Brexit talks in impasse over Ireland

LABOUR: COME OUT AGAINST BREXIT!

Labour should come out clearly for freedom of movement, for a federal united Europe of democracy and social levelling-up, against re-erected border controls in Ireland — against Brexit!

More page 5

Join Labour!

Councillor selections: democracy or “purge”?

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Inside:

Trapped in the Libyan slave trade

Ralph Peters describes how war, poverty, and Europe’s immigration controls are feeding the Libyan slave trade.

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Aspects of the housing crisis

Solidarity examines the causes and effects of the housing crisis.

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The reality surrounding the Florida fantasy

Luke Hardy reviews ‘The Florida Project’.

See page 9
Cuts could devastate domestic violence refuge service

By Ruth Willis

According to Women’s Aid there were over twenty thousand referrals to refuge services in 2015-16.

Of these, a quarter were turned down due to lack of space. The actual numbers of people accessing all domestic violence services is much higher.

The figures are staggering. It is very, very hard for a woman to find a refuge space and therefore to be able to afford to leave an abusive relationship.

The government are now considering changes that will make it even harder for women, changes that threaten the very existence of refuges in many areas.

Currently women are able to claim housing benefit to pay part or all of their rent. Refuges get 50% of their income from housing benefit payments, and in 2016 a concerted campaign by women’s organisations forced the government to exempt refuge housing from the new housing benefit cap.

New proposals could mean women are no longer allowed to claim housing benefit at all to pay for a refuge space. For many this will mean not even trying to leave an abusive relationship as they will not be able to afford to.

As this benefit is also the only guaranteed source of funding left to refuges, many facilities will be forced to close. Councils have no funding to plug the gap. In fact council funding of services for vulnerable women has fallen by £44,000 on average.

This change will leave more women and children at risk of serious injury or death.

The possible change was hidden away in one paragraph of a 56 page report called Funding Supported Housing — it is obvious that it is a serious aim.

In place of individuals’ rights to claim benefits, the government proposal is for a ring-fenced amount to be given to councils to fund all their supported housing provision. When you replace individual access to benefits with a finite pot of cash, the only motivation is to save money and the only result is a deterioration of service and harm to vulnerable people.

In the case of refuges, this change could see the end of the national refuge service which, flawed as it is, we currently have.

Refuges themselves are not directly run by councils — in most cases they are tendered out to external organisations. This has led to staff cutbacks, deskilling and fragmentation of services — all of which make it harder to organise to oppose the government attacks.

What we need is a campaign of unionisation in refuges and action taken by refuge staff and supporters against these cuts. We need domestic abuse services to be taken back under local authority control, to be properly funded and working effectively together. All of this, together with the extension of services, is something that a Labour government should priorities.

We need a loud and active campaign to highlight this cynical and underhand proposal to the government to back down; if we do not they will be left with the blood of women and children on their hands.

Haggling over the price of life

By Janine Booth

The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has approved two new medications which will help women with advanced breast cancer.

Ribociclib and palbociclib have been welcomed as “breakthrough” medicines which can prolong life and give women more time without chemotherapy. Both are suitable for post-menopausal women with hormone-receptor-positive (HR+/HER2-) breast cancer which is locally advanced or is spreading. Both are taken as a daily tablet, and are used in conjunction with an aromatase inhibitor such as Letrozole.

Currently, 85% of women with this type of cancer do not survive for five years. These two drugs will reduce that figure, and will improve the quality of life of many women in their last years.

This is good news for women with advanced breast cancer. But it has come at a price, and it has come later than it could have done.

Novartis developed ribociclib, to which it has given the brand name Kisqali, and Pfizer developed palbociclib, which it has named Ibrance. The latter got its clinical approval in February, but NICE refused to endorse it for NHS use because it decided that Pfizer’s list price of £2,950 per treatment cycle was too expensive.

Since then, NICE and Pfizer have been negotiating the price, and have finally agreed on a discount. The amount of the discount is commercially sensitive and therefore secret.

In other words: for nine months, dying women were denied a medicine which could have extended and improved the quality of their lives, while a private company tried to extract as much money as possible from a government that was trying to save as much as possible.

In a further twist, it turns out that the initial development of the drug was funded by the public, through government grants to Cancer Research UK scientists in the 1980s. Then Pfizer took over, used the original research to develop the medication, and spent this year trying to overcharge the same public purse that had funded the initial work on its money-making medicina.

Pfizer’s revenues last year were $52.8 billion and its net profit in the first quarter of this year was $3.12 billion. And yet it gobbled over a couple of thousand pounds for terminally-ill women.

Meanwhile, what MPs pay themselves in salary would pay for more than twenty-five women each to receive this drug, but the government agency NICE was not willing to pay the full asking price. For nine months they argued. How many pounds side conceded we cannot know, because it is “commercially sensitive”.

That means that it would cause economic damage (presumably to Pfizer) were the level of the discount to be revealed. How? Might Pfizer’s shareholders think that it has been too soft and gone down too low? Might its competitors see it as a green light to undercut Pfizer and go after its markets? Might women dying of breast cancer think that Pfizer is a money-grabbing predator making profit from their impending death? So we can’t answer that — it’s a secret.

The government and Pfizer were just doing what governments and private pharmaceutical companies do.

The problem is the capitalist system, although that does not excuse the two hagglers in humanity.

• Janine’s breast cancer blog: www.janinebooth.com/BigJys-BigC

Villanelle: Eyes on the Prize

The Pfizer guys are haggling with the NICE

And while they talk, the cancer spreads again

You’ll get your pills when they’ve agreed a price

You’ll get your answer when they’ve rolled their dice

And dealt your hand out in their counting den

By Janine Booth

The Pfizer guys are haggling with the NICE

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You’ll get your pills when they’ve agreed a price

You’ll get your answer when they’ve rolled their dice

And dealt your hand out in their counting den

Shareholders and Execs must get their slice

Your longer life lies with the money men

The Pfizer guys are haggling with the NICE

It’s hard for them to make this sacrifice

Each penny off’s a penny less for them

You’ll get your pills when they’ve agreed a price

Nine months of talks to get the charge precise

Let’s hope that you can stay alive till then

The Pfizer guys are haggling with the NICE

You’ll get your pills when they’ve agreed a price
Stop this slave trade!

By Ralph Peters

Recent reports about the Libyan slave trade adds further to the horror of what is going on in Libya and across the south Mediterranean region.

The Libyan slave trade has been known to be in operation for years. It accompanies the brutal exploitation of those fleeing poverty in Sudan, Chad and Nigeria. It is well illustrated by the story of Victory Imasuen, the young Nigerian interviewed by US broadcaster CNN on his return to Nigeria, a video that subsequently went viral.

Unemployment and poverty in Nigeria mushroomed in the wake of the 2014 collapse of oil prices.

**NIGERIA**

This in part led to the 2015 election of the All Progressive Congress (APC), a government which failed to ameliorate these conditions.

