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THE REPORT OF THE PARTY

#309 March/April 2021

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23

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**Peter Kenyon** 

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### CHARTIST For democratic socialism

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

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

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

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the EB

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### **OUR HISTORY 95** MICHAEL MEACHER Diffusing Power 1992

ichael Meacher was MP for Oldham for 45 years from 1970 until his death in 2015. Before becoming an MP, he was an academic, teaching social administration at Essex and York universities. He was a junior minister in the Wilson and Callaghan governments. A member of Labour's shadow cabinet between 1983 and 1997, Meacher was an ally of Tony Benn and in 1983 stood unsuccessfully against Roy Hattersley for the Deputy leadership. However, Blair did not offer Meacher a cabinet position after winning the 1997 election and he instead became a junior minister at the Environment department before being sacked in 2003. Meacher then became a prominent critic of the Labour government, notably in relation to the Iraq war. Meacher was also a prominent campaigner on environmental issues. In 2007, Meacher considered standing against Gordon Brown for the party leadership, but stood down in favour of John McDonnell to avoid splitting the left vote. McDonnell however failed to obtain sufficient nominations to challenge Brown, who was therefore unopposed. In the 2015 leadership election, Meacher supported Jeremy Corbyn.

In 1982, Meacher published Socialism with a Human Face, subtitled 'Political Economy of Britain in the 1980's.' Diffusing Power, subtitled 'The Key to Socialist Revival', was published ten years later. His last book was The State We Need.

"The imagery of the 1940's welfare state is now very dated. It oozes with the aura of paternalism, bureaucracy, dependency and a world of claimants. It emphasises the availability of rights and benefits, often perceived pejoratively as 'handouts', while neglecting the reciprocity of responsibilities, duties and obligations. However valuable are the basic principles of a welfare society, an appeal to them can no longer by itself inspire victory at a general election, as Labour's experience in both 1987 and 1992 revealed."

"If the left's ideology is to regain resonance and force, it must

recapture the power to inspire. It must be, and be seen to be, a vision that releases new forces in society, unlocks individual and group energies now pent up, and releases hidden talents. Socialism is not merely, or even primarily, about protecting the weak. It is much more about extending widely the can-do mentality which under Thatcherite capitalism was the exclusive preserve of an entrepreneurial elite."

"Not least the new socialist ideology must generate excitement. Traditional socialism, while enormously worthy and full of good works, was also rather dull and stifling. A left vision which can sweep the country needs to develop a raw cutting edge. A genuine human politics cannot thrive purely on the cultivation of high ideals, let alone the suffocating demands of respectability; it must also exercise a crusading passion."

"Putting real power into the hands of the powerless and making that new power a foundation for an enhanced contribution to one's country offers a dynamic infinitely more resilient and meaningful than the Thatcherite consumerism of share handouts and capital discounts unconnected to the actual levers of power. Such a vision, as it was steadily implemented, would proliferate new cadres for socialism with the same ardour that Thatcher spawned her shock troops on the ground, the purveyors of private capital in every niche and cranny of the economy."

"It involves a project on a scale of mobilisation never previously attempted by any socialist movement anywhere.... It represents a reversal of traditional top-down social democratic planning. It would progressively unleash bursts of undreamt-of activity where decentralisation of power would force government to adjust from the use of hierarchical controls to increasing acceptance of selfreliance and self-discipline. But as an agenda for the left, as a foundation for the drive to wrest political and ideological dominance from the renascent radical right in Britain and throughout Europe, the scope is awesome"

## Qualifications

#### Dave Lister reflects on the Small Axe film on education

he brilliant Small Axe series, written and directed by Steve McQueen, hit our screens in December. The fifth episode, Education, was shown on 13 December. It focused on the experiences of a young boy of Afro-Caribbean heritage in the education system in Inner London and was based on a true story. The boy was unjustly sent to an ESN school. (ESN stands for Educationally Sub-normal). Conditions at this special school were chaotic with children running riot and extremely bad teaching.

Those of us who taught in Inner London at this time would probably have found this drama somewhat worrying. We remember that there was plenty of Left activism among London teachers then. Yet a disproportionate number of in particular Black boys were failing the system, being excluded from school and sent to special schools. How could this be?

One factor was surely the racism in the society outside the school. Experience of this could lead Black pupils to feel alienated from white authority as exhibited in the school. Of course, there were some Black and Asian teachers but most teachers were White and the overwhelming majority of those in senior positions were. Another factor was the curriculum. Particularly in subjects like History and English the emphasis was on the British and European past. Topics like slavery and colonialism were at most slightly touched upon. Over time things began to change. For example, Key Stage Three of the National Curriculum included the optional topic Black People in America.

Dave Lister is a member of Brent Central CLP & Chartist EB A longer version of this article will be on www.chartist.org .uk Unfortunately, the issue of disproportionate numbers of boys of Afro-Caribbean origin being excluded from school has not gone away. Contributing to this must be the regressive Gove reforms of the last decade.

There is also the issue of special schools. There is no way that categorising children as educationally subnormal would be acceptable today. However, the very negative image of special schools does not fairly represent every special school at that time.

Finally, there is the role of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), which was Labour-run at the time. I find it difficult to believe that there was a deliberate attempt to make Black children fail, although there may well have been a failure to fully appreciate the need to address this issue.

## Time to take gloves off

In public spending and welfare services have wrecked the social foundations of the UK. Keir Starmer is right to highlight this context and how it has amplified the devastation Covid-19 has wreaked on our lives and NHS. Add to this the cavalier approach to early lockdown, failures on PPE provision, neglect of those in care homes, reluctance to provide basic support for poorer families, chaos on schools and incompetence on travel restrictions, a constant flow of mixed messages have amounted to the highest death rates in the world with numbers approaching 125,000. Combine this with the impact of Brexit, as yet disguised apart from delivery failures on fishing and Northern Ireland: Johnson's government amounts to a saga of failure.

Boris Johnson has blood on his hands. The failures of government lie with him. As **Peter Kenyon** explains it is now time for Labour's leader to take the gloves off. This means opening the box of economic and political ideas that meet the needs for recovery and rebuilding. Brandishing a union jack is not in that box.

The reason the vaccine programme has been successful is because it has been delivered through NHS structures

and a professional network of medics and pharmacists. This contrasts starkly with the 'moon-shot' test and trace programme outsourced to Serco and other private companies, which might as well be part of the astral debris floating through outer space.

The economy is in a critical condition. At least two and half million are likely to be unemployed alongside over 200,000 businesses lost and a ballooning spending deficit. While the Health Secretary Hancock has been found guilty of law breaking in awarding over £2 billion contracts to Tory crony companies, Chancellor Sunak has yet to decide on extending the furlough life-support package beyond April. Many self-employed workers have fallen through the net. The Government also looks set to scrap the £20 weekly uplift in Universal Credit. The poor, workers and small businesses are likely to bear the brunt of the fallout while tech giants like Amazon and Google have profited from the crisis. Bryn Jones reports on the economic prescriptions of two prominent socialist economists who argue for sustained and widespread government intervention, wealth taxes and redistribution to meet the challenge of post-Covid recovery. Starmer's team would do well to study their books.

Besides the deaths and the social and economic impacts, coronavirus has also produced a surge in mental illness as **Steven Walker** explains. His analysis echoes much of what the outgoing Children's Commissioner Ann Longfield has said in a damning report on government failure to provide counselling and emotional support for young people.

Gender inequality has also grown through the pandemic as Alice Arkwright explains. A TUC report shows how women have borne the brunt of childcare, home-schooling, redundancy and job loss. Fifty years of progress in women's rights looks set to be turned back. Mary Southcott reflects on the changing nature of feminism as women grapple with new challenges whilst standing on the shoulders of 'difficult women' pioneers.

Under cover of the pandemic the government has also begun to backtrack on promises made about Brexit bonuses. Fisherfolk feel rightly abandoned, farmers are under the cosh, with delays, bureaucracy and price rises threatening trade with our biggest partner. Workers rights and environmental protections look set to be jettisoned. **Jan Savage** explains how the NHS continues to be under threat from trade deals which could open up health to further privatisation, particularly from US big Pharma and other corporations.

The election of the Biden/Harris Democrat ticket could slow this process. **Gary Younge** puts the Democrats' presidential election win under the microscope. The left and Black voters were a major part of the success story. It is vital that the Sanders and Squad camp keeps up the pressure on Biden. Trump may be gone but Trumpism lives on. Defeating white supremacy and resolving the unfinished political business of the Civil War will decide whether the embattled right returns.

**Don Flynn** interrogates the racism that imbues the structures of the UK immigration system, through the hostile environment to the Windrush scandal, locating its virulence in our

own unfinished disengagement from British colonialism.

> On the international front **Josef Weidenholzer** regrets the departure of the UK from the EU while calling for the left to reforge positive relations with our European allies. **Sybil Cock** describes the findings of a recent Israeli civil rights group branding the Israeli state an apartheid state, the latest example being the denial of equal access for Palestinians to Covid vaccines. **Dave**

**Lister** rebuts a simplistic approach to internationalism, and particularly silence over Assad's murderous rule in Syria.

The pandemic has also underlined the deficiency of the Westminster electoral system. **Mark Serwotka** makes a forceful case for electoral change, citing the absurdity of a first past the post system that enables a minority government to inflict untold harm on its people.

Chartist continues to work with Labour for a New Democracy to commit Labour to proportional representation and a wider revolution in Britain's antiquated state—from abolition of the House of Lords, to decentralisation of power to local, regional and national governments. **Peter Rowlands** looks at how this might play out for Labour in the forthcoming Welsh elections with the shadow of Scottish independence lengthening.

Starmer has committed Labour to a constitutional convention. This should mean the entire membership of the Labour Party is enjoined to debate the nature of the democratic socialist future we are striving for. Party members must be free to debate all questions, including racism and antisemitism, within a framework of mutual respect, as **Duncan Bowie** argues on our website. Organisational methods like suspensions are not the way to end factionalism. Open political debate and thorough reflection on the party's strengths and weaknesses is the road to travel.

Boris Johnson has blood on his handsthe failures of government lie with him

## **England – which England?**

Paul Salveson on the fool's gold of English nationalism

he quest for a 'progressive English politics' has become a growing trend recently amongst sections of the Left in England, particularly in the South. Recent articles in The Guardian and Observer suggest that 're-capturing' English identity from the Right could be key to Labour re-building its popularity in a post-Brexit world. Writing in The Guardian (January 8th) Andy Beckett suggests that the nature of Englishness matters -"not least because a less prickly and entitled version would be better for our neighbours. And it might even stop a lot of the English from feeling like foreigners in their own land."

In a subsequent piece in The Observer (January 17th) Julian Coman is more specific about how a progressive Englishness could be articulated. Illustrated by a photo of 'quintessential England' - a rural English church with the flag of St George flying next to it - Julian takes us on an 'English Journey' which culminates in the idea of an English Parliament.

The implications of a unitary English Parliament are deeply worrying. It would stimulate what the Scots-born Irish republican James Connolly, in a different context, called "a carnival of reaction". Not only would it even further institutionalise the political dominance of England's South and embolden a very nasty strain of right-wing Toryism, it would drive a very large wedge between us, Scotland, Wales and N.Ireland. Any sort of federal settlement with Scotland, Wales and Northern would inevitably be dominated by England, which numerically alone would vastly outweigh its would-be partners. It would leave the North of England even more marginalised and excluded. It would set in stone the supremacy of English Toryism at its worst. A 'left-wing', or even mildly progressive, English nationalism is fool's gold and will end in tears.

We need to create a new England which is re-balanced, with the historic marginalisation of its regions reversed. Another England is possible, but it's an England of the regions.

What could this mean in practice? The alternative to a unitary, centralised English Parliament should be a de-centralised England



which reflects the regional diversity of the country and sits comfortably with its neighbours. It could provide an umbrella for several different identities, all of which are 'English' but each is different. And it's 'identity' that is key. We need to re-think the 'regional' map of England and not take the post-war regional boundaries (based on the standard planning regions) as given. People's identities are as important as what works economically.

England 'as it is' and its creation, the British state, will take some shifting. The catalyst for change could well be Scottish independence, which would result, by default, in what is essentially an 'English Parliament' with Wales as a reluctant appendage. This should be avoided at all costs and people on the Left should have no truck with it. Starmer's attempts to wrap us all in the union flag risk taking us down the road of an ugly nationalism which could lose it members and stimulate new political forces.

Cracks are already beginning to show in the North, with the emergence of small regionalist parties and most recently the new 'Northern Independence Party' (NIP) which is essentially a civic nationalist party based around a national identity ('Northumbria') which currently doesn't exist. But 'nations' are created and perhaps in the future a 'Northumbrian' identity will emerge. There's a very long way to go. In the long-term, an inde-

A longer version of this paper is available on The Hannah Mitchell Foundation website – see www.hannahmitchell.org.uk

pendent 'North' might happen. For now, it seems a very long way off, but if NIP and other regionalist parties (North-east Party, Putting Cumbria First, The Yorkshire Party and others) can snap at the heels of Labour and push it towards a more pro-Northern approach, fine. Twenty years ago no-one could foresee that Labour would be virtually wiped out in Scotland. A similar fate could befall it in the North, but it doesn't have to be so. Why not a 'Northern Labour Party' working as part of a devolved Labour across the UK and building strong roots in the English regions?

A 'federal England' within a confederation which includes Scotland, Wales and the North of Ireland, with the Irish Republic as a close friend and ally could emerge as an alternative to the complete break-up of the UK. But it should be a 'confederation' of nations and regions', not a supposed federation in which Westminster remains in ultimate control.

For the time being, Labour, with the Lib Dems and Greens, should get behind the idea of regional democracy and move beyond the flawed cityregion mayoral model. It's undemocratic and unaccountable; only the figurehead is elected, a step back even from the days of the metropolitan county councils. Regional assemblies elected by PR, which can pioneer new forms of governance working with empowered local government, should be the way forward.

## **Dubious conjuring tricks**

Dave Toke asks is the Government putting up the cost of offshore wind to pay for Sizewell C?

he cost of offshore wind is being jacked up by Government-mandated 'auction fees' just as the Government negotiates with EDF about giving it massive handouts to fund Sizewell C.

The Government has announced the award of leases to build 8 GW of offshore windfarms, but in doing so the Crown Estates (mainly the Government) will earn around £900 million a year from the fees that developers will pay the Government for the leases. This sum is broadly comparable with the annual sums it is likely to pay out to EDF for developing Sizewell C.

The Government's latest leasing round for offshore wind sites has been panned by the trade association Renewable UK who said 'too few sites were made available to meet.....demand. Any auction run on that basis will inevitably lead to higher fees and this could ultimately mean higher costs for developers and consumers'.

