



& Workers' Liberty

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No. 495 13 February 2019 50p/£1

For Labour! Against Brexit!

Labour right-wingers have chosen this moment to help out the hard-pressed Tory government.

They have turned up the volume on the murmured speculations about a right-wing split from Labour just as the

Tory impasse worsens.

Labour and trade-union activists want unity to maximise the chances of using the Tories' thrashing-round to oust them from office, to force an early general election, and to get a new public vote to stop Brexit.

To get a solid political

basis on which to build that unity, we need to shift the Labour leadership, as well as rebuffing the right-wing Labour split-talkers. Labour needs a clear stand against Brexit and for a new public vote.

More on page 5



Pullout: Ireland, Brexit and Partition



Unions in logistics

How workers have organised in the huge and growing global warehousing and logistics industry

See page 6



Solidarity with Uyghurs

Ten million people in China's Turkic-Muslim Uyghur minority face state terror

See page 3

Labour for a Socialist Europe National conference

9 March 11.30am-5.30pm

Camden School for Girls, London NW5 2DB.

labourforasocialisteurope.org

Labour: call a Special Conference!

Students: secret “White Paper” plots end to debate

By Maisie Sanders

The National Union of Students (NUS) has released a “White Paper” which outlines “reforms” to destroy its democratic structures.

Unlike a government White Paper, which is public, these proposals are hidden from the vast majority of NUS members. They have been sent only to student union sabbatical officers and NUS full time officers for consultation.

The proposals are divided into a series of “requirements”, based on discussions with student union CEOs and sabbatical officers, designed to “simplify and modernise NUS’ governance and delivery”.

Most are designed to separate elections and policy making at conference, including creating a single “NUS manifesto” which will replace individual elected officers’ manifestos in determining campaigns, making officer posts two years long, and replacing motions debates with “consensus building” workshops and seminars plus online ballots before and after National Conference to determine

student views.

Also proposed is replacing cross-campus delegate elections with a system where student unions decide without a vote who to send to National Conference.

All NUS sections, Liberation groups and Regions Conferences could be merged into caucuses at National Conference. There is no mention of making the already far too short conference any longer to accommodate this. Another proposal is introducing details of the financial or operational impact on NUS or SUs into motions: presumably these “details” will be added by NUS staff!

The governance structures of many SUs mean that the executive body which will reply to the consultation will not be an elected officer or student council, but an unaccountable CEO with vastly different interests to students.

The results of the consultation will inform a motion to be put to delegates at National Conference in April. Even then, NUS’s current governance structure means that the only-semi-elected Trustee Board can overturn any conference vote.

Indeed, President Shakira Martin told NUS National Executive (NEC) members at their 6 February meeting that their vote against the 2019-2020 budget — which included scrapping the Trans Campaign, alongside other liberation and sections campaigns — was only symbolic. The Trustee Board had already approved the budget.

The reforms paint a picture of an NGO-like NUS where the already very limited opportunity for rank and file control is almost completely blocked. Officers will be elected not on the basis of the politics in their manifesto but their “skills and experience”, and once elected they will be tied to the single “NUS manifesto”. Bland consensus-formed decisions will drown out dissident political views and marginalised groups.

Members won’t be able to debate and vote on motions as a collective and will instead have to choose which smaller “zone” workshop to attend. Management will be given more power to veto motions on bureaucratic technical grounds.

The student left must respond with a completely different vision for NUS. Conference should be

longer, not shorter, with more time for political debate and discussion, and with democratic votes, not consensus.

Student unions’ delegate entitlements should be much bigger and elected by a cross-campus ballot. NUS need to run outward facing campaigns on a national and regional basis, decided by members at conference, that organise students to fight for their interests and help student unions to organise students.

We need to get away from the idea that campaigns, demonstrations and conferences need to cost tens of thousands.

NUS training days and events must be free and accessible to all student unions, and control of their content must be given to elected officers. Decision making power must be taken from unelected and highly paid management, including those on the trustee board, and given to National Conference, the NEC and the full time officer team.

We can’t transform NUS without first democratising our Student Unions. This means putting power in the hands of elected officers, not staff, external trustees and CEOs,

holding regular, built-for general assemblies and campaigning for Labour to commit to scrapping the Charity Law which makes it difficult for student unions to run political campaigns.

NUS must work to get an independent student union set up in every college, school and university, helping students to run campaigns and ensure already existing SUs are independent from college and university management.

The Student Left Network should campaign around this positive programme for a member-led, democratic, grassroots campaigning NUS at National Conference. Student Left Network National Conference on 2-3 March in Sheffield will discuss the NUS reforms and how the left should respond, as well as student union democracy.

NUS National Conference will also vote on a motion of no confidence in NUS President Shakira Martin, submitted by Student Left Network members.

• Reprinted from SLN blog: bitly/nus-wp

McDonnell and Jackie Walker

By Sacha Ismail

The controversy surrounding John McDonnell’s alleged support for Jackie Walker is not as clear as the press coverage suggests.

After his speech, McDonnell took some questions from the floor. Jackie Walker, who after many months of suspension is facing a disciplinary hearing in March over comments connected to Jews and antisemitism, asked one. Not about her case and status in the party as such, but about the abuse she has received online and on the attempts

of right-wing Labour MPs to conduct a trial-by-media. Both indisputably real and bad.

It seemed she went out of her way not to ask McDonnell for his view on her case.

McDonnell responded in kind. He talked about the way Walker has been treated online and in the media — in sympathetic but non-committal terms — and went out of his way not to comment on her case as such.

The way that has been presented in much of the media is nonsense.

A different criticism of McDonnell can be made.

On 5 February he said, rightly, on LBC radio that charges of antisemitism in Labour are “not a smear” (bit.ly/jmcd-nots).

In a political environment like the LRC conference, where criticising antisemitism on the left would be unpopular, he avoided that issue. He avoided controversy all round.

This same approach has seen McDonnell and others fail to publicly support Labour members expelled for left-wing activism, including supporters of Workers’ Liberty.

Radical Readers: Black Boy

Black Boy is a memoir by African-American Communist Richard Wright. Radical Readers in Space will be meeting via online video-call to discuss it on Thursday 28 February.

The book is a memoir of Wright’s youth as a black kid in the American South, written from a Marxist point of view.

Please take a moment to share and RT the event page very widely.

bit.ly/rr-rw-bb

There’ll be a regular stream of content coming out on the page in the weeks leading up to the meeting. There’s an audiobook of part one of Black Boy at bit.ly/bb-rw-ab

Lexiters go on tour

By Colin Foster

Who thinks Brexit looks good? Not most of the people who voted Leave in June 2016.

They tend to say: well, it can’t be worse, and anyway, we’ve got to go through with it now.

About the only people who think that Brexit will improve economic conditions for the majority are the Tory ultra-free-marketers, who say that Brexit will allow Britain to thrive as a low-regulation, low-social-overheads offshore site of operations for global capital.

They’re about the only ones — except a few people on the left.

“Trade Unionists Against the EU” is organising a speaking tour to claim that that “Brexit [can] free our country from the straitjacket of

the last 40 years” and “bring democratic renewal and hope”: bit.ly/tua-to.

Meetings are scheduled in Coventry, Manchester, Liverpool, London, and Durham between 4 and 28 March.

The speakers will be Costas Lapavistas (top-billed), plus a selection from an unholy range stretching from “Blue Labour” figure Lord Glasman (who argued for welcoming EDL people into the Labour Party), through the Communist Party of Britain (*Morning Star*) and the remnants of Arthur Scargill’s SLP, to Tariq Ali, Lindsey German, and John Rees.

Trade Unionists Against the EU is known to have had links with the UKIP-type right-wing outfit Leave.EU and Arron Banks: bit.ly/tua-ab.

Ideas for Freedom 20-23 June

Super-earlybird tickets for Ideas for Freedom 2019, the Workers’ Liberty summer school, are now available at www.workersliberty.org/ideas.

They can be bought at half the price “on the door” — for £24 waged, £12 low-waged and student, £5 unwaged — until 24 February.

The 22-23 June weekend agenda will include presentations and debates on issues around Brexit, antisemitism, climate change, 1919, 1989, and more, and there’ll be a walking tour on Thursday 20 June and an evening debate on Friday 21 June.

The school will be in North London and will provide a free creche. Overnight accommodation will also be available free. www.workersliberty.org/ideas

Stansted 15: a chance to breathe

By Todd Hamer

On 6 February the Stansted 15 received non-custodial sentences for their non-violent direct action to halt the forced deportation of 60 migrants.

The light sentences are a victory compared to the threat of sentences of up to 15 years of jail. That reflects the political pressure of hundreds of solidarity activists who mobilised in support, including some Labour MPs.

Outside the court room one of the 15, May MacKeith, told journalists: “Until there’s been a full enquiry into the hostile environment and an end to deportations and detention centres, we’ll keep on fighting.”

The End Deportations campaign group said: “After the immense stress, the fear, the uncertainty, the intimidation, we rejoice this chance to breathe. And yet still they deported 40 people to Jamaica this morning.



“Still they sentenced 15 friends as terrorists, [with] repercussions on every defendant’s life, and for all of us taking direct action in the future. Still the detention centres stand. Still even progressive politicians call for 28 days.

“We say not one day. We should be more angry than ever.”

The Stansted 15 will be appealing against their sentences under the on the grounds that they have been charged under anti-terrorist legislation for peaceful protest.

• To get involved see enddeportations.org

Uyghurs protest at Chinese Embassy

By Ian Townson

A protest outside the Chinese Embassy in London on 5 February indicted the “ethnic cleansing” and “cultural genocide” of the Uyghur people, a Turkic Muslim oppressed group in China.

Many Uyghurs see their battle as one for self-determination for what they call “East Turkestan, but the Chinese authorities have clamped down heavily.

About 70 people came, mostly Uyghurs. Chants included “Freedom for East Turkestan” and “End the Torture”, and emphasised that the protest was about “being human, and everyone’s concern”, not about religion.

Under the pretext of fighting “terrorism” — after some Islamist attacks — the whole of the Uyghur people have been criminalised. About a million have been imprisoned without trial in internment camps. Two or three million more have been subjected to forced drinking of alcohol, eating of pork, shaving of beards, etc.

