



& Workers' Liberty **Solidarity**

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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Defeat May's Brexit GENERAL ELECTION AND A NEW VOTE!

Labour is inching back towards the "Remain [in the EU] and Reform" stance it took in the June 2016 referendum, but only inching.

The deep discredit of the Tories' Brexit formula makes it urgent for Labour to switch back fully — and in the meantime for anti-Brexit Labour people to organise to develop a pro-Labour, anti-Brexit public profile.

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Climate change walk out

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Counter-marching on 9 December

Callum Cant and Kelly Rogers debate how to tackle Tommy Robinson's "Brexit betrayal" demo.

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Universal credit debate

Luke Hardy argues for "scrapping" rather than "pausing and fixing" Universal Credit.

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Join Labour! Social calamity and councils

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Cuts calamity and councils



Interview

Peter Kenway

Solidarity: Philip Alston's recent report on "social calamity" in the UK focused on cuts in benefits. There have also been huge cuts in local government. What is their impact?

Kenway: Local government delivers about 200 distinct services. The best-known is social care for adults and children, which takes over a third of the money. There's the bins, and an increasingly residual role in education.

And then a bunch of mundane but essential stuff: school crossing patrols, maintaining roads and parks, youth services, environmental health, trading standards, building controls...

Since 2010, spending on social care has gone up, driven by statutory requirements, but councils have cut down everywhere they could. In education, the government has centralised control.

The rest, the vast majority of local government functions, which you could call "neighbourhood services", about a quarter of total local government spending, has been cut by 25% in real terms overall.

But you can find local authorities in prosperous areas of (e.g.) Berkshire and Surrey which have increased those services.



Peter Kenway is director of the New Policy Institute, and author of much research on local government. He talked with Martin Thomas from Solidarity

Metropolitan authorities outside London and some unitary authorities have suffered most.

The government has very largely reduced the grants that once sought to equalise resources, so some places have lost have the provision they had eight or nine years ago.

The Financial Times today (3 December) reports on East Sussex council as having cut all bus subsidies, scrapped school bus services, reduced support for the elderly, disabled, and families; it now plans to close most of its remaining libraries...

That's typical of the country councils who have found themselves in difficulties.. The noisiest complaints to central government have come from Conservative county councils.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has recently done a report about the government's proposal that local authorities retain 100% of extra business rate income from their areas (existing business rate income is redistributed), saying that it will lead to divergences in funding without promoting growth.

Overall, risk has been shifted downwards. The centre no longer takes backstop responsibility.

An example is council tax benefit. It used to be 100% for everyone on means-tested benefits. That was brought in by Heseltine and Major

as part of the deal to replace the poll tax.

Since 2013 it has left to councils to decide how much council tax support to pay to the worst-off. While banks are de-risked by the taxpayer, in local government the risk has been transferred downwards. If a large workplace in a local authority area closes, the local authority picks up the tab. Before 2013, this wasn't the case. The council administered CTB but in the end the bill was picked up by central government.

There is and will be more more area-by-area inequality, though there will be ad hoc rescues, as in Surrey and Northamptonshire.

Since at least 2011 it's been said again and again that "local government is on the edge". For the most part it has not fallen off. Only a full-scale financial crash could cause a council to collapse completely. And most of the cuts have been through voluntary redundancy.

Councils are losing expertise and resources. They have very little flexibility or opportunity to plan or to think strategically, rather than trying to cope day to day. Capacity and know-how is being destroyed. We're losing the social-democratic state.

This aspect of it is less visible, because many of the local government services are scarcely visible to the majority. Most people don't notice the worst cuts.

In 2010-1 several councils agitated to demand restoration of central government funding. But as the cuts have got worse, that agitation has disappeared. And, despite all its other redistributive measures, Labour's 2017 manifesto said nothing about restoring local government spending.

I am very struck by how apolitical local government has become. In my work I can be in a room full of Conservative and Labour council leaders, and it's not always obvious which is which.

Three things have led to the quiescence. The public is not kicking

off, on the whole. Local government has been very attracted by the idea of "localism" promoted by George Osborne.

And London, overall, including its most deprived bits, is in a different place from other metropolitan areas. Scottish and Welsh are now focused on Edinburgh and Cardiff. Whatever political unity there was among Labour councils is much weaker.

London has benefited relatively because it's more prosperous, it has increased business rates, and, in areas like Camden anyway, the population has shifted to include a smaller number of older pensioners.

And London is more granular than other cities. Rich and poor live very near to each other.

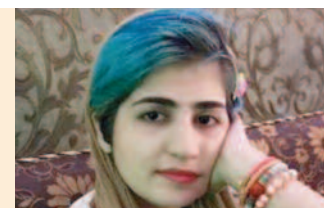
The Labour manifesto's lack of interest in local government comes (in part) from the fact that local government has not pushed hard.

But in fact historically Labour Party leaders have shown little interest in poverty. Labour Party manifestos over the years have very little mention of poverty until 2001.

"Poverty" is on the whole not a term working-class people use to describe themselves. It is more used by upper-class people concerned about what they see as social issues. I remember people in Glasgow saying to me: "This is normal for us. We don't call it poverty". Since poverty is an inherently relative concept (it being about not inability to maintain at least a minimum socially acceptable standard of living), there is no answer to that.

Poverty is not the same as low pay. Pay rates feed into it, but also working hours, how many people in a household work, child care, and so on. People who are short of money are also often short of time. "Poverty" opens up a different world from just pay rates. It raises questions of public services, access, and affordability.

Marrying the issues is a challenge.



Sepideh Ghalian

Free Bakhshi and Ghalian!

By Gerry Bates

Esmail Bakhshi, the jailed union rep of the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Workers in south-west Iran, and Sepideh Ghalian, an activist who has supported the workers, have been badly beaten in prison.

After visiting them, their families have reported that both have been tortured and are in serious distress.

Four of the striking Haft Tappeh sugar-cane workers, in south-west Iran, were arrested on 18 November. Three were then released, but Esmail Bakhshi and Sepideh Ghalian are still locked up.

On 27 November the Haft Tappeh workers gathered in front of Shush County Hall demanding the release of Bakhshi and Ghalian.

They have listed their other demands as:

- 1- Handing over the company from private sector to the state.
- 2- Payment of all unpaid wages (and benefits and bonuses).
- 3- Implementation of the job classification schedule.
- 4- Other trade union demands.

National Steel Industrial Group (INSIG) steelworkers in Ahvaz, the capital of Khuzestan province, about 100km south of Shush, are also on strike, over unpaid wages, and the two groups of strikers have supported each other.

Updates at <http://shahrokhzamani.com>. Signatures are being sought for solidarity statements: please email sacha@workersliberty.org.

AEIP conference set for 8 December

By Sam Lloyd

After opening itself out so that people can join as members, rather than just being an office with initiatives which activists on the ground can support, Another Europe is Possible is calling a conference on 8 December in London (details: bit.ly/aeip-c).

Members will be able to debate and vote on structures and strategy. Workers' Liberty will be attend-

ing the conference, and we encourage all socialists to attend and join the campaign to stop Brexit.

We will be supporting a number of proposals and amendments. One, also backed by some leading AEIP figures, calls for a specifically Labour anti-Brexit campaign, supported by AEIP but autonomous, with the capacity to create an anti-Brexit voice within the Labour campaign if an early general election is forced but the official Labour line

remains "negotiate a better Brexit".

AEIP as such defines itself as "cross-party".

One amendment will question the way that the AEIP-backed "Europe For The Many" conference on 26-7 October projected ministers from the Portuguese and Greek governments as representing the "for the many" voice in Europe, rather than promoting debate in which those ministers were challenged by working-class socialists

from Portugal and Greece.

Another will question a clause slipped into the AEIP strategy document recommending an all-Ireland referendum on Irish unity as the democratic formula. Yet another will dispute a clause in the AEIP strategy document recommending that AEIP should seek to be part of the official Remain campaign if there is a new referendum on Brexit.

(Labour was part of the official

"Better Together" in the 2014 Scottish referendum, but after shifting left in 2015 resolved to campaign in the 2016 EU referendum independently from the "official" Britain Stronger in Europe headed by big-business mogul Stuart Rose).

Some Workers' Liberty activists will stand for the AEIP committee to be elected at the conference, and we will also support other more left-wing candidates.

Our conference

By Arthur Bunting

Workers' Liberty opened our annual conference on 24-25 November with a session on the case for building a revolutionary organisation on the lines developed by the Bolsheviks in the period up to and during the revolution they led in 1917.

There is no short-cut to mass support. We have to build up, as the Bolsheviks did, from the basic tasks of developing our press, recruiting people one by one, doing "single-jack" agitation, striving to make our activities more accessible and outward-facing.

We adopted a long document on Brexit. An amendment about using the policy adopted by Labour conference in September to drive in political wedges against the leadership's current pro-Brexit line. An emergency amendment about efforts to pull together a Labour voice against Brexit was remitted for further discussion (which it has had, with results reported on page 5).

A motion opposing last year's decision to approve the large sections of the French left who used a Macron vote to fend off Le Pen in the second round of the presidential elections fell, with slightly fewer than 40% of conference voting in favour.

