

CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

#314 January/February 2022

£2

Enough is enough

Workers v robots

Jon Cruddas MP

Pay Squeeze

Frances O'Grady

Tory corruption

Prem Sikka

Sewage scandal

Karen Constantine

Ethical foreign policy

Mary Kaldor

COP26

Simon Pirani

Plus

FILM & BOOK REVIEWS

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Editorial Policy

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

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

CHARTIST is not a party publication. It brings together people who are interested in socialism, some of whom are active 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

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, Sheila Osmanovic, Patrick Mulcahy, Julie Ward, Karen Constantine, Robbie Scott, Steve Carver (Website Editor), Mary Southcott and Victor Anderson. Production: Ferdousur Rehman

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Keith Savage – an appreciation

Socialist arts champion

Many Chartist readers will be sad to hear of the sudden death of long-time supporter Keith Savage. Keith was a great friend whom I first met when he was an undergraduate at Kingston Polytechnic in the mid 1970s. Bernard Misrahi, a Chartist founder and fellow student, had organised a LPYS meeting at which I was speaking. Shortly after that Keith agreed to join the Editorial Board and remained a member until his move to Derbyshire in the early 1990s. In 1980 he became our first proper books editor. Keith was a gentle, quietly spoken but steadfast socialist and internationalist. He also joined the EB of our sister journal Ireland Socialist Review, promoting self-determination for the Irish people.

Keith's real passion was music and culture. One of his many Chartist articles was a brilliant analysis of socialism and popular music while another standout piece was an interview with the Flying Lizards following their hit single 'Money'. This was to inspire a cultural column 'Party Pieces' which he wrote or commissioned pieces for on different aspects of popular culture. He broadened our book coverage, again with a particular emphasis on personal, sexual and cultural politics.

Following Keith's move to Buxton with his wife Helen and family, he threw himself into local Labour politics, being active for over 30 years and a councillor for almost half that time. He was first elected to High Peak council in 1995 becoming a champion of local arts. He was founder of Buxton Film with annual visits to the NFT in London to source films for the festival. He was chair of Buxton Fringe for six years, culminating in the wonderful success of Fringe 40 celebrations in 2019.



Keith believed strongly that widening access and appreciation of music and culture was central to a socialist understanding of life. His last post on the Council was as Arts champion where he leaves a significant legacy--the High Peak Arts Forum.

Latterly Keith became more deeply involved in environmental protection. He commissioned articles for Chartist from his friend and nature writer Mark Cocker while writing himself on initiatives to green the local economy and enhance biodiversity. As a lifelong Arsenal fan, part of his heart remained in London despite his love of the Peak District. Keith was a self-effacing but committed activist always reliable for intelligent comment, copy and conversation laced with a wry sense of humour. He was about to complete a review of jazz music when he was diagnosed with a brain tumour. He is survived by Helen and children Toby and Jess.

Mike Davis

Contributions and letters deadline for **CHARTIST #315** **10 February 2022**

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TUC recovery plan on pay squeeze – Page 10



Beware the robots – Page 14



Ethical foreign policy – Page 16

FEATURES

8

TORY CORRUPTION

Prem Sikka exposes Tory MPs on the make

9

SHROPSHIRE SIGNAL TO STARMER

Peter Kenyon says result means Labour must commit to voting reform

10

COST OF LIVING CRISIS

Frances O'Grady calls time on the Tory pay squeeze

11

PLEDGEWATCH

Bryn Jones finds backsliding on Keir Starmer's election pledges

12

CONFERENCE SOVEREIGNTY

Does conference make Labour policy? Peter Rowlands awaits a reply

13

ELECTION BILL

Don Flynn on voter suppression and curbs on union campaigning

14

ROBOTS VERSUS WORKERS

Jon Cruddas MP defends his Dignity of Labour

16

ETHICAL FOREIGN POLICY

Mary Kaldor on socialist internationalism for 21st Century

18

NEW COLD WAR?

Glyn Ford identifies contours of a new world conflict

19

DISCIPLINE IN SCHOOLS

Dave Lister on flawed approach of new Social Mobility Commissioner

20

COLONIAL LEGACY

Mary Southcott reviews lessons of Cyprus experience

21

SEWAGE SPILLS

Karen Constantine on swimming against sea and river pollution

22

LABOUR & IRISH UNITY

Border poll challenges Starmer's unionism says Geoff Bell

23

EUROPEAN MIGRANT CRISIS

Alena Ivanova makes case for asylum in Poland and UK



Cover by Martin Rowson

CHARTIST

FOR DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

Number 314

January/February 2022

REGULARS

4

OUR HISTORY 100

Chartist Manifesto

5

EDITORIAL

Behind the lies – assault on democracy

6

POINTS & CROSSINGS

Paul Salveson on HS2 U-turn

7

GREENWATCH

Simon Pirani on cop-out at COP26

24

FILM REVIEW

Patrick Mulcahy on Spielberg's West Side Story

25

BOOK REVIEWS

Julie Ward on witches; Patrick Seyd on Sheffield socialist; Patricia D'Ardenne on Sheila Rowbotham; Nigel Watt on White Malice; Andrew Coates on Starmer; Conrad Landin on Horgan's Work; Peter Kenyon on Falling Down and Barnier's Diary; Duncan Bowie on London Problem & Red Metropolis; Bob Newland on Nigeria and International Anti-Apartheid

32

ENVIRONMENT

Victor Anderson on dangers of post-Brexit Environment Act

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OUR HISTORY 100

New Worlds for Old: Chartist Manifesto 2006

This manifesto was published in Chartist January/February 2006. It was drafted by Duncan Bowie and the final version was approved by the Chartist Editorial Board.. The full manifesto is available on the Chartist website.

Socialism for the Twenty-First Century

1. Capitalism is still the dominant global economic system. Laissez faire capitalism only exists in text books. The biggest capitalist economies, the United States and Japan, practice high levels of state intervention and protection for native corporations. The European Union is caught between an open market philosophy and trade barriers. The long boom and growth for most western economies during the 1990s will result in recession and slowdown as long as night follows day. The huge credit bubble cannot continue indefinitely. Thanks to the expansion of globalisation, war, poverty and revolutions remain prominent features of the world landscape. Global warming and environmental degradation walk hand in hand with unregulated profiteering.

2. At any one time at least 20 military conflicts rage across the world with war in the Middle East being the paramount international flash point. While Chartist supports the right of national groups to a degree of political autonomy, the right to self-determination, including for Palestine, Israel, the Kurds, Sunnis and Shias in Iraq, is conditional on respect for the rights of other national groups, especially where there is no clear territorial separation. We campaign for an international socialism, and for structures for world governance and dispute arbitration as a goal for a humane, egalitarian and democratic world.

3. Chartist wants a proportional electoral system where every vote counts equally. We believe active, democratic political parties are a crucial vehicle for social and economic change but recognise they must be inextricably linked to extra-parliamentary movements to effect a fundamental redistribution of wealth and power. Economic and social justice is a prerequisite of a truly democratic society.

4. Chartist is an independent socialist journal. It is not affiliated to any political party. While some members of the editorial board are members of the Labour Party, others are not. This has enabled Chartist to be part of a broader political dialogue across the left. While we cannot ignore debates within the Labour Party and within government, Chartist has sought to have a wider focus. Chartist has therefore published articles on a range of issues from a range of political perspectives. Chartist has however been a persistent critic of Blair and new Labour without being tied in any way to any specific faction within One of Chartist's strengths has been its recognition of a range of socialist traditions. Chartist has often sought to remind its readers of the importance of socialist history and principles – an important role given we have a Government and a wider Labour Party which is increasingly both unprincipled and ahistorical.

5. The basic position of Chartist is that it supports a socialist governance based on economic and political equality. In opposing authoritarian centralism both within government and political party structures, it supports economic and political power being operated at the most appropriate level. It therefore supports democratically elected and accountable forms of governance at international, national, regional and local level. Chartist recognises that

the main role of government is to provide the social and economic infrastructure which cannot be organised by individuals or groups of individuals and to provide a framework for the operation of 'civil society'. Chartist accepts that a central role of government is redistributive – to use the wealth of individuals and corporate bodies for the benefit of the population as a whole. Chartist recognises the diversity of both politics and culture and that governance is necessary in both protecting diversity and individual rights, while ensuring that rights cannot be exercised in a way that denies the rights of others.

Towards Socialism

20. The objectives and policies set out in this manifesto are neither extreme nor utopian. They would have been viewed as cautious, even reformist, by many socialists over the last hundred years. They are idealist but nevertheless still practical. They are based on the reassertion of the fundamental principles of socialism, while recognising the changed context in which they should be applied. While Chartist may have a relatively limited role within the UK left, never mind within the international socialist movement, we have an important role as an independent advocate of socialist ideas and can help to set the framework for the debate on a more socialist future, at least within our readership and networks. This restatement of Chartist's long-term policy objectives could assist to broaden our influence, and to avoid misinterpretations or misattributions. We need to be a beacon of light in a context which is increasingly darkened by a failure of collective memory as well as abandonment of the collectivist principle. Our objective should be not just Beyond Blair but Towards Socialism.



Behind the lies comes an assault on democracy

Boris Johnson's government is beginning to fall apart. The massive loss of the Shropshire seat underlines the cracks. Without Labour's support he would not have got pre-Christmas pandemic protection measures passed in Parliament. The ghosts of parties Christmas past, Cummings and Barnard Castle, the corruption scandals, Tory MPs second jobs, dodgy Covid contracts to mates' companies, elevation of a dozen Tory treasurers to the House of Lords, late and muddled Covid decisions long after scientists recommended action are all beginning to expose the reality of lies and contempt for the people.

What are really beginning to hit home are the false promises of a post-Brexit sunlit uplands. Poverty pay is stalking the land. The New Economics Foundation report half of UK families are £110 a year worse off since 2019 while the richest 5 per cent are £3,000 better off. Inflation is running at 5.1 per cent while incomes are lagging well behind. The growth in international stock markets has further boosted the asset rich as the pandemic has further deepened wealth inequality. As **Frances O'Grady** reports, we have now moved from pay freeze to pay squeeze compounded by the cut in Universal Credit and particularly high energy bills hitting the poor hardest. Food banks continue to grow. When will government entertain the TUC's modest Recovery Plan?

Levelling up looks more like levelling down for many in depressed northern and Midland towns with promises on HS2 and greater investment being broken. Small businesses are being hard hit with no furlough or financial support in place. Fishing and farming communities are finding themselves undone by Brexit.

Prem Sikka details the many dodgy payments and second jobs held by almost a third of Tory MPs. £82,000 plus expenses does not seem to be enough for them. Being an elected representative is a full-time job that requires conscientious and dedicated work to meet constituents' needs. However, the likes of Brexiteer and ex-Attorney General Geoffrey Cox and his boss think it acceptable to rake in over a £1million annually to help tax havens like the Virgin Islands.

Meanwhile the Government continues its assault on democracy and human rights. As **Don Flynn** explains, the Election Bill with its voter ID proposals would suppress voting by the young, poor and ethnic minorities while also attacking the ability of trade unions to support the Labour Party and turning the clock back on democratic mayoral election systems.

The Human Rights Bill seeks to undermine the rights of all individuals while the Judicial Review and Courts Bill seeks to restrict the accountability of government to domestic judges. **Victor Anderson** explains how the new Environment Bill, far from extending protection for food, farming, clean air and biodiversity is likely to do the

reverse. In the wake of more sewage outflows into our rivers and coastal waters **Karen Constantine** reports on efforts in Kent to highlight the scandal of the privatised Water companies' failure to prevent pollution.

The Nationality and Borders Bill will further weaponise the hostile environment for migrants, making it more difficult for refugees to seek asylum from war or hunger, to join families or to live and work in the UK. **Alena Ivanova** writes of the current deadly plight of migrants on the UK's and Europe's eastern borders.

This is all topped off with the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill which proposes sweeping powers to police and outlaw most democratic protest. So hard-fought fundamental rights to demonstrate against government, corporate power or show solidarity with oppressed groups are under dire threat.

Internationally the UK government seems keen to crank up a new Cold War, as **Glyn Ford** reports. What's needed is a foreign policy informed by a consistent and ethical approach, one that seeks to promote justice and equity through peaceful means as **Mary Kaldor** argues in a keynote article. **Mary Southcott** emphasises this approach in a personal account of Cyprus struggles. Labour's leadership needs to take note.

As the government sinks deeper into the mire of corruption and deceit more voters are beginning to see the reality and the polls are beginning to turn in Labour's favour. Keir Starmer is landing more blows on the Prime Minister. However, the alternative

Labour is offering continues to be vague or watered down. **Bryn Jones**

looks at the ten pledges on which Starmer was elected leader and finds much

backtracking. **Peter Rowlands** also expresses concern at the failure of general secretary David Evans to respond to requests for the policies agreed at conference to be respected by the party leadership.

Jon Cruddas MP defends his view of the continuing role of traditional work and the pivotal agency role of blue collar labour against the robots.

At Johnson's bidding Lord Frost continues to undermine the Northern Ireland Protocol hailed by the same Johnson as a great Brexit deal. **Geoff Bell** reports that pressures to hold a border poll on Irish unity are growing. He reports Keir Starmer is playing an unacceptably ambiguous game in seeming to back unionists in the face of such demands.

We have argued this is a divided but dangerous Tory government. **Peter Kenyon** stresses it is time for Starmer to abandon tribalism and embrace electoral reform. This would send a powerful signal to wavering potential Labour supporters. The opportunities are growing for Starmer to promote Labour as a clean, democratic and internationalist alternative based on popular values of equality and social justice. These opportunities must not be missed.

Starmer must not miss the opportunity to promote Labour as a clean, democratic alternative

HS2: the scheme that nobody wants

Paul Salvesson on another government U-turn

The Government's announcement on HS2, contained in its 'Integrated Rail Plan' (IRP), has produced howls of outrage 'up North' suggesting that The Government has seriously miscalculated the mood of its Northern outposts. 'HS2' is the proposed high speed line from London to Birmingham, with a western leg going to Manchester and further north, whilst the eastern leg would have gone beyond the East Midlands to Leeds with links onto the East Coast Main Line to Newcastle. The original concept is now in tatters.

Now, this may not be what you expect to hear, but it's not as bad as it's being painted. True, it represents a massive U-turn. But sometimes U-turns are necessary and we're in a different world now than we were before the Pandemic, with travel patterns changed, probably for good. HS2 was very poor value two years ago; it is even more so now. And I'm talking about 'value' in the wider social and economic sense. That's quite apart from the huge environmental damage that would/will be done during construction.

I have never been keen on HS2, a highly over-engineered scheme that would benefit the major city centres (London in particular) at the expense of everywhere else. It's interesting that the IRP admits that the now-abandoned plans for HS2 to Leeds would have given many towns a worse service. So it's bizarre that there's so much adverse comment coming from Yorkshire people about the plan when actually they do quite well out of it, on the whole. The fact is the original HS2 project had long since veered out of control with costs mounting to astronomical levels. Add on the effects of the Pandemic and those long-term changes in travel patterns (much less time-sensitive business travel, but more leisure journeys), a fundamental review of the project was necessary.

Some much-needed projects, including electrification of the existing Trans-Pennine route and the Midland Main Line through to Sheffield and Leeds will finally go ahead. A new route from



Liverpool to Huddersfield and beyond to Leeds is proposed but it's early days and I have my doubts if all of it will come to fruition. But upgrading existing routes is a good thing, and the new Plan does more for freight, which is too often ignored.

So what we now have is an improvement on what was on the table before but far from perfect. Taking HS2 into Manchester Piccadilly with a new 6-platform surface level terminal station will be massive challenge. Will it do anything to resolve the problems of the congested Castlefield Corridor across Manchester? Not really, and it will be a long time coming anyway. Stockport, Macclesfield and Stoke all lose out from HS2 with fewer and probably slower trains.

When people say that the main benefit of HS2 is that it 'frees up capacity' that is only true in part and assumes that many places will have fewer trains as the London services divert to the HS2 route which will miss out many major centres.

The big loser in all this is Bradford. It won't get the hugely expensive and difficult high-speed line from Manchester, but there are alternatives which should now be promoted. The offer of electrifying the route into Leeds is frankly risible unless the wires go further – across the Pennines to Todmorden, Rochdale and Manchester. But the case for a 'Bradford Crossrail', linking up the historically separate net-

works (reflecting the old private company structures) remains very strong.

