Defend free movement! Oppose Brexit!

LABOUR AND BREXIT: MEMBERS MUST DECIDE

In response to the continuing fiascos and scandals about the shape of Brexit, the Labour Party is edging towards a “less-Brexit” stance. But it remains evasive.

Labour members and trade unionists must be able to debate this out at Labour conference on 23-26 September this year.

The labour movement needs a policy debated through the ranks, not just “managed” by self-accredited sages and scribblers in the Leader’s Office. Only then can it have ideas which it can take out to the unorganised and the wavering voters, to convince them.

More page 5
Students: unite and renew the student movement  
By Workers' Liberty students

The conference of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts is being held in Sheffield on 8-10 June.

The conference follows a series of important industrial disputes in education — for lecturers' pensions and against the destruction of further education — from which the National Union of Students has been shamefully absent. These disputes form the background for our discussions.

A groundswell of solidarity from local student activist groups, Labour Clubs and others showed meaningful support for the strike where the NUS failed. This needs to be built on.

We need to renew and unite the student movement on a clear political basis. Loyalty to cliques or electoral factions is no substitute for unity around ideas and demands.

We need a student movement whose representatives, especially those who say they are on the left, are supported, but also tested, by a strong grassroots movement. In stead we have had from some quarters vaguesness about politics (combined with stern demands for personal loyalty). Such actions are those of an unaccountable leadership.

We need open argument about politics, and for those politics to be put to the test in action. Motions passed in support of strikes at NUS conferences and student union councils are no good if the elected leaders of the student movement feel justified in ignoring them.

The student movement needs to unite not only around the demand for free education and an end to marketisation.

It also needs to give a voice to the widely-shared pro-migrant sentiments of young people who reject Brexit's racist undertow.

It needs to unite around demands for democratic campuses, to end police monitoring of students, and to protect student activists from prosecution and the state.

We need such a programme of political and democratic demands to be extended to local students' unions, and other mass organisations like Labour Students.

Such a programme can clear the way for action — demonstrations, protests, campaigns — which can draw in new activists and renew the student movement. And for that, we need the student left to unite on a principled, clear basis.

Star says: trust the Tories, trust the League

By Rhodri Evans

Editorials in the Morning Star on 23 May showed what wretched depths the Star is bottomed by its Europhobia. The Morning Star, continuation of the old Stalinist lie-sheet the Daily Worker, is much faded journalistically, but still gets money from some union leaders: the 23 May issues boasts of subsidies from PCS, Unison, and Unite. It has some influence in Momentum.

No, says the first editorial, there is no risk of the return of a “hard” Irish border. A report by MEP’s has proposed a “smart border”. “Technology” can do the trick. Which is just what the Tories say.

The Star feels a need to concede that the prospective coalition government in Italy of the hard-right League and demagogic Five Star is unsavoury and “hostile to refugees”. But the main message of its second editorial is that “fundamental democratic and national [!] principle” means it should have its way.

Those who are anxious about the chauvinist coalition are so really only because it may increase public spending and dispute EU rules.

It looks now as if Italy will have a new election in August. The Star claims that the alternative to the League-Five-Star team is “an unelected technocratic regime”.

In fact the candidate for prime minister of the League and Five Star was Giuseppe Conte, not even a technocrat but an unelected law professor with a dodgy CV.

The landed plutocracy

By Martin Thomas

The Crown, the Church, and five aristocratic estates with a collective wealth of £22 billion still own a thousand acres of central London’s residential building land.

The wealthiest of the private landowners are the Duke of Westminster, Earl Cadogan, Viscount Portman, Baroness Howard de Walden, and the Duke of Bedford.

The “Who Owns England” blog has dug up the records — official statistics are very patchy — and reckon that the Crown, the Church, and 14 private estates own around 1,453 acres of central London, or about 600 hectares (bit.ly/landown).

At rates of £50 to £90 million per hectare — most of that land is in central London, where land prices are highest — that is £30 to £50 billion. The landowners get hundreds of millions each year in “ground rent” (a component of rent paid to the owner of the land, not to the owner of the building) and the certainty of an increase in their wealth without the least effort on their part. At any time they can cash in by selling a bit of their land.

Expropriating the big landowners, or a milder measure like taxing their wealth gains from land-price rises, would not solve the problem of house prices spiralling out of proportion to incomes. But it would help.

The early-19th century economist David Ricardo, whom Marx regarded highly, believed that in a capitalist society rents on land must tend to rise faster than wages or even profits, and would eventually, by squeezing those incomes, reduce capital to stagnation.

Actually, for reasons partly but not entirely uncovered in Marx’s critique of Ricardo on this question, something like the opposite has happened. Land was a big part of total private wealth until late in the 19th century, but it has relatively declined over the long term to a small part today. Not only a negligible part.

Ground rents have generally been fixed for a long period, 99 years, or 999 years. Between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and World War 1, the general price level was fairly stable long-term, about 100 times the level today. Between World War One and today it has increased 100-fold; between World War Two and today, 40-fold.

Some ground rents have been so diminished by inflation that the landowners do not even bother to collect them. Landowners have sold off their land bit by bit, and most residential land is now publicly-owned anyway.

Now landowners are trying to claw back. Many deals say that ground rents will double every twenty years, or, more recently, even every ten years. Some say that ground rents will rise in line with RPI. Ground rent is re-emerging as a significant drain.

Expropriate the landowners!

Organise to protest Trump visit

By a student activist

Activists in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts are planning to join the mass protests that will greet Trump's arrival in the UK on 13 July.

For young people, and school and college-age students especially, Trump is a particularly menacing figure because he threatens to annulate the future world that the young will inherit. His fight against efforts to stop climate change; his reckless nuclear grandstanding; and his support for closed borders and migrant-hunting all promise to create a darker and more dangerous world in decades to come.

In the USA, Trump’s callous disregard for the victims of school shootings and his flippancy, absurd comments about arming teachers led to a movement of mass school walk outs by school students, protesting his arrogance and calling for gun controls.

We think that when Trump visits the UK, school and college students should take a lead from American young people and, where possible, organise walk outs on Friday 13 July ahead of the larger national protests on Saturday 14 July.

The movement of protest against Trump should not just be about denouncing the evils of Trump’s own politics, but about building a movement based on positive slogans, that can offer a genuine alternative to the populist right wing.

Once left wing, now corrupt

By Gerry Bates

At least 83 protestors have been killed so far as Nicaragua’s once-left-wing president Daniel Ortega deploys police and backed street demonstrations and blockades demanding his resignation.

The protests first exploded in mid-April against Ortega’s plan to increase workers’ social-security benefits and cut pensions. On 22 April, Ortega retreated on that.

Protests have continued. They reached a new high on the weekend 26-27 May, after talks mediated by the Catholic Church broke down.

Ortega’s main bases of support have been the bosses’ group Cosep (Superior Council of Private Enterprise), the military, and some sectors of the poorest dependent on government welfare payments. Cosep and the military are now taking their distance.

The opposition has been spearheaded by students, and had support from better-off workers. The reports available to us don’t suggest it is specially left-wing.

The events demonstrate the impasse of governments which try to be left-wing by ‘clever’ manipulation from above within the constraints of neoliberalism.

