An early general election?

Theresa May’s Brexit mess shows that the whole Brexit business is a nonsense. Labour should say that.

Labour should campaign for an immediate putting-back of the Brexit date, an early general election, and an incoming Labour government to hold a “people’s vote” to abandon Brexit.

Whatever hopes in June 2016 made a slight majority of a rigged electorate (excluding EU citizens settled here, who vote in local government elections, and 16-17 year olds) opt for Brexit, the reality is different.

Few people like what May has negotiated: a 69%-17% majority, in a poll taken on 19-20 November, thought the negotiations had gone badly.

Even fewer like the Tory right’s ill-defined “harder” Brexit formulas, or a “no deal” Brexit that would see motorways turned into lorry parks and food and medical supplies running short.

Labour should campaign for an immediate putting-back of the Brexit date, an early general election, and an incoming Labour government to hold a “people’s vote” to abandon Brexit.

Whatever hopes in June 2016 made a slight majority of a rigged electorate (excluding EU citizens settled here, who vote in local government elections, and 16-17 year olds) opt for Brexit, the reality is different.

Few people like what May has negotiated: a 69%-17% majority, in a poll taken on 19-20 November, thought the negotiations had gone badly.

Even fewer like the Tory right’s ill-defined “harder” Brexit formulas, or a “no deal” Brexit that would see motorways turned into lorry parks and food and medical supplies running short.

Join Labour!

The Tories and social calamity

See page 10

Debate and Norman Geras

After the Reading University “warning notice”, Alan Johnson starts a debate on violence and revolution.

See pages 8-9

Extinction Rebellion: morals and politics

See pages 6-7

The new student left

The new Student Left Network is calling for a vote of no confidence in NUS president, and the Student Feminist Campus Collective is organising.

See page 2

ALA BOUR VOICE AGINST BREXIT

Theresa May’s Brexit mess shows that the whole Brexit business is a nonsense. Labour should say that.

Labour should campaign for an immediate putting-back of the Brexit date, an early general election, and an incoming Labour government to hold a “people’s vote” to abandon Brexit.

Whatever hopes in June 2016 made a slight majority of a rigged electorate (excluding EU citizens settled here, who vote in local government elections, and 16-17 year olds) opt for Brexit, the reality is different.

Few people like what May has negotiated: a 69%-17% majority, in a poll taken on 19-20 November, thought the negotiations had gone badly.

Even fewer like the Tory right’s ill-defined “harder” Brexit formulas, or a “no deal” Brexit that would see motorways turned into lorry parks and food and medical supplies running short.

Labour should campaign for an immediate putting-back of the Brexit date, an early general election, and an incoming Labour government to hold a “people’s vote” to abandon Brexit.

Whatever hopes in June 2016 made a slight majority of a rigged electorate (excluding EU citizens settled here, who vote in local government elections, and 16-17 year olds) opt for Brexit, the reality is different.

Few people like what May has negotiated: a 69%-17% majority, in a poll taken on 19-20 November, thought the negotiations had gone badly.

Even fewer like the Tory right’s ill-defined “harder” Brexit formulas, or a “no deal” Brexit that would see motorways turned into lorry parks and food and medical supplies running short.

Join Labour!

The Tories and social calamity

See page 10

Debate and Norman Geras

After the Reading University “warning notice”, Alan Johnson starts a debate on violence and revolution.

See pages 8-9

Extinction Rebellion: morals and politics

See pages 6-7

The new student left

The new Student Left Network is calling for a vote of no confidence in NUS president, and the Student Feminist Campus Collective is organising.

See page 2

ALA BOUR VOICE AGINST BREXIT

Theresa May’s Brexit mess shows that the whole Brexit business is a nonsense. Labour should say that.

Labour should campaign for an immediate putting-back of the Brexit date, an early general election, and an incoming Labour government to hold a “people’s vote” to abandon Brexit.

Whatever hopes in June 2016 made a slight majority of a rigged electorate (excluding EU citizens settled here, who vote in local government elections, and 16-17 year olds) opt for Brexit, the reality is different.

Few people like what May has negotiated: a 69%-17% majority, in a poll taken on 19-20 November, thought the negotiations had gone badly.

Even fewer like the Tory right’s ill-defined “harder” Brexit formulas, or a “no deal” Brexit that would see motorways turned into lorry parks and food and medical supplies running short.

Labour should campaign for an immediate putting-back of the Brexit date, an early general election, and an incoming Labour government to hold a “people’s vote” to abandon Brexit.

Whatever hopes in June 2016 made a slight majority of a rigged electorate (excluding EU citizens settled here, who vote in local government elections, and 16-17 year olds) opt for Brexit, the reality is different.

Few people like what May has negotiated: a 69%-17% majority, in a poll taken on 19-20 November, thought the negotiations had gone badly.

Even fewer like the Tory right’s ill-defined “harder” Brexit formulas, or a “no deal” Brexit that would see motorways turned into lorry parks and food and medical supplies running short.

Join Labour!

The Tories and social calamity

See page 10

Debate and Norman Geras

After the Reading University “warning notice”, Alan Johnson starts a debate on violence and revolution.

See pages 8-9

Extinction Rebellion: morals and politics

See pages 6-7

The new student left

The new Student Left Network is calling for a vote of no confidence in NUS president, and the Student Feminist Campus Collective is organising.

See page 2

ALA BOUR VOICE AGINST BREXIT
NUS crisis: no confidence!

By Maisie Sanders

The launch meetings of the Student Left Network and Socialist Feminist Campus Collective on 17-18 November decided to campaign for a vote of no confidence in National Union of Student [NUS] President Shakira Martin.

A letter signed by Martin and NUS Chief Executive Peter Robinson has announced that “radical reforms” will be made to NUS democracy to resolve an alleged £3 million deficit apparently resulting from mismanagement of NUS’s commercial affairs. These reforms are due to be discussed at a meeting of Student Union Presidents and Chief Executives on 27-28 November, with no input from students, and finalised in time for NUS Conference 2019 to rubber-stamp them.

The 17-18 November meetings demanded that NUS open the books to a transparent, accountable and democratic investigation, with decisions to be made only by a properly constituted conference. No cuts should be made to NUS democracy, campaigns or representation.

If the Student Left Network’s no confidence motion is passed in twenty-five student unions, an extraordinary conference will automatically be called, where we will run our own candidate to challenge Martin.

The new organisations will host a speaker tour and phonebanking sessions to talk to activists and student union officers on Further Education and Higher Education campuses across the country. We will call for the whole student left to unite around the campaign.

If the proposed reforms to NUS democracy go through, NUS will be little more than a service provider and think-tank. The Student Left Network plans to counterpose itself as an alternative leadership for NUS with a different vision: we want a radical, campaigning NUS that is much more democratic and representative, with genuine control in the hands of its elected representatives and student members, not unelected and highly-paid senior management.

The Student Left Network is mobilising students across the country to protest outside the “Strategic Conversation” meeting of SU Presidents and Chief Executives in Bristol on 27 November (bit.ly/nus-sc). The agenda for the event states a set of principles have already been “agreed” for a new structure in NUS. We demand to know how, when and by whom this was agreed. We also demand to know why SU Chief Executives—unelected and often on six figure salaries—are taking part in discussions on NUS democracy.

The Student Left Network also agreed to launch a campaign for freedom of speech on campus, and against the government’s Prevent policy, linked to opposing the far right. This will start with a national demonstration later this term at Reading University, over management’s decision to flag an academic article on socialist “revolutionary violence” to the government as extremist. The campaign will put motions to student unions and UCU branches advocating non-compliance with Prevent.

Workers’ Liberty students will argue for this campaign to broaden out around the right to organise and protest on campus.

The Socialist Feminist Campus Collective voted to focus this term on campaigning for migrants’ rights and the closure of all detention centres, workers’ rights and sex workers’ rights. It has already circulated a model motion for students’ unions on migrants’ rights, called a student bloc on the Yarl’s Wood demo on 1 December, and will be co-hosting a speaker tour on sex workers’ rights early next term with Decrim Now.

Both organisations have adopted structures which individuals can join and groups and organisations can affiliate to. Temporary committees were elected until the first national committees are elected at AGMs early in 2019. Websites will be coming soon.

The Student Left Network has adopted a student “left unity charter”.

The Network will support candidates in NUS and Labour Students elections who publicly endorse the broad lines of the unity charter, as well as running its own candidates.


Sickening jokes

On 13 November the left-Labour website The Clarion put out an appeal against the “culture of lying and harassment...poisoning the environment of the left” promoted by the anonymous “Red London” Facebook page.

New signatories to that statement in the last week include Sean Hoyle, national president of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT), and other RMT activists: Marie Harrington, London Transport Women’s Officer; John Leach, London Transport Regional Organiser, etc.

Also Lily Madigan, a well-known activist in Lewisham Deptford CLP; Michael Chessum, known for his work in Another Europe is possible; Pete Firmin, admin secretary of the Labour Representation Committee, and dozens more.

Red London have responded to the statement, and to the longer dissection of some of their doings by Cathy Nugent in Solidarity 485 (bit.ly/cn-rl), not by any attempt to dispute evidence, but in ways which confirm the verdict of the statement and of Cathy’s article.

