

CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

#287 July/August 2017

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Tories: pride before a fall

Don Flynn

Cat Smith MP

Chris Williamson MP

Election realities

Prem Sikka

Labour's sums

Gerry Hassan

Scotland

Mary Southcott

Whither Progressive

Alliances?

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Brexit

Marina Prentoulis

Art for Europe

plus

Greenwatch and book reviews



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CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

Editorial Policy

The editorial policy of CHARTIST is to promote debate amongst people active in radical politics about the contemporary relevance of democratic socialism across the spectrum of politics, economics, science, philosophy, art, interpersonal relations – in short, the whole realm of social life.

Our concern is with both democracy and socialism. The history of the last century has made it abundantly clear that the mass of the population of the advanced capitalist countries will have no interest in any form of socialism which is not thoroughly democratic in its principles, its practices, its morality and its ideals. Yet the consequences of this deep attachment to democracy – one of the greatest advances of our epoch – are seldom reflected in the discussion and debates amongst active socialists.

CHARTIST is not a party publication. It brings together people who are interested in socialism, some of whom are active in the Labour Party and the trade union movement. It is concerned to deepen and extend a dialogue with all other socialists and with activists from other movements involved in the struggle to find democratic alternatives to the oppression, exploitation and injustices of capitalism and class society

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Chartist 2017 Open meeting and Annual General Meeting

Saturday 8th July
11.00-4.45

University of Westminster
M212 (Marylebone block - 2nd floor)
35 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS
Baker Street underground
opposite Madame Tussauds

Morning session - 11.00 - 1.30 Labour - what next

Don Flynn (Chartist EB & former Director Migrant Rights Network)

Puru Miah (Momentum national committee)

Mary Southcott (Chartist EB) Chair

Karen Buck MP (tbc)

Ann Pettifor (Prime Economics)

Afternoon session 2.00-3.30

Brexit - where do we go from here?

Julie Ward MEP

John Palmer (ex European editor The Guardian)

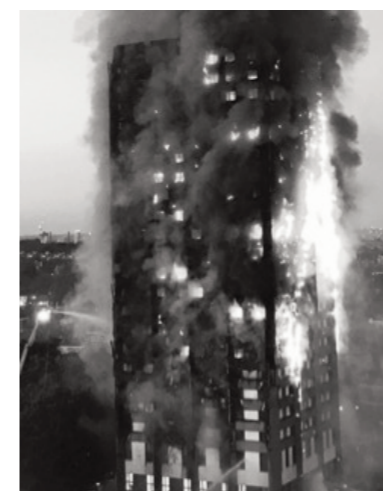
Followed by AGM 3.45



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Robin Murray – green transitional socialist

John Palmer on a red-green pioneer

Robin Murray, who died last month, was a socialist economist who was inspired by the potential for achieving a radically different society tomorrow in concrete initiatives taken by civil society and cooperative movements today. He saw a vast, largely untapped political potential in a synergy of action taken together by socialist local, national and international authorities together with grassroots labour and civil society movements on the ground.

I first met Robin during the struggle against the American war in Vietnam in the 1960s. We were part of a generation inspired by the broad New Left movements after the Suez/Hungary crisis in 1956. We went our separate ways subsequently but I always found Robin's clear headed analysis of socio-economic change compelling.

Having taught Marxist economics at Sussex University, Robin Murray was one of the first economists on the left to identify the transition from the 'Fordist' model of national capitalism – symbolised by standardised forms of mass production – to an essentially global, flexible production focussed system exploiting new information technologies.

He bitterly opposed all variations of neo-liberal, ultra-free

market ideologies with the massively greater inequalities and injustice they necessarily generated. But he recognised that the structural changes in capitalism required new strategic answers to new questions.

I worked closely with Robin when Ken Livingstone's GLC took a series of innovative economic



and social initiatives in the 1980s. Robin – as the GLC's Director of Industry – launched the Greater London Enterprise Board. He also worked there with some remarkable figures such as Mike Cooley – of the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards initiative

The related movement advocating workers' alternative plans for socially useful production in

plants and industries facing mass redundancies, inspired GLEB projects around human-centred technologies, as well as worker coops, green investment initiatives, as well as black and ethnic minority job creating projects. Little wonder Thatcher promptly closed it down along with the GLC.

Robin's subsequent work with governments and regional authorities in developing economic enterprises from the re-cycling of waste won international praise. He wrote about the immense possibilities of this approach in his book 'Zero Waste' published by the Greenpeace Environmental Trust. He also helped pioneer the influential radical new Twin Trading strategy to empower farmer cooperatives in poor, developing countries.

Robin never obsessed about a purely national focus for a socialist challenge to the system. For him, local, national, European and global were part of a seamless web. It is tragic that the left has been deprived of Robin Murray's insight and vision about what might be called a "transitional socialist politics" at a time when popular support for challenging a sclerotic and dying neo-liberal capitalist system is greater than ever.

Grenfell Tower: We are many, they are few

A fire is burning in West London. It illuminates all the injustices of the past 10 years of Tory austerity. It is a fire that will burn long after the extinguishing of the Grenfell Tower blaze.

While the ambulance crews, nurses, fire fighters, doctors, police officers are, once again, socially acceptable and are being expediently dubbed as 'heroes', our corrupt political class paid these same public servants a pitiful 1% pay rise, if they allowed them any increase at all. Their venality was underscored by the free rein given to a friendly print media to trash these overworked public sector workers' efforts to keep our cash-starved services running. Remember the Junior Doctors strike?

All the while this 'least corrupt

political class in the world' helped themselves to 11% pay rises, huge pension contribution hikes, generous expenses, lucrative second or third jobs on their pals' company boards or, like Damian Green, made millions as they profited from flogging their shares in soon-to-be privatised utility companies.

George Osborne should not be allowed to distract us as he hides behind the sensationalist headlines of his throwaway evening paper – for he bears the greatest political responsibility of all. With his cuts the banksters and the British capitalist class were able to insulate themselves from their own financial crisis. They relied on Osborne happily impoverishing everybody else so 'the few' could continue to thrive.

This is the connection between

the crash of 2007-8 and the Grenfell Tower disaster in 2017. For Tory cuts were not only to our services, they impacted severely on vital regulatory frameworks we all rely on. There was the systematic pillorying and ridiculing of 'health and safety culture' (EU imposed, of course) throughout this period.

So, grabbing some lowly town hall officials will not be enough to dowse the fire this time. The politicians and CEOs of all the companies concerned must be held accountable. We need a public inquest not a public enquiry. As Marcia Rigg, long time witness to another case of burning injustice, has said: 'No justice. No peace'.

PHIL VELLENDER
BROADSTAIRS, KENT

Labour back on track to govern

The General Election on 8th June 2017 will be seen as a seismic moment in British politics. Labour secured 40 per cent of the popular vote, its highest share since 1997, with 12,700,000+ votes (an addition of 3.5m on 2015) and an increase of 30 parliamentary seats. Labour came from being 24 points behind when Prime Minister May called the election to a bare 2.5% behind on election day. The Tories suffered an overall loss of 12 seats which would have been higher had it not been for a resurgence of unionist sentiment in Scotland.

Theresa May clings on but is a fatally wounded leader. Her days are numbered. It was an opportunistic partisan power grab that went spectacularly wrong. In a moment of hubris she called the election, with polls giving her a huge lead over Labour. This false confidence was reinforced three weeks later in local government election results.

'Strong and stable government' has morphed into the coalition of chaos she said would result from a Labour victory. The queen of U-turns has made a habit of them from the snap election call itself (seven times denied), to national insurance hikes, dementia tax, pensions triple lock. She looks weak and indecisive.

Labour did not win, but the Tories have lost their majority and are now dependent on the Democratic Unionist Party, an anti abortion, anti-gay marriage, socially conservative party that in the past has had links to loyalist paramilitary groups. Kevin Meagher explains the difficulties for the Tories over-shadowed by the spectre of a collapsed power-sharing executive and fragile Good Friday Agreement.

Shock was etched on Tory faces. They fear an early leadership change and a general election. They will struggle to sustain a confidence and supply deal with the DUP. Damage limitation is the name of the game. No sooner did they begin to adjust to the prospect of minority government than the Grenfell tower disaster struck exposing the hideous dangers of austerity and small state thinking from government and Tory controlled Kensington and Chelsea. Duncan Bowie highlights a succession of failures of central and local government on housing development and safety.

The Queens Speech contained a drastically pared down Tory manifesto: social care to be reviewed (Dilnot buried), no grammar schools, no fox hunting, no means testing winter fuel allowance or ending free school meals. Chancellor Hammond signals moves to end austerity, further postponing deficit reduction targets. Prem Sikka identifies the holes in Tory finance and taxation plans and the limitations of the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

But it is Brexit that dominates. As John Grahl predicts, there will be no progress on trade and economic deals until three major questions are resolved: status of EU nationals, the Irish internal border and the divorce settlement, with the EU holding all the cards.

These issues are huge and feature cliff falls and quicksands that would haunt any hardened adventurer let alone a weak and unstable government.

So how did it happen and what does it mean? Jeremy Corbyn's sustained, straight-talking passionate campaign founded on a democratic socialist manifesto combined with Tory gaffes and own goals. Labour's secret weapon, was the youth vote. This is the social media generation. Labour manifesto pledges to scrap tuition fees, the bedroom tax and zero hours contracts, restore education maintenance allowance, and include 18 year olds in a living wage of £10 by 2020 contributed.

Corbyn captured the growing mood against austerity. The ambiguity on Brexit enabled previous Labour voting kippers to return to Labour, and did not alienate Remainers, while in the cosmopolitan centres Labour's radical policies on the economy, redistribution, equality and social liberalism appealed to voters.

The manifesto was no Marxist programme but a radical Keynesianism of which Clement Attlee and even Harold Wilson would have been proud.

To counter the robotic big business funded Tory campaign Labour had three times as many activists on the ground. With over half a million members and an enthusiastic activist army of Momentum supporters, young and old, Labour

had troops of canvassers, on phone and doorsteps and on election day, in marginals across the country. Puru Miah explains the new way of doing politics epitomised by Momentum.

Don Flynn analyses the dimensions of Labour's advance and identifies the work still to do, and particularly the challenges around Brexit. Gerry Hassan examines the result in Scotland where the SNP were rolled back by unionist sentiment, with 12 gains for Ruth Davidson-led Tories and a late Corbyn influenced surge in old Labour heartlands securing seven seats. Peter Rowlands finds a similar

story in Wales with Labour gaining from Tories and nationalists. The print media, overwhelmingly backing the Tories, was another loser in this election. Paul Reynolds reports on research identifying blatant bias and sustained misrepresentation of Corbyn's Labour in the mainstream media. Re-elected Cat Smith MP and Chris Williamson MP report on how to consolidate gains.

So what next for a Corbyn-led Labour Party? His leadership is now firmly established. Labour now looks credible. Humble pie is being eaten by many in the PLP. Unity earlier on could have seen Corbyn in No10. All talk of a splinter centrist party will evaporate. Labour is back and on a roll. But to sustain that roll and convert it into electoral victory will require some sharp thinking and initiatives in parliamentary and media battlegrounds, sustained engagement of members in communities, a deepening of Manifesto proposals and above all a smarter approach to Brexit which finesses pro-Europeanism, worker and environmental rights to staying in the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice with a more creative linking of jobs and prosperity to remaining within the single market and customs union. **C**

But it is
Brexit that
dominates

LETTER

Long way to run

Paul Salvesson says why not go for devo-max?

Well what a few weeks it has been. The election changes everything, and just as seismic has been the fall-out from the horrific Grenfell inferno. This all has a long way to run yet and writing on the weekend of the marvellous celebratory 'great get together' events in memory of Jo Cox, everything must have an element of uncertainty tinged with hope. Up here in the North there are some great opportunities opening up, with a re-energised Labour Party and talk of progressive alliances and Labour winning back much of the ground that UKIP took from it. In the short term there's a risk that the interests of the North will get marginalised in the political debates – Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own voices and 'England' often forgets that there's a place up North with 15 million people which feels increasingly left out.

Amongst the Tories George Osborne has become a hate figure and anything tarnished with the George brush – such as 'Northern Powerhouse' - is going to get dumped. But no matter – it was always partly a cosmetic exercise and it leaves the way open for Labour to be seen as the champion of the North, without neglecting its other constituencies. The whole devolution agenda needs to be looked at again, with questions asked about the third rate devolution currently offered to parts of the North. Corbyn and McDonnell need to really seize the moment for serious devolution to the North offering similar powers to those enjoyed by Scotland and Wales.

I'm delighted by how well Labour did, and I campaigned for Labour in my own local area and in Cat Smith's Lancaster and Fleetwood constituency. Yet I remain concerned about Labour's continuing tribalism - and one issue that might trip Labour up in the general triumphalism following a great performance on June 8th is its too easy dismissal of the idea of a 'progressive alliance' which gained a lot of traction during the election. To their great credit the Greens stood down in over 30 constituencies to ensure the progressive candidate best placed to beat the Tories had a better chance. Did Labour reciprocate? Well no, it didn't. So places like Richmond Park are back with a Tory MP.

Things Caledonian

As much Labour venom seems to be directed at the SNP and Plaid Cymru as towards the Tories.

So what about Scotland? I have a personal interest in things Caledonian, seeing as my daughter and grandchildren live there and my son-in-law was recently elected onto Highland Council on an SNP ticket. It was undoubtedly a disappointing night for Sturgeon and her party but a few things strike me about the result. The SNP's performance in 2015, when it won nearly all seats, never really reflected political or social reality in Scotland where there are people with centre-right views and others who are traditional 'unionist' Labour. It was one of the ironies of first-past-the-post (FPTP) that the SNP did so well in 2015.

The situation in the Scottish parliament, elected by PR, gives a more balanced picture which can only be a good thing for democracy. If the Holyrood parliament had been elected on FPTP it would have created a political monster – a one party state which would have led to political disillusionment. Clearly another factor in the SNP's poor performance was the party's enthusiasm for a second referendum. Many Scots want one, but clearly a lot don't. Sturgeon is right to spend time 'reflecting' on this.

A better solution for the next decade may well be a Federal British Isles with further devolution for Scotland within a re-balanced federation which includes devolved government for the English regions. This isn't a million miles away from what Gordon Brown and John Prescott have recently been arguing for. 'Independence' isn't an absolute and the independence that the SNP appears to want includes retaining the Queen, the British armed forces and sterling. So why not go for devo-max and join forces

with Wales, the English regions and Ireland?

Ireland

Which brings me on to Ireland. History repeats itself, first as tragedy then as farce, as that wily old codger Karl Marx quipped. After the Irish nationalists having a very major influence in British politics in the late 19th century, we now have the bizarre spectacle of the strong and stable Tories propped up by the hard-line loyalist DUP.

