

CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

#315 March/April 2022

£2

On borrowed time

State fraud

Prem Sikka

Levelling up

Jamie Driscoll

Paul Salveson

China

Jenny Clegg

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Hostile environment

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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

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MOTION ON A BETTER POLITICS FOR WOMEN'S CONFERENCE 2022

This resolution is being promoted by LCER/L4ND for Labour's virtual Women's Conference, 19 - 20 March. They hope it will engender a debate on electoral reform between women trade unionists and Labour activists, not to negate but to understand the decision made at Brighton 2022. Some PR arguments, often mathematical, need to be complemented by the idea that Labour dropping its support of first past the post is the culmination of the history of the vote, from the Chartists and Suffragettes, in terms of enfranchisement, making votes count and changing political culture from the binary and adversarial to consensus seeking.

'Labour Women's Conference believes that Labour needs to present a vision of a new democracy that works for everyone and connects with their lives. What we have at the moment is a minority anti-consensus Conservative Party, with a voting system that gives it a fictional majority, undermining our rights by suppressing protest and voter participation.

Recourse to the Electoral Commission and the Courts is being reduced in the style of a fascist state, while the Prime Minister lies, breaks his own rules and brings our country into disrepute.

When the suffragettes achieved the franchise for women in 1928 they were not to know that modern general elections would bypass most women except switch voters

in marginal seats.

We have the vote but not all votes count.

By 1928 most other Western European countries had adopted Proportional Representation, which encourages consensus and cooperation, and reduces confrontation and male-domination.

As a result participation and progress by women in politics increases and the issues that concern women most are given greater prominence.

In 2021 Inter-Parliamentary Union rankings, every European country where over 40% of MPs are women uses PR as do four top-ranking countries worldwide with women Prime Ministers leading left-wing parties: New Zealand, Iceland, Sweden and Finland. The UK trails on 34%.

Labour Women's Conference:

**calls on Labour women in
constituencies, socialist societies and
in their trade unions, to discuss
changing our political culture to
continue the work of the Suffragettes
so that every vote counts wherever we
live.'**

Contributions and letters deadline for CHARTIST #315 10 April 2022

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Cover by Martin Rowson

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Biodiversity is political

As we approach CoP15 **Victor Anderson** calls for action on biodiversity, the other environmental crisis

A lot was said about CoP26 last year, the 26th Conference of the Parties signed up to the UN Climate Change Convention. But what about CoP15, which is this year?

CoP15 is the 15th Conference of the Parties (i.e. the governments) to the UN Biological Diversity Convention, originally signed at the same time and place as the Climate Convention: Rio de Janeiro in 1992, at the Earth Summit. Neither treaty has been a success, despite the fact that if the world had changed course then, 30 years ago, solutions rather than a string of disasters would now be in sight.

Frequently these days there is a spotlight shone on the climate emergency and the failure of the Climate Convention, but still relatively little political attention is being given to the parallel and interlocking emergency taking place in the field of biological diversity.

Twelve years ago (the gap was supposed to be ten but coronavirus got in the way) the Biodiversity Conference held in Japan set out a list of targets, 'the Aichi targets', supposed to be reached in 2020. According to the UN, none has been fully achieved, six partially achieved, and the other fourteen nowhere near.

Now the governments are preparing to meet again, in Kunming, China, April 25 to May 8. They will review the targets, report on the failures, and almost certainly decide on a new set of targets. Many NGOs are campaigning for the next targets to be more ambitious, but of course targets are no good without policies, institutions, information, and finance to implement them. There also needs to be consistency when the governments represented in biodiversity talks are in other international forums, such as those on economics and trade. However, the focus of the new conference is likely again to be on debating which targets to set.

The climate emergency is now located at the heart of economic and political life: it concerns the most powerful economic sectors, the financial and legal arrangements governing what companies are allowed and incentivised to do, and geopolitical questions about foreign



policy alliances and military intervention. It is therefore completely clear that climate is not an obscure peripheral issue of interest only to scientific specialists.

In contrast, decline in the natural world is still generally seen in the West as strictly non-political, not only in a political party sense, but also as not being relevant to the central issues of the economy, a matter only for experts and hobbyists, a minority of TV viewers and perhaps a lot of children, and as being about very specifically wildlife issues, such as alien species, the wildlife trade, and conservation projects on the ground.

Biodiversity and wildlife organisations themselves very often reinforce this impression, finding they can raise funds most efficiently by keeping away from anything controversial, avoiding drawing any conclusions regarding the economy or how people in the West live our lives. Many useful conservation projects have been funded as a result.

That approach has become increasingly misleading and has now begun to be counter-productive. This is because the biodiversity question is much more like the climate issue than it has generally been presented as being.

Many factors cause loss of biological diversity, but the principal one is land use change, and increasingly that is being joined in importance by changes in the climate. We already know that changes in climate have economic causes, being

driven largely by the ways in which energy is generated and consumed. Then what is included under the heading of 'land use change'? When, for example, forest is cut down to make way for agriculture, mining, roads, and industry, that is 'land use change'. If that important fact is traced back and spelled out, it means that biodiversity loss is caused by the way food is produced, the way materials are mined and used, and the quantity and nature of transport and manufacturing.

It is time to tell the truth about the destruction of the biosphere, and the threats which that poses to food supply, carbon absorption, and the maintenance of good quality air, water, and soil. Biodiversity loss, like excess carbon emission, is really a central feature of our current ways of life and methods of social and economic organisation.

Although many people will be sad to see the disappearance of some spectacular species of animals, it is probably through food shortages – meaning starvation in poorer countries and food price inflation in richer ones – that the biological diversity crisis will really hit public awareness and political agendas. Water shortages, soil degradation, pollinator decline, the dangerous narrowing down of variety within key food crops, together with climate change too fast for species to adapt or move, all point to food supply crises. At that point sadly CoP15 in Kunming will not look as obscure as it does today. **C**

Victor Anderson
used to work as
an economist for
WWF-UK (World
Wildlife Fund)

Government on borrowed time

Boris Johnson and his government are on borrowed time. The litany of failures and lies grows by the week. While Partygate is investigated by a disgraced Metropolitan police and Sue Gray's report remains largely redacted the court of the UK public has rejected a 'one law for the people and another for Tory leaders'.

Worse still than the lies of the PM is the fraud perpetrated against taxpayers as uncovered by the government's own minister and reported by Lord **Prem Sikka**. Up to an eye-watering £52 billion could have been corruptly obtained, all before the dodgy Covid contracts to Tory mates and the £37b squandered on ineffective test and trace. That's more than enough to cover the costs of £20 per person cut to Universal Credit and the impending rise in National Insurance. It dwarfs the paltry £5 billion earmarked largely for the NHS and much smaller amount for social care. As **Dr. John Puntis** reports, the government are pushing ahead with privatisation plans in the face of 100,000 staffing shortage and with the UK having one of the highest rates of Covid deaths, at 180,000, in the western world.

Similarly as **Jamie Driscoll**, mayor of North of Tyneside and **Paul Salveson** write, the misnamed 'levelling up' plan unveiled by Minister Gove is full of mission promises but no new money. After almost 12 years of austerity cuts which has seen around 40% reduction in local authority budgets how are local councils supposed to implement house building and development schemes with inadequate government funds? **Camilla Wheen** also highlights problems of local planning in the context of greening and protecting the planet. The same could be said of cuts to the scheduled northern links in the foolhardy plans for HS2 rail.

It's the cost of living crisis that threatens the livelihoods of millions of working people that now emerges as the biggest indictment of this right-wing government's failures. **Dave Toke** explains that the huge energy price rises could all be avoided if we had a national gas supplier serving the UK population (instead of seeking to maximise profits overseas) and sustained investment in renewable cheaper and cleaner energy – in accord with Cop26 goals.

Further, inflation is likely to be over seven per cent by April, and much higher for basic items in poorer working class food baskets. Rent and mortgages costs will also rise for millions. Brexit undone lies behind much of this surge in costs and why in desperation Johnson has moved hedge fund millionaire Jacob Rees Mogg to a new post of Brexit Opportunities Minister to search for the unicorns.

Meanwhile public sector pay is pegged at below 3% with all workers facing massive income reductions. Behind this attack on living standards and increasing social inequality flashes the huge profits of multi-billion corporations like BP and Shell (£40b profit) and Amazon, the latter two

avoiding billions of tax to the Exchequer.

Aware that protests will mount from trade unionists and green activists like Extinction Rebellion and Insulate Britain, the government is pushing draconian legislation in the form of the Police Bill to massively curb the basic freedom to protest. As **Peter Hain** reports, the Lords may have removed some of the most repressive clauses, the envy of authoritarian states worldwide, but Home Secretary Patel will doubtless seek to reimpose most through the Commons.

Alongside these curbs comes the sustained use of anti-migrant scapegoating policies expanded in the proposed Nationalities and Borders Bill. **Don Flynn** reports on ten years of the Tory 'hostile environment' policy that has brought misery to thousands of the Windrush generation living and working in the UK for 50 years, as well as causing desolation for many more seeking safety or a better life, with tighter border controls, deportations and checks. **Andy Gregg** highlights the Tories' racist colours in their quest to criminalise the movement against memorials to slavers and imperialists and reduce the independence of the judicial system.

Labour's front bench have echoed the media exposure of Partygate but have been less fulsome on the cost of living crisis. A windfall tax on the profiteering energy companies needs to be voiced alongside calls for social ownership of energy, a Starmer pledge. **Peter Rowlands** continues our series on 'Pledgewatch' with a critical look at the lack of calls for peace and disarmament. Instead Starmer extols the virtues of NATO and militarism, a far cry from the legacy of peace building and anti-nuclear campaigning of Desmond Tutu, highlighted by **Fabian Hamilton** and **Roger Symon**. Pledges on wealth and power redistribution also seem to have become invisible.

Jenny Clegg analyses Labour's recent China Report and urges an approach that promotes dialogue over denunciation. **Sacha Ismail** highlights the difficulties while China continues to suppress dissent and ban trade union and independent media in Hong Kong and mainland China.

With Labour now showing a steady lead over the Tories in opinion polls, to reach a 125 seat target in a general election, much more is needed than relying on Tory own goals. The Tory party is playing the long game seeking to ride out the current storms. To win Labour needs to go on the offensive. This must involve fulsome support for electoral reform and proportional representation and a strong campaign with trade unions for pay rises at least linked to inflation, benefit protections and a £15 minimum wage. Wider still Starmer needs to urgently set out a new vision of Britain that is greener, more equal, where social justice is the norm not the exception and that includes ending exclusions and restoring democratic norms to Labour party operations.

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Levelling-up to what?

Paul Salvesson on the hollowness of Mr Gove's mission statement

Michael Gove's weighty 'Levelling-up' white paper has been met with predictable scorn. It's certainly long but lacks substance and real commitments to invest, repeating promises of 'jam tomorrow' that have already been made, such as The Integrated Rail Plan, covered in the last Chartist.

Jennifer Williams, in The Manchester Evening News, offers a good critique of the report. She makes the point: "A new phrase is seeking to define the political lexicon of the 2020s. 'Levelling up' is now everywhere and nowhere. It is everywhere, in that it is mentioned at every opportunity by the Prime Minister and his cabinet, repeated back by headlines, academics and think-tanks; it is nowhere, in that nobody yet knows what it means in practice."

She continues: "Narrowing the regional divide is firmly on the agenda, post-electoral landslide. For years, many in this neck of the woods have been making arguments that are now becoming mainstream, as the political imperative turns towards holding seats not previously lavished with attention. So far, Number 10 has certainly been strong on transport and the need to improve infrastructure. Yet....the issues underlying this debate are far more complex and structural than that, having been exacerbated by a decade of unequal austerity. It will require imagination, compassion, determination and getting out of Westminster to rebalance the inequality between north and south, as well as rich and poor."

The White Paper runs to a total length of 332 pages. If you measured the usefulness of Government reports by volume, it would certainly be up there as a winner. Yet various commentators have pointed out the lack of real commitment, some comparing the huge investment poured into eastern Germany post-unification. It's full of good intentions; there's much useful evidence on regional disparities. It presents ten 'missions', or promises to get things done. But how much is wishful thinking? It tells us that 'levelling-up' means:

1. boosting productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging;
2. spreading opportunities



Michael Gove - missionary with no money in the bag

and improving public services, especially in those places where they are weakest;

3. restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost, and

4. empowering local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency.

The white paper highlights the Italian renaissance where city states "combined innovation in finance with technological breakthroughs, the cultivation of learning, ground-breaking artistic endeavour, a beautiful built environment and strong civic leadership," which is all very nice.

But coming back down to hard reality, what does it mean for places like my town of Bolton - a classic so-called 'Left Behind' town, with 'red wall' constituencies that turned blue in which even many of its residents seem to glory in its accolade as one of the country's 'crap towns', if social media is much to go by.

The town, and many others like it, has been the victim of three disasters. The first was the Thatcher years, which saw the collapse of its core industries, cotton and engineering, compounded by the imposition of stringent cuts in local government spending and privatisation of services. Secondly, the town had a lacklustre Labour administration that was overwhelmed by the challenges it faced with little strategic vision and an assumption among senior councillors that their seats were safe. The third disaster was the elec-

tion of a Tory Government in 2010 committed to further austerity. The cumulative effect on a once-prosperous town was catastrophic, with the loss of well-paid (and unionised) jobs, a town centre full of empty shops and 'pound stores', and the usual panoply of anti-social behaviour, drug-related crime and the rest. The creation of out-of-town shopping centres was yet another nail in the town's coffin.

So, what should 'levelling-up' mean to towns like Bolton? To be honest, I hate the term. It suggests that we all aspire to be like Slough, Basingstoke or Crawley: car-dominated, alienated suburbs. Actually, many people in Bolton want to be more like their image of how it used to be, with a flourishing town centre, locally-based jobs and a council that had real power to do things. They resented being coerced into 'Greater Manchester' and remain proud to be 'Lancastrian'. In turn, the smaller satellite towns such as Farnworth and Horwich don't like being lumped into a monolithic local authority, foisted on them in 1974.

So, the third objective (above) of 'restoring a sense of community, pride and belonging' isn't something that Westminster can impose. In fact, it's already there but needs the powers and resources to do things which the fourth objective promises, of 'empowering local leaders and communities'.

Somehow, I can't see that happening under the present administration, and as yet there's not much sign of it being done under one led by Keir Starmer. **C**



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

Green energy to reduce prices

Spiking natural gas exports prove that renewables, not gas, give us energy security, says **David Toke**

The recent revelation that exports of natural gas from the UK have actually increased during the gas price crisis provides strong evidence that producing more natural gas from British sources does nothing to help protect British energy security. By contrast, sourcing energy from British-based renewable energy under fixed price long term contracts will dramatically reduce the bills consumers have to pay compared to reliance on fossil fuels. This demonstrates how regulated renewable energy is a much surer bet to protect UK energy security, and of course the planet, compared to the often completely untaxed oil and gas companies.

In a series of tweets revealing his research into official statistics on natural gas production and exports, Richard Black of the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU) showed how, during the last quarter of 2021, exports of gas produced in the North Sea spiked. This is just at the same time as the current notorious global gas price spike which has driven millions of Britons to the breadline. UK exports of natural gas are much higher than in previous years, including years before the pandemic slowdown in 2020.

Indeed, exports of natural gas in the last quarter of 2021 are nearly double what they were in either 2018 or 2019. Black commented 'And as any company would, they're selling it for the best price they can get. Which happens to be, for large volumes of it, by sending it through the pipeline into Belgium and the Netherlands... This is utterly normal corporate behaviour, and completely to be expected. But it sure knocks a massive hole in the argument that Britain needs 'its own' gas production for energy security'.

