

CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

#296 January/February 2019

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Let the people vote

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Rupa Huq MP
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Syria & Labour
Prem Sikka
Fat Cat pay
Wendy Pettifer
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Girls education
Duncan Bowie
Town hall funding
plus
Book & Film reviews**



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CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

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

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

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

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the EB

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CHARTIST APPEAL

We enter 2019 in uncertain and dangerous times. Politics in the UK is dominated by Brexit. Under this political storm we continue to endure austerity, insecurity and falling living standards. Internationally we are witnessing the rise of right-wing populists in the shape of Trump in the US, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Modi in India, Putin in Russia alongside other new right nationalists in Eastern Europe, Italy and elsewhere. Behind these ugly developments lurk the forces of fascism and xenophobia, complimented by the repressive dictatorships in China and much of the middle east. To cap it all is human-made global warming threatening the entire planet.

Our politics is driven by the need to revitalise socialism as a thoroughly democratic and internationalist current, with the backing behind it to make an effective challenge to globalised capitalism. Chartist aims to up its game, particularly on social media. As one of the longest-standing print magazines on the Labour Left, published for almost 50 years, we recognise we are in new times. New digital forms of communication are central to getting democratic socialist ideas out to a wider, especially younger readership.

Hence this appeal. We want to improve the look of the print version while developing the website and social media activity on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and elsewhere. This costs money. For years Chartist

has operated with entirely voluntary labour. But now we need to outlay finance on developing our web presence. For that we need skilled people.

So we are appealing to readers to make a donation, big or small, to help revamp the print magazine and boost our social media profile.

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Cover by Martin Rowson

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Amidst Brexit boost to racism Rupa Huq MP calls for a Peoples Vote

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for detailsJanuary/February 2019 **CHARTIST 3**

Project hope and a Peoples Vote

The Tories have brought the UK to the brink of calamity. Rather than heal divisions of culture, wealth, regions and nations they have brought only deeper conflicts and disunity. Not least in their own party.

As the year ended Theresa May had pulled the vote on her 580 page withdrawal deal and survived a no confidence vote triggered by 48 of her hardline Brexiters by 200 to 117. Then she faced the double humiliation of being the first PM to bring the government into contempt of parliament and to have EU leaders tell her there could be no renegotiation of the deal or the 'backstop' agreement on Ireland.

It is clear there is no parliamentary majority for May's deal. But the three government defeats in Westminster also mean that 'no deal' cannot be an option. That leaves two real choices: Labour's preferred option, a general election (without Theresa May leading the Tories), or a Peoples Vote to accept the deal or to stay in the EU. This could mean a suspension or rescinding of Article 50 (now possible without the other 27 EU nations' consent).

Chartist is unequivocally for reform and remain. This was Labour's 2015 manifesto commitment and following conference 2018 it should be in the next manifesto. We have tried 'respecting the referendum result'. For two and a half years Labour has sought to influence the government for a customs union, access to the single market and full rights for EU nationals in the UK. Corbyn reached out at conference. But Labour's calls have been ignored.

The position is untenable. The Cabinet deal is worse than remaining in the EU. It's worse for jobs, living standards (the pound has slumped against the dollar and Euro), it's worse for public services, for environmental protection, human rights and workplace safeguards. It's worse for prospects of trade, it threatens peace in Northern Ireland and the break-up of the UK. It undermines prospects for collaboration with our fellow European citizens.

As **Peter Kenyon** argues we have now reached a turning point. It is time to move on. A Peoples Vote is moving up the agenda. In this political impasse it is necessary for Labour to begin preparing for a PV as Shadow Brexit secretary Keir Starmer and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell have been saying. **Trevor Fisher** says 'crossover point' has been reached to invalidate the 2016 referendum result.

Echoing calls for a PV **Rupa Huq MP** also highlights Brexit economic perils for Black and Asian people and a continuing rise in racist attacks since the referendum. **Kimberly McIntosh** provides further data on the negative impact of Brexit on BAME communities.

On trade **Nick Dearden** exposes the fantasies Brexiters seek to impose on us. With a mixture of imperial nostalgia and fawning Atlanticism they would cede control to the likes of Trump and his corporate mates behind an 'America First' trade

war protectionism. The NHS would be opened up to US Big Pharma and private companies eager to extend their profits empire. **Dave Toke** further emphasises that chlorinated chicken would be but one outcome of the bonfire of food and environmental safety regulations.

Fundamentally whether Labour is fighting a General Election or a referendum the case must be a positive one for being in Europe.

As **Don Flynn** reports the main message from Another Europe is Possible conference, is that we cannot have a remain case led by 'project fear' that characterised the last campaign. Labour's campaign for reform and remain must be independent, forthright and confident in promoting a positive vision of Europe for the many not the few. A project of hope.

As 2019 dawns an old spectre haunts the world. It is that of crude nationalism, xenophobia and authoritarianism manifest in Trump, Putin, Erdogan, Bolsonaro, Modi and others. While the EU currently provides a framework for cooperation, peace, human rights and a rules-based system, lurking below the surface the same monstrous forces of nationalist populism and fascism are straining to break through.

Niccolo Milanese illustrates these two sides of Europe while emphasising the importance of Labour being part of the progressive alternative wing in the EU.

The war in Syria continues to produce its human carnage. **Can Paz** argues Labour should come off the fence with a more robust condemnation of Assad.

Closer to home **Prem Sikka** outlines a new Labour plan to curb fat cat pay excesses while **Duncan Bowie** calls for Labour to sharpen its thinking on local government and grasp the nettle of council tax reform. **Dave Lister** welcomes Melissa Benn's book which lays out a convincing blueprint for an education service for all.

To counter austerity and recession it is vital policies for nationalisation with worker/consumer voice, for green led investment, secure, properly paid work and Europe-wide action against corporate tax dodgers be the contours of a forward-looking campaign. Thomas Piketty has also proposed a bold new blueprint to address division, disenchantment, inequality and rightist populism sweeping the continent. The multi-authored plan includes huge levies of multinationals, millionaires and carbon emissions to generate funds to tackle the burning issues of the day.

Corbyn's Labour espouses a democratic socialism as the best future for working people everywhere. In this era of globalisation, if we are to stop the clock being turned back to a nationalist siege economy with trade wars, hectoring authoritarian zealots and the prospect of a new barbarism threatening the human race we have to fight on every front. That especially means fighting for our values and policies in the European arena. And there is only one European Union. Labour must commit to making it a peoples' EU in a Peoples Vote or General Election. That is Project Hope.

The position is untenable. The Cabinet deal is worse than remaining in the EU



OUR HISTORY - 82

SOCIALIST UNION: SOCIALISM - A NEW STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES (1952)

Socialist Union was established in 1951 by contributors to the Socialist Commentary journal, which had been edited by Rita Hinden and other 'reformist' Labour Party members since 1946. The group had previously operated under the name 'Socialist Vanguard', having been initiated by a group of socialist exiles from Germany in the early 1930's. Hinden was a Jewish South African and Zionist who having completed a thesis on the colonisation of Palestine moved to London to become secretary of the Fabian Colonial Bureau in 1940, working closely with Arthur Creech Jones, its chair, who was to become colonial minister in 1945.

Hinden contributed to a large number of pamphlets and books on colonial policy, mainly focusing on the case for African decolonisation. In 1950, Hinden left the Fabian Colonial Bureau to focus on the role of editor of Socialist Commentary. The chair of both Socialist Union and Socialist Commentary was the industrial relations academic, Allan Flanders, who had been a member of the Socialist Vanguard group before the war. The journal and organisation were revisionist in the sense that they considered Marxist concepts of class struggle outdated, argued for a new social democratic response to the post-war world and increasing affluence especially within the middle classes, supported political pluralism and a mixed economy.

The group was in effect proto Gaitskellite (Hugh Gaitskell was treasurer of the friends of Socialist Commentary) and picked up many of the concepts from the pre-war works of Evan Durbin, Douglas Jay and Hugh Dalton, many of which were to reappear in Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* to be published in 1956. The group also reflected the Christian ethical tradition of R H Tawney, and Hinden edited Tawney's posthumous essays, published as *The Radical Tradition* in 1964. The Socialist Commentary editorial board included two MPs: Fred Mulley and Kenneth Younger. The Socialist Union group involved a number of MPs

including Alf Robens (later chairman of the National Coal Board), Jim Griffiths (deputy Labour Party leader) and Philip Noel-Baker. The group published three pamphlets: *The Statement of Principle* in 1952, *Socialism and Foreign Policy* in 1953 and *Twentieth Century Socialism*, edited by Hinden and Flanders, in 1956. All publications were issued on behalf of the group and contributors were not named. The group does not seem to have survived beyond 1956.

"1. The socialist goal is a society so organised as to provide each one of its members with an equal opportunity for the development and expression of personality. This is the right of everyone, and institutions should be shaped accordingly. But the human personality will not find its full expression unless men are able to live in freedom and fellowship, that is in the exercise of responsibility and in the spirit of service. These are ideals which give value to human existence and the degree to which they are expressed will determine the quality of the society we hope to build.

2. This conception of society has from the start been the ethical inspiration of the socialist movement, the deeper reason for its opposition to the exploitation of man by man. It is, of course, a conception of an ideal society which will never be wholly attained. But providing we make it our conscious goal and are not content to regard its coming as inevitable, we can advance towards it. To achieve this advance is the essence of socialist action.

3. Socialism, in this sense, cannot be expressed in any single pattern of institutions; nor does its realisation depend on any one line of political strategy. It does, however, involve a continuous struggle in various ways to change the class structure of society and the power relationships on which the class structure rests. In this struggle the labour movement, composed mainly of the organisations of the under-privileged classes, is the natural vehicle."

Free the Stansted 15

On 10 December 2018 15 peaceful anti-deportation activists were convicted of offences aimed at combating terrorism. They prevented the departure of a chartered flight deporting 60 people from the UK to West Africa, many of whom were at risk of great harm if removed.

The charge – endangering safety at an aerodrome (Aviation and Maritime Security Act) – carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. The defendants were initially charged with the lesser offence of aggravated trespass which was later amended to the more serious terrorist offence. The decision to increase the seriousness of the charge appears to be intended to dissuade activists from taking direct action.

Of those who would have been deported 11 remain in the UK to have their cases heard, whilst some others have been granted leave to remain.

It is a great injustice that those who acted to save lives have been convicted rather than those who acted to put people at risk of death and persecution by deporting them. The conviction of the Stansted 15 is a damning indictment of the UK Government's intolerance of criticism. Instead of reflecting on the harsh consequences of the hostile environment, the government has subjected brave and principled individuals to a long and expensive trial which equates their actions to those of terrorists.

A demonstration in support of the Stansted 15 defendants has been called to take place at the time of the sentencing hearing, on Monday 4 February at Chelmsford Crown Court. See the Facebook page on End Deportations (<https://www.facebook.com/EDeportations/>) for further details of the event.

Wendy Pettifer

Government rail review

In the face of a failing rail system **Paul Salvesson** puts an alternative plan

Chris Grayling's tenure as secretary of state for transport has been marked by the near-collapse of rail services in the North and parts of the South-east, while he persists with the grand folly of HS2 and CrossRail 2. Yet, to be fair to the man, he has recognised that something is fundamentally wrong with how rail services are being delivered in the UK.

Whether you are an earnest advocate of nationalisation, or still cling on to the belief that privatisation was the right thing to do back in the 90s, what we have today doesn't work. It's expensive (compared with the overall cost of running other railways across Europe) and services are often poor and unreliable, as well as being expensive. Staff are demotivated and passengers fed up. So Mr Grayling has ordered a 'fundamental review' of rail policy and has appointed Keith Williams to chair it. He comes from an interesting background – former chief executive of British Airways and deputy chair of The John Lewis Partnership, the employee-owned retail chain. In addition, members of the review panel include respected railwayman Dick Fearn, former MD of Irish Rail.

The Government's announcement of the review in September said it would "... consider all parts of the rail industry, from the current franchising system and industry structures, accountability, and value for money for passengers and taxpayers". Cynics will say that nationalisation, the holy grail of Corbynistas in a hurry, won't be given a second thought. Maybe, maybe not. But the review does offer an opportunity to come up with some fresh ideas which could start to get us out of the current mess we're in. I'm a member of a small group of professional railway men and women called 'The Rail Reform Group' which is looking at some options.

It's important that we are clear on what we want our railways to do. Getting people and goods 'from A to B' as fast as possible isn't enough and can encourage perverse outcomes. Is it right that we should be encouraging people

living in, say, Doncaster or Preston to commute to London most days? Rail is good at delivering longer distance journeys, but those trips into major centres for work, education and leisure are as important as longer distance inter-city journeys. And it tends to be the 'regional' networks that are under most stress at present, with inadequate rolling stock, lack of track capacity and poor quality stations.

Advocates of 'nationalisation' should also understand that much of the railway is already state-owned, or publicly-specified. Infrastructure is owned and managed by Network Rail. Trains mostly run as part of franchises that are specified and funded by Government (predominantly Department for Transport, but the devolved governments for Wales and Scotland, plus Transport for London for London Overground and Merseyside Combined Authority for Merseyrail). Yet once franchises are let, operators can cut corners to extract maximum profit from their short-term contract. Arguably, what we have now is the worst of both worlds – not fully private, but not really public either.

Our modest little 'Rail Reform Group' has come up with some provisional conclusions which could help improve both regional and intercity networks, as well as encourage freight. The starting point should be structural change. The current system, based on separation of infrastructure from operations (which are based on relatively short-term and highly expensive franchises) has not worked; bringing infrastructure and operations back under one co-ordinated lead is essential, but that doesn't have to imply a nationally centralised approach. It could work at a regional level. We are suggesting, for the North, a new model – a revival of the pre-1923 'Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway' brand – that would serve the major centres of the North. Basically we're proposing regionally-based, vertically integrated operations that are socially owned. The same approach could work in other parts of the UK.



Chris Grayling

We came to the conclusion that the best business model should be a social enterprise, in which profits are recycled back into the business to fund further improvements. A railway that is tied to Treasury control, as BR was, would not have the freedom to invest and look to the long-term, which is desperately needed. Instead of short-term franchises (typically less than 10 years) there should be long-term stability with periodic reviews by an appropriate public body. In terms of 'Lancashire and Yorkshire Railways' this should be a strengthened 'Transport for the North', a body which already exists.

Within this model, there would be scope for employees and passengers to be much more fully engaged, including encouragement to invest in specific projects that could also include some private sector investment. There is a need for a UK-wide 'guiding mind' that can ensure co-ordination is there when it is needed. The railway does form a strong network and even in the pre-1923 days of scores of private (and vertically integrated) railway companies, there was co-ordination on ticketing, timetables and other national standards. For freight, the issue isn't about ownership, it's about having the right infrastructure, and fiscal regime, for freight to flourish.