Meanwhile, Sinn Fein increased their tally of MPs to seven but continue the old republican policy of abstentionism. It's daft and they should reconsider it. The SNP wants independence too (of some form) but the idea that they would not take their seats in Westminster would be regarded as ridiculous. Come on shiners, we need you in there. Ditch abstentionism and make some friends. **C**



Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn with friends in the North, but is he up for a debate about whether the UK should go federal?

Siding with the future

Labour must back EU energy targets says Dave Toke

In order to make plausible both its claims to stay in the EU's internal market and to achieve green energy targets Labour must come out with a clear statement to support EU green energy targets. That means two things: first adopting EU renewable energy targets for there to be 27 per cent of all energy (not just electricity) to be provided from renewable energy by 2030, and secondly, that greenhouse gas emissions should be reduced by 40 per cent of 1990 levels by 2030.

Labour's election manifesto was strongly in support of renewable energy, but it needs to be clarified. It said, in summary, 'We will transform our energy systems, investing in new, state of the art low carbon gas and renewable electricity production'. That's promising, and there is the implication that 'low carbon gas' could be biogas from grass, suggested by Ecotricity, Jo Abess and Keith Barnham (now what a coalition that is!). Fracking gas is to be banned. Jolly good, makes a change from the Conservatives who to want to make it compulsory for local authorities to accept planning applications for exploratory drilling.

The UK Government's position since 2010 has been to insist that targets in reductions of carbon emissions will suffice. The Tories have opposed having specific targets for renewable energy. However, as proposals for new nuclear power are postponed over and over again this is turning into a way of curbing renewable in favour of nuclear power expansion which is not happening. Illusions persist that nuclear developers can somehow simultaneously meet high safety standards and deliver cheap nuclear power. They can't, but the result of the UK's position will simply be that renewable energy expansion is kept to a minimum. Labour's next manifesto needs to give firmer commitments on renewable energy.

A problem is that if just carbon targets are adopted without a specific target for renewable energy then renewable energy is curbed to make way for imaginary nuclear power to achieve the carbon reduction targets. And, at the end of the day not enough renewable energy will be adopted to meet those targets. Let's make achievement of renewable energy expansion independent of carbon targets and therefore not constrained by a 'need' to make way for nuclear power. That is why the specific EU renewable energy target needs to be adopted by the UK.

The EU targets may be regarded as themselves being cautious – but they are minimum targets, not maximum targets. What is certain is that adopting no renewables targets is a lot worse than commit-

ting to the EU's own renewable energy target. In addition if Labour wants to show that it is serious about the socially useful measures involved in the EU's internal market, then surely it should enthusiastically adopt the EU's targets for green energy.

Labour's manifesto has an interesting policy on establishing publicly owned 'locally accountable' 'energy companies and cooperatives'. This could in the right form, be highly innovative in various ways, and smacks of the influence of Alan Simpson.

But how innovative this foray into creating local energy companies will be really depends on what is meant by 'locally accountable'. If there are some local popular elections to fill the executives, then great! Lots of exciting things could happen. But I have a fear that what might actually happen is that the whole thing will be run by groups of Labour councillors, who may appoint some 'energy' trade



Renewable energy expansion requires government intervention: Labour please note

union guys from the GMB who might spend their time and money given to them trying to get 'small modular reactors' and 'carbon capture and storage' projects going which will never actually happen anyway.

There are some laudable promises on energy conservation, insulating 4 million homes (that would be a start, at least), offering home owners interest free loans for energy efficiency. But again, why cannot Labour specifically adopt the EU's energy efficiency and clean energy package?

Of course Labour's thinking is already well ahead of the Tory manifesto whose main preoccupation seems to be to persuade the English Tory shires that they will not be bothered by more wind turbines.

Labour (wrongly) feels the need to give sops to the nuclear industry, fearing blowback from trade union opinion – that is despite the fact that nuclear power is so clearly looking like yesterday's technology, especially as costs of wind power and solar power tumble and these energy sources massively outpace adoption across the world.

But above all Labour needs to show that it is at least modern and forward thinking enough to back the EU's targets. This not only provides a basis to advance renewable energy, specifically, but it also provides policy coherence with the need to negotiate a 'soft' Brexit that ensures continuation of the social end environmental benefits of cooperating with the European Union. Finally, it clearly signals how Labour is siding with the forces of progress against the rush for the past as exemplified by Donald Trump. **C**

Paul's blog – The Northern Weekly Salvo – is on www.paulsalveson.org.uk

For further reading go to: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2030_en

UK ELECTION

The tide is turning

Don Flynn sees the conditions for Labour's advance into government being forged

Labour did not win the general election of June 2017. A badly wounded Conservative Party led by a clearly dismayed and embarrassed prime minister limped over the line generated by parliamentary arithmetic and was duly awarded the prize of getting the first chance to talk to the Queen about the formation of a new government.

Theresa May, will not enjoy this 'victory' one iota. Her cocky self-assurance, spelt out so cynically in the Conservative manifesto, was that the mass of people across the UK were so demoralised by austerity, and so divided by the politics of blaming-the-poor/immigrants, that they could even be persuaded to vote for policies that were patently contrary to their interests.

The victory that Jeremy Corbyn has won from this engagement has proven in the most dramatic terms that the tide is turning and that social forces are being assembled that have served notice on the ruling elites that they are up for a fight against the poverty and hardship that has been foisted upon them for the last seven years.

Revolt of the young

This emergence of a new, popular, bloc has the revolt of the young at its heart. This is the turn of a generation of people being offered little more than the prospect of shabby, down-at-heel 'Uber'-type jobs, a life-time of inadequate accommodation in the exploitative private rented sector, and the burden of tens-of-thousands of pounds worth of debt hoping higher education could improve their lot.

But this has not been the inter-generational warfare that some academics and newspaper columnists have tried to big up. In backing Corbyn's manifesto the millennials made it clear that they did not begrudge older citizens a decent retirement pension. It was an alliance of a now grey-haired phalanx of activists who still gripped the membership cards of trade unions as well as university students and Deliveroo gig workers who stood shoulder-

to-shoulder at the Labour rallies from one end of the country to the other.

With the mood of euphoria over what has been achieved so strong we can be confident that things will not dissipate and revert to 'normal' at any time in the future. The sense of the victory that has been achieved will strengthen over the summer months as the Conservative Party and its allies continues to reel and the barrenness of the politics they stand for becomes ever clearer. More floundering on the part of the May camp during its engagement with the Brexit negotiations will furnish Corbyn's team with many more targets where direct hits will do the gravest damage to the Conservative's anti-working class cause.

Over the course of the summer Labour needs to press home its current advantage by continuing and strengthening its role as a campaigning party, offer leadership to everyone who wants to fight against austerity and the version of hard Brexit which May had been planning to impose on British society.

Great progress has been made in setting out the arguments for a strong role for government in the running of the economy and the promotion of the welfare of the majority of the population. Labour needs to show that its commitment to ending the forced indebtedness of young people in education and vocational training was not just a ploy to win votes, but something it will continue to fight for as a reinvigorated opposition.

It needs to argue that the prospect of hundreds of thousands of new jobs offering good careers and decent pay, as well as an end to the housing crisis of young people is not something that depends on the sprouting of a magic money tree, but is there to be delivered by economic policies that raise productivity and rigorously pursued measures of



Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn: on the brink of achieving one of the biggest political upsets in history

progressive taxation.

Action will continue to be needed to defend a fully public NHS, involving trades unions, professional bodies and the community-based campaigns which have kept this vital issue on the agenda for so long.

And then there is Brexit. Corbyn has been criticised by some for a failure to make it a point of principle to oppose the triggering of Article 50. But the election outcome suggests that he has been playing a much cannier game. One of the most important outcomes of the campaign of the past few weeks is the sign that Labour has been able to win back a large segment of working class voters who backed Brexit.

The refusal to make a fetish out of Parliamentary procedures, particularly in circumstances where the rituals of that arcane palace have closed down all prospects of a win, has meant that Corbyn has been able to stand tall in the eyes of all those who despaired at the idea that the EU can be made to work in their interests, but who are savvy enough to know that a really bad Brexit poses even greater dangers than remaining within its neo-liberal embrace.

Corbyn's team will have every opportunity to score big hits at what we can be sure will be an abject performance by Conservative negotiators. But Labour will need to be clearer about what it wants from a new relationship with the countries that remain within the EU.

We think that should include a commitment, not just to assure EU nationals already here that their rights in the UK will be respected, but straightforward support for the continuation of the right of free movement of people as it has developed over recent decades. The messages that need to be got across couldn't be clearer: migrants are not responsible for any of the hardship experienced by UK natives, and the right to move over national frontiers has worked in favour of the empowerment of working class people across history.

Mantra of support

The mantra of support for the single market needs a more critical dimension. This is a market designed to reap more rewards for interests which are already winners and to hold those of the weaker economies in check. We need be more sceptical of the sin-

gle market which is structured by the euro and policed by the often brutal 'troika' of the European Central Bank, European Commission and the IMF.

Labour's commentary on the Brexit process should set out the need to maintain the free movement of people in its agreement with EU, but also push for an end to the restraints which currently exist on countries participating in the single market, either as full members or connected through the EEA and association agreement arrangements. The positive element of Brexit is that it holds out the possibility of an active role for the democratic state in the running of the economy, and Labour should press for concessions in that direction.

Keen interest in what Labour has achieved these past few weeks extends a long way beyond the population of these shores. Corbyn and his closest allies in the leadership of the party should start thinking about ways of win-

ning support amongst fellow socialists, trade unions, civic groups and the progressive movement in general right the way across Europe (indeed, beyond).

We can now be confident that Labour will be forming the government of Britain sometime in the near future and the oppositional social movements it has fostered will provide the basis for the implementation of a programme of radical, democratic socialist reform that is truly fit for the 21st century. Our chance of success in the medium and longer term means that this cannot be advanced as a project to be completed in just one country. Labour is in a good position to inspire all those who are experiencing the burden of austerity and the neoliberal version of free market capitalism that is rampant across the world. Every moment spent in building this international solidarity in support of democratic socialism will reap dividends in the future. **C**

What next for a Progressive Alliance?

Mary Southcott looks at the practice and the promise

2017 was supposed to be a Brexit election with UKIP skewing the result by not standing candidates against Tory Brexiteers. It turned out to be the Remainers' revenge, particularly by young voters and in London.

The New European produced a wonderful map which indicated where Remain party candidates could beat the Tories. Yellow/green indicated Labour holds. Where Labour were less certain to win it was red except for remaining Labour Brexiteers. The only blue areas on the map were Tory outspoken Remain MPs.

The methodology used by the Progressive Alliance (PA) was flawed but politics, polling and psephology is not an exact science. They added up the Labour, LibDem and Green (or in Wales Plaid Cymru) vote and where the sum was more than the Conservative and UKIP vote, indicated which party had the best chance to beat the Tory.

Starting by suggesting 98 seats

which could be won by PA, they encouraged people to make local arrangements rather than top down pacts. Then the Green Party withdrew from seats. Their votes alone would not swing things to Labour or LibDem in any except in the most marginal seats but it was a clear demonstration of where the Tories could be defeated if all the PA voted together.

When the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform (LCER) came to discuss the PA they decided that as an organisation they would not get on board because of the pressure on Labour to withdraw candidates which Labour is constitutionally barred from doing. LCER Vice Chair, Clive Lewis, was a leading advocate of PA. When the deadline for candidates arrived, LCER used the PA targets to contact Labour candidates where a PR pitch to third party supporters might make a difference. Their list was more optimistic where the candidate was pro PR.

Emails to supporters to ask their candidate to let us know

their position, and messages from twitter, @labour4PR, helped us compile a list on our new website www.labourcampaignforelectoral-reform. When the results were in, we had confirmation of 14 extra new Labour MPs supporting reform, loads of candidates who didn't make it this time and we are asking people to help firm up the rest.

Labour needs to earn its progressive tag. There are still 40 or so Labour MPs supporting first past the post, mainly in safe Labour seats, who have yet to see the problem facing the voter where there are two or three anti Tory candidates or Labour comes third or fourth. The party has tribal enclaves. But what about the next general election which could be this year or next? We argue in LCER that we need to shore up that tactical voting by not only offering a constitutional convention but by promising to get rid of first past the post. Let's define progressive as an ability to see what so many voters see: that our voting system has to go. **C**

Mary Southcott, LCER Parliamentary and Political Officer, was working with LCER's Social Media group, Andy, Kate, John, Justina, Joe and Bill

Want to convert Labour? Contact marysouthcott@hotmail.com or ring 0117 924 5139 or 077 125 11931

Revolution!

Chris Williamson says Corbyn is reaching consensus

The government is weak and Labour is united, Corbynism has proven to be a success and the country is on the brink of departing from neoliberalism.

Despite my unwavering support for Labour's leader even I struggled to imagine writing those four statements during my first week back in Westminster. But they're true! In my first PLP meeting I was surprised and pleased to see Jeremy greeted with a standing ovation. I was even more shocked to hear reports that Yvette Cooper and Chukka Umanah were asking to be considered for positions on the front bench.

A week is a long time in politics, but the past six seem to have solidified a revolution in Labour. Only two years ago most Labour MPs failed to vote against welfare reforms, now it seems Corbyn's brand of anti-austerity politics has achieved some consensus. Why? Because it is right and because it is working.

A turning point in the campaign was the launch of Labour's manifesto. Without doubt, this manifesto is the best since the one produced by Clement Attlee's Labour Party. In 1945, when this country's heroes returned from the horrors of war they, like almost everyone else, demanded

change.

At the time Churchill told Labour's leader not to go around making any outlandish promises: the country was broke, he said. But in government Labour delivered the biggest economic boom this country has ever seen leading to a golden era of living standards.

Since then the welfare state that Labour built has been eroded by three decades of neoliberalism, vast amounts of council housing has been privatised and inequality has reached Dickensian levels. Yet deep down ordinary people in Britain have maintained an ideological commitment to fairness, and it shows.

Intimate connection

Why does there appear to be an intimate connection between old timers like Corbyn and the young, who turned out in unexpected numbers in the election? The answer probably lies in the fact that the old guard never swallowed the pill of neoliberalism while the young voters never saw its benefits. Living standards, both material and moral, have been in decline.

The time is at hand for a Labour government. May's approval ratings are at an all-time low, whereas Corbyn's con-

tinue to rise. The PM's boded efforts at a coalition with the socially regressive DUP puts at risk both the Good Friday Agreement as well as hard won values in this country like LGBT+ rights. May's nightmare of her own making simply will not last.

The absolute horror of Grenfell Tower was one more death knell for May's leadership. Unlike others, I refuse to deny this event its political character. In fact the nature of this tragedy is that it is political. Residents made efforts to warn the council that the building was unsafe. A coroner's investigation into the deadly blaze at Lakanal House in South London eight years ago prompted a review of fire regulations that was never delivered. And Labour's amendment to the Housing Act to make it a legal requirement for rented housing to be "fit for human habitation" was voted down by every Tory MP, 72 of whom are themselves private landlords.

