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The Agenda

Editorial 3



Around Britain:

Bigger priorities than Brexit	4
Performance-related pay?	5
Councils in crisis	6
Fighting climate change	7
Only a harmless flutter?	8

Uphill Struggle - Kevin Flack 9



Labour Party:

Momentum needs its Mojo back	10
Votes for Women	11
Darren Williams: A view from the NEC	13
1938 - the Munich betrayal	14-15



Voice of the Unions:

Tory Brexit threatens our rights	16
Keep the local link	17
Keith Veness	21

Round the World:

Don't trash INF Treaty	18
Michael D re-elected	19
Post-Brexit trade vs human rights	20
Solidarity now more than ever	22
Kosovo's borders - a Pandora's box?	23



Reviews 24-26

Periscope 27

On the Outside - Christine Shawcroft 28

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It's Brexit decision time

On 28th November, Philip Hammond announced that modelling of every likely Brexit scenario showed a worse economic result than remaining in the EU. What he repeatedly referred to as “the prime minister’s” (rather than the government’s) Brexit deal was, he argued, the least worst option. It came 48 hours after Theresa May faced two hours of hostile questions in the Commons before a single Tory backbencher came to her defence.

May’s attempt to talk out of both sides of her mouth – trying to persuade hardline leavers that they risk losing Brexit and remainers that they risk the UK leaving with no deal – has backfired spectacularly. With around 100 Tories, the DUP and the vast majority of opposition MPs pledged to vote against the government on 11th December, nothing it seems can save May’s deal. She will then have 21 days to come up with alternative proposals, but with EU governments unlikely to budge on anything fundamental, it’s hard to see that May can survive.

If and when the deal goes down, Jacob Rees-Mogg will surely get his 48 letters, triggering a leadership contest, unless May decides to roll the dice and trigger a general election. The likelihood of Tory turkeys voting for Christmas still seems unlikely. That leaves a parliamentary vote of no confidence which could only be carried with Tories voting to bring down their own government.

The unravelling of “strong and stable” May over the last 18 months has spiralled into the biggest constitutional crisis in decades. Not surprisingly, confusion over the substance and the detail has spread. A poll published on 28th November by Survation – the only company to get the 2017 general election right – showed 37% supporting May’s deal, with 35% against; 41% wanting MPs to vote for it, with 38% against; 46% in favour of remaining in the EU against 37% for leaving with the deal; 41% for no deal against 35% for the deal; and 48% in favour of a second referendum with 34% against.

In the Commons there is clearly no majority for leaving without a deal, no majority for leaving with May’s deal, and, as yet, no majority for remain. In the country at large, there appears to be evidence of a small remain majority, despite a majority opposed to freedom of movement. This is due to the deaths of many elderly leavers, pro-remain 18-20 year olds registering, and a small shift in the rest of the population.

Recognising that a significant proportion of the leave vote came from ex-industrial regions and left-behind coastal communities, Labour has wisely not foregrounded a second referendum, and demanded a general election. At least two thirds of Labour voters support remain, and the party faces the problem of not alienating them. What the pro-remain Metropolitan right of the party doesn’t understand is that big remain majorities in London seats do not add up to a winning strategy for the whole country.

The left’s worst mistake would be to treat leavers as ignorant and racist. Its task is to reach out to those alienated by the policies of the last 40 years and separate them from nationalists and xenophobes. Constructive ambiguity has got us this far, but it can’t be sustained. If we agree that no deal is not an option, and we can’t get a general election or win a parliamentary vote of no confidence, there is a remorseless logic that leads towards a second referendum.

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Bigger priorities than Brexit

The problem with the Referendum debate was that it was hijacked by religious fundamentalists on both sides of the argument. Depending which side you fell we were either entering paradise on the day we left the EU, or were all going to hell in a handcart.

For much of the post-referendum period this extremist rhetoric has continued. Views on the impact of Brexit have been emotional rather than rational. Or if they have been rational, they have been mendacious.

In reality the impact of Brexit was always going to be more nuanced, would depend on the terms of trade, but would probably have a small negative impact for most people. As we have approached the moment of truth some semblance of this reality is starting to show.

As the details of what an exit from the EU would actually entail, so the economic impacts become clearer to model. Whilst the likes of Jacob-Rees Mogg and the rest of his European Research Group fantasists continue to believe that the earth is flat, some clearer analysis is now starting to gain traction in the debate.

The recent publication of both the Treasury and Bank of England impact scenarios has helped inform the debate. Whilst they each have their own political axe to grind their findings are close to the consensus of most economists.

The Bank of England analysis highlights how a disorderly Brexit with No Deal can have quite a severe impact on the UK economy with GDP between 7.75% - 10.5% lower by the end of 2023 than on its May 2016 trend, though part of this is due to already lower growth since May 2016 in the UK.

Economist Laurence Davison argues that there are more important economic issues than Brexit.

On its scenario where the UK retains a close economic partnership with the EU, GDP is between 1.25% - 3.25% lower at the end of 2023 than its May 2016 trend. But most of this is due to growth which has already been lost. Compared to the November 2018 trend the Bank of England states that under a close economic partnership GDP would be between 1.25% higher to 0.75% lower depending on how close the economic partnership is.

The Treasury scenarios show that GDP would be between 6.3% - 9.0% lower after 15 years under a No Deal scenario or between 0.9% - 2.3% lower under an EEA style arrangement. The central scenario under the EEA style agreement shows GDP 1.4% lower after 15 years, or in other words GDP growth is on average 0.1% a year lower. An impact that is significant but small.

It is a similar scale to that assessed by Cambridge Econometrics in work for London Mayor Sadiq Khan. They found that the impact on total UK GVA by 2030 ranged from -1.0% to -3.0% compared to the current position. Again, under the softer Brexit scenarios the impact is less than 0.1% per annum.

These are of course averages and, as with all averages, some sectors and some individuals will fare better than average, and some will be worse off.

But it is important to keep things in perspective. A reduction of 0.1% would be like getting a slightly lower pay rise than you expected, but you wouldn't notice the difference on a day to day basis. Whilst it would

have been preferable to remain in the EU, it is not, as many would have you believe, the single most important issue facing the UK today.

From an economic perspective of far greater importance is productivity. Productivity slumped from a long-run average of 2.2% p.a. to just 0.2% p.a. over the period 2008-16 (whilst we were in the EU and pre-Referendum). So that is 20 times greater than the likely Brexit impact.

In terms of jobs, the increasing introduction of automation will have a far more fundamental impact on people's employment prospects than EU related trade factors. Artificial intelligence is being adopted in many industries at an exponential rate and many of today's jobs will no longer exist in 15 years' time. How we respond will have a huge impact on people's livelihoods

Political decisions as to what share of our national income we spend on public services such as education, health and infrastructure will affect people's lives more on a day to day basis. Such decisions are also crucial to the future productive growth of the UK economy.

And a fairer distribution of national income will have more impact on the incomes of most households than marginal changes to national income being siphoned off by the richest 1%.

When Tony Blair rails against Brexit he should have the self-awareness to realise that it was the free market policies he championed that were the cause of Brexit, with millions left behind and disillusioned whilst a few grew rich.



Performance-related pay?

The role of a local councillor is a strange hybrid position, caught somewhere between the voluntary and employed sectors. Since being elected as a Labour councillor for Wanstead Village in the London Borough of Redbridge last May, the myriad nature of the role has continued to fascinate and frustrate.

On the one hand we are treated as if employed full-time in the council role. For example, councillors have to book time off if they are going to be away and not on call for residents. In many ways of course it is a 24/7 role. Most would argue that is right, we are from the community, so must be ready to serve at all times – even when trying to catch the bus.

The public often don't understand the role of the councillor. Some think councillors are paid huge amounts and are responsible for everything from the weather to bin collections. It has been a dawning realisation that the role of councillor can amount to getting the blame for everything and the credit for nothing. How much this dynamic plays out can depend on individual councillors' ability to communicate exactly what they are doing and why.

Council officers are the full time staff responsible for the running of the various functions of councils. The elected politicians should be representing the electorate, making the political decisions and setting the direction of travel accordingly.

The allowance paid to councillors demonstrates the hybrid nature of the role – somewhere between the voluntary and public sector. Allowances are basic but when the demands are taken into the account – if the councillor is doing the job properly – then they are not exorbitant.

Redbridge councillor Paul Donovan argues that our elected representatives should reflect their communities.

While people shouldn't become councillors for the pay, too low a level has the effect of skewing the role towards the independently wealthy and those who have retired on a pension. These two categories can give of their time, without concern about monetary return. However, younger people with full time jobs and families to support can struggle to juggle the pennies.

I stand in admiration of Cabinet members, who have challenging portfolios on the council, yet hold other jobs outside. Remuneration of councillors can be a thorny topic. Councillors increasing allowances is never going to be an easy sell to the public, especially in the present austere times, with a government determined to cut council services to the bone.

Some councils have thicker skins than others, increasing allowances, sometimes disproportionately, for those higher up the tree, although recent years have seen three rounds of 1% rises, with some councils cutting allowances. In Redbridge, allowances have not increased for four years. The basic allowance for a councillor is £10,138 a year. There is another £16,000 for cabinet members. The leader gets £42,000 altogether.

That should be enough many would say, but take into account the earlier arguments. A report by the London Councils earlier this year recommended a level of £11,045 for the basic allowance and £57,000 for the leader.

The councillors I have met since being elected are all hard working

individuals, but do we reflect the demographic of the people we represent? We do have a few young members in their 20s which is excellent, but there are far more over-50s (I am one). Where are the single parents living in the poorest parts of our borough? How do these people come through the party systems to serve as councillors?

The Labour Party has done more than most to advance the representation of women. The imposition of all women short lists has played a major part in increasing that representation. But the analogy mentioned above can be extended here too.

A former Labour MP I know confessed that he regretted supporting the woman who eventually succeeded him in the seat, who was middle class, well supported and able to give a lot of time to the process of winning the selection. The individual he later felt he should have supported was a single working parent living in a sink estate. She represented an under-represented part of the population but lost out in the selection.

There certainly need to be further steps taken at local and national government levels if the Labour Party is to truly reflect the people we seek to represent. More positive discrimination, new pay levels, care support and maybe a mentoring process could all be part of such an approach because at the moment in many ways the problem is not being addressed.

see: paulfdonovan.blogspot.com



Councils in crisis

Local Government is at a crisis point across the country with councils of all shapes and political flavours having to deal with the perfect storm of increased pressures with dramatically cut funding.

