Labour’s free school meals plan should be part of bold socialist policy for education

It's about time! Labour has made a policy commitment to impose VAT on private school fees and use the money raised to finance the provision of free school meals for all children in primary schools.

Just 7% of children go to private schools. They are overwhelmingly from wealthier, more privileged families – people who should be paying more tax. The 83% of children who go to state schools will benefit from the free school meals policy.

More page 5

FOUR MILLION CHILDREN IN POVERTY

Inside:

US bombs Syria

Simon Nelson reports on Assad’s chemical weapons attack and the US’s response. See page 2

Who is Le Pen?

Yves Coleman on the politics of French Presidential candidate Marine Le Pen. See page 4

Livingstone’s bad history

Solidarity discusses Livingstone, antisemitism and the Labour Party. See pages 6-8

Join Labour!

How will Labour fare in council elections? See page 10
Chechnya: stop anti-gay state killings

**QNEWS**

**By Mike Zubrowski**

Over 100 men suspected of being gay have been rounded up and detained by the Chechen authorities, with many tortured and sodomised.

Chechnya has an authoritarian and extremely repressive state presiding over a deeply homophobic society; but this development is shocking even in this context.

Some of the suspected gay men were killed in violent raids, whilst others have been kept in secret “concentration-camp style” prisons, where many have gone missing; but by 2016 the names of three of who have been killed in detention have been released, and activists suspect many more have too. Some as young as 16, were rounded up Chechnya is a region of Russia with substantial autonomy, with a history of separatist movements, ethnic violence and conflicts with the Russian government (including under the USSR).

LGBT+ rights in Russia itself have got worse since the 2013 “propaganda bans”, which have been used to repress LGBT liberation campaigning. Putin’s response to the situation in Chechnya has been very limited and permissive at best, encouraging “official complaints”.

Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen President, has severely repressed critics, both activists and journalists. He was appointed by the Kremlin in 2007, and increased his crackdown in the decade up to elections in 2016. He was closely connected to the assassinations of several political opponents. The Chechen regime has a history of torture and human rights abuses.

HONOUR KILLINGS

Kadyrov’s spokesperson has denied the execution and detention of gay men, as “such people do not exist” in Chechnya, that if they did they would have been killed by their families.

Honour killings of LGBT people by their families are in fact quite common in Chechnya. This is in fact another danger to LGBT people in Russia.

The construction and homophobia in Chechen society is linked both to national and traditional and political Islam. 95% of the population are Muslims, although their local practices and traditions, Atrad, are often seen as more important than religion. National conflicts have worsened this situation, as separatist groups have often been Islamists, strengthening reactionary ideas.

A left response to this horrific homophobia must be secular, internationalist and forceful.

Erdogan tries to reinforce his power

**By Dan Katz**

On Sunday 16 April Turkey’s voters will cast ballots in a referendum.

They will decide on proposals from the ruling Islamists, the Justice and Development (AK) party, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The main thrust of the 18 constitutional amendments that will be voted on as a package is to highly centralise power in the hands of the President.

If Erdogan wins he will also be able to run in Presidential elections in 2019 and 2024, meaning he could be in power until 2029. Erdogan is an unpleasant, thin-skinned Islamist politician who has used a coup attempt last summer to persecute all opposition.

Tens of thousands of civil servants, teachers, academics and activists have been arrested or sacked. 150 journalists are in jail. Many media outlets have been shut down. The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) has been designated a terrorist group by the EU, but Erdogan has increased his vote in the referendum.

Opponents of Erdogan’s power-grab also have to contend with an ongoing State of Emergency and, in the Kurdish south-east, with a brutal military response to the armed campaigns of the Kurdish PKK and TAK.

The referendum is bitterly contested and polls suggest the result may be close. The stakes are high for AK who run a formidable propaganda machine. Their slogan is: “Vote for a Strong Turkey.”

During the election campaign Erdogan fell out, dramatically, with key governments in the EU. Some EU states have large Turkish communities, many of whom are eligible to vote in the referendum.

Polling data suggests many Turks in Germany, for example, are disproportionately in favour of Erdogan — who has been keen to reach them. However, planned pro-AK rallies in Germany, Austria and Holland were banned.

Erdogan responded with a wave of violence and abuse which has damaged his long-term relationship with the EU, but he has increased his vote in the referendum.

No, Donald Trump did not suddenly grow a conscience and a soul and begin to care about the slaughter of Syrian civilians.

The naked cynicism of Trump’s rhetoric as he announced US airstrikes on the Shayrat Syrian Air Force base was apparent to anyone who’s been paying attention.

Invoking the horrifying loss of life in the Syrian towns hit by the US in April, Trump made a campaign pledge that he would “stop the slaughter” of Syrian civilians, and “stop the killing” of American soldiers in the war.

No, Donald Trump did not suddenly grow a conscience and a soul and begin to care about the slaughter of Syrian civilians.

Trump’s non-interventionist stance had been based on an assessment that the Syrian opposition is dominated by various strands of Islamism, while Assad is a known quantity. In October 2016 Trump said he had already “overthrown Assad…you may very well end up with worse than Assad.”

While Obama and Clinton are still arguing about whether the US would play a direct role, Trump has never accepted that Assad would need to be replaced.

But the attack on Khan Sheikhun on 4 April were the worst in several years. There have been horrifying images of children affected — sarin can kill within 10 minutes by asphyxiation.

The Trump administration clearly felt they needed to act. US Defence Secretary James “Mad Dog” Mattis is a vile right wing militarist, but he also understands the “rules of war”. It is likely he advised Trump that if he failed to act then US credibility as the de facto world police would be undermined.

Since 2013 Assad has restricted the use of chemical weapons to chlorine gas, which are not explicitly prohibited by the Chemical Weapons Convention. Obama justified non-intervention on the basis that Assad was sticking to this norm.

More than 100 people, mostly women and children, have been killed in Syrians dying for years and desperately seeking safe passage to western nations, including the US.

[Instead] Trump has seized every opportunity to whip up racism and Islamophobia against refugees — scapegoating an already embattled population as a terrorist menace.

Trump has repeatedly called for “strong borders” and “extreme vetting” of those seeking refuge in the US. While he’s expressing concern for Syrian babies today, in February of last year, he declared at a campaign rally that he would have no problem looking Syrian children in their faces and saying[ing] “you can’t come,” because “we don’t know where their parents come from... They may be [members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria]...It could be a Trojan horse.”

Around the time of the US air strike against the Daesh capital of Raqqa, his advisors, including James “Mad Dog” Mattis, appeared to have no strategy except for American air support for Kurdish fighters in northern Syria.

Erdogan, according to the Washington Post, pointed out, to put that in perspective, that number represents just 300 people who entered the US as refugees were the subject of put that in perspective, that number represents just 300 people who entered the US as refugees were the subject of an underscoring Trump’s hypocrisy.

All of this underscores Trump’s hypocrisy.

[www.socialistworker.org]
End “the tampon tax”  
Stop funding anti-abortionists!

By Elizabeth Butterworth

In March last year, then Prime Minister David Cameron announced to Parliament that the 5% VAT levy on period-related products — the “tampon tax” — would soon come to an end. Parliament was told the European Commission would allow countries to extend zero rates on VAT, and more generally to have more autonomy over the VAT applied to individual products and services.