There's only so much our population will take before those basic values of dignity and fairness will rise once again. A majority of Labour MPs today seem to have already taken note. I hope that now will be the time for all of us to work with, not against, this movement. **C**



Chris Williamson MP was elected in Derby North by a 2000+ majority vote, reclaiming the seat he lost in 2015

Printer ad

Beyond the boundary

Puru Miah reflects on Momentum's role in the #GE2017 Campaign

The General Election result in 2017 is a wake up call to everyone that the rules of politics have changed and that we live in a tumultuous political age. It emerged out of a political context forming over the past few years, which seems like a never ending hurricane. From the 2008 global crash a chain of events have unfolded; a crisis of neoliberalism, a coalition government, Brexit, the rise of the SNP in Scotland; the rise and fall of UKIP; and the election of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the Labour Party. Political observers find themselves with one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage. The general election result re-emphasises that the way we do politics is no longer working and something must be done to make things work for the people.

Momentum was established in October 2015 just after the first election of Jeremy Corbyn to the Labour Leadership, two years later it has been credited in assisting the Labour party in a successful General Election campaign. When Theresa May called the snap election in April, Momentum was tasked with harnessing the winds of the 'New Politics'. In a result defying conventional political wisdom inside and outside Labour, the party now finds itself at the cusp of electoral victory.

Key assumption

The key assumption in the approach to campaigning by Momentum in the 2017 General Election is the shift in society towards the personal and the desire for that personal to be recognised. This act of self recognition, this ability to claim our place and space in the world whether acknowledged or not, is the essence of this approach. Politics is everybody's business, to live is to be among humans (*inter homines esse*), to be a human being is to be endowed with the quality to be politicised. It is a more individualised form of politics, which sees all change stemming from the individual



Momentum: credit where credit is due mobilising voters?

rather than the collective action.

This shift towards individualised politics is propelled by a technological disruption that has transformed the traditional space of politics. In place of established forms of organising around geography, workplace or institutions we have a proliferation of online communities based around individual preference and needs. Momentum in the General Election aimed to place itself in this untapped space, acting as a conductor by trying to give it a physical expression, recognising the anger fuelled by frustration with the language, conventions and machinations of formal machine politics. Online tools were developed like <https://mynearestmarginal.com/>, a phone canvassing app and the election day pledge, augmented by a peer to peer text messaging service.

Momentum also channelled the energy from anger, by acknowledging that people's desire was not simply to change the world, but to change the ways in which change comes about. The activists' workshops on doorstep skill sessions, lead by Bernie Sanders campaigners was part of that approach. The training sessions aimed to transform the traditional Labour Party data harvesting activity of Voter ID to mini political conversations that impact on voters' frameworks of understanding and perceptions.

With thousands of new mem-

bers Momentum sought to target the Tory held marginals, not just the 'damage limitation' approach of many regional Labour organisers restricting activity to Labour marginals. Hundreds of party members were encouraged to campaign in Tory seats.

Radically changed

The General Election campaign run by Momentum pushed political campaigning beyond the boundary set by conventional political wisdom. The campaign rejected the hegemony of acceptability politics, and created its own subject of a 'grassroots political campaign'. Above all it radically changed the perception of politics in the UK, from being the preserve of a privileged few to that of politics for the socially excluded masses.

The moral victory of the campaign created contradictions that lead everybody to question the so called common sense assumptions that underpinned the economic and political arrangements in society. Momentum has helped establish the view that real politics is not limited to the 'Clubhouse of Westminster'. The campaign established definitively that the centre of gravity in our politics has shifted from the political class at the centre, to out there in new subjects, in the lives and struggles of ordinary people. **C**

Puru Miah is a member of Tower Hamlets Labour Party and Momentum's National Committee

SCOTLAND

The end of nationalist hegemony

Gerry Hassan on the Corbyn effect and premature announcements of Labour's death

Scottish politics entered a new era as a result of the UK election. This is the end of the seemingly all-conquering impregnable SNP and the shift from a dominant one party politics to a much more fragmented and pluralist multi-party culture.

The election campaign changed things in Scotland as it did across the UK. But here an incoherent SNP campaign lacking clear strategy undermined Nationalist ascendancy. While, unlike the rest of the UK, the Tories in Scotland under Ruth Davidson fought a spirited and focused campaign filled with urgency and spirit. Meanwhile, Scottish Labour departed from the national script finding it difficult to fight a coherent contest with a unified message, only in the latter stages for their popularity to rise as a result of the Corbyn surge.

SNP bandwagon

Moreover, all of this fits into a much bigger picture. The SNP bandwagon that has presented itself as carrying all before it has stalled - and partly reversed. A party which won a whisker under half the vote two years ago (49.97%) was reduced to 36.9%, and from 56 seats to 35 seats - a loss of 21 - weakening them drastically, but leaving them still by far the largest party.

This reverse has seen some in the SNP react in denial or even with a defiance bordering on stupidity, but leaves the leadership with huge questions - about how they govern in the Scottish Parliament, and about what kind of approach to embrace on an independence referendum - which is clearly off the agenda for the next few years. Importantly, the culture of momentum, invincibility and inevitability - about the SNP and independence has been broken.

The Scottish Tories, Labour and the Lib Dems all made gains in seats. The Tories secured their highest number of seats since 1983 (13), making the bulk of the gains Theresa May's embattled Tories did across Britain (12 out

of 20), and their highest vote since Thatcher's election in 1979 (28.6%).

Labour finished in third place in votes - the first time they have done so in a Westminster contest in Scotland since 1918. On the plus side they did increase their vote and seats on the nadir of 2015 - winning 27.1% and finishing narrowly behind the Tories - and achieving seven seats as opposed to one two years ago. The Lib Dems on the other hand saw their vote go down marginally to 6.8%, but their tally of seats go from one to four. Critically, Scottish politics has shifted its axis. For decades, the mantras and dynamics were about anti-Tory Scotland - and in the 1980s and 1990s was informed by growing tactical voting and popular co-

Dugdale has tried to identify a Labour constitutional position - federalism, a People's Convention, a new Act of Union - all of which sounds unconvincing and with memories of Gordon Brown's latter day pronouncements. All of these show Labour chasing the SNP tail

operation between Labour, Lib Dem and SNP voters to defeat the Tories. This reached its apex in the 1997 general election when all three non-Tory parties made gains from the Tories, reducing them to no Westminster seats in Scotland in what was effectively 'a popular front of the mind'.

This has dramatically changed. The politics of Scotland post-indyref has transformed the furniture of politics. No longer are the Tories the pariah party of old. Instead, the three pro-union parties were in the recent election the beneficiaries of tactical voting - anti-SNP tactical voting - which maximised SNP losses.

This has come as a shock to many - with Tories in places lending their votes to Labour, Labour to Tories, and Tories and Labour to Lib Dems. John

Nicolson, who won East Dunbartonshire from the Lib Dem Jo Swinson in 2015 and lost it back to her in 2017, actually publically complained about the invisibility of the Tory campaign in his constituency. He believed, rightly, that this contributed to his defeat. There was naivety in this and also surprise at how quickly 'Peak SNP' has evaporated.

Clear winners

The clear winners - not in popular vote or seats - but reshaping debate and forcing their opponents to change tack - have been the Scottish Tories. They fought an abrasive, aggressive, populist campaign against the SNP's alleged obsession with independence and Nicola Sturgeon's plans for a second vote as a result of Brexit - where 62% of Scotland voted to remain in the EU.

Post-election the UK media are, as Theresa May struggles to adapt to her diminished status, full of praise for Ruth Davidson, Scottish Tory leader. An element of this is about the state of the British Tories and their lack of any obvious and popular successor to May. But it also about how Scotland has been portrayed - namely as anti-Tory, centre-left, and from London, a nation in permanent revolt and rebellion. Much of this was caricature, but the right-wing press portray Davidson as their saviour from all this. Some have gone over the top calling her even 'Churchillian' which is stretching it, or seeing Davidson as the possible solution to Tory problems and successor to May.

Scottish Labour's death

Tales of Scottish Labour's death have been told many times and have turned out to be premature. The party has had several near-death experiences, most notably the 2015 near-wipeout, but it always retained even at its worst a small element of life.

At its dark hour, post-2015, when various Scottish Labour former MPs and MSPs (of which there are now many) asked me if

the party had any future prospects or was dead, I would reply: 'It is in a state of being undead. It is neither fully alive or fully dead.' Sometimes this would result in them scowling, but on numerous other occasions, they would take the positive and reply to the effect: 'Well at least we aren't dead' or 'Where there is life there is hope'.

Long journey

Scottish Labour's long journey down has been painful for many in the party. From the onset of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, which produced a Labour-Lib Dem coalition, the party never comfortably or confidently adapted to devolution and the new political system.

After eight years of Labour-Lib Dem rule, the party narrowly lost to Alex Salmond's SNP in 2007 and then never recovered. In 2011 the SNP won a landslide electoral victory and majority government, preparing the ground for the 2014 independence referendum. This resulted in a 55:45 vote for the union, but fatally undermined Labour's progressive credentials - with the party's alliance with the Tories in 'Better Together' wounding it. Underneath this the absence of a distinctly Labour message about the social justice case for the union hurt the party more. This is the backdrop to the party's humiliation in the 2015 Westminster and 2016 Scottish Parliament elections.

Relative turnaround

What has produced Labour's relative turnaround from seemingly being out cold only one year ago? Already the battle is on for ownership of the party's modest success - with Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale claiming that the recovery was about her actions. From the other side Corbynistas such as Labour MSP Neil Findlay have asserted that if they had been in control of the party it would have made more gains.

There is some polling evidence from the campaign which points to who should take the credit. Kezia Dugdale is not popular as Labour leader in Scotland - and her poll ratings flatlined over the campaign. Whereas Jeremy Corbyn saw his rise - as across the UK his poll figures transformed over the contest. And the turning upwards of Labour sup-



Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale needs to take a leaf out of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's play book and focus on economic and social injustice to win back more support north of the border

port in the polls happened relatively late on - in the last week and a bit - and was so late that it caught the SNP off guard.

The SNP were encircled in a classic pincer operation. The Tories attacked them again and again on independence. While Labour's campaign themes of education and health reminded people of the SNP's patchy record in government. The SNP didn't know how to respond to these twin pillars. They couldn't claim they weren't in favour of independence or another referendum, and they haven't been able to adjust to being incumbents and admitting and explaining failures.

All over the place

Labour were all over the place at times on independence. Corbyn suggested in the campaign that he would 'open discussions' with the SNP about a second referendum, which drew the fury of Dugdale. But she herself has previous form - declaring publically around the Brexit vote that she could see circumstances in which she supported independence, and allow Labour politicians the right to do so. She tries to deny or blank mention of such comments now.

Dugdale has tried to identify a Labour constitutional position - federalism, a People's Convention, a new Act of Union - all of which sounds unconvincing and with memories of Gordon Brown's latter day pronouncements. All of these show Labour

chasing the SNP tail.

Scottish politics are changing dramatically. There is no point in Labour or other parties trying to focus more on the constitution than the SNP. Labour need to identify ground which is about the economic and social injustices of Scotland, and the scandal that after nearly twenty years of the Scottish Parliament, people don't feel any more empowered or their lives transformed.

Devolution has not delivered

In short, the SNP's dominance of Scotland was never going to be immune from the spirit of anger and impatience in the air. This is an age of disruption and the SNP were never going to remain permanently insulated from its effects. That means that Scottish Labour's future can only be with breaking with the party's past - meaning its establishment, insider, cronyist past - and becoming an insurrectionist force against the system, closed Scotland and the fact that devolution has not delivered for most of the country.

Scottish politics like the UK has some turbulent years ahead of it: Brexit, the independence issue, and 2021 Scottish Parliament elections. The era of neo-liberalism and Blairism without ever calling it Blairism has ended in Scotland, as it has across the UK. That is a challenge to the SNP's centrism and caution, and an opportunity for more radical voices, pro- and anti-independence. **G**

Gerry Hassan is the author of *Scotland the Bold*, co-editor of *A Nation Changed: The SNP and Scotland after Ten Years* and is writing a book on Labour and Britishness

Good Friday Agreement threatened

Kevin Meagher mulls the Tories' utter desperation to remain in government

There is nothing wrong with the largest party in Parliament seeking to form a government with the support of a minor party. For that matter, there is nothing inherently wrong with that arrangement including one of the smaller Northern Irish parties.

The nationalist SDLP took the Labour whip in the Commons and the Ulster Unionist Party has antedeceds with the Tories going back decades. Indeed, Labour, too, would have sought to cut a deal with the Democratic Unionists if the result of the 2010 election had been a bit closer.

But things are different now. Northern Ireland's devolved settlement faces a genuine crisis in a way it didn't in 2010. It boils down to this: how can the Government act as honest brokers in restoring power-sharing in Northern Ireland when they are reliant on one side for their very existence in government?

Peace process 'under stress'

It was a point made most tellingly - of all people - by former Conservative Prime Minister, Sir John Major, who took the remarkable step of chiding his successor-but-five for even contemplating a deal with the DUP, warning it would not only damage the prospects of restoring power-sharing, but actually put the peace process 'under stress'. This followed a similar warning by Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's former chief of staff and the man who did most of the negotiating to deliver the Good Friday Agreement.

Both men are right. A deadline of June 29 has been set by the Northern Ireland Secretary, James Brokenshire, for the parties to agree to the re-establishment of power-sharing, a situation made more difficult when one side is in cahoots with the referee. The 'optics' as they say in American politics, are dreadful.

At the time of writing, it isn't clear whether a deal on restoring power-sharing is possible, nor, in fact, whether a deal where the DUP supports Theresa May will actually come off. Some Conservative MPs are worried



DUP leader Arlene Foster in pole position to prop up a Conservative minority government in Westminster: what could possibly go wrong?

that a deal with the hard right-wing DUP would 'retoxify' their party.

To compound matters, there is a strong likelihood that DUP leader, Arlene Foster, will face excoriating criticism from the independent inquiry examining the Renewable Heating Incentive scandal (the botched energy subsidy she introduced without adequate cost controls, which has wracked-up a £500 million liability for the Northern Ireland Executive and was responsible for crashing the executive back in January). She may well be on borrowed time as it is.

Political self-preservation

Whatever happens, the Tories have shown that the careful management of the Northern Ireland political process is not their top priority. Political self-preservation outweighs just about everything.

Even if the assembly is restored further problems are in the pipeline. Dealing with what is euphemistically referred to as the 'legacy of the past' will present a fresh crisis as early as this sum-

Kevin Meagher was special adviser to former Labour Northern Ireland secretary Shaun Woodward.

He is author of *A United Ireland: Why unification is inevitable and how it will come about*

mer.