Unemployment has doubled over three years and now approaches 15%, with far higher rates among the young. Strikes and union agitation remain high on the Nigerian trade union movement agenda, the national bodies, NLC/TUC, have been unable to deliver an effective fight against government corruption and the intimidation of the police and army against unions.

There is now a strong movement among 180 million Nigerians to leave the country.

The obscenity of the EU’s response to the desperate plight of Nigerians and other Northern African migrants seeking sanctuary is well known.

Operation Sophia was launched in 2015 to stem the flow of refugees coming mainly from Libya. Those deported mid-flight in the Mediterranean can be forcibly returned to Libya for detention. The centres housing captured migrants include African town of Tqwergha with 40,000 people was ethnically cleansed as early as the autumn of 2011 with horrific reports of sexual and other brutalities.

Some of the militias recruited defectors from Gaddafi’s Libyan army, often combining with a resurgent and bloody sectarian Islamism.

Now the actions of the EU and Britain, by stopping the migrant flows, are trapping millions in this nightmare.

The British and European labour movement has to act to challenge the obscenity of the curbs on freedom of movement enacted by their governments. The blockade on the movement of migrants from Libya has to be lifted. Humane solidarity must replace the traffickers and slave traders.

We need to find ways to support both the Libyan workers’ movement and the democrats and workers in Libya fighting against religious sectarianism and racism.

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**Zimbabwe: no change at the top**

By Mike Chester

Emmerson Mnangagwa has been sworn in as the President of Zimbabwe, following Robert Mugabe’s on-off resignation.

In his rambling inauguration speech Mnangagwa was keen to heap praise on his “father” and “mentor” which added to the heap of slogans he used in Mugabe’s praise — an attempt to rehabilitate his former boss.

Zanu-PF and the new president are very clear that Mugabe’s dismissal should not be seen as admitting that there is anything structurally wrong in the country, or inherently bad in the hucksters way Zanu-PF has controlled Zimbabwean politics in the last 30 years.

It would have been very difficult to find someone less representative of the tyranny of the previous decades than Emmerson Mnangagwa.

This man was head of the notoriously ruthless Central Intelligence Organisation which continues to rig elections, beat-up and kill political dissidents and intimidate voters.

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**Daesh Sinai attack linked to growth of Islamism across the region**

By Simon Nelson

On 24 November, in the Egyptian province of Sinai, Daesh carried out one of their most sickening attacks. Killing 305 and injuring hundreds more, Daesh attacked the Rawdah mosque.

Gunmen waited to shoot down fleeing worshippers after their bombing.

Anser Beyt al-Maqdis pledged allegiance to Daesh in 2014 and has since been known as the Sinai Province of ISIS. It was founded and is central to the coup will be rewarded handsomely.

At Zanu-PF’s conference later in the month it is almost certain that General Constantino Chiwenga, the leader of the Zimbabwean Defence Forces whose troops ignited the events leading to Mugabe’s resignation will be anointed as Vice-President.

It’s likely that foreign governments will use the superficial appearance of change at the top to open up discussions on trade, and rush to exploit the country’s resources and workforce.

This is especially true of Chinese capitalists who started discussions with coup participants before the fact and who have a keen eye on Zimbabwe’s rich, but horrendously corrupt and mismanaged, mining industry.

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**Victory Imasuen’s story**

Victory Imasuen told CNN:

“When I was cutting the hair of one of my customers, he advised me to go to Europe where he promised I could earn a lot of money. When arriving in Libya, the driver said he had not paid his money and we were sold into the slave trade in Sabha.

“They started beating me to call my mother to send money. For months, I did not hear from her. They kept on beating me everyday and I fell sick. If I went to the toilet, I was shitting blood.”

Eventually people in his home town managed to raise the money to secure Victory’s freedom.

“Victory attempted to travel to Tripoli, hoping to join the thousands of illegal migrants trying and reach Italy by boat. I didn’t even get to Tripoli before I was caught and taken to prison. I met more than 10,000 Nigerians there. We only eat once a day there — one piece of bread. I would drink salt water.”

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The Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has vowed to respond with extreme force. That is unlikely to make the situation better. Sisi is determined to present himself as a bulwark against militant Islamism across the region, but in doing so he has created an authoritarian military government that has used the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood (briefly in government after 2012) to crack down on dissent, throwing MB leaders and supporters into jail, and also socialists, women’s activists, and LGBT people. He has also shackled the independent unions.

**Ban:**

Political demonstrations are now banned. There are numerous reports of torture in Egyptian prisons.

The government now faces opposition, not from an insurgent workers’ movement or a social movement for civil rights, but from far-right Islamists who want to wipe out Egypt’s Christian minority and stop the spread of “polytheism” i.e Sufi and other non-Salafi versions of Sunni Islam.

So far the Egyptian army has had a marginal impact on the group believed to have intelligence coming directly from sympathisers within the state itself. Growing disquiet with the army’s inability to deal with the problem is affecting Sisi’s credibility.

As a Brooking Institution report puts it: “[Sisi came to power] promising security, stability, and economic prosperity in exchange for near-total political control. Now, that bargain is in the process of breaking down, since he’s failed to deliver on all three fronts.”

Daesh thrives on young disaffected men in a region where unemployment stands at 30%. Repeated failures to deal with the economic depression are likely to push people further towards the jahatis.

Sisi enjoys the backing of Trump and a high proportion of US aid to Egypt has been pushed into support for the security services but it’s not enough.

The Woodrow Wilson Centre reports that, “foreign fighters — largely from Libya, the Maghreb and Europe — have migrated to the Sinai, where they constituted as much as eighty percent of the Sinai Province’s fighting force by mid-2017.”

Not only Egypt will be concerned by a growth of Daesh in Sinai, but also Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan and Libya. All fear the expansion of Daesh-linked groups.
Russian civil war: not just red and white

**LETTER**

Numerous commentators on the Russian Revolution also make comment and offer analyses of the civil war that followed. In his reply to Eric Lee (Solidarity 439; Paul Vernadsky mentions how ‘...the Bolsheviks fought a civil war against the White generals and the imperialist powers’. I have no disagreement with what Paul Vernadsky has written (and I note it was a short letter not a full-length article), but it is necessary to add a detail. The Russian civil war that followed the revolution was a very complicated often confusing affair. The armies of the imperial powers never really posed a military threat to the Bolsheviks. France sent only 600 troops, the USA 11,000 (in far-away Vladivostock).

Of the largest contingent from Europe was the German army (25,000) which occupied Odessa and parts of the Crimea. However, they withdrew after only three months. The other really large contingent was the Japanese (70,000) who were mainly interest - clapped out junk usually deployed. How - ever, in the real world there was probably only one major clash involving the British army and the Bolsheviks. The British navy played a role in the Baltic supporting anti- Bolshevik Estonian troops, and in the Black Sea they helped evacuate the beleaguered

White forces at the endgame of the civil war. But that was about it. The British were seeking to use their military strength and technology most likely arose because of the Allies’ total distrust of the White generals, whom they regarded, quite cor- rectly, as arrogant idiots, and, possibly, concern over the reliability of their own troops – would they fire on the Bolsheviks or not? The soldiers were also war-weary and British troops were described as ‘unmotivated and even clannish’. They would not have greeted the Russian winter (temperatures often -20ºC) with much enthui- siasm.