Compare this to the information from the Low Carbon Contracts Company, which administers the contracts that are given to renewable energy generators that shows renewable energy is producing lost savings for energy consumers. Under that mechanism, (called contracts for difference, or CfDs) with contracts issued from 2015 onwards, renewable energy generators get paid a fixed amount, that is net of the wholesale electricity price.

What that means is that in times when electricity prices are very high (as they are now), the cost to the



consumer is negative and large amounts of monies are paid back into the system rather than paid out to pay energy generators as is usually the case. In the final quarter of 2021, the saving the consumer was getting was said to be £468 million. This level of saving has not always been the case with renewable energy financing because the earlier renewable energy schemes were financed under a so-called 'market based' system. Under this 'Renewables Obligation' (installed in the neoliberal Blairite years) the generators earn large profits if the wholesale market electricity price is a lot more than their costs.

In fact, the savings to the consumer from renewable energy will only increase still further as more CfD funded schemes come online, the only issue being how much savings there will be, that being determined by how much gas prices remain above the costs of offshore wind, onshore wind and solar farms. Some level of savings is likely to be permanent.

We hear a lot of nonsense about how we have to produce more oil and gas from the UK to protect energy security. It does not, at least not under the globalised world of energy trading that we are in. Steady growth in demand for liquefied natural gas (LNG) in China over recent years acts to suck in available gas supplies and increase

global LNG prices. But fixed price contracts for renewable energy will provide energy security for the UK energy consumers. Because however the electricity from renewables is traded, the consumer is protected because they will only be liable for the fixed price.

In fact, the CfD system was introduced because it was thought this was a way of financing nuclear power. But the contract price for Hinkley C, which gives EDF more than twice the amount per MWh than is paid under the CfD contracts recently awarded to offshore wind schemes, was seen to be embarrassingly high. So, of course, the rules have been changed for nuclear power now and the consumers will just have to fund an unlimited nuclear black hole for the next nuclear plant, Sizewell C, likely to start at around £1000 per energy consumer.

Notions of energy security are constructed by the dominant energy corporations of the time who declare that they know the countries' interests best. They don't – they only know their interests best. An independent 'environmentalist' view, says that it is investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency, that is the way to go, not giving handouts to the big energy companies, that's happening now with the temporary loans being handed out to the energy suppliers. **C**

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

Missionaries with no new money

Jamie Driscoll calls out the Tories levelling up proposals

Do you remember “Back to Basics”? The John Major version that was satirised by Viz magazine, not the Christine Aguilera album.

Major advocated a Britain based on morality and decency, but the campaign was ridiculed when a succession of Conservative politicians were embroiled in scandals. Some lied under oath and eventually went to prison. Despite leading this moral crusade, it later emerged that John Major had an extramarital affair with Edwina Currie. That’s their business, but Prime Ministers should not set standards for others that they don’t keep themselves...

There’s an obvious parallel between “Levelling Up” and “Back to Basics.” We’ve been waiting for the Levelling Up White Paper for two years, and it arrived on Wednesday. It contains 12 missions from improving primary education to reducing crime. I’ve never met anyone in any political party who advocates for worse education or increasing crime. The disagreements are about how we achieve it and where the money comes from. This White Paper doesn’t answer the money question. In fact, it doesn’t even say how much money is needed. It’s more of a wish list, really.

What is significant is the White Paper’s commitment to devolution. It recognises the success of Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) including the North of Tyne. Given that eight out of 10 MCAs are led by Labour Mayors, that can only be because the evidence backs it up.

In the North of Tyne, we’re exceeding our job creation targets by a factor of four. For every £1 we spend, we lever in over £3 of investment. Every £1 we spend creating jobs returns over £3 to the Treasury in increased taxes. The North of Tyne is astonishing value for money.

I’ve been Mayor for less than three years, and along with my local authority colleagues in Newcastle, Northumberland and North Tyneside, we’re delivering more than 4,487 new jobs, saved



John Major and Currie together

2,679 jobs despite the economic impact of Covid, created 28,800 training courses so people can skill-up and earn more, and supported 1,707 businesses with guidance and advice. I want the rest of the region, South of the Tyne, to get the same benefits.

The White Paper now officially states the Government position is to expand the Mayoral Combined Authority for the North East. It’s good news – we’re all the same conurbation. And it unlocks £100’s of millions in transport funding.

To be a good deal for the North East, it will have to extend our existing North of Tyne funds based on the population of the extended area. There can be no loss of funding on a per-capita basis. I’ve been talking to Treasury, Transport and Local Government ministers for the past two years about this extra devolved funding. It’s now within sight.

If we can make it happen, it will bring in well over £1 billion of new money to our region. It is much needed – our local authorities have faced severe cuts over the past decade of austerity. For the record, I still think our local authorities need their full funding restored. Social care, emptying the bins, parks and leisure

centres, libraries and street lighting, and so much more is the province of local councils.

The role of an MCA is about making the region prosperous across local council boundaries. That means transport across our region – better buses, and expanding the Metro. More firms investing here from outside, and more start-ups and scale-ups inside our region. More research and development, and making sure the spin off companies are based here. The training programmes to make sure these jobs are available for everyone whatever their background. All based on a green economy, with a thriving cultural scene.

For me, levelling up is back to basics. It means nobody needing to use a food bank. Everyone able to get where they want to go, affordably. A secure warm home within everyone’s means. Every parent confident that their children have a good life ahead of them – here, in the North East, if they choose to stay. Travel is great – but we’ll know the North East has levelled up when no one has to move away to earn a decent living. **C**



Jamie Driscoll is Labour mayor of North of Tyne

Originally printed in the Journal and Evening Chronicle 7 Feb 2022

Tories failing NHS

The pandemic is still with us – 180k deaths proclaim Johnson spectacularly failed to ‘get all the big calls right’ says **Dr John Puntis**

With Sajid Javid declaring we are the freest country in Europe, and the ending of all Plan B restrictions, it might appear that the pandemic is all but over. The requirement to isolate for those with infection lapsed on February 24th. Statistics, however, tell a different story. The Omicron variant has swept the board and, while less likely to cause severe disease, it has a very high rate of transmission. In early February, there were around 160,000 new symptomatic cases each day, and 14,600 infected hospital inpatients. Daily deaths from Covid have regularly been over 250 (1 every 6 minutes!) with a peak of 276 on the 17th January, the highest daily total since 23rd February 2021. The Office for National Statistics has recorded over 180,000 Covid related deaths (mid-February) since the start of the pandemic.

To many (if not ministers), the possibility of a new and more lethal variant remains a huge threat, augmented by high levels of circulating infection - a strong argument for ensuring vaccination is rolled out across the world. Recently, 320 academics have pressed government for support to Low- and Middle-Income Countries to manufacture Covid vaccines, tests and treatments.

In addition, much more must be done to suppress community transmission and reduce the likelihood of a new serious mutation. Low rates of infection would then permit public health measures such as ‘test, trace, isolate, support’ to control further spread of the virus. The misleading narrative that we are learning to live (should this be ‘die?’) with Covid is contributing to what the Commons joint committees’ report correctly characterised as among the worst ever public health failures in our history. One of the highest rates of death in proportion to population gives the lie to the much-parroted phrase that the prime minister got all the big calls right. Such delusional thinking means that the NHS is now on a ‘war footing’, waiting lists massively increasing and many people denied the care they need.

The Health and Care Bill

This H&C Bill addresses none of the most pressing problems in the NHS. It has been described succinctly as: “an astonishing attempt to allow the Secretary of State, an enlarged NHS England as ‘rule-maker and regulator’, and new public-private ‘Integrated Care Boards’, to reduce services, limit expenditure, further degrade local accountability and entrench the market.” No wonder legislators are finding it difficult to explain to voters just what benefits patients might expect it to deliver. While this Bill should be rejected outright, parliamentary arithmetic suggests this won’t happen and campaigners have been lobbying for amendments that could ameliorate some of the worst effects. However, there is no indication that any important revisions will be forthcoming.

The start of Integrated Care Systems (central to the Bill) has been delayed from April until July in recognition that further debate is now unlikely to be completed in time for Royal Assent at the end of March. The committee stage in the Lords is almost complete and the Bill and amendments will then return to the Commons for the report stage. With the 2012 Health and Social Care Bill, it was noted that many Lords had private interests in insurance companies, private health care and private equity groups and were in danger of voting on behalf of private and personal interests that stood to gain from the Bill rather than in the public interest. It is likely that this situation is not much changed. For example, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath has proposed that 5% of budgets must be ring-fenced for digital transformation. The Parliamentary Register of Interests shows him as the paid Chair of the Advisory Board, Octopus TenX Health, a health technology investment company.

SOS NHS

The recent People’s Covid Inquiry organised by Keep Our NHS Public highlighted the effects of austerity in undermining the NHS, weakening its ability to respond to the pandemic. The final report concluded that there may be the basis for criminal proceedings



NHS SOS demo

related to charges of misconduct in public office; the Metropolitan police have been asked to investigate. The Inquiry raised the question of what kind of NHS and care system we need in the future. SOS NHS (<https://sosnhs.org/>) is an ambitious new campaign supported by around 40 key organisations. It represents a diverse range of people, united in their desire to defend the NHS against neglect, underfunding and privatisation. The central demands are for an immediate £20 billion in extra spending as a down payment to start rebuilding a fully functioning public health and care system; investment in a publicly owned NHS and guarantee of free health-care for future generations; proper pay for staff. The recently announced recovery plan falls far short of what is needed. It lacks sufficient investment and fails to address workforce issues without which promised improvements simply can’t happen. Mental health, GP services and urgent and emergency care are not covered, all of which are in dire trouble. The 5,000 beds closed during the pandemic are not being reopened and more cash is being directed to private sector providers. SOS NHS staged a national day of action on 26th February. ‘SOS NHS’ is building a movement so massive, loud and strong that the government simply cannot ignore it. One lesson to be learned from pandemic spending is that money can always be found if there is political will. **G**

Dr John Puntis is co-chair Keep Our NHS Public

Tories fiddle while cost of living crisis intensifies

In the wake of the government's own fraud minister resigning, **Lord Prem Sikka** identifies a multi-billion scandal

The UK is facing the twin threat of a rising cost of living and shrinking disposable incomes. The government is adding to the crisis by hiking taxes and sending millions into poverty and blighting people's life chances. Little attention is paid to fraud and errors which remove resources from public services and place heavy burdens on low and middle income families.

Here is a starter. The Minister of State at the Cabinet Office has told the House of Lords "that our best estimate of total fraud and error losses to Government are between £29bn and £52bn per year. This comprises the published estimates for fraud and error loss in tax and welfare".

Over the last 12 years the total loss could be between £348bn and £624bn, large enough to make a qualitative difference to people's lives.

To put this into perspective, the annual loss is up to £1bn a week. It is bigger than the annual defence budget. The £52bn loss is over four times the £12bn that the government will raise from the 1.25 percentage point increase in national insurance contributions from April 2022. The new national insurance rate of 13.25% begins to bite at incomes above just £9,880 a year i.e. the poorest will pay for the government's incompetence.

The government has also frozen the income tax free personal allowance at £12,570 until 2025/26. This alone will drag an additional 1.5 million people into paying tax at the basic rate of 20% as income may rise with inflation but personal allowance won't. The higher income tax threshold for the 40% marginal rate at £50,070 is frozen until 2025/26. It won't rise with inflation and would force around 1.2 million people to start paying the tax at the marginal rate of 40%. The above tax hikes by stealth are expected to raise £2.77 billion in 2022/23, rising to £13.04 billion in 2025/26, all considerably less than the losses due to fraud and error.

The poorest bear a heavy burden for government failures. Last

October, the Chancellor reduced Universal Credit by £4bn and removed £1,040 a year from 4.4 million families, often the poorest. The government has also suspended the triple-lock on the state pension and deprived pensioners of some £4.7bn, equivalent to about £8-£10 per week. The median weekly state pension for women is £150.25 - £174.47, and for men it is £172.83 - £178.52.

The £29bn to £52bn loss is for the year 2019/20, i.e. before Covid. The Government Counter Fraud Function has risk assessed the government's Covid-related financial schemes and classified "16 of these schemes as having a high or very high fraud risk, accounting for 57% (£219 billion) of the £387 billion". Future losses would be considerably higher. This does not include £37bn squandered on the ineffective 'test and trace' programme and sundry other programmes.

Some £33bn of Covid related expenditure appears to have been written-off in recent days. This includes £17billion of unpaid bounce-back loans, £4.3bn due to frauds in furlough and self-employed support and £10bn on faulty, unusable and overpriced personal protective equipment.

No government can fully eliminate frauds and errors, but they can make a serious dent in them. A major reason for persistence of fraud and errors is that the UK lacks effective institutional structures. HMRC is a key institution in combating fraud but has been systematically starved of resources. Fraud detection and prosecution is labour intensive but the HMRC workforce today is smaller than it was in 2005. Numerous court judgments have declared tax avoidance schemes sold by big accounting firms to be unlawful, but no big accounting firm has been investigated, prosecuted or fined though they all got Covid related contracts. Benefit fraud is about one-tenth of tax fraud but is twenty-three times more likely to be prosecuted.

Fraudsters were able to easily claim Covid related financial support because they were not required to provide employee



Lord Agnew - resigned in protest at his own government's inaction on fraud

national insurance numbers or HMRC tax reference numbers. Shell companies are used to defraud the public purse. Anyone from anywhere in the world can form a company in the UK. Companies House does not authenticate the information filed with it. Fake addresses and director names are used. I have drawn the government's attention to some improbable director names accepted by Companies House. These include "Adolf Tooth Fairy Hitler", "Lord Truman Hell Christ", "Judas Superadio Iskariot" and "Victor Les-Appy Hugo".

The UK government is losing billions of pounds due to fraud and error and the amount is set to rise as mismanagement of Covid becomes evident. Much of it is due to ineffective institutions, obsessions with smaller state, cuts to public expenditure and the ideology of deregulation. This obsession is being financed by tax hikes on low/middle income families, cuts to pensions and support for the poorest. This has deepened the cost of living crisis and condemned millions to poverty. **C**

Lord Prem Sikka
is emeritus
professor at
Essex University

Abandoned or on ice

Peter Rowlands continues our review of Keir Starmer's election pledges with a focus on peace and power and wealth redistribution

There can be little doubt about the abandonment of Pledge number four, (Promote peace and human rights). The full pledge reads: 'No more illegal wars. Introduce a Prevention of Military Intervention Act and put human rights at the heart of foreign policy. Review all UK arms sales and make us a force for international peace and justice.' The current support for the aggressive Tory policy over Ukraine, as opposed to the more diplomatic stance of France and Germany, and for the AUKUS policy in the Pacific, the latter opposed by a motion carried at conference, is sufficient to illustrate the abandonment of this pledge.

The 'Prevention of Military Intervention' is not as radical as it sounds but is welcome as a critique of the Iraq invasion, which Starmer opposed, before he was an MP, on the lawyerly grounds that it could only have been justified by a UN resolution. The other provisions are the likelihood of a viable outcome and agreement by a majority of MPs, which is still a convention.

However, the rather ambiguous attitude towards the withdrawal from Afghanistan, although it did not go as far as Blair's absurd and impossible position that the West should stay, was hardly in accord with the pledge.