These suggestions avoid the current unhelpful fixation on 'nationalisation' without people really understanding what that means; opting for a social enterprise at arms' length from the state but with clear social objectives, must be considered. The solution we're suggesting could be as relevant to Labour's thinking as to Mr Grayling's. **C**

Paul's website is
paulsalvesson.org.uk

Giving away control

Crashing out of the EU will mean subservience to US capital with more than its chlorinated chicken says **Dave Toke**



Just a taste of things to come Photo: Getty

Now that it seems we're heading for a 'no-deal' Brexit the battle lines will be drawn between those still arguing for a closer relationship with the EU and those who want a trade deal with the USA. It will be the left and the greens on one side and the right and far right on the other. We should prepare for this struggle! A strong focus will be on whether we abandon the EU rules which effectively bar US crop and animal products which variously, do not meet animal or human safety standards. This includes whether we have to swallow (literally) the much mentioned US chlorinated chicken. It also includes whether we will be forced to accept beef from cows treated with genetically modified hormones (which is acknowledged to harm the cows through over-milking) and also whether we will continue to be given the right to know whether a food comes from GM sources.

Of course this is a battle about to whom we give away control. Do we carry on with the food and animal safety regulations that we've got with the EU or do we adopt the ones that the US Government wants us to? Now that we're leaving the EU we will have no control over the EU regu-

lations and certainly no control over the American regulations that we will be expected to comply under a US trade deal.

The problem for the UK is that after a 'no-deal' Brexit there's little chance of a trade agreement with the EU until at least the Irish border issue is settled, and with the nature of the future relationship with the EU hanging in the air, it will be difficult to agree substantial trade deals with other countries. Indeed even the various trade deals that the EU has with other countries (making up around a quarter of our trade in addition to EU trade) will lapse after Brexit. This leaves a hell of a mess, with countries lining up to impose their conditions on a much weakened Britain.

The US Government, aided by plenty of their right wing cheer leaders in the UK, will be taking advantage of the UK's weakness. Indeed there may be strong pressures coming from the right wing to renounce the prospect of negotiations with the EU about trade in order to secure an agreement with the USA instead. Such a deal of course would include opening up British markets to US interests in general and forcing the UK to accept terms that the EU have always rejected that make the UK (including the

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NHS) subservient to US business interests.

What we have to do is to fight against the imposition of a US backed anti-green agenda on the UK – indeed the acceptance of such an agenda may make a future close relationship with the EU all but impossible. This is because if British food and animal welfare regulations are changed then the EU will not agree a trade deal with the UK that involves areas affected by these issues. We can't have one rule for US imports and another for British and EU produce – the EU won't accept that even if it was practical.

It may be that the UK can agree a trade deal with the USA whilst avoiding the US impositions that I have mentioned, but it will involve a big struggle to do this and it will delay making an agreement with the USA for quite a while. Politically this will unite a number of disparate factions – the greens at the head of the struggle, alongside most British farmers who do not want to lose business to American imports and the left who don't want to be dictated to by US corporate interests. But, on the other hand, we will be acting in a changed political context where right wing British nationalism will be a lot stronger. **C**

BREXIT

Brexit: Labour's options

Peter Kenyon reviews what's at stake for the nation before 29 March 2019

Hyperbole has ruled. It's time for truth. And there is not much time left. Labour is finally engaged in rigorous parliamentary opposition to the Tory government and its Brexit plans. By the time you are reading this article the Meaningful Vote (MV) on the Tory deal may have already taken place. A defeat for the Tories whether before or after Christmas is only the first step along an uncertain path with unwelcome consequences. A rear-guard action is reportedly underway inside Prime Minister May's cabinet to change course. On 15 December last year the Daily Mail led with:

Cabinet at war on Brexit: Amber Rudd and Philip Hammond are among five ministers 'swinging towards second referendum' while Sajid Javid and three others urge PM to make No Deal government's top priority.

This demonstrates the Conservative Party still irrevocably split over the UK's relationship with the European Union. This belated flirtation with a second referendum by the likes of Rudd and Hammond will no doubt be welcome news to those who have been campaigning for a Second Referendum across the political spectrum.

I should declare an interest as a member of Labour Business (a Labour Party affiliate aiming to make Labour the Party of both business and labour), and chair of its Brexit Policy Group. Labour Business supports a People's Vote or public vote as official Labour Party policy now refers to another referendum. But that was a policy formulated over six months ago. There are now less than three months before the UK is legally committed to leave the European Union unless the law is changed.

Not unreasonably after so many UK electors went to the polls on 23 June 2016 to vote Leave or Remain there is a consensus among Members of Parliament that the only democratic means of deciding May Deal or Remain in 2019 would be through another vote. Questions have been posed about the legiti-



Theresa May-no joy with Juncker

ties of the 2016 EU Referendum mainly arising from the investigative journalism of the Guardian newspaper group's Carole Cadwalladr. In addition, the Electoral Commission has ruled expenditure by the Leave EU campaign illegal. But to date that has had no bearing on the disposition of the Tory government or the official opposition,

Members of Parliament need to be asking themselves a serious question: Is leaving the EU in the national interest?

Labour Party. Further discussion about that or the circumstances under which Labour ever allowed itself to become embroiled in an irreconcilable Tory spat are probably now best avoided.

It is the future of country and the opportunities for its 65 million strong population that should be at the forefront of all our minds. There has been much self-congratulation since its September Annual Conference within the Labour Party about its ability to debate policy publicly and resolve significant differences

in its Brexit stance. But the practicalities remain unaddressed. Apologies for repeating myself, but this cannot be said too often: as UK law is writ on the Statute Book, the UK leaves the European Union on 29 March 2019.

At the time of writing no formal request has been made to the European Union Council of Ministers (EUCO) to extend the Article 50 deadline to enable a referendum/public/People's vote to be held. Provisions for such an option were ruled out in Labour Party Conference preliminaries (prosaically known as Compositing). Such a request would require unanimity among the EU-27, as opposed to a qualified majority necessary to approve the draft Withdrawal Agreement Treaty and Political Declaration.

So at this very late stage in the Brexit process our elected representatives aka Members of Parliament need to be asking themselves a serious question: Is leaving the EU in the national interest? Apart from the European Research Group in the Conservative Party and a handful of unreformed Lexiteers in the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, the vast majority of MPs would surely vote NO.

Can the political noise surrounding this issue be filtered out to achieve that necessary focus? Those of us actively engaged in trying to encourage clearer thinking have our work cut out. Ambiguity on the part of the Labour Party leadership has served a purpose over the past two and half years, it has helped keep Labour Leave voters onside. But there is a trail of debris in the UK political discourse concerning immigration and inequality of economic opportunity. Chartist's small voice has sought to contest the twin myths that leaving the EU will assuage voter concerns about the 'other' or bring new investment and job opportunities to towns and villages left to the mercy of free markets and neo-liberalism.

Shortly before Christmas, Labour's shadow education secretary and possible leadership contender, Angela Rayner MP, caused consternation on BBC Question Time by challenging current thinking about a second referendum suggesting it would be divisive:

"Saying that we'll just have a second referendum and everything will be fine, I think, is a very serious position and it

undermines democracy in itself.....People made the decision and you can't keep going back saying: Would you like to answer it a different way?"

Those are quite genuine concerns and echoed by known Remainers in the Shadow Cabinet like shadow Home Secretary, Diane Abbott MP.

With tempers being sorely tested in Brussels and the other EU-27 capitals the threat of an upsurge of support for right-wing policies and parties is real. But so is the haemorrhaging of jobs and investment if business uncertainty persists for another day. Far too little attention has been paid to this over the past 30 months, not helped by the supine disposition of so-called business representative organizations like the Confederation of British Industry and the City of London, on behalf of the financial services sector.

Labour should have more confidence in its economic and social policies in development since prior to the 2017 General Election seeking to offer hope and address those concerns of the 'left-behind'. To give them real credibility they need to be recast in the context of the UK remaining a full voting member of the

European Union, with its budget rebate, full voting rights and veto in the Council of Ministers, yet outside the EuroZone and Schengen. In the event of the Conservatives managing to cling on to office as the government of the UK albeit in name only, then the options for Labour between now and 29 March can be narrowed down to the European Economic Area (EEA)/ European Free Trade Association, another referendum or revoke Article 50.

Both the EEA and another referendum options are riddled with uncertainties. Revoking Article 50, now that the European Court of Justice has ruled it can be done unilaterally, offers decisiveness – ends business uncertainty at a stroke, enables the UK to recover leverage in its relations within the EU-28, and for Labour that opportunity to reshape and reform EU policy. How would such a move be received by the public? One suspects with overwhelming relief. For the Lexiteers there is a backstop. If their claims about the EU being able to veto Labour's plans to borrow, halt privatization and embark on renationalizing public services, then there is always Article 50. **C**

When Brexit loses its majority

Trevor Fisher on the crossover point

Early in January, Britain will switch from a pro-Brexit to an anti-Brexit country. To be more precise: if not a single voter in the referendum two and half years ago changes their mind, enough mainly Leave voters will have died, and enough mainly Remain voters will have reached voting age, to wipe out the Leave majority achieved in June 2016.

This is the clear conclusion from the YouGov survey for the People's Vote Campaign. They show that demographic factors alone are causing the Leave majority to shrink by around 1,350 per day, or almost half a million a year. Crossover Day, when Remain moves into the lead, will be January 19th. By March 29th, the day the UK is due to leave the EU, the Remain majority will be almost 100,000, again assuming that nobody who voted in June 2016 has changed their mind.

Suggestions that age has replaced class as the major determinant of voting behaviour were reinforced at the 2016 EU referendum and 2017 General Election. Pollster Peter Kellner has proposed the Crossover thesis. Namely that as older voters die and the young replace them the government cannot continue to conclude that they have a majority - and therefore a mandate - for the process of Brexit without a further referendum. The thesis rests on the perceived dominance of the elderly in registering and voting.

There is some data on this, but analysis notably the Hope Not Hate report *Fear Hope and Loss* (September 2018) while noting the impact of age on the attitudes analysed rarely places age at the heart of the patterns being described. As always with social behaviour there is no unqualified direction of travel. The attitude survey reported in the Guardian on 8th December 2018 carried out

by Populus for the RSA suggests that Age Divisions are real, but not on a Labour-Tory Basis. There are major contradictions between the generations, undermining consistent political outcomes. Age is merely one factor, though increasingly I would argue the most important- and also the most time limited.

The most pressing immediate issue - even more so than the behaviour of the elderly in recent General Elections - is the Crossover day thesis. The foundations of referendum democracy have never been clearly set out in the UK with its unwritten constitution, and the system requires a separate act for each vote, and how the existing conventions on mandates and their longevity apply is now an urgent issue. Mandate theory is an obscure aspect of constitutionalism, but clearly all mandates are subject to time decay and the 1975 mandate was gone by 2015. Has the 2016 mandate already disappeared? **C**

For further details on Democracy, Referendums and Brexit - The Elephants in the Room. See
www.brexitstakeptic.co.uk

EDUCATION

Wanted: a profound shift in how we run, fund and judge

While parents fund-raise for resources and head-teachers take to the streets in protest at government cuts **Dave Lister** finds Melissa Benn outlines a strong case for an alternative education system



Headteachers marching in protest at cuts

Labour has a plan to establish a National Education Service providing free education over the course of a lifetime. Melissa Benn's book offers a blueprint for such a service.

Benn starts by sketching out the background. The 1944 Education Act established a national education system for children up to the age of 15. However at secondary level it also created what became a binary system of grammar and secondary modern schools with less good provision for something like 80% of mainly working-class children who failed the 11+. The move to comprehensive education in the 1960s and 70s changed all that. She makes the point that too much of the subsequent discussion of comprehensivisation was negative – from the Black Paperites to Alastair Campbell's "bog standard" schools. There has been too little celebration of the very real successes of comprehen-

sive schools with, for instance, a huge increase in the number of students still in education at age 17 from 31% in 1977 to 76% in 2011 and in those going on to university.

She sees the majority of the education reforms from the 1980s onwards as having a negative impact. These include the development of national testing, the introduction of league tables and the academisation process. This has led to the loss of local democratic control with in many cases a handful of 'members' given the right to agree a Trust's constitution, appoint and sack other Trustees and control large budgets. It is also the case that many schools in MATs (multi-academy trusts) have far less freedom than they had previously.

Other reforms introduced by Michael Gove have wreaked havoc on schooling. Benn says that they were introduced too speedily and without consultation. The result has been greatly

increased stress among pupils and their teachers with all the joy removed from learning to be replaced by drilling/teaching to the test and an obsession with data leading to teachers becoming even more overworked. Yet despite what the DfE wants us to believe there has been no significant narrowing of the attainment gap between children from less well off and those from more affluent families. Clearly some schools and teachers have managed to rise above all this and still deliver interesting lessons but their task has been made infinitely harder.

Benn is talking about education 'from the cradle to the grave' and therefore discusses the shortcomings and her solutions for each sector. In terms of early years, there is too much formal teaching of literacy and numeracy. She points out that some other countries with successful outcomes start formal learning much later than England and suggests

that greater emphasis on play-based learning is the way forward.

At primary level she wants to abolish the Key Stage tests, pointing out that children in England are among the most tested in the world, and introduce a broader curriculum. A broader curriculum is also needed at secondary level where increasing numbers of schools are ending Key Stage Three a year early to focus on drilling children to pass their GCSE examinations. She wants to see the restoration of teaching in the Arts, drama and Sex and Relationship Education continue beyond age 13.

One important area Benn does not cover is the growing practice of 'off rolling' pupils. It is estimated that 30,000 pupils have disappeared from school rolls in the period before GCSE examinations over the past three years – 13,000 last year. This is done to improve exam performance and to remove disruptive pupils. A Sheffield MP Louise Haigh reported last year that one primary school in her constituency had to take on 20 new pupils because they were excluded or were at risk of exclusion from a nearby academy. Ofsted are finally taking action over 'off rolling' and their inspectors will be looking at pupil rolls to see if there is any evidence of it.

At FE level there is a crisis of funding, as there is with schools, and funding shrunk by a quarter between 2013-15. FE lecturers are paid less than school teachers and their conditions are worse. Benn proposes that there should be a parity of esteem between academ-

ic and vocational subjects. To some extent the Government has acknowledged this with the introduction of T levels and the apprenticeship levy. She points out that if Brexit happens there will be a reduction in the number of skilled workers entering the country and a consequent need for the development of the skills of Britain's young people.

At university level there is the disparity between the high pay of many vice chancellors and the low pay and uncertain conditions of many junior staff. Labour's pledge to abolish tuition fees is applauded. Their introduction has made the English system one of the most expensive in the world. Finally, she wants to see the restoration of funding for adult education. As people live longer there should be increased opportunities for them to attend courses.

In general terms Benn says that "a new educational settlement does not require the setting up of over-bearing new structures. Rather it involves a profound shift in how we run, fund, judge..." Although not many primary schools have been academised, nearly three quarters of secondary schools are now academies. She wants to see them returned to local democratic control over time. I have argued that a Labour Government would need to prioritise and it would make sense to focus on bringing failed academies and schools which were forced to academise back under Local Authority control.

