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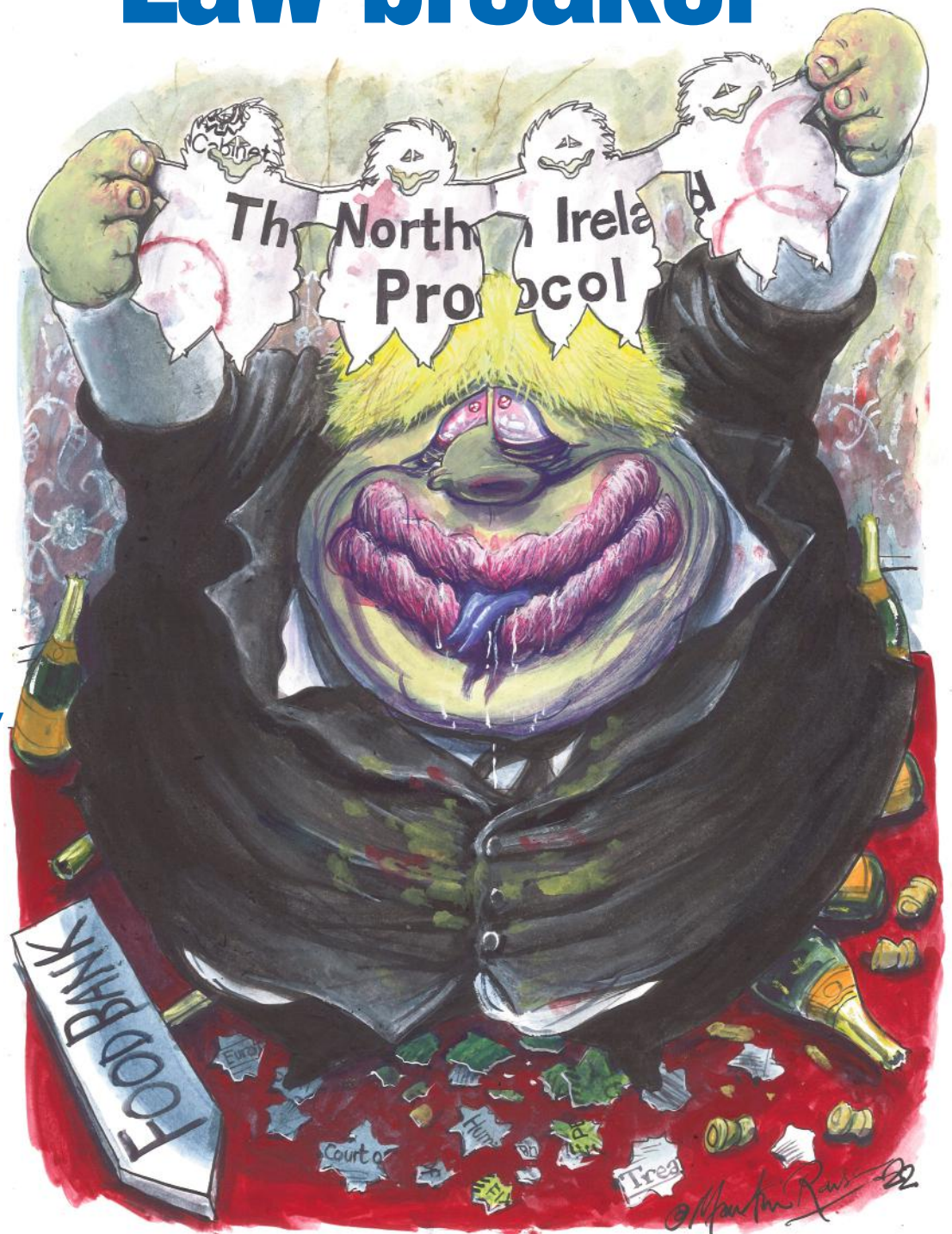
For democratic socialism

#317 July/August 2022

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Johnson's law
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Flailing Starmer
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CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

Editorial Policy

The editorial policy of CHARTIST is to promote debate amongst people active in radical politics about the contemporary relevance of democratic socialism across the spectrum of politics, economics, science, philosophy, art, interpersonal relations – in short, the whole realm of social life.

Our concern is with both democracy and socialism. The history of the last century has made it abundantly clear that the mass of the population of the advanced capitalist countries will have no interest in any form of socialism which is not thoroughly democratic in its principles, its practices, its morality and its ideals. Yet the consequences of this deep attachment to democracy – one of the greatest advances of our epoch – are seldom reflected in the discussion and debates amongst active socialists.

CHARTIST is not a party publication. It brings together people who are interested in socialism, some of whom are active in the Labour Party and the trade union movement. It is concerned to deepen and extend a dialogue with all other socialists and with activists from other movements involved in the struggle to find democratic alternatives to the oppression, exploitation and injustices of capitalism and class society

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the EB

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Contacts

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Email: editor@chartist.org.uk
Twitter: @Chartist48

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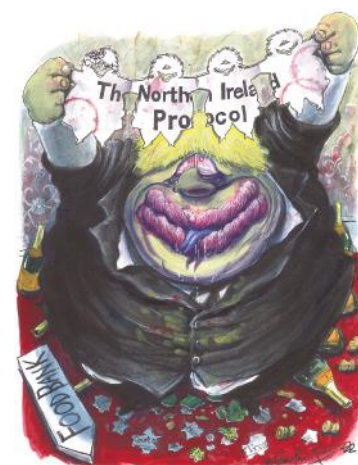
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Cover by Martin Rowson

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On the road to Electoral Reform

Mary Southcott reports trade unions are moving for change

Labour is incrementally making its way towards taking electoral reform into government. The 2021 Unite Policy Conference dropped its support for the current voting system, emulated by the Communication Workers. And at the end of its National Delegate Conference, Unison, the public sector union, not only abandoned first past the post, it endorsed a proportional voting system. Aileen McGoughlin, who wrote for the Chartist Trade Union Supplement, (available on the Chartist website, www.chartist.org.uk), moved the resolution: “Under our system so many people’s votes, so many of our members’ votes, do not count. Millions of people do not get an MP that they voted for. People often cannot vote for who they agree with but have to vote tactically to avoid getting the worst option.” She went on to the TUC demonstration, We Demand Better. We assert the same about a 19th century voting system which magics a Tory minority vote into an unassailable rubber stamp. Looking back to Annual Conference 2021, of eleven Labour Unions, four supported electoral reform: Musicians, ASLEF and TSSA, and the Fire Brigades. Nine months

later, Unite has moved from Opposed to Support/Abstain, CWU has voted against the current voting system, and Unison moved to outright support. In number terms we are there. We need the debate. Prioritisation depends on Constituency delegates. Those supporting the status quo are GMB, USDAW, Community and NUM. What now? Ideally, Labour would speak with one voice. We are not quite there but even an arithmetical victory allows the Labour leadership to support the necessary commitment in Labour’s Manifesto. We need more conversations with and among trade unionists. Labour representatives need openly to support change: prospective parliamentary candidates, NEC and National Policy Forum representatives, and MPs. We need awareness that red and blue walls are artificial constructs which disengage the majority from effective influence in general elections. Enfranchisement, fought for by trade unions, Chartists and suffragettes, has one more step to take. Votes need to count. They don’t, which is one reason for Labour losses, first in Scotland, then other Labour areas once taken for granted. Labour can only legislate after the election but it can up its chances of winning by gaining Lib Dem

and Green tactical votes in Conservative-Labour marginals, as the Cook-Maclennan agreement did in 1997. Now Labour needs to make a better offer, not a referendum, but the announcement of PR legislation in the First Queen’s speech. That could unite the centre and left voters in the way Brexit united the right in 2019.

Roadblocks still exist. Trade Unions need to hear from other parties about workers’ human rights. They want a system. Consensus could emerge on retaining the MP-Constituency link within a proportional system. We gave an Additional Member System to West Germany after World War 2 and agreed it for Scotland, Wales and Greater London. New Zealand has elected two women Prime Ministers.

Things change! Will Hutton foresees the unwinding of Thatcherism. It was Margaret Thatcher who told David Frost in 1995 that going into opposition would be disastrous. “They might change the voting system”. Labour didn’t but we can now. The next general election may be more 1992 than 1997 but Labour can win if it adopts electoral reform and voters decide on informed tactical voting just as they did in both Wakefield and Tiverton & Honiton. **C**

Mary Southcott is a member of Chartist EB

We need to talk about women

Georgia Sangster says women are once again forced to be the shock absorbers of poverty

This spring inflation reached 9% - food price inflation hit 4.3% in May (the highest rate since 2013) and a typical energy bill went up by 54%, with further increases forecast for October. Despite the Government’s narrative, we need to look further back than Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to understand the cost-of-living crisis. This crisis hasn’t blown in like a freak hurricane, it is the inevitable result of the decision of successive Governments to pursue austerity. For over a decade, millions of households have found themselves with no more slack to cut and yet it is those households, once again, left unsupported during this crisis.

When we talk about who are going to be hit hardest by price increases, we

need to talk about women. Women are more likely to be poor and they have lower levels of savings and wealth than men. Since women are still responsible for the vast majority of care within the family, of children and elderly parents, they are less able than men to increase their hours of paid work. Women are, and always have been, the shock absorbers of poverty. They usually have the main responsibility for buying and preparing food for their children and families, and for managing budgets within low-income households. When household budgets are squeezed, it is women who regularly skip meals in order to feed their children.

For some groups of women, the capacity to withstand increases in the cost of living is limited even further.

Poverty rates are significantly higher for Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Black women than among White women. Single parents, the majority of whom are women, are also vulnerable to price increases – they are more likely to be in low paid and part time work. We have a very good system for targeting support where it is needed the most – our social security system. Yet in April the Government failed to uprate benefits in line with inflation, only a few months after their decision to cut the £20/week uplift in Universal Credit (UC). Our punitive benefit payment levels are a huge driver of food-bank use. Long-term investment is needed to address the systematic causes of this crisis. Without it, women will continue to be the shock of absorbers of poverty. **C**

Georgia Sangster is a member of the Women’s Budget Group

Made in Britain crisis

Tory Britain is falling apart. We are experiencing the biggest fall in living standards since the 1950s. Soaring prices for petrol and food with inflation near 10%. Airports in chaos, strikes on the railways and law courts with teachers balloting for action.

Under the Tories we've endured cuts in benefits of £37bn, flatlining wages, and a massive growth of precariat work—zero hours contracts, agency working, insecure self-employment. The bureaucratic Universal Credit had the uplift removed, pushing almost a million people into poverty as a result. Public services have been starved of investment with problems compounded by the pandemic and Brexit.

This is a 'made in Britain' cost of living crisis built on 12 years of Tory austerity policies. **Karen Constantine** has dubbed it a cost of greed crisis in writing about the impact of austerity on the NHS. Mounting waiting lists, ambulance queues, bed blocking and huge workforce shortages (110,000 nurses short), staff drained by cuts and Covid.

Greed we see in the huge profits made by oil companies—only reluctantly now subject to a windfall tax with loopholes for reckless fossil fuel extraction, to a green light from Boris Johnson for big corporate bonus increases. We also see greed in the profits of private health companies and Big Pharma poised to take over more NHS services.

Bonkers is how **Duncan Bowie** describes the Government's latest wheeze to make Housing Associations sell off homes. In a situation of housing shortage and mounting homelessness it is also immoral to further remove housing from the rented sector. The minor restriction on no fault evictions also proposed for tenants in private housing is overshadowed by the pain of rising rents and poor maintenance, reports **Poppy Pendelino**.

Dennis Leech exposes the nonsense of interest rate rises based on a false comparison with 1970s inflation. Long buried is the promise of a high wage economy Johnson made to Tory conference last year, with public sector workers subject to average 1.5% pay rises. **Georgia Sangster** emphasises that the crisis impacts heaviest on women who will be the shock absorbers, losing their jobs and independence in the face of squeezed household budgets.

Following Brexit, Covid and Putin's war in Ukraine, a further script is written for yet another scapegoat—workers. Johnson and billionaire chancellor Sunak tell workers to tighten their belts further with below three per cent pay rises and prattle about wage price spirals. Workers have endured 12 years of real pay cuts, yet when they take protective strike action all blame rains down on them from government and right-wing media alike.

Meanwhile the Prime Minister continues on his law-breaking course, as **Margaret Owen** reports. Following the proroguing of parliament and Partygate we now have bills to tear up the Northern Ireland protocol, which endangers the Good Friday Agreement, as **Geoff Bell** reports, and most recently the threat to ditch the European Court of

Human Rights, set up largely by Britain after World War 2. There are also plans to breach treaties protecting women and minorities.

On the cost of living, Labour rightly calls on the PM to reveal a plan and negotiate with the trade unions, but where is the solidarity? Beyond these calls Starmer has said little to outline an alternative vision or to develop policies to counter the Tories, as **Ann Black** argues. She outlines the process for change-making saying it is not enough to rely on Tory own goals.

We devote considerable space in this issue to international wars, many neglected or barely reported. Ukraine cries out for an end to the genocidal war but as **Glyn Ford** says maximalist demands from Liz Truss and Johnson to take back all territory including Crimea, only sets back the prospects for a negotiated settlement.

Elsewhere are the forgotten wars. **Venus Azal** reports on the Yemen where UK/US backed Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates continue their brutal bombardment of the country. In the Horn of Africa **Andy Gregg** reports on the conflict in Ethiopia and Eritrea where Tigrayans face huge military odds and the whole region is threatened with famine on a par with the 1980s that launched Band Aid.

Ben Jamal reminds us of the repressive realities of the Israeli regime branded apartheid, in its denial of Palestinian statehood and human rights. In the wake of further illegal settlements on West Bank and Gaza and the murder of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, he calls for redoubled efforts to stop the Tories making boycott and disinvestment illegal.

In the Balkans, 30 years on from the slaughter of thousands of Bosnians, **Sheila Osmanovic** warns of the dangers of old nationalisms being reignited. **Jason Gold** sees the change of government in Montenegro as window dressing for the stealth Serbian plans to strengthen pro-Russia

ties.

With a glint of sunlight **Jude Newcombe** reports on a return of Australian Labor to government with prospects for positive action on global warming and migrant rights. Colombia's election of the leftist Petro joins the left turning Chile to bring hope of democratic socialist advances in Latin America, reports **Fabian Hamilton MP**.

Boris Johnson remains impervious to calls for his resignation despite the latest huge losses of Tiverton and Honiton and Wakefield, the resignation of chair Oliver Dowden and 40% no confidence vote by Tory MPs. However, we must guard against complacency. Labour needs vision and radical policies, neither of which are clear. **Peter Kenyon** goes further in arguing that Starmer's Labour did no better in Wakefield than Corbyn in 2017; failure to take a clear stand in defence of working people facing huge cuts in living standards by supporting railway workers and others taking action betrays a fatal weakness in the leadership. Embracing electoral reform as a central plank in Labour's democratic transformation agenda, as **Mary Southcott** argues, would represent a further leap forward. What is Starmer waiting for?

**Under
the Tories
we've endured
cuts in benefits,
flatlining wages, and
a massive growth of
precariat work**

Rail strikes: no winners

Paul Salvesson on hammering out a solution

Unless there is a last-minute settlement, by the time you're reading this Britain will have experienced its first wave of rail strikes during the week beginning June 21st. They are unlikely to be the last, with the rail unions and Government increasingly at odds. Network Rail and the train operating companies are, to a degree, 'piggies in the middle'.

So what should be the response from the 'intelligent Left' to the strikes? The knee-jerk reaction from the far-left will be to enthusiastically champion the cause of the rail unions, hoping it will embarrass an ailing Tory Government. So far, Labour has tried to ride both horses, seeming to offer sympathy to the rail workers while championing the passengers' cause.

The Left has traditionally supported 'workers in struggle', often regardless of the issue. But let's look at the situation today, in the wise words of V.I. Lenin, making 'a concrete analysis of a concrete situation'.

The railways are emerging from a gruelling time. During the worst of the Pandemic the trains, at least some of them, kept running and railway staff turned up for work. Rail patronage plummeted and the Government put in £16 billion to keep services operating and the network in shape. Wages and salaries didn't go up, but nobody was sacked, or even furloughed. We were being told by Government that public transport wasn't safe and to either stay at home or – implicitly – use the car. Many people didn't take much encouragement.

