Defeat May’s Brexit GENERAL ELECTION AND A NEW VOTE!

Labour is inching back towards the “Remain [in the EU] and Reform” stance it took in the June 2016 referendum, but only inching.

The deep discredit of the Tories’ Brexit formula makes it urgent for Labour to switch back fully — and in the meantime for anti-Brexit Labour people to organise to develop a pro-Labour, anti-Brexit public profile.

More page 5
Cuts calamity and councils

Peter Kenway
Solidarity: Philip Alston’s recent report on “social calami ty” in the UK focused on cuts in benefits. There have also been huge cuts in local government. What is their impact?

Kenway: Local government delivers about 200 distinct services. The best-known is social care for adults and children, which takes over a third of the money. There’s the bins, and an increasingly residu- al role in education.

And then a bunch of mundane but essential stuff: school crossing patrols, maintaining roads and parks, youth services, environmen- tal health, trading standards, building con- trols...

Since 2010, spending on social care has gone up, driven by statu- tory requirements, but councils have cut down everywhere they could. In education, the govern- ment has centralised control.

The rest, the vast majority of local government functions, which you could call “neighbourhood serv- ices”, about a quarter of total local government spending, has been cut by 25% in real terms overall. But you can find local authorities in prosperous areas of (e.g.) Berkshire and Surrey which have in- creased those services.

We Can Save Our Libraries!
Metropolitan authorities outside London and some unitary authori- ties have suffered most.

The government has very largely reduced the grants that once sought to equalise resources, so places have lost the provision they had eight or nine years ago.

The Financial Times today (3 De- cember) reports on East Sussex council as having cut all bus sub- sidies, scrapped school bus services, reduced support for the elderly, disabled, and fami- lies; it now plans to close most of its remaining libraries...

That’s typical of the country councils who have found them- selves in difficulties... The noisiest complaints to central government have come from Conservative council counties.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has recently done a report about the government’s proposal that local authorities retain 100% of extra business rate income from their areas (existing business rate income is redistributed), saying that it will lead to divergences in funding without promoting growth.

Overall, risk has been shifted downwards. The centre no longer takes backstop responsibility.

An example is council tax bene- fit. It used to be 100% for everyone on means-tested benefits. That was brought in by Heseltine and Major off, on the whole. Local govern- ment has been very attracted by the idea of “localism” promoted by George Osborne.

And London, overall, including its most deprived bits, is in a differ- ent place from other metropolitan areas. Scottish and Welsh are now focused on Edinburgh and Cardiff. Whatever political unity there was among Labour councils is much weaker.

London has benefited relatively because it’s more prosperous, it has increased business rates, and, in areas like Camden anyway, the population has shifted to include a smaller number of older pensioners.

And London is more granular than other cities. Rich and poor live very near to each other.

The Labour manifesto’s lack of interest in local government comes (in part) from the fact that local government has not pushed hard. But in fact historically Labour Party leaders have shown little interest in poverty. Labour Party manifestos over the years have very little mention of poverty until 2001.

“Poverty” is on the whole not a term working-class people use to describe themselves. It is more used by upper-class people con- cerned about what they see as so- cial issues. I remember people in Glasgow saying to me: “This is nor- mal for us. We don’t call it poverty.” Since poverty is an inher- ently relative concept (it being about not inability to maintain at least a minimum socially accept- able standard of living), there is no answer to that.

Poverty is not the same as low pay, Pay rates feed into it, but also working hours, how many people in a household work, child care, and so on. People who are short of money are also often short of time.

“Poverty” opens up a different world from just pay rates. It raises questions of public services, access, and affordability.

Marrying the issues is a chal- lenge.

In 2010-1 several councils agi- tated to demand restoration of central government funding. But as the cuts have got worse, that agitation has disappeared. And, despite all its other redistributive measures, Labour’s 2017 mani- festo said nothing about restor- ing local government spending. I am very struck by how apoliti- cal local government has become. In my work I can be in a room full of Conservative and Labour coun- cil leaders, and it’s not always ob- vious which is which.

Three things have led to the qui- escence. The public is not kicking

Peter Kenway is director of the New Policy Institute, and author of much research on local government. He talked with Martin Thomas from Solidarity

Free Bakhshi and Ghalian!
By Gerry Bates
Esmail Bakhshi, the jailed union rep of the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Workers in south- west Iran, and Sepideh Ghalian, an activist who has supported the workers, have been badly beaten in prison.

After visiting them, their fami- lies have reported that both have been tortured and are in se- rious distress.

Four of the striking Haft Tappeh sugar-cane workers, in south-west Iran, were arrested on 18 November. Three were then released, but Esmail Bakhshi and Sepideh Ghalian are still locked up.

On 27 November the Haft Tappeh workers gathered in front of Shush County Hall de- manding the release of Bakhshi and Ghalian.

They have listed their other demands as:
1- Handing over the company from private sector to the state.
2- Payment of all unpaid wages (and benefits and bonuses).
3- Implementation of the job classification schedule.
4- Other trade union demands.

National Steel Industrial Group (INSIG) steelworkers in Alvaz, the capital of Khuzes- tan province, about 100km south of Shush, are also on strike, over unpaid wages, and the two groups of strikers have supported each other.

Updates at http://shahrokhza- mani.com. Signatures are being sought for solidarity statements: please email sacha@workerslib- erty.org.

AEIP conference set for 8 December

By Sam Lloyd
After opening itself out so that people can join as members, rather than just being an office with initiatives which activists on the ground can support. Another Europe is Possible is calling a conference on 8 December in London (details: bit.ly/aeip-c). Members will be able to debate and vote on structures and strategy.

Workers’ Liberty will be attend- ing the conference, and we encour- age all socialists to attend and join the campaign to stop Brexit.

We will be supporting a number of proposals and amendments. One, also backed by some leading AEIP figures, calls for a specifically Labour anti-Brexit campaign, sup- ported by AEIP but autonomous, with the capacity to create an anti- Brexit voice within the Labour cam- paign if an early general election is forced but the official Labour line remains “negotiate a better Brexit”. AEIP as such defines itself as “cross-party”.

One amendment will question the way that the AEIP-backed “Eu- rope For The Many” conference on 26-7 October projected ministers from the British and Greek governments as representing the “for the many” voice in Europe, rather than promoting, and debate in which those ministers were chal- lenged by working-class socialists from Portugal and Greece.

Another will question a clause slipped into the AEIP strategy doc- ument recommending that a referen- dum on Irish unity as the democratic formula. Yet an- other will dispute a clause in the AEIP strategy document recom- mending that AEIP should seek to be part of the official Remain cam- paign if there is a new referendum on Brexit.

(Labour was part of the official

“Better Together” in the 2014 Scot- tish referendum, but after shifting left in 2015 resolved to campaign in the 2016 EU referendum independ- ently from the “official” Britain Stronger in Europe headed by big- business mogul Stuart Rose).

Some Workers’ Liberty ac- tivists will stand for the AEIP committee to be elected at the conference, and we will also support other left-wing candidates.
The G20 conference of 20 leading capitalist governments in Argentina on 30 November and 1 December saw a non-committal communiqué and a side-meeting between US president Donald Trump and Chinese president Xi Jinping.

