TORIES END DUBS SCHEME

A WORLD WITH NO PLACE FOR CHILDREN

On 8 February 2017, the Government said they would transfer just 350 unaccompanied children from refugee camps in France, Greece and Italy to live in the UK. This is only 10% of the number that they had previously committed to.

This announcement is no surprise — it represents a hardening of attitudes against immigration in the wake of the Brexit referendum vote. In May 2016, then PM David Cameron had agreed to Lord Dubs’ amendment to the Immigration Bill which called for 3,000 children to come. Dubs revised his target to say the UK should take a “specified number” of lone children, the number to be agreed later in discussion with local authorities. But, certainly, Dubs’ expectation was that the figure would be around 3,000.

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Russia decriminalises domestic violence

By Ann Field

10,000 women in Russia die of domestic violence every year. 40% of all serious violent crime in Russia and over 28% of murderers take place in the home. Around 36,000 women are victims of domestic violence every day, and so too are 26,000 children.

These are the official statistics. The real statistics will be far higher. Many women do not report incidents of domestic violence, either for fear of repercussions from their husband or partner, or because complaints are often ignored by the police.

Children have even less chance of securing legal protection against domestic violence.

That provides the context for a new law decriminalising “modest” domestic violence which was voted through by the Russian Parliament (Duma) in January and then signed off by President Putin.

The new law — in fact an amendment to legislation passed last year — makes domestic violence an administrative rather than a criminal offence, provided that: the violence is being committed for the first time, and it does not result in injury requiring hospital treatment. Beatings which cause only bruises or bleeding will therefore no longer be a criminal offence.

Under the new law anyone wishing to lodge a complaint about domestic violence must obtain their partner’s signature, and they may also seek legal advice. The police were obliged, at least in theory, to actively investigate allegations of domestic violence.

The penalty for the administratively offending domestic violence is a fine of between 5,000 and 30,000 rubles (£412), 60 to 120 hours of community work, or 10 to 15 days in jail (“administrative arrest”).

A repeat offender who commits “modest” domestic violence within a year of the first offence faces the penalty of a higher fine (40,000 rubles, or 240 hours), or a longer period of “administrative arrest” (three months).

The downgrading of “modest” domestic violence from a criminal offence to an administrative one was a sign of the times for Yelena Mizulina, a member of the ruling pro-Putin United Russia party.

According to Mizulina, in traditional Russian families “the relationship between parents and their children is built on authority and power.” Family members should not be punished because of “a slap.” To do so would cause “irreparable damage to family relationships.”

As her proposal was making its way through the Duma, Mizulina tweeted: “How many families will waste police resources while the Duma discusses [the amendment]? There are 20 million families in the Russian Federation. All of them are in danger.”

Mizulina was careful to a fault to define the parameters of her legislative initiative: “It is a matter of beatings which do not require medical intervention, because they do not cause any harm to health. They involve the most minimal family arguments with the most minimal consequences.”

In another speech to the Duma Mizulina defined “modest” domestic violence as “punishments which do not contradict the system of family values.” Decriminalisation would “allow the family to be protected from unfounded interventions and to protect the ‘traditional family’.”

Mizulina has “form” in defending the “traditional family”. She supports drastic restrictions on abortions (including a ban on abortions after the husband’s consent) and a ban on “gay propaganda”. She opposes surrogacy, and the use of violence to resolve family arguments, but then went on to declare that “unceremonious interference with the family is impermissible.”

There was certainly opposition to the legislative “reform,” albeit from outside of the Duma. A petition against decriminalisation attracted some 200,000 signatures. But repeated plans for a demonstration in Moscow were blocked by the authorities under the Legal Code adopted by the Bolsheviks in 1922 that criminalises domestic violence as “criminal extremism” and set up a council-run development scheme, including a lack of democratic oversight and the financial risks involved. The report, recommending a delay in the plan, was supported by Haringey Council’s overview and scrutiny committee on 17 January.

Soon afterwards, both Tottenham CLP and Horsley and Wood Green CLP voted on motions backing the call for the plans to be halted.

Nevertheless, the Labour group on the council, spearheaded by Claire Kober and Alan Strickland, steamrollered the concerns of the local Labour Party, and many of their own backbench councillors, to push on with their pet project.

Local activists from both CLPs, Haringey Momentum, trades unions and community campaigners from organisations such as De Ferrand Council Housing, have been working together to leaflet local residents and build the demonstration on 14 February outside the Haringey Civic Centre.

As we go to press, Haringey’s Cabinet meets to consider the future of the HDV. If it presses ahead, opposition and resistance will only continue to grow across the borough.

Russia’s ‘traditional family’ is also in danger of restricting abortion and is virulently anti-LGBT

Yelena Mizulina advocates decriminalising domestic violence to “protect the traditional family” and “allow the family to be protected from prin-

Four times more unequal

According to the Financial Times (13 February), even big business people are starting to think that top-manager pay has gone over the top.

Don’t expect anything too socialist, but “long-term incentive plans” are being looked at more sourly, as research results heap up to show that the “incentives” have little correlation with business success.

The FT reports that top bosses now get an average of £4.3 million a year. “The pay ratio of the average blue-chip chief executive to the average worker, about 140 times in the UK, has escalated from about 33 times in 1990.”

Pay growth in the US has been even more extreme. A report last spring by the AFL-CIO union calculated a multiple of 335 times.

“Two decades ago it was below 50.”
Jeff Sessions: a danger to US civil rights

By Simon Nelson

For a large part Trump has been giving jobs and boosting the careers of old friends with no political experience. Some of his appointees have greater political clout. They are not, however, better people.

Now confirmed as the new Attorney General, Senator Jeff Sessions has a long career opposing civil rights and supporting extreme protectionism.

Ostensibly now in charge of civil rights, Sessions was first in the national news in 1985 when he prosecuted three black civil rights workers in Alabama for “voter fraud.”

The charges relating to the use of absentee ballots were only brought against black activists and not a single conviction was made. That hasn’t stopped Sessions from continuing to defend the prosecution. A source in the New York Times said was this “conviction” was why Trump’s people believed he is the right man for the job.

It was just a year after the Alabama case when Sessions was blocked from becoming a federal judge because of racist remarks. He is one of only two people in the last 50 years to have his appointment blocked.

Sessions has denied the allegations of racism from Thomas FIGures, a former black US assistant attorney who said Sessions addressed him as “boy” and told to be careful what he said to “white folks.”

Sessions is on record as believing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is “un-American” and “communist inspired”. Why? Because for Sessions they “try to force civil rights down the throats of people.”

While the police were investigating the murder of Michael Donald, a black man, it was revealed he had been kidnapped, killed and strung up from a tree by two members of the Ku Klux Klan. Sessions’ only remark was that he had thought the Klan were okay until he found out they used marijuana.

At Sessions’ confirmation hearing Senator Elizabeth Warren was stopped from reading a letter written by Coretta Scott King, the civil rights activist, opposing his nomination as a federal judge in Alabama. The letter most pointedly says, “The irony of Mr Sessions’ nomination, is that, if confirmed, he will be given a life tenure for doing with a federal prosecution what the local sheriffs accomplished 20 years ago, with clubs and cattle prods.”

