



& Workers' Liberty Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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A socialist “Green New Deal”



TAKE OVER THE BIG ELEVEN!

By Mike Zubrowski

After the Extinction Rebellion (XR) action on 15-25 April, climate activists need concrete demands that we can organise around and some of which can be won, if partially, even now.

That way we can build towards the eventual transformation of society, and we can buy ourselves more time, slowing the onslaught of climate change. We need, so to speak, a socialist “Green New Deal.”

The term “Green New Deal” refers to divergent, often vague, and generally inadequate sets of proposals. However, the basic proposal of a bold government program is a good one.

The program must be international, to take on a global threat. We

should demand public ownership of the Big Eleven energy companies in Europe, under workers’ control, to bring about the fastest possible transition to green energy.

That’s the Big Six in Britain — E.ON UK; EDF Energy; npower, owned by RWE; SSE; Scottish Power, owned by Iberdrola; and British Gas, owned by Centrica — plus the National Grid. Across Europe the Big Eleven are E.ON; Engie; Enel; EDF; RWE; SSE; Iberdrola; Centrica; Vattenfall; EnBW; and National Grid plc.

We should organise around similar demands in transport, food, and other major industries; and around the banks and finance, to finance this transition.

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Mueller and Trump

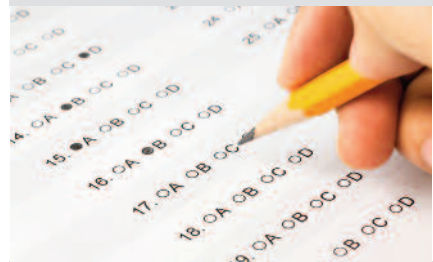
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2 May and
23 May**

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Labour and Brexit: call a Special Conference!

Protest for “Two States” on 11 May

By Martin Thomas

Asked by an interviewer on 23 April whether his “plan” for Israel-Palestine, due to be announced after 4 June, will culminate in “two states”, Trump aide Jared Kushner said, “If people focus on the old traditional talking points, we’re never going to make progress.”

The plan, says Kushner, will emphasise “economic benefits” for the

green-light the shelving of “two states”. Netanyahu’s — that the Palestinians will be isolated in rejecting Trump’s plan and he can go ahead with declaring “Area C” of the West Bank to be not only Israeli-occupied, but part of Israel.

“Area C” includes the Jewish settlements, the roads connecting them, and a small scattering of Palestinian population. Almost all the centres of Palestinian population are in “Areas A and B”. There is some Palestinian autonomy

dent Palestinian state alongside Israel”.

We will be on the streets again on 11 May, noon at the BBC, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA.

We are gathering at the same place as the protest called by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and will be talking and arguing with PSC supporters.

We do not support the slogan of the PSC protest: “Exist! Resist! Return!” The “return” of six million Palestinians to repossess what is now Israel is not workable. It could become workable only by conquering and overrunning Israel. That won’t happen in the foreseeable future. If it could happen, it would be a bloody exercise in revenge, not a democratic settlement opening the way to peace and workers’ unity.

The PSC (mimicking Hamas) focuses on such revanchist rhetoric, and on efforts like boycotting the Eurovision song contest, and ignores the Trump-

Netanyahu plan as a detail, shows the need for a new campaign on Israel-Palestine, based clearly on “two states”.

Left movement surge

Alon-Lee Green, director of the Israeli Jewish-Arab movement Standing Together, has written:

Since 10 April, the day the election results were announced, more than 550 people, Jews and Arabs, [have] joined Standing Together and chose to be part of the largest grassroots movement in Israel. Within one week alone, our monthly sustaining members al-

most doubled in numbers.

This surge in membership is not only a reaction to the landslide victory of the right wing, but it also rests on the understanding that a grassroots movement is the only way to restore hope, to build a force for change, and to connect the various struggles

Laura Murray and complaints

By Keith Road

The appointment (on 25 April) of Laura Murray to Head of Complaints for the Labour Party has real problems, whatever merits she may have.

Murray has been defended by Jon Lansman, chair of Momentum: “I can’t think of anyone better for this role. She’s developed wide knowledge about it [antisemitism], deeply wants to root it out, has engaged and worked with Jewish communities”.

Jeremy Newmark, former chair of the Jewish Labour Movement, has described her as “responsible and fair”, and defended her against charges that, intervening from a position in the Leader’s Office, she pressed complaints staff to investigate but not suspend a Labour member who was subsequently arrested by police over antisemitic social media posts.

We remain concerned with comments Murray has made about ourselves which cast doubt on her propensity for dispassionate judgement and on whether she can really be said to have developed a view on antisemitism that fits with Lansman’s description.

In a lengthy blog post in December 2016 (bit.ly/lm-dec16), Murray wrote about us as “a group with such extreme Trotskyist politics that they are almost a caricature of themselves... Subtle support for imperialist wars, uncritical support



for Israel and fanatical support for the European Union are amongst their policies”.

We’ve been outside the Israeli Embassy many times criticising and protesting against Israeli government actions, and we’ve never seen Murray there. Such things as misinterpreting our opposition to destruction of Israel as “uncritical support” are the usual ploy of left antisemites.

Also, however much Murray may have privately improved, the Labour Party today needs to signal to the Jewish community and others that its complaints administration is visibly independent from the “Leader’s Office”, which is Stalinist-dominated.

The continued cycling into key jobs in the Labour “machine” of people from the same families, schools, and political networks is no way to do that.



Something like 250,000 people went onto the streets of London to protest at Donald Trump’s visit in July 2018.

There’ll be an even larger turnout when Trump comes back, this time for a full “state visit” on 3-5 June. The protest is provisionally set for 4 June, but details may change.

As we said in 2018, against Trump we need to show the power of “a movement that trumpets free movement, migrants’ rights, feminism, curbing the power of the rich and action to halt climate change”.

bit.ly/trump4j

Vote Labour in 2 May local elections

Solidarity calls on readers to vote Labour in the local elections on 2 May, which cover one-third of the seats in almost all the metropolitan authorities in England (big cities outside London).

They cover almost all the “unitary authorities” (those which combine “county” and “district” powers): in some of those all seats are contested, in some only a third. Any they cover many district coun-



Osama Hajajeh

By Colin Foster

Sixteen year old Osama Hajajeh survived, but by luck. His story tells us, in a capsule, why the Palestinians want their own state, and the Israeli military out of the West Bank.

The Israeli army had blocked all but one path to Hajajeh’s village. A local teacher was killed in a road accident at the dangerous junction between that path and the main road.

After the teacher’s funeral on 18 April, young villagers protested at the roadblocks, some of them by throwing stones at military vehicles.

Israeli soldiers ambushed Hajajeh and handcuffed and blindfolded him. He was kneeling on the

ground, soldiers surrounding him.

He got up, maybe just for relief from thorns on the ground, maybe to flee. Soldiers could easily have grabbed him. They shot him in the legs.

An Israeli army paramedic gave first aid. But a major artery had been hit. Villagers rushed up and demanded Hajajeh be taken to hospital. One soldier, waving his gun, screamed that he would shoot anyone who came near.

The soldiers relented, and the villagers were able to get Hajajeh to hospital just in time.

The Israeli daily Haaretz reports: “This week the [local] area... looked more than ever like a collection of prison compounds. Towns and refugee camps alike were blocked and sealed with iron gates”.

Undemocratic ban

By Maisie Sanders

At the National Union of Students (NUS) conference (9-11 April), University of Bath student Zeid Truscott was disqualified from standing for the National Executive Council (NEC) on grounds of antisemitism.

The biggest issues here are of elections being controlled by full-time officials, of the NUS’s general shutting-down of democracy, and of the culture of responding to anything by “banning” rather than argument.

The Chief Returning Officer, who calls himself Jules “the rules” Mason, declared Truscott disqualified on grounds of antisemitic comments made at a Palestine Solidarity Campaign event in March.

After seeing a video and transcript, the Returning Officer agreed that no antisemitic comments had been made. Mason then asked Truscott to confirm willingness to uphold the IHRA definition of antisemitism, and Truscott complied. But was still disqualified.

There was no mechanism at NUS conference to contest this.

A delegate was able to say that “a student” had been unfairly kicked out. Mason responded that he “made the rules and had the final say”.

Under NUS rules, neither speech could name the student.

Elections should be open to the full range of candidates, and candidates who argue reactionary ideas should be openly challenged and criticised.

cils, and six mayoral elections.

The 8804 seats involved were last contested in 2015, on the same day as the general election which the Tories won, and the Tories currently hold 5521 of them.

Heavy losses for the Tories are almost certain whatever the merits or failings of Labour’s campaigns.

Our reports, though, is that Labour campaigns have been weak. Labour councils have been

administering cuts, and make clear that they will continue to do so.

The last Labour political broadcast before the polls is smoothly made but only gives an exposition of the traditional “Keynesian” argument that public payments to the worse-off will improve profits and output more than payments to the rich.

It says nothing about what Labour councils will do.

Take over the Big Eleven!



Climate

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Monday 15 April until Thursday 25 April were the eleven days of Extinction Rebellion (XR)'s "International Rebellion". In central London, there were ongoing actions at five high profile locations, plus many other smaller actions.

Over a thousand people were arrested, and thousands more participated and protested. There were other actions around the world.

XR has succeeded in raising discussions about the urgency of tackling climate change in a range of arenas, and in many people's minds and conversations. They have raised the profile of disruptive action as a way of taking a stand against climate change. They have

New Barclays action on 25 May

In late March Momentum teamed up with People and Planet, a left-wing student-focused NGO, to launch a new campaign, "Bankrupt Climate Change", aimed at Barclays.

It was politically very limited, but at least it involved action on the streets.

The original plan seemed to be for monthly actions, but with some weeks of radio-silence, I was worried Momentum's first day of action might also be its last.

