

CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

#308 January/February 2021

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Tories broken Britain

Prem Sikka

COVID CRONYISM

Paul Garver

Glyn Ford

US ELECTIONS

Mark Cocker

COUNTRYSIDE THREAT

Ann Black

LABOUR DIRECTION

Sandy Martin

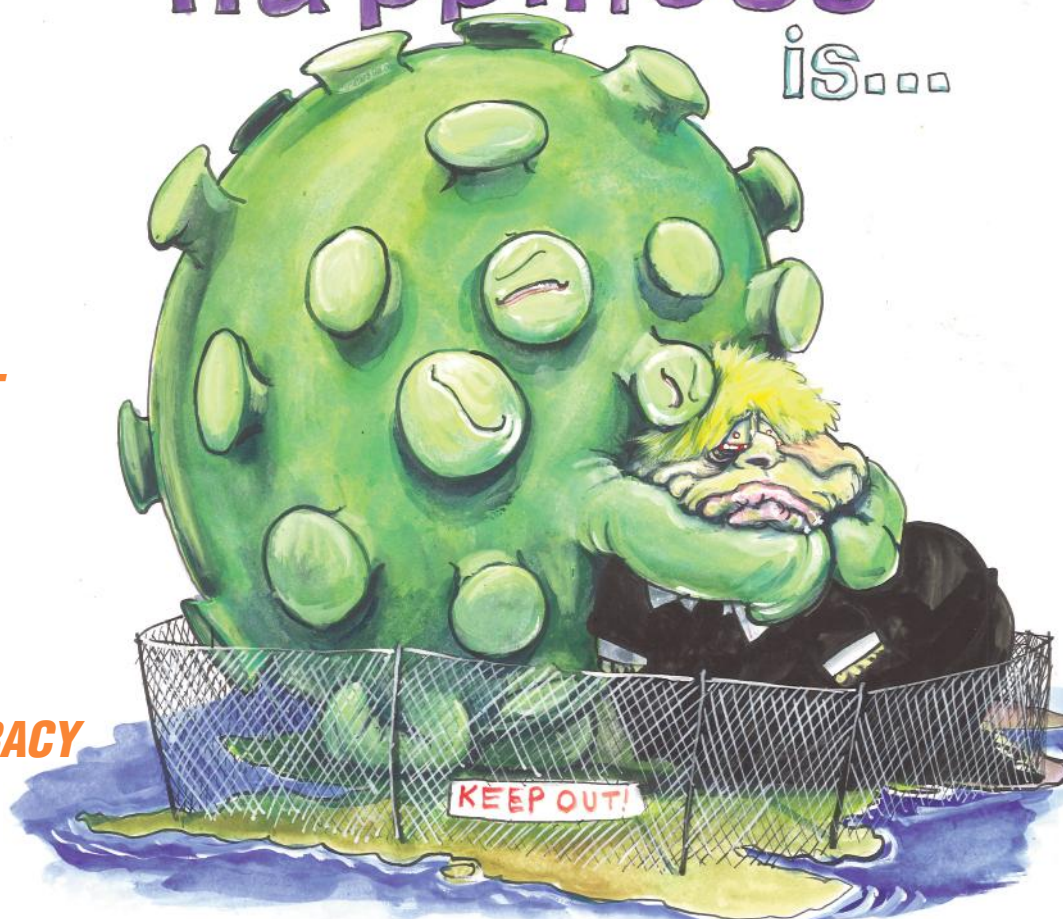
Don Flynn

LABOUR NEW DEMOCRACY

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happiness
is...



a warm Brexit

*Martin Rowson 20
after Schulz*

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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

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the EB

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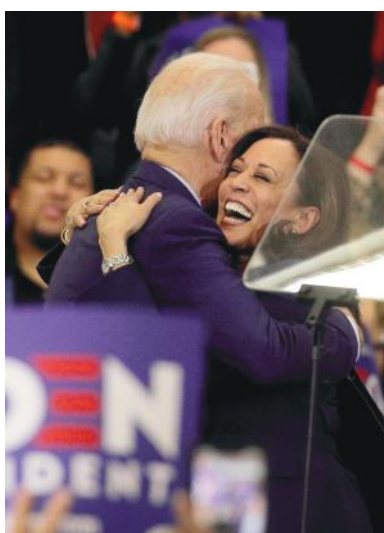
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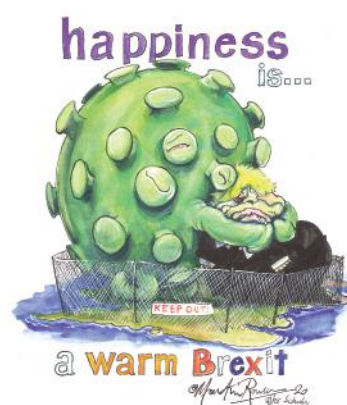
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Cover by Martin Rowson

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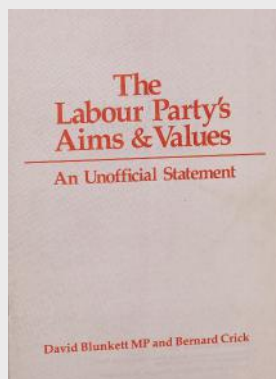
OUR HISTORY

OUR HISTORY 94

David Blunkett and Bernard Crick: The Labour Party's Aims and Values 1988

In 1985 the Labour Party National Executive Committee commissioned a statement of 'Principles and Beliefs'. The working party appointed to draft the document apparently met only once and then lapsed. Blunkett and Crick however believed that despite disputes over policy and strategy within the party, there was nevertheless widely shared common ground and that democratic socialism in Britain had a clear and distinctive doctrine. Their 'unofficial' statement was published as a pamphlet by Spokesman. Blunkett had been elected to parliament in 1987, having for the previous seven years been leader of Sheffield Council. He was later to serve as Education secretary, Home secretary and Work and Pensions secretary between 1997 and 2005 and is currently a member of the House of Lords. Crick was professor of political science at Birkbeck College, University of London, having previously taught at Sheffield University. He published some thirty books including *In Defence of Politics*, originally published in 1962. He also wrote a Fabian pamphlet *Socialist Values and Time*, published in 1984. Crick died in 2008.

"The Labour Party is proud to be a democratic socialist party. It is egalitarian, that is it believes in the equal worth of every human being; that we should treat each other always, whether friends or strangers, with equal consideration. But Labour also aims to be libertarian, open-minded and tolerant.



We wish by democratic means to transform slowly but surely our present economically and socially divided society into a truly democratic community that treats all people as equal, women and men, black and white. Such a society would maximise popular participation and would stimulate the altruism in people not only the self-interest, aiming to reinforce the best in us all. Labour seeks not to do good to people by the state but to use the state to enable people to help themselves and those around them."

"The Labour Party from its origins rejected revolutionary socialism. But Labour's founders had ideals which if applied through free and democratic processes, example and discussion, applied step by step, patiently but with determination, would create a uniquely civilised society with a revolutionary change in social attitudes and values."

"To get workable and acceptable policies is the great task of any political party. But policies must be informed by values and a sense of direction not merely by short-term practicality and expediency. Otherwise policy dwindles into mere pragmatism, always reacting to events, never trying to shape them. Policy must never mean staying in office for the sake of staying in office or trying to win elections simply by reading the momentary popularity of issues on opinion polls. Rather we should try to persuade honestly and by the example of working models on a local level of what we democratic socialists see to be a free, more just and ultimately attainable good society."

Another Europe is Possible Where do we go from here?

The UK's departure from the European Union, on terms set by the nationalist right, will mean an attack on the rights and prosperity of ordinary people, including future generations.

The Tories' Brexit agenda is not a policy but a project. It is anti-worker but not anti-state. It puts up new barriers to trade with Europe, but seeks deregulation and marketisation 'at home'. This is pushing Britain towards a new, authoritarian, 'crony capitalism'. As this becomes unpopular, the other aspects of the Tory agenda – the migrant bashing culture wars and ethnic nationalism – will become more and more important to sustain their political support. The bare bones deal being negotiated between Brussels and London protects very little in terms of rights and protections, and the economic fallout of Brexit will also be grave.

There are three broad planks to our strategy:

1. A push to stop the worst aspects of the Brexit agenda

Despite the shift in parliament, there are some aspects of the Tories' agenda that we could seek to influence by running public campaigns aimed at pressuring MPs. We identify two such areas, and more may arise in the course of 2021:

- On Settled Status, we continue to fight for a 'right to stay' for EU migrants.
- On new trade deals, such as the US trade deal, we will fight for concessions, especially around issues like food standards, the NHS and workers' rights.

2. Building mass movements of resistance

Much of the hope for progress rests on the building of movements which are simply too big, or too disruptive, to ignore. Mass mobilisation can also capture the public imagination and shift the national debate on key issues which we are fighting on. Examples of this include the building of a national protest and/or day of action for migrants' rights in early 2021.

3. Campaigning to shift the policy of the next government

The road to the next election is a long one. With many other parties already committed to our goals, much of our emphasis must be on Labour.

Another Europe has always played three roles: we are the anti-Brexit wing of the left, the left wing of the anti-Brexit movement, and a driver of internationalism with the progressive left. When it comes to internationalism, our role has never been more important. We will fight against the continuing and deepening parochialism of UK politics, including of its left and progressive political forces. All over Europe, huge events and movements are taking place, and though we are no longer formally attached to the EU, these events are likely to shape the development of politics here. Our emphasis will be on giving a platform and a voice to the movements taking place, for instance the opposition in Belarus; undertaking practical solidarity and mobilisation for them; and building lasting links between the UK left and its international counterparts.

This is a heavily abridged version of the AEIP Strategy paper agreed at the December 2020 conference

Tory Britain not working

A double whammy of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic are savaging Britain. An incompetent and reckless government has presided over the highest death rates of Covid-19 in Europe. Over 68,000 official and 80,000 excess deaths in 2020. Infections continue to rise, a virtually privatised track and trace system is a national embarrassment and mixed messages continue to flow from government ministers.

Meanwhile with the unnecessary economic hit from Brexit we are witnessing spiralling price rises, congestion at ports with miles of lorry queues, and the threat to agriculture and livelihoods of many who live by farming under threat as **Keith Savage** explains. Environmental and safety standards are being sacrificed for a bogus sovereignty.

We knew the economic costs of the pandemic would be severe. Despite Rishi Sunak's discovery of the magic money tree his Tory predecessors said did not exist, and used to justify ten years of austerity, British workers are facing huge threats to jobs and living standards. **Bryn Jones** explains the limitations of the Sunak packages which miss out millions of self-employed, casual and agency workers. Jobless numbers have risen 800,000 during the pandemic and look set to continue without much more wide-ranging support measures. Labour needs to broadcast its pledges on a Green New Deal, nationalisation of utilities and massive investment in youth training to highlight Tory deficiencies.

We are now facing a new epidemic of poverty. The United Nations Aid agency is channelling £700,000 to feed insecure households across the UK while the working poor are forced to resort to food banks in record numbers. If it had not been for Marcus Rashford's campaign to have free school meals provision for all during school holidays, many millions more children would be going hungry. All this in the world's fifth richest country.

Contrast the £16 billion found for the expansion of the Defence budget (war industry), over the next four years, alongside billions for Trident replacement, the public sector pay freeze, the threat to discontinue the £20 weekly Universal Credit uplift last year, highest homeless numbers in decades, the list goes on. Meanwhile the top 100 UK bosses trouser 73 times the average worker's income and the CEO of Ocado was awarded £58.7 million – 2605 times the average Ocado worker, with the government refusing to raise taxes or close loopholes on this richest one per cent.

This is the way capitalism works say its defenders. **Prem Sikka** shows that it helps if you are mates with ministers. He outlines the multi-million pound contracts awarded to companies linked to top Tories. Deals rushed through with no competitive tendering. Many of them failing to deliver adequate PPE and millions wasted. Serco is the de facto corporation behind test and trace. No accountability and failed delivery.

This is the face of Conservative Britain increasingly isolated from its European allies. Broken and a far cry from

the illusory 'global Britain'. This government will also be at odds with the new Biden administration in the United States as **Glyn Ford** explains. **Paul Garver** looks more closely at the Biden/Harris ticket and highlights the role of the Democrat left in turning out the votes for Biden in key swing states.

But it need not be this way. **Robin Hambleton** sees a silver lining in the Covid crisis with the way it has encouraged caring for others and the planet. He posits that a more useful measure of government success would be to look at the degree to which care is valued rather than 'growth' per se. Further he champions power to the cities and regions as a further way to rectify wealth and power imbalances.

Don Flynn reports on Labour for a New Democracy, an initiative designed to inject fresh impetus into campaigns for proportional representation in Westminster elections and broader democratic reform across Britain's antiquated broken state. **Sandy Martin** amplifies the calls laying out a road map to commit Labour to change by 2021's party conference, while **Sam Tarry** MP calls for radical federalism. **Ann Black**, newly re-elected to Labour's ruling NEC, explains some of the internal party debates while encouraging greater member engagement.

This has been made more difficult by the continuing conflict over antisemitism and Jeremy Corbyn's senseless suspension from the PLP, despite being reinstated into party membership.

If Labour is to mount an effective challenge to the Johnson government it will need a more united front and a clearer narrative on the economy, as **Bryn Jones** argues. This means an end to internal wrangling—which has to start with the Starmer leadership.

Meanwhile Labour needs to set its sights on the open goals provided by government. **Don Flynn** highlights the plight of the Windrush generation, thousands of British residents denied compensation and support. **Dave Toke** exposes corporate interests promoting blue hydrogen while **Nigel Doggett** highlights the case for more deliberative democracy to stiffen resolve in averting climate disaster. We plan a regular climate countdown column leading up to the COP conference in Glasgow at the end of the year.

Environmental journalist **Mark Cocker** reports on the threat to our wildlife and habitat which requires investment and protection. New Heathrow runways and road networks are not the way to reduce air pollution and carbon emissions.

The vaccine roll-out will take months while jobs in hospitality, creative industries, aviation and retail continue to disappear. Brexit just compounds the economic crisis. This act of national self harm is likely to mean anything from a three to eight per cent fall in GDP. Starmer needs to wind back restrictions on members and refocus on building a narrative around a new democracy and a new economy. This is the route to winning back the lost 'red wall' seats, parts of Scotland and the south.

**This is the face of
Conservative Britain—
broken and a far cry from
the illusory 'global
Britain'**

Northern democracy

Paul Salveson on 2021 and a reset for new normal

The North of England is in tough times and in the coming year they may well get tougher. Covid has killed many thousands and upended the livelihoods of millions. The end of the Brexit transition period will cause huge upheavals and potentially further major hardship, with parts of the North bearing the brunt. No wonder the newly-formed 'Northern Independence Party' has already had thousands of messages of support on social media.

The region's problems of social injustice and strategic economic weakness were already there; it's just that the last year has compounded them. Decades of 'neoliberalism' and ten years of austerity have taken their toll. Now, the rollercoaster of successive crises is here to stay: global warming is with us. The Arctic is melting and nothing can be the same again even if we wanted it to be. 2021 offers the opportunity for a reset; people don't want the new normal to be like the old normal. The North must have a new economy and a new social contract; it can and must 'build back better'.

How? The Hannah Mitchell Foundation proposes a Campaign for Northern Democracy to argue that constitutional and democratic reform is a vital ingredient in the great task of building a new economy and addressing social injustice across the North. To succeed in fixing our social and economic problems, we must fix the problem of the North's democratic deficit and abject subordination to London. It's not the whole solution, but it's an indispensable part of the solution. The North needs its own grassroots movement to demand it.

The Campaign for Northern Democracy can provide that grassroots movement. The Hannah Mitchell Foundation is inviting all citizens and organisations who are working for a better North of England, and agree that democratic reform in the North is part of what we need, to join us. It will be progressive and inclusive but politically non-aligned.

As a member of the broad campaign, the Hannah Mitchell



'Northern Independence Party' has already had thousands of messages of support on social media

Foundation will work with others to specialise in developing the thinking behind, and practice of, progressive regionalism and regional democratic government. That can take many forms and 'The North' isn't a monolithic whole. It contains at least three generally-accepted 'regions' – Yorkshire and the Humber, the North-east and North-West. In the past, advocates of regional devolution have used these 'standard planning regions' (as they were once called) as the basis of future regional government. Yet regional identities don't always fit with planners' thinking. While Yorkshire clearly has a strong emotional identity (as well as making sense as a regional economic unit), the North-West doesn't. Lancashire does and a county-region taking in much of 'historic' Lancashire, including Merseyside and Greater Manchester, has a lot going for it.