The European Court of Justice has been called upon numerous times to clarify the rules about individual, esoteric products and services — such as whether or not coin-operated booths in a Bruges sex shop counted as a cinema.

Former Chancellor of the Exchequer George “Six Jobs” Osborne tried to “soften the blow” of the short-term continuation of the sanitary product tax by pledging to spend it on women’s charities.

This was amazingly tone deaf: why should women’s charities be funded by a tax on people with wombs, rather than the general population?

The issue of the tampon tax has come back into the news for two reasons.

First, it emerged that £250,000 of the £12 million tampon tax revenue had been distributed to the anti-abortion charity Life. The issue of the tampon tax has come back into the news for two reasons.

Life state that the money will be used to support vulnerable women with services such as “non-directive counselling” and housing. How likely is the “non-directive” in “non-directive counselling”, when their mission statement says that they “won’t give up” until “abortion is a thing of the past”? When Life’s campaigning arm says they believe that human life begins at fertilisation?

Undercover researchers have found that they have given misleading and wrong information to pregnant women regarding a supposed link between breast cancer and abortion, and telling them that after taking a medical abortion pill that they will have to dispose of “the corpse”.

Second, there have been an increasing number of young women and girls not attending school as they cannot afford sanitary products and do not want to ask their parents or carers for the money, as they know they cannot really afford it. This has been attested to by police officers who work in schools, and the young people themselves.

An 11-year-old pupil told Radio Leeds, “I wrapped a sock around my underwear just to stop the bleeding, because I didn’t want to get shouted at... I once Sellotaped tissue to my underwear. I didn’t know what else to do. I didn’t get any money because my mum was a single parent and she had five mouths to feed, so there wasn’t much leftover money in the pot to be giving to us.”

Leeds MP Greg Mulholland raised this issue in Parliament and Education Secretary Justine Greening said she would “look carefully” at the issue.

Not only should period-managing items not be taxed, they should be collectively produced and free!

No one should be making a profit out of a basic biological function, especially one that mostly affects women, who get paid less anyway!

Open up the student movement!

By Workers’ Liberty students

The National Union of Students Conference takes place from 25-27 April in Brighton and, once again, we will be in attendance. It promises to be three days of constant campaigning, debating and flogging Solidarity and other publications.

Malia Bouattia is re-standing for President against two right-wing candidates. While credit is due for her commitment to campaigning for a free and liberated education system, there remain many criticisms of her twelve months in office.

The limpness of last November’s national demonstration indicates the union’s disengagement from grassroots organising. Workers’ Liberty will be backing Bouattia while making very clear our criticisms.

Solid left-winger Ana Oppenheim is running for the full-time Vice President Higher Education position; and Jenny Killin for Vice President Welfare.

Both are running as candidates for the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCACF). Both are on the Labour left and have campaigning records as sabatrical officers. We will be actively campaigning for them during conference.

We anticipate important debates on the future of the higher education sector.

NCAFC is supporting a motion calling for a continuation of the National Student Survey (NSS) Boycott, a tactic as part of the movement to defeat the government’s higher education reforms.

While take-up has not been uniform nationwide, we believe this tactic needs further support as well as escalation on other fronts in order to tackle the disastrous Higher Education and Research Bill.

A motion on Palestine is likely to be discussed. NUS policy is to support Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel in order to support the Palestinian struggle for freedom — although only passed by the National Executive Committee (NEC), not so far by conference. While supporting demonstrations and actions against the Israeli government we have many criticisms of this policy.

We will continue to argue that the BDS movement may strengthen Israeli nationalism, and ultimately result in further oppression of the Palestinians.

This conference will be particularly important in shaping the future direction of NUS. Proposed constitutional changes may abolish the NEC, making FTOs even less accountable to students.

The whole culture of cliques and other publications.
Trotskyism and Maoism

By Sean Matgamna

The Irish Communist Group of the mid-1960s, the subject of the article “Stokely Carmichael: The last of the giants. Solidarity, was part of a wider scene of Trotskyist-Maoist regroupment efforts at the time.

Stalinist Beijing and Moscow had fallen out in the early 60s. The Chinese criticised Moscow from the “left” — for instance, questioning the dogma of the Stalinist parties controlled by Moscow that there could be a peaceful parliamentary road to socialism. If you didn’t know, or let yourself forget, what and who Mao and his comrades were, it was the critique of Moscow and East European Stalinism.

The Maoists traced what they called Moscow’s “modern revisionism” to the 20th congress of the CPSU, at the beginning of 1956, the one in which Stalin’s heir Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin as a mass murderer. Groups of pro-Chinese “Marxist-Leninists”, as they called themselves, formed in and then outside some Communist Parties. They were pre-1945 revolutionary Stalinists, cherishing the memory and implicitly the deeds and politics of Stalin. Maoists in and after the Cultural Revolution (1966) would usually be political quasi-lunatics. Before the Cultural Revolution they included some more sober old-time Stalinists critical of the Western CPs.

Natural the Orthodox Trotskyists paid attention, wrote analyses of the Moscow-Belgrade “debate”, etc. When, around 1965, independent “Marxist-Leninists” groups were formed, the Trotskyists approached the Maoists with considerable caution — for instance, in Belgium the group led by Ernest Mandel approached the Maoist party there.

The majority side of a Fourth International that had reunified in 1963 after a ten-year split with the supporters of James P Cannon and the American SWP thought of China as a deformed workers’ state. A working-class revolution against the state, what in relation to Stalinist Russia the Orthodox Trotskyists called a political revolution, was not necessary. In fact they were critical supporters of the Maoist regime.

They argued that the “great revolution- ary” Mao was, unconsciously, the political heir of Trotsky (for instance, in an introduction by Pierre Frank to a French-language collection of Trotsky’s writings in 1955). They could come out for a new revolution in China — a “political revolution” — in 1969.

The first half of the 1960s, when the Orthodox Trotskyists made approaches to Maoists, they were relating to people with whom they had much in common and whom they (with some qualifications) regarded as “Moscow” — precisely because they thought valid (with the exception of the Maoists’ attitude to a Third World War, that was not even to be broached).

In fact, however, it was all in vain. There could be no rapprochement between Mac-Stalinists and Trotskyists, even Trotskyists gone seriously soft on Maoism.

Marine Le Pen’s Front National

By Yves Coleman

Since 2011, when Marine Le Pen became the leader of the Front National, the presence of anti-semitism (but not of racism) has decreased in its official public declarations. Marine Le Pen has tried several times to make an official apology. The Front National has contacted the leaders of the American Jewish community, made appeals to Jewish voters, and so on.

But evidence about what the activists and the local cadres of the FN say in internal meetings shows that anti-semitism and even Holocaust denial are still current in the National Front. Moreover, all the polls confirm that the FN is the party that attracts the most anti-semitic and racist voters.

For instance, in Belgium the group led by Jean-Marie Le Pen gives a very short press conference (thirty minutes, Le Pen is not reckless) in an immigrant neighbourhood where a young man had been killed by a stray bullet, that the district would be “cleaned up with a hosing”.

But few people know that Jean-Marie Le Pen gave a very short press conference (Harty Matgamna, Le Pen is not reckless) in an immigrant neighbourhood in 2007 and said: “If some want to power-hose or exclude you, we want to help you get out of these suburban ghettos where the French politicians have parked you. You are branches of the tree of France.”

This statement followed his 2006 speech in Valmy where he proclaimed himself a “republican” and addressed the “French of foreign origin”.