In fact three-quarters of the fees that developers will pay will go into Treasury funds (one quarter to the Crown); these funds will not offset the increase in prices for wind electricity that developers will charge when, in a few years time, they bid for contracts to supply electricity from the sites that have been leased. Indeed the costs of the auction fees will put up the capital costs of the offshore windfarms by at least 13 per cent (using Renewable UK figures).

Meanwhile the Government seems likely to agree a deal with EDF to fund Sizewell C whereby consumers will pay twice, through their electricity bills - once to fund the construction costs of the projects, and then, after it is built, to pay premium prices for the electricity generated. The connection between the auction fees for offshore wind is twofold. First, it will increase the price of the offshore windfarm supply contracts relative to the (heavily subsidised) contract for Sizewell C. Second, BEIS may, in accountancy terms, be able to offset the receipts from offshore windfarm leases against the increased public sector borrowing requirement caused by the subsidies given to EDF for the construction of Sizewell C. BEIS has been lobbying the Treasury to allow it to make



Government has announced the award of leases to build 8 GW of offshore windfarms

consumers pay for the construction of the proposed nuclear plant Sizewell C well before any generation from the plant begins. However, the Treasury says that this will increase Government debt levels.

Using a series of very dubious conjuring tricks the Government will claim that new nuclear power is much less expensive compared to offshore wind than would otherwise be the case. This is despite the massive subsidies given to Sizewell C and the fact that offshore wind is, in accountancy terms, effectively paying for much of the nuclear subsidies!

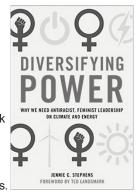
An especially pernicious aspect of the Government's policy is the meagre nature of the leasing round. 8GW of offshore wind will generate around 12 per cent of current UK electricity (a lot more than Sizewell C of course), but this is a lot less than the value of the last leasing round for offshore wind. The last offshore leasing round was concluded in early 2010 (during the lifetime of the last Labour Government) and constituted some 32 GW of capacity.

The Government is, in effect, slowing the decarbonisation process so that it can make money out of offshore wind power, and on top of that it will have the mendacity to claim that the gap with nuclear costs is falling. Dr David Toke is Reader in Energy Politics, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Aberdeen On top of all of this Sizewell C is most likely to be given a much superior generation contract compared to offshore wind. Despite the fact that nuclear electricity is much more expensive than offshore wind it will be allowed to carry on generating and push the windfarms off the grid.

Altogether the Government's focus on funding Sizewell C at practically all costs is not only diverting investment funds away from much cheaper renewable energy but it is also associated with what looks (to me) like a deliberate policy of limiting the issue of leases to offshore wind developers in order to generate funds that can be recycled to support nuclear power.

#### Climate Countdown on chartist.org.uk Diversifying Power for Climate Action

In an exclusive edited excerpt from her new book U. S. Professor Jennie C Stephens explains why antiracist and feminist leadership is vital in mitigating the climate crisis.



## **Starmer's Mission Impossible**

**Peter Kenyon** says this corrupt government with 120,000 deaths on its hands requires Starmer's Labour to seriously raise its opposition and ambition



n two months' time many UK voters will go the polls for local, regional, Scottish Parliamentary and police and crime commissioner elections.

Labour leader Keir Starmer has yet to floor Tory Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Worse, Labour faces a herculean task to form a majority government after the next general election, whenever that might be. If Johnson was seen by voters as a man with the blood of UK citizens on his hands (120,000 plus and still rising) and Labour was 20% ahead in the polls, Starmer might have a chance.

Rather than plan for a 2024 election and drape himself and his party in the Union Jack, Starmer would be better advised to think out of the box. Johnson is much more likely to go for a snap election once the nation has been vaccinated fully against Covid-19. Only the Fixed Term Parliament Act stands between Johnson and going to the country. With an 80-seat majority a repeal would not be in question. Latest opinion polling shows the Tories back in the lead by three to five percentage points.

Why? Vaccinations. Then what has Labour got to offer?

The British electorate's capacity to forgive and forget the corruption, abuse of power, and nepotism played out daily by Johnson and his cronies is encapsulated in Johnson's capacity to turn a phrase for the moment. It is nearly 18 months since the Tory-supporting The Spectator magazine published a guide to staging a coup. Yet Starmer still appears reluctant to call it out.

How can the Johnson coup be stopped in its tracks and democracy restored?

Britain's first past the post will still be in operation whenever the next UK General Election is called. The possible need for constitutional reform was given a nod in Starmer's John Mackintosh Memorial Lecture aimed at Scottish voters and delivered on 21 December last year. Starmer offered "... a UK-wide

Starmer offered "... a UK-wide Constitutional Commission to consider how power, wealth and opportunity can be devolved to the most local level. This will be the boldest project Labour has embarked on for a generation. And every bit as bold and radical as the programme of devolution that Labour delivered in the 1990s and 2000s."

Peter Kenyon is a member of Cities of London & Westminster CLP & Chartist EB Two months on and we are still waiting.

Meanwhile, the ghastly realities of Brexit are ravaging the economy. Johnson and the renegade Tories of the European Reform Group are still in power. The risks of troubles on the island of Ireland mount. Scots' thirst for independence appears even greater.

It is not inconceivable that Johnson's constitutional legacy will be a United Ireland, Independent Scotland, Independent Wales and a Conservative Little England. As for jobs for those still languishing in diminished circumstances in the so-called 'red wall' seats, only radical public-led investment programmes funded by the magic money tree will begin to turn their fortunes. Then there are the fantasies about rejoining the European Union: would the UK (if it survives) even pass the democracy tests?

However, there are clues in that mix about how to overthrow the Johnson coup peacefully.

Assuming a moment will dawn when economic considerations will come to preoccupy voters' minds, the stupidity of Brexit may well dawn too. There is already polling evidence for the latter.

A consensus of one nation Tories, Labour, Liberal Democrats, and Greens will be needed. We could start with focussing not on the seemingly obvious, but on corruption. The New Statesman magazine published a piece at the end January highlighting of Transparency International's latest edition of the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). The United Kingdom came in joint 12th (with 77 points out of 100) out of 180 countries and territories.

According to TheyWorkForYou, the last time Starmer mentioned the word 'corruption' in the House of Commons was 16 June last year in a speech on global Britain. We need to hear it for hapless little Britain. As for 'blood' - not mentioned by Starmer since he became leader in April last year.

Time is running very short to get a majority of the British electorate to recognise the dangers to their lives posed by Johnson and his cor-

### Rather drape himself and his party in the Union Jack, Starmer should think out of the box

rupt, murderous government. Starmer's policy of wanting to support government efforts to tackle the pandemic has proved a licence to Johnson to prolong the abuse of emergency powers, offer plum jobs to his mates and milk public funds. At the time of writing, Johnson has announced quarantine plans for passengers arriving at UK ports and airports. They are a year late and riddled with laxities that risk infection multiplying. It is time for Starmer to declare 'enough is enough' and shape a winning electoral narrative that casts Johnson as the villain, not our saviour.

Against that background, urgency and cross-party endeavour need to be added to Starmer's constitutional proposals. It is still difficult to imagine at the present time the readiness of voters to accept a change in the voting system being proposed for the general election after next. Ridding local politics of party tribalism is anathema to so many active in local communities. But that needs to be factored in. Debate needs to be focussed on Westminster Parliamentary arithmetic.

Results of a mega-poll by focaldata reported by Left Foot Forward at the end of January 2021 said Labour could win up to 351 seats by working with other progressive parties at the next election. (There are currently 650 seats in the House of Commons.)

Analysis by the cross-party group Compass a month earlier showed a uniform swing of 10.5%, would be needed (larger than the Labour landslides of 1997 and 1945). "This scenario also assumes that Labour can make a big comeback in Scotland. Discounting Scottish seats leaves Labour needing an unprecedented uniform swing of 13.8%, and winning all 124 seats would require constituency swings of as high as 15%", one of the authors told Left Foot Forward.

The immediate and screamingly obvious snag is that pact. What would the Liberal Democrats and Greens demand of Labour? Does Starmer really need a constitutional convention to work that out? Since he named former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown as an advisor, one would hope he will remind Starmer about the Scottish Constitutional Convention. Set up as a top-down cross-party body in 1989, it took six years to report and ten years to realise its ambition – a Scottish Parliament.

The UK cannot wait that long. If Labour is to offer something more ambitious than it offered in the 1990s and 2000s, it has to put electoral reform on the table asap.

This is urgent because in addition to the risk of a snap general election, Johnson has already set in-train the process of reducing the size of the House of Commons to 600 seats with further electoral advantage for the renegade Conservative Party he leads.

Labour grassroots organisations have not been idle in this regard. They (including Chartist) have combined to launch Labour for a New Democracy. A model resolution has already been published for debate at the next Labour Party Conference, and it is gathering support among Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs), affiliated trade unions and socialist societies.

This will be a litmus test of whether Starmer understands just what needs to be done to win power back from the renegades. As for healing the body politic, will that require a written constitution? After recent events in the United States, did the constitution ensure President-elect Jo Biden was sworn in on 20 January? Maybe. But it certainly did not prevent the outgo-



**Rachel Reeves - leading charge against Tory cronyism** 

ing renegade from trying to overturn a democratic result for nearly three months.

A good start pointing up the need to root out corruption has been made by Rachel Reeves, MP, a member of the shadow cabinet who follows arch-Brexiteer, Michael Gove's brief at the Cabinet Office, or Corruption Office as it should be known. In a speech lin February she asserted that Labour in government will clean up cronyism in contracting through greater transparency, accountability and citizens' rights, and possibly follow Biden's example in setting up an integrity and ethics commission.

All that and the restoration of the Nolan principles for public appointments depends on Labour being in government. Planning for that can't come too soon and it doesn't require Labour wrapping itself in the Union Jack.

Forging alliances to guarantee (as best one can) the renegade Tories are ousted as soon as possible is the better guarantee of a return to a decent civil civic society, providing Johnson is seen much more widely as a crook with blood on his hands. Over to you, Keir. **C** 

## **Wales and the Scotland factor**

**Peter Rowlands** says Welsh Labour face a tough contest in forthcoming elections

he elections due on May 6th in most of the UK will all be significant, but particularly those in Scotland, where an expected SNP win is certain to trigger a renewed call for an independence referendum. The issue has however loomed much larger in Wales than in any recent election, and could be a key factor in determining the outcome.

There are currently 60 Members of the Senedd (MS), previously Assembly, who like the Scottish Parliament and the London Assembly, are elected by a proportional 'additional member' system, which include 20 out of the Senedd's 60 seats.

Labour has controlled the Welsh Government since the 2007-2011 coalition with Plaid Cymru (PC), albeit technically in a coalition since 2016 with the one Lib-Dem MS. Poll ratings were dire for much of 2020, but picked up in the autumn, partly perhaps reflecting Labour's generally well perceived handling of Covid-19 in Wales, although this has been less so in the last two months. However, the latest (January) poll shows Labour down by four points, with PC up two and the Welsh Greens up by three, a doubling of their previous support.

How can this be explained? Labour's poor showing could reflect concerns about their recent handling of Covid, and in part probably does. But the reason for the shift to PC and the Greens is likely to lie elsewhere.

In 2020 there was a significant increase in support for Welsh independence. However, this didn't manifest itself as an increase in support for PC, but in a huge increase in membership of Yes Cymru (YC), an organisation committed to Welsh independence, but not a political party as such. In September 2020 a poll for them showed 32% support for independence, with 51% for Labour voters. An average of polls now indicate about 23% support for independence, slightly down from the summer of 2020, but well up on the 12% of 2014. Support grew in 2019, with a number of well attended marches. YC have not (yet) urged support

for PC, but unless Labour switches to a policy of independence, which is out of the question, it is difficult to see that they won't. (There are two small nationalist parties who are unlikely to achieve more than a small vote.)

The reason for the recent increase in support for PC and the Greens is likely to reflect, in part at least, this rise in support for independence. The Greens only resolved to support independence last October, and the increase in their vote is likely to reflect a shift by previous Labour supporters, who would probably find the Greens more politically amenable than PC. This was after its move to a more centrist position under Adam Price following the more left wing leadership of Leanne Wood, who was voted out in 2018.

However, Green votes at constituency level, which accounts for two thirds of the seats, are likely to go to PC, as Green candidates are mainly standing at regional level.

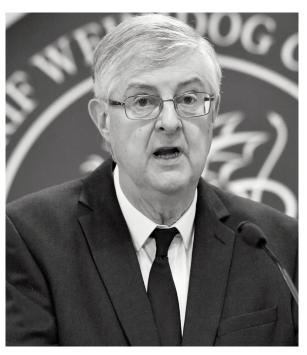
If such an increase happens it will mainly be at Labour's expense, as the Lib-Dem vote is small. The Labour left is broadly split between those who favour enhanced devolution, as advocated in the 'Radical Federalism' document, and those who support the 'Labour for an Independent Wales' organisation. Neither of these policies stands any hope of being adopted, as despite leader Mark Drakeford's stance on the left, the right are broadly dominant in Welsh Labour. Opposition to a referendum, as in Scotland, would be likely to further increase support for PC.

The Tories are in disarray, following a change of leader. Moreover, there is deep division between a pro devolution group and those who effectively want to end devolution, with one MS having been effectively deselected. It should be possible to exploit these divisions, but 'Red Wall' factors and the vaccine may help to sustain the Tory vote. Meanwhile, the seven Tories originally elected for UKIP have all made bewildering and for some multiple changes in party allegiance, except for the egregious Hamilton, who remains a member of UKIP. They are all likely to

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Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford - leading a Welsh Labour dominated by the right

lose their seats except perhaps for two standing as Abolish the Assembly candidates.

The substance of what is proposed for independence varies, with a somewhat confusing range of alternatives from PC, including a confederal arrangement with the rest of the UK. However, the key problems would appear similar to those long aired with regard to Scotland – EU membership, trade, currency, constitution, monarchy etc..

Even if PC do much better than polls now indicate, it is highly unlikely that they will gain, or even approach, a majority, while Labour's chances of achieving that look slim, although they could be boosted by the extension of the vote to those over 16, for the first time. The likely outcome is a fractious and unhappy coalition between Labour and PC, given that a coalition between PC and the Tories would almost certainly be politically impossible, even if, as could well be the case, their combined seat total was a majority.

Whatever happens in May, support for independence in Wales, boosted by likely events in Scotland, is almost certain to grow in the coming period. **C** 

## **Women in firing line**

Alice Arkwright says TUC research spotlights gender discrimination writ large in the pandemic

very week we're seeing more and more evidence of the gendered impacts of Covid. Of the 100,000 people who left the workforce in Italy in December 2020, 99,000 were women. In the US 140,000 jobs were lost in December; women accounted for all of these.

In the UK we're seeing similar patterns. The H/C Women and Equalities select committee published a report in early February warning the government that the pandemic is worsening existing inequalities for women saying urgent reforms were needed. These included reinstating gender pay gap reporting (which was suspended in 2020), extending redundancy protection to pregnant women and new mothers and reviewing childcare provisions for job seekers.

