

# CHARTIST

**For democratic socialism**

**#304 May/June 2020**

**£2**

## COVID-19 charge sheet

**Peter Kenyon**

**Don Flynn**

**CHALLENGE FOR STARMER**

**Prem Sikka**

**Bryn Jones**

**ECONOMIC FALL-OUT**

**Sheila Rowbotham**

**MODERN FEMINISM**

**Julie Ward**

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**BREXIT TRANSITION**

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# CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

## Editorial Policy

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

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

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

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the EB

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### CHARTIST #305

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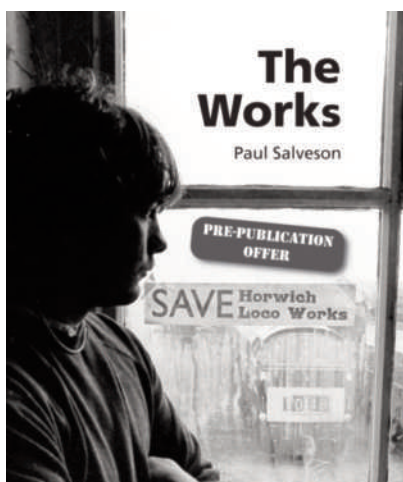
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**Chartist has relaunched its website. We plan daily blog postings, updates on Covid-19, debate pieces and articles from the print magazine to read and share. [www.chartist.org.uk](http://www.chartist.org.uk)**



**Paul Salveson's new novel 'The Works' is now available at a special price of £10 (plus £2.50) postage to Chartist readers. It is set in the former Horwich Loco Works, which closed in 1983. The novel is about shopfloor life, love and politics, including conflicts within Labour in a Northern town facing major structural change. Details email Paul [paul.salveson@myphone.coop](mailto:paul.salveson@myphone.coop) or go to [www.lancashireloominary.co.uk](http://www.lancashireloominary.co.uk)**



Can Starmer rise to challenge? - Page 8



Fifty years of modern feminism - Page 16



#Me Too victory lessons - Page 24

## FEATURES

8

### STARMER & LEADERSHIP

Peter Kenyon on the challenges facing Labour in a time of Covid-19

10

### CORPORATIST CAPITALISM

Are we in for a sustained new period of capitalist rule asks Bryn Jones

11

### RIGHT TO STAY

Alena Ivanova says EU citizens need more than settled status

12

### LABOUR'S NEW SHADOW

Don Flynn considers whether Corbyn's legacy will be sustained

13

### TURKEY STIRS CAULDRON

Mary Southcott investigates Erdogan's role in migrant crisis & Syria war

14

### NOT ALL IN IT TOGETHER

Prem Sikka dispels some myths about who will pay for the Covid-19 crisis

16

### FIFTY YEARS OF NEW WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Sheila Rowbotham on the birth and legacy of modern feminism

18

### EXTEND EU TRANSITION

Julie Ward says anything less than two years would be reckless

19

### ECONOMIC SUICIDE

Paul Teasdale argues that an historic depression beckons outside single market

20

### STOP SOME WARS

David Lister finds a campaign silence on Assad/Putin bloody war in Syria

21

### GERMAN SUCCESSION & FAR RIGHT

Glyn Ford looks behind the resignation of Merkel's successor

22

### UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

Alex Sobel MP puts the case for an income safety net

23

### GRENELL & LEASEHOLDERS

Dermot McKibbin highlights the fire safety plight for many in tower blocks

24

### #METOO VICTORY

Alice Arkwright on the lessons of Weinstein's conviction



Cover by Martin Rowson

## CHARTIST

FOR DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

Number 304

May/June 2020

## REGULARS

4

### OUR HISTORY 90

Beyond the Fragments

5

### EDITORIAL

Covid-19 charge sheet against Tories

6

### POINTS & CROSSINGS

Paul Salvesson on limits of Labour's rail plan

7

### GREENWATCH

Dave Tuke on implications of oil price slump

25

### FILM REVIEW

Patrick Mulcahy on film in a time of Covid-19

26

### BOOK REVIEWS

Mike Davis on Keir Hardie; Andrew Coates on Socialist Register; Patricia D'Ardenne on 60s LA and Mantel's Mirror; Nigel Doggett on Maisky; Tom Zagoria on squatting; Don Flynn on Grace Blakeney; Mary Southcott on Gender equality; Robbie Scott on intersectionalism

32

### WESTMINSTER VIEW

Helen Hayes on lessons from the Windrush scandal

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May/June 2020 **CHARTIST 3**



## OUR HISTORY

# OUR HISTORY - 90

## Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright Beyond the Fragments (1979)

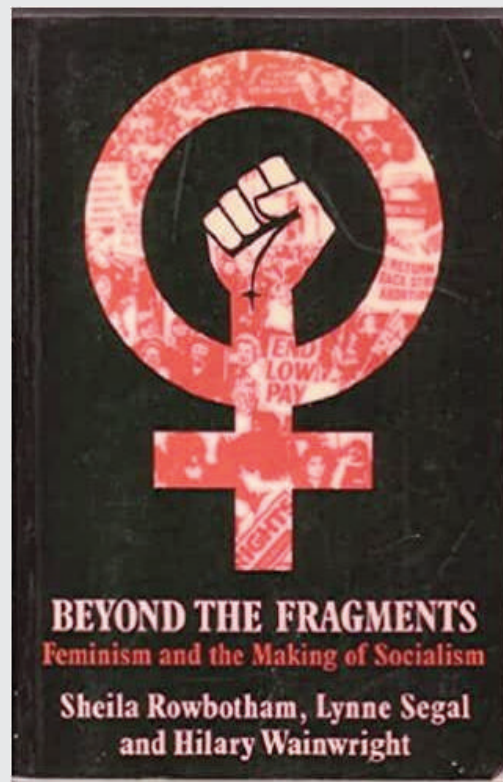
Subtitled 'Feminism and the Making of Socialism' this collective set of essays was a sustained argument for applying the lessons of the experience of the women's movement to the more traditional approach of the male dominated British labour movement and political organisations. Originating in a pamphlet published by the Tyneside Socialist Centre and the Islington Community Press, an expanded version was published by Merlin Press. Adopting a pluralist libertarian socialist approach, the essays draw on a wide range of local experience both within the women's movement and within other issue-based community struggles as well as within the more sectarian revolutionary left. In her introduction, Wainwright pointed out that "our concern in writing this book is with the forms of organisation necessary to develop socialist consciousness out of this grass-roots industrial and social strength. The book was a collaborative product and although there were only three essayists, the pamphlet and the book drew on the experience of a wide range of feminists and libertarian socialists.

"The way alliances come about will vary with local conditions. Sometimes under the pressure of the onslaught from the Tories and the hopelessness of official campaigns, the local branches of the strongest left-wing organisations or left Constituency Labour party may set up an alliance in motion. It might break with the normal customs, and make its discussions the forum for socialists in other smaller organisations or unaligned.

"In other areas the experience of successfully working together over some nationally initiated campaign might lead people to establish ways of establishing that unity on a more permanent, wider political basis. Or there might already be some form of unity, a local socialist newspaper, a shared resource centre, a bookshop, socialist club or centre, which can be built on to create a more active political alliance. Whatever the process, the signs are that conditions for such alliances – ad hoc and loose though they may be – are especially favourable at a local level"

"Because of the endless postponement of decisive conflicts in the Labour Party; because of the poverty of political debate within most constituency and ward Labour Parties; because of the absence of a mass circulation socialist paper, the left in Britain has not been through a common process of debate on

strategy and programme – even of the kind which precedes major splits from socialist and communist parties on the Continent. As a result, there is lack of agreement or even discussion of strategy and programme between any strong groupings at a national level to determine nationally the framework for unity at a local level. At a local and regional level however, there are plenty of opportunities, first, for unity around the major political problems of the day; also around socialist projects like bookshops, socialist trade union information and research centres, resource centres, alternative newspapers. Their success, though, is vital to the creation of a popular socialist party."



## Printer ad

# Covid-19 charge sheet against Tories

**T**he world is turned upside down. Covid-19 is a pandemic unprecedented in over 100 years. Millions have been infected, deaths are in the hundreds of thousands. The lockdown experienced worldwide has created conditions for a global recession many economists predict will be worse than the 1930s Great Depression.

The UK government with its part-time prime minister was slow to respond. While Boris Johnson glad-handed downplaying the risk in February, the Cheltenham Festival and international football fixtures went ahead in March when the World Health Organisation had sent out warnings since January and many countries had stopped large social gatherings.

Having hastily dropped the 'herd immunity' strategy, fearing the weakened NHS could be overwhelmed, the government switched to delay and then suppression of the virus. As many frontline health and social care staff and Labour's new leader Keir Starmer have pointed out, PPE provision and testing, tracing and treatment has been slow if not too little too late. Opportunities to join an EU procurement scheme were boycotted for political reasons. Way back in 2016 when scientists warned of a pandemic within next five years the May government continued to run down stocks of protective material.

Besides the devastating human cost in lives, the cost in livelihoods has also been incalculable. **Bryn Jones** looks at the way the new chancellor Rishi Sunak has adopted Keynesian-style pump-priming to inject billions into the economy in the form of loans to businesses and belatedly the self-employed. He asks whether a new form of corporatist capitalism is in the making.

Millions are becoming jobless, millions are furloughed and many companies large and small will go bust. **Prem Sikka** underlines the economic consequences while reminding us we're not all in it together. The rich can use their wealth to cushion the crisis, some having the brass-neck to ask for a bailout like tax-dodging billionaire Richard Branson, while the poor and vulnerable, with little or no savings, must wait for at least five weeks for Universal Credit and survive on £95 weekly. Councils have been told to house the homeless but have been allocated insufficient funds for its provision.

Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities are proportionately taking the heaviest hit in terms of medical fatalities. **Peter Kenyon** considers whether Keir Starmer can meet the challenge of holding this hapless government to account. He draws a stark contrast between Britain and Germany where the government from the outset began a widespread testing, tracing and treatment regime. Germany's death toll is at least four times lower than UK. South Korea and New Zealand, coincidentally run by women, took similar routes.

What's needed is a people's bailout. Millions more should be pumped into supporting jobs and local councils to help with testing and tracing. Environmental health and public health departments, although reduced, have skilled staff. Support is also needed to ensure all homeless and women

victims of heightened levels of domestic abuse are given alternative safe accommodation.

**Alex Sobel** MP argues costs to the state are enormous, so better to provide a universal basic income for all and reclaim through progressive taxes. Many small businesses have failed because they cannot foresee a way of repaying the loans. The self-employed are in a similarly parlous situation while for gig economy workers it's even worse.

In the midst of this crisis Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner were elected as leader and deputy leader of the Labour Party. Starmer won in the first round with 56% of the vote against Rebecca Long Bailey and Lisa Nandy. Both now have posts in the shadow cabinet. **Don Flynn** analyses the challenge facing the new leader with a part-time PM and stand-ins. He sees the new team as having a Wilsonian balance with our task being to hold the leadership to the ten pledges and the best of the Corbyn manifestos.

**Julie Ward** puts a strong case for extending the Brexit transition period while **Paul Teasdale** sees economic catastrophe in refusing to make plans with the EU.

**Alena Ivanova** highlights the plight of over three million EU citizens facing the requirement to apply for settled status by next June or become illegal. The right to stay should be a basic right.

Fifty years ago the modern Women's Liberation Movement was born. Socialist feminist historian **Sheila Rowbotham** was a participant. Chartist spoke to her about the debates at the Oxford conference and its impact on women's struggles for equality and justice. **Alice Arkwright** celebrates the #MeToo victory in the historic conviction of Harvey Weinstein and draws lessons for women's collective action.

On the international scene **Mary Southcott** looks at Turkey's role as Middle East power-broker and how it has heightened the migrant and human rights crisis in the region. **Dave Lister** sees a failure in the Stop the War Coalition's virtual silence over the Assad and Russian-backed bloody war in Syria. **Glyn Ford** looks at developments in Germany with the removal of Merkel's chosen successor following compromises with the far right AfD.

**Helen Hayes** MP highlights the continuing discrimination against the Windrush generation while **Dermot McKibbin** alerts us to the thousands of abandoned leaseholders in the wake of Grenfell fire.

The Covid-19 pandemic has underlined the catastrophic consequences of ten years of Tory austerity, cuts to public services, privatisation, de-regulation, tax failure and possessive individualist ideology. Despite this context health and public service workers have demonstrated huge community commitment. Companies have converted production to provide PPE. and are respecting the lockdown and social distancing.

Test, trace, treat and isolate those infected must be the mantra until a vaccine is found. The task falls on Labour's new leadership to ensure this government are called to account for current and past failures, to champion international cooperation, for best practice in fighting the virus and for a social and sustainable economy directed by people not markets.

## The Covid-19 pandemic has underlined the catastrophic consequences of ten years of Tory austerity

# Labour's British Railways mark 2— a dead duck

Back to the 1950s is no way to run a modern railway system says **Paul Salveson**

**L**abour launched its new rail policy on April 1st. ([https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GB\\_Rail\\_Labour\\_Opposition\\_Wbite\\_Paper.pdf](https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GB_Rail_Labour_Opposition_Wbite_Paper.pdf)) The most remarkable thing about the document is its timing, and I don't mean April Fool's Day. Four months after a general election and days before the announcement of a new leader seems an odd time to produce a major piece of party policy. Is the document some sort of 'last gasp' of Corbynism? The new shadow transport secretary, Jim McMahon, has not had much to say about this lengthy document, overseen by his predecessor as shadow transport secretary, Andy McDonald.

The essence of the approach is that Labour would re-integrate track and train and create a single, UK-wide body to be called GB Rail. For which you might as well just call it 'British Railways' and have done with it. There are concessions to devolution, with the creation of 'devolved transport authorities' that look awfully like the make-up of 1940s style state corporations in miniature, matching the over-arching governance structure of 'GB Rail'.

The document makes some legitimate criticisms of the privatised structure introduced by the 1993 Railways Act, which is pretty much a dead letter anyway, with Coronavirus achieving what Corbyn and RMT never could – the effective re-nationalisation of the railways, with existing franchises being run on management contracts with the Department for Transport. This will be an 'interim' measure but how long that 'interim' might be is an open question.

To return to McDonald Rail, it's an example of the thinking which, despite protestations of Labour 'winning the argument', helped us lose the election. It's as though the last fifty years never happened. Its 'vision' is far worse than the BR of the 1980s, which encouraged innovation and entrepreneurial drive. Working for 'GB Rail' would be a bit like

working for an Eastern European railway in the 1950s, with orders despatched from on high by headquarters. Am I being a tad unfair? The proposed 'Devolved Transport Authorities' will have some powers but with such things the devil is very much in the detail. They would be overseen by 'boards' with allocated seats for the unions, passenger representatives and others. Business or regeneration agencies don't get a look in. I suspect, if they ever came into existence (they won't) they will be powerless talking shops.

A particularly bizarre suggestion is to bring rail freight under the control of GB Rail, reflecting the determination of the documents' authors to leave not one jot of 'privatised' railway untouched. Freight transport is a competitive and highly complex business where the existing rail freight operators have had to fight for every tonne of traffic. Handing it over to a government bureaucracy means you can kiss goodbye to a lot of the traffic won for rail these last few years. I'm not sure where the 'passenger benefit' is from nationalising rail freight, nor for that matter the wider public interest. But it would make the unions happy.

And this is a very union-driven document. Some readers might welcome that, but where was the engagement with the user and community rail groups that have flourished on Britain's rail network? The 'community rail' movement doesn't get a mention – presumably such airy-fairy liberal concoctions won't be needed in this brave new world.