In late 2020 Labour supported a huge £16bn increase over four years in defence expenditure, probably the biggest single deviation from the pledge, and it is no accident that it was followed by a huge reduction in overseas aid, from 7% to 5%, and at about £4bn a year about the same as the increase in military expenditure.

Labour's reluctance to oppose military expenditure, or linked policies designed to show off the UK's military strength, such as AUKUS or the sending of one of the new aircraft carriers to the far east, in part reflects the perceived priority of winning back the 'Red Wall' seats lost to the Tories in 2019, and the identification of older working class Leave, and previously Labour voters, as crucial to this, as they are more likely to support a more nationalist and militaristic outlook than many younger voters. This strategy is flawed in many ways



and risks losing many younger and middle class Remainder votes. Labour does need to win back older voters, but there are other ways of doing that which do not risk losing support elsewhere.

As for Pledge number eight, (Radical devolution of power, wealth and opportunity), it is difficult to see that anything much has been done to promote it, even if it has not been specifically abandoned. The full pledge reads: 'Push power, wealth and opportunity away from Whitehall. A federal system to devolve powers – including through regional investment banks and control over regional industrial strategy. Abolish the House of Lords – replace it with an elected chamber of regions and nations'.

The leadership's concern in this area undoubtedly relates to the Pledge four discussed above, and the emphasis on winning back the 'Red Wall' seats. If older, more socially conservative white voters were the key to this, then they would be likely to see talk of federalism as a move towards national independence, for Scotland at least, while constitutional change, including even the indefensible House of Lords, might raise questions about traditional institutions, and in particular the monarchy, which the

voters Labour is seeking to attract in the 'Red Wall' seats are likely to largely have conservative views about.

Labour's answer has been to establish, in December 2020, a Constitutional Commission on the future of the UK to be advised by and, from last September, led by Gordon Brown. Over a year later, as far as I can make out, it has not produced anything.

In Scotland, a new leader, Anas Sarwar, took office in February 2021, replacing the previous left-wing leader Richard Leonard. However, it was Wales that posed the biggest problem, as the leader, Mark Drakeford, and cabinet member Mick Antoniw, are the most prominent advocates of 'Radical Federalism', a form of 'Devo Max'. It can be assumed that this is not what Starmer wants to hear, but as Drakeford is the senior office holding Labour politician in the UK, is personally popular and achieved the best UK-wide results for Labour in last year's elections, it is difficult to direct him otherwise.

I think that nothing much will come of this pledge, which is a shame as attention to these issues is really necessary. The pledge may not have been abandoned, but it is very much on ice. **C**

Peter Rowlands
is a member of
Swansea West
CLP

Changing whose history?

Andy Gregg welcomes the acquittal of the Colston four finding double standards at heart of Tory culture wars and planned attacks on judicial rights

The toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol has become a defining symbol in both the anti-racist and Black Lives Matter campaigns, as well as the culture wars that the Tories are now waging so desperately to try to shore up their base. Throughout history statues have been erected and then sometimes torn down according to the prevailing political, cultural and ethical conditions. This process is itself historical and as Yasmin Alibhai-Brown says those taking a stand against these statues “are enriching our history” rather than erasing it as Boris Johnson believes.

Many of those who mourn the empty Colston plinth in Bristol had no such objections to the toppling of statues such as those of Saddam Hussein or Stalin. However, for many people in Bristol and beyond, the existence of prominent monuments erected in praise of slave owners (or those to a bloodthirsty colonialist like Clive or Rhodes) are quite as objectionable as those of autocrats and despots like Stalin or Hitler. Would the anti-woke warriors also object if statues or public mementoes to Rolf Harris or Jimmy Savile were dealt with in the same way? More recently a statue outside BBC Broadcasting House, sculpted by Eric Gill, was attacked. Gill was a well-known artist who it has recently been discovered raped his sister and daughters, even indulging in bestiality with his dog. However, the anti-woke brigade of conservative politicians and media commentators did not express anything like as much as anger as they did over Colston. Many of them claimed that the toppling in Bristol led inexorably to the attack on the Gill statue and might lead even further to attempts to deface or attack statues to Churchill or other heroes of the Empire such as Clive, Rhodes or Nelson.

The Colston statue was not erected by anyone who actually knew the man or who benefitted directly from his ‘philanthropy’ – which derived directly from the enslavement and mass murder of Africans. The monument was erected over 170 years after his death by a small and elite group of Bristolian capitalists.

Those who planned the statue designed it as a response to the recent and nearby erection of another statue depicting Edmund Burke, who had been critical of the city's involvement in the colonial slave trade. In this sense the statue has always been political and was erected by those who cared not at all for the real history of Colston's, and indeed Bristol's, central role in the enslavement of many hundreds of thousands of people.

The acquittal by the jury of the four suspects charged with toppling the monument and pushing it into the river was itself a historic moment. It marked the culmination of a long campaign against the depiction of Edward Colston as someone to be lauded and lionised rather than criticised and condemned. This campaign had been resisted for many years by the conservative establishment in Bristol who had even refused to arrange for an accompanying plaque to explain the horrendous nature of Colston's involvement in the slave trade. Boris Johnson's eventual injunction that controversial statues should be “retained and explained” had in this case already shown itself as unworkable. In the case of the statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oriel College in Oxford, the anodyne ‘explanatory’ plaque states that Rhodes was a “committed British colonialist” who “obtained his fortune through exploitation of minerals, land and peoples of southern Africa. Some of his activities led to great loss of life and attracted criticism in his day and ever since.” The plaque was introduced after the college had already broken a promise to remove the statue that so many of its own students found insulting and offensive.

The Government's “war on woke” includes attacks on the National Trust for at last drawing attention to the role of slavery in the amassing of capital that allowed the building of the stately homes of the British ruling class, as well as criticisms of historians and others seeking to decolonise the curriculum. These are all examples of attacks on real history not a defence of it. Many right-wing commentators have called the jury's verdict to acquit in the Colston case “perverse”



– meaning of course just that they disagree with it. The verdict does show the importance of jury rather than judge led trials in determining the real verdict of a properly educated and politically informed group of 12 peers, as has also been the case in the acquittal of some Insulate Britain and Extinction Rebellion demonstrators. The Government has threatened to crack down on such “perverse” verdicts and the judiciary is itself coming under pressure on a number of fronts with the Government's Manifesto pledge to challenge the use of judicial reviews and proposals to weaken the 1998 Human Rights Act. These changes will affect how people can make the state accountable, potentially undermining independent scrutiny and weakening the role of the courts in holding the government to account.

New penalties for toppling statues of up to 10 years mean that those convicted would receive far more draconian sentences than those for rape. Attacks on our rights to demonstrate actively and loudly as well as the attacks on judges and juries when they don't deliver to the Governments' narrow interests are the real history here. Of course the toppling of monuments will never be enough to challenge the full-scale attacks on our democratic rights and freedoms that are now underway. What we need is monumental change to the underlying structures and institutions of our society rather than just toppling of a few monuments. The battle for these freedoms is and has always been what real history is about. **C**

**Andy Gregg was
CEO of Race on
the Agenda**

Civil liberties under fire

Peers block right wing dog-whistling on right to protest says **Peter Hain**

When Tony Blair sacked over 600 (overwhelmingly Tory) hereditary Peers from the House of Lords in 1999, it meant that the Conservative Governments from 2010 experienced for the very first time something Labour ones had always done.

Namely a House of Lords in which they had no majority. And they hate it.

Ruthlessly stuffing it with Party donors and cronies has assisted the Tories, but they can still be defeated if Labour can assemble a cross-party majority with Lib Dems and cross-benchers, sometimes even disident Tories.

Which is exactly what happened with the Police Crime and Sentencing Bill on 17 January, when Peers voted decisively to remove some of the worst parts of the Bill, most notoriously the new Priti Patel offence of blocking protest that is too 'noisy'.

That was damned in an elegantly coruscating speech by former Number 10 Policy Chief under David Cameron, Baroness Camilla Cavendish.

The very idea of protesting is to attract attention, to make a 'noise', whether on a Home Counties village high street gridlocked with lorries or a London protest reclaiming the night for women.

Having both organised and participated in demonstrations for over half a century, the Bill represents the biggest threat to British citizens' right to dissent and non-violent protest in my lifetime.

It is deeply reactionary – an authoritarian attack on the fundamental liberties of our citizens.

If enacted in past generations, it would have throttled the suffragettes and blocked their ability to rattle Parliament's cage to secure votes for women.

It would have prevented anti-fascists stopping Oswald Mosley's bullying, anti-Semitic Blackshirts at Cable Street in the East End of London in 1936.

It would have thwarted anti-apartheid protests that I led, in 1969-1970, which successfully stopped all white South African sports tours – a success which Nelson Mandela, then on Robben Island, hailed as a vital stepping



stone in the ultimate defeat of apartheid.

It would have prevented the Anti-Nazi League protests that stopped a resurgent and anti-Semitic, Islamophobic and fascist National Front in its tracks between 1977 and 1980 – and its successor the BNP in the early 2000s.

Peers defeated not only the new 'noise' offences but a series of other authoritarian measures, including powers to regulate static assemblies such as peaceful pickets or vigil.

Another defeat came over criminalising those exercising their fundamental rights, by making people unknowingly in breach of police conditions at an assembly or procession guilty because they "ought to have known" about them. Legal experts pointed out how the terminology "ought to have known" is a "vague term, hard to define, harder to enforce and possibly impossible to effectively convict."

The Government wanted a new offence criminalising those deemed "seriously annoying" or causing another person to "suffer disease".

A series of fresh clauses introduced in the Lords were also defeated including ones directed at Extinction Rebellion which would have created new offences of "locking on" and "being equipped for

locking on", risking criminalising a range of behaviours including even linking arms.

The Bill is a blatant exercise in transparent right-wing dog-whistling. Under the Public Order Act 1986 (POA), police already have wide powers to impose conditions and prohibit protests, including where a demonstration causes "serious disruption to the life of the community". Most police chiefs didn't want these draconian new powers.

By bringing in this legislation, Boris Johnson and Priti Patel have placed themselves so badly on the wrong side of history that even some in their own Party voted against them.

Of course, most of the Lords defeats could be reversed in the Commons where the Tories have a huge majority. Many Lords amendments to their Bills since 2019 have been.

But at least the new clauses which were first introduced in the Lords and then defeated cannot be resurrected without an entirely new Bill.

I've always favoured an elected Second Chamber, but it's ironic that our unelected one seems to be the only bulwark against encroaching oppression from the elected one. **C**



A Labour Peer and former Cabinet Minister, Peter Hain's new memoir is *A Pretoria Boy: 'South Africa's Public Enemy Number One'* (see review this issue)

Plan for green lifestyles

Camilla Wheen on why planning policy has to change

Global climate change and environmental degradation have pushed the earth's limits close to what it can sustain. All aspects of our civil and social systems will need to change, and our planning policies have the potential to drive such change.

Our lifestyles need to change if we are to remain within planetary limits, restore ecosystems and biodiversity. That will mean changing how we live and our relationship to the planet, by creating cities that support low carbon living. This will require thinking carefully about where we site new development to reduce emissions associated with transport in particular. Planning can reduce the need to travel by siting new development close to employment, amenity and leisure facilities or by ensuring it is connected with low-carbon transport options and by ensuring there is land close by for food production (to avoid long-haul transportation emissions). The planning system should consider development holistically, alongside its transportation and economic strategies.

We need to adapt our approach to land use and our stewardship of the environment, to provide low-carbon mobility; to provide ecologically constructed buildings; to produce food local to city centres (which will require changes to peri-urban land). All these transitions will mean significant changes in attitude to the siting of new developments, open space (in and around urban settlements) and transport access.

The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are guidance to sustainable development. They set out clear objectives and indicators for better development for people and the planet. The UK's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) does reference the SDGs, which is welcome, but how far that reference will be embedded in local plans has to be proved. At the high level the NPPF has three overarching objectives: economic, social and environmental and there is 'a presumption in favour of sustainable development'. Ultimately the philosophy is about growth and speed. It does not suggest that we need to change how we live and do things to achieve a sus-



tainable existence or that we need to do this quickly. The NPPF should be demanding radical new solutions, rather than tweaking old practice, and it should be insisting that local authorities force through changes quickly. Time is running out.

The NPPF does not adequately stress the urgency of reaching carbon neutrality, the need for alternatives to fossil fuels and low carbon lifestyles. It should be insisting that all local authorities urgently address climate mitigation and environmental degradation (now, not at some time in the future), so that we set ourselves on a trajectory of change. There is much good in the NPPF in terms of better and appropriate design etc, but not enough tough direction. There is no sense of it being an imperative.

The NPPF 2021 does not cover major infrastructure (transport, energy etc) which will be planned by the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC). Though there is a need for strategic long-term planning of infrastructure, there is also a need to align local planning with a scenario of urgently required sustainable infrastructure. The planning system needs a holistic and integrated approach to land use change and its associated infrastructure requirements; the system should open up opportunities for change, not ignore them, as well as protecting future opportunities.

Our planet has a remarkable capacity to recover from stress, but it also has tipping points. We are close to those in many areas. The NPPF allows much flexible interpretation and leaves local decision-making open to interpretation of what are its priorities. There is insufficient emphasis on thinking in the global context or the planet's limits. The planning system should ensure that locally communities are created that support lifestyles that

are within planetary boundaries.

The NPPF relies heavily on a highly subjective assumption 'in favour of sustainable development'. This may potentially allow developments that are badged as 'sustainable' to trump and close out future opportunities. The current guidance will inevitably lead to a rush to push through schemes that are full of 'sustainability' credentials or covered in 'green-washing'.

Infrastructure is currently planned at the national or regional scale, delivering megaproject solutions that are often harmful to the environment and inefficient (for example, something like 10% of electricity is lost during its delivery across the National Grid). However, planning has the potential to drive delivery of smaller, more local and sustainable solutions.

Location of new development has always been an issue. In recent decades, the allocation of land has been ad hoc, mainly driven by what land becomes available, with little regard for how new developments will be accessed, the default being to build a new road and motorway junction and to create a car-dependent settlement. Local planning must focus on creating sustainable, non-car-dependent communities with movement networks of walking, cycling and public transport, so that emissions from transport (currently about 30% of our total emissions, and rising) can be significantly reduced. One growth model that embraces this is the ConnectedCities methodology, which advocates exploiting existing rail infrastructure to create 15 minute walkable settlements that are joined by 15 minute rail journeys, to create clusters of smallish settlements that together form ConnectedCities (<https://www.connectedcities.org>). **C**



Camilla Wheen is an architect, lecturer and urbanist. She is a member of the UK High Street Task Force, a Design Council Expert and sits on many design review panels. She is Head of Communications for ConnectedCities.

Mixed Fortunes: A Letter from America

Paul Garver surveys US politics a year into Biden's presidency

I struggle to tell how truly screwed the US Democratic Left feels: about the persistent failure of the Biden administration to pass its comprehensive Build Back Better Act past the small right wing of the Democratic Party personified by Senators Manchin and Sinema, coupled with the unanimous intransigence of the Trump-controlled Republicans.

How tenaciously Bernie Sanders keeps attempting to pass smaller pieces of legislation to help the working class, only to face the same obstruction. Then the backsliding of the Biden administration on promises to reform the shameful way the US treats refugees and undocumented immigrants on the Mexican border. And finally Ukraine, where Putin's aggressive provocations prompted an over-militarized, diplomatically weak and confused reaction from the US government.

