CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

#305 July/August 2020

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Second wave

Frances O'Grady
RESISTING RECESSION
Bryn Jones
JUST ECONOMY
Duncan Bowie
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT
Allyson Pollock
Louisa Harding-Edgar
COVID-19 FAILURES
Patrick Vernon
Unmesh Desai
BLACK LIVES MATTER
Sandy Martin
WASTE
Plus
Book reviews and regulars

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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 the Labour Party and the trade union movement. It is concerned to deepen and extend a dialogue with all other socialists and with activists from other movements involved in the struggle to find democratic alternatives to the oppression, exploitation and injustices of capitalism and class society

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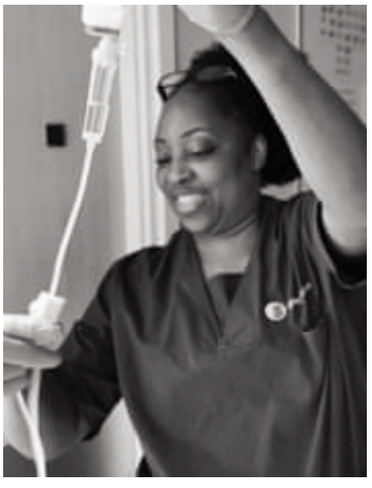
From left policy to left strategy - Tom Miller, 27/4/20

CONTENTS

TUC recovery plan-will Tories listen? Page 12

Women in the frontline. Page 21



Action not words needed on racism. Page 23

FEATURES

8 **COVID-19 & JUST ECONOMY**
Bryn Jones on new route to recovery

9 **COVID PUBLIC INQUIRY**
Jo Goodman on her father's death

10 **STATE INTERVENTION**
Duncan Bowie on localising development

11 **COUNCILS UNDER COSH**
Tom Miller on councils at breaking point

12 **TUC RECOVERY PLAN**
Frances O'Grady says listen to trade unions

13 **PLATE SPINNING ON BREXIT**
Peter Kenyon says Starmer must turn up heat on transition

14 **COVID-19 & SCHOOLS**
Dave Lister on shambles and U-turns and Mike Davis on curriculum

16 **NHS & SOCIAL CARE UNDER COVID**
Allyson Pollock & Louisa Harding-Edgar on catalogue of failure

19 **WASTE & RECYCLING**
Sandy Martin on ending throw-away society

20 **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SPIKE**
Sabia Kamali on countering abuse

21 **COVID-19 HITS WOMEN**
Alice Arkwright says women bear brunt of crisis

22 **BLACK LIVES MATTER 1**
Unmesh Desai says time for action on racism

23 **BLACK LIVES MATTER 2**
Patrick Vernon says Covid highlights BAME inequality

24 **1945 LABOUR LANDSLIDE**
Ian Bullock remembers Labour's victory 75 years ago

Cover by Martin Rowson

CHARTIST
FOR DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM
Number 305 **July/August 2020**

REGULARS

4 **OUR HISTORY 91**
Geoff Hodgson's Democratic Economy

5 **EDITORIAL**
Workers have paid enough for Covid crisis

6 **POINTS & CROSSINGS**
Paul Salveson on cycling into the future

7 **GREENWATCH**
Dave Toke on the perils of blue hydrogen

25 **BOOK REVIEWS**
Duncan Bowie on Gopal's empire, council communism & Cold War; Bryn Jones on 99% economy; Richard Olney on Raphael Samuel; Mary Southcott on Billy Bragg and William Waldegrave; Don Flynn on Kafka; Patricia d'Ardenne on Mantel's Mirror

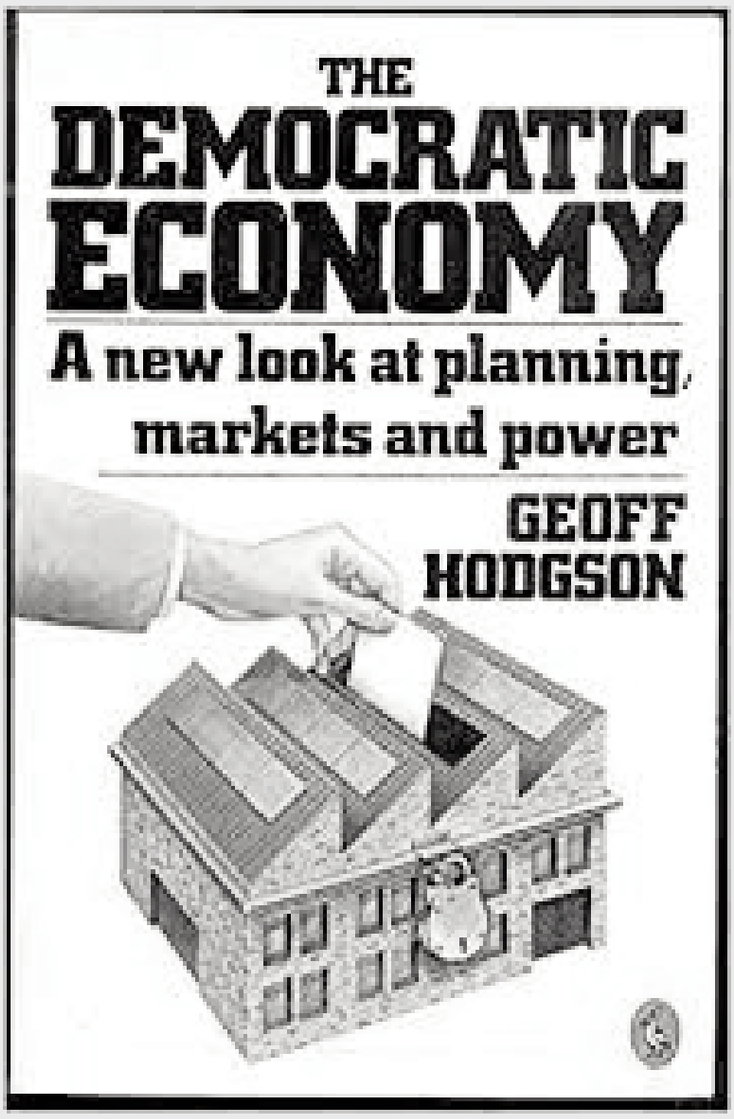
32 **WESTMINSTER VIEW**
Sam Tarry MP on needless deaths and inaction

OUR HISTORY 91

Geoff Hodgson: The Democratic Economy (1984)

Geoff Hodgson was and is an academic economist who developed a libertarian socialist approach to economic management. He lectured at Newcastle and Manchester Polytechnics and in the US. In 1981, he published *Labour at the Crossroads*, followed by *Capitalism, value and exploitation* in 1982.

Since publishing The Democratic Economy in 1984, he has published several further books on economic theory and management, including works on the Italian economist Piero Straffa and Economics and Utopia, published in 1999, as well as numerous articles in academic journals. He is currently at Loughborough University and also edits the Journal of Institutional Economics. His latest book published in 2019 is entitled Is Socialism Feasible? Towards an Alternative Future.



Hodgson's 1984 book followed from an increased interest within the Labour Party in democracy within the workplace, which had perhaps not been seen since the guild socialism and shop stewards movements of the 1920's. There had been a reconsideration of the appropriateness of the centralised Morrisonian model of managing nationalised industries. In 1977, the Labour Party had published the Bullock Report on Industrial Democracy, which had proposed statutory worker representation on the management boards of firms. It was approved by the Labour Party annual conference in 1979. There were also more radical examples of worker management, notably the Lucas Aerospace shop stewards alternative plan of 1976, the subject of a book by Hilary Wainwright and David Elliott in 1982 (recently republished by Spokesman), and the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders 'work in' of 1971 led by Jimmy Reid and other communist shop stewards.

"A society based on the fullest extension of popular participation in power, where democracy predominates, and where there is no great inequality in income or wealth, must be a form of socialism. Such a society is incompatible with the concentration of ownership of the means of production in the hands of a small minority, as obtains at present in all Western societies. Thus, in the transition to a democratic economy a threat to some vested interests is unavoidable. But that does not mean that we should not attempt to seek the smoothest possible transition. The orthodox Marxist account sees it as conceivably peaceful but more likely to be violent. This is largely because of the flawed and over-simplified picture of one class removing another from the position of power: the proletariat replaces the bourgeoisie as ruling class in a single revolutionary action. In this rapid and cataclysmic process, the 'ruling class' is bound to resist."

"The question is which forces and advances are to be given priority? The traditional socialist answer is to put the main emphasis on reform from the centre: particularly an extension of public ownership and taxation policies to reduce inequality. These matters are important, and they have to be tackled at some time. But it can be argued that extensions of democracy, participation, decentralisation and autonomy should be pressed for first. To put the matter more strongly, the present terms of debate should be changed from nationalisation versus markets and private enterprise, to the issue of how is democracy to be combined with autonomy. This creates the important possibility of a socialist consensus, which can gain wide popular support, and pose issues in terms which clear the way for the democratic economy."

"Thus, the traditional socialist configuration of means and ends is reversed. Instead of democracy being the means to achieve a goal of greater public ownership, public ownership is a means when necessary to achieve greater democracy. It could take a variety of forms, and it should not be conceived as old-style nationalisation. In any case, the pre-existence of a strong and pluralistic movement for democracy, participation and autonomy will help to prevent the emergence of state collectivist forms."

Workers must not be made to pay for Covid crisis

Beware the second wave: not just the threat to lives from a further spike in Covid-19 but to livelihoods from impending recession, mass unemployment and an increasingly likely 'no deal' Brexit. Without the massive government bailout protecting nine million workers the 600,000 increase in unemployment would run into millions -as in the US where 45 million workers are now jobless. The economy tanked in the first quarter of 2020 by 20%. The deficit has risen by almost £60 billion with worse to come.

As **Bryn Jones** argues the danger as furloughing tapers and ends in October will be that the cost will be laid on the shoulders of working people. He sees two routes ahead: the most likely a debt-fuelled, low tax road with heavy company closures, widespread redundancies and increased casualisation. Labour should push vigorously for the alternative route of conditional state aid, comprehensive labour market retraining and reallocation of workers to green socially useful production, with universal basic income replacing the discredited benefits system.

This chimes with the approach of the TUC as explained by **Frances O'Grady**. They propose an Economic Recovery Council to provide a voice for workers in a planned rebuilding in the turbulent times ahead. But will this government of diehards listen? Government failure on workplace safety does not auger well.

Duncan Bowie argues that the precedent set for massive state intervention provides an opportunity to move towards a devolved, localised polycentric development of towns, employment and housing provision . This should certainly be Labour's approach as the party reviews policy.

Besides growing economic turmoil, particularly in the hospitality, travel, cultural and creative industries, with millions of jobs threatened, there is the ongoing health emergency coupled with a resurgence of anger about inequality and racism.

Britain has the third highest death toll in the world from Covid-19. The 45,000 figure is likely to be a significant under counting if excess deaths over last year's rate are taken into account.

Lockdown was slow and even a week earlier could have prevented 20,000 deaths claims Professor Neil Ferguson. This theme is explored by **Dr Allyson Pollock** and **Dr Louisa Harding-Edgar**. They examine the catalogue of failures in the NHS and social care systems, painting a devastating picture of the spread of the contagion. Perhaps the worst feature was treating our care homes as a Cinderella service, sending elderly hospital patients back into homes without testing and then failing to provide protective equipment to staff. This was compounded by lack of testing and tracing until late in the day and a failed App.

Unlike in Germany where decentralised teams of public health staff worked in neighbourhoods to test, track and quarantine, the UK has largely adopted a centralised system, decoupling testing from contact-tracing. This was worsened by outsourcing both testing and contact-tracing to private sector companies like Serco and Deloitte, bypassing experienced local expertise. The much heralded 'world beating' App has proved a further failure. As David McAvoy, professor of Public Health at Queen Mary University London has said 'Contact tracing has been a shambles showing a disdain for evidence, an obsession with centralised control and privileging of private over public interests.'

The Cummings scandal and footballer Marcus Rashford's successful campaign to reinstate school food vouchers for the poorest families over summer holidays illustrates just how out of touch the government has become. The government has been forced into embarrassing U-turns in its school opening plans. **Dave Lister** examines the catalogue of errors characterising school policy whilst highlighting the regressive curriculum imposed by Michael Gove in 2010.

Lack of education on black history connects with the explosion of rage felt by black and white people at the police murder in Minneapolis of George Floyd**. Unmesh Desai** and **Patrick Vernon** highlight the continuing scandal of inequality and inaction on race by successive Tory governments. Both make clear it is not another race commission that's needed but action on black deaths in custody, discrimination at work, police stop and search, and of course the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

Too little too late has characterised the government's shambolic approach to the Covid crisis

Women have also been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. **Alice Arkwright** reports on the higher levels of redundancies among women, the intensification of the domestic burden of housework and childcare and other regressive impacts. **Sabia Kamali** of Sisters Forum looks at the worsening levels of domestic abuse facing women during lockdown and the erosion of support services.

Labour's shadow front bench led by Keir Starmer have begun to take back the initiative from this incompetent and uncaring government. The Labour Together review of the election defeat makes some good points but leaves many questions unanswered, glossing over the alleged internal subversion of Jeremy Corbyn. **Peter Kenyon** highlights a no deal Brexit as the other big challenge hovering under the radar of Covid-19. Without a trade deal, requiring an extended transition, the prospect of economic crash looms. Labour and unions should be preparing to meet the challenge.

Of course Labour would have faced the same challenges in the face of this global pandemic but the approach would have been very different. Too little too late has characterised the government's shambolic approach. Medical opinion is pretty united in condemning the miscalculations, from ignoring World Health Organisation warnings in January, treating coronavirus like a flu, abandoning test, trace and isolate on 12 March, lack of PPE for front line staff in care homes and hospitals, a lack of international cooperation… The list goes on.

Carry on cycling

Paul Salveson reports on a gentle cycling revolution gathering speed

Anyone involved in public transport, whether as an operator, planner or policy-maker, will be extremely worried at the moment. After spending several weeks of being told not to use trains or buses, the likelihood of people returning to public transport in the volumes we were used to, for a long time to come, seems small. Various studies have been done reflecting people's current attitudes and likelihood to use trains or buses, but the reality is that nobody really knows what is going to happen, until it does. But it doesn't look good. It isn't just that we've got out of the habit of using trains or buses (I haven't been on either for over two months now), people will also be scared of using public transport because of continuing fears of infection.

The winners will be the car, home-working and – the bicycle. As far as transport goes, the bicycle revolution is the one heartening thing to emerge from all this. It has become a cliché to talk of people getting the old bike out of the shed, giving it a bit of oil and pottering around the streets, or further afield. Bike shops have done a roaring trade and I've heard of several local cycle shops being virtually cleared out. The good weather has helped.