They have tried to “spam” the statement by adding fake signatures. Some of them joined the anti-racist demonstration on 17 November in London waving St George’s flags. (This wasn’t an “innocent” football-fan thing, but a calculated English-nationalist political gesture at a political event).

They have claimed responsibility for the “In Loving Memory of Sadam Hussein” plaque recently found screwed onto a bench on a high street in East London. Jokes? Sick jokes like that poi

No.488 will be out on 5 December

As we hope you’ve noticed, we’ve been at pains to restore the regularity of the weekly schedule of our paper and to diminish breaks to that regularity caused, for example, by other publications taking up the time at our office. However, we still make intelligent adjustments to the outside world.

This issue, no.487, is to be printed on the night of Thu 22 / Fri 23 Nov, and so to reach subscribers probably on Monday 26 November. The adjustment is because the Workers’ Liberty annual conference is on the weekend 24-25 November.

We will send no.488 to the printer on the night of Tue 4 to Wed 5 December. No.489 will be printed on the night of Tue 11 to Wed 12 December.

Since labour movement and left meetings are sparse in the last couple of weeks of December, the paper will then take a Xmas / New Year break.

No.490 will be printed on the night of Tue 8 to Wed 9 Jan, and then we will be back to the usual schedule.
By Alessa Alegre

Shortly before he was elected president of Brazil on the second round (28 October), Jair Bolsonaro made clear the extent of his intolerance to political opposition, saying of his political opponents “either they go overseas, or they go to jail.” He plans vastly to increase the powers of the militarised police, which will have significant impact on working-class, predominantly black communities.

A few days after his election, one of his political allies in the chamber of deputies proposed amendments to anti-terrorism, and stated openly they want to criminalise social and political movements such as the Movement of Landless Agrarian Workers (MST).

The amendments would include in the definition of terrorist activity any acts done to “coerce the government” to “do or stop doing something, by political, ideological or social motivations”, and would include in the list of terrorist acts “setting fire, stone throwing, destroying or exploding any means of transportation or any public or private property”.

The inclusion of these terms in the definition of “terrorism” had been previously vetoed by president Dilma Rousseff (Workers’ Party), although the existing anti-terrorism laws had already been used to penalise activists in the 2013 demonstrations.

Two of Bolsonaro’s main campaign pledges were to allow the possession of fire arms by civilians without the need to get a licence and to lower the minimum age for possession from 21 to 25 years. Bolsonaro has also stated: “I will give the police carte blanche to reabsorb CO2, but also mean the release of the CO2 already stored in the trees, and would have devastating environmental impact.”

It is stated that he will not recognise protections on indigenous lands, saying that “not one centimetre will be demarcated for indigenous reserves”. There are currently 690 indigenous territories, covering about 13% of Brazil, and it is thought that there are about 80 uncontacted groups living in the Amazon.

According to statistics from Brazil’s Indigenous Missionary Council, 110 indigenous people were killed in 2017. This will only worsen under Bolsonaro, who once stated: “It’s a shame that the Brazilian cavalry wasn’t as efficient as the Americans, who exterminated their Indians.”

The upcoming assault on indigenous rights is not a new trend, but one that has worsened since the presidency of Michel Temer took office in 2016.

One of Bolsonaro’s main points of attack on his opponent Fernando Haddad (PT candidate), and topic of “fake news” spread during the electoral campaign, was the so-called “gay kit”, that many of his supporters alleged would teach young children how to have gay sex.

The reference was to the “School Without Homophobia” project that was presented during Haddad’s time as minister of education. The material was vetoed by Dilma Rousseff for being too controversial.

Bolsonaro’s presidency will aim to wind back rights already won by LGBT people in Brazil. Evangelical Christianity is a powerful force in Brazil, having grown from three percent of the population in 1970 to nearly a third today, with the evangelical church making up a fifth of Congress.

Same-sex marriage became legal in Brazil in 2013 through the judiciary; through legislation, which means that some marital protections will likely remain, at least for some period of time. The Brazilian Order of Lawyers has recommended that LGBT couples get married before Bolsonaro takes power to avoid losing the right to do so.

Federal deputy Jesu Faria Lopes from Bolsonaro’s party PSL has questioned his followers on social media whether Brazil should have a law against gay kissing in public (as in Russia) in order to protect the innocence of children.

Bolsonaro has confirmed that the minister for both agriculture and environment in his government will be Tereza Cristina, current leader of the ruralist (or “beef”) bench of the chamber of deputies.

The Amazon is already being deforested at a rate of 52,000 square kilometers per year. An increased rate of deforestation would not only reduce the globe’s capacity to re-absorb CO2, but also mean the release of the CO2 already stored in the trees, and would have devastating environmental impact.

It is stated that he will not recognise protections on indigenous lands, saying that “not one centimetre will be demarcated for indigenous reserves”. There are currently 690 indigenous territories, covering about 13% of Brazil, and it is thought that there are about 80 uncontacted groups living in the Amazon.

By Alessa Alegre

How we got here

By Alessa Alegre

In 2003 Lula became the first PT (Workers’ Party) president to take power in Brazil, and initiating 13 years of PT government in Brazil (eight years of Lula’s presidency, followed by five years of Dilma Rousseff’s).

Various social democratic advances were made in those years, including taking 20 million people out of poverty, and introducing the benefit system “Bolsa Familia”.

In 2013, demonstrations against rises in bus fares took place in São Paulo, and Lula and Rousseff were met with a lot of police repression. In response to the state violence, and in the context of an unfavourable global economic situation that no longer allowed for the PT to implement social democratic reforms without introducing a more progressive taxation system, massive demonstrations sparked up all over Brazil.

The messages and demands from the demonstrations quickly became watered down to simplistic demands such as “better health and education” or “no corruption”, and slogans such as “o gigante acordou” (“the giant is awake”, referring to Brazil).

The upcoming assault on indigenous rights is not a new trend, but one that has worsened since the presidency of Michel Temer took office in 2016.

One of Bolsonaro’s main points of attack on his opponent Fernando Haddad (PT candidate), and topic of “fake news” spread during the electoral campaign, was the so-called “gay kit”, that many of his supporters alleged would teach young children how to have gay sex.

The reference was to the “School Without Homophobia” project that was presented during Haddad’s time as minister of education. The material was vetoed by Dilma Rousseff for being too controversial.

Bolsonaro’s presidency will aim to wind back rights already won by LGBT people in Brazil. Evangelical Christianity is a powerful force in Brazil, having grown from three percent of the population in 1970 to nearly a third today, with the evangelical church making up a fifth of Congress.

Same-sex marriage became legal in Brazil in 2013 through the judiciary; through legislation, which means that some marital protections will likely remain, at least for some period of time. The Brazilian Order of Lawyers has recommended that LGBT couples get married before Bolsonaro takes power to avoid losing the right to do so.

Federal deputy Jesu Faria Lopes from Bolsonaro’s party PSL has questioned his followers on social media whether Brazil should have a law against gay kissing in public (as in Russia) in order to protect the innocence of children.

Bolsonaro has confirmed that the minister for both agriculture and environment in his government will be Tereza Cristina, current leader of the ruralist (or “beef”) bench of the chamber of deputies.

The Amazon is already being deforested at a rate of 52,000 square kilometers per year. An increased rate of deforestation would not only reduce the globe’s capacity to re-absorb CO2, but also mean the release of the CO2 already stored in the trees, and would have devastating environmental impact.

It is stated that he will not recognise protections on indigenous lands, saying that “not one centimetre will be demarcated for indigenous reserves”. There are currently 690 indigenous territories, covering about 13% of Brazil, and it is thought that there are about 80 uncontacted groups living in the Amazon.

By Alessa Alegre

In 2003 Lula became the first PT (Workers’ Party) president to take power in Brazil, and initiating 13 years of PT government in Brazil (eight years of Lula’s presidency, followed by five years of Dilma Rousseff’s).

Various social democratic advances were made in those years, including taking 20 million people out of poverty, and introducing the benefit system “Bolsa Familia”.

In 2013, demonstrations against rises in bus fares took place in São Paulo, and Lula and Rousseff were met with a lot of police repression. In response to the state violence, and in the context of an unfavourable global economic situation that no longer allowed for the PT to implement social democratic reforms without introducing a more progressive taxation system, massive demonstrations sparked up all over Brazil.

The messages and demands from the demonstrations quickly became watered down to simplistic demands such as “better health and education” or “no corruption”, and slogans such as “o gigante acordou” (“the giant is awake”, referring to Brazil).

A shift to the right began. Demonstrators carrying red flags and wearing PT t-shirts were often met with hostility and even beaten up by other demonstrators.

By the time of the next wave of demonstrations, they had morphed into a much more moralistic, anti-PT and anti-corruption movement led by “new” right wing organisations such as the MBL (Free Brazil Movement).

In August 2016, a parliamentary coup against Dilma Rousseff took place, and she was impeached for using a type of fiscal manoeuvring widely used in Brazil and never before cited to contest someone’s place in office.