They have now announced a second day of action, on 25 May. Socialist environmentalists should get involved while also advocating more radical approaches to climate change.

brought large numbers of individuals into – or back into – activism, and climate activism.

XR is now entering "Phase Two", the direction of which is as yet undecided. XR is not in any serious sense democratic, and does not claim to be. However, from the diverse or even disparate suggestions floated in their "people's assembly" on the 22 April – which seems to have been more of a collective feed-in exercise than a forum for making concrete decisions – it is possible to glean likely general directions. More of a focus on finance and banking, and spreading the movement across the country, were two key themes.

Several leading XR activists are running to be MEPs in the upcoming elections under the banner of "Climate & Ecological Emergency Independents". They are not explicitly doing it under the banner of XR, but are clearly linked in politically and organisationally.

XR's evaluation of its success so far highlights the incompleteness of its strategy. The metrics by which XR describe its actions as a "win... a resounding success" are the number of people signed up, the money donated, the headlines made, the arrests made, and the vibes on their events.

Anyone who's been involved in campaigning will know that many of these things are important for growing. And the discussions sparked can cause ripples of their own.

But where from there? With XR, the closest I can gain to an understanding of how they see themselves winning is through numbers involved, and numbers facing state repression.

A truism in XR seems to be that "social science says" that 3.5% of the population need to be mobilised to "achieve system change".

This is oft-repeated, and mobilising that proportion is #2 of their 10 "Principles and Values". What exact systems we want to change from and to is less clear, nor is what these 3.5% would be doing or how that would bring about change.

Strategic aims in terms of numbers experiencing state repression seem stranger still. Roger Hallam, an XR theorist, says that to win they "need about 400 people to go to prison, maybe need two or three thousand people to get arrested". In reporting their activities, XR have referred to "accruing arrests" and "garnering arrests".

ACTIONS

Sometimes doing actions which will likely or definitely get people arrested is the best thing to do. But arrests in themselves being an aim?

That thinking relies on an assumption that the state and corporate media will be fundamentally benign, and on an activist base dominated by people so placed economically that they can afford to be arrested or jailed "for show".

XR has had impact in terms of discussions and statements by politicians, often positive, especially but not exclusively from Labour politicians. Labour is forcing a vote in the House of Commons on 1 May on declaring an environmental and climate emergency. This is a good symbolic move, and one of XR's key demands, although in itself it will not lead to concrete changes.

With the information available at the time of writing, it seems likely the motion will call for global targets aiming to limit global warming to 1.5°C, plus new UK targets on mass rollout of renewable low emission energy and transport, adequately funded environmental protections, tackling species decline



and rapidly reducing waste. Jeremy Corbyn has referred to the need for "concerted government action and a green industrial revolution", and the leadership have recognised the failures of previous Labour policies to address the challenges faced.

XR reports: "Beyond these early and official exchanges, our political strategy team also reports lively engagement 'through backchannels' – we can only speculate what might emerge from these." I have no idea what this refers to, and time will tell what comes from them. However, secretive engagement "through backchannels" is not a democratic and honest approach to politics. Nor, for the same reasons, is it conducive to building mass movements and transforming society.

One key area in which XR have been critiqued from the left is their attitudes towards the police. From 15-25 April the sections of XR sending out updates (at least) progressed from commenting that "[t]he peaceful atmosphere seemed to finally affect our ever vigilant security forces because they carried out their duties today with gentleness and consideration", towards describing the police at points as institutionally racist, and condemning some of their behaviour. When XR wrapped up the rebellion, it

thanked the police for "maintaining professional behaviour".

The disruption XR is causing is very much justified given the scale of the crisis. The core limitation of their strategy is not that it's disruptive, but that it isn't disruptive enough.

Capital's insatiable drive for ever-greater profit, and particularly the drive of those who and profit from fossil fuel extraction, is the key engine behind the rapid environmental destruction we see around them. Any adequate strategy for confronting climate change must seek to move beyond capitalism.

That, in turn, means orientating towards the trade union and labour movement: the working-class perform the labour which makes society run, and are the agent capable of seriously disrupting, transforming and recreating a better, more sustainable society.

XR shutting down several bridges causes serious disruption, but the disruption caused by tube and rail-workers seriously striking, or energy workers taking industrial action, is of a different order.

To tackle climate change, to build a new society, we need to be clear on what we're fighting for, and the social force that can win it.

Capital and the Amazon



Climate

By Mike Zubrowski

A report by Amazon Watch, released on 25 April, indicts the role of global commodity traders and financiers in the destruction of the Amazon rainforest.

The Amazon – the world's largest rainforest – provides 20% of our oxygen, houses 10% of the planet's biodiversity and 20% of its flowing freshwater. It stabilises global climate through driving weather patterns, and is home to many indigenous peoples. Preventing its deforestation is crucial in curtailing global warming and

other world-wide climate catastrophes.

A huge amount of carbon is stored in soil, and is released in the process of soil degradation, which also limits the ability to grow plants in that soil. Deforestation is a significant contributor to soil degradation, as are over-watering and bad farming practices.

Deforestation has steadily risen since 2012, and is set to rise further under Bolsonaro.

Hard-fought for environmental and human rights protections are under severe attack, having already been significantly weakened from 2016, under the government of Michel Temer.

More: workersliberty.org/amz.
Report: bit.ly/am-54

Turning round transport

By Mike Zubrowski

Analysis by the Financial Times on 25 April shows how the UK transport sector is failing to move towards the UK's already meagre climate targets.

According to provisional official statistics, transport accounted for 33% of UK emissions last year, the highest proportion of any sector.

Levels of car travel and purchase remain very high. Fewer than 1% of cars bought are electric (due to high cost). There has been no significant decrease in road vehicle emissions since 2003. Slight reductions in emissions by cars have been offset by increases from on-line deliveries.

Aeroplane greenhouse emissions have more than doubled

from 17.1m tonnes CO2 equivalent in 1990 to 35.5m tonnes in 2016. The number of planes flying has fallen slightly, but the size of the planes has increased hugely.

Improved technology has only slightly offset that, and does not look set to do so any more in the near future. Heathrow's third runway will hugely increase the number of passengers flying.

Short-haul flights (proportionately more polluting than long-haul) have expanded most in recent years. The frequent "business flights" are higher polluting as they are more likely to be "business class", with fewer passengers per plane.

To tackle climate change requires as fast as possible a reduction in aviation and car transport,

and a transition of vehicles into being efficient and green. We need huge investment in cheap collectively-owned public transport, especially trains, and in infrastructure to support and encourage walking and cycling and to reduce commuting.

Efficient and electric-powered transport, and spending on further public research and development into this, must be coupled with green energy production. Cargo bikes, electrically assisted where necessary, can perform courier and logistics functions where necessary.

Finally, shorter working weeks and larger quantities of paid holidays would reduce time barriers to use of high-speed rail rather than aircraft.

Morning Star says “Don’t vote Labour”



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

One of the mysteries (albeit a minor one) of contemporary British politics, is how the *Morning Star* manages to maintain its image as a pretty much uncritical Corbyn fanzine whilst opposing Corbyn’s one and only clear policy on Europe – to avoid a no-deal Brexit at all costs.

Perhaps the paper (and its political masters at the Communist Party of Britain) gets away with it because its advocacy of no-deal on WTO terms is tucked away in editorials, often posed as a just a suggestion and then spelt out in statements from the CPB published in the *Morning Star* but not officially the paper’s “line.”

Now they’ve gone further and broken with the Labour party’s most sacred shibboleth: to vote Labour in every election.

The proposition first appeared, almost as an aside, at the bottom of an editorial (24 April) attacking Change UK (something the MS does a lot, while having little to say about Farage’s Brexit Party):

“There is already a strong case for Britain’s voters boycotting the EU elections. Participating in them lends a spurious legitimacy to an exercise that would not be happening but

for the parliamentary sabotage of Brexit.”

This was followed up, two days later, with a rambling editorial (“Should we boycott the Euro Elections?” — note that disingenuous question mark), which worked its way round to suggesting “There is a strong case — rooted in a respect for the people’s democratic instincts — for an active boycott of this unnecessary, irrelevant vanity parade.”

Meanwhile, the paper’s political masters, the CPB, had put out a statement (25 April): “Communists call for ‘People’s Boycott’ of EU polls”.

““The European elections scheduled for May 23 are illegitimate in Britain’, John Foster told the Communist Party’s political committee on Wednesday evening.

“He insisted that the ‘people’s vote’ in the biggest poll in British history in June 2016 was to leave the European Union and that this should be reinforced by a ‘People’s Boycott’ of the EU elections if they go ahead...”

“In particular, he warned against Labour presenting itself as an anti-Brexit party, as some of its leaders and European candidates are intent upon doing.”

There is good reason to believe that the CPB and its *Morning Star* mouthpiece have put out their call to boycott the Euro elections because if they didn’t, quite a few of their supporters and even members, would support Farage’s party.

It would be logical, given that what the CPB and *Morning Star* say about the EU and



Brexit is (give or take a few empty slogans) virtually indistinguishable from Farage and the people he’s gathered round him, some of whom claim to be “left wing”.

And it’s happened before: in the run-up to the 2016 EU referendum, the (then) prominent CPB’er and Foreign Editor of the *Morning Star*, Brian Denny (also coordinator of the No2EU campaign) was working closely with pro-Leave Tories, Ukip and Arron Banks. He eventually left the CPB and ceased working for the *Morning Star*, though to what extent this was a genuine parting of the ways, as opposed to a mutually agreed arrangement to avoid embarrassment, has never been clear (the *Morning Star* recently carried an enthusiastic review, by Denny, of Julie Birchill’s piss-poor pro-Brexit play).

This latest move for a “People’s Boycott” is, therefore, likely to be merely a rouse to avoid the embarrassment of people in and around the CPB/*Morning Star* coming out for Farage. But it’s still a shameful little manoeuvre.

After all, what they’re actually saying is “Don’t vote Labour.”