We adopted newly-comprehensive code-of-conduct, complaint-procedure, and safeguarding policies, which will be further developed.

The debate on student work fo-

cused on re-evaluating our intervention into the National Union of Students. Two amendments, about the balance of that intervention and about activity at Further Education colleges, fell.

A motion summarised the support for trans rights we spelled out in *Workers' Liberty* 3/61: most of the debate there focused on whether the terms "terf" ("Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist") and "cis" (meaning "non-trans") can be used at all, or are comprehensively disqualified by ways they have been used.

The discussion on trade-union and workplace activity highlighted the UCU dispute, our work around the anti-union laws, and the need to develop strategies around precarious work, and was followed by the election of an industrial committee supplementary to the general committee elected from conference.

In the final discussion, on the Corbyn surge, an amendment saying that the main document was too unrelievedly negative about the Labour leadership's record on anti-semitism fell, and an amendment on fighting cuts-making Labour councils passed.

The conference heard greetings in person from the Worker-Communist Party of Iraqi Kurdistan, and messages of solidarity from several other groups across the world.

Documents adopted by the conference can be found at www.workersliberty.org/awconference18

This pamphlet republishes a selection of articles written by members and supporters of Workers' Liberty, along with an interview with the late Marxist theorist Moishe Postone, and an article by the Bolshevik revolutionary Leon Trotsky.

It is a contribution to the political debate and education.

Buy online for £4.50 here: www.workersliberty.org/as-pamphlet



Radical readers in space

By Michael Elms

A revived socialist movement needs a revived culture of reading, discussion and self-education. Even if the weather's too grim to leave the house.

Workers' Liberty and friends will shortly be launching a Skype-based reading group, "Skype Radical Readers".

We will meet monthly, online, in Skype calls. To get around the 25-participant limit on Skype or Google Hangout, we will un-

several reading groups simultaneously.

We will be reading accessible works of socialist writing — both fiction and non-fiction.

Our first reading group will take place in December (date tbc), looking at Kate Evans's wonderful *Red Rosa* — a graphic novel biography of the socialist hero Rosa Luxemburg.

While you wait, be sure to check bit.ly/RRinSpace and facebook.comRRinSpace/ for the latest



The G20 conference of 20 leading capitalist governments in Argentina on 30 November and 1 December saw a non-committal communiqué and a side-meeting between US president Donald Trump and Chinese president Xi Jinping.

At the side-meeting, Trump suspended (for 90 days) new increases in US tariffs on Chinese imports which were due to start in January, and Xi made unquantified promises that China would buy more US imports and essay "structural changes" on intellectual property protection and other issues.

Whether this is only a pause in the developing tariff war between the USA and China, or the beginning of a peace deal, is not clear.

Next week's *Solidarity* will carry an interview discussing the issues round Trump's trade policy with Leo Panitch, co-author of a major book on "*The Making of Global Capitalism*".

"Democracy Brigades" in Brazil

By Luiza Xavier

Since the far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro won the second round of Brazil's presidential election on 28 October — he takes office in January — the resistance has been limited to small initiatives focused on self-defence of LGBT individuals, or legal representation of activists.

Large demonstrations such as those seen after Trump's election in the US have not happened.

The Workers' Party (PT) and the PSOL (Socialism and Liberty Party, left split from the PT) have both called meetings of their national leaderships to make plans for the months ahead, and the MTST (movement of homeless workers, one of the largest organised social movements in Brazil) has plans to form "Democracy Brigades" across the country.

The report coming out of the PT's meeting shows that the leaders of the Workers' Party at least partly recognise the need to strengthen their link with the grass roots. Decisions included:

- the creation of more educational written material to be sent to local parties
- a push for local parties to organise series of debates and events for new members to attend
- promoting the de-bureaucratisation of the party (by making information more easily accessible)
- making local party units more accessible, refurbishing local party HQs so they can become centres for disseminating information about



MTST activists on the streets of Sao Paulo

the party and local culture

- forming a network of online activists
- a working group to look into the reorganisation of the party and its activities.

The resolutions talk about improving the flow of information from the top to the base, but on the flow of information in the other direction (more frequent local democratic meetings, a proper process for holding elected bureaucrats or government officials to account) it offers only vague rhetoric about "staying in sync" with the grass-roots.

PT decisions also include strengthening further the campaign to free Lula, maintaining an already existent solidarity network for the victims of violence (presumably from the wave of homophobic, racist, misogynistic and anti-communist violence that has been growing since the election campaign), and increasing representation of women, LGBT, indigenous and black people in leadership and government positions (but without mentioning any strategy for how: only one party in Brazil currently

has equal representation for women in the chamber of deputies, the PSOL).

The PSOL hasn't yet released the decisions made at its leadership meeting.

The MST (Movement of Landless Workers, one of the biggest and most influential social movements in Brazil) and the CUT (a "central" organisation of trade unions, close to the PT) have not released a public post-election strategy for resistance. The MTST has raised almost 50,000 reais (£10,000) to organise meetings and produce printed material for the organisation of "Democracy Brigades" (essentially, local activist groups) to organise demonstrations, meetings and physical and online actions.

The MTST does not specify how autonomous the Brigades will be, how they will be structured or what their politics would be like.

We have yet to see whether the crowds of activists that participated in the anti-Bolsonaro electoral campaign will join these resistance initiatives, or whether smaller groups will start organising after 1 January.

Brexit and fighting the far-right



Debate

Stopping Brexit isn't anti-fascism

Callum Cant takes issue over the 9 Dec counter-demo

The Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) are obsessed with trade unions. When their march was blocked in October, their leadership couldn't stop themselves from fantasising about beating up organised workers.

For many of their supporters, the organisation's high point was when a DFLA group launched a serious physical attack on RMT members in a pub in Whitehall. The essence of their politics is a hatred of the organised working class.

This is not a new dynamic – indeed, Clara Zetkin wrote about the emergence of Italian fascism in very similar terms in 1923: “Proletarian struggle and self-defence against fascism requires the proletarian united front. Fascism does not ask if the worker in the factory has a soul painted in the white and blue colours of Bavaria; the black, red, and gold colours of the bourgeois republic; or the red banner with the hammer and sickle. [...] All that matters to fascists is that they encounter a class-conscious proletarian, and then they club him to the ground. That is why workers must come together for struggle without distinctions of party or trade-union affiliation.”

Zetkin was fundamentally correct. Her ideas are applicable to the UK today – specifically on the question of how antifascists should approach Brexit. In short, we shouldn't.

The RMT backed Leave. Unite backed Remain. The DFLA want to destroy both. Dividing mobilisations against the far right on the basis of opinions regarding the referendum weakens the front. The only viable line is one of antifascist unity: some of us are leave, some of us are remain, but we're all antifascist.

The argument over a socialist position on the question of Stop Brexit/Lexit should be



conducted amongst the left outside of the sphere of antifascism, where disunity is directly harmful to our ability to oppose the far-right.

The AWL should absolutely mobilise for any and all upcoming antifascist demonstrations. But you should do so as participants in a front with the broadest possible base and the narrowest possible politics.

Unity doesn't mean ditching ideas

Kelly Rogers responds from Workers' Liberty

Callum Cant argues, both in his article here and in his article published on Novara Media, that we must build an anti-fascist “united front” with the “broadest possible base, and the narrowest possible politics.”

He also argues that anyone joining the demonstration against Tommy Robinson on 9 December under the banner of “Stop Brexit” and “fight for free movement”, with Another Europe is Possible, is “dividing mobilisations against the far right”.

Firstly, Another Europe is Possible have called their demo as a bloc at the same place and same time as the wider Momentum-backed demonstration. To argue that they are dividing the movement is a wilful misrepresentation of reality.

More importantly, this lowest-common-de-

nominator politics only makes sense up to a point. Both Workers' Liberty and Another Europe are determined to make a positive case for freedom of movement, both in terms of protecting the limited free movement that currently exists, and extending it. If we are to provide an antidote to the rise of the far right, then we need to tackle their politics head on.

Momentum refused to back a demonstration that raised that slogan because the Labour front bench does not support it. Other campaigns in the new coalition behind the 9 December mobilisation have fallen in line without protest.

If Cant and others are happy to “narrow” their politics to the point where they are prepared to junk the rights of EU migrants, then that's not practical united front tactics, it's just reactionary.

Another Europe also called their bloc to raise the slogan “No to Brexit”. Not all Leave voters are racist. Many of them will oppose Tommy Robinson's fascism. But it is a fact that Brexit is a right-wing project, and one which has helped to foster the growth of the far right in Britain.

Anti-immigrant racism and nationalism have been at the heart of Brexit since the beginning. It will mean the biggest expansion of border controls in recent history, perhaps since the 1905 Aliens Act. Brexit is situated in the context of a global phenomenon that encompasses the pan-European far right, Trump in America.

The protagonists of these movements are very clear about the connections. Steve Bannon has this year set up a Brussels headquarters and has made visits to see Nigel Farage,

Tommy Robinson, and Marine Le Pen. These people explicitly view themselves as part of a global right-wing alliance, a “nationalist international”.