But there is some good news. In recent weeks, workers at some 67 Starbucks locations in the USA filed petitions to the National Labor Relations Board demanding recognition of their Starbucks Workers United Union. The union has won elections at two stores in Buffalo; others will follow. Starbucks management is striking back hard, firing seven workers for organizing at a shop in Memphis.

This new organizing wave is still relatively small compared to the 9,000 Starbucks locations, with over 250,000 baristas in the USA alone and another hundred thousand or so internationally. But this tiny start might be deceptive. The strongest Starbucks union is in Chile, with about a 30% level of organization - some 250 unionized members - achieved since 2009, with lengthy strikes in 2011 and 2013 to gain a collective bargaining agreement with only modest gains in 2015. Significantly, the Chilean Starbucks union emerged from the same generation as former student leader Gabriel Boric, the president-elect of Chile. Starbucks union president and Boric supporter Andres Giordano was also elected to the Chilean Congress.

The DSA International Committee organized a webinar at which Giordano met organizers for Starbucks and other US fast food restaurants as part of a project for mutual and reciprocal solidarity between US and Chilean workers and democratic socialists, that will be useful after Gabriel Boric takes office in March.

The Starbucks baristas organizing in the US, like their Chilean forerunners, are typically current or former university students, under 30 years old, diverse in their gender identities, totally new to the trade union movement, and networked mainly through social media. It is reported that many had their first and only political experiences in the Bernie Sanders campaigns.

Can Starbucks baristas play any serious role in leading the global working-class revolution? Wouldn't a huge centralized logistics company like Amazon be a more strategic target? The US labor movement is eyeing Amazon, and with reform leadership recently elected to the Teamsters Union, it may find resources to implement a national organizing plan for that company.

In good news from Mexico, utilizing 2019 labor legislation that enables workers to replace the corrupt protection unions that dominated their labor movement since the 1940s, workers at the large GM plant in Silao have ousted their protection union and elected a new independent union SINTTIA. This is also positive for US workers. The Silao plant assembles trucks, largely for export to the USA and Canada. Wages have stagnated at about 20% of GM pay rates in North America. For three decades American auto workers faced blackmailing threats from the company whenever they tried to bargain for higher wages and benefits or opposed the growing division into permanent wage tiers that pay drastically lower wages to newer workers. GM and other companies insist that due to NAFTA [the North American Free Trade Agreement] they can move production to Mexico to benefit from drastically lower wages. This started well before NAFTA

came into effect in 1994, and many jobs in the heartland of North America were lost as auto plants were closed. In 1989 when I was teaching a class in the joint UAW [United Auto Workers]-GM educational program, a manager just back from Mexico described how he bribed Mexican union leaders who kept wages low at the factory. The auto workers were angry at jobs being lost in the US by such illegal practices, but also depressed and resigned.

The union leadership bargained for their existing members, while abandoning the newer generation of auto workers. The UAW's membership was halved, then halved again.

Feeling abandoned both by their union and the nation, many working class families shifted their allegiance from Democrats to racist, anti-immigrant, reactionary Republicans.

But back to the good news. Ironically, under the Trump administration N AFTA was replaced by a new free trade treaty for North America with somewhat better provisions for labor rights. Silao could encourage the revitalization of both Mexican and US industrial unions.

Finally, we hope for the election of two new democratic socialists to the US House of Representatives from Texas, which holds its primary elections in March. Jessica Cisneros, an immigrant rights attorney, is running in Laredo against right-wing Democratic incumbent Henry Cuellar, a darling of the oil industry and anti-abortion movement. In Austin, DSA member Greg Cesar is leading in the polls in Austin and will likely win both primary and general elections, despite being un-endorsed by the Austin DSA over differences on Palestine. The Squad of democratic socialists in Congress will grow but they may find formal membership of DSA more of a liability than an asset; not because of the predictable vilification from the right, but due to sectarian attacks from inside DSA, such as the attempt to expel Rep. Jamaal Bowman for a trip to Israel sponsored by "J Street" [liberal Jewish advocacy group]. **C**

Paul Garver is a member of Democratic Socialists for America

Behind Ten Years of the Hostile Environment

It is not just the callousness of a harsh Tory government that drives immigration policy, argues **Don Flynn**, but the logic of neoliberal capitalism that is striving to curtail the rights of all working people

The hostile environment for migrants was inaugurated ten years ago in a speech the then home secretary, Theresa May, gave to Parliament. Its aim was, she said, “to create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants.”

Since that date the policy has furnished the news media with a regular set of scandals which have given serious weight to the allegation that it is the very embodiment of institutional racism. The most prominent of these sets of wrongdoing was the furore over the home office’s treatment of the Windrush generation migrants – people from the Caribbean who had arrived in the UK before 1973 and spent a lifetime in the UK working, paying taxes and raising families. As hostile environment policies rolled out, thousands lost their jobs and homes and were threatened with deportation. Some were subjected to detention in immigration removal centres, and a number were actually deported or refused permission to return to the UK after traveling abroad.

But the Windrush generation people were not the only victims of the policy. It also made a devastating impact on thousands of international students who were accused of having faked the results of English language tests, with similar accusations of fraud being directed at self-employed professionals in relation to their tax returns. In both cases the actions of home office officials were subject to severe criticism in the law courts.

Damaged credibility

The credibility of the Home Office and the ministers who led its operations was badly damaged during the course of these years and the department has had to scramble to recover its reputation by engaging with an extensive ‘learned lessons’ review of the Windrush cases and rebranding



its operation as being that of a ‘compliance’ environment, rather than a hostile one. But the two pieces of legislation that provided the framework for the policy – carried into law in 2014 and 2016 – remain on the statute book and continue to sustain barriers to work, renting accommodation and accessing public services which impact on all people who fit common, prejudiced views as to the type of person who might be considered an immigrant, and possibly an ‘illegal’ one at that.

Worse still, the Johnson government considers that its Home Office, now led by Priti Patel, is sufficiently recovered from the worst of its opprobrium to launch a fresh wave of attacks on the rights of asylum seekers in the form of the Borders and Nationality Bill currently going through Parliament. In addition, with its infamous Article 9 clause, the Bill is strengthening the power of the Home Office to act against British citizens who it can claim to be citizens of other countries. This allows the government not only to remove British citizen

status but in some cases fail to inform the individual concerned.

Ten years of vigorous campaigning against hostile environment policies have seen a number of high points, with public opinion for once swinging sharply towards support for the rights of migrants – most notably the rights of the Windrush generation and, among younger cohorts in particular, people fleeing civil upheaval and persecution as refugees. But still the government perseveres along the path of stripping more and more people of their basic human rights and making them vulnerable to draconian action at the hands of the immigration enforcement authorities. What is the force that is driving them in this direction?

The tendency among many analysts is to attribute the drive for a hostile environment to a number of quaint features of the British cultural and political environment. The Lessons Learnt review of the Windrush scandal is cautious about seeing institutional racism as a feature of this but offers the view that the lesser charge of ‘institutional ignorance’ might be

the key to understanding the problem. Officials implementing the policy erred because they were too aloof from the lives of the immigrant communities whose fates they were overseeing, and a corrective is needed to ensure they have more insight on these matters. Knowing that their public officials were equipped with this is seen as going a long way to reassuring a British public, which for a time seemed to falter in its support for the strictest forms of immigration control and provide them with the reassurance they need that the hostile environment will, in future, be administered in a proportionate and humane manner.

The civil society migrant rights groups that led the charge against the hostile environment can claim some credit for blunting a crude instrument of immigration enforcement power. However, a review of the websites of the leading organisations – JCWI, Migrants Organise, Cities of Sanctuary among others – suggests that their ambition for change goes no further than this. The way policies are implemented against individuals and communities is subjected to detailed criticism, but the reason why the government is adamant that a hostile environment is the way to go is left unexamined. Yet raising the discussion to this level is likely to be the key to developing a political understanding of state authority and its imperative to strip immigration policy of any concept of the rights of migrant people.

International dimension

Immigration policy across the world increasingly draws on a limited number of templates which get transferred from one country to the next, with only minor modifications to tailor enforcement to the specific culture of the various state societies. The deportation of people who have failed to integrate to the required standard might be considered as the US model, which centres on the idea of ‘one strike and you are out’. Points-based schemes across the countries that are adopting them draw on the *kefala* systems that operate in the Gulf state countries, with the primary feature being their temporary nature, tying the worker to a specific employer for the duration of their residence. When it comes to refugee policy the forums which consider this issue talk of the ‘Pacific island solution’, pioneered by Australia, which works by ban-



Windrush Scandal protest (Credit: Steve Eason)

ishing asylum seekers to remote territories for lengthy periods during which their applications are considered, far away from the assistance of the types of networks which, in other circumstances, have provided refugees with support and leverage against hostile authorities.

Paramount in this is the renewed stress on borders as providing the most basic tool for immigration control. Ever stricter visa regimes operate with the intention of keeping the unfavoured migrant outside the territory of the nation. More than that, states are increasingly cooperating in policies that aim to keep people, not just on the other side of the border, but, if possible, contained in other continents altogether, held in check by the thugery of corrupt police agencies and gangster-led militia. Border walls are built ever higher, and the actions needed to stifle people's movement require deals being done by authorities across borders, with this becoming another factor which determines the features which hostile environment policies have in common.

Worker exploitation

Is there a logic which is driving the direction of these policies? If there is we should be looking for it within the structures of a global economy in which 83 percent of global manufacturing jobs are located in the Global South, where the majority of wage workers labour in condi-

tions of minimal rights. They are serving supply chains whose ultimate beneficiary is likely to be one of the world's largest corporations, most of whom are incorporated in just eight countries. Immigration controls function to stop these rightless workers escaping from conditions of super-exploitation to seek a better life in countries where workers, across decades of struggle, have gained some rights, even if these are now fast-eroding. The missing dimension to the fight against the hostile environment in the UK has been the failure to frame motivation for the deprivation of rights within the logic of the neoliberal capitalist order. It is because Britain is an integral part of this order that it is shaping its immigration policies in ways which deprive migrants of rights for exactly the same reasons why working people find it harder to make trade unions work with the same degree of effectiveness as they did prior to the defeats of the 1980s and the years after.

If the struggle against the hostile environment is to be taken forward, we will need a narrative which frames it as an attack on the working class of the same measure of importance as the assault on trade unionism and the austerity-driven roll backs of public services and public space. If the struggle remains outside that perspective then agitation for safeguards against its worst aspects will prove insufficient to the fundamental task of securing a rights-based underpinning of all aspects of immigration policy. **C**

Don Flynn is ex-director of Migrants Rights Network and Chartist managing editor

Why is it so difficult to talk about China?

Jenny Clegg proposes it is time to not just talk about but also to China in reviewing Labour report

The Labour Foreign Policy Report China's Place in a Progressive British Foreign Policy opens an utterly necessary but also difficult conversation. Necessary because cooperation with China - on world health, on nuclear proliferation and above all on the climate emergency - is vital; and difficult not least because working out how meet the challenge of China's rise throws into relief Britain's diminishing influence in a changing world. This at a time when Transatlanticism, the bedrock of Labour foreign policy, is looking somewhat less reliable with the increasing volatility of US domestic politics.

Meanwhile Labour's defining spirit to serve as a moral force for good in the world has been tarnished by the past 20 years of failed wars and the devastation left behind.

In articulating a strategy of challenging, competing and cooperating with China, it is in finding the balance between the three that Labour's liberal internationalism comes up against geopolitical reality as power shifts from West to East. For all its recognition of Britain as a medium-sized power in relative decline, the report presumes to set the agenda, a habit of imperial privilege that is evidently hard to break.

The first thing that needs to be established is the actual nature of the China challenge for Britain. It does not, as is acknowledged, pose an existential ideological threat. But nor is it a military one: different from the UK, its nuclear posture is one of 'no first use'. Complications arise however with dual-use emerging technologies such as AI. Here though we should not give way to creeping protectionism by defining national security too widely and drawing red lines too readily.

And let's also recall how politicised the Huawei affair became with Johnson overriding the head of GCHQ who considered the risk was manageable. The fact that China too is concerned about criminal activities in the digital world offers a basis for international negotiations. A Xi-Obama agreement on cyber security in

fact had a degree of success.

More generally however, the 'China threat' is cast in terms of a global struggle of democracy against autocracy with China expanding its international influence in order to shield itself from being held to account. But by definition, it is not up to liberal democracies to set limits on the behaviour of authoritarian governments: that is up to their peoples.

There is clearly a tension between the universalism of human rights and the sovereign rights of nations. The report states baldly that China denies the universality of human rights. It is true that China has not yet ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, but then neither has the US ratified the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. China rather takes universalism as the guiding principle, whilst maintaining that sovereign countries differ in their human rights practices according to their specific historical, economic and cultural conditions. Its own practices may go against our values, but how precisely does this threaten our national interests?

China's greater assertiveness in the South China Sea and over Taiwan is surely aimed at shifting the US-led regional security architecture. But why assume, along with the US critics of China cited by the report, that its long term plan is to replace the US as the dominant regional power? The logic of 'showing China power' to get respect is straight from the lexicon of the Pentagon and its mentality of US dominance.

From China's perspective, US control along its coast, from military bases in Japan and South Korea to aircraft-carrier strike groups in the South China Sea, blocks its own role in the region to which it belongs. A viable alternative to reliance on US 'policing' of the South China Sea could be the multipolar power-sharing model of the Gulf of Aden anti-piracy mission, in which both US and Chinese forces participate.

Taiwan is the complicating fac-

tor here: a vital gateway for China to the Pacific, it is supplied by the US with advanced weaponry to reinforce its pivotal position midway along the Chinese coast. China's claim to the island is covered clearly in the US-UK-China Cairo agreement of 1943. This validation of China's role as a key ally in World War 2 is understood from its own perspective as an intrinsic part of the process of the ending of imperialism. Following the abrogation of the Unequal Treaties earlier in that year, the agreement marks the recognition of China's equal status to then become a founder member of the UN. Whilst the US and UK may forget about the WW2 alliance, China cannot: its resistance against Japanese occupation cost 16 million lives and more.

Depending on whether the claim to Taiwan is deemed legitimate, as indeed it is by the UN, China may be judged an expansionist bully or a defensive power responding 'tit for tat'. And whereas bullies must be confronted, tit-for-tat tactics are amenable to negotiation.

How to interpret China's behaviour is the difficulty. For all its efforts to avoid adversarialism and oppose the 'Red Scare mentality', the report still falls for the 'debt trap diplomacy' myth, cited as a further example of China's damaging behaviour, despite the thorough debunking of the arguments by the Johns Hopkins China Africa Research Initiative.

And what about China's 'bullying' of Australia? Was this simply a response to Morrison's call to investigate the origin of the Wuhan virus, or was China's hostility aroused because the call was being linked to a demand for reparations, echoing the colonial imposition of the Boxer indemnity?

The charge of Uyghur genocide could not be more serious. A most scrupulous consideration of evidence should weigh the claim that, for example, greater restrictions on family size to two or three children - the one child family policy was never applied to national minorities - was imposed in response to shifts in the population-land ratio caused by deser-



Uyghurs in detention

tification.

So to recommendations: the strategy is to maintain a critical yet constructive dialogue with China whilst seeking to de-escalate global tensions. But how are these to be concretised?

Seeking closer relations with Europe as a way of balancing US-China tensions is eminently sensible. But, in real terms, can Europe's 'strategic autonomy' be realised within the security frame of NATO? And on the proposal of working in alliance with other democracies in the Indo-Pacific, the exclusion of authoritarian regimes may foster divisions in ASEAN whilst risking the alienation of Singapore, a long-standing partner in the UK-led regional 5 power defence arrangement.