If the Front National is not a Nazi party, the “strong state” and its social demagogy, it is a racist and antisemitic party. It is an extreme right-wing party because it is built entirely around a leader who has all the powers within the party.

It has a nationalist-racist ideology. It defends Christian values, like all the reactionary currents since 1789. It is far from the Nazi party, if no longer explicitly targets Jews, takes up the theme of the struggle of the “white” against the “big”, the “people” against the “elites” (the System, the UMP, the EU, IMF, World Bank, etc.), a theme common to the whole far-right.

Since 2011, when Marine Le Pen has included a number of currents: from neoliberals to traditionalist Catholics to nationalist revolutionaries. The Front National cadres have an even more absurd argument: “We are neither racist nor antisemitic. But it is normal to discriminate... in a restaurant, when you choose a dish, you discriminate against the dishes you do not order”.

Jean-Marie Le Pen never made racist propaganda in the Nazi sense of the word... he made racist remarks in order to attract the attention of the media, to keep the support of his fascist supporters inside and outside of the FN, and embarrass the members of his party who wanted to make alliances with the “respectable” right.

The Front National cadres have an even more absurd argument: “We are neither racist nor antisemitic. But it is normal to discriminate... in a restaurant, when you choose a dish, you discriminate against the dishes you do not order”.

The balance between so-called “neo-liberal” proposals (openly favourable to privatisation) and those that seem to defend the maintenance of the welfare state is very unstable.

Two fundamental elements remain. It wants to reserve social benefits and services for French people only, and for “ethnic French” (an expression whose meaning varies). It wants to establish a “strong state” against the “foreigners”, “Muslims” and the “paper French” (recently naturalised).

It defends public services only to defend the maintenance of the welfare state.

Abridged from “The Front National and its social demagogy”, in NI Putri at Frontières no. 54-55.
Dealing with Livingstone

This issue of Solidarity carries background material and discussion on the row in the Labour Party over how Ken Livingstone should be dealt with,  following his inflammatory remarks on the relationship between Zionism and Nazi Germany.

Our editorial position is that we do not call for Livingstone to be expelled. We want to limit, not expand, the powers the current Party regime has to “ban” political views.

However, as the articles we print here make clear, Livingstone’s long-held views on these matters are seriously harmful. We invite further debate.

Rising numbers of children are going to school hungry

Labour needs a bold socialist programme for education

It’s about time! Labour has made a policy commitment to impose VAT on private school fees and use the money raised to finance the provision of free school meals for all children in primary schools.

Just 7% of children go to private schools. They are overwhelmingly from wealthier, more privileged families — people who should be paying more tax.

The 85% of children who go to state schools will benefit from the free school meals policy. It will ease the financial pressures on families who currently just fail the “means test” for free school meals, who may not realise that they qualify; or who are put off from claiming free school meals for fear of being stigmatised (especially in schools where children would be required to queue separately or hand over special tokens in the canteen).

The End Child Poverty Coalition reports that four million children in the UK are now living in relative poverty. Research by The Food Foundation has shown that in 2014, 8.4 million people (about 10% of the population) were living in food insecurity (they report being unable to obtain enough food to live healthily).

Cuts and freezes in benefits (especially child benefits) are worsening this situation. Research shows a big increase in the number of people relying on food banks, indicates that food insecurity is increasing.

Policy that redistributes some income and wealth from some of the wealthiest people towards the majority of families and provides free, healthy, nutritional food is more than overdue. It would mean that there would be no financial incentive to send a child to school with a cheap, unhealthy packed lunch.

It would also mean that parents would be able to spend more of their income on healthy, nutritional food for family meals at home (or to be less in debt, or less compelled to cut back on other essentials such as home heating).

Presumably there has been outcry from those who object that Labour’s policy will unfairly penalise those (untypical for private schools) families on modest incomes who make sacrifices (cutting back on family holidays, the size of the family home etc.) in order that they can afford the school fees.

What will these families do if VAT on school fees is implemented? In some cases, say the parents, their children will have to leave their school and go to a state school.

Changing schools can be a difficult for a child, but many children do this anyway, for all sorts of reasons. It would be progress if more children go to state schools than private schools. In particular, for “clued-up”, middle-class parents to seek to find an escape for their children from what may be “struggling” or “under-performing” state schools is no answer to the problems in those schools.

Comprehensive education works well when there is a broad social mix, and where academically motivated students and their families (whatever their income level), are involved with, committed to, and supportive of, schools that serve the whole community.

Private schools and grammar schools both represent attempts to improve education for individual children at the expense of most children in society.

The objections to VAT on school fees are, in that sense, similar to the support for opening new grammar schools in England. It gives up on education as a universal service with quality provision for all and seeks only to create islands of quality for those “deserving enough” to have passed an entrance exam.

As well as the announcement for free school meals, Labour points out cuts to Sure Start centres, the 22,500 unqualified teachers in England’s schools, and the half a million children being taught in classes of over 36.

Their statement says that “Labour will invest to ensure the highest standards in schools, with every child cherished and supported.”

There is no specific mention, however, of how much will be invested or of reversing the real-terms cuts that are currently being imposed on schools between now and 2020.

There are welcome commitments to reintroduce the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) that helps to support students in post-16 education; and to bring back maintenance grants for half a million students in higher education.

But Labour could go a lot further than this — and it needs to do so.

Labour’s campaign statement concludes with the words: “A good education should not be a privilege. It’s every child’s right. Labour will stand up for all our young people and ensure that all children, whatever their background, receive the high quality education they deserve.”

To be true to these words, Labour should present a bold, radical vision for education — levelled up and increased school funding, reversing cuts; converting academies and free schools into locally accountable community schools; free, high-quality nursery education and childcare provision; free further and higher education with grants for all students; and much more!

Labour should also be willing to tax the wealthiest in society to implement this programme.

* Read Labour’s policy here: www.labour.org.uk/index.php/education

Help us raise £20,000 to improve our website

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.

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.

In the last week Solidarity sellers have increased standing orders, bringing in £70 and North London branch raised £50.

* 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, 60-33-01 (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).

Take a look at www.workersliberty.org
Ken Livingstone: bad history, worse politics

By Dale Street

Over the past twelve months Ken Livingstone has made a succession of jumbled and frequently contradictory claims about the relationship between Zionism and Nazi Germany. Even allowing for their incoherence, they add up to bad history and even worse politics.

In April 2016 he'd claimed in a radio interview: “When Hitler won his election in 1932, his policy then was that Jews should be moved to Israel. He was supporting Zionism – this was before he went mad and ended up killing six million Jews.”

Livingstone repeated the same argument in subsequent interviews: “His policy was to deport all Germany’s Jews to Israel. That’s not because he was a Zionist, it’s because he hated Jews. He then had a dialogue with the leaders of the Zionist movement, private, not him personally but his officials, privately discussing whether to not to proceed with that policy. In the end he didn’t – he chose to kill six million Jews.”


“The shocking thing about his book was that it revealed … that the Zionist leadership continued a dialogue privately with Hitler from 1933 until 1940/41. They were working quite closely. Brenner’s book shows a shared common belief between the Nazis and the Zionists in preserving their race from intermarriage and things like that.”

In an interview with J-TV in May Livingstone claimed: “In a speech he made on 6 or 7 July 1920 Hitler actually says: ‘The Jews, should move to Palestine, that is where they can have their full civil rights.’ So he already had that [i.e. that policy] in mind, long before [his election in 1932].”

