



& Workers' Liberty

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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LABOUR AND BREXIT

WHERE ARE THE 'THREE MS' TAKING US?



The Tory government is floundering, seeking to square the circle for a Brexit deal.

They are scratching around for a formula which both avoids a "hard border" in Ireland, and placates the Tory right who want no link to EU standards and rules after Brexit and don't care about Ireland.

Yet, as the Tories lurch from chaos to crisis and back again, the Labour leadership has dropped its call for an early general election, and abandoned even the lip-service it gave to the demand for a new public vote on Brexit.

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Brexit can still be stopped

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Socialism and neurodiversity

Janine Booth on how socialism can deal with the disadvantages suffered now by dyslexic, dyspraxic, and autistic people

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Marxism and science

Marxism is not a set of super-scientific keys to knowledge which can shortcut scientific research, argues Les Hearn

See page 9



Seamus Milne, Andrew Murray, Karie Murphy — key figures in the unelected "Leader's Office" of the Labour Party. Milne and Murray are longstanding Stalinists, Murphy is a former aide for Tom Watson and close to the Unite union leadership.

Labour: call a Special Conference!

Renew Labour!
L4SE
conference set
for 9 March

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Schools should teach LGBT rights

By Simon Nelson

In protests by some parents at the Parkfield Community School in Birmingham against the “No Outsiders” project, a number of parents say their religious freedom is threatened by the commitment of the Assistant Headteacher to teach LGBT rights.

The 400 parents, predominantly Muslims, who have signed the petition say that “No Outsiders” goes beyond the idea of treating LGBT people with respect and is not appropriate for young children.

Andrew Moffat, the teacher in question, has long been an advocate of LGBT education in schools. He has written a book, *Challenging Homophobia in Primary Schools*. He resigned from a previous school in 2013 when Christian and Muslim parents objected to a similar scheme.

The parents’ protests were sadly backed by a Labour councillor. It appears it took the threat of disciplinary action from the Birmingham

ham Council Labour Group for the councillor to say he had “overstepped the mark”.

For a group of parents to stop their children being taught about LGBT equality because it goes against the religious beliefs that some of them choose to promote to their children goes beyond the rights of religious freedom.

For the children to learn about different relationships, and read literature with same-sex-couple and trans characters is part of a rounded education. It provides support for LGBT students.

Some parents have withdrawn their children from the school. Similar threats have been made amongst some sections of the Haredi Jewish community, particularly in North London, who say they will home-school their children if they are forced to teach about LGBT equality.

Fatima Shah, who has led the protests, has said that, “Children are being told it’s OK to be gay, yet 98% of children at this school are Muslim. It’s a Muslim community. He said all parents are on board

with it, but the reality is, no parents are on board with it.”

The idea that Muslim children are not LGBT is what drives this opposition, and teaching unions, and the labour movement should stand up for schools being welcoming and safe spaces for LGBT students and school workers. The objection that children will become “confused” by these ideas is nonsensical.

Lots of things are confusing as you grow up. Being confused and trying to understand things, learning, asking questions are all an important part of childhood and life. The use of “confusion” is a cover for the children wondering about the contrast between certain religious beliefs and the beliefs of their parents, their own feelings and what the school is teaching.

Nor is this question, as some of the protesters say, of teaching about homosexuality crowding out maths, science and English.

In fact some of the lessons are in effect English lessons, only reading and using books that have LGBT characters.



Health-anuary

By Martin Thomas

For January 2019, 4.2 million people said they would join “Dry January”, a pledge to drop alcohol for the month.

The Alcohol Change UK group, which organised “Dry January”, says that (even if some of those 4.2 million had lapses) this year’s response was the biggest ever, and hugely up on January 2013, when the project started with just 4,000 signing up.

“Veganuary” had 250,000 people adopting a vegan diet for the month, more than its total for all its previous Januarys combined, 2014 to 2018.

84% of January-vegans and maybe 70% of all vegans are female (2018 stats), although vegetarians are nearly 50% male. “Dry January” also seems to draw many more women than men.

In the *Observer* of 3 February, the writer Linda Grant ranted against “Dry January” that it was “boring” and “what I missed was a sense of variety, that days could be different from one another”.

If your way of avoiding sameness is to booze more or differently one day than another, then you certainly should go “dry”.

Temperance was a big strand in the early British labour movement. A temperance group, the Socialist Prohibition Party, was one of those which came together to form the then-revolutionary Communist Party in 1920, and it contributed one of the CP’s early leaders, Bob Stewart.

Radical Readers:

Black Boy

***Black Boy* is a memoir by African-American Communist Richard Wright. Radical Readers in Space will be meeting via online video-call to discuss it on Thursday 28 February.**

The book is a memoir of Wright’s youth as a black kid in the American South, written from a Marxist point of view.

Please take a moment to share and RT the event page very widely.

bit.ly/rr-rw-bb
There’ll be a regular stream of content coming out on the page in the weeks leading up to the meeting. There’s an audiobook of *Black Boy* at bit.ly/bb-rw-ab

Stansted 15 to be sentenced

By Todd Hamer

On 6 February the Stansted 15 will be sentenced.

They have already been found guilty under anti-terrorist legislation following their successful action around a plane to halt deportation of 60 migrants to West Africa on 28 March 2017. They could receive life sentences.

On the same day, 6 February, it is believed the Home Office has chartered a flight to deport over 50 people to Jamaica. If it flies, this will be the first chartered plane to the Caribbean since the Windrush scandal was exposed a year ago.

One of the Stansted 15, Emma Hughes, is mother to a five-week old baby. It is at the whim of the judge whether she will be separated from her baby.



One of the likely deportees is Owen Haisley who has lived in the UK since he was four years old. He was told he could keep in touch with his three British-born children “via Skype”.

Over 10,000 people a year are forcibly deported under a system which the Home Affairs Select Committee describes as “inhumane”. Around half of these are EU citizens, a figure that has increased by over 40% since the

Brexit vote.

The policy of “deport first, appeal later” has been ruled unlawful by the Supreme Court but the practice continues.

Courts overturn 42% of the Home Office’s decisions to refuse the right to remain yet many are deported before their case can be heard.

Find out how you can support the campaigns at enddeportations.org

Working week gets longer

By Rhodri Evans

Average work hours per week are now increasing, for almost the first time since the early 19th century.

A research report from the Resolution Foundation finds:

“Since the early 19th century there has been, at least outside of wartime, a pretty steady decline in average hours worked. From the Second World War until the financial crisis average hours worked declined by an average of 12 minutes a year.

“In the decade since they have been flat, and average hours have actually risen recently”.

The decline was more like 20 minutes per year from 1945 to the early 1980s. That was the period when it became standard for workers to have two days off a week. It was already common for Saturday to be a half-day, and full two-day weekends had been common in the USA since the early 20th century.

In the neoliberal era after the early 80s, with unions weaker, the decline slowed to five or 10 minutes a year. The Resolution Foundation researchers reckon the most

likely explanation for the recent rise in hours is that, with lower real hourly wage rates (and benefits), people are working longer to keep household income at least up to pre-2008 levels (which they have done).

There has also been a big rise, to record levels, in the percentage of the working-age population in jobs.

The statistics tell our unions that they have a strong basis for battles to increase wages and reduce hours – a “tight” labour market in many sectors – but they are failing to wage those battles.

The Marxist Social Democratic Federation and British Socialist Party scorned temperance more than the moralistic and religiously-influenced Independent Labour Party; yet Trotsky, too, in the 1920s, would make open “propaganda against alcohol”.

In the era when working-class homes were often too bleak to be a comfortable refuge after work, and the pubs were the chief alternative, alcohol incapacitated, pauperised, and destroyed the health of, many working-class activists. It still does.

Even today, the statistics show hard-up students spending an average of £60 a month on “entertainment”, mostly alcohol. It is a good thing that spending is decreasing.

Between 2005 and 2015, non-drinkers among 16-24s rose from 18% to 29%. The number who, in a snapshot, hadn’t drunk alcohol over the previous week rose from 35% to 50%. Binge-drinkers fell from 27% to 18% (bit.ly/nhs-al).

If socialist dry-January people contribute the money they’ve saved from alcohol to our Workers’ Liberty fund drive, that’s good too.

I wasn’t aware of “Dry January” or “Veganuary” until they ended, but by coincidence I’d decided in mid-January to go vegan.

I went vegetarian after the mass slaughter of cattle in the BSE crisis of 1996. Then I became aware that the dairy industry delivers as much cruelty to animals, if not quite as much environmental harm, as the meat industry.

I was pushed into going vegan by the advice of a vegan comrade on how it can practically be done; and more fundamentally by the influence of a former school student of mine, a quiet and undemonstrative vegan in defiance of pressures from her family.

She’s also a brilliant mathematician and an admirably determined character. There’s a lesson here for socialists: our ability to convince workmates depends not just on our speeches about socialist politics, but also on us showing in other areas that we are thoughtful, honest, reliable people, so that they’ll think it worthwhile listening to us on issues where they start with a blur.

Socialist organisations need to unite the activists willing to promote socialism, without being distracted or divided by lifestyle arguments.

But we’re more likely to have an environment conducive to that if the successes of “dry January” and “Veganuary” continue.

Venezuela: risk of invasion

By Eduardo Tovar

Over the weekend 2-3 February, thousands of protestors gathered in rival demonstrations on the streets of Venezuela's capital, Caracas.

Juan Guaidó, who declared himself interim President on 23 January, remains committed to forcing out Nicolás Maduro. Guaidó has announced further opposition rallies for Wednesday 6 February and Saturday 9 February. The latter date is the last day of the ultimatum to Maduro set by several leading European states, including France.

On 31 January Guaidó gave a speech outlining his "national plan" for Venezuela, in which he prioritised coordinating humanitarian assistance, restoring public services, and solving people's dependency on subsidies. He also seeks to establish a "transitional government" and hold free elections.

In the same speech, he claimed that members of the Special Action Forces came to threaten him at his

apartment building.

