

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



67% OF YOUNG PEOPLE WANT SOCIALISM

» **Get socialists organised**

» **Fight for workers' rights now**

» **Transform the labour movement**

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Get socialists organised!



The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), a right-wing think tank, is mildly alarmed. It takes its new [research](#) indicating that young people are mostly sympathetic to socialism seriously, and urges supporters of capitalism not to dismiss it as “social media hype”, temporary “student radicalism” or a “passing fad which ended with Jeremy Corbyn’s resignation”. It calls its findings a “wake-up call” and a “challenge”.

They are also, and even more, a challenge for socialists.

The research commissioned by the IEA involved polling just under 2,000 people in the UK aged 18-34 (i.e. from the two “generations” sometimes called “Zoomers” and “Millenials”). It found that:

- 67% want a “socialist” system, defined as a society “where business, trade and industry are mostly owned and run by the government”.
- The terms most associated with “socialism” include “workers”, “people”, “equal”, “public”, “fair” and “opportunity”. The terms most associated with “capitalism” include “opportunity” too, but also “rich”, “corporations”, “exploitative”, “high tax” and “unfair”.
- 73% think capitalism fuels selfish-



ness, greed, and materialism, while socialism would promote solidarity, compassion and cooperation.

- 75% think climate change is a specifically capitalist problem.
- 71% think capitalism fuels racism.
- 78% think capitalism is responsible for the housing crisis and the same percentage support public housing and rent controls.
- 72% favour nationalisation of utilities and railways and 72% believe private sector involvement threatens the NHS.
- 75% agree that “Socialism is a good idea, but it has failed in the past because it has been badly done (for example in Venezuela)”.

A sympathetic audience

The IEA report reinforces a lot we already knew from everyday life, and from the 2019 climate strikes, 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, and 2021 Police Bill protests. All this should give socialists more confidence to go out, make the case and convince more people to be active for socialism.

With the right riding high in official politics, the Labour left in retreat and the labour movement stagnant, it is easy, if encased within labour-movement routine and social media, to feel as if socialist agitation, education and campaigning will get nowhere. In fact there is a huge audience for them among young people.

This does not mean that clear socialist ideas and socialist activity will grow

automatically. The IEA report illustrates multiple ways in which the views expressed in its poll findings are limited – in their definitions of socialism, in how well these are understood, in the percentage who “agree” rather than “strongly agree” and in support for contradictory statements, among others. Interestingly most of the responses suggest the average Zoomer is slightly less pro-socialist or left-wing than the average Millennial.

Ideas without actions

The report explains well the limitations of its finding on a more fundamental level:

“Britain is not on the brink of a socialist revolution. The rhetoric about ‘Generation Left’ implies a consistency, a coherence, and a degree of commitment to socialist ideas, which most people in this age group do not have. The reality is more chaotic... While socialist ideas may be widespread, they are also thinly spread. They are not necessarily deeply held convictions. They seem more like readily available default opinions, which young people adopt, because they sound familiar and intuitively appealing...”

Or, to put it another way, most of the socialist-minded young people are involved in no week-to-week organising for socialism and discussion of socialist ideas, and many involved in no regular week-to-week political activity at all.

The report’s conclusions, for the pro-capitalist right, are that all this is “neither a reason to panic, nor is it a reason to despair and throw in the towel. But it is a reason for acknowledging the existence of the phenomenon, to accept the challenge, and to act accordingly”.

The challenge for socialists is in many ways bigger. Socialism cannot be won by a thin though wide spread of socialist-mindedness, but only by organised socialist effort.

The spread of left-wing views among young people will only solidify, develop and start to reshape society, if signifi-

cant numbers are drawn into organised socialist activity and discussion.

There was widespread enthusiasm for Corbyn and “Corbynism” among young people. But by the end of the Corbyn period, there was even less of a grassroots Labour youth movement than there had been in 2015.

“Youth-led struggles only have lasting impact if they feed into ongoing political organisation.”

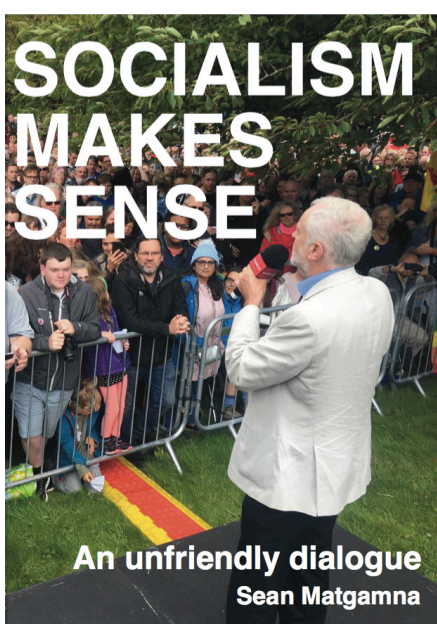
The dominant forces on the Labour left had no interest in, or were even hostile to, organising active local Young Labour groups and campus Labour Clubs and creating a democratic national Young Labour. They were hostile to political discussion and debate. They trained a small layer of prominent young Corbynites in NGO-style organising, Labour Party and trade union careerism, and quasi-Stalinist politics, resulting quickly in the collapse of youth organising around Momentum and a reduction of political life in Young Labour.

Youth-led struggles like the climate strikes and BLM protests will only have a lasting impact if they feed into ongoing political organisation and discussion. Socialists have to be out on the streets with the protesters, offering accessible ways to continue to be active.

Socialists must still build Young Labour groups, wherever we can. We must intensify discussions and organising to draw more young workers into trade unions.

Above all we need to get out on the streets and campuses to create a visible profile for socialist politics, and to convince more people that to be a socialist means being active, and to be an active socialist without joining an active socialist organisation makes no more sense than to be a trade unionist without joining a trade union. □

• See also: What is socialism? – page 3.



Socialism Makes Sense

This book confronts head-on the strongest arguments against socialism: arguing for a society based on human solidarity, social ownership of industry and banks, and political, economic and social democracy. A dialogue: a Marxist takes on an anti-socialist. □

• workersliberty.org/publications



Summer schedule

Solidarity will “skip” a couple of weeks over the summer to allow our paper staff to take breaks or to work on other projects. This is the plan (only provisional as yet): 602, 28 July; skip 4 August; 603, 11 August; skip 18 August; 604, 25 August; 605, 1 September □



What is socialism?

By Mohan Sen

In our editorial this week we argue to "get socialists organised". What do we mean by socialism?

We fight for emergency policies, like taxing the wealth of the super-rich and public ownership of key industries and corporations, to allow action to halt and reverse ever-greater inequality and to slow down climate change. We fight to build a stronger workers' movement, including trade unions, to win these steps.

But the wealth of the super-rich and their power to increase it are deep-rooted in the fact that they own and control the main systems for producing wealth, giving them control over the labour-power of billions.

The only really sustainable answer is for workers, in every country and worldwide, to take control of the whole system of producing wealth away from the plutocrats, converting it into collective social property and creating a new system run for human needs, not profits. That is what we mean by socialism.

Eliminating the profit-motive through social ownership, democratic planning and workers' control of resources, a socialist society could take quicker and more decisive action to suppress carbon emissions; and mitigate the



damage already caused and certain to be caused further in coming years by climate change and destruction of ecosystems. It could re-establish a sustainable relationship between humanity and nature. It could ensure the costs of tackling these problems are decided democratically and spread equally, rather than reducing emissions being done at workers' expense.

A socialist society run by the workers could use the gigantic wealth it has taken from the capitalists to abolish poverty and continually slash inequality. It could guarantee a good standard of living and rights – including good food, housing, healthcare, all kinds of services and facilities – for everyone,

not just in richer countries, but everywhere worldwide. It could repeatedly cut down the working week, to improve people's lives and allow us to more easily be involved in democratic decision-making and control.

With everyone freed from the pressures of working hard for long hours to make money for a boss, and provided with opportunities and resources to develop their interests, we would surely see a flourishing of education, culture, individuality, diversity, and rights for those who have been marginalised and downgraded in class societies.

A society in which workers have united to overthrow capitalist inequality, and which is getting progressively

more equal and liberated, would be the best possible environment for struggles to defeat racism, sexism and other forms of oppression. It would make any large-scale violence inconceivable, let alone the kind of brutal oppression and bloodshed we see in today's world.

Such a system would have little in common with the kinds of "socialism" which previously existed in Russia and Eastern Europe, and still exist in Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam and China. In those systems, a bureaucratic ruling class controls the state and through it the economy. Workers are still exploited and have no more power than under private capitalism: in many ways less.

That model comes from the bureaucratic counter-revolution which overthrew the workers' government in post-revolutionary Russia in the 1920s. Despite that huge defeat, the 1917 Russian Revolution shows that workers can take power away from the capitalists.

Even a developed socialist society would still face difficulties and disputes. Differences in people's natures and capacities would still have an impact. Not everyone would be happy all the time! But it would be liberation compared to the capitalist system with its combination of vast wealth and sprawling misery, and its squandering of so much human potential. □

NHS: beat the 3%, beat new privatising plans!

By Alice Hazel

It looks like the government's pay "award" for NHS workers will be 3%. Maybe only 1.5% will be a basic ongoing increase, and the other 1.5% a one-off payment.

This falls way below all the claims the unions put into the Pay Review Body.

Three per cent does nothing to address the real-terms pay cuts faced by NHS workers over the last 10 years, or the 100,000 vacancies that are taking many workers to breaking point and crippling NHS services.

After a more than a year of extraordinary effort and current escalating pressures NHS workers will feel this as a body blow. The government are confirming, what many NHS workers knew, the applause piled on NHS workers by politicians at the height of lockdown was complete hypocrisy.

The Tories have tried to convince us that this has been a collective sacrifice across society, but that is a lie. Those who already had extreme wealth and were in a position to benefit from the emergency have thrived. Inequality has risen.

The wealth is available to pay for a recovery that includes massive funds allocated to public services, including well-supported healthcare. The government can make the political decision to tax the rich, to invest in the NHS, including the 15% pay rise for NHS workers demanded by rank-and-file NHS workers' groups since mid-2020. They can do that. But they won't without a fight from NHS workers.

Activists will organise local protests to re-raise the demand for 15%.

We will also call on our trade unions to make an immedi-

ate stand – rejecting this pay award and moving quickly to ballots for industrial action, with firm commitments from the union leaderships to reject and organise.

The Royal College of Nursing, a conservative union relatively strong among nurses (and with a combative minority within it), has declared that it will require majorities in three successive ballots before strikes. That is a plan to derail any chance of action. Members of trade unions should demand formal industrial action ballots by then end of the summer at the latest.

We don't want to take action just as a release from frustration. We want to win decent pay and save the NHS from Tory privatisation.

That means a campaign that involves strike action, co-ordination across the health trade unions, building solidarity in the labour movement



and across our communities. Within the big unions – RCN and Unison – we should be calling for disaggregated ballots to give us the best chance of reaching the trade union legislation thresholds. Winning ballots in as many workplaces as possible will give

us the possibility of nationally co-ordinated action which can escalate with time.

We need to act quickly. Without pressure from below the unions won't mount a serious fight. As many in the NHS have said: "if we can't fight now, then when will we?" □

The Morning Star and the “culture war”



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Everyone who takes even a passing interest in politics knows that Johnson's government is waging a “culture war” or “war on woke” against so-called “liberals” who oppose racism and other forms of prejudice. It is also well known that this is a worked out strategy, developed by Johnson's advisers Dougie Smith and Munira Mirza – a couple who have close links with the “libertarian”-right Spiked outfit.