There is an alternative to the privatised railway, which isn't about going back to the 1950s. The current 'interim' nationalised railway offers an opportunity to look at alternatives which can build on rail's green credentials and compete with road and aviation. 'Enterprise' and 'competition' are absent from the document yet rail is competing with the car and lorry above all. And Labour can't nationalise cars and won't touch road haulage. We



need to find ways of making rail, and complementary transport including bus, cycling and rail, attractive options, not ones that you're forced to make do with. And give incentives to the rail freight companies.

There's a need for an overall 'guiding mind' in rail, but one that is light touch and not heavy-handed. Rail operations need to be close to the market and able to respond flexibly to demands. Track and train need to be re-integrated. There are alternative models available to Labour, for rail and for other sectors, which don't necessitate a return to post-war 'austere socialism'. Existing franchises could be converted into mutual enterprises, there for the long-term, with governance models involving users, workers and other stakeholders.

Socialism should not be synonymous with state ownership and control. But we need particular sectors – rail being one – to be run in the interest of 'the public good' and not private shareholders. At a time when even major private companies are asking themselves how they can move away from an excessive dependence on narrow profit, there must be an opportunity for the left to intervene with some positive ideas which reflect modern reality.

Labour's new transport secretary, Jim McMahon, has a reputation for being an open-minded and progressive thinker, having achieved some good things when he led Oldham Council. He should read the 'McDonald Rail' document, take on board its criticisms of privatised rail and then bin it. There's time to create an imaginative Labour transport policy based on engagement with workers, users, local authorities, the wider community and business interests. **C**

**Paul Salveson's  
blog is at  
[www.paulsalveson.org.uk](http://www.paulsalveson.org.uk)**



# Time for renewables

**Dave Toke** says renewable energy is likely to soar upwards in 2020 as a proportion of UK electricity consumption



US oil over-pumped

I must start by saying that I'd far far prefer renewable energy increases NOT to occur if it magically prevented further deaths in this dreadful epidemic. However simple analysis of trends does imply that renewable energy is likely, all else being equal, to increase as a proportion of UK electricity consumption from around 37% in 2019 to around 43% in 2020.

Why? Electricity consumption has plunged, so by early April it was around 15% less than the same period in 2019. Even if the lockdown ends within the next few weeks, an enormous recession may well mean that electricity consumption is cut for 2020 as a whole by well over 5%.

When you factor in the impact of recent additions to renewable energy generation capacity (which weren't operating for the whole of 2019), and even if you assume that only half the planned additions actually take place this year, then as a proportion of total electricity generation, renewable energy will increase quite substantially.

My assumptions are to a degree weather-dependent – for example, they will go awry to the extent that this year isn't as windy as last year, and to a lesser extent if it isn't very sunny.

## Oil price collapse

The collapse of oil prices on the world market to its lowest point since before the 1973 oil crisis is a reflection of the deep economic cri-

sis into which the world has plunged. Pollution in general and carbon emissions in particular have dropped heavily, but the collapse in oil prices will have mixed consequences for a transition to a green economy.

Certainly, poverty stricken populations are likely to embrace walking and cycling more, their attraction increased by being seen as both practical on economic grounds as well as culturally progressive. On the other hand, a prolonged spell of low oil prices will encourage people to run and buy gas-guzzling motor vehicles in a new age of cheaper fuel. That will be especially appealing in those places like the USA where fuel taxes are low and drops in oil prices feed into big drops in prices at the pump.

However, now that electric cars are increasingly competitive in terms of price and range, their rise in market share will continue. In addition, with low oil prices there is no point in investing in much new drilling, so oil companies may pay more attention to investments in renewable energy.

There are already several large offshore windfarms with contracts issued by the UK Government with long term price guarantees, so they will go ahead, extending the supply of renewable energy as a portion of electricity towards 50 per cent. The speed with which more will be issued will depend partly on how quickly the economy rebounds.

## Ban Wildlife Markets

One lesson that emerges with crystal clarity from the coronavirus calamity is that efforts to persuade China to stop wildlife markets must be stepped up. These markets involve the butchering and selling of wild, often exotic, animals.

We already know that such markets are a threat to biodiversity and wildlife themselves, but we can now see they are a fundamental threat to human life as they encourage the emergence of new deadly diseases for humans. This should already have been apparent from the SARS and MERS outbreaks which many have associated with human pillaging of wildlife for sale in meat markets. To ignore this issue and to allow this trade to continue is incredible madness.

It is not to be anti-Chinese to demand a ban on wildlife markets, but to be in favour of both all humankind and conservation of biodiversity. The number of species is declining rapidly because of human assaults on the natural world. Now the coronavirus threatens the stability of human societies around the world through the economic carnage that follows the necessary efforts to curb the virus menace.

This issue really ought to put other international disputes about trade policy completely into the shade. Let's abandon such nonsensical divisions and focus on the most important things – saving nature and humans themselves! **c**

**Dr David Toke is Reader in Energy Politics, University of Aberdeen**

## STARMER LEADERSHIP

# Will Starmer get lucky?

**Peter Kenyon** reviews the new Leader of the Labour Party's prospects following defeat in the 2019 General Election, the coronavirus pandemic and climate change



Starmer seen as most prime ministerial

**B**y any measure in UK political life, Keir Starmer, the British Labour Party's newly elected leader, has a mountain to climb to win the next General Election in 2024. Within days of his victory being declared, the task got a lot bigger. Bizarrely, if polls are to be believed, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has strengthened his position in the eyes of the public since coronavirus gripped his lungs. Worse, bickering broke out in the Labour Party again: this time over an unofficial report of alleged misconduct by Labour party officials opposed to his predecessor, Jeremy Corbyn.

Starmer must not be distracted. Too many people are dying from this new virus sweeping the globe. His opening gambit in his acceptance speech on 4 April was to work constructively with the government. Today, it is not unreasonable to ask 'how can you work constructively with one of the most callous and incompetent governments in British history?' Remember former British prime minister Harold Macmillan, when asked what was most likely to

blow his government off course, replied: "Events, dear boy, events." They are now so frequent as to be overwhelming. Nudging the public to recognize their significance must be part of the opposition's strategy from now on.

Starmer was seen by the majority of Labour Party members who voted in the leadership election as the most prime ministerial. His initial poll ratings were positive. He knows he has to retain and build up his confidence rating at the expense of the Conservatives and their hapless leader. Screaming from the rooftops for Johnson's resignation is a waste of breath. That could only happen if there is a coup within the Conservative Party, as there was in 1940 to remove Neville Chamberlain as leader and prime minister.

Our new leader needs our help holding true to Labour values and turn events to the best outcome. He can't rely on a Black Wednesday moment. That was in 1992 (when sterling was forced out of the European Exchange Rate mechanism) when the public lost confidence in the Tories, and

helped seal their electoral fate in 1997.

But Johnson made a triumphalist speech in Greenwich on 3 February 2020 immediately after the UK formally left the European Union, just as the spread of the virus went global. Here is an excerpt from how he set out the Tory government's global policy post-Brexit:-

*"Trade used to grow at roughly double global GDP – from 1987 to 2007. Now it barely keeps pace and global growth is itself anaemic and the decline in global poverty is beginning to slow. And in that context, we are starting to hear some bizarre autarkic rhetoric, when barriers are going up, and when there is a risk that new diseases such as coronavirus will trigger a panic and a desire for market segregation that go beyond what is medically rational to the point of doing real and unnecessary economic damage, then at that moment humanity needs some government somewhere that is willing at least to make the case powerfully for freedom of exchange, some country ready to take off its Clark Kent spectacles and leap into the phone*

**Peter Kenyon is member of Chartist EB and The Cities of London and Westminster CLP**



*booth and emerge with its cloak flowing as the supercharged champion, of the right of the populations of the earth to buy and sell freely among each other. And here in Greenwich in the first week of February 2020, I can tell you in all humility that the UK is ready for that role."*

Has catching COVID-19 given Johnson pause for thought? We simply don't know. But what we do know is that unlike the financial crash in 2008, this coronavirus pandemic is putting many of the issues we democratic socialists hold close – fairness, equality, justice, for example, into much sharper focus. Ancillary workers are now key. Multi-billionaires are being castigated for seeking government financial support for their businesses tottering on the edge of bankruptcy.

Britain's ability to cope on its own, as a sovereign nation, having taken back control, is being shown to be a lie. Could these awakenings help reshape the world we live in, not just here in the UK, but across the planet and Britain's place on it? Of course, it was prudent of Starmer to bat away Brexit during the leadership campaign, as it was, when his victory was assured, to leave open the question of re-joining the European Union. Labour activists and most right-thinking people know Britain has been reduced to an insignificant sideshow in international affairs by the shenanigans of previous Labour, Conservative/Liberal and now Conservative governments.

A global perspective in these troubled times could improve Starmer's chances of making those judgement calls that could put Labour back in power in Westminster. Laurie McFarlane in an extended essay published in April 2020 by Open Democracy raised the spectre of 'authoritarian capitalism' as a risk arising from the crisis. He sees the populist right copying facets of the economic and social model developed by communist-dominated People's Republic of China (PRC). While the Conservatives are pointing fingers at the PRC about its role in the spread of the virus, and demanding reparations,

Labour must remain focussed on reducing the death toll, keeping people as safe as possible, ensuring adequate supplies and providing compensation for economic disruption. People are beginning to understand that the National Health Service (or socialist health as some of us pre-

fer to call it) has been made vulnerable by a decade of Tory/Liberal underfunding and Conservative privatisation.

Over-dependence on imported supplies at the expense of domestic production has been exposed. The disproportionate number of BAME medics, nurses and health workers who have lost their lives due to COVID-19 so far has shown up an underinvestment in skills training in the UK. We must ensure that shortages of personal protection equipment (PPE) due to the Conservatives failure to act on a pandemic contingency planning report published in 2016, compounded by sheer negligence to secure supply chains, must be owned by them. Three times the EU invited the UK to join its joint procurement schemes. Three times, Johnson refused to join in. Labour must be tireless in seeking out the most effective ways of managing the crisis in the interests of patients and NHS/Carers.

The UK total death toll is now expected to far exceed the 20,000 forecast by the national medical director of NHS England, Stephen Powis on 28 March. Labour must remind voters of the underlying reasons for this heavy loss of life. *More people will die. Not all of them will have underlying health conditions. Many needlessly, but for the want of a capable government.* Against this background millions have had to switch to working from home (WFM) or have already been sacked. There is widespread uncertainty about how food, or housing will be paid for. Yawning gaps in social security provision have been identified.

More public policy issues have been posed. Complexities with the administration of additional financial support for people, whether through the benefits system for those out of work, or their employers, have prompted fresh debate about a Universal Basic Income. Discoveries from WFM and distant learning for school, college and university pupils are unlikely to be forgotten when social distancing and the wearing of facemasks are absorbed into folklore.

Then there are myriads of questions about how all the schemes to mitigate the pandemic, from the NHS, through the local government, to swathes of idle industries are going to be paid for. Multi-billion packages of aid have been announced, which some on the left have wryly

observed could have been lifted from the Corbyn playbook (aka Labour's 2019 election manifesto). In addition to the supply chain issue is that of state aid. Surely, EU state aid rules (the main stock in trade enjoining the Tories to get Brexit done) would prevent any such actions? Not so: the EU suspended their state aid rules to enable member states to reassure business. Stock markets crashed globally as the threat of recession was transformed by the spreading virus into a 100% certainty.

On the plus side, with most of Europe in lockdown, air-quality has improved dramatically. People are undertaking more exercise. Homeless people have been housed. Poorer students are being offered their own laptops and web access for educational purposes. It is said we are eating better, generating less food waste, enjoying keeping an eye out for our neighbours and volunteering to 'do our bit'.

Now that the lunacy of the Conservatives' response to the pandemic is being revealed to anyone who cares about facts and the truth, Starmer's task remains to build up public confidence. The risks of a return to 'business as usual' remain very high. The richest 1% include people who believe tax dodging, profiteering, evading environmental and consumer protections and exploiting their workers are their rights. They must be challenged repeatedly.

And then there is the ever-present spectre of austerity as the Tories preferred policy tool for controlling the masses, and condemning vast numbers of the population to poverty incomes, poor housing and inadequate public services. Starmer is right to demand an exit strategy from the Tories.

The world economy is going into recession, possibly worse than the Great Depression in the 1930s. That challenge can't be addressed from the UK alone. Now is the time for Starmer to offer Britain a coherent alternative narrative about its future both domestically and globally with climate change embedded. Watch out for fresh policy thinking about industrial strategy and state aid rules being drafted now in Brussels for publication in June. In the meantime, what focus groups and polling is Labour organising back home in that relentless search for signs that voters have lost confidence in the Tories? By skilful handling, Starmer might succeed. **C**

## COVID-19

# 'Whatever it takes': From Corona Capitalism to Democratic Corporatism?

**Bryn Jones** argues that the Covid-19 pandemic must be the signal for a new democratic political economy

**N**eoliberal politicians claim to be waging a war on the COVID-19, Corona virus. A 'war' metaphor is invoked when they expand spending and need public support to combat a perceived evil. They promise that the Corona enemy can be defeated before too much damage is done to the population and its economic health. But when was the 'war on cancer' (begun circa 1971) or the 'war on terror' (2001) actually won? Non-military 'wars' tend to fade from the public and media gaze, rather than ending in victory parades and garlanded heroes. Nevertheless, the scale, conduct and outcomes of the Corona campaign, may actually be closer to the total-war mobilisations of the twentieth century. If so, it will not only be a question of 'who wins' but of how much society and its governance will change.

Aspects of today's total war governance include: whole sectors of the economy suspended or closed down; huge special funds generated from treasuries and channelled to the front lines of health equipment, logistics and support for businesses and employees. Closed businesses span whole swathes of the economy – retailing, cafes, bars, transport, sports and entertainment. Governments are awarding themselves extra-ordinary powers to control and police civil populations. In shades of martial law, citizens are forbidden from congregating in groups and in public places. Freedom of assembly is abolished. In the UK health sector 25,000 'reservists', retirees and students, have been mobilised to assist the medical 'front line in the war against this virus' (Boris Johnson); assisted by a civilian corps, of 250,000 'NHS Volunteer Responders' to provide 'community support'. Actual army personnel are allocated to deliver scarce protective equipment to hospitals and convert London's commandeered Excel exhibition centre into a kind of field hospital.

Of more economic significance is the restriction of millions of 'non-combatant' citizens to their homes. This strategic retreat aims to defeat the viral enemy by depriving it of human breeding grounds. A strategy that recalls Marx and Engels' wry observation that successful generals win wars by mobilising more recruits, but capitalism overcomes its crises by dismissing armies of workers: to save on their wage costs. The current 'confinement to barracks' may help on the biological front. But like other special measures, including also unheard of government subventions to replace lost revenues, rents and wages, it troubles the neoliberal mind.

'Big state' interventions are sacrilege against the primacy of markets. They are therefore hedged with caveats: described as temporary measures to speed up a return to free competition, mass consumption and small government. Government figures promise that the pandemic will soon peak and be brought under control, enabling a return to business-as-normal. Biological and economic considerations cast doubt on this aspiration. On the biological front, mass quarantines will deprive the virus enemy of fresh supplies. Eventually transmission rates should fall, as infection rates by those still in active employment decline and precautionary hygiene minimises contagions. A preventative vaccine will eventually provide mass inoculations. However, best estimates date this stage no earlier than early 2021. It is also possible that COVID-19 will mutate, making a vaccine redundant or less effective. Moreover, previous, related influenza epidemics occurred in waves. With the first peak of mass contagion followed some months later by another of similar magnitude. It is therefore possible that crisis governance will continue for at least two years.

On the economic front a full economic reboot seems unlikely, without, at best, a lengthy transition.

