



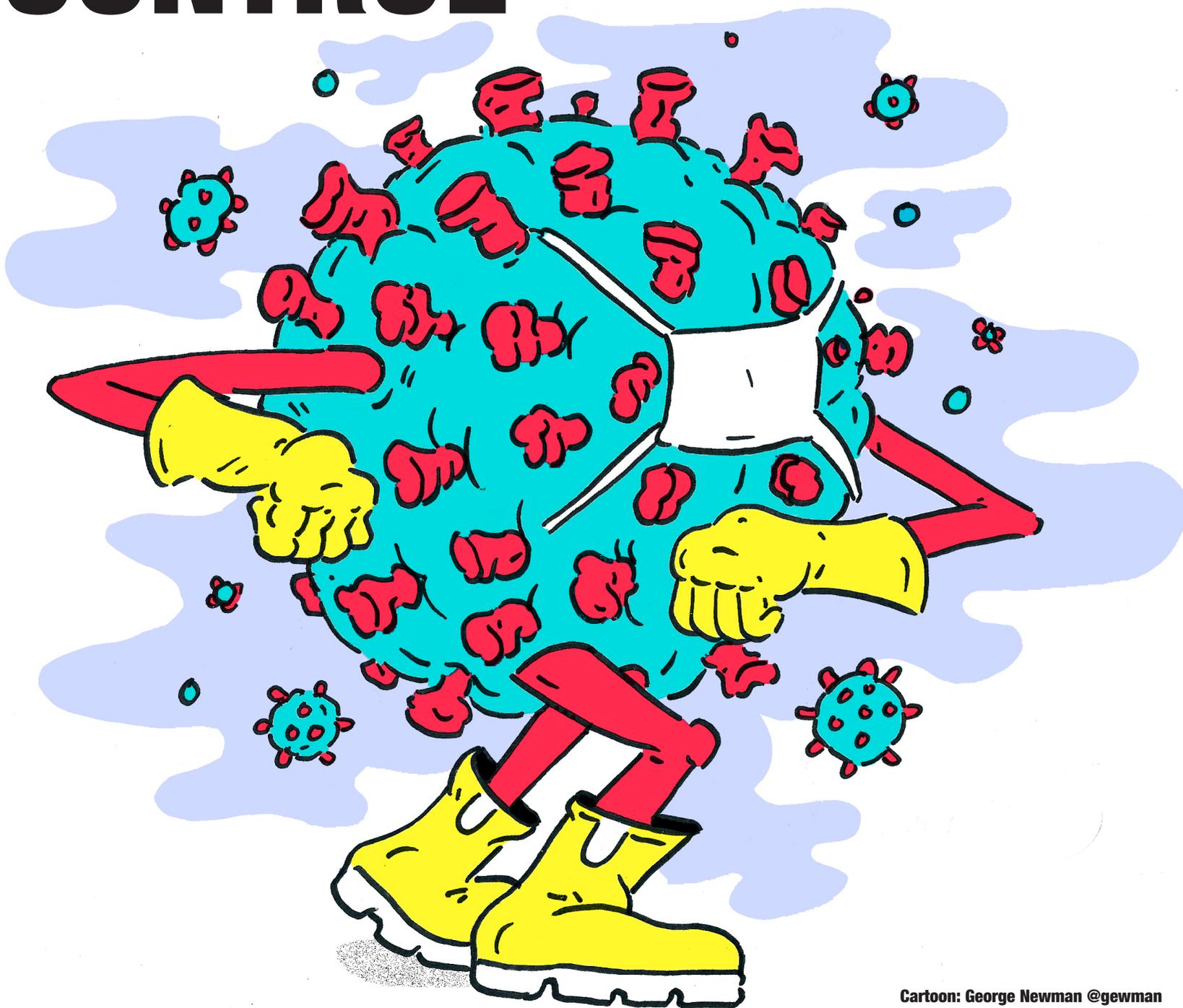
& Workers' Liberty

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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Covid-19: health and economic crisis **FIGHT FOR WORKERS' CONTROL**



Cartoon: George Newman @gewman

» **Emergency funding for NHS**
» **Full sick pay for all**

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Political revolution in the age of pandemics



Sanders campaign

By Eric Lee

The decision by the AFL-CIO to cancel the planned candidates' forum in Florida this week is bad news for Bernie Sanders.

This would have been the perfect opportunity for Sanders to challenge his sole remaining rival for the Democratic nomination, former Vice President Joe Biden, on the issues which divide them. On all those issues – social security, Medicare for all, trade deals like NAFTA and TPP – Sanders' views are much closer to those of the unions. Biden's neo-liberal agenda would have been exposed.

This is now something we are going to have to get used to as more and more events are cancelled in the wake of growing fears about a global pandemic caused by the Covid-19 coronavirus.

With events like the Summer Olympics in Tokyo facing possible cancellation, it seems increasingly possible that the Democratic National Convention, scheduled to open in July in Milwaukee, may it-

self be cancelled – with some kind of alternative arrangement made.

These changes do not bode well for the Sanders campaign which has relied heavily on mass events, some of which may be cancelled under new "social distancing" rules that are likely to be brought into effect.

And furthermore, both Sanders and Biden fall into the category of vulnerable individuals, because of their age, meaning that they are taking a particular risk in meeting voters in large numbers, face to face.

By forcing campaigns to move more and more of their efforts online, the Sanders campaign might also be disadvantaged as mainstream media, even liberal media like MSNBC, remain largely hostile to him. And it's not only a question of his campaign being outspent online, as Biden and Trump buy up millions of dollars of Facebook advertising. As Mike Bloomberg showed in his brief campaign, online influencers on popular platforms like Instagram are up for hire.

But it's not all bad news for the left. The pandemic is making it clear to many that a society's ability

to stop the spread of a pandemic is only as strong as the weakest link.

As Rupert Beale wrote this week in the *London Review of Books*, "The US response [to the pandemic] will be complicated by its lack of socialised healthcare. ... People often don't go to the doctor in the US because they are understandably fearful of the huge costs they may incur." Not only can't many Americans afford a visit to their doctors – many can't afford to take a day off from work, especially if they are displaying no symptoms.

MEDICARE

Covid-19 is making the case for Medicare for All better than a hundred speeches by Bernie Sanders.

More generally, the pandemic is exposing the Trump administration as being completely incompetent, as well as corrupt. The US, which Trumps likes to tout as the "richest country in the world" does not have nearly enough testing kits. The aid package Congress just passed, which gives out money to the individual states to cope with the virus, is pathetically small – a drop in the bucket, as several state Governors have already com-

plained.

This pandemic is turning into the worst global health crisis we have seen since the "Spanish flu" which followed the First World War. That time, about one in four people on the planet became infected, and the death toll was in the tens of millions – more than died in the war itself.

It's not just the Trump administration that is being exposed. This pandemic is focussing attention on systemic problems caused by capitalism itself.

Covid-19 is exposing more clearly than anything else how ill-prepared modern capitalist societies, with their privatised health care and pharmaceutical industries, are for crises on this scale.

The Sanders campaign, and every movement working for social change, will need to adapt to the new reality – and also to exploit new opportunities that arise. □

• Eric Lee is convenor of "London for Bernie", writing here in a personal capacity. For all Eric's Sanders columns and other coverage see bit.ly/el-bs. For another slant on Sanders, see Dan La Botz on page 8 this week.

Israel: poll impasse gives a little more time

By Rhodri Evans

The bad news from Israel's election on 2 March is that Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's right-wing prime minister since 2009, increased his score slightly in this third poll since Israel hit electoral deadlock in April 2019.

Netanyahu openly trades on hostility to Israel's 20% Palestinian minority, and, in line with Donald Trump's "plan", pledges to formally annex to Israel much of the 80%-Palestinian West Bank. He also talks of "transferring" some Palestinian-majority areas of Israel into the patchwork quasi-semi-demi-autonomous "Palestinian state" which the Trump plan promises.

The good news is that Netan-

yahu still didn't win a majority. Much of the anti-Netanyahu majority is really as right-wing as Netanyahu himself, but all of it is fixedly hostile to Netanyahu, who is due to stand trial for corruption starting on 17 March.

That gives us more time to build up the necessary mobilisation against annexation, against the occupation of the West Bank, against the blockade of Gaza, and for solidarity with democratic movements in Israel like Standing Together and the demand for a real independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

There will now be further haggling about possible coalition governments, with Netanyahu meanwhile as caretaker prime minister, as since April 2019. There may even be a fourth election.

A video shortly before the 2 March election had six former heads of Shin Bet and of Mossad, Israel's equivalents of MI5 and MI6, telling voters how dangerous Netanyahu is. Much of Israel's military top brass, for its own reasons and from its own angle, does not want annexation, and that may give us a little further time.

The Covid-19 emergency may delay drastic moves, too.

There is as yet little mobilisation in the West Bank against the threat, but Standing Together is campaigning hard inside Israel.

Currently it has a petition calling for Netanyahu's main right-wing opponent, Benny Gantz, to form a coalition government including the 15 members from the heavily-Palestinian Joint List elected to the

Knesset (parliament) on 2 March, the largest ever such contingent.

"We demand that Benny Gantz... reach understandings with the deputies chosen by the overwhelming majority of Arab citizens, and do everything required to end the era of racism and incitement".

This makes little sense as we can see it. Standing Together's aim is to link the causes of Palestinian self-determination alongside Israel, equal rights within Israel, and social agitation. Gantz has endorsed annexation of the Jordan Valley and is as right-wing as Netanyahu on social issues.

To help open up more radical alternatives, we need to build an international movement of solidarity for two states and equal rights. □



Agenda

The last issue of *Solidarity* included (printed as a pull-out to reduce costs) a new issue of *Women's Fightback*. It sold well at International Women's Day events on 8 March, and now the *Women's Fightback* pages can be pulled out for separate sale over the coming months.

Workers' Liberty union activists in the National Education Union (NEU) and the civil service union PCS are busy with preparations for those unions' conferences: 6-9 April, in Bournemouth, for NEU; 18-21 May, in Brighton, for PCS. If you're going to one of those conferences and want to get in touch with the Workers' Liberty people there, email us at awl@workersliberty.org.

There is now a special website for our charter for labour movement democracy, with the charter, suggested text for a motion raising some key ideas from it, and a link to materials from the Labour Party Democracy Task Force of 2011.

• democlm.wordpress.com.

At bit.ly/mo-pe, you will also find suggested text for motions on:

- Covid-19
- solidarity with trade unions in Hong Kong
- "Get Labour on the streets"
- Free movement
- West Bank annexation
- Iran and Iraq
- Free Our Unions
- And
- Downloadable pdf for petition on free movement.

Dates for your diary (details of all these at workersliberty.org/events):

14 March: Workers' Liberty day school on class struggle environmentalism

21 March: UN anti-racism day march. Together with others, we are supporting a free movement bloc on the march

27 March: Workers' Liberty London forum, debating Socialist Alternative on socialists and the Labour Party

16 May: demonstration demanding closure of detention centres, at Heathrow

18-21 June: Workers' Liberty summer school, Ideas for Freedom

22-26 July: Workers' Liberty residential week school on Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*

9-19 November: COP26, Glasgow □

Audio of Solidarity

Links to the audio version of *Solidarity* 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*.

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To fight climate change, fight capitalism!



Climate

By Misha Zubrowski

The climate crisis has, is, and will likely kill thousands of times more people than Covid-19 — yet why aren't governments and international institutions responding to it with the same urgency? Thoughts, questions, accusations like this have been posed by many environmentalists.

On Thursday 5 March, scientists at the European Union's CS3 declared that Europe has had the hottest winter on record by far. UK's floods and Australia's bush-fires are just two of the recent environmental disasters stoked by the climate crises.

On top of these alarming symptoms of the crisis new research, on 5 March, showed that the world's "structurally intact" tropical forests reached "peak carbon uptake" in the 1990s. Carbon uptake has been declining ever since. Forests act as a "carbon sink", absorbing carbon dioxide from the air and storing it within wood, plant matter, soil, etc. Over the 1990s and early 2000s, they performed half of all terrestrial absorption or sequestration. This allowed them to remove around 15% of all human-origin carbon dioxide.

The recent study shows that, per unit area of intact forest, there has

been a one third decrease since the 1990s, mostly in the Amazon. Rising temperatures impact on the health of trees, increasing their mortality rate. This, in turn, decreases the forest's ability to absorb and store carbon.

This change is separate from — compounding the impact of — deforestation, and the destruction of forests. The net result is yet another vicious cycle: more warming drives even faster warming.

The severity of the climate crisis is in no doubt.

DIFFERENCES

The fossil fuel industry — the key engine behind the climate crisis — is tightly integrated into modern capitalism. Historically and to this day, fossil fuels are the main energy basis upon which capitalist industry is built.

This industry is thus welded to fossil power, and an insatiable drive for ever-more economic growth welded to fossil capital, and increased consumption of fossil fuels. Additionally, and because of this, the wealth and power of the fossil industry is immense, as is the infrastructure of this industry that will have to be abandoned or dismantled in any transition.

This provides one major systemic obstacle to tackling climate change, an obstacle which isn't there to block emergency responses to pandemics. Beyond fossil fuels, capital's unquenchable thirst for ever-greater profits make it incom-

patible with ecological limits.

This difference means, too, that much more money is needed to tackle climate crises than to tackle Covid-19. Ample money exists, in the bank accounts and wealth of the rich, but they resist attempts to remove it for the necessary public spending.

