

# THE SOCIALIST CORRESPONDENT

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## Covid-19: protect profits or save lives

### AUSTERITY THE EPIDEMIC OF POVERTY

### China & Cuba respond

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The sudden shock of the coronavirus pandemic has called into question the rationale of capitalism. A system where pundits feel it is legitimate to debate the relative merits of saving peoples' lives or saving the economy i.e. big business and financial institutions. This crisis has also shown not only that capitalism struggles to deal with global challenges facing humanity, but also how it made ordinary people's lives precarious even before the virus hit. In *Covid-19 and the sickness of capitalism* Frieda Park exposes the many ways in which working class people are suffering more than the wealthy. The risks are many; of catching the virus and suffering the consequences, losing their livelihoods, their children being disadvantaged. With its disastrous herd immunity strategy, the government's response put keeping business running as usual before human life. Forced to ditch that, it has floundered and is failing to deliver on the most basic requirements of protective equipment for workers and testing for the population. But that is only to be expected from people who have little experience of how the real world works and worship the anarchy of the free market. NHS staff and others have been proclaimed "heroes", but that doesn't stretch in Tory minds to ensuring that they are protected nor paid and respected for the jobs they do. Ordinary people must not be made to pay the price for this crisis when it is over. As it has exposed capitalism so the crisis has also demonstrated the essentially social and collective nature of our lives – supporting each other and keeping vital services going. For a humane and functioning economy and society socialism makes sense – capitalism does not.

The damage done by years of austerity has also had an impact on health, care and other services' ability to respond to coronavirus. In *The epidemic of poverty – killing before coronavirus* Simon Korner

takes a look at Professor Sir Michael Mamot's report into how health inequalities are the result, not only of underfunded services but also of unequal access to life opportunities. Not only had life expectancy stagnated overall but for the poorest it had begun to fall, even before coronavirus takes its toll.

## Coronavirus - China & Cuba

But not all countries have done as badly as Britain in managing the pandemic. China, where the outbreak started, has reduced infections to very small numbers as other countries streak ahead of it in rates of infection and deaths. The strict lockdown has begun to be lifted. Pat Turnbull explores how this unfolded in *Coronavirus - Cuba and China take a lead*. China showed what worked early on but the British and other governments have chosen to ignore the lessons. Meanwhile China has been offering support to other countries to help combat the disease – as of course has Cuba, building on its reputation for offering health solidarity to countries in need. Not only have other countries failed to follow the example of what works and take advantage of Chinese and Cuban expertise, the United States has sought to use the crisis to ramp up pressure and sanctions on Cuba, Venezuela and Iran. That the US does not care about how many die in those countries due to its inhuman actions is shocking but shouldn't be a surprise as the Trump administration has been one of the world's worst at protecting its own citizens from the virus.

## In other news

Though it may appear otherwise, there are other things happening in the world and we also cover a range of international and domestic issues. In the wake of the general election defeat Sir Keir Starmer has

been elected leader of the Labour Party. In *The future after Corbyn* Frieda Park looks at the mountain of problems that Corbyn faced which were factors in his eventual defeat, but also asks were there things that could have been done differently such as the retreat over the EU, the handling of allegations of anti-semitism and building a base in the working class. Despite this huge setback there are still positives to build on. There is a new generation of activists and, virtually wiped out under New Labour, the left remains stronger than it was.

Negotiations with the EU to finalise Britain's relationship with the bloc continue. Johnson will seek to maintain neoliberal market assumptions in any deal as Bert Schouwenburg discusses in *In or out of the EU - neoliberalism is the real disease*. The coronavirus crisis is exposing the fiction of EU solidarity as richer countries, especially Germany, refuse to spread the burden of debt which poorer and worse affected countries have had to take on to combat the virus. This could prove a major crisis for the future of the Euro and the EU itself.

## Barry Johnson

Finally we pay tribute to our comrade Barry Johnson who sadly died earlier this year. Barry was a founder member of the editorial board of The Socialist Correspondent and we will miss his thoughtful socialist analysis and passionate commitment to the struggle. *Barry Johnson 1931-2020 – A life in struggle for the working class*, is based on his partner, Hilary Cave's, oration at his memorial and describes the man, his life and struggles.

# COVID-19

## & the sickness of capitalism

by Frieda Park

What is this “economy” that we are told needs to be protected in the coronavirus pandemic at the expense of ordinary people’s lives? What is the purpose of economic activity if it is not the welfare of people? These questions have arisen starkly out of this crisis as they did from the financial crash of 2008. Governments are terrified of people losing faith in capitalism and are being forced to respond in ways which clash with their underlying belief in the gods of the free market and individualist self-sufficiency. But these Emperor’s new clothes do not conceal the naked truth of capital whose principle purpose is to generate profit. This truth has been further confirmed by the reluctant responses of governments which have trailed behind the growing crisis and failed to deliver what was needed by front-line staff, patients and the population at large. Even when they did decide to act it was with a lack of commitment to do what was needed to halt the spread of the disease and look after people.

The other area which has had a spotlight shone on it is that many only just survived, even before the coronavirus outbreak. This has become evident as people are put out of work. Precarious workers in the gig economy have even fewer protections with no sick pay and employers who take no responsibility for their welfare. Then there are homeless people, asylum-seekers and refugees, those reliant on food-banks, older people who were already isolated, people in debt, small businesses living from hand to mouth...the list goes on. These are literally millions of people. Millions

of people whose lives were made precarious by neo-liberalism and whose survival is now threatened.

### Survival of the fittest

You may be a Prince of the Realm or Prime Minister, anyone can catch coronavirus, but the impact of the disease is worse if you are at the bottom of the heap. Once recovered, Prince Charles and Boris Johnson’s lives will carry on much as they did before, not so if you have lost your job or were struggling to get by in the first place. The effects of the pandemic will affect the well-off and the less well-off unequally.

You cannot work at home if you are a factory, delivery, retail, hospitality or transport worker or if you work caring for and supporting people. Being able to work from home therefore benefits disproportionately the better off who can keep their jobs and incomes and isolate themselves more effectively from the virus.

The ability of children and young people to continue their education at home is also determined by wealth. Private schools and their pupils have greater access to technology which will allow structured learning to take place. Educational inequalities will be exacerbated further and carried on into adulthood and that is not to mention the other benefits that school offers young people. For some it is a place of safety where they are warm, fed and cared for.

The more cramped a family’s living space is, then the greater will be the stresses placed on families and the

greater the likelihood of passing the virus on. We are instructed to stay at home – but what if your home is the street?

Inevitably working class people also have fewer or no reserves to tide them through a difficult patch. More than half of the poorest households in Britain have no savings. Nearly half a million people claimed Universal Credit in the nine days to March 24th 2020 and in three weeks 1.2 million people made claims.

Structurally the dice were already loaded against the poorest in the coronavirus pandemic, and in favour of the richest, ensuring the survival of the fittest. And this does not even begin to count the impact on the poorest nations in the world, those crowded into refugee camps and imprisoned on the Gaza strip.

### In the herd together?

All of the above would have held true regardless of how the crisis was managed, but the Tory government’s woeeful response makes things very much worse. It will cause hardship to many thousands of people with unnecessary suffering and deaths. No matter Johnson appearing on TV flanked by neatly folded union flags and evoking of the spirit of the war, the reality on the ground tells a very different story. We are not in this together.

The British, and most other governments, refused to take on board the evidence of what works in stemming the spread of coronavirus. What works was what was done in China: the key elements being strict isolation, tracking contacts and mass



testing. Governments have remained concerned that this approach would have serious economic consequences – as though hundreds of thousands of people falling sick and many dying wouldn't. Despite knowing at the outset of the crisis what had worked in China, the British government took no notice and adopted a "herd immunity" strategy. This strategy was born out of pandemic modelling for influenza, but it was flawed. Covid-19 is a new coronavirus, which we knew nothing about, and which is not a flu virus. It is more infectious and more deadly than flu, there is no pre-existing immunity and there is no vaccine for it. But based on this model the government believed that the virus should be allowed to run its course to build herd immunity. Even if it had been valid it still callously factored in a number of deaths. As Johnson said we must be prepared to see our loved ones die, or as Dominic

Cummings, reportedly characterised the government strategy "herd immunity, protect the economy and if that means some pensioners die, too bad".

This raises the question of whether the government was acting purely in line with scientific advice, as it said it was, and by implication doing the best it could. Science, the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of material reality, is a human activity and is subject to all kinds of biases and competing interpretations. It is not politically neutral and can be used selectively to support particular ends. To what extent in this situation did the Tories get the scientific advice they wanted? There is a remarkably close fit between the herd immunity strategy and maintaining business as usual in the economy. Officials are never, these days, appointed to be critical of their bosses, they are appointed

to tell them more or less what they want to hear. It will be so even with scientists. In all likelihood, the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Officer who appeared with Johnson at press conferences believed in the advice they were giving, however, that did not necessarily make it impartial and it certainly did not make it correct. Their presence at press conferences, however, reinforced the message of apparent expertise and objectivity and was as much a prop for Johnson as the union jacks.

The herd immunity approach began to unravel pretty quickly. It became apparent that it would not just be a few unproductive pensioners, who were in any case a burden to the NHS, care services and the benefits system who would die. Hundreds of thousands would die. And the thing about plagues is that they are no respecters of class boundaries.



The rich might be in a better position to survive, but they are going to get it too and, yes, some of them will die. How ironic that Johnson, Cummings, Health Secretary Hancock and Prince Charles all got the disease - an uncomfortable reminder for them and us that they are part of the human race.

Having been forced to change tack the government managed the situation incompetently. Measures to help people were only announced at the point that major problems arose. Planning and provision for the NHS lagged woefully behind the pace of the virus and behind what other countries were doing. The government seemed to be unable and/or unwilling to anticipate, plan and deliver - not surprising when you have spent your whole life thinking that state intervention, public services and planning are bad and that the market, the anarchy of capitalism, works. They do not know or appreciate how things actually happen in the real world. The press has suddenly discovered battalions of "heroes" saving the country. The people who have, in fact, been the fabric of our lives 24/7, 365 days a year every year. They are not just medical staff but working class people in supermarkets, admin roles, transport, cleaning, deliveries and a hundred jobs that went unnoticed before. Strange no one is out clapping for stockbrokers or fund managers.

## Dangerous failures

The total failure to provide adequate protective equipment for front line staff, and the failure to get testing for those staff, never mind mass testing, up and running has been a disgrace. Weeks in, testing was still discussed in relation to getting NHS staff back to work and not as a key element of controlling the spread of the virus in the population at large.

Care of older people and the protection of staff who work with them has been another disgrace. Older people with symptoms of coronavi-

rus are being treated as though they were living in their own homes and infected people are being left to let the virus run its course. But they are not living at home, they are living in institutions with many other vulnerable people who are going on to catch the disease and many are dying. Just as they are not being valued or protected neither are the staff who work with them who, if they are lucky, have only the most basic protective equipment. And then there are the old people who have other conditions being shunted out of hospital to hotels to be cared for by non-medical staff.

There have been many, many reports of workers being badly treated by employers and having to fight for basic rights at work in this crisis. Like the notorious Sports Direct and its boss Mike Ashley who initially tried to keep its stores open after lock down, but even when they were forced to close, was insisting that store staff still come into work. There have been major concerns about the conditions for warehouse staff across companies which raises the question whether the goods they are supplying are really necessary.

Financial support to individuals will be inadequate in many cases to meet their outgoings - furloughed workers are guaranteed 80% of their wages, but that discounts bonuses which many rely on as a part of their regular income. Many are in debt and who only spends 80% of their income in the month? Universal Credit was already not fit for purpose and the DWP is now struggling to process the mountain of new applications.

Loans directed at saving small and medium sized businesses have been funnelled through the Tories' friends - the banks. Many business owners found them inaccessible. After complaints that some banks refused the loans if the business or the owner had assets which could be used as collateral against an ordinary loan, forcing them to take on expensive debt, the scheme was

changed. This will allegedly make the loans more available. But even if businesses can get the cash it will not arrive for weeks. It has been estimated that up to a million small businesses may collapse. Looking around the streets in your town you may wonder how many coffee shops, hairdressers and other independent stores will re-open.

To be fair to the Tories the Scottish government and the other devolved administrations have followed the government line with no dissent from their central strategy and only some minor variations in policy. Despite health being a devolved power Scotland's record on delivering care, protective equipment etc is every bit as bad as England's. Nicola Sturgeon appears day after day on TV with the same waffle and excuses as the UK government to try to distract from these failures. The most egregious example of anyone thinking they were above the herd was in fact Catherine Calderwood, the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, who thought it fine to lecture the plebs about staying at home while she broke the rules by visiting her second home during the lockdown. At first she declined to step down and was defended by Sturgeon.

## The blame game

The other failed part of the Tory strategy was to emphasise individual over collective action and state intervention. This led to bizarre mixed messages and people not knowing what was expected of them. Individuals were blamed for government failings and we were encouraged to blame each other instead of holding the Tories to account.

We were instructed not to go to pubs and restaurants, even while they remained open for business. Their owners were expected to sit in their deserted premises, order food and supplies, pay staff and be unable to claim on any insurance that might have covered them if there had been an enforced shut down.



*Support for NHS staff*

We were told to go out and exercise, but initially unclear about what that meant, people were shamed for heading out to the hills to go walking.

We were told that people with underlying health conditions were more at risk, but the numbers receiving letters from the government telling them that they must strictly self-isolate is far less than the numbers at increased risk. Levels of risk are being down-graded. So what should you do if you have diabetes, severe asthma or any other problematic ailment but have not had a letter from the government? We were told we should only go to work if it was essential and safe to do so. But what if your boss takes a different view from you on that? Building work was allowed to continue on non-essential sites with workers being put at risk in their workplace and in travelling to work.

We are told not to panic buy. But with no system in place to support people if they couldn't get out to shop, stocking up on some essentials in a rapidly changing situation where you and your family may need to completely self-isolate for a week or two seemed sensible. Supermarket shelves were quickly emptied because they use just-in-

time delivery systems and do not keep big stocks of goods, especially the bulky ones like toilet rolls.

We are left to work out what our best guess is. One person may decide that they are willing to take risks, but they are not just risking themselves in the situation, they are risking other people too. Individuals cannot shoulder the responsibilities of society.