During the interview Livingstone cited as the sources for his claims: Lenni Brenner’s book, an article by the American academic and writer Norman Finkelstein, and an academic paper by the American historian Francis Nicosia.

The following month Livingstone gave evidence to the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee on Antisemitism. He said: “When Hitler came to power, he negotiated a deal to move Germany’s Jews to Palestine. I have never criticised the Zionist movement for making that deal, because the only alternative at that time was the worldwide boycott of German goods by Jews all over the world.”

“As we saw with South Africa, that did not work then, and I don’t think it would have done. So they had to deal with whoever was in power, however repellent, however antisemitic, but it saved the lives of 66,000 Jews.”

CONTINUED

At the same time, Livingstone continued to argue that Hitler supported Zionism:

“That is exactly the one I was referring to the Transfer Agreement of 1933, which ‘regulated’ the conditions under which German Jews could migrate to Palestine. That was Hitler’s support for Zionism.”

In his written submission to the Labour Party disciplinary hearing held in March of this year Livingstone wrote:

“The Transfer Agreement was a major political issue at the time as the Jewish movement to boycott German goods was a huge international campaign that would lose him popular opinion against Nazi Germany.”

“I was just pointing out [in the interview of April 2016] that the Nazi policy in relation to the Transfer Agreement had the effect of supporting Zionism.”

“I did not make any equation of Hitler and Zionism. I neither criticised the Transfer Agreement or the section of Zionism that participated in the Agreement. … Any suggestion that my intention was to draw equivalence between Nazism and Zionism is entirely false.”

At this point neither Finkelstein nor Brenner were cited by Livingstone as his sources. The only sources cited were Nicosia and the Israeli historian Y’aat Weiss. But Livingstone’s attempt at what, in other circumstances, might be called a more “nuanced” position was undermined by the claims he made as he arrived at the disciplinary hearing:

“Hitler didn’t just sign the [Transfer] Deal. The SS set up training camps so that German Jews who were planning to go there [to Palestine] could be trained to cope with a very different sort of country when they got there.”

“When the Zionist movement asked, would the Nazi government stop a Jewish rabbi doing their sermons in Yiddish and making them do it in German; he agreed to do it.”

He passed a law saying the Zionist flag and the swastika were the only flags that could be flown in Germany. An awful lot.”

“But of course, they started selling Mauser pistols to the underground Jewish army. So you had right up until the start of the Second World War real collaboration.”

In a radio interview conducted the day after the disciplinary panel delivered its verdict, Livingstone returned to the theme of Hitler’s supposed support for Zionism:

“There is a difference between saying Hitler supported Zionism in the 1930s and saying he was a Zionist. Hitler loathed and detested and feared Jews. He was never going to be a Zionist. But by doing that deal with the German Zionists he undermined the world-wide boycott of German goods that Jews from the Holocaust, and the Jewish boycott of German goods was doomed to failure. The least of Livingstone’s failings in these forays into the relationship between Zionism and Nazi Germany is their incoherence and inaccuracy.”

April 2016: “The Zionists and the Nazis” were able to “work quite closely” together because of their “shared common belief” in issues of racial preservation.

March 2017: “Livingstone had never equated Hitler and Zionism and it was fair to suggest that he wanted to equate Nazism and Zionism.”

April to June 2016: Hitler supported Zionism in the 1930s. March 2017: “Nazi policy had the effect of supporting Zionism.”

April 2017: Hitler was not a Zionist himself but supported Zionism.

April 2016: Hitler had no direct contact with Zionist leaders, it was “not him personally, but his officials”. April 2017: Hitler himself personally “signed” the Transfer Agreement.

June 2016: Zionist leaders are to be praised for the Transfer Agreement: it saved 66,000 Jews. Hitler’s policy was to deport all Germany’s Jews to Palestine.

As one review of the book puts it: “In certain political and academic circles, there are those who would love to advance the claim, however unfounded, that there exists a remarkable similarity (if not outright equivalence) between Zionism and National Socialism, with all that such a claim implies.”

“Nicolaisen, in his book, is not an academic” and therefore not a historical authority.

In his second book (Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany) Nicosia argues the opposite of Livingstone’s version of history.

As far as the Australian professor of antipodean studies is concerned, the claim is entirely false.”

In certain political and academic circles, there are those who support the theory that living in Palestine in the 1930s was worse than living in Germany. But Finkelstein quickly disappeared from view as a historical authority.


The 1998 paper by Weiss does not even deal with relations between German Zionism and the Nazis. Apart from considering the tension between the Transfer Agreement and the campaign for a boycott of Nazi Germany, it focuses solely on conflicting views of the Transfer Agreement.

CONFLICTS

Such conflicts existed: within Zionist organisations; between Zionist and non-Zionist organisations; between German-Jewish organisations and Polish-Jewish organisations; between Jewish organisations in the Yishuv and Jewish diaspora organisations; and between Labour Zionists and Revisionist Zionists.

Francis Nicosia’s paper date from 1978, and is even more fantastic. Nicosia has continued writing for the past four decades, including two books given over entirely to relationships between German Zionism and the Nazi regime. In his second book (Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany) Nicosia argues the opposite of Livingstone’s version of history.

“In certain political and academic circles, there are those who would love to advance the claim, however unfounded, that there exists a remarkable similarity (if not outright equivalence) between Zionism and National Socialism, with all that such a claim implies.”

According to Livingstone, for example, the “SS set up training camps” so that German Jews could be trained for life in Palestine. Such training camps did exist. But they existed even before Hitler came to power. Making claims that were set up and run by Zionist organisations in preparation for emigration to Palestine.

As the Nazi persecution of Jews intensified, non-Zionist organisations also established training camps to help German Jews to escape Nazi persecution. But Livingstone’s version of events is that Zionist-run training camps also ceased to focus solely on preparing for emigration to Palestine.

For a start, the SS set up training camps so that German Jews could be trained for life in Palestine. Such training camps did exist. But they existed even before Hitler came to power. Making claims that were set up and run by Zionist organisations in preparation for emigration to Palestine.

As the Nazi persecution of Jews intensified, non-Zionist organisations also established training camps to help German Jews to escape Nazi persecution. But Livingstone’s version of events is that Zionist-run training camps also ceased to focus solely on preparing for emigration to Palestine.

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The SS tolerated such camps. But they were also ambivalent towards them. They feared that the skills learnt by Jews in the camps would allow their “reinsertion” into the German economy. And they feared that the result of “rural romances” would, to use the Nazis’ language, be “the defiling of German blood.”

Livingstone’s claim that “he (Hitler) passed a law saying the Zionist flag and the swastika were the only flags that could be flown in Germany, an awful lot,” was in fact a reference to the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, the purpose of which was to segregate Germans Jews from non-Jewish Germans. Hence, they banned Jews from displaying the Reich flag or Reich colours but allowed them to display “Jewish colours”. The laws made no mention of “the Zionist flag”, and no such flag was officially recognised in Nazi Germany.

In any case, a year later Jews were also banned from displaying their own “Jewish colours” on German national holidays.

Livingstone’s claim that “when the Zionist movement asked, would the Nazi government stop a Jewish rabbis doing their sermons in Yiddish and make them do it in Hebrew, he agreed to that” is either a complete fantasy or, more likely, a reference to something completely different.