In this context, it is no good pretending that Brexit is an irrelevant detail here, something we can ignore because it's difficult, or – and I suspect this is what it is really about – because the Labour Party front bench are promising a “better Brexit” and an expanded border force.

Cant's argument that the RMT union is for Leave and the Unite union for Remain, and fascists “want to destroy both”, and therefore we have to sit on the fence, is not worth much space. We are for raising the political level of our class and equipping it with the ideas to defeat the forces of reaction.

United fronts are not simply a coalition of forces. They are a space for the battle of ideas. The slogans we raise now will shape the movement going into the future. Cant's argument is apolitical and short-sighted, based merely on a calculation of how to get numbers onto the streets.

He fails to make the political argument against Tommy Robinson. He seeks to unite people around lowest-common-denominator politics and edgy aesthetics, but fails to address the issues at the very heart of the far right in Britain.

9 December: march against Tommy Robinson and the far right

On Sunday 9 December, UKIP and former EDL leader “Tommy Robinson” have called a march against “Brexit Betrayal”, 11:45, Park Lane, London (bit.ly/brx-tr).

Organisations including the Anti-Fascist Network and Momentum have called a counter-protest, assembling 11am at Portland Place, London W1A 1AA. Another Europe is Possible is organising a bloc with slogans against Brexit and for free movement. Workers' Liberty is supporting the AEIP bloc.

Stand Up To Racism, in which the SWP plays a big part, is also calling for counter-protesters to come to Portland Place at 11.

It is possible that the assembly place may change before Sunday: check for the latest info at bit.ly/no-to-tr and bit.ly/aeip-9dec.

Morning Star denounces “experts”, glorifies ignorance



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

“The age of experts is over” proclaimed the *Morning Star's* front page headline, in huge capitals, on Monday 26 November.

It turns out that the headline was a reference to something that shadow justice secretary Richard Burdon had said during an interview on the BBC's Andrew Marr Show the previous day: Marr had argued that Labour's demand for an election was highly unlikely to succeed, given that to do so would require the support of 100 Tory MPs, to which Burdon replied by pointing out that “experts” have got a lot of predictions wrong in recent political history. Which is fair

enough as far as it goes, I suppose (though it doesn't change the parliamentary arithmetic). But the *Morning Star's* gleeful front page promotion of Burdon's off-the-cuff response to Marr goes deeper. It's a shocking celebration of ignorance and an obvious reference to Michael Gove's philistine remarks during the referendum campaign.

The fact that the story beneath that headline referred to the “elite” and “Establishment bigwigs” (terms that Burdon himself did not use in the Marr interview) marks a further degeneration by the *Morning Star* into populism. It may or may not be a coincidence that the same edition of the paper carried a semi-literate article by Kevin Ovenden (former SWP leader, then aide to George Galloway) objecting to the term “populism” as a being used by “capitalist elites” to dismiss “the massive opposition to those elites” as in (and this is Mr Ovenden's chosen example) “the current French fuel protests.”

That day's editorial was the usual anti-EU rant that included advocacy of leaving without a deal and trading on WTO terms — dismissing concerns about this (though diplomatically not mentioning the major manufacturing unions and the Labour leadership) as “Project Fear”

I write to the *Morning Star* quite frequently and they sometimes even publish my letters. They haven't published this one:

Dear Comrades,

The first proper job I had was in a large, solidly unionised factory where I had the privilege of encountering a number of well-read working class intellectuals, some of whom were members of the Communist Party, others members of Trotskyist groups. What they all taught me was to critically read and analyse the best bourgeois thinkers and then to draw my own, independent, analysis of where the interests of our class lie. As I understand it, this was the method of Marx himself.

So I was shocked to see the *Morning Star* front

page headline (November 26) “The age of experts is over” — surely a conscious reference to Michael Gove's philistine statement that “people have had enough of experts”. The fact that the headline was a quote from shadow justice secretary Richard Burdon does not excuse it: Burdon must answer for his own glorification of ignorance and backwardness, but the *Morning Star* need not approve.

I also note that the same front page uses the populist terms “elite” and “Establishment” — words that were never used by Marx, and for good reason: they do not refer to class but to a conspiratorial, sub-sociological view of the world. This glorification of anti-Marxist conspiracism and ignorance is only rendered more profound by Kevin Ovenden's article in the same issue, denying the relevance of the term “populism”: all this represents a serious regression into ignorance and philistinism.

My old autodidact teachers in the factory would recoil in horror.

Planning a Labour voice against Brexit

The following statement has been endorsed by a number of Labour movement activists including Andrew Coates, Sacha Ismail, Kelly Rogers, Julie Ward MEP, Catherine West MP, and Zoe Williams, and includes a proposal to be put to the conference of Another Europe Is Possible on 8 December.

With Theresa May's deal likely to be defeated in parliament [on 11 December], and a number of key parliamentary blocs losing confidence in the Tory government, we are facing a period of political crisis and upheaval, and a general election looks increasingly possible.

As Labour members and supporters, we want our party to fight in the months ahead, including in any General Election campaign, to stop the anti-working-class disaster that is Brexit.

To quote the official policy passed at Labour conference 2018, we want "a radical government: taxing the rich to fund public services, expanding common ownership, abolishing the anti-union laws and engaging in massive public investment".

As the party of working people, Labour must defend all the rights threatened by

Brexit – workers' rights, environmental protections, free movement. With the Tory deal published, the realities of Brexit are clearer than ever. Fighting effectively for a radical Labour government means committing to giving the people a final say, and campaigning for remain in that referendum.

In Europe, just as in domestic policy, Labour must offer a radical alternative to the status quo. Our movement must champion a revolt across the continent against austerity, neo-liberalism and anti-migrant policies and for a democratic, socialist Europe.

Labour's policy is shifting, but is not yet committed to stopping Brexit. We will continue the campaign to win Labour to a vision for a radical government leading the fight to transform Europe from within the EU. To this end, and to provide anti-Brexit Labour supporters with a platform, organising framework and program of activity, we intend to create an independent campaigning coordination within the campaign for a Corbyn-led Labour government.

We are proposing the following amendment to Another Europe is Possible's conference on 8 December, hoping that Another Europe will play a central role in initiating

this campaign.

"If there is a general election, it will be necessary to mobilise a massive campaign inside the Labour Party to demand that the party takes a position against Brexit, in favour of a fresh referendum, and in favour of transforming Europe. It will also be necessary for Labour members who hold this perspective to organise a strong anti-Brexit voice within the Labour campaign. We have been effective at mobilising significant numbers of Labour Party members for our campaigns. However, we are a cross-party organisation, and we must guard against Another Europe's output being completely dominated by campaigns focused on Labour.

"In the dynamic of an election campaign, any campaign aimed at changing Labour's policy must be free to unequivocally support Labour, which Another Europe cannot do. We will therefore support the creation of a freestanding, independent campaign, open to all Labour members and supporters, with the aim of ensuring that Labour takes the right position, and which allows Labour members who are against Brexit to have a platform in the campaign and a programme of activities".

General election and a new vote!

Labour is inching back towards the "Remain [in the EU] and Reform" stance it took in the June 2016 referendum, but only inching.

The deep discredit of the Tories' Brexit formula makes it urgent for Labour to switch back fully — and in the meantime for anti-Brexit Labour people to organise to develop a pro-Labour, anti-Brexit public profile.

John McDonnell, on Newsnight 21 November, said bluntly that even if the Tories were to let Labour form a minority government now, in terms of the 585-page withdrawal formula, the subject of the vote on 11 December, "we're talking about finalising a deal, we're not talking about starting from scratch". (A Labour government could change more in the post-2020 arrangements sketched in the accompanying 26-page "declaration" that the Tories have agreed with the EU; but even then, not much).

No Brexit withdrawal deal that Labour could in conscience support is on the table. The conclusion is inescapable: Labour should declare that experience has confirmed that Brexit is wrong, and press for a new referendum in the light of that experience.

As we go to press on 4 December, the government looks almost certain to lose the parliamentary vote on its Brexit "withdrawal deal" on 11 December.

The DUP MPs from Northern Ireland, on whom the government rests for its majority, pledge to vote against. They have consolidated that position by backing a successful motion (on 4 December) which made this Tory administration the first government ever to be indicted as "in contempt of Parliament" (for not publishing its full legal advice on the deal).

Many Tory MPs are set to vote against the deal, and no Labour MP now talks of voting with the government on the deal.

Many different possibilities open up after the Commons votes down the "withdrawal deal".

The government may bring the deal back for a second vote, maybe after securing tweaks the document it has agreed with the EU on UK-EU relations after the "transition period" due to run from March 2019 to December 2020 or later. Maybe it can get a "side letter" on interpretation of the documents agreed with the EU to improve its chances on a second vote.

The level of disarray makes a "no-deal" exit not impossible, though it looks unlikely, since no party would want to be seen as responsible for such an outcome, and the great bulk of the ruling class on all sides is very opposed to "no deal".

The government may be forced to seek a postponement of the 29 March 2019 Brexit date, while it casts around for some formula which can win a Parliamentary majority.