The politics of all this are fascinating. Every opinion poll conducted on the merits of HS2 show a majority of people in the UK as a whole firmly against it, especially in the North and Midlands – who are supposed to be the main beneficiaries. Only in London does it actually have more support than opposition, which says a lot. A 2021 YouGov poll showed support for HS2 across the UK at 25% with 39% against and 11% 'don't know' – the rest were neither for nor against. In London, the only region in support, 30% were in favour and 27% against, showing a large drop from the previous year. It surprises me that so many 'red wall' Tories feel so upset about the new plan, which would actually benefit more of the larger towns and cities of the North than HS2 ever would have. The Tory leadership have made a real hash of managing what could have been a good news story for them (but that's their problem).

The Integrated Rail Plan is flawed, without a doubt. But there is still £96 billion of investment on offer and much of the money will go into projects that politicians and the rail industry have been crying out for. Instead of shouting 'betrayal' Labour should be working with the rail industry to come up with a fully co-ordinated plan for rail in the North which does more than just benefit the major cities. **G**



Paul's website is www.lancashirelocalism.co.uk

For a well-balanced view see the Rail Reform Group paper at <https://railreformgroup.org.uk/the-integrated-rail-plan-a-considered-response>

UK government cop-out at COP26

Simon Pirani says at COP26 politicians gave the thumbs-up to more oil and gas

No sooner had politicians signed the Glasgow Climate Pact last month than the US government paved the way for new oil and gas output, by selling \$191 million of new drilling licences.

ExxonMobil, Chevron, BP, Shell and 29 other companies bid at an auction for blocks in the Gulf of Mexico, in an area twice the size of Florida.

The sale came after the Joe Biden administration's moratorium on new drilling was overturned in the courts. Earthjustice said the sale was a "climate bombshell": if all that production goes ahead, an extra 600 million tonnes of carbon dioxide goes into the atmosphere.

On the plus side, the UK's biggest new oil project, Cambo, suffered a blow, as Shell pulled out, after forceful mobilisation by climate campaigners. Siccra Point Energy, which owns 70% of the project, said it is pausing work.

Cambo could still go ahead, though, and if it does, that will be thanks in part to the UK's lavish tax breaks for North Sea producers. Siccra Point says the project is "not forecasted to pay taxes for many years".

The company-friendly tax regime means that in 2020 the treasury collected a paltry £255 million from oil and gas producers, while handing rebates of £39 million to BP and £110 million to Shell.

These tax breaks are just one part of a multi-billion-dollar mountain of subsidies for fossil fuel producers from rich countries' governments.

And those subsidies form the background to COP26's failure to tackle global heating, and to the decisions made there, which Climate Action Tracker estimates will lead to 2.1-2.7 degrees of warming, far above the 1.5 degree target.

Some politicians claimed the talks were successful, because the Glasgow Climate Pact mentioned the transition away from fossil fuels, which no international agreement has done before. But what a mention.

The actual words are that the conference "calls upon [all countries] to 'accelerat[e] efforts towards the phasedown of unabated coal power and phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies'".

That passage had started the week as "accelerate the phasing-out of coal and subsidies for fossil fuels", but was watered down.

The media focused on India, whose environment minister urged the coal "phasedown" instead of "phase-out". But far more significant were (i) the phrase "unabated coal power", which opens the door to the false solution of carbon capture and storage (that will supposedly "abate" carbon dioxide emissions), and (ii) the reference to "inefficient fossil fuel subsidies".

The idea of "inefficient" is a get-out for the world's richest nations, in the G20 group – who promised in 2009, in a blaze of publicity, to phase out all fossil fuel subsidies, and at the last count (2017-19) were paying \$584 billion per year of them. And they will themselves decide which billions, if any, are "inefficient".

The G7 nations, the richest of all, poured \$189 billion into coal, oil and gas between January 2020 and March 2021 in their pandemic response packages – outstripping clean energy investments of \$147 billion.

These subsidies are a better measure of politicians' intentions than their words. Other factors to keep in mind are:

- The insistence by rich country governments, the UK included, on supporting domestic oil production that will ensure that the 1.5 degree target is breached.

- The support governments give to oil companies greenwashing their investment strategies, by welcoming their representatives to Glasgow – while clean energy's share of oil and gas companies' capital investment is 1%, with analysts hoping it will rise to 4%.

- The promotion of gas as a solution to climate change, rather than a problem. Increases in gas consumption are incompatible with the 1.5 degree target – but coal-dependent countries in Asia are considering switching to gas. And that makes the big western-owned oil and gas companies happy. The Global Methane Pledge, launched with a fanfare in Glasgow, will underperform, Climate Action Tracker says.

- The whole idea of "net zero" – that economies can keep pumping greenhouse gases from fossil fuel use into the atmosphere, since they



can be removed later – is music to oil companies' ears.

Scientists, under political pressure, started including greenhouse gas removal guesstimates in their climate models in the 1990s, to make the politicians' numbers add up. It meant governments could claim targets were being met. This falsehood has taken on a life of its own, producing a huge illusion factory about carbon removal techniques that will probably never work at scale.

False carbon capture "solutions" were promoted in Glasgow, along with carbon trading schemes under which nations can buy credits, allowing others to pollute, in order to "meet" (ha ha) their own targets. Glasgow audiences also heard inflated claims for hydrogen, another technofix beloved of oil companies.

The UK government stands out as a promoter of these false solutions. Carbon capture and hydrogen, along with electric vehicle manufacture – the decarbonisation effect of which is constantly exaggerated – play major parts in its Net Zero Strategy.

In response, the labour movement should embrace genuinely low-carbon technologies that can achieve zero carbon – not "net zero", but real zero – in a way that serves people, not fossil fuel companies. **C**

Simon Pirani is author of *Burning Up: A Global History of Fossil Fuel Consumption and blogs at People & Nature*

Parliamentary gravy train

Prem Sikka on the scandal of MPs second jobs and Government complicity

Some may be enthralled with neoliberal democracy, but its fault lines are all too visible. Rampant inequalities, inequitable distribution of income and wealth, lack of work place democracy and unchecked corporate power are some of the daily manifestations.

A major cause of the social problems is that too many Members of Parliament (MP), including former Ministers, do the bidding of corporations and wealthy elites and corporations through a variety of consultancy and advisory contracts. In addition to the £82k a year salary as a MP around 90 of the 360 Conservative MPs, five of Labour's 199 MPs and two each from the SNP and the Lib Dems have second or multiple jobs. They are hired to advance the interests of their paymasters, provide privileged access to policy makers, neuter aggressive regulators and nullify the emergence of threatening legislation.

The sale of political influence has created an arms race in which corporations and the wealth elites outbid each other to hire well connected MPs. Citizens' interests are marginalised. People see it as institutionalised corruption. Such concerns have been fuelled by revelations that 32 MPs collected over £1.4m from corporate consultancies. Few, if any, MPs offer their time to charities, social welfare organisations or foodbanks because there is no money in it.

There are calls for bans on MPs taking second/third jobs, which in turn are resisted. The government's favoured approach is that "any undertaking of paid employment must remain within reasonable limits". The term "reasonable limits" is being interpreted as 15-20 hours a week. Such reforms will be cosmetic, unenforceable and will make no difference to the self-enriching capacities of MPs. The following examples from the House of Commons Register of Members' Financial Interests provide some food for thought.

- Tory MP Chris Grayling received £100,000 per annum for working 7 hrs per week from

Hutchison Ports Europe.

- Former Conservative whip Julian Smith received £144,000 from three consultancies with Hygen Energy, Simply Blue and MJM Marine, requiring commitment of 20 hours a year, 1-2 hours per month and 30-40 hours a year.

- Former Conservative Party leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith collected £20,000 from Tunstall Health Group and £25,000 from Byotrol Technology for 30 hours a year and 12 hours a month respectively.

- Just before becoming Prime Minister, Boris Johnson received £94,507.85 from GoldenTree Asset Management for a speaking engagement involving two hours work.

- Former MP Owen Paterson received £8,333 a month for 16 hours from Randox Laboratories, which adds up to £100,000 a year.

- John Redwood received £48,222 a quarter (£193,000 a year) for 50 hours a month from Charles Stanley, an investment advisory company.

The above examples show that the proposed limits will not derail the consultancy gravy train. Any ban with "reasonable limits" will encourage determined MPs to pursue creative strategies to comply with the letter and not the spirit of regulation.

The calls for a total ban are countered with claims that this will reduce the income of MPs and persuade many to quit parliament. Good riddance would be the response from many citizens.

Some MPs say that to retain their professional status for a post-political career they need to take on second jobs. Others say that consultancies enable them to meet interested parties and enhance their role as legislators, and that a total ban will reduce their effectiveness.

Such objections can be dealt with by a more effective reform. Under this there would be no limit on the number of jobs that any MP can hold. However, they would not receive a penny from that now or in the future. They would also legally be prevented in their post-political career from working for these employers for



Former attorney general Geoffrey Cox - earned £1m from non-parliamentary work

five years after leaving parliament. All second job earnings would go directly to a newly established Foundation for Democracy. At regular intervals, the accumulated funds would be allocated to political parties in accordance with a formula that takes account of party membership and share of vote in local, national and other elections. This reform needs to be statutory as too many MPs show little respect for voluntary codes. Statutory reforms should also empower citizens to take legal action against offending MPs.

The above proposal does not prevent MPs from continuing with their professional careers or the professed desire to become involved in worldly or corporate matters. It avoids debates about "reasonable limits" and is easily enforceable. It ensures that MPs do not receive money from outside sources to skew their judgment. Second jobs have always been about normalising corrupt practices rather than serving the people. Deprived of possibilities of personal enrichment from influence peddling most MPs would cease to be hired guns.

The benefit of the above reform is a parliamentary system focused upon the welfare of the masses rather than corporations and wealth elites. It will enhance confidence in institutions of government. **C**



Prem Sikka is emeritus professor at Essex University and a member of House of Lords

Porker skewered

Peter Kenyon reviews Conservative and Labour Party electoral prospects in the wake of the North Shropshire by-election

Voters in the Brexit supporting, predominantly rural Westminster parliamentary constituency that has voted Conservative for nearly 200 years, have a Liberal-Democrat MP. Tory prime minister, Boris Johnson's job is on the line. Labour leader, Keir Starmer's pipedream of winning a majority of seats in the next British General Election has been shattered.

How can this be? The Tories held the seat in 2019 with a 23,000 majority. Labour trailed in second, followed by the Lib-Dems. In the circumstances leading to the by-election – Labour was a shoo-in according to Starmer's glee-club. It proved to be very different. The Lib-Dems won with a 34% swing from Conservative – the seventh largest in modern political history. That has profound implications for swathes of Conservative seats in the blue belt, where the Lib-Dems were close on the heels of winning Tories in 2019. One psephologist has calculated the Tories would be left with three seats if that swing were replicated across the UK.

Why the shift in sentiment? The by-election was triggered by the resignation of Owen Patterson, who had been found guilty of breaches of Parliamentary standards for lobbying ministers on behalf of paying clients. Instead of accepting his penalty – suspension from the House of Commons for 30-days, his friends lobbied Johnson to change the rules regarding Parliamentary Standards and legislate for corruption. Typically, Johnson led the charge and hustled his back-benchers through the lobby provoking a massive Parliamentary and public outcry. Within 24-hours, Patterson was abandoned by Johnson and his scheme to make corrupt Parliamentary practices legal was shredded. Patterson resigned. This self-inflicted political wound coincided with more revelations of Covid-19 regulation busting by Tory ministers and their political aides. Opposition politicians voiced new and damaging mantras: 'One rule for us, no rules for the Tories' or 'One rule for them, another rule for the rest of us'. The idea is now firmly fixed in the public psyche.



Lib Dem victory in North Shropshire - exposes growing voter resentment over Tory corruption

With a new Covid Omicron variant, infecting the world, this loss of public trust in government could not have come at a worse time for the management of a two-year old Covid pandemic.

Tory spokespersons are seeking to brush off the loss on North Shropshire as a normal mid-term electoral event. But the Prime Minister's position is vulnerable. Once seen as an election-winner, his reputation as such had been damaged. However, his Party's standing in the opinion polls has only recently started to slip, as has his personal reputation. Some commentators point to the speed with which former Tory leader, Margaret Thatcher was forced to resign in 1990, just four weeks after a similarly heavy by-election defeat in Eastbourne. Whatever her faults, no-one would accuse her of using lying as her stock in trade – as increasingly Johnson is.

Johnson won his infamous election in 2019 on the basis of a pack of lies to 'Get Brexit Done'. That was after he lied to the Queen to get Parliament prorogued (suspended), a decision which was quickly overturned by the UK Supreme Court. Legislation has just been enacted to deny human rights to asylum seekers, ban peaceful protest, imprison protesters and criminalise the Royal National Lifeboat Institution's volunteers rescuing those in peril on the sea. Draft legislation is before Parliament to deny the vote to anyone without photographic ID – estimated to number six million. The

Health and Social Care Bill threatens the future of the NHS.

For a growing catalogue of lies go to the website: boris-johnson-lies.com * – The lies, falsehoods and misrepresentations of Boris Johnson and his government. The corrupt conduct of Conservative legislators is covered elsewhere in this issue of Chartist by our regular contributor, Prem Sikka. The corrupt letting of contracts and jobs by the Tories is being researched and pursued in the courts by the Good Law Project * on Twitter @goodlawproject and on the web: goodlawproject.org.

Spectacular defeat in the North Shropshire by-election is a powerful signal that corruption of the public realm by Johnson and his Conservative cronies is beginning to affect voters' behaviour.

How should Labour respond? In the light of its failure to take North Shropshire, it should examine its prospects of forming a majority government in the foreseeable future. Johnson's relentless assaults on the public realm require a new politics in which 'the winner takes all' is confined to the dustbin of history.

- Labour should propose to secure proportional representation and consensual politics as the norm.

- Labour tribalism has to be put aside, along with the personal hatred of Lib-Dems for going into coalition with the Tories in 2010.

- Labour must back electoral reform at its 2022 Conference and seek to build a broad national consensus that it is serious.

- Its credibility with other opposition parties would be enhanced if it repositioned itself re: relations with the EU. A commitment to repairing the worst of the Brexit damage by seeking to rejoin the customs union and the Single Market would go down well with business.

Taken together with pledges to restore trust in politics and rebuild democracy (repealing much of current legislation being promoted by the Tories) might put Labour in pole position to lead a coalition government after the next general election.

* The author contributes financially to both organisations, but gets no financial reward – just the satisfaction of doing the right thing. **C**

Peter Kenyon is a member of Chartist EB

Government talks big acts small

Frances O'Grady outlines the TUC recovery plan to combat pay squeeze

Britain still needs a pay rise. As fuel, energy and food prices rocket, working people face a big cost of living crisis. The government's shameful decision to cut Universal Credit by over £1,000 is pushing low-income families into destitution. Boris Johnson talks about building a high-wage economy, but queues at food banks are soaring. As wages stagnate and bills rise, middle income workers face being hampered too.

Trade unions are leading the campaign for change. The TUC is calling for a New Deal for working people, delivering stronger rights at work, better wages and new powers for unions to bargain collectively. We're making the case for huge investment in our public services and in the clean, green industries of the future. The latter would create over a million good, well-paid jobs – and show that 'just transition' is more than a mere slogan.

The government talks big about "leveling up" and "building back better," but acts small. The Chancellor's recent Budget completely failed to address the realities confronting working people. After years of pay misery, public sector and key workers who've got us through the pandemic discovered the pay freeze had become a pay squeeze. And buried in the Budget's small print was a startling admission: that workers face another half decade of wage stagnation.

With inflation at a 10-year high, household budgets are under huge pressure. But after over a decade of Tory government, real wages have only just returned back to 2009 levels. Real pay for paramedics has fallen by over £3,000 since the Conservatives came to power, with nurses losing £2,500 and teachers £2,000. The PM's promise of a surge in wages rings hollow to millions of workers.

That's why pay is right at the top of the TUC's agenda. We're calling for an immediate increase in the minimum wage to £10 an hour, a ban on zero hours contracts and for workers on boards to deliver fair shares for all. More fundamentally, we want stronger rights for unions to access workplaces



and bargain collectively for better terms and conditions. New pay agreements covering different sectors – raising standards across the board – would be a great place to start.