The council I'm proud to serve on, Medway, is a unitary authority in the South East so has all the responsibilities of both a County Council as well as a borough or district council. Despite popular belief that the South East is an affluent area, I can tell you that my ward is repeatedly on or near the top of various indices of deprivation. Medway is not alone in that in the South East, other areas including Thanet and Hastings have areas which also sit high in those tables.

Medway has been Tory Controlled for most of its 20 years of existence but more recently we have seen some of the most vicious cuts which have truly hit at the heart of our communities.

Last year, despite repeated broken promises, there were a number of Sure Start Centres closed by Medway Council. Sure Start Centres which have helped children and parents for years, offering advice and guidance as well as a wide range of peer support groups, stolen from our communities.

One of the centres to close was in Brompton, which was used heavily by armed forces families as it is close to the local barracks. Medway has a proud history of its armed forces, but more than 30 years on from the Thatcher Government ripping the heart out of our community by shutting Chatham Dockyard, we see the Tory Council taking away support from those military families and many families across the area.

If closing Sure Start Centres wasn't bad enough, money from the sav-

Vince Maple, Medway councillor, says only a General Election can save local government now.

ings made was spent on fireworks – yes you read that correctly, fireworks to celebrate a battle against the Dutch which we lost (and frankly very few people had heard of anyway). Money for fireworks for a historic defeat but not for the future of our children and families.

With every negative there is a positive and I'm proud that two of the young mums who worked alongside Medway Labour Councillors to fight to defend the Sure Start centres have joined the party and will be standing for council on May 2nd (any help with the campaign would be gratefully received!)

So with the decision around Sure Start, a lack of solutions for homelessness, a crisis in Adult Social Care and Special Educational Needs provision and with visitors parking increasing from £35 to potentially up to £700, increasingly people are looking for a change in administration; a recent by-election shows they are literally voting for it.

Rochester West ward in Medway was previously held by Kelly Tolhurst MP, recently promoted to Government Minister by Theresa May – Kelly resigned her council seat which on paper was probably the third or fourth safest Tory ward.

With a tremendous effort, supported by activists from across Kent (including one or two regular Labour Briefing contributors!) we managed to take the ward with a 26.5% vote share increase.

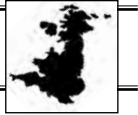
Nearly a decade of austerity has truly had a devastating impact on communities like Medway which is why the LGA Labour Group have

recently launched the #BreakingPoint campaign – you can find out more at <https://www.councilsatbreakingpoint.com/>

When people say "When do you think the next election will be?" they often mean the next General Election, but I can tell you that for huge parts of England the next election is already set in stone – It's May 2nd 2019. Due to the sheer size of the electoral challenge it will genuinely need all party members to play their part. In the South East alone we will need to have more than 2,000 candidates on ballot papers.

Like all readers of *Labour Briefing*, I want Jeremy Corbyn to be our next Prime Minister leading a radical, progressive Labour Government. In my view, we can make that happen by ensuring that every community has the opportunity to vote Labour on May 2nd where there is an election. If you live in an area where there are no elections go and lend a hand to an area that does, you will be given a warm welcome and no doubt the solidarity will be reciprocated when your area next has elections.

With more Labour Councillors and Councils we can have strong, positive policies of hope like those we saw in the 2017 General Election manifesto. We can have the rebirth of genuine municipal socialism, learning from the very best Labour Councils up and down the country, to build communities that truly work for the many.



Fighting climate change

It is the year 2,300 and only a few groups of humans remain on the scorching equator, ready to pack their bags and travel to the densely populated polar regions, the only inhabitable parts of the earth. Sounds far-fetched?

Not at all. This scenario is based on scientific forecasts of a 4 to 5-degree centigrade rise in global temperature due largely to mankind's industrial and agricultural activities since preindustrial times.

There are alarming portents. The Cerrado savanna in Brazil, the same size as Western Europe and one of the most bio-diverse places in the world, is being burned and cleared at the rate of the size of greater London every two months.

This is driven by demand for land to grow soybeans to feed livestock, such as pigs and chickens, for global consumption. The policies of newly elected Jair Bolsonaro threaten the Amazon, the lungs of the world, with deforestation.

Climate change is making destructive fires more common in the northern boreal forests which store about 30 percent of the world's carbon. Burning forests put that carbon in the atmosphere, creating a vicious cycle leading to more fires.

Melting permafrost in the polar regions also accelerates climate change by releasing methane, a greenhouse gas that is five times stronger than carbon dioxide.

The long-term impact will be a continued decrease in global agricultural production, most dramatically experienced in the poorest countries whose livelihoods are focused on agriculture and less on industrial

Barry Rodin, Orpington CLP, calls for a joined-up international effort to tackle climate change and environmental destruction.

production.

When the world should be working internationally to urgently prevent environmental and social disaster, we are witnessing instead the rise of nationalist political movements that oppose inclusive democracy and diversity and favour businesses exploiting vast natural resources to increase their shareholder value.

Populists, using inflammatory politics, have profited from the failure of traditional parties to address economic and environmental hardship and despair among large sections of working people, caused by the continuing effects of neo liberalism and the Great Recession.

Globally, from Brazil to the Philippines, populist movements have gained power using simplistic slogans and false promises of secure employment and then cynically allowing powerful corporations to put short termism and profits before the well-being of people and the environment.

How can these developments be reversed? First of all, there must be international laws to ensure that no products or financial transactions lead to deforestation, pollution and human rights violations. Organisations such as the UN and EU should spearhead the drive towards international policing of the environment.

Political pressure has to be increased on governments to plan and invest in:

- environmentally sound energy production (wind/tides/solar);
- hybrid or electric cars that reduce or eliminate use of petrol and diesel;
- public transport infrastructure and affordable fares;
- recycling of garbage and plastic.

We also need to campaign, using all forms of communication, to raise awareness that immigration and diversity is a positive process, especially when allied with regional planning so that no area is left behind. This needs to be undertaken both at a local grassroots level and internationally, with richer and poorer countries collaborating together.

For instance, at the local level, establish environmentally friendly alternative forms of ownership, with workers free from exploitation, including workers' cooperatives and municipal projects in activities such as housing, health care services and utilities.

Climate scientists forecast that we may have only 12 years to undertake the necessary changes to avoid significantly worse drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people. It is therefore imperative to combat both self-destructive nationalism and also to manage the global economy to eliminate poverty and despair without harming the environment. International solidarity and collaboration give our best route to salvation.

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Only a harmless flutter?

Hollywood actor Ray Winston concludes in a TV ad for gambling, "Bet responsibly". Well, isn't it only a harmless flutter, after all? Yet two million people are seen as 'problem gamblers' and over half a million are addicts in the UK.

Should Labour call for a total ban on all advertising, as there is for heroin, drink or cigarettes, as gambling also causes addiction? As one insider described it to me some years back "It's like legalised drug dealing".

Look at the CEO of BET365. We learnt last week that Denise Coates CBE had an annual income of £265 million. Her Dad, a bookie, is owner of Stoke FC and gave her a leg up by giving her five shops to run. With 35% of all gambling in the UK now online what can a local council with its guidelines or stance do in the face of easy betting and often unseen gambling?

More young people, half a million, gamble than smoke cigarettes, use drugs or drink. There has been a fourfold increase of young gambling addicts over the past four years. The gambling industry has nearly doubled its profits to over £15 billion over the past 20 years and the negative consequences have wrought misery on millions. 48% of people over 18 have gambled in the last four weeks. People's hopes, often desperate, are exploited but the reality is 'the house always wins'.

Regulation has not worked. Gambling in the UK is one of the most regulated industries in Europe but greed has driven it out of control. What has reduced, but not eliminated, the use of tobacco, is a ban on advertising and lighting up at work places or in public establishments and transport hubs, which brought about a massive and lasting

Pat Edlin, Islington South CLP, asks if Labour should support calls for a ban on all advertising for gambling.

change in culture and cultural habits.

The problem does not end there but should be a sharp, scary, warning about a deeper problem in our society. At all sporting venues, broadcasted events, either on commercial radio, online promotions and terrestrial, cable or satellite TV they advertise their various gambling wares constantly. Even on public service broadcasting there is no escape from the peddling.

In recent years we have witnessed an explosion of online betting with a plethora of options to gamble that bombard consumers relentlessly. That is in effect an untold story of taxation by the back door and mirrors the 'austerity politics' of the past decade.

Every day around the country we hear of 'deserts' being created as high street shops close down. But not gambling establishments, it's a boom time for them. Even the Tory government recently reduced the fixed odd betting terminals (FOBT) option of placing a £100 bet every twenty seconds down to £2 maximum. One owner of a betting shop moaned he would "go out of business without FOBT".

Last year saw online gambling firm 888 being fined a record penalty of £7.8m after it 'failed to protect vulnerable customers'. That is small change for a gambling industry that enjoys an annual turnover of billions.

The social and health problems that gambling addiction creates are immeasurable and a matter of growing concern for Gamblers

Anonymous, the Gambling Commission and many charities, and a few politicians who care. Increased debt, reliance on loan sharks, domestic abuse, theft, imprisonment, bankruptcies and serious health increases can be attributed to the growth of gambling problems.

Gambling corporations give 10% to good causes out of the 'goodness of their hearts' and are justified as they bring in revenue in taxation to the Treasury. Over 35% of bets are now placed online, it's never been easier to gamble. Profits for many major gambling companies have gone up by 10%, but with a 20% decrease in shop betting. There has only been a 2% decrease in betting shops, arcades and bingo halls, which means less rent, less rates and less in wage costs.

The introduction of the National Lottery in the early 1990s gave hope to many, including many pensioners, that they could win the jackpot of millions even with the odds being stacked against them by 44 million to 1 to win. Today we can enjoy many different types of scratch cards and one that promotes its self as helping the NHS, and a postcode lottery is now actually a thing.

As one former employee of Camelot, who run the Lottery, put it, "Every Saturday we have a great party as we pop many Champagne corks at the fortunes we are making". Hope springs eternally to be exploited by an industry that is regulated but out of control. Should all advertising of it be banned?

UPHILL STRUGGLE

Kevin Flack



Labour Goes Green

Labour's new policy document "*The Green Transformation – Labour's Environment policy*" confirms the seriousness of the party's attitude to environmental issues including renewable energy, zero-carbon homes and sustainable farming. The key rural promises include an expansion of the bus network; increasing the rail network in the South West of England and Wales; support for smaller traders in the agricultural sector and improved habitats for wildlife.

