

LABOUR

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# Briefing

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## Inside:

**Tory anti-semitism**

**Annual Conference report**

**Brexit**

**Around the World**

**News and reviews**



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# The Agenda

## Editorial

3



### Around Britain:

Learning for Life	4
Waspi Women	5
Tory anti-semitism	6-7
Brexit	8
<b>Uphill Struggle - Kevin Flack</b>	9



### Labour Party:

Whatever Happened to Lutfur Rahman?	10
John Cryer: Michael Foot	11
Rachel Garnham: A view from the NEC	13
Annual Conference: Darren Williams	14-15
Remembering Belfast	16
Political Mythology	17



### Voice of the Unions:

Campaign for Union Democracy	18
PCS turmoil	19
Unite Victory	20
<b>Keith Veness</b>	21



### Round the World:

Macron - another failed President?	22
Julie Ward: the Balkans	23
Don't Prop Up Honduras	24



### Reviews

25-26

### Periscope

27

### On the Outside - Christine Shawcroft

28

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# The strange death of social democracy

Long-time readers of *Briefing* will be used to us having been attacked by the Labour right on the grounds that our wild, left-wing socialist stance would never be electorally popular, either here or anywhere else. Last month, the once mighty German SPD saw its vote in Bavaria slump to 9.5% – barely half that of the Greens. At national level, it has been reduced to the role of bag carrier for Merkel’s Grand Coalition.

It is the same almost everywhere. In France, only six years after it won the presidency under Hollande, the Socialist Party has been reduced to an electoral rump. The Netherlands Labour Party had its worst result ever last year. In September, Sweden’s Social Democrats had their lowest share of the vote in a century. PASOK in Greece went from 44% in 2009 to 4.7% in 2015. The Irish Labour Party, founded by James Connolly, has eked out an existence as junior partner of one or other of the two green Tory parties, and supplanted by Sinn Fein, with its dynamic women leaders both north and south as the main progressive force.

We don’t wish to be smug but Labour under Jeremy Corbyn has bucked the trend. When we knock on doors and someone says “all politicians are the same”, they swiftly retract as soon as we point out the major and important differences between Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn. The general election of 2017 showed that we can only win if we have enthusiastic armies of workers on the ground. Years of Blairite posturing and ignoring the grass roots membership eventually lost us both tens of thousands of members and millions of voters. The Corbyn revolution is far from complete, but we now have more members than all the other parties in Britain combined, and it cannot be overemphasised how vital that is.

Of course, Blair wasn’t the first centrist to be swept into office by a wave of enthusiasm and then blow it. In 1964, Harold Wilson became prime minister on the back of an upsurge in party membership only to attack the unions, support the U.S. war in Vietnam and scorn the views of ordinary party members. By 1968, numbers of

constituency parties had ceased to meet regularly, membership figures had fallen substantially, and the Rhondda had become a marginal seat. All Wilson could do was to plaintively ask people “not to look to Highgate Cemetery for their answers!

The recent trends of history show there is no future in placating the establishment and trying to look responsible and respectable. The centre everywhere is collapsing spectacularly, and we need to be ready to give voice to the millions angry and demanding change. The forces of reaction, racism and right-wing extremism stand ready to cash in on this if we don’t offer a credible and far-reaching alternative.

The only parties of the left in Europe to have made headway since the crash of 2008 are those that have openly campaigned for anti-austerity and socialism – Podemos in Spain, the anti-austerity coalition in Portugal, Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Rebellious France and Syriza in Greece (until it betrayed its principles in government). Even in the United States, Bernie Saunders remarked that he was probably a left-wing social democrat but nobody there even understood what that meant so it was best just to stand as a socialist.

An international realignment of the left is a long-term project but one thing is clear – there is an anti-capitalist future for the left or no future at all.

## Join the Labour Party!

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# Learning for all, for life

Education is a human and civil right and a public good. The National Education Service is key to making this a reality. Evidence that all is not well in education comes from the fact that we have some of the unhappiest children amongst OECD countries and high levels of school exclusion and “off rolling”.

Education alone cannot solve all of society’s ills and education alone is not responsible for them. However, children subjected to overzealous levels of high stakes testing and a curriculum which is often all but devoid of music, art, drama and anything practical, is not the basis for developing well rounded and engaged people. When close to 50% of new teachers have left teaching by 5 years after taking up post, education is well on its way to becoming unsustainable.

The system, particularly in England, is fragmented and subject to both commercialisation and privatisation. Good quality Early Years provision is patchy and often expensive whilst employing staff on poor wages.

Universities are subject to commercial pressures and the sector is riddled with insecure contracts.

In the school sector where the market model has been pushed hardest it has failed. To bring about a genuinely National Education Service the academies and free schools programme must end. There is now ample evidence that these schools are no more successful and in many cases much less successful than schools which have remained with their Local Authority.

The 2017 manifesto elaborated four

**Christine Blower, National Education Union, explains how Labour’s proposed National Education Service could implement learning for life.**

foundations for education policy: investment, quality, accountability and inclusion.

On investment schools simply need more money. Teacher pay is not competitive, support staff need pay increases, many schools are in urgent need of refurbishment. On quality, burdensome workload is anathema to good teaching and learning. The commitment to trust teacher and support staff professionalism is excellent. However, it must be accompanied by a commitment to initial teacher education and training. Teachers should have an entitlement to career long continuing professional learning and development which is not confined to any particular obsession of a secretary of state. In fact, micro management from Government should be replaced by a national commission to advise on curriculum development, pedagogy and assessment and qualifications. The teaching profession through education unions should have a prominent role alongside parents and students in this. Accountability is a big question. In Finland, often viewed as one of the most successful systems, has rejected “accountability” in favour of responsibility, resting not just with teachers but also parents, students and politicians who will the means for the service. Ofsted should be abolished. Many models of accountability exist. Most favour

peer observation and review in some form as well as school to school support which worked well in the London Challenge.

The fourth element was inclusion, rightly identifying every child and young person as unique and to be given the opportunity to find their path through education. Achieving that hinges on significant change. First there is the need to abolish baseline testing and SATs in Years 2 and 6. These tests should be replaced by ongoing teacher assessment and sample testing conducted on a random national basis. The current system creates high levels of stress and far from nurturing a love of learning rather does the opposite. There is also concern that the test materials themselves sometimes, at least, exhibit gender, class race or cultural bias. Second, for learners to be actively engaged in their own education rather seen as empty vessels, the curriculum should be a mirror and a window. Young people should be able to see themselves and their community in a broad and balanced curriculum and be able to look far beyond their immediate experience to gain the skills and knowledge to be able to deploy critical thinking and problem solving as active and engaged citizens.

***A longer version of this article can be read on our website, [www.labourbriefingcooperative.net](http://www.labourbriefingcooperative.net)***



# Stinging rebuke from WASPI women

A lot of confusing reports have been bandied about in regards to retirement ages for state pensions and how they separately affect men and women. The sad facts are that women have been disproportionately affected and many of them were not even aware of how bad these changes would be to them.

## National campaign

However, there is now a national campaign to expose these injustices and to fight back against the proposals. This organisation is called by the acronym "WASPI" – Women Against State Pension Inequality. Down here in Thanet, our local group is very much alive and kicking. We had a great success when we got the Labour Group on Thanet District Council to pass a resolution in July 2017 supporting us and took it to the full Council meeting – where to our surprise and delight the Authority voted unanimously to support it. As a direct consequence of this, our campaign keeps growing and gaining wider support. WASPI's ultimate aim is to "achieve fair state pension arrangements for women born in the 1950's".

