

THE SOCIALIST CORRESPONDENT

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COVID 19 THE RECKONING



**UNIVERSAL
BASIC INCOME**

DENIS GOLDBERG
HERO OF THE STRUGGLE FOR
SOUTH AFRICAN LIBERATION

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and imperialist conflicts **P4**

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In this issue we carry the first of a two-part tribute to *Denis Goldberg*, hero of the struggle for the liberation of South Africa. In it Brian Filling describes his early life, how he became active in the fight against apartheid and the important contribution he made. He also deals with the Rivonia trial where Denis was sentenced with Mandela and others to life imprisonment and the twenty-two years he spent in prison. The article reflects on Denis' approach to politics and life: his sacrifice, dedication and sense of comradeship; also his thoughtfulness, sense of humour and boundless optimism. Denis contributed to *The Socialist Correspondent* and was a speaker at our conferences – he was an inspiration to us all and will be greatly missed.

Coronavirus

The pandemic continues to gather pace and is now beginning to affect developing countries, with hundreds of thousands dying and becoming seriously ill. It further continues to expose inequalities in economic power and resources both between countries and within them. Articles by Simon Korner, *World and British politics / Part 1 – Coronavirus, the United States and imperialist conflicts* and by Paul Sutton *Business as usual – coronavirus and capitalism* both underline the fact that the pandemic is, if anything, reinforcing negative trends. Despite Donald Trump's unwillingness to take effective measures to protect the American people from the virus, nevertheless the US remains immensely powerful and is throwing its weight around; buying up drugs to treat coronavirus, ramping up sanctions against Iran, Cuba and Venezuela and taking an increasingly confrontational stand with China. This is causing tensions with its allies such as Germany, although Britain now seems to have completely caved in to the US agenda, attacking China and Russia. This further emphasises

Britain's weakness under the Tories and their lack of an alternative for a post-Brexit Britain. It will not be the "global Britain" of Johnson's rhetoric but subservient to US interests.

Sutton points out that after the financial crash of 2008 some thought that the culpability of the banks would lead to fundamental change - it did not. Nor will it necessarily post-coronavirus, with financial institutions set to benefit from economic support measures put in place by governments. Many hope that the evidence of how workers are key to the creation of wealth and the social solidarity built during the pandemic can lead to change – but that will not happen automatically, change will only occur if it is fought for.

Prospects for change

In *World and British politics / Part 2 – Britain's future, Labour and the working class movement*, Simon Korner assesses the state of the movement in Britain. There have been positive advances. There is increased awareness of the key role of working class people yet, despite that, how their daily lives are precarious; blighted by poverty, inequality and discrimination. Trade Unions have been growing, but this has yet to translate into militant campaigning for working class demands. There have been exceptions - the most effective being Black Lives Matter, which has shown that protest is still immensely powerful.

There have been negative trends as well. Kier Starmer has moved quickly to shift the Labour Party to the right and is attempting to demoralise the left by actions like his provocative sacking of Rebecca Long-Bailey. Yet the left still has a strong base and it is important that it stays and fights for principled internationalist and pro-working class positions.

Universal Basic Income

A policy which its advocates idealistically hope will change the world, undermining the logic of capitalism, is Universal Basic income (UBI). In *Universal Basic Income: shortcut to a better society?* Noah Tucker examines this claim. The article analyses different UBI schemes revealing flaws in how they are structured. Most do not propose to pay an amount of money that people could actually live on with inevitable negative consequences. Some groups would lose out, it would tend to subsidise low-wage employers as people would still have to work and there would be tax increases on low and medium earners along with cuts to welfare spending to finance it.

Nor is UBI only an idea of the left. Neo-liberals have proposed it as a way of further cutting and privatising services. Instead of these being socially provided for all, individuals, in receipt of UBI, would be responsible for purchasing their own services in the market place.

To fulfil its utopian ideals UBI would need to be set at the level of a decent wage. To pay this to everyone would be mind-bogglingly expensive especially when a progressive government would have many other priorities. Tucker argues that a better strategy would be to greatly improve the level of current benefits and end the sanctions regime. He also argues that investment in the economy, infrastructure and public services could provide people with meaningful work and decent incomes at a fraction of the cost of UBI. But as our other writers have also pointed out none of this will be achieved without fighting for it.

WORLD & BRITISH POLITICS / PART 1

Coronavirus, the United States and imperialist conflicts

US oil fracking hit by coronavirus pandemic



by Simon Korner

The coronavirus has shown up capitalism's inability to protect people, in particular the working class. There is nothing new about that, as the Marmot report [1] showed, but now it's become increasingly visible: double the death rate from Covid-19 in deprived areas; transport, construction and health workers amongst the worst hit, that is, essential workers, or those who couldn't work from home; 20% of children going hungry here, and in the US, resulting in huge foodbank queues.

The drive to lift the lockdown early has been a form of class war, at its most extreme consisting of armed right-wing mobs in Michigan railing against the 'communist' stay at home order. While in the UK the Tories' barely concealed herd immunity strategy has shown deliberate disregard for the vulnerable.

The supposedly nimble and efficient free market couldn't handle the catastrophe or distribute lifesaving goods because the drive for profits came before the common good. The

outsourcing and hollowing out of the British state's capacity to provide necessary services meant that, even forewarned by Exercise Cygnus [2], Britain failed dismally. As with the Grenfell disaster, arms-length management, corrupt profiteering and cover-up have proved deadly. And because our whole manufacturing base has been shrunk, we suffered a strategic failure to produce what we needed. Movianto, the American-owned company running the NHS supply of PPE, was sold in the middle of the pandemic, causing chaos. Deloitte, in charge of testing also failed dismally, as did the outsourced 111 helpline.

The more parasitic and neoliberal the capitalist state, the worse they have dealt with the epidemic: the US and UK have been the worst, along with Brazil. China was the best – able to mobilise its society, with broad popular consent. In the *London Review of Books* (April 16, 2020) a Chinese intellectual complained that pro-western liberals in China were finding it very hard

now to argue that the US was the better society. The WHO described China's efforts as "the most ambitious, agile, and aggressive disease containment effort in history". Kerala and Vietnam have been other success stories. Historically, it was the young USSR, facing the Spanish Flu, that established the world's first centralised healthcare system. Other capitalist states also handled the epidemic better: South Korea having learnt from its SARS experience, as well as Germany – with a less Thatcherised economy and society.

Ruling class tactics

How did the ruling class deal with the crisis? Initially, by hiding behind the science – as if science stood above society.

Second, by lying, and using a compliant media to amplify the lies. The BBC with its Reithian bias (remember it sided against the workers during the General Strike), and all the commercial mainstream outlets,

have been openly propagandistic, their role as ideological arms of the state increasingly clear. Meanwhile, statistics have been manipulated, with the real UK death rate of 65,000 consistently undercounted and coroners ordered to exclude lack of PPE from inquests into the deaths of NHS staff.

A third tactic has been to blame China – part of a concerted international propaganda campaign to hold back China’s development. Trump said of the outbreak: “We went through the worst attack we’ve ever had on our country... This is worse than Pearl Harbor.” In the US election campaign, Biden is outdoing the Republicans in his sinophobia. China’s health silk road is derided as political manoeuvring. The WHO gets blamed too – and defunded by Trump for being too close to China. The public in Britain are being fed enemy images – by both Tories and Labour (led by Lisa Nandy) – and recruited for a new Cold War over Hong Kong’s security law and the Uighurs, and it’s working.

A fourth ruling class tactic has been to increase mass surveillance. The NHS now has to pass data from its IT systems to GCHQ, after the agency was granted extra powers. The unsafeguarded – now abandoned – tracing app would have collected individualised data permanently, with the US and British data-harvesting companies rubbing their hands. Despite its failure, at least £12 million has been paid out to companies including Faculty, run by Marc Warner and his data scientist brother Ben Warner, who served on the purportedly independent SAGE committee along with family friend Dominic Cummings.

Economic responses

We’re facing a recession worse than the great Depression, with the economy still hobbled by the 2008 crash. The IMF predicts a \$9 trillion loss of GDP globally next year – bigger than the combined economies of Japan

and Germany. The eurozone economy shrank by the largest amount on record this quarter. Fitch Ratings has downgraded Italy’s credit rating to just one notch above junk status.

Ownership patterns are changing as big corporations take over thousands of bankrupt companies, aided by government. In America, 40% of small businesses are set to fold over the next few months. Grace Blakeley calls this process Amazonification. In concrete terms this meant Jeff Bezos’s net worth rose by \$25 billion between January and April. The normal tendency towards monopoly is accelerating. This is most pronounced with the tech companies (‘platform capitalism’) whose apps, homeworking tools and data harvesting are increasing their

power massively. Google has been asked by New York governor Cuomo to take over government functions like tele-healthcare, remote learning and so on. Such increased monopolisation will in turn exacerbate tensions between nations, and eventually lead to war.

To save capitalism from itself, conventional spending constraints have been jettisoned. This sounds good to liberal ears – unprecedented bailouts of \$2.2 trillion in USA and £350 billion in the UK. But the distribution pattern reveals the class lines: landlords given mortgage holidays but not made to pass them on to tenants. Banks underwritten by loan guarantees, but refusing credit to struggling businesses. Small businesses unable to access help while big business gets billions from the furlough scheme.

Still, the scale of its spending presents a real problem for capitalism: how to undo the emergency social policies and ensure the money gets repaid – to them. It’s a dangerous moment for the system, with growing public awareness of its callousness and incompetence. It’s now more obvious that it is workers who produce the wealth – and that when they stop, wealth is not produced. And, as the worst famine since World War 2 hits the Global South, with Oxfam forecasting 265 million people starving by the end of the year, it’ll be clearer than ever that immiseration is systemic.

Objectively, there are many factors in favour of an upsurge in class struggle. Hence the *Financial Times* advocacy of more social democracy

The more parasitic and neoliberal the capitalist state, the worse they have dealt with the epidemic: the US and UK have been the worst, along with Brazil.

and Boris Johnson’s ‘promise’ of no more austerity. On the other hand, subjectively, there has been muted public resistance.

US dominance

The global crisis has hit the oil price badly. US fracking had already flooded the world markets, pushing energy prices downwards. But with Covid-19, demand for oil virtually stopped, affecting US oil regions badly, plus the Gulf, Angola, Iraq and Iran. The glut meant storage prices soared. Exxon made a loss in the first quarter of this year. Shell has cut dividends by 65%. What Trump once called “energy dominance” came to look like weakness – he had to bail out the oil companies by buying oil for the US strategic reserve. So much for small government. The climate change-denying

oil companies began calling for oil to be kept in the ground. But when Trump threatened Iran in the Straits of Hormuz in April, the oil price rose 21%. A war shutting the Straits would solve the oil price problem at a stroke. And redirect public anger. But it would also endanger the Gulf monarchies – which are struggling with the loss of their oil revenue, and which would become an Iranian target in a war.

The global recession will increase the dollar's dominance. The Fed, the US central bank, has been allowed to issue unlimited money, which means it can dictate which US companies survive and which do not, and do that internationally too. With the dollar as the currency for over 80% of international trade, the US can seriously damage its imperialist rivals, and come out of the global depression ahead. Beyond the West, with over 90 countries needing bailouts from the IMF, and 60 seeking World Bank programmes, and with the US controlling the purse-strings, America will emerge even more dominant.

Even if all the IMF and World Bank resources were used to ease the global crisis, their combined \$1.2 trillion isn't enough. There's \$11.9 trillion of US denominated debt globally – apart from debt in the form of Eurodollars. Trump will therefore use the dollar as a weapon to intensify trade wars against China and Russia. China will resist, and attract new allies into its orbit, but is not yet wealthy enough to act as world banker – its GDP was \$14 trillion last year, whereas the US's GDP was \$21 trillion – and China's GDP per capita is four times lower. So while the US is withdrawing from many world institutions and treaties – a dangerous move for world stability and peace – China is not ready to take over. In other words, we're not yet in a truly multipolar world. Meanwhile, Russia will try and expand its East Asian Economic Union and seek to attract failing Euro economies.

Overall, the world financial system could start to fragment – with the US gaining greater power, but over a hugely diminished global economy, and with China well-placed to move ahead. China's aim is to turn the accelerating US trade war into US self-isolation. Costas Lapavistas points out that China's response to Covid was public investment in state industry whereas the US and EU issued cheap loans and wage support, short term fixes that are basically useless because “businesses hoard liquidity”.

Imperialist rivalries

Globalisation could partially go into reverse – we may see a return of industry to domestic markets, and some of the complex just-in-time supply chains broken. Nationalism is rising as individual countries defend their own capitalist classes. We saw how quickly a beggar-thy-neighbour attitude arose when early in the crisis the US pirated ventilators meant for Germany and, more recently, when it monopolised supplies of the life-saving drug Remdesivir – pointing to the larger underlying inter-imperialist tensions: over the US imposing its Iran sanctions on Europe; over Germany buying Russian energy via the Nord Stream pipeline; and over Germany's close ties with China. Former German Chancellor Schröder condemned proposed US sanctions against Nord Stream as the “deliberate termination of the transatlantic partnership.” Foreign Affairs, the American establishment mouthpiece, says all the signs “herald the emergence of a less cooperative and more fragile international system”.

Not just US-European rivalry, but rivalries within the EU have intensified. Italy, the third biggest eurozone economy, represents a major problem for the EU. Germany and the Netherlands have stuck to their hard-line anti-fiscal union policy, with Germany leaning on the European Central Bank not to bail out Italy and Spain with Eurobonds.

While Germany's wealth and health system are built on cheap European labour, its capitalist class is extremely reluctant to make sacrifices to help southern Europe, even while its industry has taken half the total EU state aid since restrictions on it were lifted in March. It's unsurprising that euroscepticism has been rising in Italy. The EU eventually did give emergency aid to Italy and Spain of £500 billion, and Germany reluctantly agreed a further one-off £500 billion, driven by French pressure, the fear of Italy and other periphery countries defaulting, and the threat of the US cashing in on a resulting eurozone crash. But none of this aid transfers debt from individual countries to the EU, the way a Eurobond would do, so it won't soften austerity.

Cracks are also deepening within NATO. One example is the war in Libya, where the former colonial masters Italy and Turkey are on one side, facing France and Greece on the other. The dispute extends to who gets to exploit the eastern Mediterranean energy fields, drawing in Israel and Egypt.