Land Value Tax

The Labour Land Campaign continues its excellent campaign to create a fair tax for landowners. It says, "The UK tax system discriminates against rural businesses, favouring owners of land and other natural resources." It points out the forcing up of local home prices by those buying second homes; that agricultural land, often owned offshore, is used as a shelter against Inheritance tax and that "farm subsidies capitalise into land value, resulting in tenant farmers paying higher rents and farmland being hoarded in order to

collect CAP subsidies instead of it being used efficiently." The campaign's solution is a Land Value Tax payable annually by landowners, not tenants, against the value of a site – which is determined by the popularity of its location, its natural attributes and its permitted use decided by planning authorities – disregarding any buildings on the site. You can find out more at www.labourland.org.

Keeping the Link

Cash machines are being lost at an alarming rate – 1,400 in the first six months of this year. This affects rural dwellers more than urban as the cash economy is still very much alive there. Therefore it was good to see machine network Link targeting all 2,365 ATMs in the most remote areas to stay open. Meanwhile across Scotland RBS continue to close its banks that serve rural communities.

Dorset success

Dorchester Labour are celebrating a success when county councillors voted to refer local NHS cuts to the Secretary of State for review. Defend Dorset NHS Campaigners

at the Health Scrutiny Committee included Unison and Unity Community members. Additionally, a big thank you to Clive Lewis MP for coming to campaign for the party in Blandford Forum in North Dorset.

May Manifesto

Labour Coast and Country are ahead of the game with a manifesto for next year's district elections. For rural areas, they are calling for improved broadband connectivity – "if there has to be a choice in connectivity investment, those communities without public transport should get fibre first." They are also demanding improved democratic neighbourhood planning to ensure housing needs are met and a role in guiding decisions on local services from primary care to neighbourhood policing.

False perception of affluence

The County All Party Parliamentary Group has reported that there is a "false perception of affluence", about many rural areas. They highlight services like public transport, youth centres and child-care were being "hampered" by an "inequitable"

council funding model that benefits urban areas and said rural areas were among the least socially mobile.

Dr Who effect

The regenerated Dr Who, Jodie Whittaker, appears to be having an effect regenerating the Labour Party in the countryside, with the party winning a council by-election in the Yorkshire village ward of Denby Dale where she was born.

Commoners Defence Association

In my new status as a commoner – with the right to pasture any livestock I may have on the New Forest – I have applied to join the Commoners Defence Association. Not sure, but am presuming it's like the Ulster Defence Association but with more guns...

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.



Momentum needs its Mojo back

We live in exciting and unusual times! When you read that establishment bastion *The Times* is reporting that there is a real possibility of a Labour government led by Jeremy Corbyn you know that we have come a long way in a short number of years.

Who could have predicted that we would have overcome so many obstacles and achieved so much since Jeremy Corbyn triggered everything by unexpectedly winning the leadership contest in 2015?

But of course nothing is ever simple and it was predictable that the right were not going to give in gracefully. It is fair to say that the 2016 coup would have had more chance of success if it had not come up against Momentum and the huge campaign waged by pretty much everyone on the left. No one can dispute the enormous impact that Momentum had at the time.

If you were to ask your contacts you would more than likely find that they were phone banking (it seemed everyone ended up at a session at some stage). Many friendships were made during the high-energy mobilisation. For the first time it seemed that the left had a common purpose to fight for and Momentum quickly recognised this and rose to the occasion. Headly days indeed.

Momentum appealed to a cross section of people from all walks of life who wanted Jeremy Corbyn as leader. The organisation went on to play a vital part in the general election. It was a stroke of genius to be able to target activists to areas where they were needed most. Following the election Momentum led the way in training, helping people to be more effective in Labour party structures, council election campaigns and in their CLPs.

Dorinda Duncan, chair of Greenwich Momentum, is concerned about the direction national Momentum seems to be taking .

All great stuff. But the early days were easier to manage. We were on a wave of euphoria (almost revolutionary), breaking ground and leading the way. What was not to like? Then the problems started. It was not so easy to develop Momentum onto the next stage. The factions emerged and we did what the left always do "squabble and divide". The honeymoon was over.

Bringing in a new constitution as an attempt to calm factions, we started to move away from democracy and transparency - perhaps not by intent, just by the nature of the challenges faced. Some staff were great activists but lacked experience and the elected body, the National Coordinating Group, was not exactly selected for the skills required to run what was now a medium sized organisation. In the midst of the chaos transparency, and the members having a say, has been difficult to implement.

Suffice to say that every one of the NCG candidates ran on an election platform of "better communications and transparency". Disappointingly this has not been fulfilled. Members feel disenfranchised and groups are failing without support from HQ.

Decision making has been reduced, in many cases, to a small group of officers, locking out the rest of the NCG. Decisions were also made that took opposing positions to Jeremy Corbyn and came close to Momentum creating its own policy.

On that point I have created a petition for Momentum members. It is not contentious. It can be reversed when Jeremy retires but for now, the critical

period, it focuses Momentum on the job in hand. Is it personalising? Yes you bet it is. Without Jeremy Corbyn we would not be where we are now. We should be backing him all the way to the conclusion of the 'Jeremy project' - an elected socialist prime minister.

As it stands, the national constitution reads:

"The association aims:

- **To work for the election of a Labour government;"**

The proposed amendment is to insert the words "Jeremy Corbyn led" before 'Labour Government', and "following his policies" after it. So the new clause would read:

"The association aims:

- **To work for the election of a Jeremy Corbyn led Labour government, following his policies;"**

Unfortunately, the spark has dimmed and Momentum needs to get its mojo back. This can be achieved if we all work together and recognise the faults and successes so far. I know that some of the NCG members are trying to raise these issues and we must all hope that they will be successful. Getting the required 1,000 Momentum members to sign the petition would be a first step on the road. If you aren't yet a member, please join and help Momentum to become a truly democratic, member-led organisation.

Please sign the petition
https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/democratising-momentum-2?source=direct_link&



Votes for Women

Women in the Labour Party have been campaigning to get their Conference back for many years. At first, we were fobbed off with the one day talking shop held the day before Annual Conference. Eventually, however, our demands became inescapable and a proper Conference had to be organised.

CLP women elected two excellent sisters to the Women's Conference Arrangements Committee, Jean Crocker and Teresa Clark, and it's thanks to their sterling efforts that a proper Women's Conference is to be held next year. The Women's Conference held the day before Annual Conference this year was a bit of a half way house, to put it mildly, with delegates (rather than visitors) but not a huge amount in the way of meaningful debate..

Next year will be different. For a start, it's being held over two days, at the Telford International Centre on the 23rd and 24th of February, 2019. Each CLP can send two delegates, and at least one of them must be BAME, LGBT or have a disability.

Motions, delegates and nominations must be sent in by 14th of January. Although this is a very tight deadline, if it wasn't for the case made by Jean and Teresa, the deadlines would have been 7th January. Apparently, the notice should have been sent out earlier than it was, but it was delayed due to 'technical problems'.

Our WCAC representatives have been arguing that decisions on delegates, motions etc should be made by women in the party, as the Democracy Review recommended that Women's Forums should take the lead on this. Party staff said that CLPs can decide how to deal with Women's Conference business, but that in some CLPs it was custom and

Christine Shawcroft, Poplar and Limehouse CLP, gives details of the Women's Conference. You've got to be quick though!

practice to devolve decisions concerning women to the Women's Forum. Quite how this can be the case when delegate-based Women's Conferences have only recently been reinstated remains unclear.

Motions sent in to the Conference have to be relevant to women, and say so in the wording. They can only be about policy, not organisation. In future, two motions from the Women's Conference will be sent to Annual Conference, another recommendation from the Democracy Review.

The WCAC agreed that one will be agreed by the CLP delegates, and one by the trade union delegates. Many feel that, had this been the practice at the 2018 Women's Conference, the motion on Abortion Rights would have been sent to Annual Conference rather than one on Austerity.

There are other recommendations from the Democracy Review which have still not been implemented, for example the setting up of a National Women's Committee. This would have political oversight of the Women's Conference, which the WCAC have frequently been told that they don't have.

This is a time-honoured excuse in the Labour Party. When arrangements were being made for Annual Conference, the NEC were often told that they couldn't make any decisions about arrangements for Conference such as which speakers to invite or whether to ditch the notorious sofa discussions, because that was the purview of the Conference Arrangements Committee.

On the other hand, when left members of the CAC (there were a couple) tried to change Conference business, they were told that the CAC didn't make those decisions, it was down to the NEC! Of course, when the elected bodies are being told by officers that power lies with another body, what actually happens is that the officers wield the power.

Still, progress is being made towards a democratic, decision making Women's Conference, and much of that progress is down to left members of the WCAC, working with left women on the NEC.

Jean and Teresa were elected for two years, so there will be elections again in 2019. There will now be three women elected by CLPs, three by the trade unions, and one sent directly from the CAC.

Jean and Teresa are standing again, and have been joined by Gemma Bolton. Please make sure your CLP or Women's Forum nominates the following for WCAC:

Gemma Bolton, Mid Sussex CLP, membership number L1405940

Teresa Clark, Lewisham and Penge CLP, membership number L1427287

Jean Crocker, Gateshead CLP, membership number L1306356



Labour's alternative for Brexit

It's a time of huge decisions that could shape our future for a generation or more: decisions about our relationship with the European Union, but also about the kind of economy we want to have.

Instead of national leadership, we have a Government in complete disarray. As soon as the terms of its Withdrawal Agreement were set down on paper, the Government began to collapse in on itself.

The Withdrawal Agreement breaches Theresa May's own red lines and doesn't deliver the strong economic settlement the country needs to support jobs and industry.

The deal makes no mention of retaining frictionless trade with Europe and offers only minimal protections for workers, consumers and our environment, while hard-wiring further potential restrictions on state aid for industry.

Labour has always said we respect the result of the referendum, but we cannot respect the shambolic way this Government has bungled these vital negotiations.

Labour will vote against the Government's deal and if the Government cannot get its central policy through Parliament, then we will demand a General Election. But if we cannot secure a General Election, then we have been clear that all options must remain on the table, including a public vote.

The Prime Minister is trying to take us into a blindfold Brexit, a deal designed to get her through to the next stage of the process without anyone being able to see where we're heading as a country. It's a leap in the dark, an ill-defined deal with a never defined end date.