The repression includes physical and mental torture, harassment, identity checks, confiscation of passports, public humiliation and many other “strict surveillance” measures.



Several members of the London Uyghur community gave moving accounts of their efforts to demand the return of their ‘disappeared’ brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers and exposing the past massacres sanctioned by the Chinese authorities.

Dave Ball spoke and read out a solidarity statement from Finchley and Golders Green Labour Party. The CLP calls for an end to the mass detentions and repression of the Uyghur people, and demands that the Labour leadership (Shadow Cabinet, NEC) support

the rights of the Uyghurs

The protest was called under the “umbrella” of the International Observatory of Human Rights, an NGO that insists on an “independent”, non-partisan approach, expressed in its slogan “Stop China’s Unethical Cleansing of Uyghurs”.

But the Chinese repression of the Uyghur people is due not to the absence of ethics but to the presence of Stalinism.

The Chinese Communist Party, right from taking power in 1949, adopted a rigid top-down approach, with bureaucratic rule

through blindly obedient and undemocratically appointed apparatchiks. That thoroughly anti-socialist and anti-communist system has produced the repression of the Uyghurs — not simply moral laxity, turpitude or unethical behaviour on the part of individuals.

We will work to organise solidarity and support for the forces within and beyond China that are struggling against oppression and to establish a real socialist system that will put the working class in the driving seat.

Venezuela: barricades at the border

By Eduardo Tovar

Three weeks after Juan Guaidó declared himself president of Venezuela, on 23 January, neither Guaidó nor the sitting president, Nicolás Maduro, shows any sign of backing down.

On Thursday 7 February, a convoy of lorries carrying humanitarian aid reached the Tienditas international bridge on the Venezuela-Colombia border. Venezuelan troops barricaded the bridge with two shipping containers and a fuel tanker.

From Guaidó’s perspective, the international aid convoy presents something of a win-win scenario in terms of political pressure on Maduro. If Maduro accepts the shipments, he will look weak; if he rejects them, Guaidó, the White House, and other forces opposed to Maduro can point to him preventing vital aid from reaching his desperate people.

So far, Maduro remains firm in preventing the shipments from entering the country, defiantly telling his troops that “We [Venezuelans] are not beggars” and dismissing the shipments as a mere “political show” to destabilise his government. He also continues to warn of the humanitarian crisis being used as a pretext for a military intervention.

On 5 February, several former



Aid trucks arrive at the Tienditas Bridge

ministers of Hugo Chávez, including Rodrigo Cabezas and Héctor Navarro, reportedly met with Guaidó to make proposals as to how to solve the crisis. This appears to be the first time that figures from the Chavista left, albeit its dissident wing, have attempted to enter a rapprochement with the new leader of the majority in the National Assembly.

Some foreign governments have made efforts to produce a resolution to the crisis. The International Conference on the Situation in Venezuela — originally launched by Uruguay and Mexico, but also backed by Costa Rica, Bolivia, and Ecuador — resulted in a “Contact Group” meeting in Montevideo, Uruguay on 7 February. The meeting enjoyed support from both Maduro and the EU, and more than a dozen European and Latin Amer-

ican ministers attended.

However, Maduro ultimately rejected the declaration the Contact Group produced, which called for

new presidential elections in Venezuela. Despite having co-sponsored the conference, Mexico refused to sign the resolution, citing its constitutional commitments to non-interference in other countries, as did Bolivia.

It is difficult to judge how the situation will unfold from this point. So far, the majority of the Venezuelan military still seems loyal to Maduro, though army Colonel Ruben Paz Jimenez has now declared in favour of Guaidó, joining air force General Yanez Rodríguez’s reported defection the previous week.

Our solidarity remains with the Venezuelan workers as they navigate these turbulent waters.

Millions more in Brexit payouts to bosses

By Rhodri Evans

We now know that the Tory government offered Nissan bosses £80 million not to complain about Brexit, though at the time Business Secretary Greg Clark vowed that he “had no cheque-book”.

The *Guardian* of 6 February revealed that other car bosses were also offered millions. Toyota was promised £21 million, Ford £15 million, BMW £6 million, JLR £6 million, Aston Martin Lagonda £7

million, McLaren £9 million. The *Guardian* says PSA (owner of Vauxhall) “received promises of support” but has had no payments yet. That is how things work between capitalist governments and capitalist bosses. It is the other side of the more than £2 billion spent each year on the political lobbying industry, £3 million per average MP.

A democracy in which the working class majority can have a decisive voice requires economic equality



No excuses for Cuban labour fronts

By Pablo Velasco

Bernard Reagan, national secretary of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, has eulogised the Cuban “trade unions” in a laughable piece of semi-Stalinist sophistry (Morning Star, 9 February).

Reagan makes out that Cuban workers have been struggling continuously since the Cuban Workers’ Confederation was founded in 1939. It is true that workers fought to overthrow the dictator Batista during the 1950s — something every socialist supports. The disagreement comes after the Castro movement took over and linked up with the old (Stalinist) Communist Party.

In early 1959 workers replaced the old union bureaucrats. However, in November 1959 the Castro government imposed its own slate, using Lázaro Peña and other Communist Party apparatchiks as their agents in the workers’ movement.

By November 1961, the CTC had changed its name to Cuban Workers’ Central (rather than Confederation — hence the same initials). Peña became the new CTC general secretary.

The CTC effectively became a labour front — it accepted government proposals to give up Christmas and sick leave bonuses and to work 48 hours a week. The state actively prevented workers organising their own unions and did not enshrine the right to strike. Until 1992, the CTC was recognised in the Cuban Constitution as the “representative” of Cuban workers.

The regime has not loosened its grip on the unions. On 13 September 2010, the CTC — the CTC, not the management — announced that half a million state employees would be “redeployed” — forced into self-employment. The state allows limited discussion in “assemblies”, but all within narrow parameters. The CTC is not independent from management.

CTC leaders are party-state functionaries, with no workplace organising experience, who are parachuted in from other branches of the state administration to “lead” the workers. In reality, workers in Cuba have so little power that their monthly ration barely covers half the necessary means of subsistence, and many have to rely on black-market work or tiny “self-employment” enterprise to get by.

Nobody should be fooled. We want solidarity with the Cuban workers, not apologetics for the Cuban Stalinist regime.

Unite should call its leader to account



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Four union leaders, including Len McCluskey of Unite, had one-on-one talks with the Prime Minister in Downing Street late in January. According to usually well-informed sources like Robert Peston and the Financial Times, McCluskey played a key role.

McCluskey sought commitments from May that would give some Labour MPs an excuse to back the government in the next “meaningful vote” on Brexit. That could allow Brexit to proceed without Jeremy Corbyn being held responsible by Labour’s overwhelmingly anti-Brexit rank and file.

“The unions are at war given Unite’s attempt at a side deal,” an unnamed “senior union figure” told the *Financial Times*, adding “and people are suspicious that it’s being nodded through by the [Labour] Leader’s Office.”

McCluskey has never been particularly hostile to Brexit, given his close links to the pro-Brexit Communist Party of Britain/*Morning Star* and also the Socialist Party. Interviewed on Channel 4 (25 January) he said: “Coming out of the EU is not the end of the world.”

An unnamed “Labour figure close to the leadership” told the *FT* that Corbyn — despite publicly opposing May’s deal — wanted it to go through “without his fingerprints on it”, leaving him free to focus on other issues such as public services.

“People seem to think Len is operating his own parallel operation, but the idea that Len has gone rogue is nonsense,” the figure said. “He has permission to drive Labour MPs to

a position of supporting the deal or at least abstain.”

McCluskey has also claimed that a second referendum would be seen as a “betrayal” by Leave voters and possibly cause civil unrest.

Given McCluskey’s key role in facilitating Corbyn’s capitulation to Brexit, it’s worth recalling Unite’s policy.

The Unite policy conference in July 2018 received a large number of motions on Brexit, the vast majority of which were broadly hostile to Brexit. One (from North West/Automotive RISC) called for “continued participation in and access to the European Single Market”. Several called for a second referendum.

One (from West Midlands/Automotive RISC) called upon the union to:

“Campaign against any Brexit deal that would harm UK jobs and economy by the introduction of trade barriers. Campaign against any terms that would have a detrimental impact on UK workers’ rights. Campaign to ensure that the UK public has a binding vote to accept the terms of the UK exit from the EU or reject the terms of the UK exit from the EU and remain in the EU.

“In the absence of a public vote on the final Brexit terms, campaign to re-join the EU if the UK leaves the EU with trade barriers that have a detrimental impact on UK workers.

“Ensure the union remains fully committed to all EU trade union federations, alliances and organisations”.

There was just one motion (London & Eastern/1228 Waltham Forest Council Branch) calling for a “socialist Brexit”.

Inevitably, in the compositing process, the motions were combined, generalised. In the case of the West Midlands Automotive motion, the more outspoken anti-Brexit sentiments got omitted.

This resulted in an executive statement that began by accepting the result of the 2016 ref-

erendum, but which did not rule out a second referendum (“popular vote”) on Brexit:

“We are also open to the possibility of a popular vote being held on any deal, depending on political circumstances.”

That was not the main thrust of the statement (which is to force an early general election); but a new public vote was there in black and white as a “possibility”.

Anyone foolish enough to have depended upon the *Morning Star* for information on Unite’s policy emerging from the conference would have got the impression that (to quote the *Star*) “the union said no to a second referendum on Brexit”. That was a flat, straightforward lie.

Fast-forward to the Labour Party conference in September 2018. Over 150 constituency parties submitted motions on Brexit — by far the highest number of motions on one topic ever submitted into Labour’s “contemporary resolutions” process.

LABOUR’S COMPOSITE

The overwhelming majority were hostile to a “Tory Brexit”. Most called for a “people’s vote” or second referendum.

The composite eventually passed says:

“Should Parliament vote down a Tory Brexit deal or the talks end in no deal, Conference believes this would constitute a loss of confidence in the Government. In these circumstances, the best outcome for the country is an immediate general election that can sweep the Tories from power. If we cannot get a general election, Labour must support all options remaining on the table, including campaigning for a public vote.”