More online at www.workersliberty.org
Italy: Salvini sets the pace

By Hugh Edwards

Italian President Sergio Mattarella has refused to confirm the appointment of Euro-critic Paolo Savona as Minister of Finance in the new coalition government of the populist Five Star Movement and the Lega Nationale.

With Mattarella’s decision (taken, he said, “to save the constitution”) and the subsequent resignation of the newly-appointed Prime Minister, the obscure Professor Conte, the government has collapsed.

As the markets took fright after the government’s fall, the cost of financing Italy’s two trillion dollar public debt has risen alarmingly, to its highest point since 2014. Mattarella, like many of his predecessors, immediately summoned an ex-IMF financial wizard to serve as a “neutral” Prime Minister, charged with bringing to life a government of similar experts to soothe the markets before the inevitable elections sometime in autumn.

In 2011 the Berlusconi government was similarly turfed out of office (via the intervention of another “neutral” President, Giorgio Napolitano) amidst a similar financial crisis. But that was then, when the bi-partisan political landscape was occupied by another major mass centre-left party, solid and united, and backed by the country’s leading trade union confederations: the Democratic Party, tried and trusted “responsible” defenders of the capitalist social order in moments like this, as they proved once more over the blitzkrieg of austerity launched by the Mario Monti government “to save the nation”.

Now that landscape has changed utterly, and unlike Berlusconi in 2011, neither the reactionary, xenophobic and racist National League of Matteo Salvini nor Luigi Di Maio’s Five Star Movement have any intention of “responsibly” undertaking the desperate efforts of the individual who kicked them out of office.

Di Maio has called for the President’s impeachment, while Salvini, as bets someone politically and personally first-name terms with the fascists of Casa Proudh and Forza Nuova, has invoked a “march on Rome”, if immediate elections are not held.

In the present atmosphere any election called by Mattarella, even if it might calm the markets and restore some degree of political stability, would inevitably see an even larger majority for the populist duos, this time with a triumph for the Lega and Salvini. Since the election, Salvini has been the dominant and more calculating in terms of pace, direction and dynamic of his tactics. He arrogantly warned Berlusconi that if he voted for the President’s proposed Prime Minister, the alliance of Forza Italia and the Lega would be finished.

Similarly Salvini has promised that if returned to power as Minister of the Interior, he will launch a huge programme of deportations of “illegal” immigrants. He also promises a massive increase in detention centres (which were set up by the first centre-left Romano Prodi government, then expanded by the first Berlusconi regime, whose repressive regime was “aimed at criminals, mendicants, and skivers young and old”.

Macron: next big protest 2 June

By Michael Elms

On 26 May, the mass mobilisations against French President Emmanuel Macron’s anti-social reforms continued, with hundreds of thousands taking to the streets in demonstrations billed as a “popular tide”.

Macron wants to cut jobs on the railway, close rural branch lines, break up the state railway company and make it easier for employers in the transport sector to hire workers on insecure, low-paid contracts. These reforms come alongside a raft of other attacks, on education and health in particular.

The demonstrations came on the back of an internal referendum conducted in the state railway company, the SNCF, by trade unions. Of 150,000 employees, 90,000 voted in the referendum, with 95% voting to reject Macron’s reforms. Laurent Brun, the general secretary of the CGT-rail union, explained the meaning of the referendum, saying: “The management says that ‘since three quarters of the railway workers are not on strike, three quarters of the workers support the reforms...’ In my opinion, the response will be overwhelming, but we will see.”

Currently the French unions are organising two days of strikes across transport and other public services in every five. The next big national demonstration has been called for 2 June.

New Gaza violence likely on 5 June

By Colin Foster

On Tuesday 29 May the Israeli military launched new air strikes on Gaza, after mortar rounds were fired from Gaza into Israel.

The Israeli military said they had targeted Islamic Jihad and Hamas bases, but one bomb fell in a kindergarten playground, not killing anyone. None of the mortar rounds reached Israeli targets. Hamas, the Islamic cleric-fascist group which rules Gaza, has given some signals that it currently wants to get a temporary deal for economic relief, rather than military escalation. Islamic Jihad, rather than Hamas, may have fired the mortar rounds.

However, Hamas has called for renewed protests near the Israeli border on 5 June. Israel’s right-wing government remains truculent.

It is building a fortified breakwater, topped with barbed wire, in the sea a few kilometres north of Gaza, to further hem in Gaza.

The whole situation in the Middle East, after Trump’s withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, remains tense and close to war.
Bastani: why won’t you debate Brexit?

By Keith Road

Aaron Bastani, co-founder of online news platform Novara Media, has responded to an article in the Guardian on 26 May about calls for a debate on Brexit at the 2018 Labour conference... by trying to witchhunt the AWL.

The article quotes three anti-Brexit Momentum members in support of the call for a debate.

On Twitter Bastani accuses the AWL of being behind a “plot” with the Labour right to destabilise the Corbyn leadership through a debate on Brexit policy.

To build up his ludicrous picture of an AWL plot, Bastani says Rida Vajzus, one of the activists quoted in the Guardian, is a member of the AWL. Rida has written articles for many publications, including Solidarity (but also the New Statesman). A glance at her output would reveal that she does not share Workers’ Liberty’s politics on quite a few issues. However, unlike Bastani, Rida does value democracy – hence her support for a conference debate.

Worse than not taking a young activist seriously enough to read her opinions, it is clear that Bastani wants to get her, and the also-quoted Omar Raa (who is a supporter of Workers’ Liberty), excluded from the Labour Party.

He has misrepresented our policy on the Labour Campaign for a Single Market. To be clear, the AWL is neither a part of, nor do we back, the LCSM. Do both we and the LCSM want to see Brexit debated? Yes! Two years after the referendum, an EU membership of the UK, there is a lot to discuss. In the first place, whether or not Labour should support Brexit in the light of the probable “deals” the UK could propose with the EU and the likely consequences of Brexit?

And what should Labour say, in or out of the EU, about freedom of movement? It is of course a complex issue, all the more reason for a debate! And for Labour conference to discuss the full range of views on Brexit and Europe.

So why doesn’t a champion of the newly invigorated and open Labour Party accept it would be a good idea for conference to have that debate?

Possibly Bastani doesn’t know what he thinks, having flip-flopped on the issue of the EU. He went into the referendum believing in the “Lexit” miracle, then changed sides and backed “Remain”. He had agreed to speak for “Lexit” in a debate with Workers’ Liberty at NUT conference 2016 and withdrew at a few hours’ notice.

Since the referendum Bastani has been a champion of the “will of the people”, converting the “rabletarian” and “remainers” for questioning the unclear and indecisive plans of the Labour leadership.

A debate or democratic challenge to the perceived wisdom of the leadership is worrying for people who are unsure or are scared of the leadership losing a vote. They think it will be a sign of weakness and could therefore lose Labour an election.

The last time we heard this kind of argument Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair were Labour’s leaders. The only difference between this and then is that even under Blair there were debates on contentious issues at conference (but the votes were ignored).

But can a Corbyn-led Labour Party really afford to ignore the majority of Labour members who oppose Brexit? At last year’s Labour conference Brexit was not prioritised for debate, after Momentum and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy pushed for it to not be discussed. We would like to stop something like that happening again.