This strategy began over five years ago in an anti-EU campaign based upon hostility towards other European countries and the demonisation of immigrants.

Every politically aware person in Britain knows this – except, it seems, those around the *Morning Star* and the Communist Party of Britain. During the EU referendum and afterwards they

repeatedly denied that Brexit had anything to do with racism – and when finally forced to admit there might be a link, blamed “the desertion by large sections of the left and the labour movement of the anti-EU cause”! (*Morning Star* editorial 2 Sept 2019).

More recently, the paper has carried frequent articles from Ian Lavery MP and his “No Holding Back” group: Lavery, as well as demanding Labour give a “full throated apology” for having opposed Brexit, is also on record claiming “an authoritarian liberal elite looks down its nose at working-class voters that the party that bears its name once represented” (*Morning Star* article, 7-8 Nov 2020) and the morning after the 2019 election, appeared on *Good Morning Britain* proudly claiming to represent the “white working class”.

The racist backlash that followed England's defeat in the UEFA final forced the *Morning Star* to address the issue of English nationalism and its connection with racism.

An editorial on 13 July starts out praising the England team and criticis-

ing racist abuse but ends up promoting English nationalism, “patriotism” and sneering at those who question it “in the name of ‘internationalism’”. It's a re-run of the paper's line on Brexit and its repeated dismissal of the anti-Brexit left as “liberals”.

According to the editorial there are “good reasons why English people can rightly feel patriotic.” And in case any leftists should feel queasy about this, Marx and Lenin are roped into the patriotic cause:

“How Karl Marx would have mocked those on the left who turn their backs on their own nationality, as he did the members of the ‘Young France’ movement! How Lenin would have scorned revolutionaries who take no pride in the struggles and achievements of their own country's working people, as he – the avowed Great Russian patriot – did.”

For the record, this completely misrepresents Marx (bit.ly/abol-n). He responded to: “the announcement [by some French leftists] that all nationalities and even nations were ‘antiquated

prejudices” by saying that was nonsense and that by their magic instant “negation of nationalities” they seemed in fact (inadvertently) to mean “their absorption into the model French nation”. The claim that Lenin was a “Great Russian patriot” is a mystery, ignoring as it does his innumerable condemnations of “Great Russian” nationalism.

And, of course, that shameful editorial completely ignores the most famous words of Marx on the subject of nationalism (in the Communist Manifesto) which make a mockery of the *Morning Star*'s “patriotism”:

“The workers have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word. National differences and antagonisms between peoples are vanishing gradually from day to day... The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster.” □

The science of brains



Letter

In *Solidarity* 597 John Cunningham wrote that a materialist understanding of thought requires a deep understanding of the brain and its functioning at the physical level. Matt Cooper in *Solidarity* 598 called this a reductionist approach “which attempts to reduce the social-psychological to only a biological level”, arguing instead for psychology as “the study of observable behaviour... [and] the ideas, feelings or mental structures on which it is based”. I think both of these are true and both are partial.

How can they both be true? The brain is an extremely complex entity and must be understood simultaneously at several different levels with different properties. The late biologist Gerald Edelman wrote “mental processes arise from the workings of enormously intricate brain systems at many levels of organisation... I would include molecular levels, cellular levels, organismic levels (the whole creature), and trans-organismic levels (communication of one sort or another).”

The lower level at which John operates – that of neurons and brain structures such as the cortex – is necessary for the functioning of the higher levels and in that sense is a prerequisite of human thought. That does not mean however that it can serve as an explanation for the higher levels that Matt talks about. The reason is that complex entities often display emergent properties, by which I mean properties that emerge from the complexity that cannot be understood at the lower levels and may have causal effects.

With the brain, the mappings between levels are extremely complex and, as John points out, have not been fully explained. Edelman calls his own approach Neural Darwinism, which means that he sees Darwin's theory of natural selection applying to the internal development and functioning of the brain. He opposed theories of “mind without biology” such as analogies with computers and derived an explanation of consciousness from different levels.

It is important not to neglect that the brain is a dynamic organ that exhibits plasticity in the sense of the ability to

strengthen or weaken connections between neurons in response to the external environment, including importantly interactions with other humans. This can lead in turn to the development of specific human skills or abilities.

Nothing in this conflicts with Matt's assertion that we need different categories to deal with human social behaviour. However I think his views on Marxism and science are wrong both in claiming science is value-free and that Marxists should not venture beyond human society.

I will just point to the career of the geneticist Richard Lewontin, who died on 4 July aged 92. It demonstrated that it is possible both to be a scientist and a Marxist and not keep the two spheres separate. Lewontin used his scientific knowledge to oppose IQ testing and argue against genetic determinism – which he described as “nature as ideology” – and also co-wrote a book called *The Dialectical Biologist* which discussed evolution, scientific methodology and “Science As a Social Product and the Social Product of Science”. □

Bruce Robinson,
Manchester

Debating the “Progressive Alliance”



Letter

A theme of debate in more than one session at our summer school Ideas for Freedom, 10-11 July, was the “Progressive Alliance”.

I debated Frances Foley from Compass on the issue. The key argument for the “alliance”, I think, is that such strategies are needed because the working class and the unions in the UK are so weak.

Allying with other parties is the only way we can get rid of the Tories and get proportional representation.

In reality the “Progressive Alliance” would be less democratic and less pluralistic. In constituencies which Labour

had agreed to cede to the Lib-Dems, for example, it would mean people who wanted to vote for a Labour candidate would not be able to. And electoral lash-ups would lead to reduced freedom to have independent working class policies.

The pessimism expressed by the liberals and reformists we debated is misplaced. It is true that today the working class and unions are weak in the UK. But they are the only class that can deliver socialism. The power they have is a fundamental feature of capitalism. Rather than giving up on the working class and on socialism, socialists need to fight to transform the labour movement. □

Angela Driver, London



Social inequality has deepened the Covid pandemic; the pandemic has deepened inequality. This new pamphlet, from Momentum Internationalists, offers ideas for the labour movement to regroup and fight back on socialist lines. □

momentuminternationalists.org

It's time for Georgia to choose



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Two weeks ago, far-right thugs attacked the LGBTI community's "March for Dignity" in Tbilisi, Georgia. Dozens of people, mostly journalists, were badly beaten. It was a tragedy that could easily have been foreseen – and prevented. And it has triggered a historic fight led by the journalists' union with the full support of journalists' unions around the world.

The attacks were orchestrated by supporters of the ruling party in Georgia, whose leaders bear some responsibility for what happened. Prior to the march, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili said it was "not reasonable" to organise such an event which could lead to public confrontation. The Georgian Orthodox Church was also hostile to the idea of public LGBTI events in the streets of the nation's capital. Nevertheless, the LGBTI community decided to go ahead with the event.

According to Zviad Pochkhua, President of the Independent Association of Georgian Journalists, the police didn't provide adequate protection to media workers: "There was reason to fear that the situation would escalate as public calls for violence had been made, including from the Georgian Orthodox Church and the far-right. By ignoring the attacks on the media and not inves-

tigating them, the police is encouraging them".

"There is," he said, also "a lack of international pressure on Georgian authorities which allows authorities to close their eyes to the worsening media environment."

A week after the violence, things got dramatically worse. One of the injured journalists, 37-year old camera man Alexander Lashakarava, died after being savagely beaten. Some in the Georgian government began leaking stories that he had died of a drug overdose. This was attacked by, among others, two former ambassadors to Georgia who denounced that as a tactic usually employed by authoritarian regimes, not democratic ones.

The attacks on independent media in Georgia are part of a pattern of such attacks around the world in such places as Belarus, Hong Kong and Myanmar.

The journalists took to the streets even before Lashakarava's death, protesting at the Parliament building, demanding not only an investigation into the violence but also the resignation of the Prime Minister and other leading political figures.

The journalists' protests have taken on very dramatic forms, including shutting down four television stations for 24 hours, crashing the meeting of the country's Parliament, and demonstrating outside the headquarters of the ruling "Georgian Dream" party. Protests continued this week, as the journalists held a silent protest in the seaside city

of Batumi when European Council President Charles Michel arrived for an international meeting.

The International and European Federations of Journalists have been swift to condemn these unprecedented attacks on journalists. IFJ General Secretary, Anthony Bellanger, said: "We are appalled by the death of our colleague Alexander Lashakarava. We urge the Georgian authorities to identify and prosecute all the aggressors but also to recognise and act on its responsibilities for failing to guarantee media workers' safety while doing their job."

If any of this sounds familiar, it's because the attacks on the LGBTI community have been going on for years, with the support of right-wing politicians and the church.

Three years ago when Pride events in Tbilisi were cancelled due to fear of violence, Peter Tatchell and I wrote: "This Saturday, as it celebrates the achievements of the first Georgian republic, which was a progressive, modern, secular and liberal society [Georgia] needs to decide whether the streets of its capital belong to those demanding full rights for the LGBT community or Hitler-saluting fascists and church leaders whose homophobia gives the far right comfort and succour."

"It is time for Georgia to choose," we concluded. That is even more true today. □

• Eric Lee is the founder editor of LabourStart, writing here in a personal opinion column.



Activist Agenda

The Uyghur Solidarity campaign, with the Hong Kong campaign LMSHKUK and the Labour Campaign for Free Movement and others, has called a protest at the Home Office (Marshall Street, London SW1P 4DF) for 7pm on Thursday 29 July: bit.ly/ho-29jul. It will denounce the Tories' new immigration proposals, and demand safe haven and equality for democracy activists currently fleeing Hong Kong and for all refugees.

Free Our Unions

Free Our Unions is promoting a statement from activists in the Unite union, timed to connect with the General Secretary election, calling for the union to campaign to repeal the Thatcher anti-union laws as well as the Trade Union Act 2016: bit.ly/unite-s. It is also promoting the newly-launched Facebook page bit.ly/e-t-u of Empower the Unions, an initiative launched by activists in Earth Strike UK. Videos from its recent launch event are available there, including speeches from Vicki Morris, Janine Booth, Daniel Randall, Gregor Gall, Dave Smith, and Verity Burgmann. All the videos are cross-posted on the Free Our Unions website. □

• Links and info for these campaigns, and wording for labour movement motions on many issues, at workersliberty.org/agenda

Your assistant may not be female



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

If you've updated the operating system on your iPhone recently you'll notice Siri is no longer defaulting to a female voice. This is Apple's response to criticism of the gender bias in virtual assistance. Digital sociologists Yolande Strengers and Jenny Kennedy argue that Siri, and other voice assistants such as Amazon Alexa and Google Home, have been developed in order to "carry out 'wifework' – domestic duties that have traditionally fallen on (human) wives." They accuse tech companies of designing feminised digital assistants who are "friendly and sometimes flirty, occasionally glitchy but perpetually available".

Spike Jonze's film *Her* even had a guy fall in love with one.

This was taken up by Unesco, who reported that by naming voice assistants with traditionally female names, like Alexa and Siri, and rendering the voices as female-sounding by default, tech companies have already preconditioned users to fall back upon antiquated and harmful perceptions of women. Going further, the paper argues that tech companies have the wifely AIs respond to hostile, abusive, and gendered language with jokes or deflection.

"Companies like Apple and Amazon, staffed by overwhelmingly male engineering teams, have built AI systems that cause their feminised digital assistants to greet verbal abuse with catch-me-if-you-can flirtation," the report states. "Because the speech of most voice assistants is female, it

sends a signal that women are... docile and eager-to-please helpers, available at the touch of a button or with a blunt voice command like 'hey' or 'OK'."