This text originally said the vote should be on the deal only, but crucially that line was deleted — specifically in order to leave open the option of a new referendum including an option to Remain. Shadow Brexit secretary Keir Starmer confirmed this in the debate on

the motion and Corbyn subsequently agreed.

But immediately after Starmer’s speech, up jumped Unite assistant general secretary Steve Turner to attack Starmer for leaving open the option to remain.

“And, conference, that [“public vote”] is not a second referendum. Despite what Keir might have said earlier, it’s a public vote on the terms of our departure. We need to heal the wounds of Brexit, not reopen them”.

In fairness, it should be pointed out that although what Turner said was in clear and obvious breach of Unite policy, he was only repeating what McCluskey had said the previous Sunday, to the joy of Brexiteers, on the Pienaar’s Politics show on BBC Radio 5 Live:

“The referendum shouldn’t be on, ‘Do you want to go back in the European Union?’ The people have already decided on that. We very rarely have referendums in this country, the people have decided against my wishes and my union’s wishes, but they have decided”.

Corbyn has refused to sack eight front-bench MPs who defied the whip by not backing a vote that would have delayed Brexit and blocked a no-deal departure. That prompted speculation that Corbyn’s office was determined to kill off the possibility of a second referendum.

Former Unite personnel in Team Corbyn include party general secretary Jennie Formby and adviser Andrew Murray. His chief of staff, Karie Murphy, is a close friend of McCluskey.

“Len seems to be seeking deals behind closed doors to get Jeremy Corbyn off the hook, that’s the feeling,” said one “union chief” quoted by the *FT*. I’m usually fairly suspicious of anonymous quotes in the bourgeois press, but on this occasion it all rings true.

McCluskey’s on manoeuvres to facilitate Brexit, in defiance both of Labour policy and of Unite’s.

Dry January not so good



Letters

I’m sympathetic to some of the points made by Martin Thomas in “Health-anuary” (*Solidarity* 494) but I think the article attempts to draw conclusions with little evidence.

I took part in Dry January. I’m pleased I did. But for improving health, a general reduction in drinking is more likely required rather than a month of abstinence.

I am not a problem drinker, but like many British people an occasional binge drinker. The facts for problem drinking are stark; 30% of all alcohol is consumed by just 4.4% of the population. Dry January is neither desirable for nor targeted at those people, who are psychologically and/or physically dependent on alcohol.

Ian Hamilton, an expert in the links between mental health and substance abuse at the University of York, argues that Dry January allows a get-out for an industry that profits from addiction. It targets those who are not in general problem drinkers.

Those who do not need help with their relationship to alcohol can take part in Dry January, while those who have dependency and

related health issues have seen the services they need cut. It is still the most socially deprived who are likely to die from liver disease.

Since its launch in 2013 there has been no evaluation of the success of Dry January. As Ian Hamilton argues: “Millions of participants need a more accurate idea of whether or not they should bother (popularity should not be used as a proxy for effectiveness). Money would be better spent on those who need support the most and on tackling the root causes of excessive drinking.”

Martin Thomas also hints that Dry January is something worthy of support by socialists based on historical influence of the temperance movement. I think that misses the mark.

Was Dry January good for socialism? Its primary effect was on my bank balance. It has allowed me to donate £100 to the Workers’ Liberty fundraising drive. But I would probably save even more if I gave up crisps and biscuits!

For an alternative to the support for temperance you only have to look at early British Marxists like Harry Quelch who wrote (in *Socialism and Temperance Reform*):

“Its guiding principle [temperance] is the theory that the social evils of poverty and want, from which the masses of the people suffer, are due, not to unjust social institu-



Harry Quelch and Karl Liebknecht. History does not record what they drank at the restaurant

tions, to economic environment, and to class robbery, but to the innate depravity of the individual.”

Since Quelch’s time alcohol has become much more readily available in the home, and the cheaper prices available in supermarkets have moved the more problematic drinkers away from social gatherings in pubs and towards drinking in isolation, a worse situation.

The German socialist movement, which had its own bars, was not against moderate drinking and understood the role of the social and leisure time that those establishments helped to foster. Karl Kautsky himself

laid out the policy on alcohol in a series of contributions for *Die Neue Zeit* with mixed success.

Thomas says that the success of Dry January and Veganuary will likely produce an environment more conducive to convincing people of socialism. We want a world where people are less likely to become problem drinkers.

No one should stop anyone who seeks a period of abstinence. But we cannot prove benefits will come from just taking a month away from drinking.

Stephen Wood, Haringey

For Labour! Against Brexit!

From page 1

To get a solid political basis on which to build that unity, we need to shift the Labour leadership, as well as rebuffing the right-wing Labour split-talkers. Labour needs a clear stand against Brexit and for a new public vote.

The next votes in Parliament around Brexit are due on 14 February. As we go to press on 12 February, we do not know what will be voted on. Possibly many of the main factions will delay their pushes for votes — notably, on schemes to block a crash-out “no-deal” Brexit — until 27 February, the date when the government suggests it will bring a new Brexit formula to Parliament.

The indications from the press is that the Tory government has so far got nowhere in its search for a new formula.

Theresa May on 5 February rowed back from the position she took on 29 January, when she supported a backbench Tory motion for the Irish “backstop” — the arrangement to guarantee that the border within Ireland remains invisible — to be replaced by “alternative arrangements”.

She said: “I’m not proposing to persuade people to accept a deal that does not contain that insurance policy for the future”. She now says she wants only to modify the backstop. But a life insurance policy which can be rescinded at will by the insurer, or just expires before it can be activated, is no insurance policy at all.

The level of it is indicated by the talk of May jetting to Egypt on 24-25 February to hang around on the edges of an EU/ Arab League summit in the hope of catching the ears of EU leaders.

Economist John Springford calculates that the average household is already £2,000 a year worse off through the effects of the possible approach of Brexit. The polling com-



pany ORB finds that, now, more Leave voters think Britain will be worse off economically with Brexit than think it will be better off (bit.ly/swl-brex).

No-one much likes May’s previous deal. There is no prospect of it being changed substantially over the next few weeks.

LAST MINUTE

The best the government seems to hope for is that at the last minute the threat of a crash-out “no-deal” Brexit will swing enough MPs to vote, reluctantly, for a cosmetically-modified version of the 29 January formula.

Yet Jeremy Corbyn’s speech on 29 January, after the Parliamentary votes, dropped Labour’s previous call for no confidence in the government and an early general election. It dropped talk of a new public vote. It said only that Corbyn would meet May to discuss Brexit.

When Corbyn met May on 30 January, he took unelected officials from the Leader’s Office, notably longstanding Brexiter and Stalinist Seamus Milne, with him — not shadow Brexit minister Keir Starmer or shadow chancellor John McDonnell.

Jeremy Corbyn’s letter to May on 6 February softened Labour’s ask on a Brexit deal to little more than the UK having a customs union with the EU, plus keeping up with the EU on workers’ rights and climate policies.

Since then Jeremy Corbyn has emailed Labour members to restate his commitment to getting an early general election and having the “option” of a new public vote.

But when will the Labour leaders move on those policies? They are not even making a loud call for the postponement of the 29 March Brexit date, though by now no early general election or referendum could possibly be done before 29 March.

Labour has tried a vote of no confidence (16 January), and it was defeated. So why doesn’t the policy for a new public vote kick in? That was only an “option”? But what other options are there?

Labour front-benchers have said that they think that the June 2016 referendum vote obliges them to back Brexit. But that Labour can back a new public vote, even as an option, implies that politics did not stop in June 2016. A core idea of democracy — the right of the minority always to argue and seek to become the majority — still applies on this issue. Even more so, since “Brexit” now — May’s scheme, perhaps modified, or “no-deal” — means something much more specific, and different from, “Brexit” in June 2016.

Jeremy Corbyn should return to his 2016 stand: Remain and Reform, with support for free movement.

An actual full-scale compromise by the Labour front bench with the Tories on Brexit is still unlikely. Theresa May doesn’t want that, even if it would give her a majority in Parliament, because it would set the big majority of backbench Tory MPs against her, and quite likely create a full-scale split in the Tory Party.

More likely is that the weak and equivocal Labour front-bench position licenses enough Labour MPs from pro-Leave constituencies to vote with the Tories and help them through their crisis. But that’s bad enough! Bad enough to allow the Tories to squeeze through their crisis and the Brexit disaster to go ahead.

The right-wing split from Labour in 1981 — the Social Democratic Party of David Owen, Shirley Williams, Roy Jenkins, and Bill

£10,682 to date, £15,000 target

Finsbury Park branch of the rail union RMT has voted to buy ten copies of our new book on 1919, by Janine Booth, thus adding £40 to our fund-appeal total so far.

£100 came in this week from Stephen Wood, representing money diverted, by him doing “dry January”, from the brewing and distilling magnates to the socialist cause.

Other contributions came to £74.10, giving a total of £214.10 for the week.

Printing our pull-out this week is a cost outside our baseline budget. So will be the

£15,000

print bills for our forthcoming pamphlets on Rosa Luxemburg and the German revolution of 1918-9, and on Brexit and Europe.

So were the fares we’ve paid this last week for organisers from our office to go to meetings in Durham, Sheffield, Guildford, and Oxford.

For all such costs we depend on our fund-raising. In a period of high political ferment over Brexit, we can’t afford to be pushed back to minimal baseline operation. Even more than usually, we need the contributions our readers send us for our fund appeal.

- www.workersliberty.org/donate
- www.workersliberty.org/books

Rodgers — used Labour anti-EU policy as one of its pretexts.

Labour would drop that backward-looking anti-EU line by the end of the 1980s, in a move pushed by the remaining Labour right but, by then, no longer opposed with any conviction by the left.

Meanwhile, the SDP, whose main drive was right-wing rather than pro-EU as such, had collapsed. It did well enough in the 1983 election to guarantee a majority for Thatcher, but declined and then merged in 1988 with the Liberal Party to form the Lib-Dems. The Lib-Dems got a smaller proportion of the vote in the next (1992) general election than the Liberals in the election before the SDP was formed, October 1974.