In December 1936, without having been approached by “the Zionist movement”, the Gestapo banned the use of German in Chanukah sermons. (Far worse than Livingstone’s inaccuracy is the assumption implicit in his claim: the Nazi regime was at the beck and call of Zionists and only too happy to respond to their whims.)

Livingstone’s overarching and repeated claim that Hitler supported Zionism (until he went mad) is also wildly inaccurate. In a speech of August 1920, entitled “Why We Are Antisemites”, only a month after he supposedly backed full civil rights for Jews in Palestine, Hitler ruled out any possibility of the Zionist movement achieving its goal of a Jewish state in Palestine. And in Mein Kampf, published in 1925 he said:

> “While the Zionists try to make the rest of the world believe that the national consciousness of the Jew finds its satisfaction in the creation of a Palestinian state, the Jews again slily dupe the dumb Goysin.”

> “It doesn’t even enter their heads to build up a Jewish state in Palestine to live there. All they want is a central organisation for their Jewish organisations; refusal of official minority status for Jews; and full support for occupational retraining as the best way to facilitate emigration. Such a policy was implemented with increasing ruthlessness.”

**EMISSION**

Even after the outbreak of war in 1939 the focus of Nazi Jewish policy initially continued to be emigration, irrespective of destination. As Nicosia writes:

> “There was full agreement that while efforts would continue to be made to push Jews to overseas destinations, the ultimate destination of those who managed to leave German soil did not matter very much in the end.”

Only in 1941, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, was this replaced by a new policy: the Final Solution.

Over the past twelve months Livingstone appears to have been pulled in two politically conflicting directions at the same time.

As a disciple of Brenner he must have felt the urge to promote the “full-blooded” version of the argument that Hitler supported Zionism. This involves allegations of Nazi-Zionist collaboration, Zionist collaboration in the Holocaust, Zionism as a form of racism and fascism, Zionist genocide of Palestinians, and Israel as a latter-day Nazi Germany.

Livingstone’s view date back to early 1980s when he was an honorary editor of Labour Herald, a front paper for the now defunct Workers Revolutionary Party which specialised in theories of international Zionist conspiracies.

That paper carried antisemitic cartoons equating Israel with Nazi Germany and positive reviews of books alleging Zionist-Nazi collaboration:

> “Israel is a state built entirely on the blood of Europe’s Jews, whom the Zionists deserted in their hour of greatest need. These books will shock and horrify, for they expose the hypocrisy of Zionist leaders who used the sympathy for Jews stirred up after the Holocaust for their own devious ends.”

In the same period Livingstone was a supporter of the Labour Committee on Palestine (LCP) and also subsequently signed up as a sponsor of the Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine (LMCP). The platform of the LCP included “opposition to the Zionist state as racist, exclusivist, expansionist and a direct agency of imperialism” and “opposition to manifestations of Zionism in the Labour movement and the Labour Party in particular.”

The platform of the LMCP likewise included a commitment to “fight within the labour movement – and the Labour Party in particular – to eradicate Zionism.” Included in the LMCP’s “recommended reading” list was Lenni Brenner’s Zionism in the Age of the Dictators.

Livingstone has never abandoned such politics. Faced with allegations that there was an antisemitic component to his politics, such as when he denounced a Jewish journalist as a concentration camp guard, Livingstone coined a defence which became known as the Livingstone Formulation.

Allegations of antisemitism, according to Livingstone, were raised in bad faith in order to stifle criticism of Israel. That formulation has been repeatedly employed by Livingstone over the past twelve months. And in his submission to the Labour Party disciplinary hearing Livingstone wrote:

> “There has been a significant vilification campaign against supporters of Palestinian rights within Labour. These attacks on Jeremy Corbyn and other Labour supporters of Palestinian rights are largely not about antisemitism. Their aim is to curtail the freedom to criticise the policies of Israel.”

**PRESSURE**

But Livingstone has also subject to a countervailing pressure over the last twelve months.

He is an experienced politician. He knew that his statements have become a focus of public attention. He must have known equally well that peddling the full Lenni Brenner version of Zionist-Nazi collaboration would be easily exposed and politically disastrous.

Livingstone must have felt the need to rein it in and masquerade instead as an innocent seeker of historical truth. Hence his very un-Livingstone-like comments before the Home Affairs Committee and at the Labour Party disciplinary hearing that German Zionists were not to be criticised for their involvement in the Transfer Agreement.

However Livingstone could not pull it off. He could not help but relapse into Brennerite allegations of Zionist-Nazi collaboration – even as he walked into a Labour Party disciplinary hearing. His April 2016 point, that “Hitler was supporting Zionism”, was replaced by the syntactically incoherent and scarcely less inaccurate formulation “Nazi policy in relation to the Transfer Agreement had the effect of supporting Zionism.”

This was a rewriting of history. But one that scarcely registers as such when compared with the much larger rewriting of history in which Livingstone has engaged for the past three and a half decades.

And to use Livingstone’s own expression against him: that rewriting of history has had the effect of supporting — and encouraging — antisemitism.
Livingstone and the “anti-Zionist” left

By Sean Matgamna

“We condemn the Oder-Neisse frontier established by the victors and the practice of mass expulsions as inhuman measures which can never be approved by socialists. But we warn the refugees against the illusion that their problems can be solved through conquest by force of their former homeland through World War Three. A new war would destroy their homeland along with the rest of Europe. At present, it is important to absorb these refugees into economic life with equal rights and in accordance with their occupations. Reactionary elements among the “displaced persons” attempt in collaboration with their West German friends to distract the refugees from defending their real interests by illusory promises of a return to their former homes. But we tell them that they can get a life worth living only by joining in the common struggle with the socialist labour movement.”

From the 1950 draft programme of the German Trotskyists, discussing the ethnic Germans who were expelled from eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War.

The Ken Livingstone affair focuses attention on one of the major problems inside the left.

Is Ken Livingstone an antisemite? Livingstone is a Jekyll-and-Hyde character. Inside Livingstone, there is the do-anything-for-an-advantage careerist, Livingstone-Jekyll. And there is always a Livingstone-Hyde, raging to get out.

As Livingstone-Jekyll’s careful phrases are left behind and Livingstone-Hyde gets stronger. Is he an antisemite?

As they say: “if it quacks, most likely it’s a duck.” There was the incident of a few years ago when apparently drunk leaving a social gathering, he compared a reporter to a Nazi concentration-camp guard — meaning, I suppose, that they were conscienceless merceansaries, “obeying orders.” When the reporter told him that he was Jewish, and therefore found the comparison especially offensive, he would neither reform nor repent or apologise for it. He repeated it.

Now there is: “Hitler was a Zionist, until he went mad and started massacring Jews”. The underlying idea alluded to here is the notion that Zionism is identified with the Nazis, an idea widely accepted on the ostensible left.

It’s not just Jews, who, naturally, support Israel, that are accused of racism. The Jews, who, naturally, support Israel, however carefully, and Israel is largely meaningless here, a sleight of mind.

ISRAEL

It doesn’t just criticise or politically condemn Israel’s actions and policies and advocate redress. It seeks an armageddon for Israel, its total destruction.

In the old Christian antisemitism it wasn’t that it rejected the Jewish financiers or Jewish money-lenders, etc., as objectionable as any others. It was that the identification of a whole people with such villains. Now, it is that there is nothing to object to in Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians — towards whom Israel is a brutal colonial power — but the identification of all Israelis and non-Israeli Jewish Zionists with the worst aspects of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians. And the unconscious conclusion: that the Israeli state and its Jewish citizens should be conquered and Israel wiped off the map.