Twelve months on, there is now widespread disquiet about Labour’s policy on Brexit — from the left as well as the right. Labour is run by people who spent years fighting for democracy in the party, who should be able to see why debating this issue is important.

We are for a pluralist and open party, one that is genuinely committed to democratic debate and discussion. Bastani claims we are disloyal and hostile to Labour. This is ludicrous! Our political tendency has been fighting for a Labour government since our entire existence. The forerunner of Solidarity, Socialism or Revolution, initiated the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory in 1978. All of this was before Bastani was born!

In the first place our loyalty is to the democratic traditions of the Labour movement, which is why we express our views openly and honestly.

Loyalty to the Labour leadership without the prospect of challenge on issues of policy is dishonest politics, but, that apparently, is the place where Bastani finds himself most comfortable.

We have invited Aaron Bastani to debate us on “Can Labour stop Brexit? Should it?” at Ideas for Freedom on 23-24 June, or at a time he can make. We await his response.

The financial fantasy of “Scotland’s future”

By Dale Street

After two years in the making, the SNP’s Sustainable Growth Commission Report “Scotland – The New Case for Optimism – A Strategy for Inter-Generational Economic Renaissance” was finally published last week.

The 354-page report is meant to remedy the deficiencies of the SNP White Paper “Scotland’s Future”, the basis of its pro-independence campaign in the 2014 referendum.

“Scotland’s Future” was criticised at the time for its facile economic assumptions, reckless predictions, and glib optimism about the economy of an independent Scotland.

The new document effectively concedes the validity of those criticisms.

In doing so it throws up a new set of problems for advocates of Scottish independence. It also makes a variety of new off-the-wall claims about the economy of an independent Scotland.

The report claims that independence would eventually produce a windfall of £4,100 for every Scot. This is based on the wishful-thinking hypothesis: “If we had the same GDP/capita as the Netherlands...” But the report does not explain how Scotland might become a second Netherlands.

The report cites twelve high-growth, high-income small countries as “proof” of how prosperous an independent Scotland would be. This is a transparent sleight of hand. It is no more logical than citing twelve low-growth, low-income small countries as “proof” of how poor an independent Scot-land would be.

In any case, some of the twelve countries cited in the report have achieved their rates of economic growth through policies which the SNP claims to dismiss, such as the low-tax and high-income-inequality policies pursued by Singapore and Hong Kong.

To complicate matters even further, the report proposes that an independent Scotland model its economic policies on those of Denmark, Finland and Norway — but their growth rates are no higher than those of large advanced economies (including the UK’s).

The promised windfall does not even offset the loss of the fiscal transfer arising from the current UK-wide pooling and sharing mechanisms. That transfer would end on day one of independence. But when the supposed £4,100 windfall would kick in is anyone’s guess.

The report claims that it would kick in after 25 years. But only by assuming that Scottish economic growth would be 0.7% higher than if Scotland were to remain in the UK. And the assumption is just that: an assumption.

In the meantime, full-blown austerity would be on the agenda for at least a decade, and probably a lot longer.

The budget deficit of an independent Scot-land would be cut from 8% to 3% within a decade. The total debt ceiling would be no more than 50% of GDP (UK debts currently amount to 86% of GDP). And £5 billion a year would be paid to the UK-minus-Scotland as a “solidarity payment” in order to service Scotland’s debt.

None of these could be achieved without major cuts in public spending.

In an attempt to answer the question of what the currency of an independent Scotland would be — in 2014 the SNP had proposed a currency union although this had been ruled out by the UK government — the report proposes at least ten years of sterlingisation.

Scotland would simply continue to use the pound sterling, without asking anyone’s “permission”. But this means that an inde-pendent Scotland would have no say over interest rates and mortgage rates. Nor could it print its own money or devalue in an economic crisis.

In a worst-case scenario, this would reduce Scotland to being a cross between Panama and Greece (no control over currency in use).

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INDEPENDENT

After a decade of sterlingisation (and hyper-austerity) an independent Scotland would (or could, or might, or might not) opt for an independent currency.

If this is not confusing enough in itself, even more confusion lies in wait in what the report has to say (or not say) about an inde-pendent Scotland and the EU.

At times the report implies that Scotland would seek membership of the EU, in order to achieve “frictionless borders” with EU countries. But elsewhere in the document EU membership is no more than a vague possi-bility: “If Scotland became an EU member in the future...”

Would an independent Scotland use the
Labour and Brexit: members must decide

In response to the continuing fiascos and scandals about the shape of Brexit, the Labour Party is edging towards a “less-Brexit” stance. But it remains evasive.

Labour members and trade unionists must be able to debate this out at Labour conference on 23-26 September this year.

The labour movement needs a policy debated through the ranks, not just “managed” by self-accredited sages and scribblers in the Leader’s Office. Only then can it have ideas which it can take out to the unorganised and the wavering voters, to convince them.

The latest eye-opener came from Britain’s tax chief on 23 May, officially telling the government that “max-fac”, its favourite alternative to staying in the EU customs union, will cost £20 billion a year and anyway take years to be able to debate this out at Labour conference - on Brexit. Labour’s ranks must ensure there is debate this year.

Some say that when Solidarity campaigns for debate in the Labour Party on this, we are aligning with the right.

Our angle is different from the anti-Brexit segments of the Labour right. They are concerned for continued smooth, cheap supply chains and export paths for British bosses, and some of them explicitly oppose free movement. Our main concern is rights to free movement.

In any case, socialists cannot decide our politics by always saying the reverse of what the right says. To do that would be, in fact, to let the right do our thinking for us. We must have our own independent view.

For decades socialists who supported free movement. Open the borders, “Occupy the houses of the rich”, “Defend free movement. Open the borders”, “Make capitalism history; fight for socialism”, “Kill capitalism before it kills us”, and “Defend abortion rights worldwide”.

That’s evasive. It leaves an open door for meaner limits for migrant workers’ access to benefits, although they pay more into the welfare system than they draw out. But it’s more for free movement than against it.

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France 1968: when the workers

By Martin Thomas

On Friday 3 May students from Nanterre university, on the edge of Paris, where large protests over miscellaneous issues had been building up since March 1967 went to the Sorbonne, in the centre of Paris, for a meeting. The university authorities panicked and called in the CRS riot police.

The police raid on the Sorbonne galvanised many more students than just the left-wing activists. On the night of 3-4 May the student union UNEF and the junior lecturers’ union SNESup (led by a Maoist) called their members out on strike.

The following week, 6-11 May, thousands of students took to the streets of Paris. On Monday 6th 25 to 30,000 students marched and fought the police. On Tuesday 7th, 50,000 demonstrated.

The next day, Friday 10th, 20 to 30,000 students assembled for yet another demonstration. Observing riot police had built barricades. At 2am the police attacked the barricades, and battles continued until 6am.

The Communist Party, a Stalinist party slowly mutating into social democracy, was then by far the strongest party among France’s more militant workers. It had been hostile to the students. After 10-11 May it realised that it had to change its tone. The CP-led federation, the CGT, joined with other trade unions in calling a one-day general strike for 13 May.