The US, Brazil, and others continue to back Guaidó's power grab. White House national security adviser John Bolton was recently spotted carrying a notepad that read "5,000 troops to Colombia", which borders Venezuela.

Nonetheless, Maduro remains resolute. He has offered to hold early new elections to the National Assembly, though it is not clear how this re-elected National Assembly would relate to the government-controlled Constituent Assembly, which has the authority to rewrite the Venezuelan Constitution.

Guaidó has refused to rule out accepting US military support. Still, for now Maduro still seems to have the upper hand in this power-struggle.

As I reported in *Solidarity* 493, Guaidó's self-declaration as President appears to be a gambit to drive a wedge between Maduro and the Venezuelan top brass.

Although Jonathan Velasco, the



Venezuelan ambassador to Iraq, has declared his support for Guaidó, so far only one high-ranking military officer seems to have defected, namely Gen. Esteban Yanez Rodriguez of the Venezuelan air force's high command. I say "seems" because the video purporting to feature Yanez is edited and yet to be independently authenticated.

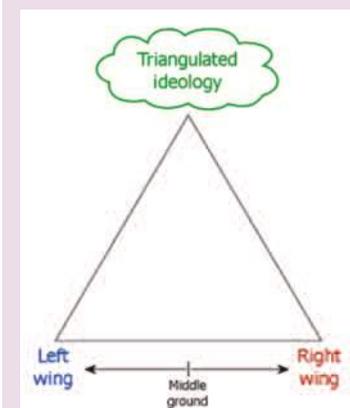
With some polls indicating that as many as 81% of Venezuelans want Maduro to relinquish power and Maduro continuing to keep control via the military, we stand by our assessment of Maduro's regime as Bonapartist authoritarianism.

Although both major sides in

Venezuela are backed by imperialist powers – the US in Guaidó's case, and Russia and China in Maduro's case – the Venezuelan people would suffer even worse if the sabre-rattling becomes an actual military intervention.

In short, we want Maduro to go, but it matters who ousts him. Unfortunately, the Venezuelan working class is not presently in a position to oust Maduro by its own power.

We will keep supporting efforts to build an independent, class-struggle left in Venezuela, while opposing any imperialist intervention



Brexit and unreason

By Colin Foster

Steve Richards is a routine political pundit, probably (in his 2017 book *The Rise of the Outsiders*, for example) a bit less hostile to Jeremy Corbyn than most of his type.

In the *Financial Times* on 1 February, however, he was acid about Corbyn, and with some justice.

"Like Mrs May, [Jeremy Corbyn] asserts rather than explains, repeatedly declaring that he supports 'a customs union', 'a close alignment with the single market' and 'workers' rights'. Why is this his position? What does he mean by these terms?"

In some media interviews Corbyn may have no choice but to limit himself to summary phrases. Yet he, or his office, could arrange longer printed-up speech texts, op-eds, or such as back-up — and they don't.

Reasoned argument is missing just because the position asserted does not come from reasoned argument. It comes from "triangulation", the desire to find a formula acceptable to a wide range of lobbies and groups.

In principled politics, the procedure is to work out what's right, then seek to convince people of it. In triangulation-politics, the procedure is to guess what people would like to hear, and then find something blurred enough to fit both what they want to hear and what you reckon acceptable and workable.

Another new twist is Jeremy Corbyn echoing some of the criticism from the Tory right and the DUP of the "backstop". After his talks with Theresa May on 30 January he said it was unacceptable that the UK could not quit the "backstop" unilaterally. Does he really think it wrong that Britain should agree an open-ended guarantee against a new "hard border" in Ireland?

Condescending, manipulative, splitting-the-difference politics can never build a socialist movement capable of enabling the working class to mobilise for its own emancipation.

More rail, less carbon



Climate

By Mike Zubrowski

New evidence backs up the need for a socialist, environmentalist transport policy. Meanwhile, Transport For London (TfL) and London Mayor Sadiq Khan continue to pursue regressive market-based "environmental" policies, which will likely make no reduction in emissions.

A report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) released at the end of January makes the case for "aggressive" expansion of railways across the world, to reduce net transport emissions.

Rail is the most efficient motorised method for passengers to travel, and much more so than cars and planes. In freight, it comes second only to shipping, and only just.

Diesel and electricity account for roughly half of rail energy use each, and rail's global energy use has remained roughly stable in recent years. When electricity is predominantly coal-powered, electric power is no greener, but with a transition to renewable and nuclear energy sources it could be extremely green. It is most green with

high passenger and freight throughput.

The rail system should be nationalised under democratic control, and be publicly funded to be free at the point of use for passengers. It should be progressively electrified and aggressively expanded to replace other medium and long distance forms of travelling.

Logistics and freight transportation, too, should be taken into public ownership, facilitating a transition from road and aviation transport to rail and shipping.

TfL has introduced regressive congestion charges for minicabs, which will see drivers lose up to 25% of their already low take-home pay, disproportionately impacting low-income and BME workers.

Weekly protests, starting 4pm Mondays on London Bridge, have been called by the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain's (IWGB) United Private Hire Drivers branch (UPHD). Crucially, TfL's policy will likely have little impact on emissions.

The IWGB instead proposes: capping the number of minicab vehicle licenses; place a licensing cost levy on private hire operators (e.g. Uber), based on the frequency of private hire vehicles from their fleet appearing on the congestion zone, rather than a flat daily charge to the drivers themselves; enforce workers' rights within the industry, as minimum wage enforcement would encourage operators to reduce the number of vehicles; and provide "rest spaces" for minicabs in London zones, as 50% of the time



Minicab drivers protest over the congestion charge

drivers spend on the road is without passengers, often "idling".

Significant investment to reduce the cost of public transport, and promote cycling and walking, would have much greater positive impacts, too.

ENDING COAL

The world's fourth-largest fleet of coal-fired power plants is Germany's. In the last weekend of January, the German coal commission published its plan for how to phase out coal.

However, it falls seriously short of even the Paris agreement, starting reductions of CO2 emissions only after 2030, and emitting 1.3 billion tons over the "below 2C pathway" limit.

WATER SHORTAGES

A study by the science journal *Nature* forecasts that climate change will impact half of the world's aquifers over the next

100 years.

Water held underground in soil or between rocks, "groundwater", is the world's largest source of freshwater and is relied on by over two billion people. Climate change will impact the way rain and moisture soak into the soil and "recharge" the groundwater.

As well as impacting water supplies, changes to moisture could push soil past a "tipping point", from a net absorber of CO2 to a net emitter, according to a different study by Nature, thus creating a positive feedback loop driving further climate change.

Internationally, socialists and the labour movement must seek to limit climate change as much as possible.

But we must also seek to mitigate its impacts, in this case through taking the sourcing, transportation and distribution of fresh water into collective democratic control, and ensuring everyone has adequate access.



Corrections

In *Solidarity* 493, the name "Roberto Fiore" was printed by mistake as "Roberto Fico".

Brexit can still be stopped

By Martin Thomas

Brexit can still be stopped. The first step, though, is to halt an emerging mood of retreat among anti-Brexit people.

"People switch off from responding to every depressing political twist and turn of Brexit", one activist wrote to us this week.

Another: "people in my local [anti-Brexit] group feel down after Jeremy Corbyn's responses on 28 and 29 January". Yet others have said: "Face facts. Brexit is going to go through. No amount of agitation now will make much difference. The task now is to prepare the left for after Brexit".

Versions of the same sentiment appear among the not-politically-active — "of course Brexit is wrong, but it's too complicated, I can't deal with it" — and among the defer-to-Corbyn types — "only the mainstream media is really bothered about Brexit. We should focus on other social issues".

This phase gives a textbook example of how a minority ruling class rules in a formally-democratic political system. Working-class people "switch off", persuaded that the rulers can always spin diversions and evasions faster than we can keep up with.

The job of socialists is to overcome this inertia and resignation. Sometimes we lose. By definition, as long as capitalism remains stable, mostly we lose. But in the case of Brexit all the improbabilities remain still open.

May may eventually get enough of the DUP and Tory right to settle for some minor

fudge on the backstop that she can get a tweaked deal through with help from some Labour rebels.

But the EU will give her little — very little indeed before 14 February, maybe a little more as the "cliff-edge" approaches. The logic is clear: a "backstop", by definition, can fall as soon as a working alternative is available, but only then.

Moreover, a significant number of the Tory right are positively happy with "no deal".

The problem with May doing a deal with the Labour front bench through warmer words on workers' rights and a lasting customs union is not lack of common ground, but that neither side really wants to do such a deal.

For May to get a deal by defying the Tory back benches by instead wooing the Labour front bench would mean splitting the Tory party. Conversely, Labour's Leader's Office want to appear to be "seeking unity" and "not blocking Brexit", but they do not want to end up taking responsibility for May's formula and risking a Labour split.

A no-deal Brexit is now more probable. Yet the Tory government will do a lot to avoid becoming seen as the team who caused a no-deal crash-out because they were incompetent to make a deal.

Jeremy Corbyn dropped talk of an early general election, let alone a referendum, in his response to May on 29 January.

It will be hard for him avoid re-raising them if May fails to fix something on 14 February, as she almost certainly will.



Sheffield Labour for a Socialist Europe stall on 2 February

In short, there will be continued turmoil and disarray at the top, at least up to 29 March, and very likely longer. A postponement of Article 50 is quite likely, but will not end the turmoil or resolve the impasse.

The Labour leadership is still under diverse pressures.

All the outcomes are improbable, but one

of them has to happen, so we can be sure that an improbable outcome will happen.

The improbable outcome of a complete impasse in Parliament which leads to an early general election, or a new public vote, is still on the cards.

Labour-focussed campaigning is especially vital in keeping that option open.

The curious incident of the Stalinists who didn't bark



By Jim Denham

In possibly his most famous Sherlock Holmes short story, *Silver Blaze*, Conan Doyle introduced the idea of the "negative fact":

Gregory (Scotland Yard detective): "Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

Holmes: "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

Gregory: "The dog did nothing in the night-time."

Holmes: "That *was* the curious incident."

