THE TRANSFORM EDITORIAL BOARD
Oscar Garcia Agustin Associate Professor, Aalborg University, specialising in populism
Len Arthur retired economics lecturer and political activist in Wales
Andrew Burgin bookseller and political activist
Katy Day Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Leeds Beckett University, specialising in feminism, gender, class identities and intersectionality
Nick Dearden Director of Global Justice Now
Felicity Dowling writer and activist specializing in health, education and women’s rights
Youssef El-Gingihy GP, writer and activist on the NHS
Neil Faulkner archaeologist, author of A Marxist History of the World: from Neanderthals to Neoliberals
Katerina Gachevska Principal lecturer in criminology at Leeds Beckett University specialising in critical security studies with a European focus
Suresh Grover a founder of the Southall Monitoring Group, anti-racist and civil rights activist
Joseph Healy expert on Eastern Europe, Chair of London Irish LGBT Network
Phil Hearse writer and lecturer, specializing in culture and communication
Tansy Hoskins journalist, broadcaster and author of Stitched Up: The Anti-capitalist Book of Fashion
Kate Hudson historian, writer and peace activist
Miguel Martinez Lucio Lecturer in Labour Studies, University of Manchester
Paul Mackney former General Secretary of UCU and co-chair of the Greece Solidarity Campaign.
Philippe Marliere Professor of French and European Politics, UCL
Drew Milne poet and academic, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
Susan Pashkoff economist and writer on US and gender politics
Marina Prentoulis Senior Lecturer in Media and Politics, University of East Anglia, specialising in European social movements
Lasse Thomassen Senior Lecturer in Political Theory, Queen Mary, University of London, specialising in nationalism and multiculturalism
Dave Webb Emeritus Professor in peace & conflict studies at Leeds Beckett University, peace activist
Michael Wongsam activist and writer on black history and politics
Jude Woodward journalist, activist and author

If you would like to get involved or write for Transform, please contact transform@prruk.org
CONTENTS

Editorial
Kate Hudson ................................................................. 1

Winter and Spring:
the extraordinary 2017 Labour surge
Michael Wongsam .......................................................... 7

The Continuing War against Women in the US
Susan Pashkoff .................................................................. 43

Challenges Ahead:
Germany’s Die Linke in times of polarization
Mark Bergfeld and Leandros Fischer ................................. 71

The History and Future of the Polish Left
Czesław Kulesza and Gavin Rae ....................................... 113

Thatcher and the Miners:
remembering the 1984 strike
Jim Gibson ........................................................................ 127

Where We Are and Where We Could Be:
transitional demands and actions
Len Arthur ........................................................................... 135

Review | Russian Revolution: Hope, Tragedy, Myths
Joseph Healy ........................................................................ 155
EDITORIAL

Kate Hudson

Since the near-collapse of the global financial system in 2008, capitalism has plunged deeper and deeper into crisis. Governments have pursued austerity policies, ostensibly to reduce government deficits but in reality to destroy the social and economic gains working people have made over many decades, reducing wages and obliterating welfare states, further exposing populations to the brutality of neo-liberalism. The economic crisis has increasingly become a social and political crisis as many people face poverty, hunger, unemployment, homelessness, sickness and even death, as a result of the catastrophic and government-imposed failure of health systems and social services. The extremes of wealth and poverty have never been so great.

Public hostility to Theresa May – already significant as a result of her election campaign – has increased, following the terrible and completely avoidable tragedy at Grenfell Tower: the destruction by fire of a tower block housing hundreds of working class tenants, many of whom were from black and ethnic minority communities. It is widely regarded as being directly the result of a combination of neo-liberal austerity policies and ruling class corruption, overlaid with racism and class con-
2 TRANSFORM

tempt. Nothing could more powerfully encapsulate what is wrong with our politics and society. And the response to it from the survivors – the rejection of the lies and cover-ups, the refusal to comply any longer with despicable and immoral impositions – is powerful, profoundly articulate and essential for the future of our society. Everyone senses that we are experiencing a significant change in British politics. The dominant ruling class narrative – that had been embraced by Labour – that there was no alternative to neo-liberalism and austerity policies, has been broken. And that is a vital step in the recovery of popular ownership of society, because pretty much everything that is happening in British politics and society today is the inevitable result of nearly four decades of neo-liberalism.

Thatcher began the really serious onslaught on ‘society’, on state ownership, on redistribution of wealth via the social wage, on workers’ rights and regulation, on many elements of the welfare state which had advanced the working class in this country since 1945. She destroyed much of British industry, both intentionally to smash the power of the organised working class, and in order to reorientate the economy towards financial services and global capital.

That process in the UK, also developing in the US under the Reagan/Thatcher axis, was paralleled through the imposition, by international financial institutions, of structural adjustment policies in Africa and Latin America, forcing economies open and ransacking them, leaving communities impoverished or even destitute. After the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, the same neo-liberal
policy prescriptions were imposed on Russia and eastern Europe by the IMF, and western Europe was brought into the same fold through government spending caps imposed by the Maastricht Treaty.

Social democracy capitulated to the neo-liberal agenda and in essence what that has meant in Britain is that whole communities have been devastated by the de-industrialisation process initiated by Thatcher, the working class more widely ground down by attacks on the welfare state, since compounded by the austerity agenda post-2008. The failure of social democracy (up until the Labour election manifesto of 2017) to challenge this politically has meant that the Conservative Party narrative as to why this has happened to working class communities and our society more broadly, has been accepted and bought into by many. Firstly, the explanation was ‘there is no alternative’, secondly, that ‘we are all in it together’, and thirdly, that ‘immigrants are to blame’.

So part of the current crisis we face, Brexit and the rise of racism and xenophobia, is to a considerable extent because of an acceptance of a false Tory narrative used to justify the economic disaster, willingly inflicted on many communities by ruling elites that have continued to pursue neo-liberal economics because it profits them.

Neo-liberalism has brought our society to the brink of disaster: to extreme impoverishment – food banks, unemployment, homelessness, old people dying unattended in squalid conditions, hospitals struggling to treat their patients, necessary medicines being ruled out for cost reasons: to social fragmentation and division, where workers blame other workers for the economic catastro-
phec imposed by our ruling class, where people are abused because of the language they speak, where refugees are refused safe haven from wars our ruling class has wreaked upon them.

But now, finally, the equally inevitable consequence of neo-liberalism is taking place: that the people will organise and fight back, to defend their homes, their jobs, their lives, their self-respect. That fight back has had many manifestations internationally, over the decades, from Africa to Latin America and beyond. The resistance was so successful that for a generation in Latin America, the left was on the rise, with extraordinary and inspiring social, political and economic reforms transforming the lives of millions. Since 2008 when neo-liberalism has hit western Europe most brutally, we have seen the rise of the radical left in Europe, particularly in southern Europe, rejecting austerity and the destruction of their welfare states. In Britain, we have seen that same surge, essentially against extreme neo-liberalism and what it does not only to our economy but to our society as well, bursting forth through the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party, and then through the huge increase of Labour’s share of the vote at the general election. Corbyn has offered something different, not the Tory-lite of previous Labour governments, but a rolling back of neo-liberalism. It is crucial now to ensure that the Conservatives are pushed back further and Labour takes government.

But this will only be the first real battle in the war to recover what the working class has lost and to extend those earlier gains: to restructure economy and society in the interests of all. There is no doubt that the ruling
EDITORIAL

class will fight back harder, using illegitimate and anti-democratic, even authoritarian methods, to prevent any real change. We can see how this process has unfolded against the earlier round of popular fight back against neo-liberalism, whether in Latin America, or Greece. If we are to be effective in strengthening and driving forward this anti-neo-liberal wave, we have to work together to analyse what is actually going on in society, to accurately assess the balance of forces, and to develop strategies for winning.

This issue of Transform addresses some of these questions: looking at the election outcome and what the Labour surge means; exploring the impact of Trump’s onslaught on women; closer investigation of the practice of left parties and movements in Germany and Poland; thoughts on how to drive forward a socialist agenda; and a powerful memoire of the miners’ strike and its transformative legacy.

Our pages are open to explore the immense political challenges that we face. Please get in touch.
WINTER AND SPRING

THE EXTRAORDINARY 2017 LABOUR SURGE

Michael Wongsam

The General Election of June 8 was called to secure a decisive majority to see through the remainder of the Conservative’s austerity programme, to drive through a hard Brexit against Commons opposition and to secure a democratic mandate against any revolt in the Lords. It has turned out to be a catastrophic miscalculation by the Prime Minister, Theresa May.

The Conservatives’ vote share was 42.5 percent against Labour’s 40 percent. And while the Conservatives benefited to some extent from the collapse of the UKIP vote, increasing its vote share by 5.5 percent compared to the 2015 General Election, Labour galvanised a movement of the new voting young¹ and increased its vote share by 9.5 percent. Thus a political manoeuvre, designed both to make May’s personal political position unassailable, and to humiliate the Corbyn leadership of the Labour Party, possibly plunging Labour into yet another leadership crisis, must go down as one of the most extraordinary miscalculations in British political history.

The Conservatives lost a net thirteen seats while Labour
8 TRANSFORM

gained thirty. Also, the nationalist upsurge in Scotland which seemed semi-permanent in 2015 now seems vulnerable. If it had not been for the Conservative gains in Scotland things would have been much worse for them. In England and Wales the Conservatives lost a net 22 and 3 seats respectively while Labour gained 21 and 3 respectively. The changes in the proportion of votes for the main parties compared to 2015 were Conservatives: +5.5%; Labour: +9.5%; Lib Dems: -0.5%; SNP: -1.7%; Greens: -2.1%; UKIP: -10.8%.

At the start of the campaign on April 18, Labour were polling twenty points behind the Conservatives and so almost twenty points were gained during the seven weeks of the campaign. The voting pattern was also still overlaid by Brexit allegiances.

Another consequence of the extraordinary Labour surge is that it has halted and thrown into reverse a two decades-long decline of the Labour vote; Labour’s vote share in General Elections since 1997 has been 1997: 43.2%, 2001: 40.7%, 2005: 35.2%, 2010: 29%, 2015: 30.4%, and 2017: 40.2%. Moreover, the Blair landslide of 1997 was achieved with the support of the Murdoch press and the establishment in general, whereas the Corbyn surge was achieved despite the total hostility of the Murdoch press and the establishment in general.

Clearly something very special has happened this year and it is necessary to understand what has brought about such an extraordinary turn of events. Section 1 surveys the situation that existed in the approach to the calling of the election; Section 2 looks at the Labour surge during the campaign; and Section 3 situates the current conjuncture of political parties in the overall structure of British politics.
1: BREXIT, AUSTERITY AND TORY DOMINANCE: THE LABOUR WINTER

It was widely expected that in Jeremy Corbyn’s first national test in front of the electorate – the local government elections in 2016 – Labour under Corbyn’s leadership would be severely punished by voters. As it turned out, outside of Scotland and Wales, Labour’s vote in England held up and equalled the performance under Ed Miliband in 2012, the last comparable elections, when the party was at the height of its popularity. This forestalled the long planned leadership challenge, premised on the expectation of poor electoral performance and bad poll ratings. This came about subsequently with the result of the EU referendum which plunged the Labour Party into a damaging period of infighting while the Conservatives enjoyed a period of relative unity after the years of division over Europe.