At the side-meeting, Trump suspended (for 90 days) new increases in US tariffs on Chinese imports which were due to start in January, and Xi made unquantified promises that China would buy more US imports and essay "structural changes" on intellectual property protection and other issues.

Whether this is only a pause in the developing tariff war between the USA and China, or the beginning of a peace deal, is not clear.

Next week's Solidarity will carry an interview discussing the issues round Trump's trade policy with Leo Panitch, co-author of a major book on "The Making of Global Capitalism".

**"Democracy Brigades" in Brazil**

By Luiza Xavier

Since the far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro won the second round of Brazil's presidential election on 28 October — he takes office in January — the resistance has been limited to small initiatives focused on self-defence of LGBT individuals, or legal representation of activists.

Large demonstrations such as those seen after Trump's election in the US have not happened. The Workers' Party (PT) and the PSOL (Socialism and Liberty Party, left split from the PT) have both called meetings of their national leaderships to make plans for the months ahead, and the PTST (movement of homeless workers, one of the largest organised social movements in Brazil) has plans to form "Democracy Brigades" across the country.

The report coming out of the PT's meeting shows that the leaders of the Workers' Party at least partly recognise the need to strengthen their link with the grass roots. Decisions included:

- the creation of more educational material to be sent to local parties
- a push for local parties to organise series of debates and events for new members to attend
- promoting the de-bureaucratisation of the party by making information more easily accessible
- making local party units more accessible, refurbishing local party HQs so they can become centres for disseminating information about the party and local culture
- forming a network of online activists
- a working group to look into the reorganisation of the party and its activities.

The resolutions talk about improving the flow of information from the top to the base, but on the flow of information in the other direction (more frequent local democratic meetings, a proper process for holding elected bureaucrats or government officials to account) it offers only vague rhetoric about "staying in sync" with the grassroots.

PT decisions also include strengthening further the campaign to free Lula, maintaining an already existent solidarity network for the victims of violence (presumably from the wave of homophobic, racist, misogynistic and anti-communist violence that has been growing since the election campaign), and increasing representation of women, LGBT, Indigenous and black people in leadership and government positions (but without mentioning any strategy for how: only one party in Brazil currently has equal representation for women in the chamber of deputies, the PSOL).

The PSOL hasn't yet released the decisions made at its leadership meeting.

The MST (Movement of Landless Workers, one of the biggest and most influential social movements in Brazil) and the CUT (a "central" organisation of trade unions, close to the PT) have not released a public post-election strategy for resistance. The MST has raised almost 30,000 reais (£10,000) to organise meetings and produce printed material for the organisation of "Democracy Brigades" (essentially, local activist groups) to organise demonstrations, meetings and physical and online actions.

The MTST does not specify how autonomous the Brigades will be, how they will be structured or what their politics would be. We have yet to see whether the crowds of activists that participated in the anti-Bolsonaro electoral campaign will join these resistance initiatives, or whether smaller groups will start organising after 1 January.
Brexit and fighting the far-right

Stopping Brexit isn’t anti-fascism

Callum Cant takes issue over the 9 Dec counter-demo

The Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) are obsessed with trade unions. When their march was blocked in October, their leadership couldn’t stop themselves from fantasising about beating up organised workers.

For many of their supporters, the organisation’s high point was when a DFLA group launched a serious physical attack on RMT members in a pub in Whitehall. The essence of their politics is a hatred of the organised working class.

This is not a new dynamic – indeed, Clara Zetkin wrote about the emergence of Italian fascism in very similar terms in 1923: “Proletarian struggle and self-defence against fascism requires the proletarian united front. Fascism does not ask if the worker in the factory has a soul painted in the white and blue colours of Bavaria; the black, red, and gold colours of the bourgeois republic; or the red banner with the hammer and sickle. [...] All that matters to fascists is that they encounter a class-conscious proletarian, and then they club him to the ground. That is why workers must come together for struggle without distinctions of party or trade-union affiliation.”

Zetkin was fundamentally correct. Her ideas are applicable to the UK today – specifically on the question of how anti-fascists should approach Brexit. In short, we should’t.

The RMT backed Leave. Unite backed Remain. The DFLA want to destroy both. Dividing mobilisations against the far right on the basis of party倒是 regarding the referendum weakens the front. The only viable line is one of fascist unity: some of us are leave, some of us are remain, but we’re all anti-fascist.

The argument over a socialist position on the question of Stop Brexit/Leave should be conducted amongst the left outside of the sphere of anti-fascism, where disunity is directly harmful to our ability to oppose the far-right.

The AWL should absolutely mobilise for any and all upcoming anti-fascist demonstrations. But you should do so as participating in a front with the broadest possible base and the narrowest possible politics.

Unity doesn’t mean ditching ideas

Kelly Rogers responds from Workers’ Liberty

Callum Cant argues, both in his article here and in his article published on Novara Media, that we must build an anti-fascist “united front” with the “broadest possible base, and the narrowest possible politics.”

He also argues that anyone joining the demonstration against Tommy Robinson on 9 December under the banner of “Stop Brexit” and “fight for free movement”, with Another Europe is Possible, is “dividing mobilisations against the far right.”

Firstly, Another Europe is Possible have called their demo as a bloc at the same place and same time as the wider Momentum-backed demonstration. To argue that they are dividing the movement is a wilful misrepresentation of reality.

More importantly, this lowest-common-denominator politics only makes sense up to a point. Both Workers’ Liberty and Another Europe are determined to make a positive case for freedom of movement, both in terms of protecting the limited free movement that currently exists, and extending it. If we are to provide an antidote to the rise of the far-right, then we need to tackle their politics head on.

Momentum refused to back a demonstration that raised that slogan because the Labour front bench does not support it. Other campaigns in the new coalition behind the 9 December mobilisation have fallen in line without protest.

If Cant and others are happy to “narrow” their politics to the point where they are prepared to junk the rights of EU migrants, then that’s not practical united front tactics, it’s just reactionary.

Another Europe also called their bloc to raise the slogan “Project Fear” and one which has helped to foster the growth of the far-right in Britain.

Anti-immigrant racism and nationalism have been at the heart of Brexit since the beginning. It will mean the biggest expansion of border controls in recent history, perhaps since the 1965 Aliens Act. Brexit is situated in the context of a global phenomenon that encompasses the pan-European far right, Trump in America.

The protagonists of these movements are very clear about the connections.

Steve Bannon has this year set up a Brussels quartermaster and has made visits to see Nigel Farage, Tommy Robinson, and Marine Le Pen. These people explicitly view themselves as part of a global right-wing alliance, a “nationalist international”.

In this context, it is no good pretending that Brexit is an irrelevant detail here, something we can ignore because it’s difficult, or – and I suspect this is what it is really about – because the Labour Party front bench are promising a “better Brexit” and an expanded border force.

Cant’s argument that the RMT union is for Leave, the Unite union for Remain, and fascists “want to destroy both”, and therefore we have to sit on the fence, is not worth much space. We are for raising the political level of our class and equipping it with the ideas to defeat the forces of reaction.