**THR EAT**

In fact the main threat to the Bolsheviks came not from Denikin or Kolchak’s de- moralised, ill-equipped troops for the Al- lies held up in Archangel, Murmansk or Odessa.

The anarchist Nestor Makhno’s Black Army was a real threat but in Leningrad, though they were allied with the Bolsheviks at various times. The army of the Ukrainian nationalists under Symon Petliura fought the Bolsheviks (as well as the White army) in Siberia, along the Trans-Siberian railroad the 30,000 strong army of former Czech prisoners, made constant problems for the Bolsheviks.

However, at least in the early period of the civil war, it was the so-called Green Army of the “Patriotic Socialists” which posed the greatest threat. Their ranks were drawn mainly from the peasantry and what political direction they had tended to come from supporters and members of the Socialist Revolu- tionaries (SRs) and some Mensheviks. They almost defeated the Red Army in the Tavrib region.

Len Glover, Lancashire

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**ILLUSIONS OF POWER: THE LESSONS OF LAST TIME ROUND**

By Keith Road

In the early 1980s many Labour councils were committed to defy Tory cuts. Sadly, every single one of these council backed down in the end. There are many lessons to be learned from that defeat.

**Today business rates are set by, and chan- neled through, the Central Government. In the 1980s, councils set and collected rates levied on local businesses. They had more scope to offset central government cuts through these tax-raising powers. In that context many an- guished that this tax-raising was progressive and redistributive.**

Solidarity Organiser (Solidarity’s predecessor newspaper) argued against rate rises in gen- eral, and most definitely in the absence of a strategy to confront the government. In 1985, after the defeat of the Militant (now Socialist Party/Socialist Appeal-led) Labour council in Liverpool, Socialist Organiser published Illusions of Power a pamphlet looking at the process, debates and mistakes of the pe- riod.

The following extract is about the problems of the rate-rise strategy.

**AS WE WERE SAYING**

Ted Knight [Leader of the Labour group on Lambeth council], who had been prominent in arguing for rate rises as a way of combating cuts, pushed a 41% cuts package through Lambeth council [in summer 1979 after the Tories took office].

Rate rises had been a preparation for total fight but for cuts.

A special conference of the borough’s Con- stituency Labour Parties rejected the cuts and also the alternative of a supplementary rate. “Lambeth Fightback” was formed by the Trades Council. Knight bowed to the pres- sure and de facto converted himself — from a cutter to a leader of the fight against the cuts.

Street meetings, door-to-door leafleting, workplace meetings, a London-wide demon- stration, all began to mobilise a mass move- ment.

But what was this mobilisation about? What was its purpose? What about the rates?

Jenny Morris reported in Socialist Organiser: ‘Knight used the same arguments [as the right wing] for refusing to follow the example of Poplar in 1921. The Town Hall unions won’t stand for empty wage packets... His answer was rate increases not consumer tax’. As other leaders would do later, Knight used the trade union card against the left.

In Michael Shvigel’s On Flows from the Sea, pro-Bolshevik Cossacks can always tell when their enemy (anti-Bolshevik Cos- sacks) are using British artillery because their accuracy is so much greater than when they clapped out junk usually deployed. How- ever, in the real world there was probably only one major clash involving the British army and the Bolsheviks. The British navy played a role in the Baltic supporting anti- Bolshevik Estonian troops, and in the Black Sea they helped evacuate the beleaguered White forces at the endgame of the civil war.

On September 27 1980 SO noted that “The statement [for the November conference] hinges the whole cuts fight on a general strike by council workers in January 1981. The unvoiced let-out clause is that if the unions do not meet this arbitrary deadline, then the Labour councils will... include cuts and rate rises in next spring’s budget”.

This device has been used again and again. Leftists call for an all-out fight by the whole working class. Given the nature of the official leadership of the left, this does not happen. The leftists then use the absence of an across the-board fight to argue that they can do nothing on the whole question of cuts.

But now the left looked for something bet- ter from the new GLC (Greater London Council).

A number of left-wingers had been elected. The GLC manifesto had declared: “A Labour GLC and ILEA (Inner London Education Au- thority) will resist any cuts and demand that the Tory government provides the necessary finance to maintain and improve all council services. Understanding that the Tory gov- ernment does not listen to pleas but only re- sponds to pressure, a Labour GLC and ILEA will appeal to the labour and trade union movement to take action including industrial action to support this stand.”

Socialist Organiser warned: “40-odd Labour men and women on the GLC can never beat the Tories without an organised mass campaign behind them.”

The Labour left’s policies have not failed for lack of energetic people. They have failed because no rate rise is based on no clear theoretical understanding of capitalist society and the conservative forces within it.”

The same month, Livingstone declared: “There can be no doubt that we are now en- tering the final phase of the struggle against the Tories.”

Meanwhile] Lothian Council was coming eyeball-to-eyeball with the Tories. Living- stone did nothing to put the GLC on the line together with Lothian.

The Tories had introduced legislation for Scotland giving them the power directly to order cuts. £47 million for Lothian. The council could not commit to a rate rise, even if they wanted to; mid year supplementary rates had always been illegal in Scotland. The council promised defiance. Shop stew- ards voted for strike-action. But once again the official trade union leadership sabotaged the struggle. Alistair MacRae, a local official and also a leading figure in NUPE nationally, was to the fore. It was better, he insisted, to have cuts and keep Labour in office than to risk defiance — which, in event of defeat, would mean a takeover.

The councillors collapsed. In their panic, they initially cut three times as much as the Tories ordered, sacking 900 teachers! The route of the left was complete when the council met again to cancel some of the panic decisions and make more measured cuts. Jimmy Bur- net, the most left-wing councillor explained that if those cuts were not adopted, a bigger Tory package would go through. “I wouldn’t underestimate the ability of working people to understand the position of pragmatic real- ism.”

At the May 1982 elections, Labour was replaced in Lothian by the Tories.

John McDonnell and Ted Knight

Letter to The Socialist Organiser, 22 October 1980.

Email your letters to solidarity@workersliberty.org
Labour: Come out against Brexit!

Brexit, Ireland, the Border, and “alignment”

Tory prime minister Theresa May wanted to promise that Northern Ireland would remain in “regulatory alignment” with the EU in order to unlock the start of substantive talks on a post-Brexit trade deal between Britain and the EU, and a transition period.

On Monday 4 December May withdrew her promise at the last minute because of protests from the Democratic Unionist Party, on which her government relies for votes.

“Regulatory alignment” to keep the border between Northern Ireland and the 26 counties free of checks and border posts, said the DUP, might imply border controls between Northern Ireland and Britain post-Brexit.

The DUP seems to have panicked at the last minute, driven by the old Northern Ireland Unionist fear of being betrayed by Britain. But there is a logic to their protest.