By June 2022, the picture is complex and far from rosy. On the one hand, leisure travel – by definition, discretionary – has surged back and Scotrail is experiencing an 18% increase over pre-Covid leisure journeys. Many other rail companies are seeing similar growth, but less in commuting, which still lags at around 75-80% of pre-Covid numbers. Revenue is still down to about 85% of 2019 figures. Work habits are changing. Covid accelerated trends that were already becoming apparent: the demise of five days-a-week commuting, a growing trend to

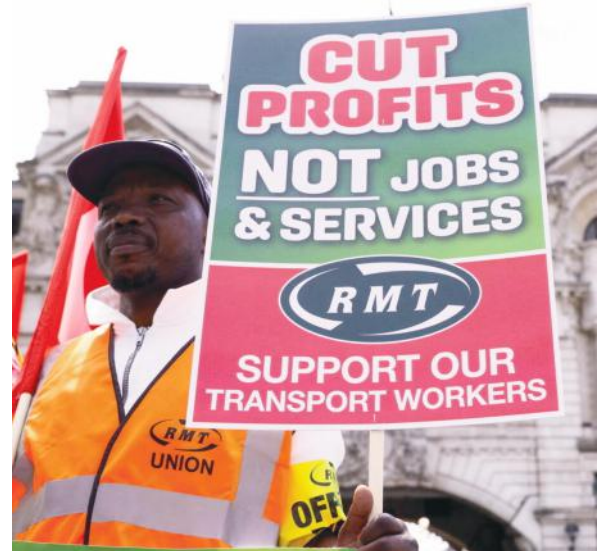
work at least part of the week from home.

We are a very long way from getting back to the full timetable that existed pre-Covid. In my own part of the world, some routes that enjoyed three trains an hour are down to just one. The reasons for this are less about demand and more to do with availability of train crew. There are still Covid-related absences and the usual steady stream of new entrants with extended training programmes was halted during the Pandemic. There's a large backlog in some parts of the country.

So what of the strikes? Railway workers can claim, with justification, that they haven't had a wage rise for over two years and dutifully came into work, with the attendant risks, during Covid. From their perspective, that loyalty is being poorly rewarded. And yet. Some railway workers, including drivers, signallers and technical staff are well paid. That isn't true of all railway staff, though the worst paid are often contract staff not directly employed by Network Rail or the train companies. Many are not members of a union.

Winning a strong position in the labour market has taken years of astute bargaining by RMT, ASLEF and TSSA. Any good trade unionist would be conscious of not allowing that position to slip. But at the same time a strong position in the labour market is based on industrial clout within an expanding economic position. Have the rail unions really got that, in 2022? Going back to Lenin's advice, a careful look at the rail industry would say that it is resting on shaky foundations. Rail use, both passenger and freight, was growing before the Pandemic; the unions were in a strong position to press their members' case. That doesn't apply now. Rail could recover and diversify into other markets such as leisure and also freight. But it faces strong competition not just from the roads but also from lifestyle choices. Take the family for a day trip by train to Blackpool? Or stay local and maybe go and see a film or take a walk?

So, we can trumpet rail's envi-



Striking railway workers – Government should get round the table

ronmental benefits until we are green in the face but people will make choices based on convenience, cost and availability. While union leaders talk about these being the biggest strikes 'since the General Strike of 1926' we need to remember one thing: we actually lost back then. The miners were defeated and thousands of railway workers who came out in support of them either didn't get their jobs back or received pay cuts. Not an experience to emulate.

For the Tories, the strikes are the one positive gleam on the horizon in an otherwise dreadful political landscape. They can push Labour into a corner and say that they are in hock to the unions. Meanwhile, you can almost hear the knives being sharpened in the Treasury for a new round of rail cuts, with attendant job losses.

The strikes will cause inconvenience and some hardship. They won't bring Britain to a standstill, people (and freight users) will make other arrangements – and these could be for the long term. There is only one sensible way forward and that is for Government, rail companies and unions to get round the table and hammer out a settlement not just on wages but also on how to shape a future, growing railway which offers the country a sustainable form of transport which underpins economic growth and good quality, meaningful jobs to its employees. **C**



Paul's website is www.lancashirelocalism.co.uk

Copping out after COP26

David Toke on Government retreats and a new cock-up in its home insulation programme



The Government has delayed the start of a new four year phase of its already minimal home energy conservation programme. This means that tens of thousands of poor households will miss out on vital cost-saving measures. The Energy Company Obligation (ECO), whose funding is small compared to the tax concessions handed to oil and gas companies, is a pale reflection of the scheme which operated under the last Labour Government.

This is the latest problem for a strategy that is failing to live up to the spirit of the UK's commitments following the COP26 climate change conference held last year in Glasgow. The Government is busy boosting the oil and gas industry's ability to sell oil on world markets with new tax concessions for development. Yet it has delayed action to mandate heat pumps in new homes and refuses to repeal the ban on onshore windfarms in England.

The latest delay in the insulation programme appears to have been caused by a failure to prepare the necessary legislation – this failure speaks volumes about the Government's priorities when it comes to energy conservation.

Rates of loft and cavity wall insulation have plunged by over 90 per cent since Labour's scheme ended in 2012, despite the fact that the majority of buildings are

under-insulated even with these most basic measures. Other types of energy conservation support are practically non-existent. Since 2012 the Conservative-led governments have organised feeble efforts to mount failed schemes to fund energy conservation, whilst starving the successful ECO programme of funds.

The next phase of the Energy Company Obligation, funded by a levy on electricity consumers' bills, was supposed to start in April. However, according to the Energy and Climate Information Unit (ECIU) it may not now begin until the Autumn.

Jess Ralston, Senior Analyst at the ECIU, said: "With this further delay to the highly successful ECO insulation scheme and Treasury having blocked additional help for homes leaking heat, voters struggling to pay the bills, many of them in swing seats, will be wondering when help is coming. The recent energy security strategy with its focus on North Sea drilling will not bring down bills now, but there are plenty of roofs that still need insulating."

The Government claims it does not have money to spend on energy conservation, yet the ECO scheme could be boosted by large amounts simply by reducing tax concessions to the oil companies. Doug Parr, Greenpeace Chief Scientist, commenting on the Chancellor's recently announced tax breaks for investment in oil

and gas supply, said: 'The tax break is worth between £2.7bn and £5.7bn to the oil companies, but a £3bn efficiency programme on homes would save bill payers over £700m every year, for good'. This tax concession is only the latest in the multi-billion worth tax concessions for oil and gas companies. Since 2015 they have not had to pay any taxes at all on their UK activities.

The currently planned ECO programme is for £1 billion a year over four years. The range and type of measures is limited, and it is only large enough to serve some of the needs of a minority of the fuel poor who are eligible. Only households on low incomes will qualify for support, and the funding is predicated on the fact that the majority of this group will not benefit. There will be strict limitations on what can be financed. Only the worst insulated houses can be helped, and then only if the work is going to give very large specified improvements, so buildings with an existing Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C will not be funded.

However, attention to this failure has been distracted by reports that Boris Johnson wants to increase spending on insulation at the expense of cutting other decarbonisation programmes. Surely we can no longer be fooled by such tactics. At best such shuffling of the deckchairs on a sinking ship can hardly inspire confidence! **C**

Dr David Toke, is Reader in Energy Politics, University of Aberdeen. His latest book is Nuclear Power in Stagnation A Cultural Approach to Failed Expansion

Getting the big calls right – the leadership challenge

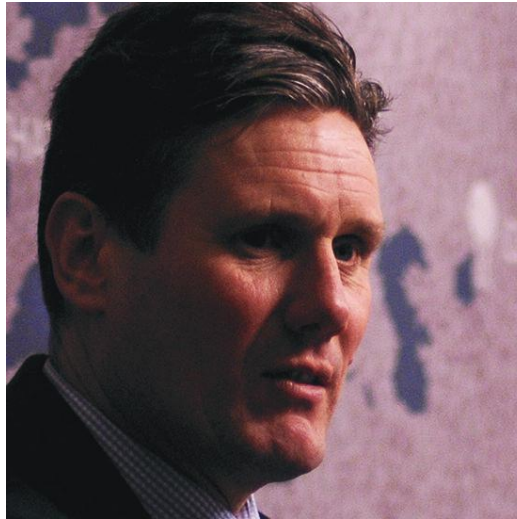
Peter Kenyon suggests Labour's leader is flailing

British Labour Party leader Keir Starmer is stumbling on the big calls. His own MPs and front-bench colleagues know it. And his political judgment is increasingly questionable. If proof were needed, consider his reaction to the party's by-election win in the 'red-wall seat' of Wakefield. "We have the sort of swing that puts us on track not just for a Labour government, but for a majority Labour government", he claimed. Who in their right mind would want to take such 'a straw in the wind' seriously when the turnout in Wakefield was less than 40 %, and the number of Labour votes was fewer than in 2017 under Jeremy Corbyn? Most Wakefield voters stayed at home. At the other end of the country, in Tiverton and Honiton (North Devon), extrapolating a historic swing of almost 30% to the Liberal Democrats to the whole of the UK would deliver them a near majority of seats in Westminster! Imagine!

Starmer's lack of psephological skills highlight another shortcoming. His personal standing compared to the Tories' Boris Johnson is not very flattering either. He continues to run neck and neck with Johnson in YouGov's monthly poll about who would make the better prime minister, despite unprecedented scandals and lies engulfing the Conservative Party and its leader.

Once again on the latest big call, the rail strikes, Starmer's political skills have been shown wanting. Instead of spotting an opportunity to show the public that Labour stands side-by-side with millions facing cuts in real wages, our dear leader issues an edict to his frontbench team NOT to be seen on RMT transport union picket lines. Whose side is Labour's leader on? Management or the workers? Beyond the crass political stupidity, this anti-trade union stance ought to bring into question the quality of internal polling/focus group work.

According to polls since the strike began, most of the electorate get what the RMT is seeking to achieve. Industrial unrest triggered by the worst cost of living crisis since the 1970s ought to be embraced by



Rail strikes – another Starmer miss

Starmer as an opportunity to reconnect with voters, or what some might call 'political education'. RMT rail union leader, Mick Lynch, is being celebrated as a new working-class hero. His capacity to make the link between labour and capital and the poor and the rich, while defending his members' interests, has confounded commentators and politicians alike.

There is a lesson to be learned by Starmer, and quickly. The cost-of-living crisis tsunami is crashing down on millions of people's lives. Starmer's supporters can claim success in forcing government U-turns such as a 'windfall' tax on energy companies to help fund help with energy bills. But where is the narrative encouraging voters to flock to Labour? People are still voting Conservative despite Johnson and his Conservative cronies leering over millions depending on foodbanks, children in poverty, by slashing universal credit.

Starmer's big calls after winning Labour's leadership election were to differentiate himself from former leader Jeremy Corbyn, and secondly, to accept uncritically the outcome of the 2016 Brexit referendum to leave the European Union. Two years on, Starmer is boxed in, while the country is screaming for an alternative. It was Johnson's clarion call to 'get Brexit done' that led to Labour's defeat in 2019 – not Corbyn's leadership. We know now that Brexit

hasn't been done. Quite the reverse, Johnson has tabled legislation to rip out the central provision of his 'oven-ready' deal – the Northern Ireland protocol, that was his pretext for 'getting Brexit done' in the first place. Can Starmer call out Brexit for what it is – a pack of lies? No. Worse, his shadow foreign secretary, David Lammy has been tasked with reminding the electorate that Labour accepts Brexit. "The British people have made a decision and we have to honour it," he told the UK in a Changing Europe's annual conference on the eve of the Wakefield and Tiverton and Honiton by-elections.

In the meantime, the Resolution Foundation has published a major study showing Britain's cost of living crisis is being made worse by Brexit dragging down the country's growth potential and costing workers hundreds of pounds a year in lost pay. This follows criticism of the Bank of England for being "reluctant" to talk about the harm caused by Britain quitting the EU to avoid upsetting the Government, from Bank of America's London office in its 'UK Economic Viewpoint' (reported in late May by the London Evening Standard newspaper).

There is a growing clamour for policies [see NEC member Ann Black's article in this Chartist], but don't expect any reset on the big issues any time soon. Labour's electoral fate continues to hang on the Tories losing. **C**

Peter Kenyon is a member of Chartist EB and Cities of London & Westminster CLP

Stampede to disaster

Dennis Leech says treating the cost of living crisis like past inflation would be a disaster

The free market economist Milton Friedman said that “inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon”. To him and his monetarist followers this was an iron law: A general increase in prices is caused by the money supply growing faster than the supply of goods available. It was never true; yet the Thatcher government made it the cornerstone of their economic policies in the late 1970s and 80s with disastrous results.

Monetarism was eventually abandoned. Yet many commentators are framing the cost-of-living crisis the same way. They cannot fail to follow the herd and ignore the evidence of their own eyes.

Today’s price increases are due to supply side factors: bottlenecks due to Covid, Brexit that has caused labour shortages and bureaucratic obstacles to the movement of goods between the UK and EU, and increases in energy prices due to the Ukraine war.

But energy price increases are not driven solely by shortages due to Russian sanctions. They are amplified in the UK by another factor: the privatised gas and electricity markets that prioritise profit. Other countries, such as France, which have not embraced free markets so enthusiastically and have retained public ownership of energy, are having a different experience, experiencing more moderate price rises.

The stock response to rising prices is for the Bank of England to raise interest rates. This has been the rule ever since Gordon Brown set up an independent monetary policy in 1997. The Monetary Policy Committee had to keep inflation within a narrow range around CPI of two per cent. That policy has proved unsuccessful for much of the time since the 2008 crash and with inflation below target and record low interest rates.

Now we are told that the Bank of England must act. The Governor, Andrew Bailey, has pleaded that it is not to blame and warned that further rate increases will cause a slowdown. Nevertheless, having already raised rates five times so far from 0.1 percent to 1.25 percent, he



promises just that. Other central banks, notably the US Fed and the European Central Bank, are following the same irrational stampede.

Rising household bills are actually recessionary, because consumers have to cut spending in order to pay them and increased saving reduces aggregate demand. Increasing the cost of borrowing adds to this deflation while increasing inflation still further. It is exactly the opposite of what is required.

Monetarism was shown to be nothing more than an ideological chimera, that does not work in practice, in the 1980s when it was the driving force of Thatcherism. It was a failure that led to deindustrialization and widespread unemployment and was eventually abandoned.

The problem is that the anti-inflationary policy regime set up by Gordon Brown in 1997 implicitly assumes that inflation is a sign of overheating caused by too much spending. The answer is to rein in spending by raising interest rates to increase the cost of money. But to apply that rule as if it is a universal remedy is to commit a monumental policy error.

This cost-of-living crisis is not an inflationary process, a technical matter of rising prices, but a matter of income distribution: households are having to pay a

larger part of their incomes to boost company profits. These windfall profits serve no economic purpose beyond income for the already wealthy - they are not needed for example to incentivize investment - and should be taxed or limited by price caps to support households.

The danger is that the cost of living increase will become a wage-price spiral as workers seek higher wages as happened in the 1970s. An inflationary spiral is a manifestation of class struggle as trade unions try to regain the wealth taken from workers by capitalists and will inevitably result in further inflation unless sensible policies are followed.

There is a lot of confused economic thinking. Many point to the sheer scale of quantitative easing that has meant all of government’s additional spending since the financial crisis of 2008 and due to the pandemic has been effectively funded by new money creation. Therefore, they argue, this must be inflationary by definition (according to the law of monetarism). So there needs to be a recession created by higher interest rates, government spending cuts and austerity for the many. This view seems to be held in high places and should be opposed since it is ideological nonsense refuted by the experience of the last decade. **G**

Dennis Leech is emeritus professor of Economics at Warwick University

What does Labour stand for?

Ann Black bemoans the lack of vision and reminds us how policy can be developed

The question is being asked with increasing urgency at every level. No-one expects a fully worked-up manifesto, but an overall vision, directions of travel, clear dividing lines and catchy campaign slogans are needed now. Where is our equivalent of Take Back Control, Get Brexit Done, Build Back Better? Security, prosperity and respect, speeches to the Fabians and 8,000 word essays are not enough. So where is policy made, and how do members have a say?

Labour's current policy-making processes were designed in the 1990s as the party stood on the edge of power. The national policy forum (NPF), with 200 members representing all parts of the movement, had two main functions: first, to review all policy areas between general elections, and second, to maintain continuous dialogue with members and avoid the splits which brought Labour down in the 1970s and 1980s. Policy would be hammered out behind closed doors, away from conference and the media glare. Tony Blair's New Labour exercised near-total control over NPF membership, with constituency representatives not even elected by one-member-one-vote until 2009.