Siri is a Scandinavian girls' name. Amazon reported they chose a female-sounding voice because market research indicated it would be received as more "sympathetic" and therefore more helpful. Microsoft named its assistant Cortana to bank on the existing recognition of the AI character in its Halo video game franchise, which has not only a feminised voice but also a feminised body (sometimes presented naked). Their gendered nature was no accident.

Though there is a long, long way to go fighting the sexism coded into the tech industry, it's good to see companies forced to make some changes.

Occupational sexism in the

tech industry has been in the spotlight for years. A recent survey by "Women in Tech" found:

- 82% of women believe that there are more males than females in tech
- 52% experienced gender bias in the workplace
- 81% believe that the tech industry would benefit from an equal gender workforce
- 70% believe SMEs as well as large organisations have a gender imbalance in the workplace

Despite being one of the fastest growing industries,

the tech sector has one of the lowest rates of union membership. Workers are starting to get organised. Last year saw more than 200 Google workers form the Alphabet Union, Facebook's US employees staged a walkout to protest the company's failure to moderate president Donald Trump's comments advocating racist violence, while Amazon warehouses have been seen many walk-outs and protests. Gender equality is one of the many issues tech workers must organise around. □

Second hand books!

Workers' Liberty is selling hundreds of second hand-books – politics, but also fiction, history and much more. Visit bit.ly/2h-books for the current stock and prices, and to order. □



GMB: more to the big picture



Debate

By Dale Street

Solidarity 600 carried a wordy eulogy, by “a group of GMB activists and officers”, for newly elected GMB General Secretary Gary Smith.

Gary Smith, we are told, was “the only candidate with any kind of commitment to an industrial fightback by the union”, the candidate with a record of “challenging collaboration and institutionalised corruption”, and the candidate backed by “the best organised and most militant sections of the GMB”.

Even if one accepts such claims at face value, there is much more to Smith’s record than that. As the article which provoked the ire of the “group of GMB activists and officers” pointed out:

“Smith also has a record of being anti-Corbyn, anti-Richard-Leonard, pro-Jackie-Baillie, pro-Anas-Sarwar, pro-fracking, anti-green-politics-in-general, and pro-big-battleships (but only if built in the UK).”

More recently, through the pages of the *Morning Star*, Smith has blamed the GMB’s decline on the union’s supposed prioritisation of involvement in the Labour Party:

“Over the last five years the GMB’s membership has been allowed to decline as we paid more attention to faction fights within the Labour Party than the industrial landscape.”

None of the above is mere assertion. The evidence on the table is Smith’s own repeated and in-the-public-domain statements, and his circulars to the GMB’s Scottish membership:

“The party of Labour were not in touch with the real world experiences of working-class Scotland. Those who orchestrated the Labour Party’s abject defeat (in 2019) should own it – they were well warned by GMB Scotland.”

Britain’s “MPs for India”

Sunday 25 July, 2:30pm. *Decolonising Parliament: Dadabhai Naoroji and Shapurji Saklatvala*. A meeting as part of South Asian Heritage Month, looking at two Indian radicals elected to the UK Parliament a century ago. Speakers: Indian historian Dinyar Patel; Sacha Ismail of Workers’ Liberty. Zoom bit.ly/naor-sak Facebook bit.ly/naorsakfb. Background: our review of Dinyar Patel’s biography of Naoroji: bit.ly/d-naor; our pamphlet on Shapurji Saklatvala: workersliberty.org/sak-pamphlet □

But in their article the “group of GMB activists and officers” explicitly refuse to engage with any of this (“we want to take a step back from the matters Dale focuses on”). Instead, they write, they want to “look at the big picture”.

But surely “the big picture” of the GMB General Secretary election includes Smith’s overall trade-union politics and record, rather than just those elements which the “group of GMB activists and officers” have chosen to select?

And once that “big picture” is taken into account, then the unrestrained enthusiasm which the “group of GMB activists and officers” display for Smith looks a lot less convincing.

The same applies to their dismissal of the fact (pointed out in the article which they criticise) that Smith is a white male Regional Secretary: “The majority of class-conscious activists in the GMB, including the majority of women and black activists, don’t buy identity politics.”

Monaghan Report

Leaving aside the general point that this is a phraseology normally – and justifiably – associated with white males of a certain age, often encountered in trade union bureaucracies, who don’t quite “get it” when issues of discrimination are raised, the criticism shows no understanding of one of the core points of the Monaghan Report:

“The GMB is institutionally sexist. The General Secretaries and all Regional Secretaries are, and always have been, men. Regional Secretaries hold disproportionate power in the GMB. ... Regional Secretaries have always been, and are all currently, men. This is important because this is where power in the GMB is located.”

When Monaghan wrote that, she was not engaging in identity politics, nor asking anyone to “buy” identity politics.

She was pointing out how sexual harassment, the male monopoly on Regional Secretary posts, and the union’s overall lack of democracy and accountability were not discrete issues but interlocking aspects of the same phenomenon.

Hence the really quite unobjectionable reference in the original article to the irony of the outcome of the General Secretary election contest:

“Ironically, the report identified the role played by white-male Regional Secretaries as the root of evil in the GMB – but the sole candidate in the election who was a white-male Regional Secretary was its winner.”

The Monaghan Report also emphasised the centrality of reasserting lay-membership control over the GMB bureaucracy. Its very first recommendation was:

“The Central Executive Council and

other lay bodies within the GMB should claim and exercise the authority the Rules give them over the General Secretary, Regional Secretaries and the regional bodies.”

It is true that, by contrast, there is a political tradition which believes in the self-reform of the bureaucracy. It is a tradition which, for understandable reasons, appears to exercise an attraction for the “group of GMB activists and officers.” But it is not our tradition.

Evidence

The article said: “Dale Street describes Giovanna Holt as the only candidate (in the election contest) with a proven track record of taking on bullying and misogyny in the GMB.”

“Unfortunately, he provides no evidence for this claim, which is a problem as we don’t know of any evidence for it either. So until Dale puts his evidence on the table, we’re just left with an assertion.”

The evidence already on the table was the first online hustings in the recent election contest (10 May 2021), in which Holt described herself as the only GMB employee ever to have taken the GMB to an Employment Tribunal and remain a GMB employee.

The recording of the hustings has been removed from the GMB website (“Oops! This video does not exist”) and the date of the Tribunal hearing (2013) means that it is not on the UK.Gov website of Tribunal decisions.

But the report on the Tribunal’s judgement published by the *Independent* (20 July 2013) is still available [online](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/employment/employment-tribunal-judgment-gmb-8284841.html):

“Gary Jones (GMB Lancashire Secretary), Kevin Curran (GMB General Sec-

retary) and three others, as well as the union as a whole, were found guilty of sex discrimination in a 120-page document, which paints a picture of a highly dysfunctional organisation. ...

“The union generally, and Mr Jones in particular, were found guilty of seven counts of discrimination against Giovanna Holt. Discrimination against Maxine Nixon, also a Regional Organiser, was proven on 18 counts. ...

“Both women complained to the court of a climate of fear in which they were bullied, sworn at, and had their work undermined. ...

“Mr Jones told Mrs Holt that if she had any dealings over the Tribunal proceedings with Mrs Nixon he would ‘blow [her] out of the fucking water.’ Her attempt to organise a seminar on bullying was greeted by a phone call from Mr Jones in which he said: ‘What the fuck is this all about? This is about your fucking case, isn’t it?’”

Readily available evidence therefore shows that Holt has indeed challenged bullying and misogyny in the GMB.

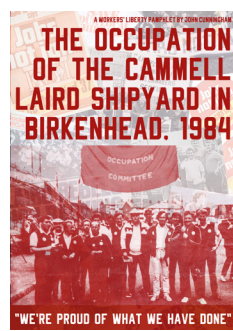
Both Smith and Azam promised in the hustings to fully implement the recommendations of the Monaghan Report, but neither was able to point to anything comparable in their own previous records.

Nor did either of them come back on Holt’s comment in the same hustings that it was impossible to have been a GMB National Officer (such as Azam) or GMB Regional Secretary (such as Smith) and not to have known of the culture uncovered by the Monaghan Report. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/ds-gs

Myanmar solidarity protests from 24 July

In Myanmar, the workers’ movement is continuing the struggle against the military dictatorship which was installed by a coup in February this year. Moe Sandar Myint and Khaing Zar Aung, leaders of Myanmar trade unions, spoke at Ideas for Freedom on 10-11 July to report that military repression against trade union activist in cities like Yangon is extremely harsh. Trade unions have issued a united call for all international brands to cease procuring any products from factories in the country, in order to strike a blow against the military Tatmadaw regime. In the week beginning 24 July, activists organised through Momentum Internationalists will do leafleting and small protests at chain stores in cities around the UK in order to raise awareness of the international fundraising appeal for Myanmar unions and to promote the workers’ call for Western brands to break off business with the regime. Check out momentuminternationalists.org. □



The occupation of the Cammell Laird shipyard in Birkenhead, 1984

Workers’ Liberty has published this pamphlet to remember the brave workers who occupied their shipyard to try and save not just their own jobs but the jobs of future generations. □

workersliberty.org/publications



Dinah Murray, 1946-2021

By Janine Booth

Workers' Liberty is saddened to learn of the death of Dr Dinah Murray.

Dinah spoke alongside me at two of our Ideas for Freedom summer schools and at an online forum last year, on the subject of neurodiversity, autism, capitalism and Marxism. Each time she provided valuable insights and increased the level of understanding among the comrades who listened.

Dinah was a thinker, an activist, and a thoroughly nice human being.

As a thinker, she developed (with others) an interesting theory of autism, that the difference between autistic and non-autistic people is their differ-

ing strategies for allocating the finite amount of attention available to them. Autistic people are monotropic, tunnelling their attention into a small number of intense interests; non-autistic people are polytropic, spreading their attention across diffuse interests. This theory is the most credible challenge yet to the dominant theories of autism (such as theory of mind and executive dysfunction) which assume in advance that autistic people are flawed versions of "normal" people.

As an activist, Dinah took part in several key projects for building autistic community, including the annual Autscap event and the National Autism Taskforce. She prioritised ensuring that autistic voices are heard in discus-



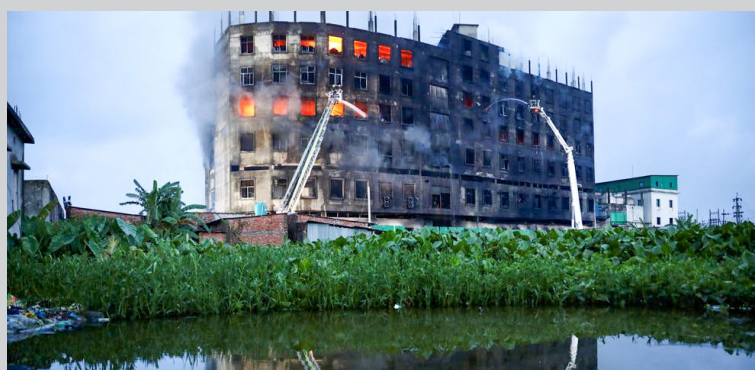
sions about autism, especially those who are most often excluded, such as non-speaking and/or high-needs autistic people.

Dinah was part of the steering group that drafted the Labour Party Autism / Neurodiversity Manifesto, and supported the work of Neurodivergent La-

bour, although she left the Labour Party shortly before her death, frustrated at its rightward direction.