The government may be forced into a referendum on the deal, or be toppled, leading to an early general election.

The bottom line is that no Brexit formula has majority support in Parliament, or in the electorate. If a Brexit formula does eventually get through Parliament, it will be only because MPs have been cornered into accepting that it's that formula, or "no deal".

The latest opinion surveys, on 28-29 November, show 42% saying Parliament should pass the deal if the only alternative is "no deal" (32% for "no deal", 26% don't know). 32% say Parliament should pass the deal if the only alternative is to stay in the EU (43%



The left-wing base of the 20 October "People's Vote" demonstration needs to find political expression autonomous from the Lib-Dem and similar politicians who dominated the platforms there.

for "stay", 25% don't know).

It makes no sense to say that this deal should be allowed through in deference to the June 2016 referendum decision.

Make Labour oppose Brexit! If the Labour leaders won't do that, the anti-Brexit Labour rank and file must and will organise to put out a pro-Labour and anti-Brexit message.

On that basis, Labour can force a general election and a new vote on Brexit.

Over halfway to £15,000

£5,070 collected at the Workers' Liberty conference on 24-25 November, and in the few days since, brings our running total on our £15,000 fund appeal up to £8,181. Over halfway there!

£15,000

The collection was significantly bigger than previous collections at our conferences.

But it needed to be. The government looks very likely to be defeated on its central Brexit policy in Parliament on 11 December. Whether it then falls, or can recover, we are in for weeks or months of intense political ferment.

It is a duty for socialists to establish the strongest possible political profile arguing both for Labour to oust the Tories, and — even if Labour remains stuck on its current "negotiate a better Brexit" policy — against Brexit, for free movement, for reducing rather than raising borders.

Solidarity and Workers' Liberty form almost the only organised socialist grouping willing to undertake that duty.

We need to reach out and organise. And that takes money: for fares, meeting-room hire, placards, leaflets, pamphlets, all the rest of it. And for the backroom stuff: we have to replace the server in our office, and recently had to replace the printer.

We have much else to do at the same time. We were at the climate change demonstration on 1 December, but few other people were. There must be potential in Britain to stir up the sort of large-scale climate protest shown in Australia with the school students' walk-out on 30 November. But to get from potential to reality takes a lot of work.

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A left case against Brexit



Interview

Alan Simpson

On Brexit, the reality is that Parliament is gridlocked. The Tories have no majority to get anything through.

Labour's response has to be much clearer. Initially ambiguity was sensible. If you're not in the negotiations, you can't say much about the details. That was when Labour set the six tests.

That position doesn't hold as you get close to the negotiation deadline. I see it in trade-union terms. Your negotiators negotiate, but what they bring back has to be put to the members.

This is not a betrayal of the electorate, or of the will of the people in the 2016 referendum. It goes to the core of trade-union democracy. It is the members who always have the final say. For example, you might tell me that you want to try a parachute jump. So you get up there. Then you find there's no parachute, and I offer you a big handkerchief instead. You'd say: get me back onto the ground. It is an act of sanity, not of political betrayal.

It faces Labour with the question of how to campaign round a second referendum. And it takes me back to the "Remain and Reform" position Jeremy [Corbyn] and John [McDonnell] tried to argue in the 2016 referendum.

They were blocked by the then leadership of Labour's campaign in the referendum, which was all in the hands of those deeply opposed to Jeremy's election as leader.

Jeremy did more meetings than any other member of the Shadow Cabinet, and more than those officially running Labour's Remain campaign. But there was specific refusal to allow Labour to campaign against the TTIP proposals then current, which would have transferred rights from citizens to corporations.

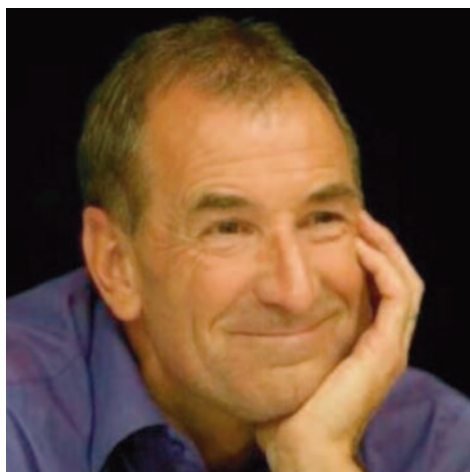
Jeremy refused to share platforms with Cameron, and we had no Labour dimension in the campaign to show how neoliberal policies had laid waste to large parts of Britain. The outcome was shaped by the crushed hopes and expectation of a public which responded to the "don't undermine our prosperity" line by saying "what prosperity?"

That's the space Labour must fill if we get a second referendum.

It is utterly naive for Labour to try to argue that a general election, producing a Labour government intent on negotiating a better Leave deal, could even do so.

The position of the EU 27 is that they are fed up with Britain. They will not entertain another round of "Leave" negotiations. What would Labour do then? An extended period for Article 50 is open to us if it is for negotiating about staying, not leaving. And that would take up back to the position that Corbyn and McDonnell tried to argue in 2016.

What if we get an early general election, and Labour is still on the "negotiate a better Brexit" line? We will need a vehicle en-



Alan Simpson was Labour MP for Nottingham South from 1992 to 2010, and is now an environment advisor to John McDonnell.

abling activists to argue simultaneously in the election campaign for Labour and against Brexit.

The DUP will almost certainly vote against the government on May's proposals. That doesn't mean that there will be a sufficient majority for a new general election.

If we get one, the obvious ploy from Theresa May will be: why replace my government by one which wants a better deal but has no idea how to get it. That would massively undermine Labour's campaigning in that general election.

Any attempt to negotiate better terms will get an absolute rebuttal from the EU. And we would struggle to engage with the 170 Labour constituencies which voted Leave because we still wouldn't have a transformative economic programme to put on the table.

All the variants of Leave put forward fail to address the wider crisis of capitalism and of survival. We need to respond to this on two levels. First, sovereignty. It is naive to think that somewhere, in a world spinning towards existential crisis, a little island could be self-sufficient and unaffected.

Second, solidarity. The EU is a mess. The only thing worse than being in it is not being in it. It needs a leadership which defines a different sense of commonwealth for decades ahead.

The ecological crisis takes us into a 1945 moment. At the end of World War Two the international institutions were not fit for the tasks of reconstruction. The same today.

Europe doesn't have mechanisms to deal with the floodtides of forced migration and a succession of climate shocks already changing weather patterns. We need new institutional frameworks to deal with those shocks.

I want Labour to be in the vanguard on this. We need to acknowledge the faults of how the EU is structured now, but in solidarity with forces in Spain, Greece, Germany and other countries we can promote a new conversation on what economics is about.

If we are serious, Labour can offer the space in which that conversation unfolds.

Labour needs to return to its previous support of free movement within Europe...

There's a danger of attaching excessive importance to the concept of free movement.

The left is a bit sloppy about this. Personally I don't believe in free movement — of capital, of drugs, of goods with unsustainable carbon footprints...

"Fair and managed movement" is a better platform, but it is bereft of meaning at the moment because we have abandoned much of the global redistribution and remedial finance which allowed people to live sustainably in whatever part of the planet.

99.4% of UK export credit guarantees go to fossil-fuel projects in the developing world. It's the equivalent of sending out crack cocaine. Through UK tax allowances, internationally we are also supporting fracking projects in India, China, Brazil, and Mexico, developments that will result in war, famine, and forced migration. There is no sanctuary from those problems via open doors.

But free movement is not just about forced migration. It's also about people who move because they want to move, rather than being forced...

We all have constraints. Europe just needs a different institutional framework to make citizen movement safe and effective.

There are four examples of how this might be underpinned by a system of Europe-wide taxes: carbon taxes, on aviation and on shipping; taxes on movements of speculative capital; and on tax haven. These all need to be pursued on a transnational basis — the EU is probably big enough to do it.

Those tax mechanisms would provide a dowry which should go on a per capita basis to those who are forced to flee from elsewhere. Thus, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy, and parts of Germany would get substantial amounts of money that came along with the numbers of people whom they offered sanctuary to. We would create a pot from which those who did most, got most — a cascade of benefits rather than costs to local economies.

Labour has got a good response to the green policies in the 2017 manifesto. But there's no success in building a grassroots movement around those policies. This year's annual climate change demonstration, on 1 December, was tiny, despite the IPCC report, despite COP24 coming up in Poland. There's XR, but that's explicitly turning away from politics.

The green groups and environment NGOs are saying to Labour: "It was a great invitation in the last manifesto. We responded to it on the basis that the values in the manifesto would be translated into specific policies to deliver huge changes. But that hasn't happened".

Both John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn recognise this. Jeremy has had round tables with green NGOs to add substance to the policy. John McDonnell increasingly talks about the need for transformative economic policies and has set up a working group with Clive Lewis charged with changing Treasury ground rules to make sustainability central to Labour's plans.