The proportionate speed in which Covid-19 is spreading and causing concretely observable and attributable harm is greater than global warming. The dog-eat-dog nature of a capitalist economy cuts against long term planning. Companies much fight for the lowest costs, the greatest output, creating the widest profits and allowing the largest reinvestment — right now. To fail to do so — even for aims which may *theoretically* pay off in the medium-term — risks economic ruin here and now.

The bosses' governments do sometimes act contrary to the immediate interests of capital, where doing so benefits capital in the longer-term. Statutory education comes at a cost of wealth removed from the rich, via taxation. It also removes, or partially removes, many young people from being at work, from creating wealth for the bosses. In part, working-class movements forced the state to institute statutory education. In the medium term it however also provides a more skilled and agile workforce, ripe for even more profitable exploitation; helping capital.

Companies themselves, when

they have large enough reserves, make some decisions for their medium-term interests over immediate profit.

Covid-19 is localised in a way amenable to an emergency response within the logic of competing capitalist states. A state which implements emergency responses to reduce Covid-19's spread and impact will, within a short time period, measurably reduce economic and social harm to itself as a state. Likewise, to a lesser extent, even within one corporation.

Less so with global warming. If one country or corporation takes steps to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions, that has a positive impact. But the impact is global, benefiting rival states and companies no less than the one making the reduction. The impact is less measurable or predictable than against Covid-19, less so still when concerned only with for the agent making the change. The benefit, so to speak, is spread wide and thin.

SIMILARITIES

There are, of course, many ways in which capitalism falls short in the face of threats such as Covid-19. Capitalist agriculture makes such viruses, and their spread to humans, more likely than necessary.

The risk was predictable. Greater research and into vaccines for combating the family of viruses to which it belongs — coronaviruses — should have been done some time ago. When no epidemics were

occurring this was not profitable. With a publicly owned and run pharmaceuticals and healthcare research programme, we would be in a better position. Or even simply greater public investment, internationally!

The atomisation and neglect for workers of the capitalist economy is another major issue. Where workers are underpaid and not given any or sufficient sick pay, many are coerced to attend work and create profit for their bosses even when they are ill, and might do best to stay at home — for their own and other's benefit.

FIGHTING

The ways in which capitalism blocks tackling the climate crisis point towards a solution beyond capitalism. Short of — and moving towards — that, there is much that we should fight for.

Workers' control of the energy industry, rapidly phase out fossil fuels. Nationalising the banks and expropriating the wealth of the rich, to fund a transition. Organising movements — at work, on the streets, in unions and Labour — to force the necessary changes at every level.

From workplace and company modifications to programmes by local and national government; from continent-wide policies to international agreements; and beyond. □

Expand public transport, not the airport



Climate

By Luke Hardy

A serious campaign is picking up momentum against the expansion of Leeds Bradford Airport (LBA).

The private owners of LBA want to build a new passenger terminal that will increase the number of passengers from 4 million a year to 7.1 million a year by 2030, and 9 million

by 2050.

In March 2019, in response to pressure from youth climate strikers and XR, Leeds City Council declared a "Climate Emergency" — committing Leeds to carbon neutrality by 2030.

Research from Leeds University has shown the planned expansion will lead to a massive overspend on the city's carbon budget, making the 2030 net zero target impossible to meet. The climate impact of the flights would be more than double the 2030 target emissions for Leeds as a whole.

The Tory government is encouraging the

expansion of regional airports, and the Labour council initially welcomed the expansion. Pressure from below has now led to a cooling of this response.

The plans are being submitted for planning permission soon. Local Labour parties are joining up with climate campaigners to pass motions in opposition. The Trades Council organising joint meetings with climate strikers and XR members.

The council has a key role in making the airport expansion feasible by building new link roads and possibly linking up to a new railway station. Even if the council refuses

planning permission, and is then overruled by central government, the council's decisions remain key.

Leeds is already one of the worst cities in Britain for air pollution, its clogged roads already full of airport traffic. There has been no real investment in our bus services. We are one of the biggest cities to lack any kind of mass transit system beyond the overcrowded rail network.

This rail network was until recently mainly run by the notorious Northern Rail, and seemed mostly to be about packed and dirty trains often up to 35 years old. □

Desperate Stalinists face their Thermidor



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star* and its political masters in the Communist Party of Britain are getting desperate: the only chance they've ever had of wielding governmental influence in the UK lies in ruins.

Only yesterday, it seems, they had a Labour leader who openly supported the paper, surrounded by close advisers whose ideology reflected the CPB's most hard-line Stalinist wing. And after the surprisingly strong Labour showing in 2017, governmental power (or at least, influence) could not be ruled out.

Now all that has been snatched away from them – or, as some would say, they've blown it.

No wonder they've been flailing about, blaming an "elite" or "big business-funded"



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• workersliberty.org

conspiracy to brainwash Labour members into supporting Remain, and the "Hasbara department of the Israeli ministry of foreign affairs" for concocting claims of antisemitism.

The best they can hope for now is a victory for their man's chosen successor, Rebecca Long Bailey.

But she is proving to be something of a disappointment to the *Morning Star*, what with having distanced herself from the Stalinists in the Leader's office and saying she's a "Zionist".

It is possible to have sympathy with those who will be voting RLB, if only to deny Starmer a crushing victory and because a defeat for RLB will demoralise some good comrades.

But it's not that obvious that RLB is decisively to the left of the other two candidates, what with her stated willingness to press the nuclear button and coming out as monarchist.

As a comrade put it to me, it's all "Kremlinology", a matter of deductions from unclear signals, rather than of clearly contrasting political positions and records.

But Nick Wright, in the *Morning Star* of 20 February told us: "Make no mistake — the competition is between the neoliberal wing and the class conscious wing of the party.

"Two poles of understanding seem to be emerging. On one hand we have a liberal pole of which the best exemplar is Starmer. This is gaining an impressive number of constituency nominations in meetings which, by some accounts seem older and reinforced by those who departed the scene after Jeremy Corbyn renewed his leadership and now see their Thermidor [see note below].

"On the other hand we have a more explicitly socialist pole given clearest expression by Rebecca Long Bailey.

"What is important here are the bat-squeaks. These are emitted at such a high frequency that to hear them requires devoted attention."

One really does have to ask, if there's such sharp contrast between the "neoliberal wing" of the party (represented by Starmer)

and the "class-conscious wing" (represented by Long Bailey), why is it communicated only by "bat-squeaks", which we need "devoted attention" to hear?

Comrade Wright returned with more verbal diarrhoea in the *Star* of 5 March: "The leadership contest has revealed new contours in Labour's ideological topography – The confidence of Labour's 2017 has dissipated instead of becoming a springboard for a further assault on a divided ruling class"

This latest exercise in stilted Stalinoid verbosity from Wright, once again boils down to bleating about Labour's anti-Brexit/ pro-second referendum stance ("cynical exercise", "big-business-funded and media-sanctioned elite", etc) plus a new, ultra-left twist:

"Brexit reconfigures the ground on which domestic economic policies, social legislation and labour market rules are decided. The rather limited social protections that EU membership entailed — already curtailed by Treaty revisions and European Court of Justice rulings — have less purchase.

"These questions are transparently now the business of a largely unmediated contest between entirely domestic protagonists. It is them and us. Tory government and labour movement. Ruling class and working class".

Or, as the Third Period Stalinists would have put it: after Johnson, us!

And – it turns out – comrade Wright is indeed a bit of a Third Period Stalinist. Like Corbyn's advisers Seumas Milne, Andrew Murray and Steve Howell, he was involved in the 1980s and 90s with the ultra-Stalinist Straight Left group. □

• Thermidor refers to the coup of 9 Thermidor, 27 July 1794, in which Robespierre and his close associates were guillotined, and the revolutionary Terror was ended, to be replaced by a "White Terror" and conservative consolidation. More generally Thermidor has come to mean the phase in some revolutions when the political pendulum swings back to conservative consolidation.

ing *Star's* natural constituency..."

While those who wrote and signed the letter clearly recognise problems with transphobia, it is telling that their biggest concern is to preserve the reputation and influence of the *Star*.

At best this is cowardice in how they confront the *Star's* transphobia, at worst it is opportunist opposition to it because they recognise which way the wind is blowing. Opportunism picked up, of course, in part from the *Star's* through-and-through opportunist approach to politics.

The true test of opposition to bigotry is fighting it even – or especially – when doing so is unpopular. See this article from the time: bit.ly/ms-tp-18. □

Misha Zubrowski, Bristol

Wrong or just unpopular?



Letters

Katy Dollar's article, "Morning Star depicts trans people as predators" (*Solidarity* 536, bit.ly/ms-cartoon) is a valuable exposition of the *Star's* recent and longer term transphobia, why unions should stop funding it, and more. I'd like to pick up on one point. Katy states:

"In 2018 a group of *Morning Star* readers wrote into the paper criticising it for publishing an anti-trans open letter.

"This division between a group of mostly younger *Star* readers who see the need to fight transphobia, and the official line of the

Communist Party and its paper, will probably have been one reason why the *Morning Star* felt under pressure to issue a mealy-mouthed apology."

This could be read in a way which overplays the extent to or sincerity with which these younger *Star* readers are genuinely committed to fighting transphobia. The open letter ended with the following:

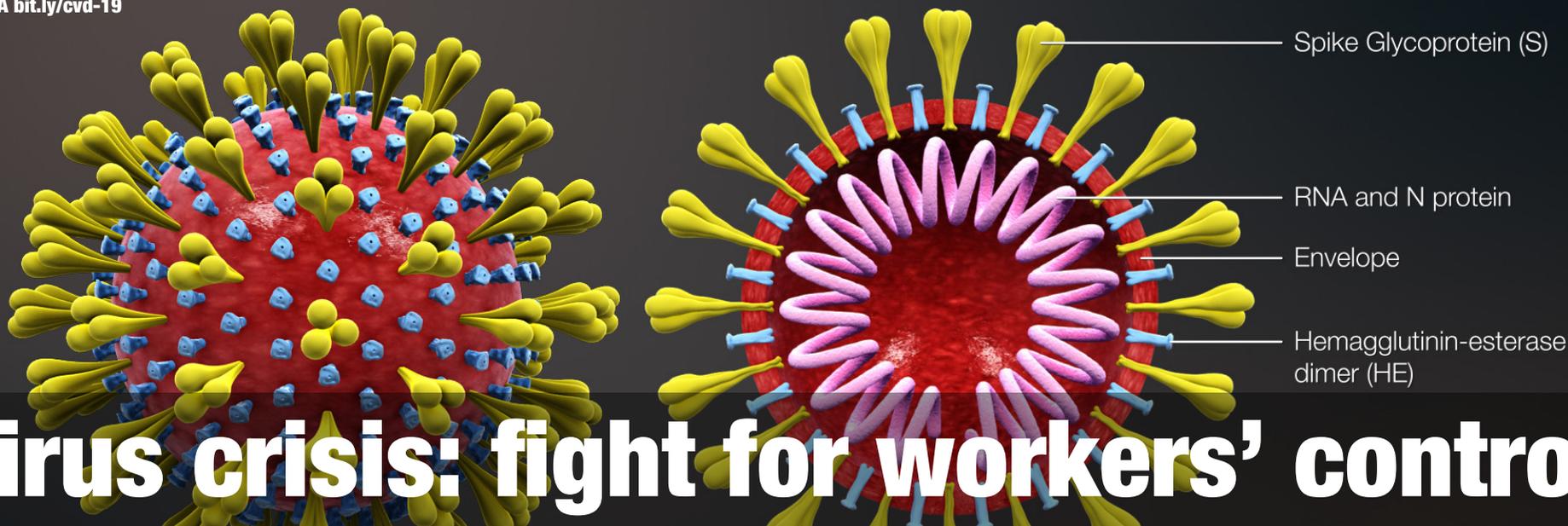
"Most worryingly, it is obvious that the *Morning Star's* apparent policy of giving voice to a small-but-vocal group of trans-exclusionary feminists is deterring thousands of young readers and is a source of embarrassment to the paper's young supporters.

"The paper risks becoming wholly toxic to the thousands of young socialists, inspired by Jeremy Corbyn, who should be the Morn-



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Virus crisis: fight for workers' control

6699 Editorial

You, the reader, know what to do about Covid-19 for yourself and your household. You know how to steer clear of the conspiracy theories and quack remedies on social media.

You also know, more or less, what the public health experts are doing. And you know it would be foolish to pretend to be an alternative expert on disease control and epidemiology.

But what is your employer doing? What is the government doing? Make the labour movement fight for public scrutiny and workers' control!

What is the government doing to secure your ability to take time off work, without being pauperised, for "self-isolation", for sickness, or to look after children whose schools are closed?

Employers will be biased towards mini-

misgiving sick pay and towards keeping all decisions behind closed doors and in the hands of top managers.

An informed, structured, measured democracy is the best way to make the crucial decisions.

The NHS needs emergency funding to ease its current overstretch and so that it can take emergency premises and emergency staff if necessary.

The government should prepare emergency production facilities, under public ownership, to produce more of the masks, gowns, etc., which NHS workers and medical workers elsewhere lack.

Local authorities need emergency funding to help them provide support locally.

Medical services in poorer countries will be much more overstretched than even the NHS. The labour movement should demand massive aid from the richer countries to help out.