Michel Temer, Rousseff’s former Vice-President and coalition partner, leader of centre-right party ‘Brazilian Democratic Movement’ (PMDB), and major player in the impeachment, became acting president.

In January 2018 Lula was sent to prison. His trial, conviction and subsequent imprisonment has been a highly politically motivated affair.

Not only has it been a symbolic victory for the right, in taking down one of Brazil’s most cherished public figures, but it has also had particular practical effect.

Lula’s popularity is such that, even if there were allegations of corruption, he could have won the presidential election if free to stand.
Rejoicing in nonsense

By Jim Denham

E-Useless: Corbyn Hits Out At ‘One Way’ Brexit. We came to the conclusion that this, Labour leader says” was the front page headline in the 19 November Morning Star.

Predictably, the pro-hard-Brexit (sorry, “Legit”) paper liked Corbyn’s interview on Sky News’s Sophy Ridge on Sunday (18 November), in which he’d opined “We’ll vote against (May’s) deal because it doesn’t meet our tests.”

For those who lack a photographic memory, Labour’s tests include obtaining the “exact same benefits” as EU membership – a comment once made by David (“thick as mince, lazy as a toad”) Davis when he was Brexit minister.

“We’re quoting back at them what they said,” Corbyn explained to Ms Ridge: “and we believe it to be possible.”

But why would the EU give a non-member the exact same benefits as members, even when asked to by Jeremy? Jean-Claude Juncker has said it’s not possible. “That was his view and we have a different view.”

So does Jeremy think that no Brexit would be better than no deal? “I don’t think that’s an option we’re going to get given,” he replied, as if he was an impartial bystander in all of this and not an active participant in the debate.

Can Brexit be stopped? Jeremy had told David Gauke: “I didn’t think it was possible, but they [Steering] Starmer jumped up and said it could (no wonder the Morning Star doesn’t like him).

So would Jeremy, having voted Remain, like to stop Brexit? asked Sophy Ridge: “I don’t think you call a referendum and then say you don’t like the result and go away from it” he replied. But then two sentences later: “All options are on the table in the future.”

So if there was a second referendum, how would he vote? “I don’t know how I’m going to vote, and what the options would be at that time.”

So Corbyn’s position (as approved by the Morning Star) is that he would get a better deal in three months than the government has managed in two years by asking more nicely but if he needed longer he could use the transition period to renegotiate the withdrawal agreement that must be agreed for the transition period to come into effect and he doesn’t like the Brexit deal agreed by Brus- sels, because it doesn’t provide the exact same benefits of EU membership which he dislikes anyway because of state aid and corruption rules, but remaining is not nec- essarily better than leaving with no deal at all, and the outcome of the referendum must be respected but all options remain on the table, but a second referendum is not an op- tion for today but could be tomorrow, and if it comes he doesn’t know how he would vote.

In other words, Corbyn is basically pro-Brexit despite the fudge that concealed an overwhelming anti-Brexit majority at Labour’s conference.

The Morning Star is desperately trying to mobilise support for Corbyn’s betrayal of the wishes of Labour’s anti- Brexit majority by (for instance) repeating over and over again that EU membership would make impossible Labour’s plans for renationalisation of rail and other forms of state intervention in the economy. This claim has been disproved time and again, but they keep repeating it.

The 19 November Morning Star carried an article by one Kevin Nelson, suggesting that last year the UK government “was reportedly threatening to pay to care workers who’d been underpaid for working sleep-in shifts, “by concerns that such a move would be subject to state aid rules, which it would need to discuss with the European Commission.”

Note the weasel words “reportedly”, “concerns” and “need to discuss” the matter had been raised by the Tory government itself, searching for an excuse not to make the payments.

And in any case, the matter was never put to the test because (disgracefully) in July of this year the UK court of appeal (note: not the EU) ruled that the payments need not be made. But why let boring old facts get in the way of a good anti-EU scare story, eh?

Corbyn’s two key advisers, Andrew Murray and Seumas Milne, are basically Morning Star supporters, whispering in Corbyn’s ear about the “will of the people” and the dangers of free movement. Sadly, he seems to be listening to them.

JH thanks Matt Charley (of the ‘Red Box’) for providing details of the Sophy Ridge interview and the concise description of Corbyn’s present posi- tion on Brexit.

One king or another

By Kelly Rogers

On 8 December Another Europe is Possible is hosting a democratic conference, where members will debate and voting on documents relating to the organi- nation’s structures and strategy (details: bit.ly/aeip-c).

With Brexit round the corner, continued division in the Tory Party and the Labour Party, at the moment, just standing aside; it is more important than ever that the left builds a strong, grassroots campaign against Brexit, with positive demands for free move- ment and workers’ rights, and a vision for a socialist Europe at its heart.

Workers’ Liberty will be attending the conference, and we encourage all socialists to attend and join the campaign to stop Brexit. These are our thoughts on what should happen at Another Europe’s confer- ence.

1. We should campaign upfront for free movement and the general lowering of bor- ders as central to our positive case against Brexit. That idea should be central in all campaigning, including at high points.

2. We should recognise that Labour Party policy at present is committed to supporting Brexit (in a shape vaguely indicated to be less damaging than what the Tories are neg- otiating) and to restricting free movement. We should campaign explicitly to change Labour Party policy to one of stopping Brexit.

3. Our “other Europe” is a Europe of cross-border solidarity and unity of the working class and of the oppressed; of Eu- rope-wide democracy; of social levelling-up; of cross-continent democratic and social control over industry and finance; in short, a working-class socialist Europe. We fight Brexit in order to retain and secure the broadest terrain for class struggle to achieve those aims.

4. AEIP should elect a committee by method- ods ensuring that the committee is broadly in line with the policies and preferences voted for at conference. Thus, the majority of the committee should be elected at con- ference, and the total voting weight on the committee allocated to delegates from affili- ates, added after conference, should be lim- ited to a minority.

5. AEIP should encourage and support the development of local Left Against Brexit ac- tivist groups, which do public campaigning (stalls, door-knocking), organise public de- bates, send speakers to and promote mo- tions in local trade-union and Labour Party bodies, etc. These Left Against Brexit groups should have autonomy in their own local ac- tivity, and be able to link together auto- nomously to coordinate some of their activities across their country.

6. AEIP conference is a unique opportu- nity for activists from across the country to meet and thrash out an agreed policy and direction. Most of its time should be given over to that work, rather than to panels of “big-name” speakers or workshop sessions.

The substantive discussion on policy and structure should be the main pur- pose of the day.

AEIP conference 8 December

Letters

Like Dale Street Democracy 486, I rather wonder whether the “pro-independence fundamentalists” who have described David Mackenzie’s Outlaw King as a “clar- ion call for Scottish independence” can possibly have been watching the same film I saw.

The entire endeavour, both in terms of the actual film itself and the story it’s telling, end up as a little... well, pointless. Chris Pine gives a measured, reserved performance as Robert the Bruce, but with the effect that his reasons for risking everything to undertake a dangerous war against the English crown seem rather inscrutable, a mystery the film never really explores.

He says that Robert “fires up his troops with an appeal to God, honour, country, and family”, but this isn’t quite right. Where Mel Gibson’s ridiculous Braveheart had William Wallace conclude his pre-battle pep talk with a bloodcurdling nationalist battlecry (“Alba gu bràth”: in Gaelic no less, a language that Gibson’s ridiculous “Braveheart” celebrated in such style that the kilt-wearing Scottish,Richard the Lionheart, said “I do not care with an appeal to God, honour, country, and family”, but this isn’t quite right. Where Mel Gibson’s ridiculous Braveheart had William Wallace conclude his pre-battle pep talk with a bloodcurdling nationalist battlecry (“Alba gu bràth”: in Gaelic no less, a language that Gibson’s ridiculous “Braveheart” celebrated in such style that the kilt-wearing Scottish,Richard the Lionheart, said “I do not care with an appeal to God, honour, country, and family”, but this isn’t quite right. Where Mel Gibson’s ridiculous Braveheart had William Wallace conclude his pre-battle pep talk with a bloodcurdling nationalist battlecry (“Alba gu bràth”: in Gaelic no less, a language that Gibson’s ridiculous “Braveheart” celebrated in such style that the kilt-wearing Scottish,Richard the Lionheart, said “I do not care with an appeal to God, honour, country, and family”, but this isn’t quite right. Where Mel Gibson’s ridiculous Braveheart had William Wallace conclude his pre-battle pep talk with a bloodcurdling nationalist battlecry (“Alba gu bràth”: in Gaelic no less, a language that Gibson’s ridiculous “Braveheart” celebrated in such style that the kilt-wearing Scottish,Richard the Lionheart, said “I do not care...”)

But, in any case, the matter was never put to the test because (disgracefully) in July of this year the UK court of appeal (note: not the EU) ruled that the payments need not be made. But why let boring old facts get in the way of a good anti-EU scare story, eh?

Corbyn’s two key advisers, Andrew Murray and Seumas Milne, are basically Morning Star supporters, whispering in Corbyn’s ear about the “will of the people” and the dangers of free movement. Sadly, he seems to be listening to them.

