

# THE SOCIALIST CORRESPONDENT

ISSN 1758-5708

£3

## The General Election Lessons for Labour

### BREXIT

### Labour party & the working class

### Nationalism in Scotland

After the general election - the  
fight for Labour **P4**

General election analysis from  
across the UK **P6 - 15**

Middle East faces down  
the West **P16**

France - working class fight on  
the streets **P20**

Latin America - a continent fights  
neo-liberalism **P23**

Winning the Green New Deal **P29**

# CONTENTS

## 4 After the Election - the fight for Labour

■ Alex Davidson

## 8 North & Midlands have a second referendum

■ Peter Latham

## 10 SNP dominates Scotland again

■ Frieda Park

## 12/13 London & the South - Little change

■ Brian Durrans

## 14 Northern Ireland – DUP & Sinn Fein lose votes

■ Ernest Walker

## 15 Wales - Brexit lets in Tories

■ Frieda Park

## 16 Middle East faces down the West

■ Simon Korner

## 20 France – working class fights on the streets

■ Jean Auld

## 23 Latin America – a continent fights neo-liberalism

■ Dan Morgan

## 27 No to war, no to NATO!

■ Pat Turnbull

## 29 Winning the Green New Deal

■ Greg Kaser

## 33 Where now for the Green Industrial Revolution?

■ Brian Durrans

## REVIEW

## 35 Treason: Rebel Warriors and Internationalist Traitors

■ Brian Durrans

**Discussion, debate and author's opinions** - To encourage the broadest possible discussion and debate around the aims of exposing capitalism and promoting socialism, we hope our readers appreciate that not all opinions expressed by individual authors are necessarily those of The Socialist Correspondent.

**Pictures** - Unless otherwise stated all pictures are courtesy of Commons/Wikimedia. Some of these will be attributed to an individual photographer. This does not mean that these individuals agree with the opinions expressed by individual authors of The Socialist Correspondent.

**Further information** - <http://commons.wikimedia.org>

# COMMENTARY

To contact The Editor of The Socialist Correspondent

[editor@thesocialistcorrespondent.org.uk](mailto:editor@thesocialistcorrespondent.org.uk)

[www.thesocialistcorrespondent.org.uk](http://www.thesocialistcorrespondent.org.uk)

It was the Brexit election and Labour could not escape this. In After the Election - the fight for Labour, Alex Davidson sets out how Jeremy Corbyn was increasingly pressured by the Remain majority in the party to abandon its commitment to respect the result of the referendum, a principled policy which had served it well in the 2017 election. This shattered belief and trust in Leave voting areas in the north and midlands of England and in Wales. Although there were other factors in Labour's failure, the evidence is clear from the seats that were lost, that its central problem was failing to respect the Leave vote.

Our correspondents report on the very different character that the election took across the country.

In the north of England, the midlands and Wales working class Leave voters deserted Labour as it had deserted them.

In Remain voting Scotland Labour lost all the seats that it had gained at the 2017 election. With the Tories also losing some seats, the Scottish National Party has again asserted its dominance over the political scene there.

By contrast in London and the south there was little change, but that was still disappointing as Labour lost votes here too and failed to gain seats it was targeting.

Northern Ireland voted Remain but the majority of Remain voters come from the nationalist community and the majority of Leave voters from the unionist side. This reinforced the sectarian divide in the election.

In the aftermath of the election the prophets of doom are out in force attempting to both demoralise people and undermine the case for a left-wing successor to Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader. However,

Labour's vote did hold up better in some places and there are now more MPs from the left of the party. Thousands of Labour activists, many of them relatively new, got involved in the campaign and gave it their all, in horrible winter conditions. There are things to build on here.

There is still much to discuss regarding the way forward for Labour but the principal question across Britain is: how can Labour rebuild in working class communities? This means both fighting locally for people's interests, and having clear policy priorities for a future Labour government which people understand and which will transform their lives. This is particularly urgent in Scotland to counter nationalism, and in Leave voting areas in England and Wales. This will not be achieved unless Remainers are prepared to accept the two votes to leave the EU - the referendum vote and the outcome of the election. The worst thing Labour could do in these circumstances is to elect the right-wing architect of its shift towards remain, Sir Keir Starmer, as its next leader, or any of the other similar candidates in the field.

The Tories will not and cannot represent working class interests. Over the next five years, it will be necessary for people to fight for their rights, services, jobs and communities. Labour, the trade unions and other community and progressive forces need to prepare for this fight.

## Elsewhere the working class fight back

While the doom-mongers in Britain predict disaster and preach helplessness, we can take heart and learn lessons from what is happening elsewhere. It is not predictable what will provoke people to fight back even after they have suffered defeats.

In France it was petrol price rises that initially sparked the Gilets

Jaunes protests which have been going on for over a year. Now there are massive demonstrations and strikes against President Macron's proposed pension reforms. As Jean Auld explains in, France – working class fights on the streets, these movements have begun to come together and to represent many other demands. These mass working class struggles are virtually unreported in the media here.

Since the height of the so-called pink tide in Latin America, reactionary forces, backed by the United States, have been rolling back progress. There have been coups, constitutional/legal manoeuvres and electoral defeats. The challenges remain massive, but despite setbacks there is an up-surge in strikes and protests by working people across the continent, most notably in Chile. In Latin America – a continent in struggle, Dan Morgan reports on tumultuous events in different countries in the region.

## Middle East resists the West

The West has caused untold suffering and chaos across the Middle East with its illegal wars, sanctions and interference. Iran is its number one enemy as it is central to a growing resistance to the west and Israel. This explains the illegal assassination by the United States of General Soleimani, Iran's key military leader. In, Middle East faces down the West, Simon Korner explores the forces at work and the changing balance of power with Iran, Russia and Turkey playing increased roles. The situation is very volatile and the risk of war has been significantly increased by America's provocative assassination of Soleimani. All the more need for a peace movement which is focused on opposing the main cause of current and future wars - intervention by the west, the US and Israel.



# After the election

## THE FIGHT FOR LABOUR



Jeremy Corbyn in Nottingham alongside statue of Robin Hood

by Alex Davidson

The 2019 British General Election was mainly about Brexit. The Tories' slogan of "Get Brexit Done" won the day where it counted. 52 of Labour's lost 60 seats were in Leave voting areas in England and Wales in the 2016 EU Referendum. Of the other eight losses, 6 were in Scotland. [1] The other two seats lost were in Remain voting areas of England: Kensington in London, traditionally Tory; and Stroud, where the Liberal Democrats stood down in favour of the Greens as part of the so-called Remain Alliance, allowing the Tories to win. [2]

The explanation for Labour's defeat lies mainly in the Brexit story of the last three and half years. Other factors cannot be discounted including the decline of mining and manufacturing over decades in the north of England and the relentless demonisation of Jeremy Corbyn.

Immediately following the 2016 EU referendum, Labour adopted the position of accepting and respecting the result and went into the 2017 General Election fighting on an anti-austerity platform with the slogan "For the Many not the Few". The

Tories fought the election on the slogan "Strong and Stable". Against the predictions of the polls, the mainstream media and the right-wing Parliamentary Labour Party, Corbyn increased the share of the Labour vote and removed the Tory majority in the House of Commons. Theresa May eventually and reluctantly resigned as Prime Minister having failed spectacularly to get her EU Withdrawal Bill through Parliament.

Meanwhile there was mounting pressure on the Labour Party leadership to call for a second referendum

on the EU. Sir Keir Starmer led this campaign inside the Labour Party and, although resisted by Jeremy Corbyn, eventually secured a change of position, largely due to the dominant Remain position held by the overwhelming majority within the Parliamentary Labour Party and also among Corbyn supporters. It should be noted that many people who had voted Remain in the Referendum accepted the result and expected it to be carried through.

The pressure, including from the so-called People's Vote campaign, meant that the Labour Party went into the 2019 General Election saying that they would re-negotiate Brexit and put it to another referendum. Several leading Labour Shadow Cabinet members including Keir Starmer and Emily Thornberry very publicly said, that in this second referendum, they would campaign to remain in the EU. While Jeremy Corbyn stated that he would adopt a neutral position, an understandable solution in a vexed situation, his Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, announced he would campaign for remain in a second referendum. This public stance of declaring that they would campaign to remain in a second referendum by leading Labour figures strained the credibility of the policy, especially in Leave-voting Labour seats in the north of England and the Midlands.

Boris Johnson replaced Mrs May as Tory leader and Prime Minister and he returned to Parliament with a 'not so new' deal negotiated with the EU. When Parliament continued to thwart the passage of the Bill, Johnson expelled the Tories who opposed him and forced a General Election on his terms.

### "Get Brexit Done"

Dominic Cummings, who masterminded the main Leave campaign in the EU referendum, had been brought in to 10 Downing Street as Chief Special Adviser to Prime Minister Johnson. His slogan "Get

Brexit Done" resonated with many people fed up with the issue dragging on for so long as well as those who had voted to leave the EU. The Tories' message was clear and in stark contrast to Labour's weak and mixed message.

The Tories rejected an arrangement with the newly formed Brexit Party, which effectively replaced UKIP.

When it became clear that there would be no electoral agreement with the Tories Nigel Farage then withdrew all Brexit Party candidates standing in Tory held seats. The Brexit Party stood candidates in Labour held seats and Farage made it clear that this was to take Leave voters away from Labour. Some other previous Labour voters who voted Remain in the Referendum may

#### DURHAM NORTH WEST - Tory gain from Labour Tory majority: 1144 (55.1% voted Leave in 2016)

PARTY	NO OF VOTES	% VOTE SHARE	% CHANGE FROM 2017 ELECTION
TORY	19990	41.9	+7.5
LABOUR	18846	39.5	-13.3
BREXIT	3193	6.7	+6.7
LIB DEM	2831	5.9	-1.2
TURNOUT	66%		

#### BURY NORTH - Tory gain from Labour Tory majority: 105 (55.7% voted Leave in 2016)

PARTY	NO OF VOTES	% VOTE SHARE	% CHANGE FROM 2017 ELECTION
TORY	21660	46.2	+1.8
LABOUR	21555	46	-7.6
LIB DEM	1584	3.4	+1.5
BREXIT	1240	2.6	+2.6
TURNOUT	68.1%		

#### BOLTON NORTH EAST - Tory gain from Labour Tory majority: 378 (58.1% voted Leave in 2016)

PARTY	NO OF VOTES	% VOTE SHARE	% CHANGE FROM 2017 ELECTION
TORY	19759	45.4	+3.2
LABOUR	19381	44.5	-6.1
LIB DEM	1880	4.3	+4.5
BREXIT	1847	4.2	+1.3
TURNOUT	64.5%		



have given their vote to the main Remain party, the Liberal Democrats. However, all estimates suggest these were many fewer than the Labour Leave votes given to the Tories and the Brexit Party.

Labour's abandonment of its commitment to respect the result of the Referendum led to its loss of seats in Leave-voting constituencies. In these constituencies the Brexit Party picked up significant Labour Leave voters who probably could not bring themselves to vote Tory - yet the effect was the same, working for the Tories (see tables on P5).

In other constituencies the Tories won with greater majorities and didn't need the assistance of the Brexit Party. Many of these were in areas with large Leave vote majorities, where the turnout was often low with many previous Labour voters staying at home. Wolverhampton North East is one example (see table above right)

If the ultra-Remainers, like Keir Starmer, had got their way and Labour had adopted a clear and firm Remain position on the EU then it is likely that more Labour seats would have been lost.

### The fight for Labour

There is now a battle between the right and left in the Labour Party to explain the causes of Labour's defeat in the General Election. Right-wing Labour never accepted Corbyn as leader nor the left policies developed under his leadership. Having failed to remove him as leader they continually undermined his leadership in a variety of ways including the charge of anti-semitism. This charge of anti-semitism has been pursued daily by the Jewish Labour Movement and the Parliamentary Labour Friends of Israel. The capitalist mainstream media has focused on this while barely reporting Islamophobia in the Tory Party. It is a well-worn saying that if enough mud is thrown

WOLVERHAMPTON NORTH EAST - Tory gain from Labour Tory majority: 4080 (67.7% voted Leave in 2016)			
PARTY	NO OF VOTES	% VOTE SHARE	% CHANGE FROM 2017 ELECTION
TORY	17722	51.7	+11.4
LABOUR	13642	39.8	-13.0
BREXIT	1354	3.9	+3.9
LIB DEM	960	2.8	+1.2
TURNOUT	55.4%		

then some of it will stick. The capitalist mainstream media are well aware of this.

Not surprisingly following Labour's defeat, right-wing Labour are on a renewed offensive to change the policies and leadership of the party. "Right-wing" is never the term used by the mainstream media as they prefer "moderate" or "centre-left". However, let us be clear, it is Labour's right-wing, which is on the offensive and hopes to swing or at least confuse many Labour members, supporters and voters that the explanation for Labour's defeat was not the issue of Brexit. They hope to convince people that the problem lay with Corbyn's leadership, and not just that, but also with Labour's policies.

Tony Blair, architect of New Labour and former Prime Minister, set out his explanation for the election defeat, and provided the narrative to be followed by his acolytes, in a lecture organised by his Institute for Global Governance a few days after the election. [3] He said that Corbyn was seen by people as "fundamentally opposing what Britain and western countries stand for. He personified politically an idea of random quasi-revolutionary socialism mixing far-left economic policy and deep hostility to western foreign policy". He went on to say that "the takeover of the Labour Party by the far-left turned it into a glorified protest movement with cult trimmings, utterly incapable of being a

credible government." In conclusion he said that "Labour can keep to the programme of Jeremy Corbyn with a new leader in which case it is finished or it can re-unite the Labour and Liberal traditions". His lecture traced the political history of the Liberal and Labour Parties from the nineteenth century and lamented the division among "progressives".

He regaled his audience with New Labour's attempt to re-unite these traditions and called for this approach to be taken again by the Labour Party. He warned that "Labour can keep to the programme of Jeremy Corbyn with a new leader in which case it is finished" and will need to be replaced by a new party. Blair referred positively to Roy Jenkins in this context. It was Jenkins who led a breakaway from the Labour Party to form the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Having damaged the Labour Party, the SDP eventually folded and with the Liberals formed what is now the Liberal Democrats. He neglected to mention that the defectors from the Labour Party (Chukka Umunna, Luciana Berger etc), who stood in this General Election as Liberal Democrats all failed to win.

He did mention Brexit but gave a very unconvincing and distorted view of its effect on the result. And, of course, he didn't refer to the campaign for a second referendum in which he and his former spin-doctor, Alistair Campbell, played a leading

role and thus took no responsibility for the undermining and eventual changing of Labour's position from that of accepting and respecting the 2016 Referendum result.

During the election of the next Labour leader the right-wing will pressurise candidates to adopt a pro-western position in terms of international policy, including support for Israel and following the USA into war; a watering down of the Manifesto commitments on public ownership and taxing the rich; as well as taking a pro-EU position. Keir Starmer and Jess Phillips won't have a problem in agreeing to that!

### Brexit will not go away

The issue of Brexit is not going to go away. The Tory government will now be going into negotiations with the EU to agree a trade deal. Johnson has promised to conclude this within one year. As trade deals can be highly complex, many commentators think this is not doable within that timescale. Perhaps Johnson will be more inclined to keep to the

promised timetable than to negotiate a radical trade deal with an intransigent EU. That would mean staying very close to the EU whilst not within it. This may be the best position achievable in the short term acceptable to British ruling circles, whose dominant position has been to remain in the EU.