The government withdrew the police from the Sorbonne; students swarmed back in and, for the next month, turned it into a non-stop festival of revolutionary and utopian debates.

On Monday 13th, one million workers and students filled the streets of Paris. There were big demonstrations in other cities, too.

The trend since the 1940s had been for union membership to decline. The CGT and the CFDT had called a national protest strike over social security and unemployment only six months earlier, on 13 December 1967, and only a scattering of workers had responded.

The 13 May one-day strike was different.

The next day, Tuesday 14th, the workers of Sud Aviation in Nantes occupied their factory; several other workplaces occupied on the 15th; the most important was the Renault car factory at Cleon. It had only had a turnout of 40% or so for the strike on the 13th.

On Thursday 16th the biggest Renault factory, at Billancourt near Paris, was occupied. Although the French revolutionary left was small then (the biggest group, the Trotsky-Guevarist JCR, had 300 members) and based mostly among students, the few Trotskyists active in big industrial workplaces had a hugely-out-of-proportion role in starting action at places like Sud Aviation and Billancourt.

The end of the week saw two million workers on strike. A general strike was under way. The trade unions supported the strike movement, though they never called an indefinite general strike.

Individual students and individual workers — especially young workers — joined efforts in neighbourhood Action Committees. The CP tried to keep links between students and workers to a minimum, and the workplace occupations in the hands of the minority of union stalwarts.

But by 18 May the Communist Party felt it had to declare: “It is time to get rid of the government and to promote an authentic democracy capable of opening a path to socialism...”

The Nanterre student activists, in a leaflet of 21 May, addressed themselves to workers: “You are asking for a minimum wage of 1,000 francs in the Paris area, retirement at sixty, a 40 hour week for 48 hours’ pay. These are long-standing and just demands: nevertheless they seem to be out of context with our aims.

“Yet you have gone on to occupy factories, take your managers hostage, strike without warning... The form that your struggle has taken offers us students the model for true socialist activity: the appropriation of the means of production and of decision-making power by the workers”.

REFERENDUM

On 24 May De Gaulle announced a referendum on his reform plans.

The strike still grew. On Friday 17 May there were about two million workers on strike; on Monday 20th, about six million; by Friday 24th, and until the end of May, about ten million were reported on strike.

Careful calculations indicate that the peak number on strike was six to eight million rather than ten million. But it was by far the biggest general strike in history to that date. France’s general strike in 1936, and Britain’s in 1926, mobilised far fewer workers — about two million in each case.

A Central Strike Committee took control of the city of Nantes for a week, from 26 to 31 May; monitoring traffic, food supplies, and petrol distribution. On the night of 24-25 May, another big demonstration in Paris led to the fiercest street fighting yet, and the Stock Exchange was set on fire.

On Monday 27 May the union leaders emerged from talks with the government and the employers with the Grenelle Agreement — a 30% increase in the national minimum wage, a 10% rise in all private sector wages, a cut in the working week of one or two hours, and concessions on social security, union rights in workplaces, etc.

CGT leader Georges Séguy hurried to the CP’s greatest industrial fortress, Renault Bil lancourt, to sell this deal. Sensing the mood of the workers, he avoided a direct call for a return to work, but still the workers booted and strike continued.

By spreading the sort of local workers’ power that had been created in Nantes, linking together the local workers’ committees into a national congress of workers’ councils to underpin a workers’ government, and organising workers’ militias to fight off the counter-revolutionaries, the movement could indeed have gone further. It could have overthrown capitalism. But those who had some idea of what to do, because they had studied such matters — the Trotskyists — did not have the strength and the roots in the working class to organise it; and the group which did have the strength, the Communist Party, did not want to organise a revolution.

On Thursday 30th, De Gaulle called off the referendum and announced that there would be general elections of the National Assembly in June. Over half a million people joined a pro-Gaullist demonstration in Paris, chanting “Back to work!”. “Clean out the Sorbonne!”, “We are the majority!” Some cried “Cohn-Bendit to Dachau!” [Daniel Cohn-Bendit, one of the Nanterre student leaders, was Jewish].

The combined weight of the government and of the main traditional leaders of the working class now began to press towards a return to work and reliance on the election. The revolutionaries were not strong enough to show workers a sufficiently convincing alternative path.

On Friday 31st armed police seized the police post office in Rouen, driving out the workers who had occupied it.

From 3 to 7 June workplaces abandoned the Grenelle terms. On Friday 7 June the police went in to try to break the occupation at Renault Flins.

After several days of fighting, on 17 June the workers voted 4811 to 3456 for a return to work. On Tuesday 11th police broke the occupation at Peugeot Sochaux, killing two workers. As at Flins, the workers managed to reoccupy, but returned to work soon after.

On Wednesday 12th all the revolutionary left groups were banned. On Sunday 16th the Sorbonne fell to the police, and on Tuesday 18th Renault Billancourt returned to work. Only a few workplaces stayed on strike into July.

In the Assembly elections of 23-30 June the Gaulists increased their majority, the CP and the Socialist Party lost votes, and the PSU, the only party with an electoral base that had backed the movement, increased its vote only from 2% to 4%. The election seemed to prove that all the talk of revolution in May had been fantasy. Not so.

In May millions of workers had started thinking for the first time that society could be organised differently. They had gained a new confidence; they had dared to think that perhaps the working class could run society, without the capitalists ruling over it.

Except among a small minority, these thoughts were vague, unclear, tentative. Then the traditional leaders of the working class did all they could to make the strike movement fade and peter out, with only minor bread-and-butter gains; and they went into an election where the CP strove no less than the Gaulists to present itself as the Party of Order. No wonder many workers who had joined the general strike became disillusioned and voted for the real Party of Order.

OCCUPIED

In one area where the May strikes have been studied minutely (Nord Pas de Calais, the North of France), 47% of workplaces were occupied. This included 88% of nationalised enterprises and 70% of factories in the metal industries.

Sometimes the occupations were run by a minority of union activists. But half the metal-working factories in Nord Pas de Calais were occupied by over 25% of the workforce.

The survey in Nord Pas de Calais found that in only 59% of workplaces did the workers want immediate negotiations on their demands. Another survey — of 100 workplaces across France — found that only two-thirds presented a list of demands after beginning their action. The workers knew they wanted something more than a little improvement in wages and conditions, but they did not know how to put the aspiration to change society into the form of a list of demands.

Workers read leaflets from groups like the JCR and Voix Ouvrière, and were interested particularly in their calls for workers’ control. In no decisive sector did the workers really throw off the leadership of the CP. The CP rode the movement with some skill. At first (and later, in its apologetics after the event) the CP said that the strikes were, and should be, only about wages and conditions. But in the midst of the general strike the CP was willing to make its main demand “a people’s government”.

The CP preferred to have the factory occu-
Socialism Makes Sense

21-24 June @ Birkbeck College, London

workersliberty.org/ideas

Provisional agenda*

Thursday 21 June
This year our Thursday evening walking tour will return with a Suffragette theme for the 100th anniversary of the vote being won for some women. Watch this space for more details.

