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STOP THE DEPORTATIONS

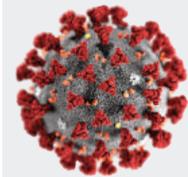
Stop West Bank annexation!

Demonstration
Thu 27 Feb, 6pm at
Kensington Court, W8
5DL, opposite Israeli
embassy. The weak or
low-key government
responses across the
world to Trump point
up the need for the left
to protest.

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Coronavirus and climate change

Climate change has
made such outbreaks
more likely, argues
Angela Driver



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Dale Street records
what's shifted, and
what's stayed fixed,
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How can Sanders beat Trump?



Sanders campaign

By Eric Lee

In early June, voters in the U.S. territory of the Virgin Islands will go to the polls to choose their delegates for the Democratic National Convention. When that happens, the primary season will be officially over, though it is likely to end well before that.

If polls today are accurate and nothing much changes in the next few months (rather large assumptions, obviously), according to *The New York Times* and the respected FiveThirtyEight website, Bernie Sanders is likely to be the nominee of the Democratic Party.

He is already generally acknowledged to be the front-runner due to the implosion of the Joe Biden campaign following his disastrous results in Iowa.

No one knows how the next few months will pan out, though it does seem increasingly likely that the field will narrow to Sanders and one other Democrat, representing what journalists like to call the “moderate wing” of the party.

That could be Pete Buttigieg, who did exceptionally well in

Iowa, but is not expected to do well in upcoming states with more diverse populations. It could be Michael Bloomberg, the billionaire candidate, who has bought his way into the next round of candidate debates. Whoever it is, the contrast with Sanders will be sharp.

We will know much more after “Super Tuesday” on 3 March when many key states – including the biggest of them all, California – vote. It may even turn out that on the morning after, we will pretty much know who’s going to be the Democratic candidate to take on Trump.

FIGHTING TRUMP

Which means that the Sanders campaign, assuming that it continues to do very well, will need to be thinking even now about pivoting to the campaign against Trump having defeated all the other Democratic candidates.

Sanders has already done a very smart thing in insisting that he and all the other candidates commit themselves to rallying around whoever Democratic voters choose to be the party’s choice this year. In 2016, Sanders took a lot of flak from the left for endorsing Clinton in the end. This year, raising the demand for party unity even if the party chooses a self-styled “democratic

socialist” seems like a very smart move by the Vermont senator.

In addition to rallying the whole party around a Sanders candidacy, and ensuring that defeated candidates like Bloomberg don’t launch third party efforts, Sanders has to become laser-focussed on defeating not just Donald Trump but Trumpism. And that means trying to figure out how Trump won in 2016.

It means first of all rejecting that idea that all Trump voters are idiots and bigoted people supported Trump. But many of those same people voted – twice – for Obama.

The reality is that for many working-class Americans, Trump spoke for their concerns about liberal elites and a process of globalisation that seemed to be destroying jobs. In 2016, Trump and Sanders had similar positions on some of the trade deals that the Obama administration had negotiated – deals which Clinton defended.

Even union members turned out in large numbers to vote for Trump, not believing that Clinton cared about them.

Trump promised things he could not deliver, and had no intention of delivering. As a result, he faces the real possibility of suffering electoral defeat in November. Knowing this, he has decided to weaponise



racism, Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment. These are the traditional tools of the American right, and they have worked well in the past.

ANSWERS

This is why Sanders’ unifying, class-wide message of solidarity is so powerful. Alone among the Democratic candidates, he offers real answers to those working class voters who abandoned Obama for

Trump four years ago.

If, as predicted, he wins the Democratic nomination, he will need to sharpen that message and push back against the racism and sexism that have become the signatures of the Trump presidency.

That is the only way he can win. □

• Eric Lee is the organiser of “London for Bernie”, writing here in a personal capacity.

Hong Kong: “Resist tyranny, join a union”

By Chen Ying

A notable feature so far of the eight-month political protest in Hong Kong has been the absence of industrial action. However, the five day strike by health workers at the start of February promises to dramatically change that perception.

The strike was not about wages or job cuts. At first glance it appeared to be xenophobic, as its main demand was shutting Hong Kong’s borders with China to keep out carriers of the new coronavirus from the mainland.

Strikers however saw themselves as trying to protect their working conditions and to save Hong Kong and its under-resourced health service from being overwhelmed by a city-wide virus outbreak.

Strikers’ anger was directed against an incompetent and insensitive government that is incapable of protecting its citizens’ health and well-being. The chronic and persistent shortage of nurses and doctors in public hospitals has gone on for years, exposing exhausted health workers now to serious hazards, amidst fears that there are insufficient masks and other medical supplies to cope with the rising numbers infected by the new coronavirus, while there is no end to

potential carriers entering the city from the mainland.

The Health Authority Employees Alliance (HAEA) registered as a new trade union in December 2019. By 26 January, it had threatened to strike for five days, starting 3 February, if the Health Authority did not respond to its demands to prevent the new virus from Wuhan from spreading to the city.

DEMANDS

The union pressed the government to stop any visitors from Wuhan, establish more isolation wards, suspend non-emergency services, follow up escape cases of infected patients, and supply sufficient facilities for medical staff to do their jobs. It threatened to escalate the strike if there was no response from the HA after five days.

By the eve of the threatened strike, the Philippines had its first death from the virus and had just banned all travellers from China and Hong Kong, and many of China’s neighbours, including Vietnam and Kazakhstan, had imposed bans on travellers from China. HAEA had balloted members in non-essential services and raised their demands on the government to totally close land, sea and air links with the whole of China.

On 3 February, over 2000 health workers went on strike. The HKSAR (Hong Kong Special Autonomous Region) Government announced the closure of most border crossing points with China, except for the Macau Bridge, the Shenzhen Bay crossing, and the airport.

Health workers responded by striking in greater numbers the next day, over 7000 according to HAEA. The Government then announced that all travellers from China into Hong Kong would be subject to a 14 day quarantine, effective from midnight on Saturday 8 Feb. The strike continued.

The strike leaders demanded open talks with both the Health Authority and the Government, and when they were turned down, thousands went to occupy the Health Authority’s administration building on Thursday and Friday.

In the face of management intransigence, and signs of patients’ distress in frontline services, a ballot to further escalate the industrial action into the second week was held on Friday. The 3000 odd who voted to continue were outnumbered by over 4000 voting against, and the strike ended.

The union’s other key demands, about increasing medical supplies to frontline hospitals and no vic-

timisation of strikers, were not answered, and the Government claimed that the 14 day quarantine announcement had deterred most people from travelling to Hong Kong from China.

It was an untidy end to the action, and the relatively inexperienced union leadership may have overestimated members’ appetite for escalating the action. Nevertheless the morale of union members and the public’s support for the strikers remained very solid.

The new union’s membership is around 18,000, just under a quarter of all health workers. Its membership has grown throughout the past month and is likely to continue growing. Unionisation has been an accelerating trend in the latter months of 2019 as the protest movement continued to radicalise the city’s population.

RESIST

“Resist Tyranny, Join a Union” became a regular chant on some marches, especially the one on New Year’s Day 2020.

There were 135 applications to form unions in the second half of 2019, compared to only 10 in the same period in 2018. At least 23 were recognised and registered.

The growing links between the

protest movement and newly formed trade unions is set to continue and prove to be a thorn in the side of the Government.

This trend is part of the protest movement’s strategy of gaining more leverage for future elections to both the Legislative Council, where there are five functional constituency places to represent trade unions, as well as for places on the 1200-strong electoral college that will elect the next Chief Executive next year. This amounts to a serious challenge to the current constitutional means by which Beijing keeps control of Hong Kong.

The HK Federation of Trade Unions, a pro-Beijing organisation, was active in protests against the British colonial rule in HK in 1967, while the Cultural revolution was raging in China. Today the HKFTU is part of the support mechanism for the HKSAR Government, holding several Legco seats.

Just as most people would say that Hong Kong will never return to “normal” after the protest movement of 2019, so we can foresee that trade union membership and political strikes are likely to be rising from the ashes of 1967.

But this time with very different politics. □

France's pension strikes still alive

By Joséphine Simplon

The strike action renewed every day at SNCF (national rail) and RATP (Paris local transport) is over, but that doesn't mean that the battle against the government's Bill is at an end.

On the contrary. Not a day passes without one sector or another making itself heard with never-before-seen actions. The strike is still alive, whether it be:

- the strike of the firefighters who have demonstrated on 28 January
- the strike of the street cleaners and refuse workers in Ile-de-France or Marseille, who have been on strike for more than a week
- the strike of the energy workers who have organised a series of power cuts and shortages; or
- the strike of the hospital staff and doctors who have been taking turns to resign over several weeks and who are calling for a national strike day on 14 February.

Various professionals also struck in huge numbers on 3 February: staff in cultural institutions, teachers, and the fighting university and laboratory staff who held a meeting of more than 700 over the weekend of 1-2 February.

And we mustn't forget the Lycée students [roughly, 6th-Form college students] who have been organising blockades of their colleges in greater and greater numbers to protest the new Blanquer Bacca-laureate qualifications system and its famous E3C exams.

The government is starting to understand that it's not enough to go on TV and whistle down the end of the strike.

This exceptional mobilisation shows the extent to which the whole working population has rejected this reform; and the growing hatred of this government. What do they expect, when [Labour Minister Muriel] Pénicaud and the [Macronist] deputies of La République en Marche (LREM) have just been fighting down a proposal to extend statutory compassionate leave for parents who have lost a child from five to 12 days? It took an intervention from [bosses' union] MEDEF before the ruling party dropped its opposition to the measure...

What do they expect, when [Education Minister Jean-Michel] Blanquer docked a day's pay (counting the absence as a strike day) from teachers who attended the funeral of Christine Renon, the Pantin headteacher who killed herself last September? What do they expect, when the government has arrested minors for blockading their Lycée, holding them for dozens of hours? What do they expect, when the government blinds and mutilates those who stand up to its policies of injustice and social regression?

What do they expect, when Michelin, laying off its staff, demands that their laid-off employees pay the company back for staff discounts they received on tyres? Or when the SNCF state railway company pays bonuses to non-strikers and the RATP local transport firm punishes strikers?

While the government seems to be holding firm, one thing is clear: it has become fragile. After the Council of State [a high court which advises the executive branch on matters of law] announced serious reservations about the pro-



posed pensions reform, the government has summarily withdrawn the "Castaner circular" [a controversial letter from the Interior Minister to regional government officials mandating changes to how the local elections will be carried out, widely viewed as an attempted gerrymander].

EN MARCHÉ TROUBLES

But that's not all. After all the disruptions faced during the swearing-in of LREM deputies and ministers, now the LREM local election candidates are facing their own troubles. [Prime Minister] Édouard Philippe himself had to face a welcome committee of strikers when he went to Le Havre.

And just days away from the parliamentary debate on the pension reform bill, divisions are breaking out within the President's parliamentary majority. On 28 January, the deputy representing the second

constituency of French citizens overseas (Latin America and Caribbean), Paula Forteza, quit LREM: since then she has been followed by almost 20 other deputies.

In terms of local politics, the case of [the mathematician Cedric] Villani [who quit LREM and is running against their candidate in the Paris mayoral race] isn't unique: LREM has suffered splits in 17 of the 50 biggest towns in France, and more than a third of municipalities overall.

And that's before we get onto the 22,000 amendments, the motion of censure, and the criticisms raised by the right regarding the conditions under which the bill is to be scrutinised. These are all additional signs of weakness, which should offer encouragement to continue and ramp up the fight.

The return to work by sectors who had been on strikes renewed day-by-day, the weariness created

by the national inter-union strike coalition's calendar of days of action, the opening of the parliamentary debates and the looming school holidays: all this means that we need an open debate about strategies for building the mobilisation.

While we should continue explaining the need for strikes and working to deepen and spread them, the way that the strike will develop over the short term is conditioned by all these factors.

The movement needs to find a second wind, to lift spirits, and to help strikers find fresh confidence. And why not a national demonstration to re-start the engine? □

• Translated from the website of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (www.npa2009.org) by Michael Elms.

First climate strike of 2020



By Misha Zubrowski

February 14 will see the first youth climate strike in the UK in 2020, the first since December's general election.

Tens of thousands of young people and students, from dozens of locations across the UK, will hit the streets to demand meaningful action on climate change. (See ukscn.org and bit.ly/ys4c-e for locations.)

Climate change gets more urgent every day that passes, and the necessity of a large and bold climate movement is only more starkly drawn under a strengthened hard-

right government led by a climate sceptic (see bit.ly/bj-cs). The election has likely dealt a blow to our momentum, but we can rebuild.

We must seek to build the strength, the organisational and democratic depth, the political boldness of the youth climate strikes — advocating for a class-struggle orientation.

These climate strikes also present an opportunity for making steps in environmental organisation at work. Small actions, such as photo-shoots or videos (see for example bit.ly/tw-v-cc), or rallies or delegations to local demonstrations, can create the embryos of further organising.

Beyond the days themselves, union branches should invite climate strikers to meetings, and offer support. These discussions can and should be linked to formulating

workplace environmental demands, demands that can be made of our employers, and campaigning around these. □

For workers' climate action: climate change, capitalism and working-class struggle



A collection of articles and reviews, produced by Workers' Liberty (£3)

• workersliberty.org/
climate-pamphlet



Stephanie McMillan

“The system will track your death”



By Jim Denham

Would coronavirus demonstrate the superiority of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” when it comes to dealing with a major crisis?

The *Morning Star* (and Communist Party of Britain) certainly thought so in late January/early February. And for a while it looked as though they might have a point.

In a piece entitled “The Planned economy vs the coronavirus” (30 Jan, republished from the US Stalinist paper *People’s World*), C J Atkins noted: “The World Health Organisation is praising the Chinese government’s quick response to the crisis... The scale of that commitment is now ramping up in a massive way - showcasing the ability of the country’s socialist state to marshal resources rapidly and efficiently in the service of public health.”

