



# & Workers' Liberty Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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## Fence-sitting won't beat Farage and far right



## Labour: lead fight against Brexit!

### An open letter to Jeremy Corbyn

#### Comrade Corbyn!

Your wishy-washy politics on Brexit are usually explained as electoral manoeuvring in an attempt to attract both anti-Brexit internationalists and pro-Brexiteers to the Labour Party.

It is likely to satisfy neither. "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth", as somebody said a long time ago.

But even should your calculation here prove to be accurate, your approach is wrong in principle. The relationship to the European Union is Britain's most important political issue in decades.

To approach it in terms of manoeuvring for votes is a sign of political and moral bankruptcy. This is an enormous issue in its own right. Where the Labour Party stands on it is a measure of what Labour is about.

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**Labour and Brexit: call a Special Conference!**



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**US-Iran  
stand-off**

Iranian socialist Morad Shirin condemns Trump's war talk but without backing the Iranian regime **p.2**



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# US and Iran in stand-off



## Interview

By Morad Shirin

**The US is applying pressure to get the Iranian regime to give more concessions.**

As long as something doesn't go wrong, that is precisely what will happen: the regime will give ground after making a show of being defiant.

Things are more complicated than before because the US has people like John Bolton, the National Security Adviser, in charge of this policy. Generally speaking, the US government is not intending to go to war. But obviously the more their military presence in the Gulf

increases, the more miscalculations become likely. In any event, the worst scenario would be small skirmishes, rather than something like the invasion of Iraq, or anything near that. But obviously even smaller clashes could have repercussions in the region.

On the first anniversary of Trump pulling out of JCPOA (the Iran nuclear agreement), and after the US had said it would cancel the waivers which allowed a lot of countries, especially China, to buy oil from Iran, on 8 May the Iranian government gave 60 days' notice that it would suspend some aspects of the agreement.

It has given the Europeans, and to some extent Russia and China too, 60 days to come up with plans to allow some oil exports to con-

tinue.

The EU set up Instex in February 2019. It is supposed to be a parallel barter system to allow European companies to trade with Iran, initially for medical and humanitarian supplies. The EU says it should do its first transactions in the next few weeks, but nobody knows how effective it will be. When it gets going, the EU wants to expand it to other types of trade and other countries.

This is an important moment for European imperialist countries. The US is applying extra-territorial sanctions against Iran, and in a few months maybe against China: do they fall in with the Americans' requests, or step out of US control?

Officially, in front of the cameras, the Iranian regime is always defiant. But they have always had back

channels for discussions with the US, through Switzerland or Austria. Oman has also helped with this, and its foreign minister was in Tehran a few days ago.

Inside Iran, social conflict has picked up. On Monday 13 May there was a big demonstration by students outside Tehran university, mainly about the compulsory hejab rules. There have been more protests and arrests at Haft Tappeh.

Many areas were hit by the floods in March and April. The regime hasn't done much to help. So people organised their own relief efforts independent of the state. The Workers' Action Committee has been organising independent deliveries of provisions for some flood-affected people.

The regime's response has been to arrest the organisers. It has even

brought in the al-Hashd ash-Sha'abi, the Shia militia force it set-up in Iraq, to control the unrest — threatening to use it against protesters. These mercenaries are currently stationed in the south of Iran, in a region that includes the Haft Tappeh.

As regards our political position, Marxists must not support this regime. This is a naked dictatorship of the capitalist class that even uses floods to smash any mass organisation independent of its state!

**Proletarian class independence has to be maintained no matter what happens.**

• Morad Shirin is a member of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency, [militaant.com](http://militaant.com).

## Organise for 4 June

By Maisie Sanders

**Young supporters of Labour for a Socialist Europe went to Young Labour's Political School in Birmingham on 11 May and spoke to lots of attendees about Brexit.**

We also hosted an evening social with Spoons Workers Against Brexit. There was no mention of Brexit on the agenda or in Jeremy Corbyn's opening speech, but we had a good reception with Labour for a Socialist Europe material and the Young Labour Left against Brexit statement ([tinyurl.com/yl-](http://tinyurl.com/yl-)

[bexrit](http://tinyurl.com/yl-)). Lots said the school was their first Labour event.

As a follow up, Young Labour activists are discussing getting together a youth presence at the demonstration opposing Trump's state visit on Tuesday 4 June.

Another Europe is Possible and Labour for a Socialist Europe are calling an anti-Brexit bloc: details soon at [another europe.org](http://another europe.org).

Join the Young Labour for a Socialist Europe Facebook group here: [tinyurl.com/young-labour](http://tinyurl.com/young-labour).

**The "Together against Trump" protest assemblies from 11am at Trafalgar Square, London.**

## Labour must face up to new antisemitism storm

By Martin Thomas

**According to the 16 May issue of the satirical magazine *Private Eye*, "former Labour staffers have... collected 100,000 emails, including tens of thousands showing how the party ignored complaints that supporters were promoting anti-semitism".**

They plan to submit the material to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, and probably also to make it public.

The story has been boosted by the pro-Tory *Daily Mail*. The main movers evidently have axes to grind.

But that doesn't mean that their grindstones are invented, and surely not that all of them are invented.

As shadow chancellor John McDonnell said on 6 February, when invited on a phone-in program to rebuff the "smears" about antisemitism directed at the Labour Party: "It isn't a smear campaign...

I've seen the evidence".

The Labour Party has been injured and skewed by a reflux of people who were trained politically in the 1980s, in the era of bans on university campus Jewish societies and the like, and have not re-educated themselves since.

Labour needs to "face up to it", as McDonnell said, and re-educate itself.

• Glyn Secker, secretary of Jewish Voice for Labour, a group focused on depicting concerns about antisemitism within the Labour Party as baseless, has made a partial apology for his speech at the Palestine Solidarity Campaign "Exist! Resist! Return!" march on 11 May.

**Secker has written: "At the rally, which highlighted the deaths and injuries suffered by Gazans demonstrating for their freedom, I allowed my outrage to dictate my expression and I am not pleased with the language I used..."** ([bit.ly/gs-apol](http://bit.ly/gs-apol)).

By Hugh Edwards

**With rosary beads in hand, and flanked by eleven of the leaders of Europe's most reactionary and racist political parties, Matteo Salvini, the leader of Italy's La Lega and Minister of the Interior in the country's coalition government, rounded off his last Euro-election campaign rally in Milan's Piazza Duomo.**

He wound up, as he had begun his campaign, with a war cry against immigrants.

"With the support of my government I have replied to the appeal of the pontiff with deeds not words to reduce the deaths in the Mediterranean... A historic moment of liberation of the continent from the abusive occupation organised from Brussels by the Europe of the financiers and uncontrolled immigration is approaching. I trust in the immaculate heart of Mary to carry us to victory".

The anti-immigrant pitch, in substance, accounts for his meteoric rise, and the support from millions of Italy's working masses far beyond what, beyond parts of the Veneto and Lombardia provinces, he and his predecessors got in the past.

Even in Salvini's current government coalition deal with Luigi Di Maio, leader of the self-proclaimed "radically new" Five Star outfit, the nakedly anti-working-class profile

of La Lega's historic core base of support — thousands of small and medium sized businesses — retains priority.

His "flat tax" demand is pushed along without a cheep of serious protest from the trade-union leaders, or from the PD (Democratic Party), which still describes itself as "left-wing".

Two decades of centre-left and centre-right regimes effectively gouged out from Italy's distinctive socio-economic formation a neo-liberal warren of the most predatory privatisation, and razed one after another rights and conditions etched in the history of working class life and struggle.

The scale of that defeat represented by the victory of the Lega-Five-Star coalition and what it has unleashed is still unfolding.

### LENS

**Salvini, like Bolsonaro, has ruthlessly exploited the race card.**

He has used it as a lens through which large sections of a defeated class, defenceless politically and ideologically, are invited to make sense of conditions in which sense, coherence and horizons shrink in direct proportion as life atomises.

The coalition is now fracturing under pressure of its contradictions, but Salvini from the very first moment grabbed the reins, confident that his rising popularity would win victory in these Euro-elections and promote him as a European leader of the Right.

Calculatingly and successfully he has raised the stakes by ever more extreme anti-migrant measures. First he took action against the NGO vessels in the Med, then he closed the ports to them and then his security law removed the humanitarian status of thousands already resident in the country's reception and care centres.

Now he has announced a 3000

euro entry penalty for every migrant rescued by the NGO vessels.

To the cries of "racism", "fascism", etc. from the centre-left and their backers in the liberal media, he calmly points to their own record of studied indifference to the thousands dying in the Med, and their own measures of attempts to criminalise and ban the humanitarian vessels.

But a growing rash of growing protests has more and more focused on Salvini. His notorious cynical latitude when former public buildings are occupied by the fascist groups Casa Pound and Forza Nuova is well known, at the same time as he (and his predecessors of the centre-left and centre-right) have physically and brutally forced immigrants onto the streets.

The countless political meetings and marches of Salvini and his supporters are massively protected, but anyone opposing them with banners or signs is immediately forced to desist. Banners hanging from windows overlooking his rallies have been forcibly seized by the fire service.

The atmosphere of mounting repression reached an even more sinister point in mid-May when a schoolteacher, having set a critical exercise of historical and philosophical evaluation to his senior students on the Minister of the Interior's latest Security Law and the race laws of the Nazi party in Germany, found herself before the political intelligence squad and suspended for 15 days without pay.

The penalty was immediately condemned and opposed by all the unions in education, and strikes have been threatened if the teacher is not reinstated and paid.

**A victory on this issue would signal that the flame of working class resistance remains alight and, in the difficult days and weeks ahead, will begin to burn ever more fiercely.**

## Shock right win in Australia

**The ruling conservative coalition won a surprise victory in Australia's federal election on 18 May. Analysis on our website: [bit.ly/aus-18](http://bit.ly/aus-18)**



# Socialism or extinction!



Climate

By Mike Zubrowski

**One million species are threatened with extinction, 23% of all land has suffered degradation, hundreds of millions of people are at greater risk of floods and hurricanes due to loss of coastal habitats, and a huge proportion of global food production is at risk due to pollinator loss.**

"The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever [is] eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide."

A report released on 6 May by IPBES, the \*Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services\* ([bit.ly/sp-xt](http://bit.ly/sp-xt)), shows "unprecedented" declines in biodiversity and ecosystem health, "accelerat-

ing" rates of species extinction, and "insufficient" current global response.

"Fundamental, system-wide re-organisation across technological, economic and social factors" is needed to restore and protect nature". This *can* be brought about: "[o]pposition from vested interests can be overcome for public good".

