

CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

#320 January/February 2023

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Brown plan

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CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

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

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

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

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FOR DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

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WESTMINSTER VIEW

Cat Smith on why her PR Bill is vital

Just Stop Oil & sunflowers

Caitlin Barr defends direct action for all to enjoy masterpieces

Almost two months on from their infamous tomato soup escapade, Just Stop Oil are gearing up for a 'Solidarity Rally' in London. With speeches from the Barclays 7 (who threw orange paint over Aberdeen's Barclays HQ in November), friends and family of imprisoned Just Stop Oil activists, and representatives from Global Women's Strike, Kill the Bill and Pregnant Mothers in Prison Group, the non-violent climate activism confederation is making it very clear that they intend to carry on with the civil resistance they have come to be known for. They have previously said that, in the face of further crackdowns on public protests, the only thing that will stop them from continuing their activism is a 'death penalty'. Public polls recently showed that 66% of the public support non-violent direct action to protect the environment, even if Keir Starmer backs strong sentencing for those who block roads in the name of the planet.

Since the group's naissance in February, its activists have undertaken action as wide-ranging as oil terminal disruptions, spraying orange paint over buildings, road blockages and even occupying beds in Harrods to protest fuel poverty. However, it is probably their actions related to art that have earned them the most air-



time – whether it was throwing tomato soup over Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers', trying to glue their heads to Vermeer's 'Girl with the Pearl Earring' in the Hague, or sticking a reimagined version of Constable's 'The Hay Wain', complete with factories and a defunct washing machine, over the original.

The group's utilisation of masterpieces to get their message across has brought them acclaim from some and derision from others. Jonathan Jones complained of the 'ridiculously false debate' conjured by the tomato-soup-gate instigators' line of questioning: "What is worth more? Art or life?". Many pundits grumbled that the activists were damaging art that celebrated the natural world and inspired people to look inside themselves. However, I believe that analysis like this fails to grasp the point. In her

speech given at the time of the action, Phoebe Plummer raised what then became the dominant discourse in the coming days – the shock at damaging a painting versus the complacency at the damage to natural life that climate change is already wreaking.

Civil resistance is not supposed to be polite. It is supposed to disrupt. The sentiment that comes around every time a group like Extinction Rebellion or Just Stop Oil blocks a road, or throws some paint or soup, that these people are selfish, foolish and downright nefarious, is the same that we hear each time unions announce strike action: 'why can't they think of me, the average person, who needs to get to a wedding/send a parcel/admire art not obstructed by Heinz?!'. This misses the fundamental point of direct action – it is working for a better world in which workers are paid fairly and peoples' livelihoods, homes, and existences at risk from the catastrophic effects of climate change are protected.

Just Stop Oil is trying to ensure that we have many, many more years of enjoying masterpieces, both on canvas and in our own natural world. In the face of bosses hoarding money and governments refusing to tackle the climate crises, we must ensure that we act in solidarity with those putting their freedom on the line for our collective future.



Caitlin Barr is a recent graduate and activist, Exeter University

Letter

The benefits of social prescribing

Dear Chartist

I read with some alarm your article about social prescribing. I feel I need to correct a few issues raised. It is simply not true that social prescribing is a Tory project or that it has little benefit. I began working with an Artist in Residence in my surgery in 2001. I noticed that when patients were referred to the artist, they would stop seeing me. In general practice, certain patients, often with personality issues or chronic pain, see their doctor almost every week. From their point of view, the NHS does little to help them and they are a massive burden to the NHS. Quite often, medicine inflicts harm on these people by

over investigating and over treating their symptoms.

Social prescribing provides a really excellent way of de-medicalising patients with chronic problems that modern medicine doesn't have the answer to.

The article is written very much in the style of the medical model, where doctors know best and dish out the medicine. Instead in social prescribing, the patient themselves work out new and novel ways of dealing with their symptoms.

By 2010, we had an artist available to every patient in Gloucestershire and were able to show: they saw their GP less (38% reduction in appointments) and

additionally, they used other parts of the health service less so that their overall cost to the health service dropped by 27 per cent.

The Tories have done awful things to our NHS and it is genuinely on the edge of collapsing. However, their promotion of social prescribing is actually one of the few things that have improved the health of patients in the last 12 years.

Health is a very broad and multifactorial process. Doctors often do not understand this. Health needs a much broader reaching set of principles than the medical model. Social prescribing helps us to deliver more holistic care to our patients.

Simon Opher is a GP in Stroud and is Labour's Stroud Labour Prospective Parliamentary Candidate

If you want to help Labour win Stroud contact SimonforStroud@gmail.com

Striking for a better future for all

Enough is enough. That is the message coming from a huge range of striking trade unionists. Of course, strikes hurt. They serve to emphasise the importance of the jobs these workers do. All strikes mean loss of pay for those striking. In public services they also hurt users: be they patients, travellers, parents, pupils or students. They are a last resort when government stops listening, stops engaging and doggedly pursues policies to suppress wages and erode working conditions. This class war government led by a billionaire is determined to make workers' pay for their crisis. They have made it harder to strike, introduced higher ballot thresholds and plan to use the military to break action by border force staff, railway workers and others with more draconian anti-union laws on top of banning 'noisy' protests. Polls show support for the strikers, particularly nurses (their first nationwide strike, excepting Scotland). They have seen their pay eroded over the last decade and work in a high pressure environment with 45,000 nursing vacancies and a similar number of other staff shortages. No wonder nurses leave. The profession is pandemic exhausted and undervalued. This is after 12 years of real terms spending cuts and privatisation. Now people face a further blow with Tory-induced inflation running at almost 12 per cent, doubling energy costs, rising interest rates hitting renters and mortgage payers alike. No wonder homelessness, food bank use and mental illness are mushrooming.

During the pandemic over £200 billion was found for the furlough scheme. The fabled magic money tree could easily fund inflation-proof pay rises for workers by borrowing and taxes on wealth. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates £18b would cover settlements.

The Sunak/Hunt government has launched Austerity Mk 2. Leading experts in public finance calculate 'public services are going to need increases of about 20% just to stand still'. The NHS faces an immediate £7bn hole which the Hunt plans of £2.5bn come nowhere near filling. While benefits and pensions have risen by CPI levels Tory governments have slashed benefits for seven of the last ten years. Local government has endured over 40% cuts in real terms funding as explained by **Tom Miller**. Ignacia Pinto on our website shows clearly that women and children continue to be hit hard by the cost of living crisis. The wealth gap has grown enormously over the past 12 years while bankers' bonus caps are lifted, shareholders receive bonanzas and big energy companies enjoy record profits upon which a timid windfall tax will make little impression.

Schools have faced years of spending squeezes. **Dave Lister** gives two cheers to the Blunkett plan for financial support, improved staffing and ending the curriculum strait-jacket. Gordon Brown presents another plan for constitutional change. Headline grabbing abolition of the Lords and more power to the regions are ideas clearly designed to bolster the United Kingdom as is, but fails the biggest democratic test, namely support for electoral reform. **Don Flynn** explains why PR must be central to any democratic overhaul. **Cat**

Smith MP outlines her Bill to introduce PR for House of Commons elections in the face of Tory intentions to suppress voting rights while **Peter Kenyon** calls on trade unions not to sacrifice Labour conference backed electoral system change for a new deal at work. The two go hand-in-hand.

Labour must come off the fence on trade union action. Backing strike action should be fundamental for a party forged in part by trade unions 120 years ago and whose members helped fund and campaign for a Labour government over generations.

Another nettle Keir Starmer needs to grasp is that of taxation. **Duncan Bowie** advocates a fundamental rethink urging Labour to back progressive taxation, a land value tax, a change in local government funding and other redistributive measures to make Britain less unequal but also to pay for the services we need.

Starmer's Labour must also pull back from its ill-informed campaigns to attack left voices in the party. Labour should be a broad church pluralist party. **Mica Nava** argues this particularly targets Jewish activists and downplays the problem of Islamophobia and other racism.

The Forde report highlighted abuses, particularly from party staff during the Corbyn period. It must not be swept under the carpet.

Planetary degradation continues as our government reneges on its stand at COP26 by approving more oil and coal production. If Labour's green new deal is to mean anything it must involve more active campaigning for renewable energy argues **Dave Toke**. **Caitlin**

Barr urges support for direct action to cease investment in fossil fuels, the main driver of global heating. **Victor Anderson** questions the premise of the need to growth, exemplified by the short-lived Truss regime, calling for different measures for progress and development.

Democratic Socialists can take some cheer from the defeat of the Amazon stripping authoritarian Bolsonaro by Lulu da Silva in Brazil, as reported by **Fabian Hamilton** MP. Elsewhere the picture looks grimmer. In Iran as **Annabelle Sreberny** reports, huge numbers calling for change, triggered by the murder of Mahsa Amini, continue to face brutal repression, with hundreds killed, shootings of women demonstrating and public executions. In Ukraine, the war continues against Putin's aggression. **Christopher Ford** reports on the need for humanitarian and military aid to drive out the Russian imperialists.

In the Middle East, veteran journalist **Tim Llewellyn** uncovers a persistent reporting bias against Palestinians in both the mainstream broadcast and print media.

Brexit, the word neither Tory or Labour leaders seem willing to speak, lies behind much of the cost of living crisis, the Channel refugee crisis, the weakest pandemic recovery of any EU country, the loss of trade and migrant workers. It's time to stand up for workers. To stand up for basic humanitarian principles. For the right to live and work wherever we choose.

It's time to stand up for workers

Massive democratic deficit not answered

Paul Salvesson on Brown's inadequate response to over-centralised UK

Labour's new report *A New Britain: Renewing our Democracy and Rebuilding our Economy* has had a mixed reception. The report was the work of the 'Commission on the UK's Future' chaired by Gordon Brown. The SNP described its proposals for Scotland as 'underwhelming' and I must say that was my reaction to its ideas for England.

It's a weighty piece of work, without a doubt, running to over 150 pages. It recognises that there is a big problem with our centralised United Kingdom: "The UK is at a constitutional moment, and needs change comparable to the important shifts in power in the 19th and 20th centuries that widened the franchise, reformed Parliament or, more recently, introduced devolution. Our economy is faltering. Our democracy has lost the trust of its people, who have repeatedly voted for change. 17.4m people voted for Brexit in 2016 and 1.6m in Scotland voted to leave the UK in 2014. Britain urgently needs a new government."

We can all agree on that and the follow-on which states that "if we are to transform our country, we must change not just who governs us but how we are governed." Yet this is where the report is weak, ducking out of the chance to transform the structures of UK governance and really energise the regions and nations of the UK. That's not to say that there's nothing good about the report – that would be a ridiculous response. Where it is perhaps clearest is on House of Lords reform – proposing to replace it with an elected second chamber – an 'Assembly of the Regions and Nations'. Yet ironically, while the House of Lords is a very easy target, it probably isn't the biggest issue facing constitutional reform. As the report says, for all its lack of democratic credibility, the Lords does have a lot of expertise which is put to good use in scrutinising and challenging Governments of the day.

The report scores several good 'hits', highlighting the problems of over-centralisation: "Brexit has not



delivered the control people were promised. Britain hasn't taken back control – Westminster and Whitehall have. And our over-centralised system has shown itself to be open to abuse – the conventions of our unwritten constitution ignored; conflicts of interest allowed to fester; the use of patronage intensified, and ethical standards – and advisers on ethics – swept aside, ignored by a conservative political class that has tried to act without constraint. Meanwhile, decisions of vital importance to communities – including the allocation of funds under Levelling Up – are made for increasingly naked party political reasons, further undermining trust. All of this makes the case for a radical devolution of power to locally elected and locally accountable representatives best placed to identify the needs and opportunities in their own areas, and to unleash the potential that exists everywhere throughout the country. Our aim must be to put power and resources in the hands of communities, towns, cities, regions and nations, to make their own decisions about what will work best for them."

Yes, absolutely, but the report fails to recognise that the levers at our disposal, particularly in England, are woefully inadequate. The mishmash of poorly-funded

local councils, a mix of unitary and two-tier authorities, with 'combined authorities' in metropolitan areas, is a very poor structure indeed to be given significant new powers. Yet we're told that "across England, we recommend that every town and city is given the powers needed to draw together their own economic and social plan and take more control of their economic future. In particular we believe that by empowering Mayors, Combined Authorities and local government in new economic partnerships, we can create and advance a supportive environment for the dynamic new clusters in the digital, medical, environmental and creative industries in a new pro-growth strategy, and make every part of our country more prosperous."

Really? I don't think so, and the report's authors missed a great opportunity to democratise the combined authorities by in effect creating new regional forms of government that would be directly elected. Instead, we're told that "We cannot turn the clock back to recreate Regional Development Agencies, or still less to impose a system of regional government from the centre on the different parts of England. This gap must be filled by growth from the bottom up."

Yet what we are likely to get is a confusing mixture of mostly unelected local bodies or 'partnerships' with increasing powers given to mayoral combined authorities which have just one person being subject to direct election. There is a massive democratic deficit with the combined authorities which has excited little comment amongst the political classes – either because they are outside of London so of little interest, or there are too many vested interests involved in keeping them as they are, overseen by leaders of the relevant constituent authorities. The report does nothing to address this and overall represents a huge missed opportunity to create a 'New Britain'. There is a model out there already with the directly-elected (by PR) governments in Cardiff, Belfast and Edinburgh. Why not the same for the English regions? **C**



Paul's new collection of short stories set on the railways of the North of England *Last Train from Blackstock Junction* is available from Platform 5 Publishing

On-shore wind u-turn

David Toke says renewables plus storage is the most secure energy strategy

As Britain faces a crisis caused by the country's reliance on extremely high natural gas prices, we desperately need an environmentally sustainable alternative to reliance on such an expensive energy source. Renewable energy and energy efficiency are solutions that can be deployed relatively quickly at low cost. Together with storage, they are also much more secure than nuclear power or fossil fuels. Crucially, they provide an effective path to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The current Government is incompetent in delivering on energy efficiency either in existing or new buildings. The last Labour Government implemented efficiency rapidly in existing buildings. But the Conservatives scrapped Labour's programme and have been unable and unwilling to pick up the ball that was stupidly discarded.

Policy inertia has continued the deployment of the plans set up originally in the latter days of the Labour Government for offshore wind. However, the Tories scrapped most of the onshore wind programme in 2015.

A recently claimed 'u-turn' in policy in allowing more onshore wind in England still leaves onshore windfarms facing large obstacles that did not exist before the Conservatives put them there in 2015. The fact that the Government decided not to impose an effective ban on planning new solar farms in England may only be thanks to the fact that the Government thought it would look bad at the same time as it has given the go-ahead to a new coal mine in Cumbria.

Nuclear power is promoted as a secure alternative to so-called 'intermittent' renewables. Yet wind and solar power are not only predictable but are so cheap that their products can be stored. But nuclear power and fossil fuels like natural gas are not stored, and as we are finding now with natural gas, are not backed up by affordable energy sources. In practice we are having to drastically cut back energy services, heating, to survive the crisis.