Opponents of regional democracy still point to the referendum in the North-east sixteen years ago, when a proposal from the Blair government for a regional assembly was decisively rejected. It was from that defeat that the idea of 'city regions' began to take hold in the world of planning and local government. However, there are two very big flaws with 'city-regions'. The first is that people don't actually like them. Within the ten districts that make up 'Greater Manchester' you won't

find anyone, even within the city of Manchester itself, describing themselves as 'Greater Mancunians'. Towns like Bolton, Wigan, Bury, Rochdale and Oldham still doggedly identify as 'Lancastrian' and many fly the Lancashire flag on Lancashire Day, November 27th.

The second major problem with the 'city region' concept is that it is highly centralist, concentrating economic and political power on 'the city' and consigning the so-called 'satellite' towns to secondary status. So in Greater Manchester, the economic growth of Manchester in the last decade has been undeniable. But the once-economically powerful towns surrounding it are in a dire way. More and more power has been ceded by the districts to the 'combined authority' which lacks either credibility or accountability.

The 'county-region' approach offers a different model where the region covers a bigger area but one which makes sense in terms of a viable regional economy, supported by a strong regional transport network and links between cities and towns on many different levels. Instead of power being concentrated on one centre, there could be two or three regional centres (in the case of Lancashire, Manchester, Liverpool and Preston) linked by good rail connections complemented by strong 'second tier' towns and cities such as Warrington, Lancaster, Bolton and St Helens. **C**

For more information on the Hannah Mitchell Foundation and CfND contact Paul on paul.salveson@myphone.coop

Grass roots versus big corporations power struggle

Dave Toke on the virtues of heat pumps over blue hydrogen

Reports suggest that domestic heating bills are likely to be around three times their current average rate in order to pay for so-called 'blue hydrogen' supplies. Blue hydrogen is produced from natural gas with a large proportion of the carbon dioxide captured and stored. It is competing for public funding resources with other more efficient low carbon solutions such as heat pumps. The fact that blue hydrogen will be such an expensive solution to decarbonise heating is likely to tip the scales in favour of strategies that place more emphasis on fitting heat pumps to heat buildings.

The information about how expensive blue hydrogen is likely to be has been given little coverage amidst the steady stream of reports promoting blue hydrogen that are financed by the oil and gas industry. Instead attention has been focussed on the costs of installing heat pumps, its key technological competitor in the heating market. Yet after installation, the running costs of domestic heat pumps should be broadly the same for consumers compared to supplying hot water using natural gas boilers.

A recently published paper in the journal *Energy and Environmental Science* comparing the costs of blue hydrogen with natural gas heating said that 'the cost of a H₂-based heat supply is on average, three times more expensive than natural gas at present.'

This conclusion matches other accounts. Analysis published in *Petroleum Economist* reports that large parts of the costs of producing blue hydrogen are taken up by carbon capture and associated costs and the costs of converting methane into hydrogen. On the other hand the 'feed-stock' costs of the natural gas, are inflated by the fact that 25 per cent more methane is needed to meet a given amount of heating than a natural gas system. That is because the steam reformation system is only 80 per cent efficient. The gas distribution system



Heat pumps use energy 3-4 times more efficiently than heating systems using hydrogen

will also need to undergo expensive refurbishment, at least to boost gas pressures.

All of this will raise the excessive cost of supplying heat to the consumer. This reality is not mentioned by gas industry lobbyists who have persuaded the Government that their blue hydrogen strategy is a serious one. Instead, the focus on talk of making sure new boilers are 'hydrogen ready' allows an impression to be spread that boiler adjustment is practically all that is needed to switch to blue hydrogen. In fact this is only a very small part of the requirement for a national heating system supplied by blue hydrogen.

Green groups have been very critical of the Government's backing for blue hydrogen. They see it as a means of continuing the oil and gas industry with its 'fugitive' methane releases during production and transportation, incomplete decarbonisation during hydrogen production and cross-subsidisation for ongoing unabated natural gas production and sale. It is also likely to be a very long time before substantial parts of the heating system will be served by blue hydrogen given

a range of issues with the gas distribution and carbon capture infrastructure, not to mention issues of whether pipes, gas meters and other parts of the system are compatible.

The difficulties and costs of rolling out the blue hydrogen system need to be compared to the potential for rapid roll-out of energy efficiency and heat pumps. Certainly, the heat pump roll-out needs substantial funding through incentives for installation in existing buildings and urgently needs planning law reform to ensure that gas heating in new houses is banned. Heat pumps, which multiply the electric power input using heat from the environment, use energy 3-4 times more efficiently than heating systems using hydrogen.

There is a battle going on between the grass roots movement and the big corporations. The corporations want top-down complicated, polluting projects including blue hydrogen and nuclear power that at best will take a long time to be delivered. The grass roots movement wants decentralised, cleaner and cheaper solutions that can be rapidly rolled out. **C**

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

COVID-19 CONTRACTS

Tories waste billions of tax-payers money

Prem Sikka says the cronyism evident in numerous Covid related contracts awarded by the Tories is nothing new to British capitalism

Anyone mapping trajectories of capitalism and the relationship between the state and corporations ought to look at how the UK government has handed out Covid-19 related contracts.

Cronyism and favours has been central to capitalism, since its inception. Remember how the East India Company was sponsored by the state (Royal Charter) to plunder around the globe. The loot was shared by wealthy elites. The form may have changed but the symbiotic relationship between the UK state and corporations remains.

Despite questions in parliament, the government has failed to provide a full list of contracts, the amounts and recipients. In November 2020, a National Audit Office (NAO) report titled "Investigation into government procurement during the COVID-19 pandemic" stated that by 31 July 2020, the UK government had signed some 8,600 contracts, worth £18bn. The contracts ranged in value from less than £100 to £410m. Personal protective equipment (PPE) accounted for 80% of the number of contracts (over 6,900 contracts) and 68% of the total value of contracts awarded (£12.3bn).

The flurry of contracts at the height of the pandemic also draws attention to the Conservative politics of austerity and neglect of the UK capacity to manage pandemics. In October 2016, an exercise code-named Exercise Cygnus, involving the National Health Service (NHS), local government and emergency services, simulated the outbreak of a flu pandemic to test the resilience of the systems. The resulting report not published in full but copies leaked to the press stated that the "UK's preparedness and response, in terms of its plans, policies and capability, is currently not sufficient to cope with the extreme demands of a severe pandemic". In November 2020, the government released the final, redacted, report titled "Exercise Cygnus Report" though most of the crucial documentation remains unpublished.

The full Exercise Cygnus docu-



mentation must have raised concerns about the large number of avoidable possible deaths and the shortage of PPE, an essential element in containing any pandemic. In the six years before the Covid-19 pandemic, the government committed to austerity ran down the emergency PPE stockpile by 40%. The funding cuts meant that that NHS was not in a position to handle the crisis. At the beginning of the pandemic, frontline health workers were wearing plastic bin-bags and homemade face masks.

Amidst the public anger, the government began procuring PPE. Contracts should have been channelled through Supply Chain Coordination Limited (SCCL), a state owned company, specifically formed to co-ordinate purchases by the NHS. But SCCL was side lined and the government handed out contracts to corporations. In panic buying, it paid £10bn over the odds.

Some £10.5bn worth of PPE contracts were awarded directly without a competitive tender process. The government defence is that to speedily secure supplies it suspended the normal competitive tender process, but the process was not applied evenly. The NAO reported that in many cases no adequate documentation exists to justify the award of contracts or the performance expected. Due diligence checks were ignored. In some cases contracts had been backdated.

Numerous UK-based businesses offered to supply PPE, but did not even receive a reply from govern-

ment departments. A large number of contracts were awarded to entities with no experience of PPE and close to Conservative politicians, often channelled through a VIP lane, created for firms recommended by ministers and leading politicians.

A £252m contract was awarded to Ayanda Capital Limited, a company with £510,000 share capital and £44,509 of tangible assets. Former investment banker Timothy Horlick is on the company board and its main shareholder. The entity is controlled by Milo Investments registered in opaque tax haven Mauritius. The contract was brokered by Andrew Mills, an adviser to Ayanda's board and Liz Truss, the Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade. There was no competitive tender. Ayanda seems to have acted as an intermediary to secure PPE from China. Around 50 million face masks it procured were not suitable for NHS use.

Since August 2015, Conservative MP Owen Paterson has been a consultant to Randox receiving £8,333 a month for 16 hours work. A £347m Covid-19 testing contract has been given to Randox, whose testing kits were later recalled because of concerns about contamination.

PPE Medpro, a company incorporated on 12 May 2020, secured a £122m contract to supply millions of medical gowns. The company has a share capital of only £100. Until the day of its formation, its founder worked for Tory Baroness Michelle Mone. In 2015, she was appointed by Prime Minister David Cameron to conduct a review into entrepreneurship and small businesses, particularly focusing upon setting up small businesses in deprived areas. Within six weeks of its formation, PPE Medpro secured the lucrative PPE contract. There was no competitive tender. In December 2020, it was learnt that the medical gowns supplied by the company have not been used.

Contracts worth £148 million have been given to Meller Designs Limited, without any competitive

Lord Prem Sikka is Professor of Accounting at University of Sheffield and is Emeritus Professor of Accounting at University of Essex

tenders. The co-owner of the firm, David Meller, had donated nearly £60,000 to Conservative politicians and the party since 2009, including £3,250 to Michael Gove's unsuccessful campaign for leadership of the Conservative party.

A £3m contract was given, without competitive tender, was given to a company called Topham Guerin. The company's controllers appear to be friends of Dominic Cummings and Michael Gove, two leading powers in the Johnson administration.

Faculty, a data intelligence gathering firm, received a £400,000 contract to collect and analyse people's tweets, as part of a coronavirus-related contract. The company was previously hired by Dominic Cummings, chief adviser to Prime Minister Boris Johnson, during his campaign to secure Brexit.

The Good Law Project reported that SG Recruitment UK Limited, a staffing agency, secured two PPE

contracts worth over £50m, despite auditors raising concerns about its solvency. Tory Peer Lord Chadlington sits on the Board of its parent company, Sumner Group Holdings Limited. P14 Medical Limited, controlled by former Conservative councillor Steve Dechan, who stood down in August this year, was awarded three contracts worth over £276m despite having negative £485,000 in net assets.

Big accountancy firms advise numerous government departments and also received Covid-19 related contracts even though they have no experience of dealing with viruses or test and trace facilities. The consultancy bonanza includes contracts worth £8m for Deloitte, £7.4m for PricewaterhouseCoopers, £5.4m for Ernst & Young, £3.8m for KPMG and £3.5m for Grant Thornton. Details of other contracts are not known.

The above list draws attention to irregular practices. It shows that crony capitalism is alive. Previously, Michael Gove, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, vowed to crush crony capitalism because it distorts free markets and enables a few to enrich themselves from political patronage. The reality is different. The government awarded Covid-19 related contracts without competitive tenders, and even without proper documentation, to businesses close to the Conservative Party. Some of the PPE was of poor quality or not capable of being used. Behind a wall of secrecy, a few selected individuals became rich. Taxpayers footed the bill for this huge transfer of wealth. There is little transparency and public accountability. The government has failed to publish a full list of contracts. An inquiry by the Public Accounts Committee is long overdue, but the government is unlikely to come clean. **C**

Ethno-nationalism

Nick Matthews on factionalism and Labour's missed moments

The Labour Party in its current state shows that it is unable to renew itself. For a short time under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership it had a point and some life. Now it is back on the road to respectability and terminal boredom.

Organisations are often most vulnerable when they are most successful. The long divorce between voters and parties, as Sobolewski and Ford, call it in their study of British political culture, *Brexitland*, can be dated to 1997. They attribute the decline in support for Labour over a twenty plus year time scale to three factors. Ideological convergence – they are all the same, competition between parties became focussed on a small number of voters and issues in swing seats – they are not talking to me and the professionalisation of politics, politicians all having the same kind of background and outlook – they don't look like me.

These issues are fundamental to the Party as an organisation. Namely how it creates and communicates its policies and selects its candidates for elections. This process of alienation from Labour by many of its historical core members and voters has been going on for a long time but was masked by

first past the post constituency-based elections.

Labour's rush to the centre left many working class areas deeply alienated by a Party which did not appear to have anything to say to them. This collapse in communication with what had been strong Labour supporting areas was filled by others who did offer a message to this group of voters. That message was ethnonationalism. For many ethnocentric attitudes can offer a coherent worldview although who exactly is 'us' and who 'them' can vary considerably between individuals and over time.

The early warning signs were in the larger more aggregate elections like those for the European Parliament. The canary in the coalmine should have been when in 2009 the BNP received almost a million votes and gained two MEP's.

UKIP as the slightly more palatable ethnonationalist party too began to gain ground in the 2000's again ironically doing incredibly well in European elections giving them a strong base across the country. This phenomenon manifested itself very differently in Scotland with the SNP offering a solution to all that country's ills.

We know how this panned out. Nigel Farage has completely changed Britain and British poli-

tics without winning a Westminster parliamentary seat but winning Brexit and completely transforming the Conservatives into an ethnonationalist Party.

Labour had a moment when it could have rebuilt itself. When given the chance to vote for a leader who was not a middle manager, members did so in huge numbers. However, instead of this leading to a renewal of Labour it produced an internal total war. Large parts of the parliamentary party and of Labour's bureaucracy spent their time using the by-ways in its Byzantine constitution to do damage. It is true that Jeremy Corbyn lacked many of the necessary skills to be a leader of a modern political organisation but it is also true that the party infrastructure made no effort to support him or remedy those deficiencies.

Organisations that can allow old ways to die and new ways to grow have a chance to survive.

Labour had a small chance to create a new kind of political party, a less centralised more federal organisation, with a more inclusive political culture. A party that did things in communities on the ground not just talked about doing things.

Corbyn may not have been the solution but the problems that gave rise to him have not gone away. **C**

COVID-19 POLITICS

Britain's Post-Covid settlement?

Bryn Jones says Sunak's cunning plans and Labour's timid alternative are no 1945 moments

If Britain's struggle against Covid-19 resembles wartime, then Sunak's November Spending Review could be the first sketch of a peace settlement. In 1944/45 wartime leaders rehearsed scenarios for what became Labour's welfare state and Keynes's managed economy. In 2020 the pro-business establishment pines for a 'return to normal'. Political divides and socio-economic devastation make this highly unlikely. Johnson's corporate cavalry charge of Big Pharma vaccine won't prevent hundreds more businesses and thousands more jobs disappearing. Knowing this, and humouring Johnsonian braggadocio, Sunak's de facto budget mixes fiscal first aid with stabs at economic reconstruction.

He has postponed tackling the huge debt mountain and tacked Keynesian demand stimulation onto neoliberal market forces. All this aims to adapt neoliberal orthodoxies to meet two challenges. 1) The very real threat of decimated consumer service sectors. 2) Failure of the Tories' fabled promises to 'level-up' impoverishment and neglect in 'Red Wall' constituencies: their new electoral base.

This pragmatic deference to public spending and workers' grievances parks several tanks on Labour's lawns. Does Labour have better alternatives? Sunak's menu has three main courses: financial help for cash-strapped low earners with labour market interventions for the workless; cash injections into public services like the NHS; and public contracts for new jobs and idling businesses. He offers both short-term and headline-grabbing spending and more strategic policies: laying the tracks down which the Tories hope an economic goods train will run.

The main pay packet measures include 'a minimum £250 increase' for two million earning below £24,000 a year; rises for one million-plus NHS staff; and an increased National Living Wage to £8.91 an hour. The labour market policies, however, will produce groans in those who recall their 1980s Thatcherite archetypes. A three-year Restart scheme of regu-

lar intensive support, 'tailored' for the long-term unemployed, receives just under a billion pounds a year. It will be accompanied by extra 'Plan for Jobs' funding: £1.6bn more for 250,000 'Kickstart' temporary placements for young workers - giving employers £2,000 for each new worker till March 2021. Reacting to long-standing inadequacies in further education provision, Sunak promises £138m of new funding for Johnson's Lifetime Skills Guarantee: essentially training courses for post-teenage workers. Though welcomed by FE representatives this scheme won't directly link the unemployed and underemployed to growth sectors needing new occupations and workers. Similar schemes in the 80s and 90s produced extra hairdressers and car mechanics not civil construction and software engineers.

Beleaguered and under-funded English public services - NHS, schools, local authorities, prisons and police - get a total of £9.45 billion of, allegedly, extra funding. Yet nearly 50% of this money goes to prison accommodation! The rail network gets a £2bn subsidy. But these sums are overshadowed by £16.5bn of four years' new money for 'defence', including a new A.I. agency for a 'national cyber force' and a new 'space command' to launch satellites and, potentially, space war rockets.

Apart from the claimed 'thousands' of jobs this last supports Johnson's jingoistic boast that: 'in the teeth of the pandemic ... defence of the realm must come first ... to end the era of retreat, transform our Armed Forces, bolster our global influence, unite and level up our country, pioneer new technology and defend our people and way of life.' A Star Wars £16 billion panacea packaged in Brexit Thatcherism.

