VOTE LABOUR
THEN REMAIN

Push for socialist policies

Special general election issue

Featuring briefing papers on the big issues, designed for voters not regularly involved in political debate. The briefings are:

» Why socialism?
» Scrap anti-union laws!
» The EU: Remain and transform
» Why free movement?
» Housing is a right!
» Restore the NHS!
» A National Education Service
» A Socialist Green New Deal
» Why public ownership?
» Replace Universal Credit!
» High finance: Take back control!
» Johnson’s Trump-Brexit
» Why not tactical voting?
» Labour and antisemitism
» The Berlin Wall and socialism
Bakhshi and Gholian freed from jail

From the Shabrokham Zamani Action Committee

Esmail Bakhshi, a leader of the Haft Tappeh sugar cane workers in Iran, and Sepideh Gholian, an activist who support the workers’ dispute, have been released from jail.

They were sentenced in September – to 14 years and 18 years respectively — on all sorts of trumped up charges, including endangering “national security” and “the Islamic system”.

Because they put up resistance while in jail, Sepideh’s brother was arrested in January and Esmail’s mother in February! Then in August Sepideh’s defence lawyer was threatened with arrest.

Now they have temporary releases on the basis of eye-washing “bail” payments, with the money raised through putting up the deeds to houses and so on. Sepideh’s bail is 1.5 billion toman (about £300,000) and Esmail’s 750 million toman (about £150,000). Yet they could be back in jail at any time.

The temporary releases have been won by a combination of solidarity action and struggles by the Haft Tappeh workers themselves. The embassies and consulates of the regime have been picketed in many European countries. There have been letters, petitions, social media campaigns and so on by many exiled Iranian opposition groups and their supporters in the international labour movement.

Most importantly, the Haft Tappeh workers have not given up. On 24 October, the 32nd day of their latest strike, their demands were:

- the release of Esmail Bakhshi and Mohammad Khanifar, and all charges against them and all Haft Tappeh supporters to be dropped
- All of their fired workmates to be reinstated and the three remaining workmates be released
- Privatisation to be revoked, the company to be taken over by the state and supervised by independent representatives of the Haft Tappeh workers or the workers’ cooperative

It should also be mentioned that protesting workers involved in other struggles can often be seen with placard bearing slogans like “Thieves go free, workers end up in jail”.

Privatisation often is the means through which asset-stripping is done and other types of quick profit are made. Right now there are attempts to break-up the Haft Tappeh land, which includes huge plantations of sugar cane, and to sell it off.

**TIMING**

The exact timing of the releases, therefore, might be due to possible conflicts within the regime and how its elite responds to these blatant violations. The fact that capitalists get away with colossal corruption – while workers are jailed and tortured over their basic demands – is now in the open.

Ebrahim Raisi, who has held various positions in the judiciary (including a high position during the execution of political prisoners in 1988), became the Chief Justice in March 2019. He has made a big show of fighting corruption, including corruption within the regime’s judiciary (e.g., declaring that 60 unnamed judges had taken bribes).

Still, these are basically token actions against some officials, and they are treated very leniently compared to workers and political activists.

Of the around 50 people arrested on May Day 2019 all – except Neda Naj – have now been released. To begin with she was in Evin Prison and then after being interrogated was transferred to Gharchak. Then after being beaten up there she was sent back to Evin. She has been in jail for nearly 190 days and her court hearing is on 13 November.

There also many teachers in jail, including Esmail Abdi, Mohammad Habibi and Mahmoud Beheshti Langeroudi.

In the past six months hundreds of labour and other types of activists have been summoned, arrested and jailed. In total their sentences include 1027 years in custody and 1500 lashes.

There are other strikes and protests being planned as the working class regains its confidence. For example, on Sunday 10 November pensioners from across the country will be demonstrating outside the Majles and the Planning and Budget Organisation.

Bernie Sanders backed by America’s Muslims

Linda Sarsour, a leader of the Women’s March, and newly elected congresswomen Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, have endorsed him and gone out to campaign for him.

Women’s March, and newly elected representatives of the Haft Tappeh workers have supported Sanders in the UK and elsewhere who have also reached out with some success to Muslim communities. But as one journalist recently pointed out, “a 78-year-old Jewish socialist from Brooklyn isn’t an obvious favourite among Muslim Americans, whose relations with US Jews have often been complicated by differences over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

In a video released by Sanders last week, he addressed a progressive Jewish audience, drawing cheers when he said “I am very proud to be Jewish and look forward to being the first Jewish president in the history of this country.”

He then went on to explain what being Jewish means to him, and it is by understanding his message that we can grasp why Sanders’ campaign has been able to successfully bridge the divide between the two communities.

“As a people who have suffered for century after century, not to mention the horrors of the Holocaust in which my father’s family was wiped out, as were many of your families, if there is any people on Earth who understand the danger of racism and white nationalism, it is certainly the Jewish people,” he said.

He then applied his view to the most contentious of all issues – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “As a kid I spent many months on a kibbutz in Israel,” he said. “I believe absolutely not only in the right of Israel to exist, but the right to exist in peace and security. That’s not a question.”

The crowd roared its approval. And then he continued, saying that he also believes that “the Palestinian people have a right to live in peace and security as well,” adding that it is not “antisemitism to say that the Netanyahu government has been racist.”

The Sanders campaign shared video widely because it sums up so clearly his message of building alliances against the racists and antisemites, for Jewish-Arab reconciliation, and for a vision of better, fairer, more equal society for all. There are lessons here. I think, for left politicians in Britain and elsewhere.

Most seem to think that the are obligated to choose sides in the decades-old conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. As Israel is currently the stronger side, and as the lives of Palestinians – especially in Gaza – have become unbearable, it is natural to take the Palestinian side. But as the Corbyn-led Labour Party has discovered in the last couple of years, this can open the door to a rise of antisemitism on the left, and a weakening of the party overall.

It didn’t have to be that way. Sanders is both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel. He understands the needs of both sides for peace and security. His is a vision that is rooted in the universalist tradition of the socialist movement. And it is not only not doing the right thing morally but as his popularity among both Muslims and Jews shows, it is a winning message as well.
Free our unions!

As long as there have been capitalists (employers running business for private profit) and workers, there has been a struggle between them. About how long the working day is, about how much we’re paid. About how hard we’re made to work.

As bosses squeezed workers to get more profit out of us, workers organised to fight back. An individual worker has little power, but when we organise collectively into trade unions we can force concessions from the bosses.

When workers in a workplace, an industry, or a trade group together in an organisation (with regular meetings, subscriptions, elected representatives, and so on), that is called a trade union.

Trade unions are how we won weekends, pensions, sick pay. They have won changes in the law to bring in health and safety protections and child labor laws.

The struggle for power at the workplace is about more than pay and working conditions. It is about who has power over our society’s most important decisions:

- What are we going to make? How are we going to make it? And who will benefit from our work?
- We want Europe-wide guarantees that protect some of our contract terms when we are transferred between employers.
- We want strengthening of these rights and new ones too. We demand Europe-wide rules for safe, healthy workplaces free from discrimination and mistreatment, and a legally enforced shorter working week with no loss of pay.
- The economic integration of the EU has produced some “leveling-up” of wages. The gap between Spanish wages, or Polish wages, and German wages, is smaller now than when Spain or Poland joined the EU. But that process is slow and uncertain.
- We want to level up wages across Europe, and to work toward a common mandatory living wage. We fight for a level up social security.
- Tony Blair boasted that Britain had “the most restricted trade union laws anywhere in the western world”. Actually the laws in some East European countries are worse. We want Europe-wide guarantees for trade union freedoms at work — a guaranteed right to unionise and strike, so that we can secure and enforce better pay and conditions. All the changes we seek in Europe depend on the labour movements and left linking up across borders.
- We want to defend, and strengthen where they already exist, basic political rights including freedom of expression, freedom of belief, freedom of the press, freedom of association and the right to privacy, as Europe-wide rules.
- We fight also for the extension and levelling up of social rights and equality. We want strong anti-discrimination laws across the EU.
- We want serious taxes on the incomes, properties, businesses, profits and inheritances of the rich, to create a sizeable EU budget to be used for leveling-up. Regressive taxes like VAT, which take a bigger proportionate slice from the poor, should be scrapped in favour of progressive taxes for income redistribution.
- We want the banking system, household finances, and major utilities taken into public ownership and placed under democratic control, in each country and across the continent.
- A banking system has immense power to shape the economy through where it decides to invest and lend — or, through short-term profit-driven decisions, to plunge economies into crises.
- The climate emergency is international. It cannot be tackled country-by-country. We want to defend the EU’s existing environmental regulations and strengthen them in many places. We also want a transition coordinated on a European scale: to break the death-grip of fossil fuel capital and retrot the economy to run on a carbon-neutral or even carbon-negative basis.
- We want Europe to take its energy industry public ownership. It must put the workers in control, democratically, alongside the communities they serve.
- Freedom of movement across borders within Europe is one of the great boons of the EU. We want Europe also to welcome and accommodate refugees fleeing persecution, violence and destruction. It should open not just its internal borders, but its external borders, to the free movement of people, and grant asylum to those already living in Europe but lacking documentation.

The EU: Remain and transform

We struggle at the workplace so we can have a say in those decisions. There are good reasons bosses and right-wing governments fear strong union organisation and seek to attack unions’ ability to organise. Across the world and across history, trade union struggles and mass strikes have brought down dictators, stopped wars, and won voting rights. They dismantled racist apartheid in South Africa.

Until 1829 unions were completely illegal in Britain. Unions acquired more or less reliable legal rights to take effective action only after more decades of struggle, in 1974.

Since 1980 the Conservatives have turned the clock back. The 2016 Trade Union Act was the latest in a long line of laws introduced to undermine the power of unions. These laws are intended to weaken the resistance of working people so the capitalists have more power.