## Local initiative

Our campaign locally was kick-started by Councillor Jenny Matterface drafting the motion to go Labour Group. I was very proud to second it. I said in a statement at the time "We think the Government could, and should, have done much more for women. We want to ensure that the 13,000+ women in Thanet affected by this issue know what it is

On 10th October, thousands of women lobbied Parliament over state pension cuts. KCC councillor and trades union activist Karen Constantine explains.

about. However, we also want people to know this affects everyone – not just women. These women are the backbone of our society but because of the gender pay gap they don't earn as much as men and because of the increase in pension age they are pushed into temporary, insecure and low-paid jobs. I knew my pension age was going to be 67 but these women were never properly notified of the changes. Across the U.K. as a whole, 2,600,000 women have been impacted by this pensions robbery.

## Uphill challenge

Some women in this age group are grandmothers who are taking care of grandchildren and they often make financial contributions to their families. As a result of these changes, and as a result of having to enter the labour market, it's a real uphill challenge. Men need to realise that these changes impact on their wives, sisters, neighbours and co-workers. It is men who will have to share this financial burden and that cannot be good for anyone.

## A life of hard work

I have met a lot of women affected and they don't want to claim benefits because they have worked hard all their lives. Women have earned their pensions and they want them! Jeremy Corbyn confirmed his support for our WASPI campaign at a

mass rally held in Mansfield on 16th August 2018. Leading trades unions are also supporting us. The next step in this growing campaign was the rally in London on 10th October with thousands of women attending from all over the country to show solidarity.

## We want justice!

Here in Thanet, local activist Lynne Sutton, 62, said: "The Government has made a £30billion saving increasing the state pension age. This has hit 2.6 million women born sometime in the 1950's. To be entitled to your pension you need to have at least 35 years of pension credits. Many of these women have already contributed 40 years but they now still have a further five years to go. There is a lot of inequality about the way these changes have been done. We want justice – we want what's ours!"



# Tory anti-semitism

For the past century, the Labour Party has drawn support from the poorer and more radical sections of the Jewish community, while the Tories have won the backing of the more prosperous and more conservative. That remains the case; only the proportions have changed since the days when the majority of British Jews were recently arrived refugees from the Russian Empire.

The British Election Study of the 2017 General Election showed that 63% of British Jews voted for the Conservatives in 2017, compared to 26% who voted Labour. This is a long term secular trend that appears to have accelerated after Ed Miliband supported Palestinian statehood in 2014.

You may have had the misfortune of seeing Iain Duncan Smith interviewed at Tory party conference, claiming that Labour under Jeremy Corbyn is a “toxic anti-semitic project”. And it’s not any old anti-semitism, but a “new anti-semitism” which isn’t about hating Jews as Jews, but apparently hides behind criticism of Israel.

Let’s acknowledge that historically there have been anti-semitic elements on the left, among them Bakunin and Proudhon, the fathers of anarchism, some strands of French socialism in the nineteenth century and late-period Stalin –

**Richard Price, Leyton & Wanstead CLP, seethes at Tory and mainstream media hypocrisy.**

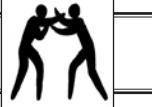
none of them exactly influential in British Labour. But overwhelmingly, both theorists of anti-semitism and organised anti-semitic movements have come from the political right, and the Tories have played their part in poisoning the well.

The British Brothers League was Britain’s first proto-fascist movement. Founded in London’s East End by Tory MP William Evans-Gordon it rapidly gained 45,000 supporters, including five other East End Tory MPs, and campaigned to restrict the immigration of Jews fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe. In response, the Labour Party and the trade unions formed the Aliens Defence League. The BBL’s main demand was met by the 1905 Aliens Act, passed by Tory premier Arthur Balfour (he of the 1917 Declaration).

Another Tory who had no problem reconciling anti-semitism with Zionism was Winston Churchill. In a 1920 article entitled *Zionism versus Bolshevism*, he set out his version of the global Jewish conspiracy: “This movement among the Jews is not new. From the days of Spartacus-Weishaupt to those of Karl Marx, and down to Trotsky (Russia), Bela Kun (Hungary), Rosa Luxembourg (Germany), and Emma Goldman (United

States) ... this worldwide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality, has been steadily growing.”

Inter-war fascism held a strong attraction to many Tories, and has been extensively documented in Richard Griffiths’ book *Fellow Travellers of the Right*. Researching the history of the British Union of Fascists in my local area, I came across an interview with a former member who stated that “the Young Conservatives in Leyton joined the BUF en masse”. On the eve of the Second World War, Scottish Tory MPs Archibald Ramsay and John Hamilton Mackie joined forces with BUF members to form the Right Club. Its aim was “to oppose and expose the activities of organised Jewry.” While the horrors of the Second World War discouraged many Tories from cosying up to fascists, that didn’t stop Andrew Fountaine from being adopted as their candidate at the 1950 General Election in Chorley, which he failed to take by just 361 votes. A former volunteer for Franco, only months before he had spoken at Tory conference attacking the num-



# Rachel Garnham's view from the NEC

September's NEC meetings – four in total – were dominated by discussions about the Democracy Review's recommendations. Katy Clark, supported by Claudia Webbe and Andy Kerr, had submitted their draft report containing a whole raft of progressive recommendations, to the NEC's July meeting based on a year of consultation and over 11,000 submissions. By September, we were unable to get support from the NEC for some of the key recommendations – and some members appeared to have forgotten that the consultation and huge member engagement had ever happened! Many changes were agreed, which will make the Party a more democratic and inclusive place; other recommendations live to fight another day.

## Leadership elections

The most important area covered by the review was the threshold of nominations for leadership candidates to reach the ballot paper. The left had put in submissions for no PLP veto, advocating that candidates would need either 10% of MPs or 10% of CLPs or 10% of affiliates. Katy Clark's report had recommended the compromise which had been submitted to the review by Unite of a threshold of 10% of MPs or 10% of CLPs plus 5% MPs or 10% affiliates plus 5% MPs. This would have reduced the veto of the PLP from 10% to 5% which would have been a significant step in the right direction – and could have made all the difference between having a successor to Jeremy Corbyn who shares his politics or not.

Unfortunately however, following discussions at the TUC, the big unions decided they were not willing to support this recommendation and the NEC was treated to a series of pro-

posals at its various meetings, as negotiations continued to see if any improvement could be made or if the situation was actually to get worse. In the end, we could not win a vote to reduce the 10% threshold and this fight must go on if we are going to have a left successor to Jeremy if and when he chooses to stand down.

The meeting immediately prior to conference saw a whole series of close votes on other aspects of the Democracy Review with some wins and some losses of the left, depending on who was prepared to vote with the six re-elected CLP reps and the left MPs on the various issues. A new Charter of Members Rights was agreed, long advocated by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, which has room for improvement but it was good, for example, to see off moves to increase qualification periods in some areas. Unfortunately, the local government representatives on the NEC felt the year of consultation was insufficient and it was decided by 16 votes to 13 that all recommendations should be sent for further review.

Some significant improvements have been agreed to regional structures but unfortunately when it came to discussions about the NEC, the left did not do so well, although we narrowly won the proposal to have by-elections for vacancies rather than hand a position to a runner up. The Review recommended that a plan be developed to increase the direct representation of members on the NEC in a series of steps. The CLP left had put in amendments to speed this process up – with OMOV elections favoured in several sections. While it was agreed to add directly elected disabled and BAME representatives –

a significant step forward – these will be elected by electoral colleges of 50% CLP members and 50% affiliates. And on proposals for parity of CLP and trade union representation on the CAC and National Constitutional Committee, again the NEC opted for the status quo rather than an increase say for members.

