

# CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

#311 July/August 2021

£2

## Calling time on divide and rule

*Don Flynn*

*BEYOND THE FRAGMENTS*

*John Palmer*

*100 YEARS OF PARTITION*

*Mary Southcott*

*VOTER SUPPRESSION*

*Richard Chessum*

*SPY COPS*

*Marvin Rees*

*BRISTOL ONE CITY*

*Ann Black*

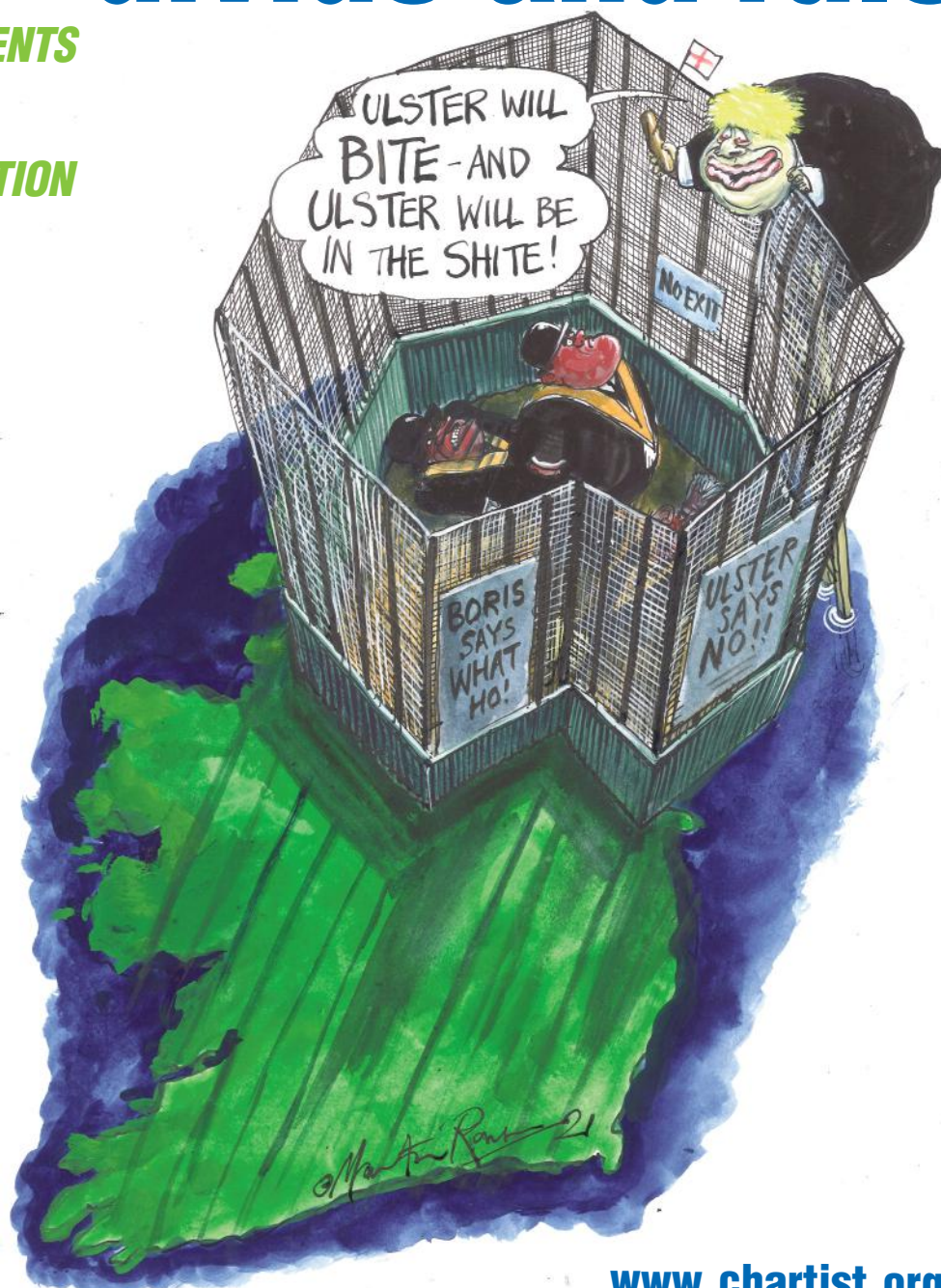
*LABOUR POLICY*

*Plus*

*Europe Supplement*

*BOOK REVIEWS &*

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# CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

## Editorial Policy

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

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

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

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the EB

## Contributions and letters deadline for **CHARTIST #312** **10 August 2021**

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## Editorial Board

CHARTIST is published six times a year by the Chartist Collective. This issue was produced by an Editorial Board consisting of Duncan Bowie (Reviews), Andrew Coates, Peter Chalk, Patricia d'Ardenne, Mike Davis (Editor), Nigel Doggett, Don Flynn, Roger Gillham, Hassan Hoque, Peter Kenyon, Dave Lister, Patrick Mulcahy, Julie Ward, Karen Constantine, Paul Teasdale, Robbie Scott, Steve Carver (Website Editor), Mary Southcott and John Sunderland.

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## Review apologies

In issue 307. The correct spelling of the name of the author of Tropical Dream Palaces is Odile Goerg. Our apologies to the author.  
In issue 310, The correct heading of the review of Empireland by Sathnam Sangara was 'Selective Amnesia'. Our apologies to the author and reviewer.



### Chartist is working with

<https://www.labourforanewdemocracy.org.uk> and  
<https://www.labourcampaignforelectoralreform.org.uk>  
to maximise the number of resolutions, urging a Labour policy change on voting reform, to Annual Conference, deadline 13 September. Our supplement in the next edition will carry articles to reinforce the message that Labour needs to change our democracy to include more people, to listen more and seek consensus. Ideas can be submitted to our Chartist Democracy subcommittee c/o [don.flynn85@gmail.com](mailto:don.flynn85@gmail.com).





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Cover by Martin Rowson

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# OUR HISTORY 97

## Arguments for a New Left - Hilary Wainwright (1994)

**W**ainwright is a socialist feminist and political activist and is currently editor of Red Pepper. A sociology researcher at Durham University and then the Open University, Wainwright co-authored the *Workers Report on Vickers* with Hugh Benyon and then the *Lucas Plan* with David Elliot. In 1980. She was co-author of *Beyond the Fragments*. In 1982, she became deputy economic adviser to Ken Livingstone, the leader of the Greater London Council and founded the Popular Planning Unit. A member of the International Marxist Group, Wainwright was married to the philosopher Roy Bhaskar, who was also involved in IMG. After the abolition of the GLC in 1986, Wainwright was attached to a number of research institutions including the Amsterdam based Transnational Institute, the LSE, Bradford Universities Peace Studies and the University of California. She was on the editorial board of *New Left Review*. In 1987, she wrote *Labour: A Tale of Two Parties*. After writing *Arguments for a New Left*, which is subtitled 'Answering the free market right' and draws significantly on Eastern European experience, Wainwright wrote a number of books on popular democracy and public service reform. She convened the new economics working group of the Helsinki citizens assembly from 1989 to 1994. Wainwright's most recent book, published in 2018, is *A New Politics from the Left*.

"The networks of this new left aspire to be international: after all, they have developed out of efforts to track down and understand the new powers of multinationals and inter-governmental institutions, and to share common experiences of struggle and organisation for which there are no national models.

"The sources of power that the movements could draw on in the early 1980's can only under special circumstances be mobilised. Frequently this new left politics is marginal and

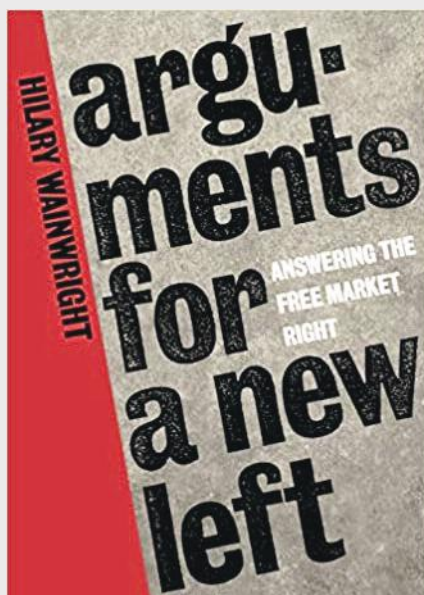
sometimes self-marginalising. The absence of a pan-European political framework contributes to their invisibility.... The result is not so much a democratic deficit, to be remedied over time, but a dangerous kind of democratic vacuum which is especially threatening at a time of growing economic insecurity for a large proportion of the population, who are therefore actively, and incoherently, seeking remedies but finding none within the existing political system. The far right in Western

Europe has rallied its popular support under banners which invoke European Community institutions as well as foreign workers as threats to the future.

"The commitment which is common to the Western new left and those Eastern opportunists who have remained outside the state-namely, the commitment to democratic civic movements as necessary though not sufficient agencies of social change-has a unique importance in filling the democratic vacuum and undermining popular support for the far right. Such movements have the power to create the social associations of daily life by which people gain some power to shape their futures and a source of identity that is not defined by its hatred of others. The growth of such democratic civic associations, rooted amongst the most powerless and frustrated of society, will be a base from which the new authoritarianism and popular racism spreading across Europe could be countered. At present, however,

the social base of democratic social and radical trade union movements is limited. There will need to be a concerted effort to extend that base from that of a minority counter-culture, to a political force for democracy and social security.

"The politics of democratic social and trade union movements provides a basis. If they were to develop they would represent a new kind of left; in which a liberalism that had moved beyond individualism, co-operated and contested with a form of socialism that no longer relied primarily on the nation state."



## Printer ad

# Divided Britain – Starmer failing to meet the challenge

**T**he government handling of the coronavirus pandemic has been a fiasco. The Cummings revelations on Johnson's 'hopeless Hancock', incompetence, lack of preparation and delays in the first phase of Covid-19 underline the evident chaos running through Downing Street, the Cabinet and beyond.

Only the roll-out of the vaccine through the NHS networks, in contrast to the £32 billion virtually privatised Test & Trace system, is saving the government.. But nothing can disguise one of the worst preventable death rates (now over 128,000) in the world.

This all underlines the urgency of the campaign for a full public enquiry now and early report, not next year to report after an early 2023 general election. Lessons should to be learned now.

When the government did commission an expert, in the form of Kevan Collins, to provide information and direction on how to enable millions of school children to catch up on lost learning, the findings and recommendations were rejected. Collins resigned as a result highlighting that without the £10bn resources needed, the government's paltry £1b would utterly fail. **Dave Lister** explains the realities of yawning educational division. It's a similar story on race equality with the Downing Street Race Advisor, Samuel Kalumu, resigning because of government ministers stoking divisive culture wars.

Keir Starmer's leadership failed to cut through in the recent local elections, with the Tories holding on to many of the areas won in the 2019 general election and winning Hartlepool. Lacking vision and clear articulation of radical policies, contributors in this issue reflect on what the results mean. **Pete Rowlands** draws lessons from positive results in Wales while re-elected Bristol Labour mayor, **Marvin Rees** and **Robin Hambleton**, outline the impact of Bristol One City approach as a template of community alliance building. Combined with the work of Andy Burnham we see a more rigorous assault on the Tories and an outline of a path for Labour.

Labour continues to fail in Scotland. **Gerry Hassan** looks at the SNP/Green administration, with prospects for a second independence referendum and ponders whether Labour can recover without some firm backing for a second indyref.

The state of the union in the UK is examined by **John Palmer** in a keynote article reviewing the 100- year history of British division and discrimination since the partition of Ireland.

All this raises the wider question of the future of Labour, alongside social democracy across Europe, and whether Starmer's leadership is capable of transforming the party's fortunes. A loss of the Batley and Spen seat would further question Labour's direction. **Don Flynn** looks at two pitches to define a way forward—Paul Mason and John Cruddas MP, from broad left wings of the party with different prescriptions. Without revival of an adventurous spirit of left populism it is unlikely Labour will regain 'red wall' seats or make headway across southern England. To move beyond the fragments Labour needs to focus on the conditions in which a progressive alliance of citizens can be built from the bottom up. This

includes using many ideas developed during the Corbyn years.

Ed Miliband wants Labour to think big. **Ann Black** wants Labour to start thinking how to engage the whole membership on policy issues from poverty reduction to climate change through a renewal of the Policy Review process.

Naturalist **Mark Cocker** and Buxton Labour councillors look at the vexed issue of brownfield versus greenbelt areas for housing, showing that sometimes the former, as in the beautiful Hogshaw fields, can be richer in biodiversity and needing more protection than the latter.

We should also note that the Tories' new planning bill removing local democratic powers to block developers, alongside HS2, helped sink them in the Chesham and Amersham by-election.

Meanwhile **Richard Chessum** writes about his personal experience of being a victim of spy cops in the 1970 and 80s, showing the practice is nothing new.

**Cat Smith MP** alerts us to the Boundary Commission reviews while **Mary Southcott** highlights voter suppression in the Tories' latest proposals and how this affects our democracy.

**Mael Galisson** exposes the deadly realities of border controls while Dutch MEP **Lara Wolters** reports on a radical due diligence policy adopted by the European Parliament aimed at protecting workers in supply chains.

Progressive Europeanism versus blind-alley nationalism characterises our special Europe supplement produced with **Another Europe is Possible**. If Labour is to retain internationalist credentials it needs to champion progressive aspects of the EU with a forward looking strategy. This is not only essential in an era of globalisation but also both to secure and expand support from liberal-minded millennials and remain voters and to expose the Tory rhetoric of 'global Britain'. If Labour doesn't then Greens and Lib-Dems will as shown in the Tories' by-election defeat.

Johnson's 'global' pitch was much in evidence at the recent G7 where the fissures over the Northern Ireland protocol cast a shadow over his glad-handing. Our supplement has **Alena Ivanova** and **Laura Parker** on the damaging consequences of Brexit for free movement and for EU citizens while **Luke Cooper**, **Glyn Ford**, **Mary Kaldor** and **Ann Pettifor** look at other aspects of Brexit and Europe.

This all serves to underline the hollowness of the Tories' global Britain agenda which has managed to alienate loyalist Northern Ireland, fisherfolk, farmers, plus their own backbenchers with the cut in overseas aid. More will see through the empty promises on the NHS as the pandemic retreats. Bleating about an Australian free trade deal which covers less than 0.2% of trade highlights the Tories' desperation.

All this highlights the importance of Labour pulling its forces together inside and out of the Labour party. It means ending the attacks on the Corbyn left, the attempts to suppress party democracy and harnessing the ideas, activism and energy of all members. Will Starmer rise to the challenge?



# Great British Railways?

Government plan for rail is neither fish nor fowl says **Paul Salvesson**

**T**he Department for Transport published its long-awaited 'plan for rail' in early June. It was co-authored by former British Airways boss Keith Williams and Transport secretary Grant Shapps, though the hand of Johnson's transport advisor Andrew Gilligan is all over it.

After such a long time in gestation the Williams-Shapps Report is sadly disappointing. There is no analysis of the deep-rooted problems in the industry which led to the report's commissioning two years ago, following the May 2018 timetable meltdown. Nor is there much reference, let alone, analysis, of the other key issues that need to be addressed, such as decarbonisation (electrification) and infrastructure development (e.g. Northern Powerhouse, Midlands Engine) or of why Great Western electrification costs rose so dramatically out of control.

The demise of the franchise system is over-stated in the document. The proposed new 'National Rail Contracts' are merely franchises with the revenue risk, to operators, stripped out. The same issues as currently exist, including 'delay attribution' which is detailed as an example of how contractual (and costly) the railways have become, will continue across the wheel/rail divide (viz., the separation of infrastructure management from train operations), which has been perpetuated for no obvious reason and with no justification.

The re-branding to 'Great British Railways' (GBR) covering both the English passenger railway and the Great Britain-wide network will add complexity, confusion and reduce accountability for the railways run by devolved administrations, (particularly Scotland and Wales, but also Merseyside and London) each of which has their own strong identity. It seems to be a political ploy to support the Government's 'defend the union' agenda.