Investigations into unsolved troubles-era killings may well see charges brought against former British soldiers. For the Government, this is toxic. Ministers are desperate to avoid images of old soldiers in handcuffs, charged with crimes from half a lifetime ago. Yet investigations into the troubles will inevitably alight on killings carried out by State forces. Politicians might want to avoid the past but Lady Justice, being blind, cannot.

Fudge

The failure to deal with the past and fudge the whole issue of a truth and reconciliation process is symptomatic of how utterly disconnected the Tories are when it comes to managing the situation in Northern Ireland. We could now plausibly see the assembly restored, only to crash again when it comes to dealing with the troubles' legacy or when the RHI inquiry reports.

2017 is going to be a roller-coaster for Northern Ireland. **C**

From bizarre to bonanza

Peter Rowlands says despite downs and ups Welsh Labour needs a rethink on Corbyn

After the amazing election results across the UK it may be considered premature to focus on one part of it, but detail is always valuable, particularly in the only region apart from London which is Labour controlled and has significant devolved powers and a sizeable nationalist party. Despite that, however, Wales remains closer to England than Scotland does, mainly reflecting the relative weakness of Plaid Cymru.

The local elections were for all seats in all 22 local authorities in Wales, as for the 32 in Scotland, but unlike the elections in England which were mainly restricted to the 34 largely rural county councils, although there were elections for 'Metropolitan Mayors' in most of the large conurbations.

These elections now seem a long time ago, and occurred when polls were still predicting a 15 point gap between the Labour and Tory percentage vote.

Labour lost 107 seats in Wales, although this was a smaller proportion than in England or in Scotland. However, about 30 of these losses were to Plaid Cymru, about 40 were to candidates from dissident Labour groupings, many including ex Labour councillors, whose election ended Labour control in Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil, the only other council being lost to Labour control being Bridgend. Labour thus retained control of seven out of ten councils, three with no loss-

es. Only one other majority controlled council elsewhere did this. But the Tories gained 80 seats, some from independents, and from the Lib-Dems, who lost 11 seats, as well as from Labour. Plaid Cymru won 33 seats with large increases in Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The result in Wales was therefore not too bad, but prospects for the general election, only five weeks later, were not good.

The Welsh Political Barometer is a Welsh polling organisation which conducted several polls, including one just prior to the general election, which was fairly accurate. Their mid-April poll was dire, predicting a substantial Tory lead in seats and votes, and was far worse than the position indicated by the national polls, which was bad enough. From this point however the poll charted Labour's fightback, their last poll being fairly accurate although slightly underestimating Labour's lead, which eventually showed a 12.1% swing, greater than the 10.3% in England, although not, I believe, than London. According to these polls, and there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the earlier ones, Labour in Wales went from a position in mid April that was worse than the position implied by the polls generally for the UK as a whole, to one which was better.

This was more or less the picture for the whole country, but why should the change have been more pronounced in Wales? The

swing against UKIP was not markedly different to elsewhere, but the reduction in the Plaid Cymru vote, almost all of which it can be assumed went to Labour, is probably the most telling reason.

Labour secured its highest vote since 1997 and more seats than since 2005. It regained three seats from the Tories, Gower and Vale of Clwyd, lost in 2015, and Cardiff North, lost in 2010, taking its total to 28 out of 40. The Tories increased their vote, more so than in England, but won no seats. Plaid Cymru had a bad night, with their vote down by about a fifth, particularly in the old mining areas of South Wales, despite winning an extra seat in Ceredigion. The Lib-Dems lost their last MP, bringing to an end their continuous representation since the mid 19th century, with their vote well down.

The foregoing is a sketch of the two elections in Wales, but it would be wrong to conclude without mentioning the bizarre approach to the election taken by Labour in Wales, by promoting Welsh Labour and a Welsh Manifesto, with no reference to Corbyn or the UK wide campaign, in effect, and very confusingly, implying that the election was a purely Welsh affair.

Fortunately this didn't appear to have much effect, but the effective disowning of the UK wide campaign, clearly responsible for the results in Wales as elsewhere, is something that the left in Wales must challenge. **C**



Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn (l) and Welsh Labour leader Carwyn Jones (r) didn't see eye to eye in the 2017 General election campaign: something the Welsh left must now challenge

The Call of the Open Seas

John Grahl ponders the dilemmas of a disastrous general election result for Tory Brexit negotiators

“Be aware, General, that every time we have to choose between Europe and the open seas, we shall choose the open seas” – Winston Churchill to Charles De Gaulle, June 1944.

I must go down to the sea again... – Masefield

The results of the general election, undermining the political status of UK representatives, make it very likely that Brexit negotiations will begin with three straight capitulations by Britain. This is because David Davis will not dare to report to the new House of Commons that talks have broken down before they have properly started and that Britain now faces a complete disruption of its economic relations with its most important trading partner. Davis seems already to have accepted the EU's timetable and order of priorities for the talks, although they hardly suit the British government. The first three issues will be the future rights and status of EU citizens resident in the UK and of UK citizens in the 27 remaining member states; the financial settlement of Britain's obligations to the EU and the border between EU member Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The May administration nurtured some hope of using the first issue as a bargaining chip – this was always a squalid tactic with no hope of success and both the new political situation and pressure from British expats in the EU who were held hostage by it have virtually killed the question. Note that the EU position paper would give the European Court of Justice jurisdiction in enforcing the rights established for EU citizens in Britain. If this is accepted Theresa May will have the humiliation of continuing subordination to the hated ECJ. Note also that rights for residents will be established at the date of departure – March 2019. Any EU citizen who wants resident rights in the UK will have two years to come and claim them – hardly a triumph for those most concerned with reducing immigration.

The financial settlement looks likely to be another sad affair for British negotiators – various estimates of the final bill (to be paid in euro) have emerged. Comment is bound to contrast the transfer of tens of billions to Brussels with the extravagant promises by the Leave campaign of a budgetary bonanza on British departure.

The problem of the Irish border seems intractable. If the outcome of the negotiations involves either tariff or non-tariff barriers between the UK and the EU then there are likely to be incentives to circumvent those barriers by moving goods between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Yet if that border is policed for contraband – effectively or not – the Peace Process could be seriously damaged. This consideration alone should have ruled out the Brexit decision. However, Davis has already agreed that the Irish border question should be resolved prior to negotiations on trading relations after Britain leaves. EU negotiating directives state: “Nothing in the Agreement should undermine the objectives and commitments set out in the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and its related implementing agreements; the unique circum-

stances and challenges on the island of Ireland will require flexible and imaginative solutions.” Will there be sufficient flexibility and imagination without a significant impact on the subsequent economic negotiations? DUP MPs will no doubt be taking a keen interest.

When these three issues are settled, there will still be much business to attend to before the key question of future economic relations is addressed. EU negotiators will not even talk about future trade until they judge that “sufficient progress” has been made with the mechanics of the separation. Disentangling Britain from EU structures is going to be messy. For instance, the Commission's position paper on the financial settlement lists some 34 “decentralised agencies” where some provision for arrangements following withdrawal will have to be made – running from the European Maritime Safety Agency through the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and the European Police Office (EUROPOL) to the Office for the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communication and the European Union Intellectual Property Office. To leave the EU is not to denounce a single treaty – it's more like denouncing several hundred and only when “sufficient progress” has been made with that extrication will future trading relations be put on the agenda.

Brexiters are of two basic kinds and have two main demands. The mass vote for exit expressed many resentments but centred on the issue of immigration. It seems that a demand for sovereign British control of entry would rule out membership of the Single Market and thus compromise the sales of Britain's service sector, including the financial sector, to the EU. One ominous aspect of the EU negotiating position is that it rules out specific agreements for particular economic sectors so that an access agreement for the provision of financial services would seem to be ruled out. Since the election one can observe an increasing assertion of the importance of the Single Market with a less emphasised downplaying of immigration controls. Since the British economy simply won't work without extensive use of migrant labour the UKIP-mobilised



UK Brexit negotiator David Davis MP grinning like a Cheshire Cat while the EU's Michel Barnier tries to put a brave face on a ludicrous state of affairs

masses are bound to be betrayed – the only question is whether the betrayal takes the form of EU-imposed immigration flows or approximately the same flows as permitted by a ‘sovereign’ UK government. For the sake of economic stability we must hope for the former.

The other main force behind Brexit is completely different. There are hardliners whose main concern is to take Britain out of the EU so that it would be free to conclude trade agreements with other countries around the world. For them the bottom line is departure not from the single market but rather from the Customs Union because it is the latter which imposes a common trading policy with third parties.

The romance of *laissez-faire* inspires this group – leading conservatives, strongly committed to neo-liberal policies, whose resentment of the EU has little or nothing to do with migration but rather with the constraints that EU membership puts on their globalisation strategies. Influential members of this group include John Redwood, Iain Duncan Smith, both former cabinet ministers, and David Davis, currently in charge of Brexit preparations within the UK government. The issue of sovereignty is critically important to them and they see the very limited regulatory structures of the EU – in labour markets, consumer protection, the environment and finance – as seriously impairing Britain's freedom of manoeuvre. It must have been something like this agenda which inspired Theresa May's threat to “change our economic model” in the event of a breakdown in negotiations.

Nigel Lawson, Chancellor of the Exchequer under Margaret Thatcher, when he made drastic cuts in the higher bands of income tax, spoke for the group when he said that Brexit makes it possible to complete the Thatcher revolution. The motto of this group is not “restrict EU immigration” but rather “leave the EU – join the world.”

The eminent economic historian, Alan Milward, died before he could complete his history of Britain's relations with Europe since World War II, but the first volume, covering the story up to 1962 when PM Macmillan's volte-face led to the UK's first application

for membership of the Common Market, examines in detail a previous globalisation strategy which in fact guided British policy through the 1950s.

The ‘One World Strategy’ aimed at three simultaneous moves towards a comprehensive liberalisation of global trade: Britain would dismantle the system of imperial preference which gave it privileged access to markets in its colonies, ex-colonies and dominions; the European Economic Community would remove its external tariff and other protective barriers; the United States would do the same for itself and the dollar-using zone. Some forty years before the notion of globalisation became common currency, British civil servants and trade experts had anticipated the emergence of a global economy.

Milward insists that, at the time, the strategy was not nostalgic but practical. Britain had “many great but short-term advantages” including its Commonwealth markets, its military strength and its value to the US as an ally, the role of London as an international financial sector, the UK's continuing control over much of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. It was recognised that many of these were wasting assets but a serious attempt was being made to trade them in for the highest obtainable price.

The strategy failed because Britain – even though it was in the 1950s infinitely more influential than today – lacked the power to put it into effect. Trade between Britain and the Commonwealth stagnated while the internal trade of the EEC boomed, making Britain's exclusion ever more costly. The sterling zone was being eroded by the exchange controls needed to fend off repeated crises. Even though Britain retained a strong voice in Europe – at that time, unlike today, the Scandinavians were not prepared to participate in a European Community without Britain – France and Germany were becoming dominant. Macmillan's decision to throw in the towel may be regretted on many grounds – it was hardly an irrational move.

What can one make of the present-day ambition to restore Britain's individual role in world trade? Apparently sceptical civil servants characterise it as ‘Empire.2.’ Milward gives the following list of the UK's major markets at the end of the 1950s. In descending order: USA; Australia; Canada; Germany; India; South Africa; Sweden; Netherlands; Ireland; New Zealand; Belgium-Luxembourg; France. The corresponding list today runs: USA; Germany; France; Netherlands; Ireland; Belgium; Italy; Spain; China, Sweden, India, Switzerland. Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand no longer appear. There are now eight EU member states on the list rather than three, Sweden and Ireland having followed us in but absolutely refusing to follow us out. To find comparable trading opportunities in the wider global economy to those now being impaired by Brexit is manifestly impossible.

One outcome of the surprising result of the general election is that there now seems to be a strong move to retain membership of at least the EU Customs Union.

It is to be hoped for everyone's sake that this happens and that the dream of the open seas remains just that. **C**

John Grahl is a founder member of Euromemo, an international group which has for 21 years produced annually a critical study of EU policies. Its latest memorandum is at: www.euromemo.eu

Change from below

Ralph Berry says resistance to austerity is growing but decentralisation must come

Years of austerity and cuts have changed the nature of politics. The election result was hugely influenced by a growing outrage at the impact of cuts to local services now on the edge of viability.

The NUT and teaching unions ran a hugely successful campaign on schools. In Bradford in the run up to the election Cuttingly Primary School and Ilkley Grammar School both sent letters home to parents outlining plans to cut the school week in direct response to the Tory cuts. New Keighley Labour MP John Grogan got an 8% swing and a majority of 249. The manifesto was for the first time in my life a platform that connected with people's experiences of degraded and reduced services and demoralised public servants. Parents used their anger at the ballot box.

Cuts have marked a retreat from sound governance, combined with tendering regimes and a clear attempt to shed social responsibility, through outsourcing and 'contracting out'.

The terrible events in Kensington have sharpened the focus. Year upon year of cuts have altered the thinking and moral outlook of battered and degraded local government, except in places like Kensington a brutally socially divided Borough that has built massive cash reserves.

Most councils are into the bone now, and more cuts are coming unless this Governments financial plans are thrown into reverse.

Labour needs to commit to rebuilding the capacity of local government, empowering us to meet the needs of those we serve. What is about to take place is unparalleled in the post war era. These cuts seek to redefine how we relate to each other as citizens and to distance us from the needs of the most vulnerable. The impact of cuts is skewed heavily against the urban, poorer areas and Northern cities.

Councils are heading for reliance on the Business Rate base, as all central support is being removed incrementally. Here in Bradford major pressures on the child protection system

have been highlighted again, with major child sex abuse investigations ongoing and a growing awareness of the needs of care leavers and the needs of children who have been abused or neglected. One CSE case cost the system over £5 million. These needs are not recognised.

Valued early intervention and 'non-statutory' support services are getting seriously squeezed. Thresholds in social care, the term for the point at which families become eligible for support, are getting higher and higher.

The policies of impoverishment and sanction driven insecurity have created a servile working poor. The Bedroom tax is now doing its work, communities are being fragmented.

We will have to try to make a system that can safeguard and support people who are leading more insecure lives based upon new models of practice with fewer resources.

Years of cuts have flattened Councils, and taken a heavy toll on the third sector. A more joined-up partnership for the future is clearly a priority as the needs of the most vulnerable cannot be simply ignored as the state walks away.

These are huge challenges on the scale of the 1920's Geddes Axe. PM May plans further moves towards a regressive system of support as resources are redistributed away from areas of poverty to areas of relative affluence. Tax Credit cuts have been made in the roll-out of Universal Credit, which in a City like Bradford where 50% of families in poverty are in work, will create a major increase in the institutionalisation of child and family poverty.

The old Morrisonian model had profound weaknesses, but it did deliver key services to a whole community. Now councillors are brokers, enablers, community workers. We are denied the powers needed to restore politics to relevance by being able to deliver resources for change.