Tensions have increased within countries too. In the US early on in the crisis, the White House redirected PPE supplies destined for individual states to private companies for sale, forcing states to bid against each other. Here, England pushed for an early opening up of the lockdown, while other nations delayed. Wales refused Covid bailouts for companies based in tax havens. Support for Scottish independence has risen. Are constitutional settlements coming under strain?

The second part of this article looks at the UK and its future, as well as the class struggle within the country.

[1] The epidemic of poverty – killing before coronavirus, Korner, S. *The Socialist Correspondent*, Issue 37 Summer 2020

[2] Exercise Cygnus was a 2016 pandemic simulation exercise carried out by NHS England

WORLD & BRITISH POLITICS / PART 2

Britain's future, Labour and the working class movement



PHOTO BY DOMINIC ALVES

by Simon Korner

How can Britain as a single country challenge the increasingly dangerous US? The likelihood looking ahead is of Britain becoming even more submissive to America, but we could instead chart a different course, looking east, and south. Johnson surprisingly faced down Trump over Huawei, which revealed the strength of the British pro-China lobby – led by Osborne, Cameron, head of the UK-China Fund, and Theresa May – as well as economic realities. But any playing off of China against the US would come up against the hard-line anti-China Atlanticists around

Tom Tugendhat, chair of the Foreign Affairs committee and armed with his China Research Group of hard right MPs, and former MI6 chief, Sir Richard Dearlove, now on the board of a US oil company. This lobby, combined with increasingly intense US pressure, has pushed the government to ban Huawei 5G, even at the cost of delaying important technological advance.

The majority of the establishment will push for the closest possible relations with Europe, to offset the influence of the US and China. They

will try to delay Brexit, reverse it if they can – perhaps using Starmer to do so. But given the EU's lack of internal solidarity during Covid, even Varoufakis says the single market effectively no longer exists, and is arguing for a no deal Brexit. Pushing re-entry will thus be a harder sell.

Labour and the movement

While Starmer is working hard to neutralise Labour, the party is not yet safe in establishment terms as an alternative government, should public and backbench anger erupt

against the Tory leadership. Despite his right-wing internal appointments, his cooperation with the Blair Institute and his provocative sacking of Rebecca Long-Bailey, Starmer has yet to assert complete control over the NEC, where there's a narrow right-wing majority and upcoming elections. He has the left-wing CLPs to contend with, and the Socialist Campaign group of MPs and councillors. At the same time, the left's level of organisation and unity has yet to ensure a united left slate for the important NEC elections, and the recent change in the NEC's voting system has made achieving a left majority harder. With Forward Momentum gaining control of Momentum – advancing the influence of the pro-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty – calls to re-join the EU are likely to become louder, accompanied by yet

Corbynism created a mass base that experienced a sense of collective strength until very recently. 10 million people voted for Labour's radical policies in 2019. Despite the weaknesses of the party's Brexit policy and its retreat on accusations of anti-semitism, there is still potential to develop socialist ideas and organisation within it, especially with the rise in political consciousness around Black Lives Matter. Political education and organising the left in the party, above all in the red wall seats, are vital. This will be in the teeth of Starmer's moves to disenfranchise the membership through suspending inner party democracy, using Covid as a pretext.

Outside the party, union recruitment is rising. TUC pressure helped push Sunak to extend the furlough scheme. Some gig economy work-

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more anti-semitism smears against pro-Palestinian members. It is possible, therefore, that we will see further disunity, as policy disagreements emerge among the 'left'. A coalition is needed, but one built on clear principles: no return to Full Remain; no outsourcing or cover-up of the Governance and Legal Unit (GLU) report; no purge of leftists on spurious grounds of anti-semitism; no sinophobia; and a clear defence of workers in struggle. Uniting the left in the party, as Don't Leave, Organise is trying to do, is of the utmost importance, at a time when the government could, should, be in real trouble.

ers have organised themselves, for example, forcing Wetherspoons to pay its staff. The rail, postal workers and bakers' unions gained various safety measures in workplaces, and there has been an attempt at a rent strike campaign among private renters, organised by Acorn and the Renters' Union. The education unions played an important role in resisting reopening schools – under media fire for insisting on health and safety, always a good sign. Without the schools reopening, the economy can't open fully. Another positive sign has been the presence of various union leaders in discussions on the way forward for the left.

All this shows potential but it's not nearly enough. There's still a need for unions to organise unorganised workers and the unemployed, and to defend their employed members' interests more effectively. Unison's links to the staff identified in the internal Labour GLU report showed how out of touch they are. Construction work continued largely unchecked throughout the lockdown. Unite and other unions have yet to mount a militant defence against major private sector job losses – particularly in manufacturing, crucial for any working class revival. We're facing a public sector pay freeze and a threat to the triple lock on pensions, which will set the old against the young. Plus Transport for London fare rises, which are a tax on workers. Universities are in funding chaos, and UCU has been unable to push back sufficiently. None of this has been made easier by the fact that the Labour Party leadership is anti-union – Adonis and Blunkett coming out against the teachers, backed by the new Education Secretary. A deeper weakness is Labour's fixation with parliamentary and inner-party processes, which tend to preclude the development of active campaigning in support of working class struggle.

On the other hand, the government has been forced into some embarrassing U-turns, almost without a fight, showing its weakness and divisions and what we could achieve were our movement united. Black Lives Matter arose with surprising rapidity and exposed truths about British colonial crimes, complicity in slavery and more broadly imperialism – producing a new generation of protestors.

Capitalism is fighting for its continued existence, but as ever it's on the offensive, using increased unemployment to discipline the working class. It will be in resisting the attacks – and seizing the moment to make demands that have a real chance now of cutting through – that things can change. And that can happen very quickly indeed.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

coronavirus & capitalism

by Paul Sutton

On the 6th May 2020, *The Guardian* published an interview with Yanis Varoufakis on coronavirus and capitalism. In it he stated: “We are sitting on a saddle point, prepared to trip in either direction. It is utterly indeterminate which of the two directions we travel...If we fail now to stand together - to deliver the investments that humanity and the planet so desperately need – my fear is that this system will only deepen its cruel logic. Surfing on the hose of liquidity unleashed by policies like quantitative easing, the financial sector will increase its grip on the global economy; bankers are very good at getting rich from such volatility. So now is the time for us, here in Europe as around the world, to mobilise behind this shared vision of a global new deal. Because without it, the walls between us will only get taller and thicker: porous only to the money that flows through them.”

Varoufakis is right to warn that the current crisis could as easily benefit the bankers as bring them down. That is what happened with the financial crisis of 2008. It was said then, as it is now, that things could not be the same again. But they were. The logic of capitalism prevailed as austerity was imposed, inequality deepened, and environmental disaster loomed ever larger, jointly feeding an increasing financial and political instability and a growing national authoritarian populism.

So is this time really different? Has the coronavirus pandemic really changed everything? To try and answer this we need to understand first some key characteristics of modern capitalism and then to see



PHOTO BY JOE RAVI

Apple profiting during coronavirus

how the responses to the pandemic by the major capitalist countries strengthen or weaken capitalism.

The twin characteristics of modern capitalism are the dominance of finance capital and the concentration of power and wealth in large corporations.

Capital more powerful

The current dominance of finance began with the loosening of capital controls and abandonment of fixed exchange rates from the early 1970s onwards. The next forty years saw increasing deregulation of financial markets along with increasing globalisation. The chief beneficiaries were the multinational corporations, the global investment banks, the derivative traders and the hedge fund investors and managers. They, in turn, were the chief causes of the

financial crisis of 2008 as the complex financial products they created fed speculation and credit bubbles which finally burst when the products they hawked were shown to be fundamentally flawed and potentially worthless.

They were rescued by the major capitalist states re-capitalising the banks and introducing quantitative easing to promote financial liquidity, backed-up by the US Federal Reserve making available virtually unlimited quantities of dollars. It was just enough and as China stimulated its economy with a massive investment programme the global economy slowly began to recover.

The banks were put under a tighter regulatory regime than before but this did not stop them prospering and growing ever larger. So did the shadow-banking system of non-

Precarious labour conditions and decreasing real rates of pay have contributed to the intensification of labour exploitation, dramatically reducing the number of those who have decent work and job security.

regulated financial intermediaries such as hedge funds. The income created fed into massive increases in the price of assets such as property and stocks and shares held mostly by the rich and the very wealthy. The City of London emerged once again as the core 'institutional nexus' which commanded the system and set the major policies of the British state at home and abroad.

Parallel to these developments has been the growth of multinational corporations. The liberalisation of national and global trade since the 1970s has stimulated their growth, limiting the power of national states and international organisations to regulate them in any meaningful way. Technological innovation has advanced productivity in many and the market value of companies such as Apple and Amazon has, in recent years, exceeded \$1 trillion, well in excess of the gross national income of most states. They have also been able to exploit technology to create new global value chains which by optimising production across multiple states has allowed corporations to avoid taxation and accountability and so amass increasing profits.

The increase in capital and low costs of borrowing have led to a massive concentration of corporate power as corporations have been taken over by others. 'Superstar firms' have come to dominate markets allowing them to reduce supplier market prices and increase the prices for their products, as well as force down labour costs, increasing their profits and attractiveness to investors. While such corporations are keen to promote an image of 'corporate social responsibility' the evidence of it being delivered is scarce whilst that of large-scale tax avoidance is easy to find.

Meanwhile major capitalist states not only turn a blind eye to such transgressions but often facilitate it through their inward investment strategies that privilege such corporations over others, rigging the market in their favour.

Workers and the state weaker

It is no exaggeration to say that each year workers and the state are rendered less powerful vis-à-vis finance capital and the multinational corporation. The 2008 financial crisis simply accelerated an existing trend again set in train in the 1970s.

Outsourcing, sub-contracting and the casualisation of labour has grown almost exponentially in major capitalist countries. Precarious labour conditions and decreasing real rates of pay have contributed to the intensification of labour exploitation, dramatically reducing the number of those who have decent work and job security. While rising employment rates are lauded as showing that 'capitalism works' the reality is that much of this masks part-time, short-term, low paid work and the increasing incidence of in-work poverty. The impact of this is felt most by those with the least which includes low-income households, women, people of colour and migrant workers.

The legal rights of workers have been eroded as trade unions have lost members and a voice in politics. Capitalist states have abetted this process through facilitating the reduction of the bargaining power of trade unions and encouraging the growth of 'flexible working' which has shifted the economic risks from the corporation to the individual employee. The impetus within capitalism to substitute technology for labour will only increase this process making labour ever more marginal in major capitalist countries, whilst shifting more production overseas to exploit cheap labour in the developing world.

The 2008 financial crisis changed none of the above. Instead in major capitalist countries the state staved off the collapse of capitalism and set it on its feet again. The costs were borne by the majority in the imposition of austerity which reduced

state provision across the board and especially among public sector workers, those on low incomes and women. Income inequality increased household debt as people struggled to make ends meet and intergenerational gaps emerged as young people found it impossible to get decent well-paid work or afford to get on even the bottom rung of the housing ladder.

Life simply got harder for most people, but the banks were saved and no one in charge was prosecuted for their mistakes in bringing the system to the point of collapse. The state had done the job the capitalists could not do through their markets. But that of course is not to say that they wanted an end to markets – rather the reverse, more market power including global market access for the UK. They got this with the election of the Johnson led Tory government in December 2019.

Coronavirus interventions

That government inherited an economy in which growth was low but everything was in place to promote a robust capitalist system. Much the same could be said for most of the major capitalist countries, including China, which was experiencing an economic slow-down but remained in many ways, along with the US, the power house of capitalism.

The initial reactions to the coronavirus pandemic reflected this situation. They drew on the experiences of the 2008 financial crisis. In Britain £200 billion of quantitative easing (QE) was announced by the Bank of England at the end of March followed by a further £100 billion in June to boost funds which otherwise were in danger of running out. That brought the total of QE in the UK, including the £445 billion QE programme after the financial crisis, to nearly £750 billion (37% of GDP).

Central banks in the European Union, Japan and the US among others have also embarked on pro-



Amazon profiting during coronavirus

grammes of QE. Totals are expected to reach around 20% of GDP in the US and 7% in the Eurozone. This time central banks have purchased corporate bonds as well as government bonds, increasing the risk that they may have bought 'junk bonds' held by the banks. QE has been shown to benefit most those who already have assets rather than those who have none. There is nothing to suggest this will not happen again, with this time the added risk that taxpayers may have to pay for what ultimately prove to be worthless corporate bonds.

The Bank of England also reduced interest rates to 0.1%, a record low, which if offset by the current inflation rate is in effect a negative interest rate. This reduces the costs to business which have already been cushioned in a variety of ways by government action. It was also supposed to benefit households through lower mortgage rates but in a number of cases these actually increased for new products while others were withdrawn. Also hit have been those with savings, especially pensioners with small amounts of cash in 'easy access' savings accounts.

Elsewhere central banks have also cut interest rates which for the European Central Bank and Japan are now officially negative interest rates, which means that banks have to pay them to deposit money with them. This is supposed to encourage bank lending but with rates so low there is little that interest rate policy can achieve to stimulate the economy. That means the primary response to coronavirus in the UK and elsewhere has been through direct government action.

At the end of May the National Audit Office issued a report on the UK government's early response to the pandemic. It identified spending of £124.3 billion to cover a range of programmes, initiatives and commitments. The largest single amount was £82.2 billion support for business followed by £19.5 billion support for individuals (including benefits and sick pay) and £15.8 billion for public services and wider emergency responses.

The fact that two-thirds of government spending has been directed at support for business speaks for itself. The largest single item is the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) which enables employers to

claim a taxable grant covering 80% of the wages of furloughed employees at an estimated cost of £50 billion. It is followed by £14.7 billion of grants to support small businesses and businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors, and £5 billion of loans for small and medium-sized businesses. The report notes that further spending will be needed.

The key justification for this level of spending, which is far greater than in 2008, is that it protects jobs. To date some 8.9 million have been furloughed under the CJRS which has covered nearly a million firms, around one quarter of the UK's workforce. That has not stopped a surge in unemployment with more than 2 million people claiming benefits. Even with CJRS, the Bank of England suggests that unemployment could reach 10% by the end of the year but it is likely to go much higher as firms within the scheme lay-off employees once it ends in October. There are currently no mechanisms in place to prevent firms from taking this action.

The inference from this is that once coronavirus is contained and if the economy begins to recover, the costs will once again be borne by the public at large. While the government claims that it will not return to austerity there is to date little indication of how it will pay for the government borrowing incurred and little serious discussion of planning for future economic growth.

After the virus

In these circumstances it is useful to return to some of the points made earlier.