But will that bike just go back into the shed in a few weeks' time? Some might, but others will stay in operation. Why so confident? Two things really. Getting into cycling involves two big leaps – physical and mental. Riding a bike for the first few days can be uncomfortable, but it steadily gets better. Your bum will stop aching after a while. At the same time, starting to ride a bike needs confidence, which you only get through practice. If you were starting from fresh, or after a long gap of not cycling, it will take a few weeks of regular cycling (depending I suppose on age and general fitness) to have the confidence and physical well-being to cycle around towns and cities.

But it isn't just an individual thing – you need to have the right infrastructure in place to really encourage the growth of cycling. In the UK, London is way ahead, but Greater Manchester is starting to do the right things. Many other local authorities, as well as the Welsh and Scottish governments, are re-assessing the potential for cycling.

Cycling today

There's a whole package of measures that are needed including reduced road space for cars, dedicated cycle lanes, cycle priority, car-free streets and wider spaces, as well as places where you can safely leave your bike. There needs to be a concerted effort to change car drivers' thinking as well.

There needs to be the resources to make a difference: such as teams of people in local government working with employers, schools, colleges and universities to promote cycling. The unions should have a role in this too, at workplace and strategic level, looking at ways to encourage cycle to work schemes and better cycle facilities at work. Workplaces should have safe places to leave a bike, whether you are employed there or are just visiting. The same goes for shops, cinemas and other places where people congregate.

Rail stations should be developed as cycling hubs, not just with space to leave your bike, but to have it serviced, buy accessories or rent a bike. New development – housing, industrial or commercial – should put cycling infrastructure to the forefront, instead of ignoring it in favour of the car.

And let's not be sniffy about the electric bike. Or, to be more accurate, 'power-assisted' bikes; you still have to pedal. I had the perspicacity to buy one in early February and it really has changed my life. There should be battery charging points in workplaces and railway stations, as well as hire facilities at stations. Cycle 'snobbery' is something that needs challenging. The idea that you have to be kitted out in figure-hugging lycra with a bike costing thousands puts people off. You need a helmet and you need to be visible. But that's all.

Cycling is one of those retail sectors that lends itself well to alternative forms of ownership. Many cycle shops are already run as cooperatives. It isn't difficult to set up a new business selling, hiring and repairing bikes, perhaps linked to other retail activities. At Auchterarder, Scotland, there's a lovely bike shop, gallery and cafe but I'm sure there are lots more.

Three months ago much of this would have been dismissed as pie-in-the-sky. Now it's starting to happen, with government money to back it up. Labour should be keeping them to their word but being more imaginative in developing local, regional and national strategies. C

Paul Salveson's blog is at www.paulsalveson.org.uk

Blue hydrogen - a Trojan horse from oil and gas

Dave Toke says stop wasting money on non-renewables

Solar power- part of the solution

The announcement by the German Government that their hydrogen strategy will include support for so-called blue hydrogen as a transitional measure must be regarded as a huge setback for a sustainable energy transition. Essentially what is being proposed is the propping up of oil and gas rather than the alternative – an energy efficient decentralised system based on renewable energy.

The danger is that the British Government will now follow suit.

Blue hydrogen is hydrogen produced from natural gas with the carbon captured and stored – with the caveat of course that the process, for cost reasons, is unlikley to abate more than 85% of the carbon content of the natural gas.

Essentially what the natural gas industry will succeed in doing with 'blue' hydrogen is to preserve their multinational gas extraction business by the trick of branding their product differently in different countries. Gas from the same fields will be either branded (further downstream) as 'blue' or nothing at all (in other words, normal carbon producing stuff).

Of course it will only be in a few places that the gas will be marketed as 'blue'. I am sure lots of fancy consultants will be employed to convince us that really blue gas comes from particular places, but the reality is that in a complex world of international gas trading such distinctions will be window dressing.

Instead of spending extra investment to kick start the blue hydrogen distribution business we should be spending it on building up energy supplies from renewable energy. In addition to this, in order to use this energy most efficiently, we should be working to make sure that buildings have the most energy efficient systems as possible.

The sort of scheme we should be supporting, indeed being made mandatory, is like one being piloted in Wales. This involves local houses being power systems in themselves that generate, store and use the energy efficiently. A scheme in Swansea involves energy efficient housing being built complete with solar pv panels, batteries and also heat pumps. This will lead to a system that (because of the efficiency of heat pumps) results in carbon emissions that are 4xs (yes, four times) less than using 'blue' hydrogen. Not only that but the system will also manage fluctuating renewable energy supplies in a way that avoids extra investment in peak power plants and also reduces investment in transmission and distribution wires.

The Swansea scheme will involve 3,300 new homes and retrofits for further 7000 homes. Energy bills for the inhabitants will drop to almost zero compared to homes where these improvements have not been made. The money for this innovative project will come from the Welsh Government via the Swansea City Deal.

It may be difficult to retrofit some existing houses with heat pumps, although fitting them to district heating systems powered by large scale heat pumps may often be possible. In such cases electric storage heaters can be deployed. These can also be managed so that their electricity use can be timed to fit in with the variability of renewable energy, again so reducing investment in power plant and distribution wires.

Of course hydrogen has important uses – (although not in space heating where it is inefficient compared to renewable electricity, especially with heat pumps). Important uses for green hydrogen include making steel, fertiliser, shipping fuel, cement and storing renewable electricity – but here we should be making investments in green hydrogen – hydrogen supplied from renewable energy via electrolysis – not wasting the money on propping up the oil and gas companies. We face a crucial crossroads here. Do we want to channel lots of money into propping up the existing gas industry or instead use it to build up markets for decentralised sustainable energy? C

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

His latest book is *Low Carbon Politics*, published by Routledge (2018)

See: https://www.routledge.com/Low-Carbon-Politics-A-Cultural-Approach-Focusing-on-Low-Carbon-Electricity/Toke/p/book/9781138696778

Towards a just economy-no return to the 1930s

In the face of massive recession **Bryn Jones** argues a narrative for a just economy must be the new direction in a post Covid-19 future

As in 2008, the left is brimming with new visions for an economy brought to its knees by the Covid-19 crisis. However, after the 2008 financial crash, thanks to public bail-outs, the neoliberal juggernaut was back on track. With a solid Conservative Parliamentary majority and a new, risk-averse Labour leadership, a neoliberal recasting of the economy into deeper free-market waters may be launched. The possibility of a no-deal Brexit trade relationship with the EU could well precipitate this scenario.

Two factors will set the politico-economic parameters for policy shifts. 1) The most severe economic impacts of the Covid-19 emergency on the state and specific business sectors. 2) The alternative policies that will appear most relevant both for mitigating these negative impacts and also social an environmental injustice exposed by the crisis.

Countries are accruing enormous amounts of public sector debt that could restrict financing of conventional social programmes. Governments' revenue bases are contracting as profits fall in the business sector and the tax take drops as a result. Last, but not least, many workers' incomes and their tax contributions will shrink as unemployment rises. Latest Office of Budget Responsibility figures estimate the current Budget deficit at 15% of GDP: almost three times the levels of the allegedly spendthrift Labour governments of the 1970s; though nowhere near the 22% of 1945.

What is sustainable is of course as much a political issue as it is of national accounting. Neoliberal hawks will campaign to reduce the deficit - not by increasing taxes but through a growth-fuelled recovery of fiscal debt. Yet this strategy would conflict with the UK's lop-sided dependence on service sectors. Tourism and travel make up about 11% of UK economic activity (GDP). This bias towards personal mass services such as entertainment, tourism and hospitality - on average UK households spend around a third of their outgoings on restaurants, hotels, recreation and culture –much of this spending is unlikely to recover from Covid restrictions and shrunken incomes.

Covid creating growing job queues

Thus a growth-based source of recovery and government revenues is unlikely. By contrast, tax campaigners and even the Financial Times advocate a wealth tax on the rich. According to campaigner Richard Murphy such rises could amass £174 billion in tax revenue per annum: enough to recoup the compensation paid to employers for furloughed workers three times over and help pay for the dysfunctional social care services.

The public debt problem could be staunched but what about workers incomes? There is a real danger that the recession will generate unemployment and poverty levels redolent of the 1930s. The most affected business are already making swingeing redundancies and, as with British Airways, trying to put retained employees on insecure contracts. An epidemic of casualization and gig economy employment looms. Johnson's government is unlikely to challenge these trends. Conservatives will probably back such injustices as a painful necessity to get the economy 'going again'.

Bryn Jones is a visiting lecturer at the University of Bath and a Policy Officer for Bath CLP

To counter mass unemployment and casualisation, and promote equitable and socially progressive crisis management, requires three medium-term policy planks. Firstly, state financial support for afflicted companies needs to be conditional on more public and social accountability. Secondly, a comprehensive labour market agency is needed to ensure redundant workers are retrained and re-allocated to socially and environmentally useful sectors. Thirdly, most of the present dysfunctional and degrading benefits system needs replacing with a universal basic income.

The airline and tourism industry usefully illustrates such policies. Airlines and airports demand government subsidies to keep them solvent. Their arguments that they contribute billions to the economy and government taxes can be countered. They were operating an unsustainable and planet-trashing industry that turned Covid from local outbreaks into a global pandemic. On both environmental and pandemic grounds mass air travel should be cut back.

However, state support will then be essential to avoid even more redundancies. So governments should take financial stakes and directorships in the companies in

order to oversee their rationalisation. To ensure equitable decision-making workers and unions should also have a board-room presence to help supervise a state-controlled labour market programme that retrains and relocates airline and airport staff to sectors in need of extra, appropriately skilled workers. There is, for example, some overlap in the skills set of air crews with care home workers, aviation engineers with green energy technology.

In the short to medium term millions of sacked and under-paid workers will need public support. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) predicts that low earners are seven times as likely to work in the sectors most affected by lock-down and Covid restrictions. The quickest, most effective and equitable method would be a universal basic income (UBI) which already has cross-party political support. UBI guarantees a non-means tested payment to every adult citizen. It reflects recognition of both the inadequacy of the government's Universal Credit (and the patchwork of the current government's Covid income support) and the need for more economic security amidst the growing recession. A UBI could reach all the low income groups losing out from the current mish-mash of benefits and unemployment compensation by providing a modest but decisive income for millions of, often female, carers and voluntary workers.

Basic tax allowances primarily benefit middle and high earners. Abolition of these would pay for UBI and would therefore be redistributive. In Stewart Lansley's illustrative model, £200 per week for a family of four (£60 for adults) would cost around £20bn net: 'less than the aggregate cuts to benefits (of nearly £40bn) since 2010' and three months of the 'cost of the government's wage subsidy scheme '.

Further savings would come from cutting the administrative cost of punitive and ineffective means-tested benefits, like Universal Credit. Feeble right-wing arguments that UBI would dis-incentivise paid employment will seem pointless in the coming scenario of mass unemployment and a drought of vacancies. UBI would also inject spending power to help a general economic recovery.

At the moment Labour is focussing on short-term measures to fill the gaps in the Tories' emergency relief for businesses, the self-employed and employees. Labour's longer-term aims seem to address more conventional macro-economic concerns: 'the weakness that made the economy so vulnerable to the coronavirus shock, such as low productivity, stagnant living standards, an eroded manufacturing base, inequality and climate change' (National Policy Forum).

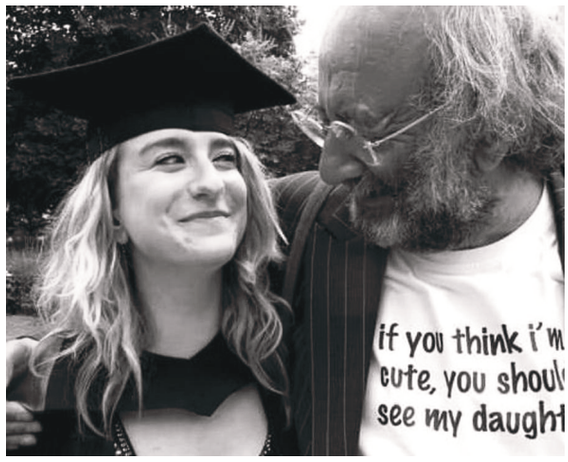
However, the impending disarray will make more direct targets feasible. All the above policies – more progressive taxation on the richest, making support for stricken companies conditional on public and stakeholder accountability, targeted training to re-allocate redundant workers to socially and environmentally vital jobs in other sectors, a universal guaranteed income for basic security – may seem tame to those dreaming of a radical socialist alternative. Yet, the marginalisation of the Corbyn surge, a more pragmatic, reformist Labour leadership and a solid, if fractious Tory majority in Parliament, mean progressive but hard-headed measures will seem more attractive by contrast; as recessionary forces intensify and the public mood demands improvements. Labour urgently needs a new narrative to give hope in the long, looming winters of hardship and discontent. Interventionist policies tackling basic incomes, corporate control and the redistribution of jobs should be at the heart of that campaign. **C**

I lost my father

Jo Goodman reports on Covid families for justice

The Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group was set up by Matt Fowler and myself, both of whom lost our fathers who had contracted the virus prior to lockdown. They felt that if the government had taken different decisions and truly 'followed the science' that their fathers would still be here. The group has now grown to more than 900 members, all personally bereaved, and is supported by Elkan Abrahamson, who previously represented Hillsborough families. The group aims to achieve accountability for mistakes that have been made, but more prominently to ensure that the government's approach to the next phase of the pandemic utilises learning from the first wave to prevent further needless loss of life.

The group is calling for an immediate public inquiry to scrutinise government decision-making and look at how the government can most effectively address the pandemic and prevent a second wave. They say "the first duty of any government is to protect its people. In the case of our relatives who lost their lives, it has failed to do so. We seek justice for the bereaved and to protect the people of the UK in the future." To support their call, you can sign the group's petition at **www.covidfamiliesforjustice.org** and follow them on Facebook **www.facebook.com/CovidJusticeUK** and Twitter @CovidJusticeUK. There is also a private Facebook group for bereaved family members.



Stuart Goodman

Stuart Goodman was a press photographer who worked on Fleet Street for over 25 years. Having moved to Norfolk in the early nineties he went on to teach photography in adult education and oversee a number of community projects, as well as being an activist for the Labour Party. Just before he passed away, Stuart published his first book, *One Saturday in 82 on Broadway Market* featuring photos from the then-dilapidated street market in Hackney which he had lived on and successfully campaigned to save from demolition. **C**

No return to free market mayhem

While we have experienced war-time levels of state intervention **Duncan Bowie** says this new normal must be a signal for a different society

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak - bailing out the bosses

There has been a dramatic shift in the role of the British state and the attitude of the public towards it over the three months of the COVID19 crisis. Over the last fifty years, under successive governments, we have seen a continuous intentional change in the balance of power between the state and citizens and corporate bodies – to a smaller state, with a lower tax take up and spending a lower share of the national gross domestic product. An almost universally held view has been public bad; private sector good and that tax is bad because it takes money away from individuals and out of the productive economy.

As in both world wars, and to a lesser extent during the 2008 Global Financial crisis, COVID19 has dramatically changed that balance. Not only has the government taken control of the operation of most private sector functions, from companies to shops, it has in effect nationalised some services (such as the railways and taken at least part control over Transport for London) and is now directly paying millions of private sector workers. It temporarily stopped the private sector housing market and the power of private sector landlords to evict their tenants.