Session believes the law constrain’s the police’s ability to do their job. He has opposed federal investigations and enforcement of consent decrees which compel allegations of corruption and violence in police departments to be investigated and changed. While investigations have been largely ineffective, opposing them and describing them as “one of the most dangerous, and rarely discussed, exercises of raw power” shows Sessions has no interest in civil rights, particularly when the people involved are not white.

Sessions has always been an outlier in the Senate, always on the extreme protectionist right of the Republicans. He co-authored an ad in the Washington Post arguing against the US free trade deals including NAFTA and CETA.

In 2015 he voted against the majority of the Republican Senate judiciary Committee over a policy that the Senate would not create legislation that discriminated on the basis of religion. His speech against was to stop an amendment enshrining “so-called immigrant’s rights.”

He was one of the few champions of Trump’s campaign for the “Muslim ban” and has been pushing the administration to act swiftly and decisively on many of Trump’s pledges, to shore up the Trump base.

With Sessions as the country’s top prosecutor, attempts to investigate Trump’s business deals and corruption will be vastly curtailed.

Protest against Trump, 20 February

Donald Trump’s national security adviser, Michael Flynn, resigned on 13 February, facing charges of unauthorised freelance dealings with the Putin regime in Russia.

As we go to press, signals suggest that the Trump administration may not appeal to the Supreme Court against judges’ striking down of its “Muslim ban”. Trump talks of issuing a new “executive order” to target migrants and travellers.

A protest against Trump, and against Theresa May’s fawning inversion to him for a state visit, is set for 20 February: 5pm at Parliament Square, London: bit.ly/trump20feb

US radical feminists team up with fundamentalist bigots

By Claudia Raven

The US radical feminist group Women’s Liberation Front (WOLF) have teamed up with the Family Policy Alliance, a section of Focus on the Family, to fight against a federal protection for transgender people in the education system.

Title IX was written to protect women and girls from discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs or activities that receive federal funding. The bone of contention is that the legal category of “sex” in Title IX has recently been changed to “gender identity”. This means that schools which discriminate against transgender people will no longer be able to receive federal funding.

Focus on the Family is an evangelical Christian fundamentalist group, which heavily promotes sexist and homophobic views. They are famous for promoting violence as a means of controlling children and describing “submissiveness to husbands” as a characteristic to cultivate in women.

They have previously regarded feminism as an enemy: “nothing radical feminists have advocated for regarding sexuality and family relationships call women to deny their womanhood in an effort to be like men. These are primarily abhorrent, sexual aggression and cohabitation.” WOLF and Focus on the Family would normally balk at each other.

However, in recent years WOLF has been a force to organise against trans women. Although their statement of Principles includes “abolishing gender”, they argue that gender identity theory “seeks to erase women as a legal class”.

WOLF argue that cisgender women have been sold out by the rest of the feminist movement and the left on this issue. The two groups have been able to link up because they agree that transgender people are morally wrong and dangerous to women.

The idea that sex is binary and determined by genitalia at birth is a flawed one — it ignores the biologically complex nature of sex and its presentations and the existence of intersex people for a start — but this reductionist view of womanhood is especially ironic in the context of radical feminists’ opposition to sexual objectification of women in porn and sex work.

Women are not just vaginas, uteruses and breasts, and nor is our oppression only sexual and materially-related. Systematic oppression of women and the maintenance of strict gender roles exists in society to serve capitalist interests without most people having to see us naked.

When trans-exclusive radical feminists prioritise the exclusion of trans women over the breakdown of gender norms, they display a poor understanding of the oppression they seek to fight.

WOLF has succeeded in its stated aim to gather media attention and fundraising from this alliance, but they have also shown that their hatred for trans women is greater than their opposition to horrendous religious misogyny and homophobia. A feminism that claims to speak for all women whilst working with those who seek to ban abortion, remove rights from lesbians and condemn working women to lives of drudgery is no use at all.

Workers’ Liberty is socialist feminist, and supports the rights of all women, including trans women.
Nuclear power is not a capitalist plot

It was good to see a report (Solidarity 429) about the demonstration at UC Berkeley which prevented the appearance on campus of Milo Yiannopoulos, a senior editor of the far-right Breitbart website.

But it is important to clarify and stress this was a victory for the kind of “no-platforming” informed by independent working class politics. Members of the “black bloc” grew used to dismantle police barricades around the Student Union building and, by throwing rocks, fireworks and petrol bombs, cause considerable damage to it and to the Amazon shop on its first floor.

The 1500 peaceful protestors, almost all of them Berkeley students, did not support or protect these “black bloc” actions. If anything, the protest was hijacked and the protesters used as cover. “Liberals get the bullet too” read one of the spray-painted messages left behind.

The “black bloc” arrived tooled up (for example with baseball bats wrapped in barbed wire) on the frequent demonstrations and protests in the East Bay area, where the Berkeley campus is, and particularly in the city of Oakland nearby. Sometimes members are arrested: records indicate that many do not come from Oakland but from the outer suburbs of the Bay Area, home to middle class whites. The group forgives no links with organised labour.

The morning after the demonstration against Yiannopoulos, Latino and Latina janitors were clearing up the mess on campus.

Black bloc and anti-Trump protests

Burst Bangqiao Dam
development of renewable energy”

Yet wind and solar power capitalists are not one whiff less capitalist than nuclear-power developers. If anything, the current government bias is against nuclear power, because it requires larger lumps of long-term investment and slower profits. Capitalist renewables (or so-called “green”) do not seem to be on any serious basis to me.”

Patrick Yarker, Norfolk

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Ian Allinson — an inconsistent critic

Dale Street assesses Ian Allinson’s campaign to become Unite General Secretary

Ian Allinson is standing as “an experienced workplace activist”, “the grassroots socialist candidate”, and “the only candidate who knows first-hand the experiences and frustrations of our members”. By contrast, writes Allinson, Len McCluskey and Gerard Coyne have both been “been paid officials of Unite for many years.” McCluskey stands for “more of the same” and Coyne stands for “turning the clock back.”

Allinson rightly criticises the current Unite leadership for its failure to build a serious campaign against the Tories’ latest anti-unions laws, its shortcomings in a succession of industrial disputes, and its concessions to the ideology of “partnership” with employers.

Allinson also unreservedly defends freedom of movement of labour, cites “increasing the participation and power of workers” as his “number one priority”, and has promised to remain on his current wage (i.e. not take the General Secretary salary of £30,000 a year).

With the close of nominations immanent, he has secured just over the 50 nominations he needs to get onto the ballot paper. But as he wisely points out: “Some will be disqualified. Keep them coming to ensure a real contest.”

If Allinson gets onto the ballot paper — one should never underestimate the creativity of Unite’s custodian of the Rulebook (Andrew Murray) — it will be a good thing. It will mean that his arguments about Unite’s shortcomings under McCluskey and his alternative ideas about rank-and-file control will reach a much wider audience than just the members sympathetic to his ideas, are more likely to support Allinson, or at least be sympathetic to his ideas, are more likely to vote for McCluskey in a first-past-the-post poll. The shortcomings of Allinson’s campaign, especially in the context of the threat posed by Coyne, outweigh the case for voting for him.

That could help open up the debate about what a lay-member-led union would really look like and how it would function in practice — something which does not figure in either McCluskey’s or Coyne’s election material. So far, so good. But there are problems with Allinson’s election platform and campaign.