We demand the government legislate to compel payment of full sick pay from day one to all, and paid leave for workers obliged

to stay home to care for children if schools are closed; and as a safety net institute payment of Universal Credit without delay and in advance.

A big spread of a disease like Covid-19 would cause economic disruption even in the best-ordered economy. In a capitalist world there is the additional risk of a snowball effect, as disruptions cause a sudden decline in workers' purchasing power and in capitalist investment spending, and an implosion of credit and financial markets.

The best way to forestall the risk of a credit implosion and snowballing economic crisis is to put high finance under public ownership and democratic control.

In every workplace, we want the unions to demand the employer publish their plans for dealing with Covid-19 risks and to discuss those plans with the trade unions, with the help of as much qualified advice as available.

Unions, as much as employers, should respect the scientific advice. But there will be many questions in blurred areas between scientific answers and social issues such as sick

pay and job security. Unions should insist that the trade unions, as the chief democratic and representative bodies of the people who make the workplace function, should have the decisive voice here.

We do not know whether this pandemic will reach anything like the scale of the so-called "Spanish flu" of 1918-20, which killed maybe 50 million people (more than World War 1), and infected maybe a third of the world's whole population.

We do know a lesson that historians of 1918-20 have drawn.

"The poor and workers suffered worse from the flu, in general, than the well-off... because they were more likely to be hungry, to have an underlying disease, and to be housed in crowded and unhealthy accommodation".

Inequality blights. Inequality and eroded social provision kill. Socialists will work for the labour movement to fight against inequality, and fight for workers' control at every level and at every step over Covid-19 measures. □

Profit drive has stalled vaccines

By Angela Driver

In capitalist society we are encouraged to believe that our health and wealth depend on individual endeavour. The market can meet all of society's needs.

Society is set up so that the only organisations capable of producing vaccines for Covid-19 are privately-owned and run pharmaceutical companies.

In fact, with more public investment and research there might have been at least partially effective treatments already available when Covid-19 was identified.

As I wrote in *Solidarity* 534, the threat of zoonotic diseases has long been identified by the World Health Organisation. Covid-19 is in fact the third novel coronavirus outbreak thought to have originated in bats.

The first was SARS, identified in November 2002. It spread to 26 countries, and had a high death rate of one in ten. Fortunately it did not become a pandemic (spread everywhere), probably because of mutations in the virus.

The MERS outbreak was contained. The more widespread epidemic in recent years was "swine flu": a quarter of the global population were infected within a year. But, fortunately the death rate from swine flu was only one in 5000.

The death rate from Covid-19 is currently estimated to be one or two in 100.

Those three recent coronavirus outbreaks led to research, and that research has enabled more rapid progress in the development of a Covid-19 vaccine. The US biotech company Moderna has announced a vaccine is now ready to test, though it is likely to be a year before it is widely available.

The SARS coronavirus is thought to share 80-90% of the genetic code of Covid-19, and is close enough to Covid-19 that the related animal modelling for SARS has been used for Covid-19 research.

Despite that, there has been no vaccine developed for any coronavirus. Dr Peter Hotez, in Texas, in 2012 developed a SARS vaccine that was ready to be tested. But, he says, the funding for SARS research dried up.

He believes that had the SARS vaccine been commercially developed it could have provided cross protection to cover for Covid-19.

This is a recurring problem. An ebola vaccine was developed but not licensed. It was found to be close to 100% effective, but was not developed to the point where it could be used until a year into the epidemic, which killed 11,000.

That led to Cepi (Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations) being formed to try to address the issue of vaccine development. Cepi has funding from several countries and from philanthropists.

The EU revamped an international treaty

to commit countries to develop their capacity to manage infectious diseases in 2007 — but today none of the countries signed up are meeting the treaty's requirements. Without an immediate large-scale threat to life, there is no profit to be made in developing vaccines, medications and research that may help with future outbreaks.

The actions taken since the Covid-19 outbreak began demonstrate that it is possible to have international collaboration, with rapid

effect: but the workings of capitalism mean that comes only at the point of crisis.

Humanity can be and should be better prepared to manage pandemics in future. That requires organising social and economic life on the basis of the needs of humanity, rather than of short term profit. □

• bit.ly/d-mck; bitly/L-sars; nbcnews.to/2v9gorA; bi.ly/vc-18m

6699 Editorial

No-one yet knows the likely scale of the Covid-19 pandemic. The biggest previous similar pandemic was the "Spanish Flu" in 1918-20, which infected maybe a third of the world's population and killed more people than the whole of World War One.

Climate change, and mass international travel, stand behind the new pandemic. Behind the old one was the war, with its mass movements of closely-packed troops.

It came to be called "Spanish Flu" because the warring governments suppressed information to try to keep up war morale. Spain was neutral and the government there did give out information.

In fact the worst-hit area was India. Maybe 18 million died there after the virus arrived on a troopship. The British colonial administration did almost nothing to help limit the disease, and millions of ill-nourished people living in crowded conditions were especially vulnerable.

The 1918-20 pandemic came in three waves: the first milder; the second, in September-December 1918, fierce (that is when most of the deaths were); and the third, milder again, from early 1919.

More is known now about how to try to control the disease. In 1918-20, it was not even known that it was caused by a virus. But even now we have no instant answer to the fact that, the virus being new to humans, no-one has immunity to it.

It is possible that this virus will, like the 1918-20 one, mutate into fiercer or milder forms. □

Uneasy lull in Idlib

By Pete Boggs

Since Friday morning 6 March, a tentative ceasefire has been in place in Idlib. Russian president Putin and Turkey's president Erdoğan came to this agreement at their meeting in Moscow on Thursday 5th.

The deal makes provisions for a security corridor covering the area around the M4 motorway which goes through Idlib from Aleppo to Latakia, and Russia-Turkey patrols starting in mid-March. It did not secure any withdrawals by Assad from any of his recent gains in Idlib province, or a safe zone for the million people who have been displaced by the latest round of fighting.

Despite being a member of NATO, Turkey has over time shifted towards a much closer relationship with Russia than with Europe or the United States. America has been largely absent from the recent conflict. Erdoğan has asked publicly that the US give him military aid in the war against Assad, but so far he has been offered only words.

Erdoğan's relationship with Europe is even worse. The slide away from any semblance of liberal democracy had certainly put the brakes on Turkey joining the EU, but now Erdoğan has done something truly unforgivable to the leaders of Fortress Europe: ceased to act as their border guard. As I write this on 9 March, he is meeting with EU officials in Brussels to discuss the refugees.

There has been violence in Idlib since the ceasefire, but only between the Syrian army and the Turkistan Islamic Party, an Uyghur Muslim jihadist group which is condemned and classified as a terrorist group by the Turkish government as well as the Syrian.

It still remains to be seen if and for how long the ceasefire will hold.

There is a saying about the Kurds that they "have no friends but the mountains".

Since Donald Trump pulled the vast majority of American soldiers out of Syria the "Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria" (NES), more commonly known as Rojava, has been forced into attempting a closer arrangement with the Syrian govern-

ment of Bashar al-Assad.

Already at the time of Assad's final offensive into Aleppo in 2016, the YPG (majority-Kurdish militias which form part of Rojava's armed forces) were tacitly collaborating with Assad on territory swaps. At various points the Kurdish forces relied on Russian air support available thanks to the Russia-Syria alliance.

CLASHES

Not that the YPG has been complicit in Assad's butchery, or even that Syria and Rojava have been unambiguous allies. There have been numerous clashes between Assad's and Kurdish forces.

In their fight for self-determination the Kurds have ducked and dived, and called for no-fly zones or military intervention from big imperialist powers such as Russia, Syria, and the United States. Such manoeuvres go with the terrain: the red line is that forces like the YPG should not be at the beck and call of imperial ambitions.

Now YPG-Assad relations have seriously

soured. On Thursday 5th, Assad said at a press conference that the Kurds cannot take American support and still expect to have any sort of relationship with the Syrian government. He said he could accept autonomously Kurdish-governed areas only if they are part of a federalised Syria and ultimately subordinate to the central government.

He demanded "Syrian patriotism" from the Kurds, and "reminded" them that they are in Syria because they fled Turkish persecution.

In an interview with the Kurdish news site Kurdistan 24, the NES senior official Bedran Çiya Kurd speculated that Assad may be attempting a diplomatic overture to Erdoğan by distancing himself from the Kurds.

He may be hinting at a return to the Adana Agreement, a deal which committed the Syrian government to repressing any groups linked to the PKK (in Erdoğan's eyes, any Kurdish organisations), and made provision for Turkey to pursue PKK suspects up to five kilometres across the border. □

Afghanistan: the US pledges to get out. Or does it?

By Martin Thomas

On 29 February, the USA signed a deal with the Taliban to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan within 14 months.

The US has been at war in Afghanistan with the Taliban, an Islamist movement based in the lawless north-west of Pakistan, for over 18 years.

In December 2019, the Afghan women's right activist and secularist Malalai Joya, on a visit to Italy, declared that in 18 years of what she called "NATO occupation... things have just gotten worse" in Afghanistan.

The longer the troops have stayed, the worse the prospects when they withdraw have become. *Solidarity* has long supported withdrawal.

But there is little to celebrate in the deal. For a start, it may not produce actual withdrawal. In 2014 US president Obama declared a plan to withdraw all US troops by the end of 2016, but it never happened.

Donald Trump campaigned for president in 2016 on a promise to withdraw the US troops from Afghanistan, but then increased the

troop numbers in 2017.

Two rivals staged competing inaugurations on 9 March as president of the US-protected government of Afghanistan, both claiming to have won the presidential election of 28 September 2019 which in any case drew only 1.8 million voters out of a population of 37 million, an even worse turnout than in other elections since 2001.

Neither of the rival "governments of Afghanistan" was party to the deal, and both may seek and be able to stall it.

The deal includes annexes on the staging posts required for the withdrawal to go ahead in 14 months' time, but those annexes are secret.

DEMOCRATIC FORCE

There is no sign yet of a strong democratic political force emerging in Afghanistan which can assert itself both against the Taliban, against the US, and against the warlord factions under US protection. So, if the US decides that the deal is more than an election ploy by Trump, and goes ahead with withdrawal in 2021, a new civil war is likely.

In Italy Joya said that about 100

people die in the country every day due to terrorist Taliban attacks, war or unexploded mines.

If there has been any everyday economic improvement over the 18 years of war, it has been almost entirely for those well-placed to soak up the spending of the US and its allies on their military presence and show projects. A survey has ranked Afghanistan as the 176th most corrupt economy out of 180 in the world, ahead only of Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, and Somalia.

Joya herself says she has to wear a burka to be safe in the capital city, Kabul.

The sequence of events which have led to this impasse started with a military coup in April 1978 by a chunk of Afghanistan's officer corps who, many of them trained in the USSR, saw the way to social progress in this economically very little-developed country as through imposing from above a system like the USSR's.

Some of their measures were progressive in the abstract, but they provoked uncontrollable revolt in the countryside, led by a variety of Islamist reactionaries.

The USSR invaded in Decem-

ber 1979, aiming to reshuffle the pro-Stalinist regime and, by canny tactics and with the advantage of overwhelming military force, to save the regime and consolidate Afghanistan as a satellite of the USSR.

COLONIAL WAR

The USSR, however, soon became mired in an unwinnable colonial-type war. After vast bloodshed, it withdrew in 1989. The USSR had, so it turned out, not only lost the war, but also shattered its own system in the attempt to win it.

The forerunners of *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty* demanded from the start that the USSR withdraw, and argued that the reactionary sequels of withdrawal would be worse the longer withdrawal was delayed.

So it turned out. Rival Islamist factions soon dominated almost the whole country bar the city of Kabul, where a Stalinist regime held out until 1992. After four more years of inter-Islamist war, the Taliban took control of the whole country bar its north from 1996 to 2001.

The 2001 attack on the Twin

Towers in New York by Al Qaeda, then closely linked with the Taliban, led to the US sending military support to the warlords of northern Afghanistan, who then quickly routed the Taliban.

From all accounts, the big majority of the population was glad to see the Taliban gone. But the inability of the warlords and the USA to install a minimally functioning regime soon led to the Taliban reviving. And so it has been for 18 years now.

It has not got better recently. US troop numbers, at 14,000, are down from their peak, but up on the 9,000 of late 2016. 8,204 Taliban attacks were counted in the fourth quarter of 2019, the highest figure for a decade.

The deal is, probably, a cruel mockery. Socialists give as much solidarity as we can to the women's movement and other democratic forces in Afghanistan, and solidarise with the defence of the cities against the rural-based ultra-Islamists. □

Student solidarity ramps up

By Maisie Sanders

In the last week of the strikes by the university workers' union UCU (9-13 March), students are escalating solidarity actions.

By the end of Monday 9 March there were eleven universities in occupation: UCL, University of the Arts London (UAL), Cambridge, Royal College of Art (RCA), Edinburgh, University of Nottingham, Manchester, Brighton, Exeter, Imperial, and Liverpool.

The occupations at Imperial and Liverpool have been organised by Extinction Rebellion Universities to demand universities decarbonise, decolonise and democratise, as well as standing in solidarity with the UCU strike. There are very likely more to come.

The UCL occupation is demanding that university management meet UCU's demands on pay, pensions, workload and casualisation, as well as implementing a thirty-five hour week, transparent funding allocation, an end to outsourcing, a senior administrative pay cap and an elected University Council.

