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Briefing

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Jeremy vindicated!

General election now!



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Summertime fun

It's summertime, the living is easy. The days are long and light, the nights are hot and sweaty, and the thoughts of Labour activists quite naturally turn to - Annual Conference. True, it's not until the end of September, but delegates have now been elected and the business of deciding on resolutions to send is soon with us.

There seem to be different schools of thought concerning resolutions and what Conference is actually for. Some newer members, possibly those who joined in the 'Jeremy surge' of 2015, sometimes seem to think that it's a debating society, and that the important thing is to make sure there is full and open discussion of a range of topics.

Even in the olden days, there were members who took this view, and were enraged with the tactics of voting in the Contemporary Resolutions ballot. 'We must have a debate on Trident!' they would rage, whilst cynical old hacks like the members of the *Briefing* EB would reply, 'Er no, not if we're going to lose it. That just gives ammunition to Blair.'

Maybe some of us COH's are also having trouble with the concept of having a Leader who is on our side. We always saw Conference as an opportunity to try and pin the Leadership down on issues, or, better

yet, defeat them. Now we have to approach Conference as an exercise in supporting the Leader and defending him against attacks from the right.

In some ways, we are victims of our own success. Having fought for years against the restrictions put on topics for debate, with resolutions ruled out of order and a Conference padded out with videos, celebrity speakers and sofa discussions, the decision at last year's Conference to greatly increase the number of topics for debate was very welcome - and a double edged sword.

The right all over the country are trying to get resolutions to Conference calling for a second referendum (aided and abetted, it must be said, by elements of the left who should know better). Even worse, there are those, supposedly on the left, who are calling for extremely radical and uncoded pledges to be put in the next Manifesto.

As we are all aware, the media will take apart any Labour politician in a General Election who makes open-ended commitments. The genius of '*For the Many, Not the Few*' was that it was achievable and fully coded. For the left, Annual Conference is about supporting Jeremy Corbyn and helping him to win an election. No other reason.

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Foodbank Britain

Britain is one of the most unequal countries in the world... and it's getting worse. Five years ago, the 1,000 wealthiest Britons owned £519 billion – the equivalent of a third of Britain's gross domestic product.

Fast forward to today, which sees the Sunday Times rich list reporting that there are 151 billionaires in the UK owning £525 billion of wealth – up 9.2% on the previous year. This compares to 104 billionaires with £301 billion of combined wealth in 2014. At the same time more than 1.8 million people went to food banks in the past year.

Britain also makes headlines in Europe for the unequal way in which the wealth is distributed, with the five poorest regions in Northern Europe to be found here. However, inner London registers as the richest area in Northern Europe.

Incidentally, the five poorest regions: West Wales and the Valleys, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Lincolnshire, South Yorkshire and Tees Valley and Durham all voted overwhelmingly for Brexit, with Lincolnshire having the highest proportion of Leave voters in the country.

The two sides of the Brexit argument would of course disagree over these stats, with Leavers obviously blaming the EU for the grotesque inequalities, while Remainers would say that it is not the EU causing the inequality and that making the country poorer overall will hit the poorest hardest.

That's as maybe, the fact of the matter is that the Britain is a model of grotesque inequality. The referendum vote was but the most obvious sign of discontent at this situation. It was a call for a change in direction and for government to start addressing poverty and inequality.

Only a Jeremy Corbyn led Government can address the growing gap between rich and poor in Britain, says Paul Donovan, Redbridge councillor.

The austerity policies of first the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government, then since 2015, the Tories on their own, have helped increase inequality to these obscene levels. However, the gap between have and have nots has been growing with the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies dating back to the late 1970s.

The Labour governments from 1997 to 2010 did some disguised redistribution of wealth from rich to poor but nothing like enough to start bridging the gap. Poverty levels continued to grow.

There has been some recognition from all sides that this situation cannot continue. The sight of millions going to foodbanks, the growing number of homeless on the streets and children living in poverty concerns everyone. There should though also be concern in the board rooms of business, where many of the super rich dwell. The popular anger will be directed there first.

But there are other elements of self interest impacting on this group. So, if more and more wealth is flowing to a small number of individuals, who lock it away or shift it offshore, then the wheels of the economy are not being greased. Put simply, people need to be earning and spending wealth for the economy to keep operating.

These developments have been recognised by the right of the political spectrum, with the Conservative government becoming a late convert to the idea of a living wage and the shifting of tax bands to put more money in people's pockets.

Universal Basic Income is another idea that can be seen in this vein – a way to get more money into the economy.

What is required though is a truly radical Labour Government that will bring in policies devised to shift this inequality. The rich need to be taxed – including particularly those minimal tax paying corporations.

There needs to be a reduction in the working week to four days, as well as possibly the introduction of Universal Basic Income. Retirement ages should be lowered and the state pension increased. Anti-union laws must be repealed, with a real push for greater unionisation across the economy.

There also needs to be a mass environmentally sustainable council house building program to counter homelessness.

Maternity and paternity provision needs to be improved and the successful Sure start scheme of the previous Labour government reintroduced and built upon.

The alternative is to carry on until there is a mass uprising against ongoing polarisation between rich and poor.

This could well provide further fuel to the likes of Nigel Farage and his far right associates, as they scapegoat migrants in order to seize power.

A radical Jeremy Corbyn led Labour government can lead the way toward closing the inequality gap, making this country a better, happier place to live.

See: paulfdonovan.blogspot.com



Time to restore local democracy

Don't get me wrong. Some of my best friends are councillors. But things in local government have got to change, and change radically. Members' rights to choose their own candidates have to be fully restored, and the entire governance of councils needs to be overhauled by the next Labour government.

In 1926, the year of the General Strike, Labour stood 26 candidates in my area. Of these, 15 were manual workers, four were clerks, one was a bus conductor, two were "married women", one a "widow", and the professions were represented by two teachers (one man, one woman) and one optician. Many of these people worked 44-hour weeks, had little or no paid holiday, and weren't paid as councillors.

These days, many Labour groups consist of middle and senior managers, lawyers, a disproportionate number of landlords, and retired people.

Most are owner-occupiers, many are multiple property owners, few are renters and even fewer live in social housing. As Mandy Clare points out elsewhere in this issue, it is not enough to tick the boxes on gender and diversity.

We have to end the near-monopoly of the privileged and the self-interested, whose standard of living is well above the average of the areas they represent. We're all familiar, I'm sure, with disadvantaged BAME communities being "represented" by self-appointed community leaders and business people.

In order to do that, the trigger ballot system, which gives huge advantage to incumbents, must be abolished, and the ability of members to freely choose who they want to represent them restored. It is an open secret that in many areas in recent

Richard Price, Leyton and Wanstead CLP, sets out what needs to change on our councils.

years, local government selections were manipulated by Regional Directors with the assistance of Local Campaign Forum officers to ensure sitting councillors were re-selected. Some of the cheating was completely brazen, safe in the knowledge that CLPs and members had little chance of redress. The scandals in Enfield, Newham and Sandwell were just the tip of the iceberg.

Last year, the NEC decided to defer consideration of local government for a year. We have confidence that the Democracy Review will make positive proposals this year.

Much will depend on whether the trade union reps on the NEC support them, and it is essential that trade unionists lobby their leaderships to support the restoration of basic local democracy.

According to the Rule Book, members and local parties should have a role in developing manifestos and be consulted on major policy and financial issues.

We have to end the freemasonry where this is seen as the property of a small inner circle of councillors. The culture where backbenchers are expected, under threat of withdrawal of the whip, to vote for policies they have had no time to study, let alone debate, must end.

Both the 'strong leader' and 'executive mayor' models of council governance are broken. In the name of efficiency, vast amounts of power and patronage are vested in a single person, who can hire and fire, promote or demote, and who is almost impossible to remove within a four-year term.

We need to return to a committee system, and Group leaders should be elected by an electoral college that includes members and affiliates.

Independent oversight of ethical standards must be restored. In-house regulation by monitoring officers doubling as heads of legal (and often hired as mates of the leader) enables the worst councillors to get away with flagrant and sometimes illegal abuses, such as the failure to declare interests.

And while we're on the subject of interests, shouldn't members know in advance of candidates being selected what is their main source of income? I'm sure many of us are also aware of non-resident councillors, who claim to be living in the local government unit they represent, but may be living miles away, renting out their homes and failing to declare the interest.

And why are councillors only obliged to declare interests in their own borough when they may own half a dozen houses in a neighbouring borough? Of course, not all landlords are incapable of disinterested public service, but the probability is that they will not see affordable housing in the same light as the rest of us.

And in what other branch of the economy can the employees decide on their own pay rise? I'm told that a generation ago council leaders received around double what backbenchers got. In some boroughs we're now approaching differentials of five and six times. It's time to cleanse the Augean stables, comrades.



Lifting the veil on net wealth

The recent Labour Party report on *Land for the Many* is the most concrete evidence yet that the veil of silence drawn so successfully over the repository of 51% of net wealth in the United Kingdom is at last being lifted.

Land was originally written out of economic theory with the shift from classical to neo-classical economics in the late 19th century: instead of the three distinct classical factors of production, namely labour, capital and land, the last two were conflated.

This is a very unhappy marriage because there are irreconcilable differences between the respective characteristics and economic roles of land and capital, but it is a very convenient one for landowners when it comes to government policy-making, especially fiscal policy.

Even in classical economics, close reading of Adam Smith shows that, while his treatments of labour and capital are perfectly internally consistent, his treatment of land contains contradictions.

Cynics have suggested that he was obliged to obfuscate certain aspects of the real role of land because his sponsor

The Labour Land Campaign, a voluntary organisation working for land reform, welcomes the Labour Party's new report.

was the Duke of Buccleuch who was at that time (and still is today!) the biggest landowner in the country.

It would indeed be ironic if the father of economic science and free-market philosophy was nobbled by a vested interest when he was inventing the discipline.

This shift in economic theory paralleled a gradual shift in fiscal policy from feudal times when most state funding derived from taxes on land.

With property-owning restrictions on who could vote and sit in the increasingly powerful Parliament, the tax burden was steadily shifted onto labour (Income Tax) and other economically productive activities (taxes on sales and profits).