We need a resurgence of civic leadership and independence of vision. Local councillors need to be the building blocks from below, not the passive recipients of watered down policies that have

no local basis. It's simply not enough to talk of nationalised models of services like a 'National Education Service'. The ruinous centralism of the Tories has at times been matched by a competing centralism of the left.

If we are to recover local socialism it's got to be varied and genuinely local. We have hardly debated electoral reform or what it is we really want from elected local government.

To end up accepting no local determination of the shape, form and direction of education and health is in effect to allow local government to wither into a set of administrative and quasi-judicial functions with a few Metro Mayors trying to break out but chained by the Treasury and struggling with what looks to be tiers of obscure committees.

Giving voice to communities and returning real powers may lead to varied and original expressions of local life struggles against the dead hand of centralism. While it's grim, it must be challenged from below. **C**

Ralph Berry is a Bradford Labour councillor



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Grenfell fire – state failure

Duncan Bowie sees the Grenfell Tower fire as a consequence of multiple failures

One of the key functions of the state is to protect its citizens. Understandably much of the debate in the General Election focused on protection of citizens from terrorists. Though understandable it diverted attention from the no less important duty of the state to ensure a safe, secure and decent quality of life for all its citizens. An inferno in a publicly owned housing block which housed lower income households represents an acute failure of government at all levels.

Residents who have lost their homes, possessions and in many cases their relatives and friends are justified in their anger and desire for justice and redress. It is unlikely that we will see any of the parties involved admitting responsibility for the disaster. The case for demonstrating gross negligence in terms of a corporate manslaughter charge will doubtless be subject to legal disputes for many months and possibly years to come.

Maximise asset values

What is evident however is that for several decades no government has focused sufficiently on the need to provide good quality, safe and secure homes for lower income households. In recent years, we have seen an emphasis on redeveloping estates to provide high density flats for the private market, rather than improving the homes of council tenants and leaseholders who live there – a programme driven mainly by the desire to maximise asset values rather than any assessment of the relative housing needs of different groups.

Government policy has been increasingly to leave decisions on housing provision and the maintenance and improvement of existing housing to local councils. Some councils transferred their stock to housing associations; others set up 'arms length' housing organisations to manage their stock. The separation of the management of the stock from the local authority's statutory housing and homelessness duties was in fact promoted by the Labour government. I never understood

the logic of this proposition. It weakened the local authority's ability to deliver its statutory responsibilities, while at the same time leaving tenants confused. Elected councillors could offload responsibility by referring complainants to the managing organisation – something many councillors were relieved to be able to do.

It is ironic that in Kensington and Chelsea, the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) was actually constituted as a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) but appears not to have been led by the tenants in terms of providing an adequate response to the concerns of the tenants living in Grenfell Tower. This raises major concerns about the accountability structures within such organisations.

There are clear concerns as to the nature of refurbishment programmes and the conflict between competing objectives. The refurbishment programme for Grenfell Tower and for similar blocks in other boroughs does not appear to be primarily about upgrading the facilities and securing the structure of the block. Cladding was justified in terms of increasing energy efficiency but also in terms of improving the external appearance of the block, a common practice for worn-looking 1970's concrete blocks.

A number of expert reports have argued for revising the Building Regulations, notably following the report of the inquiry into the Lakanal fire in Southwark. The fact that that fire was eight years ago and building regulations have still not been updated demonstrates the complete failure of Government to learn the lessons from previous disasters and take speedy corrective action. We learned that the US banned use of certain cladding materials in 2012 and the manufacturer of panels sells two versions of panels, one more combustible than the other. The building company and council chose the cheaper more combustible version (if this actually correct).

This demonstrates firstly that we need tougher building regula-

tions and secondly that issues of cost and energy efficiency are perhaps secondary to issues of basic health and safety, which is supposed to be a central objective of building regulations. Concerns about the approach to refurbishment are not new – not only did the Grenfell residents raise concerns, as did members of the TMO board and individual councillors, but it appears that the London Fire Authority actually wrote to all boroughs as recently as April advising them of their concerns on the use of cladding panels.

The fire is rightly raising the issue of why build tower blocks at all. After the Ronan Point disaster in 1968, and following changes in the subsidy system, councils generally stopped building high rise. Many councils in the 1970s and 1980s, notably in East London, had programmes of demolishing towers and rehousing the tenants in low and middle rise housing.

New high rise

However, in recent years, successive Mayors and many boroughs, have encouraged the development of new high rise residential blocks, primarily for the home ownership market, though in some cases primarily for the investment market rather than for occupation.

The current Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, like his predecessors an enthusiast for densification, is currently considering reviewing the density policy which in theory seeks to constrain over-development (though in practice it has failed to do so), to allow schemes with higher densities, and has published a research report considering the impact of density on quality of life and residents perceptions.

Perhaps this time the lesson will be learnt – that we stop giving planning consent for high rise and that we stop wrapping existing towers in flammable plastic by making it illegal – and that we rehouse all families, all elderly people and other vulnerable people in lower rise housing. We did this in many councils in the 1980's. If we could build more lower rise affordable homes then, we can and must do it again. **C**

Duncan Bowie is senior lecturer in planning and housing, University of Westminster.

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Misreading the Runes

Paul Reynolds on Corbyn v lies, damned lies and mass media bias

At the beginning of July 2016, the London School of Economics Media and Communications Department published a report analysing the British press coverage of Jeremy Corbyn from his election as Leader of the Opposition in September through to November 2015. They found 75% of coverage misrepresented Corbyn.

Its conclusions made damning reading: 'Corbyn was represented ... through a process of vilification that went well beyond the normal limits of fair debate and disagreement in a democracy. Corbyn was often denied his own voice... systematically treated with scorn and ridicule in both the broadsheet and tabloid press in a way that no other political leader is or has been... The British press has repeatedly associated Corbyn with terrorism and positioned him as a friend of the enemies of the UK. The result has been a failure to give the newspaper reading public a fair opportunity to form their own judgements about the leader of the country's main opposition.'

At the end of August 2016, Justin Schlosberg, the Chair of the Media Reform Coalition, sought to put the case rejecting a media bias against Jeremy Corbyn. His arguments?: the mainstream media were not complicit in attacking Corbyn because the media is more nuanced, with biased journalists, biased editors and those sincerely reporting as they see it; there is no mainstream media in the contemporary context because of the diversification and explosion of media sources; media bias does not matter because Corbyn's support has increased; perceptions of media bias are subjective; bias is unavoidable because Corbyn shuns the mainstream media.

Which position holds water? Should that position be qualified? After all, Corbyn appears to have led a relatively successful election campaign and Labour have improved their position. So is reporting more equal?

The weight of evidence clearly supports bias. Ironically, it was the Media Reform Coalition who reported in September 2016 that

the BBC gave twice as much time to Corbyn's enemies as his supporters during the attempt to unseat him as leader in July 2016. More recently, the Loughborough Centre for Communication and Culture monitored election coverage and found Labour had disproportionate criticism of their policies, manifesto and leadership.

Bias is not just a cry of the left. The BBC Trust found its own political editor Laura Kuenssberg had breached impartiality and accuracy guidelines by reading Corbyn's general rejection of 'shoot to kill' strategies for policing with the peculiarity of armed responses to Paris style terrorist attack. Kuenssberg was also criticised for an interview with Corbyn in which she repeatedly questioned him in a hostile and prejudicial way about Trident and defence, an interview posted on the Stop the War coalition website with a breakdown of the way Corbyn's answers and arguments were ignored for scornful associations of Trident with current security and global political issues for which the use of nuclear weapons were clearly not appropriate.

Corbyn's leadership was always a legitimate question. Other party leaders, whether Tim Farron (with the exception when he was left squirming on Channel 4 when questioned over the view of gay sex being a sin) or Theresa May did not have the same level of criticism and so could speak their messages, however anodyne. The main techniques that characterised press coverage of this election outside of direct attacks and negative characterisations of Corbyn were indirect agenda setting and unequal balances of time and space. The agenda for reporting was Trident (linked to domestic security), Brexit and the need for 'strong and steady' leadership (May's agenda). Indeed, it was the Conservative mishandling of social care for the aged that allowed a strong Labour issue to invade press coverage. Labour's leadership and internal divisions were always newsworthy, in a way the Conservatives are only experiencing after the election.

It is hardly surprising then,

that on the 25th May, Corbyn would angrily criticise the media for ignoring Labour's policies and proposals for health and education and focusing solely on his leadership. In asking the media to concentrate on the issues and holding parties to account, Corbyn was appealing to the first priority of a free press.

This does invalidate Gaby Hinsliff's point that Labour's own publicity machine had its own failings, in a piece that questioned media bias for *the Guardian* on the 20th May. Labour needs to be more effective in both circumnavigating the mainstream press and making them report to Labour's agenda. Yet Hinsliff should reflect on the balance of evidence and conclude that media bias is at present subversive to informing a public to make a free choice.

The most common subsequent refrain has been that the press cannot have been too biased as Corbyn's polling increased and Labour performed better than expected in the election. That is not evidence of fair press. One could equally ask how much better Labour might have performed with a free press, and attribute the successes on the 8th June as much to the weakness and complacency of Conservative campaigning and arguments.

Schlosberg's argument holds little water. There is still a mainstream press, and even on the web most search engines direct to dominant news sources first. There is little evidence of substantial diversification, indeed the evidence from research studies is that the bias is not subjective. However much Labour's press machinery might be improved, there is no evidence Corbyn shunned the press. Then an initial decision not to debate other leaders was rescinded.

Corbyn has said a Labour Government would enact press regulation following the second phase of Leveson. The press will say this infringes their freedom. In truth, it is their failure to stem their own bias and abuses that have led to this, and the possibility of more severe penalties for such behaviour might actually encourage and enrich more democratic discussion and debate. **C**

Paul Reynolds is a lecturer at Edge Hill University

Labour's indictment hits home

Prem Sikka rebuts the Institute of Fiscal Studies criticisms of Labour's costed manifesto

Labour would have won the 2017 general election if the Party had been united behind its elected leader. Instead, the nineteen months before the election were marked by internal divisions, coups and plots which diverted attention away from the real task of defeating the Tories. With widening inequalities, social divisions, rampant tax avoidance, weak economic growth, flat wages, lack of investment in public services and Brexit, the Tories were eminently beatable, but the plotters prevented the party from developing winnable policies. Without detailed policies the Labour leadership could hardly campaign and tell the people what it stood for. Ultimately, it is the plotters who have cost Labour the election.

Still, Labour's 2017 manifesto is likely to be the model for the next election. Unlike the manifestos of other parties, Labour's economic policies were fully costed and details of expenditure and revenues were published. Redistribution, investment in public services, people and social infrastructure, and social justice were the key principles of the manifesto.

Labour made a break from austerity politics by promising to invest £48.6 billion in the economy. This included abolition of tuition fees, investment in security, policing, border controls, healthcare, childcare, public sector pay and much more. The investment was to be financed by reversal of recent corporation tax cuts and higher marginal rates of income tax for individuals earning more than £80,000 a year, with a guarantee that 95% of the population will not face increases in income tax or National Insurance Contributions.

The party sought to broaden the country's tax base by levying modest additional stamp duty on trading of derivatives and corporate bonds as well shares. It promised to check bubbles in the housing market by levying an additional 15% stamp duty on the purchase of UK residential property by offshore companies.

Labour offered a new minimum/living wage of £10 an hour to ensure that taxpayers do not

continue to subsidise low wages paid by highly profitable companies. It promised to continue to raise the state pension by retaining the triple lock until 2025 i.e. it guaranteed to increase the state pension every year by the higher of inflation, average earnings or a minimum of 2.5%.

The confident Labour leadership was able to provide robust responses to critics, especially to organisations masquerading as non-political institutions, by anticipating their attacks. The utterances of the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) provide an interesting example and are pointers to things to come during the next election. The IFS insisted on seeing things through the neoliberal lens and claimed that a higher living wage would reduce jobs. The corollary being that low wages and the exclusionary consequences are somehow good for the economy.

The IFS insisted on seeing things through the neoliberal lens and claimed that a higher living wage would reduce jobs. The corollary being that low wages and the exclusionary consequences are somehow good for the economy

The IFS objected to a reversal of corporation tax cuts by claiming that this would lead to lower investment. It totally ignored the fact that major companies are already sitting on a cash mountain of about £500 billion and they are unlikely to invest that in productive assets without the feeling that people will have the resources to buy the additional goods and services. Higher wages increase people's purchasing power and stimulate the economy, but such macroeconomic details were missing from the IFS analysis altogether.

The IFS claimed that the reversal of corporation tax cuts would somehow lead to higher consumer prices and low wages. The IFS did not specify its assumptions but seemed to assume that there is no effective competition in the market place, the demand for goods and ser-

vices is inelastic, there are no substitute goods and services, and that consumers will somehow insist on buying the same items at higher prices. If companies can pass higher taxes to consumers in the form of higher prices, as the IFS claims, then we should not be observing companies going to enormous lengths to dodge taxes.

Scaremongering

The IFS scaremongering on higher corporate taxes leading to lower wages seems to have little empirical support. For example, the UK corporation tax rate was 52 per cent in 1982 and has declined to the current rate of 19 per cent. This has not been accompanied by increases in real wages for workers. In 1976, workers' share of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the form of wages and salaries stood at 65.1 per cent. At the end of 2016 the share of GDP going to employees in the form of wages and salaries shrank to around 49.5 per cent. In the last decade the real wages of UK employees have fallen by over 10 per cent, almost the largest fall among major industrialised nations.

The IFS has not explained how lower corporation tax rates materialised in a lower share of GDP for workers, but claimed that a higher corporation tax rate will result in lower wages. The IFS did not look at other economies either. For example, France, Germany, Canada and many Scandinavian countries have higher corporation tax rates and higher wages, certainly higher than the UK. How did they buck the trend? These countries generally make a bigger investment in their social infrastructure, which is vital for any investment in productive assets.

Labour's economic and tax policies enabled it to attract some 40% of the votes cast. They connected with people's common sense and offered escape from a politics of fear, never-ending austerity and stagnation. This momentum needs to be maintained by development of distinctive policies, especially as new challenges are likely to be posed by the uncertainties of Brexit and a weaker economy. **C**

Prem Sikka is professor of Accounting at Essex University

French Social Democracy: dead?

Andrew Coates surveys the rise of Macron and the collapse of the Socialist Party

The May election of centrist Emmanuel Macron as French President with 66.1% of the vote against the far-right Marine Le Pen, at 33.9% was greeted across the world with a sigh of relief. That the new head of state began his victory speech to the sounds of the anthem of the European Union was a rebuke to the nationalist right. Commentators suggested that the leader of En Marche! represented a 'populism of the centre' that could stand up to the anti-Europe upsurge that has fed the continent's xenophobic right and Brexit. That his 'new France' would free up the 'spirit of Enterprise' and modernise a country stifled by regulation and riddled with social division.