The government issued restrictions on individual movement much stricter than the curfews which operated in wartime, with fines for breaches. This has been under a Conservative government which has in the past advocated deregulation, privatisation, contracting out of services and lower taxation. What has also been significant, and perhaps less subject to comment is that the population of the UK as a whole not only expects the government to get the country out of this crisis, which to be honest, despite failures in pandemic preparation and NHS resourcing is not primarily of their creation, but expects the state to actually provide them an income until the pandemic is reduced and the overall economy restarts.

This is not just in relation to what can be regarded as the productive economy, but anybody unable to generate an income in their usual way in the current circumstances – so it is not just the producers of aircraft and cars, but estate agents, artists, actors and musicians. We not only have multi-millionaire company owners like Richard Branson seeking bail outs, but homeowners putting their cleaners and gardeners on the government payroll. Even charities can get government money to pay their 'furloughed' staff. Yet this package of interventions does not involve state food or petrol rationing (though we had some local rationing of toilet rolls) or any direction of labour - this is where the comparison with the world wars fails – no one furloughed has been forced to go fruit picking, so we are still flying in fruit pickers from Eastern Europe, even if most other long distance travel is restricted.

The state is now viewed as a ' deus ex machina' than can and is expected to solve all our individual problems. The state is seen as something distant, which is now responsible for us, but for which we ourselves bear no responsibility. There is a belief, which follows from the 2008 banking bailout, that the state can just print money – no recognition that there is a long-term cost to all this short-term state funding.

There is also a view that if the state can put all this money in now, why can't this also be for the longer term – for example all homeless households should get permanent homes or that all private tenants rents should be paid, that everyone should get a state-funded basic income and that all care homes, GP surgeries and

Duncan Bowie is Chartist reviews editor

dentists should get state funded PPE, rather forgetting that some of these services are now private profit (or loss) making enterprises. There now seems to be a view that not only should government enable private sector profits but that it should cover all private sector losses, whether individual or corporate. Not surprisingly there is a more balanced perspective that state funding (that is, funding from our tax payments) should carry with it not just public sector regulation but public sector ownership and reinvestment of any surpluses.

This raises the key point that reconstruction cannot be back to normal, if that is perceived as a focus on using public resources to restart the economy to seed fund what will in effect be private sector gain, driven by market demand and the potential returns to private sector investments, rather than by any national assessment of prioritised needs in terms of a baseline standard of welfare service provision and quality of life for all residents of the UK. We however do need a return to state led planning at all spatial levels – the UK, the four nations, the English regions and localities.

This also raises the issue of does our lifestyle in terms of how and where we live and work need to change. Quality of life and health must be central to all planning and investment decisions. Where resources are limited, they must be directed both spatially in terms of location within the UK and to those households who need them most. We know that it is those in the worst housing conditions who have suffered most from the virus and from lockdown, as well as that there have been disproportionately high deaths amongst people from some BAME groups, though we are still not entirely clear why.

We know that workers in some jobs involving close face to face contact with large numbers of other people, not just NHS staff and care workers, but bus drivers and taxi drivers, have also had high infection and death rates. We also know that the experience of lockdown has been far worse for people living in small flats than for those in houses with gardens and that life has been much easier for those able to work from home, compared with those who have either been unable to work, or who have had to continue travelling to work. So perhaps we need to think again about what type of residential settlements we plan for and how we plan for future employment patterns – more polycentric development with less concentration of the population in high density urban agglomerations. We are entering a very different future, not just in the UK but across the world. **C**

The great Covid-19 swindle

Tom Miller says austerity continues for councils

The area I represent as a Councillor, Brent, has the highest Covid-19 mortality rate in the country: 210.9 deaths per 100,000. This is a shocking statistic which represents a high BAME population and the health inequalities it faces, alongside generations of poverty, tight living conditions, and the legacy of a decade of austerity forced by central government upon our residents.

The Labour Council itself has been praised for our response. Writing this May, even the Telegraph was effusive, making clear that we have taken swift and early action to prevent infections in our local care homes. We were also among the first to ignore Westminster and purchase PPE for our own care workforce. We reassigned workers and helped to coordinate hundreds of volunteers to ensure that shielded people and vulnerable residents face no chance of going hungry or running low on supplies and medication.

Since the Tory government came into office in 2010, Brent has lost around half of its total workforce, and even more of our controllable budget. Cuts to the central grant have devastated our income, and this has not been replaced by business rates. The local tax base has been restricted with undemocratic red tape preventing Council tax rises, and anyway, our modestly earning residents have a limited capacity to pay compared with leafier areas in the country.

Attempts to keep vital services open have also led to Labour Councils like us prioritising external income to flesh out budgets, for example developing wedding provision as a much more commercial offer. Much of our Civic Centre building is now rented to companies like Air France, a way of earning some much needed mitigation money as well as filling some of the space where the half of our staff we can no longer afford would have been.

As well as facing the hit from additional coronavirus costs, outside income has been severely limited by the disease. It's notable that much of our Covid response has also been powered by the goodwill of local volunteers, and therefore the budget cost of our response is actually artificially low. All the while, our budget without its Covid related costs continues to break even.

Despite promises from Rishi Sunak and Robert Jenrick that Councils would be refunded for Covid costs, neither Councils nor our residents can put any trust in this whatsoever. Tory promises are forgotten almost as quickly as they are made, often with disastrous impacts, yet public debate around the issue appears almost non-existent and the impact without weight.

Brent estimates that the total pressures of Covid-19 will run to £50.2 million, but since the political heat of the early crisis has disappeared, government commitments to refund this have run to only £18.4m. This leaves a vast gap of £31.8m. The consequence will be the permanent stripping of emergency reserves and further huge cuts to add to the crushing austerity local people have already had to put up with, unless the government can be held accountable.

Johnson and co. pretend that they have weaned the Tory Party off austerity, but the truth on the ground is a totally different story. Labour's campaigning against the scourging of local services since 2010 has been insipid, weakly coordinated and low profile and it has not hit home. Since 2010 we have also fallen into the trap of repeated debates in the movement that split Councillors against campaigners, a huge strategic blunder. We cannot afford to repeat our mistakes. For the backdoor costs the Tories heap upon our residents, this time we must make sure that they are the ones who pay. **C**

Tom Miller is a Brent Labour councillor and co-chair of Open Labour

Channel the spirit of 1945

Frances O'Grady sets out the case for a National Recovery Council and a new deal - but will the Tories listen?

Factory closures like Hi-Lex Port Talbot are mounting

Trade unions are on the frontline of the fight against coronavirus. A huge public health emergency, the pandemic also poses the biggest economic threat since the Great Depression. With millions of jobs at risk, we need a plan to invest for growth. And it must have full employment at its heart.

Lots of people say this is the biggest crisis we've faced since the Second World War. Seventy-five years ago, Britain was bloodied, battered – and broke. Yet after the war Britain's economy grew faster than ever before. We did it by making the priority decent jobs for everyone, new homes, infrastructure and a new national health service.

We need to channel the spirit of 1945. Coronavirus doesn't have to equal mass unemployment and a poorer country. We can do what the post-war generation did: grow our way out of this crisis and build a better life for everyone.

Good jobs are critical. Jobs in a reborn UK manufacturing sector. Jobs in a social care sector finally getting some respect. Jobs in the green tech of the future. It's time to rebuild our country through hard work, determination and investment in all our futures. We must ensure everyone has a decent job, with fair pay and security for their family.

That's why the TUC is calling for a national recovery council bringing together government, unions, business, metro mayors and the devolved nations. And it should have one simple objective: to deliver prosperity, opportunity and security for all.

Since the crisis started, the TUC has engaged constructively with the government to deliver real gains for working people. We worked closely with the Treasury to deliver the Job Retention Scheme. We followed up by helping to secure a similar scheme for the self-employed. We pressured the government to extend this support into the autumn. And we're now campaigning for a new Jobs Guarantee Scheme to avoid the despair of mass unemployment.

But we've also held the government to account for its frequently shambolic handling of the crisis. Unions have been at the forefront of the campaign for proper PPE, highlighting mistakes that have cost countless lives. We exposed the gaping holes in ministers' return-to-work plans, securing important changes. And we're leading the debate about what safe workplaces should look like.

The crisis has put trade unions at the heart of our national life once again. Throughout, we've put the interests of working people centre stage. And with our membership rising, it's clear workers want collective representation and a real voice at work. Strong unions and more collective bargaining must be at the heart of working life after the crisis.

The pandemic has highlighted longstanding flaws with our economy – and we need to learn the lessons. Years of cuts have left our public services on life support, including our NHS. Living standards have barely risen since the financial crisis. Millions of workers are trapped in low-paid, insecure work. And those doing the most important work are often paid the least. All are symptoms of a system that puts too much power, wealth and influence in the hands of too few.

But the fight against the virus has also shone a light on potential strengths too. Government intervention has saved jobs and boosted the economy. Local authorities managed to house thousands of homeless people within days when Covid-19 struck. The mutual support and solidarity that has brought communities together has been inspirational.

Above all, the crisis has shown the value of our hard work. It's not financial wizardry in the City that has sustained the country through these tough times. Rather, it's the dedication of NHS staff, carers, teachers, council staff, posties, supermarket workers, delivery drivers and people working in our transport, distribution and energy networks. And they deserve a new deal, with fair shares and a fair say.

As we make work better, we must rebuild our public services. Months of clapping for carers must be followed by years of investment. It's time for proper funding for our NHS, social care and all our services. And time too to put a stop to inefficient privatisation and outsourcing. If the crisis has taught us one thing, it's that the private sector economy can't function without public services to keep us safe, educate our kids and protect our health.

Great public services and great jobs must be the building blocks of our economic future. If we can get the basics right and deliver a better recovery, then we can face our long-term challenges with confidence. We can achieve net zero carbon in a fair and just way, ensure new tech becomes a force for the common good, and create a more equal society.

As we come out of the coronavirus crisis, the battle lines for the next fight are being drawn. We must be ready to set out the case for investment for growth, and full employment – and to oppose the siren voices of austerity, tax cuts and deregulation. They offer no route out of this crisis.

Instead, we need millions of working families with higher disposable income to create the economic demand needed for strong growth, healthy public finances and a fairer, more inclusive country. C

Frances O'Grady is TUC General Secretary

Spinning plates and crashing out

Peter Kenyon looks forward to a dismal future for Britain and its children post-Brexit

Labour remainers are engaged in one last bid to persuade Labour Party leader Keir Starmer to speak out about Brexit. It is a difficult ask. The new leadership wants the Tories to own the issue. But how to fix that in the minds of voters?

As the Coronavirus pandemic has dragged on Starmer's standing in the polls has soared, while prime minister Boris Johnson's has slumped. But we have not seen any public clamour for a rethink on our future relationship with the European Union (EU). By the time you read this a fateful date will have passed – 30 June 2020. In law that is the last day after which the Transition Period which keeps the UK aligned economically and culturally with the other 27 member states cannot be extended. Brexit will be done on 31 December 2020, maybe.

To date Starmer's minders, the people who conceive, execute and control the messaging of the party's new leader, have discouraged him from saying anything that might be used by the Tories/Brexiteers to label him a 'Remoaner'. The idea of being seen by the electorate of appearing to reopen the Brexit debate is anathema. His electoral strategy is focussed on making Labour the winner of the next general election, even though it is four years away, maybe.

Does that mean he says nothing about extending the Transition Period? Well, maybe.

What will future generations think of the largest opposition party in UK politics failing to oppose one of the most self-destructive economic, social and cultural policy decisions in history?

That was Brexit before coronavirus. Three months on since the UK government belatedly started to take the risks to public health seriously, there are already millions of people out of work, and millions more whose livelihoods are at risk.

Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition under its new leader adopted a constructive stance. Significant changes to government policy to pay employers money to keep staff on payroll have been secured by shadow chancellor Anneliese Dodds. But billions of pounds have still been loaned to British companies, some of whom are not even registered to pay tax in the UK – an anomaly not allowed by the Scottish or Welsh governments.

Starmer needs to make Labour's position clear

Despite these harsh economic realities of the pandemic, Johnson is still hell bent on crashing out of the EU without a deal.

That means maximum divergence from EU regulations, maximum trading disruption to manufacturing and agriculture.

It seems inconceivable that Starmer is being advised to remain shtum, other than to remind the electorate of Johnson's promise to secure a deal by the end of this year.

At the time of writing efforts are underway behind the scenes to encourage him to take the opportunity to remind voters of what is at stake and what Labour's position would be. Labour Business (an affiliated socialist society of the Labour Party) in which I must declare an interest as a member has submitted a paper setting out the case for speaking out more loudly if 30 June risks passing without agreement on an extension of the transition period.

Ten principles have been set out for future trade deals under Labour covering all the benefits of workers, consumers, and environmental protections that we have hitherto enjoyed as EU citizens. Labour should place then on the public record.

Starmer needs to make a statement, without necessarily calling for an extension, about the consequences of Johnson's plate-spinning. Lastly, now is the time to remind voters, that there is no sector of the economy that will benefit from maximum divergence, except the disaster capitalists represented by the current Cabinet.

In framing a starker set of messages about the future, they will need to be targeted at those newly-elected Tory MPs from so-called red wall seats. Make them squirm. Unbelievably, they won their seat with promises of hope. What hope can there be for their constituents and their children when their local manufacturing base is having its heart ripped out by the Tories. Divergence from the EU means just-in-time supply chains will be wrecked with delays at ports, and the risk of tariffs. This is just one of the consequences of Johnson's 'fuck business' policy. Agriculture is similarly at risk.

Following the 2019 General Election there is no easy way back for the UK. Our reputation as a country has been trashed by the Tories. Starmer has already concluded there is no point in a promise to reapply for EU membership in 2024, if Labour defeats the Tories. He is right, no one trusts the British government any longer. There will have to be major constitutional change to underwrite stable rational government in the UK (if it still exists in 2024) before the EU-27 (or more) will welcome a fresh application for EU membership from Westminster. In addition, future generations of Britons will have to want to drop sterling (£) as the national currency and adopt the euro (€) and embrace free movement as part of the Schengen area. C

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

Schools out for summer

Dave Lister says government's botched action on schools is more about economics than heath protection

All right four-year olds. Make sure when you are playing in the playground that you maintain a safe distance of two metres from each of your friends at all times."

The Government's attempts to return children to school have been a complete shambles. It started off reasonably well with provision for the children of key workers and vulnerable children. Then there was the controversial decision to return early years and year 6 children to school in England on 1 June, despite the reservations of teachers' unions, many parents and some scientists, which has had only extremely limited success. Finally, there was the Government's intention to return all primary age children to school by the end of this term, which has now been abandoned.

What was wrong with these plans? The main point is the failure to correlate timing and safety. Just as, arguably, the lockdown started too late and finished too early, the idea that all primary aged children could be in school by the end of June was ill-conceived. What they should have done was to allow for a gradual phased return of pupils based on clear safety guidelines.

