



Climate emergency

Local elections

Fight the hard right



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Swings and roundabouts

The firm conclusion that can be drawn from the local election results is that no conclusions can be drawn from them. Those of us who are accustomed to scrutinising the swings from one party to another, and back again, have been somewhat nonplussed to find ourselves faced with not so much a swing, more of a wild zig-zag.

Of course, that hasn't stopped the professional Corbyn critics from insisting that Labour losses must be all his fault, him and his Brexit 'fudge'. *Briefing* supporters out canvassing in the elections found many voters saying they would not vote Labour because we weren't trying to stop Brexit, or insisting on a second referendum.

Then again, we also found many voters who thought we weren't pushing for Brexit hard enough, and could be about to betray the referendum result by insisting on a second referendum!

And surely one is permitted to enquire, that if the losses are all down to the Leader, then the gains must be, too? There have been some stunning gains, not least in previously Tory-stronghold Worthing where the number of Labour councillors has doubled (see the report on page 9).

Even in Mansfield, where one of the highest Leave votes was recorded in the referendum, the Independent (really a Tory) Mayor was defeated by the Labour candidate. True, Labour only won by 2 votes, but that's enough, and it gives one of the *Briefing* editorial board the chance to boast that her mum is half the majority.

The Labour right lost no time in calling for Labour to commit itself to holding a second referendum - indeed, many of them were saying during the campaign that Labour policy is *already* to hold a confirmatory vote on *any* deal which could get through Parliament, with Remain also on the ballot paper, naturally. Party policy is to keep open the option of a confirmatory vote on a bad Tory deal, if

that is the only way to stop it. The results of the right's elitist wishful thinking are plain to see, even with the wildly fluctuating results.

In Ashfield, 20 Labour council seats were lost. Ashfield voted Leave by 70%. 14 were lost in Bolsover, which voted Leave by 71%. 13 were lost in Middlesbrough and 12 were lost in Sunderland, which voted Leave by 66% and 61%, respectively.

And just to prove that nothing can be proved from these elections, only 5 were lost in Stoke, South Tyneside and Newark, which also voted Leave in high numbers - 69%, 62% and 60%.

Of course, there is no such thing as 'only' losing a few seats for the councillors and authorities concerned, especially when the loss of one seat could lead to a council becoming No Overall Control, or worse, handed over to the tender mercies of Tory councillors.

The elections were held in areas outside big cities where the Tory vote is naturally higher. Local factors - the calibre of the candidates (of all parties), the amount of work done before and during the campaign - also make a big difference. But one wonders how badly the Tories have to perform before the Labour right admit that Jeremy Corbyn has them on the ropes?

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Anyone seen the national interest?

A lot has been heard about the national interest lately. It's been invoked by hard Brexiteers, ultra-remainers and those in the middle seeking a compromise. This political schizophrenia isn't very surprising, since the Brexit crisis is the product of a schism within the British ruling class, represented first and foremost by the Tory party.

The present constitutional crisis is not a clear binary division. Among those most in favour of Brexit there are major contradictions between those who want a more protectionist economy to shield British industry from foreign competition, and those who want a deregulated and more globalized trading stance, with closer ties both to emerging economies and Commonwealth nations – a kind of British Empire 2.0.

Among remainers, there are orthodox neo-liberals, who stress the need for a close relationship with major European trading partners, and those who would prefer a reformed, more social Europe with enhanced workers' rights and environmental protections.

Freedom of movement has been lauded as a universal human right, supported by employers who see it as underpinning a flexible labour market, and attacked as a conveyor belt of cheap labour.

With all these competing strands of public opinion trying to bend the ear of the national interest, it would be useful to know which nation we're talking about. Great Britain plc? The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? Scotland? Wales? England? For the loonier elements of the ERG, it's mostly about England.

The vice-chair of the ERG, Mark Francois, helpfully told us: "My father, Reginald Francois, was a D-Day veteran. He never submitted to

Richard Price (Leyton and Wanstead CLP) goes in search of a slippery concept.

bullying by any German. Neither will his son." There is some doubt whether Captain Mainwaring would have recognised Mark Francois – a man with a French surname and an Italian mum – as a true born Englishman. Putting that to one side, Francois seems to have forgotten that D-Day involved a good deal of pooled sovereignty, with American army camps in the run up to invasion operating under US law, an American Supreme Allied Commander, and an invasion force drawn from 12 nations.

I can imagine some people already getting irritated by my evident lack of common sense. There are clearly a wide range of things that are clearly in the interest of the vast majority of the people who constitute the nation. Things like a prosperous economy and a decent environment for our children.

Let's see how these national interests measure up when applied to a burning topic like Heathrow expansion. Supporters would have us believe that it is served by creating a hub for business people and tourists to whizz around further and faster that will yield 77,000 jobs by 2030. Opponents argue that Londoners have a right to breathe cleaner air and for the communities around Heathrow not to be bulldozed.

The Brexit impasse has seen MPs urged to put the interests of nation before party and calls for the formation of a government of national unity, Chuka Umunna and friends clearly see themselves as the embryo of such a realignment, just as Nick Clegg did in 2010.

With the air thick with dodgy Second World War references, it is worth pointing out that Labour has only joined one such government in the last century. But when Labour entered the wartime coalition in 1940, it did so not because of an identity of interests with the Churchill wing of the Tory party, which was determined to defend the empire by opposing Nazi hegemony in Continental Europe.

A successful Nazi invasion would have seen the suppression of the labour, trade union and co-operative movements, the extension of the Holocaust to Britain along with other horrors including the persecution of gays and the gypsy/Roma community. The interests of the working class and one wing of the ruling class overlapped in the need to defeat fascism.

It was the staunch Tory, Dr Johnson, who said that patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel. Much the same can be said of the national interest, which is almost always dynamically aligned to the interests of the rich and the powerful. Big profits are routinely reported as good for the country, while decent wage increases are bad. The ability to keep a roof over your head when unemployed or sick is said to lead to welfare dependency, while the Tories' Orwellian claim to "make work pay" is the flipside of cutting benefits to the point that those in receipt of them are left destitute.

You can't see, hear, taste, touch or smell the national interest. It's an ideological construct that socialists should steer well clear of.



Climate in crisis

Extinction Rebellion is a movement which has come about as a result of government inaction on Climate Change. They believe that non violent direct action is the only way to force governments to take the necessary action to prevent the worst excesses of environmental destruction. It is calling for government to declare an environmental emergency.

On Tuesday I walked across Waterloo Bridge which was occupied by protestors and on down to Parliament Square. The atmosphere was welcoming and relaxed, aided of course by beautiful weather. A lovely lady called Louise from Gateshead offered me a cushion on the ground which I gladly accepted. I listened to the two main speakers. Naomi educated the audience on the 4Rs of taxation, stressing that repricing is most important in supporting environmental management.

Nick Shaxon author of *Treasure Island* followed. Nick spoke about using the current system of taxation not just to avoid tax but to escape prosecution, creditors, financial regulation and most of all from democratic scrutiny and accountability. He went on to say that to save the planet we need a fundamental remodelling

Liz Smith, Tynemouth CLP and NCG of Momentum, took part in the Extinction Rebellion protests.



of capitalism. A young man expressed the view that capitalism is not compatible with saving the planet. Capitalism is characterised by extraction for profit and we have to bring the current system to an end. We must change the way we live to allow others to also live.

The main speakers were followed by a series of protestors giving two minute statements about what made them activists. Some of the statements were very moving and all are clearly deeply committed to this cause. A question and answer session rounded things off before I moved on to Oxford St.

At the time of writing, the big pink boat was still occupying Oxford Circus (see picture) and the DJ still on the ones and twos. Hundreds of young people and a few from the silver generation were rocking to anthems like *London Calling*. It was buzzing up there in contrast to the somewhat serious tenor in

Parliament Square. It was fitting for the young of London and the many who have travelled to participate in this action to enjoy the London sunshine before the police moved in. The police have I think been respectful of this action, recognising the sensitivity and support this movement is gaining.

On my way home I read that some activists had glued themselves to Jeremy Corbyn's garden fence. Sorry Extinction Rebellion, but I cannot support this.

Jeremy is your best bet for a green deal and suffers terribly from press intrusion. You are also making him vulnerable by helping to identify his home. Another report described someone glued to a Docklands Light Railway train, even though public transport is surely a big help in terms of combatting climate change. Currently ER enjoys a great deal of public support. This however, could change.





A day with Nigel's followers

In March I accompanied walkers on part of the pro-Brexit walk from Sunderland to London that arrived in the capital on 29th March - the date Britain was meant to exit the European Union.

In the village of Linby, a crowd I counted at 272 assembled to make the 10-mile walk to Beeston. This well dressed group flew their Union Jacks and held up 'Leave means Leave' and 'No deal is better than a bad deal' placards. It was a beautiful day and people were in a good mood. One asked me why I was there and even when he found out I was not pro-Brexit he was happy to chat.

The numbers on the walk were small throughout the whole day, perhaps peaking at 300 before dropping to under 200 by the time we reached Beeston. The crowd was virtually all white, the average age around 55 and had more men than women. At no time did more than a handful of people come out to welcome the walkers.

At the start, Nigel Farage gave a short speech on top of the 'Believe in Britain' battlebus stating "We will get Brexit, whatever happens." He did not sound exactly convincing but he drew cheers as we then set off. There was no chanting or singing but a significant number of passing cars were happy to hoot their horns in support and this brought thumbs up and occasional cheers.

One suited male of around 40 who I chatted with was critical of the Common Agricultural Policy as "it benefits the French not us." I asked if he was happy about how it worked in Britain so that £3 billion goes to large landowners, some of whom don't even grow food on the land they get subsidised.