Meanwhile in France the year 2022 has seen a deep crisis for its nuclear industry with, at some points, half its reactors closed for different reasons. France makes



Tories back more coal-fired power

Europe's energy problems worse by having to import power from its neighbours, including the UK, when they can least afford to help France's ailing nuclear industry.

An energy system based on renewables will be very secure. That is because we know already we shall have to have effective storage systems to ensure that when there is not enough wind or sun, we still have energy supplies. That does mean having large reserves of stored renewable energy.

We can store renewable energy in the same way that countries like Germany already store large quantities of natural gas. Indeed, one plan is to convert renewable energy into carbon neutral methane. This can be done by using renewable energy to suck carbon dioxide out of the air and add hydrogen produced by electrolysis with renewable energy. The results are combined to produce methane. Carbon neutral methanol can also be produced using a broadly similar process. Methane and methanol can be easily stored.

Producing hydrogen on its own from renewable energy may be cheaper than all of this, but hydrogen is much more costly to store in large quantities compared to methane and methanol. Methane and methanol can also be used to power conventional gas turbines and engines to generate electricity

when we need it -when there is not enough wind or sun over long periods. Of course, the daily fluctuations of renewables can be ironed out by use of batteries, a lot of which are coming into existence anyway in the form of electric car batteries and home batteries which accompany solar pv on rooftops.

The risks involved in a 100 per cent renewable energy systems are known and calculable. They can be managed. But the risks of fossil fuel-based systems, such as oil crises and gas crises, have not been calculated or managed (certainly not by the UK). Likewise, the risks of breakdowns or accidents in fleets of nuclear reactors are known but are not easily calculable.

Yet the UK Government's plan for achieving net zero carbon by 2050 involves continuing consumption of natural gas in large quantities, albeit with the carbon captured and stored. Meanwhile British politicians blame each other for a failure to build nuclear power plant when the problem is not the politicians but the cost and deliverability of nuclear power technology.

There has to be a better way. It is called 100% renewable energy. The campaign group 100percentrenewableuk will soon be producing a model comparing a 100% renewable UK with the Government's plans for energy. You will be able to judge for yourself! **C**

Dr David Toke is Emeritus Reader of Energy Politics at the University of Aberdeen and Director of 100percentrenewableuk Ltd

Working hard to avoid talking about PR

Lords abolition plan cannot marginalise the fundamental democratic change that is electoral reform says **Don Flynn**



The idea that elections are contested, won and lost on the centre ground is one of the foundational myths of Blairite Labourism. It seems impossible to sustain since the late 1970s to 2019 when the evidence shows the electorate willing to go with off centre parties at pivotal moments in the evolution of British capitalism.

The current Labour leadership has had determined tutoring about its options at the hands of remaining believers in the old faith (aka Peter Mandelson) and swallowed it hook, line and sinker. The unenthusiastic response from this wing of the party might well seal the fate of Gordon Brown's Commission on the UK's Future which stunned a few commentators by the apparent radicalism of its proposals when released in December. Wasting political capital on the pursuit of constitution reform is the standard formula for pushing this into the long grass but maybe not so much if it has deflected discussion on change to the voting

system demanded by supporters of proportional representation. So, what has been going on here?

Challenges to Westminster

Brown's report is best understood as an attempt by one of the main victims of the electorate's willingness to break with Westminster conformity to get a grip on what has been going on. His commission sees this rejection of the establishment as being manifested in two key areas: the first being Scotland's apparent willingness to contemplate a future outside the unequal union with England, and the second the disaffection of working-class voters with 'Whitehall' and 'Westminster'.

Three proposals emerge from the Report to get the UK project back on an even keel. The first is decentralisation to reduce inequality across the regions. Brown calls for measures mirroring proposals outlined in the government's white paper published in February 2022, Levelling up the United Kingdom. More powers by metro mayors to intervene

in skills training, grants from central government in line with local authorities, as well as organising progress towards net zero carbon emissions, are now the consensus across the political establishment. Labour's hope is that, whatever the similarity in the political messaging, it will have more credibility than Conservative governments whose policies have increased inequalities over the past thirteen years.

The second set of proposals concern the extension of powers to the Scottish and Welsh governments so they have more influence over international agreements that impact on devolved powers. The reform of the second parliamentary chamber (abolition and reform of the House of Lords) has caught the news media headlines. Its replacement would be charged with protecting the interests of nations and English regions, with the power to block legislation to restrain the predations of government based on a Commons' majority. Brown favours the selection of this chamber by popular election, the rea-

**Don Flynn is
Chartist
managing editor**

son for the excitement in the headlines.

Ethical government

Third, Brown wants to see a change in the ethics of government, a reformed civil service, with powers of department heads more clearly defined and an emphasis on its role in focusing on long term issues which are currently crushed under the weight of policy agendas determined by winning the next general election.

The current concern about the standing of the UK system as a democracy, making government accountable to the will of the people, is largely absent from democracy activists on the centre left of the spectrum. The level of criticism directed against the first past the post (FPTP) ballot system has largely been with the way MPs are elected. Those who want reform are less concerned with moving the furniture around in devolved and regional government or the way the civil service operates, if the place where real political power resides remains unchanged.

Government structure

It is the majorities achieved for parties in general elections which

determine the structure of government across the UK and the Brown commission has nothing to say on how these work to close down nuanced debates about policy options and replace it with the simplistic binaries revolving around one party in power and the other in opposition. FPTP allows parties to 'win' when they have in fact lost crucial arguments, with their opponents gaining well over half the popular vote at all modern elections. Losing the argument doesn't matter. Once the FPTP winner has the prestige and resources that comes with being the occupant of No 10 Downing Street it is gifted all the power it needs to structure political agendas which all the other parts of government – the developed nations and regions, the civil service and even the courts - have to abide by, even if they grumble and obstruct as best they can.

Brown and Starmer leave consideration of PR, although enthusiastically supported by the Labour party and affiliated unions, because it upsets the outcome which has to be retained as the hallmark of UK government, which has been able to ensure that the 'right' sort of people get into positions of power, and

issues they feel need to have priority are not upset by factions which have commitments to more radical forms of balancing power and redistributing wealth.

The commission has already done useful work for those who want to place strict limits on the sort of reforms that might be permissible by agreeing to separate off consideration of PR and instead generating a degree of fuss about an elected second chamber. With a reform so limited – little more than a check on the encroachment of central government on devolved and regional powers – we can be confident that, even it makes the party's manifesto, it will not be acted on by any Labour administration in the near future which has to carefully marshal its political capital during hard times.

Early critics, Lord Mandelson and Baroness Helene Hayman, arguing against any element of election to the second chamber with pleas not to 'waste time' with constitutional issues, will settle the debate well before a Labour government is formed. Unless campaigns like Labour for a New Democracy can assert themselves, the demand for a Commons elected by PR will be pushed firmly back into the shadows. **C**

What you can do to get Brown Plus PR

The report of the Brown Commission shouldn't stand as the last word on constitutional reform. The debate has begun and democracy activists need to follow up on what it has put on the table, and where it needs to go further. Here's our checklist on what needs to be done to make the case for PR and constitutional reform even stronger.

- 1. Read the Brown Commission Report and input into the debate.**
- 2. Ensure that Labour knows your thoughts about how our democratic structures should look at the end of one term of Labour government. The second election is as important as the next.**
- 3. Send your ideas to Labour's National Policy Forum or talk with Shadow Cabinet Ministers, specifically the Commission which oversees Home Affairs, Justice and the Cabinet Office, Safe and Secure Communities.**
- 4. Talk in your trade unions to ensure they are reassured they can have influence under any PR voting system likely to be chosen.**
- 5. Contact your regional National Policy Forum representatives.**
- 6. Contact any National Executive people you know or can influence.**
- 7. Contact MPs and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates you know or are campaigning with and for.**
- 8. Ensure anyone influencing the Clause V process of creating the Labour Manifesto knows your views.**
- 9. Make Labour's Democracy Offer something that the Green and Liberal Democrat supporters in marginal Tory marginals cannot resist.**
- 10. Ensure that Chartism helps this process by covering, airing and strengthening the issues our democracy needs and makes the links between them.**

Onwards to a Tory-free future

Peter Kenyon says unions need to recognise the benefits of electoral reform go hand in hand with a New Deal for Working People

Idle hopes of banishing the Conservative Party to the dustbin of history suffered a tragic setback with the publication of the much-heralded Brown Commission report on constitutional reform in early December.

There was no reference to electoral reform. This poses a challenge for democratic socialists. The Labour Party 2022 Annual Conference voted overwhelmingly to end the current first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system for the Westminster Parliament in favour of proportional representation (PR). Does that guarantee electoral reform will be in Labour's next General Election manifesto? No. That can't be right, surely? Well, at the Chartist AGM in mid-December, an experienced member of the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) opined that the unions, who had backed PR at Conference, were quite capable of trading it away for better working conditions for their members. This salutary warning demands some constructive thinking. How can support for PR ahead of manifesto horse-trading be consolidated?

Labour leader, Keir Starmer's strategic thinking about the next election, which will inevitably be fought under FPTP, seems to depend on the Tories losing heavily in red walls and blue wall seats, and Labour recovering some seats in Scotland from the Scottish National Party – check out the Brown Report and recent opinion polls.

Next year will be the 100th anniversary of the first Labour-led government. Since 1924 Labour has been in power for less than 28 years in total. Visions of a promised land have generally been followed by a Tory government intent on destruction of hard-earned economic, cultural, and social gains. The exception was a period of 'Butlskillism' in the 1950s when it was genuinely difficult to distinguish between Tory policy shaped by Rab Butler and newly-elected Labour Party leader Hugh Gaitskill. The last 12 years of Tory-led governments



Labour conference vote for PR

have been most damaging to the lives of the vast majority of people, in terms of falling real incomes, cost of housing, standards of education, access to NHS services, availability and cost of public transport, and rising poverty.

A Tory-free future ought to be a key goal for everyone on the centre-left. FPTP might produce a Labour majority government at the next General Election, then it might not. Even if it did deliver a governing majority, there would be no guarantee that the Tories wouldn't breed another charismatic, persuasive leader in the Johnson-mould to "Do Britain in, again" by the time of the General Election after next.

Today's working-class leaders in the trade unions are rightly pre-occupied by the Tories ongoing determination to force yet more austerity on their members, and those working people still do appreciate the potential value of organising. When the current round of disputes is settled, as they will be before too long in the wake of surprising dogged public support, those working class leaders might quietly reflect of whether political energy would be better spent plotting a Tory-free future rather than severing links with Labour.

Propelling PR from the periphery of current political thinking to the centre is a big-ask. But reforming the electoral system and lowering the voting age to 16/17 year-olds would help ensure a progressive majority in the Westminster Parliament in perpetuity. To secure that prize, leaders of Labour's affiliated trade unions just need to link their 'New Deal for Working People' to ditching FPTP in time for the General Election after next. That is vital to ensure the commitments to be legislated for within 100 days of taking office, aren't repealed in short measure after Labour loses the General Election after next if it ignores electoral reform.

Labour Unions (the affiliated Trade union body) is circulating a model resolution for Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs). <https://labourunions.org.uk/motion/>

Just like the Brown Commission Report there is no mention of electoral reform. Given that over half Labour's CLPs voted through resolutions to support electoral reform, an amendment to make the link to protect the New Deal for Working People from a future Tory government with electoral reform would surely be in order. **C**

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Good in parts

David Lister finds Blunkett lays some key planks for Labour education policy

It has been a huge concern that Labour has failed to outline clear policies in many areas. We should therefore welcome Keir Starmer's decision to ask David Blunkett to establish a task group on "learning and skills for economic recovery, social cohesion and a more equal Britain". This was called the Council of Skills Advisers and they have now produced a report for presentation to Labour's National Policy Forum, with a view to its recommendations forming the basis of the education section of Labour's next election manifesto.

On reading this report I have been surprised by how good some parts of the section on schools are, reflecting points that I have been making in Chartist for years and which have been largely ignored by Labour's education spokespeople up to now. These include.

- A recognition that a broader-based curriculum is required with a greater emphasis on arts, humanities and technical subjects. The report states that "the Conservative curriculum reforms have substantially narrowed what and how pupils learn. The national curriculum is now highly prescriptive and supports a traditional form of education..." These are important points.
- A review of Ofsted is required. There is reference to a survey showing that a majority of teachers questioned had no confidence in Ofsted.
- The reintroduction of SureStart.
- The reintroduction of Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs).
- What appears to be a call for a return to a coursework component as part of the assessment process for GCSE examinations.
- Greater support for the FE (Further Education) sector.

It should be noted that schooling is only covered in a relatively short part of the report, which focuses mainly on issues around skills, including digital skills, apprenticeship and the workforce generally. The point is made that, given the 1.3 million job vacancies that there



were in August 2022, restoring growth cannot be achieved without "the availability of a skilled workforce with the adaptability and creativity to embrace technical change and innovative working practices". Therefore, an incoming Labour government must plan for "the impact of the fourth Industrial Revolution", the transition to net zero and "the rapidly changing profile of the workforce". Interestingly the important point is also made that market forces left to themselves "inevitably revert to short-term solutions for short-term gains".

I recently attended a meeting of the West London branch of the Socialist Education Association (SEA) where a number of valid criticisms of the report were made:

- There is no clear explanation of what is meant by 'skills'.
- There is no mention of the role of Local Authorities (LAs).
- The SEA, as the Labour Party's official education group, should have been invited to be involved in this process.
- A number of the proposals in the report are already Labour Party policy. However, the counter point was then made that this is no guarantee that they will find their way into the next manifesto.

I referred to the lack of discussion of SATs tests in the brief section on assessment. The problem with national testing at primary age is that it distorts the curriculum, with the risk of encouraging

'teaching to the test'. Michel Rosen, in the course of delivering a memorial lecture for Caroline Benn, ridiculed the way in which grammar is tested in the SATs, which involves children having to learn all sorts of information that most adults are unaware of, such as the use of the subjunctive in English.

Labour needs a clear policy of opposing any further academisation and this is glaringly missing from the report. If the Schools Bill is reintroduced by our latest government, it may well still include a requirement for all schools to have either joined or be in the process of joining a multi-academy trust (MAT) by 2030. The lie that academisation frees schools needs to be exposed. Schools have more autonomy in the ambit of an LA than they do in most highly centrally controlled MATs. Whilst a few schools may have improved following their conversion to academy status, there is no evidence generally that academisation leads to school improvement. In fact the evidence suggests that the reverse is truer. Therefore Labour should go into the next election promising to halt any further creation of academies and free schools and at the very least allowing schools that wish to de-academise – in particular those schools forced down the academies route and failing academies – to do so.

A strong positive stance on education can only help Labour in its quest to form a majority government whenever the time comes. **C**

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

Money in, money out: saving local government

Tom Miller on the realities of 12 years of Tory cuts for local services

As I write this piece, I find myself in the unfortunate position of half of the organisation I work with having disappeared. I speak of Brent Council, in North West London, where we now face our 12th successive year of budget cuts. With all-out elections across the London boroughs, each Council is moving into a round of budget making with a new administration. Boroughs in the capital face a funding gap of £400m this year and £700m next year.