JH thanks Matt Charley (of the ‘Red Box’) for providing details of the Sophy Ridge interview and the concise description of Corbyn’s present posi- tion on Brexit.

One king or another

By Kelly Rogers

On 8 December Another Europe is Possible is hosting a democratic conference, where members will debate and voting on documents relating to the organi- nation’s structures and strategy (details: bit.ly/aeip-c).

With Brexit round the corner, continued division in the Tory Party and the Labour Party, at the moment, just standing aside; it is more important than ever that the left builds a strong, grassroots campaign against Brexit, with positive demands for free move- ment and workers’ rights, and a vision for a socialist Europe at its heart.

Workers’ Liberty will be attending the conference, and we encourage all socialists to attend and join the campaign to stop Brexit. These are our thoughts on what should happen at Another Europe’s confer- ence.

1. We should campaign upfront for free movement and the general lowering of bor- ders as central to our positive case against Brexit. That idea should be central in all campaigning, including at high points.

2. We should recognise that Labour Party policy at present is committed to supporting Brexit (in a shape vaguely indicated to be less damaging than what the Tories are neg- otiating) and to restricting free movement. We should campaign explicitly to change Labour Party policy to one of stopping Brexit.

3. Our “other Europe” is a Europe of cross-border solidarity and unity of the working class and of the oppressed; of Euro- pe-wide democracy; of social levelling-up; of cross-continent democratic and social control over industry and finance; in short, a working-class socialist Europe. We fight Brexit in order to retain and secure the broadest terrain for class struggle to achieve those aims.

4. AEIP should elect a committee by meth- ods ensuring that the committee is broadly in line with the policies and preferences voted for at conference. Thus, the majority of the committee should be elected at con- ference, and the total voting weight on the committee allocated to delegates from affili- ates, added after conference, should be lim- ited to a minority.

5. AEIP should encourage and support the development of local Left Against Brexit ac- tivist groups, which do public campaigning (stalls, door-knocking), organise public de- bates, send speakers to and promote mo- tions in local trade-union and Labour Party bodies, etc. These Left Against Brexit groups should have autonomy in their own local ac- tivity, and be able to link together auto- nomously to coordinate some of their activities across their country.

6. AEIP conference is a unique opportu- nity for activists from across the country to meet and thrash out an agreed policy and direction. Most of its time should be given over to that work, rather than to panels of “big-name” speakers or workshop sessions.

The substantive discussion on policy and structure should be the main pur- pose of the day.
Brexit drama makes fund more urgent

Little to report this week on our fund appeal, not because our fund-raising organisers have been idle, but because they have been focusing all efforts on the collection for the appeal to be taken at the Workers’ Liberty conference on 24-25 November.

We hope for that collection to mark a sharp step forward in the fund drive, now at £3101 towards a target of £15,000. We need it.

£15,000

We are in for weeks or months of political drama over Brexit. The emerging groundswell against Brexit is, broadly speaking, a left-wing groundswell. “Left” here ranges from mild liberalism and cosmopolitanism to the combative socialist and internationalist ideas argued for by Jeremy Corbyn.

In fact, most of the mild liberals and cosmopolitans, most of the “Brexit-is-bad-for-business” crowd, seek only to limit and soften Brexit by lobbying, not to stop it by campaigning. Not all, but most.

The people willing to go onto the streets and into the doorways, into the workplaces and the trade-union and Labour Party branches, are mostly the more left-wing and socialist anti-Brexiters, the people who see free movement across borders as a principle and not just something “good for business”.

The left-wing and socialist anti-Brexiters need to assemble ourselves. The trouble is, the top activists of the labour movement are still mostly dominated by people who are either half-supporters, or defer to Jeremy Corbyn’s line of opposing the Tories’ formula in favour of “better negotiation”.

Solidarity is the only left-wing newspaper campaigning vigorously to stop Brexit.

We need to dig down below the accept-Brexit majority in the top layers of the labour movement to connect with the younger, fresher people who want to fight on this issue.

To do that will take energy. And resources: leaflets, placards, meeting-room hire, fares, all the rest of it. And money to pay for those resources.

Ways to donate:

1. **Subscribe to Solidarity**
   You can subscribe to Solidarity for a trial period of 6 issues for £7, for 6 months for £22 (waged) or £11 (unwaged), or for a whole year for £44 (waged) or £22 (unwaged). See back page for form.

2. **Take out a monthly standing order**
   If you take out a standing order you will also receive Solidarity. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.

3. **Make a one-off donation online**
   You can donate by sending us a cheque, setting up a bank transfer or via Palpal. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.

4. **Buy some of our books or pamphlets**
   www.workersliberty.org/books

Theresa May’s Brexit mess shows that the whole Brexit business is a nonsense. Labour should say that.

Labour should campaign for an immediate public, binding referendum of the Brexit deal, an early general election, and an incoming Labour government to hold a “people’s vote” to abandon Brexit.

Whatever the hopes in June 2016 made has happened, with all its problems, a new referendum will be needed to stop Brexit. There is nothing undemocratic about that. Democracy includes minorities always having the chance to argue and become the majority.

The problem is: what is Labour saying?

If Labour MP’s hold firm, then — for their own reasons — right-wing Tory rebels and the “backstop”-luminary Protestant Democratic Unionist Party MP’s from Northern Ireland will make it impossible for prime minister Theresa May to get her Brexit deal through Parliament.

To do that will take energy. And resources: leaflets, placards, meeting-room hire, fares, all the rest of it. And money to pay for those resources.

Ways to donate:

1. **Subscribe to Solidarity**
   You can subscribe to Solidarity for a trial period of 6 issues for £7, for 6 months for £22 (waged) or £11 (unwaged), or for a whole year for £44 (waged) or £22 (unwaged). See back page for form.

2. **Take out a monthly standing order**
   If you take out a standing order you will also receive Solidarity. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.

3. **Make a one-off donation online**
   You can donate by sending us a cheque, setting up a bank transfer or via Palpal. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.

4. **Buy some of our books or pamphlets**
   www.workersliberty.org/books

In French

Our article on “How to be pro-Palestinian without being “anti-Zionist”” (Solidarity 484), and an article by Gerry Ben-Noah from our forerunner Socialist Organiser, criticizing Lenny Brenner’s book on Zionism, have been translated into French and are available on our website at bit.ly/prop-as.

Thanks to Yves Coleman for the translations.

Theresa May’s Brexit mess shows that the whole Brexit business is a nonsense. Labour should say that.

Labour should campaign for an immediate public, binding referendum of the Brexit deal, an early general election, and an incoming Labour government to hold a “people’s vote” to abandon Brexit.

Whatever the hopes in June 2016 made has happened, with all its problems, a new referendum will be needed to stop Brexit. There is nothing undemocratic about that. Democracy includes minorities always having the chance to argue and become the majority.

The problem is: what is Labour saying?

If Labour MP’s hold firm, then — for their own reasons — right-wing Tory rebels and the “backstop”-luminary Protestant Democratic Unionist Party MP’s from Northern Ireland will make it impossible for prime minister Theresa May to get her Brexit deal through Parliament.

To do that will take energy. And resources: leaflets, placards, meeting-room hire, fares, all the rest of it. And money to pay for those resources.

Ways to donate:

1. **Subscribe to Solidarity**
   You can subscribe to Solidarity for a trial period of 6 issues for £7, for 6 months for £22 (waged) or £11 (unwaged), or for a whole year for £44 (waged) or £22 (unwaged). See back page for form.

2. **Take out a monthly standing order**
   If you take out a standing order you will also receive Solidarity. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.

3. **Make a one-off donation online**
   You can donate by sending us a cheque, setting up a bank transfer or via Palpal. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.

4. **Buy some of our books or pamphlets**
   www.workersliberty.org/books

Little to report this week on our fund appeal, not because our fund-raising organisers have been idle, but because they have been focusing all efforts on the collection for the appeal to be taken at the Workers’ Liberty conference on 24-25 November.

We hope for that collection to mark a sharp step forward in the fund drive, now at £3101 towards a target of £15,000. We need it.

£15,000

We are in for weeks or months of political drama over Brexit. The emerging groundswell against Brexit is, broadly speaking, a left-wing groundswell. “Left” here ranges from mild liberalism and cosmopolitanism to the combative socialist and internationalist ideas argued for by Jeremy Corbyn.

In fact, most of the mild liberals and cosmopolitans, most of the “Brexit-is-bad-for-business” crowd, seek only to limit and soften Brexit by lobbying, not to stop it by campaigning. Not all, but most.

The people willing to go onto the streets and into the doorways, into the workplaces and the trade-union and Labour Party branches, are mostly the more left-wing and socialist anti-Brexiters, the people who see free movement across borders as a principle and not just something “good for business”.

The left-wing and socialist anti-Brexiters need to assemble ourselves. The trouble is, the top activists of the labour movement are still mostly dominated by people who are either half-supporters, or defer to Jeremy Corbyn’s line of opposing the Tories’ formula in favour of “better negotiation”.

Solidarity is the only left-wing newspaper campaigning vigorously to stop Brexit.