Allinson claims to be a better supporter of Corbyn than McCluskey. But Allinson is not even a Labour Party member and has made clear that he has no intention of joining.

He advocates “extending Unite’s support for Jeremy Corbyn”, including “through Unite’s role in the Labour Party”. What that means is not spelled out. At a minimum, it must include encouraging more Unite members to join the party, which Allinson himself refuses to join.

Given Allinson’s defence of freedom of movement of labour, he ought to be critical of Corbyn (from the left): Corbyn has retreated from demanding access to the Single Market (and the freedom of movement which goes with it) and has backed the To-
A world with no place for children

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This announcement represents a hardening of attitudes against immigration in the wake of the Brexit referendum vote, setting up a disturbing trajectory which could end with the virtual exclusion of all vulnerable children, some of the most vulnerable.

In May 2016, then Prime Minister David Cameron had agreed to Lord Dubs’ amendment to the Immigration Bill which called for 3,000 children to come. Dubs revised his target to say the UK should take a “specified number” of lone children, the number to be agreed later in discussion with local authorities. But, certainly, Dubs’ expectation was that the figure would be around 3,000.

All Dubs, a Labour peer, was himself saved from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia in 1938 by the “Dubs amendment”. Most came, under a different name, under a different UK from Calais in 2016, 200 under the “Dubs amendment” and brought 10,000 Jewish children to the UK from areas of Europe under Nazi control.

From Trotskyist newspapers of the 1940s and 50s, to older Marxist classics, to discussion articles on feminism, national questions, religion and philosophy and resources such as guidelines for Marxist reading groups — it’s all there on the Workers’ Liberty website.

But to make our archive of real use we need professional help to make all content fully integrated, searchable by date and subject and optimised for mobile reading. We need to finance a website co-ordinator to ensure our news coverage is up to the minute and shared on social media. We want to raise £20,000 by our conference in November 2017. Any amount will help.

• If you would like to donate by paypal go to www.workersliberty.org/donate
• Or set up an internet bank transfer to “AWL”, account 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, Birmingham, 08-60-01 (please email awl@workersliberty.org to notify us of the payment and what it’s for); or
• Send a cheque payable to “AWL” to AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, London SE1 3DG (with a note saying what it’s for).

Workers’ Liberty
@workersliberty

WHAT WE SAY

Labour should argue for migrants’ rights

On Tuesday 7 February the Brexit Bill passed its third reading in parliament by 494 votes to 122. Fifty-two Labour MPs broke the whip and voted against Brexit.

This is not a left-right split in the Labour Party, nor was it a calculated attempt to oust Corbyn by anti-Corbyn MPs. Solidarity argued that Labour should vote against Article 50, and we think MPs like Clive Lewis were right to vote against.

Unfortunately Labour had already stated in advance that they would vote for the bill even if the amendments did not pass. All of Labour’s amendments to the Bill were defeated, and shamefully five Labour MP’s even voted against their Party’s amendment seeking to secure the rights of EU migrants — Gisela Stuart, Frank Field, Kate Hoey, Kelvin Hopkins and Ronnie Campbell.

A YouGov poll published on the day of the third reading showed that 45% of people who voted Labour in 2015 would be “pleased” or “delighted” if Labour promised to reverse Brexit. Only 28% responded that they wanted to see a “hard Brexit” — the Brexit it looks like the UK is about to get.

Corbyn has now declared in a tweet that the “real fight starts now”, going on to say that “over next two years Labour will use every opportunity to ensure Brexit protects jobs, living standards and the economy”. The next day Labour Party press briefings stated that the Tories had offered a “blank cheque” over Brexit. Except that Labour had already voted for May’s Bill to give her precisely a blank cheque.

After the vote Labour’s Deputy Leader Tom Watson proposed a liberal policy on inward migration for London combined with tougher restrictions for the rest of the country.

This policy makes little sense. How would such internal controls work? Would we need borders at the entry points to the M25 and mainline railways?

Watson’s main game here is to draw attention to the divisions in the Labour Party on this question — how Labour’s London MPs in constituencies that voted Remain, are divided from northern ones where majorities voted to Leave — so that he can pose as the man who can heal divisions.

The government has said that the Brexit deal will be put before Parliament at the end of the two-year period. However it insists that any deal with be presented as ‘take-it-or-leave it’, with no opportunity to amend or send the government back to negotiations. An extension to the two-year negotiations could be sought but the government would have to ask, and it would have to be agreed by all 27 EU member states — an unlikely scenario. The alternative to voting for the deal could only be no-deal scenario where World Trade Organisation rules become the default.

Labour needs to reject nonsense ideas like that put forward by Watson, and not compromise on migrant rights. It should argue clearly in favour of rights everywhere, even where it may be unpopular, to win people over and pressure the government to keep freedom of movement.

Announcing the Government’s decision, Home Secretary Amber Rudd said that local authorities do not have the capacity to take any more children. She also disarmingly argued that the scheme was a lure to traffickers. If the problem is traffickers, deal with traffickers, don’t punish children!

The Government’s announcement must be fought. The Dubs scheme itself represents only a small part of what should be done to help refugee children and their families across the world. But it should be supported.

In Calais alone, since the French authorities have closed down the notorious ‘Jungle’ camp, Help Refugees estimates that 200 children are living in the surrounding woods. They told the Guardian newspaper: “They are not in tents because it makes them more visible to the police; they want to stay secret and out of sight. But it is quite dangerously cold. We give out sleeping bags and blankets at night; when we come back the next day the blankets are frozen.”

The Dubs amendment and the Government’s backtracking on it demonstrate two things. First, that any deal with be presented as ‘take-it-or-leave it’, with no opportunity to amend or send the government back to negotiations. An extension to the two-year negotiations could be sought but the government would have to ask, and it would have to be agreed by all 27 EU member states — an unlikely scenario. The alternative to voting for the deal could only be no-deal scenario where World Trade Organisation rules become the default.

Labour needs to reject nonsense ideas like that put forward by Watson, and not compromise on migrant rights. It should argue clearly in favour of rights everywhere, even where it may be unpopular, to win people over and pressure the government to keep freedom of movement.

We need to build a left that is open to debate and is serious about self-education. Our website, including its extensive archive could help build a different kind of socialist culture — one where discussion and self-education are cherished.

In the last week we raised £300 through new standing orders, bringing our running total to £931.

£931 raised out of £20,000

Help us raise £20,000

Solidarity 431 will go to press on 28 February
The 1905 prologue

The opening days of the Russian Revolution

Continuing a series of extracts from Leon Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution. Here Trotsky explains how the 1905 revolution—a popular revolt against the Tsar—was a “dress rehearsal” for the events of 1917.

The events of 1905 were a prologue to the two revolutions of 1917, that of February and that of October. In the prologue all the elements of the drama were included, but not carried through.

The Russo-Japanese war had made Tsarism totter. Against the background of a mass movement the liberal bourgeoisie had frightened the monarchy with its opposition. The workers had organized independently of the bourgeoisie, and in opposition to it, in soviets, a form of organization then first called into being.