Tory-run Croydon has been forced into declaring a second effective insolvency after years of running the Council. In November, two other Tory administrations, Kent and Hampshire, wrote to Rishi Sunak to warn that they were headed in the same direction. This follows the well documented previous case of Northamptonshire, which was run by... well, take a guess.

As someone representing an area with high deprivation, which has been the target of hugely disproportionate cuts, it does amaze me that Conservative councillors are unable to stop semi-rural authorities in affluent areas from collapsing under the weight of their own policies in Westminster.

Perhaps they drank their own Kool Aid in the early years of austerity and refused to believe that it was happening or that it was meaningful. Perhaps they lack any sense of priorities. Perhaps, as advocates of so called 'small government', they have failed to emphasise any of the measures that would help them raise extra income. Maybe, as people who think that the market works best, they are being beaten up by the intolerable profit margins and inefficiencies that come with outsourcing everything.

In 2015 the Irish Labour politician Ruairi Quinn told his TDs (members of parliament) that "The great thing about socialists and social democrats, because we don't believe in capitalism, we know how to f*cking manage it."

The man had a point. Labour councillors are used to seeing this play out locally, where Tory councillors struggle to tell the difference



between revenue and capital, and will fund free parking and pothole repairs with reserves that can only be spent once and are meant for emergencies. But in recent months we have also seen the disastrous effects of a capitalist political party with no understanding of capitalism play out on the national stage.

If the Conservative Party is the party of British business, it is amazing that the whole country hasn't folded. Yet.

Recent Local Government Association analysis shows that the combination of inflation, National Living Wage increases and increased demand will lead to a funding gap of £3.4 billion in 2023/24, rising to £4.5 billion in 2024/25.

So what should Labour do? Firstly, it must move to fix the instability in our funding formula, which does a lot to prevent us from mitigating cuts. If you can only budget for a year, it is difficult to shape new services, identify new costs or opportunities, and attract and train the right people to make it happen. As a starting point, a multi-year funding formula must be a priority.

We also find ourselves continuously raising Council Tax up to the limit allowed without expensive and risky referendum campaigns, having already being elected on a mandate to protect local services.

The Local Government Chronicle estimates that Council Tax would

have to rise by 20% in order to cover the present gap between funding and service need. It should be obvious to everyone that this is totally unsustainable, and that the direct result of years of austerity is simply that people do not have their needs met.

We can't raise the money we need, but the tax we raise locally will hit low earners because it is regressive. Given the cost of living crisis, we are nearing the limit of public tolerance for eternal rises, but the present alternative is the collapse of social care and basic services like bin collection.

Labour must reform local taxation and make sure that more deprived areas get their fair share from central government, pairing this with a strategy for private sector growth and an infrastructure plan.

The recent localisation announcement from Keir Starmer and Gordon Brown has been encouraging, but without full protection for local funding, the consequences will be extremely serious for anyone who uses their local services. We need to be honest about cuts and where they come from. Labour members and councillors are also duty bound to push the central party on its commitments and ensure they become a reality in government. Our choice is between genuine radicalism and systematic collapse. **C**

Tom Miller is a Brent Labour councillor and member of Open Labour & Chartist EB

The Truss experiment and the highway to hell

Victor Anderson says we need to think again about growth following the disastrous Truss experiment

Liz Truss lasted only seven weeks as Prime Minister. Such a short period can be easily forgotten, and in fact the Tory Party and its newspapers want you to forget it. The Mail's front page headline, 'At Last! A True Tory Budget' has now disappeared into what George Orwell called a "memory hole".

However, this short period is worth examining, particularly for what it can tell us about the politics of economic growth and the economics of "the free market". The problems of the short Liz Truss "era" start from the claim that growth and the free market necessarily go together, along with deregulation and low taxation.

The principal ideological basis for the Truss administration was belief in the market. However right away there was a paradox: the market gave its verdict. The pound fell, shares fell, interest rates demanded by people lending to the UK Government rose, mortgage rates rose, pension fund values fell. If you were ideologically committed to the wisdom of the market, surely you would have concluded that something was wrong with your policies?

A second fundamental problem comes from the conflicting claims that the market gives people what they want, and also that it produces economic growth. However people, in the roles of both consumer and worker, are constantly weighing up the value to them of more work and pay (which count towards Gross Domestic Product and its growth) and the value of time to do other things, such as leisure and family life. In an ideal market, each person would strike the balance at the right point for them. Crucially, they wouldn't all strike it at maximum work and maximum contribution to GDP, with minimum rest, leisure, and domestic life. Going all out for economic growth is not respecting the actual preferences of people in the market, which are revealed

both in what people actually do and through responses given in surveys.

Increasingly, advocates of market economics are being highly selective about which market signals they pay attention to and which they ignore. For example, market theory implies that we should all have ownership rights in the atmosphere and anyone who pollutes it or causes carbon emissions should be paying us all compensation. But that is nowhere near the agenda of the market think-tanks, which tend these days to be funded by oil companies seeking to continue to use the atmosphere for free, and also by tobacco companies. The prime UK free market think-tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), has published work on the important concept of "regulatory capture", whereby regulators get taken over or unduly influenced by the companies they are supposed to be regulating, which perhaps provides some explanation of the pathetic records of Ofgem and Ofwat. However, what we see now additionally is "deregulatory capture", whereby the lobbyists such as the IEA arguing selectively against regulations have been taken over and funded by corporations with vested interests in seeing those regulations abandoned.

If you really did want a programme to boost economic growth, you would go about it in almost the opposite way to the Truss administration and its ill-fated budget. Rather than lowering taxes, you would put taxes up, to pay for major real terms increases in spending on health and education. Hundreds of thousands of people are said to have "gone missing" from the labour force because of ill health, mostly caused either directly by Covid or by the long hospital waiting lists resulting from it. According to the Office for National Statistics, three times as many people are out of the labour market due to long-term sickness now compared to at the start of the pandemic.

The most obvious way to increase the labour force is to fix those people's health. Similarly, the economy is dependent on people being educated, not only at the start of their lives, but right through, as circumstances and technologies change. Yet adult education has been drastically cut back, with 38% less (in real terms) spent on adult education and apprenticeships from 2010-11 to 2020-21. [2] There would also be government investment in protecting transport and other infrastructure from the effects of climate change, as in President Biden's recent budget measures, and in research and development for future-oriented green technologies, as advocated by Rachel Reeves in her speech at Labour Party Conference, as well as a policy of rejoining the EU Single Market. All of this is miles away from the Truss agenda, but it's a far more realistic one for achieving the aim of boosting and maintaining economic growth.

Liz Truss told the Conservative Party Conference that her priority is "growth, growth, growth", and that was very soon after Keir Starmer had already told the Labour Conference that the top priorities for his government will be "growth, growth, and growth". However, this turns out to be neither the priority of the British people nor what the planet most needs.

A recent survey in 'The Economist' asked about people's attitudes to economic growth. More agreed than disagreed with the statement that the UK should "protect the environment, even if it harms economic growth", and the statement "politicians focus too much on growth over other issues". People appear to on balance like economic growth but are not prepared to sacrifice much in order to achieve it. Many find it a politician's abstraction that means nothing to them.

People's preferences therefore tell a different story from the "official" bipartisan prioritisation of growth. This chimes with

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increasing worries amongst natural scientists, especially those concerned with “the environment”, i.e. the conditions for human life to exist and flourish on this planet. The debate about growth (and recently “degrowth”) continues to rumble on.

Two things about that debate are striking. One is how little impact decades of raising serious problems about growth has made on mainstream politicians’, economists’, and media discussion about the Truss/Kwarteng budget. It is as though two parallel societies are engaged in these issues: one debate is conducted by those presented as our “leaders”, fixated on economic growth, and a completely separate one conducted by ecologists, climatologists, systems modellers and environmental protesters.

The other striking feature of the argument about growth is how polarised and unresolved it remains, despite it being pretty clear that GDP is a poor measure of both economic welfare and also environmental impact. GDP has its uses as a measure of the money circulating in the economy, but its growth can take an economy in many different directions, including both catastrophe and prosperity, depending on which components and sectors of the economy are actually growing and which are shrinking.

However, despite that general abstract fact about the GDP statistics, it has to be admitted that the current version of growth is, in the words of the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the recent Climate CoP27, “a highway to hell with

our foot still on the accelerator.”

Fundamentally, the mainstream political debate has ignored the past 50 years of warnings from scientists and associated recommendations from policy wonks. At this late stage we can’t keep telling the story that it is “five minutes to midnight” and we can avoid disaster if only we adopt the right policies. There is a price to be paid, already starting to be paid, for ignoring those warnings and policy proposals. Because of the time lags involved, climate disaster is already “baked in”. We are now at “five minutes past midnight”, and the task is to prevent things from getting worse than they would otherwise be. And that work will take us a long way from the ideology of the Truss experiment. **C**

Taxation need not be a vote loser for Labour

Duncan Bowie on why Labour needs to come clean on wealth redistribution through a range of progressive taxes

Whenever Labour politicians make a commitment that a Labour government will increase spending on a specific service, it is understandable that they face the question of how this will be paid for. Labour both wants to be seen as a party of fiscal rectitude, in contrast with experience of Conservative governments, especially during the brief Truss/Kwarteng regime, but nevertheless is aware that any mention of increased taxes scares the electorate. No party wins elections (or not so far) by promising more tax, and the Labour leadership has made recent attacks on the Tories as the party of high taxation.

The party advisers have been considering a range of tax reform options for some time, but are unlikely to reveal their thinking in the coming months and are unlikely to be specific in their manifesto for the general election, whenever that may come. With the Conservatives adopting a windfall tax on electricity and gas suppliers, Labour has suggested that their main solution to any budget deficit, or need for increased spending, would be met through windfall taxes, but without

specifying who the tax would be applied to and how it would be calculated.

This is not good enough. Tax is not just necessary to fund the welfare state (as well as defence and security) but is critical to achieving a more egalitarian distribution of wealth and income, which has traditionally been a core socialist objective. Even those members of the Labour Party who may not be too enthusiastic about having more of their wealth and income redistributed to those less well off than themselves, nevertheless recognise the need for government funding for key services, such as the NHS, the police and other emergency services. Moreover, this is not just about central government but about key services provided by local authorities and other public or semi-public services, such as rail and bus transport. With decades of under investment and successive privatisations, local government and ‘public’ services more generally in financial crisis, even though in many of the privatised services it is the directors of the private companies running services on which the public as a whole depend that are still doing very well.

In recent years, proponents of what is called ‘new monetary theory’ argue that not only the balance of payments deficit is not that important, but that a government needing to increase expenditure can always print more money, pointing to the experience of ‘quantitative easing’ in the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. The argument is valid to a limited extent, so long as this approach is not taken to the point where investors and the financial markets as a whole don’t lose confidence in the ability of the Government to manage the process. The experience of the Truss/Kwarteng regime has however demonstrated the consequences of fiscal mismanagement and committing a government to unfunded expenditure. This is why Labour demonstrating fiscal rectitude is even more important than it was six months ago.

However, fiscal rectitude does not mean Labour should leave the current system of taxation untouched. Moreover, two more years of Conservative government will lead to further cuts in basic services, so Labour on coming to power will need to take urgent corrective action, and this requires increased

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revenue income. A significant Increase in borrowing to cover revenue deficits is not an option.

Firstly, the relationship between taxes on earned income and taxes on interest from investment, savings and other forms of untaxed income needs to be rebalanced, which means higher rates for the latter. Secondly, we need a more progressive income tax system, with higher rates for the highest earners. Thirdly, we need increases in the rates of corporation taxes for the largest and most profitable corporations, while taking into account the need for reinvestment.

Local taxes require reform. As set out in the useful reports from Fairer Shares, we need a much more progressive property tax system to provide additional funding for local government and a fairer distribution of the burdens of funding local services. This means a council tax system which relates to property value, with much higher levels of taxation on the most valuable properties. There is also a case for relating tax to levels of occupation, with much higher taxation on empty and second homes, but also with higher taxation on properties which are significantly under-occupied.

Clearly where household income is insufficient to fund a higher tax (for example, where a pensioner dependent on state pension or other limited income owns a valuable property) payment can be deferred until death or disposal of the property. Such an approach also incentivises downsizing and more effective occupation of both existing and new housing stock. Local authorities should have greater flexibility to set their own council tax rates, with the current central government cap removed. Councils are after all subject to democratic accountability and administrations will be voted out if they get the balance between service delivery and revenue raising wrong. Councils should have the power to raise other local taxes – for example cities and other areas with significant tourists, should be able to raise a bed tax on tourists, including occupiers on Airbnb, as do many other cities in Europe and elsewhere, which will provide significant revenue to fund services they use, but which only existing taxpayers pay for.

The current system of housing taxation both inflates house prices and fails to stabilise the housing market. It also taxes people buying their first home, while not taxing the capital gain made by most homeowners when they sell, so stamp duty should be abolished and



Rachel Reeves, Shadow Chancellor—needs to be brave and radical on tax

replaced by a system of taxing the capital gain made by households on disposal. This is a capital gain which is often made by the children of owners rather than by the owners themselves. The inheritance of property, combined with the operation of the 'bank of Mum and Dad' is now a major factor in the growth of inequality in the country. So, as well as housing taxes being reformed, we need to reform inheritance tax, whether it is the inheritance of property or other assets, through the introduction of a life-

Truss/Kwarteng regime has demonstrated the consequences of fiscal mismanagement

time gifts tax. These reforms would probably be more effective in terms of wealth distribution than a more generalised one-off or annual wealth tax, as such a system would lead to a significant reduction in wealth inequality over the longer term.

Land value taxation is often put forward as a solution to inequalities in wealth and income, but the

world is very different from the time the proposition was put forward by Henry George. The most effective way of using undeveloped land which is suitable for development (and this excludes agricultural land and land which genuinely meets environmental protection objectives) is for the land to be taken into public ownership, rather than leaving the land in private ownership and then taxing the landowner and/or developer. All this does is disincentivise appropriate development and increase the cost of development and therefore the price of the market housing built on a site. The best approach to delivering new affordable housing is for the local authority or other public body to have the power to designate the land for a specific use (such as socially rented housing) which depresses the land value. Additionally, where the landowner refuses to make the land available for development, the local authority should have the power to acquire the land at its existing use value, so any capital gain is accrued by the public sector not by landowner or private developer.

Some of these proposed tax changes would actually be popular, at least with lower and middle income households, who would all benefit. We need a comprehensive and coherent approach we can explain to the electorate. Taxation is necessary, but does not have to be a vote loser. **C**

Iran: Is this another revolution?

Annabelle Sreberny on how the murder of Mahsa Amini lit the tinder box of women's anger and wider social unrest



One month after the success of the 1979 Iranian revolution that had over turned the monarchical system, women found themselves on the streets again for International Women's Day but shouting "At the dawn of freedom, women's place lies empty". The revolution of February 1979 was a popular anti-imperialist pro-democracy mobilization that became increasingly Islamic and culminated in the Islamic Republic. It has been the focus of 43 years of political activities designed to mitigate its worst elements, to reform it and currently, in the longest sustained public mobilization, to remove it.