The second point is the choice of cohorts. Rather than bringing back early years pupils, who would find it very difficult to observe social distancing requirements, why didn't they start with years 5 and 6, with a phased return. Also, why no secondary returns? Surely it would have been more important to have larger numbers of year 10 students back in school than Reception children? Maybe the Government selected early years children because they require more attention from parents working at home, whilst older children are more likely to be able to work on their own.

If we review what has happened in more detail, it is clear that it began with a manageable and uncontroversial system. Children of key workers and vulnerable children were taught by a skeleton staff. All other children remained at home receiving work set by their teachers online. This meant that many parents experienced having to keep their children focused and maybe obtained an insight into the skills teachers require to do this with a class of perhaps 30 children. We have no way of knowing how effective this home learning has been. Parents working from home would have found it particularly difficult to also manage their children's learning.

Government u-turn on schools opening

Concerns were certainly expressed by people such as the Children's Commissioner Anne Longfield, that disadvantaged children would fare badly under this system and fall further behind their more advantaged peers. The Government had a scheme to provide children without access to the Internet with laptops, but, as The Guardian reported on 7 June, many of these have not yet been received. The point has also been made that even where there is one device in a household, it may be being used for home working or there may be more than one child needing to use it. There have also been problems with free school meals. The Government awarded the contract to supply vouchers for food to families entitled to free meals to a French company Edenred without any competitive tendering, under emergency powers. The Guardian reported on 8 May on evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with their performance, with some parents waiting two weeks for their vouchers and some supermarkets refusing to accept them.

A report by the "Independent Sage" committee, chaired by the former chief scientific adviser Sir David King, pointed out that the Government's own modelling of school opening showed the R rate rising above 1. It argued that delaying this by two weeks to 15 June would halve the risk to children and waiting until September, as in Scotland and Northern Ireland, would be even less risky. There was also considerable opposition to the Government's plans from teachers' unions, some Local Authorities (LAs) and some parents. The NEU organised a mass petition against a return unless it could be carried out safely and won support for this stance from the British Medical Association. They outlined the following five conditions for condoning a return:-

1. Much lower numbers of Covid-19 cases.
2. A national plan for social distancing in schools.
3. Access to regular testing for children and staff.
4. Protocols to test a whole school when a case occurs and isolation to be strictly followed.
5. Vulnerable staff and those who live with vulnerable people to continue to work from home.

Unsurprisingly there was a backlash from the right-wing press, with the Daily Mail accusing Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the NEU, of "working against the interests of children" and of being a "Corbynite lover of Communist Cuba".

The Government's approach can be contrasted with that in other countries such as Denmark, where a joint body of government ministers and union representatives jointly agreed on the process for reopening schools as safely as possi-

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ble. A poll in The Observer on 24 May showed that 43% of primary school parents and 54% of secondary parents who responded said that they were concerned about their children returning to school. Five days later Mary Bousted provided further clarity on the NEU's stance: "We're not saying only go back when it is 100% safe. Nothing ever is. But we are saying [to the Government] meet your own tests and produce sound scientific evidence…"

The Times Educational Supplement reported on 5 June the view of many teachers that social distancing was impossible to achieve, especially among younger age groups. Some teachers said that it was easier in the classroom but impossible to enforce around the school and in the playground. An infant headteacher also pointed out that the Government had not thought about infant schools, which would not have the space to split classes for obvious reasons.

The situation at the time of writing (mid June) is that some schools have admitted additional pupils, in some cases with a phased return, and some have not. A significant number of LAs, mainly in the north of England, either refused to allow their schools to admit more pupils on 1 June or insisted on a later date for this to happen. Figures just released show that only 25% of pupils eligible to return did so and only 52% of schools admitted any additional pupils.

The conclusion must be that the Government has rushed into its decision to reopen schools with insufficient thought and with a stronger focus on expanding the economy than on safeguarding people's health.

Now there is talk of reducing social distancing in schools from two metres to one. It is unclear at this point how far schools will be able to return to a semblance of normality, even in September. Will the teacher unions be happy with the Government's guidelines on safety? How many parents will be happy to send their children into school even then? What will the R rate be on 1 September? It could all have been handled so much better. The Labour leadership needs to develop a coherent alternative approach covering what should have happened and what should now be happening. There is the potential to win massive support from parents and teachers if this can be done. C

School curriculum – a multi-cultural past

Dave Lister and **Mike Davis** reflect on different times

The current anger around police brutality and killings raises issues about the teaching of black history. Michael Gove's reactionary curriculum reforms included introducing a much greater emphasis on British history. Whilst this has now been modified there is no requirement to teach black history at any point. Helen Hayes MP made a powerful case for change in our last issue.

At secondary level, whilst the history of slavery is now one optional suggested topic at Key Stage Three, and topics of world history need to be taught at Key Stage Four, black students are leaving school saying that they have not studied any black history.

Teaching in the 1990s there was a unit in Key Stage Three on Black People in America. This covered not only the history of slavery but slave revolts, emancipation, segregation and the civil rights movement, which is a more positive approach than just teaching slavery. At Key Stage Four it was possible to teach the exclusively World History syllabus developed by Hampstead School in London, which covered topics such as the Amritsar Massacre, apartheid and the struggle against it, the Vietnam War and Nazi Germany.

Dave Lister

Back in the 1970s and 80s, in the heyday of the Inner London Education Authority (abolished by the Thatcher government in late 1980s) an innovative curriculum that covered Black history, slavery and colonialism was promoted. A new approach to history teaching extended to English and other subject areas. The ILEA had a Multicultural Inspectorate providing guidance and training. Part of my teaching experience was in the Humanities Department in a large Hackney secondary school. It was an active learning curriculum based on project themes enabling students to develop knowledge and understanding by exploring common themes across subject areas. History texts like 'The People who Came', helped put slavery and colonialism as major features of the history and geography components. In English, Caribbean and African writers like Edward Braithwaite, Samuel Selvon, Chinua Achebe, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Ngugi wa Thong'o, all featured in the curriculum and large stocks of books were in the resource library. Most important BAME students were encouraged to draw on their own family experiences of being first or second generation immigrants. This critical curriculum continued in many schools even after the arrival of the National Curriculum made it more difficult with exam boards dictating content in KS4. The advent of Mr Gove as Education secretary in 2010 amounted to a whitewashing for most schools.

Edward Braithwaite- on earlier curriculum

Mike Davis C

Covid-19 – a legacy of failure

Allyson Pollock and **Louisa Harding-Edgar** say there is also an opportunity to end the neo-liberalism that got us to this point

COVID testing station- late in the day

There is no doubt that the Westminster government's delay in implementing public health measures to prevent COVID-19 has cost thousands of lives and enormous hardship for the many millions of people plunged into unemployment and debt. For nearly two months following the first two confirmed case of coronavirus in Britain on 30 January, the Westminster government allowed the virus to let rip throughout our communities with inadequate effort to control or contain it. This was despite the early warnings – via the World Health Organisation (WHO) – from China in January this year and when our newspapers and televisions were covering stories of hospitals in Wuhan being erected in nine days.

Perhaps, the most surprising aspect of the British COVID crisis is that the Scottish Government has allowed its strategy and the operations to be directed by Westminster, which has taken a London-centric approach to the epidemic and with respect to the lock down. And yet the COVID pandemic is not just one big homogenous epidemic. It is made up of hundreds, if not thousands, of outbreaks, each at a different stage, on-going throughout the country.

Structural changes to public health – loss of local capacity and fragmentation

The lack of capacity is down to budget cuts and structural changes that removed and fragmented local public services for communicable disease control in England. Lansley's Health and Social Care Act 2012 in England carved out public health functions from local health bodies and then further fragmented them, splitting them between local authorities and Public Health England (PHE) – an agency of the Department of Health and Social Care.

PHE now controls the decimated workforce for communicable disease control including the 300 or so field epidemiologists who, instead of being largely based in local authorities, have been centralised in regional hubs, thereby, reducing their numbers and their effectiveness on the ground. Meanwhile, although there are said to be over 5,000 environmental officers in local authorities, some of whom had indicated that they were ready to go and start contact tracing if called upon, no one made contact with them. However, when COBRA made the fatal decision to stop contact tracing on 12 March PHE had only contacted 3,500 people in Britain of which just 3% were cases and had been told to self–isolate. Resumption of contact tracing has been beset by delay. Instead of immediately building up capacity in local public health and local contact tracing team, the government wasted time and resources awarding contracts to the private sector to develop and NHS App, and an unevaluated centralised privatised system for contact trac-

ing neither of which are operational.

And so, for 12 days after stopping contact tracing on the 12 March until 23 March the virus was left to tear through our communities. Not only that, but the governments north and south of the border had not put in place travel restrictions and quarantine at the ports of entry for people coming from abroad – it appears Scotland had no powers. But lessons from communicable diseases and previous epidemics have shown that it is vitally important to monitor the ports of entry – harbours and airports.

Contact tracing and travel restrictions not implemented

The governments had both advance warning of the epidemic and advance sight of the measures that China, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan had put in place. By 24 February, WHO had published a most compelling and informative WHO China mission report – but as the WHO assistant director general, Bruce Aylward, commented: 'Much of the global community is not yet ready, in mindset and materially, to implement the measures that have been employed to contain COVID-19 in China'. He went on to say: 'These are the only measures that are currently proven to interrupt or minimize transmission chains in humans. Fundamental to these measures is extremely proactive surveillance to immediately detect cases, very rapid diagnosis and immediate case isolation, rigorous tracking and quarantine of close contacts, and an exceptionally high degree of population understanding and acceptance of these measures'.

Social services in the UK are among the most privatised and fragmented in the western world

In Wuhan, the national lockdown and travel restrictions were accompanied by local intelligence gathering and local, on-the-ground contact tracing and medical observation. Even without mass testing capacity – it appears there were only 10,000 RT-pcr tests conducted in that time in Wuhan with a population of 11m – the Chinese controlled the infection, combining contact tracing with house-to-house symptom checking and quarantining and isolation, travel restrictions, and lock down. All these measures were necessary and had been ramped up. If anything, testing was of far less importance though, of course, a very useful support.

When the epidemic was spreading too fast in some areas in Britain for contact tracing capacity, then the next step should have been to keep disease out of areas which had no cases and to stop all mass gatherings.

As the epidemic was raging in Italy, the government allowed the transmission of the virus across the border as plane loads of infected skiers from Austria and tourists and visitors from Italy made their way back to Britain. In April, plane loads of Romanians were being flown in to fruit pick, despite the millions unemployed and in furlough and despite Brexit. And yet at the same time, people have been fined for making unnecessary journeys in their local areas.

Coffins of Covid-19 victims

The vulnerable were failed because social care is fragmented, privatised and underfunded

Now the grim news. More than 80% of the deaths are in those aged 70 years and over with the majority of deaths occurring in those aged over 80 years. The appalling state of social care funding in the UK means that those at greatest risk – those living in social care and nursing homes – have been least able to effectively 'self-isolate' and most likely to contract the virus, and in consequence to die. We do not know the full extent of the Covid-19 related deaths of those within the social care system – but deaths in care home residents are very high. Moreover, in England by May 1st 72% of residents dying from COVID died in a care home, in Scotland the figure was even higher at 91%, highlighting the lack of access to high quality treatment and hospital care.

Then there are the excess numbers of non COVID deaths and disability that are still occurring due to the state of emergency in the health service.

These deaths are the unintended consequence of the clearance of hospital wards (in anticipation of a flood of corona cases), the reduction in GP services, podiatry, speech therapy, mental health services and physiotherapy services and access to cancer diagnosis and treatment and heart and stroke services.

Social services in the UK are among the most privatised and fragmented in the western world. They have been underfunded for decades. Between 2010-11 and 2017-18 local authority spending on social care fell by 49% in real terms, reducing spending from £16.1bn in 2010 to £14.8bn in 2016-17. Reduced funding has been accompanied by privatisation and the shifting of responsibility for funding to individuals, as well as the tightening of NHS

and local authority eligibility criteria. Often, there have been long delays in assessing eligibility, and inconsistent and inequitable application of criteria.

Although £48 billion is flowing into this sector from the state and individuals every year in the UK, the industry expects an 11% return on capital invested in the residential care sector. From US data, we can see that for-profit companies generally have the lowest staffing and poorest quality as they seek to maximise profits for investors.

Care services in England employ roughly 1.6 million care staff (1.1 million full time equivalent) of which 78% are employed by the independent sector.

The sector was 120,000 workers short before COVID struck, which results in inadequate care, while the use of agency staff moving from one home to another increases the risk of disease transmission. Staff on zero hour contracts do not receive sick pay, and often go to work when sick.

This is truly an appalling situation. On top of this has been the lack of PPE for social care workers and health care workers and residents and relatives, despite the high mortality associated with Covid-19 among frail older adults, and high risks to staff.

COVID collateral damage

The impact of Covid-19 provides the most compelling case possible for a national care service free at the point of delivery with all the elements of sheltered housing, community and home support and residential care integrated. A national care service would require legislation but (as with the Beveridge plan 85 years ago) many of the private providers funded by the state are in significant financial difficulty and the net cost of bringing these directly under local authority control is likely to be small.

Of course, the costs of running a national care system that mirrored the principles of the NHS would be significant, but two important factors must be appreciated. Firstly, that we are already paying for social care in the UK. For those not eligible for state-funded care there is no way of knowing what their costs will be: no way of off-setting the risk. Some will use up their entire assets in paying for it and some (for instance, those who do not require long-term care home support) will avoid paying altogether.

A national care system would be that 'risk off-setting' system and will ensure that the costs of care are distributed equitably (just as the NHS does for the costs of healthcare). It would also recognise the needs of the 5.8million unpaid, informal carers (10% of people in England reported providing unpaid care in the 2011 census).

Secondly, according to a 2019 IPPR paper Social Care: Free at the Point of Need, the cost would be of the order of 1% cent of total government expenditure.

This would not only do away with the debt and tax leverage and offshoring that characterises the current private social care system but it would provide secure, properly equipped and remunerated employment for those who perform this vital work.

More than 80% of the deaths are in those aged 70 years and over

In so doing it would go a long way to ensuring that we have a resilient and well-resourced system that not only frees up NHS resources for acute care but is also able to cope with the next epidemic.

The vast majority of the people who die as a result of Covid-19 will be people failed not by the NHS but by social care. Elderly, chronically ill and disabled people. If this government is serious in its commitment to 'never again' allow a disaster of the Covid-19 variety it needs a plan to transform our shameful social care system: a system that fails those in need, fails carers (paid and unpaid) and shames the UK.

Way forward

With some form of lockdown continuing we need local action plans around easing restrictions locally. First, it needs to put public health and communicable disease control experts in the driving seat. Second, we need to have the humility to learn from our colleagues in China, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan.

Third, as well as tracking the epidemic nationally, we need to go local and understand the epidemic in each local area. This requires contact tracing.