Peasant uprisings to seize the land occurred throughout vast stretches of the country. Not only the peasants, but also the revolutionary parts of the army tended toward the soviets of the bureaucratic monarchy, but in distinction from her combined development, is indicated by the fact that to shake Tsarism would not be enough, it must be overthrown. This sharp break of the bourgeoisie with the people, in which the bourgeoisie carried with it considerable circles of the democratic intelligentsia, made it easier for the monarchy to differentiate within the army, separating out the loyal units, and to make a bloody settlement with the workers and peasants. Although with a few broken ribs, Tsarism came out of the experience of 1905 alive and strong enough.

What changed in eleven years? The bourgeoisie became economically more powerful, but its power rested on a higher concentration of industry and an increased predominance of foreign capital. Impressed by the lessons of 1905, the bourgeoisie became more conservative and suspicious. The relative weight of the petty and middle bourgeoisie, insignificant before, had fallen still lower. The democratic intelligentsia generally speaking had no firm social support whatever.

In these circumstances only the youthful proletariat could give the peasantry a programme, a banner and leadership. The gigantic tasks thus presented to the proletariat gave rise to a urgent necessity for a special revolutionary organization capable of quickly getting hold of the popular masses and making them ready for revolutionary action under the leadership of the workers.

So the soviets of 1905 developed gigantically in 1917. That the soviets, we may remark here, are not a mere child of the historical backwardness of Russia, but a product of her combined development, is indicated by the fact that the proletariat of the most industrial country, Germany, at the time of its revolutionary high point—1918 to 1919—could find no other form of organization.

The revolution of 1917 still had as its immediate task the overthrow of the bureaucratic monarchy, but in distinction from the older bourgeois revolutions, the decisive force now was a new class formed on the basis of a concentrated industry, and armed with new organizations, new methods of struggle.

The law of combined development here emerges in its extreme expression: starting with the overthrow of a decayed mediæval structure, the revolution in the course of a few months placed the proletariat and the Communist Party in power.

The events of 1905 were a prologue to the two revolutions of 1917, that of February and that of October. In the prologue all the elements of the drama were included, but not carried through.

In October 1917 the Russian working class, led by the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, took to the streets in mass, democratic Soviets (councils). The workers constituted their own state based on the collective and democratically-organised armed force of labour, allied with rank-and-file soldiers, mostly peasants in uniform.

The Bolshevik party established a workers’ government that carried out exactly what the workers and peasants demanded: an end to the war, land to those who worked it, a shorter working day and workers’ control over production. They brought liberation to the oppressed, separating the chattering classes from the masses, abrogating force laws, granting self-determination to nations previously imprisoned by the Russian empire.

They succeeded in shattering the old bourgeois state, most notably its army, gendarmerie and old state bureaucracy. They produced for the first time a democratic revolutionary organisation capable of quickly getting hold of the workers and peasants. They succeeded in shattering the old bourgeois state, most notably its army, gendarmerie and old state bureaucracy. They produced for the first time a democratic revolutionary organisation capable of quickly getting hold of the workers and peasants.

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By 1917 the conditions for revolution were present. An incompetent government, a discredited monarch, divisions within the ruling elite, alienation of wide sections of society from the regime, deteriorating economic conditions, industrial strikers, extreme war-weariness, resentful armed forces, a revival of activity by revolutionary parties, widespread anarcho-syndicalism and a sense that something had to break soon.

Russia was a backward country, but part of the capitalist world economy. There were an estimated 160 million people living within the Russian empire, with 80% peasants. Around a fifth lived in urban spaces, with thirty cities reaching the threshold of 100,000 inhabitants. St Petersburg and Moscow both had around two million people, while Riga, Kiev and Odessa had half a million each. Russians toiled under the yoke of the Tsarist absolute monarchy, which forbade even the limited liberal freedoms found elsewhere in Europe and whose secret police (the Okhrana) and its Siberian prisons repressed those who raised their hands against the regime.

Russia’s economy and society was subject to the most extreme pressures from what Trotsky called the laws of uneven development. Squeezed between foreign and domestic capital, Russia’s economy was divided between industry, exports and agriculture. In 1916, Russia’s output was 3.6 million of them dead or seriously wounded, with the rest prisoners of war. There was seething discontent at the front, with the death penalty used for deserters. In the rear, the Petrograd garrison had about 180,000 troops, with another 150,000 in the surrounding suburbs and some two million in total. Soldiers, conscripted peasants and workers in uniform, yearned for peace.

In the first two months of 1917, over half a million workers took strike action, the lion’s share of them in the capital. In spite of police raids, on 9 January 150,000 workers went on strike in the capital, led by metal-workers.

On the 14 February, the day the Duma opened, about 90,000 were on strike in Petrograd and several plants stopped work in Moscow. Hordes of university students, incited by the police, marched down the Nevsky Prospect in the capital singing revolutionary songs. Bread rationing was introduced, sparking queues and the sack of some bakeries. These were “the heat lightnings of the revolution, coming in a few seconds. 2 February, bosses locked out workers at the Putilov plant, throwing 30,000 onto the streets. The prologue to revolution was over.

At the start of 1917 an autocracy ruled, although when the tsar took control of the army during the war, the government was left to Taaraia Alexandra and her mystical adviser Grigori Rasputin.

The largest forces in the Duma were the constitutional monarchist Octobrist party of Alexander Guchkov and Mikhail Rodzianko, the liberal bourgeois Constitutional Democrats (Kadets) led by Pavel Miliukov, and the bourgeois-liberal Progressist Party led by Ivan Efremov, Alexander Konovalov and Pavel Rabushkin. During the war, even these forces of order become a focal point of opposition to the imperial regime.

The forces of the left were savagely repressed and existed legally only through a small number of representatives in the Duma and in some semi-legal trade unions. The largest party was the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), a populist party with roots in the 19th century peasant movement and the Narodniki revolutionaries. They were the only party, who considered themselves the union of the intelligentsia, the workers and the peasants. The Labour Group (Trudoviks), a peasant party, had ten deputies in the Duma, including Aleksandr Kerensky. The other main forces claimed the mantle of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP).

In the underground, SRs played a significant role in building trade unions, cooperatives, cultural-educational societies

23 February marks the hundredth anniversary of the opening of the Russian revolution of 1917. This extract from Paul Vernadsky’s forthcoming book on the revolution describes the background and opening events—the democratic revolution, ousting the Tsar, which would eventually lead to a workers’ revolution.
Russian Revolution

Revolutionaries had planned demonstrations and strikes for this socialist festival, but the day was transformed by protests by working-class women, angry that after working for twelve hours they had to wait in food lines with no guarantees of getting any bread or provisions. Thronges of militant women workers marched on the large factories across Petrograd and brought out 90,000 workers to join the demonstrations on that day.

Factory activists organised strike committees and called for the continuation of strikes on Friday 24 February. Some 200,000 workers come on strike in Petrograd, about half the industrial workforce. Besides calling for “Bread!” workers raise slogans such as “Down with autocracy!” “Down with the war!” It was a popular revolt.

On Saturday 25 February, a general strike kicked off in Petrograd. The police shot at protesters and revolutionaries were arrested. The strikes spread wider, with a quarter of a million workers involved. Larger numbers of students and middle-class elements swelled the demonstrations. Students from Petrograd university and the various technical institutes abandoned their studies for the streets. Women faced down soldiers with bayonets, urging them to join the protests. Clashes with the police escalated, and the demand went up to “Disarm the police!”