The claims to reform fares and ticketing are also over-stated. Some of the suggestions for fares reform have already been available with some operators - there are no new major proposals.

It would be silly to say it's all bad. The support for community-rail partnerships is welcome, but the



**Defunct Virgin Trains West coast service- demise of the franchise system overstated.**  
(Pic: Takashi Hososhima)

Government should put its money where its mouth is and give them further funding to develop their work. However, expecting them to bid on their own for 'micro-franchises' could be over-optimistic unless resources are made available to assist them.

Railway people have proved adept at making the best out of a bad job and one cause for hope in the Government's plan is the likelihood that Network Rail leaders Peter Hendy and Andrew Haines will run the new 'GBR'. Both are highly respected and committed transport professionals, but they will have their work cut out in making the new body a success. I hope they will be brave and sensible enough to give real power to the proposed regional divisions and encourage them to work with regional partners such as the combined authorities.

There are fears among many rail professionals, such as the Rail Reform Group, that the new GBR "could be a return to the old days of London-based centralisation with little understanding of regional, let alone local, markets....Centralised control of timetables and fares lacks any link to local markets which are key to growing rail business, yet whilst reference is made to the five current regions (one of which is Scotland and run quite differently) there is no indication that the regions will be the key specifiers and drivers."

It appears that the 'single guiding

mind' translates into a highly centralised operation, much like the railway of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Anyone who thinks that this represents a change back to a publicly-owned and accountable railway are deluding themselves. In many ways it is the worst of all worlds, with the likelihood that the private operators who will operate the 'national passenger contacts' having little incentive to develop new products and services, and will look at ways to cut costs wherever they can. The response from some will be that the contracts won't allow them to do that, but you end up with a railway that is specified down to the tiniest detail, making any change, for good or bad, incredibly difficult to do.

There is an alternative. In previous Chartist articles I've argued for mutually-owned and vertically-integrated regional companies to run the railways that Government and the public can trust - creating a railway for the Common Good, that is there for the long term, not just a few years. The 'plan' is a wasted opportunity, but Labour doesn't seem to be offering much of an alternative, other than a return to a different model of highly-centralised bureaucracy.

Running a national railway network well involves a delicate balance with some degree of national co-ordination, other issues such as fares, core timetables and passenger standards, with regional and even local initiative. If you think that's pie-in-the-sky, have a look at the railways of Switzerland. **C**

**Paul Salvesson's website is at [www.lancashireloominary.co.uk](http://www.lancashireloominary.co.uk). His occasional 'Salvo' blog gives a quirky update on rail and regional issues**

# Germany ahead on renewables

**David Toke** explains how nuclear run-downs in UK and Germany are not stopping electricity being decarbonised

**E**ven-handed analysis of data from Germany and the UK indicates that it is still easily possible to dramatically reduce carbon emissions whilst greatly reducing the amount of energy coming from nuclear power. The likely entry of the Greens into the German Government later this year will accelerate the decarbonisation trend in Germany.

One thing not usually appreciated in the arguments about the impact of nuclear power plant retirements in Germany is that in reality much the same process has occurred, for different reasons, in the UK. In both Germany and the UK the falling proportion of electricity coming from nuclear power has gone along with dramatic reductions in carbon emissions from electricity in both countries.

Peering through the fog of the current debate one would almost think that 'pro-nuclear' UK was busy cutting its carbon emissions by increasing nuclear output whilst 'anti-nuclear' Germany was busy increasing them, or at least not reducing them, by its phase-out policy. Yet nothing of the sort has been happening.

First, strong declines in nuclear's share of electricity output this century have been occurring in BOTH the UK and Germany. In 1997 Germany derived around 31 per cent of its electricity from nuclear power whilst the UK sourced around 27 per cent from nuclear power. In 2019 nuclear's share had fallen to 12 per cent in the case of Germany and 17 per cent in the case of the UK (the older 'Magnox' plant having been phased out in the early years of the century). Germany's nuclear proportion is set to fall further as the phase-out policy is implemented. However, so is the UK's nuclear proportion going to reduce as generation from the AGR power plant wind down. Even as Hinkley C comes online (sometime after 2026?) the UK's nuclear proportion of power seems likely to fall to around 9 per cent.

In the UK nuclear power has declined because of its weak economics and consistent failure to deliver the nuclear expansion supported by successive Governments. In Germany the political consensus



Nuclear power plant in Bohlen, Germany (Pic: Trey Ratcliff)

is about finding a different, sustainable, system that does not include nuclear power.

The more rapid phase-out of nuclear in Germany compared to that of the UK has been paralleled by a bigger rapid build-up of renewables in Germany. 44 per cent of electricity came from renewables in Germany in 2019 whilst 37 per cent came from renewables in the UK in the same year. We can see from this that the proportion of power generated from non-fossil sources in both countries is roughly the same. It is also the case that carbon emissions from electricity use in German have fallen by a third since 2013- precisely at a time when nuclear power stations have been taken offline as a matter of political policy.

Of course the amount of carbon emitted per kWh of electricity in Germany is still substantially higher than it is in the UK, but that is attributable to the fact that Germany still burns a substantial amount of coal in its electricity generation. That's a failing in German policy, but it is also fair to comment that the UK has been in a much better position to substitute natural gas for coal generation because the

UK has access to relatively cheap North Sea gas, whilst Germany has to import gas at much higher prices, a lot of it from Russia.

Both the cases of Germany and the UK knock the pro-nuclear arguments on the head that say that increases in renewable energy cannot reduce carbon emissions without maintaining nuclear production. Clearly they can.

Germany remains ahead of the UK in renewable energy deployment, despite the UK's clear advantage in having much bigger offshore wind resources. Germany is working hard to make the most out of its own onshore resources by expanding opportunities for onshore wind and promoting community support for both wind and solar projects. Local communities will now receive extra income from allowing renewable energy projects.

If, as seems probable, the Greens join the Federal Government later this year, the Nordstream 2 pipeline bringing gas from Russia will be stopped if it has not already been completed by then. Moreover, the drive towards renewable energy and energy efficiency will be enhanced. **G**

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



# Getting beyond the fragments-again

Don Flynn dissects two important contributions on Labour's future



Loss of Hartlepool - a price worth paying? (Pic: AdamKR/Flickr)

It was not so long ago that Labour in the UK seemed to be bucking the death spiral which social democracy across the rest of Europe had locked itself into. The heady days of 2015-17, when the party grew to over half a million members, rallies and activities were taking place across the country, and a 40 percent share of the popular vote at a general election, are now long past. Bewilderment and paralysis seem to have gripped the mainstream organisation and a possible way ahead remains to be illuminated.

In retrospect, it seems clear that the degree of progress achieved in the middle of the last decade was due to the fact that the party under the centre left had stumbled on a way to work with the populist moods that had come to prevail across the country.

Mastery of the populist political method is a long way off and the Corbyn years figure as a series of experiments rather than the finished article. As was discussed in the interview with Marina Prentoulis in the last Chartist, populism requires an

acute sense of the moods rippling across the public and, most importantly, a sense of the direction they might be taking. Under Jeremy Corbyn the party was able to pick up on the grievances of sections of the population which attributed the hardships they felt to the state's withdrawal from policies centred on the welfare and well-being of citizens, subordinating all to balancing the Treasury's books.

## Party against left populism

Corbyn's populism mobilised a generation of millennials with politics that promised them a way into the setting of agendas and a leadership role in bringing about change. Its failure in this endeavour was that it was unequal to the task of overcoming the inertia of the party machine, dominated by a Parliamentary party strapped into the role of being a government-in-waiting, and an executive machine willing to resort to whatever skulduggery was required to defeat the would-be usurpers. If a single sentence is to suffice in describing the party's role during the course of these years it would be: to con-

front and defeat all efforts to forge a new democratic politics out of the moods of discontent that have prevailed in the period since the Great Recession.

So, the populist surge was checked and, in defiance of all the laws of physics, a vacuum has rushed in to take its place. Starmer has no excuses for finding his leadership in the predicament it is now in. His moderate social democratic backers saw the fall of the so-called Red Wall seats as the price that had to be paid for putting an end to the Corbynite experiment. They assumed that 'under new leadership' would register with people as being a return to normal politics. Labour would reappear as a party loyal to the constitution and the stability and ageless continuity it stood for, and the green shoots of a revival in fortunes would soon be seen.

That bubble burst with the dreadful result in the Hartlepool by-election and the real danger that the forthcoming poll in Batley and Spen will go the same way. True, there is an intriguing glittering in the otherwise overwhelming darkness, showing up

Don Flynn is  
Chartist  
managing editor



in the results for metro-mayors and the swing against the Tories in southern England. But if these are to become the material out of which a new mass centre left political force can be built then we will need to see a revival of the adventurous spirit of left populism which excited such a significant segment of the population six years ago.

### The Labour right

In a recent posting on the 'How to Stop Fascism' blogpost site, Paul Mason puts the need to resolve the dilemma of the hybrid character of the Labour party as the central task for the left<sup>1</sup>. He sees the organisation as a 'container' for two, or maybe, three competing visions of the future. The most prominent two of these consist of the "party of cities, technological modernity, the skilled and educated working class, the ethnically diverse working class and the young", and the second, the socially conservative viewpoint of the small towns. Difficult though the task might be, it is not in principle impossible to imagine these currents being fused into a political bloc that is based on the facts common to both – that their interests are jeopardised by the programme of the elite clustered around some

## Corbyn's populism mobilised a generation of millennials with politics that promised them a leadership role in bringing about change

version of the vision of 'Global Britain'.

But Global Britain has its own advocates within the party, represented among the groupings seeking a revival of Blairism. Seeking the ear of the floundering Starmer leadership, they have a keen interest in stymying an alliance based on the economic interests of cities and towns by promulgating the myth that the two are irreconcilable. If cultural fault lines exist between places like Manchester and Hartlepool the Labour right is working hard

to say they are utterly unbridgeable. No expedient alliance is possible and instead one has to triumph over the defeated body of the other. Since the cities, with their relative youth and ethnic diversity look so much like the sort of places that backed Corbyn six years ago it has to be their standing within the political structures of Labour that has to be reduced to rubble.

There are many rich ironies to be found here. New Labour's rigid support for global financial interests based in the City of London had a dire impact on industries which required a cheap pound to be competitive in international markets. The glitzy public sector investment, often using EU development funds, raised hopes in the areas like the towns of the North East that things were finally getting better, at exactly the same moment Treasury policies were creating an environment where industries could not prosper. It is no surprise that disillusionment with Labour runs so deep in these regions.

### Bottom up progressive alliance

The goal of the left must be to find the political programme which gives expression to the desire of the towns to see industries revive and for the people in the city regions that this should happen in accordance with the obligations of a Green New Deal and respect for diversity of the communities being built in the large urban centres. This will require a political process that is capable of working through the compromises that will be needed if the range of viewpoints that need to be accommodated in a progressive, left bloc is able to happen. The first moves in this direction are being taken and to some extent have shown up in the encouraging votes for the metropolitan mayors and authorities which, as in the case of Greater Manchester, tend to cluster both city and towns together in their respective regions.

More intellectual interest will need to be shown in the coming months in work that expresses the viewpoints of towns that cling onto to industry and the communities that are battling to preserve their values. The recent contribution of the Labour MP Jon Cruddas merits particular consideration in the arguments he has set out for a politics that is rooted in the workplace<sup>2</sup>. There is a warning here to hold back on



**Jon Cruddas - sets out a labour policy rooted in the workplace (Pic: CiceroComms/Flickr)**

the modern world of work as a place filled with 'bullshit jobs', to coin the phrase popularised by the late David Graeber. Whilst Graeber sought to underscore the psychological damage done to individuals by work he considered meaningless and alienating, Cruddas insists on seeing the possibility of the workplace as engendering awareness of injustice and exploitation that can in turn produce solidarity. Leftists in the techno-utopian camp, who have given up on the idea of even the desirability of full employment and who want to make a Universal Basic Income the core of their programme should be ready to think again about what would be lost in a world where human beings were not actively engaged in building the society in which they would live the entirety of their lives.

Labour's fractured politics requires more thinking about the circumstances in which a progressive alliance of citizens could be built from the bottom up. The tools which might allow this to be done have at least been partially revealed by the innovative thinking done during the Corbyn years and the experiments undertaken with the perspective of left populism. That is the core of the political project we need to get underway again. **C**

<sup>1</sup> 'Labour's Route to Power', Paul Mason. 11 May 2021 <https://medium.com/mosquito-ridge/labours-route-to-power-7c177f7a777c>

<sup>2</sup> 'The Dignity of Labour', Jon Cruddas, polity, to be reviewed in the next issue of *Chartist*.

# Traditional values in a modern setting

**Ann Black** on developing a policy programme and a snappy slogan to scotch the Tories

In a world turned upside-down the Tories are shovelling billions of pounds into supporting people and businesses through unemployment, supplementing universal credit, providing free school meals and raising corporation tax, and much of Labour's traditional space has been occupied. The pandemic still dominates the news, and the successful vaccine rollout has obscured 100,000 unnecessary deaths due to dithering and late lockdowns. But no-one knows whether scrapping all restrictions on 21 June is wise, or if a third surge will again overwhelm the NHS. "Boris is doing his best" is enough to win him the benefit of the doubt, for the moment.

Labour has to manage this daily unpredictability as well as developing a narrative through to the next general election. Based on the results of 6 May, there is a lot to do. When voters ask "what does Labour stand for?" canvassers need short, snappy answers. People cannot remember any Labour slogans from the last ten years, except maybe "the many, not the few", from Tony Blair's new clause 4. The Tories have "take back control", "levelling up", "build back better". A Labour leaflet had "under the Tories, rape has effectively been decriminalised". True, but it doesn't fit on a pledge card. Neither does "the best country to grow up in, and the best country to grow old in".

From 1997 the 200-strong national policy forum (NPF) has been central to Labour's policy-making processes. It has two core functions: to review all policy areas between one general election and the next, and to maintain continuous communication between the frontbench, the party and the wider movement. The system was entitled "Partnership in Power" and designed to avoid the internal tensions which brought down previous Labour governments. It never entirely succeeded. Members and local parties did not know who represented them and did not feel their voices were heard. Successive reviews failed to bring significant improvement. However the final NPF meeting



before an election allowed full and frank debate across the policy agenda and, after agreement by conference, the conclusions framed the manifesto.

## Changing with the Times

But the NPF has never adapted to being an effective partnership in opposition. Labour no longer controls the timing of elections, and the 2017 and 2019 manifestos were written in haste by a handful at the centre, rather than collectively after years of consultation. The policy commissions, which bring together NPF, NEC and frontbench representatives, were more useful when speaking directly with ministers, who had the power to act, than in opposition when they can only deplore government iniquities and dream of alternative worlds.

For various reasons the full NPF has met only twice since 2014. The position of chair was vacant from 2018 to 2020, and no elections for representatives have been held since 2018. The fifth review of policy-making closes on 24 June, with local parties and other stakeholders invited to comment on a 26-page document with more than 50 questions.

I cannot see the results turning neatly into rule changes this year, and I expect the NPF to continue in some form. I believe the policy commissions in particular could be a useful sounding-board, where shadow ministers

engage with members on, for instance, when it is safe to open schools, the covert human intelligence sources ("spycops") bill, and relations with Europe after Brexit. They should also be integrated with campaigning, looking outwards and discussing what matters most to voters.

Meanwhile the commissions have published eight short papers to which responses are requested by 19 July, before final versions are presented to conference. Each focuses on one topic, but I urge members to write about anything that interests them, at <https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk>. While the commission for justice and home affairs concentrates on violence against women and girls, it also covers policing, justice, immigration and voting laws, and received more submissions on electoral reform than on anything else.

Finally Anneliese Dodds MP, in her new role as party chair, will co-ordinate a strategic policy review, based on Labour values of equality, security and ambition. She is keen to engage with members across the country, building towards a general election in 2023 or 2024. This work will run alongside the NPF, with an interim report by summer 2022 and a final version in 2023. And I hope that before too long, the apparently never-ending reviews will lead to clear messages and decisive political action. **C**



**Ann Black is Chair, National Policy Forum and NEC constituency representative, 2000-2018, 2020-**



# Bristol One City

Can local leadership advance post Covid-19 social justice? **Marvin Rees** and **Robin Hambleton** draw lessons from the experiences of local people delivering the Bristol One City Approach

**C**an local activists living in a specific place make a difference to the quality of life in the area where they live? Or is it the case that local communities are helpless victims in a global flow of events determined by distant decision-makers who do not care about the impact of their decisions on particular places?

