Windrush scandal shows depth of inequalities

The unfolding scandal of the denial of health and social care to the now-aged children of the Windrush is a warning sign. It shows the sharp end of government racism, and the immense store of racist malice that the British ruling class is capable of unleashing on any group of foreign-born people it chooses. It is the fruit of years of right wing demagogy, in the press and in government, against migrants.

More page 5

Equal rights for migrants

Solidarity for social ownership of the banks and industry

No 467 25 April 2018 50p/£1

Inside:

How Labour responded to "River of blood"

How did Labour respond to Enoch Powell’s 1968 “River of blood” speech at the time?

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Socialism vs. Capitalism

Workers’ Liberty debates free-market academic Mark Pennington.

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Vote Labour on 3 May!

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How the ground was laid for Enoch Powell

By Matt Cooper

Last week saw the fiftieth anniversary of Enoch Powell’s “River of Blood” speech. The contents of the speech are well known, arguing that black and Asian people were an immutable and alien pollutant in Britain and that immigration should be stopped and reversed through repatriation.

The speech’s classicism sounds odd today, but it was a highly functional mask of over-educated respectability which barely concealed its main content — vernacular racism. Powell alternated between allusions to ancient Greek history and vox populi stories purportedly from people in his constituency. These stories are almost certainly fiction – the old lady with a house on a street where now lived only “Negros” who pushed “excreta” through her letter box with “wide-grinning piccaninnies” chanting after her their one word of English, “racialist.” This mix of the sacred and the profane allowed people to see their own racism as respectable as the suited former classical scholar who quoted it.

This opened the door to the recently formed National Front to present its fascism in respectable electoral clothes in the following decade — they averaged eight per cent of the vote where they stood in local elections the following year. Of more lasting significance, Powell brought to the fore the long existing right wing of the Conservative Party. They combined the economics of the free-market (Powell had resigned from the Cabinet in 1958 demanding spending cuts), populist racism and opposition to the European Union. Their ultimate heirs to this were Thatcher and the Brexit right.

Protest Trump on 14 July

By Michael Elms

In January 2018, US President Donald Trump cancelled a planned trip to the UK. His stated reason was that the famously unsuccessful loser didn’t fancy the “off-location” US Embassy. But the real reason was almost certainly that Trump wanted to duck the huge wave of protest that anyone could see would greet any visit. The racist, authoritarian and climate-change denying policies of the Trump administration stoked a storm of indignation and a series of huge rallies at the very suggestion of his visit.

In mid-April 2018, Trump announced a new trip to the UK, for a “working meeting” with Theresa May. At the time of writing the most likely date for the visit is 14 July.

Food delivery workers unite across Italy

By Hugh Edwards

On Sunday 15 April in Bologna, the first national assembly of food delivery workers took place.

Organised by the “Riders’ Union Bologna”, it drew delegates from nearly all of the largest cities as well as delegates from similar collectives in Belgium and France; and from Italy, observers came from the main trade unions, federal and otherwise.

The left and the labour movement, especially Young Labour, should start organising now to present a socialist, democratic and humane alternative to the grim nihilism of Trump’s project — and organise a demonstration of international significance.

The initiative was the culmination of a series of actions involving militants from Bologna over the last 18 months, collectively addressing the needs of the thousands of workers in the gig economy increasingly at the mercy of the multinational corporate grip on the home delivery food industry.

Only a week previously, an industrial tribunal in Turin ruled against an action brought against the food giant Foodora by six workers arbitrarily sacked, ruling that “you are not workers but volunteers”.

It was the first such case and ruling in Italy, and almost certainly the precursor to others as the challenge by those gathered in Bologna on the 15th mounts. The experience of the comrades in Bologna has been crucial, beginning with local protests, marches and mass meetings, seeing a network of solidarity slowly emerge, which is the primary condition to smash the isolation so instrumental to the power of the bosses.

The network has addressed immediate needs like the collectivisation of bicycle maintenance, accommodation to use between one shift and another, and the resolution of myriad of on-the-job problems. These fights have been integral to the formation of a collective to push for contractual status and other demands of independent workers in the city and region.

Bologna’s success has seen the collective’s “chart of rights of digital workers” presented to and accepted by the city’s council. The charter lays out the conditions for protecting of guaranteed wages as against piecework, hours of work and rights, including trade unions, and protection from discrimination, racism and so on.

The decision to launch a day general strike of “Riders” at the end of the month is proof of the growing combative and single-mindedness of these workers as May Day approaches.

Much of the coverage in the liberal media has presented the speech as bringing a subterranean racism to the surface in British politics, but greater damage had already been done by the Labour government then in power. Both Labour and Conservative policies had considered controlling Black and Asian immigration after 1945. Eventually, the Conservatives introduced racist controls in their 1962 Common Immigrants Act. Labour’s opposition to this measure was always contingent. While they branded these controls racist, they framed their opposition in a “reasoned amendment” stating that the governments of Commonwealth countries should be consulted.

PANICKED

On the whole immigration was not an issue in the 1964 election, but Labour were panicked by the loss of their Shadow Foreign Secretary. Patrick Gordon Walker, in Smethwick where the local Conservative candidate had refused to condemn the local use of the slogan “If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour”.

Even before the election many Labour MPs had been edging towards supporting control. In power, Labour not only accepted the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (after an entirely fake consultation with Commonwealth governments) but in 1965 drastically reduced the number allowed to enter under it.

Worse was to follow. When in 1966 Kenyan government, which was “at least a well-regulated country”, decided to drive out its Asian population, Labour not only accepted the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, removing the Kenyan Asians’ right to settle in Britain. Even more than the Conservatives, it was a Labour government that racialised and stigmatised black and Asian immigrants. The ground had been prepared for Powell by Labour, although the liberal-faced Conservatives contributed too, having included tighter immigration control and voluntary repatriation in their 1966 election manifesto.

The Labour government’s initial response to Powell’s speech was also dreadful. As the hatches were battened down, Home Secretary James Callaghan went on BBC1’s Panorama to emphasise that the government’s tough controls meant pro-Powell strikes were pointless, and highlight an existing low-profile repatriation scheme (one of his own civil servants criticised him, calling it a “mousetrap of a scheme” which was “at least a well-regulated, suitably compassionate, and thinking mouse.”) After a Cabinet revolt in early May the government failed hastily to make careful anti-racist statements and even attempt, although without fanfare, to direct some slight funding to inner-city areas through the Urban Programme. This was too little, too late and too much in the shadow of years of anti-immigration measures.

The response of the left did not adequately fill the gap left by the government. Widespread support for Powell was reflected by a small but significant numbers of strikes, firstly by TGWU members at Heathrow, then by steelworkers in the Midlands and most famously by London dockworkers.

The Communist Party, with a base in the London docks, could only respond by taking a Protestant vicar and Catholic priest to the docks, appealing to the brotherhood of man. The International Socialists (now the SWP), who were claiming to be building up a rank-and-file movement, produced a leaflet written by a leading member, Paul Foot. No copy of the leaflet appears to have survived, but chunks that have been quoted suggest it attacked Powell for being a Belgavia-dwelling rich Tory, but failed to mention immigration or racism.