A £4bn "levelling up" fund bypasses - ideologically, financially and ecologically - Sunak's earlier Green Industrial Revolution rhetoric. A token £1.1bn for green buildings (1% of all infrastructure spending) is eclipsed by funding for local infrastructure projects, such as new roads, which are likely to 'level down' the environmental score card. Even more jobs laying concrete and tarmac could



Sunak-presiding over growing jobless queues

come from a promised quasi-private 'infrastructure bank' for a Northern England location, needed to replace European Investment Bank funding. Underlying this neoliberal quasi-Keynesian largesse is a clear strategy and potential electoral target: stave off post-Covid/post-Brexit collapse of public services; display concern for key workers and dangle (temporary) benefit and training lifelines to masses of insecure and impoverished workers. But the big money goes to big business for military and construction contracts.

Unfortunately, Labour's alternatives differ mainly in size rather than kind. Shadow Chancellor Analise Dodds wanted Universal Credit raised and extended to the self-employed; plus more capital spending: £30 billion, a.s.a.p, for more jobs (400,000) than Sunak's token green initiatives. Dodds rightly said Sunak's 'pathways' 'lock out' the green economy and make 'transition to net zero harder'.

Meanwhile, as critics have complained, Labour is now locking out the radical structural changes - public ownership of railways and buses, progressive taxation and devolution of Green Energy and Zero Carbon funds to local government - recognised as necessary in its last Manifesto. 'Maybe later' Starmerites may respond. However, Labour's post-war settlement was not achieved by delaying its bold vision till the 1945 election campaign. **C**

Bryn Jones is Visiting Lecturer at the University of Bath and co-editor of *Alternatives to Neoliberalism: Towards Equality and Democracy* (Policy Press)

Progressive politics beyond COVID-19

Robin Hambleton suggests that COVID-19 is opening up new political possibilities

The continuing tensions between political leaders in the north of England and Prime Minister Boris Johnson regarding COVID-19 recovery strategy highlight two critical divides in society at one-and-the-same time: values and place.

As well as drawing attention to striking differences of view regarding the values that should guide societal healing, the political conflict is also shining a bright light on the unacceptable spatial divisions that now disfigure modern Britain.

History tells us that when injustice is felt not just by oppressed classes within a society, but is also clearly seen as unacceptable by large numbers of people living in particular areas within a country, the political consequences can be explosive.

A lesson from the poll tax rebellion?

Reflect for a moment on the poll tax rebellion of 1989/90. Initially introduced by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in Scotland in 1989, prior to its introduction in England and Wales in 1990, the poll tax replaced the long-established local 'rates', a tax related to the value of property, with a single flat-rate local government tax on every adult.

The new tax was, then, not based in even a notional way on ability to pay. Rather it required an individual on very low income living in a small flat to pay the same amount of local tax as a multi-millionaire residing in an extensive mansion. This inept policy was rightly seen by most people as wholly unjust and there were truly massive, well organised public protests across the country.

As Danny Burns explains in his excellent book, *Poll Tax Rebellion* (1992), the grass roots anti-poll tax campaign drew in a very wide range of voices from civil society – from poor people who simply couldn't afford to pay the tax to place-based coalitions of people who were furious at the cruelty of the tax. Within a few short months Margaret Thatcher was history – she was forced to resign in November 1990.

My point is not to suggest that a similar fate awaits Boris Johnson in 2021, although there are political commentators who take this view.

Rather, I want to draw attention to the way that place-based public resentment at a distant and out of touch government can, at times, combine with class-based interests to bring about an unstoppable upsurge in pressure for progressive change.

Owen Jones in his insightful book, *The Establishment: And how they get away with it* (2014), provides a revealing account of the role of right-wing think tanks in reshaping the political discourse about the role of the state in Britain in the period since the 1970s. He explains how these think tanks operated as 'outriders', extolling extremist, even dangerous, ideas that right-leaning politicians could then draw on.

He rightly gives attention to the so-called Overton Window. Named after Joseph P. Overton, the late vice-president of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, based in Michigan, US, this window concept claims to describe what is politically possible, or reasonable, at any given time within the prevailing politics of the day.

The window analogy is helpful as it suggests that those seeking bold change, in whatever direction, need to think beyond the development of new policies. Radical reformers need to work out how to move the location of the window in the direction they favour. The chief problem with the Overton version of the window is that it misunderstands the nature of freedom in the modern world.

Following Overton, right leaning politicians take the view that weak, or minimal, government is superior to strong government – at root they claim that 'less government' delivers 'more freedom'.

To be fair the state does, indeed, limit individual freedoms, usually to bring about significant societal benefits. For example, anti-pollution laws limit the freedom of polluters to ruin the natural environment, and laws banning physical assault and murder limit the freedom of violent individuals to do harm to other people. Clearly not all individual freedoms are good for society.

However, the experience of living through the COVID-19 calamity teaches us that the very framing of this debate about 'freedom' is misconceived. Focussing attention only on individual freedom is a peculiar-

ly narrow, even bizarre, way of conceptualising freedom. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates, if more evidence were needed, that we are all inter-dependent – we can make each other ill or we can try to make each other well.

In recent months societies across the world have favoured strong intervention by the state to meet the COVID-19 challenge precisely because they value freedom – meaning freedom from sickness, freedom from suffering and freedom from death.

More than that, there has been a spectacular rise in community-based social caring, with neighbours helping neighbours alongside a proliferation of heart-warming local projects and initiatives designed to help those in need.

These radical shifts in perception of what really matters in modern society suggest that we need a more capacious way of measuring and evaluating state intervention – one that goes well beyond the simplistic question 'Is this state limiting my individual freedom or not?'

COVID-19 opens a new window of political possibilities

In a new book, *Cities and communities beyond COVID-19. How local leadership can change our future for the better*, I suggest that we can build a useful measure of governmental performance by focusing on the concept of caring for others and for the planet.

In her book *Caring Democracy: Markets, ecology and justice* (2013), Joan Tronto argues that care, not economics, should be the central concern of democratic life. She explains how societies now face a caring deficit and COVID-19 has shown her analysis to be prescient.

By drawing on the well established literature on ecocentrism – see, for example, Robyn Eckersley's book on *The Green State: Rethinking democracy and sovereignty* (2004) – we can add to caring for ourselves and for each other the critical importance of caring for the natural environment on which we all depend.

Figure 1 (overleaf) presents a way of considering future political choices that steps beyond the outdated framing provided by the Overton Window.

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He is the author of 'Cities and Communities Beyond Covid-19. How local leadership can change our future for the better'. Bristol University Press.

More details:

<https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/cities-and-communities-beyond-covid-19>

BIDEN & DSA FUTURE

The next steps

Vast numbers of citizens and activists in thousands of cities and communities across the world have already moved the political window towards caring for people and the planet.

In my book I celebrate the progressive achievements of Bristol, Copenhagen, Dunedin, Freiburg, Mexico City and Portland. The good news is that these cities are not alone. The COVID-19 pandemic, awful and upsetting as it is, has already provided an opportunity for place-based leaders to change our future for the better. **C**

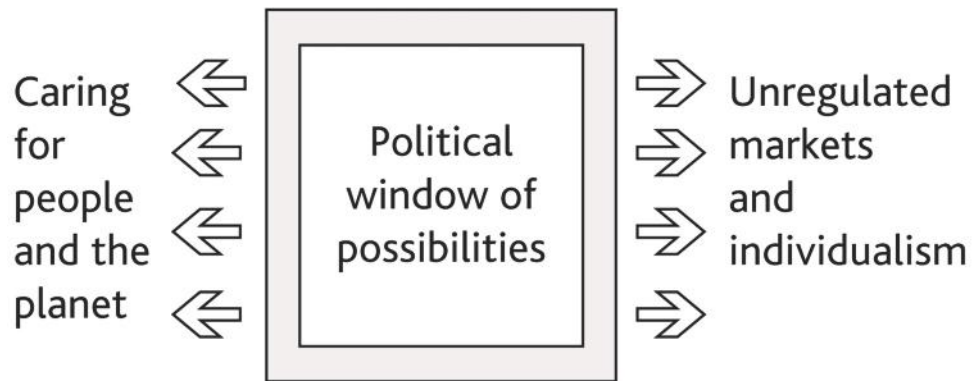


Figure 1: : A new window of political possibilities (Source: Robin Hambleton (2020) *Cities and communities beyond COVID-19*. Bristol University Press. p. 67)

Biden wins but US still on edge of precipice

Paul Garver says Left must keep up pressure for progressive agenda

At about 67%, the overall voter turnout in the US presidential election far exceeded the normally miserably low US standard. So far, Biden received more than 81 million votes and Trump 74 million, both record numbers.

Essentially a referendum against and for Trump's reelection, votes against Trump did not always transfer to other Democratic candidates. Overall Democrats lost ten seats in the House of Representatives, mainly of more conservative Democrats, retaining a slim majority. They gained net just one Senate seat, with two Georgia seats undecided until runoff elections in January.

Black, Latino, Native American and young voters were highly mobilized by volunteer field organizing efforts and grassroots organizations in key battleground states, providing crucial contributions to the Democratic victory in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Georgia, Arizona and Wisconsin, all of which had supported Trump in 2016. This was despite systematic attempts at voter suppression in Republican-controlled states.

The national Democratic Party focused its efforts on massive TV advertising to persuade suburban swing voters who had voted for Trump in 2016 to vote for Biden and moderate Democratic Senate and House candidates. Biden's

message that he would restore normalcy and decency to the White House and undo the harm wreaked by the Trump administration contributed to victory in several battleground states, especially in suburbs of major cities. However, it did not much help other Democratic candidates, since it lacked a positive or inspiring message to economically distressed voters.

Trump's base of rural voters, evangelical Christians, traditional Catholics and white men with less formal education, remained substantially intact. The Republicans mobilized voters better through social media and direct canvassing than the Democrats and invested considerable effort in attracting Latino voters, making gains among Cuban-Americans in Florida and Mexican-American voters in the Rio Grande valley of Texas. Trump's margin of victory in those large states was therefore more comfortable than expected in pre-election polls, and Cuban American Republicans gained two Florida House seats.

Two members of the 'Squad' of left Congressional Democrats helped drive turnout in the key states of Minnesota and Michigan. Congresswoman Ilhan Omar overcame Trump's personal Twitter hate vendetta against her as a Muslim born in Somalia and \$10 million campaign funding for her Republican opponent to easily win

her own re-election in Minneapolis with a 38% margin. Omar's campaign featured in-person canvassing that the Biden campaign lacked. In Detroit Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib (also a Muslim and a DSA member) engaged tens of thousands of 2016 non-voters to achieve re-election and help Biden.

Just as 'essential workers' are the real heroes and heroines of the pandemic, postal workers, local and state election officials and volunteers helped save the tattered framework of American democracy. Whether Republicans or Democrats, they toiled for many days to ensure that every vote was counted as thoroughly and accurately as possible.

Whilst the dancing in the streets after Biden's victory was justified, every responsible organization of the broad American Left is preparing its members and supporters both to defend democratic rights and to mobilize for a broad progressive agenda, including racial justice, environmental justice, universal health care and a just and equitable recovery from the pandemic.

Failure to accomplish this would be disastrous for both the broad Left and the Democratic Party. If Biden delivers only better and less venal appointed officials and executive orders reversing Trump's mayhem against immigrants and the environment, it will lose credibility

Paul Garver is a member of Democratic Socialists of America



Biden-Harris- voters playing safe

with its supporters. The midterm elections in 2022 might result in a revival of Trumpist Republican reaction in a virulent neo-Fascist form.

A Republican majority in the Senate would virtually ensure that no major national reform legislation is enacted in the next two years. Democratic victories in the January 2021 Georgia run-offs would tie the Senate, with Vice-President Kamala Harris given a casting vote. Easing the Republican stranglehold would make it more difficult for the Democratic Party to evade responsibility for progressive reform legislation.

Hence the progressive organizations on the broad Left that worked to defeat Trump by electing Biden are going all out to elect the two Georgia Democratic Senatorial candidates, Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock. Neither have endorsed Medicare for All or the Green New Deal, two emblematic goals of the Left. However, groups like the Sunrise Movement, Our Revolution and members of the House Progressive Caucus are supporting local progressive forces on the ground by registering and mobilizing Black and Latino voters. Progressive Black-led organizations like Black Voters Matter, New Georgia Project and Fair Fight have registered 800,000 new voters, mainly younger and people of color. Groups associated with the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights (GLAHR) and the Arizona LUCHA delivered record turnouts

of Latino voters. Despite some concerns before the election that Republicans were registering more new voters, exit polls showed that first time voters split 2:1 for Biden. However, turnout for other than presidential elections is normally lower, and the Republicans are pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into Georgia to mobilize conservative voters for the runoff elections.

Bernie Sanders, the Squad and progressive organizations went all out to defeat Trump and elect the cautious centrist Biden, and continue to mobilize for moderate Democratic candidates in Georgia. However, these efforts are still stigmatized and scorned by conservative elements in the Democratic Party and its official leadership.

Within days of the November elections, conservative Democrats were blaming their losses in the House of Representatives on advocacy of 'socialist' issues like the Green New Deal and Medicare for all, and on advocacy for defunding the police and support for Black Lives Matter. Members of the Squad and the Justice Democrats blamed these losses on the Democrats' lack of a compelling progressive economic message like a Green New Deal jobs program and on the failure of some Democratic candidates to make effective use of social media and direct contact with voters. That debate will continue within the Democratic Party for years to come. In the long run, even if it wins some elections, a weak cen-

trist and vacillating Democratic Party ('Republican Lite') cannot compete ideologically with a virulently right-wing Republican Party that rejects reasonable compromises that would further a multiracial working-class agenda favored by the base supporters of the Democratic coalition.

Whereas we avoided the precipice of a victorious Trump re-election, we still remain too close to the rim of destruction for US democracy. Democratic socialists defend democracy in order to deepen and extend it further so that the broad working class has more decision-making power. It is sobering that a majority of White voters voted for an incompetent, egocentric demagogue who demonized immigrants and Blacks to try to maintain power. If Trump had not blundered so egregiously by denying the pandemic, he would likely have been re-elected.

The Democratic Party played it safe with Joe Biden by avoiding any commitment to pursue fundamental reforms beyond restoration of the Obama era. Yet the threats posed by climate catastrophe, economic inequality and racial injustice are growing, not diminishing in scale and urgency, and demand decisive actions. Even if Biden's articulation of his four priorities - economic recovery, combatting COVID-19, racial justice and climate change - suggests important openings for a progressive policy agenda, these will not happen without decisive pressure from the Left. **C**

WINDRUSH

Racism at heart of government failure

The Home Office has forfeited the right to manage immigration says **Don Flynn**

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission report on the Home Office policies which produced the Windrush scandal was published at the end of November. It joins six other detailed reviews of the same topic published since the news of injustices on this long-settled group of Caribbean immigrants had been broken in *The Guardian* back in November 2017.

The reports differ somewhat in their language, but they all reach the same conclusion. The Home Office went in reckless pursuit of groups of irregular migrants through the imposition of a 'hostile environment' on whole segments of public services and civil society which were severely prejudicial to the interests and well-being of legally resident as well as undocumented migrants, with the factors that brought about these outcomes largely devolving on ethnicity and income status. Effectively, a dark skin and modest standing when it comes to measures of wealth was the thing that was going to do for you.

That was the Windrush scandal itself. The compensation scheme hastily cobbled together under Sajid Javid's brief tenure as Home Secretary was supposed to offer a financial settlement to cover the loss people had suffered. Loss included being denied the right to work and receive social security benefits, critical health care, being made homeless, and in some cases arrested, detained and deported to countries in the Caribbean which they hadn't seen since childhood.

Toxic compensation scheme

But, being the Home Office, even the task of managing this scheme could not be undertaken without dragging racism and cold contempt for the lives of the humble folk most effected into its modus operandi.

The task of administering the scheme was originally given to the most senior black civil servant working in the Home Office, Alexandra Ankrah. Ankrah resigned earlier in 2020, complaining that a 'toxic atmosphere' prevailed in the unit doing this work. According to a report in *The Guardian* she had identified failings



Patel's toxic compensation scheme angers Windrush campaigners

within the way the compensation scheme was working and had recommended changes. She cited the sluggishness of getting money to people, and the unwillingness on the part of staff "to provide information and guidance that ordinary people can understand" as being among the main reasons for her disquiet.

Officials had originally expected to pay out between £200m and £570m in compensation, such was the degree of harm that had been inflicted on the people eligible for payouts. But, after a full 18 months only £1.6m had been paid out to 196 people. The scandal had managed to trap a cohort of now elderly individuals who had been subjected to tremendous stress arising from the allegation that they were not lawfully resident. The scheme's staff appear to be indifferent to the frail health of many applicants and the extent of foot dragging has meant that at least nine people have died without receiving an offer of compensation.