United fronts are not simply a coalition of forces. They are a space for the battle of ideas. The slogans we raise now will shape the movement going into the future. Cant’s argument is apolitical and short-sighted, based purely on a calculation of how to get numbers onto the streets.

He fails to make the political argument against Tommy Robinson. He seems to unite people around lowest-common-denominator politics and edgy aesthetics, but fails to address the issues at the very heart of the far-right in Britain.

Morning Star denounces “experts”, glorifies ignorance

By Jim Denham

“The age of experts is over” proclaimed the Morning Star’s front page headline, in huge capitals, on Monday 26 November.

It turns out that the headline was a reference to something that shadow justice secretary Richard Burgon had said during an interview on the BBC’s Andrew Marr Show that same day. Marr had argued that Labour’s demand for an election was highly unlikely to succeed, given that to do so would require the support of 100 Tory MPs, to which Burgon replied, by pointing out that “experts” have got a lot of predictions wrong in recent political history. Which is fair enough as far as it goes, I suppose (though it doesn’t change the parliamentary arithmetic). But the Morning Star’s gleeful front page promotion of Burgon’s off-the-cuff response to Marr goes deeper. It’s a shocking celebration of ignorance and an obvious reference to Michael Gove’s philistine remarks during the referendum campaign.

The fact that the story beneath that headline referred to the “elite” and “Establishment bigwigs” (terms that Burgon himself did not use in the Marr interview) marks a further degeneration by the Morning Star into populism. It may or may not be a coincidence that the same edition of the paper carried a semi-literate article by Kevin Ovenden (former SWP leader, then aide to George Galloway) objecting to the term “populism” as being used by “capitalist elite” to dismiss “the massive opposition to those elites” as in (and this is Mr Ovenden’s chosen example) “the current French fuel protests.”

That day’s editorial was the usual anti-EU rant that included advocacy of leaving without a deal and trading on WTO terms – dismissing concerns about this (though diplomatically not mentioning the major manufacturing unions and the Labour leadership) as “Project Fear”.

I write to the Morning Star quite frequently and they sometimes even publish my letters. They haven’t published this one:

Dear Comrades,

The first proper job I had was in a large, solidly unionised factory where I had the privilege of encountering a number of well-read working class intellectuals, some of whom were members of the Communist Party, others members of Trotskyist groups. What they all taught me was to critically read and analyse the best bourgeois thinkers and then to draw my own, independent, analysis of where the interests of our class lie. As I understand it, this was the method of Marx himself.

So I was shocked to see the Morning Star front page headline (November 26) “The age of experts is over” — surely a conscious reference to Michael Gove’s philistine statement that “people have had enough of experts”. The fact that the headline was a quote from shadow justice secretary Richard Burgon does not excite: Burgon must answer for his own glorification of ignorance and backwardness, but the Morning Star need not approve.

I also note that the same front page uses the populist terms “elite” and “Establishment” that were never used by Marx, and for good reason: they do not refer to class but to a conspiratorial, sub-sociological view of the world. This glorification of anti-Marxist conspiracism and ignorance is only rendered more profound by Kevin Ovenden’s article in the same issue, denying the relevance of the term “populism”: all this repre- sents a serious regression into ignorance and philistinism.

My old autodidactic teachers in the factory would recoil in horror.
Planning a Labour voice against Brexit

The following statement has been endorsed by a number of Labour movement activists including Andrew Coates, Sacha Ismail, Kelly Rogers, Julie Ward MEP, Catherine West MP, and Zoe Williams, and includes a pledge to be put to the conference of Another Europe Is Possible on 8 December.

With Theresa May’s deal likely to be defeated in parliament [on 11 December], and a number of key parliamentary blocs losing confidence in the Tory government, we are facing a period of political crisis and upheaval, and a general election looks increasingly possible.

As many of our supporters, we want our party to fight in the months ahead, including in any General Election campaign, to stop the anti-working-class disaster that is Brexit.

To quote the official policy passed at Labour conference 2018, we want “a radical government: taxing the rich to fund public services, expanding common ownership, abolishing the anti-union laws and engaging in massive public investment.”

As the party of working people, Labour must defend all the rights threatened by Brexit – workers’ rights, environmental protections, free movement. With the Tory deal published, the realities of Brexit are clearer than ever. Fighting effectively for a radical Labour government means committing to giving the people a final say, and campaigning for remain in that referendum.

In Europe, just as in domestic policy, Labour must offer a radical alternative to the status quo. Our movement must champion a revolt across the continent against austerity, neo-liberalism and anti-migrant policies and for a democratic, socialist Europe.

Labour’s policy is shifting, but is not yet committed to stopping Brexit. We will continue the campaign to win Labour to a vision for a radical government leading the fight to transform Europe from within the EU. To this end, and to provide anti-Brexit Labour supporters with a platform, organising framework and program of activity, we intend to create an independent campaigning coordination within the campaign for a Corbyn-led Labour government.

We are proposing the following amendment to Another Europe is Possible’s conference motion in December, hoping that Another Europe Will play a central role in initiating this campaign.

“If there is a general election, it will be necessary to mobilise a massive campaign inside the Labour Party to demand that the party takes a position against Brexit, in favour of a fresh referendum, and in favour of transforming Europe. It will also be necessary for Labour members who hold this perspective to organise a strong anti-Brexit voice within the Labour campaign. We have been effective at mobilising significant numbers of Labour Party members for our campaigns. However, we are a cross-party organisation, and we must guard against Another Europe’s output being completely dominated by campaigns focused on Labour.

“In the dynamic of an election campaign, any campaign aimed at changing Labour’s policy must be free to unequivocally support Labour, which Another Europe cannot do. We will therefore support the creation of a freestanding, independent campaign, open to all Labour members and supporters, with the aim of ensuring that Labour takes the right position, and which allows Labour members who are against Brexit to have a platform in the campaign and a programme of activities.”

General election and a new vote!

Labour is inching back towards the “Remain [in the EU] and Reform” stance it took in the June 2016 referendum, but only inching.

The deep discredit of the Tories’ Brexit formula makes it urgent for Labour to switch back fully — and in the meantime for anti-Brexit Labour people to organise to develop a pro-Labour, anti-Brexit public profile.

John McDonnell, on Newsnight 21 November, said bluntly that even if the Tories were to let Labour form a minority government now, in terms of the 858-page withdrawal formula, the subject of the vote on 11 December, “we’re talking about finalising a deal, we’re not talking about starting from scratch”. (A Labour government could change more in the post-2020 arrangements sketched in the accompanying 26-page “declaration” that the Tories have agreed with the EU; but even then, not much).

No Brexit withdrawal deal that Labour could in conscience support is on the table. The conclusion is inescapable: Labour should declare that experience has confirmed that Brexit is wrong, and prove willing to undertake that duty.

Many Tory MPs are set to vote against the deal, and no Labour MP now talks of voting with the government on the deal.

Many different possibilities open up after the Commons votes down the “withdrawal deal”.

The government may bring the deal back for a second vote, maybe after securing tweaks the document it has agreed with the EU on UK-EU relations after the “transition period” due to run from March 2019 to December 2020 or later. Maybe it can get a “side letter” on protection of the documents agreed with the EU to improve its chances on a second vote.