The most significant factors impacting nature globally, in descending order, are ranked as: (1) changes in land and sea use; (2) direct exploitation of organisms; (3) climate change; (4) pollution and (5) invasive alien species.

For more sustainable future policies, the report calls for "the evolution of global financial and economic systems to build a global sustainable economy, steering away from the current limited paradigm of economic growth."

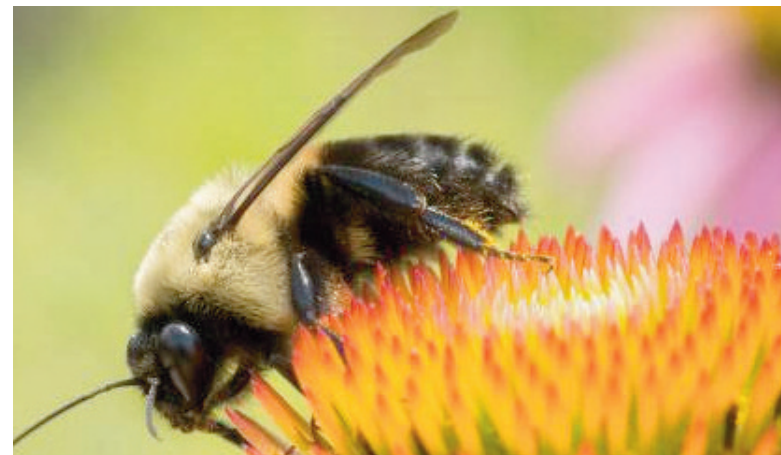
Recall who wrote the report. It isn't from a left-wing, let alone socialist or anti-capitalist body. It is *the most* extensive and in-depth research into a crucial topic, by a collective of researchers organised

through a "platform" established by the large majority of the world's (capitalist) states.

And yet its conclusions, as with various other environmental reports, point straightforwardly in the direction of radical conclusions.

Capitalism is the dominant global economic and political system today. That is, small numbers of individuals – the ruling class – own and control companies in pursuit of their own profit, with the work that actually makes them function being performed, for the most part, by the rest of us – the working class. This how most industries are run, and most services and goods are produced, and it shapes the functioning of our society.

The ruling class, through accumulating wealth, has incredible power, not just within this or that company, but over governments and more widely. This power helps them protect their "vested interests". On 12 May, an IMF report shows that world governments spent \$5.2 trillion – that is, \$5.2 mil-



Bees are vital pollinators

lion million – on fossil fuel subsidies in 2017, up from \$4.7 trillion in 2015. Individual capitalists' endless pursuits of profit, collectively constitute unlimited pursuit of economic growth, to the detriment of humanity and the environment.

Limiting harm to biodiversity and ecosystems requires us to limit the short-term profits of the agriculture and food industries; largely end the meat, fish, and fossil fuel industries; dedicate large swathes of land to promoting these aims which could otherwise be used to accrue private wealth; and prevent or transform many other activities

which could be highly lucrative. On top of this, to fund such transformations, we will need to take control of a lot – or all – of the wealth of the rich and in the banks.

This can and would all be done by economies and societies run genuinely democratically by workers and communities, and organised rationally in the interest of humanity as a whole.

**To make such limits happen from the world as we find it in 2019, requires, at the very least, serious confrontations with capital, if not the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.**

## Green politics and lifestyle change

By Mike Zubrowski

**The Committee on Climate Change report, which I wrote about in *Solidarity* 506, tags 53% of the carbon-emissions reductions as "requiring some change from consumers".**

In this article I discuss the changes in individual lifestyle which may be needed to get rapid cuts in carbon emissions.

The CCC's 53% includes, for example, "purchasing an electric car or installing a heat pump." Such changes are not genuinely lifestyle changes, they simply involve introducing new technology to perform equivalent tasks, leaving daily habits unchanged.

Such transitions should not be left to individuals either to be coerced by managed "market pressures", or to voluntarily undertake their own transition. Climate change warrants a social response: publicly funded, centrally co-ordinated systematic programs to bring about such changes.

Serious investment to improve low-cost or free public transport, and to support walking and cycling, would be best. This would be greener, and the lifestyle changes encouraged – more exercise – would be an improvement. Other changes, such as slightly lower thermostat settings on heating, would have little impact on quality of life. The two more significant direct behavioural changes required are reductions in meat consumption and flying.

Reductions in flying are called for because carbon emissions from aviation are growing fast: the num-

ber of flights is increasing much more than fuel economy. Reductions in meat consumption, because meat and other animal products account for 58% of global food-industries carbon emissions for only a fifth of the calories we consume.

I would like to see more individuals going vegan or vegetarian. But eating habits can be changed more effectively at the level of the whole food industry. Moralistic emphasis on the causal chain in the reverse direction, from individual diet choices to the food industries, is ineffective. What people eat, and in what quantities, mainly reflects availability, pricing, and marketing. When varied and good quality vegan diets are made cheaper, less time intensive, and more available than their alternatives, then changes in people's habits can follow. Workers' control of the production and distribution of food can best bring the changes in food industries. We should challenge simplistic opposition to genetic modification, which comes in part from sections of the left.

In fact, eating less meat is healthier for individuals, and social reductions in consumption have an additional major benefit. Additionally, current levels of production involve, and largely require, horrific subjugation and abuse of, and unthinkable suffering by, literally billions of animals each year.

On CCC's modelling, aviation will remain the top source of emissions for decades to come. More efficient and lower-carbon fuels, and biofuels, can limit this slightly, but no major green technological changes are on the horizon. Public funding of high-speed low-cost rail

could significantly undercut the growth of flights, but not entirely. Modern telecommunications could make many "business flights" redundant, but as yet such flights continue to increase.

Some on the left see things being "local" as good in themselves, or are against any kind of globalisation. As internationalists, we see increased global integration, facilitated partly by faster travel, as a progressive, and not counterposed to being familiar with your more immediate local surroundings.

The need to reduce flying comes at a cost. The cost of not reducing, however, is greater.

Policy passed in Workers' Liberty's 2008 conference ([bit.ly/ccwl-08](http://bit.ly/ccwl-08)) said the following:

### TAXES

**"Our general policy is for direct progressive taxation, summed up by the slogan: 'Tax the rich'.**

"Indirect taxation is almost always regressive (anti-egalitarian – because poorer people pay more as a proportion of their income) and elitist (entrenching certain forms of consumption as the exclusive preserve of the rich).

"We don't rule out the use of indirect taxes on particularly polluting activities and products but we should only promote them where alternative policies (regulatory and infrastructural measures and subsidies for greener alternatives) are not practical and where the likely effect is a change towards less polluting consumption patterns rather than simply raising the cost of living for working class people or pre-

venting working-class access to travel, leisure, culture etc. We do not see indirect taxation as an instinctive first response to carbon pollution.

"Almost half of journeys by air in Europe are now less than 500km. For many such relatively short journeys, air travel is now much cheaper than rail, despite being ten times as polluting. That is in part due to the low rate of taxation on air travel. There is no tax on aviation fuel, and it costs about \$800 per metric tonne, as against about \$3000 for petrol in the UK or \$1000 in the USA, and \$400 for bunker (shipping) fuel.

"We demand policies that would have the effect of replacing short-hop air travel with rail and coach travel. Primarily, this means improving and expanding rail and coach networks and regulation limiting air travel, including bans on flights if less-polluting, viable, alternative transport is available. Taxes on short-hop flights could be part of such a policy and we don't necessarily oppose them, but we shouldn't make them our priority demand...

"Our attitude towards rationing is basically the same as towards taxation: acceptable only where there is no better alternative but not the basis for a general strategy to resolve global warming. Rationing is more equitable than regressive taxation, though the rich will usually have access to a grey market. It is in addition highly bureaucratic. We are opposed to individual carbon rationing, which would be unworkably complex."

These basic principles remain correct and we have opposed ex-

pansion of Heathrow's third runway. Rectifying the absurdity of flights generally being cheaper than trains, even for short distances, would help reduce air travel. Currently, it can even often be cheaper to holiday in a country several hours flight away, where everything costs less, than elsewhere in the country or a neighbouring country.

Environmentalists sometimes dismiss life-quality impact of transitions as secondary in the face of the impending climate crisis. Yet to bring about the transitions democratically requires tackling these issues head on, not hoping to impose a more austere existence on humanity.

Marx wrote that "development of the productive forces is the absolutely necessary practical premise [of Communism], because without it want is generalized, and with want the struggle for necessities begins again, and that means that all the old crap must revive."

Socialism requires a society able to deliver a sufficient quality of life to its members to undercut its struggle for necessities, and to empower them to seriously participate in its democratic functioning. The degeneration of the isolated and attacked Russian revolution, building on an underdeveloped economy, provides a stark vindication of this concern. The brutal exploitative class society that developed within Stalinist Russia was at least as environmentally destructive as its western capitalist counterparts.

**Luckily, we do not face such a catch-22. A high quality of life is fully compatible with environmentalism.**



# “Pro-EU fanatics” blamed for Tory-Labour rift



## Antidoto

By Jim Denham

**In the 18 May *Morning Star*, CPB (Communist Party of Britain) secretary Rob Griffiths indicts those he calls “Labour’s pro-EU fanatics”:**

“They have succeeded in scuppering the talks with the Tory government by demanding that a permanent customs union and a second referendum form part of any new Brexit package”.

Leave aside that a permanent customs union is agreed Labour policy, endorsed personally by Jeremy Corbyn time and time again, and a second public vote is conference policy. What I’m struck by is that phrase: “They have succeeded in scuppering the talks with the Tory government.”

Does Griffiths think the Labour leadership

was wrong to break off those talks? Does he think that Corbyn should have reached a deal with May?

That would seem to be the only possible way to understand what Griffiths is saying. And now that May is talking about a new withdrawal agreement bill with (supposedly) stronger commitments on workers’ rights and environmental commitments, would comrade Griffiths, the CPB and the *Morning Star* advocate support for it?

It’s difficult to believe that they would. It would surely create an outcry within the labour movement if they did. But that seems to be the logic of their wretched, nationalist politics.

Griffiths was writing in what the front page of last Saturday’s *Morning Star* promised to be “The Big Europe Debate” — Richard Burgon MP “makes the case to vote Labour on May 23”, and Griffiths “argues against going to the polls at all.”

That sounded promising: a proper debate in the pages of the *Morning Star* for a change. But no. Sadly, it was a case of false advertis-

ing: there was no “debate” between Burgon and Griffiths: just two separate articles.