Holmes drew a conclusion from an expected fact (the dog barking) that did *not* occur.

On Tuesday 29 January the Commons held a series of big votes on Brexit. Probably the most important was Yvette Cooper's amendment creating procedures to keep Britain in the EU beyond 29 March in the event that no deal is reached by the end of the month. Corbyn's office had come out in support of this, albeit very late in the day.

Fourteen Labour MPs defied the Labour whip and voted with the Tories, and a series of shadow ministers went missing for the

crucial vote.

An amendment pushing what is sometimes charitably referred to as Labour's Brexit "policy" was then roundly defeated, before May's plan for reneging on her agreement on the Irish backstop was passed — with support from seven Labour MPs.

Corbyn's office denied giving MPs from Leave seats a "nod or a wink" that it was OK to rebel, but also made clear that shadow ministers who helped save Theresa May's plan will not be sacked.

Big news, you'd think — especially for the *Morning Star*, a publication that has carried repeated editorials and articles backing a no-deal Brexit, claiming that EU membership would be the major obstacle to Corbyn implementing his policies, accusing May of secretly plotting to derail Brexit, denouncing the nefarious schemes of Brussels bureaucrats, and warning of sinister "subterranean channels of communication between elements in Labour and the EU powers that be."

Indeed, on the day of the votes, the *Morning Star* carried a lengthy report of the Communist Party's call for "a People's Brexit" and a rambling editorial claiming that "Brazil and Russia, India, China and South Africa, find their individual and collective interests are best served by a more equal trading relationship with developed capitalist countries than one constrained by EU rules."

The following day (Wednesday 30 January) I was looking forward to reading what the

Morning Star would have to say about the Parliamentary outcome. Sadly, it had gone to press before the votes. That day's editorial was headed "Parliament's paralysis on Brexit must be broken from without" and warned Labour against ruling out no-deal or supporting an extension to Article 50 (i.e. the Cooper amendment).

That was to be the last editorial comment we'd see that week (or, indeed, up to the day I am writing, 4 February). Thursday's *Morning Star* came and went with no comment. And Friday's. And Saturday's. And Monday's.

Can it be that the editorial team simply can't work out whether or not to applaud the step towards no-deal and MPs "standing up to" Brussels? Or is it just that the Labour "rebels" included that old *Morning Star* favourite Dennis Skinner, and they're not going to criticise him, whatever he does?

Then there's the suggestion (raised by the New Statesman's Stephen Bush as long ago as October last year) that close *Morning Star* associate Andrew Murray — who works part-time as Len McCluskey's chief of staff at Unite and part-time in Corbyn's office — argued at a Team Corbyn strategy meeting that the Labour Party should vote for Theresa May's deal.

Perhaps the *Morning Star* realises that in the end Corbyn is going to upset someone: the so-called "constructive ambiguity" of promising to deliver Brexit while not com-

pletely ruling out a second referendum to reverse it cannot hold forever. You can't please all of the people all of the time.

Given that the paper is ultimately controlled by the Communist Party of Britain, it's worth noting the CPB's policy on Brexit (as outlined in the paper on 28 January):

"The 'pro-EU Tory minority regime' and the EU Commission could not be trusted to reach any withdrawal agreement that did not serve the interests of big business and the capitalist class ...

"Locking Britain into the EU Customs Union would make any such agreement even worse", Robert Griffiths explained, "because it would outlaw import regulation to protect strategic industries such as steel, while also impeding a mutually beneficial fair trade policy with developing countries' ...

"The CP executive called for a 'People's Brexit' to leave the EU, its Single Market [and] Customs Union."

As that policy is in direct contradiction to Labour's call for a new, permanent customs union and the "closest possible alignment" with the single market, maybe the *Morning Star*'s editorial team decided their best bet was to say... nothing.

As Holmes would say: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."



Where are the “3 Ms” taking us?

Continued from front page

Labour’s shift was symbolised, and expressed, by Jeremy Corbyn’s meeting with Theresa May, the day after the Commons votes on 29 January, to discuss Brexit plans.

To meet May with him, Corbyn took his backroom “director of strategy” Seumas Milne and “chief of staff” Karie Murphy, plus the chief whip, the old Labour right-winger Nick Brown. He sidelined shadow Brexit sec-

retary Keir Starmer and shadow chancellor John McDonnell.

Starmer is no left-winger, but has favoured a new public vote and even (on 5 February) free movement. McDonnell has said that a new public vote is “inevitable” and that he would vote Remain in it.

Milne, Murphy, and their close associate Andrew Murray, were not elected to their high posts by the labour movement on the basis of their activity in the movement.

Milne and Murray were members of

Straight Left, the ultra-Stalinist fragment of the old Communist Party, in the early 1980s. Their world-view remains much the same.

Murphy comes more from an old Labour-right background — she used to work for Labour deputy leader Tom Watson — but has allied with Milne and Murray.

Solidarity vehemently opposes Milne’s and Murray’s world-view. We want to deal with it by open debate and discussion in the labour movement rather than by bans or prescriptions.

But Milne’s and Murray’s influence at the top of the Labour Party (and their well-paid jobs: over £100,000 a year for Milne) come not at all from them having won debates and established their standing through activity in the ranks of the labour movement.

Before 2015 Murray worked for the *Morning Star* as a journalist, and then (no thanks to any activity in the union as a rank-and-filer) in different unelected-official posts in the Unite union. Milne was a senior journalist for the *Guardian*.

When Jeremy Corbyn won the Labour leadership in 2015, it was by a surge of scattered social revolt at the base, not by the triumph of a long-organised and well-formed Labour left. Corbyn cast around in the top circles of bourgeois society for “experts” to run his “Leader’s Office”, and ended up with Milne, Murray, and another old Straight-Left, Steve Howell, followed later.

Labour’s policy on Brexit should be decided by democratic debate, not by office cabals.

Labour should call a special one-day or half-day conference on Brexit, as demanded by the rail union TSSA and groups such as Labour for a Socialist Europe.

That special conference would be the best way to marginalise those in the anti-Brexit section of the old Labour right who are whispering speculations about a split to team up with pro-Remain Tories (and maybe the Lib Dems) to form a new “centre” party.

The reversal of the economic integration, the lowering of borders, and the limited social levelling-up achieved in the EU would be a step back, not forward. The EU’s bureaucratic and neoliberal shape should be changed by cross-Europe labour movement

Rallying Labour for migrant rights and against Brexit

By Sacha Ismail

Fifty Labour activists from ten boroughs across London attended a 4 February emergency meeting in Lewisham to discuss the Labour Party’s stance on migrants’ rights.

The meeting was called by Labour for a Socialist Europe, Labour Campaign for Free Movement and Another Europe is Possible, in cooperation with local left activists, in response to Labour’s fiasco over the Tory Immigration Bill. In Parliament on 28 January, the Labour front bench at first recommended abstention on the Tory bill. It swung to voting against only under pressure and at the last minute.

The meeting heard speeches from two L4SE Steering Committee members – Urte Macikene of Dulwich and West Norwood and Alena Ivanova of Tower Hamlets – before a wide-ranging discussion.

The contributions touched on issues ranging from the party’s position on Brexit and how we can organise most effectively to stop Brexit over the next weeks, to Labour councils and policies under which children are denied school meals on the grounds that their migrant families must have “no recourse to public funds”.

We also talked about the role being played

in all this by Stalinist politics in the trade union bureaucracy (particularly in Unite).

And we discussed the more general question of exerting pressure on the Corbyn leadership and the role of the organised left.

Participants suggested amendments to a statement drawn up by Labour for a Socialist Europe and added their names; the meeting also came up with other ideas for campaigning.

L4SE campaigners around the country were on the streets on 9 March with “stop Brexit” stalls, are gathering signatures for a petition demanding Jeremy Corbyn back a new public vote, are pushing motions in Labour Parties and trade union branches.

And will protest in Parliament Square on 14 February, the day of the next Commons votes.

- For more and updates, see the L4SE website: labourforasocialisteurope.org.

- Labour for a Socialist Europe conference — Saturday 9 March, 11:30 to 5, at Camden School for Girls, Sandall Road, London NW5 2DB. Register now: bit.ly/l4se-9m

- Labour for a Socialist Europe protest at Parliament Square, on the day of the next Commons votes about Brexit — Thursday 14 February, from 5pm.

£4,532 to go, £10,468 so far

£200 came in for our fund appeal this week — £130 in sales money for our new book on 1919 (Janine Booth has paid the production costs of the book as her contribution to the appeal), £30 in three kilograms of small change from Zack in Bristol, and £40 miscellaneous.

The same day as we write this fund column, we’ve mailed Amazon with three copies of our book *The Left in Disarray* and two copies of our book on the miners’

£15,000

strike. Odd but true, in most months we sell more copies of our backlist of books via Amazon than hand-to-hand or via our website.

Selling more books hand-to-hand isn’t strictly speaking fund-raising, but it has the same effect. After mailing books to Amazon we do no better than cover our costs, because Amazon takes 60% of the revenue. A copy of *The Left in Disarray* sold hand-to-hand is £8 gain above the print costs — or £12 direct gain. Keep sending the donations — bags of small coins, or e-payments, whatever — but also consider buying and selling more of our books.

We failed to pick up on “dry January” — our bad — but it’s still not too late for comrades who did go “dry” for January to send us the money they saved by avoiding alcohol.

If you missed “dry January” too, why not consider a “dry February” and redirect the money saved to help our campaigns against Brexit and for free movement?

- www.workersliberty.org/donate
- www.workersliberty.org/books

struggle, not used as an excuse to move to equally bureaucratic and neoliberal, but more walled-off, nation-states.

Labour should take its stand on those truths, and campaign to win a majority for them, not dither and “triangulate”.

Since 29 January the Labour leadership has offered no more than mild demur to the eleven shadow ministers who abstained on the Cooper amendment which would have empowered Parliament to stop a “no-deal” Brexit.

It has complained only in a mutter about the 14 Labour MPs, mostly right-wingers, who voted against the Cooper amendment, and the few who voted for the (right-wing Tory) Brady amendment.