Friday 22 June
Capitalism versus Socialism — Workers’ Liberty debates Dr. Kristian Niermetz of the Institute of Economic Affairs

Saturday 23 June
11:45-12:25 — Opening rally
12:30-14:00
Solidarnosc 1981: revolution against Stalinism
Neurodiversity under capitalism and under socialism with Janine Booth, author of Autism Equality in the Workplace, and Dr. Dinah Murray
The left in government: a panel discussing the experiences of Syriza in Greece, Lula’s Workers’ Party in Brazil, Mitterrand’s government in France, and the Wilson/Callaghan governments in Britain. Who’ll clean the toilets under socialism?
14:00-15:00 — Lunch
15:05-16:25
How do revolutionary socialists organise?
Challenges of a Labour government: “The Corbyn road to socialism? Next steps for Labour” Featuring Simon Hannah, author of A Party With Socialists In It and co-editor of the Clarion magazine, David Osland, Labour left activists and journalist, Ruth Cashman (Lambeth Union co-chair), and more tbc.
Revolts in the degree factories: building on the UCU strike with UCU activists Rhian Keyse and Jo Grady, and National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts activist Monty Shield
Iran: the anti-imperialist myth with film-maker Kaveh Abbassian and Obi Saiq
16:25-16:45 — Break
16:50-18:05
The new New Unionism? a discussion on reviving the trade union movement hosted by the Labour Days podcast, featuring a striker from the East Dulwich Picturehouse cinema strike, and more
Can Labour stop Brexit? with Michael Chessum, Another Europe Is Possible, and activists from the Labour Campaign for Free Movement
Is Venezuela a model? Why we published Socialism Makes Sense
18:40-19:50
What will education look like under socialism? with University and College union activist and education researcher Sol Gamsu, and teacher activists from the National Education Union
Capitalism is killing us! a discussion on capitalism and health with healthworker activists from the BMA and Unison
What should Labour do on crime and policing?
The 2011 uprising in Libya and its aftermath with Clive Bradley, co-writer of a forthcoming TV series on Muammar Qaddafi

Sunday 24 June
10:30-12:00
Socialism and democracy
A crisis of care: socialist feminism and the welfare state under the next Labour government with the Workers’ Liberty’s Lambeth’s socialist-feminist reading group

13:05-14:25
“Haringey Development Vehicle”, Architects for Social Housing, and Namaa AL Mahdi, from the Labour Campaign for Free Movement

14:25-14:35 — Break

14:35-16:00
Reimagining local government with speakers from the Labour left revolt against the “Haringey Development Vehicle”, Architects for Social Housing, and Namas Al Mahdi, Hounslow Momentum

Animation behind the Iron Curtain
The class struggle in China with Demaine Boocock

16:05-16:30 — Closing rally

*Agenda subject to change. For updates to sessions or timings see www.workersliberty.org/ideas

Book your tickets today!

Weekend tickets cover the whole event, Thursday-Sunday. Single day tickets are available, as well as separate tickets for Thursday’s walking tour and Friday’s debate.

* Until 10 June tickets are £37 waged, £19 low-waged/university student, and £7 unwaged/ school student.

• Tickets booked before the event are £43/£21/£7.

• Tickets on the door cost more.

• Free creche and accommodation available.

Book online at www.workersliberty.org/ideas or ring 02073948923 to book over the phone.
The 1980s and left antisemitism

By John O'Mahony

Consider Ken Livingstone and the Labour Party, Al Capone and the US government. They failed to defeat the WRP and the SWP — and their ex-members migrating into Labour. In 1981-3 Ken Livingstone ran (through Labour Herald) a branch of the WRP's antisemitic operation, for which the WRP was well rewarded, with over £2 million, by Arab dictators.

I can think of three main currents of virulent antisemitism that flow into the sectarian strain of Labour left antisemitism, and one, so to speak, prehistoric source.

Two of the leaders of the first British Marxist organisation, The Social Democratic Federation (founded in 1881-3), were, to judge by the vehemence of what they wrote, antisemites: Henry Hyndman and Harry Quelch. The SDF was not a kibbutz leftist sect. Discussion was possible. Ernest Belfort Bax and others argued opposite views.

The Stalinist current is unfortunately not ancient history. There was from the beginning a dimension of antisemitism in the Stalin group. In the 1920s Trotsky wrote about the use of antisemitism in the branches of the Jewish Communist Party against the Opposition. In the Moscow show trials of the mid-30s, the original Jewish names of the victims, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and many others, were printed in the newspapers along with the names for which they had been known for decades. When Trotsky pointed that out, even right-wing Jewish leftists in the USA denounced him for libelling Stalin.

Between 1949 and Stalin's death in 1953 a series of show trials were held in the satellite states of Eastern Europe in which many of the victims, leading Stalinists such as Rudolf Slansky in Czechoslovakia and Lazlo Rajk in Hungary, were accused as “Zionists” as well as enemy agents. The Stalinist press thrust throughout the world echoed Moscow and Prague. What now poisons the minds of many people on the left originated in that Stalinist campaign. It was relaunched in the writings of Leni Brenner.

"Zionist" was used but Jew was meant. The Zionists had collaborated with the Nazis. The inner nature of Nazism and Zionism were symmetrically racist. The Zionists-Jews were "rootless cosmopolitans", part of a great international network of reactionary conspirators. Israel — which Stalin had at first backed, as a potential lever against the British Empire — was a spawn of imperialism and racism. It was an illegitimate state.

In 1952 five Jewish doctors who had served the dwellers in the Kremlin were accused of poisoning and planning the poison the leaders. Stalin died before they could be brought to trial, and they were released. If Stalin had lived, a large-scale rounding-up of the USSR's Jews would probably have been the outcome of the "anti-Zionist" antisemitic drum-beatings.

The third more recent springs of antisemitism in the left come, one from the WRP and Ken Livingstone, and one from the SWP. The WRP had once been an Orthodox Trotskyist organisation, flavoured but real. For good reasons and partly with good politics, it interested itself in revolutionary movements in the Arab countries. It actively supported the Algerian war of independence against France (1954-62) and had links with one of the nationalistic organisations there: it published a small pamphlet with a portrait of that organisation's leader, Messali Hadj, on the cover. Two of its French co-thinkers, one of them Pierre Lambert, stood trial in France in the mid-1950s for supporting the Algerians. (They were acquitted.)

When the current poisonous wisdom of the Trotskyist left on Israel was being created by Stalin and his allies, 1949-53, the group called the concoction what it was, antisemitism, and denounced it.

The SWP too had a hardened animosity to Israel. The central figure in the group, Ygal Gluckstein (Tony Cliff), was a Palestinian-born Jew in background. He could say things that someone who was not Jewish could not say.

His wife Chanie, who was active in the group, and her brother Michael Kidron, who was for a long time also a central figure in the group, were also of Palestinian Jewish background.

Cliff's political evolution and history on this question can be tracked in the files of the Trotskyist press. On the eve of war in 1939 he was involved in exchanges about Palestine in the American magazine New International. At that point he was in favour of free Jewish immigration to Palestine.