“Regulatory alignment” between Northern Ireland and the 26 Counties implies disalignments, and thus border controls, between Northern Ireland and Britain. Or if not that, that the whole of Britain is also “aligned” with the EU — although for many Tories, the whole point of Brexit is to reject such “alignment” of regulations. Tory Brexit minister David Davis said on 5 December that the Brexiters are going along with May’s promise to pay around £50 billion on the “divorce bill”, the rights of EU citizens in Britain post-Brexit, and the border within Ireland, to unlock substantive talks on a British-EU trade deal and a transition period.

A few things are clear, though.

Even the majority of pro-Brexit leaders implicitly concede that Brexit will not be the easy and joyful process they predicted. Moving far from their 2016 promise of £350 million a week for the NHS from Brexit savings, the Tory Brexiters are going along with May’s promise to pay around £50 billion on the “divorce bill” and chancellor Philip Hammond’s plan to set aside further billions for contingency planning for the costs of new customs controls after Brexit.

Official bodies like the Office for Budget Responsibility and the Bank of England predict economic trouble from Brexit, and the Tories scarcely attempt to deny it.

Big business responded to the Brexit vote by regarding it as a problem to work around, and has focused on lobbying the Tories to soften Brexit.

They are dissatisfied. Big business journals like the Financial Times and the Economist express contempt and disdain for the Tory leaders, even while they prefer the Tories as a lesser evil than what seems to them the disaster of a left-wing Labour government.

The Economist of 2 December, for example, said: “However bad a politician Theresa May seems to be, the reality is worse. She is devoid of intellectual hinterland... A woman of ordinary opinions and ordinary abilities, if that”.

Exit polls in the June 2016 referendum showed that most Brexit voters never expected economic gain from Brexit. Their Brexit vote was a gesture, a statement for nationalist or anti-immigrant “values”, rather than an economic calculation.

Thus polls show only a small shift, as yet, on the substantive for-or-against-Brexit issue. But even that small shift is enough to change the balance.

Among all this, Labour is still muddling and evading issues. But there is increasing anti-Brexit pressure from below on the Labour leadership.

Labour should come out clearly for freedom of movement, for a federal united Europe of democracy and social levelling-up, against re-erected border controls in Ireland — against Brexit!

Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott declared last month: “I will argue for the right of the electorate to vote on any deal that is finally agreed” (on Brexit).

On 2 December, Jeremy Corbyn added: “We’ve not made any decision on a second referendum”.

An opinion poll on 1 December showed that a 68%-19% majority of Labour voters want a referendum on whatever Brexit deal the Tories produce. A 50%-34% majority of the whole electorate also wants a referendum before a deal can go ahead.

As we go to press on 5 December, we cannot tell whether the Tories can budge together something in time for the meeting of the European Council (chiefs of EU governments) on 14-15 December. They need near-enough agreement on the Brexit “divorce bill”, the rights of EU citizens in Britain post-Brexit, and the border within Ireland, to unlock substantive talks on a British-EU trade deal and a transition period.

“Fudge”

Whether the Tories can come up with a fudge which will do for now, and push the conflicts to a later date, we cannot know.

For now, however, as the Irish Times put it: “British-Irish relations are as fraught as they have been in 30 years or more”.

All the benign hopes of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 rested on an unquestioned assumption that Britain and the 26 Counties would remain linked in an ever-more-integrated EU. The larger frame of European integration would allow ancient conflicts to be superseded.

Over the last twenty years that benign scenario has made little headway against the institutionalised sectarianism built into the GFA. There are still over 100 “peace walls” separating communities in Northern Ireland, though a few have been taken down in recent years.

Disruption caused by Brexit threatens to derail even the most tentative progress.

“I’m just the guy who wrote the treaty telling you what the treaty means”, declared former British Euro-diplomat John Kerr on 10 November.

“The Brexiters create the impression that because of the way article 50 is written... a letter [sent] on 29 March 2017 [means] we must leave automatically on 29 March 2019, at the latest. That is not true, we can change our minds if we want to, and if we did, we know that our partners would actually be very pleased indeed”. Kerr’s comment usefully exposes the bluster and undemocratic high-handedness of the Tory government’s insistence that Brexit is now a done deal, and even that a vote in Parliament on an exit deal can only be between that deal and a crash exit-without-a-deal.

He also made an important point about democracy. “One should bear in mind that it is always possible at a later stage to decide that we want to do something different”. The main job for the left is to construct and nurture a left-wing, democratic, social-levelling-up, open-borders cross-European alternative.

And along the way to insist that democracy means the option to stop Brexit.
The housing crisis and fixing poverty

By Rosalind Robson

Britain has a housing crisis. According to Shelter more than 300,000 people — the equivalent to one in every 200 — are homeless or living in inadequate homes. According to official figures 1.3 million people are on a local authority waiting list for housing. By 2020, 25% of people will be renters, rather than home owners. Londoners now spend 40% of their income on rent, and increasing. In 2016, 100 people a day were evicted from their rented homes, partly as a consequence of private-rented tenancies being made less secure. According to the government 28% of these rented homes can be considered “non-decent”.

The government recognises there is a housing crisis. Unfortunately three recent governmental policy interventions — the November budget, this year’s Housing White Paper and the recent Greater London Authority Strategic Plan for London — will do little or nothing to solve the crisis. This is because they all make the mistaken assumption that the housing crisis can be solved by adjusting the housing market. New targets for building homes — the government now says it wants 300,000 new homes to be built in England per year — are not primarily about meeting critical housing needs or building homes that people can afford to live in. Although the figure is close to what is estimated to be needed, it is derived from what is assumed will “balance” the market and bring house prices and rents into line with wages. Indeed the government White Paper is called “Fixing our broken housing market”.

Hence all planning of the massive building programme (if it can be achieved) will be based on a mix of “housing products”, homes to buy and homes to rent. Of the homes to rent, some will be “affordable”. “Affordable” has become the most cynically over-used and mis-used word in housing. “Affordable” almost never means genuine social housing with rents substantially below market rents. Many affordable housing projects simply put money into the pockets of developers and housing associations and the better-off.

For instance the government’s budget brought in an exemption on Stamp Duty for first-time buyers. But this is going to benefit people who were likely to become homeowners anyway!

Central to both the White Paper and Sadiq Khan’s Strategic Plan is the idea that local authorities should be able to more easily dish out planning permission. It is argued that this will enable building to proceed more swiftly. Most likely in London, big developers will build more high rises around tube and rail stations, housing which is little more than storage units for overworked humans. Moreover, a potential problem with speeding up planning permission is that there is even less local accountability over so-called regeneration projects, for instance less time and ability for local residents to oppose compulsory purchase orders — a mechanism that was used to shift thousands of council tenants from north Southwark as the local authority grew-Sight the demolition of council homes and sold off land to property developers.

That the Tories have been forced to change their narrative is a sign of how the social housing movement as a whole should set the agenda for the GLA and all housing associations.