Benn also wants to see the remaining grammar schools and

all private/public schools integrated into the maintained school system over time. Labour was committed to the abolition of the private sector in the early 1960s but has never bitten this particular bullet when in office. Comprehensive Future proposes that we gradually open grammar schools up to a fully comprehensive intake. Other key points are:

- Teachers need to be trusted to teach and tight monitoring of them needs to end.
- Headteachers and teachers are leaving the profession in droves and action needs to be taken to make leadership and teaching less stressful and more manageable.

- Abolish Ofsted and replace it with a Local School Support and Improvement Office.

Most readers would agree with almost everything Melissa Benn has written in *Life Lessons*. It's packed with ideas and valuable information. One weakness is that the free flow of her writing means that at times there are disconcerting jumps from one education sector to another. Tighter editing would have helped avoid this.

If Labour wins power education reform should be an important priority. Ending harmful measures and replacing them with effective solutions in order to ensure that education becomes a rewarding experience for all children must be the way forward. Labour politicians should read this book and listen to the people who really know about and understand education at all stages. Angela Rayner (shadow education secretary) please note. **C**

***Life Lessons—The Case for a National Education Service.* Melissa Benn
Verso £8.99**

Dave Lister was a teacher and trade union activist. He is a member of Chartist EB.

Printer ad

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government on the brink

Duncan Bowie explains how eight years of an austerity straitjacket has pushed many councils to the verge of collapse. But does Labour have an effective alternative funding plan?

Who would want to be a councillor in the current climate? There has been a series of news items on councils that are struggling to fund core services and are at risk of financial insolvency – first Northamptonshire, then Somerset and most recently East Sussex – all Conservative controlled.

In March, the National Audit Office published a report on the 'Financial sustainability of local authorities':

* 49.1% real terms reduction in government funding for local authorities 2010/11 to 2017/18

* 28.6% real terms reduction in local authorities spending power (government funding plus Council Tax) 2010/11 to 2017/18

The report also projected that at this rate of spending, one in ten local authorities would run out of reserves within three years.

These reductions need to be seen in the context of increased population growth, especially in relation to elderly people who make significant demands on social care budgets. The figures above are national averages, and in many areas the cuts have been much greater.

Though the announcement of the 2019/20 on 13th December was a little more positive for some authorities than expected, the current government still intends to reduce the main local government support grant to zero by 2020. Local authorities will then be required to be self-financing, except where they are eligible for specific grants. Council tax rises remain capped at 3% per annum. Council tax on individual properties in England are based on values set in 1991, so are now 27 years out of date. Where a property value has doubled or even trebled over the last 25 years, the owner will generally be paying a similar level of council tax to 25 years ago.

The Labour Party has campaigned for the caps imposed by central government on borrowing by individual local authorities to be removed. The Government has



Cash-strapped Northamptonshire Council sells off its brand new HQ to raise funds

recently announced this reform. While this helps those local authorities, who have the assets and income against which they can borrow, it is not in itself an answer to the current crisis of local government funding, as in order to borrow more, local authorities need the ability to pay back the funds borrowed with interest. Not only have local authorities had to dig into their reserves to fund current expenditure, many have had to sell off assets to fund either services or debt repayments.

Council asset management tends to focus on immediate financial requirements rather than the longer-term strategic requirements and statutory functions of the authority. So public land and property is sold, often to the highest bidder. Land on which council homes could be built is sold to private developers, while in some cases council estates which are tenanted are demolished and tenants dispersed as the site becomes a more valuable asset for disposal if existing occupants are moved out. Council strategy becomes driven by the requirement to survive financially, and difficult decisions have to be made as to which policy objectives and services are sacrificed.

With the weakening of housing legislation, child care and adult care are the primary unavoidable statutory functions. It is not surprising that youth services, recreation services and libraries receive the harshest cuts, with housing services often becoming the next sacrifice. So, councils, irrespective of political control, are forced into difficult, and often

unacceptable decisions, as many of not just the older but the new cohort of would-be progressive councillors are discovering to their dismay.

Is there any light at the end of the tunnel? Would a Labour government come to the rescue? The honest answer is that we cannot be certain. The Labour Party is apparently carrying out a review of local government finance, but other than comments about some form of land tax being under consideration, there is as yet no published outcome. Firstly, Labour must give a commitment to restore the main revenue support from central government, what used to be called rate support grant but is now known as 'formula grant' which by the time of the next general election will probably have disappeared altogether. Secondly, the cap on rate increases must be removed, and Labour, both nationally and locally must be prepared to campaign for increases in local council tax where necessary to fund local services. This should be in tandem with a reform of the council tax system, both to relate tax to current property values and to introduce much higher tax bands for the most highly valued property.

Without these reforms, local government will continue to be primarily a mechanism by which local councillors impose austerity on their constituents and take the blame for what is not of their making. If Labour is to maintain any credibility locally and Labour councillors to have any hope for the future, the Labour Party must announce now what are its solutions to the crisis in local government funding. **C**

Duncan Bowie was a senior lecturer at University of Westminster. His most recent books are *Radical Solutions to the Housing Supply Crisis* (Policy Press) and a history of the Left in Oxford.

He is Chartist Reviews Editor.

A longer version of this article is on www.chartist.org.uk

Labour to halt bosses bonanza

Prem Sikka outlines his co-authored report on ending excessive executive payouts

Most social problems are rooted in the contemporary structure of institutions and the skewed distribution of power. The inequitable distribution of income and wealth is a good example of such a thesis. Company directors at the top collect large remuneration packages even for poor or mediocre performance, and the wages of the rest struggle to keep pace with prices.

According to the High Pay Centre the mean pay ratio between FTSE 100 CEOs and the mean pay package of their employees is 145:1. It is even higher in other companies. The chief executive of Bet365 picked up £220m plus £45m in dividends, a total of £265m. This is equivalent to £726,000 a day or 9,500 times the average UK wage. No amount of shareholder empowerment would have produced a different result because the CEO held 50% of the shares and her family and friends the remainder.

Inequalities matter because they have consequences for access to education, healthcare, housing, food, transport, pensions, security, life expectancy and ultimately social stability. The challenge is to develop policies that curb fat-cattery at the top and also secure improvement in the share of income/wealth of ordinary people.

A policy paper, of which I am a co-author, submitted to the Labour Party calls for changes to institutional structures and redistribution of power to secure more equitable distribution of income and wealth. It contains twenty recommendations. It recommends that employees and consumers, in addition to long term shareholders, should be empowered to vote on executive pay in large companies. Any director wanting more would have to think about employees' welfare or otherwise s/he would have difficulty in securing approval of his/her own rewards. Similarly, the empowerment of consumers would mean that executives can't easily get away with shoddy products, services and exploitation of consumers.

Here is a sample of some of the other policies.

Executive remuneration contracts in large companies must be publicly available so that stakeholders can have more effective information about the basis and amount of remuneration which is often a complex package of basic salary, other payments and incentives. Bonuses have become a mechanism for inflating executive pay and should only be paid for extraordinary performance. Any bonus scheme available to executives must also be available to employees.

Pay differentials between executives and employees analysed by gender and ethnicity to be published.

Executive remuneration must be in cash as rewards in the form of share options, shares and perks invite abuses and complicate the calculation. Executives

The report recommends that if 20% or more of stakeholders reject executive remuneration policy and practice then the board should get a warning (a yellow card) which should encourage directors to rethink their practices.

have been known to backdate options to maximise their gains. Frequently, excessive dividends and share buyback programmes use corporate resources to increase short-term returns to shareholders and the value of share options and shares held by directors. Such practices deplete resources for investment and are undesirable.

Golden hellos and goodbyes have all become a way of boosting executive remuneration and must be prohibited as they bear no relationship to actual performance.

Company law should be changed to give stakeholders the right to fix an upper limit. This could be in the form of a multiple of pay ratio, or an absolute limit, or in any other form that stake-



End fat cat pay excesses Credit: Martin Rowson

holders see fit. The Companies Act must provide a framework for claw back of executive remuneration under specified circumstances. These could relate to matters such as fraud, tax evasion, wilful violation of fiduciary duties, deliberate mis-selling of products/services, publication of false or misleading accounts and profit forecasts.

The remuneration of each executive at a large company must be the subject of an annual binding vote by stakeholders, including shareholders, employees and consumers. The report recommends that if 20% or more of stakeholders reject executive remuneration policy and practice then the board should get a warning (a yellow card) which should encourage directors to rethink their practices. If in the following year, at least 20% of stakeholders again reject the policy and practice, the board should receive a red card. This should trigger an additional resolution for the accompanying AGM. This resolution must consider whether the entire board, with the exception of the managing director and/or chair, need to stand for re-election. If this resolution is supported by 50% or more of the eligible stakeholders then a meeting to consider re-election of directors must be convened in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 or any new provisions that might need to be enacted.

The above proposals make company executives accountable to stakeholders and help to check fat-cattery and secure equitable distribution of income and wealth. **C**

***The paper titled "Controlling Executive Remuneration: Securing Fairer Distribution of Income" is available at <http://visar.csustan.edu/aaba/LabourExecutiveRemunerationReview2018.pdf>**

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A tale of two Europes

Niccolo Milanese looks at the multiple crises in the European Union with an unimaginative elite against the twin threats of progressive and reactionary civic movements



Amazon workers coordinating strikes across Europe

The past decade in Europe is at one level that of a decadent, unimaginative and sometimes mendacious elite unable to fully understand, let alone properly address, multiplying crises. This is the history from above of the European Union. But there is also another story which has largely been outside of the interest of the media: a story of political invention amongst the citizens, sometimes for progressive and sometimes for reactionary purposes. This is the history 'from below' of Europe. The way these two histories come together and interact is going to be decisive for the future form of the European Union.

Examples of the unimaginative elite are easy to find. The financial crisis hitting Europe in late 2007, which rapidly turned into a crisis of the euro, was above all a crisis of the banks which could have been decisively addressed early on and could have been used to complete the fiscal union necessary for the sustainability of the eurozone. Instead, the structural weaknesses of the eurozone and the lack of proper balanced governance of the single market persist, and the crisis has instead been used to reinforce a neoliberal economic model based on austerity and precarity which works to the benefit of a few elites principally in core European coun-

tries.

There is nothing sustainable in this solution and the next crisis around the corner will either be used to reinforce this model even more drastically, by totally removing those elements of social cohesion policy and structural investment which still persist, or it will be used to change direction.

Likewise, the increased migration flows in 2015 were not only predictable but predicted and the European Union not only failed to make adequate preparations for these but failed to use the policy mechanisms already at their disposal, instead allowing itself to get into a 'beggar-thy-neighbour' situation where each member state blames the other. Few take responsibility and the fortress around the European Union is reinforced. Again, this situation is not sustainable. People will continue to come to Europe, and either efforts to stop them will become so restrictive that the rights of Europeans to move will become caught up in the fortress, or a real coordinated European asylum and migration policy will be developed.

The central forces of European politics have shown their lack of imagination with a simplistic understanding of the situation. They hope that with growth returning to the European econo-

my as a whole, the pressures on the weak institutions of the eurozone will be reduced, and the underlying racism that prevents a generous coordinated migration policy for Europe will be softened.

It is delusional to suppose that growth alone will address any of the underlying problems. The European Union plans of French President Macron - by far the most ambitious of the current leaders, still amount only to minor changes in European economic governance, with proposals for a European finance minister, more resources for the Union and greater efficiency in the existing policies of granting and refusing asylum in Europe.

Even these totally inadequate changes have been rebuffed firmly by other European leaders, leading many commentators to despair at the lack of positive dynamics for the reform of the EU (the longtime European optimist Jurgen Habermas recently wrote he 'fails to see any encouraging trends right now').

Now let us turn to the history 'from below' of the European Union, which is perhaps the real novelty in the past decade: the first time that a European citizenry has really expressed itself as such. The last decade has not only seen crisis, but also citizens mobilising to address them. We have had solidarity actions with

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European
Alternatives



Matteo Salvini far-right Italian deputy PM

and inside Greece and refugee-welcome initiatives, 'blocupy' mobilisations against the policies of the European central bank, the launching of NGO boats to rescue migrants in the Mediterranean (most recently the boat *Mediterranea* in Italy, the first such boat to sail with an Italian flag and therefore in principle the right to dock), Amazon and Deliveroo strikes in the gig-economy, mobilisations to protect or advance women's rights to abortion in Poland and Ireland, or the rights of LGBT couples in Romania, protests for freedom of the press and against corruption in Romania, Slovakia, Malta and elsewhere. Such civic initiatives have found electoral expression and success, notably at city level. Cities like Barcelona under the administration of Ada Colau have become inspiring paradigms for others.

What is more, over the last decade, civic learning amongst movements has been taking place. Where the concerns of Ada Colau's Barcelona-en-comu were initially local - starting with stopping housing evictions - rapidly it became apparent that change in the economic, environmental and social conditions of the city rely on action beyond its limits, and with little support from the national government, only coordinated international action would open up such possibilities. Thus the city of Barcelona took leadership in an international network of 'fearless cities'.

A similar form of learning could be found in workers organisation in the precarious economy. In 2013 Amazon workers in distribution warehouses in Germany attempted to strike and found that Amazon simply redeployed work to the nearest warehouse

over the Polish border in Poznan. The following year, representatives of the German trade union Verdi joined up with a new trade union in Poland, Inicjatywa Pracowicza, to organise coordinated strikes. Now the Amazon strikes on Black Friday and Amazon Prime days take place in most European countries in a coordinated way.

All these initiatives on the progressive side of civil society has been matched and sometimes surpassed by initiative on the reactionary side. Whilst civic initiatives to stop housing evictions created a positive example in Barcelona, a similar process in Budapest where the incumbent Social democratic party could be blamed for the failure led to the coming to power of Victor Orban.

Far-right organisations have been able to convene protests and rallies of numbers unseen since the second world war, notably in Warsaw each November. They have also built a social base by providing services from security to social welfare where the state has failed. For every refugee welcome initiative, there is a corresponding reactionary initiative to patrol the borders. Reactionary religious organisations have been able to intensify campaigns against women's and minority rights, and freedom of expression is under attack. In many instances, reactionary civil society has been able to coordinate internationally better than the progressive side.

The success of Victor Orban in advocating a nationalist, conservative and christian European Union, in coordination with other nationalist movements, which ultimately have divergent objectives but see short term benefit in collaboration, shows that the

political translation of this civic energy has been largely to the benefit of the right.

This overall European picture of political deadlock 'from above' and civic energy 'from below', both increasingly hijacked by the far-right, should have many resonances for people in the United Kingdom.

The 'remain' cause in the Brexit referendum was led in an unimaginative, uninspiring way, which assumed that an overall message of economic prosperity - irrespective of the way that prosperity is distributed or deeper questions about the quality of life - would be sufficient to defend the status-quo. Meanwhile, enough of the civic energy for change was captured by a far-right cabal which has pulled British politics towards its most hostile, ungenerous and dysfunctional state for decades.