In December 1944 the British Revolutionary Communist Party published an Open Letter from Palestinian Trotskyists (unsigned, and to spend enough time in Britain to be associates such as ILP MP John McGovern, to arrange a visa to go to Ireland as a student and to spend enough time in Britain to be part of the British Trotskyist movement. It's critique within the organisation during and after the Six Day War in 1967 would explain his bitterly Israeli-defeating politics then in terms of his having been given "a hard time": he had spent a month in jail in late 1939 in the company of hard-core Zionist prisoners. He had been won over or coerced to their views, for a short time. I have no independent knowledge of that. Cliff's was, however, a remarkable shift of opinion to make in the early 1940s and in Palestine, and it does need explaining.

In an interview in Socialist Review 100 (July-August 1987), Cliff would say that he was wrong to favour free Jewish immigration to Palestine before the war. Considering the alternative — death — which those who escaped from Europe had avoided, that was a judgement that it would have been better if they had not escaped.

None of the Trotskyist organisations backed the Arab states in the 1948 war. Nor did Cliff. He was silent on the question for many years thereafter, and according to his biographer Ian Birchall said of Israel, with a shrug: "What's done is done".

In the aftermath of the Six Day War in 1967 Cliff published a pamphlet on Israel. That was not the full absolute anti-Zionist position: noting that an "anti-Israeli" campaign quite easily degenerates into a "jihad", he took that as a bad thing, and implied, if unclearly, the same rights of national self-determination for the Israeli Jews as for the Kurds: "a socialist republic, with full rights for Jews, Kurds and all national minorities".

The group then prided itself on a theory that capitalist imperialism had come to an end. The SWP would not attain its present "anti-imperialist" pitch until 1987, when it switched to support Iran in the Iran-Iraq war. An anti-Israel tone became dominant after the 1973 war, but the shift to hostility to Israel becoming a world outlook, with all its ramifications was also around 1986-7.

It can be dated to July 1986, when they published a pamphlet, much reprinted since, entitled Israel, the Hijack State, whose cover cartoon showed Israel as a mad dog on a leash held by the USA.
Diversifying sexuality

Elizabeth Butterworth reviews Queer Sex by Juno Roche

This book that is simultaneously poignant, thought-provoking, ground-breaking and refreshingly honest.

Subtitled as ‘A Trans and Non-Binary Guide to Intimacy, Pleasure and Relationships,’ Queer Sex is really a first foray into the possibilities of trans sexuality, intimacy and desire. For many of the interviewees, transition had unexpected effects on them and was far from plain sailing. There was diversity even sometimes within one account. Human sexuality is a complex thing and all our experiences as well as our genetics and our physical bodies and minds can affect it.

The only unifying feature in these interviews was their immense diversity. Some people were comfortable with all aspects of sexuality and their being trans had a limited or non-existent effect on their capacity to be sexually or romantically intimate. Others’ sexual experiences had been massively shaped by being trans. For many of the interviewees, transition had unexpected effects on them and was far from plain sailing. There was diversity even sometimes within one account. Human sexuality is a complex thing and all our experiences as well as our genetics and our physical bodies and minds can affect it.

EXPERIENCES

Others’ sexual experiences had been massively shaped by being trans. For many of the interviewees, transition had unexpected effects on them and was far from plain sailing.

The first regarded a common experience for trans women who have had surgery to create a vagina. In order to prevent their vaginas from closing up, they are instructed to use a dilator to stretch the muscles. This is a very boring, medicalised and potentially painful scenario for a lot of trans women. But, one of the interviewees asked Roche, why not use a vibrator or dildo instead? They’re softer, made from materials that are more comfortable on one’s genitals, and provide pleasure as well as relaxing the vaginal walls.

The second Irish Revolution was the political revolution in which the 26 Counties ended British occupation and rule, winning virtual independence and the freedom to make it real independence, a few decades after the second half of the 1930s. The Six Counties was given a limited Home Rule. The Third Irish Revolution is the breaking of the power of the bishops, priests, and nuns. You might call it the end of the Roman occupation.

The Third Irish Revolution

By Sean Matganna

Have you heard the ultimate “Irish” joke? In a referendum on a united Ireland the Protestant Unionists of north-east Ulster campaign for “no” on the grounds that the South is too liberal. The people no longer fear God, maybe scarcely believe in it, and refuse to listen to their spiritual advisers. The two-to-one vote on 25 May to rip up the 9th amendment to the Irish constitution — entrenched there by a referendum in 1983 — was a great empowering and liberating event for the women of Ireland, Msna na hÉireann. Legislation to allow abortion will soon follow.

The yes vote in the referendum on women’s right to choose is a great event in Irish history — the Third Irish Revolution. In the last 150 years Ireland experienced two revolutions. The first broke the power of the landlords and gave the land to — some of — the people, creating mass peasant ownership. The second Irish Revolution was the political revolution in which the 26 Counties ended British occupation and rule, winning virtual independence and the freedom to make it real independence, a few decades after the second half of the 1930s. The Six Counties was given a limited Home Rule. The Third Irish Revolution is the breaking of the power of the bishops, priests, and nuns. You might call it the end of the Roman occupation.

Of course, the Revolution did not happen last Friday. It has been going on for a quarter of a century or more. Friday’s vote registered that it had happened.

In the campaign before the referendum on a cardinal Catholic doctrine, the bishops and priests and nuns skulked, knowing that people wouldn’t listen to them and would resist their advice — still less accept the dictat of a gang of proven child rapists and people who covered for the rapists and let them go on doing what they did to small children. People are too aware of mass unmapped graves for infants and small children who died in nun-run institutions to listen patiently to nuns pleading for the sacredness of the potential life of an unborn embryo.

But yesterday the bishops besrode Ireland like colossi. Now they skulk, and only one in three is so poor that they will listen reverently to their spiritual advice.

For decades, it was impossible for honest Irish nationalists to deny that the old Unionist cry that Home Rule would become Rome Rule had come true. It could be argued that if there had been an autonomous united Ireland, its right to choose, a great event in Irish history — the Third Irish Revolution.

Catholic “laundries” were run across Ireland for “fallen” women and their children

Theirs was the moral responsibility to care for the children and women and to ensure that they were treated with dignity and respect. But the Catholic Church’s response to the crisis was one of denial and silence.

The Church’s failure to provide adequate care and support to those affected by the crisis has resulted in a deep sense of betrayal and anger. The Catholic Church has acknowledged its role in the crisis, and has expressed its deep regret for the harm caused to so many women and children.

However, the Church’s response has been met with skepticism and criticism. Many people believe that the Church’s actions were motivated by its desire to protect its institutional interests, rather than a genuine concern for the well-being of those affected by the crisis.

The crisis in the Catholic Church has further exacerbated the already deep divides in Irish society between those who support the Church and those who criticize it.

The crisis highlights the need for a response that is based on solidarity, compassion, and a commitment to the well-being of all those affected. It is clear that the Church’s response to the crisis has fallen short of what is needed.

The crisis in the Catholic Church serves as a reminder of the need for accountability and transparency in all spheres of society. It is time for the Church to take responsibility for its actions and to work towards a future where all people are treated with dignity and respect.

Bless in this dawn to be alive? Indeed. And to be old is to remember how dark and how long the night was.
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.
• Open borders.
• Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest Workers’ charter of trade union rights — to organise, to
• 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!

RMT divided on Labour link

By an RMT activist

On 30 May, the RMT rail and transport union will hold its Special General Meeting in Doncaster to debate whether it should reaffiliate to Labour, the party the union helped found but from which it was expelled in 2004.

