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## OUR HISTORY - 66

### Sylvia Pankhurst - Communism and its Tactics (1921)

Sylvia Pankhurst was one of the three daughters of Richard and Emmeline Pankhurst. She was active in the suffragette movement but adopted a more radical position than her mother and her sister Christabel. Whereas Emmeline and Christabel supported the war effort, Sylvia took an anti-war position. In 1913, Sylvia established the East London Federation of Suffragettes as a working class based militant feminist organisation. In May 1918, the organisation was transformed into the Workers Socialist Federation, with its journal the *Women's Dreadnought*, becoming the *Worker's Dreadnought*. Pankhurst adopted an anti-parliamentary position and collaborated with other libertarians including her partner, the Italian anarchist, Sylvio Corio. She was active in the workers council movement and in the discussions which led to the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920. Meeting Lenin in Moscow, she was later the subject of Lenin's critique in *Left Wing Communism – an Infantile Disorder*.

Pankhurst was an opponent of the authoritarian communism of the British Socialist Party, and had some sympathy with the syndicalist position of the Socialist Labour Party. She resisted the BSP's attempt to merge the *Dreadnought* with their journal *The Call*. She then established her own communist grouping, which she designated as the Communist Party, British section of the Third International or CP (BSTI). However with the failure of

negotiations to merge with the new CPGB, many of Pankhurst's supporters rejected her leadership and defected to the new organisation. The *Dreadnought* actually survived until 1924, though Pankhurst's new group, The Communist Workers Party was a small East End based propaganda group, rather than a political party. In 1924, Pankhurst and Corio moved to Woodford Green in Essex. They had a child, with the couple resuming political activity in 1932 initiating a campaign against Italian fascism and in 1936 establishing a journal opposing Italian fascism and colonialism - *The New Times* and *Ethiopia News*. She befriended Haile Selassie, the exiled Emperor of Ethiopia and after Corio's death in 1954, moved to Addis Ababa, where she published

the *Ethiopia Observer* and wrote a series of books supporting Ethiopian independence until her death in 1960. Her son Richard, who had previously written on early British and Irish socialist and co-operative history, became professor of history at Addis Ababa and a leading writer on Ethiopian history, and in his 80s is still producing historical works as well as co-authoring studies of his mother.

*"Under communism all shall satisfy their material needs without stint or measure from the common storehouse, according to their desires. Everyone will be able to have what he or she desires in food, in clothing, books, music, education and travel facilities. The abundant production now possible, and which invention will constantly facilitate, will remove any need for rationing or limiting of consumption. Every individual, relying on the great common generation, will be secure from material want and anxiety."*

*"There will be no class distinctions, since these arise from differences in material possessions, education and social status – all such distinctions will be swept away. There will be neither rich nor poor. Money will no longer exist, and none will desire to hoard commodities not in use, since a fresh supply may be obtained at will. There will be no selling, because there will be no buyers, since everyone will be able to obtain everything at will, without payment. The possession of private property, beyond that which is in actual personal use, will disappear. There will be neither masters nor servants, all being in a position of economic equality – no individual will be able to*

*become the employer of another."*

*"With the disappearance of the anxious struggle for existence, which saps the energy and cripples initiative, a new vigour, a new independence will develop. People will have more courage to desire freedom, greater determination to possess it. They will be more exacting in their demands upon life, more fastidious as to their choice of a vocation. They will wish to work at what they enjoy, to order their lives as they desire. Work will generally be enjoyed as never before in the history of mankind. The desire for freedom will be tempered by the sense of responsibility towards the commonweal, which will provide security for all."*



## Defeating the Tories requires unity

Labour has huge opportunities. The Tory party is split down the middle on Europe; ministers challenge ministers. It received a bloody nose in London. Sadiq Khan was elected on a big mandate against divisive politics. The government has been sleeping at the wheel while British Steel collapses and billions are lost to the British Treasury in tax dodging scandals. Meanwhile the government continues a relentless pursuit of austerity policies pushing millions into poverty and precarious employment.

With nine months in the job Jeremy Corbyn has helped consolidate Labour in England and Wales, London and Bristol, (see articles by **Duncan Bowie** and **Pete Rowlands**) triumphed in three by-elections and inflicted several defeats on the Cameron government, notably on working family tax credit cuts, disability cuts, unaccompanied child refugees and most recently the u-turn on forced Academisation, as **Dave Lister** explains. Of course there is no room for complacency and still a mountain to climb.

But Labour's right wing still don't get it. Elected on a huge mandate Corbyn and the shadow team have been seeking to turn Labour on course for a new politics of: ditching austerity, investing in infrastructure for sustainable growth, defending public services and a humane welfare system. It is time for the Blairites to stop their disloyal sniping and rally round to give the new leadership space to lead, as Len McCluskey has forcefully argued. Yes, there are weaknesses in the strategy as **Gerry Hassan** shows with the Scottish election results. And yes, the Corbyn leadership needs to reach further out to the disaffected with intelligent and popular policies to undermine the narrow nationalist messages of Ukip and the Tory right.

Labour is broadly united on Europe. As we show with our EU referendum special, Labour has a strong case for in to protect jobs, social rights, the environment and the principle of international cooperation. We have a case for reform, for greater democracy and transparency, stopping the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the whole neo-liberal austerity agenda. **Jeremy Corbyn** and **Frances O'Grady** and others make powerful appeals to Labour and trade union doubters to rally round for Vote Remain.

The Tories, Rupert Murdoch and friends running most of the print media will always seek to rubbish Labour. But it is not necessary for Labour supporters to aid them. The anti-semitism row was cynically used to discredit the Corbyn leadership. As the **Jewish Socialist Group** say in their statement: being anti Israel and its brutal policies towards Palestinians is not anti-semitic; being critical of Zionism as a political ideology is not anti-semitic. In this issue **Jon Taylor** takes a closer look at the Israeli state and its peace blocking policies.

The real crime is the Tory government's denial of humanitarian refuge for thousands of desperate refugees fleeing war. Only with the threat of a back

bench rebellion and Lord Dubs' Labour-led Lords' campaign did Cameron agree to accept a small number of unaccompanied children. Cameron's talk of 'swarms' of migrants and his defence of the nasty Islamophobic campaign against Sadiq Khan in London shows the true Tory colours.

In practice it is Tory government policies that are creating huge divisions in our society between the rich and poor with cuts falling disproportionately on the disabled, women and ethnic minorities. It is these policies that are the breeding ground for the racist anti immigrant, anti-foreigner sentiments spouted by UKIP and the fascists. Welfare 'reforms' architect, Ian Duncan Smith, in his resignation speech castigated the government for "hurting those who are most vulnerable" and dividing society.

So it falls on Labour and the wider progressive movement to unite and turn the heat on a divided, shambolic government. Neo-liberalism is the problem – both in Westminster and Brussels. But there are structures and parliaments where we need to take the fight for change. At the heart of Neo-liberalism is the idea that democratically elected governments, be they local, national or supranational should not interfere in the working of the free market. It promotes the idea of the small state, possessive individualism and the subordination of public good to private profit.

Labour is not alone in rejecting this philosophy. Beleagured Syriza in Greece and the new Portuguese government reject this philosophy. So do significant elements in the Italian and French governments. Some Labour doubters on the EU cite TTIP – as a reason for Brexit. But TTIP is unravelling. TTIP would undermine democracy, increase the power of corporations, open doors to widespread privatisation especially health and enable multi-nationals to sue governments. Citizen and trade union campaigning against this deal is working. French President Hollande looks set to oppose it. MEPs are resisting. Leaked documents reveal irreconcilable differences between EU and US positions. So neo-liberalism can be turned back through co-operative action.

This also applies to tax dodging. Billions are lost to the British treasury and other governments through corporate tax evasion and avoidance. EU wide co-operation can close tax havens and implement the Transaction (Tobin) tax. Cameron has opposed these moves. **Prem Sikka** puts a powerful case for tax justice and Labour action.

It is time to stop attacking the Corbyn leadership, time to end talk of coups and leadership challenges, time for a united offensive against this government. A united party, working for a democratic social Europe can start laying the foundations for success.

Labour has a plan for sustainable growth, for investment, for secure paid work. The challenge is to build a broad social movement allied to Labour to defend public services and transform our economy based on our democratic values of social justice, co-operation, humanitarianism and equality.

Neo-liberalism can be turned back through co-operative action



# Greening the new economics

**Nigel Doggett** on why we need both New and Green economics

**T**he challenge to neo-liberal economics in academia is growing. The new Labour Party leadership likewise has opened up space for political alternatives, with John McDonnell's series of events to discuss 'The New Economics'. The videos are worth watching - search online for 'Labour Party New Economics'.

But to judge by the March event *A balanced and sustainable economy*, the challenge to orthodoxy does not explicitly include green economics. The emphasis by Ha-Joon Chang was on the domination by the UK finance and service sectors and the need to reverse the decline in manufacturing, though Mariana Mazzucato in her earlier lecture did include environmental sustainability as part of smart innovation-led growth.

Classical economics assumes people behave rationally on narrow economic grounds, so competition works. This belief is a recipe for free market fundamentalism, albeit still needing government to maintain rules for the market. This is the professed ideology of the Tory government (though Osborne acts otherwise when the politics demands it).

Any environmental effects such as pollution are classically defined as 'externalities' and treated as marginal. With the advent of the Anthropocene Era, human activity now impacts on a planetary scale, so this is clearly flawed.

Two approaches to this issue are termed 'environmental' and 'ecological' economics. So called environmental economics attempts to value environmental resources or 'natural capital' (sic), and its reverse, the cost of loss, by assessing the monetary price people would pay to protect them. It has been defined as 'classical economics plus externalities', i.e. a more sophisticated version of the same.

The carbon trading sanctioned by the 1997 Kyoto Protocol in the drive to reduce greenhouse gas ('carbon') emissions, allows nations to offset their emissions by buying credits elsewhere. Whilst it's reasonable to build solar power to replace coal generation, we cannot be sure that emissions will be permanently reduced by planting or preserving forests. This reaches a nadir when a government seeks

funding to leave ecosystems untouched: "pay me or the planet gets it". Approval of such schemes depends on reductions relative to the status quo but proof is fraught with difficulties such as comparing very different entities, long term results and rebound effects. Infamously, Ecuadorian President Correa reversed a protection scheme for part of the Yasuni rainforest in 2013 to allow drilling for oil, citing a lack of international funding.

Rich nations can buy carbon credits relatively cheaply because prices are market-based rather than reflecting net greenhouse gas emissions. Such purchases may be easier than the necessary transformation of high carbon economies. This will be a danger when implementing technology transfers between nations following the Paris climate change agreement in December 2015.

By contrast, ecological economics acknowledges the intrinsic as well as use value of biodiversity and stresses that economic development occurs within the wider ecosystem. It challenges narrow cost-benefit analysis that sanctions destruction in the name of development. It emphasises equity between generations as well as regions and stresses the uncertainties and the irreversibility of environmental change.