How the Brexit process evolves will be crucially important for the future direction of Europe.

The European Union elites are attempting to use the process to generate legitimacy for themselves negatively: by showing how bad it is to leave the European Union, they aim to build legitimacy amongst their own populations. This shows the staggering lack of positive ideas for the future of the Union amongst the elites.

On the other side, the far-right nationalists build their betrayal narrative not only in the UK but across Europe - 'look at the mendacious European Union which once again frustrates national sovereignty' - and hope for an even more dysfunctional European political economy they can exploit further.

Against both of these tendencies, citizens of the UK have a common interest with progressive Europeans across the continent to continue to invent a positive future through civic initiatives of solidarity and joint struggle, and to aim to give this positive civic energy representation in political institutions at every scale.

The fronts we have to fight on are multiplying, but let us make that multiplicity our strength and our agility to negotiate different contexts our virtue. This is one of the deep meanings of the European idea over centuries, once the bureaucratic and administrative shells are stripped away: it is an expression of our capacity to create a new world together and to face-down the risks implicit in any such project. **C**

LEFT AND BREXIT

Brexit and the hard right's American dream

Nick Dearden exposes the myths of a 'global Britain'



Trump and Fox - crusaders for a bonfire of regulation

No single person better embodies the right-wing world of Brexit than trade secretary Liam Fox. Fox inhabits a parallel universe in which buccaneering adventurers scour the world for new wonders to sell in an ever-expanding marketplace ruled over by the imperial warships of Britannia.

Fox's own civil servants brand his trade strategy 'Empire 2.0', fitting for a man who chooses to have a picture of arch-imperialist Cecil Rhodes looking over his office. Even by the standards of the current government, Fox is a hard right free marketeer, close to Trump-supporting US groups like the Heritage Foundation. This might be why Theresa May retains his services. He moves in circles with climate deniers, Big Pharma CEOs, oil men, billionaires. The 0.1%.

So Fox can teach us an awful lot about Brexit – not in terms of understanding the myriad reasons that Britain narrowly voted to leave the EU, but recognising where hard Brexit will take us unless we stop it in its tracks. For beneath the bumbling, the bluster, the seeming incompetence of Fox and his hard Brexit companions, is a deadly serious vision for a very different Britain, stripped of social protection and dedicated to the pursuit of profit above all else.

Fox is also important because he inhabits the key ministry for bringing this vision to fruition. After all, for the leading Brexiteers, unlike the masses who voted with them, the core of their vision is not limiting immigration, nor even parliamentary sovereignty, but Britain's right to sign independent trade deals. Through these deals, a new world will be created – that is, unless we stop it.

Corporate courts

Liam Fox is a hardcore Atlanticist who regards Europe as a nightmare of socialist bureaucratic hell. He dreams of deregulated markets, where the state is reduced to one man sitting in an office with a nuclear weapon. He plans to use trade policy to inch us closer to that place. How? Well, trade today is not simply about finding ways to sell more cars and clothes (or even financial services). Rather, trade deals are about deregulation, liberalisation and muscular corporate power. They are about a set of rules that put the 'right to profit' above any social or environmental objective.

Nothing better illustrates this than the corporate court system, politely known as 'investor protection'. These are secret courts, embedded in many modern trade deals, which allow big business to sue

states if government policies endanger corporate profit. Governments might do this, say, by putting cigarettes in plain packaging, removing toxic chemicals from petrol, increasing the minimum wage, or placing a moratorium on fracking. In fact, these are all real cases. The government in question has no right to appeal, no right to take a similar case of its own against a corporation, and must pay extortionate legal fees for each case, win or lose.

Up to now, Britain has shared the European bloc's standards and regulations. Many of us regard these standards as pandering to the interests of the corporations that lobby for them. But for people like Liam Fox, even these standards are far too high. They would far rather we shared the low standards of the North American bloc. This would mean out of the window go workers' rights, food standards and the 'precautionary principle', which makes sure something doesn't do harm before allowing it to go on sale.

Chlorine chickens are the tip of the iceberg. The US is pretty public about what it would want from a trade deal with the UK – they have published a 400-page document to tell us exactly what they don't like about EU standards. This includes a stomach-churning list of foods the US would like to import into Britain

– including meat from animals stuffed with hormones, steroids, rac-topamine, and endocrine disrupters (chemicals that mess with animals' hormones and can cause cancer and birth defects), more genetically modified foods, and more pesticide residue allowed on fruits and nuts.

It gets worse when you look at the other side of the 'staying healthy' equation: treatment. Medicines in the US are vastly more expensive than they are in Europe, and the US is unhappy about the (still very moderate) limitations that many governments place on pharmaceutical corporations. The US wants Big Pharma to have more say over the prices charged for medicines, curtailing the NHS's limited power to negotiate pharmaceutical pricing. And the US wants to make it easier to renew patents on medicines, allow an even greater degree of corporate control over clinical test data, grant new patents on biological medicines (including many new cancer treatments), and give corporations a greater say in healthcare policy.

If the US successfully pushes through these top-line demands in a trade deal with the UK, the NHS would either have to spend more money on drugs each year, or more patients would be denied access to those drugs. The reality is that regulation is already too lax. In the last five years the cost of medicines to the NHS has increased 29% – that's more than the NHS's total deficit. It can't afford US drug prices. Indeed, most Americans can't either.

On top of this, a US trade deal would give US corporations greater powers over public services like the NHS. US corporations would have more rights to bid for contracted-out bits of the NHS, and could then use the corporate court system described earlier to make it nearly impossible to ever bring those contracts into public ownership. While the government has previously claimed that the NHS is at no risk from a trade deal with the US, legal advice sought by trade union Unite disagrees with their assessment.

The Brexit empire

The list of potentially weakened regulations and standards goes on and on: it includes threats to our online privacy, to our ability to move to renewable energies and our right to pass public health regulations. This ideological vision of Britain's future has been described as 'Singapore-on-Thames', an (inaccurate) shorthand for a low-regulation, low-tax, free-market paradise.

It's not all about the US. Liam Fox is talking trade with a whole host of countries. The oil tyrants of the Gulf.

The rising right-wing governments of Latin America. Erdogan of Turkey and Duterte of the Philippines. Any dictator or anti-democratic thug seems ideal for a trade deal. More recently, Theresa May has toured Africa, promising to spend aid money to help us get trade deals, in an effort to re-create imperial trading relationships. Her hope is that Britain will soak up cheap food and basic resources (even though those countries require them for their own development), and we will sell them back financial services at vastly over-inflated prices. That's how the empire worked – a core economy and a periphery.

MPs currently don't have any power to stop or change trade deals. Despite attempts by opposition MPs to give parliament and the public some voice in trade deals, Fox's Trade Bill, currently making its way through parliament, has conceded nothing substantial to date. The trade secretary acts under royal prerogative and has set up more than a dozen trade working groups to begin negotiating post-Brexit trade deals behind closed doors. The most MPs can do, if they're really lucky, is to postpone ratification of a trade deal for a month. So much for the all-important concept of parliamentary sovereignty.

Brexit and Trumpism

One way to undermine Fox's vision is obviously to remain in the EU. Given the popular mandate given for leaving, it's hard to imagine anything short of a referendum could achieve that. Such an outcome looks increasingly possible, as there seems no parliamentary majority for any specific deal.

But a second referendum is not a long-term solution. After all, Brexit did not fall from a clear blue sky. Along with Trump, and the rise of the far right across Europe and authoritarianism across the world, it is a symptom of the deep problems at the heart of our economy and society. While a People's Vote is necessary, on its own it is not sufficient. We require radical change to massively reduce inequality, constrain the power of the 1% and protect the environment. And those messages must be part of any new referendum campaign, if we're to have any chance of winning.

One important component is rethinking the global system of neoliberal trade rules. Neoliberalism is dying, and the battle today is about what takes its place. National (or even better, EU) law needs to be reclaimed as a means of controlling big business and 'investment' to genuinely build a more equal and sus-

tainable economy. But that doesn't mean that erecting trade barriers everywhere is desirable, or that proping up corrupt industries is the best use of taxpayer money. The left needs to redefine the purpose and limits of trade policy. Trade is not an end in itself, and where it takes place it should benefit the people of all participating countries, rather than being used to exploit. Labour's 'Just Trading' initiative is a good start, but it needs to go much further. Economic integration doesn't have to be neoliberal. The key to success is that integration must have a strong social and environmental basis, and even stronger democratic control. For all its faults – and they are huge – the EU is the world's biggest trade bloc with such social and democratic elements.

What's more, economic integration cannot be based on the super-exploitation of the planet's limited resources or of poorer countries, as the World Trade Organisation dictates. Developing countries should be encouraged and supported in forming their own regional integrations, with strong laws to control investment and trade. This is the very opposite of the Empire 2.0 logic of hard Brexit

An internationalist policy

There are other elements of economic integration that can free people, rather than capital. At the centre of this is free movement of people. Free movement doesn't 'allow' business to pick up and relocate people in order that they can produce more efficiently – rather, that is how virtually every other migration system works: power resides with the economic giants and what they demand. Free movement is different. It's one of the only immigration systems where the ability to move is a human right. Free movement gives ordinary people rights to organise for better conditions and pay on the same terms as domestic workers.

Our internationalist economic policy should combine two important principles. On the one hand, rebuilding local economies and local democracies – giving people real power over their communities. On the other hand, giving people much greater citizen rights at European and global levels, fostering much bigger democratic discussions over how we trade, how we control corporations, how we ensure that humanity survives the climate catastrophe we're facing.

This also allows us to develop a clear and compelling vision for an international economics that taps into the concerns of those who voted for Brexit out of desperation, while preserving our internationalist outlook. It is the only progressive future for Europe. **c**

Nick Dearden is director of Global Justice Now. This is an abridged version of his article in *The Left Against Brexit* published by Another Europe is Possible. www.anothereurope.org

RACE AND BREXIT

Ethnic minorities under Brexit cosh

Kimberly McIntosh reports Brexit will be harsh for BAME communities



When we're talking about Brexit, the phrase 'left-behind' is often not far behind. The 'left behind', in theory refers to everyone damaged by austerity, betrayed by politicians of all stripes and the forces of globalisation. But it conjures up images of the 'white' working class in post-industrial Britain. This is a misnomer – the working class is multi-ethnic. Whilst the discussion might not show it, Brexit has been about ethnic minorities from its inception and its impact has, and will, be felt keenly by these communities.

The vote to Leave the European Union was driven by a complex cocktail of causes. Disparate demographics across the UK said they wanted out and it's important not to conflate this with the 'Vote Leave' campaign. This campaign was outwardly xenophobic, using anxiety about migration and 'cultural change' as thinly veiled proxies for race. The increase in hate crime following the referendum result was a consequence of this rhetoric, not a random aberration.

But beyond hate crime, there hasn't been much attention given to how ethnic minorities might fare when, how, and if we leave the EU.

In our briefing Brexit for BAME Britain, I examine with my colleague Dr Irum Shehreen Ali how BAME people might fare. We find that ethnic minorities are in an unenviable triple-bind in relation to Brexit: already economically worse off, the primary targets of hate crime and hit hardest by austerity. BAME families are already more likely to be in low-paid work, spend a greater share of their income on rent and have less in savings. This makes them vulnerable to price increases and makes it harder to weather economic storms. The projected fall in GDP by 8% over the next 15 years, particularly in light of a 'No Deal' Brexit and projected fall of household income at between £850 and £6400 per year, will hit BAME people the hardest, as they are more likely to be on lower incomes and in precarious work.

Ethnic minorities are also concentrated in specific sectors of employment, some of which are at risk post-Brexit. For example, Pakistani and Bangladeshi men are twice as likely to be working in 'plant and machine operations' compared with white British men, and much more likely to be already living in poverty. The Institute for Fiscal Studies projects that a 'hard Brexit' would leave these workers at high risk

of job losses.

How ethnic minorities, and the country as a whole, are impacted by Brexit will largely depend on how the government in power responds. If Theresa May remains, with Philip Hammond as Chancellor, we can expect spending to remain at historic lows, despite assurances that 'austerity is coming to an end' or is 'over' – depending on your verb tense of choice.

So far, austerity measures have had a disproportionate impact on BAME women on low incomes. The other Conservative leadership contenders have little care for social justice and are unlikely to continue with May's "burning injustices" mantra.

Discussions of 'Left Brexit' or 'Lexit' need to be clearer about what assurances there will be that the poorest in our society will not be made even poorer. We need to see increased investment in the industries, areas and people projected to be impacted negatively – people on low incomes, disabled people, ethnic minorities and women. But if there is no election or Labour does not win it, these groups are likely to be hit harshly by the government's response after we leave. It is not an ideological game.

If we have a People's Vote and there is a switch to Remain, there will need to be a clear, positive vision as to what it can offer all of the country – not just mobile, young people who want to do Erasmus. Otherwise ethnic minorities are at risk of a backlash from anyone harbouring a sense of betrayal. Research by Hope Not Hate found that levels of optimism about economic prosperity and opportunities post-Brexit are greatest in those areas that voted most strongly to leave the EU. Again, if this is not delivered, BAME people, EU residents and migrants will be the targets of resentment. Visible minorities are the most common targets for hate crime and the police are preparing for it to increase in March 2019 when we are (supposedly) due to leave.

Now is the time for decisive leadership from our political leaders, economic policies that work for everyone and a vision that leaves anti-immigrant rhetoric and racism behind. I hope it comes soon. **C**

Kimberly McIntosh is a policy officer at Race On The Agenda. The Briefing Brexit for BAME Britain is available from <https://www.rota.org.uk/>

Another Europe is Possible: Mobilising internationalism in the fight against Brexit

Don Flynn sees the AEIP conference as a vital socialist response to Brexit



Another Europe is Possible has grown since its foundation back in 2016 from a small network of internationalist-minded individuals to an impressive organisation with the backing of over 13 thousand subscription-paying supporters at the present time.

Though with a sizeable overlap of support from people aligned with the Corbynite Momentum its backing is not confined to members of the Labour Party. Caroline Lucas, leader of the Green Party in England and Wales, is a frequent participant in its events. Left Unity also backs its initiatives and campaigns.

The AEIP network brings together that swathe of the left which is committed to the 'reform and remain' stance in the current debate over Brexit. This is not a narrow current. There is scope for disputes between people who tend to be uncritical of the European Union, who repeat its claims for a unique role in securing peace across the continent and upholding human rights, and others more inclined to see it as a 'rich man's club' but at least having the potential for change.