It looks unlikely that the Labour leadership will actually do a full-scale deal on a Brexit formula with Theresa May. The backlash against such a pact, on both Tory and Labour sides, would be too much.

Short of that, though, the current Labour stance could well license enough Labour MPs, in pro-Brexit constituencies, to vote for the Tories and get them through their crisis.

The revolt against the Labour front bench’s plan to abstain on the Tories’ Immigration Bill, on 28 January, forced the front bench at the last minute to switch to opposition.

That shows what can be done. It shows the way forward. Build Labour for a Socialist Europe. Call a Labour special conference. Stop Brexit. Force a new public vote.

Neurodiversity, capit

By Janine Booth

Autistic, dyspraxic, dyslexic and other people with atypical brain wiring have particular experiences under capitalism – with positive and negative aspects, but for many people including distress and disadvantage.

This article looks at the experience of neurodivergent people under capitalism, how socialism might remove distress and discrimination, and how we can achieve that.

CAPITALISM AND NEURODIVERSITY
Capitalism developed society's productive capacity, enabling it to provide people with goods and services that no previous society had been able to.

But it placed productive resources with private owners, so production increased in a narrow, profit-driven, undemocratic way, creating inequality and distress, and also marginalising neurologically atypical people.

How does capitalism do this?

Rigid organisation of work. Capitalism makes every worker in a production process do the same thing in the same way at the same speed, which does not work well for people who work at a different pace or who see things in a different way.

Although there have been many changes since the mills and factories of the nineteenth century, modern workplaces such as call centres, offices and warehouses work in similarly rigid ways. Lack of control over work processes is a key factor in the disadvantage and distress that neurodivergent people experience.

Sensory overload. Many neurodivergent people have unusually high (or low) sensitivities to sensory inputs. An autistic or a dyspraxic person may, for example, be affected more than average by light, sound, smell or texture. Capitalism rapidly intensi-

fied the sensory environment, generating much more light and noise than previous societies, particularly in big cities.

Social premium. How confident you are, how easily you get on with people, how well you "fit in": such social factors are becoming more and more important to your "success" in the capitalist marketplace. This makes it harder for people who find social interaction difficult or stressful, who dislike eye contact or who communicate in atypical ways, which includes many autistic and otherwise neurodivergent people.

Capitalist production has shifted towards service industries, where "soft skills" are valued more highly, and even public services have become commodities in which managers insist that "customers" require service with a smile. For example, railway employers have become less concerned about their staff's ability to do railway work and more concerned about their ability to say "thank you" and "have a nice day" to people after telling them that their train has been cancelled.

Commodifying neurodiversity. As knowledge of neurological diversity has grown, so capitalists have become aware of a new market for new products. Companies produce and sell software, toys, sensory aids, expensive treatments and more. Some of this is useful, but some of it is not, and some of it is harmful. It promotes the idea that what atypical people need is not acceptance but products.

Profit-driven research. What research there is into autism and other neurodivergent conditions is driven by the companies doing the research, which are driven by developing products that they can sell. Research is very important, but there is a political content to what is driving it.

The awful American charity "Autism Speaks" spends millions of dollars on trying to find a cure for autism rather than provid-

ing support services or campaigning for acceptance, and in doing so is harming autistic people by portraying autism as a tragic illness or defect that needs to be eliminated.

Uneven progress. The brain wiring that is now called dyslexia has probably existed for thousands of years, but it did not become a problem and was not labelled "dyslexia" until written language became widespread.

So the reason that dyslexic people have a problem or disability is not because they are faulty, but because society developed written language in a form that does not suit their brain wiring. There is an interesting case of an English man raised in Japan, who grew up bilingual, severely dyslexic in English and not dyslexic at all in Japanese. This shows that his so-called impairment, his disability, is constructed by something that has developed socially i.e. the form that language takes.

Capitalism did something fantastic – it inherited, developed and universalised written language – but it did so in a way that suited the majority neurology and left behind the minority that it does not suit.

HOW COULD SOCIALISM DO BETTER?

Under socialism, production will be planned for need rather than for profit.

Universal design. With collective ownership and democratic planning, we could transform the built environment, applying "Universal Design". Buildings and outdoor designed spaces can have not only step-free access but also a minimum-distress sensory environment, clear navigation, information in various formats, relaxation spaces, and so on.

Support services. Socialism will provide the support services that neurodivergent people need, and which capitalism does not provide.

Pluralism in communication methods. In our current society, it is "efficient" for a particular capitalist enterprise to insist on communication conformity. For example, a company will exclude dyslexic people by insisting on all reports being in writing, or exclude autistic people by insisting on eye contact in interviews. By contrast, socialism will organise society collectively, rather than in competing units, so can enable people to communicate verbally, visually, or in whichever way suits them.

Democratic and accountable research. Under socialism, we will be able to resource research, and to focus it on better understanding neurological difference in order to reduce disadvantage and distress, with neurodivergent people having a say about the sort of research that is done. Moreover, instead of having lots of separate research departments of separate companies competing with each other, researchers will be able to co-operate and thus achieve more rapid progress.

Workers' control. Having more control over our sensory environment, the hours we

work and the pace and method of our work will take a great deal of pressure and hostility away from neurodivergent people. It would make workplaces less distressing and therefore more accessible.

Only sixteen per cent of autistic adults of working age are in full-time employment – not because only sixteen per cent of autistic adults are capable of working full-time, but because working conditions are so hostile and we have so little control.

Many autistic people struggle with jobs where it is not clear how their work fits in to the overall production process. This is common under capitalism, which does not consider this to be the worker's concern, and which requires you only to do your bit to produce a product which is taken away from you and sold. Socialism will end this alienation of workers from the products of our labour and reconnect us with the work we do.

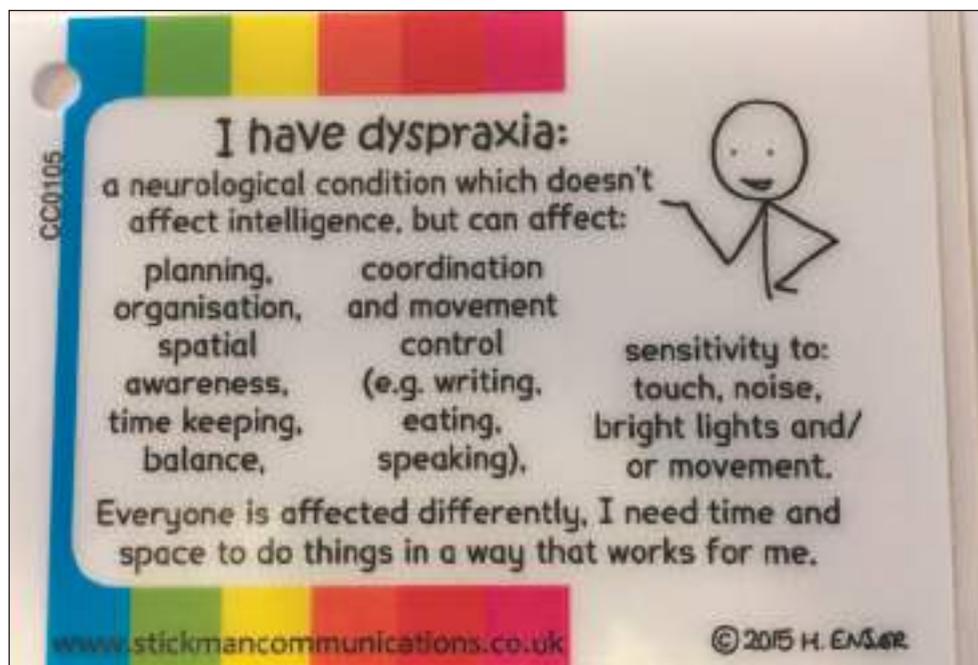
The good without the bad. We want socialism to benefit neurodivergent people by combining the advantages of mass production with a renewed scope for diversity and individuality. We don't want to go back to pre-capitalist societies or to abandon the levels of production that we have now (although there are levels of production that we don't need, such as weapons, advertising and duplicate products).

We want mass production without everyone having to be the same, sitting next to each other, doing the same thing, producing the same fifteen widgets per hour, meeting the same performance targets. If you want to go off on an obsessive tangent about something then you might actually come up with a real breakthrough, so let's have a society that allows that.

Co-operative not competitive. Competition is distressing for many neuroatypical people (as well as for many neurotypical people). Capitalism encourages us to compete over everything. Employers pit workers against each other: who is going to do better in their performance review, who is going to get the bonus, who is going to be employee of the month. Firms compete with each other, making employment insecure. A cooperative economy would remove that level of hostility.

Reduced sensory overload. Democratic, considerate planning could reduce sensory stimuli. A clean, sustainable environment would be better than an assault on your senses. A co-operative rather than competitive economy would reduce the volume of advertising. Imagine a world without adverts and see how much calmer and more pleasant it would be.

Karl Marx said: **from each according to ability, to each according to need.** This is the guiding principle of what we are fighting for: that people contribute to society in the way and to the level that they are able to and receive the support and resources that they need to get on with their lives.



Keyring card for someone with dyspraxia, which affects about 10% of the population

alism, and socialism

FROM CAPITALISM TO SOCIALISM

We have achieved some progress under capitalism.

For example, left-handedness is a neurological variant, and in the not-too-distant past, left-handed people were seriously mistreated. Schools caned kids' left hands or tied them behind their backs to force them to write with their right hands. But now there are left-handed scissors and guitars, and very few left-handed people would say that they are oppressed, even if things might be a bit awkward at times.

That is an example of how by campaigning, arguing and enlightenment, we can achieve progress within capitalism. But these changes were at low or no cost to capitalists, and even profitable for some.

That is not going to be the case with other disadvantages facing neurodivergent people. **Capitalism will not willingly make changes that cost it money or power:** it will mean that they are not in charge of "their" workplaces any more, and they will not accept that graciously.