Government and central bank financial support is replicating that doled out in 2008. But in 2008 the main goal was to refinance and insure bank capital. Now, as detailed by Laurie MacFarlane (<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/our-economic-system-life-support-who-are-we-really-saving/>) aid needs to go to businesses that have lost revenue through vanished sales and to absent workforces. The danger is that corporations may use new capital as they did with tax breaks: to restore balance sheets, reward their investors' launch takeover bids, or for financial speculation; rather than reactivating investment and employment for social reconstruction. Such Keynesian transfusions may, anyway, not renew or boost consumer demand and employment. Because fear, or government fiat are physically isolating buyers and workers from shops and workplaces in our predominantly service economy. Some online sales apart, millions of worker-consumers cannot produce and spend.

If fiscal and monetary remedies fail restructuring of the market-state relationship, in which the crisis has revealed huge holes, may be inevitable. The frayed patchwork quilt of social welfare is patently dysfunctional for millions of workers in 'atypical employment' and self-employment. For example, policy camps and politicians are making a credible case for a statutory 'basic' or 'citizens' income over-riding means testing and with almost automatic eligibility: a radical departure from neoliberalism's market-welfare paradigm.

There is a broader opportunity to rebuild the worst-hit aspects of public services and social infrastructures. A chance to reverse the neglect and run down of decades of financial mismanagement and austerity. Especially since the looming Brexit conclusion requires new policies. Health services need renovation and/or incorporation into local government, social and welfare services, vocational training and

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**Articles by Bryn Jones and others on Covid-19 can be found on**  
**Chartist website**  
[www.chartist.org.uk](http://www.chartist.org.uk)

transport. Longer term, the housing sector could be switched from speculative building firms and transformed to speed the supply of new homes, with compulsory purchase of buildings and refurbishments. Only two months into the crisis and instant housing in unused buildings for thousands of homeless is already under way; a problem previously deemed almost insoluble.

In the corporate sector there has been de facto nationalisation of railway franchises and, in light of its vanished markets, some state restructuring of the aviation industry looms. Other affected and complicit sectors – especially the profit-prioritising pharmaceutical monopolies and import-dependent, high-waste food sector – could then also be considered for new, democratic forms of ownership and control by their stakeholders: workers, long-term investors and community representatives.

Privatisations and 'hollowing out'

have stripped national government structures of the capacity they inherited from two World Wars to organise and operationalise public programmes. For national and local projects to bolster the health, social care and food systems, government will need assistance to re-allocate displaced workers and to meld funds, expertise and active leadership. So government will need to work with 'social partners' (unions), to use the EU rhetoric, plus civic partners (local government) and civil society partners (NGOs, community organisations and charities). Although right-wing ministers and the political establishment will resist, these other forces, as well as other political parties, will want guarantees that their cooperation is not only for discretionary patching up. They will want a say in planning and implementation. In the 1970s and 1980s such shared governance was called, often pejoratively, 'corporatism' and derided for its lack of

transparency and accountability.

For these reasons, to repay the population for their sacrifices and to ensure it involves the right agencies, targets the right investments and benefits the right people, socio-economic reconstruction must, as the Foundational Economy Collective argue, be as decentralised, participative and democratic as possible: 'Democratic Corporatist Capitalism'? A major drugs breakthrough, benign virus mutations, favourable political circumstances and effective propaganda may stifle such developments. But, and more likely, if the 'war' involves a prolonged campaign, with social and economic hardship, people and politicians may reject neoliberalism's endemic insecurity and the dysfunctional markets that primarily benefit investors and corporate executives. Many will recognise that it was these conditions that allowed COVID19 to flourish and kill. If they do, change may become unavoidable. **C**

# Right to Stay

**Alena Ivanova** says we must give full rights to the many EU citizens we rely on as frontline workers

**A**s the world is desperately trying to navigate the biggest public health crisis since the early 20th century influenza outbreaks, it may seem trivial to some to focus on campaigning for EU nationals' rights. Yet, while the country has discovered a new appreciation of key workers - NHS staff, carers, drivers, retail workers, many of those same people we clap for every Thursday still face an uncertain future in post-Brexit Britain.

Despite promises made to EU nationals throughout the EU referendum campaign and after, our rights and freedoms are nowhere near guaranteed. In fact, the Tory Government has so far opposed introducing a very simple measure that could make their previous pledges come true - the Right to Stay.

Settled status is the new immigration status designed for EU nationals who wish to continue living in the UK after Brexit. Instead of a guarantee, however, it is a status you have to apply for. It also comes in two shapes: settled status for those who have lived in the UK for at least five years and can prove it, the lesser and less secure pre-settled status for the rest. The ability to prove continuous residence is a key issue here. We know that hundreds

of thousands of the most vulnerable EU migrants will struggle to meet the criteria. Those include children in care, elderly people, members of the GRT communities, domestic violence victims, people in insecure housing, and carers.

To make matters worse, the ongoing Covid19 crisis has seen vital advice services suspended and the work of charities and community groups that was previously focused on assisting some of those most vulnerable. Many of the most precariously employed will be losing their jobs as a result of this crisis, making their lives even more of a struggle and making it even more difficult to demonstrate residence.

In practice, after June 2021 EU citizens without Settled or Pre-Settled status will become unlawful in the UK. Many will have just played a vital role in keeping the country running and staffing the NHS. Others will have cared for the elderly, or delivered our groceries and take aways. Because of the Covid crisis and potential delays in the Brexit process, people who require face-to-face support and advice with their Settled Status application will not have been able to access it. The most vulnerable communities will not have been assisted or even reached.

This Tory administration has

shown too little interest in the fates of migrants. For us to take their word at face value without legislative guarantees. Besides, even if deportations per se are not the outcome for those migrants who miss out, they will still be subjected to all the cruelties of the hostile environment - denied jobs, denied housing, denied welfare support and, crucially, healthcare.

The Right to Stay campaign is calling for the rights of EU nationals to be guaranteed in primary legislation. Right to Stay would mean that everyone who resides in the UK by the cut-off Brexit point is legally entitled to Settled Status automatically and receives a physical proof of their new immigration status via a registration system. More than that, however, we must continue our fight for levelling up the rights for all migrants.

The current pandemic has exposed the stark inequalities at the heart of the British economy and services - it is predominantly migrants and BAME people who are bearing the brunt not only of the illness, but also of the measures to tackle it. Beyond everyone's right to stay, we should be demanding equal rights to healthcare, housing and economic opportunities for all, and a global recovery plan post-Covid19 that has social justice at its core. **C**

**Alena Ivanova is an organiser for Another Europe Is Possible and a member of Bethnal Green & Bow CLP**



# Starmer's victory: What next for the left?

While Keir Starmer's shadow cabinet has made a few concessions to the involvement of Labour's socialist left **Don Flynn** argues that it is the extraordinary times we are living through that are generating the real opportunities for a decisive shift towards a new democratic socialism

The result of the leadership contest seemed settled weeks before Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner's victories became official. The best evidence for this came from the signals being sent that party members who had considered themselves firmly in the Corbyn camp were prepared to vote for the party's Brexit spokesperson rather than Rebecca Long-Bailey, who had been hyped up for so long as the Corbynite continuity candidate.

Why was this? A big part of the reason was the desire to see a politician at the head of the party who looked as if they might be able to actually win an election. Starmer also appealed to the part of the left who saw Brexit as an unmitigated disaster of historic proportions. The eventual winner got their vote because he had been seen to be the most effective person in the leadership group in opposing withdrawal on pretty well any terms.

Starmer, and his new deputy Angela Rayner, take positions which place them on the 'soft' left of the party. This is generally seen as meaning that, in the interests of getting into government, they will be willing to tilt towards the centrist and right wings of the party. But the choice of people to fill the shadow cabinet posts suggests a Wilsonian regard for achieving balance, with all the main wings and tendencies being represented at some level. The socialist left will particularly welcome the inclusion of Rebecca Long-Bailey in the top team in the important post as spokesperson for education. Chartist readers will also welcome Cat Smith's retention of a place at the top table, giving her the chance to continue with her ideas on young people and voter engagement, regularly featured in the magazine, at the higher level.

Among the several important points to note is the appointment of Anneliese Dodds as the lead on treasury issues. This will bring her toe-to-toe with the Conservatives star-of-the-moment, Rishi Sunak. Dodds hasn't been strongly associat-

ed with any particular ideological tendency but her appointment has the strong endorsement of her predecessor in the post, John McDonnell. Just how she manages to dissect the government's economic strategy during these fast moving times, making the case for vigorous public intervention and a final end to austerity could well mark out Labour's best chance to win back lost working class voters and regain power.

If membership of anyone of the committed factions is the guide to go by, and taking membership of the Socialist Campaign group as evidence of the strength of the left there is stronger evidence that Starmer is committed to marginalising MPs who have a record of backing Corbyn during the years of his leadership. The reduced Parliamentary Labour Party consists of 202 MPs and one half of this number has been given a job in Starmer's leadership team. But the 34 members of the Socialist Campaign group have only been given eight posts. Backbenchers on the left of the party are going to have to be careful in picking the issues on which to fight.

They should certainly ignore the advice proffered by the Morning Star as their guide for action, which has branded Starmer's victory as a 'return of Blairism'. This is a poor reading of where politics stands at the present moment. For a start, the enthusiasm for a dewy-eyed liberal version of globalisation, which was on the upswing in the 1990s and which propelled Blair into power, is no longer present. The absence of a key organising idea of this magnitude from the manoeuvrings of the newly formed 'Labour to Win' outfit means that the right wing of the party will have a thin basis for their political appeal.

The extraordinary way in which state intervention has assumed dominance at this time, prompted obviously by the coronavirus crisis allied to tackling the climate emergency, has marked out territory presenting us with opportunities to make the case for democracy and a socialised economy. The democracy



Rayner and Starmer

component must surely be the need for electoral reform in order to ensure that all votes are equal when it comes to selecting political representatives and governments. The Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform has produced an analysis of shadow cabinet members which suggests a substantial group are supporters of a system more closely aligned to proportional representation.

The places where ideas about democratic governance and an advance in the socialisation of the economy have been discussed in the recent past – ranging from Momentum, The World Transformed, and Another Europe is Possible, – now need to be reconfigured to fit in with the new situation which exists in the Labour Party. First and foremost, they need to demonstrate their commitment to democracy by opening up to their memberships and bringing them into the critical decision-making processes around strategies and tactics.

We no longer have a leadership team which closely reflects the commitments and priorities of the activist left, but we do have the enormous advantage of a political situation which favours the broad left, Corbyn-inspired programme that has been developed over the last five years. This platform should now be cemented across the new leadership team and the whole of the Parliamentary party. Starmer's ten pledges need to be the bedrock of the programme to be developed over the next period. **C**

**Don Flynn is  
managing editor  
of Chartist**

# Turkey at the tipping point

**Mary Southcott** finds the boiling cauldron of issues, from war to migration to authoritarian repression, in and around Turkey require a new world order

When Dominic Cummings made '£350 million and Turkey' the focus for the last weekend of the EU referendum he depended on ignorance not only of economics but also of foreign affairs. The unique geography of Turkey between Russia and the Mediterranean, Syria and Greece lends it strategic significance alongside its membership of NATO (with emphasis on the North Atlantic). Its insistence on the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, being a terrorist organisation, the imprisonment of its leader, Abdullah Ocalan, and denial of rights to its peaceful representatives in the HDP, Peace and Democracy Party; and its conversion from Ataturk's secular state to leadership contender with Saudi Arabia for a Sunni Muslim Caliphate in the Middle East make it a hugely contentious state. These policies were always going to confuse relationships with the EU and specifically the USA and UK and it was "front and central" to the Leave victory.

US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright's instruction to Robin Cook in 1997 was to get Turkey into the EU. Now the EU policy seems to be to keep refugees and asylum seekers out by throwing money at Turkey and protect investment and trade especially for the UK arms industry. Turkey's policy seems to be anti Kurd, anti Assad, anti EU, anti the Law of the Sea and supporting anyone but Turkish Cypriot leader, Mustafa Akinci, whose victory in postponed elections could have led to a Cyprus settlement.

There was no danger that 80 million Turks would arrive in the UK if we stayed in the EU. Turkey despite its Customs Union with the EU, and the Ankara Agreement in 1995, had far to go to qualify for the *Acquis Communautaire*, necessary for EU membership.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, now Turkey's elected President, then Prime Minister, when elected in 2002, was unable to take up his post until the following year because of a prison sentence for religious incitement. He needed the EU, said he was "Muslim and a Democrat", opened the Cyprus

Green Line in 2003, now closed because of Coronavirus, and as late as 2010 held preliminary talks about devolving power to the Kurdish provinces, even making overtures to Ocalan, the PKK leader. The West proclaimed the Turkish model as the answer to the Arab Spring.

But Turkey turned away from the EU instead promoting Sunni Islam in Palestine, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Somalia. Until recently, Turkey and Israel were US surrogates in the Middle East. Turkey also took a firm stand against President Assad. He is an Alawite.

Erdogan's overwhelming victories since have depended on the weakness and nationalism of the CHP, the Turkish People's Party and working with the MHP, the Grey Wolves, the ultranationalist secularists. But their coalition lost the 2019 rerun Istanbul mayoral elections to CHP's Ekrem Imamoglu who has challenged Erdogan's handling of the Coronavirus as a weapon of war. Particularly where it comes to prisons, the jail amnesty excludes political prisoners, academics, journalists, lawyers, civil servants, particularly the HDP's former leader, Salahattin Demirtas and philanthropist, Osman Kavala.

Turkey's recent negotiations with Russia, and decision to buy their S400s rather than the US equivalent, mark a deterioration in their relationship with the US. In Syria, Russia and Turkey are on rival sides with Turkey supporting IS and the Rebels until pulled into line by NATO. The Russians have their warm water port in Syria and recently Russian ships sailing through the Dardanelles provoked an Express headline, 'Sink them now!'

Trump is accused of betraying its allies by withdrawing US troops. The Kurds in Syria who did the heavy lifting against IS were left to deal with Turkey in Idlib.

The recent attacks focused on the last remaining rebel stronghold, meant that not only was Turkey receiving three billion Euros from the EU, it was creating the refugees and then opening the gates to Greece, thereby dumping people on the EU. The CV which is no respecter of difference will



**Erdogan handling Coronavirus as weapon of war**

attack the vulnerable in camps in Turkey and throughout the region.

After Coronavirus, the culture of international institutions needs to change from macho domination to cooperation at every level to tackle gross inequality. NATO needs to recognise its internal contradictions. The military needs to be dedicated to peace keeping and construction, hospitals, bridges. Where is China in NATO thinking? Europe needs to stop depending on the US, to deal with its own regional conflicts not just franchise migration out to Turkey.

Although self determination and a Kurdish state may not be the answer, Kurdish citizens deserve some autonomy in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. The whole region needs a break from Turkish aggression and aggrandisement. We do not need a Turkish led Caliphate any more than a Saudi one. Some suggest Islam needs a Reformation to create a mutual recognition and respect of different traditions, Sunni, Shia, Alevi, and their relationship not to secularism but democracy. The UK needs to postpone the implementation of a Brexit decision based on lies irrelevant to the challenges we face. The 'big men' in the world, Bolsonaro, Erdogan, Johnson, Modi, Morrison, Netanyahu, Putin, Trump, need to change, or be replaced, because gross inequality, authoritarianism, patriarchy, nationalism, populism can never be an answer to pandemics anymore than to war and climate emergency. It all starts in Turkey – watch this space. **C**

**Mary Southcott is a member of Chartist EB and Bristol West CLP**



# After Coronavirus

**Prem Sikka** observes markets are indifferent to who lives or dies. In the Covid-19 crisis it must not be the working class and pensioners that bear the burden.