## Disappointing outcome

On policy-making, the outcome was also disappointing. The report proposed a new and much-needed NEC Policy Committee to oversee Party policy and the policy-making process. The CLP left had submitted amendments to strengthen this proposal and enable more member involvement, which appear in the final recommendations. Unfortunately the NEC decided that rather than take the first steps to reform the much-derided, unresponsive and unaccountable NPF, we would have a review. We will now need to work hard to ensure that whatever is proposed to replace the NPF process can genuinely facilitate member input and involvement.

Finally on annual conference, it is a significant step forward to abolish the ridiculous 'contemporary' criteria for motions to conference – and to increase the number of motions discussed from 8 to 20. But it was so disappointing that some much needed reforms were rejected by the NEC on a 14-14 vote (meaning status quo). The fight for these, and many other reforms goes on, aided by the change made at conference arising from the Democracy Review that will mean rule changes will now be debated in the year they are submitted – we can look forward to next year's rule change debate already!



ber of Jews in public life. Fountaine went on to become one of the founders of the National Front. During the 1950s, right wing Tories rubbed shoulders with anti-semites in the League of Empire Loyalists.

Racist and Nazi-themed socials are nothing new to Tory students. A few years ago, drinks at the Oxford University Conservative Association were apparently accompanied by a song containing the lines “dashing through the Reich, killing lots of kike”. In 2000, four members were expelled for using Nazi salutes. In 2014, University College London Tory Soc was accused by the local NUS of fostering a toxic and discriminatory atmosphere at its meetings and on Facebook, with one Jewish Bulgarian member claiming he was told: “Jews own everything, we all know it’s true. I wish I was Jewish, but my nose isn’t long enough”. Last month, Tory students at Plymouth University were pictured on Facebook, one with a T-shirt graffitied “f\*\*\* the NHS”, another wearing a Hitler-style moustache, another making a hand gesture used by white supremacists, and others with stars of David drawn on their necks.

Then there are the Tories’ friends in eastern Europe. Fellow members of the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe group (ACRE) in the European Parliament include a roll call of anti-semites and fascist apologists. The Tories’ biggest ally in ACRE is Poland’s governing

Law and Justice Party, which earlier this year supported a new law criminalising anyone who claims that Poles were complicit in the Holocaust. Latvia’s opposition National Alliance party has campaigned for the commemoration of Latvian soldiers who fought alongside the Nazis to become a national holiday.

In April this year, Boris Johnson congratulated Viktor Orban and the Fidesz party on their election victory in Hungary, and referred to them as his “friends”. This followed a campaign with repeated anti-semitic tropes and claims that Jewish philanthropist George Soros was the leader of a conspiracy to take over the country. In September EU politicians voted by 448 to 197 in favour of a process that could strip Hungary of its voting rights at the European Council. The Tories were the only governing conservative party in western Europe to vote against the move.

Campaigner Justin Schlosberg wrote in April: “Last week, I cordially invited the Jewish Board of Deputies, the Jewish Leadership Council and the Campaign Against Antisemitism to endorse a joint statement condemning Boris Johnson for his remarks and calling

Theresa May to account for the Tories’ formal links to other political parties in Europe with equally deplorable records on anti-semitism. All of them refused without explanation.”

Five years ago, Tory Central Office suspended a candidate who compared Nazism and

socialism. In a recent contribution claiming anti-semitism is a disease of the left, Tory MEP Daniel Hannan, who was secretary-general of ACRE from 2009 until earlier this year, got round the problem of fascism by claiming Hitler was a socialist.

YouGov polls carried out in 2015 and 2017 found that Tory voters are more likely to hold negative views about Jews than Labour voters. For example, in 2015, 31% of Conservatives thought Jews chase money more than other Britons. Playing to this audience, the Daily (“Hurrah for the Blackshirts”) Mail launched a dog whistle attack on Ed and David Miliband’s father Ralph – a refugee from the Nazis – under the headline “The Man who hated Britain”.

This summer, Theresa May attempted to claim the moral high ground by calling for all political parties to adopt the IHRA definition of anti-semitism in full. The Tories claimed to have done just that, but it emerged that their code of conduct made no mention of anti-semitism. Only subsequently has the party’s code been amended to include an interpretive annex on discrimination, which does refer to the IHRA definition.

Make no mistake: the Tories remain the nasty party; the party of Windrush deportations and Grenfell indifference; the party of food bank Britain; of the hostile environment for disability benefits; of Islamophobia and scapegoating; and the party with a long history of anti-semitism.



# Revolting Tories

The Tories are not just ‘banging on about Europe’ they are tearing themselves apart over it, with Brexit ‘ultras’ threatening to bring down the government rather than accept May’s Chequers agreement. However, it’s not enough for Labour to sit back and make plans for government.

Labour has to protect working class communities from the likely effects of a hard-Brexit or no-deal Brexit by forming the next government and has to unite its pro-Leave and pro-Remain voters. The Corbyn-McDonnell leadership has to try to keep the Parliamentary Labour Party united and avoid being blamed by the voters, and posterity, for a ‘bad Brexit’.

Corbyn has a recurring problem with pro-Remainers in the Parliamentary Labour Party for whom the lines between a genuine disagreement and actively working against the leadership are often blurred. It doesn’t need a Eurosceptic to suspect that they are more interested in attacking the leadership, or talking to friendly journalists about a new breakaway party than protecting their constituents from the ravages of Brexit.

### Pro-leave arguments

Notwithstanding the loss in the 2017 general election of Mansfield and reduced votes in some other strongly pro-Leave constituencies in the overall context of the otherwise strong election result the suggestion therefore is that Labour is protecting the Leave flank of its vote reasonably well. But what of the Remain wing? Last year’s wins in Canterbury and Battersea, for example, suggest that Corbyn’s tightrope walk on Article 50 and the Brexit negotiations has not harmed Labour votes in Remain areas as much as Chuka Umunna and co, who

**Cllr Nick Davies, Swansea West CLP, says the Tories are putting ideology before holding on to government.**

delight in seizing on every scrap of ‘evidence’ for this, suggest.

Pro-Remain Labour supporters, encouraged by polls showing an increase in support for Remain or a second referendum are more confident that they can put their case without damaging Labour’s overall electoral strategy and without appearing to be using the issue as a pretext to attack the leadership.

The Left Against Brexit tour in the summer put the case for a ‘pro-EU’ position for Labour, arguing that the new economic settlement promised by a Corbyn government would be threatened by the loss of investment and jobs resulting from Brexit, at odds with the traditional ‘Lexit’ position that such a programme would be made easier by freedom from EU competition directives. It is hard to call TSSA general secretary Manuel Cortes, prominent in the campaign, and who calls Brexit a ‘Tory act of war against our class’, a disgruntled Blairite.

### Free movement

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC), Corbyn-supporting, though not formally linked to Labour, is in favour of remaining in the EU and for the free movement of workers. Thus one of the forces that propelled Corbyn to his position as Labour leader and mobilized young voters in the general election, and which could improve on the achievement next time, is setting its face against the stance of the Labour leadership but in a way that would help change the assumptions Labour has about the electoral impact of Brexit.

However, unless it changes the way it fights its cause and involves its base, trade union members, there could be a repeat of 2016 when major trade unions all supported Remain, but many of their members voted Leave.