The committee also recommended the government assess the equality impact of its recovery plan, saying it was skewed towards male dominated industries like construction, despite female-dominated sectors such as retail and hospitality being the hardest hit.

TUC research during the pandemic has highlighted the huge burden being placed on women as restrictions continue. Whilst the decision to return to home schooling in January was necessary to keep teachers and communities safe, women are overwhelmingly feeling the impact as they take on the majority of care and supervision of children at home.

The TUC's survey of over 55,000 working parents, 93% of whom were women, found that nine in ten mums' mental health has been negatively impacted by the stress and anxiety of juggling care and work and 25% are worried about losing their jobs.

Also, shockingly, despite the fact that since April employers have been able to furlough parents who can't work due to restrictions on schools, 70% of requests by working mums for furlough had been denied.

This has left women working incredibly long hours, using annual leave to cover care and home schooling, being forced to work reduced hours, taking extended periods of unpaid leave or being forced to leave their jobs.

One public sector worker



described her days as "At 5pm when I technically finish work, its then starting dinner, bath & bedtime. Then cleaning up. By 8pm I was exhausted but had to start working again. I finished at 1am and was up at 5.30am (as usual) with my three year old.".

This is completely unsustainable. Women are exhausted, worried about using up annual leave now when there are school holidays to cover in the coming year and being forced into poverty through loss of hours and pay. TUC research found that one in six mums had to reduce their hours at work as a direct result of restrictions on schooling.

Single parents are particularly affected, 90% of whom are women, as they are less likely to have someone to share care responsibilities with.

We also know that BAME women are more likely to suffer from job loss. Across the country one in twelve BAME people are now unemployed compared to one in twenty-two for white workers.

Sian Elliott, Women's equality policy officer at the TUC says "We are witnessing a staggering and rapid reversal of gender equality at work. Decades of progress are being lost in a matter of months. It is not only the pandemic itself causing women harm but the government's response to it. They have failed to take into account the impact of their decision and policy-making on

Alice Arkwright works for the TUC women, and our research has shown this has deepened the inequalities women face. There is time to fix this. And that starts with listening to women, working with their unions and taking a care-led approach to our economic recovery."

In the immediate future, the TUC is urging the government to act by creating a temporary legal right to access the furlough scheme for those who cannot work due to increased caring responsibilities as a result of restrictions or because they are required to shield.

At the moment workers are allowed to request furlough but their employer can refuse it, leaving parents trapped in an impossible situation.

This should be without victimisation or discrimination of anyone who chooses to take it up and parents should be able to share furlough on a flexible basis. The government should also ensure that newly self-employed parents have automatic access to the selfemployed income support scheme.

The TUC are also urging employers to do the right thing and make use of the Job Retention Scheme but also explore other options during this period such as temporarily reducing workload and hours with no reduction to pay, changing worktimes and other forms of flexible work. By not doing this employers risk losing valued and skilled members of their workforce.

The impacts we are seeing on women are in part caused by the UK's underwhelming provision for working parents. We have one of the least generous parental leave systems in Europe with no right to paid leave for parents who need to take time off for care. In addition to the right to furlough, the government need to take immediate action and introduce:

• 10 days paid parental leave from day one in the job for all parents

• The right to flexible work from day one. This can include predictable shift patterns, working from home, compressed hours, job shares or term-time working.

The government must also work with unions to ensure schools can reopen safely.

Not taking these actions risks the reversal on progress made on gender equality.

### **HEALTH & COVID-19**

## **Covid mental health fall-out**

Steven Walker says action is needed to avert crisis amongst the poor and young

ne of the consequences of the pandemic and the Tory governments' shambolic response will be a predicted huge increase in unemployment and cutbacks in the welfare state to pay for their incompetence. Poverty will also increase from the already shocking total of four million households living in relative poverty at the end of 2020. The link between poverty and mental health has been recognised for many years and is well evidenced. In general, people living in financial hardship are at increased risk of mental health problems and lower mental wellbeing. People in the lowest socioeconomic groups have worse mental health than those in the middle groups, who in turn have worse mental health than those in the highest. This 'social gradient' means that mental health problems are more common further down the social ladder.

The evidence of this social gradient in the UK is clear. For example, the Health Survey for England has consistently found that people in the lowest socioeconomic class have the highest risk of having a mental health problem.

As another example, a 2017 survey commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation with participants from across the UK found that 73% of people living in the lowest household income bracket (less than £1,200 per month) reported having experienced a mental health problem during their lifetime, compared to 59% in the highest household income bracket (more than £3,701 per month). The mental health risk of economic hardship starts early in life. Socioeconomically disadvantaged children and adolescents are two to three times more likely to develop mental health problems. People in debt are more likely to have a common mental health problem, and the more debt people have, the greater is the likelihood of this. One in four people experiencing a mental health problem is in problem debt, and people with mental health problems are three times more likely to be in financial difficulty. Employment is one of the most strongly evidenced determinants of mental health.

Lack of access to either employment or good quality employment



Children from the poorest households are four times as likely to develop mental health difficulties

can decrease quality of life, social status, self-esteem and achievement of life goals. In the Mental Health Foundation's survey across the UK in 2017, 28% of people who identified as unemployed reported current experience of negative mental health, compared to 13% of people in paid employment, 20% of people in full-time education and only 9% of people who had retired.

Studies have found that unemployment has a range of negative effects, including relative poverty or a drop in standards of living for those who lose a job, stresses associated with financial insecurity, the shame of being unemployed and in receipt of social welfare and loss of vital social networks. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has described how job loss has a traumatic and immediate negative impact on mental health and noted that there is further damage where unemployment continues into the long term.

A study published by the Centre for Mental Health last year found that children from the poorest 20 per cent of households are four times as likely to have serious mental health difficulties by the age of 11 as those from the wealthiest 20 per cent. Children and young people with a learning disability, who are statistically more likely to be in poorer families, are three times more likely than average to have a mental health problem. And children from African-Caribbean communities in the UK have parents



Steven Walker is former head of child and adolescent mental health at Anglia Ruskin University and author of Supporting Troubled Young People (Critical Publishing 2019) with higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide risk and are more likely than average to be diagnosed with schizophrenia.

This increases the likelihood that children in these communities will be over-represented in the numbers diagnosed with a mental health problem. The charity Young Minds recently published research that revealed 83% of respondents under 18 said the Pandemic had worsened their mental health. Self harm among young children and teenagers is increasing, along with depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have been depleted of resources for a decade during austerity, leaving staff overwhelmed and long waiting lists for help and support. Things were very bad before the Pandemic but as with the NHS, CAMHS have been left totally unprepared to face the consequences of a Pandemic.

Every government over the past 25 years has promised to either reduce or eradicate child poverty. They have all failed. Unless the root causes of children's increasing mental health problems are addressed, the current system is failing another generation of some of the most vulnerable children in Britain. They will become the adults of the future with mental health problems, at risk of ending up in the prison system, homeless, with relationship breakdowns, addicted to drugs and alcohol, or ending their own lives. It does not have to be this way. c

## NHS on the table

Despite a recent statement from the Health secretary **Jan Savage** sees plenty of scope for further NHS sell offs in trade deals

ost trade deals give extensive new powers to multinational corporations, many of which already have interests in the NHS. The privatisation of NHS clinical services has been growing, at least in the English NHS, since the notorious Health and Social Care Act (2012). One consequence, in trade terms, is that as NHS services are no longer entirely publicly provided, it's questionable whether they are "supplied in the exercise of governmental authority". This ambiguity makes them vulnerable to inclusion in trade deals, a vulnerability exacerbated by the trend for trade negotiations to use a 'negative' approach: anything not explicitly excluded from a deal will be part of it. On top of which, if NHS services become part of a trade deal including an investor protection measure, such Investor-State Dispute as Settlement, any privatisation is effectively locked in.

The government has given numerous assurances that the NHS is "not on the table" in new trade deal negotiations. What a surprise then, at least to the less cynical among us, to find that NHS services have been included in the recently signed Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) between the UK and EU. It raises the question of quite what the government understands by 'the NHS'.

The TCA excludes hospital services, ambulance services and residential health facilities, but many other sectors (for example, general medical, dental, specialist medical, nursing, physiotherapy and paramedical services) are now 'liberalised'.

Besides ensuring that EU-based companies have market access to the NHS, the TCA contains a commitment to 'national treatment', meaning that investors and service suppliers, whether from the EU or UK, will be afforded the same treatment. The deal also includes provisions for 'no local presence'. In other words, foreign-based service providers and investors will not need to maintain a subsidiary in the UK and so won't be subject to domestic regulations, such as labour laws or tax regulations, and thus avoid paying taxes.

Trade deals can have additional, if less direct, effects on the NHS beyond opening up the market for its services. Although a trade agreement with the US seems less imminent now, negotiations under Trump indicated that the US's powerful pharmaceutical lobby wants to end the UK's national price control on medicines and extend patent protection on new drugs. This would lead to a massive rise in the costs of medicines in the UK, to the point that the NHS could become unsustainable. Biden's attitude is unclear. but we know that his election campaign received considerable funding from Big Pharma.

The UK needs to negotiate a significant number of trade agreements to try to offset the economic damage of Brexit and this tends to position it as supplicant in trade negotiations. As such, there's a risk that, in order to secure a deal, the UK will agree to reduce important standards that impact on the NHS (such as those governing food safety and workers' rights).

There's additionally a growing impetus for new agreements to include a chapter on digital trade. This impetus comes particularly from the big technology companies, many of which have their sights set on the NHS. This is not least because the NHS holds one of the world's most valuable stores of data, an unprecedented resource for research and product development. This data also has huge potential value for insurance companies if, as some fear, the NHS is moving towards a healthcare system based on private health insurance. It's recently become apparent that Big Tech is already gaining access to NHS data – for example, there have been unprecedented transfers of patients' confidential health information (without consent) to companies such as Google and Amazon involved in the response to Covid-19.

The significance of digital trade is growing just as the NHS is undergoing a restructuring that's heavily dependent on digital services. For example, the NHS is increasingly reliant on digitally provided consultations and digital support for decision making, risk stratification and service planning derived from vast population data sets. This digi-

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US Big Pharma ready to muscle in for NHS contracts

talised NHS offers huge new opportunities for Big Tech, and already a large number of multinationals, such as McKinsey, IBM and Deloitte, are accredited to provide the NHS with an extensive range of digital support services.

If the NHS is included in trade agreements, the Big Tech companies will make use of digital trade rules to gain greater access to the NHS and more opportunities to exploit NHS data with fewer safeguards. For example, trade deal provisions are likely to include a ban on data being stored and processed in its country of origin (as is the case with the recently signed agreement with Japan). Significantly, if NHS data is transferred off shore, its treatment will be governed by the rules of the country where it is held.

It's also fairly standard for deals to include provisions that ban the mandatory disclosure of source code (the instructions that control a computer programme). Lack of access to source code can potentially have lethal consequences for patients.

There have been attempts by members of both parliamentary Houses to amend draft legislation (such as the Trade Bill) to provide legal protection for the NHS in future trade deals. So far, Conservatives – with their significant majority - have voted against all such efforts. The NHS really is "on the table".

## Finding my feminism?

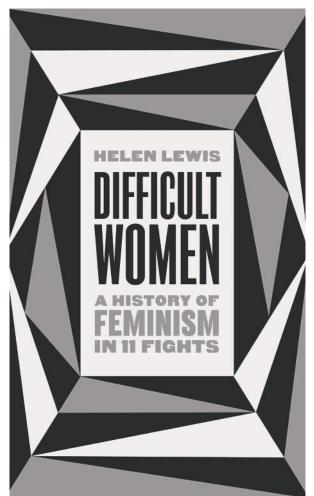
### Mary Southcott explores her feminism through the writings of two younger women

Recently a trans friend called me a TERF. I could not spell it let alone knew it meant trans exclusionary radical feminist. I could hardly claim to be a radical feminist and denied transphobia. I knew about first wave feminism, even writing that women supporters of voting reform were the New Suffragettes, but had lost touch. Young feminists seem pro Trans and to want their mother or granny feminists out of their way.

Equality, surely the most important value for Labour, is about diversity not about sameness. That battle has not been won. Even though Labour did so badly in 2019 we have more women MPs. We need to change the political culture to a more feminised one of cooperation, consensus seeking and problem solving, and better arguments for voting reform than mathematical precision. Instead of taking sides in a binary choice we can support both trans and women's rights. I needed to read more recent books than Germaine Greer and Lynne Segal.

When Helen Lewis left the New Statesman for the Nation, I cancelled my subscription which I had had from 1975 after meeting Tom Driberg, the first man in politics who listened to me rather than flirted. In the evening he went out with the men. I had always thought the Statesman gender specificity was rather 19th century. It did however publish a letter I wrote when a candidate parliamentary attacked the ideas of Tactical Voting 87. That led to my being interviewed by John Underwood and Terry Dignan. When Charter 88 arrived, it published my article on Electoral Reform and Me. I have changed my mind about tactical voting although I was right that Labour had more support than the Liberals who targeted Labour not Tories in Bristol West. Clifton Labour members who may never have been in St Paul's voted tactically for George Ferguson and did again in 2012 when he became Bristol's first elected mayor, as an Independent.

I read Helen Lewis' take on



feminism, imagining she chose her title from Ken Clarke's reference to Theresa May as "a bloody difficult woman". I wished she

## Equality is about diversity not about sameness

had kept the "Bloody" but her subtitle "A History of FEMINISM in 11 Fights" gives the structure of her book. Now she is everywhere, reading her book on Radio 4 and the paperback is out in March. I was pleased she selected Maureen Colquhoun, the first open Lesbian MP, in her FIGHT Number 7, LOVE. Maureen has just died, but long ago after she was de-selected she was in favour of voting reform.

When second wave feminism began, I was approached to go to

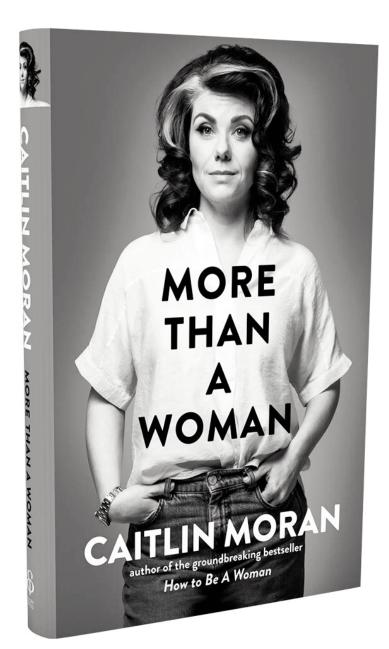
meetings but said, a bit resonant of Oscar Wilde, that there were Liverpool meetings most evenings and weekends. I left for Cyprus where I had to confront my cultural attitude to dowries, like fathers buying their daughters' husbands.