Meanwhile support for AUKUS would lend legitimacy to what is seen within the region as an intervention from outside potentially displacing ASEAN's role in promoting Asian solutions to Asian problems. And would Britain really have leverage in moderating US and Australian hawks within the pact? Why not work together with ASEAN as a whole to build a third way between the two superpowers?

Again undoubtedly sensible is the suggestion to rebuild our credibility in the developing world. Developing countries, as is recognised, increasingly see China as a positive factor in the world. But to take competition with China as the driving factor

for Labour to improve assistance in the Global South, rather than doing this as a matter of course, is a rather sad state of affairs.

Clearly it is a big ask to formulate a China policy as just one aspect of a foreign policy yet to be fully articulated. Foreign policy should serve domestic needs and how cooperation with China might serve economic growth, social justice and environmental protection must be brought into the picture. At the moment China is our third largest market for exports generating at least 150,000 jobs across the country. Again how much of this would we wish to put at risk through punitive actions?

For sure China has taken an authoritarian turn and human rights issues are not to be discounted. But the point is not to end up, as historian Rana Mitter puts it, just 'shouting into the void'. Positive interactions are likely to have more effect. The recent Great Britain China Centre roundtable on the prevention of child sex abuse cited in the report is but one example. Consider too the thousands of Chinese students passing through our universities, some even with degrees in law and in journalism. It is not as if China is not seeking to improve human rights bit by bit, not only in social and economic terms but with more media diversity and reforms to the legal system rising up the agenda.

Viewed through another lens, China's concern is to gain equal status in an international order largely shaped in the interests of the richer nations. Western governments need to take on board now that 'the other side gets a vote'. Appreciating China's point of view and building trust helps. The report, though not perhaps as well-informed as it might be, has at least opened the door to discussion.

However, the case for cooperation is yet to be won in the Party. Coming at a time when feelings over China's human rights abuses are running high, despite its critical approach, the report has already been charged as 'too soft on China'. The 'China all bad' narrative must not now be allowed to overwhelm debate; conditions for rational dialogue need to be created. At the same time, those who call for Labour to learn the lessons of failed wars, who reject military solutions, voting against AUKUS at the last annual conference, should not be ignored.

Input from Labour-controlled councils with years of experience in sister city links, as well as from business and the universities will help more concretely in identifying the spaces for cooperation as well as the challenges of engagement.

And we should not only be talking about China but talking to China - this dialogue needs to start now. **C**

Dr Jenny Clegg is a former senior lecturer in Asia Pacific Studies specialising on China and a member of Withington CLP

Hong Kong workers under fire

Sacha Ismail says solidarity with beleaguered Hong Kong and Chinese workers is key

Mainstream UK political discourse about China focuses on the relationship between the British and Chinese governments. Labour, the trade union movement and the left should certainly counter right-wing pressure for geopolitical confrontation between Western governments and China. But our main duty is different.

The only morally defensible and politically viable basis for left-wing opposition to Western-China conflict is support for democratic and workers' struggles in China.

Those fighting exploitation and oppression in China deserve solidarity just as much as those fighting in the US, for instance. In some ways comrades in China need it even more, as they face such brutal repression.

UK Labour Movement Solidarity with Hong Kong (LMSHK) was set up in 2019 to support the magnificent uprising for democracy which swept Hong Kong that year. We have since seen that struggle suppressed and the only fully independent workers' movement in China dismantled.

March 2022 will see the start of the trial of 47 leading democracy activists, including Winnie Yu, leader of health workers' union HAEA, and Carol Ng, a former British Airways worker and trade unionist who was chair of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (HKCTU). Trade unionists including HKCTU general secretary Lee Cheuk-yan have already been sentenced to years in prison.

The Hong Kong and Chinese government have moved to dismantle the Hong Kong unions themselves. In January the Union for New Civil Servants, one of many new unions formed in Hong Kong during the 2019-20 protests, became the first union to disband after civil servants were ordered to swear a loyalty oath. Since then state pressure has broken down the dam, and the trickle has become a flood. In September Hong Kong's largest independent union, the Professional Teachers' Union (HKPTU) with 95,000 members, disbanded after almost fifty years' existence.

The HKPTU was the largest affiliate of the HKCTU. In October, under huge pressure, a meeting of

HKCTU delegates agreed to disband the federation itself.

An article last summer in US magazine Jacobin <https://jacobin-mag.com/2021/10/hong-kong-confederation-trade-union-hkctu-dissolved> vividly describes the HKCTU's three decades-long militant history.

The destruction of Hong Kong's unions is part of a much wider assault on its civil society, including independent media. Previously, Hong Kong had enjoyed comparatively fair and free elections, albeit with limits and controls. In 2019 pro-democracy candidates swept the board in elections for district councils. However, in this year's Legislative Council election only pro-Chinese government "patriots" could stand and turnout fell by half compared to 2016, to 30%.

Standing with democracy and trade union activists in Hong Kong is a matter of basic labour movement solidarity. It is also part of an even bigger picture.

The fate of China's working class, its ability to challenge the country's increasingly powerful ruling class, will likely define the 21st century. At the same time as the destruction of Hong Kong's unions, repression of workers' struggles in mainland China has intensified. At the other end of the country, the Uyghur people are experiencing much more intense, even genocidal repression at the hands of the Chinese state.

LMSHK has been working to rouse the British labour movement to solidarity – with Chinese and Hong Kong-background activists in the UK, our friends in the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign <https://uyghursolidarityuk.org>, and a growing network of union branches, CLPs, trade councils and national unions including PCS, UCU, NEU and RMT.

We have worked with many Labour MPs, particularly John McDonnell, Nadia Whittome and Clive Lewis. We helped get strong solidarity motions <https://uklaboursolidaritywithhk.wordpress.com/2021/09/15/east-and-south-east-asians-for-labour-motion-to-labour-party-conference> submitted to last year's Labour Party conference, one of them by Labour socialist society East & South East Asians for Labour (formerly Chinese for Labour).



Now, in the aftermath of the Hong Kong democracy movement's suppression, increasing numbers of Hong Kongers are coming to the UK, to encounter a bleak reality of Tory anti-migrant restrictions, racism, lack of jobs, precarious employment and services in crisis. The Tories will not criticise UK corporations, including HSBC, that have endorsed and aided the repression in Hong Kong.

We must point out the growing parallels between repression in Hong Kong and China and here, with the Police Bill, Nationality and Borders Bill and other anti-democratic legislation.

Labour and trade union activists should invite a speaker from LMSHK, to discuss solidarity – with those facing repression in Hong Kong and China, and those who have made it or want to make it here.

In building solidarity, we can improve the politics of our own movement. Embarrassed to champion China as socialist, Stalinist-influenced voices resistant to supporting workers in China (and other authoritarian but anti-Western regimes) have exaggerated the threat of a 'new cold war' – and try to suggest it rules out working-class solidarity. They must be challenged.

International workers' solidarity is the necessary basis of an effective struggle against inter-state conflict. The Hong Kong labour movement will rise again; China's workers will rise and challenge the Chinese regime. Our labour movement must help speed the day. **G**

Sacha Ismail is an activist in Labour Movement Solidarity with Hong Kong
<https://uklaboursolidaritywithhk.wordpress.com>

Uprisings in Kazakhstan

An anonymous Kazakh participant reports on revolt and repression

The beginning of 2022 marked the largest protest movement in Kazakhstan since its independence. Protests that started in a small town of Zhanaozen in western Kazakhstan, triggered by a double increase in the price of liquefied petroleum gas, quickly spread to all over the country. Economic demands turned political and soon people were protesting in over 60 places demanding genuine political change.

Having a vast territory (Kazakhstan is the 9th biggest country in the world by territory), large amounts of natural resources, and a relatively small population of only 19 million people, the political regime has not used the many chances they have had to implement life-improving political and economic reforms. Decades of empty promises, corrosive corruption, injustice and the lack of basic human rights have brought people together on the streets.

Initial internet blackout and a continuing massive state-sponsored disinformation campaign helped the government to infuse confusion into the simple story of uprising against dictatorship. By replicating fake news about failed “coup d’etat”, the government is trying to devalue protests and portray the situation as an internal power struggle. The authorities do not wish to admit that dozens of thousands of people could protest in solidarity for their brighter, democratic future. Nor do they want people to believe in their power, as it would be a death sentence for them.

Shocked by the scale of protests as well as the determination of demonstrators, the Kazakh authorities resorted to the use of crowd control ammunition, including tear gas, flashbang grenades, rubber bullets and water cannons. The authorities were not expecting that demonstrators would mobilize to defend themselves and continue protests. Added to their shock were video-footages of security forces and the military joining demonstrators. This sent alarming messages about their loyalty to the political leadership. That was the turning point when life-or-death decisions had to be made. Further artificial introduction of security-services-controlled criminal groups

to start riots and consequent violence was justified by the state to crackdown on protests with the use of lethal weapons.

Inconsistent rhetoric from the government that labelled demonstrators first as “destructive individuals” and then as “foreign-trained terrorists” to justify the order to shoot-without-warning causing deaths of hundreds of people seriously questions the governments’ willingness to honestly discuss the unfolding situation. However, the primary reason for the “foreign-trained terrorists” narrative was that it enabled government to call for Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation military troops to Kazakhstan to pacify protests. This was seen by many as interference in Kazakhstani internal affairs, undermining sovereignty and setting a dangerous precedent for future use of CSTO-troops.

When asked to present evidence of attacks of “foreign-trained terrorists”, the Kazakh officials responded that “terrorists attacked morgues at night and stole bodies of their dead comrades”, “shaved off their beards” and “dissolved in the countryside”. Therefore, the government has not shown a single “foreign-trained terrorist”, except a well-known Kyrgyz musician, who was beaten and forced to give false testimony against himself on Kazakhstani state-controlled TV.

Officially, there were around 10,000 detained, thousands injured, 227 dead, including little children. Instead of publishing the names of the dead so that relatives could at least know whether or not their family members were alive, the government only repeated that those people died in “terrorist attacks”. Human rights defenders have been gathering information on those killed, injured and detained. The list of names contains peaceful demonstrators, civilians, civil activists and others who do not fit the criteria of “foreign-trained terrorists”.

It is important to understand that if the government claims there were terrorists, they will “search and find them”. This is what is happening right now. People are being tortured and forced to say that they engaged in violence, participated in riots and terrorist attacks. On 5 January, a photographer from



Protesters gathering on the main square in Almaty

Almaty, Sayat Adilbek, went to pharmacy to buy medicines for his daughter, but he was shot in his right lumbar area. He went to hospital on the same day and had a surgery, but on 8 January wounded and naked he was taken by armed police to a detention facility where he was subjected to tortures and denied medical help. The absurdity of this story is that he is being charged with “participation in mass riots” on 6 January, when he was in hospital after surgery.

Mass shooting of peaceful people and repressions show that western democracies should take decisive and swift actions in both investigating the crimes against humanity and holding human rights perpetrators accountable. The UK, as a leading global democracy, could play a key role in helping Kazakhstani civil society by supporting an OSCE-led international investigation into these events and imposing personal sanctions for grand corruption and serious human rights violations. And as Dame Margaret Hodge said, “Imposing sanctions on this corrupt elite will not of itself root out evil practices or lead to a radical democratic transformation in Kazakhstan, but it will demonstrate that we mean what we say when we commit to fighting dirty money and corruption. The cost of inaction is high”. The cost of inaction for Kazakhstani civil society will be too high. **G**

New German progressive coalition

Udo Bullmann sees a new era of progress for Germany and Europe

The German federal elections in September last year made it clear: the German voters want a government that makes Germany fit for the future and pushes for sustainable development and solidarity.

We Social Democrats and our candidate Olaf Scholz as well as our coalition partners are the clear winners of this election. With this mandate, we have negotiated a forward looking and ambitious coalition agreement, which guides our new government through these difficult and challenging times and lays out a long-term vision for Germany and Europe.

Despite some minor and some major differences in our political philosophy, what unifies us coalition partners, Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals is the commitment to developing the European Union towards a union of progress, freedom, sustainability and equality.

With our coalition agreement, we are going beyond Merkel's and the Conservatives' on-the-go management of the past. Instead, we have developed and continue to develop a forward-looking agenda for Europe, making Germany a driver of progress and reform and overcoming the conservatives mentality of blockades, cutbacks and foul compromise.

The new German government will commit to a strong and sovereign Europe that has learnt from the mistakes of the past. We will not fall back into the traps of austerity politics. Olaf Scholz has shown as Finance Minister that a new way of crisis management based on investments, increasing social cohesion and strengthening local economies is the way forward. Our common vision for inclusive and sustainable growth, guided by the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, extends to beyond Germany. This narrative has been enshrined into the coalition treaty and will be the guiding principle for our common work – also within the European Union.

And we will couple this with a social dimension, focusing on wage increases for the most vulnerable and adding to increasing



Olaf Scholz - leads traffic light coalition

social cohesion as well as social inclusion throughout Germany and the European Union.

This coalition is a one-of-a-kind in many regards. It is the first time that on the federal level a three party coalition is built and it is the first time that Greens and Liberals work together under the leadership of a social democratic chancellor. In addition, while some may have feared that after sixteen years of conservatives (CDU) in power, all under Merkel, might lead to a difficult transition, Olaf Scholz is proving already with his crisis management that his extensive experience in government pays off.

For our international partners, Germany will remain a strong and reliable ally and we will therefore push for a Europe, which takes on more of its responsibilities in the international sphere, pushing for the Sustainable Development Goals and holding the European Union accountable to its announcements.

This idea and narrative have also been enshrined in Germany's new role as partner for the EU's neighbourhood with especially relations to the UK continuing to play a crucially important role. Not only the EU as a whole, but especially Germany has established close political and cultural links to the UK, especially also

through trade. Despite the difficulties stemming from the UK leaving the single market, the new German government will continue to work as close as possible in other policy areas beyond our economic partnership.

Especially in the task of ending the pandemic worldwide, fighting climate change and launching a global Covid-19 recovery initiative along the lines of sustainability, social equality, democracy and peace, the UK must and will be a partner for our young progressive government, because without partners, we will not be able to reach our ambitious goals.

In urgent diplomatic crises, such as the ongoing conflict on the Eastern border of the European Union, we remain committed to reach out for multilateral solutions and remain committed to our allies and our alliances. Democracy, the rule of law and peace cannot be weighed against each other, they are part of the same narrative.

With this new, one of a kind government we have put Germany on track towards climate action, social progress and global fairness. We have made the UN Sustainable Development Goals our guiding principle for our approach towards global politics and we remain firm on multilateral, diplomatic solutions to the challenges of today and tomorrow. **C**



Udo Bullmann is a German MEP

Archbishop Desmond Tutu 1931-2021

Roger Symon celebrates the life and legacy of an anti-apartheid legend

Desmond Tutu was born at a time when the reputation of Christian missionaries abroad was often regarded with deep ambivalence. The stereotype of the Anglican missionary as an agent of colonialism ran deep; missionaries were said to believe that they had everything to teach the indigenous peoples, and nothing to learn from them. Desmond put it this way, "The missionaries came to our land with their Bible, and told us to close our eyes and pray. But when we opened our eyes again, we found we had the Bible and they had the land."

Despite this comment Desmond was deeply influenced by a British missionary priest whom he had known since he was a boy of ten in Sophiatown, Johannesburg. His name was Trevor Huddleston, a member of the Community of the Resurrection, an Anglican order of monks from Yorkshire, who believed the Church's pastoral role towards the poor must extend beyond charity, and be coupled with public advocacy where they suffered discrimination or injustice.