We need to use local public health teams to work with local authorities on local COVID surveillance to see where cases are and where they are continuing to spread. We need to rebuild capacity for contact tracing using local volunteers, health workers, the army, teachers, students etc for tracking and tracing in each local authority and health board, and environmental health officers and public health and communicable disease consultants should be driving it in each local health board and local authority.

GP practices must also be involved and given data on cases and contacts in their practices. Local laboratory facilities for testing must be restored and not outsourced.

Fourth, we need to put in place a radical plan for the NHS and social care.

The Chancellor's budget announcement on 11 March that the NHS would receive £6bn over the course of five years suggested it would wipe out trust deficits but this did not go far enough. The UK Governments should be reopening the PFI contracts and renegotiating the interest rates, just as large stores have been renegotiating their rental charges down with the property owners. Interest rates are at their lowest ever (0.11%) and yet PFI debt interest payments vary from 5% to 16%.

Services that have been part privatised should be renationalised (social care, some public laboratories and testing and data facilities). Intellectual property and patent laws need to be urgently changed, in favour of the public, with the government issuing compulsory licenses to stop the exploitation of patents for medicines, vaccines, medical tests, and tests and reagents.

In return for bailing out companies and businesses, the government should ensure it has a stake in them so that when the good times return the public sector sees those returns and not the shareholders who have done so well in recent years.

We still have the chance to take the road not yet travelled. A progressive government would see COVID-19 as an opportunity to plan and legislate for a National Health and Care service. To take the road not taken since the 2008 financial crisis is essential if we are to address and remedy the poverty, inequality, and injustices brought about by policies of the last three decades and the austerity of the last ten years. C

Professor Allyson Pollock is the co-director of the Newcastle University Centre for Excellence in Regulatory Science. Her website is https://www.allysonpollock.com

Louisa Harding-Edgar is a Glasgow GP and academic fellow in general practice in the Institute of Health and Wellbeing at the University of Glasgow.

This is an abridged and updated version of an article that appeared in Scottish Left Review. Spring 2020

Waste in a circular economy

Sandy Martin explains why rubbish and recycling is a socialist issue

A fundamental hurdle to achieving a sustainable world is the unwillingness of governments to override big business. Nowhere is this more obvious than in waste and recycling. We need radical change in what we make, how we make it, and how we dispose of it, if we are going to overcome the climate crisis.

The environmental impact of waste is immense. Mining degrades local environments, materials are transported and processed using fossil fuels, processing creates waste, finished products are packaged and transported, and then the packaging, and often the final product, is discarded, causing pollution to the earth, seas and air and releasing yet more climate change gases. With so many factors involved, it is hard to quantify the climate effect of waste, but it is clearly one of the big six alongside construction, transport, agriculture, heating and industry.

The best way to deal with waste is not to create it in the first place. In 1958 J K Galbraith described in The Affluent Society how US wealth was skewed towards creating completely unnecessary products rather than on transforming people's lives. The market justification is that the customer demands them. But as Galbraith pointed out, that demand is itself artificially manufactured by advertising. And customer demand is often poorly informed – nobody deliberately buys a washing machine because it will soon break down, and yet the market encourages planned obsolescence and rewards the companies that build it in.

We need to start with advertising, design and manufacture. Only if manufacturers are penalised for producing waste will the private sector build in long life and recyclability. We need to rebalance the information fed to the population – our society will not survive if £billions is spent on advertising cola drinks but virtually nothing on promoting fruit and vegetables. Profit-making companies don't advertise healthy life-choices – there's simply no profit in it. Only a government that is prepared to step in and provide a more balanced message – possibly funded from an advertising tax – can help consumers make better choices.

Waste landfill

Of course, however far we go to reduce our waste, there will always be material that needs to be disposed of. The ultimate goal of sustainable waste campaigners is Zero Waste, achieved through a circular economy. Organic waste will remain in the organic cycle as compost, while inorganic products will be separated into their component materials for recycling.

Waste collection is key. The private sector can provide the machinery necessary to process recycled materials, but it won't collect them in the first place. Local Authorities can, and in-house services usually provide more comprehensive waste collection, from households and from small businesses. The last Labour government funded councils to create a huge surge in household recycling, but since 2010 we have gone backwards. Waste collection needs to be brought back in-house and it needs to be properly funded. Front-loading the lifetime costs of products onto manufacturers should cover the entire costs of waste collection and processing – that would provide the finances councils need to meet their environmental goals.

There are sound environmental reasons for reviving manufacturing in Britain. Poor working conditions in other countries go hand-in hand with far worse environmental impacts. We should import fewer but higher quality goods, promoting fairer and greener trade. Making full use of our recycled materials will boost British manufacturing by reducing the need to import raw materials. The steel industry is a classic example – we should be recycling our current waste steel using electric arc furnaces. Only the public sector would be prepared to put in the necessary investment, but once in place, it could generate enough fresh steel to make us self-sufficient, and reduce the carbon emissions from importing virgin steel by 75%.

Creating what we need and not just what we can be persuaded to buy, making things as long-lasting as possible, repairing and reusing things rather than just dumping them, and then carefully collecting and recycling the component parts of everything which is no longer useful – this is the only way we can continue to enjoy a comfortable life on a liveable planet. Anything else will lead to pollution, runaway climate change and depletion of the world's resources.

Such an approach will improve the quality of everyone's lives. But it won't make big profits for private companies. A government based on the wealth of the few will never implement the changes needed. Labour needs to embrace waste as an issue - the voters know how important it is, and only a socialist approach can work. C

Sandy Martin was MP for Ipswich 2017-2019 and Labour's Shadow Waste Minister

Domestic violence during Covid 19

Sabia Kamali reports of the rise in abuse against women during coronavirus and the Sisters Forum support initiative

The term Domestic Violence was first used in a modern context, meaning violence in the home. While domestic violence affects both men and women, women comprise the overwhelming majority of victim-survivors worldwide. Many advances have been made in recognising the problem and to tailor help towards victims, the most recent legislation being The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.

According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) murders related to domestic violence are at a five year high. The majority of victims are women and the majority of suspects are men.

On average two women are murdered every week and 30 men are murdered every year due to domestic violence. 16% of violent crime is domestic abuse though domestic abuse is least likely to be reported to the police. There are more repeat victims of domestic abuse than repeat victims of any other crime. On average domestic abuse victims will have been assaulted 68 times before reporting it to the police. Domestic abuse is the single most quoted reason a person becomes homeless.

However, the last decade has seen a decrease in services and provision for victims of Domestic Violence. Government cuts to funding for women's refuges make it harder for women and children to escape domestic violence with 2,000 women a year affected. 60% of referrals to refuges were turned away in 2016-17 with additional funding cuts making the situation worse. Council funding for women's refuges overall fell by 6% over the five years to 2018 data from 144 out of 210 UK councils contacted reveals.

It is in the above context of funding cuts that the Sisters Forum was established in East London, with a general focus on women's empowerment and a particular focus of supporting the victims of domestic violence. As public services were reduced, we saw an increase in the demand for our services.

Coronavirus has been a challenge for the Sisters Forum and the women we work with. The women, many from BAME backgrounds, are victims of a range of domestic violence, from verbal, emotional to physical abuse. Most of these women are hampered from seeking external help from agencies by the stigma attached with being a single mother or a divorcee. The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown resulting in increased stress levels at home, with victims being forced to spend prolonged periods with their perpetrators, and with limited access to support services, all contribute to the increased vulnerabilities victim-survivors face.

Refuge, the UK's largest domestic violence charity reported a "700 percent increase in calls in a single day under lockdown". This is just the tip of the iceberg as it does not take into account the unreported cases. Many victims are petrified to make a complaint under the circumstances or fear the effect on children in those households. Whilst the government has acknowledged the increase in domestic abuse, little attention has been given to women in BAME communities who suffer in silence.

With a Government and public institutions unwilling to recognise or meet the growing need of these women and their families, the Sisters Forum decided to step up and help. At the beginning it was really difficult for us to tell the difference between those who were self-isolated and those who had been cut off due to violence. It was hard to intervene as we had very little access to women, complicated by the restrictions of trying to provide a remote service on the phone as the abuser can always listen into any conversations.

As a solution we put a message, word of mouth and through social media, to the wider community to help to identify victims, encouraging everyone to speak to their neighbour, friends or family members.

In addition, we provided a service, with volunteers, through cooking warm food and dropping off shopping to make sure these women were safe. We came across horrific incidents of women suffering marital rape, and treated as objects, solely to fulfil sexual desire. Living in constant fear, the mental health of many victims had deteriorated over the lockdown.

The Government has made much fanfare over the plight of domestic violence victims in COVID-19, with the Hidden Harms Summit in Downing Street, but nothing yet has happened in terms of additional practical help. This 'do as I say not as I do' approach is seen pre-coronavirus with the Government's attitude to the proposed new Domestic Violence Bill, announced with fanfare but, on inspection, vital protection to victims is missing from the proposed legislation.

The political will to tackle Domestic Violence is the bellweather on societal and Governmental attitudes towards gender equality. As the journalist and social commentator Aysha Taryam, said:

"If we are to fight discrimination and injustice against women we must start from the home for if a woman cannot be safe in her own house then she cannot be expected to feel safe anywhere.'

Sabia Kamali is a founder and CEO of Sisters Forum

Women in Coronavirus firing line

Alice Arkwright sees a roll-back of gender equality in Covid-19 crisis

Over the past twelve weeks the significant gendered impacts of Covid-19 have been highlighted and there is a serious danger that progress on gender equality is being reversed. Here is some of what we know so far.

Women are being pushed out of work

Whilst the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) has prevented some redundancies and job losses, we're seeing the devastating impacts of the pandemic on the labour market. The number of people on UK payrolls plunged by 600,000 between March and May, whilst the number of people claiming work-related benefits shot up by 126%.

Huge job losses have occurred in sectors, like hospitality, that disproportionately employ women - 36% of young women worked in sectors that have been closed due to lockdown.

Research also shows that overall women in the UK are 4% more likely to have lost their job during the pandemic than men and mums are one and a half times more likely than dads to have quit or lost their job or been furloughed.

Low-paid women are especially at risk of losing work. A TUC survey on experiences of pregnant women showed that low-paid pregnant women were almost twice as likely as women on median to high incomes to have lost pay or been forced to stop work.

Women providing the majority of care

Closures in schools, nurseries and other formal forms of childcare as well as lockdown preventing friends and family supporting each other has meant working parents have become full time carers. Despite fathers reporting increased hours in care, we're seeing the unequal division of childcare continue in lockdown with the burden falling on women.

BAME women are particularly impacted. Research from the Women's Budget Group shows nearly half of BAME women were struggling to cope with the demands on their time compared to 35% of white women and 30% of white men. Additionally, almost half of BAME women said they had lost support from other people compared to 34% of white women.

There was a crisis in the UK childcare sector prior to the pandemic with only 57% of local authorities having enough childcare available for early years. This is set to worsen, with as many as one in four childcare providers saying they don't expect to be open by Christmas and those that do open will have limited capacity due to social distancing. This means some care will need to be provided by parents for the foreseeable future.

There are real concerns about women being able to return to the workplace whilst they are bearing the brunt of increased caring responsibilities. 71% of new mums in a TUC survey planning on returning to work in the next three months said they are currently unable to find the childcare to do so.

There needs to be a continued package of support until schools, nurseries and other childcare are back at full capacity; otherwise there is a risk that women will be unable to return or be unfairly selected for redundancy and dismissal.

Alice Arkwright works for the TUC

Women's health and safety is at risk

Women, BAME and migrant workers are on the frontline of this crisis. 77% of workers at higher risk of exposure to Coronavirus are women and 98% of the workforce at high risk of exposure within low paid jobs are women. Women and BAME workers make up large percentages of the health and social care sector where death rates have been high and there are inadequate levels of PPE.

Research has also shown that pregnant women are either not receiving adequate risk assessments or employers are not taking necessary actions to reduce risks identified, placing them in dangerous conditions.

Women are taking on more caring responsibilities, more likely to be at risk and are more likely to be out of work. Without immediate and sustained government intervention, such as a cash boost to the childcare sector, protections for low paid workers, increased flexible working and some form of the JRS until schools and nurseries are fully functioning, there is a risk that decades of progress could be undone. C

Dismantle institutional racism

Unmesh Desai says while monuments removal is important it should not obscure action on racism and inequality

Slaver Robert Milligan statue removed from Docklands by Labour council

We are dealing with two viruses today, which have come to be interlinked: the coronavirus, which has disproportionately affected minority communities, and the virus of racism, illustrated so vividly by the murder of George Floyd on 25th May. That terrible murder has unleashed a flood of anger on a global scale, in a way not seen for many years, about the issues of race, class, poverty and inequality that are entrenched in society.

In America this is compounded by the legacy of slavery, but how does one explain the intensity of the protests here?

Those protests were spontaneous and grassroots-based. In Barking in my constituency, a group of young people organised a vigil via social media that overnight brought out a couple of hundred of people. The protests have brought onto the streets, despite the risks of doing so, people from all sections of our society, many who aren't protest "regulars", and especially many young people.

Years of frustration at the impact of institutionalised racism – despite numerous inquiries into racism in everything from policing to prisons to education and employment – has found a profound resonance in the Black Lives Matter message.

The issue of public statues has at the same time both obscured and highlighted this message. The pulling down of the Colston statue in Bristol and the removal of the Milligan one in Tower Hamlets have dominated the news, sparking counter demonstrations by the Far Right. Public monuments honour one particular view of the past, and the only surprise is that statues honouring slave owners have not previously attracted the attention they richly deserve. Yet important as these actions are, the substantive issue remains: how do we dismantle the institutional and systemic racism that is pervasive in our society?

It would be a shameful lost opportunity if all focus remained on the monuments. All historical figures are flawed, and we must not allow ourselves to be distracted from the real change that is needed. The government has announced a commission to look at all aspects of racism in our society – this from a right-wing Brexiteer, Little Englander government is a remarkable symbolic achievement in itself – yet as David Lammy has said, we have had many inquiries and the need now is for action. The key people appointed to the commission have a record of denying institutional racism, so I feel the government's rhetoric here will prove to be hollow.

Unmesh Desai is a Labour Member of the Greater London Assembly

Despite that, I believe we can use this opportunity to reshape the political terrain with regard to racism. We can ensure the school curriculum reflects the true history of this country, so future generations grow up knowing how our multi-racial society has evolved. We can achieve fundamental reforms from immigration law to equality of service provision, in areas like housing, health and social care.

To do this, we will need a nationally led race equality strategy. I said some years ago that with such a strategy, we can genuinely tackle and dismantle institutional barriers within a decade if the political will is found.

Labour in opposition must lead the formation of that strategy, while effectively holding the government to account, at the same time as the progressive devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and London make progress directly where they can. We cannot wait till 2024 to act. As the economic consequences of the pandemic set in these tasks will acquire further urgency if we are to see off a new resurgence of the Far Right.