The most important aspect of that working group is the input from climate physicists, who have been saying that we have only a



IWGB call for "people's vote"

The Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB), a union focused among migrant workers and workers in the so-called "gig economy, is backing a "people's vote". We need a people's vote to stop a Brexit that will most likely be a carnival for profiteering companies and a curse for UK workers, not least, those at the bottom of the pile", says Henry Chango Lopez of IWGB.

short period in which to make huge changes. Climate physics must be in the driving seat, not the politics of convenience.

Trouble is, there's a gap of understanding with the wider Parliamentary structures, still trying to work within a remit which says that we can work on the long term without having to make big changes in the short term. The climate physics says we have to cut emissions by half in the next decade, then halve them again in the decade after, and halve them again in the decade that follows. If we don't deliver a 50% cut in the next decade, then we are in deep, deep trouble.

The left has to be talking about tomorrow's jobs, and about the necessary huge overarching institutional changes which have to form the basis of national policy. This means national changes delivered within local structures. The whole society must feel part of this. It can begin at the smallest of levels — with trees and soils, for example. The Tories' commitments to tree-planting in their 2005 manifesto will never materialise, and they already fall pitifully short of what poorer countries are doing.

A couple of years ago, the state of Uttar Pradesh, in India, broke records by planting 50 million trees in 24 hours. Last year the neighbouring state of Madhya Pradesh broke the record again, with 66 million trees in 12 hours, using over two million volunteers.

Labour could go into the next election saying it will give every one of our eleven and a half million pensioners a tree to plant with their grandchildren — a recognition that solidarity includes "between generations" as well as "between communities".

We also need rapidly to raise the standards of energy efficiency in people's homes, and shift into decentralised clean energy and transport, following examples which already exist in Germany, Norway, and elsewhere.

We must also have to have conversations within the labour movement about the "how" of radical change. Too many people still think the problem can be kicked down the road. The climate physics says that we can kick the can, but then there won't be a road.

A younger generation is not looking to the politics of AfD type parties, but for something more visionary, radical, green-left. If Labour doesn't offer it, then people will move to the divisive politics of the right. We'd be in the scary scenario that Rosa Luxemburg predicted: on the wrong side of the choice between socialism or barbarism.

A left case for Brexit

By Grace Blakely

The left was right to campaign against leaving the EU in 2016. Based on the tenor of the campaign, it was clear the Leave campaign would embolden the xenophobes and nationalists that exist across the class spectrum in the UK. This prediction was proven chillingly correct with both the spike in hate crime that followed the referendum and the movement that has emerged around Tommy Robinson over the last few weeks.

The left should deplore and, if necessary, physically resist such acts of violent racism.

But fighting fascism does not mean accepting globalisation. The fact is, working class people are right to be pissed off about global economic and financial integration – especially those in the places that have been most ravaged by it.

Financial globalisation has led to the concentration of capital in a series of financial entrepôts, more integrated into the global economy than they are with their own countries. Rather than using this capital for productive investment, these centres have repurposed it for the kind of financial wizardry that caused the 2008 crash.

London is in many ways the global financial hub par excellence, with the City of London the vampire squid sucking on the face of the global economy.

The left should be making a case for Brexit that involves resisting financial globalisation, whilst welcoming immigrants from the parts of the world that have been most ravaged by both colonialism and free market neocolonialism. This is not as hard a case to make as some people might argue. Indeed, there is ev-

idence that anti-immigration sentiment – distinct from outright racism – is falling in the wake of the referendum.

The share of people naming immigration as one of the top three most important issues facing the UK has fallen from 50% pre-referendum to just over 20% today.

And there is a strong internationalist case for resisting financial globalisation too. Just as capital is sucked out of the UK's peripheral towns and cities to feed London's insatiable appetite for cash, it is also sucked out of the Global South.

Sub-Saharan Africa loses three times as much in capital flight each year as it gains in aid, and much of it is channelled (often illicitly) through banks in the City and into London property, or the UK's vast network of tax havens.

Unfair trading practices – often supported by the EU – have subjected subsistence farmers around the world to the caprices of global commodities markets, whilst denying many states the opportunity to industrialise by protecting their infant industries.

A POST-BREXIT ECONOMY.

Brexit should be used as an opportunity to move towards a system in which capital is embedded in national economies rather than constantly moving around the globe.

Alongside reducing capital mobility and the size of our finance sector, this should involve a radical programme to transform ownership and investment. At the local level, inspiration should come from the experiments in community wealth building conducted by councils such as Preston.

At the national level, any socialist government must consider radical propositions to

transform ownership and investment – through, for example, the creation of national and regional investment banks, or a Meidner Plan for the UK.

Whilst state intervention as a passive shareholder is perfectly permissible under EU law, interfering with capital mobility by directing capital through industrial policy, public loans, and strategic investment, is not.

Any attempt to limit capital flows, either through direct restrictions on capital movement, or through a prohibitive tax on financial transactions triggered during a crisis, would also be interpreted as an infringement of the four freedoms.

What's more, the implementation of EU law depends upon EU jurisprudence – international law, we must remember, is socially constructed and therefore strongly influenced by existing power relations.

Leaving the EU could provide the left with an opportunity to build an economy that does not rely on capital extracted from the rest of the world to ensure growth and prosperity.

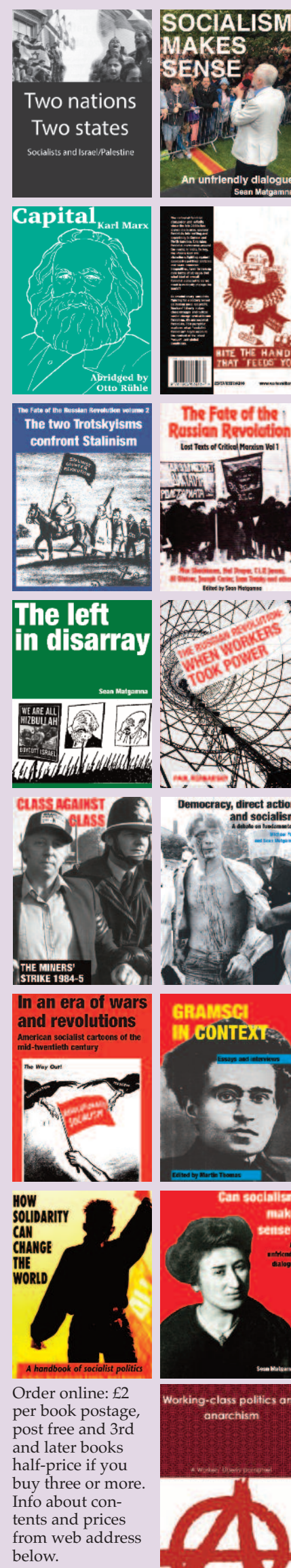
If the UK could build such an economy outside of Europe, it would act as a beacon of hope to countries like Greece and Italy, currently struggling under the weight of the EU's neoliberal technocracy.

The British left has the opportunity to create a significant dent in the armour of financial capital by showing, once and for all, that there is an alternative. We must seize it.

Abridged from bit.ly/gb-novara. Grace Blakeley is economics commentator for the *New Statesman*.



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In defence of Ernest Erber

By Alan Johnson

Russia was ruled by 130,000 landowners. They ruled by means of constant force over 150 million people ... And yet we are told that Russia will not be able to be governed by 240,000 members of the Bolshevik Party – governing in the interests of the poor and against the rich. – V.I. Lenin. ‘Will the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?, 1917

INTRODUCTION

In 1948, after he spent a year thinking it over, Ernest Erber submitted an 18,000 word resignation letter to the US Workers Party, a small group of mostly young, mostly Jewish (one early internal bulletin carried the subhead “Out To The Gentiles!”), and mostly brilliant revolutionary socialists.

The most brilliant of all, the group’s leader Max Shachtman, responded angrily to Erber in an 80,000 word polemic titled *Under the Banner of Marxism*. 70 years later the AWL has reprinted this document, calling it “one of the classic polemics of the Marxist movement, alongside *The Poverty of Philosophy* and *Anti-Dühring*.”

I take a different view. Erber was right and Shachtman was wrong about the fundamental thing: Bolshevism and Us. He was right to say “It is necessary to reject the Leninist teachings on the relationship of democracy to socialism”.

He was right that “The workers [in the West] are right in identifying their aims with the preservation and extension of those democratic processes and institutions that already exist”. And, not discussed here, he was also right that socialists, “for the sake of civilization, specifically the socialist perspective”, should not be neutral but should side with democracy against totalitarianism when the socialist third camp can’t offer a genuine alternative.

1. ERBER WAS RIGHT ABOUT BOLSHEVISM

Erber’s critique is more subtle than Shachtman admits.

Far from being a right-wing denunciation of revolution, Erber’s concern is the gulf between Bolshevik intentions and Bolshevik results; his subject is not a group of bad men but the disastrous logic of “Lenin’s revision of the traditional Marxist concept of the relationship of democracy to socialism in favour of the anti-democratic view of the party ruling in behalf of the masses”.

Erber’s pays homage to the Bolsheviks but argues that “the course they chose had a terrible logic of its own” and “could not be traversed without the suppression of the socialist opposition, the Cheka terror, one-man management of the factories, compulsory labour. They are all fatal links in a chain that began with Lenin’s revision.”