The system was seen as successful in producing winning manifestos for 2001 and 2005. However, in 2010 Labour lost the election and control of the electoral cycle, and the snap elections in 2017 and 2019 disrupted collective development of policy platforms. Instead the manifestos were drawn up centrally with limited member engagement and signed off by the Clause V committee which includes the NEC, shadow ministers, MPs and other stakeholders. The full NPF has not met since February 2018, or agreed a programme for government since 2014. The position of chair was vacant for two years, and fewer and fewer people remember what the NPF was for.

The policy commissions, which bring together members of the NPF, the NEC and the frontbench, have continued meeting. They discuss selected topics, publish consultation papers and produce reports for conference. With Labour in government, members were speaking



directly to ministers and could have real influence. However, in opposition the commissions have to respond to what the government is doing, as well as to external events, with little ability to shape the agenda. They could be useful sounding-boards on, for instance, Labour's positioning during the pandemic, or solutions to the cost-of-living crisis, feeding back from the doorstep. Instead they tend to spend more time talking about what a Labour government should do than about how to get a Labour government in the first place.

Nevertheless a new process of consultation is finally under way. There are now six policy commissions, each covering one of the themes of the shadow cabinet Stronger Together policy review led by party chair Anneliese Dodds. They have published short discussion papers, though regrettably local parties were only given six weeks to organise around them before the closing date of 8 July 2022, and whole areas such as tax policy and constitutional issues are not included. In addition individuals and groups can feed in views through the policy forum website at policyforum.labour.org.uk/ on any subject at any time. All submissions are notified to the relevant policy commission.

Current plans are for a final-stage NPF meeting in summer 2023. This will agree the basis of

the manifesto for a general election in 2024, and should follow extensive consultation across the movement. If the election is called earlier, the leadership will have to engage members and affiliates as fully as possible within the timeframe.

Meanwhile conference has regained some of its previous importance and can debate resolutions on twelve or more topics. For those dissatisfied with the opaque and slow-moving NPF structures this is again the best route for clear and public decisions. In 2021 it was used effectively by supporters of electoral reform, a subject sidelined for more than 20 years, and the campaign is building again this summer. Unless the NPF rediscovers its purpose and its role, other high-profile or single-issue campaigns will do likewise.

And a final word for those who treat the 2019 manifesto as continuing to bind the party. When Labour wins, the party is expected to implement its programme in government, and build on it towards the following election. But defeat shows that voters were not convinced, and all policies are up for review, starting from first principles. No-one insisted on sticking to Gordon Brown's manifesto after 2010, or Ed Miliband's after 2015, and sadly Jeremy Corbyn's manifestos also failed. Labour has to learn from the past but look to the future, and there is no time to lose. **C**

Ann Black is chair of the national policy forum and an elected representative on the NEC from 2000 to 2018 and from 2020 onwards

Don't underestimate Tories

Tom Miller says the May local elections were bad for the Tories but saw no Labour surge

Amidst scandal and strife, the Tory government faced local elections across the UK on May 5th. 2022 is a bumper year. Most councils elect one Councillor per ward in election years, with wards having two or three seats in rotation. Every four years however, London joins the fun with its traditional 'all out' elections across 32 Boroughs, and this was one such occasion.

Labour faced an uphill challenge, considering the numbers. Under Jeremy Corbyn in 2018, Labour was riding high on the back of the progress made in the General Election result in December 2017. It had benefitted from an 8% swing since four years before, gaining 79 councillors. The same seats were up for election again in 2022, leaving Labour with a tough hill to climb. In theory, the Tories should have been in for an easier game. In 2018 they had a 3% swing against them and lost 35 councillors.

What transpired this year cannot be separated from the Partygate scandal that has unfolded around Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak. It was impossible for activists to make it down a small street without voters expressing anger at what they sometimes felt as a personal betrayal, given how many have suffered loss and detriment during the pandemic.

The Tories suffered a 6% swing against them, losing 485 councillors, and in the process managing to lose control of 11 Councils. Labour made solid if modest advances, context considered. 108 councillors and 5 councils were gained, with an additional Council (Crawley) falling to Labour in a byelection a month later on June 9th.

The top performers in the local elections were really the Liberal Democrats, who despite only a 2% swing in their favour (compared to Labour's 6% swing), gained over twice the number of seats (224) and three councils. The Lib Dem vote is becoming more efficiently spread. Where they have struggled against Labour opponents who will not let anybody forget their ruinous choices dur-



Sadiq Khan celebrating Labour victory in Wandsworth – enough to break the Tory 'blue wall'?

ing the coalition era, they are ploughing a much more fertile furrow in the Tory 'blue wall' in the South West and South East.

Whilst there has been press (and Tory) speculation about deals between Labour and the Lib Dems, this claim is pretty much bereft of evidence. Dreams on some parts of the left about a formal 'progressive alliance' still seem a long way off. Labour voters who might have voted Lib Dem in the early 2000s are still repulsed by the legacy of austerity, and much will depend on how the Lib Dems decide to play the growing economic conflict between workers and bosses over pay and inflation.

Formalities around this situation may be a red herring. In a situation where Labour and the Lib Dems mutually profit by focussing activists and resources in different areas, both parties keeping a close eye on where their cards are played could make an enormous difference regardless of any dialogue, let alone cooperation. Between them, the two parties concluded their local election campaigns with 332 more Councillors, and have given Mr Johnson a bloody nose.

The next strategic question for Labour is how it will deal with one simple fact: it is not doing

enough on its own.

The party has a suite of policies that are not passing the doorstep tests of recognisability and identification. For every voter pleased with how Starmer has corrected some of Corbynism's mistakes, there is another who feels a lack of inspiration or ambition, characteristics that are essential in political leadership. Labour is making modest progress, but is reliant on a Lib Dem recovery in the areas it can't reach. The full extent of what both parties have in common, along with the Greens and the nationalist parties, is a self-combusting Tory opposition. But just as Labour offers steady but not compelling leadership electorally or politically, there is also no unified anti-Tory campaign or cultural bloc to complement it, unless one counts Dominic Cummings.

The Tories can't be underestimated. Their leadership are masters of political escapology, are masterful bullshitters, and they remain well funded and organised. They did not do badly everywhere, taking councils in London like Harrow and Croydon, and after every successful local election campaign for opposition parties, we can be sure that the polls will narrow. **C**

Tom Miller is a Brent Labour councillor

Don't Mention Irish Unity

Geoff Bell says election results underline the decline of unionism and why Labour must change

Keir Starmer visited both parts of Ireland on 9-10 June. It was his first significant visit there since last July when he had proclaimed his unionism and said that in the event of a border poll he would personally go to Northern Ireland and campaign against Irish reunification.

This attracted strident criticism from many in the republican/nationalist community. The accusation was both of his open identification with unionism, and because by promising to actively participate in any referendum, he was breaking the spirit, indeed even the letter, of the Good Friday Agreement. This had promised British neutrality in any such border poll.

The most recent visit to Ireland was better received. Starmer promised to vote against Johnson's plans to legislate against the Irish protocol of his own European withdrawal treaty, and he also confirmed Labour's vote against the Tories' proposal to declare an amnesty for past British crimes in Ireland.

This time he refused to answer questions on any future referendum saying, "We are not anywhere near a border poll" and that the question was "hypothetical", but he gave no indication he was stepping back from his unionism. Accordingly, the Irish News, the leading newspaper of Northern Ireland's nationalist community editorialised that while Starmer's position on Brexit and amnesty "raises hopes for the future", the Labour's leader "needs to become more balanced in his attitude to a border poll". It concluded Starmer's "pro-union stance is at odds with his more enlightened attitude to Irish affairs."

The context is two contemporary realities. The first is that never since the colony of Northern Ireland was established in 1921 has support there for the union with Great Britain been so insubstantial. Second, never since the late 1970s has the British Labour Party so openly boasted of its support for the union.

Evidence of the decline of



Sinn Féin led the first preference vote in May

unionism was obvious in the results of the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly in May. Sinn Féin, the standard bearer of Irish republicanism, led the first preference vote with 29 per cent. The leading unionist party - the DUP - attracted just 21.3 per cent. Unionist parties combined won just over 40 per cent, a fraction above the nationalist/republican total. The Alliance Party, who are neutral on the border issue, secured 13.5 per cent. Most of that vote came from former unionists.

This was the first time Sinn Féin had topped the poll to a Northern Ireland parliament/assembly. It was unionism's worst result. Before the Troubles the Ulster Unionists regularly won between sixty and seventy per cent of such votes. Indeed, the original boundaries of 'Northern Ireland' were drawn with the purpose of delivering a permanent unionist majority within that territory. Now, unionism is a minority creed, and given its wretched history of sectarianism, discrimination and divide and rule, this is something progressive people everywhere should celebrate.

There is also much that the international left can welcome in the victory of Sinn Féin. Its economic policies, as well those on trade union rights, housing and the minimum wage are to the left of British Labour. It has played an active role in promoting a women's right to choose and mar-

riage equality, in opposition to both the DUP and the Catholic Church. Of its candidates for the Northern Ireland Assembly nearly 60 per cent were women.

Sinn Féin is also well ahead in the south of Ireland. Current polls suggest it would win more than the two major coalition parties in government there combined. Again, the party's appeal is a radical one, particularly on housing and economic equality. Accordingly, there is now a real prospect of the south of Ireland seeing one of the most left-wing governments in Europe. And of course Sinn Féin's onward march means discussion on the referendum has moved well beyond Starmer's "hypothetical".

There is then an irony that at this very moment in time when unionism is more discredited and unpopular in the north of Ireland than ever and when there is a progressive momentum throughout all of Ireland, the British Labour Party is more unionist than at any time since the late 1970s. Then, Labour's Secretary of State Roy Mason was accelerating state repression, while saying discussion on Irish unity "causes me trouble".

Today Starmer is equally unwilling to discuss unity. The Irish News editorial was an example of the obvious: that while Labour not only advocates unionism but declines to recognise the need to discuss an alternative, it stands in the way of progress. **C**

Geoff Bell is on the executive of Labour for Irish Unity. His *Twilight of Unionism* will be published later this year by Verso

30 years on from war Bosnia needs cool heads

Sheila Osmanovic fears there is a real danger of a future conflict in Bosnia

Bosnia is frequently mentioned in the conjunction to the Ukraine-Russia war. The country's troubles featured in one of the recent Sky news prime time podcasts as a potential future conflict bearing Russian interest. It was portrayed in a similar fashion in several publications dealing with Russian foreign policy analysis. The fact is that Russian foreign policy had little or no interest in Bosnia's affairs. At least not until around 2008 with rising Russian energy lobbies and the strategic port of Brcko in semi-autonomous Republica Srpska. Even though Brcko is in theory a district governed by a separate jurisdiction, it falls de facto under the orbit of Republica Srpska. Dodig, its long-standing president, was only too keen to host and entertain various Russian oligarchs, who found a fine welcome amongst emerging local tycoons with strong political ties.

The Russo-Serb profitable business relationships became politically threatened with heightened Western interests, led by the UK special envoy to the Western Balkans – Mr Stuart Peach. An army veteran, Peach was dispatched to mend the broken relationship between Serbs and Bosniaks, but more importantly to curb Russian influence across Republica Srpska. In his omnipotent style Dodig dismissed the British messenger only to – alas – find himself facing sanctions, most notably a ban on trade on lucrative London stock markets. The British government reinforced their punitive intentions in a series of visits by various high-ranking politicians. Truss visited Sarajevo on 26 May and made a special address to the Bosnian military announcing a plan to 'deepen strategic military partnership.' What does this mean and why now?

It is bemusing that the alleged support comes from the same Tory government that 30 years ago turned a blind eye to massacres, aggression, rapes and ultimately genocide that ravaged Bosnia 1992-1995. The population of Sarajevo, where Truss came to urge support,



Ruins of the Bosnian War

was left with no food, water, gas or electricity for over three years suffering the most atrocious siege and information blockade of the 20th century. Major, Carrington, Owen and co, one after the other were signing hollow peace settlements that served to inflame rather than stop the war. Not a single viable peace solution was proposed, and the war was allowed to bloom. Under the pretext of keeping the peace talks going, the Tories maintained a tight arms embargo. It was under the very eyes of Truss's Tory predecessors that over one million people fled their homes, more than 50,000 women and girls were raped, and several concentration camps mushroomed, whose only purpose was to torture and terrorise. The final horror was the genocide during which over 8000 men were killed in mass graves in less than three days.

The three-year long bloody war finally ended with the US-led Dayton agreement signed in 1995. However, it enabled all three sides in Bosnia: Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks, to continue war in peace. The Dayton agreement set up Bosnia as an 'International protectorate', installed a High Representative with overall powers to make political decisions, and

established the rule that only a foreign citizen can become a governor of its Central Bank. It was a first-of-a-kind state-building experiment.

Naturally, Bosnia made very little progress, stalled by the crippled state mechanisms. In addition, it was ravaged by constant Serb divisive rhetoric threatening the secession of Republica Srpska. The international governing elite conveniently ignored the multi-layered corruption (on all sides) even allowing Dodik to enjoy access to the UK bond and securities markets. The shambolism of the state-building in Bosnia dissipated under various self-interests until Dodik vetoed sanctions against Russia and potential NATO membership, much to British dislike.

Tory policies echo those from 30 years ago. They threaten conflict in Bosnia, yet again. The British are fast-tracking Bosnia into NATO, a proposal that was universally ridiculed just a year ago. Bosnian talks for the EU accession have been a carrot since the end of the war in 1995, but always ended in hollow promises and endless demands for improvement. It was a well-known joke on the streets of Sarajevo that Bosnia will join when the EU is no more. **C**

**Sheila Osmanovic
is a member of
Chartist EB**

Poisoned chalice

Jason Gold on political shifts in Montenegro masking moves to 'Open Balkans'

With a change of government Montenegro (MNE) remains extremely pro-Serb and Pro-Russian, but in more subtle ways.

A new minority Government assumed office on April 28th and President Djukanovic offered a mandate to Dritan Abazovic of URA (United Reform Action) to become Prime Minister. The new administration comprises a coalition of political parties most of which were part of the previous Government but with one important change, the inclusion of one of our sister parties, the Social Democratic Party. There are three Montenegrin sister parties, the other two being President Djukanovic's Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and the Social Democrats, neither of which are in the new ruling coalition. The condition of the minority Government being formed was that DPS would be excluded, even though it had the largest number of MPs. The SD were invited to join the coalition but refused.

So why did Djukanovic offer a mandate that excluded his own political party? To understand this one must know two things. The first is that ALL substantive parliamentary legislation needs a super majority of the 81 seat Parliament to pass into law, and the second being that Abazovic lost his left-wing supporters by joining forces with the previous Government giving it a majority of one in Parliament.

Any substantive legislation, and in particular any relevant to furthering Montenegro's accession to the EU (all chapters are open but only three have been closed) will only become law with support from the DPS and SD in opposition, thus making the new PM, Abazovic, susceptible to losing his right-wing, pro-Serb, pro-Russian supporters. The Social Democrats (previously in Government with DPS before 2020) understand the long game that DPS are playing. Namely to hold a new General Election as soon as possible and therefore not to taint themselves, as URA have, by being part of a Government with pro-Serb/pro-Russian par-



President Djukanovic (credit: Jason Gold)

ties.

People outside of Montenegro, even seasoned politicians, do not understand that President Milo Djukanovic has not been in power for 30 years because he is a tyrant or a dictator but only because he understands how politics works, domestically, regionally and internationally. He has given this minority Government, particularly Abazovic, a poisoned chalice, while ensuring Abazovic, with the help of his new Foreign Minister (SDP Ranko Krivokapic), continues on a pro-Western, pro-EU path.

Abazovic has always claimed publicly that many international 'players', such as Germany, USA, EU, UK, France and others, support him, but there is an elephant in the room and it's called 'Open Balkans', President Vucic of Serbia's pet project, supported by Abazovic.

Vucic has managed to sell the idea to the international community as a positive initiative for the Western Balkans. The project aims to open the borders of Kosovo, Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH), Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia for trade, travel, investment etc., like a mini-Schengen for the region. This would be hugely advantageous to everyone except Montenegro because MNE is so far advanced in its accession process compared to the other countries that it

would in reality just hold MNE back. This would either precipitate all the remaining Western Balkans joining the EU en masse or not allowing them to join at all with 'Open Balkans' seen as an alternative to EU membership.