The stock market has fallen by around 20% since the beginning of the year, roughly in line with the contraction of the UK economy April-June. It has however stabilised and there has been no loss of demand in the bond markets for UK government debt. This suggests that confidence is high in the City

of London and that before long there will be the start of a V shaped recovery and a quick return to growth. As much was predicted by Andy Haldane, Chief Economist at the Bank of England toward the end of May when he told the Confederation of British Industry that there had been a 'modest recovery' in spending and business confidence and that surveys on future business prospects were coming in 'a shade better' than expected.

While airlines and car makers have been badly hit by coronavirus some multinationals have prospered. Global internet companies, mass retail corporations, pharmaceuticals and the electronics sector have all seen increased revenues and with it the expectation of increased profits. While the slow down and disruptions to world trade have hit the smooth working of global value chains the largest corporations are better placed to re-engineer them than are smaller ones who will have to factor in new risks. This and the negative impact of coronavirus on small and medium sized business will all favour the biggest and especially the 'superstar' firms, further increasing their size, concentration and domination.

While some of the workforce have been furloughed others have continued working, sometimes in hazardous conditions without proper personal protective equipment and others from home, where there are anecdotal reports of more intensive working than in an office. The incidental costs of such 'flexible' home working are borne by the worker and such individual working not only limits social interaction but also any collective representation to employers, whether through trade unions or not. The possibility of incidental work becoming the norm through such practices increases and with it the precariousness of work in general. The chief losers in such situations are women, Black, Asian and ethnic minorities, and immigrants, while the debts incurred by many to

manage their households during the pandemic are future costs likely to further increase inequality.

These considerations show that to date the coronavirus pandemic has not changed some of the key essentials of modern capitalism. These remain in place and can even grow and intensify as economic recovery takes place. The opportunity to make real changes such as moves toward a green economy have been proposed by many and feature in a TUC report *A Better Recovery*. This points out that the crisis has shown "who really keeps the country going" and that it is "the labour of working people that creates the goods and services people need". Indeed it is, but unless there is a rapid mass mobilisation of the majority to effect change and the political will by the left to lead it, the opportunity identified by Varoufakis will have passed and it will be 'business as usual'.

From The Socialist Correspondent 10 years ago

"...the issue is as much about how the US comes to terms with others over its relative decline as it is about the intentions of its rivals.

In the meantime the international system is likely to be marked out for greater competition between countries than at any time since the Second World War, with all the attendant risks and conflicts this inevitably brings."

Issue 9 Summer 2010

China and the USA: partners or rivals?

Dr. Paul Sutton

Building workers & coronavirus

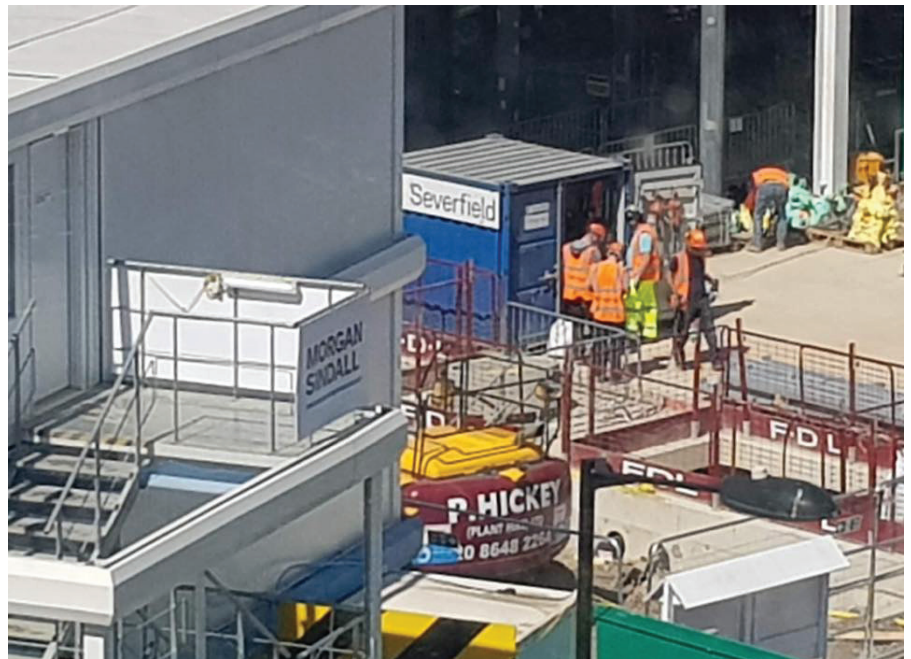
by Pat Turnbull

On March 23 the Prime Minister announced a lockdown to hinder the spread of Covid 19. By then 6,650 had tested positive and 335 were known to have died of the disease. On 23 June he announced an easing of lockdown. The worldometer coronavirus up-date on 28 June recorded total cases in the UK as 311,151; new cases 901; total deaths 43,550 and new deaths 36.

Sham lockdown

A factor which led to the UK having one of the worst death rates in the world from the virus – 642 per million of the population at 28 June – was the fact that the lockdown was a sham. Hundreds of thousands of workers in activities not essential in a pandemic continued to have to go to work without adequate protection from catching the deadly illness. This was factored into the lockdown announcement from the start, with the repeated message on the television advising us all to work from home – unless we couldn't. A major group of workers exempt from the lockdown were building workers. What followed exposed the many already existing problems for workers in the industry: insecure employment conditions, use of bogus self-employment, subcontracted work as a norm, opposition by construction firms to trade unions and victimisation of anyone raising safety concerns.

Building workers were, from the start, worried about the implications for their health of the Government's failure to order sites to close. On 25 March the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, in an article entitled, *It's appalling – construction workers blast sites for remaining open*,



Britannia site Hackney

reported: 'One worker, who is based on a Morrison construction site in Ayrshire said: "We are all freaking out and nobody's listening. Some jobs you can't do by yourself on a building site. Boils down to money, that's what its all about. They're scared they'll get stuck with the bill. They're putting money before men." He said he's been given a choice between health and livelihood which is impossible to make. There was a lot of buck passing. The article continues: 'A spokesman for East Ayrshire council said: "The Barony Campus [a super school] remains open at the current time: however, this is a matter for Morrison Construction and cannot be influenced by East Ayrshire Council. The advice issued by both Scottish and UK Governments regarding closure of construction sites is advisory. No guidance has been provided to clarify what is meant by essential.'"

The article quoted a subcontractor, who has been working on a new tax office building in Glasgow being developed by BAM construction company: 'The man's wife is a key worker caring for the vulnerable and elderly. The worker was told to stand down yesterday and was sent home but now he is unsure if he will qualify for the 80 per cent furlough salary or will have to sign up for Universal Credit. "We need them to close. I just know that.'" BAM planned a pause for a review of working practices saying, 'Where work can be delivered according to these guidelines, it is anticipated that sites will re-start from Monday, March 30.'

On 24 March Nicola Sturgeon told a press conference that construction workers on sites of non-essential buildings 'should not be working... advice given by the Scottish gov-

The cartel of major contractors that run the British construction sector are huge financial donors to the Tory Party and appear to have lobbied hard to keep the sites open.

ernment for Scotland'. Advice not instruction.

On 26 May Architects Journal carried an article entitled Young architects launch petition calling for all building sites to be shut down. The Architecture foundation's Young Network was saying that construction workers could not maintain the two metre social distancing recommended by the government. Prime minister Boris Johnson had imposed what was described as a strict national lockdown but stopped short of ordering construction sites to close. In fact, the Architects Journal's sister title, Construction News, had seen an e-mail that day from a senior prime ministerial adviser which explicitly said the Government was not closing construction sites nor was it encouraging them to do so.

Tory friends

Campaigning construction worker, Dave Smith, one of the organisers of the #shutthesites campaign reported: 'immediately after Boris Johnson's speech, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Robert Jenrick tweeted advice for the housing, construction and building maintenance industries which stated that, "if you are working on site, you can continue to do so". Smith added that the Minister, 'even had the brass neck to end the tweet with the hashtag #StayHome-SaveLives.' (Morning Star 25 March) Since then Jenrick has become more known for his role in the notorious Westferry Printworks affair where he looked favourably on a planning application by Richard Desmond who subsequently made a donation to the Tory Party.

Dave Smith gave his interpretation of events: "The cartel of major contractors that run the British construction sector are huge financial donors to the Tory Party and appear to have lobbied hard to keep the sites open. In addition the Government doesn't want to have to pay

the loss of income for about a million construction workers who are classified as self-employed.'

Architects Journal reported that some developers had closed sites, listing Multiplex, Taylor Wimpey, Barrett Homes, Galliard, Mace, Crossrail and LSG. L&Q closed its sites for three weeks saying: 'Social distancing is extremely difficult to achieve. Added to this, in London, our construction workers are heavy users of the public transport network.' But the journal added: 'Contractors are refusing to shut sites until the Government force them to so they don't fall foul of any contractual clauses.'

Workers' experiences

An article on the Reel News website (2 April) entitled Coronavirus: Workers demand construction sites are shut down reported: 'Reel News has been inundated with messages from construction workers all over the UK, demanding their sites are shut down during the coronavirus crisis.' It quoted the Government advice: 'With the exception of some non-essential shops and venues we are not asking any other businesses to close – indeed it is important for business to carry on. However, you should encourage your employees to work from home unless it is impossible for them to do so. Sometimes it will not be possible... for instance if they operate machinery, work in construction or manufacturing, or are delivering front-line services.' Reel News advised workers to 'shut down sites...get furloughed on full pay (or at least the 80 per cent promised by the Government) and put pressure on the Government to tell these sites to shut down.'

Reports on the website showed building workers taking action of all kinds to get their sites shut down, and ensure they could still feed their families, and the resistance they faced from construction employers.

SOME EXAMPLES:

■ The MGT construction site building the biggest biomass power station in the world near Middlesbrough is close to being shut down completely.' Given the outcry from '1,700 workers being forced to work in dangerous conditions where social distancing was impossible, a number of companies doing the work on the site backed down and furloughed their workers at the end of last week, sending them home on 80 per cent wages – but SPIE, Powertherm and Brand were still insisting on their workers turning up yesterday. Following negotiations with union reps over the weekend SPIE was forced to back down too. Powertherm, who work directly for the Spanish client Technicas Rodundas, were foolishly still trying to carry on – that may be because they are probably paid by the hour by Technicas Rodundas for labour, materials and equipment instead of having submitted a quote for the job. But all their ladders just sat in the welfare yesterday refusing to work, before going home. Brand are disgracefully still holding out and expecting their workforce to come in. We're being told there are only around 300 workers out of the 1,700 still left on site. There are also problems with companies just paying their workers off instead of furloughing them on 80 per cent of their wages – something that won't cost them a penny. One company that's refusing to furlough is Balfour Beatty.' 72 workers on fixed term contracts where there was still work to be done, could have been furloughed but

instead were given a week's notice and paid off. In the end the site was shut down and all the workers went home on full pay. This was within hours of GMB safety rep, Simon Duncan, posting photographs of workers congregating at the start of the shift and asking the question on social media: 'Please tell me, Mr Johnson, how do we adhere to social distancing.'

■ A worker reported from Smulders yard in Wallsend: 'Multiple people on the yard and offices already have symptoms and there have been confirmed cases already, and still they will not close.' Normally there were up to 700 employees on site. All workers were being classed as key workers when they were clearly doing non-essential work. Reel News continued, 'The majority of the workforce is from Portugal/Poland and they were promised a few weeks back that if they stayed when they had the chance to go home, they would 100 per cent be able to carry on working. Now it's very difficult for them to walk off the job because they have nowhere to go. [...] As if this wasn't bad enough, on Sunday night Coosemans (the general manager) took the unbelievably stupid step of starting twenty new welders – brought up from London, and staying in caravans in the car park. Apart from the fact that no one should be travelling out of London (the epicentre of the virus) at the moment, it is highly likely that these workers have been flown in from abroad. They won't have been tested at the airport – and they certainly

won't have been tested before coming on site.'

■ Workers on sites sent Reel News photographs of what was going on, including one from Hinckley Point at 6pm on March 25, showing clocking stations and queue for buses, with no social distancing at all, on a site with thousands of workers. The website added, 'And it's now emerged that the management were still taking on workers from abroad up to last week.' Hinckley Point management were also allowing their staff to travel home all over the country for consecutive days off. Workers sent photos from Keadby power station project near Scunthorpe, run by Siemens and SSE, which showed workers queuing up to have their ID checked with a finger print machine. 'So every single worker on the job is touching the same surface, one by one. Meanwhile SSE managers have left the site to work from home and left just one man on site!'

■ Affinity Living, Manchester, was a job building luxury flats, employing hundreds of workers. SISK, the main contractor, was actively fighting to keep the site open. 'Some firms have pulled off but are unbelievably trying to allocate their workers to different Manchester sites. Thirty brave workers were trying to take a stand and refusing to move to another site on March 26, thereby risking spreading the virus even more, but then had the problem of needing to eat at some point – and they needed to be sent home to be paid.'

Local authorities are by far the biggest commissioners of construction projects in the country. Activities non-essential during a pandemic were kept operating. Hackney Labour Council, as developer and Morgan Sindall as builder, kept their Britannia leisure centre and school site open throughout the lockdown, despite being provided with evidence by nearby residents which showed social distancing was not being observed. The irony of having notices in the neighbouring park advising users to keep two metres distant was not lost on local people.

Still not safe

On 22 April Unite the Union published an item, Watered-down Covid 19 construction guidance is unsafe warns Unite and launches hotline for worried workers. It said, 'The latest of the site operating procedures (version 3) published by the Construction Leadership Council is noticeably weaker than previous versions. It was issued to coincide with a return to work at a large number of sites this week, particularly in the London area.' The union noted, 'the fundamental requirement for workers to socially distance at work. The guidance now states that where workers are required to work within two metres of each other they should: "work side by side or facing away from each other rather than face to face. When this is not possible and workers have to work face to face within two metres of each other workers should keep this to fifteen minutes or less where possible..."'. Unite national officer for construction, Jerry Swain, said: "...no site should be working unless it can do so safely and that means two metres social distancing must be maintained at all times...Construction workers should not be forced to use overcrowded public transport...please contact Unite via the hotline. Your identity will not be revealed to your employer."

On 15 May, Risks: Union Health and Safety News, the Trade Union Congress's weekly newsletter, reported that the Office for National Statistics revealed workers in low skilled elementary occupations, at a rate of 21.4 deaths per 100,000, were almost four times as likely to die from the virus as professionals, at 5.6 per 1000,000. The occupations so described included building workers.