Soldiers

On Sunday 26 February Tsar Nicholas dissolved the state Duma and ordered soldiers to suppress the protests. But Cossack soldiers, long feared by the revolutionaries, winked to indicate their sympathy with the demonstrators – the forces of coercion were no longer willing to repress. Tens of thousands of workers were on the streets.

Captain Lashkevich ordered the Petrograd-based Volynska regiment to use sabres and whips to disperse the crowd and then after the warning bugle, ordered soldiers to fire into the crowds. Chastened soldiers debated the killings in their barracks overnight and the following day they rebelled. They shot their commanding officer – the same Lashkevich who had ordered firing on the crowds the day before.

On Monday 27 February the revolution reached its zenith. The temporary committee of the state Duma, headed by Rodzianko, was formed with a specific goal “to restore order”. But the workers were not finished. Apparently at the suggestion of the Menshevik liquidator Fedor Cherevanin, prominent representatives of the trade-union and co-operative movements together with leftist Duma deputies met to call for a soviet of workers’ deputies to be formed. The Petrograd soviet was reconstituted that evening. The Duma committee and the Petrograd soviet met in opposite wings of the Tauride Palace, the meeting place of the state Duma, which became the physical focal point of the revolution.

Tsarsim had been effectively ousted and dual power (dv dovlastie) was being created, whereby a provisional government replaced the fallen autocracy but was “weak to the point of impotence”. Effective power lay in the hands of the soviets.

Petrograd bore the brunt of the fighting in the February revolution. The Petrograd city council estimated the numbers killed, wounded and injured at 1,315, of whom 53 were officers, 602 soldiers, 73 policemen and 587 citizens of both sexes. Who led the February revolution? The sympathetic American historian William Chamberlin described the collapse of the Romanov autocracy as “one of the most leaderless, spontaneous, anonymous revolutions of all times”, while Stalin’s Short Course claimed the credit entirely for the Bolshevics. Neither view stands up to scrutiny. Historian Michael Melancon provides copious evidence for socialist agency and leadership of the February revolution, but from a diverse and multifaceted range of organisations.

Despite constant repression, by autumn 1916 revolutionary leaders of various socialist groups had begun to coordinate their activities, because they considered the situation to be revolutionary. During February 1917 an all-socialist leadership group met regularly and continued to do so throughout the protests. Because of differences in outlook, “the left socialists also maintained a separate informational group and the socialist Duma faction performed the same role for the moderates”. The right socialists, still smarting at the defeat of their plans as regards the opening of the state Duma on 14 February, were hesitant”. Socialists intervened on 23 February to prolong and deepen the protests. They “issued leaflets, led factory strikes and demonstrations in the streets, held meetings at all levels, including of the joint socialist groups, and agreed on slogans to be used each day”. By the 25 February, the right socialists joined the movement and began to urge the election of soviets.

On 27 February a group of right socialists, including the SR Kerensky and the Mensheviks Matvei Skobelev and Nikolai Chkheidze, with others, formed the provisional executive committee of the soviet and issued calls for factories and soldiers to send elected deputies to the Tauride Palace. Meanwhile, left socialists issued leaflets urging the movement forward to full revolution. But the rightists prevailed and by 7 March the provisional executive committee was elected, replicating the composition of the joint socialist group and transforming itself into a proto-government.

Socialists had no specific plans in advance to launch revolutionary disturbances on 23 February and bring them to fruition on 27 February. What they did have, was an “orientation to promote strikes and demonstrations, and, if they showed promise, to prolong them and push them toward revolution. Direct and organised socialist involvement and intervention occurred at every single stage”. Tsar Nicholas abdicated, oiling his nominates successor Grand Duke Mikhail a day later. The first provisional government was formed by the provisional committee of the Duma, with Prince Georgi Lvov as minister-president and a cabinet including Miliukov (Kadet) as minister of foreign affairs, Guchkov (Octobrist) as minister of war and Kononov (Progressist) as minister of trade. It was supported by the Petrograd soviet leaders and Kerensky was made minister of justice.

On 3 March the provisional government announced the revolution to the world by radio and installed itself in the Marinsky Palace.
A debate about Momentum
Maintaining the centre-left coalition

This explanation by Jon Lansman of recent events in Momentum was circulated in the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. Since it contains nothing confidential, and is the only political explanation available from the Momentum leadership other than the article by Christine Shawcroft in Labour Briefing (Feb 2017), which we replied to last week, we reprint it here.

I wanted also to counter the lies and misinformation which are so widely repeated by sectarian elements on the Left who wish to turn Momentum from a broad alliance it was intended to be, seeking to maintain the centre of gravity of that coalition that elected Jeremy Corbyn to support his administration, democratise the party along the lines long advocated by CLPD, to help Labour win elections into a hard-Left organisation reminiscent of the LRC designed to put pressure on Jeremy from the left.

It would have done better if (as we urged) it had organised a presence at Labour conference cancelled by the 10 January coup had been agreed in outline as far back as the February 2016 Momentum NC. The minority of the steering group and the half of national committee who had individually preferred the other course then set about misrepresenting the decision and vilifying those who were party to it. I have personally been subjected to appalling abuse to which it is difficult to respond without simply perpetuating their attempt to personalise blame for the alleged wrongs of which they unfairly accuse me.

I regret that Martin [Thomas] has chosen to act in this way. I have worked with him within CLPD since the early 1980s. I have done so because he and his colleagues from Socialist Organiser as his organisation was originally known, showed a genuine commitment to CLPD they never showed to the LRC or any other left organisations in which they pursued the opportunistic self-interested methods we are used to from all Trotskyists sects.

The slates he lists (for the new Momentum NC) are, in fact, those organised by Socialist Organizer’s successor, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, an organisation that was registered with the Electoral Commission as a separate political party until eleven days after the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader, though they have now made the tactical decision to back close fellow travellers and some well-known activists rather than their own full members for these elections.

I notice that Martin has not charged CLPD with a lack of activist democracy in spite of the fact that, since he and I got actively involved in CLPD, I think there has only ever been one contested election for the CLPD executive — in 1983 when we were both on the same slate, a division I later came to regret. Vladimir rightly put the effective exclusion of the organisation and the contribution of people to its work first. Like Momentum, CLPD is an organisation which seeks to democratise the Labour Party, not to operate like a party-within-a-party.

Similarly, Vladimir was determined for CLPD to reach out to the centre of the party, since without doing so we would inevitably lose. The same is true for Momentum now.

Panic makes for bad politics

By Martin Thomas

Jon Lansman identifies “sectarian elements” almost entirely with us (“Trotskyists”), but at the same time finds these “sectarians” so numerous among Momentum’s 21,000 members that the clash can be resolved only by abolishing Momentum democracy.

At stake here is no “sectarianism” of ours, but the issue of what socialism is and how it can be won. The liberation of the working class can be won only by a vivid movement where each participant is a lively contributor with her or his own ideas; which is full of bouncy debate; in which even the deepest prejudices and the most revered leaders are subject to question.

In a new movement like Momentum, we have reasoned patiently and tactfully, rather than bellowing.

