



& Workers' Liberty

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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DEMAND EVERY LABOUR MP VOTES AGAINST BREXIT

The May government and its Brexit process are bracing themselves to take the coming weeks at a run, trying to hurtle us all over a rickety bridge.

Yet it looks like they could be saved by some Labour MPs voting for the Tories' Brexit formula.

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Push Labour to “remain and reform”

Interviews

John Palmer talked to *Solidarity*

S: You’ve talked about a “Schrödinger’s Brexit”...

P: The great Austrian physicist Erwin Schrodinger, who worked with Einstein, discovered that there are particles that have the strange characteristic of being in two places at the same time, or two states at the same time. He illustrated it by a thought-experiment of a cat in a box subject to such particles which is simultaneously alive and dead.

I use this metaphor to illustrate the character of the Brexit deal which Mrs May’s government will — fairly soon now, I expect — come back with. It will have many of the full obligations of EU membership — EU law, Single-Market alignment, de facto Customs Union membership, payments into the EU budget, being subject to ECJ [European Court of Justice] jurisdiction in a whole range of areas — but we will no longer be members of the European Union. We will not have a voice in decision-making, we will have no votes in the Council of Ministers or in the European Parliament or in the selection of Commissioners.

We will be *in* as far as obligations are concerned, and at the same time *out* as regards democratic powers of decision-making.

A lot of people on the left say that the Tories are heading for a very “hard” Brexit, or a “no-deal” Brexit. Do you think this is a scare story with the political function of rationalising, maybe, some Labour MPs voting for May’s deal on the grounds that those are the alternatives?

There are broadly three alternatives spoken of. One is a “hard” deal in which we are treated by the EU as an external country like Canada, or, more favourably, Norway. The Canadian option, which is a free-trade deal virtually outside the special relationships of the EU economy, seems now very unlikely.

Corrections

Page 11, *Solidarity* 484: In the Merseyrail offer in the DOO dispute, the pay freeze is two years not three. The offer doesn’t specify that the settlement is only for the life of the franchise.

Page 12, *Solidarity* 484: a DWP worker tells us: “money earned in very low-pay/part-time work if calculated correctly does not reduce the amount of Universal Credit given. Equally, a claim isn’t closed after one month of extra earnings”.

May will say that is still the ultimate objective, but for not for years to come.

The second option, which is often equated with “hard” Brexit, is no deal. That is a theoretical possibility. But I don’t think in practice capital in Britain or elsewhere in Europe has any interest in that, and the Government knows that. While it plays at right-wing populist politics, I think at the end of the day the interests of capital will be a major restraining factor.

So we get the third option, this ambiguous relationship. The key issue is that we will only have negotiated the terms of eventually exiting the EU. The Government will not have yet negotiated a deal describing in detail the future long-term relationship.

That is going to take years — not just the already-agreed transition period, which will last from the end of March 2019 to the end of December 2020, but now, almost certainly, way beyond that. May herself talks about December 2021. Others say it could take seven, eight, nine years — that is typical of the time it takes to construct a comprehensive new relationship.

This in/out state is going to go on, I suspect, to 2022. It might last even longer. A general election could and should happen much sooner, but at the latest it has to happen by June 2022.

So some Labour MPs could argue that if May proposes a deal like that, it leaves things open, and isn’t it better to vote for that than to risk another outcome which could close things off more?

The job of the left in this complicated discussion is to hold on to some key strategic objectives. The first is that any deal outside full membership of the EU will represent a worsening of conditions, and one particularly affecting working people and the likely level of social standards.

Nobody seriously argues that the position of working people would, from day one, be *in any way* improved by Brexit. Even the right wing fears that talk of massive new

As soon as we can make space in *Solidarity*, we’ll be printing discussion articles on “pause and fix” vs “stop and scrap” views on Universal Credit.

Some readers have asked what the “Antidoto” label on Jim Denham’s column means.

The column is meant to be an “antidote” to the politics of the *Morning Star*.

The Italian form, “antidoto”, evokes the use by Leon Trotsky in his early years of the pen-name “Antid Oto”, chosen by Trotsky to signal an effort to offer Marxist antidotes.

trade deals is now for the birds. Britain will not be legally able to introduce any new deals until the future long-term treaty relationship with the EU has been negotiated, at the end of a tunnel which looks longer and longer.

The job of the left, the supporters of the Corbyn leadership of the Labour Party, is to argue for rejection of these terms. Labour has set out six tests which speak to the original Tory promises of reproducing exactly the same benefits as we currently have. Those May cannot reproduce, because she will be excluded from all decision-making arenas.

May’s deal will be clearly inferior to what exists now. The question is, can it be defeated? There is a reasonable chance that it can, because of the confluence of different political forces. Many on the hard right won’t like the deal, and the Tory majority even with the DUP is quite small. The DUP itself may abandon the government if arrangement for the Irish border involve some new controls on trade between the north of Ireland and the rest of Britain (some already exist).

The biggest risk of May’s deal not being defeated comes not so much from old-style Lexiters who think that there can be some kind of socialism in one country outside the EU. It comes from moderate, so-called centrist, Labour MPs, who are flirting with the idea of voting with the Government. They argue that this would be better than a Hard Brexit or No Deal. In this way they could preserve the Tory government in power.

The six tests, however, expressly reject the free movement of workers across European borders which exists at the moment.

The position of the Labour leadership is ambiguous on this. Keir Starmer, who speaks for the front bench on this, says that he has raised a number of issues which a future Labour government might wish to discuss with the European if it were to win an early general election after the May deal had been rejected by Parliament.

Among those issues, in my opinion, are likely to be some adjustments to British legislation on EU migrant workers which are fully consistent with EU law but which the British government has chosen not to introduce. For example, there are questions like making possession of an employment offer a condition for migration and social security benefits. We’re talking here about European workers, not asylum seekers.

Such measures have never been introduced by the British government, and one reason is that introducing them might involve introducing identity cards. Identity cards are universal throughout the European Union, but not in the UK. The real question, however, is not any excess of EU workers coming



to Britain, but a desperate shortage. There has been a massive reflux of workers deterred by the “hostile environment” which the Government has created for European workers, and that has created great shortages in the health service, in social care, and in some other sectors.

I suspect there is here, as in other areas, scope for a Labour government to negotiate changes which a Tory government wouldn’t be interested in, but which would allow Labour, if successful, to return with a new “remain and reform” agreement which could be put to the vote. That has happened before. When Labour rejected the Heath Tory government’s terms for entry into the (then) EEC, the newly elected Harold Wilson initiated an admittedly rather staged process of renegotiation and a renegotiated treaty deal was successfully put to a referendum in 1975.

But shouldn’t the left stand up for the rights of free movement which already exist, and oppose attempts to restrict them?

Yes, of course it should. Defence of workers’ rights of free movement within the EU (movement of capital and trade are already free) is essential. The next British Labour government should openly support trade unions in Britain and across the EU which fight to protect wages and employment standards.

Employers have used the EU Posted Workers’ Directive to undercut wages and standards when sending workers on contracts in other EU countries. But there is a proposal going through the EU institutions — European Parliament, eventually Council of Ministers, etc. — to change the Posted Workers’ Directive so as to prohibit the use of it by employers to undercut wages and conditions.

The current Labour leadership policy is no longer “remain and reform”, but to replace a Tory deal by what Jeremy Corbyn calls “a workable plan”, a better-negotiated deal. In order to pursue the scenario you describe, we have to change the Labour

Party policy, from the “workable plan for Brexit”, to “remain and reform”.

Yes, I agree with you. The Labour leadership has not explicitly rejected “remain and reform”. During the 2016 referendum, Jeremy Corbyn explicitly argued for “Remain and Reform”. Now it has fallen silent about what — in detail — it would do in power if elected after the fall of the Tory government over the Brexit outcome.

The position of the left must still be “remain and reform”. Sooner or later, if Labour finds itself in power it will face the realities of how to manage an economy in isolation from the rest of the European Union if we are Out and not In. But there are already left political forces — socialist, social democratic, left Greens, left regionalists/nationalists — fighting for some of the same objectives, sustainable growth, ecological reform, far greater democratisation of the EU itself, greater labour and social rights, greater social equality.

Labour in office must be part of that movement across Europe to have any chance of sustaining their own reform promises and countering the real risk of a swing to the far right.

“Remain and Reform” in Britain and in Europe is indivisible.

• John Palmer was a leading member for a long time of what is now the SWP, and later European editor of the *Guardian*. He was talking with Martin Thomas.

Another Europe is Possible conference

Saturday 8 December

Birkbeck University, London

More: bit.ly/aeip-c

NUS set to gut democracy

By Maisie Sanders

The National Union of Students [NUS] announced last week, in a letter to affiliated student unions, that it is on the verge of bankruptcy.

The NUS Group, which includes NUS UK plus NUS Services, the union's commercial arm, could face a £3 million deficit this year and in future years. "Radical reforms to democratic and corporate structures" which will "drastically simplify and modernise NUS" are to be announced at NUS Conference 2019, which will take place in spring.

Student union presidents and Chief Executives will be invited to a "strategic conversation" meeting in late November.

These reforms will likely be gutting. The student left must respond by organising around a democratic programme for NUS that can transform it into a political fighting force that students have real control over, alongside a drive for democratic and autonomous student unions, particularly in Further Education.

We don't know whether the claims of financial crisis are true. It certainly can't be campaigning that NUS has spent all its money on. To

start, NUS must open its books to a democratically accountable and elected investigation.

A lot of money could be saved by cutting pay of senior managers, by not putting NEC members and NUS officers up in the Hilton, and by scrapping pseudo-conferences in expensive venues with no democratic function.