Dinah was able to play such an important role in autistic politics and community because of her commitment and her powerful intellect – and also because of her warmth and empathy. She always listened to and welcomed different views, seeking to understand them as well as possible even when she knew she would disagree. She helped others to grow in confidence and to build projects that would take the struggle forward. She was delightful company and a great friend.

When the story of how we won autistic liberation is written, Dinah Murray's name will feature prominently. □



Bangladesh fire deaths: murder by capitalism

By Mohan Sen

On 9 July a fire at the Shezan Juice food and drink factory outside the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka killed dozens of workers.

Initial reports confirmed 52 deaths, but searches were ongoing. 49 died from the fire and three after jumping from third floor windows; dozens were injured in that way. Some of the murdered workers were children.

The workers were trapped by an illegally locked door. Yet Abul Hashem, chairman and managing director of Sajeeb Group, which owned the factory, has refused to accept any responsibility and blamed "workers' carelessness".

For years Bangladesh has seen repeated fires in factories and elsewhere. The Bangladeshi government, run by the occasionally left-talking but completely capitalist, deeply corrupt and authoritarian Awami League, has complained about the

deaths. But it is allied with the country's factory-owners and has taken little action to change anything.

Reports say the Shezan Juice factory was visited by government inspectors last month and that they ignored its numerous glaring safety problems.

Trial proceedings against the owners of the Rana Plaza factory complex, which collapsed in 2013 killing over a thousand people, have gone nowhere. Both Abul Hashem and Rana Plaza owner Sohel Rana have stood as Awami League candidates.

Bangladesh has also seen many workers' struggles, particularly by garment workers. Shortly after the fire hundreds of workers gathered outside the remains of the Shezan Juice facility to demand unpaid wages and allowances for June. □

- The No Sweat campaign supports workers organising in Bangladesh: nosweat.org.uk

Unlocking land profits, locking out tenants



Book review

By Jim Fraser

Review of Estate Regeneration and its Discontents: public housing, place and inequality in London, by Paul Watt

This is a most important book, and a powerful indictment of the Tory and Blairite housing agenda.

The objective of council housing was to give everyone a decent place to live, as a right, at a rent they could afford, and with security of tenure irrespective of income. In that it was largely successful.

To the Tories and Labour's hard right housing is a commodity, nothing more, to be used for the maximisation of profit irrespective of the consequences. Regeneration is part of this commodification.

"Estate regeneration" is not about regenerating estates, nor about dealing with the housing crisis. It is another stage in the ideological attack on council housing. To the Tories and the hard right of the Labour Party (there is virtually no difference between them on housing) first the curtailment and ultimately the ending of council housing has always been their objective.

Pre-Thatcher, estates were modernised and numerous improvements made. Today regeneration means whole estates are taken over by developers, emptied out, usu-

ally demolished, and mostly replaced with luxury housing. Often few of the original tenants get a place on the new estate. Often much of the luxury housing is bought up by overseas business interests as an asset and not for housing.

Successive Tory Governments refused to fund repairs, maintenance, refurbishment and renewals of council estates. Blair made that funding heavily conditional on estates being transferred to housing association. They thus substantially, and intentionally, worsened a situation of disrepair.

With the Cameron, May, and Johnson governments dramatically reducing direct local authority funding, we end up with government-financed and government-driven gentrification and social cleansing, eagerly supported by Tory and Blairite councils.

The so called "failed estates" or "sink estates" are used as the main argument for regeneration. Tories, Blairites, and the press suggest that it is because they are council estates that they are "sink" estates.

Watt effectively refutes that canard, indicting a lack of maintenance and repairs, plus a media campaign of stigmatisation.

Put another way estates are deliberately allowed to deteriorate, and then the cost of bringing them up to standard skyrockets. With the financial constraints on local authorities, they can't meet the costs. Redevelopment may in-

crease the total number of new homes, but many of the new ones are for rent or sale at levels which few if any of the previous tenants can afford. Some may be at "affordable rents". As these are up to 80% of market rents, they are unaffordable to those on low or even average incomes.

Estate regeneration "unlocks" land value. Extremely valuable public land passes from the local authority to developers, who can then cash in on it. It also increases scarcity of public land. The "freed" land prices drive up rents and house prices.

Effectively destroying the case for so called regeneration, Watt also shows its inherent human cost, its dispossession and its displacement, the despair and the distress.

He exposes the fraudulent nature of the "consultation processes", and the prolonged timescales (some, like the Carpenters estate, taking decades with no end in sight).

Council estates are working-class communities, and often with a strong sense of community. Regeneration destroys this.

Watt shows how when the community comes together it can fight regeneration, the classic case being the Haringe Development Vehicle, which the local community, supported by the local Labour Party, was able to stop.

This is an excellent book and should be read by all housing and tenant activists. □

Poplar rates rebellion centenary

By Janine Booth

It is the centenary year of the Poplar council rates rebellion, an inspiring victory in London's east end rich with lessons for today.

At the time the rebellion took place, just after the first world war, the London Borough of Poplar comprised the dockland area in the big bend in the River Thames (Poplar) and an area of similar size to its north (Bow). A quarter of its people lived in (official) poverty, 83 of every thousand of its babies died, and over thirty thousand people lived in overcrowded housing.

It had a tradition of working-class organisation and action. The east end was the centre of the New Unionism movement in the late nineteenth century, with the landmark strike by matchwomen taking place at Bryant and May's factory in Bow. It had an active working-class suffragette movement, led by Sylvia Pankhurst, Minnie Lansbury and others, and virtually every socialist group had a branch there. Socialists educated themselves and others, running street corner meetings and classes and engaging people in politics.

In 1918, most working-class people gained the right to vote. Although the Tory-Liberal coalition won the general election it had hastily called to ride the tide of war victory, the recently-formed Labour party was in a strong position to contest 1919's local elections, encouraging newly-enfranchised working-class voters to vote in their own interests.

Lesson no.1: Labour had built a strong movement in the east end; its council candidates were products of that movement and fought the election explicitly on the basis of independent working-class representation.

Labour romped home in the Poplar Borough Council election in November 1919, then added four new Labour aldermen. The total included six women, which may not seem many out of a forty-two, but was higher than any cohort of Labour councillors in the other London boroughs. There were postal workers, railway workers, engineers, dockers and teachers, so for the first time, Poplar had a council that looked like its electorate.

Lesson no.2: Poplar councillors were local working-class people, drawn from diverse local communities. Not just white English, they included Jewish and Irish Labour councillors, and three out of the six women councillors were the daughters of immigrants.



Poplar's newly-elected Labour council set about the business for which it had been elected – radically improving the lives of its working-class electorate. The minutes of its meetings show that they often openly disagreed with each other. Although they did work together as a collective, they did not have a problem with taking differing views on particular issues.

Poplar Labour included a range of views, from Minnie and Edgar Lansbury, both members of the Communist party as well as the Labour party, through to avowed royalists. As the rates rebellion developed, some argued for a less combative strategy, but once the decision was made, they got behind it.

Lesson no.3: Poplar Labour operated a united front. There was a broad range of views among Labour councillors and open disagreement, but when they decided a strategy to fight, they stuck to it. They did not allow disagreement to become destructive.

George Lansbury, elected by the new council as Mayor for 1920, asked rhetorically, "Labour councils must be different from those we have displaced or why displace them?" I think it may be worth printing that on a postcard and sending it to every Labour councillor today.

Poplar's Labour council certainly was different from its Tory and Liberal predecessors. It built new public housing, appointed inspectors to serve improvement notices on private landlords and if the landlords did not improve the houses, the council did the work and made the landlords pay for it.

The major health issue of the time was tuberculosis (TB). The council took Poplar's small, charity-run TB dispensary into municipal ownership and expanded it significantly.

The council electrified Poplar's street lighting. It gave proper jobs to people who had worked cash-in-hand for the council. It increased council workers' pay and introduced equal pay for men and women fifty years before it became

legally obligatory to do so. It expanded maternity and child welfare services, and improved the baths, wash houses, parks and libraries.

Poplar's Labour council did not just serve, it organised. It added labour representatives to council committees, received deputations at council meetings about community issues, and took deputations to the government to demand a better deal for their area. The council called conferences to campaign on issues including milk prices and coal supply. And it called protests.

Poplar was not an everyday council for a year and a half which suddenly had a rates rebellion in 1921. It was doing radical work from when it was elected in November 1919, not just in employment and in services but in helping people to organise.

Lesson no.4: Poplar council acted as the working-class representative body it was elected to be. It did so in service provision, as an employer, and, crucially, by making itself a centre of resistance.

After a brief post-war boom, export trade collapsed, causing an economic crash which hurt Poplar even more than other areas because its local economy relied so heavily on the docks. In response, socialists advocated public works: spending public money on work that needs to be done, providing work for people who need it.

So in late 1920, the council set up a road-building scheme which provided jobs to thousands of local men, and the government gave an informal pledge to fund it. But the government backed out and Poplar council was left to fall back on its regular funding.

But the funding system for local government then was even more unfair than the system now. Apart from a very small amount, councils had to raise all their money locally. Unlike now, poor relief was a local responsibility, so to give welfare benefits to poor and unemployed people, councils had to tax local people, most of whom in Poplar

were poor or unemployed! Socialists demanded the "equalisation of rates" across London, by which they meant a system of pooled funding under which rich boroughs put more in and poor boroughs got more out.

They made a socialist critique of the system that was biased towards rich areas while, as they described it, "the poor kept the poor" in the poorer areas. They did not treat local government funding as too complex for working-class people to understand, or as something to be discussed behind closed doors. They engaged people about it, they explained how funding worked, and people came to public meetings about it. Those people understood the demand for "equalisation of the rates" and they took part in campaigning for it.

Lesson no.5: Poplar's labour movement consistently campaigned for better local government funding, and explained the issue. This provided the foundation for the council going on to defy the law.

There were contrasting approaches within the Labour party to these issues, personified in the contrast between George Lansbury and Herbert Morrison, who was Mayor of the neighbouring borough of Hackney (and is the political and literal grandfather of Peter Mandelson).

The two wings of Labour at the time were referred to as the "direct action" wing and the "constitutional" wing. Lansbury and the Poplarists were direct actioners, and Morrison was a constitutionalist. Morrison argued that Labour has to prove itself trustworthy enough to run local government, while the Poplarists countered that if they came up against an unfair system then they did

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enary: ten lessons for today

not have to bow down to that system.

Lansbury and Morrison also disagreed about who tells Labour councils what to do. The Poplarists were politically committed to the idea that the local Labour party debates the issues, draws up the strategy and tells the council what to do, and the council does it. Morrison, however, argued that Labour councils were elected by everybody, not just by Labour people, so had to represent everybody, so did not have to follow the local Labour party's orders.

Today, Morrison's view dominates, although its advocates tend not to set up any mechanism by which "everybody" can tell them what to do. I might have more sympathy for their argument if they were calling open meetings which voted on what the council should do, or if they set up committees of street representatives to direct ward councillors.

Having hit financial crisis, Poplar council faced a choice. It could balance its books by cutting services had set up or putting the rates up. Or it could defy the law. It chose to defy the law.

Lesson no.6: *Poplar Labour council took its orders from the local labour movement. It was politically committed to democratic debate and decision-making in Poplar Labour, in contrast to the view taken by Labour figures elsewhere.*

In early 1921, a conference of delegates from Poplar's trade unions and Labour party bodies thrashed out the strategy of withholding the precepts to cross-London bodies. These were the monies that borough councils collected and handed over to the London County Council, Metropolitan Asylum Board, Metropolitan Police and the Water Board (water supply was still in municipal ownership), the equivalent of today's precepts to the Greater London Authority and other bodies. Refusal to collect and hand over the precepts meant that Poplar council would only levy rates on local people to provide

local services and poor relief.