### The six tests

Labour’s current policy, agreed at September’s conference is a product of all these calculations. It is to wait for May to do a deal with Brussels and then vote against it. Labour’s criteria for supporting any deal, Keir Starmer’s ‘six tests’, are designed never to be satisfied by any deal that May thought she could present to the Tory party for support (and in any case May and Raab are now saying that any vote would be a straight Yes or No, with no possibility of amendment). After that, all options are on the table, including a general election.

Bringing down the government has to be the aim, with only Labour-conducted negotiations with Brussels avoiding the deregulated dystopia yearned for by the likes of Rees-Mogg. The Tories’ poisonous embrace of the DUP may well become terminally toxic as the issue of the Irish border threatens to defeat May and bring down the government. The votes of four pro-Brexit Labour MPs have already kept this government alive. The votes of more right-wing Remain Labour MPs may prolong its life further. By contrast, Labour MPs should lose no sleep about voting on the same side as the DUP to kill it off once and for all.

# UPHILL STRUGGLE

## Kevin Flack

### Cutbacks at

#### Natural England

George Monbiot has highlighted the problems of cuts to Government agencies, and their effects on the countryside. Natural England, he says, "has been reduced to a nodding dog in the government's rear window." He cites lack of assessment of the badger cull, overwintering birds and increasing control by Defra. Natural England has suffered 44% cuts since its formation.

### Dorset – more than just Tolpuddle

The Rural Dorset Labour Campaign Forum produces a 'glossy' 30 to 40-page online magazine that covers every issue imaginable outside the urban seats in the county and is particularly good at reporting rural issues and organising for events from film clubs to

quizzes, BBQs to speakers. With a strong Corbyn-supporting slant, it's worth having a look to see how your local party could produce something similar, at [www.dorsetlabour.org.uk](http://www.dorsetlabour.org.uk)

### New Forest Tories in Trouble

A Muslim Tory Town Councillor has quit the party in protest at Boris Johnson's recent remarks, describing the Tories as being a "closed shop" and "at a national level, of having issues with Muslims." He has joined the Lib Dems. This follows the departure of their Bransgore & Burley District Councillor in protest at austerity cuts to frontline policing, who now sits as an Independent.

### Chalford: a proud Labour history

A big shout out to Chalford Labour Party in

Gloucestershire (@LabourChalford) who's twitter strapline reads "There was a disturbance at Chalford in the depressed year of 1795 when some of the inhabitants stopped a barge-load of wheat on the canal, demanding that it should be sold locally at a reduced price." As they say, "Chalford – for the many, not the few since 1795."

### Somerset against the cuts

Comrades from Taunton Deane CLP joined forces with Unison to protest at both cuts in services and attacks on staff terms and conditions at the Shire Hall in Taunton recently. Often in rural areas, where numbers are smaller across the Labour movement, it appears the Labour-union links and mutual support are more effective than in some urban areas.

### Rural schools

Jeremy Corbyn has called for action to eliminate the funding gap between urban and rural schools. Even a BBC commentator has been forced to admit that there is "huge dissatisfaction in Tory shires" on this issue.

### And finally

Those bored with the rural outlook will be pleased to know that this column is likely to end by 2050 when, according to a presentation to Public Health England, an ageing population combined with a shrinking workforce mean villages are likely to die out...

**Kevin Flack** has left the hustle and bustle of the Kent hop fields behind to report from the New Forest in Hampshire. Future articles may disproportionately mention broadband connectivity.



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# Whatever happened to Lutfur Rahman?

*Labour Briefing* readers may recall the case of Lutfur Rahman, who overwhelmingly won the Tower Hamlets Labour Party Mayoral selection ballot eight years ago but was refused endorsement by the Labour Party NEC. He stood as an independent and won the first mayoral election in 2010, and won again in 2014 with a turnout approaching 50%. Then came the election petition and court hearing with its verdict cancelling the 2014 mayoral election result and banning Lutfur Rahman from public office for five years. Despite the damning verdict, no criminal charges were brought.

Operation Lynemouth was established following huge pressure applied to the Metropolitan Police by the GLA's Police and Crime Committee to reinvestigate criminal allegations. Established in May 2017, the purpose of the new investigation was to assess and investigate allegations relating to electoral fraud and malpractice, or other criminal offences. The new investigation focused on four strands:

(1) a review of 27 files of documents from the 2015 election petition court hearing which found against Lutfur Rahman and his deputy, Alibor Choudhury.

(2) an assessment of all evidence of electoral fraud and malpractice relating to the 2014 mayoral election;

(3) a reassessment and review of other criminal allegations relating to Lutfur Rahman or the London Borough of Tower Hamlets; and

(4) an independent review by the City of London Police (COLP) of the Metropolitan Police investigation into Communities, Localities and Culture (CLC) Youth Project grant funding.

Strands 1 and 2: Previously, the Met was not legally allowed to examine the documents from the election court. It had been considered by the CPS who had not referred any matters to them.

**Stephen Beckett reports that the latest Police investigation has found no evidence of criminality against the former Mayor. Again.**

Operation Lynemouth undertook a detailed assessment of the evidence relating to 169 separate allegations and one other matter identified by the new investigation. 15 specialist detectives have considered over 2,450 documents and statements, 28 days of election court transcripts, and several thousand pages of digital material.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) were engaged by the Met's Operation Lynemouth to provide on a number of allegations arising in relation to Strands 1, 2 and 3. The CPS concluded that it was very unlikely that the Code for Crown Prosecutors test would ever be passed in respect of the potential offences. The Met has accordingly reviewed all the available evidence, together with the CPS advice, and decided that there are no offences arising from these allegations that should be referred to the CPS.

Of the 170 allegations of electoral fraud and malpractice:

- 66 allegations related to behaviour that did not amount to a criminal offence,
- nine were duplicate allegations,
- 16 allegations related to 'ghost voters'. These were errors, none voted,
- 18 allegations related to rejected postal votes due to irregularities with signatures. None were found to equate to a criminal offence.

The remaining 61 allegations were all reinvestigated. The new investigation agreed with the previous one whereby:

- one person was charged with making a false statement on a nomination paper but no evidence was offered at court and the case was dismissed.
- two persons received a police

caution, and

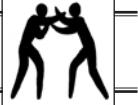
- six persons received written warnings. In all other matters there was insufficient evidence for any individual to be referred to the CPS.

Strand 3: In addition to allegations arising from 2014, the Met has considered the evidence in a number of others:

- one allegation remains under investigation,
- three allegations form part of a wider investigation led by the City of London Police,
- two allegations had previously been subject to criminal proceedings, and no additional action was necessary,
- two allegations have been dealt with by the relevant ,
- In six cases, there was insufficient evidence of a criminal offence, and
- In four cases, due to the nature of the allegation it was not proportionate to undertake investigative enquiries.

Strand 4: The COLP review into the previous Met investigation into Tower Hamlets CLC Youth Project grant funding concluded that all reasonable lines of enquiry have been progressed.

Operation Lynemouth has now concluded having reviewed thousands of pieces of information. The final cost is £1.7million, and involved up to 20 detectives and police staff. After extensive enquiries by specialist detectives, the investigation has not identified evidence to enable the Met to request the CPS to consider the charging of any individual in relation to offences arising from the 2014 mayoral election. The Met states that the new investigation does not undermine the 2015 election court judgment of Mr Mawrey QC - but surely that's exactly what it does do.



# Michael Foot: giant of socialism

Like many others who knew Michael Foot, my reaction to the recent claims that he was a paid Soviet agent was a mixture of outrage and indignation.