Thanks to his fearless denunciation of apartheid and frequent public protest, Trevor Huddleston led the way in rousing the conscience of Britain to what was happening in South Africa. It won him the enthusiastic support of Africans, the vehement hostility of the apartheid government, and worldwide fame. He became President of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in 1956.

Trevor Huddleston became Desmond Tutu's lifelong friend and mentor. Like him Desmond had no patience with those who thought the Church should not be 'meddling in politics', an accusation which he rebutted with the words, "You must be reading a different Bible to the one I read!"

One obituary said the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, set up in 1998, two years after he retired, was the climax of Desmond's career. It certainly reflected his deepest belief, the innate dignity of all people. But reconciliation is not possible without justice, and that required brave leadership with many personal risks. He was fearless, passionate, and at times angry. He led an illegal march on Parliament, for which he was



arrested and his passport confiscated. He once spotted a man in an angry mob who was about to be 'necklaced' – a punishment for informers when a burning tyre was put around their neck. Desmond personally pulled him away out of danger.

He always had a special word for the poor. I sometimes met him very early in the morning when he arrived at Heathrow for a visit to London. Once I saw him emerging into the arrivals hall pushing his trolley, and being suddenly surrounded by cleaners who had abandoned their equipment and rushed forward to greet him. They saw him as a champion of those who lived on the bottom rungs of society.

He treated everyone with respect, regardless of their role or status, friend or enemy. He defied the apartheid government, but when democracy finally arrived and the African National Congress were elected, he never hesitated to speak out against them when their policies failed or when he sniffed corruption.

He was generous to his opponents, and courteous to President de Klerk in private discussion (at least on the occasion that I was present) without ever compromising his strong convictions.

He generously approved the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to de Klerk as well as Mandela, although that preceded the revelations that later emerged from the

Truth and Reconciliation Committee.

He was persistent in seeking support when times were hard. He was constantly in touch with Lambeth Palace, urging the Archbishop to persuade the Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, who had dubbed the ANC "a terrorist organisation", to change her mind and support a policy of sanctions. But alone among Commonwealth prime ministers, she held out against them, claiming that without sanctions she was in a better position to influence the apartheid government.

The TRC was the work of Mandela and Desmond. Both believed that the public admission of guilt was essential to healing the wounds of the past and to building a non-racial future, a theme Desmond expanded in his book *No future without forgiveness*. Only then was reconciliation possible.

It was a privilege to know him personally, and to experience his wonderful humour. Some obituary writers seemed to think his spiritual life and his public life were separate aspects of his character. In fact the two were inseparable. Mandela recognized this when he spoke at a service to mark Desmond's retirement as Archbishop of Cape Town. He said, "His joy in our diversity and his spirit of forgiveness are as much part of his immeasurable contribution to our nation as is his passion for justice and his solidarity with the poor". **C**

The Revd Canon Roger Symon was on the staff of the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1986 to 1994, critical years in South African history

Grand Theft, What Oh!

Patrick Mulcahy
on a comic twist to Goya heist

Outside of the films of Ken Loach, British cinema has always had a difficulty with portraying the working class. Essentially, they are either problematised – vividly evidenced by the depiction of domestic violence in Gary Oldman's 1997 film, *'Nil by Mouth'* – or else turned into comic characters, notoriously encapsulated by the 2004 box-office flop, *'Sex Lives of the Potato Men'*. Most of British cinema is preoccupied with the middle or upper middle class, with the working class relegated to the British gangster genre; people from poor socio-economic backgrounds with agency must automatically be criminals or else are cast as victims. Community spirit once exhibited by the working poor has been replaced by individualism, nurtured by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government (1979-1990). Kenneth Branagh's Oscar-nominated semi-autobiographical film, *'Belfast'*, offers a glimpse of a community that once looked out for one another (more spoken about than shown) but for the most part working class communities are divided by suspicion, the thought that your neighbour could be a strike-breaker or from another culture entirely.

'The Duke', written by Richard Bean and Clive Coleman and directed by Roger Michell, tells the story of retired bus driver, amateur playwright and social activist Kempton Bunton (Jim Broadbent) who was charged with the 1961 theft of Francisco Goya's 1812 portrait of the Duke of Wellington from the National Gallery. Bean and Coleman twist the facts a little – the painting took four years to recover – in order to give the story some dramatic momentum. Michell employs split screens and a jazzy soundtrack to inject some pace and stages Bunton's account of how he stole it. Bunton's plan, according to the film, was never to keep it, but rather to ransom it to obtain free television licences for the over-sixty-fives, an issue for which he campaigned vigorously. He is depicted in a long line of delusional social com-

plainants, a Northern cousin to Tony Hancock's screen persona.

The film's starting point – Bunton's attempt to avoid paying his television licence – is somewhat niche. Indeed, his struggle to be heard by the British Broadcasting Corporation – his plays, including his latest, *'The Adventures of Susan Christ'* are summarily rejected – plays into the so-called culture war against the Corporation, that the BBC is not representative of wider society and therefore doesn't deserve state support. The current Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is angling for the BBC to have to prove itself

appearance, gripping the side of a fireplace as she is shown cleaning it; it is one of the most expressive shots in Michell's career. Dorothy is dour, humourless and intolerant of her husband's principles – she is happy to pay the television licence. She is also given a character arc, refusing to mourn the death of daughter Susan, the inspiration behind Kempton's plays.

Once the painting is stolen, the film turns on Kempton's attempt to extract a ransom from the National Gallery, as he contacts 'the people's newspaper', the Daily Mirror. The police suspect a criminal gang, with Kempton escaping their notice.

The tone is comic, but there is a heavy dose of pathos, with Kempton taking a job at a bakery and faking bringing home damaged produce. He stands up for a Pakistani co-worker, Javid (Ashley Kumar) that results in Kempton being fired. He also contends with the reappearance of his second son, Kenny (Jack Bandeira), who has a criminal past.

Michell and his screenwriters have twisted the facts to fit a jaunty caper movie, that really only comes into its own in the trial scene, with Kempton defended by Jeremy Hutchinson QC (Matthew Goode). The behaviour of Kempton and his supporters in the courtroom generate some long-overdue laughs.

The attempt to stay true to Kempton's obsessions – emphasising the specific to create the universal – may nevertheless alienate audiences outside the UK. Ultimately, this is a conflict between the establishment and the little man.

The makers save their best joke for last, with a clip from an iconic British movie that references the theft. However, the film doesn't deliver the warm, crowd-rousing riposte to the establishment that you hope for. Essentially, Kempton is another in a long line of British failures. He emerges with some dignity but doesn't stick in the mind.

'The Duke' is on release



mercially, threatening the abolition of the television licence fee, a threat strangely not aimed at opera houses. Back in the 1960s, the BBC did become more representative. Ken Loach started his career there, while the *'Play for Today'* brought theatre to the masses, showcasing work by Trevor Griffiths, Mike Leigh and David Hare. ITV's content, by contrast, is defined by true crime stories, game shows and reality television – an indictment of the commercial model.

Broadbent's Kempton is a chipper family man, who is contrasted with his wife, Dorothy (Helen Mirren). She makes a spectacular

Ending Labour's loyalism

In the wake of continuing bad news for the monarchy Steve Freeman & Phil Vellender give a critical welcome to a Labour case for Republicanism

Labour and Republicanism: Making citizens sovereign
Ken Ritchie
www.labourforarepublic.org.uk

This book is both timely and serious and has much to recommend it. Ritchie provides a useful, if necessarily brief, introduction to English republican history, touching on the Levellers, Paine, the Chartists and the radical tradition of the 19th century. He rightly says 'socialism and republicanism must go hand in hand' and reminds us that Keir Hardie believed in 'republican principles' while noting that George Lansbury once called for George V to be dealt with 'in the same way as Cromwell had handled Charles I'. Ritchie recounts how attempts by Labour figures, most notably Tony Benn, to persuade the party to engage with republicanism ultimately met with little success. Surprisingly, Ritchie dubs Benn's 1992 proposal for a democratic and social republic, put before the Commons, a 'vanity project'. He highlights Labour's reluctance to challenge the monarchy, despite a poll in 2019 that found 62% of Labour supporters favoured it.

Labour was and remains a loyalist party whose credentials were established during the First World War when the party backed 'King and Country'. After Russia became a democratic republic in 1917, the Labour Party adopted Clause IV as an alternative and subsequently, in 1923, voted to support the monarchy. Thus, Labour established itself as a 'monarchist-socialist' party. After the Second World War the Attlee government established Britain as a 'social and constitutional monarchy'. This remained the core of Labour politics until Blair removed Clause IV.

Ritchie rightly draws our attention to many anachronistic features of the British monarchy. Any future monarch is likely to be white, male and protestant. There has been no formal acknowledgement of the monarchy's historic links to the slave trade nor, apparently, any recog-

nition of the crimes of empire; indeed the monarch awards many honours whose very titles still celebrate it. Finally, we know precious little about the true state of royal finances. The book is probably at its best when it tackles the mystique of the monarchy and how little the institution embodies contemporary society. However, its preoccupation with individual royals and the costs of maintaining the monarchy is at the expense of exploring the nature of the Crown.

Thus, a weakness of the book is its lack of a clear distinction between the Crown and the monarch. The former is the con-

stitution of the crimes of empire; indeed the monarch awards many honours whose very titles still celebrate it. Finally, we know precious little about the true state of royal finances. The book is probably at its best when it tackles the mystique of the monarchy and how little the institution embodies contemporary society. However, its preoccupation with individual royals and the costs of maintaining the monarchy is at the expense of exploring the nature of the Crown.

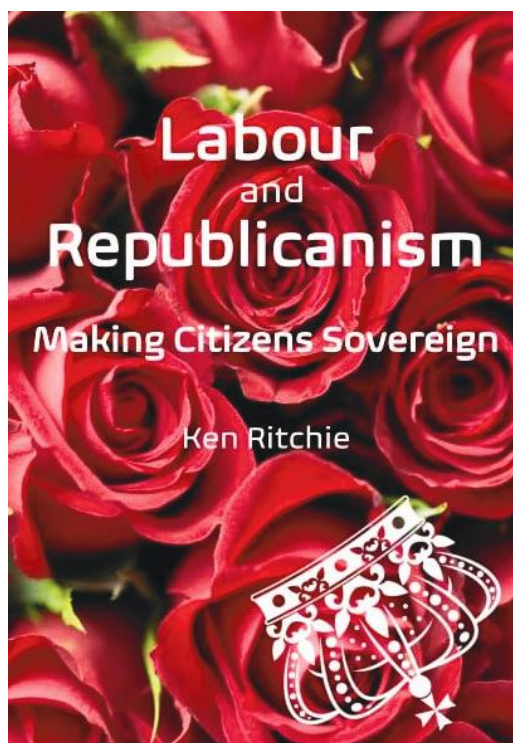
More problematic is Ritchie's call for a British Republic, without recognising the distinct aspirations of the people of Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The British Union is a major barrier to national self-determination and has prevented Ireland, Scotland and Wales from achieving their sovereignty. Today, the struggle for Scottish independence will bring the question of a republic to the top of the political agenda. It will also pose fundamental questions for the present constitutional set up in England.

Finally, by ignoring the national question, Ritchie's approach to how a British republic might be achieved, for example by reforming the Privy Council and abolishing the Prime Minister's weekly audience, becomes a kind of Fabian gradualism in which the monarchy is slowly dismantled bit by bit. However, reformed monarchy may be the means by which Tory and Labour loyalists can maintain the status quo, little changed, for years to come, rather than campaigning directly for a republic at the next general election.

There is a contradiction in the English Left itself. On the one hand, is a gradualism that seeks social and economic change before moving to a republic, rather than Ritchie's position of a reformed monarchy preceding a republic. On the other hand, there are those who believe that a socialist revolution comes before any republic.

Neither of these perspectives recognise the key point of Benn's republican socialism; that republican democracy is the means of achieving radical social and economic change.

Despite these reservations, Ritchie is surely right about the necessity of winning the argument in the Labour Party and trade union movement for a democratic and social republic. This book, therefore, deserves to be widely read and represents an important contribution to the much needed debate about how to achieve real democracy, popular sovereignty and socialism.



centrated power of the state and the latter is merely its head. Today, it is the network of power that the Crown embodies which is in the hands of a secretive political class, a class that has never been more powerful, dangerous and unconstrained.

As Tony Benn argued thirty years ago, "We are told that power has moved over time from the throne to the Lords, from the Lords to the Commons and from the Commons to the people. But in practice power has now moved to the Prime Minister who then, exercising the power of the Crown without explicit consent from parliament, dominates the whole sys-

Politics for mediators

Victor Anderson
on Engaged Buddhism

Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet
Thich Nhat Hanh
Penguin Random House £16.99

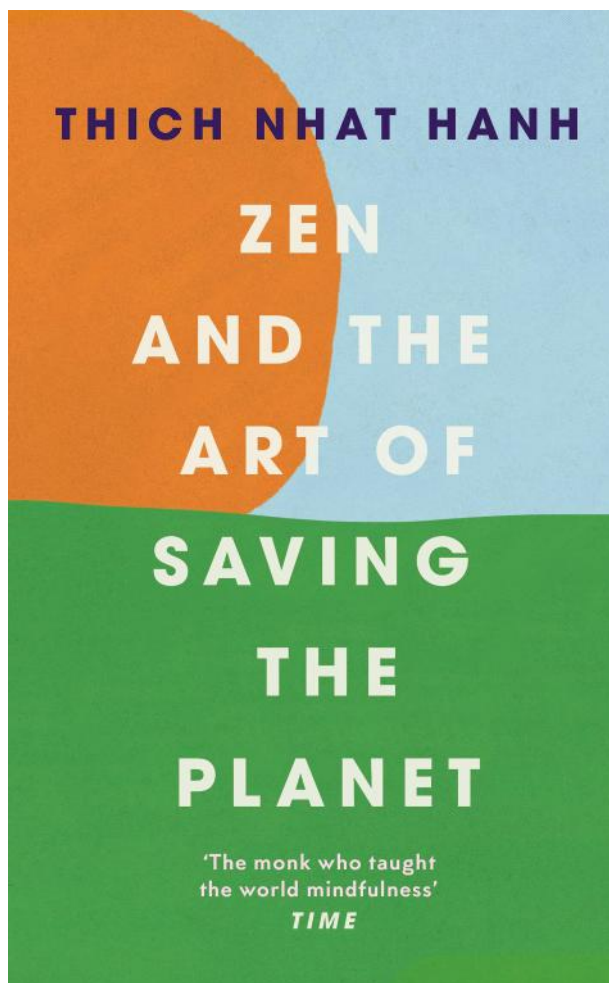
Thich Nhat Hanh is a Buddhist monk who invented the term 'Engaged Buddhism', referring to social and political engagement. There's an echo here of Sartre, because although Thich Nhat Hanh came from Vietnam, he spent time in the 1960s in Paris, the capital of the old colonial power that used to rule his country. Just as intellectuals and artists should be politically engaged, so he believes should monks and meditators.

Over the decades since then, he has spun out many of the implications, giving many talks, and inspiring a large number of people to become his students. He has also written literally dozens of books. 'Written' is not quite right, as most appear to be edited transcripts of talks he has given, then presented in book form by his students. He is now old and frail, and although he has this new book out, it is in fact a compilation of talks and writings already previously created over the years.