Occupiers have covered the campus with posters advertising these demands and asking students to join them in the South Cloisters for a week of cultural workshops and political discussion as part of a module called "Strike 0001".

UAL occupiers also demand a concrete plan to end the BME attainment gap, which for home undergraduate students is 21.5% in favour of white students, an increase in counselling provision, five new counsellors of colour, face-to-face training in mental health and anti-racism, and an end to the University's social cleansing of Elephant and Castle through developments with Delancey. There is currently just one mental health adviser per 750 students.

Students at the RCA taking part in a spontaneous sit-in at their Vice Chancellor's office were broadcast live from Strike Radio (@StrikeRadio1). Students in the RCA's Battersea accommodation spoke about how they don't even have access to functioning water and heating.

Another explained how RCA management knowingly oversubscribed the college by accepting too many students without adequate

planning for resources, space, facilities and staff to meet their needs. This is a common story across UK universities since the cap on student numbers was lifted in 2016. When Vice-Chancellor Paul Thompson refused to meet the occupiers' they called a mass protest for the next day.

Exeter students have also set up camp early in the morning with tents and placards in management parking spaces, refusing to move until they endorse the UCU's demands. On Wednesday, they plan to disrupt the University's open day.

At Liverpool University students have been disrupting lectures on strike days by entering with a banner, calling for staff and students to respect the picket lines and declaring the space occupied. After disrupting an environmental committee meeting Cardiff students secured a pledge from their Vice Chancellor that he would lobby USS to divest pensions from the fossil fuel industry.

These actions follow a call from Student Strike Solidarity for students to escalate their solidarity actions by organising occupations, blockades and other disruptive action during the last week of strikes. We want to ramp up

the pressure on university Vice Chancellors nationwide to meet the demands of UCU in full.

On Tuesday 10 March, students in occupation are getting together for a zoom call where we will agree some shared core demands on our Vice Chancellors to boost the impact of our actions nationally.

Some occupations have faced authoritarian responses from management. Liverpool University called the police on student occupiers early Tuesday morning. Although they have now left the occupation, they have many more actions planned.

As UAL students went into occupation, management's first reaction was to lock them in behind a metal security screen with no access to toilets or water. Last term, Stirling and Reading universities suspended students for taking part in occupations; thirteen Stirling students are still suspended. It is crucial we defend the right to protest and speak on campus.

Police should not be invited onto university campus without the permission of the student and trade unions. □

Uni strikes in fourth week

By a UCU activist

In this fourth and last week (9-13 March) of the current round of strikes, increasing the size and effectiveness of picket lines is vital.

Although pickets are still smaller compared to the 2018 strikes, or the first round of the current action late last year, organising efforts led to many workplaces seeing larger pickets in week three.

Effective picketing means making an active effort to persuade workmates coming into work to turn round. As we said in our last bulletin: "In the 2018 strike, the union leadership wanted to call off action to ballot on an extremely shoddy offer. A big factor in what stopped them was that lively and well-attended picket lines acted

as spaces for collective discussion, and a strong rank-and-file pushback to the leadership's strategy developed, which eventually forced them to change course and prevented the demobilisation of the strike at that point".

We must also push for transparency in negotiations. The decision by UCU negotiators to respect the "confidentiality" of negotiations has had a negative impact on democracy within the dispute. Without rank-and-file scrutiny over negotiations we've got no means of collectively assessing their progress and making decisions about the future direction of the dispute based on a clear understanding of how much we've pushed management back so far. Our aspiration should be for negotiations to be

conducted in the open, but short of that we need regular, as close to "real time" as possible, and comprehensive reports from our negotiators.

It may be that there are concessions on offer that are worth taking; it may be that the bosses have hardly budged. Without transparency and scrutiny, we can't judge.

The only significant public discussion has been around the 3% figure, which a "Statement from the Four Fights Negotiators" said had been put forward from the union side as part of a "potential path to resolving the dispute".

With our ballot mandate due to expire, there'll be a discussion about next steps. With strike fatigue beginning to set in, there'll be pressure to press pause for now,

with maybe re-ballot at the start of the new term in September 2020. We believe this would be a mistake.

Although hitting ballot thresholds again will be a challenge, putting off any further action for six months would mean a huge sacrifice of the momentum we've built up. Some of that will inevitably dissipate as a result of the Easter holidays, but a new ballot campaign – including balloting for strikes and Action Short Of Strike aimed at disrupting marking – and potential action in the third term could help us regain it.

Disrupting exam processes is now our main form of leverage, so we must begin building towards that. Other direct actions that don't require a ballot, such as

local demos and rallies, can also be organised to maintain momentum throughout exam periods. □

• A previous bulletin included a headline calling for strikes to disrupt exams, including via picketing exam halls.

Following discussion amongst UCU members in Workers' Liberty, we've concluded it was a mistake. Although we maintain our view that disrupting exams remains a key form of leverage, targeting the marking process rather than exam attendance is the main and most effective means of achieving that.

Local strikes during the third term may make sense in some areas, but a generalised strategy of trying to use strikes and pickets to stop exams from taking place is likely to be counterproductive.

The UCU's "four fights"

The UCU's "four fights" are:

- pay
- workload
- equality
- casualisation

The main demands on pay are for an increase of Retail Price Index plus 3%, £10 per hour minimum for in-house staff, and Foundation Living Wage (£9 per hour outside London, £10.55 in London) for outside contractors.

On workload, a 35 hour week.

On equality, action to close the gender and ethnic pay gaps.

On casualisation, demands include: end zero-hours contracts; transfer hourly-paid staff to fractional contracts; take outsourced staff back in house; give postgraduate teaching assistants give them guaranteed hours and proper employee contracts. □

Vote Maisie for VPHE!

Maisie Sanders, an activist with Student Strike Solidarity, the Student Left Network, and Workers' Liberty, will be standing for Vice President Higher Education (VPHE) in National Union of Students (NUS) elections being held on 16-31 March, in the run-up to NUS conference on 31 March / 2 April. In that election she will be the only distinctly socialist left candidate, with a clear commitment to support the UCU dispute and to take a clear political stand against marketisation. A number of other candidates across three full-time officer positions are generally leftist; however, the emphasis is on professional expertise rather than an activist orientation.

The election is a rare opening for political contest with NUS, where wide-ranging anti-democratic reforms carried in 2019 have left the organisation with just three officer positions being elected and a shut-off and limited conference. □

- Manifesto: bit.ly/ms-vphe

What a croc

Following the publication of a cartoon in the *Morning Star* which pictured trans people as predatory and deceitful crocodiles, the Poetry on the Picket Line group, which has previously published verse in the paper, has decided that this contribution from Janine Booth, below, entitled What a Croc, is its last:

An oversight has come to light
our usual process
transgressed, broke apart

and through the cracks
crept a carnivorous
cold-blooded cartoon,

a hand-drawn saurian,
fawning, crawling, stalking,
readers bravely pleading for safety.

It turned prey
into the predator,
swaggered past the editor,

a sinister sketch
scaled to draw out
every stereotype, tabloid hype,

every irrational fear.
Apology noted.
Crocodile tears.

Solidarity! That'll work.



Why is Biden winning?



Sanders campaign

By Dan La Botz

Joe Biden turned out to be the big winner on Super Tuesday. While not all of the votes have been counted, Biden seems likely to end up with a majority. He is now positioned to do well in the rest of the primaries and is likely to come into the Democratic Party Convention with majority of delegates. The major media, as to be expected, are hailing him as the Democratic Party saviour.

Bernie might make a comeback. Perhaps, as some have suggested, Elizabeth Warren, whose own campaign has no way forward, might endorse him. Sanders and Warren aides are reportedly discussing that possibility. That would give Sanders a real boost — but it seems unlikely. Remember that Warren declared, “I’m a capitalist to my bones.” A Warren endorsement of Biden might win her a cabinet post.

But let’s turn to the real question: Why is Biden winning?

First, of course, after Joe Biden’s victory in the South Carolina race, the other moderates — Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar — dropped out. Then they endorsed Biden, as did earlier dropout Beto O’Rourke. All three joined Biden for a big rally in Houston, Texas with lots of media attention that no doubt influenced voters in that state and elsewhere. The next day Michael Bloomberg, who spent millions and won very few delegates, also dropped out and endorsed Biden.

There is nothing surprising about establishment Democrats coalescing around a leading moderate candidate, especially when, as in the case of Buttigieg, there was encouragement from Barack Obama. No doubt Klobuchar, Buttigieg, and O’Rourke have been promised or are expecting some sort of political reward, perhaps cabinet or other high level positions. We knew that the establishment was powerful — representing as it does, the banks, corporations, the corporate media, the political class — and now we have seen it in action.

Sanders’ support has no doubt also been somewhat exaggerated as a result of his

large and spirited rallies and the tremendous amount of money he has raised — though most of that money has come from perhaps five million donors among about 140 million likely voters in 2020. Those things were a good indication of the fervent character of Bernie’s supporters, but not of the campaign’s actual depth and reach.

Sanders proved to be weaker than many of his supporters understood. His fundamental strategy failed: Young voters and other new voters did not turn out in numbers large enough to change the balance of forces and bring him victory. In fact, many young people, as he has himself admitted, didn’t turn out to vote. And where voter turnout did increase, for example in Virginia (spectacularly) and Texas, the majority were moderate voters who cast their ballots for Biden.

BLACK VOTERS

Then, of course, there is the black vote. Most black people don’t consider themselves to be liberals. So it is not surprising that while Sanders significantly won support from young African American voters, the majority of black voters — between 60 and 70 percent — voted for Biden in Virginia, North Carolina, Alabama, and Tennessee. Sanders did well among Latinos in the West, contributing to his victory earlier in Nevada and also in Colorado and California on Super Tuesday, but this could not compensate for losing the black vote.

Black voters voted for Biden because he had been the vice-president of the first black president, Barack Obama. And more importantly because the Democratic Party establishment has worked for decades to convince black voters that their fate depends on the party. Bernie Sanders could not overcome the powerful political links forged over decades between the establishment and black politicians and preachers, a relationship that has maintained the black community’s subordination and dependency.

After centuries of abuse and neglect, exploitation and oppression, black voters took enormous pride in the election of Barack Obama. And no Democratic Party politician, including Sanders, dared speak the truth—as some black intellectuals like William A. Darity, Jr., Adolph Reed, and Cornel West have done — namely, declare that Obama had failed the black community. Nor can anyone

say out loud that Biden, Obama’s VP, was nothing but his insignificant, smiling sidekick, though black people of course already know that.

Still, faced with Trump, African Americans, having no where else to turn, rally to Biden and the Democratic Party establishment to defend them, even though it has for decades failed to do so. Consequently and lamentably, black people (at least the majority who support Biden), who have so often been the vanguard in our social struggles, have adopted a pragmatic position that makes them a conservatising force in the primary.

DEEPER REASONS BIDEN IS WINNING

The more important reason that Biden is winning, as I argued in an earlier article, is that while Sanders’ campaign has some of the qualities of a social movement, we do not have a level of class struggle sufficient to propel Sanders into the presidency and others of his ilk into congress. A genuine leftist political movement requires a deep sense of crisis within the society and a powerful desire for social change that has been expressed in social conflict. The votes for Biden, Buttigieg, and Klobuchar suggest that many and maybe most Americans do not feel we face such a crisis — or only see the crisis as Trump’s presidency — and they don’t desire serious structural change.

Jacobin and DSA’s Bread and Roses caucus have tended to vastly exaggerate the uptick in recent strikes, which, while important, hardly amount to a significant strike wave. Other social movements of recent years — Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and Me Too — have had an episodic character, here today, gone tomorrow, with some of the energy they have given off flowing into the Sanders campaign, but much of that energy dissipating. The forty-year neoliberal reorganization of the economy and re-composition of the working class has yet to produce a new working class movement with the power that led in the 1930s and again in the 1970s to massive strikes and to experiments in independent left parties.

Biden may well arrive at the convention with a majority of delegates. But if either Sanders or Biden arrives with a plurality and cannot

win on the first ballot, then on the second ballot the super-delegates (who this year are being called “automatic delegates”) will be able to vote. These are “distinguished political leaders” (former presidents, etc.), governors, senators, congressional representatives, and Democratic National Committee members, that is, the Democratic Party establishment. There are 775 of these super-delegates (making up 16 percent of the total of the 4,750 delegates) and the great majority of these can be expected to support Biden. And their votes will give him the nomination.

Sanders has pledged to support the Democratic Party nominee and he can be expected to do so, just as he did in 2016. If he loses, many of Sanders’ supporters will be deeply demoralized and others will be angry. Some may come out of this experience with a desire to create a new political party, a working peoples’ party, a mass socialist party. More power to them (and I’m happy to join them in the effort) though we will face the same fundamental problems as the Sanders campaign: the low level of class struggle, the episodic character of the mass movements, the organisational and ideological hold of the Democratic Party.

Though I wish I might be proven wrong, as I wrote a few months ago:

“Yet, we know that the American capitalist class and the corporate media hate Sanders and what he stands for, as does the entire political establishment, including the Democratic Party leadership, which loathes him. From the beginning, a Sanders victory has been a long shot....We do not have a level of class struggle that might propel Sanders to the presidency together with a large number of Democrats into the House and Senate, which is the only way that he could affect the political direction of America.