Evictions and deportations

Back in July, in response to her own department's Learned Lessons review, the current Home Secretary, Priti Patel, claimed that 'compassion' was to be the watchword from now on, with further reforms bringing 'diversity' into the work of immigration management. Yet just weeks later the mistakes of

the hostile environment were being replicated in measures that required the eviction from housing of people subject to negative asylum decisions. Refugee campaigners described this as recklessly pushing vulnerable people into homelessness and destitution during a pandemic that has disproportionately impacted black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

On another front, the deportation of non-citizen offenders, many of whom came into the country as children, has been stepped up through specially chartered flights to the Caribbean which seem to be an effort to beat difficulties that are expected to arise for peremptory expulsions when the UK is finally out the EU in January 2021.

Many organisations working to support the welfare of migrant and refugee people are at their wits end when it comes to dealing with a government department that refuses to learn from its past failings. For these critics, institutional racism is now so deeply embedded in the Home Office that the only remedy can be a decisive end to its role in anything connected to migration and refugee policy.

Exactly where the proper place within government would be for the administration of policies which would work with compassion to get social justice into the way the management of people movement across frontiers and borders is a discussion we urgently need to get started. **C**

2021 Climate Countdown starts here

Nigel Doggett says citizen's assemblies and direct action needed to save planet

Yet again this year is billed as a make or break year for climate action. The COP26 climate conference in Glasgow at the end of November will be the most important since the 2015 Paris Agreement. Chartist will be commissioning a series of articles on a range of climate-related topics in addition to our regular Greenwatch page. Check our website chartist.org.uk for updates as well as the journal.

Low carbon technologies such as renewable energy and 'green' hydrogen extracted from water are increasingly viable and affordable. Popular demands for action have risen with the awareness of such phenomena as extreme weather events, loss of biodiversity, melting icecaps and deforestation.

What Sort of Democracy?

It is clearer than ever that tackling this emergency is a political problem. A system fostered by a society based on a stable climate, plentiful raw materials and particularly fossil fuels faces a crisis unprecedented in extent and urgency that upends these assumptions. This brings into question the nature of our democracy and its limitations. *In Too Hot To Handle*, published in March 2020, academic and activist Rebecca Willis sees a democratic deficit that needs to be addressed if we are to act effectively on climate change.

She characterizes the 'climate' community centred on academia as over-focussed on depoliticised scientific and technological options, ignoring entrenched industrial interests, infrastructures and cultures of inequality and consumption that charge political dilemmas. Even laudable concepts such as 'planetary boundaries' seem abstract to many people and economic measures discussed in terms of 'carbon taxes' and 'creative destruction' can alienate those they need to persuade, without a political strategy such as using the resulting revenue for equitable purposes (as recently announced in Canada) and government intervention to guarantee employment

in low carbon replacement industries.

Willis conducted interviews with a range of politicians to paint a remarkable picture of timidity and lack of leadership, citing a lack of popular engagement, albeit grounded in the practical difficulties of transforming our society and lifestyle. She identifies a despairing trend shared by some of those in power and self-styled 'environmentalists' such as James Lovelock to suggest that democracy itself is inadequate.

Many politicians, not just Prime Minister Johnson, are prone to grand gestures but wary of provoking a backlash by challenging vested carbon intensive interests in business and trade unions alike and lifestyles based on consumerism, travel and western diets. The sensitivity over climate concerns also reflects its fault-lines that tend to parallel the Brexit /cultural divides over age, education, class and geography.

They therefore resort to 'stealth strategies' and 'feelgood fallacies' designed to achieve change without facing hard choices. So grants are paid for renewable energy alongside continued road building and tax breaks for fossil fuel production and aviation fuel alike. Popular concern also carries its own risks of tokenism and feelgood fallacies such as over plastics reduction and even the electric car rollout while SUV promotion continues apace.

The result is a failure to bring home the necessary rapid transformation, which will affect how we live in both good and bad ways. In other words, we are not being treated as adults. (Of course, it was movements of children in climate strikes and Extinction Rebellion's direct actions last year that demanded our leaders tell the unvarnished truth.)

Instead we need to develop democracy beyond passive focus-group consultations, to initiate deliberative democracy based on genuine discussion such as locally determined plans and citizens' panels. The experience of UK climate assemblies and the Irish citizens' assembly drawn from a



cross-section of society shows that a measured (and progressive) consensus can emerge. Perhaps counter-intuitively, basing government policy on such measures can bridge the divides that blight our politics, a development that would shock sectarian class warriors and Brexit hardliners alike.

Where does this leave climate and political activists, struggling for influence beyond either sloganizing or local projects? Willis sees radical direct action as the other side of the coin. There cannot be many Green or Labour activists with any illusions about parliamentary reform in the absence of popular campaigning. But we also need to understand the web of factors that underly people's views and speak in terms relevant to them. (An echo here of the dilemmas facing the left on other issues.)

The key messages offered for 'good climate citizens' also apply to a wider field than just climate action: don't despair or give up; speak out to colleagues and political leaders at all levels; and amplify individual lifestyle decisions by initiating changes at whatever scale you can.

This should be fertile ground for our readers: after all democratic socialism differs from liberalism in advocating the redistribution of economic and social power as well as electoral democracy. Political campaigners and activists need to engage in genuine dialogue with the public. That does not mean giving up our principles or reaching a centrist lowest common denominator. This lesson should be taken to heart by us all. **C**

Nigel Doggett is a member of Chartist EB

COUNTRYSIDE THREATS

New Deal for Nature

With the end of the pandemic in sight **Mark Cocker** talks to **Keith Savage** about the possibilities and challenges for environmental campaigners

The COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted massive loss and damage on our country. Yet in all the hardship of the last year we have learned or relearned something about ourselves. Could it be that the experience of lockdown has changed our lives and our relationship with the natural world for the better?

Mark Cocker says

Just as there are wide reports of mental health problems triggered by the pandemic and lockdown, so there have also been positive outcomes. For instance, many came to appreciate the centrality of green space to the quality of their lives. Dozens of studies report that experiencing green spaces and nature is good for mental well-being and is an aid to recovery from illness, mental and physical. The issue is not why we should engage with nature, but how do we do it.

We are trapped in a set of historical relationships with nature which are so deeply embedded they are hard to alter. But green space is still unevenly distributed across the population. Black people are four times less likely to have daily access to quality green spaces than white people. We gained the right to roam in 2001 but we still only have access to 8% of the country. Our country, supposedly. But it still feels like someone else's land. It is another example of the social injustice that bedevils our society. People are a casualty but so is nature because so many of us are unaware of our responsibilities to the rest of life in these islands.

Theoretically there should be scope to turn the tanker of habitat loss around in this country. Whatever your views on Brexit and our membership of the EU, a silver lining in our leaving Europe politically could be the opportunity to press a reset button on our attitudes and policies for the natural environment.

In the autumn the government made great play about investing in the countryside. Given their track record one is entitled to be sceptical. The prime minister talks about 'Build, Build, Build', and

sweeping aside 'newt counting' formalities, as the means to economic recovery after Covid while the planning White Paper offers few environmental safeguards. It's a bit like expecting the butcher to promote vegetarianism!

But who and what can affect our political discourse? Our binary political system distorts debate and prevents really innovative views on how to tackle the profound social, cultural and economic problems from being heard and considered. Our biggest environmental charities have been weakened financially by the lockdown and their charitable status prevents them from taking on explicit political campaigns.

All of this might leave you feeling a bit pessimistic - after all David Attenborough has been a brilliant educator and campaigner for 40 years but wildlife populations worldwide have halved in that time. However, there are issues that we can focus on in Britain that would make a significant difference.

We have the largest, most important areas of blanket bog in the world. The Flow Country in northern Scotland is typical. It was proposed as a UNESCO world heritage site 40 years ago, and calls have rightly been renewed for recognition. This blanket bog landscape is made of peat and is a land form that contains fewer solids than milk. Boggy and quaking it may be but it stores 400 million tons of carbon and sequesters more carbon than rainforest. It is, therefore, brilliant for wildlife but it also has a key role in combatting climate change.

These islands have about five million acres of peat moorland and it is vital that they receive proper environmental management too. Instead we see millions of pounds in subsidies go to support their degradation. Much of this upland area is intensively managed to support the sporting interests of perhaps 10,000 super-rich people. Instead of being improved for carbon capture the areas are often systematically burned to create breeding habitat for grouse. The whole exercise is ecological illiteracy and I look for-

ward to a complete ban on driven grouse shooting.

The government recently signed-up to a target of protecting 30% of the countryside for biodiversity but what is centrally important is that all areas of land rich in nature are linked and connected with corridors. Nature functions as a single system, not as a series of separate pocket-sized fragments. The creation of new National Parks will be great but it is also necessary that we have a connecting network that links them all.

In existing National Parks, such as the Lake District and Peak District, much of the high ground is a sheep-shorn desert. The Parks need to be funded and farmers supported so that we slowly shift from this traditional sheep monoculture, devoid of wildlife, to a wilder countryside that fulfils the nation's requirement for green space and recreation.

We need a New Deal for Nature. We have seen local charities and voluntary groups showing great creativity and imagination, getting bold projects off the ground. Environmental politics is, in many ways, still marginal to the mainstream and the recognition that we as a species are party to a single functioning biosphere, and completely dependent upon it, is still undeveloped in the mainstream political conversation. Too few politicians at Westminster are well-informed and able to argue the case for and about nature.

A post-Covid, post-Brexit world could allow us to 'Build Back Better'. But part of that means not putting the needs of the dominant species first every time. That is going to be difficult to argue. The economic hardship inflicted by Covid-19 will see unemployment rise, child poverty will reach into new communities and health services will be stretched.

Tackling these issues will be at the heart of political arguments in 2021 but the pandemic has proved how much our own health depends on the life around us. It is time to recognise that acting in the interests of the biosphere is not just good for nature, it is good for us too." **C**



Mark Cocker is an award-winning author and naturalist. Follow him @MarkCocker2

Farms face double exposure

Keith Savage on threats to farmers, food and land from EU withdrawal



One of the consequences of leaving the European Union is the fact that the Common Agricultural Policy no longer applies to British farmers. About 50% of farmers' income comes from CAP payments and something is needed to replace it.

The CAP reinforced a post-war farming focus on producing food as 'efficiently' and cheaply as possible. This has made it impossible for farmers to live off the price paid for what they produce and, at the same time, led to great damage to the bio-diversity in our landscape. As it stands some sort of direct government investment in farming is inevitable - otherwise the industry will collapse.

The Agriculture Act 2020 became law on November 11 and proposes that payments be made to farmers for maintaining and caring for land in a responsible and sustainable way - support will be offered for delivering public goods. The transition from the present system of payments to a new Environmental Land Management scheme will take seven years altogether.

The details of the new payments are yet to be spelt out - the view from Defra is that it is better if they are co-designed with

stakeholders rather than announced and imposed. For farmers trying to run a business this approach is not necessarily helpful. James Rebanks, a Lake District shepherd and author of *English Pastoral*, reported on *UnHerd*:

"It is not a prospect relished by farmers. As one of my peers put it, 'it is like shifting from a salary to a per hour contract, with your salary halved by the fourth year, and the hourly rate not revealed'. It looks like a great many of us will lose financial support."

Farmers do produce food, but they are also stewards of the land and they manage millions of acres on behalf of all of us. It is best that this job is done well and it should be paid for. The Agriculture Act identifies a number of public benefits that farming can deliver. The post-war farming industry has damaged the health and biodiversity of the countryside in a host of ways. To begin to put this right farmers can be paid for work that will:

- mitigate climate change
- protect nature and promote biodiversity
- lead to cleaner air and water
- improve the health and condition of the soil
- address animal welfare.

These proposals, in principle, have been largely welcomed. That doesn't mean that this 'landmark legislation' is seen as being the saviour of farming or the countryside. Rebanks is scathing of what he perceives to be the government's longer-term strategy.

'The Secretary of State (George Eustice) was very clear that in seven years, British farmers are going to be competing with farmers from across the globe without the support of any subsidy for farming itself. It is about the oldest of neoliberal dreams — killing off state involvement and throwing open our country (and countryside) to free trade and deregulation.'

Critics also disputed the government view that this legislation was not the place to make connections between food production and public health and despite a petition signed by two million people there are no guarantees about food standards.

Farmers have usually been assumed to be Tories. If that is the case then their loyalty will be sorely tested. There is an opportunity for Labour to be a part of a new alliance when it comes to farming practices and the management of our land. Chartist will be reporting on these questions in future issues. **C**

**Keith Savage is a Labour councillor in High Peak, Derbyshire.
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BIDEN & UK

Biden in the UK

Glyn Ford questions whether Johnson's UK will be back of the queue or in the game at all

Biden's was a 'good' bad win. He took the Presidency, held the House - albeit with a reduced majority - but failed to take the Senate. The two run-offs in Georgia look possible rather than probable. Even a win in both races leaves the Senate deadlocked at 50-50 and only breaking to the Democrats for two years, with Vice-President Kamala Harris' casting vote, before being swept back into Republican hands with the 2022 mid-term elections.

Biden's victory over Trump's nativist xenophobia, blithe racism and shiftless authoritarianism is pause - not cause - for celebration. Biden will be in custom and practice a snapback to the bad old days of Washington politics. It's the lens of Trump's departure that misleads as a rosy glow. Half a century in politics never saw the next President dressing to the left. He's not going to start now.

The Democrats desperately cling to the illusion that they can peel away Maine's Susan Collins and Alaska's Lisa Murkowski from the Republicans. The reality is when push comes to shove they're all mouth and no trousers, hawking their consciences to no consequence. All the more so with Trump threatening to emulate Grover Cleveland, the only President (1885-89, 1893-97) to re-capture the White House after a defeat. Trump's mob of devotees - unless beaten by biology - give him a lock on the 2024 Republican nomination.

The result is domestic deadlock, with Biden hostage to Senate Republicans unwilling and unable to collaborate with the enemy. With no choice but bargain, the ransom to the beggars of Wall Street will prove steep. Biden's mark will make be abroad. It will be guns and better. With, or even without, a Brussels Deal there is little on the trade table for Johnson. The issue is whether we are in the game at all or at the back of the queue. Biden's fashion consciousness as to his Irish heritage makes any new Irish border a bar, without the need to replay Johnson's gratuitous references to Obama from Kenya.

Washington's trade priorities will revisit membership of the Comprehensive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CTPP) - on Trump's desk ready to be sign in 2016 - and



attempt to breathe fresh life into the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the EU that would constitute the world's biggest trade deal. This second is an easy sell in Washington - if agriculture is in the mix - but fiercely controversial in Brussels with threats to labour rights, food standards and the subordination of new EU legislation to the multinationals, the result of the privileging provisions of Investor-State Dispute Settlement. France's farmers and films may have to ride to the rescue.

Washington's central foreign policy focus will be Beijing. Trump's tantrums were the response to the very dilemma Biden faces; how to contain a rising Superpower closing in to successively break the three legs of American hegemony, R&D, the dollar and military monopoly. Biden will speak in a lower register, cloaking comprehensive containment in the language of conciliation and compromise. His underlying goal will remain the same. Biden's wants to rebuild the Transatlantic political relationship for export. NATO spending should surge to spend abroad, not at home. Here Britain remains - for the moment before the second Scottish Referendum - an important player on the UN Security Council and in

NATO.

Johnson's recent £16.5 Billion November bonus for Britain's military is the buy-in to US security plans. The Queen Elizabeth, the UK's biggest and best aircraft carrier, due in service in 2021 has already trialed integrated operations with US forces. Deployment is to follow in the Gulf and Pacific. It would be a geographical surprise if that didn't include joint Freedom of Navigation Operations in Chinese territorial waters that will have Beijing scrambling their fighter-bombers.

Biden is signed up to the Pentagon's new Indo-Pacific Command and Trump's enthusiasm to build 'NATO in Asia'. The Quad - an alliance of the US, India, Japan and Australia - had its first joint naval exercise in 2020 and now the pressure is on for a Quad Plus containment of China. The key is coercing Seoul into developing a 'blue water' navy choosing US security interests over its biggest economic partner Beijing. Washington via NATO wants the EU onboard. Does Labour see Britain in the role of 'judas goat' allaying entry inhibitions from Seoul and Brussels to triggering a new Cold War as somewhere we want to go? The last time we played patsy it gave us Iraq. **C**

Glyn Ford was a Labour MEP

The end of 'the last dictatorship in Europe'?

Mikalaj Packajeu and Alan Flowers on the 2020 Belarusian Revolution of the People to electoral reform

Organised labour will likely enjoy a significant position in Belarus's post-Lukashenka politics."