Gig economy workers left out of government support, despite being key workers

There are a few things that we have learnt from the coronavirus crisis. You can't rely upon capitalism to provide essential things for emergency unless there is profit. Hospitals desperately need masks, gowns, aprons, protective equipment, test kits and ventilators, but they can only be provided if a company can make profit. Private hospitals have been mobilised and they are all doing well out of the emergency. Buses owned by giant corporations may be parked idly in depots or carrying fewer passengers due to social distancing rules, but they aren't going to run them for the vulnerable people or essential workers without profit. The UK government has given them £400 million.

Some would attribute the above to market forces, but markets don't give a damn about whether people live or die. Essential services need to be provided on a collective basis to people on the basis of need rather than profit. Medicines, protective equipment, ventilators, hospital beds, intensive care unit beds and public transport would come into that category.

Rather than focusing on social good, the UK governments have been aping private sector practices. Doctors, nurses and care home workers have to pay for their education. The cost acts as a form of rationing and also excludes many from pursuing a fulfilling career. Many are burdened with loans, but that did not matter because government got a pat on the back from neoliberals for perpetuating their values. Subservience to capitalist values has ensured that the UK does not have enough doctors and nurses to deal with the crisis. Even before that, there was a shortage of hospital beds, doctors and nurses, as shown by a long waiting list for treatment.

The coronavirus pandemic should make us rethink the role of the state. Is it just a committee of the ruling class or concerned with welfare of the people? Some would say that the benevolence of the state has ensured that thousands of homeless people have suddenly been housed. Well, the state always had resources to reduce or eliminate homelessness but it chose not to. It could have built special shelters, but lacked the political will to do so. So what is so

different now? The coronavirus crisis threatened to cause fatalities, wiping out businesses, their pool of skilled labour and consumers. Housing the homeless seemed to be a small price to pay to protect corporate profits and interests. Of course, all this could be dismissed as conjecture, but a test will come after the crisis. It will be interesting to see whether the homeless people remain in shelters or once again turfed out onto streets.

The state needs to accept greater responsibility for tackling homelessness and other social problems. However, under the influence of neoliberal ideologies it has actually worsened them. After the 2007-08 banking crash, the UK government appeased neoliberals with mythical talk of balancing the books and imposed austerity; wage freezes (especially in the public sector), cuts in investment in the National Health Service and other public services and reduced social security benefits. Inequalities increased but neoliberals rejoiced as this enabled the state to fund tax cuts for corporations and the rich. Now the comparatively low-paid health and care home workers, midwives,

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ambulance drivers, delivery drivers, supermarket workers, bus drivers and postmen are the ones taking high risks and standing between economic oblivion and some sense of sanity. The government and neoliberals are all applauding essential workers, but that is no substitute for a decent wage and an equitable distribution of income.

After the 2007-08 banking crash, many commentators forecast that capitalism will never be the same again. It did not turn out that way. Instead, the UK government bailed out the finance industry, providing guarantees and cash outlays of £1,162bn and quantitative easing of another £435bn. It punished innocent people by imposing a never-ending austerity. Once again, the UK government is bailing out businesses and has set aside an initial £330bn for loans and guarantees through the banking system. Billionaires like Sir Philip Green and tax exile Sir Richard Branson

## The coronavirus pandemic should make us rethink the role of the state

are heading the queue for bailouts. Tax avoidance and past predatory practices don't seem to be a barrier to securing government handouts. Interestingly, in March 2020 EasyJet paid out a final dividend of £174 million. Some £60 million of that went to its co-founder Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou. The company was simultaneously seeking a government bailout as shareholders were unwilling to invest. On 6 April, the company secured a government loan of £600 million. No think tank has objected to this or any other corporate bailout.

The coronavirus pandemic may have encouraged the low-paid to see themselves as essential workers and demand higher. The ruling classes would not like that. Unsurprisingly, neoliberal think tanks are busy with class war. They are picking off the low-paid and vulnerable people and reminding them that they are a danger to economic recovery.

From 1 April 2020, the national minimum/living wage for a worker aged 25 or over rose from £8.21 to £8.72 an hour, which is hardly

adequate to enable people to make ends meet. To soften the economic impact of the coronavirus crisis, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) recommended a delay in the rise and even a "temporary cut" in minimum wages. The IFS proposal would penalise many essential workers currently engaged in the fight against coronavirus. It did not urge the government to reduce executive pay/bonuses, or dividends and share buybacks which enrich shareholders.

The Social Market Foundation (SMF) - funded by the likes of Vodafone, Provident Financial, Barclays, Kellogg's, Novartis, Post Office, BP and KPMG - is urging the government to reduce the value of the UK state pension by abolishing the triple-lock. In 2011, the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government introduced a triple-lock, which meant that the state pension would rise by a minimum of either 2.5%, the rate of inflation or average earnings growth, whichever is largest. Triple-lock was introduced because in the 1980s the government broke the link between average earnings and the state pension. This eroded the value of the pension and condemned many retirees to poverty. Despite the triple-lock, the state pension decreased by around 20% in real terms from 1994/95 to 2017/18.

Depending upon circumstances, the current state pension can be between £134.25 and £175.20 per week - hardly adequate. The amount is taxable. In 2019, the UK state pension was 29% of average earnings, the lowest amongst industrialised nations. The proportion of retirees living in severe poverty in the UK is five times what it was in 1986. The UK public pension spending is about 6.2% of its GDP, compared to an average of 8% for the OECD countries. The SMF claims that its proposal would save the government £4bn a year. Well, actually, if savings was the concern it could have recommended abolition of the £4bn-£5bn annual subsidy given to railway companies. In any case, balancing the government books is not the issue at the moment. Therefore, the SMF proposal is bizarre.

The Office for Budget Responsibility has forecast that coronavirus pandemic could shrink the UK's economy by 35%. The most effective way to combat that is investment by the state in infrastructure and by nationalising essential services such as gas, water, electricity, railways and



**Billionaire Branson asks for bailout**

buses. The state needs to ensure that people have good purchasing power to buy goods/services produced by businesses. Therefore, neoliberal think tanks' proposals for hitting the low-paid, the elderly and the vulnerable make no economic or social sense. The government has decided that an income of £2,500 a month per worker is adequate for managing the crisis and that should form the benchmark for minimum wage and state pension. Equitable distribution of income is needed and should be facilitated by repeal of anti-trade union laws, placing worker-elected directors on the boards of large companies, with employees and consumers voting on executive pay.

Now is also the time for the state to redistribute wealth by adopting progressive taxation policies. These can include a wealth tax, a reversal of cuts in corporation tax, a higher marginal rate of income tax on the rich, higher VAT on luxury goods; windfall taxes on banks, supermarkets and hedge funds; a financial transaction tax, a land value tax, elimination of numerous tax reliefs/subsidies for the well-off - just to mention a few.

However, none of this will happen unless people resist the return of the pre-coronavirus social settlement. The resistance would require support from trades unions, the Labour Party and civil society organisations. Without this, neoliberals will once again impose harsh penalties on the 99%. **C**

## WOMENS MOVEMENT

# Celebrating 50 years of the modern

50 years ago in February 1970, over 500 women met at a conference  
**Sheila Rowbotham** was at this ground breaking event and part of the small group of women w



1970 Oxford conference launched modern Womens Movement

In 1969 I was at Ruskin College at a History Workshop meeting where one of the few women trade union students gave a talk about working class women in the 19th Century. When a man said it would be better if women didn't work outside the home, I disagreed strongly, believing that by working and earning a wage women could achieve a level of economic independence.

Some women met together after this workshop, including Anna Davin and Sally Alexander and decided to have a bigger meeting to discuss the issues. I suggested a history conference about women, but Barbara Winslow, an American socialist said we should not just be looking at the history but also at the contemporary situation for women..

Sally was then a student at Ruskin and, along with another student there, Arielle Aberson, did most of the organising within the college. Arielle was an inspiring historian who was already aware of the important part women had played in the French Commune.(1871) She was tragically killed in a car crash

shortly after the conference.

A few women's liberation groups had started to form and we met on an ad hoc basis to plan the conference in London. Among the people I remember at a planning meeting was Juliet Mitchell (who had written a pioneering article in NLR) and a veteran Suffragette, who said to me 'You are very lucky to be able to have a hall to meet. They banned us'.

The first Women's Liberation Conference was held on the last weekend in February and the beginning of March and we were overwhelmed by the numbers. I remember the extraordinary eloquence of really young women, standing up at the microphone and speaking about their local groups on the Friday evening.

## So what were the main issues discussed at the conference?

Audrey Wise (a trade union activist and later Labour MP) argued that working for equal rights between men and women was not enough, because the position of working class men was not a good one. Instead of fram-

ing demands in terms of 'rights', Audrey Wise stressed the need to go beyond this and challenge the meaning of work and life in the workplace, questioning power relationships as a whole. Audrey gave an account of this in a collection of interviews about the conference edited by Michelene Wandor called *Once a Feminist*.

The Peckham Group—a 1 O'Clock club, described the emotional impact of being enclosed at home doing all the housework and child care. This was an early indication of how personal life began to assume a political aspect.

Sheli Wortis, a US woman active in the Stop It group against the Vietnam War, belonged to one of the first women's liberation groups in London, the Tufnell Park Group. She challenged the exclusive emphasis in current approaches to child care of the close bonding of mothers with their children and asked what about fathers? She said father deprivation ought to be taken into account. She added too that connecting to a loving group for children need not be limited simply to the family

# ern Women's Liberation Movement

ence in Oxford. The event launched the modern women's movement.

n who helped to make it happen. **Mike Davis** spoke to her about the conference and its impact

unit. It could be part of a wider shift to cooperation. Her husband Henry was among the men who ran the crèche at the conference,

Some history did get raised at the conference. I spoke on 'The Myth of Inactivity' and described the active role played by poor women in all the nineteenth century French Revolutions. Jo O'Brien talked about women's part in crowd action over food in the early 19th Century. It was interesting that right at the beginning there was an awareness that the organisation and resistance of women had extended well beyond arguing simply for equality with men.

However the four demands that were to be raised from the conference did emphasise equality in work, education, pay and stressed the need for both child care and free contraception and access to free abortions. Of course these are needed but I thought then and think still now they do not go far enough.

## Were there divisions evident between different groupings?

The older women tended to be from the Communist Party with a few from older feminist lobbies. A small number were trade union women. The women I knew there were in their twenties, many had been active in CND, anti apartheid and against the Vietnam war. We had been influenced by the ideas from Civil Rights and from Black power about challenging how you were seen and defined, which we connected to our position as women. But some must have just heard about the conference and turned up because they were feeling angry about their oppression simply as women.

Because we met under the umbrella term of 'Women's Liberation' differences were not so evident. The emphasis was on asserting our interests and needs as women. It was not until around 1972 and 1973 that divisions began to emerge between



Sheila Rowbotham- "We need to emphasise values of care and cooperation"

radical feminists and socialist feminists. But for several years we continued to be able to work together.

## What were the most significant achievements of the Oxford conference?

Organisationally the event gave enormous confidence to women and boosted feminist groups. We did not feel so isolated. I wrote an early article on our beginnings in the first collection on women's liberation *The Body Politic* (1972)- edited by Micheline Wandor and I reflected then that it was the first time a sense of being part of movement became a reality.

The immediate result was that we grew in numbers. By March 1971 thousands of women turned out in sleet and snow for the International Women's Day demonstration.

We got the idea of consciousness raising groups from the Americans. It allowed us to talk about our private life, everything from domestic labour to orgasms became part of politics. This shift in what constituted politics spread out to many more demands and a critique of how

women were seen and treated in society. It led the way to a bigger challenge to cultural hegemony and a rebellion against the confining of women through a world bounded by a male lens.

It led too to important organisational innovations like community controlled nurseries and Women's Aid centres for women who suffered domestic violence. We really stressed control and grass roots democracy.

What we did not, could not envisage was that though a minority of women would move upwards in the work place, the cuts in public state provision would place many working class women in a more vulnerable position.

I think one of the most striking features of the new women's movement is that young women today, our grandchildren's generation, are so much more confident. But they face big problems.

What we all need now so badly is an emphasis upon the values of care and cooperation which have been dismissed and dumped. Both women and men would benefit immensely from this turn around in society. **C**

**Sheila Rowbotham is the author of numerous books including a celebrated biography of Edward Carpenter.**

**Her latest book is *Rebel Crossings: New Women, Free Lovers and Radicals in Britain and the United States*. Her memoir of the 1960s *Promise of a Dream* has recently been reissued by Verso.**



## BREXIT

# Reckless and irresponsible

**Julie Ward** says Labour must demand the government pushes pause on Brexit

**M**any will be forgiven for thinking that Brexit has indeed been concluded and may even be wondering what all the Remainer tears were about. Apart from a few ugly displays of English nationalism on the streets around Westminster on January 31st the moment of separation passed largely without incident and the world as we know it did not end! Indeed the transition from fully-fledged EU Member State to a 'third country' did not result in major changes to daily life for the majority of people living and working in the UK. So what's to worry about?

Since Cameron's ill-advised referendum in June 2016 the media had reported on little else other than Brexit, so much so that the ongoing war in Syria and other conflicts and disasters barely received a mention. With all the focus on the ongoing drama in the UK Parliament no one noticed reports coming out of China at the beginning of January regarding a new form of deadly coronavirus likely to be on a par with SARS, MERS and Ebola.

For three and a half years we had lived and breathed Brexit 24/7 and many were truly fed up and weary of the seemingly endless deadlock. It was only when Boris Johnson appeared to have solved the Brexit dilemma that he began to address other issues including what was already becoming a global health crisis. However, little government progress was made in respect of either post-Brexit deals or a Covid-19 response during February, by which time the unseen but not unexpected foreign enemy had already infected millions.

Speaking at the Another Europe Is Possible online national conference on April 4th, Paul Mason referenced a florid speech made by Johnson at Greenwich on February 3rd where the PM prioritised his post-Brexit vision of a buccaneering global free-trading Britain over medical necessity:

"when there is a risk that new diseases such as coronavirus will trigger a panic and a desire for market segregation that go beyond what is medically rational



**Barnier likely to agree UK extension**

to the point of doing real and unnecessary economic damage, then at that moment humanity needs some government somewhere that is willing at least to make the case powerfully for freedom of exchange".

Barely two months later Johnson would be in intensive care, struck down by the virus and on the receiving end of NHS care delivered by those pesky migrant nurses in a country belatedly in lockdown. Meanwhile the EU's Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier, had also tested positive and self-isolated, meaning that trade talks between the UK and EU had effectively stalled. As the pandemic swept the world, overwhelming health systems, the UK had dithered, trying to present a 'business as usual' front. Initial negotiating texts were published by the UK and EU in late February with the UK demanding divergence on a number of issues, contrary to the Withdrawal Agreement made in good faith, leading Barnier to question the UK's commitment to reaching a deal at all.

As deaths continue to rise and the UK prepares for more weeks of life under lockdown with 25,000 civil servants allocated to dealing with the pandemic, most voters now appear to want to extend the

transition period regardless of Leave/Remain affiliations. The double whammy of recurring waves of Covid-19 on top of a No-Deal Brexit is a terrifying prospect for businesses and communities. Yet the government continue to insist they are sticking to their timeline, even threatening to walk away in June. However, some Tories are growing nervous, with former MP Nick du Bois (who served as Dominic Raab's chief of staff in DExEU) writing in the Sunday Times on April 5th: "It would be incomprehensible to many members of the public if Johnson's government devoted time and energy on these talks until the pandemic was under control."