We can **make the case for liberation through socialism:** we can say to autistic, dyslexic, other neurodivergent people and our allies that yes, we can fight for advances within this society, but we can go beyond this to imagine and fight for a different society. We can do this most effectively if we **develop theory**, write and discuss seriously about Marxism, autism and neurodiversity, as Workers' Liberty has started to do.

As knowledge grows about autism, dyslexia and the diversity of human brain structure, it is important to **avoid going along with mainstream "neurodiversity awareness" and the employers' agenda.** Bland "awareness" campaigns ask only that people notice the issue a bit more; they do not demand change. We need action not just awareness.

Some employers now acknowledge neurodiversity. For some, this gives them another equality kitemark, another badge to wear to show that they care. Others are taking up the issue for directly exploitative reasons, and if you look close up, you can find



them openly admitting this.

There are employers who actively recruit autistic people, attracting praise for providing employment to people who struggle in other jobs. But then you might read an interview with the Chief Executive, who explains that they like autistic workers because "they don't waste time having conversations with other people, so they are more productive", or something similar. These employers seem interested in us because they think they can exploit us more than others, and are probably recruiting the more independent, skilled autistic people, rather than those who have more limited capacity and need constant support.

We campaign for radical, life-improving demands. The draft Labour Party Autism and Neurodiversity Manifesto, which a group of us have been working on with the

support of John McDonnell, has all sorts of progressive policies to address the issues we have mentioned.

We can also discuss what transitional demands would be useful on the issue of neurodiversity – what demands could guide us in the fight that we have now but also prompt people to look at changing society as a whole in order to achieve them thoroughly.

We need to educate and mobilise our movement. Let's be out there protesting against abuse and discrimination. Activists have protested against US charity Autism Speaks and its negative portrayal of autism, against the Judge Rotenberg Centre and its electric shock treatment of autistic young people, against snake-oil salespeople and their quack cures. And let's step up our training and educational programmes across the labour and neurodiversity movements.

We will be more effective if **we make the left and the labour movement neurodiversity-friendly** and more accessible to neurodivergent people.

That means **using materials in different formats.** We can not just rely on a text-heavy newspaper any more. People may not read it if they are dyslexic; or they may not read huge chunks at a time if they have a shorter attention span than others. Thanks to capitalism, the technology exists where we can easily do things in different formats.

We can very easily make short videos about what we want to say about socialism; we can use graphic methods; we can travel around and speak to large and small gatherings; we don't have to rely on just the printed word any more.

We can also be **more socially inclusive.**

Of course people form friendship groups in political movements, but let's be aware that this can leave people out and let's ensure that people are included in what we do, in our events and activities, even if they don't banter like others do.

Harassment and bullying exclude neurodivergent and other people. The labour movement has never been immune from these, and I think the problem may be on the increase. If people are treated badly and made to feel bad about themselves, then in the end they burn out or walk away. The culture of respectful comradeship does not exist across our movement in the way that we need it to.

We can also **improve the sensory environment at our events:** provide a quiet room, tone down the sensory stimulus.

TO SUMMARISE:

Capitalism develops productive resources, but it does so in the interests of the small ruling class that is motivated by making profit and so creates distress and disadvantage for neurodivergent people.

By reorganising society on a socialist basis, with a democratically-planned economy geared towards human need not private profit, we can start to remove those barriers and problems that capitalism creates and make a more inclusive, less discriminatory society.

We have looked at some of the ways of how to get there – mobilising, developing theory, making our own movement more accessible.

We are beginning to show the potential of achieving liberation through socialism.



Bolshevism, the civil war, and Stalinism

By Martin Thomas

In the weeks after the Russian workers' councils declared themselves the country's rulers, on 25 October 1917, the Bolshevik (and then Bolshevik/ Left SR) government had essentially no means to implement its policies other than power and cogency of its political agitation.

It inherited no functioning state machine. On 12 February 1918 the Soviet government officially decreed the total demobilisation of the army, which was anyway in collapse.

Most government officials at first refused to cooperate. The new People's Commissars had to scabble just to find an office, a table, some chairs, some ready cash, to begin even nominal operation.

The Red Army was officially inaugurated on 20 February, but at first it could be built into an actual army only by persuasion and agitation.

The Bolshevik party's central "machine" consisted essentially of Sverdlov and half a dozen assistants. Their ability to keep strict organisational tabs on party members and units was slight even in St Petersburg and Moscow, let alone in outside areas with which even basic communication was difficult.

The Bolshevik party was a powerful revolutionary factor because of the force of its ideas and its revolutionary will, not because of any special strength of its organisational machine.

Far from the Bolshevik party imposing a centralised structure of its own on the new state, the Bolshevik party acquired a strong centralised machine only as a by-product of its effects to construct a new state centralised enough to fight a civil war.

"NESTED" INSIDE

Dangerously, and ultimately tragically, the centralisation of the Bolshevik party was "nested" inside the centralism of the state machine, rather than standing beside it.

But that happened through the constraints of the civil war, not through deficiencies in the Bolsheviks' ideas of democracy.

Arguably, the tragedy of the civil war could have been diminished if the Bolshevik party in October 1917 had been more stereotypically "Bolshevik" – ruthless, organisationally tight, capable of having its own

centralised machine apart from and alongside any state centralism.

The "making" of the revolution was not just the uprising on 25 October and the vote in the Congress of Soviets to oust the unelected Provisional Government, but the activity in the first few months through which the new workers' government won support as a viable administration.

Many of the best-known Bolshevik leaders resigned from their positions soon after the revolution in protest at the Bolshevik majority's refusal to accept the Mensheviks' and SRs' conditions for a coalition government. Then they were won round.

In October, the Mensheviks and the SRs had walked out of the Congress of Soviets in protest. Their entry into discussion on a coalition government, even though they posed impossible conditions, was a first step back. In April 1918, Martov's "Menshevik Internationalists" voted to recognise the Bolshevik regime as a proletarian government.

The first attempt at armed overthrow of the Soviet government was set in motion on 31 October, by General Krasnov, leading a body of cossacks. It was defeated by two Bolsheviks smuggling themselves into the cossack barracks at 3am and arguing with the soldiers for five hours until they persuaded them to wait and see.

The next day, Bolsheviks were able to arrest Krasnov. They released him as soon as he gave his word of honour not to attempt counter-revolution again. The freed Krasnov immediately headed for the south in order to mobilise a counter-revolutionary army there!

It would be as foolish to mock the Bolsheviks' "softness" in late 1917 as it would be to recoil in horror from their "hardness" in 1921. In neither era could the Bolsheviks jump over the head of history.

Tsarist Russia did not give them the possibility of organising a party that could be "ideally" efficient, centralised, and ruthless.

The Red Army was built, and the civil war was won, only by repeated episodes of daring comparable to that of the Bolsheviks who won over Krasnov's cossacks. As the Red Army acquired military clout and structure, the Bolsheviks used that ruthlessly. But throughout, and right through to the peasant revolts in summer 1921, agitation, by voice, leaflets, and pamphlets, was primary.

They could only have won the civil war by that agitation being successful. All the advantages of pre-established force were on the side of the Whites, who had most of the old Tsarist generals and top officers, plus the backing of substantial foreign forces including the "Czech Legion" (the strongest coherent armed force in Russia at the time of the revolution).

As the civil war proceeded, the SRs and most of the Mensheviks swung back to the positions they had had between July and October 1917, when they allied with bourgeois politicians who, when they could, suppressed the Bolsheviks and their newspapers. By the end of the civil war, there was widespread weariness, resentment at rigours, desire for a "return to normal".

Many follies were committed under war communism. There was much misguided making virtue out of necessity during it. Trotsky's call for a proto-NEP in early 1920 was surely not too early, possibly should have come earlier, and conceivably would have done better than "war communism" right from the start in 1918.

But look at it without hindsight. War com-

munist and the Red Terror were inaugurated following the assassination by Left-SR Cheka people of the German ambassador (designed to provoke renewed war with Germany) and abortive insurrection of July 1918; the assassination by SRs of the Bolsheviks Volodarsky (June 1918) and Uritsky (August 1918), and their attempt to assassinate Lenin on 30 August 1918.

War communism and the Red Terror were emergency measures by a government which had just seen even those who had previously been its closest allies attempt an armed uprising against it, and try to tip the country into a new disastrous war with Germany.

There were some incidents of "Red Terror" before August 1918. For example, the massacre of five thousand officers by rank and file soldiers in two incidents in January 1918, which were neither decreed nor agitated for by the Bolsheviks.

Russian peasant life before the Revolution was extremely violent. Part of the mission of the revolution was to end that culture of violence. But first the revolution had to happen, and consolidate itself if only for a short while.

The Red Terror was partly designed to control and restrain the terror "from below" (there was something of the same with the Terror in the French Revolution, which also started "from below"), and was partly motivated by the fact that, where persuasion could not work – and it couldn't always – and where you needed to terrify the enemy – and in war you do – mild measures could not work with a population accustomed over generations to high levels of violence.

Formal and procedural democracy was no incidental for the Bolsheviks. For decades it had been the chief cause for which they endured jail and exile. Right up until 1917, the Bolsheviks had argued that the maximum possible in Russia, short-term, was radicalism in clearing away the old Tsarist lumber and instituting a democratic republic.

CRUSHING PROSPECTS

After the civil war got under way, the Bolsheviks believed – and with evidence from Finland in 1918 and Hungary in 1919 – that their ousting would not lead to some moderate regime but to a Russian version of fascism.

It would also lead to a crushing of the prospects of revolution in the West. So their determination was to hold on as long as they could, which they were sure would not be very long, to keep those prospects open.

The remarkable thing about, for example, the stories of the Bolsheviks manipulating or delaying soviet votes in 1918 is how high the standards were which they had set themselves, and which they felt they had to infringe on.

For governments in all-consuming war, war which threatens the very existence of the polity, to allow elections at all is rather rare.

The British government in World War 2 counts historically as exceptional wartime democracy because it allowed debates in Parliament and a fair degree of press freedom. Yet it pretty much suppressed popular votes – there was no general election between 1935 and 1945, and in wartime the big parties renounced all contests in by-elections. Newspapers and MPs favouring the enemy, even implicitly, were banned or jailed. Yet Britain was never invaded.