West Bank

One of the people who joined us on our 18 April protest at the Israeli Embassy against Netanyahu’s plan to annex Area C on the West Bank queried some of the text on our leaflet.

She didn’t dispute that the “right of return” to Israel of all six million descendants of the 1947-9 refugees is neither workable nor just (since it could not happen without the conquest and displacement of the Israeli Jews). But, she said, we should uphold the “right of return” *to the West Bank*.

Part of the call for a real independent Palestinian state alongside Israel is a demand for that state to have sovereignty over its borders. No special “return” slogan is necessary: the state would surely extend rights of citizenship to the Palestinian diaspora, and welcome scattered Palestinians who want to come back to their ancestral land.

That’s good. But “return” — promoted by Arab states by decades, by much of the Western left today, and by Hamas has always been a demand to repossess what is now Israel — to reverse the outcome of the 1948 war.

Between 1948 and 1967, the West Bank was annexed by Jordan, and any of the Palestinians living in Jordan (today about 3.2 million, of whom 2.2 million are UNRWA-registered refugees, some 370,000 in camps) could easily move to the West Bank. None saw moving to the West Bank as “return”. 800,000 of the 2.8 million Palestinians in the West Bank are registered refugees, 200,000 in camps. An independent Palestinian state would bring great improvement, but it would not be “return”.

We can’t win the argument against Hamas by pretending that we have a similar slogan to them, only in a tweaked version.

Rhodri Evans, London

Economic and ideological



Letters

Much of what Todd Hamer (*Solidarity* 500) reveals is plausible in uncovering the connections between economic inequality and mental health disorders that are widespread in capitalist society, such as anxiety and depression.

However I don’t believe this is the whole story. Other “ideological” factors come into play.

I could use myself as an example, though it is a moot point whether or not it is the best approach to move from the particular to the general.

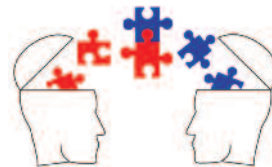
It became clear to me when the fog of misery had cleared that the root cause of the “psychotic” disorder I had fallen into in my late teens was double-edged.

Growing up in a working class family with expectations of bourgeois normality and masculinity, I was crippled by the fear of being discovered a sexual pervert coupled with an aversion to making any form of sexual contact with other males. It didn’t help that one of my sisters was a lesbian and one of my brothers was gay.

Hence compounded secretiveness under a domineering older brother who acted like a controlling patriarch in place of an absent father added to the frigid zone of cold deception, evasion and alienation.

Had we been living in a society that was more accepting of homosexuality, none of this mental disruption and social dislocation would have happened. In other words ideological oppression in the shape of bourgeois expectations of normality played the major part here, rather than any considerations arising from income or status inequality.

There are many other cases of people con-



sidered to be “mad” because they do not conform to the social role or emotional route assigned to them by bourgeois convention, or because of the twisted and contradictory parental signals on how to live a normal, respectable life. This could range from the woman who found marriage unsatisfactory because her husband did not measure up to marital expectations of love and affection that he promised her, to the child who defied his parents by simply not doing their bidding as a “good” child should.

My own non-conformity to bourgeois norms were apparent in some of the findings of the MMPI test for psychological disorders. Apart from establishing how miserable I was (self-evident), these included the very un-masculine traits of having a “basic interest pattern in the direction of the opposite sex. He is tender minded and nonaggressive, preferring poetry to sporting activities”.

Add to that the fact that I was “imaginative, creative, unconventional and an individualist” and capable of “unusual thoughts and sometimes preoccupied with abstract ideas”, and you have a shopping list of forbidden fruit disallowed in a capitalist-bourgeois system or at the very least frowned upon.

Women, BAME, and LGBT+ people are disproportionately affected by mental illness because of bourgeois normativity, as in racism, misogyny, and homophobia.

Ian Townson, south London

[Ian has written more on this: workersliberty.org/ian-mh]

Physics, maths, and telos



Letters

Continuing my dissection of Martin Thomas on Aristotle and Hegel (*Solidarity* 499) — he says, “quarks, as far as we know, do not go through ‘stages of development’.”

Now, strange though they are, it is self evident that they have “become” fundamental to the constitution of the sub-atomic particles necessary for the existence of neutrons and electrons. That will do for me.

Since we are talking about physical fundamentals, let’s remind ourselves of the relevance of this to Marx and Aristotle. Marx’s Doctoral Dissertation is an exhaustive discussion on the “atomic” theory of the Greeks.

He is exploring a “categorical mistake” made by the Greek Democritus and his many followers, that the world is governed by atoms in motion. The argument ends with Marx agreeing with Aristotle that the large parts of reality we are concerned with, the physical, living and social worlds, are composed of entities which are not reducible to smaller, simpler bits of reality. There is no explanatory power in saying everything is made of atoms in motion, or quarks.

This principle applies to entities making up bigger entities too. So you cannot reduce history and society to simple aggregates of individual humans. You need the categories of class, state money, market etc. A stomach cannot come into being as an isolated organ. It is “organically” inseparable from a whole with a necessary line of development (Telos) and function (Ergon).

Division of labour, exchange, commodity, trade, money, capital and state are a line of necessity, a coming-into-being. This is humanity’s Telos, that is the realisation of the social nature of humanity as it transcends animality, domination by nature, domination by economic forces, and slavery to class.

I think a possible confusion here may stem from Martin’s references to “‘emergent’ patterns of development of very large systems...”. I’m assuming this is about structures and events emerging from randomness over time, complexity etc.

This is of mathematical and statistical interest and of course, lays the material foundation for the emergence of something completely different and more interesting, the coming-into-being of entities.

Martin also says: “Numbers don’t develop”. Consider that numbers are not entities and that mathematics is not an entity. Both are formal systems of logic.

The world is not mathematical. It lends itself to mathematical description and abstraction because there is “lawfulness” in nature, but that is not reducible to mathematics or formal logic. Unless you’re Plato or Hegel.

Grey... grey is theory. Green... green is the tree of life!

Paul Cooper, south London

Make it clear-cut!

Clive Lewis MP spoke to *Solidarity*

Whatever Brexit deal passes, whether it's one negotiated by the Government with Labour, whether it's one passed through Parliament that is separate from those talks, whatever it is, it needs to come back to the British public for a final say and a confirmation vote.

Anything that fudges that issues fails to put clear water between us and the Brexit Party on a critical issue. We can talk about social care, health, the environment, and many of those things also have a European dimension.

If we're not going to have a clear-cut position on the fundamental issue, then it's a fudge, and political parties that are not clear about their strategic dimension pay a price. Some of the electorate, not all, but some of the electorate, will vote for the parties they see as being clear in what they stand for.

European elections are different from a national election. People feel that the relationship between them and their MEP is quite distant. People often don't know what Europe does — they know even less than they know about what their local authority does. As a result, the European elections come to be used as a way to send a message to political parties and the political establishment.

My fear is that many of the people who want to stay in the EU and really want a confirmatory vote will say that it's not a vote for

the next government, or even for their local authority, and therefore they will vote with their "conscience" rather than their "tribal preference".

We will pay a heavy price if we fail to articulate our overall strategic aims in this election.

I think Labour needs to be really clear on free movement. With the rise of the far right and racist sentiment, not just in this country but across Europe, we need to have a very clearly expressed view on freedom of movement.

There's an opportunity for the Labour Party to put clear water between itself and the Conservative Party on this. But it's complicated, because we've adopted a position for a points-based system — very similar to the Conservatives in some ways.

Of course it will be a Labour-led government under Diane Abbott and Jeremy Corbyn who would implement the policy, but nonetheless there's potential for confusion, for a green light to groups who say that immigration is bad for this country. That's one of the weaknesses of having a position which is other than freedom of movement.

The other side of this is that we need to be in Europe to make sure that Fortress Europe is changed, and that as a European entity we have changes towards migrants and migration.

It's a multi-faceted issue which has to be looked at in some depth.



For Labour, against Brexit

The "build unions, not borders", "socialist Europe", "free movement" anti-Brexit left is organising to make an impact in the Labour campaign for the Euro-election on 23 May.

A model is the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory (SCLV) initiated in 1978-9 by Socialist Organiser, a forerunner of Solidarity. It produced literature arguing for a Labour vote against Thatcher's Tories, and also criticising the 1974-9 Labour government and proposing socialist alternatives.

Some constituency Labour Parties voted to back the SCLV and to use SCLV leaflets. In other constituencies individual activists were able to use SCLV leaflets while campaigning.

Since the Blair days — and still today — Labour's election campaigns have been more tightly controlled, and the volume of will and energy to speak out for sharp socialist ideas has been less.

There is more scope for distinctive activity in this election for four reasons.

First, there is already an organised body of Labour left-wingers speaking out, in Labour for a Socialist Europe (L4SE). Their efforts are being amplified by the Love Socialism, Hate Brexit group of left MPs, who are speaking at meetings round the country.

Second, the Labour "Leader's Office" knows it is isolated in the Labour Party in its accommodate-to-Brexit stance, and is losing its political authority in the movement. On 30 April Labour's National Executive decided a vague formula: if Labour cannot reach an acceptable Brexit compromise with the Tories,

then to "back the option" of a public vote.

What's "acceptable"? Who decides? Really Labour should break off the talks with the Tories. It should call a special conference to decide a clear Brexit policy democratically.

The vagueness makes it hard for the Leaders' Office to keep tight control.

Third, many of Labour's Euro-candidates are anti-Brexit. Two sitting MEPs, Julie Ward and Jude Kirton-Darling, have backed L4SE's statement on the Euro-election.

Fourth, on the evidence little more than three weeks from polling day, official Labour election campaign efforts look weak.

If L4SE and other "bring-down-borders" leftists organise a decent scattering of street stalls, then that will create a visible profile, not swamped by the hugeness of official efforts.