I knew and worked with Michael at *Tribune* in the early nineties after he had retired from parliament. He had an office with us where he kept what seemed like a lorry load of books and papers. This was, of course, long before the internet so if I happened to be writing about a particular era in Labour movement history and needed some information or a point clarifying I would walk about 10 feet into Michael's office and ask him. He was in his eighties by then and physically frail – some readers will recall that he was very badly injured in a near-fatal car crash in the early sixties – but his mind was certainly very sharp and his powers of recall formidable.

Michael had a long association with *Tribune*. He was one of the founders in 1937, along with Nye Bevan, William Mellor, Stafford Cripps and others. Interestingly, when in 1938 Mellor was sacked for failing to follow a sufficiently pro-Communist line Michael resigned his position as a journalist in sympathy.

## Cowardly attacks

About 20 years ago similarly lurid claims were made about his alleged connections to the Soviets. He sued and won. It seems particularly cowardly to me that the story has been rerun now that Michael is dead and cannot defend himself.

The recent claims go further than before in that it is now alleged Michael took money from the KGB. That money, we are told, was then passed onto *Tribune* in

John Cryer, MP for Leyton and Wanstead, defends the reputation of Michael Foot against outrageous slurs.

order to keep it afloat. I can clearly recall Michael giving money to *Tribune*. That money was his own and at one point he even re-mortgaged his home to help out the struggling publication. In fact, when Michael won the libel case shortly after the original allegations were published he spent his winnings on a new kitchen – and on helping out *Tribune*.

## Little interest in money

Michael always had very little interest in money and I am certain he would not have accepted any support for the magazine which he had founded if there were the slightest doubt over its provenance.

The claim is that Michael was an “agent of influence”. This might mean that he had a conversation with someone who later turned out to be KGB. Michael would talk to just about anyone and speak to any group of people but he would have done it without having the slightest idea as to who the individuals were because he was just that sort of person.

I can remember once going with him to the Conway Hall to watch him wipe the floor with the then leader of *Socialist Organiser* in a debate on the record of the 1974-79 Labour government on a miserable winter evening, as I recall. He didn't have to do such a debate and certainly had nothing personally to gain from it but to do it accorded with his naturally ebullient and open personality.

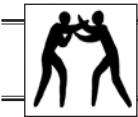
This was a late flourish of one of the great platform and parliamentary performers in living memory. Such was his power that the then prime minister, Jim Callaghan, asked him to wind up the confidence debate in 1979 which Labour lost by one vote, ushering in a general election and a Tory government. Nevertheless, even Conservative MPs have told me that, oratorically at least, Michael was spell-binding and his speech is remembered as one of the greatest in parliamentary history.

## Opposition to Stalinism

Personally, I have no doubt whatsoever that Michael would never have come to the aid of a totalitarian government. He was deeply opposed to Stalin and was a longstanding critic of the Soviet Union. He believed thoroughly in democracy. If he had happened to have been born Russian, he would have been one of the first to be marched off for questioning by the KGB or its predecessor.

Those who knew Michael will be immediately aware of what I am talking about. While he had strongly held views, he was always deeply tolerant of the views of others regardless of how strongly he disagreed with them.

I hope and believe that the fuss over these allegations will die away pretty quickly and that the memory of one of the giants of British socialism, journalism and literature will live long into the future.



Party pieces

# Fight racism and fascism

## National unity demonstration against fascism and racism

### Assemble 12 noon

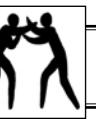
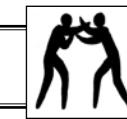
(varied assembly points, check TUC website)

# Saturday, 17 November

Initiated by Stand Up To Racism

Supported by Trades Union Congress

Sponsored by Unite Against Fascism and Love Music Hate Racism



# Annual Conference consolidates Corbyn project

This year's Labour conference in Liverpool was preceded, as usual, by media speculation that disagreement over a number of policy issues, notably Brexit, would dominate proceedings, potentially damaging Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. In fact, the tone of debate was, for the most part, remarkably united, the atmosphere vibrant and enthusiastic and, while there was frustration and disappointment over the limited progress on party democracy, several of the agreed rule changes will nevertheless help to democratise conference and the party generally into the future.

## Determined push

There was an unexpected flurry of excitement at the start of conference on the Sunday morning, as a result of a determined push by CLP delegates to vote down the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) report setting out the conference agenda, in an attempt to rescue CLP motions promoting open selection, which were set to fall due to the precedence accorded an NEC compromise position on the same issue. While the card vote results showed that an impressive 92% had backed the challenge to the CAC in the CLP section, this had been cancelled out by a 98%

Darren Williams, Cardiff West CLP and NEC member, reports on Labour Party Annual Conference 2018 in Liverpool.

vote in the affiliates' section, prompting some anger towards Unite and other left-led unions, considered to have let the side down.

Concern over this issue, and over the proposal to set additional hurdles for future leadership candidates, had been a major preoccupation of party activists in the run-up to conference; as an NEC member, I received more than 2,000 emails on the subject. The lobbying of NEC members had been orchestrated by Momentum and their subsequent advice to delegates to vote for the compromise on selections, and to make up their own minds on leadership nominations, caused bemusement and meant they received some of the same flak as the unions.

Those of us on the NEC were aware that progress had been made behind closed doors in dragging the unions away from even more conservative positions and that the NEC proposals represented (for the left) a pragmatic recognition of the best achievable outcome, given the residual strength of the right both on the NEC itself and, in the leadership of several key unions, on the conference floor. It is understandable, however, that this didn't cut

much ice with many CLP activists and the passion and commitment to party democracy that was displayed suggests – reassuringly – that these issues will not be allowed to drop.

There was and is, ample justification for the disappointment felt among the party membership in relation to the overall package of rule changes emerging from the Democracy Review, especially in light of the emphasis given to the historic opportunity presented by the Review when it was launched last year. The failure to adopt more of the recommendations put forward by Katy Clark and her team – based, let's not forget, on more than 11,000 consultation responses and innumerable meetings – means that that opportunity has not been fully grasped. For example, there has been no progress towards re-establishing a more accountable structure for Labour in local government, in place of the failed Local Campaign Forums, nor about what policy-making process should take the place of the dysfunctional National Policy Forum; the NEC is to continue to consider these matters over the next year and bring proposals back to the 2019 conference. Proposals to elect more NEC seats by OMOV were also killed off in advance of conference.

## Positive moves

More positively, there will now be an NEC seat for Disabled members and there is a commitment to establish more democratic structures for all equality strands. In relation to conference itself, it was an achievement to scrap the arbitrary 'contemporary' criterion for policy motions; to increase the number of issues on which motions can be debated from eight to twenty; and to remove the one-year delay in discussing rule changes submitted by party units. And while the compromise on parliamentary selections fell far short of establishing open selections as the norm, it does make it significantly easier than before to allow members a choice of candidate.

The unusual decision to schedule most of the rule changes – those flowing from the Democracy Review – on the first day of conference at least meant that the most contentious debates were dealt with early on and there was a high degree of unity in the various policy debates. It was a particular achievement to secure a united position on Brexit (following a six-hour compositing meeting), which largely reinforced the leadership's existing position while acknowledging that all options remain "on the table" but that the party's clear preference is for a general election.



## High point

The adoption of a Composite motion on Palestine on the Tuesday was a particular high point of conference, given the concerted attempts over the summer to suggest that any serious efforts to promote solidarity with the Palestinian people were a slippery slope to anti-semitism. The motion – debated amid a sea of Palestinian flags – condemned Israeli brutality in Gaza and called for an end to arms sales and an end to the blockade, while Jeremy's speech recommitted the party to a two-state solution and to formal recognition of a Palestinian state, while also reiterating Labour's commitment to eradicate anti-semitism, both from the party and from wider society.