The struggle for women's rights was part of both Iranian revolutions of the twentieth century, the Constitutional revolution in 1906 and the 1979 revolution, with the covering and uncovering of women part of a wider politics. As part of his modernization programme in the 1930s, Reza Pahlavi forcibly unveiled women. Under the last Shah, women had gained various social rights but these were rapidly abrogated in 1979, as mandatory hijab, religious covering for women, was imposed and the media censored.

The Islamic Republic is a patriarchal, theocratic structure where old men rule under the notion of velay-

at-faghih, the supreme jurist. Women do not enjoy equal citizenship with men nor adequate social protections, denied the guardianship of their children and rights to divorce, travel, and equality under the law. Women can vote, unlike some countries in the region, but one would have to say that while the regime tries to maintain its popular revolutionary mandate through elections, these are increasingly performative. There are no independent political parties and the Guardian Council vets political candidates. No woman has been allowed even to run for president. Bani-Etemad's film *Our Times*, 2002, brilliantly explores this.

Women have actively fought for their rights as well as being involved in more general political matters. There have been various attempts to build a women's press but journalists and editors such as Shahla Shakeri have been imprisoned. Bloggers raised many issues, especially issues around sexuality and private life, as have women film-makers such as Milani and Makhmalbaf. When women lawyers tried to defend women who were arrested, they themselves ended up in trouble; viz, Shirin Ebadi, Nasrin Sotoudeh, Mehrangiz Kar. Sadly, there is a special women's political wing of the notorious Evin Prison. Its inmates have just spoken out in support of the current mobilization.

The hardline president, Raisi, enjoying a very weak mandate after a highly contested election in 2020, recently produced a 119-page document about 'Hijab and Chastity' which not only continues to mandate hijab but also intends to limit contraception and abortion, essentially returning women to private, family life and reproduction in order to increase the population to 150 million as Ayatollah Khamenei wants.

This goes against the grain of the slow social revolution in mores and attitudes against hardline Shiite ideology that has been unfolding. The regime's problem is that more women have joined the workforce, as two wages/salaries are needed for many families, and who are now experiencing high inflation and economic difficulties. Over 60% of university students are women, many in STEM subjects, but they cannot find appropriate work. 22% of women graduates are unemployed. The Islamic Republic is increasingly known for its misogyny and gender apartheid.

The spark of Mahsa (Jhina) Amini's death on September 16th fell on the dry tinder of women's anger and frustration, triggering the current mobilization under the slogan of "woman, life, freedom". But it also fell on popular concern with the other economic, environmental and political crises that



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Iranians are facing.

There is immense impoverishment caused by externally-imposed sanctions but also by economic mismanagement and corruption. The economy has not grown in the last decade and remains centred on oil and gas production, 82% of Iran's exports. This produces a very particular and skewed class formation. A small coterie mainly connected to the Revolutionary Guards, the IRGC, have become hugely rich. The most Porsches in the world were imported to Iran recently and their rich children live in Los Angeles and elsewhere. The cost of basic foods has skyrocketed and inflation is running at over 50%. There were strikes in the years 2017 to 2019 around economic issues, with protestors angry at the removal of food subsidies and a threefold rise in petrol prices. The slogan "down to Khamenei", the supreme leader, emerged. These protests were brutally crushed with 1500 known deaths in 2019. No protest lasted longer than one week.

There is terrible environmental decay. Lake Urmieh has dried out and the noble Zayanderood river that ran under the magnificent bridges of Isfahan is but a trickle while the bridges themselves are cracking. Air pollution keeps city schools closed while dust storms have affected farming.

Minorities have always had to fight for their cultural and political rights and there has been terrible brutality recently in both Baluchistan and Kurdistan, the regime playing on irredentist fears.

Youth - 60% of Iran's population are under 30 - see no future for themselves. The Islamic Republic, despite its ideological desire, is not totalitarian like North Korea but a culturally-leaky environment. There has been a massive brain drain, with over four million Iranians in a worldwide diaspora that tells Iranians at home what life is like elsewhere. One might even suggest that Covid lock-down set young people internet-surfing, to see and inform themselves about elsewhere. The regime tries to control the internet by slowing it or periodically shutting parts down but that hurts business and their own activities and has not stopped a very digitally-savvy population who use TOR and VPNs to get around regime limitations.

A wonderful song called Baraye, "For", which rapidly became the anthem of this movement, notes the range of crises facing Iranians.

Since September 22nd, all the different oppositional elements have come together in an intersec-

tional uprising. It is geographically widespread across the country. It is driven by women and the young but their parents are there too. It includes ethnic and religious minorities. It includes university students and school children, striking steel workers and truckdrivers, ordinary men and women. Unity is a central rallying cry. There is (as yet) no obvious leadership nor clear set of demands, other than an emergent "down with the Islamic Republic".

As of mid December around 450 people had been killed since September including 60 children. Around 18,000 people have been arrested including musicians and rappers; environmental activists; actors; film-makers; journalists. The two women who broke the story about Amini's death are in peril. Thirty six protesters have been charged with capital crimes, two of whom have been publicly executed without due process. Many people have been blinded in one or both eyes by the security forces and many have been shot with a particularly cruel kind of pellet that explodes on contact, leaving a body riddled with fragments. Women's faces and genitals have been targeted. There have already been two hangings and more are likely, which happen without trial, without evidence, without legal representation. Women and girls have been expelled from universities and schools while others have been fired from workplaces. There is no right of assembly, of protest, of peaceful gathering and the regime is using extreme force against its people.

The UN Human Rights Council has established a fact-finding mission about human rights violations. On December 14, the members of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) voted to turf the Islamic Republic off the UN Commission on the Status of Women, a small victory. Iran has never signed the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women, CEDAW, and did not warrant a seat on the committee.

Emerging demands from inside Iran and from its human rights activists in the diaspora ask that the international community respects the Iranian people's right of self-determination and not to continue to engage with a regime that not only does not recognise its people but kills them for voicing their dissatisfaction. The regime continually says that the "rioters" are working for and with foreign powers (the US, Germany, the "zionist regime") yet this is clearly a home-grown move-

ment.

People are calling for the cessation of all negotiations with the Islamic Republic, including negotiations on the nuclear programme (the JCPOA) and the expulsion of its ambassadors and other representatives serving within embassies or international organizations.

The EU, Canada, the US have already sanctioned select individuals and entities. But this is somewhat toothless as Iran doesn't really have a large cohort of Putin-style oligarchs travelling the world, so travel bans is a weak tool. The international community could list and sanction more entities, including the SETAD, Mostazafan Foundation and others. It could trace the outward flows of money, particularly of those assets connected to perpetrators of human rights abuses. Any sanctions need to be smart, not the blanket ones that hurt ordinary people. Perhaps most importantly, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) should be designated a human rights abuser and a terrorist organisation.

There has been a huge groundswell of global symbolic acts of solidarity, especially of women and men cutting their hair, helped by a well-connected and effective diaspora. The aim is to maintain the visibility of what is happening, using social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook to carry information from inside Iran to the wider world and to resonate back inside the country that the world is paying attention. Mainstream media which are not allowed into Iran to report directly can pick up material from the scores of citizen journalists who are reporting on events.

This is now the third month of massive public protest. There have just been three days of general strikes. The bazaar closed yet it is unclear just how far it will support this mobilization. There is little sign of action abating, despite the regime's repression. Indeed, one popular slogan is "Kill one of us and a thousand more will appear". It remains leaderless, eschewing old reformists, exiled intellectuals and external models of change. It embodies Havel's sudden "power of the powerless" in refusing the religious "normalization". It appears to be a fascinating example of Gramsci's "organic intellectuals" coming to the fore. And there are, slowly, a few voices from within the power structure suggesting that violence is no answer and that Iran's youth has to be heard. Iranians are demanding that this be called a "revolution". This is not over. **G**

Labour must help Ukraine win the war

Ukraine—frontline of the fight against the new authoritarians argues **Christopher Ford**

We will soon be approaching one year since Russia launched the genocidal all-out invasion of Ukraine on 24 February. This new year provides us with a vantage point to consider what has happened and our approach in the period ahead. It is one in which Labour must do all in its power to help Ukraine to win both on the military and the social front of the war.

In the last year we have witnessed Ukrainians mount a courageous resistance against a nuclear superpower with greater numbers, weapons and resources. Against the odds, and Washington's advice to evacuate the government, the populace rallied to bolster a resistance which successfully defended their capital Kyiv and second city Kharkiv. Strengthened by thousands of volunteers and making the most of the aid provided, the armed forces liberated the Kharkiv region and Kherson. They have provided for history yet another example that a people empowered by the idea of freedom can defeat the strongest armies of the world.

Overall, 1,888 settlements have been liberated, but this is not yet victory, Russia still occupies almost as many villages and towns. Ukrainians know the price of occupation, the thriving city of Mariupol destroyed with 25,000 killed, areas liberated only revealing mass graves and horrific war crimes by Russian forces. Conscious of this reality Ukrainians are determined to free their entire country and continue their struggle.

Yet despite defeating Russian strategic objectives at each turn and with barrages of missiles targeting the energy grid to maximise civilian suffering, the idea of Ukraine winning has been brought into question by a wide spectrum of opinion, from U.S military and political officials to the siren calls of sectarian socialism, stating it is time for negotiations and even trading land for peace.

Advocating the victory of Ukraine follows from the appreciation of two components of the current war.

The first is that Ukraine is an historically oppressed nation whose struggle is as legitimate as those

colonies who struggled against Empires in the 20th century. Subjugated by Russian Tsarism for more than two and a half centuries, Ukraine was the object of economic exploitation, national oppression, and a colony for Russifying policies by the ruling classes of the Russian Empire. But for brief periods this continued in new forms in the USSR, with millions of Ukrainians losing their lives at the hands of the Kremlin and rival powers.

That this history is not fully appreciated in the labour movement can be partly explained not only by Stalinism but notably a relentless campaign of Kremlin disinformation, particularly since Euromaidan in 2014. Ideas which first arose in the Tsarist era and have been adhered to by Russia's rulers have filtered into sections of our movement, aided by such vehicles as Russia Today and the Morning Star.

Essentially that Ukraine is historically part of a unitary Russia and that the idea of a separate Ukrainian nation is manufactured by foreign powers to weaken Russia.

To strengthen solidarity there needs to be a campaign to raise awareness of the true history of Ukraine. But not to justify support for the resistance on the basis of past crimes but that the current invasion is a continuation of that oppression, to reimpose neo-colonial domination.

The majority of our movement support Ukraine and challenging the efforts of the sectarians and parts of the union hierarchy is important. Sustaining this popular support should be of concern to Labour and points to the second reason to help Ukraine win.

Russia's war on Ukraine is an expression of a broader attack on democracy that is occurring throughout the world.

Analysis of the present situation must take into consideration the fact we are already living in a new historical period. We see a spiral of inter-state competition, state racism, degrading of international institutions, creeping authoritarianism. These features of this ever-dehumanizing society are amongst the character traits of this new phase. China's dictator Xi Jinping summed up when he said 'democracies cannot be sustained in the 21st

century, autocracies will run the world.'

If Putin wins it will strengthen reactionary forces globally, analogous to the fall of the Spanish Republic. But the success of the authoritarians is no more inevitable today than in the 1930s. The war in Ukraine is a frontline of the fight against the new authoritarians.

How then can Labour help Ukraine win? Labour needs to break from a non-partisan approach. Bevan's criticism of Tory hypocrisy in 1943 is as relevant to their attitude to Putin: 'There are many Members in the House who have no complaint against Fascism, except when it is strong enough to threaten them'. They need to be subjected to far more scrutiny over aid to Ukraine and reconstruction policies. The fact that in 2022 the MOD sold off 1,105 vehicles, including combat vehicles and ambulances rather than dispatch them to Ukraine is shameful.

Information Ukraine Solidarity Campaign obtained through Parliamentary disclosure confirms that arising from defence reviews significant new aid could be provided to Ukraine in 2023 – including Typhoon Aircraft and Chinook Helicopters, and fleets of Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicles, Scimitar reconnaissance vehicles and crucially Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks. This could make a major contribution to helping end the war sooner. Labour must campaign for these arms to Ukraine!

But Labour must aid on the social front. Conference policy commits to support for a socially progressive reconstruction involving the trade unions. Instead, the Tories are directly aiding the introduction of anti-union laws alongside a reconstruction prising open Ukraine for profit-making by global capital, with deregulation of labour rights. Russian imperialism must pay for their war crimes through a new Nuremberg and for reconstruction through seizure of assets. In this we must campaign alongside the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine and the democratic left in Ukraine.

These must be amongst our key priorities in 2023 to win the war and ensure a genuine just peace for Ukraine. **G**

Christopher Ford
is organiser of
Ukraine
Solidarity
Campaign

Progressive government returns to Brazil

Fabian Hamilton on hopes for renewed anti-poverty drive with Lula

Jair Bolsonaro has yet to concede defeat following the closely fought Presidential election in Brazil, the final round of which took place on October 30th. Whilst the opinion polls had been predicting that Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) – the former Workers' Party President, was far ahead of the incumbent conservative President Bolsonaro – the first round of polling which took place on October 2nd was far closer than most commentators believed possible. Lula received 48.43 percent of the vote to Bolsonaro's 43.20 percent, showing how badly the opinion polls had got it wrong. Some had even predicted that Lula would win outright in the first round.

Some of Bolsonaro's supporters let it be known that should he lose the second round by a small margin, then the incumbent would challenge the result and claim that the election had somehow been corrupted or ballots falsified and there were many rumours that the army could step in to prevent Lula 'stealing' the election through ballot rigging. But Brazil's modern electoral system is very robust and extremely hard to corrupt or falsify. It's the underpinning of a treasured democratic system dating back to 1985 which finally replaced the military junta after 21 years of dictatorship. Brazilians value their current constitution and democratic processes because so many remember what it was like to live under a military regime. Many Brazilians were also extremely worried that Bolsonaro had so often praised the military dictatorship of 1964 to 1985 and had on occasions implied that he would even prefer it to a left-wing government being elected.

However, unlike the USA, Brazil has a multi-party system which means that the populist right does not command such a high and broad level of support as it might in the USA, for example, where there are only two major political parties.

Lula is set to take office on 1st January 2023 and has been busy selecting his government since his narrow election victory – he won by only 1.8% of the vote, or just over two million votes. More than seven-



ty nine percent of the electorate turned out to vote on 30th October. As a very experienced leader and former President who left office in 2010 being one of the most popular presidents in Brazilian history, Lula knows well how to appeal to the broadest possible sections of society in a country which – like so many – is deeply divided. One of his key priorities will be to stop the destruction of the Amazon rainforest and to work with all the countries of the continent which have parts of the Amazon in their territories in order to forge a consistent and viable approach to preserve such an essential, diverse environmental region for the sake of the whole planet. Another important priority is to tackle the extreme inequality which still plagues Brazil and contributes to so many of its social ills including drug gangs, addiction and some of the appalling violence often seen in the poorest districts of Brazil's major cities.