Our taxation system has been created by landowners and today, property taxes account for only a tiny part of government revenue.

From 1906, a new force emerged in parliamentary democracy that was to

become the Labour Party, the main economic plank of which was to shift taxation back onto land wealth.

In power, they passed the 1931 Finance Act which instigated a land value tax but, before this could be levied, a Tory-dominated administration took over, stopped the preliminary valuation process and revoked the Act.

All talk of taxing land wealth then disappeared from the discourse of the country's main socialist party until the 2017 election manifesto compiled under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn.

Anthony Molloy, Chair of the Labour Land Campaign, welcomes this report, "The subtitle—*Changing the way our fundamental asset is used, owned and governed*—bears witness to the commitment of the reinvigorated Labour party to repair the dysfunctional UK land market that has been engineered over centuries to benefit a few very rich citizens at the expense of the many."





Thanet summer kitchen

Is 'The Summer Kitchen' in Thanet happening again?

It is - and bigger and better than last year thanks to Sainsbury's sponsorship, huge support from K.C.C. councillors Karen Constantine and Barry Lewis, a grant from "Street Games", support from Henry Dimbleby and Leon and unique offerings from the gleaners, forest school, Thanet earth, and a huge number of other local organisation and people in Thanet.

It is too easy in a time of ever deepening austerity, after a winter of trying to find where and how to dry the washing, to feel like things will never get better.

There are a large number of children in Thanet who have been denied the opportunity to enjoy a rich assortment of opportunities and activities, who have not eaten a really healthy diet and whose families are struggling to stay out of debt.

The Summer Kitchen reminds everyone what prosperity, generosity, mutual respect, fun as a family and how important belonging to a community is.

Moving money between generations to pay the debts of a past generation is immoral. It abandons families and leaves children without the quality support they must have to come close to realising their potential.

There is a cohort now who have little reason to want to be law abiding or contribute to society in the future. They have had so little given to them they have little reason to feel they need to give back.

This year's summer kitchen is a rich collection of experiences, good but simple food so many more people can get involved in cooking and serving the meals, visitors who represent serious projects and concerns to kick

Kent's Sharon Goodyer, pictured with Chris Williamson, is working culinary miracles again this summer.

off discussion, healthy cooking and craft activities and inclusive, collaborative sport for all. It is so important that everyone has a stake in society that I am asking for quality experiences for everyone to be provided for free.

For example 50 14 +year olds will be offered a chance to enjoy being very active. This is important for their future so we have a responsibility to make sure it happens.

Your leisure will provide them with free membership and I am trying to find fit bits for 10 of them. As a community we need to bolster parental efforts to get children to eat more veg, be more active and get enough sleep!

I encourage volunteers to offer to share their own favourite past-times so we will be sewing something beautiful together and can learn how to hula hoop.

There will be lots of adults to play board games with, the children's centres will be providing sensible appropriate activities for younger children and there will be painting every day.

We will go gleaning each week from each site. This means families can go into the local countryside (coach and picnic provided for free), harvest a local crop, bring it back and cook and serve it - thus understanding more about local food.

I need some money to ensure we can feed everyone good healthy tasty food for free and to employ a skeleton staff so the whole thing is safe but after that Thanet does it for itself.

I want to be able to step back and encourage local parents to develop their skills and capability to run



events themselves. This year I hope the entertainment in the evenings will be organised by the community and I will be listening out for new ideas to trial.

We all need to improve our diets. Anyone can enjoy being creative in a group. Everyone benefits from being both a receiver as well as being a giver so The Summer Kitchen is for everyone. We have more in common than that which drives us apart.

We will be using "Dame Janet" school in Newington - one of the poorest parts of Ramsgate - and Drapers Mill school in Margate (near the large Millmeads Estate).

It will run from 2pm - 8pm each Monday, Wednesday and Friday starting July 29 for 5 weeks - if you are around Thanet, why not drop in and be part of this unique collaboration?



Twenty five years ago

"The best Prime Minister we never had" proclaimed the *Guardian* the day after Labour Party Leader John Smith died. Though two weeks earlier the same newspaper derided John Smith as it described him as "lacking in charisma". Death obviously improved him in their eyes.

At 8.05am on 13th May 1994, John Smith suffered a major heart attack and at 9.15am that same morning he was declared dead on arrival at St Bartholomew's Hospital. A stone's throw from his Barbican London residence.

But the story doesn't end there as that's where the intrigue begins. As confirmed by future Prime Minister Tony Blair in the 1996 documentary for BBC *Panorama*: "Oh, within 30 minutes of his death I was repeatedly called and asked if I would be Leader", all delivered while deploying his famous shiny grin.

On the same programme media guru, Machiavellian Peter, now Lord, Mandelson refused to comment on the election of the Labour Leader. Today Lord Mandelson briefs anyone who will listen, by his own admission, that "Every day I do a little something to undermine Corbyn as Leader".

Sarah Baxter, now deputy editor of the *Sunday Times*, then a journalist for the *Observer*, fresh from the *New Statesman*, wrote a 2000 word 'op-ed' piece for the *Standard* the morning of the Labour leader's demise titled 'Why Blair should be leader'.

Pat Edlin, Islington South CLP, looks back at a pivotal moment in Labour's history.

It emerged in the second edition that day, 12pm, on page 13. Now it is interesting to note several things about the placing and timing of this piece.

There is the deadline for any new material for the front page of 10am for the 12pm edition, please note 25 minutes after the public notification of John Smith's death and before his body was cold.

Sarah Baxter must have enjoyed a visionary outlook as well as a immeasurably fast typing speed to deliver a perfectly formed 2000 word 'op-ed' in less than half an hour, when very few facts were known.

You have to ask why a hack from the *Observer*, a liberal publication, wrote an 'op-ed' for the right-wing mouth piece. Who sanctioned the rushed placing of this ill-timed assertion that 'Blair should be leader'?

Some knew then, many know since that media guru Peter Mandelson brokered a deal on Westminster Bridge, saying to social democrat Gordon Brown that he would not be the best optic as leader to his preferred candidate Christian democrat Tony Blair.

A deal was struck at the Islington Upper Street restaurant Granita that Tony would lead and Gordon would follow him after two terms in office. So began a bitter battle over

who would rule from Number 10.

Tony Blair was elected Leader of the Labour Party that autumn. After an internal election battle that offered John Prescott (later Tony's Deputy Prime Minister) and Margaret Beckett as alternatives, Gordon Brown was agreed to be his 'Iron - End of Boom and Bust' Chancellor of the Exchequer.

But the selection of Tony Blair as leader was made much further back down the track. And some say before John Smith's death.

After eighteen years of what is called 'Tory misrule', euphoria at political change greeted Blair as he entered 10 Downing Street in May 1997.

Nine years and three victories on, whilst losing 5 million Labour votes in 2005, Tony Blair left office with no apologies for a war which was based on lies that will forever be his legacy - Iraq. One of his last comments as outgoing PM was "I did what I thought was right!"

However, all of us can say he got it wrong and over a million died for the vanity that replaced diplomacy with bombs.

'New Labour' was said by Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to be her greatest success. That all depends how you define success!



Walter Wolfgang 1923-2019

On Wednesday 29 May Walter Wolfgang, 95, died peacefully in hospital after a brief illness. A socialist and an internationalist, Walter was an unwavering opponent of war and nuclear weapons throughout his long life. An organiser of the first Aldermaston march, he was an active supporter of CND and a founding member of Labour CND. At the time of his death, Walter was a Vice President of both organisations and of Stop the War Coalition.

Born in Germany and sent to Britain by his parents in 1937 to escape the Hitler regime, Walter became a British citizen in 1948 and joined the Labour Party that same year. 'I realised I was joining a broad church', he told me, 'and didn't expect my views would always win out. But I had to engage in a process to get politics moving – and Labour was the agency.'

Walter believed the Attlee government was making a major mistake by lining up behind one of the two power blocs which emerged at the end of WWII. He campaigned throughout his life for Labour to adopt an independent foreign policy, based on peace and social justice. As a Labour candidate in the 1959 general election, he stood on a nuclear disarmament ticket and increased the local vote. And

Carol Turner, Vauxhall CLP and CND co-chair, remembers a dear comrade.

as a member of Labour's National Executive 2006-8, he used that platform too to promote anti-war and nuclear disarmament.

Walter was a very private person, and not all his comrades and friends knew he was a devout and practising Jew. He explained the relationship between his religious and political views to me thus:

'I believed there was more to life than that which is visible, and I came to understand the spiritual side of human existence through the Hebrew prophets. I was influenced by the idea that a society which doesn't care for the disadvantaged ultimately decays and began to articulate the notion that western civilisation had taken a wrong turn. I believe that western civilisation has yet to be realised.'

A new generation of labour movement and peace movement activists came across Walter for the first time in 2005, when he was evicted from Labour conference and detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act for heckling then Foreign Secretary



Jack Straw over the Iraq War. His own comments on the affair, illustrate another side of Walter: a modest man and seasoned observer of politics.

He said of the incident: 'I'm not very important and I'm certainly not a celebrity. But I have done a lot of things in my life that are important – considerably more so than getting thrown out of Labour Party conference, which isn't very important at all.'

Until the very end of his life, Walter Wolfgang used every platform he had as an opportunity to speak truth to power – opposing extraordinary rendition, supporting refugees and asylum seekers, calling out Israeli aggression against Palestinians and warning of the rise of the far right in Europe, as well as promoting nuclear disarmament and peace. And he never missed an opportunity to support his long-time friend Jeremy Corbyn whom he believed to be the best party leader – and Prime Minister – Labour has ever had.





Jeremy's tribute to Walter

I am sorry I cannot be with you today. I am attending the commemorations for D-Day in Normandy.

While I am there, I will be thinking about all those who suffered at the hands of Nazism and fascism, but especially Walter and his family, who were put through so much by that ideology of evil.

I first got to know Walter in the 1970s, through the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. I remember chairing meetings of the CND council. Every single council member would speak at length, all on the same topic.

When nobody could take any more, I would try and bring the meeting to a close. It was always at that point that Walter would raise his hand to make his contribution.

But you couldn't say 'no' to Walter. You knew that whatever he wanted

Unable to attend Walter Wolfgang's funeral, Jeremy Corbyn sent this tribute to his old friend.

to say, it would be important and interesting. We loved him for it.