Pragmatists argue that we cannot guarantee absolute protection in the face of national priorities, even 'green' hydro-power, windfarms or tidal power schemes, but the pendulum must not swing too far.

How much does it matter? Just as the hold of neo-liberal economics skews the field against non-profit, community and government action, 'environmental' economics can legitimise destruction of environmental reserves for dubious short term gain but long term loss. Just as the marketisation and privatisation of public assets and spaces undermines the culture of community so the monetisation of biosystems weakens the culture of ecology.

We must support the right of all people to benefit from technological and health innovations, with the consequent need for energy and particularly electric power. But let's get both sides of the economics coin right - anti-austerity and pro-environment.

## Jewish Socialists' Group statement on 'Labour's problem with antisemitism'

**A**ntisemitism exists and must be exposed and fought against in the same way as other forms of racism by all who are concerned with combating racism and fascism.

Antisemitism and anti-Zionism are not the same. Zionism is a political ideology which has always been contested within Jewish life since it emerged in 1897, and it is entirely legitimate for non-Jews as well as Jews to express opinions about it, whether positive or negative. Not all Jews are Zionists. Not all Zionists are Jews.

Criticism of Israeli government policy and Israeli state actions against the Palestinians is not antisemitism. Those who conflate criticism of Israeli policy with antisemitism, whether they are supporters or opponents of Israeli policy, are actually helping the antisemites. We reject any attempt, from whichever quarter, to place legitimate criticism of Israeli policy out of bounds.

Accusations of antisemitism are currently being

weaponised to attack the Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour party with claims that Labour has a "problem" of antisemitism. This is despite Corbyn's longstanding record of actively opposing fascism and all forms of racism, and being a firm supporter of the rights of refugees and of human rights globally.

A very small number of such cases seem to be real instances of antisemitism. Others represent genuine criticism of Israeli policy and support for Palestinian rights, but expressed in clumsy and ambiguous language, which may unknowingly cross a line into antisemitism. Further cases are simply forthright expressions of support for Palestinian rights, which condemn Israeli government policy and aspects of Zionist ideology, and have nothing whatsoever to do with antisemitism.

We stand against antisemitism, against racism and fascism and in support of refugees. We stand for free speech and open debate on Israel, Palestine and Zionism

**David Toke** on soaring costs of a nuclear power plant

# The insanity of Hinkley C

**T**he insanity of the Hinkley C nuclear power project for the French nation in general and EDF in particular was by two events on the same day, April 20th, 2016.

First, the French Government found itself unable to solve the Gordian-like knot of problems facing EDF, despite a well-advertised meeting of French ministers and stakeholders. Second, a group of EDF managers wrote a letter warning the directors that they could face legal action to make them take responsibility for taking on the Hinkley C project if, as they fear, the project goes wrong. This follows an earlier letter from engineers doubting the wisdom of proceeding with Hinkley C.

Yet again a high level political meeting of French ministers billed as giving a green light for the project has prevaricated. It is a wondrous testament to the trust we wrongly place in the press releases issued by EDF and its allies that we believe every one of the now dozens of times that the green light has been given for the project. Of course, if it is so certain, why the need for these repeatedly stated 'final investment decision' meetings that never resolve the issue? Why aren't they just building the damn thing!

Now of course with any privately owned company the merest hint that there were serious internal doubts about a project would send the shareholders scattering and the project would not be implemented. Indeed the employee shareholders have opposed the project and EDF's share price has plummeted. But this matters not a jot to the directors who browbeat the French Government, who own 85 per cent of the shares, to go ahead with the self-destruction, mainly it seems, to have one last gasp attempt to rescue the pride of the EDF leadership. Any notion that this is a vaguely competitive project - even with offshore wind projects, is rendered nonsensical by all of this, with some made-up price that the British would have to pay being paraded as the 'cost'. Now it seems the cost includes the French Government injecting billions of euros in various types of support, even if all goes well. The chances are it will not, and the French state will be on the hook to pick up the pieces of EDF which will effectively collapse as a result. Indeed the company could well go under even without the added weight of Hinkley C.

The reason why they are not building the plant is because the projects being built in France and Finland using the same reactor design as planned for Hinkley C (the European Pressurised Reactor or EPR) are running several years behind schedule. They are ruining EDF with the resultant financial losses. France's nuclear power industry may have been regarded as a success in the past, but not only are its efforts to build new nuclear

power stations failing, its existing reactor fleet in France is facing high costs. Either the plants are decommissioned, which costs an awful lot of money, or expensive refurbishments are needed to keep them running. Yes, nuclear power plants can last a long time once they are built, and provided a lot more money is spent on them to keep them running when they become old!

Amber Rudd (Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change) says that EDF is taking the risk of the project according to the contracts. Well, legally, some risk maybe. Except that we are responsible for maybe £17 billion worth of loan guarantees. And we're protected from paying this out because of the legal paraphernalia? Think again about what happens in the nuclear business, which is really not a business at all despite the made-up fantasy costs (as high as they may be) that are bandied around in government press statements.

Ultimately whatever the contract terms actually say, the politics are that if EDF runs out of money half way through (they already have!) because of cost overruns and says 'we can't complete it', the British Government will step in, just as they did with Sizewell B post privatisation and declare it was now economically necessary to pour even more cash in....

Strange attitudes are developing. Increasingly many pro-nuclear supporters are hoping that the project is cancelled for fear that the coming disaster will ruin the prospects of nuclear power in Europe forever. On the other hand anti-nuclear advocates are hoping that the project is actually attempted on the grounds that will finally destroy EDF and its nuclear power mission.

The reality about what has happened to nuclear power has not yet dawned on people. Increasing regulatory demands have been loaded on to the designs of the power plant to meet safety criteria, nuclear plants have become increasingly expensive to build and very difficult to deliver. The sooner we realise this and that the world has moved on to renewable energy and low energy alternatives to achieve economic development, the quicker the UK will enjoy faster growth too.

**The reality about what has happened to nuclear power has not yet dawned on people**

Edited from statement of 28 April 2016





# Panama papers expose tax dodging of rich elites

Tackling tax abuses will fall to Labour says **Prem Sikka**

**T**he leaked files of Panama law firm Mossack Fonseca have further confirmed the existence of a parallel universe where lawyers and accountants enable wealthy elites and corporations to avoid and evade taxes. Anonymous shell companies, trusts, secrecy and complex transactions are the tools of trade for funnelling wealth upwards to the global 0.01%.

The lost tax revenues are a major cause of government debts. The neoliberal solution is not to crush tax avoidance, but to impose austerity on normal people, erode hard won social rights, destroy trade unions and create insecurity. Tax avoidance threatens the very core of democracy. Through the ballot-box, citizens may mandate a government to distribute wealth and improve social welfare, but public choices are vetoed by elites through tax avoidance/evasion strategies.

## Little appetite

The Tories have shown little appetite for challenging the destructive tax games played by wealthy elites and major corporations. For example, in April 2013 the government trumpeted its rules on “Promoting Tax Compliance and Procurement” so that tax avoiders/evaders would be banned from securing central government contracts. So far, no one has been barred.

The task of introducing effective reforms will fall on Labour. It needs to mobilise openness, public accountability and international co-operation to curb the excesses of elites. The following reforms could be considered.

1. The tax returns of large corporations and wealthy elites should be placed on the public record. The public availability of information can enable citizens to ask searching questions, expose cheats and alert tax authorities and media to unusual practices.

2. Organisations engaged in design, marketing and implementation of abusive tax avoidance

schemes should be barred from securing public contracts. Those found guilty of tax evasion should be closed and their directors and shareholders made personally liable for the tax debts. Of course, they can avoid personal liability by ensuring that companies do not indulge in unlawful practices.

3. HMRC is not fit for purpose. It needs to be redesigned and properly resourced. Since 2005, its staff has been reduced by nearly 35,000 and its funding has been cut in real terms. It is too sympathetic to big business and brings too few prosecutions. Since 2010, only 11 prosecutions have been mounted in relation to off-shore tax evasion.

4. The secrecy provided by tax havens is at the heart of the murky tax dodging business. They should face trade sanctions for facilitating tax evasion and

**Tax avoidance threatens the very core of democracy.....public choices are vetoed by elites through tax avoidance/evasion strategies**

avoidance. After all, their business is to prevent citizens in other states from enjoying their hard won social rights. Those undertaking reforms should receive grants from the UK, EU and elsewhere so that they can develop an alternative economy. The UK should force its Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories to adopt the standards of openness and accountability applicable on the mainland. It should refuse to negotiate trade deals or represent these microstates in international forums, such as the EU and UN unless they reform.

## Opaque destinations

5. The UK and the EU should develop a list of opaque destinations of capital. Banks should be required to report all movement of capital to these places. Monies going to these jurisdictions should



**British conservative Prime Minister David Cameron: clear as ever about what he can do to shut down UK tax havens**

be subjected to a withholding tax of 25%, which would be returned once the owners provide evidence that they have paid all the taxes due.

6. The UK should support the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB) proposed by the European Union. This can end much of profit shifting by companies. Under the current corporate tax system, a company with 100 different subsidiaries is assumed to have 100 independent taxpaying entities. This invites companies to shift profits through intragroup transactions, such as royalty payments, management fees and interest of loans. No cash ever leaves the group as a whole but the profit/loss of each subsidiary is affected. The reality is that subsidiaries are not independent. They do not compete against each other.

**Prem Sikka is professor of Accounting at Essex University and a member of Tax Justice Network**

## Integrated

Companies like Google and Starbucks are integrated and under common control. CCCTB calculates the worldwide profit of an integrated entity. It ignores intragroup transactions. The global profit is allocated to each country by an apportionment formula that takes account of how value-added is generated. This could be on the basis of sales, assets, number of employees and other key variables. The resulting profit can be taxed by the government at its preferred rate.

# London: still a Labour city

**Duncan Bowie** on a resounding win but says Mayor Khan faces huge challenges

**S**adiq Khan has been elected Mayor of London. After second preferences were counted, he won a majority of 57% to 43% - a greater margin than expected, especially when the Tory candidate Zac Goldsmith was regarded initially as a shoe-in. Many in the Labour Party thought that Khan could not win and that Baroness Tessa Jowell was the only potential Labour contender to defeat Goldsmith. The election demonstrated that London is still a Labour city - confirmed by the London Assembly results, where Labour has a majority of the super constituency seats, and took another seat from the Tories with Leonie Cooper's victory in Wandsworth and Merton. With the Conservatives in government and divided over Europe, this was an election that Labour should have won. A defeat for Labour's candidate would have been a failure which it would have been difficult to recover.

## Housing

The campaign of both major parties rightly focused on housing. But when the campaign started, it was interesting how little most of the Mayoral candidates (including all six short-listed Labour nominees) knew about housing policies and the role of the Mayor. Even those who had served in Government had demonstrated little interest in this dominant issue facing London's electorate. Most candidates made competing promises to build new homes without being very clear (LibDem Caroline Pidgeon excepted) as to how to fund them. Candidates were also less clear about how many new homes would be affordable to lower and middle income households, and where they would be built.