Reduced to a rump

At 6.36% of the ballots in the first round, Parti Socialiste (PS) candidate Benoît Hamon's score was a historic low for his party. Not since 1969, when Gaston Defferre, representing the party's predecessor, the SFIO (Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière), obtained 5.07% have the socialists been so marginalised in a presidential election. Despite the participation of over two million people in the 'primary' that chose Hamon, and the pledges of all candidates to respect the result, leading right-wing socialists, including his opponent former Prime Minister Manuel Valls, openly backed Macron. The new President's cabinet includes a number of former socialists, including Richard Ferrand, now embroiled in controversy over property and financial dealing. One-time PS Presidential contender (2007), Ségolène Royal, who had also supported En Marche! regretted that she had not retained his post as Environment Minister. June legislative elections confirmed the Socialists reduced to a rump of 34 seats.

Today those collaborating with Macron are active supporters of his modernising programme, including, after the 2016 reform of labour laws, further liberalising measures. Manuel Valls' claim that there are two "irrecon-

cilable" lefts, one with a mission to govern, the other reduced to protests, appears to mean preserving Ministerial positions at all costs. His rival, Benoît Hamon's appeal to "the coming generation", a green radical programme of opposition to neo-liberal economics, social reform, including Basic Income, has disappeared from sight. Fragmented, the Socialists are unravelling the unity that has sustained them since the modern party's creation at the 1971 Congress of Epinay.

For many on the left, notably outside of France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France insoumise (LFI) was a ray of hope. Just behind the classic right François Fillon, 20.01% at 19.58%, the leader of LFI was backed by over 30% of the 18-14 vote, and 24% of workers. This compares well with the Front National, who got 25% of the younger vote, while at 39% support, became the leading party amongst workers. Mélenchon's rallies attracted tens of thousands. Mélenchon's ability as an orator – without parallel in the

The basis for long-term political refoundation has yet to be found

UK – his evocation of French radical traditions, from the Revolution to the Paris Commune, gave heart to the left.

The ambitions of La France insoumise extend beyond the left. Mélenchon's and his allies consider that we are living in a new era of the 'people', which has replaced the 'party of the working class' as the motor of the fight against the 'oligarchs'. From the 'multitude', a mass of protests, a movement that federates the People into a political force can be constructed. Some commentators note that LFI's programme is in effect a greening of Keynesian anti-austerity economics and political reform (a 6th Republic). Others point to the structure of LFI, which has several hundred thousand 'members' – adhering online for free – but without any of the signs of a functioning internal democracy, such as an opposition.

But Mélenchon's team equally draw on the experience of Podemos. It has however little in common with the 15M protests



Newly elected French President Emmanuel Macron hoodwinked the left

from which the Spanish radical party grew, or only indirect links with the much smaller Nuit Debout occupations in France last year. Leading figures also evoke the radical democracy of Chantal Mouffe, and use the theories of populism of the late Ernesto Laclau as a handbook for their political strategy. This does not only imply challenging the political 'caste'. The latter involves a hefty dose of 'sovereignism', that is the belief that making the body politic the common property of the people takes place by an assertion of national power. Their platform, L'avenir en commun proposed to challenge the EU's neoliberalism and the 'oligarchs' with 'protectionnisme solidaire', and the 'independence' of French military power.

There are many voices on the French left calling for a new synthesis between radical aspiration and practical reform. But for the moment those joining Macron in the hope that watering down social democracy to a point that resembles the failings of the Third Way under Tony Blair have wind in their sails. Facing marginalisation in the National Assembly the alternative to political office at any price, modernisation for its own sake, is unlikely to be a movement around a populist leader. The basis for long-term political refoundation has yet to be found. **C**

Dismal result for French left

Pierre Bocquillon asks what's next for the left?

The second round of the French legislative election finally concluded a never-ending electoral cycle of six months, started with the primaries of Les Républicains (right) and the Socialist Party in the winter. At the end of this cycle, the political spectrum appears radically transformed and the position of the left considerably weakened overall.

As is usually the case, the legislative election has given a clear majority to the newly elected President, Emmanuel Macron, who created his own political movement a year ago and ran on a centrist, 'neither right nor left' ticket. In view of the short political career of Macron – first as an adviser to President Hollande, then as his Economy Minister – as well as the novelty of his movement En Marche! this is an undisputable success. His party La République en Marche! (LREM) now has 308 Members of Parliament, 340 with his centrist allies of Modem (i.e. 51 seats more than the threshold of 289 for an absolute majority). It represents the 6th largest majority in the history of the 5th Republic, certainly a strong showing although not the sweeping victory that polls predicted. More importantly abstention has reached a record high of 57.4% in the second

round of the legislative election (for the record, abstention represented 44.6% in 2012). Macron and his party clearly won the two electoral contests, but based on the support of a fairly limited share of the electorate, in the context of a deepening democratic crisis of representation.

To the left of LREM, the picture is not pretty. The Socialist Party (PS) has completely collapsed and – including its allies from smaller parties – has a group of only 45 MPs, down from a majority of 331 in 2012. This confirms the dismal showing of Benoît Hamon in the Presidential election and the widespread rejection of François Hollande's term in office. It is not clear how the PS could recover from this all-time low. While some socialist figures are now talking about a re-foundation of the party clearly oriented to the left to counter a process of 'Pasokification', others may be tempted to cooperate with LREM, at least on a case-by-case basis.

Further to the left, Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his new movement France Insoumise ('Unbowed France', FI) are satisfied with winning 17 seats, while the warring brothers of the Communist Party (PC) secured 10. Even combined, these results are below what one could have

hoped for after Mélenchon won 19.6% of the votes in the first round of the Presidential election. But it is a clear progression compared to the last legislature. For the first time, Mélenchon will constitute an independent group in Parliament, while the Communists should be able to form another one with independent MPs from overseas territories.

FI and PC are expected to cooperate closely to fight Macron's social-liberal agenda, starting with his project to normalize emergency measures in the name of security, and his contested reform to 'flexibilize' labour laws. However fragmentation, a tense relationship over both substantive and strategic issues, and personal rivalries do not bode well for the ability of the left to expand its support base when Macron starts facing his first serious difficulties.

The capacity of the radical left to overcome its division and promote a positive narrative of social, ecological and democratic renewal will be crucial to counter Macron's deepening of the technocratic and neoliberal consensus and take the space that has been left vacant by the collapse of the socialists. **C**

Pierre Bocquillon lectures at the University of East Anglia

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OUR HISTORY - 73

John Strachey - The Theory And Practice Of Socialism (1936)

John Strachey was the most prolific British advocate of Marxist theory in the 1930s. From an upper middle class family, after Oxford University he became a journalist at the *Spectator*, of which his father was editor. Joining the ILP in 1924, he unsuccessfully contested a parliamentary seat in Birmingham for the Labour Party the following year. He then became editor of the ILP's monthly journal *Socialist Review*, moving on after the general strike to become editor of the Mineworkers Union journal *The Miner*. He was close to Oswald Mosley and in fact published *Revolution by Reason* in 1925 which promoted Mosley's economic policies – this was before Mosley left the ILP to form the New Party and subsequently the British Union of Fascists. Strachey was however Mosley's parliamentary secretary when the latter was a Minister in the 1929-1931 government and contributed to both the Mosley manifesto and the volume *A National Policy* which in effect became the New Party's founding statement. However like his co-author Aneurin Bevan, he broke with Mosley and in his case moved to a Marxist position.

Though never a member of the Communist Party, Strachey published a series of books promoting a Marxist position in effect identical to the position of the British Communist Party, which also idealised the Soviet Union's political and economic structure including the 'dictatorship of the proletariat': *The Coming Struggle for Power* (1932), *The Menace of Fascism* (1933), *The Nature of Capitalist Crisis* (1935) and *The Theory and Practice of Socialism* (1936). He wrote for the Communist Party's *Daily Worker* and in 1936, together with Victor Gollancz and Harold Laski, he helped found the Left Book Club and its journal *Left News*. Strachey then sought to integrate orthodox Marxist theory and Keynesian interventionist economic theory into a leftist social democracy. He distanced himself from the Communist Party to the extent of contributing to Gollancz's *Betrayal of the Left* in 1941. Strachey was elected as Labour MP for Dundee in the 1945 General election and served in a number of Government posts including Minister for Food and Secretary of State for War. In 1956, Strachey

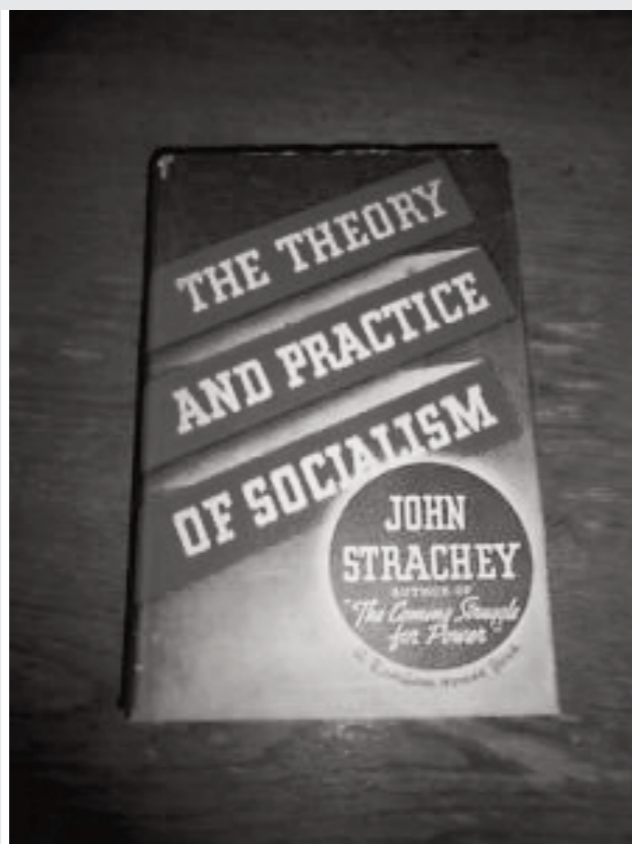
published *Contemporary Capitalism*, he argued that socialism could be progressed within a reformed capitalist system, in effect a rebuttal of his pre-war arguments. This was followed by *The End of Empire* in 1959, *On the Prevention of War* in 1962 and *The Challenge of Democracy* in 1963. In the early 1960s, Strachey was shadow Commonwealth minister. He died in 1963 just before Labour returned to Government.

"During the transition stage between capitalism and socialism there is no possibility of an all-inclusive democracy. For, during this stage, classes will still exist. And there can be no democracy between classes:

there can be no democracy between those who own and those who do not own the means of production. During this stage, if socialism is to be built up, the working class must dominate the community just as completely as does the capitalist class in a capitalist society."

"Communists and socialists propose that the workers should destroy one dictatorship, that of the capitalists, and replace it with another, their own. But a workers dictatorship will establish democracy by the far greater part of the population while destroying democracy for the small capitalist class alone. For it will be the comparatively small capitalist class alone over which the new dictatorship will be exercised. Moreover the capitalist class, having had its ownership of the means of

production taken from it, will be gradually absorbed into the working class, which will become co-extensive with society itself. Then, and not till then, will the establishment of true all-inclusive democracy become possible (the extraordinary historical importance of the new Soviet Constitution is that it shows that the Soviet Union is now reaching this point). Thus what the spokesmen of capitalism call democracy means the effective subjection of the mass of the population to a small minority, whilst what communists and socialists call dictatorship means the subjection of a small and ever-dwindling minority to the great majority of the population – which is itself democratically organised."



Julia Bard
on the
Holocaust

FINAL SOLUTION: THE FATE OF THE
JEWS 1933-46
David Cesarani (Pan, £14.99)

David Cesarani was a colossus in the world of Holocaust history, whose life's work was to challenge superficial interpretations and the instrumentalisation of the Holocaust. Tragically, he died suddenly, and much too young, before publication of *Final Solution*, a book which fulfils his aim to fill "the yawning gulf between popular understanding of this history and current scholarship on the subject" – scholarship which includes a growing mass of investigation into the archives that have become accessible in eastern Europe in the last three decades.

Two arguments underpin his analysis. The first is that, although antisemitism was central to Nazi ideology, it was not the driving force in determining Hitler's actions, nor the wave on which he rode to power. What shaped and motivated him, along with many of his generation, was a drive to war – to an existential struggle, following the humiliating surrender of 1918, which he saw as a betrayal perpetrated by the Jews. The second is that, far from being a well-oiled machine operating according to a carefully thought-out strategic plan, the path the Nazis took, militarily and in terms of the relentless attacks culminating in the genocide of Europe's Jews, was confused, conflicted and erratic.

Written in a powerful narrative voice, this book is both a compelling and an unbearable read. Contemporary testimony, ranging from reports by top diplomats to personal accounts of people's daily lives, vividly conveys the impact of the rising level of persecution on the lives and psyches of individuals, communities and the wider society. American Consul Raymond Geist reported back to his government on the "emigration psychosis" afflicting German Jews during 1938 and 1939 as the Nazis dismantled their lives in a wave of terror, destruction, deportations and humiliation. Ruth Maier, an eighteen-year-old schoolgirl in Vienna, started a diary to document the attacks on the Jews. "We've been attacked," she wrote

in November 1938. The streets, she said, looked "like an abattoir". A lorry was packed with Jews "standing up like livestock on its way to the slaughterhouse!"

The most significant strand in this detailed account of the Nazi project is Cesarani's exploration of the range of responses to every twist and turn of events. Jewish communities were split as the Nazis, pointing a gun at their heads, co-opted leaders into Jewish Councils to register Jews and "manage" the Judenpolitik while others resisted in a whole range of ways, in the ghettos and even in the death camps.

In October 1938, when thousands of despised "Ostjuden" (Polish Jews living in Germany) were dragged out of their beds, stuffed into buses and trains, then marched to the Polish border having had their meagre luggage stolen by the SS guards, a witness recalled that "Polish miners who saw the wretched Jews arrive, wept at the sight." Jewish communal organisations did what they could for the thousands who ended up, "wet, cold and starving" in makeshift camps but the pattern, even as the persecution was ramped up, was for foreign governments to turn a blind eye. Even when people could escape, there was nowhere for them to go.

Cesarani writes brilliantly and simply. He is unflinching in facing the horror but equally unflinching in challenging the uses, abuses and oversimplification of these events. As Auschwitz has come, in education and popular culture, to symbolise the entire Nazi project, what gets lost is the complex, contradictory and chaotic truth. For example, if we can even conceive of making such

comparisons, Treblinka was, in terms of the death rate, even worse than Auschwitz. The last extermination camp to be constructed, the true purpose of the buildings was disguised. As people came off the trains they undressed, handed over their clothes and valuables, were shaved and led straight into gas chambers. The work this entailed was done by other inmates, many of whom collapsed or were killed in the process. But the camp's capacity was too small for the huge numbers of victims and the procedure was "so chaotic and the security so lax that dozens of Jews managed to escape."