The chief of the Health and Safety Executive, Sarah Albon, reported on May 12 to Parliament's Work and Pensions committee that between 9 March and 7 May the Executive had received 7,149 coronavirus related queries from people concerned about their safety at work. In only 321 cases did inspectors speak with employers and inspectors were yet to close any businesses as a result of the reported concerns.

As Mike Clancy, the General Secretary of Prospect, the union representing Health and Safety Executive inspectors, put it: 'The Prime Minister has indicated that the Health and Safety Executive will be carrying out spot checks on workplaces to ensure safety. To enable the Health and Safety Executive to cope with this level of work he promised a £14 million funding boost, but this is just ten per cent of the real-terms funding cut the Health and Safety Executive has experienced over the past ten years and there are now fewer than 500 main grade inspectors in the UK.'

In an article in Yahoo Finance UK (13 May), entitled Coronavirus: Fears for construction workers' safety as UK building sites reopen, Tom Belger reported: 'Boris Johnson singled out construction workers when he announced an easing of the lockdown this week, urging them to get back to work...figures [suggest] almost three quarters of building sites in England and Wales were already open last week. Firms are keen to keep projects on track, and many workers reliant on their

incomes...Taylor Wimpey began reopening its sites last week...The Unite union has warned breaching the two metre rule at all is unacceptable however. Most importantly, there are big questions about what workers should do if the rules are not followed. Issues can be reported to the Health and Safety Executive, but it has suspended targeted inspection activity of sites during the pandemic. Workers may also fear reprisals in a sector with a history of blacklisting.' Indeed, on 25 February 2019 the BBC reported: 'The union Unite is taking a case to the High Court after names were found in a file compiled by the Consulting Association, which was raided in 2009. More than 3,000 people were on the blacklist, often for being a union member or for raising safety issues. The blacklist has been used by dozens of construction firms to vet those applying for work on building sites.' The raid had been carried out by the Information Commissioners office.

Yahoo Finance UK quoted Geoff Wilkinson of building standards firm, W construction Consultants, 'Some contractors also "put pressure on sub-contractors to continue to work", particularly when they may face penalties for delays. Many site workers are self-employed, with not all eligible for Government support schemes and payments only from late May for those that are. "That's why you've seen a lot remaining in the workplace." However safe sites can be made, commuting is another major concern... many colleagues lived in Kent and typically travelled at peak hours to London by train...Wilkinson expects an eventual surge in legal claims against firms on behalf of both laid-off workers and those left seriously ill or even killed by Covid 19.'

Sadly any legal claims will come too late to save the lives of the building workers, their family members and members of the public already sacrificed on the altar of business as usual.

Universal basic income shortcut to a better society?



Change not easy – Occupy London 2011

PHOTO BY ALAN DENNEY

by Noah Tucker

“The idea is simple: all adults receive a no-strings-attached sum from the state to cover the basic cost of living. The amount is paid to everyone, regardless of their employment status, wealth, marital status, or any other circumstances” (definition from an article in *The Independent*, 31st July 2018.) The attractiveness of universal basic income (UBI) derives in large part from its combination of such apparent simplicity with the huge improvement in human welfare which one can imagine would result.

With proponents in different parts of the political spectrum, who would

define themselves as being in the radical left, the soft left, the neo-liberal right-wing, and the centre, another reason for the lure of UBI is that despite being such an ambitious ‘big idea’, it is presented as being feasible and achievable. The major political problem with seeking to achieve a massive step forward (for those who need it most) in material living standards by moving towards a socialist society is that, to use the words of Karl Marx, “this cannot be effected except by despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production”. Measures of

this kind are of course very hard to achieve, as they are opposed by the wealthy and powerful by every and any means at their disposal. Could UBI, on the other hand, without challenging capitalist property relations or depriving the top 1% of their wealth, give hope of at least reversing the impoverishment of so many millions of people which has resulted from the reversion towards full blooded capitalism that has unfolded over recent decades? After all, even in Donald Trump’s USA, a one-off version of a universal payment has been implemented as a response to the Covid-19 crisis,

and trials of basic income schemes have been proposed or actually conducted by centrist or right-wing governments in other countries, most recently in Finland.

And further, could UBI even be a step in the direction of a better form of society altogether? Some on the left who are promoters of UBI assert that it would help the transition to a post-capitalist society by “challenging the ideology of work that makes one’s job a signifier of social purpose and worth”; meanwhile, it is claimed, it would disrupt the exploitative labour market by allowing workers to reject unsatisfactory jobs, thus forcing capitalists to invest in creating high quality, high productivity employment. [1] This view was popularised among left and leftist intellectuals by a 2015 book entitled *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*. [2] In it, the ‘left accelerationist’ theorists Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams asserted:

“A UBI therefore unbinds the coercive aspects of wage labour, partially decommodifies labour, and thus transforms the political relationship between labour and capital [...thus] making work voluntary rather than coerced”. Calling for a shift from remuneration based upon ability or effort to remuneration based upon ‘basic need’, the writers argued that: “... we are all responsible for reproducing society: from informal to formal work, from domestic to public work, from individual to collective work. What is central is not productive labour, defined in either traditional Marxist or neoclassical terms, but rather the more general category of reproductive labour. Given that we all contribute to the production and reproduction of capitalism, our activity deserves to be remunerated as well [...] All the genetic, historical and social variations that make effort a poor measure of a person’s worth are rejected here, and instead people are valued simply for being people.”

Libertarian dystopia

Putting aside for the moment the question of whether it is useful to seek to break the ‘ideology’ which links work to social purpose and value, it is important to note that Srnicek and Williams concede that UBI could also be used to achieve the very opposite of their goals:

“The demand for a UBI, however, is subject to competing hegemonic forces. It is just as open to being mobilised for a libertarian dystopia as for a post-work society – an ambiguity that has led many to mistakenly conflate the two poles [...] The risk is that, if set too low, UBI becomes just a government subsidy to businesses [...] The conservative argument for a basic income – which must be avoided at all costs – is that it should simply replace the welfare state by providing a lump sum of money to every individual. In this scenario, the UBI would just become a vector of increased marketisation, transforming social services into private markets.” In order to avoid such a catastrophic outcome, the authors of *Inventing the Future* propose that: “In demanding a UBI, therefore, three key factors must be articulated in order to make it meaningful: it must provide a sufficient amount of income to live on; it must be universal, provided to everyone unconditionally; and it must be a supplement to the welfare state rather than a replacement of it. The first point is obvious enough: a UBI must provide a materially adequate income.”

This lack of clarity on the level at which UBI payments would be set points to a huge problem, which will be returned to later in this article. For now, it can be noted that the ultra-capitalist dangers inherent in UBI are potentially very real. Indeed, backing for UBI encompasses neoliberal ideologists, Silicon Valley billionaires and others, for whom an income delivered via the state to each individual would be a way to help entrench the capitalist system. Among the various expectations for

UBI from these viewpoints is the aim of facilitating further reductions in public services as the recipients of the universal payments would purportedly be able to purchase their own services from the private sector on an individual basis.

Expressing particular concern about the implications in terms of services and benefits for disabled people, Disabled People Against Cuts observed in a 2019 article: “If disabled campaigners weren’t previously worried about growing support for the idea of a Universal Basic Income, then following the publication of the World Bank’s draft annual report for 2019, they should be now. This document clearly articulates the link

Often referred to as a ‘citizen’s income’, UBI could reinforce and worsen the inequality and exclusion which are already features of our labour market...

between intensification of the neoliberal agenda and provision of a basic income, putting forward a policy programme of extensive labour deregulation including lower minimum wages, flexible dismissal procedures and zero-hours contracts, compensated in part by a basic income ‘modest in size’ so as to ‘be complementary to work’ and financed largely by regressive consumption taxes (i.e. increasing VAT).” [3]

Other positives conceived for UBI from a pro-capitalist viewpoint include fostering a more ‘entrepreneurial’ dynamic among the population as people would supposedly use the basic payment to help them

start up their own businesses; and propping up a society which continues to function on a capitalist basis even though, as some predict, the majority of the working age population will become unemployed as further automation renders most jobs and professions redundant. (In fact a look at the history of capitalism reveals many waves of unemployment as technological changes displace workers; however new industries and services have always arisen through which the investors can exploit people in order to create profits.) And UBI might not merely subsidise business as such, it could potentially encourage the most unscrupulous employment practices, allowing employers to successfully offer more insecure jobs, and work at pay rates below a realistic living wage, as employees would initially be able to manage to get by on their meagre or intermittent salary plus the allowance from the state. Even where workers currently are on reasonable pay and conditions, a slide to generally lower living standards could ensue as trade union organisation and collective bargaining with the employer become less relevant in determining workers' overall incomes.

Spanning the centre and left arguments for UBI, there is the view that it would assist both the capitalist offering zero-hours type employment, and the impoverished who are victims of both the changing capitalist economy and the penalties built into the current benefits system, along with those among the workers with creative or innovative aptitudes. In her foreword to a widely cited paper on UBI published by the 'soft left' think tank Compass in 2016, Professor Ursula Huws proposed that a form of UBI should replace the existing state benefits system, because the latter: "...penalises claimants whose messy and complex lives do not fit neatly into its anachronistic categories. But that is not all. It also disadvantages employers who, in a competitive global economy, want to access labour



PHOTO BY ROGER BLACKWELL

Disabled people, winners or losers?

flexibly on demand, and artists and innovators who want to develop new ideas without starving. In other words, it does not just damage social cohesion, it harms the very economy it is supposed to help."

But Professor Huws is aware also of the dangers which accompany UBI. In addition to the neoliberal drawbacks outlined above, she concedes another difficulty. Often referred to as a 'citizen's income', UBI could reinforce and worsen the inequality and exclusion which are already features of our labour market and our system of access to benefits and services. In an article in *Open Democracy*, Ursula Huws asks: "If a UBI is defined as a right of citizenship, then this raises the question of entitlement: who is, or is not, a citizen? And on what basis is their right to UBI established? A final serious risk associated with the introduction of UBI is that it could become linked to a narrow definition of citizenship from which some people (for example refugees, asylum-seekers or residents who do not hold UK passports) are excluded. In addition to the support this could give to racism and xenophobia this could also lead to a two-tier labour market in which people who are not entitled to UBI become an exploited underclass." [4] She therefore argues for safeguards, e.g. "that the introduction of a UBI should be embedded with policies that protect the scope and quality of public services and their collective and universal character". However, she is not specific about how such

protections could be assured, calling instead for "a debate, not about the abstract idea of a UBI, but about how it could be introduced in the real world in a way that is genuinely compatible with social-democratic and feminist ideals".

Trial and error

In May this year, political commentator Paul Mason tweeted: "Well blow me down! The Finnish UBI trial shows it works". This evaluation was based on the partial conclusions of a study in Finland in which 2,000 people, who were unemployed at the start of the experiment, were paid an unconditional allowance of £560 per month, an income which continued to be paid irrespective of whether or not they became employed. These subjects were compared with a similar group of people who were not paid the allowance. Unfortunately the Finnish study, as with similar experiments in other countries, was not a trial of a universal basic income given that the money was only paid to people who were unemployed at the outset of the experiment; but perhaps its findings and their interpretation might help illustrate or untangle at least one aspect where the claims for UBI are contradictory. Would an unconditional state income facilitate people to accept low paying work, thus subsidising exploitative employers? Or would it have precisely the opposite effect, with people using the financial independence provided by their universal income to reject such unsatisfactory work?

In 2015, Paul Mason wrote a *Guardian* article asserting the latter. Entitled *Paying everyone a basic income would kill off low-paid menial jobs*, the article proposed a UBI set at £6,000 a year per person while abolishing state pensions and basic welfare benefits. Mason predicted enthusiastically that of the positives of UBI: “The first would be to eradicate low-paid menial work. Why slave 10 hours a day with mop and bucket for £12k when you get £6k for free? Corporations would rebalance their business models towards a high pay, stable consumption, lowish profit world, and the tax take would rise as a result. All tax relief for the poor would end.” [5]

Somebody unfamiliar with Paul Mason’s intellectual output might imagine, therefore, that the ‘successful’ Finnish study on which he later triumphantly tweeted, had demonstrated that many among the 2,000 recipients had refused low paying jobs, and thus either were more likely to remain unemployed or to successfully hold out for higher quality work. But those who had set up this pilot scheme had envisaged quite an opposite result. As Professor Heikki Hiilamo, Professor of Social Policy at the University of Helsinki, explained: “The basic income experiment was more than anything else set out to study how the social security system could be reshaped in a way that promotes active participation and gives people a stronger incentive to work. That means employment outcomes were the focal point of the endeavour. In simple terms, the idea was to test if the carrot works better than the stick in encouraging the unemployed to accept new job offers and to seek income from entrepreneurial activities.”

In fact the Finnish study provided no evidence for either of these theses. Prof. Hiilamo concluded: “With that respect the results were disappointing. Basic income recipients did not have more work days or higher incomes [from work] than those in

the control group. Despite the fact that basic income recipients had clearly better incentives to work, there were no statistically significant differences between the groups.” [6] Among the reasons for this lack of any significant effect one way or the other, it could be surmised that firstly, the ‘stick’ of benefit sanctions (which are in force and becoming more punitive in Finland, contrary to impressions of social democratic Scandinavian beneficence) works only to degrade and further impoverish the unemployed, rather than ‘incentivising’ people into employment; and secondly, that the £560 a month, a comparable amount to Paul Mason’s suggested £6k per year, is well below subsistence level and hardly provides the financial independence needed to refuse to seek or accept ‘low paid menial jobs’.

The left hand giveth, but the right hand taketh away

But of course, an unconditional income provided via the state, for all members of society and not just a couple of thousand jobless individuals, and set at a level far above £6k per year, so that it might really create the possibility of avoiding unsatisfactory employment or even of ‘challenging the ideology of work’ might have outcomes very different from those suggested by the Finnish study. And a high enough level of universal benefit would make possible one practical result, which is claimed or implied by some proponents of UBI: that means testing for state benefits could be ended. But there is a serious problem here, which is that the calculations usually given for the cost of implementing UBI, which claim to show that such a scheme is potentially affordable, are based on a low level of UBI payments which would not allow the realisation of the lofty aims which UBI is supposed to achieve. Moreover, in these ‘affordable’ schemes most of the money paid out to people is to be recouped by the abolition of some existing state benefits and increases in tax-

tion, including the taxes paid by the lower paid.