In early 1921, the full-scale civil war had finished. But the Bolsheviks knew that the



overthrow of Robespierre – initially, by what presented itself as merely a dissident Jacobin faction – on 9 Thermidor (27 July 1794), followed within a few months by a smooth but speedy slide into full-scale White Terror.

They knew also that Thermidor had been triggered, paradoxically, by the great French victory at Fleurus (26 June 1794). The Fleurus victory produced a backlash against the rigours of the revolutionary regime.

The Bolsheviks in 1921 faced a far greater mass exhaustion than the Jacobins in 1793. Fourteen million dead since 1914! Four and a half million dead in the civil war! Seven million abandoned children! Industrial production collapsed!

Harassed, exhausted, the Bolsheviks nevertheless resolved to try to stave off Thermidor long enough to keep open the possibility of reconstituting the working class and (as Rakovsky would later put it) "re-educating [it] in the love of liberty", and the possibility of victorious workers' revolution in Western Europe.

So, they emphasised closing ranks, keeping the party solid against the triple threat posed to it by the large surviving corps of Tsarist officials, the exhaustion and revolution-weariness of the mass of workers and peasants, and the new layers of merchants and rich peasants who they knew would emerge with NEP.

They were defeated. The party was crushed between the stones of officialdom and mass disillusion, with the assimilation of a part of the party into the officialdom on the one hand, and the "Lenin levy" on the other.

Lenin wrote to Miasnikov in August 1921: "We have many maladies. Mistakes... have greatly aggravated the maladies springing from our situation... Want and calamity abound... They have been terribly intensified by the famine of 1921.

"Revive the Soviets; secure the co-operation of non-Party people; let non-Party people verify the work of Party members: this is absolutely right. No end of work there, and it has hardly been started".

The work was soon engulfed by Stalinism. That happened, not because the Bolshevik party was too strong, but fundamentally because history made it impossible for it to be – in relation to the pressures of the time – other than "too weak".

• This article is an abridgment from a much longer one discussing Sam Farber's book *Before Stalinism*: bit.ly/b-cw-s

In Defence of Bolshevism

Max Shachtman



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Marxists and science

By Les Hearn

"Marxism does not provide a ready-made key for making judgements about scientific ideas. It cannot substitute for a detailed knowledge of the appropriate scientific material." — Peter Mason, Marxism, Science and the Big Bang

Marx and Engels saw themselves applying a scientific method to economics and the dynamics of class societies.

Their philosophical approach was derived from that of Hegel who used dialectics, a discussion between opposing points of view, to arrive at truths. Marx and Engels applied Hegel's methods to the real world, in particular showing that the capitalist mode of production gave rise to a class whose interests lay in overthrowing it and replacing it with a socialist society.

Marx and Engels' methods were therefore historical and materialist but later came to be called dialectical materialism (DM), unfortunate because this jargon term masks its straightforwardness.

Seeing their work as part of science in general, both were deeply interested in the natural sciences of their time. Indeed, Marx wrote of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* that it "contains the basis in natural history for our view."

Eleanor Marx's partner, Edward Aveling, was a populariser of Darwin's theory. Simon Ings, in his recent *Stalin and the Scientists*, sees Marx as believing in scientific government, where science would be extended into politics until there was "no distinction between knowledge and policy." Sadly, evidence-based government policies are just as elusive now as then.

Engels was particularly interested in modern science: he saw his philosophy of "new materialism" (i.e. DM) potentially uniting all disciplines. It was materialist, in that all phenomena arose from the physical world, and dialectical, in that all knowledge was obtained through reasoned argument and inquiry.

As a philosophical method, DM was therefore a study of how all things change, whether these be species, chemical substances, or societies. Perhaps the most successful of Engels' attempts to use DM in considering a scientific problem is contained in his unfinished 1876 essay *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*.

MATERIALIST NATURAL SCIENCE

Modern natural science has no choice but to be materialist and both Engels and Lenin sought to connect science to DM, seeing scientists as unconscious dialectical materialists.

Engels likened the scientists of his day to Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* who had been speaking prose all his life without realising it.

These included natural scientists, such as the chemist Mendeleev, who pulled together the different chemical elements into a systematic periodic table, or the physiologist Pavlov, who with his dogs elucidated the conditioned reflex, found widely in the natural world.

In practice, scientists are often "reductionist" in that they break up problems into smaller parts to work on. This has been criticised but is only wrong if one assumes that



Lysenko measures the growth of wheat in a field. Lysenko rejected Mendelian genetics in favour of "soft inheritance".

the whole is simply the sum of the parts, not recognising that higher forms of order may emerge from combinations of factors.

Engels criticised idealists who believed in a static universe since his dialectics, "conceived as the science of the most general laws of all motion," did not admit of stasis in nature, any more than in human society.

While he was correct in this, it is not generally helpful to try to apply DM in the natural sciences. Indeed, the attempt to force the natural sciences into the straitjacket of Stalin's distorted idea of DM was counter-productive, to say the least. Where it came to Stalin's influence on agricultural science in the Soviet Union (USSR) through Lysenko, it may rightly be said "It was worse than a crime – it was a blunder."

Engels was particularly impressed with Mendeleev's prediction of "eka-aluminium" from an anomaly in his *Periodic Table of the Elements*. Mendeleev found that arranging elements into columns of those with similar properties led to some contradictions.

Guessing that not all the elements had been discovered yet, Mendeleev left gaps (in order to preserve correspondences in behaviour) and predicted the properties of the 'missing' elements. He was resoundingly vindicated when eka-aluminium, since named gallium, was discovered in 1875, with the predicted properties, just as Engels was compiling his thoughts on science.

Engels saw the periodic table and its resulting predictions as a manifestation of the dialectical law of the transformation of quantity into quality.

LENIN AGAINST MACH

Lenin's interest in science led him to take time out in 1908 to write a weighty tome demolishing the philosophy of Ernst Mach, a respected physicist and a fairly influential philosopher.

Mach's ideas had caught on with some Bolsheviks, such as their co-founder Bogdanov who was challenging Lenin for leadership, and Lenin thought this was a dangerous departure from materialism. Bogdanov was subsequently expelled.

Mach enumerated three principles for valid physical theories:

- 1 They should be based entirely on directly observable phenomena;
- 2 They should be based on the principle of relative motion, rather than on absolute space and time;
- 3 Any properties apparently based on absolute space and time should instead be seen as arising from the large-scale distribution of matter in the universe.

Principle 1 led Mach into error when he refused to accept the existence of atoms, even after Einstein had showed how to prove

their existence in his 1905 paper on Brownian motion (and Jean Perrin had actually done so in 1908).

This was because no-one had directly observed them, a rather poor reason given that many small objects had been invisible to the human eye until the invention of the microscope and one might have allowed that other smaller objects might exist, particularly with the overwhelming indirect evidence for atoms. The atomic nature of matter is so fundamental that the great physicist Richard Feynman once said that the simple sentence "Everything is made of atoms" encapsulated the most important scientific knowledge we possess.

Principles 2 and 3 were rather more sound and Einstein praised them as important influences in his development of the theory of relativity.

Nevertheless, Mach, with his habit of backing the wrong horse, rejected Einstein's theories; indeed Mach's name was included in a rather embarrassing tome entitled *A hundred authors against Einstein* (though he appears not to have contributed). Einstein remarked that, if he was wrong, one author would have been enough!

PURE SCIENCE?

Aleksandr Bogdanov, an interesting character, is given quite a bit of attention by Ings.

Bogdanov, a medical doctor, was very interested in science, seeing capitalism as fragmenting scientific progress into separate, non-communicating, disciplines. The "pursuit of 'science for its own sake' was a tragic error." In a socialist society, "practice and theory would once again be fused, and science could at last be put to the service of society." In other words, "there is no such thing as pure science."

This is a profoundly misleading approach as there is no way of knowing what there is to discover and you can't just say "Let's find the cure for cancer" (though of course you can try to find it). Unfortunately, this is close to the attitude of Stalin to science. As Lenin recognised, Bogdanov, a follower of Mach, had departed somewhat from Marxism some 10 years before the revolution.

Bogdanov did not rejoin the Bolsheviks but did set up Proletkult, a "proletarian" art movement whose rather ultra-left aim was to completely replace the old bourgeois culture. He later became interested in the idea of rejuvenation through blood transfusions but seems not to have been aware of the painstaking work that had revealed the existence of blood groups and their role in death following blood transfusions...in 1901!

He died in 1928 after receiving blood from a student with malaria, tuberculosis, and an



Gallium, predicted by Mendeleev as "eka-aluminium", sits immediately below aluminium in a modern periodic table.



Clover harbours nitrogen-fixing bacteria

incompatible blood group: the student recovered.

Lenin seems to have been widely read on nature and ecology and would go for long hikes in the wilderness and mountains while in exile in Switzerland. While desperate to find ways of increasing agricultural productivity and aware of the latest science on soil fertility (such as the discovery of nitrogen-fixing bacteria in leguminous plants in 1888), he understood that people could not simply ignore the forces of nature.

It was essential to understand nature and work with it: "To replace the forces of nature with human labor ... would be just as impossible as replacing the arshin with the pood... man may merely avail himself of the actions of nature's forces, if he knew these actions, enlisting machines and tools to make this process easier".

TROTSKY AND SCIENCE

The other great leader of the October Revolution and leader of the triumphant Red Army, Trotsky, who is not really discussed by Ings, had an important though short-lived role in Soviet science.

After being forced to resign as People's Commissar of the Army in 1924, he was given two scientific posts in 1925, head of the Electro-Technical Board and chair of the Scientific-Technical Board of Industry, nominally in charge of science in the USSR. He clearly rejected the idea that politics could direct science, as he stated in a speech to the 1925 Mendeleev Congress (on the centenary of Mendeleev's birth).