Most of what passes for education in the far left about the Bolsheviks is a fairy tale. Erber told some inconvenient truths: that Bolshevik practice after October was an authoritarian travesty of socialism; that, before the civil war, non-Bolshevik socialists were being censored, persecuted, jailed, tortured and sometimes shot; that trade unionists who struck or voted Menshevik or just insisted on organising independently of the Bolsheviks were being sacked and jailed, exiled or shot; that the constituent assembly, elected by the

people but with a non-Bolshevik majority, was forcibly shut down; that the Soviets were gutted by the Bolsheviks as soon as they started electing non-Bolshevik majorities; that some Soviets electing Mensheviks were visited by the Cheka; that the Cheka was an out-of-control disgrace to socialism from its first days; and that the Bolshevik culture of lying about other socialists and about troublesome workers, some of which Shachtman repeats, began early.

Erber also saw that the Bolsheviks – Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Stalin – revised Marxist theory to justify their own authoritarian practice, and then educated the international socialist movement in this new brutality.

Socialism was unmoored by them from democracy and liberty; belief in the fantastical qualities of transformative revolutionary violence and central command was promoted, not least by Trotsky who for several years was a flat-out and in-principle authoritarian.

The international movement was taught to substitute a totalitarian doppelgänger for Marx’s and Engels’s democratic version of “the dictatorship of the proletariat”. The fruits of centuries of working class struggle, those civilisational gains of liberty, rights and representative democracy – which socialists should aspire to defend, extend and make to work for all – were trashed, in theory as well as practice.

Shachtman’s claim that “Lenin’s theory is nothing but a restatement of what Marx and Engels taught” is spectacularly, staggeringly wrong. According to Lenin, “The scientific term “dictatorship” means nothing more nor less than authority untrammelled by any laws, absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on force. The term “dictatorship” has no other meaning than this.”

The third camp socialist Hal Draper observed that Lenin’s definition was “a theoretical disaster, first class [with] nothing in common ... with any conception of the workers state” held by Marx. More: that Plekhanov, Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin, in the manner of their counterposition of “bourgeois” and “proletarian” democracy, reduced democracy per se to “bourgeois democracy” and flatly counterposed dictatorship to democracy.

This had the consequence of (Draper again) “gutting socialism of its organic enrootment in the mass of the people. When Stalin took another lead, the lead in organising the socio-economic counter-revolution in class power, the “juridical” basis in theory (to use Trotsky’s later expression) had already been laid.”

2. ERBER WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUAL ENTAILMENT THAT EXISTS BETWEEN DEMOCRACY, LIBERTY AND SOCIALISM

Erber may have lacked Shachtman’s erudition (though I confess I find Shachtman’s unrelenting crude sarcasm repulsive) but he knew a thing or two.

Erber knew that a party, even one full of the most talented and the most selfless idealists, who substitute themselves for a self-conscious majority will produce a tyranny, no matter what. Never mind Lenin’s 240,000 Bolsheviks; if every single one of Russia’s few



Did the Cheka go un-checked?

million proletarians had all been Bolsheviks and tried to rule over a population of 150 million, the results would have been the same.

Erber knew that the institutional form of a socialist democracy is the democratic republic, albeit one freed of feudal left-overs, freed of the coercive of indirect economic power of the capitalist class, and deepened by new forms of participation.

Erber knew that Lenin turned that formulation upside down, by insisting: “The task of the proletariat consists in blowing up the whole machinery of the bourgeoisie, in destroying it, all the parliamentary institutions with it, whether they be republican or constitutional-monarchy” (emphasis added).

Lenin did not just oppose limited franchises, unelected second chambers and royal prerogatives, but the elective principle per se, the universal franchise, representative assemblies (i.e. elected parliaments and elected local councils), the rule of law, and the separation of powers between executive, legislature and judiciary.

Lenin declared for rule untrammelled by law, denounced “all kinds of voting, democracy and suchlike bourgeois deceit”, never took the Soviets seriously (within months they were being marginalized, their non-Bolshevik majorities ignored and, if trouble, their delegates arrested, imprisoned, and exiled). In their place, came dictatorial rule by the Party-State through its newly created and monopolized institutions. Soon enough – as a younger Trotsky and Luxemburg had predicted – the Bolshevik banned opposition within the party, crushed the Kronstadt rebels (and then lied about who they were and why they rebelled), and threatened party dissenters such as Alexandra Kollontai and the Workers Opposition until they shut up. Trotsky did not even oppose the first show trials, of Mensheviks.

Much of Shachtman’s reply to Erber’s critique of the record of the Bolsheviks is totally unserious. Shachtman dismisses the crushing of the working-class and socialist Kronstadt rebellion by the Bolsheviks in his jokesy folksy way as “stories by any number of people who weren’t there, authenticity guaranteed or your money back”.

He swishes aside Lenin and Trotsky’s explicit and in-principle support for lawless dictatorship in the hands of the party as “a selection of quotations from Lenin or Trotsky” (64). He simply refuses to engage with the facts about the Cheka’s appalling persecution of non-Bolshevik socialists and recalcitrant workers from the earliest days of the Revolution, treating all charges in the manner of a cheap lawyer: “labels marked “Cheka Terror”, “Secret Police”, “Suppression of Socialists” all lithographed in scarlet to imitate bloodstains and scare children’. It is desper-

ate stuff.

Erber also knew the Bolsheviks were wrong to reduce modern representative democracy in the west to a “bourgeois dictatorship” to be “smashed”. He knew socialism should be the continuation and the deepening of the institutions and the culture of representative liberal democracy. He pointed out that far from being a mere “machine for the suppression of the working class” as Lenin had it, representative democracy was an arena of struggle which “bears the marks of dozens of great social conflicts”, has been “nowhere was a political monopoly of the bourgeoisie”, and towards which the working class has always oriented. Erber understood that the working class had constituted the democratic arena as it broke into it to win vital political and economic conquests – the vote, the right to organise and to strike, precious economic and social reforms to make its escape from numbing commodification and to civilise the whole society (the eight hour day, the weekend, the welfare state).

Lenin was completely wrong to claim that “The parliament can in no way serve as the arena of a struggle for reforms, for improving the lot of the working people”.

More: Erber knew that the Bolshevik hostile view of democracy “creates a frame of mind in our movement which is alien to the workers of a political democracy and isolates us from them”. His insight – “What is bourgeois about our present democracy is specifically its limitations, its shortcomings, and, above all its exclusion from the economic sphere” – is more useful than Lenin’s talk of “smashing” representative democracy.

Why does any of this matter today? Because what Rosa Luxemburg called “barbarism” is here: a world of grotesque inequality, rapid onset environmental collapse, technocratic governance, racism and war. A new but inchoate left seeks to stand athwart this history-as-nightmare, yelling Stop. Rather than Matgamna’s uncritical hymn-singing of “Glory O Glory O to the Bolsheviks!” that left really needs to hear Erber’s call for socialists to “re-evaluate with an open and unprejudiced mind the many theories that have battled for acceptance in the past, and check them anew against the experience of the past decades”.

That the AWL has done more of that work of re-evaluation than any other group over the last four decades is why it is the only UK far-left group that can still be taken seriously.

But there is still a smell of incense in that airless room where “Glory O Glory O to the Bolsheviks!” is sung. Maybe it is time to open the windows. What need have you to dread the monstrous crying of the wind?

Australian school students strike over climate change

By Lilly Murphy

Lilly Murphy, a year 9 student in Melbourne who was involved in the 30 November Australian school students' strike for climate action, talked with Workers' Liberty Australia.

At my school a few of my friends knew about it due to social media. There were a few signs around school. So a friend asked me because they knew I was quite politically active, wearing a "Victorian Socialists" top ["Victorian Socialists" is a local left electoral coalition].

I found out more about it. And then we were all thinking of going to it.

We [six students] had a maths exam on the Friday when the walkout was on. So with a few of my friends we asked our teacher if we could change it; she asked the principal, and he said no.

We wrote an email to the principal and had a meeting with him. He seemed quite OK about it, and then in the last five minutes said "I don't think this is going to work".

The Department of Education told principals "don't let the students go", so our principal was probably under a lot of pressure from them.

At the end of recess, 10.45, about five or six of us went off [others left the school later]. We hung around for a friend who had been at an audition at another school.

We all walked from Victoria Gardens to Parliament House, and there were already a whole lot of people there.

There were strikes on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday 28-30 November, but more emphasis on the 30th. Over 250 strikes all over – some with only 10 people, and that is fine, some with over 10,000, like in Melbourne.

I couldn't hear the speeches much. They were talking about how the government hasn't been doing much about it, and how great it was that so many people were there.

There was a really cute placard which said "I am here for her future" with a picture of a baby. Another one said "I am 9 and I know more about climate change than our Prime Minister does. Maybe he should go back to school". I found that one quite funny.

One of my friends had made a few placards. One said #climate strike, one said "system change not climate change", one said "no thanks", with a picture of water levels rising; another said "we are not going to be hurt by the choices you have made for the environ-

ment".

One key demand was that we want all renewable energy by 2030. Stopping the Adani coal mine [a huge new coal-mine project in northern Queensland] was another.