I continued to work with Walter through CND, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, and the Campaign for Non-Alignment, in which Walter played a huge part.

I will be eternally grateful for all the support he gave me, particularly at the 2005 General Election, where he spent hours on end fundraising, and telephone canvassing for our campaign in Islington North.

And I will never forget him turning up at my house with a present in hand, the very first visitor after my eldest son Ben was born.

I was so proud to be able to pre-

sent him with a Labour Party Merit Award at our Annual Conference last year, where he delivered a televised video message to the conference, emphasising the importance of peace, justice and socialism.

He was an inspiring comrade, a brilliant mentor, and a wonderful friend. He is a huge loss to the international labour movement and the peace movement.

My wife Laura and I were among the last people to visit Walter in hospital before he died.

He said to me: 'Jeremy, we are going to win aren't we?' I said 'yes', and he smiled. And that is how I will remember him.

Narendra Mekanji - key pioneer

Reg Race, Labour MP for Wood Green (Narendra's CLP) until 1983 writes:

Sometimes it seems that nothing ever changes. But it does.

If you look back 40 years we find a political world where there were just 11 women Labour MPs, no ethnic minority MPs, no openly LGBT MPs, few people with disabilities in politics, and where the issues of hanging, abortion and birching were still being actively pursued by rabid Tories.

This was the world which Narendra engaged with as a key activist. He was a genuine pioneer – arguing for the rights of all black and ethnic minority people, supporting the campaigns of women, and arguing

strenuously against the very real fascists who inhabited the fringes of London politics and raised the temperature against anyone who looked and sounded different.

It was also a world that was changing rapidly. The Keynesian consensus was gone, abandoned by the Labour Government in 1976.

Thatcher was busy dismantling British industry, slashing benefits, preparing to destroy the trade unions which had kept some kind of balance between labour and capital, and readying the big bang liberalisation of the finance sector which prepared the way for increased inequality, desperate instability, and in the end the market crash of 2008.

That world, Narendra's world, was

the most challenging in Britain for generations.

That world was difficult, especially for people like Narendra and many others who were raising difficult questions about being heard – and being listened to. It is a tribute to him and his colleagues that we now have a vibrant and very different Labour Party, a Party that takes seriously the issues that he fought so hard to register.

There's still a very long way to go – but people like Narendra never gave up, never surrendered, looked to the future and won many battles.

We shall miss him. He was important.



A significant victory

Peterborough was never going to be easy, and I won't lie to you: after a mammoth 12-hour 'get-out-the-vote' session with 'team Leyton & Wanstead' I thought we'd lost, despite an impressive campaign. So my elation was even greater when I heard that Lisa Forbes had won for Labour with a slightly increased majority on a lower turnout.

Make no mistake, this was a very important byelection to win. Tory press and bookies alike thought a Brexit Party win was a done-deal. This would have meant more air-time for Farage, more encouragement for the far right, deeper splits in the Tories and the green light for the Corbyn-haters within our own ranks to launch another coup attempt.

There was a lot at stake, especially as the voters, after electing a Labour MP (Fiona Onasanya, majority just 608) in 2017, had seen her disgrace herself and end up in prison. Correctly, the Labour Party backed a successful recall petition to remove her as MP, signed by 28% of the electorate.

The election was a vindication of Labour's campaign strategy. Travelling around Peterborough I was surprised by how run-down much of the city seemed; it's clearly been hard-hit by Tory cuts. Focusing on austerity and the effects that has had on 'the many', regardless of whether they voted leave or remain, was the right thing to do.

Lisa Forbes was a strong local candidate, someone who supports the Corbyn project and is known as a campaigner. Dubbed 'Local Lisa' on leaflets, I met people who quoted this back to me on the doorstep.

The political terrain could not have been more challenging. Peterborough voted 61% to leave in the 2016 referendum. In May's Euro

Local Lisa saw off Nasty Nigel, says Tim Harris, Leyton and Wanstead CLP - with a little help from her friends.

elections 53% backed clear 'leave' parties, 29% backed those arguing for a second referendum, with just 17% supporting Labour. A relentless barrage of media stories presented a narrative was that this was going to be Farage's big Brexit breakthrough.

Some elements within Labour would have secretly – or not so secretly – delighted in a Labour loss, using it as a stick to beat the leadership's Brexit stance. They may sneer at what they describe as 'sitting on the fence' but Labour's attempt to appeal to leavers and remainers alike was validated on the day.

My team worked in a varied cross-section of the city, covering six road-groups during the course of the day. In the overwhelmingly BAME community around Clarence Street, backing for Labour was rock-solid and turnout was ultimately high. On the ex-council Welland estate in Dogsthorpe, support was not so strong, however. One doorstep conversation summed up a problem we have. One very friendly, elderly woman explained her 'manifesto' to me. She wanted more good-quality council houses, an end to the privatisation of the NHS and a government that took more notice of 'ordinary' people. The Tories? 'They're just interested in the rich.' Unfortunately, she'd already voted – and her vote had gone to the Brexit Party.

We then headed east, working the rural villages of Eye and Newborough. No rich pickings there, where the Tories traditionally pick up lots of support, but more interesting conversations, including a Labour

couple who weren't going to vote for us because we weren't campaigning hard enough against Brexit. I'm pretty sure I persuaded them, but there would have been others who weren't persuaded.

The result was a disaster for the Tories (-25%), a setback for the Brexit Party, which gained 29% of the vote but fell short of expectations, and it wasn't a spectacular success for the LibDems (+12%). A fall of 17% in the Labour vote (compared with 2017's spectacular result) is serious, but in the context of parties making 'leave!' or 'remain!' their main demands was not unexpected. It's interesting to note that compared with 2015, Labour's vote fell 4.7% and compared with 2010 it actually went up.

What conclusions can be drawn? First, if Labour had campaigned for a second referendum to the detriment of the basic issues facing voters – education, housing, crime and the environment – we would have been smashed. Second, getting boots on the ground can be crucial; there were more than 500 of us out on the day and without them we wouldn't have won.

The difficulty of reaching many working-class voters – who feel that politicians of all shades don't care about them – helped fuel the 'leave' vote in 2016 but runs much deeper than Europe. Labour must step up its campaign to present a vision of the kind of society we want to see, and we need to take it into every town and city across the country.



Standing firm against racism

At the beginning of June, Jewish Voice for Labour held its second and very well attended Annual General Meeting.

The need for JVL continues to be proven with the ongoing attacks on the Labour Party as it has shifted to the Left and is committed to a programme that is in the interests of "the many not the few". The Party is committed to social justice and to peace and that includes justice for Palestinians and freedom from Occupation.

The sea of Palestinian flags at the conference last year when the motion in support of Palestinian rights was debated has been interpreted by some as an example of antisemitism. JVL exists for many reasons but one is to emphasise the distinction between these two things.

We now have members in more than half the CLPs in the UK and this is an engaged membership, eg more than a quarter of our members attended or sent apologies, often very heartfelt ones.

We were surprised, for example, by the level of interest in our Officers' reports and our constitutional amendments, which consequently took more time than we had planned.

We also endorsed the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and called on the Labour Party to support this UN Convention in full.

We elected new members to the Committee and are pleased that now 3 of the 10 officers and 6 of the 8 additional Committee members are from outside London.

A major challenge is to have more time to be proactive and to spend less of our time reacting, responding and defending, but we do not expect that this will happen any time soon.

Leah Levane, Hastings CLP and JVL co-chair, gives details of the AGM of Jewish Voice for Labour.

We now have the Equalities and Human Rights Commission starting an Inquiry into how the Labour Party has handled complaints of antisemitism.

There are certainly criticisms to be made, but we suspect that this will not be about how good members have been subject to a witch hunt, enduring long suspensions without even knowing the nature of the charge.

We have letters going to members that are written in such a way that people can easily be trapped into "guilt" when there is none (see <https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/blog/warning-avoid-entrapment-by-labour-party-questionnaire/>)

The terms of reference are narrowly drawn and the EHRC say that they will not respond to submissions that fall beyond them. So the large number of submissions that we have from Jewish Labour Party members who feel absolutely comfortable inside the Party, falls outside that remit.

One very long standing Labour Party member and member of JVL was Walter Wolfgang who died a few days before the AGM.

In the usual Labour tradition, we stood for a minute's silence at the beginning of the meeting. We will continue to operate as he did, with commitment, dedication and a belief in the future.

As well as the important formal business of the AGM, we gave a substantial amount of time to a political discussion.

We discussed the current situation, both within the Labour Party and internationally, the concerns about

shifts to the right and the importance of having a Corbyn led Labour Government to start to move our society and our economy to operate in the interests of all and not for the richest 1%.

JVL's key role is defending the leadership, our own organisation and our members from malicious accusations of antisemitism as well as to stand firmly against racism in all its forms, which is being used, as so often, to divide and rule, while injustice continues and poverty and insecurity grow, despite the statistics proudly quoted by the lame duck Prime Minister.

The value that Labour Party members place on JVL was well expressed at the meeting, eg in my own report as one of the Co Chairs, I emphasised that whenever I speak at Labour Party meetings, in many different parts of the country, those attending express their gratitude for our existence, the work we do and especially, for the thoughtful articles and other postings on our website. For this, especial thanks are due to Richard Kuper who is mainly responsible.

"JVL is a Shining Beacon of Light in the Darkness. Absolutely brilliant work. Please convey our heartfelt thanks to all at JVL for speaking the truth with intelligence, compassion and bravery."

We will do all we can to deserve such praise, even though it is relentless and our resources are stretched and small. We have been able to garner support to address the issues that we, and the Labour Party, are facing.

UPHILL STRUGGLE

Kevin Flack



Rural economies

I'm indebted to Labour peer Baroness Stone for summing up what this column has tried to get across over the years – "Rural economies are not just like urban ones but with less people and more cows..."

Writing for *Labour Coast & Country* on the latest Lords report on the rural economy, she says "they are distinctive, providing not just livelihoods for rural dwellers but increasingly locations for business start-ups, often digitally enabled. Thriving rural economies are dependent on good and affordable housing and good transport. Too many rural kids have to leave their rural areas to get accommodation or to live somewhere they can access education. But the dash for housing, driven by government targets, mostly doesn't deliver affordability or supporting infrastructure, including transport and health services." Wise words.