These questions highlight the stark choices all societies now face as they seek to recover from the catastrophe of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## The good news

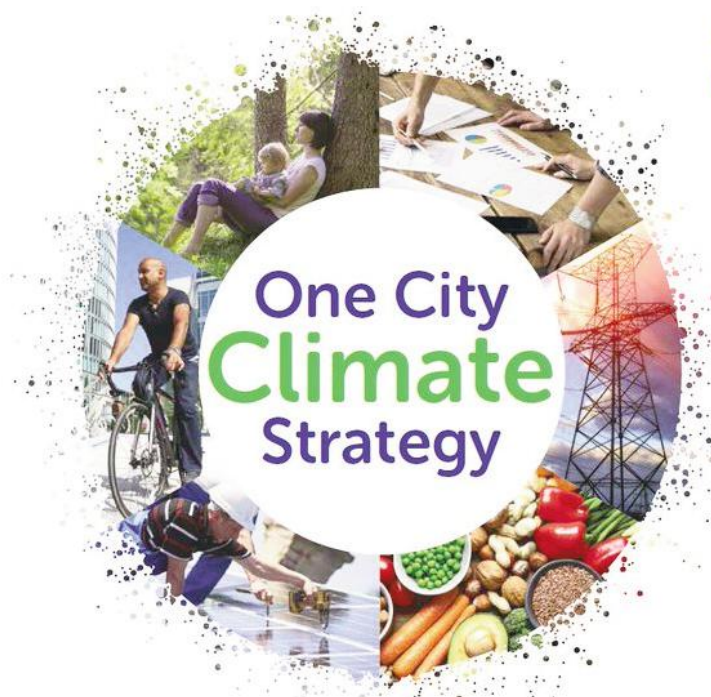
The good news is that, across the world, local communities have responded, with both compassion and creativity, to the challenges set down by the Covid-19 pandemic. Found in places like Amsterdam, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Newcastle, Preston and Wigan, these place-based leadership efforts provide signposts for the way forward.

Largely unnoticed by the national and international media, these cities, and many others, are moving practice beyond outdated, neoliberal conceptions of society. They are demonstrating that imaginative place-based leadership can advance the cause of fairness in our societies.

Progressive leaders in communities across the world now face four major challenges at once: 1) the Covid-19 health emergency; 2) a sharp economic downturn arising from the pandemic; 3) the global climate and ecological emergencies; and 4) deeply disturbing increases in social, economic and racial inequality.

This is happening in a context in which the task of political leadership is becoming increasingly complex as both the left's and right's trust in public institutions is increasingly fragile, with misinformation common.

The key point we want to make here is that any effective approach to responding to these enormous societal challenges needs to be integrated, place-based and relational.



**BRISTOL  
ONE CITY**

## A strategy for a carbon neutral, climate resilient Bristol by 2030

### The Bristol One City Approach

The Bristol One City Approach ([www.bristolonecity.com](http://www.bristolonecity.com)) is designed to unite civic purpose in our city. It brings a wide range of voices into local policy-making processes and acts as a catalyst for collaboration - to identify and define challenges and opportunities and the actions the city needs to take.

At the first City Gathering, held in July 2016, 70 civic leaders drawn from every sector of the city shared ideas on the big challenges facing Bristol and agreed to work together in a new way to tackle them.

At the twelfth City Gathering, held in March 2021, over 400 civic leaders participated. More and more leaders have joined in - from local businesses, trade unions and local communities - because they see great value in this inclusive approach to community problem solving.

The Bristol One City Approach combines structural with cultural innovation. We get people together at these gatherings, and also through the thematic boards we have set up to drive work on specific areas such as homes and

communities, climate and sustainability, transport and children. And we introduced a way of working we describe as 'make a big offer and make a big ask'. This involves asking partners to approach the city with a big offer, then ask for what is needed to enable delivery of that offer.

The beauty of this approach is that it invites leadership and guides people to look at the possible through imaginative responses to the challenges and opportunities facing the city. Many civic initiatives designed to tackle issues relating to fairness and prosperity are now making an impact on the quality of life in the city, and these are documented in the One City Annual Reports.

Here are just three examples of inspirational local leadership:



**Marvin Rees was re-elected for a second term as Mayor of Bristol in May 2021 and Robin Hambleton is Emeritus Professor of City Leadership, University of the West of England, Bristol**

The Feeding Bristol Healthy Holiday 2019 Programme delivered over 65,000 meals to needy children and other vulnerable people. Council staff took on a leadership-enabling role, but it was voluntary sector activists who led working with businesses, faith groups and volunteers from every ward of the city to make sure that no one went hungry.

The Period Friendly Bristol Initiative of 2020 is already recognised as a world-leading example of a civic initiative designed to address the problems encountered by women and girls being denied access to menstrual products. Again the initiative was a joint effort between the council, business and civil society.

Launched in 2018, the Bristol Housing Festival promotes better ways to live in cities ([www.bristolhousingfestival.org.uk](http://www.bristolhousingfestival.org.uk)). In January 2021, residents moved into the first Modern Methods of Construction development of its kind to be completed in the UK. The Zedpods homes were built on stilts above a council car park. The eleven affordable and low-carbon apartments house young workers and vulnerable households. The scheme was driven by a local social entrepreneur working with Bristol City Council, Zedpods and the YMCA.

## The Bristol One City Plan

Launched at a City Gathering in January 2019, the Bristol One City Plan looks forward to 2050

and sets out, in detail, how the city intends to become a fair, healthy and sustainable city.

This is not a conventional city council plan – it is a collective plan that sees the council's efforts as part of a broader civic effort. Better than that, it is reviewed annually with our city's youth mayors having a direct say on what the top three priorities should be for each coming year.

Written by city partners working closely with the mayor and the city council in a highly inclusive process, the One City Plan delivers a level of consistency in forward planning that has been lacking in Bristol. The collaborative process builds in a degree of immunity to the uncertainty thrown up by political change. Thus, in the recent mayoral election, city partners asked all mayoral candidates if they would remain committed to the One City Plan and Approach.

Each year the European Union invites cities from across the continent to apply for the award of European Capital of Innovation (iCapital). This is a very competitive process involving rigorous

## Further information

**The Bristol One City Approach is discussed in more detail in a new book by**

**Robin Hambleton, *Cities and communities beyond COVID-19. How local leadership can change our future for the better.* Bristol University Press.**

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

evaluation of bids by an international panel of experts. It is a credit to Bristol that, in September 2019, the One City Approach led to our city being recognised as one of the six most innovative cities in Europe.

## Emerging lessons

Three lessons emerge from this discussion. First, the top-down 'silo' approach, traditionally employed by central governments, simply cannot comprehend, let alone respond effectively to, complex modern challenges.

Second, it follows that it is essential to rebalance power within the UK. Elected local authorities must be given the respect, powers and financial certainty that is commonplace in other western democracies.

Third, strong place-based politics is unique in that it offers an approach to governance that can be both strategic and street-level at the same time. Creative relationship-building at the local level not only gets things done, it can build interest in, and support for, progressive change. **C**

# Battered and vital

**Ralph Berry** on how the Covid pandemic has revealed the value of local partnerships

**A**s we went into the Covid-19 pandemic local government in England had just begun to emerge from a decade of cuts and centralisation that has seen many Authorities hollowed out. It appeared we were emerging from the punitive regime of austerity and care precepts to a world where suddenly the local mattered and the central had need of the local. The centralist municipal structures we have had since Modernisation (with small groups of councillors holding most power by allocation of roles) found that grassroots community-based decision making and coordination was a vital matter of near life and death. Localism was pulled back out of the archive.

Go spend what you need was the mantra. Suddenly the voluntary sector became the frontline as councils no longer had the numbers of staff to pick up emergency work. The same voluntary sector that has been squeezed to the edge by austerity. But the

bills have not been met and local government faces perhaps its toughest years since the 1930's.

Effective local partnerships have emerged and we need to keep and build on them as a real locus of power and decision making. Detailed local knowledge and partnerships became vital in getting resources and links made to build the local Covid hubs. In Wibsey, my ward, all the churches opened up facilities, provide food and other support including befriending and emotional well-being.

The reversion to the old ways needs to be opposed. The reason is simple: community partnerships work. They can and will co-design more than just a food bank rota and meals for kids in school holidays. It's not just councillors that have seen the reality of the fragility of our communities and the need for change. It's just not in a programme yet.

It's been a challenging time with many local facilities lost to cuts with the old command and direct model of councillor activity

being out of place. We've been pulling together the threads of local co-operation and solidarity across all communities and faiths, filling the gaps left by austerity. We have led work across agencies to secure support and protect the most vulnerable, filling the gap that have grown in a centralist structure.

Councillors now emerge with a more detailed knowledge of the strength of their communities while Covid has blown open the inequalities in work, housing and health.

The status of Public Health had never been really secured in Councils. The budgets were often raided for other purposes but now the Director of Public Health and the health brief is one that has to be used to tackle the agenda we face in recovery from Covid. We have forged new links to tackle some of this. We must not let the old ways slip back. Doing things to people or for people isn't going to change things. Involvement and facilitating community voice is the key. **C**



**Ralph Berry is a Bradford Labour councillor**



# Tories caught out on schools catch-up

**Dave Lister** on how penny pinching provoked the resignation of top government commissar

The appointment of Sir Kevan Collins as Education Recovery Commissar arose from the concern that children from less well-off families had found it harder to make normal educational progress during the pandemic than their more comfortably off peers. A DfE report calculated that this was “equivalent to undoing between one-third and two-thirds of the progress made in the last decade in closing the disadvantage gap in primary schools” and as a result of the further disruption caused by the most recent school closures the gap could widen even further. Boris Johnson was in no doubt about the urgency of this situation. “I am absolutely determined”, he said, “that no child will be left behind as a result of the pandemic”.

So Sir Kevan was appointed to the accompaniment of fanfares from the Government. He was a former teacher, Director of Children’s Services and then Chief Executive in Tower Hamlets, they pointed out, and most recently Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation. He then began working towards recommending an extension of the school day and the organisation of summer schools to help those children who had regressed to catch up on their missed learning. He talked about using online learning, supporting teachers in their professional development and summer schools for new year 7 children, focusing on improving their reading skills, but emphasised that they needed to be engaging and motivating for young people and not a big turn-off (my words). Whilst Government ministers were probably envisaging that the extra tutoring and summer activities would mainly address reading and maths, Sir Kevan saw the importance of a broader curriculum and wanted sport, music and the arts generally to be covered also. None of this could be delivered effectively without substantial funding it should be noted.

Then came the bombshell for the Government. Their celebrated Commissar resigned in protest at a funding package he described as falling “far short of what was needed... A half-hearted approach risking failing hundreds of thousands of pupils.” It appears that he was call-



**Sir Kevan Collins speaking with students at Mulberry Academy Shoreditch in London’s Tower Hamlets**

ing for a package costed at £15 billion whilst the Government was offering a comparatively paltry £1.4 billion. Yet earlier in the year they had unfurled a £16.5 billion programme of military spending, which was in addition to their commitment to increase military spending by 0.5% annually. This was their priority. Not catch-up, or foreign aid for that matter. Labour’s shadow education secretary Kate Green commented that Sir Kevan’s resignation was “a damning indictment of the Conservatives’ education catch-up plan...He was brought in by Boris Johnson because of his experience and expertise in education, but the Government has thrown out his ideas as soon as it came to stumping up the money needed to deliver them”.

There are however some broader issues to consider. Some people in the education world have questioned whether the emphasis should be on additional hours of learning and summer schools at this stage rather than focusing on children’s wellbeing and support for their mental health. Playing with their friends should be the priority not swotting up on missed learning. An article in the Times Educational Supplement also questioned the value of additional after school classes, arguing that children learn best in the morning and by the end

of the school day are taking in less and less information. These points need to be balanced against the genuine concern that children from more deprived backgrounds have lost out on the learning progress that they would have made in usual circumstances. It would also be interesting to know the extent to which schools are tackling this issue by interventions during the normal school day.

Another controversy has also emerged as the Government has assured secondary schools that it is now safe for children to remove their masks. Teaching and non-teaching unions have opposed this based on the data. Thus the Office for National Statistics reported that secondary-age children had the highest rate of Covid-19 infection of any age group in the week ending 29 May. In Bolton almost one in three secondary pupils were absent because of Covid in the same week.

Meanwhile the hapless Secretary of State for Education Gavin Williamson continues in post despite all his failures. Angela Eagle asked: “Why are the Secretary of State’s powers of persuasion so inadequate that he has only been able to persuade the Chancellor to fund a mere tenth of Sir Kevan Collins’s admirable catch-up plan?” The question remains unanswered. **C**

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

# Demise of Empire State Britain

**Gerry Hassan** with eleven takes on the SNP, Labour, independence and the problem of the British state



**T**he SNP won a fourth term in the recent Scottish elections, winning their highest ever vote – 47.7% of the constituency vote and 64 seats in the 129 seat PR elected chamber. The Greens, a pro-independence party, won 8.1% of the regional vote and eight seats: both record highs, contributing to an independence majority of fifteen seats. Here are eleven takes relevant to Scottish politics and its future – with huge consequences for British politics.

1. If the Tories win the next UK election this would amount to 19 years of successive Tory Governments, following on from 18 years of Thatcherism. Overall that would mean that the past 50 years have witnessed 37 years of Tory Governments (74%) which Scotland did not vote for. The last time the Tories finished ahead in the Scottish vote at a UK election was in 1959: the era of Macmillan and ‘you have never had it so good’.

2. The SNP have now been the Scottish Government for fourteen years. Such a period of dominance brings downsides in terms of how the SNP does politics and governs, with part of its success due to the leadership of Nicola Sturgeon, the salience of the independence question, and the weakness of the SNP’s opponents – Tories, Labour and Lib Dems.

3. At the same time Sturgeon has been in frontline politics in

senior roles in the SNP for the entire 22 years of devolution – which makes her an archetypal insider. If this were not enough her husband Peter Murrell has been Chief Executive of the SNP for that entire 22 years. That concentration of power and decision-making is bad for politics and also bad for the SNP as a party – and cannot be sustainable.

4. Scottish Labour have had over those two decades ten leaders. Some have failed to have any real impact – Richard Leonard being an obvious example. The current leader Anas Sarwar had a decent recent election, winning widespread plaudits. But despite that Labour’s vote continued on its downward path: 21.9% of the constituency vote and 18.6% of the regional vote: the lowest votes the party has achieved under devolution; the latter the party’s lowest Scottish vote since the party was constituted in 1918. It would have been worse under Leonard, but Sarwar’s personable style is not enough without substance.

5. There will be no immediate indyref but this will remain a live issue and the defining topic of Scottish politics. It suits the forces of independence to wait when Boris Johnson says no or delays. Such a Westminster response – particularly if the issue ends up in the UK Supreme Court – makes the independence case synonymous with democracy

and changes the nature of the union in a way which undermines the union case.

6. Both pro-independence and pro-union arguments have heavy lifting to do. The independence side has to come to terms with the risks inherent in such dramatic change, and address the thorny issues: the fiscal deficit, currency and borders.

7. However, the pro-union corner seems reduced to a sort of ‘disaster nationalism’ – saying that Scotland would be the equivalent of a basket case bereft of Westminster subsidies. Add to that the degeneration of Tory unionism into an obsession with putting Union Jacks on everything and dragging the Royal Family – and in particular William and Kate – into the constitutional debate, and the dearth of fresh thinking is apparent. Too many on the pro-union side take succour in the difficulties for the independence argument. Rather, they should recognise that they are fighting a defensive war and one of retreat on the territory of their opponents.