Cyprus had little social housing before a third of their population became displaced. When I arrived in 1971 it was remarkable how high home ownership was and I could not think that the dowry system helped women who basically had bought their husbands. However, what I realised later was that even the poorest families give their daughters a dowry house, even if the parents had to move out of their own homes or to small accommodation. The safeguard for women was they owned the house not their men. So, if their men died or philandered or gambled their money away or inflicted domestic violence, a theme of Lewis' book in the section on SAFETY, the man was turfed out, not the wife.

I am not advocating dowries but it puts women and families in a better position than a refuge.

Three things woke me up to feminism. The joy that greeted the birth of my brother. Secondly, a meeting at the women's centre in Piccadilly in 1975, heavily pregnant, with a husband left outside, (I now understand the need for safe spaces), and the walls all posters of Fight 10: ABORTION and abuse in Fight 6: SAFETY identifying Erin Pizzey. Thirdly, having two daughters, trying to ensure the same prejudices I encountered were not repeated. But one woman taught me about feminism. I resisted going to the women's section but defended the right to self organise. Ellen Malos had set up a refuge in her home and written the counter arguments to Wages for Housework in the Politics of Housework.

I met Selma James, the idol of Helen Lewis, in her role in Wages for Housework. Often described as CLR James' wife, as women often are, she appears in FIGHT 9, TIME. She was depicted in the Small Axe series of films by Steve McQueen. Do we judge people differently depending on what stage



of their lives and ours we meet them. By the time I went to Greenham I had caught up with feminism circa 1983. Each FIGHT has a quote: "My grandmother didn't have the vote, my mother didn't have the pill and I don't have the time."

Helen's first fight was DIVORCE which surprised me from a young journalist. No fault divorces and Baroness Brenda Hale get a mention. The second fight was THE VOTE and Annie Kenney. In Fight 3: SEX, Marie Stopes whose book Married Love, Lewis thinks "bonkers" but hopes "for more women, sex won't be such a fucking let down". Fight 4: is PLAY where she explains why many women don't care about sport because time and space are needed. Clearly this is changing as is WORK her fifth fight. Lewis starts with Grunwick and Javaben Desai, and via Jack Dromey, to Harriet Harman, Barbara Castle, and the Equal Pay and Equality Acts. That leads us to Fight 8: EDUCATION and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and teachers.

Another of her difficult people is "tough, mouthy and uncompromising", Julie Bindel who found herself on "the unfashionable side of the two most divisive and heated issues ... transgender issues and prostitution". Bindel attacked Caitlin Moran's best selling How to be a Woman as "fun feminism which should be consigned to the rubbish bin". Helen found herself attacked as "white, straight, and cis-gendered, the top of the feminist food chain in terms of intersectionality" for defending Caitlin Moran, and clearly she had a bruising time on social media where attacking women has become fair game.

Caitlan Moran is definitely a 'difficult woman'. Her *More Than A Woman* also came out in 2020. It is a series starting with *How to*  Helen Lewis, Difficult Women: A History of FEMINISM in 11 Fights, Jonathan Cape, 2020, p/b March 2021, Penguin. Caitlin Moran, More Than A Woman, Ebury Press, 2020 *build a Girl*, the film of which was released last year. Her book How to be a Woman is claimed as the game-changing take on feminism, the patriarchy and becoming a woman.

There could be no such different books. Helen's has an index, a structure but both are remarkably honest, funny and likeable. Caitlin's is disorganised into hours in one day, reminding me only slighty of Solzhenitsyn's take on Ivan Denisovich or the Beatles' Day in the Life. Its Contents page takes us from 7 am to 7 am the following day ending with A Woman's 'If' apologies to Rudyard Kipling. "If you can beat the truth

### These women are not only funny they are worth reading

you've spoken Mansplained back to you ten minutes after everyone else ignored it".

In among her discursive thinking she has a few political gems like it is childcare not housework that is a job and should be paid for, pointing out that for some golf is tax deductable. She also makes the argument for liking ones body. When Clare Short once said "we all want to be prettier", I said I didn't. I found it a distraction which I used to ignore. I would like to be alive to read Caitlin when she deals with ageism and being called "the elderly". She brought me more understanding of Double Income parents sharing time with children whereas I took time off work to be with my daughter, time only shared with the Open University and shopping for some in the street.

I should have read Caitlin's other books before this one. She argues that when you are under 30 it is all about you but in middle age, 44 at the time of writing, it is about others, the fourth emergency service for family and friends. Her stream of chattering uses words I have never seen written down, certainly not in her Times column. She discusses what any average women would encounter, all the time thinking, linking, exploring ideas. Christopher Hitchens said that women weren't as funny as men, his colossal misjudgement along with the Iraq war. These women are not only funny they are worth reading.

Did I catch up with feminism? No. Will I bother? Perhaps not. Still a feminist, YES. **C** 

## The State of the Union

**Gary Younge** looks at what influence the left will have now and sees a political resolution of the American Civil War still being played out



#### What won it for Biden and Harris?

The presidential election was always going to be fairly close. Looking at the past six or seven elections Republicans have only won a majority once since 1992. So they are a declining force.

Electorally there were two principal reasons why the Democrats won by nearly seven million votes and in the key swing states.

Firstly, Trump's failure to secure white suburban women, who were first of all upset at his inability to functionally engage with Covid and secondly given the political turmoil, mostly relating to Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the riot, felt less safe with his posturing than with an accommodation to Trump. Trump lost that gambit.

Second, was the significant mobilisation of the Black vote in certain areas and who had previously been somewhat ambivalent or indifferent when Hilary Clinton stood. Certainly in Georgia, and other places, we saw a significant uptick in registration of Black voters during BLM campaigns. What is often true of a second term, is that the election was a referendum on the sitting president. It was a case of people voting primarily against Trump rather than for Biden. We saw the same in 2004, when I was reporting. I didn't meet many voting for John Kerry, they were voting against George Bush.

We also have to take into account the weird campaigning due to Covid. The usual grammar of politics didn't come through. The conventions, the debates (Trump refused to turn up to one), the rallies that usually secure the mass news coverage, just did not happen.

So it was a particular kind of campaign. Biden was not a very good candidate. We could make the same point with Obama. What would he have looked like without rallies?

#### What was the significance of the Squad and the younger democratic left in the success of the Biden/Harris ticket?

This was the first election I'd not been in the US since 1996. My reading from here (Hackney) is Gary Younge is a journalist, author and professor of Sociology at the University of Manchester. His last book was Who Are We? How identity politics took over the world (Penguin) that certainly in many places they were able to mobilise the base. It starts with Bernie [Sanders]. Unlike with Hilary Clinton there was not such a huge tail off from Bernie supporters. They voted loyally for the Democrats. The Squad is an iteration of that. They understood the Democratic Party is the pathway for change. The result was significantly fortified by the left forces in the Democratic Party. We shouldn't forget how close Bernie came. He was running away with it. It was only the solidification of all anti-Bernie forces and support from older African Americans, who are in some ways the most risk averse electorally, that made Biden possible. He was coming fifth and sixth, hopelessly adrift. He emerged as the most viable unifying anti-Bernie candidate. What's yet to be seen is the degree to which he'll negotiate with those other forces.

Biden has a lot of credibility with the Black base. BLM activists are not the same. People are watching and waiting. He went into the contest with very little credibility. This is a man who introduced the Crime Bill that led to massive incarceration of black people; who left Anita Hill out to dry in the Clarence Thomas hearings. Kamala Harris's signature moment was when on platforms with Biden she was attacking him for opposing bussing. So he had some work to do.

All of this comes in the framework of he's not Trump.

An awful lot can be gained through symbolism: particularly in his appointments. Bill Clinton was a nightmare for Black America. We saw a huge increase in incarcerations; his welfare bill, black women pushed into poverty. Yet symbolically, he knew the words to the negro national anthem, he was a 'southern boy'. So he remained one of more popular presidents even though he did terrible things.

The BLM activists are likely to take a critically supportive stance. They will exact a significant price for support and will engage in making sure they get change.

There was quite a significant push back. Democrats did not do well in the Congressional races. This tells us that it was Trump that lost rather than the Democrats that won it.

In the first call out of House of Representatives there was significant push back from Democrats in more moderate areas, attacking BLM for its 'defund police' slogans. This cost them dearly. So there is a battle going on within the Democrats. A fight is on over the degree of influence the left should have and central to those left demands is anti-racism.

#### To what degree did the insurrection pose a real threat to American democracy?

American democracy was in peril long before the rabble turned up. They would have gone to K Street if they really wanted big change, that's where the lobbyists are.

I spend a lot of time thinking about this. It was an insurrection against a notionally democratic institution. It was timed to prevent the certification of the election result. But it was not a coup or even a coup attempt. It was not a realistic attempt to take over the organisation of the state. Once in Congress they had no idea what to do. They weren't serious about taking over state power.

Think of Fidel Castro's arrival at Sierra Maistra. A lot of coups or insurrections often start as ridiculous events that are then sharpened up.

It wasn't a mass event. But this does not mean it wasn't serious. The

ambivalence of the police force was telling, they did not take it seriously or take it as a threat, unlike many other demos, especially Black Lives Matter protests.

There is one counterfactual scenario worth contemplating. If Bernie had won, what would that crowd have looked like? People would have been invoking socialism. We saw over here what happened with Corbyn. It's not fanciful to think Bernie could have won the election then those sections of the media that decided to be outraged with Trump might have said 'well we are becoming a bit like Venezuela'. A very different scenario could have emerged.

American democracy has long been a myth. Look at the numbers excluded from voting, the gerrymandering, the money, all of that. Even the symbolic nature of it is in peril. Most Americans like to think of themselves as a democracy.

#### Trump may be down, but Trumpism is not. What is the nature of the threat and can it be repulsed?

Trumpism is really a caffeinated version of what we've seen for a long time. Trump cohered, amplified and embodied a trend in American mainstream right politics. It predated him and it will survive him.

These are still the death throes of the American civil war. There was a military resolution but there was never a political resolution with equality and a challenge to white supremacy. We are increasingly approaching the moment when white people will be in a minority. If you look at where and how Trump lost, it's very graphic. In Arizona, Nevada, even majority black or black minority major cities like Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Detroit, Atlanta and Milwaukee Trump lost. So when the right say the election was stolen from us there is a sense in which that is so. White supremacists think these people shouldn't be voting.

It was telling that the day before the Senate vote Georgia elected its first black representative and its first Jewish senator ever, and both Democrats. Kamala Harris, a mixed race daughter of Indian and Jamaican migrants has the casting vote. This happened in the heart of the Confederacy, so you get a sense of why that insurrection took place. It's not a new anxiety, but as time goes on the numbers of non-white voters keep growing. Most kids under the age of 16 are not white. Soon they will be early voters.

**Gary Younge was** 

in conversation

with Mike Davis

and Phil

Vellender

My sense is that things will get

worse before they get better. That intense demographic march will continue. The question is also how it plays out in the Republican party.

Trump was never even majoritarian. It was a very narrow eye of the needle that he was threading. With each year that becomes less and less possible. Increasingly places up for grabs are old Republican strongholds. These are the death throes of the first civil war.

Someone has to lose. Actually white supremacy has to lose. That's a long, painful, hard challenge to make. I don't think the Democratic Party is up to that challenge. My hope is that Biden ends up like LBJ [LB Johnson]. LBJ was not considered a hopeful in terms of radical progressive politics. He steps into Kennedy's shoes, and decides he is going to go for it. That's when you have the most radical changes, they all happened in the five years of his presidency.

So there is an opportunity.

It's also an opportunity for the right. There is a lot to play for. The Alt-right become bigger fish in a smaller pond with Trump gone, and Bannon gone. The imprimatur, the authentication of the state is now missing. They are fully outsiders once again.

#### So what of the succession?

Somebody like Trump could emerge, particularly if Biden fails, if there is no improvement in the lives of many people. Trump followed Obama for a reason. A significant number of white Americans were made anxious by this mixed race man of immigrant background whose father was a Muslim. He also failed to deliver. He stopped things getting worse but 'yes we can' become 'yes we tried'.

#### What are the prospects for Biden/Harris to turn the tide and stop a return of Trump or Trumpism?

A lot depends on the left, the Squad and the degree to which they can exercise political force. It's going to be about the extent to which Biden and Harris are aware of a strong political flank to their left. That flank did not really exist under Obama or Clinton. Or if did exist it did not make itself felt. So it's about the degree to which they can hold the leadership's feet to fire. The extent to which they can make inroads into the source of discontent. This is primarily about the economic problems that made Trumpism possible.

## **View from the European left**

**Josef Weidenholzer** says the UK departure from the EU should not be the start of blame games

rom its early beginnings the European project was following the mode of an 'Ever Closer Union'. Gradually more and more national responsibilities became common competencies shared by a growing number of Member States. It was commonly embraced as an obviously irreversible process.

For Eurosceptics this was always hard to take. David Cameron particularly focussed on this issue when he negotiated his 'EU reform deal' ahead of the referendum. 'Remain' should mean yes to the EU, however not on the 'Ever Closer' ticket. Mission impossible, too vague and not an argument good enough to convince people against Brexit. 'Leave' promised a clear and final cut. As it turned out this was not achievable. The impact of being a member in the bloc for almost half a century could not be undone with one stroke. As a matter of its EUmembership the UK's DNA had become substantially European. It took over four years to finalize Brexit and the solution reached was unsatisfactory.

Even the Brexit-hardliners had to realize that this common heritage could not be conjured away. They are meanwhile caught in an 'Ever Looser' trap.

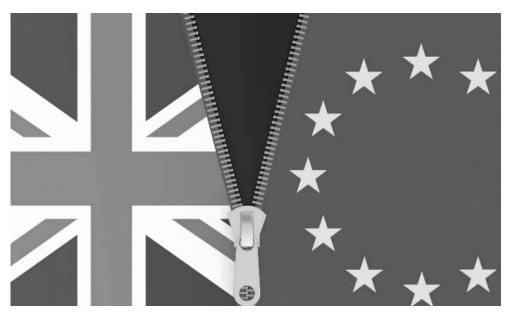
Since Brexit was not always following pragmatic arguments this fight against the EU past becomes sometimes rather irrational.

The future of the relations between EU and UK should not follow these pathways. Unfortunately a series of blame games is looming, as the vaccine battle already exhibits,

Progressives on both sides should do our utmost not to fall into this habit. Nationalists and right-wing populists will use every shortcoming to fuel their political business model full of distortions. Some merely satisfy the interests of their foreign donors primarily interested in weakening European cooperation based on shared values.

The Left must concentrate on solving problems in contrast to the Populists deliberately fabricating them. Our driving force is hope not fear.