And, on the whole, so far, since 1980, they have done exactly that.

UNLAWFUL

Now the anti-union laws make it unlawful to strike for wider political and social issues. On climate change, school strikers have called on workers to take action alongside them. And some workers have. But strictly speaking it was illegal.

We demand a right to strike, and for strong legal rights for unions, and strike days, to historic levels. That is the main reason for so many workers these days enduring long hours, precarious work and high levels of in-work poverty.

The laws also allow workers taking industrial action. Postal ballots “cooling off” periods and red tape around notifying employers mean many disputes run out of steam before lawful action can be taken. So the main active union person in your workplace can be sacked, and you’re legally banned from doing anything about it until it’s too late.

The years of Tory rule, and Tony Blair’s refusal to repeal Tory anti-union laws, have driven down levels of workplace organisation in terms of number of trade union representatives, membership of trade unions, and strike days, to historic lows. That is the main reason for so many workers these days enduring long hours, precarious work and high levels of in-work poverty.

Unions have gone through downturns and defeats and risen again in the past, in many times and many countries. Britain’s trade union movement can rebuild itself. Deeating the anti-union laws is an essential part of that.

We call for the complete and rapid repeal of all anti-union laws and for strong legal rights for workers to join, recruit to and be represented by a union. It should be a basic human and legal right for workers to strike at times and for demands of their own choosing, including in solidarity with any other workers and for broader social and political goals.

Labour for a Socialist Europe

Labour for a Socialist Europe (L4SE) has decided to organise an effort in the coming general election for a pro-Remain, pro-socialist-Europe, left-wing voice within the Labour campaign.

L4SE has produced leaflets and will produce other materials for Labour activists to use on street stalls and on the doorstep.

L4SE was part of the push for a Remain policy at Labour conference on 21-25 September, and worked closely with the Labour Campaign for Free Movement there for the victory there for defending and extending free movement.


L4SE has been fighting to stop Brexit and build a socialist resistance to the right-wing forces and ideas driving it ever since it was launched from the Another Europe is Possible conference in December 2018.

labourforasocialisteurope.org

This issue will have a longer life than usual. Solidarity 525 will be out on 20 November, not 13 November.
Taking the illiberal side?

By Jim Denham

Andrew Murray, one of Jeremy Corbyn's key advisers, gave a "rare interview" to the Guardian on 30 October in which he warned against Labour taking the “liberal side” of the “culture war” around Brexit and "warned that the campaign to stop Brexit has increasingly become a form of identity politics.”

Mr Murray, it should be noted, was until 2016 a senior member of the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) and has been one of the “four Ms” (together with fellow Stalinst Seumas Milne, plus Dave Murphy, and Lea McCluskey) actively promoting pro-Brexit lines in tune with the CPB within the top bureaucracy of the Labour Party. They have failed largely because of the overwhelmingly anti-Brexit sentiment of Labour’s rank and file, and because even these long-standing anti-EU manoeuvres re-alised it might look a bit bad for Labour to simply follow the CPB into openly backing the Tories over Brexit.

According to the New Statesman in October 2018, in high-level Labour meetings Mr Murray advocated supporting May’s deal, but he quickly backed down.

What of this Brexit “culture war” and the “identity politics” warned against by Murray?

Well, first of all it’s clear that Mr Murray is accusing the remain side – and not leavers – of this. The claim that the remain case boils down to a “culture war” was promptly and effectively answered in a tweet from Another ray?

"The future of the NHS is not a "culture war." What of this Brexit "culture war" and the "identity politics" warned against by Murray?

"Brexit Derangement Syndrome" that – allegedly – infects all those opposed to leaving the EU. Mr Murray tailed an anti-Brexit "elite" (the sinister phrase used by Paul Embery) and warned against Labour taking the “liberal” and the “illiberal.”

In his words to the Guardian Mr Murray doesn’t spell out exactly what he means by “liberal”, but in his recently published book “The Fall and Rise of the British Left”, Mr Murray attacked “racist identity politics, ‘othering’, on the basis of race, nationalist education, geography or a potpourri of assumed values.”

He has denounced what he calls then “Brexit Derangement Syndrome” that – allegedly – infects all those opposed to leaving the EU. In reality, of course, the most virulent form of “identity politics” around at the moment is the repeated beatings from self-proclaimed “pro-working-class” leavers about loss of a “somewhere” identity (David Goodhart), about “rootless cosmopolitans” (the sinister phrase used by Paul Embery) and about how British workers are being ignored by a “well-funded” pro-remain “elite” (“Morning Star”).

In other words, white people who object to multi-cultural Britain and think being “working class” means having reactionary views on a swathe of issues from women’s rights to immigration.

These workerist poseurs conveniently ignore the fact that a clear majority of real-life UK workers (i.e.: people in full time or part time work) voted remain in 2016, as did all but one (Birmingham – by a tiny margin) of the overwhelmingly working-class cities of Britain: Bristol, Liverpool, London, Glasgow and Manchester.

The pseudo-left Brexiteers ignore all this: in their narrow, outmoded concept of who - and isn’t - “working class” white, anti-immigrant reactionaries predominate.

Actually, Mr Murray, who is not a fool, knows at least some of this. He admits to the Guardian : “I personally voted leave, but the leave campaign unfortunately gives no warrant for a Lexit position, because it was dominated by this alliance of xenophobic nationalists and Thatcherite utopians. And they set the tone.”

What Mr Murray can’t bring himself to admit is that the “tone” he abhors is an inherent part of the pro-Brexit cause – and of his own politics.

Compare the following two quotes:

• “The preference for individual rights over the collective, which has come to preponderate on much of the Western left, a flowering of the more poisonous seeds of the politics of personal identity and human rights.”

• “Human rights universalism prevents us from defending ourselves in the name of a short-sighted individualism that does not see that it is not individuals who are in question but rather great masses of people…”

Savings the planet is not a “culture war.”

One might further add that if Mr Murray is warning against taking the “liberal side” in this so-called “culture war”, then presumably he wants Labour to take the “illiberal” side, or at least to declare neutrality between the “liberal” and the “illiberal”.

In his words to the Guardian Mr Murray doesn’t spell out exactly what he means by “liberal”, but in his recently published book “The Fall and Rise of the British Left”, Mr Murray attacked “racist identity politics, ‘othering’, on the basis of race, nationalist education, geography or a potpourri of assumed values.”

He has denounced what he calls then “Brexit Derangement Syndrome” that – allegedly – infects all those opposed to leaving the EU. In reality, of course, the most virulent form of “identity politics” around at the moment is the repeated beatings from self-proclaimed “pro-working-class” leavers about loss of a “somewhere” identity (David Goodhart), about “rootless cosmopolitans” (the sinister phrase used by Paul Embery) and about how British workers are being ignored by a “well-funded” pro-remain “elite” (“Morning Star”).

In other words, white people who object to multi-cultural Britain and think being “working class” means having reactionary views on a swathe of issues from women’s rights to immigration.

These workerist poseurs conveniently ignore the fact that a clear majority of real-life UK workers (i.e.: people in full time or part time work) voted remain in 2016, as did all but one (Birmingham – by a tiny margin) of the overwhelmingly working-class cities of Britain: Bristol, Liverpool, London, Glasgow and Manchester.

The pseudo-left Brexiteers ignore all this: in their narrow, outmoded concept of who - and isn’t - “working class” white, anti-immigrant reactionaries predominate.

Actually, Mr Murray, who is not a fool, knows at least some of this. He admits to the Guardian : “I personally voted leave, but the leave campaign unfortunately gives no warrant for a Lexit position, because it was dominated by this alliance of xenophobic nationalists and Thatcherite utopians. And they set the tone.”

What Mr Murray can’t bring himself to admit is that the “tone” he abhors is an inherent part of the pro-Brexit cause – and of his own politics.

Compare the following two quotes:

• “…the preference for individual rights over the collective, which has come to preponderate on much of the Western left, a flowering of the more poisonous seeds of the politics of personal identity and human rights.”

• “Human rights universalism prevents us from defending ourselves in the name of a short-sighted individualism that does not see that it is not individuals who are in question but rather great masses of people…”
Regrouping the left

Editorial

Even years on from 2008, inequality is spiralling, the signs are that we’re heading for another crash, and mainstream ruling-class politics is veering away... from neo-liberalism only towards the nationalist right.

The working classes of the world need a political movement which fights for socialism as working-class self-emancipation, as a full-scale change of society to social ownership and democratic control of productive wealth.

It needs socialists who focus on agitating and educating positively for socialist ideas, not merely on nay-saying and reactive opposition to day-to-day bourgeois policies.

Who fight for consistent democracy and accountability, and a culture of free speech and open debate, both in the labour movement today and for society in the future.

Who are consistently democratic and internationalist on an international level, arguing for open borders, free movement, and self-determination for all nations. On Brexit, that means a fight to “Remain and Rebel”, resisting the drive to break up the EU on the basis of nationalist reaction (while also, of course, opposing neoliberalism in the EU as elsewhere). It means a consistent advocacy of the right to self-determination of all national groups (a two-state settlement in Israel/Palestine, guaranteeing an equal right to self-determination for Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, and self-determination for oppressed national groups such as the Kurds, Western Sahrawis, Tamils, Hong Kongers, Uyghurs, Tibetans, and others).

The main political beneficiaries of the consequences and echoes of the 2008 financial crash have been far-right nationalist movements of various kinds: Trump in the USA, neo-populists called themselves “left”, but were the main oppressors of the workers and of democracy in many countries, and in other countries would break strikes or foment chauvinism if Russian foreign policy required.

Despite the disappearance of the USSR, we are in a similar situation today of the term “left” being claimed by widely different or even opposing forces.