I had a lengthy chat with one of the security personnel. Security on the

Mark Metcalf spent time on the Brexit walk with Nigel Farage's supporters.

walk was provided by properly trained staff, some had military backgrounds. He was happy to admit he was a Tory. He did not like what he described as "the far right" and it was clear throughout the day that the organisers were determined not to be associated with UKIP. When two walkers attempted to fly UKIP flags they were asked to take them down and did so.

One walker I chatted to was unaware that most of the socialist groups had campaigned for Brexit and he had never heard of Lexit. He was sure that Brexit would lead to Britain becoming "more Tory" and that it would not lead to Britain moving left. He criticised trade union leaders for taking salaries "well above what their members earn" and "for getting extra monies above their salaries to buy houses."

He was sure that if Brexit did not happen there would be trouble and even riots. He could understand why people would riot as "democracy was being denied" but he was keen to stress he would not get involved himself. I had similar chats with others throughout the day.

I then chatted with another man of around 50 who said he was not a big fan of Farage as "he's a politician and I don't know if he's doing this for himself or for everyone." I heard similar discussions take place throughout the day.

A number of those on the walk shared the fact that this was their first public political event, some had previously attended a rally but none had gone on a demonstration. There was one or two who saw themselves as

taking part in some great historical occasion with one group discussing how they felt Harold must have found it a lot harder in 1066 when he marched north to fight the invading Vikings near York before marching south to take on William the Conqueror.

On only two occasions were people we passed openly hostile but whenever anyone failed to respond positively to a hello they were referred to afterwards as 'Remainiacs'.

I had a few chats with people about how few there were of them, especially compared to the massive anti-Brexit London demonstration. No one suggested that the numbers expected when the walk arrived in London would be anything approaching a million although some hoped for 100,000.

As we walked into Beeston we were met by a handful of supporters and around a dozen from Stand up to Racism. There were no media present. Considering the resources put into the walk, if this is all Farage can organise you'd have to say his best political days are gone.

*For the full report see **Fighting Talk** by Mark Metcalf: writemark.blogspot.com/*





Fox news

The announcement that Claire Fox, formerly of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and *Living Marxism*, had been adopted as a candidate for Nigel Farage's Brexit Party, has been greeted by a mixture of astonishment and amusement. Fox (along with former RCP members James Heartfield and Alka Sehgal Cuthbert) is standing shoulder to shoulder with the likes of Annunziata Rees-Mogg, Anne Widdecombe and former Tory London mayoral hopeful and property developer, Richard Tice.

The thread of continuity in the long march of Fox and her friends from ultra-left pseudo-Marxism to right wing libertarianism is that they always seemed more hostile to the Labour Party, whoever was leading it, than to the Tories.

The RCP began life in 1978 as the Revolutionary Communist Tendency – a split from the Revolutionary Communist Group, which had split from the International Socialists shortly before they became the SWP. (Bear with me, it gets easier.) To begin with, the RCT concentrated on published long post-graduate sized tracts, mainly on imperialism. By the early 1980s, its main efforts were concentrated on two front organisations, Workers Against Racism and the Irish Freedom Movement. Along with a talent for self-publicity, like the puffer fish, it was good at appearing larger than it was. In 1981 it ceased to be a tendency and styled itself a party, and its paper, *the next step* hosted several conferences optimistically called Preparing for Power.

The RCP developed positions 180 degrees from any emerging consensus on the left. Its attempts to intervene in the 1984-5 miners' strike around the need for a national ballot after the issue had been settled by

It's a long way from the RCP to the Brexit Party, writes Richard Price (Leyton and Wanstead CLP).

events were singularly unsuccessful. On one occasion its supporters were memorably thrown into a pond by striking miners. Not long afterwards, during my stint as a health service trade unionist, the RCP took to agitating around hospitals for new unions.

Although the Irish Freedom Movement's annual anti-internment march attracted a decent attendance, the RCP's version of Irish solidarity suggested that anyone who didn't wholeheartedly support the IRA's military campaign in Britain was a hopeless chauvinist. In the 1987 general election, the RCP stood as part of the Red Front – the name derived from Stalinism's ultra-left phase in the early 1930s – and received derisory votes.

In 1988, *Living Marxism* was launched, modelled on the Euro-Communist *Marxism Today*, but with added ultra-leftism. Adapting to the pessimistic post-miners' strike mood, it became the increasingly contrarian home for sharply dressed lifestylists, with Camden Lock Market in north London one of its favourite sales pitches. Despite claiming to be the fastest growing group on the left, it turned out that only a secretive inner core were full members of the organisation with any rights. By 1990, it decided that "for the time being at least, the working class has no political existence". During the first Gulf War Claire Fox crossed my path as part of Hands Off the Middle East, in which the RCP for once played a less sectarian role.

By now, courting controversy seemed to be its main reason for existence, with *Living Marxism* run-

ning articles denying that genocide had taken place in Rwanda, claiming that fears that the AIDS epidemic would spread among heterosexuals were part of a repressive "moral panic", and accusing ITN News of faking coverage of Bosnian Muslims being held in a Serbian concentration camp.

In 1996, the RCP dissolved, although *Living Marxism* was relaunched as *LM*. In 2000, ITN was awarded £1m damages in a libel action and *LM* too folded.

Since then, the RCP/LM core has been reinventing itself as a right wing libertarian cult with privileged access to the Murdoch media and the BBC. Mick Hume was a *Times* columnist and has also graced the *Sun* and the *Sunday Times*. Claire Fox is a fixture on Sky News' review of the papers, as well as appearing on Radio 4's The Moral Maze and BBC Question Time. Frank Furedi, who founded the RCT over 40 years ago, pops up regularly as a talking head.

Operating under a variety of names, including the Institute for Ideas, Spiked Online and the Manifesto Club, its hobby horses include anti-environmentalism, opposition to state regulation of almost anything and championing of biotechnology firms, leading George Monbiot to identify it as part of "the pro-corporate libertarian right".

None of this comes cheap, and the ex-RCP has been linked to funding from Saatchi and Saatchi, the Adam Smith Institute, the British Council, Relate, Novartis and Pfizer. As the Grateful Dead once said, what a long, strange trip it's been.



Hard nut to crack

Handbridge Park Ward in Chester was always going to be a hard nut to crack. It's a really diverse ward, with pockets of social deprivation and areas of affluence, former council estates and leafy suburbs cheek by jowl.

Two ineffective Tories have squatted in my local two-seat ward for many years. But the Voter ID data looked good, so the ward was targeted as winnable.

I'm a local resident of over 26 years, a Corbynista and new on the political scene. I was standing for Council for the first time, and determined to give the Tories a run for their money.

I worked very hard for 10 months to build relationships in the community promoting our Labour values. I helped serve hot dogs at children's parties, reported litter, served tea at community events, liaised with our PCSO about antisocial behaviour. I hit social media in Facebook community groups. My MP even said the residents thought I was already their councillor!

But Tories are very good at self-promotion; one is known locally as "the Photo Opportunity Queen". They scarcely ran a campaign, just capitalised on Austerity cuts by promoting grievance politics with their slogan: "Bring Back Free After Three Parking".

We tried pointing out that subsidising parking only impacted on other service budgets, like disabled children's school transport. But it's hard to get this message across to someone with two brand new cars in their drive being polished by a private valeting firm!

We'd hoped for more support from our branch, and from local and national Momentum during the long campaign. Also, unfortunately my

Lisa Rossetti, City of Chester CLP, wore out her shoes as a candidate in the local elections and increased the Labour vote.



running partner injured her knee. So it was mostly my husband (who deserves a medal) and occasional stalwarts who tramped around every single street in the ward with me. However, local members did turn out from very different parts of our Labour political spectrum.

Our CLP Chair canvassed for me relentlessly every Friday for months; our Council Leader hit the streets with me too. One of our NW Regional Board members brought a lively posse over from Momentum Warrington. Christine Shawcroft, thank you for your support too. In the end, 60 comradely volunteers helped out in some way large or small. What more could we do?

On Polling Day, ward turnout was the 2nd highest in the region at 49.5%. But in the end, I didn't win – I came third, with an increased share of the vote. So why?

Maybe the data was skewed, after all a lot of "natural Conservatives" voted for our Labour MP in 2017. Or was it the Brexit Effect? Some Labour voters were more concerned about lodging their protest vote than

electing a Labour council for the Many, like the member who told me she was "sending a message to Jeremy" by not voting for me. Maybe diehard Tories turned out and Labour voters, the confused Guardian readers from the leafy suburbs, stayed at home?

The local pro-EU group threw a stupid spanner in our works too, by circulating a list of so-called Remain candidates, turning local elections into their mini-Referendum. (I refused to be on their list.)

In the end, we lost control of the council by one seat and eight votes, though Labour will form the administration, and the Tories have lost 7 seats.

But the Brexit Effect is also likely to influence the upcoming European Elections. For God's sake, don't let voter apathy or confusion elect Tommy Robinson in the North West, or the Brexit Party in your own region. Get out and galvanise your voters and members with a clear message to unite and vote Labour on May 23rd.



Surging tide hits Worthing

When I moved to Worthing in 2016, there hadn't been a Labour councillor in the town for over forty years. Now there are ten. How did this happen?

I should stress that the key element was the election of Corbyn as party leader rather than my arrival on the scene! This led to an explosion in the number of party members which obviously enabled much greater political activity.

The breakthrough came in August 2017 when Labour won a surprise victory in Marine ward (not one of our natural targets) in a by-election.