The European Left, no matter whether inside or outside the EU, has to become seriously engaged with real issues: an environment securing survival of mankind, an



international order respecting multilateralism and non-violence, safeguarding equality and non-discrimination at all levels, a just society caring for everyone and of course universal appreciation of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

This requires international cooperation - on a global level and obviously in our geographic neighbourhoods. On a European level the progressive family provides a set of well-established institutions and think-tanks such as PES, ETUC, FEPS or Solidar. These bodies should be used as platforms for ideas exchange and to develop joint activities such as tackling the rising global threat of the far right, developing new and fair mechanisms to manage migration, combating tax evasion and the undermining of social standards.

Regardless of being a member of the Union, 'Social Europe' must be at the core of every Progressive. Not having delivered on this essential issue was one of the most deplorable shortcomings of Social Democracy when it was determining EU politics at the turn of the century. This failure contributed substantially to the rise of the Far Right over the last decade. The Left lost significant parts of its electorate because people felt neglected and ignored.

To bring about Social Europe means engaging in new answers to the fundamental technological changes which entirely transformed working conditions and labour rela-

Josef Weidenholzer was an Austrian MEP tions. Solidarity is always needed but it has to be organized in a different way. One of the consequences of the coronavirus crisis is that we need more and efficient public services. Progressives have to deliver in this respect and build on the experiences made throughout their own history. Europe offers a wide range of good practices even the US Left is looking at. Answers to the new challenges cannot be found through the nationalistically biased attitude of exceptionalism, they have to come from cross-national endeavours appreciating diversity and otherness.

Our common history - having the UK as a highly valuable member of EU, should not be in vain. It makes us ready to master the truly historic tasks ahead of us. Identifying common problems and trying to find progressive answers could bring us even closer than ever.

After Brexit the EU did not break apart as its enemies were forecasting, although its membership decreased it became closer and the level of integration became deeper even moving towards common debt insurance.

It is getting more and more evident that the EU is a long-term project with good prospects. It can prevail without the UK. Vice versa it is not that clear.

Nevertheless Europe will always be a torso without Britain. It has been decisively shaped by its contribution and this will not vanish.

The left should take the lead in learning from the mistakes.

## **Covid hits Palestinians hard**

**Sybil Cock** on a report that brands Israel an apartheid state

partheid, a term coined during white rule in South Africa, is defined by the International Criminal Court as an "institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group."

The recent report from B'Tselem, Israel's most important human rights NGO, that labels Israel as an apartheid state is significant.

'There is one regime governing the entire area and the people living in it, based on a single organizing principle,' said B'Tselem.

This will come as no surprise to anyone who has followed events in Palestine, especially those who have visited the West Bank. The wall, the checkpoints, the segregation, the house demolitions and the brutality of the military and settlers are all in shockingly plain sight.

The pandemic is hitting Palestine hard, and there are ucrrently no vaccines. Despite the hugely trumpeted success of the Israeli vaccine operation, those that live under its occupation are not sharing the success. Israeli settlers, living deep in the West Bank, are, however, being vaccinated.

Before the pandemic, 68% of the Gaza population was food insecure and this is increasing dramatically. Healthcare systems in both Gaza and the West Bank have been ravaged by years of occupation.

Palestine activists have been arguing the case for naming Israel as an apartheid state for years. A UN report endorsed this view a year ago, and researchers from South Africa have rigorously established the facts.

As respected Jewish scholar Tony Klug wrote in the Guardian recently:

'Israel's only defence against the accusation of apartheid is that its hold over the West Bank is a temporary occupation. If this is not its case, it doesn't have a case. Even if it were its case, after some 53 years it would be running perilously thin.'

The bones of the argument are these:

First, Palestinians in the Occupied West Bank live under military occupation. There is no freedom of movement for them, and they live under military law. The limited powers of the Palestine Authority, which is an 'interim government' are wholly constrained by Israel. Any Israeli soldier can stop and search even the highest-ranking officials. Human rights abuses, including the arrest and killing of unarmed civilians, including children, are daily occurrences. Israelis in the West Bank (settlers living on stolen land), on the other hand, have full Israeli citizenship rights.

Second, Palestinians in Gaza are under siege. The strip is overcrowded and surrounded by Israel and Egypt. The area of the Mediterranean in which Gazans can fish unmolested by the Israeli navy is tiny. Gaza is an open-air prison.

Third, Palestinians in East Jerusalem (captured by Israel in 1967) are stateless and at constant risk of losing their residency in the city. 35% of land in East Jerusalem has been confiscated for settler use, and Israel is open in its desire to remove as many Palestinians as possible. Forced displacement, house demolitions and settler violence are daily occurrences.

Four, Palestinian citizens of Israel face massive economic discrimination and restrictions on where they can live. Although they can vote, the Israeli state, with the recent Nation State law, has codified apartheid: "the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people."

Five, Nearly 6 million Palestinians are registered as refugees by the UN. They live in dire conditions in camps across the Middle East. A million more are unregistered. They are all seeking the Right of Return to the lands stolen from them by Israel in 1948 or 1967. Every Jew in the world has the right to 'return', to go and live in Israel.

So, why does B'tselem's intervention matter? B'tselem does not even support the Palestinian Right of Return. It does not acknowledge that the state of Israel was founded on separatism in 1948. And, of course, Palestinians have been saying Israel is an apartheid state for decades, based on their daily lives.

They are listened to because they are Israeli, and very clearly a Human Rights group. Their report gained some publicity in the mainstream media, leading to a Guardian editorial which essentialSybil Cock (East

London) is an

**Palestine** 

Solidarity

Campaign

**NEC** member of



Palestinians not sharing in the success of Israel's vaccine programme

ly endorsed B'tselem's view.

But it is important for another reason. The TUC acknowledged Israeli apartheid in September, extending the possibilities for unionbased campaigning for Palestine.

All the big trades unions are nationally affiliated to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, which has over 60 active local branches. We have had some recent successes:

The campaign to get Local Government Pension funds to divest from companies complicit in the Occupation gained a major victory as East Sussex Pension Fund agreed to divest from Elbit Systems, Israel's largest private arms manufacturer. Elbit makes drones which were among those that killed 164 children in Gaza in 2014.

Tory Education minister Williams' attempt to force Universities to adopt the deeply flawed IHRA working definition of antisemitism took a severe hit when the UCL Academic Board decided that the definition is 'not fit for purpose' and risks conflating anti Zionism with antisemitism. The IHRA has been extensively used to shut down discussion on Palestine in universities, local authorities and elsewhere.

## New times, old delusions

Dave Lister on simplistic internationalism

buld we talk about "handwringing" about the Holocaust the Atlantic or Slave Trade? Clearly not, so how can it be justifiable to use it in relation to the murder of half a million Syrians by the Assad regime and their Russian allies. Clearly fewer people have died in Syria than in the aforementioned examples but massively more than in for example, the bombing of Gaza, against which the Stop the War campaign rightfully marched in protest. More also than in the Saudi bombing of Yemen, which Mike Phipps again rightfully castigates'.

This was my opening response to a review article by Phipps of an Open Labour pamphlet. I acknowledged Phipps often makes useful points in his articles and that he had in fact made some in this one, but I added that there were also some highly questionable points in it, use of the term 'handwringing' being one.

My more detailed critique of the failure of the Left in general to campaign against the mass murder in Syria can be found in my article 'Don't Stop the War Coalition' in Chartist 304.

I also referred to what I considered to be some fallacies in Mike Phipps's points about previous interventions. His account is much too simplistic. The intervention in Iraq was always unjustifiable, although if Saddam had remained in power there would also have been bad consequences but probably not on the scale that occurred. However, the intervention in Libya is not so easy to dismiss, as Phipps does citing Labour's 2019 manifesto, which, he says, "explains how military intervention, for example in Libya, worsened security across Africa, accelerating the refugee crisis." My alternative view on Libya is that whichever decision had been made would have been equally dreadful. Not to intervene would have left the Libyan people at the mercy of the Gaddafi regime and there would have been a bloodbath, whilst the intervention has left the country in a mess with civil war and extreme instability. Similarly, if Labour MPs under Miliband had voted for intervention in Syria and it had happened there would in all



Raqqa, Syria- the Left must not ignore the complexities behind conflicts

probability have been very bad consequences. However, not intervening has led to mass murder on an unacceptable scale.

There seems to be a view in sections of the Left that military interventions in other countries are always wrong. However, if this is so, should we not condemn George Orwell and, for that matter, the International Brigades for intervening militarily in the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s to fight fascism?

In more recent times, as many readers will remember, the Armed Forces Council inflicted a reign of terror in Sierra Leone in the 1990s. Thousands of civilians were killed and large numbers of amputations were also conducted. Tony Blair's Labour Government sent a British force to bolster a UN operation that was on the point of losing control of Freetown to the various militias that controlled most of the country and had taken hundreds of peacekeepers hostage. There was no discernible strategic or commercial interest for Britain in this action and it was surely a perhaps rare case of Robin Cook's ethical foreign policy being carried out in practice.

Arguably UN-led military intervention in Bosnia again in the 1990s could have saved huge numbers of Muslim lives. In Srebrenica for example 8000 Muslims were murdered by Serb units under the command of Ratko Mladic and huge numbers of women and girls were

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

This article is an expanded version of a piece submitted to LabourHub in **December**, which they did not publish. It was written in response to an article by Mike Phipps, a member of the Briefing editorial board, entitled 'New times, old delusions'. reviewing an Open Labour pamphlet **A Progressive** Foreign Policy for *New Times*' by Dr **Harry Pitts and Professor Paul** Thompson.

raped. Readers may remember that Ken Livingstone called for troops to go in "as many as it takes and for as long as it takes".

In 1998 Yugoslav/Serbian forces attacked the Muslim population of Kosovo and initiated a programme of ethnic cleansing. Lessons had been learnt and NATO launched air strikes against Serbian military targets in March 1999. By June NATO and Yugoslavia had signed a peace treaty resulting in the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces and the return of nearly one million ethnic Albanians and a further 500,000 people who had been expelled from Kosovo.

My conclusions are that, firstly, we on the Left should not only react when the US or Britain or Israel murder defenceless civilians. True internationalism is principled and must extend to all peoples, not a selected few.

Secondly, every foreign intervention must be considered on its merits. In some cases, eg. Iraq, they should be opposed with all guns blazing metaphorically speaking. Where they have prevented massive bloodshed and had an apparently successful outcome they should surely be supported. There are also going to be cases, eg. Libya, where the issues are far from clear-cut. Above all we need to accept that the world is a complex place and all scenarios deserve a thoughtful and compassionate response, not a narrow sectarian outburst. c

## A socialist recovery from Covidstricken capitalism?

Bryn Jones considers partial prescriptions for human survival

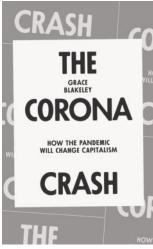
umanity is sick - but so is capitalism: self-isolating in some countries and convalescing in others. Elsewhere it could be said to be on life-support: dependent on the drugs of 'quantitative easing', furloughed workers and government subsidies. For radical commentators like Grace Blakely and Andreas Malm, only a transplant will transform the patient. British economist Blakely sees Covid climaxing a chronically overfinancialised economy. She prescribes pushing what has become a financial capital-corporate state hybrid towards a democratically accountable state system. On a different tack, Swedish ecologist Malm believes only radical surgery, comparable - in scope if not in methods - to Lenin and Trotsky's war communism can cure what he sees as a triple affliction: climate catastrophe, Covid pandemics and neo-colonial abuse of the ecosphere.

Blakeley considers climate issues indirectly, for their political and economic potential in a democratically accountable Green New Deal. While Malm's deeper diagnosis sees inextricable and systemic links between climate, Covid and capitalist globalisation. His short book documents, in scrupulous detail, how corporate ravaging of (sub)tropical forest and savannah for minerals, timber and plantation land - precipitates zoonotic diseases and epidemics: defined

as those that spread from wildlife hosts to human populations. The recorded and potential list of zoonotics is daunting. Besides Covid19, we have had Aids, MERS, SARS, Zika virus - with 'avian flu' still a contender - amongst many other latent viruses hitherto confined to remote human communities and locations.

Deforestation, desperate local populations smuggling or eating threatened species, together with the world's most efficient carrier – air travel – have opened the fullest Pandora's Box of disease in world history. Malm compares the months it took the ancient world's plagues to travel across and between the trade routes of empires, with the weeks it took 'Spanish Flu' to globalise via steam ship technology; and now the few hours to carry Covid from Wuhan in China to London and New York. I would add that consumer capitalism's urhan concentrations of humans in mass transport and entertainment, retailing and 'hospitality' businesses present perfect hot spots for contagion.

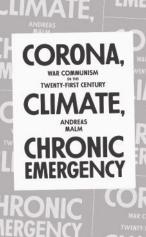
When commodities such as minerals and palm oil '...wild nature' including pathogens, is dragged into the global 'chain of value' says Malm; providing handy diagrams to illustrate the inter-connectedness. Both authors draw upon Marxian political economy traditions: Hilferding and Lenin in Blakely's explanation of the reap-



pearance and intensification of monopoly finance capital; and James O'Connor in Malm's argument that capitalist over-development is undermining its prime condition of healthy and available labour power. However, Blakely's prescriptions advance clas- $\operatorname{sic}$ Marxist insights further. After an excellent exposition of pre-Covid trends

towards parasitic dependence of corporate and financial capital on state monetary policy (the Bank of England went from being Thatcherism's guillotine to Osborne and Sunak's intensive care unit), Blakeley argues that the left can work from the Tories' punk Keynesianism and no longer needs to fight for state interventionism.

The once locked door to a state directed economy is now almost off its hinges. The left's demands, argues Blakely, must now be to add democratic accountability and popu-



**Grace Blakely:** 

Crash: How the

**Pandemic Will** 

**Andreas Malm:** 

Corona, Climate,

**Emergency: War** 

the 21st Century.

Communism in

(Both Verso;

The Corona

Capitalism.

Change

Chronic

2020)

lar participation via the totemic Green New Deal. Her prescription lacks specifics but the recent plea from the head of the CBI to have direct representation in government policy-making, together with unions and civil society organisations, may be a straw in a rising wind of change.

Malm however argues that, together with the defeat of social democratic possibilities such as the Sanders and Corbyn upsurges, the combined pandemic and climate crisis impacts are now so severe that 'gradualism' is obsolete.

Instead Malm evokes the war communism to which Lenin resorted and Trotsky managed. Besieged on all sides and deprived of critical resources the infant Soviet state commandeered labour and requisitioned business resources to re-stabilise the economy and end the civil war. Malm admits that his 'War Communism' prescription is more of an analogy and metaphor than a precise model. In Britain, appeals for sacrifice and control for the collective good might chime better with the nation's ever-popular World War II nostalgia. As I have argued in previous Chartists, a warfooting state could rationalise Covid-spreading, carbon-spewing industries like aviation and redeploy workforces into green energy, medicine and care work.