Paul Mason calculated in 2015 that his scheme, involving giving everyone a mere £6k while abolishing state pensions and most welfare benefits, would cost approximately an additional £160 billion per year. In March this year Daniel Susskind proposed, in the pages of *The Financial Times*, a scheme with a somewhat higher level of payments: “For instance, handing out £1,000 cash per person per month would cost the government about £66bn a month — a fraction of the nearly £500bn bailout the UK needed to stay afloat during the 2008 financial crisis.” [7] Susskind’s proposed UBI, although better than Mason’s meagre £6k a year, would still be set at a level below what could be considered as providing a reasonable standard of living for a single person. But Susskind’s scheme did not involve partially or wholly clawing back its cost by the abolition of existing welfare benefits or increases in taxation. It is important to note that the projected feasibility of his £66 billion a month proposal was based on the assumption that it would be strictly for a temporary period, to help prevent the economy crashing during Covid-19 lockdown. Based on Susskind’s figures, a permanent scheme on these lines would cost almost £800 billion a year- equivalent to over 35% of the UK’s GDP, more than the total annual central government tax revenue, and about four times the total declared annual profits of companies listed on the UK stock market. Even if part of that cost were reclaimed by means of abolishing all state benefits including pensions, that would still leave an overall cost approaching £600 billion a year. Hence the scheme could be implemented for a few months only and, it can also be assumed, would be financed not from immediate tax revenue but by a big increase in state borrowing and/or quantitative easing. (In the event, the government opted instead for the much cheaper option of the furlough and the self-employed income support schemes.)

The paper issued in 2016 by the 'soft left' think tank Compass, entitled *Universal Basic Income: an idea whose time has come?* is the study which is most widely cited by UBI advocates as proving the feasibility of UBI. This paper is worth looking at when comparing the promises versus the costs of projected universal income schemes. The various options which are set out in the Compass paper involve payments per working age adult that are very much lower even than Mason's annual £6k, ranging from £51 to £73.10 per week, with the cost of the payments being (partially) clawed back through abolition of some current welfare benefits and (partially) paid for by rises in taxation. Notably, it concludes in regard to the possibility that UBI could remove the need for means tested benefits: "a full scheme that

most palatable of the more far-reaching models considered in the paper still involves the continuation of housing benefit, council tax support, and other benefits; despite which, several groups including single parents would lose out, and there would be big increases in child poverty and pensioner poverty! Although in these schemes the basic rate of income tax would rise from 20% to 30%, and the higher rate from 40% to 50%, there would still be a gap of £35 billion to £43 billion a year in terms of funding the UBI payments.

The partial UBI schemes projected in the Compass paper, which involve keeping existing means tested state benefits and increasing taxes (although the UBI payment itself would be taken into account when

allowance and increasing income tax rates, including a rise in the basic rate from 20% to 25%. According to the Compass paper, this would still leave an overall funding gap of £8.2 billion a year.

Even less ambitious, although more straightforward in its method, is a proposal outlined in a paper by Alfie Stirling and Sarah Arnold for the New Economics Foundation in 2019. In fairness to the authors of this proposal, they do not claim that it amounts to a UBI as such, but it has similarities. It would involve paying every adult with a national insurance number a 'weekly national allowance' of £45.68 a week in Scotland, or £48.08 in the rest of the UK (the difference being due to slightly different income tax rates either side of the border). [8] Under this proposal, the expense of the weekly payments would be more than recouped by increased tax income, gained by scrapping the income tax personal allowance, and also by making people's income from the new 'national allowance' subject to means testing and income tax; and the surplus would be used to increase child benefit (to return it in real terms to its 2010/11 level). While the authors calculate that this would reduce overall inequality, when the figures in the paper are looked at in detail it becomes apparent that- as with the models proposed by Compass- there would be substantial numbers of people on below average incomes who would be made worse off through the scheme- including single parents, and families with four or more children. Therefore, as the paper concedes in one of the appendices, under the scheme, "Adult poverty falls significantly but child poverty remains largely unchanged". It also needs to be noted that the redistribution under this scheme would take place almost entirely within the bottom 95% of income earners, with almost no perceptible cost being borne by the top 1 or 2%. Thus, to put it simply, the closer a scheme gets to achieving the adver-

Paradoxically, despite removing millions of people from their workplaces, the Covid-19 crisis and its economic consequences have come as a dramatic reminder of the importance of productive work, and of the use value of some forms of economic engagement as opposed to others.

replaced all or most of the existing [benefits] system would be difficult to implement in the present circumstances; it would be too expensive and there would be too many losers among poorer households"

So, this kind of UBI scheme would make a lot of poor people even poorer. Why? Because, to prevent the overall cost looking frighteningly expensive, the amount of the universal payment has to be less than what many low to middle income people would lose due to tax and benefit changes which are part of the scheme. And although described as 'full schemes', the

doing the means testing) would also involve some people on lower incomes losing out. In these models, single parent families and couples with children would become financially better off, but at the expense of single pensioners and working age people without dependent children. By the authors' calculations, the overall cost of the 'best' of these partial schemes (which would pay £71 per week to working age adults over 25) would be an annual £168.8 billion net after deducting the savings from reduced payments of welfare benefits and tax credits. This would be mainly defrayed by abolishing the income tax personal

tised goals of UBI, the less affordable it becomes; and conversely, the closer we get to the nuts and bolts of a feasible scheme, the further we get from any thoughts of a transition to 'post capitalism', or even from not worsening the financial position of many less well-off people.

Steps towards socialism

But, even if it were possible to construct a version of UBI that would go some way towards the aspirations of those on the left wing of the array of pro-UBI voices; and avoid leaving significant numbers of working class people worse off; and somehow combine it with cast iron safeguards against it being used for neoliberal or xenophobic purposes; and be a relatively inexpensive scheme that would require 'only', for example, around £170 billion a year (as in the 'best' partial Compass scheme) to be raised mainly from additional tax revenue - would that make UBI a worthwhile demand for the labour movement?

Two questions need to be raised here. One is whether we want to attack the link between productive labour and social value and income.

Paradoxically, despite removing millions of people from their workplaces, the Covid 19 crisis and its economic consequences have come as a dramatic reminder of the importance of productive work, and of the use value of some forms of economic engagement as opposed to others. People's understanding of the usefulness of the labour of workers in health and social care, refuse collectors and teachers, workers in production, distribution and retail (in contrast to the activity of property speculators, city traders and other dealers in and receivers of income from the ownership of wealth) has been increased.

The role of labour has always been a key part of the socialist understanding of society and of our critique of capitalism; it is reflected in the words of the Labour Party's old 'Clause 4' which aimed: "to secure for the

workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry [...] through the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange." That demand, and the acknowledgement of productive work as the source of wealth and value, needs to be emphasised and can, if anything, find readier support and understanding than before the current crisis.

The second question flows from the fact that we already have demands and policy proposals, that, in a capitalist economy, would need to be paid for by increasing the government's tax income. The additional spending envisaged in the 2019 manifesto for a Corbyn Labour government would have required a total annual revenue of £82.9 billion to be raised by changes in taxation. Encompassing very modest tax increases on corporate profits, capital gains, the incomes of people earning over £80,000, and action to tackle tax avoidance and evasion, the rises in state expenditure which this was to allow were equally modest: on education including abolition of tuition fees, on health and social care, restoring cuts in public sector pay, reversing some of the cuts in state benefits, and other very moderate steps in a better direction. [9] Unless these proposals for restored or improved collective provision are to be dropped, the additional scores of billions for a UBI scheme would have to be funded by very much greater tax increases, on top of those set out in the 2019 manifesto. If it is seen as viable to propose such huge tax rises - and there is at least a very strong case for much higher taxes on the super-rich and on corporations than was proposed in last year's Labour manifesto - it does not at all follow that the entirety, or almost the entirety, of these hard-gained extra funds should be used to create a UBI scheme.

One use for additional tax money, costing a tiny fraction of what a UBI would cost, could be for increases to state welfare benefits well above

those set out in last year's Labour manifesto, combined with removing the punitive and inhumane sanctions regime. Another would be for an extensive programme of nationalising firms and setting up state owned companies, which would be subsidised to ensure that they provided mass, well paid, unionised, secure employment and free training. A hint of such a plan could be found in the Corbyn-era Labour manifestos which included a national investment bank, the state led 'green new deal' and the extension of broadband provision via the nationalisation of BT Openreach. On an ambitious enough scale, these proposals, alongside a big expansion of public services, would not only end the pressure on people to accept low quality, badly paid work, but would allow our economy and society to be rebuilt, on the basis of productive and well rewarded labour, in the interests of 'the many not the few' - in other words, taking steps towards socialism.

We have just seen, and are still seeing, how mooting even the most modest steps in that direction arouses enormous and fierce resistance by the establishment - but there is no short cut to the achievement of a better society.

[1] <https://newsocialist.org.uk/capitalist-and-socialist-universal-basic-incomes/>
[2] [https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/16935/1/SRNICEK%20and%20Williams%20\(2015\)%20'Inventing%20the%20Future'.pdf](https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/16935/1/SRNICEK%20and%20Williams%20(2015)%20'Inventing%20the%20Future'.pdf)
[3] <https://dpac.uk.net/2018/06/solution-or-illusion-the-implications-of-universal-basic-income-for-disabled-people-in-britain/>
[4] <https://neweconomics.opendemocracy.net/the-key-criticisms-of-basic-income-and-how-to-overcome-them/>
[5] <https://www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2015/feb/01/paying-everyone-a-basic-income-would-kill-off-low-paid-menial-jobs>
[6] <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/news/nordic-welfare-news/heikki-hiilamo-disappointing-results-from-the-finnish-basic-income-experiment>
[7] <https://www.ft.com/content/927d28e0-6847-11ea-a6ac-9122541af204>
[8] https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/NEF_Weekly_National_Allowance_FINAL.pdf
[9] <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Funding-Real-Change-2019.pdf>

SLAVERY, CAPITALISM & SOLIDARITY

by Simon Korner

Many of the stately homes in Britain were built with slave trade money. The elite landowners who built these country houses, “utilised notions of gentility, sensibility and cultural refinement in part to distance themselves from their actual connections to the Atlantic slave economy”, according to *Slavery and the British Country House*, an English Heritage study. The reality of that economy entailed kidnap, murder, rape and torture to enforce the commodification of human beings. Yet heritage plaques on buildings still describe former slave traders euphemistically as “West India merchants” and slave owners as “West India planters”. Unlike the US which had slavery on its own territory, Britain has been able to cover up its history because most of its slavery was overseas – though house slaves existed in Britain in the 18th century, often as conspicuous displays of wealth (as portrayed in Hogarth’s *Harlot’s Progress*).

Slavery, industrialisation & global trade

Despite slavery’s low profile in this country, British capitalists made vast wealth out of the slave industry. The growth of Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow can be traced to the lucrative slave trade. Where once Norwich was England’s wealthy second city, Bristol’s population overtook it by the 1740’s – Edward Colston’s slave-trading playing an important role. Belfast grew from a small town to an industrial city on the back of trade with Africa and America, its shipbuilding, rope-making and shoemaking supplying the growing slave trade.

In *Capital Volume 1, The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist*, Marx points out that “...the turning of Africa into



Slaves in cotton fields

a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins” is one of the elements that “signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production”. [1]

Earlier, in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1846, he wrote: “Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that gave the colonies their value; it is the colonies that created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance.” [2]

Hypocrisy & Abolition

University College London’s Legacies of British Slave Ownership project shows that up to a fifth of Britain’s richest families made their money from slavery. Yet what we hear mostly is a self-congratulatory tale of British decency in abolishing the slave trade in 1807, and slavery itself in 1833. Historian Kate Donington calls this the “moral capital” of abolitionism, which has served usefully as a “means of redeeming Britain’s troubling colonial past”. The Emancipation Act of 1833 only abolished slavery in the Caribbean – stipulating that for four further years, released slaves had to work unpaid for 45

hours a week for their former masters. Meanwhile, slavery remained legal in India until 1848, and in Nigeria till 1901, while domestic slavery continued in northern Ghana till 1948. Indentured labour was not covered by the abolition laws.

Massive loopholes existed after abolition, with British ships using Spanish or Portuguese flags to transport slaves. The Royal Navy's West Africa (Preventative) Squadron, supposed to catch the now-illegal slave ships off the West African coast, frequently re-sold captured ships back to slavers. British capitalists were still able to invest in the enormous slave markets in countries where it remained legal – Brazil, the Spanish colonies, and the US – and in slave-worked mines and plantations. British consuls in these countries personally owned slaves.

Slave capitalists in Britain were awarded huge compensation for their loss of 'property' after 1833: £17 billion in today's money, which was 40% of total annual expenditure. Meanwhile, the 800,000 British-owned slaves received no compensation at all. The historian David Olusoga criticised the trivialising nature of a Treasury tweet in 2018: "Here's today's surprising #Friday-Fact. Millions of you helped end the slave trade through your taxes." He pointed out that it took until 2015 for British taxpayers to pay back this government debt, the largest bailout in history before 2009. What the Treasury should have said was: slavers made fortunes from both slavery and its abolition – at the expense of taxpayers, who included the descendants of slaves.

Damage limitation

The Black Lives Matter movement has finally forced some of the UK's major capitalist institutions to issue statements admitting their complicity in slavery. The Bank of England has confessed that 25 of its governors and directors were major slave-owners or slave traders.

A spokesperson said: "As an institution, the Bank was never itself directly involved in the slave trade, but is aware of some inexcusable connections involving former governors and directors and apologises for them."

The big banks have also made statements. RBS, founded in Edinburgh in 1727, said it had financed plantation owners, and that its directors personally owned slaves. "We have a strong multicultural network across the bank and have recently set up a taskforce led by our BAME... colleagues which will look at what more we can do as a bank. This includes looking at making contributions to BAME groups." Barclays was also heavily involved in the slave trade and stated: "We can't change what's gone before us, only how we go forward. We are committed as a bank to do more to further foster our culture of inclusiveness, equality and diversity, for our colleagues, and the customers and clients we serve." HSBC likewise had slave connections and stated that it is "committed to learning from the past." Lloyds bank said: "A lot has changed during the 300-year history of our brands and while we

have much within our heritage to be proud of, we can't be proud of it all." The bank "can do more, we can do better and we will do it together." Lloyds insurance market, which dominated the British Empire's shipping trade and likewise made fortunes from the slave trade, said it now plans to support BAME groups. It called the slave trade "an appalling and shameful period of English history, as well as our own".