This is a worrying prospect, especially for MNE, because Vucic's mantra vis-a-vis Montenegro is in every way (except military as yet) identical to that which Putin holds regarding Ukraine. Vucic has publicly declared ALL Montenegrins to be Serbs (which they most definitely are not). He denies that Montenegrin is a separate cultural identity and denies the existence of Montenegrin as a language. He denies the right of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church to exist and has used the Serb Orthodox Church in MNE as a political weapon to promote his narrative, much as he has done in BiH and Kosovo but with far more subtlety, to the point of it being omni-present in all areas of Montenegrin life including across all media avenues.

I remind readers that in 2016 on the eve of presidential elections in MNE Putin and Vucic together organized an attempted coup d'etat which only failed because one of the people involved backed out at the last moment and alerted the Montenegrin security service. (All this has been widely reported by Bellingcat.)

Is the international community going to do to Montenegro what it has done to Ukraine? It is true that total war is not yet on the horizon in MNE but many didn't think it was going to happen in Ukraine either.

Politicians like Putin and Vucic play a clever game over a long period of time. This is how they build false narratives and false equivalence to change the perceived consensus of the places they wish to rule over. Vucic's stand on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Montenegro's recent (2017) membership of NATO should tell us all we need to know about the situation facing MNE. Pro-peace Left progressive internationalists need to wake up to the dangers brewing in the Balkans. **C**

Jason Gold is chair Labour International Central Eastern Europe

Playing Liar's poker with Ukraine!

Glyn Ford on dangerous echoes of Korea and proxy war

Putin's invasion of the Ukraine on the 24th February was a criminal act of folly that destroyed in an instant his dream of a Russian Empire reborn. In a long deeply divided country - where as little as a short decade ago Viktor Yanukovich fled office after nationalists and liberals violently protested against his corruption, brutality and most of all his pro-Moscow leanings in a short insurrectionary civil war - the clock of history had moved on. How the West has won. What Putin had failed to see was its sweeping victory over the Russian Empire in the cultural wars amongst the post-Soviet generations. The old were dying and the young coming of age. They - like Syrians and Afghanis - saw futures written in the West, not the East. The invasion immediately crystallised the support of oligarchs and public behind the previously unloved populist President, Volodymyr Zelensky, while millions fled into exile; most through fear, but many through hope.

The war itself will be fought in the coming months to its mutual culminating points of failure as neither Kyiv nor Moscow proves capable of breaking a stalemate, both too exhausted to meaningfully continue. Then war should turn to jaw as Beijing - or an alternative power - brokers peace. But here lies danger. Ukraine's embrace by the West threatens their conflict turning proxy for others' wars as the West feeds the mouth and mind of war with increasingly sophisticated weapons and goads Kyiv on with false hopes and expectations.

The initial demands on Moscow were for the restoration of the status quo ante, almost immediately bargained upwards with objective steal and creep. It was no longer sufficient for the West that Putin abrogated present gains. Now those parts of the country under the control of pro-Moscow forces with Russian collusion were to be 'liberated' along with Crimea, Khrushchev's capricious gift to Kyiv in 1954. There is precious little evidence to show either want liberating. Yet why stop there? Some of those around



Foreign Secretary Liz Truss with Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Minister Dmytro Kuleba

Biden and Johnson - Brussels is more torn - want to ensure that Moscow is so devastatingly beaten that it will be incapable of future military adventurism.

The world has been there before with Washington. The evidence of where such ambition leads is seared across the waist of Korea and cemeteries. In 1950 the US - and UK - sent an expeditionary force again to restore the status quo ante as Pyongyang formalised the Peninsula's civil war. When on the verge of delivering the UN's war aim, the arrogance of General MacArthur and the gullibility of President Truman saw ambition raised to demand total victory as the US military marched north across the 38th Parallel. The prospect of American troops on the Yalu River precipitated Mao into a bloody war that lasted two long more years, killed millions of soldiers and civilians on both sides and left the Peninsula divided, dangerous and unstable seventy years on.

Total victory is a big ask in any military conflict, but effectively asking for a nuclear power to be fought to the point of virtual surrender is psychosis. Yet there are those in and around NATO who want at that point of stalemate to rearm Ukraine and provide a fresh echelon of weaponry and support to continue the war at Ukraine's cost. Yet - if successful - this will take the world treacherously close to Dmitry Medvedev's threshold when he stated on 26

March that Moscow would consider the first use of nuclear weapons 'when an act of aggression is committed against Russia that threatens the existence of the country itself'. Cornering Putin with no escape path is the high road to disaster not only for Ukraine, but for the world as a whole.

None of this serves the people of the Ukraine well, even when they are bribed with the idea of membership of NATO and the European Union (EU). For Kyiv to join NATO is to drive a permanent hostile wedge between Russia and Ukraine. Yet worse is to pretend that early membership of the EU is in any way feasible. The problem is not its heroic people, but its rulers and the oligarchs who pull their strings. Transparency International's Corruption Index placed Ukraine 117th out of 180, bracketed by Zambia and Egypt. Russia weighed in at 129th. It's equally difficult to empathise with or echo any enthusiasm for today's national cry of Slava Ukraini (Glory to Ukraine) as it resonates down time as the same hollered during the massacre of 100,000 Jews a century ago by Ukrainian nationalists and again bawled a generation later by the far-right collaborators with Nazi war crimes. Arming Ukraine's people to help them to fight their own battles is one thing, but using them as unsung mercenaries in a proxy war by Washington as it gears up to fight to maintain its global dominance is another. **C**

Glyn Ford was a Labour MEP

US backed Saudi lead genocide in Yemen

Venus Azal on a forgotten tragedy of the century

Yemen is a beautiful country located in Southwest Asia, which was nicknamed "Arabia Felix" or "Happy Arabia" by the Greeks and Romans thousands of years ago because of the prosperity, wealth, and stability its people enjoyed. Tragically, Yemen has become grief-stricken while suffering from the worst humanitarian crisis in the present-day world, according to reports by UN organizations.

This crisis is a result of an aggression by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, who have waged a devastating and relentless war against Yemen since March 2015 under the pretext of restoring the so-called "legitimate government" of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi who had previously resigned and fled the country. (President Hadi had originally come to power after a popular revolution in 2011 by a fraudulent election imposed by the Gulf Initiative in which he was the only candidate, one that was boycotted by a majority of Yemeni people.) These two countries have been deliberately bombing civilian targets located in Yemen. Saudi Arabia has also set up an air, sea and land blockade so that hardly anything can get into Yemen.

Over the past seven years of war, 17,734 have been killed, including 4,017 children, while the number of wounded has reached 28,528, including 4,586 children. In a speech last year to the Security Council, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore asserted, "A child dies every ten minutes in Yemen, whose death could have been prevented," noting that about 11.3 million children need humanitarian assistance to survive.

The number of victims increases daily. Among these victims are families whose homes were bombed by Saudi and Emirati planes in civilian areas far from any military confrontations. These crimes amount to genocide, as they are being repeated despite knowledge by the Saudi coalition leadership that the targeted areas are civilian areas devoid of any military.

For more than seven years, the aggression has caused millions of Yemenis to suffer from severe shortages of food and medicine, lack of

services, and almost complete destruction of infrastructure and civil facilities, including schools, hospitals, markets, farms and factories as well as drinking water wells and power plants. These are supposed to be protected under international humanitarian law that prohibits the bombing of civilian targets. Saudi Arabia has cut off salaries for millions of Yemeni employees and their families. It has also blocked the arrival of ships carrying oil derivatives and foodstuffs to Yemeni ports causing the prices of oil and gas to rise dramatically, meaning millions of people are unable to obtain their most basic needs because they lack purchasing power. This has pushed an overwhelming majority of Yemenis below the poverty line.

Other victims of the aggression are the medical patients who are unable to travel for treatment abroad because of Saudi Arabia's closure of the airport in Sana'a. This has resulted in the deaths of thousands of individuals because they did not receive the necessary treatment in a timely manner, especially considering the deterioration of medical services in Yemen due to wartime conditions and the bombing of medical facilities.

"Patients in Yemen are trapped even when there is a way to save them. The past years have been a death sentence for thousands of Yemeni patients who urgently need medical treatment abroad. Over the course of five years, Yemenis were deprived of their right to travel abroad to seek medical care, do business, work, study or visit the family. For thousands of Yemenis living abroad, they have been stranded or have difficulties visiting their homeland", stated the acting Director of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Isaac Okou.

The closure of the airport has also caused billions of dollars in economic losses, exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation in Yemen. Despite an agreement to open the airport and operate two flights per week, according to the terms of the last initiative between the Saudi-led coalition and the de facto authority in Sana'a, the impossible terms imposed by Saudi Arabia on travellers and its ongoing delay in opening the airport and allowing Yemeni planes to fly to



Yemeni children play in the rubble of buildings

and from it has meant that many people will die because they will not be able to leave the country to receive medical treatment

The actions by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which are backed by the United States and UK, seek to put in charge of Yemen parties affiliated with their own agendas in order to interfere in the affairs of the Yemeni people. First, to take over the strategic location that controls the most important global shipping routes represented in the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Gulf of Aden. Second, to have authority over oil and gas sources, ports and important islands, including Socotra Island that is currently occupied by Emirati-backed forces.

The only way to achieve peace and stability in Yemen is by stopping external interventions in the country's internal affairs so that its people can solve their own problems through comprehensive dialogue between all conflicting parties, and by entering into a system of power sharing based on national interests. Once that happens, then Yemen can return to its former glory of being Arabia Felix. **C**

Venus Azal is a Yemeni Rights activist

Horn of Africa in turmoil

Without a ceasefire in the murderous war, a famine akin to levels that launched Band Aid is likely says **Andy Gregg**

In November 2020 Ethiopia declared war on its restive northern province of Tigray and launched an incursion and was simultaneously backed by Eritrea who invaded across their southern border into Tigray. Since then, the whole of the Horn of Africa has been thrown into turmoil. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands have died directly from the conflict and that many millions are in danger from starvation and famine that exacerbates the effects of the drought that has affected the area for the last four years.

In early June 2022 it was estimated that one person across the Horn of Africa is dying of starvation every 48 seconds. The fighting has been characterised by brutal ethnic cleansing and genocidal killings by all sides including the official defence forces of Eritrea, Tigray and Ethiopia as well as ethnically based militias and paramilitary groups. Pre-existing ethnic and national differences have all been exacerbated. All of the countries that surround Ethiopia including Eritrea, Djibouti, Sudan and Somalia have been increasingly drawn into the conflict. Refugee flows from the region have grown exponentially in the last two years even though the region already produced some of the world's highest numbers of refugees and internally displaced peoples before war broke out.

The current war and the massacres that have accompanied it have a long history in the inter-ethnic rivalry that besets the Horn and which was incubated over the long period of the 30-year war of resistance (1961-1991) between Eritrea (and later Tigray), and the despotic Ethiopian regimes of Haile Selassie and then Mengistu Haile-Mariam. When Eritrea's thirty-year long war of independence came to an end in 1991, with a subsequent 1993 referendum that established the independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia, there were significant issues that were left unresolved. These issues resulted in a further border war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998-2000.

This war brought into conflict the highly authoritarian Eritrean regime (often described as the



Tigrayans protest war

North Korea of Africa) and an Ethiopia whose Government was then dominated by Tigrayans who are a relatively small ethnic group from the far north of Ethiopia. The Tigrayans (the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front) had taken power in Ethiopia in 1991 with the capture of Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa in alliance with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. However, these two erstwhile allies then fell out over the next seven years over the demarcation of the border between the two countries and Ethiopia's desire for access to Red Sea ports. The 1998-2000 war was fought most intensely for control of a few barren hillsides along the border with Ethiopia's Tigray region. The more recent war has been far more mobile and has laid waste to large parts of Northern Ethiopia both outside and inside Tigray with armies and militias surging back

and forward causing huge displacements of people.

Since November 2020 the new war has swept across Northern Ethiopia with the Tigrayans now largely surrounded and unable to get food or other supplies into their heartlands. Eritrea invaded Tigray at the start of the war and then was forced to withdraw but now shows signs of being about to launch another incursion across its southern border with Tigray. Refugees in Ethiopia who fled the brutal Eritrean regime are now being targeted and there have been substantial movements of refugees across the borders into Sudan. Ethnic groups including those representing Oromos (the largest ethnic minority in Ethiopia) and others have taken sides against the Ethiopian government. Other groups (particularly Amharas and Afars) have also carried out reprisal raids and massacres against Tigrayans throughout Ethiopia.

Four years ago, in July 2018, Eritreans and Ethiopians had caught a glimpse of a more hopeful future. Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia's new prime minister, came to Eritrea's capital, Asmara and embraced Issaias Afwerki, Eritrea's dictator. The two signed a peace deal formally ending the bloody border war that had cost some 100,000 lives and which had been left unresolved after 2000. Abiy received the Nobel Peace prize for this but more recently has been responsible for the invasion of Tigray in 2020 and has shown himself to be entirely unworthy of such an accolade,

Pressure for a ceasefire needs to be put on all of the combatant parties by the UN, the African Union and other international parties including the EU and US. The increasing famine will shortly produce scenes as bad or worse than those that led to the launch of Band Aid in 1985. Large areas of the Horn of Africa are becoming increasingly uninhabitable due to drought and climate change as well as the constant hostilities. If catastrophic levels of famine and refugees flight from the area are to be avoided then the world needs to take as much notice of what is happening here as it currently is in the Ukraine. **C**

Andy Gregg was Director of Race on the Agenda

Winds of change as Labor wins Australian election

Jude Newcombe reports cautious optimism on the left with Greens holding balance of power

On Election Day, a boat of asylum seekers from Sri Lanka was intercepted by Australian Border Force as it headed to Christmas Island. Breaking his rule of never divulging information about 'on water matters' the outgoing Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, announced the interception. It is widely believed that he also urged the Commander of Border Force to confirm the matter. The Liberal Party promptly sent robo-text messages to voters urging them to vote Liberal. This was a cynical and desperate attempt by the former conservative government to retain power; after all, this was the playbook that John Howard dipped into to defeat Labor in 2001.

Stories of 'boat people' on the approach to Australia's shores ramp up xenophobia and racism and make the claim that Labor is 'soft' on boats. Anthony Albanese stated that Labor supported boat turn-backs (although this is contentious within ALP ranks) and would continue offshore processing. The new government has instigated an inquiry into what role the former Prime Minister's office had in publicising the story.

Fortunately this time the manipulation of events and the attendant media coverage was unsuccessful. On 21st May, the Australian Labor Party, led by Anthony Albanese, won power. Despite Labor having a wafer-thin majority, a wave of profound relief and cautious optimism has swept through the left. This is only the fourth time Labor has seized government from Opposition, and has been achieved despite the pervasive anti-Labor stance of the Murdoch press.

However, it is anything but a straightforward result. The ALP gained only 31% of the primary vote (that is people who marked ALP as number one on the ballot paper). In Australia's preferential voting system preferences from those parties with fewer primary votes flowed to Labor to deliver 77 seats in the lower house. In the Senate Labor will not have the numbers to pass legislation and will need to negotiate each time with non-Labor Senators. The Greens will hold the balance of



Australian Labor leader Anthony Albanese

power in the Senate.

The Greens have also increased their numbers in the House of Representatives, from one to four. Their election strategy targeted inner city electorates, mostly those held by progressive Labor MPs. In their campaign the Greens attracted throngs of passionate volunteers, often much younger than the Labor party faithful.

The election saw the emergence of a new force known as the Teal Independents. They stood in inner city electorates held by 'moderate' Liberal members. Though not forming a party they are united in fighting for more urgent action on climate and the establishment of an anti-corruption commission. They have successfully unseated a number of high profile Liberal MPs.

Together, the Greens and Teal Independents make up a large cross bench in the House of Representatives.

Climate action is front of mind for many voters. In the last two summers, extreme weather devastated the eastern seaboard: in 2020-2021, wild fires burnt towns and massive areas of forest and killed wildlife. Repeated catastrophic floods were widespread this summer. For Labor the challenge (as well as the massive budget deficit, gas prices etc.) is how to facilitate transition to renewables

and green energy industry so that trade unionists in the mines are not left behind. Labor's target of 80% renewables and 43% reduction in emissions by 2030 will be difficult enough and more ambitious targets as demanded by the Greens and Teals have the potential, as described by the convenor of the Labor Environment Action Network, to break the 'fragile truce' in mining towns.