Belarus became an independent state in 1991 following the collapse of the USSR. It then started along a path of nation-building, transition to a pluralist democracy, and economic reform. That came to an end in summer 1994 when it elected Alexander Lukashenka, initially a populist politician who soon made himself an autocrat.

26 years of Lukashenka's rule gained Belarus the reputation as an autocrat-ruled state pursuing elements of Soviet conservation, a state-run economy, not signing the European Convention on Human Rights, lacking reliable rule of law and independence of courts, holding political prisoners most of the time, and enjoying Russia's subsidies in exchange for geopolitical and 'cultural' loyalty. Lukashenka credits himself with providing 'stability' above all and is keen to eliminate any doubts about how firm and unchallengeable his grip on Belarus is. This dampened any expectation for changes in Belarus and so there was comparatively little international attention on Belarus until the recent events of 2020.

The dramatic pictures of mass protest and brutal repression in Belarus that suddenly appeared in July and August 2020 in worldwide media were a result of issues that have been in place for a long time – as well as of novel developments.

For a long time, there have been underlying post-Communist issues 'frozen' by Lukashenka. The traditional opposition in Belarus had to be, for the last 26 years, the advocate for democracy and accountability of the government to the people over human rights, rule of law, the rights of organised labour, and better opportunities for non-state sectors of the economy.

Why did these issues come to a head now in 2020? On 9th August 2020 a presidential election was held. Prior to that several new factors had been at work. A new momentum of civic participation in

politics had been developing in Belarus' society over recent years. There were larger-than-usual rallies in 2018 to mark the 100th anniversary of the brief independence of a non-Soviet Belarus. Many observers suggested that the regime was growing more moderate – a perception which created expectations for change among younger Belarusians in particular. More recently the public widely felt that Lukashenka was negligent regarding public health when the COVID-19 pandemic started – more people than ever losing faith in Lukashenka's paternalistic 'social contract'. Economically it became stagnation for some and going from bad to worse for others. Official ex-Soviet trade-unions are in practice part of the state system and act more as a tool against any protest movement.

Lukashenka was officially declared the winner in the first round of the 2020 presidential election, with over 80% of the vote, thus claiming to have heavily defeated his main and very popular rival, Sviatlana Tsichanouskaya. The magnitude of the discrepancy with Lukashenka's popularity was so enormous and evidence of reported vote-rigging so numerous that Lukashenka's declared 80% victory appeared an outrageously crude fabrication to a very large section of the Belarus people. An unusually large network of election observers and an independent online system registered voters' declared choice. Based on polling station results where the count could be verified, election experts, and importantly increasingly the public, believed that Tsichanouskaya had won in the first round. The initial explosion on the streets, of popular rejection and outrage about the rigged election, ensued as never before.

Mass protests have kept on for four months after the election not so much because of vote rigging but the continuous brutality, stun grenades, shooting and torture with at least 30,000 detained and at least several killed between August and November.

The traditional white-red-white



flag of a democratic Belarus now has been raised (quite literally) by many members of the public with no previous interest in politics. It is not that the opposition has evolved in Belarus – but rather that there has been a generation change and a tectonic shift in Belarusian society itself.

This dramatic change in the public attitude to Lukashenka has been made irreversible by both the arrogance in robbing the voters of the presidential election on 9th August 2020, and by the massive and lawless brutality against non-violent protesters which then followed. Lukashenka's popularity cannot be salvaged.

A prominent feature of this dramatic public change has been local communities' self-organising, expressions of solidarity and the humanitarian volunteer movement. Given the expected role of general strikes at the final stages of toppling Lukashenka's regime, organised labour will likely enjoy a significant position in Belarus's post-Lukashenka politics.

These recent events are no reason suddenly to categorise Belarus as a "delayed Ukraine" or analogous to any other neighbours. Since August this year Belarus is visibly progressing to a more 'normal' East-European member of the European continent but is taking an unusual and rather traumatic path. While Lukashenka still clings to power, now is the critical historic point to help the nation of Belarus. **C**

Alan Powers is a retired lecturer and a leading British-Belarus academic Mikalaj Packajeu is a legal researcher and chair of the Association of Belarusians in Great Britain (a UK diaspora organisation founded 1946).

A longer version of this article can be found on www.chartist.org.uk

LABOUR REFORM

There and Back Again

Ann Black updates on returning to Labour's ruling body

I was elected to the NEC again last November, and a lot has changed in two years. Another lost general election, new NEC members, a new leader and deputy leader, a new general secretary, new staff. All this is overlaid with the continuing coronavirus crisis, so it's hard to catch up informally, over coffee in the kitchen or waiting for the lifts. Meeting online has advantages – less time and money spent travelling, and easier to visit far-flung local parties, from Cornwall to South West Surrey to the Wirral to Scotland. But it also has drawbacks and, just as people watching TV swear and throw things if someone annoys them, some remarks would not be made if the speaker was sitting next to their target.

In that time I've attended the joint policy committee (JPC), an NEC awayday, special meetings of the equalities committee and the NEC to discuss Labour's response to the EHRC, disputes sub-panels to decide how to deal with membership rejections, and the NEC funds panel which allocates money from subscriptions to local parties. Generally the larger meetings have been shoutier, the smaller ones more consensual.

Weirdly I returned as chair of the national policy forum (NPF), a position to which I was elected back in 2018, and of such importance that it remained vacant for more than two years. However, policy development does need urgent attention. At the JPC meeting I was impressed by the knowledge and enthusiasm of shadow ministers, but little of this reaches members. They are looking to the leadership for visions of a better society, tackling the climate crisis and the poverty and inequality which Covid-19 has exposed. They also want campaigning points, for instance keeping the uplift to universal credit, protecting tenants from eviction, and opposing public sector pay freezes. These are not contentious, and could unite the party in the run-up to next May's elections.

Where there are differences, members deserve to know why Labour abstained on the covert



Ann Black addressing Labour conference

human intelligence sources bill and the overseas operations bill, and to understand the thinking behind positions on Brexit and on the pandemic. Without continuous dialogue, mutual respect and well-defined objectives the party will turn inward, the vacuum will be filled by factionalism, and normal people will stay away or leave. I would like to see regular news from Labour in parliament, more direct consultation with members, even a return to the national campaign days, where members across the country mobilised around a common theme.

Within the NPF I have asked to join the justice and home affairs policy commission, which will be considering electoral reform as one of its key issues. The dozens of resolutions from local parties and individuals have clearly had an impact, and I hope to take them forward. I benefited from Labour's switch to single transferable vote for the NEC elections: under first-past-the-post, 60% of the membership might again have won 100% of the seats. In Scotland, Labour won three of the 73 constituency seats in 2016, and only top-ups from regional lists saved the party from obliteration. And we

know that too many members are torn between voting Labour and keeping the Tories out. They should not have to make that choice.

I shall also attempt to fulfil my campaign pledges. I support student proposals for dual membership, with defined rights in their home CLP and their university CLP, something which would benefit both. I hope to get a larger share of subscription income back to local parties, as I am now even more convinced that the 2011 model is neither fair nor sustainable. I would like to enable members to start selecting their parliamentary candidates, after the NEC imposed candidates in dozens of seats twice in three years. As joint NEC vice-chair for women, I expect to play an active role in the second free-standing women's conference of the modern era, albeit held virtually. And last but certainly not least my dossier of individual and collective complaints has grown since 2018. I shall follow them up, but better systems are clearly still needed.

My NEC reports are at www.annblack.co.uk – I welcome questions and comments, and you can always contact me at annblack2001@gmail.com. **C**

Ann Black is a constituency rep on Labour's NEC

Time to change the system

Sandy Martin outlines a road map for transforming our broken electoral system

2020 was the year of “jobs for the boys”. The wellbeing of UK citizens was trumped by the desire to put as much public money as possible into the hands of private individuals and companies.

Such wholesale corruption might be expected to put paid to any Party's chances of being democratically elected, even on the basis of 43.6% of the vote. Alas, past experience and the current polls tell us otherwise. Unless such behaviour is regularly reported and characterised as corruption, the voters will not know about it.

The print media does not have the stranglehold on political opinion it once held, but it still sets the agenda. Ownership of radio and television channels is increasingly in the hands of the same proprietors, in particular the Murdochs. Tory operators have used Cambridge Analytica and others to subvert social media for their own ends. The only organisation with enough presence in the lives of the majority of people to be able to challenge the misinformation is the BBC. That is why the government has put so much effort into subverting the BBC's ability or willingness to criticise it, and deliberately stifling Ofcom.

It's not just broadcasting that the Conservatives are undermining. Changes to the registration system took millions off the electoral roll, and that depleted franchise is now being used to redraw constituency boundaries. The Electoral Commission has criticised the hurdles put in the way of registration - in response the government has threatened to abolish it. Tory MPs who have been sanctioned for breaking electoral rules are on the committee that oversees it, a classic case of putting Dracula in charge of the blood-bank. And voters may have to carry photographic ID at the next General Election, also depleting Labour votes.

Labour has got to address constitutional issues – it is a matter of life and death, not just for the Party but for democracy itself. Creating a society where there is mass popular access to politically balanced information, and some way of calling out deliberate lies, will not come about over the course



of a single Parliament. Political education, rebalancing wealth and power, and wide-ranging institutional change are all essential, but they are not quick fixes.

One change Labour can make during a single Parliament is to introduce proportional representation for the House of Commons, in time for the subsequent General Election. It would massively improve the chances of a further progressive government after that General Election – the Conservatives have not won more than 50% of the vote since 1935. And it would ensure that constitutional safeguards put in place by Labour were not subsequently demolished by a doctrinaire Tory government elected on a minority of the vote.

Labour must be committed to change before the next election takes place. We need the voters and the other political parties to know that we will make every vote count. We need that commitment enshrined in our Manifesto. 75% of Labour members support PR – we need that recognised in a Conference resolution next autumn.

That's why Chartism has joined the Labour for a New Democracy campaign, alongside Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform, Make Votes Matter, the Electoral Reform Society, Open Labour, Compass, Unlock Democracy, Labour for a European Future, Another Europe is Possible, Politics for the Many and Get PR Done.

At the time of writing 111 CLPs had passed a motion supporting

PR and by the time you read this, that number will almost certainly be higher. We are hopeful that a substantial number of those will be submitted as a Conference motion.

In addition, members were encouraged to make submissions to the Justice and Home Affairs Commission of the National Policy Forum this summer. 65% of the submissions to the Commission mentioned PR, and it had the most mentions of any single issue in the whole NPF consultation. Ann Black, Chair of the NPF, has assured us that it will be one of the matters on the agenda for the coming year.

The other major focus this year needs to be on speaking to affiliated Trade Unions. Trade Unions and their members will benefit from a more progressive electoral system. An electoral system which prevents doctrinaire right-wing governments will almost certainly lead to a just settlement for Trade Unions which gives them the powers to genuinely protect their members interests and enables them to grow their membership again.

Labour for a New Democracy aims to see our Party ready to start on the creation of a new electoral system as soon as we are in government. Many Chartism readers have already been at the forefront of our campaign. If you want to get more involved you can register at www.labourforanewdemocracy.org.uk – and of course I would also be delighted if you join www.labour-campaignforelectoralreform.org.uk.

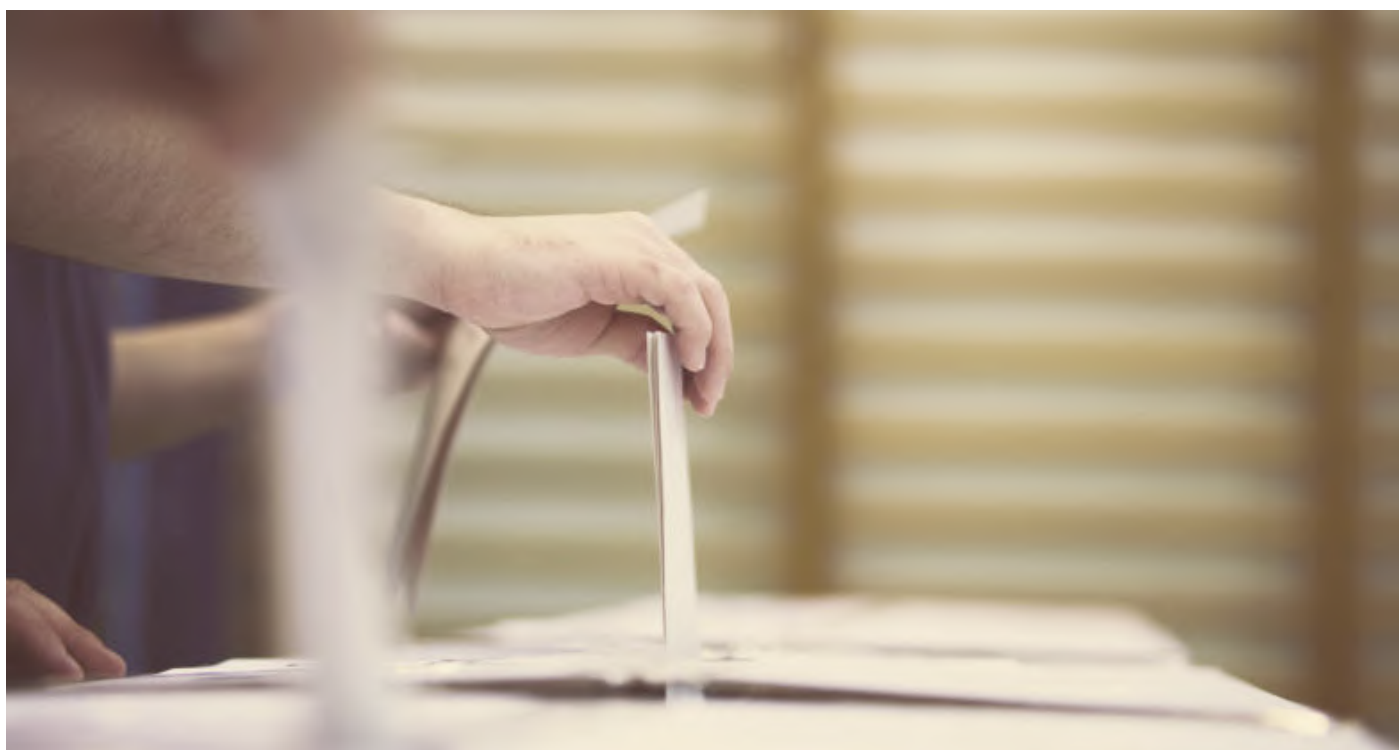
Together we can change the system. **C**

Sandy Martin is chair of LCER

LABOUR DEMOCRACY

Labour Campaign for a New Democracy

Don Flynn says equal voting will lead to more equal society



The Labour establishment has always been dismissive of talk about reforming the UK's antiquated system of Parliamentary democracy. For them the rules of the game say that you have to aim to win elections under the long-established first-past-the-post system (FPTP) and any complaints about the unequal weighting this gives to individual voters is nothing more than weakness and whinging.

The Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform has been a feature of the political landscape for decades, but despite winning over the likes of the late Robin Cook and Mo Mowlam, its efforts at promoting a broadly proportional voting system have not succeeded in swaying the views of the 'big beasts' of the party and affiliated trade unions.

This might just be changing with the formation of the umbrella campaign Labour for a New Democracy (LfND) campaign which combines the skills and contacts of many organisations working in Labour who have come together to get a commitment from the party conference in favour of PR by the end of 2021. It counts on a change in the mood of party members at grassroots

level to achieve this, with recent polling from YouGov showing 76 per cent supporting change and only 12 per cent being decidedly in favour of retaining FPTP.

Among the third of MPs who are now in favour of change, Clive Lewis, has been the most outspoken. He puts the majority for PR down to a general election which has given the Conservatives a commanding majority of 80 seats in the Commons with just 43 per cent of the popular vote. Lewis argues that the FPTP system has frozen parties representing centrist and leftist positions out of power despite the fact that they are together more representative of the country's broad political stance.

The AV dead-end

This is an argument that has been around for a long time and at the tail end of the last Labour government it appeared that cracks were appearing in the monolithic support for the established system. The 2010 manifesto expressed support for a referendum on the alternative vote and Lords Reform. Whatever it might have promised in the way of change, AV would not have brought about an electoral out-

come reflecting the votes cast. In any event the reform, not even supported by many LibDem members, crashed out, rejected by 68 per cent of the people who voted in the referendum held in 2011 under the auspices of the coalition government.

The failure of AV was salutary and might have brought an end to any further dalliance with electoral reform were it not for the role that new systems have played in the devolved assemblies.

In Wales it has allowed Labour to retain its position as the natural party of government (albeit in coalition with other centrist-leftist groups), and in Scotland to govern in coalition with the LibDems, and in the face of the rise of the SNP maintain any sort of presence in the politics of the country at all. Even the one English region with a claim to having a devolved assembly, Greater London, has given its voters the chance to feel what is like to participate in one of the versions of a PR-style ballot.