Labour will not countenance a no deal Brexit. I understand why business is so concerned at the prospect,

Speaking at the CBI's annual conference on 19th November, Jeremy Corbyn set out Labour's position on Brexit negotiations.

and why some might feel under pressure to support any deal, no matter how botched and half-baked, to avoid a worse outcome.

But the threat simply isn't realistic. If the Government believed no deal was a genuine option, it would have made serious preparations, but it hasn't.

The choice between Theresa May's deal and no deal is a false choice, designed to scare people into backing the Government. So Labour has set out an alternative plan for a sensible jobs-first agreement that could win support in Parliament and help bring our country together.

First, we want a new comprehensive and permanent customs union with a British say in future trade deals that would ensure no hard border in Northern Ireland and avoid the need for the government's half-baked backstop deal.

The Tories' sticking plaster plan for a temporary customs arrangement, with no clarity on how long it will last and no British say, can only prolong the uncertainty and put jobs and prosperity at risk.

Second, a sensible deal must guarantee a strong single market relationship. Talk of settling for a downgraded Canada-style arrangement is an option popular only on the extremes of the Tory Party. It would be a risk to our economy, jobs and investment in our schools, hospitals and public services.

Third, a deal must also guarantee that our country doesn't fall behind the EU in workers' rights or protections for consumers and the environment. Britain should be a world lead-

er in rights and standards. We won't let this Conservative Government use Brexit as an excuse for a race to the bottom in protections, to rip up our rights at work or to expose our children to chlorinated chicken by running down our product standards.

A good Brexit plan for this country is not just about what can be negotiated with Brussels. It must also include a radical programme of investment and real change across our regions and nations.

Brexit should be the catalyst to invest in our regions and infrastructure, bringing good jobs and real control to local communities and people.

The shape of our economy after Brexit will not only be determined by the text negotiated in Brussels. It will be driven by political decisions about the direction we wish to take as a country.

We could try to carry on as before, with economic thinking that has fuelled instability, insecurity and crisis. Or we can embrace change and build a more equal and prosperous society that meets people's hopes and needs.

The full text of Jeremy Corbyn's speech which criticises rising levels of inequality and also sets out Labour's Industrial Strategy and plans to close the skills gap and invest in British infrastructure is available on the Briefing website: labourbriefingcooperative.net/

A VIEW FROM THE NEC

Darren Williams



Labour's new NEC has begun the two-year term inaugurated by conference – although most of the outgoing 39 members are continuing, with just three new CLP reps and two new trade union reps. The major political change is that the nine-strong CLP section is now united by a commitment to support Jeremy Corbyn's leadership and his agenda for party policy and democracy. The first post-conference meetings of the new NEC were comparatively positive, friendly and consensual, especially in contrast to the fraught discussions over the summer on the anti-semitism furore. The three most important challenges for the NEC now are: preparations for the general election, which could come at any time; delivering on the promise of the Democracy Review; and completing the reform of Labour's disciplinary procedures. There has been some progress in the last of these areas, particularly in relation to anti-semitism, where the backlog of

cases waiting to be heard by the NEC Disputes Panel has now been cleared – although most of the members assigned to the most serious category have simply been shunted along to the next stage of the process, the National Constitutional Committee (NCC), at which point a bottleneck remains. The bulk of the cases that were still waiting to be considered by the Disputes Panel have been dealt with by small ad hoc panels of 3-5 people. These have been anonymised and more information has been made available than the two or three paragraphs presented in the past; the likelihood of fair treatment has thus been increased – although the outcome of any given case will also be somewhat dependent on the make-up of any given panel. For those referred to the NCC, the chances of a fair hearing have been increased by the expansion of that body from eleven seats to 25 and by the shift in its political composition, especially given the clean sweep by the left slate for

the six CLP new seats in the recent election. However, there is still a major job to be done in reforming the party's disciplinary procedures. Attempts to get to grips with this have faltered in the two years since the Chakrabarti report emphasised the need for Labour to adopt an approach consistent with the principles of natural justice. There is now a Working Party dedicated to this area but – notwithstanding some useful work by the party's new in-house legal counsel – there is an ever-present danger that this important area will lose out to more pressing priorities. The Democracy Review represents a major programme of work over the year ahead, both to give effect to the decisions made by party conference (for example, to organise the election of an NEC seat representing disabled members) and to develop ideas on those areas where there was insufficient consensus for a decision by conference. A key example of the latter is the successor to the

current National Policy Forum (NPF) apparatus for policy development. The NEC meeting on 27 November was presented with a timetable, setting out the point at which further proposals would be agreed in each area. Disappointingly, however, the NEC isn't scheduled to consider our future policy-making arrangements until November 2019 – and an attempt to bring this forward was voted down. It was argued that a number of changes to our policy-making are already due to take effect at the 2019 conference – and the effect of these changes will need to be reviewed. This is not an unreasonable point, as is the formidable workload facing our hard-working staff – but I know that members are impatient to see tangible change in the way that we make policy, given the evident problems with the NPF. Work on candidate selection and campaign strategy is proceeding apace and the party seems reassuringly prepared for an election when the time comes.



1938 - Munich and its meaning

The year 2018 has seen some significant anniversaries – principally the centenary of the conclusion of the First World War and the abortive German revolution which followed it. One event less well remembered this year however is the infamous Munich agreement of October 1938 by which the leaders of the UK, France, Italy and Germany forced the democratic Czech government to cede its most economically important and militarily defensible territory to the Nazi regime.

This was the culmination of what became known as ‘appeasement’ – the western powers refusing to oppose Hitler’s aggressions. Not that Hitler was pleased – what he had wanted was a victorious war to overrun all of Czechoslovakia. The initiative for this ‘agreement’ actually came from Mussolini who, having his hands full with Ethiopian and Spanish blood, wanted to avoid a destabilising war in central Europe. However the principle of giving in to Hitler’s demands from 1935 onwards came primarily from the British Tory government which dragged their French counterparts along like obedient poodles while contemptuously rebuffing any Soviet proposals for an anti-Nazi alliance.

During all the twentieth century since 1917 anti-communism and anti-Sovietism were obsessively central to the British ruling class outlook – and not only during Stalin’s

Historian Willie Thompson looks back at the Munich Betrayal 80 years on and draws some lessons for Britain’s foreign policy today..

rule. Admiration for Mussolini and Franco was nearly universal among the upper classes with a few renowned exceptions such as the Dean of Canterbury and the Duchess of Atholl. The same at first was the case with Hitler. The Establishment saw these dictators as excellent bulwarks against the communist tide or even as admirable models for the British future.

Anti-communist bulwarks

The British premier, Neville Chamberlain, on one occasion assured Hitler that Nazi Germany and conservative Britain were the most reliable of these bulwarks. The publications and declarations of British Nazi-sympathising organisations, even apart from the specifically fascist ones, are spattered with the names of hons and sirs, MPs, lords, colonels, admirals and generals, even dukes and a bishop.

According to the Duke of Windsor, as revealed by the diplomat and secret agent Bruce Lockhart, ‘war [over Czechoslovakia] would have destroyed both the democracies and the dictatorships and the victory would have gone only to communism’.

Communism, it has to be emphasised, was detested by the rulers less for its practice in the USSR but primarily for its original emancipatory project of social equality and a

workers’ regime. The maintenance of class power, property and privilege was their priority.

‘Appeasement’, exemplified by Chamberlain, subsequently became a very dirty word, especially during the Cold War when it served as a convenient excuse to denounce any diplomatic initiative coming from the West’s former wartime ally, the USSR, or demands from colonial liberation movements or even mainstream labour organisations if they became insubordinate.

More to the point, appeasement offers a very revealing insight indeed into the nature of the British state oligarchy. There are three principal interpretations of its character.

Some recent right wing historians, such as John Charmley have argued that, while Hitler was undoubtedly a very evil dictator, appeasement was nevertheless a sensible policy and should have been continued even after the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939, leaving Hitler to stew in his own military juice and saving the British empire from the dissolution it underwent in the post-war decades.

Well-intentioned idiots?

Although that interpretation has some other academic supporters, the general consensus is that Chamberlain and his cabinet were well-

intentioned idiots desperate to avoid war and fooled by the tyrant’s apparent reasonableness and sincerity, while in addition the Western powers were not in any case militarily ready.

The third explanation is that far from having been conned by Hitler and Mussolini, the British leaders actively connived with the Führer in order to promote a Nazi attack on the Soviet Union. This is argued in the volume *In Our Time* by Clement Leibovitz and Alvin Finkel. They produce masses of circumstantial evidence but were unable to find a document to provide the ‘smoking gun’. However their conclusion is by no means improbable. The British oligarchy had very decided form in this respect.

Consider a thought experiment. Suppose the attempted communist revolution of 1918 in Germany had succeeded and established a soviet German regime. If then in the 1930s that regime had demanded diplomatic and military equality and border rectification as Hitler did, would there then have been any talk of ‘appeasement’? Not likely!

An alternative scenario

Communism was the supreme bogey. If, instead of going on to attack Poland because the quasi-fascist Polish rulers declined to become his satellite, Hitler, as Chamberlain hoped, had invaded the USSR with their willing support the British upper classes would have



Neville Chamberlain waves that notorious piece of paper.

applauded ecstatically.

Nevertheless it was against Germany in September 1939 that war was eventually declared, probably because of the blast of popular fury ignited when Chamberlain himself broke the article in the Munich treaty guaranteeing what was left of Czechoslovakia, and instead looked the other way when the Nazis invaded and absorbed that remnant.

The UK was still a bourgeois democracy, and this popular anger forced Chamberlain to promise to mend his ways. So, he asserted that he would guarantee the threatened Polish frontier. Breaking that promise as well could prove electorally suicidal. Moreover in August Hitler, to avoid war on two fronts, had put himself in the wrong by signing a pact with the devil in the shape of Soviet Union and thereby betrayed the anti-communist cause.

Nevertheless it is clear that initially the war was not taken

seriously by the British government, and a peaceful compromise to Hitler’s advantage was expected soon. That the major charge against him was not his Polish invasion but the Nazi-Soviet pact was made clear in a government-issued pamphlet sponsored by foreign secretary Lord Halifax. During the phoney war’s early months a project was even considered for British and French troops to attack the USSR while it was engaged in its brief Winter War with Finland.