International solidarity

West Suffolk Labour Party are to be credited with the support they gave to the recent meeting with the Cuba Solidarity Campaign in the County. International solidarity alive and well in rural Labour Parties.

Land for the Many

The publication by Labour of the excellent independent report "*Land for the Many: Changing the way our fundamental asset is used, owned and governed*" (also discussed on page 6 of this issue of *Briefing*) has gathered support in perhaps surprising quarters – a Motion in the Scottish Parliament welcoming the report by Green MSP Andy Wightman and signed by at least one SNP MSP.

The report has positive policies for both urban and rural areas and deserves widespread discussion across the Labour Party.

Food and climate crisis

The Landworkers' Alliance latest report, "*Food, Farming and the Climate Crisis*" points out that our food production system is responsible for 30% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions.

It explores a way forward, pointing out that, "Across the UK today thousands of small-scale farmers and foresters are successfully demonstrating that a range of tools – from alternative production models to innovative climate-friendly farm-

ing techniques and local supply chains are capable of not only reducing agriculture's carbon footprint – but also of mitigating the impact of historic emissions. We are showing how farmers and foresters can cool the planet by creating local supply chains, re-building community food systems, integrating forests, wetlands, deep pasture, and hedges into their land management systems."

Why Labour must stand in every seat

I bring you the story of Billingham, Martin and North Kyme Ward on North Kesteven District Council in Lincolnshire. A by election is about to be held as only one candidate stood (a Tory) for a two-member ward. So if Labour had just bothered to put up one candidate back in May, we would have gained a council seat – our only one on the council.

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.





We need to ta

Those of us who have recently campaigned on the doorstep in lower income wards can likely agree that we have reached a tipping point in terms of losing what remained of the trust and patience extended by the working class toward the Labour Party.

The party that we love and have been relieved to see come back to its socialist roots has traditionally represented working class interests first and foremost. This tipping point can only be partly explained by the perception of having been ignored by politicians regarding Brexit.

Whether applying to become a party employee or a candidate in local or parliamentary elections, there is a gulf between what is more readily available to middle class comrades and their working class counterparts. As a party, we struggle to even discuss the topic, and increasingly use phrases like “working people”, as if the problem will go away.

We have been socialised not to mention class in polite company. Party membership is predominantly middle class.

Analysis by Professor Tim Bale of Queen Mary College found that 77% of Labour members fall into category ABC1 (middle class), compared to a national average of 62%.

Even within a party committed to anti-austerity, raising the issue of class is usually met with middle class defensiveness, guilt or denial.

We’re told that work and education have changed. That true class divisions no longer exist. That we’re all working class now. That it’s divisive to talk about class. That class is self-defined. That nobody wants to identify as working class anymore. That class is too difficult to define. That a Corbyn-led government will sort all that out. That it’s a can of worms.

It’s time to discuss the elephant in the room, argues Cllr Mandy Clare, Eddisbury CLP.

That we should just talk about policy. Even among groups recognised as under-represented and subject to discrimination, including women, LGBTQ, BAME and people with disabilities, those who have advanced have been mainly middle class. However you cut the cake, there is still a layer missing.

The proportion of privately educated Labour MPs remains significantly above the 7% national average. One in five MPs who weren’t privately educated attended a grammar school. Private schooling is just the tip of the iceberg of what sets middle class students ahead of the pack in education and career prospects.

Private tutoring has become the norm for many middle class children in state schools. Every child apart from me that got accepted into the local grammar school had home tutoring, and I was one of only three working class kids in the school.

Channel 4 analysed MPs’ previous careers and found that well over half of all MPs had worked in politics, business, law, finance and accounting, while only 1.3% came from manual or engineering backgrounds.

Labour MPs came from a wider range of backgrounds but hardly any had worked in semi- or unskilled jobs, on insecure contracts, or managed with no savings or problem debt for any substantial portion of their life prior to becoming an MP.

Huge class divisions within politics skew policy and lead to a large section of the electorate feeling unrepresented. “They aren’t like me”, “what do they know about my life?”, “I’m never voting again” and “they don’t

really care” is what we are hearing on the doorstep in traditional Labour communities. The party can grasp this issue and control the narrative, or watch as it is taken over by others who don’t want the leadership to succeed.

The Blair era saw a steep drop in the proportion of working class MPs. A recent study by UCL found that this, combined with the rise of career politicians, shifted the Labour Party towards a more right-wing policy stance on welfare. The term “careerist” is underpinned by analysis of factors such as the language used in MP when promoting party policy.

The research examined the policy preferences of both groups within the Labour Party before and during Blair’s leadership. It shows that working class MPs – those with a manual labour background – were substantially more in favour of traditional welfare policies and policies that benefited working class communities than their careerist colleagues.

Career MPs – ones with a background in politics or a closely related profession – were more likely to adopt policies to attract swing voters. “Put bluntly”, the author says, “careerist MPs are much more likely to blow with the political winds”. This is not lost on many traditional Labour voters.

The background of selected PPCs has not altered very much over the last four years. The electorate, whether it supports Corbyn or not, is still substantially middle class, and that will be reflected in how policy is shaped and how much working class



Ik about class

voters trust us as a party. They need to recognise their own lives when they hear our voices speaking up as their representatives.

In the 2015 leadership contest, apart from Jeremy, none of the other candidates believed the membership or the public would support a more socialist agenda. Despite a hostile media, the exponential rise in party membership and the General Election proved them wrong.

It shouldn't be such a surprise. A quarter of adults in the UK have no savings, and, according to the consumer data company CACI, this proportion rises to 60% of those on incomes below £13,500.

Average house prices are well above £200,000 and repossessions increased by a third, year on year, during the final quarter of 2018. A large section of the working class is really struggling.

They recognise when the party is on their side, but also when we don't quite hit the mark. More working class candidates would give us the insight and experience to directly inform our policy direction to the public.

Daily stress and financial pressures are only the beginning when it comes to what holds back working class activists from becoming party representatives. A series of other unseen mechanisms, including the lack of the "right" connections, self-confidence and encouragement combine to keep all of the meaningful and visible roles within the preserve of the more financially secure, who often have networks and visibility on their side.

Better-off activists tend to get accolades because they are able to do more political "work", and so are more visible within their CLPs. Campaigning and attending events

don't come free. Greater leisure allows middle class activists more time to prepare for meetings and make the right impression.

We should recognise these factors and not make assumptions about people's suitability for a post based on their ability to "shine" or appear more dedicated.

If someone on a low income has a consistent and positive involvement, a strong allegiance to the values of the party and some understanding of how its structures work, that should be valued and supported for what it is. Consistency and quality should count, not just quantity.

Thatcher turned large parts of our industrial centres into wastelands. It had a devastating impact on working class identity, pride and opportunity. Instead of empowering the working class, the party under Blair turned its back.

The hope and belief that politicians could be other than self-serving fell away over a long period. The working class didn't imagine that our party abandoned them – it did. Brexit despondency and anger is the latest chapter in a long story.

Having a Corbyn-led middle class Labour team who promise to change things for The Many, great as that is, will not, on its own, be good enough. Middle class staffers may calculate that we can afford to lose working class votes, but we abandon them to their eternal distrust of politics, while trading on their name. If we do this, we do not deserve to win.

We need measures to ensure that we are monitoring party appointments and selection processes so that we urgently boost working class representation at every level, including senior and more visible ones.

We have many intelligent and committed working class activists within



our ranks. Promoting them would send a clear and positive message to the public.

Class cuts across every single policy area, and we need direct working class activist input into policy making. We need mentoring, training and funding programmes in place for working class candidates, and suitable publicity to encourage people to step forward.

It should be as acceptable to discuss class as it is to address any other area of under-representation. It's not personal and not about blame, any more than a BAME activist raising equalities issues means a dislike of non-BAME comrades.

It's about recognising and addressing barriers that hold people back unfairly. There is no legal protection against discrimination or under-representation on the basis of class. We, of all parties, need to break this taboo.

Working class under-representation was notably absent from the equalities section of the Democracy Review. We need to go beyond paying occasional lip service and set up a working group to gather evidence and set out urgent measures to address this glaring party oversight.



Warley members' voices heard

There were pretty extraordinary scenes at a special All Members Meeting to decide whether Warley CLP should move from a delegate structure to holding monthly All Members Meetings (AMM's). Warley MP John Spellar is a persistent critic of Jeremy Corbyn and the wider left

The final vote of 176-114 in favour gives some indication of the level of interest, and the extent of factional mobilisation. On that same evening, the Manchester Central CLP of another vocal Corbyn opponent, Lucy Powell, also voted to go AMM.

The speculation is that this is all about trigger ballots but i think it's more useful to view these votes as being about increasing democracy and the engagement of party members

I'm not familiar with the delegate structures in Manchester, but in Warley the structure was EC/GC with representation loaded to favour smaller branches giving them disproportionate representation. There were other concerns about the opaqueness of party affiliates

My own Abbey branch had submitted a hybrid AMM/ delegate motion

Steve Price, Warley CLP, reports on huge changes afoot. MP John Spellar seems far from amused.

which was correctly ruled out of order; the motion to move to AMM does have to be a straight choice. But we are aware that there are constituencies that operate a basic AMM but with variations to retain some delegate structures

The AMM motion was moved by Ahmed Bostan, a young visually impaired kashmiri member and recently elected councillor for my own ward.

He spoke very well, he spoke the language of Jeremy Corbyn and anti austerity, language rarely heard at a gathering of the Warley constituency. Comrade Spellar was noticeably not applauding.

Bostan was recently selected to contest the seat of suspended councillor and council leader Steve Eling. This has proved highly contentious. Indeed the whole process was controversial because the LCF has been suspended for a long time so that the 24 selections were carried out at regional level under the auspices of the NEC.

This is not a state of affairs that CLPD and the left would normally advocate but the situation that pertains in Sandwell is, by any definition quite exceptional

Complaints, suspensions and investigations have been going on since before Jeremy Corbyn became leader. And investigations are still ongoing, complaints unresolved.