Some at least of today’s anti-Brexit Labour right-wingers will know that history: if they do, their current split-talk is a spoiling action rather than a serious enterprise.

Even as such, it could give decisive help to the Tories in their difficulties. As could votes for a Tory Brexit deal by the pro-Brexit wing of the Labour right.

Labour should call a special conference to reconsolidate the party round a clear left-wing, anti-Brexit, pro-free-movement, pro-new-public-vote policy.

Labour for a Socialist Europe

National conference

9 March 11.30 am-5.30pm

Camden School for Girls, London, NW5 2DB.

labourforasocialisteurope.org

Why does Solidarity oppose Brexit?

Because the working class can be effective only through solidarity across borders and across differences of birthplace and background.

Because less barbed wire, fewer frontier posts and checks, lower borders are better for developing exchange and comradeship across borders.

The only exception is where a nation needs to erect barriers to gain democratic rights for itself and stop itself being ruled by a foreign power. That doesn’t apply with Britain and the EU.

The chief obstacle to democratic and social progress in Britain is not “Brussels”, but the “enemy at home”, the British bosses, bankers, and top state officials.

Because free movement across borders — even the limited free movement within Europe given by the EU — is a boon.

Historically, countries of high and relatively free immigration have been culturally and economically better-off than those that remain walled-off and happy to stew in their own thin juice.

Immigration does not reduce wages or increase unemployment. Migrant workers have typically enriched and played a dynamic and leading part in labour movements.

Because socialism is not possible in one country alone. At a long-ago stage of his-

tory, economic progress came through small-scale local economies, in which most people had access only to what was produced within walking distance, being linked into larger national economies.

Long ago capitalism went beyond that, creating a world economy with global production chains. Socialism can be established only by building on what capitalism has achieved.

No national economy, let alone a relatively small one like Britain’s, can be “economically independent” in a high-technology world.

For the inescapable economic interlinking to be managed through a voluntary confederation of states, like the EU, offers more potential for advance than it being managed only through the competition for advantage of different national administrations in the capitalist world markets.

In Europe, that competition for advantage in world markets, and the formation of alliances to serve that competition, generated two world wars in the 20th century.

Because the remedy for the bureaucratic and neoliberal shape of the EU as it is today is a united labour-movement struggle across Europe for democratic and social improvements.

A walled-off Britain is likely to be more bureaucratic and neoliberal, not less so.

Unions and the Inland Empire



Review

By Rhodri Evans

The Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach employ about 14,000 dockworkers, with the number fairly static as throughput has risen. The whole logistics industry around those ports employs over 500,000, with the number increasing.

Over 100,000 work in some 300 warehouses in one of the world's biggest centres of warehousing, the Inland Empire area of Southern California, 100+km inland from Los Angeles. Their numbers increased from 40,000-odd in 1990 to over 100,000 in 2012.

The Inland Empire is a microcosm of global trends, discussed in *Choke Points: Logistics Workers Disrupting the Global Supply Chain*, a book edited by Jake Alimahomed-Wilson and Immanuel Ness.

The dockworkers, at least the permanents, are among the highest-paid manual workers in the USA. Although big US ports are generally less automated than big European, Asian, or Australian ports, the workers use complex, high-tech equipment. They have a strong union, the ILWU.

Among the warehouse workers and the truck drivers who go between the ports and the warehouses, though, things are different. Warehouse work often involves a lot of heavy lifting, bullied by managers, in stifling heat.

The big majority of warehouse workers are non-union. 40% are immigrants, many illegal. Over 70% are Latino. About 70% are under 40. About half the warehouse workers are temps. Since deregulation of the trucking industry in 1980 (by Carter, not Reagan) many of the truck drivers are classed as "independent contractors", although they may not own their trucks and are controlled by a single employer.

Blue-collar warehouse workers average about \$17,000 a year, and about two-thirds do not have health insurance from their jobs; dockworkers, about \$100,000, with health insurance. Decades ago ports around the world were among the unsafe workplaces. Now they are relatively safe. But among the warehouse workers, a 2012 survey had 65% reporting that they had had at least one workplace injury in the previous year. (More stats at bit.ly/inl-emp).

Contrary to what you might expect, Amazon warehouses are among the least bad for wages. The worst tend to be "third-party logistics" warehouses, which contract their services to the big-name corporations like Walmart.

In 2005 the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the union most famous for talking about the "organising model" of unionism in contrast to the "service model", led a split called "Change To Win" from the US trade-union confederation, the AFL-CIO; and in 2008 CTW launched a Warehouse Workers United (WWU) union.

In the end the WWU drive failed. Mostly

through legal and media-oriented campaigns, some serious redress was won for some warehouse workers along the way, but WWU was wound up after the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) withdrew funding for it in 2014. All that remains is a Warehouse Worker Resource Centre (WWRC), www.warehouseworkers.org, which publicises bosses' abuses and workers' protests, and helps workers with legal or administrative complaints.

WWRC is funded by liberal foundations, not by unions. Its "board of directors" includes one representative each from the Electrical Workers Los Angeles construction electricians' local and the SEIU LA public-services local, but no-one from the Teamsters or the ILWU.

Three of the best chapters in the book discuss that experience. Though none of the chapters comments on this, the defeat of the WWU drive is typical of CTW's efforts since the 2005 split. Although CTW's stated reason for splitting was that it would make the organising drive which the AFL-CIO was unwilling to make, since 2005 CTW has done worse than the AFL-CIO at building membership.

PAID ORGANISERS

The SEIU-CTW "organising model" mainly means building up a large staff of paid union organisers.

These are tightly managed by the union leadership (and insulated from even informal control by the rank and file), who are quick-switched from one "leverage" (public protest) campaign to another membership-sign-up campaign to another "leverage" campaign, and so on.

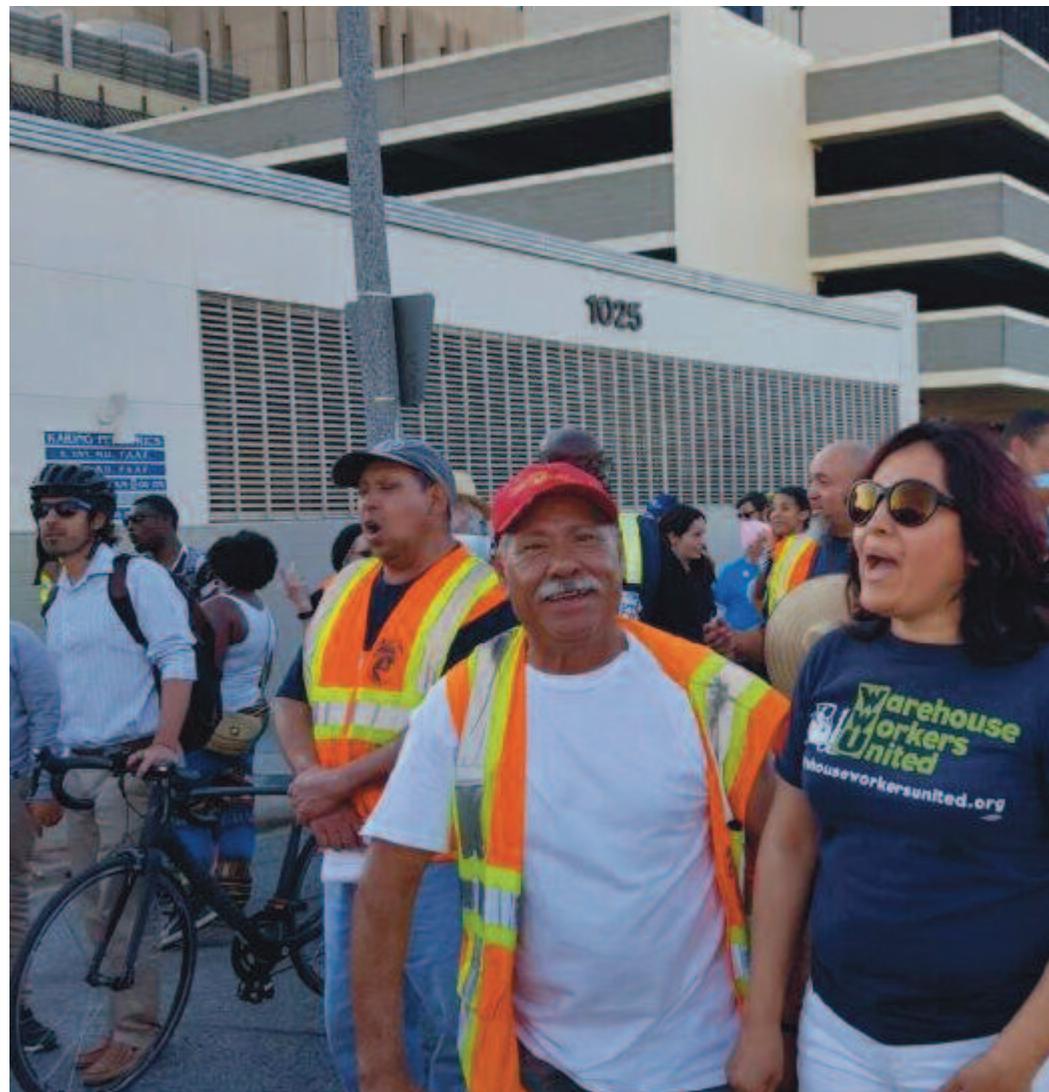
Those campaigns are not useless. Pursued, often, with dedication and courage by young union organisers, they sometimes win concessions from bosses. The problem is that the whole model is still managerial rather than class-struggle-based, and lacks two essential dimensions: union democracy, and the idea of sustained, militant cross-industry campaigns for positive demands, based with and geared to workers organising themselves within their own workplaces. (bit.ly/wl60x).

In this case, authors in the book report flatly that "WWU did not pursue a traditional unionisation campaign" in the warehouses. That was reckoned too difficult because of the high number of temps and illegal immigrants among the workers.

Instead, the campaign was pursued mainly through "leverage" publicity efforts targeted at Walmart. One effort focused on legal action eventually won \$21 million for workers employed by Schneider, a contractor operating distribution centres for Walmart which Schneider in turn staffed through two labour-hire companies.