Poplar justified this with a critique of the law being biased against them. Councillor Edgar Lansbury said that "the law and justice are two different things", and Sam March, Poplar's Mayor for 1921, said that "the master class has made the laws". They asserted that they were not obliged to adhere to laws that the ruling class had created to keep them down.

The London County Council took Poplar to court. Poplar's Town Clerk, J Buteaux Skeggs, warned the council against breaking the law, but when the council confirmed that it would do so anyway, he followed its instructions. This contrasts with those Labour councils today which allow their well-paid Chief Executives to tell them what to do.

Poplar had examined what the law required it to do, how the LCC and other bodies could get the courts to enforce this, and how the council and its supporters could organise around that.

Some people argue against the Poplarist approach today, saying that it worked a century ago because rebel councillors would be sent to prison and their supporters could mobilise (as though that were easy!) whereas today, if a Labour council refused to make cuts, the government would send in commissioners to take over, strip elected councillors of their power, and make the cuts anyway. In fact, the government nearly did that to Poplar. In August 1921, the Cabinet debated quickly passing a law enabling it to send in officers to take over Poplar, but decided not to. Ministers made this decision not for any legal or technical reason, but because they knew there would be uproar in Poplar.

Lesson no.7: *Poplar took account of the law when devising its strategy, but did not defer to it. Local government laws are different now, so the detail of the strategy would be different, but the approach could be the same.*



The high court convened on 29 July 1921 to enforce the mandamus (an instruction to collect the money) issued by a previous hearing. But Poplar's councillors had worked out how to use the platform that the legal action offered them. In court, they gave evidence that yes, they were breaking the law, and explained why. The hearing saw a succession of speeches about poverty and unfair funding, and five thousand supporters marched from Poplar to the high court in the Strand.

The court told the councillors to collect the precepts or go to prison, but gave them the whole of August to calm down and see the error of their ways. As their ways were not in error, the councillors instead spent August campaigning even more. They held an Old English country fair, promoting their cause to the thousands who attended. They held public meetings in every part of the borough and ended the month with a demonstration at Tower Hill.

On two occasions during 1921, Labour councillors resigned, but they were simply replaced in by-elections by activists drawn from the thousands that Poplar Labour had mobilised.

Lesson no.8: *Poplar's rates refusal was a mass movement. Poplar Labour held marches, put posters in windows, hosted public meetings, knocked on doors, and used the Daily Herald newspaper to spread news of the rates rebellion.*

The government was under so much pressure from this mobilisation that it offered a significant concession. In August, it announced a degree of pooling of rates and a royal commission to revise the way that local government was funded in London. Poplar council could have accepted this concession and called off its refusal to collect the precepts. It could justifiably have claimed that its defiance had won something real. This would have been the equivalent of what Liverpool council did in the 1980s: an active, defiant fight that won real advances but not an outright victory. But Poplar did not do this, because it knew that continued resistance could win more.

Lesson no.9: *Poplar did not settle for less than it was fighting for. In August 1921, it could have accepted the significant concession the government made, but instead continued to fight.*

At the beginning of September 1921, the sheriff arrested the councillors, taking twenty-five male councillors to Brixton prison and five women to Holloway. Thousands mobilised to show their support for their elected representatives as they were arrested and contin-

ued to do so outside the prisons.

The councillors continued to organise the campaign from behind bars. They even convinced the prison authorities to let them hold official council meetings in prison.

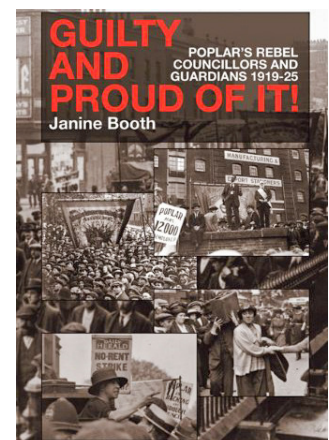
Supporters of Poplar's strategy had battled hard to persuade other London councils to also refuse to levy the precepts, but many had voted this down, often with Labour right wingers voting with Tories against it. Although they could have done so earlier and perhaps speeded Poplar's victory, in September Poplar's neighbouring councils Bethnal Green and Stepney voted to follow the same tactic.

Lesson no.10: *Poplar council and its supporters worked to spread the action to other councils, but they did not wait for that to happen before taking action themselves.*

In the middle of October, Poplar's councillors were released to attend conference about reforming London local government funding, which led to the government rushing the Local Authorities (Financial Provisions) Act 1921 through Parliament, introducing cross-London pooling of outdoor relief (welfare benefits) costs up to scales set by the Minister of Health. Poplar had won. It gained over a quarter of a million pounds per year and other poor boroughs gained as well.

Jimmy Thomas, General Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen and also a Labour MP, said that "This is a great discouragement to those who believe in constitutional action and a great encouragement to those who believe in revolutionary methods". I agree with him, except that he thought that was a bad thing while I think it was good! □

Guilty and Proud of it: Poplar's rebel councillors and guardians 1919-1925



Janine Booth's book on the poplar rebellion is available at: janinebooth.com/shop

How to get a democratic,

The Labour Party leadership's new move to ban some groups, following on a new wave of suspensions and exclusions since December 2020, and the previous waves in 2015 and 2016, is built on a rulebook allowing much scope for arbitrary purges. In this article, written before the move for new bans, Dave Levy argues for a rulebook providing democracy and due process.

By Dave Levy

The reaction of the Party's new leadership to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) report on antisemitism seems to be to assume that everything they wanted was agreed, and that what they wanted is the answer to the Party's problems of bullying and harassment.

I believe that the EHRC, in their report on Antisemitism in the Labour Party, have failed to meet their duty of balancing Human Rights and Equality Law, and that this has been accepted with alacrity by the Party's "new leadership". They mention Freedom of Speech which is enshrined in Article 10 of the European Convention but not the Right to a Fair Trial (Article 6), nor to the right to Freedom of Association (Article 11), both of which are engaged in the politics and good governance of a political party.

Curbing free speech

The arrogance in the leadership shows itself as a continued harassment of free speech activists and party voluntary officials, actions which can now be seen as going beyond any reasonable action to defend the reputation and legal position of the Party. The arrogance exposes itself in the Labour Party [Plan](#) published on 17 December 2020; the EHRC is monitoring the plan and its progress.



Lessons for socialist activists and the Labour left from the Labour Party under Corbyn 2015-20. 60 pages, £4. workersliberty.org/publications □



There are problems with their determination of criminal harassment, or certainly with the interpretation made by David Evans, General Secretary designate of the Labour Party. It must be recognised that "Free Speech" includes the right to offend, and that political free speech is doubly protected. Evans' use of "prior restraint" is an overreach of any proportionate response. To stop debates and motions because someone might be offended is an abuse of powers not granted in the rules or the law.

No process

The General Secretary's response to the Report shows a myopic focus on potential unreasonable offence. While many, including it seems Starmer and Evans, are concerned that the Labour Party has been found to have broken the law by permitting harassment, to me, the worst finding is that there was no process for the conduct of investigations, the decision to "prosecute" and the determination of sanctions, exacerbated by the fact that the National Constitutional Committee (NCC) was not given independent legal advice. All of these make a "fair trial" impossible. Such a situation, i.e. a lack of policy, permits arbitrary actions by those authorised to act and denudes such staff of the ability to defend themselves against accusations of corrupt behaviour, except by "innocent until proven guilty", a privilege denied many caught in this Kafkaesque process.

The Labour Party's disciplinary processes must be made to comply with Article 6 of the European Convention, guaranteeing a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time conducted by an independent and impartial tribunal, this should be conducted in the open, people are innocent until proven guilty, they have the right to time to prepare a defence, have a lawyer of their choosing, and to have it paid for if they can't,

and to cross examine witnesses. This is crucial and the current fast track fails in many ways; and the failure to offer independent legal advice to the NCC and to restrict defence lawyers' access to the NCC is also a failure. The use of administrative suspensions, ostensibly to protect the party's reputation, is in contradiction to "innocent until proven guilty", and the leaking of such decisions is in breach of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the right to privacy; yet this is persistent and to my knowledge no-one had been suspended, expelled or dismissed for such behaviour.

Many seek to focus the remediation plan on the need for "independence". Too much focus has been given to the requirement that the disciplinary process is independent, but independent of whom? The report states that the disciplinary process must be independent of the leadership and the National Executive Committee (NEC). Independence also raises the issue of how people can exercise their right to freedom of association (ECHR [Article 11](#) rights) if others are telling them (us) who can't be a member. The decisions on expulsion and punitive suspension must be taken by a party body such as the NCC which then must receive independent advice, separate to that given to the investigators and "prosecutors".

The more I think about this, the more certain I become that Labour's rules defining the grounds that the Party can take disciplinary action are unsatisfactory. The rulebook states:

"No member of the Party shall engage in conduct which in the opinion of the NEC is prejudicial, or in any act which in the opinion of the NEC is grossly detrimental to the Party".

This puts the impact on the reputation of the party as the central test for disciplinary action. This is wrong and in breach of Article 10 (Free Speech); the Party does have the right to deal with

racism, harassment and bullying, but these are not reputational issues, there will be facts and legal precedent and when dealing with such complaints, the Party should always bear in mind that criminal acts should be dealt with by the police and courts; but we are left with the fact that there is no objective test defining prejudicial or grossly detrimental and that the test in the rules is "in the opinion of the NEC", which I would expect to be interpreted in a court through the lens of a reasonable person. This needs to change. There is currently a lack of certainty to party members and certainty is another aspect of natural justice.

Additionally, the summary power to expel for "supporting a political organisation other than an official Labour Group" is imprecise, too broad, and in reality, used in an unacceptable, arbitrary fashion.

Towards a democratic procedure

The Labour Party needs to rewrite its disciplinary code, embedding Article 6, together with the principles of natural justice, innocent until guilty, proportionate punishment, the MacPherson principle, clarity for members and staff on grounds for disciplinary action, technical and organisational controls to stop the destruction of records or other improper behaviour, robust victim care, fairness to complainants to stop the premature and arbitrary rejection of complaints, ensure that there is no undue and unfair delay, rules on how to deal with NEC and staff, policy about how to exercise the Party's safeguarding responsibility and inform the police or other responsible persons of any crime, policy on how and why administrative suspensions are to undertaken, prohibiting disguised double jeopardy and guaranteed timescales. The policy needs to offer certainty to members and staff, and a tariff of punishments acting as guidance to the NCC needs to be published.

So what needs to be done to introduce a fair and independent disciplinary process for the Labour Party?

Anti-racist resources

We have compiled various anti-racist resources to learn about anti-racist movements, and arm yourself with ideas to beat back racism: readings and pamphlets, video and audio.

See workersliberty.org/anti-racist-resources □

due-process Labour Party

1. The codes of conduct and means of complaint, investigation, 'prosecution' and determination of complaints needs to be written down. The processes must be compliant with the European Convention of Human Rights, especially, the right to a fair trial, but also the right to privacy, the right of free speech and the right to freely associate. These codes and processes contrary to the EHRC report's recommendations must be applied to all complaints including actions by staff that are harassing, bullying, or factionally motivated.

2. The rules should be changed to ensure that they are interpreted as complying with the European Convention on Human Rights.