A period of consultation within the union has revealed a fairly even split. A slight majority of branches and Regional Councils that held meetings to debate the issue voted in favour of reaffiliation, but those voting against represent a slightly larger proportion of the membership.

The support of all three national officers for attentation Labour (General Secretary Mick Lynch and the two Assistant General Secretaries, Mick Lynch and Steve Hedley) has led some in the anti-reaffiliation camp to characterise the drive as a top-down one that the bureaucracy is attempting to impose against the wishes of the members.

However, the reality was that some branch and Regional Council meetings that took positions on the question, on both sides, were attended by less than 0.5% of their memberships. In such circumstances, neither side can claim a rank-and-file groundswell for their position, nor that their strategy represents the overwhelming will of the members. Whatever the outcome on 30 May, socialists and rank-and-file activists in the union will have much work to do to improve grassroots engagement.

The anti-reaffiliation case was presented as a campaign to defend the union’s existing political strategy. In truth this is no coherent strategy at all, but a pick-and-mix approach that has seen the union donate some money to various Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates (never really a viable project and now nothing more than an electoral front for the Socialist Party), the odd Green, and a few independents, but has not contributed in any way to the effort by the bad blood and trees that might provide any serious or ongoing working-class political representation.

On the pro-reaffiliation side, some, including prominent Stalinsists, have mobilised primarily bureaucratic arguments, emphasising the “influence” RMT might be able to have within Labour, mainly via possible seats on various committees. This is hardly an enticing, rank-and-file case for reaffiliation.

Against both the incoherence of the anti-reaffiliation camp and the machine-politics influence peddling of some on the pro side, others of us have presented a case for affiliation based on the possibility of RMT mobilising its grassroots membership to intervene in transformative struggle at grassroots level in Labour.

If the union votes to reaffiliate, we will continue to make that case, and to argue for a genuinely democratic Labour link, responsive to control and pressure from below, rather than the ossified bureaucratic structure that Labour affiliation sometimes is in other unions.

If the vote is against affiliation, we will continue to argue for a coherent political strategy, and for RMT members who do recognise the importance of involvement in Labour to coordinate to promote socialist policies and strike support within the party.

And whichever the vote goes, socialists on both sides of the debate must work together to renew rank-and-file engagement and reinvigorate the union’s democratic culture.

This article first appeared on theclarionmag.org

We want unity in Lewisham

By Sacha Ismail

Activists in Lewisham for Corbyn (the established Momentum group in Lewisham) are campaigning for a new, properly conducted, democratic AGM, and for the election of a broad, politically pluralist committee representative of Momentum activists in Lewisham.

This comes, after National Momentum decided to recognise a factically inaccessible, irregular and undemocratic ad hoc split meeting in the front bar of a pub as an official Lewisham Momentum AGM. Lewisham for Corbyn have submitted complaints about this and the campaign of lies and slander conducted by Stalinsist Red London supporters, absolute anti-Zionists and others against the group in the run up to the AGM.

In the meantime, we have tried to explain these issues to Momentum supporters and the wider left in Lewisham and beyond, held two meetings since the abortive AGM and are getting on with campaigning, in particular around support-

ing the Lewisham Southwark College strike and other issues of workers’ rights. However, rather than ignoring the other side in this split, we have approached them formally them with proposals for unity.

Unity for us means sitting down, talking and trying to work out how the two groups can be reunited. The existence of two Momentum groups in Lewisham is a gift to the right and can only weaken the left, not just in terms of duplication of effort but the bad blood and frustration that have been generated.

It also means unity in terms of campaigning. There is no argument that the two groups working together in struggle, whether that’s the college strike, by-election in Lewisham East or building up the left caucuses in Lewisham’s local parties.

We know that the hard-core Stalinsist, who drove the slander-and-split campaign to pursue a vendetta against the AWL and other left-wing critics of the Momentum office and leadership, will resist unity or even talking.

We want unity in Lewisham

Events

Saturday 2 June
London Momentum meet-up
3pm, Nun Hall, UCL, Institute of Education, London, 20 Bedford Way, WCH 0AL
bit.ly/2kdYyKr

Saturday 2 June
London Radical Bookfair
12pm, Goldsmiths University of London, Lewisham Way, London, SE14 6NW
bit.ly/2lAYSSC

Saturday 6 June
Unl. back in house Strike and Protest (IWGB)
5.30pm, Senate House, University of London, London, WC1E 7HU
bit.ly/2rh5c9

8 - 10 June
We Are The University — National Student Left Conference
Sheffield Students’ Union, Wester Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TG
bit.ly/2ghy8/6/10June

Saturday 9 June
Kurdish Solidarity Campaign AGM
11:30am, Kurdish Community Centre, 11 Portland Gardens, London, N4 1HU
bit.ly/2GfheHQ

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

More online at www.workersliberty.org Facebook Workers’ Liberty Twitter @workersliberty

LAUR

But we believe that there are good activists around the other group who will see the sense in trying to heal the breach in the Lewisham left.

• For Lewisham for Corbyn’s open letter to the Amersham Arms Momentum group, see dav-eley.info/lewisham-momentum

W e want unity in Lewisham
Striking against NHS outsourcing

By Gemma Short

Workers in Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS foundation trusts struck for 48 hours on Wednesday 23 and Thursday 24 May over outsourcing plans.

Hospital caterers, cleaners, porters, and other workers, members of Unison, voted by 89% in favour of strikes. Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS foundation trusts plan to outsource workers to a new company called WWL Solutions. The trusts claim they need to do the outsourcing to save money, however a recent staff newsletter quoted trust chief executive Andrew Foster saying it has not only met is financial plan, but recorded stated reason for the plan is to enable the trust to save money, it is hard to imagine the new company would not try to reduce workers’ pay and conditions in order to save that money.

stopped from taking annual leave

By Luke Hardy

Refuse workers in the Kirklees area of west Yorkshire, members of Unison, returned a majority on 8 May for strikes over bullying and harassment, inability to take leave to attend medical appointments, and inability to take annual leave they are entitled to.

Workers voted by 85.5% in favour of strikes on an 86.1% turnout. This is a massive turnout and “yes” vote well above the new minimum turnout of 50% for industrial action ballots. The balloted workers are at two depots, one in Huddersfield and one in Dewsbury.

The ballot followed management’s failure to keep promises, made over six months ago, to look into long-running issues of bullying and harassment. Some bin workers have over 10 months’ holiday to take and no chance of taking it. Workers also report not being able to take compassionate leave or look after sick relatives and children.

Paul Holmes, Kirklees Unison Branch Secretary, said “workers don’t take strike action lightly – going on strike is a serious business and a great deal of ‘soul-searching’ is involved. Our members have families, dependants and some are carers. But how long can you put up with bullying every day?” At some stage you have to say ‘enough is enough’. The bin workers have reached that stage” Unison named 14 days of strikes starting on 4 June. However Kirklees council, a Council which Labour won the majority in May’s election, have now promised an investigation into the bullying and harassment as well as levels of cover.

Unison has suspended the strike action pending the outcome of this investigation.

Picturehouse strikes at Sundance festival

By Gemma Short

Picturehouse workers will be on strike again for the Sundance film festival happening at Picturehouse Central from 31 May to 3 June.