## Radical commitments

The key speeches from Jeremy and his frontbench team were well-received,

setting out a series of radical policy commitments that will form the basis of Labour's manifesto at the next General Election. These included John McDonnell's pledge to introduce worker share-ownership funds; Dawn Butler's announcement of a right to paid leave for women who are the victim of domestic violence; Rebecca Long-Bailey's commitments on green jobs, regional investment and tougher action against climate change; and John Healey's announcement of a massive expansion of affordable housing and support for tenants' unions in the private sector.

The Leader's speech, tying together these and other policy proposals, showed more clearly than ever Labour's capacity to rise above our internal divisions and the relentless attacks of our opponents and present a credible and attractive alternative to the Tories.



# Remembering Belfast 1971

Watching Massacre At Ballymurphy, on how the Parachute Regiment killed 11 innocent civilians and wounded 40 more in the two day period following the introduction of Internment in August 1971, I recalled my own arrest by the Royal Green Jackets several days later. I was subsequently interrogated in the Royal Military Police base in Hastings Street and then at the RUC Special Branch HQ in Castlereagh, Belfast.

In August 1971, I was home on vacation from the South Bank Polytechnic of London, having been expelled in 1969 from St Joseph's College of Education, Belfast, for my involvement in People's Democracy, the radical student wing of the Civil Rights Movement. When the PD leadership was arrested and interned, I became involved in its publicity work, writing press releases and delivering these to journalists in the city centre hotels. And briefing them on the British Army's lies about non-existent battles with the IRA - such as the 'two hour long gun battle with 20 IRA men in Ballymurphy', claimed by the British Army to justify their killing of 11 non-combatants, including a priest.

### 'Human shield'

On my second trip, I was arrested by a Royal Green Jacket Land Rover patrol at the corner of Royal Avenue and Castle Street. Having been kicked around in the back of the vehicle, I was then stood up as a 'human shield' on the journey up the Falls Road to the Hastings Street Barracks. I was questioned for hours standing against a wall in the 'spread search position' and battered when my answers were

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Channel Four's documentary on the Ballymurphy Massacre reminds Michael Maguire of his own experiences of August 1971.

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considered unsatisfactory. When I fell to the floor, I was kicked back up onto my feet. My interrogators seemed unhappy when an officer intervened and said I was wanted at RUC HQ.

On my arrival at Castlereagh police station, I was 'greeted' by the Special Branch Detective Inspector Harry Taylor, whom I had been accused of assaulting during the People's Democracy occupation of Belfast City Hall in October 1968, the start of my problems with the St Joseph's administration. Harry Taylor had been an RUC heavyweight boxing champion, as I discovered when his large fist sent me reeling backwards at the City Hall.

Taylor spent the night questioning me. Both he and an unidentified Englishman tried to recruit me as an informer over the next couple of days.

### Sleep deprivation

Realising that I was becoming disorientated through sleep deprivation, and concerned that I might involuntarily reveal the location of both the Radio Free Belfast transmitter and the few arms held by those People's Democracy members who subsequently formed the Irish Citizens Army, I agreed to their proposals and was released. I went to Dublin and informed the media of my experience and the attempt to get me to report on London students.

The Union of Students of Ireland accommodated me in Trinity

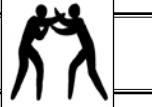
College, Dublin for several weeks while they pressurised a reluctant British National Union of Students, Jack Straw and co, to lobby the Home Secretary to secure my return to my London studies. As a result of my experience of the British Army, like many other young Belfast men and women, I also became involved with the Republican Movement.

On my return to London, I initiated legal action against the Ministry of Defence and the RUC. I was offered an out of court settlement of a few hundred pounds, not in respect of any injuries incurred, but for the loss of personal property, wallet, money, ring etc, which had been 'misled' by the British Army. My solicitor advised me to accept this as, had I gone to the High Court in Belfast to seek proper compensation, I was likely to be interned.

### Prevention of Terrorism Act

I subsequently spent a week in Brixton Prison as Cat A, until the police learnt that they couldn't actually charge me with membership of the IRA, as this did not become illegal in Britain until the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1974. But I spent the next three years on bail while pursuing the remainder of my studies.

*Massacre at Ballymurphy was first broadcast by Channel Four in September 2018 and can be viewed on: <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/massacre-at-ballymurphy>*



# From Paektu to Nottingham East

Paektu is the highest mountain in the Changbai and Baekduaegan ranges that stretch along the North Korean/Chinese border. The mountain, a still-active volcano, and its caldera lake play a prominent role in traditional Korean mythology. So ingrained are these fables that they continue to be deployed in the mythobiographies of North Korean leaders.

B.R. Myers summarises the opening of the officially sanctioned 'origin story' of Kim Jong Il as follows:

*"It was on February 16, 1942, in a snowcapped log cabin at Kim Il Sung's guerrilla base on Mount Paektu, that Kim Chǒng-suk gave birth to the Dear Leader Kim Jong Il. Overjoyed partisans celebrated the great event by carving his name into thousands of tree trunks..."* [Myers, B.R. (2011) *The Cleanest Race*, Melville, NY]

Official North Korean portraiture continues to feature Paektu as a backdrop and the mythobiography of the incumbent Kim is riddled with references to the sacred mountain.

So it is a lamentable fact that mythological thinking is not the preserve of the North Korean political elite, but is readily peddled within and without a democratic political organisation such as the Labour Party. More damning than lamentable is the reality that in certain instances, these mythologies dispense entirely with any account of an 'origin story'.

So it is with the Labour Member for Nottingham East, Chris Leslie, who is the latest parliamentarian to face a vote of no confidence from their constituency party.

## No confidence

Chris Leslie is frequently remembered in the press as the former Shadow Chancellor – a role he occupied for a full four months and one day between Ed Miliband's resignation and the elec-

**Tom Unterrainer, Nottingham East CLP, explains the link between political myths and Labour Party democracy.**

tion of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader – but he is perhaps most notorious for being an 'outspoken critic' of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership.

However, Chris Leslie's 'outspokenness' could not, even in the most charitable of interpretations, be classified as arising exclusively from "one who thinks differently" – as per the Rosa Luxemburg dictum – or as someone going against the grain or as someone making an individual stand for the betterment of society. In fact Chris Leslie's 'politics' can be best characterised as being representative of a defeated creed and the individual in question is someone who is yet to appreciate the scale of the defeat. This, along with the truth of his 'origin story' as the Labour Member for Nottingham East, is the real source of the no confidence vote. No matter how much Chris Leslie peddles the line that he is simply standing up for the best interests of his constituents; that he is primarily and collectively accountable to the 28,102 constituents who cast their vote for 'him'; that he is being targeted by a group of 'hard-left infiltrators'; or that he's being 'punished' for calling-out antisemitism the truth, as always, is rather more complex than the myth.

Inconveniently for the myth-peddlers, but conveniently for the rest of us, Chris Leslie recently took the trouble of writing an extensive exposition of his political outlook titled *Centre Ground*. This pamphlet, published by the Social Market Foundation, clearly states the degree to which its author not only remains wedded to the central ideological tenets of Blairism, but the extent to which he holds Labour Party members and our democracy in utter contempt. In fact, the pamphlets scant references to the Labour Party are wholly repre-

sentative of the authors outlook.\* What about Chris Leslie's Paektu moment? How did he come to be the Labour Member for Nottingham East? Unlike in North Korean mythology, for some reason this origin story is not widely promoted.