Johnson is fond of invoking war-time analogies to make himself look Churchillian. He has failed to recognise that the wartime effort to defeat fascism relied not just on individuals playing their part but on a virtual command economy with food rationing, strict standards for production of basic goods etc. He seems also to have forgotten that after the war the British people kicked Churchill out of office and elected a reforming Labour government which brought us the NHS (which the Tories voted against), other pillars of the welfare state and a massive programme of council house building.

### **Shielding the banks**

There has been a clear effort to protect the financial sector and big business – what the Tories regard as the economy. Indeed banks are likely to benefit as they funnel government guaranteed loans to businesses. Struggling companies will have to pay the cash back once the crisis is over at the same time as they are trying to re-build. By delaying government enforcement of closures many felt they had to act to protect themselves by, for example, cancelling holidays, but in the absence of government advice not to go they will have been unable to claim on their insurance. Likewise businesses that were forced to shut up shop earlier. Governments are borrowing billions to throw at the problems they are trying to deal with. This is debt that they will have to re-pay to the money markets and financial institutions when this is over. Other

big businesses close to Tory hearts will find their recovery supported better than the local coffee shop. They have already gone out of their way to keep construction going and expect a bailout for airlines.

### **No going back**

We do not know how badly this pandemic will affect us or when it will end. It has exposed capitalism's inability to respond effectively to major threats to humanity – it is not that long ago since we were debating its inability to tackle Climate Change.

If the banks have to be repaid then who is going to re-pay them? The Tories will certainly want to shift the burden to ordinary people and small businesses. Let's see the banks make the sacrifices instead. No going back to austerity, to an underfunded, privatised and marketised NHS with badly paid staff working in debilitating compliance cultures. No more nurses going to foodbanks or junior doctors forced to strike over unsafe contracts. No more gig economy and precarious lives.

No more forgetting that we, the people, are the heroes of our society and should not be made to pay the price for Tory incompetence and capitalism's failures. We have the skills, knowledge and commitment that make the real economy work. That must be recognised and valued. We are social beings whose lives depend on us acting together, not the individualists of capitalist myth. No more worshipping the free-market whose inability to meet the needs of people is tenuous at the best of times, but in a crisis spells disaster.

# CORONAVIRUS

## CUBA & CHINA TAKE A LEAD

by Pat Turnbull

On March 2nd it was reported that authorities in Wuhan, China, had closed the city's first makeshift temporary hospital after discharging the last 34 recovered coronavirus patients, as fewer than 200 new cases had been reported for the first time since January. The head of Wuhan's largest temporary hospital, located in an exhibition centre with beds for 2,000 patients, announced it would be closed by the end of March.

Wuhan, a city of over 11 million inhabitants, was the site of the original coronavirus outbreak, reported to the World Health Organisation on December 31st 2019. The world marvelled as Wuhan built a new hospital in ten days, with the total number of hospital beds in the city eventually going up from 5,000 to 23,000.

On the 7th of April China recorded no new deaths from coronavirus and only 32 new cases of the virus all of whom had arrived from abroad. Up to that date China had 81,740 cases of whom 3,331 were recorded as having died. China has been rapidly overtaken by many other countries in cases and deaths where strict measures to control the virus have not been applied. China has been able now to ease the restrictions and come out of lockdown.

From the time China realised what it was dealing with, the whole country went to work to combat the virus. As of January 23rd, 50 million people were put in lockdown, slowing the spread of the virus. Appearing on television on February 8th, President Xi declared "a people's war against the new demon". Tens of thousands of volunteers poured into Hubei to build the new hospitals. Thousands of teams were sent to trace the con-

tacts of the sick. When, at the end of the Chinese New Year celebrations, 860 people returned to Beijing, the government ordered them to stay at home for two weeks, and the city authorities mobilised 160 building keepers to ensure the instructions were met. Bruno Guigue, a French academic, added that the response was also enabled because 50 per cent of national wealth is public property.

**Lvov continued that Beijing had taken "extraordinary measures" to combat the virus spread, and said we should "congratulate their healthcare system and the government on the sweeping measures they've taken"**

Virologist Dmitry Lvov, who had spent his career researching the most dangerous viruses in the Soviet Union and beyond, commented on China's policy of putting entire cities on lockdown, "In case of coronavirus, it makes some sense...if everyone worked like the Chinese, it would end very quickly." Chinese scientists had quickly framed the virus, examined its genetic structure and published the results for the benefit of the world's health services. Lvov continued that Beijing had taken "extraordinary measures" to combat the virus spread, and said we should "congratulate their healthcare system and the government on the sweeping measures they've taken" adding "they did well."<sup>[1]</sup>

### **Britain's dangerous strategy**

All the more incomprehensible, therefore, that Britain ignored this experience and embarked on a different and dangerous strategy. Health chiefs in England and Scotland, instead of organising serious measures to combat the spread of Covid-19, breezily announced that it was expected to infect 70 or 80 percent of the population. Prime Minister Boris Johnson advised us all to "take it on the chin" and allow coronavirus to "move through the population without really taking as many draconian measures", that it will be "business as usual" for the "overwhelming majority" of people in the U.K. and that we should anticipate the deaths of "loved ones".<sup>[2]</sup>

The government's approach was criticised by Jeremy Hunt, former health secretary and now chair of the Commons Health and Social Care select committee, who said it was "surprising and concerning" that the government was not looking at more decisive measures, adding "the places that have succeeded are the ones that have moved earliest to social distancing."<sup>[3]</sup> Professor John Ashton, a former public health chief, criticised the government's "complacent" response, saying it "wasted a month" before getting serious.<sup>[4]</sup> As I write the government has recognised that its approach is ineffective and unpopular and has started closing public facilities and requiring over seventies to stay at home, but has still delayed the closure schools and colleges, a policy called for by the National Education Union.

The Premier League, Football Association, English Football League and



World Soccer League took matters into their own hands on 14/3/20 and collectively agreed to postpone the professional game. Former England star Wayne Rooney strongly expressed his anger that footballers had been treated as guinea pigs, but only with the revelation that Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta had tested positive were the football authorities finally spurred into action.

The coronavirus pandemic has also exposed the failures of health coverage in the USA. A video of Katie Porter, a US law professor, attorney, and politician serving as the US representative for California's 45th congressional district, confronting Dr Robert Redfield, director of the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, has gone viral. The Hill, reported that at the House Oversight and Reform Committee on 12/3/20 Katie Porter confronted Dr Redfield with the cost of a coronavirus test - \$1,331. She asked "Dr Redfield, do you want to know who has coronavirus and who doesn't? Not just rich people, but everybody who might have the virus," and finally got him to say he would use his power to guarantee that people would be eligible to get a free test.

## How did it start?

While coronavirus first publicly surfaced in China, question marks are now being raised about its true origin. The World Health Organisation states that no direct causal proof has been established for what is now described as the Covid-19 pandemic, since it has spread throughout the world. While it was first reported as a coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, China, on 31st December 2019, the identity of China's "patient zero" is also unclear.[5]

The disease was thought to have originated in an open-air seafood market, but further research, a study of genetic data from 93 coronavirus samples taken from 12 countries across four continents, led by researchers from the Xishuangbanna



*A nurse measuring the body temperature for outpatients in Hubei TCM Hospital*

Tropical Botanical Garden of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, South China Agricultural University and Chinese Institute for Brain Research, suggests the virus was introduced from elsewhere and had already circulated widely among humans in Wuhan before December 2019, probably beginning in mid to late November. The crowded market was what enabled it to be transmitted so that it spread to the whole city in early December 2019. (Pan Zhaoyi, writing in CGTN, 23/2/20)

A video of Robert Redfield, the above mentioned director of the US Centres for Disease Control, admitting that some patients in the US, thought to have died of flu, later tested positive for the coronavirus, raised questions for Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian about the origins of the virus. China has asked for details of the cases and the dates. (RT, 13/3/20)

## Inhuman sanctions

Iran, as a country seriously affected by US sanctions, has suffered badly from coronavirus. Al-Monitor reported on 12/3/20 that Foreign Minister Mohammad Javid Zarif had tweeted that efforts to fight the virus "are stymied by vast shortages caused by restrictions on our people's access to medicine/equipment" with a picture

listing the country's medical needs, including respiratory assistance devices and basic medical equipment like gloves and masks. Zarif also wrote a letter to United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres calling for an end to US sanctions as Iran battles the disease. Iran has asked the International Monetary Fund for \$5 billion; Iran's economy has been seriously affected by its inability to sell oil, combined with banking and insurance sanctions.

But far from loosening sanctions the US administration has tightened them not only on Iran, but also Venezuela and Cuba. The US has sent gunboats to Venezuela rather than medical help. Britain, France and Germany have announced that they plan to get round US sanctions and provide medical aid to Iran.

Cuba too has suffered, in particular from the United States' sixty year blockade and especially since the defeat of the Soviet Union, its chief trading partner. Nevertheless, Cuba, with its socialist economy and humane priorities, is well prepared to face the threat of Covid-19. Cuba has long been renowned as a developer of medicines, in this case Interferon Alpha- 2B Recombinant, an anti-viral product from the country's biotechnology industry. Granma reported on 10/2/20: "The Chinese Health Com-

mission has selected our product among those used to fight coronavirus. Cuba shared the technology to produce the drug some years ago, with the opening of the Chang Heber joint Chinese-Cuban facility in the town of Changchun.”

Radio Havana Cuba on 15/3/20 quoted Maria Elena Entenza, National Director of Primary Health Care, reporting that all doctors’ offices and polyclinics in the highly organised and comprehensive free Cuban health service are prepared to assist patients and to actively seek out cases with respiratory symptoms and offer them timely assistance. The family doctors, living in their communities, are deservedly renowned for their detailed knowledge of their patients; in this case they are also closely following tourists in their districts, and polyclinics have established separate areas with medical and nursing staff to care for them. Maria Elena Entenza added, “Emphasis should be placed on vulnerable groups and where there is a concen-

tration of people with risk factors such as the elderly, especially those living alone and the disabled. Also in social institutions such as grandparents’ homes, homes for the elderly, maternity homes, and psycho-pedagogical centres.”

Cuba News on 13/3/20 reported: “The protocol envisaged on the island to deal with the coronavirus outbreak includes 22 Cuban products, of which there are already doses for the treatment of thousands of people, Eduardo Martinez, president of the BioCubaFarma Business Group, told the press.”

Meanwhile, in Britain, the Conservative government, which has cut 17,000 hospital beds since 2010, now anticipates renting 8,000 private hospital beds at a cost of £2.4 million a day.

- .....
- [1] RT 2/3/20
  - [2] The BBC 5/3/20
  - [3] The Independent 13/3/20
  - [4] RT 12/3/20
  - [5] RT 13/3/20

## From **The Socialist Correspondent** 10 years ago

“This was the hidden agenda of the Copenhagen Conference (on Climate Change COP15). As Hugo Chávez and others have noted, industrialised country governments have been keener to support the banks than tackle the risk to life on earth. Our governments – captured by capital – have failed. A popular movement for a low carbon economy must take up the challenge.”

Issue 8 Spring 2010

**We can’t save both our planet  
and capitalism**

*Alex Mitchell*

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Cuba Medical Aid

The US is continuing with its 60 year policy of attempting to restore capitalism and US neo-colonialism in Cuba. Even during this pandemic, the Trump administration is pursuing its policy of isolating Cuba politically and economically.

## The EU & the USA dismiss the “politics of generosity”

by Simon Korner & Gary Lefley

Since mid-March, China has delivered millions of masks and test kits to EU countries to help fight Covid-19, as well as to countries around the world. But this aid has been dismissed as the “politics of generosity” by the EU’s Foreign Minister Josep Borrell, who said a “global battle of narratives” was being played out. “China is aggressively pushing the message that, unlike the US, it is a responsible and reliable partner,” he said.

Borrell’s politically loaded ingratitude seems especially shabby given the EU’s refusal to help Italy when it requested face masks through the EU’s Civil Protection Mechanism. On 8th April, EU talks aimed at supporting the poorest and some of the worst hit nations broke down over the reluctance of some of the wealthier ones to provide the financial aid needed. Pedro Sánchez, Spain’s Prime Minister, has warned that if the EU fails to help countries indebted by coronavirus then the bloc could “fall apart”. Whilst a package of aid has now been agreed Germany has absolutely refused to countenance any measures that would spread the debt burden and relieve countries most in need. Meanwhile the President of its Scientific Research Council has resigned over the EU’s failure to have a plan to fight the virus

Cuba, too, has been extraordinarily active in sharing its advanced medical practice – including send-

ing a health care brigade to Italy. Other brigades have gone to help in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Grenada and Suriname. Cuba has also made available to all countries its anti-viral “wonder drug”, Interferon Alpha-2B Recombinant, that has been used so effectively in saving lives in China.

### US warns - do not accept Cuban aid

But the US State Department has warned other countries not to accept Cuban aid. The US is continuing with its 60 year policy of attempting to restore capitalism and US neo-colonialism in Cuba. Even during this pandemic, the Trump administration is pursuing its policy of isolating Cuba politically and economically. It has yet again ignored calls from the United Nations to lift the blockade and end sanctions.

Meanwhile, Trump has put US big business ahead of its people’s health. He wanted, for example, the US lockdown to end by Easter. His half measures, denial and failure to act threaten the lives of millions of Americans. We are indeed facing a battle of narratives: between those who prioritise humanity and those who would sacrifice people for profit. For some, evidently, domestic dividends and imperial power are more important than defeating Covid-19.



# THE EPIDEMIC OF POVERTY

## killing before coronavirus

by Simon Korner

The Covid-19 epidemic has exposed the abject failure of capitalism to protect our lives. But in February, before the current virus took hold, a major report revealed that life expectancy in Britain – which had been rising steadily for 120 years – had begun to plateau. The report by Professor Sir Michael Marmot, who heads the Institute of Health Equity, is a sober, and sobering, analysis from a leading establishment academic. Not only life-span but quality of life was examined by Marmot, who documents a huge rise in ill health and disability: “While life expectancy is one important measure of health, how long a person can expect to live in good health is perhaps an even more significant measure of quality of life... For women, healthy life expectancy has declined since 2009–11 and for both men and women years spent in poor health have increased.”