The forerunner of the AWL, Workers Fight, although only a handful of people, did better. Workers’ Fight March-April 1968 concluded: “We can only combat racism by organising the rank and file of the labour movement against it, utilising the strength of the working class. We cannot expect to look to the organs of the capitalist state to abolish what is essentially in its interests,” a conclusion that remains true today.

• Full text of Workers’ Fight article: bit.ly/2Fdbx7U

More online at www.workersliberty.org
Syria, chemical weapons, and bombing

By Colin Foster

On 14 April the USA, Britain, and France made air-strikes which, so the US says, disabled some of the Syrian government’s chemical-weapons sites.

US Defence Secretary James Mattis described the operation as a “blistering” success, and in fact further substantial military action by the USA and its allies seems unlikely in the near future in Syria, where Russia, Iran, the Assad government which Russia and Iran support, and Turkey in some areas, control most of the territory.

It is the Russian government, which vehemently condemned the air-strikes, made no charges about civilian casualties from them (bit.ly/putin-s).

From a socialist point of view, it cannot but be a good thing if Assad’s chemical-weapons capacity has been diminished.

That does not imply that we endorsed, or should have endorsed, the military action by the USA and its allies, let alone that we endorse Britain taking part without the Government consulting Parliament.

We have no confidence in the USA, or the British state, as world police. They have sought to act as world police for many decades.

They do so in a way conditioned by the world-wide profit-grabbing, social-resistance-suppressing interests of the USA’s and the UK’s big capitalist corporations.

Frequently “peace-keeping” has been a pretext for war, or for interference to help whatever local faction best suits the US or British rulers.

One particular operation going “against a special status in the US system as to disqualify radical distrust”. In this case, the air-strikes leave Assad and his allies in control and with ample military capacities to kill and to oppress.

DISTRACT

To have an attitude of radical distrust and of intransigent independence from the big powers’ actions is, however, a different matter from presenting the Russia-Iran-Assad axis as a lesser evil.

According to the World Health Organisation, on 7 April in the Islamist-rebel-held city of Douma, in the eastern Ghouta area on the outskirts of Syria’s capital, Damascus, “an estimated 500 patients presented to health facilities exhibiting signs and symptoms consistent with exposure to toxic chemicals. In particular, there were signs of severe irritation of mucous membranes, respiratory failure and disruption to central nervous systems of those exposed.”

“More than 70 people sheltering in basements have reportedly died, with 43 of those deaths related to symptoms consistent with exposure to highly toxic chemicals”.

Syrian exile organisations have collated more detailed reports (bit.ly/sohr-d), and charged the Assad regime with using chemical weapons on civilians. Assad has a history of using chemical weapons and of murderous reprisals against civilians even before the 2011 uprising.

The attack was followed by the Islamist rebel group which had controlled eastern Ghouta fleeing, and the Assad government taking control of the area.

Investigators from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons were able to get into the now-Assad-controlled area only on 21 April. A UN reconnaissance group working with the OPCW was forced to withdraw by small-arm fire on an earlier attempt, on 18 April.

Yet the Morning Star reported no details of the casualties on 7 April. It was indignant only against the reports that the Syrian government carried out the attack (bit.ly/ms-douma), arguing alternately that Islamist rebels had carried out the attack, or that there had been no casualties at all.

For the following two weeks it agitated as if in war in Syria were not a reality of many years, but only a threat which might be opened by US military action.

CHMED

The Stop the War campaign, now run by Counterculture, chimed in, with the Morning Star website carrying an audio interview with Stop the War convenor Lindsey German (24 April).

Socialist Worker and The Socialist were more willing to think that Assad might have carried out attacks, but still saw the US-led strikes on military targets as a much worse thing than the civilian casualties on 7 April.

After conceding on 10 April that the 7 April attacks were real and “likely carried out by Syrian regime forces”, Socialist Worker on 17 April stressed that “details of the reported attack had not been confirmed”. In any case, its 10 April report started with condemnation not of the attacks, but of what SW saw as the greater evil: “the bluster and grandstanding of Western leaders.”

The Socialist, while assuring readers it gave no support to Assad, focused on excoriating him. “Why would the Syrian army launch a chemical attack now...? this recent attack might have been initiated by ‘rebel’ jihadist forces...”

The left needs to break from presenting the most reactionary forces as lesser evils simply on the grounds that they are in conflict with the USA.

Brexit is more and more troubled

By Gerry Bates

The House of Commons will vote soon on a proposal for Britain to stay in a customs union with the EU after Brexit.

On 18 May, the House of Lords defeated the Government on that issue, voting through a motion that ministers take steps to negotiate a new customs union with the EU.

On Monday 23rd, the Government declared: “We will not be staying in the customs union or joining a customs union”. Pro-customs-union Tory MPs may blink, faced with the prospect of the Government being defeated, but it will only take a few Tory rebels to defeat Theresa May’s administration.

The EU’s Customs Union is a common set of tariffs on items imported from outside the Customs Union area. Customs Union members, or partial-members, make up negotiating trade deals with other countries distinct from those the EU may have with those countries. That is the Tory right’s stated reason for opposing Customs Union membership, though in fact their promises of quick and easy trade deals with non-EU states to come with Brexit has proved empty.

Most experts believe that avoiding a “hard” border in Ireland — border posts, checks, etc. — is impossible because of how much remains in the Customs Union at least. Unless Northern Ireland is kept in the EU (and the Common Market as well), it cannot continue to trade with the rest of the EU.

The Tory government has suggested that bi-tech wizardry could finesse this contradiction, but the EU has comprehensively and officially rejected those Tory suggestions as “magical thinking”.

The EU is asking for an agreed solution on the Irish border by an EU summit on 28-29 June.

SHIFT

Although opinion polls show only a small shift in the Leave-Remain stance since the June 2016 referendum, that small shift has been enough to create a small Remain majority.

Surrey also shows a 56%-28% majority reckoning that the Government is doing a bad job on Brexit, and a 42%-24% majority believing that Brexit will bring economic harm.

On 15 April Liberal-Democrats and Greens launched a “People’s Vote” campaign for a referendum, before Brexit goes through, on whatever deal the Government comes up. They were supported by Labour MP Anna Soubry and Labour right-winger Chuka Umunna.

The leftish campaign Another Europe is Possible commented: “Another Europe has a different perspective to Remainers Tories and others on the right of politics. Our rallying cries are internationalism, solidarity, democracy, social and economic justice, free movement, workers’ rights, environmental protections and human rights.

“But this news is big — because it means that the parliamentary arithmetic for a referendum on the terms of the deal could well be there. In October, Theresa May will put her deal to a vote in parliament. If it fails, the case for a fresh popular vote ought to be overwhelming.

“AEIP said it would step up its activity in the coming weeks, and it is right to do so. The right for minorities to continue to campaign, and to become majorities, is central to democracy. The Tories cannot take the June 2016 vote — based on promises now exploded, like the supposed £350 million a week for the NHS, or the prospect of slick new trade deals around the world — as a mandate for whatever deal they scrape together.