## Imposed candidate

The grubby fact is that Chris Leslie was imposed upon the constituency. At no point did local Labour members select him. He was parachuted in during the dying days of the Brown premiership and, as the record shows, as a result of the personal intervention of Gordon Brown. Little wonder, then, that Labour Party members in Nottingham East have taken the opportunity – after a period of considerable restraint and contemplation – to indicate their lack of confidence in Chris Leslie.

The changes to rules on reselection procedures agreed at Conference make it likely that there will be a changing of the guard in Nottingham East. When the opportunity arises, Labour members will most likely select someone other than Chris Leslie.

That this entirely legitimate and democratic process will be accompanied by cries of outrage, further smears and apolitical nastiness will be the responsibility of those who oppose everything positive that's happened since Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader. Fortunately for us, the Labour Party is not a hereditary dictatorship.

\* for a fuller analysis and critique of *Centre Ground*, see *Central Reservations* at <https://medium.com/@tomunterrainer/central-reservations-e73d86b7ba9e>



# Come in and join us!

At the 2018 Labour Party Conference, the Open Selection motion and the Democracy Review were served up with mint sauce and roast potatoes, and then hungrily gobbled up by the 'democratic pack' that is the Conference Arrangements Committee. They were devoured, and would play no further 'singular' part in the conference. The left delegates cried "Wolf!", whilst the shepherds were partying at The World Transformed.

If the establishment base within the party (still alive and kicking) was one wolf, the other lupine predator was the big grey Omega otherwise known as "The Unions." Both came together to shut down the flagship aims of the left at Conference, which left Luke Akehurst and his pack to howl at the moon in celebration long into the night.

## Vested interests

In seriousness, the left screwed up. We won some important victories, but now we must potentially wait for years to completely neuter the threat posed by vested interests represented through their 'acquired' proxies within the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) and elsewhere. Losing Open Selection and the Democracy Review was calamitous in my view.

So that's why we launched the Campaign For Union Democracy (CUD) – way ahead of schedule. The anger from grassroots party members was palpable at what they considered a betrayal by Union delegates and bosses. That anger is misplaced – we should be angry with ourselves, and here is why.

## Democratic systems

Democratic systems rely on a concept of 'whole integrity' to continue to be democratic. Any system that contains 'vote entry points' for opposing agendas trying to stifle or break up a democratic movement will immediately have those entry points used and leveraged against it. That is what happened to Labour in the

**Ben Timberley, Campaign for Union Democracy, channels Benjamin Franklin's dictum: 'Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch.'**

80's when the right under Blair took hold and purged many regions of leftists, supported by the Murdoch media empire and other power players.

## Pyrrhic victory

Momentum, the CLPD, and other groups combined forces to democratise and reassert the will of the left in the Labour Party. They have mostly succeeded – but there is a risk of a Pyrrhic victory here. Because that other key 'vote entry point' was not democratised with it... the Trade Unions. With huge voting power because of affiliated members and seats on committees, the Union votes have shown at Conference that they still carry the fate of the Corbyn project with them.

As a movement, we missed the threat. Despite the warning signs shown by unprompted mass constituency party affiliations from right-wing-dominated Unions, 'ghost branches' popping up everywhere and voting in various electoral contests, Union General Secretaries being appointed by member mandates as low as 2.4%, and other obvious problems... we decided to put our fingers in our ears, and claim that our Unions were on-side and democratic. It's our fault – we have let our Union comrades down, and we must do better.

## Union democracy

Internal Union votes are well known for biased electoral colleges, and extremely low voter turnout. It's not hard to see why now – the executives of many Trade Unions wield unaccountable power, and have stacked the odds in their favour.

We are democratising the Labour Party. To succeed at that, we must democratisate the Trade Unions – and the votes

they wield at all levels of the party. Accountability to grass roots Union members, the people that actually ARE the Unions, is paramount and sacrosanct.

## 'Industry capture'

Despite many of my words here, this isn't a left vs right issue. Unions MUST represent the will of politically educated, active and engaged grassroots members to prevent 'industry capture' – the scenario many Union members will be familiar with where the employers and managers wield the power in their associated Union, and NOT the workers. The decades my late Dad spent as a representative within Unison were littered with cases where he fought against 'industry capture'.

The CUD has been formed by grassroots Union activists and Labour Party activists, to ensure that Union members belong to a proud and 100% democratic movement. From November 2018 onwards, we'll be creating a baseline standard of Union Democracy that grassroots members would like to be deployed. We'll be highlighting where things have gone badly wrong, and proposing democratic solutions. We'll be fighting for a strong, 21st century, 100% honest Trade Union movement. A movement that starts with YOU.

## CAMPAIGN FOR UNION DEMOCRACY (CUD)

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/TheCUDUK/>

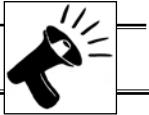
Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/CUDUK/>

Twitter Feed:

[https://twitter.com/CUD\\_UK](https://twitter.com/CUD_UK)

Email:

[campaign@uniondemocracy.co.uk](mailto:campaign@uniondemocracy.co.uk)



# PCS at the crossroads

The main Civil Service trade union, PCS, is not affiliated to the Labour Party. Although motions have been submitted to the union's conference calling for affiliation, the leadership has opposed them and encouraged its supporters to vote them down. Often the leadership has argued affiliation would upset 'apolitical' members and Scottish members. It is true many Scottish members of PCS detest the Scottish Labour Party, until recently led by Blairites. However, the main reason why the leadership blocked affiliation is the sectarianism of the Socialist Party towards the Labour Party. Even in the 2017 General Election, the Socialist Party (through its front, TUSC) stood candidates against Labour. The Socialist Party felt the Corbyn leadership would be only temporary and when he was beaten either by the Tories or Labour's right, disenchanted leftists would leave Labour and support TUSC.

## Union democracy

Rank and file members of PCS did force the Union in 2017 to allow branches to recommend some Labour candidates to their members at the General election. However, the leadership only agreed this shortly before the election, and just over 90 candidates got backing from the union. Labour might have won a few more seats if PCS had supported more Labour candidates. Unfortunately, it now appears that the leadership may not even allow such limited support. It opposed a motion at this year's Conference that would have allowed branches to support Labour candidates at parliamentary by elections and in local government elections.

## Formal support

Although the union formally supports the election of a Corbyn Government, it doesn't mobilise its members for

A PCS activist reports on turmoil at the top of the union.

this purpose or allow branches to take practical steps to bring this about. This political paralysis is being challenged by supporters of the Independent Left in the union who are the main electoral opponents of the current Left Unity leadership bloc. Rank and file members of Left Unity are increasingly questioning the Union's lack of engagement with the Labour Party.

## Assistant Group Secretary

Nevertheless, this issue doesn't appear to be the reason for the current split in Left Unity. PCS President Janice Godrich is seeking to gain the Left Unity nomination for the position of Assistant Group Secretary (AGS) in opposition to Chris Baugh, the current incumbent. Godrich and Baugh are both Socialist Party supporters and Godrich has decided to stand even though the Socialist Party is backing Baugh. Godrich has stated she has no political differences with the Socialist Party and her main reason for standing appears to be that Baugh doesn't get on with General Secretary Mark Serwotka, and has allegedly sought to undermine him. Godrich has rallied around her many of the Socialist Party's other leading figures in the union and they are likely to be expelled from the union.