The supposed “big debate” within the labour movement and the left over whether to vote Labour or support a “people’s boycott” is simply a figment of the fevered imaginations of the CPB and the *Morning Star*.

Has anyone witnessed any public debates about a “people’s boycott”, any rallies, stalls or even leaflets advocating it? No: this “campaign” had no real existence at all because it is based upon a premise no different to that of Farage.

Griffiths claimed that: “... the poll in Britain on May 23 is illegitimate. It is an insult to all those who participated in the June 2016 referendum in good faith, whether they voted leave the EU or remain [...] the people have already decided to leave the EU and their decision must be implemented.”

But, said Griffiths, people must not vote for either of the two parties that are standing on precisely that basis: Farage is reactionary, anti-immigrant and Trump-loving, while “a vote for Ukup is a vote to endorse its open col-

laboration with fascists and racists” (all perfectly true, of course).

Why not stick to the CPB/*Morning Star*’s usual position of calling for a Labour vote (something they did throughout the Blair years)?

For Griffiths, the problem is that “most Labour candidates have made clear their support for remaining in the EU. Many have announced that they want a second referendum in which they would campaign for such an outcome.”

Worse still, such candidates “use their disruptive pro-EU position to undermine Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership — itself the result of yet another democratic election for which they have no respect.”

**On the subject of democracy, what of the relentless campaign of the CPB/*Morning Star* and its co-thinkers in and around the Labour leader’s office, to water down and undermine the policy on a public vote passed at Labour’s last conference?**

## Responses in PCS



## Letters

**The victory in the PCS civil service union’s Assistant General Secretary (AGS) election for John Moloney, candidate of the Independent Left and a supporter of Workers’ Liberty, has met diverse responses from the left press.**

*Socialist Worker*, which backed Lynn Henderson, was the first to respond. It emphasised the low turnout (it was low, but higher than last time) and claimed that “Moloney... is against the union’s national campaign for a 10 percent pay rise”. Not true: John Moloney emphasised pay equality, but not at the expense of a general rise.

The Socialist Party, whose member Chris Baugh was the incumbent AGS, took longer to respond. Both they and the Henderson faction pushed the story that the votes for Moloney were, like their own votes, votes for change, against the status-quo leadership.

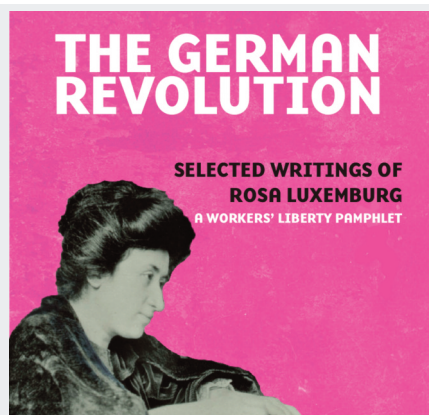
The SP also, and contradictorily, argued that Baugh’s vote combined with Henderson’s represented a single “Left Unity” vote that shouldn’t have been split. (“Left Unity” is the longstanding dominant faction in PCS, and until recently was itself dominated by the SP. Baugh was the “official” LU candidate, but many LU people backed Henderson).

Socialist Appeal backed Lynn Henderson, but headlined its response: “Baugh defeated by John Moloney”. Henderson’s score? No worries, she was “a relative newcomer”. She has been a prominent PCS full-time official for 15 years, and had the backing of Mark Serwotka, general secretary for 17 years.

Mostly Socialist Appeal was pleased to see the SP discomfited. “In the past, the SP activists had played an important role in defeating the right. But increasingly they have put their own prestige above the general interests of the movement.

**“However much they put a gloss on things, they will not recover from this debacle”.**

Gerry Bates, London



**A new pamphlet from Workers’ Liberty, “The German Revolution: Selected Writings of Rosa Luxemburg”, has Rosa Luxemburg’s major articles from 1918-9.**

**They span the time from when the German revolution of 1918-9 broke out, and she was released from jail on 8 November 1918, through to her murder on 15 January 1919 by a right-wing militia operating under the protection of the Social Democratic government.**

**An introduction is provided by Paul Vernadsky, author of the Workers’ Liberty book *The Russian Revolution: When Workers Took Power*. It tells the story of the German revolution and discusses the findings of recent scholarship on the events.**

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## Audio version

Many thanks to the volunteers who have enabled us to produce an audio version of the paper. Links to the audio version are at [www.workersliberty.org/audio](http://www.workersliberty.org/audio).

## Defining “Islamophobia”

The Government has rejected a proposed definition of “Islamophobia” from a cross-party group of MPs. Read a debate at [bit.ly/isl-def](http://bit.ly/isl-def): comment favouring the rejection, from the National Secular Society, and opposing, from Daniel Randall, and an open letter from a variety of people favouring rejection.

## Peace demo at the Gaza border



## Letters

**My friends and I, who are active with Standing Together, came to Yad Mordechai junction near the Gaza border, and raised our voices in protest.**

We were there, both Jewish as well as Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel. We held signs and chanted in Hebrew and Arabic, and we were demanding a change to Netanyahu’s policy: Safeguarding the future of the Israeli citizens in the South of Israel — goes through negotiations and dialogue with the Palestinian leadership and advancing towards peace.

For us, it’s very clear, that without lifting the siege on Gaza and ending the Occupation — there can never be real security for any of us. Just a non-ending cycle of escalations and cease-fires.

As we were standing there, some passing drivers honked in support. Others — in protest.

One driver, spotting our purple bilingual sign that read “Jews and Arabs Together” yelled at us: “If you like Arabs so much, go and live with them”. “Well, I am Arab”, answered the activist holding the sign — Ahmad Abu Mdighem, a fellow member in Standing Together.

We were a few dozen locals in this gathering, which took place far away from the hustle and bustle of the big cities of Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv. Our spirits were high, because our cause is right.

**The movement’s motto of Standing Together is “Where there is struggle — there is hope”. We won’t give up hope, and we will definitely keep on fighting. Together.**

Mark Joffe, Kibbutz Kfar-Aza, near the Gaza Strip

[From the Standing Together website]



# Labour: lead the fight against Brexit!

from page one

**The European Union is not the Socialist United States of Europe which socialists put on our banner more than a century ago. It is not something built by the working-class movement. Like Britain and all the other member states taken separately, the EU is bourgeois.**

Despite that, it is an immense step forward from the Europe that preceded it — a place of fierce national conflicts, wars, forced population movements, ethnic cleansing, and mass murder — a continent that engendered two world wars in the first half of the 20th century. The borders within Europe are now more open than since the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, and over a much larger area than that covered by Rome.

Often in our history the labour movement has had to come to terms with seeing the bourgeoisie do things we wanted done, and, in the nature of things, doing them in their way and not ours, and for their own reasons, which are not ours.

Our movement has two clear-cut choices on such things. It can reject them out of hand and look to a reversion to the previous conditions. As long ago as the Communist Manifesto (1847-8), Marxists defined some of those who took that choice — the well-meaning ones, who among other things objected to the degradation of the working class — as “reactionary socialists”.

All of them were historically regressive and reactionary.

The other approach has been and is to own that what the bourgeoisie has done in the case has been progressive, try to reform and reshape it, and build on it.

That second choice, fundamentally, is our approach to capitalism itself. The entire Marxist tradition, that of Marx and Engels,

Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, points us to the second approach — to build on what the EU has developed, to fight to transform it, to strive to realise adequate bourgeois democracy within it, to cut down the smothering tendrils of its bureaucracy, to build working-class unity within the frame of the EU (and beyond it, of course), and finally to put the working class in control and create the Socialist United States of Europe.

Brexit on any terms involves regression to a walled-off British bourgeois nation-state. It counterposes that to the unity which the bourgeoisie has achieved over the last 60 or 70 years, since the European Coal and Steel Community of 1951 and the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

It also risks destabilising other EU countries’ integration, and the EU itself.

It is to realise some of the program of the chauvinist, racist, and even fascist far right, and to encourage them in their foul work.

The Labour Party urged people to vote against Brexit in 2016. After the June 2016 referendum result, it should have turned itself into a great campaign for European unity, and in the main place for working-class unity. It should have lined up behind the call for a second, informed, public vote.

Instead, the Labour Party has accepted Brexit, and promotes it. It is a question of democracy? Nonsense! The referendum was three years ago, at the height of a wave of xenophobia against immigration. The Brexit vote was largely a vote against free movement. Many, many people simply did not know what Brexit entailed.

Three years on they know more. A lot of people who didn’t vote in 2016 are now of an age to vote.

It is one of the cornerstones of parliamentary democracy that a Parliament cannot bind future Parliaments. But a referendum



three years ago can bind Britain into a Brexit trajectory and ban the possibility of release from the decision of three years ago? Democracy froze and petrified itself in that moment of putting ballots in boxes in 2016? The idea is ridiculous!

The idea that people now are forever locked into and politically defined by the 2016 vote is a negation of living democracy and its replacement by a senseless automatism.

And even if all that nonsense had substance, no serious working-class party would bow its head and meekly comply. Political parties don’t, or anyway should not, passively adapt even to their own “natural” electors. Serious parties exist to educate and re-educate the electorate, to win support for what they believe is true and right and necessary. Instead, you abandon opposition to Brexit in deference to the referendum. You speculate on electoral trends, acting as if the question itself — in or out of the EU — is of little importance. As if, on the level of principle, socialists are indifferent on the issue of European unity or fragmentation.

Marxists talk — perhaps too much — about a “crisis of leadership” in the labour

movement, meaning an incompetent, lukewarm, or treacherous political leadership in the labour movement.

The EU debate has revealed a major crisis of bourgeois leadership in Britain. “Dodgy Dave” Cameron blundered into a referendum he didn’t need to have, and lost it. Theresa May chose to make it her political mission to realise Britain’s break with the EU.

The Labour Party — the “Corbyn” Labour Party — followed with a docility that bodes ill for a “left” Labour government, and as if you had no responsibility to question and oppose the 2016 referendum result.

What we need from you is serious working-class leadership, with a proper sense of history and of what the labour movement must be and do in politics — not the daft pretence that a confused one-off vote three years ago can obliterate the lessons of history and the obligations they place on socialists.

**Fight Brexit! Fight for European working-class unity! Fight not for a return to British isolation, but for a Socialist United States of Europe!**

Sean Matgamna

## Renew call for Labour special conference

**According to all polls as we go to press on 21 May, the Brexit Party, the personal vehicle of the ex-Tory, ex-Ukip-leader, friend-of-Trump, right-winger Nigel Farage is set to come top in the European Parliament elections on 23 May.**

The Tories will do very badly. Labour will get a mediocre result, and according to one poll may even get fewer votes than the Lib Dems.