This certainly took the Tories by surprise but could have been a one off. Indeed they were so shocked that they have made it their top priority in subsequent elections - we have annual elections here, deep joy.

In 2018 we increased our vote in the ward but lost, which shows the Tories can pull out the stops when threatened, and we lost again this year despite our candidate polling over 900 votes. But we broke through in other wards and added four councillors to our Labour group.

Worthing Council spans two CLPs, Worthing West (WW) and East

Dorothy Macedo, Worthing West CLP, celebrates Labour's tsunami on the south coast.

Worthing & Shoreham (EWAS). This year WW targeted three wards and won two, Marine eluding us again, while EWAS targeted three wards and won them all, bringing our total number of councillors to ten, shown in the photo below.

We did have a surge in the Lib Dem and Green votes, but we just did even better. The Lib Dem's won one seat and now have three councillors. The Greens polled over 500 in their key target ward but we polled over 1000.

There is no great secret to the successes as it's mainly hard work and not just in the short campaign. The Tories are very good at working the local media and have high visibility at local events and in every sort of local organisation.

EWAS MP Tim Loughton even turned up with a group of fans at Worthing's first ever Pride march in 2018 despite voting against pretty much everything involving gay rights in Parliament.



Our candidates worked incredibly hard during the campaign, the stand-out being Henna Chowdhury, Worthing's first ever Asian woman councillor. Standing in a ward with a negligible ethnic minority population she was out with her team in all weathers and on Election Day she stood outside her polling station for fifteen hours to ensure voters had a chance to see her. It did help that the Greens didn't stand in her ward but she achieved a stunning result, 1213 votes to the previous Tory councillor's 951, with the Lib Dem's on 418.

Electoral Calculus now shows EWAS as a potential Labour gain in a general election but with the narrowest of margins. The PPC is the feisty Scot Lavinia O'Connor, a lifelong union activist and strong Corbyn supporter. EWAS is in fact the last seat on Labour's list of targets if we are to have a majority government. The key will be squeezing the Lib Dem and Green votes without being too negative. So if anyone fancies campaigning in the famous Sussex sunshine when the election is called, you will be very welcome!





Strange goings on in Kent

Elections on 2nd May were some of the strangest ever seen in the County. Sixteen out of the seventeen constituencies here voted "Leave" in the referendum, some by very large majorities indeed, with only leafy and very pleasant "true blue" Tunbridge Wells bucking the trend. This set the backdrop for what was to happen but with vastly different consequences.

Best news of the day was that Gravesham returned to Labour overall control – and they also won the County Council by-election caused by the incumbent becoming the Labour M.P. for Slough.

Also very good were the Labour gains made in Swale [Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey], where Labour went up from 5 councillors to 11. A group of hard working canvassers, including my good self and Kent county councillor 'Bolshy' Barry Lewis, are pictured below.

In the only "unitary authority" in the county, Medway [Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham], Labour made solid gains but not enough to take control. Dartford was a disappointment and remained Tory.

Tunbridge Wells produced a real surprise in Paddock Wood where the Tory Council leader only retained his seat after a tied vote with Labour and straws had to be drawn.

Keith Veness, South Thanet CLP, gives a round up of the mixed bag of council election results in Kent.

Maidstone remained a hung council with the Liberals as the main opposition.

Further south and east in the county, Folkestone produced another surprise where Labour gained six seats in the town, the Greens gained six seats in Hythe and the Tories lost overall control.

Yet neighbouring Dover was a real shocker with the Tories increasing their majority and Labour losing a seat in Deal. In Thanet we recaptured 16 seats from UKIP – who are now just a nasty stain on the carpet.

The Tories gained seven of the ex-Kipper seats but some sitting councillors clung on as "Thanet Independents".

The Greens emerged from nowhere to take two formerly safe Tory seats and one seat in central Ramsgate.

The new council is officially hung with 25 Tories, 20 Labour, 8 Independents and 3 Greens but will certainly be Conservative run after a bit of "wheeler dealing".

Across the county as a whole, four Conservative leaders lost their seats

on a wretched night for them but though Labour made gains, it was against the background of tens of thousands of voters feeling betrayed over "Brexit" and telling us this on the doorsteps.

Lots of our voters made clear they were happy to vote for a Labour council but would be voting "Brexit" in Euro elections.

How many do remains to be seen – but the working class areas here [mainly the seaside and coastal bits] seem to have far more in common with Yorkshire and the North Midlands than they do with London.

There is little support for any re-run referendum and lots of people telling us "just get on with it" and honour their vote.

No doubt this is the result of neglect and a feeling nobody listens to them – Labour still has a lot of work to do winning these areas.





Whey Aye, we did!

Something exciting is happening in the North East of England. An area neglected by successive governments over four decades. This long term decay is however about to be addressed by something radical. Socialism at a local level.

Jamie Driscoll was victorious in the North of Tyne Mayoral election and is determined to bring about change in the region which will benefit 'the many'.

How did he do it? He surrounded himself with committed activists and developed an excellent set of policies.

The strategy throughout the campaign was to be grassroots-led, policy driven and positive.

A great deal of time was used devising different ways to allow people to help in a meaningful way while accommodating other commitments.

Jamie had a vision for a coherent policy platform from the start. He saw the potential in the North of Tyne Mayoral role and was clear from the outset on the direction he wanted to go. His ideas were creative, specific and deliverable, and excited a lot of people.

The ideas were worked up with help from a wide range of activists to form the policies so we were confident we could implement them and communicate them accurately.

The key idea was to keep money that was already being spent in the region, a policy known as community wealth building. This, underpinned by green policies which permeate throughout, formed the basis for a coherent manifesto with a clear vision.

The first phase of the campaign was the internal selection to become the Labour Party candidate. Our website was striking in its design, easy to navigate and packed with useful

Rachel Broadbent, Newcastle East CLP, and Jules Rutherford, Blyth Valley CLP, report on the fantastic achievement in the north east.

information on the policies.

It included a blog and short videos explaining each policy including the economic theory behind them. To communicate with members, we also used social media and phone banking.

We believed that if we could communicate our

policies effectively that we could win, which proved to be the case.

On 20th February Jamie was announced as the Labour candidate for North of Tyne Mayor.

The next phase was the public vote. We stepped up our social media operation, created eye-catching leaflets with policies prominently displayed. Again the campaign was policy-led to promote a positive vision for the region.

As with the entire campaign, social media was run by volunteers. A presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter meant that the campaign reach went as far as possible. Facebook adverts were run in specific wards to support door knocking in the hope of doubling up opportunities for face and name recognition.

An advert was also run across all 3 regions. This attracted the usual trolls and negative commentary on the current state of politics but given the number of views and likes the negativity had a relatively small impact.

The overall approach to dealing with it was to remain focussed on the policies.

The fantastic creativity offered by volunteers resulted in some excellent



short videos with engaging music and graphics.

One of the social media team said, "the amount of time given by volunteers, the creativity given for free and the great humour it was all delivered with has made this one of the most extraordinary 6 months of my life. It is a testament to Jamie and his policies that so many talented individuals came together to run such a positive online campaign.

Jamie was announced as North of Tyne Mayor on 3rd May. It was a fantastic achievement. We are all very excited about being given the opportunity to implement the policies that we've lived and breathed for 6 months, and most of all believe can make a real difference to people in this region.

All the way through this was a true grassroots campaign and this success belongs to everyone who volunteered.

And it will continue to be grassroots and community-led now Jamie is Mayor. We wouldn't have it any other way.



Hope for West Mids yet

Change is coming to the West Midlands!! It sometimes feels too slowly, but you know - step by step and inch by inch...

A recent highlight was the decision of CLPD to hold its Annual General Meeting in Birmingham Council House. By general consensus it was a great success, with around 150 in attendance. There were some great speeches - I'll single out young Asif Mohammed from Unite, Stephen Marks from the NCC and three speakers reporting back on interventions at February's Women's Conference which was also held in our region.

I had laryngitis, so to the amusement and no doubt relief of many I was uncharacteristically silent!

CLPD have been active in the West Midlands, building grassroots left networks, and campaigning around a 'Charter for a democratic, transparent and accountable West Midlands Regional Labour Party'.

But it's still a struggle. The local election results pretty well mirrored the national picture. There were no elections in Birmingham which is Labour led, but disappointingly we failed to take two very marginal target councils in Stoke and Walsall.

My own local authority - the (not very) socialist Republic of Sandwell - is now 72 out of 72 Labour, and you may have read about the various pretty extraordinary goings on in both national and social media. I don't intend to comment here.

Encouragingly, we have elected some new, younger left councillors, which lifts the spirits no end. But I'm not a happy clapper and I think we really should be doing better than this. Where are all the 300, 000 'new' members?

A problem Labour faces in local elections is this. We have a brilliant

Steve Price, Warley CLP, reports from the West Midlands, the cumbling empire of the hard right.

party leader and a shadow chancellor who are committed to an anti austerity programme, built in part on investing in public services. But Labour local run authorities are still being forced to 'manage Tory cuts' What are we offering to voters 'in the here and now' - nicer, kinder, gentler cuts? It's a difficult sell on the doorstep!!!

In Birmingham this has led to a severely cash strapped council finding itself in dispute with its unions, and with its own workers. The two bin workers disputes made national news, and the unions won! But there have also been campaigns against nursery closures, and attacks on care workers resulting in over 70 days of industrial action.

In the coming period the selection processes for the West Midlands Conurbation Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Metro Mayor will begin to select Labour candidates for elections in May 2020.

The current PCC David Jamieson intends to stand down, and there are already a few runners and riders. The current team seem okay at describing the problems the police service face, but they appear to have no analysis or strategy for dealing with this. We need a candidate with some new thinking and a bit of energy.