## Independent left?

Clearly there is a possibility that whoever loses the internal Left unity selection battle will stand for AGS separately from Left Unity. This will probably break up Left Unity and its dominance of PCS since 2000. It could even allow an Independent Left candidate to win the AGS election.

The Left Unity leadership of PCS has not delivered on key issues for members, who have suffered pay cuts for over a decade, and lost an estimated £2,500 since 2010. It has failed to prevent the Civil Service pension age being tied to the State pension age and a worse pension scheme being imposed, along with higher pension and national insurance contributions. There have been a huge number of office closures in the DWP and the HMRC, the two largest government departments. In the DWP PCS signed up to a four-year pay offer that led to 10,000 women workers receiving 0.25% for four years, and other workers working longer or anti-social hours. Other government departments are now seeking to increase hours for Civil Servants. PCS has haemorrhaged members as a result of these successful attacks by the employer. PCS tried to launch a challenge to pay cuts through a national ballot this year but failed to get the 50% turnout needed to allow a legal strike.

## Divisions

The divisions in both Left Unity and the Socialist Party should be welcomed. The Socialist Party's dominance of Left Unity has allowed it to veto the union's closer engagement with the Labour Party for too long. Now it doesn't have the strength to impose its line. As historical loyalties are set aside, perhaps both sides of Left Unity will start to reassess their political and industrial strategy. Hopefully a new leadership of the union will soon emerge that does seriously engage with the Labour Party and address PCS's industrial weakness.



# Don't prop up Honduras!

2019 will mark different anniversaries in Latin America, including 20 years since Hugo Chavez became president of Venezuela and 60 years since the Cuban Revolution. Sadly, it will also mark 10 years since the coup in Honduras. The military coup saw Juan Orlando Hernandez come to power, and the elected President Manuel Zelaya – who had started to implement wealth redistribution and joined the ALBA regional bloc of left-wing governments that challenged US domination of Latin America and the Caribbean – removed.

The coup was widely condemned by governments across Latin America, the EU, the OAS and other regional blocs. In contrast, President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton refused to label the crisis a military coup. I was amongst those who raised concerns in the British Parliament, including over the US stance which gave oxygen to the burgeoning dictatorship at the time. The elections following the coup in Honduras have included a media blackout and political repression against left-wing opposition candidates. The murder in 2016 of internationally-renowned environmental leader Berta Cáceres illustrated the extent of human rights violations. It also illustrated how the imposition of severe neo-liberalism in post-coup Honduras was not only directly leading to more poverty and inequality, but also necessarily accompanied by severe repression against any

resistance. Discontent with the government grew in the wake of Cáceres' assassination. Revelations of widespread government corruption and embezzlement led to thousands of Hondurans taking to the streets calling for the president's resignation.

Yet following a controversial ruling by the Honduran Supreme Court which changed the constitution to eliminate term limits and allowed for re-election, Hernández was permitted to run again in the 2017 presidential election. He 'won' the election in highly suspicious circumstances. The country's electoral tribunal, which is allied with the president, has been accused of manipulating the vote to reverse a mid-count lead for opposition challenger Salvador Nasralla and ensure a narrow victory for the incumbent president.

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# Don't prop up Honduras!

2019 will mark different anniversaries in Latin America, including 20 years since Hugo Chavez became president of Venezuela and 60 years since the Cuban Revolution. Sadly, it will also mark 10 years since the coup in Honduras. The military coup saw Juan Orlando Hernandez come to power, and the elected President Manuel Zelaya – who had started to implement wealth redistribution and joined the ALBA regional bloc of left-wing governments that challenged US domination of Latin America and the Caribbean – removed.

The coup was widely condemned by governments across Latin America, the EU, the OAS and other regional blocs. In contrast, President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton refused to label the crisis a military coup. I was amongst those who raised concerns in the British Parliament, including over the US stance which gave oxygen to the burgeoning dictatorship at the time. The elections following the coup in Honduras have included a media blackout and political repression against left-wing opposition candidates. The murder in 2016 of internationally-renowned environmental leader Berta Cáceres illustrated the extent of human rights violations. It also illustrated how the imposition of severe neo-liberalism in post-coup Honduras was not only directly leading to more poverty and inequality, but also necessarily accompanied by severe repression against any

resistance. Discontent with the government grew in the wake of Cáceres' assassination. Revelations of widespread government corruption and embezzlement led to thousands of Hondurans taking to the streets calling for the president's resignation.

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# ON THE OUTSIDE

## Christine Shawcroft

When I thought about writing my column this month about the National Constitutional Committee elections, I never dreamed it would all turn out to be so exciting. After all, it's not so long ago that we used to urge (or 'con') people to stand for the NCC by saying, 'Don't worry, you won't have to do anything, the NCC practically never meets!'. How times change.

I would just like to point out, in passing, that the National Executive Committee never agreed to this crazy explosion of disciplinary action against members. In the summer of 2015, they had an Organisation Committee meeting at which it was reported that there had been some mischievous membership applications from known Tories (in some cases, sitting Tory councillors) who hoped to influence the Labour leadership contest. Apparently, they thought that if they voted for Jeremy Corbyn, that would keep Labour out of power for a generation (excuse me for a moment whilst I wet myself laughing), but clearly no one on the Org Committee wanted Tories voting, no matter how noble their intentions. It was therefore agreed that membership applications would be run past local

members to see if they had knowledge of why anyone should not be allowed to join, which would be put before a small Procedures Committee which was a) accountable to nobody, and b) not exactly stuffed with Left-wingers. It was already the case that new membership applications have to be approved by local branches and CLPs, but the Procedures Committee was set up (we were told) because there is usually an eight-week window for local objections, which was clearly untenable during a Leadership election. So the process was nodded through.

Yet over that summer, it was found that not only were new applicants being barred after complaints from local members, but existing members were being suspended, having their votes taken off them, etc - in their thousands. None of that had ever been agreed, but as no one seemed to be able to control the Procedures Committee there was little to be done about it but protest vociferously. So now we find that the Disputes Committee, which used to be over in fifteen minutes with only a couple of items on the agenda, now lasts for hours with an agenda running to several pages, and

the NCC is absolutely snowed under with the cases of members referred to them for further disciplinary action - or expulsion.

At Annual Conference in Liverpool, it was agreed to increase the number of people on the NCC, and add 6 places in the CLPs section. So the Left had to draw up a slate. Then the fun really started.

The problems faced by the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance in agreeing one slate have been much raked over, on social media and in the increasingly agitated emails flying around the ether. People who have been criticising the lack of transparency in CLGS slate-making for years are now nodding wisely and saying, 'See? We told you so!' Which is an easy thing to say, of course.

Not so easy is to work out how the process could be improved. Everyone seems to think it should be more democratic and it's hard to argue with that. After all, we all want more democracy, don't we? Problems arise when one considers how, exactly, this desirable outcome could be achieved.

There are several organisations involved in the CLGA, such as the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Jewish Voice

for Labour, Momentum, Labour CND, Labour Briefing Co-op, and several others. Are there to be allocated seats for each organisation? Or should all the members of these organisations participate in some kind of OMOV ballot? What would we do about multiple membership? And how would we make sure there was regional, gender and ethnic balance in the people elected? Every time we have one of these slates, whether it's for the NEC or something else, the recriminations start - there are too many southerners, not enough BAME candidates, no disability candidate, etc etc. Not that I would necessarily disagree with many of these concerns, but the problem is how to achieve the balancing act which is required? If organisations ballot their members and you end up with a list of mainly white men from London, what are you going to do then? If anyone has any proposals of how to solve this conundrum, I would like to hear them.