Yet Momentum would have contributed more, much more, if it had successfully promoted a left Remain vote, free movement across borders, opposition to Trident renewal. It would be stronger now if its national office as well as its local groups had campaigned in support of workers’ disputes like at Picturehouse, and for the NHS.

It would have done better if (as we urged) it had organised a presence at Labour conference 2016. It would be healthier if it had a proper discussion on left anti-Semitism (in which Jon Lansman and we would have been broadly on the same side), rather than trying to quell the issue administratively.

All those things are not “sectarian” caprices, but would have happened if Momentum had been allowed to develop “normally”, democratically.

The “hard left” will ally with the centre where we can, as we did in the early 1980s; but to ally with the centre, rather than just being part of it, we must have our own ideas, our own criteria.

We cannot “drive away non-aligned activists”! Some people have stopped attending meetings because he and his colleagues from CLPD they never showed to the LRC or any other left organisations in which they pursued the opportunistic self-interested methods we are used to from all Trotskyists sects.

We haven’t suddenly become hellions. Vladimir’s successor, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, an organisation that was registered with the Electoral Commission as a separate political party until eleven days after the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader, though they have now made the tactical decision to back close fellow travellers and some well-known activists rather than their own full members for these elections.

10 January was a coup. Imagine its analogue in general politics: Theresa May declares that, on the strength of a 50%-plus-one majority got in an hour’s emailing round the Cabinet, she is abolishing the Cabinet, Parliament, and an imminent general election in favour of office rule plus a future “coordinating group” in which elected citizens’ representatives are a minority. Or, if that’s too much, imagine the analogue in any other left movement.

Despite all it, Momentum’s local groups will continue to organise, and I don’t think the panic-stricken officials can stop them.
By Jim Denham

It was fortunate for both jazz and the phonograph industry that their emergence coincided: the improvisational music that is jazz was caught in its early days by the phonograph, and jazz repaid the industry a million times over in sales of music that owed its existence to early jazz.

It is generally accepted that the first jazz records were made in New York on 26 February, 1917. The band was the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (or "ODJB") — the recognised birthplace of jazz — but there were five white guys in a practical demonstration of racism, even in the foremost art-form developed by African-Americans.

Well, maybe: but even disregarding the (unsubstantiated) legend that the black/Creole trumpeter Freddie Keppard turned down a recording deal (on the grounds that rivals would steal his stuff) in 1916, before the ODJB recorded, there is no evidence that the Victor Talking Machine Company was motivated by racism when it recorded ODJB for the first time. Shortly afterwards black or Creole jazz groups led by Kid Ory (1922), King Oliver (1923) and Jelly Roll Morton (1923) began making records, which are generally considered far superior to ODJB's efforts.

The spurious race issue has been further exacerbated by preposterous rantings over the years from ODJB leader and trumpet/organist Nick La Rocca, claiming that he and ODJB had "invented" jazz and that black musicians had stolen everything. La Rocca's racism has antagonised jazz lovers ever since, and contributed to a general consensus in which ODJB are downgraded as little more than a comedy act who struck lucky and happened to make the first (supposed) jazz records.

Philip Larkin, not often cited as an anti-racist, wrote this about La Rocca's claims (as repeated uncritically in The Story Of The Original Dixieland Jazz Band by H.O. Brunn): "Mr Brunn's thesis that the ODJB 'invented' jazz out of a kind of instrumental ritual is put forward mainly by the staggering trick of completely omitting all reference to contemporaneous Negro New Orleans performers such as Bolden, Oliver, Bunk Johnson or Keppard. No reader of this book would suspect that the Negroes had anything to do with jazz at all. Can this be the official Southern view?"

So was ODJB actually any good, and are its records (still widely available on CD) worth listening to? I have to admit that I can only listen to the ODJB as an exercise in musical archaeology — something that I wouldn't say for trumpet virtuoso for the ODJB, I have to acknowledge their place of jazz history. But hasn't the referendum result made it more difficult to do? The Socialist Party's negative view of capitalism is that it is the “fight over racism”.

To avoid difficult questions on how a worker-friendly Brexit can be achieved they revert to stressing the centrality of immediate campaigns. And the most urgent immediate issue, is the fight against racism. No shit Jack! Isn’t that the fight over racism generated by the Brexit vote and the rise of the populist right of which it is an example?

It is good that the Stand Up to Racism/Socialist Worker want to “set out a different vision of Brexit favouring working class interests.” This translates as opposition to the “neoliberal single market” as opposed to the neoliberal “take back control” capitalism of the Tory right. But, says Choonara, “our priorities are to break with austerity, secure protections for workers and the environment, and reverse the privatisation that go hand in hand with corporate globalisation.” Where is this offer in any form of Brexit?

Brexit: nightmare for bosses? Or for us?

THE LEFT

By Liam Conway

Despite evidence of rising racism, as well as the likelihood of severe cuts to working class standards of living, the two main left groups in the UK continue to peddle much the same nonsense about Brexit as they did during the referendum. The Socialist Party editorial of 1 February focuses on the Brexit “nightmare for the capitalist establishment in Britain”. It is as if the pending dismantling of rights and current rise in xenophobia did not exist.

The Socialist Party integered a YouGov poll showing 57% support for leaving the EU single market and 56% support for leaving the European Customs Union as evidence of “deep disillusionment with the capitalist establishment and an enormous accumulation of anger at endless austerity”. This is a dangerous fantasy that ignores the serious work needed in working class communities such as Kirkby in Ashfield, where I teach, to counter the view that migrants are the problem rather than capitalism and the Tories.

They repeat the old line about Corbyn failing to support Left meaning “the interna- tionalist case for exit” led by the “defence of the majority of the population”. They add, quite insultingly, that many of “those who have joined Labour to back Corbyn have only heard the right-wing, nationalst arguments against the EU put by Ukip, Boris Johnson and their ilk.”

The communists Blairite MPs for supporting “the EU single market… an agreement between the different capitalist classes of Europe to create the largest possible market in order to maximise their ability to exploit the working classes of Europe. The single market is based on the ‘four freedoms’ of the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour.

But the “four freedoms” so-called are not the decisive means by which capitalist exploits labour. In a socialist society we would certainly be in favour of at least three of those. These freedoms are only beneficial to capitaliser in proportion to their ability to gain political hegemony via the likes of anti-union laws, wage cuts, attacks on conditions, undermining public services and privatisation. The Socialist Party’s negative view of capitalism’s desire to “create the largest possible market based on the freedom of movement of goods, services, capital and labour” is in sharp contrast to Marx’s positive view of the same process. Marx says that the capitalist class “keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralised the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary con-sequence of this was political centralisation.

Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments, and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier, and one customs-tariff”. Can it be the case that a not a single member of their editorial board has read the Communist Manifesto?

Talk of the EU being “about freedom for big business to exploit us rather than real freedom” completely ignores the potential of the organised working class across the EU to defend itself from such attacks, just as it does in a single state, except with the benefit of organising with other workers across borders, challenging class rule and racism at one and the same time. The Socialist Party editorial finishes in a flourish, demanding that Corbyn “campaign clearly for a workers’ Brexit which is socialist and internationalist, around a programme to defend and improve the lives of the majority”. But what if these demands are not conceded?