We are not going to sit by and let this planet be ruined by people older than us who won't be around when the effects are taking a huge impact. We are going to fight so that when we are their age, and our children are around, we don't have to live in a really bad world.

When the government said "more learning, less activism", I know a few people who said "Ok, I am going to the protest now. I am not dealing with the Prime Minister telling us to have less activism in schools." A lot of people got very angered by him saying that, and so came.

People thought: "Maybe there should be more learning and less activism, but that can only happen if you guys are actually doing stuff, and listen to us when we are not protesting. We can voice our opinions, but if we do so very small-ly, then you guys won't hear. So this is one way you will hear us."

The whole thing was started by a Swedish student, Greta. She had said "I hope that this strike continues in other countries that are very well off, like Australia", so that was how it got started in Australia. Facebook and Instagram were the main ways of sharing it; also just people talking to other people.

I want things like to continue until the government actually does something. Getting more schools to realise that we need to do a few little things — that would do a bit. But, if every school did something big, there would be a drastic impact. So we can make sure our schools do stuff like that as well.

There are some people at my school thinking of setting up an environmental club. I have not been very involved, but am thinking of getting more involved in that.

Socialist Alliance were at the rally, handing out stuff and they had a booth at the end. I saw lots of people holding up Green Left Weekly signs. I was wearing my Victorian Socialists t-shirt on the day, and a few people came up and said they were also in Victorian Socialists.

Maybe at school we can get a socialist or left group where people can come and talk about issues in their communities. But I don't think separating it off as just Victorian Socialists is a good idea, especially in schools.

It wasn't a socialist matter — or, at least, it is a socialist matter, but just for socialists. It



School students on the streets in Melbourne on 30 November

was a matter for anyone who thought the government was not doing enough on climate action. There were probably a lot of people there with socialistic views, but it wasn't specifically for people who were members of a socialist party.

Striking is one of the things that works for young people. Social media is becoming a bigger thing, and helpful for getting our message across, but one of the things that the government will actually listen to is when we go out of school, walk out on strike, and go to the Parliament House and protest.

One thing to tell the adults of the world? Just listen to young people more, and not regard their opinions as immature.

A lot of adults, as soon as they see a young

person, think: "Oh their opinions are not as worthy, as they don't know much".

Well, we might not know as much, but we know enough to have a good opinion. Our opinions need to be heard.

We have grown up seeing all this stuff, and we get political information from all over the world. We know climate change is real, and we can see it.

Some older people might not want to get involved, or just think that it "does not bother me.". But this is our future. In 50 years, a lot of the older generation will not be alive, but we will.

And we don't want a world that is so shit, when we are older, or when our children are alive.

Erber, Geras, and Bolshevism

Workers' Liberty has recently published *In Defence of Bolshevism*, by Max Shachtman, in which the major text is a defence of the politics of Lenin, Trotsky, and the revolutionaries of 1917 against criticisms made by Ernest Erber.

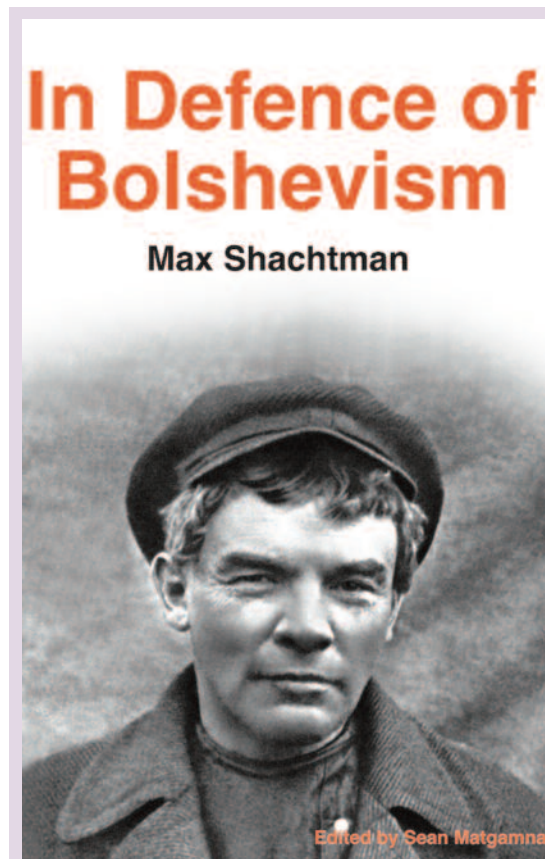
Erber had been a close comrade of Shachtman's in the Trotskyist movement in the late 1930s and the 1940s, but in 1948 broke away, and for the rest of his life was a sort of social democrat.

In *Solidarity* 487 we published Alan John-

son's article "On Norman Geras's 'Our Morals: The Ethics of Revolution'", which develops many arguments also reflected in Alan's article on Erber (facing page).

We'll be carrying replies, from the point of view argued in the "Defence of Bolshevism" book, in later numbers of *Solidarity*.

Norman Geras's article can be found at bit.ly/ethics-g, and Leon Trotsky's *Their Morals and Ours*, referred to in Geras's article, at bit.ly/ldt-tmao.



Max Shachtman's *Under the Banner of Marxism*, which forms the bulk of this book, deserves to be considered one of the classic polemics of the Marxist movement, alongside *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *Anti-Dühring*, and others. It defends the Bolsheviks, their revolution, their work to build a revolutionary socialist movement, and the continued relevance of their approach.

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Scrap, not pause, Universal Credit



Debate

By Luke Hardy

Will Sefton (*Solidarity* 486) talks of the origin of Universal Credit in separation from the Tories' benefit cuts. Its intellectual origins are from the same neoliberal place.

Universal Credit's intellectual inspiration is "negative income tax", an idea promoted by the likes of Milton Friedman as an alternative to the welfare systems developed after World War 2 under the pressure of a militant working class.

Unlike those systems which had at least the rhetoric of redistribution and the state's responsibility for a decent standard, NIT was meant to reduce the state's responsibility to a single sliding scale payment.

What Iain Duncan Smith added to this idea was making it monthly-paid in arrears, to ape and instill the discipline of work. For IDS as well, Universal Credit was about expanding the whole set of conditions for receiving benefits. Conditionality is at the heart of this system.

Universal Credit is not some sort of technocratic improvement with unfortunate additions. It is a method of disciplining people in to accepting low-paid, precarious work.

As for the point Will Sefton makes about the legacy benefits, it



is of course true that they are also terrible. That is why I advocate Labour's policy should be "Scrap and Replace".

That does not preclude demands to scrap sanctions, work capability assessments and the cuts to the old benefits in the meantime. Demands to do so have been made forcefully by us, DPAC, welfare rights groups and Unite Community for several years now.

If we manage to scrap Universal

Credit, the momentum will be with the movement to scrap the cuts and the coercive elements of the legacy benefits. "Pause and fix" also means keeping people on the legacy benefits system until universal credit is "fixed".

Will Sefton argues in the meantime no one should lose out. What's the difference between that and those advocating "scrap" the system who are also fighting for changes to the legacy benefits?

As to the argument that Universal Credit has the improvement of the single sign-on and a lack of cliff-edges — those elements can be a key part of a new system.

A movement is developing against Universal Credit. It is making Universal Credit a dirty word. To positively advocate Universal Credit, albeit with a longer list of what needs changing, does not build or develop this movement.

On the contrary it lowers the horizon of the movement.

Ructions in PCS union

By Gerry Bates

The Independent Left group in the PCS civil service workers' union is standing John Moloney for Assistant General Secretary.

Nominations open on 17 January, and balloting will run from 16 April to 9 May.

The political platform on which John Moloney is standing was summarised in an article in *Solidarity* 486: bit.ly/pcs-il.

It remains a possibility that the union machine will set the required number of branch nominations so high as to make it impossible for the Independent Left candidate to get on the ballot paper. But who the candidate will be to be favoured by such a restriction is not clear.

A right-wing looks unlikely. PCS has been dominated for a long time by the Socialist Party and its allies.

Chris Baugh, an SP member, has been Assistant General Secretary since 2004, and says he wants to stand again.

But this time round he lost the vote for the support of the PCS Left

Unity group, within which the SP is influential.

He was opposed by Janice Godrich, also an SP member, who has been President of the PCS for 18 years, but now wanted to stand for AGS.

The Left Unity voting results were announced, showing Godrich ahead. The SP said that the count failed to include some votes which should have been included.

A Left Unity conference on 1 December agreed to include the extra votes, but Godrich still won, and Godrich supporters dominated the newly-elected Left Unity committee.

Soon after, however, Godrich said that ill-health would prevent her from standing for AGS.

As we go to press, we do not know whether Left Unity will now back Baugh, or try to nominate a third alternative.

The political differences between Godrich and Baugh are murky. Mark Serwotka, who has been General Secretary of the PCS since 2000, is not a Socialist Party member, and

was elected General Secretary without the support of the SP, but has worked closely with the SP since then: he has backed Godrich against Baugh. The SWP, a relatively small force in the union, has also backed Godrich.