In terms of the Labour Party, the EU will remain an Achilles heel until such time as the EU is seen for what it is, that is a Eurocentric capitalist organisation which imposes bad deals on developing countries, treats migrants appallingly, engages in war and forces neo-liberal policies on its citizens.

The last number of years have consumed the Labour Party and its members with referenda, elections and internal feuds. The domination of electoralism over campaigning and supporting workers' struggles within Labour over decades is one of its great weaknesses. However, if struggle were to be lifted against the Tory government's (and the EU's) policies then class and politi-

cal consciousness will develop such that socialist politics would gain many more adherents and activists. Victories can and need to be won and not just in elections.

[1] The election was fought on different ground in Scotland - see separate article, *SNP dominates Scotland again* by Frieda Park in this issue.

[2] Stroud: 54.1% voted Leave in 2016  
Tory gain from Labour.  
Tory majority 3,840  
Votes - Tory 47.9% (+2%)  
Labour 42.1% (-4.9%)  
Green 7.5% (+5.3%)  
Turnout 78%

[3] Tony Blair lecture: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3grOIZ7518&feature=emb\\_rel\\_pause](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3grOIZ7518&feature=emb_rel_pause)

Blair's acolytes following his narrative include Lord Andrew Adonis, who said on 29 December, "Corbyn and Corbynism have to be completely eradicated if Labour is to become an electable democratic socialist party". Peter Mandelson, in an interview with the *Financial Times* during the Doha Forum on 14 December 2019, said, "the far left programme that was put forward is never going to be supported by enough voters to get us elected. So much is clear and demonstrated.

## The Socialist Correspondent on Facebook

Follow and like the new **Socialist Correspondent** Facebook page for up to the minute comment and analysis. Search @socialistcorrespondent



## The Socialist Correspondent Podcasts

Selected articles from each edition of **The Socialist Correspondent** are available as Podcasts. Search Socialist Correspondent on iTunes or SoundCloud.

They can also be accessed via our website. [www.thesocialistcorrespondent.org.uk](http://www.thesocialistcorrespondent.org.uk)

# NORTH & MIDLANDS

## have a second referendum

by Peter Latham

What has happened is so clear, even allowing for interpretation. In one Labour seat after another many voters deserted their own party to hit back against the neglect of their vital interests, and even their very existence. High profile losses crossed the political spectrum in Labour: Dennis Skinner was beaten in Bolsover, Caroline Flint in Don Valley, Laura Smith in Crewe and Nantwich, Laura Pidcock in Durham North West, and Mary Creagh in Wakefield. Other Labour seats went Tory in Burnley, Blackpool, Bolton, Bury, Derby North, Dewsbury, Dudley North, Great Grimsby, Keighley, Lincoln, Rother Valley, Scunthorpe, Sedgfield, Stoke-on-Trent, Warrington, West Bromwich, Wolverhampton and Workington.

Despite the Brexit Party snapping at Labour's heels in many seats, the Conservatives offered a quick Leave and benefitted massively. Trouble brewed early in the north-east. A week before the EU referendum in June 2016, 25 of the regions 26 Labour MP's signed an open letter to the Northern Echo calling for people to vote to Remain in the EU [1]. Only Ronnie Campbell, MP for Blyth Valley, did not sign it. He stood down at the 2017 general election.

In 2016 on a high turnout, people voted to leave the European Union. In 2017, promising to respect the result of the referendum, Labour's vote exceeded expectations. By 2019, Labour was facing both ways. Working class voters turned away from Labour en masse in a conscious effort to resolve the Brexit crisis themselves in their own interests.

The 2019 Labour Conference had decided to extend voting rights to EU

nationals resident in Britain. It was a serious error for Rebecca Long-Bailey, the Shadow Business Secretary, to speak up for this idea a week before polling day.

The Shadow Cabinet were warned. Last June, after the local elections, the European elections, and the Peterborough by-election, 26 Labour MP's from Leave-voting consti-



Dennis Skinner defeated in Bolsover

cies wrote to Jeremy Corbyn to urge backing for a Leave deal before the 31st October. They stated clearly that "a commitment to a second referendum would be toxic to our bedrock labour voters, driving a wedge between them and our Party, jeopardising our role as a Party of the whole nation and giving the populist right an even greater platform in our heartlands." To no avail. Back in March, Stephanie Peacock, MP for Barnsley East, a Remainer and one of the 26, had resigned as a Labour whip to be free to vote against a second referendum. It did some good as she was re-elected, albeit with a reduced majority.

### Mixed messages

Before the election was called, the anti-austerity message was on the back foot compared with 2017. Confusion reigned. Do I vote Tory to come out of the EU, or vote Labour for a better life? I want both. It was palpable when canvassing. There were other factors too. In Barnsley for instance Jeremy Corbyn had almost no personal support outside activist circles. People did not say why. But he does not sound or look like someone from the north or midlands. Many voters just wrote him off as another London do-gooder. For such a decent leader, with the best politics in decades and a mass following in some circles, this a great shame, but it must be faced.

The campaign sagged as the leadership made one radical announcement after another, but without insistent explanation that the economy would stand it and prosper. The message became blurred and less credible, while proposals were plucked like rabbits out of a hat, seemingly unrelated to an overall approach. It became clear when canvassing that this was a mistake, as many people simply did not believe that these things could be afforded. Fewer radical proposals, but better argued with the economic need for them repeatedly spelt out, would have been better.

Here lies a lesson: since the 2008 crash people have been deliberately misled by the establishment. The Government budget has been spoken of as if it were similar to the performance of the productive economy. The bankers were bailed out and the price tag appeared in the government's balance sheet as a cost, hence

the "need" for austerity. The earlier public understanding that corporate and private wealth, the economic base, should be taxed to provide a social superstructure in health, housing, education, social care and transport etc has become so eroded as to be outside the experience of younger voters. It is hard to persuade people coping with their own debt that the Government should borrow to build council houses for example, never mind that this was how it was done before in worse conditions. People are having difficulty seeing a future beyond austerity in the media blizzard. Yet Labour's proposals are feasible and to our benefit.

### Defeats and successes

Ironically, Blyth Valley was the first to go Conservative on election night, by only 612 votes. Of 60 seats lost by Labour, 45 were in the midlands and the north. All 45 without exception voted Leave in the 2016 referendum. The bigger the Leave majority, the more voters abandoned Labour, according to a Financial Times analysis.

However, the large Labour majorities in city constituencies are worth noting. Paul Blomfield in Sheffield Central has a majority of 27,612 over his Conservative runner-up. He is a Remainer in a Leave-voting area. Gill Furness for Sheffield Hillsborough and Brightside has a majority of 12,274 over the Conservative. In Leeds North West, Alex Sobel, who supports EU integration, more than doubled his majority to 10,649, while Hilary Benn in Leeds Central, also for Remain, won a majority of 19,270 over the Conservative. Richard Burgon (Leeds East), a Corbyn supporter who supports more EU integration, polled a reduced majority of 5,531 over the Conservative. In Newcastle-upon-Tyne two of the four seats retained Labour majorities of well over 10,000.

Labour did well in Liverpool, where "the city once again bucked national trends and the party's vote held

strong" [2]. Three new Labour MP's were elected, Kim Johnson being the city's first black MP with a majority of 37,043 in Riverside. Dan Carden in Walton has a majority of 30,520; in Wavertree, Paula Barker has 27,085, while in West Derby Ian Byrne has 29,974. All four backed Jeremy Corbyn strongly, saying that the focus on nationalisation, the NHS and schools resonated with voters. Only Maria Eagle for Garston and Halewood, a Corbyn critic, had doubts. Her majority is 31,624.

Over in Manchester, Labour majorities were also high: in Central 29,089; in Gorton 30,339; in Withington 28,005; in Blackley and Broughton 14,302; and in Wythenshaw and Sale East 10,396. Labour retained Birmingham with big majorities. In Hall Green, Tahir Ali has 28,508; in Hodge Hill, Liam Byrne has 29,655; in Ladywood, Shabana Mahmood has 28,582. Three other Labour MP's have majorities over 10,000.

### Labour not finished

Labour is certainly not finished on these figures as some pretend. Many millions have voted for the radical manifesto. It has mass appeal, especially where good local candidates are coming forward. This is a good start for the future.

The Labour vote has done better in the big cities than in smaller former coalfield and industrial towns. The reasons for this need careful thought, as the Blairite tendency is exploiting this question to suit their agenda. Some may give city-based regeneration the credit for this, but with wealth failing to trickle down to the poor other factors should be considered.

Radical thought can flourish more easily in cities, but in towns and ex-mining villages with less industry conservative feelings may persist amongst working class people. A way forward here must be found. Community and trade union work by supporters of Labour's manifesto offers hope.

In spite of everything the good voters of the north and midlands have given the ruling classes of Britain and corporate Europe the biggest kick in the teeth in recent history. They have done it with consistency and determination, whatever the cost on other questions, and done it on their own initiative without much help from organised labour, the trade unions, most Labour party activists, and the Shadow Cabinet. This a remarkable fact.

An analogy: the military in combat have orders to "attack at all costs". Voters have done something similar.

[1] www.thenorthernecho.co.uk 16 June 2016

[2] www.liverpooecho.co.uk Nick Tyrrell, 13 December 2019

## From The Socialist Correspondent 10 years ago

"The British government... pumped billions into the City to 'nationalise' or otherwise prop up tottering establishments. That money had to be borrowed from – the City! That is, it went straight back where it came from, only now with interest attached to it. The ideologists of the bourgeoisie usually decry state handouts to failing businesses on the grounds that it constitutes 'interference' in the workings of the market. But the bourgeoisie itself has never objected to state handouts - so long as they come to them."

Winter 2010 – **Quantitative easing: printing money to throw at bankers**

Leslie Masters





Prime Minister Boris Johnson and First Minister Nicola Sturgeon

# SNP DOMINATES SCOTLAND AGAIN

by Frieda Park

The main headlines from the General election in Scotland were: The resurgence of the Scottish National Party (SNP); Labour's poor performance; a decline in Tory fortunes; a small upturn for the Lib Dems overshadowed by the defeat of their UK leader, Jo Swinson; and the failure of the Brexit Party to make any impact.

## The state of the parties

The SNP won 48 seats out of 59, though one of their elected MPs had actually been suspended from the party for alleged anti-semitic comments. They reasserted their recent dominance of Scottish politics, increasing their tally of seats by 13 and gaining 45% of the vote.

The second party in Scotland, the Conservatives, lost 7 seats reducing their number to 6. However, it had been thought that they might have fared even worse after Johnson's election as leader which had prompted the pro-Remain Scottish leader Ruth Davidson to step down.

Labour had another miserable electoral outing losing all 6 of the seats it had gained at the 2015 election, leaving only one MP, Ian Murray, who represents a well-healed constituency in Edinburgh where he relies on Tory tactical votes aimed at keeping out the SNP. Overall Labour lost 8.5% share of the vote. In a number of seats it came 4th, lost its deposit in 6 (half the UK total of

Labour lost deposits) and had double digit declines in 16 seats. Many of the worst results can be accounted for by tactical voting to defeat the Tories or Lib Dems where the SNP candidate was seen to have a better chance of winning. In some places the number voting Labour held up, but the SNP still did better because of the higher turn-out.

The Lib Dems only slightly increased their vote and retained the same number of seats. Though they won one from the SNP they also lost Jo Swinson in Dunbartonshire East. In a mini-referendum on her leadership 80.3% of the electorate turned out to vote there with the SNP taking 37.1% and winning by 149 votes.

The Brexit Party were irrelevant making no significant impact in any of the 15 seats they contested and achieving 0.5% of the vote.

The Greens achieved a modest increase in overall votes of 0.8%

## Why?

We don't know for certain why people voted the way they did and anecdotal feedback from canvassing found electors fairly tight lipped about how they were going to vote and why. Many were "undecided" but clearly voted SNP on the day, whether that had been their unstated intention all along or not. The result was not for the want of effort by Labour activists, particularly on the left, with people turning out in the most appalling weather to canvass. There were a number of good left-wing candidates with strong campaign teams, positive materials representing the party's main policies, trade union and community support and local roots. At the end of the day this only made a marginal difference in some places. For example, in neighbouring constituencies; Glasgow South had a former leader of Scottish Labour as the candidate (very much a figure from the past), Johann Lamont, and in Glasgow South West, Matt Kerr, a Corbyn supporter stood. The vote share for Lamont fell by 7.4% and for Kerr by 5.9%.

It is a reasonable assumption that most of Labour's lost votes went to the SNP. There was also a higher turn-out reflecting SNP supporters who had not voted at the last election doing so this time.

Why did this shift happen? Labour failed to build on and consolidate its very modest improved performance from the 2017 election, where, although it gained 6 seats, this was achieved by adding less than 10,000 votes and was mainly due to a decline in SNP support. Whilst the left has made progress in the party the right remains strong, with MSP Anas Sarwar in Glasgow and MP Ian

Murray in Edinburgh trying to situate themselves as an alternative leadership. As in other parts of the UK, attacks from the right do not help the party win the confidence of voters.

In Scotland Labour was not only squeezed by Brexit, but also by the question of independence. In the EU referendum Scotland voted strongly to Remain 62% versus 38% for Leave. Whilst initially that may have led to some disaffection among Leave supporting SNP voters the SNP managed to pull off the feat of becoming the party of Remain in Scotland whilst also retaining many of those Leavers. If Scotland is, as Nicola Sturgeon endlessly repeats, "being dragged out the EU against its will", then that boosts the argument for independence. It seems independence matters more to Leave voting SNP supporters than Brexit so they will vote SNP knowing that it's Remain stance may bring independence closer. Since the EU referendum the SNP has made support for the EU a badge of Scottishness scooping up a big chunk of the Remain vote.

Scottish Labour adopted a position in advance of the election of supporting Remain and a second referendum. This seems to have had little impact on how it fared. This was different from the UK position which added to Labour's confused message on Brexit. To make things worse it shot itself in the foot by failing to have a clear stance on independence, with John McDonnell at the Edinburgh Festival blithely conceding that there should be a second referendum if it was the will of the Scottish people. The further qualifications and lack of clarity on what that meant made Labour look weak.

The Scottish media give the SNP an easy ride. Despite scandals including the forthcoming trial of former leader and First Minister Alex Salmon on charges of attempted rape and sexual assault and the resignation of the Lord Provost of Glasgow who maxed out her expenses on clothes and shoes nothing seems to stick. Their

record in government is appalling, with incompetent Health Secretaries presiding over declining standards in the NHS and the cover up of child deaths in the new gigantic flagship hospital in Glasgow. Educational standards continue to head downwards and services are falling apart.

Whilst there was a glimmer of hope opened up at the 2017 election that Labour might win at Westminster that hope had weakened in 2019. There was a widespread belief in Scotland that voting SNP was fine because it would be supportive of a Corbyn government anyway. But as the prospect of a Labour defeat became more likely, Scots opted for what they regarded as the safe anti-Tory vote – the SNP. This was influenced by Brexit, opposition to austerity and support for independence. Ironically, however, the vote for the SNP in Scotland makes the defeat of the Tories harder as Labour is weakened and will struggle to return enough MPs to form a government. Unfortunately, voters in Scotland tend not to see this, regarding Labour versus the Tories as something that is happening in a different country.