The Plan is the idea that local authorities should be able to more swiftly. Most likely in London, big developers will build more high rises around tube and rail stations, housing which is little more than storage units for overworked humans. Moreover, a potential problem with speeding up planning permission is that there is even less local accountability over so-called regeneration projects, for instance less time and ability for local residents to oppose compulsory purchase orders — a mechanism that was used to shift thousands of council tenants from north Southwark as the local authority grew-Sight the demolition of council homes and sold off land to property developers.

The government’s Affordable Homes Programme will now only not include “help to buy” but some discounted rental property projects. This will not tackle the problem of rent poverty, as discounted rents are typically 80% of market rent — a very high level, especially in London. Otherwise, again, the government is relying on increasing housing supply to fix the problem of unaffordable rents.

The idea of a Rent Index, which undermines the GLA’s — now a Labour authority — plan for London. Beyond running transport and some other infrastructure, the GLA’s role is more to co-ordinate and systematisse planning across London. Its housing plans follow the line of providing “mixed housing products” of rented and buyable homes.

Khan has said that in return for getting swift planning permission, property developers should ensure 50% of all new developments are based on “affordables”. The devil is in the details. This is no radical proposal.

Of those “affordables”, a 30 per cent minimum should have the London Affordable Rent. Currently that is 80% of the market rent. Khan has only vaguely said he would like that percentage to be lower. A further 30 per cent minimum of the affordables should be Shared Ownership or the London Living Rent, a scheme that is also linked to eventual ownership. The rest of the affordable, Khan has said, should be based
Private renters get organised

Richard Driver spoke to Acorn, who have been organising private renters’ unions.

Can you tell me some of the history of your campaign? How did Acorn start?

Our roots are in Acorn’s 50 year history of organising low income folks to fight for economic and social justice. The organisation was originally founded in Arkansas, USA, by benefit claimant mums, and over 40 years has organised 500,000 members across the USA, building direct-action community, and trade, unions. That organisation was destroyed by right-wing attacks in 2010 (though ex-chapters continue playing important roles in Fight for $15, Indivisible and more).

In 2004, Acorn began supporting similar groups around the world, and in 2014 a small group of British union and direct-action organisers began organising here. The idea was to organise large sections of the low-income population who are not well represented in existing unions.

Acorn UK was launched in Bristol by 100 private renters in May 2014, voting to fight for decent, secure affordable homes. Today we number 1000 members and 15000 supporters in eight branches across England (and our sister organisation Living Rent Tenants’ Union in Scotland is also Acorn affiliated).

What do Acorn members do?

Acorn members are engaged in local grassroots organising, training organisers and building our democratic membership and leadership structures across our cities, and in our neighbourhoods and campuses etc. We run direct-action fights at local, city and national level. This ranges from organising members to defend themselves when faced with eviction, unsafe homes, deposit theft etc, to mobilising nationally (for example last year we held a day of action, successfully persuading Santander bank to stop demanding their buy to let mortgage holders raise tenants’ rent).

How do you relate to other housing campaigns and the wider labour movement? Why is a campaign like Acorn necessary?

We absolutely consider ourselves a component of a much wider organising and mobilising initiatives for justice and an economy that simply doesn’t work for the majority. There are short and mid-term solutions we’re fighting hard for such as rent control, longer tenancies and an end to Section 21 “no reason evictions”, a national licensing and registration scheme for landlords, an end to the right to buy and a mass social house building programme.

Of course, grassroots solutions like community housebuilding and housing coops are important too. But also, we need movement on decent jobs, pay rises, and a real welfare programme etc.

What does Acorn advocate as a solution to the housing crisis and how does it organise for that goal?

That’s a hard question, because fundamentally we’re talking about inequality and an economy that simply doesn’t work for the majority. But there are short and mid-term solutions we’re fighting hard for such as rent control, longer tenancies and an end to Section 21 “no reason evictions”, a national licensing and registration scheme for landlords, an end to the right to buy and a mass social house building programme.

Of course, grassroots solutions like community housebuilding and housing coops are important too. But also, we need movement on decent jobs, pay rises, and a real welfare programme etc.

What is the history of Acorn?

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How do people support Acorn?

Please join and get involved. Become a member. If there’s a branch locally we’ll train you and get you involved.

Otherwise, if you’re serious about organising where you are, we’ll help, and if you’re in a trade union or similar group, donations and affiliations let our organisers keep paying rent!

acorntheunion.org.uk

For all the press and “twitterati” commentary of “Momentum organizing” and “member take over” — i.e. not automatically made the candidate again, only “suspend the selections and impose all candidates”. Many incumbent councillors chose to withdraw from the selection process after suffering the apparent “indignity” of being “triggered” — i.e. not automatically made the candidate again, only given the automatic right to be on the shortlist and stand on their merits against other candidates in a vote of party members.

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Our duties in the Corbyn surge

By Simon Nelson

The opening debate at the AWL’s annual conference on 25-26 November was around the document on industrial and trade union work, and our role as the new left, neoliberalism, and the new right”, published a short while back as a pull-out in this paper:

The AWL has been prominently involved in the Picturehouse strikes, helping to spread the strikes, to build up the support of the community pickets and to agitate for greater rank-and-file control of the dispute. We agreed to continue to “unbalance” our work by putting emphasis on bringing this dispute to a successful conclusion. A key issue is the remuneration of the sacked reps.

In the Driver Only Operation disputes in the rail industry we have also been able to play a role. The document noted that the current deal with Aslef at Southern Rail brings with it the danger of a deadlock in the dispute and could spur other companies into closing many openings right across the labour movement.

Our conference was less than two weeks after the Free Education march and demonstration in London (15 November). Comrades reported on the prospects for fighting for free education and winning new interest in the AWL as part of the demo preparation and the march itself. Following the election of Corbyn, there is more prospect of winning free education. The document argues that we cannot be complacent on the issue, but should continue to work with the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts and take this fight into Labour Students as well.

The conference was addressed by comrades from the Worker Communist Party of Kurdistan and the Iranian Revolutionary Marxist Tendency. LALIT, a Mauritian socialist and French comrades, provided solidarity.

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The reality surrounding Florida’s fantasy


When Walt Disney planned “the Florida Project” (the plan that became Disney World Resort) he deliberately located it in a state with cheap land and compliant politicians who would allow him to own land beyond the park.

Disney wanted more than his fantasy kingdom: with themed hotels, he also wanted a corporate-controlled futuristic city where anyone who would not fit in with the magic kingdom’s fantasy would be kept out.

The characters in ‘The Florida Project’ definitely do not fit in with Disney’s fantasy world. Their world, just outside the bounds of Disney’s domain, near to the highways and highways and helipads, is a world of gaudily painted but run down motels, knock-off souvenir shops, cash-in diners and icecream stands. It is a world of what is sometimes called “hidden homelessness”. Here, “entire families have to scrimp together $35 dollars a week for a cramped motel room to live in.”

The movie explores this world through the eyes of six-year-old Moonee (Brooklynn Prince) and her friends as they are tear and Moonee and her gang spend it spitting on cars, shouting swear words they don’t understand, getting under the feet of stressed-out adults.