Mason predicts that "a hard Brexit on December 31st could turn a sharp, six-month recession into a two-to-three-year slump", and lays down the gauntlet to Keir Starmer to call for a one-year extension and repudiate the government's existing negotiating text. For my part, I am working closely with Labour for a Socialist Europe, gathering signatures for an open letter encouraging Keir Starmer, Angela Rayner and the NEC to support the call for a major extension. Unprecedented times call for boldness and we must therefore put Brexit on the back burner. **C**

**Julie Ward was a Labour MEP for NW England**

# We need to talk about Europe

Government plans to leave the European Single Market at the end of December will lengthen the corona recession says **Paul Teasdale**

In the months ahead politics will be dominated by coronavirus and its aftermath, and there is a danger that the challenge of Europe will not get the crucial attention it needs. First, Brexit is not “done”; second, decisions on Europe are critical to how well the economy recovers from this massive downturn; and third, leaving the EU is likely to have the greater effect in the long term.

Many people wish the debate on Europe would go away and will try to use the virus crisis to avoid the subject. When the general election produced such a decisive result there were people, on many sides, expressing a hope that politics would get back to normal – what mattered to ‘real people’. In the election the Labour leadership tried to avoid the issue. Whenever it arose, they changed the subject. They either believed, or pretended to believe, like Johnson, that leaving would have no effect on the economy or the capabilities of government. Some now seem to think that we should accept that Johnson has a mandate to get Brexit done and the Labour Party can focus elsewhere.

But there is no such thing as “getting Brexit done”. Leaving the EU at the end of January was just a step in a long process of administrative and economic change. Government, Parliament and the civil service need time to develop new regulations, new legislation, new institutions and new trading agreements. This could be expected to take up most of the legislative and administrative time available for the next five years.

The economic effects of leaving the Single Market will take years to work their way through. It is not like a shock that might cause a recession but is followed by a recovery as the economy gets back on course. Leaving the Single Market may not produce an immediate downturn but it puts the economy on a new course of slower growth – so the consequences become cumulatively worse.

This was all known at the start

of the year. Despite its clear majority the government was vulnerable on the economy. However, now everything will be seen through the prism of coronavirus and it will be very hard to isolate the effect of leaving Europe from the huge one-off shock of coronavirus. So the difficult economic times ahead will be wrongly blamed on the lasting effects of the coronavirus alone.

However, continuing on the Government's path to leave the Single Market and Customs Union in the current circumstances will make a bad situation worse. The process of leaving the EU will be much harder than it would have been anyway. Dealing with the consequences of coronavirus is likely to take up most of the time that might have been spent on post-EU arrangements. It will be even harder to find new trading arrangements in a world shaken by coronavirus. When the world economy is limping along a self-imposed reduction in the UK growth rate could mean no growth at all.

Perhaps more importantly, recovery from the coronavirus recession will be much more difficult for the UK, separated as it will be from its main trading partner and established customers. It is therefore likely that the UK recession will last longer than it would do otherwise, and longer than elsewhere.

In the longer term, leaving the EU is the more significant influence on the economy. But it may be hard to make that case right now. The impacts will be visible only after a time. I fear that Government, Opposition and media will attribute a poor economy to the coronavirus. It will be therefore important to see how other economies are performing. Just as in the late sixties it will become clear that living standards in the UK are being overtaken in our neighbours, and we shall, in time, see the quality of public services and infrastructure falling further behind the rest of Europe. The issue of membership will have to be reopened. The Labour Party needs to be in a position of being able to say “We



1930s style mass unemployment threatens

told you so”.

Labour should accept neither the Government's agenda for departure nor that the debate is over, even if the Remain campaign is no more. Any relaxation of the argument weakens Labour's stance in the longer term. Even outside the EU, the UK economy can still remain closely aligned. Every step away from the Single Market imposes new costs, raises prices, loses jobs. In Parliament, the Labour Party must contest every effort to create regulations that diverge from Europe – even if they are in effect the same standards that still impose a bureaucratic cost.

Priority for the new Labour leadership – as a central part of the efforts to deal with the coronavirus – should be to get the government to extend the transition period – preferably for two years. The economy is now in perhaps the deepest recession ever, and that will worsen if the Government sticks to its plans to end the transition period in January. It makes absolutely no sense to break existing trade links with our neighbours. The Government should review this only when the economy is showing signs of being back on its feet. Labour can argue that the efforts of the government and administration should be devoted to rebuilding our economy and reinforcing public services, not on coming up with new regulations that add costs to businesses and cut them off from the Single Market. **C**

**Paul Teasdale is a member of Exeter CLP. The full version of this article will appear on the Chartist website**



## SYRIA

# Don't Stop the War Coalition

**Dave Lister** finds the silence and equivocation of Stop the War on Syria raises questions on its peace ambitions



What would the reaction have been if Britain, the US or Israel had murdered 500,000 Muslims? Undoubtedly there would have been extremely angry marches organised by the Stop the War Coalition and much else. Yet the lives of about half a million people in Syria apparently do not count. They are arguably the wrong sort of Muslims killed by the right sort of people. Russia, Iran, Hezbollah – these are the good guys in the world view of some people on the far left. The Stop the War website records that over the last two years they have protested about the threatened war on Iran, Palestine, the Trump visit, Yemen and Venezuela – all worthy issues. But on Syria nothing.

Clearly the same indictment applies to world leaders. Apart from token bombings by the US following the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime, very little has been done to stop the war. Clearly also the lessons of the intervention in Iraq have been learnt and Russian vetoes have stymied any chance of UN action. But the EU, for example, has shown far greater determination to keep out refugees than it has on finding ways to put pressure on

Syria and Russia to stop their relentless onslaught.

What we have seen is the deliberate bombing of civilians, hospital and schools. The Syrian Centre for Policy Research recorded 336 attacks on medical facilities and the deaths of 697 medical personnel between 2011 and 2016. Those doctors who have not fled, been detained or been killed have to struggle with shortages of supplies and equipment and the constant threat of more bombing. The Guardian (15/2/20) commented that “the attack on hospitals and bakeries looks more like the deliberate terrorising of civilians than the targeting of jihadist fighters”.

In addition to the dead and wounded there are the displaced people. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees there were 6.6 million people displaced internally and 5.6 million displaced around the world in 2018. Over three million of these refugees are in Turkey alone. The recent attack on Idlib, which was launched in mid-January with the aim of capturing the last part to Syria to remain outside central government control, created another million refugees fleeing towards Turkey. They faced sub-zero temperatures and many did not have tents to shelter in. Consequently, there

were reports of children dying of exposure.

In evaluating the drive into Idlib, on the one hand there is the complicating factor of the concentration of jihadist groups in Idlib. On the other hand, there is the decision of the Assad government to dispatch people from places like Homs, Ghouta and Aleppo to Idlib province despite the presence of the extremist groups there. There is also evidence published in The Guardian (14/3/20) that the main Jihadist group in Idlib has broken its links to al Qaida and affirmed that its aim is to protect civilians not to continue waging their version of jihad.

At the time of writing a ceasefire remains in place but there is no guarantee that this will hold once the coronavirus crisis is over. Turkey has played a positive role in helping to halt the onslaught, whatever Erdogan's motives for doing this.

The lesson from this dreadful course of events is surely that there is generally no justification for targeting civilians in any conflict and that we on the Left must condemn this wherever it occurs, even when perpetrated by forces which by some strange logic can be portrayed by some people as enemies of imperialism. **C**

**Dave Lister is a member of Brent Central CLP and Chartist EB**



# Germany at the crossroads?

Compromises with the hard right AfD led to the resignation of Merkel's anointed successor.

**Glyn Ford** looks at next steps for the ruling party

On April 25th the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Emergency Congress was due to elect a new leader after Angela Merkel's hand-picked successor, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, resigned in mid-February as the party struggled to find its way. The post-war dance around the political centre - between the CDU and their Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), on the one hand, and the Social Democrats (SPD) on the other - was finally over. It had been a long time coming as the electorate splintered away from history over the last three decades. First the Greens appeared in the West, then the Left Party dawned again from the ashes of East Germany's Socialist Unity Party and finally the Alternative for Germany (AfD) erupted everywhere. The quandary for the CDU's leadership was where to find safe harbour in a new world where old maps no longer told the way.

The dilemma was whether to cling to the centre and repel the Green surge, or heft to the right and the AfD. Merkel herself preached and practised the former. To the fury of her conservative colleagues she had welcomed hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees into the country as those around her were slamming their doors. Her actions fed the growth of the AfD, a xenophobic party with fascists in it, whose Members of the European Parliament spent 2014-16 in the same group as Cameron's Tories. The conservatives believe at best their policies on immigration, security and fiscal policy should be tailored to suit AfD voters, and at worst the political quarantining of the AfD itself from the cut and thrust of day to day political manoeuvring should be laid aside. The transformation of theory into practice was October's election in the former East German state of Thuringia. Here the parties of the Grand Coalition scored barely 30% between them, with a majority of voters going to the two extremes - 31% to the Left Party, 23% to the AfD - leaving the CDU holding the baby in the middle.

For the CDU it was a choice between fascist-lite and the heirs of



Merkel and ex Die Linke leader of Thuringia

the Stasi. When the local CDU finally opted to vote with the AfD to elect a state premier from the small, liberal Free Democrats, Merkel said it was "unforgivable". The vote was re-run with the Left Party's candidate, Bodo Ramelow, re-elected, but not before Kramp-Karrenbauer had jumped.

Eighteen months earlier in the leadership election, with Merkel's full backing, she had only beaten Friedrich Merz, the conservative candidate, 52-48. The leadership was now his to lose. Three candidates declared: Merz, the long-time rival of Merkel; Armin Laschet, a Merkel loyalist and state premier of North-Rhine Westphalia; and rank outsider Norbert Röttgen. Yet if, as Harold Wilson said, 'a week is a long time in politics', a month is an eternity. Merkel took the first steps to control the spread of coronavirus on March 22nd.

Crisis is the hour for those in power. In the immediate wake of the Thuringia fiasco, both the Economist and the Financial Times were saying it was time for Merkel to go. But Germany has - to date at least - had a rather good pandemic. The combination of a well-funded and well-resourced health service, early intervention and the round mantra of test, trace, treat, has Germany as a global success story, particularly in the shadow of Italy, Spain and the UK. Now Merkel's ratings and those of the CDU have soared, taking support and voters from every other party. Inside the right the winners have been

Laschet, Jens Spahn, the Health Minister, and the CSU Bavarian state premier Markus Söder. Merz has been stranded by events. Testing positive for Covid-19 he's been abandoned on the sidelines, blogging his symptoms to an audience that's stopped listening. The CDU's Extraordinary Congress has been postponed sine die.

When normal service is finally resumed the new favourite to succeed Kramp-Karrenbauer as party leader will be Armin Laschet, particularly with the deal he's done to run in tandem with Jens Spahn, the gay conservative Health Minister, as his deputy. What is less clear is whether he follows Merkel as Chancellor. The Bavarian CSU, always well to the right of the CDU, has been increasingly restless over Merkel's social liberalism. While success is a great healer there has never been a CSU Chancellor. It's that time again. Twice they had candidates: in 1980 when Franz-Josef Strauss lost, and again in 2002 when it was Edmund Stoiber's turn for failure. Markus Söder now has the opinion polls saying he would be the best candidate to ensure a CDU/CSU victory in the October 2021 federal elections. If that was the outcome Germany would - largely - continue its current domestic trajectory, particularly with a CDU/CSU-Green coalition in Berlin; but in Brussels there would be a demand for a more assertive EU, leaning to the right in terms of security, defence and foreign affairs.

**Glyn Ford was a Labour MEP**

UBI

# Time for a universal basic income

**Alex Sobel** says the coronavirus crisis reveals our broken social system needs a radical solution

**W**ith an extended coronavirus lockdown we are starting to see the devastation caused not only to our public health but to the very foundations of our economy. The Government's measures are a welcome relief for many, but do they go far enough to ensure that no one is left behind and that our economy can recover?

We are on a wartime footing. We have correctly decided as a society that the most important priority is to protect public health and our NHS—at all costs. This is why I support the Government's decision to implement lockdown measures and believe these should be observed for as long as necessary. That said, I hear regularly from people who are bearing the financial brunt of this sacrifice.

I support in principle measures such as the Job Retention (or 'furlough') Scheme and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. Never before has the government sought to underwrite the whole nation's wages to such an extent. But I fear that by not fully embracing an emergency Universal Basic Income, this extraordinary outlay acts more as a sticking plaster than a genuine recovery agent and may prove to be the mother of all false economies as many people fall through the cracks.

Whilst many employers have furloughed staff, there are still many who have not been. For instance, I have received lots of emails from people who have only just moved from one job to another and are therefore unable to ask their new employers to be furloughed. There are also reports of HR departments who for one reason or another do not have the capacity or wherewithal to efficiently furlough their employees.

Fundamentally, making the employers of Britain the arbiters of our welfare system is fraught with problems. Furloughed staff cannot work, meaning that organisations are having to make difficult choices about whether to keep a staff member on payroll to help the business survive or furlough and save the huge financial



**Foodbanks have seen massive increase in clients as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak**

outlay at a time where income is all but lost.

The measures for the self-employed are also welcome, but have some serious flaws. Basing payments on profit does not account for overheads that are not going away. It's estimated that as many as two million of the 5.75 million self-employed will miss out altogether from the scheme.

It is for these reasons and more that Universal Credit sign-ups are exceeding one million and foodbank use is approaching record highs. Any means-tested system is complicated, bureaucratic and allows many who need it the most to fall through the cracks. This is why over four million low-income families and over one million pensioners have missed out on targeted support they were entitled to.

An Emergency Universal Basic Income is, by contrast, a simple and efficient way of guaranteeing basic financial security for all during this crisis. It allows people to work and ensures universal coverage, meaning that nobody will slip through the net. Modelling from the Royal Society of Arts showed that 74% of the self-employed, particularly low earners, would have been better off under their emergency UBI

scheme when compared to the Government's support package for the self-employed. If put in place as a recovery measure, it will provide relief to millions of households and boost consumer spending in our local shops and businesses. There is a menu of options around how it can work and could be combined with use of the tax system to ensure that money given to those who do not need it is recouped fairly and efficiently.

We must also think long term. Coronavirus has exposed the fundamental weaknesses in our economy: driven by private and corporate debt, short term and zero-hours contracts and generation rent - as well as a broken social system that has been undermined by austerity. We cannot go back to business as usual once the immediate crisis is over. We must consider the way we work and how the state is involved in the productive capacity of the nation creating a much stronger stake in its economic resilience. We must have a debate about the way people are paid in this country but also about ensuring we have a decent social security system and Universal Basic Services, creating secure jobs, universal childcare and a healthier, more secure nation. **C**

**Alex Sobel is MP for Leeds North West**



# In the wake of Grenfell

**Dermot Mckibbin** says government has abandoned leaseholders as well as victims of the Grenfell fire

**O**n 14 June 2017, a preventable fire broke out at the Grenfell Tower block. 72 people tragically lost their lives. The aftermath has exposed the appalling scandal of the country's fire safety system. In October 2019 the Inquiry Chairman issued his Phase 1 report ([www.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/](http://www.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/)). This looked at the immediate causes of the fire and the role of the authorities. The AMC fire cladding panels which were meant to prevent the spread of fire had had the opposite effect.

Phase 2 will look at the design of the cladding and wider building safety issues. The inquiry has already heard about the casual approach by the architects in considering fire safety issues.

After June 2017, local fire brigades began to urgently inspect high rise buildings throughout the country. Many buildings were found to have such dangerous cladding that a 24 waking watch system was required to ensure the immediate evacuation of the building in the event of a fire. Research by the housing magazine Inside Housing has found that London has 68% (289) of these waking watch properties. Incredibly this research discovered that the London Fire Brigade had attended 263 fires at these properties since June 2017. Is it only a matter of time before another disaster?

Initially the Government allocated £600 million to deal with the problem of unsafe cladding in properties regardless of their ownership. However, this was only for buildings with AMC cladding above 18 metres.