Shockingly, the

Tories won the first metro mayor election with John Lewis boss Andy Street running the show following a frankly incompetent campaign by the Labour Party. We desperately need to elect a LABOUR MAYOR, but one with a radical and innovative agenda. We didn't even want a mayor in the first place but the authority has devolved powers and a big budget so we have to get fully engaged.

Finally, the Euro elections. Oh dear, are you all up for these? Brexit is drowning everything out just now. I'm pretty gloomy to be honest, though obviously I want to be wrong. In West Mids we do at least have two impressive young candidates who are full of energy and campaigning hard.

Keep the faith and JC4PM'

Jeremy Corbyn with Pete Lowe and Shami Chakrabarti



UPHILL STRUGGLE

Kevin Flack



Revive the grouse moors

Rural Scotland is being shaken up by a coalition of conservation, environmental and animal welfare groups called Revive. Incredibly grouse moors account for almost a fifth of Scotland yet provide little economic benefit for society. The landscape is intensively managed, grouse numbers are kept artificially high and natural predators and mountain hares are destroyed – all for a shooting ‘sport’ for the rich. Join the campaign at www.revive.scot

Give Postman Pat a break

Rural Post Offices featured in a recent debate in Parliament with Labour MP Gareth Thomas suggesting that, “Given that many rural post offices are barely profitable if they are profitable at all, is it not time for Ministers to consider giving business rates relief to all rural post offices—in particular, those housed by the Co-op movement, which continue to provide a service to local communities?”

Land Justice

The Land Justice Network have produced a draft manifesto for land reform in Britain, citing “the historic root of inequality in Britain is the uneven distribution of land, the rights given to those who own it, and the rights taken from those who don’t.” The network of environmentalists, farmers, housing activists and others are inviting supporters to help create a People’s land policy. Details at www.landjustice.uk

Housing for all

Local election candidates will have received a housing campaign pack from Labour shadow housing minister John Healey. It’s very useful if you happen to live in a town or city but not a single mention of ‘rural’ anywhere in the document. Obviously issues such as fair rents and secure tenancies matter wherever you live but there should be some recognition of the special requirements of villages and rural areas especially around second homes, planning policies and new affordable village housing for offspring of current villagers (with no right to buy).

On the buses

The Campaign for Better Transport is pushing improved bus service policies that would go a long way to help people travel in rural as well as urban areas:

- The introduction and enforcement of bus priority measures (such as bus lanes) to beat congestion and deliver a reliable service
- Bus stops that are in the right place and well-maintained, with safe access and crossing points
- Traffic information shared with bus operators, so that live travel information can be displayed at bus stops and park and ride services

Local elections

First the bad news. The Conservatives were guaranteed 283 councillors before the polls opened because Labour didn’t

stand, most of these seats in rural areas. With half a million members in the Labour Party, this is simply inexcusable. It wasn’t a good night for Labour in the rural Tory Districts, especially in the west. Most did manage better than my seventh place (out of 7)! However, a big shout out to South Norfolk for winning a seat and we won two in Eden, so...

Oh no! It’s the SDP (2)

Readers will want to know (ahem...) how the SDP has progressed following the report two months ago. Well, their candidate in the Newport West By-election, who had stood for UKIP just two years previously, came 9th with 202 (0.9%) votes. Somewhat unrealistically he had claimed “There’s a very good chance a party like the SDP could actually, if not win, split the vote a lot and reduce the majority. Obviously we are aiming for a win - or a good second would be nice.”

What Party am I in today?

A quick comment on MPs switching parties. Tory MP Sarah Wollaston felt so strongly about it that she sponsored a bill to make MPs who switched parties stand down and face a by-election under their new colours....before, of course, she joined TIG.

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



The housing crisis -

There can't be many people who have not noticed we have a housing crisis. Even if you own your home and have paid off your mortgage, you will almost certainly know a friend or family member who is struggling to get a mortgage, complaining about their Housing Association's repairs, paying through the nose for their rent or on a long term waiting list for better accommodation.

In 2016, The Guardian printed an article "Millennials may be first to earn less than previous generation – study". In it they referred to a report by the Resolution Foundation. This shone light on the UK's growing intergenerational divide and showed that millennials, who are aged between 15 and 35, fared significantly worse than their parents. The Foundation has since released several more studies on housing. These demonstrate how across all income groups and all parts of the country, young people believe they are on the receiving end of a poorer housing experience than their parents and grandparents.

The studies highlighted the following:

- 1) 30 year olds today are only half as likely to own their home as the baby boomers,
- 2) young people are 4 times as likely to rent privately than they were 2 generations ago and
- 3) housing costs and rents absorb a larger share of family income with significant living standards effects.

Brian Madican, Leyton and Wanstead CLP, details the actions we need to take to solve the housing crisis.

With home ownership often out of reach, and options in the social rented sector highly constrained, it is no surprise that 30 per cent of millennials still share a home either with their parents or others to whom they are not partnered at the age of 30. This compares to just 16 per cent of baby boomers at the same age.

Many more houses are needed to combat the housing shortage. The government has set a target of increasing (English) housing supply by 300,000 units a year. Over time, building this number of properties would have an effect on housing costs and prices. But targets are one thing, achieving them another. Since 1946, there have only been six years in which 300,000 homes or more were built. If we want to build at scale again then the state must take a pro-active role.

However, it is not just the costs of private renting and house prices that need state control. Housing Associations - whilst retaining their charitable status they have become profit seeking businesses who sell off their more expensive housing stock and pay their CEOs eye-wateringly huge salaries. Empty properties - who could not be incredulous that according to The BBC <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42536418> "The figures, from

276 local councils, show there are more than 216,000 homes across the country which have been empty for six months or more." Grenfell - who in the UK did not see the horror of Grenfell Tower and wonder how unfavourably the current Fire regulations would compare to the laws passed after the Great Fire of London in 1666.

The housing crisis needs to be tackled on many fronts. Over 1.7 million people pay over one third of their annual salary in rent to private landlords and £20 billion a year of taxpayer's money goes in housing benefits payments to plug the gap between housing costs and household incomes. If more people lived in council accommodation and rent controls on private properties were introduced then the Housing Benefits bill would be reduced by £billions each year. This money could finance a council house building programme.

Labour's current housing policies are contained in the *For the Many, Not the Few* manifesto, the current Housing green paper and the composite motion on Housing passed at the 2018 Conference.

We need to add to these policies by being bolder about council house building, introducing rent controls and making Housing Associations more accountable and



what is to be done?

responsible to their tenants.

Below is a suggested motion containing actions that, if implemented, would tackle the root causes of the current housing crisis.

'This Branch/CLP notes the dire state of housing in the UK which causes insecurity and untold suffering (both financially and emotionally) to millions of people in the UK. In order to tackle housing issues on 3 levels (Council housing, Housing Associations and properties for private renting), this Branch/CLP demands that the following ten actions be completed by a Labour Government.

1) Labour should commit to building and/or acquiring 500,000 green council homes by the end of its 1st Parliament and 1,000,000 (one million) council homes built/acquired within a 10 year period.

2) No companies who use black-listing agencies or methods shall be employed by Councils.

3) Future Government and Council funding to social landlords for new affordable homes will be based on improvements in transparency and management in their organisations. In addition, all Housing Associations and their sub-contractors will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

4) Legislation will be passed to ensure that current Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) must be supplied by Housing Associations to Tenant's

Resident's Associations (TRAs) and that future FRAs on all properties are enforced by a statutory body.

5) All Council, Housing Association and private high-rise flats must be fitted with sprinkler systems.

6) The government's Regulatory Framework for social housing will be strengthened, repealing the de-regulatory measures of successive governments, and the Regulator of Social Housing's powers to intervene with underperforming landlords will be strengthened.

7) Rent controls should be introduced in order to reduce (year by year over the first term of Parliament) the price of renting to 30% of the lower quartile of average UK earnings for all Housing Association properties and properties of private landlords valued at less than £1 million.

8) Councils will be given powers to compulsorily purchase properties that have been empty for 9 months or more and/or charge a 1000% Council tax charge on such properties.

9) Legislation will be passed to enable Leaseholders to buy the Freehold for their property more easily and at reasonable rates.



10) Legislation will be passed to ensure indefinite tenancies for all renters (as is practised in Scotland).'

If you are a Labour Party member then raise this as a motion at your Branch/CLP so that it can be passed on to socialhousingreview@labour.org.uk and copy to Jeremy Corbyn leader@labour.org.uk and to the Nation Policy Forum for inclusion in the Manifesto (<https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/commissions/housing-transport>) (deadline for submissions is 30 June 2019)

If you are in an affiliated trade union then raise it at your union branch meeting and, once passed, ask for your delegate(s) to raise it at their next CLP/GC.

If enough CLPs put these ideas forward and they are incorporated into Labour's Housing Paper and adopted by the NPF then Labour would have housing policies that do indeed work For the Many, Not the Few.



Cultural Marxism & anti-semitism

'Cultural Marxism' is a trope that is rapidly spreading from the far right to the conservative mainstream. The term first gained notoriety when white nationalist, Anders Breivik, cited it as a reason for killing 77 people in two terror attacks in Norway in 2011.

The shootings at Poway synagogue outside San Diego in April shows once again how dangerous these ideas are. They create a rationale for violence against leftists, against Jewish people, and against anyone associated with either.

'Cultural Marxism' has been around as a term for some time, and hasn't always carried its current connotations. It's been used to describe left cultural analysis by figures like Marxist historian EP Thompson.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Centre, the term first began to gain traction in right-wing venues when paleo-conservative writer, William Lind, used it during a 2002 speech at a Holocaust denial conference.