A few days later (2 Feb) *Morning Star* For-

eign Editor Steve Sweeney noted “China is set to open a new hospital in Wuhan to deal with the coronavirus today, just 10 days after construction began... Work began on the 1,000-bed Huoshenshan Hospital on 23 January and Chinese state media said that the last brick was laid yesterday morning... It has an area of 25,000 square metres, and 1,400 staff will operate the facility.”

It really did look as though China’s authoritarian, top-down system was dealing with the crisis with an effectiveness that a liberal western democracy would have found impossible. This looked like being a brilliant vindication for the *Morning Star* (which regularly carries uncritical reports repeating the regime’s propaganda) and the CPB (whose general secretary Robert Griffiths, calls himself a “big fan” of China).

But strangely, since comrade Sweeney’s report on the near-miraculous creation of the 1,000 bed hospital in ten days - which was true, by the way - the *Star* had no more to say until a report this Monday repeating the regime’s claim that new cases were falling - the opposite of the truth, as it turns out.

The explanation is not difficult to fathom:

since late January, when the World Health Organisation and even some of the mainstream western media, were praising China’s “unprecedented” and “decisive” response, a new picture has been emerging:

It turns out that although the first case of coronavirus was reported on 8th December, the Wuhan health authorities took over three weeks to issue a notice. Between 3 and 16 January, the authorities falsely claimed there were no new cases and no evidence of human-to-human transmission, the key driver of any epidemic.

And even after that, on January 18, the city’s Baibunting district mass banquet was allowed to go ahead, further spreading the infection.

It then emerged that a doctor, Li Wenliang, had warned an online chat group on 30 December, of a new illness spreading in Wuhan, only to be reprimanded by the police and made to sign a document stating that his warning constituted “illegal behaviour.” At least seven other medical professionals were warned over “rumour-mongering” and “disrupting social order.”

Then, of course, on Friday 7 February Dr Li

died of the virus. It was front page news in most bourgeois papers while in China social media has been awash with posts mourning the death of a martyr. It wasn’t even mentioned in the *Morning Star*.

The Chinese authorities are terrified of anger spilling onto the streets. Hundreds of millions of users on China’s Twitter-like Weibo have shared pictures of Dr Li and the words to ‘Do You Hear the People Sing?’, a song about revolution from *Les Misérables*.

On past form the government will blame local officials and sack a few sacrificial lambs. But the real problem will remain - the lack of free speech and the absence of a civil society capable of exposing corruption and efforts to bury bad news.

But there is some good news: the *Morning Star*’s Steve Sweeney reports that the government has developed the Wuhan Neighbours mobile phone app which means:

“If you need to see a doctor, your community will arrange a car to send you to the hospital through volunteers. At the same time, the system will track your progress: hospitalisation, treatment at home, discharge, death, etc.” □

Not so worthy



In an otherwise excellent piece in *Solidarity* 534, (“Blaming ‘the intellectuals’,” bit.ly/blame-int), Len Glover is much too kind to Ian (“white working class”) Lavery, saying that he “has, in many respects, a worthy record and before becoming an MP was President of the National Union of Mineworkers.”

Indeed he was; but the Certification Officer reported the following on the National Union of Mineworkers [NUM] (Northumberland Area) (below: “the Union”), of which Ian Lavery was General Secretary.

This organisation reported 240 members each year from 2002 to 2012, and 10 members in 2013 and later years.

“The Union’s [returns] for the years 2010 to 2012 which recorded payments under the description ‘redundanc’ to the General Secretary (or former General Secretary) as follows... Total: £147,424...”

“The Union’s then General Secretary Mr Ian Lavery ceased to be General Secretary when he was elected as the MP for Wansbeck on 7 May 2010 and [complainants] questioned in what way this was redundancy...”

“As a result of our investigations the Union established that they had overpaid Mr Lavery. The Union and Mr Lavery subsequently reached an agreement with regards to this overpayment.

“The Union was not adequately able to explain why they should have taken full responsibility for the under-performance of the endowment policy taken out by Mr and Mrs Lavery [set up to cover money advanced by the Union for Mr Lavery to buy a house]... It is far from clear why the Union should have made an arrangement with the Provident and Benevolent Fund to write off the whole of Mr and Mrs Lavery’s £72,500 debt to them”. □

Jessie Ramsey, Birmingham

Use conference policies



Mark Osborn’s call to get Labour out on the streets (*Solidarity* 533) describes some clear, radical policies we should push for the party to campaign around - on schools, the NHS, housing, nationalisation...

Fairly detailed left-wing policies on most of these issues have already been agreed by Labour Party conference. Those conference policies are a source of useful demands, and an at least somewhat raised platform from which to campaign. They can also aid the fight to democratise Labour, through the demand for a sovereign party conference.

For instance: the 2017 manifesto promised the biggest council house-building program “for at least thirty years”, which implies building 15,000 council homes a year - a step up, but far short. But last year’s conference voted for building 150,000 social rented homes a year, of which 100,000 must be council homes, £10bn annual funding for councils to do it, and ending “right to buy”.

Audio of *Solidarity*

Many thanks to the volunteers who have enabled us to produce an audio version of the paper.

Links to the audio version are at workersliberty.org/audio, and can be found through many podcast providers: search “Workers’ Liberty” or “Solidarity & More”. Email awl@workersliberty.org for e-reader versions of *Solidarity*.

If Labour had argued for this kind of policy for several years, let alone campaigned properly, the political situation would likely be much better.

Since 2016, conference has passed policies on immigration, climate change, union rights, the NHS, schools and other issues which, while not radical by our standards, are miles better than what the party leadership has advocated (though, as Mark says, actually campaigning is a whole other matter). Versions of some of these (for instance on housing) appeared in the 2019 manifesto - but generally watered down, and in any case conference decisions are surely a more solid basis for campaigning than manifesto policies announced last minute.

Obviously socialists should not limit our demands to what Labour conference has passed. Apart from anything else, we need to continue to take the initiative in strengthening conference policy. But where we can hang demands on policy passed in the broad labour movement, that helps.

Trade union policy, often ignored by the unions themselves as well as Labour, is also important. Take Mark’s demand for nationalisation of the banks. This was passed by the TUC Congress in September 2019, on the ini-



tiative of the Fire Brigades Union, but who talks about that? □

Daryl Leon, London



56 pages A4. Cover price £5. With postage — non-UK £7, UK £6. Buy online at bit.ly/rl-gr

Stop the deportations!

6699 Editorial

On Tuesday 11 February, the Tories deported at least some of 50 people to Jamaica on a charter flight.

This was only the second deportation flight the Home Office had chartered to Jamaica since the Windrush scandal broke. Some of the 50 scheduled for the flight had a last-minute temporary reprieve thanks to a court order late on 10 February.

Many of those deported or threatened with deportation have lived in the UK since childhood. Many have families here, families now facing not only heartbreak and chaos but in some cases destitution. Many of the deportees are at clearly demonstrated risk, for instance from gang violence, if they return to Jamaica.

The Johnson-Patel regime does not care. Priti Patel walked out of the House of Commons chamber as Labour MP David Lammy was asking about how this deportation relates to Windrush.

The attitude of her Home Office is summed up by its ruling that one deportee does not have a "genuine and subsisting" relationship with his wife and five month old child, and that separating them would "not be unduly harsh".

Only 36 victims of the government's mistreatment of Windrush-generation migrants have received any of the compensation promised after the early-2018 scandal, out of over 1,108 that have applied so far. Only £62,198 has been paid out, of £200 million allotted.

170 MPs and members of the House of Lords, mostly Labour, issued a call for the 12 February flight to be halted. They did that because of the energetic action of one socialist

MP, Nadia Whittome from Nottingham East, with the backing of Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott.

Their letter calls for all deportations to be cancelled until the Windrush Lessons Learned Review is published and its recommendations implemented.

We can go further. The Tories are focusing on the minority of deportees guilty of serious crimes. Many were convicted of minor offences, many have had no legal difficulties since, and some insist they were wrongly convicted. But in any case, deporting people after they have served a sentence amounts to a cruel form of double-punishment, focused on migrants. It must stop.

This case is hit the headlines because of the Windrush angle, but all deportations ruin lives. They should stop immediately and permanently. □



Labour leadership: what about the anti-strike laws?

6699 Editorial

Speaking in Sheffield on 7 February, Labour leader candidate Rebecca Long-Bailey pledged to back all striking workers "no questions asked", promising to be a leader "as comfortable on the picket line as at the dispatch box".

She argued that building up trade unionism should be central to increasing Labour support, including in areas lost to the Tories, and said a Labour government should aim to increase union membership by a million in its first year.

We are not supporting Long-Bailey, because of her close ties to the established Labour "backroom" cabals of the Unite union hierarchy and long-time Stalinist officials, and because she is no better (sometimes worse) than the other candidates on key issues of Labour democracy, especially conference sovereignty.

However, credit is due here. This is better than Starmer's appeal to the safely dead good cause of strikes several decades in the past, to say nothing of Lisa Nandy's dismissal of "placard-waving" (as if Labour does much of it!) and cautioning against "picking a side" (it's strikers vs consumers, apparently) in strikes.

However, we should ask the following:

- What about repealing the anti-trade union and anti-strike laws – all of them, in line with clear Labour conference policy? Long Bailey's campaign has remained silent or at best highly ambiguous about this. She has not replied to the Free Our Unions pledge for leadership candidates (bit.ly/union-spledge).

- Will she be better than Jeremy Corbyn has been?

There is a pervasive view that Corbyn has stood strongly and consistently with workers in struggle. A closer look reveals a much more mixed picture. The party under Corbyn has done virtually nothing to support strikes

and workers' struggles; and the same is true of most of its leadership. Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell is a partial exception.

Corbyn himself has done much less than you might expect. This is important because he has a voice and mobilising power much greater than others. Of course he has been better than his predecessors as leader – but that was a low bar to beat. He has not been a consistent presence, energetic campaigner or loud voice in support of strikes.

He attended a protest for the last McDonald's strike – a politically safe and photogenic event, but not really an ongoing industrial dispute. In contrast, he has largely steered clear of much more sustained, disruptive and controversial rail strikes against Drive Only Operation. Ditto, any dispute where the employer is a Labour council (which includes some important ones, like the Durham and Derby TAs).

He attended a junior doctors' demonstration in 2017, but not any picket lines.

Most perplexing of all is the Picturehouse dispute, going on for two years at multiple sites a few Tube stops from Parliament. Corbyn's office evaded repeated requests for him to join the picket lines – something which in 2017 might well have made a decisive difference. Corbyn did nothing to help the strike except a short written statement right at the end of the dispute.

We need to know whether Rebecca Long-Bailey means something different.

Constituency Labour Party nominations for the Labour Party leader, deputy leader, and National Executive elections close on 14 February.

Many warm words have been spoken about "democratising" the party, but aside from disagreement on open selections (RLB for, Nandy against, Starmer not saying), with few specifics.

Attitudes to Labour councils and councillors have also generated a lot of words and some heat – many Labour councillors don't like Long-Bailey, basically because they are right-wing – but none of the candidates is saying much distinctive about the issues. □

Get Labour onto the streets!

6699 Editorial

In an interview on 5 February, Labour leader candidate Lisa Nandy said: "The entirety of the British Left... we are starting to be very much in danger of abandoning politics for protest."

"By politics what I mean is a willingness to negotiate the shared challenges that we face".

This line is the opposite of what the labour movement needs as we face Boris Johnson's Tory government.

The "challenges we face" — closed doors to migrants, public services cut back, all the rest — are not "shared" at all by the top Tory politicians and the wealthy class they represent.

And the Tory government is not offering "negotiations" even on "challenges" which threaten us all, like climate change.

Most of what the labour movement has gained over the centuries, and of what we have been able to conserve over the hard decades since Thatcher, has come from protest, mobilisation, action, strikes, demonstrations — not sighing, sitting back, and hoping some clever person will negotiate well for us.

Nandy continued:

"On the Left, most of us came into politics in order to campaign, in order to stand up

for certain values...

"But it is not enough to pick a side and shout, especially at the moment when the country feels so needlessly divided..."

"Every time there is a strike in Britain, the phone call goes into the leader's office: are you supporting this strike or not? When it was Ed there would be lots of debate about it, with Jeremy it's fairly straightforward."

"Our response has only ever been to pick a side. When I look at the most recent strikes for example, on public transport [there, workers who commute have] got their interests pitted against a group of people in the public sector who are probably quite low paid, their jobs are pretty insecure and they are standing up for their rights."

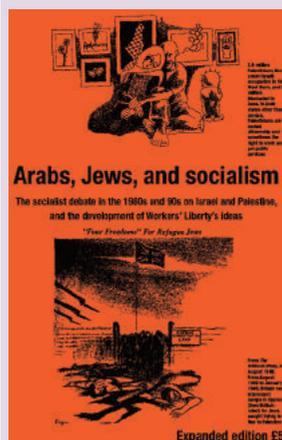
"How is it then that Labour's response is that we pick one side or another and ignore the fact that it is the system at fault and that needs to be changed?"

Indeed, the rail unions want to change the system of running the railways — from a mess of privatised for-profit operations, to a public service under public ownership.

But the railworkers know that they will get near that only by standing up for themselves, and getting the labour movement to "pick their side".

Get Labour onto the streets! Demand the Labour Party starts a drive, with demonstrations, rallies, against the Tory government and for essential public services!

Pick the side of the working class! □



Arabs Jews, and Socialism

Third reprint, with an additional intro by Sean Matgamna.
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Labour NEC: vote Townsend and Wright!

By Mohan Sen

The by-election for three places on Labour's National Executive Committee is messy, with multiple "left" slates or partial slates in competition.

Momentum, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, the rump Labour Representation Committee, and the (Chris-Williamson-ite) Labour Left Alliance are supporting different combinations of candidates.