The UK has one of the worst records on low pay of all the OECD industrialised countries. Despite being one of the richest economies in the world, one in six workers earns less than the real living wage of £9.90 (£11.05 in London). And as a result, two thirds of kids growing up in poverty have at least one parent in work: a scandal in a modern industrial democracy.

So the case for a real living wage is unanswerable. While a growing number of firms are becoming real living wage employers – and sometimes demanding the same from their suppliers – far too many bad bosses are getting away with poverty pay. And the TUC believes there is an economic, as well as a moral, imperative to act. Rather than squirreling their money away in tax havens, low-paid workers spend their wages on the high street and in their local economy. That leads to a virtuous circle of demand, growth and regeneration.

As we make the case for higher wages for working people, the trade union movement is also grappling with the challenges posed by Covid-19. Although the vaccines have made a big difference, the NHS is under huge strain this win-

ter. Throughout the crisis, unions have called for robust health and safety measures, Covid-secure working and greater flexibility for all working people, not just professionals with Zoomable jobs.

We've also demanded, and won, financial support for working people. The TUC and unions won the furlough scheme that saved the livelihoods of one in three workers. That's one of the reasons why the TUC has called for ministers to set up a National Recovery Council, bringing together government, businesses and unions to discuss how to build a stronger, fairer post-pandemic economy – because there can be no recovery for workers if we are locked out of the room.

There can be no doubt that this must be a watershed moment. After all, it's the labour of working people – not captains of industry, hedge fund managers or private equity barons – that has got us through the crisis. And those workers deserve an economy that works for them: with higher wages, decent jobs and investment in our public services.

The TUC will keep banging the drum for change. Brexit, the pandemic and the broader challenges of tech change and the climate emergency all demand we build a more just, more resilient future. As more groups ballot for action, workers are demanding dignity and a fair share of rewards. **C**



Frances O'Grady is the General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress

How is Starmer doing?

Starting our new column, **Bryn Jones** reviews some of Starmer's Ten Pledges

You might say it's only natural for politicians to make 'pledges' that they can't or won't keep to. On the other hand, if one makes as many as ten commitments it should surely be possible to stick to a few of these, at least in part. All of that applies to Keir Starmer, who has not yet had to square pledges with the pressures of governing for them. Yet, within twelve months of becoming Labour's leader, many in the Party complain that most or all of his ten pledges to the Party's membership have been explicitly broken. In this first of a series of Chartist audits of his promises, I'll look at the most strategic economic pledges for: 'economic justice', 'common ownership' and 'workers' rights and trade unions'.

Economic justice, the first pledge, included the airy promise that there would be "No stepping back from our core principles". Shrewdly perhaps, he did not state what those principles were. Mainly concerned with taxation, this pledge promised to:

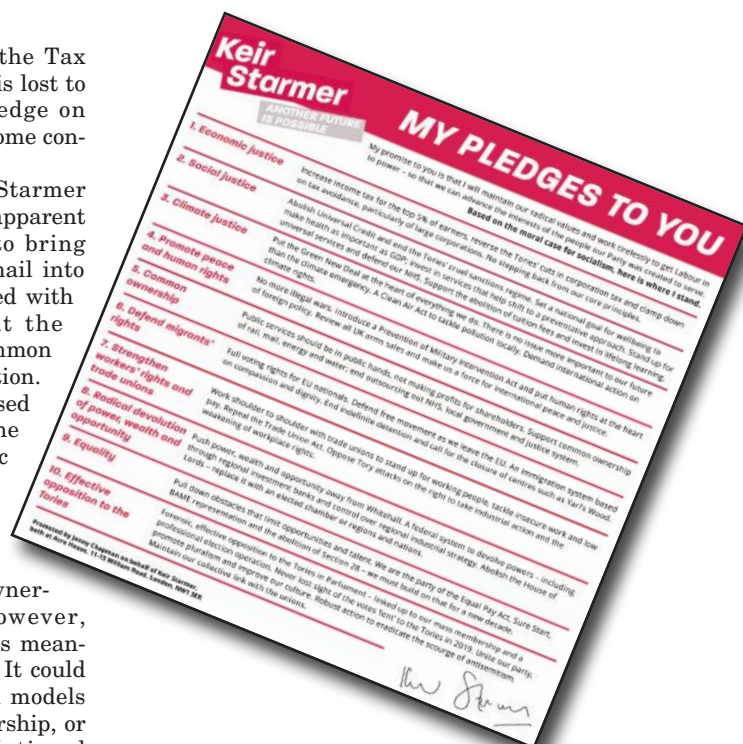
'increase income tax for the top 5% of earners, reverse the Tories' cuts in corporation tax and clamp down on tax avoidance, particularly of large corporations.'

Yet Starmer has since vowed to make Labour a pro-business party, working 'in partnership' with business. Does the partnership involve business tax reform? His recent speech to the CBI made no mention of taxation policy except to promise the old Gordon Brown mantra of fiscally-balanced spending – "on behalf of the tax-paying public". In her 2021 Party Conference speech, Rachel Reeves, the new shadow chancellor, was more specific. Resurrecting the hi-tech cliché of bringing a "laser focus to efficiency in our tax system", she cited "hundreds of different tax breaks" that provide "loopholes for those who can afford the best advice". Reeves identified "private equity bosses" paying "a lower rate of tax on their bonuses than workers do on their wages". Labour, she said, would scrap dodges that didn't "deliver for the taxpayer or for the economy". Most tax reformers would not regard personal bonuses as corporate tax avoidance – especially when compared to, say, the £10 bil-

lion in UK corporate tax the Tax Justice Network estimates is lost to offshore havens. That pledge on corporate tax hikes has become conspicuous by its absence.

On public ownership, Starmer has been criticised for an apparent retreat from the pledge to bring energy utilities, rail and mail into 'public hands'. He responded with the tactical defence that the pledge only mentioned 'common ownership' not nationalisation. Fair enough. The nationalised industry model was not the most efficient or democratic of post-war Labour reforms. As shadow chancellor, John McDonnell considered the merits of other forms of common ownership like mutuals. However, Starmer has not defined his meaning of 'common ownership'. It could mean democratically weak models like the John Lewis Partnership, or the corporate mutual, National Rail. Plenty of scope here for Policy Forum and Conference campaigns to press for more radical forms of commonality.

Workers' rights and trade unions, the third economic pledge, promised to 'tackle insecure work and low pay'. Before he abruptly resigned as shadow secretary of state for employment rights and protections, Andy McDonald announced – presumably with Starmer's backing – that "all workers would receive rights and protections including Statutory Sick Pay, National Minimum Wage entitlement, holiday pay, paid parental leave, and protection against unfair dismissal". Furthermore, Labour would tackle bogus self-employment and gig economy abuses by folding such contracts into a single status of 'worker': all with the same rights, 'from day one' of employment. This would definitely achieve the pledge on insecure work but low pay would still be at the mercy of Government decisions on the National Minimum Wage level. The employment pledge also promised to 'work shoulder to shoulder' with trade unions and to repeal the Trade Union Act. Yet in his speech to the TUC in September 2021, Starmer said only that Labour "would ensure a greater role for unions in boosting pay, with more workers covered by collectively



agreed deals".

Significantly, he made no mention of repealing anti-union legislation to increase union influence. Some unions seem already to have decided that the legislative pledge has been broken. The Bakers Union has disaffiliated (though allegedly over the suspension of its president, Ian Hodson) and the giant Unite affiliate has scaled back its financial support to focus on extra-parliamentary campaigning.

Overall, a score card for his main economic pledges would probably rate Starmer fairly low for the pledges on public ownership, worker and union rights and even less for corporate taxation. The promise of a 'partnership' with employers looks much more as though Labour would not shift the dial of economic power very far away from corporate to worker power. Starmer's TUC speech indicated that tactical electoral strategy would trump any pledges made to his Party. Because Labour has lost the last four elections, "if we don't change then we won't be in a position to deliver the new deal that workers in Britain, your members, deserve". But many voters may conclude that if Starmer's 'change' means breaking commitments to his own membership, he may well break pledges to them – which might not win an election but lose it. **C**

Bryn Jones is a member of Bath CLP

Conference: policy-maker or media rally?

In late November **Peter Rowlands** wrote to Labour's General Secretary, David Evans. He's still waiting for a reply

I write with some concern that policies agreed at our recent conference, in the form of resolutions, are in some instances being spoken about or acted upon as though they were not policy. Thus the leader has denied that a £15 minimum wage is Labour policy, and has said that sanctions should not be used to promote Palestinian rights; the Shadow Chancellor has denied that there is any need for the nationalisation of energy; and the party has adopted a policy which gives the NEC the main voice in shortlisting for by-elections. All of this is very clearly in opposition to policies agreed at conference.

'What this could mean, if we were to accept what the leader and others have said, is that there is no point in holding a conference that determines policy, and that this should now be controlled by the leader and NEC. However, our rules clearly state that this is not the case, and that conference has the ultimate say in determining policy. I believe that legal opinion would support such a view. In 1960, as you will know, conference voted against the deployment of nuclear weapons by the UK,

which prompted Gaitskell, then leader, to oppose this policy in a well-known speech ("I will fight, fight and fight again..."). The relevant point here is that it was accepted by Gaitskell that there had been a change of policy, and he did not attempt to claim otherwise. We should do likewise in my view. I hope therefore that you will seek to ensure that the promotion of policy is always in line with what has been agreed at conference.'

The lack of response from Evans is predictable, but it is something I will pursue. More disturbing is the relatively poor response from the left where, despite opposition, there has been no organised campaign, based on model motions, letters, articles, demonstrations and meetings, which surely could have been taken up by the 'Labour Left for Socialism' umbrella organisation that mobilised for the conference, or by the SCG, Momentum or CLPD. Unfortunately, the same applies to other issues, notably the reinstatement of the whip to Corbyn, the move to the right on policy, the 'future candidates' programme and other issues. Hopefully this will change in the

new year. Arguably this issue is the most important of all, not just for the left but for all who think that members should have a voice in determining policy and rules. If the denial of policy agreed at conference is not successfully challenged, the way is open to turning conference into a rally, where policy is determined by the leadership, as was the case under the 'Partnership in Power' arrangements from 1997 to 2016, although those were agreed by conference.

Skwawkbox carried a piece recently about a claim that conference does determine policy, but only for the few days that it is sitting. This is obviously absurd, and perhaps indicates a recognition by some of the right that there must be plausible reasons for opposing policy agreed at conference. We must strongly argue that there are no such reasons.

This should now become the key issue for the left in the Labour Party. We must strongly assert the right of conference to determine rules and policy, and insist on confirmation of that. If we cannot do so then we cannot make progress on any other issue. It's as simple as that. **C**

Peter Rowlands
is a member of
Swansea West
CLP and a past
parliamentary
candidate

Printer ad

Tories plan more curbs on union rights

Don Flynn explains the new threat to trade unions and their role in fighting the undemocratic Elections Bill

The assault on democratic standards by Boris Johnson's Conservatives extends beyond even the corruption and duplicity which run through its method of governing, which makes cronyism and lying a key part of statecraft.

The Elections Bill currently going through Parliament has been much criticised for the headline issue of making the presentation of ID a condition of the right to vote. This is a provision that is likely to chill participation in elections on the part of young voters and poorer people who are less likely to have the driving licences, passports and other official documents which are deemed acceptable evidence of identity. But in recent weeks the trade unions have begun to raise their voices against clauses that will stifle their role as civil society bodies campaigning for changes in laws and policies.

The Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation (TULO), which brings together the eleven national unions affiliated to the party, has pointed out that its constituent organisations have a legitimate interest in campaigning together to change laws that have an adverse effect on workers' rights, such as outlawing zero hour contracts or giving holiday and sick pay entitlements to people contracted to companies as independent agents.

However, the bill empowers the Electoral Commission to regard all union campaign spending that takes place in the twelve months prior to an election to be rolled into the total spend that is permitted to the Labour party during an election campaign itself. Helen Pearce, the director of TULO has criticised this provision in a recent LabourList blog, asking "How can unions, NGOs and civil society organisations take part in public life when they know that, should an election be called, all their campaigning could count towards election spend limits, with rules and guidelines that



ASLEF general secretary Mick Whelan - denounces undemocratic Elections Bill

could be changed by ministers after the fact?"

In a comment to the Guardian, Mick Whelan, general secretary of the ASLEF rail union and TULO chair, denounced the measures on the grounds that they were "a deliberate attempt to silence the trade unions that have a century-long relationship with the Labour party". He went on to say: "It's not only an attack on freedom of expression, it's also utterly unnecessary – trade union money is the cleanest money in politics."

It is encouraging to see the trade union movement enter the fray on issues that go to the heart of the way democracy operates in Britain. There are many issues under this heading on which the voice of organised labour needs to be heard. Another provision in the bill deals with elections for executive mayors in the English towns and regions, running what are known as 'combined authorities', which are currently conducted on the basis of a supplementary voting (SV) system that aims to secure outcomes which reflect a consensual majority across the spectrum of voters.

A trade union issue

Elections conducted on this basis tend to favour the centre-left consensus that exists in most

cities and large towns in England, with eight resulting in victories for Labour candidates, and two for the Conservatives. The government intends that the Elections Bill will contain provisions that will scrap SV and return to a first-past-the-post system of balloting, which has tended to favour centre-right candidates who can claim victory on the basis of minorities of votes cast.

Trade unions need to register a stronger interest in this aspect of the Elections Bill. The combined authorities which are big players in regional economies and the leadership provided by executive mayors is likely to have a significant effect on labour markets and conditions of employment for hundreds of thousands, if not millions of workers. The two largest authorities – Greater Manchester and West Midlands – contribute nearly eight percent in total to UK gross added value and have the potential to outstrip this figure. The reindustrialisation of Britain outside London and the South East will only be accomplished through a vigorous local democracy which is committed to intervention in regional economies.

This makes the defence of SV in the English regions a cause for the trade union movement to take up on the grounds that it provides the best basis for a democratic partnership between government and civil society to be secured. This is a precondition for the policies that will produce the hundreds of thousands of decent jobs and high quality public services that the country will need as it faces up to the challenges of the transition to a zero carbon economy.

This bill comes on top of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which will further restrict freedom of speech for trade unions. Let us not also forget that the 80 seat Tory majority in the House of Commons is only there because of the first past the post voting system. **C**

**Don Flynn is
Chartist
managing editor**

The robots are not coming

Jon Cruddas defends the arguments in his recent book looking at the future of socialism and work

In a recent edition (Chartist no. 312) Don Flynn provided an elegant, critical review of my book *The Dignity of Labour*, concluding that I retain a limited understanding of capitalism due to a parochial concern with changes in the Dagenham labour process over the last century. Don's argument is informed by a deep understanding of the history of the left alongside decades of political activity on behalf of those cruelly exploited by the system. I respect his approach; it deserves a response.

My argument is not about the periodisation of capitalism, the dynamics of globalisation nor patterns of international development as such. These are clearly critical issues in terms of the changing international division of labour and certainly inform shifting work patterns in my constituency. However, my concerns are less ambitious - to use the changing forms of labour in Dagenham to contest certain contemporary approaches on the left regarding how we understand the forms by which labour is commodified, exploited and understood as an economic and social category. Simply put fashionable elements of the left seek to altering the very purpose of radical politics and its association with the working class.

Such an approach might shed light on three intersecting crises. First, the crisis of the left and its lack of moral purpose. Second, the rise of Authoritarian Populism rampaging across the planet and upending our politics. Finally, our decade long productivity 'puzzle' and longer term structural economic problems. Returning to the terrain of how human labour in understood, rewarded and represented - rather than the broader dynamics of the capitalist reproduction - might offer a political route to renewed relevance for the left by rebuilding a politics of work.

I make a simple argument. Labour should rebuild around questions of human dignity as we emerge out of the pandemic, specifically the dignity of labour. A popular response to this argument is this is obvious, painfully self-evident; it is what labour is all about. But is it? Historically yes, but recently we have become over reliant on assumptions that the



working class are on the wrong side of history, withering away due to technological change; the robots are coming.