The Covid emergency has plunged most of the world into a dark tunnel. No one, including these authors, knows in exactly what new terrain we will emerge. Nevertheless, please study both these books if you want a clearer light than the back to normal 'complacency of our current political leaders. Read Blakely to see how financialisation, aided by the pandemic, is bringing capitalist economies to the brink of state guardianship. Read Malm for a forensic explanation of the combined impacts and barbarism of climate trashing and zoonotic plagues. But don't look to either for road maps out of these interlinked crises. That book has yet to appear.

## **Structures of British racism**

### Don Flynn on three books that shine a light on Britain's racist immigration policy

hat is the source of the racism which is such an integral part of the immigration policies of the countries of the Global North? These three books\* should be on the essential reading list for anyone trying to find the answer to this question. On the face of it they share the same starting point: Britain (and presumably other developed countries with similar historical trajectories) became imbued with racism during the period of its 'primitive accumulation' of wealth during the years of trading in enslaved African people and rule over colonial possessions.

Yeo doesn't make this point central to his argument, though his references to postcolonial theorists suggest agreement with the proposition. What he does do is set out the ways in which racism runs through the structure of British immigration controls using the evidence that accrues from his work as one of the much excoriated 'activist lawyers' so detested by the Tory establishment. From his work as a barrister specialising in this area Yeo is able to explain how unjust and discriminatory policies infiltrate the system. From the hostile environment which arches over access to employment, through the right to rent and the use of public services, to government efforts to deport those who have been resident in the UK for many years. It includes the obstacles placed before family reunion, the multiple vulnerabilities of migrant workers, the cruel treatment of refugees, and the recent curtailment of British citizenship exemplified in the Windrush scandal.

His real insight hinges on the direction which immigration law and policy have taken as it strives to become totally comprehensive in managing all aspects of the lives of migrant people and their communities. This has led to new dimensions of complexity in the rules, expanding their volume in a short time from a succinct 80 pages to well over a thousand. For Yeo this is ultimately the reason why the system is broken, but also why there is some hope, albeit faint, that it can be fixed. The starting point, he argues, is dealing with newcomers as people who are on a road to settlement and citizenship of the country and making sure

the rules steer them as efficiently as possible to that end.

### Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theorists like Nadine E1-Enany, would largely reject this possibility that a system like UK immigration control could be fixed in any meaningful sense of the term. Making robust use of the concept of 'bordering' as a means to structure the hierarchies of immigration and citizenship status, she sees all immigration policy as a continuation of the methods used to sustain the

subject status of people as developed and used during the period of colonialism. Her argument is an important riposte to liberal theorists of the stature of John Rawls and Michael Walzer, who assert a moral right on the part of the governments of the overdeveloped nations to deny entry to immigrants on the grounds that they have not contributed to the social system that sustains the prosperity of their populations. On the contrary, she insists that the wealth that underpins the surfeits that exist in these countries has been obtained from the exploitation of the labour of colonial subjects and the physical removal of resources to support consumption by the populations of the Global North.

For El-Enany, the "Ideas and practices of racial ordering", having origins in the colonial era, are now "embedded in contemporary Dob Flynn is Chartist Managing Editor and founder of Migrants Rights Network articulations of immigration, asylum and nationality law." That may be so, but she is not inclined to see any change in the way cap-

italism itself functions as a consequence of moving on from this colonial era. The image she offers is one of a system which accumulates wealth in classical mercantilist fashion by piling up valuable stuff on lands exploited by imperialism and physically removing it to places where it can be used up by people imbued with the presumption of white supremacist privilege. Immigration control functions to prevent denizens of the creator countries following the wealth taken from them and denying them the chance to share in its enjoyment.

#### Modern capital-

This might be a forceful and not inaccurate statement about the injustice which immigration control entrails, but it does not help us understand the modern dynamics of the global capitalist system. We are now urged to understand the capitalism of these neoliberal times as a system which aims at accumulation by throwing everything into constant and irresistible motion, with value being captured by asset-holders able to profit from the market energies which keep the factors of production in constant movement. Is it likely that the swirling mess that constitutes the immigration policies of the world's wealthy nations arises from tensions produced by contradictory tendencies within modern capitalism. These work to simultaneously compel people into migration whilst also limit their options to the narrow purpose of

ism



LAW, RACE AND EMPIRE . NADINE EL-ENANY

serving the interests of capital accumulation.

Luke de Noronha offers some helpful ways to think through the issues which arise from this dilemma. Like Yeo his starting point is the concrete ways in which immigration policy gives rise to specific forms of harm. In common with El-Enany he traces the deep origins of its racism to the norms arising from managing populations native to the territories seized during the colonial period. He scrutinises the situation of individuals who have moved under the dispensations tolerating mobility but are now considered to be violating the

imperative of being useful to capital. In short, they are a group of people who have become eligible for deportation from the UK.

He makes a series of ethnographic studies of four men who had been deported to Jamaica - the country whose citizenship they nominally held after troubled years of teenage run-ins with the law in England. Claimed to be individuals who had failed in their duty to integrate into British society, de Noronha argues, on the contrary, they had integrated but into the subcultures of its diverse urban communities. He points out that British society is constantly generating social conditions which bring specific groups of people, such as the racialised urban poor, into friction with the police and other authorities. The racial structuring of this tension leads to more severe penalties being inflicted on black and ethnic minority people. The very worst outcomes are

inflicted on black and minority people who hold citizenship of another country.

This component of racial structuring is just part of the much bigger picture that de Noronha seeks to lay out. In an important section of his study he shows how the possibility of deportation is also determined by the relationship that the UK state has with the country of origin. Some countries are highly resistant to cooperation with the UK when it comes to accepting the return of individuals judged to be their citizens, having a different relationship to the UK state and the capacity to resist. Jamaica is not one of these countries and in fact has a whole system of cooperation with UK immigration authorities that facilitates the identification of individuals as Jamaicans and supports their return. Some of these measures of collaboration include community initiatives which operate within a rationale of recovery and empowerment. The standards of human rights themselves are shifted to smooth the way in which a person who has known only British society since childhood can be made to fit into a place where s/he has no

FIXING OUR BROKEN

**IGRATION SYSTEM** 

*Welcome to Britain* Colin Yeo Biteback Publishing, £20

COLIN

YEO

(*B)ordering Britain: Law Race and Empire Nadine EI-Enany* Manchester University Press £20

*Deporting Black Britons: Portraits of Deportation to Jamaica* Luke de Noronha Verso £16.99 network of support.

De Noronha suggests that this capacity for deportation might be contaminated by the legacy of colonialism. It is also structured by the fact of being two modern states which occupy different positions in the hierarchy of nations. Jamaica is no longer the place where cheap sugar is grown for the benefit of UK mega-corporations, and even its bauxite deposits have run low. It is now just another low middle income country which needs to keep on the best of terms with other states if it is to have any hope of survival. As de Noronha sardonically notes, the one thing worse than being exploited by capitalism is not being exploited by capitalism.

Deporting Black Britons situates the racism of immigration control in an eminently modern world whilst rightly accounting for its deeper origins in the colonial past. When it comes to considering strategies to bring about change the tensions and contradictions within the modern form of capitalism, rather than the legacies of its colonial past, are likely to be the best guide to the actions and mobilisations that will be needed.

FPORTIN

PORTRAILS OF DEPORTATION TO JAMAICA

Luke de Noronha

## **PR must be new normal**

**Mark Serwotka** says government mishandling of the pandemic underlines the case for electoral reform



he events of the past twelve months have fundamentally changed this country. Many of the norms that ran through our lives have been turned upside down and society will never be the same as it was before the pandemic. That same commitment to a new normal must now apply to our voting system too.

We've undoubtedly come a long way in the two centuries that have passed since dozens of men and women died at Peterloo protesting for the right to vote. This seismic event had a profound impact and in the wake of the pandemic, now is the time to continue the fight for a voting system that is truly representative.

Despite the tragic consequences of the Covid pandemic, the country has come together and united in the face of unprecedented challenges. From cleaners to nurses to supermarket workers, everyone has played their part in keeping the country going. This sense of fairness should extend to our voting system because, after everything we've been through, it simply isn't fair to persevere with a system that represents some groups in society and excludes others.

Research shows that people in the lower social grades, C2DE, are

more likely than those higher up - grades ABC1 - to say that the democratic system doesn't address their interests. Furthermore, those in the two highest social grades say they know more about politics and are more satisfied with the current political system, compared to other social groups. In essence, the further down the social grades, the lower the engagement and satisfaction with the state of politics in this country.

This should be a call to arms for progressives across the labour movement to make the case for proportional representation in its strongest terms yet. Working class people have the most to gain from a political system that better represents them and their interests and so electoral reform can play a pivotal role in addressing the problems that have plagued working communities for decades.

Proportional representation can also be the catalyst for much greater levels of political engagement, which isn't limited to putting a cross on a ballot paper every five years. A system that means every vote really does count will encourage people to get more involved in the political process and this can only be a good thing for the health of our democracy.

Other significant and deeply

divisive events over the past few years have brought electoral reform to the fore. From Brexit to the election of Donald Trump, truth in politics has become a dominant theme. A proportional system is one of the best tools we've got to cut through the disinformation and fake news that has become so prevalent and has eroded trust in politics to a new low.

I'm confident that had we used a proportional representation system in the December 2019 election, a Tory party that so frequently and brazenly lied to the electorate wouldn't have ended up with anything like an 80-seat majority. In the end, their deception was rewarded with a 7.4%increase in seats off the back of just a 1.3% increase in the vote share and won 56.2% of seats from 43.6% of the vote. The government's subsequent catastrophic handling of the pandemic has further highlighted the absurdity of our system and the need for urgent reform.



Mark Serwotka is General Secretary of the PCS union As we navigate our way out the pandemic, electoral reform should be at the forefront of our minds in the long road to recovery. If we are to heal the country's deep divisions and come out of the pandemic stronger, we must make sure that every single vote matters. **C** 

### **Holding pattern**

### Patrick Mulcahy

on a Guantanamo Bay set legal thriller

he Mauritanian is an odd, fact-based legal thriller. Throughout the film and without knowing the story in advance, you are never sure whether its subject, real-life Mauritanian detainee. Mohamedou Ould Slahi (Tahar Rahim), is entirely innocent. He had gone to Afghanistan to fight against Russian troops - we see him being trained at Camp Al Farouq, flashes of gunfire illuminating his face. An electrical engineer by trade – there is a brief reference to him putting

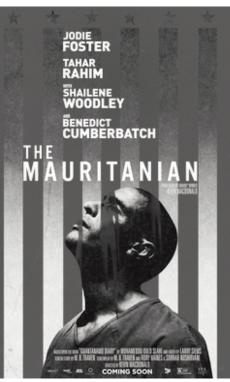
up a satellite dish – he is suspected of being a recruiter for Al Qaeda and was named as such by Ramzi bin al-Shibh, one of '9/11's attack coordinators. Mohamedou does not run when asked to accompany a pair of officials. He doesn't expect to be transported (via Afghanistan) to a detention facility housed on Cuba's Guantánamo Bay either, where he would spend fourteen years and two months of his life.

Director Kevin Macdonald (best known for the mountaineering documentary Touching the Void) doesn't construct a drama that portrays events that demonstrate his innocence, rather the attempts to free him because he has never been properly charged. The film is based on Mohamedou's prison diary, published in redacted form in 2015, but focuses on the unusual situation in

which neither prosecution nor defence has access to the facts. In the case of defence lawyer, Nancy Hollander (Jodie Foster, sporting matching red lipstick and nail polish, that contrasts strongly with her gun-metal grey hair), material presented to her from a Freedom of Information request is entirely redacted. The prosecution, Marine Corps lawyer Stu Crouch (Benedict Cumberbatch, with a thick American accent that restricts his ability to show depth) has only summaries to work with. The actual transcripts of Mohamedou's interrogations, 'MFRs' - Memos for the Record are classified as intelligence material, not to be produced in a court of law.

Because Mohamedou's brutal treatment is only shown in flashbacks, we don't fear for him in the present tense. One aspect of his torture, sexual humiliation, is cruel both to him and the female soldier forced to perform it. Throughout, Nancy and her colleague Teri (Shailene Woodley) are confident they can prove that there are no grounds to detain Mohamedou; they rely on his handwritten testimony (eventually published as his diary) to make their case.

At the start, we wonder whether Mohamedou is deceiving his lawyers – Nancy is joined by her



assistant, Teri (Shailene Woodley), ostensibly as translator. They have taken his case on a pro bono basis. In the film at least, Nancy doesn't care whether Mohamedou is innocent; she just wants to end arbitrary detention. In her words, she took the case for America.

The film privileges ideas over people. What we see – couched in safe flashbacks – is a system that relies on breaking people. Mohamedou's story, sadly, isn't exceptional. He was one of over 770 prisoners detained at Guantánamo but never convicted; of the eight convictions secured, three were overturned. Guantánamo demonstrates that torture doesn't guarantee actionable intelligence.

Foster shows us a woman who tries to insulate herself from feel-

ing; announcing her recent divorce, she shrugs it off. By contrast, Teri is empathetic and emotional. Having been Nancy's loyal companion, there is a point at which they are divided, and Nancy treats her cruelly.

Crouch is driven by the desire to avenge the death of a friend who died on United Airlines Flight 175, the second hijacked airplane flown into the World Trade Center. Pressured to secure a conviction, he realises that the case is deeply flawed. Cumberbatch

never plays him as the antagonist. Indeed, Crouch could just as easily have been the film's protagonist; he certainly loses a lot and in storytelling terms undergoes the biggest transformation. I think Macdonald and screenwriters Michael Bronner, Rory Haines and Sohrab Noshirvani made a mistake in not making Crouch the principal viewpoint character. But then under President Trump, America has moved on from seeking retribution. The Trump years were all about ideological isolationism for profit.

The film doesn't really make us see Guantánamo through Mohamedou's eyes, which really is its unique selling point – a first-hand account of life in the facility. This isn't a traditional prison movie where we empathise from the get-go with the prisoner's suffering. The film's main argument is that cruelty invali-

dates evidence. There are individual moments that work well, such as conversations between Mohamedou and another prisoner, 241, also known as Marseilles, the men divided by green tarpaulin, and some of the torture scenes have shock value - notably when a woman guard breaks down in front of Mohamedou only for the brutality to continue. Some of the humour works better. As Kent, the guardian of material that Nancy and Teri are allowed to view, David Fynn exudes pragmatic wit. Overall, The Mauritanian is a remote viewing experience that makes the case for the closure of Guantánamo without emotive force.

Subject to Covid-19 restrictions, *The Mauritanian* opens in UK cinemas in April.