Make no mistake, the depression that is coming is the ideal breeding ground for fascism, and that's another reason we must start acting now – before it's too late. C

Knee in the neck for racism

Patrick Vernon on why Black Lives Matter here in Britain

The resurgence of Black Lives Matter as a result of George Floyd murder is now a universal human rights campaign. This time round more white people are fully embracing BLM and starting to understand that every-day and structural racism is not a figment of black people's imagination. They are attending the marches, demos, vigils in defiance of the government lockdown due to COVID-19. The debates around white privilege, being an ally to black and brown people and mainstream bodies rushing out statements of solidarity to the Black Lives Matter cause is all welcomed.

The question which all black people are asking is: is this the start of a serious discourse on race relations in Britain when for many years race was off the agenda despite Grenfell and the Windrush Scandal. However, the removal of Edward Colston's statue in Bristol was a similar iconic moment to when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. The demolition has kick started a national conversation about Britain's colonial past and its crimes against humanity which black people have had to endure for the last 400 years.

However, Boris Johnson seems more concerned about protecting statues representing the colonial past than black lives. The government handling of Grenfell fire and Windrush scandal is our Black Lives Matter cause with 72 people who died in the tower and five people from the Windrush Generation who died with health related problems linked to the traumatic impact of the hostile environment.

Johnson's response to Black Lives Matter is to focus on the rule of law and announce another commission on race relations, another way of avoiding the issue. This country has had more reviews on race in the last 30 years than the number of weapons in our nuclear arsenal. The review regarding the Windrush scandal which was published in March with 30 recommendations regarding structural change in the Home Office is already being displayed in the museum next to Colston statue.

The Public Health Review on BAME deaths and Covid-19 has now become a laughing stock demonstrating a lack of transparency or an acknowledgment of the reasons behind the loss of black and brown lives.

It is now clear that despite the attempts by the government to convince BAME health professionals and the wider community that it wants to tackle and focus on high levels of deaths connected with Covid-19, it is just a mirage. The reality is a lack of commitment and a blatant disregard for our lives and humanity.

Patrick Vernon OBE, social commentator and Windrush Campaigner

I am part of a campaign called We Need Answers calling for an independent public inquiry on Covid-19 and BAME communities. This campaign like previous ones over decades in fighting for race equality and justice eventually resorts to a legal challenge to force scrutiny and public accountability for change. We hope the Prime Minister in the context of Black Lives Matter will now seriously consider the issues of racism, tackle head-on structural racism and adopt the UN Decade of African Descent for a meaningful dialogue and engagement with the community. C

1945-promise of a new day

Ian Bullock reflects on the mixed legacy of the Attlee government

I can't really remember much about 1945 and Attlee's Labour government that was its surprising result. No wonder really. I was only four in 1945 and ten when Labour managed to lose the 1951 election in spite of winning more votes than their main opponent. This was due, of course, to our barmy electoral system which most of the Left – with some notable exceptions such as Ramsay MacDonald – had rejected in favour of some form of PR by 1914. Where did that disappear to?

What I can remember are some odd, disconnected, things from those years - walking past prefabs and, quite nearby, a huge area being turned into a new estate of what were called 'council houses,' the failure of the 'Groundnut Scheme' which seemed to be being blamed on Stafford Cripps because he was Chancellor of the Exchequer although he wasn't its main promoter.

My parents weren't very interested in politics and growing up in a very Conservative town (Sutton Coldfield) the only overt bit of combative party politics I can recall is seeing some blokes wearing little silver-coloured badges with a picture of a rat on them after Nye Bevan had called the Tories 'lower than vermin.' One thing that did capture my imagination was – paradoxically as will become evident later – the brainchild of Herbert Morrison – the Festival of Britain. I never got to London to see the Dome of Discovery or the Skylon but looking at them on our new TV was exciting,

Of course, in subsequent decades I came to have more appreciation of the achievements of the Attlee government. Clearly, the most almost universally appreciated – well before the pandemic – is the NHS. It became a cliché to say that it was the nearest thing we have to a religion in Britain. What's always struck me is how little public support, in comparison with the NHS, there was for the other excursions into public ownership of the Attlee government. The'70s and '80s saw lots of sympathy and support for the miners - but there wasn't much – to put it mildly – for the National Coal Board.

Nye Bevan launching NHS

Then in the '90s we had rail privatisation:.now very unpopular but I can't recall much of a widespread public resistance at the time. Certainly I, and I imagine all the people reading this, were totally opposed. But I do remember arguing with a British Rail employee on Brighton Station who was quite unperturbed about whether privatisation came or not. The NHS was 'ours' in a way that none of the other nationalisations ever became – not even to a lesser extent. Why?

Well the NHS – even though there's quite a flourishing private health sector and NHS dentists are rarer than hen's teeth – is different in that nothing is more personal and important to us all than our health. But why didn't other nationalised industries garner at least a bit more support?

Back in the '70s when I was lending a hand on Walter Kendall's Voice of the Unions I would have put this down to the lack of any kind of workers' self-management. I'd only dissent from that now by saying 'that's important, but it's a lot more complicated.'

I do find it a little strange that this happened under Attlee's premiership. In the early '20s as an activist in the ILP he had been the promoter, together with Clifford Allen, of the 'Allen-Attlee' version of that party's new programme, which is often described as being inspired by guild socialism. Their version wanted 'clearer recognition' of 'the principles of "workers' control"'. They urged that the ILP should unequivocally take a stand 'for political and industrial democracy and for devolution by locality and function as against the theory of the all-controlling State.' (For more on this see chapter four of my book on the inter-war ILP, Under Siege.)

So Attlee was at least aware of alternatives to the public corporations associated with Herbert Morrison. But I guess the social and economic crises of the later '40s, the Berlin airlift, the advent of the Cold War, the Palestine problem, the Marshall Plan and the rest of it discouraged contemplating anything more radical in the style of public ownership during those years.

So if and when Labour gets another chance I hope it will go for forms of public ownership which do have at least a chance of becoming 'ours', not just in a purely formal sense. As far as railways go I think in Chartist we can leave it to Paul Salveson to get us thinking about how this might be done. C

Ian Bullock's latest book is *The Drums of Armageddon*

Anticolonial resistance and British dissent

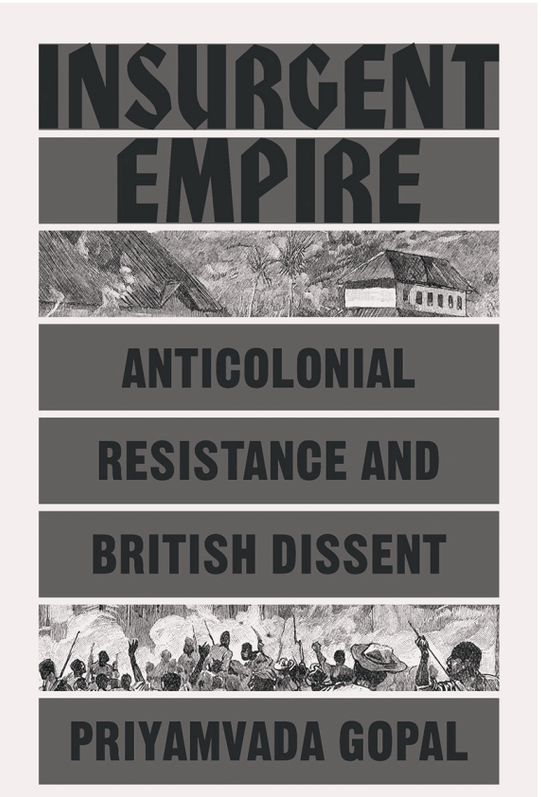
Duncan Bowie
on demythologising Empire

Insurgent Empire
Priyamvada Gopal
Verso £25 (hb) £14.99 (pb)

Gopal is a reader in literature at Cambridge University. This book is in effect an analysis of the literature (as opposed to the political history) of British anti-imperialism on which there is now an extensive literature. Two of the most recent studies are Gregory Claeys' *Imperial Sceptics* (2010) and Mira Matikkala's *Empire and Imperial Ambition* (2015), both of which were reviewed in Chartist. There is also an extensive literature on specific historical episodes, including a growing literature on pan-Africanism. I was therefore interested in whether Gopal's substantive work of 600 pages (including 140 pages of notes and bibliography) had much new to say.

For an historian familiar with many of the primary sources, reading what is in effect a literary analysis was hard-work but actually very rewarding. It was time consuming as I kept checking the original sources, some of which were more familiar than others, as well as reading or re-reading some of the secondary works, including biographies, on which Gopal draws. The book is stimulating, but perhaps not as novel and controversial as Gopal claims. Gopal's conclusion is that decolonisation was not granted by British advocates of reform but was won by resistance and insurrection. However this conclusion is drawn from an examination of the anti-colonial literature rather from an analysis of historical events.

The book, based on extensive reading of both primary and secondary sources, comprises a number of case studies: the 1857 Indian mutiny (or First War of Independence) and the writing of the Chartist, Ernest Jones; the critique of British foreign policy and the 1867 Jamaica suppression by the positivists Richard Congreve and Frederic Harrison; Wilfred Scawen Blunt's writing on the Egyptian nationalist movement of 1882 and on the Indian swaraj movement of 1905; the critique of British government in India in the 1920's by the Communist MP, Shapurji Saklatvala; the agitation of the League Against Imperialism focusing on the Meerut conspiracy trials; London based Pan-Africanism with a focus on the Haarlem poet Claude Mackay; C L R James and the campaign to defend Ethiopia; George Padmore's contribution to the Independent Labour Party's New Leader; and finally the agitation led by Fenner Brockway and the Movement for Colonial Freedom on British policy in Kenya and the Mau-Mau uprising in the early 1960's, which also focuses on the role of Kenyan trade union militant Tom Mboya and the Oxford academic Margery Perham. The final section argues that Perham, the academic imperialist and biographer of Lord Lugard (former Ugandan and Nigerian governor and author of Indirect Rule) finally recognised the impossibility of imperial reform and the case not just for self-government but for independence.



The book is extremely ambitious. Much of the book comprises textual analysis of the writings of the various anti-colonialists, with a continued focus on whether they were advocates of imperial reform or of national independence. I would question some of the arguments in the book – for example that Brockway was a reformer only converted later in life to a more 'revolutionary stance'. This view understates Brockway's lifetime support for militancy and independence (though a continuing commitment to non-violent means).

Gopal rightfully gives attention to some of the writers and organisations, whose roles have been previously under-recognised – for example Ernest Jones, Shapurji Saklatvala, Brockway and the ILP and the League against Imperialism.

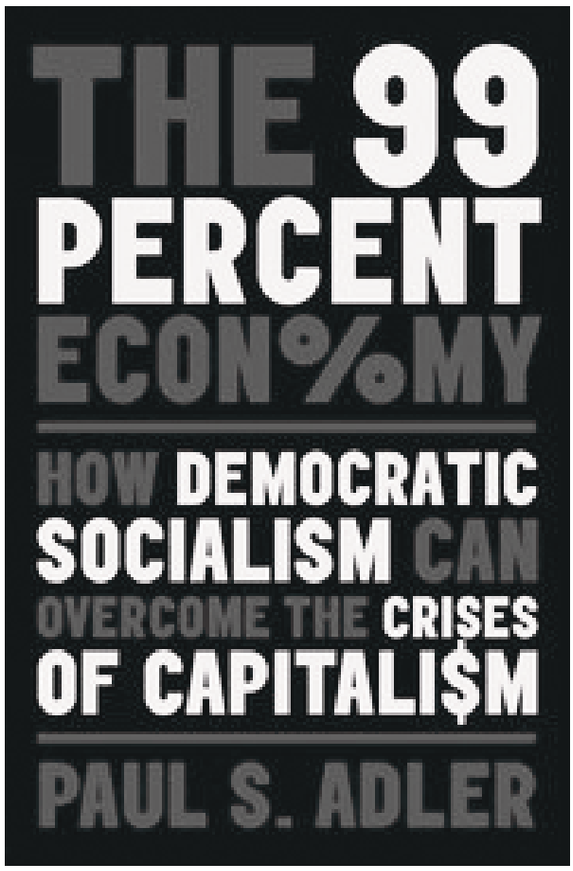
Interestingly Gopal gives little attention to the Fabians and the Fabian Colonial Bureau, who are seen, quite rightly, as defenders of imperialism and then of a reformed imperialism. I would have expected some consideration of other post WW2 campaigns, such as Michael Scott's Africa Bureau and the earlier campaigns to support Black trade unionists in South Africa and against apartheid, including the role of Winifred Holtby. However, this would have significantly extended the work, which does tend to give more attention to India than to Africa. This is perhaps understandable given this is the author's previous research focus, which has produced two books on Indian literary radicalism. This new book is certainly worth time and effort to read. It not only provides an overview of the subject but a useful guide to further reading and it is now coming out in a paperback edition.

Economic democracy in America

Bryn Jones on fighting the capitalist virus

The 99% Economy. How Democratic Socialism can Overcome the Crises of Capitalism
Paul Adler
Oxford University Press £16.99

Paul Adler, is a democratic socialist from the unlikely setting of the Marshall School of Business – but it's in Southern California, where strange hybrids bloom. His basic message is in the title. He identifies six crises besetting US society. Sometimes Adler relates these crises and solutions to other capitalist nations, though the USA is his predominant focus. These predicaments comprise: 'obscene' levels of wealth and inequality; disempowerment in the workplace; a plutocratic distortion of democracy; the carbon-driven environmental crisis, a social crisis in communities, gender and ethnic relationships - their governance and public service provision. A final crisis is the breakdown in the international order that is failing to tackle climate change, war, famine and national conflicts. His solution to all of these is a democratic socialism combining participatory institutions in the workplace with representative democracy at all levels of the political system.



Veteran socialists might shrug at this panacea. It's been advocated in similar forms for nearly 200 years: what's new? Though he name-checks transformative social movements, such as Occupy, climate activists and various strands of trade unionism, Adler's unusual source model comes not from the opposition to capitalism but from the so-called 'High Road' firms at its core. He admits that these still have a substantial democratic deficit but some, like his star pick - health care provider Kaiser Permanente, flourish because of worker participation in the firms' strategic development.

This is not exactly industrial democracy. The Kaiser board selects itself from top executives; but it is a socially inclusive set-up that has, by US standards a reasonable management- union machinery and proactive health care policies. KP, as it is known, was much admired by Tory Health Minister, Jeremy Hunt, as a possible replacement for current NHS systems. The flaw in this 'High Road' democracy is that it doesn't extend to top-level corporate strategies deciding investments, financing or take-overs. Indeed, Adler's discovery of surreptitious 'socialisation' within the capitalist enterprise is not a new attack. In a famous section of Capital, Marx - who is discretely absent from this book - discussed the unwitting socialisation of private capitals through concentration and multiple share ownership. In the 1960s and '70s analysts of 'managerialism', including J.K. Galbraith, talked up the burgeoning social conscience of a new, responsible executive class.

Adler is aware of such false promises, emphasising that marginal amelioration, such as corporate social responsibility, or even Nordic-style social democracy, will always be subservient to the bigger forces of monopoly power, financial flows and profit imperatives. His full-blooded socialism would mean outright public ownership of most big corporations, including banks and the new online leviathans from Silicon Valley. As a vision of what could be, the model is flawless.