Whatever the outcome of those wranglings, John Moloney and the Independent Left will work to propose a working-class socialist alternative.

• More info: pcsindependentleft.com



No.489 12 December, no.490 9 January

This issue, no.488, is printed on Wednesday 5 December. No.489 will be printed on the night of Tue 11 to Wed 12 December.

Since labour movement and left meetings are sparse in the last couple of weeks of December, the paper will then take a Xmas/ New Year break.

No.490 will be printed on the night of Tue 8 to Wed 9 Jan, and then we will be back to the usual schedule.

Grimethorpe women save their jobs

By Patrick Murphy, NEU executive (p.c.)

The striking dinner ladies at Ladywood school in Grimethorpe returned to work on 29 November claiming victory in their fight to defend their jobs.

The school proposed to make all nine of the school meals supervisors redundant as part of a cost-cutting exercise announced in June.

Backed by their union, Unison, the women decided to fight back and voted to take extensive strike action to save their jobs. Starting in September they took a hugely impressive 36 days of strike action. For most of that time there was little or no sign of movement from the employer, but the women remained determined and strong.

When the school made it clear that they intended to use their teaching assistants to carry out the lunchtime supervision normally done by these women, the teaching assistants voted to join the strike.

SUPPORT

The women also had overwhelming support from within the local community.

Ladywood Primary is in the historic mining village of Grimethorpe, just outside Barnsley where trade union traditions remain strong and class loyalty still counts for something.

The strength and tenacity of the women together with the solidarity of their colleagues and community



forced the school to shift its position. Last week Unison reached an agreement with the school management under which the threats of redundancy were withdrawn.

After the settlement was reached area organiser, Jordan Stapleton said "It was completely unacceptable to attempt to make the dinner ladies redundant when job losses were unnecessary. Where schools do need to make savings they need to know that low-paid women are not easy targets and the contributions they make to our communities cannot be underestimated."

It looks like the number of jobs in the school will reduce over time, though. The Unison press release announcing the end of the dispute goes on to describe final agreement as one which will "address the deficit in the school's budget without any redundancies, due to expected natural staff turnover". This suggests that when some categories

of staff leave they will not be replaced and that the problem of increasing the workload of remaining staff hasn't gone away.

Meanwhile the Grimethorpe women should be congratulated for their stand. These women faced what seemed like the inevitable loss of their jobs. They decided to fight and got their union to back them. When the fight itself was long and gruelling, with no sign of movement at all from the employer, they stuck to the task. The fact that their jobs are saved, the school has had to back down and the women can see that their action has had an effect are all real and tangible successes.

They have shown that collective action, solidarity and class unity are the only effective weapons we have to fight austerity. That's a prize even greater in the long run.



Labour Party banners at the Cammell Laird picket line

Cammell Laird strikes until January

Workers at Cammell Laird shipyard in Birkenhead have been on strike since Monday 26 November in a dispute over plans to cut 40% of the workforce.

The initial three week program of strikes, involving different groups of workers across the shipyard walking out for 24 hours at a time, has now been extended from Friday 14 December to Friday 18 January 2019, while an overtime ban is in place until Friday 1 February 2019.

The announcement to cut 290 jobs was made despite the shipyard winning two contracts, worth a total of £619 million, to support and maintain ships for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary over 10 years. Workers also fear that the cuts may be a backdoor way of casualising the workforce, by replacing permanent jobs with agency labour at a later date.

According to the workers' union Unite, Cammell Laird has refused to put on hold redundancies in order for an action plan to be put in place to fill the gap in work which the shipbuilder is using as the reason for slashing jobs.

Workers have received wide labour movement and public support, with Labour banners a regular fixture on picket lines. Unite regional officer Ross Quinn said: "The support that striking Cammell Laird workers have received from the community and local politicians is overwhelming. We would urge Cammell Laird to wake up to the strength of feeling and do the right thing by halting these job cuts and working with us to find solutions."

• Donate to the strike fund: bit.ly/2QeUoVJ
• Sign the petition: bit.ly/2zGBU5W

Support staff strike at John Roan

By a teacher

Parents and school workers at John Roan are continuing to show the way to resist forced academisation.

The school in Greenwich, south-east London, is threatened with forced academisation after a poor Ofsted report. A vibrant community campaign, backed with significant strike action has brought support from local politicians and media attention.

Despite this, Labour-controlled Greenwich council threatened legal action against the National Education Union (NEU) at the school for striking on the pretence that the NEU wasn't striking against the Local Education Authority as it wasn't academising the school, and that couldn't strike against the incoming academy chain as the chain didn't employ the NEU members yet. After a chorus of protest against a Labour council behaving like that, it backed down. However, this has led to the status of the strike action being discussed by the union's national action committee.

Support workers at the school who are members of the GMB



struck on 29 November and many NEU members refused to cross their picket lines. This action got good coverage on the ITV London News.

Support staff will strike again on 11-13 December, and NEU members say they will continue to refuse to cross picket lines.

• Greenwich NEU and Greenwich Campaign for State Education are holding a public meeting **Take back our Schools**, on Thursday 6 December, 7.30pm at Grand Salon, Charlton House, Charlton Road, Greenwich SE3 8RE
• A model motion is available here: bit.ly/2zDWh3F
• For updates see: www.thejohnroannut.org

Shelter strike over pay

By Gemma Short

Workers at housing charity Shelter will strike for 72 hours from Tuesday 11 December in a dispute over pay.

Shelter has imposed what the workers' union, Unite, calls a "derisory" pay raise of 1%, plus a non-consolidated (one off) 1% payment. Unite members are demanding a 3.5% increase in line with the retail price index (RPI) as of April 2018 (the annual pay date) or a flat rate of a £1,100 increase for all workers.

According to Unite, Shelter's workers have suffered a real-terms

pay cut of 11% since 2010, after a series of below-inflation pay increases. Shelter recorded a surplus of £1 million last year and has £15.7 million in reserves.

One Unite member told Unite "I am very worried about the implications of this on my own financial obligations and responsibilities. We are here to support people on low incomes, but Shelter staff are now facing this themselves".

Another said "Shelter's vision of a safe secure affordable home for everyone is a bit meaningless considering I am struggling to pay my mortgage every month."

Durham bus drivers strike

Bus drivers at Arriva Durham County will strike from midnight Sunday 16 December until midnight Saturday 22 December in a dispute over pay.

Drivers are demanding a pay rise of £1 an hour, backdated to March

2018. According to their union, Unite, they are the second-lowest paid of all of Arriva's national bus operations.

The strike will involve drivers in Darlington, Durham, Redcar, Stockton, and Whitby.



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Australian school students strike on 30 November. More: page 9



Pushing Labour on climate



Interview

Clive Lewis

At the “together for climate justice” protest on Saturday 1 December, Clive Lewis MP talked with Mike Zubrowski from *Solidarity*.

MZ: Labour’s Green Transformation proposes a lot less investment than, say, the “One Million Climate Jobs” document that a few trade unions brought out a few years ago...

CL: I had very little to do with that document. Shall we describe it as a work in progress, at the moment? I think it could have been more ambitious, but it’s a start.

We should be pushing Labour, pushing the envelope, making the political space for Labour not just



Clive Lewis is Labour MP for Norwich South, and a shadow Treasury minister.

to spend more on fighting climate change and biodiversity loss, but to make sure that every aspect of our policies, economic or otherwise, has climate issues and sustainability issues at its heart.

For us as socialists, this intersects with not living in a society which is completely dominated by

consumption for consumption’s sake. About working less; about sharing the wealth far more evenly; about more culture, more art; about looking after an ageing population; more time spent with family, more community work.

MZ: The document talks about no new runways which have a negative impact on the climate. I was quite disappointed that the Labour Party didn’t whip all of its MPs to vote against Heathrow expansion.

CL: I think anyone that understands Labour Party democracy will understand that, in a modern economy, after 40 years of having the bejeez kicked out of them, trade unions are not in the strongest of positions. Consequently, they look out for the here and now of their members.

As politicians it’s our job to look

out for those union members, but also for future generations, and for people who aren’t in that trade union here and now.

This is where the issue of “just transition” comes into play. It’s an issue of having a Labour government which is going to make sure that workers are not thrown onto the scrap heap: that there are good, green, environmental-sustainability jobs put in place.

That’s the argument we’ve got to have with those trade unions. It’s a work in progress, but until we do it they’re going to continue to back destructive projects like a third runway at Heathrow.

We need to gather together not just trade unions, not just the Labour Party, but NGOs, business, activists, and work out what the principles of decarbonising our economy will be.

When I speak on the platform

here, I speak as myself and as I want the Labour Party to be. But I understand that there is a challenge to convince elements of our party that this is something that they need to be concerned with.

For many people in the Labour Party and trade unions, these issues are peripheral. But actually, they’re all interconnected.

We see the rise of the rise of the far right in Europe. Imagine that with failing economies around the world, with millions of people on the move, fleeing from climate change which makes their countries are no longer habitable in summer months, and sometimes in the spring.

I don’t want to poke and jab fingers at trade unions and elements of the Labour Party – I want to have a conversation with them and bring them along with us.

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