In the British Labour Party today, for example, for some, the key metric is not whether you are for workers’ power, social ownership, and radical democracy – but how vigorously you defend Chris Williamson against accusations of antisemitism. We have self proclaimed leftists who back Brexit, or even Johnson’s or “no-deal” versions of Brexit. Or who focus their efforts on policy adviser jobs, think tanks, and NGOs, and inside the Labour Party put “support for the leadership” above all else.

Who oppose free movement. Who give credence to, or even promote, conspiracy theories, sometimes antisemitic conspiracy theories. Who support some or all of Xi Jinping, Putin, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Assad.

There is also a “left” based on demagogy, personality-cultism, and conspiracy-theorist politics, and a left that emphasises internationalism, class struggle, and a culture of critical inquiry and democratic debate.

There are grey and blurred areas in between, and neither of the two blocs is uniform or homogeneous, but the urgent job today is to cohere as much as possible of the rational, internationalist, worker-oriented left into an effective force.

Workers’ Liberty conference
18-19 January

Because of the general election on 12 December, we have postponed our annual Workers’ Liberty conference from 7-8 December to 18-19 January.

That shift, sadly, also wipes out our planned 2-5 January week school on Trotsky’s History of the Russian Revolution, because we’ll have to use the weekend 4-5 January for pre-conference discussion meetings.

Some of the discussions for our conference – on Israel-Palestine, on Universal Credit, on the hijab in primary schools, and so on – are little affected by the general election, but the major discussion on regroupment and realignment of the left obviously is.

Just over £10,000 to go

Another £220 this week for Massei Sanders’s sponsored give-up-smoking effort brings Massei’s total to £696 and our overall fund-drive total to £14,390.93.

Thanks to Gemma Short, £50; Ruth Cashman, £30; Vicki Morris, £10; Jim Densham, £50; Joe Booth, £10; and a donor who wants to be anonymous, £50.

We have another £10,609.07 to raise to reach our £25,000 target.

We’ve already spent a lot of money on buying leaflets for the general election campaign from Labour for a Socialist Europe, and we’ll need a lot more to be as active as we need to be in this campaign.

Donate at workersliberty.org/donate. And look out for other fundraising efforts now in the planning stage.
Democracy, not e-surveys!

By Misha Zubrowski

Will you help write our manifesto? [first name]!

[48x440]I

plicitly link by the administration to the Ukrainians investigating Biden’s son and an election.

Democrats had help from Ukraine in the 2016 Council.

European Affairs on the National Security America’s senior diplomat to Ukraine, and aging were those of William Taylor, currently Trump impeachment goes public

Democracy, not e-surveys!

By Barrie Hardy

If the dreadful reality TV show that is the Trump Presidency had titles its first series “The Mueller Probe” then series two should be called “Impeachment”. The catchphrase is series one was “No Collusion”, it’s now “No QAnon Pro Quo”.

Although it was apparently difficult for Robert Mueller’s investigators to provide direct evidence of collusion between the Trump team and agents of Putin’s secret state in the run up to the 2016 election, evidence Trump has committed crimes in his dealings with Ukraine are in plain sight. Asking for a favour from a foreign government to help his re-election bid is a crime according to the US Constitution. Furthermore, that military aid was dependent on a willingness of the Ukrainian government to dig up dirt on his potential rival Joe Biden compounds Trump’s criminality.

Over the past week or so Washington wit nessed a succession of testimonies from straight laced establishment figures in the government bureaucracy that Trump was criminally culpable. Amongst the most dam aging were those of William Taylor, currently America’s senior diplomat to Ukraine, and Lt Col Vindman, based in Europe, the Director of European Affairs on the National Security Council.

Taylor testified that US military aid to Ukraine and a meeting of their President Volodymyr Zelensky with Trump were explicitly link by the administration to the Ukrainians investigating Biden’s son and a discredited conspiracy that the Democrats had help from Ukraine in the 2016 election.

Vindman testified that the transcript of the now notorious Trump/Zelensky phone call was not a full one. There were ellipses (lots of dot dot dots) where specific mention of Biden was made. Vindman’s testimony went against Trump’s claim that he’d issued an “exact transcript”. The number of lies Trump has told since assuming office has already passed the 14,000 mark, with one satirist to the 14,000 mark, with one satirist to passed the 14,000 mark, with one satirist to have come across as highly credible to many of these policies off conference floor. We won despite them. Since then, the leadership have been silent on almost all of these policies; and have actively, repeatedly, contradicted the policy on free movement. This is an affront to democratic principles. Respecting conference’s mandate is not only the democratic thing to do, but would help enliven and so improve the democratic processes going forward.

A consultation, superficially, may seem more democratic. After all, Corbyn is asking for the opinion, directly, of every single person who have signed the email to. Surely a larger number than the conference delegates. But no — consultationocracy is not democracy, and is much worse than democracy.

A lot of us know that from work. Endless “surveys” and “consultations” of staff are a common play by bosses who want to sideline trade unions.

Some of us know it from the Blair days in the Labour Party. Blair made a show of defying Labour Party conference when it was critical. He also made a show of encouraging electronic submissions to “policy commissions”. The members were “consulted”. The consultation had no effect on policy.

Because people know these facts, consulta tions generally have low levels of participation. The self-selected few who responded will probably be fewer than the delegates at the conference. Certainly have been orders of magnitude smaller than the number of those represented by these delegates.

Additionally, the process of consultations is atomising, rather than encouraging en gagement, discussion, and debate: the processes which make it possible, for minority — generally more radical — opinions to win people over, and become majorities.

There is very little opportunity to challenge the creators of the consultation, or to hold them to account. There is no explained process for how responses will translate into the manifesto.

Consultations are almost always used extremely selectively, with results ignored, highlighted, or spun depending on preconceived priorities.

Trump Impeachment goes public

By Barrie Hardy

It the dreadful reality TV show that is the Trump Presidency had titles its first series “The Mueller Probe” then series two should be called “Impeachment”. The catchphrase is series one was “No Collusion”, it’s now “No QAnon Pro Quo”.

Although it was apparently difficult for Robert Mueller’s investigators to provide direct evidence of collusion between the Trump team and agents of Putin’s secret state in the run up to the 2016 election, evidence Trump has committed crimes in his dealings with Ukraine are in plain sight. Asking for a favour from a foreign government to help his re-election bid is a crime according to the US Constitution. Furthermore, that military aid was dependent on a willingness of the Ukrainian government to dig up dirt on his potential rival Joe Biden compounds Trump’s criminality.

Over the past week or so Washington wit nessed a succession of testimonies from straight laced establishment figures in the government bureaucracy that Trump was criminally culpable. Amongst the most dam aging were those of William Taylor, currently America’s senior diplomat to Ukraine, and Lt Col Vindman, based in Europe, the Director of European Affairs on the National Security Council.

Taylor testified that US military aid to Ukraine and a meeting of their President Volodymyr Zelensky with Trump were explicitly link by the administration to the Ukrainians investigating Biden’s son and a discredited conspiracy that the Democrats had help from Ukraine in the 2016 election.

Vindman testified that the transcript of the now notorious Trump/Zelensky phone call was not a full one. There were ellipses (lots of dot dot dots) where specific mention of Biden was made. Vindman’s testimony went against Trump’s claim that he’d issued an “exact transcript”. The number of lies Trump has told since assuming office has already passed the 14,000 mark, with one satirist to have come across as highly credible to many of these policies off conference floor. We won despite them. Since then, the leadership have been silent on almost all of these policies; and have actively, repeatedly, contradicted the policy on free movement. This is an affront to democratic principles. Respecting conference’s mandate is not only the democratic thing to do, but would help enliven and so improve the democratic processes going forward.

A consultation, superficially, may seem more democratic. After all, Corbyn is asking for the opinion, directly, of every single person who have signed the email to. Surely a larger number than the conference delegates. But no — consultationocracy is not democracy, and is much worse than democracy.

A lot of us know that from work. Endless “surveys” and “consultations” of staff are a common play by bosses who want to sideline trade unions.

Some of us know it from the Blair days in the Labour Party. Blair made a show of defying Labour Party conference when it was critical. He also made a show of encouraging electronic submissions to “policy commissions”. The members were “consulted”. The consultation had no effect on policy.

Because people know these facts, consulta tions generally have low levels of participation. The self-selected few who responded will probably be fewer than the delegates at the conference. Certainly have been orders of magnitude smaller than the number of those represented by these delegates.

Additionally, the process of consultations is atomising, rather than encouraging en gagement, discussion, and debate: the processes which make it possible, for minority — generally more radical — opinions to win people over, and become majorities.

There is very little opportunity to challenge the creators of the consultation, or to hold them to account. There is no explained process for how responses will translate into the manifesto.

Consultations are almost always used extremely selectively, with results ignored, highlighted, or spun depending on preconceived priorities.

Trump Impeachment goes public

By Barrie Hardy

It the dreadful reality TV show that is the Trump Presidency had titles its first series “The Mueller Probe” then series two should be called “Impeachment”. The catchphrase is series one was “No Collusion”, it’s now “No QAnon Pro Quo”.

Although it was apparently difficult for Robert Mueller’s investigators to provide direct evidence of collusion between the Trump team and agents of Putin’s secret state in the run up to the 2016 election, evidence Trump has committed crimes in his dealings with Ukraine are in plain sight. Asking for a favour from a foreign government to help his re-election bid is a crime according to the US Constitution. Furthermore, that military aid was dependent on a willingness of the Ukrainian government to dig up dirt on his potential rival Joe Biden compounds Trump’s criminality.

Over the past week or so Washington wit nessed a succession of testimonies from straight laced establishment figures in the government bureaucracy that Trump was criminally culpable. Amongst the most dam aging were those of William Taylor, currently America’s senior diplomat to Ukraine, and Lt Col Vindman, based in Europe, the Director of European Affairs on the National Security Council.

Taylor testified that US military aid to Ukraine and a meeting of their President Volodymyr Zelensky with Trump were explicitly link by the administration to the Ukrainians investigating Biden’s son and a discredited conspiracy that the Democrats had help from Ukraine in the 2016 election.