Opinion polls show that the Tories will do poorly on 23 May, and the main contest will be between Labour and Nigel Farage's new Brexit Party.

The dangers for Labour are that it will not sound a clear note against Farage, that it will leave space for Chuka Umunna's Change UK and the Greens to pull away pro-Remain voters, and that it will be so blurry that Labour supporters won't bother to vote.

To build an internationalist workers'-unity wing in the labour movement, we need a strong Labour left Remain voice in the Euro-elections.

• bit.ly/l4se-23M

We've hit our fund target!

Many thanks this week to Nik from Manchester, has donated £975 to get our fund appeal up to its £15,000 target in time for May Day.

There was just £4.50 from other contributions this week, but Nik's big donation has got us there.

We'll take a short break on fund-raising now, but the process will have to start again soon. It's what pays for everything we do on top of the minimal ticking-over basics of covering rent and utilities and basic supplies at our office, printing Solidarity, and paying stipends to some of our office staff.

We're now paying one of our own people to work part-time on fixing and improving our website, as well as paying for expert outside help on that.

We need a lot more money, immediately, to help us do public activity with Labour for a Socialist Europe in the European elections campaign running up to 23 May.

Nigel Farage told the Daily Express that his new "Brexit Party" has so far raised £2 million, a major part through "one big donation".

No millionaire is going to donate to us. Yet no-one but us and the comrades we work with in Labour for a Socialist Europe is going to promote the clear-cut, across-the-board alternative to Farage's right-wing nationalism. We have to compete with Farage, and on a terrain and in a society where he goes more "with the grain" than we do.

Some of the imbalance we can make good by the greater energy and voluntary effort of our people, compared with Farage's elderly and cynical activists. But we need money, too.

• www.workersliberty.org/donate

The pro-Farage "left"

By Ralph Peters

On 17 April George Galloway declared his support for Nigel Farage and his newly formed Brexit Party.

Farage is a former Tory, then Ukip leader. He is vehemently anti-migrant. He has called for the NHS to be replaced by "social insurance", for laws against discrimination at work to be repealed, and for millions of public sector jobs to be cut.

Claire Fox, Alka Sehgal Cuthbert, and James Heartfield have been announced as Farage party candidates. They are figures round the online magazine *Spiked!*, the "legacy" operation of the "Revolutionary Communist Party" of 1978-97.

Frank Furedi, the best-known leader of the *Spiked!*-RCP operation, has tweeted his support for Farage.

Spiked! is funded by the multi-billionaire Koch brothers, who also fund union-busting

activity in the US and a fair few Tory ERG Brexiters such as Steven Baker.

It has been a big factor in the "Full Brexit" operation, along with people like Blue Labour founder Maurice Glasman, who argued for welcoming EDL people into Labour.

Chelley Ryan, a prolific and popular pro-Corbyn tweeter in her own name and for the social media Facebook page Red Labour (and a contributor to the *Morning Star*), has

given a half-endorsement, tweeting that she wants "the Brexit party to contain diverse voices from left and right so it's not just the Farage show".

This is a new stage in the development of a political trend which calls itself left-wing, but sees working-class interests and working-class unity as no significant factor.

Instead it looks to nationalist politics which are, or can be construed as, anti "establishment".

Union to boycott high-stakes school tests

By Patrick Murphy (NEU national executive, personal capacity)

On 15 April, the first day of the National Education Union (NEU) conference, delegates voted to ballot primary members for a boycott of all high stakes summative testing, including Key Stage 1 and 2 SATs and the phonics tests.

An (electronic) consultative ballot will run from 4 June to 12 July or later. Disaggregated "real" ballots will follow at the end of 2019, in areas and schools where there has been sufficient response to the consultative ballot, and will conclude in January 2020.

This was the fourth successive years that supporters of a boycott had put such a motion. They had responded to objections over the years by clarifying and sharpening their proposal so that it embraced all imposed tests and all primary members, including support staff.

The Executive had, as usual, submitted a spoiling amendment. It was clear that something dramatic was happening when the Executive amendment was easily defeated on a show of hands. A second, more woolly amendment could still have been passed.

Duncan Morrison from Lewisham had used his right of reply to oppose the first amendment. Good speeches by Kari Anson and Tracey McGuire, a Durham TA, persuaded delegates to reject this second amendment too and move to a straight vote on the boycott.

The President at first described the hand vote as "too close" to call. The normal proce-



Some of the NEU activists who successfully campaigned for the testing boycott

dures in that case would be to hold a "digi-vote". (Each day delegates were issued with electronic voting devices).

Instead the President called for the show of hands again and then declared that the boycott motion was lost. Several delegates stood up to demand a proper vote. The President

refused, insisting that she couldn't see 200 people. At which point around 500 people stood up. She continued to refuse. Mayhem.

In the end the delegates succeeded in forcing a digi-vote. Within minutes the results appeared on the screen. The boycott testing motion had won by over 30,000 votes.

This was a tremendous victory, not only for the advocates of a boycott but for union and conference democracy. It wouldn't have been possible without the organising efforts of the rank and file group Education Solidarity Network and the political focus and tenacity of comrades in the Workers' Liberty school workers' fraction.

For now, of course, this is just a Conference victory. Getting to a ballot will be a major battle requiring maximum effort by all in the Union. Under NEU rules we will need to achieve a high turnout and overwhelming yes vote in a consultative ballot before moving to a legal ballot. This can be done but it won't be easy. Despite an over two-month balloting period and a huge effort from head office, our recent ballot on pay and funding saw a national turnout of just 31%. The 2016 Trade Union Act requires 50%.

The NEU conference was a militant and feisty affair which augurs well for the future of the fourth largest union in Britain and the largest education union in Europe. Delegates voted for action ballots on teachers' pay, too, and came close to calling on the union leadership to overturn a bureaucratic agreement with the TUC which prevents the NEU from seeking bargaining rights and recognition to represent our support staff members.

It was commonly thought that the mixing in of delegates from the traditionally more cautious and moderate ATL (which merged with NUT to form NEU) would dilute the militancy of the NUT. And the old NUT left has itself become tamer. On the National Ex-

ecutive of the NEU decisions have been entirely dominated by a huge bloc uniting the two main competing factions from the old NUT (Broadly Speaking and the Socialist Teachers Alliance).

That bloc came to Conference opposed to a testing boycott and seeking negotiating rights for support staff. At a launch event for what they call the NEU Left, their aims were summarised as "moving away from the old to embrace the new" and "focusing on what unites us, not what divides us". In fact this was essentially the old NUT leadership trying to engineer the maintenance of their own power.

The credibility and influence of that "new left" lasted less than 24 hours. The vote on an immediate move to demand recognition and bargaining rights for support staff was close enough to be win next time.

The most determined speeches against came from the so-called NEU Left. In particular, a SWP member speaking for the Executive urged support staff delegates to "be patient" and avoid "going to war with" other unions. Two days earlier he had opposed the testing boycott; now he said that we must not risk falling out with Unison and GMB at a time when we were balloting.

In fact it will help us win action in more schools and stop the testing regime if more support staff are recruited to the only union proposing to boycott; the NEU.

The ESN fringe meeting was hugely boosted by the dramatic testing vote. The fringe also saw a lively and militant meeting to abolish the anti-union laws and a Workers' Liberty meeting opposing Brexit.

Now the testing boycott must be won. That will require all districts and branches of the union to be on a war footing from now until the summer break.

Stand for what's right

By a Durham teaching assistant

Mam?

Mam why are you sad?
Why do you cry?
Why are you stressed?
Why do you sigh?
Why do you snap over the littlest thing?
Why don't you laugh?
Why don't you sing?

I'm sorry my pet that you see me sad
I don't mean to cry
I don't mean to get mad
I've only ever wanted to just
do my best
I don't see my friends
I don't get much rest
I know that the powers that be won't agree
I know that the upset of all they won't see
I feel bad that my time is taken by fight...

... Stop mam! I want you to stand for what's right!

I know that you're busy, you don't have a choice
I know that it's time that they heard your voice

I know when you stand together you're proud
I know you've a message that's clear and that's loud
I know that I love you
I know that I care
I know that my mam I'm willing to share
I only ask one thing when you fight off the sack
If you don't mind can I have you, my mam back?

Fast forward two years, and the job's still not done
I'm there with you mam when you shout all for one
A more determined collective you'll surely not find
the headline stood out... none left behind!
I've moved forward mam, time goes so fast
No more school days, it's uni at last!
The fight and the passion that you all show
Has helped me to learn
Has helped me to grow
I hope a solution for all will be found
A solution that's fair
A solution that's sound
But til then with pride I am happy to say
I'm proud of my mam
A Durham TA

When tests are toxic

By Patrick Yarker

On 15 April, NEU Conference narrowly passed a motion to boycott all high stakes summative testing in primary schools.

On 21 April, Education Secretary Damian Hinds responded in the *Sunday Telegraph* with a series of ill-informed claims (bit.ly/hinds-st).

Hinds began by likening assessment in primary schools to dental and eye tests. “If something matters, you check that it’s all OK”. Children’s learning matters very greatly, and it should be checked. Happily, this is what primary teachers do. Every single working day.

Intrinsic to the work of teaching is the assessment of learning. Such assessment is a sophisticated, complex, demanding activity requiring nuanced evaluation and skilled judgement, but perhaps that’s what Hinds meant by the word “check”.

Assessment is how teachers understand the way their teaching makes a difference for pupils. Teachers reflect on this understanding and use it to foster their pupils’ further learning. Assessment, undertaken continually and in a variety of ways, enables teachers to fulfil their chief responsibility, which is to pupils’ learning.

But testing is not a synonym for assessment. Testing is a sub-set of assessment. The testing which NEU members in primary

schools may vote to boycott is of a particular sort: high-stakes and summative. Classically, it is embodied in SATs.