But "there was", says another author, "little effort to address the issues [the warehouse workers] dealt with on a daily basis". There were some strikes, in 2012 and 2013, but the bulk of it was street protests and legal battles.

With the drivers, the Teamsters focused on



Warehouse Workers United won some concessions, but was wound up in 2014.

organising those who were classified as wage-workers, and legal action to get others reclassified from "independent contractor" to wage-worker.

"By 2017 thousands of port drivers have been involved with claims of misclassification... Almost every one of those claims has resulted in determinations of employee status and thousands per year in back wages and illegal deductions owed...", and cumulatively they have created "living examples, paid by the hour with benefits and 40-hour work weeks, Social Security, workers' compensation, and unemployment benefits".

"Over a dozen companies have experienced strikes" since 2014 with "massive" picketing operations. Under US law, if a strike is defined as against "unfair labour practices" by the boss — and most bosses give plenty of ground for such disputes — then the strikers have more legal protection than if it is an "economic" strike (bit.ly/ulps). "Wages have risen steadily... Port drivers are part of positive change where it was said to be impossible". Unions have also pushed with some success for better emissions and safety standards for trucks.

Peter Olney, the former Organising Director of the ILWU, argues that "the future for powerful dockworkers lies in conceptualising themselves as logistics workers and not dockworkers... breaking out of treating the

workers as isolated individuals clinging to elite status on the waterfront, and instead making common cause with workers all along the logistics supply chain".

This approach would include organising "the new jobs in maintenance, programming, electronics, and data management that have arisen because of the implementation of new technologies on dock and near dock" — Olney argues that "there is no future in fighting the machines", rather than fighting over the terms of their introduction — but also reaching out to the truckers and warehouse workers.

1930S

The ILWU did that in the 1930s. "The union led two historic 'Marches Inland' on the West Coast mainland and in Hawaii... [soon] the workers in the warehouse division far outnumbered the members on the docks".

In the 1970s and 80s, however, the warehouses were moved further inland and the ILWU let them escape its reach. "Local 6, the warehouse power local of the Bay Area with 20,000 members in the 1950s, has been reduced to a shell of its former self with fewer than 1000 members", even though the warehouse workforce has soared. Then since 2008 the ILWU has given no help to WWU or WWRC or the Teamsters.

re



Brexit's never-ending nonsense

By Alan Simpson

Let's get the bad news out of the way first. Whatever happens, Brexit is going to dominate parliamentary politics for at least another year, maybe more. No matter how bored you are by it, no matter how tempted by the thought, "Oh, sod it, let's just jump and get it over with", the nightmare still has years to run.

Why? Because Britain is nowhere near prepared for anything. The legislation for leaving hasn't been prepared or passed. No post-Brexit trade deals are in place (though we're told that one with the Faroe Islands is looking hopeful!!).

And no "frictionless trade", ongoing relationship with Europe has even been discussed. The most enthusiastic "jumpers" will find that Brexit is the entanglement they can never escape from. This is "the special place in hell" reserved for all of us.

Where then do you turn for sanity? Unexpectedly, it may be in the lifeline thrown out by Bob Kerslake, former Head of the Civil Service. His advice is to accept our current gridlock, rule out a No Deal exit, and face up to the reality that we need at least a year in which to give the public the final say on which option Britain wants to go for.

It is this space that I want to explore. If the EU has any sense it will offer to suspend Article 50... for as long as it takes for Britain to work out what it wants to do. The folly would be in putting a time limit on it, leading to yet another charge into patched up absurdities. To avoid the UK lurching into disputes about whether this required us to participate in the coming EU elections, we should just agree to extend the term given to existing UK-MEPs until Britain's position is clarified. Giving freeloader Nigel Farage an extension of his euro salary would be a small price to pay for this breathing space.

Labour's problem is in finding a way to support this. Jeremy Corbyn's letter — despite its omission of binding commitments to the environment — may be enough to (constructively) ensure no cross-party agreement. This is critically important. Just like the Lib-Dems in the coalition government, Labour would cop the blame for everything that goes wrong in the post-Brexit debacle. Wavering Labour MPs should think hard on this.

Many people have already explained that the five points in Corbyn's letter are either

not on offer or considerably worse than a Remain and Reform platform. A Customs Union would be worse than being in the Customs Union. Britain would have no say in rules we would then be bound by and no "exemption" rights currently open to existing Member States. It's a "fools gold" proposition.

CITIZENS' CONVENTIONS

The real opportunity is to turn any "pause for thought" into a new national conversation. The best way of doing so would be under a Labour commitment launch a nationwide series of Citizens' Conventions. It isn't just what the country needs. This could be Labour's lifeline too.

It scares me to look at the gap opening up between the Leadership and the membership in the Labour Party. Polling indicating that Brexit could be more damaging to Labour than the Iraq War or the 2008 financial meltdown, cannot be swept under a carpet labelled "the will of the people".

Labour's messages about austerity and social inclusion have not been enough to put the Party streets ahead of one of the most discredited and divided Conservative governments in living memory. The Party looks like a better organised Opposition, but not a government-in-waiting. One reason for this is the failure to offer a vision of post-austerity Britain that lives in the future rather than reconstructs the past. This is the space that large numbers of Labour's newest members are wanting to occupy... And they aren't waiting for the Leadership to lead.

It may not have figured in Labour's letter to Theresa May, but all round the country localities (and activists) have been declaring that climate breakdown is the test tomorrow's "transformative economics" has to engage with.

From Lambeth to Lancaster, Scarborough to Stroud, and Milton Keynes to Brighton, local authorities have been formally declaring their own "Climate Emergency". The core of these make one thing clear: Britain must to cut its carbon emissions by 50% within the coming decade. Nothing Labour currently has on offer is within reach of doing so.

"Climate Emergency", however, offers Labour the space in which all the negatives opened up by Brexit could morph into a national reconstruction agenda; providing hope (and inclusion) for all. What Labour has to do

is seize every opportunity to radically shift the goalposts of debate every time something conventional fails. The Nissan/Brexit debacle is a good example.

Of course Brexit was going to haemorrhage jobs. Labour's platform, however, should have begun from a recognition that there is no future in producing cars that add to the climate crisis rather than reduce it. Why fight for the right to produce a new generation of diesel cars when the next generation needs to be on PVs or hydrogen vehicles?. The same logic applies to housing, heating, waste and water. Every aspect of tomorrow's sustainable economics will have to work within fixed (and reducing) carbon budgets.

In practice, this means carbon budgets that reduce by 15% per year. It is a challenging but still do-able task. Citizens Conventions could be the platform for mapping this out; a platform Labour needs to connect itself back to its own membership.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Ten years ago Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and I supported an Early Day motion in Parliament. EDMs put down a marker rather than actually change the law, but their importance should not be missed. The 2009 EDM read

"... this House recognises that there is a climate emergency and that the catastrophic destabilisation of global climate represents the greatest threat that humanity faces; further recognises that the world is already above the safe level of atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration for a stable planet; further recognises the need to reduce this level to 350 particles per million or below; believes it is impossible to predict how close the world is to dangerous tipping points and that action to reduce emissions now is worth considerably more than doing the same later..."

Ten years later, and in Leadership positions the Left never dreamed it could be in, the challenge for the Labour Party is to do just that. Labour must move the debate beyond the debacle Brexit has taken us into. As the number of "climate emergency" localities burgeons around the land, lambasting the Tories is not enough. Labour now has to lead.

It's what the country is waiting for.

• Alan Simpson was Labour MP for Nottingham South from 1992 to 2010, and is now an environmental adviser to John McDonnell

The only chapter in the book written by logistics workers themselves is from Amazon workers in Poland.

The Polish Amazon workers, frustrated by the official union machines, have since 2014 organised their own mini-union, IP, with about 400 members and no paid officials. IP has not been able to call strikes, because Polish anti-strike laws are even tighter than British: a valid strike ballot has to get a turnout of at least 50% of the entire workforce, not just of union members.

Still, a strike ballot called by IP, and some wildcat slowdowns, have pushed Amazon into raising wages a bit. IP has also coordinated cross-Europe Amazon rank-and-file workers' meetings (amworkers.wordpress.com).

The "from-above" approach of CTW failed. The "from-below-only" approach of IP has not had quick success either, though its effort is continuing where CTW gave up.

The book can give no real example yet of an organising effort combining the resources of unions which have established points of strength with a democratic, from-below, persistent push in unorganised sectors. But probably that combination is what we need.

• Longer version of this article online at bit.ly/u-ie.

The historians and the B

By Colin Foster

Of Tsarism, the bourgeois liberals under Tsarism, the Provisional Government in 1917, the Whites in the Civil War, and even the Mensheviks and the SRs, what Figes has to say is pretty much what the Bolsheviks said of them.

Thus, for example: "Trotsky described Martov as the 'Hamlet of Democratic Socialism' – and this is just about the sum of it... [His qualities] made him soft and indecisive when just the opposite was required".

The Mensheviks, Figes notes, "had practically ceased to exist in Petrograd by the end of September [1917]: the last all-city party conference was unable to meet for lack of a quorum..."

"Blind by their own commitment to the state, which made them defend the coalition principle at all costs, they ceased to act or think like revolutionaries and dismissed the workers' growing radicalism and support for the Bolsheviks as a manifestation of their 'ignorance' and 'immaturity'..."

About Kerensky he is more scornful than anyone else I've read. Kerensky actively fomented a personality cult around himself, equating himself with Napoleon. He would visit the front dressed in the finest uniforms, and "even wore his right arm in a sling, although there was no record that the arm had ever been hurt..."

Figes does not even have much more than scorn for the Constituent Assembly dispersed under the influence of the Bolsheviks and Left SRs in January 1918.

When Figes wants a pithy summing up of something or someone – as of Martov, above – it is usually Trotsky he turns to for the telling phrase. Yet Figes is vehemently hostile to Trotsky and the Bolsheviks.