Labour for a Socialist Europe ([bit.ly/14sew](http://bit.ly/14sew)) has distributed around 47,000 pro-Labour, anti-Brexit leaflets for the campaign to constituency Labour Parties and to individuals, and reports a good response on street stalls and on doorsteps.

The official Labour campaign has been weak. The Unite union has announced a special campaign to get out the Labour vote and stop far-right leader Tommy Robinson (formerly of the EDL) winning a Euro-seat in north-west England — but announced it only on 20 May, just three days before polling day.

On 17 May Jeremy Corbyn called an end to the six-week-long talks between Labour and Conservative leaderships for a compromise formula on Brexit.

Since then Corbyn has nudged his on-the-fence position slightly in an anti-Brexit direction. On 19 May he signalled that he might support a new public vote on a deal passed through Parliament with Labour support,

and not just on a “bad Tory deal”.

Labour, he said, want to “get a deal which guarantees trade and relations with Europe in the future, and if we can get that through Parliament... then I think it would be reasonable to have a public vote to decide on that in the future”.

He also made a statement which has been interpreted as reopening the door to Labour support for free movement, though in fact he hardly said that. “It would be open for negotiation, the level of movement of people between Europe and this country if we were a non-member of the EU”.

Prime minister Theresa May has said she will put a revised presentation of (the same) Withdrawal Agreement to a new vote in the Commons in the week starting 3 June.

She is unlikely to win that vote, and has said that if she is defeated she will set out when she will stand down as Tory leader.

Boris Johnson and others have already started their campaigns for the new Tory leadership election. It looks like the Tories will get a “harder-Brexit” leader, and one operating under the pressure of Farage’s probable victory on 23 May.

Labour’s current “on-the-fence” policy is unprincipled; is demoralising Labour activists, and pushing a steady trickle of Labour members to quit; and is not even serving its designed purpose of retaining votes.



According to a survey by the polling company YouGov, 62% of Tory voters from 2017 are likely to vote on 23 May for Farage’s Brexit Party. Labour will also lose the big majority of its 2017 voters, with more going to anti-Brexit parties (21% to the Lib Dems, 16% to the Greens) than staying with Labour (35%). 14% are estimated to be going to the Brexit Party.

The “on-the-fence” policy undermines Labour’s basic function as a proper political party (to work out a policy and rally people, by argument, around it), and is correspondingly destructive for Labour’s internal life.

Members should be debating the issues in structures which allow for reasoned exchange of views and clear decisions. Instead they are left sifting through media statements by different Labour front-benchers and trying to gauge the shifts and nuances and bal-

ance. The exercise is reminiscent of the “Kremlinology” used by journalists in the heyday of the old USSR to estimate from opaque public statements the trend of thinking behind the walls of the old Tsarist fortress which housed the autocratic government.

Ever since TSSA (transport union) general secretary Manuel Cortes raised the call on 6 December 2018, anti-Brexit leftists have been campaigning for a special Labour conference. The demand is still relevant. It will be even more relevant if the Labour results on 23 May are as bad as expected.

**Labour for a Socialist Europe will continue to organise in the branches and constituencies. Its next big public activity is a left anti-Brexit contingent, alongside Another Europe is Possible, at the anti-Trump protest in London on 4 June.**



# Organising cleaners in the 1970s

By Bruce Robinson

Shown as part of the "Women Organise!" film season in Manchester, *The Night-cleaners* is a documentary about the struggle to organise women office cleaners in 1970-2.

The film has many resonances today when organising cleaners and other low-paid, insecure workers is again a central task for the unions.

The filmmakers of the Berwick Street Film Collective (one of whom, Humphrey Trevelyan, was at the Manchester showing) were not traditional documentary makers, but saw themselves both as part of the women's fight and as creatively producing a piece of cinema.

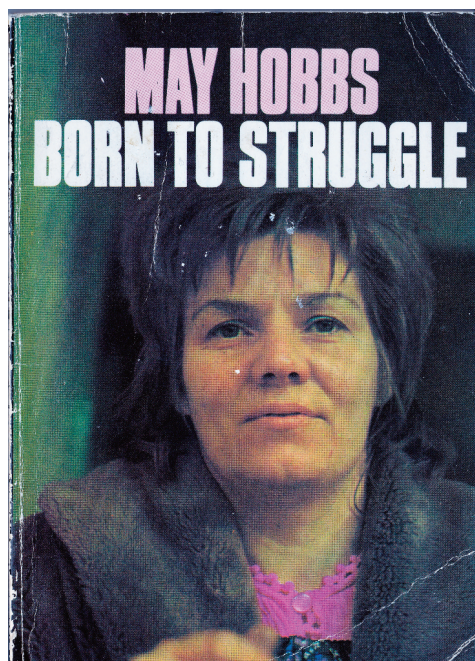
The result is a film that is a powerful depiction of the cleaners' struggle with highly unorthodox elements.

It begins with the camera watching lone women cleaning offices in an otherwise darkened office block, talking about the job and why they put up with shifts from 10 at night till 7 in the morning

In interviews conducted on their break, women talk about the financial pressures of providing for their families, in one case because a partner refuses to share his pay packet.

They still have to do all the work of childcare, shopping and housework. Sleep suffers – one woman only sleeping for one or two hours a day – but none of them can afford to give the job up, and they stay partly also because it enables them to accommodate paid and domestic labour.

The boss of one of the firms who subcon-



May Hobbs wrote an autobiography in 1973

tracts the cleaners and wishes to appear sympathetic acknowledges that "without these people, I'd be penniless", while also saying that competition with a small number of similar firms for contracts puts a constant pressure on wages.

The double burden of paid and domestic work was a central concern of the "Second Wave" feminist movement which was just coming into being in Britain with its first national conference in Oxford in February 1970.

A major theme of the film is how the feminist movement interacted with the cleaners through a support group doing work such as leafleting buildings but also discussing tac-

tics and more general issues. Two of the organisers of the Oxford conference, Sally Alexander and Sheila Rowbotham, are seen and heard in the film talking with the cleaners. The newly elected 21 year old MP for Mid Ulster, Bernadette Devlin, is also seen explaining to some of the cleaners how capitalism works.

The film moves from showing the women's situation to following their campaign for unionisation, higher wages and more workers on the job. Central to this – and the film – was May Hobbs.

May Hobbs, an East Ender in her thirties, set up the Cleaners' Action Group and was victimised after she and other cleaners had taken action to demand more cleaners on a particular job.

She became the key organiser and is seen recruiting to the union (the T&GWU, a forerunner of Unite) and giving advice to cleaners on how deal with a problem on the job.

She speaks in Trafalgar Square under a Women's Liberation banner about how not all supporters of that cause are middle class, and talks to the camera about how much she has learnt through the struggle.

It quickly becomes clear that recruitment to the union is only the first major hurdle. The union itself fails to provide more than verbal support.

One union official, close to the stereotype, gives reasons why it's not possible to do much: "500 people in 50 workplaces are not the same as 500 people in one factory". Other officials don't turn up for meetings. Participation in union structures is impossible because of the women's working hours and home commitments. May Hobbs can't get any financial support for her organising job.

The film repeatedly shows the then might of the unions on a massive demonstration against Heath government's anti-union Industrial Relations Bill – in contrast to the limited resources and power of the cleaners.

Many ideas float around in the discussions between May Hobbs, other cleaners and their women supporters. One comments that the women should start their own union; another that the union needs to become a social movement. May talks to unionised cleaners about whether and how much less than their wage demand they'd be prepared to settle for if they get to negotiate.

The film does not come to a conclusion. Trevelyan pointed out that there were some successes for cleaners in the public sector and in organising in smaller unions. There is a second related film.

The lack of a conclusion points to the film not being a standard documentary. Trevelyan talked of it being influenced by a fashion for "deconstruction". The film makers are themselves filmed filming. There are long silent, grainy, black and white focuses on the faces of some cleaners and silent pauses of a minute or two with a grey screen, presumably intended to give the viewers time to reflect.

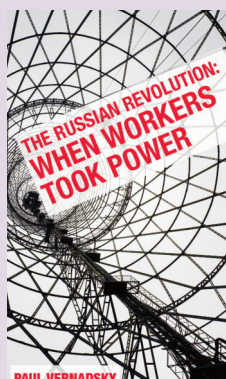
These get a bit irritating after a while. Trevelyan reported that some people walked out, but that the cleaners who had seen the film did not object. It points to the experimental nature of much post-68 radical arts.

The film is available on DVD and deserves to be seen again widely.

**An extract from the film and a link to an interview with Sally Alexander are at [bit.ly/nc-film](http://bit.ly/nc-film).**



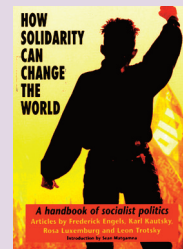
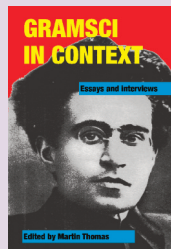
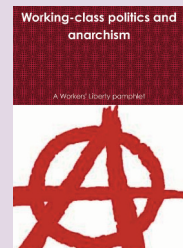
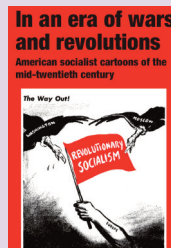
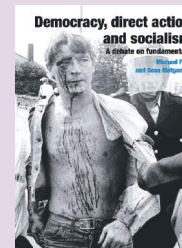
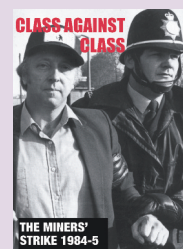
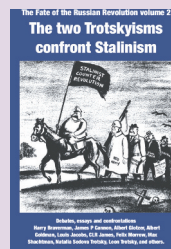
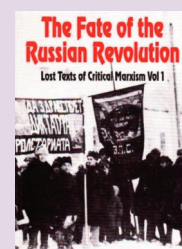
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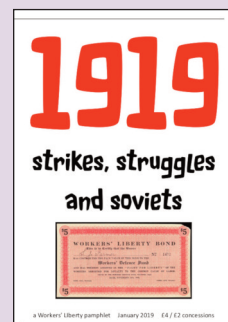
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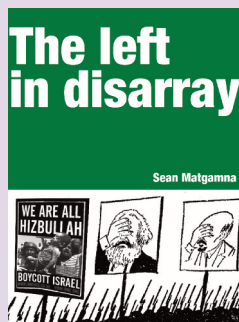
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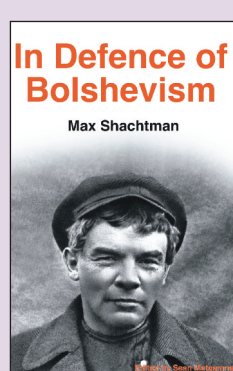


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# The roots of inequality

By Matt Cooper

**On 14 May the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) launched its Deaton Review into inequality in Britain.**

The broadcast and print news outlets carried interviews about the five-year study into the nature and causes of inequality in the UK, with the Nobel laureate Professor Sir Angus Deaton in the chair and a budget of £2.5 million supplied by the charitable Nuffield Trust.