“We find ourselves in the uncomfortable position—not so uncommon for socialists at different periods over the last 170 years since the Communist Manifesto—of having to recognize that the working class is not yet prepared to act on its own. We will continue organising and fighting for our politics in the labor and social movements, while waiting for the events that will trigger the eruption of the mass movement without which our politics have no vehicle.” □

• Taken with thanks from *New Politics* bit.ly/dlb-bi

Clive Lewis on the left after Corbyn



Clive Lewis talked with Sacha Ismail

What Corbynism started to talk about in 2015 was an end to austerity, and trying to return to a sort of 1945 moment, trying to recapture a Keynesian economic approach — redistribution of wealth, trying to use social democracy to move us towards a more socialist economy in stages.

But also at the beginning it was about democratising the party, which I think is what attracted so many of us. The idea of democracy and membership engagement and members having a real say over policy really resonated.

New Labour came in and put their boot on the throat of the others within the broad church and declared unity. We saw a process where through the party machinery there was a drowning out of other voices. Corbynism was meant to revitalise a more democratic party.

Five years on, out of ten, I'd give them three! I think two key things went wrong. Some of the older traditions of the Labour left are very centralised, they share a lot of common with the right of the party — undemocratic centralism if you want to call it that — where a small group of people make a decision and hand it down and the rest of us are expected to follow. There is a fear of decisions being taken in a more democratic way.

The other thing was the 2016 chicken coup pushed the Corbyn project pretty much into the arms of what I'd call a stale trade union bureaucracy. There's a bureaucratic mentality within our trade unions — unions face that same challenge that the Labour Party does.

The Corbyn project begun to be run by people who are used to that way of doing things. And of course Momentum changed at the point too, and we moved into a new phase where the more democratic impulses of the initial stage were suppressed.

SOVEREIGN CONFERENCE

Isn't the demand for a sovereign party conference key?

I referred to that in my leadership manifesto, but I am a little reticent. Let me explain. I see a situation where members that elect delegates and so on are a very particular layer of people who are already engaged, who aren't working, who don't have childcare or other caring duties, and you get a culture that is quite limited in scope.

I'm thinking how do we apply 21st century networked technology so that if you have meetings people who are excluded by various factors can engage. The same applies to a national conference.

On the other hand there are problems with the way people deliberate and make decisions online. All I'm saying is I don't want to box myself in, and rule out new, innovative ways of engaging members in decision-making.



Clive Lewis, Labour MP for Norwich South, put his name forward for the Labour leadership but did not receive enough MPs' nominations to get on the ballot paper. He spoke to Sacha Ismail about the way forward for the Labour left after Corbyn.

ing. But in the party we have now conference should absolutely be sovereign. That principle is vital but it could be expressed in different ways through different kinds of structures. When you get a larger group of varied people involved you tend to get better, more progressive decisions.

Of course there is a danger that you never have proper collective meetings or innovative engagement but largely bureaucratic decision-making through politicians' offices.

What political ideas should the left be fighting for now?

There's an idea that socialism is inevitable, whether that's a Marxist view, or just the idea that given time people will organise themselves for a better society. The problem is that we've got a climate crisis, and that obviously puts a ticking clock on what we've got to do.

If we can't change what's happening to the climate, we can't stem the decline of biodiversity, we can't deal with issues of big data, we've got a real problem.

We've now got five or potentially ten years of a Tory government when the clock is ticking on the climate. We've got to build alliances out of our comfort zone. The labour movement is quite a narrow and shrinking slice of civil society. We've got to recognise that we're part of a wider ecosystem of civil society, whether that's the green movement, the antiracist movement, internationalist movements — whatever those progressive movements are, wherever there are politicians and political movements who can see we need to challenge the Tories, those are the kind of political alliances we need.

UNIONS

One of the things about Corbynism is you have this big ferment in the Labour Party, but it didn't have much reflection in workplaces or in the trade unions. Why is that? What can we do going forward to build that link between politics in the Labour Party and workers' organisation?

Trade unions are a particular way of organising labour within an economy, but that economy is changing very rapidly. But with new

challenges like the rise of the robots, it's not clear what form that organisation will take.

I don't think anyone quite knows. We've got a 19th century model of organisation in a 21st century post-industrial economy. The reason that trade union membership has declined isn't just about decisions trade unions have taken, but rather longer term trends.

If you look at the way that people are organising in civil society now, it's very different. Do trade unions fit into that model?

If you look at tech companies with marginal costs of zero, and there's very little need for human input. That's not the future of everything, but still...

Well, also there are tech workers and they have immense potential power — because if you have a small workforce with their hands on the process they can turn the switch off... That's true.

You were the only leadership candidate to sign the Free Our Unions pledge for all anti-union laws to be repealed. Can you say something about that?

One of the reasons for decline over forty years is the legal hamstringing of unions to operate collectively. What we've seen is the atomisation of not just society, but the trade union movement. The idea of solidarity has become increasingly alien to many people.

The legislation that was brought in by Thatcher and subsequently was about reducing working people's ability not just to organise in their own sector but also to show solidarity with other groups. Unions will struggle to network and find new ways of organising if they're unable to show solidarity, so one of the biggest and most fundamental changes is to restore that right.

Getting rid of this legislation will also allow trade unionists to engage with not just issues that effect them directly at work, but wider issues that effect everyone, above all the climate crisis. And that requires the right for workers to take action over political issues too.

People even on the left are very reticent about this because the right won the culture war in the 1970s and 80s about how trade unions were depicted. Trade unions were blamed for Britain's decline, but actually their role meant we had some of the highest living standards and lowest levels of inequality in Europe in the 1970s. There was a massively good story to tell about what unions achieved, but we didn't win the argument.

Culture eats everything for breakfast. Take the argument now about the BBC. So many people on the left are angry with the BBC. I know it's an establishment institution, but we have to defend the concept of public sector broadcasting.

There are certain arguments about immigration, about strikes, which Corbynism has been afraid of having and by failing to do that it has undermined itself.

I suppose that's partly true. We have to recognise that a lot of communities were saying to us, "our communities were devastated long before 2010". But they had drawn the wrong conclusions about why, for instance

about immigration, that had to be consciously challenged.

What's your take on the leadership election? Well, I'd like to be voting for myself! I'm glad we ran the campaign and got to raise what I see as crucial issues.

In terms of the options now, I don't think Corbyn won because lots of people were orthodox socialists. Many of the people who back Corbyn were more soft left. They were against runaway inequality, they were wanted to tackle climate change, they didn't want an adventurist foreign policy, but it was a very broad coalition. A lot of those people don't want to return to vapid centrism, where we accept what the Tories are saying but somehow within that apply "Labour values".

They want a leadership which is on the left but seems more competent in putting together a force that can take on the Tories.

RIGHT

Is that the right's way back in?

If Keir Starmer wins, there are those parts of the left who will want to retire back to the tomb as oppositionalists. It's dark, it's warm, it's cosy. I don't think we've got that time. We've got to engage.

I don't think Starmerism exists yet. I think there are people on the right who want to take it into a certain direction, but I don't think it's clear that's where he wants to go. There's a potential there for the radical left to be able to influence that. That's why we need a democratic party where we're not just lobbying the leader but having a real say over what happens.

I don't think Keir can plausibly talk about an agenda for democratising politics without the politics of pluralism, of agency, of control, in the party itself. You can't apply those political-cultural principles without applying them in the party too.

Is there anything in the 2019 manifesto you'd drop?

Look at the policies Labour won in the 1940s, there was a real campaign around them to make them popular, which really shifted the consensus and put the Tories on the back foot for forty years.

If we want to win the arguments on migration, on public sector broadcasting, on trade union rights, we have to win arguments in civil society and create a consensus. □

• For the full interview, on *The Clarion* website, see bit.ly/clivelint



Democracy in the labour movement

On 4 March Labour deputy leader Richard Burgon set out a ten-point plan for improving Labour Party democracy. We want that to pick up on that to open a wider debate. We review Burgon's plan on page 11, and we have set up a special website for our democracy charter and related material. Check out democlm.wordpress.com

A left opposition to Starmer

By Sacha Ismail

Barring a surprise, Keir Starmer will be elected Labour leader on 2 April by a big margin.

How will the left respond? The signs are that Starmer will want to not marginalise left MPs, but rather “incorporate” them, as Harold Wilson “incorporated” the left MPs in his day.

Although the 2019 Labour Party conference showed that at constituency level the Labour Party is much more left-wing, in a general way, than it was before 2015, the actual organised Labour left is weak. Momentum has a big membership, but does not even aspire to discuss and campaign for left-wing policies.

What left MPs do, and what the smaller Labour left groupings which nevertheless played a big role at the 2019 conference do, can be critical for the future of the left and the party under Starmer. By those Labour groupings I have in mind for instance Labour Campaign for Free Movement, Labour for a Green New Deal, Labour Homelessness

Campaign, Labour Campaign for Council Housing, Free Our Unions, Labour for a Socialist Europe...

Will left MPs accept front bench positions? In which case, who will there be to play the kind of role that, among others, Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell played under Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband? A role without which the left would not have triumphed, in however limited a way, from 2015.

We should argue for left MPs to throw themselves into helping the grassroots Labour left develop itself organisationally and politically, with clear campaigning goals.

There are multiple reasons to be concerned about the direction in which Starmer will take the party. To ignore the fact that Matt Pound, the Labour First leader who boasts that he “organise[s] full time against the hard left”, is a senior official in his campaign – and that this is emblematic of the bulk of the Labour right rallying to Starmer as a means to defeat and marginalise the left – would be naive.

Many on the left, particularly supporters of Rebecca Long-Bailey, have portrayed

Starmer as more right-wing than he is, but often in a despairing “if he wins, then I’m off” way. And many among the significant number of left-wingers supporting Starmer have portrayed him as more left-wing than he is. (The same goes for RLB supporters’ presentation of her.)

In any case, the *current* reality and direction of the party is not good. After four years of “Corbynism”, Labour is not meaningfully democratic, does very little actual campaigning or supporting working-class struggles, has practically no youth or student wing, and has a day-to-day message which is simply not very left-wing. There is lots of potential, in the larger and generally more left-wing party membership, but most of it is still dormant.

Bringing together left MPs and organised left-wing campaigns to push for the party to get out on the streets campaigning, consistently week-to-week and in larger mobilisations, is surely key. So are arguing for member-led policy- and decision-making, above all through a sovereign national conference, and launching and building democratic youth and student wings.

All link to defending and developing left-wing policies and making them a living political force. □

Labour, antisemitism and the general election

Rabbi Sikdar and Daniel Randall debate antisemitism in the Labour Party and socialists’ stance in the 2019 general election: bit.ly/aseexchange

Rabbi is a member of the Labour and Co-operative Parties, and an activist involved in anti-racist politics. He is the author of the article “As a left-wing Muslim, I cannot vote for Corbyn’s Labour”. Daniel is an activist in the rail and transport union RMT, a Labour supporter and a member of Workers’ Liberty. He is Jewish, and is the author of numerous articles on left-wing antisemitism. □

Regrouping the Labour left

By Sacha Ismail

Norwich South MP Clive Lewis hosted a second meeting of Labour left campaigning organisations on 4 March.

There were people present from almost but not quite the same list of organisation as at the previous meeting on 5 February: Labour Campaign for Free Movement, Labour for a Socialist Europe, Labour for a Green New Deal, Labour Campaign for Council Housing, Free Our Unions, Labour for a 4 Day Week, The World Transformed, Labour Transformed, and

Workers’ Liberty. As before, Nottingham East MP Nadia Whittome was there for part of the meeting.

At the first meeting, there was discussion of developing an on-going network of Labour left campaigns, with the reference point of the former Labour Campaigns Together initiative (labourcampaignstogether.com). Participants wanted to use the second meeting to clarify goals for such a network. Unfortunately, that didn’t really happen. Discussion ranged widely but without much resolution or progress.

There is due to be another meeting in late April (provisionally 22

April). Some things to discuss:

- Would a network exist to develop collaboration on limited campaigning goals, or to unify a chunk of the Labour left around a set of more extensive political ideas, or both? Both ideas are rattling around, but they are distinct.
- In terms of campaigning, which issues can the organisations unite around and which can’t they?
- How can a network avoid becoming a not very effective echo chamber for things going on elsewhere, and make a distinctive contribution to developing things – particularly in the Labour Party, since involvement in and orienta-

tion to Labour is what unites the organisations? On the other hand, how to combine a focus within the party with active, visible campaigning?

• In terms of political ideas, what are the areas of agreement and disagreement? The “progressive alliance” and “battle mainly on the cultural front” perspectives raised repeatedly by Clive Lewis in the two meetings (hence his focus on winning PR and defending the BBC) need proper discussion.

A number of speakers raised the question of campaigning to make progress on democratising Labour, with some linking this explicitly to

winning a sovereign conference and fighting for left-wing policies passed at conference to be carried out.

Becky Crocker from Free Our Unions raised the question of getting local Labour Parties and the party as a whole out on the streets campaigning, immediately against the Tories’ proposals for a new anti-union law but also on wider questions of workers’ rights, social provision and living standards. It was agreed that Becky will lead a discussion on fighting anti-union laws at the next meeting. □

Phillips: argue it out, not suspend behind closed doors

By Mohan Sen

The issues involved in the suspension of former Equality and Human Rights Commission chair Trevor Phillips from the Labour Party on charges of Islamophobia are somewhat murky.

Listening to Phillips talk about them does not clarify a great deal, and the party itself seems to be avoiding comment.