The level of disarray makes a “no-deal” exit not impossible, though it looks unlikely, since no party would want to be seen as responsible for such an outcome, and the great bulk of the ruling class on all sides is very opposed to “no deal”.

The government must be forced to seek a postponement of the 29 March 2019 Brexit date, while it casts around for some formula which can win a Parliamentary majority.

The government may be forced into a referendum on the deal, or be toppled, leading to an early general election.

The bottom line is that no Brexit formula has majority support in Parliament, or in the electorate. If a Brexit formula does eventually get through Parliament, it will be only because MPs have been coerced into accepting that it’s that formula, or “no deal”.

The latest opinion surveys, on 28-29 November, show 42% saying Parliament should pass the deal if the only alternative is “no deal” (32% for “no deal”, 26% don’t know). 32% say Parliament should pass the deal if the only alternative is to stay in the EU (43% for “stay”, 25% don’t know).

It makes no sense to say that this deal should be allowed through in deference to the June 2016 referendum decision.

Make Labour oppose Brexit! If the Labour leaders won’t do that, the anti-Brexit Labour rank and file must and will have to put out a pro-Labour and anti-Brexit message.

On that basis, Labour can force a general election and a new vote on Brexit.

Over halfway to £15,000

The collection was significantly bigger than previous collections at our conferences. But it needed to be. The government looks very likely to be defeated on its central Brexit policy in Parliament on 11 December. Whether it then falls, or can recover, we are in for weeks or months of intense political ferment.

It is a duty for socialists to establish the strongest possible political profile arguing both for Labour to oust the Tories, and — even if Labour remains stuck on its current “negotiate a better Brexit” policy — against Brexit, for free movement, for reducing rather than raising borders.

Solidarity and Workers’ Liberty form almost the only organised socialist grouping willing to undertake that duty.

We need to reach out and organise. And that takes money: for fares, meeting-room hire, placards, leaflets, pamphlets, all the rest of it. And for the backroom stuff: we have to replace the laptop our office boss, and recently had to replace the printer.

We have much else to do at the same time. We were at the climate change demonstration on 1 December, but few other people were. There must be potential in Britain to stir up the sort of large-scale climate protest shown in Australia with the school students’ walk-out on 30 November. But to get from potential to reality takes a lot of work.

Ways to donate:

• Subscribe to Solidarity
You can subscribe to Solidarity for a trial period of 6 issues for £7, for 6 months for £22 (waged) or £11 (unwaged), or for a whole year for £44 (waged) or £22 (unwaged). See back page for form.
• Take out a monthly standing order
If you take out a standing order you will also receive Solidarity. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.
• Make a one-off donation online
You can donate by sending us a cheque, setting up a bank transfer or via Palpay. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.
• Buy some of our books or pamphlets
www.workersliberty.org/books
A left case against Brexit

Alan Simpson
On Brexit, the reality is that Parliament is gridlocked. The Tories have no majority to get anything through. Labour’s response has to be much clearer. Initially ambiguity was sensible. If you’re not in the negotiations, you can’t say much about the details. That was when Labour set the six tests.

That position doesn’t hold as you get close to the negotiation deadline. I see it in trade-union terms. Your negotiators negotiate, but what they bring back has to be put to the members.

This is not a betrayal of the electorate, or of the will of the people in the 2016 referendum. It goes to the core of trade-union democracy. It is the members who always have the final say. For example, you might tell me that you want a parachute jump. So you get up there. Then you find there’s no parachute, and I offer you a big handkerchief instead. You’d say: get me back onto the ground. It is an act of sanity, not of political betrayal.

It faces Labour with the question of how to campaign round a second referendum. And it takes me back to the “Remain and Reform” position Jeremy [Corbyn] and John [McDonnell] tried to argue in the 2016 referendum. They were blocked by the then leadership of Labour’s campaign in the referendum, which was all in the hands of those deeply opposed to Jeremy’s election as leader.

Jeremy did more meetings than any other member of the Shadow Cabinet, and more than those officially running Labour’s Remain campaign. But there was specific refusal to allow Labour to campaign against the TTIP proposals then current, which would have transferred rights from citizens to corporations.

Jeremy refused to share platforms with Cameron, and we had no Labour dimension in the campaign to show how neoliberal policies had laid waste to large parts of Britain. The outcome was shaped by the crushed hopes and expectation of a public which responded to the “don’t undermine our prosperity” line by saying “what prosperity?”

That’s the space Labour must fill if we get a second referendum.

It is utterly naive for Labour to try to argue that a general election, producing a Labour government intent on negotiating a better Leave deal, could even do so.

The position of the EU 27 is that they are fed up with Britain. They will not entertain another round of “Leave” negotiations. What would Labour do then? An extended period for Article 50 is open to us if it is for negotiating about staying, not leaving. And that would take up back to the position that Corbyn and McDonnell tried to argue in 2016.

What if we get an early general election, and Labour is still on the “negotiate a better Brexit” line? We will need a vehicle en-

The left is a bit sloppy about this. Personally I don’t believe in free movement — of capital, of drugs, of goods with unsustainable carbon footprints...

“Fair and managed movement” is a better platform, but it is bereft of meaning at the moment because we have abandoned much of the global redistribution and remedial financial aid which allowed people to live sustainably in whatever part of the world.

94% of UK export credit guarantees go to fossil-fuel projects in the developing world. It’s the equivalent of sending out crack cocaine. Through UK tax allowances, internationally we are also supporting fracking projects and developments that will result in war, famine, and forced migration. There is no sanctuary from those problems via open doors.

But free movement is not just about forced migration. It’s also about people who move because they want to move, rather than being forced...

We all have constraints. Europe just needs a different sense of commonwealth for decades. The outcome was shaped by the crushed hopes and expectation of the people in the 2016 referendum, and other countries we can promote a new community of survival. We need to respond to this on the basis that the values in the manifesto...
A left case for Brexit

By Grace Blakely

The left was right to campaign against leaving the EU in 2016. Based on the tenor of the campaign, it was clear the Leave campaign would embolden the xenophobes and nationalists that exist across the class spectrum in the UK. This prediction was proven chillingly correct with both the spike in hate crime that followed the referendum and the movement that has emerged around Tommy Robinson over the last few weeks.

The left should deplore and, if necessary, physically resist such acts of violent racism. But fighting fascism does not mean accepting globalisation. The fact is, working class people are right to be pissed off about global economic and financial integration – especially those in the places that have been most ravaged by it.

Financial globalisation has led to the concentration of capital in a series of financial entrepots, more integrated into the global economy than they are with their own countries. Rather than using this capital for productive investment, these centres have repurposed it for the kind of financial wizardry that caused the 2008 crash.

London is in many ways the global financial hub par excellence, with the City of London the vampire squid sucking on the face of the global economy.

The left should be making a case for Brexit that involves resisting financial globalisation, whilst welcoming immigrants from the parts of the world that have been most ravaged by both colonialism and free market neocolonialism. This is not as hard a case to make as donning the vampire squid sucking on the face of both colonialism and free market neocolonialism. This is not as hard a case to make as donning the vampire squid sucking on the face of both colonialism and free market neocolonialism.

A POST-BREXIT ECONOMY.