It's tempting to view Sandwell as some sort of socialist nirvana! Labour have held control ever since its creation in 1974 and after the May elections we had 72 out of 72 seats. Although we now have our very own

'tinge' group consisting of a couple of disaffected Labour councillors. But the lesson from Sandwell is an old and familiar one; power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It's not a pretty picture...

Sandwell should be of more than passing interest to activists, given that its MPs are long time organiser of the hard right Mr Spellar, Adrian Bailey and....Tom Watson!!!!

Outsiders are particularly animated by any prospect of voting for an AMM in West Bromwich East, as Watson continues to undermine Corbyn at every opportunity. Indeed, the Chair of the CLP recently cancelled the GC meeting when it was suggested that a motion to convert to AMM might be put.

The secretary has informed delegates that the meeting has been cancelled because there was 'no urgent business' to discuss. Yet that means the CLP will not be able to elect delegates to Annual Conference.

A number of comrades have contacted me rather excitedly when they heard about the Warley AMM thinking there'd been some kind of hard left coup. Unfortunately that's rather wide of the mark. Frankly it is often difficult to discern who's the 'real' left and who's the right.

What is clear is that the 176 who voted to go AMM the other night want change. Our task on the left is to work to ensure that the change is in a pro Corbyn, anti austerity direction. We're not just looking to replace one dodgy clique with another one.





Edward McHugh honoured

A new headstone was unveiled at the grave of Edward McHugh in Flaybrick Memorial Gardens, Birkenhead on 29th June.

Irishman Edward McHugh (1853-1915) was a radical trade unionist, labour movement activist, social reformer and land rights organiser.

Rural poverty forced McHugh's family to emigrate from Co Tyrone to Glasgow where he witnessed urban destitution, particularly amongst the Irish who had fled the Great Famine of the 1840s and Scottish Highlanders affected by the Clearances.

McHugh backed Henry George who contended that the unequal distribution of land lay behind all social ills. McHugh's talents as a speaker and organiser saw him lead a Land League mission to the Scottish Highlands where he helped direct the nascent crofters' agitation along radical lines.

Mark Metcalf reports on Merseyside trade unionists honouring Edward McHugh.

McHugh's talents were then harnessed by the Trades Union movement. He and Richard McGhee established the National Union of Dock Labourers, leading bitter strikes in 1889 in Glasgow and in Liverpool in 1890, following which he settled in Birkenhead.

He spent the mid 1890s in New York City where he organised the American Longshoreman's Union and preached George's 'Single Tax Gospel'.

After his death in 1915, McHugh was buried at Flaybrick Memorial Gardens. The ceremony was attended by many people. McHugh's original headstone was destroyed by the German bombing of Merseyside in the Second World War.

An appeal for funds was successful following a fundraising campaign by Wirral Trades Council and support from many trade union branches. A ceremony took place to mark the unveiling with speakers at the event including Luke Agnew, Unite workplace rep at the Memorial Gardens, Sheila Coleman of the Hillsborough Justice Campaign, former docker & Merseyside TUC President Kevin Robinson, historian Andrew Newby, and a Henry George Foundation rep.

A booklet on Edward McHugh has been published by Unite and is now available. Download at: <https://mark-writcouk.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/edward-mchugh-booklet-1.pdf>





South Africa's economic crisis

The return of the ANC to political power in the May elections may be seen as a vote of confidence, despite it being seen by many as 'a party at war with itself'. However, its share of the vote fell from 62.4% in 2014 to 54%, with a low turn out.

230 seats in the National Assembly (a loss of 19) gives the ANC a clear majority but the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) gained 19. The EFF's propensity to disrupt proceedings will not make policy-making any easier. In some provinces, the ANC will be forced into negotiating deals with other parties.

The ANC claims to have created 1.5 million jobs but today 27% of the labour force is registered unemployed, including 54.7% of the youth. Job losses in mining and manufacturing are set to increase. For example, in platinum, Lonmin (of Marikana infamy) continues its 2017 policy of shedding 12,600 jobs over 3 years.

Low productivity and job losses in the gold fields have led to Ghana replacing SA as the largest gold producer on the continent. In the public sector ESKOM's electricity output is less than it was 10 years ago and its programme of job and power cuts goes ahead. SA Airways (SAA) and PetroSA are also in deep trouble and plan to continue cutting jobs. Investment of \$100billion to create jobs in manufacturing has been promised by some ANC spokespeople.

Economists widely agree that South Africa is experiencing an economic crisis as 'an endemic and enduring condition'. The President's declared faith in pursuing the established lodestar of the National Development Plan seems somewhat misplaced. In the first 3 months of this year GDP fell by 3.2% - the greatest fall since 2008.

Dot Lewis, Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP, examines President Cyril Ramaphosa's call for the new National Assembly to 'Grow South Africa together'.

"State capture" - corrupt practices to influence state bodies for individual gain - is often held at least partly responsible for the economic problems. On becoming President after Zuma was forced to resign, Ramaphosa set up the Judicial Commission of Enquiry into 'allegations of state capture, corruption and fraud in the public sector, including Organs of State' (Zondo Commission). Revelations of malpractices in ESKOM and SAA in particular have frequently made the news, and currently Zondo is investigating SAA.

Ramaphosa has met with the CEOs of 20 state enterprises to sort out "inadequate capitalisation, poor governance and political interference". In 2018 a committee of enquiry was appointed to investigate whether anyone in the Public Investment Corporation 'has used their position for personal gain'. Publication of its report keeps getting delayed.

Corruption is encouraged by underlying structures and processes. In South Africa, the electoral systems for both ANC officers and for national and provincial assemblies are receiving increasing criticism, with frequent accusations of horse-trading at all levels. Decisions to reform the systems have not been implemented. (see eg Khulu Mbatha: *Unmasked: why the ANC failed to govern*)

At a more fundamental level, in his forthcoming book *Fighting for the Dream* RW Johnson argues that the small black elite (a 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie') is not a class linked by

a common purpose. Hence competition and faction fighting take place in the pursuit of individual gains. A member of this elite may well hold shares (eg Ramaphosa in Lonmin and MacDonalds), or become CEO of a public enterprise such as those (frequently changed) in ESKOM and SAA, but economic power remains in the same hands as in apartheid days.

The top 10% owns 71% of the wealth, the bottom 60% owns 7%. (it was 50% / 8% a few years ago). From 1996 to 2015 the 'racial' gap in average earnings narrowed only slightly. As a proportion of 'white' earnings 'Indian/Asian' wages remained at 50%; 'coloured' earnings rose from 22% to 25%, 'black' from 18% to 23% of 'white' earnings. (apartheid labels persist.).

70% of 'whites' have access to medical care, but only 10% of 'blacks'. Inequality in access to education remains vast, and some rural areas and 'townships' (not 'suburbs'!) have no school at all. (economist Michael Roberts' blog). In March a minimum wage of R20 per hour was introduced, with trade union support. However, it has now emerged that a farm worker's rate is R 18, and a domestic worker's is R16.

The likelihood of Ramaphosa receiving the collaboration he asked for seems somewhat unlikely ('magical thinking' in Johnson's view) as divisions intensify and South Africa struggles in a world looking increasingly unstable. Declining rates of profit, low investment, unemployment and inequality seem all set to increase across global capitalism.



Year Zero for the French Left

The European elections in France may well cast a longer shadow than those in Britain. They confirm that support for the traditional parties of the centre left and centre right has collapsed, and have unleashed a crisis within the last significant force on the left. Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National (the new name of the Front National, although most people still use the old one) won the largest share of the vote, riding a wave of growing Euroscepticism, which has enormous significance because the Franco-German alliance is pivotal to the entire structure of the EU.

The elections were billed in the media as a for-or-against-Europe showdown between Emmanuel Macron's La République En Marche and Le Pen's RN. Le Pen junior has flirted with the idea of Frexit and leaving the Euro for a while. In 2014, her slogan was 'No to Brussels, yes to France'. This time round, the RN spoke of a staged return of national sovereignty. Two openly Frexit lists won just over 1.5% between them.

Although Le Pen's RN came first with 23.3%, just ahead of Macron's list (which included the centrist Democratic Movement) on 22.4%, this wasn't a bad result for Macron, who polled only slightly less than the 24% he won in the first round of the presidential election in 2017. It could have been much worse. For over six months, Macron's government has been locked in conflict with the *gilets jaunes*, and was forced to make humiliating concessions in December. As it is, the *gilets jaunes* protests, which continue every Saturday, are clearly in decline, and a *gilets jaunes* list won only 0.54%.

The irony is that, while both Macron's LREM and the *gilets jaunes* claim to be 'neither left nor

Storm clouds are building in the home of the revolution, warns Richard Price, Leyton and Wanstead CLP.

right', the effect has been to weaken the left and strengthen the hard right. If political debate is allowed to rotate around a for-or-against-Europe axis, the left will always lose, since it can neither endorse the neo-liberal elements of the 'European model', which have led to deep structural unemployment in France, particularly among the young, nor the nationalist alternative. Although there is no shortage of dog whistle anti-immigrant and islamophobic rhetoric in Le Pen's speeches, by no means all of the RN's voter base is directly motivated by racism. Macron is less dangerous politically than Le Pen, but his policies feed the 'left behind' resentment of large sections of France.

It was a catastrophic election for the Republicans, the main party of the centre right, which took just 8.5%. Previously known as the UMP, they dominated French politics between 1995 and 2012 under Chirac and Sarkozy. In 2017, their presidential candidate, François Fillon, was felled by a corruption scandal, and this time, with the Sarkozy election finance scandal still dragging through the courts, Patrick Balkany, a former Republican MP and mayor, has been charged with tax evasion. Since the election, Republican leader, Laurent Wauquiez, who had moved the party to the right, has resigned.

It was also a disaster for the left. The Socialist Party's collapse continues, with its joint list polling 6.2%. The Communist Party (PCF) proposed a joint list to Jean-Luc Mélenchon's *la France Insoumise*

(LFI, roughly 'Rebellious France') and Benoît Hamon's Socialist Party split, *Génération.s*, but nothing transpired. The high hopes of LFI were dashed, its 6.3% just under a third of Mélenchon's presidential vote. Its campaign wasn't helped by the defection of one of its regional councillors to Le Pen.