I last visited Brazil in 2013, just three years after Lula left office and during Dilma Rousseff's presidency – she had been Lula's chief of staff and became the country's first woman President in 2011. What I and my Parliamentary colleagues saw were innovative schemes and investment in infrastructure, training and education for some of the most deprived communities in Rio de Janeiro. We walked through the

favelas scattered across the steep hillsides of extinct volcanoes which pepper the Atlantic coastline in the south east of the country. They were still poor and dismal, often ruled by criminal gangs, but the government's community policing as well as the installation of running water, sewerage and electricity had already transformed the lives of many of the city's poorest and most ignored population. Lula has been clear that he is determined to carry on the anti-poverty policies which he started and which Dilma continued.

What happens in Brazil is not only important for Brazilians, but for the whole world too. Brazil is a country of 217 million people and covers 8.5 million square kilometres. It has been an independent state for just over 200 years and is the fifth largest country in the world by area (seventh by population). It has a fast developing economy – by far the largest in Latin America – and the tenth largest in the world. But in order to achieve its full potential, the new government knows that it must not only halt the destruction of the rainforest but also tackle extreme inequality.

President Lula and the Workers' Party of Brazil certainly have the ideas, the policies and the ability to achieve this. We need to support their vital work which will bring hope back to so many. **C**

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

The tilt towards Israel in British broadcasting

Tim Llewellyn on the continuing failure of public broadcasting to tell the truth on the Israel-Palestine conflict

Two BBC radio news-writers who specialise in Middle East stories, often those concerning Israel-Palestine, told me recently a grim but not, to me, surprising story. I had hoped to hear something different from the words of a former BBC Jerusalem Correspondent, nearly 20 years ago: “a BBC producer or editor trying to report or hold a discussion on Israel and the Palestinians issue waits constantly for a call, from above, how high in the hierarchy depending on how senior is Israel’s supporter.”

These journalists told the same story, except it is worse. There is a culture of fear in the ranks of senior editors, producers and news managers. Any complaint about a story emanating from Israel support groups, such as MEMRI (Middle East Media Research Institute), or the Board of Deputies of British Jews, or Lawyers for Israel, or indeed from prominent Israel-supporting individuals, will immediately be listened to and usually acted upon. These interventions invariably result in the news item being changed to favour the Israeli position. In one example my informants cited a story about a Jewish settler attacking a West Bank civilian being changed to remove the word “settler”, and replace it with “activist”. Furthermore, across the BBC and ITN, including Channel 4, a deadening self-censorship has set in. It is no longer so necessary for the Israel lobby to bother.

In the past six years or so, with the widening of anxiety across the political class, journalism, academe and civil society of anything that might be deemed, however spuriously, to be “anti-Semitic”—remembering what happened inside Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party—everyone is even more prone to tread softly, especially in a politically beleaguered BBC.

This goes much of the way towards explaining the imbalance in the coverage of Israel-Palestine: the language used; the way the sequence of events is described; the outnumbering of Palestinian inter-



Israeli soldiers defend illegal settlement against Palestinians

locutors in studio sessions by pro-Israel ones.

I was first struck, during al-Aqsa Intifada, of 2000-2005, when Israel invaded the Occupied Territories, how the descriptions of Palestinians and Israelis differed, the former being buried in a kind of mass anonymity; the latter real people with names and lives. To this day, Palestinians “die”, while Israelis “are killed”. One typical example was in October 2000. Jewish mobs in Tel Aviv, Jaffa, Tiberius and Nazareth killed 13 Palestinian-Israeli citizens. ITN and the BBC were restrained, describing these attacks as “responses” to Palestinian attacks on a Jewish shrine in the Occupied Territory of the West Bank. There was no expressive language.

When a few hours later scores of Palestinians attacked a police station in the West Bank city of Ramallah, and killed two Israeli soldiers being held prisoner, the broadcast media were quick to be descriptive: the crowd was a “lynch-mob”, “a frenzied mob”, “baying for blood...” the frenzied crowd could hardly contain their glee.”

Since then, this characterisation of the Palestinian Arab somehow as “the other”, a terrifying, savage if anonymous threat to the state of Israel, which is populated by “peo-

ple like us”, with a system, a government, international respect and recognition, has intensified, despite endless complaints and criticisms from across civil society. The prejudices colonialism engendered are hard to shake.

One of the ways the imbalance of the newscasts and portrayal from London studios is maintained is the acceptance almost without demur of the Israeli narrative...well backed up here in the UK by Israel’s diplomats, agents, propagandists and supporters...that Israel’s attacks on the Palestinians, whether the full-scale invasions of Gaza of 2001-2005, 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2021, or the almost daily killings, woundings and arrests of Palestinians in all the occupied territory that are mounting as I write, are responses to Palestinian violence or attack.

This is possibly the Biggest Lie of all. On a number of occasions the Israelis have violated a ceasefire, but more essentially what is left out of the media’s explanations is the fact that the Palestinians are in their 56th year of an ever-expanding, ever more brutal occupation, violating the international rules of military occupation. They have the right to resist. Across the territories Palestinians are consistently under physical attack, from soldiers, air-men, the navy, police agents and

Tim Llewellyn is a former BBC Middle East Correspondent. He well understands that UK reporters on the ground in Israel-Palestine do their best, when allowed, to report honestly—the spin is administered in London

Jewish settlers. Even the question of why firing missiles into Israel is possibly a war crime is never analysed. We should remember, too, that next year it will be 75 years since all Palestinians lost their nation.

Simply, it is the Palestinians who are responding to violence, not the Israelis. But you will not hear this from our broadcasters, among whom, because of its power, the BBC is most culpable.

The backdrop against which these military excesses take place is mostly ignored by our media. The daily indignities and the steady toll of lives on the West Bank, in East Jerusalem and in Gaza do not rate much notice, so that when Israel's air force begins to fly, its tanks roll and its bombs and shells land, mostly in civilian areas, it is happening as far as British listeners can tell in a contextual vacuum. Thus, "in a response to growing Palestinian violence...", "following a series of

rocket attacks on...", "after weeks of clashes with armed groups in the refugee camps of...". Here is the (false) context. Who is engendering the violence will be a question not too thoroughly gone into. If it is, the telephones will start ringing in New Broadcasting House.

Jeremy Corbyn recently spoke of his visit to The Guardian while he was Leader of the Opposition. At the newsroom level, the reporters and sub-editors, he found support for and intelligent questioning of his ideas for social reform and a new international morality. At editors' level he felt he was being lectured by superiors. It is the same at the broadcast institutions, especially the BBC, to which most people still turn when a major news story breaks. At the working journalist level there is an understanding of what the Palestinian situation involves: settler colonialism, dispossession, armed aggression, false arrest, and the compliance in all this of the main Western

nations. In the realms of management, the bosses are very wary of the British Establishment and the Israel lobby, not to mention fake anti-Semitism charges and the ignominy they can bring. One hundred and five years after the Balfour Declaration laid the groundwork for Israel's creation and the Palestinians' dispossession the British Government remains unremittingly proud of its achievement, and joins in the farcical diplomatic consensus in Europe and the US, Canada and Australia, that Israel is fighting for its survival and has "every right to defend itself". Certainly, our main journalistic institutions, especially the BBC, are not going to do anything to try to change this, to ask "who is attacker, who is defender?"

It is an uphill slog, given the iron wall of the BBC Complaints system, but everyone must keep at the BBC, up to OfCom, or by contacting individual producers and correspondents. The tide will turn. **C**

Gramsci in Sussex

Victor Anderson on cross-party thinking

Lewes Labour Party has developed a reputation for putting on excellent conferences discussing interesting issues without rancour and name-calling. They did it again in November.

This seems to have started some years ago when Mark Perryman got elected as the Constituency Labour Party's Political Education Officer. That's not normally thought of as one of the great offices of state, bearing in mind Labour in Lewes always comes third in general elections. But Mark took that post and turned it into something influential, by using it to organise events which now draw in Labour members, Liberal Democrats, Greens, and others from across the whole of south-east England and in some cases further afield.

The mood is thoughtful and there's a lot of listening as well as quite a lot of talking. A wide spectrum of progressive opinion is represented, but without apparent factionalism. The events are a model of what can be called "co-operative pluralism" – helping to form a Gramscian-style potentially "hegemonic bloc" led by Labour while maintaining a Hannah



Arendt style of respect for and positive valuing of different perspectives, including those of other parties. A powerful combination.

In terms of practical politics under first past the post that means a willingness to vote tactically, and it was appropriate that the first session of the conference was Tim Bale, probably the nation's number one academic

expert on the Tory Party, talking about the "Blue Wall" of Tory-held seats, many of them vulnerable to tactical voting. One of his interesting statistics was that while 69% of people remember which party came first in the previous parliamentary election, only 29% remember which came second. Tactical voting depends above all on people having the knowledge which enables them to know who to vote for.

The most thought-provoking session was on the problem of England, led by John Denham, an ex-minister who resigned over Iraq who now runs the Centre for English Identity and Politics. He pointed out how, despite all the political and economic changes of the past hundred years, nation-states have remained the main focus for political action. The idea that globalisation has made them redundant has simply proved wrong. What I was less persuaded by was the claim that, with the growth of nationalism in Scotland and Wales we now need to build English political institutions. Wouldn't an English Parliament be Tory-run? Or would setting it up provide the basis for Labour to renew itself as a patriotic party? **C**

Labour silence on abuse uncovered in reports

Mica Nava says the Forde Report and Labour Files raise serious questions on Labour's approach to antisemitism and wider racism

The weaponization of anti-semitism has been going on for several years now. In 2019 Greg Philo et al argued convincingly that the level in the Labour Party had been grossly inflated by the mainstream media and the right of the party because accusations of anti-semitism seemed an effective way of undermining Jeremy Corbyn and the left.

The 2020 EHRC report, set up to investigate antisemitism in the party, also found no substantial evidence to support the allegations. That was when Corbyn said how much he deplored all forms of racism, including antisemitism, but that the scale of the problem had been overstated for political purposes. His statement led to a messy suspension, reinstatement and then a withdrawal of the whip. He now sits as an Independent MP in his Islington North constituency but is still a member of the Labour Party.

Antisemitism has remained an issue for the Labour Party, despite research showing that levels are extremely low on the left and very much lower than among the general public or Conservatives. Moreover, antisemitism is far less widespread than islamophobia and racism against people of colour. In the current climate, when the need for an inspiring set of policies to deal with the escalation of poverty, strikes and the energy crisis is so urgent, you would have thought that the subject could be dropped.

The issue has resurfaced because both the 2022 Ford Report and the 2022 Al Jazeera Labour Files programmes expose, among other things, the abuse inflicted on Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL) members. JVL was set up five years ago to ensure an alternative voice to the pro-Zionist Jewish Labour Movement was heard and to show that many Jewish members of the Labour Party oppose the repressive and discriminatory policies of the Israeli government regarding Palestinian human rights, now categorised by Amnesty International as 'apartheid'.



However, JVL arguments have been largely ignored or even labelled antisemitic and many of its members suspended or expelled from the Labour Party for 'undermining the party's ability to combat racism'. The figures are shocking. Left-wing Jewish members of JVL are about 35 times more likely to be accused of antisemitism and disciplined by the Labour Party NEC than non-Jewish members. This has happened to all 14 members of the JVL executive committee. Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi, media officer of JVL and elected by Labour constituencies to be a member of the NEC, was suspended on the opening day of the Labour Party conference in 2022 and then expelled on her 70th birthday. Leah Levane, co-chair of JVL was expelled on the second day of the Labour Party conference in 2021. The list is long. The bullying, dishonesty and lack of due process have been extreme.

There are now two new sources of information. The Forde Report, commissioned by Starmer in 2020 to investigate the culture and practices of the party, was finally released in July 2022 but has barely been discussed in any of the mainstream media outlets, including nominally Labour supporting

papers like the Guardian, and has been pointedly ignored by the party leadership, probably because it is unexpectedly hard hitting in its conclusions and recommendations. It defends JVL and deplores the hierarchy of racism practiced by the Labour Party leadership which privileges antisemitism, when Islamophobia and anti-black racism are just as serious and far more prevalent. This is something JVL members have always maintained.

John McDonnell is among the few senior Labour figures who has welcomed the report. In July 2022 he wrote to Starmer and secretary general David Evans urging them to address the recommendation to respect diversity in the party and to address the defamation of JVL. 'The treatment of this group and many of its members by the Party has been disrespectful, at times uncaring, even brutal', he says, and quoting from the report: 'there has been a refusal to engage with JVL's proposals for antisemitism education... and CLPs are not even allowed to enlist their help'. As far as we know there has been no response.

The Al Jazeera Labour Files, a series of four landmark programmes released to coincide with the 2022 Labour Party conference, have also been shamefully ignored by the party leadership and the mainstream media. They document with detailed evidence the fabricated accusations made by the right wing of the party in order to smear, humiliate and exclude Corbyn supporters, particularly JVL members and people of colour.

It's not known whether Labour Party leaders have actually watched the Labour Files, but, as Peter Osborne (former Telegraph journalist interviewed for the series) points out that, if so, they have remained stonily silent and issued no rebuttals. In the programmes and in a recent DDN video Osborne 'demolishes' the media silence on the Labour Files and asks, with foreboding, if this is how the party leadership treats members of its own party while in opposition, how might it behave in power? **C**

Mica Nava is a member of Islington North CLP and of JVL council

No to Hassockfield

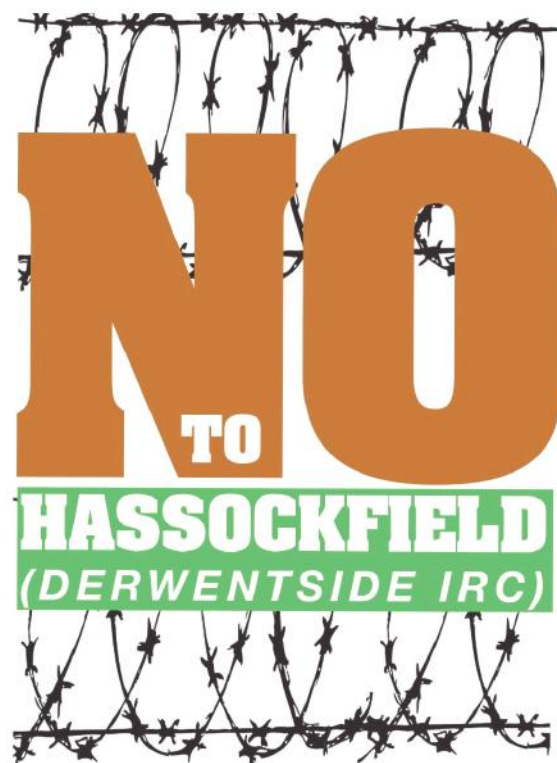
Julie Ward on the scandal of women held at Hassockfield Derwentside IRC

It was in January 2021 when County Durham Labour members first learned that the Home Office had decided to take back the site of the notorious former Medomsley Detention Centre (for boys) for the purpose of detaining women asylum seekers. This facility (which had been renamed Hassockfield Secure Training Centre in 1999) was largely seen to be a replacement for Yarl's Wood which had attracted its own notoriety since first opening in 2001. The renamed Hassockfield centre finally closed in 2015 but not before 14 year old Adam Rickwood from Burnley had taken his own life during his incarceration within its walls.