And it is basic in a larger sense that we use every democratic opening or opportunity we can find to fight to retain the freedom of movement for workers between Europe and Britain which currently exists, and to defend the rights of EU-origin people already in Britain.

Since late 2016, the Labour Party has refused to back freedom of movement. Labour Party conference 2017 was pushed and persuaded into not debating the issue. That has to be changed.

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell told the Financial Times (2 March) that Labour’s current position on Europe is “like walking a tightrope”. In truth much of it is like sitting on a fence.

On 11 February he said Labour would not necessarily oppose a second referendum, though he would prefer a general election. On the economic issue, he has said (11 December): “We want to be as close as we possibly can to ensure tariff-free access... as close a relationship with the single market as we can and possibly a customs union... We want to keep all the options on the table and that way we think we can protect the economy...” He has also said that Labour will be “flexible” on free movement.

Solidarity will campaign to stop Brexit, for a second referendum, for free movement, for workers’ solidarity and unity across Europe, and for a workers’ united Europe.

Protest at Israeli shootings in Gaza: Two nations, two states

Monday 30 April, 7 May, 14 May 6.30-7:30pm

Kensington Court, off High St Kensington, London W8 5EA (near Israeli embassy)

By Lewisham AWL

On Monday 23 April the Momentum group in Lewisham (south London) held its Annual General Meeting to elect a new set of officers and to plan future work.

Up to 160 people turned up. Around 30 people were not able to get into the venue as it was full to capacity, and therefore were excluded from the meeting.

Maybe 60-70 had no previous record of local activity in Momentum or the Labour Party, and had been mobilised simply to vote out members of the existing steering group who were standing again for different roles, and specifically members of the AWL, which for months now has been the target of vicious slanders.

Because not everyone could get into the meeting, officers of the local group proposed reconvening the meeting at a later date and in a bigger venue. This proposal was made calmly and reasonably, but there were immediate objections, including from those who were butted out from the audience.

One person volunteered to find a larger room at nearby Goldsmiths college, and it was being investigated. Alex Nunns spoke about his book, _The Candidate_.

Towards the end of his speech he was interrupted and the meeting was told that a big room at a local pub was available — big enough to hold everyone.

Officers of Lewisham Momentum objected because the time was late and maybe because they were baffled, frightened or disgusted with the meeting, or they were not able to get in in the first place. The officers repeated the proposal to reconvene at another date. That provoked further baying.

Eventually, with a national Momentum official now in the chair, a vote to go to the pub was held, with a majority in favour. But it was followed by further barracking.

Over the last three years Lewisham Momentum has been active, lively, open for debate, and embraced a variety of different political strands. Unlike many Momentum groups these days, it has regular organising meetings in which its members vote on policy.

Workers’ Liberty members have been prominent because they have been active and shown much work to keep the group going. We have argued our political views on many issues, from free movement through anti-social model of gender identification (‘self labeling’) to do, always to convince, never to impose.

DEBATE

We have worked with some fantastic comrades in Lewisham Labour Party to build up this group, to create a structure where democratic debate can take place. We are one of many people, who are not going to be aired. We will continue to work with those comrades through thick and thin.

If democratic processes should put us in a minority, so be it. If the local AGM vote, so be it. But it must all be properly conducted and argued for.

The mobilisation for a takeover on 23 April came from an amalgam of groups and individuals behind a slate headed by Aaron Bas- tani from Novara Media. There was no open statement of why that politics Bastani and the rest of his slate stood for.

Bastani had never previously attended a local Momentum event. In typical Stalinist or self-designated ‘Stalinist’ fashion, the whole campaign for his slate was organised “behind the scenes”. People on the slate denied its existence right up until the meeting itself. The slate had no common goal except the ousting of the AWL.

Its political cement is no-spelled-out political statement or strategy, but misrepresenta-

tion and artificial scandal-mongering.

Most recently, AWL members on the steering committee Jill Mountford and Sacha Issaint had been expelled from Labour but that sup-

port the AWL.

Slanders against the AWL by Jill, as chair, controlled those speakers who were hostile to the meeting and the people who organised it. She made sure the meeting was the last chance for Momentum to vote in favour of trans rights. She could ask questions of the speaker, Maria Exall, the chair of the TUC LGBT committee (see statement on page one).

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On 23 April, slanders like that were deliberately used to draw out all kinds of (right wing generated) fears and hostilities towards the AWL, and to demonise the AWL and the Lewisham activists who work with us and have worked with us over the last three years. It was this kind of smear that led to a letter written on behalf of Momentum’s national steering committee in support of the AWL.

No one asked us, and no one asked us if we would participate in a meeting which was the billing of and the purpose for the Red London blog “Check Their Minutes”.

The Red London blog is trolling, melded to do, “against us”. Some of that group are self-described Stalinists, and some of them are part of the Red London clique. Some just go on about the micro-culture created in and around that group because of friendship networks.

That culture has involved shaming and shaming down political opponents on social media as “cranks” and “splitters”, and threatening to “drive them into the sea” (for an example of that outside Lewisham, see the “debate” on Facebook after a Red London proposed making an alternative left slate for the Labour Party National Executive).

The mobilisation for 23 April was a rotten bloc of different groups which came together to drive out the AWL, because we are perceived as a challenge to the consensus of “ne Marxists please, we are the Labour Party”.

That consensus, will, if it is not challenged, poisons the Labour Party for radical politics for years to come. What happens when class struggle revives in the UK, and many more people are ready to declare themselves boldly as Stalinists?

National Momentum was invited in by the splitters, not by the elected committee. Its representatives did not play a good role.

They tried to run the AGM from the outset but they did not do a fair job. One reason people were left outside is because Momentum delayed the ballot for the right wing and secondly by the left, absconding the methods and attitudes of the right, shutting down debate in Momentum and turning a blind eye to political thuggery. RECKLESS

These reckless accusations have real-live implications for real people, those who are parents or work with children. It is time that the labour movement outlawed Red London for this and similar behaviour.

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The unfolding scandal of the denial of health and social care to the now-aged children of the Windrush is a warning sign. It shows the sharp end of government racism, and the immense store of racist malice that the British ruling class is capable of unleashing on any group of foreign-born people it chooses. It is the fruit of years of right wing demagogy, in the press and in government, against migrants.

However, it is only the tip of the iceberg — and unless the left and the labour movement rally to defeat the Tory government and Brexit, more is to come.

It was in 2012 when then-Home Secretary Theresa May made her bid in the ongoing auction of racism, playing to the gallery of the right wing press and man-at-the-bar bigotry, declaring that “The aim is to create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants.”

The June 2016 Brexit referendum raised the stakes in that particular auction, dramatically. The success of the long-running ultra-reactionary campaign of Brexit demagogy saw the Tories playing catch-up with their own report, reiteration of the racism of Powell or of the National Front, of the BNP, or of Katie Hopkins. Those citizenship rights and that right to freedom of movement were wiped out in the 1981 British Nationality Act, which came after the 1948 British Nationality Act.