"An individual scientist may not at all be concerned with the practical application of his research. The wider his scope, the bolder his flight, the greater his freedom from practical daily necessity in his mental operations, all the better."

Clearly, Trotsky understood that science cannot simply be ordered to come up with the answers. Soon he was to resign over Stalinist political interference in science policy.

The history of science in the USSR from the revolution through Stalin's counter-revolution to its collapse (and even to the present day) confirms Paul Mattick's conclusion that Marxism has nothing to say about the physical sciences, beyond taking their results into consideration when considering the development of the class struggle and setting physical limits to what may be achieved by a workers' government.

Suffice to say that the reverence for facts that characterised the early scientific policies of the Bolshevik government gave way to the idea of science as a tool to implement the plan. If scientific theory indicated the impossibility of the plan, so much the worse for scientific theory – and for the scientists who tried to explain this.

All too frequently, the messenger was shot!

• Version with full references at bit.ly/lh-ms

Deliveroo: next strikes 14 February?

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!

By Zack, a Bristol Courier and treasurer of Bristol Couriers Network

Strike action by Deliveroo couriers has spread across the country, with simultaneous strikes having been held in various locations over pay, on 1 February.

These strikes were inspired by an energetic and visible strike that took place in Bristol on the 18 January, and precipitated by steadily decreasing pay.

Bristol, Cheltenham, Horsham, London, Nottingham and Worthing all saw strikes by couriers, mostly starting 6pm. Birmingham struck earlier that week.

Couriers in those six places are all, it seems, discussing or planning further strike action and protests. Couriers in Bournemouth, Cardiff, Leeds, Manchester, and at least one other place, are also planning future strikes, and probably many more beyond these 12 places that I know of at the time of writing.

Many places have been discussing strikes on Valentine's day, 14 February. This is a busy day for Deliveroo, and riders can communicate "no love for Deliveroo". Other places have been discussing alternative dates.

On 1 February, in Bristol, we built upon the previous protest, with around 250 or more riders striking, the bulk of the active workforce. This led to three quarters of Deliveroo's normal operation shutting down — 120 of 160 restaurants stopped delivering — and very long waiting times, and cancelled or refunded orders.

A large proportion were striking by simply logging out and choosing to stay at home, rather than joining the protest, because of the snow and the cold weather. They struck despite Deliveroo yet again offering "boosts" — additional pay — in an attempt to undermine it.

Around 40 of us — couriers and supporters — were on the protest, which was energetic and loud. We protested outside and leafleted within four restaurants. We know that Deliveroo was scared of this too, as they had it seemed hired bouncers to be outside some of the restaurants, and at least one of them followed us from restaurant

to restaurant. In Nottingham, too, Deliveroo reportedly supplied bouncers to restaurants too.

In Cheltenham, around 30 people struck, a significant proportion of a much smaller fleet. 22 people joined in a protest, chanting and talking to customers in the busiest restaurants. Deliveroo attempted to bring in riders from other zones. There was nonetheless a significant backlog of orders with long waits, and restaurant managers reportedly furious at Deliveroo.

Horsham saw 11 people striking in a smaller workforce still, with a few of them talking to couriers who hadn't heard about it before. Most of the riders had been brought in from other zones, although some were from Horsham but felt unable to strike because of loss of pay. Some restaurants turned off their Deliveroo service, and others saw over two hours delivery times as they struggled with a backlog.

Worthing, perhaps the smallest workforce of them all, reportedly saw slightly fewer people striking. The majority of restaurants turned off their Deliveroo service, and the others had a backlog. Deliveroo called some riders about their strike action, confused about what was occurring.

Couriers in London went on strike for longer, starting earlier in the day, with perhaps 50 present at the protest — much more on some reports — and others passively striking. There is a much larger total number of couriers in London, across many zones, and Deliveroo reportedly placed a £2 boost on all orders to try to bring in strike breakers.

Riders picketed a restaurant and a set of Deliveroo's "dark kitchens" in Islington. Dark kitchens are prefabricated shipping containers with industrial cooking equipment which Deliveroo rents to restaurants wanting to expand their delivery service.

Nottingham saw a large number of riders striking, causing severe delays and cancelled orders. Birmingham, earlier in the week, had seen a strike by 50 couriers, who protested outside Deliveroo's offices.

We know that the strike caused Deliveroo to directly lose tens of thousands of pounds across the



Deliveroo riders protest in a restaurant in Cheltenham

country, perhaps significantly more, in lost or refunded orders. We know that they were scared enough to email restaurants across the country warning them about it, and to hire bouncers in many places. In many places they raised pay significantly to attempt to break the strikes — but they should raise that pay not just for a day, or weekend, but in the longer term!

DEMANDS

Most places had fairly similar demands, as we encouraged them to model theirs on ours (bit.ly/demandsBC). The core of these demands is higher pay a hiring freeze which would allow us to work more orders and so raise our weekly pay.

We also have demands around due process for termination — i.e. job security — and transparency. Most places have one or two demands about particular aspects of their local working conditions.

To escalate this strike, activists in all of these areas need to build robust local organisation, and reach out to more and more couriers. This means organising local meetings of couriers, to plan democratically and to organise how to reach out effectively to yet more riders.

Bristol Couriers' Network (BCN) have regular and well publicised general meetings for all couriers, and we make sure that we always have one shortly after a strike that we publicise at the strike. BCN also elected a committee that does more detailed organising between these meetings. For every strike and meeting we make bilingual leaflets.

At every restaurant where we see other riders, we discuss the struggle, try to persuade them if they are unsure, give them leaflets, and take their phone numbers. We keep in contact through texts and WhatsApp. Press releases, getting support from local union branches and left-wing groups, and social media, have been very useful too.

This local organising is the back-

bone of how we can build a successful strike movement to force Deliveroo to pay us better. BCN has affiliated to the IWGB union, and lots of us have joined. Cheltenham Couriers' United likewise have a growing number of members, and activists in various other places are members too, and hopefully more will join up and more places will affiliate. IWGB's Couriers and Logistics Branch (CLB) has been very supportive and has a wealth of experience of fighting and winning in the courier industry in London.

Couriers nationally should try to co-ordinate and come together in a more organised way nationally, which will help us to support each other better. The similarity of demands in most places across the country is a good step in the right direction.

One demand that hasn't yet been raised in these strikes is for us to be categorised as workers rather than "independent contractors", a demand that would automatically win us many workers' rights. Deliveroo has promoted a lot of misinformation about the supposed but non-existent advantages of the way they (mis)categorise us.

Many riders have accepted or repeated this misinformation. Locally and nationally we need to have this discussion, and I think most couriers will be won round when they know the facts.

Finally, the spreading of these strikes increases the urgency and importance of building a strike fund. In Bristol we have almost £1,600 altogether, but with hundreds of riders altogether we decided that it wasn't enough to make available for the last strike.

IWGB's CLB is also reviving its slightly bigger strike fund, to be further supported by a proportion of membership dues, and to be available to members.

- gofundme.com/bristol-couriers039-strike-fund
- fb.me/bristolcouriersnetwork
- twitter.com/couriersnetwork

Ideas for Freedom 20-23 June

The 2019 Ideas for Freedom — Workers' Liberty summer school — has been set for 20-23 June, in London.

As well as main sessions on the weekend 22-23 June, there will be a walking tour on the evening of Thursday 20 June, and a debate on the evening of Friday 21 June.

We're only just beginning to organise the agenda, but it will include presentations and debates on issues round Brexit, antisemitism, climate change, 1919, and 1989, and more.

Super Early Bird tickets are now on sale, and until 24 February at half of what will be the price "on the door" — £25 waged, £12 low-waged and student, £5 unwaged.

After 24 February, ticket prices will go up in instalments.

Book now, fix the date in your diary, and be ready to book your transport to London at cheap rates when they become available (probably late March). www.workersliberty.org/ideas



Lambeth children's centres

By Kelly Rogers

Local parents, residents and trade unionists in Lambeth are campaigning against the latest round of cuts to children's centres.

Lambeth Council's proposals would close five of 23 children's centres in the borough, and cut in half the provision at another seven centres.

Children's centres are places for children to play, and, for parents, a

point of access to a range of services from ESOL classes, through breastfeeding sessions, to LGBT parenting support groups.

The right-led Labour Council have been running a public consultation since mid-December, which has been met with a huge backlash from children's centre users and other local residents.

The Green opposition in the council has submitted an amendment, to be decided on later in February, which asks the Council to reduce the amount by which it

plans to increase its reserves. The Council could then continue funding children's centres for the next four years, by which point there might be a new government.

Lambeth UNISON and community-campaigning group Lambeth Save Our Services have distributed thousands of leaflets, held meetings with parents and workers, organised a well-attended demonstration in Brixton on 26 January and occupied Lambeth's newly refurbished Town Hall with toddlers in tow.

PCS left focus on living wage

By Mike Chester

The civil service union PCS has just completed a membership consultation on the 2019 civil service pay claim and campaign plan.

A February meeting of the union's National Executive (NEC) will "press the button" for a new civil service pay ballot.

At a December NEC, general secretary Mark Serwotka and the leadership proposed a pay claim of 8-10%. Phil Dickens, a member of the PCS Independent Left, the organisation where Workers' Liberty activists organise in within the union, proposed the following alternative claim:

- A living wage of £10/hour (£11.55 in London) for the lowest grades

- Pay at all other grades to be uplifted in proportion

- A spot rate [standard rate] for AO and EO grades based upon the pay max in the civil service

- Contractual pay progression where there aren't spot rates

- Outsourced pay to be minimally brought in line with civil service pay

Previously PCS has had a perennial "5% rise" formula, and IL has argued that goes nowhere near addressing the pay injustice PCS members have suffered.

The Living Wage and common pay rates across the civil service

both appear in the official pay claim. There has been almost no emphasis on them, so the likelihood of them being addressed looks minimal.

IL's alternative claim makes common rates and a living wage the central points on which the claim hinges.

The claim eradicates the worst injustices of the current pay system — that there are workers who don't make enough money to live, and that those of the same grade can have wildly different rates of pay.