The effect on the polls of the EU referendum and the Labour leadership challenge is shown in Figure 1 in the simultaneous rise and decline of Conservative and Labour poll standing respectively in the period following the EU referendum on June 23, 2016 and the calling of the General Election on April 18, 2017. Also shown is the period after the calling of the General Election where it can be seen that there is a reversal of the previous trend with a spectacular rise in Labour’s standing combined with a peak and subsequent decline in Conservative poll standing. The clear ascent of the Lib Dems and decline of UKIP in the period from June 23, 2016 to April 18, 2017 are also readily apparent.
From this it can be concluded that broadly speaking, there were two camps in British politics which could be discerned according to the support for or opposition to May’s hard Brexit. In the hard Brexit camp stood the Conservatives and UKIP; in the soft Brexit/Remain camp stood Labour, Lib Dems, SNP and Greens. Moreover, the movement in the distribution of votes was taking place primarily within the camps as opposed to between the camps: UKIP support was haemorrhaging to the Conservatives and Labour support likewise to the Lib Dems in the period from June 23, 2016 to April 18, 2017. In the period from April 18, 2017 onwards, the haemorrhaging of support from UKIP to the Conservatives accelerates while the haemorrhaging of support from Labour to Lib Dems is thrown into reverse. This period of the rapid ascent of Labour during the election campaign proper – the Labour spring – is surveyed in detail in Section 2.

Returning to the period June 23, 2016 to April 18, 2017, the simultaneous rise and decline in Conservative and Labour poll standing respectively, was particularly borne out by the by-election results following the leadership challenge, in particular in Copeland and Stoke-on-Trent Central on February 23. In Copeland, UKIP’s share of the vote was cut by 9 percent and the Tories vote share increased by 8.5 percent, whereas the Lib Dem vote share went up by 3.8 percent while Labour’s vote share was cut by 4.9 percent. In Stoke-on-Trent Central, UKIP leader Paul Nuttall was widely expected to take the seat as the UKIP vote had surged by 18.5 percent in 2015 and the constituency had voted strongly for Brexit in the EU referendum. Therefore UKIP was better placed to take the seat from Labour than the Tories. In the
event, UKIP’s vote increased by just 2.1 percent while the Tory vote share also increased by 1.8 percent, Labour’s vote share decreased by 2.2 percent and the Lib Dems vote share increased by 5.7 percent.

The Copeland result was the first time in thirty five years that the party in government had taken a seat from an opposition party in a by-election. The main issue in the by-elections was of course Brexit, which was the signature issue of the new government under Theresa May – and was of course the issue that the signature issue of the new government under Theresa May – and was of course the issue that the Labour leadership was seen to be weakest on. As far as the remain camp is concerned the most anti-Brexit force was the Lib Dems, whilst Labour’s leadership were in the process of making concessions on the issue.

Figure 1: Opinion polling in the run up to the 2017 General Election based on averaging the last ten polls. (Blue: Conservatives; red: Labour; purple: UKIP; orange: Lib Dems; yellow: SNP; green: Greens)
THATCHERISM MARK 2
On becoming Prime Minister, Theresa May at first seemed to acknowledge the large anti-establishment component of the leave vote in the EU referendum and the rhetoric seemed to project the *just about managing* to the front of governmental concerns. The architects of the Tory austerity project had been dispatched from the cabinet, and there were signals of acknowledgement⁴ that austerity had been storing up long term problems. However, it soon became clear that the spin around relaxation of austerity was woven pretty thinly. To understand this it is necessary to examine how Brexit relates to the overall economic project of British capital.

Withdrawal from the European Single Market seems irrational. Modern production requires a scale of market far larger than an individual national economy except for a small number of notable exceptions. Withdrawal from the Single Market will inevitably lead to job losses and lower standards of living. The largest producers will inevitably be the most severely hit by withdrawal from the Single Market – this is why the negative effects are being felt first among such sectors as car makers, large scale manufacturers and financial institutions. Sectors that are dominated by large scale capital, such as car production and banking are scaling back their investment plans even before negotiations with the EU commence⁵.

The consequences of the Brexit vote, and threat to leave the Single Market, are already leading to downward pressure on living standards, which will intensify. The UK economy already faces considerable problems [5], which
are being expressed via the inflation consequent upon the devaluation of the pound after the EU Referendum. This inflation will inevitably intensify during 2017, putting downward pressure on real wages.

However, the withdrawal from the European Single Market has contradictory aspects. While in general it is irrational, the cut in living standards is the aim of the Tory Brexit project. The calculation of the Tory Brexeters is that by this reduction in living standards a large transfer of resources into profits will take place and the British capitalist economy will be revitalised on that basis. Britain will become a low tax low social security country – a further twist downward of the Thatcherite spiral. As the trade unions and labour movement are an obstacle to such an assault on living standards, so they must be further weakened. In this sense, withdrawal from the Single Market is the continuation of the austerity project.

So why did Theresa May shock everybody by calling the General Election, given the Brexit negotiation clock was already ticking after the passing of the EU Notification of Withdrawal Act on March 13? A hint may be seen in the fact that Sir Ivan Rogers, the former Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the European Union, has said diplomats had told him they were unwilling to allow the UK access to the single market for preferred sectors, without the country accepting the authority of EU law – something the Prime Minister has already pledged to break free from. The outlook warning signs are already becoming apparent. In two years’ time, they would be even more apparent with a general election looming in 2020 and an economic situation which could be much
more disadvantageous to the government than the situation of the Labour winter. May went sooner rather than later because the situation as it presented itself was more favourable than the situation anticipated in 2020.

Also, given the ever-deteriorating outlook and the commanding opinion poll lead of the Conservatives over Labour at that time, and of Theresa May over Jeremy Corbyn, and the necessity to plough on with the austerity agenda free of the restrictions contained in the 2015 manifesto, she will have hoped to lock in a significant parliamentary majority and also to subject the Labour leadership to a humiliation and perhaps provoke a third Labour leadership contest.

2. WHAT LIES BEHIND THE LABOUR SURGE?

The extraordinary progress of the 2017 general election campaign revealed similarities and differences with more widespread developments on a European level. As Gary Younge [9] has written:

In 2009 the Greek Socialist Party, Pasok, entered the government with 44% of the vote; by 2015 it was down to seventh, with just 5%. The party’s demise coincided with, and was arguably precipitated by, the rise of the more leftwing Syriza, which went from 5% and fifth place to 36% and government within the same period. This dual trajectory gave rise to the term Pasokification: the dramatic decline of a centre-left party that is eclipsed by a more leftwing alternative. A word
was needed for it because there’s a lot of it about. Earlier this month the French Socialist party came fifth in the first round of the presidential election with just 6% of the vote, while the hard left won 20%; back in 2012 the Socialists came first with 28% and went on to win the presidency. In Holland the PvdA, the mainstream social democratic party, won 6% in March and came 7th while the Green Left coalition won 9%; back in 2012 the PvdA came second, with 25%.

The Tories at first attempted to portray the election as a contest between Theresa May representing strong and stable leadership and Jeremy Corbyn who would be the leader of a coalition of chaos. In reality, this would be no comfort for Corbyn’s detractors within the Labour Party. Business Insider [10] reported on a poll carried out for them which found that voters were more likely to vote for Labour led by Corbyn than led by Tony Blair, Ed Miliband, Yvette Cooper or Sadiq Khan. The conclusion that can be drawn here, and which was spectacularly confirmed by the quantum leap in Labour’s fortunes in the General Election, is that the ‘Pasokification’ in Britain refers to the Blairite wing of social democracy, while the Corbyn leadership represents the insurgent force on the left.

Their campaign narrative was that the election was all about Brexit, was called because of the difficulties being presented by parliament to the progress of Brexit, and that a resounding victory with an enhanced majority would deliver the Prime Minister a strong hand in the Brexit negotiations. Nothing, in fact, is further from the truth. Jeremy Corbyn delivered the government an unobstructed path by announc-
ing that Labour would vote to trigger article 50 whatever the result of the vote on the commons amendments.

THE LABOUR SPRING
Labour started the election campaign a long way behind in the polls [12, 13], and with fears that they were one of the main parties haemorrhaging votes from their 2015 general election result [10], and with the main beneficiary of changes in voting intentions since 2015 being the Conservatives [11].

The local elections held on May 4, 2017 resulted in the Conservatives gaining 563 seats and control of eleven authorities, and Labour losing 382 seats and losing control of seven authorities [16]. The start of the campaign was therefore progressing according to plan as far as the Conservatives were concerned [12].

Upon the publication of the election manifestos it was instantly apparent that Labour had taken the policy high ground with virtually immediate gains in the polls with YouGov showing the Conservative lead cut to 9 percent. On the weekend of 20/21 May, polls showed the Conservatives on between 44 – 46 with Labour on 33 – 35 percent [18, 19, 20], and one poll carried out in Wales [21] put Labour ahead by 10 percent. Jeremy Corbyn’s YouGov [22] net positivity rating had improved from -23 on 18 April 2017 when the general election was called, to +22 on 21 May 2017, and YouGov [23] reported that the public had given Labour’s manifesto policies a much more positive reception than Conservative policies. By May 25 a YouGov poll [24] put Labour just 5 percent behind the Tories with two weeks of further campaigning left [13]. By May 29 the final Survation poll [26] for Good Morning Britain had La-
Labour just six points behind with ten days of campaigning left. Of course it had always been the intention of May’s cabinet to use its commons majority to drive forward the austerity programme unencumbered by coalition partners as David Cameron had been, despite the softening rhetoric delivered in May’s speech on moving into number 10. It has become increasingly clear that the Conservatives under Theresa May were intent on a qualitative further deepening of the austerity drive. This became explicit in the election manifesto with the abandoning of the triple lock on pensions, the axing of free school lunches, the abandonment of universal winter fuel allowance, etc.

It was also apparent that the Tories had made major errors in the formulation of their manifesto. Just four days after the launch of the Conservative Party manifesto it was immediately clear that the centrepiece social care policy was widely being dubbed a ‘dementia tax’, so that a so-called ‘extraordinary U-turn’ was already being performed by the Prime Minister during her introduction to the launch of the Welsh Conservative manifesto. Even the hard line Tory press could not hide the fact that a major political misjudgement had been made [27]. The so called U-turn was clearly forced by the tightening of the conservative lead in the opinion polls [28, 29].

Furthermore, on May 24 it was reported that they had started a retreat on their published £60 million for free primary school breakfasts [30]. By May 25 the Telegraph’s Tim Wallace [31] was reporting that according to their Business tracker a majority of small businesses were hostile to the Conservative manifesto, and that the Tory stance was even too extreme for some UKIP candidates.
Figure 2 shows a representation, using the results of a series of YouGov polls, of Labour’s advance from a predicted Conservative landslide on April 19 towards a hung parliament\(^1\). The final data set is taken on May 19 showing the Conservatives on 44 percent and Labour on 35 percent. The 2015 General Election result is shown to the left of the figure in grey. The horizontal distance between the 2015 result and the Conservative poll share in the 2017 series indicates the effect of the transitioning of UKIP votes towards the Conservatives during 2017. In the 2017 series the reversal of Labour’s fortunes in the local elections can be clearly seen in the loop performed around the local elections held on May 4 in the sub-series April 28 – May 12.

Figure 2: Figure reproduced with the kind permission of Gareth Nicholas.
Despite the Conservative attempt to make the general election about Theresa May’s political stature and suitability to conduct the Brexit negotiations, contrasted with Jeremy Corbyn’s weak and chaotic leadership, both the Conservative Party as a whole and Theresa May personally were seeing an ineluctable slide in poll standing from a position of dominance to a position of precariousness. By June 5 there were even widespread calls for the Prime Minister’s resignation.

The weakest element of Labour’s manifesto was the approach to Brexit. Whilst the position of guaranteeing the existing rights of EU nationals currently residing in the UK is correct, the wording of the position on the Single Market and Customs Union is enigmatically vague. It states that following the EU referendum result free movement will automatically come to an end, seeming to automatically rule out continued membership of the Single Market and Customs Union, whilst also saying that the maximum amount of access to the single market would be sought in the negotiations in order to protect UK jobs, and that the level of immigration will be determined by the needs of the economy. Whilst infinitely more progressive than the Tory approach to Brexit, the approach shares the same delusion – that the benefits of the Single Market and Customs Union can be retained without the obligations such as freedom of movement.
TERRORIST ATTACKS

It might have been anticipated, following the terrorist attack in Manchester on May 22, that Labour’s forward march in the polls would be halted and sent into reverse as the Tories concentrated their campaign focus around security. However, even as late as May 31 polls were still reporting Labour advances. Labour was also either gaining a significant lead, or closing the gap among some demographics such as the LGBT community; among women (Figure 3 left); among remain voters (Figure 3 right); and among young people.