We need to dig down below the accept-Brexit majority in the top layers of the labour movement to connect with the younger, fresher people who want to fight on this issue.

To do that will take energy. And resources: leaflets, placards, meeting-room hire, fares, all the rest of it. And money to pay for those resources.

Ways to donate:

1. **Subscribe to Solidarity**
   You can subscribe to Solidarity for a trial period of 6 issues for £7, for 6 months for £22 (waged) or £11 (unwaged), or for a whole year for £44 (waged) or £22 (unwaged). See back page for form.

2. **Take out a monthly standing order**
   If you take out a standing order you will also receive Solidarity. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.

3. **Make a one-off donation online**
   You can donate by sending us a cheque, setting up a bank transfer or via Palpal. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.

4. **Buy some of our books or pamphlets**
   www.workersliberty.org/books

Theresa May’s Brexit mess shows that the whole Brexit business is a nonsense. Labour should say that.

Labour should campaign for an immediate public, binding referendum of the Brexit deal, an early general election, and an incoming Labour government to hold a “people’s vote” to abandon Brexit.

Whatever the hopes in June 2016 made has happened, with all its problems, a new referendum will be needed to stop Brexit. There is nothing undemocratic about that. Democracy includes minorities always having the chance to argue and become the majority.

The problem is: what is Labour saying?

If Labour MP’s hold firm, then — for their own reasons — right-wing Tory rebels and the “backstop”-luminary Protestant Democratic Unionist Party MP’s from Northern Ireland will make it impossible for prime minister Theresa May to get her Brexit deal through Parliament.

To do that will take energy. And resources: leaflets, placards, meeting-room hire, fares, all the rest of it. And money to pay for those resources.

Ways to donate:

1. **Subscribe to Solidarity**
   You can subscribe to Solidarity for a trial period of 6 issues for £7, for 6 months for £22 (waged) or £11 (unwaged), or for a whole year for £44 (waged) or £22 (unwaged). See back page for form.

2. **Take out a monthly standing order**
   If you take out a standing order you will also receive Solidarity. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.

3. **Make a one-off donation online**
   You can donate by sending us a cheque, setting up a bank transfer or via Palpal. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.

4. **Buy some of our books or pamphlets**
   www.workersliberty.org/books

In French

Our article on “How to be pro-Palestinian without being “anti-Zionist”” (Solidarity 484), and an article by Gerry Ben-Noah from our forerunner Socialist Organiser, criticizing Lenny Brenner’s book on Zionism, have been translated into French and are available on our website at bit.ly/prop-as.

Thanks to Yves Coleman for the translations.
“Moral issue”, or politics a class analysis.

XR: I haven’t seen anything in particular within XR which is targeting the working-class in particular. We’re an inclusive diverse organisation, and we don’t try to use any kind of political or class system as a stepping stone to cause this movement to be recognised. Ultimately we go from the narrative of “this is a moral issue, this is a non-political issue, no matter what class system we are in you are going to be affected by climate change”.

In some respects you could say the working-class are more embodied together, the higher classes are more individually led. I don’t think that’s the strategy or conversation we’ve had within XR.

The lessons from Genoa, Climate Ca

By Todd Hamer

The emergence of Extinction Rebellion is a good thing. After a long period where there has been very little mass environmental activism, it is good to see someone doing something.

However, if this new movement is going to develop into something worthwhile, it will need to confront the problems faced by similar movements that have gone before.

In 1999 after the J18 Global Day of Action (where anticapitalists protested in the City of London), a series of articles were published on the state of the anticapitalist movement. One article, “Give Up Activism”, generated a great deal of discussion at the time.

The author is not from the AWL tradition and offers no answers, but their central argument remains important. They describe a contradiction between the tactic of “direct action” or civil disobedience and the goal of social revolution.

The anticapitalist movement came about as a result of lots of single-issue campaigners arriving at anti-capitalist conclusions: “Our methods of operating are still as if we were taking on a specific corporation or development, despite the fact that capitalism is not at all the same sort of thing and the ways in which you might bring down a particular company are not at all the same as those in which you might bring down capitalism.”

This type of “direct action” politics is essentially liberal reformist, seeking to change the behaviour of this or that corporation. It leads to a self-isolating culture where “activists” perceive themselves as “specialists in social change” sharply differentiated from “ordinary people”.

The article was written as the anticapitalist movement was growing. Following J18 there were large international mobilisations against capitalist summits in Seattle 1999 and Genoa 2001. However, as the police repression increased, the dead-end of the “shut them down” tactic became all the more apparent.

Were we going to risk life and limb for these one day spectacles? How does shutting down a summit challenge capitalism? By the time the G8 met in Gleneagles in 2005 the movement was already on the wane.

From the remnants of the anticapitalist movement in the UK came Climate Camp in 2007. Climate Camp organised weekends of collaborative living and political discussion combined with attempts to shut down a major polluter, 2006 focussed on Drax power station, 2007 Heathrow, 2008 Kingsnorth power station.

In 2009 after declaring itself officially “anticapitalist” the Camp decided to target the City of London. This Camp coincided with a workers’ occupation of Vestas wind turbine factory on the Isle of Wight which was threatened with closure. Instead of orienting to the first ecologically-concerned workers’ struggle since the 1970s, the Camp opted for instead for a smaller, less international re-run of J18.

A decade earlier J18 activists had well understood the problem with direct action against banks: “Instead of campaigning against Monsanto and going to their headquarters and occupying it, we have now seen beyond the single facet of capital represented by Monsanto and so develop a ‘campaign’ against capital. And where better to go and occupy than what is perceived as being the headquarters of capitalism – the City? So we have the bizarre spectacle of ‘doing an action’ against capitalism.”

But capitalism is not something that can be shut down by occupying a financial district. Capitalism is a social relation between people mediated by things; it is reproduced by us all in our social interactions. After 2010, Climate Camp ran out of direction and energy and petered out.

From 2007, AWL activists, with other class-struggle environmentalists, organised as Workers’ Climate Action. We sought to bring the energy and urgency of Climate Camp into the labour movement, and bring a class struggle orientation to Climate Camp. We were instrumental in initiating and then supporting the Vestas occupation.

We argued that greenhouse gases (and machines that produce greenhouse gases) are produced by workers following the bosses’ orders in exchange for a wage. To halt climate...
What has been said is that the inability of some classes to mobilise up the class ladder is a symptom of a systematic issue, and climate change is also a systematic issue: in that inequality, special interest groups stop certain things from happening: like equal pay or a more diverse country.

The rational reason behind that is because of special interests, and climate change is another symptom of that political issue. It’s a tricky thing to say because the front end of things isn’t trying to completely trying to tackle that issue wholeheartedly. It’s trying to raise awareness of that issue and say “there is a better way of doing things, and that better way of doing things is a democratic process”.

That democratic process would be inclusive of any class because you need to – in my opinion anyway – have a level of experts, who are competent people in the relevant fields, in that conversation.

So I don’t see us targeting the working-class in particular, I think we’re trying to be a uniting organisation irrespective of whatever demographic – gender, religion, class, whatever – and appeal to people’s moral duty that we need to do something...

• The full text of this interview is on the web at www.workersliberty.org/xr

change we need collective defiance of the bosses’ power in the workplace. We need mass working-class organisations to take industry out of private hands and into collective ownership where it can be democratically controlled.

This is the only democratic way of organising the rapid and unprecedented transition to a zero carbon economy. Those who grasp the urgency of this task should organise together to build the movement for a workers’-led just transition.

The civil disobedience that is now being organised by Extinction Rebellion is a promising way of building a movement around the alarming trajectory of climate change. However, at a certain point people will start to ask the same questions – how does sitting in a road or clogging up the courts help halt climate change? If the goal is simply “consciousness raising” then what next? It is important that this movement does not end up in the same direct action cul-de-sac as the movements that went before it.

The perspectives promoted by Workers Climate Action still offer a way forward.

By John Cunningham

Before the year 2018 reaches its end, the 100th anniversary of the death of Georgi Plekhanov should be noted and remembered. He is sometimes referred to as the “father” of Russian Marxism, and for good reason.

Plekhanov was the most important figure in the early Russian Marxist movement, a major theorist and voice in the Second International; and, as a member of the editorial board of Iskra, a collaborator with Lenin in the first years of the twentieth century.

Plekhanov and Lenin were to go their separate ways. By the time of the October Revolution in 1917 Plekhanov had moved considerably to the right. Despite this he was held in the highest respect by the Bolsheviks.

Born in Tambov of a moderately well-to-do family, Plekhanov studied in St. Petersburg. In 1875 he met Pavel Axelrod and was drawn into revolutionary activity. He joined the Zemlya y Volya (Land and Liberty) group, which espoused a radical populism based on the peasantry. Plekhanov was arrested a couple of times and then moved to Europe, where he spent many years in exile.

He met Social Democrats from the Second International and established contact with the ageing Engels. He studied Marxism. In 1883 he, along with Axelrod, Vera Zasulich, Lev Deutsch, and Vasily Ignatov formed the Emancipation of Labour Group, the first Russian Marxist organisation. It had just five members: soon Ignatov died and Deutsch was arrested and sent to Siberia, reducing it to three.