In February 2020 during a Parliamentary debate, MP's from all parties queued up to express deep concern about what was happening in their constituencies. In a Birmingham block the work must be completed by November or their insurance will be invalid. Their mortgages will become void, and they will have to leave their block.

The UK Cladding Action Group reported insurance costs for these blocks going up from £40,000 to £200,000. In Putney the new Labour MP Fleur Anderson has



constituents who have been informed that their liability will be between £50,000 and £80,000 per flat!

Leaseholders living in these blocks are unable to sell these properties as any buyer must obtain a fire safety report in order to obtain a mortgage. Their properties are in effect worthless. There are approximately 500,000 residents living in unsafe properties.

Problems for leaseholders will be made worse in the current emergency. Universal credit only provides a loan after a waiting period to pay for mortgage costs. While many leaseholders may have above average incomes, they are innocent victims of a defective building safety system.

After a fire cladding protest outside Parliament organised by Andy Burnham, the Manchester Mayor on 25 February, the budget promised £1 billion for safety works. However Inside Housing has calculated that the bill for the social sector alone is £10 billion. The Government still does not have the data to know the extent of the problem.

Further Government measures followed. A recently introduced Fire Safety Bill will place a legal requirement on residential building owners to inspect cladding

and fire doors. A new building safety regulator will be established. A duty holder will become responsible for multi-occupied residential buildings taller than six storeys or 18 metres. Sprinklers will be required. Residents will have the right to obtain information about their building's safety.

Many of these belated proposals are welcome. They reflect successful campaigning by Labour's Housing front bench and the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership charity. The question of who pays the costs of making these buildings safe is a glaring omission. In Australia flat owners unlike in England and Wales jointly own the whole building. The Victorian state Government provides funding to tackle fire safety issues on condition that the owner transfers ownership to the state. Building costs do not have to be repaid. The state has a comprehensive response to the problem. This is described by Professor Susan Bright at ([www.law.ox.ac.uk/housing-after-grenfell](http://www.law.ox.ac.uk/housing-after-grenfell)).

It remains to be seen whether the new normal after the current emergency is over will be sufficiently different to persuade the Government to prevent freeholders from passing on these charges to hard-pressed leaseholders. **C**

**Dermot Mckibbin**  
is a member of  
Beckenham CLP



#METOO

# MeToo victory shows collective power of women

**Alice Arkwright** on the significance of Weinstein's serial sexual abuse conviction

**I**n October 2017 the New York Times and the New Yorker published stories detailing accusations of sexual harassment and assault against Harvey Weinstein. Over the next few days, weeks and months many more women came forward with their own experiences.

The MeToo movement sparked global conversations about experiences of sexual harassment and violence and about how work can so often be an environment of exploitation for women. As a society, we have also had to face difficult questions of why sexual predators are able to act in plain sight and the fact it took 25 years for Weinstein to be held accountable.

Over 100 women have now accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct against them personally, leading to his sentence of 23 years in March. Weinstein was convicted of raping an actor in 2013 and for forcibly performing oral sex on a production assistant in 2006. However, he was acquitted on three other charges, including predatory sexual assault and rape in the first degree. Very soon after, LA prosecutors also filed new sexual assault charges against him; however, this is now on hold due to the coronavirus crisis.

The trial was remarkable in numerous ways and many, including myself, thought this outcome might never happen - in part, due to incredibly low conviction rates for sexual violence, the fact that his behaviours and those of many other perpetrators had been ignored and even condoned, and the power that Weinstein held. This emphasises what a victory this was for the MeToo movement and the power that women hold when they speak out collectively.

As Tarana Burke, the founder of the MeToo movement stated, "For so long these women believed that he was untouchable and could never be held responsible, but now the criminal justice system has found him guilty. That sends a powerful message". However, this is the start of the conversation and there are so many important learnings from the case.

One of the most notable features of the case was the fact that the



**Tarana Burke- founder of the #MeToo movement**

women accusing Weinstein had relationships with him before the attacks and afterwards. Even though this is so common, it is very rare for prosecutors to go to court with, and get convictions for, women who maintain contact with their attacker. Complainants in sexual violence cases are often presented as dishonest, as defendants argue there is no way people who experience sexual assault would continue to work, live or socialise with someone who would hurt them. In this trial the prosecution worked hard to counter this narrative, exploring issues such as power, control and the shame and guilt that women can experience following an attack.

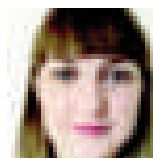
The hope is that this will lead to many more convictions in cases like this and prosecutors will use this line of argument. Whilst 60,000 reports of rape were made between 2018 and 2019 in England and Wales, this resulted in only 919 convictions. Violence against women organisations have expressed concerns that police and prosecutors are dropping cases where the perpetrator and complainant have an ongoing relationship for the fear that a jury will not find the case credible. This is despite the fact that this is so common in sexual harassment and assault cases. That said, the power dynamic in Weinstein's case may be easier for a juror to recognise than in other cases given

his public influence in the entertainment industry.

The jury in this case also seemed to reject victim-blaming narratives that were used by the defence. Donna Rotunno, the lawyer defending Weinstein, stated in an interview that she had never been sexually assaulted as she had never put herself 'in that position'. The dress of one of the accusers was presented as evidence during the trial and the women were continually belittled and blamed for their experiences.

The sentence received by Weinstein also hopefully demonstrates that the perceived success of the perpetrator should in no way influence any decision made by the criminal justice system. This was attempted by his legal team who stated in relation to the length of his sentencing: "His life story, his accomplishments and struggles are simply remarkable and should not be disregarded in total because of the jury's verdict." Unfortunately, this has impacted on sentencing many times before.

Weinstein's conviction was a powerful statement and managed in part to overcome these dangerous narratives and stereotypes, but it also took more than 100 women coming forward and a global movement. The lessons from this must be carried forward. His behaviour was enabled by social, political, cultural and legal systems that must change to support and believe survivors. **C**



**Alice Arkwright works for the TUC**

# Cinema in the time of Covid-19

**Patrick Mulcahy**  
muses on  
the loss of  
the big  
screen  
experience

*Nona: If They Soak Me, I'll Burn Them* was available on the streaming service, MUBI

On March 18th 2020 every cinema in the UK – along with other every place of public entertainment – was closed for the foreseeable future. The day before, I took the afternoon off to be immersed in a Disney-Pixar cartoon (*Onward*) that made me cry and an Irish drama (*Calm With Horses*) which under normal circumstances would have launched its leading actor, Cosmo Jarvis, into bigger things. Neither screening was particularly well attended. Nevertheless, I was consciously saying goodbye to something – a genuinely shared experience amongst strangers at which it was OK to emote in public. Unlike football fans on the weekend of 7th March, I knew I was facing an enforced separation from the pastime I loved. I took the time to thank the employees who turned up for work. Every trailer was for a film I had no idea when I would see – even the remake of *Blithe Spirit* seemed enticing.

Now I watch films at home on my laptop or on television. Anticipation is limited. There isn't a shared conversation – a new argument – to be had. The big Easter releases – the live action remake of *Mulan*; the new James Bond adventure, *No Time To Die* – have all been stored away, awaiting a screen big enough to host the filmmakers' ambition. In the days before, successive film festivals – South by Southwest, BFI Flare, Prague, Cannes, Edinburgh – were cancelled. Launchpads for movies were closed. I felt glad that I attended the Berlinale this year – the last festival to be held without interruption by the virus.

The coronavirus itself is a film director's 'high concept' – an unseen virus caught from people who show no symptoms. You don't know you have it. You don't know you've passed it on. We are 18 months away from a vaccine – if one can be developed. What do

we do in the meantime?

In the grand scheme of things, missing cinema is not a hardship. We can return to the immersive delight of books. We can watch old movies – and some new ones – on television, cable and streaming sites. It is interesting to note that it wasn't just Covid-19 victims who lost their sense of taste; every new film reviewed in the *Standard* newspaper on 3rd April was given four stars. I don't think

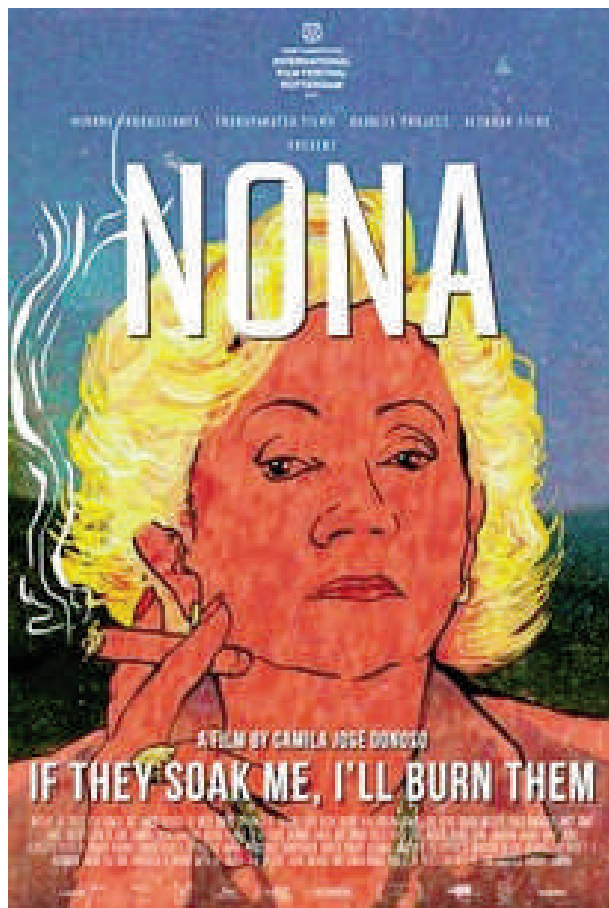
and Dwayne Johnson playing with *Scalextric*, any time soon.

Films about pandemics tend to focus on panic: the so-called 'end of civilization as we know it'. Reality has proved rather different. A friend of mine remarked that society has moved from virtue signalling ('Support the NHS') to vice-flagging ('why has that person had two walks a day?'). Essentially, we still have water and electricity and humankind hasn't dwindled to armed groups foraging for tinned goods.

Film allows us to share a perception of reality, but we are already doing it in the real world, equally confined to our homes with only our income levels and health to differentiate us. We have complied all too willingly with social distancing, at least in the street. Inside supermarkets, shoppers are as unaware of others as they ever were, staring at the use-by date of broccoli whilst blocking an aisle. Creative individuals have been flummoxed by the lockdown, unwilling – or unable – to imagine other stories. Columnists and commentators have come into their own. We've moved from presenters disinterestedly discussing a topic to them monologuing – Emily Maitlis addressing the language

around Covid-19 survivors; Eamonn Holmes asking us not to be so quick to dismiss conspiracy theories around 5G phone masts. Our communicators have gone off-script.

For comfort, I find myself looking at screening times at the Zita Cinema in Stockholm – it's still open – remembering that social interaction under Covid-19 can be managed in a different way. Like everyone, I yearn for my old life. Social distancing has generally reduced conflict; if you can't see someone, they can't upset you. We all want to go back to taking control of the personal decisions we make and engaging with others freely.



the individual who watched *Nona: If They Soak Me, I'll Burn Them* saw the same over-worked, devoid of emotion Chilean movie that I did. Maybe they were just grateful that it was there.

It is not just cinemagoing that has stopped. So has filmmaking, even though the empty streets are ripe for making an apocalyptic drama on the cheap. Los Angeles, though affected by the virus, is uniquely prepared for it, with green screens available to simulate company. Nevertheless, most TV and film productions have been postponed. Chat shows have been continuing, but it is unlikely we'll see *Fast and Furious – The At Home Edition*, with Vin Diesel

## BOOK REVIEWS

# Keir Hardie and the 21st Century Socialist Revival

**Mike Davis**

on inspiration from yesterday's Keir

**Keir Hardie and the 21st Century Socialist Revival**  
Pauline Bryan (ed) Luath Press £9.99

A new Keir has now taken over leadership of the Labour Party. The first Labour leader was a giant among socialists. Hardie was the driving force behind the formation of the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Party itself 120 years ago, becoming the first leader of the Party. His socialism was highly moral, principled and uncompromising, exuding internationalism, republicanism and a democratic spirit as this collection of essays illustrates.

Book-ended with a foreword by Richard Burgon and an afterword by Jeremy Corbyn, the book is very much in tune with the anti-war, peace and campaigning approach of Labour's recently departed leader.

For many the chapter by Caroline Sumpter on Hardie and the Right to Childhood will come as a revelation. He wrote a children's column in the ILP's Labour Leader over several years where he popularised socialist ideas. The Labour Crusader and Chats with lads and lasses by Daddy drew on fairy stories. Frequent themes in the stories were slaying the giants of 'Mon-o-Poly' and 'Com-Pe-Tition' alongside 'Ig-no-Ramus' and 'Super-Stition' in his Jack Clearhead column. Robbed of his own childhood—he started industrial work aged eight and lost his own child at the age of two, Hardie clearly saw the importance of education for the younger generation.

Chapters on the trade unions, municipal socialism, Hardie as newspaper columnist (by Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard), his travels to the United States and work with Eugene Debs help sketch in the range of Hardie's interests.

What comes across most strikingly is Hardie's internationalism, in another clear parallel with Jeremy Corbyn. He took a strong stand against the Boer War, a difficult stance given the jingoism of the time, and campaigned for

Home Rule for Ireland and an end to colonialism in India, though he believed in a kind of independence within the British empire for all the colonies. Jonathan Hyslop's chapter on Hardie as critic of empire brings out his unshakeable convictions but also the limits of his views.

He embraced republicanism, standing alone and pilloried in Parliament to urge the commemoration of several hundred Welsh miners killed in a pit accident rather than celebrate the birth of

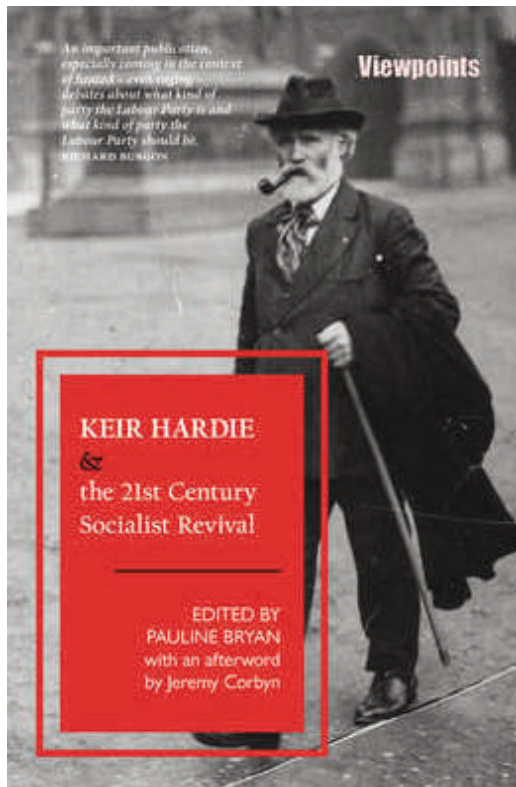
stantly putting the suffrage case in parliament. He also campaigned for abortion rights and the provision of contraception seeing women's economic independence as the key to their advance to sexual equality. Hardie did not live to see the franchise gains of 1918 and 1928.

Vince Mills looks at the parallels and differences with James Connolly, the leading figure in Irish republican socialism. They both believed working class unity was the route to Ireland's freedom. However, both in different ways underrated the national independence struggle as the first stage to realising a socialist alliance of Catholic and Protestant workers. Mills looks at the difficult parliamentary calculations and context of the immediate pre-First World War years where alliances and deals were an intricate part of the process towards Irish independence.