A second terrorist attack occurred at London Bridge/Borough Market on the evening of June 3, the same day that a poll conducted by Survation for the Mail on Sunday placed the Conservatives on just a one percentage
point lead – on 40 percent against Labour’s 39 percent.

While May’s response to the terror attacks was to continue her characterisation of Corbyn as being soft on terror, Corbyn’s approach was to both condemn the atrocities and to advance a notion that security policy was failing and there had to be a new approach, including in the framing of foreign policy [44].

The final week of campaigning inevitably took place against a backdrop of the aftermath of the terror attacks, with the Conservatives playing on Corbyn’s perceived weaknesses of i) not having previous front bench experience; ii) his association with the Irish republican movement, the Palestinian cause, and the peace and anti-war movements; iii) his voting record with respect to anti-terror legislation. And yet, the debate kept coming back to the cuts in police numbers under the Tories generally, but specifically on the watch of Theresa May as Home Secretary and then as Prime Minister [48]. Indeed, on polling day itself an unorthodox poll was published in Wired which was the first to put Labour narrowly ahead of the Conservatives [46].

THE FIRST LAW OF ELECTIONS

It is now possible to understand how Labour was able to reverse the polling trend from that which prevailed between June 23, 2016 and April 18, 2017 – the Labour winter – to one in which Labour was ascendant and the Conservatives beset by a series of crises – the Labour spring. This involves understanding what may be called the first law of elections – that is the dictum who sets the agenda dominates the debate. Between June 23, 2016 and April 18, 2017 the essence of British politics was Brexit. This dominated the
Transform concerns of the media as well as the parliamentary timetable\(^3\). Also, it was the weakest area of Labour’s policy with the leadership’s application of a three line whip in the vote on article 50 which led to shadow cabinet resignations and 52 Labour MPs voting against the whip, whereas the government benches exhibited spectacular unity\(^3\) with only one MP voting to defy the government.

However, by March, and especially after the budget debate\(^3\) and the continuing fall in wages [49, 50], rise in inflation and deterioration in GDP growth [51] the downside of Brexit was becoming more apparent and combining with the continuation and sharpening of the austerity offensive. Therefore, we moved into a situation where the government was defending seven years of rule underpinned by an increasingly unpopular austerity programme, with Labour leading on a radical new anti-austerity programme. Labour is increasingly seen to have the initiative in the economy while the Conservatives are seen to be pursuing the same tired old failing policies.

So, the 2017 General Election appears to open a new situation – one where for the first time the Labour Party has a left-wing leadership with a policy platform which breaks the mould of the neoliberal consensus and achieves a measure of success – and where the de-consolidation of the two party system over the past several decades seems to be undergoing a process of reconsolidation. These matters will be examined in the context of the underlying structure of British politics in Section 3.
3. THE STRUCTURE OF BRITISH POLITICS

The underlying structure of British politics has remained virtually unchanged throughout the twentieth century and endures well into the twenty first. This is summarised in Figure 4. It can be seen that British politics is characterised as consisting of periods of stable two party rule with the Conservatives being the dominant force, punctuated by transitions where an attempt is made to swap between the Labour Party and the Liberal Party/Liberal Democrats playing the role of the main opposition party, where the anti-Tory vote is fragmented between the Labour Party and one or several other parties.

![General Election History from 1900](image)

*Figure 4*
These sharp transitions occur in 1920 where Labour replaced the Liberals as the main opposition party; 1983 where the Labour Party split and the SDP/Liberal alliance was created; and 2010 where there was a Liberal Democrat surge sufficient to take them into coalition with the Conservatives. Thus, it can be seen that the Tories are the main party of British imperialism with a solid historically constructed system of class alliances leading to a rather solid electoral base. Throughout the period the Tories poll between 30 and 60 percent with their historical low point being the 1997 general election.

However, when one smoothes the curve of Tory election vote share it can be clearly seen that there is a long-run gradual decline in the Conservative vote from the mid to high 40s at the beginning of the twentieth century to the mid to high 30s at the beginning of the twenty first century in percentage terms. It must therefore be concluded that over the long run the Tory vote is solid but in gradual decline, whereas the anti-Tory vote is shared between Labour and Liberals – and now between a multiplicity of parties. The conjunctures where it was possible for Labour to form the government coincided with times of extremely low Liberal performance, whereas the conjunctures where Labour was far from challenging Tory dominance coincided with Liberal resurgence, and vice versa. It is therefore possible to say that the structure of British politics consists of a consolidated Tory vote which is undergoing long term gradual decline and a fragmented anti-Tory vote. As far as the British ruling class is concerned, a single main opposition party is only acceptable where there is no fundamental challenge in terms of its policy platform.
to the central conjunctural requirements of capitalist rule. This coincided with the Atlee, Wilson, Callaghan and Blair governments. However, the Foot leadership in the 1983 election was totally unacceptable in the context of the re-organisation of capitalism taking place in the 1980s – the neoliberal counter revolution pioneered by Thatcher and Reagan – and so this explains the resurgence of the third force, the Liberal/SDP alliance, later the Liberal Democrats. Similarly, following the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent stagnation, the primary policy posture of imperialist governments has been the austerity drive. Therefore, it was necessary to circumvent any radicalisation in the working class with another third party surge.

Ross [52] has argued that the objective material basis for the gradual long run decline of the Tory share of the vote is the decline of British imperialism relative to its competitors. It follows therefore that at some point there will occur a de-consolidation of the pro-Tory vote as the electoral bloc that the party represents starts to fall apart. This time the third party surge took the form of a generalised fragmentation with the insurgent nationalist forces Plaid Cymru and SNP, and the renewal of the Lib Dems under the Orange book philosophical orientation. However the fragmentation was not confined to the anti-Tory vote – the upsurge of UKIP indicated a fragmentation within the Tory vote itself. The emergence of UKIP is but the first instance of the de-consolidation of the pro-Tory vote. As British imperialism slips further behind its more dynamic competitors there will be further fragmentation on the Tory side, accompanied by more desperate attempts to prevent a consolidation on the anti-Tory side.
The significance of the Corbyn surge in this year’s General Election can now be situated in its historical context – whilst the Conservatives have seen off the first episode in the de-consolidation of its vote with the collapse of UKIP, it has miserably failed to i) subject the Corbyn leadership of the Labour Party to a decisive defeat, and ii) continue and deepen the fragmentation of the anti-Tory vote. In fact, in view of the diminishing vote share of the SNP, Plaid Cymru, the Lib Dems and the Greens at the 2017 General Election and the giant step forward in Labour’s vote it is clear that the anti-Tory vote has become less fragmented and more consolidated around a radical new Labour leadership. What is more, this leadership poses a deadly threat to the Tory austerity programme – now augmented by Brexit – designed to drive down wages and restore profits.

Given the now proven electability of Corbyn and hence of his policy platform and the consolidation of the anti-Tory vote behind Labour, we are entering the arena of new politics.

Michael Wongsam is an activist and writer on black history and politics
NOTES

1 Based on anecdotal evidence an unprecedented 56 – 70 percent of young people turned out to vote. Also, according to the Runnymede Trust [1] black and ethnic minorities continued the swing in their support towards Labour – an increase of 8.4 percent in 2015 followed by a further increase of 11.5 percent in 2017. Support for the Conservatives among this demographic decreased by 0.2 percent in 2015 and again by 0.3 percent in 2017.

2 Lord Ashcroft has conducted a poll of over 14,000 people who had already cast their vote [2]. Labour voters made their minds up much later in the campaign than those who backed the Tories. More than half (57%) of those who voted Labour made their decision in the last month, and more than a quarter (26%) in the last few days. Conservatives were more likely to have known how they would vote before the campaign started [2]. Voters who made up their minds towards the end of the campaign were more likely to vote Labour than Conservative.


4 Campbell Robb, Chief Executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation responding to the publication of a report from the IFS Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2016-17 to 2021-22 said [3]: ‘These troubling forecasts show millions of families across the country are teetering on a precipice, with 400,000 pensioners and over one million more children likely to fall
into poverty and suffer the very real and awful consequences that brings if things do not change. One of the biggest drivers of the rise in child poverty is policy choices, which is why it is essential that the Prime Minister and Chancellor use the upcoming Budget to put in place measures to stop this happening. An excellent start would be to ensure families can keep more of their earnings under the Universal Credit.’ Also, the IFS produced a briefing note [4] that warned of the consequences of the government’s reform of the school funding system, which includes replacing the 152 different local authority funding formulas with a National Funding Formula (NFF).

This is also why leaving the Single Market is such a deadly threat to the trade unions. In the private sector it is among large scale employers, both manufacturers and in the service sector, that the trade unions have their strongest membership. The still deeper cuts which will follow from the economic consequences of leaving the Single Market are also a direct attack on public sector unions [5].

Tom O’Leary [6] has argued that austerity has resulted in a decline in the level of wages, but not in a restoration in profitability: ‘...In 2012 the Tories commissioned, but were unable to implement the main measures of, the Beecroft Report [7], calling for the wide-ranging removal of workers right. So far, austerity has worked only to drive down wages. It has not driven up profits. New, more radical solutions will be attempted if a real recovery in profitability is to be achieved, facilitated by Brexit.’
7 Sir Ivan Rogers resigned in January 2017 complaining about the government’s ‘ill founded arguments and muddled thinking’. [8]

8 The Prime Minister has sought to rid the UK of the obligation to offer free movement for EU citizens, by saying that Britain will leave the single market and instead negotiate access for some UK industrial sectors as part of a free trade agreement.

9 In fact there was a Labour U-turn on the matter when as late as November 2016 Labour identified red lines which if not incorporated into the negotiating strategy would lead to them opposing the triggering of article 50. This had been abandoned by the new year (Hearse [11], p.161)

10 Opinium [15] have followed a representative community of voters since 2015 and have found a transition in voting patterns favouring the Conservatives and the SNP.

11 Opinium [16] averaged the Scottish sub sample of their political polls in 2017 and found that the SNP are on around 48% (down a couple of points from 2015), the Conservatives are between 27-28% (up around 13 points), with Labour far back in third on 14% (down 10 points).

12 Opinium [18] tried to determine the most important topics for voters. In mid-April their results found the Conservatives had been even more successful in dominating the early stages of the campaign than in the last general election.

13 This poll was conducted after the terrorist event in Manchester. The YouGov poll [25] published on May
25 sent the Tories into panic mode with David Davis suddenly pulling out of a planned event (Rob Merrick [26]) in central London on 26 May, with Theresa May away at the G7 summit.

14 For instance, if there had been an intention to preserve workers’ rights they could have accepted Labour’s amendment to the article 50 bill on this [11].

15 The homes of people receiving care could be sold, and for the first time, it would include pensioners who own their properties who receive care in their own homes – while cancer patients, for example, treated in hospital, receive free care. In the original publication there was no ceiling to the amount that could be levied against a recipient’s property (the idea of a cap on care costs was recommended by Sir Andrew Dilnot following a major inquiry for the previous coalition government – this was explicitly rejected in both the Tory manifesto and a briefing to journalists about the policy [29]). However, by the launch of the Welsh Conservatives manifesto she announced that there would be a cap on the cost of care, but would not reveal what the cap would be [34].

16 The Tory slide in the polls accelerated after announcing the profoundly unpopular ’dementia tax’. However, not including a cap at the launch of their manifesto, and then hastily announcing a cap following the furore does not constitute a U-turn. A U-turn would imply that they have abandoned the dementia tax altogether, which they patently have not done.