### Class inequalities

The report points to class inequalities, as seen in stark regional disparities, with the poorest 10% of regions far harder hit than the wealthiest. In the most deprived areas, such as the north-east – and also among certain demographics, such as women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin – life expectancy actually fell between 2010-2012 and again between 2016-2018.

Typically, a boy born in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea might live 8.8 years longer than one born in Blackpool. Similarly, a man in Westminster can expect to live 7 more years than a man in Rochdale. A baby born in a poor area is almost

twice as likely to die within the first year of life than one in a rich area. The highest life expectancy in the UK is in London and the south-east – though deprived London boroughs such as Tower Hamlets have some of the lowest levels of life expectancy in the country.

In terms of ill health, people born in Rochdale are likely to develop a disabling condition in their late 50s, according to the Centre for Ageing Better. A boy born in Blackpool today can only expect to reach age 52 without a long-term physical or mental health condition, and a girl can only expect reach age 53 without a chronic disabling condition. That's nearly 20 fewer years of good health than those born in Richmond, London. “The poorer the area, the worse the health,” says Marmot. “There is a social gradient in the proportion of life spent in ill health, with those in poorer areas spending more of their shorter lives in ill health.”

Overall, the picture is dramatically unequal: if you're poor your life will be shorter and less healthy than if you're well off – by a large margin.

### Austerity

The Marmot report is an update of an earlier report, ‘Fair Society, Healthy Lives’, which was commissioned by the Tory-led Coalition government 10 years ago. The previous report recommended among other things “giving children the best start in life” and “fair employment and good work for all.” All of its vital recommendations were ignored. Since then, austerity has led to further massive rises in poverty, precarious employment,



cuts in education, unaffordable rents and increased homelessness. Over the past decade, public spending was reduced from 42% to 35% of national income. This meant severe government cuts to local councils. In particular spending on public services was hit hard – down to 1948-49 levels, according to analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (2014). Central government funding for housing was cut by 77%, leading to a massive rise in homelessness.

In 2010, Sure Start centres, which provided help for pre-school children and advice on child and family health, were shut down. The Coalition government also shifted responsibility for public health from the NHS to local councils, whose budgets had been decimated. Ring-fenced government funding for public health was held down in 2014-5, according to the King's Fund, and local authority cuts in non-ringfenced areas, such as

housing and parks and leisure services, damaged public health. Marmot comments: “The cuts over the period shown have been regressive and inequitable—they have been greatest in areas where need is highest... the cuts have harmed health and contributed to widening health inequalities... and are likely to continue to do so over the longer term.”

The “red wall” constituencies that voted Brexit are typically the poorest and least healthy, and receive the least government funding.

Marmot’s current recommendations echo those he made a decade ago, all of which still need enacting. These include raising the living wage; reducing casual employment; removing barriers to welfare payment; increasing spending on early years services; and restoring per-pupil secondary school funding.

## International comparisons

Out of the major imperialist countries, only the US has worse life expectancy figures than Britain. Average American life expectancy has fallen since 2014, especially among poor white Americans, while the lowest life expectancy is still to be found among Native Americans and African Americans. Deaths of despair – suicide, drugs, drink – account for much of their rising mortality rate. In England, deaths of despair have likewise risen, particularly related to alcohol. “People who live in more deprived areas are up to six times more likely to die from alcohol-related liver disease than those in wealthier places”, writes John Harris (*The Guardian*, 9 March 2020). He adds that the UK has the “highest per-capita rate of drug fatalities in Europe.” Ian Lavery and Jon Trickett’s paper *Northern Discomfort* links the high unemployment rate in the north-east, Yorkshire and Humber to the high rate of male suicides.

Other rich countries have also seen falling improvements in life expectancy, though France and Germany’s

rate of decline is slower – at roughly half the rate of the US and UK. For British women in particular, the 90% slowdown in rising life expectancy is the worst in the rich world.

The EU has contributed to the decline in rising life expectancy by insisting on steep cuts to healthcare and welfare in its member states, making a nonsense of the supposed benefits of the ‘social contract’. The European Commission has made 63 individual demands of member states to cut spending and privatise healthcare services between 2011 and 2018, according to Emma Clancy, Sinn Fein policy adviser in the European parliament.

Compare this situation to a socialist country like Cuba, which has suffered decades of US sanctions. In Cuba, life expectancy is 5 years longer than that of African Americans, though 70% of the Cuban population is of African origin. Its infant mortality is half that in most big US cities. Socialism has prioritised primary healthcare, focusing on prevention – with some of the highest vaccination rates in the world – and excellent medical education.

China’s life expectancy rose rapidly after its socialist revolution, “among the most rapid sustained increases in documented global history”, according to Cambridge academic journal *Population Studies* (2015). Average Russian life expectancy rose from age 33 in 1917 to age 43 in 1927, according to the *World Atlas of the Child* (World Bank, 1979). By 1975 it had risen to 70.

## Coronavirus

Coronavirus has exposed inequality in the starkest ways. The working class are most likely to catch the disease, being forced to work in unsafe conditions without protective clothing and without proper physical distancing. Research on an earlier flu outbreak in Connecticut, USA, found that the rate of infection nearly doubled in poor areas. And, if they escape the disease, workers are more likely

to be hit by loss of income or healthcare as a result of quarantine.

Moreover, working class people are not only likelier to catch Covid-19 but to die from it. This is because healthcare is unaffordable to so many. In the US, 26% of people went without necessary healthcare because it was too expensive, according to a recent Gallup poll. 18% of the poll’s respondents said someone in their family had foregone prescribed medication for the same reason. Given that underlying ill health increases the chances of dying from Covid-19, and given that the poorest in society tend to develop chronic health conditions much earlier in life (5-15 years earlier, according to the *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2009), class is therefore a major risk factor along with age. While on average it is people over 70 who are at much greater risk of dying from the coronavirus, for the poor the figure may be as low as 55.

As Marmot says: “The question we should ask is not, can we afford better health for the population of England, but what kind of society do we want?... Put simply, if health has stopped improving, then society has stopped improving. The health of the population is not just a matter of how well the health service is funded and functions, important as that is, but also the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, and inequities in power, money, and resources. Taken together, these are the social determinants of health.”

Dr Lucy Haim and Martin McKee (*The Guardian*, 24 June 2019) underline Marmot’s point: “Life expectancy, mortality rates and infant mortality are the most important statistics a nation can produce about its health – and the UK’s are not only stalling but worsening, falling behind international trends.” And as the award-winning progressive journalist Jonathan Cook points out on his blog: “There is nothing unique about the coronavirus crisis. It is simply a heightened version of the less visible crisis we are now permanently mired in.”

# In or out of the EU NEOLIBERALISM is the real disease

by Bert Schouwenburg

Keir Starmer's election as Labour leader represents a satisfactory outcome for the forces of reaction both inside and outside the Party who had come to view Jeremy Corbyn as a real threat to the established neoliberal capitalist order. Ironically, it comes at a time when the coronavirus pandemic has served to highlight the system's deficiencies as never before, not least within the European Union, the endorsement and defence of which cost Labour the 2019 election and Corbyn his job.

## The Brexit election

During opening remarks at the Chingford and Woodford Green constituency hustings on December 6th, Tory candidate and eventual winner, Iain Duncan Smith had said that the General Election was about Brexit, that all political parties had pledged to uphold the result of the 2016 referendum but that the Conservatives were the only party that would keep their promise. We now know that IDS' analysis was correct. Voters in the hitherto Labour strongholds of the North and Midlands who had voted to leave the EU in 2016 abandoned the party in droves and handed the Conservative Party a landslide victory.

In the 2017 election, Labour had said it would honour Brexit and reaped the benefits at the ballot box, but by 2019 their manifesto policy had morphed into a commitment to renegotiate its terms followed by another referendum with an option to remain in the EU, a muddled compromise rightly

seen by many as a betrayal of the 2016 verdict. In the months and years leading up to the election, Labour had repeatedly thwarted all attempts by the government to negotiate an exit package with the EU and by the time it took place, several prominent shadow cabinet members were openly supporting the remain option, in lockstep with a sizeable rump of their backbench colleagues. Kier Starmer was at the forefront of this pro-EU movement and his activities made a significant contribution to Labour's humiliating defeat.

Outside Parliament, a formidable campaign had been launched for the UK to remain in the EU, a campaign that attracted huge numbers of people onto the streets of London in support of a second referendum or "People's Vote". A significant percentage of the marchers were white, middle class folk from London and the Southeast, many of whom had a scarcely disguised contempt for those who had voted for Brexit. Indeed, a feature of the campaign were claims that the referendum result was unfair because ill-informed Brexit voters had been lied to by politicians like Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage, as if other elections were somehow different. Unsurprisingly, what was seen as patronising drivel from the metropolitan chattering classes went down like the proverbial lead balloon in the deprived post-industrial areas of England where the electorate saw the European Union as an integral part of a system that had largely abandoned them.



Monument commemorating the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992

## EU fundamentals

In contrast, many remain supporting voters had an idealised view of the EU as a benevolent institution promoting international cooperation and harmony and perceived anyone who opposed it as being "Little Englanders" or downright racist. As Costas Lapavistas said in his book *The Left Case Against the EU*, "the privileged layers, including a broad section of the middle class with access to the media, the universities, research institutes and so on have become closely attached to the notion that the EU stands for progress", an illusion that is shared by many on the left, including trade union hierarchies increasingly out of touch not only with the poor and the dispossessed but also with their own rank and file members. The attachment to the EU by the left has alien-



ated working class people across Europe who have looked elsewhere for a political voice to the detriment of social democratic parties seen as defenders of the status quo, and to the benefit of re-emerging extreme right wing nationalist parties.

Far from being a force for international cooperation and development, the EU has its origins in the politics of the Cold War. From the 1950s onwards, it was essentially a customs union designed to promote the coal and steel industries of Western Europe, protect its farmers and act as a bulwark against the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact countries. The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 created the common currency, the Euro, and reasserted the 'Four Freedoms' that underpin the European single market, i.e. free movement of goods, services, capital and people between what were to become the 28 member states. Significantly, it reinterpreted them as individual rights, thus enabling them to be used against collective interests and policies. Maastricht provided the impetus for increasing European integration to the benefit of multinational capital and big business by institutionalising neoliberalism.

In 1939, the economist who is considered to be the Godfather of neoliberalism, Friedrich von Hayek, proposed the creation of a federal union that would remove the impediments to the free movement of 'men, goods and capital' and become a single market. Consequently, prices and wages would reflect production costs across member states and, crucially, would inhibit their ability to arbitrarily interfere with workings of the free market. The EU has become the embodiment of Hayek's vision, a hierarchical alliance of nation states operating within a single market promoting neoliberalism, a borderless region for private property and enterprise. By contrast in this federal body, member states have limited rights and decision-making in many spheres is taken out of their hands. The control of

money has also become the province of the EU through the establishment of the European Central Bank and the introduction of the Euro which played key roles in the evolution of a neoliberal EU and the hegemony of Germany.

German economic dominance of the EU destroys a prevalent myth that there is a level playing field allowing all member states to share in its supposed prosperity. From the outset, the European Monetary Union (EMU) lacked mechanisms such as mutualising public debt, that would alleviate the glaring inequalities within and between EU member states. Although national central banks retain control of assets and liabilities, the European Central Bank oversees the statutory responsibility for member states to keep inflation below 2%. The EMU Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) obliges member states to maintain public deficits within 3% of GDP and public debt within 60% but, pursuant to Article 125 of the Lisbon Treaty, the ECB will not assume responsibility for their obligations in this regard. In short, the EMU has benefited large European multinational corporations in an era of advancing financialisation of the economy, and in particular those of Germany which has become the hegemonic country of the EU.

An important factor in Germany's dominance was the defeat sustained by organised labour in the 1990s, exposing another myth: that EU membership is essential for the protection of workers' rights. Neoliberal policies were enacted to curb trade union power and drive down wages. The labour market was deregulated and worker protections reduced to permit the growth of part-time, temporary and precarious employment. Rights to unemployment benefit were curtailed, forcing people to take work that they would otherwise not have considered. Unions were less able to resist and few workers were organised in the growing service sector. The cumulative effect

of the labour market reforms was to effectively end the tripartite bargaining relationship between employers, unions and the state and, make Germany a harsher and more unequal society. Germany became more competitive, not through improved productivity, but through enforced austerity.

## No solidarity

The constraints of the SGP have occasioned enforced structural adjustments in several member states, most notably in Greece where an EU/IMF bailout, primarily designed to protect the Euro and safeguard loans from German banks, has brought the country to its knees. An integral part of the adjustment package involves the dismantling of collective bargaining mechanisms and across the EU over the last 10 years there has been an average reduction in its coverage of 14%. The largest drop has been in Romania – a staggering 63% – and, predictably, in Greece (45%). According to the International Labour Organisation, EU collective bargaining agreements are experiencing the greatest percentage drop in the world. Of course, the most basic right is the ability to have a secure and well-paid job in the first place; what the TUC would refer to as decent work. With unemployment rates across the EU having touched levels not seen since the great depression and significant increases in precarious, informal low paid work, not even the most ardent EU supporter can claim this as a success. Hardly surprising then, that in a recent poll, over 60% of Bulgarians said that life had been better under Communist rule.

In fact employment rates in the accession states of the old Eastern Bloc would have been worse, had it not been for "freedom" of movement inside the EU, allowing people to emigrate in search of work elsewhere. Entire villages and towns in Poland and Romania have lost virtually all their young adult males,

Migrant workers are routinely employed to undercut hard won terms and conditions and union rates of pay and in these circumstances it is hardly surprising that there can be resentment amongst the indigenous workforce, especially in poorer areas that then become fertile territory for the xenophobic rhetoric of the far right.

leaving children to be looked after by their mothers and grandparents. What is seen as a success by some of the more naïve NGOs in the UK is in fact a licence for exploitation, not only by unscrupulous employers but also by organised crime syndicates engaging in modern day slavery to such an extent that British police forces have admitted that they do not have the resources to control it. Migrant workers are routinely employed to undercut hard won terms and conditions and union rates of pay and in these circumstances it is hardly surprising that there can be resentment amongst the indigenous workforce, especially in poorer areas that then become fertile territory for the xenophobic rhetoric of the far right. The situation is worsened by erroneous claims from the TUC that freedom of movement is not a factor in the decline of workers' rights, a direct contradiction of Friedrich Engels accurate observation on the benefit of a 'reserve army of labour' for the capitalist class.