### 'We Are the People'

Alice Carter on the German Right 'We are the People': The Rise of the AfD in Germany Penny Bochum Haus £7.99

Garmany's populist party, AfD (Alternative for Germany), was founded in 2013 by a group of economists and professors, as a reaction to the Eurozone bailout of Greece in the wake of the 2008-09 financial crisis. It soon moved rapidly to the right, attracting new leaders who used Nazi-era words, phrases and slogans, expounded anti-Semitic, xenophobic and racist

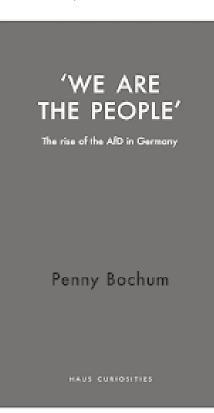
views, and worked to undermine the legitimacy of democratic centre parties. The AfD adopted many of the characteristics of populist parties across the world: it was nationalist and anti-immigrant and saw itself as representative of the 'pure' people against a 'corrupt' political elite. These views were reflected in the public and private pronouncements of its leaders, who introduced increasingly more extreme policies.

The party's policies in the 2017 federal elections included closing Germany's borders to end immigration (which it linked to terror and criminality, and which it claimed threatened the welfare state, pensions and health grants), introducing a system of referenda to assert the sovereignty of the German people and leaving the eurozone. The manifesto condemned feminism and encour-

aged women, with the support of tax breaks, to remain at home to bring up children.

Many of these changes in the AfD were driven by an organised faction called "Der Flügel" (The Wing), described as being both "neo-Nazi" and as "A party within a party". However, as Bochum demonstrates, it would be wrong to see the AfD just as a reborn neo-Nazi party. The success of the party and its ultra-nationalist policies is rooted in more recent concerns, not least disillusionment with globalisation, a loss of confidence in democracy, a sense of powerlessness, antiMuslim prejudice and anti-Semitism.

The book references several sociological and political research papers, which show that the AfD attracts support across Germany, and it is not confined to any one class, age group or socio-economic grouping. However, it is clear that its appeal is strongest in eastern Germany, where it is said the inhabitants start from the assumption of being the 'losers' of history, having been occupied by the Soviet Union after the war, and having suffered from decades of austere, authoritarian rule.



They lived in a closed society, isolated from immigration. When unification came, they felt like second-class citizens. All these feelings were compounded by a demographic crisis, as a quarter of the east's population (mostly the young) migrated to the west, leaving a declining birth rate, aging population, declining tax revenues and dwindling social infrastructure. The AfD tapped into these concerns and provided easy, nationalistic solutions, many of them centred on antiimmigration.

Bochum explains how the AfD drew support away from the mainstream centre parties in 2017, how it pursued a strategy of permanent provocation and confrontation to exploit people's fears and how, under Petry, the party resurrected a Nazi-era term: the Lügenpresse, or 'lying press'. As Bochum shows, populists benefit when centre parties are weak and divided. The political situation is more fragmented in Germany than at any time since the war. The mainstream parties are divided within themselves and the current coalition government has been weakened by disagreements, not least about immigration.

> The situation is pressing especially with new federal elections looming in September 2021. However, all is not lost. Bochum identifies internal divisions and factionalism within the AfD itself, including its own struggle with Der Flügel, its set-back in the 2018 European elections (when it lost electoral ground having misguidedly promoted a German "Dexit" at a time when the Brexit project had embroiled the UK) and its own financial scandals that damaged the credibility of its leaders.

> Bochum devotes the final chapter of her book to ideas of how to contain the AfD; solutions that she says "require courage and clarity". These are centred on pursuing a "progressive agenda" which is inclusive, speaks to voters, bridges divides and

addresses the decline in respect for political institutions, by telling the truth, being transparent and avoiding conflicts of interest. They include new government initiatives, investment in regional and local civic programmes, and civic education, to confront the problems that fuel populist support. Inequalities, especially in the east, need to be addressed.

Bochum ends optimistically, but it remains to be seen if mainstream German politicians respond effectively to the challenge of the AfD. The book is a well-written introduction to the subject and a relatively quick read.

## **Sport and Apartheid**

### Bob Newland on the Stop the Seventies Tour

#### Pitch Battles: Sport, Racism and Resistance Peter Hain and Andre Odendaal Rowman and Littlefield £25

This is the latest contribution to the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the success of the Stop the Seventies Tour campaign (STST). It is a collaboration between Peter Hain, the chair of STST and Andre Odendaal a firstclass South African cricketer and anti-Apartheid campaigner.

Peter is well known to political activists in the UK. Andre was a brave sportsman putting his career on the line to support the cause of multi-racial sport in Apartheid South Africa. He is the author of many books but is renowned as the person appointed by Nelson Mandela to transform Robbin Island from a terrible place of detention into a World Heritage site and the first Director of the Museum.

The book begins and ends with Black Lives Matter (BLM), linking a major historical battle in the fight against Apartheid with the ongoing struggles in the world today against institutionalised racism. It follows the authors' shared conviction that 'sport can no more be isolated from the ideological and political trajectories of society and globalisation than people can from the air and daily life around them'.

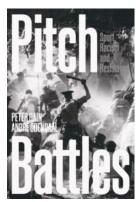
The book chronicles both personal journeys and the history of STSC and the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC). It tells wonderful stories of a young campaigner who hijacked the Springbok's coach loaded with the team four hours before a match and a young woman 'Mata Hari' who befriended the Springbok players to gain insider knowledge.

We learn of the history of cricket in South Africa from the days of Cecil Rhodes and how sport (white), cricket and rugby became a pillar propping up morale in the beleaguered racist state. It was hardly surprising that the state fought back. Activists at home and overseas were targeted with smears, false legal charges and in the case of Peter Hain, a letter bomb.

Such was the upset created by the increasingly successful international campaign that collection boxes appeared in shops and bars across South Africa raising money to 'Cause Hain Pain' to fund private prosecutions in the UK.

Touching upon issues still being debated today, the book explores the use of 'spy cops' in STST and the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM). Agent provocateurs abound and of course we explore the murky details of Peter Hain being set up for a bank robbery in Putney. Slanderous links to IRA terrorism are introduced by M15 'evidence'. Despite all the information about this that has dripped out over the years, it's still hard to accept the degree of illegality committed by the British State and the extent of its collaboration with South Africa's Bureau of State Security (BOSS).

The wonderful stories of the



struggles against racism in sport merge smoothly into the preparations in the late 1980s for a new South Africa and the joy accompanying Nelson Mandela's release from prison. With this came about a significant realignment of sporting authorities and competitions. Apartheid in sport was gone as was the Apartheid State.

The book ends with an exploration of racism and gender inequality in sport. It identifies the role of commercialism on the game and its players. It highlights the courage of individual sportsmen and women over the years who stood up against discrimination and were willing to challenge the power of their 'owners'. Its message is clear – while there have been enormous strides forward in the world of sport since the 1970s discrimination and inequality remain and have to be challenged.

All in all, the book is a captivating read for activists, sports fans and students of history and politics.

### Andrew Coates on the Posadists

## **Mystical Marxism**

I Want to Believe. Posadism, UFOs and Apocalypse Communism A.M. Gittlitz Pluto £17.99

s the rightful inheritors of Lenin and Trotsky's Internationals. the Posadists believed themselves best equipped to tackle the mysteries of the universe left underdiscussed during the tumult of the first half of the century'. Homero Cristalli, 'Posadas', born in Buenos Aires in 1912, is remembered for his 'mystical, futurist and visionary' speculations on intelligent dolphins and UFOs. We must "appeal to the beings on other planets, when they come here, to intervene and collaborate with the Earth's inhabitants in suppressing pover-ty".

I Want to Believe is not a Trotskyist X-Files. It tells the story not only of Posadas himself but also of his tendency, which played a part in the history of the labour movement. They 'fought in the Sierras of Cuba with Castro and Yon Sosa' they built up groups in factories across two continents and organised peasants in Brazil. They spent decades in prison, some disappeared in the torture chambers or were thrown from helicopters of the Condor dictatorships.

Gittlitz offers an eye-opening account of the post-war Latin American left. Cristalli, born in the Cordoban slums, a tango dancer, and football player, was re-born as a shoemaker union organiser and an activist in the Socialist Youth. He began working for the main current of the Trotskyist Fourth International. For many on the left Perón's rise to power in the 1940s had resulted in a dictatorial regime. Posadas took the stand to 'criticalsupport' Peronism. lv Foreshadowing theories of 'left populism' as President Perón was against the imperialists, his supporters offered a base to build a 'revolutionary movement.'

If that was not enough to cause divisions, international Trotskyist debates in the 1950s, under the **Continued on page 28>>** 

### The dictator who refused to die

### **Nigel Watt** on the Portuguese dictator

Salazar Tom Gallagher Hurst £25

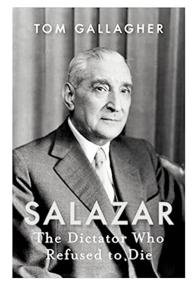
ortugal had long been unstable: weak monarchs followed by a chaotic republic, heavy losses in the First World War and non-stop economic crisis. The north of the country was (and is) conservative and Catholic; the cities and the south liberal or communist. Antonio de Oliveira Salazar came from a village in the interior. Conservative and Catholic, he rose to become Professor of Economics at Coimbra and following the revolution of 1926 which overthrew the liberal parliamentary regime he moved into politics as Minister of Finance. He became Prime Minister in 1932 and remained there until 1968. He effectively created a ruling party, the Uniao Nacional, and announced the creation of the New State (Estado Novo), an authoritarian set up based on corporations and interest groups and an ineffectual parliament.

He always kept a low profile. He was not a typical dictator of the period. He did not go in for parades and public speeches. He did not admire Mussolini, still less Hitler. He mostly stayed in his office making very sure that he was in control of everything. He clung to the old alliance with Britain (though he was disgusted when Britain accepted India's conquest of Goa). He kept on good terms with Franco's Spain, welcoming his victory in the civil war. His decision to keep Portugal neutral in the Second World War was wise – though maybe it was just fortunate that Hitler was too busy elsewhere. In the event it helped keep Spain, which could have been an important ally for Hitler, out of the war too.

A small nation in European terms, Portugal's weight was magnified by including its large colonial empire, most importantly mineral-rich Angola. Salazar never seemed to take a lot of interest in the empire but could see its importance; it was declared to be "an integral part of Portugal" and the concept of Lusotropicalism was evoked. Salazar never liked or trusted the Americans but his hatred of Communism was stronger and when invited to join NATO in 1949 he accepted. The Soviet Union vetoed Portugal's membership of the United Nations until 1956.

Opposition to the regime grew in the 1950s. Salazar did nothing to relieve the poverty of a large part of the population and his regime, always repressive, relied increasingly on the PIDE, the secret police which relied increasingly on torture. All human rights were trampled on, notably in Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique where liberation struggles began and where the mainly conscripted army lacked the will or the means to control the situation. This, along with discontent in Portugal itself was the major cause of the 1974 revolution. By that time Salazar, tired, ill and unpopular, had left the stage to Marcello Caetano whose control of the situation was short-lived.

Gallagher's book is an interesting read. While he has not written a hagiography, he is much too tolerant of the evils of a regime which kept Portugal backward. He makes very little reference to the PIDE and its brutality and one does not get a picture of the stifling nature of this ultra conservative state where the dictator 'refused to die'.



#### >>Continued from page 27

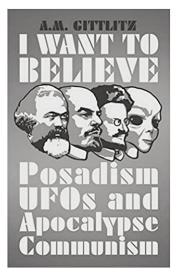
shadow of a battle between the USSR and the West, about global war/revolution, led to deep rifts. Posadas took the view that nuclear war was inevitable. He ended, after bewildering splits, with his own Posadist International. Their task was to create nuclei that would take a leadership role in the aftermath of a nuclear apocalypse and build a Socialist future. The less than genial side of Posadism is underlined. Their role, Armageddon or not, was to guide the workers towards revolution and 'rule over them afterwards as dictators'.

The movement ended as a neo-Saint-Simonian cult, with the remaining faithful holed up in an Italian Villa. The birth of a daughter, Homerita, was the 'rebirth of the entire International around the common cause of preparing the heir apparent.' An authoritarian leader, who gave 'kindergarten level lectures' to his followers, right up his death in 1981, ruled the sect. "Even if I die" he said, "I'll rise again!"

Another heir, Dante Minazzoli, expelled from the movement after twenty-five years of activism, back to the foundation of the Grupo cautro international in 1947, was Gittlitz says, their preeminent enthusiast for "science fiction, cosmic philosophy, and Bolshevik futurists." the Minazzoli was one of the forerunners of 'neo-Posadism', an interest in futurism in space, and Futurology, seen in the 'Fully Automated Luxury Space Communism' web memes. Yet, Gittlitz concludes, Posadism will not be revived, as a 'prophet of catastrophe, socialist futurism and epochal unity.' This 'bizarre signpost' Gittlitz concludes, directs towards an 'uncertain future'.

I Want to Believe is thoroughly

researched, helped by consultation with a wide range of people including eccentrics like Sebastian Budgen and Dave Broder. Eminently readable, it is a valuable study of an aspect of the left that deserves a wide audience.



## **Pilgrims**

### **Duncan Bowie** on the religious and political

background

The Mayflower in Britain Graham Taylor Amberley Press £20

Which the 400th anniversary in 2020, there have been a number of books and pamphlets published on aspects of the Mayflower pilgrims story. This book is however different from others – the clue being partly in the subtitle – 'How an Icon was made in London'. The focus, unlike most other studies, is on the history of

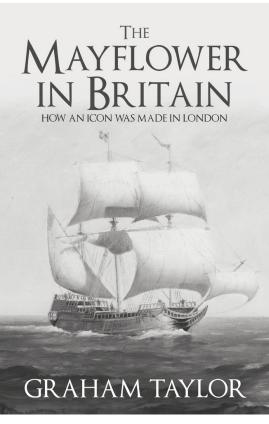
the passengers and crew of the Mayflower before they sailed to New England. Taylor focuses on the links with London, which he argues are stronger than acknowledged by previous writers - but the book is much more valuable than would appear from this localist perspective as it presents a detailed and comprehensively researched study of the religious and political background to the pilgrims journey. It includes schedules of members of various dissident churches in London and Holland as well as details of the religious and political backgrounds not just of the Mayflower pilgrims but of those who followed.

Taylor provides an extensive analysis of the development of different dissident groups and their heritage and interactions, examining the exile of the core dissident group, the 'Brownists', to Leiden and other centres in the United Provinces of Holland. He also examines the political links of the lead-

ing Pilgrims. The extent to which the Mayflower was sponsored by and negotiated with leading politicians – both supporters of James I and opponents - has perhaps not been fully recognised in most of the earlier scholarship.