17 *Daily Telegraph* Business Tracker; an exclusive analysis of thousands of social media comments by small business
owners carried out by monitoring consultancy Impact Social found a substantial majority of those mentioning the manifesto and its pledges did not like what they saw.

Nicola Bartlett [32]

Using data from Electoral Calculus [33] Gareth Nicholas was able to produce a representation of the progress of the Tory-Labour contest according to polls conducted between 19 April and 19 May. It can be seen that there is a steady progress from a predicted historic Conservative landslide on 19 April to a slightly more modest landslide on 28 April just prior to the local elections on 5 May. The polls move back into the Conservatives favour during the local elections, after which they resume their steady march towards the territory of a hung parliament. The horizontal distance between the 2015 general election result and the 2017 series of polls demonstrates the effect of the translation of part of the 2015 UKIP vote onto the Conservative poll performance.

Jeremy Corbyn straightaway issued a call for her to step down, but even former advisor to David Cameron, Steve Hilton, was saying that she should not be seeking re-election over her security failings [35].

There seems to be deliberately vague wording, only alluding to ‘strong emphasis on retaining the benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union – which are essential for maintaining industries, jobs and businesses in Britain’ [36].

Sam Coates [37a] writing in *The Times* reported on a YouGov constituency by constituency estimate of the result predicted that Labour could gain 28 seats, while
the Tories would lose 20 seats, resulting in the Tories being sixteen seats short of an overall majority. Also on May 31 YouGov reported their latest *Times Westminster* voting intention survey [37b] which placed the Tories on 42 percent with Labour on 39 percent.

23 *Pink News* [40] reported on a voting intention survey from their own readers that Labour had support from 44 percent, while the Conservatives had the support of 32 percent.

24 The *Daily Telegraph*/ORB poll with fieldwork conducted 24 – 25 May showed that support among women for the Conservatives peaked in mid-May and declined thereafter, whereas support among women for Labour bottomed out in mid-May and increased thereafter (Figure 3), placing the Conservatives and Labour on 41 and 40 percent respectively.

25 The *Daily Telegraph*/ORB poll with fieldwork conducted 24 – 25 May showed that Labour’s lead among people who voted remain in the EU referendum increased from mid-May (Figure 3).

26 According to data from the government website registrations surged days before the deadline by almost twice the extent that occurred for the 2015 general election.

27 The Survation poll result contrasts sharply with a ComRes poll the same day, which suggests the Conservatives on 47 per cent and Labour on 35 per cent [42]. Opinium for *The Observer* also had the Conservatives on 43 per cent and Labour on 37 per cent [43].

28 Sadiq Khan issued a warning that the Metropolitan Police could lose as many as 12,800 constables as it seeks to make £400 million of savings to its budget,
and could lose as much as a further £700 million per year under changes to the formula for determining police budgets [45].

29 The poll was carried out by a company with no previous election polling record called Qriously. ‘Qriously said the data was collected via mobile phone between 4 and 7 June, and it surveyed 2,213 UK adults, including 1,905 registered voters and 1,279 likely voters. It claims to use machine learning to turn that into a representative sample. The findings gave an outcome of 41.3% to Labour and 38.5% for the Tories.’ [46].

30 This included the legal challenge to the authority of the government to invoke article 50 by using prerogative powers and the subsequent decision of the High Court which ruled that parliament had to invoke article 50.

31 Despite the well-known perennial Tory strife over Europe, only Ken Clarke defied the line of the government in opposing the Brexit bill.

32 The character of Mayism was clearly revealed in the spring budget when Philip Hammond announced rises in National Insurance Contributions for the self-employed in combination with tax giveaways for the rich and big business [48].

33 John Ross has produced a very detailed discussion of the Tory Party and the background to its long-run gradual decline [52]

34 The only time that the Liberals were able to form a majority government was when the Labour Party was in its formative period and had very low electoral performance.
REFERENCES


[6] Tom O’Leary; Austerity has only half worked. New, more radical measures will be attempted; Socialist Economic Bulletin; April 13, 2017; http://socialisteconomicbulletin.blogspot.co.uk/2017/04/austerity-has-only-half-worked-new-more.html

published-ahead-of-schedule-after-leak.html


[14] James Endersby, Priya Minhas; How voters have
switched since 2015; Opinium; April 29, 2017; http://opinium.co.uk/electorate-switch-allegiance-as-disillusionment-for-labour-lib-dems-and-ukip-leaders-grow/


[17] James Crouch; The Brexit election; Opinium; April 26, 2017; http://opinium.co.uk/the-brexit-election/

[18] Polls show UK’s Conservatives losing ground as policies set out; Reuters; http://uk.reuters.com/article/us-britain-election-poll-yougov-idUKKCN18G0XF; May 21, 2017.


[22] YouGov; https://yougov.co.uk/opi/browse/Jeremy
Corbyn?belboon=031b3908984b04d39d00589b, 4711849,subid=44681X1528610X4ec81a11764d53e7d50fdaf554e80770;

[23] Anthony Wells; Labour’s manifesto launch has gone much better for them than the Conservatives’; YouGov, May 25, 2017; https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/05/25/manifesto-destinies/

[24] Anthony Wells; Are the Tories losing ground or regaining it?; YouGov; May 25, 2017; https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/05/25/are-tories-losing-ground-or-regaining-it/


[27] Sam Bowman; The Conservatives were right to U-turn on social care but their plans still punish savers; The Telegraph; May 22, 2017; http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/22/conservatives-right-u-turn-social-care-plans-still-punish-savers/.


Freddie Whittaker; Conservatives backtrack on 60m for primary school breakfasts; Schools Week; May 24, 2017; http://schoolsweek.co.uk/conservatives-back-track-on-60m-for-primary-school-breakfasts/

Tim Wallace; Britain’s small businesses overwhelmingly reject Tory manifesto; The Telegraph; May 25, 2017; http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2017/05/25/britains-small-businesses-overwhelmingly-reject-tory-manifesto/?WT.mc_id=tmg share tw

Nicola Bartlett; UKIP candidate urges voters in Wakefield to back Labour’s Mary Creagh; The Mirror; May 26, 2017; http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/ukip-candidate-urges-voters-wakefeld-10507036

Electoral Calculus; http://www.electoralcalculus.co.uk

Rob Merrick; Theresa May waters down ‘dementia tax’ in extraordinary U-turn after poll lead slashed; The Independent; May 22, 2017; http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-dementia-tax-u-turn-pensioners-labour-corbyn-general-election-conservative-tory-poll-a7749001.html

Kirsty Major; Theresa May should resign over the London Bridge attack but not for the reasons Jeremy Corbyn says; The Independent; June 5, 2017; http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/jeremy-corbyn-says-theresa-may-should-resign-police-cuts-ter-
rorism-london-bridge-attack-not-for-this-a7773806.html?cmpid=facebook-post


[37a] Sam Coates; Poll firm predicts shock losses for Theresa Mays Tories at general election; The Times; May 31, 2017; https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/latest-general-election-poll-predicts-conservatives-will-lose-seats-02zfwl8lc.


[38] Patrick Scott; UK General Election: Five charts showing how Labour’s support is increasing; The Telegraph; May 31, 2017; http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/31/uk-general-election-five-charts-showing-labours-support-increasing/

[39] Simon Walters, Glen Owen; Theresa May goes nuclear as shock poll reveals Tories lead at just ONE PER CENT four days before the election: PM rips into Corbyn over his ‘chilling refusal’ to defend the UK with Trident – and says ‘he will take us back to the 70s’; Mail Online; June 3, 2017;

[40] Benjamin Butterworth; Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour has a huge poll lead over Theresa May’s Conservatives among LGBT voters}; Pink News; May 30, 2017; http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/05/30/jeremy-corbyns-labour-has-a-huge-poll-lead-over-theresa-mays-conservatives-among-lgbt-voters/

[42] Independent / Sunday Mirror June 2017 Voting In-

[43] Nadia Khomami; Theresa May approval rating sinks as Tory lead shrinks to six points; The Guardian; June 3, 2017; https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/03/theresa-may-approval-rating-sinks-as-tory-lead-shrinks-to-six-points

[44] Rashida Islam; A Change in British Foreign Policy, Needs A Change in British Leadership; Medium (Politics means politics); June 6, 2017; https://politicsmeanspolitics.com/britains-wars-feed-terror-in-the-uk-5e4e96b5828e


[46] Joo Medeiros; Final election poll gives Jeremy Corbyn the lead over Theresa May for the first time; Wired; June 7, 2017;

[47] Martin Belam; Seen the poll showing a Labour lead? It’s worth checking the methodology; The Guardian; June 8, 2017; https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/08/seen-the-poll-showing-a-labour-lead-its-worth-checking-the-methodology

[48] Tom O’Leary; Workers and the poor hammered as Hammond gets UK match-fit for Brexit; Socialist Economic Bulletin; March 13, 2017; http://socialisteconomicbulletin.blogspot.co.uk/2017/03/wo
ers-and-poor-hammered-as-hammond.html

[49] Tom O’Leary; Wages are falling; Socialist Economic Bulletin; March 16, 2017; http://socialisteconomicbulletin.blogspot.co.uk/2017/03/wages-are-falling.html

[50] Tom O’Leary; Fall in wages has much further to run; Socialist Economic Bulletin; March 24, 2017; http://socialisteconomicbulletin.blogspot.co.uk/2017/03/fall-in-wages-has-much-further-to-run.html

[51] Tom O’Leary; Britain isn’t booming it’s in crisis; Socialist Economic Bulletin; March 6, 2017; http://socialisteconomicbulletin.blogspot.co.uk/2017/03/britainisnt-booming-its-in-crisis.html

In order to understand the level of onslaught against women in the US under the Trump administration and in Congress, you need to know that this is not a new development. This war has been going on for decades. However, there have always been some limits to pushing a misogynist agenda due to either lack of control over both houses of Congress, insufficient control over all members of either political party in Congress (not all Republican members of Congress would support these laws) and the possibility of Presidential vetoes for the most odious legislation.

So for example, the attempts to redefine rape in the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act in 2010 and 2011, tabled by Representatives Todd Akin and Paul Ryan (the cur-
rent Speaker of the House), was unsuccessful for the most part as the public outcry was substantial, leading to some of those advocating this agenda losing their seats. There was a horrified reaction to Todd Akin claiming that women that get raped would not get pregnant because their body shuts down – this notion was rejected back in the 1700s in Europe. The attempt to revive an empirically and medically defunct and absurd argument was defeated. But three things must be noted: 1) this introduced into common discourse (and hence was an attempt at normalising misogyny) a new legal definition of rape that essentially was misogynist; that rape would only refer to a ‘forcible’ act by a stranger (so neither ‘date rape’ nor rape within a marriage or a relationship would legally constitute rape); 2) this was not only misogyny for its own sake, but relates to the rape exemption for Federal Funds for abortions further limiting funding for abortion to only incest and endangerment of the woman’s life; and 3) the impact on this obviously would be that a rape victim who would need Medicaid funds to obtain an abortion in these circumstance would not be able to get the funds and would be forced to carry to term. Alas, this is not the last word on rape from Republicans; following a series of high-profile rape cases at colleges and universities in 2015, Phyllis Schlafly reappeared having been reasonably silent for quite some time, putting the blame on women who dared to want higher education rather than their rapists. The woman who led the attack on the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s and who did not believe that marital rape exists, argued that too many women are on college campuses and competing against men and that was the cause of rape on campuses.

The normalisation of misogyny legitimises misogyny,
it becomes acceptable, or if not acceptable, something that is no longer outside the bounds of normal behaviour. This holds with treating women as sexual objects rather than human subjects and it holds also with insisting that women are asking for special treatment because they are women (like health care coverage for maternity and access to affordable birth control under their control rather than their male partners). This is like Ben Carson (the director of Housing and Urban Development; HUD) saying that LGBTQ people will no longer have special treatment by being protected from bigots in accessing HUD funds/loans to purchase properties obtained through HUD and/or housing opportunities. LGBTQ couples are not asking for special treatment, they are asking for protection from homophobes just as Black people are demanding protection from racism when getting a property from HUD or renting a property from a private landlord or buying a home. Since straight white couples do not suffer from racism or homophobia when renting a property, all that people are asking for is the same, not special, treatment.