Nevertheless, workers' ability to cross borders to find employment does not extend beyond the boundaries of the EU and the treatment of migrants and refugees from other continents who are fleeing famine, wars and the effects of climate change, often as a result of Western interventions, is appalling and well documented. Indeed, those who have suffered most within the EU during the coronavirus pandemic are refugees packed into squalid camps on Greece's Mediterranean islands without adequate food, housing or sanitation. Even before the virus took hold across Europe, not one EU member state had fulfilled its obligations towards taking in a proportionate share of those currently stranded in Greece. In a more recent development, European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, praised Greece for being the EU's border "shield" after their police teargassed and brutalised thousands of refugees on the Turkish border.

In other aspects of the struggle to contain the virus, there is little evidence of pan-EU solidarity and it has exposed EU divisions and the unequal status of member states. Appeals for help from Italy, the most hard-hit member state, fell on deaf ears obliging it to bring in doctors from Cuba and medical supplies from Russia and China, some of which were impounded by the Czech Republic en route, prompting Lombardy's Health Minister to castigate the EU for its lack of support. As Serbia's President, Aleksander Vucic, said, EU solidarity is a 'fairy tale'.

Bad as this may be, the longer term threat to Italy arises from the imposition of the SGP. The country's economy is no bigger now than it was at the time of the crash in 2007. When it joined the Eurozone in 1999, it had a thriving manufacturing sector but this has reduced by 20%. Its national debt is already 135% of GDP and growing during the crisis. Most of it is held by Italian banks so if there is a collapse, the banks go down too, leaving the State with little room for manoeuvre, given that, being part of the Euro, it cannot devalue the currency or print money. Italy's plight epitomises the EU's inability to address the economic consequences of the Covid-19 lockdown, largely because of German Chancellor Merkel's refusal to contemplate any form of fiscal union to socialise the collective debts of member states by the issuing of Eurobonds. Instead, Germany, the Netherlands and other more prosperous northern states are insisting that Italy and others can only be bailed out by using the same mechanism that was deployed in Greece with all the attendant austerity measures that entails. Small wonder then that some economists are predicting that the Eurozone will break up under the weight of its own contradictions. Yanis Varoufakis, Greece's former Finance Minister, has said that Greece should have abandoned the Euro and still should.



*Friedrich von Hayek, godfather of EU neoliberalism*

## Trade agreements

The EU has competence for trade on behalf of all member states and has an aggressive policy of securing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) across the globe. In reality, these have little to do with trade, are not free and do not have the agreement of those affected. They are primarily instruments to facilitate the deregulation and liberalisation of trade partners' economies for the benefit of European capital and are therefore more about investment than the exchange of goods. FTAs are long term commitments that override any constraints that may be imposed by domestic legislation and are enforced by investor state dispute settlement mechanisms, allowing private corporations to sue countries that do not allow them unfettered market access as per the terms of the agreement.

FTAs are particularly pernicious when applied to countries in the global south and the deals made by the EU would be instantly recognisable to an 18th century colonial administrator. Euphemistically titled Economic Partnership Agreements have been made with African countries using a style of negotiation that would not be unfamiliar to Al Capone, whereby the European Commission demands that their economies are opened up to subsidi-

dised European agribusiness, failing which their exports would be barred from the EU. In Latin America, despite opposition from civil society groups on both sides of the Atlantic and the EU's supposed commitment to human rights, FTAs have been signed with some of the most repressive regimes on the continent, including Guatemala, Honduras and Colombia. The European Commission justifies this by repeatedly insisting that constructive engagement will improve matters and that that each FTA includes a chapter on "sustainable development" obliging the trade partners to respect labour rights and the environment. Without the will or the means to enforce the chapter, it is utterly meaningless and widely ignored.

It is precisely this type of agreement that Boris Johnson wants the UK to sign up to post-Brexit. His assertion that it can be negotiated and finalised in a year, together with his Chancellor's insistence that they will not have to adhere to EU standards on goods and services are little more than grandstanding. EU FTAs take, on average, 7 years to complete. The proposed deal with Mercosur (South American Common Market) has already taken over 20 years and if a third country wants to operate in or sell goods to the EU, they will have to comply with their standards. If and when Johnson does get

his deal, it will compromise British sovereignty as much, if not more in some aspects, than remaining in the EU and will undoubtedly permit EU companies access to services that are already tendered such as the railways and, yes, the NHS. This should not come as a surprise to anybody. Johnson may have wanted to come out of the EU for reasons related to British capital's ability to compete on a wider stage and for his own personal ambition but his government's version of neoliberal capitalism is in essence no different to that of the EU. His effusive praise of NHS workers caring for coronavirus victims should not be interpreted as a damascene conversion to a health service exclusively owned and run by the state.

## Different futures

A progressive government freed from the constraints of the EU could have begun to reverse some of the collateral damage caused by decades of neoliberal capitalism and, at the same time, weakened an institution that is dedicated to the preservation and advance of a profits based system predicated upon infinite economic growth as measured by GDP, an absurd proposition at the best of times, let alone in the midst of a growing climate emergency and the current health crisis. Instead, thanks to Labour's shift towards Remain and defeat at the election, we have a right wing administration largely in tandem with Brussels' direction of travel. The common enemy was and is neoliberal capitalism, a class issue rather than a nationalist issue, and those of us on the left must do everything possible to agitate, educate and organise to get that message across, not only to the supporters of the EU, but also to the alienated Brexit voters who will soon realise that, under Johnson, the separation that they wanted will be little more than a sham. Just ask Kier Starmer.

*Bert Schouwenburg is a trade union adviser*



# THE FUTURE AFTER CORBYN

by Frieda Park

What is most notable about Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party was that it actually happened at all and even more astonishingly that it was sustained for nearly 5 years. In and of itself this was a huge success. It created and enabled the continued development of a left movement in Britain and moved the whole of politics to the left. Not only has the Labour right had to shift leftwards, but even the Tories have been forced to ditch the grim austerity message which nearly lost them the 2017 general election – albeit neither of them is embracing this with great sincerity. All of this remains a huge legacy of the Corbyn period. But obviously there were weaknesses as well which came home to roost in the 2019 election.

## NOT OF OUR CHOOSING

The central problems that Corbyn faced, and which did most to undermine his leadership, were objective, and they were problems which we could do little to change:

1. He was catapulted to the leadership of the Party from virtually nowhere. There was no long-term campaign that built support, infrastructure and like-minded people gaining positions in the Party and as elected representatives.
2. Class struggle, with some honourable exceptions, was at a low ebb with unions taking a beating from the Thatcher era onwards. Socialist organisations and ideas had been marginalised.
3. The movement around Corbyn involved a lot of people new to

politics. Though radical many did not have much political education or experience of struggle. Many also bought into identity politics and were uncritically pro-EU. The movement did not have strong working class roots.

4. Initially Corbyn did not have the wholehearted support of the trade unions.
5. Well to the left and with a particularly strong record on peace and international issues Corbyn was then leader of a Party one of whose roles has been to be an acceptable alternative government to the Tories for British capitalism.
6. This earned him the contempt and loathing of the right of the Party and,
7. the enmity of the British state and the media.

These objective problems made it tough for Corbyn to advance his politics when he was being undermined and attacked on all fronts. At points it seemed impossible that he could hold on to power. From the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) there were resignations, coup attempts and nasty attacks in the media. At one point he did not have enough people willing to be in his shadow cabinet and some jobs had to be doubled up.

Against all the odds he survived, and having won a second leadership election actually began to gain ground in the Party. He led the party into the 2017 general election where, rather than May winning a resound-

ing victory, she lost her majority and Labour increased its vote share by 30.4%. It was the first time it had gained seats since 1997. This was a huge triumph for Corbyn and the team running the election campaign, with radical policies, including nationalisation of the railways and an end to austerity, under the slogan – For the Many not the Few.

Corbyn consolidated support in the party and the unions, but that did not make the problems go away. The right-wing and the British establishment realised they had underestimated Corbyn, his anti-austerity message and the loyal support he had in the Party. They changed tack. Many were less overtly confrontational in the PLP, they were digging in for the long haul. The attacks shifted to the relentless campaign over alleged anti-semitism in the Party.

## SUBJECTIVE PROBLEMS

Although at one level Corbyn consolidated his position, at another level subjective problems arising from the objective conditions in which he became leader began to emerge. The handling of Brexit, alleged anti-semitism and the 2019 election campaign demonstrated these. The lack of political depth and experience of class struggle and connection to the working class became evident. Although severely constrained by the objective circumstances and less than solid support on the left there were areas where things could have been done better.

1. Led by the liberal media and Sir Keir Starmer the party moved inexorably towards a Remain posi-

# LEADERSHIP 2020

 Labour



Keir Starmer and Rebecca Long-Bailey, 2020 Labour Party leadership election hustings, Bristol

tion, ditching the pledge to respect the outcome of the EU referendum which played an important part in Labour's success in the 2017 general election. Most of the left, Momentum and leading figures such as John McDonnell were part of the problem. Attempts to prevent the Party adopting an out and out Remain position represented continued retreats and eventually the Party ended up going into the election with a scarcely credible position on the key issue it was fought on. The voices of those on the left who saw the folly of this were not loud enough and were not listened to.

**2.** The media and right wing campaign round allegations anti-semitism was never adequately addressed. There was never any evidence that anti-semitism was a wide-spread or institutional problem. There was only a small proportion of members who had allegations made against them and there

was never any evidence that Labour had a bigger problem than other political parties or society as a whole. In fact the reverse was the case, the evidence that did exist seemed to suggest that the problem was less. Under its new General Secretary, Jennie Formby, Labour speeded up dealing with anti-semitism allegations. Yet false narratives were not adequately countered. On the other hand members were suspended who had not made overtly anti-semitic comments and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Definition was adopted which conflates criticism of Israel with anti-semitism. Though Corbyn had tried to take a stand on this at the EC he was undermined by some in the trade unions and by Jon Lansman, founder and chair of Momentum.

**3.** The constraints imposed by the weak understanding of the issues around anti-semitism and the EU made it very difficult for people to

speak out – but it would have helped enormously if they had. Indeed a toxic political environment developed where to criticise the Party's handling of the anti-semitism issue risked individuals being branded anti-semitic and being expelled. And opponents of the EU were branded as racist and anti-worker, so attempts to hold the policy of respecting the outcome of the referendum foundered.

**4.** Progress was difficult on bringing together and educating activists in consistent socialist politics and focusing on building the Party in working class communities. The domination of Momentum was a barrier to this. While it did great work mobilising activists and winning internal elections, its politics were weak.

**5.** The lack of political maturity and direction began to be apparent at the 2019 Party conference. Motions

were passed making the abolition of private schools and complete free movement of people Party policy. A classic coming together of liberal and ultra-leftist ideas. This continued into the general election where more and more policies, over and above what was in the manifesto, were announced daily.

6. There was little appreciation or preparedness for the fact that a Corbyn government, even with the more modest manifesto of 2017, would be taking on the vested interest of capital and the British state, never mind the extensive further policies in the 2019 one.

## A POSITIVE BALANCE

Whilst all that is frustrating the positives gained from the Corbyn period are enormous.

1. The entire political landscape has shifted to the left. The British public have demonstrated that they are tired of austerity and want something different. No candidates for the Labour leadership felt emboldened to turn the clock back on policies like re-nationalisation of the railways. The Tory chancellor, Rishi Sunak, made a flurry of spending announcements in his budget – austerity is a dirty word. Whilst the sincerity of much of this is in doubt, the argument is with those challenging austerity and seeking a better deal for working people.

2. The left is stronger throughout the party, even in the PLP where a new cohort of left MPs was elected at the last election.

3. Masses of committed activists, many young and from diverse communities, have joined the Party. Their work rate in the general election was incredible.

4. Out of that new generation of activists is emerging many who have learned some of the hard lessons from the successes and failures of the Corbyn period. There are

academics and intellectuals arguing for social democratic and socialist policies. Not so long ago words like capitalism, socialism, the working class, imperialism and exploitation were rarely used and seemed an anachronism – now they are the currency of debate on the left. There is the potential for a serious left to be built from this experience.

## STARMER'S VICTORY

Keir Starmer's victory in the leadership election was a result of the historic trends within Labour and the more recent weakness of the left. It rested largely on his pro-EU credentials and a tremendous ability not to say anything much of any significance about anything else. Although he said he would continue with Corbyn's most popular policies. He appealed to a desire for "electability" and enough people on the left bought this package, along with a big number of right wingers who rejoined Labour to support him, to give him a resounding victory.

Momentum foisted the Long-Bailey/Rayner ticket on the left and Jon Lansman managed Long-Bailey's campaign. Though good on a number of economic issues and the Green New Deal which she pioneered, Long-Bailey seemed bland on other issues. It was dismaying to hear her say that she would be prepared to launch Trident nuclear missiles and commit mass murder. She also signed up to the pledges pushed by the Jewish Labour Movement designed to further persecute critics of Israel in the Party and the pledges on trans-rights which committed her to expelling people who take a critical view of gender self-identification. It was a campaign which failed to enthuse.

Fortunately Richard Burgon stuck to his guns and stood for the deputy leader post on a consistent left platform, so that voice was heard in the campaign. He received strong support from Momentum groups around the country and from the Campaign for Socialism in Scotland.

In the final round of voting he came third receiving 21.3% of the vote, despite not having the backing of Momentum. (Long-Bailey secured 27.6% with Momentum's backing.)

The most overtly Blairite candidate standing was Ian Murray for the deputy leadership who was knocked out in the second round.

Remember that Corbyn only managed to get on the ballot for Labour leader by securing the mis-guided support of some on the right, so it is a measure of how far we have come that both Long-Bailey and Burgon were able to secure support in their own right to get on the ballot from within the PLP.

## PRACTICAL LESSONS

Starmer's victory is a big setback, but there is still much that has been achieved and more importantly can be achieved.

There is a burning need to root the left in the working class and to develop and support class struggles in workplaces and communities. There needs to be greater clarity about policies, tactics and strategy to take the working class forward.

