis or Bernard Ransom and Owen Dudley Edwards, have long been out of print.

Suggestions are given at the back of the book for further reading. Most are sound, though I would add David Howell's *A Lost Left: Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism*, which contains useful material on Connolly in a comparative perspective; and credit is rightly given to the Marxist Internet Archive for making accessible a good range of Connolly's writings online.

If you have not read any Connolly, this is not at all a bad place to start.

Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Events

Sunday 23 September
Repeal the anti-union laws! Conference fringe with Matt Wrack
7pm, The Liverpool Pub, 14 James St, Liverpool L2 7PQ
bit.ly/2N5UltP

Saturday 29 September
Protest at Tory Party conference
12noon, Victoria Square, Birmingham
bit.ly/2x7u1Eu

Saturday 29 September
Lewisham Southwark College strike fundraiser
7pm, New Cross Learning, 283 - 285 New Cross Road, London SE14 6AS
bit.ly/2QGAv6C

Sunday 30 September
Left Against Brexit Bloc at Bin Brexit Rally Birmingham
11am, Victoria Square, Birmingham
bit.ly/2xlF8ut

Saturday 13 October
Unity demo to oppose the far-right in London
11am, London meeting place TBC
bit.ly/2OyLe1o

Tuesday 30 October
Rise of the Precarious Workers — National Demo
8am, Transport for London, 197 Blackfriars road, London SE1 8NJ
bit.ly/2D543bi

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

TUC congress: one step forward, two steps back

LABOUR

By Walter Feather

TUC Congress 2018 closed with its accustomed dearth of fanfare, with little to suggest it will be a major political factor in British politics over the coming period.

The one glint of hope was the discussion on the Gender Recognition Act (GRA), where speaker after speaker stood up to make the case for self-determination on trans rights. Behind the scenes several union leaderships, including some regarded as left, have joined the chorus of opposition to changing the GRA on the grounds of women's self-organisation.

But the Congress discussion was dominated by contributions from a range of women from different industries, some trans but others not, who explained how removing medicalisation and simplifying the registration process does not threaten women's groups, refuges, facilities at work and other concerns. The TUC LGBT position, moved by Maria Exall, was carried unopposed.

However this step forward was overshadowed by at least two significant steps back on other fronts. First, the TUC position on Brexit, calling for a "people's vote", was definitely NOT the call for a second referendum in order to stop Brexit. Speakers from Unite's Steve Turner (representing the General Council) to PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka queued up to argue that the vote should be called only on the terms of Brexit, not whether to leave the EU.

Their scenario seems to be that a vote on the terms would reject both a no-deal Brexit and May's Chequer's plan, undermining the government and triggering a general election. Brexit would be delayed to allow Jeremy Corbyn's Labour government to negotiate a "workers' Brexit", which would be something like the arrangement Norway has with the EU.

The argument completely ignores the central question of what any version of Brexit will mean for workers, not only in the UK but in the rest of Europe, and for migrant workers more widely. If the consequences of Brexit are universally a setback for workers, then why pretend that there are some magical terms on which Brexit ("by a Labour government") will somehow be okay?

RESPONSE

The response is generally, "you've got to accept democracy, the last referendum has to be respected".

Oddly, advocates of leaving the EC, including many with the unions, did not "accept" the result of the 1975 referendum, despite it being more emphatic than the 2016 vote. Nor should the labour movement "accept" that because the Tories won the last general election that they have a mandate to do whatever they want. Working class democracy is continuously renewed, as reality changes and as clarity is gained.

Sadly the TUC debate became a re-run of the tired trade union bureaucracy's mantle of "sod any principles, wait for a Labour government".

Another setback was the discussion on climate change and just transition. The GMB, backed by Prospect, Unison and Unite, brought a motion that made these

unions and their members in the energy sector "paramount and central" to all union policy on climate change. This gives these union leaderships a veto over other workers. The GMB motion was motivated on entirely sectionalist, craft union grounds, bereft of the class struggle internationalism that should anchor union climate politics.

Almost all speakers opposed the resolution, explaining that firefighters, teachers, communication workers, civil servants and all manner of workers are directly involved with climate matters and should have a voice. But the arithmetic of TUC votes was not amenable to rational argument and the motion was carried.