Participation in elections which weigh the value of each vote differently might have softened visceral resistance to change, but it still leaves the question of what PR is for largely unanswered.

**Don Flynn is
Chartist
managing editor**

Simply allowing the Labour vote to cling on for another generation is not the most persuasive argument, so what else is on offer? The LfaND campaign is making a case for a voting system that makes all votes count equally and in turn will produce a more equal society. Unfortunately, the analysis that might back up this bold claim is not yet present on its public platform. If it was, how might it run?

The virtue of PR is seen as giving each and every vote equal weight in determining the political character of the government of the country. This is not the case as things stand at present. The phenomenon of 'electoral deserts' exists which, for Labour, take the form of rural or southern constituencies, where preference for the party can be a wasted vote because FPTP closes off any hope that it will gain representation in Parliament. Under any of the systems of PR – in reality either single transferable vote or a form of additional member system – fewer if any votes would be entirely wasted, with the votes

Voting systems depend on democracy and democracy depends on listening

for all parties being aggregated across constituency boundaries and having some influence on the formation of the eventual winning government.

But how does this get us to the point of an 'equal society'? Systems which have some element of proportionality prevail across most European countries but, on their own, they have done little to stem the tide of growing inequality and the sense among large parts of the electorate that they 'are not being listened to'.

'Fair votes' or empowerment?

It would help, inside and outside Labour, if the PR argument was framed as being less about abstractions like 'fairness' and more about strengthening a commitment to the empowerment of currently neglected segments of the population within the democratic system.



This is particularly urgent given the way in which politics is being shaped round the idea of chronically 'left behind' people who live on the margins created by decades of deindustrialisation and a decaying national infrastructure. It is of critical importance that we think about what democratic reform might mean for these groups, and then build a political campaign that brings them on board.

A start would be for LfaND to declare itself as being an advocate of democracy and enfranchisement rather than a shorthand for it, PR.

The vote has been the symbol for change throughout the centuries from the Chartists via the Suffragettes but of course it needs to be accompanied by further democratic reform. The current strategy of prioritising voting reform for one year or two allows this umbrella campaign to focus on something it can change – namely, the default position of support for the status quo on the part of the Labour Party and trade unions.

But after it succeeds it is of critical importance that the demand is nested in more comprehensive sets of proposals which include the no-brainer demand to finally scrap the House of Lords, and stronger regional and local government, with revenue raising powers and the ability to modify the impact of policies emanating from central government.

The Commons itself needs to continue the modest changes of recent years to ensure that it looks like an assembly of representatives of citizens more fit for the 21st century than the 19th. The devolved assemblies in Scotland and Wales have much to teach Westminster not least votes at 16 for their own elections.

Encourage diversity

The real challenge for LfaND is to convert this vision of a democracy that empowers all the citi-

zens of the country into something which can, first of all, win over the Labour party. Its approach at the moment is limited to the familiar one of recommending a model resolution that can roll across the CLPs (See Sandy Martin this issue) and eventually be big enough to win at a party conference.

But perhaps it needs to encourage a diversity of reasons for dumping the voting system which evolved from the nineteenth century before the Labour Party and recently multi party politics existed.

Accommodating its political practice to the dumping-down realities of a FPTP system, Labour tends to make its highest priorities campaigning in what are understood to be marginal seats, whilst ignoring constituencies facing the brunt of deindustrialisation and poverty.

Then we have the tactics which focus everything on switch voters, not ironically Labour supporters, who want the assurance that a 'safe' government is in the offing that won't scare them off with talk of radical change.

Trade unions all too often have not made the connection between the outcome of FPTP elections and bread and butter issues in terms of health, education, investment and expenditure.

In exchange for having the whole cake once in a generation they throw away the incremental but revolutionary build-up of better services and more secure jobs.

The LfaND also needs to focus attention on the party's Commission on Justice and Home Affairs. Democratic reform is covered by its current remit.

It has decided to extend its current evidence-gathering into summer 2021 to allow constituency, branches, individuals and trade unions to submit their ideas and arguments for change. Out of this we might get a Commission report which reflects the fact that Labour members have moved on from PTTP.

A revised voting system depends on democracy and democracy depends on listening and learning and recognising that it is sometimes necessary to move on from the old way of doing things.

Our new democracy ought to be a way of governing in partnership with the people we are asking to vote for Labour – rather than asking for a mandate to rule over them for simply another five years. **C**

Chartist is one of the 11 groups involved in the Labour For A New Democracy Coalition.

Full details of the campaign can be seen on its website at <https://www.labourforanewdemocracy.org.uk/>

Starmer & Negotiating the Rapids

Andrew Coates looks back on the innovative thinking of a left current involving Keir Starmer

The Socialist Society was founded in 1982. Independent of the Labour Party, although many members were active within the party, it was committed to radical socialism. Members included Raymond Williams, Ralph Miliband, John Palmer, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright. Committed to “socialist education and propaganda” the Society in *Empowering the Powerless* (1983) called to “counteract the ominous rightward drift in British party politics” underway in the wake of Margaret Thatcher’s election victory in 1981. The last meeting of the Socialist Society Steering Committee was in 1993.

In 1987 the Socialist Society joined with the Campaign Group of Labour MPs, the Conference of Socialist Economists to convene the Socialist Conference in Tony Benn’s constituency, Chesterfield. In 1989 The Socialist Policy Review was published in the Society’s journal (*Interlink* No 13) for discussion at the Third Socialist Conference (held in Sheffield). It offered an alternative to what it called “Labour’s hopeless behaviour” in government, and looked beyond the just completed Party Policy Review, to a “living, vibrant politics and a renewed vision of socialism for the 1990s”. *The Judiciary and the legal system* by Keir Starmer and Robin Oppenheimer was, *Interlink* noted, incorporated into the main strategy document, which had a long section on a new democratic constitution and human rights.

Negotiating the Rapids is prefaced with a quote from Raymond Williams’s *The Long Revolution* (1961), calling for socialism to have a “sense of an alternative human order.” The Introduction reflects on the end of the “long night of the Cold War” hoping that the division of Europe, and that the “creation of a just and peaceful international order” might seem a “realistic goal”. Yet, socialism had been discredited by the “authoritarian bureaucracies of post-capitalist societies”, the “mixed economy” had failed to deliver the goods, and social-democracy, “and by association, socialism” was in crisis. The suc-



cess of a “neo-liberal political economy” the “Thatcher regime” anticipated the “triumph of reaction elsewhere.”

From the “ruins of consensus” *Negotiating the Rapids* argued against the New Times perspective developed in the pages of the journal *Marxism Today*. This combined a “monolithic analysis of Thatcherism” an “emphasis on novelty” and “hegemony”. The new model Labour Party ‘realism’ was an adaption to neo-liberalism and the efforts of the Conservative government to create a “new consensus”. Nevertheless the Socialist Society did not dismiss the new conditions brought about by “post-Fordism”. This “mode of deregulation”, transformed forms of production, while a globalised paradigm of accumulation, the collapse of traditional manufacturing, and loss of trade union membership, marked the economic and social landscape. The biggest change had been the “qualitative increase in the power of transnational corporations over labour and democratic political institutions”.

If the traditional proletariat was declining, those who depended on waged labour and state payments remained the “vast majority of the British population”. Reflecting debates during drafting the pamphlet looked to “new trade union thinking” and “new cultures of resistance” linking up with social movements. “Anti-capitalist class struggle cannot be workerist or exclusively workplace based”. As part of feminist, gay, black and other self-organised bodies socialists had a

role to play renegotiating universalist socialist and working class politics, a current distinct from those who promote “identity, values and culture” – “identity politics”.

Negotiating the Rapids sought to promote democratic and participatory socialism by political reform. It drew on the campaign for political reform, Charter 88, for a “democratic programme for the transformation of the UK’s political system” and the “unitary centralised state”. One advance would be the “introduction of a genuinely proportional electoral system”. In the international sphere the goal of a “socialist United States of Europe” was needed to “reply to the offensive of transnational capitalism with a transnational trade union and social strategy.” Dismantling the “barriers between European socialists” instead of withdrawing into “glorious isolation” was the way forward to contest the “emerging European space”.

The Socialist Society was conscious of its role within the Socialist Movement, founded through the Socialist Conferences. In *Negotiating the Rapids* green issues, the “ecoblind development of capitalism, imperilling the planet itself” is presented with the way the “ecology movement has recently proved central to re-defining socialism, especially in Europe”. Committed to the “politics of ecology” the pamphlet states, “the Socialist Movement must be preparing the ground for an eco-socialist party”. In Steering Committee meetings the group (*Socialist Alternatives*) of the present leader of the Labour Party, Keir Starmer, argued for a more immediate formal structure for this “alternative”.

The radical red and green magazine, *Red Pepper*, launched in 1995 with the support of the Socialist Movement, and edited by Hilary Wainwright, is a successor to the Socialist Society. Many of the distinctive ideas in *Negotiating the Rapids*, an internationalist stand on Europe, democratic left politics, Green politics, a supportive but not uncritical view of what is now called “intersectional” issues, have an influence across the left

***Negotiating the Rapids. Socialist Politics for the 1990s* was published by the Socialist Society in 1989.**

Andrew Coates is a member of Chartist EB

Wandering Star

Patrick Mulcahy
on realities
of nomad
capitalism

For long sections, the film *Nomadland* plays like a documentary in which director Chloé Zhao follows actress (and double Oscar-winner) Frances McDormand as she adopts the lifestyle of a transient person – minus those moments to camera when McDormand reflects on a hand-to-mouth existence that she is fortunate not to have. McDormand is only one of two professional actors in the cast – the other is David Strathairn – and she detracts from the story being told. She doesn't give a bad performance – McDormand can corner the market in brittle loners – but she is surrounded by people who exude lived experience, the true survivors.

The film, which McDormand also produced, is based on journalist Jessica Bruder's 2017 book of the same name (subtitled 'Surviving America in the 21st Century') in which the author followed houseless Linda May as she travelled from state to state in her recreational vehicle, living off seasonal work with no government support. In adapting the book, Zhao follows a fictional character, Fern (McDormand) a widow who once lived in the factory town of Empire, Nevada. The factory closed. The town's population dispersed. We first meet Fern at the lock-up garage where most of her possessions are kept. It is a brief stop-over before she heads off to an Amazon packaging plant where she has a temporary job. We see Fern throw herself into her work with a mixture of infectious energy and professional care as she scans barcodes of parcels on their way to customers. Then, just as suddenly, she moves on, at risk of hypothermia with sudden temperature drops.

Fern is invited to join a community of travelling workers in the desert, where they swap stories, share meals and offer mutu-

al support. They are a benign version of the motorised community in the *Mad Max* films, albeit with anti-capitalist rhetoric. She meets a young man, also on the move, whom she taught in a school in Empire. Fern is warned about the need to attend to her vehicle. If it stops moving, so does she. She also meets a man, Dave (Strathairn) who helps her get another job the following summer, though when moving a box for her, he is responsible for crockery dropping through the

life in isolation honours her husband and we sense that maybe she doesn't want to become attached to someone else, even when Dave invites her to stay at his son's home. (The son is played by David Strathairn's actual son, Tay.) When, late in the film, Fern is lying on a bed in a house, not at the mercy of the elements, we feel her unease. Sure, it is comfortable, but it isn't hers.

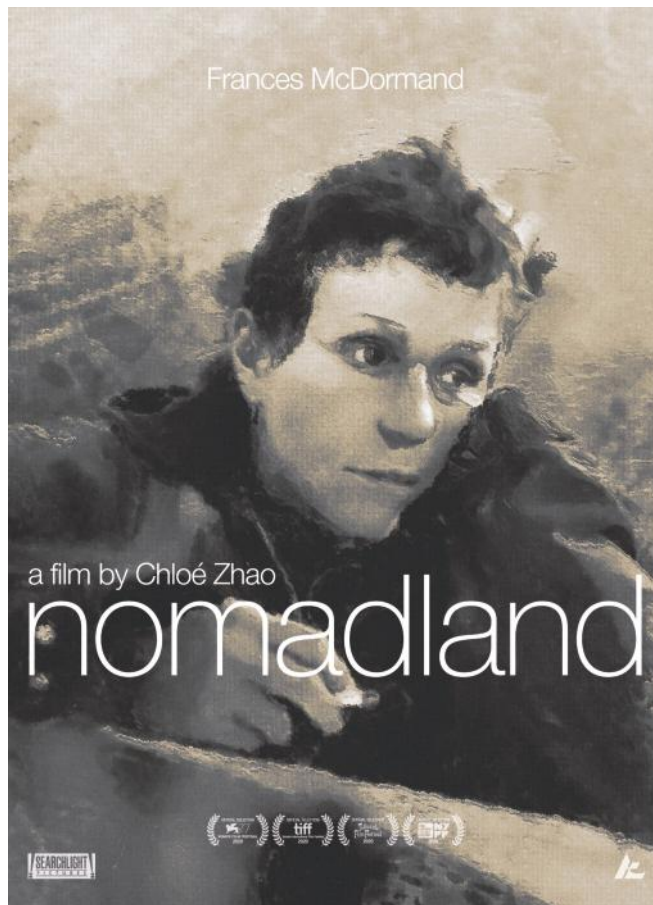
Towards the end of the film, in its only heavy-handed moment, Fern re-visits Empire, a journey

more for the audience than for her. The town resembles a 1950s nuclear test site after an explosion, with properties, including her own home, left empty. It is in this moment that McDormand doubles as a tour guide. Look at the waste, she appears to be saying; why can't we design communities to be more resilient?

At its heart is an observation that when we see service employees at work, we have no way of guessing where they come from and what their stories might be. Zhao shows their dignity. The villain of the piece is a cruel form of capitalism that doesn't invest in workers but asks that they chase employment, ostensibly for the benefit of the more privileged. Corporate America exploits a travelling work force, giving only

temporary wages back. Zhao doesn't overtly blame corporations – her film was produced by one, Fox, since acquired by Disney. There is a disconnect between the ending – Fern choosing a road that hints at a return to normalcy – and the community that Zhao honours, where such choices aren't available. The stars of the movie are the real nomads – Linda May (Bruder's subject), Swankie and others, all playing themselves. All over fifty – marginalised and unseen – but illuminated by Zhao's spotlight.

***Nomadland* opens in UK cinemas on 19 February 2021**



bottom of the box. Simmering with rage, noting that many of the plates have a sentimental value, Fern tells him to go away.

Zhao portrays an alternative view of America, where individuals aren't defined by their jobs, but instead by their warmth and willingness to help others. But these individuals are denied the opportunity to build something and they are isolated from their families through shame. At one point, Fern asks her sister for help, doing so through gritted teeth.

Insomuch as there is drama, the film asks whether Fern can form another relationship. Her

BOOK REVIEWS

The decay of truth

Denis MacShane
on bending
historical
facts

Twilight of Democracy. The Failure of Politics and the Parting of Friends

Anne Applebaum
Allen Lane £16.99

This is an important book, the first building block in trying to understand where we are in a world where 'truth decay' as Barack Obama neatly calls it is now a major question for all political discourse and even moral philosophy.

The term 'Truth Decay' originated in a 2018 Rand Corporation report of that name. Rand identified four interrelated trends: 1. an increasing disagreement about facts and interpretations of facts and data; 2. a blurring of the line between comment or opinions and facts; 3. an increase in the influence, of opinion and personal experience over fact; 4. and lowered trust in formerly respected sources of factual information. Add in social media, the manipulation of foreign powers, the explosion of new TV, radio and on-line news platforms and the failure of the 40 year (1980-2020) era of globalisation, rentier economics symbolised by the Davos gatherings of top capitalists and top politicians where it was never clear which was which and you have a modernity in which most of the rules of journalism no longer apply.

Anne Applebaum, is an American journalist and writer who covered the end of Soviet communism in the 1980s. She married Radek Sikorski, a young student activist from the era of Solidarnosc who came to Oxford and was in the Bullingdon Club along with Boris Johnson, David Cameron and George Osborne. Sikorski rose in Polish politics while his wife was writing major studies of the Soviet Gulag and Stalin's genocidal repression in Ukraine in the 1930s when up to 12 million were starved to death to build Stalin's idea of socialism.