Yet, for the kids this is a magic kingdom even if it is circumscribed by the very real threats of the poverty around them. In the end, Moonee’s summer idyll comes to an end as adult reality crowds in and starts to directly affect her.

Moonee’s young mother Halley (Bria Vinaite) finds life is spiralling out of her control. She struggles to make the rent, she resorts to selling knock-off perfume to tourists. In her own way she’s trying to provide for Moonee, but she’s also immature and alienates the people who are trying to help her, including the weary but sympathetic motel manager Bobby (Willem Dafoe).

When Hollywood makes films about people on the margins they often end up schmaltzy, with actors giving showy performances and making declamatory statements as the soundtrack swells. This film, with its cast of largely non professional actors, is the opposite of that kind of filmmaking. The story is told through a series of vignettes and through a child’s eyes. It’s funny, full of energy and gives you a very real sense of the place the characters live in. Much of the script is improvised and the performances are tremendous.

The movie also looks great. Unusually for 35mm, so the amazing colours of the building and T-shirts pop out of the screen with all brightness of an old MGM musical or indeed, a Disney animation. It’s often filmed at the eye-level of the children, which gives the film a subtle fairy-tale take on how they see the world.

This is a film that shows rather than tells. It doesn’t pass moralistic judgements on the choices the characters make. Neither does it claim that Halley and Moonee are representative of a type of person. The single parents are individual with their own ways of coping with their situations in different and differentiated ways.

A criticism that could be made of the film is that it does not provide a political manifesto against poverty. But the film is political when Moonee and her Mom flick a finger at the helicopters landing on the nearby helipad, bringing rich tourists in and out of Disney World. When we see the unfinished condos that stand empty since the 2008-9 crash, whilst the motels are full of people who need homes.

“The Florida Project’ is full of humanity; the people living in the motel do not have much, but they share much of what they do have. They have created a network of solidarity and kindness. In the moments when we see that solidarity, the film gives us a glimpse of how the world could be re-made.

How the 0.1% Rule

By Martin Thomas

“How does a political party dedicated to the material interests of the top 0.1 per cent of the income distribution win and hold power in a universal suffrage democracy?”, asks columnist Martin Wolf in the Financial Times (21 November 2017).

It is indeed the question of questions about the politics and economics of today's social system. Wolf is a former right-wing Labourite who recounts that in the early 1970s he shifted “from social democracy to classical liberalism. I remain such a liberal today”.

He interprets the question as one only about the Republican administration in the US today. He is prompted to ask it by the Republican tax bill. “To the extent that the changes in the US are driven by a demographic effect, they are driven not by the change in the median income, but by that among the very richest: the share of income received by those at the top 0.1% of the population went from 0.6% in 1978 to 5.7% in 2007 in the United States.”

With that the Republicans plan to “slash spending on nearly all of the non-defence discretionary spending of the federal government, plus its spending on health and social security.”

“This is a determined effort to shift resources from the bottom, middle and even upper middle of the US income distribution towards the very top, combined with big increases in economic insecurity for the great majority”. The Republicans are not unique. They do it in a particularly gross way, but they share the general direction with pretty much every administration of every major country since the early 1980s at least.

“The Blair government in Britain did bring in the minimum wage and increase NHS and education spending; the Workers' Party regime in Brazil did run the Bolsa Familia welfare program and bring many workers from the “informal” into the “formal” economy where they would have some legal rights; but even such measures have been side-sweeteners within an overall priority of boosting profits and the revenues of the wealthy.

The puzzle

Wolf identifies the answer to the puzzle as “pluto-populism”. That has three planks.

“The first... is to find intellectuals who argue that everybody will benefit from policies ostensibly benefiting few so...”

Among intellectuals enjoying high profiles, who are almost always well-off, it is easy to find some who argue that corporations which say that policies benefiting you and your friends, and the businesses which may give you grants for research or give visibility to your work, will somehow, in the long run, be best for the more remote-from-you mass of people out there. Even more so for politicians to think that the desired policies of the lobbyists which surround them, and the bosses who may give them high-paid jobs after their time in politics, also serve the common good.

The arguments convince some of the worse-off, too. Capitalism appears to be the only show in town. To get jobs and better wages out of capitalists, you first have to make sure they’re making good profits.

Moreover, the bosses are the bosses, aren’t they? They know how to run the system. In the USA, Trump seems to have got many votes from worse-off people because of, not despite, the fact that he is a billionaire.

A second plank, says Wolf, is “to give wealth the overriding role in politics it holds today [and] to suppress the votes of people likely to vote against plutocratic interests, or even disenfranchise them”. That is especially true in the USA. But it is true in Britain, too.

The third approach is to make sure they always has an advantage in funding. The Labour right has billionaire funding for its internal campaigns, and Labour is always under pressure to woo rich donors. Young and transient people, especially those doing debt-collectors, have less access to the vote than well-off and settled people.

The “third approach is to foment cultural and ethnic splits”, to create scapegoats, to channel the anger and frustration of the worse-off against migrants, or the “liberal elite”, or sometimes just big-city dwellers.

The top 0.1 per cent are very remote to almost everybody. Quite a few of the worse-off can be persuaded or half-persuaded that billionaires got to be billionaires by exceptional energy and skill, and no doubt a bit of luck, in negotiating the sort of channels for advancement that those worse-off people can see as accessible to themselves: starting a small business, winning promotion at work, etc.

They can be persuaded that policies that would cramp the billionaires would also harm their own chances of advance through individual effort, and divert resources to the faceless and idle.

A new “cultural split” exploited by the right has been between older people in smaller towns, often lacking the formal educational credentials so over-valued in today’s capitalism, and younger educationally-credentialled people in big cities. In the USA, in France, in Britain, Trump, Le Pen, and Brexit draw support disproportionately from those older small-town people.

As recently as 1991, in Britain, the proportion of over-65s was about the same in small towns as in big places. By 2017, there were almost 20% of people ageing over-65 for every 100 working age people in Britain’s villages, double the figure of 19 in large cities.

Universities

University graduates gravitate to big cities. In 2014-5, 45% of university students had lived in smaller towns, rather than cities, before university, but only 20% of students were in non-citites.

Some students return to non-cities after graduation, but most stay in cities. London alone has almost a quarter of all new graduates working in it six months after graduation.

Those graduates are not necessarily at all in luxurious jobs, but to uncredentialled older people in small towns they may seem to monopolise stench discourse and form the alien “liberal elite” that Trump and other US right-wingers rail against.

It has the appearance of “naturalness” that parties can command the votes of the majority of the worse-off. In fact the result dependson an intricate and constantly-revised ecosystem of political dynamics.

The way to break through is to make that system simple to state, though effortful to implement. Nurture working-class unity and solidarity, through political education and through unifying struggles. Uphold democratic rights. Foster working-class self-assertion, combat deference.
Selections, factionalism, and Akehurst

By Will Sefton

“We may well have reached ‘the moment of truth’. These are the most favourable political circumstances Labour’s hard left could envisage.