The Albanese Labor government has four indigenous members, greater ethnic diversity and more women in Parliament and in Cabinet than ever before. Preparation for a referendum on constitutional change to provide an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, as called for in the Uluru Statement, has begun. A government submission to the Fair Work Commission will support an increase in the minimum wage to keep pace with inflation. Negotiations are underway to finalise a bill for a Federal Integrity Commission to come before Parliament by next spring. And, if ALP policy is implemented, our humanitarian intake of refugees will be increased 'over time' to 27,000 a year, and thousands of asylum seekers languishing on Temporary Protection Visas will have a pathway to citizenship. Welcome winds of change. **C**

Jude Newcombe is a member of the Executive of the Brunswick Branch of the ALP and is a Chartist supporter

Women and children bear the brunt

Margaret Owen on the serial law-breaking of the Johnson government

The shaming of Johnson's government, and our associated loss of trust on the global stage, increases by the hour. The resignation of Lord Geidt, his ethics advisor, should rouse the backbench Tory MPs to demand that this Prime Minister leaves No 10 now.

Obligations under international treaties are part of international law. But Johnson has little respect for the law or lawyers. Defenders of those deprived of their rights enshrined in statutes and international treaties are branded "leftie lawyers". He even labelled our Supreme Court judges as "enemies of the people". Some of these breaches are well known to the public, others less so. The list is long but here's a few examples.

On 24th September 2019 the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Johnson's prorogation was both justiciable and unlawful, and therefore null and of no effect. His advice to the Queen to prorogue parliament was "outside the powers of the Prime Minister". He was motivated by a desire to suspend parliament sitting until the Queen's speech would deliver his planned legislative agenda for a hard Brexit.

Since then there has been a constant stream of lies, about Partygate, who paid for the decoration of the Downing Street flat, Spanish holidays, cash for peerages, and, still unresolved, his relationship with the American businesswoman, Jennifer Arcuri, and whether there were conflicts of interest when she received funding and accompanied Johnson on trade trips. Soon Johnson must face questioning by the parliamentary Privileges Committee.

When governments ratify international treaties, the articles in them become part of international law. They are legally binding despite there being no centralised governance to enforce them. If a country flouts international law the courts can demand that it immediately cease its illegal act, and make reparations to those individuals damaged by their law-breaking. The June 14th eleventh hour interim judgement of the ECHR stopped the ill-fated Rwanda-bound plane carrying des-

perate suicidal asylum seekers who sought safety here. However, Johnson's response to being found to be in breach of such laws is to renounce our treaty obligations, whatever their source.

We have seen the ripping up of the Northern Ireland protocol, thus risking a European trade war and exposing this country to prosecution for its breaches by the International Court of Justice. Johnson signed the Brexit deal in 2019, agreeing customs checks on goods travelling between the UK and Northern Ireland, creating an EU border in the Irish Sea. We will also breach the Good Friday Agreement, inciting a return to 'the troubles' that plagued the region for decades.

Johnson and Priti Patel have blatantly breached the articles of the 1951 Refugee Convention, also the European Charter of Human Rights, and several other UN Conventions such as those on Political and Civil Rights (UNPCR), Economic and Social Rights (UNESR), the Prevention of Torture (CAT), and Children's Rights (UNCRC), with their policies on migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The unlawful, cruel, unworkable, and hugely costly plan to deport to Rwanda traumatised, often tortured, asylum seekers, has been deplored internationally, and specifically by authorities such as the Refugee Council and UNHCR.

Refugees should not be treated as criminals simply because of the means they used to arrive on our shores. The IRCs (Immigration Removal Centres) used to house these vulnerable people are unlawful and should be closed down. Less well-known to the general public is the opening of yet another IRC in County Durham intended to house some 84 deeply traumatised women asylum seekers. Many of these women have been victims of rape, modern slavery and trafficking, and have fled extreme violence, conflict zones and harmful misogynist traditional practices.

Further comes Government indifference and breach of the CEDAW (UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women). This groundbreaking convention

was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, after much lobbying by women's NGOs. Women must have, for example, equal rights to healthcare, family planning, education, land ownership, freedom to marry and access to justice. The UK ratified the CEDAW in 1986, but has retained reservations on such issues as immigration and pensions, which the CEDAW Committee (of 26), have ruled are incompatible with the spirit of the treaty.

To the anger of many women's NGOs here, including those in the devolved regions, Johnson and his cabinet have not only shown utter indifference to this Women's Convention, and therefore also its obligations (not legal but moral) under the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, but also to successive annual Agreed Conclusions of the UN CSW (Commission on the Status of Women).

Earlier this year, before the start of the 66th CSW, the Government affirmed in meetings with UK women's NGOs that it would not comply with any of the recommendations made by the CEDAW, and therefore would not be domesticating the Convention's articles.

The coalition of Tories and Lib Dems in 2010 abolished the world-renowned Women's National Commission. The CEDAW asked HMG to fill the gap so that we women can have restored to us an effective 'Institutional Mechanism for Women', as laid down in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the CSW Agreed Conclusions. This has been refused.

We now learn that Johnson plans to repeal the 1998 Human Rights Act. We are living in a world where a rules-based order is no longer respected. When this government sells arms to autocratic, misogynist and racist regimes that have no regard for human rights, including women's rights, we breach the Arms Treaty (ATT). Women and children bear the brunt disproportionately. My organisation, Widows For Peace Through Democracy, tries to address some of these privations and violations. The British public must not allow this destruction of the values we hold dear to continue. **C**



Margaret Owen is a veteran human rights barrister

Israel apartheid regime

In the wake of the murder of Shireen Abu Akleh and further illegal settlements **Ben Jamal** says anti-racists must resist Tory complicity

On May 11th, as Israeli forces, conducted their latest incursion into Jenin in the occupied West Bank, news emerged of the shooting of prominent Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. Eye witness reports made clear that she was shot by IDF forces, a conclusion subsequently reinforced by investigations by international media outlets and B'Tselem, Israel's leading human rights monitoring organisation.

On the same day Shireen Abu Akleh was killed Israeli bulldozers began to move into Masafer Yatta, a network of villages further South in the West Bank, demolished buildings and uprooted 45 people including children.

Two days later on May 13th the world watched in horror as Israeli Police attacked Shireen's funeral procession in Jerusalem, beating pall bearers to their knees with batons. All of these actions, including the attack on the funeral procession in full glare of the world's media, were conducted by Israeli forces robustly confident that beyond rhetorical condemnation their actions would provoke no meaningful punitive response from Governments worldwide. This confidence, rooted in historical experience was not misplaced. According to Reporters without Borders, Shireen Abu Akleh was one of at least 30 journalists, the vast majority Palestinian, killed by Israeli Forces since 2000. None of these killings have resulted in prosecutions. B'Tselem has described investigations carried out by Israel as "amounting to an organised cover up that aims not to bring about truth and accountability but on the contrary to prevent them"

The culture of impunity is sustained by a framework of understanding encouraged by Israel that has determined decision making across western governments for decades, a framework that portrays Israel as a liberal democracy overseeing a problematic but temporary military occupation. It frames the issue within a paradigm of conflict requiring peace building measures that bring "moderate" Palestinians and Israelis together to achieve mutual understanding.

It is a vision that enabled Keir Starmer in his speech to Labour Friends of Israel last year to praise "Israel's rumbustious democracy, its independent judiciary and its commitment to the rule of law" and to describe past Israeli leaders like Golda Meir as "comrades in the international struggle for equality, peace and freedom". Golda Meir, some will recall, who once famously declared, that there is no such thing as a Palestinian people.

Standing opposed to this is a second vision or framework articulated by Palestinian civil society for decades and endorsed over the past year and a half in seismic reports from B'Tselem, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International. It is summarised simply in this statement in the B'Tselem report "The Israeli regime enacts in all the territory it controls (Israeli sovereign territory, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip) an apartheid regime. One organizing principle lies at the base of a wide array of Israeli policies: advancing and perpetuating the supremacy of one group – Jews – over another – Palestinians."

The consensus now being established across international civil society in acknowledging the reality of Apartheid is important because from it consequences flow – legal consequences - but also political consequences. History has taught us that you cannot and do not seek to have normal relations with a state practicing apartheid – It is this understanding and these lessons from history that create the moral foundation for the Palestinian call for BDS until Israel ends its violation of Palestinian rights.

As actors in the solidarity movement, responding to this call from Palestinians is our central driving imperative. For us in the UK what this demands is that we take action to end the complicity of our Governments, our public bodies, our companies and corporations in supporting this system of injustice.

Israel is engaged in a global effort to delegitimise this resistance to injustice, including by persuading willing allies to introduce laws designed to suppress the response to the BDS call. The UK government is falling into line planning to intro-



Protesters carrying photos of slain journalist Shireen Abu Akleh

duce a law to prevent public bodies from divesting from or not procuring from complicit companies, a bill expected to be introduced in July or September. PSC has been busy building a broad coalition of organisations opposed to the Bill, including many trade unions, Liberty, the Quakers, Methodist Church, Greenpeace, and Friends of the Earth. They are opposing it because they share our view that it is not only a right of public bodies to decide not to procure from or invest in companies complicit in violations of international law and human rights no matter where they occur, it is a responsibility to do so.

But as we defend the space defending the right to boycott, we also commit ourselves to continue to work to enlarge that space. In the aftermath of the huge demonstrations involving more than 200,000 marching in London last May, in response to acts of ethnic cleansing in Sheik Jarrah and a renewed assault on Gaza, PSC established more than 14 new branches taking our total to over 80 all committed to taking our campaigns for justice to the heart of communities across the UK. Those joining us do so from the foundation of recognising that there is no coherent and continuing anti racist and anti colonial struggle that does not have the liberation of Palestinian people at its heart and centre. Our task remains to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Palestinian people until they enjoy what is their fundamental and inalienable right to live in freedom with justice and equality in their historic homeland. **C**



Ben Jamal is Secretary of Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Judicial assassination in Turkey

Julie Ward on the life imprisonment of Osman Kavala

On April 25th my friend Osman Kavala, a leading Turkish intellectual, rights campaigner, businessman, restaurateur and philanthropist, was sentenced to life imprisonment by a court in Istanbul. Kavala, who is the founder and chair of the board of Anadolu Kültür, an Istanbul-based nonprofit arts and culture organisation, had already spent more than four years behind bars, detained on several spurious trumped-up charges including involvement in the 2013 Gezi Park protests as well as allegedly being one of the main architects of a coup against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2016.

The panel of three judges also jailed seven other defendants for 18 years each on the charge of aiding the attempt to overthrow the government during the large-scale public protests in 2013. Others now in exile had already been tried and convicted in absentia including the award-winning journalist Can Dündar. Meanwhile Gezi activist, actor Mehmet Ali Alabora, fled the country and is now based in Cardiff.

Kavala addressed the court by video link from Silivri prison near Istanbul saying that he viewed the entire process as a 'judicial assassination'.

"These are conspiracy theories drafted on political and ideological grounds," he said to a packed courtroom minutes before the sentence was handed down. Erdoğan had portrayed him as a leftist agent of George Soros and accused him of funnelling foreign money aimed at overthrowing the state.

"We can never be together with people like Kavala," Erdoğan had declared in 2020.

Kavala is well-known for his support of the Armenian community. This makes him a thorn in the side of Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party who refuse to recognise the genocide which began in April 1915 with the rounding up of hundreds of intellectuals and political activists who were sent on journeys to a certain death.

Kavala was one of tens of thousands of Turkish citizens who were either jailed or fired from their jobs in purges that followed a coup attempt against Erdoğan when he was already president in 2016.



Osman Kavala was sentenced to life imprisonment by a Turkish court

Kavala was arrested in October 2017 at Istanbul airport as he returned from a meeting with the Goethe Society in the border city of Gaziantep regarding a civil society cultural development project.

A court acquitted and released him in February 2020 – only for the police to re-arrest him before he had a chance to return home to his wife, Ayse. Another court then accused him of being involved in the failed 2016 coup. Kavala ultimately ended up facing both sets of charges, but the recent April 2022 ruling only covered the case stemming from the 2013 unrest.

The seemingly arbitrary nature of the alternating charges filed against Kavala have made him a symbol for rights groups critical of Erdoğan's increasing authoritarianism, which has seen Turkey's application for membership of the EU stalled. Kavala's case against pre-trial detention was heard at the European Court of Human Rights in 2020 where it was deemed unlawful, but his imprisonment continued.

His treatment has prompted the Council of Europe to launch rare disciplinary proceedings that could ultimately see Turkey's membership suspended in the continent's main human rights grouping.

Speaking from inside the courtroom co-defendant Mucella Yapıcı, an architect and trade unionist, said:

"The Gezi resistance is the most democratic, creative, egalitarian and most inclusive peaceful mass movement in the history of this country. It has become a symbol of

talking and making decisions together and protecting all kinds of life.

"Accusations based on imaginary scenarios, groundless accusations like terrorism, coups and manipulation of foreign powers coupled with the coercion of the judiciary, whose impartiality has become quite questionable, cannot change the historical reality of the Gezi Resistance.

"The Gezi Resistance took place on a very legitimate and constitutional basis, within the framework of democratic rights and freedom of expression, that is the truth.... It was not the Taksim Solidarity or the social media calls of individual participants that made the Gezi resistance grow bigger, but the police brutality and the statements of the government at that time, that increased social tension...

"We reject this lawsuit! We will see the days when those who ruthlessly caused these deaths and injuries of our friends are brought to justice.

"We are aware that you want to make people forget that Gezi is a song that will be part of every resistance on the side of labor, on the side of the poor, on the side of nature, on the side of the oppressed, on the side of the marginalized, on the side of women, on the side of peace.

"The democracy that will come to this country takes its strength from the echoes of the voices in Gezi, which you were not able to suppress, despite all the oppression and violence."

This article is an attempt to amplify those voices. **G**

Julie Ward was a North West England MEP and is a member of Chartists EB

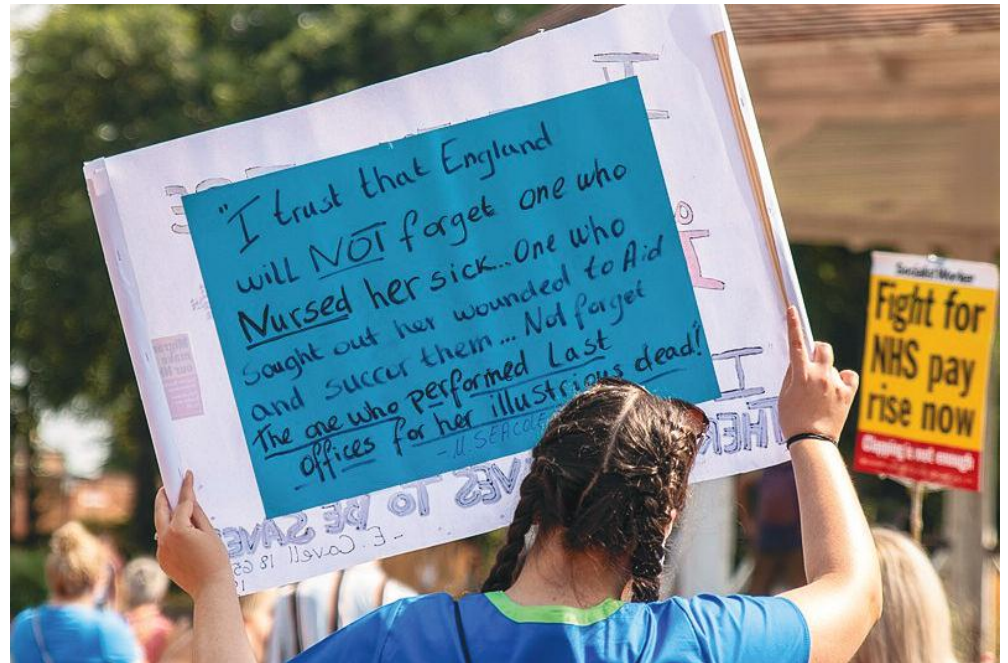
NHS on life support

Karen Constantine says the Tories fatally undermined the NHS before the pandemic, now it is facing destruction

Back in 2015, I (along with many others) was knocking doors - gearing up for the General Election in my hometown of Ramsgate, in the South East. Nigel Farage, then leader of UKIP, was sailing high and expected to win the South Thanet constituency. UKIP had a vacuous, ill-informed, cavalier attitude towards the NHS. Farage said 'we're going to have to think about healthcare very, very differently. I think we are going to have to move to an insurance-based system.' Some local residents in the poorest wards of Ramsgate, amongst the most deprived in the country, parroted these sentiments back, when we asked residents on the doorstep if they were worried about the future of the NHS under the Conservatives, they stated alarmingly they favoured privatisation. The dye was cast and the far right played their part in assisting the Conservatives in reshaping public perception. The Tories have long eyed the NHS as a cash cow for the private sector, wishing to sell it off, as with so many previously publicly owned organisations.