All six major candidates opposed any development in the Green Belt. London's housing needs could be met entirely through brownfield development, including densification of existing council estates, rather ignoring the fact that many lower income households already live there. Mayor Khan may have closed off options which need to be consid-

ered to increase affordable housing supply. His policy for 'first dibs' for Londoners, also adopted by Goldsmith, is both inadequate and misguided.

On transport, Khan made a mistake in announcing a four year freeze on tube and bus fares, before the Government announced that Transport for London (TfL) would need to be self-financing by 2020. TfL officials immediately responded that such a commitment would leave a massive hole in the London transport budget and would obstruct the continuation of the transport investment infrastructure programme. I raised this issue at the London Labour Party manifesto conference - which had little impact on Khan's belated manifesto. This begs the question of whether the candidate once selected should write their own manifesto independently of LP policy at a national or regional level.

Khan's comment that TfL was inefficient and could make necessary savings, dropping vanity projects such as the Garden Bridge or the Docklands cable car was unconvincing. Much better ideas

**Sadiq Khan is in for a nasty shock. The new Emperor has few clothes**

for fares policy came from LibDem Caroline Pidgeon, and the Green Sian Berry. Let us target reduced fares for low income households commuting in from outer London, and reduced fares for commuters outside rush hours. We need a much more targeted approach than a simple fares freeze.

The last couple of weeks of the campaign were overshadowed by a national row over whether the Corbynite party was anti-semitic. The Tories in desperation tried to associate Khan with Muslim fundamentalists and terrorists - both allegations lacking any justification, as Tory elements now concede. Introducing religion into politics is always dangerous. In the circumstances, Khan came over as moderate and reasonable. I got a bit tired of hearing and reading about the 'son of a bus driver who grew up on a council estate in Tooting', but the mantra worked and demonstrated that



**Mayor Sadiq Khan: the day-job will be challenging**

Khan was normal. Whereas his opponent, the smooth, handsome son of a multi-millionaire resorted to racist smears.

Now Sadiq Khan as Mayor will discover his powers are quite limited, even if they have been increased since the Livingstone era. He depends on central Government for most of London's resources, and the prospects of the Conservative Government giving a Labour Mayor tax-raising powers, as advocated by Boris Johnson's London Finance Commission, are limited. With TfL needing to sell off its land to fund transport investment, delivering 50% affordable homes on this land as promised by Khan is not deliverable. Moreover, with the prime housing market in difficulty, house building in London is likely to slow down.

It is perhaps best that some of the planned 420 tower blocks will not be built. But it is difficult to see how those sites could be used to build more appropriate affordable housing. That would require changes in the Mayor's planning and land acquisition powers and significant public capital investment.

## Kills off social housing

While many have been focusing on the Mayoral election: few have noticed that the Government has taken through parliament a new Housing and Planning Bill that in effect kills off social housing and radically weakens borough and Mayoral planning powers. This is more significant in its impact on Londoners than whether London has a Conservative or Labour Mayor. Sadiq Khan is in for a nasty shock. The new Emperor has few clothes.

# Welsh Labour steady

Labour holds but needs to recover radical edge in Wales says **Peter Rowlands**

Although Welsh Assembly elections are likely to be judged less significant than either the London Mayor or council elections, Wales has since 2010 had the most senior elected Labour representatives in the whole of the UK, and for control of the Welsh government to have been ended, having been held since its inception in 1999, would have been a considerable blow.

In practice there was never much likelihood of that happening, partly because the rise of UKIP meant that it was unlikely that a 'rainbow coalition' of Plaid Cymru, the Conservatives and the Lib-Dems, which might have been a possibility, would achieve a majority, and it didn't. This assumed that Plaid would not have been prepared to enter a coalition with UKIP, although their tone prior to the election cast doubt on whether they would have been willing to form a coalition with anybody, with unrealistic calls for a Plaid Cymru government which all polls indicated could not possibly be achieved, and wasn't. In practice Plaid achieved a stunning victory in Rhondda for its leader, Leanne Wood, due in part to extra publicity for her as leader, particularly via the debates last year and this. There were some other good results in the valleys and Cardiff, but results were patchy else-

where, failing to re-take Aberconwy from the Tories or Llanelli from Labour, and ending up only marginally increasing their vote, from 19% to 20.5%, and seats from 11 to 12.

The Lib-Dems were virtually wiped out, losing all their four regional seats and only retaining that of their leader, Kirsty Williams, again in part for the same reasons that Leanne Wood won. The Greens also failed to win any seats.

The Tories failed to take any of the four seats from Labour that they currently hold at Westminster, losing vote share from 25% to 21% and seats from 14 to 11.

Labour in one sense did well, in that it successfully defended all the six seats in which it was thought vulnerable, only losing to Plaid Cymru in Rhondda. Meaning that it can almost certainly rule without a coalition, with 29 out of 60 seats. But in many of its safer seats it saw significant shifts to Plaid Cymru and UKIP, and it is this that accounts for its heavy loss of vote share, down from 42% to 35%.

It is the advent of UKIP that is the most sweeping change, winning 12.5% of the total vote, most strongly in a number of former Labour valleys seats, giving it seven AMs from the regions, including disgraced former MP Neil Hamilton.

## How Labour won the Bristol mayoralty by our own correspondent

Marvin Rees' historic victory, as a mixed heritage Labour candidate in a city whose wealth came from the slave trade, came as no surprise to those who took into consideration his defeat in November 2012. Here we were in 2016, with all out local elections, after a tremendous effort in the General Election in identifying Labour promises, turn out was bound to go up on the low of 2012. Bristol has four women MPs, three Labour and is definitely a city where there is a Labour majority.

But something happened in between the General Election and Marvin's start of campaign. At the same time as he was selected, Jeremy Corbyn was

elected Labour Leader. This changed the dynamics of a city where the Green Party had won over much of the anti Conservative vote, not just from the Liberal Democrats but also the middle class vote which was going Labour for the parliamentary campaign.

So by paying attention to registration, to postal votes, to all those second preferences from particularly but not only the Green and LibDem parties, but Conservatives even UKIP, Labour had the advantage. By performing successfully at the hustings where ex LibDem independent Mayor Ferguson was the incumbent who had to deal with issues from the audience, Marvin went



To score heavily in these seats, where there are few Poles or Romanians because there are few jobs, and those that there are are in part funded by generous EU grants, may defy logic, but the UKIP vote was largely at Labour's expense, as there are few working class Tories in these areas. It represents deep disaffection among mainly older people who have loyally voted Labour for most of their lives.

Labour has much to its credit in policy terms in Wales, particularly its defence of a decent NHS against the lies and distortions of the Tories, but although Carwyn Jones has been a competent leader in very difficult circumstances, Labour in Wales has lost its radical edge, and needs to recover it. If it does not and allows Plaid Cymru to position itself to its left, as the SNP did in Scotland, then Leanne Wood's exhortations may prove to be less unrealistic.

### Proportional Representation in Wales

*The Welsh electoral system is based on additional member top up, with 40 seats elected on a first past the post constituency basis and 20 in five regions, four in each, to achieve proportionality.*

into these May elections with a full complement of 70 council candidates all with a vested interest in getting their own vote out. Others were committed to having a Labour mayor and to Marvin himself.

With a sunny day that brought people onto the streets and a commitment from Jeremy Corbyn that brought him down to Bristol to support Marvin, it should be no surprise that he won. He had a dedicated team, a commitment to equality, a rainbow cabinet with gender parity and job sharing and a changed political culture. Here was a Bristolian whose story was told repeatedly and chimed with the voters at many levels.

# Age of 'Labour Scotland' is over

Gerry Hassan on the end of British politics and what it means for Scotland

There is no such thing as British politics. This was evident in the fragmented picture of 2015, and confirmed by the 2016 contests.

This has consequences when England represents 84% of the population and a similar number of Westminster seats. It gives the Tories a built-in advantage – aided by Labour's now confirmed serial Scottish disadvantage – which emerged last year and has been underlined by the May elections.

The age of 'Labour Scotland' is over: a story of a once impregnable social democratic land shaped by Labour and collectivist ethos. It is a picture replayed across large swathes of Europe.

Of course Scottish Labour (the party) was not as popular as 'the idea' of 'Labour Scotland' – never once winning a majority of the vote – peaking in the 1960s and 1997.

Some of the same caveats can be said of SNP Scotland. They too have a vision of Scotland and the future (like Labour at their peak) that they have convinced themselves and many voters of – which appears compelling and optimistic – while being competent in office.

Yet the Nationalists even at 'peak SNP' in 2015 never won a majority of votes: 49.97% in 2015, now 46.5% in the constituency vote, 41.7% in the regional vote, with 63 seats out of 129, two seats short of a majority.

Non-SNP Scotland is a majority. And just as with non-Labour Scotland – who it was essential for Labour to understand and reach out to – so the same is true for the SNP. They have to recognise the limits of their appeal, politics and version of Scotland. That's good politics, and not doing so is bad politics.

The Scottish Tories now have a new found place and purpose in politics, based on their increased appeal and the popularity of Ruth Davidson. They finished second in votes (22.9%) and in seats and will form the main opposition to the SNP: the best Tory result at any level in Scotland since 1992. All of this struck a very different tone and content – not just from

the dog-whistle politics of Zac Goldsmith's disreputable campaign against Sadiq Khan for the London Mayor, but also from Cameron and Osborne.

Scottish Labour found a new basement level of support – winning a mere 22.6% of the constituency vote and 19.1% of the regional list vote – putting the party in third place behind the Tories on the list vote and seats. The party under Kezia Dugdale tried to place itself in a more assertive left-wing space compared to the SNP – without going anywhere near a Corbynista position.

They found themselves caught between the dynamic of the 55% pro-union majority – which the Tories had no qualms standing up for – and the 45% pro-independence camp – which is made up of the SNP, Greens and a significant section of Labour's former vote.

They ended up not being sure which way they faced, and found themselves punished. Anas Sarwar, newly elected as a Glasgow MSP, said that Labour 'are not comfortable as national-

## Labour 'are not comfortable as nationalists, and they are not comfortable unionists.'

ists, and they are not comfortable unionists.' It leaves Labour in an uncomfortable, ill-defined middle ground.

It was a Scottish election of much subtlety, tactical voting and regional differences. The SNP are rising in the West of Scotland and Glasgow, and declining in former rural areas. The Tories have emerged from thirty years of being seen as a pariah party and as toxic, rising in Edinburgh, Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders, and middle class, prosperous areas. Labour only held out in a few isolated constituencies, and not one part of the country can be described as a Labour heartland – a seismic change from twenty years ago.

All of this leaves big questions about the future. Has Scottish Labour served its purpose? The answer, at least for a generation, if not longer, looks as if it has.



Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale: struggling to find a place and be heard north of the border

That begs the question of how Labour and non-Tory Britain can assert itself to challenge what could be an uninterrupted period of Tory rule.

Are the Scottish Tories able to make the case for a Conservatism different from South of the border? If the main fault line becomes SNP vs. Tory does that offer more prospects for a politics of ideas, based on centre-left v. centre-right, or will everything be seen through the prism of the union?