Phillips is a longstanding Blairite, but until this row burst I had no idea that he held controversial views on anything to do with Muslims or Islam. Looking around to catch up now, my reading is firstly that Phillips is unpopular for saying some things, for instance about the failures of “multiculturalism” as public policy and about the reactionary views held by many British Muslims, that are true.

Maybe also he has drifted into a stance

of minimising or making casual use of anti-Muslim bigotry. His mantra-like repetition of “Muslims are not a race” is not the defence he seems to think it is.

In general, even grave differences should be dealt with through argument and education, not through administrative measures. That goes for mistaken views on anti-Muslim bigotry as on antisemitism. The exception is if extreme and persistent cases are involved – one issue being that for so long the Labour Party unaccountably did nothing at all to some very blatant antisemites. Phillips’ views surely do not fall into that category.

There are also people with much more blatant anti-Muslim views living quite happily in the Labour Party. For instance, former Lambeth mayor Neeraj Patil was imposed by the NEC as a parliamentary candidate, in Putney, in 2017 – after going to India and openly joining the anti-Muslim BJP! In 2019 Patil was allowed to put his name forward

in a number of constituency selections and as far as I could see his connections didn’t generate any controversy.

Unless he seriously recants his support for the BJP, Patil should be expelled.

Why the party machine has decided to target Phillips?

At a time when Labour is being investigated by the EHRC over antisemitism (Phillips has been a vocal critic of antisemitism in the party too), the move looks particularly self-sabotaging.

On the other hand, many of those denouncing Phillips’ suspension do seem to apply a different standard than in cases of antisemitism – both in terms of the political threshold for disciplinary action, and the nature of the discipline.

Phillips, with all the well-positioned lawyers and other friends at his disposal, seems likely to receive due process and to be reinstated – unlike many socialists who remain

excluded from the party in cases nothing to do with racism.

Asked about reinstating Alastair Campbell, Keir Starmer commented:

“I think we need to get past this whole question of chucking people out and expulsions, etcetera. The cases we should concentrate on are cases, for example, of antisemitism or other racist behaviour within the party.”

This needs to be applied consistently, to “ordinary” members and to the left, not just to the Alastair Campbells and Trevor Phillips of the world.

Immediately it seems like Phillips’ views on Muslims do not meet a reasonable bar for expulsion, so he should be reinstated. Then if the Labour leadership thinks his views are a problem they should — have a duty to — make the arguments to the world. □



Bristol International Women's Day march. Around 600 people, with a large Spanish and Latin American constituency. Plus an NEU samba band.

Democracy means that conference decides

By Sacha Ismail

Labour deputy leader candidate Richard Burgon has launched a set of ten democracy proposals for the Labour Party, including a clear statement that conference should be sovereign over Labour policy (bit.ly/rb-dem).

His argument that Labour's national conference must be its sovereign decision-making body is clear and welcome, and is evidently not just a passing gesture for tactical advantage. He made the same case in not-very-widely-circulated interview with Aaron Bastani and Michael Walker on 10 February (bit.ly/burgconf).

Burgon's wider politics are close to those of the Stalinist *Morning Star*, and it is not clear why he has launched these proposals so late in the Labour leadership contest, on 4 March, nine days into the ballot period which closes on 2 April, and after many people have already voted.

But he explains:

"The [2017] Democracy Review was an important step forward in creating a mem-

bers-led party. But there is a long way to go to implement all its recommendations and to create a truly democratic party.

"As deputy leader, I will push for all its outstanding recommendations to be fully implemented whilst simultaneously launching a Democracy Review 2.0.

"It will ultimately be for the members to decide the best ways of further opening up the party...

"I am launching these ten proposals to spark that next wave of discussion on how we strengthen grassroots members' say. Some will agree, some will disagree but – whatever your view on these specific proposals – if I am deputy leader, members will be in the driving seat in deciding how we best democratise our party."

Burgon's proposals also include:

- automatic open selections for candidates;
- a guarantee that policies achieving an agreed threshold at conference will be in the manifesto
- replacing the National Policy Forum with a more democratic system
- an annual women's conference with policy-making powers and maybe conferences

for other oppressed groups

- removing the ability of the PLP to block leadership candidates
- and election of council Labour group leaders by local members.

Some of Burgon's specifics raise issues. Say the threshold for a policy being included in the manifesto is 60%. That could mean a much argued-over and important policy which wins 59% of the vote not being included, while a little-discussed policy winning near to 100% is. The fact that many votes at Labour Party conference are not counted at all also raises a problem: sometimes chairs deny delegates a card vote even when one is requested.

Burgon's proposals for student and youth representation say nothing about democratic national structures or about building functioning local groups, only "a new national student body that secures maximum involvement" and "regional Young Labour committees".

In terms of replacing the NPF, he calls for "much better use of digital engagement" and more widely he calls to "invest in digital tools and technical support, so that CLPs can

properly engage with their members using a range of channels, bringing the party into the 21st century".

Better use of IT and the internet is good. For instance, the Labour Party currently refuses to publish and circulate in advance motions submitted to conference. That and other useful information could be put on the web at virtually no cost, and it would facilitate democratic engagement and control.

Unfortunately, given the dominant discourse in the party, there is a real risk of "e-engagement" being used to undermine what limited democratic structures and meetings currently exist in favour of more atomised and passive pseudo-democracy.

So there is plenty to discuss further. Overall Burgon's proposals point in the right direction. □

- *Solidarity* is campaigning for a wider platform of democratic change in the labour movement: see democlm.wordpress.com

"Policy labs" or proper votes?

By Mohan Sen

Rebecca Long-Bailey, one of the candidates for Labour leader, has announced that she is organising "over a dozen" local "policy labs" across the country to discuss Labour Party policy.

These are "Rebecca for Leader" meetings, and so not necessarily an attempt to replace votes in Labour

Party structures by glorified "focus groups". And discussion is good.

But the way Long-Bailey talks about this process does hint somewhat at the "focus group" approach.

"I know from developing the green industrial revolution through meetings across the country with unions, businesses, local communities, members, activists and experts that policy created at

the grassroots is more robust and more relevant to people's lives."

So we can replace class struggle by "grassroots" meetings with businesses, and it'll all be good?

In fact, over climate policy at last year's Labour conference, Long-Bailey led the effort to avoid radical proposals from CLPs making it to conference floor. Since then, as shadow minister responsible, she has ignored many even

of the policies that were agreed by conference.

A democratic party implies members being able to propose policy through clear formal structures, at the grassroots (e.g. in wards, union branches and CLPs) but also all the way up to a national structure, conference, which can hold the leadership to account and ensure agreed policy is carried out. □



The NHS is already overstretched before the Covid-19 pandemic, and the 11 March Budget is likely to ease the financial squeeze on the health service only slightly. It's high time for Labour to get on the streets with demonstrations, rallies, and protests demanding emergency extra funds for the NHS, and a reversal of the Tories' privatisation and marketisation drive. Text to adapt for a motion to your CLP or union branch: bit.ly/1-o-s

Migrant rights day of action: 25 April

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement has called a day of action for 25 April against the Tory government's plan to illegalise immigration of "unskilled" workers to Britain [bit.ly/im-bill].

Initial signatories to the statement below, circulated by the campaign, include:

- Nadia Whittome MP
- Kate Osamor MP
- Apsana Begum MP
- Ronnie Draper, General Secretary, Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union
- Ian Hodson, President, Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union

As trade unionists, Labour members and supporters we call on our movement, our Labour Party and our unions to fight the Tory government's new immigration policy with all our strength.

These proposals will slam the door in the faces of untold numbers of working-class people. Those who they allow in, they will leave precarious and at the mercy of exploitative employers. They will mean more dehumanising, racist and violent attacks like the deportations we recently protested. They will fuel the suspicion and resentment that divide our communities and our workplaces.

In our campaign against these proposals, our movement must be crystal clear: ending

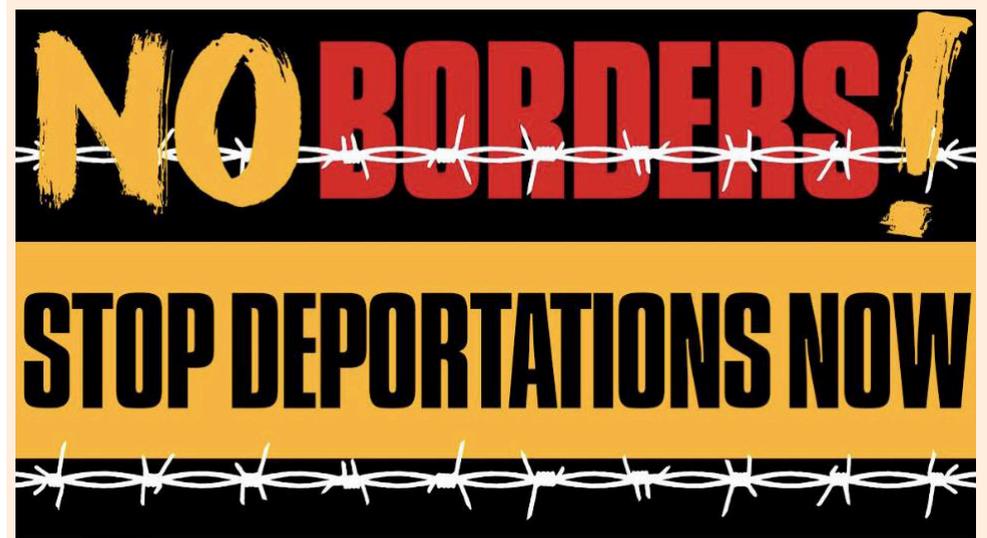
free movement, restricting immigration and attacking migrants' rights will do nothing to fix the problems facing working-class people.

Instead our campaign must stand unapologetically for the vision of free movement, equality and solidarity set out in the policy that was overwhelmingly endorsed by Labour members and trade unions at last year's Labour conference:

- To defend and extend the free movement of people.
- To reject any immigration system based on incomes, migrants' utility to employers, or number caps or targets.
- To close every detention centre.
- To end all Hostile Environment measures and restrictions on migrants' NHS access.
- To ensure the right to family reunion is unconditional.
- To abolish "no recourse to public funds", guaranteeing the social security safety net to everyone.
- To extend equal voting rights to all UK residents.

These are the principles on which Labour and our unions must base our campaign against this rotten, xenophobic policy.

We will mobilise in Parliament, in our workplaces and in our communities until we



**Join the free movement bloc on the UN anti-racist day march:
Riding House Street/ Langham Place, London W1;
Saturday 21 March, noon**

win, beginning with the day of action called by the Labour Campaign for Free Movement on Saturday 25 April. □

• labourfreemovement.org

Who's "skilled", who's "unskilled"?



**Women's
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

Home Secretary Priti Patel has announced the government wants to "encourage people with good talent" and "reduce the number of people coming to the UK with low skills".

Rightly, this has provoked a flurry of articles and social media content arguing that the government's characterisation of care work, which is very badly paid, is ignorant and offensive.

Under the proposed point system, people wishing to move to Britain will need 70 points to be eligible. Migrants must have spoken English (10 points) and a job offer from an approved sponsor (20 points) at the skill grade of A-level or above (20 points) and which pays at least £25,600 a year (20 points) or £20,480 for shortage occupations or those which require a PhD in a STEM subject (20 points).

Nadia Whittome MP raised questions in parliament, making the point that the definition of care work as low skilled has primarily come from terrible pay in the industry.

"When I was a care worker my colleagues taught me to help sick, elderly and disabled people live full lives. This government calls

care work 'low skilled' because it has made it low paid."

Millions of people work in care work (1.62 million reported in October 2019). It is estimated that 7.8% of the roles in adult social care are vacant, equal to approximately 122,000 vacancies at any time. In the sector 24% of workers are on zero-hours contracts. Jobs are low paid and low status, despite their obvious importance.

Care workers need sensitivity, tactfulness, patience, honesty, the ability to keep information confidential and assess and react to people quickly. There are specific skills and knowledge relating to personal, social, medical and domestic care roles. Workers must be understanding, treating people with dignity and empowerment under difficult situations.

Most roles require provision of basic medical care. Care workers must also have appropriate knowledge of often changing policy and legislation.

This is skilled work. Why is it paid so badly and seen as unskilled?

As in health care, about 80 per cent of all jobs in adult social care are done by women; the proportion in direct care and support-providing jobs is higher, at 85 to 95 per cent. Why can work requiring an array of knowledge and skills be designated "unskilled"? Because it is a female workforce doing work associated in our society with femininity.

Capitalism separated social reproduction

(the job of housework, bringing up children, running a home) from that of economic production (what we normally see as work). Social reproduction largely fell on women, was carried out in the domestic sphere and was compensated for by love and a socially reinforced sense of virtue.

SEPARATION

Economic production largely fell on men, was carried out in public life and was compensated for by money. These were not separate but equal areas of activity; the importance of social reproduction was obscured by its physical separation from public life and was relegated to a lesser position. In a world where money is the primary source of power, people and skills undeserving of payment were bound to be secondary.

Women's work – cleaning, cooking and caring – when done as waged work is underpaid because of a pervasive ideology that these things, however important for the continuation of human life, aren't very valuable. "Skilled workers" like engineers, crane operators, plumbers must be trained in their manly trades, but women are assumed, by virtue of our gender, to know how to look after people.

Assumed to be for free in the sphere of social reproduction, these skills embody unpaid women's work, not the paid work of professors or trainers.