The research promises to be wide-ranging, looking at inequality not just in incomes, but also in other areas such as health, wealth, political participation and opportunity.

The first motivation for the report is that the UK is becoming more like America. The IFS has published a preliminary survey ([bit.ly/ineq-ifs](http://bit.ly/ineq-ifs)), showing that the UK now has one of the most unequal income distributions in the developed world (only the US, Romania, Bulgaria, and Lithuania are worse among European and North American states).

After 1945 inequality was (mildly) reduced by redistribution through tax and benefits, full employment, and other welfare policies, particularly affordable council housing. Important in this, as the IFS survey recognises, was a strong trade union movement capable of pushing wages up and supporting the welfare state.

The Gini coefficient measures inequality, with 0 being complete equality and 1 being complete inequality (one person having everything). On disposable income (after state redistribution by tax and benefits), when Thatcher came into power in 1979 the Gini score was below 0.25. It had been stable for decades. By the end of 1990 it was 0.35.

That was a massive shift. 0.25 would make the UK currently one of the most equal societies in Europe. 0.35 makes it one of the most unequal today.

Since 1990, the Gini score has remained at a little below this 0.35 level. In fact, since the 2007/8 crisis, it may have decreased a little (more equality). This might sound odd.

In fact nearly everyone has seen their real income stagnate or decrease since 2008, but, particularly since Conservative-Lib-Dem austerity from 2010, the richest have got much richer. The bottom 90% (the upper bor-

der of which is a household disposable annual income of £50,000) have been squeezed closer together (hence the stable Gini score). But the super-rich have become richer.

The zoom-away group is not even the so-called 1%, but a much smaller group, more like 0.1% or even 0.01%. The richest five families have wealth equivalent to that of the bottom 20%. At the top, wealth is the decisive indicator, and income is less significant: it is just what you choose to draw from the wealth that year.

The IFS review pulls back from looking at this wealth. It does point to increasingly bloated board-room pay packets, but it does not address this as indicative of the underlying problem of the private ownership of society's productive forces by the 0.1%.

Many in the centre-ground of politics beside the IFS are worried about inequality now. Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the 21st Century* was the left-wing publishing hit of 2014, with its argument that accumulation of capital by the richest, and hence their source of income, exceeds the general rate of growth and thus outpaces average incomes, but similar views are found way beyond the left

## CRISIS.

**Many other writers have blamed spiralling wealth inequality for the 2007/8 crisis. You can't put a billion quid in the bank, so the wealthy hectically hunt for new investment vehicles (most famously collateralised debt-obligations on sub-prime mortgages), and that hunt was a factor in the financial crisis.**

Piketty's policy proposals, wealth and inheritance taxes, are shared by a broad swathe of opinion, not least Christine Lagarde and the IMF. The IFS's turn to concern about inequality is less an outbreak of humanity within mainstream economics, more a reflection of the way that many pro-market economists are seeking to dampen capitalism's tendency to crisis.

There is a second reason why the Deaton Review is happening now — the UK's vote to leave the EU and the underlying shift to populist politics that this reflects. The IFS's preliminary review implies that this is a result of rising inequality, not just in income, but education, political representation and opportunity. This is the "left behind" thesis

(popularised by Matthew Goodwin and Robert Ford in their work on UKIP, [bit.ly/jrf-bx](http://bit.ly/jrf-bx), a view also underpinning Blue Labour and Lexit nationalism).

There is a problem with this view. If inequality drives populism then it should be less successful in more equal states, but this is not the case.

Populism is strong in some of the more equal states in Europe. Slovenia, Czechia and Finland have the three lowest Gini coefficients in Europe. In each populist parties are strong: the anti-immigration Slovenian Democratic Party came second with 21% of the vote in 2018's general election, in Czechia populists are in power and the (True) Finns won 18% of the vote in Finland's April 2019 general election.

A better explanation is put forward by the Dutch academic Cas Mudde, who argues that populism is fundamentally a cultural phenomenon originating in an intermediate social layer (lower-middle class, the self-employed) which can then spread to sections of the working class with a weak class identity because of de-industrialisation and precarious employment. The resentments that this is based on include economic pressure and instability, but are not reducible to inequality.

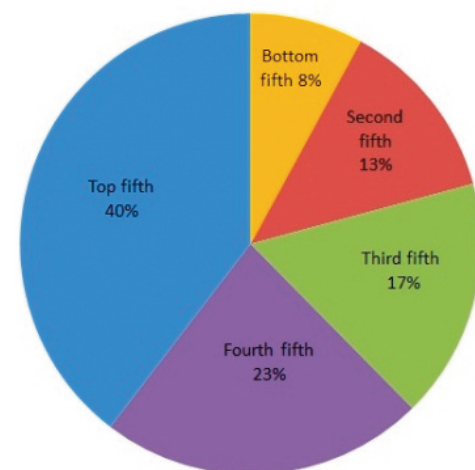
Previous studies have produced strongly critical examinations of poverty but have concluded with lame policy proposals. Stewart Lansley and Joanna Mack's 2015 *Breadline Britain* is a brilliant indictment of poverty, but concluded that Britain should adopt a more European model of capitalism with UK Uncut and Citizens UK as the agency of change. It is likely that the IFS's proposals will be even meeker.

The IFS is well known for its fact-checking commentaries on taxation and spending in the UK. It was formed in the late 1960s by well-heeled Conservatives in response to the Labour government's introduction of corporation and inheritance taxes. It recruited Labour politicians to its board, but from the right of the party. The IFS's first director was Labour MP Dick Taverne, who left Labour in 1974 to sit as an independent, ending up in the SDP; Roy Jenkins was another senior right-wing Labour politician to serve on the IFS's board.

The IFS is firmly planted in the uncritical mainstream of academic economics, accepting the inevitability of capitalism and is pro-market in its assumptions.

Deaton is in this mainstream too — his Nobel prize is for his work on the mathematical modelling of aggregate consumer behaviour. But he has taken a different direction in recent years with his work on "deaths of despair" particularly among white, middle-aged Americans, which Deaton and his co-author Anne Case, suggest is linked to increasing inequality and the absence of adequate welfare in the US ([bit.ly/d-desp](http://bit.ly/d-desp)).

Case and Deaton's work is one of the foundations of the approach the Deaton Review seems set to take, along with other American-focused work: Andrew Cherlin's *Labor's Love Lost* (inequality linked to people living alone rather than in nuclear families) and Robert Putnam's *Our Kids* (chaotic families linked to



How income is distributed in the UK

lower income).

Both Putnam and Cherlin see stable family units as the basis of society, and both use education as a proxy for class. Their work, however, is strongly empirical and clearly shows, as with Case and Deaton, the human cost of increasing inequality in the US

## CAPITALISM

**The closest the IFS's preliminary report comes to holding capitalism and the private ownership of the means of production responsible for poverty in the midst of plenty is to suggest curbing chief executives' pay.**

They point to the economy becoming dominated by a smaller number of large companies with larger mark-ups on prices over costs — or what a Marxist, at any point in the last hundred and fifty years, might have called the concentration of capital with a heightened rate of exploitation, although in the cases of the tech companies to which IFS is alluding, often the heightened exploitation is in other companies down their supply chain.

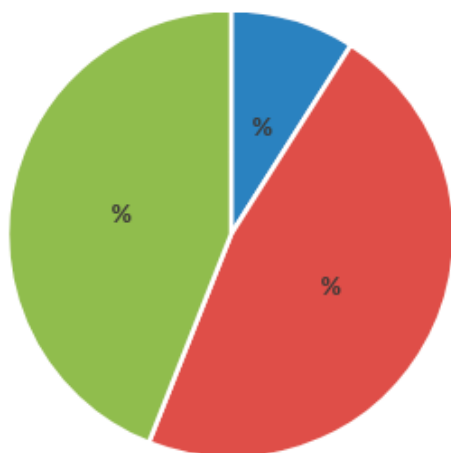
The best that IFS can offer is the long standing EU proposal of breaking these companies up to create more competition. Perhaps more interestingly, IFS propose that unionisation be encouraged to give workers a voice, although very much along the German lines of workers on company boards in a more corporatist capitalism.

But the IFS proposals represents is a shift in opinion in at least some of the policy makers around the ruling class in Britain and internationally. It parallels the social liberals at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century who argued both for welfare policies to create a more stable social order and that increasing consumption could help capitalism remain healthy. That school of liberalism nurtured both Beveridge and Keynes, the intellectual architects of the post-1945 welfare state.

But it was a strong, confident labour movement that forced the creation of that welfare state.

**Without the labour movement being fundamentally rebuilt, it is unlikely that the IFS report will lead to a new welfare state, let alone solve capitalism's innate drive to ever increasing inequality.**

## Distribution of wealth



■ Least wealthy: 1% to 50% ■ Middle wealth: 51% - 90% ■ Wealthiest 10%



# Two-and-a-half cheers for

By Janine Booth

Since autistic activist Judy Singer coined the term “neurodiversity” some twenty years ago, it has facilitated a great enlightenment and a progressive new approach to the experiences and rights of autistic and other neurologically atypical people.

It is now facing a backlash, much of which is reactionary but some of which has been helped by flaws in some presentations of neurodiversity.

Here, I examine some of these issues. This article references autism more than other neurodivergent conditions because this is the area in which most of these arguments take place.

I conclude that an effective neurodiversity approach is one that locates neurodiversity in social structures.

## THE NEURODIVERSITY APPROACH AND ITS BENEFITS

**The neurodiversity approach has enabled us to supersede a highly pathological and disabling view of autistic and other neurodivergent people into a far more empowering one. In particular, it has facilitated us to:**

- identify that humanity is naturally neurologically diverse, that differently-structured brains are not necessarily faulty, and that there are good reasons why these conditions have remained in the human gene pool
- progress from “awareness” to “acceptance”, and thus from pity to demands for rights and equality
- focus on how social structures and environments disable people who are neurologically atypical, rather than assuming that all our troubles are caused by our brains, and so to fight for social change in preference to cures
- highlight the positives of various conditions alongside any deficits
- draw on the experiences of movements for the recognition of other diversities, such as sexual diversity or ethnic diversity.