A regime of high stakes summative testing, such as Hinds defends, is educationally damaging for pupils and teachers in profound ways. (“Summative” means that the tests are supposed to be end-of-period measurement against a benchmark, as opposed to “formative” testing-as-you-go). Hence the boycott-call. But scrapping SATs, or Baseline Assessment, or “the phonics screening check”, won’t mean scrapping the assessment of learning.

Hinds asserted that primary tests exist to check up on the system and those who oversee it on behalf of the public. He stated: “These tests are tests of our education system, not our children”.

Who does Hinds think sits these tests? Who reads out loud the “unreal” nonsense words of the phonics check or spends twenty minutes with a teacher jumping through hoops for the Baseline Assessment?

In conjuring away the people who are actually put through England’s high-stakes testing regime, Hinds also erases their teachers. In his article, teachers are never mentioned. Nor is the activity of teaching. It’s as if Hinds can’t bring himself to look in the eye the people whose work he misrepresents, for example with his claim that an end to testing means an end to checking whether children

can read, write and add up.

A well-attested truth of the high stakes summative testing regime is that it narrows the scope of the taught curriculum. One form this narrowing takes is that increased classroom-time is devoted to coaching children for the tested activities, at the expense of what is not to be tested. So opportunities to engage with art, drama, PE or science decline.

In his article Hinds paraded more than once his sense of duty to the children of the country, yet seemed unconcerned at the way his “checking” mechanism impoverishes their educational experience.

Hinds did acknowledge that testing can cause stress, and that this isn’t acceptable. But where stakes are high, stress will be present. Since Hinds defends a high stakes regime which inevitably generates stress, all he can offer schools in mitigation is wishful thinking.

Primary schools, he wrote, should “guide children through tests without them feeling pressured”. He didn’t elaborate on how this might be done. He claimed that in many schools there is no “exam stress”, but he offered no evidence for this claim.

Hinds denied that test-results are important for any individual child, on the grounds that “no-one has ever been asked for their SATs results when they got a job interview... because they are not public exams”.

But SATs are public exams. They are designed and developed centrally by a public body, the Standards and Testing Agency. Maintained schools must proceed with them. They are marked by people recruited for the purpose, by a private company paid out of public funds, just as GCSEs are. Results are made public, school by school, just as they are for GCSEs.

The public nature of SATs is a significant element in making the tests high stakes.

Hinds erred again when, noting that SATs have been around for almost 30 years, he refused to “countenance returning to a world where Government had no effective way of knowing how well our children were being taught”. The existence of Ofsted, and before that (back to 1837) of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Schools, must have slipped his mind.

In closing, Hinds pointed out that test results reveal “the improvement over the last few years in children’s reading”, and “the declining gap” (presumably in tested attainment) between richer and poorer children. Here Hinds finally came clean. He wanted to get political credit for some of the outcomes of the high stakes summative testing regime in primary schools, while denying or ignoring the other results.

It’s a regime whose nature, impact, workings and consequences, so his Sunday Telegraph article suggested, he neither understands not cares to learn.

Mueller, Trump, and the Putin connection

By Barrie Hardy

Sergei Mikailov was in for a nasty shock at his works meeting in Moscow in December 2016.

Proceedings started when a bag was placed over his head and he was unceremoniously frog marched out of the room. This was the Lubyanka, and the FSB was cleaning house.

Loose tongues had been wagging about Russian interference in the US Presidential election. Mikhailov, deputy head of the FSB’s cyber security arm, soon found himself facing a secret trial which landed him with 22 years in prison for “treason”. Three other servants of Putin’s secret state met similar fates.

Such career endings are an occupational hazard for spymasters employed by an authoritarian state. An ignominious end in prison is a marginal improvement on a bullet in the back of the head, so progress of a sort since Stalin’s time!

Nevertheless, it transpires the Kremlin didn’t need to worry overmuch, because the highly anticipated Mueller Report apparently found no evidence of actual conspiracy between the Trump campaign and the Russian state.

It is still too early to tell whether Mueller’s findings are a damp squib or contain enough explosive information to damage Trump. The Trump appointed stooge who is Attorney General Bill Barr has conducted a damage

limitation exercise to spin the report by making out that it somehow clears his boss. Legal experts claim Barr is acting as Trump’s “defence Lawyer”.

Barr’s strategy seems to be to release the findings a bit at a time. A heavily redacted version has been released, and will be followed by episodic unveilings of various blacked out sections. The logic is that a drip-drip release of damaging details minimizes the overall impact.

The Trump team may not have actually conspired with the Russian state, but it certainly actively courted its help. There’s plenty of evidence for that, from Trump imploring the release of “incrimination” emails at his rallies, to the infamous Trump Tower meeting to discuss “Russian adoptions” (code for getting sanctions on Russian oligarchs dropped so that they could resume spending in luxury shops and buying up US real estate with their stolen cash).

There’s the mysterious change in the Republican Party Platform which watered down support for Ukraine, and Manafort’s handing over of polling data on swing states to an associate of a Putin-linked oligarch. The fact that key members of Trump’s circle lied about numerous encounters with Russian operatives suggests their behaviour was far from innocent.

Unhinged “shock jocks” like Alex Jones had prattled about a “deep state” conspiracy to oust Trump, but the outcome was nothing

like that. Mueller appeared reluctant to upset the domestic constitutional apple cart.

Partly that may be due to the narrow focus of the probe. Trump said he regarded it as crossing a red line if Mueller investigated his business affairs, and it doesn’t seem that was done in any systematic manner.

Trump has been suspected of laundering money for Russian oligarchs and Putin cronies for a couple of decades. An oft-cited dodgy deal was the sale of a Trump-owned Palm Beach mansion to fertiliser billionaire Dmitry Rybolovlev. It went for \$95 million – way above the asking price for comparable properties. Rybolovlev had no intention of living there and went on to demolish the mansion.

As if to make things even more peculiar, on several occasions Rybolovlev’s private jet appeared to be following Trump around various airports during his campaign.

Pro-Putin sentiment is not confined to a venal maverick president. It extends into other sections of the American capitalist class. The days are long gone when the Republican Party denounced Russia as an evil superpower intent on destroying “the American way of life”.

The National Rifle Association (NRA) has had millions of dollars pumped into it from Russian oligarchs subject to economic sanctions. Wilbur Ross, Trump’s billionaire Commerce Secretary, has been the business partner of Putin’s son-in-law. Substantial

connections also exist between American oil conglomerates and Russian oligarchs.

“Libertarian” American capitalists see in Putin’s crowd kindred spirits whose desire for self-enrichment takes precedent over anything associated with the public good. If only the American state could conspire more fully with corporate pillage like their Russian counterparts do!

The Trump family circle are especially determined to further enrich themselves by exploiting their positions in government.

Whether or not Mueller’s report leads to impeachment, there are at last count still another 16 investigations going on into Trump affairs. Should any of those hasten his undoing, it would be welcome. However, most reliable means of being rid of him must be via the 2020 election.

The working class should not look for saviours in the American establishment, though. Instead, socialists need to campaign on a number of issues.

There is a particular need to address the substantial democratic deficit in its various forms, such as voter suppression and electoral gerrymandering. Answers also have to be found as to how best to establish an independent socialist party presence.

Trade union militancy and (general, unformed) sympathy for socialist ideas in the USA are enjoying a promising phase. Let us hope that full advantage can be taken of these opportunities.

Retreating up a ladder



Debate

By Sean Matgamna

This is a reply to Daniel Randall's polemic in *Solidarity* 498 against my article in *Solidarity* 497.

A story. A man begins to think his partner has another lover. He asks her and is told: "Of course not! That's ridiculous!"

He doesn't want to believe it. But he can't get rid of the idea.

So, scandalously, he takes to following his partner around. He sees her meet someone. They greet each other affectionately, and afterwards he sees them impatiently kiss and grope each other. They go to a flat and to a bedroom.

He spies on them with binoculars, through a window. They begin to undress. Then one of them remembers to draw the curtain, and he can no longer see.

"Bugger it", he mutters in frustration. "I still can't be sure. It's still not a matter of blinding obviousness".

It is not of "blindingly obviousness" that the "right of return" to what is now Israel of six million descendants of 1947-9 refugees is code for eliminating Israel?

You say that my argument "functions to obliterate distinctions" within support of the formula "right of return".

What distinction subtracts from the meaning of "return" to possess Israel by six million people? No such distinction!

There are surely distinctions of *motive* and *intention* among "return" advocates. I didn't say that they are racists, not in any ordinary sense. I focused not on the subjective drives of advocates of "return", but on what the program means in the real world.

"The distinctions and gradations" in the program are not, as Daniel claims, "many". No distinction of motive and drive has any necessary bearing on what "return" of six million people means in reality, outside the heads of the advocates. You conflate the objective meaning of "return" and the different subjective motives of those who advocate it.

You say you reject "a 'right of return' policy that presumes the collective resettlement of five to six million Palestinian refugees and their descendants". Oh, *that* "right of return" policy! Is there another one?

Stated plainly, "right of return" is a right in principle to "repossess" Israel for up to six million people, only a small fraction of whom are actually 1947-9 refugees from what is now Israel.

Whatever a given advocate of "right of return" intends, the idea acts to delegitimise Israel and legitimise those who want to destroy it.

What else is advocacy of "return" of second, third, fourth... generation descendants of refugees, a total two-thirds the size of the population of Israel now, including Israeli Arabs — if not advocacy of the displacement of the Israeli Jews?

"Right of return" is in reality another way of saying "destroy Israel". And by force. It would have to be. To deprive the Hebrew nation of the right to exist in territory of its own could only be done by war, conquest, and massacre.

That is not of "blindingly obviousness" to some advocates of the "right of return"? Then we need to enlighten them. The "return" people who do not mean it literally help give

bulk and weight to those who do.