How long can the SNP's 'Big Tent' continue? All such political projects eventually begin to decline, part based on your own choices, as well as mistakes. Will the SNP, shorn of their parliamentary majority, but seemingly dominant for the foreseeable future, be able to speak for centre-left Scotland, and not disappoint their supporters? How will a politics of redistribution, working class politics and challenging inequality find voice – and will the SNP be pushed further left by the Greens and even the Lib Dems?

Politics are set to change dramatically. The SNP need a different tone and style. The era of just being anti-Tory is no longer enough: going on about Thatcher, Blair and 'Red Tories'. The usual shibboleths of 'opposing Tory austerity' and #indyref 2 (whether you are for it or against it), will no longer do. Scottish politics is going to become about difficult choices – one in which the Nationalists are no longer quite so ascendant, Tories have new confidence and Labour struggle to find a place and be heard.



# Tories retreat on Academies plan

**Dave Lister** hails a great victory but says the fight against academisation continues

The Tories have been forced into a massive retreat / U-turn on their plans for the forced academisation of schools. This had been a major plank of their education strategy and of George Osborne's last budget. The reason for this setback for them is the huge amount of campaigning carried out by Labour Party members, teachers and parents. This issue has also caused yet another split in Tory ranks with a significant number of Conservatives involved in local government voicing their concern at the attempt to wrest away their community schools.

What was being proposed was really draconian. Only about 18% of primary schools have opted or been forced to become academies. This means that the remaining 82% plus the remaining Local Authority (LA) secondary schools were going to be forced to become academies against their will.

## Power remains

However it is important to realise that this policy change is only in relation to schools rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted. The power remains to force all schools deemed to require improvement or to be failing to become academies through a Government Academy Order. Each successive Ofsted framework has been more demanding and schools that are generally successful can be failed for instance if small groups of pupils are deemed not to be making sufficient progress or if they are judged not to be inculcating British values sufficiently or to be failing to take measures to deal with radicalisation, whatever this means. For example my local primary school was forcibly academised in 2014 despite its SATs results being above local and national levels. It was then taken over by CfBT which removed its governing body and replaced it with an unelected trust structure with no local / parental representation. Incidentally it is unclear at the time of writing what the final Government proposals will entail but we need to resist any attempt

to remove parent governors more generally.

The rationale for the Tories' academisation drive, which will continue, is "to place education in the hands of heads and teachers rather than bureaucrats". This ignores a number of points:

(i) Under local management of schools heads and governors have a large degree of autonomy already

(ii) Where schools are in academy chains they will be subject to a different 'bureaucracy' not no bureaucracy

(iii) Many schools have appreciated support from their LA, which is one reason why so many primary schools have no interest in becoming academies

We should also recognise the utter hypocrisy of the Tories in claiming to be giving more freedom to schools when in reality they are taking it away from them.

As Professor Michael Bassey wrote to *The Guardian* (17 March 2016) "LAs do not tell schools what to do but provide a range of services as well as a local inspectorate...Chains of academies will often be remote from local communities and unapproachable by parents".

Instead of being maintained by LAs the academised schools will become national schools. In terms of support a black hole has been created. Instead of this coming from LA advisers (where they still exist) there are six regional commissioners covering the whole country. It is impossible for them and the DfE to provide the level of support required. Even though a hugely disproportionate amount of DfE funding is going to the academy and free school programmes there will not be the capacity to support schools, hence talk about the need for a new middle tier.

All over the country teachers heaved a huge sigh of relief when Michael Gove ceased to be Secretary of State for Education. However what we have instead is Daughter of Gove, Nicky Morgan. Rather than a softening of the onslaught on schools there has been a continuation and even a hardening of policies. SATs are being deliberately made more dif-



**UK conservative Education Secretary Nicky Morgan: This lady was for turning and in the right place too!**

ficult and the pressure on teachers and heads to achieve is becoming unbearable for many. It is back to the 1950s but in some ways worse.

## Evidence for academisation

What is the evidence for academisation? The answer is that there is none. Quite the reverse. We have heard Nicky Morgan blithely state that there is strong evidence that academies perform better. Her lackies in the DfE make similar misleading statements. However the truth is that they are not comparing like with like. Important research has been published by the Local Schools Network which shows that sponsor academies, schools in MATS, have performed considerably worse than LA maintained schools. Henry Stewart's research reveals that sponsored academies underperform as compared to non-academies. For instance 'inadequate' primary schools are twelve times as likely to remain judged by Ofsted as inadequate if they become sponsored academies. Secondary schools are four times as likely. Also, of the top 20 multi-academy trusts, 17 achieved below average value added progress.

So we'll still need local campaigns to oppose attempts to force schools to become academies against the will of their staff, governors and parents and over the longer term we need to work for the election of a Labour Government in 2020 that will halt this process.

# Isreal: a society living in fear

While illegal settlements continue **Jon Taylor** sees little advance for a two-state solution, and Israel possibly facing a military aid embargo

Wherever you go in Israel – or in Palestine for that matter – conversation will inevitably return to the settlements. These have expanded to cover vast swathes of territory that previously were owned and occupied often over many generations by Palestinians. Under UN resolutions, these 'settlements' are illegal but the world refuses to take action.

It all started with the Six-Day War in 1967, when the Israeli Army, sensing victory, went far beyond the terms laid down by the Israeli Government for the conduct of the war. The army occupied Old Jerusalem and what we call 'the West Bank' or what the settlers call 'Judea and Samaria', the land they claim was given to them in the Bible - the sole and wholly illegal basis for the claim.

In 1948 the new Israeli Government adopted the British Administration concept of 'government land', under which land was registered in the name of the village and not in the names of the individual residents. This enables the settlers (often abetted by the army) to seize villages, towns, whatever they fancy and evict the Palestinian citizens living there. It all constitutes the long-term vision of creating 'Greater Israel' – Judea and Samaria. Since 1967, more than 500,000 Israelis have been transferred to Palestinian land in the West Bank and East (Old) Jerusalem.

## Two-State Solution?

In essence, this part answers the next question: what is happening about the Two-State Solution? A strong indicator would appear to come from Joe Biden, US Vice-President, who said in a speech recently: "...there is no political will at this moment among Israelis or Palestinians to move forward with serious negotiations". Equally, Barack Obama has himself been steadfastly silent on the issue.

Amongst Palestinians the con-

flict between Hamas and Fatah has blocked any positive proposals that could become part of the discussions. So far as other Arab states are concerned, they are far more worried about the collapse of democracy in Syria and the stand off between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It would appear that Netanyahu is off the hook.

But this is not the whole story. Behind the scenes 'hectic deliberations' have been going on. Following a private meeting of senior diplomats in Jerusalem on 28 March, Obama, in an effort to leave his successor (Hillary Clinton?) a powerful package, is now considering a substantial resolution to place before the UN. If successful, the package will be powerful because it will have the backing of the Security Council.

Other things are stirring in the

**All this and much more indicates a very frightened people. And fear does not form the basis for a secure and happy society**

USA. The Leahy Law – named after the Senator who put it forward - prohibits the U.S. from providing military aid to countries that are committing grave human rights abuses. Senator Leahy and 11 Congressional representatives have written to the State Department, urging them to investigate "gross violations of human rights" by Israel and Egypt, specifically extrajudicial killings. If proven, it could trigger the Leahy Law, potentially cutting off the flow of military aid on which both states depend.

Within Israel, uglier incidents increase by the week. In January some Israeli passengers refused to allow their plane to take off because there were two Israeli Arabs on board. The plane left without them. The Ministry of Education tried to ban a novel by a widely respected Israeli writer. The novel is set in America and is about the relationship between a Jewish girl and an Arab boy. Outrageous! How could you allow a good Jewish boy to go out with a pesky Arab? Opposition pointed out that the Bible is full of good

Jewish boys – Moses, David, Solomon – getting together with non-Jewish girls. In the end, the Ministry withdrew the proposal.

The recent potentially extrajudicial killing of a Palestinian by an Israeli soldier has led to the soldier being hailed as a hero by Netanyahu, the settlers and the right-wing press. This killing is now part of the State Department investigation. It has led to the first mutiny in Israeli history; the final degradation of the one institution beloved of all Jewish Israelis: the Army.

In the midst of all this fear and despair, who is doing anything to dismantle the structures of violence, injustice, and oppression and replace them with structures of true equality; structures where every human life is accorded equal value and every child's rights and needs and fears are given equal weight? It is only under those circumstances that we can begin to talk about a just and durable peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

## Never been so grim

The reality has never been so grim. And yet, in the midst of this darkness, Israelis and Palestinians are working tirelessly for an end to bloodshed, and to all forms of violence. Looking through the list, I counted well over 20 organisations devoted to peace and reconciliation. Many of them participate actively in demonstrations in support of Palestinian villagers who find the settlers encroaching on their land and destroying their orchards. Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc) is one of the most active, with experience going back to the earliest days of the State of Israel. They produce an excellent website – available on [www.gush-shalom.org](http://www.gush-shalom.org) - with weekly (often humorous) articles by their leading writers.

Sadly, these excellent organisations are not able to alter the direction of Israeli society today. All this and much more indicates a very frightened people. And fear does not form the basis for a secure and happy society.

# Hasta la vista – baby!

The much vaunted centre-left alternative model of economic and political development in Latin America is under attack from a resurgent neo-liberal right, writes **Frank Lee**

The centre-left movements in Latin America which emerged in the early noughties had seemingly carried all before them, sweeping out the US proxy regimes (often brutal CIA-sponsored dictatorships) setting themselves on a path of independent development and freeing themselves from the yoke of Yankee Imperialism – a feature of this region for the last 100 years. However, recent events seem to have led to at least a partial return to the *status quo ante*, as government after government in the region has been under attack from a resurgent right. What is different this time is that these transformations of the political situation were not brought about by the usual CIA playbook; no US sponsored coups. No, this time around these governments were simply voted out of office (as was the case in Argentina, or to a lesser extent in Venezuela and Bolivia) or were subject to large scale internal opposition and political crisis, as was the case in Brazil, and which at the time of writing is still ongoing.

## What went wrong?

So what went wrong? Well firstly the global economic slow-down led to the collapse in commodity prices. At one time favoured by investors these countries including Brazil and Argentina had put all their export eggs into one basket of extractive industries and resources. The continent is now counting the cost (quite literally) of not diversifying its economies away from basic commodity production. The price of everything from iron ore to soya beans, and of course in Venezuela's case - oil, has dropped alarmingly while regional output is expected to shrink for the second straight year. Venezuela is particularly at risk since 95% of its foreign currency earnings come from oil – a commodity whose price has fallen from more than \$100 to around \$40 barrel. Discontent over spi-

ralling prices and widespread shortages, from milk to cancer medicines, helped Venezuela's opposition wrest control of congress in December from President Maduro's United Socialist Party for the first time in more than a decade.