The Thatcher government did not need, repeat the vile racist rhetoric of Powell or of the Thatcher government did not need, to re-open the way to the inhuman attacks on these black people’s right to healthcare and social care. And the attack on black people’s free movement was a government attempt to open the door to the inhuman attacks on these black people’s right to healthcare and social care. And the attack on black people’s right to health care and social care.

The Thatcher government did not need, any more than the Tories today need, to re-shape Powell’s speeches with the arguments now made by segments of the trade union bureaucracy against freedom of movement. Roosevelt’s speeches with the arguments now made by segments of the trade union bureaucracy against freedom of movement.

Compare Powell’s speeches with the Daily Mail headlines about criminal floods of Eastern Europeans and the Tories’ UKIP Brexit campaign rhetoric — or indeed, compare the slogans of the dockers who marched to support Powell with the arguments now made by segments of the trade union bureaucracy against freedom of movement. Compare Powell’s speeches with the Daily Mail headlines about criminal floods of Eastern Europeans and the Tories’ UKIP Brexit campaign rhetoric — or indeed, compare the slogans of the dockers who marched to support Powell with the arguments now made by segments of the trade union bureaucracy against freedom of movement.

**WHOLE**

Racism, attacks on freedom of movement, murderous denial of basic services and rights, from the 1948 generation to today, all form a rotten whole.

Racism, attacks on freedom of movement, murderous denial of basic services and rights, from the 1948 generation to today, all form a rotten whole.

Every generation of arrivals to the UK is as deserving as the last, because all people of all backgrounds are as deserving as each other. Labour should commit to removing all NHS and social care charges. A Labour government should treat all migrants — whether they are economic migrants, asylum seekers, documented or undocumented migrants — exactly the same as people with UK citizenship when accessing public services. And Labour should come out clearly against Brexit.

To strike at the root of the outrage perpetrated by Rudd against Windrush passengers, the labour movement, the left and all friends of humanity and civilisation need to fight back against all racism and xenophobia, both its left and right wing variants; against all attacks on freedom of movement and rights for foreign-born people, be those attacked by right wing or “left wing” politics.

We defend freedom of movement and decent public services for all.
By Keith Road

Workers’ Liberty supporters and friends recently spent a number of days in France to learn from, and take part in, the movement in opposition to President Macron’s reforms.

We spoke to French socialists, trade unionists and student activists. During our stay we visited occupied universities, attended workplace and student general assemblies, and took part in a number of smaller and large demonstrations.

The background to the current unrest is the push by President Macron to reform the university application system; open the way to privatising the SNCF, French state railway company; and make massive cuts to the French welfare state. At the same time, Macron sent armed police to violently crush the occupiers of a proposed site for an airport (the “Zadistes”).

Workers’ Liberty supporters also visited France during the last wave of struggles against the El-Khomri labour law, which was pushed through by the Hollande government. That movement was defeated and the trade union leaderships hadn’t learned the lessons of that dispute. But this time, many of the activists we spoke to observed that the movement is growing and reckoned that Macron can be beaten.

A vital question is the political alternative to Macron, and the division of the left.

The trade union movement has been in slow retreat in France since the 1995 wave of strikes which defeated the Juppé plan, a series of neoliberal reforms which tore up pension, particularly on the railways. In the 1990s there was a rightward turn in the CFDT, which now has a “social partnership” policy. The CFDT has not been involved in the latest round strikes.

The largest union federation, the CGT, and others like SUD, FO and smaller federations have been the main drivers. On the political terrain, the hard left is influential within sections of the strike and student movement. The two largest organisations, the NPA and Lutte Ouvrière, are prominent but only number a few thousand each. The Front de Gauche – a lash up of ex-Socialist Party minister Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the Communist Party, and others – has broken down. The Socialist Party is in total disarray, with its Presidential candidate Benoît Hamon (the incumbent Socialist President, Hollande, did not even seek his party’s nomination) breaking away with most of the party’s youth to form Génération.s.

Within the trade unions the PCF still holds a number of positions in the CGT bureaucracy, while the NPA and LO mostly have people active at a workplace level as the equivalent of shop stewards.

France Insoumise, the party founded and led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, is a populist electoral campaign, divorced from and in competition with the labour movement. It has a nationalist policy about putting France first. It talks about the people rather than the workers and at its rallies the Tricolour is flown and the Marseillaise is sung, as a conscious move to dispense with the red flag and the Internationale. Mélenchon has spoken in support of Putin and he is recycling the Gaulish tradition of setting up France as a pole of opposition to the USA.

France Insoumise doesn’t function like a normal political party: there are no branch structures, none of the norms of labour movement democracy. Its strategy is to subordinate the labour movement to its electoral project, and the way it has related to this strike movement illustrates that.

One of Mélenchon’s lieutenants, filmmaker and journalist François Ruffin, has put out a call for a big demonstration on 5 May. It is billed as a family fun day, specifically called on a Saturday so as to divorce it from the strikes.

Unlike in Britain where strikes are normally accompanied by pickets and maybe a small rally, French workers combine strike days with large demonstrations like the one called on 19 April in Paris. This huge demonstration, coordinated by the CGT the largest union federation brought together workers and activists in cities across France from many sectors of the economy.

There is a need to develop a governmental alternative to Macron. In the absence of a strong political wing of the labour movement, perspectives for getting rid of the Macron government are weaker. The ability to pose a political alternative is as urgent a condition for toppling a government as a powerful industrial movement. But that political alternative must be on the basis of socialist, democratic, working-class politics.

A big controversy was the question of when to strike. The CGT’s strategy for the dispute is to strike two days in every five for a period of several weeks. The more radical but smaller union confederation SUD is arguing for “reconducting” the strike – going for an all-out strike, renewed by show of hands voting every morning. Supporters of this position say that the whole movement needs a shot in the arm from an escalation on the part of the transport workers, and they enjoyed widespread support from many supporters of both SUD and CGT at the stations we visited. Supporters of sticking to the CGT calendar argue that all-out strikes threaten to exhaust workers too soon.

These general assemblies form a model for how the trade union movement in the UK ought to conduct itself: all-grade, all-union workplace meetings, instead of dictats from on high. Of course, anti-trade union laws in the UK prevent a show of hands at a demonstration. The practice of General Assemblies in France is a backbone of the strike, allowing workers to build their political confidence by sharing ideas, discussing the mood of their colleagues, and planning a variety of actions, from brief workplace occupations to mass workplace tours, or visits to other local workplaces.

The General Assemblies help build solidarity in the local community. At Gare d’Austerlitz, the railworkers were also addressed briefly by students from the occupied Tolbiac campus down the road, and a CGT officer...
our mind, and that’s the win!”

who gave a report on solidarity work with staff at a local hospital.

**Clichy**

On 23 April, a strike day, around a hundred railway workers from different trade unions occupied the offices of the SNCF freight organisation in the rue de Villemene in Clichy, in the Parisian region.

The workers were protesting against the proposal to break up the SNCF railway company and place freight (as well as other rail services and networks) into separate subsidiary companies – a move which workers believe will open the way to a UK-style shattering of the service into many different companies, with different terms and conditions for their workers. The workers made clear that their unity in action today will defend the unity of their terms, conditions and collective agreements tomorrow.