- CLPD are backing Lauren Townsend and Cecile Wright for the two CLP places

- Momentum, Lauren Townsend and Leigh Drennan, plus Nav Mishra for the BAME place

- LRC, Jo Bird and Deborah Hobson, plus Hassan Ahmed for BAME

- LLA, Jo Bird and Mohammed Azam, plus Mehmood Mirza for BAME.

Yes, it's a little dizzying.

Jo Bird and Mohammed Azam, who were doing well with CLP nominations, have just been suspended from the party for unknown reasons and thus disqualified. Despite our

decisive disagreements with the LLA on many issues, and in particular antisemitism, this seems like an anti-democratic stitch-up.

There is only one right-wing slate, and it is clearly right-wing, organised by Labour First: Johanna Baxter and Gurinder Singh Josan, plus Carol Sewell.

We don't want the right-wing candidates to win, and for the first time in years, they may win. So?

It's difficult to see clear political contrasts between the candidates from their election statements. The rump LRC is very poor politically (bit.ly/lrc-s), the LLA even more so. The CLPD option seems better than Momentum for several reasons.

Firstly, for all its organisational and political problems, CLPD is more democratic and open to discussion, and thus more of a forum to hold NEC members to account. Secondly, both the Momentum-backed candidates are full-time unelected union officials – not what we need representing the left. Lastly, other things being equal, a black woman candidate is preferable to a white man.

Vote for Cecile Wright and Lauren Townsend □



New links on Labour left

By Sacha Ismail

On 5 February representatives of nine Labour-oriented campaigning organisations attended a meeting convened by Norwich South MP Clive Lewis.

They were: Labour Campaign for Free Movement, Labour for a Four Day Week, Labour Homelessness Campaign, Labour Campaign for Council Housing, Labour for a Socialist Europe, Free Our Unions, Momentum NHS, Labour Transformed and The World Transformed. Nottingham East MP Nadia Whittome was also there.

It was, in many respects, a follow-up to the previous get-togethers organised under the banner "Labour Campaigns Together" (labourcampaignstogether.com). LCT was created to organise pressure for left-wing policies passed at last year's Labour Party conference to be carried out. It did some useful but limited bits, and since the election has been pretty low-profile.

So much has happened in the last few months that the discussion on 5 February inevitably ranged all over the place. There seemed to be consensus that maintaining and developing a network of Labour-focused left-wing campaigns can be useful. There will be

another meeting in a few weeks, perhaps with a few more organisations, to discuss exactly what the purpose of a network should be and, if possible, makes initial plans.

Minimally, to start with, such a network should: advertise and popularise the policies passed at Labour conference and fight to get the party campaigning for them; promote genuine democratisation, above all the idea of a sovereign decision-making conference; and provide a forum in which parts of the critical-thinking Labour left can at least exchange information and ideas.

Those limited goals are worth fighting for, but even in themselves quite ambitious. Dis-

ussion and clarification would be needed to go further.

At the meeting a few people flagged up the idea of an alternative left to Momentum. Practical difficulties aside, those present clearly had major disagreements on what the left should stand for. A discussion about Clive Lewis' attempted leadership campaign turned into one on "progressive alliances" – a welcome debate, but it couldn't get very far, and participants had a wide range of views, many of them sharply contradictory.

I'll report on the next meeting. □

W. Mids feels the Byrne

By Gerry Bates

Right-winger Liam Byrne has been selected as the Labour candidate to unseat Tory West Midlands metro-mayor Andy Street in May.

Out of 6,948 votes, Byrne received 3,105 first preferences. There were two left candidates, former Dudley council leader Pete Lowe on 2,034 votes and former Respect activist Salma Yaqoob on 1,809.

Yaqoob's transfers did not go to Lowe, or not much more than they went to no second preference or to Byrne. After transfers Byrne beat Lowe 56.5-43.5%.

Byrne has, for obvious reasons, made vague leftist noises, but he was a loyal minister in the Blair-Brown regime, nominated Yvette Cooper in 2015 and supported the coup against Corbyn. He also has a record of playing to anti-migrant bigotry. Yet very early in the campaign, for reasons that are still not clear, he got the backing of Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell.

Lowe's campaign emerged out of local ac-

tivist networks; it was eventually supported by Unison, the Bakers' Union, FBU, NUM, the Musicians' Union and the Labour Homelessness Campaign, as well as a number of local Momentum groups.

The Momentum National Coordinating Group then weighed in and backed Yaqoob, whom the NEC exempted from the normal rule about length of membership for candidates despite complaints from Bradford West Labour MP Naz Shah about what she said was Yaqoob's demagogic campaign (as an independent) against Shah in the 2017 general election.

MESSES

There followed support for Yaqoob from Unite, CWU, some Momentum groups and high profile figures including Owen Jones.

The grassroots left in the West Midlands will continue to organise, to beat the Tories in May, put Byrne and co. under pressure, and avoid messes like this one in future. □

Labour Campaign for Trans Rights launch

By Natalia Cassidy

On 10 February the Labour Campaign for Trans Rights (LCTR) constituted itself as an online presence and released a launch statement and a series of 12 pledges for Labour supporters to sign up to (bit.ly/LabCTR).

This is a campaign launched by trans and non-binary Labour Party supporters with the aim of shifting the terrain within the party on the question on trans rights, educating activists on issues of transphobia and bigotry as well as seeking to shift Labour Party policy on support for trans rights and on issues around trans healthcare in particular.

The campaign only exists in online form as it stands, but there will now be a drive to organise a physical launch meeting at which a committee can be elected and perspectives and questions of strategy and tactics can be discussed more substantially than online organisation allows for.

The campaign is not without its problems. Pledges 10 and 12, which call for the NEC to rule out motions deemed to be transphobic and for transphobic individuals to be ex-



pelled, are a cause for concern. They are indicative of a wider trend within the left of an over-reliance on bureaucratic manoeuvring and empowering structures over which lay members have no control and which could very easily be used against the left.

It is not for the party machine to determine which activists or which motions cross an undetermined line of bigotry. It is our duty as activists to defeat bad ideas with better ideas.

We cannot hope to change society more widely and win people over to liberatory ideas and politics if we are so reliant on bureaucratic methods of defeating bad politics in our own movement. □

Liverpool Mayor says he'll refuse cuts

By Jane Edwards

Liverpool's Labour mayor Joe Anderson has said "I will refuse to make any further cuts to our budget because we are now at the stage where doing so will mean closing down vital services."

He added: "This means we are entering a crisis point in the city's history and it will put us on a collision course with the government but we aren't prepared to play their games any more."

"I will say this now — I will not close any libraries or children's centres in this city, I will not set a budget that cuts any of these vital services".

The Tories have already cut £436 million from Liverpool's funding since 2010. This year the council is looking to make £30 million worth of cuts from front-line services.

In the plans they have recently released for consultation the council are planning to balance the books through cutting services, increasing income, and reducing demand.

It assumes a council tax rise of 3.99%. Other plans include:

- reduce residential care places for chil-

dren, £2 million

- reduce number of teenagers coming into services, £1million
- supported living transformation £2.5 million
- cut public health grant by £1.4 million
- means test adult social care £1million
- £11 million increase in fees for home care providers and residential homes.

Fortunately for Joe Anderson, libraries and children's centres aren't on the list.

Liverpool Against the Cuts has just begun campaigning against this year's council cuts and will be appealing to Labour councillors to oppose them too. Until Anderson's statement, the response has been the usual — it's the Tories' fault and there's nothing we can do.

Maybe Joe Anderson is changing his mind and deciding that now Labour councillors should support those fighting against the cuts; or maybe there's a reselection process for Mayor about to start.

Either way anti-cuts campaigners should ask him to speak at meetings and rallies building opposition to the latest round of cuts in local services. □

Limited edition t-shirts available



Workers' Liberty has created a new range of t-shirts.

Order them for £12 plus postage: £1.50 UK, £5 international. 100% cotton and available in sizes from XS through to XXL.

As well as being incredibly stylish, these serve three functions: fundraising for our vital activism, championing foundational political ideals, and raising the profile of our politics and organisation.

- Buy online at workersliberty.org/t-shirts

Class struggle environmentalism

Saturday 14 March, 10.30am-5.30pm
Park View School, London, N15 3QR

Join this day of discussions and workshops!

Buy tickets, or book a free space in the creche online. The last two years have seen an upsurge of environmental activism: the youth climate strikes and Extinction Rebellion. Workers' Liberty activists have been involved in these actions, and in previous

waves of climate activism.

Capitalism is the central driver of environmental crises. Class struggle environmentalism, and the ideas of Marxist ecology, are key to stopping climate catastrophes. Workers' Liberty has been developing, debating, and putting into practice these politics.

Save the date, book transport and tickets, invite everyone you know!

Early bird tickets end 14 February: £18 high waged, £8 low waged, £3 unwaged. £1 for school students. Tickets and creche can also be booked in person or over the phone. □

- bit.ly/14-3-20



Protest hits new Ukraine labour law

From Social Movement

Twenty cities experienced a wave of anger on 30 January against the government's antisocial actions, in particular its draft legislation "On Labour". The decision to carry out a national mobilisation was adopted at the Trade Union Forum on 16 January.

In Kyiv, thousands of protesters filled the road alongside the Cabinet of Ministers building. Trade union activists together with young leftists chanted anti-capitalist slogans: "The law on labour is exploitation", "Labour under capitalism seriously damages your health", "Trade unions across the world oppose parasites in power", "Don't work till you die for their millions".

Social Movement activists and sympathisers carried a banner which read "Even coronavirus will die from such work". After all, the continual stress from the risk of dismissal and the unlimited increase in work rates and targets will exhaust anyone's strength.

This legislation does not solve a single problem which concerns the ordinary worker, but only aggravates it even more.

1. The low level of pay. Wages here remain the lowest in Europe. Rather than encourage the employers to pay decent wages, the state has decided to cut them even more. Premium pay for overtime work and work on weekends and holidays has been reduced from 100% of the hourly rate to 20%. You will be able to collect wages that are in arrears only one year after the arrears have been formally acknowledged.

2. Discrimination. Employers today discriminate against vulnerable categories of workers. Mothers, people with disabilities and students are regarded as unable to fully commit themselves to their jobs. The legislation permits employers to sever all relations with such "unnecessary" workers just by paying them a modest compensation.

3. The critical state of labour protection. The absence of legal grounds and limits for overtime work will lead to over-exploitation. New enterprises will start working without the consent of the State Labour Inspectorate. Workers in hazardous industries are not guaranteed additional leave.

3. Workers' lack of rights before their employers. The grounds for concluding fixed-

term contracts, particularly with journalists, will be expanded. Where a job is created as a result of a proposal by an employee, the said employee will not have to be formally dismissed if the job is terminated: it will simply be enough to withdraw the job from him or her. The procedure for dismissal will not include the removal from the records of explanations and reprimands for the dismissal, which at the moment can still be challenged.

5. Informal employment. The radical lowering of fines will certainly not encourage employers to come out of the shadow economy. The fine for not allowing an inspector who is looking for informal workers on to the work site will be reduced to one sixth of the present fine. At the same time, the workers themselves will hardly be eager to secure formal terms of employment: their rights in case of dismissal will differ very little from workers who have been taken on "by verbal agreement".

Around fifteen thousand people took part in the 30 January protests all across Ukraine. That's an army of people united in anger against the antisocial, neoliberal policies. The participants in these protests, it would seem, will not be satisfied by piecemeal concessions.

The wave of protest cannot be stopped simply by withdrawing the draft legislation No. 2708. The people demand the complete overhaul of the system, including the resignation of the government.

The crisis will continue. Therefore, the populace should start thinking now: are they ready to take their own destiny in their hands and put forward people from their own midst to replace the oligarchs' politicians? What can be the plan for change?

The Social Movement reminds you of the list of urgent demands: end the offshoring of profits to tax havens, remove oligarchs from control of the state, expand civil and social rights, introduce a moratorium on neoliberal reforms. A further consolidation of our forces is needed to realise these logical demands. □

- Excerpted from the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. More at ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org. For a useful summary of the proposed changes, see the International Trade Union Confederation bit.ly/ukrainelaws.

Coronavirus and climate change



Climate

By Angela Driver

The novel coronavirus originating in Wuhan (2019-nCoV) is a zoonotic disease. It is an infection that has passed from animals to humans.

Humans have not developed immunity to such infections. That in turn means they are often more deadly, and spread rapidly.

According to the World Health Organisation, new zoonotic infections are becoming more frequent because of climate change and other human behaviour.

Zoonotic diseases are more likely to occur when populations of animals and humans that do not normally interact come into contact with each other. Climate change makes this more likely in a number of ways.

In areas affected by climate change there is more likely to be movement of human and animal populations, as habitats change. Encroachment of human settlements on animal habitat, and destruction and degradation of ecosystems, reduces the habitat available to wildlife and results in animals living closer to humans. Urbanisation also increases the populations of animals such as rodents and mosquitoes that commonly transmit zoonotic diseases to humans.

Human movement into new areas can also lead to increased farming of animals in the area. This brings new farm animal populations in contact with humans, and the nutrient-rich waste that results can increase the number of other animals such as insects and ticks that feed from it.

Populations affected by climate change are often under increased social and economic stress, which weakens the immune system,

making infections more likely, and more widely spread.

As the world becomes hotter, our own immune system response of increasing body temperature in response to infection may become less effective against new pathogens. Increased temperatures are broadening the areas that mosquitoes can live in, and they are frequently responsible for transmitting diseases to humans.

A rise in sea levels results in more flood plains, and increased exposure of human populations to sea wildlife such as shell fish.

Our ability to produce medicines to combat illness is partly dependent on the availability of diverse ecosystems. For example, 25 % of modern medicines are derived from rainforest plants. Climate change and human behaviour continues to reduce these areas of rich diversity.

As well as causing climate change, a societal focus on trade and profit exacerbates the problem in additional ways.