NUS's democratic structures have already been stripped away by successive governance reviews, the most drastic of which were pushed through in 2007-9 despite opposition from several annual conferences. It now works more like an NGO than a union, with barely any real control by rank-and-file members.

NUS Conference is now so short that most motions are never debated, while unions' delegate entitlements have more than halved in size. Delegates at 2017 conference stormed the stage in Glasgow venue when it became clear that motions calling for support for abortion rights in Northern Ireland and the decriminalisation of sex work would not be debated, thanks to filibustering from the right.

We must demand a longer conference, with the additional "zones conferences" replaced by a second annual conference. NUS needs to



The stage was invaded at NUS Conference 2018 because debate was guillotined on decriminalisation of sex work

radically expand the delegate entitlement for unions. Decision-making power must be taken from the currently existing semi-elected trustee board and given to the elected National Executive.

Highly paid senior managers who have lots of day-to-day control should be replaced by coordinators on a workers' wage. Training days and events should be free, accessible and controlled by elected full time officers. Regional organising, with conferences, full-time officers, and campaigns, should be restarted.

And the part-time stipend must be returned to the NEC so they can travel the country as organisers, helping activists with campaigns and implementing NUS policy.

Between 2016 and 2017 a string of student unions held referendums on NUS disaffiliation following the election of left-winger Malia Bouattia (whom Workers' Liberty critically supported) as president and controversies over antisemitic

comments.

Surrey, Newcastle, Loughborough, Hull and Essex voted to disaffiliate. These campaigns were mainly driven by the non-Labour right, who argued NUS was "too radical" on issues that didn't concern "the average student". The left responded by arguing the need to fight campaigns collectively, while the right-wing Labour Students faction which still dominates NUS argued students shouldn't give up the right to discounted alcohol and free McDonald's burgers provided by an NUS discount card. The disaffiliation campaigns were used by the Labour Students faction to stress the narrative that NUS was "in crisis" under a left leadership and needed to resume to normality.

In fact, Bouattia's year in office did little to disturb the "normality" of weak grassroots organising. Since then, under Shakira Martin's leadership NUS has shifted to the right: it has worked with the Lib Dems and the government's Office

for Students, and blocked a motion on organising a national demonstration for free education from even being discussed at the NEC. It made no effort to support this year's UCU strike, even showing hostility to the wave of student occupations.

Workers' Liberty students will be arguing for the Student Left Network which launches itself on 18 November to call for the student left to unite around a democratic programme and left unity charter. The left should call for NUS to weave together and link up student struggles over rent, precarious work, climate change and mental health services and make them part of a programme it campaigns around, alongside mobilising students alongside the labour movement around broader issues such as on Brexit and migrants' rights, anti-fascism, for a living wage and end to zero hour contracts.

We need to remake and reshape the student left.

Socialist Feminist Campus Collective Launch Meeting

Saturday, November 17, 2018 at 12 PM – 5 PM, UCL, London

National Student Left Organising Meeting

Sunday, November 18, 2018 at 11 AM – 5 PM, UCL, London

To fix climate change, we need accountable democracy



By Mike Zubrowski

Over 1,000 protesters blocked roads around Parliament on 31 October calling for urgent action on climate change. The action saw 15 protesters arrested and was the launch of an "escalating campaign of civil disobedience".

This came the day after a major report warning that population sizes of most forms of animal wildlife have decreased by 60% globally since 1970. And two days after the Tory chancellor unveiled a

budget which did not mention climate change, nor move towards tackling it.

Almost all of £30 billion invested in transport has been in roads, rather than public transport. There is a planned 95% decrease in investment in renewables between 2017 and 2020.

Protests like 31 October's, led by "Extinction Rebellion" — a campaign in turn run by "Rising Up!" — demand that the government, working with the media, communicates the gravity of the situation and the urgency for change. That it enacts policies to make UK at least carbon neutral by 2025, and co-operates internationally on sustain-

able resource usage.

They demand a "Citizen's Assembly" is formed to oversee these changes, comprised of citizens randomly selected by lot, rather than elected.

Bold demands on the government to positively enact necessary changes — rather than simply stopping a few bad things — are a fresh and vital change from the often defensive politics common on the left.

Extinction Rebellion are right to be concerned about democracy, but their proposition is not democratic. Allocation by lot removes the ability of wider movements to place pressure on their representatives to keep them accountable, instead



extinction rebellion

placing random and unaccountable people technically in charge.

With random selection by lot, the net result is an unorganised selection of random, transient and unaccountable individuals.

Orientating towards workplaces is more democratic, as most of the necessary changes to tackle climate

change will require radically transforming industries. This should be led by the workers in these industries.

Beyond that, we should aim for a federated system of workplace and community councils, electing recallable delegates.

“We are losing Jews from the Labour Party”

Adrian Cohen spoke to a local Workers' Liberty supporter

S: Our CLP [Constituency Labour Party], Hornsey and Wood Green, with one of the largest memberships in the country, voted at its October meeting it affiliated to Jewish Voice for Labour [JVL: a group concerned to reject complaints about antisemitism in the Labour Party as spurious].

Now we have a letter from people in the local Jewish community to the CLP calling for the affiliation to be stopped.

Adrian, you are the chair of the London Jewish Forum and a Jewish Labour Movement delegate to the CLP, and a signatory to the letter in your capacity as the deputy for Highgate Synagogue to the Board of Deputies (BoD). I spoke and voted against JVL affiliation, but I think the letter poses things wrongly. It is an attempt to try and overturn the Labour Party vote by external pressure, not to continue and change the discussion.

Just saying that JVL is “divisive” can only get you so far. The issue is the politics they stand on.

A: We are about the last surviving people in the [Labour] party from the mainstream community. Most of the people in my synagogue in Highgate think I am barking mad to still be involved. Things are at a real impasse.

JVL oppose the adoption of the IHRA text [on antisemitism] and continue to support people who are expelled or, in the case of Livingstone, have left the party. I could have said JVL are a pernicious astroturf organisation that gaslights people. I chose not to.

People identify with some of the JVL supporters as “our Jews”. They end up being

hostile to the majority of Jews because we are the “wrong kind of Jews”. Then they invert that, and say the people in the mainstream community pick on them and tell them they are the wrong kind of Jews. The politics get sunk in an argument about who are the right kind of Jews.

The letter is not a Labour Party response. This is Jewish residents of Haringey and representatives of the two synagogues saying a mess has been created. It takes one fool to drop a stone down a well and eight wise men to pull it out.

What do we want to happen? Logically we want the resolution revoked but I realise that is not going to happen. I’m not sure what I want to happen.

With Naz Shah [a Labour MP charged in April 2016 with having made an antisemitic comment on Facebook], the heat was taken out of it very fast by her accepting she had made a mistake and talking to the JLM and the community.

JVL are too niche, obsessed by one particularly narrow aspect of the issue. The other notable thing about them is how few young people are involved.

I am not going to resign from the Party. I feel very invested in it. I joined in 1982 and I still want to be involved. I have no plan to give up on the GC meetings. It wasn’t a staged walk out after the vote. I was very annoyed and David (the other JLM delegate) was very upset. He is a local rabbi. He has to explain what has happened to the local community.

The mainstream community believe that JVL is being used to try to silence them. I think that this feeds into a Stalinist culture within the movement: the cynical use of arguments when it suits your ends.



Adrian Cohen (right) with Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis and London Mayor Sadiq Khan

What do you think can be done by the national Labour leadership?

The official answer (to which I subscribe) is what the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council said when they met with the leadership and Seumas Milne in April. There has been no progress on those points.

The IHRA text was adopted, but will it stay put with the new National Executive Committee? What is the situation with the outstanding cases (e.g. Jackie Walker) and the fact that Chris Williamson MP shares platforms with them? I don’t think things will move forward until those issues are addressed.

That is where things are officially. Unofficially, we are losing Jews from the Labour Party. Particularly young left wing Jews, especially those who are involved in organisations like Yachad and who have more radical politics on Israel-Palestine. They are the ones leaving. People like me, the “centrist dads”, will stick around! I don’t want to do the bidding of the people who might try to drive me

out.

This generation of Corbyn and his milieu can only keep a grip on all of this for so long. Some of the newer people and the younger people will be fed up by this and will want things to change. I am sceptical we can achieve much in the short term.

Even with the adoption of the IHRA text, Corbyn had his last stand with his “free speech” clause. I can’t see Seumas Milne shifting. Jeremy just hasn’t read the memo.

What did you think of Emily Thornberry’s speech at Labour Party conference [condemning antisemitism]?

That was very well received, but not so much in the Jewish community. Because of the line about “fringes of the movement”, it doesn’t ring true.

• **Solidarity has approached leading members of JVL to offer them a chance to explain their stance, but all so far have declined.**

Arron Banks, the EU, and the Morning Star



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Arron Banks is a millionaire who quite frequently threatens legal action against those who cross him, so I’ll be careful what I write here.

What can be stated as a matter of straight fact is that his highly complex business and financial arrangements were of sufficient concern to the Electoral Commission that they have now passed their investigation into the £8 million he gave to Leave.EU, and other pro-Brexit groups, over to the National Crime Agency.

Oh, and it’s probably safe to quote what the *Guardian*’s Matthew d’Ancona has already written about him: “Banks is the John Gotti of populist campaigning, a dapper don who relishes his public profile.” If you don’t know who John Gotti was, check Wikipedia.