This left says Israel doesn’t have the right to exist and therefore doesn’t have a right to defend itself. From the identification of Jews — even poor Jews — with money to the identification of the Jewish state with its outside supporters with imperialism — with some sort of essence of imperialism — and the same conclusion as Hitler reached about the Jewish people, about the Jewish state — wipe it out.

And to an enormous extent this is based on lies and half-lies.

Take, for example, the question of the Palestinian refugees and their “right of return”.

It is routinely asserted that there are six million Palestinian refugees. In fact, the figure includes two or three generations of people who are of Palestinian descent, not Palestinians. The number of Palestinians who fled or were driven out in the 1948 war was about 750,000. There can’t be all that many of these people still alive. The figures of six million refugees is a straightforward ideological lie, and a big one.

The idea that these six million descendants of Palestinian refugees have a moral “right to return” and that Israel should be abolished so as to allow that, is implicitly the idea that their grandparents (or in some cases great-grandparents) can pass on to them a right that greater generations of Jews had to go on living where they and their parents and in some cases their grandparents were born and have lived their lives.

The underlying idea on which this is based is also an ideological lie — the idea that Israel, founded in 1948, was and is entirely and solely responsible for the plight of Palestinian and non-Palestinian living in the former Palestinian territories. Israel should be criticised and denounced for specific actions and policies.

The “Israel must be destroyed” people, who reject a two-state solution thereby make it possible for the Palestinians living in the former Palestinian territories. Israel should be criticised and denounced for specific actions and policies.

Finally, the idea that the 750,000 Palestinian refugees of 1948 are a unique event in modern history and therefore should have a unique solution — the extermination of Israel — is wrong. In the years after 1948, almost 600,000 Jews were expelled from Arab countries, their property seized, and made their way to Israel. It amounted to a brutal population transfer between Israel and the Arab states. Do their descendants now have a right of return? If not, why not? Because the Zionists-Jews are uniquely evil?

Compare also the case of the ethnic German refugees of 1945 expelled from East Prussia, Poland and Czechoslovakia at the end of World War Two — 13 million of them, people whose ancestors had lived there for hundreds of years. They were severely ill-treated and large numbers of them were murdered by revenge-madened people. They were victims of the often-racial anti-Germanism preached, by for instance, the Russian state. The expulsions were done with the prior agreement of Britain, the USA, and Russia.

They ethnic Germans were driven into a Germany that was in a state of ruination. Three million ethnic Germans died in these transfers. It is calculated that one in four Germans today are descendants of those 13 million ethnic Germans.

Only those whom the press used to call “West German revanchists” talked of reversing these expulsions. What the West German Trotskyists said about it is at the head of this article.

There is much to criticise and denounce in Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. Israel should be criticised and denounced for specific actions and policies, but not for existing.

It is nourished by Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians, the living political root of left-wing antisemitism today is in the rejection of Israel’s right to exist.

The left needs sane, rational politics on the Middle East. The cause of the Palestinians, of winning a Palestinian state alongside Israel, is too important to be left to those whose first concern is not the Palestinians but hysterical opposition to Israel’s existence.
Demystifying the Russian Revolution

Workers’ Liberty’s new book — The Russian Revolution: when workers took power — retells the story of the revolution, draws lessons and outlines the important political debates of the period.

One of its central concerns is to counter the lies and myths which have falsified the record of the Bolsheviks. While being a partisan account, it also draws on the most recent scholarship about the Russian revolution, which the author believes vindicates a sympathetic account of the Bolsheviks. The record shows the Bolsheviks to be a diverse group, even more so by the middle of 1917, with a long-established culture of open debate.

By providing a succinct but comprehensive overview of the complexity of the political decisions made and actions taken by the both the Russian and international left in this period, Paul Vernadsky has written a handbook for today’s socialist activists.

Chapter Two’s narrative of the events of 1917 tells us what a mass working-class movement looks like. In 1917, this is heterogenous movement, containing a wide spectrum of political groups with different attitudes to the Provisional Government which took power after the abdication of the Tsar in February.

Beginning in April from exile, to Petrograd Lenin proposed a new perspective for the Bolshevik faction within the revolutionary movement, arguing that an international working-class revolution was possible. As such, the Bolsheviks needed to break workers from support for the Provisional Government, for the bourgeoisie and its continued support of Russia’s participation in the war. This was a policy the Bolsheviks pursued to build up support — in Lenin’s words, by “patiently explaining” over the course of the years.

Chapter Three explains how the Bolsheviks’ methods of operation — ideological discussion, political clarification, education — originates in both the international and Russian Marxist socialist movements from the late nineteenth century. Lenin did not go out of abstract debates but was situated in, and developed out of class struggles and working-class self-organisation. Indeed the Bolsheviks drew on, learnt from and interacted with workers attempts at self-organisation which are described in Chapter Four: the soviets, factory committees and trade unions.

These three chapters together form the narrative elements of the book. The next four chapters explore the political themes that emerged prior to and after the revolution. Chapter Five discusses the perspectives Trotsky idea of “permanent revolution”; a perspective for workers to take power in the context of Russia’s unevenly developed capitalism. Vernadsky deals with Trotsky’s differences with Lenin, differences that were later exaggerated and falsified by Stalinists.

Chapter Six looks at how Marxist socialists, and Lenin in particular, responded to the First World War. These debates split the socialist movement, and many Marxists betrayed their own ideals by supporting their “own” governments in the war.

Chapter Seven explains Lenin’s approach to the national question – that of “consistent democracy”. This is an idea which the AWL has developed in our critiques of the contemporary left, those who have supported reactionary regimes as long as that regime opposed the US power. A “third camp” approach takes as its starting point the needs and interests of the workers opposed to the ruling parties, whether Assad, nor the bombs and boots of big power armies.

Chapter Eight discusses how the Bolsheviks organised around worker and peasant power: with a detailed analysis of the work of Alexandra Kollontai. The final chapter details the important political questions the came after 1917. Chapter Nine looks at the international communist movement set up after 1917. Chapter Ten describes the conditions under which a counter-revolution took place in Russia and how Stalin came to power.

This book does give the reader a sense of the bigger picture, the reality of the Russian working class and poor peasants as they took a chance to make a revolution, but Vernadsky has also written a nuanced account, as is to be expected with our perspective of one hundred years. As such it debates the controversies rather than simply asserting an alternative historic truth.

- Order online for £14.80 including postage at workersliberty.org/books
- Join us for the London book launch on Friday 21 April: bit.ly/2mN2IE
- Find out about launches across the country: bit.ly/2m2yDJF
Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. The capitalists’ control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**Labour council losses expected**

**Labour**

**By Keith Road**

Labour are 18 points behind the Tories according to a Guardian/ICM survey produced on the eve of Corbyn’s launch of Labour’s campaign for the May Council and mayoral elections. Labour could lose as many as 125 councillors across England, Scotland and Wales. Particularly damaging in Scotland where Glasgow Council is likely to fall to the SNP. The Tories and the Lib Dems are expected to pick up 100 seats each across all the elections. A likely collapse of the UKIP vote, particularly in the south is likely to benefit the Tories. Meanwhile the metropolitan mayoral elections in the West Midlands, Manchester and Liverpool, and the Manchester-Gorton parliamentary election are where Labour is likely to do best.