The “wet market” in Wuhan has been implicated in the spread of 2019-nCoV. However the first cases of the virus are thought to have had no connection with the market. Economic conditions have led to impoverished farmers in China increasingly “farming” wild-life domestically to increase their income, and more farmers living in close quarters with wildlife.

More broadly, the misuse of antibiotics in intensive meat farming has led to resistant zoonotic bacteria such as MRSA in pig farming.

Concerns about trade and international relations, as well as the desire of government to control their population, are likely to be at the root of the suppression of whistleblowers in China. If Dr Li Wenliang’s warnings had been heeded, then containment of the virus could have started six weeks earlier.

Zoonotic pandemics can have global impli-



Overuse of antibiotics has led to the spread of resistant diseases

cations, such as the 1918 flu pandemic that originated in birds and killed at least 45 million people.

The increasing risk of zoonotic pandemics is a global threat and require a global response. The current outbreak demonstrates that capitalist states are capable of international collaboration, and rapid technological investment in the face of this current “health emergency”. But the action is largely being taken “after the horse has bolted”.

To decrease the risk of future outbreaks, ongoing rational measures are required on the basis of human need rather than profit. These include:

- Reforestation – by replanting forests, and conserving existing forests, ecosystems can

be protected, climate change reduced, and sources of future medications preserved. Projects such as “One Health” have demonstrated that the preservation of ecosystems can reduce zoonotic disease.

- Technology and research – for the benefit and use of humanity rather than for profit. Researching medications that will be useful in future outbreaks. Studying further the risk factors so preventative measures can be taken.

- Public health – of animals and humans, as well as social and economic measures to reduce stress and illness.

- Decrease in animal farming – and with it reduction in use of antibiotics, and of close contact between humans and animals. □

The potentialities of Acorn

By Dan Rawnsley

Since the general election, the “community union” Acorn has been growing.

On 22 December the *Guardian* reported on Acorn’s “glut of applications” after the 13 December exit poll. Acorn UK national organiser Nick Ballard was quoted saying “We’ve had hundreds of new members join.”

Acorn has branches in Bristol, Sheffield, Manchester, Newcastle, and Brighton, and is best known as a renters’ union. The organisation has been able to turn out pickets of a hundred people to block evictions and has pressured Santander, TSB and NatWest to get rid of rent increase and “no DSS” clauses in buy-to-let mortgage agreements.

In Sheffield the campaign has won selective landlord licensing in parts of the city with poorly maintained housing.

Acorn in Bristol halted the council’s plans to remove council tax discounts for 16,000 of the city’s poorest households. In Bristol and Sheffield campaigns are underway to bring buses under a franchise system like Transport for London.

Acorn’s organising model is based on the ideas of Wade Rathke, founder of the original Acorn organisation in the United States. In the US Acorn ran minimum and living wage campaigns in over a dozen cities, did voter

registration drives, and launched many single-issue community campaigns, most notably in New Orleans, supporting residents in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

At its height, around 2009, the organisation had 500,000 members with 1200 neighbourhood chapters in over 100 US cities.

Rathke outlined an organising method in his 1973 “Acorn Community Organizing Model”. The short document was released on his blog, chieforganizer.org, in 2011, and notes that “there have been many developments and advancements over the last 35 years... but the organising model still provides a useful guide”.

The model offers a tight guide to setting up a community campaign as an individual, external activist, with details down to model agendas for initial meetings. The model expresses some anxious competitiveness about other organisations active in communities. “You need to know what the competition is – to avoid them, freeze them out, and not tread on ‘their’ issues until after you have built your base.”

Nick Ballard, quoted again in the *Guardian*, explained his thoughts on the need for Acorn. He argued that communities “need to be organised and, we would say, outside of political parties.”

There is a risk that refusing to build links

between community organisation and political organisation will make it hard to win larger-scale reforms. A serious Acorn intervention into the Labour Party could win major ground on housing policy and a range of other issues. If Acorn is able to build a network of working-class community organisations, then bringing those people in to the Labour Party to confront the bureaucrats and careerists who run it and are most of its councillors and MPs would be part of a project to transform Labour.

Callum Cant, writing for *Notes from Below* in 2017, offers a perspective for Acorn in the UK. He argues that the “model shares a lot of superficial similarities with de-politicised third-sector ‘community organising’”. However, the fundamental difference of community syndicalism comes from its orientation towards a political method. Acorn prioritises confrontational and direct tactics which put power into the hands of members on the streets”.

But the confrontational tactics do not automatically make Acorn more political. Organising and being confrontational are not political ends.

In practice Acorn branches are variable, and some not good, as regards space for political discussion. At worst Acorn can narrow down to small groups of better-off people

carrying out “confrontations” on behalf of the worse-off, and that activity crowding out political discussion and maybe crowding out self-organisation of the worse-off.

The actions Acorn takes do have an anti-capitalist political theory underpinning them. Pushing for landlord licensing, and standing up to letting agents and the police who defend them, all assume a problem with landlordism in general. Formally the landlords have the right to do what they want with their property, but we correctly do not recognise that right. Fighting for increased public ownership of transport assumes a problem with private ownership.

Acorn offers an important alternative to the world of Labour Party electoralism. It is not enough to mobilise activists to get left-of-centre MPs and councillors elected.

An important lesson of the election is that if Labour is not active in communities, then radical policies will come across as unconvincing and will fall flat with voters. Activists should try to get Labour Party branches to do more things with Acorn and more things like Acorn.

Alongside community and workplace organising, we need a political perspective that can put it in the context of fighting against capitalism and for socialism. □

Stop West Bank annexations!

By Dale Street

The Trump Plan, and the announced intentions of both of the biggest political parties in Israel (Netanyahu's Likud and Gantz's Blue and White) to annex big chunks of the West Bank, have had an eerily subdued response in the Middle East.

Action on the streets across the world is needed to block the annexations. Governments are keeping quiet, or blustering, and Boris Johnson's Tory government in Britain is the Plan's strongest supporter in Europe.

The Trump Plan, announced on 28 January, gives Israel's right wing government everything it wants – annexation of the West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley, Jerusalem as the indivisible capital of Israel, demilitarisation of the Gaza Strip, the disarming of Hamas – and even something only some Israeli right-wingers want, the transfer to the notional future Palestinian (semi) state of a heavily-Palestinian pocket of Israeli territory.

For Palestinians it offers no more than "statehood" in the form of a scattered fragments of territory devoid of genuine sovereignty. The borders, airspace, and territorial waters of an "independent" Palestine, for example, would be controlled by Israel.

In the short term, the Plan is unlikely to be implemented, but it will provide license for the Israeli government to annex the Jordan Valley and other areas and then, over coming years, to tell the Palestinians to accept the Plan or expect worse.

There have been demonstrations and agitation inside Israel against the Plan and the annexation plans. (And, behind the scenes, so it is said, Israel's military top brass also oppose annexation, for their own reasons).

There have been street protests in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip against the Plan, but only carefully choreographed and small-scale. Attacks on Israeli troops and police in early February appear to have been isolated incidents rather than the start of a co-ordinated violent confrontation.

This may change over time. Israeli attacks and Palestinian fatalities may trigger a broader wave of protests which morph into a popular mobilisation against the Plan. Not so far.

In the run-up to the Arab League conference held a few days after the Plan's announcement, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates wanted a motion which called for a resumption of peace negotiations and contained no criticism of Trump.

In the event, the 22-member-strong Arab League conference voted unanimously to reject the Plan. The for-show vote failed to cover up fundamental divisions.

Oman, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates were officially represented at the White House press conference at which Trump announced the Plan. Despite subsequent claims that they had been misled about the Plan's contents, all three states subsequently issued statements supportive of it.

Kuwait, too, has declared that it "highly appreciates" US efforts to end the Israel-Palestine conflict. Saudi Arabia "appreciates the Trump administration's efforts" and advocates talks "under the auspices of the United States." Egypt also "appreciates the administration's efforts" and is urging Israel and Palestinians to "carefully study" the Plan.

While calling for a Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders, Qatar likewise "appreciates the endeavours of President Trump and the current US administration to find so-

lutions for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict."

Jordan, although it has long been the Arab state most disposed to cooperate with Israel, has been more forthright in its verbal condemnation of the Plan. It has stated its opposition to any "annexation of Palestinian lands" and its support for a sovereign Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders.

For many Arab governments, especially the Gulf States, a fear of the growing Iranian influence in the region and a consequent desire to maintain close military ties with the US outweigh the traditional lip-service paid to the rights of Palestinians.

States such as Qatar and Jordan still call for an independent Palestine in the borders of 1967, but they fail to denounce the "endeavours of President Trump" negating such a state.

Of course, the Palestinian Authority (PA, which nominally governs Areas A and B of the West Bank) and Hamas (which holds power in the Gaza Strip) have rejected the Plan.

"I will never accept this solution, I will not have it recorded in my history that I have sold Jerusalem," said PA President Mahmoud Abbas. He has dismissed the proposed Palestinian state as "a Swiss cheese state" and has pledged: "We will not kneel, and we will not surrender."

Abbas also singled out for criticism the Plan's requirement that a future Palestinian state recognise Israel as a Jewish state:

"There are 1.5 to 2 million Russians in Israel today. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the gates opened. To prove they were Jewish, they would go to some rabbi, pay him 100 roubles, get a certificate that they were Jewish, and go to Israel. Even among the Falash Mura from Ethiopia, believe me, the percentage of Jews is tiny."

HAMAS

According to Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh: "The deal of the century was born dead. It bears futile seeds and has no future. We will foil the deal at all costs." Hamas official Abu Zuhri singled out for criticism the proposal to make Jerusalem the Israeli capital:

"Trump's statement about Jerusalem is nonsense and Jerusalem will always be a land for the Palestinians ... The Palestinians will confront this deal and Jerusalem will remain Palestinian land."

Other Hamas spokespersons have promised that "our Palestinian people will not let these conspiracies pass" and that the Plan "will cause rage and anger among Palestinians, who will oppose the conspiracy against their legitimate rights."

As a symbol of the across-the-board opposition among Palestinians to the Plan, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, Hamas and Islamic Jihad sent representatives to the press conference at which Abbas announced the PA's rejection of the Plan.

According to Abbas, Hamas has agreed to form a "united front" with the PA against the Plan. The actual ability of the PA and Hamas to mobilise opposition and win support from supposedly sympathetic governments falls far short of the rhetoric.

The PA has been in power for well over a decade. Elections due to be held in 2009 were cancelled and never rescheduled. The PA has "delivered" for the West Bank "establishment" but has failed on every other front, resulting in popular disillusionment and a growing level of social conflict. Hamas has ruled the Gaza Strip since 2006, the date of the last elections. It too has used its power to



Protest: No occupation or annexation: two states and equal rights

Thursday, February 27, 6pm –7pm

Kensington Court, London, W8 5DL (on High Street Kensington near Israeli Embassy)

Supported by

• Clive Lewis, Labour MP for Norwich South • Nadia Whittome, Labour MP for Nottingham East • Barnaby Marder, Socialists Against Antisemitism • Dana Naomy Mills, UCU activist • Daniel Randall, RMT activist • Seema Syeda, Labour and Momentum activist • John Moloney, Assistant General Secretary, PCS • Alex Blenkhorn, Socialists Against Antisemitism

reward its own supporters while crushing any sign of political opposition and dissent. Israel's economic "siege" and its repeated military incursions have added to popular disillusionment and fatigue.

According to a PA spokesperson, there will be no attempt at popular mobilisations before the 2 March Israeli elections, in case Netanyahu uses them to boost his election prospects: "We'll wait at least until the Israeli elections to see where the wind blows."

The PA and Hamas both recognise the divisions in the Arab League and the unwillingness of many of its members to challenge the Trump Plan head on. According to the PA Civil Affairs Minister, the Arab states could become "a dagger in the Palestinian people's side."

Divisions within the Arab League and the reluctance of its members to condemn the Plan outright have provided an opportunity for Turkey and Iran to present themselves as the champions of the Palestinian people.

According to a statement issued by the Turkish Foreign Ministry: "The United States' so-called peace plan is stillborn. This is an annexation plan aimed at killing a two-state solution and extorting the Palestinian territory. Palestinian people and its land cannot be bought for money."

Turkey would not "allow any step that will legitimise Israel's occupation and persecution. We will always stand by the brotherly Palestinian people. We will work for an independent Palestine in the Palestinian territory."

According to the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei:

"The American plot of the 'Deal of the Century' will die before Trump dies. This plan is indicative of US viciousness and manipulation. They have come to negotiate with the Zionists over what belongs to the Palestinians! Palestine belongs to the Palestinians!"

Iran has promised to "work with other countries in the region at all levels to unite the Muslim world to confront the great conspiracy." It has criticised "reactionary Arab governments" for "supporting Zionists against Palestinian groups" and is aiming to create a "united front" of Hamas, Islamic

Jihad and the PA.

Turkey and Iran's repression of their own national minorities is a measure of their commitment to national rights. For both governments the Trump Plan is no more than an opportunity to use the Palestinians as political pawns in an attempt to pursue their own regional-imperialist aims.

EU

The response of the European Union to the Plan was initially non-committal: "The EU will study and assess the proposals put forward. [The Plan] provides an occasion to relaunch the urgently needed efforts towards a negotiated and viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

A later statement was far more critical. The Plan "departs from internationally agreed parameters [concerning Palestinian sovereignty]." The EU does not "recognise Israeli sovereignty over the territories occupied since 1967". "Steps towards annexation, if implemented, could not pass unchallenged."

That statement was issued by the EU foreign policy spokesperson. Divisions among the EU member-states – six of which are reported to back the Plan – meant that the statement could not be issued as a formal EU declaration (for which unanimity is needed).

The UK government, now freed from the Lexiters' nightmare of the shackles of the Brussels bureaucracy, has taken probably the most pro-Plan position of all European states.

The Plan was "a serious proposal, reflecting extensive time and effort" and "could prove a serious step forward." The Israeli and Palestinian leaders should "give these plans genuine and fair consideration."