Most writers, including what is perhaps the fullest study, that of the American historian, Nathaniel Philbrick, in his book *Mayflower- A Voyage to War*, have focused largely on what happened after the Pilgrims had arrived in New England. Taylor's approach may appear localist, focusing on London and especially on Southwark, where he lives, but it is actually a transnational study – examining both the political relations between England and Holland, both Protestant countries, but also the politics of colonisation and sponsorship of the different groups of settlers in America.

The final sections of the book examine the legacy of the Mayflower pilgrims, both in terms of the religious and political legacy back in London – many of the pilgrims on the Mayflower and the three other boats which followed, returned to England to fight on the Cromwellian side in



the English civil war – but also on the legacy in New England. Taylor stresses the importance of distinguishing the development of the New Plymouth/Providence Bay settlement, from the earlier entrepreneurial settlement at Jamestown, Virginia, the much larger puritan settlement at Boston led by John Winthrop – the city on the hill' and the theocratic and intolerant settlement at New Haven led by John Davenport.

Taylor examines the nature of the Mayflower compact as a basis for democratic self-government, stressing the Mayflower pilgrims wish to live in friendship with the indigenous population, their opposition to slavery, and their relative religious tolerance. Taylor sees the Mayflower pilgrims as an antecedent of the Quaker movement that was to emerge in England in the later 1640's.

There is a problem with the use of the term 'icon'. In recent years the Mayflower has become the focus for a debate over colonisation and slavery as some historians have seen the Mayflower journey as almost a symbolic event from which many of the crimes of Anglo-American eco-

nomic and racial dominance followed. This has been partly in response to the treatment in American society, culture and politics of the Mayflower compact and especially the Thanksgiving day celebration as an origin myth. Taylor is right to point out that the Mayflower pilgrims' settlement was only one (and not the first) of a number of settlements of the eastern coast of America by Europeans and that compared to the motives and practice of some other settlers, including some other puritans,  $_{\rm the}$ Mayflower settlers were relatively progressive in terms of religion, politics, governance and relations with the indigenous population.

By treating the Mayflower story as iconic and focusing on the progressive elements of the Mayflower legacy in his final 'vindication', there is

a risk that Taylor's somewhat partisan conclusion takes away from the value of the sound historical research in the substance of the book. Having had the pleasure, if a somewhat challenging one, of chairing a debate between Graham Taylor and some of his critics, I would strongly urge anyone interested in the subject and the controversies it has generated to read the book as a whole, before reaching judgement, rather than relying on the somewhat assertive concluding section. Taylor has undertaken important original research which has contributed much to our knowledge of the background to the Mayflower story.

### Fascism, freedom and the Spanish Civil War

#### **Glyn Ford** on international solidarity in action

#### The International Brigades Giles Tremlett Bloomsbury £30.00

pain was Europe's first lost battle fighting fascism. It was 1936-45, not 1939-45. The Republicans combatting Franco's 1936 insurrection saw 35,000 volunteers - from just shy of a hundred countries - flock to the banners of the International Brigade. One in five died in Spain before the Brigade's soldiers were sent home. It was a futile attempt to press London and Paris to act on the policy of Nonintervention they were hawking to salve consciences and public opinion.

The International Brigades is a welcome break from the Anglo-centric focus of much of Civil War history, even if it still misses China's hundred volunteers. The core of recruits were members of their domestic communist parties, leavened by socialists and unattached progressives. The mix had national characteristics. Germany's experience of left-wing sectarianism saw a thinner mix than Italy's cocktail of leftists experienced in combatting together Il Duce. Jewish volunteers were at a premium in reaction to Nazi anti-Semitism, as were black Americans spurred by racism at home and abroad. One of these last was Oliver Law who, in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, was the first black commander to lead white troops into battle.

The Brigades were the Republic's shock troops across the war. They suffered accordingly. Thrown into the early battle for Madrid they defended the capital, outperforming all expectations in frustrating Franco to the surprise of the Republican Government who'd already fled to Valencia. Orchestrating it all and often orchestrating it badly were the Russians and their 'Mexicans'; international communist officials delivered straight from Moscow; cliquish, secretive and commanding.

As Tremlett makes clear, there was no level playing field. It was Franco more than the Republic that was reliant on foreign

troops. Between Mussolini and Hitler Franco had a foreign legion of a 100,000; three quarters from the Italian Corpo Truppe Volontaria (CTV). The Italians fought their 'away' civil war on the plains of Guadalajara when the Garabaldi Battalion faced off with the CTV and won. Yet it was one of the Brigades few offensive successes with serial failures to follow. Technology, not troops, spoke loudest. Ford and General Motors sold the rebels trucks and Texaco oil. Yet decisive was German artillery, tanks and planes that weighted the balance to the right. Europe saw a 'blitzkrieg' dress rehearsal in

GILES TREMLETT

THE INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES FASCISM, FREEDOM AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

March 1938, with 'shock and awe' in German, as Stuka dive bombers hammered the Brigades Belchite front lines day after day. Franco fought two wars on the Peninsula and the Republicans fought each other. In the industrial heartlands of Catalonia there was a revolution to overthrow capitalism, while in Spain's rural fastnesses it was a battle to break the chains of feudalism linked to church, army and land. Moscow insisted the war be played with rules humouring the West. Thus the anti-Stalinist communists of the POUM, who saw revolution preceding rather than following victory, needed putting down, as they were in 1937's Barcelona May Days' and after.

After Belchite it was a defeated army marching. The Republic was hanging on waiting for Europe's War to start and cavalry to arrive. London and Paris recognised Franco's regime two months before Madrid fell. The war came seven months too late for Spain. Franco murdered tens of thousands in the years that followed. Having slandered the POUM in claiming their collusion with fascism, the echoes of Spain's deathrattle had scarcely died away before Stalin signed the Nazi-Soviet pact.

Yet Tremlett shows us the Brigades veterans fighting and dying - again. In France, Italy and Belgium they led the resistance. A minimum of two hundred died in Hitler's concentration camps, where 'Red Spaniards' were branded with red triangles. Henri Tanguy led the resistance in Paris. When General Leclerc's 2nd Armoured Division liberated the city on 24 August 1944 the lead tanks bore the names of Spanish Civil War battles - Guadalajara, Ebro and Teruel - manned as they were by Republican Spaniards fighting with the Free French in the La Neuve company. Aldo Lampredi, a veteran of the Garibaldi Battalion, there again for the home leg of Italy's civil war, was one of those partisans who executed Mussolini. The Russians fell to Stalin's paranoia, but in Eastern Europe, in Yugoslavia and

Albania, East Germany, Hungary and Poland many of the 'Spaniards' lived long and prospered; some to their shame.

The International Brigades has some labelling them 'premature anti-fascists', Ronald Reagan said they fought on the wrong side. Actually, they were on time. It was the Governments in London, Washington and Paris that were delinquent in letting slip the last best chance to stop the Axis before it was too late. Bedtime for Bonzo (1951) has Reagan trying to teach morals to a chimpanzee. That says it all.

## **The Politics of Queer History**

### Duncan Bowie

on antiappeasement and sexual orientation

#### The Glamour Boys Chris Bryant Bloomsbury £25

This is a fascinating read but a difficult book to review. Bryant, the Labour MP for Rhondda, who has previously written books on Christian socialism and Stafford Cripps, has written a study of a group of young Conservative MPs in the inter-war period who in the late

1930's opposed appeasement. Bryant in his study focuses on both the political trajectory and private lives of this group of 'Glamour boys', with the focus on the fact that some (but by no means all) of the group were queer.

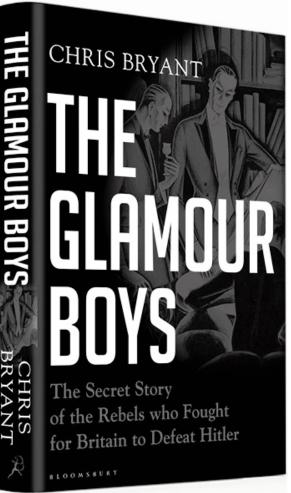
This perhaps explains the endorsement on the book's cover by Stephen Fry, and the fact that the book has received considerable coverage in the media, with the attention being given to the sexual orientation of the MPs more than their political activity – the *Guardian* review was by the actor Simon Callow. Not all members of the anti-appeasement group were homosexuals, but is not surprising that Bryant focuses on those who were. Much of the early part of the book focuses on the sexual activity of members of the group in Soho and in Weimar Berlin, which was regarded as the most sexually liberal city in the world, and the book provides a guide to the world of Christopher Isherwood as portrayed in Cabaret.

It is clear that politics played a part in this activity, in that some of Bryant's subjects enjoyed the homosexual milieu within the Nazi party

and SA and that their opposition to Nazism was only generated after the 'Night of the Long Knives', when Hitler started persecuting homosexuals as well as Jews, socialists and as communists.

The main characters in Bryant's book are the quartet of Jack Macnamara, Ronnie Cartland, Victor Cazalet, and Rob Bernays (who wrote one of the early reports of Nazism Special Correspondent, for Gollancz in 1934). Harold Nicholson, Labour National MP and diplomat, and wife of Vita Sackville-West, also has a central role, with Tories, Ronnie Tree, Henry Crookshank, Bob Boothby (Churchill's aide) and Jim Thomas (not to be confused with Labour's Jimmy Thomas) having walk on parts.

What I found somewhat disconcerting, was in introducing any character into the narrative, Bryant first refers to their sexuality- individuals who were not specifically identified as queer are



bachelors. identified as Unmarried, bisexual, married but queer or 'nearly queer' (this latter being a new categorisation to me) as if this factor was the main determinant of an individual's political position, and their attitude to rearmament, appeasement and the Nazi menace. Bryant is clearly trying to argue that sexual orientation transcends party affiliation, though perhaps he has a point since the Labour MP Tom Driberg ( who features in Bryant's book on Christian socialism) and the Soviet agent, Guy Burgess were

part of this circle. A central element of Bryant's argument is that his four characters were all patriots and that somehow homosexuality should not be associated with cowardice or 'wimpishness', not that many people today would necessarily think that was the case, though perhaps that was a more widespread view at the time. All four served in the forces - two died in plane crashes - Cazalet.

> who was liaison officer with the Polish army, died in the same plane crash as General Sikorski; Bernays' plane crashed in the Adriatic when he was part of a parliamentary delegation to visit the troops. Macnamara was killed fighting in Italy; Cartland in the battle of Dunkirk.

Bryant is justified in drawing attention to these four individuals. What is curious, apart from the fact that the book tends to downplay the roles of Churchill and Eden and their supporters including Harold MacMillan in challenging Chamberlain and Halifax's appeasement policy (possibly because they were heterosexual) is that Brvant does not acknowledge that all his subjects have central roles in a study by an American academic, Lynne Olsen, published in 2007 Troublesome Young Men – The Rebels who Brought Churchill to

Power and Helped Save England.

Nor does he acknowledge Simon Ball's 2014TheGuardsmen, which includes Macmillan and Crookshank in its quarter of young Tory politicians, and has a chapter entitled 'The Glamour Boys', nor Neville Thompson's 1971 study The Anti Appeasers: Conservative opposition to appeasement in the 1930's. None of these books appear in Bryant's bibliography, but perhaps studies which focused on politics rather than sexuality were not regarded as relevant to Bryant's argument.

#### VIEW FROM WESTMINSTER



## Stand by nuclear test ban

**Fabian Hamilton** is Labour MP for **Leeds North East** & Shadow **Minister for** Peace and **Disarmament** 

### **Fabian Hamilton** on peace prospects in a world without Trump

he UK has a rich history of conflict resolution. Whether it's in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, or anywhere in the world, the UK has rightly acted to save lives when necessary. But over the last decade, this Government has failed

to take a proactive approach needed to make the UK a world leader in multilateral disarmament once again.

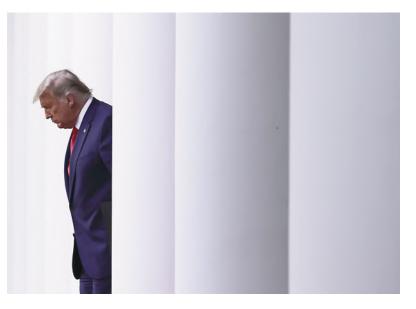
With our position on the UN Security Council, the G7 and our fantastic institutions such as the British Council, we are in dire need of the political will to take significant multilateral disarmament initiatives forward.

Our excellent diplomatic corps and those who work to engage with states and leaders across the world are vital to promoting international peace and stability.

After Donald Trump's disastrous US presidency, we have seen the dangers of brinkmanship over diplomacy. Donald Trump brought the world to the brink of nuclear conflict on several occasions, namely with Iran and North Korea. Unilaterally withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran was a dangerous moment for regional peace and stability in the Middle East. In a welcome reversal of Trump's decision, President Biden has committed to rejoining - once Iran complies with the agreement.

The United States looks to reengage with the world again, and it's so important that the UK follows suit. Now that the New START agreement between the US and Russia has been extended for the maximum of five years, it is surely incumbent on every nuclear power to convene and negotiate a broader treaty of the same calibre in time for W START's

expiry i n



2026.

The UK is also a huge benefactor of multilateral disarmament agreements and the stability they bring with them. We must, therefore, play a leading role in negotiating them and encouraging allies to follow suit.

The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which outlaws all nuclear testing, was ratified by the last Labour Government, so it is vital now, more than ever, that the current UK Government meets its moral responsibilities to make clear that any nuclear testing has the potential to undo over 60 years of progress on nuclear disarmament and that nuclear brinkmanship is only a path to escalation, not to stability.

Without ratification by US and China, the CTBT is severely restricted in its effectiveness by the notable absence of two of the world's largest nuclear powers. Given the UK's position on the United Nations Security Council and our historic relationship with the US, the UK is in a prime position to mediate an agreement between the US and China so both countries may finally ratify this vital treaty.

Beyond the political and diplomatic process, it's also important that we remember the human consequences of nuclear testing, already evident in US states like Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah where significant cancer clusters have been linked to previous testing

All countries should be free from the threat of nuclear weapons, but also the threat of violence. In Colombia, for example, the UK has a part to play as the penholder for that country at the UN.

Everyday, trade unionists, environmental activists and human rights defenders are targeted and threatened with violence in Colombia. Last year was the deadliest year since the historic peace agreement was signed in 2016.

Alongside the impact of climate change and the pandemic in the country, the UK must press the Colombian Government to ensure that the peace agreement is upheld. Without it, regional stability will be put at risk and violence will be widespread.

The UK's role as a peacemaker is as important now as it ever was during the depths of the Cold War. Every day it becomes more and more clear that we cannot go back to business as usual after the pandemic - where conflicts are allowed to claim the lives of innocent civilians across the world and the proliferation of nuclear and non-nuclear weapons rages on. This country can be a force for change for a better world and it's about time we reclaimed that moral duty.