What can also be safely stated is that Mr Banks is right wing. In fact, he’s very right wing, having switched his backing from the Tories to Ukip (which he’s since broken with) in 2015 and then, during the referendum campaign, funded Leave.EU, the group fronted by Nigel Farage with its infamous

“Breaking Point” poster.

What the Electoral Commission has referred to the National Crime Agency is the question of whether Better for the Country Limited – Banks’s campaign firm – “was the true source of donations made to referendum campaigners in its name, or if it was acting as an agent”.

As well as “lending” £6m to Leave.EU, Better for the Country donated around £2.4m to other anti-EU groups like Grassroots Out, which was supported by some Tory MPs, including David Davis, and a few Labour Brexiters like Kate Hoey.

Donations were also made, between March and June 2016, to WAG TV Limited (who made an anti-EU film), Ukip (led at the time by Farage), Veterans for Britain... and Trade Unionists Against the EU (TUAEU).

Hang on a minute! Trade Unionists Against the EU! Isn’t that a supposedly “left wing” organisation, regularly promoted in the pages of the *Morning Star*? And it received funding from Arron Banks? Yes, dear reader, I have to tell you that it did: £54,000 according to the Electoral Commission.

But surely now the *Morning Star* knows about TUAEU’s links with Banks, it will have no more to do with them. After all, as long ago as June 2015 the *Morning Star* carried an editorial (“Left Reasons to ditch the EU”) denouncing right wing anti-EU campaigners as

“neoliberal and nationalist extremists” and called on trade unions, the Labour Party and the left to “develop an independent position of their own, one which represents the real interests of workers and the mass of the people across Scotland, England and Wales.”

TUAEU’s links with Leave.EU and Banks have been public knowledge at least since the publication (in March 2017) of Banks’s book *Bad Boys of Brexit* in which he describes how he funded an anti-TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) leaflet produced by TUAEU and how in January 2016 the Labour anti-EU campaigner John Mills put him in touch with a key TUAEU contact: “I just spent an hour on the phone with Brian Denny from the RMT signing off anti-TTIP leaflets for the trade unionists. This is the kind of thing we should be doing much more of.”

Brian Denny, as well as being an employee of the RMT, one of the few unions to back Brexit, was at that time probably still a member of the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) which backs the *Morning Star*. CPB people have said he’s since left the party, but was certainly still a regular contributor to the paper. And in any case, Denny was also a leading light in the Campaign Against Euro Federalism (CAEF) which in October 2015 announced its affiliation to Leave.EU:

Denny and fellow CAEF people like the



ultra-nationalist John Boyd continued to contribute articles to the *Morning Star* long after their affiliation to Leave.EU was announced.

And even though Denny and Boyd no longer have major articles in the *Morning Star*, other TUAEU people still regularly contribute rabidly nationalist anti-EU tirades. As recently as 3 November, the paper published a little-England rant from TUAEU secretary Doug Nicholls. It would be interesting to read Mr Nicholls’ explanation for having accepted Arron Banks’s money.

In fact it would be quite interesting to read anything in the *Morning Star* about Banks but at the time of writing, the paper has had precisely nothing to say about him.

Demand every Labour MP votes against Brexit

The May government and its Brexit process are bracing themselves to take the coming weeks at a run, trying to hurtle us all over a rickety bridge.

Yet it looks like they could be saved by some Labour MPs voting for the Tories' Brexit formula.

Constituency Labour Parties and trade unions should insist that all Labour MPs vote against the Tories' deal. There is a real chance of bringing down the Tory government. No-one who will vote to save the Tory government deserves to be a Labour MP.

According to a recent leak, the government plans to get a deal at an EU summit on 17-18 November. Then, nine days of political campaigning between 19 and 27 November — with 22 November as a "take back control of our borders" day against free movement — to build up to a Parliamentary vote on 27 November.

Big business bosses are being lined up to raise a chorus of support.

Whether the Tories can actually do that, we don't know. But for sure they will be trying to get some deal through Parliament soon. It will probably be only a semi-deal, with big issues fudged or pushed away into future negotiations, but it will be their formula to get Brexit "over the line" in March 2019.

For their own reasons, the DUP and a section of the Tory right will dislike the semi-deal, and may vote against. The Tory government can be brought down, and the way opened to stop Brexit, by Labour MPs voting solidly against the Tories.

The Labour Party leadership is on course to vote against a Tory deal, but there is a real risk that enough Labour MPs will break ranks to save the Tories. And as yet the Labour leadership's studiously non-committal line — condemning the Tories for being "chaotic" and "divided", rather than in more substantive terms — weakens it in pushing against such breaking of ranks.

On 31 October the *New Statesman* magazine reported that: "At a recent strategy meeting, Andrew Murray — who works part-time as [Unite union leader] Len McCluskey's chief of staff and part-time in Corbyn's office — argued that the Labour Party should vote for Theresa May's deal to avoid a no-deal exit". Murray, reports the *New Statesman*, was suc-



cessfully slapped down by Diane Abbott, but his stance will surely encourage the "centrist" Labour MPs thinking of voting with the Tories.

If the Tories are brought down, then further progress will depend on changing the Labour leaders' stance. At present they say they want to replace the Tories' negotiations by a "workable plan" — a message which really just claims "we can negotiate better than the Tories" — and they explicitly oppose continuing free movement for EU and British citizens across European borders.

But there is no case for saving the Tories. The Tories may try to blackmail us by saying that the only alternatives are "no deal" or a "hard Brexit" of the type proposed by the Tories' right-wing fringe.

In fact the great bulk of big business is firmly against those "ultra-Brexiteers": there is little chance of the Tories replacing May as leader by an "ultra-Brexiter", and almost no chance that this "ultra-Brexiter" could win a parliamentary majority for their favoured schemes.

No-one should let scaremongering corner them into supporting a supposedly "lesser-evil" Brexit. When the Tories are in trouble, that is an opportunity to stop Brexit altogether.

Left Against Brexit groups have been

formed in Nottingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Haringey, and South London. They have gone out on the streets to win people against Brexit.

Over the next weeks and months they need to double their efforts. Those should include campaigning in areas which are heavily pro-Remain, and in places like university campuses with strong pro-Remain opinion, in order to connect with and draw in more activists.

The message needs to be "Remain and Rebel", a battle for a different Europe reshaped in the interests of the working class by active working-class solidarity in the broad class-struggle arena created by the capitalist semi-unification of Europe.

AWL conference

On 24-25 November, members and friends of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty will meet for our annual conference.

Since August we've been circulating draft documents and organising regional pre-conference meetings to prepare the conference.

One of the main documents for the conference, on what sort of organisation we need, has been published in *Solidarity*: bit.ly/rev-org. Another main document, on Brexit, is largely a codification and collation of material published in *Solidarity* on the issue.

The conference will discuss a short motion summing up ideas from our May 2018 pull-out on trans rights, bit.ly/g-ch, and some detailed amendments to it.

It will also discuss reports on areas of work, take another look at our 2017 debate on the second round of the French presidential election, and hear a call to change our voting system for the committee we elect to guide the organisation between conferences.

Fund stands at £3075 so far

£15,000

Australian supporter Boyd has sent us £200 this week, and Lambeth AWL have sent £105 raised at a Halloween party.

And we have another £10 from a Lewisham reader who bought a copy of our new book *In Defence of Bolshevism* and paid £10 extra for it.

Two North London readers plan a second-hand book sale to raise funds, at the School of Oriental and African Studies on 29 November.

Comrades in North London and elsewhere are starting to discuss fund-raising events in 2019 linked to 30th anniversaries of events in the popular revolts which overthrew Stalinism in Eastern Europe in 1989.

Discussing with a left-wing NGO organiser recently, we were told, disconcertingly, that they reckoned that another £60,000 annual income for them would cover the costs of one additional staff member.

As an activist organisation based in the working class, Workers' Liberty operates differently. Most of our activity is unpaid volunteer activity. We need an office staff, but most of the staff depend on part-time outside work, or incomes such as Pension Credit, to support them.

Every extra book or pamphlet or leaflet we print, every extra bunch of placards produced for a demonstration, every extra fare for an organiser or speaker to travel across the country, every repair or replacement of our makeshift office equipment, is covered by stretching a tight budget. Our current fund appeal is not for £60,000, but for £15,000 by June 2019.

With £15,000, however, we pledge that we will do much more than any NGO does with £60,000.

Ways to donate:

• Subscribe to *Solidarity*

You can subscribe to *Solidarity* for a trial period of 6 issues for £7, for 6 months for £22 (waged) or £11 (unwaged), or for a whole year for £44 (waged) or £22 (unwaged). See back page for form.

• Take out a monthly standing order

If you take out a standing order you will also receive *Solidarity*. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.

• Make a one-off donation online

You can donate by sending us a cheque, setting up a bank transfer or via Palpal. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.



Threading together strugg



Interviews

T: How would you sum up the idea of permanent revolution in a few words?

L: The development of the proletarian revolution out of what starts as a democratic bourgeois revolution. Then the proletarian revolution has to be internationalised.

How does the experience of the last 50 years in Ireland, with the 20-odd years of the Provo war and the 20 years since, relate to that idea?

The failure was that there was no revolutionary socialist party to take the lead when it began in 1968-9. You had an agitation which was attacked by the state, and then that brought a response from the South which the Provisional movement believed could give support for an aggressive armed struggle. The aggressive armed struggle itself was seen as one that could be kept and should be kept within the Six County boundaries. It couldn't be won that way.

So are you saying that the decisive loss of the possibility of permanent revolution came back in 1968-9?