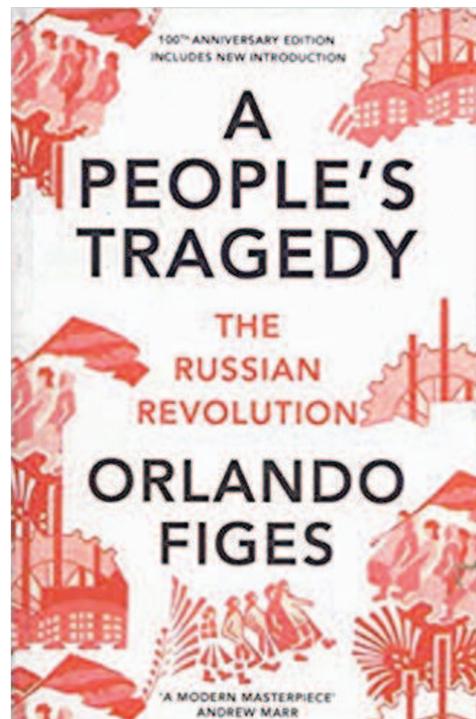
Discussing the civil war, he makes equations of them with Franco's fascists in the Spanish Civil War as frequent as they are nonsensical.

He especially hates Lenin. His first major reference to Lenin [p.129] is a claim that: "During the famine of 1891 he opposed the idea of humanitarian relief on the grounds that the famine would force millions of destitute peasants to flee to the cities and join the ranks of the proletariat: this would bring the revolution one step closer... In this contempt for the living conditions of the common people were the roots of the authoritarianism to which the revolution had such a tragic propensity..."

Figes cites no source. The story comes from one Vodovozov, later a Trudovik, writing 34 years later, in 1925. It was put into wider circulation by the biography of Lenin by the Menshevik David Shub.

Bertram Wolfe criticised Shub, citing a discussion of Vodovozov's story by Trotsky in his book *The Young Lenin*. Shub offered no reply other than that he considered Vodovozov "one of the outstanding Russian publicists, who devoted his life to the struggle for freedom and humanism" [Russian Review, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Jan., 1950), pp. 74-76].

Trotsky comments: "Vodovozov's reminiscences on the subject represent not so much Ulyanov's [Lenin's] views as their distorted reflection in the minds of liberals and Populists. The idea that the ruin and decimation of the peasants could promote the industrialisation of the country is too absurd in itself..."



Rhodri Evans surveys two influential anti-Bolshevik histories of the Russian Revolution: *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924*, by Orlando Figes; and *Lenin: a biography*, by Robert Service

"The Marxists [not just Lenin, who then was not yet politically active, but edging through his studies from populism towards Marxism] of course opposed not aid to the starving, but the illusion that a sea of need could be emptied with the teaspoon of philanthropy..."

"Even the old moralist of the revolution, Lavrov, proclaimed in print: 'Yes, the only "good cause" we can possibly embrace is not the philanthropic but the revolutionary cause'..."

"When famine recurred seven years later, there were immeasurably fewer political illusions... A very moderate liberal journal wrote... that [the officially permitted relief operations were] a 'pitiful measure', whereas 'general measures' were needed..."

Figes goes on to claim that in his 1902 pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin wrote: "Socialist consciousness cannot exist among the workers. This can be introduced only from without" (p.152). Figes then refers back to this claimed assertion by Lenin as an explanation for Lenin's actions in the civil war.

In general he believes: "In everything he did, Lenin's ultimate purpose was the pursuit of power. [Personal power, presumably]. Power for him was not a means – it was the end in itself" (p.504).

The simplest facts of Lenin's life make nonsense of that claim. As a man with outstanding academic qualifications from a relatively well-off background, he could easily have sought "power" through rising through official society. Tsarist repression was not so vindictive as to bar careers to people with radical pasts.

Lev Tikhomirov, the former leader of the terrorist Narodnaya Volya, recanted in 1888, in a big book entitled *Why I Ceased To Be A Revolutionary*, and within a year had a comfortable and influential position as editor of a right-wing paper.

Maybe Lenin was unconfident of Tsarism's stability? But why then, among all the oppo-

sition parties, join Russian Social Democracy, and then the Bolshevik Party?

One thing that marked off those parties from almost all opposition parties in history, paradoxically, was their belief that it was impossible for them to come to power! At most they aspired to a temporary minority place in a temporary "provisional revolutionary government" in the revolution they strove for. More, so they believed until 1917, was impossible.

In *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin did not write what Figes claims. He wrote that in the absence of vigorous political intervention "from without" (i.e. by already-organised socialist activists), and in the presence of the vast array of bourgeois ideological influences in capitalist society, workers' trade union struggles would lead only to "trade-unionist" consciousness and not to socialist consciousness.

He admonished the socialist activists not to treat the workers like infants, to be talked to only on narrow economic issues. The workers were fully capable of absorbing and developing the most advanced socialist ideas, but could not do so unless those ideas were presented to them energetically and vividly.

Later [p.550] Figes claims: "After the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk [March 1918] there was no real prospect of the revolution spreading to the West. Lenin was quite adamant about this" – when? where? in fact Lenin said the exact opposite! – "To all intents and purposes, the 'permanent revolution' had come to an end, and from this point on, in Lenin's famous phrase" – in fact Stalin's, not Lenin's! – "the aim of the regime would be limited to the consolidation of Socialism in One Country".

DEMONISATION

If we were to grant all Figes' demonisation of Lenin, we would face a mystery. Why did the Bolsheviks back him? Figes is candid enough to write:

"It was more than the dominance of Lenin's personality that ensured the victory of his ideas in the party. The Bolshevik rank and file were not simply Lenin's puppets... The idea that the Bolshevik Party in 1917 was a monolithic organisation tightly controlled by Lenin is a myth..."

"In fact the party was quite undisciplined; it had many different factions... If in the end [Lenin] always got his way [in fact he didn't], this was due not just to his domination of the party but also to his many political skills, including persuasion..." [p.393].

The nearest that Figes comes to reconciling these strands is the thesis that the Bolsheviks were mostly "peasant sons, literate young men... who had left the village to work in industry or to join the army before 1917, and who in the process came to reject the 'dark' and 'backward' ways of the old peasant Russia" (p.813), and that this made them believe in the mission of a city-based bureaucracy, including themselves, to impose progress on the Russian countryside.

When Figes comes to 1917, he makes a great deal of the flurry of drunkenness and vandalism which followed the workers' seizure of power in October. "The Bolshevik insurrection was not so much the culmination of a social revolution... more the result of the degeneration of the urban revolution, and in particular of the workers' movement, as an organised and constructive force, with vandalism, crime, generalised violence and

drunken looting as the main expressions..." [p.495].

He is scarcely warmer about the February revolution. Dismissing the claims of the liberals, Mensheviks, and SRs, he points out that those events too were accompanied by much violence, looting and disorder.

Presenting the story "warts and all"? Maybe. Figes explicitly rejects the idea that Russia could instead have progressed by quiet liberal reform. But the book, excellently written and full of vivid snippets of fact as it is, is curiously uncertain in tone, sometimes furiously denouncing the Bolsheviks, sometimes seeming ruefully to admit that for all their shortcomings they represented a heroic force of progress.

Figes' chief source of indictments of the Bolsheviks is, of course, the brutalities of civil war. The Bolsheviks never claimed not to have been authoritarian, ruthless, and brutal in the civil war, and the bulk of Figes' account is not very different from that given by the Bolshevik-friendly historian Jean-Jacques Marie in *La Guerre Civile Russe*.

Figes offers occasional extra "atrocious stories". Given the way Figes describes Lenin's ideas, I give little credit to those "extras".

But even, incongruously, while comparing the Red Army to Franco's fascist army in the Spanish Civil War, Figes recognises that the Reds won the civil war primarily because of politics. Both Reds and Whites started with no army to hand – except the Czech Legion in the hands of the Whites – and had to build one.

The war was decided by the ability of each side to "tap mass support or at least exploit mass opposition to the enemy".

Figes himself gives a telling example. Late in 1920, the White army in the south, under Wrangel, decided that to win they had to try to "make a leftist policy with rightist hands", as Wrangel himself put it. They evolved a land-reform programme.

But then they went to the villages with that programme in the form of a thick pamphlet, full of bureaucratic limitations to the land reform, trying to sell that pamphlet for 100 roubles.

The Bolsheviks, meanwhile, were distributing the short, clear Decree on Land adopted by the Soviet government soon after October 1917 in millions of free leaflets. Leaflets and speeches won the civil war as much as guns did.

The reading book used to teach Red soldiers how to read, and later in primary schools, started with the line: "We are not slaves, slaves we are not!"

The figures whom Figes treats with most sympathy are the liberal aristocrat Prince Lvov, who became the head of the first Provisional Government in 1917, and the talented Tsarist general Brusilov.

As Figes himself records, Brusilov joined the Red Army in 1920, and continued to serve the Bolshevik regime as Chief Inspector of Cavalry until he retired in 1924. He died in 1926, his coffin carried with full Red Army honours to a Russian Orthodox monastery (Brusilov had remained pious throughout).

Lvov went into exile but ended up half-endorsing the Bolsheviks. "The people and the power are, as usual, two different things. But Russia more than ever before belongs to the people... The people supports Soviet power. That does not mean that they are happy with it. But at the same time as they feel their op-

Bolsheviks

pression they also see that their own type of people are entering into the apparatus, and this makes them feel that the regime is 'their own'."

Figes himself, after eight hundred pages frequently equating Lenin not only with Stalin but also with Hitler and Franco, remarks that: "there were fundamental differences between Lenin's regime and that of Stalin" (p.807).

Does Figes subconsciously feel the same admiration that Bolshevism compelled from old Brusilov and Lvov? If so, he does not openly admit it. His conclusions are so philistine as to make Martov seem a hero of revolutionary decisiveness.

"The Russian Revolution launched a vast experiment in social engineering – perhaps the grandest in the history of mankind. It was arguably an experiment which the human race was bound to make at some point in its evolution, the logical conclusion of humanity's historic striving for social justice and comradeship..."