Sikorski became first defence then foreign minister for the centre-right-liberal Civic Platform party which governed Poland 2007-2015. Applebaum meanwhile was working in London for the Spectator, edited by Boris Johnson. Her natural anti-com-

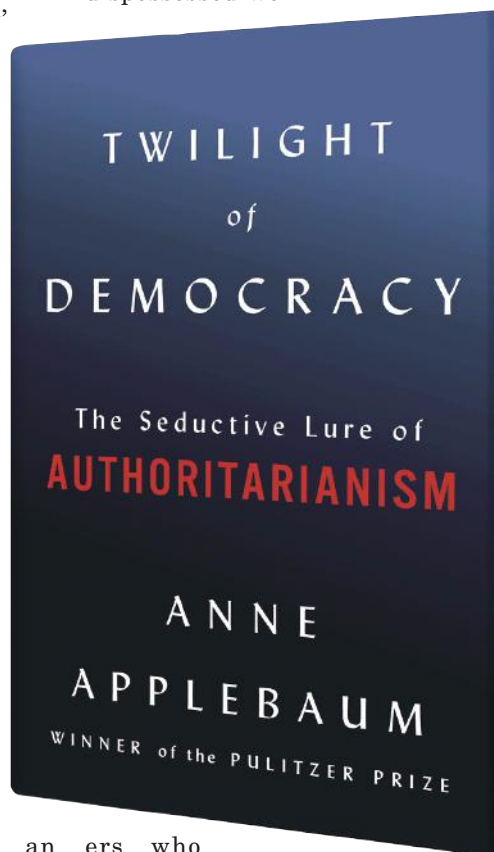
munist reinforced by the atrocities she was writing about under Soviet tyranny took her into the fold of Tory journalism. But in this remarkable and unusual book of journalistic self-awareness, she recounts how she gradually discovered that her Tory friends were drinking at the fountain of nationalist, ethno-identity politics. This politics also attracted the non-metropolitan, rural, dispossessed work-

much interest in distinguishing between fact and fiction and between what is true and false. Donald Trump and Boris Johnson are serial liars. Trump may have over-reached himself and stumbled but Johnson is protected by the journalism of half-truth and post-factual narrative perfected this century by anti-European forces. This has also contaminated the left. The Corbyn team indulged in easy sloganeering and eschewed hard analysis and telling truth to the power-holders of the left, notably in some trade unions.

Applebaum worked for the US funded Legatum Institute based in Mayfair after the Spectator. But there she found the path to the top of rightist journalism was to bend the truth, especially on Europe. She knew from her own lived experience in Poland that most of what was written on the EU in London was simply false though she prefers the genteel adjective 'fanciful.' And then her liberal friends who seemed to be keen on democracy in post-communist Europe began boosting nationalist politics and closing down media and university freedom in Hungary or women's rights and judicial independence in Poland. Normally a senior and much respected writer-journalist like Anne Applebaum would simply find new outlets and leave the world of nationalist identity lies behind to sink in its own sewer.

The arrival of Trump as president of her own country revealed how much the contempt for truth and facts entered into and did serious damage to modern democracy. Her book is a witness into just how corrupted journalism has become this century. Luckily, Trump has gone but Johnson and Brexit, based on post-truth politics face no major opposition in England while Victor Orban and Jarosław Kaczyński are still running Hungary and Poland.

This book is a brave effort to expose the wrong turning politics and its associated journalism has taken since the end of communism 30 years ago. Stopping 'truth decay' is a herculean but nonetheless urgent task.



Denis MacShane was a former Minister for Europe. His latest book is *Brexiterity: The Uncertain Fate of Britain* out now from IB Tauris.

The Left's failures and fascism's triumphs

Don Flynn
on anti-
fascism in
1930's
Europe

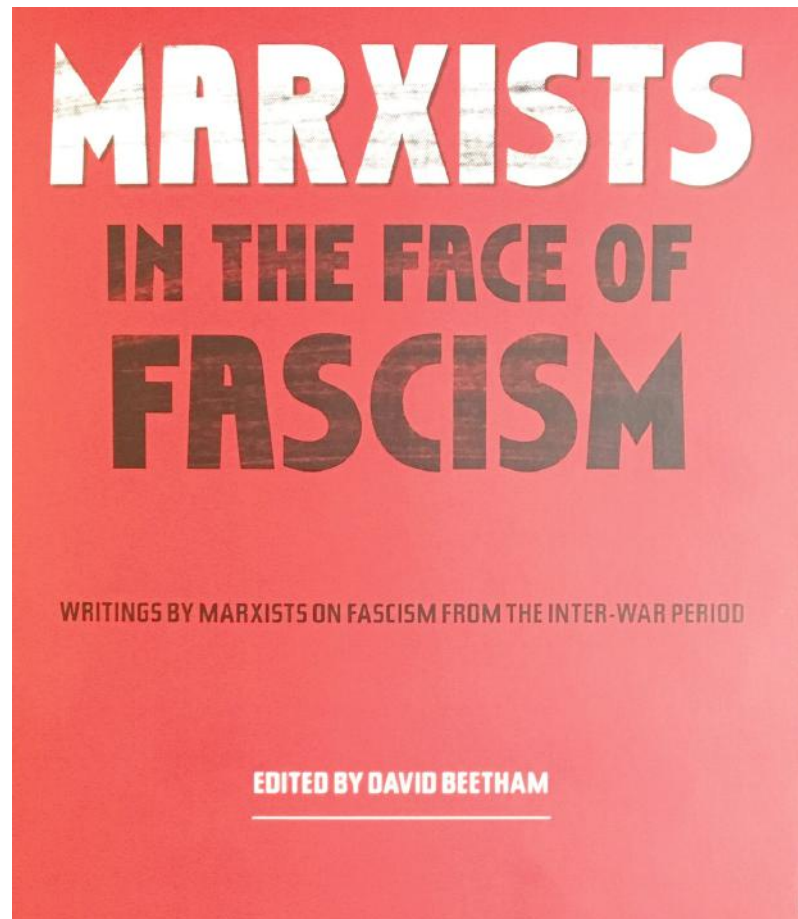
**Marxists in the Face of Fascism:
Writings by Marxists on Fascism from
the inter-war period
Edited by David Beetham
Haymarket Books, £15.99**

The idea of fascism haunts the left from the standpoint of its failures to deal with the challenges this far right ideology set before the organised working-class movement in Europe in the middle decades of the 20th century. The 'Marxists' who provide accounts of their struggles against the impending disaster in this valuable book cover the viewpoints of the Stalinised Comintern and its affiliates across Europe, the critical viewpoints of figures like Trotsky, Gramsci and Andres Nin, right the way through to social democrats of various hues.

The book benefits from an excellent introduction by its editor, David Beetham, who does the service of distilling something that approaches a consensual viewpoint as to what fascism actually is from these diverse commentators and participants in anti-fascist struggle. He settles on a definition that draws most heavily on Gramsci and Togliatti. It revolves on the idea that it is a distinctive form of capitalist offensive which depends on the mass mobilisation of petty bourgeois elements, but with a significant section of the working class in tow. This popular support arose from the defeat of revolutionary movements and the failure of the socialist left to resolve the economic crisis of that period.

The obligation to consider viewpoints from the entire spectrum of Marxism makes it necessary to include a review of articles setting out the 'third period' take on 'social fascism' which emanated from the official Communist parties. This is a dip into a world of such baleful error as to make it hard to take seriously except as an example of how to get everything wrong.

The sections which reproduce the views of the more critical group of militants represented by Trotsky and the Italian currents are now part of the cannon sufficiently well-known and frequently republished to be already present in volumes on the shelves of many modern-day socialists. This is much less so with the social democrats, and it is the contributions of the likes of Rudolf Hilferding, Max Seydewitz, Alexander Schiffrin, Otto Bauer and Richard Lowenthal which make this



book particularly interesting.

This group were all leading figures in the Austrian and German Social Democratic parties who had played a role in the parliamentary and ministerial arenas of political struggle during the 1920s and 30s. Their instinct throughout these critical years had been to strive for working class unity ahead of the demand for ideological purity which had led to splits and the formation of mass Communist parties. Bauer accepted the logic of maintaining class unity as the highest priority meant being prepared to go into government whenever electoral majorities had been secured in order to deliver reforms like the working-class housing projects that were the jewel in the crown of the city of Vienna. But as the economic crises of the period gained momentum, the refusal of the social democrats to acquiesce to the demand of the bourgeoisie to abolish tenant protection led to a swing towards the nationalist right wing and fascist parties.

In a riveting analysis of how the commitment to programmatic reform had led to social democracy emerging as a cluster of 'interests', Lowenthal shows how the entire

political project of the party could only be bound together by bureaucratic means. This critique of reformist socialism from the insider reveals a picture that is far from the 'social fascism' of the Stalinists, and just as distant from the 'treachery of the leadership' which is central to so much Trotskyist analysis. What the best of these articles shows is the belated awareness of how socialists intent on change had been lured onto the terrain of parliamentarianism and the state, which was only too ready to dump them whenever it served the interests of capital.

In a country like the UK today the threat of fascism is not present on the immediate horizon mainly because the parliamentary state has proven adept at rolling back working-class gains without feeling the need to mobilise the masses in a violent counter-revolution. The threat of socialism in this country can be blown out of the water by not much more than a newspaper campaign in support of a silly English Brexit party and a set of spurious slurs against the personal integrity of leftist politicians. A long way off from fascism certainly, but also light years away from socialism.

BOOK REVIEWS

The state in a time of crisis

**Duncan
Bowie**
on Labour in
the First
World War

For Class and Country
David Swift
Liverpool University Press £25

This study is subtitled 'The Patriotic Left and the First World War' but the book's coverage is much wider than this title would imply. Much attention has been given to those elements of the left who were opposed to the war: Macdonald and the ILP, the No-Conscription Fellowship and the Union for Democratic Control (UDC) and also to the role of the revolutionary left in the last two years of the war, after the first and second Russian Revolutions. Predominantly, John Maclean in Glasgow and the rent strikes and Sylvia Pankhurst in London's East End. Swift provides an important counter-narrative. His main argument is that while the left was divided between supporters and opponents of the war, this was not a simple left-right division and that it was possible to be both a socialist and a patriot and that patriots were not all aggressive imperialists and jingoists. He argues convincingly that the wider working-class Labour movement supported the war effort, even if somewhat reluctantly and that the opposition was largely led by intellectuals, many of whom were associated with the Liberal Party rather than the Labour Party.

Swift focuses on the role of Labour ministers, who joined the wartime administrations of Asquith and Lloyd George – the first experience of Labour in government – Henderson at the Education board, but also George Barnes as pensions minister, John Hodge as minister of labour, Jimmy Clynes as food controller and William Brace at the Home department. These Labour representatives, with trade union backgrounds, had significant achievements in protecting the interests of workingmen and women during wartime. Swift has also undertaken a systematic analysis of the records of the War Emergency Workers National Committee, which brought together the Labour party and trade unionists and also involved the Fabian, Sidney Webb. The Committee's secretary was Jim Middleton, the Labour Party sec-

retary, who worked exhaustively to take up the cases of thousands of individuals in relation to pensions, food, employment, housing and a range of other matters, making use of his personal contact with Labour ministers, some of whom held the relevant portfolios.

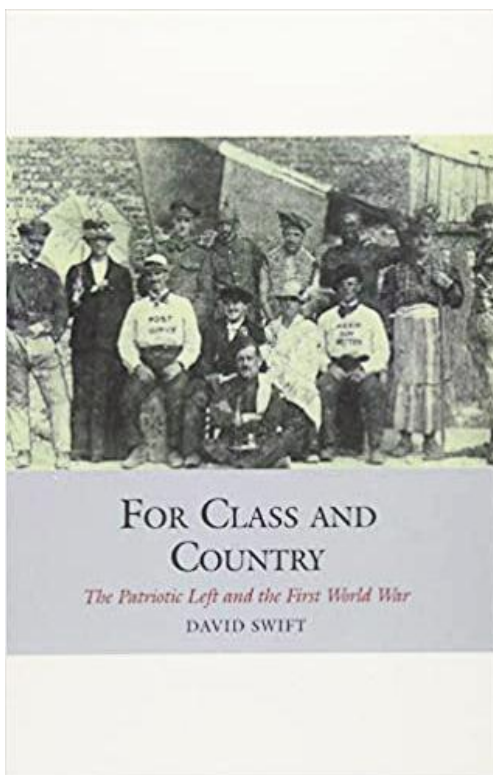
What is perhaps most surprising is the extent of government control over so many of the elements of daily life and what in effect was an emergency welfare state, administered largely by

meals were provided for schoolchildren, not just on weekdays but on Saturday and Sunday as well. Child care classes for mothers were provided free, some interesting precedents for our current government in the COVID-19 crisis.

Swift demonstrates that contrary to the perspective of academics who have focused on militancy and strikes, which were limited to specific locations and industries, and the 1917 Leeds 'soviet' conference, that actually there was increased collaboration between trade union leaders and the government, assisted by the group of trade unionist Labour ministers. Swift also examines the growing importance of the co-operative movement, which played a significant role in food distribution, and the increasing collaboration with the Labour Party to which many co-operators had been initially hostile.

Swift's study is well researched. Unlike so much of the literature, it focuses on what the labour movement held in common, rather than on internal differences. It also demonstrates the extent to which the wartime pressures generated support for collective action by the state and the breadth of coverage of what became in effect an emergency welfare state and national health service. The Labour Ministers demonstrated that they could act responsibly in government and were not all wild revolutionary Bolsheviks.

Moreover, the work of the War Emergency Workers National Committee won the respect of the many thousands of working people it had helped. The romantic anti-parliamentarianism of William Morris and the Socialist League was long forgotten. The syndicalism of Tom Mann and the guild socialists such as Cole was marginalised. While Labour was damaged in the 1918 Khaki election, with McDonald and the ILP's losing their seats, most of the wartime Labour Ministers were re-elected and it was the wartime experience that led to Labour replacing the Liberal party as official opposition in 1922, and then becoming the government in January 1924.



Labour Ministers working with a group of Liberals, many of whom were Asquithians with a laissez-faire small state anti-tax background. The railways were taken into state control, as was 85% of the food supply. The mines were commandeered. Taxes and regulations restricted alcohol consumption. The government closed the stock market and took control of the financial system and credit. A minimum wage was introduced for munitions workers and for agricultural workers. The Rent Restrictions Act controlled private rents and protected tenants from eviction. Pensions were provided for the families of fighting soldiers and those killed or invalided.

The state for the first time funded new council housing, initially for munitions workers. Free

First black superhero

Mike Davis
on an epic liberation drama

Black Spartacus: The Epic life of Toussaint Louverture
Sudhir Hazareesingh
Allen Lane £25

Serialised on Radio Four in November this is an epic story of black liberation, bravery and military genius. Toussaint Louverture led the first black revolution to overturn slavery against the Spanish in what was then Saint-Domingue, now Haiti.

Louverture was inspired both by the Enlightenment ideals of French republicanism, to which he remained steadfast, and a hybrid of native mysticism, fraternal slave organisations and African political traditions. He emerged as the leading figure capable of organising and mobilising the thousands of black and mixed race slaves against their oppressors in last decade of 18th century.

Many would have believed the account by the great West Indian Marxist historian CLR James, *The Black Jacobins*, would be the last word on the subject but Hazareesingh has unearthed voluminous original works, letters and documents to produce a book that expands on James to create a deeply engrossing, richly rewarding and inspiring read.

Slave revolts against brutal Spanish rule, indeed against, British and French colonials across the Caribbean had been widespread. What Louverture did was pull together the disparate forces and

leaders into a political movement. His evident charisma lives and breathes in these pages.

Hazareesingh takes us through the early days of Louverture's education and upbringing to the point of the successful slave uprising against the Spanish forces in August 1791. On achieving power Louverture abolished slavery, and set about economic reform, lowering taxes, introducing horse drawn carriages, encouraging new settlers. He sought to rebalance the economy away from just banana and yams to sugar, coffee and cocoa. This involved meticulous planning.

At the same time he displayed astute diplomatic and military skills in fending off hostile and scheming colonial invaders intent on reconquering Saint-Domingue and re-enslaving its people.

By 1801 Louverture drafted a set of laws which became the new constitution—inspired by Republican ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality. He sought to strengthen ties with the French republic. The previous year he had effectively become the governor.

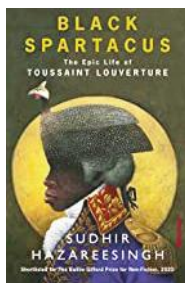
Louverture led from the front. In the face of Spanish, British and finally French counter assaults he displayed a supreme military intelligence and was a brave commander willing to fight in the field. He introduced new uniforms and fortified defences. He avoided triumphalism, calling on his forces to remain vigilant and defend the

sovereignty of the country. He could be ruthless in the face of rebellion. He was quite an aesthete eschewing the fine life while instructing freed plantation workers to put in the hours in the fields.

Despite his willingness for Saint Domingue to remain a French colony it was the French, under the instigation of Napoleon whose treachery engineered Louverture's defeat. He had sought equal citizenship under the French republic. Bonaparte had other ideas and with a huge force of 16000 troops and a year long war finally overcame Louverture. He was taken prisoner, brought to France and spent his last year incarcerated in a fortress thousands of miles from his family. In Wordsworth's phrase 'a most unhappy man of men'.