The site is associated with historic institutional violence going back decades with hundreds of former Medomsley victims coming forward as part of Operation Seabrook to give evidence of abuse by the staff. Despite several high profile court cases and convictions of former employees, calls for a full public enquiry have recently been dismissed by the Government.

Home Office plans to turn the site into a Category 3 prison for women asylum seekers is not only in direct contradiction to the government's previous pronouncements, which had suggested that fewer detention facilities would be needed, it is also a slap in the face for local people who were hoping to lay to rest the memory of abuse on their doorstep through the construction of a new housing development on the site with a pocket park. Indeed Durham County Council had already granted planning permission to Homes England for 127 new dwellings when the Ministry of Justice announced it was taking the site back into the detention estate. The repurposing of the site also rides roughshod over local democracy with the County Council being sidelined and limited opportunities for scrutiny under cover of Covid.

A dedicated campaign group called No To Hassockfield was quickly established, bringing together activists from a wide range of backgrounds and political persuasions, initially in the hope that we might prevent the centre from opening. However, in late December 2021 we learned that approximately a dozen women had been moved



there with plans for up to 84 women in total to be incarcerated, all of whom would be deemed by the Home Office as suitable for deportation due to their immigration status. We know that many of these women would be extremely vulnerable, victims of abuse, trafficking and various forms of gender-based violence. We also know that there are alternatives to detention which often serves to retraumatise victims of torture and abuse. Newcastle-based Action Foundation carried out a UNHCR research project in 2021 which found that, "it is more humane and significantly less expensive to support vulnerable asylum seekers in the community as an alternative to keeping them in detention centres." The Home Office funded this pilot but appears reluctant to act on the recommendations.

We have received excellent support from various Labour politicians including Lord Alf Dubs who attended one of our first campaign meetings and reminded us that 'no-one is illegal'. Mary Foy MP (Durham City) was on the case months before the centre opened, tabling written questions in parliament. In May 2022 she spoke at our

national demo in front of Durham Cathedral along with veteran human rights lawyer Margaret Owen. In December 2022 Kate Osborne MP (Jarrow) called for the centre to be shut down after she made a visit with members of the Women and Equalities Select Committee. Her visit coincided with the publication of HMIP's first inspection report which highlighted various issues including a high level of women reporting feeling suicidal, male supervision of at-risk women and concerning 'use of force' incidents.

The local Tory MP, Richard Holden, describes the women as 'criminals' and 'illegals' whilst all the while promoting the Immigration Removal Centre as an economic opportunity for the area. The centre is managed by Mitie whose former CEO is now a Tory Peer. The company (which won multiple Government contracts during the pandemic) posted half year profits of £50 million for March to September 2022. A significant proportion of their turnover derives from 'Care and Custody'. Mitie is one of the companies implicated in the recent Manston scandal which saw shocking levels of overcrowding and chaos at the Kent facility established to process newly arrived asylum seekers. In November 2022 a group of No To Hassockfield campaigners joined activists from the north west to mount a protest at Mitie's office near Manchester Airport in solidarity with those protesting at Manston.

Over the past two years we have become an efficient, democratic and closely knit community of activists. We regularly work with organisations such as Medical Justice and Women For Refugee Women who themselves took the Home Office to court regarding inadequate access to justice for the women detained in the centre. The judge ruled in favour of the Home Office but that will not stop the many organisations and individuals involved in our campaign from our avowed aim to force closure of the centre. What we lack in campaign experience we make up for with our commitment to speak up for the women imprisoned in the centre and our passion for a fairer more just society where everyone seeking sanctuary will be welcomed in our communities. **C**

Julie Ward is a former Labour NW England MEP and member of Chartist EB

Flicker

Patrick Mulcahy
on Mendes' *Margate* on screen

After the critical and box office success of the virtuoso simulated single-take World War One film, 1917, English director Sam Mendes could have pitched any movie he liked and got a green light. He has done exactly that with the decidedly niche *Empire of Light*, a film set in Margate in 1981 that mixes race, mental illness, and cinema. At its centre is Hillary Small (Olivia Colman), the Duty Manager of the fictitious Empire Cinema – its real-life inspiration was called Dreamland – who is coerced into giving sexual favours to the General Manager, Mr Ellis (Colin Firth in a thankless role) before beginning a relationship with front of house staff member Stephen (Michael Ward), born in the UK to Ghanaian parents. Hillary has a secret that only becomes apparent to Stephen after he criticises her sandcastle-building ability. It is only a matter of time before she snaps.

Mendes, who moved seamlessly from theatre to cinema with his Oscar-winning debut, *American Beauty*, has helmed more hits than misses, including *The Road to Perdition* and two James Bond films, *Skyfall* and *Spectre*. He doesn't work as a director for hire, but he isn't an auteur either. That said, mental illness and cultural disaffection appear in Mendes' 2008 film adaptation of Richard Yates' *Revolutionary Road*. The madness of the world outside is a feature of 1917.

Empire of Light is a throwback to the early output of Film Four, the film arm of Channel Four, that showcased original screenplays by playwrights such as Hanif Kureishi, Mike Leigh, David Hare, and Alan Bennett as well as the novelist Neil Jordan. In the early eighties, Film Four supported dramas that were a riposte to heritage cinema – contemporary, or at least post-war dramas tackling social taboos. Mendes doesn't tackle the taboo of Brexit, but as we – and Hillary – watch Stephen being taunted by a trio of skinheads, we are reminded of the racist, anti-

European, anti-liberal rhetoric of Nigel Farage and others that have now been mainstreamed.

Film Four's most acclaimed work from the 1980s – *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Wish You Were Here*, *High Hopes* – attacked conservative attitudes towards sex and class, with Thatcherism being the counterpoint. In the intervening decades, English films depicted heteronormative relationships with a post-modern edge. Characters simulate the 'happy endings' that the audience craves but their cou-

Mendes challenges stereotypes about the ambition of second-generation immigrants, but he also wants to support his mother, hard-working nurse, Delia (Tanya Moodie).

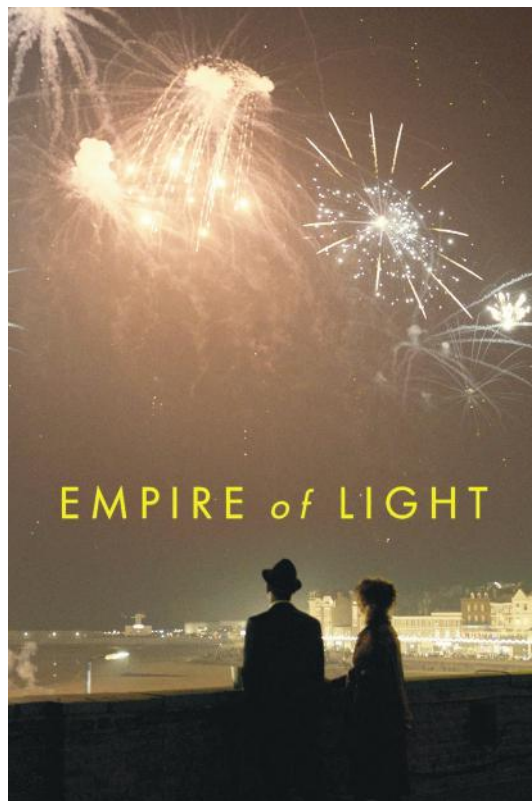
While set against a backdrop of barely suppressed racism, the film offers the counterpoint of Two-Tone ska records – black and white musicians performing together in bands such as The Specials, The Selecter and The Beat. Stephen introduces Hillary to their music. She shares poetry with him by Tennyson and Larkin. Hillary's poetry choices, including a cringe-making reading at the cinema's premiere of *Chariots of Fire*, posits literature as a force that transcends prejudice and class.

Colman specialises in playing middle-aged women on the verge of breakdowns who assert themselves, often with fruity language. She is equally skilled in comedy and drama. Her performance as Hillary is well within her range. Ward's Stephen is another of those young men who are tutored in love by older women. Mendes doesn't critique Stephen's involvement with an older woman who is otherwise exploited by her boss. He shows him as a man who can repair the wing of a wounded gull and send it off flying from the roof, which is as close to cliché as the film gets.

If there is one genre that gets less love from contemporary audiences as films about filmmaking, it is films about cinema.

Empire of Light had a dismal theatrical opening in the US, with the industry still reeling from Covid. I confess to being irritated by the *Empire*'s lobby posters (I collected film posters in the early 1980s) including the 'wrong' *Raiders of the Lost Ark* poster on display pre-release (the production designer used the post-release re-design instead). *Empire of Light* pays homage to oppositional cinema of the early 1980s. It is Gregory's Girl shown on the cinema's second screen that is a touchstone of sorts.

Empire of Light is on general release from Monday 9 January, 2023



pling has no clear basis in reality.

Mendes' film, which he also wrote, is as close to 1980s social realism as the director has ventured, with inter-racial and inter-generational sex scenes; Colman's Hillary looks older than Stephen's mother. The relationship is doomed from the start, not just from censorious looks – Stephen removes his head from Hillary's shoulder on the bus home when we see he is being looked at – but also because their ambitions are misaligned. Hillary isn't looking for a relationship, and rails against men who have told her in the past what to do. She is also scornful towards her mother. Stephen wants to study architecture. He's an idealised character,

Pursuing unity?

Hugh Gault
on keeping
the left from
power

Labour's Civil Wars
Patrick Diamond and Giles Radice
Haus Publishing £16.99

In 1964 Harold Wilson published 'Purpose in Politics', a selection of speeches as Labour leader. In Attlee's first post-war Cabinet from 1947 he resigned in 1951 with Aneurin Bevan and John Freeman in opposition to Hugh Gaitskell's budget imposition of prescription charges. The principle that health should be free at the point of use trounced any short-term considerations of unity. Contrast this with the current Labour leadership that seems to be waiting for the Tories to trip up. Starmer's timidity contrasts markedly with the passion that has animated Labour activists in the past. Unity is only enough if your aim is to achieve power for its own sake.

Or, to provide a diametrically opposed view: The pursuit of 'unity' never bothered the PLP in Corbyn's time as leader and nor, according to the Forde report, was it a priority for many members of Labour HQ. Undermining the leadership, and burnishing your own profile, was more important.

Few people would become national politicians, of course, if vanity didn't reinforce an initial determination to bring about change. As in many occupations it is easy to forget the original motivation, and arguably this matters less in the Tory party where it is easier to reconcile self-interest with the small state and personal responsibility mantras.

The Labour Party extends from those on the right, through moderate social democrats and democratic socialists (there is a difference), to the 'extreme' left. Many retain a passion even if it is no longer the same as the one with which they started. Giles Radice, who died just after this book was published, was for many years a prominent social democrat as well as Labour MP and fine historian of the party. His best known book is probably 'Friends and Rivals' analysing the wounds that Crosland, Healey and

Jenkins inflicted on the party by their failure to co-operate and, in the case of some of them, by allowing personal ambition to trump party interest. Patrick Diamond is now Professor of Public Policy at Queen Mary University of London but worked for most of the decade 2001-2010 in the Blair and Brown Labour governments.

The authors, therefore, represent a narrow section of the party and much of their analysis reflects this, chronicling five Labour Party 'civil wars' as they describe them:



PATRICK DIAMOND



How infighting has kept the left from power
(and what can be done about it)



GILES RADICE



- 1931 and Ramsay MacDonald's betrayal by joining the National Government
- Gaitskell and Bevan in the 1950s
- Tony Benn's 'revolt' and the birth of the Jenkins, Owen, Williams and Rodgers SDP
- Blair and Brown after 2000
- the 'left insurgency' as they call Corbyn's leadership.

The first chapter seeks to explain why Labour is given to civil wars and the final one charts 'the way ahead'

There are several points to make about their analysis.

Firstly, the Tories and Liberal Democrats have been known to

fight like 'cats in a sack' as well, and, while much of this might have occurred behind closed doors until recently, it is not just the names of Truss, Johnson, May and Cameron (or Clegg and Thorpe) that provoke antipathy as well as plaudits among party activists. Thatcher had her 'wets' but observed the advice 'to keep your friends close, but your enemies closer'. 'One nation' Conservatives found it hard to agree with 'no such thing as society' Thatcher and ultimately saw her off.

Secondly, many of the disputes the authors label as Labour's 'civil wars' were actually arguments of principle and often about the best way forward for the Party. They may have been more open than the Tories and less prepared to compromise (or be ruthless) in the pursuit of power, but that is at least partly because views were strongly held, often fundamental to the reasons for becoming a politician in the first place. Having one eye on the approval ratings is not necessarily a recipe for electoral success and might in any case be anathema for those who came into politics to bring about change rather than self-aggrandisement.

Finally, however, it is worth noting that the supreme political manager of the post-war era (and the most successful Labour leader), Harold Wilson, was involved in several of these: directly in the Bevan/Gaitskell one and in the effective management of Tony Benn and Roy Jenkins during the 1960s and 1970s. Gordon Brown was a strategist who like Wilson made huge changes on the domestic front (not just the Treasury one), and Philip Snowden, one of Wilson's heroes, joined the National Government alongside MacDonald in 1931.

Doing what you believe to be right should win you respect in the long-term, even if it proves less popular in the instant judgement of 24-hour media and the twitterati. Unity takes many forms and party discipline without a purpose is perhaps the least of them.

Becoming Indian?

**Duncan
Bowie**
on Western
Gandhians

Rebels against the Raj
Ramachandra Guha
William Collins £25

Guha is an Indian historian, perhaps best known for his two-volume biography of Gandhi. In this new study, Guha has turned his attention to seven Westerners who joined the Indian nationalist struggle and who spent much of their lives in India. Some of his chosen subjects have been the subject of previous biographies, others not. Gandhi is in the background of most of these studies, but each chapter focuses on the contribution of one or more of the westerners.

Guha's first subject is Annie Besant, the subject of numerous previous biographies, but Guha focuses on her latter years in India from her role in the Indian Nationalist Congress and her Home Rule movement, to her later educational work.

This provides a useful updating to the second volume of Arthur Nethercott's 1963 Besant biography and sets out Besant's rivalry with other Indian radical nationalists such as Bal Tilak, as well as her disagreements with Gandhi. Rather annoyingly, no doubt in seeking to draw comparisons with the Irish home rule movement, Guha keeps referring to Besant as an

Irishwoman, which is curious as Besant never to my knowledge described herself as such and never lived in Ireland.

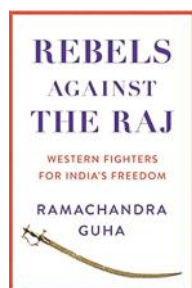
Guha's second subject is less well known - the English born journalist B. G. Horniman, who edited a series of journals supporting Indian self-government, which made him unpopular with the Indian administration. The third is Madeline Slade, who became the adopted daughter, secretary and servant-companion of Gandhi. Known as Mira Behn, her duties included monitoring Gandhi's bowel movements (I'm not sure we needed to know that!). The fourth subject is an American Quaker, Samuel Stokes, who established a farm on the Nepal border, growing apples and becoming a Gandhian and ascetic mendicant before being jailed for his support of Gandhi's non-violent resistance campaign.