There were always potentialities, particularly in the strikes [in the South] after Bloody Sunday [January 1972]. The Irish government handed over the British Embassy [in Dublin] to be burned — that's what they did: I was there, I saw it — and then the British government prorogued Stormont [the old Northern Ireland parliament]. But the Republicans, the provisional Republicans didn't realise what was happening. They thought they only had to carry out a few more actions, and they would win.

What would it have looked like if the potentialities for permanent revolution had been realised?

It would have meant proletarian responses — strikes, occupations of British-owned factories — and then possibly a movement from that to the development of alternative governmental powers. It's difficult to say what would happen if you got that far. As Trotsky pointed out, you cannot assume that revolution in other countries would be a carbon copy of the Russian experience.

You say that the problem was the lack of a revolutionary socialist party, but in fact revolutionary socialists were more strongly-placed in Northern Ireland in 1968-9 than they have been at any time since.

The left was relatively strong in 1969? It depends what you mean by "the left". There were relatively small and underdeveloped nuclei in Belfast (Farrell, Toman) and in Derry (McCann), along with individuals, some of whom were more sophisticated, but who were active, if at all on an individualist basis. The rise of the People's Democracy gave the revolutionary left more credibility but the faultlines soon affected it.

Moreover much of its support was essentially cross-class nationalist. This is particularly true of, perhaps, its greatest success, putting in Bernadette Devlin to Westminster.



Rayner Lysaght has been active on the Irish left for over 50 years, and is the author of *The Republic of Ireland and other books*. He was interviewed by Martin Thomas in advance of a debate with Sean Matgamna on 9 November.

Her victory was one of a cross-class nationalist unity campaign. It was repeated in 1970, but by 1974 its bourgeois elements and those they influenced had moved to the SDLP. Bernadette had failed to organize a socialist base and she came third in the first general election that year.

The same sort of confusion was true of the republic. The [Irish] Labour Party had a relatively large left then, but it wasn't going to play a role in a proletarian revolution.

Some of the left is much stronger than it was in 1969. There was no question then of groups like the Socialist Workers Network today [group linked to the SWP in Britain] getting seats in the Dail.

There were mass mobilisations in the North then. Those developed only after the invasion of the ghettos in 1969. There might have been a mobilisation in the South if there had been a revolutionary socialist party. But there wasn't.

Now in the Six Counties the Provisional movement has all but hegemonised the nationalist population. There was no such hegemony in 1969.

Anyway, what happened, happened. How do you see the idea of "permanent revolution" in Ireland now? Starting from now?

There's the neo-liberal problem. Peter Casey [a maverick right-wing candidate] got second place in the presidential election [on 26 October]. He represents a feeling that has been pushed around by the mainstream media, and in response by the alt-right, that the undoubted economic failures of neoliberalism are due to its social and political aspects, of liberalism, not to the economic side of privatisation and deregulation, which is pretty much accepted by those people.

The peace process is in danger. The peace process wasn't a great peace process. Its whole principle was very dubious. The collapse of the Stormont coalition [DUP — Sinn Fein] government was not the end of the world. But there is the danger that if the whole process collapses we're back to the bloody armed struggle, for which the dissident republicans are pushing.

Whether the Provisionals will revert to armed struggle, I don't know. They are pretty far gone into reformism. Without the rifle in hand, the Republican is a reformist.

We remember what happened to the Stickies [the Official IRA of the 1970s]. They kept up some sort of armed struggle until 1972, then they gave up because they thought they could get a democratic Northern Ireland, which I think is impossible.

Until the struggle is treated as an all-Ireland struggle, it won't be permanent revolution.

You talked of permanent revolution as proletarian revolution coming out of a democratic bourgeois revolution. What sort of democratic bourgeois revolution do you envisage, starting from now?

The potentialities of working-class revolution would be threaded together with the democratic struggle. The British government is not really interested in running Northern Ireland democratically (its wiser members may recognize it as an impossible task). This fact can stimulate actions by workers in the South. That can start the chain reaction. It will need a revolutionary organisation to do it. Whether there is one strong enough to do it is another question.

What would be the democratic bourgeois objectives of this democratic bourgeois revolution, the demands comparable to land for the peasants and a Constituent Assembly in Tsarist Russia?

The demands would be, in the North, what the Provisionals are maintaining, except that they're not doing much with them except using them as counters over the restoration of the coalition government. The liberal demands for the right of abortion and equal marriage — which we now have in the South, after all the years of the liberal Unionists saying that they couldn't have Irish unity because the South was too illiberal.

There's the language issue, the whole question of the symbolism of flags. And there are many other points. The Brits are in fact doling out money to the sectarians — to Sinn Fein, mind you, but also to people who are known Loyalist murderers.

The question is: can these problems become sufficiently extreme to move the South?

Also, if there is a hard Brexit there could well be a bigger crisis around the Border. That would be an extreme expression of the overall democratic deficit in the settlement of 1921.

The hold of the Catholic Church in the South has been shaken through a series of scandals. How do the old arguments about "Home Rule means Rome Rule" look in the light of this?

As to "Rome Rule", the republic is now considerably more liberal than Northern Ireland on day to day issues. [DUP leader] Arlene Foster raised a liberal critique of the southern state in 1991, including its ban on abortion. Now she's on the wrong side on that issue.

A more sophisticated Unionist would be justified in remarking, however, that there is still much work to be done. Too much of the education system and of health is under reli-

gious (mainly Catholic, of course) control. That has to be combatted.

Have the Irish Trotskyists, over the last 50 years, been adequate on the fight against clericalism?

I think we played a pretty principled role — demanding legal contraception, divorce, abortion and gay rights even when many on the left were putting their toes into the water on the special position of the Catholic Church. I do not think this is a field in which we made many mistakes. The one criticism of our role is that we were like the fabled horsefly on the coach wheel. Still, we propagandised and agitated.

What is your assessment of the political journey through which Gerry Adams and those around him took the Provisional Republicans?

It was done more intelligently than before. But it's not new. In the 1880s there was the New Departure which brought a lot of Fenians into the Home Rule party. Then the Treatyites fought a civil war to enforce a limited Dominion status.

Then there was De Valera and Fianna Fail, then Clann na Poblachta, then the Officials.

There is a consistent failure of analysis in the Republican movement. It has the idea that the movement is the Republic virtually established, so they can just send people out with guns and bombs and they will win the support of the majority.

They find those methods just kill off the support for an united Ireland, an independent Ireland. They abandon the armed struggle, which is probably a good thing, but then the alternative is just a step to reformism.

Now the Republicans are even talking of going into a coalition government [in Dublin] as a minority partner with one of the bourgeois parties.

What is your summing-up on the development of the revolutionary socialist currents in Ireland over the 50 years since 1968-9? And of Irish Trotskyism in particular?

At the moment the two dominant Trotskyist bodies are the Socialist Party, which now calls itself Solidarity, and the Socialist Workers Network. Both the SW and the SP see the struggle in Partitionist terms. The SP, which is even more determinedly Partitionist than the SWs, tries to do work with the Unionist workers in East Belfast, but it doesn't get very far. The SWs claim to be crossing the sectarian divide, but its vote is overwhelmingly from the nationalist population.

Both of them have done fairly good campaigns in the South. The SP ran a good campaign against water charges, but it is very agitationaly confined. Its Marxism is not very developed. The SWs are maybe at a slightly higher level.

What went wrong over the 50 years? There wasn't a revolutionary organisation that could do what was necessary. The bad thing that [Sean] Matgamna did in the Irish Workers Group [of the late 1960s] was not so much splitting the organisation, as instilling the idea that internationalism was simply anti-nationalism. It was almost going back 60 years, to William Walker [a Belfast socialist of

les

the early 20th century].

The idea that any initiative by revolutionaries for what could be deemed nationalist aims is wrong affected the League for Workers' Republic [the main product of the IWG split] even after it broken with Matgamna.

You mustn't fight nationalist struggles as a nationalist, but you can't avoid them either. National struggles are usually a struggle between an oppressor nation and an oppressed nation, and the right side is with the oppressed nation.

Our comrades in the North [in 1968-9] were rather intoxicated by getting lots of people onto the streets. They called it People's Democracy. We founded the Irish section of the Fourth International in 1971, and by the time we united with PD in 1978 we in fact the larger group, which tells you something.

By then the Provos' campaign was on in earnest. They had the blood of the martyrs, they were the people who were doing things.

Sean will debate what you say about him never supporting national struggles at the meeting on 9 November! Leave that for now. The LWR became the Irish Lambertists [linked to the "Lambert" group in France]. Why did they collapse?

The LWR increasingly became almost Stalinite in their attitude to discussions. Then Carol Coulter, who was probably their leading theorist, was given the boot. I don't know when they wound up. I still see Paddy Healy from time to time, but how far he could be called a Trotskyist now, I don't know.

There's been some attention recently to the Saor Eire group of the late 60s and early 70s. What's your assessment of that in hindsight?

They were urban guerrillas. It was rather



Catholic areas in Derry declared themselves "Free Derry" and excluded state forces for some months in 1969 and again in 1971-2

disastrous. We had hopes of them, I admit. Perhaps we could have won some of them if we knew what we know now. We now know much more, for example, about what the Irish Trotskyists from the late 1930s to the early 1950s said.

Simultaneously with the political developments, we have seen the rise of the "revisionist" school in Irish historical writing. What is your assessment of that trend in historical writing?

Basically, it was going to happen anyway. The history departments in the National University of Ireland were dominated by opponents of republicanism. They were encouraged in the 1960s by the opening of the economy. It raised exaggerated hopes of how much things would be better. The old Sinn Fein economic nationalist idea of "burn everything British except their coal" was dis-

credited. The revisionists saw their chance of rationalising this mood.