Cesarani's great achievement is not only to enable us to see, hear, smell and feel the events themselves, but to give us a way in to imagining the shock and confusion of those who were caught up in them – whether as victims, onlookers or perpetrators – and to analyse the range of responses to them. His death is a huge loss but this book is his precious legacy.

Compelling and unbearable



Workers in power

Dave Lister on Russia's revolts

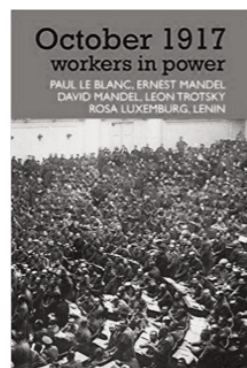
OCTOBER 1917
Paul Le Blanc, Ernest Mandel, David Mandel, Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin (Resistance Books, IIRE, Merlin Press £15.95)

In the preface, it is claimed that "this book is intended to provide a critical examination of the achievements of the Russian Revolution". It is certainly an interesting read and includes some valuable information based on recent research. But in my view only the two Mandels' pieces get anywhere near a critical approach, and otherwise we are subjected to uncritical acclaim. This is particularly true of the contribution by Francois Vercaemmen of the Belgian section of the 4th International. His crude piece includes statements such as "the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries attempted to curtail the pressure of the masses through the politics of class collaboration". Also, despite a vast bibliography, there is no recognition of the important contribution to the issues discussed of two contributors to Chartist, Tony Polan and Ian Bullock.

One hundred years after the events should be enough time for us to make a proper evaluation of the significance of the turmoil in Russia in 1917. Reading this book has led me, to some extent, to revise my revisionist views on the Bolshevik uprising.

There is little controversy over the first revolution in 1917. As Paul Le Blanc explains, it began with rallies for International Women's Day, on 23 February 1917 (or March 8 in everybody else's calendar) that 'got out of hand'. This developed into a spontaneous uprising in Petrograd which the soldiers refused to put down and even joined. The rotten edifice of Tsardom collapsed very easily and was replaced by a Provisional Government which the Bolsheviks declined to join.

It is important to note that all the socialist parties assumed that the revolution would be bourgeois democratic in nature and that the relative backwardness of Imperial Russia meant that it was not ready to advance to socialism. It was the return of Lenin in a sealed German train that changed the situation. Lenin was adamant that the call should now be changed to "All power to



the soviets", the councils set up by workers and soldiers. Advocates of determinist history may not like this but we see here the power of an individual to shape history. Without the Bolsheviks there would not have been a successful transfer of state power. Arguably also, without Lenin the Bolsheviks would not have been in a position to organise this.

David Mandel's piece on 'economic power and factory committees' provides details from serious research. He points out that the Bolsheviks never mentioned support for workers' control of industry until it happened. This was more of an anarchist/syndicalist conception. It was a gradual process during the period between the two revolutions whereby workers came to want to have a say in the management of their enterprises. Mandel explains that this was for a variety of pragmatic rather than ideological reasons. For instance some soviets feared that they might be locked out, as had happened in the past and decided to take action to prevent this. Incidentally it is interesting to observe in the cover photograph showing the Petrograd Soviet, that all the vast number of delegates are men.

After the second revolution there was the anomalous situation that factories under workers' control remained in private hands. By March 1918 the Supreme Soviet had come to the view that this situation needed to change and a slow process of nationalisation ensued. It appears that the Petrograd workers' soviets tended to recognise that they could not continue as autonomous units but had to be under some form of central direction. Regional commissioners were then appointed to take control of enterprises, with their decisions binding on the factory

committees, but workers were allowed to form an administration committee to oversee the administration manager. David Mandel argues that the exigencies of the civil war and the dire state of the national economy drove the Bolsheviks towards the concept of one man management.

Ernest Mandel rejects the idea that the Bolsheviks were still an elitist group of professional revolutionaries by October 1917 and counter-claims that they were now a mass workers' party in which there was open debate and disagreement was tolerated. This may well be true. Mandel also argues that the Provisional Government had failed to deliver on anything: peace, land for the peasants, the 8 hour day, or deal with the growing economic dislocation. Also that the real choice was between soviet power and bloody reaction. This may also be true. General Kornilov would probably have seized power in the summer of 1917 without the actions of the Bolsheviks and the Petrograd proletariat. The point is also made that in the civil war that followed the revolution the White Army executed all communist prisoners and carried out a huge amount of pogroms against the Jews, especially in the Ukraine. Mandel's further point, quoting Leonard Shapiro, is that the Red Army was victorious in the Civil War because the peasants hated both sides but preferred the Communists, who gave them the land, to the Whites, who either took or threatened to take it away.

To his credit Mandel is prepared to accept that mistakes were made in the post-revolutionary period, citing in particular the banning of other parties in the Soviet and factions in the Bolshevik Party. He also believed that the creation of the Cheka, the secret police force that flourished under Felix Dzerzhinsky's leadership, was a mistake. They got out of hand. Evidence of this outlined in this book is that Lenin met his old friend, the Menshevik leader Martov, and gave him a false passport, saying that other than this he could do nothing to save him.

The elephant in Mandel's front room is the Constituent Assembly. The Bolsheviks

CONTINUED ON P 27 >>

Art and life

Mike Davis on a thrilling story minus critique

OCTOBER: THE STORY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION
China Miéville (Verso, £18.99 hb)

This is a gripping docudrama-style story of the Russian revolution. Miéville sweeps the reader along in a breathtaking account of the conflicts and catastrophes, plans and intrigues that produced a revolution. It is a roller coaster narrative, weaving dialogue, description and quotation to cover the events, debates and ideas articulated by all the leading personalities involved in the revolution that changed the 20th century and still reverberates today.

Miéville covers the political maelstrom in a language you would expect from this celebrated wordsmith better known for his steam punk and sci-fi writing. It makes the book more akin to John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World* than Leon Trotsky's monumental *History of the Russian Revolution* or the many more academic accounts.

Some readers may be surprised that an SF writer has plunged into the world of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. But not those of you who have followed Miéville's political journey. He was an active member of the Socialist Workers Party expelled for opposition to the cover up of rape allegations against the general secretary four years ago. When I interviewed him just after a bruising internal political struggle he was in the splinter International Socialism group. Why is this relevant? Because at the time and it seems today, Miéville still sub-



scribes to a Leninist politics.

Lenin is the hero of this story. His ideas, battles and spirit animate the story. Since the death of his brother at the hands of the Czarist secret police he had worked tirelessly for revolution. On the eve of October he fought steadfastly for an insurrection against doubters like Kamenev and Zinoviev. In his letters and pamphlets from exile including *State and Revolution*, as leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party, he had worked for a tightly disciplined democratic centralist revolutionary party. This was needed, he argued, to lead the seizure of power from an autocratic oppressive Czarist regime and since the February 1917 revolution, the Provisional Government led by the moderate Kerensky.

Miéville's story goes back to

late 19th century, lifts off with the 1905 revolution then tracks the development of political struggles to the successful conquest of the Winter Palace and other centres of power through the organs of the relatively new Petrograd, Moscow and provincial soviets of workers and peasants.

Miéville's epilogue uncovers the initial shadows and then summarises the realities of one party state rule. The degeneration of the revolution began early after the signing of the Brest Litovsk treaty that ended the imperial war but saw Russia propelled into a bitter civil war, with western capitalist powers supporting the White against Red Army. War communism, censorship, curbing of other parties, suppression of the Kronstadt sailors, all augured badly for the future. The White Terror morphed into the Red Terror. No international revolutions followed. Russia remained isolated. Democratic centralism became brutal Stalinist dictatorship.

You won't find much analysis of why the revolution failed or an exposition of the fault-lines of Leninist politics. (Try Tony Polan's *Lenin and the End of Politics*, for that). Nor will you read a more open treatment of ideas from contemporaries like Martov and Dan who argued for a different approach. Miéville hints at a deeper critique in urging that those who side with the revolution 'must engage with the failures and crimes'. This is not the book to do that but is nonetheless a thrilling story by a writer at the height of his powers.

Workers in power

>>CONTINUED FROM P 26

allowed the elections for this to go ahead, then found that they had only 25% of the seats and dissolved it, claiming that it was a relic of bourgeois democracy. In the piece by Lenin, he argues that soviet democracy is the highest form of democracy, adding that he sees no reason why bourgeois elements should have a say in the country's future. Maybe a coalition of the progressive parties could have ruled Russia and prevented all the evils of Stalinism. Maybe such a government would

have been overthrown by the forces of reaction. But it is worth noting Ian Bullock's point on this that much of the Left internationally wanted to emulate the soviet system, but this proved in reality to be even less representative than parliamentary democracy, with all its faults.

Elements of the vanguardist Left in Britain still look to the soviet system as the way forward. Many of us on the democratic left are happier to stick with parliamentary democracy, but hopefully

a more equitable version of it than we have at present. As for socialism, the prospects for it in the shorter term do not look good. We are left with a few regimes around the world that claim to be socialist, although Tony Cliff may be spinning in his grave with the thought that there might be a case for classifying China as 'state capitalist' these days. In the end the ten days that shook the world may be more of an exciting story than a blueprint for the future.

BOOK REVIEWS

Duncan Bowie on the housing crisis in London

Who is London for?

BIG CAPITAL
Anna Minton (Penguin, £8.99)

This book is well worth reading. It reviews the impact of the housing crisis in London and the reasons for it. It combines reportage and interviews with some of the individuals affected by the crisis and research from a range of academics and lobby groups as well as from investigative journalism. As someone familiar with most of these sources and interviewees Minton presents a fair overview, which is more readable than most academic outputs.

Minton starts by focusing on the extent to which new development in central London is now targeted at the international investment market, viewed through a tour of luxury developments and attendance at marketing events. She then reviews the post-war approach to planning

and housing enshrined in the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act and the 1949 Housing Act. Minton then seeks to explain how housing production has been financialised (which basically means both housing development and the housing market are driven by the needs of investors rather than the needs of future residents – be they prospective owner-occupiers or tenants).

The demolitions chapter – how developers and London boroughs have redeveloped estates to increase their asset value, often displacing the pre-existing residents – revisits the well-known narrative of the redevelopment of the Heygate and Aylesbury estates in Southwark. A chapter on ‘Bricks to Benefits’ retells the story of the Focus E15 ‘single mothers’ in Newham and Waltham Forest, the placement of homeless families in Welwyn Garden City and Westminster

Council rehousing strategy. A chapter on ‘Generation Rent’ looks at private rented housing in East London and the Newham licensing scheme which seeks to drive out bad landlords. The final chapter on ‘Right to the City’ is disappointing. After referencing the French urban sociologist, Henri Lefebvre, and the UN’s New Urban Agenda, Minton recognises that a paradigm shift in UK housing policy is required. She is disappointed with the lack of progress made by Sadiq Khan as London Mayor, but after discussing radical activism in Spain, her suggestions for alternative policies relies on conversations with a very limited number of housing practitioners, before focusing on Community Land Trusts and self-build. This is all fairly marginal to the fundamental failure of the current system and the radical corrective action required.

Henry Abraham on the Nigerian left

NAIJA MARXISMS
Adam Mayer (Pluto Press, £17.99)

Naija Marxisms (the plural is intended to indicate the wide variety of Nigerian Marxist thinking) covers a great deal of ground in less than 200 pages. It fulfils its purpose of recording, indeed celebrating leading Nigerian leftists, focussing on the period since Nigeria’s independence (or as Mayer would say, “(merely) flag independence” in 1960. Beyond that, it explains the context of these leader’s lives and work, and in doing so provides an informative summary of Nigeria’s history for those not already familiar with its often depressing trajectory. That historical context is of particular relevance to the book’s subject, because for much of the period both before and after Nigerian independence, leftists were proscribed or at the least strongly discouraged, and so their achievements which Mayer documents are all the more admirable.

Mayer is aware of the irony that this book, which excoriates neo-colonial impositions on Nigeria, is written by him, a European with just a few years personal experience of Nigeria. His obvious deep respect for the Nigerian leftists that are his subject helps mitigate the implicit challenge, and he also points out that his personal knowledge of Eastern Europe and its relationship with the USSR provided helpful context for understanding the interactions between the USSR and Nigeria in the latter’s development of Marxist thinking. There are nonetheless a few points in the book where Mayer’s ‘outsider’ perspective leads to a degree of oversimplification, particularly his repeated contention that Nigeria was largely made up of an acephalous and apparently rather idyllic South and an oppressive and feudal North in

the period before European colonialists malign intervention.

Mayer’s assessment of Nigeria’s history since the colonialist intervention, and of its current condition, is bleak (for example, “Nigeria’s democracy is a sham, and it is a powerful demonstration that a bourgeois democracy that degenerates into a plutocracy can become an empty shell, unliveable even for its creators, a giant slum, a hell for millions”). Indeed, this bleak assessment motivated his writing: as he says “when someone with a conscience is confronted

tive contribution.

Mayer is meticulous in documenting his sources, with 30 pages of end-notes. The overviews he provides of key individuals in the Nigerian left are clear and generally convincing.

In his conclusion, he suggests the key lessons to take from considering the work of Nigerian leftist and particularly Marxist thinkers are firstly the enduring importance of class; secondly, the interaction between international neo-colonialism and Nigeria’s under-development (he supports the value of ‘dependency theory’, describing imperialists making colonies dependent on and subservient to the metropolitan centre); and thirdly, the critical role of the workers in the formalised sector, supported by important roles for students and ‘peasants’.

At times Mayer’s Marxist orthodoxy leads him to stretch a point or two: to give a few examples, in calling Nigerian smallholder famers ‘peasants’; in arguing that despite formally employed workers making up only around 5 million of the country’s population of 160 million or more, their role in driving change and potentially revolution has been and will be decisive; in his



under-playing the importance of pan Africanism in leftist thinking in Nigeria in favour of class based analysis (though he shows somewhat more flexibility in accommodating feminist perspectives alongside class based ones in his discussion); and in his superficial assessment of religion in Nigeria as simply a cover for economic exploitation (Western materialists naturally often find it difficult to comprehend the centrality of the spiritual dimension in most Africans world view). However, overall, this is a lucid and valuable book that covers an interesting area of Nigerian history in a scholarly yet accessible way.

with Nigeria, he/she is forced to think like a radical”, albeit he was clearly a committed radical and Marxist long before he lived in Nigeria whilst teaching at a University in northern Nigeria. Book chapters include ‘The Descent’ – an assessment of Nigeria’s current condition and the path to this; ‘Leftist movements in Nigeria’ - an overview of the country’s history, and in particular of the development of its Labour and Women’s movements; three chapters giving brief biographies of different groups of leading Nigerian leftists; and finally ‘Conclusions’, which provides a brief analysis of Nigerian leftist thinking and of its distinc-

Duncan Bowie on Mrs May

Enigmatic?