I believe this is wrong and not just because there is very little evidence for it. The political danger is such thinking writes the working class out of the script. People know it - they feel it - and funnily enough are less prepared to vote for us because of it. I think this is a better entry point into debates around the 'Red Wall' and political strategy that much of the noise you hear on the subject.

Thomas Piketty has recently talked of the rise of the Brahmin left. The most educated citizens and the greatest beneficiaries of the knowledge economy and our meritocracy have captured left wing parties at the expense of the working classes. Brahmin means a socially or culturally superior person.

It is unarguable that Labour is

increasingly drawn from certain parts of society and certain parts of the country. 74% of our membership is now drawn from the professional middle class. We pull an increasing vote share from social classes ABC 1. Recent YouGov polling suggests a 25% tory poll lead - 52/27 - over labour amongst working class voters.

Here is the kicker and why I jumped in. Without any debate or real discussion a dramatic reset is currently underway on the left; underreported but highly significant. Let's call it a new emerging new socialist imagination. It is best captured in talk of 'Fully Automated Luxury Communism'; of seamless transitions to a vague utopia of abundance labelled Postcapitalism. An inevitable destination where en route we demand full automation and a world without work financed by UBI. Within this new imagination there is no such thing as dignified work. The

historic mission of the left anchored around contesting the capitalist employment relation is being jettisoned from within. What is emerging is a powerful lobby who self identify as the post-work left.

My parochial concern in the book is to contest some of this new thinking by returning to how we understand socialism and Marxism, the capitalist labour process and the politics of work referenced by the changing character of the Dagenham working class. Not least because this re-engineering is driven by highly questionable readings of Marx and historic interpretations of socialism that require scrutiny. Dagenham is a useful portal into these debates not least because of what it tells us about the rise and fall of Fordism and with it the decline of the organised industrial working class in this country, the one-two punch of Thatcherite deindustrialisation alongside the 'Right to Buy' and being situated on the front line of recent epic battles against domestic fascism within the so called 'Red Wall' and amongst – in that dreadful term – the 'left behind'. This year marks the centenary of modern Dagenham and the construction of the mighty Becontree Estate, and offers a condensed story of the changing character of the British working class over the last century.

The book considers how three competing economic philosophies regarding human labour have defined post war British politics. The Classical Political Economy of Smith, Mill and Ricardo influencing post war corporatism. The Neo-classical revolution of the 1870s that helped define the politics of Thatcherism. Finally, the fashionable Marxism present across the Corbyn left and its fraught relations to classical Marxism and socialism.

The book also considers three competing political philosophies regarding labour issues and questions of justice. The first concerned with maximising human welfare. The second with questions of rights and freedoms. Finally, more ancient concerns with promoting human virtue. I argue it is the latter tradition – a politics of the common good – that has lost out in battles within the history of the left. To rebuild the ethical character of the party we need to rehabilitate such lost histories not least by returning to questions of human labour. Without doing this it could literally be all over politically – as revealed in Brexit and a crumbling Red Wall which are symptoms and not causes of longer term decay across the left.



Dagenham workers part in a secret ballot to end the Nine Week Strike 1971 (Credit: Historic Barking and Dagenham)

Human labour remains central to the notion of the common good. There exists a mass of evidence about the purpose of work in our lives; a source of dignity above and beyond material reward. I basically seek to rehabilitate a lost post war social democratic tradition – a form of early stakeholding – that sought to bolt the working class into the operation of the economy through the promotion of good work and extension of free collective bargaining – and seek to update it for today. Because you will find no evidence of this tradition on the left today. Technological determinism – a core feature of modern left – from Corbyn to Blair – something that has disfigured the history of the left – must be resisted.

The evidence that suggests the robots are coming is highly questionable – technology is not destiny – these are political questions and not technologically inevitable. There is very little consensus about the future disruption – much of it is speculative and contains serious methodological flaws. We should instead focus on the political choices that confront us going forward – starkly revealed by a tiny virus.

Many in Labour hate the argument; a lot of both the Blair and Corbyn crowd reject it out of hand. Both often remain captive to forms of technological and demographic determinism that see victory in every defeat. I accept this – that is

politics – but the clock is ticking. We have lost four elections in 11 years, there is no political safe space here. It is not inevitable that Labour will survive.

The Tory levelling up agenda is a very serious threat to labour – we have to confront it rather than hand over traditional communities and bed down in the urban settings and university towns – that would be deadly. There is no coalition that can win in those parts of the landscape.

Finally, and put simply, that was not what the Labour Party was created for. The party was created to advance the interests of working people. You cannot just decide to reject that; politics is not just about dicing and slicing and chasing votes. I argue a necessary, at times parochial, first step in a painful journey is a return to understanding human labour as an economic and social category.

My response to Don's review therefore is to accept his criticism; I devote too little attention to global transformations shaping the workplace. However, I believe a specific, at times parochial, rethink in understanding human labour is necessary before we can achieve this because literally as we speak many fellow socialists are dramatically redrawing the purpose of the left and that also deserves scrutiny. From our different perspectives we might not disagree after all. **C**



Jon Cruddas in MP for Dagenham and Rainham
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What do we mean by ethical foreign policy?

In the midst of a global pandemic, climate change and conflict **Mary Kaldor** suggests features of an ethical socialist Labour internationalism or human security policy



Global vaccination and patent waivers need to combat pandemic (Credit: Global Justice Now)

An ethical foreign policy was the term adopted by Robin Cook when he became foreign secretary in 1997. While it served the purpose at the time of identifying a distinctive foreign policy stance, the term 'ethical' was always problematic. In discussions about foreign policy there is a tendency to distinguish between norms and interests, or in the language of International Relations, between realism and idealism. In practice, the distinction is not at all evident. Most countries frame their foreign policies in terms of values. Thus, the dominant US foreign policy narrative is expressed in terms of an idealistic story about the United States as a global policeman acting in support of freedom on the American model. Even Putin claims to be operating on the basis of international law and opposing what he claims is illegal Western behaviour. Thus, the issue is really about the nature of those values and whose interests.

What Robin Cook meant by an ethical foreign policy was a foreign policy based on human rights. It was the idea that human beings are equal and the rights of Americans, Russians, or Afghans matter just as much as the rights of British citizens. What followed from this starting point was a commitment to the prevention of war, a rights based international rule of law and a multilateral system of governance. This distinction is also what is meant by the distinction between idealism and realism. Idealism is supposed to be about the construction of a peaceful international system while realism is about the defence of national interests in military terms if necessary, 'blood and iron' to use Bismarck's phrase. But the terms idealism and realism are misleading; in today's interdependent world where a major war could mean the destruction of humanity, idealism may be more realistic than what is considered realism.



Mary Kaldor is professor of Global Governance at the LSE and a National committee member of Another Europe is Possible

Smaller powers such as the Scandinavian nations have always tended to favour what are known as idealist or ethical foreign policies. Because they lack the capabilities of great powers, they define their interest in terms of international norms. Or to put it another way, since they could never win in a war with a great power, their interest is the prevention of war. Hence, small powers contribute disproportionately to the construction of international institutions, to peace building and global development; they favour the strengthening of international law. In the contemporary context, the national interest for all countries is to live in a safer, fairer and more secure world. What Robin Cook meant by an ethical foreign policy was a foreign policy along these lines - something that is the only realistic option in today's world.

A good illustration of why an ethical foreign policy along these lines is more realistic is the current pandemic. We are learning

that just vaccinating the citizens of the UK does not protect the UK from the disease. New variants such as Delta or Omicron inevitably emerge in countries with much lower vaccination rates. Thus, UK citizens have an objective interest in vaccinating everyone, in other words, this is not just an ethical consideration. That not only means exporting surplus vaccines but also ending pharma monopolies and allowing vaccines as well as drugs and medical equipment to be produced at cost. It also relates to other global challenges like climate change and conflict. Contemporary conflicts, for example, are transmission belts for Covid; this is because of inadequate health care, inter-generational living, and large crowded places like refugee camps or detention centres. Polio was supposed to have been eradicated by 2006 but it has reappeared in Afghanistan and DRC.

If Labour were to adopt an ethical foreign policy in today's world, what would it involve?

First, a central goal would be prevention of war between the great powers. The situation is currently dangerous. Both Russia and China are acting as irredentist powers. Russia is currently engaged in a military build-up on the border with Ukraine; China is undertaking menacing overflights over Taiwan. But threats of retaliation by Western powers are extremely risky and play into the legitimising narratives of Putin and Xi Jing Ping. Hence Putin justifies his behaviour in terms of the possible expansion of NATO and the possible deployment of missile systems on Ukrainian territory. If the threats fail to deter aggressive action, the consequences are unimaginable. What is needed instead is a defensive approach that eliminates offensive weapons, especially nuclear weapons, and engaging in confidence building measures, while maintaining the pressure on human rights issues and co-operating on life-threatening global challenges such as climate change and Covid. A future Labour government should put an emphasis on upholding and extending arms control and disarmament treaties and should, in particular sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

There is also a need to rethink the role of NATO. In the aftermath of the Cold War, many hoped that both NATO and the Warsaw Pact would be dissolved

and replaced by a pan-European security system. That did not happen. As long as NATO remains a classic war-fighting alliance, any expansion can be interpreted by those excluded as threatening. Were NATO to rethink fundamentally its posture emphasising its defensive nature and its potential role in crisis management, this would be more difficult.

Second, it would involve an active contribution to multilateral crisis management. Contemporary conflicts in places like Syria or DRC or Afghanistan are characterised by persistence – the UK is affected by such conflicts as a consequence of large-scale forced migration, the spread of organised crime such as smuggling in drugs or antiquities, and the growth of extremist ideologies based on ethnic nationalism or religious fundamentalism. The American so-called withdrawal from Afghanistan is an example of what not to do in such situations. In fact, it only involved withdrawing troops on the ground. The Americans continue to be engaged in what is called the 'War on Terror' – long distance air strikes, often using drones, aimed at killing potential terrorists. The War on Terror does not work in terms of eradicating radical Islam – it merely provokes further insurgencies. The areas under the control of radical Islamist groups in Africa and the Middle East are growing. Currently, former members of the Afghan Security Forces, trained by Western governments, are joining ISIS in order to attack the Taliban. For all their shortcomings, multilateral peace-making and peace-keeping operations have contributed to a lowering of violence in the places where they have been deployed and there is a growing experience and learning about how to stabilise contemporary conflicts. The UK should have a capability, both civil and military, for contributing to such missions on the ground, aimed at protecting the local population and dampening down violence. Such a capability could also be deployed in other types of emergencies such as natural disasters.

Third, the alternative to war is the strengthening of international law. The establishment of the International Criminal Court at the end of the 1990s was a huge achievement. But it risks being undermined by the one-sidedness of its judgements since nearly all the cases concern conflicts in

Africa and the Balkans. To restore credibility, the Court needs to have the authority to rule on the responsibility of Western leaders for war crimes or the legality of the possession and use of weapons of mass destruction.

Fourth, such a foreign policy would involve major commitments on a range of global issues including climate change, a global treaty on pandemics, a multilateral managed approach to asylum and migration issues, and the promotion of global development especially debt reduction, poverty alleviation, the spread of education and effective healthcare.

Perhaps a better term than ethical foreign policy is human security. Human security is understood as the security of individuals and the communities in which they live, in the context of multiple economic, environmental, health and physical threats, as opposed to the security of states and borders from the threat of foreign attack. Human security implies that the security of Afghans or Chinese is just as important as the security of British, or to put it another way, British citizens can only be secure in a world in which the Chinese and Afghans are also secure. In the case of the Israeli - Palestinian conflict, for example, it would mean addressing the security of Palestinians and Israelis rather than the security of the Israeli state as tends to happen at present.

At present, the term human security is becoming widely accepted. It is used by multilateral institutions such as the UN or the EU. It has also been adopted by NATO and a number of Western governments including Canada, Belgium, Portugal, Italy (in relation to cultural heritage), the UK, Germany and France. The UK Ministry of Defence is currently working to mainstream the concept within the armed forces. In these contexts, human security has been understood as an umbrella term that encompasses Building Integrity (anti-corruption), Protection of Civilians, Cultural Property Protection, Children and Armed Conflict, Conflict-related Sexual and Gender-based Violence, Human Trafficking, and Women, Peace and Security. But there is scope for making use of the way the term is currently being legitimised so as to introduce a broader understanding along the lines of Cook's ethical foreign policy. **C**

History's trajectory

Glyn Ford on the threat of Cold War mark 2

The US won the Cold War in the West, but not the East. Military Keynesianism drove economic growth in America and the collapse of the Soviet Empire in Eurasia. The Soviet Union was pushed into an Arms Race that while underpinning the US economy sucked the life out of the Soviet civilian sector, driving the population to drink, despair and indifference. This hollowing ultimately proved fatal as its colonies dropped like Autumn leaves with the first breathe of Winter. Washington's win in the West, blinded it to the sleeping giant in the East.

Powers grow from the bottom up. Industry is the foundation for economic and financial strength that begets political domination and military hegemony as they seamlessly flow one after the other. They rot the same way, collapsing like dominoes to order. China is not the stumbling and stunted economic cripple US policy created in the Soviet Union. Now two generations on Beijing's economy threatens American global hegemony.

The last transition between 'Great Powers' - exceptionally - passed off peacefully as the British Empire died and American Imperialism grew of age. Britain stepped down to subaltern from sovereign. But this was court churning within the Anglo-Saxon clan. The next passage is between civilisations. Here racism and xenophobia will colour the presaged future 'yellow'. Anyone with doubts should read Matt Pottinger - Trump's Deputy National Security Adviser - in Foreign Policy (Sept/Oct 2021), 'Beijing's American Hustle; How Chinese Grand Strategy Exploits U.S. Power'.

China was seen casting its shadow over the US economy under Obama with his consequent 'pivot to Asia'. In fact a full spectrum redeployment of US economic, political and military assets to coerce, confront and confound Beijing. Under Trump, Pottinger and others persuaded the President to step on the gas and accelerate the process. Pacific Command became Indo-Pacific Command and The Quad, a new alliance with an armed-wing of US, India, Japan and Australia, became the waiting to be born

NATO in Asia. Trump unilaterally renamed and repurposed the G7 as the Democratic 10 (D10) adding with a distinct echo India, Australia and South Korea - Japan was already a member.

US politics at home has descended into internecine political warfare as the bridges between Republicans and Democrats have been dismantled or burnt. With the first wallowing in racism and the second impotence; former President Donald Trump looks more likely to be beaten by biology than Biden in his attempt to be the first President since Grover Cleveland in 1892 to win a non-consecutive second term. Yet in battling Beijing the two march in lock-step. Biden has systematically repudiated - sometimes foolishly - Trump on everything. China is the sole exception. Here, the Trump game plan designed by Pottinger remains fully in play.

The Quad is en route to Quad+. South Korea is being pressed to join, while subsidising the US military-industrial complex with a first aircraft carrier and a record 10% increase in its defence budget. All forcing forward Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes outspent as they are by a factor of sixty with the combined military spending of Washington, Tokyo and Seoul. If Yoon Seok-youl, the conservative candidate, wins the South's Presidential Election in March it's close to a done deal. Today he's ahead in the polls.

Biden's second front was December's 100+ Summit of Democracies that alienated as many as it pleased, Philippines not Hungary, Iraq not Thailand. But we know what the US wants to do and at the second time of asking 'our bastards, not theirs' may find a better conjunction.

Where's Europe and the UK? Brussels is under relentless pressure from Washington, aided and abetted by the European Parliament, to change its terms of trade with China, to continue to subvert its 'One China' Policy and sanction China - for its undoubted Human Rights abuses - that go unremarked amongst the US's subordinate dictatorships in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere.

In the UK there has been a creeping Tory collaboration. This



collusion has gone un-noticed or at least unremarked by Labour. In November 2016 'Operation Invincible' saw a squadron of RAF Typhoons form part of a US, South Korean 'decapitation' exercise on the Peninsula, followed by US, UK and Japanese Special Forces in Operation Vambrace Warrior launching a seaboard raid to 'capture' the moribund Trawsfynydd nuclear power station that just coincidentally is the same design as North Korea's Yongbyon plant. Where Theresa May walked Boris Johnson rushes. The UK's new aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth's maiden deployment saw a traverse of the disputed South China Sea and sequential joint exercises with India, the US and South Korea, and Japan.