In the Socialist Review section of the SWP’s website an article by Joseph Choonara rightly defends freedom of movement and criticises Theresa May for claiming that free movement undermines wages. They appear to have moved on somewhat from Charlie Kimber’s analysis last year in which he identified the vote to leave as being essentially a reac-tion of the establishment by the working class. Instead of recognising and explaining their mistake on the likely racist outcome of a vote to leave the EU (otherwise why set up Stand Up to Racism?), Socialist Worker want to “set out a different vision of Brexit favouring working class interests.” This translates as opposition to the “neoliberal single market” as opposed to the neoliberal “take back control” capitalism of the Tory right. But, says Choonara, “our priorities are to break with austerity, secure protections for workers and the environment, and reverse the privatisation that go hand in hand with corporate globalisation.” Where is this offer in any form of Brexit?
Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. The capitalists’ control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

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

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

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- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

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

**Events**

**Monday 20 February**
Mass lobby of Parliament for the rights of EU citizens in the UK
2.30pm, Parliament, London
bit.ly/2kLhbZC
Defend migrants, stop Trump
6pm, Parliament, London
bit.ly/2kYbYbU

**Saturday 25 February**
Demonstrate for a Living Wage for Picture House workers
From 12 noon, Leicester Square, London, WC2H 7DE
bit.ly/2kGvqDM

**Saturday 4 March**
National demonstration for the NHS
12 noon, Tavistock square, London, WC2H 9HW
bit.ly/2h9wqRe

**Tuesday 28 March**
Stand up for Choice fundraiser for London Irish Abortion Rights Campaign
7.30pm, London Irish Centre, Camden.
bil.ly/2ktrRqp

**Saturday 6 May**
New Unionism conference
A one day conference to discuss the history of new unionism and its legacy.
11-5 pm, London

**Thursday 29 June-Sunday 2 July**
bil.ly/2kmVSNv

**Labour**

**By Keith Road**

The Labour Party has 600,000 members and Momentum has 20,000. That should be good news for the activist left in the party.

Certainly, if the left organises on the scale it did for the two leader-ship elections that delivered majorities for Corbyn, then it should be capable of making real progress in other Labour internal elections, in getting through positive rule changes which would strengthen and democratise the Party.

However it would be foolish to discount the organisational strength of the Labour right and its ability mobilise. That’s particularly a problem because the fall-out and demoralisation arising from the “coup”, in Momentum (the abolition of existing committees and imposition of a structure) has knocked the left’s organisational ability — at least for now.

Labour First, a self-styled “moderate group”, continues to work with Progress to organise within local Labour Parties, and they have been well prepared for internal elections and selections.

At last year’s Labour Party conference they were much more effectively organised than the left, even if formally their numbers are much smaller than Corbyn supporters.

The right want to demoralise the often more experienced left. They will have had a lot to say about using Labour’s current poor polling — 16 points behind the Tories — and media speculation about potential leadership challenges that the right.

In the Guardian (13 February) Matthew D’Ancona declared, “There is no shortage of talent among the party’s centrists. But where is the coordination, the focus, the rage for victory? At a moment of maximum danger – and opportunity – they are barely ready for a game of rock, paper, scissors, let alone a battle to the ideological death.”

D’Ancona’s article is an attempt to galvanise the right into taking action now and preparing for a future leadership contest.

The huge potential of left support that arose out of the leadership elections should be able to stop the right, but the left has to up its game and ensure that activists are prepared to fight locally for both socialist policies and for democratic procedures across the board.

This is not an attack on work already being done. This is about recognising the scale of our difficulties, and suggesting the Labour left urgently needs a discussion on strategies and tactics to strengthen our position. The left also needs to reour own democratic organisations. The networking conference organised by activists in Momentum for 11 March will be an opportunity to discuss all of these issues.

The building of functioning wards, constituency Young Labour groups and other Labour forums as well as active Momentum groups are two ways our movement can be organised. One problem (of many) with the Momentum coup is that local groups are not seen as the core part of the organisation.

**Transparency**

To have an active, interventionist movement fit to fight the right, you need transparency and accountability. Relying on the functioning of “inner circles” and those in the know, no matter how good their discussions, will not build an open, strong left.

In dealing with the right we are not taking on new, inexperienced activists. That is another reason why we need strong structures and open debate. We need a lot of political preparation, to arm ourselves with arguments for the fight ahead.

Almost 40 years ago similar debates were being had around in the Rank and File Mobilisation Committee, an organisation that drew together most of the organisations of the Labour left, and some unions to democratise the Labour Party. At the height of its success it and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy helped to push through the electoral college structure that would elect the Labour leader up to the Collins review abolished those structures.

In an article from that time, John Bloxam, the RFMC Secretary, took on the arguments about why a democratic movement is essential to win against the Tories. These arguments are relevant now.

Speaking at Mobilising Committee meetings round the country, I have come across one argument again and again. Won’t the disputes over democracy divert from the fight against the Tories? Sometimes it is a cynical argument from opponents or reform, but sometimes it expresses genuine concern. What do we need to fight the Tories effectively?

A bigger and more active membership in the Labour Party (and the trade unions).

A clear policy to mobilise mass action against the Tories.

Confidence that we can replace the Tories with a Government that really bases itself on the demands, the needs and the struggles of the labour movement.

Without democracy, we will get none of these... How can Labour be an effective united force against the Tories if our supposed leaders are lining up with the other side? All our parliamentary leaders at least make general speeches against the cuts. But how much credibility can Labour have to fight the cuts when everyone knows the last Labour government cut £8 bn, making itself “accountable” to the IMF rather than working class?

We need a Labour Party where policy is seriously debated in the confidence that decisions will actually be carried out. Activists must be able to join the Party knowing that they will not just be the foot-sloggers for Parliamentarian careerists or time-servers who ignore the rank and file. They must be able to join knowing that the resolutions they debate and pass will lead to action, not just to overcrowning in the water-poker baskets. There can be no effective fight against the Tories without a fight against those who obstruct anti-Tory action, and against the undemocratic practices and structures which slow down struggles or dissolve them in a mess of cynicism and betrayal.

We need to be able to fight for policies with the confidence that we have a movement that will carry them out.

**Where we stand**

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**Sacked while on strike!**

By Dale Street and Martin Corby

Ten employees of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) were sacked with immediate effect on Thursday 9 February by email — whilst they were on strike.

They were told to come into work the next day to clear their desks.

PCS and Unite members were taking part in the first of five days of strikes in the latest round of action against compulsory redundancies. The stated reason for their dismissals was redundancy — despite the availability of 30 vacancies in the EHRC.

The PGS civil service and government agencies is unprecedented for employees under notice of redundancy to be dismissed en masse with immediate effect. Under civil service rules you have to be given three months notice of a compulsory redundancy, effectively giving you time to look for another civil service job. EHRC have decided to pay the notice period in lieu rather than let the individuals work the notice. There is precedent for this but only with union agreement. Without agreement this is unprecedented and, to be frank, a provocation. If EHRC get away with this, this will happen in the rest of the civil service.

Irony is clearly not lost on the EHRC — trade unionists, disabled members of staff, and BAME members have been disproportionately represented in the 10 compulsory redundancies.

The PCS and Unite have pointed out to the EHRC that suitable alternative employment to which the employees at risk of redundancy could be redeployed is available amongst the current 30 vacancies.