If such things remain apart from the claim, the government could arguably agree to the percentage PCS asked for without giving a living wage to all or equal pay for equal work.

SERWOTKA

Serwotka and the leadership of the union's dominant Left Unity faction said IL's claims was "too complex". The points about spot rates and progression pay were mere "details for negotiations."

But for many members the lack of contractual pay progression being as big an issue as the lack of a substantive pay rise.

Phil also argued that the ballot (or re-ballot) should be disaggregated by departments, but with a clear central steer on the demands. This doesn't divide or erode the national nature of the campaign, but instead serves as a backstop against

further failures to meet the 50% turnout threshold and allows the tunnelling of resources into any group [sector of the civil service] which fails to reach the threshold.

There is a serious strategic and organisational deficit in the leadership's reliance on the biggest sections of the union to drag the rest over the line for the ballot.

As we saw with the MoJ pay offer that followed the ballot, an aggregated ballot doesn't hide organisational weakness from the employer, though even from such a weak position, the reps in that group pulled off a heroic effort to see off the attack.

In a disaggregated ballot, any group which didn't make it past the line could similarly regroup, but instead of having to do so alone they would have the cover of an ongoing campaign by those groups that passed the threshold.

We will know the results of the membership consultation in the week starting 4 February. We expect the leadership's proposal to win through as it was presented as a fait accompli at the consultation meetings, often poorly attended.

IL will continue fighting for our claim and our strategy and encourage members to support and vote for our candidates, including John Moloney for Assistant General Secretary.

• pcsindependentleft.com

NEU: call a march on school funding!

By Patrick Murphy (NEU national executive, in personal capacity)

On 28 February the Executive of the National Education Union (NEU) meets to consider the next steps in our campaign on funding and pay.

The most significant new information available to NEC members will be the results of a lengthy indicative ballot which closed in mid-January. After a number of "warm-up" questions about support for the union's campaign, the ballot asked whether members would support industrial action to achieve its demands.

Support for industrial action from those who voted was overwhelming (over 80%) but the turnout across the union was 31%. The 2016 Trade Union Act requires a turnout of 50% and a yes vote from 40% of eligible members.

The Executive is unlikely to call a "official" national ballot for strike action on the basis of this result. There must be a serious risk that industrial action will be shelved for the moment.

If action remains on the table it is likely to be in the form of some sort of selective strikes in areas or phases with the highest turnouts.

There are major problems with all options there. Members who voted yes to action in the indicative ballot did so on the understanding that they were supporting unified national strikes. They weren't voting to take action only in their own schools or geographical area.

There is also little point in selective action unless the intention is to roll it out across the country. In the 2012 pensions dispute, London was called out for a one-day strike with the promise that other regions would follow. In fact no other region was called out. Many mem-

bers in London felt used and misled.

The demands of the proposed action have been a problem from the start. School funding is a critical and popular campaigning issue, but the main effects are yet to be felt and will be different between different schools and areas.

PAY

The pay element of the campaign was very weak.

The NEU abandoned its own pay claim (for a 5% increase for all) and replaced it with a demand for 3.5% for all. This was justified by the claim that 3.5% was the recommendation of the School Teachers' Review Body and it would embarrass the government to have that highlighted.

In fact the majority of teachers were already getting a 3.5% increase under the government's pay award. The Union was asking the majority of teachers to vote for strike action which might gain an increase in the pay of school leaders and such but would not gain most teachers a penny.

It is unlikely that a viable proposal for strike action which really builds a national dispute will emerge from the 28 February Executive meeting.

But the NEU should call a national demonstration on a Saturday to demand increased funding, decent pay, an end to the exam-factory model of education and bringing academy schools back into local authority control. We should call on Labour and the rest of the trade union movement to support it.

Such a demonstration would not only put education on the political agenda in a new way, and build confidence and engagement ahead of the national industrial action that will eventually be needed.

Checks only after 82 days?

By Ollie Moore

Tube union RMT is preparing to ballot members working in fleet maintenance for industrial action to resist an attempt by London Underground to extend train preparation schedules.

Currently, trains are prepped, with all basic checks being performed, every 24 hours. New proposals from the company would extend that by varying lengths on different lines, to a 96-hour schedule on some lines and an 82 day one on others.

Although LU bosses are yet to announce any definite plans for

job cuts, union activists say that a reduction in head count could follow an extension of train prep schedules.

Elsewhere on London Underground, station staff on the District Centre group, covering stations including South Kensington and Gloucester Road, are planning a ballot for strikes against short-staffing, after a similar ballot on the Bakerloo Line forced significant concessions from management.

Drivers at the Acton Town depot on the Piccadilly Line are also preparing to ballot, after management imposed a new roster.



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Students vote "no confidence"

By Natalia Cassidy

The National Union of Student (NUS) Trans Students' Conference, on 30-31 January in Manchester, unanimously passed the Student Left Network motion of no confidence in NUS President Shakira Martin.

Earlier in January, an NUS UK board meeting had voted to scrap the trans students' campaign, budget, officer and committee.

The motion condemned the NUS leadership's "deeply undemocratic" handling of NUS's financial deficit. It called for NUS to open the books and to call an extraordinary conference of delegates elected on cross-campus ballots from affiliated student unions to give members, not an unelected trustee board, the final say.

The motion also demanded no cuts be made to NUS democracy or campaigns and resolved to campaign for a "radical, campaigning National Union of Students that is much more democratic and representative, with real control in the hands of its elected representatives and student members."

Both the Student Left Network



and Workers' Liberty were active at the conference. The Student Left Network spoke to delegates about the upcoming Student Left Network conference, 2-3 March in Sheffield, and produced a well-received bulletin with articles about no platform and free speech, NUS democracy, and materialism versus identity as a focus for the women's and trans liberation movements.

The conference also passed a motion submitted by Workers' Liberty students resolving to campaign alongside the labour movement for better provision for trans healthcare in a fully funded, publicly and democratically owned and run NHS.

Another motion we submitted argued against the dominant view on the student left that transphobic feminists should be "no-platformed", making the case that protest, discussion and debate are more effective than bureaucratic methods such as bans at rooting out reactionary ideas within the movement.

An amendment to the motion argued that transphobic feminists should be denied a platform because they often use "fascist tactics" such as "doxing, allying with the religious right, and stirring up the demonisation of trans people on the street." The amendment passed, although around forty percent of delegates abstained.

We argued that while tactics of leaking personal information about trans students should be condemned and dealt with by existing well-being policies to ensure the safety of students, this does not represent the core threat that fascism poses to the labour movement and minority groups: that is, an immediate, physical threat to their continued existence and ability to organise. Transphobic feminists are simply not building movements on the streets.

Unfortunately, transphobic attitudes are widespread, not marginal, in society. Only through democratic rather than bureaucratic techniques can we hope to make a lasting impact on the values and ideas present in the wider movement and society as a whole. It is crucial that the left champion the right to free speech. This, by necessity, includes fighting for free speech for those who hold ideas we do not agree with.

Although we lost the vote this time, the large number of abstentions shows that opinions on the student left are starting to shift slowly in our favour on "no-platforming" as a tactic and on freedom of speech.

Workers' Liberty held a fringe meeting entitled "Bolsonaro, trans liberation and class struggle in Brazil". Fifteen people came (the total at the conference was 50 or 60), and interesting discussions were had.

The Student Left Network and Workers' Liberty interventions had a positive effect on the conference as a whole: normally, all motions pass unanimously and there is little political debate or contention. Similar interventions should be organised into as many upcoming NUS Conferences as possible (Women's, LGBT+, Disabled, Black Students, plus National Conference in April).

NUS National Conference is 9-11 April in Glasgow, and the deadline for motions is 28 February. Workers' Liberty students have already submitted motions to on solidarity with Brazil, campaigning against Brexit, for free movement and migrants' rights, and for radical social and democratic changes in the EU, actively supporting workers' struggles and campaigning to bring outsourced workers in-house. The Student Left Network will be submitting motions of no confidence in Shakira Martin and the NUS Trustee Board, plus others on positive demands NUS democracy and other political issues and campaigns.

Student Left Network candidates Justine Canady and Ross Taylor are running for President and Vice President Higher Education respectively, with more candidates to be announced.

• Read the Student Left Network bulletin: bit.ly/nustrans
• Register for the SLN conference: bit.ly/SLN19

Nissan and payout politics

In the first months after the Brexit referendum of June 2016, the Tory government revealed, triumphantly, that it had reassured the car-making multinational Nissan.

Nissan, whose 7000-worker site in Sunderland is the biggest car factory in the UK, wouldn't move production from the UK after Brexit after all.

The government refused to say what had done the trick. It insisted "there was no special deal for Nissan".

Business minister Greg Clark said: "There's no chequebook. I don't have a chequebook".

Now we know Clark offered Nissan bosses £80 million. It turns out Nissan is moving its new production lines anyway, so won't get most of the money.

The Tories offered no similar pay-out to workers facing Brexit clouds. They were happy seeing EU-citizen workers pushed out, and knew British-born workers would have little choice but to endure whatever came.

This is a curtain lifted on a whole world of capitalist lobbying, deals behind the scenes, and pay-outs.

A book published in 2014 estimated the lobbying industry in Britain at £2 billion a year, which means an average of £3 million a year per individual MP, and a lot more for the more powerful MPs. The lobbyists expect a return for what they pay.

The other side of that coin is the lavishly-paid "adviser" and "non-executive director" given to ministers and MPs after they finish with politics. Former chancellor George Osborne now has eight jobs on top of his post as editor of the Evening Standard, including a one-day-a-week gig with Blackrock which pays £650,000 a year.

The Tories have attempted a feeble "workers' version" of the same ploy by suggesting Labour MPs who vote for whatever Brexit deal the government comes up with may get central government investments in their constituencies.

Labour right-winger John Mann, who voted for May's deal on 15 January anyway, shamelessly responded "show us the money". Mostly even pro-Brexit labour movement people responded with scorn.

Only an economically equal society, with open financial accounts, can bring substantive democracy.

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