## Saltires, Union Jacks & Red flags

The SNP now claims that it has mandate for independence based on its success at this election. But it is not at all clear that voters were endorsing that, as they were also voting on other issues. The sense on the doorstep was not that people were voting SNP to through a strong belief in independence. However, the SNP will certainly use this opportunity to build support for independence so that needs to be robustly countered. The left needs to more effectively frame its arguments and policies in class terms and expose the SNP's failing New Labour-style policies. Over the years, increased powers over domestic policy and tax have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament, yet the best that the SNP can say about our declining econo-



my and welfare provision is that we are not as bad as England. On this evidence, independence provides no solution to the urgent problems facing the Scottish working class.

Tragically Labour's defeat in Scotland has given rise to the opposite approach by some on the left of the party. This is partly a reaction which accepts the line that people in Scotland want another referendum, and partly it stems from the strand of nationalist sentiment which has a long history in the party and the labour movement.

Some leaders of the Scottish Trades Union Congress have long been in the pocket of the SNP. It gets more than two thirds of its income from the Scottish Government and its (retiring) General Secretary Grahame

Smith holds a number of paid positions on public sector boards as well as sitting on the Nicola Sturgeon's standing council on Europe. It is unsurprising then, but still depressing, that he is now openly backing a second referendum on independence. Monica Lennon, Labour Shadow Secretary for Health and Sport, has called for a separate Scottish Labour Party, making its own policy and being self-financing. Given Scottish Labour's weakness this seems like a remedy more likely to kill than cure the patient.

In the short term there is no chance of Johnson's government granting the Scottish Government the power to hold another referendum. This suits both sides nicely as they can continue to argue about constitutional matters distracting voters

from other, more important issues. The left should not get caught up in this. In the first place it is not clear that supporting a second referendum will be massively popular. Secondly focusing on constitutional arguments and falling in behind another referendum will only serve to make Labour a support act for the SNP, which would truly call into question the logic of its existence. Labour would be increasingly marginalised and, without solid arguments opposing the SNP's agenda, independence would be more likely. Voters need a distinctive reason to support Labour. It needs to be different from the SNP. The SNP is the party of nationalism. Labour cannot be a leftist version of that and thrive. Labour needs to be the party of Socialism - something the SNP will never be.

## LONDON & THE SOUTH - little change...\*

YEAR	REGION	TURNOUT	CONSERVATIVE VOTES (+/- SHARE)	LABOUR VOTES (+/- SHARE)	LIBERAL DEMOCRATS VOTES (+/- SHARE)	UKIP VOTES (+/- SHARE)
2019	London	67.3%	1,205 (+1.1%)	1,813 (-6.4%)	563 (+6.1%)	-
2019	South	71.1%	4,125 (+0.8%)	1,743 (-6.2%)	967 (+5.5%)	-
2017	London	70.1%	1,269 (-1.7%)	2,087 (+10.8%)	337 (+1.1%)	-
2017	South	69.1%	4,069 (+4.1%)	2,197 (+10.9%)	933 (+1.0%)	-
2015	London	65.4%	1,233 (+0.3%)	1,545 (+7.3%)	273 (-14.4%)	287 (+6.4%)
2015	South	69.1%	3,554 (+2.6%)	1,306 (+1.4%)	843 (-18.7%)	1,032 (+9.9%)
2010	London	64.6%	1,175 (+2.6%)	1,246 (-2.3%)	752 (+0.2%)	59 (+0.3%)
2010	South	68.6%	3,329 (+4.6%)	1,125 (-7.8%)	2,088 (+1.5%)	145 (+0.9%)

### General Election Results in London and Southern England 2010 – 2019 for main parties

(Turnout = % of eligible voters; Actual votes rounded to nearest 1,000; (+/- share) = change in party's share of vote since previous GE)

# LONDON & THE SOUTH

## little change...



Labour activists in Kensington and Chelsea

by Brian Durrans

In London, Labour retained marginals like Battersea and Dagenham & Rainham, held onto safer seats but with lower majorities, yet won only Putney. In 2017 it gained Kensington by a mere 20 votes but has now lost it to the Tories by 150 votes. This was made possible by the LibDem candidate, a former Tory Remainer whose penance for jumping ship was to split the anti-Tory vote. Not even being a vocal Remainer in a constituency that voted 2:1 Remain in 2016 was enough to save Labour's Emma Dent Coad. Labour also failed to dislodge former Conservative leader and reviled architect of Universal Credit Iain Duncan Smith from Chingford & Woodford Green which had been almost evenly split between Leave and Remain in the referendum.

Overall, there was little change to London seats. The Conservatives lost two and won two, equally to and from Labour and the LibDems. Neither Green nor Brexit Parties nor the long-running pernicious attacks on Labour and Corbyn over alleged anti-semitism in the Party, or weakness towards it, resulted in

any changes to London seats, and except for Kensington alone the LibDems didn't change the outcome where Labour and Tories were the main contenders.

It was much the same picture in the rest of the south, where Labour did both slightly worse (not gaining a seat) and slightly better (not losing one) than in London but much better than in the calamitous performance in its northern "Red Wall". In southern England outside London, Labour retained fourteen seats, mostly with turnouts well above the national average and in ten of them with over half the vote. In all fourteen, the Conservative candidate came second and the LibDem trailed a poor third, gaining too few votes to have a made a difference even if all those votes had "tactically" gone to the Tory instead. These were mainly cities or larger towns with younger (some including students) and more working-class voters than in more rural seats in the same region. Only three of these Labour-held constituencies voted Leave in 2016 (Slough, Portsmouth South, Plymouth Sutton

& Devonport) and in ten of the rest which voted Remain, the Leave vote was above 40%. [1] Interpreting these outcomes is a challenge but whatever the extent of the "Brexit factor" - compared with other issues like the NHS and economic plans on which Labour focused its efforts - it seems mainly to have reinforced the Party in seats it already held in this part of the country where the only serious competition were Tories.

The votes and changes in vote-share in London and the south over the last four general elections are shown in the accompanying table\* - see P12 opposite. [2]

[1] <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/parliament-and-elections/elections-elections/brexit-votes-by-constituency/>

[2] Data for 2019 are mainly from the BBC. Data for earlier years are from several sources, including YouGov, Wikipedia and the Electoral Reform Society. In the case of votes cast, figures for southern England are combined from SE and SW regions; regarding turnout and changes in vote share, the average of these two regional figures, rounded up to a single decimal place. The regional figures ignore any changes in constituency boundaries between elections.



# NORTHERN IRELAND

## DUP & Sinn Fein lose votes

by Ernest Walker

Like the UK, Brexit played a major part here, some would say it played the only part, unlike the UK though sectarianism is never far away. Indeed one political commentator wrote that the election would be the most sectarian ever, “and that’s saying something”. The 2016 EU referendum broke down on sectarian lines with the Remain vote coming mainly from the nationalist community and the Leave vote from the unionist one. In the General election, what we saw in the constituencies of North and South Belfast were nationalist parties standing aside to allow the other a better chance of winning. The fact that the aim was to defeat the pro-Brexit Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) gave it that sectarian mode. Many unionists would have seen it that way especially when the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) urged its members to vote for the DUP and Arlene Foster attributed their two defeats to nationalist parties ganging up on them.

### Winners and losers

The loss of deputy leader Nigel Dodds to Sinn Fein’s (SF) John Finucane was a severe blow to them. It was not a two-horse race as the Alliance Party (AP) also stood a candidate and had declared prior to the elections that they would not stand aside in order to maximise the Remain vote. “We do not do pacts” was their statement. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) had declared its intentions to contest all constituencies but stood down at the last minute in North Belfast with the belief that certain people had leaned on them. Obviously one unionist candidate was preferable to two with the possibility of splitting the vote. In the event it did not matter.

The other defeat for the DUP was in South Belfast where the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) regained a seat that they had held for some years, losing to the DUP’s Emma Little-Pengelly in 2017. Whilst the SDLP stood aside in North Belfast, Sinn Fein stood down in South Belfast as did the Green Party, in order to maximise the Remain vote. The leader of the Green Party even signed the SDLP candidate, Clare Hanna’s, nomination papers. Hanna won a resounding victory with a majority of over 15,000.

The victory in north Belfast was however tempered by the loss of the Foyle seat in County Derry, where SDLP leader Colm Eastwood trounced SF sitting member Elisha McCallison securing a 17,000 plus majority. Significantly the SDLP vote went up by 17.7% whilst SF dropped by a whacking 19%. One of the main themes of the SDLP campaign was the abstentionist policy of SF which stands in Westminster elections but does not

Nigel Dodds - loser...



take its seats. This policy has come in for criticism in recent times and no doubt would have affected the result in Foyle.

Other results in Belfast did not show much in the way of surprises. The DUP’s Gavin Robinson retained his seat in East Belfast, but his main opponent, Alliance Party leader, Naomi Long, winner of a seat in the EU elections cut his majority from 8,000 to just fewer than 2,000. Sinn Fein also retained its seat in West Belfast but saw its vote reduced. The SF candidate, Paul Maskey, did secure nearly 51% of the vote with a 14,000 majority, but interestingly People Before Profit (PBP) candidate Gerry Carroll, who is also a Member of the Northern Irish Assembly, obtained 6,194 votes an increase of 2000. People Before Profit came out of the Socialist Workers Party and is active in both N Ireland & the Republic. It has to be said that not for the first time PBP and Carroll have been the victim of a nasty campaign from SF especially on the issue of Brexit.

Other areas outside Belfast saw no changes with SF retaining Mid-Ulster, West Tyrone, South Down Newry and Armagh. They also retained Fermanagh and South Tyrone but by just 57 votes from the UUP. Their candidate, Michelle Gildernew’s vote was down by over 3,200 votes from 2017. Significantly the DUP stood aside in order to maximise the unionist vote and it nearly paid off, The DUP was successful in the constituencies in Upper Bann Lagan Valley, Strangford, East Antrim and Ian Paisley Jnr’s stronghold of North Antrim, albeit with a loss of 8,000 votes. The DUP was hoping to gain the seat vacated by independent unionist Lady Sylvia Her-

mon, however the seat fell to Stephen Farry of the Alliance Party. The fact that three unionists of varying hues stood and amassed more votes than Farry shows that if one single candidate had stood there could have been a different result.

Overall figures show that SF got 22.8% of the total vote, down 6.7%; DUP got 30.6% down 5.4%; SDLP 14.9% up 3.1%; Ulster Unionists got 11.7% an increase of 1.4%. The Alliance Party got 16.8 up 8.8%. The combined Unionist vote was 42.3% the total of the nationalist vote 37.7%

Sandwiched between are Alliance who do not declare either position.

### Brexit

Sinn Fein festooned areas with posters predicting that Brexit will cause food, electricity, fuel, holiday prices to rise and anything else that you can think of.

During the election campaign a thousand unionists attended a “Rally for the Union” and heard speeches denouncing Johnson’s withdrawal deal as the “betrayal act” which in

their view would lead to an “economic united Ireland”.

The DUP and SF did not have a good election despite the latter’s victory in North Belfast. Whilst the defeat of the two DUP members is welcome, we have to remember the new MP’s attending Westminster are all fervent supporters of the European Union.

(Ernest Walker in a member of the Communist Party of Ireland and contributes to its newspaper, Unity, each week. He lives in North Belfast).

# WALES

## Brexit lets in Tories

by Frieda Park

Wales voted Leave in the EU referendum and as with Leave voting areas in England Labour paid the price at this general election for its failure to honour its promise to respect that vote. Labour lost 6 seats to the Tories – the only seats to change hands. As a share of the vote Labour went down by 8%, the Tories up by 2.5% and the Brexit Party took 5.4%. It should be borne in mind that the Brexit Party did not stand everywhere and it got a much higher vote in some seats fulfilling its function of taking the Labour vote to enable the Tories to win.

Plaid Cymru failed to make any headway, retaining 4 seats with a slightly decreased vote share. The Lib Dems and the Greens both slightly increased their share by 1.5% and 0.75% respectively.



There were a few seats where the Labour vote held up well, but even where it won generally its vote was down substantially. As well as losing votes to the Leave parties Labour likely also lost some votes to Remain parties, though this was not a critical factor in its defeats. Turnout was also down which would account for some other lost votes for Labour.

What about the future for Labour in Wales? Labour is still the biggest party with 22 seats as against 14 for the Tories and 4 for Plaid Cymru. But the decline in the Labour

vote and the lost seats should be a wake-up call. It would be folly to think that lost voters will be easily won back. Labour also came under sustained attack during the election for its record in power in the Welsh Assembly, especially on the NHS. Mark Drakeford the First Minister has been outspokenly pro-EU which did not help. Labour in Wales must think about how it delivers more effectively for the people of Wales and respects this second vote in favour of Leave.



# MIDDLE EAST FACES DOWN THE WEST

by Simon Korner

The US assassination of Iran's General Soleimani, in a drone attack outside Baghdad airport in early January, has made major war in the Middle East more likely. Soleimani was the most important military leader in Iran, head of the Al Quds force – an elite section of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps – which co-ordinates anti-imperialist resistance outside Iran, across Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. Soleimani, who was the key strategist in the defeat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, was rapidly replaced by Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani, his experienced second in command – but the US will be hoping the killing destabilises the Iranian regime. One senior US official said it was important “to show Iran we own escalation. If they kill one of our men we can kill 30 of theirs. If they attack our embassy we can take out their military commanders”.

The naval drills that took place in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf in December, involving for the first time Iran, China and Russia, may also have provoked the hawks in Washington to act, urged on by Netanyahu who has been eager for war against Iran to save his political career. But plans for Soleimani's assassination existed already – so that the precise timing may have depended on the US making use of a “target of opportunity”, as one US official put it. Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini made a public announcement warning of a harsh response. This could well be carried out by Iran's militia allies in Iraq, the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs) which were formed to defeat ISIS in 2017, and whose deputy leader

Al-Muhandis was killed alongside Soleimani, along with several other officials. There are many other possible targets for Iran to select outside Iraq, including Israel, whose missile defences may not be able to deflect swarms of Iranian drones or Hezbollah missiles, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, US shipping in the Gulf, and so on. There are also dozens of US bases which are now on high alert.



Major General Qassem Soleimani at the International Day of Mosque

## IRAN

Iran had already been facing serious attempts at destabilisation, on the back of peaceful protests that began in mid-November against a severely weakened economy caused by US sanctions, and against ongoing establishment misrule and corruption. The trigger for the protests was a fuel tax price rise of 200%. The day after the non-violent protests, according to former UK diplomat Alastair Crooke, the “protestors

almost wholly vanished from the streets. Instead, small groups of pre-prepared, armed and violent activists – not protestors – attacked the strategic hubs of state infrastructure ... using rocket-propelled grenades and sub-machine guns.” The regime blamed militants from the Saudi-funded People's Mujahedin, and royalists who support the Shah's son. It suppressed these armed “thugs” violently, while releasing thousands of the peaceful protestors it had arrested. Acknowledging the hardship caused by US sanctions, President Rouhani announced a “budget of resistance”, backed by a \$5 billion Russian investment, promising to raise public sector wages and continue subsidies on food and medicines. Despite genuine dissatisfaction with the regime, Iran's defiant foreign policy remains popular – and the recent US escalation has only enhanced that.