Vindman testified that the transcript of the now notorious Trump/Zelensky phone call was not a full one. There were ellipses (lots of dot dot dots) where specific mention of Biden was made. Vindman’s testimony went against Trump’s claim that he’d issued an “exact transcript”. The number of lies Trump has told since assuming office has already passed the 14,000 mark, with one satirist to have come across as highly credible to many of these policies off conference floor. We won despite them. Since then, the leadership have been silent on almost all of these policies; and have actively, repeatedly, contradicted the policy on free movement. This is an affront to democratic principles. Respecting conference’s mandate is not only the democratic thing to do, but would help enliven and so improve the democratic processes going forward.

A consultation, superficially, may seem more democratic. After all, Corbyn is asking for the opinion, directly, of every single person who have signed the email to. Surely a larger number than the conference delegates. But no — consultationocracy is not democracy, and is much worse than democracy.

A lot of us know that from work. Endless “surveys” and “consultations” of staff are a common play by bosses who want to sideline trade unions.

Some of us know it from the Blair days in the Labour Party. Blair made a show of defying Labour Party conference when it was critical. He also made a show of encouraging electronic submissions to “policy commissions”. The members were “consulted”. The consultation had no effect on policy.

Because people know these facts, consulta tions generally have low levels of participation. The self-selected few who responded will probably be fewer than the delegates at the conference. Certainly have been orders of magnitude smaller than the number of those represented by these delegates.

Additionally, the process of consultations is atomising, rather than encouraging en gagement, discussion, and debate: the processes which make it possible, for minority — generally more radical — opinions to win people over, and become majorities.

There is very little opportunity to challenge the creators of the consultation, or to hold them to account. There is no explained process for how responses will translate into the manifesto.

Consultations are almost always used extremely selectively, with results ignored, highlighted, or spun depending on preconceived priorities.
Why free movement?

Briefing

No one today disputes that freedom of movement within a country is a boon. Both for the individuals who can move to a place or a job they prefer, and for the places where they arrive, which become livelier.

Problems may arise: for example, shortage of affordable housing in London. The answer is to tax the rich to improve social provision (for example, build more council housing in London), not to exclude those who want to move. The immigrants are often a big part of the workers producing that improved social provision.

The same principle hold across national borders. We want to defend the free movement across Europe we have had for decades, and open up both Britain and Europe more to the rest of the world.

Those who want to divide workers say borders protect us from outsiders. But really, the workers producing that improved social economy without the Tories’ “hostile environment” for ourselves, our neighbours, our friends, our workmates. Without the barbed wire, the detention centres, and the 2am raids.

The basic answer is to build very large numbers of high quality council housing so that more and more people can live in good homes, with security of tenure, at low rents. Private tenants should have secure tenure and tribunals to set fair rents. The existence of a large and growing council housing sector will make this more effective by putting landlords under pressure.

Deliberate policies pursued by governments since 1979 – removing funding for councils to build homes, severely restricting their ability to raise money themselves, and encouraging council tenants to buy their homes at cut price (“Right to Buy”) – have reduced council housing drastically.

That “Right to Buy” sounded good at first, but many of those who bought their home had a hard time covering the repair and maintenance costs which now fell on them. The majority of those homes eventually fell into the hands of private landlords.

Much of what council housing remains is falling increasingly into disrepair, particular with the cuts to councils’ funding since 2010.

This year’s Labour Party conference in September passed a clear policy that would allow a Labour government to start seriously improving the situation.

Firstly it said that Labour should set a target of building 3.1 million new “social homes” (homes owned by councils or housing associations rather than private landlords, with council-level rent) over 20 years – an average of 155,000 a year. Of these 100,000 a year must be council homes.

Secondly, a Labour government should provide councils with a £10 billion a year grant, ring-fenced for building council houses.

Thirdly, “Right to Buy” should be abolished.

These policies are something like the minimum needed to make a substantial difference. To put the figures for new homes in context, 1.8 million council houses have been lost under Right to Buy since the policy was introduced; and in the 1950s, under Tory governments, something like 300,000 council houses a year got built.

The Labour Party conference motion rightly said that a large, properly-funded council house building plan should be combined with policies to help private renters like limits on rent levels, open-ended tenancies, an end to “no fault” evictions, and tough new standards for the quality of housing.

We call for the party to campaign for those conference policies and a Labour government to carry them out.

Sadly, many Labour councils have become cosy with landlords and property-developers, and promoted local policies which worsen rather than slowing down and resisting the Tories’ assault on council housing.

Some have also actively taken measures to criminalise homeless people. That needs to change.

And Labour councils and the party more generally have done little to oppose and fight to reverse cuts to local government funding – allowing local services to fall apart instead of demanding the government restores the money necessary to rebuild them. That needs to change too.

Housing should be a right!

More than half of the 1,900 ultra-luxury apartments built in London in 2017 failed to sell, so overcrowded London has dozens of “posh ghost towers”.

Meanwhile, some 320,000 people are homeless across Britain (on the streets or in temporary accommodation). On-the-streets homelessness has doubled since 2010. Millions more are stuck-sharing with parents or friends because they can find nowhere affordable.

Other millions are in insecure, often expensive, often squalid privately-rented accommodation. The private rented sector has increased from 2.6 million households in 2007 to 4.7 million on the latest figures, and is now a bigger sector than social renters, mortgage-payers, or outright home-owners.

The basic answer is to build very large amounts of high quality council housing so that more and more people can live in good homes, with security of tenure, at low rents. Private tenants should have secure tenure and tribunals to set fair rents. The existence of a large and growing council housing sector will make this more effective by putting landlords under pressure.

Private tenants should have secure tenure and tribunals to set fair rents. The existence of a large and growing council housing sector will make this more effective by putting landlords under pressure.

Deliberate policies pursued by governments since 1979 – removing funding for councils to build homes, severely restricting their ability to raise money themselves, and encouraging council tenants to buy their homes at cut price (“Right to Buy”) – have reduced council housing drastically.

That “Right to Buy” sounded good at first, but many of those who bought their home had a hard time covering the repair and maintenance costs which now fell on them. The majority of those homes eventually fell into the hands of private landlords.

Much of what council housing remains is falling increasingly into disrepair, particularly with the cuts to councils’ funding since 2010.

This year’s Labour Party conference in September passed a clear policy that would allow a Labour government to start seriously improving the situation.

Firstly it said that Labour should set a target of building 3.1 million new “social homes” (homes owned by councils or housing associations rather than private landlords, with council-level rent) over 20 years – an average of 155,000 a year. Of these 100,000 a year must be council homes.

Secondly, a Labour government should provide councils with a £10 billion a year grant, ring-fenced for building council houses.

Thirdly, “Right to Buy” should be abolished.

These policies are something like the minimum needed to make a substantial difference. To put the figures for new homes in context, 1.8 million council houses have been lost under Right to Buy since the policy was introduced; and in the 1950s, under Tory governments, something like 300,000 council houses a year got built.

The Labour Party conference motion rightly said that a large, properly-funded council house building plan should be combined with policies to help private renters like limits on rent levels, open-ended tenancies, an end to “no fault” evictions, and tough new standards for the quality of housing.

We call for the party to campaign for those conference policies and a Labour government to carry them out.

Sadly, many Labour councils have become cosy with landlords and property-developers, and promoted local policies which worsen rather than slowing down and resisting the Tories’ assault on council housing.

Some have also actively taken measures to criminalise homeless people. That needs to change.

And Labour councils and the party more generally have done little to oppose and fight to reverse cuts to local government funding – allowing local services to fall apart instead of demanding the government restores the money necessary to rebuild them. That needs to change too.
The socialist rule is “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs”. The capitalist rule is “from each according to what the hours and effort they’re forced to put in, to get a living; to each according to their wealth”.

Under capitalism, the system where the economy is run for private profit, it is possible to win socialist-type bridgeheads. The NHS is one of them. You get health care according to your needs, instead of being denied if you’re badly-off and getting lots if you’re rich.

Since 2010 the Tories (and the Lib-Dems, to 2015) have systematically undermined the NHS.

To produce the goods and services we need efficiently and without exhaustion and destruction – to reshape our economy to avoid climate catastrophe – to add beauty to life – to be informed about our social conditions and equipped to debate and decide on our needs.

The left within Labour pushes for the full-scale restoration of the NHS as a public service under democratic control, without “internal markets”.

A National Education Service

To produce the goods and services we need efficiently and without exhaustion and destruction – to reshape our economy to avoid climate catastrophe – to add beauty to life – to be informed about our social conditions and equipped to debate and decide on our needs.

The huge increase in student fees in 2010 has led to a squeeze on SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) provision. The whole “exam factory” and “league tables” culture works to make schooling a process which teaches many students, above all, that they are “failures”.

The whole “exam factory” and “league tables” culture works to make schooling a process which teaches many students, above all, that they are “failures”.

That the exams, set by competing exam boards competing to offer predictable assessments cheaply marked, test only the most standardised skills in the most stereotyped contexts, makes this worse. Even the bosses’ Confederation of British Industry says that GCSEs are harmful. Yet years of students’ efforts are focused on so-called “core academic” subjects, has marginalised and downgraded important areas of learning. A survey in 2017 found that GCSE courses in design and technology had disappeared from nearly half of schools. Students more interested in design and technology and other hands-on learning find themselves branded as “failures”.

The whole “exam factory” and “league tables” culture works to make schooling a process which teaches many students, above all, that they are “failures”.

The capitalist rule is “from each according to their ability, to each according to their wealth”. The number of NHS managers in England rose 37 per cent between 1997 and 2010. Lots of time and energy is spent on box-ticking for performance measures; endless staff and patient surveys; and contracting-out.

The NHS is also burdened with huge debt from the “private finance” schemes used instead of straightforward public funding, mainly by the Blair government, to build new facilities.