They raised some important questions. But in fact they have tended to parrot the traditional Republicans on some issues. A lot of Republicans argue that Connolly abandoned socialism and simply became a Republican in the last 18 months of his life. The revisionists say the same. It's not true. So you get agreement between the revisionist and the traditionalist Republicans.

If you read Conor Cruise O'Brien's *States of Ireland*, he attacks Connolly's analysis on the base of three or four quotations. That wasn't a proper investigation. I would suggest that Cruise O'Brien should have read all of Connolly! But his whole approach there and in other works was dependent on subjective forces – perceptions. He was almost as hostile to considerations of economic factors as he was to the IRA.

The revisionists have become very opposed to any working-class mobilisation, for any idea. Another revisionist, David Fitzpatrick of Trinity College Dublin, came to speak to the Labour History Society, and his idea was that there is no such thing as labour history and we should look instead at the history of work.

Peter Hart produced a book proving to himself that the IRA was simply a Catholic sectarian organisation. He used the example of a number of murders of Protestants in south Co. Cork in April 1922, backed by long chunks of a document produced by British intelligence saying that very few Protestants helped the British forces, so that that was not a factor. He left out a passage saying that there were many Protestants helping the British forces in that one particular area.

I deal with a lot of this in my pamphlet *The Great Irish Revolution*.

Building for workers' unity



Interviews

T: In 1968-9 there was a political explosion in Northern Ireland, focused around democratic issues. Do you think that explosion had within it the potential to develop into an all-Ireland socialist revolution?

M: No. The Irish working class was divided in the North, and between North and South. Everything that roused up the Northern Ireland Catholics antagonised a large and growing part of the Protestant population.

So are you saying that the Northern Ireland Catholics should not have rebelled?

No. The Catholic civil rights movement was a progressive upsurge of oppressed people. Its great political weakness — perhaps especially the weakness of the left within it — was that the civil rights de-

mands were allowed to appear to Protestants to be demands for them to lose some of what the Catholics were seeking to gain — houses, jobs etc. Then they came to be seen as the thin end of the wedge for an IRA attempt to force the Six Counties into a united Ireland.

The leftists who were prominent in the civil rights movement after the police batoning of a demonstration in Derry in October 1968 were destructively ultra-left. They saw their main enemy as the liberal Unionists then seeking reforms; they were even willing to make alliances with the worst dihard Unionists against them.

Bernadette Devlin, one of them, would get elected to the Westminster Parliament as the Westminster Parliament in an April 1969 by-election for Mid-Ulster, but as the Unity (Catholic Unity) candidate. Ian Paisley would allege on US television that before the February 1969 Northern Ireland election the same Bernadette Devlin came to his house and proposed to him collaboration to bring down the liberal Unionist prime min-

ister Terence O'Neill. I don't know that this was ever denied. It fits in with the logic of what PD said it was doing in that election.

I didn't say that at the time that because the struggle was divisive, they should have bided their time. I don't say it now.

How could those leftists have done better?

As AWL's predecessor said at the time, by including class demands for increasing the total number of houses and jobs at the same as they demanded equal rights.

If they'd done that, would it have created a dynamic of "permanent revolution" (merger of bourgeois-democratic revolution and working-class socialist revolution)?

It might have made the struggle less divisive, and helped a possibility of building a strong socialist organisation within it. No more, and certainly not "permanent revolution".

In fact the "constitutional question" — the



Sean Matgamna was in 1969 the representative in the Derry Citizens' Defence Association of the "outside" volunteers who helped defend "Free Derry" against Northern Ireland state forces, and has written frequently for *Solidarity* and its forerunners. He was interviewed by Martin Thomas in advance of a debate with Rayner Lysaght on 9 November.

relationship of the 6 Counties with independent Ireland and with Britain — came to dominate. The leftists made no attempt to

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relate to it. At the beginning all the prominent socialists said that the “constitutional question” should be avoided. Even the Republicans (then led by the Stalinists who would become the “Officials”) said that. That left the “constitutional question” to be shaped by the Provisionals on one side and the Paisleyites on the other.

Lenin wrote in *What Is To Be Done?* that Marxists must be able to offer answers on all the big questions of political and social life, not just the “socialist issues”. We must be like the “the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears... to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth before all his socialist convictions and his democratic demands”.

The leftists did not have those answers on the “constitutional question”. The only conceivable answer was and is a federal Ireland, with regional autonomy for the Protestant north-east. That should have been combined with confederal links with Britain. The 26 counties then had been fully independent for decades. Socialists could and should have proposed confederal links with Britain, to conciliate and reassure the Northern Unionists. The UK and Ireland in fact formed such a confederal link when both joined the EU at the start of 1973.

All that would have limited the communal polarisation, and increased the chances of building a strong socialist organisation. But there was never, in the events of 1968-9, and after, a possibility of “permanent revolution”.

What is your assessment of the Provisionals’ military campaign, which started from early 1971?

I’d said in the 1960s that there was no possibility of the Republicans launching a revolution. I was wrong on the question of whether they could launch a physical-force movement. They could and they did.

Unfortunately, I was not wrong that they were incapable of launching or leading a genuine Irish revolution. Sinn Fein today repeats for maybe the fifth time an old pattern: the physical-force revolutionaries of one period, once they have to recognise that their military campaign is a dead end, become the reformist constitutional nationalists of the next period.

Do you think the Provisionals should have bided their time?

A socialist would never have voted for the Provisional IRA war that started in March 1971. What would its objective be? The Northern Ireland Protestants could not have been, and should not have been, coerced into a united Ireland. The Provisionals should not have launched their war.

Once that war got underway, socialists had to respond to it as a fact. We responded by giving them critical support against the British army.

Why?

Because they were part of the revolt of an oppressed people, even if they were not doing what we wanted to have done. To an extent they were something not far from a militia of the Catholics held within an oppressive state structure.

We backed their right to fight, and rejected the idea, then very common on the British left, that they could be dismissed as “individual terrorists”. We were the only British socialist group to have our headquarters raided by (armed) police (in September 1973) because of what we said on Ireland.



Troops in Belfast

But we did not construct fanciful ideas that the Provos were other than what they were, as a lot of people who should have known better did. We criticised the Provisionals, over “Bloody Friday” in July 1972 for example.

And later?

Really there was not one Provo war. There were two Provo wars, at least. The first, in 1971-5, had the goal of driving Britain out of Ireland, and succeeded in ending Orange Home Rule in Northern Ireland.

The Provos won that objective within a year of the start of the bombing and shooting. The British abolished Belfast Home Rule in March 1972. There was then a ceasefire by the Provisional IRA for a couple of weeks (June-July 1972) and a ceasefire by the Official IRA (from May 1972) which has lasted ever since. Their ceasefire came in response to a big demonstration by Catholic women in Derry against The Officials, in protest at one of the most stupidly savage episodes of the war: they captured and then shot an 18 year old member of the British Army who had come to visit his family in Derry.

The aftermath to the abolition of Belfast Home Rule was a confused period. The Provisionals resumed their war after mid-1972, now without much of a clear effective objective. Instead of sectarian Protestant rule in Belfast, in the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement Britain offered the Catholics essentially everything they were going to win with the Good Friday Agreement 25 years of war later — namely, constitutionally-enshrined power-sharing, no government in which Catholics did not have a part. The Orangeists had had a veto over an all-Ireland state. Now the Northern Ireland Catholics got a veto over Protestant majority rule in the Six Counties.

It would have been better if the Provo war had stopped after that. It didn’t. Britain proceeded to set up a power-sharing government in Belfast in January 1974. The Provo war’s main effect now was to exasperate the Orange working class. The SDLP, the constitutional nationalists, were the main pillar in the power-sharing government, because the Unionist component in it did not have enough support among Protestants. That first attempt at a power-sharing government was brought down by a great Orange general strike in May 1974.

Britain then decided to call a Convention to work out an agreed constitution for the Six Counties. The Provisionals called another ceasefire for most of the period during which the Convention met. Predictably the Convention resolved nothing.

Then what might be called the Provisionals’ second war was launched. This was a war against Partition, but it had no coherent rationale.

In 1971 the Provisionals had adopted a new programme called *Eire Nua*, which advocated an Ireland of four federal units, one of them a nine-county Ulster. That contained what might have been the beginning of a negotiated settlement for Protestant autonomy.

Now there was talk of a long war, twenty years of war. Over the time the Provisionals dropped federalism and talked instead of

getting Britain to act as a “persuader” to push the Protestants into a united Ireland. In fact, as the 1974 general strike had shown very powerfully, Britain had no such power of “persuasion” with the Protestants.

“Persuasion” here meant financial, political and military coercion. The Provisionals’ war was now a war to compel Britain to force the Orangeists into a unitary Irish state, with an unmediated Catholic majority. It was a piece of absolute political nonsense.

With the hunger strikes of 1981, in which ten Republicans died, the Provos developed a new political dimension — “the Armalite and the ballot box”.

In 1985, the Anglo-Irish Agreement gave Dublin a share of political power in Northern Ireland. Arguably the Provisionals won that, but in practice it meant little. Executive power remained exclusively British.

Couldn’t you say the Provisionals’ war won the Good Friday Agreement of 1998?

You might say it was a concession to the Provisionals. But in essentials the same thing had been won by 1974. And the Good Friday Agreement was possible only because the Provisionals had tacitly accepted that they had been defeated in their war.

Then Sinn Fein accepted the Good Friday Agreement — after fighting a war for the twenty years after Sunningdale for what? To put Sinn Fein and the Paisleyites into government in the Six Counties!