The next subject is the British communist, Philip Spratt, sent by the British Communist Party to help establish a communist movement in India. He was somewhat resented by Indian communists such as M. N. Roy who thought Spratt had something of a colonialist approach. Spratt was to write an autobiography entitled *Blowing Up India*, somewhat mistitled as Spratt never engaged in terrorist acts (although jailed with fellow British

communists Lester Hucheson and Ben Bradley and some 27 Indian communists after the famous Meerut conspiracy trial), and in later life, became critical of Soviet communism, editing a pro-American newspaper.

The fifth subject is the American missionary, Dick Keithahn, who developed an interest in Indian religions adopting an Indian lifestyle and opposing Christian conversion of Hindus, and who was twice deported and briefly imprisoned, for his support for the Indian nationalists.

The final subject is Catherine Mary Heilemann, a young London woman of part German ancestry, who had become clerk in a firm of merchants, met some Gandhian students in London, and traveling to India and meeting the mahatma, set up a Gandhian ashram in the Himalayas, changing her name to Sarala Devi. She lived to write a book in 1982 entitled *Reviving our Dying Planet*. Guha has written a fascinating group portrait of these Westerners who adopted India as their country and disassociated themselves, in different ways, from the colonial Raj. It is valuable to have the perspective of an Indian historian, given so much of the academic writing on westerners in India comes from British and American historians.



**Conrad
Landin**
on a
Zimbabwean
memoir

Coming of Age

The House of Hunger
Dambudzo Marechera Penguin, £9.99

Preparing to step foot in independent Zimbabwe for the first time forty years ago, Dambudzo Marechera was nothing if not ambivalent. "You mention the name 'home' to me - it means nothing," he said in an interview with the filmmaker Chris Austin. "Even my own voice is no longer my own."

Eight years before, Marechera had arrived in Britain from a country still known as Rhodesia, to take up a scholarship at Oxford University. But he was soon "sent down" - and instead ended up seeking a living as a writer from a series of north London squats.

There was also a stint at Her Majesty's Pleasure. Asked for his next of kin on arrival at Pentonville, Marechera said there was no-one. Pressed further, he

opted for the publisher of his first book, *The House of Hunger*. "Imagine being buried by Heinemann's," he later chuckled. "Good god."

The House of Hunger, re-published last April by Penguin Modern Classics, is a coming-of-age novella. Set in the Rhodesia that Marechera had escaped, whose Unilateral Declaration of Independence under Ian Smith was designed to thwart the prospect of majority rule, its narrator is a literary misfit searching for "black heroes". Instead he finds police informants and charismatic sex workers, racist students and wizened elders, black poets and white sympathisers - jostling together in a colonial hangover of oppression, violence and revenge. This human cocktail provides fuel for a mind - and a narrative - riddled with anxiety, paranoia and hallucinations.

nations.

Yet these characteristics sit alongside a persistent tone of dispassionate melancholia, which Marechera establishes from the moment his protagonist stands by while his brother beats his wife. The narrator's much-feted "disinterested intervention" in this scene of domestic abuse is in fact nothing of the sort.

Later on, amid a catastrophic rain storm, we see the weakness of human civilisations in the face of the natural world - much like in the "Time Passes" section of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. But Marechera's epic description of this scene - "the singing fury of it stuck little needles into the matter of our brains" - seems equally a metaphor for society's corruption at the hands of prejudice, greed and poverty.

In *The House of Hunger*, the

impact of these evils is as apparent in black men's struggles with their own masculinity as it is in the colonial hierarchy. "Something diseased had been unleashed among us," Marechera writes: "there was in that rain the swollen seeds of an old feud".

The narrative voice is nonetheless fundamentally detached: not only from politics and emotion - but from time and place too. Switching between settings in a flash, we realise that no matter how far or fast we run, the scars of the past will always re-emerge.

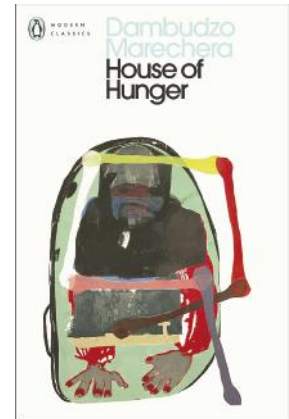
Marechera knew this too well, becoming as much an exile in Mugabe's Zimbabwe as he was in Thatcher's Britain, and struggling with homelessness, drink and violence before his premature death in

1987. It's a message that's also reinforced in the sequence of short stories and essays which follow the title novella: in spite of temporal and geographical shifts the same themes and preoccupations return again and again.

Back in the rain storm, as the township's people struggle to defend their homes from the downpour - "building, rebuilding, groaning against its blows" - we see the power too of collective resistance. These reconstruction efforts continue "until once again the walls of that malice came crushing down" - a phrase which seems deliberately ambiguous.

It calls to mind Antonio Gramsci's observation that "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born".

The "morbid symptoms" of the interregnum that Gramsci spoke of are on display not only in *The House of Hunger*, but in humanity's failure to defeat injustice in the decades since its publication.



Ten choices for a better now

Mary Southcott
on a
Manifesto
against a
Heartless
World

Together
Ece Temelkuran
Fourth Estate £12.99

Together" was the watchword at Labour's 2022 Conference. It was emphasised in speech after delegate speech and by Keir Starmer. It was probably not because they have read the latest book by Ece Temelkuran. That does not mean her ideas are not relevant. It recognises perhaps a cultural shift in politics which was foreseen when for the first time in a century Labour supported a more proportional voting system. It is the same paradigm shift moving away from binary, majoritarian politics to more consensual, solution seeking ways of addressing problems in the world.

I met the author at a meeting of the Centre for Turkey Studies, at SOAS, and you can see her in conversation with Rachel Shabi on CEFTUS' website. It is well worth following as she takes on issues which the world, not only Turkey, is struggling with, but also the Kurdish issue, the Armenian genocide, the long running antagonism with Greece in NATO.

Ece Temelkuran wrote *Together*, full title *A Manifesto Against a Heartless World*, as an antidote to her previous book *How to lose a Country: The Seven Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship* which is more political. Even this new book refers to

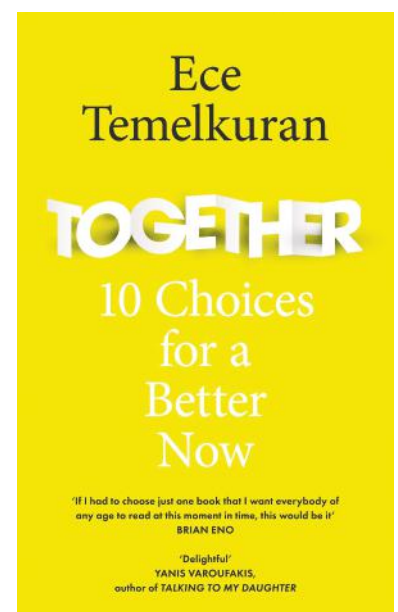
much more than her native Turkey where Erdogan awaits elections in late spring 2023 to see if his country loses him, a hundred years since the establishment of Turkey by Kemal Ataturk from the remains of the Ottoman Empire in the Lausanne Treaty.

How to lose a Country made the links for non-Turkish followers of Trump's America and to post Brexit UK. It reminded us of how Remain supporters felt from 2016 when what appeared political but anti-democratic amounted to a loss of a country.

Together attempts to answer the question, what to do now? And she writes: "We need it now and now is long enough. Now is the time for the new, the beautiful and the humane."

Ece, pronounced Eje, worked in Turkey until forced to leave by Erdogan's onslaught on democracy, particularly journalists, Kurds and their People's Democratic Party, HDP, with many of its key people in prison. The invitation to the meeting which launched *Together: 10 Choices for a Better Now* describes the author as 'an award-winning political thinker, author and poet'. The book was written as an antidote to the dark reality of her previous book. It provides an inspiring manifesto for change, reveals fresh possibilities for the better world we want to live in, and gives us a new vocabulary for the political action that the twenty-first century asks of humankind.

But *Together* is more generally applicable, for her ways of combating despair. The chapters illustrate her recommendations. Choose faith over hope; the whole reality; to befriend fear; attention over anger; strength over power; enough over less; the reef over the wreck; friendship and the last choice, to choose to be TOGETHER.



Revolutionary warfare

Duncan Bowie
on French
and US
policy in
Indochina

Number One Realist
Nathaniel Moir
Hurst £35

The book's subtitle - Bernard Fall and Vietnamese Revolutionary Warfare – may be somewhat off-putting to anyone not familiar with Bernard Fall's work. Fall was a French national, based in the US for most of his professional career, who was an academic, journalist and military critic. Actually born in Vienna, his Jewish parents were both killed by the Nazis – his mother in Auschwitz, his father in Vichy France. In his youth, Fall joined the Maquis in the high Alps and then the Free French Army. After the war, he became an interpreter and research assistant at the Nuremberg trials, first for the French and then for the US prosecutor, Telford Taylor, focusing on the case for prosecuting the directors of the Krupp armaments firm, who had employed slave labour. He then took a Masters degree at Syracuse University in the US, worked for various think tanks, before being appointed to an academic post at Howard University, in a department headed by the American diplomat and UN under-secretary Ralph Bunche.

Fall then decided to focus on studying French Indochina, where the Viet Minh led by Ho Chi Minh and General Giap were fighting a war against the French colonisers, who had been restored to power with the assistance of

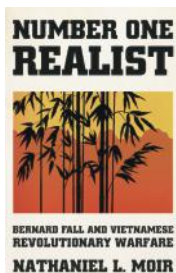
British forces, after the defeat of Japan. Fall is best known for his book *Streets Without Joy*, his critique of French political and military policy in the First Indochina war, which concluded in 1954 with the Geneva treaty and the (temporary) division of Vietnam, with the communist led government in the north and the French and US backed government led by Ngo Dinh Diem in the south. Fall was no armchair critic. He made seven research visits, interviewing north and southern political and military leaders, as well as joining French and US military missions. He was in fact killed on such a mission in South Vietnam in 1967. As well as his best-known book, Fall wrote a large number of journal articles, as well as books on the Viet Minh government, a comparative study of North and South Vietnam, a study of Laos, and a detailed study of the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. A collection of Fall's articles were published in 1966. Further reflections on the wars were published posthumously.

Streets without Joy is generally regarded as the best study of the First Indochina war – Fall's intention was to provide lessons from the French experience of defeat which might inform the US approach as they took over the French role in fighting the Vietnamese communists. Fall was no fellow traveller, but his criticisms of French and US policy made him unpopular with French and US politicians and military leaders, though as US involve-

ment in Vietnam in the mid 1960's escalated, his expertise on Indochina society and the military tactics of the various participants in the struggle began to be appreciated.

Moir's book provides a detailed study of Fall's writings, but also provides an analysis of both the first Indochina war, and of the early years of the second Indochina war, commonly known as the Vietnam war. This does not necessarily make for easy reading and I did find a tendency to repetition. I also found the last chapter which attempted to relate the experience of revolutionary warfare to the US approach to military strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan unhelpful (Moir as a military historian was himself a veteran of Afghanistan).

However, as a study of the politics and military strategy of revolutionary warfare, as experienced in Vietnam, Moir's study is excellent, though I would advise any prospective reader to read *Streets without Joy* first, as I did. As far as lessons which should have been learnt before the US and the British decided to take on the Taliban in Afghanistan, rather than Fall's book, which after all related to a much earlier war in a very different country, I would recommend Rodric Brithwaite's *Afghansy*. This study of the Russian occupation of the country between 1979 and 1989, which culminated in their military defeat, in many ways paralleled the US and UK experience of defeat and withdrawal in 2021.



Printer ad

The Russian Revolution's wider impact

Steve Cushion
on an
African-
Atlantic
Marxism

Revolutionary Lives of the Red and Black Atlantic since 1917
David Featherstone, Christian Høgsbjerg, and Alan Rice, eds.
Manchester University Press £85

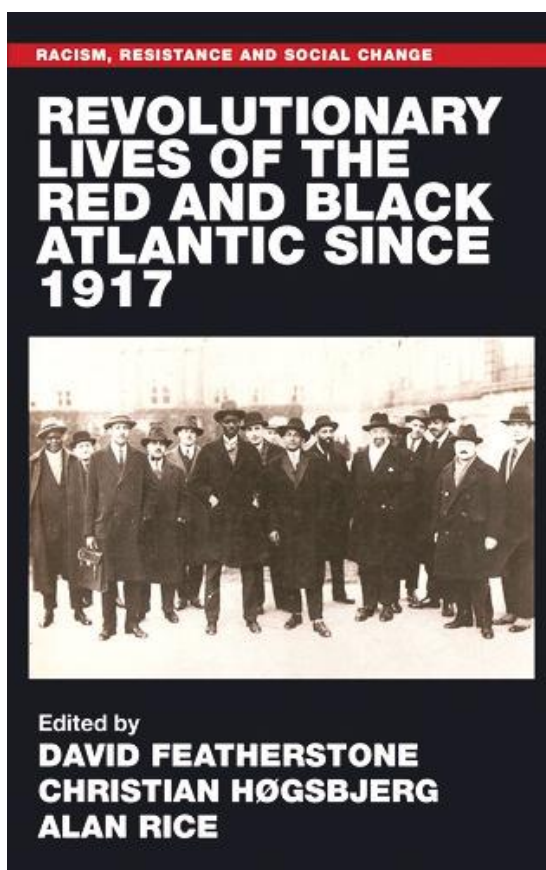
Revolutionary Lives of the Red and Black Atlantic since 1917 David Featherstone, Christian Høgsbjerg, and Alan Rice, eds. Manchester University Press £85,

This is the second volume to come out of the *The Red and the Black – The Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic* conference held at the Institute for Black Atlantic Research (IBAR), University of Central Lancashire, Preston, in October 2017, to mark the centenary of the Russian Revolution. The first volume, David Featherstone and Christian Høgsbjerg eds., *The Red and the Black: The Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic* (MUP, 2021) explored the political and social fallout of the Russian Revolution, the creation of the Soviet Union and the Communist International for black and colonial liberation struggles across the African diaspora. As such it dealt mainly with broad political issues. This second volume now looks at the effects of the Russian Revolution on various individuals, some relatively well known, other less so. Hubert Harrison was the first Black leader of the Socialist Party of America to actively organise Black workers for socialism. His writings produce a Marxist analysis of the relationship between race and class, white supremacy and capitalism, Black nationalism and socialism. He had a profound influence on the development of Marcus Garvey. In June 1917, faced with the US entry into the First World War, to “make the world safe for democracy”, Hubert Harrison argued for the need to “make the South safe for democracy” in front of two thousand people in a church hall in Harlem. This was the first meeting of the Liberty League of Negro-Americans, dedi-

icated to the fight against lynching and the Jim Crow laws. He never joined the Communist Party, but worked closely with many Black Communists. Less well known even than Harrison is Grace Campbell. Her early political activity was in the fight for votes for women, in particular, the right for Black women to vote, recognising that the US women’s suffrage movement was dominated by the interests of white middle and upper-class women, while racist legislation and white supremacist terror prevented many Black men from

Blood Brotherhood (ABB), in which she managed to blunt the edges of its male chauvinism. She worked with Cyril Briggs in building the ABB, and when it merged with the Communist Party, she joined with her Harlem comrades, staying in even when the party wound up the ABB. This volume also has a chapter on Briggs which gives more detail on the ABB, a fascinating organisation in its own right.