You sum us up as rejecting "a 'right of return' policy... via the displacement of the contemporary Israeli-Jewish population if necessary". Where do you get the "if necessary" from? There is another sort of "return" of six million people that does not mean that displacement? Or you want to keep mental reservations which allow you to question definite statements like mine in *Solidarity* 497?

Advocates of "right of return" are not only those "who got their political training on a 1970s and 80s far left". A lot of them are younger people, poisoned politically. And then you think the best way to combat the actual idea, the literal program, is to dissolve it into a series of distinctions based not on different actual meanings, but on different subjective motives (including plain ignorance) and different understandings of what it means?

We should not point out, plainly and insistently, what it literally means? We do not say just how wrong it is for someone who does not support displacing the Israeli Jews to hold to the formula, accept it passively, or tolerate it peacefully?

Here, Daniel, you go from little bits of reserved judgement and fudges of meaning to defending and championing (by "explaining") some of the advocates of "return".

The subjective displaces the objective. We must "patiently tease out" the different understandings of the slogan, and pull back from summing up plainly what the slogan means.

Obviously when we talk with people, we take account of their specific angles and what the slogan means to them. You counterpose that to saying what is. I don't; you do.

A proper summary statement of what the "right of return" slogan is — that is "moralistic denunciation"? That implies a denunciation which is unjustified, or too smug, or emotionally self-serving. So: it is wrong to be outraged at the advocacy of the destruction of Israel? Do you not sometimes feel "moralistic" anger over that? Or don't you? Is that the point?

CONTRADICTION

Daniel, here you soften the contradictions between what we say and what the kitsch left and those duped by it say by toning down what we say or deconstructing and qualifying it almost out of existence.

A statement like mine that Israel "often" tramples on Palestinian rights, you say, is inadequate. You write: "It is less a question of 'often', more one of 'always'."

As if I haven't said that Israel is consistently blocking the Palestinians' right to a state of their own! The point here is, what follows from your way of putting it?

You write as if the mortal hostility to Israel and its right to exist may be just, or not unreasonable, or no less than Israel's misdeeds merit.

You seem to indicate that the things about Israel and its behaviour which we criticise justify those who back "right of return", the destruction of Israel, and the incorporation of the Jews who survive the necessary conquest and massacre as a minority into an Arab state. No, Daniel. Israel's misdeeds do not license the proposition that the Jewish state must be destroyed. They point to what we advocate: two states, and the "normalisation" by the Arab states of relations with Israel.

Why the impulse to moderate what we say? The wish to soften things by explaining



that the "revanchist" slogans are just outrage at Israel's "barbarism"?

Here you seem to be looking for a softening of the conflict between us and all the advocates of "return" and displacement. Daniel, we are politically at war with all the advocates of the destruction of Israel, whatever the manner or "code" through which they express that idea, "right of return" included. Short of us hiding our full politics, there is no way of softening that contradiction.

Beating about the bush, hawking, mental reservations, identifying against my "moralistic denunciations" with those who from outrage against Israel adopt revanchist attitudes — none of that is Marxist politics.

We have to say what is. Then, after that, we think of ways of influencing individuals by taking their motives as a starting point.

For Hamas, you write, the "right of return" means "not conceding a single inch of the land of Palestine". But then you say we must remember that for others "it simply expresses a desire to live in the... place where their families are from and from where they fled or were driven out".

Here you describe what the "right of return" means, you think, to "others" than Hamas. But the second category is usually the raw material for use by Hamas and others.

You inflate the importance of vague psychology, and try to exclude the hard political reality of what "right of return" means.

"Right of return" is not just a welling-up of vague nostalgia rooted in current misery (and the misery of the Palestinians is not just the responsibility of Israel).

And "return" is not something young people arrive at spontaneously, to express their indignation: it has been propagandised for by Hamas, by Arab states, and by the kitsch left.

"Romantic" attachment to the "right of return", you write, is only likely to break up when there is "a sizeable movement amongst both Israeli Jews and Palestinians for... both peoples... equal right to their own state". Again, you are dissolving and fudging the problem, remitting it into some desirable future. Again, you substitute psychological speculation for hard-edge politics. You make opposition to the "right of return" depend on big future changes.

Meanwhile the "right of return" — demanding the destruction of Israel and the displacement of its Jewish population — and all that goes with it is a barrier to any Jewish-Arab common movement.

I made no suggestion that the Palestinians are "aspirant agents of genocide". To think of them as such, you continue, "can only serve to drive them into the arms, and strengthen the hand, of the revanchists such as Hamas".

That is something in the future tense? What are you trying to say? To point out the logic and implications of the "right of return" — that it implies displacement — can only

serve to make it come true?

You say plainly that we can't hope to eliminate advocacy of the right of return, and the left antisemitism that goes with it, before there exists a strong Israeli-Jewish movement for the Palestinians. Isn't that a little too much like the writer in the *Morning Star* who said antisemitism would only stop when Israel stops ill-treating the Palestinians?

Why exactly do you bring in the general upsurge of old-style antisemitism? Many older forms of antisemitism are indeed being revived. Much of the subsoil of society is poisoned by antisemitism. The internet is a cesspool of it. And elements of older antisemitism exist among left-wing antisemites concerned with Israel-Palestine.

In fact, as in your whole article, once again you misrepresent reality and fudge, to take the edge off our confrontation with left antisemitism. You write that I "underplay" the problem by focusing on left-wing antisemitism and what is peculiar to it.

What you do there — now clothed in virtuous concern with the broader societal antisemitism — is soften the hard edges where we are in conflict with our immediate political world, the rest of the left.

You say that more general "vicarious-Arab-nationalist or vicarious Islamism 'drive the Jews into the sea' type cheerleading for Hamas", and the left's refusal to differentiate from it, is less "toxic" than the older, broader, vaguer antisemitism which the left does differentiate from and repudiate.

You see the vaguer general antisemitism as more important than the left-wing antisemitism geared around Israel. And easier to combat.

You end with a smug advocacy of education against all antisemitism. Yes, Daniel. But also no, Daniel!

It is the antisemitism of the left that we primarily encounter and have to confront. That is what my open letter to Jeremy Corbyn was concerned with.

We can't shy away from confronting that left antisemitism. We can't slip into dissolving awareness of it, and step back from making others aware of it, by focusing on the possible good motives involved, or by saying that we should instead focus on the older forms of antisemitism.

But that, I think, is the whole thrust of what you write. In sum, you suggest someone who wants to soften our conflict with the antisemitic ostensible-left, and to explain away "right of return" as an understandable response to Israeli "barbarism". You retreat from our specific problems into generalities, run up the ladder of generalities away from the kitsch-left dog barking at our heels.

That, Daniel, is not good Bolshevism. It's not even good consistent liberalism.

Further contributions for this debate? Email solidarity@workersliberty.org

Reading or stagnating?

By Daisy Thomas

"You can never get a cup of tea large enough or book long enough to suit me." – C. S. Lewis

When I was a young child, I learned an appreciation for the written word through both of my parents reading aloud to me and through listening to audiobooks on long car trips.

Somewhere during the dreaded forced reading during my secondary and tertiary schooling, I lost my fascination with reading. Then, over time, with that lack, I noticed other things were lacking.

There are so many reasons to read: to inform, to amuse, to connect, to understand, to critique, and so on. Reading is a fantastic way to improve our empathy and ability to understand the position of others; to travel the world and understand different cultures and societies; and to increase our knowledge.

Without reading, I was absorbing less new information about the world, and what I got

was through the hollow echo chamber of my social media feeds. I was becoming more self-focused. The more I didn't read new information, the less inclined I became to seek out new information. I was spinning my wheels and stunting my cognitive, emotional, and relational growth.

So, I started, bit by bit, to find my way with reading again. I re-entered the world of literature through the comforting, familiar, well-worn tracks of books that I remembered enjoying when I was younger.

Once I'd gotten my feet wet with reading again and I was feeling more confident, I joined an open book club run by a Brisbane local bookstore, Avid Reader. In the year and a half that I attended that book club, I learned much about the world, about others, about myself (including what I enjoy in books and what I don't), and I participated in a range of interesting and thought-provoking discussions.

Nowadays, my reading tastes are mostly in fiction, but I have realised that reading memoirs or biographies has enabled me to further

understand the minds, motivations, and actions of others, especially those in the public eye. It has given me greater appreciation for the hardships they have faced and allowed me to make more balanced and constructive critiques of their choices.

Part of the issue with the media climate, especially the consumption of "news" on social media, is that it often isn't the whole story. We are hearing only what those in our social-media circles think we want to hear. That kind of "news" isn't moving us forward in our individual knowledge, or as a society.

I would encourage you to consider reading a range of material, including books, to gain more understanding of what is happening in our world and where we are heading as a society. It will enrich your own understanding and the conversations in your social circle. And, over time, small changes can lead to big shifts.

So, go and get a cup of tea and settle down with a good book. Your future self will thank you for it.

The Glorious Heresies



Review

By Matt Kinsella

Lisa McNerney's *The Glorious Heresies* is a strong debut novel, which won her the Bailey's Women's Prize in 2016.

McNerney was already known for her blog, *Arse End of Ireland*, in which McNerney spoke about the impacts of the financial crash on Ireland's poorest. The novel continues similar themes, focusing on those forced into the fringes of society in Cork.

Ryan is a teenage drug dealer, whose gruff persona masks his hidden inner depths: his talent as a pianist, born of childhood boredom and neglect, and his strong desire not to turn out like his alcoholic father, Tony. A scene where he loses his virginity, with childhood posters of cars still on the wall, and his more general conflict between his teenage insecurities and the need to act tough as a dealer, shows the nervous transition to adulthood with care.

Georgie is a sex worker who finds herself joining a born-again movement to escape her work — and her drug habit. Georgie's storyline combines comedy and pathos in equal measure. Other characters are less formed: Jimmy Phelan, fearsome gangster and estranged son of Maureen, whose confrontation of an intruder sets the characters' paths on a collision course.