What is new about this book is the political situation it speaks to, and so this is a collection geared to, as its title says, "saving the planet". It speaks to a time in which there are now many Buddhists active in the climate movement and in organisations such as XR (Extinction Rebellion) Buddhists. This book tries to explain what it is about Buddhism that chimes with environmental activism.

I don't think it really tells us. In fact, its author would probably be the first to say that, as his message is about practices more than theories, you have to try them and live by them, and not just read about them. That even applies to reading this book by one of Engaged Buddhism's leading exponents and most charismatic figures.

Thich Nhat Hanh does, however, express very clearly the most important point: the Buddhist tradition includes a set of techniques for helping our minds to more effectively function in the world, sorting out the anger, paranoia, unnecessary enemy-making, and the like, which can often get in the way of our own wellbeing and our ability to work well politically. This aspect of Buddhism has given rise in recent years to teachings about 'the psychology of mindfulness', taking



some ancient ideas out of their original religious contexts and putting them to use in secular settings such as therapy and business.

Buddhism is also about strengthening our ability to face the worst aspects of life, traditionally seen as suffering, sickness, and death. Our current climate and ecological crisis gives all this a new scale and dimension, because the abyss we look into now, if we dare to, is the prospect of a whole planet and its many species of inhabitants suffering from devastation and decline. Joanna Macy has led work on this aspect of Engaged Buddhism through her teachings on 'despair and empowerment', seeing facing reality as the precondition for developing the inner strength required to fully take action. There is no sense here that the Fifth Cavalry, or Jesus, will ride in at the last minute to save us: if anything like that is to happen we will have to do it ourselves.

Despite the strengths of Thich Nhat Hanh's version of Buddhism, however, there is a difficulty about it all which this book comes

nowhere near resolving. Whatever we do about our motivation, clarity, and mindfulness, there is still the question of what to think. Surrounded as we are by a blizzard of misinformation and lack of information, there is no easy move from good intentions through to good actions, because how we see the world and its politics comes in between. If for example my knowledge of the wider world is derived from The Daily Mail, then however lovely my heart is, my actions and choices are unlikely to be so lovely. The book appears to gloss over this problem, as if sufficient attention to Buddhist practices by sufficiently large numbers of people will automatically lead to solutions to ecological, economic, and social problems. But that optimistic view crucially misses out the continuing need for some analysis, some view about the causes of problems, some understanding of how the dimension of power and inequality still shapes our lives and today is shaping the whole planet's crisis. Sadly Thich Nhat Hanh's death has recently been announced.

Public Enemy Number One

Bob Newland
on a memoir
of an activist
youth

A Pretoria Boy
Peter Hain
Icon Books £20

This is Peter Hain's latest biographical offering. I have known Peter for many years since our struggle against apartheid. Our relationship continues in Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA), the successor organisation to the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) where I am a member of its Advisory Council and he is Honorary Vice-President.

The story begins with Peter's childhood and his introduction to the ways of the Apartheid Special Branch as they pursued his activist parents Ad and Wal. He graphically illustrates his emotions at their imprisonment; being among the first to be detained without trial under the 12 days detention laws. Following their 'banning' they also achieved another first with special dispensation to permit them to meet each other as husband and wife as banning regulations meant that no 'banned' person was allowed to meet with another 'banned' person.

Peter's parents were members of the Liberal Party and a family friend, John Harris, had become involved in the 'Liberal' Armed Resistance Movement (ARM) following the Sharpeville massacre. ARM was committed to sabotage, but sought to avoid injuries to people. Harris' cell decided to bomb Johannesburg Central Station. Harris phoned a warning to the police but the Justice minister and the head of the Bureau of State Security (BOSS), decided not to clear the station. An elderly woman, Ethel Rhys, was killed in the bomb blast and her grand-daughter was maimed providing an excuse for the launch of further repressive measures. Harris was sentenced to death and soon after his execution the Hain family left South Africa for the UK.

Peter came to prominence in the Stop the Seventies Tour after the MCC (under enormous public pressure) selected Basil D'Oliveira to play for the English team touring

South Africa and South Africa banned the tour saying that it was the "team of the Anti-Apartheid Movement". Despite this, the MCC invited a South African team to the UK. It was then discovered that a South African rugby team had been invited to tour the UK and Ireland in the winter of 1969-1970. The campaign against the rugby tour succeeded and the cricket tour was cancelled. This was the start of the process which saw South Africa expelled from world sporting events, and is why Peter Hain became a hate figure amongst white South

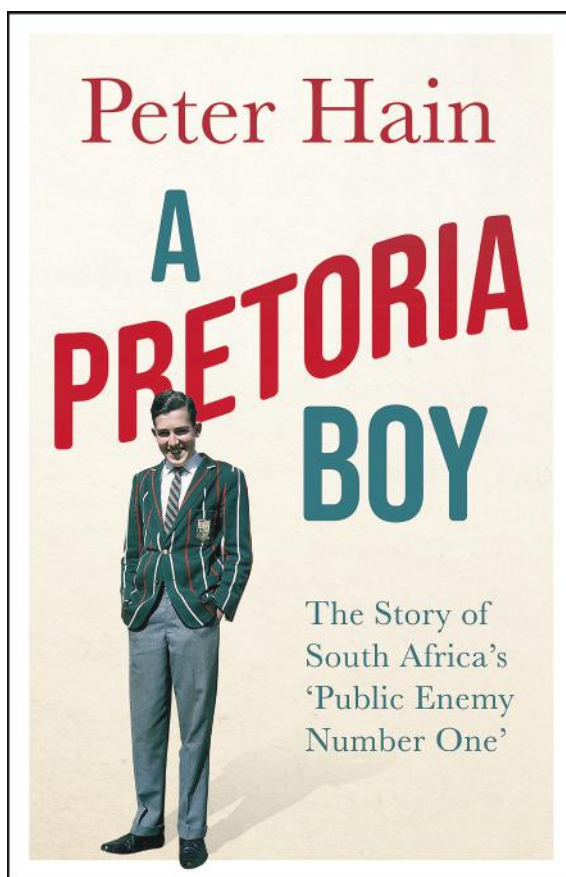
Africans.

that Peter Hain was not the man that he had seen. Throughout his recollections of these events Peter shares insights into the workings of BOSS and M15 backed up by personal conversations with participants. These are interspersed with tales of plots against Jeremy Thorpe and a coup attempt against the Wilson government.

Peter's most recent contribution has come with his exposure of the role of a British PR company, Bell Pottinger, in trying to cover up corruption and state capture by President Zuma and his allies, the Gupta brothers. Bell Pottinger was run by Sir Tim Bell, Margaret Thatcher's public relations guru and it engaged in unpleasant racist publicity campaigns. This was exposed by Peter Hain, in speeches in the House of Lords, using information from a secret South African source. He went on to expose the appalling role of 'respectable' international banks in assisting the growth of corruption through their money laundering processes.

Over the years, Peter Hain has made significant contributions to the liberation of South Africa and this latest volume includes personal experiences and conversations with giants from that struggle as well as during his role in various UK Government Ministries. He shares anecdotes from his new life in exile along with his political journey from radical Young Liberal to the House of Lords. One ironic image is described when as an international observer to the 1994 first free and non-racial elections Peter visits the newly established United Cricket Board HQ at the Wanderers Cricket Stadium in Alexandra Township. Here he posed next to a sign saying 'spectators who run onto the pitch will be prosecuted'. His story concludes with some thoughts for the future reflecting on Mandela's words: "What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others."

Readers may find some of the stories familiar and some of his experiences will be shared, but the book is well worth a read.



Africans.

Francis Bennion, who had links with BOSS and MI5, then launched a private prosecution against Peter Hain for conspiracy 'with persons unknown' to disrupt the sporting tours. Bennion raised money in South Africa for the 'Hain Prosecution Fund' or 'Pain for Hain' as it was known. The drama of the trial is well described in the book, so no spoilers here. Peter was acquitted on all but one count.

BOSS then tried to implicate him in a robbery of Barclays Bank in Putney. Peter was charged with robbery but the case collapsed when a schoolboy witness was adamant

Not Delivering Brexit

Duncan Bowie
on an
insider's
view

**Chief of Staff
Gavin Barwell
Atlantic Books £20**

Barwell was Teresa May's chief of staff between the 2017 election and her resignation in July 2019. The book is subtitled 'Notes from Downing Street'. Barwell had been MP for Croydon Central and Minister for Housing but had lost his seat in the 2017 election.

He is now a member of the House of Lords. This is an important book as it gives a detailed insider's story on those two tumultuous years, in which May was unable to deliver a BREXIT agreement and was forced out of office by her own party, leading to the catastrophic premiership of Boris Johnson.

Barwell is a readable chronicler and provides more criticism of both the working of government and of his own colleagues than are normally found in political memoirs, at least by politicians who may still have some career ahead of them – Barwell is still only 49.

Barwell is loyal to his former

boss in contrast with his successor Dominic Cummings' post No. 10 attitude to his former boss, Boris Johnson.

Most of the book is taken up with the BREXIT negotiations, which distracted both May and Barwell from dealing with the domestic issues they faced. Barwell comes over as decent, honest and self-critical. He demonstrates how difficult, perhaps impossible was the task of delivering a BREXIT deal which did not split the Conservative Party, alienate the DUP on whom the Conservatives depended for a parliamentary majority, satisfy the EU and get parliamentary approval.

Cameron resigning after the referendum vote meant that May and her team inherited a commitment without either a strategy or a mechanism to deliver the objective.

The decision to call an election in 2017 was clearly May's biggest mistake, and left her without an overall majority. Her own party was divided between Remainers and Brexiteers, many of whom were unable to accept the realities of the UK position following the referendum decision. Barwell is surprisingly generous to those Conservative MPs and Cabinet Ministers who were unable to recognise that the EU had its own interests to protect and that there were going to be some downsides. Johnson's 'Have your Cake and Eat it' approach was clearly untenable – and Barwell demonstrates how appalling Johnson's behaviour could be – not just disloyal but offensive, with his only interest being not 'to bring back control' but to force May out and position himself to succeed her – an ambition which he of course achieved.

Barwell demonstrates that Johnson had no understanding of the impact on Northern Ireland. He also demonstrates that the BREXIT deal Johnson actually delivered – or at least got Parliament and the EU to agree, as the Northern Ireland issue has still not been resolved (and moreover cannot be satisfactorily resolved unless the majority of the Northern Irish electorate vote to join Eire and re-join the EU) has been a worse deal than the one May put to Parliament.

Barwell's memoir does of course cover other issues – the continu-

ing battle with chancellor Philip Hammond, who sought to block domestic initiatives which involved increased public spending, relationships with Donald Trump, who not only publicly criticised May's policy but publicly supported both Johnson and Nigel Farage, national security in the context of terrorist attacks, and the decision to take military action in Syria, specifically targeted at chemical weapons installations, action authorised without parliamentary approval.

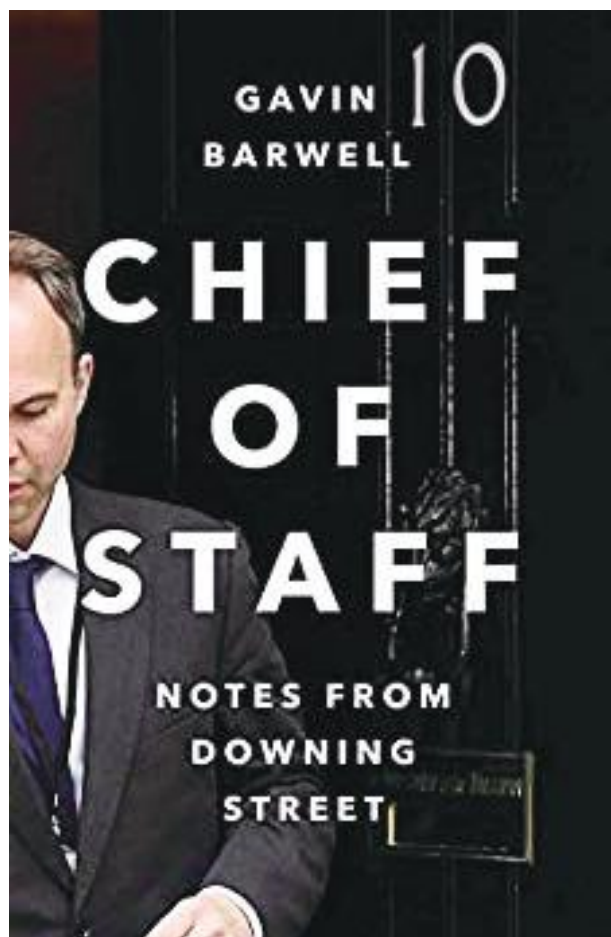
I was always of the view that despite May's questionable record at the Home Office, especially in relation to Immigration policy, that she was a fundamentally decent politician and, in contrast with her successor, a serious and hardworking one. Two years of Johnson makes us realise what we have missed.

Barwell's judgement, which is also a judgement on his own performance, is much more positive than that of Anthony Seldon, whose study of May at Number 10 published within a few months of her resignation and before any comparison with Johnson was possible, was in my view unfairly harsh and the conclusion of which presents a list of May's failings without recognising the toxic inheritance from Cameron and the divisions not just within her own party but across Parliament and the country as a whole.

The withdrawal from the EU has perhaps increased rather than reduced these polarisations, as there is now a much wider understanding of the negative impacts of BREXIT, even though these have been somewhat disguised by nearly two years of the Pandemic, which has again diverted attention from dealing with other critical domestic challenges, as well as increasingly fractious relations with our European neighbours.

Barwell's book should help us to understand how complex BREXIT was bound to be as well as doing a little to restore May's political reputation.

It is of course easier to be an armchair critic as is the arrogant Seldon, who has now published his critiques of five successive Prime Ministers (as well as an early book on Churchill's last government) than actually having to do the job of trying to manage the country.



Africa's Che Guevara

Glyn Ford
on Burkina
Faso

Thomas Sankara: A Revolutionary in Cold War Africa
Brian J. Peterson
Indiana University Press

Thomas Sankara has been often described as the 'Che Guevara of Africa'. An element of, but not the whole truth, with differences in scale and process. Che's footprint as revolutionary icon was global while Sankara's was a narrower tread scarcely wider than Francophone Africa. For Sankara the revolution stayed at home in Burkina Faso absent Che's military adventurism in Africa and South America. As a military leader Sankara was strangely averse to military solutions; eschewing the seduction of Maslow's hammer. Yet what killed them made them stronger, execution and assassination earmarking them both for export rather than domestic consumption.

Sankara's fast start in life came from being the son of a veteran 'volunteered' for military service instead of his master's son. Veterans' families had job preference and privilege in the dying of French colonialism. His self-education ended him as an unorthodox Marxist-Leninist, with an eclectic credo boiled down to a radical left populism flavoured with a hint of Mao. His political formation drew on West African heroes like Kwamé Nkrumah (Ghana), Leopold Sedar Senghor (Senegal) and Sekou Touré (Guinea), shaken with four years military training in Madagascar and stirred with lessons from China and the small communisms of North Korea and Albania. He noted, 'a soldier without political education is but a criminal in power'.