8. Labour’s lack of understanding of the British state remain major drawbacks. The recent massive Corbyn-commissioned report on reforming and democratising the British state and moving towards a more federalised Britain has been parked. Gordon Brown is on manoeuvres – supposedly setting up a UK-



**Gerry Hassan is the author of numerous books on Scottish and UK politics including *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland* and *The People’s Flag and the Union Jack: An Alternative History of Britain and the Labour Party***



wide Constitutional Convention. But no one in the UK Labour Party knows anything about how it is to be organised, its basis and how it will be housed. The Corbyn report understood that one central problem is the nature of the British state; it is unlikely that Brown will have such insights.

9. As long as Britain remains so unequal – economically and socially – and undemocratic with an atrophied political centre and unprecedented centralisation particularly in relation to England, the dynamic of Scottish independence will remain to be solved and addressed. There is a British as well as a Scottish dimension to independence.

10. Scotland needs a credible

left politics challenging the centrism of the SNP. At the moment the importance of the independence question shields the SNP from being held accountable on their domestic agenda. The nearest equivalent to a left critique of the SNP's record comes from the Scottish Greens, but they are less critical because they are pro-independence, and limited on the politics of class and inequality.

11. Scottish Labour through ten leaders have been increasingly not listened to as they have shifted from being the political establishment to being usurped in that role by the SNP. If Scottish Labour is to have a future not only does it have to grasp how to do opposition it has to challenge the insider

elite politics of the SNP.

Labour cannot position itself against Scotland's right to decide its own future – which the party has done under a succession of leaders. Rather than stonewall or equivocate the party has to champion self-government and Scotland's right to decide. In so doing it should challenge the conservatism of the nationalism of the SNP and the nationalism of the unionism of the Tories which defends an archaic British state.

Scotland's constitutional debate is not going away anytime soon. It should not be seen as a diversion from radical change, but rather as a means to bring it about, and bring about the demise of Empire State Britain. **C**

# Labour winning in Wales

**Peter Rowlands** gets behind the success of Mark Drakeford's Welsh Labour

**T**he May results in Wales were the best for Labour across the UK. They mainly concerned the elections to the Welsh Senedd, until recently called the Assembly, the body established in 1999 to manage devolved government in Wales. It is elected by an additional member system of PR, with 40 constituency seats and 20 'top up' list seats. A novel feature was that 16 and 17 year olds were given the vote for the first time, although it is not yet clear what impact this had. There were also elections for four Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC). These were the sixth set of elections for the Assembly/Senedd, and by winning 30 seats, one up on 2016, and 40% of the vote, a five point increase, matched the best previous results for Labour in 2003 and 2011 for seats, and for votes in 2003. Labour also won an extra PCC post, giving it three out of four in Wales, in contrast to the loss of seven PCC posts in England.

There is general agreement that the management of Covid and the accompanying media exposure was an important factor in Labour's success, and First Minister Mark Drakeford came over as serious, competent and sincere, unlike Johnson. Otherwise Labour's programme was relatively cautious, but they did stress the need for increased devolution along federal lines. A document, 'Radical Federalism',

was produced to promote this.

The Tories also did well, boosted no doubt by the 'vaccine bounce' as they were elsewhere, and they increased their support by five points to 26%, gaining 16 seats, their best result, and an increase of five, including the only seat they took from Labour.

For Plaid Cymru the election was a disappointment. Having changed their leader in 2018 they had sought to broaden their appeal, and there was polling evidence from early 2020 of growing support for independence, up from around 15% a few years previously to around 25% in mid 2020. One poll showed 50% of Labour voters supporting independence, and an organisation 'Labour for an independent Wales' grew in support, while an independent pro independence organisation, Yes Cymru, also grew in support. It was therefore reasonable to assume that all of this would have significantly boosted Plaid Cymru's vote.

However, opinion polls did not register this, and they were right. Their vote remained almost the same as before, at 20%. Two small nationalist parties also stood candidates, but their combined vote was only about 1%. Why Plaid Cymru did not do better is unclear. It could be that the appeals of Labour in managing Covid and the Tories in delivering the vaccine were stronger than that of independence, or that

Labour voters looking to independence were either satisfied with Labour's stance on more devolution, or wanted an independent Wales but governed by Labour. There was anyway little movement by Labour voters to Plaid Cymru. That does not mean, however, that nationalism will not continue to be an important factor in Welsh politics for the foreseeable future, or that Plaid Cymru's appeal will remain limited. Clearly developments in Scotland and Northern Ireland are likely to be of major influence here.

The Lib-Dems continued their decline in Wales, with their vote down by a third to 5%, losing their remaining constituency seat, although they gained a regional seat. The Greens did well, increasing their vote by a third to 5%, but not enough to win a regional seat.

In 2016, UKIP were strong and managed to gain seven seats, and although most of them moved to other small parties or became independents, they have all gone, and Senedd politics are likely to be more orderly as a result.

Mark Drakeford, the senior Labour office holder in the UK, has said that he will step down as leader before the next Senedd election. He is a left winger, but there is no certainty that another left winger will replace him. However, the succession will now become an important issue in Welsh politics until it is resolved. **C**

**Pete Rowlands is a member of Swansea Labour Party**

# Time up for rigged Northern Ireland state

In the 100th anniversary year of Ireland's partition **John Palmer** surveys the conflicts in the gerrymandered state and looks at prospects for a united Ireland and a rump UK



**I**s there any future for the United Kingdom as we know it? Growing Scottish demands for independence, Welsh insistence on full 'Home Rule', and calls from the north of England for a radical transfer of powers away from Whitehall to the English cities and regions suggest there may not be.

In the wake of Brexit (very unpopular in Northern Ireland), public opinion also seems to be edging towards an eventual reunification of Ireland. Little wonder that celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the British government's enforced partition of Ireland in 1921 have been so muted.

The treaty ending the 1919-1922 Irish war of independence resulted in a mini-state created by partitioning six of the nine counties of Ireland's northern Ulster province. It was engineered to create a loyalist pro-British UK enclave. The other three Ulster counties became part of the Irish Free State (now the Republic of Ireland.)

Northern Ireland was run on

sectarian religio/political lines by Unionists confident of a seemingly permanent majority in the Stormont Parliament. The local government electoral system would not have been tolerated elsewhere in the UK. Rigged electoral boundaries and a tendency to "Vote Early – Vote Often" ensured impregnable Unionist majorities even in strongly nationalist/Catholic areas like Derry.

The Northern state was policed by the 'B-Specials' - a thuggish Loyalist para-military force - alongside the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the British army. The Catholic/nationalist community was subject to episodic pogroms sometimes associated with triumphalist displays by the ultra-loyalist Orange Order marching through nationalist communities.

In 1922 Catholic workers were killed or driven out from the giant Belfast shipyards and other work places. Homes were besieged in Catholic areas and families forced to flee the city and seek refuge in the south. Loyalist mobs were watched by the police

and B-Specials without intervention.

Little attempt was made to dislodge the anti-Catholic bias of the regime. The government in London washed its hands of any direct responsibility for what was happening, citing the constitutional terms of the Partition Treaty. At annual conference Labour Party delegates were prohibited by the NEC - as late as the 1960s - from debating the record of the Stormont regime for alleged 'constitutional' reasons.

British politicians averted their eyes from the blatant rigging of local election boundaries and the arrangement in the early decades whereby business owners (mainly pro-Unionist) were given a second vote in local elections! The regime itself ignored accusations of disregard of human rights and democracy. As the first Unionist Prime Minister of the Six-county regime, Lord Craigavon, proudly declared: "All I boast of is that we are a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant State."

There are profound historical ironies in all this. The origins of Irish republicanism lie as much



in the non-conformist Protestant communities in the north of Ireland as those in Catholic Ireland. Many of the executed leaders of the failed 1798 rising by the 'United Irishmen' were non-conformist Protestant radicals inspired by the French revolution.

But in subsequent decades, after the bloody repression of the 1798 rising the British government adopted policies systematically favouring the Protestant community. A strong advocate of this strategy was Lord Randolph Churchill – Winston Churchill's father. Northern Catholic nationalists were treated as a subject, 'disloyal' and 'subversive' community. Protestant tenant farmers were given privileged terms for buying their land denied to Catholics.

After 1921 successive Irish governments adopted a constitution with a shameless, doctrinally 'Catholic' bias. But Irish governments did not overtly discriminate against non-Catholics in the way Protestant triumphalism was imposed on Catholics in the north.

Over the decades attempts by remnants of the IRA to launch cross border guerrilla campaigns were a complete failure. But the stifling political culture in Northern Ireland meant that progressive political and social forces made little progress in either the Catholic/nationalist or the Protestant/Unionist communities.

The trade unions were a partial exception. Inspired by the revolutionary socialist ideas of James Connolly - one of the 1916 leaders - there were instances of joint struggles by workers in both communities, except in the 1930s these rarely extended beyond limited economic and social issues.

In the south successive conservative Fianna Fail and Fine Gael governments (products of the post-treaty Irish Civil War) ran anti-partition propaganda campaigns with no success outside the US. But, inspired by the black civil rights movement in the US, a mass campaign was launched in the 1960s for civil rights and democratic reforms. This proved to be a dramatic turning point.

The civil rights movement was led by young leftists in Peoples Democracy including Mike Farrell, Bernadette Devlin and Eamonn McCann. It was supported by a wide coalition mainly but not solely drawn from the Catholic community. It was met with violent repression by the

RUC. That, in turn, sparked a major revival of the then dormant IRA and its political affiliate – Sinn Féin.

The bloody carnage which followed led to a disastrous bid to impose internment without trial on 'subversive' republicans and civil rights activists backfired. Thousands were detained. Support for the IRA grew exponentially and survived the appalling blunders and loss of innocent lives which inevitably accompany urban guerrilla warfare.

The introduction of crack units of the British army to crush the IRA in the 1970s turned civil unrest into open urban guerrilla warfare. Only now has there been any (limited) public accounting for the massacres of unarmed civilians in Derry, Belfast and elsewhere by the British Army - as well as by Loyalist and Republican para-militaries.

After more than 25 years of bloody stalemate it became clear that neither the British government nor the IRA could achieve military success. Negotiations between the IRA, Loyalists and the British state (but with close involvement by the United States) led to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Building on a permanent 'ceasefire', the agreement included a complex 'power sharing' system of government by elected representatives of both communities.

Subsequently a Stormont 'coalition' between the hard line Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin has ensured a fragile peace and has produced some elements of political, social and cultural equality between the two communities. But the precariousness of the GFA has now been revealed in the wake of Brexit.

The EU/UK withdrawal agreement negotiated by the Johnson government was only approved by Parliament with the support of the DUP. But to the ire of the DUP, the small print of that deal, leaves Northern Ireland inside the EU Single Market and Customs Union with the rest of the UK outside. This necessitated an Irish Sea customs trade border between GB and NI.

The DUP denounced the Tory deal as 'rank treachery' and in the wake of angry Loyalist demonstrations and threats of a return to violence there are fears for the peace agreement itself. The DUP has now split into rival factions and electoral support for Unionism as a whole is waning

and divided between three parties. Even more striking is the evidence that support among younger, anti-Brexit voters from a unionist background is switching from Unionism as a whole to 'non-confessional' parties such as Alliance and the Greens.

Polling evidence also suggests that opposition to an eventual United Ireland may be waning. Many northern Unionists have applied for a second Irish passport. A poll in the pro-Unionist Belfast Telegraph recently predicted that Sinn Féin would emerge as the largest party in the NI elections due to be held in the north next year.

The responsibility for heading the Stormont government would, in this event, pass for the first time from a Unionist party to an Irish Republican party. Meanwhile – according to a recent poll in The Irish Times – Sinn Féin may also become the largest party in the Dublin Dail (Parliament) for the first time since 1918.

Any unification process will necessarily be gradual. Initially it may involve little more than a "Shared Island" emphasis on cross-border economic and social developments. There is debate about All-Ireland 'Citizens Assemblies' to explore possible future constitutional changes not least to reassure those who identify as 'British' rather than 'Irish' in Northern Ireland. Formal negotiations on the precise terms and time table for referendums on unification in both parts of Ireland might take place after a few years.

The entire process could still be threatened by a return to violence by Loyalist para-militaries. But – conversely – it would be strengthened if the campaign for Scottish independence, demands for radical devolution in Wales and the English regions succeed.

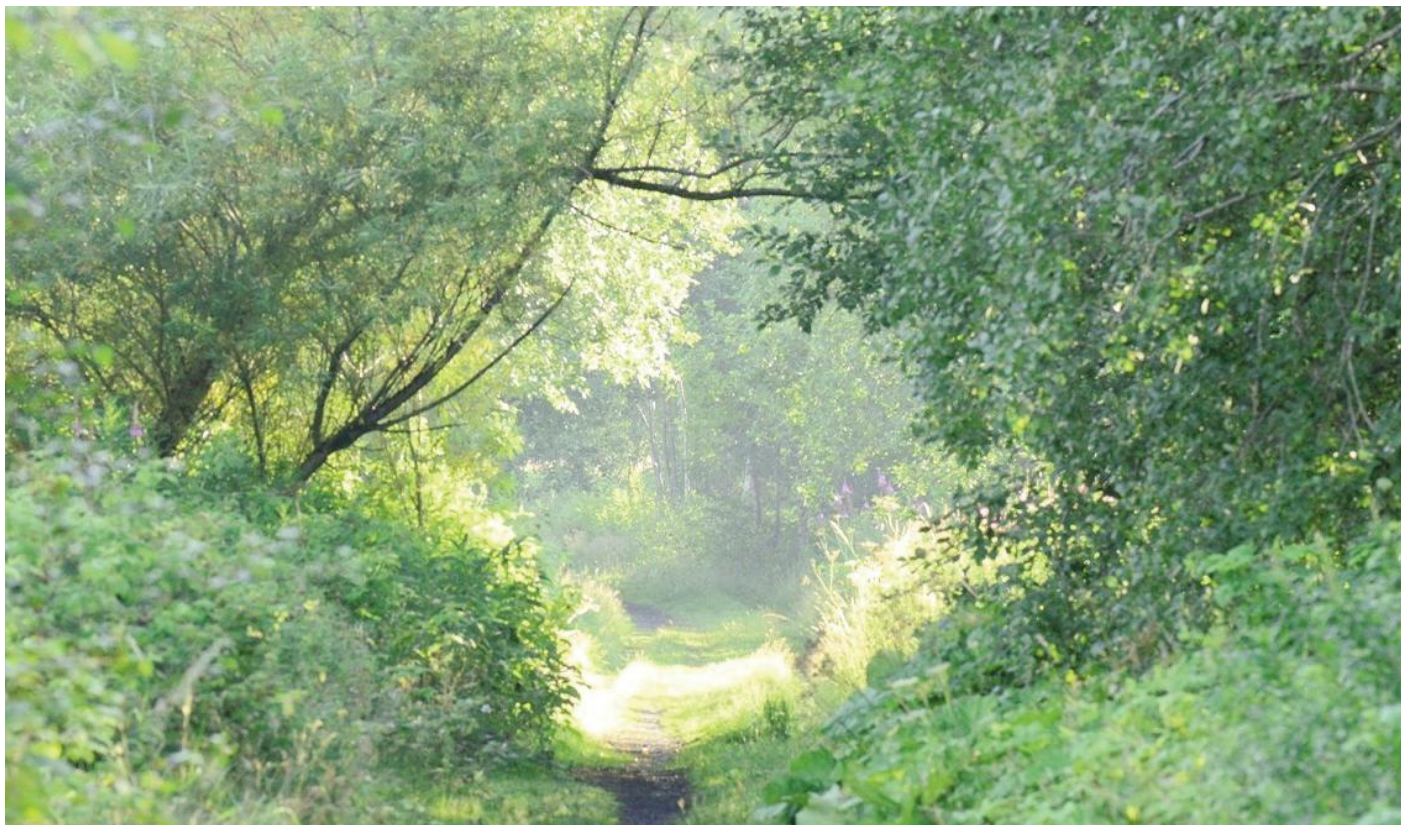
Such dramatic changes would surely make a comprehensive 'Constitutional Convention' - for whatever remains of the UK - unavoidable. Such a convention would have to grapple with more than the fragmenting UK. Could it avoid long overdue reform of our grotesquely undemocratic electoral system? And what future for the once imperial UK monarchy? After all the creation of the United Kingdom - through the conquest/subordination of the Celtic nations - was itself the first major step to the British empire. Time for the Left to get its thinking cap on. **C**



**John Palmer was the Guardian's Europe editor and is a member of Woolwich Labour Party**

# Rebuilding for biodiversity

In Buxton, **Mark Cocker** has been talking to local councillors **Madeline Hall**, **Rachael Quinn** and **Keith Savage** about how we rethink the future of brownfield redevelopment



Hogshaw - rich in biodiversity

**B**oth the Labour Party and the Tories are insistent that central to their plans for economic renewal is the building of new homes. There is a degree of rivalry about how many hundreds of thousands each will deliver, but focussing on the numbers avoids scrutiny of how this addresses Britain's long-term housing requirement. By using construction volume as the only yardstick precise details of housing need are ignored.