There also requires to be clarity about the nature of the British state and the challenges of taking on the vested interests of capital. We have to develop principled internationalism and campaigning for peace.

People need to have the courage of their convictions and stand up and be counted over controversial issues.

All this points to the need for better left organisation and political education.

There is now a basis to do this work – before Corbyn that would have been a fantasy.



# University staff fight on wages, conditions & the future of education

by Brian Durrans

At the time of writing (20 March 2020), UK universities are in the news for two main reasons connected with the coronavirus pandemic. The Government's belated decision to close schools has been welcomed by teachers but those in secondary schools and some university representatives have questioned how students' GCSE and A-level grades will be allocated given exam cancellations. Interestingly, one Vice-Chancellor challenged this decision as a risk to social justice for many students, acknowledging that, compared with coursework assessment which may now be unavoidable, exams discriminate less against working class students.

Far more than this, however, universities have been in the headlines because of their scientific research-based input to debate and policy on how to deal with the current pandemic; and medical specialists at Imperial College London played a lead role in persuading Downing Street to ditch its fatuous "herd immunity" approach for a more robust line on social isolation and testing.

The pandemic doesn't kill its victims just with the help of a decade's austerity. The erosion of capacity in the NHS began earlier than the 2008 financial crash and even before the Private Finance Initiative (PFIs) of New Labour. Likewise, over the decades de-industrialisation and the shrinking and shackling of trade unions paved the way for the gig

economy and unprecedented levels of inequality in wealth and health. The crisis reveals whose work matters most, and that we need not just a proper NHS but also proper social care integrated with it; and sustainable jobs for the future, which point us towards Socialism.

For all that our scientists are lauded as heroes in the battle against coronavirus, the university system that makes them what they are has itself been under systematic attack for many years on several fronts, principally a narrowing corporatisation of learning and research and cuts to jobs, security and incomes, and ever-increasing workloads. Academics and ancillary staff who together run higher education under increasingly difficult circumstances have begun a serious fight-back both on wages and conditions and with a clear understanding that the very future of advanced learning hangs in the balance not only in more vocational fields like engineering, medicine, law and management but in the swathe of other disciplines on which the economy and the quality of all our lives also depend.

Following increasingly well-supported and militant campaigns in 2018 and 2019, the University and College Union (UCU) organised industrial action this year with strikes and other forms of non-co-operation on an unprecedented scale covering a range of issues including workload-related stress and ill health as well as equality, job security, pay and job-



UCU picket, 3 March 2020

related pensions. Staff in 52 colleges and universities voted for actions on pensions and in 70 of them the focus was on wider work-related issues; altogether 74 different institutions were involved over a four-week period from 20 February to 13 March. On 15 March 2020, in view of the pandemic and pressure to close classes, picketing was suspended but the campaign continues.[1]

Those strikers on one of the several official pickets at Imperial College London (ICL) with whom I spoke on 3 March were good-humoured yet realistic about their prospects of winning concessions from intransigent employers. The dominant outlook was that their working lives had been deteriorating for so long that passivity is not an option. Long ago, these would have been among the "middle strata" who'd have identified with the capitalist status quo. They gave me a flyer advertising a lunchtime discussion on environmental policy, a hot topic at ICL. UCU members might not win this round, but they increasingly know which side they're on.

[1] <https://www.ucu.org.uk/heaction-institutions>

# THE TRIALS OF SALMOND AND TRIBULATIONS OF STURGEON

by Martin S. Gibson

Probably the most serious schism in the history of the Scottish National Party is no longer hearsay or gossip: it is real and could split the independence movement right down the middle.

Over two years ago Alex Salmond claims his worst 'nightmare' began. According to the former Scottish National Party (SNP) Leader and former First Minister of Scotland it started when Nicola Sturgeon's SNP Government launched an official investigation into allegations that Salmond sexually assaulted nine women who worked with him in 2013 while he was First Minister. Scotland's MeToo movement version of Hollywood's Harvey Weinstein scandal: a powerful man serially sexually assaulting the women in his employ. It was all the more astonishing because it was provoked by someone who was Salmond's closest political ally and friend and his chosen successor as First Minister. It had to be true.

## SNP splits

For Salmond and his staunchest supporters this was akin to a declaration of war. Never one to run from a fight, Salmond's riposte was a crowdfunding campaign to raise £50,000 to meet his legal costs. This closed two days later after he raised over £100,000. In August 2018, Salmond launched a civil action in the Court of Session for a judicial review. His complaint - that the Scottish Government's investiga-

tion was unjust - was upheld by the court. Sturgeon's Government paid more than £500,000 in Salmond's legal expenses. They further admitted breaching their own investigation guidelines by appointing an investigating officer who had 'prior involvement' in the case. Sturgeon's Government also admitted its procedures had been 'flawed' and 'unlawful'.

Despite Salmond's resounding success, the sexual assault allegations did not vanish with his victory. The Court of Session only concerned itself with a complaint of an 'unjust' procedure. A second, criminal, case on 9 March 2020 at the High Court in Edinburgh, would determine his guilt or innocence.

What Salmond's judicial review did was to lift the lid a little on the SNP's schism between supporters of direct action to win independence sooner rather than later, versus those who preferred to tread the legal and more cautious road to independence. This longstanding faultline has, for the most part, been suppressed for the greater good of the cause of independence. Fast forward to 23 March 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic is raging over every continent. On that day the schism lid is blown off completely when a High Court jury - under Judge, Lady Dorrian - acquits Salmond of all the charges made against him. One of the 14 charges was dropped before the trial began. After nine days in court and six

hours of deliberation, the 13-member jury - mainly women - found him not guilty of 12 charges and not proven on one charge of sexual assault with intent to rape. Salmondistas 'welcomed' their former party boss's victory and demand:

- 'heads must roll';
- a judge led inquiry into the whole affair;
- a clear out of the SNP's HQ from top to bottom; and,
- the return of Salmond's party membership surrendered when he began his fight to clear his name.

Sturgeonites - having lost in court twice inside two years - licked their wounds again and worried about what lay ahead. Nicola Sturgeon says the jury's verdict must be 'respected', and adds that now is not the time for discussing Salmond's two court cases, 'This country faces a crisis right now (Covid-19) that is bigger than anything we've ever faced before, and as first minister my duty to the public is to focus 100% on steering us through that crisis - and that is what I intend to do.'

In a joint statement, issued through Rape Crisis Scotland, the nine women said: 'While we are devastated by the verdict, we will not let it define us. We hope through shining a light on our experiences, it will serve to protect and empower women in the future.'



All those outside the party's inner circles wondered what on earth was going on inside the normally ultra-disciplined, on-message SNP, and why all 14 charges by nine women were rejected. From the very start of the whole affair two years ago, Salmond's main line of defence was to admit he was 'no saint' but had committed 'no criminality.' This was employed to the full by Salmond's lawyer, the veteran Dean of the Faculty of Advocates and former Labour MSP, Gordon Jackson QC. Jackson told the jury that Salmond, 'should have been a better man', but none of this made him a 'criminal'. Something with which a majority of the jury agreed. A few days later, the Dean was overheard talking about his client's case on a train, including naming two of the female complainants whose anonymity is protected by law. As a result, Jackson referred himself to the Scottish Legal Complaints Commission (SLCC) and resigned as Dean.

Salmond's demeanour when he left the court was devoid of the victor's wide triumphant smile and fist in the air. He had more the air of a troubled, wounded man who felt he has a very big score to settle. This was perhaps a sign that, although acquitted of all charges, he knows his reputation has been shredded like no other time during his turbulent political life. Nonetheless, he was still able to issue his own warning to Ms Sturgeon and her supporters, '... there is certain evidence I would have liked to have seen led in this trial but for a variety of reasons we were not able to do so. At some point, that information, those facts and that evidence will see the light of day.' To jostling journalists and photographers who surrounded him outside the court, he made a final and personal plea to all of them, 'Whatever nightmare I have been through over the last two years it is as nothing compared to the situation (Covid-19 pandemic) we are all going through. I know you have a

job to do. If you can, go home, take care of your families, God help us all.' Salmond and Sturgeon agree that the SNP's civil war, in public at least, has to wait until the world war to defeat the invisible and deadly Covid-19 pandemic is over.

It is believed Mr Salmond is writing a book about his two year 'nightmare' and the alleged conspiracy against him by his SNP opponents and institutions of the state. Nicola Sturgeon will face a Scottish Parliamentary Inquiry into her role during the whole two year-long sexual assault affair. She has also referred herself to a standards panel which will investigate whether or not she broke the Ministerial Code during her government's investigation.

### **Independence now or gradualism?**

The SNP's schism is between 'independence now' fundamentalists



- fundis - like Salmond and those like Surgeon who prefer to tread a legal and more cautious road to independence. It is said that one of the biggest political parties in Scotland is the party of ex-Labour opportunists who have joined the SNP. These defections reached their height during the highly emotional and divisive Scottish independence referendum in September 2014. SNP fundis are sceptical of these Johnny-come-lately ex-Labour devolutionists whose significant influence has - wittingly or not - undermined the struggle for independence. Few political parties have had the SNP's good fortune to discover that their Labour unionist enemy's only policy to defeat them - devolution, which the SNP always opposed - turned out to be highly beneficial electorally to the SNP. In less than a decade - as the late Labour MP for West Lothian, Tam Dalyell forewarned - the SNP has become the largest party within the Scottish Parliament. 'Devolution', Dalyell far-sightedly warned, 'is a motorway with no exits'. And the irony of all ironies, is that the SNP's inexorable rise is matched only by Scottish Labour's inexorable fall. Labour used to count on 50 Scottish MPs at Westminster, today they have only one.

On the back of repeated SNP victories in Scottish Parliament and UK first-past-the-post General Elections, Salmond's relentless demands for a Scottish independence referendum finally succeeded in October 2012 when Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron agreed to a referendum which took place on 18 September 2014. Scotland's answer to the referendum question, 'Should Scotland be an independent country?', resulted in a decisive 10% victory for the No side: 55% for No and 45% for Yes. Salmond immediately announced he would resign as SNP leader and First Minister.

Nicola Sturgeon - unopposed - became the new leader and First Minister. She paid a warm tribute to

Salmond, 'The personal debt of gratitude I owe Alex is immeasurable.'

The SNP's disappointment at losing this 'once in a generation' chance of independence left them with a quandary which they have so far been unable to resolve. Do they accept the No vote and wait for another 30 years or for another legal referendum and use that time to win more powers for the Scottish Parliament. Or should they take the Jim Sillars' direct action road to independence. Former left-wing Labour MP and former Deputy leader of the SNP, Sillars said, 'We must be prepared to hear the sound of cell doors slamming behind us if we are prepared to win independence'.

When Salmond became First Minister, two Scottish voting blocs - Remain vs Leave - were established:

1. The three main unionist parties - Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats - are the sole beneficiaries of the 55% who would vote to Remain in the UK; and,
2. The SNP is the sole beneficiary of the 45% who would vote to Leave the UK.

This is the great and stubborn 10% Remain vs Leave dividing line in Scottish politics which the SNP has failed to reverse. In normal Scottish Parliament and UK General Elections this 45% SNP block vote is unbeatable because the unionist vote is always split three ways. It's why SNP electoral victories since 2007 - and more so after 2014 - usually vary from excellent to landslide. The last real test of Scottish public opinion was Boris Johnson's Get Brexit Done Westminster election in December 2019. The SNP did well winning 13 new seats but their share of the Scottish vote was 43.6%, a gap of 11.4% against the unionist parties' combined vote. Sturgeon wearily demanded another independence referendum (IndyRef2) on the back of the SNP's 'overwhelming' vote. Johnson flatly refused her demand.

## Sturgeon vs Salmond

Since February, Nicola Sturgeon's SNP Government has been consumed by Scotland's battle against the Covid-19 pandemic which is naturally taking precedence over everything else. Her decision to ditch - indefinitely - IndyRef2 will only add to her fundis' sense of disappointment and impatience. The tabloid's usual and deeply shallow tendency to present political schisms as a clash of two personalities, is not totally unwarranted in this case. As an ardent advocate of the European Union, Sturgeon made many appearances in the Brexit Referendum of 2016 for the Remain campaign. Her passionate performances catapulted her into political stardom around the world. The US Forbes business magazine ranked Sturgeon in 2016 as the 50th most powerful woman in the world and 2nd in the UK. Around the same time, BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* regarded her as the most powerful and influential woman in the United Kingdom. At home and abroad her stature - and most probably her ego - was unmatched. Sturgeon was riding high, basking in the sobriquet of 'Nicola, Queen of Scots' and a reputation as one of the most powerful women in the world. Salmond was on a downer, having lost his Westminster seat of Gordon in East Aberdeenshire to a Conservative in the UK May 2017 General Election.

In August Salmond reappeared on the public stage at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival where he hosted his own show, *Alex Salmond Unleashed*. In November - his ego still intact - he launched the *Alex Salmond Show* on the RT (Russia Today) TV Channel and was fiercely criticised by politicians and media alike as a puppet of the Kremlin. Among Salmond's critics was Sturgeon who said, 'Alex ... is free to do as he wishes, but had I been asked, I would have advised against RT and suggested a different channel ...' This gentle rebuke is evidence that she believed - as his party leader - she should have

at least been consulted, and at best, he should have followed her advice. The fact that he did neither is evidence they were no longer communicating with each other and that their old roles were reversed. She was now the boss. Their two enormous egos apart, the differences between Salmond and Sturgeon go beyond clashes of personality. The substance of their conflict is the unresolved quandary about which road to take to independence.

Many argue in Sturgeon's defence that she has enhanced the SNP's electoral superiority over all other parties in the devolved Scottish Parliament. Others argue that what she has never done - despite all her 'successes' - is reverse the stubborn 10% gap between Remain and Leave and delivered a majority for independence. It's 21 years since the devolved Scottish Parliament was established. It's 13 years since Salmond became that parliament's First Minister and over five years since Sturgeon succeeded him. It's also getting on for six years since the nationalists' deep disappointment at the outcome of Scotland's one and only legal independence referendum. These milestones constitute an especially long

time for many impatient nationalists who never wanted devolution in the first place and who have watched their party - year after year - being sucked into managing the affairs of a Parliament that is still devolved, still subservient, still incomplete and still not an independent and sovereign Scottish Parliament.