“Rewrite its disciplinary code with natural justice, innocent until guilty, proportionate punishment and much more”

3. It is necessary to establish or re-establish a complaints department to receive complaints, investigate them or discard them, and prepare prosecutions where indicated after investigation. The conduct of the complaints function must remain accountable to Labour's complaint handling policy once it's written one. The EHRC only requires that organisational independence occurs “until trust and confidence in the process is fully restored and should ensure that independent oversight and auditing are permanently embedded in the new process”. Independence means independent of the Leader and NEC. Sanctions must be the sole prerogative of the NCC.

4. The rules, policy and practice of suspension needs to be rewritten so that the authority to issue suspensions is defined, used only in defined emergency cases of where further harm is highly likely if an alleged culprit is allowed to continue to hold office or

attend meetings, suspension notices must define the alleged wrongdoing, specify an end date and guarantee an independent hearing within a limited time. The excessive confidentiality clauses in the suspension letters is also contrary to the principle of innocent until proven guilty and, while the privacy of others including alleged victims, must be respected, suspended members must be able to discuss their suspension and build a defence.

5. The determination of sanctions should remain with the NCC in order to guarantee the membership's Article 11 freedom of association rights. Sanctions should be subject to policy. The NCC must be given a budget and the ability to receive legal advice independently of that offered to the NEC and the investigators. It requires a full-time secretary, which should be established in the rules with their accountability belonging to the NCC, not the General Secretary (GS) nor the NEC. The NCC requires a right to report to Conference. The summary power to expel for “supporting a political organisation other than an official Labour Group” needs to be abolished. The Party does not need such a rule to act against people who stand or nominate candidates in opposition to Labour. In the circumstances of an election, speed of decision is important and desirable, but yet again there is a lack of process, lack of certainty and lack of transparency.

6. The rules defining the CLP route to a complaint must be abolished. (Chapter 6.II); it is not possible to run this process and conform to the right to a fair trial, especially innocent until proven guilty, a hearing in front of an independent tribunal and the right to privacy. It is equally deficient in guaranteeing any victim care.

7. A decision to proceed with a “prosecution” has two stakeholders, the complainant and the accused. Labour's processes must be fair and proportionate to both. Complainers deserve to know what has happened to their com-



plaints, and the accused need certainty and speed to allow them to establish their innocence.

8. The General Secretary role is too powerful and insufficiently accountable to the rules, the law and the NEC. It requires more checks and balances as exist within most private sector organisations where the Chief Financial Officer, and the Head of Compliance, together with the Data Protection Officer have accountability to the law above that of their accountability to their employers. These officers should be established in the rules, and their accountability established to the membership through the law. These officers should be appointed through a fair competition and only suitably qualified persons appointed. These officers must be independent and safe from factional victimisation and dismissal, i.e. they are not to be dismissed for doing their job; they must have the right to address the NEC and Conference. The GS must be prohibited from exercising the powers of these officers. The NEC must be prohibited from delegating their powers of oversight of the General Secretary to the GS; they i.e. the NEC are the means by which the GS is managed and made subject to performance management control.

9. The party requires a Members' Ombudsperson, who shall be a paid appropriately, and provided with sufficient resources necessary to carry out their assigned tasks. The role of the Ombudsperson shall be to investigate complaints of a breach of rules or other improper behaviour by the complaints and compliance functions. The Ombudsperson shall be independent and impartial. The Ombudsperson must be appointed through a fair competition and only suitably qualified persons appointed. The Ombudsperson must not receive any instructions regarding the exercise of their tasks, nor be dismissed or penalised for performing their role. The Ombudsperson must have the right to forward disagreements with the

complaints and compliance functions to the NCC for final resolution and to address the NEC and Conference. The GS must be prohibited from exercising the powers of the ombudsperson.

While these specific, rules orientated changes are needed the “big goal” tests that we must judge any proposals for change are, that any changes must bring Labour's disciplinary process into compliance with the ECHR's rights to a fair trial. Disciplinary offences must only seek to sanction acts of harassment, crime in which the Party or another member is victim, and crimes or misdemeanours as a public servant. Personal hostility is also unacceptable. Processes must be fair, proportionate, offer members certainty and a right to an effective defence and meet the Party's safeguarding responsibilities. Factional abuse must stop. □

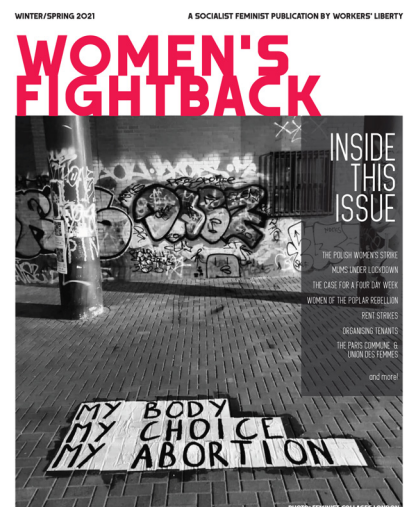
• Dave Levy is secretary of Lewisham Deptford CLP, writing here in a personal capacity.

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Women's Fightback is a socialist feminist publication by Workers' Liberty. Order issue 25, Spring 2021, for £1 – or cheaper in bulk! □

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Isolation pay in Test Centres: plug the loopholes!

By Todd Hamer

Following pressure from Labour MPs, notably Emily Thornberry, and the [Safe and Equal](#) campaign last winter, we were told that “the Department of Health and Social Care has approved the payment of occupational sick pay for periods of self-isolation for all workers at Test Centres. This commitment has also been included in the tender specifications for the new Test Centre contract which commences in July 2021.”

As Safe and Equal activists have visited Test Centres across the country, we have found that the situation is more complicated. The government has outsourced the Test Centres to G4S, Serco, Sodexo, Mitie. But those firms have often further outsourced staffing their Test Centres to agencies.

The workers directly employed by the main contractors may get isolation pay; but many workers we have talked with are employed via agencies on zero hours contracts. Some were unsure about the pay arrangements if they had to take time off to isolate. Others

told us that they got paid to isolate if they could provide evidence of a positive test but not for other reasons e.g. a member of their household was ill.

One worker was sent home to isolate due to being a close contact of a confirmed positive case and was not paid for this time.

In March 2020, NHS bosses were told they needed to arrange full isolation pay for subcontractors and bank staff. In May 2020, the PCS union negotiated full isolation pay for outsourced workers operating in civil service buildings. In June 2020, the government introduced the Infection Control Fund for care homes that included provision for full isolation pay for care workers.

The new on-paper agreement for full isolation pay for Test Centre workers is a further admission that exploitative employment practices and the UK's desultory Statutory Sick Pay scheme are undermining attempts to control the virus. However, instead of addressing the problem at its root and legislating to ensure all workers are entitled to full sick pay (as in many European countries), the government has introduced

sector-by-sector isolation pay quietly and half-heartedly, leaving plenty of workers excluded from the provision.

Absenteeism

Part of the issue here is that the work-from-home boss class believe that paying workers to take time off to isolate will encourage absenteeism. In reality, presenteeism is a far greater problem. Workers attending work when they are unwell allows all sorts of infectious dis-

eases to spread and accidents to occur.

Head of Test and Trace, Dido Harding told Emily Thornberry MP that she was “making changes to increase the financial support available to staff during periods of isolation” in recognition of the “immense contribution” of frontline Test Centre workers. But sick pay and isolation pay are not rewards for hard work: they are necessary health and safety measure to slow the spread of the virus. □

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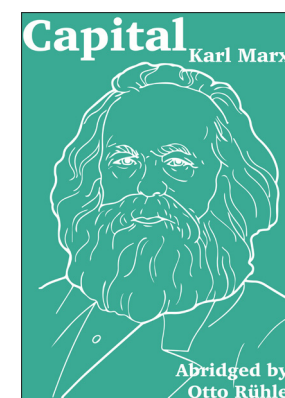
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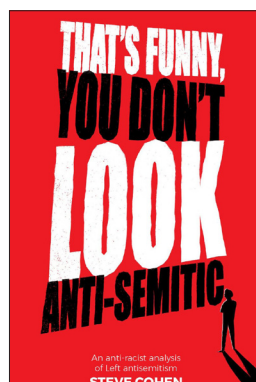
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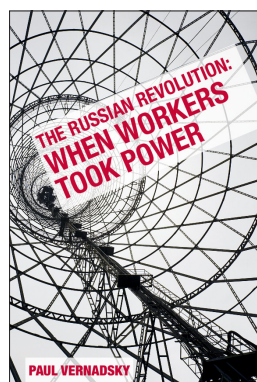
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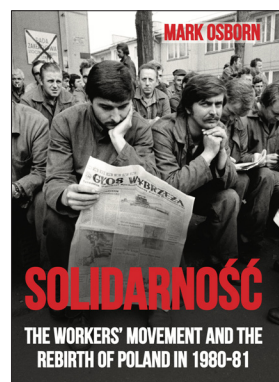
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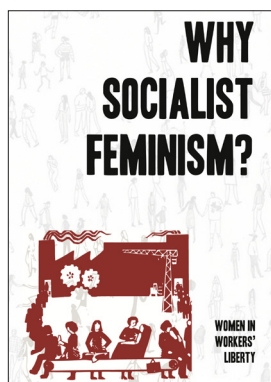
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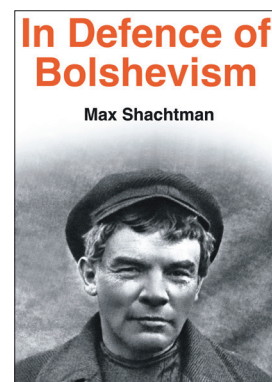
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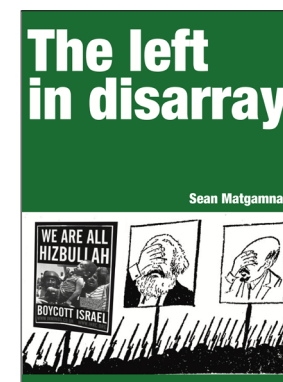
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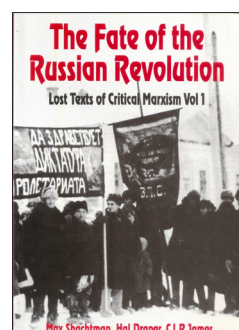
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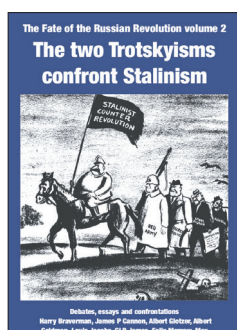
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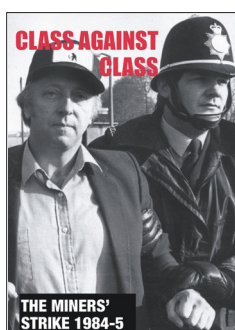
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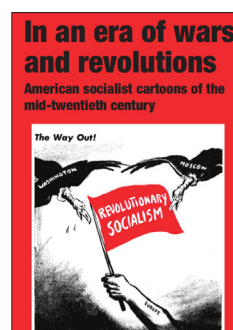
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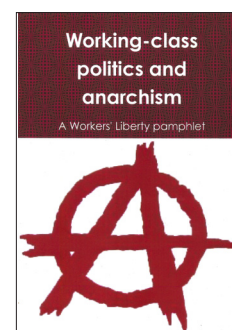
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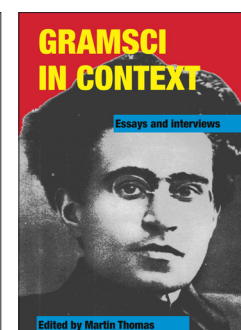
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Cuba: support the protests, support workers' democracy

By Sacha Ismail

Faced by large-scale protests on 11 July for the first time in decades, Cuba's "socialist" government has arrested many dissident socialist activists among others. Many reports say that over a hundred people have been arrested or have disappeared.