They will be striking during the opening night on Thursday 31 May, and again on Saturday 2 May. The strikes will hit several premières taking place at the festival.

Workers will hold picket lines from 17:30-20:30 each night, and welcome supporters to join them.

UoL’s vague promises

Outsourced workers at the University of London are disappointed after a much delayed announcement from the University about bringing workers in-house has failed to give workers any real commitment.

Workers organised by the IWGB union previously struck on 25-26 April, and will strike again on 6 June, in a campaign to be brought back in-house and have parity of terms and conditions with in-house workers. Outsourced workers currently receive inferior pensions, and less holiday, sick, maternity and paternity pay.

The university’s vague statement gives no clear commitments to bringing workers in-house and no timetable on taking more action.

PCS to ballot on pay

By Charlotte Zalens

PCS members voted at their Annual Conference, taking place in Brighton from 22-24 May, to ballot members across the civil service for national strikes on pay.

An emergency motion from the union’s National Executive instructing the executive to “organise a statutory ballot of members in the civil service and its related bodies on a programme of industrial action involving both all member and targeted action, to be held as soon as possible after Conference” was overwhelmingly carried. And about time too.

PCS held a consultative ballot of members in September-October 2017, but those members have been left waiting until now for the next steps. In order to beat the new anti-union laws the union needs to get organised, and fast.

PCS conference also overwhelmingly passed policy reaffirming the union’s commitment to free movement.

FE strikes win a pay rise

By Peggy Carter

UCU members at Further Education (FE) colleges in Hull, Sandwell, and across London have been on strike over a variety of dates in May over pay and jobs.

As a result of the strike management at Sandwell college have offered a pay rise equating to 6.45% over three years. The deal has been endorsed by UCU, as well as by Unison. The deal also includes an increase in the minimum pay level to bring all workers onto the voluntary Living Wage, and the establishment of a joint working group to look at working practices, including staff well being.

FE colleges can set their own pay rates, though there are recommendations made by the Association of Colleges. The UCU hopes other colleges will follow Sandwell’s lead and offer pay rises. UCU members at Bradford college suspended a strike planned for Friday 25 May over job cuts after what UCU said were positive discussions with college management. The college had announced plans to cut 75 jobs as part of a restructure.

Workers at Hull College struck again on 17 and 18 May in their fight to save 231 full-time equivalent jobs. More strike dates are expected soon.

FCC strike continues

By Will Sefton

Unison members at FCC waste recycling in Hull have voted to continue their strike for sick pay.

Now entering their seventh week of strike action the workers have a gotfundme page (bit.ly/2slKoew) to support their strike action.

Hull City Council have made no moves to take the contract in-house despite several senior councillors supporting the pickets.
By Gemma Short

On Friday 25 May the people of the Republic of Ireland voted to repeal the “eighth amendment” to the constitution, richting a wrong which for almost 35 years had put women’s lives in danger by banning access to abortion even more tightly than it was before under 19th century law.

The vote to repeal was carried by 66.4%, with just Donegal voting not to repeal. Opinion polls have shown majorities in favour of repeal for several years. However the organisation and mobilisation by the anti-choice lobby for the referendum was substantial. It makes the large majority for repeal a very significant victory.

The eighth amendment enshrined in law equal status be tween a foetus and woman and the organisation and mobilisation before under 19th century law. The Irish government says it intends to follow votes from the Citizens Assembly in 2017 and legislate for abortion, without restriction, up until 12 weeks. While Ireland would have a significantly lower time limit than other countries where abortion is legal, it would not have other restrictions such as the need for women to get permission from two doctors, as is the case in the UK.

The referendum result was greeted with cheers, tears, and chants of “yes, yes, yes” and “Savita, Savita, Savita” by crowds throughout Ireland.

In the feminist movement in Poland there was a lot of joy and celebration at the result, but some people saying that it was a step too far... There is a difference of opinion in the Polish women’s movement: some people want to stop the government’s attacks, and aren’t convinced about extending abortion rights much further. The influence of the Catholic Church is very great. I know Polish atheists in Poland who christen their children because the stigma of being unbaptised is so great.

Medical professionals felt unable to act even when a woman’s life was in danger. Technically the repeal will not legalise or decriminalise any abortion in Ireland, but it does lay the basis for further legislation which will legalise abortion, to which the amendment was previously a block.

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But Poland will be one of the last islands in Europe where abortion is not legal. Because Poland has been trying to catch up with Western Europe, and we don’t want to be perceived as a backward country, a change in mentality is taking place. But I don’t think this present government will take any steps to legalise abortion. After the next election we will have a shot at discussing it further.

The Polish feminist movement was awakened because the government wanted to restrict abortion even further. But the movement of women who support full legalisation of abortion is not a majority.

The memory of Savita Halappanavar played a significant role in forcing through a referendum and winning the campaign. Savita lost her life when, at 17 weeks pregnant, she suffered a miscarriage. Despite being told by doctors that the foetus would not survive, she was refused an abortion while there was still a foetal heartbeat. Savita and her family were forced to go through the agony of waiting days for the heartbeat to stop. As a result of that wait she contracted an infection which lead to septicaemia and her death. A subsequent investigation concluded that confusion over the eighth amendment was a contributing factor in her death.

A mural of Savita in Dublin was by the time the result was announced on 26 May covered in handwritten messages taped to the wall. One message read: “Sorry we were too late. But we are here now. We didn’t forget you.”

The “In her shoes” stories published during the campaign highlighted the significance of women being denied basic medical care in winning the referendum. Such stories demonstrated the way Irish society treated pregnant women — more as vessels for pregnancies than as human beings.

“Women, fed up with decades of discrimination, of abuse in the Catholic Church, of rape, of Magdalene laundries, of being made to feel shame, of rushed-up journeys to England, voted for change. For ‘never again’. On the day of the vote social media was filled with stories of mothers and daughters, and in some cases grandmothers, mothers, and daughters, going to vote ‘repeal’ together.”

On Sunday 27 May stories were shared on social media of priests announcing from the pulpit, at the first Mass after the referendum, that “yes” voters were not welcome, people got up and walked out.

This rolling back of the power of the Catholic Church in Irish society is a good thing, and long overdue.

The #HomeToVote movement played an important role in the referendum. Women, mainly young, who have left Ireland in recent years made journeys home — consciously connecting their journeys with those of women forced to travel to access abortion... and thousands helped them fundraise for their plane tickets.

Many in the crowd outside Dublin Castle carried placards saying “the north will be next”. They are right, the referendum result in the Republic of Ireland will act as a catalyst for change in Northern Ireland, the only part of the UK where women cannot access abortion at “home”. Some have called for a similar referendum in Northern Ireland, but no such referendum is necessary. All that is needed is for the 1967 Abortion Act to be extended to Northern Ireland.

The 1967 Abortion Act also needs to be changed. We need to get rid of the two doctor rule and the restriction of reasons for termination, and the qualification that “continuing the pregnancy would involve greater risk than termination to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any of her existing children”.

This historic vote vastly improves the lives of women in Ireland, in the long run in the whole of the island of Ireland, and will act as a beacon of hope for those fighting for abortion rights in other parts of the world.