The organisation continued its evolution to a more structured entity with a democratic constitu-

tion and a leadership team at its first national general meeting which took place in London on 8th January. A couple of hundred AEIP members gathered for discussion which centred on the current state of the Brexit saga and the role taken by the Labour Party leadership. By the end of the day the assembled membership had adopted a strategy paper and a constitution which provided for the election of a 16-member executive committee. Highlights of the discussion included contributions by Emiliano Mellino of the gig economy's nemesis, the largely immigrant Independent Workers Union of Great Britain, Molly Scott Cato, a Green Party MEP, and Guardian journalist Zoe Williams, Labour MP Russell-Moyle and Chartist EB member Marina Prentoulis.

The speakers welcomed the revival of political activist moods across the UK and saw this as having the potential to support a radical government of the left at some point in the future. The main challenge at the present time was to confront the delusions being sown by the supporters of Brexit, both in the form of the right wing nationalist rhetoric being generated by the Tory party, but also the naïve leftism of the advocates of 'Lexit'.

Another Europe has been mak-

ing its pitch through an impressive website - <https://www.anothereurope.org/> - which features opinion pieces, news items and video blogs which aim to make the case for its 'remain and reform' position. Supporters are also urged to get active in campaigns which share its concerns for an internationalist response to contemporary challenges. Foremost among these is its defence of freedom of movement for people - one of the most important rights directly threatened by Brexit.

AEIP's 'remain and reform' message is a response not just to the Tory version of Brexit which is the immediate threat, but also the version of socialism which believes that the working class can achieve its emancipation within the high enclosing walls of a reinvigorated national state. Its alternative vision sees socialism arising from acts of resistance to capitalism and its crises that extend across national borders and aims to mobilise the power of a working class that is truly international. If it is to achieve any degree of success in the coming months it will need to show that its principled internationalism does translate as a practical programme of action for new cohorts of working people as they enter into struggles to defend jobs and wages and the gains of the welfare state. **C**

SYRIA

Corbyn's Labour needs to get real on Syria

Can Paz dissects the Syrian conflict while making a robust call for Corbyn's Labour to change a skewed view of the war

Following a successful year for the Assad regime which has seen it recapture a number of areas from a poorly equipped and increasingly demoralised armed opposition, Syrian rebels have been pushed back to the country's north-western province of Idlib. The province is now home to some 1.5 million IDPs from across the country, doubling its pre-war population. Fears of a regime effort to recapture the governorate in September fortunately did not materialise, with predictions that a major offensive could generate the worst humanitarian crisis of the 21st century, and the UN predicting an exodus of up to 800,000 people.

While a Turkey-Russia deal ostensibly prevented an offensive and established a demilitarised zone within the borders of the province, the conflict's previous experiences with demilitarised zones suggest that this arrangement may well be a temporary one. Indeed, each of the other three de-escalation zones agreed on in Astana in 2017 have now been seized by the regime. In effect, the new de-escalation agreement in Idlib sits on top of the previous one the regime was recently preparing to violate. On Saturday the regime shelled areas within this newly agreed area.

Donor disengagement is an additional pressing issue. With the Turkey-Syria border having now been tightly barricaded with financial assistance from the EU, international donors previously incentivised to support stabilisation efforts in order to curb refugee flows are now pulling out. The subsequent drying up of funds has already led to the termination of large numbers of crucial development programmes.

Meanwhile, the international community is moving to re-accommodate the Assad regime. This is the same regime which responded to peaceful demonstrations in 2011 by sending the military to the streets to kill demon-



Syrian men rescue babies after air strike in Aleppo Credit: Ameer Alhalbi - World Press Photo

strators, by 'disappearing' pro-democracy activists, and by torturing and mutilating the genitals of children. This is the same regime which, despite its history of supporting transnational terror organisations, attempted to present itself to the international community as a lesser evil in a two-way choice between itself and a jihadist nightmare – and then committed itself to seeing that choice materialised.

At the same time it was killing and locking up pro-democracy activists in the early months of the uprising, the regime released scores of Al-Qaeda-affiliated fighters it had previously supported in the expectation that they would act in a way which would substantiate the pre-arranged narrative. This cynical public relations strategy informed its subsequent war effort also, with the regime and its backers first and foremost targeting moderate opposition groups more palatable to the international community, and showing a blind eye to jihadist organisations whose growth was seen to benefit the regime's international image.

A cautious Obama Administration had defined US strategy in Syria through a framing that only considered counterterrorism. Keen to avoid a collapse of Syrian state institutions which could generate a haven for transnational jihadism, Obama

rejected the view of others in his Administration that controlled support for armed opposition groups would generate incentives for the regime to make concessions and achieve a political settlement. Seeing any such support as too risky, the policy chosen was twofold: (1) to influence the pre-existing arms pipeline that had been established by regional states so as to steer supplies away from groups considered hardline by US planners, and also to limit the quantity and quality of arms provided to the 'sanctioned' opposition; and (2) to locate local forces which could be relied on to solely fight jihadist groups. Ironically, this policy contributed to the very dynamics it sought to avoid. This effective intervention by the US to limit the support provided to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) led directly to the relative growth of radical groups within the opposition whose sources of sponsorship could not be so easily controlled.

In essence, the US policy was one which inadvertently supported the regime in Damascus by undermining the military capacity of the FSA. The resulting balance of power in the conflict led the regime and its backers to become increasingly intransigent in the various peace talks, and this is the context in which the failure of the peace process should be understood.

Yet this is not the image of the conflict one would take from the comments of leading figures within the UK Labour Party, nor within a wide portion of the political Left, both in the West and in the Middle East and elsewhere.

This connects to a wider problem many leftists nowadays tend to have with their understanding of global politics. Unlike their views on domestic political issues which are typically formulated in an honest and lucid manner, and which represent a serious intellectual attempt at producing a nuanced analysis of a given situation, dominant leftist approaches toward world affairs rest on a lazy, fixed logic. This logic is both disinterested in the specifics of the case being examined, and is disconnected from the Left's traditional commitment to internationalism. In sum, it is one which is both analytically and morally bankrupt, and which does its tradition a deep disservice.

The structure of this logic rests on a number of interrelated assumptions: (1) that Western imperialism is the primary 'problem' in international relations; (2) that it has an insatiable appetite for regime change; (3) that non-

Corbyn refused to condemn the regime for a large chlorine attack

Western agency is largely irrelevant; and (4) that only human rights abuses that can be linked to the West are worthy of criticism. Indeed, criticism of other states, particularly those with shaky relations with the West, is dangerous as it risks reproducing an imperialist pro-regime change discourse.

It is because of these assumptions that so many prominent leftist voices associated with the advocacy of social justice and human rights have been able to reproduce the dishonest, dehumanising and counterrevolutionary narrative of the Assad regime. In this view, the West is committed to regime change in Syria, and its reckless sponsorship of armed opposition groups has led to the proliferation of jihadist groups and the rise of ISIS.

In this view, criticism of Russian war crimes in Syria by policymakers in the US and Europe constitutes the important act of aggression, a deplorable action which risks dangerous

escalation. In this view, condemnation of actually-used chemical weapons against civilians is often likened to the claims of chemical weapons possession in Iraq prior to the 2003 intervention. The list goes on. This is the sick ideological quackery which explains how self-styled human rights advocates dismiss volunteers who risk their lives saving civilians from the rubble of air-strikes as a 'propaganda construct'; suggest that Syrians gassed themselves as a pretext for American regime change; reproduce conspiracy theories that portray the Syrian conflict as an effort by the US to institute a gas pipeline; and write that the dictator who plunged his country into war is in fact a legitimate and democratically elected President.

While not reaching such depths, Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party seems to exhibit a similar view of foreign affairs. While Corbyn was chairman of the Stop the War Coalition, the organisation invited Mother Agnes, a notorious regime apologist who claims that the uprising is a 'conspiracy' and videos of sarin gas victims are fabricated, to speak at its annual 'peace conference'. As shadow leader earlier this year, Corbyn refused to condemn the regime for a large chlorine gas attack in the city of Douma that killed seventy people and injured over five hundred. His recommendation of exercising caution, and not assigning blame prior to a conclusive investigation may seem reasonable on the surface. It is not. Given that the regime has already been found responsible for numerous chemical weapons attacks against civilians, the source of attacks launched from the air into opposition-held areas is obvious. Suggestions to the contrary are an affront to the victims, and efforts at postponing criticism of the regime until well after it has benefited militarily from the attacks enables it to continue using chemical weapons with impunity.

In September, among fears of a major regime offensive in Idlib, Labour's shadow foreign secretary, Emily Thornberry, was preparing this argument even before the next batch of chemical weapons were used. Addressing Parliament, and with no sense of irony, she emphasised the need to postpone criticism of the regime in the event of an additional chemical attack – to confirm its responsibility for actions which, by virtue of her very statement, she anticipated were likely to hap-



Thornberry dismisses evidence 'on the ground'

pen.

In the same speech she went on to dismiss open-source information – compiled by local journalists, human rights activists and humanitarian organisations, and which has been crucial to documenting war crimes by the regime – as unreliable, suggesting that it was typically produced by 'terrorist groups'.

Prior to becoming Labour's strategy and communications director, Seamus Milne wrote in 2013 that the regime may not be responsible for its most notorious chemical attack in Eastern Ghouta which killed over a thousand people. Amid suggestions that Assad had no 'rational motivation' for the attack and that rebels may have gassed themselves, Milne claimed that 'even if it turns out that regime forces are responsible', outrage would amount to 'moral grandstanding by governments that have dumped depleted uranium, white phosphorus and Agent Orange around the region and beyond.' Since becoming Corbyn's communications chief, he has rallied against what he sees as the unfair 'demonisation' of Russia, and his deputy, Steve Howell, has repeated Assad's line verbatim, stating that, for Britain and the US, 'the choice in Syria is Jihadists or secular Assad supporters'. There are many more such examples.

The Labour Party must change its skewed understanding of foreign affairs. Rather than standing up for the marginalised and providing a voice to those in need, Corbyn's Labour is obfuscating the responsibility of their killers. This self-styled anti-imperialist identity politics is anything but: it denies non-Western actors agency and sees sovereignty as belonging to states rather than peoples. Fundamentally, this thinking within the party leadership goes beyond an abandonment of the party's legacy of internationalism – it is actively serving to defend the perpetrators of crimes against humanity. **C**

Can Paz is a member of the Syria Solidarity Campaign. He is currently based in Gaziantep, Turkey, where he works for an organisation running development projects in northern Syria.

ANTI-POLITICS

Is the Left opposed to Politics?

Ian Bullock looks back on earlier socialists' idealised view of the end of politics and that view today

People sometimes stare at me in total disbelief, wondering whether I've finally succumbed to madness in old age, when I say that, since the very beginning of the socialist movement one of its deepest flaws has been its frequent lapse into an anti-political stance. Who, they ask, could be more 'political' than the earnest left-wing activist – past or present? So how on earth have I arrived at such a view?

Consider, first the beginning of the chorus of the former Communist Eugène Pottier's *L'Internationale* of 1871 – 'C'est la lutte finale – It's the final struggle.' Is there ever going to be a final struggle? The notion lurking here seems to be that 'come the Revolution' all conflicts, all problems, will miraculously be resolved. The early English version is no better – 'the last fight let us face.' The Billy Bragg version from 1989 is in this respect a great improvement – 'For the struggle carries on.'

Fast forward two decades to the early 1890s and William Morris's *News From Nowhere*. It's not that, famously, the Houses of Parliament has in the imaginary future been turned into a manure store. It's perfectly possible to envisage an alternative – indeed a more democratic – system than that represented by the Palace of Westminster. But Chapter 13, 'Concerning Politics,' is by far the shortest one in the book. The time traveller asks his guide 'old Hammond' how they 'manage with politics?' in this utopia. Hammond responds that 'we are very well off as to politics – because we have none.'

Hostility to politics, given how dodgy it often is, is not at all difficult to understand. Many would prefer to flee to the hills rather than get too involved in it. People tend to agree that 'politics is a necessary evil' and leave it at that. OK as far as it goes. But we should stress the 'necessary' part much more and to constantly bear in mind that the only known alternative to politics is violence in some form – suppression of dissent, insurrection or civil war. Is that an exaggeration? Hardly. And they all rarely if ever end

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William Morris's *News from nowhere: A Utopia sans Politics?*

happily.

Consider where what I've called the anti-political stance can lead. Before the 1930s no one would have thought of those Fabian intellectuals, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, as hostile to politics. Yet Kevin Morgan, in the second part of his *Bolshevism and the British Left* trilogy which deals with the Webbs' attitudes towards the USSR surely got it right when he characterised their Soviet Communism. A New Civilisation as demonstrating an 'aversion to politics'. Pat Sloan quoted them approvingly in his 1937 book *Soviet Democracy*. It now seems incredible that at that time he – or anyone – could write, or Victor Gollancz publish in the Left Book Club format, a book with that title given what was going on in the USSR at the time. Could Sloan have seriously believed that some form of democracy was flourishing under Stalin's brutal dictatorship? I suspect he did.

Sloan denied that one should 'treat democracy and dictatorship as two mutually exclusive terms.' In the Soviet Union 'the democracy was enjoyed by the vast majority of the population, and the dictatorship was over a small minority.' Protected by Stalin's dictatorship Sloan saw an essentially

apolitical 'real democracy' flourishing in the soviets, and all social institutions from schools to trade unions. He wasn't the first to argue for this unlikely co-existence of democracy and dictatorship. I traced it, (if I may be allowed a plug) – in *Romancing the Revolution* to articles by Morgan Phillips-Price, the Manchester Guardian journalist, and in Sylvia Pankhurst's paper, *The Workers' Dreadnought* in 1919. The 'two great social institutions' of revolutionary Russia were, he told readers, 'the political soviet and the economic soviet'. The role of the former was to protect 'the new social order' – just like Sloan's 'dictatorship' – and under its protection the non-political economic soviet would 'build up' and eventually be left in sole charge. To be fair to Phillips-Price the evolution towards a totalitarian state was a lot less evident in 1919 than when Sloan gave much the same account.

So, we can see where 'anti-politics' can lead. But what of now? Minor stuff in comparison, no doubt. But it's worth us all thinking hard about the implications of committing to – democratic – politics and the continuing influence of a persistent flaw in left-wing thinking. **C**

Ian Bullock is a member of Brighton Labour Party. His most recent books are *Romancing the Revolution-The Myth of Soviet Democracy and Under Siege a history of the inter-war Independent Labour Party*

Calais Children abandoned

Thousands have drowned in the Mediterranean, died trying to get onto lorries or as victims of traffickers since the Jungle was demolished in 2016. **Wendy Pettifer** reports on the fate of children

The hardship and homelessness of unaccompanied children coming to Europe, and particularly the region around Calais (to try to get to the UK) did not disappear when the Jungle was destroyed in October 2016. On the contrary, it rendered children even more vulnerable as hundreds now sleep in about 10 informal camps in the pas de Calais area. They have no protection against the harsh Calais winds sweeping down from the North Sea.

Since 2016, 293 children at least have been trafficked illegally into the UK and are now forced into bonded labour and/or child prostitution. Only 103 have been located. The children are too scared to say anything due to threats from the traffickers both to themselves and their families back home.

Numbers of Dubs children accepted.