The striking workers entered the building and draped it in their union banners. 200 members of management had to leave the building and break off work for most of the day.

One of the biggest sectors of the movement is university students. Currently, anyone who holds a Baccalauréat qualification in France can go to the university of their choice, places permitting.

Macron is proposing a reform which would introduce a selection system to university applications based on grades. But students point out that this is the road to a UK-style model of elite institutions for the rich and bargain-basement colleges for working-class students. Initially the fight against the reforms was slower to build than previous struggles, but, following an attack by a fascist gang on the occupation at Montpellier law school, probably arranged by the right-wing dean of the school, there were huge general assemblies were called in Marseille, Toulouse, Rennes and then in various universities across Paris.

**Students**

Over half of French universities are now involved in the fight.

These assemblies, like those in the workplaces, allow anyone to speak, to put forward a proposal and have it voted on. National student co-ordinations are held on a weekly basis with delegates coming from the various campuses to discuss how to build a more effective and stronger movement.

Since 1968 universities in Paris have remained almost entirely free of the police. After the demonstrations against the labour law and the huge police repression, police have managed to make their way back onto the campuses. One of the features of this movement has been the brutality by which the CRS and BAC (riot police) have broken up demonstrations (using water cannon and “flashball” bean-bag guns) and violently broken up the occupation of Tolbiac campus of Paris-1 University.

**Tolbiac**

Tolbiac, which had been occupied since 26 March, and which was a centre of activity, organising and socialising during the movement, was violently cleared out by riot police on 20 April.

Over 100 people were in the occupation when the police forced their way in and forced all of the occupiers out, chasing some occupiers over a ledge. Word spread that one of the occupiers had been hospitalised and was in a coma. A demonstration the next day culminated in another General Assembly at Censier, Paris-3, which called for a protest on 21 April at a local hospital demanding to know if any student or occupier had been seriously injured and ended up at the hospital. Samya Mokhtar, General Secretary of UNEF (one of the French student unions) in Paris-1 told Le Monde that, “one person was directly present at the scene, which happened when the CRS intervened. A young man wanted to jump from a low wall to outside auditoriums and, according to the direct witness, he was destabilised by a policeman. He fell head first on the floor. There was a lot of blood”.

Paris police denied that anyone required hospital treatment. A demonstration of around 100 people on Saturday 21st demanded the truth from the hospital and the police.

**UK students support the occupations**

National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts statement in solidarity with the student occupations in France

Occupations have been taking place around France in opposition to Macron’s education reforms, of which a key part is the introduction of selection in the university application process.

Not only are the criteria of selection dubious, but the introduction of selection is clearly part of a larger move to create a number of ‘elite’ universities in France capable of charging more for tuition, thereby marketingising French higher education. The occupations have also been part of an expression of solidarity from students in support of the mass strikes across France, including striking rail workers.

On the night of the 19th-20th April, the CRS (French riot police) violently cleared out an occupation at Université Paris-1 Panthéon-Sorbonne which had been taking place for four weeks.

We condemn the violent tactics of the police and offer our solidarity with the occupiers and all students who have been injured, and join students in France in their call for the release of information from hospitals of students who have been hospitalised by police.
Socialism or capitalism?

On 17 March Katy Dollar of Workers’ Liberty debated Mark Pennington, Professor of Political Economy and Public Policy at King’s College London, on Socialism or the free market?

Here we present extracts from their speeches. The full audio of the debate can be found at bit.ly/SovCa

Katy Dollar

Capitalism has brought us progress, an explosion of technology and industry, unprecedented productivity and efficiency. It has connected globally and built human cooperation on a scale not yet known before.

Markets have produced products to meet the needs of people of whom they have no direct knowledge. We have stuff people 100 years ago did not have and some things they did not even know they wanted.

If I took a surf into my house and showed him my bed, my mobile and my fridge, if I showed them my 90-plus year old grand-mother who is still alive thanks to better diet and medical advances, they would be impressed. We are living through a period of peak in global life experience.

But that isn’t the whole story. Everyday 22,000 children die because of poverty.

Half of all deaths of under-fives in the world are attributable to hunger. Babies and toddlers die because the market doesn’t allow for the food to get to them. 168 million children are engaged in child labour. Over half of those are in hazardous work.

What is it in the free market that breeds these inequalities?

It is a particular exchange, the exchange between worker and employer. I sell my ability to work, my skills, my time and energy, and someone buys it. It is like selling or buying anything else in the market, a mobile phone, a nuclear weapon, the difference being that anything else in the market, a mobile phone, and then move on with your life with either the bulk of your life. The exchange decides this exchange your boss then controls the these inequalities?

We have all the building blocks of that work. We can do away with this wretched system.

GLOBALISATION

Globalisation has linked people together. Across the economy, in the public and private sectors, cooperation happens every day at work, and even more on the picket line and other arenas of struggle.

Democratic planning would mean the ending of insecurity and hunger. Work would be shared out, ending long work-hours. The shortening of the working week and the loss of insecurity would mean we would have more time to think, to be with the people we love, to read, to play. Human culture could flourish from that leisure. Particular distribution of resources will chip away at the source of violence and war.

We have all the building blocks of that work. We can do away with this wretched system.

I will cover some of the arguments against socialism and for capitalism. One of the most damaging of them is that we have had socialism, with Stalin and his like, and that it led to state terror, removal of freedom and starvation.

I would answer: Stalinism was not socialism. It was separated from socialism by a river of working-class blood. I don’t say that after the event, because it failed. People like you were caught up in it.

The tradition I am proud to be a part of championed underground workers’ movements who challenged the “actually existing socialisms” and others. We were cheered when people rose against those states.

Since the 1880s Marxists had argued against state socialism, against bureaucratic control of the economy. They had insisted that socialism is democratic and controlled by the working class.

1917 was socialist in the sense it was the beginning of the international revolution. But, as leaders of the 1917 revolution said, and as Marxists had said long before 1917 was that the prerequisites for socialism grew out of advanced capitalism.

Socialism developed not from the best achieved by advanced capitalism, but in competition with and in imitation of the West. It was motivated by growth, not by a need to one of the world economy in human life. It was much more part of the history of the era dominated by capitalism than it was part of our socialist future.

The new technologies which arise under capitalism are developed by collective social processes. The development of mobile phones was funded through a series of large contracts with the LAPD. In computing the big advances have originated in academia, in state-funded programs for the military, and more recently with open source development.

Some major advances support the “market drives innovation” theory, but most have not. Fridges and vaccines and the internet all came out of the public sector. Major innovation requires failure after failure after failure in order to make breakthroughs. That is not sustainable for a private business.

The biggest driver of technological development in the 20th century was the US Army. Progress has often been based on human need and liberation rather than death and power, where we could be and what we could have right now!

The market keeps some people very rich and others in absolute poverty. That is the supposed freedom and rationality of the market.

You are pushed down, not because you worked hard, or you stole something, or you attacked your boss — not even because people do not want what you produce. There was no natural disaster to explain the housing crash, and it didn’t come through the newly-liberated all exercising their freedom to try camping, but lives were ripped apart.