Brexit Britain wants a trade deal with the USA. Any concerns the Tories have for Palestinian rights rank much lower with them than easing the way to a deal.

Bourgeois diplomacy will not stop implementation of the Trump Plan. We must stir trade unions and campaigns committed to a genuine two-states solution to mobilise against the Plan in alliance with the pro-peace forces in Israel and their Palestinian counterparts. □

Three decades of Socialist

By Dale Street

When Sunderland Polytechnic Students Union (SPSU) banned a campus Jewish Society in 1985, *Socialist Worker* (weekly newspaper of the Socialist Workers Party) rallied to its defence.

The SPSU was "quite clearly not racist... One thing is clear – they are not racists, unlike the Zionists who oppose them." (SW/928)

Socialist Worker conceded in passing that "it can be argued whether the SPSU was tactically wise to ban the Zionists." But the ban itself was not criticised. In fact, the paper uncritically quoted the SPSU Treasurer's rationale for the ban:

"The students union has a policy that Zionism is a form of racism. This was reaffirmed at a union meeting in January and 1,000 students voted against a Zionist motion protesting about the banning of their group."

"A second Jewish Society has been formed by a minority of Jewish students at the college," the SPSU Treasurer continued, "this is a 'cultural and religious' organisation and does not include the promotion of Zionism in its aims. Of course we have no objection to that."

In its defence of the SPSU, *Socialist Worker* explained that the SPSU "has not banned Jewish students nor banned discussion of Zionism, but it does not support the promotion of Zionism."

The author of the article did not seem to realise that this would make for a very one-sided "discussion".

According to *Socialist Worker*, the ban had "provoked claims that to oppose Zionism is to be antisemitic." This was not quite accurate. It was not "opposing Zionism" which had given rise to allegations of antisemitism. It was the banning of a Jewish Society.

Socialist Worker continued its defence of the SPSU with a history lesson: "Until recently the majority of Jews were not Zionist" (SW/929). But, logically, this could only mean: the majority of Jews today are Zionist; and something must have happened to bring about that change.

Zionism was defined by *Socialist Worker* as "the idea that Jewish settlers are entitled to drive Palestinians out of their own country to create an exclusively Jewish country" (SW/929). Few Zionists would recognise that

description. For SW, the real villains of the piece – apart from "the Zionist Jewish Society" itself – were the National Union of Students Executive and the Union of Jewish Students, both of which advocated expulsion of the SPSU from the NUS:

"Their (the NUS leadership) attacks on antizionist students at Sunderland Poly are a cynical and shoddy attempt to divert attention away from their own failure to support students fighting a real racist and antisemite at North London Poly." (SW/928)

"The same (NUS) leadership who condemned Sunderland Poly for opposing Zionist racism themselves condemned the students at North London Poly who campaigned for months against well-known National Front member Patrick Harrington." (SW/930)

Two years later, in 1987, Zionism again loomed large in the pages of *Socialist Worker*. This time the trigger was Jim Allen's play *Perdition*, widely and rightly condemned for its antisemitic language, imagery and content.

PERDITION

Nominally, the play was a fictional trial involving the alleged role of Zionists in the Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry. In reality, the play was a cipher for claims of Zionist-Nazi collaboration in the Holocaust, and the centrality of that collaboration in the creation of Israel.

According to Allen: "Privileged Jewish leaders collaborated in the extermination of their own kind in order to help bring about a Zionist state, Israel, a state which is itself racist." As one of the play's characters put it: "Israel was coined in the blood of Hungarian Jewry."

Under the headline "Perdition Is Not Antisemitic" *Socialist Worker* claimed:

"It powerfully brings out the role Zionist leaders played in that process [Nazi extermination of Hungarian Jewry]. It does not equate Zionism with Nazism. It does not argue that Zionism murdered the Jews, rather that its commitment to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine was greater than its commitment to saving the lives of Jews." (SW/1051)

Apart from misrepresenting the play's rewriting of history as fact, this claim did not even fit in with lines in the play such as "the Zionist knife in the Nazi fist" and "to save your hides, you (Zionists) practically led them (Jews) to the gas chambers of Auschwitz."

A letter about the play in the subsequent issue of the paper – by Chanie Rosenberg, who enjoyed a certain status in the SWP – enthused about the play's premiere in Edinburgh and highlighted its relevance to today (at least in terms of the SWP's politics):

"It is to be hoped the play *Perdition* will find further venues after the excellent rendition I attended at the Edinburgh Festival. ... The logic of the Zionist state now is to kill the Palestinians." (SW/1052)

The same letter ("Zionism Laid Bare – 40 Years Ago") equated the Holocaust with Israeli oppression of Palestinians:

"What a tragedy that Jews, who suffered their supreme agony in the Holocaust because of their 'race' [inverted commas in the original], should mete out the same murderous punishments to the Arabs because of their nationality." (SW/1052)

Allen spoke at that year's SWP Summer School, Marxism 87. His session was "one of the most dramatic of the many meetings and debates" (SW/1048). *Socialist Worker* portrayed him as a victim of Zionism:

The Royal Court had decided not to perform his play "as a result of concerted Zionist pressure." Allen had falsely been accused of antisemitism because "wherever Zionism finds itself under political attack from Marxists", the bogus charge of antisemitism is "one of its main lines of defence." (SW/1048)

But Allen could count on the support of the SWP, whose members "supported Jim Allen and confirmed the historical validity of the charges he made." (SW/1048)

Moving into a wider terrain, the same article acknowledged that "another subtler, more complex" argument was involved in the controversy about *Perdition*.

Did the deep historical roots of antisemitism make "any sharp or unequivocal attack on Zionism suspect in itself" because it might flow out of subconscious antisemitism? And were such attacks "likely to arouse the latent antisemitism of others"? (SW/1048)

There was, the article conceded, "a grain of truth here." But if that grain were to be "exaggerated, as it frequently is", then that would be "disastrous for left debate and for the cause of the left in general." Debate would be "dominated by an individual's personal credentials" rather than by "what is being said". (SW/1048)

This was far too much for Chanie Rosenberg. In a letter headlined "No 'grain of truth' for Zionists" she denounced the idea of "a grain of truth" as "a form of vulgar materialism" which "blunts the straight issue of class." (SW/1050)

"Was Lenin more prone to antisemitism, because he was a gentile, than Trotsky, because he was a Jew?" asked Rosenberg rhetorically. Fortunately, she continued, "there is always a minority which rejects the prevailing ideology totally and fights against it. Only because such a minority exists can a revolutionary party be built." (SW/1050)

A further performance of *Perdition* the following year led to a new round of applause by the claqueurs of the SWP.

The play had exposed the role of Zionists in Nazi-occupied Hungary:

"The leaders of the Jewish community, all Zionists, at first cooperated and then collaborated with the Nazis. The only lives saved by collaboration were their own, those of their friends, leading Zionists and the richest members of the Jewish community – less than 2,000 in all." (SW/1087)

And it helped provide an understanding of Israel today:

"Allen indicts some, but not all, Zionists for doing deals with the Nazis before and during the Holocaust. It is necessary to be reminded of this, for understanding the ideas and motivation of Zionism's founders makes it easier to understand the horror of Israel today." (SW/1087)

If the play had any faults, then it was that of being too soft on Israel:

"Jim [Allen] certainly pulls a punch when one character accuses Israel of being a racist state 'but not like South Africa'. Yet to many people, watching the repression of the Palestinian uprising on the West Bank and Gaza, the parallels seem only too clear." (SW/1087)

For *Socialist Worker*, the controversy trig-

gered by the play the previous year was simply a witch-hunt of a playwright – "one of the most shocking displays of witch-hunting in the arts" – who had dared to tell the truth:

"For daring to write about this, Jim Allen was roundly abused by journalists and academics who support the state of Israel. ... Anyone lucky enough to see it (the play) will understand that it is Jim Allen and not the victims of the Holocaust who have been slandered." (SW/1087)

ATTACK

But none of this sits easily alongside of Allen's claim that his play was "the most lethal attack on Zionism ever written, because it touches at the heart of the most abiding myth of modern history, the Holocaust." The Holocaust was, in some way, "a myth"?

Nor does it address the problem posed by Allen's supposed historical insight that all over wartime Europe "Jews were massacred because their leaders covered up for the Nazis."

They were not massacred because the Nazis had the politics and the power to massacre them, but because "their leaders" (by which Allen means Zionists, even though they hardly counted as "leaders" in the 1930s) "covered up for the Nazis"?

The defence of the SPSU and *Perdition* in the pages of *Socialist Worker* in the 1980s was the inevitable result of the SWP's overall (mis)understanding of Zionism, the origins of Israel, and the nature of contemporary Israel.

Zionism was a form of racism: "The logic of this belief (Zionism) was racism" (SW/985). And it was an agent of imperialism: "Zionism has acted and continues to act as the agent and watchdog of imperialism, especially US imperialism, in the Middle East." (SW/1048)

Zionists saw antisemitism as "a positive force, for it justified their belief in the separateness of the Jews" (SW/985).

Consequently, when Hitler came to power "the Zionist leaders saw an opportunity to bolster their aim. They colluded with Hitler to allow German Jewish funds to flood into Palestine." (SW/985)

Antizionists were the best anti-racists: "Being antizionist has nothing to do with antisemitism. Defenders of the Palestinian people are the best and most principled anti-racists, who fight alongside Jews against antisemitism." (SW/1192)

Some readers of the paper were certainly in need of help in the matter of identifying antisemitism, even if *Socialist Worker* itself was hardly likely to cast light on the issue.

Shortly before the *Perdition* controversy erupted, *Socialist Worker* had published a letter challenging the idea that antisemitism existed prior to capitalism: "A brief look at the history of the Jewish community in the Middle Ages shows how wrong this is." (SW/1015)

From the twelfth century onwards, explained the writer, indebted peasants had "attacked their Jewish moneylenders, sometimes with the sole aim of destroying the credit notes. This is very different from antisemitism." (SW/1015)

The article was accompanied by a photograph of rabbis with the caption "There's a lot more to Jewish history than antisemitism."

More often than not, when the Holocaust

Socialist Worker rejects the call for an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, and wants instead to "end" Israel

Socialist Worker

Class anger on show at TUC demonstration

MURDER BY ISRAEL

END THE TERROR STATE

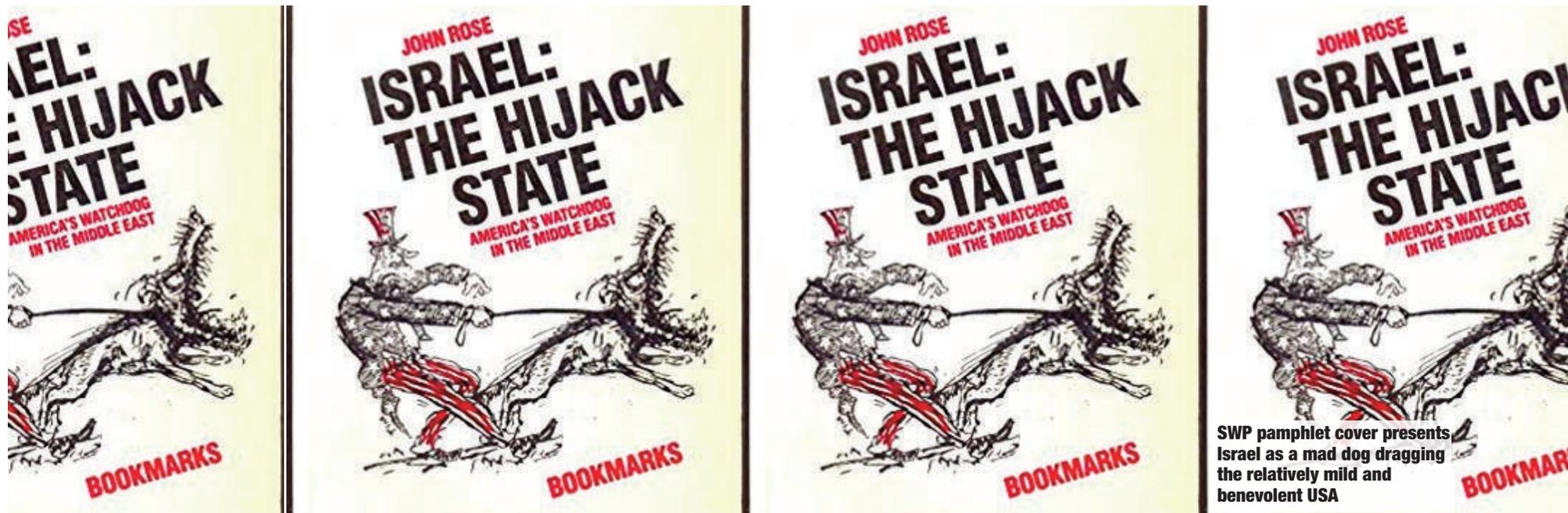
BREAK ALL LINKS WITH APARTHEID ISRAEL

Survivors demand more from inquiry

Back this health workers' fight to stop outsourcing

ALREADY WORKERS are... (text partially obscured)

Worker on antisemitism



appeared in the pages of *Socialist Worker* at this time it was for the purpose of condemning its survivors: "The horrible logic of Zionism has proved to be as deadly as the period of antisemitism it grew from." (SW/985)

Veteran *Socialist Worker* writer Paul Foot asked the question: "How on earth can one set of concentration camps justify another? Concentration camps are precisely what are being built in Gaza and the West Bank this very moment by the so-called victims of persecution." (SW/1069)

"How can a people who endured the Nazi Holocaust inflict such horrors on the Palestinians?" asked *Socialist Worker* (SW/1382). The oppressed – at least they were spared the epithet of "so-called" – had become the oppressors:

"After the horror of the Holocaust people throughout the world defended the establishment of Israel. Israel was born of the brutal eviction of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and a bloody war. How could the oppressed become the founders of an oppressive state?" (SW/985)

Israel even used Nazi tactics as a model in its repressive policies: "One tactic was modelled on the Nazis – keeping prisoners in the open in sub-zero temperatures in order to break them." (SW/927).