This is not a simple sign of disaffection amongst working class Labour voters for Jeremy Corbyn, and neither is this decline solely the fault of a hostile media. McDonnell is right to say that the media does not portray Labour policies accurately; if even fairly moderate and limited reforms are not being reported accurately then imagine what the press would be doing if Labour were to go far more radical. Media hostility to socialists and socialist ideas should be welcomed as a sign you are attacking the right people! The British media is owned by a tiny clique of the ultra wealthy. Relying on this media to give you a fair hearing is misguided and looks like a way of deflecting from a lack of clarity that is currently coming from the Labour leadership. McDonnell is right that the Party is divided. It is clearly the agenda of the right of the party to undermine Corbyn, and bad election results are the easiest way to run down confidence in his leadership. However, McDonnell surely has the party is united on Brexit. Whilst this may substantively be the case, the problem with this example is that they effectively allowing Theresa May to get away with a hard Brexit.

Corbyn is right to highlight the vast cuts being made by the Government and to welcome those council’s that endorse the Ethical Labour Charter and have sought to improve pay and training for care workers. However this completely fails to recognise the significance that these cuts are being implemented by Labour Councils who are now engaged in some serious industrial battles with their own workers.

Both Durham and Derby councils go into these elections in the midst of fights with their own teaching assistants! In both instances Labour councils are attacking a low paid and largely female workplace: level. Such a contradiction needs to be expressly condemned by Corbyn. His failure to call on councillors to resist making cuts in another reason why his leadership appears weak in the face of the thousands that voted for him as leaders.

Within the reasonable number of members leaving, which undoubtedly includes some on the right who believe the current left wing surge won’t be easy to defeat, there will be those who have left not because they are disappointed in Corbyn but in the policies and actions of Labour in local government.

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**Dodgy general secretary election?**

**LETTER**

On Friday 17 March an Employment Appeal Tribunal judge overturned the decision of the Certification Officer to reject a complaint against the GMB bureaucracy, brought by GMB member Keith Henderson.

Keith had complained that a misinterpretation and misapplication of the rules had prevented him or any other rank-and-file member from standing in the 2015 GMB General Secretary election.

Among other things he claimed by-law 13 had been misinterpreted and a misapplication of the by-laws prevented potential nominees from contacting branches to seek nomination. To become a candidate it was necessary to obtain the signatures of 30 of the 968 GMB branches.

Keith has stated publicly his belief that the GMB general secretary election of 2015 was a bureaucratic stitch up of monumental proportions.

The figures themselves tell a story. The complaint was won by one of the 10 elected Regional Secretaries who were contesting it. Tim Roach won with the backing of 2.4 per cent of GMB members in an election that saw a 4.4 per cent turnout.

The misapplication of rules and by-laws preventing rank and file members contacting branches must have had something to do with this.

But despite the fact that there was something clearly wrong the Certification Officer chose to accept the technical case put by the GMB’s QC, employed using GMB members’ money. Keith’s claim was rejected on a legal technicality.

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**APPEAL**

However on appeal the Certification Officers decision was set aside and a damning judgement against the GMB bureaucracy was made. A judgement that has implications both in the GMB and the wider labour movement.

By breaching their own by-laws governing the election the GMB bureaucracy had also breached section 47.1 of Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. They had prevented GMB members from participating in the general secretaries election in their own union. Keith was awarded a Declaration.

The decision has given ordinary GMB members an opportunity to join together and organise to take back power from the unelected, barely elected, and crookedly elected bureaucrats who have usurped power and currently run the union.

It is now vital that a grassroots left organisation is built to democratise and radicalise the GMB. Devolving power and moving resources away from a national and regional level to a branch and workplace level, away from unelected national and regional officers to elected shop stewards and branch officers.

More no more dodgy sweetheart deals with employers behind the backs of the members and bending the knee to the management to protect those deals. An end to nepotism and cosyism and running the union as if it were a family business or a plc.

Aim to rebuild the stewards movement in every industry that the GMB operates in.

This decision has potentially the widest implications and holds the most significant opportunities for the left since Jeremy Corbyn was first elected as Labour leader.

The GMB Grassroots Left has been set up to challenge the GMB unelected or barely elected leadership on behalf of GMB members.

- GMB Grassroots Left facebook: bit.ly/2ppr8cP
- This letter was written by a GMB Grassroots Left member, we invite responses and discussion on the issues raised in it.

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**Saturday 15 April**

**Picturehouse strike demonstration**

12.30, East Dulwich Picturehouse, Lordship Lane, London SE22 8JD

bit.ly/2q1HHHG

5pm, Hackney Picturehouse, Mare Street, London E9 1HE

bit.ly/2nARMAs

**Saturday 22 April**

Take back control youth event

11am, Rich Mix, Bethnal Green Road, London E1 6LA

bit.ly/2aUPG10

Our vision for Haringey — labour movement and community conference

10.30am, St Frances de Sales junior school, London N17 8AZ

bit.ly/2gljEBI

March and rally for Forest Hill school

11.30am, Mountsfeld Park, London SE1 1AN

bit.ly/2nAQd8o

**Friday 21 April**

**The Russian Revolution: when workers took power**

7pm, The Calthorpe Arms

252 Gray’s Inn Road, London WC1X 8JR

bit.ly/lRlaUnch

**Monday 24 April**


6.30pm, The Packhouse Pub, Woodhouse Lane, Leeds LS2 9DX

bit.ly/2uUC2UZ

**Have an event you want listing? Email: solidarity@workersliberty.org**

More online at www.workersliberty.org
Forest Hill strikes again

By a Lewisham teacher

National Union of Teachers (NUT) members at Forest Hill School in Lewisham will strike again on 20, 25 and 26 April in their campaign against vicious cuts being imposed by management to fulfill conditions of repayment of loan to Lewisham council.

There is a demonstration on Saturday 22 April.

The proposed restructure at the school is in response to a £1.3m deficit. Lewisham council has given the school a “loan” however they are demanding that the school cuts £800,000 from their wage bill. This would mean a loss of 15 teaching jobs, an escalation in teachers’ workload and a greatly diminished education for the students.

Thus far, the teachers have organised three strikes, a demonstration and two lobby’s of the council and a public meeting, within just two weeks! We are backed by an increasingly energetic parents’ campaign and now the students are pay rise in the NHS, despite NHS volved as well. Two of the three Lewisham Constituency Labour Parties have passed motions supporting the strike and calling on the council to intervene. We will need to maintain and escalate all of these approaches to the campaign if we are to ensure that we protect the school, the students’ education and jobs.

Our aim is to make Lewisham Council ensure that the deficit is dealt with not at the cost of the students or the staff. The school is a Local Authority School. The council audited the school’s books. This mismanagement that has caused this crisis was by an employee of Lewisham Council. But above all of the council has a responsibility to the children in the borough.

They cannot wash their hands of Forest Hill School!

RCN to ballot nurses over pay

By Gemma Short

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) announced on 5 April that it will be “consulting” its members over the latest round of pay restraint in the NHS.

The RCN will conduct an indicative ballot asking members about the impact of pay restraint, and how to respond, including whether members would consider taking industrial action.

It is the fourth year in a row that the government has imposed a 1% freeze on NHS nurses’ pay.

Both RMT and Aslef had ballot for strikes showing significant majorities for action.