"The experiment went horribly wrong, not so much because of the malice of its leaders, most of whom had started out with the highest ideals" – this is what Figes says in his final pages, though in earlier pages he has freely equated Lenin, even early in his political activity, with Hitler, Franco, Mussolini, and Stalin! – "but because their ideals were themselves impossible... [for reasons] more to do with principles than contingencies."

"The state, however big, cannot make people equal or better human beings..."

Workers, in our struggle to become equal and make our lives better, can overthrow the "big" states which help keep us unequal and set against each other. We can make our own state to help us against the revenge of the old states. That is what the workers of the Tsarist Empire, led by the Bolsheviks, did.

The remnants and inertia of the old order eventually overwhelmed them, and subverted some of them. But the "ideals" will win in the end.

SERVICE

Unlike Orlando Figes, Robert Service notices Lenin stating in 1920: "We've always emphasised that a thing such as a socialist revolution in a single country can't be completed".

"Lenin's zeal for spreading the October Revolution was undiminished... The prospects for an isolated Russia were pathetic".

Service also knows – from his own unsympathetic but far from worthless book, *The Bolshevik Party In Revolution, 1917-1923* – that "the Bolshevik party was not [a] well-oiled machine of command... Organisationally the party was as anarchic as any other contemporary political party. It was also equally subject to the vagaries of the post and telegraph services..."

He gives, for example, a much more plausible account of Lenin in the July days of 1917 than does Figes.

Service: "Out on to the balcony he went, and told the crowd to stay calm. He asserted that the anti-governmental demonstration should above all be peaceful. This did not go down well... But his judgement held sway"

"Figes: "When [Lenin] was finally persuaded to make an appearance on the balcony, [he] gave an ambiguous speech, lasting no more than a few seconds... He did not



A Bolshevik cartoon from the Civil War shows the White Army retreating as the Reds advance

even make it clear if he wanted the crowd to continue the demonstration... Perhaps Lenin lost his nerve..."

Service rejects Figes's ludicrous claim that when Lenin was expelled from Kazan University in 1887 because of a small student demonstration, "this effectively ended Lenin's chance of making a successful career for himself within the existing social order, and it is reasonable to suppose that much of his hatred for that order stemmed for this experience of rejection".

(Actually, Lenin secured permission to complete his legal studies as an external student, qualified, and practised law, before he became an active revolutionary. But, in any case, the idea that someone devotes their whole life to overthrowing the state just because of a student mishap...)

Service gives an account of *What Is To Be Done?* which, though flimsy and uncomprehending, at least steers away from the myth that the pamphlet is a blueprint for authoritarian rule.

Service's Lenin is, in short, less of a caricature demon than Figes's. In some respects his book gives genuine information.

We learn, for example, that Lenin's health was collapsing as early as early 1920 – "the headaches, the insomnia and the heart attacks continued to give him trouble".

"By mid-1921... his health, which had never been wonderful, was in drastic decline. He could no longer put in a full day's work. The chronic headaches and insomnia had got worse, and he had suffered a series of 'small' heart attacks... he was seriously ill".

We should analyse the Bolsheviks' deeds and misdeeds in 1921, even if anti-Bolsheviks often do that with immense sneering at the Bolsheviks' supposed incomprehension of the democratic principle that the critics can champion so well from their armchairs. We should also bear in mind that theirs was a government not only beset by economic collapse, famine, and mass peasant rebellion, but also run by people exhausted and with their nerves mangled by three years of strain such as we cannot imagine.

It was not just that Lenin was desperately ill long before his stroke in May 1922. Trotsky was much diminished in vitality, and invalid much of the time, from the end of the civil war to about 1926. Other leading Bolsheviks must have felt the same strain.

But Service never looks at the Bolsheviks' actions in the civil war and 1921 as those of revolutionaries desperately trying to maintain their revolutionary bridgehead until the workers in the West can make their own revolutions. Of revolutionaries concerned that if they slacken, weaken, and fall, then the result will be not only the massacre of themselves and vast numbers of class-conscious workers in the former Tsarist Empire, but the collapse and disintegration of the revolutionary possibilities brewing in the West.

His method is to work backwards from every ill-tempered and exasperated comment made by Lenin in times of extremity, and the shortage of recorded comments by Lenin that he regretted the brutalities of the civil war (whom, one wonders, should Lenin have asked to record such comments in order to convince Service eighty years later that he "really cared"?)

From those things, Service works backwards to a general claim that "the Leninists" believed that they had "irrefutable knowledge of the world – past, present and future" and therefore could and should use any methods to impose their ideas on the population. "Lenin eliminated concern for ethics".

Service completes the chain with the old story about Lenin's supposed welcome for the famine of 1891.

Service's case in brief, is that Lenin was a tense, imperious, highly-strung, short-tempered, self-confident, arrogant character, and to deduce his alleged amoral, authoritarian politics directly from that.

To be sure, all accounts other than Stalinist hagiography suggest that Lenin was anything but an easy-going character.

But Service seems to be brainwashed by the prevailing culture which would have us consider all political choices in function of the supposed personal qualities of prominent people.

He seems unable to understand that politics have autonomy from personality. The leadership of a revolutionary party cannot be exercised effectively by anyone other than people with strong and forceful, even peremptory characters; but to condemn it on those grounds is no more than to sit on the sidelines of history wringing one's hands.

"Oh, if only history were made by gentle, easy-going people!"

Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

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

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

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

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

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

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

More online at www.workersliberty.org  Workers' Liberty  @workersliberty

More greenwashing than green



Climate

By Alan Gilbert

On 7 February, bosses at the Drax power plant, near Selby in North Yorkshire, announced they had started using "carbon capture and storage" (CCS) to remove carbon dioxide from the plant's emissions.

The operation will remove only a tiny proportion of the carbon dioxide which the plant emits, and as yet has no provision to store it anywhere.

The bosses have hailed the operation as a breakthrough, variously claiming that it is the first working "carbon capture" project in Europe, and the first one capturing carbon from the burning of "biomass" anywhere in the world.

However, environmental scientists warn that "biomass", even with more developed CCS, is not a good low-emissions technology.

Drax burns seven million tonnes

of wood a year, more wood than is harvested in the whole of Britain. The theory is that the wood has already absorbed CO₂ from the atmosphere while the trees were growing, and if CCS extracts CO₂ from what is emitted when the wood is burned, then the whole process subtracts CO₂ from the atmosphere.

Coal, oil, and gas are generated from organic matter which absorbed CO₂ from the atmosphere millions of years ago, but wood and other "biomass" fuels have absorbed it more recently.

And (attractive profits alert!) power stations previously running on coal, as Drax was, can be relatively cheaply adapted to run on biomass, as Drax has been since 2003.

The argument cuts several corners.

If trees were not cut down and burned, and continued growing instead, then they would absorb more carbon.

If land is allowed to develop or continue dense and diverse plant



growth, it will absorb more carbon than if it is converted into the sparser, more monocultural plant growth suitable for the harvesting of biomass.

Drax burns large quantities of wood pellets which come from the clear-cutting of carbon-rich coastal wetland forests in the south-eastern USA.

A UK government in 2014 reported that increased logging of such forests for bioenergy results in carbon emissions that are up to three times as high as those from coal over a period of 40 years.

Even if an area has already been converted to agribusiness use, and

theoretically, long-term, CO₂ absorption by new-growing trees and plants will match CO₂ emissions from burning current trees and plants, there will be a "lag" on the scale of decades. And with global warming, we can't spare decades.

Reliance on CCS is part of an approach which does lip-service to tackling climate change by gradual changes to the fossil-fuel-based power industry done in a way that doesn't disturb profits.

We need instead a concerted global plan for conversion to low-CO₂ technologies — wind, solar power, hydroelectric, probably nuclear too, but not biomass.

Momentum, Tribune and Brexit

By Sacha Ismail

This is in some ways the biggest crisis of parliamentary politics ever in British history.

Brexit dominates politics in a way no issue has done since, perhaps, the miners' strike of 1984-5.

Yet the biggest Labour left grouping, Momentum, has remained silent on Brexit.

In October-November 2018, after some pressure from activists, Momentum ran a consultation of its members on Brexit. The consultation was not a conference with debate, motions, amendments, votes. That's not Momentum's way. It was an e-polling exercise.

It showed 82% of Momentum members thinking Brexit a bad thing, and 81% saying Labour should go for a new public vote on Brexit, at least unless Labour could force a new general election. But Momentum has not promoted those 80%-plus majority views.

As is often the case with Momentum's silences (for instance also on the related issue of free movement, which, as far as we know, Momentum still supports, on paper), the silence conceals a rather definite and unhealthy political leaning.

There are different views among Momentum's senior office staff — those who actually make decisions in the organisation. But on this, pro-Brexit people are driving what Momentum does. Their influence shapes its refusal to take a position which would be popular among its members.

Does Momentum say nothing about politics at all then, other than to support Jeremy Corbyn in general and to mobilise votes in

internal Labour Party elections?

Not quite. Momentum has done some good work on left anti-semitism recently, tweeting a recommendation to read Steve Cohen's valuable book *That's Funny, You Don't Look Antisemitic*.

And, in a less welcome move, Momentum has promoted the new *Tribune* magazine, a publication run by pro-Brexiters and publishing mostly pro-Brexit articles.

A 6 February Momentum circular told members: "Momentum Westminster have started a reading group for the dazzling recently-relaunched socialist magazine *Tribune*... Want to set up your own *Tribune* reading group? Email editor@tribunemag.co.uk and they'll tell you how".

Momentum is not promoting debate and reading in general, but promoting one particular publication of the Labour left as against all the others (*Solidarity*, *The Clarion*, *Socialist Appeal*, the two *Labour Briefings*, etc.).

Arguably this is an advance on Momentum's earlier publication preferences. The first *The World Transformed* event in 2016, sponsored by Momentum, promoted the *Morning Star* (the paper linked to the Communist Party of Britain), putting it "officially" on sale inside the event while sales of Labour left publications were "officially" (though ineffectively) banned there.

We need a Labour left which has internal democracy, which debates out political ideas (including Brexit), and which encourages a pluralistic and open-minded culture of reading and discussion.



School student walkout 15 February

On Friday 15 February school and college students across the UK are set to walk out of lessons to protest over climate change.