Lind used 'cultural Marxism' to characterize the ideology of the Frankfurt School - a group of predominantly Jewish intellectuals who fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s.

Lind argued that the Frankfurt School had developed anti-racism, feminism, and sexual liberation in order to undermine traditional American values. For Lind, it was a foreign Jewish plot meant to weaken the white Christian patriarchy that had made America strong.

The theory, in one stroke, paints all left opposition to conservatism as an evil plot formulated by Jewish people. It's an easy bridge between typical anti-political correctness rhetoric and outright white nationalism.

In other words, 'cultural Marxism' is a very effective dog-whistle. The

Noah Berlatsky looks at the links between critics of political correctness and white nationalism.

term's deniability makes it convenient for bad faith laundering of anti-semitism into mainstream discourse.

Right-wing self-help guru, Jordan Peterson, has also used the term 'cultural Marxism', blaming the Frankfurt School and post-modernists like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault for what he sees as North American cultural rot.

Peterson doesn't mention Jewish people specifically, but he's still mainstreaming anti-semitic talking points with no apparent concern for their impact. In doing so, he provides a vocabulary with which the alt-right can reach out to the disaffected young men who follow him.

The term 'cultural Marxism' was used in an infamous 2017 memo to Donald Trump from a White House staffer. A member of the strategic planning office at the National Security Council wrote: "While opposition to President Trump manifests itself through political warfare memes centered on cultural Marxist narratives, this hardly means that opposition is limited to Marxists as conventionally understood."

Instead, cultural Marxism has "become the dominant cultural meme," and "some benefit from it; while others are captured by it; including 'deep state' actors, globalists, bankers, Islamists, and establishment Republicans."

This language, which lumps together all critics of the President with the anti-semitic dog-whistle of 'globalists' (followed up by 'bankers', no less) is a bridge between the mainstream right and the far right.

One of the most insidious conspiracy theories of the moment holds that Jews are actively engineering the refugee 'crisis'. The Tree of Life synagogue shooter targeted the Jews of Pittsburgh because he believed that billionaire Jewish financier George Soros, and Jewish people in general, were working to bring immigrants into the United States to destroy the white American way of life.

'Cultural Marxism' echoes and amplifies these strains of anti-semitism, which collectively present Jewish people as conniving to destroy white culture, heritage and purity.

Hitler saw himself as waging a heroic battle against what he called "the Jewish doctrine of Marxism" - an alien leftist creed designed to destroy Aryan German integrity and destiny. 'Cultural Marxism', in extending Hitler's logic, is a reminder that Jewish people are attacked in part because they are seen as leftists, and that leftists are attacked in part because they are seen as Jews.

There is anti-semitism in left communities too, and it's important to work against it. But right now it's far more urgent to recognize that the right's reactionary, conspiracy-theory fuelled vision is structured around anti-semitism. The invocation of 'cultural Marxism' is a warning: the more power the far right gains, the less safe Jews will be.

This is an edited reproduction of a piece in Jewish Currents. For the full article see: www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/



The importance of 1919

A lot of centenaries have been commemorated in the past few years. 1919 has been less in the public eye, yet the events of that year were of great significance. We are still living with the aftermath of their impact right now, including in the UK.

Throughout the trade union movement militancy was on the rise. Passive mutiny by British veterans kept waiting for their discharge in France did not have long-term consequences, but the outcome was different for the extensive police strike whose defeat banned police officers from trade union membership and instituted the police structure which, in essentials, we still live with. Even more far-reaching was the outbreak of the Irish war of independence, which soon resulted in the division of Ireland and creation of the Ulster police state, with the issue of its frontier currently giving the Tory government hell in relation to Brexit.

However even these dramatic and momentous events were small scale stuff compared to what was going on that year in Europe and the distant British Empire. All were representative of the popular disillusionment and anger consequent on the just-concluded murderous and futile war. In the former Russian Empire, that year saw the height of the devastating and destructive invasion and civil war sponsored by the victorious great powers and their satellites aiming to overthrow the soviet government.

Popular revolt had toppled the German monarchy, but the governing Social Democrats teamed up with the most vicious elements of its defeated army to preserve the reactionary social structures and murder the revolutionary leaders both in Berlin and outlying parts, particularly Bavaria and its capital, Munich,

Historian Willie Thompson casts his eye over some of the momentous events of 100 years ago.

where Hitler joined and began to take over what was to become the Nazi Party. Similar developments were occurring in other parts of eastern Europe. The ultra-right anti-Semitic government which had emerged in resurrected Poland crushed any internal left wing elements and seized territory from its neighbour, the struggling soviet regime.

In Hungary an indigenous soviet regime was overthrown by reactionary proto-fascist elements assisted by the Romanian military, and then they went on to massacre anyone who, in the words of an American commentator, was red, pink, or just a bit too flesh-coloured. In the new Austrian republic ultra-right politicians quickly seized control and fiercely repressed opposition. In this part of Europe only the linguistically diverse new Czechoslovak state was able to retain some elements of a democratic politics. To the south in that year Mussolini in Milan was assembling his fascisti of army veterans and thugs, and in the following year these, in alliance with capital and landowners, would cover Italy like a blight, murdering and torturing socialists and communists and even liberals. In the USA a 'red scare' against socialists and progressive opinion was being vigorously pursued.

Drunk with their victory over the Central Powers the British military and officialdom in the overseas Empire felt no restraint in using techniques to frighten local populations into complete submission. 1919 was the year of the infamous Amritsar massacre in India when an entirely

inoffensive crowd of celebrants at a religious festival were used for military target practice (no exaggeration), killing around a thousand. Even the House of Commons, composed of hard-faced men who had done well out of the War, including Churchill, raised objections to this atrocity, though the House of Lords congratulated the perpetrator, a Colonel Dyer.

With less immediate impact and scarcely remembered, but of considerable historic significance, was the foundation in Moscow of the Communist International (Comintern), declared by Lenin to be the 'general staff of the world revolution' but later used by Stalin to subordinate all the foreign communist parties, often disastrously, to the Soviet state which he controlled.

Better remembered is the Versailles system of treaties prophetically denounced by J M Keynes, inflicted by the victors on the defeated powers. Its instigator was the US President Woodrow Wilson, the twentieth century's prize hypocrite, and was designed both to rob and humiliate the defeated regimes and to institute a 'cordon sanitaire' of anti-Soviet medium-sized satellite states to provide a barrier to the spread of communism westwards.

As much as the World War itself, the year 1919 emphasised the relentless malevolence of international capital in its various manifestations to entrench its hegemony, and the weakness of its opponents – even in the militarily victorious Soviet Russia.



Narendra Makanji 1952-2019

Our movement has lost a lot of good comrades recently who will be sorely missed but few had as many friends and admirers as Narendra. He died suddenly at the comparatively young age of 66 and whilst still active on many campaigns and causes he still firmly believed in.

He lived long enough to see, improbably, his old pal Jeremy Corbyn become leader of the Labour Party, his once marginal constituency of Hornsey and Wood Green become a Labour stronghold and the cause of black self-organisation become mainstream in the labour movement.

His funeral at Finchley was packed out and the subsequent memorial meeting even more so. Tributes poured in from many places as he was a truly multi-talented and totally committed campaigner. Just a tiny selection of tributes could be listed here and we would recommend readers to look at the Facebook site "Remembering Narendra Makanji" put together by Seema Chandwani and other local comrades.

You will see an amazing collection of photos and written tributes covering the Grunwick strike, the picket of the then South African Embassy, elections and canvassing in

Keith Veness, South Thanet CLP, remembers a great socialist, Labour councillor and campaigner.

Haringey, the early days of the Labour Party Black Sections and so much else.

A lot of people were surprised to find out that he was actually raised in what is now Zimbabwe and was thus an East African Asian. He was of Indian heritage and always defined himself as that when asked. He was also a keen cricket devotee and someone once remarked that "Narendra totally failed the Tebbit cricket test" but he easily passed the "Tendulkar test"!

Also unusual among us lefty blokes, he nearly always wore a tie or similar neckwear – his absolute favourite being a bright red one with dotted white traffic markings and a slogan of keep left.

He worked for Islington Council in the 1970's in its Race Relations Unit and got to know a lot of activists in that Borough through his work. He was later elected as a Labour councillor in Haringey for Noel Park ward – then a marginal but now a very safe Labour seat indeed. He worked with

and supported so many local community organisations in that diverse borough – including Greek Cypriot, Afro-Caribbean, Kurdish, Orthodox Jewish, Turkish and others who fetched up in North London as well as the Indian and Bangladeshi organisations across capital. He was a founder member of CLPD and wrote and help get *Briefing* out in its early days in the 1980's. Ken Livingstone valued his input in getting the work of the GLC race unit up and running. He was a supporter of Irish unity and loved unearthing the various links between the Irish and Indian independence struggles.

Most people on the wider left though got to know him or learnt about him when he chaired the national Labour Party Black Sections organisation. Looking back, this assembled a remarkable group of highly talented and deeply motivated campaigners – Diane Abbott, Marc Wadsworth, Bernie Grant, Sharon Atkin, Martha Osamor, Roger McKenzie, Russell Profit and so many others. What they had in common was they were very committed and very noisy.

Narendra was a unanimous choice as the steady hand on the tiller that everyone respected and accepted. He wore the tee-shirts with the clenched fist logo but you somehow felt he was always happier in a suit and tie. He made friends easily and loved to chat – he was a good listener as well as a good agitator. Lots of us feel he was a one off and we will miss him terribly.