The pro-Pentagon Defense One website provides a useful overview of Iran's position: “Slowly but surely, Iran has transformed its “axis of resistance” with Hezbollah and the Syrian regime into a regional alliance spanning from Iraq to Yemen. No longer simply Iranian proxies, groups like Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Units now form a group of ideologically aligned, militarily interdependent, political-military actors committed to one another's mutual defense – a resistance to NATO, essentially, with military footholds across the region, political influence in key Arab capitals, and a network of dedicated partners.” It is this regional alliance that will respond to the recent US act of war.

## IRAQ

In Iraq, anti-American feeling has been given a huge impetus by the killing of Soleimani. The assassination followed the US bombing of one of the Iraqi PMUs, Khataib Hezbollah, which lost around 20 of its fighters. This attack led to thousands of Iraqis storming the US embassy compound in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone.

In response to Soleimani's death, the powerful Shia leader Moqtada Al-Sadr re-mobilised his Mahdi army, which led attacks against the US occupation from 2003 on, but which had been partially stood down since 2008. Moqtada, along with the Iraqi government, had been attempting a compromise position between the US and Iran, but the US belligerence has pushed all parts of the fractious Iraqi establishment closer to Iran. If the remnants of ISIS in Iraq seize the moment to launch renewed attacks, as some commentators have suggested, Iraqi-Iranian ties could be further strengthened as they join forces to defeat the terrorists.

The assassination of Soleimani came during protests that have been taking place in Iraq since October – against soaring unemployment, corruption and lack of basic services such as healthcare, water, and electricity, which never recovered from the destruction of the US invasion. The protests, which forced the now caretaker prime minister Mahdi to tender his resignation, cut across sectarian lines, and have been met with violent repression. The death toll is in the hundreds. While the protests expressed genuine grievances, the speed with which they escalated suggests outside interference. As in Ukraine's colour revolution, both demonstrators and security forces have been killed by unidentified snipers. The Al Akhbar newspaper reported in early October that the Iraqi government had been aware of a planned US-backed military coup by General al-Saadi – commander of the elite army corps

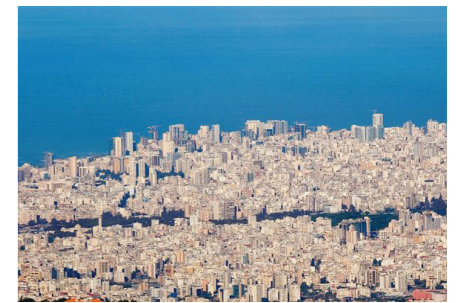
which fought ISIS, with close ties to the US military. His removal headed that off. The US disapproves of Prime Minister Mahdi's plans to buy Russian S-400 air defences and do a major oil deal with China. They also dislike his award of a multi-million dollar electricity deal to Germany's Siemens rather than to General Electric, his refusal to sign off a \$3 billion deal with Exxon, his partial opening of the border with Syria, and his flouting of US sanctions by buying electricity from Iran.

But above all, it is the level of Iranian influence in Iraq, through the Iran-backed PMUs, that has proved intolerable to the US and Israel. Israel has been busy inflaming anti-Iranian sentiment – blaming the PMUs for killing protestors, who have actually been guarded by the PMUs from violent masked groups. Arson attacks on the Iranian consulate in Najaf have been another well-organised provocation. The violent crackdown by the security forces against the demonstrators has only served to inflame the situation. Now, the game-changing provocation by the US could lead to increased attacks against US bases in Iraq, eventually forcing it out of the country altogether.

## LEBANON

In Lebanon, wage cuts and high unemployment resulted in massive demonstrations against the corrupt political establishment, forcing prime minister Hariri to resign. The sectarian political system, which has kept Lebanese society divided and ruled since the French colonial era, has fostered huge levels of inequality.

The demonstrations, initially supported by the working class, changed character rapidly when right-wing pro-US parties joined them. These parties sought to use the protests in order to challenge Hezbollah, which is an influential part of the government. Working class support ebbed away and the largely middle class protest camps and roadblocks were



An overview of Beirut, Lebanon, which bounced back partly because of its location on the water

infiltrated by right-wing forces, blocking arteries out of Beirut. The US-influenced Lebanese army refused to dismantle them. Samir Gagea, leader of the right-wing Christian militia, the Lebanese Forces – whose soldiers killed thousands in the 1975-1990 civil war – has demanded a share of government power or else the roadblocks it controls will continue. Other factions have similarly been riding on the protests to vie for power. Hezbollah, which has been sympathetic to the demonstrators' anti-corruption demands, asked its mainly working-class base not to block roads so as not to worsen the already dire economic situation. It rejected any move to topple the president, saying this would leave a dangerous vacuum – having learnt from the example of Syria, where the US fanned similar protests into civil war. It refutes any suggestions that its supporters have attacked protest camps and roadblocks. Meanwhile, left parties, including the Communists, are supporting the protests, as they are in Iraq.

Hezbollah's massive popularity – with 90% support from the Shia population, according to a recent poll, due to its effective welfare provision and its history of resistance to Israel – has made it a key western target. Evidence of western plotting came in a leaked document in March 2019, revealing a secret US-Israeli plan to spend \$200 million on fanning the flames of sectarian conflicts against Hezbollah. The aim was to provoke full-blown civil war, which would



then lead to requests for intervention by the Israeli military. Israel would only agree to do so with a show of extreme reluctance.

Another example of western pressure is the financial blockade on Lebanon, including blocking the \$8 billion worth of remittances from Lebanese living abroad. The squeeze has slashed the value of the Lebanese lira against the dollar and created widespread poverty. In effect the West is holding Lebanon's economy hostage, demanding that the Christian president break his alliance with Hezbollah. As Mike Pompeo tweeted in mid-December, the US "will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to counter the threat Hezbollah poses". Hezbollah has not been provoked into a violent defence of order against the demonstrations, which would have provided a pretext for the planned Israeli 'rescue'. It has promised never to turn its guns on the Lebanese and ordered all its supporters not to rise to any provocation. Instead, it is calling for a government that cuts across the sectarian divide and includes all different Lebanese factions, including the main Christian party.

In the longer term, US sanctions and interference are likely to push Lebanon towards Russia and China, both of which are investing heavily in the region. A recent poll suggests low public support for the US, while Putin outscores Trump in approval ratings across all communities.

## SYRIA AND TURKEY

Turkey's unilateral decision to invade the Kurdish-controlled enclave in north-eastern Syria (Rojava) pushed out the 1,000 US troops stationed there. The US evacuation to Iraq was chaotic, and left their Kurdish allies, the Syrian Defence Force (SDF), feeling betrayed, facing the Turkish invaders alone. At the same time, different US troops entered Syria from bases in Iraq, and occupied the Syrian oilfields near Deir Ezzor in the east of the country. The US

Defense Secretary said this was to prevent ISIS capturing Syria's oil, but Trump tweeted more honestly that it was about the US taking the oil for itself. The Pentagon warned that "overwhelming force" would be used against any attempt to dislodge the US from the oil-rich region – even though they have no legal right to be in Syria in the first place. The Turkish invasion is being led on the ground by jihadist militias, who have been beheading and mutilating Kurdish fighters, including women. These are the same 'moderate' rebels Obama and Hillary Clinton armed and trained in 2012 as part of the CIA's Timber Sycamore programme.

The US is, meanwhile, hanging on to its well-established base in southern Syria on the Iraqi border at Al Tanf, blocking the major highway between Baghdad and Damascus. Its continuing control over Syrian oil and water supplies gives it the ability to economically blackmail President Assad, having failed to remove him by military means. The forced Kurdish withdrawal from a zone within north-eastern Syria, demarcated in the Turkish-Russian Sochi agreement, has so far satisfied Turkey, and the fighting between Turkish and Kurdish forces has not amounted to full-scale combat. Russia's aim in its deal with Turkey was to limit the extent of the Turkish invasion – penning it into an area 30kms deep in the centre of the 275 mile border. To underline Russia's stabilising presence, Russian military police are patrolling the Turkish-Syrian border jointly with Turkish troops.

Overall, Damascus now governs half of Syrian territory, where over 70% of the population lives. Parts of the Syria-Iraq border have been re-opened. ISIS no longer rules any cities, and has lost the support of Turkey and the Gulf states. Over a million Syrians have returned to their country and the rate is accelerating. Syria controls its border with Turkey to the east of the Turkish 'safe zone' – preventing eastward encroachment. Its troops hadn't set foot in

north-east Syria since 2012, when Kurdish SDF forces took over and made their bid for secession from Syria. Syria also now controls key cities near the Turkish border, as well as the important hydroelectric dams of Tabqah and Tishrin. It has also retaken some of its oil fields, though it is not confronting US troops nearby. Meanwhile, its army is advancing into Idlib in the north-west – the province where defeated jihadis were shipped from all the Syrian hotspots during the war to be dealt with later on. As for the Kurds, their dream of an independent Rojava has gone. Their opportunistic American allies have deserted them. The SDF may eventually become integrated into the Syrian army.

Despite the view of some commentators that Russia made too many concessions to Turkey, the deal has advanced the cause of peace. True, 200,000 civilians fled the Turkish invasion, and there has been major damage to water supplies and electricity. It's also true that Turkey has done well out of the deal, pushing its Kurdish enemy away from its border. And although the deal stipulates that Turkey must respect Syria's territorial integrity, it remains to be seen whether they will honour this. From Turkey's point of view, its neo-Ottoman ambitions have been advanced. Nevertheless, taking all that into account, the deal has not only allowed Syria to reclaim more of its territory from US-Kurdish control, but driven a bigger wedge between Turkey and the US. Even if it had wanted to, Russia couldn't have prevented Turkey's invasion by force without risking Turkey running back to its American NATO partner for protection.

Overall, Russian regional influence is greater than before; bad news for Israel, whose ability to bomb Syria at will is now limited by Russia's presence. Israel's hope of a permanent pro-imperialist Kurdish statelet in Syria has been dashed, and not only has it lost the airspace it had in north-east Syria, but American will-

ingness to abandon its Kurdish allies has rattled the Israeli establishment. Equally worrying for Israel has been the successful Houthi attack on Saudi oil installations and the US failure to prevent it. Russia is now recognized by all sides as the regional powerbroker and peacemaker, an outcome the US had worked for decades to prevent. On the other hand, the Americans are preying on weaknesses elsewhere to cause maximum damage to Iran and the 'axis of resistance'.

Meanwhile, in a further sign of its expansionist aims, Turkey has announced that it is sending troops to Libya to support the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA). It has already sent jihadi



Aramco petro chemicals, Jubail, Saudi Arabia

militants from Idlib in Syria, along with armoured vehicles. The GNA, which is recognised by the UN, is fighting forces under General Haftar, who was once close to Gaddafi, but later went into exile in the US. Haftar has been trying for eight months to capture Tripoli from the GNA. This is the latest battle in the ongoing civil war in Libya, which began after the disastrous western regime change intervention of 2011, leaving no single force in overall control. Haftar controls the majority of the country and receives military aid from France, whose Total oil company is based in Haftar's territory, as well as major support from the UAE. Meanwhile Qatar backs the GNA, as does Italy whose oil giant, ENI, is based in its territory. Turkey's expansionist plans follow an economic agreement with the GNA on energy exploration in Libya and underneath the Mediter-

anean, prompting a furious reaction to Turkey's Libya adventure from its regional rivals Israel, Greece and Cyprus. Israel and Turkey are already in dispute over Turkey's incursion into Cypriot waters to drill for energy.

## YEMEN & THE GULF

A subsidiary war-within-a-war between proxies belonging to Yemen's two main invaders, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has made the dire situation there even worse. The two countries, supported by a western-backed coalition, invaded the country in 2015, using Blackwater mercenaries and 14,000 impoverished Sudanese fighters as ground troops against the Houthis, whom they perceived as

being too close to Iran. But recently the UAE decided to pull its troops out, worried by Saudi recklessness in provoking Iran – the UAE's biggest trading partner – and by threats of Houthi attacks on its oil installations. It is, however, leaving in place a proxy force of southern secessionists – the Southern Transitional Council (STC) – to fulfil its own agenda: control of the port of Aden and domination of the Bab-el-Mandeb seaway, a chokepoint for world shipping. The STC's war against Saudi-backed Yemeni forces loyal to the exiled president Hadi has recently halted, after the STC was offered a future share of power in Yemen. But the causes of the conflict remain.

Meanwhile the Houthis – their common enemy – showed up the limits of US air defence systems against relatively low-tech weapons by suc-

cessfully bombing the Saudi Aramco oil refinery. They also exposed the weakness of the huge Saudi military, designed for conventional wars but not for defending against small-scale attacks. The Saudis' biggest weakness, however, is Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman – whose reckless invasion has failed to defeat the Houthis and install a puppet regime in Yemen. After Aramco, the Saudis have been forced to begin negotiations with the Houthis, releasing 200 Houthi prisoners and approaching neutral Oman to act as go-between. They will try to divide the Houthis from Iran – an unlikely prospect given Iran's importance in underpinning Houthi power through its deliveries of arms parts and drones.

In the face of any moves towards peace, Israel will try to escalate the war in Yemen. Having already mounted secret missions against the Houthis, it plans airstrikes on the pretext of defending itself against 'Iranian' attack. Its recent attempts at wooing the Saudis and other Gulf states represent a necessary regrouping of these pro-imperialist regimes in the face of setbacks in Syria. Closer relations will also help Israel prevent peace from breaking out in Yemen.

## Prospect of major war

As a result of the killing of Solemani, all the separate but linked conflicts outlined above could well be drawn into a single conflagration. In such a major war, the US will have to be seen to be able to protect its regional allies; the Saudis, the Gulf states and Israel. If it fails to do so, the long-term effects may well be to diminish US influence across the region. Furthermore, with the US embroiled in the Middle East, the Americans' strategic aim of pivoting to Asia to counter the rise of China will be put on hold, allowing China more space and time in which to develop. We are witnessing potentially epochal shifts in power. In the meantime, there is the very real prospect of millions of people suffering and dying.



# FRANCE

## *Working class fights on the streets*

by Jean Auld

Huge strikes by French transport and other workers have paralysed the country for several weeks. The unions are demanding an end to Macron's plans to reform the pensions system. The strikes brought public transport to a halt throughout December, and at different times closed schools, chemical works and oil depots. The first wave of mass marches in dozens of French cities drew 1.5 million protestors, the second 850,000 and the third 1.8 million, with the pro-establishment CFDT union joining for the first time.

The strikes initially shut down seven of France's eight oil refineries – and strikes by tanker drivers caused petrol shortages at service stations. About a quarter of Électricité de France workers have also been on strike, leading to rolling power cuts in different regions. Train drivers in the most militant CGT union centre said they would continue striking until Macron's pension reforms were scrapped. Railworkers in other unions also took a tough line.

The CFDT union centre, however, supports the new points-based system and is only striking over one central aspect, the raising of the retirement age to 64. Despite these differences, there has been a new level of co-operation and unity between the traditionally rivalrous union centres – and unity between trade unionist *gilets rouges* and *gilets jaunes*, who have marched together in towns and cities across France. The militant mood follows more than a year of *gilets jaunes* demonstrations, along with strikes through-

out the summer and autumn of 2019 – by firefighters, hospital workers, teachers and others.