This was only the start of the stealthy, crafty, PR battle to convince the public that crumbling hospital infrastructure, asset stripping, the removal and down-banding of qualified clinical staff, the rationing of GP's, the ever lengthening queues for treatment, centralisation of vital treatment, and a demoralising culture of constant, (and often pointless) costly reorganisation was in fact for our own good. Fast forward to 2022 and the destruction of the NHS.

From 2010 onwards, knowing full well that there was an age demographic retirement cliff edge on the horizon, the Government already had a clear indication that many key clinical staff would need to be replaced. Their response? The removal of the nursing bursary. With the predictable result that many clinical functions in both acute and community settings are now decimated and operating with unsafe staff levels, unable to offer continuity of care, particularly in maternity and mental health services. There is still no plan in place to address this. This was all pre-



Covid.

Due to the cover offered by the pandemic, Tory rhetoric has morphed. They can now claim that it's Covid that has impacted the NHS. It has. But only because the Conservatives fatally allowed the rot to set in. The damage to the NHS which we are all now experiencing, the long waits for GP appointments, the appalling 6,358,050m people (as of March '22) on waiting lists for elective surgery, the scandalous delays of people waiting in the back of ambulances when trying to obtain emergency treatment, the crisis in maternity care, and otherwise healthy patients ready for discharge essentially trapped in hospitals, 'bed blocking' as there is inadequate social care provision to discharge them into. But still, the Tories instead of accepting they got it wrong, and accepting the need for urgent intervention, investment, training and recruitment are content to try to pin this astounding fall in services on Covid. The truth is, this is entirely due to the austerity measures the Conservatives imposed. We've experienced the lowest rate of growth in the NHS since 2010.

The NHS had already been hollowed out leaving Covid to take a huge toll.

In the 2019 Conservative mani-

festos Boris Johnson had famously boasted about building 40 new hospitals over the next 10 years. That's great - because new facilities are needed and would drive up both quality of care and aid staff recruitment and retention. But are all of them genuinely new? Not at all is the answer. This promise amounts to little more than refurbishment and new wards tacked onto existing infrastructure. In any case £3.7B will not build 40 hospitals according to experts.

Post-Covid, Johnson also promised that he would look after our NHS staff but has called for pay restraint across the public sector as the cost of living crisis continues to spiral out of control and as inflation tops 10%. Not forgetting that hospitals are now opening foodbanks - for staff - struggling to manage. Little surprise that Unison leader Christina McAnea has challenged him to keep his promise and to do the right thing for this group of key public sector workers:

"The government in Westminster has completely forgotten who got the country through the pandemic and the impact on public-sector workers of that. Care workers who were having to hold the hands of dying patients because the families couldn't get to them ...for [the government] to say, you need to show pay restraint, is completely inappro-

Karen Constantine is a Kent County councillor and Chartist EB member

priate.”

McAnea also challenges the Government to get back around the table to discuss and negotiate workforce issues. Johnson's Government are resolutely tin eared to the workforce insight and knowledge that the trade unions bring to the table.

In fact, Johnson's Government seem locked in permanent dispute with all the health unions. The BMA chair Dr Chaand Nagpaul frequently reminds the Government that the NHS is “still under crippling pressure.” Recent BMA polling shows 25% of GPs are so tired at work that they believe the care of patients is being undermined.

Unsurprisingly Pat Cullen, General Secretary and Chief Executive of the RCN, says that nursing staffing levels are not safe for either staff or patients and are driving nurses out of the NHS: “Our new report lays bare the state of health and care services across the UK. It shows the shortages that force you to go even more than the extra mile and that, when the shortages are greatest, you are forced to leave patient care undone.”

The warning signs of workforce decay, overwork and demoralisation were already evidenced.

The King's Fund has concluded that the impact of Covid has reduced life expectancy globally, but notes that the “U.K. compares poorly with other advanced nations.” Veena Raleigh, senior fellow at the think tank, adds: “The NHS is further on the back foot than most advanced health systems in coping with the pandemic's legacy, which includes an exhausted workforce, a large and growing backlog of care, and widening health inequalities.”

And, it's getting worse. Within my role on Kent County Council's HOSC, (health overview and scrutiny committee), I have repeatedly asked for up to date information on ambulance waits and stroke outcomes amongst other things. Many, many months later I'm still waiting for that information, which causes me to wonder ‘what are they hiding?’

No-one within Government takes responsibility for workforce issues in the NHS. It's the single most important factor that the troubled NHS is facing. It's also the one thing that Labour must do: legislate to reinstate that responsibility directly to the Secretary of State for Health. If Labour does that, I'll be back out door knocking at the next General Election telling Ramsgate residents to vote Labour because their lives actually depend on it. This time, I think they might just believe me. **C**

Bonkers and immoral

Duncan Bowie on the Tories' latest wheeze to reduce social housing

Boris Johnson's post-Partygate policy relaunch centred on two proposals relating to housing policy. Both centred on the Conservative party's obsession with promoting home ownership, by seeking to attract households into home ownership who cannot afford it. This is based on the belief, which has some basis, that home owners are more likely to vote Conservative. This fits in with a narrative of implying those in rented council homes are second class citizens. As put forward by Michael Gove, so-called secretary for Levelling Up, the first of the two proposals is to enable tenants of housing associations the Right to Buy their homes. This has been proposed by Tory governments before, but dropped in favour of pilot or voluntary schemes.

There are a number of obvious problems with the scheme. Firstly, most housing association tenants cannot afford to buy their homes even with a significant subsidy. Secondly, most housing associations are charitable bodies and cannot in law, and in terms of their charitable objectives, sell assets at less than market value, and therefore require compensation for loss of assets. Thirdly, the government has not said how this compensation is to be paid for – it would have to come from government income.

There is a further problem – the Government has promised sold properties would be replaced ‘like for like’. This was also promised by government in relation to the Right to Buy scheme for council tenants, introduced by Margaret Thatcher in 1980. In practice, councils (under the statutory scheme) and housing associations (under the pilot scheme) have much lower replacement rates, on average one home replaced for every three sold.

The policy does nothing to add to overall housing supply while leading to a further loss of rented homes. We have witnessed a loss of 70 per cent of council rented housing stock over the last 50 years. Moreover, it is the best

homes which tend to be sold, especially the larger street properties, while the replacements tend to be smaller flats. To reduce the social housing stock available for letting to lower income families in greatest need and to force charities to sell off assets originally provided to meet charitable objectives is clearly immoral.

If you think this proposal is bonkers, just listen to the second proposal – Tenants on Housing Benefit should be able to use the benefit to fund mortgages to buy a home. This beggars belief. Most tenants in rented homes are in rented homes because they cannot afford to buy. Tenants with insufficient income to cover their rent, either because they are unemployed or disabled or in low income jobs get housing benefit (for private rented tenants, this is called the local housing allowance) to contribute to their housing costs. In an increasing number of cases, the benefit or allowance is insufficient to cover rental costs as caps are applied.

The proposal that low-income tenants could then use their housing benefit to pay towards home ownership is patently absurd. If your housing benefit does not cover your rent, or even if it does, there is no benefit left to contribute to saving up for a deposit, let alone get a mortgage. Moreover, no lender could possibly assume that such an income is guaranteed for a 30-year mortgage period or longer. Housing purchase costs are increasing (national average now £266,000; with London average £650,000 for a second-hand property, £743,000 for a new build) with mortgage interest rates increasing from the current all-time low.

These policies are unworkable and irrelevant. Johnson and Gove are more interested in populist rhetoric than actual delivery. Treasury officials surely can't be happy with schemes which are unfunded. The Government says it has yet to do the impact assessments on the schemes and that we should wait for detailed announcements on how the schemes would work. This only shows that ministers haven't a clue. **C**

Duncan Bowie is author of several books including *Radical Solutions to the Housing Supply Crisis*. He is Chartist reviews editor

Academy Fictions

Dave Lister on rolling back the years of Tory schools mis-education

Over half the government's new Schools Bill introduced in May deals with academies. All schools will have to be either part of a multi-academy trust (MAT) by 2030 or in the process of joining one, despite the lack of evidence that academies in general improve performance or anything much else. The National Education Union (NEU) has pointed out that the data produced by the DfE to justify this draconian change is misleading. Academies are listed as having positive inspection grades at a time when they were still Local Authority (LA) maintained schools, the NEU says.

The fiction peddled by the Tories is that academisation frees schools from LA bureaucracy. The reality is that they themselves introduced local management of schools in the last century, giving school management much greater autonomy. Academy chains are, as Warwick Mansell has pointed out, putting schools into the very position of lacking autonomy. They are run from a bureaucratic centre, often dictating to the school in their chain exactly what their curriculum should be, taking away from teachers the ability to shape the curriculum to the needs of their pupils.

Another issue is that the MAT centre is often a long way away from some of the schools in its chain, thus depriving them of any local knowledge of what is right for that particular school. I know from my own experience that they can ruthlessly dissolve effective governing bodies and impose their own structures without parent and staff representation in some cases, sometimes establishing handpicked advisory boards instead.

There are also cases of corruption and financial mismanagement of MATs. Huge powers can be in the hands of a family fiefdom such as in the Harris chain or a husband and wife team, as in the body overseeing Holland Park School, where the headteacher recently stood down after uproar by students and staff over the way in which the school was run.

An interesting development however is the provision in the Bill for LAs to establish their own MATs. This presents a dilemma for Labour-run LAs. Do they take

advantage of this provision and move quickly to set up their own MATs, thus keeping many of their primary schools (most secondary schools have academised) in the LA family of schools, or do they wait in the hope that there will be a change of government by 2024? Even if the Tories go there is no guarantee that academisation will be reversed.

Another area of controversy is around the National Tutoring Programme (NTP). There was justifiable concern, as schools came out of lockdown, that the achievement gap had widened because less advantaged children had generally had less access to learning whilst they were at home for long periods of time. The Government therefore commissioned a Dutch company Randstad to organise and deliver the NTP. This has been yet another private sector disaster. It has been calculated that only 10-15% of students have been reached by the Programme so far and the contract with Randstad has finally been ended. Shadow Schools Minister Stephen Morgan has referred to millions of pounds of public money being squandered with, for example, lessons delivered to empty classrooms.

Perhaps as a smokescreen for the NTP failure, Minister Nadhim Zahawi has written to headteachers saying that a list of those schools that have failed to take up the NTP offer will be published. The headteacher unions have pointed out that schools are required to contribute 25% of the cost of the programme from their own highly stretched budgets at a time when, in areas like London, falling pupil rolls are leading to budget cuts and schools are even ending up setting deficit budgets.

A further issue that has arisen is around Ofsted. All schools, including hitherto outstanding schools, are to be inspected over the next few years. In a recent NEU survey, 86% felt that Ofsted inspections create unreasonable or harmful levels of workload and stress on teachers. Ofsted has also adopted the Government's insistence on a knowledge-based curriculum rather than a skills-based one when we need both. This is taken to the absurd level of Ofsted inspectors questioning children about information that they learnt some years



previously and possibly downgrading schools if they cannot recall this information.

Finally, there are issues around school attendance, which has fallen since the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic levels. There are requirements in the Schools Bill for LAs to have standard systems for the imposition of fixed penalty notices for parents whose children are persistently absent. There is also reference to setting up compulsory registers of home-schooled pupils. It seems extraordinary that parents have been imprisoned for not sending their children to school when they can say that they are home schooling them.

A future Labour Government should, in the first instance, return all failing and unpopular academies to LA control. It would be good to be free of all academies but some are popular and successful so a gradual approach to de-academisation surely makes good electoral sense.

We also need to address the dreary curricular provisions that originated with Michael Gove. We need a broad and balanced curriculum; no more teaching to the test; no ridiculous grammar tests for primary pupils; teachers given more scope to teach as they think fit within a less restrictive national curriculum; and more creativity in lessons. Attending school should be more enjoyable, not a grind. **C**

Dave Lister is a member of Brent Central CLP and Chartist EB

Generation Rent – the cost of greed crisis

Poppy Pendelino says it's becoming impossible for young people to rent on average incomes

I t's dubbed a 'cost of living' crisis. Everything is getting more expensive. From electricity to chips, and train fares to a bottle of Pinot Noir. However, I prefer a different phrase for this phenomenon. Not the cost of living, but the 'cost of greed'. BP more than doubled its profits to £4.2bn; a massive 138% increase from last year. Boris Johnson has belatedly agreed a windfall tax.

Nowhere is greed more apparent than in the cost of rented housing. Rents are skyrocketing across the country, and young people in particular are feeling the squeeze. Over April, Google searches for "rent increase" and "landlord put rent up" reached an all-time high in the UK, and private rents have surged nationally.

The only protection most renters have from government is the caveat that, for existing tenants, rent rises must be "fair and realistic", in line with "average local rents" – but there is no cap.

The government has recently announced their long-awaited Renters Reform Bill: reversing some damaging Thatcherite rental reforms. The Bill will protect renters by abolishing the pernicious 'no-fault' Section 21 Notice Evictions. Polly Neate, Chief Executive of Shelter, has said it will enable tenants to "stand up to bad behaviour instead of living in fear." More open-ended tenancies are also promised, plus rules that homes must be free from serious health and safety hazards, the ability to rent if you're receiving benefits, and to keep pets. Crucially, the government has said it wants to end arbitrary rent review clauses which allow landlords to increase rents without justifying them. However, this isn't guaranteed and doesn't go nearly far enough as rents soar nationally. Whilst elements of the bill are hugely welcome, what we need are hard rent restrictions to ensure affordability and restrict greedy landlords.

My personal experience is much the same as many across the country. I live in a building in Manchester which is managed by the letting agency Northern Group.



High-rise rents

In February-April, tenants across the building were shocked by rent increases of 12-16%. One tenant had an increase of 25%. This, alongside up to £200 electricity bills for small 1 bed flats, increasing council tax, soaring cost of food and living (as well as wages not rising), has already forced tenants out. Many of us have lived here for several years.

It is patently unfair that we will be forced out by such massive rent increases. The building also has multiple issues including an unsafe car park, parcel thefts, broken communal doors, regularly broken lifts, poor electrics, leaking floors/ceilings and more.

We collectively approached the landlord offering a fair increase of 3.5%, as many had already had rent increased by 2-4% within the last six months. We were met with outright contempt; insistence that we were living in 'high quality' flats and that we simply didn't understand the situation 'for the land-

lord'.

Despite involving our local MP and local councillors, having an article published in the Manchester Evening News and even securing over 100 signatures on a petition within the building against the huge rent increase, nothing could be done as there was no legal avenue to negotiate.

Many are now moving out. This kind of abusive, predatory landlord behaviour is becoming ever more common. One of the landlord's most galling points was 'we didn't raise rents during COVID', conveniently neglecting the fact that people weren't moving into cities during COVID and that they wouldn't have actually filled the empty flats. Raising rents by up to 25% immediately after the pandemic is supposedly 'over' is also hugely against the spirit of supporting loyal, often struggling, tenants.

Just because we rent does not mean we should be treated like second-class citizens, and we deserve to be able to keep the homes we have made for ourselves whilst paying fair increases. Young people in this country are being crushed by the cost of living, making saving for a mortgaged home increasingly impossible. According to the ONS, average house prices in England increased over the year to January 2022 to £292,000 (9.4%).

The average salary for a 29 year old in the UK is just under £25k PA (2021). The average rent is £1,060 per month (2021). Over half of a single 29 year old's salary is therefore being spent on rent. At a £25k salary, the average house price is multiplied by well over ten times; without factoring in that half the salary is already spent on rent, soaring bills, and more.

Millennials are expected to get 16% of their lifetime income from inheritance, and many are now advised to wait for this 'windfall' to buy.