Jeremy wows the teachers

After NUT and ATL members voted in 2017 to amalgamate, the National Education Union was formed in September 2017. However, until January this year, the two unions worked together but still operated as two distinct sections with their own conferences and democratic structures. This year saw the first National Conference of the NEU proper in Liverpool from the 15th to the 18th of April.

Both state education and the teaching profession have been placed into a parlous, state by nearly a decade of austerity and a succession of under-qualified and over-zealous Education Secretaries. Funding cuts, real-terms pay cuts, rising class sizes, rampant privatisation through the academies and free schools programme, an increase in high-stakes testing of students, an exponential rise in unmanageable and meaningless workloads, swinging cuts to SEN provision, a narrowing curriculum, the scaling back of vocational education – all problems brought about, or exacerbated, by the retrograde and deeply unpopular reforms laid out by then Secretary of State, Michael Gove in the coalition government in 2010. Gove famously remarked in the lead up to the 2016 referendum that “people in this country have had enough of experts”. He and his successors have studiously ignored the increasingly angry opposition of education experts, teachers and unions throughout their disastrous near-decade in charge.

Research suggests that the school cuts campaign influenced up to 750,000 votes at the last general election, and that the NEU’s campaign on school funding is cutting through with the electorate. Politicians of all hues other than blue now seem to be engaging with the

Haringey NEU District secretary Ed Harlow reports from the new union’s first conference.

profession in a positive manner. Layla Moran, the Lib Dem education spokesperson, spoke encouragingly at conference and pledged to scrap baseline testing and SATs. However, the most rapturous welcome and prolonged ovation at conference was reserved for Jeremy Corbyn. Flanked by Shadow education secretary Angela Rayner, Jeremy started to lay out for the first time since an extensive consultation process, a more detailed vision of what the National Education Service (NES) will entail.

The vision is for an education service for all, from cradle to grave. This means an end to university tuition fees, and reinvestment into free pre-school care for all 2-4 year olds. It means removing corporations from education and halting the academies and free schools programme. This was very welcome but there are many who would argue that slamming the brakes on is not enough. We will need to find reverse gear swiftly and re-nationalise all academies and free schools under local democratic control, ending the corporate culture in schools and ending the scandal of Multi Academy Trust CEO pay which has spiralled out of control. Any school in receipt of state funding should be democratically accountable to the community it serves rather than run by an absent, anonymous board of directors or an all-powerful, outrageously remunerated CEO.

There were other headline pledges: repeal of the Trade Union Act, a return to collective bargaining,

a role for unions in shaping education policy under the NES, increased funding for the arts and SEN. Yet it was the announcement that Labour would scrap the proposed baseline testing of 4 year olds and SATs at 7 and 11 that brought the hall to its feet and drew the loudest outpouring of relief from delegates.

For many younger teachers, this was probably the first time they have heard a politician speak about education in a way that mirrored both their own experiences in the classroom, and their own educational beliefs. Corbyn spoke powerfully about the intrinsic value of education as a ‘pathway to liberation’ as opposed to the limited notion that the function of education is to meet the needs of the economy. Teachers have become accustomed to being patronised, pilloried and blamed for many of the perceived ills of the world. The recent suggestion from the Home Office that teachers and nurses could be held accountable for knife crime is just the latest in a long line of tone-deaf insults and blame shifting to the profession.

The National Education Service has the potential to be the next Labour Government’s greatest legacy. Corbyn’s speech was a rallying call to beleaguered teachers and a pledge that while the Tories aren’t listening, Labour is. It was a timely reminder to our new, bigger union to redouble our efforts in campaigning for more funding for schools, a better deal for teachers and support staff, and above all a better education for the students we teach.



Revolting shareholders

It was worth the trek. Despite the venue being difficult to find, there was a well attended protest from Stop the War and Palestine Solidarity Campaign against HSBC support for the arms trade with Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The topic came up in AGM questions. The responses were pretty much the same as last year; the bank has its own criteria for dealing with ethical issues and that was that. Chairman Mark Turner said afterwards the decision to

East London's Alan Mackie is just back from the HSBC AGM in Birmingham.

divest from Elbit stemmed exclusively from it buying a phosphorous manufacturer 'which crossed (HSBC's) red line', suggesting it had nothing to do with external pressure. When it came to divesting from Caterpillar et al (implying the BDS campaign) he said it was much less clear cut determining what was legitimate and what was illegitimate activity.

HSBC's ethical focus needs to be sharpened by keeping up the pressure. As a questioner commented, shareholders are increasingly concerned with ethical conduct (climate change included) and ignoring these issues and the rising level of protests they spur comes with an increasing reputational cost.

Dear Jacinda ...

I am writing to thank you for the work you have done to help the Muslim community in New Zealand. Thank you for helping the victims of the families that have endured a huge loss.

My condolences to all the families that have been affected by a mindless act of killing against innocent civilians. We must always be united and not allow anyone to divide us.

My prayers are with the people of New Zealand. Peace be with you.

Sincerely yours,

Mohammad Rukhsar
London

Dear Mohammad,

Thank you for your kind words.

The Prime Minister has been deeply moved by the support and compassion shown in the wake of the attack in Christchurch, and by the thousands of people who have taken the time to share their condolences.

She has asked me to pass on the following statement:

"My thoughts are with the families who have lost loved ones and who are now experiencing unimaginable pain and grief. While I can't take away this pain, I send the Muslim community my love, as so many New Zealanders have, and the reassurance that I will do all I can to support them. My focus is ensuring those

who have been affected have the care and support they need - not just now, but in the coming months and years.

This is a tragic time, and all of New Zealand is feeling the impact. While we as a nation grapple with a form of grief and anger we have not experienced before, the compassion and kindness that has been expressed at community events, on social media, and by people right across the country show us who we are as a nation.

Going forward, I know those are the values we'll all work hard to protect."

Thanks again for getting in touch.

Kind regards,
Office of the Prime Minister,
Jacinda Ardern

The KEITH VENESS Column



Photo courtesy of Hackney Unison.

Justice – a word I think most of us support as a concept but very few think through what actually this means. Having spent years of activity in the various “miscarriages of justice” campaigns, we had to always stress that it’s not the awfulness or otherwise of the crime(s) committed but whether the accused actually did it. In the 1970’s we had the rather sick joke that “you were innocent until proven Irish”. Like a lot of “near the knuckle” jokes, it had a strong element of truth buried in it.

Years later I undertook courses to get qualifications in investigations and evidence gathering. On some of these training sessions, the class contained police officers and other law enforcement staff. Often the tutor would start by asking, “What is the purpose of an investigation?” – some of the more “unreconstructed” coppers would say things like, “So we can get them to admit it” or “So we can bang ‘em up!”. Of course the real sole purpose of any investigation is ... to get to the truth. Simple really.

On one course I chatted to a Police Chief Inspector who hailed from Glasgow but now had a sinecure job in the Caribbean. He told me about the day he started work as a Police Constable in one of the then rougher areas of Scotland’s biggest city. He was put on the night shift and had a very “old style” Police Sergeant

welcoming him to the job and then pointing to a holding cell and saying, “Get in there and get that bastard to confess”. He in turn asked, “What’s he done Sarge?” but was told “Never mind about that – just get in there and make him cough”. He subsequently spent from 10-00 p.m. until 2-00 a.m. shouting at the wretched suspect, “Confess you swine” and “Admit you did it”. Finally the man declared he could take no more and asked, “Where do I sign?”. The Sergeant appeared with a ready-typed confession sheet and, after getting the signature, congratulated the newest member of his team. He admitted to me that, “To this day, I have no idea what the man was accused of or whether he was innocent or guilty!” So much for getting at the truth.

Of course we now have the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 [“PACE”] and interviews are now recorded, suspects are properly cautioned, prosecution evidence has to be disclosed to the defence and suspects are entitled to a solicitor or appropriate adult with them when questioned. However, people still get wrongly convicted and huge cuts to Legal Aid make getting a proper defence together much harder.

One of the principles I also learnt is that “justice delayed is justice denied” – keeping people for unfair periods on remand before trying a case is inherently unfair in itself. Yet our own Party

has an abysmal record in this regard. In 2015 and 2016 hundreds of members were “administratively suspended” over flimsy allegations about posts on social media – in many cases these suspensions lasted months and years. Some got letters telling them the case had been dropped but warning them not to do it again. Often the member didn’t even know what they were accused of and certainly never got the chance to put their side of the case. We still have dozens of cases where members were suspended two or three years ago and still don’t know what is happening. Bleating about staff being overworked and foul-ups between the bureaucrats, the NEC and the NCC is just not good enough. For any democratic party there needs to be a “habeas corpus” clause.. A time limit of, say, three months should be enshrined and if after this time the “prosecution” is not ready to proceed, then case should be dropped forthwith.

This would stop frivolous or politically biased suspensions occurring and ensure a judicious way of proceeding. How about CLPD or the other left campaign groups taking up these demands? I will certainly be pushing at every opportunity.

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.



Venezuela on the brink

In late February, the Group of Lima, a loose body of 14 Latin American countries that support self-proclaimed president Juan Guaidó met in Bogotá to discuss the Venezuelan crisis, with US vice-president Mike Pence and Guaidó himself in attendance. Until then, the US government had not ruled out military intervention. At the end of the meeting, the Group issued a statement declaring its opposition to intervention. Brazil and Colombia, which border Venezuela, also rejected any kind of military invasion.

Guaidó's 'presidency' has been recognised by 50 countries. In a press briefing the State Department's spokesperson, Michael Palladino, expressed his disappointment that the media still referred to Guaidó as 'leader of the opposition' or 'president of the National Assembly'. Matt Lee, Associated Press's diplomatic correspondent, pointed out that 50 countries is substantially less than half of the 190 members of the UN.