Under capitalism, right to live for the majority falls below the right of the rich to get richer. We now have everything we need to leave that system behind. We should do that.

Mark Pennington

I’m going to make the case that to achieve workers’ liberty you need capitalist institutions and substantial, although maybe not economic participation of the means of production.

You need a regime where individuals or groupings — firms, corporations or cooperatives — own the means of production. That does not exclude some forms of state ownership or the redistribution of income. But what distinguishes it from capitalist regimes is that there is a genuine instance of private ownership of the means of production.

Even if the pragmatic objections to socialism could be overcome, capitalist institutions are preferable because they hold people to a higher ethical ideal.

The first pragmatic objection is that it is not possible to have an advanced economy in a system without substantial reliance on market prices. Prices convey dispersed information about the changes in scarcity, supply, and demand, of countless different inputs and outputs. Profit and loss accounting within the context of market pricing enables producers to learn which goods generate the maximum value from the minimum of inputs.

Any economic system which is remotely rational needs to be able to communicate where the maximum value is compared to the minimum. Without market prices you cannot have a rational allocation of economic resources.

We have seen the consequence of that in all sorts of socialist regimes that have moved away from markets. They have always been characterized by bureaucratic production of things that people do not want, and production with inputs that are too expensive relative to the demands of the people for whom they existed.

If prices are to be effective communicators of information, they cannot be determined effectively with a single public owner of the means of production. They have to come from a bottom-up process where decision-makers are at liberty to bid up or down on prices in response to circumstances with which only they are familiar.

In a market economy each person is a data point. Each time someone chooses one purchase over another or one investment over another they transmit a piece of information about their circumstances to other actors that they can then adapt to.

RISK

Multiple ownership of property disperses risk, whether it be equal or not. If you have a single farmer that owns the mistakes, then the whole system is affected in a negative way. If ownership is dispersed, there will be mistakes, but the effects can be minimised because they are dispersed in a regime of private and not social ownership.

A private property regime would allow for what I would describe as permission-less innovation. Progress in all fields of human endeavours occurs when people are encouraged — by the way the majority believes is right, and do something different. Then their ideas are copied and we have progress occurring by a ripple effect.

Progress never occurs by a majority deciding what counts as innovation. It is what minorities spot and move ahead with without requiring permission of large numbers of other actors.

In real world capitalism we have too many examples of privatization of the gains and the socialisation of losses. If you sell off a grain in the financial crisis, the bailing of the banks and agricultural subsidies. They are genuine problems. But they are bugs in the system, not inherent features of it.

The top 100 companies across the world account for about 6% of global GDP. Those companies only have the power that they
have because they sell things that people want. They require the consent of people who buy those products. They might use their power inappropriately to steal from others and to get favours from the state. But in general those corpora- tions have to compete for people’s money. The arguments I have sketched explain why capitalism has been so successful compared to the failure of socialism. They explain why capitalist societies are more prosperous and why living standards for the working class have increased by 1800% since the industrial revolution. They explain why in the last 20 years we have seen the biggest ever global reduction in poverty as China has moved towards a socialist model. They also explain why in so- cialist regimes, people have to be kept in. There are very few people running to go to socialist regimes! There are persuasive arguments but there is an important objection. Is socialism not to be preferred because it expects more from people than capitalism? Socialism has failed, say some people, because people are too selfish. If people were not selfish and were socialised to think about the common good and not private greed, then collective ownership could work. They would not need private property rights to in- centivise them to act in the right way. People would give freely to the disadvantaged because that is the morally right thing to do. To continue the argument, it is said that capi- talism has failed because its leaders have abused power, but if people had proper re- spect for others then those in positions of power would only ever do what is right for the common good. They would not dream of privatising gains and socialising losses. There is no need for the collective owner- ship of property to lead to famines or lead to gulags.

The problem with this kind of argument is that it can be applied to the case for capital- ism. Real world capitalism already out-per- forms really existing socialism but it could work far better if people could be socialised out of some of the behaviours they have in today’s world. What are those behaviours? Capitalism today falls short of its potential because people do not treat each other as ends in themselves. They treat them as instru- ments to be used and exploited. There is no inherent exploitative about trade. It represents the principle of reciprocity. But in today’s world people take advantage of in- formational imbalances and mistakes of other people to rip off their trading partners. If they were socialised out of such selfish trades, then we would have the benefits of trade and division of labour without the downsides. Capitalism falls short of its potential because those who lack the opportu- nity to live a good life through no fault of their own are often neglected. In so far as their interests are catered for at all, people have to be coerced into doing the right thing through the welfare state. If people were more socialised into re- specting the moral worth of others, then capi- talism would provide more and better opportunities to the disadvantaged.

People would not need to be coerced into doing the right thing. We could dispense with the entire apparatus of the welfare state and rely on voluntary giving — not patron- ising charity but giving on the basis of gen- uinely wanting to improve the lives of others. Others say that to keep the system operat- ing, it required a system of coercion to enforce property rights. But if people were properly socialised, then we could dispense with the entire apparatus of state coercion. We could have a world where we could abol- ish the criminal justice system, an anarcho- capitalist society where the state withers away as it supposed to do but never does under free-access communism.

Many socialists will argue that this is fan- tasy. It is fantasy to ask people to transform themselves under a capitalist system that makes people behave badly. If we are sup- posed to accept that socialism will not end in famine, dictatorship and gulags, then we should also accept that it is possible to so- cialise people to mitigate the morally repre- hensible aspects of the capitalism we see today.

It seems to me that both socialism and capi- talism would perform better if people were more morally virtuous. In my view though capitalism would still be the morally superior option.

To suggest that people will be incapable of respecting the humanity of others unless dif- ferences are eradicated is not to appeal in the highest in human nature.

**Asking people to respect differences, including differences in wealth, that result in different value judgements and choices, and still to respect others with humanity, is to hold people to a higher ethical stan- dard.**

Why Greece’s “left government” faded

**CHALLENGES OF A LABOUR GOVERNMENT**

Greek socialist Dora Polenta spoke to Solidarity about the challenges that were faced by Syriza and the lessons for a Corbyn government

The Syriza election was a reflection of the hard, militant class struggle by the work- ing class and neighbourhood community movements against the attacks of the “Black Block” Memorandum govern- ments of the years 2010 to 2012.

Syriza gave political substance to this movement, and it carried all of this move- ment’s political contradictions.

The movement had only a vague idea of what it expected of the Syriza government. It expected some form of relief, to get rid of the Memorandum laws and privatisation, to re- store wages and pensions and collective bar- gaining, to give some right to housing. These demands were concretised in the Thessa- loniki Declaration.

People were hoping that the Syriza govern- ment would restore what they had pre-Mem- orandum. It was a defensive rather than an aggressive type of hope.

There was a distinct change in Syriza, in terms of who made decisions, between 2012 and 2015. As Syriza was moving towards government, there was a shift towards petty- bourgeois technocratic politics. In 2012, by that was a more left form of talk, and from a European social movement, about working-class control, talking about nation- alising the banks. That was all wiped out when Syriza moved into government. With Yanis Varoufakis, there was the idea that Syriza was going to outsmart the creditors.