Brexit should be used as an opportunity to move towards a system in which capital is embedded in national economies rather than constantly moving around the globe. Alongside reducing capital mobility and the size of our finance sector, this should involve a radical programme to transform ownership and investment. At the local level, inspiration should come from the experiments in community wealth building conducted by councils such as Preston.

At the national level, any socialist government must consider radical propositions to transform ownership and investment – through, for example, the creation of national and regional investment banks, or a Meidner Plan for the UK.

What’s more, the implementation of EU law depends upon EU jurisprudence – international law, we must remember, is socially constructed and therefore strongly influenced by existing power relations. Leaving the EU could provide the left with an opportunity to build an economy that does not rely on capital extracted from the rest of the world to ensure growth and prosperity.

If the UK could build such an economy outside of Europe, it would act as a beacon of hope to countries like Greece and Italy, currently struggling under the weight of the EU’s neoliberal technocracy.

A left case for Brexit

A POST-BREXIT ECONOMY.

Brexit should be used as an opportunity to move towards a system in which capital is embedded in national economies rather than constantly moving around the globe. Alongside reducing capital mobility and the size of our finance sector, this should involve a radical programme to transform ownership and investment. At the local level, inspiration should come from the experiments in community wealth building conducted by councils such as Preston.

At the national level, any socialist government must consider radical propositions to transform ownership and investment – through, for example, the creation of national and regional investment banks, or a Meidner Plan for the UK.

What’s more, the implementation of EU law depends upon EU jurisprudence – international law, we must remember, is socially constructed and therefore strongly influenced by existing power relations. Leaving the EU could provide the left with an opportunity to build an economy that does not rely on capital extracted from the rest of the world to ensure growth and prosperity.

If the UK could build such an economy outside of Europe, it would act as a beacon of hope to countries like Greece and Italy, currently struggling under the weight of the EU’s neoliberal technocracy.

The British left has the opportunity to create a significant dent in the armour of financial capital by showing, once and for all, that there is an alternative. We must seize it.

In defence of Ernest Erber

By Alan Johnson

Russia was ruled by 130,000 landowners. They ruled by means of constant force over 150 million people. That is a fact. And yet until now it has not been possible to be governed by 240,000 members of the Bolshevik Party – governing in the interests of the poor and against the rich. – V.I. Lenin, “Will the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?”, 1917

INTRODUCTION

In 1948, after he spent a year thinking it over, Ernest Erber submitted an 18,000 word resignation letter to the US Workers Party, a small group of mostly young, mostly Jewish (from the internal bulletin carried the subhead “Out To The Gentiles!”), and mostly brilliant revolutionary socialists.

Erber was brilliant of all, the group’s leader Max Shachtman, responded angrily to Erber in an 80,000 word polemic titled Under the Banner of Marxism. 70 years later the AWL has reprinted this document, calling it “one of the classic polemics of the Marxist movement, alongside The Poverty of Philosophy and Anti-Dühring.”

I take a different view. Erber was right and Shachtman was wrong about the fundamental thing: Bolshevism and Us. He was right to say “It is necessary to reject the Leninist teachings on the relationship of democracy to socialism”.

He was right that “The workers [in the West] are right in identifying their arms with the preservation and extension of those democratic processes and institutions that already exist”. And, not discussed here, he was also right that socialists, “for the sake of civilisation, specifically the socialist perspective”, exist. And, not discussed here, he was also right to say that socialists, “for the sake of civilisation, specifically the socialist perspective”, should not be neutral but should side with democracy against Bolshevism and Us. The third camp socialist third camp can’t offer a genuine alternative.

1. ERBER WAS RIGHT ABOUT BOLSHEVISM

Erber’s critique is more subtle than Shachtman admits.

Far from being a right-wing denunciation of revolution, Erber’s concern is the gulf between Bolshevik intentions and Bolshevik results; his subject is not a group of bad men but the disastrous logic of “Lenin’s revision” of the traditional Marxist concept of the relationship of democracy to socialism in favour of the anti-democratic view of the party ruling in behalf of the masses.

Erber’s pays homage to the Bolshevists but argues that “the course they chose had a terrible logic of its own” and “could not be traversed without the suppression of the socialist opposition, the Cheka terror, one-man management of the factories, compulsory labour. They are all fatal links in a chain that began with Lenin’s revision.”

Most of what passes for education in the far left about the Bolshevists is a fairy tale. Erber told some inconvenient truths: that Bolshevist practice after October was an authoritarian travesty of socialism; that, before the civil war, non-Bolshevik socialists were being arrested, persecuted and, in some cases, tortured and sometimes shot; that trade unionists who struck or voted Mensheviks or just insisted on organizing were independent of the Bolshevists were being sacked and jailed, exiled or shot; that the constituent assembly, elected by the people but with a non-Bolshevik majority, was forcibly shut down; that the Soviets were gutted by the Bolshevists as soon as they started electing non-Bolshevik majorities; that some Soviets elected Mensheviks were visited by the Cheka; that the Cheka was an out-of-control disgrace to socialism from the first days; and that the Bolshevist culture of lying about other socialists and about troublesome workers, some of which Shachtman repeats, began early.

Erber also saw that the Bolshevists – Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Stalin – revised Marxist theory to justify their own authoritarian prac-tice, and then educated the international socialist movement in this new brutalism.

Socialism was undermined by them from democracy and liberty; belief in the fundamental qualities of transformative revolutionary violence and central command was promoted, not least by Trotsky who for several years was a flat-out and in-principle authoritarian.

The international movement was taught to substitute a totalitarian doppelganger for Marx’s and Engels’s democratic version of “the dictatorship of the proletariat”. The fruits of centuries of working class struggle, those civilisational gains of liberty, rights and representative democracy – which socialists should aspire to defend, extend and make to work for all – were trashed, in theory as well as practice.

Shachtman’s claim that “Lenin’s theory is nothing but a restatement of what Marx and Engels taught” is spectacularly, staggeringly wrong. According to Lenin, “The scientific term ‘dictatorship’ means nothing more nor less than authority untrammelled by any laws, absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on force. The term ‘dictatorship’ has no other meaning than authority untrammelled by any laws.”

The third camp socialist Hal Draper observed that Lenin’s definition was “a theoretical disaster, first class [with] nothing in common...with any conception of the working-class government in the manner of their counterposition of “bourgeois democracy” and flatly counterposed dictatorship to democracy.”

This had the consequence of (Draper again) “gutting socialism of its organic entourage in the mass of the people. When Stalin took another lead, the lead in organizing the socio-economic counter-revolution in class power, the “juridical” basis in theory (to use Trotsky’s later expression) had already been laid.

2. ERBER WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUAL ENTAILMENT THAT EXISTS BETWEEN DEMOCRACY, LIBERTY AND SOCIALISM

Erber may have been Shachtman’s erudition (though I confess I find Shachtman’s unrelenting crude sarcasm repulsive) but he knew a thing or two. Erber knew that “The parliament can in no way serve as the arena of a struggle for reforms, for improving the lot of the working people”, and that “The workers [in the West] are right in identifying their arms with the preservation and extension of those democratic processes and institutions that already exist”.