The UK's hostile environment ensures that the numbers of children able to access the UK through DUBS and Dublin 111 is pitifully low. In 2016 the Government promised to fill 480 Dubs places with children from Calais but until now only 220 have been transferred. This number includes a very small number of children from Greece and Italy and some children entitled to join family members under Dublin 111.

The recent court cases

When the Jungle closed over 1000 children were dispersed in accommodation centres around France, called CAOMIES where they were allowed to stay until March 2017, although many ran away from these isolated places. An expedited process Operation Purnia was put in place between the French and UK authorities between October 2016 and March 2017 whereby all the children were 'interviewed' by the Home Office in France to assess whether they were eligible to join close family members in the UK in accordance with Dublin 111. 500 of these children were given one line refusal letters. They



Lord Alf Dubs and Safe Passage launch campaign to get councils to commit to supporting refugee children

were denied the chance to make fully evidenced applications.

The UK ignored French warnings that many of the children would go missing, which is exactly what happened. Now they are destitute around Calais, in Paris and in Brussels even though many are legally entitled to join family in the UK. They no longer have mobile phones, have no access to interpreters or lawyers so cannot exercise their legal right to come to the UK.

The Court of Appeal rulings in September and October 2018 in cases brought by Safe Passage and Help Refugees held that Operation Purnia failed to meet standards of procedural fairness. The court also found that statistics on which the Government relied in terms of the reluctance of Social Services to accept children across the UK were fundamentally flawed. Children who are still in touch with their lawyers, or with NGOs now have a chance to come to the UK legally. But for the majority who cannot be found it is too late.

Dubs Campaign in support of Court Decision

To counter the Home Office argument that Social Services are unwilling to accommodate children, Lord Dubs and Safe Passage are running a campaign to persuade them to formally commit to supporting specific numbers of children over a period of 10 years.

Wendy Pettifer is a human rights lawyer

Hackney Council in October 2016 have agreed to take three per annum, and Islington Council 10. It is a small step in the right direction. Other councils should be pushed to make similar commitments.

Brexit and Dublin 111

Lord Dubs succeeded in obtaining an amendment to the EU Withdrawal Bill currently scheduled to become operational in March 2019. The Government initially excluded Dublin III from the Bill but the amendment now means that children will still be able to apply to join family members in the UK, although the definition of family has been tightened to only include parents and siblings.

It becomes ever more difficult to argue that the UK should provide a safe haven for non EU children facing exploitation and hunger in Europe when we face another savage round of austerity cuts to front line services, particularly the Social Services of local authorities. These cuts threaten the well being of all disadvantaged children here.

But to give up diminishes all our humanity. Every child should have a chance to thrive somewhere. The hostile environment fostered by the Government since 2010 against migrants is wrong and every small successful challenge is a beacon of hope for the thousands who face destitution in the UK, the EU and beyond. **C**

YOUTH VIEW

The Girl Effect

Alice Arkwright welcomes 'girls' education' celebrity endorsements but highlights flaws in the campaign

And for women and girls in developing countries, this is vital...Providing them with access to education is the key to economic and social development, because when girls are given the right tools to succeed, they can create incredible futures — not only for themselves but for all of those around them."

Since around 2010, girls' right to education has received unprecedented global attention. Not only has it become an increasingly visible area of international development, there has been a mainstreaming of the issue in wider public debate.

Many development organisations now have programmes specifically focused on the issue, for example Plan International's Because I am a Girl campaign. Governments have also stepped up their investment; Let Girls Learn was launched in 2015 by Barack and Michelle Obama. Since 2012, we have celebrated International Day of the Girl every October and multiple celebrities and companies, such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram have endorsed campaigns on girls' education. The quote above is from Meghan Markle at the end of 2018. She is the latest prominent figure to add their name to the issue.

The attention now given to girls' education has occurred alongside the rising popularity of feminism in Western countries — Sheryl Sandberg's 2013 *Lean In* is one of the only books focusing on women's rights to have reached international best seller lists, celebrities and politicians have proudly called themselves feminists wearing 'This is what a feminist looks like' t-shirts and multiple elements of pop culture now reference gender equality. Critiques of 'popular feminism' have been widely published in the wake of this.

The quote by Markle exemplifies some of the narratives that are being promoted around girls' access to education in the Global South. The first being that a girls' education will not only relieve her own poverty, but her family's, community's and nation's. These



ideas began to emerge in the 1990s as researchers, including Larry Summers, former World Bank Chief economist, produced work suggesting that girls' education was correlated with higher access to employment and lower mortality rates. Girls' education has also been framed as an essential input for national security in debates around the war on terror. Subsequently, slogans, such as 'invest in a girl and she'll do the rest' have been used.

Whilst an inspiring and potentially simple solution to the crisis of extreme poverty, this linear timeline of access to education to economic growth fails to connect with the realities of women's lives. Inequalities which prevent women from succeeding in the labour market are all but ignored; lack of safety in work environments, maternity policy and equal pay to name but a few. In the UK, where girls' access to education is near universal, over half of all women have experienced some kind of sexual harassment in the workplace.

This logic also considers all girls to be the same when we know other aspects of identity, such as race, class, mental health and how these intersect with each other will influence experiences of education and employment.

As well as failing to link to wider societal factors, the current discussions ignore the processes of education. School-related gender-based violence has become a key area of development intervention in the past ten years, but as the issue has mainstreamed,

discussions have focused on simply accessing education. This overlooks what occurs in the classroom and the ways in which school environments can act as a liberating environment, or can reinforce gender stereotypes and discrimination. All girls have a right to education, but for it to be transformative the content of education and how it connects with other inequalities need to be considered. In failing to acknowledge how societal barriers and power structures influence people's choices, the responsibility for educational achievement, empowerment and poverty alleviation falls on the individual. This shift of responsibility means governments and institutions are not held accountable for creating conditions that are harmful to women. Facebook supports campaigns for girls' empowerment, whilst doing little to challenge widely known sexism in Silicon Valley. Larry Summers published work promoting the benefits of girls' education, whilst supporting World Bank programmes which pushed for welfare reduction and cuts to state education expenditure in the Global South. ONE, an international development campaigning organisation, used the tag line 'a seat at the table starts with a seat in the classroom', whilst over 70% of its own Board of Directors are male.

Finally, focusing on the individual's path to success or failure means people are not required to unlearn attitudes that have contributed to gender inequality in systems, structures and society. **C**



Alice Arkwright
works for the
TUC

Crowd Trouble

Patrick Mulcahy
on Mike Leigh's
homage to
Peterloo 200
years on

Peterloo' is writer-director Mike Leigh's most ambitious film to date – and one of his least financially successful. With an advertising campaign that did not foreground any of the leading actors (Maxine Peake, Rory Kinnear) and a release strategy that pitted it against more commercial fare – 'Bohemian Rhapsody', its main competitor, continued to wow audiences in its second week of release – it was quickly removed from mainstream cinemas and replaced in art-houses by the movie version of 'Widows'. It remains though a brave and bold work, the product of a filmmaker with a distinctive way of working that informs what we see on the screen. It should enjoy a healthy afterlife on the streaming service Amazon Prime and, later, Film Four.

Its subject is the Peterloo Massacre of 16 August 1819, when an address by Parliamentary reformer Henry Hunt at Manchester's St Peter's Fields attended by sixty thousand people was deemed illegal whilst it was taking place and local yeomen and subsequently 600 Hussars (the light cavalry) moved in. In the ensuing chaos, between 10 and 20 people were killed – historians don't agree on an exact figure – and many hundreds were injured. The Massacre remains a national outrage, an example of government failing to listen to the demands of the people and acting with incompetent cruelty – one of the film's most forceful moments is a cut from crowds being trampled underfoot to the thundering hooves of horses crossing the finishing line as the military man that should have been in charge of his forces at St Peter's Fields attends a horse meeting with landed gentry.

The massacre led to the rise of the Chartist movement, formally founded two decades later with its six demands – votes for all men, equal electoral districts, abolition of the requirement of MPs to be landowners, payments for MPs, annual general elections and the secret ballot. At the time, only 2% of the country had the vote and poverty was rife. Men returning from the Napoleonic wars found it difficult to find work; food prices were increased owing to restrictions on imports



Leigh's film tells the story of the Peterloo massacre, which took place in 1819

and families struggled to make ends meet. Leigh restages the 'attack' on the Prince Regent's carriage after the state opening of Parliament in January 1817 that resulted (not explicitly set out in the film) in the suspension of habeas corpus – men could be arrested without proof of wrongdoing – as well as the prohibition of seditious meetings and suppression of the press.

The bulk of the film is told from the point of view of ordinary Lancastrians. Our initial viewpoint is a lone bugler whom we see on the battlefield of Waterloo ensuring that troops could act appropriately – some bugle calls signalled attack, others retreat. He returns after a long and lonely walk to Manchester and the family home (his mother is played by Peake). His difficulty in finding employment is summarised in a short but telling scene in which he approaches three craftsmen at work in the high street, his military uniform – the only clothes he possesses – seeming an anachronism. He attends a meeting of reformers, who then take centre stage travelling to London to hear and then talk to Henry Hunt (Kinnear) – they are successful in the former, but not the latter.

There is plenty of light humour as the reformers agree their strategy. Leigh shows us a printing press at work – one copy at a time – and how one newspaper curses a regional rival ('bloomin' rag'). Meanwhile, a spy is at work, sniffing out potential rebels

and getting them arrested. There is a brutal scene of a so-called agitator being dragged to a cell and then beaten.

Leigh also shows us government at work, principally small meetings rather than the Cabinet that we know today. Home Secretary Lord Sidmouth (Karl Johnson in the role of his life) is hopeful that the North can be policed appropriately.

The film gets into its stride when Hunt is smuggled into the locality and hides in lodgings. There he contends with having his portrait painted. Hunt is determined to be the only speaker and no platforms a local reformer, who is in effect embarrassed in front of his family.

In telling the story, Leigh doesn't invite contemporary parallels. Nevertheless, some exist. The poor aren't being listened to and Brexit, the so-called exercise of the popular will, has become the national distraction. Leigh's passion project could have been kept under wraps until 16 August 2019, the 200th anniversary of the massacre but film financing, demanding a return in a particular fiscal year, appears to have prevented this. Chartist arguments are rehearsed in the film (notably annual elections) but not framed in a way to remind us of aspirations not yet met. Though an accomplished work, 'Peterloo' is no rallying cry for the socially disenfranchised of today.

This may be its biggest aesthetic failure.

BOOK REVIEWS

Still the undeserving poor

Rory O'Kelly
on work
ethic
benefits

Bread for all – The origins of the Welfare State
Chris Renwick Allen Lane
£14.99

It is easy to regard the Beveridge Report of 1942 as the origin of current debates but it can equally be seen as the end of a long process of reconsideration of the principles of the Elizabethan Poor Law. This book gives the history of this process over its final century and a half. Though the title refers to the Welfare State generally it is mostly about Social Security, with limited references to public health, medical care, education and housing and some interesting observations on relations between central and local government.

The underlying theme is the replacement of moralism by empiricism. The majority and minority reports of the Poor Law Commission in 1909 illustrate the perennial struggle between those who see poverty as the result of individual moral weakness and those who see underlying economic forces. The fact that in expert opinion the latter are seen to have won the argument is due largely to the series of detailed studies in the later 19th Century showing who was poor and, equally importantly, when they were poor. If predictable proportions of working people were unable to support themselves at any given time and much higher proportions at some points in their lives (e.g. when they were too old or ill to work or had care of dependents) attributions of personal blame seemed not only unfair but irrational.

The result in the post-war world was the combination of Keynesian economics to address the threat of mass unemployment and Beveridge's social insurance system to help people cope with individual misfortune. Underpinned by large scale social housing, a National Health Service and a system of family allowances these did in fact deal with the main drivers of poverty and largely resolved problems which had seemed an integral part of all human societies.

The truly remarkable development since 1979 has been not the

political dominance of Conservatives pursuing an unabashed agenda of class warfare directed towards the revival of mass poverty but the general collapse of rational thinking which has made this possible. Public opinion has in effect regressed to a state which is not only pre-Beveridge but pre-Elizabethan.

The distinction between 'sturdy beggars' and the 'impotent poor' has been around for many centuries, together with the fear that members of the first group would try to insinuate themselves into the second. Until very recently however it was

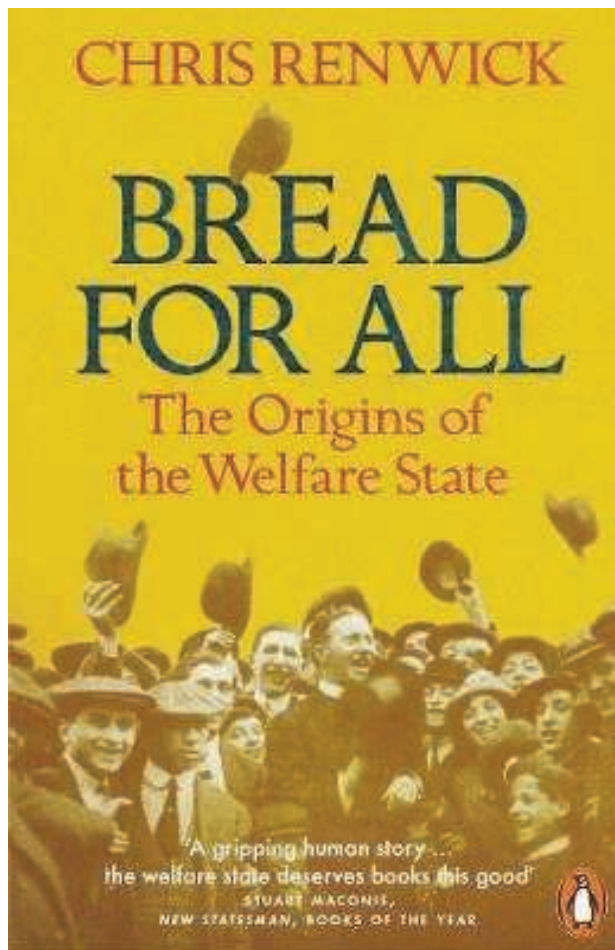
remembering that pensions were first introduced (in the Civil Service) not so much to relieve old age poverty as to make it possible for people to retire and be replaced when they were no longer functioning effectively. Similarly, the original idea behind Labour Exchanges was to match workers better to jobs, not, as now, to force absolutely everyone into some kind of employment (or 'self-employment') whether or not they are capable of it and whether or not there is something else they could do better.

The resulting doctrine of 'conditionality' of benefits involves the creation of a complex, elaborate and expensive bureaucratic system designed solely to make some of the poorest people in Britain even poorer. It also however removes any possibility of a rational employment policy by making employment an end in itself rather than a means to securing economic outcomes. It is ironic that many of the pundits who trumpet the benefits of conditionality are the same ones who moan endlessly about Britain's low productivity, without apparently ever considering that there might be some connection between the two things.