The appeasement sell-out is not merely of historic interest. As well as leading directly to World War II and all its consequences it exemplified the British ruling class’s partiality for tyrants provided they possess the right social attitudes and practice the right sort of repression to keep the lower orders in place – especially if they are also satisfactory economic partners. Saudi Arabian arms sales come to mind.



Tory Brexit threatens our rights

The Prime Minister's Brexit deal fails our tests on jobs and rights. For the past two years trade unions have been clear that any Brexit deal would have to safeguard rights at work or we couldn't support it. Theresa May brushed off our concerns, insisting that her deal would protect and enhance rights at work.

Well, now we know for sure that it doesn't. We're not talking about abstract regulations here, the kind no one really understands. We're talking about everyday protections that really matter to working people. Like paid holidays, rights for part-time workers, time off for working mums and dads, equal pay for women and limits on working hours.

These rights were won by trade unionists through the EU, and we've been clear that leaving the EU must not put them at risk.

Working people need a long-term, binding guarantee that rights in the UK will keep pace with those across Europe. But the government's deal doesn't come close to meeting this test.

In both the proposals for the transition period and for our future rela-

TUC General Secretary, Frances O'Grady, says we should oppose a deal that puts paid holidays, time off for working parents and equal pay for women at risk.

tionship with the EU – and whether we end up with the backstop or a free trade agreement – our rights are under real threat.

First, while the Tory right is up in arms about a transition where they say everything will stay the same, the reality is that on employment rights UK workers will lose out. Under the government's plans, new EU rights that come into force after the transition won't apply to UK workers.

Second, after the transition, the rights of British workers look set to fall far behind those of workers across Europe. And it's not clear how any agreement on rights between the EU and UK will be enforced.

Third, and worst of all, the only employment rights commitments that cover our future relationship with the EU are in the draft Political Declaration. Unfortunately, this section of the agreement is non-binding: it's not worth the paper it's written on.

A future government of Tory

Brexiters could easily ignore its intention and try to negotiate a free trade agreement that undermines our hard-won workplace protections. We know there's appetite in the Conservative Party for a bonfire of workers' rights. Plenty of Tory MPs and cabinet ministers are on-the-record opponents of, for example, the Working Time Directive, which stops bad bosses forcing their staff to work dangerously long hours.

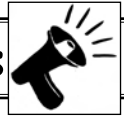
The government knows this deal is bad for jobs, as its own impact assessments show. But we now know it would also be a disaster for rights at work.

The government has failed to achieve a deal that delivers for working people. Trade unions can't support it, and we don't think MPs should either. And we won't stand for the country being held to ransom. "My deal or no deal" is not a real choice. The prime minister must not bully MPs into backing a deal they know will hit their constituents' jobs, rights and livelihoods.

Ultimately, the millionaires on the Tory benches aren't the ones who'll pay the price if we get Brexit wrong. It's working families' futures that are at stake. And the government is failing them.

So the country needs to come together to find a real alternative. One way or another, the people must have the final say on the deal. And that means we need a general election or a popular vote now.





Keep the local link

Labour's 2018 Conference agreed a Constitutional Amendment that made it easier to change the structure of CLP meetings. Most CLPs currently have a delegate based structure, where only elected representatives sent by party branches and affiliated trade unions and socialist societies can vote.

Following the rule change, some CLPs have considered switching from delegate structures to All Member Meetings (AMMs) in which every individual Labour Party member in that CLP can attend and vote.

This switch now requires only a simple majority of members attending a specially convened AMM to vote in favour of it. In London, four CLPs have initiated this debate on moving to All Member Meetings: the proposal has been defeated in Bermondsey & Old Southwark, Hampstead & Kilburn and Holborn & St Pancras and may be debated in Streatham in January. The proposals for change have been initiated by the left in CLPs where the right wing are in control and the initiators see it as a way of weakening the right's dominance.

In their statement to members, Labour's affiliated trade unions have expressed their concern that All Member Meetings effectively break the trade union link at local level. Their statement makes clear that: "Trade Unions support delegate-based structures for local CLPs, because they allow trade union branches that have affiliated to the CLP to be formally represented and take part in the CLP's decision-making processes. All member meetings do not allow affiliated trade unions to be represented in CLP decision-making, and this weakens the relationship between the Party and the unions at a local level we believe

John Stewart, a Unite delegate to Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP, considers the debate over All Member Meetings versus delegate structures.

that this link is crucial locally as well as nationally."

Socialists in the Labour Party should be sympathetic to those left wingers in right wing controlled CLPs who think that a move to AMMs will make stitch ups harder. AMMs may entice newer members to get involved and start to play more of a role in the party. This would be a good thing and should not be dismissed. But it's only part of the story.

In my neighbouring CLP, Hackney South & Shoreditch, the right wing controlled the party for 30 years since the 1980s. Under right wing control, members simply drifted away and the CLP had to move to an All Members structure as it couldn't achieve quorate meetings. AMMs made it easier for new members to get involved in the CLP when they started joining in the Corbyn surge from 2015 onwards and the left quickly took control of the party.

In my CLP, the left-right balance was more even, we had maintained a delegate structure and the right wing held onto control for another year as it took longer for the Corbyn surge to feed through the branches and into the CLP's elected structures. But the left now controls the CLP and maintains a healthy party structure with GCs packed out with enthusiastic delegates.

Some rural CLPs with small memberships covering large geographical areas may find it hard to sustain a delegate structure and AMMs may be more suitable for them. And, if dozens of affiliated delegates turn up for AGMs but are never seen during the rest of the year, a desire for

AMMs may be understandable. But, in general, delegate structures are more democratic for a healthy functioning party. Apart from the practical difficulties for large CLPs of having to book meeting rooms for the several thousand party members who could, potentially, attend, we should not abandon the principle of representative democracy.

The labour movement tradition is one of electing our representatives and, if those representatives fail us, replacing them with others. Comrades who complain about the lack of democracy in some of the unions should participate in those unions and try to improve them – and face up to the difficult fact that neither the Labour Party itself nor the wider institutions of the labour movement have a pristine record on democracy either.

It would be a backward step to try to remove union affiliation at CLP level. Breaking the local link would leave the regional and national structures in place – which are often far more bureaucratic than the local structures which, in many cases, feed into the structures higher up the chain and hold them to account.

The local link is what makes the Labour Party the institution it is, created and sustained by the working class over 120 years and what gives it the potential for improvement. We should be promoting and democratising that local link, not considering losing it.



Don't trash INF treaty

At a Mid-Term rally in Nevada on 20 October, President Trump announced his intention to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Think I'm exaggerating to say it's a threat to world peace? Please read on...

Signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in December 1987, the INF Treaty marked the beginning of the end of the cold war confrontation between the US and Soviet Union. American cruise and Pershing missiles and Soviet SS20s were removed from Europe – and with them the threat of a nuclear war on our doorstep.

Under the terms of the Treaty, the US and USSR (and later Russia), agreed:

- not to possess, produce or flight test ballistic missiles or ground launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) with a range of between 500-5,000 kilometres,
- not to possess or produce launchers for these missiles, and
- to an on-site verification process.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) records that 2,692 short- and medium-range missiles had been destroyed by 1991. The very same year, US cruise missiles were removed from Greenham Common airbase in Berkshire. The INF helped clear the way for subsequent US-Russia arms agreements – including the New START Treaty, a bilateral arms reduction agreement coming up for renewal in 2021. In 1972, the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972 had reduced the threat of a global nuclear confrontation between the two nuclear powers, by limiting the number of ABM sites and missiles each could deploy. Each agreed to scale down

CND Co-chair Carol Turner looks at the threats to world peace from the Trump administration.

their defences against a nuclear attack by the other, thus reducing the risk of the US or Soviet Union launching a first strike in the belief that they would be protected from retaliation.

Just as the ABM Treaty cut down the threat of a global nuclear confrontation between the two nuclear powers, so the INF Treaty removed the threat of a 'limited' confrontation fought out in Europe. Both were landmark arms control agreement of their time.

In 2002 then-President George Bush unilaterally withdrew from the ABM Treaty, to enable the US to press ahead with national missile defences. Now his successor is following suit, with the intention of upgrading America's ability to fight a nuclear war in a limited 'theatre'. (See previous editions of Briefing in which this author has written about the US drive to develop so-called lower yield and more precisely targeted nuclear weapons.)

At the Nevada rally Trump reiterated US claims that Russia has failed to abide by the terms of the agreement. The Pentagon asserts that development of a Russian GLCM it calls the SSC-8 (Russian designation 9M729) breaks the terms of the Treaty.

But what he told the press afterwards is, perhaps, just as important to note:

- 'Russia has violated the agreement; they have been violating it for many years. And we're not going to let them violate a nuclear agreement and go out and do weapons and we're not allowed to';

- 'if Russia's doing it and if China's doing it and we're adhering to the agreement, that's unacceptable';

- 'We'll have to develop those weapons, unless Russia comes to us and China comes to us and they all come to us and say, let's really get smart, and let's none of us develop those weapons.'

Trump has not only put the possibility of nuclear confrontation in Europe back on the table, he has hinted at a wider threat – that of a world-scale military confrontation between the US and China.

France, Germany and the EU have defended the INF Treaty – calling for greater Russian transparency but making clear they oppose American withdrawal. Britain's response however has been at best ambiguous. Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson was quick to support Trump, saying Russia had made a 'mockery' of the INF.

The threat to the INF needs urgent action:

Ask your MP to sign Labour MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle's Early Day Motion, EDM 1744 on US withdrawal from INF treaty.

Contact Shadow Defence Secretary Nia Griffiths and let her know how strongly you feel, and ask your CLP to do likewise.

Invite a Labour CND speaker to your branch or constituency meeting to discuss what's at stake, contact labourcnd@gmail.com

Visit Labour CND website at www.labourcnd.org.uk and sign up to our e-newsletter.



Michael D re-elected

The citizens of Ireland have been mulling over the results of the October Presidential election and Blasphemy referendum. Neither campaign galvanised the country as reflected in the less than 45% turnout.

Incumbent Michael D. Higgins was always going to be re-elected, which he was with 822,000 votes (56%), followed by an Independent, Peter Casey on 342,000 (23%). The other four candidates were left scrambling for scraps. The vast majority felt Michael D. (as he is known) hadn't done anything to either annoy or embarrass us so why bother with the fuss and expense of an election? Irish presidents serve a 7-year term in this largely ceremonial position and it has become the norm for them to be re-elected unopposed for a second term. But some felt democracy demanded an election especially as Michael D. had initially said he would only serve one term. So we were off!