Mélenchon's message of 'building new European cooperation freed from the austerity treaties' didn't get through to voters. Hamon went chasing the youth vote and pulled in only 3.3%, while the PCF limped in on 2.5%. Throw in *Lutte Ouvrière's* 0.8%, and the combined centre left/left vote was 19% - the worst result for over a century.

Post-election, there have been complaints of a lack of internal democracy in LFI and accusations that Mélenchon acts as a 'dictator'. Prominent LFI member Clémentine Autain launched an attack on Mélenchon in *Le Monde*, signing an open letter with Communist MP Elsa Faucillon, supported by 1,000 activists and intellectuals, calling for a 'big bang' realignment of the left.

The big surprise was the Greens coming third on 13.5%. Historically not one of Europe's more left-wing green parties, it and clearly benefited from the disarray of the left.

And finally, enthusiasts for PR (dreaming no doubt of the ideal red-green coalition) would do well to ponder the special kind of insanity that results in 34 national lists in France. The system that seems to champion individual choice ends up undermining collective rights.



Brexit clouds Irish voting

The chaos over Brexit was to have ramifications for our European elections in Ireland.

The election in the North resulted in Sinn Fein (SF) and Alliance, both Remain parties, and the Brexit-supporting DUP being returned. The combined vote of the Remain parties at 57% mirrored the way the people of the North voted in the 2016 EU referendum. The Alliance Party had enjoyed a good local election and the European result, with it defeating the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), was icing on the cake.

There was an element of tactical voting involved in bolstering Alliance. There's been a collapse of the 'soft' Unionist party, the UUP, which has embarked on a course of being more DUP than the DUP. The only realistic political home for these, more secular, Unionists was the Alliance. Voting SDLP would be a step too far. It was therefore politically savvy for some Republicans to 'loan' their vote to Alliance to ensure the election of 2 Remain parties.

The elections in Midland NW was relatively straightforward with 1 Sinn Fein, 2 Fine Gael and a left independent being elected as predicted.

It was the elections in Dublin and Ireland South that were to prove much more interesting. Both these constituencies gained an extra seat on the re-allocation of the British representation. These seats are in 'cold storage' and can only be used once the Brits have exited.

Margaret Crowley reports from Dublin on the elections for the European Parliament in Ireland.

The only incumbent MEP standing in Dublin was Sinn Fein's Lynn Boylan, widely regarded as capable, hard working and solidly on the left. Then the unexpected happened: Clare Daly TD entered the race.

Daly was elected to the Dail in 2011 as a member of Socialist Alliance (Militant) though she later resigned. Her parliamentary performances are legendary. Even President Obama got the Daly treatment. Clare enjoyed support from across the political spectrum, hard left to liberal right. Lynn Boylan, though every bit as committed on the same issues, and a Republican, would find it hard to match. Sinn Fein were relying on the bedrock of their 'blue collar workers' to help even things out.

The turnout in Dublin plunged to 42.9%. Some of the boxes in strong working class areas reported as little as 15% participation. It was a different story in less disadvantaged areas. There was a notable presence of young voters and the more mature. But very few in the 30-45 age group. The result was Greens, Fine Gael and Clare Daly with Fianna Fail in the 4th seat.

Ireland South has 4 seats and 1 in cold storage and again a surprise candidate, Mick Wallace TD. This

contest is tight and we have a recount as very few votes separate Fine Gael in 4th, the Greens in 5th and Sinn Fein in 6th. The result won't be known for weeks.

Daly and Wallace did hurt Sinn Fein. There was a chance both SF and Clare could have been elected, but the soft liberals of the centre left preferred the centre right. Being Independent makes it easier to move on issues without the need to bring a party with you, and that can be hard, ask SF. They need to sharpen their message. Hopefully Lynn Boylan will make a swift return to front line politics.

Those most hurt by the crash and austerity are now enduring a chronic housing crisis. They will come out and vote on issues that affect them and theirs, but the scepticism of the late 20s to early 40s age group and the fragmentation of the left gave the centre right parties here easier victories than they deserved.

It was a good European election for Fine Gael and the Greens, not bad for Fianna Fail and great for the Independents and Alliance. Sinn Fein retained their seats in the North and Midlands NW and lost 1 in Dublin. (Ireland South is way too close).



The KEITH VENESS Column



Photo courtesy of Hackney Unison.

Boring subject this month – pensions and superannuation.

Except that it's not – it's a vital lifeline for millions of people and the difference between being vaguely comfortable and living in grinding poverty in your declining years.

It's also an area that trades unionists and socialists need to take a lot more seriously as it is really about deferred wages and salaries.

During my long years of working in Hackney Council, I was always berating fellow workers about joining the pension scheme. Many of them said they couldn't afford to, but I always replied that they couldn't afford not to.

We were part of the National Local Government Superannuation Scheme – a final salary scheme that both the employer and employee contributed towards that gave you an index-linked pension based on your final year's earnings.

What these folk thought they would live on in their old age always baffled me but I often got responses along the lines of, "I could get run over by a bus tomorrow" or, "They can't let you starve". As we now know, 'they' certainly can!

This issue has a certain topicality down here in the Garden of England as Kent County Council has scored another own-goal by being forced to admit it invested its workers' pension fund in a slice of the Mark Woodford portfolio.

When it got wind of the possible failure of this set-up and tried to withdraw its cash, the scheme stopped trading and FCA has had to step in.

The Council has been told it will get its money back in the next three weeks but we shall see... Our County Councillor 'Bolshy Barry' Lewis has

been interviewed by media locally, regionally and nationally and has been attacking the Tories' reckless use of workers' monies and has used the quote "casino capitalism" at least twenty times.

He has also been reminding everyone of Kent's Tories previous misadventure in investing large sums in Icelandic banks that crashed and burnt during the banking collapse ten years ago.

At one time pension schemes were largely autonomous but now the Government has a far more interventionist attitude towards them.

Gordon Brown was one of the worst offenders – ordering schemes to pay larger rises so the Government didn't have to during the banking collapse. Now Tory ministers regularly interfere in what can and can't be paid out.

This was also the area where Tory privatisation reared its ugly head during the 1980's when workers were generously given the right to opt out of company schemes and move the money into private pension pots.

Various senior managers in Hackney got franchises from assorted banks and insurance companies to go around persuading staff to switch.

I knew instinctively that this couldn't be a good deal – the banks don't match your contributions so how you be better off in a private scheme?

I incurred the wrath of these managers for torpedoing their sales – but as a senior union activist they probably hated me anyway so no real change there then!

More recently the Tories have again 'set the workers free' by allowing them to cash in their pensions pots by taking the lot as a lump sum.

Much was made about someone being allowed to waste their savings by buying a Lamborghini – presumably to have something smart to drive to the food bank in.

Of course, the reverse side of this is the gradual dismantling of the state pension. Rises are index-linked and no Government has had the bottle so far to try and sever this but sly attacks occur everywhere.

A previous issue of *Briefing* highlighted the plight of the WASPI women – the most blatant of hardships caused by raising the age of entitlement.

When Lloyd George bought in the first pensions in 1911, the expectation then was that most of us would be dead and gone by the age of 65 so the expense to the Exchequer would not be large.

Now, thanks to trades unions, the NHS and better understanding of diet etc., we persist in lingering on into our '70s, '80s and '90's, much to the disgust of the ruling class.

Lastly, does any else share my anger that old age pensions are now called 'benefits' by the DWP? They are not – we worked hard and paid our contributions for 40 or 50 years. They are entitlements or deferred earnings and should be called such!

Keith retired seven years ago and moved to Thanet after 32 years working in Hackney Council's housing - for 31 years of which he was a shop steward and activist in NUPE / UNISON.



Still standing in Athens

I was fortunate to join the ninth "Greece Solidarity Campaign" delegation to Athens. This included Labour councillors and M.E.P.s and assorted party activists. We were able to examine how Greece was emerging from the formal end of the 'Memorandum' (August 2018), managing the refugee situation, and how the wider community was faring. We arrived during an election period where Syriza has suffered defeats in both the European and local elections. We await the outcome of the National election on 7th July.

Syriza policies to support the most vulnerable communities have been successful. Securing free health care for everyone, developing a range of 'people first' policies including subsidies on rent and public transport, developing childcare and play spaces for children to enable women to work, creating an ability for refugees to claim citizenship after 5 years, and decreases in VAT and social security contributions, reducing costs for people and freeing up more money for the daily essentials. The Parliament has also become more open to the people too. The most vulnerable people have been

CLlr Karen Constantine, Labour KCC member for Ramsgate, reports on the recent delegation to Athens.

deliberately targeted for extra support to keep the community 'standing up'. Greek Solidarity for all has prevailed. Strong fiscal policies that put people first have worked and have been popular. But it remains to be seen if the improvements implemented by the left wing Syriza party have filtered through to the all the workers or appeal sufficiently to the middle classes to secure them another term of Government. Syriza simply haven't had a long enough term of office to make all the progress they want to make. Coupled with this is the fact that the conservative New Democracy Party have used the mainstream media to great effect to blame Syriza for all the failings in Greece going back 45 years. Speaking with Costa Douzinas MP, he explained that grassroots social media had been extremely powerful in offering counter arguments and evidence.

Concerns about the extreme right

wing Golden Dawn continue, even though they have seen a significant decrease of vote share from 9.3% to 4% of the vote. Worries are that the public narrative is pulled further to the right, is made more 'mainstream' and achieves a veneer of acceptability. This makes a left wing perspective of socialism seem more 'alien'.

Speaking with Greek comrades about the situation in the U.K, we were given a clear message for and to the U.K. and European leftists to be progressive together for the greater social good. This was a clear 'policy', from Syriza. In order to have a progressive, social, citizen focused EU we need to stand together across national boundaries - as left progressives. Another Europe is possible, one that prioritises the social agenda and gives supremacy to the inalienable human rights of the individual and to the power collectivism and solidarity. What part the U.K. can play in that remains to be seen.



The Greek Solidarity Campaign would welcome more members - you can join via greesolidarity.org and they are keen to attract more people to visit and see at "first hand".