In the last year, the same government has suppressed LGBT rights and Black Lives Matter-type demonstrations.

"Socialist Cuba" is an extremely repressive dictatorship. Despite its achievements in healthcare and other areas, it is in some ways even further from genuine socialism than Britain is, because its regime allows no independent workers' movement to exist. Cuban workers are not allowed independent trade unions or even the heavily curtailed right to strike we have in the UK. It is effectively a one-party state, with no free elections to even a bourgeois type of parliament.

Socialism requires workers' democracy and workers' control. It can exist in a developed sense only on an international scale and not in one small coun-



try alone; but a system without workers' democracy is not even embryonically or potentially socialist.

Cuba has had variants of its current system, in which a bureaucratic class exploits workers through its "ownership" of the state which owns most of the economy, for 60 years.

Recent reports of Cuba's political landscape by exile Cuban socialist Sam Farber would suggest that a lot of the protesters are probably right-wing in a pro-free-market capitalist sense. It would be surprising if not, given the way the regime has discredited social-

ism. Nonetheless it seems clear that the protests have drawn their dynamism from genuine and legitimate popular frustration at poor material conditions and lack of democracy.

We are on the side even of pro-market people demanding improved workers' and social conditions, and more democracy, against the Cuban regime. Although we would oppose privatisation of large-scale industry, the freedom of the working class to discuss, organise and protest is a higher value for us than public ownership in the hands of a bureaucratic class. At the same time, we will do all we can to support left-wingers who organise within the protests for a clearly socialist opposition.

The issues the protesters are raising are not reducible to the long-running US economic blockade of Cuba. They are connected to [the nature of the Cuban system](#), the interests of its ruling class and the way that class runs society.

At the same time, the US blockade has clearly made the situation for Cuba's working class and people far

worse. Donald Trump tightened the blockade. Joe Biden has not reversed these changes.

At the UN on 23 June 184 governments, including even Boris Johnson's, voted for a resolution to end the blockade of Cuba; only the US and Israel voted against.

Socialists and labour movement activists must denounce the Cuban government's repression and find ways to support those fighting for more democracy in Cuba, particularly socialists, those who want to organise an independent workers' movement, and campaigners for black, women's and LGBT rights. At the same time we must magnify calls for an end to the US blockade. □

- Abridged: more bit.ly/cuba-p
- Petition to free arrested Cuban socialists: bit.ly/free-fgh
- Summary of Cuban-American socialist Sam Farber's analysis of the Cuban system: bit.ly/cuba-sf
- Account of the protests from the Comunistas group (translation by Socialist Worker): bit.ly/cuba-c

Starmers' wretched support for NI Unionism

By Patrick Murphy

On 10 July, towards the end of a two day visit to Northern Ireland (NI), Labour leader Keir Starmer was asked, in an interview by BBC NI, what he would do in the event of a future border poll on a United Ireland.

At first he dodged the question. When pressed by the interviewer though, he said that he "believed in the United Kingdom" and would campaign for the union and against a united Ireland.

It's difficult to know what exactly Starmer was trying to do here. It's not as if he picked the safe, uncontroversial option. That would have been to state his neutrality and that of any UK government in a border poll.

Harold Wilson argued in 1971 that a Labour government should announce an intention to leave Northern Ireland in favour of reunification in 15 years and begin to work towards that. The Party

adopted a manifesto policy for unity by consent in 1983 and that remained the policy until the New Labour years, when the Downing Street Declaration (1993) was used as a pretext to shift to neutrality.

The Declaration committed the UK government to accept any decision by the people of NI on the constitutional question. It produced a (choreographed) IRA ceasefire and was a key part of the lead-up to the Good Friday Agreement. It involved the UK government taking a neutral stance on the issue.

In a poll of Labour members in 2018 two thirds backed reunification by consent. Jeremy Corbyn visited NI as Labour leader in 2018, and he was asked the same question. Despite being a long-time activist for British withdrawal and a united Ireland, Corbyn's reply was that a government led by him would remain neutral and respect the decision of the people of NI.

Starmer's decision to come

out as a Unionist, if it makes any sense, reinforces the impression that he has no greater vision than scrabbling for lost "red wall" votes with ersatz British nationalism.

Culture wars

Time and again he underestimates and patronises disenchanted working-class voters with the assumption that their central concerns are culture wars centred on patriotism and race rather than economic abandonment and inequality.

Such is the low level of interest in NI in wider UK politics that there's likely to be little electoral impact from Starmer's latest bombshell, though it won't have gone down well with the sizeable and mostly Labour-loyal Irish electorate in Britain.

Labour should be openly for the reunification of Ireland on democratic principle. Partition was an unjust, gerrymandered attempt to frustrate the express democratic will of the Irish people and it produced,

as it inevitably would, a sectarian police state in NI.

It should be borne in mind too that a border poll will only be called if the UK Secretary of State for NI calls it. And the criterion for that is that the evidence over a period of time suggests that it would result in a vote for a united Ireland.

To commit to campaigning for a unionist position in those

circumstances is more than "a belief in the UK". It's an attempt to defend partition and reject the right of the Irish as a whole to self-determination.

Anyway, if Starmer genuinely believed in the union he would ensure that people in NI could vote for Labour in elections by standing candidates there. □

- Abridged. More: bit.ly/ks-ni



Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom.

Thursdays 8pm, until 5 August: Kohei Saito's Marx's Ecosocialism – study course

Saturday 24 July, 9.30-10.45am: Cuba: stop the repression, end the blockade!

Saturday 24 July, 12-1:30pm: Degrowth? What should socialists advocate? – Socialist environmental reading group

Thursday 5 August, 7 - 8.30pm: Neurodiversity – What's class got to do with it? With Workers' Liberty and PARC (Participatory Autism Research Collective).

3-5 September: Workers' Liberty tent-only summer camp

For our calendars of events, updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, see workersliberty.org/events □

“What we stand for

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

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

The working class must unite to struggle against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, in the workplace and 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, 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, strike, picket effectively, and take solidarity action
- Taxing the rich to fund good public services, homes, education and jobs for all
- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression
- Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. Reproductive freedoms and free abortion on demand.
- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans 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 full openness in debate

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Where the power is



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

The difference between “power” and “elected office” (letter in [Solidarity 600](#)) is well illustrated by the 1982 TV drama *A Very British Coup*, based on a novel by former Labour MP Chris Mullin. Harry Perkins (Ray McNally), Labour MP for Sheffield Central and a former steelworker, leads Labour to a landslide victory. The new Prime Minister promises sweeping changes which includes nuclear disarmament and neutrality. The whole British establishment is in shock. Plots against Perkins are set in motion, including fake reports of looming financial disaster, press speculation about his state of health and polls supposedly showing his plummeting support. The security services, military top



Ray McNally as Harry Perkins

brass, big business and the press grow increasingly alarmed about this upstart. With pressure on him increasing all the time, Perkins is persuaded to resign (a “soft” coup). Then, appearing on TV, he refuses to use his prepared speech and instead announces a snap election, while senior military officers and MI5 watch their TV screens in horror. Come election day, Perkins can hear the noise of helicopters overhead. An ambiguous ending. Is this the first sign of the “hard” coup to come? □

Who knows best, managers or workers?



Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

There are times when you feel like shutting down and letting management just completely fuck up as they go in circles trying to obey the latest “drive” for efficiency while not listening to us on the sharp end.

One example. We have had a faulty cable for some weeks now which was due to be changed. A team went out, but found that the rules for changing said cable were conflicted, i.e. the tests were described for an old style cable, not for the new “plug and play” connectors.

The first team reported this back, saying that they needed a certain bit of kit, and so the job was pushed back.

Another team was then sent out, without the kit requested, and effectively told to ignore that testing requirement and bring the cable into work. This put the team leader in the position of signing off something which he knew to be not up to standard, which would have him in the firing line if anything went wrong.

To his credit he refused and has fired this back up to management with a “not on my watch” email.

This team did actually go and have a look at the replacement which had been run into position, but found it had



some construction faults and it must have come from the factory in that condition. Again, the previous team had reported this but nothing had been done.

Finally, regarding the “bit of kit” they required to do the job in the first place: this new signalling system has been in work for over a year, and previously it had been installed over 18 months with the contractors doing the testing before it was brought into work.

How did they do the tests if they hadn't got the required kit, and if they had, then why have we not got it? This problem has been brought up previously to higher management.

And they wonder why their most experienced staff are taking retirement. To use a colloquialism, you couldn't make it up. □

• Matt Shaw is a railway trackworker.

Tory “levelling up” is pork-barrelling

By Colin Foster

Boris Johnson's 15 July speech on “levelling up” soon levelled down to oblivion, as the government floundered through its Covid restriction-easing.

Yet the theme is likely to continue, in a particular way.

The Tories are on a “culture war”. The USA shows that even when average opinion is edging more liberal and leftist (as [in the UK](#), and in the USA too, since 2009), such “culture war” may become politically potent by mobilising a minority which “radiates” effectively.

But only “may”. In the Hartlepool and Batley-Spen by-elections, the Tories didn't campaign on “culture war”. They left that to George Galloway in Batley and Spen. Instead, their pitch was that electing a Tory MP would get the areas more central government cash. It was pork-barrelling.

Johnson's speech was along the same lines. He promised (some time, vaguely) more autonomy, and (but only in the form of handouts negotiated one by one) more cash to local authorities.

Only to some. He declared that the Tories had for decades “relentlessly crushed local leadership” in case “irresponsible municipal socialist governments” took advantage, and said that fight was not yet won.

“The loony left [a Tory-press label for left-Labour local authorities in the 1980s] remains pretty loony”.

Labour should counter with a defence of local government autonomy and funding, and with a real program of “levelling up” – expanded public services, public enterprise for green conversion of industries. That will also involve some “levelling-down” of the top few per cent, the plutocrats. □

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BEIS: ready for a long fight



John Moloney

Outsourced workers at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) strike from 19-21 July. We're prepared for a long dispute there if necessary. Neither ISS, the outsourced contractor, nor BEIS itself has offered a settlement to avoid the strike, so our members will continue taking action.

Cleaners and toilet attendants at the Royal Parks will strike on 30 July. On the day of the strike, there'll be a mass meeting where members will discuss any offer from the employer, if one's been made, and discuss further action. Reps are proposing an ongoing programme of strikes totalling 17 days, but the meeting will also hear other ideas and proposals from members. We're working closely with the United Voices of the World in this campaign.

We have commenced talks with Mitie, which employs security workers across a number of different civil service contracts. They've paused their restructure for now, but haven't committed to taking the threat of fire and rehire off the table. I will be writing to them shortly asking for a binding guarantee that fire and rehire won't be used. Of course, we're not only interested in how Mitie makes changes; we will also oppose any detrimental changes to members' terms and con-

ditions, whether imposed by fire and rehire or by any other means.

Union pressure succeeded in forcing a climbdown from bosses at the Southbank Centre in London, where management planned a re-grading that would have led to pay cuts for workers at the Hayward Gallery, which is part of the centre. They've backed off from that plan for now, but it shows how precarious things are in the culture sector. We'll give our members the tools to organise and fight back.