Sinn Fein put forward Liadh Ni Riada, a Member of the European Parliament. She was soon joined by four other candidates who had secured the nomination of four county/city councils. Sinn Fein hoped to broaden their appeal, especially among women voters, and improve on the performance of Martin McGuinness at 13.7% in the previous election. They thought they

Margaret Crowley writes from Dublin on the Irish Presidential election.

might be able to capitalise, to some degree, on Mary Lou's bravery in being to the front on the recent abortion referendum, and with the prominence of women in leadership roles within the party. Their candidate was launched with a soft sell approach without even a Sinn Fein logo on the posters. What could go wrong!

It turned out women liked Michael D. and Ni Riada didn't have name recognition. Then there was the 'blasphemy of the poppy' when, during a live debate, she said she'd wear a Poppy!!! It was downhill after that.

In the final week of the campaign, Peter Casey, an independent who was marooned in 6th position, launched an outrageous attack on the Travellers and followed it up with more of the same on welfare recipients. Suddenly the polls shifted and Michael D's lead started to slip as Casey dominated media coverage. The end couldn't come soon enough.

Eventually Sinn Fein came 4th with 94,000 votes (6.4%) and lost their expenses. If they receive 12.5% of the vote candidates are allowed to claim back expenses of

up to €200,000. Sinn Fein was banking on getting above that vote in which case the election campaign would work out as financially neutral. Didn't happen! A disaster! Not only had they failed to widen support among women, they alienated their base.

The proposed amendment to the Constitution to remove the offence of blasphemy was agreed by almost two thirds of voters but, in truth, very few were interested in that debate, other than those of a more faith driven orientation. The Defamation Act remains intact minus the reference to Blasphemy and nothing has fundamentally changed. There was a majority in all counties except Donegal, which is rather more conservative, and they voted No, but they have a history of bucking the trend.

The year 2019 will bring local and European elections here and, depending on Brexit negotiations, a possible general election. Sinn Fein is at present locked in an internal analysis of what went wrong. Question is, will they continue on with this centrist sugary approach they are adopting or will they fight the good fight?

The first woman MP

A group of trade unionists intend to stand outside the former entrance of Holloway Prison in North London at 1pm on 28th December. They want to commemorate the centenary of the first woman to be elected to Parliament - Countess Markievicz (Constance Gore-Booth). Constance was in Holloway Prison when she was elected in 1918, for her leading role in the 1916 Easter Rising. Although Constance Gore-Booth refused to take her seat in protest against British rule in Ireland, she did take her seat in the Dail (Irish Parliament). Without Countess Markievicz, the chance of women being elected to Parliament could have been delayed for decades.



Post-Brexit trade v human rights

On Monday 5 November Manny Pacquiao, the multi world title boxing champion, addressed students at the Oxford Union. Pacquiao draws large crowds as a sporting legend, but does not limit himself to speaking about sport. These days Pacquiao is also a politician, a member of the Philippines Senate. He is very, very rich (with an estimated \$190 million net worth).

His politics are extremely conservative – Nike dropped their sponsorship over his extreme homophobia – and he is a close ally of the Philippine President, Rodrigo Duterte. More than that, he is Duterte's chosen successor for the country's Presidency.

When he was elected President in 2016, Duterte launched a so-called "war on drugs". This unleashed two years of extra-judicial killings by the police and death squads. This has been mainly targeted at drug users in urban poor communities, but has also steadily spread to more political targets, with the murder of tribal and community leaders, union organisers, and church workers.

Reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have all catalogued these killings. One cold blooded execution, of high school student Kian de los Santos, was even caught on CCTV and circulated on social media. The latest death toll is estimated at somewhere between 14,000 and 20,000.

Duterte has ignored pressure from the UN Human Rights Council to halt the killings and has even issued threats against any UN investigators (they will be "thrown to the crocodiles"). But in February 2018 the International Criminal Court (ICC) began a preliminary investigation of the President for crimes against humanity. This has him worried. It is

Those turning a blind eye to the thousands of extra-judicial killings in the Philippines include the UK government, writes Henry Jackson.

why the President has threatened to behead any human rights defender who looks into his crimes. Lawyers and activists have been put on police hit lists.

These were some of the grim truths which were highlighted in the very different account heard (on the same day as Pacquiao's Oxford Union speech) at a meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) at Westminster, chaired by Shadow FCO Minister Helen Goodman.

Kristina Palabay, General Secretary of the Philippines human rights organisation Karapatan, told MPs and other guests that threats have increased sharply in recent months. Members of a recent Karapatan mission to Sagay on the island of Negros, where nine members of the sugar workers union were massacred, received texts telling them that they too were soon to be killed. Palabay has herself received death threats from the military.

Palabay was addressing the meeting also to raise her concerns over the UK's relationship with Duterte, particularly the sale of arms and surveillance equipment. She said: "At a time when international bodies are condemning and isolating Duterte the UK Government appears to be trying to get closer to him".

In April 2017 Liam Fox, the UK International Trade Minister, met with Duterte in Manila and announced that the UK and the Philippines operated under "shared values". Like Pacquiao, the UK Government, seeking post-Brexit trade deals, seems to find it convenient not to see the

unending wave of extra-judicial killings.

Palabay's concerns are echoed by Dr Tegg Westbrook, an expert in counter terrorism at the University of Stavanger, who has documented a steady rise in UK arms exports to the Philippines during Duterte's Presidency. According to Westbrook: "There are concerns that the UK may omit its human rights obligations because of the uncertainty and restraints since the UK's vote to leave the EU. This is demonstrated by UK arms sales to the Philippines".

Labour MP Lloyd Russell Moyle, a member of the House of Commons Committee on Arms Exports Controls, agrees. He told the meeting: "The Philippines should be made a test case of the UK Government's readiness to apply rules protecting human rights". The PHRG will now be calling for a halt to the UK export of arms and surveillance equipment. It will also urge the Government to support an independent UN investigation into extra-judicial killings and press for the protection of human rights defenders.

Within 24 hours of the meetings held in London and Oxford, Benjamin Ramos a prominent human rights lawyer was shot dead in Kabankalan City by unidentified gunmen. The Philippines National Police had featured the lawyer's name and picture in a poster - which effectively invited his assassination.

A longer version of this article can be read on our website, www.labourbriefingcooperative.net

The KEITH VENESS Column

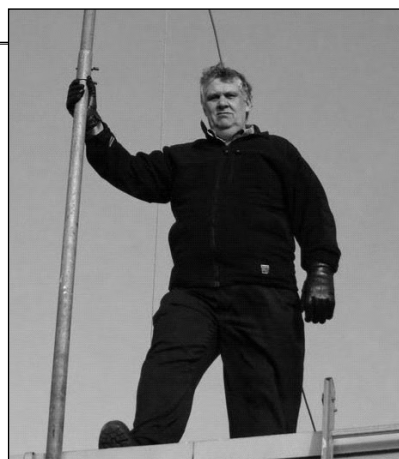


Photo courtesy of Hackney Unison.

At the end of 1988 an event occurred two thousand miles away in the east of Turkey that was to have a profound effect on Hackney and me personally. The town of Maras is a muddy settlement in the heart of the Kurdish Anatolia. Many of its inhabitants are Alevi Muslims – a sect of Shiism – unlike the vast majority of Turks who follow Sunni Islam.

The Alevi differ from most peoples' ideas of what Muslims are – men and women worship together, the women never wear veils or burkas and they did not have mosques.

There had been attacks on Kurds there – and people were very jumpy about the local council elections. When these were won by the MHP (the nationalist party linked to the fascist "Grey Wolves") in November 1988, it started a mass stampede.

Huge numbers caught planes to London to claim political asylum – most heading for the three boroughs that already had émigré Turkish populations.

These were Hackney – and also Haringey and Islington

There was a "welfare organization" called the Kurdistan Workers Association with a full time worker named Ihsan Qadir. They were swamped with families arriving with literally the clothes they stood up in.

A desperate Ihsan approached local trades unions for help - in particular the Hackney Trades Union Support Unit where my wife Valerie worked. He was a young worker at his wits end with nearly 20,000 people arriving on the doorstep.

People were landing at Heathrow and immigration officers were giving them the KWA address and telling them to return and claim asylum in six months time!

Valerie and Ihsan regularly went to the airport to meet people tumbling off planes – Ihsan was invaluable as he not only spoke Turkish but also Kermanji Kurdish, the dialect spoken by most of the refugees.

Gradually we managed to get some families accepted as homeless and rehoused. but it took years to sort out this issue.

A lot of kids had heard of what Christmas was like in Western Europe. ["Jesus" is a prophet in Islamic teaching but not thought of as divine]. Just for those refugees that we were in contact with, what could we do?

There were five hundred kids who faced a bleak and miserable "season of good cheer". A small group of us met to see if we could do anything. We decided to cobble an event together.

I began with my own NUPE branch. Having got the Chair's "okay", I had my

first £250. I matched it from the NUPE Manual branch. I then tackled the other council unions. I got £500 out of NALGO and sums from the other unions. In total we managed to raise over £2000 in four days. Valerie went to Margaret Hodge, leader of Islington Council, and she offered Islington Town Hall as a free venue.

Ihsan came back with a list of 400 kids – which with their parents etc. meant nearly a thousand people. We arranged food and drink but what about presents?

Here we had another break. I bumped into Gerry Ross in Hackney Town Hall and spoke to him. Gerry was an elderly left-wing Jewish councillor. He suggested he contacted his brother Roger, who ran a local supply business.

Gerry phoned him and we set off. He had been let down over an order for kids' presents and had a thousand sitting around in the warehouse. Even better, they were wrapped already and just needed writing on. A negotiated price of £500 for the lot and we loaded them into a car.

Come the day Islington Town Hall was packed. We got donations of food from Turkish businesses and from church groups. A NUPE colleague then turned up with two cases of home-made plonk.

He hid these under the

table but once we started tipping we noticed a group of men looking at us with sad eyes and making drinking gestures.

I explained we were drinking strong alcohol – "Harem" i.e. forbidden to Muslims. The only English speaker said "Yes, that is why we are looking" and there were more gestures of drinking made at us.

We then gave them a glass each – they said what I presumed to be Kurdish for "bloody good booze". Very soon a lot of them were "tired & emotional" but looking very happy.

Then came the low point. Someone had to be "Father Christmas". Given my large body size, I was a natural for the part and I had done this lots of times before – often at tenant's Xmas parties with kids doing an impression of Genghis Khan's hordes as they mug you for the sack.