However, European observers will be more sanguine about its utility as a potential blueprint. It begs two major questions: agency and process. Who will push through the necessary changes and how will they do it? Throughout, the book invokes an undefined 'we' as the ones who will campaign, legislate and implement. This is rather in the style of UK Labour manifestos that say ' We will . . .' Yet there is, as Adler tacitly, concedes no such political agent in the US. 'We ' will have to work with: the pro- business US Democratic Party, labour unions, green movements and community groups; showing along the way, how micro-democracies can be scaled-up to run nationalised firms, industrial sectors and regional and national economies. How this process will bypass the elephant of business oligarchy in the democratic arena is not discussed.

All in all, the admirable scope of this book - showing what could be done to transcend current crises - is undermined by its omissions. What of corporate control of media and communications, foreign, globalised economic interests that own or control huge swathes of corporate America? Or the strength of authoritarian capitalisms, such as China, or the power of international finance, that could bring down the dollar and inflict a disabling recession against any serious economic reformation? On the other hand, our immediate, seventh crisis: the catastrophic coronavirus maelstrom is making some forms of 'socialism' plausible again. If Adler's underlying ideas were combined with more concrete politics we might get a new vaccine to cure humanity of its capitalist affliction.

A memoir of love, grief and consolation

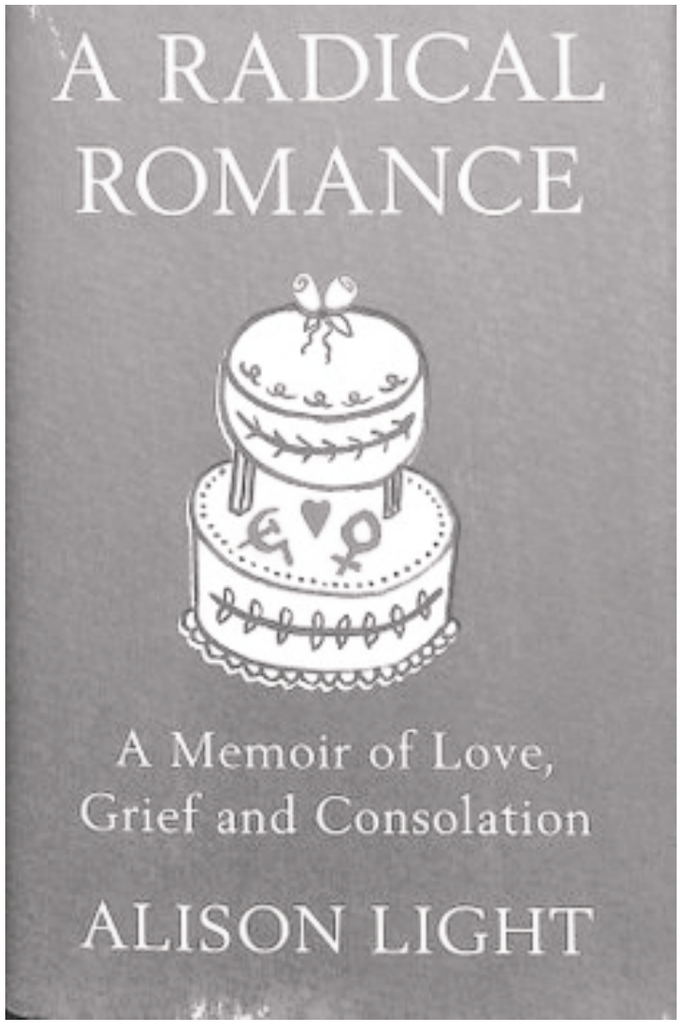
Richard Olney
on Raphael Samuel

A Radical Romance
Alison Light
Fig Tree/Penguin Random £20.00

The name of Raphael Samuel who died in 1996 will be familiar to all those interested in English radical history and politics. A social and labour historian, he was among the most influential figures of the latter half of the twentieth century in his chosen fields, alongside such luminaries as Eric Hobsbawm, Edward Thompson and Samuel's own college tutor and early patron Christopher Hill. For an introduction to his life and work there is no better starting point than the Oxford DNB article by his longtime friend and near contemporary Gareth Stedman Jones.

Recently, however, two full-length studies have been published. The first, Sophie Scott-Brown's *The Histories of Raphael Samuel*, was reviewed in Chartist by the reviews editor. This is the second, by Samuel's widow Alison Light. The two books to some extent complement each other, but they could hardly be more different. The first is an analysis of his social and political thought by a scholar who never met the man himself. Alison Light's book, on the other hand, does not give an account of his work, although, as she hopes, it should 'whet the reader's appetite to read more of it'. Rather it is about Samuel the man, and her relationship with him.

Written with great honesty and clarity, it is a moving and thought-provoking account, and one that brings its subject very clearly to light. I did not know Raphael well, and moreover knew him (through the early Ruskin History Workshops) roughly two decades before Alison Light first met him. But she vividly recalled for me his amazing energy, his ceaseless curiosity, his enthusiasms and his great personal kindness. She also describes his eccentricities, and the propensity of his life to slide into chaos from time to time, which those who knew him better must have found both endearing and sometimes exasperating.



There can be no doubt of the strength of their mutual bond, but he and Alison Light made an unusual pair. In some ways it was an attraction of opposites, as they were both clearly and articulately aware. Her background was provincial and working-class, his metropolitan and middle-class, having been brought up in Jewish north London and then having migrated to Spitalfields by way of Bethnal Green. He was an historian, she a writer and critic. She was in her twenties and he in his forties when they met. Needless to say, their romance presented her with many challenges, not least among them the difficulty of adjusting to life in Spitalfields. Raphael's house there, an interesting but profoundly uncomfortable relic of the early Georgian period, was crammed from top to bottom – it had five storeys but only one room on each floor – with his clutter; and it lay in a very urban neighbourhood under increasing threat from the developers.

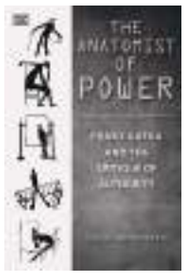
A major element in the clutter was his personal archive. Not only was he a tireless observer and researcher, he was an obsessive hoarder of letters, notes, drafts and other material, stashed away in box files all over the house.

Alison Light is very interested in memory, and an important theme of the book is the relationship of memory to the written evidence of the past. Another theme is mourning. After only a decade of marriage she was left a widow, when he died of cancer in December 1996. Dealing with his archive turned out to be part of the mourning process, and it is very good to record that thanks largely to her his papers found a safe home in the nearby Bishopsgate Institute. There they remain as a memorial to him, and as a resource for the continuation of his work.

Searching for Kafka

Don Flynn on Kafka's anarchism

The Anatomist of Power: Franz Kafka and the Critique of Authority
Costas Despiniadis
Black Rose Books
$21.99



This brief book sets out a robust claim on the part of a dedicated anarchist to have Kafka as a comrade, with the particular aim of demolishing Max Brod's suggestion that his great friend was a 'non-political writer'

Despiniadis picks through the texts of his novels and short stories, augmented with references to his diary and surviving letters to reveal a Kafka with unquestionable anarchist sympathies and an outlook on the world that was fully a part of that philosophy.

The critique of the insanities of bureaucratic power is obviously central to works like The Castle and The Trial. The intensity of his vision of corridors, waiting rooms, minor officials and incomprehensible proceedings that make up the subject of these novels makes it unlikely that Kafka's stance was a generalised alienation from the world, more to do with religious feeling than a political outlook.

A second manifestation of alienated power which is a common theme in anarchist thinking is that of the patriarchal family. Kafka's writing on this form of authority stretches across three principal works, The Metamorphosis, The Judgement and the first chapter from Amerika which started life as a short story entitled The Stoker. All depict troubled father-son relationships which Kafka experienced in his own childhood.

The final component of Kafka's analysis of power is the compulsion to strive for the approval of the established social order, best illustrated in The Metamorphosis. The central character, Samsa, is crippled by his transformation into a giant insect but it seems that, in the first instance, his mortification comes from his inability to attend to the obligations of his employment. The family is deeply implicated in this fall from grace, since Samsa has to forego his role as the main breadwinner of his household. But his anguish is intensified by the loss of his ability to go out in the world and be seen as the sort of citizen who might win the approval of his society.

Having read the novels and short stories it seems surprising that the view of Kafka as a non-political writer could have held sway over the years. Analysed as an 'anatomist of power', this book goes to the heart of his absorption in the detail of human subjection. Alienation is our lot because of the patriarchal capitalist society that grinds people down through its mastery of the power of castles, trials, and ultimately, the family.

Freedom

Mary Southcott on Billy Bragg

The Three Dimensions of Freedom
Billy Bragg
Faber & Faber £6

Three Dimensions of Freedom from the perspective of Liberty, Equality and Accountability by singer/songwriter/musician and activist, Billy Bragg has much overlap with William Waldegrave's analysis (see below). The British "sense of entitlement fails to recognise the UK's place in the world".

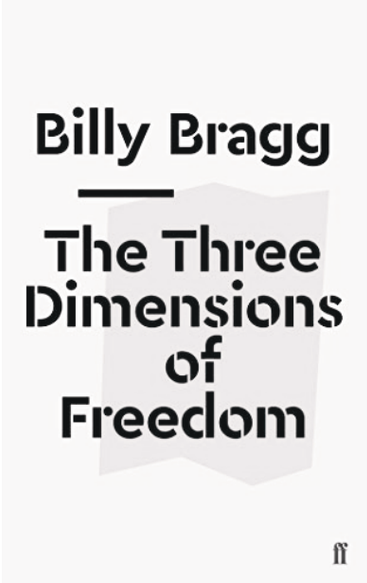
At a time when we see strongmen ruling many countries, our Prime Minister clearly not happy with scrutiny, select committees ignored, experts once dismissed used to shield the politicians making coronavirus decisions, Climate Emergency, #Me Too, #Never Again, #Black Lives Matter, Billy Bragg draws attention to accountability to make our freedom work as the antidote to authoritarianism.

This is the first of Faber Social's Political Pamphlets. Billy Bragg draws on the USA as well as the UK, social media as well as his own reading of history. It fills in gaps for those of us not so well acquainted. He tackles first Liberty, which has been redefined as neoliberalism, where policy decisions are replaced by global market forces. He reminds us of Carillion, Public Finance Initiatives and TINA -there is no other way.

He turns to Equality where he draws on ancient Athens and Isegoria, the idea that all citizens have equal rights to participate in public debate, except slaves and women, and the idea ascribed to Voltaire about defending "your right to say it" when we disagree. We need to ask why some of the most deprived in the UK and USA voted for Leave and Trump and supported gilets jaunes in France.

In Accountability he quotes Danny Dyer's "where is the geezer?" referring to David Cameron as a twat who scuttled off after the EU referendum. Bragg looks at the role of Dyson and Rees-Mogg in Economists for Free Trade and links with climate denial. Accountability is about listening. Businesses need to recognise their social responsibilities. Progressive taxation would help at home. A digital bill of rights would set up an international framework protecting personal data. Social media need sanctions against abusive content.

Bragg believes scrutiny of health, employment and tenancy comes from giving people agency. Accountability is key to creating a civic revolution and we need a programme of democratic reform to match. "Decentralisation and making everyone's vote count is needed to engage citizens in deliberative and regulatory democracy".



The sadness of an old Tory Remainer

Mary Southcott on post Brexit reflections

Three Circles into One: Brexit Britain: how did we get here and what happens next?
William Waldegrave
Mensch publishing £10

I stood against the author in the 1987 general election. His other opponent was the Liberal Alliance candidate, George Ferguson, who went on to be the first Independent elected Mayor of Bristol.

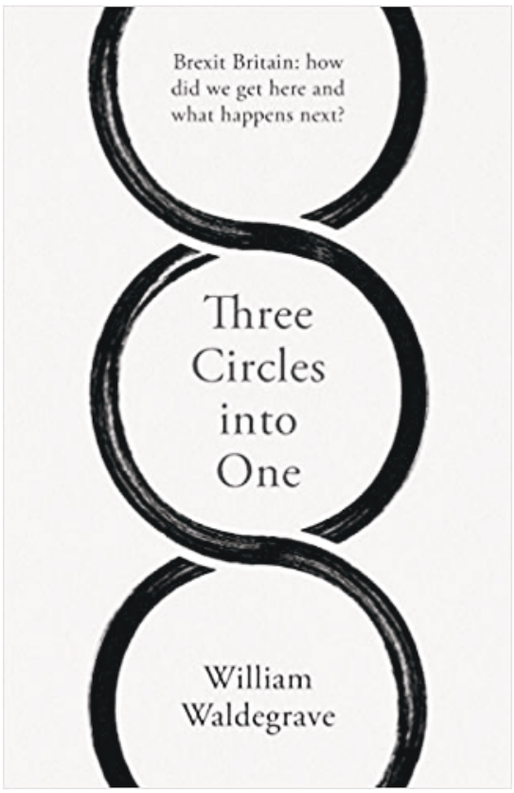
If we are to forge an overlapping consensus on the future of the United Kingdom and its relationship with what this Government calls our 'European neighbours' before the next general election, we need to listen to other voices, including perhaps that threatened species of Tory Remainers, in both senses, the ones in the Commons, such as Greg Clark and Caroline Noakes or in this case, William Waldegrave, now Provost of Eton College.

He has been in the House of Lords since he lost his seat and worked in the City of London; but evidenced by this book he clearly thinks, reads and empathises. He was in 1987 a Tory 'wet', alongside Chris Patten in Bath. They both lost to tactical voting, the former in 1992 to the LibDems and the latter in 1997 to Labour's Valerie Davey. Bristol West and Bath were both Remain in 2016 and Bristol West even voted YES! to Alternative Vote in 2011. Before boundary changes, Bristol West was the most intelligent seat in England judged by A levels.

Bristol clearly influenced the author. "Prophets are often without honour close to home, particularly in Bristol". He quotes the Bristol MP, Edmund Burke, who lost his seat for opposing the Slave Trade, to justify his own opinion that the Commons works like a jury, and MPs are representatives not delegates. If we accept this, Keir Starmer has the right profile.

Bristol West's 1987 candidates ended up voting Remain in 2016 although Waldegrave said what swung it for him was his children who thought of themselves as European. At the 1987 count, William Waldegrave thanked me for letting him win by putting up the Labour vote and depriving the Liberals of our tactical vote in the inner city. This led to my supporting electoral reform. The author even writes "if first past the post works, it works well".

His 'three circles' are why Britain punched above its weight before Brexit: its former Empire, the English-speaking world (mainly the USA) and Europe are three overlapping Venn diagrams. After Suez, France and Britain took different routes. The author cites Sir Humphrey in Yes Minister: "We joined to make sure it did not work". We were "a Trojan Horse for Atlanticism" and never really made the political case for the EU. But we did have a national post World War II narrative.