In the first ever *Alex Salmond Show* broadcast on RT on 16 November 2017, Salmond's main interviewee was the now exiled former President of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont, who on 1 October 2017 unilaterally declared Catalonia an independent republic. The Spanish government declared it an illegal rebellion and later gaoled several leaders of the Catalan independence cause. Like Salmond, Nicola Sturgeon supports the Catalan nationalists' battle for independence. However, it's clear she has doubts about how they went about it. In the run up to the 'illegal' 2017 Catalan independence referendum, Sturgeon and Salmond offered their personal support. As First Minister, the Spanish Government criticised Sturgeon, claiming she had 'totally misunderstood' the situation in Spain and Catalonia. Sturgeon replied by advising

the Spanish Government to follow 'the shining example' of the 2012 Edinburgh Agreement between the Scottish and UK Governments that allowed Scotland to hold the legal referendum in 2014. Another of her imperial majesty's gentle rebukes!

Eighteen days after his acquittal, the *Alex Salmond Show* was broadcast on RT with Salmond alone at the helm and looking completely untroubled. The whole show was devoted to the 700th anniversary of the Declaration of Arbroath of 6 April 1320 and its 'fundamental importance' to the struggle for Scottish independence today. Optimistic supporters want Salmond to return to front line politics and lead the fight for independence now. Pessimistic supporters feel his sexual assault 'nightmare' will prevent such a return. The *Alex Salmond Show's* first broadcast on Catalan independence, and his latest broadcast on Scottish independence, suggest that whatever he does, it is unlikely that he will be cautiously trudging along any legal roads to independence. It will be about winning Scottish independence sooner rather than later and by hook or by crook.

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# The case of **JULIAN ASSANGE**

by Clare Bailey

If you have never visited the WikiLeaks site, now – as we approach the final stage of the Assange extradition hearing – would be a good time to do that. You could do worse than begin by dipping into its Global Intelligence Files – 5 million emails from Stratfor, a ‘geopolitical intelligence platform’ based in Texas. Stratfor provides services to huge corporations like Raytheon and Lockheed Martin as well as to government agencies like the US Department of Homeland Security. The emails are directly revealing of Stratfor’s networks and methods – the following one for example, in which Fred Burton, their chief security officer, discusses the arrest of Julian Assange in the UK in December 2010 and advocates moving Assange ‘from country to country to face various charges for the next 25 years.’

## Re: Discussion - Assange Arrested

Released on 2012-02-28 15:00 GMT

Email-ID	1056763
Date	2010-12-07 14:50:44
From	burton@stratfor.com
To	analysts@stratfor.com

Re: Discussion- Assange Arrested

One other point is this. Ferreting out his confederates is also key. Find out what other disgruntled rogues inside the tent or outside. Pile on. Move him from country to country to face various charges for the next 25 years. But, seize everything he and his family own to include every person linked to Wiki.

Marko Papic wrote:

> Nate makes a good point. The arrest is not necessarily the end of  
> Julian Assange. He could become a martyr in jail, particularly a  
> Swedish jail, which I imagine has better amenities than my house.

>

>

> On 12/7/10 7:38 AM, Fred Burton wrote:  
>> Will take weeks for extradition, unless he waves the process.

>>

>> DOJ (Holder) won't seek prosecution on their own, but look for the GOP  
>> (Congress) to press for criminal prosecution.

>>

>> Be easy to indict.

>>

>> I would pursue Conspiracy and Political Terrorism charges and declassify  
>> the death of a source someone which I could link to Wiki.

Leaked e-mail



In the event, the US used the 1917 Espionage Act rather than conspiracy or political terrorism charges, and did not need to move Assange from country to country. The Swedish government's 2010 warrant for his arrest on concocted allegations of rape and molestation was sufficient to keep him in suspension in the UK, on bail until May 2012 when the UK Supreme Court ruled he should be extradited to Sweden and fearing subsequent extradition from there to the US, he took refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy where he remained for the next 7 years.

Anyone with questions about the rape allegations made against him should read *Republik's: A Murderous System*, an interview with Nils Melzer, the UN's Special Rapporteur on Torture, published on January 31st 2020. Melzer's account of the Swedish authorities' actions and proceedings against Assange is uniquely well-informed and makes it clear how the fictitious charges came about and were rapidly instrumentalised by the countries involved: <https://www.republik.ch/2020/01/31/nils-melzer-about-wikileaks-founder-julian-assange>. All the charges were eventually dropped.

The US has been more than willing to play a long game. Assange has now been persecuted – tortured according to Melzer's official report – for a decade. His long incarceration in the Ecuadorean embassy provided the Americans with the opportunity to destroy his reputation and discredit him personally, so that he was cut off from public support. He was turned into a living example of the punishment any journalist would suffer if they dared receive and publish material from whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning. In the same interview with *Republik*, Melzer states: 'In 20 years of work with victims of war, violence and political persecution I have never seen a group of democratic states ganging up to deliberately isolate, demonize and abuse a single individual for such a long



Assange supporters protest

time and with so little regard for human dignity and the rule of law.' The 'democratic states' he refers to are the US, the UK, Australia, Sweden and, latterly, Ecuador.

Manning herself was arrested in 2010, convicted under the Espionage Act in 2013 and sentenced to 35 years. She served 7 years of that sentence before being pardoned by Obama as he left office. She was re-arrested and convicted in 2019 for refusing to testify against Julian Assange to a grand jury investigating the Assange case in preparation for the extradition hearing now in progress in the UK. She was released a second time in March 2020 after a suicide attempt; her release was accompanied by the statement that her imprisonment 'no longer serves any coercive purpose'.

## WikiLeaks

Assange founded WikiLeaks in 2006. A publishing platform for whistleblowers, it describes itself as 'an uncensorable system for untraceable mass document leaking'. Ten years after its first publications, in his first speech as director of the CIA in 2017, now US Secretary of State Pompeo defined WikiLeaks as 'a hostile intelligence service'. It was in 2010 that it came to most people's attention when it leaked the first of the files lodged with it by Manning. These were, in April of that year, the *Collateral Murder* footage of the 2007

US airstrike on unarmed civilians in Baghdad and, in July, the *Afghan War Diary*, internal US military logs of the war in Afghanistan. Worth noting again that the first rape charges against Assange were brought by the Swedish government in August 2010.

*Collateral Murder* (so-named as corrective to the repulsive euphemism 'collateral damage') is described by WikiLeaks as 'a classified US military video depicting the indiscriminate slaying of over a dozen people in the Iraqi suburb of New Baghdad - including two Reuters news staff.' Released on April 5th 2010, the full version is 38 minutes long and the footage, compared with other officially released film, is unusually clear. It suggests that the public is misled by the brief clips broadcast occasionally on news channels into believing that these gunships can't see the ground very clearly. In *Collateral Murder* the grotesquely named Apache helicopter circles the same patch of residential neighbourhood endlessly; the soldiers inside can be heard deliberately and consciously discussing what they're doing. They shoot indiscriminately at a group of men, one of whom may have been armed – it's hard to tell; two of the 'objects' however turned out to be cameras carried by Reuters journalists. The dialogue continues to shock however many times one hears it: 'Light 'em all up.' The group instantly falls to the ground and the bodies are covered by the dust cloud raised by the storm of bullets. Then the crosshairs settle on a wounded man trying to crawl to shelter. They open fire on a van that comes to try and pick up the wounded and kill another '4 or 5'. 'Look at those dead bastards. Nice.' Then they see a child in the van: 'Looks like a kid.'

Kristinn Hrafnsson, editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks since Assange stood down in 2018, said that when he first saw the film with Assange it was the word 'Nice' that bore the full weight of the horror he was watching, 'the callousness of the imperial mind' in action as a recent WikiLeaks podcast put it.

Hrafnsson went to Iraq 3 years later to try to find the children who'd been in the minivan and was successful. He learned their father had been taking them to school and was killed protecting them from bullets; they themselves had been wounded in the attack and bore the scars.

The reaction of the US military to the film was that it was a "partial picture" and that everything that took place was anyway within the rules of engagement. Lawyers acting for the US Army advised that since no one can surrender to an aircraft, the people killed were killed legally. Later on when WikiLeaks published the *Iraqi War Logs*, it became clear that this was no isolated event and that the assassination and the killing of civilians was normal. There have been over 200,000 documented civilian deaths since the beginning of the war; the only thing that distinguished the killing filmed in *Collateral Murder* from 1000s of others was that the unedited film was successfully released into the public realm.

The *Afghan War Logs* were released a few months later. Published in *The Guardian*, *Der Spiegel* and *The New York Times*, it was one of the largest leaks in the history of the US military. As stated in the overview provided by WikiLeaks: "The material shows that cover-ups start on the ground. When reporting their own activities, whether directly or via embedded journalists, US Units are inclined to classify civilian kills as insurgent kills, downplay the number of people killed or otherwise make excuses for themselves." Taken together the archives show, again in the words of WikiLeaks, "The vast range of small tragedies that are almost never reported by the press but which account for the overwhelming majority of deaths and injuries."

In the age of the embedded journalist, Manning and WikiLeaks enabled the public to see what routinely happens when imperialist armies are deployed in adventurist wars.

**APRIL 5** 10 YEARS AGO TODAY  
WIKILEAKS PUBLISHES  
A CLASSIFIED U.S. MILITARY VIDEO  
DOCUMENTING A WAR CRIME

**COLLATERAL MURDER**

LEAKED HELICOPTER GUNSHOT VIDEO DEPICTS THE  
2007 SLAYING OF UP TO 25 PEOPLE IN THE IRAQI  
SUBURB OF NEW BAGHDAD INCLUDING 2 REUTERS  
JOURNALISTS & THEIR RESCUERS

**2 JOURNALISTS KILLED**  
THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S CAMERA IS VISIBLE

**2 CHILDREN SEVERELY INJURED**

FOI

PENTAGON BLOCKS  
REUTERS FROM  
ACCESSING THE VIDEO  
UNDER FOI LAWS

THIS CONTRIBUTES TO U.S. ARMY  
WHISTLEBLOWER CHELSEA  
MANNING'S DECISION TO LEAK IT

LIGHT 'EM ALL UP.  
C'MON, FIRE!  
OH YEAH, LOOK  
AT THOSE DEAD  
BASTARDS...

THEIR FATHER DIES IN A VAN ATTEMPTING  
TO SAVE ONE OF THE JOURNALISTS

WASHINGTON POST  
SITS ON A COPY FOR  
AT LEAST A YEAR BEFORE  
WIKILEAKS RELEASE

“ We saw a wounded man  
lying in the square, my  
father stopped to help him

“ The acts depicted in this  
video are everyday  
occurrences of this war  
Josh Stieber, soldier from  
Army unit responsible for  
Collateral Murder incident

“ The detention and criminal prosecution of Julian  
Assange sets a dangerous precedent for journalists.  
Mr Assange's extradition to the US must be barred  
and he must be promptly released.  
COUNCIL OF EUROPE

**Exposing war crimes  
is not a crime.**

END THE U.S. ATTACKS ON WIKILEAKS  
**Free Julian Assange now.**

## A word about 'embeds'

The 'embed', defined as a journalist attached to a specific military unit for a period of weeks or months, was the creation of the US military determined to control reporting of major conflict. After journalists reported critically on operations during the war in Vietnam, especially after the Tet offensive in 1968, media-military relations were no longer considered 'safe'. As the press increasingly questioned strategy and reported significant defeats, public opinion began to change and to challenge decisions to send ever more troops. Some decades later, in February 2003 an unclassified US government report included the following Pentagon statement: 'Media coverage of any future operation will, to a large extent, shape public perception of the national security environment now and in the years ahead. This holds true for the US public, the public in allied countries whose opinion can affect the durability of our coalition, and publics in countries where we conduct operations, whose perceptions of us can affect the cost and duration of our involvement.'

The Iraq war began six weeks later.

Embedded journalists have said that they became attached to the soldiers in the units they work with. There are strong emotional incen-

tives to omit the worst of what they see and hear, as well as political ones; the reports they send back to their editors present an entirely sanitised version of the truth on the ground. In an essay written in 2008 for *The Stanford Journal of International Relations*, Kylie Tuosto writes: "What embedded reporting shows .... is the media and military are now accomplices in the creation of a Hollywood-esque dramatization of war in Iraq used to propagate pro-war sentiment at home as well as justify America's presence in overseas conflict" (*The Grunt-Truth of Embedded Journalism*, 2008).

## Inside the embassy

Assange's 7 year stay in the Ecuadorian embassy was officially neither detention nor imprisonment, but while the threat of extradition hung over him it was impossible for him to leave. A sympathetic Ecuadorian government granted him citizenship in December 2017 and while left-wing President Correa was in office, he was safe from arrest. This relative security did not, however, prevent the destruction of Assange's reputation in the British press. By a process of consistent insinuation, rumour and smear, he was cut off from progressive public support and the reason for his incarceration was obscured behind the trumped up image of a sex offender created by journalists

willing to do the state's work. Most journalists ignored what was happening to Assange, and those who did pay attention obsessed about his personal traits, his hygiene, his cat, and of course the Swedish allegations, which no one took the trouble to investigate properly. The NUJ was notable for its absence from campaigning. When Moreno was elected president of Ecuador in May 2017, things changed dramatically. Moreno discussed Assange with Trump's advisor Manafort and later with Vice President Mike Pence. Assange's internet access was cut off and the level of surveillance was stepped up. Spanish security company Undercover Global Ltd was later found to have been supplying audio and visual information about Assange's meetings with his lawyers directly to the CIA. Assange's Ecuadorian citizenship was revoked in April 2019 and he was immediately taken from the embassy by force. Since then he has been held on remand in Belmarsh high-security prison – in solitary confinement until earlier this year when Belmarsh prisoners demanded his release into normal detention.