There is also the underlying assumption that home-ownership is the universal goal. More than one-third of British households live in rented accommodation and the private sector has grown by more than 60% in this century. The shortage of good quality rental housing must be addressed. In short, we need to ask what sort of housing should be built, where and by whom, in a post-Covid-19, post-Brexit Britain.

Another key consideration is Britain's status as the 12th worst

nation (out of 240) when it comes to biological integrity. England is 7th from bottom. State-based conservation has been delivered through a process designed by Clement Attlee's postwar Labour government. In its day this was a radical innovation. Despite repeated tweaks over 70 years, using the same blueprint for nature has manifestly failed to secure an environment worthy of a civilised people.

This country therefore faces two simultaneous crises: one of housing need and the other of environmental loss. Our planning system currently fails to meet this national challenge that bears down now on all the political classes in Britain.

The north Derbyshire town of Buxton is wrestling with the future of one particular site that goes to the very heart of the problem. Hogshaw has a specific history. Pretty much in the centre of the town's residential area, it was until the 1970s the official tip. Quite what contaminants are in the soil is unclear, but asbestos in

high volume and engine oil are known to lie below the surface, not to mention decades of household refuse and all its toxic metabolites. With a railway line on one side and a stream on the other, Hogshaw currently has almost no vehicular access. Yet for decades it has been used constantly by adjacent residents and is crisscrossed by a complex of footpaths.

Over the years the site has taken on the character of scrub woodland, represented especially by two pioneer species, birch and willow. They are respectively the third and the second most invertebrate-rich tree species in Britain. Only oaks have a higher ecological value. As a consequence, these trees are full of breeding birds including five Red-listed and two Amber-listed species such as song thrush, bullfinch and willow warbler.

The soils are poor and ironically perfect for an almost continuous summer carpet of common flowers: ragwort, rosebay willowherb, various clovers, eye-



bright, knapweed and avenues of bramble. The profusion of colour in summer outshines any of Buxton's formal parks. The blackberry, raspberry and gooseberry bushes produce wild fruit by the tub full, and the whole area is beloved by nectaring insects, most notably the nationally scarce bilberry bumblebee. There is also one unexpected botanical rarity: a localised patch of a beautiful orchid, the broad-leaved helleborine. In short Hogshaw is both an enclave of scruffy suburban detritus and a beautiful place full of biodiversity.

Hogshaw includes a 'rec', a well-maintained and much-loved football pitch-sized play space that is flat, safe and in constant use. The wider site is equally well-used by residents for dog-walking and exercise. A local group has self-declared part of it as a nature reserve, while children have opportunities for free-range play and Hogshaw is dotted with dens and other installations. One thing that we have surely learned from the pandemic is that all communities need spaces like Hogshaw for mental and physical health. If we lose them, we can never get them back.

Why, then, would anyone give up something so precious? The story is long and complicated but it comes down to the pressures on local authorities to set-out plans for land use and to meet government-imposed house-building targets. Much of Hogshaw is owned by High Peak Borough Council, which is also the planning authority. Five years ago, after much discussion, the Council agreed a Local Plan which set aside most of the Hogshaw site for housing development. The 'rec' was deliberately excluded from development and the understanding was that it would be protected.

At that time there was little serious argument about the future of 'brownfield' sites; the land, it was assumed, had been spoiled and neglected and new development would improve and 'tidy-up' such sites, which was a far better option than the trashing of green-belt land. This is precisely what the planning regulations instituted by Attlee's government were intended to achieve: protect the supposedly wildlife-rich countryside from the biological shrinkage inflicted by housing and urban development.

There was a widely held understanding, across political parties, that the contaminated Hogshaw

site was an obvious candidate for redevelopment. Additionally, a new road would unlock the site, although the addition of hundreds more cars to an already overburdened road network where air quality is poor is a questionable ambition.

Current government pressure demands that planning authorities identify five years' worth of land supply for new housing and for a borough like High Peak that equates to over 1700 new homes. There are thousands of people on the housing waiting list and the only realistic way that new housing on any scale will be built is through deals with private developers. In short, the only measure available to meet the social challenge of adequate local housing is the blunt instrument of capitalism.

The Council manages housing stock, but its budget is small and borrowing to build housing is not an option. This puts developers in a strong negotiating position - a situation which the government

## Nature doesn't function in parts; it operates as a unified single system

is happy to strengthen. A consequence of this is that builders want to build wherever it is most profitable, without regard for what is needed. This undermines local democracy.

In the case of Hogshaw, interested developers have let it be known that they 'need' a bigger site than the one identified in the Local Plan - in fact they want the whole site, including the 'rec', if they are to make a reasonable profit and provide some affordable housing.

Sceptics about Hogshaw's future, if its sale and development were approved, anticipate that the developers will soon conclude that the costs of 'decontamination' work are higher than forecast and seek to reduce the amount of affordable housing provided. This is just one case study. What does it tell us or ask of us at a policy-making level?

In the first instance it highlights the inadequacy of more-or-less arbitrary targets for new housing imposed by central government. No real account of

demographic data informs these top-down goals. Nor do they capture local need.

The 2021 Census data is likely to confirm that the British population is ageing - especially outside of big cities - and that many younger people have left following Brexit. This should have implications for planning - especially housing stock - but will it be taken into account?

In many parts of the country it is also obvious that housing is too expensive and with many workers on flexible contracts and minimum wages there needs to be more rented accommodation. This is only going to be provided by local authorities or housing associations. For that to happen more money needs to be targetted in that direction. Housing could be built to higher standards meeting stricter environmental targets that would go some way to meeting the needs of those marginalised by the present set-up. Some of this would start to target the real issues of housing supply and deliver with a flexibility not expressed in chest-beating slogans like 'Build, Build, Build'.

Equally, Hogshaw highlights the inadequacy of protecting greenbelt at all costs and prioritising brownfield sites which remains not only a planning objective but is routinely espoused by organisations such as CPRE, the countryside charity.

Greenbelt is an old idea that carried meaning when there was a rough alignment between the farmed environment and ecological complexity. Modern agro-industry has obliterated that rule-of-thumb. Hogshaw demonstrates that inner urban areas can sometimes be far richer in nature, not only than the greenbelt but than many areas designated for natural beauty.

Furthermore, nature doesn't function in parts; it operates as a unified single system. Our old misunderstanding of this truth has created a country fragmented by competing land uses. Preserving Hogshaw now as it stands offers the possibility to rethink aspects of town planning and house provision. Leaving the old tip intact would help create green corridors that allow billions of other British residents, all of them non-human - flowers, trees, plants, insects, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians - to live within, and pass through this beautiful town, its surrounding areas and, ultimately, across the whole landscape. **C**



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

# The secret state and us

**Richard Chessum** on being a victim of government political espionage

**H**ow seriously should we view the secret state? What impact does it have on our daily lives as political activists? How concerned should we be that it may be directly influencing the direction of our politics more widely?

Several years ago I was approached by an Undercover Research Team and asked if I would be prepared to be a Core Participant in the Mitting Inquiry set up by Theresa May when she was Home Secretary to investigate aspects of undercover policing. The concerns arose out of the practices over several decades of the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) created after the big demonstrations against the Vietnam war in 1967/8.

It has never been in doubt that the state in so called capitalist democracies spies on activists, mostly on those of us on the left of the political spectrum. That has been well documented. SpyCops are not exclusively a feature of countries with political dictatorships. Every state has its spies, but just how numerous are they and how intensive is their intrusion into our private lives and not just our politics?

I was befriended by one such SpyCop in the 1970's and thought he was a friend and colleague for nearly two years. That experience was in the distant past and had not been uppermost in my consciousness for decades until recently. However, my involvement in the Mitting Inquiry and the evidence uncovered by my legal team has persuaded me to re-assess the whole experience and its significance.

The scandal surrounding the SDS revolves around the methods it employed, taking the identities of dead children of bereaved families without their consent, and sexually targeting and exploiting leading women in the organisations it infiltrated. The most notorious of these activities included having a child with one of these women and being present at the birth. There was also the extraordinary revelation that another of the SpyCops had actually re-emerged as an Assistant Police Commissioner responsible for monitoring police behaviour! In both of these examples as with so

many others, the women concerned thought they were in a substantive relationship and had no idea of the real identity of the men involved, leading to justified claims that they had been "raped by the state".

So much was common knowledge before my involvement with the Inquiry. What has emerged since? And what else does it tell us that we had no evidence for before?

The man who befriended me became a political colleague in the Troops Out Movement (TOM) campaigning for a United Ireland and the withdrawal of British troops from the north. It is clear that he did so because he thought his closeness to me would give him political credibility with other campaigners as he had no track record of his own. He adopted the name of a deceased child called Rick Gibson, but his real name was Richard Clark, and he was a Police spy in the SDS who eventually became a Detective Inspector.

Mitting himself at first thought his deployment was "unremarkable" (his own word) but came to believe through the evidence I gave that he had been wrong. My own legal team did their own investigations and came to believe that his deployment could well have been a game changer. The Metropolitan Police, when they were finally forced to admit the sexual exploitation that had taken place with so many women, tried to maintain that it only happened in the later stages of the SDS deployment and only then because rogue officers had disobeyed official guidelines. Rick Gibson was deployed in the early stages and I knew that he had relationships with at least four women in our organisation, thus undermining that dishonest but convenient narrative.

What we now know is that far from being a rogue officer, Rick Gibson was actually boasting about his sexual relationships in the presence of other SDS men, and almost certainly in the presence of his superiors who knew full well what was going on and did nothing to stop it. We also now know that one of the earliest instructions to officers deployed was that they should not take on roles of responsibility in the movements they infiltrated, yet Rick Gibson quickly became secretary of our local TOM branch, then

rose to become London Organiser and finally National Secretary, in a pivotal role in the whole organisation. This was also known to his superiors who allowed it to happen and may even have helped him facilitate it.

Gibson's deployment acted as a template adopted by the SDS, not only targeting key women for relationships to give themselves a cover, but also moving up hierarchies to influence the direction of movements and, in extremis, almost certainly attempting to sabotage and derail them.

How high did all this go? The deployment of the SDS was sanctioned at the highest level up to and including the Prime Minister of the time, and its more sordid activities were clearly known about and not prevented by senior police officers. So were the tactics and strategy decided from the start, or did Rick Gibson's 'successes' change the name of the game? One thing is clear. His deployment was most definitely not 'unremarkable'.

What has also emerged in the course of this Inquiry is that others who I thought at the time were political colleagues were also SDS SpyCops, including a very helpful and sympathetic Vice President of a local Students Union supporting our local TOM. Professional infiltrators were not uncommon, indeed quite numerous. Two a penny, you might say. And the reports sent on a regular basis to MI5 about me and some of my relatives and friends give very detailed descriptions not only of our political activities but also about our private lives and even our general appearance. So I ask myself how many times have I been targeted since, especially, for example, as I strongly suspect, when I was a Labour Parliamentary candidate.

More generally should we assume that today such detailed monitoring continues? That we are all being watched and monitored goes without saying. It has always happened. But how intrusive and all-encompassing is the secret state in our own time? And who are the people in high places who are authorising it? Is there any reason to believe that those who govern us in 2021 are more trustworthy than those who have gone before? One only has to ask the question. **C**



**Richard Chessum**  
is joint chair of  
ASSIST



# On the side of democracy

Tory voter suppression versus democracy - Labour needs to take a leap of faith says **Mary Southcott**

**Y**ou only have to look at their 2017 and 2019 Manifestos and the 2021 Queen's Speech to know how much the current first past the post is the Conservative voting system. It makes voter suppression easy and inevitable. The next time Labour is in office this needs to change, not for expediency but to prevent the whole of politics drifting into irrelevance.

After the Chartists and Suffragettes struggled to widen the franchise, you might expect people to want their vote to count. Voter suppression is official Tory policy. They only want meaningful votes for their voters. Labour needs to address all those who are taken for granted and bypassed in seats where the same party always wins. They are the many, but the few decide current general elections.

New boundaries (see Cat Smith on back page) are not based on population. People who are not registered to vote do not count. A decade ago, Mark Harper, the Tory-led Coalition's Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform, confessed to a meeting in Number 10 he was only interested in low hanging fruit, basically the settled communities, owner occupiers, in short, Tory voters, in terms of registration.

Who is disenfranchised? Young and other people who move frequently, in private multi occupation, looking for jobs. What we call churn, which contributes to low turnout. People who may be registered but have moved before the following election. Others find filling in details difficult, on paper or computer. Millions don't appear on registers, the building blocks of the Tory bid to create equal constituencies.

Registration itself is voter suppression. Boundaries create the constituencies which decide where the next general election is fought, target marginals, and won. The fight to change boundaries will be naked Party interest although their evidence will be about bus stops, schools and parishes. What matters will cause voter suppression just as in the United States where redistricting and gerrymandering are two sides of the same coin. Not a good look for democracy.

On the spurious grounds of massive electoral fraud, failure to show



**Voter queues will get longer under Tory plans**

Voter ID will disenfranchise another few million people who have neither a passport or driving licence, foreshadowed in Theresa May's 2017 manifesto, ironically to create "a flourishing and secure democracy". At the same time, they will legislate for votes for life for British overseas electors they reckon will vote for them.

Priti Patel is determined to return to first past the post voting everywhere in England where the current government's writ runs. They have their sights on mayoral and police and crime commission supplementary vote elections that currently maximise the support for the person elected. Dropping SV will not change Labour first vote victories in Liverpool and Manchester but many others where it gets transfers from other anti Tory voters.

It is interesting how many Labour politicians support voting reform having fought elections which make them reach out beyond their core supporters. Andy Burnham joins the ranks of Labour electoral reformers like Tracy Brabin, Mark Drakeford, Anas Sarwar, Jamie Driscoll and (we believe) Kim Leadbeater in Batley and Spen.

In their 2019 Manifesto, Get Brexit Done, the Government promised to get rid of Fixed Term parliament, tick; equal parliament boundaries, tick; ironically "making sure that every vote counts the same – a cornerstone of democracy"; to continue to support the First Past the Post system of voting, "as it

allows voters to kick out politicians who don't deliver", tick; to protect the integrity of our democracy by introducing identification to vote at polling stations; making it easier for British expats to vote and getting rid of the arbitrary 15-year limit on their voting rights; maintain the voting age at 18, and setting up a Constitution, Democracy & Rights Commission to examine how our democracy operates, as if they are interested in it operating. Tories are stuck in the past, whereas 16- and 17-year-old voters had no problem voting in the Scottish Independence referendum and the 2021 Scottish Parliament and Welsh Senedd elections.

The Tories know what is in their interest but does Labour? Labour should prevent or promise to reverse most of what the Tories want implemented in order for them to win the next general election. Tories are not playing games. They are serious about retaining power. Just by offering to introduce a voting system to make votes count, to prevent the move back to first past the post in mayoral and other elections fought by supplementary vote, to allow young people to vote and introduce citizenship education, and training for teachers, to ensure that all British people living abroad can vote and not just Tories, Labour can be on the side of democracy. This change of political culture will bring people back into politics rather than suppressing voting and, more important, boost engagement. **C**

**Mary Southcott is a member of Chartist EB and Bristol Labour**

# Deadly consequences of tighter controls

**Maël Galisson** says the new plan for the French-British border suggests the same old recipes with disastrous human consequences

**W**hile the British authorities are ready to pay hundreds of millions of pounds in order to make the Channel between Dover and Calais "unviable", in defiance of the rights of migrants stranded in northern France, who are considered to have "no legal right to be in the UK", it's important to recall some of the basic elements of what is happening at the border. This situation, generated by a pile of bilateral agreements between the UK and France, has been going on for more than 25 years. The result: violent consequences for migrants, without any solution to a situation whose roots will never be resolved by control measures.