His material support base was Marx and the military, with workers and soldiers sharing interests. The organised radical left amongst the urban trade unions worked together with a coterie of progressive junior officers to challenge the neo-colonialist policies of a series of increasingly inept military leaders. He was co-opted into the administration of Colonel Saye Zerbo in

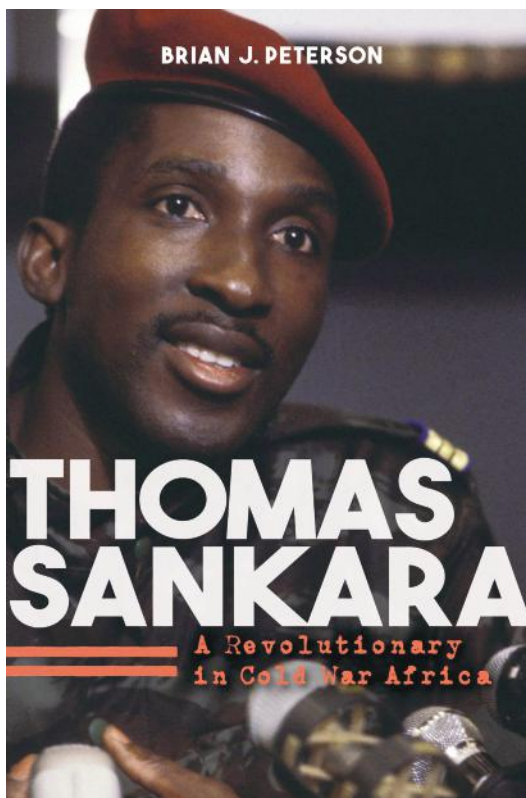
1980 as Information Minister, but with mass strikes threatened he spectacularly resigned during a live radio broadcast and was promptly arrested. After six months in prison he was released when a further muddled coup removed Zerbo and was belatedly and reluctantly named in early 1981 as Prime Minister. Here he offended the West with a visit to Qaddafi's Libya, only compounded by his intervention at the New Delhi Non-Aligned Movement Summit when he condemned the US and Israel for their complicity

hours.

As a consequence his regime was under threat from these four from its inception. But it was the fifth column inside the regime that was to prove fatal. By the beginning of the end the military had marginalised the Marxists. It was only a matter of time. His August 1983 - October 1987 period as President, even though he made his share of mistakes, proved a bright interlude in half a century of dark authoritarianism. The friend responsible for his murder, Blaise Compaoré, served as Burkina Faso's President from the coup d'état until 2014 when the populace drove him into exile in the Ivory Coast after a failed attempt to yet further prolong his 27 year reign. Compaoré's policy of 'rectification' had gone out of its way to erase all Sankara's legacy. The messy 2014 transition saw democracy restored with the election of Roch Kaboré as President in 2015, and again in 2020. The President started the process of trying Compaoré in absentia for Sankara's death.

Burkina Faso's new democratic interregnum was short. In January military rule returned as the democratically elected President was overthrown, purportedly because of the Army's failures to deal with the Islamic incursions into the North East of the country that had resulted in hundreds of thousands of internal refugees. One of their first acts was to stop the trial.

Peterson has produced a valuable biography but, despite his claims to the contrary, it is not the first in English. That position is occupied by Ernest Harsch and his *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary* (2014), an excellent short study that is bizarrely listed in the bibliography. What is entirely missing is Lauren Wilkinson's *American Spy*, a fictionalised adaptation of Washington's role in his downfall. Fun to read, but it gives more agency than warranted to the State Department and CIA over Paris' Quai D'Orsay. When the monkey speaks, the organ-grinder can stay silent.



in the massacres in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Then it was briefly back to prison before mass protests delivered him the Presidency.

In power he drove literacy campaigns and land redistribution, alongside a mass of infrastructure projects while breaking with feudalism and fundamentalism by banning genital mutilation, forced marriages and polygamy. Sankara was a man ahead of his time - and a portion of his population - with mass vaccinations and tree planting. He continued to be outspoken on the international stage, yet closer in reality to Havana than Tripoli. No matter, all equally infuriated Paris and tribal rulers, church and neigh-

From Apartheid to Trump

Don Flynn
on racism
in the
Anglosphere

Global White Nationalism
Edited by Daniel Geary, Camilla
Schofield and Jennifer Sutton
Manchester University Press £19.99

In what ways has white nationalism functioned as a global movement aiming to preserve racial hierarchy in an epoch otherwise marked by decolonialisation and the liberal commitment to equality? The question posed at the start of this book seems as pertinent as just about anything that could be asked about our current epoch. Why are there people today who persist in seeing in the colour of their skin the answer to problems of modern-day life?

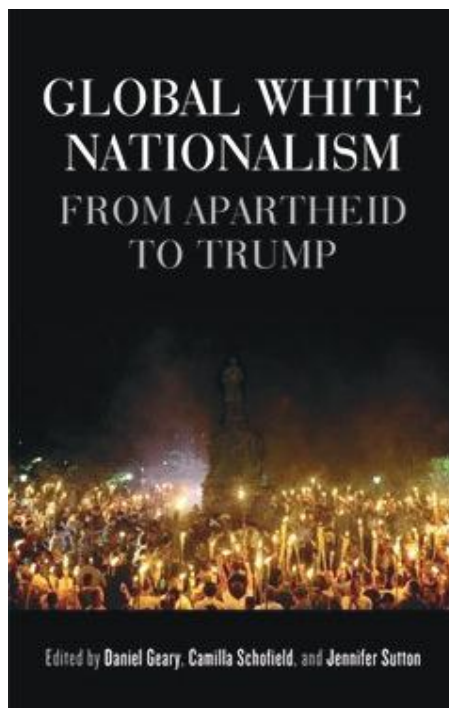
The various authors contributing to the volume are united in viewing white nationalism as something more than a movement of far-right extremists. It has its underpinnings in “...an ideology that suffuses the mainstream electoral right and continues to structure widely held beliefs about history, law and order, and the limits of freedom in our societies.” Within its purview, European colonialism, and all it entailed, was the exercise of a ‘white right’ to rule territories which contained valuable resources, including the labour power of people who were enslaved. The whip of white power was needed to bring the wasting assets of the African continent into the mainstream of capitalist accumulation.

In an opening chapter, Kennetta Hammond Perry noted

a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ as the cleavage that brought on white nationalism out of white supremacy. This hinges on the abolition of slavery; after which the sense of the erosion of white right – later accelerated by decolonialisation – brought on a reaction aimed at preserving

besieged racial order in which whites were being challenged across the world by blacks demanding the rights to which they had hitherto been denied.

How much of this was a feature of reaction by racists operating specifically in the anglosphere, restricting white nationalism to an outgrowth of the ideologies that justified the expansion of settlers from the British islands, rather than ‘white’ people per se? The chapters detail movements advocating white nationalism in case studies that deal with Australia, the US, England, Northern Ireland, and the Rhodesian colony, which encourages the view that the mindset of the British Empire has been particularly formative in the belief of a global white brotherhood. Whilst we learn a lot about the support extended by racist movements in Australia to Ian Smith’s ultimately defeated attempt to preserve white domination, the US and among the supporters of Enoch Powell in England, apart from a single scant reference, little is learnt about white solidarity with Portugal’s efforts to maintain its rule in its African colonies. Research on this point would be welcome, but one instinctively feels that France’s brutal struggle to maintain its grip on Algeria did not excite any significant supportive moods in Britain or any of the other English-speaking countries.



racial privilege. Evidence of this reactive character, illustrated by the white nationalist strident defence of racist Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa, underscores the book’s core argument. Namely that white nationalism emerged out of the sense of a

Printer ad

Two Hundred Years of Dulwich Radicalism

Mike Davis
on Dulwich
change-makers

Two Hundred Years of Dulwich Radicalism
Duncan Bowie
Community Languages & Socialist History Society £10

Who would have thought that the small south London hamlet of Dulwich would harbour so many radicals and revolutionaries? Certainly not this reviewer, a decades long resident of the roots of rebellion and revolt in London's East End. But here in a 233 page-turner Chartists' reviews editor uncovers the radical riches of his part of London. Some people had loose connections, a few years residence others represented the area, while others were lifelong. It's a rewarding read. Bowie has mined books, archives, local newspapers and other sources to assemble a biographical digest of some of the

most influential figures of the socialist, feminist and modern reform movement.

Helpfully divided into sections with illustrations, we meet early 19th century city radicals George and Harriet Grote, author John Ruskin, Tory socialist Maltman Barry and Louise Michel, anarchist refugee from the Paris Commune. Annie Besant pioneer socialist, secularist, theosophist and champion of the Bryant and May Match Workers strike and Indian nationalism appears alongside other leaders of the pre-Labour socialist and secularist movement.

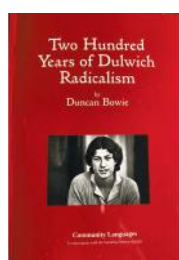
The biographical sketches include Harry Quelch, a leader of the Social Democratic Federation and the British Socialist Party alongside town planning pioneer Ebenezer Howard.

Bowie is ecumenical in his coverage. We meet suffragettes, com-

munist like writer Edward Upward, Marxist historian George Thompson, Jonathan and Freida Knight followed by post-war Labour representatives, the Silkin family—Lewis, Sam and John, George Brown MP (ex-Labour deputy leader) alongside 'local heroes' Transport and General Workers Union leader and Spanish civil war veteran Jack Jones and his wife Evelyn while Tessa Jowell MP is described as a 'people's politician'.

Black radicals like WW2 fighter pilot Sam King and the first black bishop Wilfred Wood are also featured.

Current Labour MP Helen Hayes has written the introduction. Though connected to Dulwich, these many and various figures speak to us about the common struggles, debates and progressive changes that resonated throughout the UK.



Sarah Hughes
on Rwanda
under
Kagame

Murder in Africa

Do Not Disturb
Michela Wrong
Fourth Estate £20

I am not the first to say this is an important book. Firstly, it is the minutely, and compellingly narrated story (almost a 'whodunnit') of the murder in cold blood of a Rwandan man, Patrick Karegeya, in South Africa in 2014. Patrick was Paul Kagame's close ally in the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) elite. He was debonair head of external security, General, and ultimately leader of the dissident group, the Rwanda National Congress. Placing the account of the murder at the centerpiece of her book allows Wrong to draw the reader into a gallery of murders and assassinations that have bloodied Rwanda since the RPF took power after the genocide in 1994. Foremost amongst them is that of Fred Rwigyema, the true national hero and thereby a very early threat to the ambitions of the President of the last 27 years, Paul Kagame.

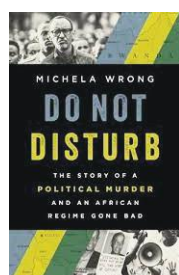
A sly feature of the book is that Kagame remains a shadowy figure throughout. Always there, but never quite in the floodlight. He remains at the apex of the subtle

art of duplicity, rumour-mongering, and deceit which have shored up the narrative he and his overwhelmingly Tutsi regime have created over the last 27 years. Wrong's purpose in *Do Not Disturb* is to present the counter-narrative, that of some of the countless victims (one reviewer counts 10 categories of victim in the book including the majority Hutu population). In her own words, it is personal stories that drive history in Africa, and so she personalizes the countless relationships through which Rwandans, and we all, strive to decipher the truth about this totalitarian state and its leaders. My own relationship with Rwanda began in the early 1980s, along with the other Central African countries, and I have always had an uncomfortable feeling that the truth of what I see and hear on my visits, even my 20 month stay in Goma, DRC, lies just beyond my reach. *Do Not Disturb* has helped put many separate pieces of my mental regional jigsaw together.

Indeed, Wrong also sets out to expose the unquestioning acceptance of the powerful elite's narrative by the majority of journalists (including herself in the early

days), aid agencies, and governments (including the UK). *Do Not Disturb* describes the blind consensus which has fed the world's guilt at the horror of the genocide for nearly three decades. The world's reaction to this new narrative has naturally been polarized. Wrong is well aware of the personal risk she has taken in igniting such controversy.

There is nothing more controversial than the book's climax, the chapter 'The plane and other secrets'. This tackles head on the dominant account that the missile which downed the plane (in which President Habyarimana was returning home) was fired by Hutu extremists. The argument of the book is constructed so securely that the assertion that in fact the RPF was responsible rings true. And the final chapters of the book go on to challenge other well established 'facts' such as the government's statistics on poverty reduction and other economic miracles. In its broadest sense *Do Not Disturb* is an important book because its examination of one small country's totalitarian leader and his militarized fortress, is representative of many other totalitarian leaders and states in the world today.



Anti-nuclear archbishop

Fabian Hamilton on the peace legacy of Desmond Tutu



Fabian Hamilton is Labour MP for Leeds North East & Shadow Minister for Peace and Disarmament, Latin America and the Caribbean

Although he was small in stature, Desmond Mpilo Tutu - who died aged 90 on Boxing Day last year - had a gigantic reputation and a huge presence on the international stage. He was one of the most important, outspoken and thoughtful activists in the historic struggle against apartheid in South Africa and spent ten years from 1986 to 1996 as Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town.

As Chair of the venerable organisation The Elders, he visited Cyprus on a number of occasions in 2008 and 2009, together with other former world leaders, Lakhdar Brahimi, Gro Harlem Brundtland and Jimmy Carter, to see how The Elders could work with both sides of the divided island towards reunification following the failed Annan Plan referendum of 2004. The visits left a deep impression on Tutu who said at the time, after his meetings with then Turkish Cypriot Leader, Mehmet Ali Talat and the late President of the Republic of Cyprus, Dimitris Christofias: "Of course we were hoping that the people of Cyprus would be celebrating reunification by now. I always have to remind myself that these things take a long time. But I remain hopeful." However, he went on to say, perceptively, that the Cyprus problem remained an open wound which has been - and continues to be - exploited for political ends.

Tutu came to the UK in 2011 to show the film he made at the time with four young Cypriot peace activists - two Greek speaking and two Turkish speaking. Titled 'Digging the Past in Search of the Future', it was shown to British politicians and civil society representatives.

Sadly, we are still waiting for the reunification of Cyprus which failed to happen in Tutu's life -



time - but we do all need to remain hopeful. Throughout his life, Desmond Tutu stood for equality and integrity and was a universal representation of morality. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his contribution to ending apartheid in South Africa and he is widely credited with coining the description of a united South Africa after apartheid as "the rainbow nation". But he had strong opinions on so many issues across the world as well as across his own nation, and one of them was on nuclear weapons. As a patron of ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, Tutu lived to see it being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 following ICAN's pivotal role in helping to achieve the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (UNTPNW) which, after more than fifty UN member states ratified it, became an article of international law on 22nd January 2021 in the teeth of vehement opposition from the nuclear armed states including the UK.

In an article in 'The Guardian' in May 2010, Tutu said: "Disarmament is not an option for governments to take up or ignore. It is a moral duty owed by them to their citizens, and to humanity as a whole." In that same article, he went on to say: "Sceptics tell us, and have told us for many years, that we are wasting our time pursuing the

dream of a world without nuclear weapons, as it can never be realised. But more than a few people said the same about ending entrenched racial segregation in South Africa and abolishing slavery in the United States."

In so many ways, Desmond Tutu was able to join together seemingly disparate human issues and connect them under the same set of moral values in a way that few politicians, world leaders and faith representatives have been able - or willing - to do. It's why he will be greatly missed across so many areas of our lives.

One of Tutu's best known achievements is, of course, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission which he chaired. It was an essential milestone in the transition from apartheid to full democracy but Tutu was able to connect the work he did in bringing the 'Rainbow Nation' together with his vision of world peace. If individuals can resolve their seemingly intractable differences through dialogue, trust and co-operation, then surely the conflicts which tear apart nations, and sometimes whole regions, are also capable of non-violent resolution too. Perhaps the best testament to the life of Desmond Tutu would be to test these ideas on an international stage - something which has never been more urgent than it is today. **C**

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