Erber knew that “The scientific term ‘dictatorship’ means nothing more nor less than authority untrammelled by any laws, absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on force. The term ‘dictatorship’ has no other meaning than authority untrammelled by any laws.”

Erber also knew the Bolsheviks were wrong to redact modern representative democracy in the west to a “bourgeois dictatorship” or “bourgeois democracy”. He knew that socialism should be the continuation and the deepening of the institutions and the culture of representative liberal democracy. He pointed out that far from being a mere “machine for the suppression of the working class” as Lenin had it, representative democracy was an arena of struggle which “bears the marks of dozens of great social conflicts”, has been “nowhere a political monopoly of the bourgeoisie”, and towards which the working class has always oriented. Erber understood that the working class had constituted the democratic arena as it broke into it to win vital political and economic conquests – “the voice, the right to organise and to strike, precious economic and social reforms to make its escape from numbing commodification and to civilise the whole society (the eight hour day, the weekend, the welfare state).”

Erber knew that Lenin formulated that conclusion upside down, by insisting: “The task of the proletariat consists in blowing up the whole machinery of the bourgeoisie, in destroying it, all the parliamentary institutions with it, whether they be republican or constituted ‘parliamentarism’ (emphasis added).”

Erber did not just oppose limited fringes, unelected second chambers and royal prerogatives, but the elective principle per se, the universal franchise, representative assemblies (i.e. elected parliaments and elected local councils), the rule of law, and the sepa-ration of powers between executive, legisla-ture and judiciary.

Lenin declared for rule untrammeled by law, denounced “all kinds of voting, democracy and suchlike bourgeois deceit”, never took the Soviets seriously (within months they were being marginalised, their non-Bolshevik majorities ignored and, if trouble, their delegates arrested, imprisoned, and exiled). In their place, came dictatorial rule by the Bolshevik Party – governing in the interests of the capitalist class, and deepened by new forms of participation.

Erber knew that Lenin turned that formulation upside down, by insisting: “The task of the proletariat consists in blowing up the whole machinery of the bourgeoisie, in destroying it, all the parliamentary institutions with it, whether they be republican or constituted ‘parliamentarism’ (emphasis added).”

Lenin did not just oppose limited fringes, unelected second chambers and royal prerogatives, but the elective principle per se, the universal franchise, representative assemblies (i.e. elected parliaments and elected local councils), the rule of law, and the separation of powers between executive, legislature and judiciary.

Lenin declared for rule untrammeled by law, denounced “all kinds of voting, democracy and suchlike bourgeois deceit”, never took the Soviets seriously (within months they were being marginalised, their non-Bolshevik majorities ignored and, if trouble, their delegates arrested, imprisoned, and exiled). In their place, came dictatorial rule by the Bolshevik Party – governing in the interests of the capitalist class, and deepened by new forms of participation.

Erber knew that Lenin turned that formulation upside down, by insisting: “The task of the proletariat consists in blowing up the whole machinery of the bourgeoisie, in destroying it, all the parliamentary institutions with it, whether they be republican or constituted ‘parliamentarism’ (emphasis added).”

Lenin declared for rule untrammeled by law, denounced “all kinds of voting, democracy and suchlike bourgeois deceit”, never took the Soviets seriously (within months they were being marginalised, their non-Bolshevik majorities ignored and, if trouble, their delegates arrested, imprisoned, and exiled). In their place, came dictatorial rule by the Bolshevik Party – governing in the interests of the capitalist class, and deepened by new forms of participation.

Lenin knew theBoIsheviks were visited by the Cheka; that the Cheka was an out-of-control disgrace to socialism from the first days. And, not discussed here, he was also right that socialists, “for the sake of civilisation, specifically the socialist perspective”, exist.

Lenin’s term “dictatorship” means nothing more nor less than authority untrammelled by any laws, absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on force. The term “dictatorship” has no other meaning than authority untrammelled by any laws.

The third camp socialist Hal Draper observed that Lenin’s definition was “a theoretical disaster, first class [with] nothing in common...with any conception of the working-class government in the manner of their counterposition of “bourgeois democracy” and flatly counterposed dictatorship to democracy.”

This had the consequence of (Draper again) “gutting socialism of its organic entourage in the mass of the people. When Stalin took another lead, the lead in organizing the socio-economic counter-revolution in class power, the “juridical” basis in theory (to use Trotsky’s later expression) had already been laid.

Much of Shachtman’s reply to Erber’s critique of the record of the Bolshevists is totally unserious. Shachtman dismisses the crushing of the working-class and socialist Kronstadt rebellion by the Bolshevists in his joky folkway as “stories by any number of people – their lives”.

He swishes aside Lenin and Trotsky’s explicit and in-principle support for lawless dictatorship in the hands of the party as “a selection of quotations from Lenin or Trotsky” (64). He simply refuses to engage with the facts about the Cheka’s appalling persecution of non-Bolshevik socialists and recall-citizen workers from the earliest days of the Revolution, treating all charges in the manner of a cheap lawyer: “labels marked “Cheka Terror”, “Secret Police”, “Suppression of Socialists” all lithographed in scarlet to intimidate bloodstains and scare children”. It is desper-
Australian school students strike over climate change

By Lilly Murphy

Lilly Murphy, a year 9 student in Melbourne who was involved in the 30 November Australian school students’ strike for climate action, talked with Workers’ Liberty Australia.

At my school a few of my friends knew about it due to social media. There were a few signs around school. So a friend asked me because they knew I was quite politically active, wearing a “Victorian Socialists” top [“Victorian Socialists is a local left electoral coalition.”]

I found out more about it. And then we were all thinking of going to it. We [six students] had a maths exam on the Friday when the walkout was on. So with a few of my friends we asked our teacher if we could change it; she asked the principal, and he said no.

We wrote an email to the principal and had a meeting with him. He seemed quite OK about it, and then in the last five minutes said “I don’t think this is going to work.”

The Department of Education told principals “don’t let the students go”, so our principal was probably under a lot of pressure from them.

At the end of recess, 10.45, about five or six of us went off [others left the school later]. We hung around for a friend who had been at an audition at another school. We all walked from Victoria Gardens to Parliament House, and there were already a whole lot of people there.

There were strikes on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday 28-30 November, but more emphasis on the 30th. Over 250 strikes all over – some with only 10 people, and that is fine, some with over 10,000, like in Melbourne.

I couldn’t hear the speeches much. They were talking about how the government hasn’t been doing much about it, and how great it was that so many people were there.

There was a really cute placard which said “I am here for her future” with a picture of a baby. Another one said “I am 9 and I know more about climate change than our Prime Minister does. Maybe he should go back to baby.” Another one said “I am 9 and I know more about climate change than our Prime Minister.”

One of my friends had made a few placards. One said “climate strike, one said “system change not climate change”, one said “no thanks”, with a picture of water levels rising; another said “we are not going to be hurt by the choices you have made for the environment”.

One key demand was that we want all renewable energy by 2030. Stopping the Adani coal mine [a huge new coal-mine project in northern Queensland] was another.

We are not going to sit by and let this planet be ruined by people older than us who won’t be around when the effects are taking a huge impact. We are going to fight so that when we are their age, and our children are around, we don’t have to live in a really bad world.