Not all migrants blocked in Calais and in the region were attracted to the United Kingdom when they fled their country. What we see on the ground is that most migratory routes are built step by step, often in response to immobilization measures that complicate people's original aspirations. Their priority is to find a safe place, and this often means crossing a border when there is no such option in the country of origin. In turn, if the situation in the neighboring countries does not allow one to live in safety and to imagine rebuilding their life, then people may decide to travel further. Most of the time, this is how migratory routes are constructed: by navigating through daily uncertainties, potential opportunities to continue the journey, family and networks abroad and available monies, among other things. Often, the measures deployed abroad in partnership with European countries as part of an externalization process of border control in fact aggravate the conditions and contribute to push the exiles to take the road again.

In the north of France, for example, many migrants find themselves in a 'wandering condition'. Indeed, it is common to come across people who have been refused asylum in another European country (Sweden, Germany, France), who are taking the road again in order



Rescued refugees in the English Channel

to avoid a potential deportation and hope to find a better future in the United Kingdom. Or they may be people who have regular residence permits in other countries, but who, faced with discrimination (particularly racist) and/or economic difficulties in the country of arrival, think they will find a better situation in the UK. People might also have historical family links in the UK and simply want to be among their loved ones. In the end, it is also the national migration policies that are hostile to refugees on the European continent that push some foreigners to continue their journey and try their luck in the UK.

Meanwhile, border security or legislative measures aimed at preventing or dissuading migrants from crossing the border do not have the desired effect. The bilateral agreements between France and the UK signed since 2014 illustrate this very well. In 2014, the two governments decided to 'fortify' the port of Calais to prevent exiles from entering the port site. Kilometers of fences, barbed wire, and video surveillance systems were installed. But this did not deter migrants from trying to cross the border: exiles simply changed their strategy and, instead of crossing the border hidden in trucks, tried to go through the Channel

Tunnel. So, in 2015, the two governments decided in a new agreement to 'fortify' the Eurotunnel site.

Again, miles of barriers, barbed wire and drones were installed, forcing migrants to find another way to cross the border. As of 2015/2016, and even more after the eviction of the Calais Jungle in October 2016, the attempts to cross by sea multiplied. In fact, what is likely to happen because of one of the measures of the "New plan for immigration", namely to facilitate the removal or tighten the conditions of access to asylum for people arriving in the UK by 'small boats', is that exiles turn away from boat crossings to adopt even more dangerous passage strategies.

The truth has been evident for a long time that when authorities try to close a migratory route, another one opens up, further away, more dangerous and more expensive and for which the recourse to smugglers is even more necessary. Let us remember in passing that since 1999, at least 302 migrants have died in this Franco-Belgian-British cross-border area. In short, 'securing' the border accentuates the deadly dimension of this territory and strengthens the hold of the smuggling networks, which the authorities claim to be fighting. **C**



**Maël Galisson is a member of the French migrant support group, Gisti (Groupe d'Information et de Soutien des immigrés).**

**Translated by Celine Cantat**



# Transport – going nowhere fast

**Nigel Doggett** on government rhetoric supplanting serious action

**A**s noted in Chartist 310, the UK has succeeded in cutting carbon emissions in 2020 by around 50% since 1990. However, this was mostly achieved in the energy sector, especially phasing out coal and the ‘dash for gas’, and a rebound is in hand as the UK economy gears up after successive lockdowns. The further 28% reduction to reach the latest target of 78% by 2035 will require a 56% saving based on recent emissions, with most ‘low hanging fruit’ already plucked. This demands a gargantuan effort, but the British government shows little appetite, relying on crowd-pleasing rhetoric rather than serious action, most recently at the June G7 meeting. Yet record levels of public concern, climate assemblies and campaign pressures backed by reports of climate impacts such as iceshelf and glacier shrinkage, biodiversity loss and ocean warming, means that excuses for inaction observed by Rebecca Willis (Chartist 308) are wearing thin.

The UK’s statutory watchdog Committee on Climate Change (CCC) has shown the UK falling behind its ‘carbon budget’ targets and its recent adaptation report is scathing about the lack of preparation for hazards already occurring. The CCC highlights several sectors making slow and piecemeal progress: agricultural and land use, building (heating and cooling, especially of housing) and transport.

The surface transport sector has been the largest contributor to emissions since 2015, producing 22% of the total in 2019, over half of this from fossil-fueled cars. Despite technical innovation and the introduction of hybrid and battery electric cars, these emissions have hardly changed since 1990 due to increases in both car numbers and size, notably the rise in SUVs. Plug-in hybrids (PHEVs), heavily promoted by mainstream makers, have very limited range on electric power and their overall economy is often no better than a small petrol car. Surveys show that most drivers fail to make the most of their potential savings.

Ending sales of new fossil-fueled cars in 2030, and hybrids in 2035, are positive steps, but lack the necessary strategic planning. The UK




government’s Transport Decarbonisation Plan, originally scheduled for late 2020, then delayed until the Spring, has still not appeared. The extra £20 million grants for electric vehicle charging points will not address the main barrier: not so much a shortage of charging points as a variety of suppliers, subscription arrangements and connections - crying out for ministers to ditch their default mode of leaving it to the market and knock manufacturers’ heads together for ‘Link ATM’-style standards.

But it will be a mistake to switch the current cohort of vehicles with electric or even hydrogen, on

grounds of congestion, particle pollution (from tyres irrespective of vehicle type) and raw material supply. The car ownership divide also both reflects and reinforces social inequalities. Of course, one tragic effect of the pandemic has been the shift from public to private transport, which government at all levels needs quickly to work to reverse.


The CCC stresses the virtues for societal shifts to cycling, car sharing, home working and online shopping. Rail transport needs to migrate from diesel to electric power, using batteries and hydrogen for less busy lines. We need to see real evidence of such ambitions in advance of COP26. **C**

**Nigel Doggett is a member of Chartist EB**



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# Protection for supply chain workers

**Lara Wolters** on a key human rights and environmental due diligence protection from the European Parliament

**O**n the 10th March, the European Parliament adopted a legislative initiative report on corporate due diligence and corporate accountability. With broad support from across political groups, the plenary assembly put its weight behind mandatory rules on responsible business conduct, which will also extend to UK businesses active on the internal market.

The agreement was unthinkable just a few years ago. But a number of headline-grabbing scandals and the COVID-19-induced necessity to reconsider overly complex global supply chains have produced a broad political coalition in favour of a binding duty of care. The EU Commission must now use this momentum to present an ambitious legislative proposal.

In spite of the crisis, or maybe rather because of it, there has never been a better time for human rights due diligence. The pandemic has not only exposed vulnerabilities in our supply chains, but also our reliance on business models that fail to respect human rights or harm the environment.

The garment industry serves as a sad example. In the first few weeks of the pandemic, as a consequence of government-imposed shop closures, big Western brands cancelled more than 3 billion euros worth of orders and demanded considerable discounts on others. The poorest and most vulnerable workers were made to bear the brunt of the health crisis.

At a time when many companies will seek to reduce the economic vulnerabilities in their supply chains as well as their dependence on risky sources, crafting a duty to equally scan those supply chains for environmental and human rights risks is vital.

In logistical and economic terms, our world is connected enough for businesses to minimise costs and maximise profits. In legal terms, it is disconnected enough for those so inclined to disregard the negative consequences of their business decisions. As long as the international legal framework serves multinationals rather than the victims of human rights violations or of environmental degradation, this

amounts to a standing invitation to environmental and social dumping.

This is why the European Parliament has now, with a strong majority, passed a proposal that would require companies to identify, prevent and mitigate adverse environmental, social or governance impacts in their global supply chains. The requirements will apply to all businesses operating on the EU internal market and to their entire value chain, including UK businesses active in Europe or businesses with value chains that extend to the UK. In doing so, the EU is aspiring to set a new global standard for responsible business conduct.

Harm should be addressed meaningfully, violations sanctioned, and victims compensated. The legislation asks of companies to make efforts within their means. While it will not ask the impossible, it will ask companies to take their duty of care seriously and put in place robust processes to avoid harm in line with international conventions.

The legislative report also calls to improve access to judicial remedy for victims. This should clarify what the duty of care of an EU parent company entails, for instance if - as has recently been the case - Nigerian farmers bring a case against the British-Dutch oil company Shell for pollution in the Niger Delta.

Crucially, the proposal includes a provision that would make human rights due diligence "overriding" and "mandatory" so as to enable victims in third countries to hold EU parent companies liable under EU law, rather than under the law of the country where the harm was done. This is a vital provision: of roughly 35 cases against EU companies in EU member states' courts by foreign victims in the past ten years, only one has succeeded. The legislation begins to address the barriers to justice at play in the other cases by extending liability for harm throughout the value chain; more fairly distributing the burden of proof; and ensuring reasonable time limits for bringing such claims.

In itself, the Parliament's ideas on responsible business conduct are nothing new. The OECD and the UN have been working on due diligence guidance for multinational



Thousands of garment workers and their unions rally on the one-year anniversary of the Rana Plaza collapse that killed more than 1,100 garment workers. (Pic: Solidarity Center)

enterprises for years, and thousands of companies across the globe already implement these standards. But while 'soft law' due diligence standards have been a useful tool for companies wanting to take responsibility, they have failed to transform those shunning it.

Sound EU due diligence rules will not only level but elevate the playing field for businesses that want to sell their goods or services to the EU's 450 million consumers - and potentially across the globe. The rules can be beneficial for any business from a viewpoint of legal clarity, risk management and access to the EU market.

While in the UK, an environmental bill that would hold companies liable for ecological devastation has been delayed for the third time, UK businesses active in the EU would be clear on the standard of care expected of them.

While we cannot undo the collapse of Rana Plaza, the pollution in the Niger delta or the deaths of migrant workers in Qatar, the COVID-19 crisis has offered us a chance to rethink and redesign global value chains. Let's make them more robust, more transparent and put them at the service of the environment and human rights. **C**



**Lara Wolters is a Dutch Labour MEP**



# Roman Horror Day

**Patrick Mulcahy**  
on a modern  
Arabian  
Nights

Set in the infamous La Maca prison in Abidjan, Côte D'Ivoire, *Night of the Kings* is a gripping, non-naturalistic drama in which a new inmate (Bakary Koné) is reluctantly anointed 'Roman' (storyteller) and is tasked with entertaining other prisoners on the night of the red moon. He is threatened with the hook by Barbe Noire (Steve Tienchieu), a.k.a., Black Beard, the prison's Dangoro – the equivalent of a Mafia Godfather. Barbe Noire needs oxygen to survive. His time is almost up and is yet to anoint a successor. Meanwhile, Lass (Abdoul Karim Konaté) prepares to take over. 'We will stop making prisoners our slaves and make them our customers,' he says with a grin, a comment on how mercantilism is a form of subjugation. In a packed courtyard, heaving with an audience who respond theatrically to his words, Roman tentatively steps onto a box and tells the story of Zama King, the infamous leader of the Microbes – the gang's name is apparently taken from their fictitious counterpart in the film, *City of God* – with whom he hung out. Right from the off, Roman – we never find out his real name – informs us that he is no storyteller. However, he accepts the role. 'If God made us killers, then we're killers. If God made me Roman, I am Roman,' he declaims to the expectant crowd. The film's writer-director, Philippe Lacôte, is no conventional storyteller either. He does not explain how La Maca came, according to one of the wardens, to be the only prison run by a prisoner, though a lack of staff might have something to do with it. Roman mythologises Zama, claiming he was the son of a blind man and that Zama's mother was killed in scenes that seem to take place in another time and a more rural place. Roman is a latter-day Scheherazade, the narrator of 'One Thousand and One Nights', who told a series of stories to the King, who resolved to kill her once she had finished. Scheherazade kept herself alive by only telling half the story until daybreak, then finishing it the next night before starting another and so on. Roman's story focuses on how the infamous criminal met his fate at the hands of an angry mob, before going back to



the beginning. A group of inmates act out Roman's words through threatening and powerful dance-like gestures. In parallel, Barbe Noire prepares to drown himself. On one level, the film is a meditation on fatalism. Yet Roman is advised by another prisoner – the ironically-named Silence (Denis Levant, playing La Maca's only white inmate) that – like Scheherazade – he must never finish his story. Roman should endeavour to survive, though what sort of future he faces isn't clear. Levant has been cast to link Lacôte's film to *Beau Travail*, Claire Denis' 1999 film set in Djibouti in which Levant appeared. Just as Denis took a character from Jean-Luc Godard's film, *Le Petit Soldat* (played by Michel Subor) and put him in *Beau Travail*, so Lacôte took Levant's character from *Beau Travail* and put him in *Night of the Kings*. It is a touch designed to appeal to cineastes but also a way for Lacôte, who arrived at filmmaking through journalism, to acknowledge his influences – Denis' film also turned action into choreography. It is also an acknowledgement that all stories

are based on other stories, all histories are based on other histories. There isn't a culturally pure form of storytelling authentic only to a particular region, which is another way of saying there is no pure, perfect form of African cinema. As you watch the film, hoping for Roman's survival, you also wonder what effect Lacôte hopes to achieve. His film does not offer an activism narrative, pleading for prison reform or to address social inequality in Côte D'Ivoire. Rather Lacôte suggests that his characters should stand outside their history, to separate themselves from the roles – and names – they have been assigned. Lacôte is saying to his audience – not distinguishing between African and European – that you always have possibilities. You need not be defined by your environment, the slum where you grew up, the choices you made at a certain point. Although the film is normally about one Zama King, the multiple 'kings' in the title is important. We can all be royalty in our own minds.

***Night of the Kings* opens in UK cinemas on 26 July, 2021**

# The New Barbarism

**Peter Kenyon**  
on Johnson and Trump

**The assault on truth: Boris Johnson, Donald Trump and the emergence of a new moral barbarism**  
**Peter Osborne**  
**Simon and Schuster £12.99**

Few authors speak truth to power so bluntly. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson lies. Mercifully, Osborne states in his Introduction to Political Lying that publishing them all would make the book too long. Instead, he concentrates on the most vivid, shocking and powerful examples. Even for those of us who have been and remain close followers of both Johnson and former US President Donald Trump we need reminding of how they came to power. At least our cousins across the pond are enjoying momentary relief, following Trump's defeat in November. But here in the UK, we are now witnessing the incendiary consequences of Johnson's Brexit lies in Northern Ireland. It is a matter of both life and death, and livelihood and poverty that voters recognise this moral barbarism that has befallen our democracy.

Osborne, a well-known and self-confessed right-wing commentator, has sacrificed his 'career' by chronicling their lies. The role of many of his journalist colleagues in the British press get their own chapter. But first he set himself two tasks, one using the wealth of irrefutable evidence to prove that Johnson is a liar, and second, to explain how did he get to be leader of the Conservative Party and then installed as prime minister in a prequel to a landslide Tory victory at the polls in November 2019? To reinforce his thesis, Osborne entitled his second chapter: 'The 2019 election: One Lie after Another'. Followed by Chapter 3 on 'The Triumph of Political Lying', and Chapter 4 on Johnson himself whom Osborne described as 'Britain's First Gonzo Prime Minister'.