Labour has pledged to restore NHS funding, to reverse privatisation in the NHS, and to repeal the 2012 law which pushes the NHS towards contracting-out to private firms.

The left within Labour pushes for the full-scale restoration of the NHS as a public service under democratic control, without “internal markets”.

Restore the NHS

The left within Labour pushes for the full-scale restoration of the NHS as a public service under democratic control, without “internal markets”.

Labour has pledged to abolish SATs tests and to make school boards competing to offer predictable assessments.

The whole “exam factory” and “league tables” culture works to make schooling a process which teaches many students, above all, that they are “failures”.

The whole “exam factory” and “league tables” culture works to make schooling a process which teaches many students, above all, that they are “failures”.

The whole “exam factory” and “league tables” culture works to make schooling a process which teaches many students, above all, that they are “failures”.

The whole “exam factory” and “league tables” culture works to make schooling a process which teaches many students, above all, that they are “failures”.

The whole “exam factory” and “league tables” culture works to make schooling a process which teaches many students, above all, that they are “failures”.
A socialist Green New Deal

Global climate change, caused primarily by the burning of fossil fuels, poses the greatest threat to humanity.

The evidence is overwhelming, as are the stark warnings of dire risks if we don’t act urgently to limit it. Yet fossil fuels are being burned at an ever faster rate, accelerating us towards more and even more severe catastrophe.

Capitalism, the system of organising production according to what is most profitable for the business-owners, is the driving force behind environmental catastrophes. Limitless and eternal pursuit of profit cannot respect nature’s boundaries. The bosses seek and compete to extract wealth at the highest possible rate, exploiting workers and the natural environment as much as possible to this end.

Fossil fuels have been closely entwined with capitalism throughout its development. Today, fossil fuel capitalists are a particularly powerful section of their class, internationally. Climate change is the most acute of a plethora of environmental crises which are driven by capitalism’s insatiable thirst for profit.

Capital is created and recreated by workers performing wage labour. It is us, the working-class, who carry out production — production with often devastating environmental impacts. This means it is us, too, who can force the necessary environmental changes, challenging the power of our bosses to do so.

It comes as no surprise that the bosses’ party, the Conservatives, have a record of inaction, and worse, on climate change. They have been champions of fracking, their last-minute moratorium on it looks like an election gesture, and Boris Johnson has a recent record of supporting and investing in this destructive, environmentally catastrophic, unproven and economically and socially destructive form of energy.

As well as a society-wide fight for a socialist Green New Deal, we want to help workers and students making environmental demands on the bosses at the level of workplaces and campuses.

Replacing Universal Credit

Fourteen million people, a fifth of the population, live in poverty.

“Four million of these are more than 50% below the poverty line, and 1.5 million are destitute, unable to afford basic essentials...” That was Philip Alston, the United Nation “Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights”, reporting on Britain a year ago.

He added: “Various sources predict child poverty rates of as high as 40% by 2022...”

“Homelessness is up 60% since 2010, rough sleeping is up 134%... Food bank use is up almost four-fold since 2012, and there are now about 2,000 food banks in the UK, up from just 29 at the height of the financial crisis”.

All that has happened while unemployment has been lower than since the mid-70s. Most of those in poverty are in households where people have jobs. Just jobs that do not bring in enough to live properly.

Universal Credit, the new benefits system gradually brought in by the Tories (and Lib Dems) since 2010, to replaced other benefits, has been central to that growth of poverty. It is, as Alston said, “fast falling into Universal Discredit”. “Consolidating six different benefits into one makes good sense, in principle”, but the punitive way it has been done annuls the good sense.

Labour has promised to “scrap” Universal Credit. That doesn’t necessarily mean going back to older system of separate benefits. It means reversing cuts and making the system much more generous and supportive.

Labour has promised to

- reduce the waiting period for benefits from five to two weeks
- scrap the ban on claiming benefits for more than two children
- scrap the overall limit on how much can be received
- suspend the “sanctions” regime used to punish and bully claimants, particularly the unemployed, sick and disabled
- recruit five thousand new benefits advisors so people can get face-to-face support to claim what’s due to them.

Far more benefit money goes unclaimed than is claimed fraudulently.

Independent analysts say these changes will boost the incomes of many of the poorest people in society, in some cases by thousands of pounds a year; and help many hundreds of thousands more.

In a cynical election manoeuvre, the Tories have announced they will end the freeze they imposed on benefits in 2015, which keeps them frozen at the same level so that in fact with inflation their real value falls. That will undo the damage done by the freeze over the last four years and all their other “reforms”.

For decades the benefits system has become less and less about supporting those in need, and more and more stingy and punitive, pushing down claimants’ living standards to cut costs and create an environment in which workers are more under pressure and vulnerable to exploitation. That shift was, shamefully, encouraged by New Labour under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown – but it has gathered speed since the Tories returned to office in 2010.

Two nations, two states

Socialists and Israel-Palestine


•workersliberty.org/2n2s
The banks and high finance should be converted into a public banking, mortgage, and pension service, under public ownership and democratic and workers’ control. Public ownership and democratic control will also provide the means to stop a reforming government being sabotaged by a “strike” or “flight” of capital, as France’s reforming government was in the early 1980s. Britain’s big four banks made about £22 billion profits in 2018-9. That is more than the total of £19 billion per year required, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies in October 2018, to end the cuts in welfare, schools, and other services brought in by the Tory and Tory-Lib-Dem governments since 2010.

The latest official figures for bankers’ bonuses (for 2016-7) gave a total of £15 billion a year. Again on latest figures, more than 3,500 bankers in the UK are paid more than a million euros (£900,000) in 2017, with total income of almost £6bn between them. The average pay of those money-mERCHANTS was nearly £2 million each a year.

World-wide, bank profits in 2018-9 were an amazing £1135 billion.

The banks and the other financial companies do provide us with a convenient way to manage what wages we get and to pay our income tax. That’s not as bad as “no-deal” (8.1%). It is by far the worst of it. Boris Johnson’s prime alternative to the economic integration which Britain currently has with Europe is economic deals with Donald Trump’s USA.

That’s not as bad as “no-deal” (8.1%). It is worse than Theresa May’s deal (4.9%), and of course a lot worse than Remain.

The bad economic impact comes from the barriers to trade and the barriers to immigration. Immigration, which mainly brings in young and energetic workers, boosts economic growth.

That is not the worst of it. Boris Johnson’s prime alternative to the economic integration which Britain currently has with Europe is economic deals with Donald Trump’s USA.

Even if he gets those deals, and he may not, that means “level playing field” arrangements for trade which “level” Britain with the USA’s regime of gross inequality, poor public services, few workers’ rights, and life based on cut-throat capitalist competition.

The EU citizens in Britain — people who have lived here as equals, often for decades, have the right to come here to work, study, or retire in Europe will be unable to do that, or able to do it only insecurely.

The police and cuts

Local Labour Parties are still distributing leaflets which make Labour’s prime play the call for more police.

The call should be instead for cutting the social roots of crime. Stop school exclusions. End the “exam factory” culture and tinpot authoritarianism which make schools inhospitable for many students, and worsen the mental-illness epidemic among teenagers.

Give social services the resources and funding so that they can actually do family support work, and not just crisis control.

Develop enough clean, safe social housing that everyone has a decent home. Make benefits adequate. Reform the DSS.

Create a society of solidarity, rather than of dog-eat-dog competition.

More police on the streets, doing more stop and search, roughing up and further alienating more working-class and black and ethnic-minority young people, are the last thing we need.

A ten-year study compiled from the Metropolitan Police’s own data showed that stop and search did not reduce violent crime. And stop and search is ten times more likely to target black and ethnic-minority young people.

Society will continue to need policing for a long while to come. But we should call for more democratically-accountable policing, rather than just a boost to the same sort of police force that harasses picket lines.

Johnsons’s Trump-Brexit

According to the most thorough study so far, Boris Johnson’s Brexit deal will reduce average income per head in Britain by 6.4%. It will cost you about £300 a year if your income is £20,000.

That’s not as bad as “no-deal” (8.1%). It is by far the worst of it. Boris Johnson’s prime alternative to the economic integration which Britain currently has with Europe is economic deals with Donald Trump’s USA.

The police and cuts

Local Labour Parties are still distributing leaflets which make Labour’s prime play the call for more police.

The call should be instead for cutting the social roots of crime. Stop school exclusions. End the “exam factory” culture and tinpot authoritarianism which make schools inhospitable for many students, and worsen the mental-illness epidemic among teenagers.

Give social services the resources and funding so that they can actually do family support work, and not just crisis control.

Develop enough clean, safe social housing that everyone has a decent home. Make benefits adequate. Reform the DSS.

Create a society of solidarity, rather than of dog-eat-dog competition.

More police on the streets, doing more stop and search, roughing up and further alienating more working-class and black and ethnic-minority young people, are the last thing we need.

A ten-year study compiled from the Metropolitan Police’s own data showed that stop and search did not reduce violent crime. And stop and search is ten times more likely to target black and ethnic-minority young people.

Society will continue to need policing for a long while to come. But we should call for more democratically-accountable policing, rather than just a boost to the same sort of police force that harasses picket lines.
Labour has pledged to bring energy, rail, water, and mail into public ownership and to “put democratic management at the heart of how those industries are run”. These are some reasons for doing this:

- Those industries are central to economic life. To make a real socialist Green New Deal, to reshape economic life to cut carbon emissions adequately, requires public control of those industries rather than just nudging and coaxing their private owners.
- They are, to one degree or another, monopolies or semi-monopolies. Private-profit companies running such industries acquire big chances to make extra profits while providing a poor service, as the privatised Train Operating Companies do.
- Historically, the privatisation of those utilities was a rip-off. For example, the regional water companies were sold off by the Government in December 1989. Over the next six years the shareholders gained £10 billion, in addition to the large amounts paid out to them in dividends from the companies’ profits, which totalled over £1.7 billion in 1994-5.