If you want to help in a practical way you could donate to Refugee Legal Support Athens, RLS-Athens. This small underfunded charity that works to ensure unaccompanied refugee children are reunited with their families right across the EU.

<https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/fundraiser-display/showROFundraiserPage?userUrl=RefugeeLegalSupportAthens&pageUrl=2>



Voice for the disenfranchised

It was distressing to learn about the death in April of Stephen Smith after a year-long fight to regain his disability benefits. His tragic case exposed the callousness and brutality of the benefits system under the Conservative government and in many ways mirrors the narrative of Ken Loach's seminal film, *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), which was a powerful indictment of how claimants are treated in modern Britain.

Together with screenplay writer, Paul Laverty, Ken Loach undertook extensive field research into the realities of those seeking disability benefits and subsequently revealed stories of people who, unable to work and in real need, were treated harshly and unfairly during the claiming process. During post-production screenings, Loach and Laverty travelled around the country, offering local screenings and post-film discussions of the issues raised in the film, during which participants would often stand up and reveal that they had undergone similar experiences.

We should not underestimate the power of films such as *I, Daniel Blake* in dispelling the myths of neo-liberal ideology, fostered by government that places the blame on the poor and unemployed for their plight. This could account for the apparent decrease in social empathy in our society, giving claim to the belief that people sink through their own shortcomings.

A recently published pamphlet by the PCS Union outlined the decline in public support for social security and those who receive it. This highlights the political value and social importance of film in raising public awareness and influencing national discourse. *I, Daniel Blake*, with its emo-

Lesley Rodin, Great Yarmouth CLP, applauds the work of Ken Loach in exposing the harsh realities of life in modern Britain.

tionally compelling and moving narrative, follows the trajectory of a man, aged 59 who after a serious heart attack has been ordered not to work by his doctor and the heartless way he is treated during his struggle to reclaim his disability allowance.

Ken Loach's filmmaking career, spanning more than half a century, has clearly been driven by his socialist principles. His filmography has followed a political trajectory, driven by the desire to bring to the screen films which stand for basic morality and social justice, giving a voice to the disenfranchised and those living on the margins of society or under difficult circumstances. Growing up in Britain in the 1960s, I remember the social impact of one of Loach's early works, *Cathy Come Home* (1966), depicting a young family's slide into homelessness and poverty, triggered by a work-related injury. As with *I, Daniel Blake*, *Cathy Come Home* demonstrated the power of film to raise awareness, and public outrage regarding Britain's housing crisis, giving a huge boost to the recently established housing charity, Shelter.

Later films, such as *Riff Raff* (1990), and *Raining Stones* (1993), still resonate today, with their depiction of the devastating impact of Thatcherite economic policy on the lives of ordinary working-class individuals and their families, and how lives are constrained by socio-economic circumstances, such as chronic unemployment and the subsequent hardship and pressures on family life.

On its release, *I, Daniel Blake* received huge media exposure and generated an ongoing conversation. When interviewed on what motivated him to make the film, Loach said that he wanted to bring into the national discourse the realities of negotiating a benefits system that is imposed with conscious cruelty and how lives are thrown into chaos as a result. The national response to the film was enormous and was even raised in Parliament.

Undoubtedly, *I, Daniel Blake* demonstrated the power of film to expose societal ills, giving a voice to the more vulnerable members of our society, such as those affected by harsh changes to the welfare system.

This voice is needed more than ever with the publication on May 22nd of Philip Alston's final report, commissioned by the UN, which states that the UK's welfare safety net has been deliberately removed and replaced by a harsh and uncaring ethos.

I am looking forward to the release later this year of Ken Loach's new film, *Sorry We Missed You*, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May. Focusing on the gig economy and a family struggling to survive on zero-hours contracts in modern-day Britain, it promises to offer another opportunity for film to raise important issues and to get people talking about what really matters and the harsh realities for so many living in modern-day Britain. Thank you, Ken Loach.



Hope amid despair

This is a wonderful addition to the works of Victor Serge in English. Although excerpts from the *Notebooks* were first published in Jean-Paul Sartre's review *Les Temps modernes* in 1949, their only prior appearance in English was a selection on-line. The discovery in 2010 of previously unknown Serge writings in Mexico, including diaries for 1941-43 and 1946, has led to this edition, which is as definitive a version as we are likely to get.

Victor Serge is the 20th century socialist I most respect, as an activist, prolific political author, novelist and poet. The son of impoverished Russian exiles, he took part in the Belgian socialist youth movement in his mid-teens. An anarchist in pre-First World War Paris, he suffered five years' harsh imprisonment for defending in print members of the Bonnot Gang. Released in 1917, he witnessed the abortive syndicalist uprising in Barcelona that year. Attempting to join the Russian revolution, he was again jailed in France, before reaching Petrograd in 1919.

After working for the Comintern in Germany and Austria, he was jailed and subsequently exiled to Central Asia by Stalin. As a result of a campaign by French intellectuals, he was stripped of his Soviet citizenship and miraculously allowed abroad in 1936, just before the Great Purges took place. Despite his great respect for Trotsky, he was alienated from the Trotskyist movement, which he considered sectarian.

Forced to flee southwards from Paris by the Nazi victory in 1940, he endured a precarious existence in Marseille before escaping by boat in March 1941. Imprisoned by Vichy authorities in Martinique, he managed to get to the Dominican Republic, from where he finally man-

Richard Price, Leyton and Wansted CLP, reviews *Victor Serge Notebooks 1936-1947*, New York Review Books, £17.99

aged to secure a visa to Mexico – almost the only country in the world accepting left wing political refugees.

Although there are scattered entries for 1936-1941, over three quarters of the *Notebooks* cover Serge's final exile right up to his death in 1947, dovetailing with his classic *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, which end where the main body of the *Notebooks* begin. Life in Mexico was far from easy. Separated from his wife and child for an extended period, he writes that, despite being surrounded by the supposed cream of the European intelligentsia: "I am at present completely isolated, materially defeated, with no money, no platform, no party, no support."

He was almost completely prevented from publishing – and thereby from earning a living – by Soviet pressure, thuggery on the part of the Mexican Communist Party and the cowardice of intellectuals, who would assure him of their sympathy while closing the door in his face. Although he tried to rally a broad front of "anti-totalitarian" socialists, all too often he found them clinging to yesterday's platitudes and relations between them dominated by sectarian posturing: "Distant religions that are far apart and totally different can be indulgent towards each other, but sects of the same religion must hate each other: family hatreds, competition for the possession of the same truth." He reflects sadly that in the entire world, apart from himself and Natalia Trotsky, "there is no one left who knows what the Russian Revolution was in reality, what the

Bolsheviks were".

One by one, Serge receives word that past friends, comrades and acquaintances have been murdered, executed, committed suicide or died in mysterious circumstances at the hands of the Nazis and Stalin. Yet, despite everything, he remains full of hope for the future of Europe and of socialism. When not trying to see through the fog of battle across the Atlantic, he writes in his beautiful poetic style of pre-Columbian art and archaeology, the life of poor Mexicans and the dazzling scenery.

Not all Serge's anticipations of the future shape of the world would prove accurate. He continued to believe, even after Stalingrad, that Germany and the Soviet Union would reach some kind of accommodation, and generally underestimated the potential for Western capitalism to recover. But some of his predictions proved startlingly accurate – that Stalin would seize a large buffer zone in Central Europe; that the United States would take responsibility for reconstructing Western Europe; that Japanese resistance would be long and stubborn; and that despite huge damage, German industry could quickly recover.

The translation of Serge's style is excellent throughout, although an index would have been very useful. As it is, there is a glossary of names but some entries are not very informative. For those not previously acquainted with Serge, his *Memoirs* would be a better starting place. For those who do know his work, this is a very valuable resource.



Paving the way

This second edition of an excellent book contains eleven walks, none too strenuous, each beautifully illustrated with a map and guide, around sites where radicals fought, successfully and not, to create a democratic, poverty ridden, classless society of equals.

The walks cover the areas around Clerkenwell Green, Bow, Spitalfields, Bloomsbury, Battersea, Cable Street/Long Lane, Bermondsey, Westminster, Poplar, Fleet Street and Bethnal Green/Shoreditch.

The latter two are new walks and I was particularly drawn to the latter as it is an area I know reasonably well from living in east London between 1988 to 2000. Fighting for decent, affordable housing has a long tradition in Bethnal Green and Shoreditch. There was no legislation governing the standard or quantity of housing for the working classes until the 1850s and even then new laws only laid down stipulations about sanitation standards in lodging or 'doss-houses'.

When bread riots broke out in 1861 the author John Hollingshead wrote a series of articles focusing on living conditions in which dozens of families were crushed into dilapidated accommodation. Almost three decades later, Bethnal Green's medical officer, George Paddock Bate, estimated that 45% of houses could not be made fit for human habitation.

In the 1880s political reformers created the London Municipal Reform League and their efforts bore fruit when the London County Council (LCC) was set up in 1889 and the following year a Housing Act 'empowered a progressive alliance of LCC liberals, labourites and socialists to embark on council-housing projects.' Slums were cleared and, as new buildings were con-

Mark Metcalf reviews *Rebel Footprints - a Guide to uncovering London's Radical History* by David Rosenberg, Pluto Press.

structed, a new group was formed in the LCC architects' department, the Housing of the Working Classes Branch. Architectural means were used to change lives. Many of these houses still exist. Some of those who benefitted were immigrant Jews, many artisans, who faced discrimination in seeking employment and private housing to rent.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Jews formed 50% of tenants on the Boundary Estate and many children had very happy memories of their childhood. In the 1930s the Communist Party helped create a tenants league that successfully won a maximum scale of rents, official recognition of the Tenants' Association and an understanding that necessary repairs would be carried out on a regular basis. Tenants fought off an attempt by Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to distort their activities.

The walk for this chapter starts at St Leonard's Church, Shoreditch High Street. It contains ten distinct landmarks including Brick Lane and Columbia Road flower market.

My favourite chapter is *Coming in from the Cold: Immigrant Agitators and Radicals in Spitalfields*. This walk includes Whitechapel Art Gallery that, when it opened in 1892, became known as the 'People's University of the East End', Angel Alley, home of the anarchist Freedom Bookshop, now over 130 years old, and Wentworth Street, home of Sarah Wesker who led strikes in many east London trouser factories throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

The book also details many plaques and, as the organiser of the Unite Rebel Road project <https://markwrite.co.uk/rebel-road/> I am aware that the number of plaques on it from London is a lot less than should be the case.