The novel perhaps struggles to find its conclusion, but McNerney's humanist desire to show people trying to overcome their difficult circumstances wins out.

The novel is part of a recent wave of Irish women writers who ably explain the inner conflicts generated by modern society, including Sally Rooney, Sinéad Gleeson, Wendy Erskine and Anna Burns.

Caring for the NHS

By Simon Nelson

Mark Thomas's show 'Check Up: Our NHS at 70' (bit.ly/nhs-mt) is a whistle-stop and funny tour of what is wrong with underfunding, short staffing and the creeping privatisation of the NHS.

In some ways this is Mark Thomas at his softest, and probably on a topic on which he is on very safe ground.

But the takeaway message is that inequality, low incomes, poor housing, cuts to social care and local authority services have all combined with the dismantling of the NHS to make the health outcomes for the poorest significantly worse.

In Kensington and Chelsea, the residents around the Grenfell tower had a life expectancy 22 years lower than those just down in the road, within the same London Borough, who in theory had access to the same services.

Thomas has done some serious research for this show. He spent several days working with different teams in an NHS trust, from A&E to a dementia ward, and interviewed a range of people from former Health Minister Frank Dobson to the current Chief Medical Officer for England.

We only get short snippets of the interviews — including Frank Dobson saying his greatest regret is PFI (a bit late!). Thomas moves along at a roaring pace, getting through a huge amount of material in 70 minutes.

He is largely preaching to the converted, and for a comedy show this is light on jokes, but his enthusiasm for the NHS is infectious, much like the diseases the antibiotics we are all taking will soon fail to cure.

• Mark Thomas: Check-Up — Our NHS @ 70 is now (until 4 May) at Battersea Arts Centre



Tickets for our summer school, Ideas for Freedom, are £38 waged, £22 low-waged and students, £9 unwaged until 26 May.

Prices will increase in steps until the event, around 22-23 June.

The 22-23 June weekend agenda will include presentations and debates on issues around Brexit, antisemitism, climate change, 1919, 1989, and more. An almost full (but provisional) agenda is at workersliberty.org/ideas.

There'll be a walking tour on Thursday 20 June looking at "Queer Brixton" and an

evening debate on Friday 21 June between Workers' Liberty and Paul Embury of the Fire Brigades Union on socialists views on Brexit.

Venue: Camden School for Girls, Sandall Road, London NW5 2DB.

Free creche. Overnight accommodation will also be available free. Contact awl@workersliberty.org for further details.

www.workersliberty.org/ideas



www.workersliberty.org/books

Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

More online at www.workersliberty.org  Workers' Liberty  @workersliberty

ISO: the picture from Chicago

By Eduardo Tovar

On 19 April the International Socialist Organization (ISO), previously the largest far-left group in the US, announced it had completed the process of winding itself up.

The decision to dissolve came in the wake of a major controversy over the ISO Steering Committee's mishandling of a sexual assault allegation in 2013. The row began on 15 March with the publication of a letter from the new ISO Steering Committee elected at the organisation's national conference in late February.

The echoes with the 2013 "Comrade Delta" scandal that led to mass departures from the SWP are difficult to ignore.

Across the US, local ISO groups are rebranding themselves as "Chicago Socialists", "NYC Socialists", and so forth. Many ex-ISO members have jumped ship to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and begun to involve themselves in its left caucuses.

The annual Socialism Conference that the ISO used to sponsor is due to take place on 4-7 July in Chicago, only this year it is sponsored by *Jacobin* magazine, Haymarket Books (a publishing company linked to the old ISO leadership), and the DSA instead.

I suspect that the political circles around *Jacobin's* editorial team will pick up a good number of former ISO members.

As Stephen Wood reported in *Solidarity* 500 and 501, the ISO was a "Cliffite" sister organisation of the UK Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). It split from the SWP's international network in 2001, but largely retained the SWP model of organising. I believe that this rigid organisational model, which allows members to form political factions and to voice political disagreements in the group's press only in

very limited circumstances, was a major contributing factor to the ISO's dissolution.

With such a brittle organisational structure, the ISO was unable to withstand the mounting pressures from within, including the ever-growing rifts between members over key political issues, such as how to orient towards "identity politics" and the left-wing of the Democratic Party.

Nonetheless, these structural factors only provide part of the explanation. After all, much of the old ISO leadership was ousted in the Steering Committee elections in February 2019, and the new leadership had committed to reforms to the voting system and to a more accommodating stance towards matters of gender, race, and sexuality.

One therefore has to ask why, given this changeover in leadership and wider hopes for structural change, most ISO members preferred to dissolve the organisation rather than reform it.

Moreover, when the mass departures from the SWP occurred after the Delta Scandal, the splinter groups — RS21 and the International Socialist Network — emerged on the basis that they would continue and build a better organisation. No such organised and programmatic splits have come from the ISO.

Going by conversations with former ISO members here in Chicago, I suspect that there were a few key factors that resulted in the drive to dissolve without immediately forming a splinter group. For one, the pro-reform members who became the new ISO leadership in February quickly concluded that the rot in the organisation ran deeper than they had realised. And many branches resentfully felt that they had been tightly controlled from the organisation's centre at the expense of being able to discuss and develop political ideas.

The more that the new leader-

ship members encountered and shed light on the extent of bureaucratic suppression within the group, the more sceptical they became of the ISO's viability as a vehicle for socialist organising. Additionally, many more dedicated ISO activists felt burnt out from years of intensive activity.

Others became somewhat insular in mentality: their activity in unions and other sites of struggle came to be seen as in conflict with their ISO branch duties, as opposed to integrating these different fronts of political activity into an approach to socialist organising that facilitates exposure to other ideas on the left and engages in comradely debate with people who hold such ideas.

Whilst different ex-ISO members have starkly different perspectives on the matter, plenty found that the weeks of gigantic conference calls during the crisis period just kept airing out too much "dirty laundry". These multiplying revelations and accusations further fuelled distrust and resentment.

The experience left many who had committed to organisational reform feeling that they had bitten off more than they could chew. Soon the dominant mood among ISO members was simply to "burn it down". Many who had hoped that the ISO would survive the crisis eventually came to favour dissolution because they believed it would allow them to "step back from" all the bitterness and toxicity surrounding the debate.

At least some of these members are open to forming a successor group once they feel they have had the time and breathing space to draw firmer conclusions about the ISO's organisational failures.

There is a good deal of movement amongst the ruins of the ISO, but it will probably be a good while before someone tries to build a new house from the rubble.

More online

Alan Simpson on Labour and XR:
workersliberty.org/simpson-wasteland

Dale Street on recent surveys of antisemitism in Britain:
workersliberty.org/as-surv

Riki Lane on the Australian federal election of 18 May:
workersliberty.org/ausfed18-5

And on the Victorian Socialists effort in that election:
workersliberty.org/vicsoc

Ian Townson on mental health:
workersliberty.org/ian-mh

Dale Street on the SNP's plan for a new referendum on Scottish separation some time before 2021:
workersliberty.org/scotref2

Audio and e-reader versions

Many thanks to the volunteers who have enabled us to produce an audio version of the paper! Links to the audio version on SoundCloud are at www.workersliberty.org/audio.

To be sent our e-reader version of *Solidarity*, email awl@workersliberty.org.

This may be helpful for dyslexic readers. E-readers enable you to choose the font, type size, and line-spacing you prefer, in a completely uncluttered layout.

Please give feedback so that we can find out whether these efforts are worthwhile, and, if they are, improve them.

Radical Readers, 30 May

Steve Cohen's book *That's Funny, You Don't Look Anti-semitic* is a classic examination of left antisemitism.

Radical Readers in Space is an online reading group. They will discuss the book by videocall on 30 May, or for those who miss that, 6 June — all welcome!

• bit.ly/RR-funny

Ticket office victory

By "Off the Rails"

Transport for London has backed down on plans to close London Overground ticket offices.

RMT reps and activists, and local Labour Party activists, handed out thousands of leaflets and travelled round the stations affected. They made the case that ticket offices are essential for people to safely access the network and for protecting jobs.

The campaign contrasted with the shocking failure of Unite the Union to raise any kind of meaningful campaign against bus route cuts, which TfL confirmed last week would go ahead.

The victory has a sting in its tail, as management still plan to cut their opening hours, mostly to just three hours in the weekday morning peak.

Once people see closed ticket offices 21 hours a day, they stop using them, and once the Mayor's election is safely out of the way next year, we would not be surprised to see another move to shut them.

Fortunately, RMT reps and activists on London Overground are determined to keep up the fight against any cut in opening hours. While celebrating their victory in preventing full closure, they know that the battle goes on.

We hope that the union's leadership is equally determined: the fact that the union's press release did not even mention the cut in hours is not a good sign though.



MAY DAY
CELEBRATION & MEET-UP
To commemorate the international workers' day

SATURDAY 4TH OF MAY 2019
2:30 - 7:00PM
Halkevi Community Centre, 31-33 Dalston Lane, E8 3DF

Food and drink available: all proceeds to Iranian flood victims.
Organisers: Worker-communist Party of Iran - Hekmatist (official line) & Iranian Protest live Information

Workers' Liberty activists will be at May Day events across the country



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Our new pamphlet has Luxemburg's major articles from 1918-9: from the German revolution beginning to her murder.

56 pages A4. Cover price £5bit.ly/r1-gr



Nottingham strike on 4 May

By Zack, IWGB National Deliveroo Committee Chair

Deliveroo Couriers are to strike again on 4 May in Nottingham, for higher pay and better conditions. They have already struck and held various other actions, winning some small concessions, and are pressing on.

Their demands, in line with demands of most groups nationally, are for minimum pay of £1/mile, £10/hour waiting time, greater transparency and visibility within the app, a hiring freeze, no “terminations” without due process and adequate evidence, and more.