Has the Good Friday Agreement been a success?

On a certain level, yes. Overall, peace has lessened tensions. But there are still “peace walls” on the interfaces between working-class communities in Belfast.

I argued against voting for or endorsing the Good Friday Agreement at the time, but that was not because I thought it could do no good at all. I thought socialists should not take political responsibility for a system of bureaucratically-balanced institutionalised sectarianism.

How do you assess the impact of the European Union on Ireland? [Britain and Ireland joined the EU in January 1973].

The border had remained high for military reasons. One consequence of the end of the military struggle in Ireland, since the mid-1990s, has been a rush to catch up on 20 years of European economic integration.

Ireland has benefited greatly from membership in the EU. There have been tremendous economic and social advances.

The question of Irish unity might now conceivably get a Yes in a referendum in Northern Ireland. I would like a united Ireland. But such a referendum majority would not necessarily resolve the issue. History suggests that the Protestants would never accept it unless there were arrangements to meet their concerns.

The traditional Protestant-Unionist objections to a united Ireland cited the lower social and economic development of the South, and the clerical domination of its politics. The economic growth and liberalisation of the South over the last decades have changed things there.

Have you heard the new Irish joke? The Protestants of Northern Ireland now object to Irish unity because the South is too liberal and the people there have stopped listening to their old spiritual advisers!

The Northern Ireland Protestants’ objection to a united Ireland was never just a negative thing, of complaints about the South. It was also their own positive identity as British-Irish.

Some scheme of local autonomy for the Protestant north-east is still a necessary part of any plan for a united Ireland. It is encouraging that even the Provisionals now say: “British identity can and must be accommodated in a united Ireland, and I believe nationalist Ireland is open to constitutional and political safeguards to ensure this” (Mary Lou McDonald).

For centuries the fear of a foreign military landing in Ireland to use Irish disaffection against Britain shaped British policy in Ireland. Now the whole of the EU is intervening! The whole of Europe is on the side of Ireland against Britain on the question of the Border within Ireland and Brexit.

The EU dimension also (as long as Brexit can be stopped) provides the confederal links between Britain and Ireland which could facilitate a united Ireland. In fact, in spite of and because of the long history of conflict, there were already special links between Britain and Ireland before 1973. Irish people had full citizen rights in Britain, including voting rights, as soon as we got off the boat.

As you say, the hold of the Catholic Church in the South has been shaken through a series of scandals. How do the old arguments about “Home Rule means Rome Rule” look in the light of this?

Indisputably, “Home Rule” did become “Rome Rule”. Honest people have to acknowledge that. The sort of things once depicted in sensation-mongering anti-Catholic tracts such as *The Awful Revelations of Maria Monk* came to exist in independent Ireland. You had cases of women escaping from Magdalene Houses and, in effect, seeking political refuge in Northern Ireland or in England. The priests ruled Ireland in a regime which included predatory sex against children wrapped in impenetrable layers of hypocrisy and cant. Self-torturing nuns beat and abused generations of Irish children. Schools in the North were segregated at the insistence of the Catholic Church.

Ireland is now experiencing its third revolution. The first was the revolution in land ownership, the second was the political revolution 1916-22. The third is the end of what might be called the revolt against Rome Rule.

In one of his articles on the Home Rule crisis of 1912-4, Lenin comments on the fear of “Rome Rule” that it wouldn’t and couldn’t happen because England, which under the then-projected Home Rule would still have overall control, wouldn’t allow it.

In fact England allowed the Northerners to run an Orange sectarian state for 50 years. In fully independent Ireland we had a theocratic state, more so than in fascist Portugal or Spain in the mid 20th century.

If Ireland had remained united, the presence of the North might have made a difference. But we can’t know how things would have gone if a united Ireland had won Home Rule and then expanded it.

None of that justifies or excuses the partition that was imposed on Ireland, or the Orange sectarian Home Rule regime set up in Northern Ireland.

Have the Irish Trotskyists, over the last 50 years, been adequate on the fight against clericalism?

I don’t think so. A background dispute on that question, about an anti-religion piece which I wrote, contributed to the split in the Irish Workers’ Group in 1967-8.

What is your assessment of the “revisionism” of recent decades in Irish historical writing?

“Historical revisionism” began about the time of the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Ris-

ing. To a serious extent it is a healthy movement.

It debunks the Republican revolutionary tradition — but it cannot but be good to establish the facts. Much of the tradition is encrusted in mysticism and other sorts of nonsense. Serious Irish history-writing really begins with the revisionists. Up to 50 or so years ago Irish history-writing was little more than an ethnic-sectarian chronicle.

But it included the idea that things that had seemed immutable could be changed, and were changed, by revolutionaries overcoming great odds. Dressed up in talk of the upper classes as a mere British garrison “alien in race and creed”, it held within itself an idea and a story of class struggle.

All of that passes down to the working-class revolutionaries. Historical fiction and confusion, cultivated or otherwise, never did anyone any good.

There is a historical parallel. There was a great agrarian socialist tradition in Russia in the 19th century, the Narodniks. They killed the Tsar in 1881. The ideas of that movement dominated the intellectuals for a long time.

Then a sort of revolutionary debunking of that tradition developed, showing that Russia was heading for capitalism rather than agrarian socialism. Some of the debunkers came to use a Marxism reduced to economic determinism, which is not Marxism. As Trotsky put it, “the sharp knife of Marxism was the instrument by which the bourgeois intelligentsia cut the Populist umbilical cord”.

The revolutionary Marxists claimed the heroic Narodnik tradition as its own, without the mystification and confusion.

The Irish revolutionary tradition — the plebeian revolutionary tradition, the Fenians’ — is ours, the socialists’, the Marxists’. We can benefit from the work of the revisionists, even if often in conflict with them and in criticism of their conclusions.

Finally: there has been some attention recently to the Saor Eire group of the late 1960s and early 70s. What is your assessment?

Saor Eire was a strange hybrid, a mixture of people with revolutionary political motivation and gangsters. They robbed banks and killed a policeman. A brave Marxist, Peter Graham, got entangled in their affairs and died at the hands of certain members of Saor Eire.

What they did could never have made any sense. 26-Counties Ireland was a functioning bourgeois democracy. Even according to Guevarist theory, such as it was, guerrilla warfare in such conditions made no sense.

I had personal connections with some of them, but never thought what they did made sense, or was serious revolutionary politics, still less working-class politics.

In Irish history, the way things were going was often telegraphed by funeral marches. In 1861 the funeral of Terence Bellew MacManus was a tremendous demonstration of the Fenian revolutionaries.

In 1915 the funeral of Diarmaid Ó Donnabháin Rosa was a formidable nationalist affair, at which Patrick Pearse made his famous oration declaring that “Ireland unfree will never be at peace”. It presaged the nationalist Rising in the offing.

In 1970 the funeral of an unarmed Garda, Richard Fallon, shot down by Saor Eire people robbing an Arran Quay bank, produced a great spontaneous popular demonstration against what Saor Eire stood for and did.

Some people of the Mandel Fourth International wove fantasies around Saor Eire. But what it did never made sense. What the Mandel Trotskyists did and said in relation to it made no sense either.



Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, leaders of the 1918 revolution, murdered by right-wing gangs

Revolution in Germany, 1918

By Paul Hampton

In November 1918 German workers overthrew the imperial government and ended the First World War.

What began as a sailors’ revolt within weeks saw workers’ councils take charge of various German cities. A social democratic government took power amidst a situation of dual power.

The revolution, however, would be defeated, or at least limited to the replacement of the old monarchist government by a parliamentary democracy, and a parliamentary democracy so flawed that it would within 15 years fall to the Nazis.

At the end of October 1918 the German admirals decided on a last-gasp operation, committing the fleet against the superior British forces. To crews, it looked like a suicide mission.

When ordered to sea, sailors from Wilhelmshaven mutinied. Mass arrests were ordered, but the revolt spread. On 3 November, Karl Artelt, a member of the Independent Social Democratic Party [USPD, a semi-revolutionary party built by people who had been expelled from the old Social Democratic Party (SPD) for opposing World War One], was elected leader of the first sailors’ council, a committee representing 20,000 sailors.

On 4 November, SPD politician Gustav Noske arrived in Kiel. Since most sailors (and soldiers, and even workers) still saw the SPD as the big more-or-less party, Noske was elected chair of the newly formed Kiel Soldiers’ Council. But the SPD worked to control, deflect, and limit the revolution.

Between 1 and 15 November, workers’ and soldiers’ councils took charge of many German cities, including Leipzig, Hamburg, Bremen, Chemnitz, Brunswick, Düsseldorf, Mülheim an der Ruhr, Kiel, Lübeck, Flensburg, Oldenburg, Cuxhaven, and Hanover.

Typically, workers’ mass strikes and demonstrations would break out, then soldiers would join the revolt, and then a joint workers’ and soldiers’ council would oust the old authorities.

On 3 November officers fired on a massive, unarmed demonstration in Berlin, killing eight. The next day the Berlin workers responded with a general strike. The SPD Executive demanded the abdication of the Kaiser [Emperor]. In a private meeting with top army chief Wilhelm Groener, SPD leader Friedrich Ebert said: “If the Kaiser does not abdicate then social revolution is inevitable. But I will have nothing to do with it. I hate it like sin.”

On 9 November 1918, hundreds of thousands of workers demonstrated on the streets. In Berlin, SPD leader Philipp Scheidemann proclaimed Germany a republic while the Kaiser was in Belgium, aiming to preempt Karl Liebknecht’s call for a socialist republic at the same demonstration. Ebert became chancellor [equivalent of prime minister].