WHY IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM BEFORE?

In many senses it is not different, the attacks on women’s rights (reproductive, employment, and healthcare) will continue. But there are some differences. I, for one, cannot remember a Presidential candidate being accused of routinely sexually assaulting women nor talking about it as though it was normal ‘locker room talk’ before. I remember strongly when a Supreme Court nominee (Clarence Thomas) was accused of sexual harassment and protected
and appointed to the Supreme Court (SCOTUS). I will never forget the manner in which Anita Hill was treated by Senators during the confirmation hearings in 1991. There were certainly accusations against Bill Clinton for sexual harassment and sexual assault, but these came out after he was in office (not prior to his election and certainly this is not a justification for Bill Clinton’s behaviour). So yes, there is continuity in many senses; the idea that powerful men are entitled to assault and harass women has not changed much.

However, now we are talking about a President whose perspective on women basically views them as objects available for his sexual pleasure along with his ‘right’ as a wealthy white man to act on his desires. While Trump had no negative views on contraception or abortion (as far as I can ascertain) prior to running as the Republican Party candidate for President, he jumped on board the anti-abortion ship like an old hand. Add to this, the fact that Jeff Sessions, the Attorney General, is not only a racist that supports private prisons, he was also unable to define whether Trump’s stated behaviour of grabbing women’s genitals without consent constituted sexual assault initially. It was only in his confirmation proceedings that he admitted that what Trump did constituted sexual assault.

Vice-President Mike Pence is not only Trump’s insurance policy against impeachment or assassination as many people are saying; the choice of Mike Pence brought fundamentalist Christians on board to vote for Trump for President during the election. In exchange for these votes, he appointed people to his cabinet that hold anti-abortion, racist and homophobic beliefs.
Mike Pence is the closest that fundamentalist Christians have come to the White House. If Trump actually manages to get impeached, the President-in-waiting is a man who is a fundamentalist Catholic who does not believe in access to contraception, abortion, voluntary sterilisation, women’s pay equality, and who thinks that abusing gay people using conversion therapy to make them straight is perfectly legitimate. To understand the dangers of Mike Pence as President, here are some of his efforts in his role as a Representative and as Governor of Indiana. As Indiana Governor, he opposed sex education. He opposed needle exchanges for addicts, vitiated funding for Planned Parenthood (which also does HIV testing) and led to an HIV outbreak in one town. He also signed a bill into law that opposed abortion on the grounds of foetal abnormality, on the grounds of sex, religion, nationality, etc. These restrictions may sound legitimate or justifiable to some, but they are not. When women go to have an abortion, they should not be asked why they want to have one, only that they want the procedure done. Those performing the procedure would have been subject to criminal liability of wrongful death (thereby forcing doctors to invade a woman’s privacy before they would undertake a procedure); of course there was the unnecessary foetal ultrasound and hearing of the foetal heartbeat 18 hours before the procedure (paid for by the patient), requiring the remains of foetuses to be buried or cremated, doctors having admitting privileges at local hospitals and the illegality of collecting foetal tissue (I guess unless the foetal tissue is cremated or buried which is now part of Texas Law after a recently amended Bill was signed by the Governor in June 2017;
expect other states to follow if this is not stopped).  

Pence, of course, gutted Planned Parenthood funding in Indiana. He wants Roe and Doe ‘consigned to the ash heap of history’. To add to the pleasure of Pence, when he was in the House, he opposed the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act at three different times when it was up for passage in the House of Representatives. His economic positions have also impacted women strongly. While a Representative, he opposed raising the federal minimum wage and while Governor of Indiana, he signed a law blocking local governments forcing business to raise wages or benefits above the federal minimum and repealed a law requiring construction companies on publicly funded projects to pay the prevailing wage. As people should know, women are overly represented in minimum wage work (but his problem seems to be with the notion of a minimum wage rather than women being the primary recipients of it).

So, what is different now is not only the election of Trump and the control over both houses of Congress by the Republicans that has upped the ante. At this point, the vast majority of Republicans are Christian fundamentalists and also believe the usual free market nonsense that is so dear to Republican politicians. While attacks on reproductive rights were predominantly waged at a state level using legislation and plebiscites with the possibility of provoking Supreme Court decisions (SCOTUS) and the use of pieces of failed legislation in the US Congress, we are seeing an acceleration of these attacks.

The elections of 2016 have heightened the situation whereby misogynists in political power have unleashed an attack where not only reproductive rights are being at-
tacked, but also women’s access to health care, employment, income, and potentially housing rights are facing attack. Trump’s appointments of fundamentalist Christians to positions of power, such as his Vice-President and as cabinet members, means that the voices of these people are no longer confined to the state and federal legislatures and they will use that power.

Among the first attacks against women in Trump’s Executive Orders was the reintroduction of the Global Gag Rule where countries receiving foreign aid from the US could not discuss the option of abortion, could not refer people to get one. Moreover, not only has Trump reintroduced it (it was eliminated under Obama; just as it has always been under Democratic Presidents), he has expanded it. So, it is not only international family planning institutes that are covered by the Gag Rule, but all international global health providers that are recipients of US foreign aid. Given that the Helms Amendment (1973) had already prohibited the use of foreign funds for abortion as a form of family planning you may be wondering why The Global Gag rule keep on being reintroduced by Republican Presidents. This is yet another example of how misogynist ideology finds its way into not only foreign policy but also impacts healthcare globally as acceptance of US Foreign Aid constrains health care provision not only for American women but that of countries overseas.
THE REPEAL OF THE PATIENT PROTECTION AND AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Both Trump and the US Congress moved against the ACA (also known as Obamacare). Shortly after being sworn in, Trump wrote an Executive Order which allowed the Department of Health and Human Services (controlled by Tim Price) and other executive departments and agencies the discretion to roll back the ACA. Congress also moved to repeal the ACA but rather precipitously, as they did not have a coherent replacement and their constituents protested vigorously. Many Republican members of congress represent low income areas especially in the Southern US and the elimination of the ACA would have significantly impacted their constituents who were furious and this was expressed strongly when congress members came home to speak with their constituents. This frightened enough Members of Congress to draw back until there was a replacement plan. Given the manner of the attack, it became clear that many of the protections for women and those with low incomes that were embodied in the ACA were under serious threat.

Again, the problem is not only Trump, it is the fact that there is a Republican-controlled Congress which is led by those that want to privatise and undermine social security, want to cut funding of Medicare (healthcare for the elderly and disabled) and Medicaid (provides money for healthcare for those on low incomes distributed from the Federal government to the states) and also who want to defund Planned Parenthood (PP), a major provider of
women’s healthcare as part of Medicaid funding, which will leave large numbers of women without access to routine health care, including contraceptives, routine cancer screening (breast, cervical), STD screening, and prenatal health care), and contraceptive provision.¹¹

In the space of a week after the 115th Congress met, the first round of the repeal of the ACA began. While there were attempts by the Democrats to maintain some of the positive provisions (e.g. access to affordable contraceptives, pregnancy care, maternity care and neonatal care including breastfeeding coverage, coverage for younger adults under age 26 (6 million people are covered) on their parents’ health insurance, coverage for people with pre-existing conditions (pregnancy is considered a pre-existing condition; 52 million people are identified as having pre-existing conditions in the US), coverage for children on Medicaid or Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) providing comprehensive healthcare for children (8,397,651 children are covered)¹², maintaining the Medicaid expansion which ensures coverage for the 11 million people with lower incomes, and protecting veterans’ health care through the Veterans’ Administration. However, they lost the votes on these amendments and as a result, if this access to free contraceptives is not maintained, 55 million women will no longer have access to affordable birth control.¹³ Kirsten Gillibrand’s amendment attempting to protect the gains for women’s healthcare (e.g. access to no-copay contraception on health insurance plans, access to healthcare during and after pregnancy, support for breastfeeding) lost on a vote in the Senate of 49:49 with only two Republicans willing to fight for the gains made for
women. This first attempt at repeal is instructive as it gave an indication of which portions of the ACA would face elimination. It has recently come to light that Trump is considering allowing all employers to eliminate free access to contraceptives on health insurance packages on the lines of a moral or religious exemption. This use of the conscientious objector clause would not only impact small religious-based organisations, but also universities and large publicly traded companies.

The defunding of Planned Parenthood is extremely serious and of course will hit women with low income the hardest. The Republican right (and that is most of them these days) has initiated the defunding of PP as part of the repeal of the ACA. In both proposed House and Senate Bills, PP would be defunded for at least one year. Planned Parenthood receives money through Medicaid funding distributed to states. The Planned Parenthood network is one of the primary providers of contraceptive care to women across the country, it provides routine health care such as pregnancy testing, cancer screening (pap smears, breast cancer screening), STD testing and support, for many women who cannot access routine reproductive healthcare.

While the ACA (also known as Obamacare) did not meet the requirements for developing a coherent provision of health care (having health insurance does not guarantee access to comprehensive health care unfortunately), there were some provisions that were extremely helpful enabling larger numbers of people to access some form of healthcare in the US. Clearly single payer healthcare in the US would be far preferable, but this was not even on the table
when the ACA was developed. Eliminating the ACA without a replacement would prevent access to basic healthcare for large numbers of people.

Round 2 of the repeal of the ACA and the attempt to create a ‘Trumpcare’ package to replace it led to the American Health Care Act of 2017 (AHCA) passed by the House on the 4th of May 2017 (HR 1628) by a majority vote of 217-213, and the Better Care Reconciliation Act of 2017 in the Senate (which since it is a reconciliation act a filibuster can be avoided with voting by simple majority) written by a committee of 13 male Republican Senators. For an indication of how this bill impacts women, the terms women and mothers only appear in the bill in the context of abortion and in calling for those on Medicaid to start work two months after birth of the child. Since the vast majority of people on Medicaid are in working families (80%) and 59% are actually working in low-paid employment, the proposed demand that you are in work seems simply gratuitous. Of those not in work, 35% are disabled or ill, 28% are taking care of home and family, 18% are in school, 8% are looking for work and 8% are retired.

The AHCA has come under heavy criticism for a number of reasons. The way in which health insurance regimes were organised under the ACA meant that healthy people paid more for their health coverage to ensure that those with chronic illnesses, the elderly, the disabled and those with pre-existing conditions could obtain coverage without discrimination under the Community Rating Provision. In the absence of this form of pooling, and the proposals of creating high risk pools, health insurance coverage for those that would routinely require healthcare would be ex-
tremely expensive and would put healthcare out of reach for many people. The House and Senate AHCA allow differential rates to be charged for the elderly and the elderly can be charged five times as much as younger people. Coverage for those with pre-existing conditions cannot be increased even with a break in coverage; but some states may allow insurance companies to not cover costs for certain conditions. The creation of high risk pools for those that actually will use their health insurance and state stability funds to reimburse insurance companies to ensure that insurers do not suffer large losses.\(^{21}\) This brings us to the issue of what defines necessary and essential healthcare and leaving it up to the various states to determine. The lack of clarity about what is considered an essential and necessary healthcare benefit in the House and Senate bills is deeply concerning; discussions of prenatal and pregnancy care being not essential because it only impacts women was raised by Republican members of the House.\(^{22}\)

Additionally, the Medicaid expansion of the ACA (which was not adopted by all states, specifically 19 Republican-controlled states did not adopt it) covered healthcare coverage based on household income alone; provided your income is 138% of the Federal poverty level.\(^{23}\) Both versions of the AHCA eliminate the Medicaid expansion; the Senate version doing so after 2021.\(^{24}\) Most important, is the change in the nature of Medicaid which is currently based on need and a Federal-State financing partnership and will, if the Senate bill passes, be based on a block grant which does not adapt to need; block grants have been shown historically to decrease access to social services.\(^{25}\) The importance of Medicaid and the Medicaid expansion covering
children, women and people of colour cannot be understated. In the 19 states where the Medicaid expansion did not occur, a coverage cap affecting 2.6 million people exists, primarily impacting those without children; but even still 25% of those not eligible for Medicaid in those states have children. Women access Medicaid in higher numbers due to our predominance in part-time low paying jobs; while the majority of people accessing Medicaid are white, people of colour and those on low incomes have benefitted significantly from the Medicaid expansion. So, fewer people will be covered and for a smaller amount of coverage to boot. Under the House version of the bill, it is estimated that 14-23 million Americans will lose access to healthcare; under the Senate version of the bill, 22 million Americans will lose access. According to House Speaker Paul Ryan, the issue is not that they will be pushed off health insurance, rather that they would choose not to buy it (the absurdity of this position given incomes in the US and inability to save for health insurance coverage is rather impressive).