The largest and perhaps most economically and politically important country in the region, Brazil, finds itself in the middle of a conjoint political and economic crisis. In economic terms the situation could only be described as bleak. GDP was down 3.8% last year and will probably be about the same this year. The Industrial sector was down 6.2% last year, and the mining sector down 6.6% in the last quarter. Brazil is on course for its worst

**We can see where this is going: austerity, repression, more austerity, more repression – the familiar neoliberal package and the usual attendant consequences.**

recession since 1901. There was no 'Plan B' by President Dilma Rousseff's administration for the Chinese slowdown in buying Brazil's mineral/agricultural wealth and the overall global slump in commodity prices.

Added to this is the ongoing political crisis. Ex-President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who ruled from 2003-2011, is under investigation for corruption and money laundering offences, involving Petrobras the Brazilian state oil company. Lula has not been charged with any offence and Brazil's former President got a temporary stay from criminal prosecution keeping the scandal-clad Workers' Party figurehead free from the top criminal prosecutor in the ongoing Petrobras criminal investigation. His case continues. President Rousseff has also been under investigation for allegedly being involved in the scandal, and the right-wing press and media conglomerate, *O*

*Globo*, has been howling for her impeachment, as have the huge crowd of demonstrators on the Avenue Paulista in Sao Paulo. This pressure seems to have worked as the Parliament (lower house) in Brazil has voted to start impeachment proceedings over charges of her manipulating government accounts. The 'yes' camp comfortably won the required two-thirds majority in the vote. The motion will now go to the upper house, the Senate, which is expected to suspend Ms Rousseff next month while it carries out a formal trial.

She denies tampering with the accounts to help secure re-election in 2014.

## 'Coup against democracy'

Her supporters describe the vote as a "coup against democracy" and the ruling Workers' Party has promised to continue its fight to defend her "in the streets and in the Senate".

Undoubtedly there have been corrupt and dubious practices ongoing in the ruling Workers' Party (PT) and one cannot wish it away. But this is Brazil and as the saying goes, 'The system is not corrupt, corruption is the system.' If anything the rightist opposition is even more corrupt than the centre-left. The situation is very volatile and it would be naïve to exclude the possibility of an outright coup if the right doesn't gets its pound of flesh. Not such an unusual turn of events in Latin America.

In Argentina the left has lost power to the new centre-right (read neo-liberal) Mauricio Macri, founder of the political party *Compromiso para el Cambio*. According to *Forbes* an American business magazine, 'Mr Macri's victory marked the end of the 12 year Kirchner era, characterised by wild inflation, huge public debts and unsustainable subsidies.' Just what you would expect *Forbes*, to say. Here's some more: 'Both monetary and fiscal policy have to be tightened substantially, in order to tackle the double-

digit inflation rate ... the currency is overvalued and needs a 30-40% reduction against the US\$, an adjustment which will hurt but is essential if Argentina is to attract investment and restore trade competitiveness ... This realignment will cause short-term pain ... but in the end the benefits coming from higher capital inflows and long term investment will be worth it.' Now where have we heard this patter before? Oh, yes, IMF structural adjustment policies aka austerity, tried and failed everywhere from Indonesia to Greece, for the 99% that is.

## Debt crisis

Argentina has been one of the few countries that has under the tutelage of husband and wife rule of Nestor Kirchner and Cristina Fernandez, refused to bleed its population in order to pay off the odious debts – a debt crisis which resulted from the mismanagement and resulting economic collapse in the period 1998-2002. Upon assuming office President Kirchner suspended debt repayment that would have impoverished the country. He negotiated a restructuring package whereby 93% of bond holders agreed to a significant reduction in the face value of their bonds (this is called a 'haircut' in the trade). However, there were two hold-outs (US hedge-funds) that waged a 15-year battle to extract the full value of the bonds they held, even though they had bought them in the secondary bond market for a

few cents on the dollar. This in the trade is called 'vulture fund/capitalism. It includes buying distressed assets in secondary markets then suing the original debtors for full recompense, in court if necessary.

Mr Macri is going to put the policy in reverse and pay off the holdouts. Even before he took office he had reassured the two US hedge funds in question, who owned the remaining Argentinian bonds, that they would receive 75% value of the bonds in question. The Macri government has now committed itself to paying \$6.4 billion to the holdouts. How will it pay for this? By borrowing. Argentina had been blocked from borrowing in the international credit markets, and as part of the overall deal will be allowed to borrow in those markets again, promptly putting Argentina back into the debt situation it was before the Kirchner's came on the scene. Macri has also abolished an anti-monopoly law which restricted a number of TV, cable and radio licences a company can hold at one time so that now a handful of corporations can control the mass media, corporations who are in bed with the political establishment.

## Mass layoffs

Demonstrations against these developments are already taking place, as have public sector strikes against mass layoffs. In order to contain this situation a new 'security protocol' enables

indiscriminate arrests and restricts press ability to cover such events. The ongoing criminalization of legitimate protest violates several judicial decisions that state that the right to demonstrate supersedes any occasional traffic problems that may be caused.

We can see where this is going: austerity, repression, more austerity, more repression – the familiar neoliberal package and the usual attendant consequences.

It should be noted that in addition to Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina, the Evo Morales administration lost the constitutional amendment allowing the President's third term re-election in Bolivia (2016)

## Set back for the left

Is it then 'Hasta La Vista, Baby' to the Latin American experiment? All things considered these events have without doubt been a major setback for the left and the struggle against the neoliberal globalization project. It is difficult to see where we go from here. The historical window for social democracy is now closed. Capitalism with a human face was only possible given a power equilibrium between the contending classes. This equilibrium no longer prevails. Notwithstanding, class struggle will go on, like a plant growing towards light, it is in the nature of things. What form it will take is a matter of speculation.

**Add for printer**



# Northern Powerhouse – more than a gimmick

Neville Hill on Osborne exploiting decades of neglect

The general reaction from most people on the left to George Osborne's 'Northern Powerhouse' project has been one of derision. "Just another Tory gimmick to mask the disproportionate impact of cuts on Northern local authorities" is the typical response. That's an understandable reaction. But there is much more to it than that. Osborne is an extremely shrewd politician and though he may not have read Gramsci, his skilful incorporation of many local Labour politicians and his capturing of the 'Northern agenda' shows a clever combination of the savvy Italian Marxist and his fellow countryman, Machiavelli.

The Tories are pursuing a strategy that is designed to keep them in power well past 2020 and despite David Cameron's recent difficulties, they are showing every sign of succeeding. Parliamentary boundaries will be changed in time for the 2020 general election, guaranteeing the Tories a significant number of extra seats. Cutting funding to opposition parties and attacking the trade union link to Labour will further strengthen their position. Of course, the Tories' big problem is Europe and a vote to leave the EU will probably trigger a leadership election and a period of even more vicious infighting than has already been seen. But even then luck could be on their side, if Scotland goes for another referendum and votes to leave the UK, whilst hoping to negotiate continuing membership of the EU. Whilst many Tories have a romantic attachment to 'the Union' it looks like many of the party strategists have written off Scotland as a hopeless case and would be resigned to that country going its own way.

If things did work out like that, combined with everything else outlined above, a Tory-dominated England, with a reluctant Wales tied in - which may be tempted to 'do a Scotland' - looks like a scenario for a very long time indeed.

So where does the 'Northern

Powerhouse' fit in to this? In the same way that Labour needs to do better in the South of England, the Tories need to strengthen their position in the North. They did surprisingly well in many Northern constituencies in 2015, though their results were uneven. They need to show that they are pursuing a Northern regeneration agenda which recognises and addresses the huge imbalance that now exists between London and the North. Don't forget that Osborne is a 'Northern' MP even though Tatton is hardly a typical Northern seat. He has been extremely canny in courting the key decision makers in nearby

**Osborne is an extremely shrewd politician ..... his capturing of the 'Northern agenda' shows a clever combination of the savvy Italian Marxist and his fellow countryman, Machiavelli**

Manchester – a city without a single Tory councillor. Manchester is at the heart of the 'Northern Powerhouse'. It is not just any other Northern city: it has benefited from highly effective leadership from both its chief executive, Howard Bernstein, and its leader Sir Richard Leese (and before him, Graham Stringer). Manchester is infinitely more powerful and effective than its traditional rival across the Pennines, Leeds – let alone Liverpool, Sheffield or Newcastle. Part of Manchester's success has been to weld the nine neighbouring local authorities of 'Greater Manchester' (the term says it all) into a more or less obedient group. Most of the councils are Labour controlled and while they might moan about 'the City of Manchester' when it comes down to it they do what Sir Richard (and Howard behind him) tells them to do.

While London-based commentators wax lyrical about the 'Manchester model' of devolution

the reality is that it is a highly undemocratic arrangement foisted on the people of 'Greater Manchester' in the shape of the combined authority with precious little debate. The appointment of an interim Greater Manchester mayor, without any electoral mandate, was a further stunning example of the Osborne – Leese axis at work.

On the few occasions when people have been asked for an opinion, the reaction has been to say they'd like something that has a degree of democratic legitimacy. As things stand, the only chance the people of Greater Manchester will get is the opportunity to elect a mayor in 2017, by which time Labour will be hoping that things are suitably sewn up to get their man in (and it almost certainly will be a man). So while Labour holds on to power across Greater Manchester (and in West and South Yorkshire which have also got combined authorities) the Tories will dominate at constituency level. I suspect that the Labour grandees of Northern politics will have given up on the prospect of Labour forming a government in 2020 so will take a pragmatic approach which protects their local power bases, with Osborne's tacit support.

So the North will get – and already is getting – long delayed investment in infrastructure, particularly rail. The 'Northern Powerhouse' is to a very large extent a rail project based on electrification and high speed rail – not just the north-south HS2 but also east – west ('HS3' - after various re-namings which included 'Northern Powerhouse Rail'). What a pity we had to wait for Andrew Adonis – now chair of the Government-sponsored National Infrastructure Commission - to take over as transport secretary in the last few months of Gordon Brown's reign, after years of disinterest in Northern rail investment. Labour will continue to pay a high price for those decades of neglect.

**Patrick Mulcahy**  
on slapstick  
US female  
mercantilism



## Market leader

During a recent visit to New York, I really wanted to see Michael Moore's *Where to Invade Next* but wound up viewing *The Boss*, Melissa McCarthy's latest comedy. McCarthy specialises at playing loud, abrasive women who don't spend a lot of time complaining about their lot but take an aggressive, acquisitive approach to life. The pleasure of her performance is in her outspoken outrageousness, offset by slapstick pratfalls. In *The Boss*, she is thrown by a highly sprung sofa bed against a wall and suffers in a restaurant whilst consuming badly cooked fish - I half expected a plot twist to revolve around wanton litigation, but it doesn't happen. McCarthy's lack of an off-switch both endears her to audiences – I heard shrieking laughter during some scenes of *The Boss* – and turns them off.

The interest of *The Boss* is in seeing how it portrays modern American mercantilism. McCarthy plays Michelle Darnell, a turtleneck wearing CEO of an investment company. She is a motivational speaker caught out by a rival (Peter Dinklage), who wants her to back away from one of his deals. Sent to prison for insider trading – there is a nice joke about her complaining about prison yard life whilst playing tennis – she is released five months later broke.