His inspiration and achievements live on. He became a figure of legend and a beacon for slaves across the Atlantic and for generations of European republicans and progressives in America and Europe. He inspired the black anti-slavery campaigner Frederick Douglass. His emancipatory struggle was hailed by anti-imperialist campaigners well into the twentieth century.

Hazareesingh relates that in the modern era his life inspired the French poet Aime Cesaire's seminal idea of negritude and has been celebrated in a remarkable range of plays, songs, poems and novels. It's hard not to agree that he was the world's first black superhero.



Ben Francis
on diagnosing dictatorship

Dictatorship as a medical condition

The Dictatorship Syndrome
Alla Al-Aswany
Haus publishing £12.99

The Dictatorship Syndrome is ostensibly a guide to the various elements of dictatorship, using the metaphor of a medical condition. In reality, it makes a very readable account of some of the author's history and ideas but in presenting his own private wonderings and conclusions based on a specific experience, perhaps a missed opportunity.

In many ways Al-Aswany is stuck between two poles. The book benefits from decades of his experience as a prominent Egyptian liberal voice and a key player in the protest movement which deposed Mubarak as part of the Arab Spring in 2011. His familiarity with the subject matter, having known a string of autocratic Egyptian rulers since Nasser, shines through in anecdotes to highlight the points

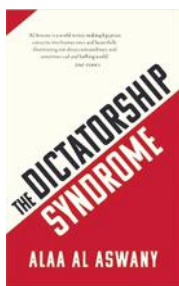
being made.

He also claims to offer a universal analysis of the traits and inevitable failings that all dictators have in common, but sadly, fails in this loftier ambition. Though not an academic political science work, it would carry significantly more intellectual heft if he had drawn on the large body of literature and analysis of authoritarian leaders and their states. Why, for example, in a book that claims a global remit, is so little attention paid to the 20th century dictatorships beyond the Arab world? From Central Asia to the North Korean dynasty and Latin America, too many examples are either ignored or fleetingly mentioned. The conclusions therefore appear narrow and tailored to Al-Aswany's sphere of experience.

A principled commitment to democratic ideals and political freedoms shines through each chapter of the book, with a clear normative rejection of the unquestioning loyalty and dou-

ble-speak required by many dictatorships of their citizens. This absolutist rejection of dictatorship, though admirable, does lead to some reductionism. This is especially true in considering the populations subjected to dictatorial rule, where Al-Aswany ignores influences of culture, poverty and education to buy into disparaging notions such as the caricature of the 'good citizen' upholding the status quo.

This book is both an easily digestible and enjoyable read, not least because of the personal experience that feeds into its conclusions. But the sense that something is missing remains. That there is no commentary on the economic success of the Chinese Communist Party, the illiberal democracies of Hungary and Turkey or the cult of personality style populism in India, Brazil and the USA is a great shame. The dictatorship syndrome is real; but this book does too little to diagnose it.



BOOK REVIEWS

Heroes or Villains?

**Duncan
Bowie**
on Lilburne
and
Cromwell

The Common Freedom of the People
Michael Braddick
Oxford University Press £25
Providence Lost
Paul Lay
Head of Zeus £30

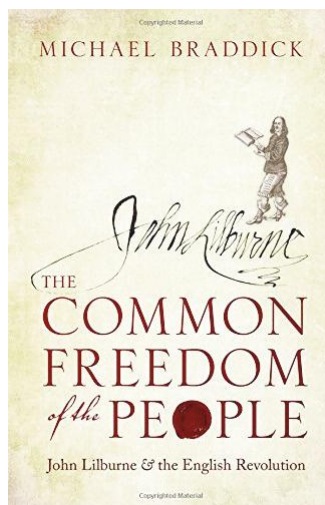
Braddick's volume is a biography of the leveller, John Lilburne, the first since Pauline Gregg's 1961 study, *Free-Born John*. Braddick sets Lilburne's political career within the wider context of the English civil war, the Commonwealth and the Cromwellian protectorate which followed. In doing so, he demonstrates that Lilburne did not actually believe in economic equality. Lilburne recognised that there were different classes in society and was proud that he was a member of the gentry and a landowner. He was not opposed to the monarchy as an institution and did not actually support the execution of Charles I.

Lilburne's focus was on individual political liberty. He was not a collectivist and the Levellers were a group of pamphleteers and polemicists, who sometimes collaborated but often argued with each other. As Braddick demonstrates, they were not a political organisation, despite the later claim of the socialist historian and journalist Henry Brailsford, and certainly not a working-class organisation. As polemicists, Lilburne and other Leveller pamphleteers were however influential in that they had allies within the army council and some supporters within parliament. Lilburne was never elected to parliament, though on a number of occasions he was tried by parliament, and his election to the common council of the City of London Corporation was quashed by parliament on the petition of his fellow councilmen.

Lilburne was a persistent litigant, seeking to defend his own rights against the governments of the civil war era, irrespective of whether the government was seen as reforming or repressive. He succeeded in falling out with most of his political associates, partly through his own egotism, but also through his unwillingness to compromise. To him, the Commonwealth and the Protectorate were as tyrannical as Charles I had been.

Lilburne was certainly not a pragmatist. Once a close ally of

Cromwell, he called for Cromwell to be impeached. Fighting against all religious authority, in his final years he was converted to Quakerism. He appeared to be against all civil authority in that he always challenged the authority of those who sought to try him. Despite not being trained in law, his legal theatrics outwitted some of the leading lawyers in the country. Twice on trial for his life, he convinced juries to acquit him of offences of which he was clearly guilty. Spending nearly half of his political life in prison, he was finally sent into exile as a result of a personal dispute over property. He then returned from exile



without authority to do so, only to face another trial and a further exile.

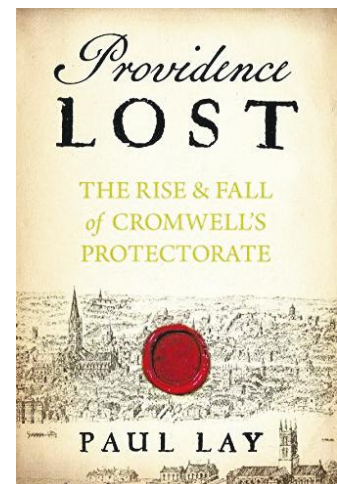
In prison he managed to continue pamphleteering, and was accompanied by his wife Elizabeth. Prison clearly did not interrupt his procreational achievements. Elizabeth was consistently loyal to her husband and clearly deserves some sympathy given how badly she was treated by her husband who publicly berated her for her perceived weaknesses in suggesting that he should seek allies rather than enemies. She was endlessly petitioning on his behalf.

Lilburne however does deserve credit for his determined defence of the rights of the individual against those in power including the right to a fair trial and the right to stay silent to avoid self-incrimination. Braddick, as a historian who has taught in American universities, notes how these rights have been incorporated in the US constitution.

Lilburne was in essence a democrat. However, despite having fought in the civil war, he clearly preferred fighting in the courts to fighting in battles. Moreover, while his activity inspired conspirators, and even riots, he himself appears to have avoided plots and conspiracies, and unlike Leveller colleagues such as John Wildman, did not ally with Royalists in their attempt to bring down Cromwell.

Lay's book, subtitled *The Rise and Fall of Cromwell's Protectorate* is in contrast, rather odd. The author, Paul Lay, is editor of *History Today*, and the book is written more as a popular narrative than as an academic study. Rather oddly, Lay's initial focus is on Cromwell's 'Western Design', his unsuccessful attempt to capture the Spanish West Indian colonies and much of the rest of the book focuses on Royalist military campaigns and Royalist conspiracies.

Lay seems to have undertaken only limited original research and both of these subject areas have been well covered by more academic historians, such as Carla Pestana and Karen Kupperman on the former and David Underdown on the latter. There is some interesting material on the rule of Cromwell's major generals and on the debate on the succession to Cromwell and the falling out with John Lambert, who had been seen as Cromwell's deputy, but the book is spoilt by repeated comparisons between Cromwell and Margaret Thatcher. If you were looking for an analysis of the rise and fall of Cromwell's protectorate, this is the wrong book.



A Marxian biologist losing his way

Glyn Ford
on genetics
and
communism

A Dominant Character: The Radical Science and Restless Politics of J.B.S. Haldane
Samanth Subramanian
Atlantic £20.00

Haldane was a funny Marxist biologist. Asked what nature told him about God he replied: 'He has an inordinate fondness for beetles'. Part of a pantheon of a half dozen communist scientists in the thirties and forties that filled the airwaves, hard-pressed Government from without and counselled them from within, it saw intertwined research, lives and politics. Gary Werskey's *Visible College* (1988), the collective biography of five of the six - JD Bernal, Haldane, Lancelot Hogben, Hyman Levy and Joseph Needham, demonstrates the whole was greater than the sum of the parts. Quite what the Marxist archaeologist V Gordon Childe had done to miss the cut, apart from being Australian, was unclear.

For this fraternity science wasn't neutral. Intelligent design was not proof of god, but rather proof of purpose. The reel of history was yet to fully unwind but the finale had already been previewed in Russia's revolution. The 'eureka' moment had been the descent of the Soviet Delegation, led by Nikolai Bukharin, on London in 1931 for the 'Second International Congress of the History of Science'. The very title of Boris Hessen's paper *The Social and Economic Roots of Newton's 'Principia'* said it all. Science was the horse which 'red experts' were to ride into the future. It may have staggered like a drunk in the past, but the discipline of the dialectic would sober it up to find direction and speed.

A Dominant Character, portrays its subject as a complex splintered character. Principally a geneticist his work helped consummate the necessary marriage between Darwin's evolutionary crawl and Mendel's jumps, where 'hopeful monsters' face nature's grim tribunal. He, in parallel with Alexander Oparin (*The Origins of Life*, 1924), stirred 'primeval soup' to life. His

numeracy allowed him to ravage the intellectual structure underpinning US eugenics - heavily borrowed by the Nazis - that legitimated the racism, sexism and family punishment in that unfinished American civil war where 'Black Lives Matter' is only the latest skirmish. He gaudily painted eugenics' scientific basis in the colours of the Inquisition.

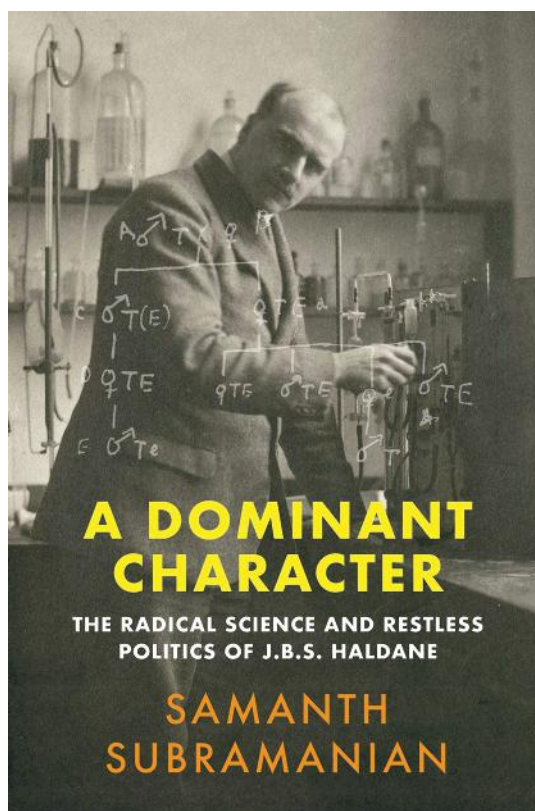
He was as equally happy experimenting on himself as on others. Early in his career he wrote

read and didn't listen there were his science columns in the *Daily Worker*.

He was blinded by Stalin's light. The Nazi-Soviet Pact had him defending Stalin's perspicacity in *New Statesman*. Stalin had no need to mop up the unemployed in war work to bolster capitalist profits. The Soviet Union had neither. In a most ill-timed and ill-turned phrase Haldane damned himself, 'I would sooner be a Jew in Berlin than a Kaffir in Johannesburg or a negro in French Equatorial Africa'. April 1942 saw his first wife Charlotte leave him and the CPGB. The Party had told her to stay for the cause. She left both. Haldane took the Party's card in May.

Haldane's darkest hour was to follow. His only visit to his beloved Soviet Union had been in 1928 at the invitation of the renown geneticist Nikolai Vavilov. Arrested as a British spy and saboteur in 1940, Vavilov waited three years to die of malnutrition. He had stood in the way of TD Lysenko, a snake oil salesman selling the pseudo-science that wheat could be 'taught' to like the cold. When the last remnants of the Soviet biological establishment were purged in 1948 Haldane defended Lysenko and his 'sect' on the BBC, betraying in the process much of his own corpus of work. With Stalin's death in 1953 the cult's grip was broken. Haldane became a critical supporter of Lysenko, yet uncritical of Stalin.

In 1957 Haldane escaped himself with exile to India. Reborn in Calcutta's Indian Statistical Institute he ran down his life working to its 1964 end. For him the secrets of human existence lay in biology, not theology. His penance was in his British valediction (*Rationalist Annual*, 1958), 'a man must not do an action which he regards as dishonourable even if ordered to by the chief of the gods in person'. *A Dominant Character* suffers only one failing. Subramanian's Haldane is fish out of the water in which he swam. Placing him firmly in the social function of his science proved a bridge too far. Pity!



Callinicus (1925) in praise of chemical warfare. The Spanish Civil War had him in Madrid providing medical knowledge along with military and political expertise. The first two proved more useful than the last. With Norman Bethune he pioneered new techniques for storing blood plasma and his frontline experience of 1914-18 in the Black Watch prepared Republican Spain for gas warfare that never came. Franco preferred bombs.

By the late thirties his Spanish adventures led to tireless campaigns to mitigate the impact of explosives, over his preferred poison, with a crusade for better Air Raid Precautions as the Left Book Club published his *A.R.P.* (1938). All, in concert with his 'college', made a radio star. For those that

VIEW FROM WESTMINSTER



Radical federalism

Sam Tarry is Labour MP for Ilford South and a junior shadow minister. This is an edited transcript of his talk at Chartist AGM

Sam Tarry calls for a radical federalism to connect with the people's desire for greater power over their lives



Welsh Labour leading in devolved Assembly

Democratic reform must be high up Labour's agenda. As shadow minister for elections I have been working closely with Scottish and Welsh Labour to develop our commitments to a deeper devolution of power in the economy and society.

This year we have a huge electoral challenge with elections for the Scottish and Welsh devolved governments, mayoralities in cities throughout England and many local elections.

This is important because it shows how different our democracy is now compared to the 1980s. We have an asymmetric picture of devolved powers, with some areas like London controlling a large infrastructure, for example Transport for London, with local councils overseeing education, adult and child-care, housing and local environment.

We have an Everest style mountain to climb to win a majority in 2024.

How do we use the anti-Tory majority in the country to fashion a new federalism alongside the challenges

in England and London, almost another country and economy on its own? It's both a question of culture and politics.

We are clear on the need for greater economic democracy but the 2016 referendum underlined the lack of power people feel. Give people a binary choice, many people in smaller towns, who feel a lack of power, were attracted by the idea of 'taking back control'. In normal elections people are not given this sort of say.

Devolution in Scotland has meant ordinary citizens now have a higher satisfaction level about elections, following changes to the electoral system, according to Electoral Reform Society. They have higher electoral turnouts and appear more positive generally about political engagement. The Citizens Convention in Scotland that preceded the referendum on independence meant there was real buy-in from citizens, charities and civil society organisations. This has been sustained since.


When we were last in government huge opportunities were missed. Yes, we had devolution but the changes to the House of Lords did not go nearly far enough. Our first past the post electoral system was untouched. We now have to fashion a manifesto attractive to people and other parties—the SNP, Green Party and LibDems—who we may need to form a government.

We may well see a further splintering of the UK in the near future. We need to anticipate and plan for constitutional transformation. I'm working with Clive Lewis to develop this. With the Tories attacking devolution Labour needs to develop a fully fleshed out plan for the whole UK.

We are talking about a radical federalism involving devo-max and something big that relates to the democratic deficit in England. We also need to target smaller towns and rural areas, not just the bigger cities. Labour in Wales has been doing some pioneering work, particularly illustrated with early interventions in the first wave of the pandemic. Devolving new powers needs to be at heart of our future manifesto.

One of the plus points in Corbyn's manifestos was economic democracy. But the lock in of progressive democratic political change has not yet been done. These two forms need to be connected, particularly building a movement for democratic reform in the trade union movement.

More devolution needs to be done in a way that is meaningful to people.

Ed Miliband's plan for a Green Industrial Revolution builds on the Corbyn period. We have got to enable people to envision what this means for their jobs, for their communities and their wider environment. Economic democracy and putting real power in people's hands need to be our goals. 

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