At the moment, the Senate vote has been put off as 8 Republican Senators are opposing the bill due to a variety of reasons; some due to the impact on the elderly and poor, others due to the fact that it does not go far enough to replace the ACA. This means that they cannot win a vote in the Senate and the support for the bill is extremely low across the US.
THE ATTACK ON REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Reproductive rights refer to women’s decisions if, when, and how many children that they choose to have. As such, it refers to access to contraceptives, abortion and voluntary sterilisation as well as ensuring that women that do want to have children actually can make that decision given the context of societies that are influenced by racism and class discrimination, independent of religious constraints and actually are able to ensure that their children have access to care and support, healthcare, education, housing, food and clothing to sustain them. These are two sides of the same coin and cannot be separated from each other.

Since the SCOTUS rulings in Roe vs Wade and Doe vs Bolton (1973), attempts to undermine and limit women’s right to abortion have been constant. Roe and Doe legalised abortion and granted women a negative right to have one; it is a negative right as while the procedure is legal and access must be maintained (so that there must be hospitals and medical centres that provide the procedure) the federal government does not have the obligation to ensure that women can access this right through provision of funds.

Beginning with the Helms Amendment (1973) which prohibited US Foreign Aid funding to be used by family planning clinics internationally to discuss abortion and followed by the Hyde Amendment (1976) where federal funds were prohibited to be used for abortions, women’s rights to obtain an abortion have been undermined. The Hyde Amendment is passed on appropriation bills and impacts all federal funding for the purposes of abortion.
It affects those on Medicaid (unless states fund that directly), disabled women on Medicare, it impacts those on CHIP (healthcare for children) it impacts on insurance policies for federal workers, for those women serving in the military, it impacts Native American women as their health coverage is provided by the federal government, it impact veterans who get their health care from the Veterans’ Administration, it impacts on women in prison and of course, it impacts on women with low incomes that live in Washington DC. Given the Global Gag rule, this ideologically driven policy not only affects American women, but women that live in countries whom are recipients of US Foreign Aid.31

According to the Guttmacher Institute:

For Medicaid and CHIP enrollees, this means that access to affordable abortion care is dependent on where they live. Of women aged 15–44 enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP nationwide in 2015, 58% lived in the 35 states and the District of Columbia that do not cover abortion except in limited circumstances. This amounted to roughly 7.5 million women of reproductive age, including 3.5 million living below the federal poverty level.

In states that do not extend coverage beyond the limits of the Hyde Amendment, a woman whose income is at the Medicaid eligibility ceiling would need to pay nearly a third of her entire family income for a month for an abortion at 10 weeks of pregnancy.3 (An abortion at 10 weeks costs an average of $500, and the average Med-
icaid ceiling for a family of three for a month in these states is $1,566.)\(^{32}\)

The Hyde Amendment primarily impacts women of colour who are more often on Medicaid due to the racism and poverty that people of colour live with, in the US. According to Guttmacher, “Thirty-one percent of black women aged 15–44 and 27% of Hispanic women of the same age were enrolled in Medicaid in 2015, compared with 15% of white women, just over half of the 7.5 million women of reproductive age with Medicaid coverage in states that do not cover abortion were women of color.”\(^{33}\) Disabled women on Medicare cannot get abortion coverage and if they are also poor they are blocked through Medicaid as well.

So while we have become used to attempts in the US Congress to provide civil rights to zygotes, attempts to prevent working class women from accessing reproductive rights, attempts to eliminate funding for Planned Parenthood, attempts to eliminate different medical procedures for abortion, attempts to legislate against late term abortions, attempts to block fair pay for women, attempts to block domestic violence legislation, and blocking abortion coverage on health insurance plans, what is the difference now? At the state level, continual plebiscite campaigns to make abortion illegal in the state, attempts to introduce legislation to forceunnecessary requirements on doctors and abortions centres (TRAP laws) which required doctors working in abortion centres to have local admitting privileges and that the centres had to have full surgical hospital requirements, parental consent for minors, unnecessary
medical procedures, waiting times, gestational limits stopping abortions after a specific time period, state-mandated counselling, false information that abortions cause sterility or increase risk of cancer, state laws prohibiting use of Medicaid money to enable women with low incomes to access abortion rights.

And are elected state and federal officials the only problem? Certainly not, pressure from anti-abortion groups continues and both the Catholic Church and some Protestant church sects have waged an attack on women’s reproductive rights. Using conscientious objectors laws, they have attacked parts of the ACA requiring birth control coverage in health insurance plans. The actions of religious groups working to undermine women’s bodily autonomy have had significant impact upon accessing reproductive rights. Catholic hospitals routinely do not provide proper reproductive health care including emergency contraceptives, preventive contraceptives, will not provide for voluntary sterilisation and will only provide abortions if the mother’s life is at stake (sometimes). While there are other options available for this treatment in most places, there are areas in the US where Catholic hospitals are the only available place for treatment. The constant harassment at abortion clinics by faith-based groups, the murders of abortion providers, the attacks on the clinics and patients are long standing problems.

Certainly, attacks on women’s reproductive rights through legislative action and attempts at plebiscites continue on the state level. For example, In South Dakota, access to funds for abortion are limited only to the life of the mother in clear violation of the Hyde Amendment, there
have been constant attempts to make abortion illegal in the state and it is a constant struggle to maintain the limited access to abortion in the state. Unnecessary waiting times, unnecessary medical procedures compound difficulties of accessing a civil right; this is compounded by the fact that abortions are only done in one centre in the state where doctors travel in to do the procedure.

CONCLUSION
The problem that women are facing not only relates to reproductive rights of which many women are aware, it also relates to women’s access to healthcare, it relates to equal justice under the law for men and women (and for that matter between white men and everyone else), it relates to attempts to redefine rape, an understanding of what sexual assault constitutes. It relates to economic issues such as the fact that while equal pay legislation has existed for decades, women still earn less than men in the same jobs, they earn less in women’s traditional employment even using the same skills that men have, they do not have guaranteed paid maternity leave, they do not have access to free or affordable childcare, women are still over-represented in part-time minimum wage jobs and working several of them to ensure that they can still care for their families and homes.

Women’s inequality relates to the fact that women are more dependent upon their social services including their state pensions and social security (they still live longer than men, had lower wages, and social security is tied to lifetime income). Given that women’s income is still lower than men’s, that still holds.
As such, cuts to social security or its privatisation will undermine retired people’s plans, but will impact more strongly on women; women are also more dependent upon health benefits such as Medicaid. Cuts to Medicaid, cuts to children’s benefits (or the loss of healthcare for children) will hit the poorest hardest as they have to cover their children’s healthcare.

Susan Pashkoff is an economist and writer on US and gender politics.
NOTES
1  See http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/01/republican-plan-redefine-rape-abortion/
2  The idea was that women who were raped did not enjoy it and hence could not conceive. This was used as a defence against rape claims often in medieval period. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pregnancy_from_rape
7  Texas Senate Bill 8 which requires cremation or burial of all foetal tissue following an abortion and makes illegal the use of the safest and most common abor-

In Missouri, legislation is going through the State Congress and has the support of the Governor. This legislation will allow landlords and employers to discriminate against women that are using contraceptives or have had an abortion. See: http://www.newsweek.com/womens-rights.birth-control-abortion-missouri-discrimination-628538. If the law passes, it would certainly require physicians to violate the privacy of patients and an injunction would certainly be filed as it is a violation of constitutional rights of privacy for women and would cause medical practitioners to violate confidentiality. What the Missouri state legislators and Governors are probably hoping is that a SCOTUS decision could undermine the right of privacy and that clearly this would have an impact on Roe vs Wade which is based on the right of privacy unfortunately rather than the autonomy of one’s own body. If successful, this would open women’s private lives for scrutiny and impact upon access to housing and employment.

See Guttmacher Institute on anti-abortion ideology and foreign policy and health care: https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2017/06/when-antiabortion-ideology-turns-foreign-policy-how-global-gag-rule-erodes-health-ethics?gclid=CNb87uq63tQCFTEz0wodJrEHPg.

The Helms Amendment (1973) states ‘No foreign assistance funds may be used to pay for the perfor-
mance of abortion as a method of family planning or to motivate or coerce any person to practice abortions (http://www.genderhealth.org/the_issues/us_foreign_policy/helms/).

11 The lie that Planned Parenthood does abortions with federal funding is part of this attack; this is false, money for abortions on Medicaid is done through separate state provision of funds consistent with the requirements of the Hyde Amendment.

12 The numbers are enrolment numbers as of May 2, 2016, see, http://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/annual-chip-enrollment/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D.


15 The importance of the role of Planned Parenthood in provision of health care and reproductive care cannot be understated.

‘Medicaid is the single largest provider of reproductive health services to women of childbearing age. The program accounts for 75 percent of all public funding for family planning services. In 2015, more than 20 percent of all women ages 15 to 44 were enrolled in the Medicaid program.

Many women enrolled in Medicaid rely on specialized family planning clinics like Planned Parenthood for their health care. Six in ten women receiving
contraceptive care at a publicly funded family planning clinic consider that provider their usual source of health care, and for four in ten women, the family planning clinic is their only source of care (https://rewire.news/article/2017/01/13/congress-latest-attack-low-income-people/).

16 The Planned Parenthood network of clinics has wide reach throughout the country and other smaller clinics cannot replace its services if funding is withdrawn. It is an essential and critical component of family planning on the nationwide level in the US (https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2017/01/understanding-planned-parenthoods-critical-role-nations-family-planning-safety-net). Already some states have defunded PP and it is impossible that local centres (https://thinkprogress.org/abortion-providers-trump-presidency-144c37b5094e#.59e8gvdrr) will be able to cover for the loss of funding for PP (http://www.vox.com/identities/2017/1/12/14189500/defund-planned-parenthood-congress-paul-ryan-republicans).


20 For information of the work requirement to take up Medicaid

21 See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/

23 The Federal poverty levels (FPL) depend on the size of the family and relate to household income. FPL is used to calculate eligibility for Medicaid and CHIP in the context of health insurance in the US:
   - $12,060 for individuals
   - $16,240 for a family of 2
   - $20,420 for a family of 3
   - $24,600 for a family of 4
   - $28,780 for a family of 5
   - $32,960 for a family of 6
   - $37,140 for a family of 7

Eligibility depends upon being within 100-400% of FPL and in states with Medicaid expansion you need to be below 138% of FPL. In states that have not passed the Medicaid Expansion, if your income does not fall below 100% of FPL you will not qualify for Medicaid and CHIP.