Outside banking, Greene King, one of the UK's largest pub chains, whose fortune derived from slave labour, will also make donations. Its founder owned cane sugar plantations in the West Indies and argued against abolition. Individuals such as George Orwell's great-grandfather received the equivalent in today's money of £3 million in compensation, as did David Cameron's family. William Gladstone's father got the equivalent £83 million in compensation for his 2,500 slaves – Gladstone's maiden speech in parliament was in defence of slavery. The Church of England also made money from abolition. Altogether its clergymen claimed £46 million in compensation, with 32 new churches built by donations from their

Workers in textile mill



windfall money. A spokesperson said: “While we recognise the leading role clergy and active members of the Church of England played in securing the abolition of slavery, it is a source of shame that others within the church actively perpetrated slavery and profited from it”.

What these statements of regret have in common is equivocation. The admissions of guilty behaviour are hedged about by defensive claims. The actions proposed are tokenistic – making contributions to BAME organisations (Which ones? Who decides? How much? Any provisos?). Their apologetic gestures are being offered only after the public mood made it difficult for them to remain silent. This looks like damage limitation. Bravo! The Bank of England is removing slaver portraits from its walls!

Meanwhile, not a hint of apology from the Monarchy.

Not that apologies are enough. CARICOM Reparations Commission – the pan-Caribbean campaigning body for reparations from the former colonial powers – wants more: “We are not asking for anything as mendicant

as handing out checks to people on street corners. The issue of money is secondary, but in this instance the moral discharge of one’s duty does require in a market economy that you contribute towards development”. Demands for reparations have been made for decades – in the USA, Africa, the Caribbean and the UK.

Yet far from meaningful action, the opposite is happening. So-called development in the Global South serves to enrich the wealthy ‘donors’. The \$134 billion of loans, foreign investment and aid to Africa each year is dwarfed by the \$192 billion extracted annually in profits and debt repayments. Debt bondage under neo-colonialism, like slavery, results in black lives foreshortened. Capitalism exacerbates under-development, both in poorer countries and within the ‘metropolitan’ countries (Britain, the US, France, Belgium and elsewhere), where the daily economic and physical subjugation of black people continues. The capitalist notion of individual betterment has proved to be a cruel myth.

As African American campaigner Queen Mother Moore put it: “They took our boots, no less our straps”.

Shared enemy - common cause

This moment of Black Lives Matter represents an opportunity to revise the complacent history and self-understanding of our country – as a step towards radical change. The movement’s published aims are to “dismantle imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy and the state structures that disproportionately harm black people”. This is not an exercise in guilt-tripping the white population – the multi-cultural nature of the demonstrations shows people making common cause against a shared enemy, in the knowledge that racism terrorises the black population daily and allows capitalism to divide and weaken.

Marx’s declaration, “Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin” remains as true as ever. [3]

[1] Marx, K. *Capital Volume 1*, Lawrence and Wishart 1974 p. 703

[2] Marx, K. *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Progress Publishers 1978 p 104

[3] Marx, K. *Capital Volume 1*, Lawrence and Wishart 1974 p 284

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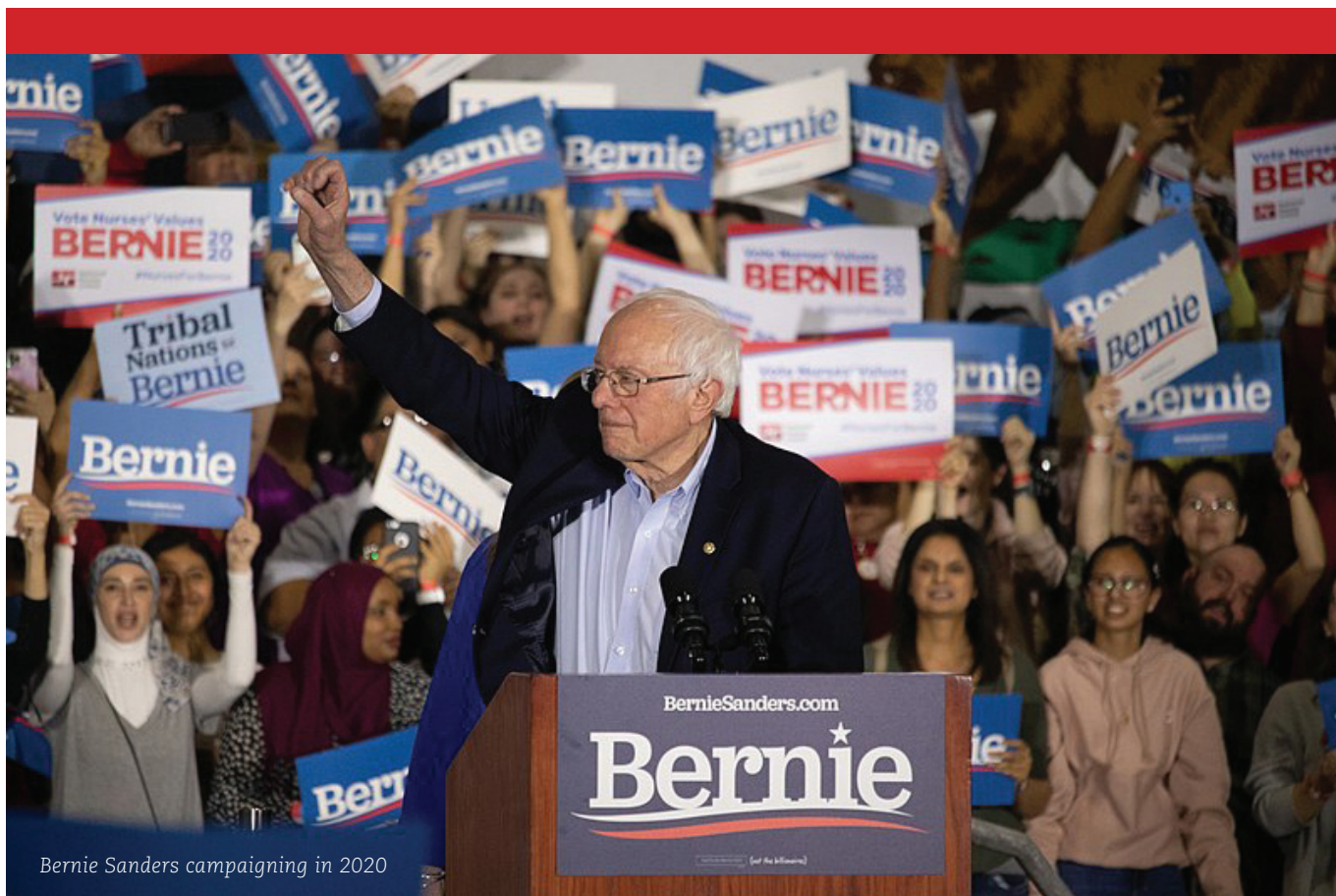
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Bernie Sanders campaigning in 2020

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ANOTHER UNAPPETISING CHOICE

by Steve Howell

When US voters go to the polls on November 3, it is an understatement to say they will face, once again, an unappetising choice for president. While Donald Trump stokes confrontation with China and uses the army to suppress domestic dissent, Democrat challenger Joe Biden has a history of being one of the party's most conservative figures on domestic policy and a staunch supporter of regime-change wars.

What happened to Sanders?

So, how did the Democrats end up with Biden when Bernie Sanders was at one stage the front runner for the nomination? And where does that leave the left?

The turning point in the Democratic presidential primaries was a fre-

netic weekend of unprecedented manoeuvring by the party's hierarchy at the end of February. At that point, Sanders had established a clear lead in the delegate count after primaries in Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada and was ahead of Biden by more than ten points in the rolling average of national polls. The fourth primary – South Carolina on February 29 – was one the polls had been saying Biden would win comfortably. In normal circumstances, his victory there would have been seen as no more than a fillip ahead of Super Tuesday, four days later, when 15 states were due to elect a third of the Convention delegates.

However, with Sanders certain to win California and leading in the polls in Texas, the Democrat establishment was panicking at

the prospect of him emerging from Super Tuesday in the lead. After interviewing 93 leading figures, the *New York Times* (February 27) reported that the Democrats were “willing to risk party damage to stop Sanders”. Meanwhile, the *Washington Post* (February 29) said: “Top Democrats are increasingly alarmed that Senator Bernie Sanders could gain unstoppable momentum from the primary voting that starts next week.” Something drastic had to be done, and Biden's better-than-expected showing in South Carolina gave them leverage to pressurise two candidates occupying similar political ground – Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar – to drop out and endorse Biden ahead of Super Tuesday.

It's impossible to overstate how unusual this is. Buttigieg and Klobuchar had both done unexpectedly

well in the early primaries and were serious contenders. Normally candidates in their position would see how they fared on Super Tuesday and then decide whether or not to withdraw. But the situation was make-or-break for centrist Democrats, and the pair were 'persuaded' to do their duty. This closing of ranks against Sanders was far from enough to knock him out on Super Tuesday, but it did give Biden enough of a boost for him to win narrowly in Texas, come a strong second in California and, with wins in nine smaller states, take the lead in the overall delegate count.

Though the Sanders campaign still had the capacity to bounce back at that point, what no one had reckoned with was how quickly the Covid 19 crisis would transform the situation both in terms of the political mood and the practicalities of campaigning. In the weeks that followed Super Tuesday, rallies had to be cancelled and several primaries were postponed. At the same time, counter-intuitively, some Democrats switched from backing the Medicare For All message from Sanders, which you might expect to resonate in a pandemic, to the seemingly safe option of a former Vice President. On April 9, Sanders announced that he was suspending his campaign because he couldn't see "a feasible path to the nomination".

The future for the left

Nevertheless, the battle for the Sanders policy agenda continued. After the campaign was suspended, Sanders and Biden appointed six Unity Task Forces to find common ground on climate change, criminal justice reform, the economy, education, health care and immigration. At the same time, Sanders kept his name on the ballots in states that not yet held primaries so that he would continue to gather delegates.

The task forces have now produced a 110-page report that will serve as a starting point for the

policy debate at the convention in August. When it was published in July, Sanders said: "Though the end result isn't what I or my supporters would've written alone, the task forces have created a good policy blueprint that will move this country in a much-needed progressive direction and substantially improve the lives of working families throughout our country." Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the New York socialist member of Congress who co-chaired the climate task force, said it had "accomplished a great deal" including a target for 100% clean energy of 2035 (rather than 2050 as originally proposed by Biden) and what she described as ambitious plans for investment that would create millions of good jobs.

The platform is important because it is the basis on which not only Biden but all Democratic party candidates will be contesting the elections in November. If the Democrats can expand their majority in Congress and deny the Republicans a majority in the Senate, some of the policies could well come to fruition. And there will be more of a chance of this to the extent that progressives fighting primaries to be Democrat candidates are successful.

Since suspending his campaign, Sanders has also put his weight behind a drive to build on the 2018 midterm elections when the four women known as 'the squad' won House seats - Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar (Minnesota), Rashida Tlaib (Michigan) and Ayanna Pressley (Massachusetts). That effort has already scored a major success with the primary victory in June of Jamaal Bowman, who defeated the incumbent, Eliot Engel, in the Bronx Congressional district neighbouring the one held by Ocasio-Cortez. Engel, who has been in Congress since 1989 and was chair of the House Foreign Relations Committee, was actively backed by Hillary Clinton and other establishment Democrats. But Bowman won a convincing 30,709 to 18,012 victory,

highlighting how Sanders has energized a new generation of activists.

But the situation is far from ideal and has left key figures in the Sanders campaign divided over backing Biden. While Larry Cohen, a co-chair of OurRevolution, is urging Sanders supporters not to "run away from the lesser of two evils"; Briahna Joy Gray, Sanders's former national press secretary, says she's "concerned we have no strategy to ratchet back the rightward creep that 'lesser of two evils' enables". Biden's choice of running mate could be critical in mobilising the left-wing activists behind his candidacy. When OurRevolution polled supporters, two-thirds favoured Elizabeth Warren, the Massachusetts senator who ran for president but dropped out after a poor showing on Super Tuesday. Though Warren disappointed the left by not endorsing Sanders at that critical point, the domestic policies of the two senators are very similar.

Trump, meanwhile, is doing his best to make Biden look attractive. His repressive reaction to the Black Lives Matter upsurge foreshadows a campaign that will play strongly to white supremacy. And, as in 2016, he can secure a majority in the electoral college, without winning the popular vote, by taking key states such as Florida and Pennsylvania. However unappetising Biden is, with the alternative being four more years of Trump, most on the left will swallow hard while investing their energy in winning Congressional battles that would advance a progressive agenda.

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HEALTH, COMMUNITIES & CULTURE

by Steve Bishop

The isolation imposed upon the population due to the Covid-19 crisis has meant that many aspects of regular social life have disappeared. The most obvious and high profile is sport, with the absence of the Premier Leagues, Formula 1, Euro 2020, Wimbledon and the Tokyo Olympics leaving gaping holes in the summer calendar for many. Add to that the gaps left by high profile music events, such as Glastonbury, and the prospects for diversion in the months ahead, as the pandemic develops, look bleak.

While these high-profile, money spinning activities are the headline grabbers, support for the health and wellbeing of local communities is being affected in more subtle ways. More people visit a library every week than watch Premier League football. They will have no access to the wide range of books and learning on offer for an extended period. Many will simply miss the opportunity for social interaction which libraries provide. Museums, theatres, galleries and heritage attractions, usually preparing for holiday seasons, are mothballed.

Creative Health

The benefits of cultural activity for health and wellbeing have been the subject of much investigation and detailed research for many years. In July 2017 the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on arts, health and wellbeing published its inquiry report *Creative Health*, outlining a ten

point plan for the NHS, Public Health England and local authority services to work together to promote greater cultural activity, in order to increase general health and wellbeing.

The plan envisages inter-departmental collaboration across government to address the social determinants of health; a national centre for arts, health and wellbeing to promote research and collaboration; that local NHS boards and local authorities have an individual designated to take policy responsibility for arts, health and wellbeing; that Arts Council England makes health and wellbeing one of the priorities of its 2020-30 ten year plan; that the education and training of clinicians and other healthcare professionals includes accredited modules on the evidence base for the benefits of arts, health and wellbeing; and that Healthwatch and other patients organisations promote the benefits of the arts contribution to health and wellbeing.