The damp squib ending was epitomised by leaving vital debates on pay and collective bargaining to the final morning. There are no sign of coordinated TUC action on pay, despite almost every pay offer coming in below the current rate of inflation.

The TUC says this decade has seen the worst pay squeeze for generations, yet there is no strategy to change the balance of forces and no plans for strikes to make business and government take notice.

Left antisemitism: what it is and how to fight it
Public meetings organised by Workers' Liberty

Workers' Liberty is hosting a series of meetings across the country about antisemitism.

If you'd like more information about a meeting or would like us to organise a meeting in your area get in touch with office@workersliberty.org.

Lewisham
Tuesday 18 September, 7.30, 388 New Cross Road, London SE14 6TY
Speaker: Daniel Randall, London Underground worker, RMT activist and Workers' Liberty
bit.ly/2ML4dnE

Newcastle
Tuesday 18 September, 7pm, Room 2, Good Space, Commercial Union House, 39 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle NE1 6QE
Speaker: Michael Elms, Workers' Liberty
bit.ly/2MHOlIR

Leeds
Monday 24 September, 7pm, Packhorse Pub, 208 Woodhouse Lane, Leeds LS2 9DX
Speaker: Pete Radcliff, Workers' Liberty
bit.ly/2MJ3Utp

North London
Thursday 4 October, details TBC
Speaker: Daniel Randall, London Underground worker, RMT activist and Workers' Liberty
bit.ly/2MIPWYG

Northampton
Tuesday 9 October, 7.30pm, The Black Prince pub, 15 Abington Square, Northampton NN1 4AE
Speaker: Daniel Randall, London Underground worker, RMT activist and Workers' Liberty

Lambeth
Thursday 11 October, 7pm, Effra Social Club, Effra Road, SW2 1DF

’Spoons workers ballot

By Gemma Short

Workers at The Bright Helm and The Post & Telegraph Wetherspoon’s pubs in Brighton are being balloted for strikes for union recognition and a £10 an hour wage by the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers’ Union (BFAWU).

On Monday 17 September, shortly after the ballot was announced, Wetherspoon’s announced it would be bringing forward an annual pay rise due in April next year to this November. The pay rise will see wages for under 18s increase by 50p to £5.95, the a lower rate of pay for 18-20 year olds will be abolished — raising the starting rate to £8:25 an hour, and Wetherspoon’s has agreed to pay a night shift premium of £1/hr. Workers at The Bright Helm had previously won the suspension of over-night shifts.

Chris Heppell, 29, Kitchen Team Leader, at the Post & Telegraph, said: ”If this is how they respond to two pubs just threatening to take action, imagine what we can achieve when we all come together in a union across the country.”

Strike ballots will continue however. Jesse Enfield, 28, kitchen manager, at the Post & Telegraph said:

“It’s going to make too little difference to workers in their day-to day-lives. It’s still different pay for different ages. That’s unfair. Young workers are doing the same work and yet getting paid far less for it.

”We’re determined to continue until we get £10 an hour, ‘all ages — same wages’ and a union”

• Find out more: fastfoodrights.wordpress.com

Members of the IWGB union’s United Private Hire Drivers branch and supporters rallied at City Hall on Thursday 13 September during the London Assemby’s Mayor’s Question Time. Transport for London is currently consulting over whether to extend the congestion charge to minicab private hire vehicles — the fear being that for drivers working for organisations like Uber the cost will fall on them. They were also protesting at TfL’s continued refusal to recognise the IWGB/UPHD.

Home care workers rally

By Charlotte Zalens

Hundreds of Home Care workers and their supporters rallied in Birmingham city centre on Saturday 15 September, on the 21st day of strikes in a dispute over job losses, pay cuts and unworkable shift patterns.

As reported previously in *Solidarity*,Labour-run Birmingham council is imposing £2m of cuts in social care. When the strike started in January, workers were trying to save 40% of jobs. Unfortunately the council has managed to impose those job cuts, but are seeking to make even more cuts. New cuts would see 55 jobs go and all workers forced onto part-time contracts whilst simultaneously tendering out more work to the private sector.