Historically, past British and American politicians are no strangers to corruption and deceit. But over the last hundred years, our ancestors inspired by Victorian values and evangelical Christianity erected a series of

protections against foul play in public life. They were tested severely during 18-years of Tory rule in the late 1900s, and arguably this led to the fall of the Major government in 1997. Towards the end of that administration Lord Nolan, a law Lord, was commissioned to draw up a new code of standards in public life. He demanded selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness and honesty in pub-

are currently enduring in the UK is not inevitable. What is at risk is set out in Chapter 6 'How to Destroy a Country'. The main culprits are tackled in the following two chapters, the press as mentioned above, and the Conservative Party itself, which demonstrated in July 2019 its utter fecklessness in electing Johnson as its leader. Osborne sees that date as a seminal moment in British political history. Prior to that date, "those engaged in public life could join in the national conversation regardless of what political tradition they hailed from or which party they supported. Afterwards they couldn't."

As he concludes in the last sentence of his Postscript: "It's time to fight back". That is a daunting task. Osborne sets out in his Conclusions some suggestions targeted at Parliament, Conservative MPs, public servants, maligned persons, the judiciary, the Committee on Standards in Public Life (yes, it still survives) and the press. Osborne hesitates from naming just one, but for me the Speaker of the House of Commons is possibly uniquely placed to call out the lies powerfully and effectively.

Under the rules governing parliamentary conduct, he and no other member of Parliament can do that explicitly for fear of being suspended. Speaker Hoyle on 11 March 2021 made a start in a statement to the Commons:

"All members of this House are honourable. They must take responsibility for correcting the record if a mistake has been made. It is not dishonourable to make a mistake, but to seek to avoid admitting one is a different matter."

Osborne is no longer intimidated by publicly calling Johnson a liar, perhaps it's time for Hoyle to reflect more deeply on the procedures he is bound by.

PETER OSBORNE

## THE ASSAULT ON TRUTH

BORIS JOHNSON, DONALD TRUMP  
AND THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW  
MORAL BARBARISM



lic leaders. They were insufficient to discourage New Labour evangelist, Prime Minister Tony Blair quietly taking donations from corporate sources in return for policy adjustments (remember Bernie Ecclestone and Formula One tobacco advertising). These uncomfortable truths are woven into Osborne's highly readable and heavily footnoted narrative, understandably for the avoidance of doubt and m'learned friends.

Just in case you are tempted to presume or conclude that all politicians are liars, Osborne in Chapter 5 sets out the remarkable career of Germany's outgoing chancellor, entitled: 'The Candour of Angela Merkel.' So, what we



# Decolonisation of an academic discipline

**Duncan  
Bowie**  
on Racism  
and Empire

**The Imperial Discipline**  
Alexander Davis, Vineet Thakur and  
Peter Vale  
Pluto Press £19.99

This study by three academics, based respectively in Western Australia, the Netherlands and South Africa presents itself as an attempt to decolonise the academic discipline of International Relations or IR. Their argument is that IR as a discipline originates in the work of Lionel Curtis and the other members of Milner's 'kindergarten', young Oxford graduates who helped Alfred Milner, the High Commissioner in South Africa during and after the Boer War to establish a colonial administration over the two captured Boer republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State and to devise the constitution for what became the Union of South Africa in 1910.

Curtis and his colleagues, including Philip Kerr (later Lord Lothian) on returning to Britain, established the 'Round Table' as a discussion and advocacy network in London and with centres in the dominions of Canada, New Zealand Australia and South Africa. Curtis was also a founder of the London based Royal Institute of International Affairs, commonly known as Chatham House, perceived by the authors as the first modern 'think tank' and from which the term 'Chatham House rules' originates.

The main argument of the study is that the work of Curtis and his colleagues both in South Africa and in the dominions in the inter-war years was predicated on a belief that the British empire and its transformation into a Commonwealth of nations was based on an Anglo-centric approach which was explicitly racist in that it presupposed the continued predominance of the white Anglo-Saxon race. This critique is clearly justified by a reading of both the theory and practice of Lionel Curtis and his colleagues.

The authors focus on the work of the early round table groups and IR institutions in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India, institutions

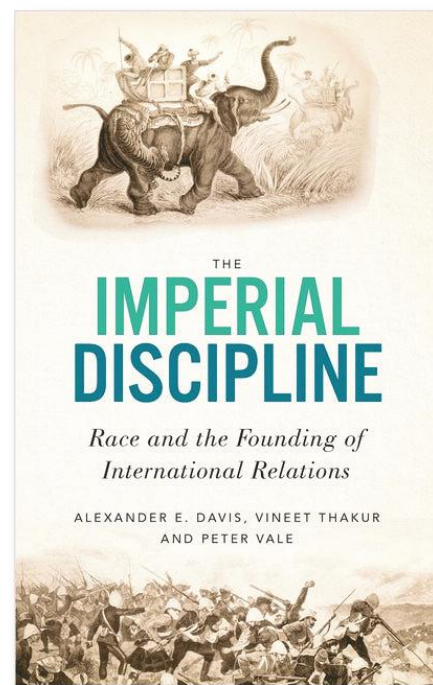
which were generated by Curtis' tours of the dominions.

The Canadian IR institute became divided between the Anglo-centric Empire loyalists and the French Canadians who focused on Canada's independence and relationship with the US rather than its dominion status. Australian IR bodies based on the defence of a White Australia, a view shared by Australian politicians of all parties became increasingly focused on the fear of Asian settlement in the Northern territories and latterly on the threat from Japan.

New Zealand is given as a more tolerant example of colonisation in terms of relationships with the indigenous Maori population, but nevertheless demonstrating New Zealand itself developed a colonial role in relation to Samoa. Race was a dominant consideration in the politics of IR in South Africa, but with the focus on the relationship between the Boer nationalists led by Hertzog who sought independence from Britain and those led by Jan Smuts who saw benefits from the association with the British Empire – Smuts sharing the Round Table's Anglo-centric view of the Commonwealth – with both groups sharing the view that there was no role for Africans in governance of the country. Smuts and Curtis both became leading proponents of the League of Nations mandates system, with 'underdeveloped races' being supervised by Anglo-Saxon nations – South Africa receiving the mandate to govern the former German West Africa, which only achieved independence as Namibia in 1990.

India presented a different picture, with the IR institutes run by Indian nationalists rather than by British settlers – Curtis became a leading proponent of dyarchy, the governance structure introduced in the Montagu Chelmsford reforms of 1919, with limited powers being devolved to Indian provincial legislatures, with national governance functions retained by the British imperial administration under the Viceroy.

While this is a valuable book, it is primarily a study of the institutes for International Relations in the four dominions and India in



relation to the pre First World War thinking of Lionel Curtis. The authors do not adequately relate developments to the developing thinking of Curtis and his colleagues in the interwar period nor to the development of politics in the five countries studied. As IR academics, there is too narrow a focus on IR as an academic discipline, as if it is somehow detached from global as well as local political and economic developments over the period considered, including two world wars and the rise and fall of international organisations such as the League of Nations.

The authors do not appear to recognise that the most vigorous dominion supporters of a White Empire and opponents of native rights and Asian immigration, notably in South Africa and Australia, but also to a lesser extent in New Zealand and Canada, were in fact the organised White working class political parties and whites only trade unions. Deborah Lavin's biography of Lionel Curtis and John Kendle's study of the Round Table are essential reading for anyone interested in the impact of Curtis and the Round Table on the British Commonwealth and international relations theory and practice, and best read before rather than after this new study.

# On revolutionary alternatives to Stalinism

**Glyn Ford**  
on the ILP's  
final years

**Waiting for the Workers**  
**A History of the Independent Labour**  
**Party 1938-1950**  
**Peter Thwaites**  
**The Choir Press £19.95**

**W**hy did the revolutionary alternatives to Stalinism fail in Britain? In civil war Spain one could argue force majeure in the form of Moscow's guns, savage repression and collusion in the necessary silence killed, both literally and metaphorically, the anti-Stalinist Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) and the anarchist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT). In Britain the first two - at least - were missing. When the ILP voted to disaffiliate from a Labour Party compromised by its hesitancy, indecision and cowardice in face of the Great Depression and take the revolutionary road in late 1932 it was three times (16,500 to 5600) the size of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and, unlike them, integrated into the wider Labour Movement rather than trapped in the Soviet Union's political cul-de-sac of Third Period revolutionary absolutism.

As Thwaites details, the ILP had lost ground badly by the eve of War. They had had a contingent in Spain, led by Bob Edwards, fighting with the POUM and the CNT, they were as vital in the winning of the Battle of Cable Street against Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists as the CPGB and yet membership had shrunk to 3000. Influenced by Marx, Luxemburg and Kropotkin, from a policy perspective the ILP had long been in the vanguard; too far ahead on occasion to get the recognition their perspicacity deserved.

As early as 1926 the Cook-Maxton manifesto *Socialism in Our Time* displayed all the proto-Keynesian tools that Labour, had it had the courage, could have used to good effect in 1929. In the thirties they had called for a National Health Service, free school meals and milk, maintenance grants for working class

children in school and University, while raising the school leaving age to 16. All this and more, including Universal Basic Income, figured in 1942's *For a Socialist Britain Now*.

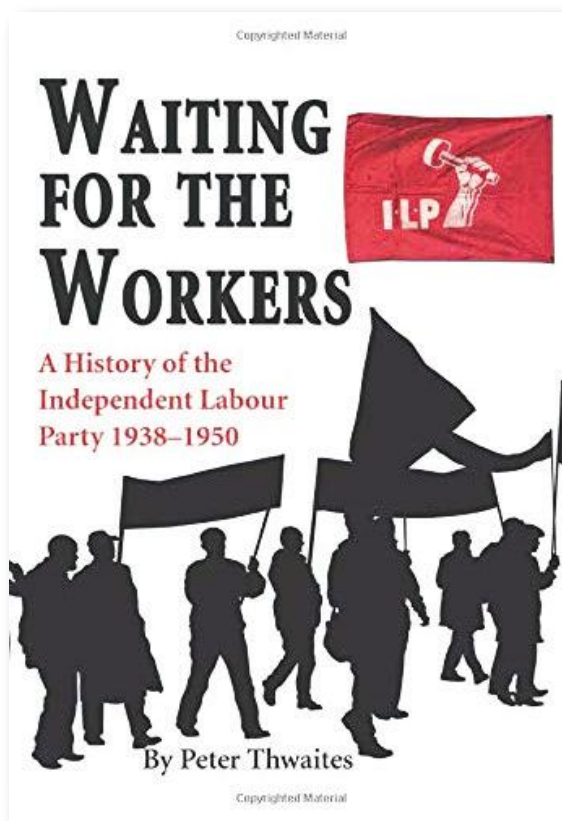
Even organisationally they were more astute than most. In early 1939 a group including George Orwell, learning from Spain, started preparing clandestine printing presses ready to go underground, while Edwards and Fenner Brockway smuggled a radio transmitter in from Belgium

the CPGB's deep-entryism. It shattered inside as it was eaten from without. The Labour Party made life as difficult as possible for the ILP, blocking all attempts in the mid-thirties for united front activities, often driven more by fear of the CPGB than the ILP. But Labour was blocking from without, the CPGB was boring from within.

The Revolutionary Policy Committee was one cuckoo in the nest. In 1934 they drove out the Unity Group around the Adelphi and John Middleton Murray and the majority of the ILP membership in the North West into forming the Independent Socialist Party taking Labour's *Northern Voice* with them, before themselves flying off to the CPGB at the end of 1935. Under instructions from Trotsky, CLR James and The Marxist Group - a spin-off from the Balham Group - made a 'smash and grab' raid making off with several score valuable militants.

The War could have seen the resurrection of the ILP, but timing and armies count. The revolutionaries were drowned in pacifists. There were by-elections they might have won, but were lost to events. Pearl Harbour and

the ILP's solidarity with Japanese socialists proved an unpalatable mix for the electorate. They did get within 349 votes in Bilston in 1944 where they were running on FA Ridley and Bob Edwards The United Socialist States of Europe - Bob was to end up representing the Constituency on behalf of the Labour Party from 1955-87. But what was mainstream in resistant Europe was the political tip of the spear amongst Britons. It explains a lot about where we are today. The ILP ran the campaign into the 1950s, but the workers never came and the Party faded from history.



and installed it in a van to move covertly around the country. Neither were ever used, but they had the right instincts. Odhams Press refused to publish the 3 September 1939 New Leader with its 'Imperialist War' line despite being passed by the censor. By May 1940 the ILP had no printer and no distributor.

After disaffiliation the ILP made a series of missteps. It foolishly surrendered hard won territory by refusing to pay the trade union political levy and simultaneously walked away from the Co-operative Movement, but its worst mistake was to leave itself open to



# Left Populism: A double movement stalled?

**Don Flynn**  
on prospects  
for a new  
politics

**For the People: Left Populism in Spain and the US**  
**Jorge Tamames**  
**Lawrence & Wishart £17**

Interest in left populism is, thankfully, surviving the eclipse in its fortunes. This is measured by set-backs in Greece, Spain, the termination of Corbyn's leadership of Labour in the UK, and Sanders's failure to secure the nomination as the Democrat party candidate for President in the US in 2020.

This is a comprehensive list, and some might think it is time to declare the experiment a failure and move on to something else. The case for doing so would be stronger if it could be shown that left populism was what its critics claim it to be – an opportunistic effort to trick one's way into a position of political influence over the unsophisticated masses. But in this account Jorge Tamames searches for deeper roots in the idea of the 'double movement' which he adapts from the work of the maverick Austro-Hungarian socialist active in the mid-20th century, Karl Polanyi.

Polyani was an historian of social and economic crises. He saw these as recurring periodically in capitalist societies because of the tendency of markets to shake off the restraints which came from being embedded in social structures. This first movement away from social control provoked a second movement on the part of society which sought to contain the turbulence which market forces generate and return to some sort of predictable order.

## 2008 – a Polyanian crisis?

Tamames argues that it was a crisis of exactly this nature that shook the neoliberal capitalist system in the period around 2008. Neoliberalism had been working since the 1970s to break out of the strictures imposed by the Keynesian post-war order. The 'embedded liberalism' of these decades, which functioned through state intervention in national economies, powerful public services and influential trade unions, was overthrown piece-by-piece as markets came to assume a superior role in shaping

society.

The 2008 financial crisis and recession that followed exposed the contradictions inherent in the markets which had become disembedded from the purview of society, triggering the second of the double movements in which efforts to regain control were spontaneously contrived. But it could not be assumed that this would involve a simple return to the old forms that operated during the years of the liberal-democratic dispensation. The double movement kick-back comes in two distinct versions, both with a clear populist logic. On one hand there is right wing authoritarianism, invariably tinged with xenophobic nationalism; on the other a turbo-charged attempt to reinvent a more inclusive democracy which would be better at expressing the 'true' will of the people.

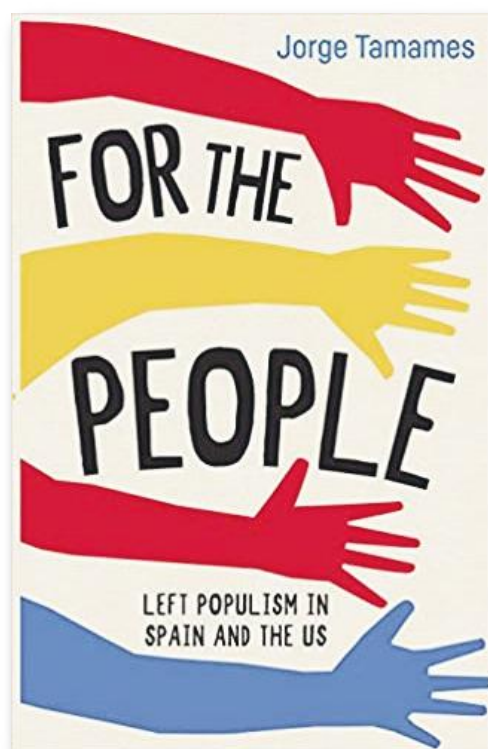
Seen in this way left populism resists being dismissed as a trivial event from which we can now move on. Tamames sees in this Polyanian moment in which society necessarily attempts to reassert itself the basis for testing the ideas that have come from the efforts of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who attempted to elaborate a theory of left populism orientated towards strategic intervention in the political mainstream. He undertakes this task through a close analysis of Podemos in Spain, and the campaigns initiated by Bernie Sanders in the US.