But with writings like Plekhanov’s Our Differences and Socialism and Political Struggle it established a distinctive Marxist analysis which won supporters including Engels: Marx had died in 1883, and before his death was very sceptical about Plekhanov’s group.

In the 1890s workers’ strikes and local Marxist circles more or less linked to the ideas of the Emancipation of Labour Group burgeoned. In 1898 the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party was founded, but only as a name (all the members of its committee were soon arrested).

In 1900 Plekhanov joined with Lenin and others to launch a Social-Democratic (meaning Marxist) paper from exile, called Iskra. They were soon joined by the “Pen” – a young revolutionary just escaped from exile in Siberia, better known as Leon Trotsky.

The ground was beginning to shift. In Trotsky’s autobiography, My Life, he remarks, “His [Plekhanov] strength was being undermined by the very thing that was giving strength to Lenin – the approach of the revolution. All of Plekhanov’s activity took place during the preparatory, theoretical days. He was a Marxist propagandist and polemist-in-chief, but not a revolutionary politician of the proletariat”.

And at for a while after the Second Congress (the first real congress) of the RSDLP in 1902 Plekhanov allied with Lenin. But soon he went over to the Mensheviks, who had split by refusing to accept the Congress decision about the editorial board of Iskra, and he was with the right wing of the Mensheviks in the revolutionary upheaval of 1905.

In 1912 the “Pro-Party Mensheviks” led by Plekhanov allied with the Bolsheviks to declare them no longer just a faction, but the sole real RSDLP. But then, in 1914, Plekhanov and his close comrades supported Russia in World War 1. Three years later Plekhanov opposed the October Revolution in 1917. He left Russia shortly after October, and died in Finland.

Plekhanov’s theoretical contributions were enormous and are still worth reading today. He published The Materialist Conception of History in 1891, Essays on the History of Materialism in 1895, and The Role of the Individual in History in 1898, and many other writings.

His long essay Fundamental Problems of Marxism (1908) was widely read, and along with many of his other writings republished by the Bolshevik government after his death.

He was one of the first and most vehement to oppose the so-called “revisionist” ideas of Eduard Bernstein in the German Social Democratic Party, and a strong opponent of varied philosophical-idealist trends within the Second International.

Shortly after the death of Plekhanov, Trotsky, who had been one of his most vociferous critics, paid this tribute to the man who had kept him off the Iskra editorial board before 1902. Trotsky was addressing the 17th Joint Session of the All Russian Central Executive Committee of Trade Unions on 4 June 1918.

He is dead but the ideas which he forged in the best days of his life are immortal, just as the proletarian revolution is immortal. He is dead but we, his pupils, are living and fighting under the banner of Marxism …

And before we turn to today’s struggle against oppression and exploitation against lies and slanders, I call on all of you to silently stand and solemnly honour the memory of Plekhanov."
On Norman Geras’s “Our Morals and Ours”

A friend has assigned one of Norman Geras’s essays (Our Morals: The Ethics of Revolution) for his undergraduate course, and as a consequence all the students have to fill in a special form, in accordance with the university’s implementation of the Government’s “Prevent” policy. — Tweet by Cambridge University academic Chris Brooke on 6 November 2018.

It is well worth using the occasion of Prevent’s intervention to encourage people to read Geras’s essay, which is summarised below. Our Morals: The Ethics of Revolution is an important critique of the mistakes of the Bolsheviks regarding the use of revolutionary violence and a valuable attempt to set out an ethics of revolution that learns the lessons of those mistakes.

1. Geras’s Question

The question the essay answers is this: “by what normative principles socialists might be guided, whether in judgement or in action, when it comes to revolutionary change.”

Geras’s answer draws on the insights of the “just war” tradition because he came to believe that “by way of a normative code” socialists have “nothing either as concrete and defined or as compelling as was embodied in just war thinking.”

The essay (Prevent staff take note) seeks to expel “beyond acceptable limits” much that has been viewed hitherto as a legitimate part of a just revolutionary struggle. Trotsky’s essay Their Morals and Ours — from which his own title is surely taken — comes in for particularly sharp criticism from Geras. He thinks Trotsky bequeathed only “generalities about means, ends and class interests, capable of answering no specific question as to what is permissible in revolutionary struggle” and so he allowed revolutionaries to feel that, under pressure, they could “relax all moral limits.”

It is important not to overstate the distance between Trotsky and Geras (who self-identified as a Marxist and socialist until the day he died). The essay makes the all-important point that social change is constrained by its historical context, but it underlines the pressure under which Trotsky felt himself to work. The essay questions whether revolutionary violence is ever justifiable.

Geras says it is “light work” to use the doctrine to ground a justification for revolution in the face of the oft-heard liberal and conservative denial that revolution is a legitimate part of human history. And why is this? Because:

“…means cannot in general only reflect the ends in view, because they will also reflect their own beginning, so to put it. They are doubly determined: notably by what they are intended to achieve, the putative goal, but by that situation which is their starting point as well. It is the nature of the problem under discussion — of revolution — that this starting point has ugly features, including the mobilization of violence on its behalf. How could the means of opposing it not reflect some of that ugliness … [s]hooting at the direct agents of a hated tyranny is still killing people.

Geras’s argument proceeds as follows. First, he establishes that revolutionary struggle can be just if it is directed (a) against tyranny — he invokes the Lockean defence of revolutionary violence in defence of fundamental rights, and (b) against “serious systemic injustices.” And if the state is the bastion of such injustice, then a political revolution against the state is also just.

He then moves to a second related question of limits: “What is morally permissible in the pursuit of a just revolutionary struggle?” Well, for starters, means must be “apt” i.e. “efficacious” and they must also be the “least costly”. So far, so obvious, you might say. But Geras does not leave matters there. Trotsky argued that those criteria determine the permissibility of any particular action because “problems of revolutionary morality are fused with problems of revolutionary strategy and tactics”. Geras raises the alarm at that point. Hold on, he says, this is all “a bit thin”. It risks licensing too much. More: it often has licensed too much.

Trotsky and Lenin (long before Stalinism) too often dismissed the question of limits and too often licensed too much. By seeing revolution as civil war, and war as pushing aside all morality; by misconceiving the “dictatorship of the proletariat” as violence “unrestricted by any laws”, by lacking any conception of individual rights, the very idea of limits was made unthinkable. And even those Marxists who have thought about limits, such as Herbert Marcuse, have failed to specify “where such limits fall and why”.

Geras himself approaches the question of limits initially by way of a deurborough reading of Steven Lukes’s critique of the Marxist tradition on morality. After pointing out to Lukes that the norms he identifies in Marxism are not specific to it, being shared by other political traditions, Geras then agrees with Lukes that, nonetheless, “Marxist discussion of means and ends has been deficient”. He also agrees with Lukes that making good that deficiency will involve a new focus on what Lukes calls “agent-centred restrictions” i.e. individual rights. A certain Marxist hostility to rights, thinks Geras, has got to go. A new positive attitude to individual rights is needed to make good the tradition on the question of revolutionary violence.

However, while Geras certainly rejects Trotsky’s and Lenin’s all-out ruthlessness, he does not think “individual rights” can be a fully adequate basis for revolutionary ethics either. It is at this point in the argument that he takes to a supplement from the non-Marxist and non-socialist tradition of moral thinking about violence: just war doctrine.

2. Geras and Just War Doctrine

Just War theory is a tradition of thinking about war that famously distinguishes between the right to go to war (jus ad bellum) and right conduct in war (jus in bello). Geras says it is “light work” to use the doctrine to ground a justification for revolution in the face of the oft-heard liberal and conservative denial that revolution is ever justified.

According to Geras, “if war is sometimes justified, then so too is revolution, the reasons
The Ethics of Revolution

Leon Trotsky meeting Red Army troops during the Russian Civil War of 1918-21

given on their behalf being of a kind: self-defence, autonomy, rights and freedoms, the throwing off of an oppressor, and so forth."

But what about right conduct in revolution? It was when Geras turned to the centuries of detailed reasoning about jus in bello, i.e. justice in war, that he realised what a neglected resource of great value just war doctrine really is for a revolutionary ethics. Where there was a relative poverty in socialist thought about setting limits to revolutionary conduct, just war doctrine offered a wealth; in the sheer number and complexity of the rules proposed, the welter of qualifications, the situational specificity, and in the long conversation about the practical application of jus in bello, sustained over centuries.

The contrast struck Geras hard: “on the one side, only the vaguest of notions; on the other, vast and detailed literature, not to speak of well-developed international codes and conventions”. He concluded that if socialists are to develop a socialist ethic of revolution embodying “a precise code of moral limits and moral rules” than they should view just war doctrine as a resource. His essay is him making a start on that project. In particular, he found just war doctrine helpful in answering the questions who? and how? just war doctrine helped Geras to answer the question of who can legitimately have violence directed against them? Here, Geras favours the introduction, adapted, into revolutionary ethics of (i) the distinction in just war doctrine between combatants and non-combatants, and (ii) the notion of non-combatant immunity.