Guaidó's 'presidency' is more symbolic than real. The armed forces remain loyal to Nicolás Maduro, most state governors belong to the ruling United Socialist Party, and the government controls the judiciary, the electoral commission and the state-owned oil company PDVESA.

The economic crisis meanwhile deepens. On 7th March, most of the country was plunged into darkness. Maduro's government blamed the US and the opposition for the breakdown at the Guri hydroelectric plant, which supplies 70% of Venezuela's electricity, but failed to provide concrete evidence that it was caused by sabotage. More likely it was the result of years of underinvestment.

Behind Venezuela's economic crisis is a combination of governmental

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incompetence and corruption, and sanctions affecting the import of food and medical supplies. In 2017, Citibank refused to approve the purchase of insulin. US pressure froze a Venezuelan government bank deposit at the UBS Swiss Bank used to acquire vaccines. The Colombian government prevented imports of anti-malaria treatment from the BSN Laboratory. Baster, Abbot and Pfizer, three of the biggest pharmaceutical multinationals in the world refused to issue export certificates for cancer drugs. European and American banks face sanctions if they do business with Venezuela, preventing the import of food and other supplies.

Until recently, there were strict exchange rate controls, but Venezuelans could buy the local currency, the Bolívar, using US dollars, at rates over ten thousand times the official rate, fuelling hyperinflation. Under Hugo Chávez, Venezuela's became dependent on oil for 97% of its hard currency. The economy never diversified and most food was imported. To tackle food shortages, the government distributed food to the poorest barrios, but corrupt officials took advantage of this system to steal and re-sell it.

The government has partially lifted the exchange rate controls but it will take many years for this to help reduce inflation. The Constituent Assembly, elected in 2017 and boycotted by the opposition, has included in the country's constitution measures to create a post-oil economy, but an article in the constitution won't change the situation.

Venezuela is facing a severe economic, political and social crisis, despite having the biggest oil reserves in the world. The US meanwhile wants regime change in order to exploit Venezuela's oil wealth. In early January, John Bolton, Donald Trump's National Security Adviser told Fox News that "It will make a big difference to the United States economically if we could have American oil companies invest in and produce the oil capabilities in Venezuela."

Elliot Abrams, implicated in the Iran-Contra scandal and subsequently pardoned by George Bush Snr, was a White House adviser during the failed coup attempt in April 2002. Abrams is now US special envoy for Venezuela. Venezuela has become a proxy-cold war, with the US and some of its allies supporting the opposition, while Russia, China, Turkey and most developing countries support Maduro.

The only way out of this crisis is a dialogue between the government and the opposition. New elections would have to be agreed by both sides, free from external pressure or ultimatums. Otherwise, civil war cannot be excluded. Negotiations should exclude Washington, which is clearly after Venezuela's oil.

The Labour Party should adopt a neutral position, demand that Venezuelan sovereignty is respected, oppose any kind of military intervention, and actively promote a dialogue that would help that country to get out of a crisis that is tearing Venezuelan society apart. The land of Bolívar deserves better.



Elections in the 6 counties

Despite all the media hype before and during the counts, the elections were once again a triumph for Sinn Fein and a setback for the various right wing and unionist forces.

Following on from their breakthrough last time, Sinn Fein retained their 105 seats total and remain the biggest party on Belfast City Council and in most councils "West of the Bann".

The DUP lost 8 seats – dropping from 130 to 122 – and the UUP lost 13 – declining from 88 to 75. The PUP, linked to the Belfast paramilitary groups, lost a seat and the ultra-unionist TUV dropped from 13 to 6.

Keith Veness, South Thanet CLP, reports

Other winners were the Greens, doubling their seats from 4 to 8, and the left wing "People Before Profit" who went up from 1 to 5 seats and saw the return of veteran socialist and republican Eamonn McCann as an elected councillor. The Alliance Party also increased its seats from 32 to 53 – obviously at the expense of the hard-line unionists.

The decline of the SDLP contin-

ues unabated, down from 66 to 59 seats. Their increasing irrelevance has led to them discussing a merger with the "green Tory" Fianna Fail party from the 26 counties – move that would surely seal their demise.

Direct comparisons are difficult – Belfast has 60 councillors and all the other ones 40 each, despite a wide variance in numbers of electors and geographical area. This tends to create a bias towards the unionists but is hard to quantify.

What the results do show is that winning a "border poll" is now a real option as the six counties are becoming more diverse, younger and losing their inbuilt unionist majority. Sinn Fein has campaigned for equal marriage, reforming the oppressive laws on abortion and for implementing all of the "Good Friday Agreement". Under the leadership of Michelle O'Neill these policies resonate with younger and less sectarian voters.

The next few years should be interesting.



Due to the European elections, the deadline for the CAC and NCC nominations has been extended to 14th June.

For the Conference Arrangements Committee, Seema Chandwani and Billy Hayes are standing again.

For the National Constitutional Committee, Gary Heather and Stephen Marks are standing again, together with Jabran Hussain.



All to play for in north

Against a backdrop of no functioning Assembly, the events in Derry, growing calls for a Border Poll and the 'cash for ash' scandal, the two main parties in the North called upon the people to renew their mandate for the forthcoming talks to break the deadlock.

In Belfast, Greens and People Before Profit (PBFA) had a good day. And it was repeated across the board. There's an accepted wisdom that west of the River Bann is more nationalist than the east.

Even there, in the perceived nationalist stronghold of Derry and Strabane council, Alliance and PBPA took 2 seats each, and Aontu got one.

And Derry was where Lyra was killed. It was also where a prominent dissident republican was elected, having topped the poll in one of the wards.

The DUP shed 8 seats, winning 122 overall, but marginally increased their vote percentage. Sinn Féin retained their 105 seats but lost .8% first preference vote. The UUP and SDLP lost 20 seats between them and a combined 3.7%.

What was a surprise was the strong showing of Alliance, up 21 seats, the Greens doubling their tally to 8 and PBPA up 4 to claim 5 councillors. Even Aontu got 1.

The Independents, who last time out comprised mainly pro-Union dissidents, were joined on this occasion by more republican and progressive elements.

Much attention was given to the DUP candidate, Alison Bennington, an openly gay woman, who was elected. She was standing for the same party that deselected a sitting councillor, Tom Smith, for voting in favour of lighting up the Council Building in Rainbow colours. He

Margaret Crowley looks at the outcome of the elections in the north of Ireland.

stood as an Independent, topped the poll and was re-elected.

This cut no ice with Jim Wells, a former Health Minister and DUP MLA who declared Alison Bennington's selection as totally opposite to the ethos of the DUP.

It wasn't just the DUP that were left to struggle with a dilemma. SF had very successfully gained seats in the councils to the east, including gaining seats where they had never had representatives before.

But they lost 5 in Derry and Strabane, and others in Fermanagh and Omagh and 1 in Belfast to People Before Profit.

The UUP embarrassed itself by trying to be more DUP than the DUP and suffered another loss of 13 seats. There had been a deal on the table to re-open the assembly by agreeing on language rights but the DUP couldn't deliver their grassroots and the UUP said they definitely wouldn't support it. So much for the facade of soft Unionism.

The Alliance had a spectacular election. They mopped up that soft unionist anti-Brexit vote and gained 21 seats and an increased vote share of 4.8%.

Their boost from transfers helped them take many of the last seats at a cost to the DUP. The best example of that was the Alliance candidate in Waterside, who came last in the first count, but was ultimately elected through transfers.

The Greens, People Before Profit and progressive independents, many from the republican gene pool, gave further testimony to the clamour for

rights and equality. People want to see the cultural and equality rights guaranteed by the GFA implemented but they also want a health and education system.

Most agree that the Petition of Concern, adopted to protect each community from legislation that would favour the other, is being abused in the Assembly.

It was used to stop movement on limited abortion reforms. If that could be suspended then an Irish Language Act and Same Sex Marriage law could well be enacted.

Voter unhappiness was able to find expression because of the STV vote system. The North had a 52.6% turnout, though in Erne East in Fermanagh it rose to 71.6%.

I like to think that was in part because one of my all time heroes, Big John McCluskey, stood as an Independent on an anti-austerity platform, and was elected on the 1st count.

If there are European elections, SF and the DUP will probably retain their seats, but the UUP are in trouble. Alliance are standing Naomi Long and they are Remainers (and the North voted Remain). They probably will pick up a lot of transfers, I wouldn't rule them out of the 3rd seat.



Film 2019

.You may have missed two brilliant recent films, neither of which had a huge UK distribution so you may have to resort to Netflix or else buy the dvd. If you're lucky you may just catch them at an indie cinema.

At first glance *Capernaum* and *Ray and Liz* will appear (literally) miles apart both stylistically and in content, but they have much in common. To me they are essentially humanist films, but both also deeply political.

Capernaum is a Lebanese film, directed by Nadine Labaki, which follows Zain, a street wise 12 year old who ran away from a violently dysfunctional family.

We find him in prison for stabbing a 'son of a bitch' and we learn that nobody knows his date of birth; that strictly he is a 'non person'. Despite this, Zain files a civil action against his parents 'for being born' as he wants to stop his mother having any more children.

The film takes place in flashbacks. We see how a homeless young boy meets Rahil, an Ethiopian migrant toilet cleaner who was a sex worker for 6 years until she fell pregnant. She lets Zain live with her in exchange for him providing childcare when she is at work.

We learn that 'the son of a bitch'



Stock up on the popcorn; Steve Price, Warley CLP, has some film recommendations. Eat your heart out, Barry Norman.