In other words, millennials are advised to wait for their parents to die. A completely macabre and economically unviable suggestion, regardless of how much avocado on toast we might eat. It's time for rent controls in the UK. **C**

Radicals, reformers & revolutionaries

Julie Ward
on female
change-
makers

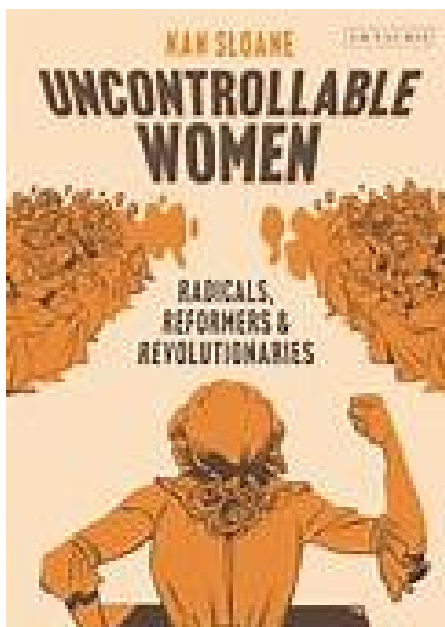
Uncontrollable Women
Nan Sloane
I.B. Taurus £20

At least one good thing to come out of the pandemic is Nan Sloane's wonderful volume, *Uncontrollable Women*, a collection of insightful essays about female change-makers upon whose shoulders we stand today. Nan is known for her role in the Labour Women's Network and the Centre for Women and Democracy as well as for her previous book: *The Women in the Room: Labour's Forgotten History*.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Nan for her painstaking work putting this new book together and shining the spotlight on a group of women who have largely been ignored by the history books. Except for Mary Wollstonecraft, the female 'Radicals, Reformers & Revolutionaries' who leap off the pages are women whose lives lay buried in disparate archives, overshadowed by the loud men around them including many radical men whose cause they frequently espoused.

This book focuses on a tumultuous period in history, beginning in 1789 at the outset of the French Revolution and ending with the passing of the Great Reform Act in 1832, a half-hearted measure that was designed to counter any similar mob rule in the UK. In the short space of 33 years our French neighbours had destroyed the decadent monarchy, unleashing an orgy of blood-letting via Madam Guillotine. But before things got out of control on the other side of the Channel a number of British and American radical thinkers had gone to soak up the spirit of republicanism in the salons and coffee shops of Paris, among them novelist, poet and foreign correspondent, Helen Maria Williams, who is brought vividly to life by Nan's writing. Alongside Williams Nan also delineates the lives of a plethora of women from diverse backgrounds who refused to remain silent about the injustices they saw around them. Through the author's excellent research and well-organised writing we see

how these women took inspiration and courage from each other, building an ultimately irrefutable case for equal votes that was later taken up by the Suffragettes. The chapters on the Peterloo Massacre and its aftermath are written with a focus on the women who played a part in the proceedings on that fateful day, including Mary Fildes, President of the Manchester Female Reform Society, (who was the only woman on the podium), and the Lancashire mill girls full of hope who were trodden underfoot by rampaging horses or grievously injured by the indiscriminate use



of sabres and bayonets by a brutal military. One woman lost her breast, others their lives, and many their livelihoods as mill owners and politicians subsequently sought to break the spirit of the working class and outlaw any attempt at organised protest.

Key to the burgeoning movement for representation and social change was the press and printing trade and it was largely through the existence of radical street pamphlets that word spread from town to town, and indeed from generation to generation of campaigners, contributing to a rich archive of working-class protest for which we must be forever grateful and which was key to Nan's research.

The book is organised in three

chronological sections and each of the eleven chapters bears a title taken from contemporary criticism, as indeed does the book's very title which comes from Wheeler's Manchester Chronicle, 21 August 1819: '... an uncontrollable woman, whose tongue no human effort could check.' An Epilogue entitled 'An Ignorant Woman' completes the history of these tumultuous times with an account of an incendiary petition from a mysterious Mary Smith that was both personal and political, mocked by parliamentarians and the press alike and roundly dismissed. A comprehensive set of notes with a bibliography attest to the scale of the painstaking task undertaken by the author.

Set in the context of an exclusive, wealthy, political elite, constrained by the straitjacket of religion, hounded by the moral approbation of the Vice Society, mocked by a vitriolic press, and denigrated by members of their own sex, the small but significant achievements of these women are even more impressive. Along the way many suffered imprisonment (and even execution in the case of the hapless Hannah Smith who ended up on the wrong side of the law during the food riots of 1812). Psychological and physical violence both inside and outside the home was common, and grinding poverty was endemic in many places.

Childbirth was a deadly health risk for all regardless of status and money, and marriage was generally a stifling institution. Sadly, there are many passages in the book that continue to resonate with our current situation.

We radical women campaigners therefore still have a job to do and we owe it to the women in Nan's book not to give up the fight for true equality and full participation. But let's do it in style like the Stockport Female Reform Society, who purportedly dismissed the menfolk from their meeting room in order to discuss the 'Manchester Address', but made sure to grab the ubiquitous bottle of brandy as they exited. Here's to the ongoing struggle of our collective sisterhood!

A darker shade of green

Victor Anderson
on the climate crisis

The Disenchanted Earth
Richard Seymour
Indigo Press £9.99

At the same time as Russia attacked Ukraine, the West was attacking India. Temperatures in India and Pakistan reached record levels in early May, with severe consequences for health and food supply, principally as a result of change in the global climate. Countries with the highest per capita carbon emissions, which mostly means the West, bear the main responsibility for this global change, which is not some accident but a result of processes that are well-established scientifically, with consequences that have long been foreseen. Unlike some people in the early days of Nazism and Stalinism, we can't claim we didn't know what we were doing.

In the 1970s and 80s, environmental politics was largely about prediction and prophecy. Then particularly from the time of the UN Earth Summit in 1992, the focus shifted to constructive policy work, much of it focused around the concept of "sustainable development". However, most of the policy recommendations were ignored, and most of the science received only lip service. We are therefore now on to a darker phase, indicated by book titles such as *This Civilisation is Finished* (Rupert Read & Samuel Alexander), *The Uninhabitable Earth* (David Wallace-Wells), and *How to Blow up a Pipeline* (Andreas Malm).

This new book belongs to this darker, sadder but wiser, phase. Given that the world is still heading towards climate and ecological catastrophe, with the graph of carbon emissions continuing to go up despite all the conferences and speeches, how can we explain this failure to change course and

the relative passivity of most of the world's population in the face of this existential crisis?

Richard Seymour, who wrote this book, is amongst those with a sophisticated understanding of the nature of capitalist economies, and who therefore have a key part to play in providing some of the answers. But as Seymour makes clear at a series of points, the agenda of ideas needed to understand this problem needs to be wider than the study of politics and economics can provide. He describes the need to strike out

almost watch the author thinking and rethinking, as he develops his ideas from one essay to the next. The path he treads matters partly because it is one that others are treading, and which more can be expected to tread in the future, the path beyond "socio-centrism", towards what can be described as a "biocentric" perspective.

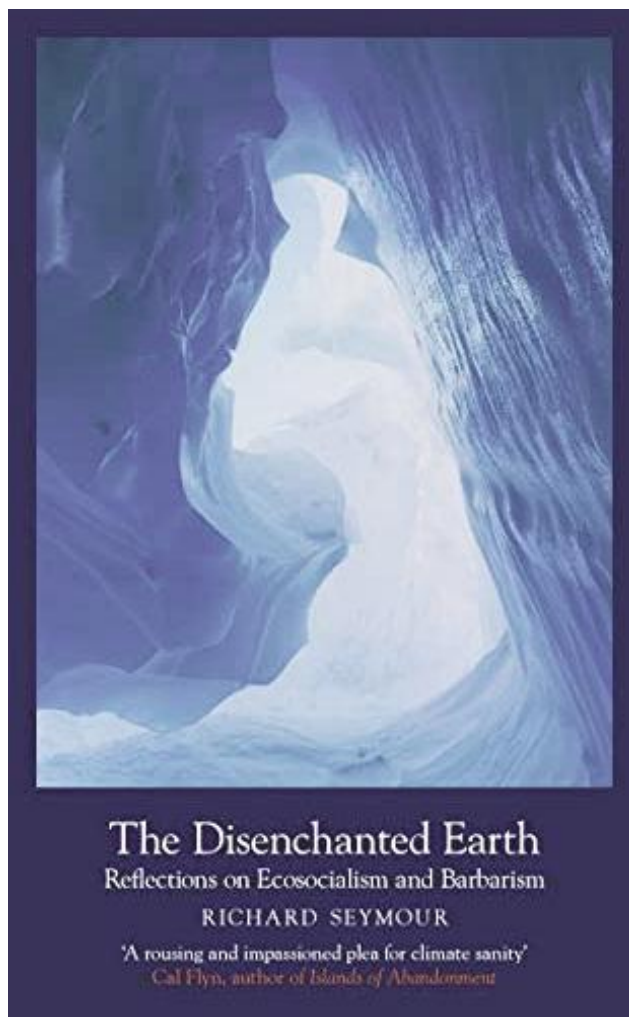
At the same time, the "collection of essays" format in this case proves unsatisfactory. Most of the essays begin

by stating some very big and interesting questions but then are frustratingly short, closing before the questions are elaborated, and certainly before any conclusions are reached. This book can therefore work as a stimulus to thought but it will disappoint anyone looking for answers.

The best essay is the one on the Arctic, describing not only the loss of a material environment but also the consequent loss of something that imagination and myth have been based on: the Arctic of the mind as well as the "real" Arctic of the physical world.

The worst is the essay on Extinction Rebellion, which resorts to multiple leftist name-calling - "anti-political street theatre", "apocalyptic moralism", "apolitical techno-populism". Unsurprisingly that essay ends with the political intellectual's favourite call to "above all raise the level of political understanding". However, given what XR achieved, particularly in 2019, in

terms of moving climate up the public and political agenda, it is high time people on the Left acknowledged that there is much to be learned from XR as well as inevitably points to criticise. And that would be in line with Seymour's wider argument, and the trajectory of this book, about the need to break out of an analysis of the world that is guilty of the latest heresy: socio-centrism.



into areas until recently unfamiliar to him, such as ecological science, palaeontology, and climatology. Now he even denounces those who stick to the focus he himself used to have until pretty recently as being guilty of "socio-centrism", the belief that what matters is simply humans and their societies.

This book is very much a collection of separate essays. You can

Winning over pensioners?

Rory O’Kelly
on surprising findings & useless remedies

A mature approach: How Labour can reconnect with older voters
Ben Cooper
Fabian Society 2022

In 2019, after a long period of decline, Labour’s vote share among older people (defined here as over 55) reached a historic low. This pamphlet analyses the shift and suggests ways to reverse it. Its evidence base is a series of focus groups with people who did not vote Labour in 2019 but might consider doing so in future, and polling data about changed attitudes to the Labour Party since Keir Starmer replaced Jeremy Corbyn as leader.

Analyses of Labour’s loss of support among various groups have been appearing since ‘Southern Discomfort’ in 1992. All ignore actual Labour voters, considering only those who have just voted Conservative. Predictably, all conclude that to gain support Labour should move to the right. The focus on gaining new supporters inevitably ignores the equally important need to retain existing ones.

Changes which appeal to some people tend to alienate others, even within age groups. The report highlights the estimated two million older people who did not vote Labour in 2019 but might in future, but glosses over the 700,000 in the same age group who did but would not even consider doing so next time.

Between age groups the contrasts are even greater. The report emphasises that 32% of older people think that Labour has been going in the right direction since Starmer became leader and only 28% in the wrong direction (the rest being unsure). It notes, in passing, that among younger people this pattern is reversed, the figures being 23% and 28% respectively, and among the whole population 27% and 28%. In mainstream political discourse the idea that Labour might be doing better if Corbyn were still leader has been not so much dismissed as completely written out of the script. This evidence, however, certainly seems to support it.

Some reasons are given for pri-

oritising older people over younger. Cynically speaking, one can argue either for ignoring young people because they will soon be old or old people because they will soon be dead. The author prefers the former approach. He assumes that as people age their politics will approach those of the current older generation and that, as the proportion of older people increases, so will the need to address these political preferences.

This is questionable. Until quite recently people have tended to become more settled, secure and prosperous as they age and

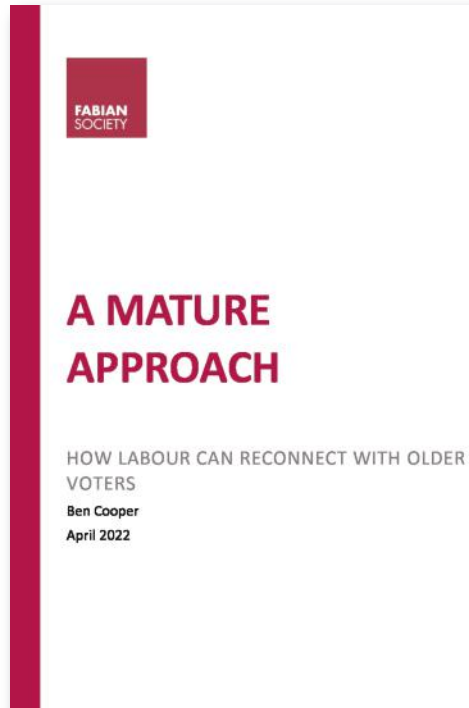
them and try to convince the old and the not yet old that they would have general social benefits. This was what socialists, especially Fabians, used to do, when they saw their task as being to convince people that social and economic relations which seemed natural were in fact the product of human choices and could be changed.

This approach is now seen as totally outmoded. These days it is wrong to argue with voters, tell them anything or try to persuade them of anything. The job of politicians is to find out what people already think and agree with them, and to find out what they want and offer it to them, whatever impossibilities and self-contradictions this might involve.

This pamphlet embodies the modern approach. Its conclusions are confined to vague slogans like ‘security’ and ‘safety’. The only practical proposals involve offering pensioners more money and services, combined of course with low taxes and fiscal rectitude. This is weak as a programme for winning an election but utterly useless as a programme for a future Labour Government.

The real problem with age groups is not addressed. Our immediate task is to restore the post-war settlement, offering not only universal healthcare but also secure employment, affordable housing, free education, adequate pensions, legal aid etc. Many older people have enjoyed and may still enjoy most of these, cannot get excited about them and may even take them for granted. Younger people however are more likely to see them as impossible visions and to think that anyone pursuing them is delusional and any politician offering them a fraud.

The Labour Party’s task is to set out practical policies which voters will accept as both necessary and achievable. This may involve emphasising different points to different groups, but the overall structure must be consistent. Most fundamentally, if you want people’s consent, you must be prepared to try to persuade them.



this may explain their voting pattern. The prospects for people who are young now may be quite different.

Another argument is that the old are more important because more of them vote. This is rather circular. Perhaps younger people do not bother to vote because the major parties do not address their needs or wishes. Despite the present Government’s best efforts lack of motivation is still the main bar to voting.

Assuming that the Labour Party should try to attract more older voters, what does this pamphlet suggest? Traditionally one would devise policies geared towards older people, explain

Anglo Saxons in exile

Duncan Bowie
on transnational medieval kingship

Conquered
Eleanor Parker
Bloomsbury £20

I had not read any Anglo-Saxon history since university, when I was required to read Bede's *History of the English Church and People* in medieval Latin. However, an outstanding review in the Sunday Times drew my attention and I was always puzzled to know what happened to the Anglo-Saxon leadership after the Battle of Hastings. I never read Charles Kingsley's *Hereward the Wake* or Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* and was always a bit puzzled why William Morris, E P Thompson and other radical historians harked back to a myth of a utopian pre-Norman England – the belief that England's liberties were destroyed by the 'Norman yoke'.

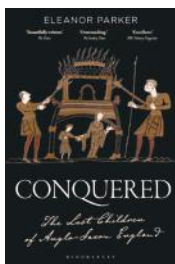
Eleanor Parker is a historian of medieval literature at Oxford, who has previously published articles on Cnut and the Danish invasion of England in *History Today* and BBC *History* magazine, and as all younger historians do, has a history blog. This book is a revelation. What it demonstrates is the inter-

national inter-connectedness of the pre-Norman secular and ecclesiastical aristocracy. Parker traces the post Hastings trajectory of several of these aristocrats.