The quest for social justice and peace animated Hardie's spirit. He died, not yet 60, in 1915 a broken man, with the carnage of the First World War seeing the formally internationalist parties of the Second socialist International collapse into nationalism and support for their warring imperialist states.

These essays provide an invaluable introduction to Hardie's life and work. As Jeremy Corbyn says in his

afterword, socialist solutions through universal free education, community organising, campaigning through newspapers, leaflets and any speaking platform, and most significantly through trade unions and a Labour party rooted in communities winning political power would be the means to liberation. Hardie the international socialist travelled by steamship to the USA, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and India and well as Europe seeking to build socialist alliances. That cooperation, coordination and solidarity he sought to build should be an inspiration in these dark times of pestilence and national populism.



a royal baby.

He was also a passionate supporter of votes for women and the extension of the franchise. He supported suffragists and suffragettes in and out of parliament. Ann Henderson's chapter illustrates his advocacy for women's equal rights. He wrote of the limited Women's Enfranchisement Bill that 'it is for the removal of the sex disqualification only...it would at once lift 1,250,000 British women from the political sphere to which 'idiots, lunatics and paupers' are consigned and transform them into free citizens'.

He was a tireless speaker at open air and indoor meetings with women campaigners while con-



# Socialism is back or is it Left Folk politics?

**Andrew Coates**  
on non-reformist reform

**Beyond Market Dystopia: New Ways of Living, Socialist Register 2020**  
Merlin Press/Monthly Review Press  
£18.99

Perhaps the foremost challenge in trying to think beyond the market dystopia of contemporary capitalism', the Preface to the 2020 Edition of the Socialist Register states, is to 'assess the implications of the alarming ecological conditions' we now confront. The two editors ask whether a 'new strategy for structural reform that would take capital away from capital' and remake the 'nature-society relation' is needed.

In the opening essay, Stephen Mahler, Sam Ginden and Leo Panitch hail the 'renewed appeal of socialist discourse'. They speculate on the challenges that would face socialist-led governments and André Gorz's 'non-reformist reform'. The opportunity to test plans for economic democracy against Gorz's later view that the working class no longer had the capacity to organise production, and be the subject of social transformation, has vanished. Today the 'tens of thousands of young people' 'galvanised' into groups like Momentum and the Democratic Socialists of America are digesting the Labour Party's historic 2019 defeat and Bernie Sanders' uncertain future.

One aspect looks set to continue, 'the 'Green New Deal' and 'just transition' have become central parts of the socialist

lexicon. Indeed, some are staking the survival of the Corbyn project through a dose of ecosocialism, as offered by Rebecca Long-Bailey's version of the Green New Deal.

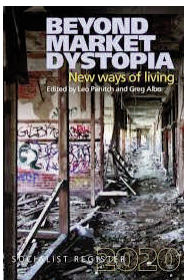
Other contributors offer a glimpse into the scale of environmental and other global problems. In a thoughtful article, Barbara Harriss-White probes the world's ecological catastrophes and suggests that alarm is not misplaced. What can be done in one country, she asks, when capitalism is the problem? Carbon-reducing mechanisms are not yet up to the task. Climate change is set to continue. Nancy Holmstrom is more upbeat: 'Based on a global commitment to public goods/commons as the default and social rationality we can aim for the 'buen vivir' for all'. Many readers will agree with Harriss-White that in this area there are more questions than answers.

Amy Bartholomew and Hilary Wainwright strike a more optimistic note. Recounting their take on the refugee and migrant crisis in Greece they discover 'radical democracy' in the refugee-solidarity City Plaza squat in Athens. A 'radically democratic model of living together' in this one hotel, this practised 'equality and freedom'. Evicted under the victorious right-wing New Democracy government, the authors see the City Plaza as part of 'solidarity across struggles'. Despite this 'new landscape' there is no indication about how a radical

left government, led by Syriza, under EU and home-created fiscal pressure, could deal on its own with large numbers of migrants.

One of the contributions to Socialist Register stands out. Yu Chunsen offers a brilliant account of the struggles of the 'new precarious working class' in Chinese factories. Workmates ('gongyou') have established their own forms of solidarity faced with 'management by stress', workplace despotism, and trade unions which function as conveyor belts for management rule. Chunsen compares the Chinese willingness to take 'collective actions' with the making of the English working class described by E.P. Thompson.

"Socialism is Back", declares Nancy Fraser in the concluding contribution. Some people suggest that the Tory victory in Britain will see a revival not of socialism but of 'left folk politics.' That is, a retreat to indignation and moral protests. Alyssa Battistoni, from the populist cheerleaders of the US Jacobin magazine, cites a long list. In the indignados, Occupy, Nuit Debout, the 'London riots', Black Lives Matter and Red for Ed (Red for Education) she sees 'struggles combine critiques of wealth inequality, renewed labour militancy and attention to the spaces of daily life'; but none of these have been strategies towards an electorally victorious socialism prepared to begin 'non-reformist reforms.'



## California dreaming

**Patricia D'Ardenne**  
on a delicious cocktail of counter-culture

**Set the Night on Fire L.A. in the Sixties**  
Mike Davis and Jon Wiener  
Verso £12.50 (reduced)

This remarkable history of the political and social upheaval in LA throughout the sixties' narrates the desperate struggle faced by a million people of African, Asian and Mexican ancestry- who were being 'edited out of Utopia', better known for its Hollywood glamour and surfing Beach Boys.

Why LA and not New York? The authors note that it was the incorruptibility and sustained aggression of an authoritarian, right wing, racist, LA Police Department (led throughout by the 'Warden of the Ghetto', Police Chief William H Parker) that ensured battle lines were clearly delineated and publicised throughout the local media. The scope of the book is immense, detailed and scholarly. The setting

covers the full decade of the sixties, but places all the movements defined into a broader post WW2, Cold War era.

Why the 1960's? EP Thompson characterised the fifties as 'the apathetic decade', where people looked to private solutions for public ills. But 1960 will always be remembered as the dawn of a new age of political and social consciousness, that challenged racial segregation, the Vietnam war, the Bomb, the remnants of McCarthyism, with the emergence of pop culture, gay pride, feminism, Catholic Liberation Theology, intersecting (and occasionally colliding) with high school students, anti-war feminists, and Black Power.

The authors introduce us, through archival documents and personal interviews to many amazing characters who risked life and limb to bring the City of Angels

into enlightenment. Enlightenment initially meant decent affordable housing, free health care, functional schools, employment opportunities in the lucrative aerospace industry. LA also launched Black Power and was where Angela Davis and Malcolm X first came to prominence and the Watts uprising shook the nation. As LA became a more radical hotbed of political and social upheaval, enlightenment came to mean freedom of expression for sexual, racial and gendered minorities, in a delicious cocktail of Californian counter culture.

This is a beautifully written, brave, exhilarating work. Readers will be well rewarded for the effort of ploughing through all 36 chapters, each sourced and annotated. A wonderful antidote to the Trumpist fiction of the current US administration.



## BOOK REVIEWS

# Through a Glass Darkly

**Patricia d'Ardenne**  
on  
**Cromwell's Fall**

**The Mirror and the Light**  
**Hilary Mantel**  
**4th Estate £25**

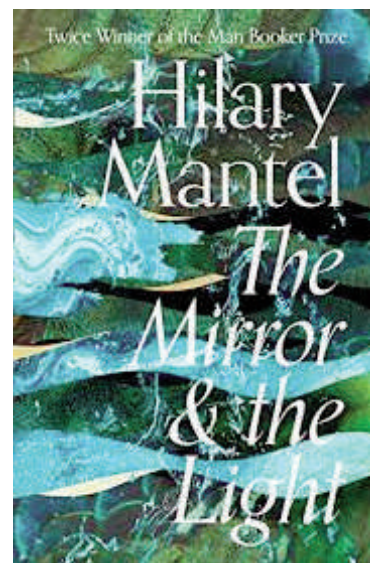
**W**hitfield has authored a number of volumes on privatisation of public services across the world and is director of The European Services Strategy Unit. This is his magnum opus – a 560 page text reflecting a lifetime of research - a comprehensive guide to what is wrong with privatisation and what to do about it. The bibliography covers 60 pages; the list of acronyms fills 8 pages. But this is a very readable book rather than a dreary academic tome. It includes useful tables -for example a typology of privatisation, financialisation, marketisation, and individualisation policies and objectives; an analysis of tuition fees in higher education in selected countries - UK is highest with the US in second place, and a comparison of administrative spending as a proportion of

health service expenditure in OECD countries (UK is 2% compared with 8% in the US – so much for the criticism of excessive expenditure on NHS bureaucrats).

If we were ever short of evidence to support the case for public ownership of welfare services and the regulation of the private sector, we are not any more. It is only regrettable that Labour did not focus sufficiently on the economic as well as the moral case for public ownership in the recent election.

The book's final chapter on Strategic Action sets out the key challenges, summarises the case against privatisation, provides a guide to challenging corporate interests, a list of actions which trade unions and community organisations should take and examples of campaigns both in the UK and internationally, and a guide to writing alternative plans for community managed public services – all very useful. So, don't

be put off by the thickness of the book – the last few pages tell you what to do, while the rest provides supporting evidence. At the reasonable price of £25 it is certainly better value for money than privatised services.



# Moscow's man in London

**Nigel Doggett**  
on the tale  
of a great  
survivor

**The Maisky Diaries**  
**Edited by Gabriel Gorodetsky**  
**Yale UP £12.99 pb**

**F**rom 1932 at the height of the Soviet purges to 1943 in the depths of World War II, the Soviet Ambassador to Britain was Ivan Maisky, a former Menshevik with a deep affection for his hosts and a network of personal contacts ranging from the leftist intelligentsia to establishment Tories. In 1993 after the Soviet archives were opened up, UK Russia specialist Gorodetsky stumbled on Maisky's diaries. They are now condensed into a single volume, with explanatory notes, providing a treasure trove of historical commentary and entertaining anecdotes.

Highlights include discussions with Fabians George Bernard Shaw and Beatrice and Sidney Webb, who all had some sympathy with Stalin. There is an interesting account of Stafford Cripps, for a time ambassador to the Soviet Union: apparently Stalin preferred to deal with members of the British establishment than such a left winger. Maisky also recounts conversations with Lloyd George, Winston Churchill and Anthony

Eden, while promoting a pact with the USSR to head off any British rapprochement with Nazism. Poignantly from a 2020 viewpoint, he reports Tory reformer RAB Butler's expectation that some form of socialism was inevitable in Britain after the war.

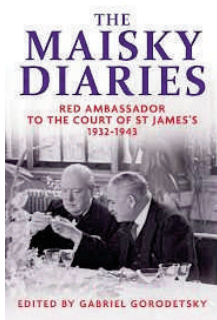
Even more than most memoirs and diaries, the details should be treated with caution. He sometimes puts his own views in the mouths of others, when they differ from the Moscow line. Maisky was tainted as a former Menshevik who had originally opposed the Reds in the Civil War. He knew his diary might one day be read by his superiors and enemies. So there is no criticism, and even a little eulogising, of his own government, such as the unintentionally droll comparison of Lenin with Gandhi: guess which one he deems an insignificant figure!

Another amusing incident occurs at a reception in 1934, with guests including both British royalty and Kirill Romanov, who claimed the position of Tsar. This entourage studiously avoids Maisky the representative of Bolshevik regicides and he suffers many hostile looks and muttering.

Otherwise he is treated remarkably well by the British establishment and he is clearly at ease in London society. As the editor notes, his affection for class enemies would have been regarded as "inherently bourgeois" in what was still a major imperialist capitalist power. That makes him a highly attractive figure far removed from the austere Bolshevik stereotype of any variety.

The prospect of recall to Moscow and of being purged is a constant backdrop, as a new generation like Stalin's henchman Molotov displaced the more westernized 'old Bolsheviks' and ex-Tsarist diplomats. With the USSR and Britain finally allied, in 1943 Maisky was recalled and assigned an internal Foreign Ministry post. He was distraught at leaving his second home, even in wartime far more congenial than Moscow. Remarkably, he survived the purges to complete his memoirs and even outlasted Stalin.

This is a ferociously entertaining and fascinating read for anyone with an interest in UK-Soviet relations, inter-war diplomatic manoeuvres or the role of diplomat for a revolutionary government.





# Political change from below

**Tom Zagoria**  
on homeless direct action

**Squatting in postwar Britain**  
**Don Watson**  
**Merlin £ 16.99**

While Britain braves its way through an international crisis, luxury hotels and unused buildings sit empty and millions live in unaffordable overcrowded accommodation or sleep on the streets. Housing inequalities which have been brewing for decades are forced out into the open. Sound familiar? This was 1946, related by historian Don Watson in *Squatting in Postwar Britain*. On its own terms Watson's work is both a detailed exposition of the housing situation in the years after the Second World War and an evidenced contribution to many well-worn debates about the spurs to the squatting movement, the role of the Communist Party in squatting, and the drivers of Britain's postwar council house-building programme.

But since Watson published the work, Covid-19 has made a setting of society-shaking crisis and looming economic depression feel more familiar. 1946 offers parallels as well as promises to 2020. Covid-19, like the Second World War, is already leading to longstanding and seemingly 'objective' policies appearing more ambiguous and more contestable. Is it right for buildings to sit empty generating capital, while homelessness skyrockets? Do we need to wait for, and rely on, private profit and control to fund redevelopments of our ageing neighbourhoods? Who has, in the words of Henri Lefebvre, the 'right to the city', and can it be reclaimed for the majority who live there?

Watson's work inspires, but doesn't examine these questions in any great detail, focusing instead on his narrative: of a squatting movement seemingly popularised by a cinema operator in Scunthorpe moving into a disused army camp, but with its roots in decades of housing campaigning. He covers the rent

strikes of the 1930s and the requisitions of the war years, the first squats in disused army camps, the more self-consciously political 'luxury squatters' in empty mansions, and the methods of organisation, negotiation and resistance of squatters while they waited for council housing tenancies which sometimes took decades to come.

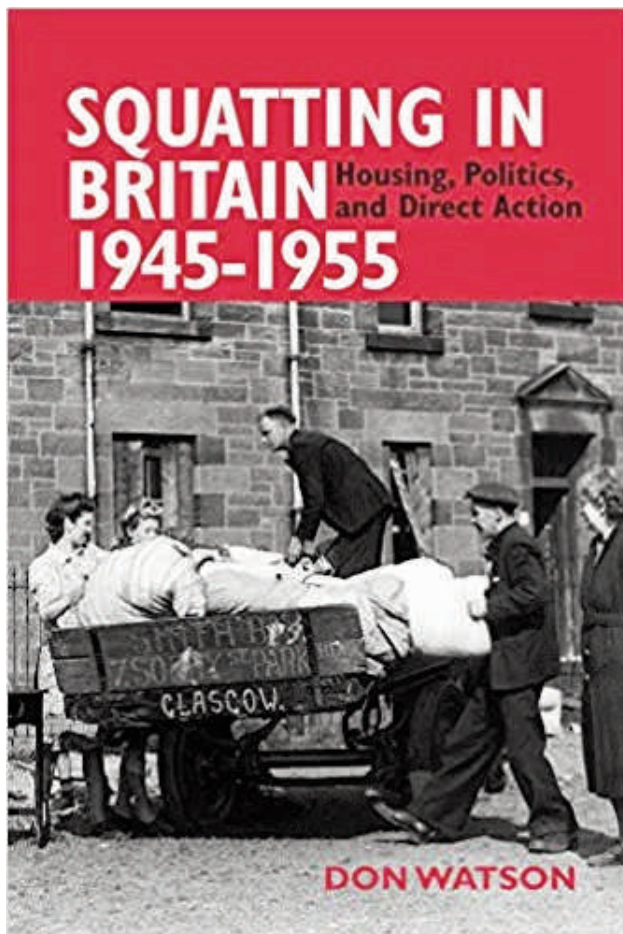
terms, and his conclusions are nuanced, befitting a complex subject. Read his work and you will learn a lot about local authority allocation policy and camp squatters' committee systems. For people involved in housing campaigning today many details will be familiar, from councils adopting absurdly stringent 'local connection' rules to disbar more transitory applicants, to vulnerable people being cleansed from waiting lists when they 'refuse' obviously unsuitable half-built accommodation. Tactics used to divide and rule, or obscure injustices, are still ongoing - and in many ways there have been steps back (such as the 2012 legislation criminalising residential squatting).