IMPERIALISM

The creation of Israel, explained *Socialist Worker*, had been the result of imperialist machinations, initially by British imperialism, and then by American imperialism:

"The power of Zionism to cause so much horrible violence and drive so many Arabs from their homes would never have come to fruition had it not been for the support of first British and later US imperialism." (SW/1083)

In the 1920s and 1930s "Zionist settlers [had been] dependent on British support and defended British control of the area" (SW/1083). But by the 1940s British imperialism had decided to withdraw from Palestine:

"The British were desperate to find an excuse to get out. They found it in the USA's growing interest in continuing something Britain started four decades before – making Zionism into a watchdog of imperialist interests in the Middle East." (SW/1083)

Zionism therefore switched its allegiances:

"If Zionism once unleashed terrorist forces against the British mandate, it did so solely to embarrass British imperialism in the eyes of American imperialism and to shift its allegiance from one to the other." (SW/1069)

In the aftermath of the Second World War, "the USA under its leader Truman – a man desperate to win the now important Jewish vote in the 1948 presidential election – went all out to pressure delegates to the United Nations into supporting the partition of Palestine." (SW/1083)

This was because "the most powerful country in the world, this time the United States, saw Zionism as a useful card to play in ensuring control over the Middle East" (SW/985). Thus, "acting at the behest of the US, the United Nations created the state of Israel" (SW/1264).

Israel was "a country built on stolen land, a country which is a watchdog for the West in the Middle East" (SW/1359). It was "a state created by colonisers and the superpowers. It is built on stolen land. It is racist." (SW/1354)

And it was also a very unsafe country for Jews. With a monotonous regularity, carrying on into the 1990s, *Socialist Worker* warned of the dangers facing Jews in Israel.

Zionism had "turned the Jewish state into one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a Jew" (SW/929). Far from being a safe haven for Jews, "Israel has become the most dangerous place in the world for Jews to live" (SW/1224).

Israel was "the most dangerous place in the world for Jews to live" (SW/1283). "Today" Israel was "the most dangerous place in the world for Jews to live" (SW/1354). Israel had become "the most dangerous place in the world for Jews to live" (SW/1382).

Israel was "the most dangerous place in the world for Jews" (SW/1400). Jews who emigrated to Israel "have found not the haven they expected but one of the most dangerous countries in the world for Jews" (SW/1485). "Once again", Israel was "set to become one of the most dangerous places in the world for Jews" (SW/1497).

According to *Socialist Worker* there was no chance of change from within, nor any chance of peace and reconciliation with the surrounding Arab states.

The Israeli working class had been bought

off. Under the headline "Do Israeli Workers Hold the Key?" an article explained:

"There is a working class in Israel and it does fight. But the Israeli working class has never taken action over the discrimination against Arab workers. ... Israeli workers are in an almost unique position [due to US subsidies guaranteeing higher living standards]. This is why the government has always been able to count on their support against Arabs." (SW/1072)

IRRELEVANCE

And the Israeli peace movement was an irrelevance: "Inside Israel a fraction of the Peace Now demonstrators are questioning the existence of the state [of Israel]. We should applaud them. But they are a minority of a minority movement." (SW/1072)

Palestinian resistance resulted in Israelis becoming even more reactionary: "The more the Palestinians resist, the more most Israelis feel threatened and the more reactionary they become." (SW/1072)

This was an inevitability: "In Israel itself public opinion increasingly favours more repression. This is inevitable in a state which, like the apartheid state in South Africa, is based on the principle that one part of the population is superior to another." (SW/1070)

Given the nature of the Israeli state, a two-states solution (i.e. an independent Palestine alongside of an independent Israel) was a logical impossibility.

Beneath the headline "Why We Don't Support the Two States Theory" a letter to the paper explained that two states would cause "further bitter hostility between the two ethnic groups." It would be a "defeatist acceptance of the status quo" and "a betrayal of all those who seek a just peace between Arabs and Jews." (SW/1079)

A two states solution was not "realistic" and reactionary – "the sort of idea that might be advocated by supporters of apartheid in South Africa." (SW/1079)

Another letter in the same issue of the paper – headlined "And Why It Is Reactionary", accompanied by a photo with the caption "It's the nature of the Israeli state that's the problem" – engaged in quack Marxism to justify its stance.

"Marx noted that being determines con-

sciousness," explained the writer. Defeats suffered by the PLO had therefore led them to lower their sights and "concede on the position of the legitimacy of the Zionist state." (SW/1079)

The impossibility of "the two state theory" was rooted in "the nature of the Israeli state. Israel was set up as American imperialism's watchdog in the Middle East. This is where the conflict originates from." (SW/1079)

There would be no peace, according to *Socialist Worker*, "while the state of Israel continues to exist and the Palestinians are denied the right to live in their own country" (SW/1224).

"The tragedy of Jews and Arabs in the Middle East" would continue "as long as the state of Israel exists. It would end only with "the establishment of a democratic secular Palestine in which Jew and Arab live side by side in which Palestinians are not denied the right to live in their own country." (SW/1283)

But *Socialist Worker* provided only the scantiest of details about how Israel was to be abolished:

"That is a solution which depends on the Arab masses of the region overthrowing the rotten regimes of Syria, Jordan, Egypt and the rest – and throwing American imperialism out with them." (SW/1264)

But times change. And, at first sight, it might appear that the SWP has changed its attitude towards Zionism and Israel-Palestine since the 1980s.

It no longer demands that "Student Union money and facilities should not be used for activities whose aim is to further the Zionist state's interests" (model motion by SWP Student Society for 1977 NUS conference).

Strictly speaking, this policy, not banning Jewish Societies, was the SWP's policy in 1985. But denying funds and facilities was pretty much tantamount to a ban. In fact, the SPSU simply took the SWP's antizionism to its logical conclusion – and the SWP backed it.

When the issue of Nazi-Zionist collaboration erupted in 2016 after comments by Ken Livingstone, *Socialist Worker* made a point of not "supporting the historical validity of the charges he made."

continued page 11

Three decades of Socialist Worker on antisemitism

From page 11

As if it had never been cheer-leader-in-chief for Jim Allen, *Socialist Worker* informed its readers: "The argument about Zionist collaboration with the Nazis has been around for a long time. It is rightly ignored by solidarity activists with Palestine." (SW/2501)

The article continued: "Zionist leaders stupidly thought that they could do a deal with Hitler that would enable some German Jews to go to Palestine. This disgraceful manoeuvre bitterly divided the Zionist movement. Many young Zionists, in particular, were outraged. They took for granted you had to fight Hitler to the death." (SW/2501)

The repetitive expressions of concern for the fate of Jews in Israel – "the most dangerous place in the world for Jews" – have also mercifully disappeared from the pages of *Socialist Worker*.

But in term of its "big picture" politics on Zionism and Israel-Palestine, nothing has changed.

Zionism is "the ideology that justifies Israel's racism towards Palestinians" (SW/2644). It is "an enemy of peace" (SW/2651). Racism is "built into the foundation of the Israeli state" (SW/2598). Israel is "a racist state ... racism runs through its fabric" (SW/2598).

A two state solution is "neither possible nor desirable" (SW/2598). The only solution is "one democratic secular state where Jews and Arabs live side by side" (SW/2604). This means "accepting the end of a state founded on ethnic division" (SW/2682).

In some unexplained way, this will be achieved by "the return of the revolutionary process across the Middle East" (SW/2605) because "Palestinians have been closest to liberation when their struggle has been part of mass resistance across the region" (SW/2605).

And when it comes to left antisemitism – which underpinned both the banning of a Jewish Society by the SPSU and the contro-

versy around *Perdition* – the reality is that the SWP has learnt nothing in over three decades.

The charges of antisemitism against the SPSU and *Perdition*, claimed *Socialist Worker* in the 1980s, were spurious, a distraction from "real" antisemitism, a smear on "real" anti-racists, and an attempt to gag legitimate criticism of Israel.

LABOUR

But that too is how *Socialist Worker* has responded to the issue of left antisemitism in the Labour Party in recent years.

"An unscrupulous campaign to brand the Labour left as antisemitic" has been underway since Corbyn's election (SW/2606). Accusations of antisemitism have been "a stick to beat Labour members with" (SW/2644). The accusations are "smears against the left" (SW/2643).

There was no substance to the charges of antisemitism against Corbyn: "The accusations against Corbyn are utter nonsense" (SW/2683). And the most that Naz Shah and Ken Livingstone could be accused of was that of having made "careless comments" (SW/2644).

Another issue of the paper described Livingstone's comments as "poorly phrased and probably an ill-judged attempt at provocation" (2606). *Socialist Worker* diplomatically sidestepped the fact that Livingstone had been making such "careless comments" for the best part of forty years.

Richard Burgon was innocent: "Burgon was right to describe Zionism as an enemy of peace" (SW/2651). And Chris Williamson was even more innocent: "[He has been] suspended for standing up to smears against the left. His crime was to openly challenge that." (SW/2643)

"If you want to make sense of the row about Jeremy Corbyn and antisemitism," explained *Socialist Worker*, "you have above all to understand that it has nothing to do with antisemitism." (SW/2614)

Having imperiously declared that antisemitism was not an issue in the controversy about antisemitism, *Socialist Worker* turned its attention to the "real" issues.

The "real motivations of Corbyn's critics" in raising such allegations were "to weaken him and keep him constantly on the defensive, and to protect Israel from criticism." (SW/2614)

Corbyn was being targeted because "he is such a long-standing and consistent supporter of the Palestinian struggle, and because he is the most left-wing leader Labour has ever had." (SW/2683)

Israel was to be protected from criticism because "the strongest Zionists are on the right [of the Labour Party] and support for Israel is associated with the drive to forcibly maintain Western domination of the Middle East." (SW/2683)

Socialist Worker also detected the hand of the Israeli government in all of this: "For the Israeli government and its supporters the rise of someone with Corbyn's views is a political disaster. So of course they are targeting him." (SW/2606)

The Israeli government had "turned a crisis into an opportunity. It has reacted to the potentially disastrous election of a Labour Party leader who supports the Palestinians by backing a campaign that has successfully driven Labour onto the defensive." (SW/2614)

Allegations of antisemitism were really an attempt to gag legitimate criticism of Israel. They were based on "the idea that criticism of Israel and support for Palestine inevitably leads to antisemitism." (SW/2644)

"Ever since Corbyn was elected leader" the Labour right had "tried to insinuate that the left's support for Palestinian liberation made it inherently antisemitic" (SW/2653).

"The idea is to link antisemitism to opposition to Israel in order to accuse the left of being naturally antisemitic" (SW/2643). "The smear at the heart of Labour antisemitism row" was that "opposing Israel is inherently

antisemitic" (SW/2683).

"Giving in to this argument" would be "disastrous for the left" (SW/2643). It would prevent Palestinians from "describing their expulsion as ethnic cleansing central to the creation of a racist state" (SW/2651).

In the face of "supporters of Israel wanting to shut down criticism of Zionism," declared *Socialist Worker*, "the best response is to defend the right to oppose Israel – and to be anti-Zionist." (SW/2651)

Even when *Socialist Worker* has appeared to have something half-sensible to say, it has been more a matter of appearance than reality.

The "argument about Zionist collaboration with the Nazis" was not to be "rightly ignored" because it was an obsession of people like Tony Greenstein. It was to be ignored because it was a trap:

"Antizionism is not antisemitism. Nevertheless, the antizionist, pro-Palestinian case must be argued effectively and sensitively. Traps must be avoided which favour our opponents."

"On Thursday Ken [Livingstone] created then walked into precisely such a trap. The argument about Zionist collaboration with the Nazis... is rightly ignored by solidarity activists with Palestine. Ken, as a seasoned campaigner, should have known that." (SW/2501)

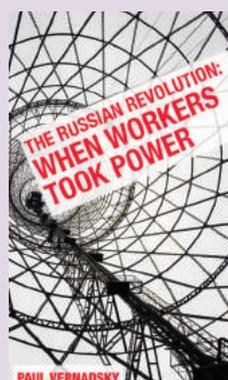
It was a "trap" because it was the wrong terrain from which to launch attacks on Israel:

"The terrain on which to criticise Israel is not the fact that the Zionist and Nazi organisations undoubtedly did cooperate during the 1930s to promote German Jewish emigration to Palestine. It is the continuing dispossession and oppression of the Palestinians." (SW/2606)

Socialist Worker was wrong to have backed Sunderland Poly Student Union and Jim Allen in the 1980s. It is just as wrong, if not even more so, in its apologetics for left antisemitism today. □



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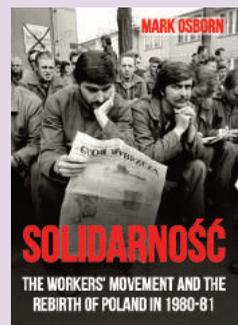
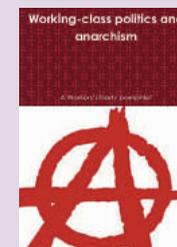
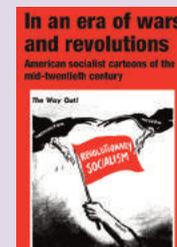
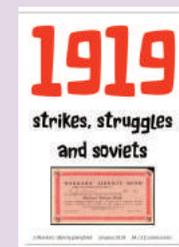
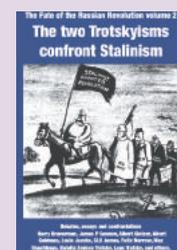
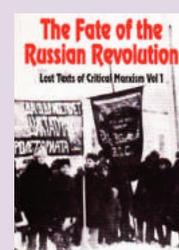
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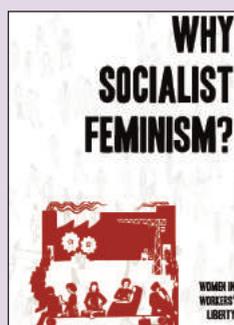


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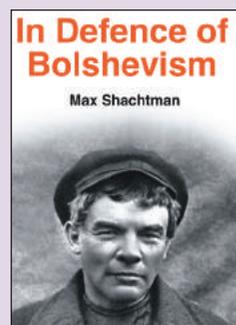
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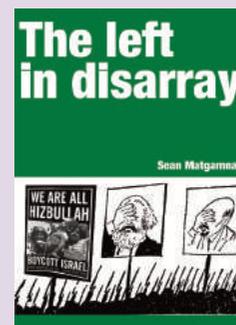
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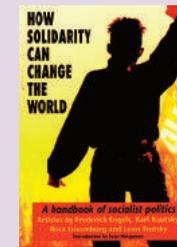
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Being “minimally civil”

Book review

By Cathy Nugent

Keith Kahn-Harris, in his book *Strange Hate: Antisemitism, racism and the limits of diversity*, argues that selective anti-racism and selective racism have become dominant modes.