Once this distinction is introduced, he thought, a revolutionary struggle against a tyrannical or grossly unjust regime must distinguish between “its direct agents of oppression and everybody else”. Once adopted, that distinction rules out “terrorism in the true sense”, “more or less random violence against whole populations”, “indiscriminate terror”. (Yes, there is an absurdity about Prevent making students sign a form before they can read an essay which makes a left-wing case against… terrorism. But let’s leave that aside for now, and follow the argument.)

For example, Geras sharply criticises Trotsky’s practice of taking hostages, “non-participants”, as violating the rule of non-combatant immunity. Trotsky’s justification of this practice on the grounds that these hostages have “ties of class and family solidarity” is, Geras says, simply “awful”. As, he believes, was Trotsky’s blurring of another critical distinction – between intentional and non-intentional injuring or killing of non-combatants. We might mention here Lenin’s staggering 9 August 1918 letter to G. F. Fyodorov ordering him to “appoint three men with dictatorial powers (yourself, Markin and one other), organise immediately mass terror, shoot and deport the hundreds of prostitutes who are making drunkards of the soldiers”.

Another question better answered with the aid of just war doctrine, Geras believed, was “how might those who are properly targets in war be killed?” Just war doctrine says: with minimum force and without seeking gratuitously to accentuate suffering. Again, this rules much out – some weapons, some methods of killing, torture. The separation of jus ad bello and jus in bello is so valuable, says Geras, because it makes us see that the justice of a cause does not make just every means employed in its pursuit. He cites several examples of unjust means being used in just revolutionary struggles.

3. Geras’s Principle

Geras then sets out some principles. Just war doctrine forces us to admit that even after the legitimate demands of historical realism are acknowledged, the force of other demands must still be felt.

“The leaders, the militants, of a movement against injustice are obliged for their part to try, as far as it is on their power, to bring a disciplined, scrupulous, discriminating, ethical code into the dark history they are fighting to transform.” Geras is advocating “discipline and scruple … self-imposed by a revolutionary movement in the light of a defensible code of ethical principles and constraints…”

Pulling it all together, Geras sets out a categorical imperative (my words not his): “individuals have rights – against being killed or violated – rights that may not, in general, be set aside; unless they forfeit them by making war themselves in defence of tyranny or grave injustice” (46). History tells us that if we do not spell out clearly, in advance of a revolution, “the extent to which the relevant rights may be forfeited”, then, likely as not, “the rights … are not worth a fig”.

Geras goes on (in words which, I think justify my use of the term categorical imperative): “These individual rights constitute a limit upon consequentialist calculation. They cannot be disregarded in favour of, traded off against a hypothesis or speculation of there being, some greater benefit derivable from such trade – even if this supposed benefit is itself computed in terms of rights”. Deeming these individual rights “all but absolute”, he insists that “no one’s life or person may be simply discounted,” and certainly not for “what are by their nature uncertain, sometimes highly speculative, projections”. And what of the problem of “dirty hands” (i.e. the scenario in which one finds that one has to kill an innocent person to save a city, the subject of so many moral philosophy seminars.) One can override these rights “if and only if doing so is the sole means of averting imminent and certain disaster”. Geras argues. He stresses “sole” and “certain”. Only if we face “impending moral catastrophe” can we do a moral wrong. And if we do, he thinks it remains just that, a moral catastrophe.

4. Is There a Right to Revolution in a Parliamentary Democracy?

Yes, says Geras, but not on grounds of tyranny. Rather, on grounds of the “grave injustice” that is “capitalist forms of power, wealth and privilege”.

This right has to be qualified by the fact of “popular consent”. In fact, “the stronger the basis for a presumption of freely given consent to some particular set of social relations, the more qualified must be the practical conclusions that can be drawn from any judgement of injustice pertaining to them”.

So, first, revolutionaries must wait until “those on the receiving end” act themselves in ways that show they too recognise the injustice. This gives the revolution “democratic credentials”. Second, the revolution must offer, and gain majority support for, “an alternative form of democratic legitimacy” (not a lawless “dictatorship of the proletariat”). Consequently:

“The road of social revolution cannot therefore simply bypass the institutions of parliamentary democracy. It either runs through them as a gateway or, being blocked in the attempt, shows in practice that they are not one, but are a fortress rather, a bastion against social revolution, just or democratic as it may be; and shows the location of a genuine gateway at the same time”.

Geras rejects “pure parliamentarism” and “pure insurrectionism” arguing, in effect, for a combination of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle in “a more or less well-articulated assault on the positions of capitalist power and wealth”.

I read Geras’s The Ethics of Revolution as yet one more example of Geras’s contribution to a self-accounting of the Marxist tradition, sitting alongside his remedial work on Marxist thinking about human nature, justice, “the party”, the institutions of a socialist democracy, the Holocaust, and much more.

The essay is another demonstration of his near-unique determination to confront as a Marxist what Perry Anderson once called “the internal obstacles, aporia, blockages of the theory in its attempt to approximate to a general truth of its time”.

UN report indicts “social calamity”

**LABOUR**

By Martin Thomas

“14 million people, a fifth of the population, live in poverty. Four million of these are more than 50% below the poverty line, and 1.5 million are destitute, unable to afford basic essentials...”

“Various sources predict child poverty rates of as high as 40% by 2022.

“Homelessness is up 60% since 2010, rough sleeping is up 134%... Food bank use is up almost four-fold since 2012, and there are now about 2,000 food banks in the UK, up from just 29 at the height of the financial crisis.”

“Philip Alston, the UN “Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights”, in his 16 November report (bit.ly/alston), sums up the picture as a government drive since 2010 for a “punitive, mean-spirited, and often callous approach apparently designed to instill discipline where it is least useful...”

“Wages and conditions...”

“Alston is not speaking from a left-wing background. He is an international lawyer, coming from a well-off background in Australia, where his brother was recently the president of Australia’s Liberal Party (equivalent of the Tories).”

**SUMMARY**

His report, a crisp summary of work by many research and campaign groups, primarily indicts social benefit policies, but starts by saying that “the labour and housing markets provide the crucial backdrop”.

In other words, the Tory mode of dealing with the economic turmoil and depression since the crash of 2008 has slashed union rights, batted union organisation in the area where it was strongest, the public sector, and thus pushed hard against unions’ ability to sustain wages and conditions.

Real wages are still way down on levels before the crash.

Then there’s the long-term rundown of social housing, the push which has taken most young people into private renting under landlord-and-tenant laws giving them little security and few rights, and the cutbacks in housing benefit rates.

Against that “backdrop”, the benefit system, the “safety net”, has been transformed not just by cuts but by an orientation “more concerned with making economic savings and sending messages about lifestyles than responding to needs”.

Many of the cuts mean costs, even costs to public budgets, being displaced from the benefits bill to elsewhere (food banks and other forms of emergency provision) rather than being reduced, but Government policy, says Alston, is shaped by “wanting to make clear that being on benefits should involve hardship” and to push people into “low-paid, temporary work just to avoid debilitating sanctions”.

“Almost 80% of those in poverty in the UK are in families where someone works. There are 2.8 million people living in poverty in families where all adults work full-time...”

“If Brexit goes through, it will all get worse. Even supporters of Brexit now mostly no longer dispute that it will hit economic life. The most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society will be least able to cope and will take the biggest hit.”

Alston reports at length on the Universal Credit program, “fast falling into Universal Discredit”. “Consolidating six different benefit fits into one makes good sense, in principle”, but the punitive way it has been done annuls the good sense.

The five week delay from a claim to getting benefits leaves many destitute. If they get “advances payments”, those must be repaid in relatively short order, and debts to DWP can be deducted from Universal Credit at a rate much higher than from older benefits.

UC involved “draconian sanctions, even for infringements that seem minor.” A UN report found “grave and systematic violation of the rights of persons with disabilities”, partly on the basis of the sanctions regime.

The UC has to be claimed on-line, not an innocent drive for efficiency. “One wonders why some of the most vulnerable and those with poor digital literacy had to go first in what amounts to a nationwide digital experiment”.

“Only 47% of those on low incomes use broadband internet at home...”

“This is not able to fill out an online application form.

“People who do not speak English and the disabled are more likely to be unable to overcome this hurdle...”

“According to DWP’s own survey from June 2018, only 54% of all claimants were able to apply online independently, without assistance. As of March 2018, only about one third of all Universal Credit claimants could verify their identity online via GOV.UK Verify, a crucial step in the application process”.

**FAIL**

“Around one third of new UC claims fail in the application process”. But “official policy is to keep ‘face-to-face’ help at a minimum”.

• The “automation” in the UC system has another twist. It relies on the tax authorities remitting information about your income, received from your employer, automatically to DWP.

• About 2% of the millions of monthly transactions are incorrect”. Because of the computerisation, “claimants often have to wait for weeks to get the proper amount even when they have written proof”.

• The automated systems are also used to “segment” claimants into “low, medium, and high risk”, making them more vulnerable to cuts...”

**March against climate change**

“Together for Climate Justice”. Sunday 1 December, noon, London. bit.ly/1dec-cc

Rally against Tommy Robinson’s new nationalist, anti-immigrant march

“Tommy Robinson”, formerly of the “English Defence League” has called a protest in London on Sunday 9 December against “the Brexit betrayal”. Plans are in process for counter-demonstrations.