The neurodiversity approach has won wide support, but it has not become the dominant ideology of society. The older, pathological view still dominates our social structures and political decision-making.

Even where public authorities and employers adopt the language of neurodiversity, they usually do not apply it in practice: they still pathologise, discriminate against and mistreat neurodivergent people. Neurodiversity remains a minority, radical approach, and one that offers the hope of a liberatory social transformation.

**OBSCURING SPECIFIC CONDITIONS**  
**“Neurodiversity” is an approach which understands that some brains are wired or structured differently from society’s “norm”. It is not a diagnosis, or a condition. It is not a substitute for talking and campaigning about ADHD, or autism, or other conditions.**

Consider anti-racism. It is hugely important. But if we only ever pursued anti-racism as an overall theme, we would miss the specificities of anti-Muslim bigotry, of anti-semitism, of anti-traveller racism, and so on.

Similarly, “LGBT+” is a useful term to bring together everyone who experiences op-

pression on the basis of sexuality and/or gender identity. But it consists of different initials meaning different things. I am part of the LGBT+ movement, but I am not LGBT+. I am B.

I am autistic, and therefore neurodivergent. Let’s use the overall approach where that is relevant and the specific condition where that is relevant.

For example, people with Tourette syndrome have tics. Stating instead that neurodivergent people have tics is unhelpfully non-specific. Let’s not allow our understandable enthusiasm for the neurodiversity approach to crowd out specific conditions and needs.

On the subject of terminology, I am not – and neither is anyone else – “neurodiverse”. An individual cannot be neurodiverse: only populations can. “Neurodiverse” describes a population that contains individuals who have different neurologies from each other. An individual is either neurotypical or neuroatypical/ neurodivergent.

This may sound semantic, but the wide misuse of this terminology, even in “official” documentation, reveals a misunderstanding of what neurodiversity is, locating diversity in the individual’s identity rather than in humanity as a whole.

## DISABILITY OR DIFFERENCE?

**Our society defines neurodivergent conditions almost entirely negatively. Look at the use of the prefix dis/dys in their official names: dyslexia, autistic spectrum disorder, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.**

A growing body of evidence suggest that dyslexic people are particularly skilled at spatial reasoning, but we still call their brainwiring “dyslexia” rather than, for example, “enhanced spatial reasoning syndrome”.

The neurodiversity approach allows us to understand that different individuals may have different brain structures, that this occurs naturally, that it is not necessarily an impairment, and that deficits may be matched by strengths.

The social model of disability allows us to separate impairment from disability, stressing that the medical condition may be an impairment but that “disabilities” are the barriers that society places in the way of people with impairments.

To apply the social model to neurodivergence, we need to tweak the model to acknowledge that some people’s brain structure, while not impaired, is sufficiently different from the “norm” that those people are disabled by society.

For example, it may be a difference rather than a fault in your brain that makes you unusually sensitive to artificial light, but when your living, working and other environments all use that artificial light, then the distress caused to your senses disables you, sometimes quite severely.

(On a historical note, laws barring, say, women or Jews from public offices used to be referred to as “legal disabilities”, based on a meaning of disability as a barrier that society imposes on a category of people.)

However, some people’s neurodivergence is an impairment. The mainstream, medical-model view sees those people as disabled entirely by their neurological condition and overlooks the significant contribution that social structures and environments make to

their negative experiences.

But a flat insistence that a neurodivergent condition is never an impairment (or disability, as used in common language rather than in the social-model sense) would be inaccurate. I haven’t come across any neurodiversity activists who actually argue this, as is sometimes alleged, but a bit more acknowledgement of impairment would be welcome.

We can develop a “social model of neurodiversity” that says that people who are neurologically atypical are disabled by society, for some of us entirely by society, for others by society in conjunction with our impairments.

It is important not to throw the social model and neurodiversity babies out with the impairment-denying bathwater. It is also important not to throw the impairment baby out with the medical model bathwater. I hope you follow my meaning.

## IGNORING THE SEVERELY AFFECTED?

**Linked to the previous point, one of the main criticisms of the neurodiversity approach is that it excludes neurodivergent people (specifically, autistic people) who are severely disabled.**

Some critics of neurodiversity complain about the dominance of discussions about autism by more independent and vocal autistic people and the neglect of more dependent autistic people’s needs. I think there is a genuine issue here, although it is unfair to attribute this problem to the neurodiversity approach.

Although some complain about the imbalance of voices between more independent and more dependent autistic people, the reality is that all autistic voices are under-heard in our society. We are talked about more than we talk, and certainly more than we are listened to.

There is an urgent need to amplify autistic and other neurodivergent voices, and to facilitate self-organisation in order to do this. We can minimise imbalance within this self-organisation by ensuring maximum accessibility, enabling people to contribute in their preferred format, with whatever support they need.

Many of the most committed activists and advocates for high-needs autistic people that I know are so-called “high-functioning” autistic people who are strong believers in the neurodiversity approach. They have campaigned against cuts in support services, against abuse in institutions, for justice for those mistreated by the system.

Many are themselves parents and carers of autistic people with very high needs, including those requiring 24/7 care. So the anti-neurodiversity allegation that neurodiversity activists ignore the people that they call ‘severely autistic’ is unjust.

Moreover, when the term “neurodiversity” was coined, it was intended to encompass people whose neurodivergence was primarily difference rather than impairment. It seems unfair to accuse neurodiversity of failing to include something that it did not intend or claim to include.

However, ideas and terms develop over time and “neurodiversity” is no exception: its scope and usage has broadened. Alongside this, distinctions between different autistic people have been reconsidered and rela-

belled.

In 2013, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual’s fifth edition (DSM-5) dissolved Asperger Syndrome under the heading of Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Although there was a case for doing this, it has had an unfortunate consequence. While it helps to identify what all autistic people have in common, it has also obscured our differences.

But this change was made by the American Psychiatric Association, not by the neurodiversity movement. The APA’s explanation for the change does not reference neurodiversity. It is more concerned with medical insurance criteria than with a diversity agenda.

## PARENT-BASHING?

**Another allegation from the anti-neurodiversity camp is that neurodiversity campaigners indulge in “parent-bashing”.**

Neurodivergent people have good reason to criticise aspects of parenting. At one end of the scale, there are parents who administer abusive “treatments” to their children (from bleach enemas to exorcism) in a vain attempt to cure them. These are, thankfully, a very small minority.

However, more mainstream parenting styles also warrant criticism. There is a common view that having a neurodivergent child (particularly an autistic child) is a tragedy and that the priority is to fix or normalise them. It is legitimate and progressive to criticise this view and its consequences for neurodivergent people.

It is understandable that autistic adults are angry when they see parents publicly shame their autistic children by, for example, posting videos of meltdowns. It is legitimate that autistic adults who were traumatised as children by (legal and mainstream) “therapies” speak out against them.

It would be far better for parents and others to listen to these critiques than to dismiss them as “parent-bashing”.

Parents take on these approaches not because they are bad people but because they live in a society which tells them to, and which simultaneously gives parents huge pressure and precious little support. Parenting a child who is often distressed, sometimes violent, difficult to communicate with, excluded by society and highly dependent is hard.

It is harder than it needs to be in a society like ours which gives parents very little support or resources and teaches them nothing about neurodiversity.

This situation is rooted in the capitalist structure of society: the economic system in which production is carried out in the public sphere but reproduction (including child-rearing) in the private sphere. It is a society that treats having children as a private indulgence rather than as the reproduction of the species.

It is also a system which organises production for profit and considers pretty much everything a legitimate market, so entrepreneurs market products and treatments to parents whether they are helpful or harmful.

We need to tackle this system and its policies rather than vilify parents. We can do this by demanding the regulation of all treatments and the banning of proven abusive ones; a massive expansion of free, child-centred childcare provision; inclusive, well-funded, progressive education; rights rather



# neurodiversity

than charity; and proper support for parents.

## POLICIES FOR LIBERATION

**There has been a co-ordinated opposition from some who are involved in autism issues to one part of the draft Labour Party Autism / Neurodiversity Manifesto – the appendix that critiques behaviourist therapies. I don't propose to address that issue in this article.**

It is notable that there has been no similar opposition to the other policies in the Manifesto. Of course, we would not expect people to agree with them if they do not agree with the politics that underlie them: politics of anti-austerity, of inclusion, of rights, of socialism.

But the apparent consensus of support from the political left and from people affected by neurodivergent conditions for the main Manifesto document suggests that our key demands are beneficial to the full range of neurodivergent people.

It includes policies that will benefit people

with ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia and other conditions as well as autistic people – and policies that will benefit people wherever they are on the spectrum of autism and / or other neurodivergence.

It is based on five key principles, one of which is the neurodiversity approach. It shows that the neurodiversity approach can be both unifying and inclusive.

## TOWARDS A MATERIALIST NEURODIVERSITY

**These arguments point to the need to understand neurodiversity in the context of the society in which people live.**

People are part of the physical, natural environment. We also help to shape that environment. We both exist in our environment and interact with it – our physical and sensory environment and the people who live in it alongside us.

We form social structures, and unlike other species we do that in a very conscious way.

But since the early days of human history, we have done it in a way that divides people into distinct classes with distinct interests, with a ruling minority holding most of the power.

When we look at how employers exclude neurodivergent workers, we are considering a specific social relationship in which “employers” and “workers” are different categories of people with different relationships to production.

When we look at parenting of neurodivergent kids, we are considering the way in which parenting is structured as a private activity, as described above. And when we look at disability, we are considering how our physical, sensory and social environment, and features of our own selves in conjunction with that environment, create difficulties for us.

Understanding our experience in these terms is known as a materialist approach.

A materialist understanding of neurodiversity, rather than one based simply on pathology or identity, will enable us to better



understand the oppression of neurodivergent people.

**It will also enable us to imagine and fight for the reorganisation of society that will embrace and support neurodivergent and neurotypical people.**

# Democratic Deficit USA

By Barrie Hardy

**North Carolina's 12th District was said to be the most gerrymandered in America.**

Until 2017 it was a long, straggling, narrow strip, at points extremely narrow. One critic quipped that a two hour drive down its length with both car doors open would endanger the lives of most people in the district.