However the Kurdish kids didn't and loved their "prezzies" – for years afterwards we bumped into Kurds around our areas who still warmly remembered their first "Kurdish Xmas"!

Keith Veness has retired after 32 years working in local government – for 31 of which he was a shop steward and held a variety of other posts in NUPE and UNISON.



Solidarity now more than ever!

The likelihood of an Israeli election might delay the launch of Donald Trump's threatened "deal of the century" to "resolve the Israeli/Palestinian conflict" – but it won't diminish the threat it poses to further dispossess and disenfranchise Palestinians. Drafted by a team including Trump's son in law, Jared Kushner, it is not a peace plan so much as a one-sided set of proposals designed to legitimise the status quo and impose a "greater Israel". The direction of travel can be seen from two decisions Trump has already made.

First, the decision to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem and recognise it as the capital of Israel, aiming to prevent East Jerusalem ever being the Palestinian capital. Secondly, the US decision to stop funding UNWRA, the UN aid agency for Palestinian refugees.

Leaving aside the humanitarian implications for Gaza – which the UN says will be uninhabitable by 2020 – it is designed to solve the issue of Palestinian refugees, now estimated at 7.1 million worldwide, simply by saying they don't exist anymore, at a stroke removing their internationally recognised right of return.

This is paralleled by Israel's increasingly forthright assertions that there will be no "two state solution", with Israeli Ministers laying claim to all land between the Mediterranean and the River Jordan. Speaking recently Netanyahu set out what he called a Palestinian "state-minus, autonomy-plus" solution in the West Bank, with Israel preserving its total security control over the West Bank and the Jordan River.

The hints from Washington are that this would be accepted along with the formal annexation of land occupied by Israeli settlements. Former Presidential candidate Mustafa Barghouti told a visiting trade union delegation that the real risk was a "no-state solution" until there was a fundamental shift in the balance of power. Occupied and up against two of

Palestine Solidarity Campaign chair Hugh Lanning warns that Trump's 'deal of the century' is no solution.

the most heavily armed countries in the world, Palestine has no realistic prospect of progress at this stacked negotiating table.

Despite these overwhelming odds and Israel's concerted campaign to silence all criticism, support for Palestine continues to grow. Recently the Quakers, Airbnb and Leeds University have all announced decisions not to invest or operate in Israel's settlements and occupation. Having spent millions to combat BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions), including trying to brand it as an anti-semitic act and banning its supporters from entering Israel and Palestine, Israel sees public support for it increasing.

At this year's Labour Party conference, a sea of Palestinian flags greeted the moving of the contemporary motion on Palestine – the first time in living memory Labour has discussed one. Passed overwhelmingly, it called for a freeze on UK arms sales to Israel.

Not a giant leap, but a significant step forward for Palestine inside Labour. Maybe a response to the debates over the summer during which there was one message from Palestinians. "Why aren't you talking about us anymore?", one prominent campaigner said privately in a Skype conversation from Ramallah. "It feels like we have been pushed under a bus by the British Labour and trade union movement."

On some of the protests over the killing of the Right of Return marchers in Gaza, there was not a single Labour MP in evidence. It was almost as if Palestine had become an issue on which Labour politicians "dare not speak its name".

The alliance between the right-wing populism of Trump, his racist – and often anti-semitic – supporters and

Netanyahu's far right government is a huge threat to Palestinian self-determination. The solidarity movement has to win global acceptance that Israel, far from being the only democracy in the region, is a settler-colonial state operating a comprehensive system of apartheid.

Visualizing Palestine have just produced a series of images illustrating Israel's Hafrada – the Act of Separation – comparing it to South African apartheid. (<https://visualizingpalestine.org/visuals/hafrada-apartheid>)

Netta Barzilai, Israel's Eurovision winner, represents the state as a "cultural ambassador". It saw winning Eurovision as a PR triumph. Instead, there is a mass campaign exposing the reality, with more and more artists, most recently Lana Del Ray and Lorde, making decisions to pull out of planned concerts in Israel.

The obligation for the solidarity movement is not to be silenced, but to ensure Palestinian voices are heard, exposing Britain's past colonial role in Palestine, along with advocating its present responsibilities towards the Palestinian people. Building BDS is the crucial strategy in the solidarity movement's armoury to try and redress the balance in favour of Palestine.

A longer version of this article can be read on our website, www.labourbriefingcooperative.net



Kosovo's borders - a Pandora's box?

The Republic of Kosovo, supported by the vast majority Albanian population, fought a war of independence from Serbia and declared independence in 2008. The declaration was recognised by the majority of European countries, along with over 100 countries worldwide, including the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy and France, but was opposed by five EU countries as well as Russia and China, which are blocking Kosovo's UN membership. Serbia continues to regard Kosovo as its province.

In order to move towards EU membership, Serbia and Kosovo need to normalise their relations. For its part, the EU is keen to show that it is capable of growth with Brexit looming. Political talks between Kosovo president Hashim Thaci and Serbian president Aleksander Vucic, aimed at settling their historical dispute, are being mediated by High Representative of EU for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, and being closely observed by the United States and the main EU states.

Both presidents are very concerned with proposals to redraw Kosovo's borders. Although these proposals have not been discussed face-to-face, there is an assumption of a land and population exchange, in which parts of the Albanian-majority area of Presevo Valley, which includes municipalities of Presheva, Bujanovc and Medvegje, would become part of Kosovo, and Serbian-majority northern municipalities of Kosovo would become part of Serbia.

Although the European Union has yet to establish a firm position, the indications are that it will support the proposed border changes.

European Commissioner Johannes Hanne has said that he will support

Cllr Kastriot Berberi examines the controversial proposal for a population exchange.

any agreement accepted by Kosovo and Serbia which brings peace and stability to the region. Federica Mogherini has stated that the EU will support any agreement made by the two sides which is in accordance with European and international law and is looking towards a normalisation deal in 2019.

However, how this will be achieved is not at all clear at the moment.

During her recent visit to the Balkans, German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that she values the current territorial integrity of Kosovo. Her position was reiterated by the German Minister of Foreign Affairs who opposed the proposals, arguing not only that the border changes will not solve any problems, but that they potentially open up a Pandora's Box of ethnic retaliation across the region. In addition, opposition to the proposals has been voiced by Albanian president Ilir Meta.

The American position is more fluid. Previously the United States supported existing borders in the Balkans. More recently, US National Security adviser John Bolton – a close ally of Donald Trump – has stated that the United States does not exclude the exchange. Other members of the Trump's administration have indicated that the US is prepared to consider any solution including the border changes, but may not support it. Since Bolton's comment there have been no official statements from the US State Department.

In addition to the different positions of the international political actors,

the strongest opposition has come from within Kosovo. President Thaci's proposals are not only opposed by the opposition but also by Kosovo's prime minister, who has said that altering the border with Serbia could mean war.

One of the more principled Kosovan politicians, Albin Kurti, the leader of the Self Determination party, reckons that the driving forces of the dialogue seem to be Serbia's intention to get closer to the EU and extend its influence to Serbian enclaves within Kosovo, and President Thaci's desire to prolong his power in Kosovo.

Some critics of the border plan argue that re-drawing the Serbian-Kosovo border on ethnic lines would send a dangerous message to other Balkan states, especially after the wars which accompanied the break-up of Yugoslavia. These proposals, they argue, could fan nationalist flames and lead to wars in Balkan states, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which could be divided between Serbs, Croats and Bosnians, but also in Macedonia, where ethnic Albanians could seek a similar partition.

Opposition within Kosovo has stalled negotiations for the time being, although the Kosovan president has said that they could bring a lasting peaceful settlement, and the prospect of EU integration. Others with a view to bitter historical experiences such as the Greece-Turkey population exchange of 1923 fear they that could reignite a new conflict in the region.



My brilliant TV series

Everyone loves Elena Ferrante. The toast of literary London and New York, critics rave about the Neapolitan novels with their portrait of the working class upbringing and enduring friendship of two girls, Lenu and Lila, in the slums of post-war Naples.

Everyone, that is, except me. I slogged through the first book, *My Brilliant Friend*, and although I appreciated reading a story which places women centre stage, and I can see that the portrayal of working class Neapolitan life is valuable from a political point of view, I just found the book so slow and repetitive that I couldn't face the other three books in the series.

I did feel at one point that the story of the girls' childhood and adolescence was unfolding in real time - and as it takes place over about ten years, that is no joke.

Of course, there was a huge scandal when it was discovered that 'Elena Ferrante' is a pen name, and that the real author wasn't born and brought up in Naples after the war at all. Not being that emotionally invested in the books in the first place, that really didn't bother me. I'd always assumed that, if books are on the fiction shelves, they have basically been made up by the author. Documentary works are generally found on the non fiction shelves, after all.

People complaining that 'Elena' isn't really the 'Lenu' in the books remind me of those who express horror that a little girl was burned at the stake in *Game of Thrones*. It's just a story, people, it isn't real!

Anyway, this is just a rather long-winded and roundabout way (just like the books, in fact) of saying that, although I didn't get on with the books, the TV adaptation now showing on Sky Atlantic is splendid.

Christine Shawcroft, Poplar and Limehouse CLP, confesses to having her doubts about a feminist icon.



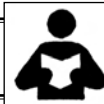
In an attempt, no doubt, to cater for my goldfish-length attention span, the TV series misses out some of the 'action' and also cuts down on the cast of characters. It's all very well populating your novel with hundreds of people, but when your poor reader has to keep checking back to the index of characters to work out who everybody is, well, she gets a bit discouraged.

The main characters are in the series and the bit players fade mercifully into the background. The girls are growing up a lot quicker, too, in fact several actors are being used to portray them at different ages.

As a matter of fact, many of the people taking part in the show aren't professional actors at all. This is becoming more commonplace in many films and TV programmes. I don't know what Equity has to say about it, or whether they say nothing and sign the amateur performers up quick in order to rake in the membership fees, but it makes you wonder if acting talent is more widely distributed through the population than has generally been supposed.

There has been a great deal of debate in the media about access to drama schools or the thespian profession generally, and whether working class people are able to do so. It is often pointed out that many of our current crop of young actors are Old Etonians so there must be an imbalance somewhere. The use of amateurs in *My Brilliant Friend* would seem to bear out the theory.