Certain minorities, and certain sub-sections of minorities, are approved when they express a political or social orientation that is a close fit to another group. In other words, there is a process of political selecting out going on.

For Kahn-Harris, Jews have precipitated the development of selective anti-racism, and in his book how Jewish people are treated forms a “case study”. Unfortunately he does not make any substantial comparison with other groups.

Kahn-Harris is a Jewish leftist and a sociologist, and both of those biographical facts are relevant to how he sees antisemitism. In this book he tries to unpick the logics of the “cycle of accusations and denials of antisemitism that have permeated left-wing politics for years and have more recently spread to the right.”

That “controversy” (about who is correct on what constitutes antisemitism) has risen to the surface in Corbyn’s Labour Party is very much in the foreground, but that is not a new controversy.

The antisemitism on display as the controversy plays out does not appear as violent hatred of Jews. There are a number of bewildering disputes involved, and Kahn-Harris takes us through some of them.

The AWL has long made differentiated between a distinctively “left-wing” strand of antisemitism and other forms. Kahn-Harris also makes that distinction.

On the one hand there is “selective” antisemitism, on the other, what he calls “consensual” antisemitism. In the “zone” of selective antisemitism there may be love for some Jews — anti-Zionist Jews for example — but bewilderment and disappointment at other Jews, some Zionist Jews perhaps. For Kahn-Harris this is a zone that Corbyn drifts into and out of.

It is not that Corbyn’s heart is full of hate, but he is confused (in a way that someone who is Labour leader, and was at the time of writing a potential Prime Minister ought not to be).

For Kahn-Harris a process of selection is made possible by the long and convoluted history of antisemitism. You can only be disappointed by people who are for you a some-

what mysterious, homogenised group.

To accuse someone in this zone of being a pure and simple antisemite is to ignore a real ambivalence, and that is not helpful. On the other hand, many Jews experience antisemitism as antisemitism whether it is “consensual” or “selective”.

This is a useful book which will get you thinking more deeply about the political logic or lack of logic on the left as it discusses these issues.

Kahn’s proposed solution to a cycle of accusation and counter-accusation is what he calls “sullen solidarity”. If humans cannot let go of their hate, anger and abusiveness (which may appear to them as a passionate embrace of a cause) then they must learn to live side-by-side with others in a way that does not demand respect, or some soppy “all you need is love” formula for life.

I think Kahn-Harris is making a broader point about free speech, while avoiding that concept. If politics is all about contestation — of analysis, historical record, logic of argument — then all politics, everyone’s politics, must be open to contestation.

But being open to contestation is not easy, and requires a special kind of commitment in the age of online politics, when we are pushed into responding to the views we disagree with by anger and contempt because that’s the way to do something in the allotted



word-count which will get your response “shared” widely.

If we are not all to be driven into the ground by cycles of accusations, and counter-accusations, we must learn to be “minimally civil”. It’s an interesting idea. □

How unions should tackle sexism

By Katy Dollar

It’s HeartUnions from 10 to 16 February 2020. I was reminded of the week of activity, highlighting the work of unions, by a parcel from the TUC arriving at my union office announcing the focus this year is on sexual harassment.

It was accompanied by a letter from our co-ordinated industrial leadership, bringing together 48 unions and 5.5 million members, and declaring “a radical yet practical plan” to end sexual harassment.

Over 1/2 women and nearly 7/10 LGBT workers are sexually harassed in the workplace. Subjecting women to fear, shame, and discomfort in a workplace, street or union meeting reinforces a gendered division, reminding women that, despite having to work, they do not fully belong in the public sphere. It reinforces and perpetuates sexist assumptions and divisions. A radical and practical plan is certainly required.

My bundle included posters for workplaces and Protection from Sexual Harassment at Work booklets. The booklet included some good tips for formal grievances (always keep a record of all incidents!), a decent outline of the existing legislation relating to sexual harassment, advice to seek support from your union (or a Citizens’ Advice Bureau where you don’t have one) and an explanation of how Employment Tribunals worked.

I’m glad that individuals experiencing sexual harassment at work can access these basic guides on law and grievance procedure, but help for victims after the fact is not an adequate trade-union response to such a widespread problem.

Putting hope before experience, I signed up for the TUC conference call which would plan the campaign. During the call, Frances O’Grady explained that the TUC were re-launching a campaign to lobby the government for “legislation to force bosses into preventative steps such as mandatory training for all staff and bosses and setting out clear policies against harassment... This would shift the burden from individuals to employers, changing workplace cultures and stopping the problem once and for all.”

We shouldn’t be sniffy about legislative change. Steps which move the focus from a victim’s ability to bring a complaint after the fact to an employer’s responsibility to positively prevent harassment are welcome. Institutional culture can make a dent on levels of harassment and confidence in combatting abusive behaviour when it happens.

Nonetheless the TUC announcement, a year on from #MeToo, trails behind better examples not just in terms of understanding the politics of sexism but also in the understanding of the importance of collective action.

The strength of #MeToo and #NiUnaMenos were that they refused to see sexual harassment complaint by complaint, individual by individual, and instead saw structural oppression that needed to be met with mass action. What followed went beyond a Twitter storm and the court cases of some high-profile offenders.

For instance at Complutense University in Madrid, women hung accounts of sexual harassment on washing lines across campus to expose the culture at the university. They created a network of reps identified by violet badges.

McDonalds workers in the USA organised



a multi-state strike against sexual harassment at work. Screen Actors Guild members called for Do Not Work Orders against abusive producers.

Sexual harassment is a pressing workplace issue in most industries. The TUC should be organising around it, not just lobbying. We should be building local and sectoral disputes around management who commit or condone harassment at work. That requires the day to day rebuilding union strength at workplace level.

Do Not Work orders and strikes only work where you have the membership for them to have an impact. We need to fight barriers to workers feeling secure in taking on their bosses for example, industries that run on personal patronage; zero hours contracts and immigration controls.

Of course, we cannot assume that union-workplaces where workers feel more confident to stand up management are free of

sexual harassment. Sexual harassment at work does not come exclusively from bosses. It may come from workmates or even from within our unions.

We must confront sexism in our class and class organisations. Workers’ power can only be built by universalising class politics which breaks down divisions and hierarchies between workers. This can’t be fully achieved legalistically. We need to build a culture of honestly confronting sexism and educating and supporting each other.

We can’t assume this will spring organically from male dominated union structures. We need to democratise our unions and build women’s self organisation.

Building a militant working class women’s movement and a democratic, strong labour movement should be our radical and practical plan to combat sexual harassment. □

Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Swimming pool



Diary

By Emma Rickman

A fortnight ago, there was an especially large leak on the district heating network. A pipe manifold underneath a large planter in the city centre was billowing steam into the bus interchange.

When engineers responded to the call out, they found the man-hole cover was 100 degrees. On my way home I have a look at the screens and fences they've used to cordon it off, and wonder why we always spring leaks in the same place, even though new pipes were installed six months ago.

That week I'm working with S in the control room, managing the network remotely. Because of the leak, the system is losing 120 cubic metres of water every day, and bleeding heat. S shows me the temperatures and pressures we have to maintain.

At peak times in the morning and evening, when everyone is turning on the heating and having a shower, more heat is being extracted from the water in the network, and the pressure drops as more fluid is diverted into the heat exchangers of each building. To make up for the heat losses, we have back-up gas boilers; and to keep up the pressure at the far end of the network, we can switch on pumps at different points.

The five gas boilers at the back of the plant are enormous, each the size of a terraced house. The cylindrical drum is lined with pipe

manifolds that pump the water around a hollow area. The gas is injected at one end into this space, and instruments supply oxygen to control the flame. On start up, the air must be completely purged and replaced to ensure nothing explodes when the gas ignites.

Water from the boilers can be directed onto either of the heat networks, set at a temperature of 106 degrees. As well those on the plant, we have boilers and pumps near the university science department; frustratingly they can only be operated by an engineer at the site.

Pumps ensure that buildings up the hill towards Crookes get enough heat.

"But you don't want the flow rate to be too high," says S "or the water just kind of runs past — the heat exchangers can't extract heat from the network fast enough, so the buildings get cold."

Another thing S is watching is the pressure at our end of the system. "Pumping too much can trip the safeties and then we'll be venting steam at our end — it isn't good for the pipes."

During the day the district heating team are all out of the office trying to find and repair the leaks, talking to customers and planning isolations. The next morning I come in to some very sleep-deprived civil engineers — after a night of shut-downs and eight hours of digging, they still haven't found all the leaks.

"We dug out the planter, and several metres down the road," says R (baggy eyes, Leeds accent) "but when we patched the holes the steam kept coming. We're going to have to keep digging."

In the control room, S is dismayed when the general manager explains they won't be isolating again for two days, but the reasons are complicated. The civil engineers need permission from the highways authority to dig up each section of the road. The work means traffic diversions, resurfacing costs, the risk of digging up electrical cables — and of course turning off the heating to forty buildings for the second night in a week.

STEAM

Nevertheless, there is a very public plume of steam emerging near the Crucible Theatre, which will soon be hosting the snooker.

The length of pipe leading up to the network's largest customer, Ponds Forge leisure centre, is very old. The network engineers strongly suspect this length of pipe has several leaks, and venting steam is working its way back to the planter through the line of least resistance. Ponds Forge staff have noticed that the pool is colder in the mornings.

"I strongly suspect Ponds Forge pump room is flooded with hot water by now," smiles S "but maybe we should turn the leak and the cold pool into a public sauna — steam bath; cold plunge!"

Ponds Forge managers really don't want a weekend isolation, because they have athlete time trials in the pool that week.

"But we've got to go ahead, they've got to understand that." R explains

S and I begin preparing the system for a shut-down. All the support boilers are off, and we need

to lower the temperature of the network to below boiling point, making it safer to isolate and drain down. To do this, we look at the power plant. The ERF has its own steam system which is directed into the turbine to generate power, as with any waste incinerator.

What makes Sheffield ERF different, is that we syphon off some of that steam before it makes its way through the turbine and divert it to a large header tank. This tank feeds two very large heat exchangers, which pass heat onto the district network. To moderate the temperature, the operators control the amount of steam that passes from the header to each heat exchanger by regulating the valves.

A computer screen displays a system diagram. I spend half an hour slowly decreasing the set-point temperatures from 109 to 99 degrees, two degrees at a time. The smaller heat exchanger temperature drops faster, so I wait for the larger exchanger to catch up. Once the network is at temperature from our end, it will take several hours to circulate around the city. In the meantime that steam is diverted into the turbine, and we generate an additional 4MW to the grid.

By the end of the week, Ponds Forge is connected to a transportable gas back-up boiler, and the district pipe supplying it is permanently isolated while the road is excavated.

The plant yard is suddenly full of welders preparing a completely new length of pipe. It needed replacing badly. There were seven leaks in one run. □

• Emma Rickman is an engineering apprentice at a combined heat and power plant in Sheffield.

Sixth form colleges strike

By Hugh Workman

The NEU's (National Education Union's) last strike day in sixth form colleges over funding and pay was 20 November last year. The next is 12 February.

In December the union executive and many NEU activists were, I think, hoping that an imminent Labour government would resolve the dispute in our favour.

The reason for the delay being around a month after most colleges came back is to build up momentum again after the election and Xmas break.

The upcoming three days (12 and 27 Feb, 10 March) are within the six month "shelf-life" of the first ballot, but at the same time we are preparing to ballot to extend the dispute for a further six months. Indicative ballot results in the affected colleges so far look good.

In October (bit.ly/6fc-hw) I said

that the ballot could be a way to rebuild the union in the sixth-form sector. And in fact, since action started, more colleges have joined following re-ballots.

We need a National Organising Strategy, to put reps in every college. Lay activists (who work in and know the sector) are in the best position to do this, not Full-Time Officers (who may not).

Because this is a dispute with the Secretary of State for Education any commitment to increase funding would lay the groundwork for GMB and Unison to negotiate a rise at the same level — it's essential that a rise for teachers should not be funded or divisively agreed at the expense of support staff pay.

10 March is the third of our currently planned strike days, and is also one of the UCU's strike days. This offers an opportunity for building joint lay-led solidarity and action. □

Council workers: start fight now

By Ed Whitby

Local government employers have come up with a pay offer of 2%, and all three unions have rightly rejected it.

The Unison, GMB, and Unite unions submitted a claim in summer 2019 for a 10% increase and £10/ hour minimum for the one-million-strong workforce.

For a number of years in Unison the membership have mandated the union to lead a fight to reverse years of pay freezes and real-effect pay cuts, and to use the threat of strikes early enough to impact on the pay round.

But now as in previous years, workers are desperate to receive a pay increase due in pay packets in less than two months' time (1 April); and the union leaderships appear to have yet again played into the employers' hands by ignoring conference policy to build a fight and to force the employers to

make an offer early in the autumn to enable a serious campaign to be built.