Nottingham Riders’ Network are well organised, with a comparatively high number of couriers being members of our union, IWGB. When I visited on a previous action I felt a sense of community among couriers. They are linking to May Day events, and there has been talk of a Star Wars theme (May the Fourth be with

you...).

The national IWGB Couriers’ Strike Hardship fund will be available to members in Nottingham for the strike, and worker-activists from elsewhere will travel to show solidarity.

In Italy, on 1 May, food couriers including Deliveroo couriers will strike for better working conditions.

York couriers struck on Good Friday, 19 April, primarily over the rolling out of a distance-based fee system by Deliveroo, which they are rightly concerned will lead to a fall in pay. They flyered the public that morning, getting what Will Bossman from the York Courier Community described as an “overwhelmingly positive” response.

The strike was a “flash shut-down”: they announced that they would be striking for three hours from 5-10pm, but not *which* three hours until that afternoon. The element of surprise causes more disruption to Deliveroo, for a given loss of earnings. Despite Deliveroo

offering higher fees than usual, the turnout was even larger than at previous strikes.

Deliveroo claim that the changes are “to ensure riders [a]re paid more for longer distances”, claiming the “vast majority” of riders are “happy” with pay nationally “increasing”.

But from our pay analysis so far in Bristol, we can see that since July, when they introduced a distance-based fee system here, average hourly pay fell, slowly at first, and then faster, only starting to pick up slightly after our three strikes this year, when we won a hiring freeze. This pay structure also makes it easier for Deliveroo to slowly drop pay in a less noticeable way.

Within the logic of a piece-rate pay structure, variable pay per distance makes sense. But Deliveroo’s model for doing so is little more than another stealthy way to drop our pay.

In the medium term, we should fight for a liveable minimum pay for the time we are working.

Accessible workplaces

By Janine Booth, Chair, RMT Disabled Workers’ Advisory Committee (personal capacity)

On 26-27 April more than thirty disabled transport workers attended the RMT trade union’s largest Disabled Members’ Conference yet.

Every delegate contributed to debates and discussions, which covered subjects including accessible public transport, mental health, and “reasonable adjustments”. On the latter, the conference stressed that our priority is to win accessible workplaces, rather than leave the onus on individual workers to ask for personal changes.

Delegates also condemned the personality testing used by many

employers, which seeks to enforce social conformity in the workplace and discriminates particularly against autistic and other neurodivergent applicants.

Delegates spoke about the need to confront employers, rather than go along with their “awareness”, “inclusion” and “diversity” claims, which usually mask attacks on disabled workers.

Luke Pollard, Labour MP for Plymouth (where the conference took place), told the conference of his support for RMT’s battles to keep guards on trains and staff on stations, and about the devastating impact of Tory cuts to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities funding.

Since the union changed its rules last year, equality group committees now have the power to decide their own procedures and activi-

ties, although these remain subject to approval by the National Executive. The disabled members’ action plan includes protests against job cuts and for accessible transport, and initiatives to widen disability activism across the union at rank-and-file level.

The conference voted to expand the size of the disabled members’ committee from three to five seats per region, although delegates are concerned that this may face opposition on the National Executive.

Disabled members are also concerned that our own union falls well short of being accessible. From its premises to its branches and communications, significant action is required, and disabled members are ready to hold the union’s leadership to account if it fails to deliver those changes.

PCS vote falls just short

By John Moloney

The PCS union’s ballot for action on pay, which closed on 29 April, gained a turnout of 47.7%.

That is over 6% higher than in 2018, but still about 3,000 votes short of reaching the 50% threshold required under Tory anti-union laws. This has highlighted, yet again, the extreme unevenness of our organisation on the ground.

There has to be a frank and honest discussion about how we can rebuild our organisation. Involving a full autopsy of our areas of strength and weakness. In the past, the suggestion that the union leadership should be open with members about which areas are stronger or weaker has almost been viewed as treachery, because it lets the bosses know where we’re weak.

But they already know that. Rank-and-file activists need to know where the union’s areas of strength and weakness are so we can target resources for rebuilding. We need fundamental reform of

our approach to organising, moving away from a top-down, bureaucratic model based on recruitment quotas, towards a democratic, bottom-up model that aims to consolidate organisation in workplaces and target union resources to the areas where they’re most needed.

Meanwhile, the elections for the union’s National Executive Committee and Assistant General Secretary positions close on 9 May. We’ve now done six branch hustings in the AGS elections, which have been useful for highlighting the differences between candidates.

As well as having a strong social media presence, our campaign has distributed at least 5,000 leaflets individually to PCS members in workplaces across the country. It’s been a substantial campaign so far. The turnout is likely to be low, so every vote will count.

There’s a lot still to play for.

• *John Moloney is the Independent Left candidate for PCS AGS. bit.ly/il-pcs*

Outsourced workers fight back

By Ollie Moore

Outsourced facilities staff at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will strike on 1-2 May, following the semi-collapse of outsourced contractor Inter-serve.

The company, which is now run by financial administrators, has refused to negotiate with the PCS union over the workers’ conditions.

Along with outsourced workers at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), and the Ministry of Justice, where workers are organised by the

United Voices of the World union, these strikes form part of a small but growing wave of outsourced workers’ struggles in major government departments.

Interserve workers working for Transport for London and London Underground are also organising, with RMT supporting the workers’ attempts to resist attacks on their terms and conditions.

Outsourced “Travel Safe Officers”, employed by the STM agency on London Overground, who are also members of RMT, will strike again on 16 May for living wages.

The sound of silence

By “Off the Rails”

Ever since RMT announced its positive-sounding deals with various Train Operating Companies (TOCs), Off The Rails has argued that it is essential that the union keep members informed of what is going on in talks.

Arriva Rail North (ARN) guards are telling us that the silence is deafening. From Barrow to Newcastle, and all points in between, guards are getting increasingly disappointed that the union, having taken such a celebratory attitude to the deal, has been so passive since.

In mid-April the union has finally felt the need to issue an update. But between the waffle and jargon, we were told nothing more substantial than that “significant progress is being made around operation modes and that these are now being explored in further detail”.

Rank-and-file workers do need to know what’s going on: because we want to be able to guide our negotiators, because we want to be able to judge the outcome of talks from a position of knowledge.

And in case the talks fail and we have to strike again.

Solidarity with Miguel, solidarity with migrants

Protest organised by the Fire Brigades Union and Labour for a Socialist Europe

**4-6pm, Thursday 9 May
Italian Embassy,
Three Kings Yard,
London W1K 4EH
More information: bit.ly/l4se-w**

9 May, Europe Day, will see fire-fighters, trade unionists and migrant rights activists protest in support of Spanish firefighter Miguel Roldán and in support of migrant rights.

Miguel has been accused by the Italian authorities of “facilitating illegal immigration”. He faces up to 20 years in prison.



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An open letter to the SWP

By Tracy McGuire
(president Darlington NEU,
personal capacity)

I'm writing this letter as a working class woman, a teaching assistant, a trade unionist and a revolutionary socialist. Oh, and did I mention that I am really angry too!

Last week I returned from the inaugural conference of the National Education Union (NEU) — a union that has joined teaching staff and support workers together for the first time — or should have!

There were many of the traits which I expected of you at this conference: refusal to debate, shouty slogans with no political depth to them, and your attempts to gain political glory. But what I didn't expect was this...

On 15 April I proposed a motion entitled "Representation for Support Staff". It argued that Support Staff should have recognition, col-

lective bargaining rights and representation rights equal to teaching staff. Furthermore, that we should actively recruit these low-paid workers to our union.

The active left and a good portion of conference, who believe in equality and solidarity for all workers, voted for it. Your organisation did not.

Not only did you fail to support equal rights for all support workers on the lowest wages in our union — cleaners, caretakers, lunchtime assistants, teaching assistants and many more — your organisation took a speech on an amendment to this motion, effectively arguing against it.

When I as a working-class woman on a minimum wage was arguing for equal rights for all education workers, here's what you said: you asked us to wait! Ah, that old chestnut.

Funnily enough, that was the argument used in the speech preceding yours by the Support Staff

representative on the National Executive Committee. He too told us to wait, saying (on a previous motion on Support Staff moved by the NEC) "14,000 support workers have lost their jobs in the last year" but "we can't do anything today. Not yet". We must be patient!

Your organisation reiterated this message. You argued against workers' rights and solidarity.

LOST JOBS

Would you tell that to the 14,000 workers who lost their jobs last year or are currently facing cuts but an increase in hours? Would you?

As a pawn of the right wing, you even argued that workers should abide by a bureaucratic decision made by the NEU leadership with other unions such as Unison and the GMB that we should not recruit support staff to our union. Yes, the lowest paid workers in our buildings!

You said that this would lead to a battle between the unions (leadership). But what about its rank and file membership? Are we not the union, do we not determine policy?

Even on very basic socialist principles, I would condemn your arguments. But for so-called revolutionary socialists to work against rank-and-file organisation and solidarity is nothing short of a disgrace.

The other argument you used in your speech against this motion was that the NEU needed to concentrate its efforts on organising the ballot for the boycott against all High Stakes Summative Testing in primary schools. You said it would deflect the union's concentration if we voted for the support workers motion.

Why not involve the thousands of support workers up and down the country and recruit them to industrial action to support this boycott? But no. Even on the motion to

ballot members to boycott all High Stakes Summative Testing in primary schools you failed, and voted against and with the leadership.

This doesn't surprise me, it just angers me. It angers me that you call yourselves socialists but argue against the fundamental rights of workers and working-class action.

In the NEU you are led by your executive members, Jess Edwards, Stefan Simms, Simon Murch and Sally Kincaid, and their desire to ingratiate themselves with the leadership and the right-wing, not by rank-and-file workers on the ground, who would never put forward such spineless, anti-union, anti class and anti-solidarity arguments. You are what I expect but I'm still calling you out on this.

I look forward to your reply.

* More on high-stakes testing and the school workers' boycott: centre pages.

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