McCarthy created the character of Michelle during her Groundlings improvisational comedy days. She's inspired by a combination of Martha Stewart

and Jane Fonda, women who turn themselves into brands, even though you're not sure what they are selling. The narrative is typical Hollywood – a redemption trip tricked out with learning the importance of family rather than self-gratification. You can gratify yourself, sure, but make sure you have loving relationships on the way. Darnell doesn't care about the competition. She has a desirable product – Claire's brownies – and aggressive, sometimes shameless marketing techniques.

McCarthy is not interested in the cost of aggressive sales techniques, though the script by McCarthy, her husband Ben Falcone (who also directs) and Steve Mallory has a few smart lines – 'when selling to rich people, jack up the price. They want to be seen to be buying a premium product.' The justification for Darnell's business model is that people are inherently selfish.

As much as I didn't enjoy *The Boss* – I don't like slapstick as a redemption trope – I can certainly see the market for it. McCarthy sticks two fingers at her haters. She knows that as long as she performs with go-for-it energy, her comedy will work, even if it is based on introducing young schoolgirls to the concept of lesbianism. McCarthy doesn't deal with real American taboos – we aren't going to see her playing a doctor in an abortion clinic any time soon. She is however pro-choice. If you don't like her comedy, don't watch it. She is not trying to persuade you her films are better than the opposition.

*The Boss* opens in UK cinemas on 10 June

# MAYDAY



## Solidarity greetings from Unite the Union – building stronger trade unions, working to create decent work for all, a better, more equal Britain and a more peaceful world.

Len McCluskey, Unite General Secretary  
Tony Woodhouse, Chair – Unite Executive Council

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# A pioneering socialist

**Duncan Bowie** on socialism in practice

**ADA SALTER**  
**Graham Taylor (Lawrence and Wishart, £18.99)**

This is an important book. It is important as a biography of a neglected socialist, who was active at a local, national and international scale, but it is also a fascinating local study of socialism in power and a testament to what a small group of committed socialists can achieve to improve the lives of their fellow citizens. As a long-term resident of Southwark, which now incorporates Bermondsey, I found the book both inspirational and providing a message for Labour councillors of today who struggle against the constraints imposed by central government.

It is now 66 years since Fenner Brockway in 1949 published his biography of his friend and fellow ILP activist, Alfred Salter, the MP for Bermondsey. This new book rightly pays attention to his wife Ada, who was in many ways a more important political figure. In Bermondsey, they were a powerful wife and husband partnership and Taylor effectively demonstrates that it was often Ada, local and GLC councillor rather than MP, who played the leading role. It was however Ada who was a national and international figure – through her role in the Women's Labour League (of which she was president in 1914), and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Much of the book focuses on the 'Bermondsey revolution', when the Salters, active in the Bermondsey settlement established by John Scott Lidgett, led a group of working class socialists to take control in 1922 of Bermondsey Council. Scott Lidgett was a leading Methodist who went on to be leader of the Liberal Progressives on the London County Council. The Salters however broke away from the progressive alliance to establish an Independent Labour Party branch - this was significant as the ILP had not historically been active in South London. The

municipal reform programme established by ILP in Bermondsey was impressive - workers housing based on the garden suburb model, a public health programme including public baths, a groundbreaking municipal maternity service and a programme of municipally produced films, which toured the streets in a cinema van. The council, on Ada's initiative, undertook a programme for beautifying the area with a programme of trees, parks and children's playgrounds. Ada Salter was to become the president of the

Government) represented the ILP. Lenin was in Bern at the time and the Bolsheviks dominated the Russian delegation, which included both Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya and his lover, Inessa Armand. The British delegates joined the Dutch and German delegates, successfully resisting the Bolshevik argument that the working class should turn their weapons on their capitalist governments.

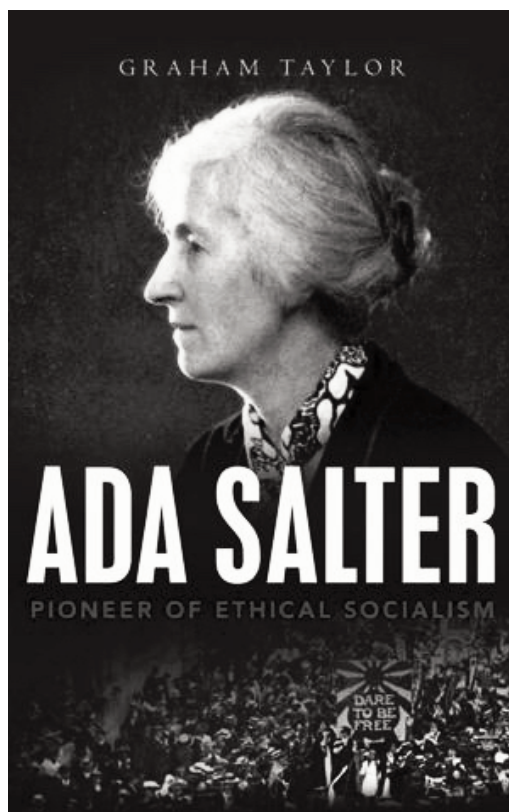
The Salters had a significant role in the anti-war movement, with both active in the No-Conscription Fellowship. Alfred was treasurer, while Ada organised maintenance for the dependents of conscientious objectors and set up a convalescence arm for conscientious objectors in Kent. Ada had been active in the suffrage movement but split from the NUWSS when Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst supported the war effort. Ada joined the International Committee for Women for Permanent Peace

(ICWPP) which later became the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). She represented the British section at the post-war congress in Zurich in 1919, which was aimed at influencing the peace conference at Versailles and advocated a non-annexationist and non-punitive treaty. Finding starving children in Vienna, Ada took a group home with her to Bermondsey.

Taylor's final chapters follow Ada's later career, both in Bermondsey and on the London County Council, the Socialist League, the Peace Pledge Union, the struggle against the growth of fascism and the attempt to avert a second world war. Ada survived until December 1942. Her life has been commemorated with a statue in Bermondsey near the river.

This is one of the best socialist biographies I have read and certainly the best study of a local socialist movement.

Congratulations are due to both author and publisher. Buy the book, read it and be inspired.



National Gardens Guild and sought to spread the Bermondsey approach throughout the country. Ada also established a municipal bakery

Taylor rightly also focuses on Ada's international role. She attended conferences of the Women's Socialist International at Stuttgart in 1907 and at Copenhagen in 1910. In January 1915, the German Clara Zetkin, secretary of the Womens' Socialist International, proposed a conference in Bern in neutral Switzerland. Ada Salter, together with Margaret Bondfield (later Minister of Labour in the 1924

# Undocumented migrants in a global city

**Don Flynn** on migrant realities

**LIVING ON THE MARGINS**  
**Alice Bloch and Sonia McKay (Policy Press, £70)**

If you take a map of almost anywhere in the UK and plot into it all the evidence of immigration raids on business premises which UK Visas & Immigration helpfully provides, two things emerge very clearly.

A new book by Alice Bloch and Sonia McKay – two long-time researchers into issues around migration and employment – takes us a bit further than the platitudes of 'commonsense' when it comes to understanding the ethnic enclaves at the sharp end of immigration enforcement. *Living on the Margins* is a study of three of those communities where the task of earning a living brings people right up against authority.

Bangladeshi, Chinese and Turkish/Kurdish businesses operate on high streets across the country, open all hours and providing goods and services, like a restaurant meal, that are suggestive of what luxury might be like to cash-strapped households everywhere. They were founded by earlier generations of newcomers with the critically important migrant skill of sniffing out opportunities for a livelihood in sectors and segments where direct competition with natives was minimised and the possibility of utilising the scarce resources available to the community could be optimised.

A significant part of these scarce resources was labour in the form of a workforce skilled enough to produce goods or services which customers hankered for – typically foreign cuisines, beauty products or the convenience of shopping late night. With a business model operating on the principles of a wing and a prayer the proprietors needed their workers to be cheap and casual. Taking staff on for busy days and sending them home when there was no trade has been a part of the survival plan for enterprises in the ethnic enclaves from the beginning.

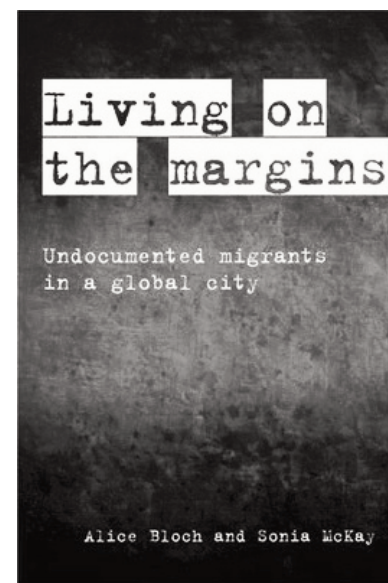
Bloch and McKay provide a thorough-going account of how the undocumented migrant emerged as the exemplar of the type of worker who could operate in these circumstances. The precariousness of their existences strips them of any hope of earning a living which other than the one that meets daily expenses for food and a bed for the night, stretching at most to a small surplus which they could remit to family back home. Amongst their informants they find men and women who have lived in the country for many years – in some instances reaching a decade or more – and who continue to cling on for no

one on without papers and decides in favour when the advantages to be got from working someone longer hours at low wage rates outweighs the chance that they will be raided and fined. This becomes a more compelling option when the period of hire is brief, to fulfil an exceptionally large order or a seasonal increase in trade, reinforcing the requirement that the worker be dismissable at the shortest of notices.

This treatment is deplorable, but Bloch and McKay's extensive conversations with employers gives the sense that they are also working in a system that stacks the odds against their long-term security and welfare. Racism was the force that shaped the original ethnic enclaves, creating the limited spaces in towns and cities where they were permitted to live and work.

As great cities across the world are showing us, these ethnic enclaves are not marginal to the functioning of the modern metropolis, but a critical part of its political economy. Wiping out the business concerns that have made precarity a part of their business plan would have knock-on effects across the intertwined sectors of trade and commerce, where the ultimate assurance of high profits rests on the fact that somewhere in the convoluted supply chains workers will be found who cannot say no to whatever appalling, slave-like jobs are offered to them.

This study reminds us that just above the workers there are the businesses, themselves nurtured by denial of opportunity to people a generation back, which have learned to live only by making use of the wretched conditions of co-nationals. Immigration enforcement even when heavily concentrated on these groups will never eradicate the hardship and exploitation this system entails. On the contrary, it only adds to the mix of risk and insecurities which made the insecure and vulnerable into the exploited in the first place.



better reason than the fact that all their options are so bleak.

In these circumstances life in ethnic enclave business hinges around small differences. A 'good' job becomes one in which you can work with your ethnic fellows and the friendships that might be possible there. The opportunity to add skills to your repertoire – the kitchen porter learning to prepare vegetables and move towards the status of the chef – is highly valued and the worker will invest time and effort into fostering relations that prove she is dependable and can be trusted with higher grade tasks.