As with much of the political landscape in the UK over the past three years, the impact of the report was blunted by the Brexit vortex into which other political discussion disappeared. In spite of this it was widely welcomed, acknowledged in the health world as a significant contribution to the discussion on prevention, and welcomed in the arts world as vindication of what many in the sector had been saying for years. Professor Sir Michael Marmot characterised the report in glowing terms saying,



Library closed due to coronavirus

“The mind is the gateway through which the social determinants impact upon health, and this report is about the life of the mind. It provides a substantial body of evidence showing how the arts, enriching the mind through creative and cultural activity, can mitigate the negative effects of social disadvantage. Creative Health should be studied by all those commissioning services.”

Prevention better than a cure

Given the increasing age profile of the population of the UK, investment in prevention will be vital if NHS resources are not going to be swallowed entirely at the acute end of the health spectrum. UK average life expectancy is currently identified by the Health Foundation as 79.5 years for men and for women 83.1 years (*Mortality and life expectancy trends in the UK: stalling progress* - Health Foundation 2019). However, the impact of poor investment in prevention is particularly severe for those living in poverty. The average expectancy for healthy life for men and women in the poorest 10% of the population is 52 years, with

a life expectancy of 78.7 years for women and 74 years for men (*Creating Healthy Lives* - Health Foundation 2019). That means many years of life, in potentially preventable poor health, often reliant on increasingly expensive NHS resources. People born in the most deprived 10% of local areas are expected to live, on average, over 18 fewer years in good health than those born in the least deprived 10% of local areas.

It is perhaps surprising then that the *NHS Long Term Plan* (2019), its ten-year strategy for the service, running to 136 pages and 190 references, makes no mention of the APPG *Creative Health* report. The plan does place some emphasis on the need to support social prescribing, the latest strategy for diverting patients from GPs surgeries and

studiously non-party political, nevertheless eloquently outlined the impact of ten years of enforced austerity upon the health of the nation emphasising, in particular, the disproportionate impact of poverty upon the poor health of the most deprived communities. In a telling exposure of policy contradictions Marmot outlined how the cost of following Public Health England advice to eat healthily would take 74% of the weekly income of families living in the most deprived communities. The same families need to spend on average 35% of their income on housing costs. Tough choices have to be made.

In spite of the forensic detail contained in Marmot's review, the 172 pages and over 500 references also fail to acknowledge the *Creative*

corner universities', giving access to learning and culture for those otherwise denied it. As a lesson in history it had an all too contemporary feel

Lessons from Covid-19

The Covid-19 crisis has dramatically exposed the fragility of an NHS which has been under-resourced for over a decade and has been overwhelmed by the surge in demand brought on by the pandemic. It has brought to the fore the need for increased resourcing for the NHS, not only to deal with periodic crises but to deal effectively with the existing health demands of the population. The crisis has also brought into sharp focus the need for greater emphasis upon prevention as part of a holistic approach to how health and wellbeing are addressed. The implementation of the recommendations in the *Creative Health* report would by no means solve all of the problems facing the poorest communities in the UK; without the funding to support a wide range of community and cultural assets it will barely scratch the surface.

However, the Covid-19 crisis has shown that resources can be diverted, priorities changed and that a planned approach to addressing the health of the nation is possible. That should not only be the case in times of crisis. Health is not just a medical issue but a wider societal and class issue. It is an issue about how our community infrastructure and cultural assets are owned and resourced. It is, most significantly, an issue about the impact of austerity and the consequences of poverty. Under-resourcing and the creeping privatisation of the NHS have been starkly exposed by the present pandemic. The symptoms though have been presenting for a long time. The drama of current events is increasingly confirming that the cure for the recovery of health provision in the UK is only possible with the planning, investment and organisation necessary under socialism.

People born in the most deprived 10% of local areas are expected to live, on average, over 18 fewer years in good health than those born in the least deprived 10% of local areas.

into the community, but contains no assessment of how, after ten years of austerity, community infrastructure is in a position to cope with such an approach.

Health and austerity

Just before the Covid-19 pandemic wiped any other news from the airwaves Professor Sir Michael Marmot published his report, *Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On* (Institute of Health Equity 2020), assessing progress in tackling the social determinants of health since the original Marmot Review, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives* (2010).

Marmot is a key figure in the public health world and was a keynote speaker at the North East Public Health Conference, 2020 and beyond: time to turn talk into action, in March this year in Sunderland. Marmot,

Health report, or the significance of cultural activity in promoting health and wellbeing. It was especially surprising that Marmot had overlooked this aspect given his glowing endorsement of the report and his recognition of the role of the arts in addressing the social determinants of health.

There was some recognition of the cultural agenda at the Sunderland conference in the form of author Ann Cleeves (Vera, Shetland) who placed particular emphasis upon the role of libraries as focal points for local communities, promoting literacy, literature and learning. As another lifeline is shredded, and in some places cut entirely by austerity, Cleeves recognised the especially important role libraries have played over the years in working class communities, their function as 'street

Scrutinising Scruton what is conservatism?

by Alex Mitchell

The aesthete and intellectual provocateur Roger Scruton, who died aged 75 in January, rose to prominence in the 1980s “at the height of Margaret Thatcher’s reign of terror” (as he described it in his characteristically flippant prose). [1] An Oxford academic, he had published a no-holds-barred polemic against the *Thinkers of the New Left* (1985). He founded and edited *The Salisbury Review* with the financial backing of the sixth Marquess of Salisbury, a right-wing Tory peer, as a competitor to the *New Left Review*. It was his life’s work to defend ‘conservatism’ as an intellectually respectable ideology against liberal and socialist ideas.

In a BBC talk in 2017, Scruton summarised his view of the main political ideologies thus: “Liberals seek freedom, socialists seek equality and conservatives responsibility.” [2] He argued that “conservatives believe in free association and private initiative... because they know that society itself depend upon them. It is through free association, and what Burke called the ‘little platoons’, that the sense of responsibility arises.” Paraphrasing the eighteenth century politician Edmund Burke, Scruton claimed he was not a reactionary, who wished to put the clock back, since “we must ‘reform in order to conserve’.” [3] The same idea is expressed in Tomasi di Lampedusa’s novel *The Leopard*, set in the Sicily of the 1860s: “If we want things to stay as they are, everything has to change.”

Whigs and Tories

Conservatives are apt to lay claim to Burke’s authority for their views.

The problem is that Burke was a Whig and never a Tory. As a friend of Adam Smith, Burke opposed the Corn Laws in support of competitive markets; he backed free trade between Britain and Ireland (to the benefit of his mercantile Bristol constituents). He defended the demands of the American colonies in 1775. He advocated the repeal of anti-Catholic penal laws; the abolition of slavery;



Roger Scruton

the decriminalisation of sodomy; and restricting the sovereign’s powers. Towards the end of life, in 1791, he defected with William Pitt the Younger to form a Tory-backed government allied to the royal houses of Europe to prosecute the War of the Coalition against revolutionary France, but he always remained a Whig. Conservatives also prefer to forget his anti-democratic opinions concerning the threat of tyranny if the “swinish multitude”, the working poor, were able to vote. [4] Marx

rightly castigated Burke a “sycophant... in the pay of the English oligarchy... [and] a vulgar bourgeois through and through.” [5]

The Tories have regularly absorbed liberals into their ranks along with their ideas. In the 1820s, nominally Tory MPs from urban constituencies supported a reformist programme promoted by George Canning, an MP for Liverpool from a Whig-supporting family who had joined Burke to back Pitt’s war cabinet, and who was briefly prime minister himself. These liberal-minded MPs declined to take the Tory party whip but were also opposed to the Whigs, whom they considered to have been insufficiently supportive of the wars against France; nor did they care for the Whigs’ demand for Catholic emancipation, a critical issue, of course, in Ireland and the North of England.

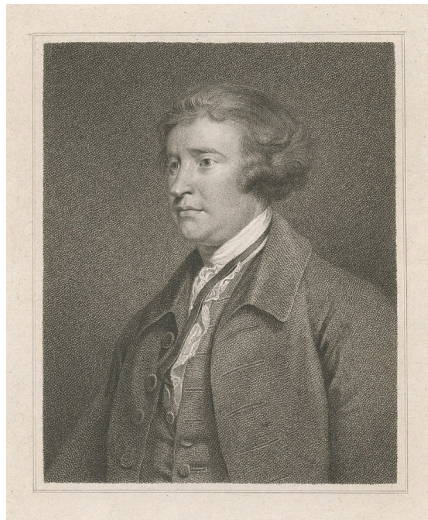
When Robert Peel, considered the founder of the modern Conservative Party, eventually repealed the Corn Laws in 1849, he relied on the Whigs for the votes to pass the legislation. Peel’s Tamworth Manifesto of 1834, which followed the Whigs’ successful campaign to reform Parliamentary constituencies and enfranchise property owners on a more or less equal footing, committed the Tories to “the correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances”. [6] Peel needed to cooperate with the Canningites and Whigs to get his reforms adopted.

Whigs and Tories had renamed their parties the Liberals and Conservatives by the end of the 1830s to broaden their electoral appeal. [7] After Peel’s death the remaining

free trade Peelites, including future prime minister William Gladstone, joined the Liberals in 1859. Many former Whigs split from the Liberal Party in 1886 over Irish Home Rule and their faction then merged with the Conservatives in 1912. Joseph Chamberlain, the Tory urban reformer, was once a liberal, and Winston Churchill returned to the Conservative Party in 1924 after a twenty year career as a Liberal MP. The establishment of the Labour Party in 1906 eroded the Liberals' support among the working class and by 1922 Labour had become the official opposition in Parliament. Henceforth the Conservatives consolidated the anti-socialist vote and took over from the Liberals as the UK's main pro-capitalist party.

Whenever Scruton makes a case for a distinctive and coherent ideology of 'conservatism' we instead find liberalism. "Conservatism is about conserving things", Scruton told his BBC listeners. But what are the things that should be preserved? "The good things that we admire and cherish", was the answer. And what should we seek to reform? This was not answered. "Institutions, traditions and allegiances survive by adapting" to changing situations, Scruton wrote on another occasion in the *New York Times*. [8] Few would disagree with these points. The trouble is they do not amount to a coherent philosophy.

Liberals, and socialists, have clear ideas on why political and social change may be necessary to address the abuse of power and reduce inequality. It is what Burke meant when he called for the reformation of the state. The French revolution, according to this Whig view, occurred because the *ancien régime* had failed to reform. Unlike Britain there was no peaceful alternation of political power by which one party's administration could redress the corruption or mistakes of its predecessor; there was no separation of powers between the judiciary, legislature and executive as envisaged



Edmund Burke

in the American Constitution. All these are liberal ideas, not conservative, though the Conservative Party adopted them in due course.

Defending privilege

Conservatives often hark back to a phrase Burke used in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790): "To love the little platoon we belong to in society is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed toward a love to our country and to mankind." [9]

The misuse of this quotation by conservatives explains the notorious remark by Margaret Thatcher that "There is no such thing as society". [10] Certainly, Burke does not deny the existence of society, nor even of a global society where all might find a place. But conservatives often invoke the ideal of the little platoons to justify loyalty to King (or Queen) and Country to the exclusions of other allegiances, to our class, community or humanity. It is the way conservatives seek to turn patriotic feeling into a mechanism to defend privilege and prejudice. According to Thatcher, we have no allegiance to society, but only to our family, to the civic associations to which we belong, and to the nation and its sovereign. A sense of duty to the sovereign,

respect for national tradition and a preference to keep things as they were, are important beliefs for conservatives. It explains 'conservatism' as a state of mind but they do not form a political philosophy. Once we strip away the liberal elements in conservative thinking, we find that nothing distinctive remains except an antipathy towards progress, rightly termed reactionary. There is no distinct and coherent set of ideas, shorn of the liberalism conservatives share with other liberals.

Roger Scruton's defence of 'conservatism' ends up as being merely a defence of privilege and prejudice, the reactionary tenets of a political party under pressure from the labour movement for social advance. The slogan 'to reform in order to conserve', which Scruton relies on as the justification for conservative hostility to progressive policies, is a stratagem to appear to be in favour of change in order to keep things the same.

[1] Roger Scruton, 2016, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left*, London: Bloomsbury: p. vii

[2] Roger Scruton, The Meaning of Conservatism, broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 20 August 2017; transcript at <<https://www.roger-scruton.com/images/pdfs/Conservatism-POV-1.pdf>>

[3] As above and Roger Scruton, 2017, *Conservatism*, London: Profile Books: p. 6

[4] Burke, 1959, pp. 95 and 152-153. It sparked a rejoinder from radical surgeon and pamphleteer James Parkinson, the man who identified Parkinson's disease: *An Address to the Hon. Edmund Burke from the Swinish Multitude*, 1793, London: J Ridgeway

[5] Karl Marx, 1867, 1976 edition, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, volume 1, Harmondsworth: Penguin: pp. 925-926

[6] Derek Beales, 1971, *From Castlereagh to Gladstone, 1815-1885*, Sphere: pp. 23-24, 61, 74-75 and 115

[7] Beales, 1971, p. 115

[8] Roger Scruton, What Trump doesn't get about Conservatism, *New York Times*, 4 July 2018.

[9] Burke, 1959, p. 55

[10] Interview with Margaret Thatcher, *Women's Own*, 31 October 1987



DENIS GOLDBERG / 11 APRIL 1933 - 29 APRIL 2020

Hero of the struggle for South African liberation

PART 1 / BACKGROUND, RIVONIA TRIAL, PRISON

by Brian Filling

After his release Denis went into exile in Britain where he became a very effective spokesperson for the African National Congress (ANC). Following his release in 1985, I organised his first speaking tour of Scotland and I remember the media insisting that he stood outside the venue behind the iron bars on the windows, looking in for the photographs. Denis obliged and in his characteristically jocular style commented, “it is better looking in than out!”

Remaining in Britain to be with his family after the end of apartheid in 1994 Denis founded the charity, Community H.E.A.R.T. (Community Health, Education and Reconstruction Training) in 1995 to assist with the building of the new South Africa with himself as Director and myself as Chair of the organisation.

Returning to South Africa in 2002 Denis became Special Adviser to the Minister of Water and Forestry Affairs, Ronnie Kasrils. His last years were spent defending the ANC’s non-racial stance, criticising corruption and the Zuma Presidency, promoting his House of Hope and supporting Palestinian resistance to Israeli apartheid.