Workers will strike again for five days from 24 September and a five days from 5 October.

• Send messages of support to: caroline.johnson@ birminghamunison.co.uk

• Make cheques payable to “Birmingham Unison”, clearly marked as for the hardship fund. Send to Mclaren building, 35 Dale End, Birmingham, B4 7LN.

NHS outsourcing strike

By Gemma Short

Estates and maintenance workers, organised by Unite, employed by York Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust will strike on 27-29 September over plans to transfer them to a wholly owned subsidiary company.

Workers are concerned that the creation of a wholly owned subsidiary, designed to avoid paying tax and to enable the Trust to compete with commercial competitors, will lead to job losses and a ”salami slicing of service provision”. The dispute follows a similar one at the Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Foundation Trust where the Trust backed down on their plans for a wholly owned subsidiary following strikes by health workers.

Workers will strike from 06.00 on Thursday 27 September to 05.59 on Saturday 29 September.

Tube strikes back on

By Ollie Moore

Drivers on London Underground’s Piccadilly Line will strike from 26-28 September. Drivers on the Piccadilly Line “Night Tube” service, which runs on Friday and Saturday nights, will also strike on Friday 28 and Saturday 29 September.

The strikes were called after Piccadilly Line bosses reneged on agreements made in July, for which the RMT union suspended a strike planned for 11-14 July. The agreements included commitments around maintaining staffing levels at Piccadilly Line train depots, which the union says bosses have failed to uphold.

Train drivers’ union Aslef is balloting its members on London Underground, in a vote closing on 19 September, as *Solidarity* went to press, for strikes to demand better cab security, after a female driver on the Northern Line was attacked by passengers who broke into her cab. RMT has said it may also ballot its driver members on the same issue. In a separate dispute, Aslef is balloting drivers on the Central Line for strikes against an authoritarian management. A union statement said: “This is a management out of control; prepared to ignore agreements and sack drivers at will.”

RMT is also balloting driver members on the Central Line for strikes to demand the reinstatement of Paul Bailey, a Central Line driver sacked after “failing” a drugs test, despite the test showing Bailey to be within the accepted limits for cannabinoid substances.

The union says the case calls into question the integrity of London Underground’s drugs and alcohol testing policy.

Eurostar workers to strike again

By Ollie Moore

RMT members working for Eurostar at its St. Pancras terminal will strike again on 30 September, following a previous strike on 28 July.

Workers are angry at having to bear the brunt of service disruptions and staffing shortages over the summer, which the union says has reduced St. Pancras to “chaos”.

The strike will demand improvements to the timetable and staffing levels to ensure passenger and staff safety.

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For a workers' government

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Build a new student activism!

By Christie Neary, NUS Trans Committee (p.c.)

Over 70 student activists attended the Student Activist Weekender on 7-9 September, coming from campuses across the country to London for a weekend of education, organisation and establishing collaboration.

The event, a Student Feminist Campaign Day (7th) and the Student Activist Weekender (8th-9th),. was co-hosted by a range of student activist groups and campaigns including the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, People and Planet, Rent Strike, UCU Rank and File, Young Greens, Surrey Labour Students and Bristol Student-Staff Solidarity.

On the Friday a series of workshops were held around women's issues, with productive discussions on migrants' rights, reforms to the Gender Recognition Act, sex workers' rights and more. All this was in a socialist feminist framework, emphasising the importance of class struggle and collective action from below.

During the rest of the weekender, the level of political discussion remained very high as we discussed topics such as: reforming and fighting within NUS and university Labour Clubs, having our universities divest from fossil fuels and the arms trade, trans liberation, Palestine solidarity, anti-fascism, a discussion on antisemitism on the left and much more.

Attendance from over 20 campuses across the UK showed a broad range of support for this kind of student activism.

Going forwards, it was decided, both by the Student Feminist Campaign day attendees and those at the Student Activist Weekender that two new national student organisations should be launched: a socialist feminist organisation active in NUS Women's Campaign and a national student left organisation.

The purpose will be to facilitate joint activism across campuses and to participate within broader national structures such as the NUS and Labour Students to transform the student movement into a more political fighting force.

Look out for a bulletin produced by activists from the weekend at your Freshers Fair

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