Those shareholders were mostly not small owners; by 1995 only about 15% of the shares in the water companies were owned by individuals, whether of large wealth or small.

Assets which had been built up by the labour of public-sector workers over decades were sold off to give a cash boost to the Tory Government and a bigger pay-out to the new shareholders and the company bosses.

Another drive behind privatisation was to break up workforces and expose them more to the cutting winds of capitalist competition.

The only counter-argument is that public ownership is “inefficient”. But the vast complexity of relations between the chunks into which the electricity and rail industries were chopped up for privatisation has expanded paperwork and bureaucracy far beyond anything the old integrated public enterprises were guilty of.

**NATIONALISED**

Public ownership is not in itself socialism. It wasn’t socialism under past Labour governments, if only because newly-nationalised industries were generally run by the same bosses as when they were private, with no more say for the workers. And it was surely not socialism in the old USSR and the East European states which called themselves “socialist” before 1989-91.

Socialists knew that in advance. The Irish socialist James Connolly explained:

“State ownership and control is not necessarily socialism — if it were, then the Army, the Navy, the police, the judges, the gasoliers, the informers, and the hangmen, all would all be socialist functionaries, as they are state officials — but the ownership by the state of all the land and materials for labour, combined with the co-operative control by the workers of such land and materials, would be socialism...

“An immense gulf separates the ‘nationalising’ proposals of the middle class from the ‘socialising’ demands of the revolutionary working class. The first proposes to endow a class state... with certain powers and functions to be administered in the common interest of the possessing class; the second proposes to subvert the class state and replace it with the socialist state, representing organised society — the socialist republic...”

“...to the cry of the middle class reformers, ‘make this or that the property of the government’, we reply, ‘yes, in proportion as the workers are ready to make the government their property’. ”

---

**Support Hong Kong and the Uyghurs!**

At Labour Party conference, shadow foreign secretary Emily Thornberry made a speech denouncing tyrants all across the world, Putin, Bolsonaro, Duterte, Trump, and the rest. All good. But one notable omission: the biggest: Xi Jinping, ruler of China.

As the election campaign happens, Xi Jinping is repressing the democratic revolt in Hong Kong, and locking up something like one million Uyghurs in “re-education” camps in north-west China.

Labour Party conference passed an emergency motion in solidarity with the Uyghurs.

We want Labour to stand for self-determination for the people of Hong Kong and for the Uyghurs.

---

**Why not tactical voting?**

Unity and pluralism are important. Labour needs to be a coalition rather than seek to make coalitions with non-socialist parties.

It needs more member control, more trade unions affiliating. It needs to readmit the unjustly expelled socialists, many hundreds of whom were purged without a hearing or even precise charges in 2015 and 2016. It needs to recruit, involve and represent working-class people in all our diversity.

But that is different from tactical voting, or agreements to stand down, of the type which Sinn Fein and SDLP have made in Northern Ireland. (Sinn Féin will stand down in favour of pro-Remain Unionists in East Belfast and North Down, and in favour of the SDLP in North Belfast).

Or from the type which Plaid Cymru, the Lib-Dems, and the Greens are discussing.

Or from the “independent” websites offering advice to voters about which pro-Remain candidate they should back, Lib-Dem or Labour, constituency-by-constituency.

Elections are not the be-all and end-all of politics. We see our job in politics as building an independent party based on the working class, equipping it with socialist policies, and helping it win a majority. Elections are primarily an opening to advance that effort.

In history that has meant starting from small beginnings. The Labour Party started even in a small way only after decades of mostly voting “tactically” for the Liberal Party as the only party likely to beat the Tories, and independent working-class candidates being squeezed out.

For its first 18 years, the Labour Party was mostly just a junior partner of the Liberals, tied to them by mostly behind-the-scenes deals.

Only in 1918, when Labour decided it would stand independently, did Labour’s history as a real force begin.

The same happens in constituencies. There are many which Labour has won only after years of building up from a position where it seemed to have “no chance”.

Labour can build support by arguing for its policies everywhere in the country — in every constituency. Because although there may be constituencies that Labour can never win under our current electoral system, there are no constituencies where there is no class struggle, no capitalism, no working-class political interests, no potential recruits and activists.

To put it another way, politics is not all about the single issue of Brexit.

The NHS and the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (backed by the Lib Dems) are also issues. Universal Credit (shaped by a coalition government including Lib Dems) is another. Education is another, and the Lib-Dems were joint architects of the increased student fees under the 2010-5 government.

With the capitalist system in crisis as it has obviously been since 2008, it makes no sense to vote for the Lib-Dems, who boast of being “the only pro-business party” and promise obviously been since 2008, it makes no sense to vote for the Lib-Dems, who boast of being “the only pro-business party” and promise...
The general election in Scotland

By Dale Street

Speaking at last Saturday’s #indyref2020 rally in Glasgow, SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon pledged that there would be another referendum on Scottish independence in 2020. This was the first pro-independence rally to have been addressed by Sturgeon since the run-up to the 2014 referendum. But it was not the first time that she has promised another referendum.

Sturgeon first promised a second referendum immediately after losing the 2014 one. She has been promising one ever since.

In the 2017 general election campaign, for example, she initially called for a second referendum “in the autumn of 2018 or spring of 2019”, but subsequently amended the timeline to “at the end of the Brexit process”.

Two factors have combined to push Sturgeon into making a specific pledge (or prophesy) that permission to hold a second referendum will be granted by the end of 2019, and that the referendum will be held next year.

Firstly, true believers can only await the Second Coming of Christ for so long before becoming demoralised. Then they turn to heretical thoughts. Consequently, as time passes, more and followers of the cult have become more and more restless.

Recent months have seen the All Under One Banner alliance of regressive nationalism stage a series of major – but not as major as they claim – demonstrations in Scottish cities. Sturgeon has always been there “in spirit” but never in person.

There have been demands for “the Catalan option”: The SNP government in Holyrood should organise a second referendum in the absence of a Section 30 order (i.e. the Westminster Parliament giving approval to the referendum).

But this has failed to gain traction. And for the faux radicals of Scottish-populist posturing, the prospect of up to 13 years in prison suddenly made their strategy appear distinctly less attractive.

Alternatively, leading figures in the SNP have argued that a majority for the SNP in the UK general election would amount to a mandate for independence, dispensing with the need for another referendum.

Attempts to make this SNP party policy were dealt with in thin SNP style.

Motions for the SNP 2019 conference which backed this position were ruled out of order. Attempts to move an amendment on the same lines to another motion on independence failed when all motions about independence were kept off the agenda.

There was also the Supreme Leader’s speech. That contained everything that conference delegates needed to know.

But on Monday’s promises of a referendum in 2020 should satisfy the restless natives, at least for the time being.

Secondly, a general election has been called and the SNP needs to work out its election strategy.

2017 did not go well for the SNP. Its vote went down from 1.5 million (2015 general election) to 1.4 million (2017), and its number of seats fell from 56 to 35. And Tory-free Scotland suddenly had 13 Tory MPs.

Sturgeon’s calculation is that putting the issue of a second referendum centre-stage, in the broader context of opposition to Brexit, will resurrect the half a million voters lost in 2017. In a first-post-the-post election, this will result in a virtual clean sweep for the SNP.

There are obvious attractions to such a strategy.

It will divert attention away from the SNP’s record in Holyrood (which influences voting even in a Westminster election):

- Scandals in the NHS, an education system in crisis, an explosion of homelessness, a decline in life expectancy, delays in major infrastructure projects, an unreliable railway network, declining standards of social care, and the highest number of drugs-related deaths in Europe.

It will also cut across the chances of a Scottish Labour revival. It will lead to national identity rather than class identity being a major determinant of voting intentions, with Unionists more likely to vote Tory and pro-independence votes going to the SNP.

(The latter calculation has been marred by the decision of the Scottish Greens to stand 20 candidates, including in key SNP marginals.

**LEAVE**

A million Scottish voters backed Leave in 2016. A third of them were SNP voters. These were primarily the voters who deserted the SNP in 2017. The promise of a post-Brexit independent Scotland returning to “our European family of nations” will not help attract them back.

And for all its usual bluff and bluster, the SNP’s record on Brexit has been erratic. It flipped from total opposition to any form of Brexit to support for the “Norway model”. It likewise flipped from not supporting a second EU-referendum to becoming its foremost advocate.

Promising another referendum on independence will warn the hearts of the faithful it may not have the same impact on the broader electorate.

Some opinion polls have shown support for Scottish independence at around 50%, compared with 45% in 2014. But other opinion polls show a decline in support for independence, and only minority support for another referendum on Scottish independence in the imminent future.

A second independence referendum also conjures up some unpleasant figures for the SNP:

- A spending deficit of 7% of Scottish GDP;
- An annual £10 billion fiscal transfer from central government to Scotland; ten years of public spending cuts in an independent Scotland.

Plus the costs of setting up a new currency (a proposal backed by 13% of the population), the cost of setting up a new central bank, and the cost of replacing the new currency by the euro (a probable condition of Scotland’s admission to the EU).

And while Sturgeon has denounced a hard Brexit ever since June of 2016, she has now refused to rule out a “hard border” between England and an independent Scotland.

The supposed rationale for a referendum and independence – Johnson in Downing Street, and Scotland out of the EU – could also easily collapse: What if the Tories do not win the general election? And what if there is no Brexit (because of a second EU-referendum)?

Sturgeon’s decision to prioritise a second referendum and independence is already adding to the existing problems faced by Scottish Labour in the general election.

There was no “Corbynite influx” into Scottish Labour after 2015. The activists who could have constituted such an influx remained in the political orbit of the SNP and pro-independence campaigns outside of the SNP.