Early Years

Denis was the son of Sam and Annie Goldberg, both born in London, the children of Lithuanian Jews. Annie was a member of the Socialist Sunday School during her childhood in

Hackney and she and Sam were both members of the Communist Party. They emigrated to South Africa in the late 1920’s. Growing up in South Africa with Communist parents Denis recounts his first day at school and their advice: “They told me that I should not get upset if other children or teachers called me ‘Kaffirboetie’ (‘Nigger lover’ is the easiest awful translation), Commie or Jewboy. Of course, I knew we were different because none of the people who lived around us had black and coloured friends who visited them and had dinner in their homes. Nor did other kids sit on the front of their Dad’s truck leading the May Day parade with flags flying while the band on the back played songs for the people of all colours marching behind.” [1]

Denis went to university to study engineering at sixteen years of age and in his final year met Esme Bodenstein, the daughter of Minnie Bodenstein, a political activist in the Communist Party. Esme took Denis

to meetings of the Modern Youth Society, a non-racial organisation bringing students and young workers from all races together. Denis and Esme married in 1953 and they had two children, Hilary, always known as “Hilly”, and David.

Modern Youth Society

The Namibian, Andimba Toivo ja Toivo, was a member of the Modern Youth Society in Cape Town, and he and Denis became friends and comrades. When the South African government denied Chief Hosea Kutako from putting the case of the Namibian people to the United Nations Special Committee on South West Africa (now Namibia), Andimba asked Denis to help him send a tape-recorded message to the UN Special Committee. It was not easy to get a tape recorder in those days but Denis secured one and made a tape-recorded letter to fictitious friends in America, which included some jazz music. Andimba recorded his state-

ment in the middle of the music. His statement included outrage at the South African illegal occupation of Namibia and its imposition of apartheid laws and policies. To avoid it being discovered by the apartheid authorities the tape was secreted in a pocket in the inner pages of the book, *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson (RLS), and sent to New York. I am sure RLS would have appreciated that! The book and the tape were waved around at the UN Special Committee hearings by the Namibian, Mburumba Kerina. The incident showed the world that the apartheid regime was determined to hide its administration of Namibia as a colony. The picture of Mhurumba Kerina waving the book and tape appeared in the South African press.

Andimba was declared an illegal immigrant, given 72 hours to leave Cape Town and removed to Namibia where he was placed under severe restrictions. Andimba became a founder of the Ovambo People's Organisation, which soon after became the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) and he assisted in the launch of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). In 1968 he was jailed for his activities. Denis was already in prison by that time. [2]

Freedom Charter

From the Modern Youth Society Denis joined the Congress of Democrats, allied to the African National Congress. He was very active in organising for the Congress of the People held in 1955 at Kliptown where the Freedom Charter was adopted by the 3000 delegates attending. He was invited to join the underground South African Communist Party in 1957. The newly re-organised Party was functioning again after the Communist Party of South Africa had been banned under the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950.

On 21 March 1960, 69 peaceful protesters against the Pass Laws

were shot down in the Sharpeville Massacre. This led to the ANC calling for a stay-at-home on 28 March. There was a massive response and the apartheid government declared a State of Emergency on 30 March. The ANC and the Pan African Congress (PAC) were banned. Denis was arrested and held in detention for four months. Denis's mother, Annie, was also arrested and held in the women's section of the same prison.

Following the Sharpeville Massacre and the banning of organisations, it had come to the end of the road for peaceful protest. Umkhonto we Sizwe (the Spear of the Nation, abbreviated to MK) was launched on 16 December 1961 to mount an armed struggle against the apartheid regime. Denis was one of the first to join MK. One of the earliest training camps was held at Mamre in the Western Cape with Denis as Camp Commander and Looksmart Solwandle Ngudle as Field Commander. Here they taught politics as well as practical things like the fundamentals of electric circuits so that explosives could be set off at a distance. Looksmart led units which sabotaged telephone and telegraph lines. The events were not spectacular but did lead to communications blackouts over widespread areas. This drew in many police officers from neighbouring towns to patrol a large area around Cape Town. They were beginning to achieve one of the aims of guerrilla forces and stretch the state's security services.

A group trained at Mamre tried to leave the country secretly for further training outside South Africa but were caught 2,000 miles away at the Bechuanaland (now Botswana) border. Under interrogation one of the group divulged Looksmart's address. Unfortunately, Looksmart had taken ill and had been unable to move to a safe house as planned and so was arrested. He died in police custody. When Denis learned of Looksmart's murder he took it very badly. In his autobiography Denis wrote that Looksmart, "played such an impor-

tant role in my life and without whom any account of my part in the South African struggle would be meaningless." [3] and [4]

Following the establishment of MK there were over 100 acts of sabotage and the apartheid government introduced new laws including the 90-day law and the Sabotage Act. The 90-day law enabled the security police to detain people for 90 days without bringing them before a court of law. Denis went underground and moved secretly to Johannesburg where he worked for MK as Technical Officer. He helped set up the radio transmitter which allowed Walter Sisulu in hiding to address the people on 26 June 1963 to show that despite the draconian laws and the banning of the ANC there was still an active resistance inside the country.

Rivonia Trial

On 11 July 1963 the High Command of Umkhonto we Sizwe and some advisers were arrested at Lilliesleaf Farm, Rivonia. Their trial became known as the Rivonia Trial. The whites arrested were separated from the blacks. Nelson Mandela was already in prison having been convicted for calling the nationwide strike and unlawfully leaving the country. [5] Others arrested on the same day included Arthur Goldreich, when he returned from work to Lilliesleaf, and Harold Wolpe. Arthur and his family lived in the main house at Lilliesleaf and provided a 'respectable' front for the clandestine activity although Arthur secretly was the Logistics officer of MK. Arthur and Harold were held in Marshall Town police station but with the assistance of two Indians, Abdulhay "Charlie" Jassat and Mosie Moolah, who bribed a warder, they were all able to escape. [6] During the 90 days of detention in which the three whites, Denis, Rusty Bernstein and Bob Hepple were held in solitary confinement, Denis managed to escape. Using his engineering skills, he managed to open his cell, pulled

himself onto the roof and jumped six metres to the ground. Unfortunately, he was spotted by a criminal prisoner who reported the escape to a warder and soon after he was caught. After a week of interrogation, he was returned to Pretoria Local prison and put in the cell next to Rusty Bernstein.

“The next morning he (Denis) is brought into the yard, dishevelled, unshaven and in chains. His ankles are shackled and connected by a heavy chain to a chain belt around his waist. He must either drag the spare length of chain along the ground behind him, or lift it up between his legs and carry it in his hands as he shuffles along splay-legged...it seems to me to be the ultimate expression of apartheid: a human being treated like a mad dog.” [7] Being shackled was the standard response to escapes from apartheid prison. He was kept in the leg irons for a month. However, as Rusty pointed out in his Memoir, Denis found a way of easing the pain. “Chains are left on day and night. Denis found nights intolerable and devised a way of picking the locks underneath his blankets and relocking them before dawn next morning.” [8]

The 90 days detention came to an end with the beginning of the Rivonia Trial. Nelson Mandela was Accused No.1, Walter Sisulu Accused No.2 and Denis was Accused No.3. Bob Hepple, one of the ten accused, negotiated with the police to become a witness for the prosecution. He was released in order to give evidence as a state witness and then fled the country. The Defence opened with Nelson Mandela’s speech from the dock which ended with the famous peroration: “I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.” [9]

It had been agreed that Nelson would make his speech from the dock to avoid interruption. This meant that he could not appear in the witness stand. Walter Sisulu took to the witness stand and was examined by the prosecution for four days. He turned in a brilliant performance, quietly and calmly explaining the history, aims and objectives of the African National Congress. Walter Sisulu was regarded by many as a ‘walking history of the ANC’.

Denis also took to the witness stand. As George Bizos, one of the defence lawyers, wrote in his memoir, *Odyssey to Freedom*, “...matters did not look good for Denis from the moment the judge referred to him as ‘Sisulu’s clever friend’...Clearly the derisive expressions pulled by Denis when a prosecution witness contradicted himself, as well as his persistent though muted remarks to his co-accused had not escaped the judge. During our consultations with Denis, his answers were quick, flippant and humorous...Such behaviour would not go down well in court.”

The defence lawyers had concerns about putting him on the witness stand. Anyone who spent any time with Denis would know his irrepressible humour and would empathise with the defence lawyers’ concerns. However, as Bizos reported, “To our relief Denis was a satisfactory witness. He successfully avoided any witticisms and controlled his expressions” when under examination by the prosecution. [10]

Eight of the Rivonia trialists were sentenced to life imprisonment on 11 July 1964. [11] When the Judge’s verdict was given Denis’s mother didn’t hear the sentence, because of the courtroom clamour, so she asked Denis. He replied, “Life! Life is wonderful!” [12]

Prison

Due to the racist laws of apartheid Denis was separated from the others

and served his time in Pretoria Central Prison. Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, Raymond Mhlaba, Elias Motsoeledi and Andrew Mlangeni were sent to Robben Island. Esme and the children, Hilly and David, went into exile in Britain.

During his time in prison Denis like all prisoners suffered a lot but he also learned. He learned how to deal with warders, the prison system and his fellow political prisoners. He also studied, gaining two university degrees and was half way through a law degree when he was released. He led the long and eventually successful prisoners’ campaign to be allowed newspapers and magazines which after rejection at every level was eventually successful at the Supreme Court. The political prisoners were allowed newspapers in 1980, sixteen years after Denis was imprisoned.

Whilst in prison Denis’s mother died and he was refused permission to attend the funeral. When his father died Denis did not ask permission to attend the funeral as he did not want to give the authorities the pleasure of refusing him.

Bram Fischer, a member of a prominent Afrikaner family and a Communist [13], led the defence brilliantly in the Rivonia Trial. Shortly thereafter he went underground and when he was caught and sentenced, he joined Denis and the other white political prisoners in Pretoria Central prison. Bram became ill and was very badly treated by the prison authorities. Denis kept a diary of how Bram was ill-treated and he looked after and nursed him in the face of this cruel and inhumane treatment. [14] Denis was eventually allowed to stay in Bram’s cell during the night. Bram became so weak and was so emaciated that Denis could carry him to the chamber pot. For the final few weeks of his life Bram, with terminal cancer, was taken to his brother’s house, which was declared a prison by Act of the apartheid parliament. So, Bram died in prison.



Sentenced to life imprisonment at the Rivonia trial

From left to right, above : Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba

From left to right, below : Elias Motsoaledi, Andrew Mlangeni, Ahmed Kathrada and Denis Goldberg

The Defence opened with Nelson Mandela's speech from the dock which ended with the famous peroration "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Denis assisted in the escape of Tim Jenkin, Stephen Lee and Alex Moumbaris by helping to make the keys to open cell doors, diverting the night warder and arranging the escape vehicle through his secret outside contacts. [15]

Denis was released in 1985 after 22 years in prison. His release caused controversy in some ANC circles as he had signed a document renouncing violence. However, when he re-joined the struggle to work for ANC in exile, he was given great support by O R Tambo and the whiff of criticism disappeared. Denis's release was brought about by an Israeli, Herut Lapid, who worked for the release of Jewish prisoners around the world, and by Denis's daughter, who was living in a kibbutz in Israel. Denis was deported to Israel and on arrival he stayed with Arthur Goldreich. In an article published in *The Socialist Correspondent* Denis reported that on arrival at Arthur's home near Tel Aviv, Arthur remarked with pride that, "the last house I had been in when we were arrested was his home, and the first house I was entering after my release was also his home." Denis responded with a question: "Is it safe this time?." [16]

Denis, who was critical of Israel and its treatment of Palestinians, left as soon as he could to join his family in

Britain and to work for the African National Congress.

Brian Filling is Honorary Consul for South Africa in Scotland and Chair of the Nelson Mandela Scottish Memorial Foundation. He was Chair of the Scottish Committee of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, 1976-1994.

Part 2 of this obituary, dealing with Denis's life and continued struggle after his release from prison will be published in the next edition of The Socialist Correspondent.

[1] Goldberg, Denis, *The Mission: a life for freedom in South Africa*, p.40, pub. STE, 2010.

[2] Andimba Toivo ja Toivo was sentenced to 20 years, which he spent on Robben Island alongside Nelson Mandela. He was released after 16 years and following Namibia's successful armed struggle and the gaining of independence he became a Minister in the first independent government of Namibia in 1989.

[3] Goldberg, Denis, *The Mission: a life for freedom in South Africa*, p.16, pub STE, 2010.

[4] In 2007, following the end of apartheid, Looksmart's remains were traced by a special unit in the National Prosecutions Authority and after DNA tests they were handed over to his family and Denis was invited by the family to speak at the memorial.

[5] The CIA tipped off the Apartheid regime about Mandela's whereabouts leading to his arrest on 5 August 1962. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-36296551>
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/nelson-mandela-cia-arrest-south-africa-a7030751.html>

[6] Arthur Goldreich escaped from South Africa and went to live in Israel where he became a leader in the Israeli Anti-Apartheid Movement. Harold Wolpe went into exile in Britain. He returned to South Africa in 1990 and worked at the University of the Western Cape as well as working for the ANC.

[7] Bernstein, Rusty, *Memory Against Forgetting: Memoir of a time in South African politics 1938-1964*, p.251, 2nd edition, pub. Wits University Press, 2017.

[8] Ibid, Note 64, p.350.

[9] Mandela, Nelson, Statement from the dock at Rivonia Trial, 20 April 1964.

[10] Bizos, George, *Odyssey to Freedom*, p.265-266, pub. Random House, 2007.

[11] Rusty Bernstein was acquitted as the prosecutor had become so engrossed in his political confrontation with Rusty that he forgot to put issues of fact to Rusty. Rusty's declaration that he had not done the things alleged in the indictment had therefore to stand. He was immediately re-arrested in the courtroom for being a member of a banned organisation, the Communist Party. However, he managed to secure bail and then fled the country for exile in Britain.

[12] Goldberg, Denis, *The Mission: a life for freedom in South Africa*, p. 371, pub. STE, 2010. "Life is Wonderful - Mandela's unsung heroes.", film directed by Sir Nick Stadlen.

[13] Bram Fischer's father was Judge President of the Orange Free State and his grandfather was Prime Minister of the Orange River Colony and later a cabinet member in the Union of South Africa.

[14] Goldberg, Denis, p.174-176.

[15] Goldberg, Denis, p.192-209. Jenkin, Tim, *Escape from Pretoria*, pub. Mayibuye Books, 1987.

[16] Goldberg, Denis, *Arthur Goldreich and the ANC's secret HQ*, p.23, Issue 13, Autumn 2011, *The Socialist Correspondent*.

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