While Johnson leaps with joy, Brussels steps with caution. They have seen where blindly following Washington can lead; whether it's the killing zones of Iraq or the flit from Afghanistan. The EU needs to look to its own interests. True they are closer to Washington than Beijing, but they are far from being at one. To do that though Brussels needs to look to its own capacity. The EU is the world's number two military spender. It just spends it badly. The EU 'Foreign Minister' Josep Borrell is right that the EU needs its own defence capacity. For the US every problem is a nail and it brings its military hammer. To make the mistake of equating Beijing today with Moscow in the eighties is to misread both China's economic strength and political will. To re-run tragedy as farce beckons. Back in Britain Labour needs to take on Boris and challenge our being press-ganged into Cold War 2. **C**



Glyn Ford is an ex Labour MEP

Seen but not heard

Dave Lister on the backward ideas animating the chair of the new Social Mobility Commission

In October 2021 Katharine Birbalsingh was appointed by the Government as Chair of the Social Mobility Commission. Liz Truss, in her role as Minister for Women and Equalities, stated that she wanted her to work on applying the levelling up agenda in particular to the fields of education, enterprise and employment.

Katharine Birbalsingh first came to prominence, or notoriety depending on your point of view, when she was wheeled out at the Tory Party Conference to attack progressive education. She claimed that education standards had been “so dumbed down that even the teachers know it”. She also said that “my experience of teaching for over a decade in five different schools has convinced me beyond a shadow of doubt that the system is broken because it keeps poor children poor”. She then returned to her school Saint Michael and the Angels Academy in Camberwell, South London (which I knew well) where she was the vice principal. Perhaps unsurprisingly she was then asked not to attend it while the governors discussed her position and she finally resigned because she was unwilling to comply with the conditions that were put to her.

In 2014 Katharine Birbalsingh founded Michaela Community School, a free school in Wembley, north west London. Central to this school's ethos is the draconian discipline policy that she favours, which led to its being dubbed “the strictest school in the country”. Pupils were instructed on how to sit properly on chairs and to walk to lessons in single file. Detentions were dished out for forgetting to bring a pencil or for talking in a corridor in between lessons. Ofsted were impressed and judged Michaela to be outstanding in all areas.

However, this approach to discipline is not confined to Michaela School. Many academies have a similar ‘zero tolerance’ approach to student behaviour, which arguably is more appropriately deployed on New York streets than on the corridors of English schools. Misbehaviour leads to warnings; the next stage is detentions and the final stage is isolation or exclusion. Isolation can take place over a long period of time. Exclusion can be

used as a means of ridding the school of troublesome or under-achieving pupils and can also take the form of informal exclusion – parents being told to remove their child – which is in fact illegal. It has been pointed out by education commentators that these policies are particularly detrimental to children with special educational needs and to BME children. This is reflected in the data on exclusions.

Ofsted has been criticised for praising the behaviour policies of a school that insisted on silent corridors and had excluded a large number of pupils. However, they have also stated that schools do not have to adopt zero tolerance policies to be praised for how they manage behaviour. Rather, schools will be judged on whether their approach works. In their latest inspection framework Ofsted are focusing more than before on children's behaviour in school. In doing this they should consider whether children with SEND and other groups have been adversely affected by the implementation of their school's behaviour policy.

Birbalsingh is not entirely wrong to insist that schools need to have a strong behaviour policy. In my experience, for example, there were a few schools in Inner London in the 1970s which were out of control. Children cannot learn well when disruption is constantly taking place. It's a matter of degree. Many schools, many teachers seem to manage well without zero tolerance policies. Firm but fair, firm but kind seems to work for many people. An interesting, creative, meaningful curriculum would also help! Draconian discipline policies are detrimental.

But the Michaela approach is not only about behaviour. It is also about the methodology for teaching and learning. Birbalsingh is strongly opposed to progressive education. She believes controversially that group learning can never work. She believes, like Tory ministers, that schooling should be about imparting knowledge, not developing learning skills. She believes that Black children's education should focus on British history and literature to help make them British citizens and definitely not on the history and culture of their family's country of origin. In addition, she



Birbalsingh - leads Tory attack on ‘progressive’ education

has opposed the Black Lives Matter movement, teaching about white privilege and so-called ‘woke’ culture in general.

Schooling should be about instilling knowledge or developing learning skills. Knowledge is meaningless without understanding, and many education experts disagree with the current governmental bias against teaching skills. But skills-based learning is operating in a vacuum without knowledge and understanding. Teaching History in the 1990s I thought that there was too much emphasis on skills such as interpreting documents. Children also need a sense of chronology and the key to understanding the modern world that historical knowledge and understanding can provide.

Also, the belief that progressive education harms children is nonsense in my view. The evidence has always suggested that it is the quality of the teaching that counts. Good progressive and good traditional teaching are effective. Bad progressive or traditional teaching is not. For me, children benefit when lessons are creative, interesting and enjoyable. Over-reliance on ‘chalk and talk’ can be boring and stifling.

We are fighting a losing battle in education currently. The removal of Nick Gibb from his post in the education ministry is a positive however. The Labour Party needs to develop alternative policies giving teachers more autonomy and local authorities more clout. Our children should be both seen and heard. **C**

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

Global Britain versus the last colony

Mary Southcott provides a personal testimony on extending democracy and anti-colonialism

I was born when Britain was global and most of my atlas was pink, into an anti-imperialist family in Leeds. My Canadian father hated the idea that their Governor General, at one time John Buchan, made all their decisions. His mother was Scottish. He supported any team playing against England, whether this was Gandhi or Archbishop Makarios.

My mother was also a first generation history graduate. Her father was at the Relief of Peking (Beijing) and the Boxer Rebellion. It was only when I arrived back from Cyprus in 1975, she told me he hated Turks and Winston Churchill whom he held equally responsible for many friends dying at Gallipoli. Long before Cyprus was divided in 1974, by the Greek Junta Coup, then by Turkey, Britain's divide and rule damaged Cypriots. Hugh Foot observed the UK policy "doing nothing was also a policy". James Callaghan had wanted to intervene but Henry Kissinger said "No".

I went to Cyprus in 1971 having only read Lawrence Durrell's *Bitter Lemons*, an anti-Greek Cypriot autobiography. He was a British intelligence officer, once a spy always a spy. I travelled through the Corinth Canal displaying Junta phoenixes and read AJP Taylor's *Origins of the First World War*, the war of Ottoman succession. My parents had a lot of visitors including four orthodox priests from Istanbul I insisted were Turks. I was sympathetic to Chamberlain not Churchill and Munich on the Edge of War, based on Robert Harris' book, may shed light.

I lived in Cyprus for four years arriving at the same time as Grivas landed in 1971 and EOKA B' was bombing police stations. I read more books, visiting most of Cyprus, under the guidance of Rupert Gunnis' *Historic Cyprus*. The *Times* of Cyprus editor, Charles Foley, invited by Makarios to give a Greek Cypriot perspective, although pro independence not enosis, (union with Greece), wrote *Island in Revolt* as fact as did the *Washington Post's* Laurence Stern in *The Wrong Horse* which Kissinger had pulped. He led the way in his chapter on *Study in Ethnic Conflict* to blaming the colonised with his fiction of warring



Greeks and Turks. The Empire and Commonwealth Museum even asserted that they were fighting when Britain arrived in 1878 and when they left in 1960.

By the time I was Labour's Parliamentary Candidate in 1987 I was a committed anti colonist but yet to see the problem with the UK voting system. It wasn't like an exam where the more work you did the better the result. The *New Statesman* commissioned my article, *Electoral Reform and Me*. When I sought selection later, I was accused of only knowing about two things, Cyprus and electoral reform. It wasn't true at the time but it may be now. They are linked for me by the idea of democracy which Robin Cook said was also a value.

Novels on Cyprus are often important as historical documents but disliked by Cypriots because they get Cyprus wrong, although *The Cypriot* by Andreas Koumi, draws on the lived experience of his Cypriot parents. Victoria Hislop's *The Sunrise*, is a parable of cooperation for Cypriots in Famagusta after it was deserted in August 1974. *Small Wars*, by Sadie Jones is based on a diary by a National Service man who commented on British human rights abuses, torture and rape, which led to a 2019 out of court settlement similar to the Kenyan Mau Mau case.

The most recent, *Island without Trees*, by Elif Shafak, leaves out Turkey, assumes Kissinger's war-

ring Greeks and Turks, forgets colonialism, nationalism and the Cold War and calls Turkish Cypriots "Turks". She writes as if Cyprus was always divided by the Green Line rather than the "ethnographical fruitcake" it was during British rule. One well researched section concerns the Committee on Missing Persons in digging up remains, identifying and then returning them to their families. Far from dividing people this has brought teams of Cypriots together and empathy between families, as Sevgul Uludag writes in her factual *Oysters with the Missing Pearls*.

Recently, devolution has drawn attention to the way Whitehall works: overcentralised based on ruling the Empire. Michael Gove wants us all to have Governors. This links my preoccupation with voting reform and Cyprus. We are the last colony. Governance should be pluralist and about coordinating with other countries and devolved authorities.

What the world needs now is more democracy not Global Britain. This may be the choice at the next election. The Conservative Party, particularly in this English nationalism phase, is on the wrong side of history. We need to decolonise our history from out of date stereotypes. The playing fields of Eton did not win the battle of Waterloo any more than we will persuade the previously colonised that Global Britain is the future. **C**

Mary Southcott is a member of Chartist EB

Not fit for purpose

Sea water swimming brought **Karen Constantine** up close to the realities of sewage pollution

Covid has altered our lives in many ways. For me, and hundreds of others in my Division of Ramsgate, Covid was the stimulus required to get me sea swimming regularly. I'm part of a rapidly growing U.K. trend of people who have taken to sea, lake and river swimming year round during Covid times. The cold water benefits us, staves off depression, reduces social isolation and has created communities of people that didn't exist previously. As a Kent County Councillor I've used my members grant to fund essential cold water swimming accessories and open water swimming lessons for 200 Ramsgate residents.

Not only are we swimming together for our health and social connection, we've become tuned in to our local environment. We notice what is going on. In East Kent that includes unfortunately, getting up close to the effluent routinely discharged into our sea. When that happens, our swimming has to stop. We don't like that. Nor are we happy about footing the bill for such a poor service, and the so far hidden environmental costs.

30 years ago we were told that privatisation would improve our Victorian sewage systems. That significant investment would be forthcoming. In reality we were sold a pup. Like other Tory 'private is better' sell off's, privatisation consistently fails to deliver the 'public good'. In this case water companies have creamed off an estimated £57bn in dividends for shareholders since 1991, whilst failing to invest in infrastructure meaning that everyday 2.4 billion litres of treated water is lost through damaged pipes.

This ideological Thatcherite plundering of public utilities has resulted in an expensive and broken sewerage system that is not fit for purpose. Surfers Against Sewerage has flown the flag against raw discharge for decades. "We Own It" have highlighted that water and sewage companies are run by nine regional monopolies owned by private equity. With vast profits being



Karen Constantine (in red beret) with Kent protesters against sea sewage

siphoned to Australia, Canada, Hong Kong. The GMB union highlight this paucity of investment extends to workforce. Most of us are aware of the mountains of plastic in our seas and oceans. It's visible. Sewage outfalls are most often unseen, unless you swim.

All around the Kent Coast, and in almost every part of the U.K. swimmers, environmentalists and consumers alike have been appalled to discover the true impact of this failure of investment and the impact of raw sewage discharge. At Lake Windermere untreated sewage has left water quality so poor it is in danger of becoming ecologically dead. Here in Kent, this pollution has impacted jobs and tourism as 10,000 oysters were potentially contaminated with E-coli. In July 2021 Southern Water were fined a record £90m. But this eye watering sum has been treated as a business cost. And factored into our bills.

Research shows the public are in favour of renationalisation of water companies. Gill Plimmer writing in the Times says, "Privatised water costs con-

sumers £2.3bn more a year, renationalisation would save each household in England £100 a year."

Headline grabbing protest events have sprung up around the Country. I organised a lively summer protest of 400 Ramsgate locals and I've spent recent months attempting to force accountability by requesting Southern Water to address a public meeting. As they wrestle with their PR disaster, they have now agreed to host a meeting with local Conservative MP, Craig MacKinlay, a privatisation fetishist as chair. The political alignment is clear, I expect a greenwash!

Given the critical importance of clean water and effective treatment of sewage, the failure of the privatisation rhetoric and the public's desire to end this expensive monopoly, it's high time Labour made its policy clear. Renationalisation is not only possible it's desirable. The public are with us. Democratic ownership of the infrastructure we all rely on, including railways and water, is within our grasp. Let's get it in the manifesto. **C**

Karen Constantine is a Kent County councillor and Chartist EB member

Where is Labour going on Ireland?

Geoff Bell says Labour should reject unionism and become part of the solution

Keir Starmer is a Northern Ireland unionist. This he emphasised when he visited the six north-eastern counties of Ireland in July.

Speaking to BBC Northern Ireland, Starmer was questioned by political editor Enda McClafferty on what his stance would be on a border poll.

"I respect the principle that the decision, in the end, is for the people of the island of Ireland," Starmer said, but then went on to declare, "I personally, as leader of the Labour Party, believe in the United Kingdom strongly, and would want to make the case for a United Kingdom strongly and will be doing that."

McClafferty pressed the Labour leader further, asking him to clarify whether he would remain neutral during a border poll, or that instead would he be "very much on the side of Unionists, arguing for Northern Ireland to remain in the UK", even if he were Prime Minister at the time. Starmer repeated his assertion that "I believe in the United Kingdom, and I will make the case for a United Kingdom."

He also told the Irish Times:

"Obviously, there is more discussion now about a border poll than there was some years ago. I think it is not in sight, frankly, and the obvious priority at the moment, particularly coming out of the pandemic, is the economy, health and education and longer-term issues. These are very important priorities and I think a border poll is not in sight. It is not in sight as far as I am concerned."

So, there we have it. The Irish should not concern themselves with their country's self-determination, they are unlikely to be permitted to have a referendum and if this somehow does occur, Keir Starmer will join the Orange Order, the DUP and all other Northern Irish unionists in campaigning against Irish unity.

But, was this really Labour's policy? In November, the shadow spokesperson on Ireland, Louise Haig offered a different version. She said, contrary to Starmer that the party would not involve

itself in any border poll and would remain strictly neutral. However, she also reiterated that Labour was a unionist party. She said this twice in a short statement. And then, in Starmer's reshuffle, Haig was transferred to become the party's spokesperson on transport.

Was this because she had dared to challenge Starmer on campaigning in a border poll? This seems unlikely, after all her new job was, apparently, a promotion, so she was not punished for straying from Starmer's policy. It may indeed be that Starmer encouraged her to say what she did on Labour Party neutrality in a border poll. He had come under a lot of criticism for his remarks from the left in this country, and the northern Irish nationalist community, with stringent criticism coming from columnists in the Irish News, and openly from Sinn Féin. One can also assume there was also more private criticism from the SDLP.

What's the truth in all this, what was important was what united Starmer and Haig was their insistence, even pride in that they and their party were unionist.

The form that this is likely to take will be revealed in the policy document Gordon Brown is now preparing on the British state, in particular in relation to Scotland, but also it has been promised Northern Ireland. A crystal ball is not needed for what this will recommend. It will be a 'reformed' British state with slightly increased devolutionary powers for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In short, the centenary of partition in Ireland will be celebrated by the unionist Labour Party saying more of the same. And we all know what that meant in Ireland before and after partition: starvation, death, coercion, discrimination, 'special powers' of repression, Bloody Sunday, the killings in Ballymurphy, and thirty years of war, which included the security forces of the British state colluding with loyalist sectarian murder gangs.

Labour has been along this road before, most notably when James Callaghan was Prime Minister and Roy Mason was



Geoff Bell's latest book is *Hesitant Comrades, The Irish Revolution and the British Labour Movement*

A group of Labour Party members committed to promoting discussions and campaigns designed to achieve unity in Ireland has been set up with the name Labour for Irish Unity (LFIU). Currently functioning as a Facebook group, requests to join the discussion can be made at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/214537116138723/about>

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland between 1976 and 1979. But such was the odious nature of the colonial role they were inflicting on the people of northeast Ireland that a campaign against this began in the Labour Party. In this, Chartist played a significant role and helped to form the Labour Committee on Ireland. The campaign had important successes, most notably winning the party to a policy to become persuaders for Irish unity.