On 10 November 1918, a Council of People’s Delegates was formed, with three SPD members, led by Ebert, and three USPD. Ebert now led the government both by regular appointment from the old order, and as chief of the “People’s Delegates”.

The SPD, by mobilising less-politically-aware soldiers to disrupt a workers’ and soldiers’ gathering, retained control of the Executive of Berlin’s workers’ and soldiers’ councils.

An all-German congress of workers’ councils, on 16-21 December 1918, had 292 SPD supporters among its 425 delegates, 94 USPD, and only 10 from the loose radical faction in the USPD led by Rosa Luxemburg, the Spartacus League. It voted to cede power to a parliamentary National Assembly to be elected on 19 January.

On 30 December the Spartacists joined with others to form a Communist Party

(KPD-S) aiming to lead a workers’ revolution in Germany as the Bolsheviks had done in Russia.

But the KPD-S did not have the political self-education and training that the Bolsheviks had acquired over decades. It got caught up in a ragged and premature semi-attempt at a revolutionary uprising in Berlin, together with the “Revolutionary Shop Stewards” aligned with the USPD, in early January, and in the wake of that right-wing gangs sponsored by the SPD murdered Luxemburg and other revolutionary leaders.

The revolution was not over. Short-lived workers’ republics would be formed in Munich and in other cities in 1919. A general strike in March 1920 would smash a right-wing attempt at a coup and lead even conservative union leaders to talk of a “workers’ government”.

Another revolutionary opportunity was missed in October 1923 before the capitalist order restabilised.

• Workers’ Liberty will be publishing a pamphlet telling the story, and including new translations of some of Luxemburg’s articles from 1918-9. In the meantime, more at bit.ly/g-1918 and bit.ly/rl-sp

Socialism, Ireland, Permanent Revolution and the Provo War
Rayner Lysaght debates Sean Matgamna, 7:30, Friday 9 November London Welsh Centre, 157-163 Grays Inn Rd WC1X 8UE

The story of the Limerick Soviet with Rayner Lysaght
5:30, Saturday 10 November, Brunner Hall, 152 Lever Street, EC1V 8BG

Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Fake news" inside the left

By Cathy Nugent

On 26 October, the Red London Facebook page, purportedly a site run by Corbyn-supporting socialists, posted a meme (pictured right) indicating that the *Clarion* magazine and one of its editors, Sacha Ismail, support child abuse. Sacha is a member of Workers' Liberty and one of the parents of a young child.

The claim is ludicrous, reckless, and malicious. It is not the first time that Red London have smeared members of Workers' Liberty.

Who are Red London? What are their politics? What other attacks have they made on us and other socialists?

Red London's administrators have always been anonymous, but it is clear that they are part of a clique or set of cliques around the Labour Party, Momentum, and the RMT union.

Red London say they exist to promote "a confrontational attitude in all socialist struggles". Their prolific daily content is usually not confrontational, but similar to every other Corbyn fan club site. The bland serves as a backdrop for the less frequent but more "edgy" content, including praise of "High Stalinism".

Red London's extreme attitude is not only "online". It has infected "on the ground" political life. The meme smearing *Clarion* and Sacha appeared when the left in Lewisham Labour was split over candidates in a constituency elections. Sacha is the secretary of the local left caucus Lewisham for Corbyn.

Red London's Stalinism is much cruder than the *Morning Star*'s. Red



London say the USSR in the 1930s was the best, North Korea is a workers' paradise, and Enver Hoxha was a great leader. Some take those claims as ironic or joky, but they provide an "extreme" and authoritarian mindset to frame Red London's targeting of its hate figures.

Red London's stock-in-trade is unkind and unsophisticated ridiculing of "identity politics" people whom they caricature as always saying "woke" and "intersectional"; so-called RadLibs; so-called snowflakes and melts. "Goldsmiths" (that is, students from Goldsmiths College) is a stand-in word for all those.

Red London are not interested in reasoned critique of identity politics. They are interested in stirring up a hardcore audience, mainly of young white men, to hatred and contempt. Their stance has sometimes licensed sneering hostility towards oppressed groups and marginalised people (such as sex workers): (see image on far right).

Red London style themselves as a forum for the expression of an "authentically" working-class identity. This is confused. Class is most importantly a relationship to the means of production and only secondly a cultural identity, and a complex one at that, varying between times and places.

Their take on class takes them into dangerous territory. Red London have tried to relate to Tommy Robinson's followers as misguided members of "our class", saying, "we need our own Tommy or Tommies".

In this context Red London have foregrounded their anti-paedophile message by way of a border-line authoritarian "lynch mob" mentality against paedophiles. Socialists oppose child abuse, but we also oppose vigilantism: it drives child abuse underground, works against rehabilitation, and will not keep children safe.

Red London have an obsession with paedophilia which predates Robinson's campaigns. They use "paedo" and "nonce" (a word

which has homophobic roots) as general swear words. They have used it to smear Trotskyists in general (who along with anarchists are their next favourite hate figures) and Workers' Liberty in particular.

Towards the end of 2016, Red London began to say that Workers' Liberty supports paedophilia and/or child abuse (the group never makes any distinctions). They have always ignored our clear and considered statements on these issues.

SNIPPETS

They, and an anonymous blog which is associated with the group (bit.ly/fake-p), have based themselves on four snippets out of hundreds and thousands of texts that our political tendency has published over fifty years.

Those snippets were "read" by way of ripping them out of context. One is an exchange of letters dating back to 1981, one of which opposes censorship laws and another which calls for a discussion around the age of consent. Both texts are impossible to understand without knowing something about the 1980s left and the topic under discussion.

Another snippet is a postscript to a letter opposing "Megan's Law" (making the sex-offenders register public) on the grounds that it would encourage counter-productive vigilantism. That meaning is lost in Red London's presentation.

The fourth is from an article by Gerry Byrne published in 2003 (bit.ly/gerry-b). The basic position here is very clear: "Any sexual relationship between an adult and a child is necessarily exploitative, even if there is no physical coercion involved... 'consent' is meaningless in the structurally unequal relationship of adult to child". That position is never acknowledged by Red London.

Our actual record is of consistent support for an age of consent and often-expressed strong views on tackling child abuse. For example, on the sexual exploitation of chil-



dren in Rotherham: "The bottom line here is that everywhere, a minority of abusive men, often involved in criminal gangs, will look for vulnerable children to prey on. If the system does not believe children who report abuse, regards children who are sexually active as 'sluts', and does not trust trained workers or give them the resources they need, it will continue to fail vulnerable children."

In Red London's way of using snippets to create "fake news" and to whip up "death to nonces" fever, there is little difference between them and the alt-right. The politics are not the same but the *method* is: misinformation, angry identity claims, and calls to ditch empathy all drive out reasoned discussion.

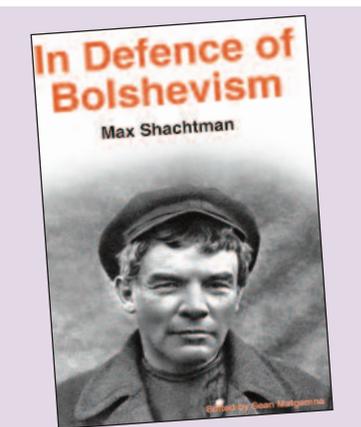
In early 2018 Red London's smears became entangled with a report made online of an historic sexual assault in the AWL, where the victim was under 18 and over the current age of consent. The case had not been reported to the relevant AWL bodies at the time (2005). We investigated. We immediately stated that individually and collectively we had not provided the proper support — that is facilitated access to professional help, as part of a safeguarding duty to that young person.

Red London's smears helped only to exploit and instrumentalise the case; young AWL members and some allies were called "nonces" at a February 2018 London Young Labour. The atmosphere made it impossible to get a proper discussion on the serious issues.

The recklessness, the authoritarianism, and fake-scandals of Red London are geared to stoke up sectarian division on left.

Those who value words, meaning, and dialogue should challenge Red London.

- More on how Red London creates fake news: bit.ly/fake-pol
- Our Working Group report on the 2005 case: bit.ly/res-2005
- Website collection on the new Stalinism: workersliberty.org/new-stal



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. Order online for £12* including UK postage. www.workersliberty.org/books *£15 including study guide

Women say: “Not OK Google”

By Kelly Rogers

On Thursday 1 November thousands of Google workers staged an international walk-out to protest against the company's handling of sexual harassment.

Thousand of workers from cities as far apart as New York, London, Berlin, Zurich, Singapore, Tokyo and more, took part. Many of them took to the streets, or gathered in squares and parks holding placards with slogans like “O.K. Google, really?”.

The action followed revelations that Google had paid millions of dollars in exit packages to male executives found to have committed sexual harassment and had covered up the incidents. Most notably Google had paid Andy Rubin, the creator of the Android mobile software, a \$90 million exit package, despite the company finding that sexual harassment allegations against him were credible.

The organisers of the walkout produced a list of demands, calling on Google to change how it handles sexual harassment cases, in-



cluding an end to its use of private arbitration in such cases, the publication of a transparency report, further disclosures of salaries and compensation, an employee representative on the company board, and a chief diversity officer.

While the global strike was not co-ordinated by any union in particular, Unite in the UK has been organising Google workers at offices in London. Unite said about the strike: “We applaud the principled stand taken by Google workers in

London and across the world today (Thursday 1 November) over how the company tackles allegations of sexual harassment.

“The employees are rightly demanding key changes in how sexual misconduct allegations are dealt with at the tech giant, including a call to end forced arbitration — a move which would make it possible for victims to sue.