Our National Disputes Committee will meet on 19 July, and set the timetable for the re-ballot of workers at the DVLA complex in Swansea. This is something we're forced to undertake due to the anti-union laws. It will be a challenge, but we're confident. The first ballot only narrowly cleared the thresholds, but the strikes have been so well supported that we're confident of a higher turnout this time.

The "back to work" drive in Job Centres continues. Not only does the employer want more people back in office, it wants claimant interviews to take place across desks with no screens, meaning the claimant and the job coach will be face-to-face, putting both at risk. My view is that we must organise for action to prevent this reckless endangerment of workers and claimants. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of the civil service workers' union PCS, personal capacity.



Tube drivers to strike from 3 Aug

From Tubeworker

Following the ballot for strike action over the abolition of the Night Tube drivers grade on London Underground, RMT have now named two 48 hour strikes (3 – 5 and 24 – 26 August). 87% of drivers voting backed strike action and as RMT heads into talks with ACAS with days already declared, drivers should start building for these strikes now.

An emergency meeting of the RMT train grades committee met on 12 July with unanimous support for naming dates and strong support for two 48 hour strikes with midday starts. The timing of the strikes aims to cause the maximum disruption for the company and force them to abandon their plans which threaten work life balance and future jobs.

Tubeworker knows that this is likely

the first in many fights the company are about to launch as they pass on the cuts they will try to make to appease the government's funding package. Now is the time to build support for these strikes among all workers across the combine and prepare to ballot on the coming attacks.

With dates now public, a focus must be on getting a good turnout on the pickets from all lines, including those who do not currently operate Night Tube services. Aslef members should refuse to cross these picket lines. Despite Aslef themselves backing these changes without consulting their membership, there is growing unease over their stance. □



Rail Gourmet workers strike against bullying

From Off The Rails

Rail Gourmet workers on the LNER contract have been striking against a culture of management bullying. The strikes follow a 100% vote for action, a clear indication of the strength of feeling and resolve amongst the workforce. There were strong pickets at Edinburgh Waverley, where the workers are based. Rail Gourmet provides outsourced catering services to a number of Train Operating Companies. It is owned by Select Service Partners, which runs food concessions on railway stations and which cut thousands of jobs last year. Beyond an immediate change in management culture, we should fight for direct employment for catering and food workers on the railway. □

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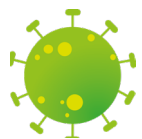
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Impose Covid “responsibility” on bosses!



Covid-19

By Martin Thomas

It's down to the unions – or workers self-organising in un-unionised workplaces – to hold the line on virus precautions.

It's possible. Some employers are already keeping the Covid precautions in their shops and offices after 19 July. In London Covid precautions (masks) will be mandatory on the Tube and buses.

Workers whether in unions or not have a legal right to insist bosses respect workplace safety, and to refuse to enter work areas which pose danger (section 44 of the Employment Protection Act 1996).

The precautions will be more effective if the labour movement can win social measures.

A better way to prepare for winter than the Tories' speculative lunge to get past the infection peak before September would be to focus on:

- improving ventilation
- bringing in full isolation pay
- giving NHS workers and the NHS resources to rebuild
- bringing elderly care into the public sector, with workers on NHS-level pay and conditions
- easing overcrowded housing

The Netherlands, after easing all restrictions on 26 June, reimposed some of them on 10 July when cases soared as the Delta variant arrived. It's not a grim “never meet your friends” regime. Schools have stayed open. Cafés and bars stay open, but with precautions. Nightclubs are closed again, and isolation rules continue. It's too early to say, but it looks like the surge in cases may be levelling off. (Scotland, with light restrictions, has had a levelling-off).

Norway, with better social conditions than the UK, now has Delta well-established (over 80% of cases). It has postponed Step 4 of its restriction-easing. But cafés and bars remain open. The loss of “life” from the restrictions is slight. Cases are not rising there, despite Delta, despite vaccination rates behind the UK's.

Unsurprisingly, the Netherlands bans travel from the UK, and Norway allows it only with 10 days in a quarantine hotel after arrival.

Worldwide the Covid case count has been rising since mid-June, and the death count, since 2 July. It is already much higher than in April 2020.



The rates will continue to rise as the Delta variant spreads. Africa is vaccinating at the rate of only 0.04 per 100 people per day, and Bangladesh, where the death count has rocketed since 28 May, at about zero rate.

Mass vaccination

Worldwide, the priority is emergency mass vaccination: requisition Big Pharma for a publicly-directed crash program of vaccine production and distribution!

The Tories have rowed back from their blather about “Freedom Day”. They have even, after less than three hours, u-turned and said Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak would follow isolation rules after meeting with Covid-infected Sajid Javid. But they have given signals to encourage many bosses to ditch precautions and push workers to come in even if they should be self-isolating.

As it's explained by scientists like Neil Ferguson, the rationale for the restriction-scrapping goes something like this. With high vaccination and a lot of people having had Covid (mostly milder, in recent months), the virus will soon find too few susceptible people to spread fast.

The soaring infections will start to decrease some time in August. Then we can go through the more dangerous winter with a sort of population immunity. That's the realistic best to aim for. Covid cannot be eliminated any more than flu can. Lockdowns forever would be impossible and anyway cause arguably cause more loss of real (human, social) life than they would save.

Trouble is, we're nowhere near knowing exactly enough for that sort of speculative aim: “if it goes up now, it will go down then”.

Here and now it's down to the unions, and self-organised workers, to organise mutual aid. □



By Mohan Sen

The Labour leadership is planning to propose that the party's National Executive Committee, at its meeting on Tuesday (20 July), bans four organisations.

The four are Labour Against the Witch-Hunt, the Labour in Exile Network, Resist / Resistance Movement and Socialist Appeal.

A “Labour source” said Starmer wants to “stamp out anti-Semitism and toxic extremism” and condemned the “far left fringes”.

The Labour right want to create an association between left-wing socialist politics and antisemitism. They also seem to be throwing in the issue of support for other candidates against the Labour Party. The issues need untangling.

Chris Williamson, the leading figure of Resist, backed the noxious George Galloway in [Batley and Spen](#). But Williamson has already resigned from the Labour Party, action against people backing anti-Labour candidates needs no new rule, and that's not the issue here.

Some LAW and LIEN people have already faced disciplinary action for antisemitism, for instance Jackie Walker (as we said at the time, not without cause). Walker chose not to challenge that at the decisive committee but instead to walk out. But, again, charges should be against individuals and they should get due process. The bad politics of these groups on antisemitism should be dealt with through argument and education, something which Starmer and co. have [little interest](#) in doing.

Socialist Appeal is a would-be Marxist group. They have enthusiastically supported Chris Williamson (while criticising his standing against Labour), and they have at the very least minimised the issue of antisemitism. Those are reasons for polemic against them, not a ban.

In 2015-2016, when dozens of Workers' Liberty people were expelled from the party, the same

thing happened to Socialist Appeal people. The highly ambiguous Labour Party rule 2.1.4(b), the first clause of which on the face of it licenses summary expulsion of anyone who supports or joins any political grouping other than an official Labour one (Momentum? Progress? Friends of the Earth? CND?), was cited to justify exclusion of our comrades and others. The current proposed ban, too, can and may easily be spread to other groups.

There were very few expulsions under Blair, Brown and Miliband. The 2015-16 drive by the right-wing Labour Party HQ machine which suspended or expelled thousands of people on various pretexts was part of their vain attempt to swing the Labour leadership elections of those years. Sadly, the Corbyn regime, once established, continued a habit of trigger-happy, no-due-process exclusions, though on a lower level, and did nothing to change the arbitrary rules which the HQ machine had used.

In the 1950s and 60s the Labour Party had a long list of “proscribed organisations”, mostly connected to the Communist Party. The list was abolished in 1973. Ambiguous rules have remained, which has enabled periodic purges (of Militant in the late 1980s, of Socialist Organisation in 1990-1, and in 2015-6) without re-establishing a list. No list should be reintroduced, and the ambiguous rules should be changed.

Now, because of the political degradation and disarray of the left, the right has been able to make a central thrust of its attack the issue of antisemitism. Nonetheless, it is clear that banning the four groups has very little to do with actually tackling antisemitism. It will serve as a lever to ramp up warfare against the wider left within the party, and create an authoritarian culture in which the leadership cannot be challenged. It must be opposed. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/st-ban



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For a workers' government

KINDLE THE CLIMATE FIGHTBACK!

By Zack Muddle

Cycling across London the day after our summer school *Ideas For Freedom* (10-11 July) I was soaked to the bone in, I believe, the heaviest rainfall I've experienced in the UK. The tropical-style downpour turned roads into rivers. A premonition of things to come? Very soon, in fact.

In the week since, over 165 people have been confirmed dead from flooding across western Europe. Up to 1,300 further people are unaccounted for in one German district alone: whole villages have been destroyed, bridges twisted out of place, as rivers have burst banks.

In Verviers, in Belgium, an overnight curfew was implemented to prevent looting, after floods swept cars through the streets. Residents of Belgium's third-largest urban area, Liège, were ordered to evacuate on Thursday 15th. Areas of Tokyo, Japan, have received the heaviest rainfall since measurements began.

Meanwhile, the UK Met Office has issued extreme heat warnings, the first of their kind under a new warning system after a wave of heat-deaths last summer. Record-breaking temperatures have hit Scandinavia and Moscow, hundreds have died from heat in areas of the Northwestern USA famed for cool and foggy weather, and cities across India, Pakistan, and Libya have all had unusually high temperatures.

Ongoing wildfires across much of North America have burned whole Canadian villages off the map.

A hotter world torches forests and dries and roasts humans: warmer atmospheres take up and hold more moisture, causing more extreme rainfall with greater regularity.

This extreme weather rages across landscapes, ecosystems, infrastructures, and societies unused and unadapted to it, causing widespread destruction. The rainstorm I experienced on Monday 12 saw a whole-month's worth of July rain fall on London in one day. Parts of Western Europe received up to two months rainfall in two days – Wednesday and Thursday – on soils already near saturation.

Yet for extreme weather, the years we're living through now are the best we'll ever have. The most ambitious targets aimed at by governments and most climate scientists are to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The ever-increasing use of fossil fuels, the short-sighted inaction on climate change, puts the world on a trajectory to far higher still than that.

Even if we surpass current environmental and political ambitions, and limit warming to even less than 1.5°C, we will still move towards a hotter world with more chaotic and destructive extreme weather.

"Once-a-century" weather events will become even more

commonplace. Many changes that happen before we win the net-negative CO2 emissions world we must fight for – glaciers melting, ecosystem destruction – are irreversible, at least on the scale of a single human lifetime.

This is reason not for despair, but for urgency in the radical action and organising that can win the changes we need to limit the destruction.

A world limited to 1.3°C will be almost unimaginably better than a world limited to 1.5°C; a world limited to 3°C in turn unimaginably better than one limited to 4°C. And how society will be structured, what climate interventions and what infrastructural adaptations to the changing world are made, matters just as much.

We – the organised working class, and socialist environmentalists within that – will be the decisive force in determining which future is realised. Organised where production happens, we have the power to transform society from the ground up.

We can kindle that fight now: joining protests, organising around environmental issues in our workplaces, bringing bold motions to the Labour Party and our unions, taking working-class and socialist politics to our local XR groups.

And engaging in Workers' Liberty's environmental events and publications, to arm ourselves with the ideas needed for the fight. □