24 For an examination of the impact of access to healthcare due to the Medicaid expansion portion of the ACA broken down by race, ethnicity and gender, see Rand Research Paper, ‘The Effect of the 2014 Medicaid Expansion on Insurance Coverage for Newly Eligible Childless Adults’ by Michael Dworsky, Christine

25 ‘Specifically, Medicaid and CHIP enrolment have helped to decrease disparities in health care coverage for children of color over time. In 2008, seven percent of non-Hispanic white children, ten percent of Black children and 19 percent of Hispanic children lacked health insurance coverage. However, by 2015 only four percent of both non-Hispanic white and Black children lacked coverage and eight percent of Hispanic children lacked coverage. Additionally a study of New York’s CHIP program that found enrolment in the program not only reduced pre-existing racial and ethnic disparities in access to care, but also, reduced unmet need and improved continuity of care. Currently, children of color are enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP at higher rates than white children, with roughly one in four white (26 percent) and Asian (25 percent) children covered by one of the two programs compared to over half of Hispanic (52 percent) and black children (54 percent)(https://www.cssp.org/policy/2017/Protecting-Medicaid-Equity.pdf).’

26 Ibid.


28 ‘Changes to Medicaid under AHCA would disproportionately affect low-income individuals and people of color for whom the program is a central source of coverage. Medicaid provides coverage to over half (54%)
of families with income below poverty and nearly four in ten (38%) of near-poor families, with incomes between 100% and 199% FPL (Figure 5). Moreover, it covers more than one in five nonelderly Hispanic, Black, and AI/AN adults. It plays an even larger role for children of color, covering nearly six in ten Hispanic (56%) and Black (54%) children and nearly half of AI/AN children (47%) (http://www.kff.org/disparities-policy/issue-brief/what-is-at-stake-for-health-and-health-care-disparities-under-aca-repeal/).


30 For Roe vs Wade and Doe vs Bolton decisions and later SCOTUS decision on abortion rights, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roe_v._Wade.

31 The Hyde Amendment is a rider upon Federal appropriations bills. Initially, Federal funds could only be used for abortion if the mother’s life was endangered. Under the Clinton Administration (1993), this was amended to allow Federal funds for abortion use in the cases of rape and incest. The Hyde Amendment had to be passed each time the federal budget was passed (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyde_Amendment). The most recent version (2017) HR7, entitled No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion and Abortion Insurance Full Disclosure Act of 2017 makes these prohibitions permanent, also prohibiting abortion provision in a federal building and by federal employees.
Qualified health insurance plans are no longer able to cover abortions as was formerly the case. See: https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/7.


34 As discussed above, Medicaid is federal money devolved to the states for use for health care and medical procedures for those with low incomes. In the case of abortion, and given the Hyde Amendment, each state has to cover abortions in the case of the life of the mother being endangered, rape and incest. One state only covers it in cases where the mother’s life is endangered in violation of the Hyde Amendment. See: https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/state-funding-abortion-under-medicaid.


In recent years, discussion about German politics has centred on Germany’s role in the Eurozone, or Chancellor Angela Merkel’s politics. The Economist, for example, has labelled Germany ‘the reluctant hegemon’ and Forbes magazine has declared German chancellor Angela Merkel the most powerful woman for five years running. More recently, the anglophone media has been lauding Chancellor Merkel as the saviour of Western liberalism in the wake of Donald Trump’s presidential victory and the Brexit vote. The media coverage and public debate represent a sea change from the mid-1990s and early 2000s when Germany – plagued by high labour costs and reform tie up – was regarded as the ‘sick man of Europe’.

While renewed attention has been given to Germany and its role at the European and international level, due to its aggressive insistence on austerity in Greece or Merkel’s unilateral move not to close the borders to Syrian and Iraqi refugees, the ensuing political fallout from these moments of crisis have frequently been overlooked, despite
bearing a cost for Merkel and Germany’s internal stability. The twin crises of the Eurozone and subsequent ‘refugee crisis’ have dominated German public discourse for nearly six years now, exposing lingering contradictions within the economic, as well as political, structure of German capitalism. Like its other Western counterparts, German parliamentary democracy faces growing problems of legitimacy, primarily expressed in the rise of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).

By illuminating and critically analysing economic and political tendencies of the last few years, we show that Germany has not been immune to the crises engulfing other EU states but rather is subject to similar dynamics. In this article, we aim to demonstrate how Die Linke’s inability to grow amidst the crisis is validly rooted not only in objective conditions – notably Germany’s exceptional position in the Eurozone crisis and the media bias against the party – but subjective ones as well. We ask, how do the current refugee crisis and the success of the far-right alter the strategic tasks of Die Linke? We do this by examining the rise of the AfD and the corresponding weakness of Die Linke along a series of contested fields – the economy, electoral and party politics, industrial relations, social movements, and ideology. The article concludes that Die Linke’s institutionalization as a parliamentary party has enabled the AfD to pose as a protest party which Die Linke once was. We conclude that after more than ten years of existence, Die Linke requires a repositioning as an organic part of the movements for social justice and against racism and neoliberalism.
TWIN CRISES AND POLARIZATION IN GERMANY

A brief overview of the German state’s labour market policies shows a picture of an increasingly polarized society. Contrary to perceptions of the German working class as a profiteer of the European crisis regime, Merkel has been presiding over an increasingly unequal society. Far from profiting from the crisis, workers in Germany have been subjected to similar measures since the 1990s which now serve as a template to restructure Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain amongst others.

Germany’s export-driven economy is pivotal to understanding the policies of wage repression. More than anything else, its export orientation is an export dependency on the rest of the Eurozone. Its total trade surplus with other Eurozone countries amounts to €54.6 billion while Germany’s trade deficit with Russia, Libya, Norway and China amounts to €43.4 billion.1 As pointed out by Heiner Flassbeck and Costas Lapavitsas, the introduction of the Euro has acted mainly as a de facto currency devaluation, thus cheapening German exports and turning said economy into ‘the driver of the Eurozone crisis’.2 This has been coupled with a policy of wage restraint by several German governments since the 1990s. Consequently, this has depressed household consumption and turned Germany into ‘a zombie economy at home’.3 In 2013, real wages were lower than in 2000. Dustmann et al. show how only the wages of the 85th percentile – the top earners – rise continuously while the median wage begins to drop from the mid-2000s onwards.4 Today more than eight million
employees or 23.1 per cent of the total workforce are classified as low-income earners. Estimates see more than 6.9 million Germans unable to pay back their debts in the near future. Criticisms of Germany’s policy of wage repression are growing louder, with the EU Commission criticizing the fact that wages have fallen even further behind productivity gains during the Eurozone crisis.

Unfortunately, the introduction of a legally-binding cross-sectoral minimum wage of 8.50 Euro at the beginning of 2015 has failed to act as a counterweight. What was meant to boost the wages of 3.7 million workers is, on closer inspection, a red herring. The number of workers who will not receive the minimum wage amounts to 2.5 million, which is nearly nine percent of the total labour force. According to the ver.di trade union, it excludes under 18-year olds, interns, trainees, and the long-time unemployed. Thus, the introduction of the minimum wage has not been able to tackle the rampant and growing problem of old-age and child poverty, as well as wage and wealth inequality.

At the same time, Germany is experiencing a so-called jobs miracle with nearly full-employment. Yet, it has been built on precarious employment and deregulated labour markets: a product of the SPD’s Agenda 2010. Between 1998 and 2008 the number of workers on full-time contracts decreased by 800,000 while the number of workers in precarious employment grew by 2.4 million. By 2012, ‘atypical’ workers made up 21.2 per cent of the German labour force. Today more than 2.6 million people work second jobs. Thus, it is unsurprising that the social question (child poverty, old-age poverty, wealth inequality etc.)
features prominently in public debates in Germany.

It is against this economic backdrop that Chancellor Merkel decided not to close the border to Syrian and Iraqi refugees, the greatest movement of people in Europe since World War II. While Merkel received accolades for her seemingly generous decision to open the borders in the international press, a possible explanation could be attributed to German employers’ search for cheap labour in times of severe labour shortage. As soon as these refugees had entered the country, Germany’s employers demanded newcomers be exempted from the minimum wage. In doing so, Germany could experience a new economic miracle.9

Retrospectively it can be argued that Merkel has had to pay a high cost for her gamble. For one, it exposed enormous financial strains on municipalities, strains that are primarily accentuated by the Schuldenbremse (literally ‘debt break’), monetarist constitutional provisions on the federal and Land level that forbid local governments from incurring new debt. The Schuldenbremse and Germany’s dogmatic adherence to the policy of Schwarze Null (“zero spending”) amounted to a ticking time bomb, as infrastructure such as roads, schools and other buildings were and remain close to collapse. Even from a neo-classical point of view, such a debt ceiling makes little sense given the fact that the ECB recently set its interest rates to 0.0 per cent.

The lack of financial and other resources engendered resistance from the right. In November 2015, 215 mayors wrote a letter to Merkel urging her to reintroduce immigration controls and warning of an imminent financial collapse.10 This gave disproportionate voice to racists and other reactionary forces under the cloak of financial prudence. Thus,
the right-wing CSU – the CDU’s sister party in Bavaria could place itself at the helm of questioning the debt ceiling on a reactionary basis\textsuperscript{11}. Surveys following the letter revealed that a burdening of public budgets ranked first among refugee-related fears (77\%), followed by fears of increased competition in the housing market (72\%), more crime (62\%)\textsuperscript{12}.

The intolerable conditions in the labour market and austere welfare systems could now be blamed on Syrian and Iraqi refugees. The refugee crisis is not the root cause of growing social pressure, yet it has acted as a mediator for the venting of anxiety and frustration with the economic policies of the SPD-CDU coalition. It would be a mistake, however, to view the emergence of the far-right as an automatic consequence of discontent with the socioeconomic status quo: its rise is, among other factors, the mirror image of Die Linke’s failure to be perceived as a protest party opposed to the establishment. Thus, the AfD became the prime beneficiary of this twin crises and ensuing social and economic polarization. This trend has become evident in the recent state election in North Rhine-Westphalia, where the AfD managed to poll well above its result of 7.4 per cent in de-industrialized constituencies of the Ruhr, a traditional SPD stronghold. It has effectively capitalized on fears that newcomers will burden welfare systems and lead to a race to the bottom-effect in the labour market. Meanwhile, the solidarity movement with refugees and the much-celebrated Willkommenskultur (“welcoming culture”) that saw roughly 10 per cent of the German population involved in solidarity work with refugees, has largely disappeared from the public imaginary and/or the political field\textsuperscript{13}. 
LEFT RESPONSES TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS

Within Die Linke, mixed responses have emerged to the current refugee crisis. On the one hand, the reformist wing of the party has rhetorically positioned itself on the side of Angela Merkel’s refugee policy, by correctly insisting that open borders are a non-negotiable principle for the left. But at the same time, rhetorical support for open borders has been subordinated to short-term political considerations. Nothing better exemplifies this ambivalence than Bodo Ramelow, who heads up a Linke-SPD-Green coalition in Thuringia. While Ramelow had promised to halt deportations during the harsh winter months, he has backtracked from this decision a year later. He proposed bringing in 2,000 refugees from the provisional refugee camp at Idomeni at the Greek-Macedonian border a year ago, only to add that the state’s employers are imploring him to do so due to the existing labour shortage.