The whole thing was started by a Swedish student. Greta. She had said “I hope that this strike continues in other countries that are very well off, like Australia”, so that was how it got started in Australia. Facebook and Instagram were the main ways of sharing it; also just people talking to other people.

I want things like to continue until the government actually does something. Getting more schools to realise that we need to do a few little things — that would do a bit. But, if every school did something big, there would be a drastic impact. So we can make sure our schools do stuff like that as well. There are some people at my school thinking of setting up an environmental club. I have not been very involved, but am thinking of getting more involved in that.

Socialist Alliance were at the rally, handing out stuff and they had a booth at the end. I saw lots of people holding up Green Left Weekly signs. I was wearing my Victorian Socialists t-shirt on the day, and a few people came up and said they were also in Victorian Socialists.

Maybe at school we can get a socialist or left group where people can come and talk about issues in their communities. But I don’t think separating it off as just Victorian Socialists is a good idea, especially in schools.

It wasn’t a socialist matter — or, at least, it is a socialist matter, but just for socialists. It was a matter for anyone who thought the government was not doing enough on climate action. There were probably a lot of people there with socialist views, but it wasn’t specifically for people who were members of a socialist party.

Striking is one of the things that works for young people. Social media is becoming a bigger thing, and helpful for getting our message across, but one of the things that the government will actually listen to is when we go out of school, walk out on strike, and go to the Parliament House and protest.

One thing to tell the adults of the world? Just listen to young people more, and not regard their opinions as immature. A lot of adults, as soon as they see a young person, think: “Oh their opinions are not as worthy, as they don’t know much.”

Well, we might not know as much, but we know enough to have a good opinion. Our opinions need to be heard.

We have grown up seeing all this stuff, and we get political information from all over the world. We know climate change is real, and we can see it.

Some older people might not want to get involved, or just think that it “does not bother me.” But this is our future. In 50 years, a lot of the older generation will not be alive, but we will.

And we don’t want a world that is so shit, when we are older, or when our children are alive.

Max Shachtman’s Under the Banner of Marxism, which forms the bulk of this book, deserves to be considered one of the classic polemics of the Marxist movement, alongside The Poverty of Philosophy, Anti-Dühring, and others. It defends the Bolsheviks, their revolution, their work to build a revolutionary socialist movement, and the continued relevance of their approach.

Order online for £12* including UK postage.
www.workersliberty.org/books

*£15 including study guide

Erber, Geras, and Bolshevism

Workers’ Liberty has recently published In Defence of Bolshevism, by Max Shachtman, in which the major text is a defence of the politics of Lenin, Trotsky, and the revolutionaries of 1917 against criticisms made by Ernest Erber.

Erber had been a close comrade of Shachtman’s in the Trotskyist movement in the late 1930s and the 1940s, but in 1948 broke away, and for the rest of his life was a sort of social democrat.

In Solidarity 487 we published Alan Johnson’s article “On Norman Geras’s ‘Our Morals: The Ethics of Revolution’, which develops many arguments also reflected in Alan’s article on Erber (facing page).

We’ll be carrying replies, from the point of view argued in the “Defence of Bolshevism” book, in later numbers of Solidarity.

Norman Geras’s article can be found at bit.ly/ethics-g, and Leon Trotsky’s Their Morals and Ours, referred to in Geras’s article, at bit.ly/oldtmao.
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’ 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:

• 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.
• A workers’ control, with their capitalist or Stalinist social organisation.
• A workers’ movement to take workplace or community to global solidarity against the rulers.
• A 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!

Scrap, not pause, Universal Credit

As to the argument that Universal Credit has the improvement of the single sign-on and a lack of cliff-edges — those elements can be a key part of a new system.

A movement is developing against Universal Credit. It is making Universal Credit a dirty word. To positively advocate Universal Credit, albeit with a longer list of what needs changing, does not build or develop this movement.

On the contrary it lowers the horizon of the movement.

Ructions in PCS union

The Independent Left group in the PCS civil service workers’ union is standing John Moloney for Assistant General Secretary.

Nominations open on 17 January, and ballotting will run from 16 April to 9 May.

The political platform on which John Moloney is standing is summarised in an article in Solidarity 486: bit.ly/pcs-il.

It remains a possibility that the union machine will set the required number of branch nominations so high as to make it impossible for the Independent Left candidate to get on the ballot paper. But who the candidate will be to be favoured by such a restriction is not clear.

A right-wing looks unlikely. PCS has been dominated for a long time by the Socialist Party and its allies. Chris Baugh, an SP member, has been Assistant General Secretary since 2004, and says he wants to stand again.

But this time round he lost the vote for the support of the PCS Left Unity group, within which the SP is influential.

He was opposed by Janice Godrich, also an SP member, who has been President of the PCS for 18 years, but now wanted to stand for AGS.

The Left Unity voting results were announced, showing Godrich ahead. The SP said that the count failed to include some votes which should have been included.

A Left Unity conference on 1 December agreed to include the extra votes, but Godrich still won, and Godrich supporters dominated the newly-elected Left Unity committee.

Soon after, however, Godrich said that ill-health would prevent her from standing for AGS.

Whatever the outcome of those wranglings, John Moloney and the Independent Left will work to propose a working-class socialist alternative.

* More info: pcsindependentleft.com

No.489 12 December, no.490 9 January

This issue, no.488, is printed on Wednesday 5 December. No.490 will be printed on the night of Tue 11 to Wed 12 December.

Since labour movement and left meetings are sparse in the last couple of weeks of December, the paper will then take a Xmas/ New Year break. No.490 will be printed on the night of Tue 8 to Wed 9 Jan, and then we will be back to the usual schedule.
Grimethorpe women save their jobs

By Patrick Murphy, NEU executive (p.c.)

The striking dinner ladies at Ladywood school in Grimethorpe returned to work on 29 November claiming victory in their fight to defend their jobs. The school proposed to make all nine of the school meals supervisers redundant as part of a cost-cutting exercise announced in June. Backed by their union, Unison, the women decided to fight back and voted to take extensive strike action to save their jobs. Starting in September they took a hugely impressive 36 days of strike action. For most of that time there was little or no sign of movement from the employer, but the women remained determined and strong. When the school made it clear that they intended to use their teaching assistants to carry out the lunchtime supervision normally done by these women, the teaching assistants voted to join the strike.

SUPPORT

The women also had overwhelming support from within the local community. Ladywood Primary is in the historic mining village of Grimethorpe, just outside Barnsley where trade union traditions remain strong, and the local loyalty still counts for something. The strength and tenacity of the women together with the solidarity of their colleagues and community forced the school to shift its position. Last week Unison reached an agreement with the school management under which the threats of redundancy were withdrawn.

After the settlement was reached area organiser, Jordan Stapleton said “It was completely unacceptable to attempt to make the dinner ladies redundant when job losses were unnecessary. Where schools do need to make savings they need to know that low-paid women are not easy targets and the contributions they make to our communities cannot be underestimated.” It looks like the number of jobs in the school will reduce over time, though. The Unison press release announcing the end of the dispute goes on to describe final agreement as one which will “address the deficit in the school’s budget without any redundancies, due to expected natural staff turnover”. This suggests that when some categories of staff leave they will not be replaced and that the problem of increasing the workload of remaining staff hasn’t gone away.