Consequently, Scottish Labour in many parts of the country remains moribund and controlled by the right wing. This is reflected in the outcomes of selection contests for Westminster candidates: Many of them are walking reminders of why so many voters abandoned Labour in 2015.

Claims that Labour “turned the corner” in the 2017 general election are a myth. Six new Labour MPs were elected. But its overall Scottish vote increased by less than 10,000, 7,000 of which were in just one constituency.

In this year’s European elections Labour’s share of the poll slumped to 9%.

Claims by Sturgeon that she simply knows for sure – because she knows everything there is to know in the universe – that a Corbyn-led government would grant a Section 30 order have already been seized on by the Tory press to portray Labour as weak on the Union.

Already rampant are headlines such as “Corbyn’s Cave-In to Sturgeon”, “Secret SNP-Lab Plot Revealed” and “We Must Stop Corbyn Gifting SNP A Fresh Chance to Break Up UK”.

Right-wing Scottish Labour candidates hostile to the relatively radical policies adopted by Labour conferences will seize on Sturgeon’s new push for independence as an excuse to wrap themselves in a Union Jack and appeal to Tory voters on the basis of saving the Union.

This will make it even more difficult for Scottish Labour to win back working-class SNP-voters.

**LABOUR LEFT**

All this underlines the vital role which the Scottish Labour left – however relatively small it may be in comparison to England – has to play in the election campaign.

Scottish Labour policy is to support a second referendum on EU membership and, unlike party policy at UK level, to support Remain (i.e. no need for a special conference to decide what Labour’s position would be). That is the right policy, although Scottish Labour has not been particularly vociferous in promoting it.

While remaining opposed to independence for Scotland, Scottish and national Labour policy is to support the granting of a Section 30 order if there was clear support among Scottish voters for another independence referendum.

This is simple democracy.

Opposition to that policy and claims that it could cost Scottish Labour votes is a measure of just how right-wing the Scottish Labour right is. And what could cost Labour votes are its attacks on the policy, not the policy itself.

That policy is qualified by opposition to a Section 30 order in the early years of a Labour government, so that the electorate can judge the government on its record. The qualification is open to criticism. But it is secondary to the recognition of the basic principle.

Scottish Labour activists should be the fore in pushing party policy on Brexit and Scottish independence during the campaign.

At the same time they need to work to transform the election from being a battle of flags into a battle fought on the basis of class politics.

The SNP vision of a referendum tomorrow and independence the next day is based on a scenario in which the Tories win the general election and Brexit goes ahead. Once again, the SNP’s political promises presuppose, and require, major working-class defeats.

The only referendum which should be decisive in Scotland in this election is a “referendum” on the Tories record in power and the choice between the nightmare of five years of Boris Johnson in Downing Street or a Labour government committed to radical policies.
Labour and antisemitism

The Berlin Wall and socialism

The August 2019 Labour Party leaflet entitled “No Place for Antisemitism” condemns conspiracy theories which portray capitalism and imperialism as the product of plots by a small shadowy elite. These are “just one step away from myths about Jewish bankers and a secret Jewish plot for world domination.” Some of these conspiracy theories “substitute Israel or Zionists for Jews, presenting Israel as controlling the world’s media and finances” and “ascribe to Israel an influence on world events far beyond any objective analysis.” Jewish people, the leaflet states, “have the same right to self-determination as any other people.” Many Jews “view calls for Israel to cease to exist as calls for expulsion or genocide”.

Opposition to the Israeli government “must never use antisemitism”, such as “comparing Israel to the Nazis.” The Labour Party “mini-site” also includes the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition and examples of antisemitism.

Some of us in the Labour Party have long argued to recognise that there is a real history of antisemitism on the left, as well as the right. We have made an impact. It will bring no advantage to Jewish people in Britain to vote for the Tories or Lib Dems, or by abstaining to give Boris Johnson a path to a parliamentary majority. A 2017 poll by YouGov showed that 40% of Tory supporters endorsed at least one of a set of (old-fashioned, straightforward) antisemitic statements put to them, as against 32% of Labour supporters.

There is a lot more to do on anti-semitism in the Labour Party! The labour movement should be a positive force against prejudice, and not just “not as bad as the Tories”.

The Berlin Wall was one of extreme exploitation of the workers and peasants run by a backward bureaucratic ruling class with a monopoly of political and social power. It was the bureaucracy that decreed that their state should nationalise and control everything — not Marx or for that matter Lenin.

Way before, back in the 19th century, socialists in the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and many others had been arguing that “state socialism” (the state owning all industry) could be even worse than the usual capitalism if in the hands of a state controlled by an exploiting minority. We are for public ownership, but with democratic control.

Most important of all, from our point of view, in 1989-91, was that the workers in the Stalinist state gained the liberty to organise, to think, to discuss, and thus to learn.

Labour and antisemitism

The first Remembrance Day

By Janine Booth

One hundred years ago, on the very first Remembrance Day, 11 November 1919, the Daily Herald, a socialist newspaper, published this article on its front page.

It was one year after the Armistice, and Prime Minister David Lloyd George’s promise of a “land fit for heroes” rang bitterly around a country in which many conscripted soldiers had still not been demobilised, and many of those who had lived in poverty. These were the days before poppies; when there were different ex-services organisations for rank-and-file soldiers and top officers because they had very different class interests. Socialists both remembered the war dead and spoke out against those who sent them to their deaths.

You are asked to be silent for two minutes to-day, to be silent and to pause in your labours, to remember this day and this hour last year.

At 11 a.m. a year ago this day the guns that had made the days hideous and the nights hideous brought along all the western front. The war that seemed endless had come suddenly to an end. The Peace that seemed beyond hope came suddenly within reach. Men who for four years had lost touch with living, saw life blossom gloriously at their feet. And men who had given themselves up for dead came suddenly back to life.

All this at 11 o’clock in the morning of November the Eleventh one year ago.

And to-day, at the same hour, you are to be silent for two minutes; you are to stand bareheaded wherever you be; you are to remember the Glorious Dead.

What will you remember and what will you forget? You will remember, mothers, the fear you have had, the fear you have had that your sons will not come back. You will remember, fathers, your sons, your daughters, your friends, your children. You will remember the warm hands and the cool hands that you have held upon returning soldiers.

But what will you forget? The crime that called these men to battle, or the fond, glorious feverish passion under which they went. The war that was to end war, and that in bitter reality did not? The lies, the hatred, the cruelty, the hypocrisy, the pride; and the agony, the tears of the innocent, the martyrdom of the weak, the hunger of the poor?

Make the most of this day of official remembrance. By the sacred memory of those lost to you, swear to yourself this day, at 11 o’clock, that never again, God helping you, shall the peace and happiness of the world fall into the murderous hands of a few cynical old men; that never again shall you, or your children after you, be set in arms against a brother man; that never again shall the fair face of the earth and sky be shaken and devastated by the hate and terror and the torture of a fratricidal war.

Use it better for you that to-day you lay dead in your grave, and for your children that they had never been born!
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, inhumanity, 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 their rights to be independent of “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:

• An 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 democracy at every level of government.

• Open borders.

• Independence against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalists or Stalinist rulers.

• Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace 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.

• Independence against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalists or Stalinist rulers.

• Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace 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.

Vote Bev Laidlaw for PCS General Secretary

By a PCS activist

PCS has been run by a “broadsheet” alliance, made up of the Ladt Unity grouping working with some more right-wing elements, for over 15 years. In that time, after an initial increase, membership has haemorrhaged. In all major government departments, membership has fallen by between 10-50%.

The “broadsheet” narrative has led to a decline in workplace activism and militancy, and a decline in density among all bargaining units in the union.

Mark Serwotka, the incumbent general secretary, says he is “standing on his record.” This is the reality of that record.

Following a split in the leadership faction, Serwotka will be opposed by Marion Lloyd, a member of the Socialist Party. But Marion Lloyd has supported, and in some cases led, the vast majority of the bad decisions taken by our “left” leadership. Her differences with Serwotka are very recent discoveries on her part. For example, both Serwotka and Lloyd supported the cancellation of union elections in 2015, allegedly to save money. Both backed the 2005 pensions sell-out, which has led to a two-tier setup where new entrants are on much worse terms and conditions than existing staff. And both supported the hated and divisive “Employee Deal” in the Department for Work and Pensions, where the majority of PCS members work, which saw attacks on terms and conditions, including a reduction in weekends off work, in return for a few crumbs.

Against these two candidates, who essentially represent different factions within the union bureaucracy, Bev Laidlaw is standing as a rank-and-file candidate backed by the Independent Left. Bev’s perspective is that the union needs to rebuild itself from the grass roots, by empowering reps and activists to organise at workplace level. Bev is a low-grade, frontline civil servant in an operational role in a job centre, with recent experience of organising strikes in her area. She has committed to only take an average PCS member’s wage if elected, rather than the full general secretary salary of nearly £100k.

The difference at the heart of this election — a perspective of rank-and-file empowerment and rebuilding from the ground up, versus the idea that electing “fighting,” “left-wing” leaders is an end in itself.

INDEPENDENT LEFT

While Bev has fewer branch nominations than the other two candidates, Independent Left candidates have the advantage of having a shared perspective that what’s needed is a new PCS organisation that’s truly rank and file.

While Bev has fewer branch nominations than the other two candidates, Independent Left candidates have the advantage of being independent of the union hierarchy.

We’re also aiming to work with branches that nominated Bev to ensure that work is done. We’re also organising a programme of leafleting at civil service workplaces across the country, and will visit to workplaces and branch meetings.

We’re also aiming to work with branches to rebuild PCS, and membership meetings, and hopefully persuade some of the branches that didn’t nominate a candidate to recommend a vote for Bev to their members. Unlike Serwotka, Bev doesn’t have the communications machine of the union officials behind her, so our campaign will be based on grassroots activists doing work on the ground.

People can support the campaign by getting involved in leafleting, and by spreading Bev’s candidacy on social media, and donating. The campaign website is bev4gs.com.