Exploitation easily takes root in employer and employee relationships. The business owner calculates the risk of taking some-



## Leadership and lost opportunities

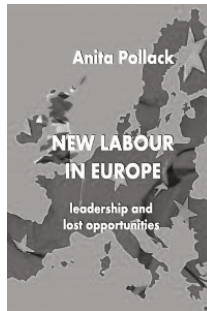
**Stan Newens** on a troubled relationship

**NEW LABOUR IN EUROPE**  
Anita Pollack (John Harper Publishing, £17.50)

Anita Pollack is a former Labour MEP. Her previous book, *Wreckers or Builders*, covered the period 1979-1999, for much of which many Labour MEPs – in the beginning, a majority – were opposed to British membership of the European Union. Her new book covers the subsequent period (1999-2015), when the Labour Party has been in favour of EU membership. The change of attitude was gradual, but there were key events like the speech of Jacques Delors to the TUC in 1988. The British Labour Group of MEPs, the European Parliamentary Labour Party (EPLP), lost all its anti-EU members in the 1999 European Election, but also changed from a group in which the left was strongly represented to one which was overwhelmingly New Labour.

Prior to 1999, when Tony Blair first assumed the Labour leadership and embarked on his campaign to get rid of Clause IV, Part 1, of the Labour Party constitution which committed the Party to public ownership, a majority of the EPLP came out in opposition to his proposal. Tony Blair did not forget this. The acceptance of proportional representation for the 1999 European election took the choice of candidates out of the hands of Euro-constituency Labour Parties and enabled officials acting on behalf of the Labour leadership to influence the order in which candidates appeared on regional lists. A number of left-wingers did not stand in 1999 anyway but, of those who did, any regarded as unreliable from a New Labour perspective or who had somehow blotted their copybook with Tony Blair, were placed too low on the lists to be elected. This resulted in a much more compliant EPLP and one supporting EU membership.

Following Labour's 1997 landslide victory in the British General Election, Tony Blair proclaimed himself strongly in favour of EU membership. However, he made it clear that he had strong reservations about it being used to achieve across the board improvements in workers'



rights and social conditions. Addressing the Party of European Socialists at Malmo shortly after Labour's 1997 victory, he said: "... we do not believe that the Social Chapter means that we should seek to harmonise and regulate whenever it can."

He postulated a 'third way' which concentrated on market liberalism, distinct from the objectives of both the traditional left and the traditional right. He appointed Roger Liddle, who had returned to the Labour Party after leaving it to join the SDP, as Labour's special adviser on Europe, and made Douglas Henderson, who had no previous real knowledge of the EU and merely learnt his speech, Minister for Europe.

Tony Blair was in favour of Britain joining the Single Currency but on this was frustrated by Gordon Brown as Chancellor, who laid down five points that had to be met if Britain were to join, but these never were.

In international relations Tony Blair forged a relationship with US President George W. Bush, which he clearly rated higher than his links with Europe. Accordingly, he agreed to British participation in the invasion of Iraq on the false grounds that Iraq was manufacturing nuclear weapons. The quiescent EPLP was split on the issue. Tony Blair further offended Socialist leaders of EU member-states by cosying-up to the right wing leaders of Italy and Spain who supported the war.

In subsequent years, Labour under Tony Blair opposed the application of the Working Time Directive in Britain and opposed a Report on take-over bids which the then Europe Minister, Denis McShane, argued would harm British business.

Today the EU is probably more unpopular in Britain than at any

time since the 1980s and a British exit may be the result of the forthcoming referendum. However, despite the shortfall in achievements it is important to remember that the EU has given us 71 years of peace in western Europe and the need is greater than ever for international co-operation to tackle environmental problems, international crime and terrorism, the dominance of multinational companies across frontiers and the improvement of social and working class conditions on a level plain throughout the EU.

This book is a comprehensive and meticulously compiled account of EU events and personalities. To those seeking facts on the EU in the period covered, it is an indispensable handbook. It is also, however, the story of New Labour's failure in Europe. More thoroughgoing and positive socialist policies are required, not only in Britain but across Europe as well if British and other European working people are to benefit more fully from the EU in the future – provided, of course, that Britain remains an EU member.

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**James Grayson** on international development

**MAKING PUBLIC IN A PRIVATIZED WORLD**  
Ed David A McDonald (Zed, £24.99)

Edited by a Canadian academic the book comprises fifteen chapters which originated as part of a Municipal Services Project Conference: Putting Public in Public Services-Research Action and Equity in the Global South, held in Cape Town, South Africa, during 2014.

This is a must read for people embarking upon development projects because it draws from around the world and provides information from a sphere which is not easy to research in. It offers Participatory Action Research which is a new use of PAR to those of us who sought to scrutinize the Cabinet Office during the Heath administration.

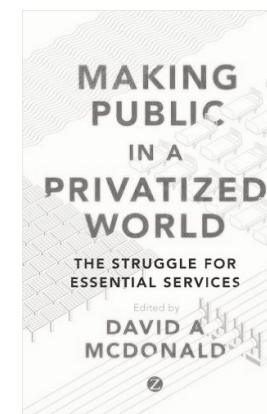
The section on the USA

reminds us that in the heartland there is much that has not been privatized and much that has been taken back as municipal services. It raises thoughts about legitimacy. Where services are only available informally, this usually means stolen at source, residents wish for legitimacy and higher bills contribute towards this. It is absurd that legitimate providers are often debarred from extending provision into, 'illegitimate' areas. The cost of power or water from informal providers usually settles at about twice that charged by the legitimate providers.

There is a useful chapter on South Africa which weaves through explanations of a growing kleptocracy in a society with firm political identification which can become an obstacle to improving the provision of (from the

North) quite basic services.

Governments need reliable revenue streams and make different choices about infrastructure provision. One is reminded that the Morales administration in Bolivia extended the UN Declaration of Human Rights to recognise a right to water as recently as 2010.



## Remoralising capitalism?

**A NEW MODEL CIVIC CAPITALISM**  
Colin Hay and Anthony Payne (Polity Press, £12.99)

The basic premise of this short book is that 'it is time to ask what capitalism can do for us and not what we can do for capitalism'. Premised on the notion that the 'Anglo-liberal growth model' is mired in a crisis, the authors consider how a new progressive politics can be formed, avoiding the clear failures of contemporary capitalist development. Hay and Payne's work is ambitious and sets out a concept of 'civic capitalism', based on principles of 'governance of the market, by the state, in the name of the people, to deliver collective public goods, equity and social justice'. The book contains some excellent, albeit very brief, chapters by a selection of highly renowned authors and the attempt to find a moral purpose for contemporary capitalism is a worthy one. But the book is short on prescriptive recommendations, preferring instead to establish a number of core principles, which can constitute a model and can 'remoralise' capitalism.

The book provides a powerful critique of the failures of the Anglo-liberal growth model and recognises many of the new chal-

lenges that have arisen in a world of global interdependence; challenges which demand state intervention rather than further deregulation. Seeing state intervention in the market as a civic duty, with regulation a collective public good, is an important principle. Similarly, the book contains useful guidelines for the management of economic policy, including reducing the cost of borrowing, prioritising public investment and coordinating debt and growth. The first part of the book contains Hay and Payne's analysis of what civic capitalism can offer and is followed by short chapters commenting on their ideas, thus providing both prescription and critical scrutiny of the model offered.

However, the book is written at the level of general goals, many of which are non-contentious. For example, the authors mention the importance of social cohesion, inclusion and empowerment but their analysis of these issues at times seems curiously apolitical. This is unfortunate because the book does contain useful recommendations, but they appear ones strangely removed from the main cut and thrust of political debate, for example neglecting issues of class, gender or race. The discussion mentions such problems as

entrenched inequality, but these systemic problems cannot be addressed solely by outlining new moral principles. More radical solutions are needed - there is also limited discussion of how capitalism should deal with the crisis in housing provision. The terminology is problematic, assuming that the prefix 'civic' to capitalism can provide radical reform, rather than seeing capitalism itself as the problem. Given the huge level of political dissatisfaction with existing institutions it seems unlikely that a call to arms around the slogan of civic capitalism will appeal to those who have suffered most egregiously from contemporary failures of governance.

The book therefore in parts lacks teeth and appears abstracted from the demands of current political debate.



**Stan Newens** was an MEP for Harlow from 1983 until 1999 and previously an MP



**Patricia d'Ardenne**  
on  
community  
action and  
party politics

**GET IT TOGETHER**  
**Zoe Williams (Hutchinson, £14.99)**

This light-hearted text is fast, funny and very witty-yet covers the most serious of subjects- politics, the economy, modern society and the revolution. Zoe is personal, personable and always starts directly from her life experiences. And as she is a 40 something middle class professional graduate living in inner London- her culturally close readership no doubt empathises with her through and through. Her *Guardian* pedigree is impeccable, which again, is fine if you have read and enjoyed her columns and features on global finance, climate change, and inequality.

She takes an anti-capitalist, anti-Tory, collectivist approach on most topics, but places value on the citizen(ess), not the political parties. Politicians are often grouped together as people who respond to public pressure or

lobby groups rather than instigating policies for the greater good of all. There is almost no reference to members of parties debating



policies together and trying to ensure these get on their party's manifesto, which for a democratic socialist is a disappointment. Vainly did I seek historical refer-

ences to the Left and its successes through social and fiscal policy, through universal franchise, through the trade unions, through feminism and through the Labour movement. Zoe Williams stays with her 21st century agenda and guides us through environmental organisations, action groups, alliances, and lobby groups intent on acting on specific issues or policies. So far so good. But there are still plenty of us who believe that radical agendas only empower communities when they become embedded not just in our culture or campaign, but in the policies and laws of the country through party politics. This book makes me realise how we need to communicate the power of community action on specific issues as well as party political membership and action. Each is a necessary but maybe insufficient condition for political development and growth.

## A film begging to be made

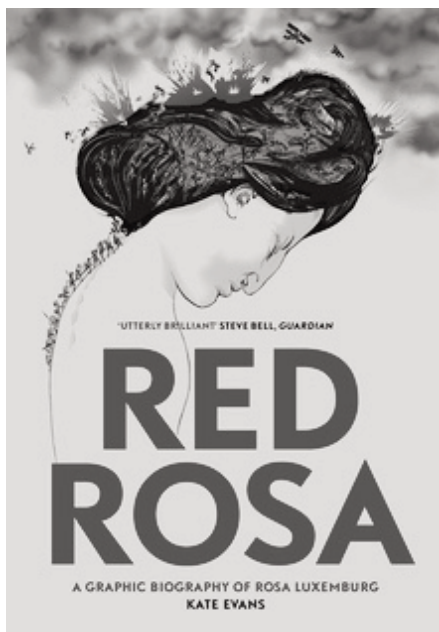
**Mike Davis**  
on a comic  
inspiration

**RED ROSA - A GRAPHIC BIOGRAPHY OF ROSA LUXEMBURG**  
**Kate Evans (Verso, £9.99)**

Moving, inspiring, insightful but ultimately tragic this visually stunning life story of the Polish born German revolutionary socialist is as good as a graphic novel gets. Luxemburg was not afraid to challenge the Marxist orthodoxies of the day. She believed Marx's Capital needed developing and wrote 'The Accumulation of Capital', which in many ways anticipated globalisation and the military industrial complex by 50 years. For questioning the leadership of German Social Democracy she was shunned by its leaders and was one of its few activists to make a stand against the First World War in accordance with its internationalist policy. She was imprisoned for nearly two years for her position.