Macron's new points-based retirement scheme would abolish the 42 individual pension schemes operating in different sectors and replace them with a universal system, based on points accumulated over a working life – though exactly how points are earned is unclear. Currently, pension calculations in the private sector would be based on an employee's 25 best earning years. Public sector pensions are based on earnings made in the last six months before retirement. Macron claims the reform is necessary to pay for an ageing population, with pension system deficits forecast at 17€ billion by 2025. But there is widespread public recognition that he has started a race to the bottom on pensions. In one opinion poll (Dec 11-12), 70% of respondents saw the reforms as an attack on pension rights, and there is solid public support for the strikes – this despite the fact that only 8% of French workers are unionised.

The reforms would force people to retire later or face reduced pensions when they retire. Though over the past ten years the official retirement age has risen from 60 to 62, France still has one of the lowest retirement ages of the rich OECD countries. The plan would make employees work till 64 to draw their full pension. Currently, France has one of the lowest rates of pensioner poverty in the EU but that would change drastically under the new scheme. Communist leader Fabien Roussel said

the plans “attack the principle of solidarity that is the basis of French social protection,” and “individualise” pension pots. Another Left MP said that “under the alibi of universality, the government is picking everyone's pockets.”

Coupled with France's earlier austerity measures, such as the Code Pénicaud, which targeted national pay bargaining and undermined union representation, and the Thatcherite programme of privatisation, the pensions reforms aim at rolling back the social advances made since 1945. It represents a direct challenge to the power of trade unions, who have suffered a series of defeats in recent years.

A danger for Macron is that the pensions protests have begun to link with other struggles, drawing increasing numbers of people into the struggle. One example is health-workers who have struck against underfunding and unacceptable workloads, joining the pensions protests in the streets. Equally difficult for Macron are the signs of ‘convergence’ between *gilets jaunes* and unions. Such unity has until recently been hindered by the *gilets jaunes*' suspicion of organised labour, and the unions' initial suspicion of *gilets jaunes* as chaotic and right wing. But here too there have been growing indications of unity. A one-day protest in February 2019 saw them marching side-by-side, and in November the CGT welcomed *gilets jaunes*' calls to support the pensions strikes. The regular *gilets jaunes* Saturday marches throughout Decem-



Riot police bear down on *gilets jaunes* in Paris

ber were joined by strikers, such as the RATP Paris public transport workers, all condemning the pensions reforms.

### **Gilets jaunes**

The *gilets jaunes* protests began in November 2018, and have continued ever since – though Macron's PR stunt of a ‘great debate’, a sham engagement with the people in early 2019, had the effect of dampening them down. Aside from the weekly demonstrations known as Actes, *gilets jaunes* have occupied roundabouts and shut down motorway toll booths, where close-knit groups have formed. They have become an important symbol of resistance – against the establishment, against austerity, and against the French constitution. As a result they have met with harsh state violence. Police have used anti-terrorist emergency powers to inflict a level of visible brutality not seen

since the Algerian war. So far, at least two people have been accidentally killed, and 25 protestors have lost an eye, and 5 a hand. 4,000 have been injured, 315 with serious head injuries including broken skulls and jaws. Flashballs, banned elsewhere in Europe, and considered weapons of war, have been widely used. Amnesty, the UN and the European parliament have all condemned the excessive use of force.

Despite such repression, the protests have continued week after week. Initially sparked by fuel price rises and the provocative lowering of wealth taxes, they developed into a wider expression of revolt. Over a year into the movement, 69% of French people still believe it to be “justified”. Yet the media in Britain has blatantly ignored the movement and the violence against it, while highlighting the demonstrations in Hong Kong and Venezuela, which it suits the British establishment to support.

Condemned as a rightwing mob by liberal commentators and initially by the unions, *gilets jaunes* protests have at times taken on a reactionary appearance and some leading individuals among them have expressed xenophobic views. According to a poll conducted during the last election, 60% of those finding it “very difficult” to cope financially voted for Le Pen over Macron. That means that many of the *gilets jaunes* would have been Le Pen voters. But the *gilets jaunes* are by and large not ideological right wingers. Their demands are progressive: for higher wages, pensions, and benefits. There are also demands to tax big business, rebuild hospitals and other public services, and renationalise utilities and SNCF. Demonstrators may sing the *Marseillaise* and wave the Tricolore, but these symbols have been reclaimed for their original revolutionary significance. The early demonstrations attacked the Stock Exchange, large department

PHOTO BY NORBU GYACHUN



stores and even the Elysée Palace. Though the *gilets jaunes* are supported by the *Front National*, they are also backed by the Communists and Mélenchon's leftist *France Insoumise*.

This is a movement of the poor and dispossessed who found a spontaneous expression of class discontent in the *gilets jaunes*, just as the vote for Brexit expressed working class anger in Britain. It arose after a period of successive union defeats, including the key defeat of the railworkers against the privatisation of SNCF, and when the once powerful Communist Party had been weakened by decades of ideological retreat.

The *gilets jaunes* mostly come from small towns and villages rather than cities, places cut off by lack of public transport – hence the furious reaction against the petrol price rises of 2018. This geographical isolation is coupled with chronic employment and lack of access to care. 9 million people in France live below the poverty line; 30% of French people feel they live in neglected areas. But such poverty is not confined to rural areas. Urban protestors join the weekly protests that coalesce in the big cities, and in summer 2019 the movement spread to undocumented migrants in the Paris area. These *gilets noirs* – a movement of about 1500 migrants – made headlines with several high-profile occupations protests in Paris, most notably of the Panthéon, and Charles de Gaulle airport. But despite some local *gilets jaunes*' expressions of solidarity with migrant victims of police violence, there has been little ongoing joint action between them and *gilets noirs*.

The movement, based outside workplaces, has not hit the economy directly – apart from blockades of fuel depots, impeding the circulation of heavy lorries, and disrupting tourism and the retail trade during demonstrations.

The movement's most visible call has been for direct referenda. The RIC (*référendum d'initiative citoyenne* or citizens' initiative referendum) is a plan to allow a referendum on any proposal that gains 700,000 signatures or more. The problem with this idea is that referenda can simply be ignored, as we in Britain know. The RIC demand reflects widespread distrust of politicians and the current system of representation, and is an attempt to bypass parliamentary democracy. This rejection of state structures has led to some positive experiments in grassroots democracy, such as the various assemblies, local organising groups and, so far, four *assemblées*

**The gilets jaunes mostly come from small towns and villages rather than cities, places cut off by lack of public transport – hence the furious reaction against the petrol price rises of 2018.**

*des assemblées*, most famously in the small town of Commercy, attended by delegates from *gilets jaunes* groups around the country. More important, the regular informal local protests, as well as the larger demonstrations in cities, have drawn thousands of people into active political struggle.

But the movement's refusal to join with established working class organisations such as the trade unions has been a weakness. It has kept the *gilets jaunes* isolated and has prevented a potential alliance that would help them achieve their demands. Separation from the organised Left also means the movement has not

developed a clear view of the state as a vehicle of class rule – despite the police violence.

The *gilets jaunes* did win some victories in the early stages: the fuel price rise was halted, and Macron announced a 10€ billion package of wage increases and tax cuts for low earners and pensioners. Companies were also encouraged to give out Christmas bonuses, which would be tax free up to 1000€. But these giveaways did not address the fundamental grievances.

### Activists converge

Now there is potential for 'convergence' to make headway. Work has already been done in a number of cities. The Communists in Marseille, for example, successfully brought activists together at an early stage in the *gilets jaunes* movement. Nationally, the wave of strikes has begun to create a gravitational pull, drawing the *gilets jaunes* towards the labour movement. On a wider political level, the demands of both strikers and *gilets jaunes* are incompatible with continued membership of the EU, whose rules lead to the driving down of wages and welfare cut-backs, including pensions. The need is to link the current struggles with demands for a new constitution – a 6th Republic – and for popular sovereignty outside the EU.

In a possible sign of government weakening, Macron's Pensions Minister Delevoye was forced to resign in mid-December for his failure to declare outside interests – one of which was administering an insurance training institute, a sector that could benefit from the planned pension reform. Macron has offered the possibility of concessions on the age of retirement in an attempt to divide the CFDT from the other unions. But at the time of writing (end of 2019), the unions are united and not giving way. This has been the longest running strike action since the railworkers' strikes in 1986-7.

# Latin America

## a continent fights neo-liberalism

December 2019

by Dan Morgan, Chile

Where do I begin? So many countries in turmoil. The commodity boom fuelled by China's former spectacular growth rate ended and economic problems gave the opportunity for the right wing to smother the 'pink wave' in much of the continent. But capitalism does not solve people's problems and so we now have a wave of social explosions. The best placard I saw in Chile was one held by a middle-aged woman that read, "Hay tantas wea, que no sé qué poner" which freely translates as, "There's so much crap, I don't know what to put". In short, there are massive protests against neoliberal policies of austerity in Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Honduras and Haiti. The coup against a progressive government in Bolivia was also followed by huge protests and the story does not end there. Mexico and Argentina have seen electoral successes against the right and Venezuela and Cuba continue to resist US sanctions.

The imposition of neo-liberalism in Latin America, often through dictatorships, is well known, however, the return of democracy did not mean a reversal of these policies with continued privatisations and, for example, worsening social segregation in education. Now Chile and several other countries are convulsed by protests and the great need is for political development, for people to see the possibility of socialism, a real alternative system. The political will is not yet there and socialism is demonised. Cuba and Venezuela are struggling economically against increasing US sanctions and Venezuela is in such difficulties that it is successfully used as a negative example. How long will it take to overcome this?

There's no knowing, but it will and must happen. Until then, the protest movements will continue and will develop politically, as people learn in their struggles.

### Ecuador - reaction pushed back

Rafael Correa, President 2007-2017, improved life for the people and fought for compensation from Chevron, the oil company giant, which caused an ecological disaster in the country. Business sectors hated him for making them pay social security contributions and minimum wages etc. But Ecuador had its longest period of political stability under his presidency. His successor is the treacherous Lenin Moreno, elected as candidate of the same political alliance but bent on reversing these gains (as well as cosyng up to US imperialism in other ways). Austerity policies followed, and on 1 October he introduced an economic package called Decree 883 which was agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The people of Ecuador rose in revolt. Protests were started by the trade union confederation FUT, the indigenous peoples' confederation CONAIE, the Popular Front and students. A transport strike paralysed the country from 3 October, and then the CONAIE came into action, marching on Quito, the capital, and defying the police. The armed forces were deployed on the 7th October and the government moved to Guayaquil for a short time.

With the whole country in revolt, the government was forced to talk

to the CONAIE – the first session on 13th October was televised at their insistence. Moreno agreed to suspend Decree 883 and thus cancel the IMF package. The bad news was the arrests of several leaders of the 'Citizen Revolution Movement', supporters of ex-president Correa, leading to others seeking asylum in the Mexican Embassy.

### Chile in revolt

Social Media, especially Facebook, buzzed with the news from Ecuador. People's protests led to the cancellation of a neoliberal social package! If they can do it, why not us?



Chile - The people rise up. Goodbye Pinera

The Metro fare had just gone up by 4% (4 pence). No big deal, but just another cut in workers' standard of living. From October 6th, secondary school students started jumping over turnstiles to avoid paying their fares. The 'evade' movement snowballed and by Friday 18th October the whole Metro network was closed at 3pm – police repression could not stop the protests. That night there was the



first of many ‘cacerolazos’, pot and pan protests, and 23 Metro stations were set on fire. We still don’t know who did this. There are organised anarchist groups who certainly have done similar things, but it seems unlikely they could have coordinated such widespread attacks and at such an early stage of the protests. There are images of police entering Metro stations with cans of liquid but the truth is not clear. In any case, if there were a conspiracy to commit arson in order to discredit the protests and end them, it did not work at all. There were huge marches on Saturday 19th October and a social explosion followed, reaching its visible high point two weeks later when a million and a half demonstrated in Santiago and hundreds of thousands more across the country, even in small towns. In Villarrica the population of the commune is 50,000 with about 30,000 in the town and there were close to 3,000 on the march – and two weeks later it was even bigger, more than 4,000 strong. The lid was off the pressure cooker of decades of resentment at low wages, poor public health and education, miserable pensions and ever more visible corruption.

The marches, demonstrations and “cacerolazos” met fierce repression. For the first time the police fired shotguns, rubber bullets and tear gas grenades at face level, causing thousands of injuries including 354 eye injuries. At least 30 people lost the sight of one eye and a student taking photographs at a demonstration is now totally blind. At least 4 people died directly from army and police fire, hundreds have been tortured, including sexual torture, in police stations. Complaints by the official National Institute for Human Rights and Child Defence and civil society had no effect, nor did the Amnesty International report. Only the Human Rights Watch (HRW) report led to a promise to reform the police and demand an answer from the Police Director. HRW is of course the imperialists’ favoured ‘human rights’ organisation for its very ten-

dentious reporting on Venezuela and Nicaragua, etc.

Politically the explosion, long feared by the ruling class, took them by surprise. All TV channels were filled with film of the demonstrations and discussion of people’s real problems for two weeks. Now they scarcely mention marches and concentrate on damage done by looters etc. The government’s plan for a tax reform to reverse the Bachelet government’s limited progressive measures was scrapped. Small improvements to the miserable minimum pension have been agreed, as was a state subsidy on low wages to raise minimum income to £375 net from £375 gross a month. (The exchange rate varies and purchasing power is very different but an average estimate of 800 Chilean pesos per pound has been used). Other social benefits that do not affect the basic neoliberal model will be given. The biggest gain, though, is the promise of a referendum in April on having a new constitution to completely replace the Pinochet one of 1980 which sets the neoliberal model in stone. There will now be a fight about how to elect the members of a possible constituent assembly.

Last year political action centred on feminist issues and women have been to the fore in this movement, recently creating the choreographed dance against rape that has gone world-wide. It includes specifically Chilean references to rape and harassment by the police, as well as other state institutions.

The protests were really spontaneous and for some time no real leadership was evident. Anarchist groups have indulged in burning buildings and infrastructure, possibly leading looting but much of this has also been spontaneous revolt and criminals taking advantage of the chaos. Now a ‘Social Unity’ group has been formed from over 200 trade union and social organisations which has made proposals for election of the constituent assembly for example.

One political problem is widespread objections to all political parties. In 2015 illegal financing by big business of the parties in Congress was clearly exposed and the huge, self-awarded salaries of deputies and senators have been widely denounced. Even the Communist Party, not involved in this corruption, was ‘tainted’ by its inclusion in Michelle Bachelet’s second government. It tried to end the worse abuses of the system but was stymied by its own right wing of Christian Democrats and also by the Constitution Tribunal. The Broad Front deputies are new but some opportunist mistakes, along with anti-politics prejudices, make its work hard. So forming a good political alternative will be difficult. Anarchistic attitudes go deep among wide sections of young people especially and the pro-dictatorship right wing is still important.

As of 5th December marches and one or two-day strikes continue along with growing local assemblies to discuss social issues and the possible constituent assembly.