However, not being such hard work as the book, the TV series is a great success. Sometimes with dramas set in the past, one gets the feeling that the period detail took precedence over everything else. The designers and producers seem so keen to get every last detail of costume or buildings right, and are so worried about wrist watches or TV aerials making an appearance, that it detracts from the actual story and the whole thing becomes stilted. Luckily that does not happen here, and the atmosphere of working class Naples is conveyed with love. Even if 'Elena' didn't happen to be born there.



A conflicted legacy

Bernardo Bertolucci, who died on 26th November aged 77, was undoubtedly one of the most gifted directors of his generation. Whether he was “a filmmaker of radical genius” (Peter Bradshaw in the *Guardian*) or someone who failed to realise his potential is debatable. A production assistant to Pasolini at 20, he shot his first feature a year later, and found early fame with his widely acclaimed *Before the Revolution* (1964). Like almost every other significant Italian film director of the 1950s-70s, he was in the orbit of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), still bathed in glory for its role in the resistance to Mussolini, but moving in an increasingly reformist direction.

The two films Bertolucci released in 1970 – *The Spider's Stratagem* and *The Conformist* – are among his most interesting. The former, derived from a Jorge Luis Borges short story transposed to post-fascist Italy, has never been released on DVD, but is his most visually experimental and daring. The son of a supposed anti-fascist martyr returns to the village of his birth and uncovers a very different history in which the identities of father and son become entwined and confused.

The latter, adapted from Alberto Moravia's novel, explores themes of betrayal, guilt and the nature of middle class conformism under fascism, and is brilliantly framed. Less clear are the film's implication that the protagonist's repressed (gay) sexuality predisposes him to act as the assassin of his former university professor, now an exiled anti-fascist.

Bertolucci's version of Marxism always had a strong Freudian and Reichian sub-text, in which the dysfunctional and “abnormal” sexuality of the bourgeoisie is contrasted with the virility of the oppressed. What

Richard Price, Leyton and Wanstead CLP, looks at the work of Bernardo Bertolucci.

seemed to critics then as radical and visionary now seems contrived and dubious.

Last Tango in Paris – the film that would catapult Bertolucci to international notoriety – explores sexuality from a very different perspective. The story of an obsessive no-strings attached relationship between a middle aged man and a 19-year old woman, the film initially horrified censors for its depiction of raw, doomed sexuality. Years later it emerged that the film's young co-star, Maria Schneider, spoke of feeling violated by its most notorious scene, which she claimed that Bertolucci and Marlon Brando bounced her into. Brando's character, it only emerges slowly, is devastated by the suicide of his wife, and even if elements of the film are very unsettling, it remains one of his greatest performances.

For *1900* (1977), Bertolucci finally got a big budget and a galaxy of international stars. Beautifully filmed, it traces Italian history from the turn of the century until 1945. Using the contrived plot device of the birth of two boys on the same day – one the son of a big landowner and the other the son of a peasant on the estate – there are strong elements of soap opera. The two remain – improbably – friends throughout war and fascism. Donald Sutherland's local fascist enforcer is ridiculous for all the wrong reasons, and every bit as bad as his IRA man in *The Eagle Has Landed*. The padrone's failed attempt to rape a child leads – hey presto – to him hanging himself. The disarming of partisans on the orders of the Communist Party is treated

unproblematically, and the final scene in which the two old men replicate a game from 40 years before seems to say that you cannot really change anything.

It was perhaps not entirely coincidental that the film coincided with the Communists' embrace of the “historic compromise” with the Christian Democrats, the Mafia's political party of choice. Bertolucci's failure to engage critically with the rightward-moving politics of the PCI constantly undermined his efforts to say original things about either fascism or anti-fascism.

The Last Emperor (1987) was by a distance Bertolucci's most successful film, winning nine Oscars. Visually sumptuous, it was the first Western film made almost entirely on location in China. Tracing the story of Pu Yi, the last emperor of China, it had a lot to commend it. It also came in for criticism for glossing over Japanese atrocities during Pu Yi's time as puppet emperor of Manchukuo. Others saw in its depiction of Pu Yi living out his final years as a gardener in Communist China a parable of China's historic compromise with the West in the post-Mao years.

The rest of Bertolucci's output was distinctly weaker. Incest drama *La Luna* (1979) and Tuscany-based coming-of-age flick *Stealing Beauty* (1996) looked like the kind of films middle-aged male directors should steer well clear of. Bertolucci has left us several films that were both innovative and interesting, both technically and politically, and a larger body of work that is infused with dubious sexual politics.



Trump's finger on the nuclear button

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Fun and games in Westminster

It's at times like these that Periscope almost writes itself. In fact, the suspicion that *Briefing* is being out-Periscoped by the Palace of Westminster is beginning to take hold on the editorial board.

In the latest twist of the Brexit saga (well, the latest as we go to press, goodness knows what might have happened by the time you read this) is that senior Government figures, and possibly the Prime Minister herself, may end up chucked out of Parliament for contempt, having refused to publish their legal advice on the effects of May's dead-in-the-water Brexit 'deal'.

The possibility of this happening has been admitted by Geoffrey Cox, who as Attorney General is supposed to keep the Government (and everyone else) on the straight and narrow. You really couldn't make this up.

When is a surgery not a surgery?

As our regular reader will remember, the November issue of *Briefing* contained an article about Nottingham East members and their dissatisfaction with the MP originally imposed on them, Chris Leslie.

One of the complaints leading up to the motion of no confidence which was passed, was that Chris was rarely seen in his constituency, and didn't hold advice surgeries

for his constituents. Imagine the surprise of local members when, on going out to their local supermarket for a spot of early Christmas shopping, they should happen upon their MP, running a 'pop up' advice surgery.

No notice had been given of this event, but helpers were giving out leaflets to started shoppers, asking if they wanted to meet their MP. Several reportedly answered with, 'Er, who is he?'

Nevertheless, the subsequent photos of Chris 'out and about' in his constituency, chatting to local people, are thought likely to appear in his election material if he hasn't been deselected in the meantime.

Fun and games in Enfield

The selections for last May's Council elections in the London Borough of Enfield were considered so dodgy that even Labour's NEC was moved to open an investigation. No doubt, this is proceeding at a glacial pace. Meanwhile, Council Leader Nesil Caliskan, a Turkish Cypriot, has accused all those who criticise her of orchestrating a 'racist smear campaign'.

Just to recap: Ms Caliskan organised the candidate selections from her position on the Local Campaign Forum (LCF). She managed to run this body even though she was already a councillor, having won a by election in May, 2015. During the panel

interviews and subsequent selections, all the black Afro-Caribbean councillors were deselected.

Having organised the selections, Ms Caliskan went on to challenge incumbent council leader Doug Taylor for the leadership, beating him by 24 votes to 22.

The EC of Enfield Southgate CLP passed a motion of no confidence in her, but when it came to the GC the motion fell as the meeting was packed with Caliskan supporters.

Briefing doesn't know how well Enfield Council is run, but Caliskan certainly seems to know how to get her people to meetings.

When is a Labour office not a Labour office?

John Woodcock MP resigned the Labour Whip when he was facing an investigation into some nefarious goings-on.

Since his lonely resignation John has continued his practice of rarely appearing in the constituency (see Nottingham East, above) but when he did grace the area with his presence, he still used his office with Labour branding above the door. After criticism of his using Labour logos and signage even though he is an independent, John has now masked out the 'Labour' signs on his office with tape. *Briefing* is pleased to note, however, that at least the tape is red, even if the MP isn't.



ON THE OUTSIDE

Christine Shawcroft

As a woman I am, of course, well versed in the usage of double standards. When I was a child, if I showed even half of the determination showed by boys, I was dismissed as 'a bossy little madam'. At secondary school, those of us girls who had boyfriends (shock, horror) were called slags, whilst those who didn't were called frigid. So you just can't win.

All this brings me, of course, to Jeremy Corbyn and the extremely partisan attacks on him. Some of the accusations seem to have changed with the weather. In the last three years, Jeremy has been accused of misogyny (for 'only' having 50% women in his first Shadow Cabinet), allowing anti-semitism to flourish amongst his supporters (whilst not actually being anti-semitic himself), but then suddenly turning into an anti-semitic (despite many Jewish organisations in north London pointing out that they had worked with him for many years and he was nothing of the sort). Different in kind from the allegations which seem

to be made up as his critics go along, however, are the accusations from media commentators that he has shared platforms with the 'wrong' people, in some cases referring to them as 'friends'. The double standard here is breath taking. Margaret Thatcher was 'friends' with General Pinochet. Boris Johnson has referred to the extremely right wing Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orban, as his 'friend'. Tories generally are friends with any number of crypto fascists, not to mention the charming habit of young Tories in days gone by of wearing 'Hang Nelson Mandela' t-shirts. But apparently, it's different if you're a socialist. You can't welcome anyone to a meeting, or refer to them politely as 'our friends', without being accused of agreeing with everything they have ever said or done - or even being pilloried over things that they were yet to do. Not only is this a double standard, it is also disingenuous in the extreme. Platforms of speakers are put together on the basis that the people con-

cerned have something to say on the topic or campaign under discussion. It may well be that all the speakers, whilst they agree on that topic (or maybe they don't, it might be a debate) don't agree on anything else. In fact, if you think about it, it would be impossible to put together a platform of five or six speakers, all of whom agreed with each other about everything.

The only time I see anyone with whom I agree about absolutely everything is when I am looking in a mirror (and even then I sometimes disagree with myself). It's quite ridiculous to assume that platform speakers must all agree, when you'd be pushed to find any group of political activists who all agreed with each other.

Of course, how are you to know what the people sitting on the platform with you actually do think about other topics? Are we supposed to give them a questionnaire to fill in before we agree to sit down? And even if we do know, the important thing is the matter under discussion. I have shared platforms with Tories and

Lib Dems, not to mention right wing members of the Labour Party. What we had in common was our opposition to the matter in hand, whether it was new road schemes, the abolition of the ILEA, the Poll Tax (I'm going back a bit now, I know) or whatever it was.

A couple of years ago I spoke at an anti-Brexit meeting in the West Midlands on the same platform as MP Ruth Smeeth. Does she get accused of agreeing with me about everything? In the days when I was being hounded by journalists, now thankfully over as I sink back into a well-deserved obscurity, a *Times* hack emailed me with all sorts of lurid accusations about agreeing with people I'd shared a platform with (not Ruth Smeeth). I hit back with all the arguments I've made here, and the piece never appeared. We all need to defend Jeremy in the same way.