Meanwhile the Grimethorpe women should be congratulated for their stand. These women faced what seemed like the inevitable loss of their jobs. They decided to fight and got their union to back them. When the fight itself was long and gruelling, with no sign of movement at all from the employer, they stuck to the task. The fact that their jobs are saved, the school has had to back down and the women can see that their action has had an effect are all real and tangible successes.

They have shown that collective action, solidarity and class unity are the only effective weapons we have to fight austerity. That’s a prize even greater in the long run.

Shelter strike over pay

By Gemma Short

Workers at housing charity Shelter will strike for 72 hours from Tuesday 11 December in a dispute over pay.

Shelter has imposed what the workers’ union, Unite, calls a “derisory” pay raise of 1%, plus a non-consolidated (one off) 1% payment. Unite members are demanding a 3.5% increase in line with the retail price index (RPI) as of April 2018 (the annual pay date) or a flat rate of £1,100 increase for all workers.

According to Unite, Shelter’s workers have suffered a real-terms pay cut of 11% since 2010, after a series of below-inflation pay increases. Shelter recorded a surplus of £1 million last year and has £15.7 million in reserves. One Unite member told Unite “I am very worried about the implications of this on my own financial obligations and responsibilities. We are here to support people on low incomes, but Shelter staff are now facing this themselves”.

Another said “Shelter’s vision of a safe secure affordable home for everyone is a bit meaningless considering I am struggling to pay my mortgage every month.”

Support staff strike at John Roan

By a teacher

Parents and school workers at John Roan are continuing to show the way to resist forced academisation.

The school in Greenwich, south-east London, is threatened with academisation after a poor Ofsted report. A vibrant community campaign, backed with significant strike action has brought support from local politicians and media attention.

Despite this, Labour-controlled Greenwich council threatened legal action against the National Education Union (NEU) at the school for striking on the pretext that the NEU wasn’t striking against the Local Education Authority as it wasn’t academising the school, and that couldn’t strike against the incoming academy chain as the chain didn’t employ the NEU members yet. After a chorus of protest against a Labour council behaving like that, it backed down. However, this has led to the status of the strike being discussed by the union’s national action committee.

Support workers at the school who are members of the GMB struck on 29 November and many NEU members refused to cross their picket lines. This action got good coverage on the ITV London News.

Support staff will strike again on 11-13 December, and NEU members say they will continue to refuse to cross picket lines.

Support:
• Donate to the strike fund: bit.ly/2QeUoVj
• Sign the petition: bit.ly/2zGBUSW

Shelter strike over pay

By Gemma Short

Workers at housing charity Shelter will strike for 72 hours from Tuesday 11 December in a dispute over pay.

Shelter has imposed what the workers’ union, Unite, calls a “derisory” pay raise of 1%, plus a non-consolidated (one off) 1% payment. Unite members are demanding a 3.5% increase in line with the retail price index (RPI) as of April 2018 (the annual pay date) or a flat rate of £1,100 increase for all workers. According to Unite, Shelter’s workers have suffered a real-terms pay cut of 11% since 2010, after a series of below-inflation pay increases. Shelter recorded a surplus of £1 million last year and has £15.7 million in reserves.

One Unite member told Unite “I am very worried about the implications of this on my own financial obligations and responsibilities. We are here to support people on low incomes, but Shelter staff are now facing this themselves.”

Another said “Shelter’s vision of a safe secure affordable home for everyone is a bit meaningless considering I am struggling to pay my mortgage every month.”

Durham bus drivers strike

Bus drivers at Arriva Durham County will strike from midnight Sunday 16 December until midnight Saturday 22 December in a dispute over pay.

Drivers are demanding a pay rise of £1 an hour, backdated to March 2018. According to their union, Unite, they are the second-lowest paid of all of Arriva’s national bus operations. The strike will involve drivers in Darlington, Durham, Redcar, Stockton, and Whitby.
Pushing Labour on climate

Interview

Clive Lewis

At the “together for climate justice” protest on Saturday 1 December, Clive Lewis MP talked with Mike Zubrowski from Solidarity.

MZ: Labour’s Green Transformation proposes a lot less investment than, say, the “One Million Climate Jobs” document that a few trade unions brought out a few years ago...

CL: I had very little to do with that document. Shall we describe it as a work in progress, at the moment? I think it could have been more ambitious, but it’s a start.

We should be pushing Labour, pushing the envelope, making the political space for Labour not just to spend more on fighting climate change and biodiversity loss, but to make sure that every aspect of our policies, economic or otherwise, has climate issues and sustainability issues at its heart.

For us as socialists, this intersects with not living in a society which is completely dominated by consumption for consumption’s sake. About working less; about sharing the wealth far more evenly; about more culture, more art; about looking after an ageing population; more time spent with family, more community work.

MZ: The document talks about no new runways which have a negative impact on the climate. I was quite disappointed that the Labour Party didn’t whip all of its MPs to vote against Heathrow expansion.

CL: I think anyone that understand Labour Party democracy will understand that, in a modern economy, after 40 years of having the begeez kicked out of them, trade unions are not in the strongest of positions. Consequently, they look out for the here and now of their members. As politicians it’s our job to look out for those union members, but also for future generations, and for people who aren’t in that trade union here and now.

This is where the issue of “just transition” comes into play. It’s an issue of having a Labour government which is going to make sure that workers are not thrown onto the scrap heap; that there are good, green, environmental-sustainability jobs put in place. That’s the argument we’ve got to have with those trade unions. It’s a work in progress, but until we do it they’re going to continue to back destructive projects like a third runway at Heathrow.

We need to gather together not just trade unions, not just the Labour Party, but NGOs, business, activists, and work out what the principles of decarbonising our economy will be. When I speak on the platform here, I speak as myself and as I want the Labour Party to be. But I understand that there is a challenge to convince elements of our party that this is something that they need to be concerned with.

For many people in the Labour Party and trade unions, these issues are peripheral. But actually, they’re all interconnected.

We see the rise of the far right in Europe. Imagine that with failing economies around the world, with millions of people on the move, fleeing from climate change which makes their countries no longer habitable in summer months, and sometimes in the spring.

I don’t want to poke and jab fingers at trade unions and elements of the Labour Party — I want to have a conversation with them and bring them along with us.

Subscribe to Solidarity

Or subscribe with a standing order
Pay £5 a month to subscribe to Solidarity or pay us more to make an ongoing contribution to our work
To: ........................................... (your bank) ........................................... (address)
Account name ........................................... (your name)
Account number ........................................... Sort code ...........................................
Please make payments as follows to the debit of my account:
Payee: Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham, B1 2HB (60-83-01)
Amount: £............
To be paid on the ......... day of ......... (month) 20..... (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing.
This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date ........................................... Signature ...........................................

Contact us

020 7394 8923
solidarity@workersliberty.org
Write to us: 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG
Solidarity editorial: Simon Nelson, Cathy Nugent, Gemma Short, and Martin Thomas (editor)
Printed by Trinity Mirror