The culmination of this process is 'Universal Credit', a benefit inspired purely by the obsolete doctrine of 'less eligibility'; the removal of supposed financial incentives not to work. Interestingly Professor Gregg also has a claim to be the originator of the Universal Credit concept. Social Security policy is a field

in which idiocy has never exactly been rare, but he is perhaps in something of a class of his own.

A final thought suggests itself on the effectiveness of the British state. The conceptually absurd and administratively shambolic Universal Credit, was launched in 2011 but has still not quite struggled into life. The latest estimated delivery date is now 2023. Our predecessors 70 years ago did things better than we can. Perhaps we should consider the possibility that they may have seen things more clearly as well.



universally accepted that there were at least some people who actually were incapable of work. It was the Welfare Reform Act of 2007 which abolished incapacity for work by legislation, opting grandly for a 'vision of a welfare state where virtually everyone is either looking for work or preparing for work' in the words of Professor Paul Gregg, possibly the most important Government advisor you have never heard of.

The effect of this in reinforcing the link between illness and poverty is well known. Equally important are the economic effects. It is worth

Bolsheviks in Britain

**Duncan
Bowie**

on spies,
forgeries
and politics

Russia and the British Left
David Burke
I B Tauris £72

The Zinoviev Letter
Gill Bennett
Oxford University Press £25

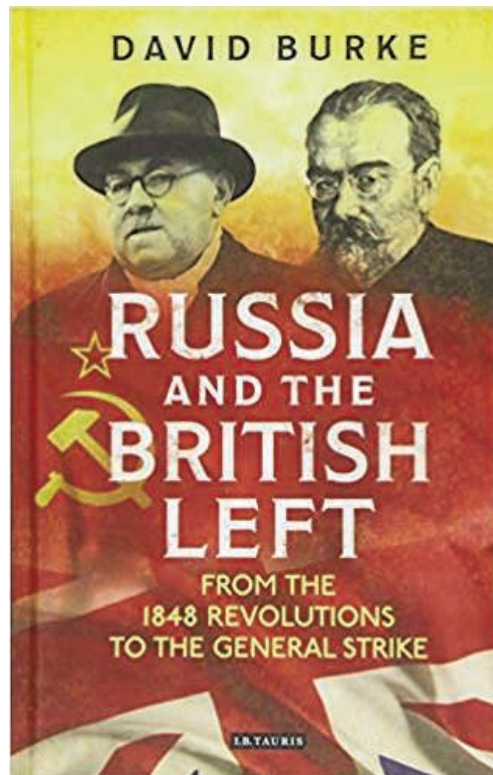
Burke is the leading expert on the role of Russian Bolshevik emigres within the British left. He has published two books on Russian agents in Britain including a study of the background to the Melita Norwood case. However, he has also published academic articles on early Russian emigres and this book is based on his unpublished PhD. The subtitle is a bit misleading as it refers to 'from the 1848 revolutions to the General Strike', while the focus is actually on 1905 to 1926 and on the role of two individuals, Theodore Rothstein and his son Andrew Rothstein, both of whom have been largely overlooked in previous studies.

The older Rothstein is perhaps best known for his historical study of the British labour movement; *From Chartism to Labourism*, published in 1929. Theodore (or Feodor) was born in Latvia in 1871, but emigrated to Leeds via Germany in 1891, moving to London in 1893 to work at the British Museum on a Marxist history of Rome, which was never published. He first collaborated with Robert Spence Watson and Sergei Stepniak in the *Friends of Russian Freedom* before becoming involved in the Social Democratic Federation (later the British Socialist Party) in East London and was a regular contributor to its journal *Justice*. He also worked with Wilfrid Blunt in the anti-imperialist movement and in 1910 published a scathing attack on British imperialism in *Egypt, Egypt's Ruin*.

As an internationalist he became a leading opponent of the Hyndman faction in the SDF/BSP, working with W P Coates, Zelda Kahan and Joe Fineberg. He then acted in an unofficial liaison capacity between the exiled Bolshevik leadership and the British radical and Marxist organisations, playing a central role in establishing the British Communist Party in the post-war period. One of the most fascinating elements of the narrative was that throughout the war, Rothstein played a dual role, actually working for the War Office as a translator

and propagandist while operating as a Bolshevik agent.

Burke tells the story of the battle within Whitehall and the various security services as to whether Rothstein should be deported or whether he was too useful to the war effort to deport. In 1920, Rothstein returned to Russia, carrying out a number of government functions, including acting as H G Wells interpreter before becoming Soviet ambassador in Persia, where his main function was to counter Britain's imperialistic ambitions. He was also a member of the Russian trade delegation to Britain, led by



Kamenev and Klishko, in 1922. He later carried out academic and research functions for the Soviet government, living until 1953.

Feodor's son, Andrew was a student in Oxford in 1916, before being called up to serve in the British army. Returning to his studies in 1920, Andrew became a leading figure in the nascent student communist movement, the 'hands off Russia' campaign, supporting the local bus strike, contributing to the BSP journal *the Call*. His postgraduate studies were terminated when the army withdrew its sponsorship at the insistence of Lord Curzon, who had the dual roles of University chancellor and foreign secretary. He was nevertheless allowed to visit his father in Russia, accompanied by two other communist students, Tom

Wintringham and Ralph Fox, both of whom like Rothstein were to be leading members of the Communist party. Wintringham later moving on the Common Wealth party during the Second World War.

Burke gives considerable detail, derived mainly from British security service archives, of the younger Rothstein's activities as a Soviet agent and his work with both official (the ARCOS trade mission) and unofficial Soviet representatives (the propaganda commission of the London branch of the Bolshevik party) in London. Rothstein stayed in the Communist party until its dissolution in 1991, serving decades on the executive committee as a leading supporter of the Soviet Union throughout the Stalinist period and writing a number of short books on British-Soviet relations and a pamphlet on Lenin's time in London, (which included staying with his own family when he was a teenager).

Gill Bennett was the chief historian at the Foreign Office who produced the report of the Zinoviev affair commission by Robin Cook when foreign secretary in 1999. The affair which relates to whether or not a letter from Gregory Zinoviev as Comintern president to the British Communist Party inciting subversion was genuine or forged has become one of the conspiracy myths of British political history, given the publication of the letter a few days before the November 1924 election contributed to the fall of the first Labour government.

Bennett's book, which has revisited the numerous previous studies of the affair and based on a scrupulous and exhausting analysis of British and Russian diplomatic and intelligence service archives, does not reach a clear conclusion, which as the author admits, is a little disappointing for conspiracy theorists. She recognises that whether or not forged the letter was believable in that it was similar to numerous genuine letters issued by the Comintern to communist parties in various countries. In fact elements within the Soviet leadership themselves thought it might be genuine.

The main argument against this is that given the Soviets were trying to finalise a trade agreement with the McDonald government, it wasn't

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31>>

BOOK REVIEWS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 32>>

in their interests at that time to be subversive. Moreover, there is no evidence that the British Communist party actually received this specific letter, which was apparently co-signed by Arthur Macmanus who was himself a member of the British Communist party executive as well as that of the Comintern.

Bennett's conclusion is that the letter was probably forged by the Polish anti-communist forger Ivan Pokrovsky and fed to the British through the SIS (secret service) agency in Riga in Latvia and that secret service officers (and retired officers) in London ensured that the letter was circulated to the Daily Mail and the Conservative Party at the time that was most damaging both to the Ramsay Macdonald government and to the Soviets.

Bennett's story is fascinating, not just the story of her search through the Russian archives in Moscow and meetings with Russian secret service agents and archivists, but also the review of the various anti-Bolshevik networks across Europe in the mid 1920's, the forging centres and their links to intelligence agencies of a number of countries including the UK, Germany, Poland and the Baltic states. What I had not been previously aware of is that in 1927 George Lansbury, through Eden and Cedar Paul (at the time Lansbury's Daily Herald was itself secretly funded by the Russian government) published a detailed study of Anti-Soviet forgeries, which includes copies of a number of forgeries in addition to providing a detailed analysis of the Zinoviev letter, and which reached conclusions not that far from that of Bennett's new study.



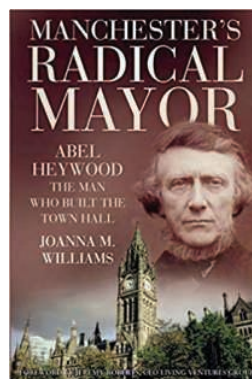
From Chartism to municipal politics

Duncan Bowie
on radical
municipalism

Manchester's Radical Mayor: Abel Heywood
Joanna Williams
History Press £14.99

In this anniversary year of the Kennington Common rally of 1848, which is often seen as the end of Chartism, it is important to note that many leading Chartists were to become active in radical politics at national and municipal levels. In this context, the biography of Heywood, who twice became Mayor of Manchester, is welcome. Heywood was an active Chartist who had been imprisoned in 1831 for selling the unstamped Poor Man's Guardian. As the leading radical bookseller and publisher in the north of England, he built up a series of local businesses while becoming active in local municipal politics. He was a member of the Police committee, a Poor Law Guardian, a magistrate and a member of the Manchester municipal corporation from 1843.

A moderate Chartist, who grew up in the jerry-built housing of Angel Meadow in Ancoats (an area studied by Engels and described in a new book by Dean Kirby as Victorian Britain's most savage slum), he built alliances between working class organisations and middle-class radicals, being active in Joseph Sturge's Complete Suffrage Union and the Financial and Administrative Reform Association.



The biography provides a day by day account of Manchester's municipal politics, dealing with paving and sewerage, working class housing, open spaces, leisure provision, controversies over commemorative statues for Prince Albert (the centrepiece of Albert Square) and Oliver Cromwell (moved from the city centre to Wythenshawe park) and the building of the new town hall.

Heywood was prominent in almost every national and international protest movement over a 50 year period. He was leader of a radical faction within Manchester liberalism, challenging the municipal establishment. He twice unsuccessfully stood for parliament in 1859 and 1865. Williams provides a detailed account of the divisions and rivalries within Manchester liberalism. This includes analysis of the role of Richard Cobden, John Bright and his brother Jacob Bright who was

a Manchester MP, collaboration with other former Chartists such as Edward Hooson and Ernest Jones, and in the later years, the leading role of Richard Pankhurst in the Manchester republican and radical Liberal movement.

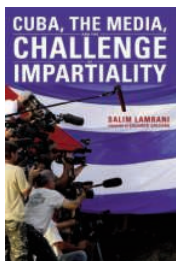
Both Ernest Jones and Richard Pankhurst were supporters of Heywood, with Jones unsuccessfully standing as radical Liberal parliamentary candidate in 1868, and Pankhurst later helping to establish the Manchester Independent Labour Party. The book, as with some other studies of municipal politics, can at times be a bit dry, with pages on meetings of paving committees and municipal events attended, but is well worth reading.

So congratulations to Joanna Williams on her extensive research and in getting the commercial sponsorship to get this biography into print. Given the shortage of modern biographies of leading provincial radicals, I would also draw attention to the biography of George Dixon, Birmingham radical mayor and founder of the National Education League and 'father of free education'. Written by James Dixon and published by Brewin Books in 2013, under the title 'Out of Birmingham', the book provides a useful narrative of Birmingham municipal politics in the era of Joseph Chamberlain as well as the story of the campaign for the 1870 Education Act.

A One-Party State?

Andy Roberts
on partiality

Cuba, The Media and the Challenge of Impartiality
Monthly Review Press \$16



This book, which is certainly not itself impartial, is based almost entirely on refutations of criticisms of Cuba made in one newspaper, the centre-left Spanish newspaper, *El Pais*, rather than 'the media' generally.

It may or may not be correct on some points, especially re social policy – I don't know enough to comment. But the give away is in the short (6 pages) chapter on "The Issue of Human Rights". Despite a comment that "Cuba is not beyond reproach. Amnesty International states that in Cuba 'the rights to freedom of expres-

sion, association and assembly remain limited and many critics of one-party rule have been harassed", there is otherwise no mention that Cuba is a one party state, in which there are no opposition political parties, independent civil society organisations or trade unions. Nor, of most relevance here, that there is no independent media at all, let alone independent publishers like the one (based in the US) which published this book. This is a crucial point since, whatever the failings of *El Pais*, in liberal democracies other sources of information are legally available.

Three pages of this chapter then list various human rights violations by EU member coun-

tries. As well as inviting the basic moral rejoinder that "two wrongs don't make a right", the point is that all of these are open to review through (admittedly imperfect) democratic processes, including the supra-national European Convention on Human Rights, which simply don't exist in Cuba.

Much of the rest of the book is devoted, improbably, to showing that all dissent in Cuba is the result of US and other 'foreign' funding, etc. Mmmmmmm

British eyes on the twilight of imperial influence

Dev Sultan
on divisions of empire

The Endgame: The Final Chapter in Britain's Great Game in Afghanistan
Susan Loughhead
Amberley publishing £9.99



This is an interesting study of the swift loss of imperial British power and influence in Afghanistan and the struggles of British diplomats to deal with that loss. Susan Loughhead focuses on the period from Indian independence in 1947, before which Britain all but controlled Afghanistan's foreign affairs, to 1950, by which stage British influence and credibility there had quickly crashed. This narrative is interspersed with recollections from the personal letters of Loughhead's grandfather who was a junior clerk at the British legation in Kabul during that time. Loughhead was herself posted to Kabul where she was based in the new embassy compound from 2010-13.

Using British diplomatic correspondence and papers, the book charts Afghanistan's fractious early relationship with Pakistan, and its attempt to use independence to reassert its claim over territories that now became part of the new country Pakistan. Drawn by Britain in 1893, the Durand line was a hated border dividing ethnic Pashtun and Baloch communities. But the cre-

ation of the new country rendered void agreements with Britain over the Durand line, Afghanistan claimed - and continues to claim.

This set the tone for a relationship with Pakistan that has overshadowed Afghanistan's regional relationships, domestic politics and security through the cold war and beyond. By 1950, Cold War dynamics in which Afghanistan was caught between, but also sought to benefit from, Soviet-US rivalry as well as Indian-Pakistani rivalry, were also beginning to take shape.

Meanwhile, British diplomats in Kabul battled in vain to secure attention and previously promised resources from London for Afghanistan, to sweeten the pill over the North West Frontier Province, and to counteract Soviet influence. Britain was overstretched and lacked the finances to invest in a country that was not considered a priority. The US eventually stepped in, initially with a loan to the Afghan government in 1949, and from the early 50s with more cultural economic and political presence and with technical assistance. Although the UK did eventually participate in aid to Afghanistan alongside the Americans, it would, of course, never recover its previous role.

The book contains more than a little imperial nostalgia and fascination with the lives of British colonial staff. The history, architecture, and occupants of the British diplomatic compound, commissioned by Lord Curzon in 1919 to be the finest embassy in Asia, have a central place in the narrative. Life in this compound was described in the 1920s as 'an endless country house weekend' and the tennis, horse riding, cocktail receptions, and white-tie dinners continued into the 40s. The author's grandfather at times enjoys, and at times avoids, the 'confounded parties.'