The term Gerrymandering dates from 1812 and refers to the manipulation of electoral boundaries to establish party political advantage. It was coined from the practice of Governor Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts who had electoral districts drawn up in what looked like the shapes of a salamander. Gerrymandering continues in Republican states more than two hundred years later.

The Republicans have effectively become a whites-only party in a country that is becoming ever more diverse. With their electoral constituency becoming increasingly limited, the only way of holding on to power is to adopt a full range of voter suppression methods.

Claims of widespread voter fraud caused by ineligible voters have been proved baseless. Trump scrapped his advisory commission on electoral integrity last year because they failed to come up with a shred of evidence to back his assertions.

The real frauds, largely uninvestigated, are those practised by Republican politicians attempting to rig the system to their advantage.

These methods are legion. Voters lists are purged of potential Democrat voters. Voter Registration is made difficult. Polling stations are shut down in areas with large ethnic minority populations. “Felons” are disenfranchised, often for many years after they’ve served their sentences.

ID requirements disproportionately discriminate against poorer electors.

Such tactics went a long way to help elect Trump in 2016. It is estimated that over a million votes were lost because eligible voters

didn't have the right ID, encountered long lines at the polling stations or couldn't register.

Trump “won” by a combined total of 78,000 in three swing states. Trump lost the popular vote in the US Presidential Election by the order of three million votes, but made it the White House courtesy of an arcane institution, the Electoral College.

Americans do not directly elect their president. Instead, the winning party in each state secures all Electoral College seats for that state, on a first past the post basis. Trump won a number of key states by a very narrow margin, though he was way behind in others with huge populations.

The Electoral College is a legacy of the 1787 US Constitution, which was drawn up to a large extent by and for the benefit of slaveowners. Ten out of the first 12 US Presidents were slaveowners.

George Washington and his ilk were no great fans of “democracy” in what it has come to be regarded in its modern sense. They feared that electing the nation's leader via universal direct (male) suffrage carried with it the danger of plebeian rule.

Another founding father, Alexander Hamilton, has become something of a historical hero due to the hit musical Hamilton. We'll never know what he might think of hip hop, but he was certainly no great fan of Vox Pop.

He was opposed to an “excess of democracy” and argued that American Presidents should serve for life.

According to Hamilton “The people are turbulent and changing. They seldom judge or determine right”. In his opinion they should be ruled by “landowners, merchants and men of the learned professions.”

To deal with the risk of a “populist” demagogue, an extra filter on the popular vote was called for. Thus the Electoral College, a conclave of “the great and the good” – guardians of the propertied classes – who would deny

office to any victor who represented a serious challenge to the status quo.

Paradoxically, the Electoral College as originally envisaged by the “founding fathers” was just the sort of body that should have denied a maverick like Trump the keys to the White House.

However, with the firm establishment of a two-party system after the American Civil War, the Electoral College effectively became a rubber stamp on the popular vote, only counted state-by-state with winner-takes-all in each state.

Serious calls are now being made to scrap the Electoral College altogether, with a recent opinion poll showing 55% in favour of its abolition. It is not the only democratic deficit resulting from a seriously flawed constitution.

## REPRESENTATION

**Representation in the Senate is disproportionately skewed towards the Republican Party. Wyoming, with a population of just over half a million, returns two senators to Congress – both Republican, whilst California, with 40 million people, also gets two senators.**

A Senate dominated by Republicans from small states can frustrate all kinds of progressive legislation even though it represents a minority of voters nationwide.

An especially pernicious aspect of the way the 1787 Constitution was drawn up was the Three-Fifths Compromise. This proposed that three out of every five slaves be counted as a person when determining a state's total population for representation in the legislature.

That gave slave states more seats in Congress and the Electoral College, without giving slaves themselves a vote, and obviously increased the power of the slavocracy.

That Three-Fifths compromise was done away with after the Civil War, when all adult males were in theory given the vote with the

ironic exception of First Nation Americans. But there is a modern day equivalent dubious population count.

The “land of the free” has the largest prison population in the world, with over two million people behind bars. Incarcerated people don't vote, yet their numbers are included in the population counts used to draw electoral districts in the largely conservative rural areas in which the prisons are situated, rather than the urban areas from which most inmates originate. Black American males were briefly given the vote during the “Reconstruction” period (1865-1877), only to have it taken away from them de facto for nearly a century under the “Jim Crow” regimes, as white supremacy was reestablished in the southern states. Today, in spite of advances made by the civil rights movement, black voting rights continue to be suppressed.

Voter suppression is not the only reason why general elections in the USA have notoriously low turnouts, averaging around 50% of the electorate and heavily skewed towards the wealthier sections of the population. The other reason is traditional lack of choice between Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee, the two major capitalist parties.

As there is a myth that “the working class” voted for Brexit, so also there is the false claim that Trump's victory was down to large-scale working-class support. A minority of working-class people, mostly white, did vote for Trump, but the main shift was that overall turnout declined. In nine midwestern states, turnout in absolute terms dropped from 33.2 million in 2012 to 29.9 million in 2016. The decline reflected a sense of despair, lack of choice, and resentment against two unpopular candidates.

Socialist can reverse this situation by advancing clear policies in defence of jobs and living standards and calling for universal health and socialised medicine.

**There must also be campaigns against all laws and ruses to suppress the vote.**



## 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](http://www.workersliberty.org)



Workers' Liberty



@workersliberty

# From St George to Xi Jinping



## Debate

**By Rhodri Evans**

**The *Times* (18 May) has splashed our denunciation of the wearing of the old Russian imperial emblem, the St George Ribbon, by some members of Lewisham Momentum.**

The incident is only a specially gaudy display of the general political trend of the section of the Labour supposed-left which gravitates around the *Morning Star*.

The *Morning Star* is the continuation of the *Daily Worker*, which for decades from 1930 was a mouthpiece for the regimes of Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev.

It saw the old USSR as "socialist". It based that claim largely on the fact that all sizeable industry in that regime was government-owned. There were no individual, private capitalists.

Demoralised by the collapse of the USSR, the *Morning Star* continues to side with Russia today. Its authoritarian regime is no obstacle. Neither is the fact that the industry is now owned by loot-flaunting private oligarchs.

The *MS* sides with Russia in a demoralised, mealy-mouthed way. Its real enthusiasm, as we shall see, is for the Chinese regime.

On Ukraine, for example, the *MS* declares: "The West has characterised Russia's attempts to defend ethnic Russian populations in Ukraine [i.e. its military intervention in eastern Ukraine] and its 'annexation of the Crimea' as further evidence of its expansionist aims and aggressive policies" (5/12/18).

The *Morning Star* doesn't say straight out that it supports Putin in Ukraine, but gives its readers to understand that since "the West" objects, Putin's course must be basically healthy.

## SYRIA

**On Syria, the *Morning Star* hailed the conquest of Aleppo by the Assad dictatorship, with Russian support, as "liberation" (13/12/16)**

It has mostly been more roundabout in its arguments. On 21/12/18, it derided "British politicians and media [who] will scoff at Russian ambassador Alexander Yakovenko's suggestion that Sergei and Yulia Skripal may have been injected by British authorities with a nerve agent produced at Porton Down.

"They will be equally scornful of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's declaration that Moscow has 'plenty of evidence' that Britain staged the alleged chlorine gas attack in the Syrian town of Douma".

The *MS* made no clear claim that the Putin regime and Assad were innocent. It just said that anyone rejecting the Russian story lacked "scepticism over news we are fed".

The *MS* denounces the charge by

despised "liberals" against Donald Trump of connections with Putin, calling it "the big lie of Russiagate".

"The interminable Mueller investigation", it declared, was out of order because... the US too had interfered in other countries' politics.

The *MS* does criticise Trump, but its indignation against the "liberals" and "human rights indignados" is hotter (5/1/19).

On Europe, the *Morning Star* has exactly the same policy as Nigel Farage. "Britain should leave the EU on World Trade Organisation (WTO) terms to free a future Labour government from single market rule" (27/1/19). It denounces the Tory government as being too pro-EU — "the pro-EU Tory minority regime" (27/1/19) — and especially condemns any customs union with the EU.

Like the Tory right and Farage, the *MS* claims that the British government has no obligation or responsibility to prevent the re-erection of a hard border within Ireland.

The whole border issue, it says, is just "a concoction of cynical and reckless politicians, commentators and top bureaucrats" from the EU, the USA, and Dublin (18/4/19).

As in the old days of Stalin and Brezhnev, the *MS's* attitude to governments across the world is chiefly governed by their diplomatic alignments and alliances.

Its comment on the popular revolt against Nicaragua's crony-capitalist (and Russia-allied) ruler Daniel Ortega is: "What happened in Nicaragua last year was without doubt a US-inspired attempted coup". The *MS* denounces Amnesty International for "denying" that (26/2/19).

In Venezuela, there are indeed attempts at a coup with US support, which *Solidarity* has condemned. The *MS*, though, ignores the facts that the Maduro regime has already carried out a "coup" of its own against the National Assembly elected under its own supervision and relies mainly on its support in the military, and that the actual big-power troops in Venezuela are Russian (backing Maduro).

The *MS* gushes: "Tens of thousands poured onto the streets of Caracas to defend the socialist Bolivarian government from a US-led coup... The democratically elected leader addressed crowds from the Miraflores palace" (24/1/19).

The Israeli government has good relations with Russia and China, but the *MS* sees it as the worst of the "Western" camp. It is the most vehement campaigner in the labour movement for boycotts of Israel, including of Israeli trade unions (2/5/17).

The *MS* is formally for "two states", but says it's against "a Jewish state". (It suggests that any "Jewish state" must be exclusivist. But national self-determination for the Hebrew nation in Israel no more automatically excludes full rights for minorities than does national self-determination for any

other nation with minorities among it, that is, almost every other nation in the world).

The *MS* ran, for example, an approving review of Thomas Suarez's *State of Terror*, a book portraying the whole existence of Israel as an arbitrary ideological act of "terrorism", and the solution as "untangling the injustice" back to pre-1947 or even pre-1914 (3/1/17).

Israel is the axis of evil in the *MS's* view of the world — after all, the *MS* cuts even Trump some slack, on the grounds he is attacked by "liberals". China is the axis of good. The criticisms and demurs in the *MS's* coverage of Russia are absent on China.

A statement from *MS*-backed candidates in the 2008 Greater London Assembly elections, for example, denounced Tibetan protesters as "a minority of violent thugs" and claimed that their supporters "echo the rhetoric of the far right" and "put British Chinese people at risk of racial discrimination and violence from such elements as the fascist British National Party and the National Front".