Other groups in the sector have been offered better pay deals: teachers in England got 2.75% last year and may get more this year, and local government workers in Scotland received 3% last year and 3.5% this year as part of a multi-year deal.

The 2% offer would see a classroom assistant receiving a lower percentage pay deal this year than the teachers in the same school, or a bin worker in Berwick receiving a lower pay deal than a bin worker in North Berwick, a few miles over the border in Scotland

Unison, GMB and Unite members need to coordinate to force their leadership to fight for the 10%/ £10 minimum pay offer and build a serious campaign urgently.

Ballot for action now, rather than wait for any minor increases that the employer might have in their back pocket. □

Sorting out the left in UCU

By a UCU activist

As UCU members in higher education prepare to strike — action begins on 20 February — voting is underway in both HE and FE sectors of the union for members of the National Executive Committee and a new Vice-President.

The VP election sees a contest between the two long-standing union factions, UCU Left (dominated by the SWP) and the Independent Broad Left (on the right). Margot Hill, the left candidate, is Branch Secretary at Croydon College and has recently led local strikes over pay and conditions. Janet Farrar, her opponent, has no such track record.

FARRAR

It was a surprise to many activists, therefore, to see a prominent supporter of the union's newest grouping, a loose slate linked by support for the new General Secretary Jo Grady, post on social media that he was backing Farrar in preference to Hill.

One of the "Grady4GS" list has since asked for her name to be removed from it: this is Rhian Keyse, branch VP at Exeter University and an anti-casualisation activist both locally and nationally. Solidarity urges a vote for Rhian in the NEC elections, and also for her fellow Exeter activist Mike Finn. Both

were central to the protests over democracy at last year's Congress and are solid independent left voices with a genuine commitment to rank-and-file activism.

Both the Grady4GS list and the UCU Left slate include some activists with impressive experience of building action locally, and belief in rank-and-file democracy. Neither list, however, deserves uncritical support.

The Grady4GS list has no clear platform beyond candidates' vague agreement with Grady's 2019 manifesto, and a sense of "backing the General Secretary", while in practice UCU Left has a mixed record on engagement of members and local militancy.

Over last weekend the campaign entered a particularly vicious phase, with an anonymous website leaking confidential details of a union expulsion procedure against a member of UCU Left (concerning sexual harassment, bullying and an attempt to exclude another branch member) in an attack on that faction, especially national negotiator Jo McNeill, and on the union's independent left-wing president Vicky Blake.

In a response, one of the women involved in the case has denounced this weaponisation of the allegations for factional gain.

While it is clear from her account that UCU processes failed when it came to supporting survivors

and need urgent review, she is also right to oppose banning SWP members from the union, "just as I would not support a motion which suggests banning Labour Party members, Liberal Democrats, Conservative party members, practising Catholics or those who donate to Oxfam. All of these groups have had institutional failings with regard to sexual violence; but this does not mean all individual members are complicit in that violence, or that their institutional structures cannot be changed."

PARTIAL

For all the problems in UCU's procedures, the offending activist was expelled from the union in 2017 (having previously been expelled from the SWP); the expulsion from UCU was announced publicly, and the decision was upheld by the Certification Officer following an appeal in late 2018. Parts of the case have therefore been in the public domain for some time.

Publishing a highly partial anonymous version of events mid-election when many of the participants are bound by confidentiality agreements — and when Blake and McNeill are part of the national negotiating team as UCU heads for strike action — is pure sectarianism which could backfire and undermine the strike, as well as a flagrant act of contempt for the well-being of survivors. □



A month-long strike by outsourced workers at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office continues. The workers, who are members of the PCS union, are demanding living wages, union recognition, and greater equality with directly employed staff. The TUC launched its "Heart Unions" week from the picket line, with TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady addressing a rally, along with Labour MPs including Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell. □

3 March for posties' ballot

From the *Postalworker* bulletin

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) has announced it will be "serving notice" of a new national ballot of Royal Mail members on 25 February.

As anti-union laws require that unions give seven days' notice to employers of a ballot, presumably this means that the actual ballot will start the following week, on or around 3 March.

There's no good reason why it's taken this long to gear back up for a national ballot. Deputy General Secretary Terry Pullinger signalled that the ballot might start sooner, then rowed back from that by saying the union would encourage local disputes.

Local disputes are important; the threat of strikes at Bootle and Seaforth DOs, planned for 18-19 January, forced the bosses to back off from sacking a rep and taking disciplinary action against other members, following an unofficial walkout there last year. Wherever members want to take action over local issues, including over specific local breaches of national agreements, they should be encouraged and empowered in doing that.

But local disputes are not a substitute for a national fight with the employer. It'll take national industrial action to force Royal Mail to back down from its plan to restructure parcel delivery, and to force it to implement previous agreements over issues like working hours. It's vital that workplace reps and local branches keep the pressure on the union's national leadership to ensure horizons don't narrow.

Once the ballot starts, everyone

needs to be in campaign mode. While we shouldn't be reckless, we can't let the previous injunction inhibit us from organising an active, vibrant, and assertive campaign.

We also need to discuss how to respond if our ballot is injunctioned a second time. Last time, workers in some workplaces discussed the prospect of an unofficial "work-to-rule", something which we can effectively implement at any time without needing a ballot, as it only involves working to our contracts, agreed hours, and formal rules and procedures. Tactics like that should be discussed again.

Royal Mail workers have retained traditions of unofficial, "wildcat" strike action better than perhaps any other group of workers.

Usually unofficial actions take place over local issues, such as the victimisation of individual reps or members, rather than around national disputes. A few wildcat strikes in a few offices aren't a substitute for national action, but where members feel like unofficial action could be pulled off in an effective way, that should be discussed.

The first task is to ensure the national ballot starts as soon as possible, no later than the 3 March date suggested by the union's recent announcement. A programme of gate meetings across the country can provide a space for rank-and-file posties to discuss strategy for the dispute.

Grassroots coordination, and linking up with other unions to resist anti-union laws, will put us in a stronger position to respond should our bosses turn to the courts again to scupper a strike. □

as the Labour-controlled GLA, which administers Transport for London). □

Daniel Randall, RMT Bakerloo branch assistant chair (pc)

• For updates and details of planned actions when announced, check bit.ly/FreeOurUnions.



Bakerloo drivers to strike

By Ollie Moore

Drivers in the RMT on London Underground's Bakerloo Line will strike, in a local dispute over working conditions, from 11:59 on Friday 21 February to 11:59 on Saturday 22 February, and from 11:59 on Sunday 23 February to 11:59 on Monday 24 February.

The aim of the rolling strike is to maximise the impact of the action by calling out key shifts across several days.

The dispute has arisen from London Underground's refusal to withdraw a timetable which drivers say has led to such short gaps between trips that they don't have time for a toilet break or a drink of water.

The union is demanding a new timetable and a review of incidents that have taken place under "Working Timetable 44". □

• More online: Aslef launches ballot. Tube drivers to ballot for strikes, see: bit.ly/aslef-b

School workers meet

By David Pendleton

Workers' Liberty school workers met on Saturday 8 February to discuss perspectives after then General Election defeat and preparations for the NEU Annual Conference.

We overwhelmingly agreed a motion that committed us to fight for the NEU to organise a "Defend Education" demonstration and to approach UCU, other school unions, and the National Union of Students to join us to campaign for decent education funding and high-quality teaching. This should include advocacy of national contract for all education workers. We will seek to get this discussed at national conference.

We also agreed to advocate that Education Solidarity Network (ESN), the rank-and-file organisation we support in the union, adopts our political perspective: a mass mobilisation of workers,

students and parents in defence of free, state-run education for all.

The NEU Annual Conference, which this year is in Bournemouth on 6-9 April, decides the policy and direction of the union in the coming year. We are hoping motions that AWL comrades have written on support staff representation, boycotting testing in primaries, fighting the anti-laws and ending the deal with the NAHT that helped scupper the Harbinger dispute last year, will be prioritised for discussion at conference.

We are also hoping that motion 20 on a National Contract for All School Workers, which is an ESN-supported motion will be debated. We will write amendments to other motions if prioritised.

At the conference we will be organising a fringe meeting on the Tuesday night on Industrial Unionism and how it applies to the NEU. We will also produce a conference bulletin. □

Rank-and-file activists from several unions, including PCS, NEU, Unite, Unison, RMT, UVW, and IWGB, met on 11 February to plan activity in opposition to proposed new anti-strike laws, at a meeting called by Lambeth and Islington Trades Councils, and supported by the Free Our Unions campaign. Representatives of the National Shop Stewards Network

also attended. Plans for a range of activity, including rallies and demonstrations, were discussed, as well as proposals to lobby Labour leadership candidates, GLA candidates, and Mayor Khan to commit to supporting resistance to anti-union laws, and to setting the "minimum service requirement" under new law to zero wherever Labour is a transport employer (such



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Irish election: behind the left surge

By Micheál MacEoin

The Irish election results have seen an unprecedented surge of support for Sinn Féin, overtaking both the establishment parties to win the popular vote with 24.5% of first preference votes, to Fianna Fáil's 22.2% and Fine Gael's 20.9%.

SF's vote was a rejection of the two-party system, which has seen FF and FG rotate in power since the early 1930s. This rejection was overwhelmingly fuelled by anger about issues such as housing, homelessness and health.

Whatever SF's willingness and capacity to deliver fundamental change on these issues, or its credentials as a genuinely left-wing party, the election undoubtedly represents a shift to the left in Irish society.

SF's tack towards left-populist policies saw it effectively channel discontent with the outgoing FG government. FG were backed by FF with a confidence and supply agreement, allowing SF to cast itself as the effective opposition.

The surge of support was unpredictable, not least by SF who, after a poor showing in the European and local elections, stood only 42 candidates in the 39 multi-seat constituencies. That made them unable to capitalise fully on their popular vote in terms of seats won.

FF won 38, to SF's 37, with FG trailing on 35. Behind that are 21

Independents, with the Greens on 12, the Social Democrats and Labour both on 6 and Solidarity-People Before Profit on 5.

SF owes a large part of its support to younger votes, disillusioned by their life and prospects in post-recession Irish society, rather than any sudden retrospective support for the Provisional IRA.

These material reasons are paramount. One relatively minor but contributory phenomenon, however, may have been the surge in online communities on social media in which republican themes are expressed through forms including Simpsons memes.

This content, fuelled in part by Brexit, and with an ironic or ambivalent edge, created a small sub-cultural hinterland which will have normalised SF in the eyes of some sections of the electorate, and may have eased the flow of support towards the party.

SF will have benefited too from FG's pre-election blunder, when it proposed a state commemoration for the old colonial police force, the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). In the wake of the row, a version of "Come Out Ye Black and Tans" by republican folk band the Wolfe Tones briefly reached first position in the Irish iTunes download charts.

In one sense this is a nationalist shift, but it is crude, however, to

collapse SF completely into wider "identitarian" turns in world politics – or, as Ruth Dudley Edwards has done, compare it to the rise of the Nazis.

The party, in its modern incarnation in the South, is pro-EU, and generally understood as pro-migrant and pro-refugee, so not directly comparable even to forces such as La France Insoumise.

While SF is a bourgeois nationalist party, managing the power-sharing structures in the Six Counties, the basis of its support, its roots in the transformed but likely still-existent Provisional IRA, and the party's opposition to sections of the Irish state apparatus such as the Special Criminal Court, will cause discomfort for the Irish ruling class. It is not yet reckoned a reliable partner to govern the Irish state, though that is clearly its aspiration and direction of travel

RESPECTABILITY

How far SF has travelled along this road to "respectability" will be revealed by what it chooses to do next. It would be highly risky for the party to form a coalition with FF, a party of the establishment SF claims to oppose.

Another option would be to force FF and FG, much weakened, into an unpopular government, and prepare the way for another election in which SF could stand enough candidates to emerge as

the largest party. SF is now reaching out also to the smaller parties, including the Social Democrats and the Greens, but it is difficult to see the arithmetic adding up.

A question, too, will be SF's attitude towards the Protestant minority in the context of Brexit and the demand for an Irish unity referendum. SF leader Mary Lou McDonald has stressed the need not to "sleepwalk into disorderly constitutional change," as the UK has done with Brexit, but to start talks on Irish unity "responsibly, thoughtfully, inclusively."

In 2016, SF's "Towards a United Ireland" discussion document spoke of "constitutional recognition of the unique identity of Northern unionists and the British cultural identity of a significant number of people in the North of Ireland".

On the other hand, when celebrating his election as a TD for Waterford, SF's David Cullinane marked the occasion by shouting "Up the 'RA' to supporters in a local pub.

The far left had a mixed showing in the election, with People Before Profit (PBP) holding its seats but Solidarity's Ruth Coppinger losing out in Dublin West and its total vote going down from 3.9% to 2.6%. Former Solidarity-PBP TD Paul Murphy was re-elected as a TD for his new organisation, RISE.

In a left-moving electorate, how-

ever, SF was clearly the main benefactor, with the far left reliant on transfers. In part, this represents part of the far left dissolving its focus into electoralism, competing on similar ground to SF rather than making a clear case for a socialist society, distinct from and transcending capitalism, or presenting distinctively socialist and democratic answers on the national and communal questions.

LEFT

PBP, though controlled by the nominally Marxist Socialist Worker Network (SWN), ran on a left-social democratic programme. In words reminiscent of Corbyn's Labour, or even to its right, PBP's electoral programme was "inspired by hope for a fairer economy and a better society" with "fully costed [proposals which] rely on wealth and income distribution that targets the top 7% of the population." The rich, it is promised, "will still have considerably more than the average worker [but] the benefit of living in a more cohesive and healthy society."

This was not terrain on which the far left could win convincingly. The voter hoping for leftish social democratic policies to be achieved through parliamentary means was better off voting for SF, who could realistically approach a majority, as against PBP who definitely could not. □

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