Zain stabbed was the sleazeball local stallholder and black market operator who was 'given' his sister 'when she started bleeding' with tragic consequences and subject of a heart breaking scene where Zain tries to stop her being handed over.

Ray and Liz was a film I was compelled to watch. It's based on an actual family that lived 5-6 miles from where I grew up.

Ray and Liz's son is Richard Bingham who made his name as a photographer based on the vivid images he made of his violent and dysfunctional family life. This film uses actors to play the real life 'Ray and Liz' and they are brilliant.

It's a raw portrait of a certain type of working class family life that I find startlingly realistic. There's not much love and affection on display here.

Ray, Liz and three kids (one is Richard himself, quieter, reserved, observing and clearly thinking, 'What is this, is this 'normal'?').

Ray is an alcoholic and we are to infer that his drinking got much worse after he was made redundant by Maggie

Thatcher. Ray is subjected to domestic violence by his wife Liz.

It's a very claustrophobic film compared to *Capernaum*, indeed it's suffocating.



Watching it is a tense experience and you constantly expect violence to erupt, not necessarily physical violence but psychological and emotional violence that often can be even more damaging and corrosive.

So, two very different films? I don't think so. In both films we see how poverty often brutalises the poor.

We see the everyday cruelty and abuse that can blight some people's lives. How family life is not always that idealised place providing love, support and emotional security.

And we understand that the poor children brought up in these environments will too often reproduce the same patterns when they become parents.



Songs of protest

It is now 50 years since the 'Swinging Sixties' culminated in the first landing on the moon, the establishment of the Open University, of Woodstock and the New York music festival. This was widely regarded as a pivotal moment in popular music history and a defining statement of the 60s counter-culture revolution in clothing, music, drugs, dress, sexuality, and formalities. The pioneering satirical news and comedy show *That Was The Week That Was* also led the way to a more open critical look at social customs and the establishment.

But like most decades since the Second World War there was a darker side. The 'Cold War' between the USA and USSR was at its height. The 1962 Cuban missile crisis is considered the closest hostility between the superpowers came to escalating into full-scale nuclear conflict. As the decade wore on tensions between East and West transformed into proxy wars in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, with the Vietnam conflict lasting into the 1970s.

1968 was a particularly tumultuous year, with global students' protests, the suppression of the Prague Spring and the assassination of Martin Luther King.

At a time of significant social and cultural change, popular music became more inventive, colourful and political, with a flow of protest songs spearheaded by musical giants such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, James Brown and the

Barry Rodin, recycled teenager and activist in Orpington CLP, remembers the golden age of the protest movement.

Beatles. In many ways, the 1960s is considered the golden age of the protest movement and the heyday of protest songs.

Bob Dylan's *Blowin' in the Wind* became an anthem for the civil rights and peace protest era.

"How many roads must a man walk down / Before you call him a man? / How many times can a cannonball fly / before they're forever banned?"

It inspired songs from artists of other genres such as Sam Cooke's *A change is going to come* which referred to the struggle against segregation:

"Go to the movie and I go downtown / Somebody keep tellin' me don't hang around / It's been a long, a long time coming / But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will."

Supergroups such as the Beatles and the Plastic Ono Band were able to infuse the anti-war and peace movement into mainstream pop music through songs such as *Revolution* and *Give Peace a Chance*. A key message of John Lennon's *Imagine* is to be aware of actions that breed division (e.g. nationalism, intolerance and racism) and that positive thinking can unite us and make political change.

The following 1970s and 1980s saw greater economic turbulence, with growing alienation and unemployment.

Protest music became more fragmented, aggressive and anarchic as evidenced by punk rock such as the Sex Pistols' *God Save the Queen*.

The advance of neo liberalism resulted in the decline of traditional industries in many western industrial regions; this is depicted in the Specials' classic *Ghost Town* which addressed urban decay, de-industrialisation, and violence in inner cities; major consequences of Thatcherism and globalisation, which are still pertinent today.

Artists from a wide range of music genres continue to make protest songs covering a multitude of issues, including Black Lives Matter, LGBT, social discrimination and the Trump Presidency. Music allied with modern communication and social media can increase solidarity and political action worldwide to meet huge challenges, such as climate change and combating the Far Right.

There is an overriding need to form global alliances of progressive political parties, trade unionists and campaign activists. Not only can this international political movement encourage grassroots empowerment but also co-ordinate the struggle against global poverty, growing inequality and environmental damage.



No marks for Engel

So it's farewell to Natascha Engel, who resigned as fracking tsar in April after just six months in the job – missing you already! At one level, it's undoubtedly a victory for environmental campaigners who she claimed have been "highly successful" in encouraging the government to curb fracking.

At another level, it's a cautionary tale of how New Labour managerialists are able to move seamlessly from advocating for an industry while in parliament, working for the industry having left parliament, and then regulating the industry for government, all in the space of a couple of years.

Between 2005 and 2017, Engel managed to lose a majority of over 10,000. While some of this was down to factors that affected other Derbyshire seats, her support for fracking – against Labour's national policy – in an area that has significant opposition to it was undoubtedly part of the reason. On leaving parliament, Engel became a consultant for Ineos, which has shale gas licences in North and South Yorkshire, the east Midlands and Cheshire.

Greenpeace recently put in a Freedom of Information request covering email between Engel, Ineos and Cuadrilla, another fracking company. In her response, she provided only a small amount of correspondence,

claiming: "I tend to deal with everything on the day and delete what has been done to avoid any huge build-ups or risk of duplication. The same is true of the few notes I take in meetings which I review in the evenings, action and throw away." Well, she would, wouldn't she?

As for the future of fracking – described by Engel in her resignation letter as "perfectly viable and exciting" – Rebecca Long-Bailey has confirmed Labour will scrap it altogether.

Joint enterprise?

A house owned by the wife of a former Labour mayor of Redbridge, Cllr Gurdial Bhamra, was vacated by a group of women after police visited it following reports from neighbours that it was being used as a brothel. Classified ads online included a link to a website offering "full personal services" for £99 per hour or £750 per night. The house has not had a house in multiple occupation license since 1994.

We would like to make it clear that we are not suggesting that Cllr Bhamra, a former Metropolitan police inspector, had any knowledge of what was going on at his wife's property. Or that his wife knew that it was in multiple occupation. Or that either failed to show due diligence about goings on at the house that were evidently known by the rest of the street. In fact, we're not suggesting any-

thing.

Of course, it's up to couples how they arrange their financial affairs. Most couples tend to own properties jointly. Amazing how many councillors have close family who own properties separately, isn't it?

Triumph for democracy

By the time you read this, the House of Lords Crossbench hereditary peers (all 31 of them) will have elected a previous Crossbench peer ousted in the 1999 reforms or one of their offspring to replace one who has died. Lord Mountgarret, brings a new perspective to publishing an election manifesto, stating simply "All my previous statements portray accurately my reasons for wanting to represent the electorate. Thank you" Not sure this would have worked for May's council elections...nor would the candidate stating he could attend Parliament for just two days a week.

Sandwell shenanigans

The injection of a modicum of democracy into the goings on in Sandwell Council led to the suspension of key councillors and the selection of some fresh blood. Some deselected councillors promptly stood as independents. As is often the way, some of the old guard Labour councillors supported them. Two are now facing expulsion. And not one, but two Group leaders have suddenly resigned. Happy Days.



ON THE OUTSIDE

Christine Shawcroft

The eagle-eyed viewers who spotted the modern coffee cup on the table in the banqueting scene during *Game of Thrones* are apparently furious at the anachronism. What they seem to have forgotten is that the only reason they were watching a 'medieval' feast in the first place is because there was a camera crew, compete with moody lighting and the sound guy with the grey fluffy thing on a stick, recording the whole thing. Surely that's the most anachronistic of all? It always makes me laugh in these wilderness documentaries when the star confesses how cold, wet, lonely and scared of being attacked by bears he is - all of which is delivered as a monologue straight to camera. Yet people seem totally accepting of the artifice. All of which, of course, brings me to Nigel Farage. And Boris Johnson. And Jacob Rees ('but he's so polite!') Mogg. They have all constructed a totally false persona, designed to convince the public that they're harmless - in fact, that

they're really jolly good blokes that just want to be mates with the voting public. And if you actually want to give them your vote as well it's, 'oh, go on then, if you must. I'd really rather be having a pint / a trip on a zip wire / letting nanny change all the nappies.' Why don't people see through the artifice? I'm becoming seriously alarmed by the things that apparently rational people are willing to believe. Some people are so concerned about some world wide vaccination conspiracy, that they are gambling with their children's lives by refusing measles vaccinations. New York has had to bar schools and playgrounds to children without vaccination certificates. Lest you think that is unnecessary hysteria, let me tell you that a seven year old died from measles complications at a school near where I work just a couple of weeks ago. Then there are the climate change deniers. How many more floods and forest fires have there got to be before people realise that the fossil fuel companies are lying to

them, in order to keep making shed loads of money? I really don't understand the fossil fuel companies because they aren't in error, they know, as did the tobacco companies before them, that their products are lethal, but they keep telling the public that there's nothing to worry about. Now, I wouldn't say I was capitalism's biggest fan, but surely even multi national companies with their eyes fixed firmly on the bottom line can understand that they are facing extinction along with the rest of us? What good will their vast profits be to them then? I don't believe that people are stupid, far from it, but they have got to start looking beyond the simple answers pushed by the snake oil salesmen and start asking, 'What's in it for them?' Particularly at election times. If anyone tells you there are simple answers to complicated problems - there aren't. So remember when you walk into the voting booth - what do we say to the god of con artists? Not today.