"The recent well-funded activists in Athens, London, Paris, San Francisco and elsewhere constitute an attack on the constitutional and territorial integrity of the sovereign republic of China.

## CHINA

***MS* editor Ben Chacko claims that China is socialist, and indeed a refreshing improvement on "top-down" socialism.**

"This vision, of a party educating, agitating and organising in farms, factories and mines across China to give working people the tools to fight for their rights, is a fascinating departure from 'top-down' socialism and may owe something to the methods used by the PSUV in Bolivarian Venezuela, a country the Chinese see as a close ally" (6/1/14).

Challenged by the *South China Morning Post*, in an interview, about China's ban on free trade unions, Chacko replied: "We wouldn't want to sit here and judge". Non-state companies, including foreign-invested enterprises, account for more than half of total economic output in China. It is a thoroughly capitalist regime, only one with a fascistic level of suppression of workers' and democratic rights.

Yet Chacko told the *SCMP*: "for [the US and Britain] to say, 'Oh China's got a problem with human rights', is just totally out of order". And if Chinese workers and students to say the same thing? No, Chacko tells them, "there [is] a lot more participation by ordinary residents in local decision-making in politics [in China] than I've ever seen in Britain" (10/5/18).

And on the repression of the Uyghurs, the *MS* responds:

**"China's Foreign Ministry told US politicians today to stop poking their noses in the country's business and posing as human rights authorities" (30/8/18).**

## Courier fight widens

**By Zack, IWGB National Deliveroo Committee chair**

**Couriers and IWGB members at The Doctor's Laboratory will strike for 48 hours from 7.30am on 23 May until 25 May, over better pay and terms and conditions and equality with non-courier staff.**

TDL have been trying to illegally intimidate couriers out of striking, but have not managed.

Deliveroo couriers will be joining them in solidarity.

The second issue of *Puncture*, the IWGB Deliveroo bulletin, started being distributed on Thursday 16 May. We've had very good reception from the first one, and we had way too much content to fit into it — a good problem to have!

It's on A3 folded, with two sides in English, and two sides in Portuguese — a large number of couriers are Brazilian. [bit.ly/puncture2](http://bit.ly/puncture2)

Beyond the issues covered in *Puncture* #2, couriers have been organising to tackle a restaurant refusing toilet access in Bristol, and raising concerns of what seems like Deliveroo stealing tips.

On 17 May, it was revealed that Amazon is the biggest investor in Deliveroo's latest round of fund raising, which overall raised £450 million. Amazon, like Uber, have reportedly previously tried to buy out Deliveroo. Deliveroo said it would use the money for international expansion, growing its "dark kitchen", and "improving its service". Unsurprisingly, there is no mention of higher or more secure pay.

In itself, investments in Deliveroo, Deliveroo expansion, or Deliveroo being taken over by other companies are not bad — these all have potential positive (as well as negative) sides. It shows that they could easily afford to pay us better, and more securely, but that we need to fight to win this.

Stuart couriers, subcontracted by JustEat, continue to become more organised nationally. Many Deliveroo couriers also work for Stuart and/or UberEats, often simultaneously, because of the precarious nature of the work. We will be — I hope — working very closely with IWGB Stuart couriers, and other takeaway platform-based couriers.

**Internationally, in Bologna, couriers for Glovo, a service similar to Deliveroo occupied Glovo's headquarters on Monday 13 May, following the company's refusal to accept or negotiate their demands following a strike the previous Friday.**

• TDL picket line details [bit.ly/tld-23](http://bit.ly/tld-23)



# Campaign renews NEU

**By Duncan Morrison**  
(assistant NEU secretary,  
Lewisham, in personal  
capacity)

**National Education Union (NEU) districts across the country are gearing up for the indicative ballot to boycott high-stakes summative testing in primary schools, which will open on 4 June and close on 2 July.**

It is clear the campaign is having a hugely invigorating effect on many NEU districts. Reports abound of large meetings with primary members who have not been active before turning up, and many signing up to be reps in schools where previously there were none.

In Lewisham we had a meeting of 30 with around 20 members who

had not been to a meeting before. We signed up three new reps on the night and had 14 primary schools represented.

It is clear that this campaign matters to lots of school workers and has a big potential to mobilise and to mend the fact that the union is usually less well organised in primary schools than in secondary.

It is also a campaign for action with a clear goal, which benefits all members and all children in primary schools, and has a clear method to achieve that goal. That clarity marks off the campaign from the NEU's indicative ballot over funding and pay last year and recent campaigns of the National Union of Teachers (the larger of the NEU's predecessor unions).

Nationally, the union is preparing a publicity campaign to back the work going on at district level.

The publicity will focus upon the issue of restoring trust to those who work in schools as well as the detrimental effects of the tests on children.

The anti-union laws mean that the dispute could not be about just the effect on children. However, the restoring trust is a central issue for school workers concerning these tests. It also links with the harm caused to children, as school workers can see the damage the tests cause and if they were trusted they would not inflict them on the children.

**We have a lot of work to do, but the evidence is we can get a significant turn out and "yes" vote in the indicative ballot. In the fight to do this we are shaping the NEU into a stronger fighting union for the future.**



## Strike to stop bullying

**By Todd Hamer**

**Workers at Harbinger Primary School on the Isle of Dogs in East London, members of the National Education Union, are on strike 21, 22, and 23 May against bullying and unacceptable behaviour by the headteacher.**

Staff first officially raised concerns in November 2018, when 18 staff members submitted a collective grievance in the hope of resolving this issue. In their own words, the official complaints process "got us nowhere".

The union's demands are a damning indictment of the headteacher. They insist that the head must apologise for shouting at and belittling staff, agree to anger-management therapy, and admit that he has lied during the investigation into his behaviour.

They call for competent leadership. They also request an apology from the Local Education Authority for their "disrespectful, negligent and unbalanced" handling of their original complaint.

In a letter to parents, headteacher, Andy Smith, said that the strike is due to "concerns over my leadership style". However it takes a rare arrogance to describe his behaviour as "leadership". Smith has managed to unite an entire staff

team against him to the point where they are walking off the job.

The union group, which comprised all qualified teaching staff except the head, voted 100% for strikes in an 87% turnout. Since the ballot almost every member of staff in the school has joined the NEU, showing the power of an all-grades union.

Strikes of this nature are rare, but the type of behaviour that Harbinger NEU describes is probably familiar to many school workers. The government's obsession with pitting children and schools against one another in endless high stakes tests has trained a new breed of head teachers who care more about gaming the system than offering a well rounded, child-centred education.

The demands of the league tables cut against the best instincts of children and the best values of teaching staff. In this high pressure environment, management bullying becomes rife.

**The Harbinger NEU group have had the courage, vision and organisation to stand up against the bullying. If they win it will inspire many more to organise and take on the bullies.**

• For full list of demands, updates and solidarity messages: [bit.ly/h-binger](https://bit.ly/h-binger)

## PCS: close vote on pay

**By a conference delegate**

**On the first day of the conference of the PCS civil service union in Brighton, 21 May, a composite backed by the Independent Left on pay was only narrowly defeated.**

The debate centred round two emergency motions, one from the National Executive (NEC), and a composite backed both by the Independent Left and by the Socialist Party, which until recently dominated the union leadership.

It went to a card vote. The NEC motion passed 62,000 to 60,000, so the alternative composite fell.

The NEC motion could be summed up as "do the same again". PCS's latest attempt to beat the 50% turnout threshold demanded by the Tories' Trade Union Act 2016 in a ballot for strikes on pay failed narrowly, and the NEC wants to make another push. Its motion ruled out "disaggregated"



**ISS workers at the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) picketing on 21 May with the Free Our Unions campaign**

ballots, which would permit strikes in departments with over 50% turnout even if the overall average is below. The alternative motion also supported a new push, but called for wider consultation and discussion with the membership, in a way which enables the membership to make an informed choice on aggregated or disaggregated ballot-

ing. It also took up questions of union organising, and issues of conditions as well as pay.

The NEC motion was backed by close supporters of general secretary Mark Serwotka, by the Socialist View section of Left Unity, and by the SWP.

**The conference continues on 22 and 23 May.**

## Left at FBU conference

**By Sacha Ismail**

**I attended the Fire Brigades Union conference in Blackpool, 15-17 May, as a visitor for the Free Our Unions campaign.**

The conference saw debate about the union's industrial strategy as well as significant decisions and stances on a number of big political issues.

After FBU members resoundingly rejected a pay proposal from fire service employers which would introduce open-ended contracts, without a clear definition of firefighters' role, in return for only the possibility of a pay rise, the

union is moving towards a national dispute. The conference debated various aspects of strategy and tactics in taking the campaign forward.

Issues of pay and job roles are intertwined with questions about national standards, so this is a debate about reasserting a universal, high-standard fire and rescue service after years of cuts and deregulation, as well as about firefighters' conditions. The reality of tragedies caused by growing holes in the service, and in particular Grenfell, was very much part of the discussions.

The conference voted unanimously to make the FBU the first

national union to back the Free Our Unions campaign (see the motion on the *Clarion* website at [bit.ly/2YMrtbt](https://bit.ly/2YMrtbt)). That was after a packed Free Our Unions fringe meeting organised by the union's Eastern and West Midlands regions, which I addressed along with FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack, anti-blacklist activist Dave Smith and youth climate striker Patrick Wakefield.

Patrick's speech evoked a very strong response in the meeting, and was particular timely because after it the conference also debated and passed a radical motion calling for a Socialist Green New Deal, including demands going well beyond

the mainstream of what has generally been fought for under the Green New Deal banner so far ([bit.ly/2JQP1r8](https://bit.ly/2JQP1r8)).

But the highpoint for me, and I'd guess for many of the delegates, was hearing from Spanish firefighter Miguel Roldán, who the FBU is campaigning to defend from the Italian government's threats to prosecute him for his work rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean.

Miguel was warmly welcomed and his impassioned defence of migrants' rights and free movement got a good response; Matt Wrack spoke afterwards drawing out many of the same themes and making the case for an internationalist

labour movement.

A real weakness in terms of internationalism, however, was that the conference did not discuss Brexit. After deciding to take a strong left-wing Remain stand in 2016, the FBU has been much more divided on the issue since the referendum. Anti-Brexit socialists in the union need support and encouragement to change that.

The left-wing initiatives reported here were supported by the national leadership but came from officers and activists somewhat further down in the union.

**It should be said that the FBU's Eastern region played a particularly important role in all of them.**





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