Moving across the Atlantic, there is a chapter on Clements Kadalie, leader of the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union of Africa (ICU) in South Africa. ICU showed the importance of black leadership and unionised black workers. The success of the ICU helped to change the priorities of Communists in Southern Africa by organising black workers in their hundreds of thousands. This led the CPSA to see the mass organisation of the black working class, rather than the local white labour aristocracy, as the motor of social change. This led the CPSA to attempt to take over the ICU, which in turn caused factional strife and weakened the workers movement in the region. There are eleven chapters in all, each dealing with a significant activist, ranging from Wilfred Domingo to Walter Rodney. Clements Kadalie is the only real workers’ leader in the volume, most of whom are campaigners, journalists and party activists. They are also, with the exception of the Paris based Lamine Senghor, all English speakers. None the worse for that, but it suggests the possibility of another such volume that looks at working class activists in the wider African diaspora: US dockers, Cuban cane cutters, West Indian and Haitian migrants working on the Panama Canal or Senegalese railway workers. This should not be seen as a criticism, the book does very well what it sets out to do and is a valuable addition to the rich history of African-Atlantic Marxism.



voting. She was active in organising black women workers which she saw as the most exploited part of the workforce. She addresses this in an article entitled ‘Negro Working Women Must Take Place in the Class War’. She was unusual amongst Marxists of her time in that she saw the inter-relation of race, class and gender, as well as the importance of non-wage domestic or reproductive work. Her constant campaigning activity in Harlem made her one of the most prominent leaders of the African

Stark lessons

Glyn Ford
on Libya's
debacle

Libya and the Global Enduring Disorder
Jason Pack
Hurst £25.00

Two books inside one cover, the first details the passage of Libya from the early cracks in the wall that presaged the collapse of the long-standing Qadhafi regime through to today's turmoil and chaos, while the second uses Libya as the first frost of that bleak geopolitical winter Washington's weakness is wreaking on the world and what it portends. Pack's framing has as a backdrop the period 1914 – 45, a second thirty years war where America was finally victorious in that four-way battle to supplant Great Britain as the global hegemon between the US and the USSR, Germany and Japan.

Now for Pack, we face a new interregnum as Washington loses traction and Beijing challenges and overtakes from the inside. The enemy at the gate is incapable of any early conventional military victory in a crash of civilisations, but new technological weapons bring to the field unconventional warfare with the internet and all its works; a virtual battleground where facts are the enemy and enduring tumult, rather than freedom, the order of the day. We have seen the future and it is chaos. *Libya and the Global Enduring Disorder* oversells the country's trailblazing role; not pioneer but consummate exemplar. Afghanistan and Iraq shared the disarray, although more self-inflicted than visited from without. Yemen too has a claim, while Ukraine's post-Soviet semi-sovereign institutions provided the same lucrative opportunities for illicit enrichment for oligarchs and misery for the masses in its Russian modelled organised kleptocracy.

Regime change in Libya quickly turned to regime collapse. Hard affluent authoritarianism shattered into the poverty of weak despotisms. On any rational basis Libya was not foredoomed to fail. It was a last best hope of delivering America's

transformative dream. It had wealth and location, sweetened by the absence of religious schism and ethnic division. Under Qadhafi greed and grievance was adroitly managed for 40 years. Libyans were well paid and 'gas-tarbeiter' did the work. There was plenty of money to oil friction. Libya's late flowering revolution was more assisted insurrection than civil war. Ten thousand insurgents armed with Western weapons and airstrikes drove Qadhafi's mercenary army and

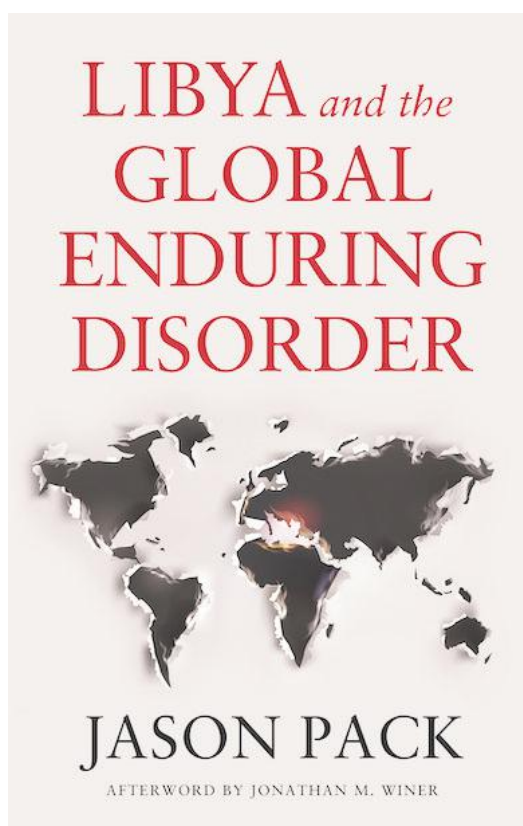
Tobruk backed by the self-styled Libyan National Army whose military wholesalers were Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

In October 2020 a dirty ceasefire was finally agreed and in the following March an interim unity government was appointed in anticipation of that December's promised Presidential election. Two years on Libyans wait in vain as postponements stack one upon another. Politics are gridlocked and a return to war increasingly likely as low intensity conflict threatens to catch fire. A wealthy oil state has become a basket case.

If Libya doesn't serve as Pack's torch bearer it epitomises the politics of chaos and disorder being favoured over reform. Libya's post-Qadhafi politicians have never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity. They have connived in establishing institutions pliable to clientism and self-interest that are far too weak to support effective governance. In this the West and the rest have colluded. Washington has been unwilling - and likely unable - to impose its will either in country or from the outside. European nation states like France, Italy and Britain have allowed differences to conspire against overlapping interests. Politics - like nature - abhors a vacuum and here it has been filled by regional and sub-regional actors testing their freedom to roam in Washington's absence. The result is a country polluting

its near abroad, spilling out economic refugees, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, hot money, terrorists and discord.

It's a long and complex read, yet the lessons are stark. The US's vaulting ambition is not longer - if it ever was - matched by its capabilities. The EU and the UK should be wary of being sucked down by an America in danger of scuttling its future. Responsibility to protect is a two-way street. Here in Europe, we should dress our foreign policy in the colours of social democracy rather than thoughtlessly rally behind the conservative and commercial banners of Washington's military industrial complex.



himself to assassination in Sirte.

The civil war followed rather than preceded Qadhafi. Within three years that small band of 10,000 immortal brothers - a division in army parlance - had swelled into a quarter of a million militiamen under serial warlords and their satraps. Libya's civil war ranged from 2014 - 20. The country was cut in two in the political churn. Western Libya was the territory of the Grand National Congress in Tripoli underpinned by Turkey and Qatar, while the larger East was held by the House of Representatives - later reborn as the Government of National Accord - who set themselves up in

Rekindling spirit of solidarity

Julie Ward
on a timely
call to arms

Ukraine - Voices of Solidarity and Resistance
Edited by Fred Leplat and Chris Ford
Resistance Books £10

Prior to February 24th 2022 few people could accurately pinpoint Ukraine's borders on a map and although our geographical knowledge has improved over the past year Ukraine's complex history and distinct culture remains a mystery to many. Along with a tendency for the Left to eschew all things supported by the USA this has resulted in sharp divisions concerning the nature of the war, leaving Ukrainian comrades feeling abandoned due to a lack of solidarity from the quarters where they should be most prevalent.

This collection of essays, interviews, articles, manifestos, and demands is therefore an excellent antidote to the simplistic mealy-mouthed and frankly dangerous pronouncements of many involved in movements such as Stop The War who have failed the basic test of international workers' solidarity which is to listen to the people on the ground who are risking their lives to resist imperialism.

The book begins with Professor Jean-Paul Himka's 40 page clear concise history of Ukraine in 'Ten Turning Points', a must-read even for those already engaging positively with the Ukrainian Left. The subsequent texts are short and to the point, sometimes impatient and littered with expletives, a reminder that people fighting for their very existence don't have time and energy to waste. Frankly they are exhausted by constantly having to explain why Ukraine needs our support in the form of more and better weapons and harsher sanctions not just medical and humanitarian aid, and beyond that a plan for economic and social reconstruction that won't favour neo-liberal solutions.

The contributors range from trade union leaders to academics, from journalists to refugees, with many being activists in Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement), a platform that is working closely with Another Europe Is Possible and CADTM (Campaign to Cancel the Illegitimate Debt), already with some success.

Many of the contributors address the oft-repeated excuses of Putin apologists, recognising that, like many other countries, Ukraine shel-

tered its fair share of corrupt wealthy elites, right-wing extremists and voracious free marketeers before the current hostilities broke out and that these tendencies must not be allowed to prevail post-war. The most powerful piece in this respect is Niko Vorobyov, a Russian-British journalist who joined protests in St Petersburg in the face of the OMON riot squad.

The voices of Ukrainian women rise from the pages loud and clear, offering practical down-to-earth feminism that directly challenges pacifist thinking as expressed by The Feminist Resistance Against the War. The 'Right to Resist' uses examples of the work (paid and unpaid) that Ukrainian women are doing in all spheres and highlights the gendered dangers not only of war and occupation but also of capitulation and appeasement.

This is a book rooted in a terrible reality - Ukrainians are not fighting NATO's war, they are fighting our war, and in the same spirit that our movement supported the Spanish against Franco and many other liberation struggles we need to rekindle the spirit of generosity that is international solidarity.



Don Flynn
on
'managed
migration'

Becoming Singaporean

The Culture Transplant: How migrants make the economies they move to a lot like the ones they left
Garrett Jones
Stanford £21.99

The advent of 'managed migration' as a paradigm for controlling the movement of people across national frontiers has assigned the task of sorting out the sheep from the goats primarily to economists. Equipped with the science that supposedly allows them to determine what a given country 'needs' in terms of the functioning of its labour markets, some of the bolder sorts of bean counters have ideas about the types of people and the places they come from who might fill the vacant slots.

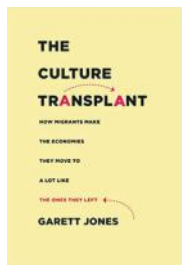
Garrett Jones proposes that closest attention needs to be paid to the cultures of the peoples who make up the migrant flows to determine whether they, and indeed their descendants, are likely to provide the qualities that the economy needs. Being keen to

avoid simplistic interpretations of 'culture' which will make the argument open to the accusation of an ethnic bias, he takes the reader through a series of 'tyre-kicking' exercises which are intended to adjust for the superficial impression that the proportion of the population of European heritage is a key indicator of economic success. No, what it seems we are really looking for from our migrants is their association with regions of the planet that have a long history of 'good government', because the values of 'good government' migrants align with the people who have had its values instilled into their world views.

Countries which can demonstrate an association with good government and 'good ideas' are the places where we should expect to find the best immigrants. Jones is a fan of Singapore and his argument comes to a crescendo with a call to make its denizens the archetype of the migrant which countries need. The closer the fit to

this go-getting, super-industrious fragment of humanity into your migration flows then the better assured you can be that you are dealing with good immigrants and have a template for excluding those furthest away from this description.

What is totally absent from the reviews of research papers, the bulk of this book, is consideration of any objective other than the economic benefit of migration to the receiving country. Nothing is said about the impact of the movement of people on the regions from which people migrate, whether this might provide mechanisms for redistribution and the reduction of inequality, or even more radically, as reparations for environmental and climate damage and historical injustice. Setting a policy objective which aims to make migrant receiving countries look a little more like Singapore seems an impoverished ambition in an area where so much more is needed in the modern world.



Time to ditch outdated voting system



Cat Smith is Labour MP for Lancaster

As Tories draw from US Republican playbook **Cat Smith** counters with her Bill to adopt PR

On 29 November I presented a Bill to Parliament to introduce a system of proportional representation for Parliamentary elections, for elections for directly elected mayors in England, for local authority elections in England, and for police and crime commissioner elections in England and Wales.

Because of the structures of the UK Parliament, the Government controls time for legislation, therefore without a Labour Government I am going to struggle to get time allocated for my Bill to progress to becoming a change in the law. Indeed, any non-Conservative MP finds this near impossible. I would like to stress, therefore, that the nature of our Parliamentary system is such that this Bill stands no chance of becoming law and indeed I do not expect it to even be debated further in the House of Commons. Nevertheless, I do intend to have a full Bill drafted in the coming weeks and I hope this will help to draw attention to our outdated voting system and the need for change. This will both highlight the problems with Parliament, and with our outdated voting system.

Our current 'first past the post' voting system was designed for a time when parliamentary constituencies usually only had two candidates, the franchise excluded women completely, and only one in five men were entitled to a vote. Thankfully we now live in a more enlightened time and with the expanded franchise we have also seen an increase in the number of political parties that are likely to contest an election.

So it is time that our voting system reflects this. The last Labour



Government helped us take a huge step in the right direction with devolution in Scotland, Wales, and in London with the London Assembly – all of which were devised with systems of proportional representation. Two decades on we have been reminded that progress is not inevitable.

In the Elections Act passed by the Tories last year the requirements for showing photo ID to vote grabbed the headlines, not unjustifiably given this comes straight from the US Republican playbook on voter suppression. However, the legislation also rolls back the progressive voting systems for Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales, and for the elected mayors too. The next time you get the chance to vote in one of these elections you will find your ballot paper asks for you to place a cross in one box – gone has the supplementary vote.

Why do the Tories want to roll back progress and try to make all elections first past the post? Simple. They think this will increase their chances of winning.

False flags about voters finding other systems complicated are a nonsense when they've been using them for the past few elections. Where I am in Lancashire the only time I got the opportunity to use a system that wasn't first past the post was the three elections we have had for Police and Crime Commissioner, and anecdotally people are pleased to be given the opportunity to vote for the

eventual winner. It removes the pressure for voters to vote for Candidate A in order to stop Candidate B even though they feel that Candidate C would most closely share their values. They could simply vote Candidate C first and transfer to Candidate A.

I was recently chewing the fat with a comrade from the Irish Labour Party where they need to win second preferences from other parties. I realised that a change of voting system wouldn't just be better for voters but also for politics.

There is plenty written about the toxicity of politics, the dirty tactics and abuse faced by candidates (especially women and minority ethnic candidates) so I won't rehash them here. But if you are trying to win second preferences from your opponent's voters, that surely at the very least encourages you to speak civilly about your opponent. Ideally, it might even see you drawing the similarities that you share with them in order to reassure the voter that you are worthy of their second preference.

So for the sake of making votes matter, fairer and for an attempt to make the kinder gentler politics we strive for I think it's time to say goodbye to first past the post. I am open minded as to which system of proportional representation we have, that should probably be nailed down by a people's assembly or civic jury. Let the voters in to reforming our voting system, making it fit for the 21st century. **C**

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