## The continuing grip of centrist reformism

In both cases the central problem for the left populist is how they contend with the parties with long-standing claims on embedded liberalism – the Democratic party in the US and the Socialist Party (PSOE) in Spain. Some militants had believed they would simply be swept aside as the new politics of the post-2008 era began to reveal themselves, allowing the left populist movements to become the hegemonic political

forces. However, the trajectory in both Spain and the US suggests that was never going to be the case and a more nuanced understanding of the hold of centrist reformism on mass politics needs to be developed. The current status of the Sanders movement – still vibrant but a subordinate component of mainstream Democratic politics – and Podemos as a junior partner in a PSOE-led coalition – suggests that the outcome of the necessary engagement with the liberal-social democratic tradition will decide whether left populism really has a future.

On that point a study of the struggles of the Corbyn movement in the British Labour party, carried out as meticulously as Tamames has done with his US and Spanish case examples, would add new insights to the current predicament of left populism. Perhaps the key point to understand is the fact that centrist reformism of the Labour party variety, though in deep trouble, is still managing to function as the chief obstacle to the emergence of a radical democratic politics adequate to the challenge of the unravelling epoch of neoliberalism.



# Lenin in London

**Duncan Bowie**  
on a triumph of archival research



**The Spark that Lit the Revolution**  
**Robert Henderson**  
**I B Tauris £25**

This fascinating book updates Andrew Rothstein's 1970 pamphlet *Lenin in Britain* and Helen Rappaport's 2010 study *Conspirator: Lenin in Exile*. Henderson is an archivist who has been Head of Russian collections at the British Library. In 2017, he published a detailed study of the Russian revolutionary exile, Vladimir Burtsev, who was also at one time based in London.

Henderson has traced previously unresearched archival sources to follow Lenin's movements between 1902, when Lenin published the journal *Iskra* from Harry Quelch's

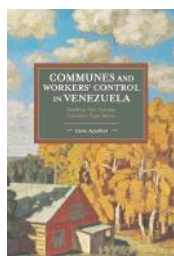
office in Clerkenwell Green, now the Marx Memorial Library, to Lenin's sixth and final visit to London in 1912. Henderson provides a detailed study of the Russian exile community in London in the 1890's and early 1900's, focusing on the Free Russian Library in Whitechapel run by Aleksei Teplov.

One central focus of the study is Lenin's close relationship with his fellow exile, Apollinariya Yakubova, a relationship which preceded Lenin's marriage to Nadezha Krupskaya. Yakubova organised the East End Lecturing Society and helped at the Free Russian Library. She married Konstantin Tachtarev, and the Tachtarevs were Lenin's closest associates until political differences developed, with the

Tachtarevs viewed by Lenin as 'economists', opposing Lenin's vanguardism. There is considerable new material in the book on Lenin's contacts in London, both with Russian exiles of varying political persuasions, and with British socialists, mainly members of the Social Democratic Federation, and occasionally with Fabians and Liberals. There is new material on the two Russian socialist congresses in London in 1905 (third congress) and 1907 (fifth congress). The book includes images never before published, many taken from the files of the Okhrana, the Russian political police. This book is fascinating. I could hardly put it down and I could not recommend it more highly.

# Building 21st century socialism from below

**Alan Gilbert**  
on a social laboratory



**Communes and workers' control in Venezuela**  
**Dario N. Azzellini**  
**Haymarket Books \$19.60**

Azzellini's book is concerned with social relations and popular participation in Venezuela since 1998; a period during which "Venezuela has been the largest social laboratory in the world". It accepts that the country has not become a 'socialist society' but is interested in the evolution of popular initiatives such as cooperatives, communal councils and efforts at workers' control. The author examines how such forms of popular participation have been encouraged and discouraged by the state. Even if the detailed case studies suggest that the results are ambiguous, the author believes that "subaltern self-empowerment", particularly in the local communities, has "set in motion a profound process of social transformation that leaves no social relation untouched". This is the successful side of the last decade and a half and, he claims, more important than material improvement.

This is where I have doubts about the book. Venezuela has suffered terribly in recent years in terms of any measure of social progress. Its economy is in a sad state with oil revenues, by far the major export, at a very low level. Recently, hyperin-

flation has hit the population hard and for various reasons there are major shortages of food and medicine. The country has also been suffering from a major crime wave with homicides per capita among the highest in the world. State corruption, always a problem in Venezuela, is seemingly worsening and Transparency International's Perceptions Index puts the country among the worst offenders in the world. The political situation is complicated, but it is arguable that the current regime is more dictatorial than democratic, more corrupt than socialist. Even if the author rightly suggests foreign propaganda exaggerates the problems facing the country, one indicator suggests that the current situation is dire: between four and five million Venezuelans, out of a total population of 30.7 million in 2016, have left the country.

Unfortunately, Azzellini barely addresses the overall economic and social situation. Admittedly the situation has worsened since the study was completed in 2015, but even so rising poverty, prices, corruption and violence were major issues during the whole of the last decade. He never addresses the question of whether state efforts at social transformation may have made the situation worse? For example, to what extent are the communal councils responsible for at least some of the

political violence in the country? The government claims that it has provided "the armed wing of the Bolivarian Revolution" with the means to defend themselves. Critics say that the arms have been used to attack political opponents.

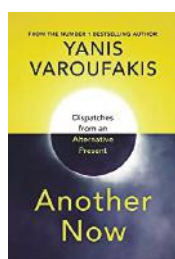
Azzellini's emphasis on social relations and his belief in the need to develop socialism from below is fully justified in a clearly unjust society. And the book successfully explores the multifaceted forms that popular participation has taken. He is to be credited with the detail he provides in the case studies which demonstrate both the successes and the failures of the transformation of society in Venezuela. He is clear that the state has both encouraged and opposed popular initiatives.

Unfortunately, he barely addresses the question of how far popular participation and belief in socialism can withstand the pressures of extreme poverty, hyperinflation, high rates of crime and violence and limited access to food and health care. Of course, Venezuela has been badly affected by falling oil prices and hostile external opposition. But, if most people are not better off than they were before Chávez, and certainly before Maduro, and millions of Venezuelans have been leaving the country, it would seem to be a poor reflection on the prospects for socialism.



# Dispatches from an alternative present

**Mary Southcott**  
on the road  
not yet  
taken



**Another Now**  
**Yiannis Varoufakis**  
Vintage £16.99

**Y**annis Varoufakis, is part academic, politician and celebrity. More liked in the UK than Greece, he was elected under their PR system in 2019, as a representative for the international grassroots movement, DiEM.

His *Another Now* was published after the worst slump in history in August 2020. Some will not read it because it is science fiction. Its subtitle suggests that the roads parted between his Now and ours in 2008 with the banking crisis. Was that the lost opportunity to end capitalism? One did wonder, What If? Why did we reward the bankers and make ordinary people pay with austerity? Why didn't his Other Now start then? Imagine it did.

Clearly, we find it easier to contemplate the end of the world than

the end of capitalism. Varoufakis attempts to discuss this using three characters, all facets of himself, to have a conversation. Iris whose red and black draped coffin signifies the failed project of the Left, a feminist Marxist, at Greenham Common, when Labour was pro miners, anti Murdoch. By 1987 she felt defeated. Her university called students "customers" and then Labour ditched Clause IV, the dream of common not state ownership.

Eva was a recovering American investment banker, Lehman Brothers since you ask, now academic perhaps symbolising the philosophers who interpreted the world. She did not show. Iris's diary which inspires this book, was delivered by Costa, the inventive engineering genius, definitely the only Greek in the trio, judging from the myths of Gyges, of Proetus and Bellerophon. Iris tell his story through their correspondence from

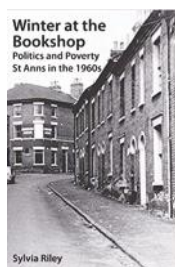
eventually Silicon Valley, with a warning to beware the corporates.

Varoufakis believes in the road untaken. Robin Cook said Labour should be more William Morris and less Morrisonian. Work is without hierarchy, without banks except a central bank, where everyone receives a stake at birth. Shares are like a library card, you can use them but they are not tradable. Bonuses are decided together by a European song contest type voting system.

His brave new world enshrines democracy, equality and justice embedded in our economy. Isn't that what Labour should be offering? But not without challenging Amazon, Google and Netflix representing a different sort of capitalism to Adam Smith's. Margaret Thatcher believed in TINA but do we believe there is an alternative Now. This book may help us think so.

## Nottingham Trots and graphic Orwell

**Mike Davis**  
on tales of  
60s  
Trotskyists  
and  
a graphic  
Orwell



**Winter at the Bookshop**  
**Sylvia Riley**  
Five Leaves £7.99

**Orwell**  
**Pierre Christin & Sebastien Verdier**  
Self Made Hero £14.99

**F**or seasoned lefties this book is an entertaining read. It focusses on a group of revolutionary socialists in and around the early days of the International Group, later International Marxist Group, and their activities in local and wider politics.

All manner of Trotskyists pop up from Tony Cliff to Ken Coates (later an MEP), Ken Tarbuck, 'Selbyites', Martin Flannery (later an MP) and Tariq Ali, though centre-stage is Pat Jordan who ran the bookshop which was the organising centre for most of the actions recounted. The author, a young participant, living with Jordan in the bookshop for much of the 1960s, brings a dazzling array of social and political features alive as youthful activists (and customers) come and go. The bookshop was the hub where Roneos rolled, newspapers The Week and Young Guard were produced or distributed with the glossiest being the Posadists' funded by bank robberies in Latin

America.

Subtitled 'Politics and poverty in St Ann's in the 1960s', the emphasis is very much on the politics but told in a light-hearted, warm and wry manner. Riley recounts her many short-lived jobs, bundling up book parcels for Bertrand Russell, working in the local Labour Party and forays to Labour Party Young Socialist conferences at windswept seaside resorts. Ventures to London were usually for demos against the Vietnam War and involved crashing on comrades couches.

The politics is hopeful if idealistic, full of camaraderie and comics, with plenty of funny anecdotes. A favourite was a telegram sent through the author to Ceylon/Sri Lanka when working as a switchboard operator. It read: 'Congratulations on your split from the Lanka Sama Samaja Sama Party. Long Live the Fourth International and Workers Rights and Forward to World Revolution'.

There are many and various books about George Orwell, but nothing like this one. This graphic biography with stunning drawings and a script mixing Orwell quotes and original text is a joy.

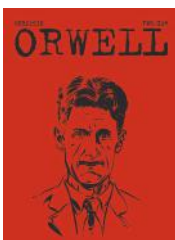
From Orwell's childhood at private boarding school, on to Eton through to Burmese days in the

imperial police, we see the boy grow into the man, slowly becoming aware of class differences and discovering socialism.

The black and white drawings turn to colour perhaps to emphasise the wealth and arrogance of British colonial life or the luxury of a Parisian hotel. Colour occasionally enlivens a panel if it's a fire or flowers or flags. We see Orwell's early experiences down and out in Paris and London, his relationships and writings.

The chapter 'Blair invents Orwell' is particularly gripping on his brief time as a volunteer fighting in defence of the Spanish Republic during the civil war. Wounded out of the bloody conflict we see the emergence of the politically independent leftist, anti-Stalinist writer. The Second World War has him broadcasting at the BBC, followed by the pinnacle of his career, the post-war publication of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four*.

Retreating to the Scottish island of Jura with his young son the graphics reveal a life cut short by illness and early death. For anyone who wants a visual introduction to Orwell's life and work or an entertaining reminder of his friends, foibles, literary and political achievements, this is it.





# Tory power grab

Cat Smith is Member of Parliament for Lancaster and Fleetwood and shadow Cabinet Office minister

## Cat Smith slams government's one-size-fits-all boundary review approach

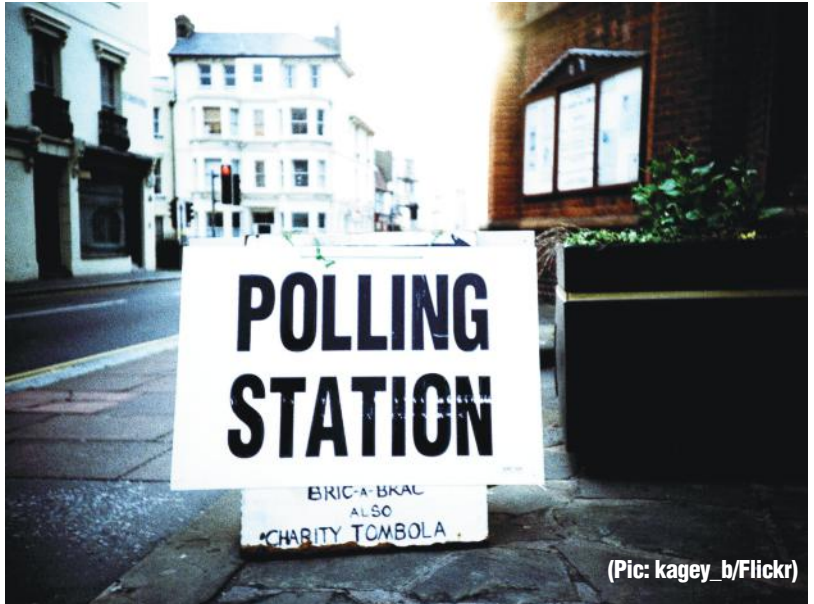
On 8 June 2021 the Boundary Commission for England published its first draft of the parliamentary constituencies 2023, with the first drafts from the Scottish and Welsh commissions expected separately. The process of consultation on these first drafts now begins and will run until the final recommendations which will be made by 1 July 2023. With the exception of four 'protected constituencies' which are islands.

All UK constituencies must have an electorate of between 69,744 and 77,062 electors based on the electoral roll of March 2020. The exception to this rule are all islands: the Isle of Wight will become two constituencies, Ynes Mon (Anglesey) and Na-h-Eileanan (the former Western Isles). Orkney and Shetland are protected in the Legislation and not under review.

A review of parliamentary boundaries is long overdue, with current seats drawn up on data from two decades ago. After years of delay and indecision, the government has finally abandoned its plans to reduce the number of MPs to 600, and to remain at 650.

Covid-19 has underscored the importance of strong scrutiny over the executive during a time of crisis, yet the Tories have not missed this opportunity to sneak through a few government power-grabs. They are removing parliament's ability to have a final vote on boundary proposals. Instead, the approval of the boundary review will be in the hands of the government.

This is the same government that unlawfully prorogued parliament. We cannot assume that they won't use the lack of parliamentary oversight to push through changes that give the Conservatives unfair advantages. This loophole allows for a power-grab, with no parliamentary



(Pic: kagey\_b/Flickr)

tary backstop to limit the dominance of the executive.


As the legislation which set the framework for this review went through Parliament, Labour supported increasing the flexibility when it comes to the size of constituencies. In the legislation all constituencies have to be within 5% above or below of the national average electorate size. Despite 10% being an international standard.

As we see from some of the examples in the first draft of constituencies, this tight quota would have created seats that include multiple local authorities that do not take account of local ties and communities. Labour has long opposed the restrictive 5% quota. A wider variance would have allowed for greater flexibility and consideration of local ties and identities.

This review has drawn up constituencies which cross county boundaries that have never previously been crossed and it will be interesting to see what public reaction is to this. When voters struggle to identify with the constituency boundaries it doesn't bode well for how well they will be able to engage with and recognise their elected politicians. These risks weaken our democracy.

The process thus far has been beset with dither and delay, with

millions of pounds of tax-payers' money wasted on shelved reviews. Given the current boundaries are mostly 20 years old, it is right that we get a fresh set of constituency boundaries. Yet the Tories are using this process to strengthen its own power at the expense of parliamentary scrutiny. It is an insult to the House of Commons and sets a dangerous precedent for future legislation.

The Boundary Commission for England is currently consulting on these initial proposals for an eight-week period, from 8 June to 2 August 2021. I would encourage you to take a look at how your community is affected and consider responding to this at [www.bcereviews.org.uk](http://www.bcereviews.org.uk) where you can also find more information about the proposals. 

**Seats stay at 650. Number in England to rise from 533 to 543, Scotland will lose two, down to 57, Wales will fall from 40 to 32, Northern Ireland will stay at 18.**

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