But none of the dismissed employees were offered any of these vacancies — or training to ensure that they could carry out the vacant roles — before they were dismissed.

Now that they have been paid in lieu of notice — although none of those dismissed had requested or agreed to this — they are no longer EHRC employees and therefore no longer eligible to be redeployed into the vacancies.

At short notice, protests against the sackings were organised in London, Glasgow, Manchester and Birmingham at lunchtime on Friday 10 February. Over a hundred turned up to the protest in Glasgow, with big contingents from the PCS itself and from the GMB, though oddly not Unite even though they represent workers involved in the dispute.

The EHRC will certainly face claims for unfair dismissal as a result of the sackings. But trade union and industrial action pressure also needs to be maintained and increased.

PCS used to have a policy that one compulsory redundancy would trigger a national ballot. It was our line in the sand – An injury to one is an injury to all. However one NCS member said on social media that a national ballot would be “industrial suicide” — so much for an “effective campaigning leadership”.

This is one of the many reasons why PCS members should elect a new Independent Left leadership in the NEC elections in April.

Further strikes had already been scheduled for 1st March, 20th March, 18th April and 17th May.

- Send messages of support to londonhargaining@pcs.org.uk
- Tweet to @savetheehrc
- Donate to the PCS PSG Hardship Fund (sort code: 608301; account number: 2015124).

**University threatens campus closure**

By Neil Laker

Over 180 workers at Manchester Metropolitan University’s Crewe site have been put at risk of compulsory redundancy through management plans to close the campus.

The institution, which has £378.9 million in reserves, cited financial problems in its justification of the decision. The recent history of higher education tells us that when restructuring such as this takes place, it becomes the opening to further management aggression.

In response the local UCU, which has held its largest ever meeting, which raised confidence for fighting against the cuts. They are unafraid to take a consultative ballot of the membership to gauge appetite for industrial action — which was strong amongst those at the meeting.

Last Friday they held a lobby of the MMU Board of Governors meeting. Morale was strong, with a good attendance of reps of different campuses and faculties.

**Mass Job Centre closures**

By a PCS activist

After months of secrecy, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced on 26 January plans for large scale closures. 108 sites are to be closed by March 2018, while a further 40 could be closed at a later date, affecting almost 6000 jobs.

These closures will have a significant impact on workers, on DWP customers and on the wider community.

The proposals include:

- 78 out of 714 job centres to close, with work and staff transferring to the nearest job centres.
- 18 of these fall outside the criteria of 2 to 3 miles distance or 20 minutes by public transport from the old site to the new site.
- A further 80 job centres to be located with local authority premises.
- 30 out of 150 Back of House Operational sites to close (e.g. Child Maintenance Group,公积金 centres, benefit processing and contact centres).
- Corporate centre hubs to be limited to six, with two current corporate centre sites closing.
- A further 40 Back of House Operational sites have been labelled transitional sites, which means their future is only secure for the next three years, or five years for six of the 40 sites.
- 18 sites where DWP is unable to make an announcement as commercial negotiations have not yet concluded.

Closings over 10% of Jobcentres will impact on claimants, especially as many of those identified for closure are in areas of high unemployment and social deprivation.

Ironically, some of the difficulties for claimants who will have to travel further to visit their Jobcentre, incurring increased costs they can ill afford, disproportionately affect disabled claimants and claimants with caring responsibilities, and increasing the risk of being late and therefore the risk of sanctions.

The DWP claim that the world has changed and many people use digital channels to communicate with government. However evidence shows many claimants still prefer to talk to a person rather than trust a machine to handle their claim. A significant number will also be unable to use digital channels due to lack of access or lack of IT skills.

Some parts of the country that have been disproportionally affected by these job centre announcements. For example, Glasgow has already seen proposals to halve the number of jobcentres serving the city. London and the Home counties also has 24 proposed Jobcentre closures – a third of the total.

The DWP have refused to give assurances of no compulsory redundancies. While some staff may be able to be redeployed to another nearby DWP site or other government departments, for many this will not be possible, leaving redundancy as the only alternative.

The impact on service users is likely to be far greater than the impact on staff. Clearly PCS should support branches that wish to take action over closures but, initially the emphasis of the campaign should be on services.

**DOO fight at Northern**

Rail union RMT has declared a dispute with Arriva North (who run Northern) over a failure to provide assurances over the safety critical role of the guard on the train.

The union is now preparing to ballot its members. RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said: “The union’s position on Driver Only Operation (DOO) is perfectly clear. We will not agree to any extension of DOO and will fight to retain the safety critical role of the guard and to keep a guard on the train.”

There has long been a threat of DOO imposition on Northern, one of many attacks on the role of guards on trains across the country.
Build solidarity with Picturehouse workers

By Gemma Short and Simon Leser

The largest cinema workers’ strike in British history happened on Saturday 11 February. Workers at four Picturehouse sites in London struck, including Picturehouse’s flagship cinema near Piccadilly Circus.

Workers at the Ritzy in Brixton, Picturehouse Central, Hackney and Crouch End walked out at 2pm. Workers at all four sites were greeted when they walked out by supporters and staff who had not been working in the morning. This was the first strike for workers at Crouch End and Picturehouse Central, who joined those at the Ritzy and Hackney when workers were re-balloted earlier this month.

Workers are on strike for the London Living Wage, sick pay, maternity/paternity pay and union recognition. Wages vary across the Picturehouse chain but none currently pays the Living Wage Foundation rate (£9.75 an hour). Picturehouse continues to refuse to negotiate with the workers’ union, the Bectu section of Prospect. It is clear Picturehouse wants to stand firm on not recognising a union. They fear their workers’ continuing ability to collectively organise.

During the strike the Ritzy cinema was completely closed, while a combination of head office management, workers on their probationary period and workers shipped in from Cineworld cinemas were used to keep the other three sites open. However confident picketing by workers resulted in many potential customers being turned away, and many who had already bought tickets online demanding a refund from the cinema. Bosses were clearly annoyed by this and attempted to intimidate workers who were picketing — bosses even called the police to keep an eye on the picket at Crouch End. Disappointingly some union staff were also giving pickets incorrect advice about picketing laws, and tried to discourage pickets from turning customers away at the doors.

Labour’s London Mayor Sadiq Khan has written to Moshe Greiinger, the chief executive of Cineworld (the owner of Picturehouse) calling for Picturehouse to pay its staff the London Living Wage. In his letter Khan said: “I am concerned therefore to read reports of an ongoing dispute relating to the Living Wage in your Picturehouse subsidiary … The London Living Wage (LLW) is a voluntary floor to earnings which has my full support. As Mayor of London, I strongly support the Living Wage campaign.”

At the Bafta awards ceremony on Sunday 12 February ‘I, Daniel Blake’ director Ken Loach stopped on the red carpet to talk to and take photos with Picturehouse strikers, and wore a “living staff, living wage” badge whilst receiving his award.

Picturehouse workers and their supporters will be holding a demonstration on 25 February in central London. They will start at the Empire cinema, Leicester Square, which Picturehouse has recently bought, before going on a tour of central London cinemas.

- Sign the petition: change.org/p/picturehouse-pay-proper
- Join the demonstration on 25 February: bit.ly/2jXQsIU
- Donate to the strike fund:

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