Wages are set by struggle. Bosses will set

wages as low as they can get away with. Workers must collectively fight to push them up. The lack of status for "women's work" has combined with forty years of defeat and acquiescence by the labour movement to leave wages at a very low level.

Unions must recruit and organise in the care sector. It is work that performs an essential social function and makes bosses huge profits. We must take the industrial power of these workers seriously.

Wages in the sector will rise, if only to roughly the meagre level of equivalent skilled "male" work. The difference between £20,480 and £25,600 makes an enormous difference in an individual's life. The struggle for wages is worth more than the pay rise, as Karl Kautsky explained back in the day:

"But the self-respect of the proletarians increases and also the respect that other classes of society give them... they are beginning to expect more from themselves... becoming more sensitive towards every slight and every oppression..."

"All the improvements, which some hope and others fear will make the workers contented, must always be less than the demands of the latter, which are the natural result of their moral elevation".

The fight for higher wages shows us our power and importance and opens up the possibility to fight for more than just a pay rise. □

A hard-hitting fable

Film review

By Barrie Hardy

When I started watching the new BBC drama *Noughts & Crosses* I was pretty sure I'd seen something like it before.

A society where racial oppression holds sway in much the same way as it did in apartheid South Africa except the twist is that the roles are flipped, black African-heritage people are the oppressors and the white population of a fictitious England the oppressed?

Then I remembered my cockney working-class father being more than a little outraged at the self-same premise of another play by the BBC. It was called *Fable*, written by John Hopkins for the ground-breaking Wednesday Play slot, and broadcast in 1965. Its screening was delayed for a week lest encouraged racists to go out and vote!

Worthy though the BBC's latest effort is, it can't be as hard hitting as the one that went out fifty-five years ago and seems to owe more to *West Side Story* than Orwell's *1984*. *Noughts & Crosses* naturally earned an obligatory attack from failed Brexit Party candidate Calvin Robertson in the *Daily Mail*, but even that rag has not been unduly outraged by the series.

If episode one is anything to go by, the whites do not seem to be spectacularly oppressed, added to which there's an agent provocateur in their midst who wants to stir them up against their black rulers. Black policemen and black news presenters don't seem particularly out of place to the general viewer either. And we have in our present government people from BAME backgrounds — albeit enacting immigration policies which would have excluded their parents from coming to this country in the first place.

What was shocking about *Fable* was that it came at a time when, nearly twenty years after Windrush, not a single member of any UK police force was black, there were no

black newsreaders or presenters, and no black MPs. Black faces weren't common on television either unless you count the notorious *Black and White Minstrel Show*, where white men "blacked up" their faces to sing "traditional" minstrel songs.

Fable actually provided black actors with a rare opportunity of employment on TV at the time although they saw their roles as oppressors a frightening experience. According to cast member Carmen Munroe "suddenly you were being asked to perform the sorts of acts that were performed against you in real life."

Hopkins' drama attempted to examine race relations in Britain by imaging the country under a brutal, Black dominated authoritarian regime. His intention was to use the play's black-white power reversal to challenge views on the relationship between races.

He was dismayed that some viewers interpreted the play in the opposite way to that he'd intended. "I got a letter from a viewer which said 'I really enjoyed that play. Boy, you showed them what would happen if they came to power.' He didn't even specify who 'they' were."

CONTROVERSY

The controversy the play aroused at the time was in its highlighting of the fear at the core of white supremacy that the oppressed would pay back in kind what their oppressors had done to them! It was behind every vile suppression of slave revolts and colonial rebellions. In 1960s Britain it had arrived in the form of the "threat" posed by immigration from the Caribbean.

Fintan O'Toole discusses this irrational belief in his thought provoking book on Brexit, *Heroic Failures*, when he talks about anti immigration sentiment embodying "the nightmare of reverse colonisation, of the Empire striking back by occupying England's own streets."

Such claptrap was spouted by Enoch Powell in his infamous "rivers of blood" speech made in 1965, which stated that "in this country, in 15 or 20 years time, the black



From *Fable*

man will have the whip hand over the white man." Powell knew full well that the Afro Caribbean bus drivers and nurses, some of whom he'd been instrumental in recruiting to fill jobs which many in Britain were reluctant to do, had neither desire nor power to take up "the whip hand" in this racist fantasy. Nevertheless, his infamous "rivers of blood" speech played well to large sections of the public who'd grown up indoctrinated by racist and imperialist ideology.

The decision by the BBC to delay the broadcast of *Fable* for a week in 1965 was made "to avoid accentuating the colour issue" during the Leyton by-election. Patrick Gordon Walker was the Labour candidate. He was also Foreign Secretary since Harold Wilson's October general election victory of the previous year, despite not having a seat in parliament.

The reason for this was that Walker had lost his Smethwick seat in that election through the Conservative candidate Peter Griffiths' exploitation of racist attitudes. The local Tories had used the slogan "if you want a n****r for a neighbour, vote Labour" and were aided in their spreading of this through

posters and stickers by Colin Jordan's neo-Nazi British Movement.

Griffiths denied the slogan was racist, claiming it was instead "a manifestation of popular feeling" — a sound bite that sounds all too familiar today! Gordon Walker lost in Leyton also, but went on to win the seat in the Labour landslide 1966 general election.

We live in a time where Conservative politicians once again think it's acceptable to use racist terminology, even though they claim Britain isn't racist. Powell's talk of "grinning piccaninnies" is echoed in the language Johnson uses.

Noughts & Crosses has definite merit in that it makes the audience think about the injustices and irrationalities of dividing and discriminating against people on racial lines. Yet for me it lacks the impact of other dramas such as 2018's *Black Earth Rising*, which dealt with the Rwandan genocide.

It would be great if the BBC had a trawl through its vaults, was able to find a dusty old recording of *Fable*, and showed it again. If it still exists, its re-screening really would be a public service. □

Dark Waters, darker corporate power

Film review

By Janet Burstall

In the film *Dark Waters*, released in the UK on 28 February, Robert Bilott (played by Mark Ruffalo) is a lawyer who takes us through an exposé of chemical giant Dupont's cover up of its toxic product PFOA.

The film shows us the obstacles thrown up by the legal system and US government agencies to redress for residents of West Virginia who had been exposed to dangerous levels of PFOA. It has parallels with other heroic corporate whistle-blower movies from the USA, such as *The Informant* (2009) and *The Insider* (2009).

It's an excellent exposé, explaining enough

of the science and the victims' experiences for viewers to understand the story. We learn that Dupont gets \$1 billion of revenue a year from PFOA based products, including Teflon, and compare that to the around \$700 million ultimate cost of settlement which Dupont tried to avoid. We see the power of Dupont to damage Bilott's livelihood, and the toll of the 20 year struggle on Bilott's family.

Some of the West Virginia residents and Dupont workers who were not party to the legal claims against Dupont abused and ostracised cancer-suffering claimants, Bilott and his family. A house belonging to one of the families was set on fire.

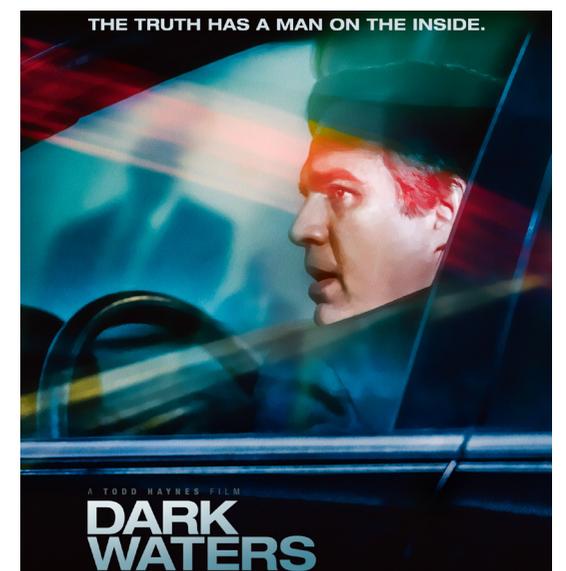
The implication is that Dupont is such a big employer in down-at-heel West Virginia that many locals were more fearful for their immediate livelihoods if Dupont were damaged than of the risk of cancers and other health problems caused by the PFOA con-

taminated water in their area.

If there was a union or community campaign against Dupont, it's not apparent in this movie and not easily found online. Dupont, like other corporations and investors (think Adani), commands a degree of loyalty or support that it does not deserve.

This is a less examined side-story, one that seems to be difficult for movies and novels to convey the significance of, when civil law claims are the best-known examples of tackling corporate malfeasance in the USA. □

• [imdb.com/title/tt9071322/](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9071322/)



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! □

"I'm used to dealing with ministers"



Diary

By Emma Rickman

The operations manager – K – handed in his notice at the end of 2019. In K's final week, the general plant manager also announces he's leaving, that he has partly served his notice, and the new manager will start after the weekend for a handover period.

"They wanted to leave together" is the word in the control room "And it was Lumley St (higher management) that made him keep it quiet. Vacancy wasn't advertised internally."

The recruitment for a new Ops manager has already dragged into a second round. Workers at the ERF were all routing for one of their own, A, the most qualified young operator, who darts around the plant with business-like authority and explains things too quickly for the apprentices to follow.

When he fails at interview a disagreement with the general manager is blamed.

Then there is an old, cockney

shift leader who many fear will get the position – "He used to bellow like a sergeant major" because in a former life, he was. Thankfully he's not recruited.

Meanwhile, as a different Ops manager is sought, M begins as general manager. I'd grown to like our old GM, who looks and sounds like a young David Cameron, but with an engineering background and a posh lisp. M on the other hand looks bullish, not making eye contact with anyone he feels unworthy of his attention.

"He didn't introduce himself or shake my hand," laughs J (mechanic) "he spoke to M and V 'caus I reckon he thinks M is some kind of manager, and V is shift leader."

"It's like eh – hello?!" adds Mc, an operator "we're operatives, we know things, ask us!"

"I've been doing some digging at his old workplace," P, electrician "He's not good news. Something not quite right with 'im."

In the same week I'm helping with electrical fault-finding, and the back-and-forth is exhausting my colleague. A contractor is attempting to fix errors on the DCS system (the plant's computer control) and making mistakes. J the electrician has been moving back

and forth between the boiler houses to prove that errors are being made – we drive out to Park Hill and J connects wires across signal terminals for the pumps while I read the computer graphic.

"That's signal on"

"Pump is red."

"Not green?"

"No, red."

"What about now?"

"Grey – but the pipe is green."

"Well he's sorted out the harder part then – but the pumps are definitely coming up wrong – I told him that – it's like he's not hearing me –"

We get back to plant and J heads to the other pump room to reboot the PLC. I head to the management offices to drop off the van keys, when the old GM hails me and ushers me into the new manager's office.

"M this is – one of our second-year apprentices."

"Hello," he stands behind his desk and shakes my hand. I'm caught off guard; my hands are not that dirty by normal standards, but the manager's office is very clean and I'm dusty from the boiler house. My boots literally feel too big; heavy and clumsy clown's feet.

"Hello, good to meet you."

We have quite a long conversation, where he tells me about his background and asks in some detail about mine.

"Which college were you at?"

"Oh you mean..."

"Oxford wasn't it?"

"Oh, yeah, um, St. Hilda's was where I did my degree."

"I used to negotiate region-wide deals for the steel industry. I'm used to dealing with government ministers – not sure what it's going to be like with local councillors..."

He talks about his qualifications a bit more and then I manage to politely escape, disgusted and uncomfortable with the conspiratorial chat.

I mention this chat to A, senior electrician.

"He pulled me in, talked a lot about his background, bigging himself up."

"Oh yeah?"

"He's very posh."

"Ha! Posher than you?"

I laugh and make my voice clear and clipped "Yes, that is, in fact, possible." □

• Emma Rickman is an engineering apprentice at a Combined Heat and Power plant in Sheffield.

McCoy Tyner, 1938-2020

By Bruce Robinson

The jazz pianist, composer and bandleader McCoy Tyner has died aged 81. Best known as a member of the "classic" John Coltrane Quartet between 1960 and 1965, in a career of over 50 years Tyner developed one of the most influential styles of modern jazz piano and produced a wide range of varied yet distinctive music.

Tyner grew up in Philadelphia where there was a thriving jazz scene in the 50s. He started learning piano when he was 13 and had some classical training.

He first met Coltrane in 1957 and they developed a friendship and musical understanding despite more than ten years age difference. Coltrane told him that he would call him to fill the piano chair whenever he had a group of his own, which finally came about in 1960.

This was around the time of the beginnings of modal jazz, where improvisation is based on scales rather than chords, giving the musicians a wider range of possibilities. The Coltrane quartet was in

the vanguard of this development.

Coltrane said in 1961, "My current pianist, McCoy Tyner, holds down the harmonies, and that allows me to forget them. He's sort of the one who gives me wings and lets me take off from the ground from time to time."

Tyner developed his own style which involved heavy left-handed chords set against tinkling lines and making use of distinctive modal voicings (combinations of notes to give a particular sound). The forcefulness of this style did not prevent Tyner from being sensitive and delicate interpreter of ballads.

"What you don't play is sometimes as important as what you do play," Tyner later explained "I would leave space, which wouldn't identify the chord so definitely to the point that it inhibited other voicings."

While he was with the quartet, Tyner recorded as a sideman on some of the classic Blue Note albums of the 60s and after he left Coltrane, unhappy with the new freer direction his music was taking, recorded under his own name



for the label. But the late 60s were not a good time for jazz and he briefly considered getting a day job.