THERESA MAY
Rosa Prince (Biteback, £20)

As an avid reader of political biographies and having read, I think, a biography of every British Prime Minister since Lord Liverpool (yes that is 200 years of PMs!), I felt obliged to read the first biography of the latest holder of that post. The author Rosa Prince, a former *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Telegraph* journalist, recently wrote a reasonable biography of Jeremy Corbyn, (reviewed *Chartist 281*), so I was interested how she would tackle May. Prince admits that the book was originally to be published at the end of the year but that she had to finish it rather quickly in the light of May’s unexpected and rather sudden promotion.

Subtitled, ‘The Enigmatic Prime Minister’, I have to admit that after 350 pages, I felt I had little more idea of Theresa May’s politics than when I started. The last few weeks has perhaps revealed more. The book is a competently written narrative, but Prince struggles to make it interesting. May got a geography degree from St Hugh’s college, Oxford where she was secretary

of the Edmund Burke society and met her husband, who became president of the Union Society. I was Labour candidate for student union president at the time, but I don’t remember her – we no doubt moved in different circles, though I did know some geographers at St Hugh’s in her year. She then went into banking before becoming a Conservative councillor in the London borough of Merton, with election to parliament in 1997.

Much of the narrative is pretty tedious as May focused on ‘getting on with the job’, avoiding controversies and the intra party factionalism which saw the Conservative party work its way through four leaders. Prince focuses on how May promoted the role of women within the party which in fact built up a strong personal support network (ironically including Andrea Leadsom, who was to strand against her for the party leadership). There is a whole chapter in the book about how May benefited from confusion with the ‘adult film star’ Teresa May, who was better known than herself at the time. There is also much focus on May’s ‘nasty party’ speech, which did her more damage within the

party, than it did to those she was criticising.

Prince demonstrates the extent to which May was outside Cameron’s charmed circle. No Bullingdon Club photos here – her dismissal of George Osborne was perhaps as much about Osborne’s lifestyle and image as his politics. May, daughter of a vicar with her focus on quietly getting on with the job, clearly resented the flamboyance of the Notting Hill/Chipping Norton set. It is important to remember that not only did she have a different background, but she is from an older generation. Prince is generally sympathetic to May – not very critical of her role at the Home Office and in the immigration debate (with those Go Home vans) and her quietude in the Referendum debate. Was this really part of her strategy to become Prime Minister? Did May really state her ambition at school? No doubt one of thousands who did so – but May has actually got there. How long she will stay is somewhat uncertain. I can only plead that whoever succeeds her is a bit less enigmatic (and has a few skeletons in their closet) so the biography is not quite so tedious.



Universal income and working time

James Grayson on building a new economy

UTOPIA FOR REALISTS AND HOW WE CAN GET THERE
Rutger Bregman (Bloomsbury, £16.99)

Bregman, a young German philosopher, is interested in more equitable societies and has chosen to demonstrate the validity of a number of initially unlikely propositions. For example, a proposal for international development is to cease major projects, usually supervised by outsiders in four by fours and substitute simple payments. This has the benefit of avoiding distortions to local markets and dumping.

His major proposal however is a guaranteed universal income. This was tested in a Swiss referendum as recently as 2016. Paying street sleepers a modest income tends to re-integrate them into society and avoids massive welfare infrastructures. The basic thesis is that over time society has become massively better resourced whereas concepts of

poverty are relative. Western economies are well resourced and can afford to be generous but the political implications may be dire!

Bregman rails about the methodology for calculating Gross Domestic Product; by doing so he neatly illustrates some of the absurdities of the calculation.

Mill and Keynes predicted a much shorter working week for the future. The latter anticipated 15 hours per week by 2030. Henry Ford learned that by introducing a five day working week in 1926 (40 hours) the productivity of his staff increased. Kellogg introduced a six hour working day during 1930.

There are interesting thoughts about industrial dilution. During the 20th century this encompassed women taking up work and immigration which, in the UK was encouraged by Conservative governments after the Second World War. Talent was drained from other

economies to such an extent that the National Health Service and education would be very different should they cease to be able to call upon immigrants. Both the UK and the USA have benefited enormously from the talents and skills of refugees, perhaps the Manhattan Project furnishes an example?

Politics can be used to maintain the status quo but also to introduce ideas which initially seem leftfield but become the norm, an example could be the abolition of slavery or the aim to offer universal healthcare. Bregman draws our attention to the Overton window which sets out a series of degrees of acceptability: unthinkable, radical, acceptable, popular, policy, sensible. Successful practitioners include President Trump and Foreign Secretary Johnson.

This is not a call to arms; it is a call for agitation.

Marina Prentoulis on opportunities missed in an Athens art show

Documenta14: “We will fail. But we will try”, but let’s try a bit harder

A group of young Austrian photography students is having a debate outside Benaki Museum, one of the main venues of Documenta 14, the exhibition that has taken over public spaces and museums in Athens from April 6th to July 16th.

It seems the whole European art scene from art students, art aficionados and simple art lovers have descended by the thousands on Athens for the 14th iteration of Documenta the ‘100 day exhibition’ as it is called. This year’s organization is attempting something new: for the first time it is hosted outside its birthplace, Kassel, Germany (where it will return in July for another three months) aiming to open up a space that will mediate the divisions between North and South Europe after the financial crisis. Greece, the weaker link of the Eurozone, the country under memoranda agreements for the past seven years and Germany, the de facto ruthless supervisor of the Greek government and a questionable, if not undesirable, leader and guarantor of the European neoliberal project, have a lot of bad blood between them to deal with.

The title of Documenta14, “Learning from Athens” is an attempt, according to the organizers to critically reflect on colonization (or ‘neo-colonization’ if we think how the position of Southern Europe has been shaped the last ten years) within the framework of globalization and neoliberalism. Greece, the border of the European Union, the sign that the European project has taken the wrong turn, the crossroads between Europe, Africa, Middle East and Asia, is seen by the organization as an “alternative, collaborative art and activist project”. This objective is close to the original conception of Documenta, in 1955 (ten years after the end of WWII) by Arnold Bode (1900-1977) aiming to bring Germany back in dialogue with the rest of the world.

Documenta14 was opened by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and his Greek counterpart Prokopis Pavlopoulos. Despite the welcoming ceremony, Greek reactions were less posi-

tive. Organisers offered Athens as a ‘fertile land’ to explore the global socio-economic complexities of neoliberalism, displacement and debt. Many perceived the exhibition as one more attempt at cultural domination and exoticization demonstrating neo-colonial attitudes.

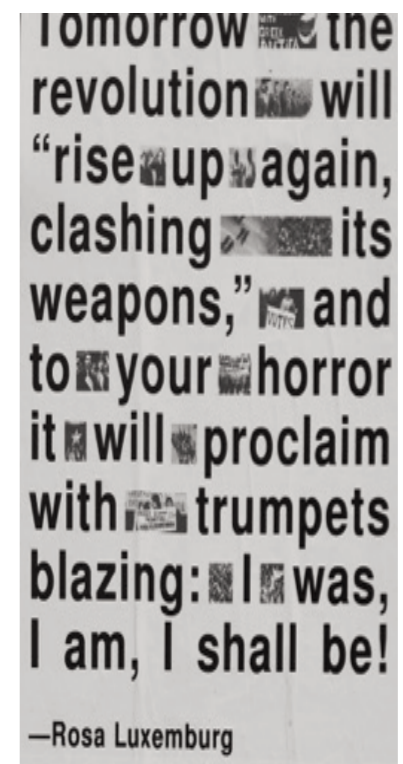
Within or outside the framework of Documenta, came other initiatives. For example, ASKI (the Archive of Contemporary Social History), organized thematic walks at places of torture and freedom in Athens. Another

strands, placing the exhibits within more accessible frameworks, and explanatory material that would guide visitors in deciphering contemporary art.

Similarly, some of the open space installations seemed to disregard the particular context offered by the city. To give two examples: First, the installation by the London-based Rasheed Araeen entitled ‘Food for Thought, Thought for Change’. Drawing on his Pakistani roots, the artist alluded to Pakistani weddings at Kotzia square and in collaboration with the NGO ‘Organization Earth’ offered 60 free meals a day to those early enough to get tickets. Inspired by the solidarity networks that mushroomed in Athens as a response to the economic crisis and the imposition of the severe austerity of the loan agreements, in the Greek context the installation can be read more as the need for charity and less as what was a truly magnificent grassroots movement based on active solidarity. With the necessary brochure explaining the Greek context and how the solidarity networks worked, it could have had a political message if placed in some Northern European metropolis like London.

Another installation, the ‘Monument to Revolution’ inspired by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s Rosa Luxemburg memorial in Berlin destroyed by the Nazis, was placed at Avdi square. Although it alludes to the Nazi resistance in Athens, it misses the opportunity to offer itself to multiple readings by being installed half a mile away, at Koumoundourou Square, where the offices of the governing party Syriza are housed. In that location it would have gained a contemporary political significance and controversy due to the potential connection with the EU debt negotiations and be visually challenging since the square is populated by a number of policemen guarding the offices.

In the years to come, Europe will need more transnational art initiatives in order to heal its wounds. The big question being, is high-brow art willing to really reflect on how this can be achieved for the many.



Bad habits

Nigel Watt on a little known country

GUINEA: MASKS, MUSIC AND MINERALS
Bram Postumus (Hurst, £25)

This is an interesting book about a little-known country. This is the former French Guinea, not to be confused with Guinea-Bissau (Portuguese) and Equatorial Guinea (Spanish). As socialists (if we are old enough) we are likely to have identified with the first President, Sékou Touré, who bravely led his country in voting “no” in the referendum in 1958 in which President de Gaulle asked the French African colonies to vote to join a new French-African Community. The French left in a hurry and in revenge destroyed the economy, even cutting telephone lines and smashing equipment. Nkrumah’s Ghana stepped in to help and they formed a union, later joined by Mali. Ironically all the other French colonies became independent two years later but with a close, neo-colonial relationship with France.

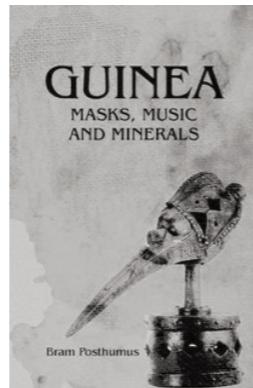
The author quotes Guineans as saying that “five decades of bad habits” started here. In fact Touré corrected many of the evils of the colonial regime, built a couple of

iconic buildings in Conakry and created a remarkable cultural revival, promoting music and dance. “Les Ballets Africains” were founded before independence. We were proud to have welcomed the two best known musical groups, Bembeya Jazz and Les Amazones du Guinée to the Africa Centre in London. Famously he also hosted Miriam Makeba in exile. She remained a fan of his. Otherwise, Postumus finds nothing positive about Touré, describing his increasingly savage treatment of opponents (notably the brilliant former head of the OAU, Diallo Telli who was starved to death in prison) and his rigid control over everything. France later made peace with him and he died peacefully in 1984. The country then changed gear from “too much government to none at all” under the corrupt rule of General Lansana Conté who, at his death in 2008 “managed the incredible feat of leaving his country worse than he found it”.

It did not need to be like this. Guinea is exceptionally rich in minerals – in fact bauxite exports, mostly processed abroad, provided almost the only income for some years – and it has agricultural

and tourism potential. Sadly Sékou Touré failed to develop the economy and Lansana Conté let things disintegrate. The end of the story is more hopeful with the election of Alpha Condé in 2011, a good man facing colossal challenges.

Postumus provides a good description of this very varied and beautiful country as well as the complex ethnic jigsaw and the cross-border relationships with Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire, including the overspill of civil wars in those countries. He is especially strong on the music, though I do not recall much about the “masks” referred to in the title.



WESTMINSTER VIEW



A Labour government within our grasp

Cat Smith on reaching out to consolidate gains

The Labour Party fought the best campaign and a Labour Government is now within our grasp. However, we must do more to engage marginalised voters for the next General Election.

Labour defied expectations, making gains across the country - in every region of England and in Scotland and Wales. Jeremy Corbyn led from the front, but at the very heart of our localised grassroots campaign were Labour activists, organisers and hard-working candidates. Our message was clear - we will build a Britain that works for the many, not the few, and put an end to Tory austerity and continued cuts to public services. We put forward a detailed, costed manifesto with popular policies reflecting the views of the majority and it's clear that the electorate warmed to our message.

In comparison, the Tories ran a negative campaign, full of smears and slurs. Theresa May called an election in order to strengthen her hand in the Brexit negotiations but her party lost seats and failed to reach a majority. She failed to defend her record on NHS failure, cuts to schools, and axing 20,000 police officers, while giving tax breaks to the biggest corporations and the richest individuals.

During the election young people rejected the idea that they are apathetic to British politics. More than two million 18-34 year-olds

registered to vote in the weeks between Theresa May calling the election and the registration deadline. Youth turnout increased significantly, rising from 43% to 58% since the 2015 General Election. We also witnessed a huge swing toward Labour with 63% of voters aged between 18 and 29 voting for Labour compared with 36% in 2015.

The assumption that young people are all left wing is mis-

If a general election is called within the next two years, a swing of just 1.63% to Corbyn's party would deliver the 34 gains we need to make Labour the largest party in the Commons

guided. Young people face a wide range of concerns that do not necessarily fall on the left or right of the political spectrum. However, the Labour campaign resonated with young voters by making politics relevant to their everyday lives and offering hope for a decent future. Theresa May on the other hand neglected young people, assumed they were too lazy to vote, and presented nothing in her manifesto.

Indeed, our pledge to scrap tuition fees and bring back the education maintenance allowance, proved to be popular,

particularly for students. Constituencies with large student populations, such as Newcastle East, Newcastle Central, Manchester Withington, Manchester Central, Cambridge and Canterbury were among the top 22 constituencies that saw the highest increase in overall turnout.

Our vision of building a society where every person is enabled to get on in life, regardless of race, faith or ethnicity also resonated with the Black and minority ethnic electorate. Bristol University academic Paula Surridge found that diversity, not young people, was more important in driving higher turnout in constituencies. According to analysis by the Muslim Council of Britain, BME and Muslim communities moved away from the Conservative party in large numbers and voted for the Labour Party.

Although we lost the election, the opportunity to form a Labour Government is now within our grasp. If a general election is called within the next two years, a swing of just 1.63% to Corbyn's party would deliver the 34 gains we need to make Labour the largest party in the Commons.

Our manifesto gives us a focus and a policy platform to build a progressive society. We must now build on this message, continue to reach out to marginalised groups, and inspire people from all ages and backgrounds to join the Labour movement. **C**

Cat Smith MP was re-elected for Lancaster and Fleetwood on a much increased majority

Chartist reviews Athens exhibition - see page 31

Marina Prentoulis says art has a big role to play in the European project



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