“Unite the union began organising and recruiting Google staff in London six months ago and membership continues to grow.”

Libraries demo: missed opportunity

By Ruth Cashman, Lambeth Unison (p.c.)

Since 2010, more than 500 public libraries have been closed across England, Scotland and Wales.

More have faced crippling staff and budget cuts. That is set to continue despite the Chancellor's claims that austerity is ending.

There have been local fightbacks by Unison members in Lambeth, Barnet and Blaenau Gwent and Unite members in Greenwich. For many years, grassroots library campaigners have been calling for a national, cross union coordinated political and industrial strategy. In 2016 reps in PCS, Unite and Unison along with community campaigners organised the Libraries, Museums and Galleries demonstration attended by 3000 people. Unison conference 2017 supported another

national demonstration.

Sadly this demonstration took a year and a half to organise and then was called at the last minute for Saturday 3 November by Unison HQ without coordinating with local union reps, limiting turnout. One branch trying to build the demo tried to order 1000 leaflets only to be told that only 1000 had been printed for the entire national mobilisation.

In the end roughly 100 people marched from the British Library to Parliament Square. Most marched with union and community banners on the road, whilst the march's stewards made up of Unison staff bizarrely walked alongside the march on the pavement with the national Save Libraries Banner.

Labour Party deputy leader Tom Watson welcomed the demonstration but clearly hadn't been warned of the poor organisation in the run up, commenting:

“Thank you Unison for showing — once again — what an effective, campaigning union looks like. I hope Theresa May hears your message loud and clear.”

I'm proud to be a Unison rep in libraries, proud of my workmates and how they've fought again and again, proud of my local community who occupied Carnegie Libraries, proud of my comrades across the country who have been campaigning against job losses, closures and privatisation. But the 3 November demonstration certainly doesn't show what an effective, campaigning union looks like. If we want to save Britain's public libraries we need to build the cross-union shop stewards network that reps have been calling on Unison to facilitate since 2012. We need to coordinate our strikes and campaign nationally and locally against Tory cuts. We need Labour to stand up for libraries. Alan Wylie, library campaigner, has warned Labour's policy on libraries will have to confront the question of the actions of Labour Councils:

“What about Labour councils like Lambeth, Lewisham and Sheffield that are cutting, closing, privatising and/or handing libraries over to volunteers? I hear you ask

“We need to get Labour to develop a national policy and then use it to whip these and other councils into line and commit to upholding and strengthening the statutory basis of public libraries.

“Then we stand a chance of reversing/halting the damage.”

- Payment for trial shifts
 - Payment for unpaid online training
 - Re-establishment of the Tronc Committee [a method for determining fair distribution of tips]
 - 60% / 40% split of tips changes to 65% / 35% in Feb preventing move to 50% / 50%
- More details will follow in next week's *Solidarity*.

TGIs workers declare win

As *Solidarity* went to press Unite announced that workers at TGI Fridays had won their dispute.

A post on Facebook said “workers at TGI Fridays won their well publicised dispute after taking highly effective industrial action and embarrassing the company into concessions.

- The victory has meant:
- Reinstatement of staff meals

Leicester Uni security staff fight cuts

By Clara Bennett

Security staff at the University of Leicester are currently in dispute with management, who wish to cut their working week to 35 from 37 hours, with the loss of two hours' pay.

Effectively this works out to be about £800 per year. A large sum for relatively low paid workers but a tiny sum for the university, especially when the team they are targeting is very small.

A consultative ballot was held last week where 100% turnout achieved 100% in favour of industrial action. This, from the 100% unionised team, should send a very clear message to the bosses that a cut in wages will not be tolerated. The security workers recently won a change in their rota and hope the momentum of winning will carry them through this dispute.

There were definite signs of solidarity between staff students and

security during the UCU pension dispute. As a consequence to this, the Unison members are now meeting with the University of Leicester student activist group who, during the UCU strike, occupied the office of the vice chancellor Paul Boyle.

The UCU branch is likely to discuss how to support security staff too.

I spoke with a couple of the security team who are very keen to receive messages of support from other trade unionists and activists but were hesitant to give their name as they were concerned about reprisals. On security worker said “I used to think that trade unions were a waste of time, but they've been brilliant”

They have urged people to go the web link below and sign their petition calling on the University to reverse its plans to cut wages.

- Sign the petition: bit.ly/2Doteoj

Tube station staff plan ballots

By Ollie Moore

London Underground station workers at Baker Street are preparing to ballot for strikes to demand the reinstatement of an unfairly sacked colleague, and to resist unfair disciplinary procedures.

The RMT union says the procedures used to dismiss a Customer Service Assistant after his probation were unfair. A statement on the RMT London Calling website said: “We note the company has undertaken to review the dismissal of Bro. Mahoney, and state here and now that unless Bro. Mahoney is reinstated without delay; this union will issue them the notice and commence a ballot of our members for industrial action.”

The RMT also cites “spurious disciplinary procedures” against two members, one of whom is the local union rep, as reasons behind the dispute.

The union has also declared a dispute on the Bakerloo South Cover Group, which includes Ox-

ford Circus, Piccadilly Circus, Charing Cross, Lambeth North, and Elephant and Castle, over short-staffing. A union activist told *Solidarity*: “There simply aren't enough staff to cover the work. If someone goes off sick, their duty will often be left uncovered, meaning people are working on incredibly busy gatelines on their own. Staff feel like they're being hammered.” The RMT said that short-staffing “creates undue stress on our members and puts them and the travelling public at risk.”

RMT also plans to ballot its train driver members at the Morden depot on the Northern Line over substandard conditions in the staff accommodation areas.

And, as *Solidarity* went to press, RMT and Aslef driver members on the Central Line, were due to strike on 7 November. Piccadilly line strikes for the same day have been suspended.

- For more on these disputes, see the *Tubeworker* blog at worker-sliberty.org/twblog.

Rail catering workers strike

By Ollie Moore

Rail workers employed by Rail Gourmet, which provides catering services on board mainline trains, struck on 30 October.

The workers, who work out of an Edinburgh depot on LNER Inter City services, are resisting management bullying and demanding pay-

ment for additional duties. An RMT statement said:

“This is a fight for workplace justice involving a crucial group of staff servicing the catering functions on LNER trains and they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect just like any other group of transport workers.”



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25 years in jail for Catalan leaders?

By Colin Foster

On Friday 5 November Spain's Supreme Court Prosecutor called for sentences of up to 25 years for the Catalan nationalist politicians jailed after the 1 October 2017 referendum on independence for Catalonia.

The prosecutor's case is that the Spanish constitution says that such a referendum could be called only with the agreement of the Spanish government. The Spanish government did not agree: in fact it mobilised state forces to try to disrupt the referendum.

The referendum ended inconclusively — only a 43% turnout, though 92% for Catalan independence.

A December 2017 election for the Catalan regional parliament was similarly inconclusive: separatist parties won a majority of seats but a minority of the vote. Since then the Catalan separatists have focused on pressing for Spanish government agreement to a referendum, and freedom for the jailed politicians.

From June 2018 the new Madrid minority government, headed by the "centre-left" PSOE, has attempted a balancing act. It depended on votes from Catalan nationalists to take office, and needs them to pass its Budget (though in Spain a government can survive losing its Budget, by rolling over the previous year's).

On the same day that the Prosecutor demanded drastic sentences, a key parliamentary ally of the PSOE, Pablo Iglesias of



Podemos, went to the prison to talk with the jailed Catalan nationalists and seek their support for the budget which Podemos has agreed with PSOE.

The Catalan nationalists say they want the prisoners freed before they back the budget. The government claims that it has no power to free them now that the court processes are underway, and that it has done the most it can by having its Solicitor-General make representations to the court to have the "rebellion" charge against them replaced by the lesser one of "sedition" (still carrying up to 12 year sentences).

The trial is expected to start in 2019 and last at least three months, with the decision not known before the local and regional elections scheduled for 26 May 2019.

On 4 November, about 15,000 people protested outside Lledoners prison calling for the prisoners' release. As the revolutionary socialists of IZAR point out:

"The acts of force, aggression and violence' existed but were used by the Spanish state against the Catalan people who only wanted to vote and decide their future".

BRAZIL NEEDS OUR SOLIDARITY

By Kelly Rogers

The left and the labour movement, feminists and LGBTQ people, are on the defensive after the election of far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro as president on 28 October 2018.

Bolsonaro takes office on 1 January, but already the right wing are energised. Street parties were held all over the country on the night of his election. Many places saw military vehicles parade through the streets. Thousands of people poured out to show their support.

More than 20 universities have been subjected to invasions by military police and the confiscation of teaching materials relating to anti-fascist history and activism. It is unclear where the orders came from, but since the invasions took place in the days immediately following Bolsonaro's victory, it seems very likely that they are linked.

A Landless Workers' Movement (MST) camp was set on fire by a group of Bolsonaro supporters in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, in southern Brazil. The

MST has expressed fear that these kinds of attacks are going to grow in the wake of Bolsonaro's election.

There has been a more generalised surge in mob violence surrounding the election. Women and LGBTQ individuals have borne the brunt of the spike in violence. Workers' Party supporters and leftists have also been targeted and reports have even been made of people being attacked simply because they were wearing red.

However, many are continuing to oppose Bolsonaro. Tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets in some of Brazil's major cities — São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre and Recife among them.

The demonstrations have been backed by the Frente Brasil Popular, a coalition of left-wing organisations that was formed in 2015.

The FBP encompasses LGBT organisations, student organisations, the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) and the main confederation of trade unions in Brazil, the CUT, in its list of almost seventy affiliates.

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