See www.workersliberty.org/8dec-tr
How to beat the threshold

By PCS Independent Left*

Now that the union is on course for another national ballot in March 2019, a key question is what we need to do to beat the 50% turnout threshold this time. One option might be a disaggregated ballot.

The civil service is the largest ballot constituency in the trade union movement. Whilst other unions are larger than PCS, their membership is spread across a great many employers in the public and private sector. No other union is likely to need to take such a large number of members into a dispute at once as PCS, and certainly not on any kind of regular basis.

A disaggregated ballot simply, breaks that massive ballot into more manageable chunks. The civil service ballot becomes separate ballots of HMRC, DWP, HSE, DFT, Land Registry, Home Office, Ministry of Justice, etc. all at the same time.

The UCU did this for their dispute over pensions recently and have just done it again regarding pay, balloting each university and college individually. Unlike PCS’s last ballot where it was all or nothing, in this scenario those who passed the 50% threshold were in a position to take action – and those who didn’t could regroup and re-ballot.

Ballots would be coordinated and on the basis of common demands over pay. There would need to be national oversight of the campaign and what a settlement would look like, and the NEC would need to use the leverage of the ballot in talks with the Cabinet Office.

In other words, the only difference in a disaggregated ballot from an aggregated ballot is in the practicalities of the vote itself.

Levels of organisation differ starkly across the union, and this would more than likely be represented in the spread of results. If this is the case, the entire civil service doesn’t have to be held back by the sections who still have work to do. Those sections that don’t meet the threshold can take stock and use the results and action elsewhere as part of their efforts to agitate and inspire members when moving to re-ballot.

And if all sections meet the threshold there will be no difference to an aggregated ballot in outcome. There is a far greater risk of the union falling short in an aggregated ballot than a disaggregated one.

The elephant in the room is the split in the Left Unity faction. There’s a civil war on between supporters of Chris Baugh, the incumbent Assistant General Secretary of the union, and of PCS President Janice Godrich, who wants the post.

SPLIT

The split is the result of General Secretary Mark Serwotka wanting Baugh gone for not being an unquestioning disciple.

It’s entirely personal, and so political and strategic differences are being manufactured to disguise the fact. This in turn means that every question becomes one of which side you support rather than being considered on its own merits.

Chris Baugh is among those arguing for disaggregated ballots, and therefore the idea is opposed as a knee-jerk reaction by the Serwotka-Godrich axis.

None of the opposition holds up to serious scrutiny. In fact, it is all based not on disaggregated ballots and in of themselves but on disaggregated ballots combined with rolling up demands on terms and conditions into the national pay campaign.

Whilst this may be what some of Chris Baugh’s supporters are arguing, it is not an approach the Independent Left favours, since we have seen the “laundry list” approach to demands in the past – usually when responding to the failure of individual disputes by lumping them together. The fact is that opposition to adding demands on terms and conditions to a dispute over pay is not a serious argument against disaggregated ballots as part of a national pay campaign with proper coordination by the NEC.

The ballot in March 2019 will be a crucial test of the union. That we may lose it on the basis of personal dislike and resultant childish spats amongst those running the union is yet another reason we need a change in leadership.

* Abridged from the PCS Independent Left blog. Full article at: bit.ly/2kpNqql

Birmingham care workers continue strike

By Gemma Short

Home care workers in Birmingham struck again on 17 November in their ongoing dispute with Birmingham Council over cuts to services, pay cuts, and the imposition of an unworkable three split shift system.

Earlier this month the council, under pressure from the strikes, proposed a £6,000 pay cut (due to cut hours) instead of the original £11,000. Workers unanimously rejected the deal in a packed union meeting.

In a press release, Birmingham Unison said: “Management issued a new business case to make all the staff, 60% of whom are full time or work over 30 hours, redundant or impose on them a contract for 22.75, 21 or 14 hours. They will be asked to work 7 days out of 14, working opposite days each week. 14 hours’ contracts will be 7-11am. 21 hr contracts 4-10pm and 22.75 hr contracts 7-11am and 12-2.30pm. This will make it almost impossible to get a second job which, due to low pay, many rely on to make ends meet.

“This cut in hours will lead to a substantial loss in pay and remove entitlement to benefits like Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit.”

“Enable staff passionately believe in the work they do. The service they provide is a vital one.” The Council say the service isn’t efficient enough, but before the cuts started the service had a really high satisfaction rate.

“An employee Unison must win. If the Council can impose such drastic cuts in hours and working patterns on this group of members, all staff face a similar risk in the future.”

Workers have struck for 15 days over November and are planning more strikes for December.

• Donate to the strike fund: bit.ly/2z0EzEf

Central Line drivers strike again

By Ollie Moore

Train drivers on London Underground’s Central Line will strike again over 21-22 December, to demand the reinstatement of unjustly sacked colleague Paul Bailleu.

Paul was sacked after passing a random drugs test. Although he registered for the presence of cannabis substances, due to taking hemp supplements, he was within the “cut off limit” of 50ng/ml. The RMT union says Paul’s sacking “undermines the integrity of London Underground’s entire drugs and alcohol testing regime.” Company management seems to be worried the union might be right; they recently issued guidance to staff not to take hemp supplements, even though they are entirely legal and sold on the high street. The strike also doubles up as further action in a separate dispute against what RMT calls a “break-down in industrial relations” on the line, with workers objecting to an authoritarian management culture.

The 21-22 December strike will involve Night Tube drivers on the Central Line, only the second time Night Tube workers have taken industrial action since the service was launched.

Meanwhile, RMT is preparing strike ballots for station staff at Baker Street, in a dispute over management bullying, and Oxford Circus, Piccadilly Circus, Charing Cross, and Elephant and Castle, in a dispute over short-staffing.

All-Saturdays strikes

By a train driver

Guards on Northern will strike every Saturday until 29 December, and guards at South Western Railways until 24 November, in the ongoing dispute over Driver-Only Operation.

There has been no sign of movement from either TOC. According to the Telegraph, though, Northern have been in crisis talks with the DFT over extra funding to run the franchise. This has fuelled speculation that Northern may be re-nationalised in the near future, which would change the dynamic of the DOO dispute — as the union would be negotiating directly with Downing and the DFT.

Merseyrail talks are still going on after the RMT released a draft settlement/negotiating framework in October, but it is unclear where the talks have got to. Strikes remain suspended on Merseyrail. The RMT has somewhat belatedly started doing public solidarity work, holding public meetings in the north east and north west to drum up public and labour movement support for the strike.

They have also set up a Northern guards’ solidarity fund, administered by the union.

• Donate to the strike fund: bit.ly/2sarS3Bb
Iranian strikers arrested

By SZAC

Four of the striking Haft Tappeh sugar-cane workers, in south-west Iraq, have been arrested.

On 18 November, Iranian regime deployed its riot police and other forces en masse, and Esmail Bakhshi, Mohammad Khanifar, Mohsen Armand and a female journalist were seized and transferred to an unknown place.

A further 15 workers were arrested, but released on 20 November.

The previous day, 17 November, the 13th day of the sugar workers’ strike and the fourth day of general protests in Shush, the sugar workers were joined by their families and many residents of Shush.

At the same time hundreds of striking National Steel Industrial Group (INSIG) steelworkers protested in the streets of Ahvaz, the capital of Khuzestan province, about 100km south of Shush.

Workers in both cities chanted solidarity slogans in support of each other.

The steelworkers are striking over unpaid wages. Just in 2018 the steelworkers have been on strike and held street protests in February, March, June and August. The Iranian regime has beaten up workers and jailed more than forty.

On Friday 16th the sugar workers had carried a coffin — representing the demise of Haft Tappeh — through the streets of Shush. They chanted slogans like “One less fraud and our problems will be solved”.

They gate-crashed Shush’s Friday prayers and chanted slogans there about being hungry.

On 13 November steelworkers had joined the Haft Tappeh workers in a protest in front of Shush County Hall.

In addition to many bread-and-butter issues like unpaid wages, the Haft Tappeh workers’ main demand is that the Iranian regime “expropriates the company and ends the private sector ownership of Haft Tappeh... under the supervision of workers’ councils and general opinion...”

The Bakers’ Union has made a statement supporting the Haft Tappeh workers, and further support is being pursued.

Updates from SZAC at http://shahrokhzamani.com

Subscribe to Solidarity

Or subscribe with a standing order

Pay £5 a month to subscribe to Solidarity or pay us more to make an ongoing contribution to our work

To: ........................................... (your bank) ........................................... (address)
Name ........................................................................................................
Account name ..........................................................................................
Account number .................................................. Sort code ..............

European rate: 6 months €30 □ One year €55 □

Please make payments as follows to the debit of my account:

Payee: Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham, B1 2HB (60-83-01)

Amount: £................

To be paid on the 20th day of .......... (month) 20... (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing.

This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date .................... Signature ....................................................

Cheques (£) to “AWL” or make £ and Euro payments at workersliberty.org/sub
Return to 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.

Contact us

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