Syriza gained power and there was ini- tially an anamnestic attempt to create a pro-gov- ernment social movement, with rallies and demonstrations supporting the government implementing the Thessaloniki Declaration. But soon Syriza abandoned any attempt to relate, even in a top-down way, to any friendly forces in other countries in Europe. A team around Alexis Tsipras took control, and they conducted negotiations with the EU in a secretive way. Democracy within Syriza was strangled, and there was no attempt from the Syriza rank and file to control what was happening in the negotiations.

For six months, the Syriza government was like a person free-falling from a block of flats, and we were looking for the final crash.

There was a hope that gravity might be de- fied when Alexis Tsipras called the referen- dum in June 2015. Up until that time, the movement was in a sort of limbo. It was wait- ing – the government was waiting as well. Now there were all these people on the streets, talking about getting rid of the Mem- orandum at all costs.

The referendum majority was for No; but Syriza capitulated. The anti-Memorandum movement was defeated.

They co-operated with openly nationalist, anti- democratic formations like Syriza, but also educated its members. They turned to social democratic formations like the Democratic Left.

The most important lesson for us here and now from the Syriza experience is full de- mocratisation of the party; it is very impor- tant to fight against a leadership clique that becomes unaccountable and detaches itself from the democratic decision-making of the party. It is important to build unity between the party and trade unions at the rank and file level.

Most importantly, we must prepare for the ferocity of the class struggle which will be unleashed by both national and international forces. We need a programme that recognises the new situation and fragility of forma- tions like Syriza.

We must understand that the revolu- tionary left, should participate in centrist formations like Syriza. We must also educate our cadres and maintain its autonomy while being a part of these movements.
Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. The capitalists’ control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society. The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers’ control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats’ and managers’ privileges.

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

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

• Independent working-class representation in politics.

• A workers’ government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.

• A workers’ charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.

• Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.

• A workers’ movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers’ unity against racism.

• Open borders.

• Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.

• Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.

• Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.

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

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

Events

Saturday 28 April

What organisation of socialists do we need? Workers’ Liberty day school

12-5pm, room 736, IoE, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL
bit.ly/2IqM5P6

Saturday 28 April

Sheffield March for the NHS

1.30pm, Barker’s Pool, Sheffield S1 2JA
bit.ly/2lqM5S6

Monday 30 April

Anti-Semitism and the left: A discussion

6.30pm, 208 Woodhouse Lane, Leeds LS2 9DX
bit.ly/2HL2Zki

Tuesday 1 May

London May Day march

Assemble noon, Clerkenwell Green; march to Trafalgar Square.
bit.ly/md-2018

Monday 7 May

Chesterfield May Day march and rally

11am, Town Hall, Rose Hill, Chesterfield S40 1LP
bit.ly/2Jn2dU0

Thursday 10 May

NHS Free for All Activists Meeting

6.30pm, Unite, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8TN
bit.ly/tuc-12

Far right in local elections

LABOUR

By Luke Hardy

On 3 May UKIP and groups to its right are likely to face a well-deserved drubbing in the local elections.

UKIP will be standing in only a fraction of the seats they stood for in 2014, the last time most of the same council wards were up for election. In 2014 UKIP got 16% of the vote and won hundreds of new councillors. This time round UKIP’s support is likely to continue to drop, as it did in the 2017 general election, when it got under 2% of the vote. Since then they have been through two more leaders and have shown little sign of revival.

The newly energised Labour Party, organising and campaigning, which has won back some of the disaffected working-class voters who voted UKIP on the basis of its faux anti-establishment credentials. But that is not the sole, or the main reason for UKIP’s decline.

BREAK

The vote for Brexit and a shift to the right by the Tories under Theresa May has cut the political ground from under UKIP. The Tories are adopting much of UKIP’s policies and rhetoric.

A new ultra-Eurosceptic party, Democrats and Veterans, led by former UKIP leadership candidate, John Rees Evans, is also standing in these local elections.

On the fascist far right there is the welcome news that the last BNP sitting councillor is standing down. Their decline has been even more dramatic. As recently as nine years ago the BNP won nearly a million votes and had 50 councillors, a Greater London Authority member and two MEPs. Now the husk of the BNP is standing a handful of paper candidates with no hope of winning.

A new party of the far right, the “For Britain Movement”, is standing in just 15 seats.

For Britain was founded by Anne Marie Waters, who was also a candidate for the leadership of UKIP. She called for UKIP to become a party organised around anti-Muslim populism and demagoguery. She won 21% of the leadership vote in September 2017 and then left to form For Britain. Hope Not Hate, an anti-racist group, characterise the group as “a British attempt to build a ‘counter-jihad’”, that is a counterpart to parties like AfD in Germany and the PVV in the Netherlands. A party which will focus on scaremongering about Muslims and opposition to Muslim migrants.

Hope Not Hate rate For Britain’s electoral and organisational prospects as poor. The left and anti-racists definitely needs to be vigilant about For Britain.

They have managed to unite much of the far right with some of the more populist UKIP activists. Tommy Robinson, previously of the EDL, is involved and the party seems to be well funded, if their website and the glossy leaflets they are using in Leeds are anything to go by.

In Anne Marie Waters they have a leader with a profile and an unusual biography — she started out as a Labour Party, LGBT and women’s rights activist. However she has decisively moved to the anti-Muslim right, working with street racists from around the EDL as part of a failed attempt to replicate the Pegida movement and its mass demonstrations against Muslim refugees in Germany.

For Britain’s policy platform is explicit about opposing what it calls the Islamification of Britain. They vilify millions of British people from Muslim backgrounds and more recent migrants as an existential threat to “British culture” and blame Islam for the fringe who are terrorists.

The labour movement needs to confront and defeat organised racists in elections, through a combative Labour Party fighting on the ground against the spread of their ideas.

We need to mobilise to drive them from the streets when they organise racist demonstrations.
UCU: new network launches

By Ollie Moore

Planned strikes by members of the University and College Union (UCU) in pre-1992 university, aimed to stop cuts to the University Superannuation Scheme for academic workers’ pensions, have been suspended after union members voted to accept an employers’ offer.

UCU members voted by 64% to 36%, on a turnout of over 60%, to accept an offer from bosses’ organisation Universities UK which proposed to set up a joint “expert panel” to review pension reform. However, many UCU activists argued that the deal, which did not come with any firm guarantee to abandon plans to reform pensions, or any long-term commitment to retaining the status quo, could only postpone, rather than defeat, the attacks.

Activists also argued that the UCU leadership, including General Secretary Sally Hunt, effectively gerrymandered the ballot by circulating misleading emails about the UUK deal.

The substantial minority which voted to reject the deal and continue striking reflects a significant upsurge of rank-and-file organisation in the UCU. Dozens of branches passed policy opposing the deal and mobilised for a no vote. The website “USS Briefs” published regular bulletins analysing and commenting on particular aspects of the dispute, and a new network, “UCU Rank-and-File”, has been provisionally established, with a formal launch meeting due to take place in London on 29 April.