RMT holds first disabled members conference

By Janine Booth

On 28 March, transport union RMT held its first ever Disabled Members’ Conference.

Rank-and-file activists had called for the establishment of this conference for several years, but repeatedly met with rejection by the union’s National Executive. But two years ago, RMT’s Annual General Meeting voted to overturn the Executive’s position, and this conference was the result. Although it was quite small, it will prove itself to be a launchpad for transport workers organising against the many abuses of our and other disabled people’s rights.

Delegates examined the TUC Manifesto for Disability Equality, and called for the union to act on issues including invisible impairments, the use of disciplinary policies against disabled workers, and the need for the union itself to provide materials in accessible formats. The conference repeatedly stressed that our demands benefit disabled passengers as well as workers, and that the current fight to keep guards on trains is essential for disabled people’s access to public transport.

The conference passed six resolutions, on: Attendance at Work Policies; Mental Health; the Social Model of Disability; an RMT Accessibility Audit; Disabled Workers and Austerity; and Autism and Neuropathy.

Tube news round-up

By Ollie Moore

Reinstate Lee Cornell!!

Tube station workers at London Bridge and Waterloo stations are balloting for strikes to win the reinstatement of Lee Cornell, a Customer Service Assistant sacked after he intervened with a fare evader who had pushed a pregnant colleague.

Lee Workers punched twice in the head and had his glasses taken; instead of carrying out their commitment to support staff who are assaulted, London Underground have sacked Lee for defending himself. Two other CSAs, Dave Sharp and Saeed Siqusi, have been given final written warnings for attempting to support Lee and defuse the situation.

The RMT union held a demonstration at London Bridge station on 3 April. Activists say that a ballot for strike action on the Tube is expected to follow shortly after the local ballot concludes.

Night Tube win

Drivers on the “Night Tube”, overnight services on five Tube lines on Friday and Saturday nights, have won significant concessions in a dispute over career progression.

 Strikes planned for 8-9 and 29-30 April were cancelled after London Underground agreed to scrap a rule preventing the drivers, who are employed on 16-hour contracts, from applying for full-time positions for 18 months.

Both RMT and Aslef had ballot for strikes showing significant majorities for action.

Six cinemas on strike

By Gemma Short

Workers at the East Dulwich branch of Picturehouse cinemas have voted to join strikes which already involve five other cinemas in the chain.

Workers at East Dulwich will join those from Ritzy (Brixton), Hackney, Central, Crouch End and Duke of Yorks (Brighton) on strike on Saturday 15 April. Workers will walk out at 1pm, and be joined by workers from the other five cinemas and their supporters for a rally at East Dulwich Picturehouse.

Community supporters in Hackney will be holding a “community picket” of Hackney Picturehouse in support of the strike asking customers to boycott Picturehouse and not use the cinema on the day of the strike.

Cleaners’ wild-cat strike

By Peggy Carter

Cleaners at Barts NHS Trust, London, walked off the job in a wild-cat strike on 6 April after management allowed their breaks and stated they would freeze their pay for 10 years.

Just a day later Serco backed down and conceded that workers have the right to breaks. The workers are still organising around issues of pay, their union Unite is planning an official ballot over pay.

The cleaners had recently been outsourced to Serco, notorious for bullying workers and cutting pay and conditions to the bone to make a profit out of public service contracts.

Train strikes disrupt Grand National

By a railworker

Workers at Southern, Merseyrail and Northern struck again on Saturday 6 April.

Merseyrail drivers again refused to cross picket lines, causing heavy disruption to trains to Aintree for the Grand National. A small number of Northern drivers also respected RMT picket lines. If more Northern drivers had followed Merseyrail drivers’ lead then Northern might not have been able to run extra services for the Grand National to make up for Merseyrail disruption.

More dates have yet to be set, but the Tour de Yorkshire at the end of April would be a good target.

Keep the guard on the train!

By Jan Pollock, Momentum disabled caucus

The guard is there for everyone’s protection; recent incidents can only remind us of this.

Access to rail services for disabled passengers rely on an adequate number of well-trained staff and accessible facilities. Environmental barriers, service provider policies and attitudes lead to our isolation and exclusion from work, education, volunteering and involvement in our communities.

Guards have months of training and 35 different safety-critical competencies. Yet the government is encouraging the extension of Driver Only Operation (DOO), and in many cases guards will be replaced by less-trained staff or not at all. Southern have introduced an On Board Supervisor (OBS) with just 2 days very basic training.

Southern has announced 33 stations where disabled passengers can no longer arrive on the same turn-up-and-go basis that non-disabled travellers enjoy. There will be no second member of staff and disabled people requiring assistance to board/exit the train face abolition of the right to ride. Private companies are creating longer trains with up to 12 carriages with the impossibility of drivers seeing anyone trying to board at the back of curved platforms. Lack of maintenance staff leads to the break-down of lifts, lack of toilets, help-points which don’t work, etc. The two minutes time allowed at many stations for all passengers to board/exit trains discriminated against many disabled People and puts staff under intolerable pressure.

Momentum Disabled Caucus have been campaigning to “Make Rail Accessible.” We joined Transport for All in London on 5 April to march to London Bridge Station demanding our Right to Ride.
Trump targets North Korea

By Gerry Bates

On 4 April the Syrian government used chemical weapons on civilians in the rebel-held town of Khan Sheikhoun in northern Syria.

On the morning of 7 April Donald Trump’s government responded with a cruise missile attack on the Syrian airbase which the US military believes was used to launch the chemical attack.

Trump has also sent a navy battle group to the waters off the Korean coast.

Trump’s actions carry a number of advantages for the US government beyond destroying the targets and intimidating Assad. By showing a willingness to use military force Trump ramps up pressure on North Korea and North Korea’s reluctant ally, China.

The rational element of this shift in US policy is to press China to deal with North Korea.

North Korea’s bizarre and totalitarian regime, led by Kim Jong-un, is developing nuclear weapons and — apparently — missile systems that within a decade may be able to reach the US.

The North Korean state tested a missile system on the eve of the recent US-China summit. The US believes a further nuclear test is planned for Saturday 15 April, the anniversary of the birth of North Korea’s founder, Kim Il-sung. The US has refused to rule out a first strike on North Korea. However, a Syrian-style US cruise missile attack against North Korea, or an air strike on North Korean targets, would produce a very different response.

The Syrian state has not yet made a response to the US missile attack. If North Korea is bombed the minimum likely response is a North Korean attack on the South.

Seoul, the South Korean capital, is only 35 miles from the border with North Korea. A wide-range of sanctions are in place against North Korea — imposed against its development of nuclear weapons. North Korea’s weapons programme has been condemned by states in the region, including China.

China has reportedly moved 150,000 troops to the border with North Korea. While the Chinese state is worried about its well-armed neighbour, it also believes that the collapse of the North Korean state would pose risks for China. In particular China is worried about enormous numbers of refugees fleeing North Korea.

Trump’s bluster and posture in “foreign affairs” mirrors how he behaves in domestic policy. But these actions, notwithstanding the “provocation” of regimes like Kim Jong-un, are forging a dangerous global situation.

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Contact us

020 7394 8923
solidarity@workersliberty.org
Write to us: The editor
(Cathy Nugent), 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG
Solidarity editorial:
Simon Nelson, Cathy Nugent (editor), Gemma Short, and Martin Thomas
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