We also aim to grow and consolidate the Independent Left, if possible as part of a wider rank-and-file regroupment, as part of the campaign. Over the past couple of years, a number of independent-minded branches and activists who didn’t feel they had a home in the existing dominant factions in PCS have emerged. Some of those people have joined the Independent Left, some are involved in “PCS Rank-and-File” grouping, and some are in both.

We want to use the general secretariat election to grow and consolidate that layer of people, not simply on the basis of negative opposition to Serwotka and the existing “broadsheet” leadership, but on the basis of a shared perspective that what’s necessary to rebuild union power in our workplaces is workplace action that is truly rank and file, possible via industrial action, and developing a higher level of rank-and-file engagement.
Postal workers talk of 29 Nov action

By John Moloney

PCS members at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will strike again on 7, 11, and 12 November. These are members working in facilities management, employed by outsourced contractor Interserve. We want interserve to meet certain demands, including recognising the union; guaranteeing company sick pay; and reversing cuts in hours, but ultimately we want these workers to be employed directly on the same terms and conditions as all other civil servants.

We are also working closely with the United Voices of the World (UVW), which have members in the Ministry of Justice and Royal Parks, which are civil service workplaces. Workers there have struck recently and we’ve promoted those strikes, and encouraged fundraising for the UVW strike fund.

We want to continue and deepen that relationship, which we feel provides an important alternative way of working. This is because the hostility that’s sometimes characterised the relationship between TUC-affiliated unions and the smaller non-TUC unions like UVW and IWGB.

The union is gearing up for the general election by mobilising members in constituencies in England and Wales to campaign for Labour. We have a clear position that we want to see a Labour government, and will be explicitly calling for a Labour vote in England and Wales, but we don’t want that to be a passive expression of support, so it’s important we mobilise members to campaign.

We also want to put demands on Labour, to ensure they implement policies we support. PCS has a radical environmental policy, including net zero carbon emissions by 2030. That’s now largely in line with policy passed at Labour conference but we want to hold Labour to account to ensure these policies are implemented as Labour gets into government.

We’ll also be pressing Labour on our central industrial demands. Our policy for civil service pay is for a 10% increase, with a flat-rate minimum for the lowest paid, and pay equalisation across the civil service. We’re also demanding an increased staffing level, which might mean 25,000 additional staff in the biggest section of the civil service. These are demands we’ll press whoever wins the election.

John Moloney is Assistant General Secretary of PCS, writing here in a personal capacity.

---

Low-paid workers strike across London

By Ollie Moore

November 2019 is witnessing a wave of strikes, disputes, and campaigns involving low-paid workers.

The United Voices of the World union (UVW) has members involved in several strikes across London — at St. Mary’s Hospital in Paddington; in Royal Parks; at the University of Greenwich; at Channel 4’s and ITV offices; and at the Ministry of Justice.

Flying pickets on 31 October visited multiple workplaces, as well as the offices of the outsourced contractors who employ the workers.

The strikes are demanding greater equality with directly-employed staff, including living wages and company sick pay.

Further strikes are due at St. Mary’s on 11-13 November, and at the University of Greenwich on 5 and 11 November. UVW members working as security guards at the University of East London are also balloting for strikes; they were taken into direct employment in November, and the claim is not on their old terms and conditions.

On 29 October, outsourced workers in the Independent Workers’ Union of Great Britain (IWGB) at University College London demonstrated to demand direct employment. The demonstration was well supported by student activists as well as a number of directly-employed UCL workers.

IWGB members at 5 Hertford Street, home to exclusive Mayfair members’ club “LouLou’s”, are balloting for strikes to win living wages and company sick pay.

The club is nicknamed “Brexit HQ”, due to its billionaire aristocratic owner Robin Birley’s high profile political and financial support for Ukip, Nigel Farage, and Boris Johnson’s Tory party.

McDonald’s workers in the Baker’s, Food, and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) at six London stores will strike on 12 November, demanding a pay increase to £15/hour, an increase in guaranteed hours, and union recognition.

This will be the fourth “McStrike” in the UK, following walkouts on 4 September 2017, 1 May 2018, and 4 October 2018.

The overwhelming majority of workers in these disputes are migrants, showing one how more, contrary to the myth that immigration depresses wages, migrant workers’ struggles can in fact drive wages up.

Support the disputes:

• Donate to the UVW strike fund: https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/strikefund
• Sign the PCS’s online petition in support of Foreign and Commonwealth Office workers. https://action.pcs.org.uk/cc/fo-dispute
• Send a letter to London Mayor Sadiq Khan in support of London Underground cleaners: https://www.rmt.org.uk/letter/justice-for-tube-cleaners

---

Universities will be out from 25 November

By a UCU activist

Members of the University and Colleges Union (UCU) will strike at 60 universities between 25 November and 4 December, over pay and conditions, pensions, and both.

The dispute over the USS pension scheme that shut down many universities in 2018 remains unresolved. While employers have backed away from entirely closing the defined benefit scheme, employee contributions have risen to 9.6% from 6.35% ten years ago and 8% when the current Career Average scheme was introduced. Jane Hutton, a statistics professor who raised concerns about the governance of USS, has been sacked from its board of trustees.

UCU has found 97% of full-time academic and 80% of hourly-paid staff would prefer permanent contracts, and 80% of hourly-paid staff would prefer guaranteed hours to “flexibility”. Black academic staff are paid 14% less than white staff, on average, and the gender pay gap in universities is 13.7%, well above the national average.

Overcoming the 50% threshold for action at 54 institutions is a huge achievement for the union under the leadership of Jo Grady, a long-standing leadership faction, against workload intensification, to become General Secretary earlier this year.

Unsurprisingly the pre-92 institutions that struck in 2018 were more likely to achieve positive results this time, with many post-92 universities missing the threshold. These are the institutions most vulnerable in the current marketisation of HE, with many facing redundancies and course closures. That may explain the greater nervousness about striking.

Still, there were some notable successes, including Sheffield Hallam, which also won a local ballot against workload intensification.

---

Strikes at Virgin, West Midlands, South-West Rail

By Jay Dawkey

Rail union RMT has called a strike on Virgin Trains, West Midlands Trains, and South Western Railway (SWR).

On the latter, the union has narrowed a calendar of strikes throughout November and December, which will see walkouts on 16, 23, and 30 November, and 7, 14, 21, and 28 December. West Midlands Trains is the latest Train Operating Company to see its workers plan industrial action over the imposition of “Driver Only Operation” (DOO).

On Virgin Trains, train managers, a grade of customer-facing train crew, on the West Coast franchise will strike on 19 November to demand the reinstatement of an unfairly sacked colleague.

On Northern Rail, where RMT guards have previously struck in opposition to DOO, RMT members have voted by a 75% majority to reject the company’s latest pay offer, of 2.75%, at the workplace and told Solidarity: “The Executive Committee of the drivers’ union, Aslef, has accepted the offer over the heads of its own membership. Various rumours are circulating about what dodgy deals full-time reps might be concocting. On the shop floor, Northern workers know we can fight for something better.”

On SWR strikes have been called for 21-23 December, and 27 December — 1 January. They are over Driver Only Operation.
Why socialism?

The word “socialism” has been used by all sorts of people to mean all sorts of things. Like “democracy”.

That’s really because (like democracy) socialism is such a good idea that all sorts of political tricksters and frauds have wanted to lay claim to it.

William Morris was famous as a designer, but also an active socialist. Over 130 years ago, at the time when socialism was first becoming a stable and organised movement, he summed up how he understood it.

“What I mean by socialism is a condition of society in which there should be neither rich nor poor, neither master nor servant, neither brain-sick brain-workers, nor heart-sick hand-workers, in a word, in which all people would be living in equality of condition, and would manage their affairs unwastefully, and with the full consciousness that harm to one would mean harm to all — the realisation at last of the meaning of the word commonwealth”.

The language seems old-fashioned, but the thought is as relevant now as it was then.

Measured against that definition, the old USSR and the East European states which called themselves socialist were the very opposite. There, a minority of bureaucrats lived in luxury and lorded it over the workers.

Real socialism is more than just a good idea, and more than just a different interpretation from the tricksters, because it builds on how the working class develops under the existing economic system, the private-profit or capitalist system.

By working class we mean everyone who has to sell their capacity to labour to an employer for a wage in order to live. (Also, of course, the children and elderly or disabled people who depend on others’ wages).

The employer, who is a position to buy our capacity to labour because they’re rich and own the factories, offices, the equipment, and facilities necessary for production, makes profits through the exchange.

In Britain these days, for example, each worker produces an average of about £74,000 in goods and services. Of that, just £22,000 comes back to the worse-off 80% of households in wages.

The employers try to increase their cut by keeping wages down, by pushing us to work harder and longer, and dividing us so that some groups of workers can be pushed down to even lower wages.

Across all countries and times, workers respond by organising to help each other, and banding together to improve their collective conditions. That is what trade unions are about. That’s solidarity.

Socialism is solidarity raised up and projected to become the guiding principle of all society. It will get rid of exploitation by making the factories, offices, equipment, facilities, collective social property, rather than private property run for private gain.

The privileges and perks of managers, officials, bureaucrats and shareholders will be abolished. There will be democratic self-rule at all levels of the economy, including the workplace. Each electorate will control its representatives and be able to use a right of recall and re-election at any time.

Production will be democratically planned for need. Waste will be reduced. Economic activity will serve human life, rather than human life serving “the economy”.

Individual liberty will expand.

Versions of this picture of socialism have been widely though vaguely recognised as long-term aims in the labour movement for decades. Only, with the movement lacking confidence and daring, its leaders of the movement have too often aimed only to go forward inch by inch, on ground which the capitalists are simultaneously moving backwards beneath our feet.

Build up the confidence and daring! That’s what the active socialists work for.