The sons of King Edmund 'Ironside', Edward and Ironside, Edward and Edgar, exiled by Cnut to Denmark, ended up in Kiev. Edward the Confessor managed to find the exiled Edward and brought him back to England, but he died suddenly leaving Harold Godwinson in a position to take the throne (Harold being the son of Edward's sister, Gytha), only to be challenged by both Harold Hardrada, King of Norway and then by William of Normandy. The Anglo-Saxon Edward the Confessor was actually a half-brother to the Danish king of England Harthacnut, as his mother, Emma of Normandy, had married Cnut after the death of her first husband, the Anglo-Saxon king Aethelred. Gytha's brother was married to the sister of Cnut, so the ties between the Anglo-Saxon and Danish royal families were strong. The grand-daughter of Edmund Ironside, Margaret, was born in Hungary, before becoming Queen of Scotland as wife to King Malcolm.

Their daughter, Matilda, was to marry William's younger son, King Henry I, reuniting the Norman and Anglo-Saxon royal families.

There were other connections with Eastern Europe. Harold Hardrada had previously been a general in the Varangian mercenary army of the Byzantine Empire. Another group of Anglo-Saxon exiles founded settlements in the Crimea which they named 'London' and 'York'. Harold's daughter, Gytha, married Vladimir II, Prince of, their eldest son, known as both Harold Mstislav, had descendants who married into the royal families of Norway and Denmark. Meanwhile, King Harold's brother Tostig, actually joined Harold Hardrada in Norway only to be killed by his brother's forces at Stamford Bridge. So, the notion of a complete break between Anglo-Saxon England and the Normans becomes somewhat questionable, when it is realised that most of England's kings had a dual or even more complex heritage. England's peasants, whether of Anglo-Saxon or Danish ancestry, of course continued to be peasants under the yoke of whichever aristocrat was on the throne.



After the King was executed

Duncan Bowie
on Britain without a Crown

The Restless Republic
Anna Keay
William Collins £25

This is an excellent narrative history of the English republic between the trial of Charles I in 1649 and the restoration of 1660. Keay has selected a number of key players in the republican period and weaves their personal stories into a chronological narrative. By commencing her narrative at the close of the civil war, the book avoids just being a list of battles (beloved of military historians). Instead she is able to focus on the impact of events on the personal lives of her selected characters, while also managing to provide a readable narrative of the complex political changes in the period, in which six successive parliaments were dismissed.

The first by Pride's Purge under the initiative of Henry Ireton, which expelled the moderates and created the Rump parliament. Then three suspensions by Cromwell himself, the creation of a nominated

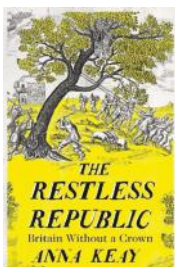
rather than elected parliament (known to history as Barebones parliament after one of its members), a dismissal of parliament by Richard Cromwell, Oliver's son and the second Lord Protector (known as 'Tumbledown Dick') under pressure from the military leadership and then a less successful intervention by General Lambert. This was when the Commonwealth had been revived after the toppling of Richard.

The narrative concludes with a military face-off between General Lambert, head of the army in England supporting army rule, and General Monck, who led the army in Scotland and sought to defend parliamentary, but in doing so, ensuring the succession of Charles Stuart as Charles II.

Keay is not a radical historian and has a background in English Heritage and the Landmark Trust and is a trustee of the Royal Collection, but despite the endorsements by a number of Conservative partisan historians, she has not written a

biographies of Charles II and that royal rebel, the Duke of Monmouth, as well as the official illustrated history of the Crown Jewels.

Her chosen central characters include the Royalist Duchess of Derby, Anna Trapnel, the Fifth monarchist prophetess, the Protectorate's leading pamphleteer, Marchamont Nedham, the puritan lawyer who prosecuted the king and then presided over the Council of state, John Bradshaw. Also, Thomas Fairfax the first general of the New Model Army, Cromwell's brother Henry who first conquered and then governed Ireland, the statistician William Petty and General Monck and his wife Anne. Levellers, diggers and quakers make brief appearances in the narrative, but given these have been fully covered by several radical and socialist historians, Keay's more diverse approach is to be welcomed. This is a good introduction to the period, in comparison to many earlier rather dry and more specialist studies.



Heroism and resistance under fire

Mike Davis sees wartime parallels

The Battle of London
Jerry White
Bodley Head £30

Reading this study of London during the Second World War inevitably brought to mind very present images of the desolation of Mariupol and other Ukrainian cities. London was badly bombed, though not on the scale of Eastern Ukraine, during the Blitz months of 1940. Over the six years of war almost 30,000 lives were lost. A further 139,349 were injured, with the East End suffering particularly badly. Londoners experienced a world turned upside down with bombs, particularly the dreaded V1 rockets, firestorms and blackouts, bunkers, shelters, food shortages, rationing, child evacuations, devastated homes and untold hardships. But it also created an enormous sense of community and practical mutual aid, amplified by trade union growth, expanding pensioner and charitable clubs, and civil defence organisations which White sees as part of the foundational post-war sentiment that swept the Labour Party to a landslide victory in 1945.

Whilst there was no Nazi land invasion Londoners certainly experienced the harsh realities of war, though after the Blitz life did return to something akin to normality with cinemas and theatres, football stadiums and sports facing a surge of support as Londoners sought leisure respite. After Pearl Harbour in 1941 the sight of Commonwealth uniforms on London streets was joined by those of Americans, adding to the cosmopolitan feel.

White records the many inno-

ventions, often inspired by direct action, like the use of underground stations for air-raid shelters, at first resisted by the National government, or the commandeering of hotels for housing. The Air Raid Precautions (ARP), Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS), Women's Voluntary Service (WVS), and others became vital organisations for London's defence (the war of acronyms as it was dubbed). It also saw women brought into workplaces in huge numbers, generating big changes in social relations.

Pre-NHS hospitals were put under huge strain during the Blitz, with echoes of the recent Covid pandemic period. Sick and elderly patients were discharged to their homes to make space for injured soldiers, with many dying prematurely, and unnecessarily as it turned out.

White peppers his riveting account with many quotes from diaries and memoirs of ordinary people caught up in the life-changing events.

There are interesting vignettes on how Londoner's attitude to Russia shifted from hostility during the Hitler-Stalin pact period, 1939-1941, to huge sympathy with the Red Army following the Nazi attack on the USSR. Membership of the CPGB doubled to 60,000 with big fund raising efforts, including by Conservative organisations, held in aid of besieged Russians--a far cry from today.

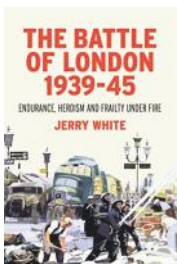
Many small acts of heroism are recorded. The horse and cart made a comeback with enforced queues at bus stops as public transport failed to cope with demand. Queues became ubiquitous.

London welcomed refugees.

5000 Wandsworth residents offered homes for fleeing French, Belgian, and Dutch following their countries' surrender to the Nazis, (another echo of Ukraine today).

In 1939 three groups of people opposed the war: fascists, notably Mosley's British Union; communists who branded it an 'imperialist war' (until 1941) and pacifists. Fifth column fears were stoked. 73,000 people were classed as enemy aliens. Unlike the First World War there was no indiscriminate internment. After review, only 569 were initially interned. Though after the perceived threat of invasion many more were imprisoned without trial. White argues their treatment was more humane than in WW1 and most Jewish refugees remained undisturbed. Nor was there any collective violence against German and Austrian refugees in London, in sharp contrast to the anti-German riots of 1915.

The war provided an object lesson in how greater equality of sacrifice and consumption was necessary in war and that 'fair shares' in coal, food, clothing, domestic appliances, housing and fixed rents was now essential to build the peace and a different world from the 'hungry thirties'. It would take years to replace the 130,000 houses destroyed while repairing 1150 of London's 1200 schools damaged was also a slow undertaking. The books' scope is panoramic, with an extensive bibliography. It's another must-read classic of social history in the White oeuvre of *Zeppelin Nights*, *Rothschild Buildings* and his studies of London in the 18th and 19th and 20th centuries.



Printer ad

Britain's first Marxist party

Duncan Bowie
on the Social Democratic Federation

Social-Democracy with a Hyphen
Ian Bullock
Grosvenor House Publishing £9.99

This book's somewhat curious title is seeking to distinguish Marxist social democracy from the more moderate or even centrist use of the term in more recent political history. The Social Democratic Federation Party of the late 19th and early 20th centuries has a somewhat poor reputation, mainly because its founder and dominant figure throughout its history, Henry Hyndman, is considered by a number of socialist historians to have been an anti-Semite, an imperialist and a jingo, as well as a plagiarist for 'stealing' Marx's ideas without acknowledging them. His authoritarianism is often contrasted with the libertarian socialism of William Morris' Socialist League, and his Marxist dogmatism with the ethical socialism of the Independent Labour Party.

Bullock, whose previous work has focused mainly on the ILP, has produced a somewhat different view of Hyndman and the 'old guard' of the SDF and can be seen as revisionist. His first chapter challenges the more critical view of Hyndman by putting Hyndman's early writings into context – he was critical of Jewish wealth, without being anti-Semitic, a view shared by many radicals and socialists of the period, notably by the anti-imperialist J A Hobson. He supported self-government in India and Ireland and sought to reform the British empire without advocating its dissolution and he opposed the Boer war, while taking a 'patriotic' stance during the First World War. Bullock then seeks to examine the extent to which the SDF was actually a pluralist socialist group, and that not only did the SDF leadership hold a range of views, but that *Justice*, its newspaper, accepted a wide range of contributions from its diverse membership, without any apparent censorship. No-one was expelled from the SDF. It was Morris and his followers who left, primarily because they rejected

Hyndman's commitment to parliamentary democracy.

Some Socialist Leaguers, such as Ernest Belfort Bax, were to re-join the SDF. Bullock has undertaken a comprehensive study of the columns of *Justice*, no doubt assisted by the recent digitisation of the journal and has been able to present a much fuller analysis of the views of SDF members than previous studies of the SDF such as that of Martin Crick. Interestingly, Graham Johnson's 2002 study *Social Democratic Politics in Britain 1881-1911* is not referenced. Bullock, who previously co-authored a classic study on democracy in the early socialist

unionism, other SDF members such as Will Thorne, Harry Quelch, Ben Tillett and Fred Knee were active trade unionists. The SDF old guard however were pragmatists – their interpretation of Marxism was not rigid and was in many ways close to that of the German social democrats and the Russian Mensheviks. The purists/impossibilists seceded to form the Socialist Party of Great Britain while the syndicalist followers of the American De Leon left to join the Socialist Labour Party.

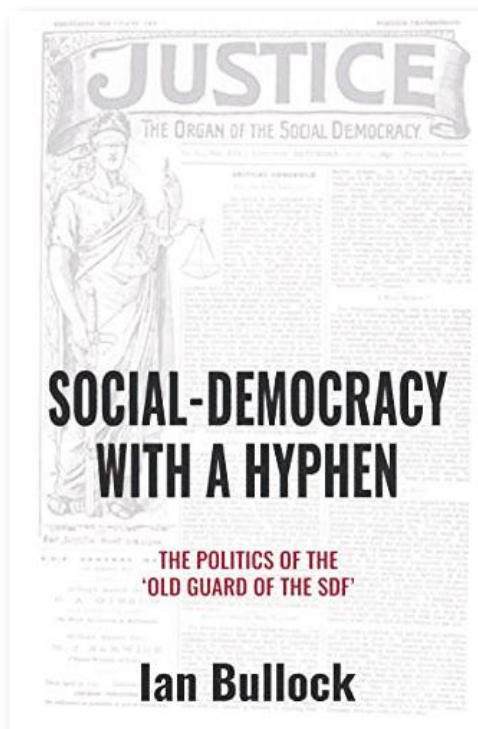
The SDF divided over the old guard's 'patriotic' support for British participation in the First World War. With the internationalists led by Theodor Rothstein and Zella Kahan Coates winning control of the SDF (which had become the British Socialist Party/BSP after the Unity Conference of 1911, when the SDF had been joined by a number of ILP branches, the Clarion cyclists and some other local socialist groupings).

Hyndman and other members of the 'Old Guard' formed a new political organisation, with the perhaps unfortunate name of the 'National Socialist Party' – patriotic but still social democratic.

The residual BSP members moved towards Bolshevism and together with the Socialist Labour Party formed the British Communist Party in 1920, based on a Leninist/vanguardist rather than democratic socialist model. The NSP then affiliated to the Labour Party and readopted

its original Social Democratic Federation name. In 1921, Hyndman in his final work *The Evolution of Revolution* reasserted his and the SDF's social-democratic Marxist position. The SDF was not actually dissolved until 1939, but leading members such as Will Thorne and Thomas Kennedy served as MPs. Kennedy became chief whip in the first Labour government in 1924.

Bullock's book is an important study which deserves a wide readership. A rehabilitation of Hyndman and the SDF perhaps, but a justified and perhaps overdue rehabilitation.



movement, seeks to demonstrate both the internal democracy within the SDF and its attitude to democratic governance, with the SDF's commitment to proportional representation, the referendum and the 'initiative'.

He also stresses how the SDF supported unity with other socialist bodies so long as this was based on socialist principles and did not involve subordination to the Liberal Party. The SDF was opposed to both syndicalism and Bolshevism as neither were seen as within the social-democratic tradition. While Hyndman himself saw limitations in new trade

Colombia shifts left



Fabian Hamilton is Labour MP for Leeds North East and shadow minister for peace and disarmament

Fabian Hamilton on hopes for ending years of brutal repression lying on the shoulders of new left president Petro

When Isabella's seventeen year old son, Mateo, failed to come home from tending the community garden in the poor Bogotá suburb of Ciudad Bolívar a year ago, she began to worry – especially when she found out that there had been a violent battle with the police in the neighbourhood earlier that day. Mateo wasn't someone who would be involved in fighting the police, but he was involved with the Youth Collective. After several frantic days of phoning police stations and hospitals, visiting police stations and talking to his friends, she found out that he had been arrested whilst digging in the garden – little more than a patch of scrub just off the dual carriageway which runs through the suburb – but where many of the unemployed young people were trying to cultivate flowers, vegetables and fruit.

Mateo's body was found floating in canal four months later. He had been tortured, violently beaten and murdered, but by whom and why nobody knew. His body was so badly mutilated that it was described as that of a 47 year old male – not a teenager.

I found the story so upsetting that it was hard not to shed a tear, especially whilst watching Isabella's reaction as she repeated it for my benefit whilst we sat together with twenty or so members of the Youth Collective in Ciudad Bolívar's tidy but basic community centre one Monday afternoon in late May. At

Isabella's feet sat a large portrait of her dead son and half way through the story of Mateo's disappearance, she left the room, unable to continue speaking.

The rest of the distressing



tale was told by Isabella's brother, Diego.

Sadly, Mateo's fate is not an isolated one in Colombia today. The police, which comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence, use horrifically violent methods to control demonstrations which are often precipitated by extreme poverty in a middle-income country but is one of the most unequal countries in the world.

I was in Colombia as part of my Shadow Ministerial brief covering Latin America and the Caribbean. I had been invited to join the Justice for Colombia delegation which visited the country from 27th May to 2nd June and aimed to show its participants a true picture of the country: the successes and gains made so far since the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) laid down its arms in a historic peace agreement five years ago; and the setbacks, including violent attacks on Trade Unionists, Indigenous activists and Human Rights Defenders. It almost seemed at times as if the right-wing government of incumbent President Ivan Duque wanted the peace agreement to fail. And yet, in spite of the 320 murders of former FARC combatants in the past year, 90% of them still believe in the peace agreement and are pre-

pared to continue to adhere to it by engaging in peaceful political and economic activity.

We spent an afternoon at the House of Peace, sampling the locally brewed beer – 'La Trocha' – made on the premises by the demobilised former insurgents who fed us with home-grown produce for lunch and spoke movingly of their hopes and dreams for a peaceful, democratic Colombia where injustice and inequality can be conquered. It was deeply touching and flew in the face of what is often appalling violence carried out undercover by wings of the military or police that do not want to see the peace agreement succeed, or who are out for vengeance against the former crimes of the insurgents.

On Sunday 19th June, just three weeks after witnessing the start of the Presidential election in Bogotá's Bolivar Square, Gustavo Petro – the first left candidate ever to have been elected – won the final round by a four percent margin. The hopes and dreams of all those who want to see a true democratic peace and prosperity for all Colombian citizens now rest with Petro. He will have a lot of goodwill with which to achieve his goal, let's hope that he can realise those aspirations and finally make the historic peace agreement a true reality. **C**

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