This is the tradition which the left in the party should now re-establish. The fight against Starmer needs to embrace the issue of Ireland and the unionism the party leadership is now espousing. At the very least this means referring to the Good Friday Agreement and saying the Labour Party must spell out the conditions for the border poll this promised. But more basically it means saying that socialists in England will welcome and support a new, united Ireland, free from British interference. That is, we will be part of Ireland's coming together, and no longer part of its problem. **C**

Belarus & Poland in murderous migrant policies

Alena Ivanova on solidarity acts for thousands trapped in hostile environments in Eastern Europe

The end of 2021 brought a series of horrific stories for those of us working on migrants rights. We may never know the names of all who have lost their lives in the freezing waters of the English Channel. But while we are rightfully focused on the Tory policies and the damage they do to all who try to build a new life in the UK, the situation on Europe's external borders belies policy failures and cruelty by the EU as well.

The situation at the Belarus border is ongoing but it escalated this spring when Belarus' leader Aleksandr Lukashenko forced a Ryanair flight to land and apprehended opposition voice Roman Protasevich. The EU retaliated with sanctions but the regime used the bloc's paranoia over migration as leverage by proclaiming they will no longer prevent attempts to cross the EU border. In fact, Belarusian authorities spent the summer facilitating tourist visas from the Middle East to allow migrants to travel to the border area with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. By autumn conditions were worsening and desperate people would find themselves trapped in an impossible situation - the Polish border authorities push back all who they find in their territory, often in contradiction to international human rights regulations. On the other hand, migrants report Belarusian officials beat and detain those who return from Poland, and they prevent them from leaving the country even when they'd like to return to their home countries. People are spending days, sometimes weeks in the forests around the border, with no food, shelter or healthcare.

Although all sides share responsibility for this human crisis, providing assistance to those suffering seems to come last in terms of priorities. Latvia and Poland have both declared a state of emergency on their borders, which includes additional troops and border patrols, razor wire fences and far-right vigilante groups roaming the area. In Poland, the state of emergency cov-

ers 183 towns and villages within two miles of the border, blocking all access to that area for journalists, civil society organisations, volunteers, and others. On the Belarus side, the 10 kilometres stretch parallel to the border is a secure zone, to which only Belarusian nationals who reside there have access, with the 3-kilometre area closest to the border completely restricted to all but military and security officials.

In October, the Polish Parliament passed an act legalising pushbacks and allowing for asylum applications to be left 'unexamined' if a person has entered the country 'illegally'. Human Rights Watch has interviewed people on the ground and investigated reports that Polish border guards follow no due process in executing pushbacks. In some cases, if those crossing were injured or sick, authorities took them to hospital for medical treatment and gave them a temporary six-month stay on humanitarian grounds. However, the family members of those hospitalised were mainly taken back to the border and pushed across to Belarus, separating them from their loved ones.

Given the harsh winter conditions, the emergency measures, general violence and harassment of activists and NGOs attempting to help, the situation on the ground is very charged. Still, local residents are organising as best as they can to provide emergency support, with younger people smuggling blankets, food and medication into the forests and small villages and towns uniting around the Green Light initiative. By putting a green light on the window, residents indicate to those looking for a warm place for the night that they'll be allowed to come in, have a meal and a shower. Residents are not hiding migrants or facilitating further journeys but preventing immediate loss of life, especially given many of those trapped at the border are families with children.

Human rights observers, journalists and activists such as the Grupa Granica collective report regularly on the situation not only focusing on



Refugees on Polish border

the violence and harassment against migrants but also the unauthorised searches of activists' vehicles and homes, the false statements by police authorities and the scaremongering police officials are spreading in the area to try and discourage residents from assisting desperate migrants. From the beginning of the crisis until November 11 at least 5000 people had applied to Grupa Granica asking for help from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Iran and Somalia but this is only a snapshot of the scale of the situation.

Dunja Mijatović, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, spent four days in Poland and went to the field with Grupa Granica. 'The greatest strength of the aid movement for migrants and refugees from the Polish-Belarusian border are the inhabitants of the neighbouring towns - in the zone of emergency and next to it. It is their compassion and empathy that prolongs the life of people in the forest. Their courage and selflessness. Their good saves lives', she said.

While winter and word of month seem to have helped slow the flow of people to Belarus, the number of people looking for safety and dignity across the world is only going to rise as the climate crisis deepens. We need institutions that put human life first, and we need practical organising and practical solidarity measures to make these institutions happen. **C**



Alena Ivanova is an organiser for Another Europe is Possible

Rumbled

Patrick Mulcahy
on
Spielberg's
West Side Story

Director Steven Spielberg has reached the point in his career when he doesn't have to prove himself anymore. In the 1970s and 1980s, he was the joint godfather of blockbuster cinema alongside *Star Wars* creator George Lucas but, unlike Lucas, hankered after the acceptance of Oscar voters. He achieved this in the 1990s with *Schindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan*, whilst never compromising his visceral, populist style of filmmaking. At his best, Spielberg takes his audience into a situation and puts them through the wringer. In *E.T. – The Extra Terrestrial*, his best film, he reduced them to tears. Spielberg is not instinctively a political filmmaker, though he has tackled political subjects – slavery in *Amistad* and *Lincoln*, East-West relations in *Bridge of Spies*, even statelessness in *The Terminal*. In these films, he is not overtly arguing for political change, rather celebrating values worth cultivating – compassion and tolerance. In the last five years, he has become more overtly political, re-telling period stories that have a contemporary, specifically anti-Trump message. In his 2017 film *The Post*, a prequel to the Watergate scandal thriller, *All The President's Men*, he venerated free press at a time when President Trump dismissed facts as 'fake news'. With his remake of the Oscar-winning 1961 musical, *West Side Story*, he argues for harmonious co-existence in direct opposition to the racial demonizing of Trump's 'America First' policy.

The bravura opening – a partial tracking shot, partial ballet featuring the white, delinquent Jets led by Riff (Mike Faist) stealing paint from the building site of the Lincoln Center in Manhattan and making their way uptown to deface the Puerto Rican flag on 72nd Street – sets up the central conflict between two social groups with distinctly oppositional outlooks. The Puerto Rican Spanish-speaking residents are focussed on being integrated, with dreams of moving into new housing units. The Jets resent the gentrification of their neighbourhood, with Spanish-speaking businesses replacing those run by the descendants of Polish and Irish immigrants. Interestingly, Spielberg – himself a low-culture guy – shows



high culture being one of the drivers of slum clearance that the Jets resent. For its own part, *West Side Story* is a blend of high and low culture that takes as its departure point the plot of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* but stumbles trying to replicate its twists.

The film's Romeo, Tony (Ansel Elgort, fresh from his success in *Baby Driver*) is a damaged anti-hero. Newly released from prison – he was sentenced for a year for almost killing a man – Tony is determined to abandon violence. The extremely tall Elgort looks suitably different from the other Jets. Maria (Rachel Zegler), his Puerto Rican love interest, is the sister of head Shark Bernardo (David Alvarez), a young boxer. They live with Bernardo's girlfriend, Anita (Ariana DeBose, in a role made famous by Rita Moreno). Moreno herself appears as Valentina, Tony's employer. She attempts to exert a positive influence. Tony and Maria meet at a school dance, the former breaking curfew with apparently no consequence.

The attraction between Tony and Maria ignites a gangland war, though Riff and his pals, spoiling for a fight, need no such catalyst. Jets and Sharks confront each other in a warehouse amongst salt stacks, where Tony's attempt to diffuse the situation makes things worse.

The faults of the film are entirely down to the plotting, with the original book-writer, Arthur Laurents, hidebound by Shakespeare. The saving grace, by some distance, are the musical numbers. It is a real pleasure to hear Stephen Sondheim's lyrics

(set to Leonard Bernstein's music) clearly enunciated. They deepen the film's themes and move the action along.

The film is clearly on the side of the Sharks, yet Maria rejects her Puerto Rican accountant date, Chino (Josh Andrés Riviera) in favour of Tony. We don't completely believe in Tony and Maria's attraction. Their romance is clearly intended to heal the rift between the two gangs – and society in general – but Spielberg and his screenwriter, Tony Kushner, don't sufficiently problematise the Sharks.

The police are a central presence, breaking up fights and reminding the Jets that other white folks will move into condominiums with Puerto Ricans serving as doormen. However, the 'Hey Officer Krupke' song satirises society's treatment of juvenile delinquency as the Jets embrace environmental determinism.

The finale doesn't have the emotional impact of Spielberg's best work, but the film has numerous pleasures, including full frame shots of the dance numbers. Most of the musical set pieces are rooted in story points, though Maria's department store performance of 'I Feel Pretty' is superfluous. For the number to work, Maria would have to be portrayed as less attractive than the other neighbourhood girls and more neglected, so that Tony sees in her something that other Puerto Rican boys do not.

You won't cry at the end of Spielberg's remake. However, you will still be entertained.

***West Side Story* (2021) is currently on release**

The Last Witches of England

Julie Ward
on the
demonising
of women in
17C

The Last Witches of England, A Tragedy of Sorcery and Superstition
John Callow
Bloomsbury Academic

I rarely feel deeply moved by academic publications but John Callow's exploration of the 'Bideford Witches' had a profound effect on me, not least because I grew up in North Devon where an 'outbreak' of suspected witchcraft in 1682 led to the trial and public execution of three 'hapless and shuffling' old women.

From the dramatic opening paragraphs describing a troubling avian intrusion into the bedroom of a woman afflicted with an unexplained sickness - an event that provoked a brutal witch-hunt - to the final chapter documenting recent campaigns for the public memorialisation of the executed women, Callow's work invites the reader to bear witness to the persecution of the poor and marginalised, both then and now.

The author's exploration of events that both preceded and followed on after the execution of Temperance Lloyd, Susanna Edwards and Mary Trembles considers the wider socio-economic, religious and political influences that effectively allowed mob rule to dictate the fate of the women at a time when rational thought was gaining ground over superstition and religious jiggery-pok-

ery.

Callow paints a picture of a divided community in an outward-looking thriving town, a sea-port of huge commercial significance with a shifting population. The comings and goings of sailors and merchants made for a colourful quayside, and taverns abounded along with prostitution. The Civil War was only recently ended and despite edicts from London outlawing congregational assemblies or 'conventicles' many preferred to worship illegally in private homes and barns rather than attend the Anglican service on Sundays, incurring large and oft repeated fines. These religious dissenters had been supporters of Cromwell, ergo republicans and Whigs, but they were also the artisans, industrialists and traders in a town famous for its pottery.

The challenge for the Tory administration was maintaining the local economy and loyalty to the King in a situation where hostility towards former enemies would have been counter-productive. The solution came in the form of accusations of witchcraft from both Whigs and Tories against a common enemy - destitute women past child-bearing age whose only hope of survival was from begging and gleaning scraps. These women were completely expendable having no commercial function in the town, rather needing charity in the form of 'Dole' money. (Callow's extensive survey of public records reveals regular payments to all three women, whereas some wealthy women who were later accused were acquitted.)

It seems that the town was also suffering from multiple power vacuums with an absentee landlord in the form of the Earl of Bath who preferred to live elsewhere despite his grand home overlooking the Long Bridge, and a lazy vicar who allowed an ambitious inexperienced junior cleric - Francis Hann - to assume responsibilities way beyond his pay grade, taking him eventually to Exeter where the accused were tried, convicted and hanged. Hann even accompanied the women to the scaffold where he continued, unsuccessfully, to try and exhort full confessions from them right to the last in order to please a baying crowd. He subsequently situated himself at the

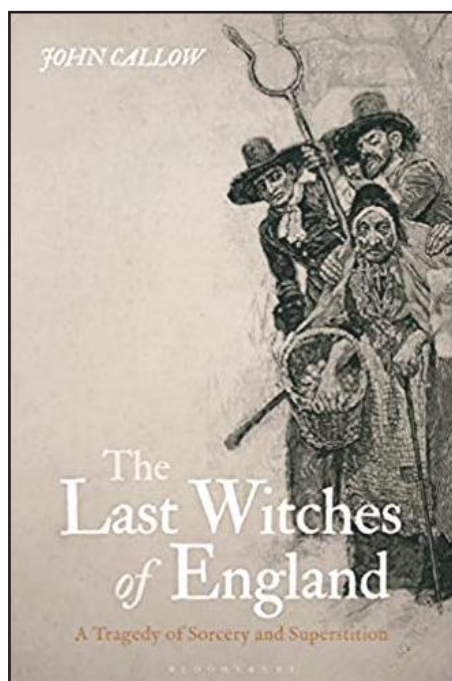
centre of the drama in a minor published pamphlet but history does not treat him well.

Meanwhile local physicians were ill-equipped to deal with strange afflictions that bedevilled increasing numbers of people, both men and women, of all ages. And so it was that the finger of blame pointed at Lloyd and then the two other women. Callow's research throughout is meticulous, turning up a plethora of material including letters, a popular ballad, and graphic accounts of humiliating public strip-searches to find the 'witch's mark' or supernumerary teats whereby a familiar such as a cat or toad might suckle and also the Devil himself. In a tightly-laced society where barely a woman's ankle was seen, the voyeuristic titillation gained from an old woman's genitals being probed smacks of sadistic pornography.

However, despite the depiction of poverty and violence we are also introduced to the voice of compassion and reason in the person of John Webster, a former Parliamentarian chaplain, medical practitioner and natural philosopher, who risked his own position and security to go against the grain by publishing a sceptical treatise, 'The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft', in 1677, pre-figuring a more tolerant and rational age.

Callow traces society's changing attitudes to women, witches and witchcraft over the ensuing centuries introducing us to self-defining white witches who even now practise a different kind of magic more akin to paganism and goddess-worship. Lifting up the memory of oppressed and violated women, the feminists who flocked to Greenham Common wrote the names of the 'Bideford Witches' on ribbons which they tied to the fence. And here I enter the story again as I lived nearby at the time and was involved in the Cruise Missile Watch.

Finally, it was wonderful to read that an arts officer (Dr Judith Noble) and a Labour politician (Ben Bradshaw) had invested time and energy into trying to right a terrible wrong, campaigning for a memorial plaque and a posthumous pardon for the women. The latter remains unfinished business but Callow's work adds considerable weight to a strong moral argument.



Socialist Sheffield

Patrick Seyd
on
municipal
socialism

**People's Republic of South Yorkshire:
A Political Memoir 1970-1992**
Helen Jackson
Spokesman £12.99

Over recent decades local government has suffered a significant diminution of both its powers and prestige to such an extent that the incentives to become a local councillor are much reduced. Who wants to take on a role which involves the management of budgetary cuts and service decline? The contrast between today and the 1980s, when Helen Jackson was first elected to Sheffield City Council, is most striking. Notwithstanding the election of a Conservative government in 1979, the Sheffield Labour Party, under the leadership of David Blunkett, possessed the powers to initiate a radical local political project. 'Red Bologna' was matched by 'Socialist Sheffield'. In her political memoir Jackson documents some of the radical initiatives undertaken in Sheffield in the 1980s and, as a key player, she provides a valuable record.

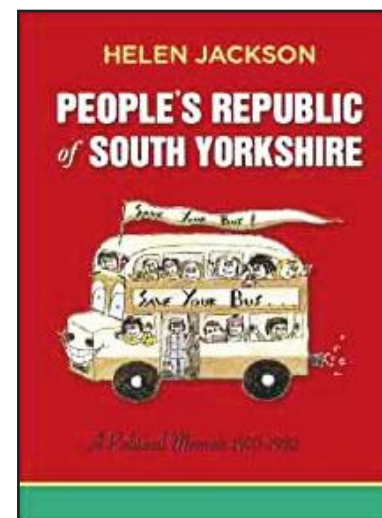
Jackson studied history at the University of Oxford, trained to be a teacher, was the mother of three children and moved to the outskirts of Sheffield with her husband, Keith, in 1973. Although involved in Labour politics in Stoke on Trent and then Liverpool the transition to south Yorkshire was something of a personal shock. She was an outsider in this 'masculine industrial world' of engineering, steel and coal. Nevertheless, she had the good fortune to be welcomed into a remarkable group of people in the Sheffield Brightside constituency, all of whom were rooted in the local community, many of whom had work experience in the steel and engineering industries, and all of whom were committed socialists. In addition to their political work they also socialized together and their annual Spring Bank Holiday camps, which lasted for over ten years and eventually involved over one hundred people, 'created an undeniably strong cohesive political culture' and 'foundations for the political direction in Sheffield ... into the 1980s'. That political, social and personal bonding in the Labour hierarchy was an important feature of Sheffield politics in the 1980s and, as we shall note in the conclusion to this review, its absence today is one contributory factor in Labour's marginalization

in the city.