The deal politically vindicated by the general election result have, a well-funded, well-staffed organisation holding a vast amount of cash on hand; and have reshaped Labour’s membership through successive rounds of mass recruitment.

So says Luke Akehurst, secretary of Labour First, writing a sober article about Momentum and local council selections in a week of right-wing hysteria from the tabloid press, with Roy Hattersley and Angela Rayner making (politically differentiated) contributions.

Akehurst is relatively realistic on Momentum’s political advantages. The “centre-left”, as he calls the wing of the party, did okay on nominations to Labour’s National Executive, although Eddie Izzard still has his Constituency Party nominations than Momentum-backed candidate Yasmine Dar. One of their candidates — Izzard, Johanna Baxter and Gursharan Singh — could win a seat. Across the UK, the left of Labour is, in fact, not sweeping the board. The picture is mixed. In Harrow, the campaigning against the £2 billion Harrow Development Vehicle (HDV) regeneration plan has ensured nearly all of the incumbent Progress-dominated constituency, which has been ousted by Greens and supporters. In Lewisham East, the right retained control of the party. In Watford a Momentum-backed trade unionist would not have got onto the shortlist for the MP candidate without an intervention by the National Executive.

What really bothers Progress, so they say, is the lack of experience of the left candidates as against established right-wingers. Akehurst is only worried about is the kind of politics that these councillors will be putting forward and who they feel they are accountable to. He mourns the passing of cosy dinners and drinks receptions with lobbyists and property developers.

Undoubtedly it is true that many of the new intake in councils in 2018 will be relative newcomers, soon bewildered in politics within the last two years. That only indicates that the pressure on new left councillors to make cuts, to carry out “tough decisions”, will be intense. It highlights the importance of discussing the strategy for councillors in a fight against austerity. It cannot wait till May. It needs to be more than an anguished plea for a Labour Government in 2022. Without such a strategy the left will be caught up in passing on more cuts

...to participating MPs’ services in a dire state following seven years of Tory austerity.

Having a layer of Labour councillors who are accountable to Labour members and the local labour movement, who want to mobilise it to fight, is long overdue. But can we get this? Minimally local council candidates should call for the next Labour government to restore all the money that has been cut since 2010. Local labour movements should call meetings to discuss the need for the cuts and what strategy is needed to defeat them. Our movement has historical examples that we can learn from — victories at Poplar and Clay Cross, as well as those that ended in defeat as with the fight of the local government left between 1979 and 1985 (see page 4).

DEMOCRACY

We must be absolutely clear that there is no subversion of democracy, no underhand coup, going on in Labour.

Membership is simply exercising their democratic right to select the representatives they want. Some right-wingers are moaning about an increasingly factional atmosphere and condemn the fact that their democratic right to select the representatives they want. Some right-wingers are moaning about an increasingly factional atmosphere and condemn the fact that their"...
### Brum bins: on balance, a victory

By Jim Denham

After 12 weeks of strikes, Unite members have agreed to a deal to settle a long-running dispute over changes to waste management services in Birmingham.

On balance, this has to be considered a victory for the workers.

The Labour council have agreed to withdraw proposed redundancies in exchange for giving the affected workers new job titles and duties. Grade 3 workers will now be promoting recycling among residents but still be working on bin lorries and maintaining their current grade, pay and conditions.

In addition a victimised shop steward will be reinstated, unions will be included in a forum on future changes to the waste management service, and there will be no changes for at least 15 months.

The concession the union has made is to agree to a five-day working week, but there will be no increase in working hours.

The council has also agreed to pay Unite’s legal costs. They have spent over £6 million of public money in an attempt to defeat the action and break the union.

The local authority’s leader, Cllr Ian Ward, said the deal had been agreed after “a legally sound position, going through the governance processes which we must follow”.

Unite meanwhile described the agreement as “a victory for common sense”.

The dispute dated back to June this year, when the union warned that proposals for changes to the service could lead to the loss of more than 100 jobs and pay cuts of up to £5,000.

The tactics that Unite and the workers opted for – one-hour stoppages each day involving a return back to depots on each stoppage – proved to be effective in creating maximum disruption. This approach also minimised the loss in strikers’ pay and retained a limited service under the effective control of the workers.

Under the new proposal, the grade three bin loader role, which was to be deleted, will now be retained. However, this will be with a change of job title and added responsibilities such as data collection for refuse compliance. Refuse workers will transition to the new roles in February 2018. They will also move from a 4-day week to a five-day week.

In the present industrial climate, we can properly call this a victory – but we shouldn’t exaggerate the extent of the victory, as some are doing.

* Abridged from: bit.ly/2AqWSV

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### Living wage boost at Nottingham University

By a Unison member

University of Nottingham has agreed to pay the Living Wage to its lowest paid employees for 2017-18.

This boost to the pay of cleaners and catering workers comes after a lively campaign by campus unions – UCU, Unison and Unite – and students, including the students’ union.

We took the opportunity of a new Vice Chancellor arriving to renew our push for the University to become an accredited employer with the Living Wage Foundation (LWF).

Each year the University has been raising the lowest wage in line with the new LWF only from August to November. When the new living wage is set in November, University pay has fallen behind again.

This November we held a big protest that got TV and newspaper coverage, and we invited the VC to do a shift with the cleaners (she has declined the invitation).

Responding to the adverse publicity, the University has now raised the lowest wage for November-August to the updated rate, £8.75. Unison and Unite still have to vote on the offer, but we are celebrating our partial victory of a nine months’ pay boost for our lowest paid workers.

Our campaign is far from over, as pay is only part of the picture. The University has also been increasing the amount of work cleaners must do, through freezing recruitment, and they want to end the flexible hours cleaners have been able to work. Many need to start early so they can finish early to go to their second job (sometimes within the same university).

The University are still holding out against becoming an accredited living wage employer. They argue that they don’t want to relinquish control over setting their pay rates to an outside body.

We argue that a rich institution like the University needs to demonstrate its commitment always to treat its lowest paid employees with respect. Fifty-six HE institutions have signed up, including Oxford University.

And, of course, looking at the bigger picture, an incoming Labour government enacting its pledge of a £10 minimum wage would blow any such quibbling out of the water.

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### Picturehouse workers Star Wars strike planned

By Gemma Short

Workers at Picturehouse cinemas will strike again on Thursday 14 December.

The strike is to disrupt the opening night of ‘Star Wars: the last Jedi’, Picturehouse’s biggest revenue-raiser in the year. Workers at the Ritzy in Brixton, and Hackney, Crouch End, East Dulwich, and Central Picturehouses will strike.

Workers will also strike on 24 and 26 December. Management has in the past scheduled strikers to work on those days, rather than non-strikers, meaning they don’t get a Christmas break.

Community supporters of the strikers have called a weekend of action for 15-17 December and will be organising community pickets and protests at Picturehouses and Cineworld cinemas across the country.