## The extradition hearings

The first phase of the hearings took place over 4 days in February this year. The judge overseeing the hearings, Lady Arbuthnot, could hardly be a more compromised figure after a report by DeclassifiedUK in November 2019 revealed that her husband 'has financial links to the British military establishment, including institutions and individuals exposed by WikiLeaks'. Her son also has links to an anti-data leak company, Darktrace, set up by the UK intelligence establishment and staffed by US intelligence officials. She has refused to declare any conflict of interest, and though she has since appointed a junior presiding judge for the Woolwich sessions, Vanessa Baraitser, she remains in charge of the extradition case overall. According to Craig

Murray, former British ambassador who attended the hearings: 'When enquiring about facilities for the public to attend the hearing, an Assange activist was told by a member of court staff that we should realise that Woolwich is a "counter-terrorism court". That is true de facto, but in truth a counter-terrorism court is an institution unknown to the UK constitution. Indeed, if a single day at Woolwich Crown Court does not convince you the existence of liberal democracy is now a lie, then your mind must be very closed indeed.'

Argument over the first 4 days was focused on the terms of the UK-US extradition treaty and the nature of the charges against Assange. An excellent account of those days in court can be found on Murray's blog: <https://www.craigmurray.org.uk> According to him and others who were in court, the treatment of Assange throughout was brutal. The International Bar Association issued a strong condemnation:

'The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) condemns the reported mistreatment of Julian Assange during his United States extradition trial in February 2020, and urges the government of the United Kingdom to take action to protect him. According to his lawyers, Mr Assange was handcuffed 11 times; stripped naked twice and searched; his case files confiscated after the first day of the hearing; and had his request to sit with his lawyers during the trial, rather than in a dock surrounded by bulletproof glass, denied.'

In his summary at the end of this first stage of the hearings, which are set to continue in May unless Assange's lawyers succeed in having them postponed until September, Murray wrote that in its proceeding against Assange, the US is claiming universal jurisdiction. It is claiming the right 'to charge anyone

of any nationality, anywhere in the world, who harms US interests...'

## Health fears

Assange is one of only 2 (out of 797) inmates held in Belmarsh for violating bail conditions. Most are there on charges of, or convictions for, far more serious offences. And Assange has anyway now been held for longer than the 50 weeks he was originally jailed for in April 2019; he is in detention without charge. In November 2019, well before the coronavirus outbreak, 60 doctors sent a letter to the Home Secretary expressing serious concern about the state of Assange's health: 'We have real concerns, on the evidence currently available, that Mr Assange could die in prison. The medical situation is thereby urgent. There is no time to lose.' The number of signatories increased to 117 by 9th April.

On March 25th 2020, Assange's lawyers applied for his release on the grounds of seriously impaired health. The request was refused by the presiding judge Vanessa Baraitser, who ruled that the Covid-19 pandemic does not provide grounds for his release. She came to this decision despite the fact that at that time there were already outbreaks in prisons. At the time of writing, 9 prisoners (one of them in Belmarsh) and 2 prison staff have died of the virus. In addition 100 Belmarsh staff are currently self-isolating.

4000 prisoners are to be temporarily released from British prisons as a result of the epidemic. Julian Assange will not be one of them.



# From Potsdam to Defender-Europe 20

by Pat Turnbull

This year is the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Potsdam Agreement on 2nd August 1945 by Joseph Stalin, Harry S. Truman and Clement Attlee, representing the victorious allies against Nazi Germany in the Second World War, namely the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The Potsdam Agreement was founded on the policy of post war cooperation and mutual understanding laid down in the Declaration of Yalta, signed by Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin, which resulted from the Crimean Conference, February 3rd to 11th 1945. The Potsdam Agreement Part III dealing with Germany, the defeated opponent, states:

“The purpose of this Agreement is to carry out the Crimean Declaration on Germany. German militarism and nazism will be extirpated and the Allies will take, in agreement together, now and in the future, the other measures necessary to assure that Germany never again will threaten her neighbours or the people of the world. It is not the intention of the Allies to destroy or enslave the German people. It is the intention of the Allies that the German people be given the opportunity to prepare for the eventual reconstruction of their life on a democratic and peaceful basis.”

To ensure this outcome the Potsdam Agreement laid down: the complete disarmament and demilitarisation of Germany, the arrest and bringing to judgment of those responsible for the war and for Nazi crimes, the final reform of German political life on a democratic basis, the decentralisation of German economic life “for the

purpose of eliminating the present excessive concentration of economic power as exemplified in particular by cartels, syndicates, trusts and other monopolistic arrangements.”

Germany was, very importantly, to be treated as a single unit, the obligation being to set up a number of central administrative organs for the whole of Germany until the formation of an all-German government. Three days after the signing of the Potsdam Agreement, on 5th August 1945, the New York newspaper *PM* wrote:

“The decisions on Germany mean a complete defeat of those financial and industrial circles in the United States and Britain who bowed down to fascism before the war and hoped for the renewal of the German big monopolies after the war, who supported Hitler...the removal of German monopoly control over... German industry is an outstanding achievement of this historic conference...The decisions of the Potsdam conference have one aim: to secure peace. Reactionaries everywhere will be dissatisfied with this.”

As a consequence of the post war agreement between the allies, a series of military tribunals known as the Nuremberg trials were held in 1945 and 1946. Prominent members of the political, military, judicial and economic leadership of Nazi Germany were tried for their war crimes. In his prosecution speech to the Nuremberg tribunal, the United States Chief Prosecutor, Robert H. Jackson, while admitting that the United States had suffered the least damage in the Second World War, declared that despite



Yalta Conference (Churchill, Roosevelt & Stalin)

this, the USA was determined to make a repeat of German aggression impossible, continuing:

“Twice in my lifetime the United States has sent its young men across the Atlantic Ocean, has nearly exhausted its resources and loaded itself with debts in order to help subdue Germany...The United States cannot throw generation after generation of its youth upon the battlefields of Europe...Experience has taught that wars can no longer be contained; all modern wars finally become world wars, and none of the great powers at least can remain outside. If we cannot remain outside a war then we have only one hope - to avoid it...” It was necessary “to create a legal security that he who begins a war must pay for it.”

History has shown what happened to these hopes. Rather than see a united, democratic, de-nazified Germany, the western powers split Germany, keeping the western section as a bastion of big capital, and as the intended military spearhead of aggressive policies

against the Soviet Union. Germany finally 'reunited' only in 1990 as the most powerful capitalist country in Europe, with the German Democratic Republic, the German peace state, the state which had fulfilled the Potsdam Agreement, destroyed in the process.

## Defender-Europe 20 manoeuvres

A reminder of these ambitions of 75 years ago is timely in the year of United States exercise Defender-Europe 20. Only the spread of coronavirus halted the largest military training deployment in Europe for 25 years. Due to last for five months, the operation would have been at its height in April and May. 20,000 US soldiers were to be the core of the 37,000 troops from 18 NATO countries which were to participate under US leadership. From January about 6,000 US soldiers had been moved from the US to Europe. The US European Command reported that 9,000 vehicles and pieces of equipment from Army Prepositioned Stocks had been moved, and 3,000 pieces of equipment moved via sea from the USA. It viewed the exercise as a success in that respect: soldiers and equipment had been moved from multiple ports to training areas in Germany and Poland. Training had been intended to take place in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The Bundeswehr, the German armed forces, which would have had a central role, called a halt to its participation in mid-March. But German military ambitions were clearly expressed at SiKo, the annual Munich Security Conference (so called), which took place from 14th-16th February with 150 heads of government and ministers, and 500 participants including representatives of arms manufacturers like Raytheon, Kraus-Maffei Wegmann, Airbus, Lockheed Martin and Rheinmetall - all at a cost of 2.6 million Euros to German taxpayers.

German paper *Unsere Zeit* reported that Wolfgang Ischinger, leader and ideas man of SiKo since 2008, bemoaned that Germany was not more involved militarily on a world level: "I think the neighbours would all rejoice if Germany had deployed as many planes against Islamic State as Denmark."

Retired colonel Mikhail Khodarenok who served as an officer at the main operational directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, interviewed by RT on 4/2/20, had no doubt who was the target of Defender-Europe 20: Russia. "Defender-Europe 20 is an exercise of strategic defence and its objective is to counter a 'Russian invasion'. Since there is no indication that Moscow would ever seek to invade Europe, it's clear that these exercises are anti-Russian in nature, and are yet another planned provocation against Russia."

### Barbarisierung



PROTEST GEGEN DIE ANKOMMENE SICHERHEITSKONFERENZ AM VERGANGENEN SAMSTAG (FOTO: GUSTI, BALLINI)

No war

## Fighting wars or fighting coronavirus?

German newspaper *Junge Welt* reported that NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg, introducing NATO's latest annual report on 19/3/20, had declared that despite the coronavirus crisis, NATO's ability to carry out operations remained unweakened. "Our armed forces are ready to be deployed." This applied to manoeuvres of the "international battle groups in the east" near the Russian border, and to naval and land inter-

ventions "from Afghanistan to Kosovo". Coronavirus had already forced NATO to call off at short notice its March "Cold Response" manoeuvre in Norway, where the war alliance had intended to practise high intensity battles under cold winter conditions: Oslo called a halt in view of the rapidly spreading virus.

When countries the world over are struggling to find the resources to fight Covid-19, it seems particularly inappropriate that, as the NATO General Secretary announced, NATO member states raised military spending by 4.6 per cent in 2019 in comparison to the previous year - to a massive 1,039 billion dollars. The entire national budget of Germany in the same year was 343 billion Euros.

This huge waste is brutally highlighted by the coronavirus crisis. *Junge Welt* interviewed peace campaigner Michael Schulze von Glasser on 20/3/20. As he said, "Above all else the current crisis shows that there are threats to humanity worthy of our concern. Epidemics and the climate crisis which threaten humanity need to be fought. Instead ...billions of Euros are senselessly pumped into the military." The talk is of mobilising the Bundeswehr against the coronavirus crisis, but one example shows how little suited it is to the task. Chief administrative officer Stephan Pusch, CDU (Christian Democratic Union), responsible for Heinsberg in North-Rhine Westfalia, particularly hard hit by coronavirus, asked for medical help from the laboratory capacity of the Bundeswehr to get prompt test results, but was disappointed that all requests for help were turned down.

(Quotations from the Potsdam Agreement and the Nuremberg trials are from *The White Book on the American and British Policy of Intervention in West Germany and the Revival of German Imperialism*, National Council of the National Front of Democratic Germany, August 1951.)

# The Fall and Rise of the British Left

Andrew Murray, published by Verso Books 2019

review by Marianne Hitchen

Despite the recent setbacks of the general election defeat and the election of Keir Starmer as Labour leader, this book is a reminder of how far we've come in the five years since Jeremy Corbyn was elected, and the gains that have been made in that time. Many working class demands that were considered wildly unrealistic, are currently being considered by some sections of the Conservative government. In the book, Andrew Murray follows the fortunes of both the British left and of international capital from his starting point of 1973 to the summer of 2019, when a Corbyn-led Labour government still seemed possible. It is a useful reminder of the struggles and movements that many of us grew up with.

In 1973 trade union power was at its strongest since the General Strike of 1926, with successful strikes, sit-ins and solidarity actions to protect living standards. Attempts by both Labour and Tory governments to restrict industrial action in the early 1970s were defeated. Working class confidence was further boosted by the successes of the socialist world and international liberation movements. But darker forces were already at work; indeed, they never went away. The Labour left controlled neither the party nor the Trades Union Congress (TUC), both of which were dominated by people allergic to socialism. Working class support for Labour was divided by Harold Wilson's refusal to oppose the Vietnam War, and by the government's 'In Place of Strife' attack on the trade unions. The idea that successive Labour governments, together with the power of organised labour in the workplace, would eventually lead

to socialism was widely held by many on the left, as well as in the Communist Party of Great Britain. The latter was finally shut down after a highly organised and determined campaign waged by the numerically stronger anti-communist forces within its ranks.

## Roots of neoliberalism

With all its flaws, the British labour movement was a major headache for capitalism which, feeling under threat, was preparing to break with the rules of the game as it had hitherto been played in this country, at least since 1945. Evidence that capitalism had no intention of being voted out of power and going quietly was provided by the savage coup in Chile, in which the socialist government was overthrown by the fascist dictator, Pinochet, supported by the US – in particular, by Milton Friedman's doctrine of the radical free-market economy now known as neoliberalism. For Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, the Chilean experiment was to serve as a model for their own countries. The result was a crushed and atomised society, together with undreamed of freedom, riches and power for the few, courtesy of an alliance between domestic reaction and US imperialism.

But while the flow of international capital and the markets were to be freed from state intervention, any opposition that threatened to be successful would be met by uncompromising force. Dissenting voices in the media were gradually phased out. In 2015, we were reminded of the implacable and abiding nature of the capitalist state by an

unidentified senior serving general in the British army, who told The Sunday Times that the military would use 'fair means or foul' to stop an elected government led by Jeremy Corbyn pursuing policies considered by the top brass to be dangerous to British 'security'.

The late 70s and 80s saw a depressing succession of setbacks for the working class. Jim Callaghan, the Labour Prime minister, introduced the beginnings of neoliberal economic policies, then known as monetarism. Then Margaret Thatcher's election in 1979 unleashed a full-blown, neoliberal economic and political agenda. She repeated her electoral success in 1983, following the jingoistic Falklands war. A democratic, left-wing upsurge in Labour was seen off and finally, the great miners' strike of 1984-5 saw the National Union of Mineworkers – the 'strongest Trade union movement in the capitalist world' – confronted and defeated. The lesson the TUC took from the miners' strike was the wrong one – essentially that militant action was a dead end. Almost gleefully, the forward march of labour was declared halted by an influential section of 'left' commentators.

The 1980s saw an upsurge of small, separate campaigns and protest groups such as those centred on women, black people, gay rights, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Greater London Council, often most successful when these groups joined forces, for example Women against Pit Closures and the Greenham Common Women for nuclear disarmament, or gay groups in support of the miners. However, the message of solidarity, caring, col-





lectivity and creating a better society was often drowned out by the call for individual rights, which is very much with us today. This was followed at the end of the decade by the catastrophic collapse of the chronically exhausted socialist world. The author does not dwell on the causes of this, but makes clear that it was a massive blow to working class movements world wide. We now had 'gloves off' capitalism, no longer fearful of unfavourable comparisons with socialism, and with the prospect of new markets to exploit.