Loughhead acknowledges her sources inevitably tell 'the British side of the story' and the result is that Afghan voices in this story are largely silent, and Afghan actors are presented mostly through the eyes of British diplomats. Maybe this is why the book tends to present its British diplomatic protagonists more as 'neutral technocrats' than as political actors who were part of a colonial chapter that was hated by Afghans. It is a chapter that, in the form of the Durand line, has also left an apparently intractable legacy that continues to poison the stability of the region.

BOOK REVIEWS

When you look in the mirror.....

Don Flynn
on identity
politics

Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump

Asad Haider

Verso £10.99 (£5.50 before 1/1/19)

Identify the crisis can't you see" -Poly Styrene – X-Ray Specs

Ms Styrene's modest hit record (number 24 in the UK charts, July 1978) set out a viewpoint that was more correct than it could ever have been known. Lurking behind all the more obvious crises of the final decades of the 20th century – politics, economics, performances of national sports teams, etc – has been a crisis of identity that was waiting for the dawning of a new millennium to really make its impact.

The 1970s young adult generation struggled with identities that straddled the communitarian class consciousness of the post-war decades, with its emphasis on the solidarities of universal welfare and unionised workplaces, and the radical individualism that had begun to emerge in the 1960s. Everything was up for, perhaps not quite demolition, but certainly a rigorous round of deconstruction. This was a cultural ferment that nurtured any number of projects which preoccupied radicals across the spectrum of right and left. For the left the issue has been whether there were energies amongst the turmoil that would express new solidarities between oppressed and exploited groups. For the right the hope has been for the rebirth of the nation as a collectivity that would put class in its place and re-define the nature of the relationship between the ruled and their rulers.

Haider's brief book considers the emergence of identity politics in the context of the US and its social and cultural life since the late-1970s. The work of the socialist feminist Combahee River Collective is the starting point for his reflection. It provided some of the earliest examples of the use of the term 'identity politics', proclaiming in its often quoted 'state-

ment' of 1977 that "the most profound and potentially the most radical comes directly out of our own identity, as opposed to ending someone else's oppression."

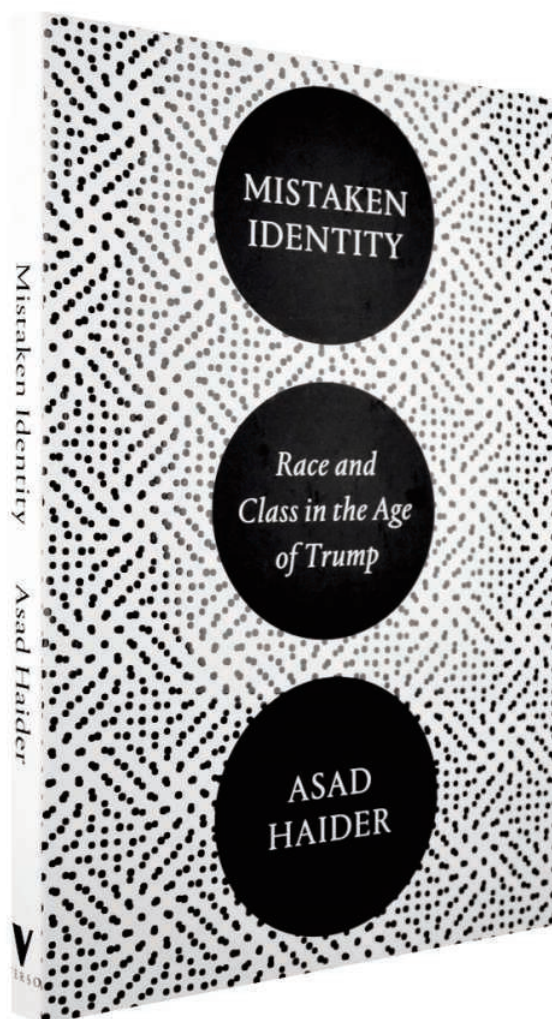
Some have seen in this the splintering of the left into a thousand different projects which have issues around ethnicity, gender oppression, and sexual orientation, and with all having very little capacity to generate an

justice that reinscribes a bourgeois (masculinist) ideal as its measure." The very structure of politicised identity involves a demand for "restitution and inclusion" rather than a social transformation that would negate injury and exclusion.

What does this mean in concrete terms? Haider offers up the example of the ideologies of race which have been integral to the colonial projects instigated by British, French, Dutch, Spanish and Japanese ruling elites. Whilst race is critical to these histories there is nothing to be gained by reducing the subjection of the peoples of Africa, India and Korea solely to the atrocities inflicted on the subordinated ethnic groups. More pithily, the essence of transatlantic slavery was its function in generating profit; not the misery and pain it inflicted on people of colour.

Haider's challenge to identity politics concerns its role in obscuring the role which capitalism now plays in reproducing the categories of race and gender and projecting these as a means to maintain the subordinate position of class. It is a strong argument that is consistent with the warnings fired off by a trio of socialist feminists in the UK in the 1970s who saw the dangers of radical currents agitating as separate fragments with limited capacity for generating a more powerful solidarity among all people who

were compelled to struggle with the harsh realities of an over-arching, all permeating capitalism. *Beyond the Fragments* became a key text for 1970s socialism in the UK, just as the Combahee River Collective offered up their take on the challenges for the left in the US during the same period. Haider has provided a stimulating text that reminds us that whilst identity might be a component in the crisis of contemporary society, it ought not to define our response to it.



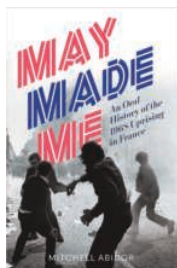
over-arching concern for solidarity across all the fragments. Haider is keen to rescue the CRC from this judgment and points to the Collective's political practice in turning up on union picket lines to support struggles over wages and conditions as evidence.

Nevertheless, he is prompted to assert that the 'Holy Trinity' of race, gender and class figure as "entirely different" social relations. Quoting the political theorist Wendy Brown, he argues that when these categories of identity are "tethered to a formulation of

Speaking for themselves

Andrew Coates
on 1968

May Made Me. An Oral History of the 1968 Uprising in France
Mitchell Abidor
Pluto Press £12.99



If the events in France were not a 'revolution', strikes ground France to a halt. Hundreds of thousands demonstrated, students and workers discussed politics in general assemblies, and action committees were set up across the hexagon. Capitalism was not overthrown, or seriously challenged. President De Gaulle left the political scene but the conservative liberal Georges Pompidou was elected President in 1969. Yet French life was "freed up" and "sexual and social constraints" were removed.

Mitchell Abidor has had the good idea of conducting interviews from participants in May 68 in France, from across the left spectrum. Well-known figures such as Alain Krivine, currently in the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) who recalls a 'revolt' not a revolution, stand

alongside activists outside of Paris. Daniel Pinos, from a working class Spanish anarchist background was studying at a technical secondary school near Lyon. He had close ties with the workers at his brother and father's factories. Pinos had direct experience of those with no intention of overthrowing De Gaulle, the Communist led CGT union federation.

Amongst the many strengths of May Made Me is that Abidor lets people speak for themselves. Many agree with his view that the Communist Party had a "baleful influence", thwarting a radical challenge to the power of de Gaulle. By contrast, Dominique Barbe points to the huge anti-May Champs-Élysées demonstration on the 30th May followed by the crushing of the left in elections. If demands for freedom of expression were a motor for the protests (France's media was ruled with a heavy hand) Bernard Vauselle points to CGT priorities in tackling "bread and butter issues".

There are equally mixed judgements about the long-term effects of the revolt. A contrast could be made with optimistic, sometimes strident, declarations made by the protesters. Amongst the latter, the 'Marxist-Leninists', or Maoists, Pierre Mercier, believes the uprising was "recuperated by capital". Perhaps endorsing Le Goff's cultural argument, the filmmaker Michel Andrieu more positively calls it an "absolute reference".

Abidor knows his subject inside out. With the exception of Jean-Jacques Libel the conversations took place in French and are translated into fluent American. Given the variety of the interviewees' political backgrounds, ranging from the predecessor of Lutte Ouvrière, Situationist and Socialisme ou Barbarie sympathisers, to an editor of the anarchist le Monde Libératoire, an explanatory glossary would have been useful. Those who have read one of the many histories of May 68 that have appeared this year are strongly recommended to get hold of a copy of May Made Me.

A coherent body of thought?

Andy Roberts
on Corbyn
and ideology

Corbynism. A Critical Approach
Matt Bolton and Frederick Harry Pitts
Emerald £14.99

This is a fascinating, and I think courageous, book, in which two activist academics, who voted for Corbyn in 2015, put their heads above the parapet, and develop some potentially devastating criticisms, generally from a left democratic and libertarian perspective, of what they call Corbynism. At times it seems to be going through a speeded-up version of thought-processes which the left has been through before.

I am not at all sure if there is yet a sufficiently coherent body of thought to merit this term Corbynism – though one of the merits of this book is to mention many of the bodies of thought, some quite exotic, which have attached themselves to Corbyn. Much of this happens on-line – there are whole cultures there – of which few are aware. Some of them may even turn out to be far-seeing.

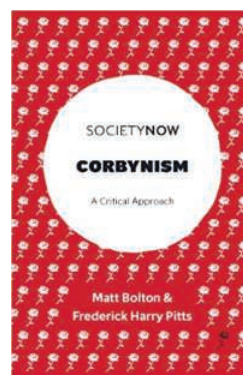
The authors themselves have a pretty specific theoretical frame-

work, which I struggled to fully grasp, derived from the Frankfurt School, and especially Adorno. The basic point they are making is that we are all part of an international system, based on markets (albeit socially-mediated ones). Within this the 'law of value' (i.e. competition) limits the room for manoeuvre of any individual country or other entity. (An interesting parallel here is with the theory of 'state capitalism' developed by former SWP guru Tony Cliff, although the authors reach very different political conclusions).

However, it is possible to reach similar conclusions without subscribing to this body of theory. Areas covered – among many others – include Corbyn's own vague definition of 'socialism' – allowing all kinds of people to project their own vision onto it; the personality cult surrounding Corbyn and his supposed purity; what the authors call 'two-campism', i.e. in foreign affairs seeing 'imperialism' (especially the US version) as responsible for everything bad in the world, and thus leading to dubious sym-

thies on the basis of a "my enemy's enemy is my friend" logic; economic nationalism – deriving from 'Bennism' and the Alternative Economic Strategy (AES) of the 1970s and 80s, leading to 'lexit' sympathies; the tendency to conspiracy theories; tendencies to convergence between left and right wing versions of populism.

In terms of political conclusions the authors recommend a reformist but radical approach based on the realistic and pessimist 'minimum utopia' recommended by the late, great Norman Geras.



WESTMINSTER VIEW



The people deserve a say on deal or stay

Brexit will stoke racism, especially against BAME EU migrants says **Rupa Huq**

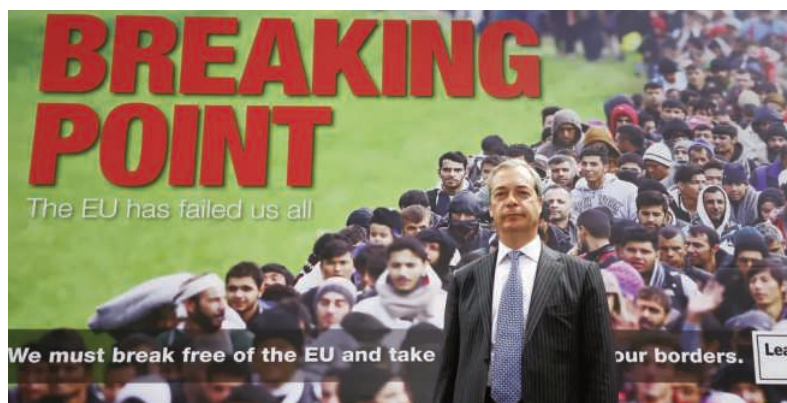
Rupa Huq is MP for Ealing Central & Acton

The news in early December that Sajid Javid sympathised with the Syrian refugee teenage victim of racist bullying that went viral via sickening video footage as he'd been there too as an Asian kid subjected to racism, won the Home Secretary plaudits. As someone whose been called paki in my time myself it was a welcome admission and punctured the government spin that all is rosy in near post-Brexit Britain which threatens to take us back to the 70s in more ways than one.

Less welcome was his announcement that he would not be publishing his immigration white paper before the meaningful vote on the Brexit withdrawal agreement. Described as "shocking and unacceptable" by MPs across the political spectrum, Javid's announcement illuminates the Cabinet divisions on this issue: Chancellor Philip Hammond and Business Secretary Greg Clark oppose Theresa May's proposals to clamp down on low-skilled migration from anywhere.

The draft Brexit withdrawal agreement states that freedom of movement will end, and will be replaced by a skills-based immigration system. On top of this, Britons living in EU countries, and EU nationals living in the UK (for five years) will be able to stay in their respective countries of residence, but will need to apply formally to remain in those countries. This additional layer of bureaucracy - and its potential to cause mayhem due to procedural incompetence - adds to what is already a hostile environment for immigrants.

The European Parliament's Brexit lead has already expressed concern



UKIP posters stoked anti ethnic-minority feelings in their Brexit campaign

about how EU residents would fare if the Windrush scandal was anything to go by.

Of course, more general freedom of movement concerns affect ethnic minorities too. For example, having spoken to ethnic minority leaders, People's Vote found opportunities for their children and grandchildren's future was a real worry. If Brexit goes ahead without freedom of movement guarantees, these opportunities will inevitably shrink, with many EU jobs potentially off-limits to UK workers.

Immigration issues will hit BAME EU migrants the hardest, since they look visibly different, and may be more likely to be asked for ID to access employment, housing and healthcare. The Roma community are particularly vulnerable to this, since they tend not to feature on electoral registers or have identity documents, and are more likely to be stateless.

Further, it is no secret that the Brexit referendum unleashed a wave of xenophobia: hate crimes spiked by almost a third in the year after the referendum, according to Home Office statistics. The victims were not just EU citizens, but also people of Asian, African and Caribbean heritage.

40 years on from first being called Paki I'm now an MP representing my home seat that's rich in demographically diversity. I know that even constituents who voted "out" with loyalties to the

commonwealth and in frustration at immigration policy that seemed to keep out their own relatives are now horrified at jobs and investment already leaving our shores and the plummeting pound. Almost invariably they are asking "can't we call the whole thing off?" and imploring "now we know all-we-know, voters deserve a final say not just MPs".

If ethnic minorities in the UK want to resolve these issues, their best option is to loudly demand a People's Vote on Brexit. Please write to your MP at www.not-buyingit.uk, asking them to support a People's Vote on the Brexit deal and copy Theresa May in too. After all she's fond of talking about "what the British people want." All our voices should count. Let's put her right once and for all. **C**



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