Until the "childish disruptors who believe that throwing things in the air is good fun", we had the "settled institutions of a liberal democracy" although, he adds, we don't have "a safety net of a constitutional sixty-forty required majority in referendums". All our institutions were undermined by an almost religious belief in leaving the EU by the European Reform Group: our Parliament, the law, even the Queen. I would add the BBC, the Conservative Party and the unwritten British constitution.

The book is an argument that post Brexit Britain should have a new national narrative. We should punch at our correct weight. We should relinquish our permanent place on the United Nations Security Council. We should settle for an offshore European Canada.

Waldegrave is handicapped by having written this short book in summer 2019 although he foresees some of what happened in the General Election and leaving the EU but not Coronavirus. He overestimates by miles the number of soft Conservatives who might have been tempted by and would actually vote LibDem.

He takes apart each circle. "Singapore on Thames" prioritises wealth over democracy and relies on "comic imperial nostalgia". Why insist on a non-existent special relationship where with "America First" you exercise no power under Trump, but even under Biden? And what of Rejoiners when the argument for full integration with the EU was never made? He argues they need "to take back control of the Europe of which we are part" depending how the European ever closer union project is going.

After we have crossed the "toxic and sulphurous" Brexit ditch, we need a realistic narrative not born of empire, a special relationship or the WWII settlement, which can unite us rather than divide. We can agree with him on much of his analysis. Not surprisingly, he gets Tony Benn and the Labour Party wrong. We do not need to return Labour to the Blairites. Labour needs to be a broad church. But "Returnism" makes sense if the EU hangs together. We can accept "middling world significance". Let us change our institutions, not undermine them cynically. Let's believe in something. We don't need an Atatürk as Waldegrave misguidedly suggests. Secularism is not enough and has given way to Islamism in Turkey. We need people to advance the cause of democracy everywhere.

A challenge for libertarian socialists

Duncan Bowie on socialism and freedom

Council Democracy
Edited by
James Muldoon
Routledge £120

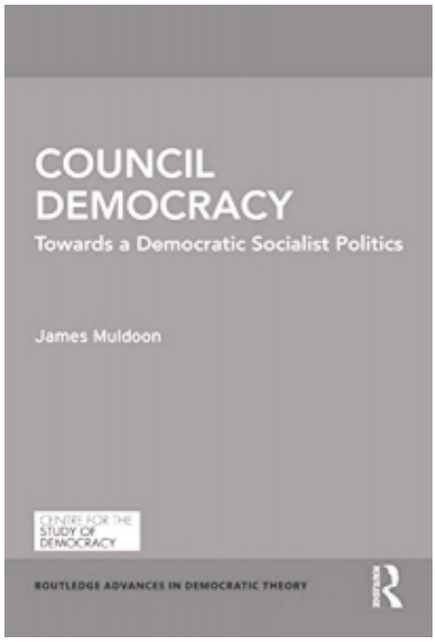
For democratic socialists, especially those who have a libertarian perspective, one of the key challenges is how to develop a system of governance which balances individual freedom against social justice. This debate is not new and theorists as well as socialist activists have sought to develop decision making structures which seek to ensure that political decisions are taken at the level nearest to the individual but which maximise both social and spatial equity, often referred to as the principle of 'subsidiarity'. This recognises that the state can operate at a range of spatial levels – global, continental, the national, regional, county/district; neighbourhood. This accepts that a national parliament is only one of a number of levels of decision making.

Theorists of council democracy have historically focused on local political decision making, based on the direct democracy of group activism, whether residential or workplace based. In the past, Left socialists have tended to focus on workplace organisation – factory based councils with local federations of trades councils, rather than on the residential based politics of municipal politics and neighbourhood and parish councils.

This set of academic essays (thus the price) produced by the Centre for the Study of Democracy at my previous academic institution, the University of Westminster, provides a very useful historical introduction and theoretical discussion of council democracy. The approach is a progressive one in that the book is subtitled 'Towards a Democratic Socialist Politics', there being a somewhat questionable assumption that locally organised politics has a socialist tendency.

The historical essays inevitably focus on the post WW1 experience of workers councils in the early Soviet Union and in Germany. The revolutionary and in fact insurrectionary concept is advocated by Donny Gluckstein, who can be described as the Socialist Workers Party in-house historian – interestingly the only contributor to declare his organisational affiliation, but that seems mandatory for SWP members. Not surprisingly this essay is what is best described as uncritical historical romanticism.

The introductory chapter by Muldoon is more useful as it draws out some of the theoretical issues within the somewhat simplistic concept of council democracy, examining the relationship between direct and representative democracy, the presumption being their existence within a democratic liberal if not actually socialist society. The theoretical chapters draw on the writings of the Dutch council communist Anton Pannekoek, the Germans Karl Kautsky and Karl Korsch, the Austro-Marxists such as Karl Renner, before considering more recent theorists such as Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis of 'Socialisme ou Barbarie'.



Interestingly Muldoon points to the somewhat abstract theorising of his own university's politics professor, Chantal Mouffe, and her concept of 'agonistic democracy', which seems to have been popular with some of the leading advisers to Jeremy Corbyn, as failing to acknowledge the significant barriers capitalist relations of production pose to delivering her Gramscian notion of a 'war of positions' within the institutions of a liberal democratic society.

For me the most interesting contribution is that of the American political theorist Michael Thompson. Thompson is critical of those political philosophers who have a highly idealised view that direct democracy will somehow lead to a progressive collectivist consensus. Thompson is scathing about what he considers to be the naivety of Hannah Arendt. Thompson notes that much of the tradition of council communism is not just anti-parliamentary but anti-state.

For Thompson, any structure of councils has to operate within a framework of democratic accountability. He considers that both Pannekoek and Arendt, in claiming that councils are anti-bureaucratic and spontaneous and would unleash a direct democratic potential leading to the withering away of the modern state, misunderstand the nature of decentralising politics. "It does not lead to furthering democracy, but expands the opportunities for elite control and domination by loosening the powers of oversight over particular interests".

Thompson rightly asserts that "the state is therefore a crucial ingredient of any system of economic democracy". This is a similar point to one I made in my article on 'Limits of Devolution' in Chartist 303.

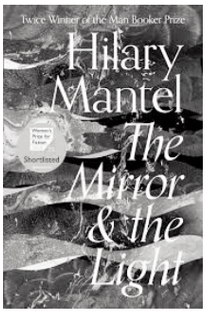
This is an important book and highly recommended. Unlike much contemporary political theory, the essays are readable and provide a range of approaches to the critical challenges faced by libertarian socialists, not just in terms of historical experience but in terms of the contemporary context and the debates within the left on the relationship between means and ends.

My one disappointment was the limited attention given to British socialists who had sought to develop organisational and governance structures to balance socialism and freedom – for example the Owenite and French associationists of the early 19th century, and the guild socialists on early 20th century (though G D H Cole and Sidney Webb get brief mentions) and the French municipal socialists such as Brousse and Malon. Hopefully, Routledge will publish a cheaper paperback version. Otherwise get your library to order a copy.

Through a Glass Darkly

Patricia d'Ardenne on Cromwell's fall

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



This much anticipated final part of the Tudor Trilogy has not disappointed. Mantel casts a penetrating light on Thomas Cromwell, a figure of shadows and monstrous reputation in the court of Henry V111, by describing (and, occasionally, imagining) the last four years of his life. Light and mirror metaphors pervade the entire narrative: immense good fortune, regal splendour, insight and understanding, as well as the light that blinds us, haunts us, or is a trick of the mind.

We are pitched into the turbulence of Tudor England, trying to separate itself from the religious and financial corruption of Rome, yet keeping its trading, military, cultural and dynastic alliances with the rest of Europe. This England is led by a powerful, but dangerously capricious and narcissistic Prince--the Light, and his mirror, the Lord Privy Seal/Master of the Rolls/Principal Secretary, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Lord High Executioner rolled into one. Cromwell is an outsider, reviled by the establishment for not being one of them, and equally by the 'ordinary man' for having climbed above his station in life.

Sounds familiar? Cromwell gives Henry everything he asks for, and in doing so he himself becomes too dangerous to Henry and too powerful to survive. The very processes that he has used to unseat the enemies of the State, are used with equally ruthless speed and certainty against him, the second most powerful man in the country.

We might know something about the fall of Cromwell, but it is Mantel who illuminates his thinking, through his many letters, diaries and internal and external speech and allows us to see his story anew. We can appreciate his humanity and skills, as well as the many influences on his meteoric rise and fall from grace. England is leaving its medieval certainty and superstition and is finding a new consciousness, through the Reformation, through Regional Councils, its language and shared English language Bible.

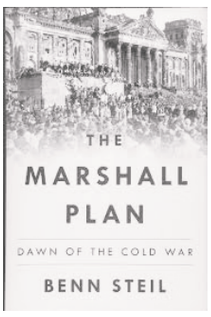
This immense and scholarly book begins where the last finished, at the scaffold of Ann Boleyn, continuing through the next four years of Henry's marriage to Jane Seymour, the birth of Edward, her death, and the much negotiated but disastrous marriage to Anne of Cleves. The book decelerates and the last chapter takes us through his last hours in unbearable slow motion, towards his final moments. The incredulity of no reprieve. The inevitability of blood and death. This is historical fiction at its best, providing us with factual record and then fleshing these out with the novelist's informed creation.

A perfect read for lockdown England.

Dawn of the Cold War

Duncan Bowie on post-war Europe

The Marshall Plan
Benn Steil
Simon and Shuster £25



This book is much more interesting than the title would imply. Steil is an American economic historian, who previously wrote a book on the Bretton Woods agreement of 1944 which established the International Monetary Fund. The Marshall Plan, named after General George Marshall, the American Secretary of State under President Truman was the investment programme, initiated in 1948, which assisted the post-war European economic recovery.

Steil's book is however a study both of the international negotiations which enabled the programme to be implemented but also of the internal American political context in which Marshall and Truman converted the hostile Congress from an isolationist position to one of accepting American responsibility for leading the European recovery and accepting a new global responsibility. The massive financial expenditure involved in investing in former enemy countries such as Germany and Italy, at significant cost to the American people in a period of financial constraint and austerity can be seen as altruistic, but was argued for by Democrat and Republican politicians as the only way to save Western Europe from communism and to restrict the expansion of Soviet influence.

Steil provides a detailed analysis of the roles of diplomats and political advisors such as the academic George Kennan who was a strong advocate of Soviet containment and the hard line American governor of the American occupied zone in Germany, General Lucius Clay. It is not insignificant that the Marshall plan's implementation was conditional on Communists being thrown out of the French and Italian governments, at a time when the Communists were the largest parties in both countries.

So the Marshall Plan is seen as being the start of the Cold War, with the case against the Soviets being strengthened by the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and the conflict over Berlin and the establishment of the federal West German state (in breach of the Potsdam agreement)– the Soviets the victors in the former; the Western powers in the latter case.

The book is much more of a political history than an economic history and certainly a much more readable narrative of the period than anticipated. Although the focus is primarily American, the study is also revealing about Soviet, French and also British attitudes to the Marshall plan. Steil presents an interesting argument that it was the American initiative that forced economic cooperation between the Western European powers, against significant opposition from both France and Britain, and which was consequently the main instigator of not just the European Steel and Coal Community of 1951 but also of the European Economic Community of 1957 and the subsequent European Union. This is perhaps surprising in the Trumpian era, where European Union is seen as a competitor to and enemy of the US. It is also a reminder of why the EU exists and the dangers of isolationism.

VIEW FROM WESTMINSTER

Howl of rage

Sam Tarry is Labour MP for Ilford South

Sam Tarry on needless deaths and government inaction

Unparalleled deaths across the country, with class, social and racial inequality intersecting in a heart-breaking way has been the story of the past few months. Then, a brutal and murderous moment has unleashed a howl of rage and righteous indignation spreading from Minnesota, across the United States to cities in the UK like London and Bristol. A moment of sheer anger, articulating that in 2020 things feel like they are regressing, and that the rhetoric of the racist right is now mainstream discourse in too many countries, including our own. It's not just where you were born, or how much or how little wealth you were born into, that sadly matters, but all too often the colour of your skin still defines your opportunities and life chances.

This is a deeply troubling situation for many black and diaspora communities, not least in my own constituency of Ilford South, where South Asian heritage communities form a majority of the local population. Ilford South has a rich tapestry of different coexisting communities including the Afro-Caribbean, and African and several south Asian diasporas, who form a large part of Ilford's long-standing multicultural vibrancy. Unsurprisingly, I have received hundreds of calls, emails and letters on recent events, as well as issues that are directly related to it, such as the death of rail worker Belly Mujinga, who was a member of TSSA Union.

Many have lost loved ones during this pandemic. People are burning with anger and despair.

Many more are terrified to leave their homes for fear of contracting this deadly disease. A high percentage of my community in Ilford are frontline workers who are either being prevented from doing their jobs or are concerned about the health risks associated with carrying them out.

Johnson- No action on racism and inequality

These workers in the frontline of this crisis, repeatedly putting their lives on the line for the rest of us. For them these are very rational fears.

For example, for those of Bangladeshi ethnicity (a sizable proportion of my constituency in Ilford South), the risk of death has been double that of those of white British ethnicity, and for those of Indian, Pakistani, other Asian, Caribbean and other black communities the risk has been 10-50 per cent higher than white British people.

One of many factors would appear to be a lack of support for those who have either spoken out, or have been too scared to speak out. For example, in one case in my constituency, doctors who were working in this country from abroad were worried they couldn't express their fears of working on the Covid hospital wards as they didn't have adequate PPE. As a result, they themselves, as well as many of their colleagues who were also from abroad, were later struck down by the virus.

This Government has failed these workers. From inadequate and insufficient levels of PPE to continuing to allow workers to work in unsafe spaces due to a lockdown that was far too slow in being announced and one that, as Professor Neil Ferguson pointed out, would have resulted in 20,000 fewer deaths had it been announced just a week earlier rather than continuing to put the economy before people's lives.

Constituents such as my own are therefore rightly angry that the Government's review to discover why Covid-19 has had a disproportionately high impact on BAME communities has fallen well short, offering little in the way of answers, or concrete steps for action.

Zubaida Hague, Interim Director of Race Equality at the Runnymede Trust, which was consulted by Public Health England for the report, has said she was "flabbergasted that there was not a single recommendation" contained within the report, or indeed any plan of action on how to save lives. As a result, she concluded that it was "wholly inadequate".

In the wider context, it is time for us to heed to long standing calls for a deeper understanding of our colonial past. We must update the national curriculum to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact colonialism, Empire and slavery had around the world, and its role in forming our country today.

We cannot wait for this Government, led by a known racist, to make a difference. We must be the change we want to see in the world. That means community-led anti-racism campaigns, tying in with pre-existing organisations such as mutual aid groups where, in addition to hands on support for vulnerable people, education and awareness initiatives can help to change the entrenched mindset that many people still have. And hold power to account, wherever that is - the town hall, the police station, self-appointed community leaders, and of course Parliament itself. Power is never given, it is only ever taken. C