### Colombia – strikes and protests

The latest wave of protests in Colombia is a new phenomenon. Remember Colombia had difficult negotiations to end the long guerrilla struggle of the Marxist inspired FARC under previous President Santos. His more hardline successor since 2018, Ivan Duque, has undermined that agreement, leading to some FARC leaders resuming armed struggle. Others have been assassinated, along with an increased number of social activists including indigenous leaders – at least 500 killed since 2016 when the peace agreement was signed. These massacres by paramilitary and other criminal gangs have not been stopped by the armed forces. In August the army bombarded a supposed camp of FARC dissidents killing up to 18 children. On 5th November a vote of censure was presented in the Congress against the Minister

of Defence and he resigned the following day.

A block of organisations set up a movement for a National Strike against outrages such as corruption, inequality and all neoliberal policies and this started on 21st November. The strike and associated demonstrations and “cacerolazos” have been enormous in all major cities. On the third day a young man was killed by police shotgun fire in Bogotá which increased resistance. The National Strike Committee which includes the main trade union centre has a list of 13 demands.

As of 5th December the strikes and protests continue.

### Bolivia – coup d’etat



Evo Morales

Evo Morales, first indigenous president of Bolivia, wanted a fourth term in office and went for re-election on 20th October. This was the opportunity right wing pro-imperialist forces had hoped for. The constitution limits re-election to two terms and Evo had very narrowly lost a referendum held to change this. Then a legal judgement allowed him to stand but this manoeuvre provoked a lot of resentment, along with the loss of some left wing and environmentalist supporters. Evo and his more ideological vice-president Alvaro Garcia Linera had pursued a policy of developing nationalised industries along with ‘normal’ capitalist development, promoting indigenous peoples and social services. However after 13 years in power, a universal health

service was only started this year.

Lots of US dollars, over 1.3 million last year alone from the National Endowment for Democracy, funded the right wing opposition. The rabid racist right wing, along with some leaders exploiting supposed regional grievances, plotted to get rid of Evo whatever the election result was. A plausible, soft opposition candidate, Carlos Mesa, was put up. Evo got 47% of the vote against 36% for Mesa, just over a 10% difference and therefore an outright victory for Evo in the first round of voting. But a mistake was made in inviting observers from the Organisation of American States which enabled them to release a preliminary report citing some vague irregularities. Bands of brutal thugs began blocking roads and then attacking leaders of MAS, the government party (which won over two thirds of the deputies and senators in 2014, the previous elections and a majority this time). The police did nothing against the increasing wave of right wing protests and finally announced a mutiny in several cities. The army Commander-in-Chief then ‘invited’ Evo to resign, amid brutal intimidation of ministers and other leaders. Evo and Alvaro opted to leave for Mexico, and some MAS ministers and others sought political asylum in embassies. A senator, Jeanine Añez, was self-ordained as interim President and hard line ministers appointed to dismantle MAS’s state bodies. Many leaders are being charged with everything from sedition to terrorism to embezzlement and other forms of corruption.

New elections, with a new Electoral Tribunal, are promised for March or April. The new authorities will try everything to rig these, using widespread intimidation and acting with dubious legality. The election, however, showed how strong Evo’s base is among the poor and indigenous. They have strong local and peasant organisations (male and female) and their resistance will be strong. They have prevailed against hard repres-

sion in the past. We must hope they can again.

### Argentina – neoliberal failure, left success

Mauricio Macri was very narrowly elected President of Argentina in 2015, defeating a less than charismatic candidate from the party of the previous president, Cristina Fernandez. Cristina’s government was popular but opposition to it grew amid rising inflation and accusations of corruption. She is probably not corrupt (although personally quite rich) but several of her ministers almost certainly were. Corruption is not unusual in Argentina and they all came from the traditional Peronist Party.

So a right wing businessman came in, promising neoliberal policies that would create economic stability and growth, bring investment and employment. The result was almost incredibly the opposite. Lifting of exchange controls led to a massive exodus of money. Devaluation first led to an exchange rate of 18 pesos per US Dollar from a previous rate of 10 or 14, and now stands at an amazing 58 pesos per dollar! Taxes on exports of wheat, maize and mining products were dropped and those on soya, the main export, cut from 35% to 30% so the fiscal deficit only increased.

In a financial mess, Macri went cap in hand to the IMF and got a big 50 billion dollar loan, later increased to 57 billion. He was forced to reintroduce the export taxes to try and balance the budget. Inflation was 48% in 2018 and estimated to be 52% this year. Cristina’s government ended with a national debt of 52% of GDP, it is now at 95%. Nineteen thousand companies have closed and unemployment is around 14%, the highest since 2004. Generous subsidies on natural gas, electricity and public transport were gradually slashed, leading to prices increasing by 2 to 3 times, hitting the poor hardest. Poverty has increased enormously

and will stand at about 40% of the population at year's end, with 7% indigent (miserably poor).

So in the elections of 27th October, the Fernandez double – Alberto for President and Cristina for Vice-President - got 48% and Macri 32%. Alberto Fernandez promises to be a moderate, centre-left president and faces tough economic problems left him by Macri. His first visit abroad was to President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador in Mexico, and is very much in tune with him. They both condemned the coup in Bolivia for example.

### Mexico – AMLO one year on

Last year Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, thankfully shortened to AMLO, with his new National Regeneration Front (MORENA), won a stunning victory against the neoliberal and corrupt parties in Mexico. The alliance led by the MORENA, formed only in 2012, won a majority of deputies and senators. AMLO got 53% of the votes, the next highest had 23%. AMLO had been mayor of Mexico City: he is a soft-spoken, decent man who is no revolutionary but promised a hard fight against the corrosive all-embracing corruption in the country which is linked to extremely rich drug traffickers. He also promises free, secret elections to trade unions which have usually been corrupt class collaborationist organisations. If he can make big differences in these two things then Mexican politics will have the chance of serious change. The other distinctive feature of AMLO is that he does not take a submissive attitude to the USA. Feelings of national dignity are important in Mexico, and that explains some at least of his popularity.

### Brazil – Bolsonaro turns back the clock

Jair Bolsonaro, a pro-fascist, racist, misogynist was, nevertheless, elected President last year and took office

in January. He appeals particularly to the strong racist currents in Brazilian society. By self-identification, 48% are white, 44% brown and 7% black. The darker the skin, generally the more excluded and poor you are – slavery was abolished only in 1888. Racial divisions, as in the USA, explain a lot of the relative weakness of the working class movement. The Workers' Party (PT) governments of Lula de Silva and Dilma Rousseff had introduced elements of positive discrimination for university education for example, and these were hated by racists. The corrupt political system was not challenged by Lula or Dilma and this was their greatest mistake, leading directly to the parliamentary coup against Dilma in 2016. Lula's imprisonment on trumped-up charges followed – he has now been released after a year but still faces legal action.

Brazil, with a population of over two hundred million and the huge Amazon forest, is the giant of South America and so to have a reactionary and repressive government there is a major tragedy. Bolsonaro openly welcomes more rapid destruction of the Amazon forest – forest fires increased this year by 77% over last year. It was important that Brazil had not adopted neoliberal policies of 'opening' its economy. It has a lot of industry, which had been protected, however, Bolsonaro has promised to open it to please US imperialism. His reward last week – Trump imposed tariffs on imports of Brazilian steel and aluminium. His policies are counter to those of Alberto Fernandez, so there will be tensions in the Mercosur trading bloc.

The Landless Workers' Movement MST organises around 400 thousand families in settlements and encampments to fight the big landowners and produce healthy food. Recently 700 of these families were evicted in Bahia state due to Bolsonaro's regime. The prospect is bleak, for now, but resistance will

develop. Joao Pedro Stedile is one of the leaders of the MST and writes good analyses of the situation from a Marxist standpoint, starting with the world outlook. An English translation of his latest long article can be found at: <http://www.mstbrazil.org/content/contemporary-challenges-working-class-peasantry-brazil>

### Uruguay – right wing win

The Broad Front, a left and centre-left alliance, has governed Uruguay since 1999 and won handsomely in 2014. This time it lost its majority of deputies and senators, and in the run-off ballot the right wing presidential candidate won by 51% to 49%. The commodity boom is over and all South American countries have had falling economic growth rates (although Bolivia maintained the highest rate under Evo, at 4%). Uruguay perhaps suffered more than most and the Broad Front had a very tepid approach to economic change. Although polarisation was avoided, no radical changes were made. If new President Lacalle brings in austerity, we shall see how long it takes for the people, and left wing forces, to react.

### Haiti – mass protests

Haiti is famous for the first successful slave revolt in 1898. French-speaking, it is different from the rest of Latin America and often ignored. The poorest of countries, it suffered decades of brutal dictatorships but in 1990 with the first democratic election there was a glimpse of hope. The new President Jean-Bertrand Aristide promised progressive rule. Not to US imperialism's taste, he was overthrown in 1991 by a military coup. He was President again from 1994 to 1996 and again from 2001 to 2004 when, with US backing, right wing paramilitaries removed him again and he went into exile. A number of corrupt neoliberal governments followed and recently the country has also been swept by massive protests.

# NO TO WAR NO TO NATO!

by Pat Turnbull

On 3rd and 4th December 2019, NATO held its 70th anniversary summit in London, celebrating its foundation on 4th April 1949 in Washington DC, USA. The summit was able to welcome as a participant its future 30th member, North Macedonia, strengthening NATO's stranglehold on the Balkans.

Before the summit, there was a lot of talk about divisions. In an article of 3rd December entitled 'NATO summit: Divisions exposed ahead of meeting', the BBC web site highlighted widely publicised disagreements featuring French President Macron, Turkish President Erdogan, and US President Trump: 'Last month, the French president angered some countries by suggesting the alliance is "brain dead"'. It continued, 'Ahead of his departure from Ankara to London, Mr Erdogan said Turkey would not approve a plan to defend Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the event of a Russian attack unless NATO recognises the Kurdish YPG militia as terrorists.' President Trump was quoted as saying ahead of the meeting that Macron's statement was "very, very nasty" adding: "You can't just go around making statements like that about NATO. It's very disrespectful." In addition,

the mass media was full of Trump's disgruntlement at NATO members' failure to meet the target of military spending of at least 2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

Thieves do fall out, but predictions of a major rift turned out to be fake news when the final statement, agreed by all members, was delivered. According to the statement: 'NATO guarantees the security of our territory and our one billion citizens'. It reaffirms, 'our solemn commitment as enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty that an attack against one Ally shall be considered an attack against us all.' It continues: 'Through our Defence Investment Pledge, we are increasing our defence investment in line with its 2 per cent guidelines' adding that 'non-US defence expenditure has grown for five consecutive years; over 130 billion US dollars more is being invested in defence.'

### Who is the enemy?

'Russia's aggressive actions constitute a threat to Euro-Atlantic security; terrorism in all its forms and manifestations remains a persistent threat to us all. State and non-state actors challenge the rules-based international order. Instability beyond our borders is also contributing to irregular migration. We face cyber and hybrid threats.' The statement repeats the lie that 'Russia's deployment of new intermediate-range missiles ...brought about the demise of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.' It continues 'Allies are strongly committed to full implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in all its aspects', an assertion which does not sit well with the involvement of non-nuclear NATO states in preparations for nuclear war and with NATO's

policy that in the event of war the non-proliferation treaty would be disregarded.

The statement highlights new, additional priorities: 'NATO and Allies, within their respective authority, are committed to ensuring the security of our communications, including 5G.' Worryingly it continues: 'We have declared space an additional domain for NATO' and 'We are increasing our tools to respond to cyber attacks.' A new enemy is added. 'We recognise that China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an alliance.'

Given these additional aggressive priorities by NATO, it is disappointing that the 2019 Labour Party manifesto was weak in this respect. Under Defence and Security the manifesto says: 'We will maintain our commitment to NATO and our close relationship with our European partners.' It adds, 'Labour supports the renewal of the Trident nuclear deterrent.' Given that Britain in July 2019 reclaimed the title of the world's second biggest arms exporter, it is unfortunate that the manifesto says, 'Labour's commitment to spend at least 2 percent of GDP on defence will guarantee that our armed forces are versatile and capable of fulfilling the full range of roles and obligations' and 'the UK defence industry is world-leading, and Labour will continue to work with manufacturers, unions and export partners to ensure it maintains its highly skilled workforce.' There are better ways to guarantee skilled jobs than manufacturing arms.

It is also disappointing that the demonstrations on the occasion of the NATO summit in London were organised under the slogan



'No to Trump, no to NATO! As a result the focus of the march was not on NATO but on Trump, with a range of organisations highlighting issues unconnected to the summit. This contrasts with demonstrations in Portugal on the dates of the summit headed 'Yes to Peace! No to NATO!' or the proposed slogans in Germany next year 'No to War! No to NATO!'

### Danger of war

On 6th December German paper *Unsere Zeit (UZ)* published in its online edition an interview with Anne Rieger, one of the organisers of the 22nd Kassel Peace Advisory of 7th and 8th December. The Advisory, with forty speakers, was entitled 'No to war - disarmament not arms build-up - ban nuclear weapons'. The interview was headed 'No Natural Law: without resistance the danger of war will grow.'

UZ's questions began: 'Tanks roll eastwards through Germany to the Russian border. At the beginning of October German, US and other military units undertook the NATO military exercise 'Steadfast Noon' rehearsing nuclear war over Germany. How does the peace movement assess the current danger of war?'

Anne Rieger answered: 'The danger of war is growing enormously. World wide the profits of the concerns are not reaching the levels capitalist necessity requires. The exploitation of nature and human beings is reaching its limits. So with the competition among themselves, the clashes over resources, markets, means of transport and cheap labour, their room for manoeuvre grows less and less. If this can't be dealt with by economic means, the option of a military conflict between the states concerned becomes ever

greater and with it the danger of war. We see and feel the build up of arms. The question is how strong we, the people involved, the peace movement, are to fight against this. War is not a natural law, but a question of the balance of forces. Sadly we must say that this is not on our side in Germany, NATO and the EU. The concerns and the politicians acting for them feel themselves since 1989 so strong, so brutally armed that they can take chances on this danger of war.'

But Anne Rieger continued: 'If we can succeed in developing lasting common demands and actions with the young people of the "Fridays for Future" demonstrations, join the problems of the environment and climate to the anti-war question, we can change the balance of forces a little bit to our advantage. We must make it clear that wars and the concerns which prepare wars and armaments for them are the great climate destroyers.'

In 2020 NATO is planning a huge manoeuvre, Defender 2020. More than 37,000 troops will practise redeploying to Poland and the Baltic. In preparation the German peace movement will use the collection of signatures on the petition 'Disarmament not arms build up', which already has 170,000 signatures, to explain to people what is going on and the dangers it holds. They want to extend their work with the trade unions, and mobilise for the February security conference in Munich and the regular Easter marches.

The manoeuvres are happening around the 8th of May, the 75th anniversary of the liberation from fascism, which gives them a particularly baleful significance. On the days of the manoeuvres the peace movement will organise actions along the route of this

war provocation, especially in east Germany, where actions and organisation were recently discussed at a big meeting of peace activists in Leipzig.

Anne Rieger sees no contradiction between the PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence) EU military project and the plans of NATO. Like NATO, the PESCO members have committed themselves to spending more every year on armaments. She judges that Germany, with the help of the EU, will play an even more central role in NATO, with the German bourgeoisie excited to have access in the EU to France's nuclear weapons. At the negotiations to ban nuclear weapons in 2017, the official and de facto nuclear powers and the NATO states with the exception of the Netherlands did not take part. The German peace movement wants to press Germany to sign the treaty.