By 1972, when he signed a new contract with the Milestone label, things had improved. He was able to define his own music independently of the two dominant trends of the time: jazz fusion and free jazz. He drew on Latin, African and Indian musics and recorded a number of albums with larger groups.

From this point on, Tyner played in a wide range of contexts going from big bands down to playing solo, but appeared most commonly with a trio.

For Tyner music was more directly linked to spirituality than to politics, something he shared with Coltrane. He had become a Muslim while in his teens. He told Nat Hentoff "To me living and music are all the same thing. And I keep finding out more about music as I learn more about myself, my environment, about all kinds of different things in life..."

"I play what I live... I just want to write and play my instrument as I feel." □

CWU goes for big ballot majority

By a North London postal worker

The campaign around the ballot [closing 17 March] seems more proactive this time.

Our union [CWU] rep is having one-on-one conversations with as many people as possible, directly encouraging them to vote and ensuring they've posted their ballot. There are more posters up in the workplace.

We've had one gate meeting, which was addressed by a union official I'd never seen before. He gave a good speech, everyone cheered, but there was no discussion. Those meetings are clearly not seen by the union officialdom as somewhere for collective discussion.

We get something called "work time learning" every week, where management get us in to watch work-related videos or give us

presentations. The union rep gets some time at the end of that session, with management out of the room, and that's often a time when there's more discussion about the dispute and what's going on.

The branch meeting is seen as something the rep goes to, with an understanding that they'll report back anything the rest of us need to know.

There's not yet been much explicit discussion about what kind of action to take, and when, if we win the ballot. Everyone's focused on returning a majority and hitting the threshold.

PICKET LINES

In informal conversations I've had with workmates, everyone is ready and willing to strike, but I think a lot of people aren't entirely confident we can win.

Hopefully the union will call strikes quickly after the ballot re-

sult and people's confidence will develop via the experience of striking and conversations on the picket lines.

There are a lot of different issues involved in this dispute. Our workload is increasing, the job is getting much harder, and the pay hasn't increase proportionally. That's a substantial element of what people feel the dispute to be about, the detrimental way in which the job and management culture has changed.

We recently had some manager from head office come and give us a presentation, where they talked about using our ID cards to tap in and out of shift, which would mean we'd be paid to the minute. That's the direction management want to take things in. We also had surveyors come into one of the offices I work at recently, taking measurements and discussing valuations. It looks like they're sizing the place up to sell it off.

If the small offices close, we'll all be working in soulless warehouse-style depots.

The other huge issue in the dispute is the fear of job losses resulting from Royal Mail transferring all the parcel and package delivery to a separate part of the business. We could see things developing more in the direction of a Deliveroo-style, gig-economy model.

The way Royal Mail justify what they're trying to do is by asserting that the company has to "modernise" in order to "stay competitive". But we shouldn't be seeing things in terms of the profit motive.

The privateers who took over Royal Mail when it was privatised can only understand things in terms of maximising their profit. But some of the services Royal Mail provides, or should be providing, might not be "profitable", but are still socially necessary.

We need a postal delivery service as a public service. □

Vote Independent Left in PCS!

By a PCS activist

Elections for the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the civil service union PCS and for important departmental committees will soon be underway (nominations close 12 March, balloting will run from 16 April to 7 May).

Three sets of candidates will be standing: the PCS Independent Left (IL), Left Unity (LU), and the Broad Left Network (BLN).

The IL, which includes Workers' Liberty, currently has three members on the NEC and successfully campaigned in 2019 for the election of long standing PCS activist John Moloney as Assistant General Secretary (AGS) on the basis of a workers' candidate on a workers' wage.

For many years now the IL has been the only opposition to the bombastic and failed PCS leadership. The IL has long advanced policies for the transformation of the Union into a membership led union with positive policies for advancing the interests of members.

FIGHT TO WIN

Against a PCS leadership which has lost nigh on all of the major disputes and many smaller ones, the IL has argued for:

- national disputes which are carefully prepared rather than turned on and turned off by the "leadership" whenever it suits them
- which are centred on real demands that would improve members' lives rather than uninspiring bullshit slogans such as "they won't talk so we must walk"
- for an industrial action strategy developed and built in close dialogue with activists and members, subject to democratic membership

control, and which has some hope of convincing members that they and their union can win.

In the absence of fightbacks co-ordinated at a departmental level IL activists and, importantly, independents, have led various local disputes – but with one hand tied behind their back against an employer which most certainly did have a coordinated and national strategy.

In contrast, the leading figures of LU and the Socialist Party (SP), which set up the BLN, were once part of the same closed PCS leadership. For years it was nigh on impossible to get a feather between them.

They now create or exaggerate differences to put a gloss on their unprincipled split. But when the current PCS leadership and the SP were chums, they were absolutely united, for example,

- in selling to members the Department of Work Pensions (DWP) Employee Deal;
- in refusing to allow North West Contact centre workers to ballot for action; in cancelling the 2015 NEC elections;
- in opposing elections of full time officers; in supporting massive remuneration packages for the very top officials;
- in the 2005 pensions sell out.

There are lots more examples! Unfortunately for the SP, General Secretary Mark Serwotka and leading figures in the LU leadership (including, critically, SP members in key union roles who turned on their political organisation) successfully campaigned in 2018 and 2019 to sideline SP members in the official national structures of the Union and in the unofficial structures of Left Unity.

Their campaign started with moves at the 2018 PCS Conference

to eject long standing SP member and incredibly well paid senior PCS FTO, Chris Baugh. The plan went a bit awry when John Moloney won the AGS election but it eventually saw Baugh leave PCS in 2019 with a reputedly enormous pay off from the members' dues. Hence the formation of the BLN as a vehicle for the SP to continue the fight with its former friends, albeit it has some able independents on the NEC slate who most certainly do not share the SP's record in PCS.

The leadership of PCS remains lacklustre and unable to meet the challenges now facing members. The Left Unity slate, in the "Democracy Alliance" with the self-selecting and far from radical "PCS democrats", is an electoral machine for their continued top down domination of the Union and must be opposed.

MYTHS

But the SP is not the answer to the current leadership. Certainly not when they combine vague policies with myths of the golden years of PCS when they sat high at the top table and helped to create the bureaucratic culture, record of defeat and lack of achievement that now grips the Union.

SP activists now denounce the lack of coordination against office closures in the LU-led DWP, though they did not do so when they were part of the DWP leadership, and are standing a BLN slate in the DWP elections. Yet the same SP will not stand a BLN slate in Revenue and Customs (HMRC). Instead they will stand with the LU HMRC leadership on the LU slate against IL activists and allies, despite the HMRC leadership also failing to coordinate a fightback against office closures.

Instead of starting from what needs to be done to defend jobs and living standards, the SP's approach is electorally driven and their arguments shaped around that electoralism (who will give them slots and should be allied with, who will not and should be opposed).

If PCS activists want to change the leadership of the Union, if they want to change PCS for the better, they cannot do so on the basis of the SP's opportunism. They should campaign for the IL and for the IL/independents in HMRC.

The Independents on the BLN slate in the national and DWP elections need to demand significant and detailed policy changes and commitments from the SP.

Nevertheless, activists who want to change the Union, irrespective of any past differences or their political organisation, could work with IL on the basis of fighting for principled policies at Union conferences and in union structures.

For instance activists could work together at PCS national conference in support of an IL motion to link the pay of full time officers more closely to that of the membership. Similarly, activists with different organisational commitments could work together on the national conference floor, and on the floor of the DWP and HMRC departmental conferences, to impose fighting policies on the national and departmental leaderships.

If people want to change PCS then they must change the policies and culture of the union, as well as the leaders; not simply swap one set of aspirants for union lay office and union employment for another.

Vote IL and build a fighting union! □



PCS takes up Covid-19 issues

On Thursday 12 March, the Cabinet Office will be meeting the workers' rights in the Covid-19 pandemic.

We'll be putting a number of demands to them, including the right for workers to walk off the job if they feel themselves to be at risk of infection, and that people with underlying health conditions are moved away from public-facing work.

We're also demanding that the government ensures the companies to which it outsources various work pay full company sick pay from day one of any sickness, and that any outsourced workers who have to self-isolate are fully paid. If the employer doesn't agree to these demands, the union will have to issue its own advice.

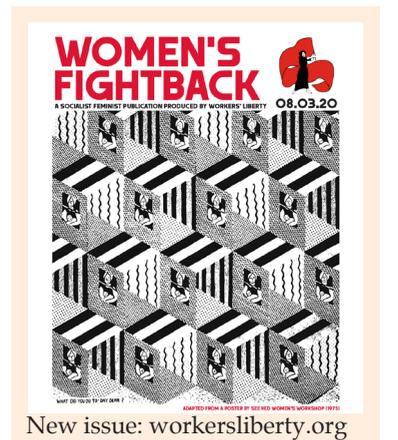
Outsourced cleaners in HMRC offices in Mersyeside and Birmingham are gearing up for further strikes this month, in their dispute to win living wages and improved conditions. Directly-employed HMRC staff, in a telephony centre in Bootle, are also balloting, over workload and management bullying. Their ballot closes on 20 March.

On 11 March, the union is meeting Interserve to discuss the dispute at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Our members there are absolutely determined to escalate their action if the employer doesn't concede.

On 5 March, I spoke at the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign demonstration in central London. We have formally backed the campaign as a union, and issued a statement about the oppression of the Uyghur people on our website.

We'll continue to raise the issue and will aim to mobilise PCS members for future demonstrations and actions. □

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



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BIG BRANDS PROFIT FROM UYGHUR FORCED LABOUR

By Ben Tausz

Uyghur Solidarity Campaign protesters invaded flagship Oxford Street stores on 5 March, demanding that global corporations – including Nike, H&M and Microsoft – cut ties with factories using Chinese-state-directed ethnic forced labour programmes.

Workers' Liberty activists have played a central role in building UK labour movement solidarity with the Uyghur people and other Turkic minorities in the north-western Xinjiang province (known to the Uyghurs as East Turkestan). The Chinese state has targeted them with brutal, industrial-scale persecution: it has locked more than a million in internment camps; imposed a suffocating surveillance regime; separated children from families; and suppressed political, cultural and religious expression.

In recent years, a trickle of reports have indicated that the repression is moving into a new phase. Government-directed programmes are hiring out "batches" of Uyghur workers to factories, not just in East Turkestan but across

China.

Now, a new investigation by researchers at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute has laid bare the extent of the programmes coercively transferring Uyghurs out of their homeland to toil in factories that supply a myriad of multinational corporations. The dozens of brands implicated include Apple, Google, Microsoft, Nike, Gap, H&M, Puma, BMW, Samsung and Sony. (See bit.ly/ASPIUyghurs)

State media claims that participation is voluntary. But the programmes are tied to the threat of arbitrary detention in the camps, and other punishments for the workers and their families. And transferred Uyghurs live and work under intense surveillance, with segregated dormitories, canteens and transport.

One advert encouraging businesses to hire "batches" of transferred workers aged 16-18 boasted that advantages included: "can withstand hardship"; "semi-military style management" by "government-appointed cadres"; and the option for managers to request police stationed around the clock

"for in-factory management". One factory supplying Nike was secured with inward-facing barbed wire, watchtowers, and facial recognition cameras monitoring the gate.

The political indoctrination efforts of the internment camps extend into the labour programmes too. Outside work hours, Uyghur workers attend "patriotic education".

NEWSPAPERS

A Xinjiang newspaper report boasted that they were being taught to "alter their ideology and... understand the Party's blessing", and at work to "follow discipline, obey management". A local government labour office stressed the need to "turn around their ingrained lazy, lax, slow, sloppy, freewheeling, individualistic ways so they obey company rules."

In words that echo the patronising, racist European colonisers who claimed they were "civilising savages", state media even bragged about the hygiene lessons bestowed on the "backward" Uyghur workers, making

them "more physically attractive".

This is unsurprising when China is understood as an empire – a "prison house of nations", just as Lenin and others described the Tsarist Russian empire. East Turkestan, Tibet, and the homelands of other minority nationalities are brutally controlled by the Beijing state.

Its campaign against the Uyghurs aims to dissolve their national identity in order to atomise desires for autonomy or independence. This is an effort to protect the Chinese ruling class's economic interests: in East Turkestan's fossil fuel reserves and in its planned position as a Belt & Road trade route nexus.

The latest revelations show how the state is also using violent coercion to convert a relatively rural, agrarian population into a compliant, beaten-down, "re-educated" workforce that generates more profits for industrial capitalists. Proof – as if more were needed – that the Chinese "Communist" Party's claim to stand for "socialism" and "anti-imperialism" is a sick joke.

That lie makes it all the more vital for real socialists and trade unionists to build solidarity with the Uyghurs and all those workers and oppressed peoples suffering under the iron fist of the Chinese ruling class. In doing so, we stand up for what socialism is really about.

The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign plans to build on its monthly embassy protests by turning up the heat on businesses connected to – and profiting from – the Chinese state's repression of the Uyghur people.

We are calling on the labour and trade union movements to step up solidarity work. Workers' Liberty activists have already played a central role in passing motions in local labour parties; Labour's national conference; branches of Union, RMT and NEU; and the PCS national executive.

We must do more to put these motions into action by mobilising members, and spread the campaign further – particularly to the workforces of the businesses involved, who are in a unique position to exert leverage. □

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