## Rise of New Labour

When asked about her greatest achievement, Margaret Thatcher said in 2002: 'Tony Blair and New Labour. We forced our opponents to change their minds.' Blair was eager to demonstrate that New Labour was a safe pair of hands for capitalism. One of his first acts was the abolition of Clause Four as it stood in the Labour Party constitution. Its aim was to 'secure for workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof'. New Labour's policy was to leave the economy, the City of London above all, to its own devices. The financial sector was to be lightly taxed, barely regulated, and open to the world. London became the centre for international money laundering. Corporation tax was cut from 35% to 28% - 'going further than Thatcher in letting bosses hang on to their bloated rewards'. This was meant to produce a higher rate of growth, and the expected tax proceeds were supposed to 'trickle down' to improve public services. Instead, New Labour sowed the seeds of its own demise with the financial crash of 2008.

New Labour 'swiftly became entirely absorbed in the apparatus of political power and started to lose its connection with public opinion, the original source of its strength.' It was a managerial project, which recognised the importance of every identity except class, while fusing cultural liberalism with hardline free-market economics: 'Competence, rather than conviction, was the virtue prized above others.'

The Labour Party leadership and the British labour movement generally, not to mention town halls up and down the land, are still struggling with the legacy of these ideas and the people they produced.

## Fighting Back

A few dissenting voices continued, steadily, to be heard. Ken Livingston was elected Mayor of London in 2000 and, in parliament, Jeremy Corbyn voted against the New Labour government line 428 times: against war (Afghanistan and Iraq), in defence of civil liberties, against cuts in social welfare, and for better treatment of immigrants and asylum seekers. Then in February 2003, two million people marched in London and other cities around Britain to try to stop the imminent war in Iraq - 'One of the longer-term consequences of that huge protest, and the dismissal of it by the New Labour administration, was the election of Jeremy Corbyn to the Labour leadership.'

Andrew Murray was chair of the Stop the War Coalition during the years 2001- 2011 and 2015-2016, and he emphasises the part it played in raising consciousness of imperialism and reviving debate within the trades union movement. ASLEF, NATFHE, RMT and the civil service union all declared support for Stop the War. British Muslims took part in protests and demonstrations in greater numbers, challenging the rise in islamophobia following 9/11, and became an important feature of the renewed political climate. 'It became straightforward to locate the whole war policy in an inglorious tradition of self-interest in the Middle East by great powers.' says Murray, pointing out that the argument over whether the Iraq war was justified is now finished.

Turning to the banking crash of 2008, the book tells of the scandalous price paid by the working class for saving capitalism: hundreds of billions of pounds of public money plus a savage austerity programme. Privatisation of public services, outsourcing and

private finance initiatives - and their spectacular failures - and the ongoing transfer of wealth from Labour to capital galloped ahead under New Labour. It intensified under the Tory/ Lib Dem coalition elected in 2020. Neoliberalism now entered its 'zombie phase...surviving without point or public purpose'. Murray considers the effects of the Scottish referendum on independence, 'when the politics of identity and class collided with disastrous results for the Labour Party electorally', and the catastrophe of Grenfell: 'What came in with bombs and bullets in Santiago goes out amid social calamity'.

Does Andrew Murray consider the neo-liberal phase of capitalism to be over? This book was written before the current pandemic, when the state's role in managing social welfare is being reluctantly resurrected, if only for a short time. Every successful socialist advance has been made by movements whose leaders had a firm understanding of Leninist principles, he says, stressing the need to study politics seriously, the importance of internationalism, and the spirit of self-sacrifice and discipline that is needed to succeed. The Tories cannot adapt to the failures of capitalism, but 'have chosen to remain the party of rampant inequality, food banks and hedge funds'. This continues to be the case.

Today another economic recession is on the cards. Will the British people stand for austerity mark 2? Alistair Heath, deputy editor of *The Daily Telegraph* wrote: 'Another crash could destroy capitalism as we know it...no developed nation today could possibly tolerate another wholesale banking crisis and proper, blood and guts recession...another collapse, especially were it to be accompanied by a fresh banking bailout by the taxpayer, would trigger a cataclysmic, uncontrollable backlash, the public...would simply not wear it. Its anger would be so explosive, so all-encompassing that it would threaten the very survival of free trade, of globalisation and of the market-based economy.' We shall see.

# BARRY JOHNSON 1931-2020

## A life in struggle for the working class



We pay tribute to our comrade Barry Johnson who was a founder member of the editorial board of *The Socialist Correspondent*. We will miss his thoughtful socialist analysis and passionate commitment to the struggle. This obituary is based on the oration given by his partner Hilary Cave at the well-attended memorial commemoration of his life held in Chesterfield on 17th February 2020.

Barry was the middle son born to Laura and George Johnson in Byron Street, Hucknall. Barry's older brother Arthur has died, but his younger brother Don is with us. As Barry and Don grew up there was plenty of love, but little money, in the family. This was because their father had been sacked from his job in the pit after having been identified as a local strike leader in the 1926 dispute. After the end of the second world war, when his father had been able to return to mining, enough money was found to enable Barry to visit his French pen-friend Guy. This was the start of a very long friendship, with Barry and Guy staying at each other's family homes. As both Barry's parents were hard-working communists and community activists, he learned his politics at an early age. Before he was old enough to vote himself, Barry was involved in running general election Labour Party Committee Rooms in Hucknall. On leaving school Barry became a library assistant. Perhaps that was where he acquired his lifelong love of books, or perhaps he took the job because he already loved books.

Above: Barry with Arthur Scargill during the miners Strike

In due course he was obliged to do National Service in the RAF, which he disliked. Barry told me that during this time national servicemen were being used to break a strike. He was furious about this, so when his name appeared on the list of those selected for the following week's dirty work, he kept repeating to everyone that he would refuse to strike-break, no matter what. The officers in charge clearly did not want to take him on and have a public fuss, so as if by magic his name disappeared from the list of those ordered to break the strike.

Barry was married, then separated, with a son, Shuan, whose early death following an acute illness was a source of enormous grief.

### Struggles and studies

Barry worked in the International Department of Boots, where he quickly learned about the tricks employed by pharmaceutical firms to maximise their profits, often at the expense of people in poor countries. As an active member of USDAW he became involved in Nottingham Trades Council. Later, working on circulation for the

Morning Star, he spent a lot of time campaigning in pit yards and other workplaces.

Barry was keen to undertake further study, so as a mature student he attended a Nottingham college of further education to gain his A Levels. Then he was able to give up paid work to attend Loughborough University, studying Economics and Economic History, which he loved. During this period he became heavily involved in the print workers' struggle against a lock-out at the Nottingham Evening Post. His trades union campaigning experience and commitment were so highly valued that the union paid him a wage so he could afford to keep working on their campaign instead of spending his university holiday taxi-driving to earn money.

In the early 1970s Barry went to work at Chesterfield College, developing TUC courses for workplace reps, which he regarded as his dream job. Later he also worked on the radical Access course led by Angus Mclardy. Barry and I first met during the 1970s, when I too worked in trades union education.

In the period leading up to the Miners' Strike, when we could all see that Thatcher's government was intending to attack the miners and their industry, the labour movement in Chesterfield needed to select a Labour Party candidate for the general election. Of course there were many contenders, including an NUM member supported by his own union. At an advanced stage of the selection process Barry used his influence to persuade the NUM that they should vote for Tony Benn, rather than for their own member, as candidate. Tony was finally chosen, then elected. His support for the NUM, and his efforts on their behalf in the House of Commons, were magnificent, so for that and many other reasons, Tony was the best choice among the possible candidates. Barry's persuasive skills had been useful to the movement.

## The Miners Strike

During the 1984-5 Miners' Strike Barry would get up very early to join the picket line at his nearest pit, Linby, close to Hucknall, before travelling to work in Chesterfield. As President of the Trades Council here, he worked tirelessly to support the NUM and the local Mining Women's Support Group. Early on in the Strike, the Trades Council organised a march around Chesterfield to show support for the miners, ending in a rally on the Town Hall steps. We were joined by Yorkshire miners on their way to a march in Nottingham. At one point in his speech Barry praised those Notts miners who were on strike. There was a cry of "scabs" from one of the Yorkshire miners. Barry challenged him immediately, pointing out that it took more courage to be on strike in Notts, where most miners were working, than in Yorkshire, where the strike was solid.

Later in the Strike, Kate Whiteside, a miner's wife and activist, had been asked to speak at the Trades Council. As the miners were getting no strike pay and the government had altered

the regulations to remove benefits from any striking miner, the strike would have collapsed without food parcels supplied by the Women's Support Group. Kate told us the group was very short of money, showing us a plastic carrier bag containing the small amount of food that was all they could afford to put into weekly parcels. Barry picked up the bag, waving it at the meeting, declaring, "This is our shame. We must raise more money for the miners, or they'll be starved back to work."

As I worked then for the NUM and knew the hardship being felt by mining families, I added my pleas to those of Barry. We both knew how important this battle was for the whole labour movement. Afterwards, some delegates, who preferred not to help the miners, accused us of haranguing them. Somehow neither of us felt guilty about this.



*Barry campaigning*

As President of the Trades Council, Barry was one of the founders of what is now Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres, advising people who are out of work, sick, disabled or precariously employed. It must be doing valuable work, because Derbyshire County Council, now Tory-controlled, has withdrawn every penny of their grant to it. North East Derbyshire District Council, also Tory-controlled, has cut our grant significantly, too.

Returning to the winter of 1985, as the Miners' Strike was obviously in trouble, Derbyshire Women's Support Groups organised a march to every pit in North Derbyshire. The weather was appalling, with snow and blizzards. Every time Barry could slip away from college for an

hour or two he would march with the women as they struggled along their route. After the strike was lost, the resources of Nottingham miners were stolen, with court permission, by the breakaway outfit. Nottingham NUM Area had many newly-elected branch officials who needed training, but as the NUM's National Education Officer I had no resources to do this. So Barry spent many weekends working with me as we trained this new generation of activists, mainly at Ollerton Miners' Welfare. Barry did this work willingly, on top of his normal week's work at college, without being paid a penny.

Barry had joined the Communist Party at an early age and although much later he became very unhappy with many of its positions, he refused to leave until it finally dissolved itself.

## Personal passions

What was Barry like as a person? I found him quiet, kind, thoughtful and affectionate. He taught me to enjoy opera and old buildings. Together we enjoyed the theatre and many types of music. Barry particularly admired Paul Robeson, not only for his marvellous voice, but also for his political stance. Barry always remembered, with emotion, attending a concert in Nottingham when Robeson was supposed to appear in person. Because the American government had withdrawn his passport, he was forced instead to sing in America, with his voice being relayed to Nottingham over the radio.

In his youth and middle age Barry had liked beer, but he later switched his affections to red wine and Armagnac. After the tremendous shock of a massive heart attack during his sixties, he became a keen walker, aiming to walk the entire Notts/Derbyshire border. He loved moors and had a special affection for Eyam Moor. As the years went on, he eventually needed a wheelchair and in good weather I used to wheel him along flatter parts of the High Peak Trail, Sherwood Forest and Chesterfield Canal, where he enjoyed



the fresh air and wildlife. Until Barry's illness prevented him from going anywhere at all, we enjoyed attending the local jazz club.

When Barry and I first became a couple, I discovered that he tended to regard holidays as a waste of good campaigning time. Visiting France, though, was a different matter in Barry's eyes, so we had a number of lovely holidays there, sometimes visiting Barry's friend Guy and his wife. During one holiday we saw a poster advertising a march in Poitiers organised by the CGT, a French trades union confederation, to protest against unemployment. When we turned up at the pre-march rally in a trades union hall, Barry approached one of the organisers to offer solidarity from Chesterfield Trades Council, then we took our seats unobtrusively at the back of the hall. We were taken aback to hear the platform speaker announce our presence, then invite us to stand up to be applauded. Feeling embarrassed by the warmth of our reception, Barry muttered "It's the first time I've ever been applauded just for being a Brit!"

## Further studies & final years

A good few years into his retirement, Barry went to Leicester University to study part-time for an MA in Local History. He really loved this. I will read you a poem that sums up Barry's approach to history, and to education in general. This approach is not officially popular these days. Written by Bertolt Brecht, who was forced to flee from Nazi Germany, the title of the poem is: **"Questions from a worker who reads"** (see right).

Barry was encouraged by his tutors to pursue research for a PhD. He enjoyed being part of various historians' online groups, exchanging ideas, information, and sources. After years of study, Barry's illness forced him to abandon his PhD studies, which he found upsetting. Later, his supervisor Professor Chris Wrigley offered to edit a paper

Barry had written about the butty system in the pits, so our Labour History Society could publish it as a pamphlet. At least Barry had the satisfaction of seeing some of his research in print.

Well-read and passionate about learning, Barry helped to found the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Labour History Society, serving as its first chairperson. Having also helped to found Sheffield Humanist Society, he was active there for several years, also becoming a humanist funeral officiant.

The last twelve years of Barry's life were very painful for both of us, as he became more and more incapacitated, both physically and intellectually. According to his wishes, I cared for him at home for ten of those years. Finally, on the instructions

of a consultant, he was sent into St Michael's nursing home for end-of-life care in September 2018. Barry was a fan of the Dylan Thomas' approach to death:

*"Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close  
of day:  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light"*

Initially resistant to living in care, as he became more and more ill, Barry developed close bonds with staff members there. My thanks to staff for the care and sensitivity with which Barry and I were treated, especially during and after his last days and hours of life. However, this period of illness was only a small part of his long and active life.

Barry, you will stay in our memories, our thoughts and in my heart always.

*Who built Thebes of the seven gates?  
In the books you will find the names of kings.  
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?  
And Babylon, many times demolished  
Who raised it up so many times? In what houses  
Of gold-glittering Lima did the builders live?  
Where, the evening that the Wall of China was finished  
Did the masons go? Great Rome  
Is full of triumphal arches. Who erected them? Over whom  
Did the Caesars triumph? Had Byzantium, much praised in song  
Only palaces for its inhabitants? Even in fabled Atlantis  
The night the ocean engulfed it  
The drowning still bawled for their slaves.*

*The young Alexander conquered India.  
Was he alone?  
Caesar beat the Gauls.  
Did he not have even a cook with him?*

*Philip of Spain wept when his armada  
Went down. Was he the only one to weep?  
Frederick the Second won the Seven Years' War. Who  
Else won it?*

*Every page a victory.  
Who cooked the feast for the victors?  
Every ten years a great man.  
Who paid the bill?*

*So many reports.  
So many questions.*