* Weekend of action: bit.ly/2Q9thf

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### Bus strikes suspended

The workers, members of Unite, work on buses in the Liverpool, Merseyside, Manchester, Lan-cashire and Cheshire. They are fighting for a pay rise and for differentials in pay between garages to be addressed by leveling up pay.

Workers struck on 20 and 27 November, and 4 December, and had planned strikes on 7, 12, 13, 14, 20, 21, 22 and 23 December.

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### Deliveroo wildcat strike

On Saturday 25 November Deliveroo workers in Brighton took part in a wildcat strike over low wages.

Wages have steadily been dropping for Deliveroo workers in Brighton, as Deliveroo is deliberately flooding the system with more drivers than are needed, meaning they don’t get as many jobs each. With workers being paid only £4 per delivery, often workers don’t make the minimum wage in an hour. Workers also picketed the newly opened “Deliveroo Editions” kitchens and organised a convoy around the city.

Some workers are members of the IWGB union, which is demanding a pay rise of £1 to £5 a drop, a hiring freeze, and no victimisation of striking workers.

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### Teachers strike over workload

By a NEU member

Workers at Westays Primary School in Sheffield voted overwhelmingly to strike on 7, 12 and 13 December against reforms which will worsen excessive workload and increase scrutiny of teachers.

Sam Fearnehough, the school’s executive head (read: off-site manager) claimed that there is “already having a positive impact” and that “a majority of staff are very happy with the support and training they have received to implement new ways of teaching”.

So happy indeed that they have voted overwhelmingly for strikes and for a statement through Sheffield National Education Union (NEU) stating that “the changes are having a direct impact on the children’s educational experience and are making many staff members lose trust in their own school.”

Parents and supporters held a rally at the school on Friday 1 December and a solidarity meeting on the 5 December will hear from a Westays School worker.

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### DPD drivers “strike”

By Dale Street

Over 50 members of the GMB protested outside the Carmyle (Glasgow) depot of the DPD parcel delivery firm on Tuesday 5 December as part of their Scotland-wide campaign over working hours and rates of pay.

DPD has introduced cuts in the sliding scale of delivery rates and additional obligatory weekend working. According to the GMB, the latter breaches the EU Working Time Directive.

The GMB members, who are all Owner-Driver-Franchises (ODFs), have also reported being forced to drive overloaded vehicles, being overcharged for work done on the vehicles which they lease from DPD, and being charged for work which was either not necessary or not done.

DPD treats the ODFs as self-employed, despite the fact that ODFs cannot determine their working days and working hours, nor what route they use for deliveries. DPD allows them to take just two non-consecutive and unpaid weeks off work each year.

ODFs are also subject to a £150 “breach charge” if they take an unauthorised day off due to sickness or bereavement or do anything else which DPD classes as a breach of contract.

Because ODFs are self-employed, the event were a protest rather than a picket, and “they report non-availability for work” rather than a one-day strike.

In any case, it is clear that the ODFs are classed by DPD as self-employed meant that GMB members had no need to overcome the obstructions to picketing and strike action imposed by the Tories’ anti-union laws.

So far, attempts by the GMB to meet with DPD have either been ignored or refused. But the level of support for last Tuesday’s activities and the rapid increase in GMB membership in DPD is evidence of the increasing pressure on DPD to back down.

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### REPORTS 10-11
By Gerry Bates

Donald Trump’s tax overhaul was passed early on Saturday 2 December in the US Senate.

Although the bill will now need to be reconciled with the House-passed version, it is likely still to include tax cuts which will make the rich rich and US corporations much richer, while also punishing the working class and the poor.

The legislation proposes to cut taxes collected by the federal treasury by around $6 trillion over 10 years. A $1.4 trillion addition to the federal debt is forecast. To get to that figure, the Republicans have also implemented $4.5 trillion in tax increases over the same period.

WEALTH

The massive transfer of wealth upward includes a cut in corporation tax, from 35% to 20% and a cut in “death duty” taxes on the very rich.

The Senate tax plan also copperfastens the repeal of the individual mandate in Affordable Care (Obamacare) which required all Americans to have health insurance or face a penalty. This will have projected to mean 13 million more uninsured people and a 10% increase in premiums. In addition, individual income tax rates will drop temporarily but then rise in a few years — for many households outside of the richest 10 percent.

There have been a number of last-minute amendments to the tax bill which also benefit the better off, for example, more tax advantages to college savings accounts.

The likely consequences of the bill will be cuts in Social Security and Medicare and a further crisis bill which also benefit the better off, for example, more tax advantages to college savings accounts.

There have been a number of last-minute amendments to the tax bill which also benefit the better off, for example, more tax advantages to college savings accounts.

The measure may bolster some of the House Republicans who will establish a conference committee to negotiate over the differences between the House and Senate versions of the tax bill. It is likely, but not a foregone conclusion, that the measures will eventually pass.

Meanwhile inequality in the United States is at record levels. As of last year, the richest 1 percent of households controlled 38.6 percent of all wealth in the US, while the bottom 90 percent of the population combined was worth barely half as much. The US is more unequal than at any time in a century and a half.

The measures may bolster some of the Republican congressional base, but only one-third of the electorate supports the Republican proposals, according to opinion polls.

That is why the Democrats, while failing to mount an opposition to the measures, are hoping for an electoral swing back to them. However, the tax reform will pacify Republican unrest. It has ended the year-long hiatus when the Republicans failed to get through any legislative initiative, despite controlling House, Senate, and presidency.

Immediately after the passing of the reforms Trump declared (on Twitter) that this would stimulate huge economic growth. That seems highly unlikely. The Joint Committee on Taxation estimated that the tax cuts would add less than 0.1 percent annually to US economic growth over 10 years.

Republicans who had previously voted against smashing up Obamacare, voted for these measures, which will make the health crisis worse. They seem to have been bought off by a range of tax incentives, some of which will directly affect those of them who are multi-millionaires.

That happy circumstance, for millionaires, may also part explain the lack of Democratic opposition. And, judging by past performances, it is unlikely that Democrats will repeal these tax cuts.

There have been protests against the tax cut legislation, particularly among graduate student employees (see picture). Many graduate and PhD students currently receive free tuition – and stipends – in exchange for teaching or conducting research.

Currently, students are only taxed on the stipends they receive. They will now be taxed on the amount of their waived tuition fees as well. Expect the drop-out rates to increase.

Protest Trump’s visit

26-27 February 2018

US Embassy and 10 Downing Street (tbc)

bit.ly/2kibrXB

The US Supreme Court comes after Trump the ban on travellers from six Muslim-majority plus two other countries will be immediately imposed while the court cases challenging the ban are resolved, something that is likely to take months.

The United States can now categorically refuse entry visas to prospective travelers from Chad, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen, plus North Korea and Venezuela, apart from some exceptions.

This version of the Muslim ban has evolved from Trump’s original electoral pledge to implement a “total shutdown” on all Muslims entering the US. It is still inflammatory and racist.

Its temporary acceptance by the Supreme Court comes after videos from the far-right Britain first.