The existing “UCU Left”, which is dominated by the SWP and whose supporters will meet on 28 April, functions almost exclusively as an electoral machine rather than engaging in transformative struggle within the union.

Members have been discussing what a transformed UCU would look like on Twitter using the hashtag #UCUOfMyDreams.

End UoL outsourcing!

By Gemma Short

Cleaners, porters, security officers, receptionists, gardeners, post room and audio-visual staff at the University of London will strike on 25-26 April.

The workers, organised by the IWGB union, are employed by a range of outsourcing companies that have contracts with the university. They are fighting to be directly employed by the university and for parity of terms and conditions with currently directly-employed workers. Outsourced workers currently receive inferior pensions, and less holiday, sick, maternity and paternity pay.

For a work/life balance!

From Tubeworker bulletin

London Underground Jubilee Line drivers are unhappy with new duty schedules forced on them by management. Like much of the Tube, the Jubilee Line gets busier and busier each year, and working patterns deteriorate with the pressure ramped up too.

Drivers have decided it is time to say enough is enough, with both unions likely to declare a dispute.

The key issue is work/life balance, in particular weekend working. When reps negotiated with management on the draft schedules, the line manager was absent. We are now told these sheets are good for us as workers as they give a better service to passengers. Great for them, but that doesn’t help improve our work life balance.

It was agreed at the 2015 Pay Dispute that weekend working would go down. It hasn’t, it’s gone up. And not just on the Jubilee Line. Tubeworker believes work/life balance is a crucial concern for all Tube workers. Something we should all fight together to improve.

Follow Tubeworker online: www.workersliberty.org/twblog

CWU conference debates free movement

By a CWU member

The Communication Workers’ Union (CWU) conference met on 22-23 April, with sector conferences following.

At the general conference one of the big issues debated was the Windrush scandal, and the union overwhelmingly expressed its solidarity with Windrush migrants and their families.

Unfortunately this compassion from migrants did not last into the same afternoon when a motion calling for the CWU to affiliate to the Labour Campaign for Free Movement fell heavily. The union made sure it was tailing the Labour leadership’s position on the response to Brexit and free movement. General Secretary Dave Ward spoke against the motion, claiming it was “about pushing Labour beyond where it is”, and “about elevating above any other consideration the free movement of people.”

On a more positive note there was a debate on pushing forward for a genuine rank-and-file approach, based on the structures of the union, which fights for greater democracy and more radical and creative industrial action.

Labor manifesto. Corbyn also spoke at the conference and was well received.

The CWU ratified the decision to affiliate to Momentum, which was overwhelmingly carried. Although there were concerns of Momentum, the overwhelming feeling was it was better to be involved.

Discussion was also held on the redesign of the union. The current leadership is looking to change how the union is organised, there were some good contributions on maintaining a lay organisation and particularly getting young members involved. There will be a special conference in the Autumn to make decisions on the re-design. It is likely that any moves to cut back on democracy, for example by moving away from annual conferences or to more appointed officials, will be opposed by members.

The telecoms conference, which happens from Tuesday 24 April, will be meeting in the shadow of a controversial deal on the closure of the BT pensions scheme. Debate on the scheme is unlikely to overturn the deal but it may see significant opposition.

Shoddy and divisive pay offer

By a delegate

The main discussion at the Union Health conference (16-18 April) was the current pay offer. 24 hours before delegates debated the issue, the ballot was sent out to members with a recommendation from the leadership for acceptance.

After this undemocratic move the debate was fairly meaningless, but anyway, a 65:35 majority stuck with the position of the executive.

The basics of the deal are a three-year, below-inflation, pay rise, with additional increases for some through abolition of band 1 and a reduction of increments, alongside a step towards performance related pay. It’s a shoddy and divisive offer, which dilutes rather than builds up the industrial strength of the union, but the leadership argued the negotiations had broken the pay cap and won big gains for the lowest paid. We should oppose the leadership and fight for better.

The ballot closes on the 5 June.

DLR strikes suspended

By Gemma Short

Workers on the DLR were due to strike on 20-24 April. Strikes were suspended after what the RMT union said was “signific­ant progress” made in talks at ACAS with contractor Keolis Amey.

No further details have emerged of what that progress may involve.
I first got involved through one of our organisers, Garrett. I've been a member of the union since before the September strike but we didn't have the numbers in Watford at that point to ballot, but I attended the strike committee meeting in Crayford. I helped build up the campaign with workers from the other stores.

I joined the BFAWU online when I started working at McDonald's, I had previously been a member of Unite Community and I had heard about the Bakers' union being the union for some-one working in McDonald's. When I was in Unite Community I was involved with solidarity activ-ity with PCS members on strike, and with Labour in the last elec-tion.

After the first strike McDonald's announced a pay rise for lots of workers. But our core demands are still the same. £10 an hour, and an end to the youth rates: scrap zero hour contracts, and a choice of fixed hour contracts; union recogn-ition; and an end to bullying in the workplace.

Since the strike last September we've built up strength, we now have five stores striking. After the last strike we got people coming up to us in restaurants talking about it, it was really important for getting people into the campaign. We recruited a lot of people from the publicity of the last strikes.

We've been out speaking to people outside of the restaurants and recruiting people to the union. We've been talking to them about the importance of our bold de-mands and linking up their expe-riences with the struggle nationally. It's been brilliant hav-ing some of the people who were on strike last time being organisers for the union and going into stores organising. We will be growing the membership up until the day of the strike.

What's really interesting is how many people now know about the McStrike. People talk about it in the workplace. Watford is the hometown of the CEO, and this has raised the profile of the camp-aign. He even visited Watford last December. I think the cam-paign is having an impact on the wider industry. There are now workers organising in TGI Fri- day's, (Unite), Burger King and KFC (BFAWU).

It's true the strike has had an im-pact in the wider labour move-ment. It helps that we've had the support of people like McDonnell and Corby, and Laura Pidcock MP (a former McDonald's worker). That has had a big im-pact, particularly in popularising it. Two years ago talking about a strike in McDonald's would have been impossible, but this shows it can be done.

We have frequent meetings with the union organisers, and train us and give us practical help. We are maximising every single one of our members, and empowering them with skills to fight back. We are getting workers to put in griev-ances about issues such as sched-u-les being up late. When we win those cases workers are able to see what we are able to achieve and are joining the union.

The first strike was mostly about publicity rather than hitting Mc-Donald's profits, and it's some of the same this time. The impact on profits is a secondary issue, but if we hit them where it hurts with their public image we can win. McDonald's usually have workers who have been prepared for the strike, sometimes by getting in workers from other restaurants. Their strategy is damage limita-tion.

The best experience during the dispute has been the sheer amount of support from the wider labour movement — meeting McDonnell and Corby was a highlight. When we held the rally in Westminster, it really enthused a lot of people, and lots of people joined the union at that meeting.

The biggest lesson I've learnt is that the best thing to do is to always ask questions of work-ers, find their main concerns and talk about how the union can address those issues.