She was first elected as a Sheffield city councillor in 1980 and in her 12 years on the Council she became a senior figure, first, as Chair of the Works committee (at the time 3,000 were employed in Sheffield Works Department) and, then, of the Employment committee. Notwithstanding the fact that some senior figures on Sheffield City Council had been women (Enid Hattersley for example) this was still very much a man's world. Sheffield embarked on a political project involving a joint economic and social strategy to combat the decline in the engineering and steel industries (between 1979 and 1981 the city lost almost 20,000 jobs). A new Employment Department was established in 1981 with a remit to develop municipal enterprise in both the economic and social spheres. Jackson, as Chair of the Employment Committee, placed particular emphasis upon women's role in the local economy and initiated specific projects to facilitate paid educational leave and skills training for women in low-paid jobs, as well as recruiting women into senior positions in the local authority. 'Building from the bottom', engaging with tenants and workers, and changing the culture of the city attracted, on the one hand an influx of numerous policy specialists into the city, but, on the other hand, created significant tensions between some of the traditional local government officers and these specialists, as well as opposition from the Chamber of Commerce and the local newspaper, the Sheffield Star.

After 1985, however, rate capping and government restraints on local authority capital spending undermined the Sheffield project. Enterprise zones and Urban Development Corporations were the preferred options of the Conservative government and Sheffield was obliged to fall into line. What then are the legacies of this socialist period? The Employment department's investment in the 'cultural industries quarter' had the most long-lasting impact - the cultural vitality of the city (music, film, and art in particular) is most apparent. Furthermore, David Blunkett's particular commitment to care for the elderly has been long lasting.

Jackson's memoir is inevitably a personal history but she captures some of the essential features of



Sheffield politics in the early-1980s. She has made extensive use of internal city council documents and has interviewed many of the key personnel. It is an important contribution to local history. But it is only one perspective and one hopes that it might prompt other actors to provide their interpretation of this period. What of other policies and personnel in the city (education, for example)? And what of other Labour-controlled local authorities? Did they adopt alternative, and more successful, political strategies?

Finally, her memoir prompts the question what lessons should be learned? Long-term strategic thinking is a fundamental necessity as a basis for the socialist project, as is learning and drawing upon the experience and policies of other local authorities (for example, Preston and Nottingham today). In 2021 Labour lost overall control of Sheffield city council and now shares power with the Greens. People with ideas and ambition are less attracted into local government today as compared with that group of talented people, of which Jackson was a part, in the 1970s/80s. Furthermore, there was a personal, social and political cohesion among this group in the 1980s which is absent in Sheffield today. Labour as a party is riven by factionalism and distrust which will take considerable effort to eliminate. Perhaps Labour as a national party is beginning to acknowledge at long last the importance of local government and if so then Sheffield along with other Labour-controlled authorities need to play a significant part in developing a socialist project relevant to the 21st century. In that context, the 'People's Republic of South Yorkshire' is strongly recommended.

What it was really like

Patricia D'Ardenne
on an
inspiring
memoir

Daring to Hope
My Life in the 1970s
Sheila Rowbotham
Verso Press £20

What could be more irresistible for review? A feminist autobiography, set in the Borough of Hackney, covering a revolutionary period of British cultural and political life, written by an historian and activist, with consummate detail and original materials should fit the bill!

Rowbotham does not disappoint. In eleven chapters, she covers in strict chronology, the development of the Women's Liberation Movement, the politics and creative radical culture, and answers the question at a personal and systemic, of why she and her comrades and collaborators dared to hope. It was a decade of unparalleled dislo-

cation and rebellion, that included the miners' strike, the three-day week, the war in Vietnam, troubles in Northern Ireland, welfare cuts, and the election of Mrs Thatcher. There was much to hope for.

Rowbotham is funny and deeply personal, but still able as an historian, and distinguished academic, to stand back and re-evaluate the feminism of the seventies, and to analyse what its successes have been, and, fifty years on, what was lost on the way. She also describes her complex relationships with three men, with the sisterhood, and with motherhood, set in the communal house in Hackney, amidst the sleeplessness, the chaos, and the financial insecurity that characterised the Left at that time.

It is worth comparing the Britain of the seventies to now. Rowbotham describes her struggles as ultimate-

ly failing, when it was a significant part of the journey. Then, there was no Equal Pay legislation, no contraception or abortion on demand, and no such thing as rape in marriage. There was no Black Lives Matter movement. Only ten women Labour MP's (with no black members until 1987). Women still needed a male guarantor for obtaining a mortgage, and it was the Tories who had chosen a woman leader and Prime Minister.

We have limited grounds for hope. Thank goodness for this historian who tells us what it was like on the ground (literally at rallies and demonstrations), and who is still fighting for a more just society, not merely that women compete equally in the power struggles of our corporate ladders or corridors at Westminster. Strongly recommended.



Dirty tricks in Africa

Nigel Watt
on the neo-
colonisation
of Africa

White Malice
Susan Williams
Hurst £25

Chartist readers probably do not need to be persuaded that the CIA has been up to no good throughout its history, but this book provides 500 pages of damning evidence of its poisonous activities in the 1960s. Based on very thorough research, Susan Williams has thrown light on the CIA's role in plotting the death of Patrice Lumumba, the elected prime minister of the ex-Belgian Congo, and the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah, the visionary first president of Ghana. Williams had already probed Congolese history in her earlier books, "Who killed Hammaraskjold" (2011) and "Spies in the Congo," (2016), both reviewed by me in Chartist. The latter volume relates to the Shinkolobwe mine in the Congo which produced extremely high-grade uranium to which the US was desperate to block German access – and later Soviet access.

The book begins by reporting on Ghana's independence and the All Africa People's Congress where Nkrumah first met Lumumba. It then details CIA's financial support to, inter alia, the African American Institute, the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the journal, Encounter, regarding which Wole

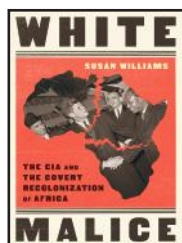
Soyinka wrote "we would discover we had been dining...with the Devil himself, romping in our post-colonial Garden of Eden..." When in 1960 the Belgians were frightened into granting independence to the Congo, Patrice Lumumba rapidly emerged as the only leader of national stature. Initially he trusted the US, but he stood up for real independence and when the US and Belgium and their Congolese allies thwarted him, he threatened to turn towards the Soviet Union.

The Cold War was on, this was the period of McCarthyism in the US and both presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy were obsessed by what they saw as the Communist threat. The CIA had already beefed up its numbers in the Congo. Its chief motivation was to ensure that the large stock of uranium at Shinkolobwe could be shipped to the US, but the country was strategic for its many other minerals and for its geographical location. Mobutu had been appointed army chief by Lumumba but with CIA backing he turned against Lumumba. After a short period of rule by Cyrille Adoula (also backed by the CIA), Mobutu took power in a coup, still with CIA backing, and ruled the country for thirty years. The book describes Lumumba's travails, and the UN's attempts to end the conflict – including Dag Hammarskjöld's attempt to end of

secession of Katanga which led to his death.

Kwame Nkrumah, as he pursued socialism and Pan-Africanism also attracted the attention of the CIA, which wormed its way among some of Nkrumah's close colleagues who deserted him. He became understandably paranoid about the many threats to his life and was removed in a coup in 1966 when he was on a State Visit to North Vietnam and China. An interesting parallel is that the atomic reactor in operation since 1958 at the university in Leopoldville (Kinshasa) was disabled by the CIA immediately after independence. Similarly, Nkrumah's nuclear reactor was closed down immediately after the coup.

The CIA was also suspected of supplying the drugs which led to death of other friends of Nkrumah: the American writer, Richard Wright; George Padmore who had worked with Nkrumah to organise the Pan African Conference in Manchester in 1945 and who came to Accra as chief advisor on Pan African affairs; and the singer, Paul Robeson, whom Nkrumah had invited to work at the University of Ghana. It also backed the uninspiring Angolan leader, Holden Roberto, but soon deserted him in favour of UNITA as a stronger opponent of the leftist MPLA who emerged as the rulers of Angola.



A Tory Peer on a Labour Knight

Andrew Coates
on Ashcroft
on Starmer

Red Knight. The Unauthorised Biography of Sir Keir Starmer
Michael Ashcroft
Biteback £20

Red Knight aims to 'explore Sir Keir's experiences and temperament' to see if he is 'equipped' to move from his 'present predicament' to becoming Prime Minister. The former treasurer and deputy chairman of the Conservative Party and, as the blurb puts it, 'international businessman' (tax avoidance issues unmentioned), would not be any Labour leader's choice as his first biographer. Starmer, the Lord begins, 'did not want this book to be written'.

Compared with some left-wing jibes at the Leader of the Opposition, the jibes are subdued. The biography is a serious, if unfriendly, study of Starmer's career. Considerably helped, one imagines, by chief researcher, Miles Goslett.

From his Surrey upbringing, the 'schoolboy socialist' Starmer became involved in the Labour Club at Leeds

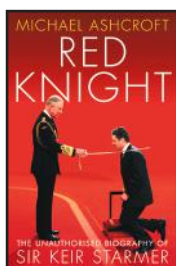
University (its extent is disputed), and the radical left, small circulation, magazine Socialist Alternatives, run from his house on Oxford where he was studying law. A chapter on that Pabloite post-Trotskyist publication and the Socialist Society, is informed by interviews with those involved, including this reviewer. At a distance of thirty years they were happy to speak on its 'unashamedly hard left', Green inflected alternative politics.

The book's biographical meat is about Starmer's legal career. From Doughty Street Chambers, his involvement with the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers, he spent time in the Department of Public Prosecution (DPP), the third highest-ranking public prosecutor in England and Wales. We learn that he had a 'rather technical approach to the job...interested in process'. In 2015 he was elected MP for Holborn and St Pancras. In a position of influence under Corbyn, Shadow Brexit Secretary, Ashcroft speculates that by backing a new referendum and supporting staying in the EU Starmer 'helped

the circumstances of Labour's rout' in 2019.

The Labour leader, Red Knight asserts, is often described as 'intensely ambitious'. He is said to be 'willing to charm anybody and everybody who might be of use to him'. But popularity amongst his constituency members and those directly appealed to has not been translated into national poll ratings, even if some recovery seems underway.

Many of those on the left who supported Starmer's leadership campaign are disappointed with back-tracking on one-member-one vote and other issues, the latest being migrant rights. The expulsion of left-wingers for a variety of reasons, many contestable, looks bad from somebody with a reputation for concern about due process. While there is respect in the Party, enthusiasm is in short supply. Former Tribune Editor Mark Seddon is quoted, 'pandemic or no pandemic, we simply don't know what Sir Keir believes in.' This fits badly with Ashcroft's advice for future Labour success, 'Let Starmer be Starmer'.



Crap jobs and a call to action

Conrad Landin
on work
under
Capitalism

Lost in Work
Amelia Horgan
Pluto £9.99

At the tender age of 18, I was offered a Christmas job at HMV's flagship Oxford Circus branch. "You're here because you love the music, you love the games, and you love selling," the manager told us in the training session - in between detailing how few rights we had according to our zero-hours contracts. "We want you to be proud to be part of our family."

On Christmas Eve, with HMV reporting losses of £40 million, all the temps were laid off early. So much for the family, I thought on my long walk home. Then again, what's Christmas without some family drama?

In *Lost in Work*, Amelia Horgan suggests we recognise the constant edicts to love and be grateful for our jobs for what they really are: cynical attempts to increase profit margins and quash dissent. "This isn't just a book about crap jobs," Horgan tells us. "It's a book about how work under capitalism is bad for all of us."

This book incisively dissects what counts for received wisdom

about work, in a country whose newspapers no longer deem it necessary to report on industrial relations. Technological progress is steadily automating manual work, right? Horgan takes the example of automatic car washes, which have largely disappeared from garages, replaced by hand-washing stations run by exploitative gangmasters. "When labour does not have much power, particularly in the context of low wages, there is little pressure to automate jobs," she concludes.

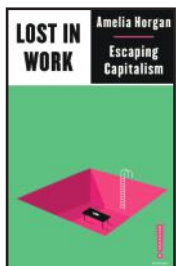
Amid this factual but conversational narrative, Horgan occasionally weaves in her own experience. Awarded a private school scholarship at 11, she went from "the group least likely to make it to university - those on free school meals - to the group whose future is set in gilded stone". Discussing the discombobulation that such a journey through the class system can inflict on a child, she reflects on the codes of speech and behaviour which "give those who possess them the ability to move more easily between jobs and to gain status and material support in times of hardship".

Yet in discussing this language "of 'outcomes' and 'going-forwards' and 'as-per-my-previous-emails'", it is a pity Horgan did not examine

the sectors where it is most pervasive. As well as the profit-hungry worlds of marketing and management consultancy, jargon is central to the operation of large bureaucracies like the NHS and local government. These sectors are rare in still offering career progression - and sometimes educational development - to employees from working class backgrounds.

Lost in Work is not just an indictment of capitalism - it is a call to action too. Individual resistance can be inspiring but, Horgan argues, ultimately falls short. Instead, Horgan makes the case for re-building trade unions, asserting workers' power and mounting a serious challenge to the capitalist model of company ownership. "A consciousness against capitalist work, a class consciousness, is something that needs to be developed, rather than something that appears automatically," she as-serts.

Books about the world of work are too often based on anecdote and conjecture - or, alternatively, they are academic in the worst sense. In contrast to both, Horgan has applied Marxist theory to everyday life with alacrity. In so doing, she has armed her readers to fight back.



Tory survival and Labour weakness

Peter Kenyon remains to be persuaded

Falling Down – Parliamentary Conservatism and the Decline of Tory Britain
Phil Burton-Cartledge
Verso, £18.99

This is a must-read book for anyone interested in the survival of the Conservative Party, and the ineptitude of the Labour Party. Here's the challenge: "The Conservative Party is the indispensable machine for arranging and repeating patterns of dominance and subservience across British society." So how can the author possibly justify the title. You just have to bear with him, like I did. His exploration of the 'Dimensions of Decline' in the first chapter ranges from what is written about the party, through membership, national and local organisation, policy making and activism, before launching into the arguments for decline.

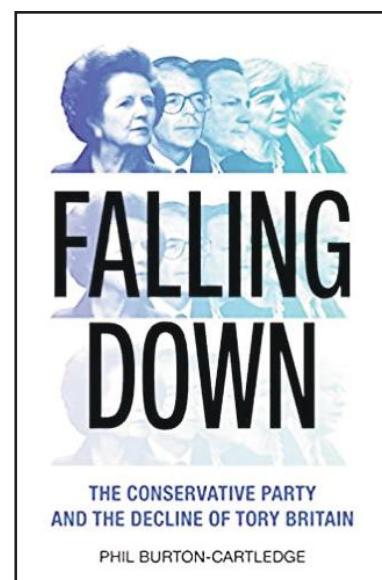
Most striking is the age profile of voters in each general election since 1992. Back then the young were marginally disposed to vote Labour with Conservative support gaining through the decades. By 2019 more than 60% of 18-24 y/o voted Labour compared to less than 20% Conservative compared with more than 60% of those aged 65+ voting Conservative. But an ageing, dying electoral base is not sufficient to write the Tories off. Far from it. The author focuses on the ways the Tories over the past 40 years have

sought to 'buy' votes through the petit bourgeois attractions of property, and the risks that now poses for their future electability. He then expounds on the role of leader in shaping policy and electoral fortune starting with former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in Chapter 2. Although Labour lost the 1979 election, Thatcher's Tories had plans – deeply ideological ones to reshape society shackling the powers of organised labour (the unions) and selling off public assets to enrich and entice the working class. 'Thus, the Thatcherite offensive was a class project'.