As such, if anyone can get me photos of those such as rebellious MP Robert Waithman in Dorset Rise in Farringdon, Liberal MP Dadabhai Naoroji, one of the founders of the Indian National Congress, in Roseberry Avenue near Finsbury Old Town Hall or of Bertrand Russell in Bury Place near to Bloomsbury Way that would be appreciated.

The final paragraph in the book, which contains a general appeal for more public illustrations to highlight London's rebellious past, is correct when it states: "London remains a vibrant and rebellious city, and we should honour those who had the courage, conviction and determination to blaze the trail."

Time to get some walking shoes out, keep fit and educate yourself at the same time. Enjoy.

To stay in touch with Mark's writings see his blog: <http://writemark.blogspot.com/>

Stop press:

Thursday 17th October, 6pm
Unite HQ, Theobald's Road, Holborn WC1.

First meeting to organise to erect a plaque and mount an exhibition to remember the life of Micky Fenn, docker, trade unionist, socialist and anti-fascist.



Politics of classical music

This month marks the beginning of the annual Proms season, which carries on throughout the summer until the patriotic flag-waving last night on 14th September. Henry Wood, who founded the Proms in 1895, saw his task as educating a middle class public. "I am going to run nightly concerts and train the public by easy stages. Popular at first, gradually raising the standard until I have created a public for classical and modern music."

Wood certainly increased access to classical music, promoting cheaper tickets and premiering many new works. At the same time the classical concert developed a series of rituals – a dress code, the elaborate bowing, the calibrated applause for conductor, soloist and leader of the orchestra, permission to cough politely but not to applaud between movements, etc. Composers, conductors and orchestras were overwhelmingly male. If "raising the standard" was about including more middle class consumers, it was also about excluding the working class.

Critics developed the theory that there were two types of culture: high culture for the educated minority, and light entertainment for the masses. This compartmentalised world only began to break down in the 1960s, by which time it was apparent that there were jazz and rock musicians who were not only as gifted as their classical counterparts, but who could improvise too. In the last 20 years there have been efforts to widen the repertoire, and women conductors are no longer a rare species, even if audiences remain overwhelmingly white and middle class.

At the time the Proms were launched, Britain was labouring under a deep sense of cultural inferiority. Britain was, the German critic Oscar Schmitz wrote sniffily in 1904,

All flag waving and patriotism? Think again, argues Michael Barnes.

"a country without music". In fact, this had already begun to change with the premier of Elgar's *Enigma Variations* in 1899. The gifted generation that followed included Frederick Delius, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, Frank Bridge and Arnold Bax. Pastoralism was the dominant trend, with the countryside rather than Britain's rapidly expanding cities providing the backdrop.

Vaughan Williams is best known for works such as *In the Fen Country*, *The Lark Ascending* and the *Pastoral Symphony*; George Butterworth for *The Banks of Green Willow*; Delius for *Brigg Fair*. Ivor Gurney wrote *A Gloucestershire Rhapsody* and Holst *A Somerset Rhapsody*. Despite writing a tone poem called *Tintagel*, Bax was more sceptical and remarked, "You should make a point of trying every experience once, excepting incest and folk-dancing."

From this you might assume that British classical music was dominated by a group of late Romantic, backward-looking nationalists. In fact, the opposite was true. Both Holst and his friend Vaughan Williams were influenced by William Morris and attended meetings of the Hammersmith Socialist Society at Morris's home. Holst hated the patriotic hymn *I Vow to Thee my Country*, which used the tune of "Jupiter" from his *Planets Suite*. From 1917-25, he lived in Thaxted in Essex, and was friends with its turbulent priest Conrad Noel. Noel flew the red flag and the Irish tricolour from his church's steeple, and once attached a notice to the church door announcing "prayers at noon for

the victims of imperial aggression".

Aged 41, Vaughan Williams volunteered as a private in the Royal Army Medical Corps, serving as an ambulance driver and stretcher bearer in northern France and Salonika. In his eighties, he wrote that "ever since I had a vote I have voted Radical or Labour except once".

Meanwhile, Arnold Bax, who had lived in Dublin before the First World War and moved in Republican circles, was appalled by the execution of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising, and indirectly referenced them in two of his works. George Butterworth died at the Somme; Ivor Gurney was wounded and suffered from severe PTSD for the rest of his life; other promising young composers died in action.

Frank Bridge, who taught Benjamin Britten, had deeply held pacifist convictions. Britten registered as a conscientious objector in the Second World War, and gave concerts for concentration camp survivors. The son of a suffragette, Michael Tippett joined the Communist Party in 1935 with the novel idea—in the midst of the purges!—of converting it to Trotskyism. Malcolm Arnold also registered as a conscientious objector, and among his large output was a *Peterloo Overture*, commissioned by the TUC. Of course, there are works in the classical repertoire that were allied to monarchy and empire. Many of the composers mentioned mellowed in later life, aided no doubt by the sprinkling of knighthoods, but there is also much that the left should reclaim.



Q & A

Q: How many Tory leadership candidates does it take to formulate a national drugs strategy?

A: Seven to sit round the table discussing their personal experiences and one in the toilets to do the practical research.

Q: How was Michael Gove punished when he was at public school?

A: He was kept in after 4 o'clock to do some lines.

Q: What's the difference between state and public school pupils?

A: State school pupils have to buy their drugs outside the school gates.

Q: Which countries do the Tories have high hopes of doing early free trade deals with?

A: Bolivia and Colombia.

Just an Englishman who's a dork

Don't you just love it when rock stars like Bono with a carbon footprint bigger than Big Foot lecture the rest of us on the need to protect the environment?

Now there's rainforest saviour Sting and his bestie Shaggy advertising the new Fiat 500 to the ditty 'Just One Lifetime'.

Note to self: climate emergency – must buy new family-sized car, big enough to have

tantric sex in. Boombastic!

Forgiving and forgetting

Chuka Umunna 2017: "The Liberal Democrats are trying to bury their recent past as the enablers of Tory austerity, but working people in this country will not forget or forgive the damage they did in government."

Chuka Umunna 2019: Anyone got a big shovel I can borrow?

No urgent business

As the winds of change howl through the West Midlands Labour Party, a desperate rear guard action is being fought in West Bromwich East.

After neighbouring CLP Warley voted to go over to AMM (see report on P 16) in order to democratise the CLP, panic broke out in WBE. Despite the fact that the deadline for electing Conference delegates is upon us, the GC has been cancelled on the grounds that there is 'no urgent business' to discuss.

Rumours of an attempt to convert the GC to AMM were swirling around, but *Briefing* can assure everyone that, of course, that couldn't have been the reason for cancelling the meeting. Nor could it possibly have anything to do with the fact that the Chair of the CLP is Simon Hackett, who works as

a Parliamentary researcher for well-beloved local MP, Tom Watson.

Twitter twits

The geniuses who run the *Daily Express* decided a couple of weeks ago to run a Twitter poll, asking readers to vote for their preferred next Prime Minister. No prizes for guessing who the *Express* wanted to come top.

They included three names, basically Boris and two also-rans. Now comes the brilliant bit. In case any readers wanted to vote for some other no-hoper, they included a box for 'Other'.

Over 20,000 votes later, Boris had indeed got a respectable number of votes. But there was also a huge number in the 'Other' box.

And the name vastly outnumbering anyone else in the 'Other' section? Jeremy Corbyn.

Briefing can only hope that the right wing hack responsible for this cock up (or great victory, looking at it from our point of view) has been allowed to clear his desk and slink away, not put up against a wall and shot.





ON THE OUTSIDE

Christine Shawcroft

In the light of the revelations which emerged during the Tory leadership contest, I feel I owe it to my regular reader to confess that I, too, have taken illegal drugs. When I was about 13 I used to smoke cigarettes.

Well, I say smoke, I basically used to stand around posing, fag in hand, during the social highlight of my week - the disco held in the Boys Brigade hut in Warsop. I thought it made me look very grown up and sophisticated. Eventually I realised I just looked like a silly girl holding a cigarette, so I stopped.

When I was at Uni I was pressured to try all sorts of rubbish, mainly by overgrown adolescents who said things like, 'Wow, man, try this, it makes you feel like you're standing on a high mountain.' I wasn't remotely tempted, mainly because I've never been able to trust anyone who says, 'Wow, man.' In fact, a strong case can be made for having them put up against a wall and shot. So I've never actually found out what you would have to take to make you feel like you're standing

on a high mountain, unless of course you go and stand on a high mountain. That would definitely work.

Also, I don't know what kind of hallucinogen you would have to have ingested to make you think that resolutions calling for a second referendum should be sent to Annual Conference. This seems to be a bit of a 'thing' at the moment.

The reasoning seems to go like this: only the Tories can legislate for a second referendum, therefore we should demand Jeremy Corbyn calls one and complain loudly when he can't deliver. Even if the Tories are compelled by Parliamentary deadlock to hold some kind of confirmatory vote, the ballot paper would offer a choice between the Tory deal and no deal at all. There is absolutely no way that they would ever allow 'Remain' onto that ballot - so let's demand that Jeremy Corbyn puts 'Remain' to another national vote, and complain loudly when he can't deliver.

Furthermore, not only would a majority of the Tories not countenance another refer-

endum, whatever name it goes under, a majority of the PLP would never agree to it either, nor is there any kind of Parliamentary majority. This has been tested several times, but we should still demand that it becomes Labour Party policy, not forgetting to slag Jeremy off when he can't deliver.

Lastly, it's clear that coming out strongly for Remain / having a second Referendum would lose us a General Election, as it would have lost us Peterborough. Maybe the Right are smoking something, the potency of which was undreamt of by my old Uni acquaintances.

Tory leadership candidates have pledged to take Britain out of the EU by 31st October. Annual Conference is at the end of September. So any policy passed will hold for about five weeks before it becomes totally irrelevant.

Remember that when you get to Conference, and when the Resolutions come up on supporting Remain and holding a second Referendum - don't inhale.