This is part of a global wave of action, sparked by Swedish school student Greta Thunberg last August, which has already included large mobilisations in Australia (pic above: 30 November), Belgium, and other countries.

Walkouts are expected in around 30 different cities, towns and villages. A global day of school strikes will follow on 15 March.

Organisers have built the walkouts through social media, with regular online meetings, producing guides for how to walkout, and model letters to headteachers and lesson resources for teachers.

• <https://www.facebook.com/Strike4Youth/>

Couriers: building a movement



Interview

Deliveroo couriers are due to strike again on 14 February, for demands including a minimum payment of £5 per drop, paid waiting times of £10/hour, and more.

An activist involved in the Couriers and Logistics branch of the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB) spoke to *Solidarity* about the strike.

Deliveroo couriers in a number of cities are planning further strikes on 14 February. Bristol is the flagship city for the strike, where couriers are best organised, and have lots of action planned that'll be revealed on the strike day itself.

Organisation in London is a bit weaker. There was strike action in

London 1 February, but things have receded a bit in the period since, so worker-organisers in London are focusing on doing some proper ground work to build things back up. In part the setback has been a consequence of people feeling deflated about having struck but not made any immediate gains. There is couriers' organisation in other cities, including Birmingham, Cardiff, Cheltenham, and Horsham, with possibilities for strikes there.

Individual couriers, often representing larger groups, have tended to approach the union at the point where they're ready to go on strike. The fundamental organisation is done organically, "in the workplace", and then workers contact a union as a mechanism for taking action. In Nottingham, there were over 100 couriers ready to strike at the point the union was ap-

proached.

We now need to turn that into sustained, ongoing organisation. Conversations I have with workers are about saying: this isn't just about one strike, it's about building a movement, spreading solidarity across the country, and preparing for an ongoing struggle.

URGENCY

That's not to say that we don't need a sense of urgency, or a sense of wanting to win.

When couriers approach the union, their aim isn't to have a strike for the sake of it, it's to make material gains. The traditional trade union movement might congratulate itself just for organising a successful action, regardless of whether or not it gets any results. This isn't about that; we want to win.

In terms of organisation, I'd still

be cautious about calling these strikes "IWGB actions", as such. We don't want to take credit for things we haven't organised. But it is increasingly the case that leading worker-organisers are joining the IWGB. We're attempting to coordinate as much as possible with the Industrial Workers of the World's courier network, and have largely managed to complement each other so far.

The demands are still focused around pay, and aren't yet taking on bigger questions around employment status [moving from being categorised as "independent contractors" to being categorised as workers].

In part that's because it's much easier to demand more money than a big contractual change in your legal status.

However, many IWGB members

in particular are very passionate about getting worker status, and have joined the IWGB precisely because of that, often because they've seen the work IWGB has done in other sectors around those questions. The IWGB does a good job of framing the rights that come with worker status as rights we should be entitled to anyway but are being robbed of.

Deliveroo spreads a lot of misinformation about what worker status would mean, so a lot of workers are still sceptical about it. To me, that restates the case for a consistent work of on-the-ground organising, and having conversations that are about more than just "what time are we striking? Where are we meeting?"

Starting to look at the big questions around what we're fighting for.

Deliveroo strikes again on 14 February



Interview

An activist involved in the Bristol Couriers Network, affiliated with the Independent Workers' union of Great Britain (IWGB), spoke to *Solidarity* about the Deliveroo dispute and the next strike planned for 14 February.

The number of riders striking has increased with each action so we're expecting a good turnout on Thursday. In Bristol, we're trying out some new tactics this time. We've called a "flash strike", meaning the time of the strike will only be announced on the day itself. This is definitely an experiment for us and will be a test of our organisation.

In Bristol, we built up our organisation by having regular meetings

of committed organisers and recruiting as many couriers as possible into a Bristol-wide network. We used every action to identify and recruit more organisers and build capacity.

Launching a formally organised committee, where people had designated roles, was very important, as this helped solidify our organisation and give it some permanence between actions. Social media and press were also very important in reaching out to other riders and putting pressure on Deliveroo. Our social media presence in particular is what's allowed couriers in other cities to connect with us when they've been looking to organise their own actions.

Our charter of demands is a work-in-progress. If someone suggests an additional demand, that'll

be discussed at a meeting and voted on. If it passes, it'll be added to the list. The question of worker status is still contentious among gig economy couriers. I think it's something we should have, but I wouldn't advocate adding it to our demands until further down the line.

I see us building up our organisation and confidence with successful struggles over immediate pay and conditions, and then using that organisation to raise demands around employment status at a later stage.

The immediate next step after the 14th will be recruiting more organisers. We'll advertise our next meeting during the strike, and use the action to consolidate the network. Our strike fund is growing, with over £1,200 in donations so far, but



we need more. The fund will be crucial going forwards, to allow people who can't afford to strike to do so.

If it takes sustained strikes – all-day strikes, rather than strikes of a few hours, or strikes of two, three, or more days – to bring Deliveroo to the table, we need to be in a position to finance that.

So we need to bolster our strike fund significantly before we're in a position to support workers in taking that kind of action.

- gofundme.com/bristol-couriers039-strike-fund
- fb.me/bristolcouriersnetwork
- twitter.com/couriersnetwork

The outsourced fight back

A joint union day of action against outsourcing has been called for Tuesday 26 February, 8am to noon in London.

It is sponsored by the IWGB (Independent Workers of Great Britain, a small new union focused on precarious workers), United Voices of the World (UVW, an organisation similar to IWGB), the BEIS Branch of the PCS civil service union, and the Bakerloo and Finsbury Park branches of the rail union RMT.

The demonstration will coincide with the day the IWGB is facing the government and the University of London in a landmark legal case.



If successful, the case could open the door for the UK's 3.3 million outsourced workers to

negotiate directly with their de facto employer.

Details: bit.ly/o-s-w

Unison gags NEC members

Three members of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the public service union Unison, including two Socialist Party members, have been told they breached "collective responsibility" at the NEC meeting of 6 December by speaking against a new rule banning collective campaigning in NEC and Service Group Executive (SGE) elections.

These new procedures stop groups of Unison members getting together to campaign in the election. They follow another motion last year which stopped "outside organisations or companies" making any kind of donation or contribution "in money or in kind" in the elections.

To gag members from speaking in opposition to a policy in an NEC meeting is draconian. Before a policy is even decided, it is an outrage against democratic norms to stop Unison NEC members from speaking against it. Even outside of meetings, members should be free to criticise and continue to argue for a differing policy. NEC members represent the members that elected them and have a duty to speak out to defend the basics of Unison democracy.

The NEC members who fought against these changes are right. A motion proposed by Salford City Unison to the National Delegate Conference coming up in June 2019 to remove the new rules should be supported.



Solidarity

For a workers' government

No 495 13 February 2019 50p/£1

Train guards save jobs in fight against bosses and government

By Ollie Moore

After nearly 50 days of strikes, Northern guards have forced their employer, Arriva Rail North (ARN), to scrap a plan to impose "Driver Only Operation" (DOO).

ARN has instead committed to maintain a conductor on every Northern train, including on services using new or newly modified rolling stock.

This is a massive victory for Northern workers, who have won a prolonged war of attrition with a previously intransigent employer, backed up by a Tory government determined not to cave into union pressure. If the victory is consolidated it could be one of the biggest wins for the labour movement in Britain for some time.

The strikes have forced a shift in position not only from ARN, but from the Department for Transport too, which has agreed to further fund the franchise and to alter the requirements laid out in the franchise specification document.

Brendan Barber, the former head of the TUC who now chairs conciliation service Acas, confirmed ARN's climb-down in a letter to the RMT, in which he invited the union to further mediated talks with ARN on the basis of their commitment to retain a conductor on all services.

The discussions that will now take place to agree a method of working trains in future will still need to be approached with care by the union, although they can now negotiate from a much stronger position.



New technology is still going to be introduced, and "other relevant stakeholders" will still be involved with the negotiations. ARN are highly likely to want to transfer as much of the current guard/conductor's job as possible over to the driver, and will want to try to bribe drivers' union Aslef to help them.

RMT must stay on its guard until they have an acceptable settlement in black and white, and refuse to tolerate any attempts by the employer to negotiate with Aslef behind their backs.

Activists are calling on the leadership of Aslef to ensure that as the principal "other stakeholders" in

this dispute, they have their negotiators agree to attend joint talks to ensure that the RMT's gains are not undermined.

SABOTAGE

The company is likely attempt to sabotage the RMT's win.

They may transfer hugely significant parts of the guard/conductor's operational responsibility onto the driving grade in return for improvements to drivers' terms and conditions. For Aslef to play the company's game at this stage in the proceedings would be to colude in the attempted sabotage.

Workers must also resist pres-

sure, for example from moderate elements within unions and the Labour Party, to take the threat of further strikes off the table or to wind down disputes elsewhere.

The Northern victory should serve to revive action on Merseyrail, where the RMT has been tied up in slow-moving negotiations. The RMT branches organising Merseyrail workers have passed policies calling for a return to industrial action, and guards' strength on Merseyrail is bolstered by the fact that it is the only train company where they can rely on the solidarity of large numbers of Aslef drivers.

Further strikes on Merseyrail and South Western could see the momentum of the Northern victory translated into wider gains.

Worryingly, the RMT press release announcing the win reserved special praise for Andy Burnham and Steve Rotherham, the Labour mayors of Greater Manchester and Merseyside respectively.

In reality their role has been inconsistent at best, mainly centring around attempts to broker a fudged compromise rather than throwing their weight and the weight of their offices fully behind the workers and their strikes.

Subscribe to Solidarity

Trial sub (6 issues) £7
Six months (22 issues) £22 waged , £11 unwaged
One year (44 issues) £44 waged , £22 unwaged
European rate: 6 months €30 One year €55

Subscribe online at www.workersliberty.org/sub

Or send your name, address and postcode with payment to AWL, 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London SE1 3DG
Or subscribe with a standing order: £5 a month to subscribe to Solidarity or pay us more to make an ongoing contribution to our work

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

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 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

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, Martin Thomas, and Mike Zubrowski

Printed by Trinity Mirror