Then the author tackles the Major Interregnum, Into the Abyss (post 1997) and the Rise of Liberal Toryism which he dates to 2005 and the election of David Cameron. This marks what proved to be a turning point in the Tories' electoral fortunes. Chapter 6 Liberal Toryism in Office tells the story of how the Tories profited from Labour's sham-bolic political mismanagement of the financial crash and the ground was laid for full-on right-wing government in the wake of the 2015 General Election and that EU Referendum.

The author is swingeing in his criticism of Cameron, who he said 'bet the house' to the perceived electoral and immediate reputation interests of the ruling party [the Conservatives]. Chapter 7 is titled 'The One Nation Affection: Theresa May.' 'She put the party

first above all else....and she pointed her successor to the way out of the hung parliament that hamstrung her. Enter Creature of Havoc: Boris Johnson in Chapter 8: Most of us have sufficiently clear memories to know what happened in 2019. But the author throughout this book offers exquisite, well-sourced chronicles of the events under-pinning his thesis. In the Conclusion he admits that to argue the Tories face long-term decline might seem premature. But for this reader, the great value of this book is a searing reminder of how weak the Labour Party is at shaping an agenda of lasting appeal to the British electorate.



Peter Kenyon enjoys the lies being revealed

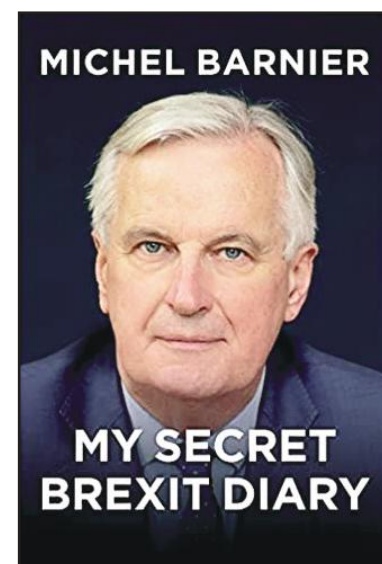
A glorious illusion

My Secret Brexit Diary – A Glorious Illusion
Michel Barnier
Polity £25

Michel Barnier needs no introduction. A consummate diplomat with a profound understanding of the best way to cope with the outcome of the British EU Referendum announced on 24 June 2016. In brief, the remaining 27-members had to be, and remain throughout, united as one. This 400 plus page work is what it says on the cover – a diary, arranged chronologically. Instead of an introduction, Barnier offers a warning. A self-deprecating slight attributed to the British photojournalist, Don McCullin in an inter-

view with the leading French newspaper Le Monde: "I don't like this Michel Barnier" To which Barnier responds: "So that's settled then!"

Barnier's ability to mobilise a highly professional team of negotiators was powered by his experience of the Commission and an extensive network of contacts. As events unfolded he shares his insights into how to tackle each step of the process that claimed the careers of so many Conservative politicians, and resulted in a hard Brexit that will cost the British people for years to come. In conclusion, he doesn't gloat. He just got on with the job he was appointed to do, to keep the EU-27 together. Instead, he reflects on future challenges and the need to work together to solve them.



Nostalgia and London-centrism

**Duncan
Bowie**
on two
recent
London
essays

Red Metropolis
Owen Hatherley
Repeater £10.99

The London Problem
Jack Brown
Haus £7.99

Both these short books are well worth reading. Hatherley is a prolific young author of several entertaining books on planning and architecture, who is culture editor of *Tribune*. This new book is a nostalgic history of municipal socialism in London, with photographs on every other page. Not surprisingly the book has endorsements by John McDonnell, Lynsey Hanley (author of *Estates* and *Guardian* writer) and Emma Dent Coad, architectural historian and briefly Labour MP for Kensington.

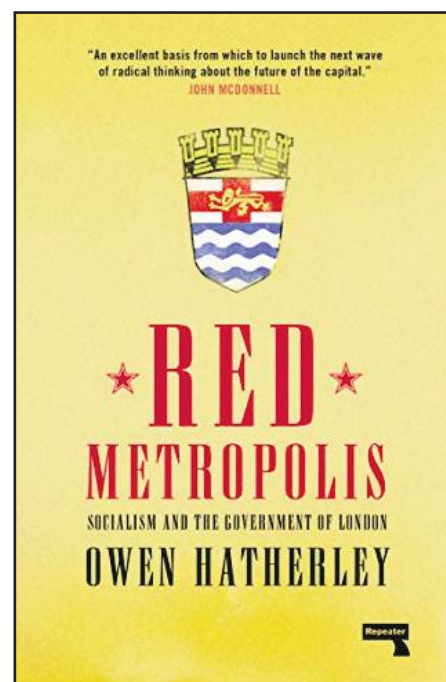
The book presents a selective narrative, with a focus on housing and planning in London over the last 120 years, starting with the progressives on the LCC in the 1890's, moving on to the municipal socialism of Bermondsey and other Labour councils (including Lansbury in Poplar) in the years after the First World War. This is followed by Morrisonian London of the late 1930's, the Abercrombie Plans of 1943 and 1944 and the Festival of Britain in 1951, a discussion of the GLC battles over planning between 1964 and abolition in 1986, and the revival of

London politics with the election of Livingstone as Mayor in 2000. The last chapter sets out a programme for the Left in London.

Interestingly, Hatherley argues that London should stop growing, which seems a rather conservative, even nostalgic perspective which fails to recognise London's economic role and attraction to job migrants not just from the rest of the UK but the rest of the world. He also argues that London as a social democratic city should be more aggressive in challenging a Conservative central government, even to the point of breaking the law. This seems to me to be both dangerous and anti-democratic and an encouragement to Conservative run councils, of which there are many, to rebel against a future Labour central government. Nevertheless, the book is a great read and certainly preferably to Simon Jenkins recent history of London.

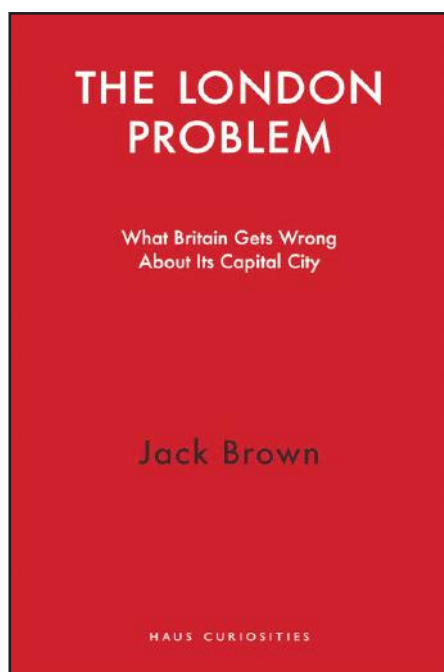
Brown is a lecturer in 'London Studies' (a nice title I might like to have had) at King's College, who also had the curious role of 'researcher in residence' at 10 Downing Street. He was also co-editor with the LSE's Tony Travers and Richard Brown (no relation) of the Centre for London of the recent book on twenty years of the Labour Mayorality, which had the not very imaginative title of *London's Mayor at Twenty*. Jack Brown's new book, which like Hatherley's is really an extended essay, is based on research he undertook for the Centre for London for a report entitled *London UK*, which examined the relationship of London to the rest of the UK.

This is a contribution to the Levelling Up debate, as in the absence of any regional economic or spatial planning by Government over the last few decades, the differential of income and wealth between London and the wider London city region, and most of the rest of the UK has grown, including both in the post-2008 economic collapse and during the last 18 months of the pandemic. Successive London Mayors, supported by Travers' London Finance



Commission have argued for London to have greater devolved powers, including retaining revenue from London's property tax, while the Conservative government is now focusing on devolving power to city Mayors and combined authorities outside London and on trying to shift investment to other regions, though admittedly on a much smaller scale than in the regional policy to support the 'depressed areas' in the late 1920's and early 1930's.

Brown tries to respond to this growing anti-London sentiment by arguing that London remains central to the UK economy. He rightly points out that there are a large number of low-income households in London as well as in other regions, though he does not really follow through on how London's wealth could be more fairly distributed among London's residents and workforce or how the growing gap between rich and poor within London can be reduced to make London a more equal city. We can be proud of London's diversity but need to be ashamed of its inequalities, which neither national government or successive Mayors (Livingstone and Khan included) have done much to challenge. His concluding comment that we should 'stop worrying and to love London more' is really not good enough as a response to the challenges faced not just within London but by the inter-regional inequities that have generated the increasing anti-London policies of the current government.



Solidarity and armed struggle did it

Bob Newland
on the role of
International
Brigade in
defeating
Apartheid

**Secrets of the People's War that
Liberated South Africa**
Ronnie Kasrils (Ed.)
Jacana £16.95

December 16th 2020 was the 60th Anniversary of the founding of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) the army of the African National Congress (ANC). Editor Ronnie Kasrils was MK Chief of Intelligence and a Minister in the Governments of Mandela and Mbeki. The book title demonstrates Kasrils' belief that armed struggle was key to the defeat of Apartheid - something many recent commentators have tried to underplay.

Pallo Jordan introduces the fight for National Liberation dating back to the 18th Century, one of the longest and arguably most successful international struggles against imperialism. The ANC strategy 'the four pillars of struggle' encompassed mass mobilisation, effective underground organisation, armed struggle and international solidarity. This brilliant book contains many moving and informative stories bringing home the scale and scope of solidarity actions. It is interesting to discover the intercon-

nection between the different parts of the struggle.

Many Chartist readers will be familiar with the 'London Recruits' who in the 1960s and 70s went to South Africa on clandestine missions for MK. I was privileged to have been one of them. This volume tells of the many other internationalists whose underground exploits contributed to the victory over Apartheid.

Activists from Britain, Belgium, Canada, Holland and Southern Africa share secrets of this extraordinary saga of leaflet bombings, arms smuggling, safe houses, dead letter boxes and transportation of MK combatants. Near misses, capture, torture, imprisonment and escapes add to the drama. However, you will have to read the book to discover these secrets for yourselves.

Many of the 'Brigaders' did their bit and returned to 'normal' life in their homelands. Others remained in their adopted South Africa'

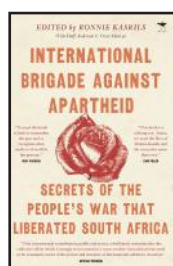
Part two is dedicated to international solidarity organisations including Britain's Anti-Apartheid Movement and groups in France, India, Ireland and Canada. Support from the Soviet Union, German

Democratic Republic and Cuba with arms and training is also addressed.

Some contributors illustrate the price paid by the Front Line States (many only just independent) for daring to support MK. Others raise controversies about the way the armed struggle developed, life in the camps and not surprisingly issues about post-Apartheid developments. Kasrils identifies the victory by Angolan and Cuban troops over the South African Defence Force at Cuito Cuanavale in 1987 as a turning point.

Urko Airtza from the Basque Country, recalls the relationship forged between ETA, MK and other liberation movements while training in Algeria, highlighting Kasrils' role in assisting an ETA ceasefire and subsequent arms decommissioning. Urko quotes the last words to his parents of an ETA militant killed fighting in Salvador in another internationalist initiative: 'Solidarity is the tenderness among peoples'.

Finally, Kasrils addresses the question 'Was it worth it?' While cataloguing the problems in today's South Africa, he is clear - 'Yes it was.'



Bob Newland
on a brutal
inside story

Robbery and indirect rule

What Britain Did to Nigeria
Max Siollun
Hurst £20

The history of Britain's occupation and exploitation of its colonies has come under a new spotlight with the development of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement. Too much of this history is written and taught from the perspective of Empire rather than that of its victims. Siollun's history of Nigeria from the 15th century through to independence in 1960 is therefore a refreshing if challenging narrative. He also leaves the reader with brief comments on the tensions, religious, tribal and political which continue until today.

As with many African countries, Nigeria is an artificial construct bringing with it the seeds of divisions so brutally exploited by British Colonialism. It was created from two already disparate Protectorates of Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria. The book demonstrates powerfully what a

disaster this British meddling was with terrible consequences then and still today.

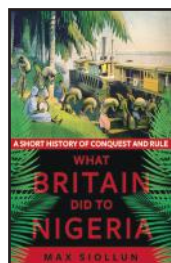
Britain's major role began at the start of the 19th century. The land produced vast quantities of palm oil to make soap and oil Britain's rapidly expanding industrial machinery and, with the advent of motor vehicles, rubber plants for their pneumatic tyres. As with so many of Britain's colonial adventures, the history of Nigeria is a litany of disputes between trading companies frequently supported by private armies. It is interesting to see how, at times, the Foreign Office resisted one or another company's ambitions but always seemed to come in line with their actions in the end committing troops when local forces were threatened.

As palm oil and other products became more valuable, companies merged becoming bigger and more powerful with the largest eventually becoming Unilever. In the 20th century, palm oil was replaced by

petroleum as the main economic driving force which led in post colonial Nigeria to new disputes between nations for control of its resources.

The occupation and exploitation did not happen without resistance. Many workers disputes and tribal revolts took place and were put down in the most brutal and murderous fashion. Unlike many British colonies in Africa such as Kenya and Rhodesia, Nigeria was not a settler colony. The rapacious exploiting companies relied on indirect rule - an interesting and arguably cheaper way of maintaining control. This did, however, lead to considerable regional and tribal conflict which has its ongoing impact on today's Nigeria.

The detail and breadth of this exploration of Britain's crimes in Nigeria makes the book an invaluable contribution to an ongoing discussion. Even readers with a general appreciation of imperialism's crimes will find Siollun's insight fascinating.



Getting the environment done?

Victor Anderson finds holes in government plans to replace EU green laws



Victor Anderson used to work for the Sustainable Development Commission and is a member of Chartist EB



As a result of Brexit the European Commission no longer protects the UK environment. Its enforcement of EU laws drove improvements particularly in air quality and the state of the beaches. The Johnson Government tells us not to worry, because the role of the EU Commission is now being transferred to a new body, the Office for Environmental Protection, with updated environmental laws contained in new legislation, the Environment Act 2021.

This Act was the outcome of a long, slow and much interrupted parliamentary process, beginning with a Draft Bill in December 2018. It covers topics such as air, water, nature, and waste, and sets up a system of environmental targets and principles. As with most other aspects of Brexit, the Act doesn't really mean that anything is finally "done": a great deal is going to depend on interpretation, resources and the drawing up of a series of plans the Act requires. It is therefore too early to tell what the eventual impact of the Act is going to be.

However right

from the start it looks like it has some bits missing.

The Government's Environmental Principles explicitly don't apply to "taxation, spending, or the allocation of resources within government" (Section 19). Since most measures either cost money or use a system of incentives through the tax system, that rules a lot out. Basically, this is the Treasury getting itself opted out of the new arrangements.

The Principles themselves don't include the most important principle for sustainability: that policies should take into account the interests of future generations: the Government opposed a move to add that in. The "precautionary principle" is there, left undefined in the Act, although a recent consultation document stated the Government's view that it is about being careful about the likely consequences of a policy – even though the Covid-19 pandemic has surely shown us that what we most need to be cautious about is consequences which appear to be unlikely but in fact will have a very big impact if they ever do occur.

Another term left undefined is "environmental law", which the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) has been set up to safeguard and monitor the enforcement of. But a lot of what affects the environment is to be found in planning law and decisions on infrastructure,

such as building roads and expanding airports, and of course economic and trade policy, none of which come within a strict understanding of "environmental law". The OEP has nothing like the autonomy or remit of the old Sustainable Development Commission, abolished by the Tories in 2010, which was able to range across and advise about all areas of policy.

The Act does, however, reflect some campaigning achievements. It establishes a system of environmental targets, with plans to be drawn up to achieve them, and a system of annual reporting on progress. It also looks like it will boost the importance of biodiversity conservation in the planning system, although the complicated details make it difficult to tell whether that's how it will actually turn out. The Act ended up with a compromise about discharges of sewage, the issue which galvanized public interest in this legislation just as it was in its very last stages in the House of Lords.

The Act establishes a whole set of processes which will enable people concerned about the environment "to fight another day", for many years to come. There will only be a short break: the fight will resume at the latest in February 2022, when the Government will be consulting on its new environmental targets, followed soon after by its proposals for soil health. **c**

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