### Climate Change

Anne Rieger also drew attention to a particular danger, that pressure for climate change can be used to justify an aggressive foreign policy. 'Several politicians have already said that because of rises in temperatures, there is a danger that more people will have to leave their countries and come to Europe. So that they don't overrun us, the outer borders of the EU must be defended.

'Another argument being raised more and more is that in states where conditions are 'chaotic' by reason of climate change, western militaries will be needed to restore the states to 'orderly' conditions. Climate protection is being used in these cases solely to excuse the further build-up of arms.'



# Winning the Green New Deal

by Greg Kaser

Campaigning for the Green New Deal is an opportunity for progressives to channel the passion to 'save the planet' into targeted campaigns nationally, locally and industrially.

With more and more evidence that climate change is well and truly upon us, progressives have rallied around a solution: the Green New Deal. In America, the Green New Deal is being championed by socialists inside and outside the Democratic Party; in Europe, the movement for democratising the EU, DiEM25, founded by Yanis Varoufakis, is pushing a continental version; and in Britain the 2019 Labour Party Conference adopted a policy advocating it. All versions have one thing in common: a just transition to a net zero carbon emitting society by the 2030s.

The ambition is feasible but its achievement faces numerous obstacles, technical, political and economic. Changing to more responsible lifestyles will play a part, but a modern society relies on energy for almost every activity. Setting climate goals is insufficient unless these are developed democratically and supported by a realistic plan. It will involve a shift away from letting market forces inflict yet more damage in the direction of a general plan for the country. Indeed, this is one reason why the Green New Deal encounters neoliberal opposition, even from those concerned about climate change. *Financial Times* economics commentator Martin

Wolf warned his readers against the Green New Deal as many of its supporters "view climate [change] as a justification for the planned economy". [1]

### Market failure on global emissions

The alarm over global warming from greenhouse gases (GHGs) was raised in 1968 when the American Petroleum Institute was told by scientists that CO2 emissions could raise the Earth's temperature over the next thirty years. [2] Ten years later, governments established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and then held an international conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 that agreed to halt global warming. In practice little has been achieved with atmospheric CO2 rising from 322 parts per million to 407 over the 50 years between 1968 and 2018 according to the World Meteorological Organisation. This lack of results has come about for two reasons.

Firstly, companies have continued to operate on the basis of business as usual. Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, speaking to the Treasury Select Committee of the House of Commons on 15 October 2019, said that global capital markets were "pricing the transition" away from carbon on a pathway to "probably north of 4 degrees" in terms of global warming. "Policy" he continued, "is not yet consist-

ent with stabilising temperatures below 2°C". With 95 percent of world energy production based on burning fossil fuels and other combustibles, there is a myriad of vested interests with a stake in the existing business model. As long as it remains legal and profitable to burn stuff, companies are not going to change from what they are already doing.

The second reason for the dearth of results lies in the neoliberal approach taken by governments. The Rio Earth Summit took place at the same time as the USSR and its economic model were discarded and supplanted by rapacious capitalism. The remedies enacted to reduce GHG emissions were designed to be market-friendly. Emissions were to be limited gradually through the price mechanism by establishing markets to trade permits to pollute. The exchange between buyers and sellers of pollution permits would set a price for carbon and so consumers of fossil fuels would face an increase in their energy costs and be encouraged to switch to less polluting alternatives. But, as the *gilets jaunes* protests in France demonstrated, as did the earlier Europe-wide truckers' and farmers' protests of 2000, consumers are very sensitive to energy price changes. Governments calculated that the political risks were too high to warrant a major hike in energy prices.

Governments instead subsidised renewable energy to diminish the usage of fossil fuels. The major oil

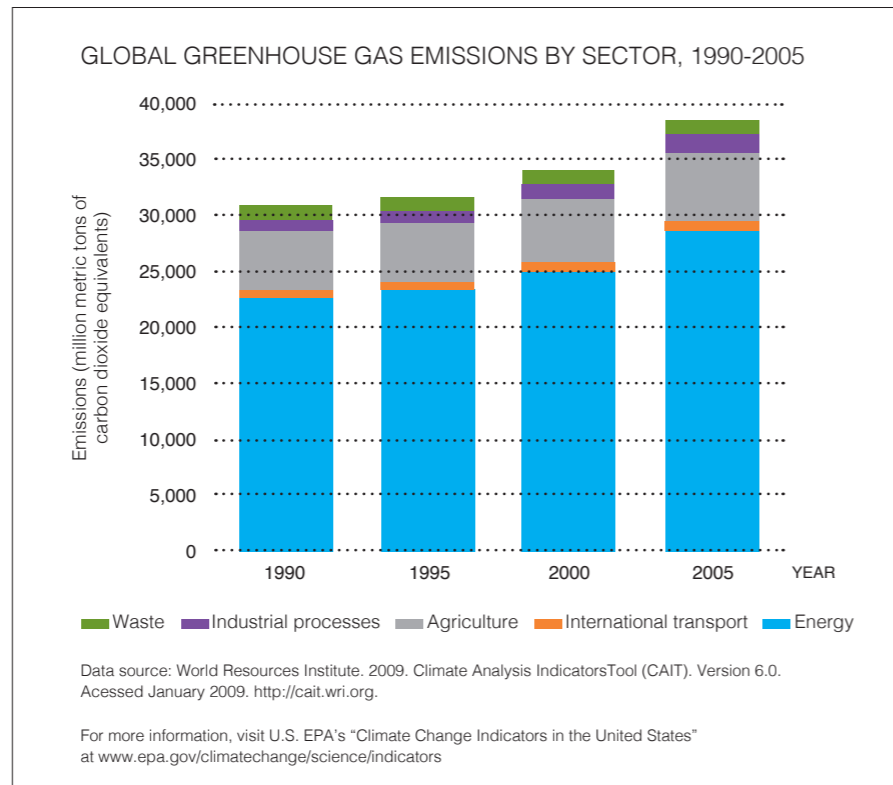
and gas companies had no objection to this policy because the intermittency of sunshine and wind meant there was always a gap in energy supply that had to be filled. Gas-fired power plants thus accompanied the expansion of renewable energy.

## Renewables plus

The debate over how to address global warming has not been helped by the emphasis on renewable energy as the principal solution by the environmental movement. Many supporters of environmental responsibility are also opposed to nuclear energy and this bias has skewed their analysis.

It's not that we are addicted to fossil fuels as some say; it's just that we want energy supplied when we want it: to be able to switch on the light or start the car as necessary. We are not ready as a society to change our way of life to one where we use energy only at the times when Mother Nature chooses to supply it. The fossil fuel suppliers are actually selling us convenience and mobility, not simply energy, which is why they are content with a transition strategy focussed on renewables because these are not always the dispatchable sources that give us energy whenever we want it. So, while it is great to be able to make use of the air, water and sunshine, which are resources that no one owns, there is a disconnect between consumers who want around-the-clock power and the intermittency or seasonality of those sources. Anyone who favours renewable energy must also explain how they would address the supply gap. And if you reject nuclear energy you have to propose something else.

Among the answers promoted by energy supply companies and campaigners alike is 'demand response'. This means that, as a consumer, you would have an electricity supply contract that links the price you pay to the wholesale power market. When, say, the wind is blowing,



the electricity price would be very low but on windless days the price would be much higher. With smart meters installed, you could set a cap on the price you pay. When the wholesale market price of electricity goes beyond the cap you have set, then your power is cut off. If you have installed battery storage in your home, you could ride out the interruption of supply as long as it is a brief one. In theory, with continent-wide inter-connectivity, the absence of wind one day in Britain could be offset by power from hydroelectric plants in Norway, wind power from the Black Sea coast or from concentrated solar power plants in the Sahara. These long-distance supplies of electricity (or energy transmitted by hydrogen gas through a modified but existing gas pipeline infrastructure) would, of course, be more expensive than more locally-supplied wind generation.

Decentralised energy systems are also touted as a solution, whereby households share surplus electricity they have generated from their solar panels or wind turbines. Although battery technology is developing rap-

idly, the period during which storage can be relied upon is relatively short and insufficient to match lengthier windless periods or overcast weather. Thus the most controversial aspect of the energy transition involves the cost of the necessary but complementary dispatchable energy supply to cover the periods that intermittent renewable sources are out of action. The attempt, therefore, to accomplish the energy transition principally through intermittent renewable sources and the market mechanisms will inevitably involve hiking up the cost of energy and/or cutting off supplies if consumers find the higher cost to be unaffordable.

## Labour's Green New Deal

The Labour Party has adopted a Green New Deal policy to "work towards a path to net zero carbon emissions by 2030, guaranteeing ... a just transition for workers." It agreed to formulate "a comprehensive plan that leads the world in bold climate targets [...] in collaboration with the trade unions and the scientific community." The party's conference did not wholeheartedly

endorse a target date of 2030, which many experts considered unrealistic and could leave the party exposed to alarmist criticisms.

In parallel, a report from a group of energy experts proposed thirty recommendations by 2030 to put the UK on the fastest path to a low-carbon energy system. (3) Their key recommendations were to:

- Reduce demand for heat by 20%
- Increase the supply of heat from low-carbon sources to 50% plus gas 50%
- Reduce demand for electricity by 11%
- Increase supply of low-carbon electricity (including 15% from nuclear energy) to 92% with 8% gas-fired generation for demand/supply balancing
- Trial Carbon Capture & Storage projects
- Raise the proportion of electric vehicles on the road to 60%

They estimated that these measures would see GHG emissions fall by 77% by 2030. Whether this is feasible is another matter, since it is hard to reconcile the ambition to switch to

electric vehicles at the same time as cutting electricity consumption. Nevertheless, the report provides much useful information that supplements the more conservative assessment from the Tory-led Committee on Climate Change, which recommends a net zero GHG target date of 2050. The '30 by 2030' report formed the basis for the Labour Party's manifesto pledges. [4] The party's failure to win the December general election must not deter us from advancing this agenda!

The quicker the transition to a low-carbon society is made, the greater is the chance of avoiding catastrophic climate change. But this entails relying on today's proven technologies. Delaying the transition in the hope that less developed technologies, such as using hydrogen or grid-scale battery storage, will mature over the period to offer alternative solutions carries a higher risk of failure.

Based on existing proven and possible technologies, the UK could make a massive stride over the next decades to reduce reliance on GHG emitting fuels:

- Electricity sector: Massive investment in additional generating capacity (renewables and nuclear energy) and storage

● Road and rail transport: Electrify and/or use hydrogen cells (without producing hydrogen from natural gas but only through electrolysis from water)

● Heating of buildings: Solar PV panels, heat pumps and district heating using small modular nuclear reactors and/or hydrogen

● Industrial process heat sources: Mini transportable high temperature nuclear batteries and/or hydrogen

● Steel-making: No substitute yet for metallurgical coal (coke) although hydrogen is a possible candidate

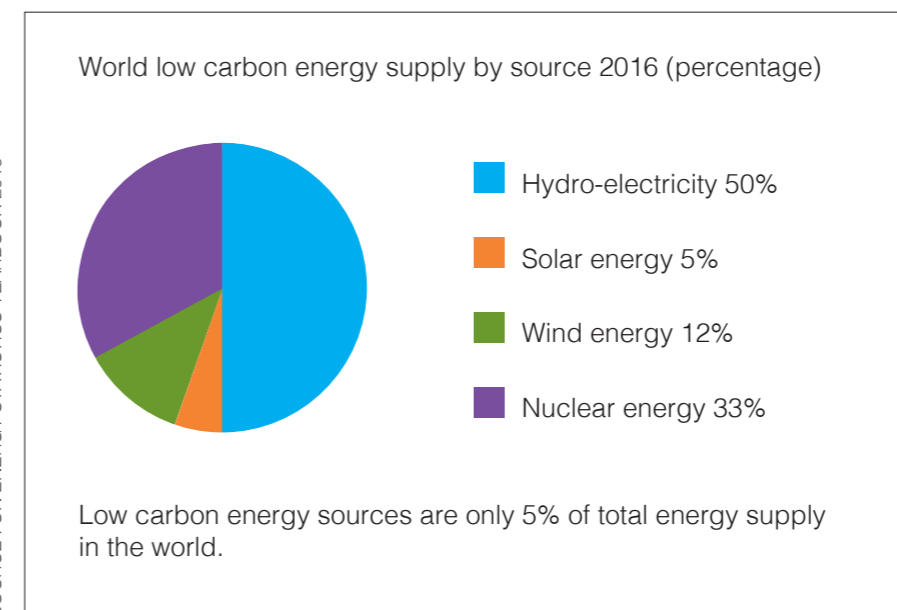
● Shipping: Nuclear or hydrogen-powered vessels

● Aviation: Technology not yet available so emissions from flights must be off-set through afforestation

## A just transition

These steps could be controversial so it is critical that a democratic and participatory process is adopted to plan the transition, as the Labour policy requires. The Labour Party, the TUC and the co-operative movement should form a joint commission to come up with solutions and make an input into the local authority planning and licensing processes, to, for example, fast-track a switch to electric vehicles.

The climate action network Extinction Rebellion favours the holding of citizens' assemblies but a better procedure would be to use the local planning system. Campaigning for a change in government policy and the convening of a citizens' assembly is no substitute for locally and industrially targeted drives to push for prompt action. Local authorities should be pressured to formulate plans to put the Green New Deal into effect, borough by borough, county by county. If a critical mass of councils agreed to do this, they would probably establish a country-wide coordinating mechanism to address





common issues. Such a bottom-up process should engage people through questionnaires, social media and parish hall meetings.

Local governments may lack the powers that exist at national level but they can work together to draw up realistic local plans for heating homes and commercial premises, for restricting town centre parking to low emission vehicles and in forcing petrol stations to offer electric vehicle recharging points. They can also contribute to greening employment and training.

Trade unions see the Green New Deal as a programme to avoid the social costs that came with the forced closure of Britain's coal mines in the 1980s and 1990s. Although the likely new jobs in wind and solar energy of between 85,000 and 135,000 would not equal the number of jobs to be lost in oil and gas extraction and coal mining (165,000), the impact on the economy from the massive investment needed would far outweigh the redundancies. Energy workers from the GMB, Prospect, Unison and Unite agreed in 2018 to demand a just transition to a balanced low-carbon energy system. [5]

The senior management at energy companies realise that change is coming, but until 'it happens' they will carry on doing business as usual. Complacency leaves the workforce highly vulnerable to a repeat of the situation the miners found themselves in when the National Coal Board was restructured to be ready for privatisation. Financial considerations will ultimately drive the closure of the fossil fuel industries because greenhouse gas emissions are an unquantifiable liability. Energy workers have therefore prepared a set of demands for adaptation, re-training and re-location, with no communities 'left behind', as was the case in the coalfields. The four energy unions recognise the importance of securing a long-term plan to secure a sustainable future.