This book is a case study of a principle in working class history. He persuasively argues that direct action, pressuring from below, was able to expand the horizons of the possible. He shows working class people in many cases (justifiably) crediting themselves with jumpstarting requisitioning and council house-building programmes through direct action.

So it's worth reading how, in the aftermath of an international society-shaking crisis, working class people began to feel that the sacrifices hadn't been fully shared. They saw after that crisis an opportunity to break an unjust policy paradigm and fight for the principle of housing for all. And they didn't wait for what government bureaucracies handed down to them - they took what they needed, and left the government to catch up. Unlike in 1946 of course, today we don't have a government which is notionally socialist - which makes all the more heartening a story showing that great political changes can be driven from below. 1946 may well be on its way.

His empirical style - building a strong evidence base from local archives for every argument he makes - can sometimes be slightly dry, but it also builds a refreshingly national picture, not at all London-centric. He tells much of his story in the words of the squatters themselves; this is not a book written from the perspective of council minutes and working papers, but in the lived experience of working class people. In the words of Communist activists Watson quotes, this is a narrative written 'with a warm feeling of admiration and respect' for the ordinary squatters.

Watson doesn't write in grand





## BOOK REVIEWS

# Asset rich – everyone else poor

**Don Flynn**  
on rolling  
back  
parasitical  
rent  
seeking

**Stolen – How to save the world from financialisation**  
**Grace Blakeley**  
**Repeater Books, £10.99**

It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.' This piece of pessimism of the 1990s limped on into the new millennium and shaped the thinking of the crew who gathered around the New Labour 'third way' project. The glitz and glamour of a world that was being refashioned through the globalisation of capital movement led them to the question whether it was ever desirable to end capitalism anyway. Much better to grab a seat on the helter-skelter ride and see where it took us.

Grace Blakeley's book looks back on forces that shaped capitalism during these years and offers a challenge to all those who thought it could be made to support the cause of equality and social justice. The changes wrought by Thatcher's years in office had shifted the locus of the system away from its base in manufacturing, moving it instead in the direction of banking and financial services. The difference was that, whilst factories, mines and steel mills provided spaces where working people could assert their collective power against bosses, banks and the business running the financial services provided no similar opportunities for the interests of wage earners to be advanced.

## Rent seekers

More than that, the shift meant a move from productive to a rentier form of capitalism. Profits under the former system had depended on firms investing in plant and machinery that would increase the productivity of labour. The exploitation of workforces was still at the heart of capitalism but at least under the old dispensation the boss class ran a system that brought useful goods and services into circulation.

This is far less the case when

financialised capitalism becomes hegemonic. Capitalist wealth accrues from the holding of assets – buildings, land, patents, stocks and shares – which in themselves create no new value but which can generate income in the form of rents. Financialisation describes a strategy in which rent seeking became the preferred form of economic activity on the part of those with resources to invest. The reforms to banking law and the

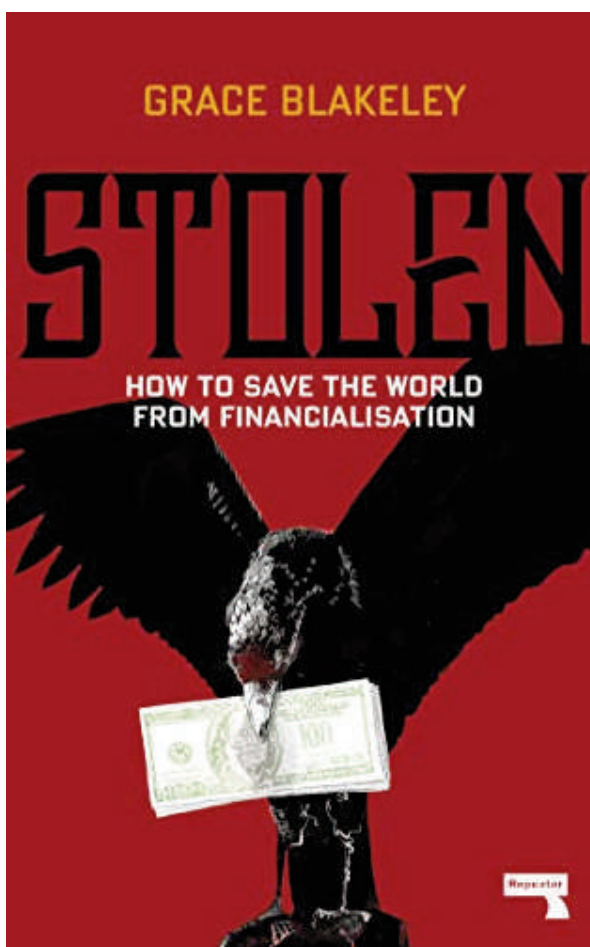
finance companies saw pressure on working class living standards as an opportunity to grow their asset portfolios by offering readily available, but very expensive, credit to families wanting to finance home improvement or take foreign holidays. For some this could be secured against the windfall gains from the right-to-buy sell-off of council homes in the 1980s. For the rest credit cards and overdrafts became essential to managing tight budgets.

## Non-financial businesses

But financialisation involved more than the extension of the power of banks and financial service companies. Blakeley explains how it changed the nature on non-financial businesses that had hitherto made profits out of selling goods or providing services. Company accounts were restructured to put commitments to spending – investing in machinery or technology, maintaining buildings, even paying the wages of workers – off the balance sheets which had the effect of enhancing the value of the assets they were holding. The financialised company now set on a huge volume of things that gained in value without anything being done to them whilst having very little in the way of committed outgoings. The mantra of shareholder value meant that what

counted as the gains of this system were handed out as dividends to already wealthy owners of company stocks, whilst the now invisible workforce that was still retained paid peanuts.

Blakeley does more than explain how we got into this mess. Her book concludes with an eight-point plan to roll back this parasitic model and build a system where investment worked to promote the well-being of people and communities, rather than a means for the already affluent to grab larger slices of society's wealth for themselves.



structure of the stock market in the 1980s increased the amount of money seeking opportunities to earn rents whilst the amount of valuable assets in existence grew at a slower rate. The result was a form of inflation that hiked the value of assets and created a series of expanding bubbles that were destined at some point to pop.

The other side of Blakeley's account is the tremendous growth in debt during this period. Household debt expanded because the position of wage earners was weakened in the UK's post-industrial economy. But banks and

# On intersectionalism

**Robbie Scott**  
on race and gender

**Beyond the Pale**  
**White Women, Racism, and History**  
Vron Ware

**H**ave images of white women played a significant contribution to discussions on race and feminism, and if so to what extent? Not only have images played a key role; Vron Ware goes further, saying feminism has been influenced fundamentally by racism, particularly in its aversive and institutional forms.

Beyond the Pale is an analysis of the intersections between race and gender. Ware examines the symbiotic relationship between black and white women within contemporary race and feminism and scrutinises the different meanings of womanhood.

The historical context she provides helps us to understand the

pitfalls of the modern women's movement and its often racist undertones. This comes mainly in the form of a British perspective and highlights the ways that the fight against racism and patriarchy developed together and the ways they diverge.

Some of the first major political organising in Britain came out of the anti-slavery movement. The book roots the women's liberation movement firmly inside the earlier fight for civil rights. Were it not for the latter, the women's liberation movement may never have happened. This is a bold claim to make. Ware backs it up with a range of case studies and profiles of prominent activists drawn from the feminist and anti-racist movements.

Ware shines a light on how patronising and racist attitudes were common among white women

and no less prevalent among those who saw themselves as anti-racist. One interesting way she does this is by examining the views of white women in India under the Empire. I found this area particularly informative in the use of the modern term "whitesplain": the act of a white person explaining topics to people of colour, often in an obliviously condescending manner.

Beyond the Pale is an eye-opening, excellent analysis of the intersections of race and gender. Although at times academic in style and tricky to follow, Ware's work is a must-read for feminists or those involved in anti-racist politics. The book serves as a reminder of historical and contemporary opportunities for intersectional cooperation whilst serving as a warning on how that collaboration might be damaged.



# Chasing the dream

**Mary Southcott**  
on gender equality

**Gender Equality in Public Services**  
**Hazel Conley and Margaret Page**  
Routledge £84

**T**his book is part of the Routledge studies in management, organisations and society and was published in 2014.

In many ways, the authors have the right to add something to the book in the light of all that has happened in those intervening years: the Brexit decision, Trump's election, the #MeToo campaign and trial outcome, Jeremy Corbyn's campaign to end austerity, a fourth Tory victory and the rise to CV decision maker of a Conservative minister who labelled feminists "obnoxious bigots". The opening quote from one equality advisor in local government comparing equalities work to "running around with a butterfly net!" is surely apt.

It seems good timing to look at the issue of gender equality as the authors do, first five, and now ten, years after the passing of the Equality Act. We have had no Labour equality legislation since then. But everything has changed utterly and we may see a few butterflies flying out of CV crisis. Anyway, there is room to hope that we will begin to value what has been traditionally women's work, often low paid: cleaners, food production staff, health and care work-

ers and elsewhere in public services or in the home.

I enjoyed best Chapter 3: Dreams and visions of feminism equality in the local state. I lived through that. I joined the Labour Party just as feminists started their work in local government particularly in response to the election of the first woman Conservative Prime Minister. I recognised many of those whose books were cited from the Labour movement or arguing for constitutional reform.

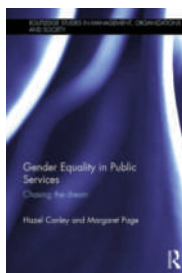
It is also 50 years since the Ruskin College women's liberation conference. This book looks at the work of feminists in the local state during two periods 1978 – 1997 and then 1997 – 2010. My catch up came via Labour Women's Section and Council. I met Ellen Malos who had organised the Bristol Women's Liberation Movement conference in 1973. I spoke in support of quotas for women on the NEC at first Women's and then Annual Conference. I wrote policy to set up Bristol's women's and race committees, compared with Avon's Equalities Committee. I was on the Labour NEC women's subcommittee, a parliamentary candidate, on EMILY's List, Labour National Policy Forum. I had reservations about the move to create the Equality and Human Rights Commission because I could com-

pare the local single equality campaigns with the generic one.

The Equal Opportunities Commission somehow got lost in the EHRC but the Gender Equality Duty was the "most important advance in women's equality legislation since the Sex Discrimination Act".

Their book started in their case studies of implementation of the Gender Equality Duty funded by the British Academy and sabbatical time by the West of England and Queen Mary Universities. Everything in the book is clearly signed, the research, the case studies. It is dedicated to 'practitioners and activists who campaign to protect and to extend the long agenda for women's equality within local, democratically run public services' without whose efforts, things would be much worse.

I was curious about the strapline. What dream were the authors chasing and would it be found. It would be ironic indeed if the epidemic which has hit us, showed up how important that dream is, not just for gender equality, but hugely the public services. It is really important that those involved in public policy and local government read this book and draw on the experience of the pioneering equality workers and their local authorities.



## VIEW FROM WESTMINSTER



Helen Hayes is Labour MP for Dulwich and West Norwood

# Ending invisibility



## Helen Hayes on the Windrush scandal and reforming the history curriculum

**M**y constituency has a strong and direct connection with the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948. Around 200 Windrush passengers came to the Labour Exchange on Coldharbour Lane, finding work and settling in the surrounding area of Brixton. The Windrush generation has helped to form and sustain the identity of our part of south London, working at King's College Hospital, on London Transport, starting many local businesses, churches and community projects.

As a consequence, when the Windrush scandal broke in 2018 – the same year that we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush – many of my constituents were affected, facing demands from the Home Office for proof of their right to be in the UK which they could not possibly meet, and subsequently with the threat of deportation, loss of employment, housing and benefits. It is impossible to overstate how deep the impacts of the Windrush scandal run. For people who had come to this country as British citizens, at the invitation of the British government, to contribute in multiple different ways to our economy and communities, made their lives and their homes here, paid taxes and brought up their children to be told they were no longer welcome represented the most profound and hurtful rejection.

Much has been written about the scandal itself and the government's response, and we are still battling for justice and compensation for many Windrush citizens. It is important to me that, as well as seeking justice for all those directly affected, we reflect on what the Windrush scandal tells us about the state of our national identity and we think practically about how we can stop such a thing from ever happening again.

One of the

most shocking aspects of the debates which followed the Windrush scandal was the basic lack of understanding of some members of the Tory government of the implications of the 1948 British Nationality Act which extended British citizenship to Commonwealth citizens. So many times, in the House of Commons the plight of Windrush citizens was inaccurately presented as a visa problem, rather than a wrongful denial of existing citizenship. At the same time, the narrative around the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush all too often characterised this event as the arrival of the first black people in the UK, when in fact we know of black Britons as long ago as Roman times.

That led me to reflect on how our basic understanding of our national identity could have become so distorted and inaccurate. British history is a history of migration: whether our ancestors were Roman, Norman or Viking invaders, Huguenots fleeing persecution or Irish immigrants fleeing starvation, whether our family story is rooted in the shameful history of colonialism, whether our forebears came to the UK as freed slaves in the 19th century or as Commonwealth citizens after WW2, we can all find our story in the history of migration.

More than one in six children aged 0-15 in England and Wales are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. BAME young people make up more than a quarter of state-funded primary and secondary school pupils in England, but despite Britain's increasingly diverse classrooms the history taught in schools remains focused on narrow and celebrated accounts of "our island story" or "the Tudors and the Tudors and the Tudors" which are inaccurate and incomplete.

Data reveals that this narrow curriculum is struggling to engage students from all backgrounds. Research by the Royal Historical Society highlights a low uptake of history for both GCSE and undergraduate study by BAME students. Students understandably struggle to place themselves within the narrative of British history or contextualise their studies in the wider global story.

Racial and ethnic inequality affects

history more acutely than other disciplines. What we were taught in school has a huge impact on our understanding of history, yet history is not a science; it is never complete and it is never completely objective. Sources and perspectives matter. Whose story is told informs our understanding of who was important, who were the heroes and who were the villains. A partial telling can leave people and communities entirely invisible and leave stories that affected hundreds of thousands of people completely untold.

Our understanding of history in turn informs our sense of national identity and our understanding of the word "British" – who is included in that term. Too often, what we are taught in school can inform a characterisation of Britishness which is only partial, and therefore inaccurate.

The current history curriculum offers some opportunities to teach migration and modules are available within the GCSE syllabus of two examination boards. However, the optional nature of this content means that it is currently taught to less than 10% of students. Innovative work has been carried out by the Runnymede Trust, the Black Curriculum and others to engage young people and teachers with more expansive, representative and inclusive histories of Britain. The lesson from this work is that there is strong appetite from young people and teachers from all backgrounds for history teaching that reflects a broader range of voices and experiences. Yet, there is also a lack of confidence, support and resources for teachers who want to embed these histories in their classrooms.

In our society, which is both diverse and divided, we need the teaching of history to be inclusive, to allow everyone to find their place in it and have an inclusive understanding of 'Britishness'. That means not only making migration content available but signposting it effectively and making more of it compulsory. It also means making additional training and continuing professional development available to teachers to equip them to teach new material. It means working to realise a vision in which everyone, whatever their heritage, can say with pride "Our history is British history". **C**

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