She differed with Lenin on the kind of party that was needed, on the use of terror, the freedom of the press and assembly and she championed 'mass action' by working class organisations.

She formed the Spartacist League on release from gaol. Her brave leadership of the German revolution in 1919, alongside Karl Liebknecht, led to their brutal murders by the Freikorps, with the



complicity of the slavish parliamentarians of the SPD Ebert, Noske and Scheidemann

She was a woman of ideas and strong passions and Evans bring

this out to the full.

Interwoven with her writing, public speaking and political education meetings we see her relationships with Leo Jogiches, then with Kostya Zetkin, both flower and wilt, and finally with Carl Levi her co-thinker and attorney. Her early family life and fun times with women friends Louise Kautsky and Clara Zetkin further animate the story.

There are some imaginative touches, as with her conversations with her cat Mimi and the bird in her prison cell garden. The author draws herself into the narrative at one point to question the relevance of Marx and Luxemburg's theories today. Affirmative comes the answer.

One of the most startling images in the book is the depiction of her hair and neck as the battleground of the war. The 175 pages of graphics are followed by over 40 with textual references and explanations. But the book stands alone without them. It provides a tremendous story book for a film. Any takers?

**Norma Cohen**  
on a  
communist  
childhood

**PARTY ANIMALS**  
**David Aaronovitch (Jonathan Cape, £17.99)**

My parents' politics were inseparable from their psyches. In *Party Animals*, David Aaronovitch lambasts the lifelong commitment his parents Sam and Lavender made against all odds, preferring, in his eyes, the "comfortable certainties of life in the [Communist] Party" to looking revelations of Stalin's crimes straight in the eye, castigating all "who lacked the stamina to stay the course". These include unshaken party historian Eric Hobsbawm who found it impossible to renounce "a commitment forged via a structure of beliefs, guidelines, discipline, aims that have illuminated one's life, given it meaning and for which sacrifices have been made".

Backed up by quotes from Dickens to Brecht, Bernard Kops to Neruda and Pete Seeger, many of his recollections ring true. I was born into a similar family background, albeit Liverpoolian, with the same attitudes imbibed by osmosis: Beano out, Chuck and Geck and "tractors and clinics newspaper Soviet Weekly" in, the litany of meetings, marches, demos, pre-Prague Spring trips to Czechoslovakia, Daily Worker bazaars...

He vividly describes the certainties of that world: "How much more normal could you be?" with its "separate culture and argot", the contradictions of outlook: "the radical and conservative, bohemian and puritan" or flip Party jargon dismissing Americans as "arrogant gum chewers".

Apart from some sharp analogies, I found the style determinedly grim, unleavened by Aaronovitch's industrious research into a brief history of the Communist Party, of "comrades - hardened in adversity" through the downslope of Stalinism via the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. He adds to Alison Macleod's *The Death of Uncle Joe* in a gathering of evi-

dential threads into a circular, storybook exposé: buggings and debuggings within MI5/6 surveillance and of blithe party spies whose lives touched those of his family.

Skip the politics, the gripping part of this book is the excoriating last chapter when family dynamics explode in the face of his parents' neglect. He paints a distasteful picture of his ambitious, autodidact father Sam from a biting poor East End Jewish

replaced the genteel family that had rejected her. Slavishly devoted to her husband, she emanated a seeming dislike and neglect of an obstreperous, "mean and grasping" son who simply wanted, from an early age, to think for himself.

Barred by his parents from going to grammar school (he was at Gospel Oak Primary before going on to Holloway School and then William Ellis) or being told of his promising chances for Westminster, he was unwillingly hauled to long-term family therapy sessions run by esteemed psychotherapist Robin Skynner. Coupled with his perceived outsider status as Commie Jew, all evidence points to a lost childhood, enough to fuel feelings of exploitation and abandonment from parents for the higher good of political ideals.

Based on his lengthy involvement with student politics and the Communist Party, Aaronovitch's conclusions seem to throw the baby out with the bathwater. As staunch anti-fascist, Spanish Republic supporters, his parents joined the CP in the 1930s, when political divisions were stark. But everything they worked for is here rendered suspect.

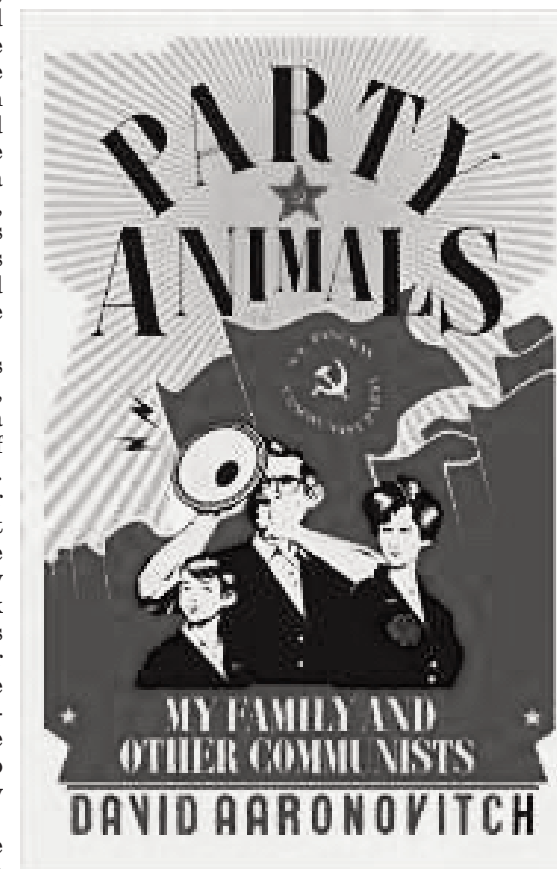
Aaronovitch's verdict: post-war McCarthyism and Communism ushered in not progressive social systems, but oppressive

political ones may be true but his overview, to my mind, adds up to a standpoint of retreat rather than seeking ways of continuing to engage, assuaging any possibility of collective, transformational politics or keeping ideals alive.

Aaronovitch is still "furious with that roomful of dead adults". Such intense feelings of hurt, resentment and betrayal by his parents and the politics they embodied may well reverberate long after the sparks thrown up by this memoir have settled.

*Review previously published in the Camden Review*

**Actor/writer**  
**Norma Cohen, is**  
**daughter of**  
**lifelong,**  
**Liverpool-born**  
**Communist Party**  
**members Eve and**  
**Eric Cohen**



family, self-taught at Bernard Kops' University of the Ghetto: the Whitechapel Library. Sam was outwardly a charismatic, leading cadre with a Stakhanovite capacity for "Work, work, work. Rigour, rigour, rigour... learning or marching... no vacuum unfilled". He was, however, capable of physical violence towards his children, carelessly parking his kids to carry out myriad party tasks as smoke-screen and parallel activity to a preening philandering at odds with CP notions of decency and family values.

For his mother Lavender, operating under a regime of duty, loyalty and sacrifice, the party





Richard Burgon MP on Osborne's Southern hot air for Northern poorhouse

Richard Burgon is MP for Leeds East and Labour's shadow City minister

# Hitting the poor hardest

The Conservative Government's social security cuts are hitting hardest those who can least afford it - particularly people living with disabilities.

Analysis of the Budget by experts such as the Institute of Fiscal Studies demonstrates that the effect of all tax and benefit changes in last year's Autumn Statement would mean losses around 25 times larger for those in the bottom decile than for those in the top decile.

Following George Osborne's first Budget back in 2010, he claimed that he would ensure cuts would not hit the poorest the hardest. He said: "Too often when countries undertake major consolidations of this kind, it is the poorest - those who had least to do with the cause of the economic misfortunes - who are hit hardest. Perhaps that has been a mistake that our country has made in the past." Yet it is abundantly clear that the Conservative Government's ruthless programme of cuts is hitting the poorest people - and the poorest areas - hardest.

Local elections have just taken place. Cuts to local government are hitting Labour-run councils in areas of financial disadvantage in the north of England hardest. And these same councils benefitted least from the Conservative Government's £300m transitional grant.

Oxfam and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation recently commissioned research on the uneven impact that

welfare reform will have on people and the places in the UK. The findings of this research - carried out by Christina Beatty and Steve Fothergill at Sheffield University - should make the Conservative Government ashamed.

The research found that the post-2015 welfare reforms will take almost £13 billion a year from claimants by 2020-21, bringing the cumulative loss since 2010 to £27 billion a year - equivalent to £690 a year for every adult of working age. The report also found that new reforms impact unevenly across the country. Older industrial areas, less prosperous seaside towns, some

residents of local authorities in the South East like Guildford, Hart, South Buckinghamshire, South Oxfordshire and Wokingham is somewhat less than £400 per person. All Conservative run Councils or Councils where the Conservative Party is the largest political party on the Council. £400 per person is undoubtedly a challenge to those dealing with those cuts - but far far less than that facing individuals, families and communities in less affluent areas in the north.

Indeed, Oxfam commented that that "social security cuts will further entrench deep-seated regional inequalities across Britain, hitting some of our most deprived communities the hardest. These cuts suck money out of already struggling local economies and are likely to push people on low incomes, particularly families with children, into hardship."

This is a damning indictment of a Conservative Government and its so-called "Northern Powerhouse". During the Labour Party Leadership election, Jeremy Corbyn memorably commented that the "Northern Powerhouse" was "Southern hot air". He was right. George Osborne boasts of a "Northern Powerhouse" but in reality is delivering a Northern Poorhouse by cutting the incomes of poorer people in the North of England, whilst helping the wealthiest in the South of England.

This not only hurts ordinary people - it harms the wider economy too.

Labour is fundamentally committed to shaping an economy that works in the interests of all and protecting the services our communities rely upon.

The real truth is that it's the Conservative Government which is putting ordinary people's living standards and Britain's future at serious risk.

## TORY COUNCILS TELL OSBORNE "NO MORE CUTS!"



VS



London boroughs and a number of other towns are hit hardest. By contrast, much of the more affluent areas of southern England escape more lightly.

Looking at the total anticipated financial loss per working age adult from the post-2015 welfare reforms, those areas at the top of that list are the North West, the North East, Wales, the West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber. In some local authority areas, this figure was as high as £1270 per person in Blackpool, £1000 in Blackburn and Knowsley, and almost as high as £1000 in Bradford and Hull. In my home city of Leeds, the anticipated loss of the cumulative cuts made by the Conservative / Liberal Democrat Coalition and now the Conservative government is £700 per person by 2020-21. All of these local authorities are Labour run.

In sharp contrast, the cost to

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