Until there is a plan on how to achieve the target of net zero GHG emissions, the date and cost is unknown. The UK Committee on Climate Change has calculated an annual resource cost of up to 1-2% of GDP to 2050, which implies a cost of at least £1 trillion (or 12 times the cost of the high speed rail link from London to the North of England (HS2)). [6]

It is only through an open planning process that controversial aspects such as the expansion of nuclear energy or the adoption of hydrogen as an energy carrier can be resolved. Opinions regarding the merits of nuclear energy are changing. Nuclear energy is a proven technology that can generate a huge amount of power from a compact site whereas the other well-developed sources of low-carbon energy occupy a much larger area in order to generate the same amount of electricity. The IPCC defined nuclear energy a low-carbon energy source in a special report last year. The health risks and environmental impacts from nuclear energy are accepted by the world science community as low if managed properly. [7] There are risks associated with the use of hydrogen but it is an option for electricity storage and for transportation, although it is not yet deployable at scale. [8]

### We can't wait

The Green New Deal involves exchanging 14 million gas-fired condensing boilers for other forms of home heating; electrifying 10,100 km of railway; replacing 33 million cars, four million vans, 530,000 HGVs and 160,000 buses and coaches with electric or hydrogen-powered vehicles; and closing the six remaining coal-fired power plants and most of the 45 large gas-fired power plants. There also needs to be a plan to deal with emissions from agriculture and investment in reforestation to absorb the residual emissions from other activities. These plans will need government investment

but waiting until the next general election is not an option. The British labour movement can start the just transition by targeted local initiatives and through trade union pressure on energy companies to address their business risks as the Earth heats. Pushing forward on the Green New Deal will channel the enthusiasm generated by the Fridays for the Planet movement among school pupils and Extinction Rebellion. Winning support for a just transition could show the world how a country can leave the fossil fuel economy behind and utilise the planet's natural resources sustainably and sparingly.

[1] Martin Wolf, There is one way forward on climate, *Financial Times*, 6 November 2019.

[2] Jonathan Watts, Warnings given to the oil industry from the 1950s still ignored, *The Guardian*, 10 October 2019.

[3] Tom Bailey and others, 2019, *Thirty Recommendations by 2030: Expert briefing for the Labour Party*, London, at <<https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ThirtyBy2030report.pdf>>.

[4] Labour Party, 2019, *It's Time for Real Change: For the Many not the Few*, The Labour Party Manifesto 2019, London: pp. 12 and 14-15.

[5] Prospect, GMB, Unite the Union, Unison, 18 December 2018, *Demanding a Just Transition for Energy Workers* at <<https://unitetheunion.org/media/2254/002-just-transition-leaflet.pdf>>.

[6] UK Committee on Climate Change, 2019, *Net zero: The UK's contribution to stopping global warming*, London: pp. 8, 12, 180, 213, 220 and 228.

[7] IPCC, 2018, *Global warming of 1.5°C*, Special Report, Geneva: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: pp. 17, 130-132, 461, 466, 485 and 500-507.

[8] IPCC, 2018, *Global warming of 1.5°C*, Special Report, Geneva: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: pp. 140, 320, 326, 333, 335, 460 and 504.

# Where now for the Green Industrial Revolution?

by Brian Durrans

Under the current Fixed-term Parliaments Act (which it plans to scrap), Boris Johnson's government can remain in power for five years if it weathers the storms ahead. Not only the metaphorical storms of political action and social unrest provoked by unpopular legislation but also actual storms, floods and other meteorological mayhem which will remind everyone that too little is being done to meet the UK's modest climate control commitments.

### Price of defeat

The price of losing the election will almost certainly be paid by those already worst-off after nearly a decade of capitalist austerity and the many more whom Labour's alternative programme would have helped; and the Government's foreign policy puts at risk millions of others in Britain and around the world. If – and that's currently a big if – the Labour and progressive movement mobilises on the scale required, some of the worst excesses of Johnson's economics might be mitigated and the warmongers reined-in. However those who – urged on by proven liars Tony Blair and Alistair Campbell – lumbered Labour with its second EU referendum policy, and thus lost it the election, have jeopardised the very future of the planet. If you want the full power of the state used to safeguard present and future generations, Boris Johnson is last person you want as Prime Minister.

Labour's Green New Deal (GND) and Green Industrial Revolution (GIR) – see the 2019 manifesto [1] – were ably championed by Shadow Minister, Rebecca Long-Bailey but denied



Rebecca Long-Bailey

the attention they deserved during the election. Unfortunately, neither Green New Deal nor Green Industrial Revolution was (or is) as simple and catchy as the winning Tory mantra of "Get Brexit Done". Might "Green New Brexit" have fared better? Were Labour's green policies frog-marched into the manifesto rather than field-tested first? Was the manifesto itself too much for most voters to take in? It did a great job of linking other commitments to the core of its green policy; but that core needed to shine like a beacon for everything else.

Recrimination won't win back five years for effective action on climate change. Labour's new leader and depleted MPs must press the Government for what's needed and hold them to account, and those who elected and canvassed for these MPs must press them in turn. But the matter can't be left to Parliament or the normal channels of party

politics, essential though both are to what needs to be done, which is at once complicated, controversial and costly. In the absence of a Labour Government we need to press the one we have as hard as possible and build the movement that alone can make the irrefutable argument for climate action irresistible.

### Winning commitment and action

The argument itself is robust but needs to be kept sharp and accessible; most of the matching policy framework is in place or can be soon. If many already feel anger, urgency and commitment, the essential task of winning key sections of the working class to this cause will take patience and organisation, especially in view of the Party's setback in its former heartlands. Labour's Green Industrial Revolution plan is fit for purpose or can be updated and popularised as the standard against which Johnson's efforts in this direction can and must be judged. Labour and all who care about this issue need to start fighting the next election now.

When working people are called on to support their exploiters in times of war or economic difficulty, they're told that the short-term sacrifices they make will be rewarded by longer-term benefits to themselves – in the case of war, even by dubious benefits like being remembered when someone wears a poppy.

In a parliamentary democracy, the government often tries a similar confidence trick when seeking re-election. A promise to restore to the

social wage a credible yet still lesser sum than it had previously withheld, such as during the near decade-long and - at the time of writing - not-yet abandoned austerity, may be presented as a “reward” to those who never consented to the sacrifices which government policies forced them to make, rather than a bribe for votes. It’s not clear, if Johnson didn’t win on Brexit alone, that many believed his promises to restore funding to schools and hospitals, of which Tory and coalition austerity had deprived them. So, even though saving the planet really is in the common interest, we can’t use the “jam tomorrow” argument, because many people are justifiably suspicious of it.

If at least some of the measures in the Green New Deal can be implemented under this Tory government, people will need to be convinced that it really is in their own interests and in the interests of those they care about, both now and in the short-term future. Quick benefits, rather than just promises of transformations favouring only those who outlive us, will also be essential well before Labour has the chance, in government, to enact the full GND. What’s worse: letting the Tories claim credit for what we force them to do to do or sabotaging the planet?

One precedent where longer-term benefits really did justify short-term sacrifices was the Second World War. Helping the UK grasp and accept what needed to be done then were both the example of the Soviet Union and our own, powerful anti-fascist movement, based in the working class and active during the previous few years. Today we lack the equivalent examples and arguments in the working class itself with which to help popularise the GND, but getting it implemented at least in part by a reluctant government would still be a step forward.

If most people are understandably sceptical of apparently self-interested scare-mongering from the upper-class, there’s also a broad if shallow

understanding that the environment and therefore all of us are currently in real danger. David Attenborough’s programmes attract a mass audience. But diet, doing without plastic bags or recycling household waste, instead of being experienced as a step in the right direction, can seem mere antidotes to feeling powerless: “at least I’m doing something”. People need and deserve a sense that their actions matter. That means embedding understanding through shared engagement focused on specific, strategically-coherent, achievable targets, where it is clear what progress has been made and what’s still to do. Whatever the issue, the best way to learn about it and to deal with it confidently is through co-operating with others.

To apply that understanding and confidence to best effect is ideally done not through ad hoc arrangements but existing structures, political and workplace party or union branches, community groups or campaigning organisations, all with sustained memberships giving capacity for outreach and alliances. However infectious their spontaneity, informal assemblies or networks may unravel when enthusiasm wanes. It can’t be over-emphasised that, as a strategy for climate justice, and especially when the government is not on your side, the GND needs to be rooted in the Labour Movement and help win elections.

### Priority: global heating

The priority is not plastic in the oceans nor alleviating drought here or floods there, but to curb global heating. That’s where the big science is, and we already have most of the national and supranational bodies in place to commission and interpret the evidence, formulate targets for states and corporations and call for compliance. Any decent government could help steer this process not just here but across the world.

But we still need states, shareholders and citizens to hold big pollut-

ers to account. People need to hold governments, parties and local authorities to their own commitments, and to ensure those commitments and measures taken are the right ones. There’s no substitute for state intervention (most effective as socialist planning), but we should also be clear that for maximum effect personal contributions are also necessary.

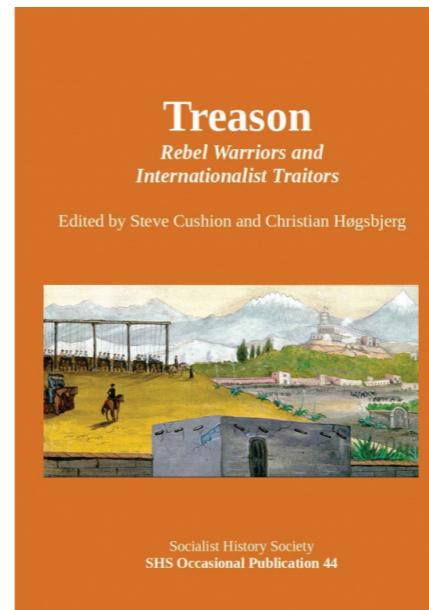
This approach worked well in the worldwide movement against South African Apartheid. The boycott campaign was easy for consumers to join, who knew or at least hoped that by refusing to buy Outspan oranges, for example, they were contributing to the struggle for justice. Many who began as ethical consumers later got involved in other ways but even just on their own such acts felt right, and they helped people to a deeper understanding of the struggle to which even just a trip to the supermarket really did contribute. What today’s cynic might dismiss as “virtue signalling” at least signalled that it was indeed a virtue to take action.

The GND can even do even better than that by benefiting people materially as well as morally. For this to be understood, our focus should be on the GND in its specific form of the Green Industrial Revolution – producing and consuming more of what we need rather than producing (or importing) and consuming what we don’t. This can be grasped by anyone and everyone as simple, common-sense and making most people better off. If Tories can’t implement that, Labour must try to by any means necessary.

.....  
[1] <https://labour.org.uk/manifesto/>

# TREASON

## Rebel Warriors and Internationalist Traitors



Steve Cushion and Christian Høgsbjerg (eds.)  
(London, Socialist History Society Occasional Publication no. 44, 2019, 94pp, paperback; £5)

### Review by Brian Durrans

Dating from at least the thirteenth century, “treason” is a legal term referring to political or violent acts judged by representatives of the state (i.e. of the ruling class) seriously to subvert its integrity or stability. If caught, convicted traitors usually face execution or life imprisonment. Whether bribed, coerced or acting on principle, the traitor is feared or despised by those siding with the established order, but not always admired or celebrated by its opponents. In class terms, the moral compass ought to be clear, but in practice “treason” foregrounds individuals or groups who break, often with conspicuous heroism or cunning (or both), with the routine class-collaboration that maintains the status quo. But unless the stakes are already high in terms of national self-determination or class power, such acts alone rarely galvanise those whose interests they aim to serve.

Admiring heroes with the hindsight of history is one thing; siding with them at the time is another. Those who flush out and punish traitors exploit widespread and well-founded disapproval of deceit to undermine their reputations (calling a former home-team player a “traitor” shows how unforgiving football fans can be if s/he now plays a game for visiting rivals); and although an enemy of my state may be a loyal servant of yours, such loyalty only confirms that if an enemy at the gate is bad enough, one in the living room is far worse. Such acts of treachery, however sincere and justified in their own terms, and however inspiring for others in their own day or down the decades, do not in themselves make the case for replacing the existing order nor do they usually

encourage engagement in that task which, even if it is unsuccessful, may help people appreciate what success requires.

This book, the fruit of a workshop convened in 2018 by the London Socialist Historians Group, focuses on “internationalist renegades and traitors”, all of them Europeans, from the early nineteenth century to the 1960s. In their Introduction, the editors deny such episodes constitute a “tradition” but still claim they offer “timely lessons in intransigent internationalism”. If by “timely” is meant that in the world’s current turmoil global justice, including the prevention of war and environmental disaster, demands internationalism more urgently than ever, then it makes sense; but less clear is why our internationalism needs to be “intransigent” rather than effective.

The book’s nine examples of people or groups acting “disloyally” on their convictions make inspiring reading, and it is always worth a reminder that solidarity overcomes divisions such as those of class and nation to further the interests of exploited and subject peoples. As these stories make clear, the course of such struggles is seldom predictable; activists often but not always learn the lessons of experience; and – perhaps most strikingly – in none of these examples is the struggle for liberation yet complete: not in the Caribbean where Polish soldiers sided with Haitian revolutionaries; nor in Mexico whose nationalists were strengthened by an Irish battalion; nor in Ireland itself whose independence cause also inspired British volunteers; nor in Germany where some workers and soldiers defied the Nazis and sided with the USSR or, in France, joined the Resistance;



nor in Ethiopia where a handful of Italian Communists helped locals resist the fascist occupation; nor in Indochina or Algeria whose armed resistance attracted a few recruits from the colonial side.

### Effective internationalism

What can be done, in the present, with the information provided in this book? In their Introduction the editors trace a thin historical line (not, remember, a “tradition”) of examples of “treasonable” behaviour from the English Civil War, via the focus of each chapter and including the International Brigades in Republican Spain and the struggle against South African Apartheid and (very briefly) up to the current struggle for Palestine. At the end of their Introduction they rightly point to the persistent class-divided and

increasingly militarised world of nation-states and global (dis)order and suggest that the heroic (and hitherto largely unsung) individuals who feature in the book deserve recognition for their sacrifices. There’s a strong case for that, but a stronger one for asking the harder question of what kind of activity is best suited to present challenges.

Even in the examples mentioned in the book itself, not all “treasonable” work involved taking up arms, and even where this was important it was by no means the only means of struggle. In the case of defeating apartheid, military assistance from the Socialist countries was certainly decisive (most conspicuously, as Mandela acknowledged, from Cuba at Cuito Cuanavale), but the editors’ passing reference (p. 16) to “British radical students” helping smug-

gle arms to the ANC’s armed wing inside South Africa hardly deserves mention by comparison not only with what the Cubans did but also with what even rather unradical students (and others) did to help bring down the regime by closing or refusing to open accounts with Barclays Bank until it withdrew from the apartheid state.

Was that “intransigent” internationalism? Maybe. But as an example of effective internationalism, that boycott can better inform current and future strategies (such as BDS – the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign) than apparently more heroic or “treasonable” acts. In any case, attempts by opponents of Palestinian rights to outlaw BDS are beginning to make campaigners seem heroic simply for being effective internationalists.

## Subscribe to **The Socialist Correspondent**



Keep yourself armed with facts and analysis that you won't find anywhere else by subscribing.

Not surprisingly we have no wealthy backers and rely entirely on subscriptions, standing orders and donations from our readers to survive.

Please support us by contributing financially to ensure that we can continue to make our unique political voice heard.

You can do this via our website:

[www.thesocialistcorrespondent.org.uk/subscribe](http://www.thesocialistcorrespondent.org.uk/subscribe)