But elements of the party that have rightly emphasized that welcoming refugees should not go hand in hand with further cuts have also failed in providing an adequate response. Oskar Lafontaine and Sahra Wagenknecht, for all their principled opposition to softening the party’s line on coalition governments and foreign intervention, have provided a technocratic response by labelling the AfD’s electoral success a vote against neoliberalism. Lafontaine has a rather unflattering past regarding immigration. In 1991, he moved the SPD into signing away the drastic curtailment of the right to asylum along with the CDU. He has joined the current debate by demanding immigration
controls and criticizes Merkel’s handling of the refugee crisis from a standpoint of ‘limited capacities’. His motives for doing so have less to do with racism and more with a reformist Keynesian outlook that sees mass uncontrolled migration as benefiting capital as it lowers wages (a position also expressed by Bernie Sanders at the beginning of his campaign)\textsuperscript{17}. Accompanying this is the fear that, while being under pressure from mass immigration, workers will inevitably turn to the right. As Oskar Lafontaine stated: ‘I believe [racism] has to do with the fear of relegation on the social scale. When these fears, combined with fear of marginalization are present, this leads to certain social layers responding with the marginalization of others’\textsuperscript{18}. His partner, Sahra Wagenknecht, current co-chair of the party’s group in the Bundestag shares these opinions. While listing demands to back Germany’s ‘welcoming culture’ with an increase in social spending and taxing the rich, she has called for the deportation of asylum seekers if those were found to be involved in the Cologne sex attacks\textsuperscript{19}. Wagenknecht spoke of \textit{Gastrecht} – one’s ‘guest right’ – that ought to be stripped in the case of a criminal offence, running against the long-standing consensus on the German left that the right to asylum is inalienable.
AFD AND PEGIDA: FROM ELITIST EUROSCEPTECISM TO PLEBEIAN MOBILIZATION

The rise of the AfD is a symptom of the most significant political polarization in Germany since the Weimar Republic. It is a clear sign that, far from being insulated from the effects of economic crisis, Germany is now experiencing elements of political polarization affecting the rest of the continent. Yet unlike the Weimar Republic, a similar growth of the radical left does not couple the growth of the far-right. The AfD has become a magnet for disillusioned voters from nearly all established parties, polling especially well among workers, the unemployed and non-voters. In the recent NRW elections, almost half of the AfD’s votes came from the Pirate Party, the internet-themed party hailed as the ‘new’ protest party during the previous election. The far-right received an almost equal number of votes from both the CDU and SPD (50,000 and 60,000 respectively), whereas only 1.6 per cent of its share came from former Linke voters.

The AfD was founded as a Eurosceptic party by a group of neoliberal academics who argued that ‘bailing out the Greeks’ in the name of preserving the Euro was bad for the German economy in 2013. By consciously moving into a grey area between right-wing conservatism and neo-fascism, campaigning against feminism, arguing for stricter immigration controls, and ending ‘red-green experiments’ in education in favour of traditional elitist models, the party could tap into the widespread feeling among the Christian Democrat constituency that Merkel had moved
the CDU too far into the centre. Like Donald Trump, the AfD offered a model of a conservative utopia free of the hold of ‘political correctness’, while proposing measures like stripping recipients of unemployment benefits of the right to vote. Despite espousing an extreme neoliberal and business-friendly worldview, the AfD has recently seen the emergence of a social demagogic wing within it. So, whereas the AfD campaigned on a platform of law and order in more affluent areas in recent state elections, it concomitantly claimed to stand for ‘the little guy’ in working class neighbourhoods.

The emergence of the AfD and its entering 13 out of 16 federal parliaments has shaken Germany’s post-World War II edifice. The AfD is not your ordinary right-wing party; since its evolution in 2015 it has seen a radical neo-fascist wing as well as various right-wing populist elements seek control of the party machine. Yet unlike a classical neo-fascist party, the AfD does not draw much of its ideological impetus from the Nazi past (even though there are Nazis in its ranks) but rather from the ideological evolution of the ‘extreme centre’. In doing so, the new party has not only created a major upheaval within the governing CDU – which has traditionally seen its raison d’etre as absorbing all emergent right-wing parties – but has also represented a challenge for Die Linke. While the latter has been unable to turn widespread discontent with established politics into an electoral advantage, the AfD has proven highly capable of mobilizing non-voters, and is poised – should current trends sustain themselves – to enter the Bundestag in September 2017. This would mark the first time in the history of the Federal Republic that such a political formation
gains representation in the national parliament.

While back in 2013 it toyed with far-right themes, the relation of its leadership to these political forces was mostly tactical in nature. The party thus openly identified with the British Tories upon entering the European Parliament in 2013. But its conscious ideological ambiguity proved a magnet for many far-right and even fascist activists. These saw the opportunity to enter the mainstream. Ultimately, the leadership around economics professor Bernd Lucke was replaced by a coalition of far-right and national-conservatives who embraced a politics of the extreme racist right. Under Frauke Petry the party moved further to the right, and then she saw herself axed by an even more extreme right-wing tendency in April 2017.

Arguably, we are now dealing with a quasi-fascist formation. A first step in this direction was the de facto merger with the Islamophobic PEGIDA-movement (‘Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident’). PEGIDA emerged as a self-proclaimed citizens’ movement against ‘the threat of Islamization’ at the end of 2014. Its weekly demonstrations counting tens of thousands infamously feature tirades against the liberal establishment and the Lügenpresse (‘lying press’). 71 per cent of those surveyed cited a ‘general discontent with politics’ as their main motivation for participating in the marches, with opposition to ‘religiously motivated violence’ and prejudice against migrants and asylum seekers ranking last (10.3 per cent) and third (31.2 per cent) respectively. Contrary to their self-perception as society’s underdogs, PEGIDA’s followers comprise overwhelmingly people with incomes above the average monthly income in Saxony. It thus is
the ‘the product of a nervous society’\textsuperscript{24} or an expression of an all-pervasive fear of social relegation and the economic squeezing of the middle classes. On the other hand, the \textit{de facto} programmatic convergence of mainstream parties ‘which have become agencies that govern […] rather than represent’ facilitates a plebeian posturing by parts of the middle classes against ‘those above’\textsuperscript{25}.

But growing social and economic insecurities do not suffice as explanatory factors for the rise of the AfD and PEGIDA. We would argue that the AfD is on the rise due to the existence of an accommodating hegemonic discourse of Islamophobia. Its rhetoric is pushing other parties to the right by way of imitation, or by implicit acceptance of its culturalized interpretations of problems that have social root causes. The chronic weakness and lack of challenge from the left have contributed in that respect. Since the summer of 2015, the AfD and PEGIDA have organically converged in a way \textit{Die Linke} and various protest movements of the left were never able to. In effect, PEGIDA has become the movement arm of the party, enabling the rise of Nazis like Björn Höcke – the current head of the party in Thuringia – who claims Europe is endangered by the reproductive habits of Africans.

Since 9/11 and even earlier, Islamophobia and the underlying idea of a ‘clash of civilizations’ have become a socially acceptable racism within German society. Thus, it is especially ironic that PEGIDA view Angela Merkel as a liberal multiculturalist despite it being she who proclaimed the ‘failure of multiculturalism’ back in 2010\textsuperscript{26}. That same year, Thilo Sarrazin – a former member of the \textit{Bundesbank}’s board of directors and prominent Berlin SPD official
published a book called Deutschland schafftsich ab (‘Germany abolishes itself’) in which he claimed that Turkish and Arab migrants were dumbing down Germany through higher birth rates. In turn, Sarrazin was hailed as a taboo-breaker even by some of his liberal critics while excerpts of his book were reprinted in BILD.

Consequently, it does not come as a surprise that PEGIDA – a mostly white-collar movement primarily motivated by anxiety and a sense of lack of political representation – should use the coded language of ‘Islamization of the Occident’ as its rallying cry to enter the mainstream. Besides warnings of ‘Islamic extremism’, PEGIDA makes use of the popular trope that ‘communism and fascism as two sides of the same coin’ and even arguing that the left and the Antifa are ‘fascist’. At the same time, their admiration for Vladimir Putin’s Russia – authoritarian, social conservative and culturally homogenous – also becomes evident within the AfD discourse structure while its youth wing embraces Putin’s United Russia Party through signing a memorandum of understanding with its youth organisation. Thus, it can be seen how Germany’s twin polarizations (though autonomous fields in their own right) interact and reinforce each other.

In the aftermath of the so-called ‘Cologne sex attacks’ on New Year’s Eve, racially-charged statements by SPD NRW interior minister Ralf Jäger who argued that ‘we will not allow groups of North African men to organize with the purpose of sexually humiliating defenceless women’ only gave the AfD/PEGIDA a boost. By then the entire political spectrum had started to shift rightwards with these events largely being framed as the result of ‘foreign ma-
rauding men harassing European women’. Even the previously multicultural Greens started to act as if they were courageous for being ‘ready to discuss the perpetrators’ origin’\(^{28}\). A wave of racist violence against refugee shelters ensued. In 2015, Germany witnessed roughly 1000 attacks on shelters compared to 199 in 2014\(^{29}\).

**UNDERSTANDING THE WEAKNESS OF THE LEFT**

The AfD’s rise has indeed acted as a wake-up call for *Die Linke*. There are many voices that say that the party has distanced itself from its voting base and complains of not being perceived anymore as an oppositional force\(^{30}\). Both Lafontaine and Wagenknecht have deemed the AfD’s electoral successes a ‘punishment’ for the established parties and have refused to call the AfD’s voters racist\(^{31}\). Many suspect that Wagenknecht – who in recent years has moved from being an ‘unrepentant communist’ to an admirer of West German ordoliberalism – is acting on the grounds of a purely electoral strategy. In the discussion forums close to the party, such as the *Neues Deutschland* daily, one can find numerous references to Didier Eribon, the French author whose recent autobiographical work *Returning to Reims* castigates the established parties of the French Left for abandoning the working class in favour of identity politics, thus leaving workers at the mercy of the Front National\(^{32}\).

But demands for ‘more radical demands’ will lead nowhere by simply downplaying anti-racism and ‘proving’ to the electorate that the AfD is just another neoliberal party. For one, this obscures the fact that there are two wings in the AfD regarding economic and social policy. A
more ‘radical’ approach will also prove insufficient if it is not accompanied by an analysis and action around Islamophobia, which has functioned as the cultural code enabling the current rise of the far-right. Though not weakened by a similar tradition of left laicité as its French counterpart, clearly distinguishing Islamophobia as a distinct form of racism with specific functions and purposes in the current conjuncture, has been the Achilles’ heel of a significant part of Die Linke on the matter, and one that transcends the reformist/radical-divide. It has prevented the construction of movement alliances with Muslim communities on an anti-war and anti-racist platform on the scale of those seen in the UK for instance, out of which Jeremy Corbyn’s successful bid for leadership of the Labour Party has drawn much of its strength.

The chronic stagnation of Die Linke is proving to be the biggest problem for the wider left and progressive forces. The party was formed between 2005 and 2007. It is a pluralist formation, born out of the merger between the post-communist Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the successor to East Germany’s ruling party on the one hand, and the WASG, a trade-unionist left-wing split from the SPD on the other. Undoubtedly it gathered its momentum from the crisis of class representation facilitated by the SPD’s neoliberal welfare and labour market ‘reforms’. It is in this context that the ‘Monday demonstrations’ (Montagsdemos) against the introduction of the Hartz IV reform of unemployment benefits which began in 2003 are seen as the beginning of the process that led to the WASG breakaway. An equally important point of cohesion was the rejection of foreign intervention abroad,
a long-standing taboo in German society that was broken by none other than the SPD-Green government, when it participated in wars against Serbia and Afghanistan. It was thus able to win support from non-voters, disenfranchised SPD supporters, as well as sections of the anti-war and anti-globalization movements.

Since 2005, the party has consistently passed the Bundestag’s five percent electoral threshold. It is a relatively stable and centralized organization. Its think tank, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLS), is an important institution of the global radical left, with offices around the world.

Especially in the East, Die Linke is a mass party with countless elected officials on the local level. It has participated in coalitions on the state level with the SPD, most notably in Berlin between 2001 (as the PDS) and 2011. In 2014, it even elected its own prime minister, Bodo Ramelow, in the eastern state of Thuringia.

Largely due to its image as a protest party against neoliberalism, Die Linke could grow and enter many state legislatures in western Germany in the first five years of its existence. It arguably benefited from other parties’ attempts to isolate it; its demands for a minimum wage were for example deemed ‘unrealistic’. This rapidly changed, however, with the advent of the Eurozone crisis and the construction of Merkel’s hegemony around a so-called ‘security discourse’ (Sicherheitsdiskurs), which entailed making the necessary sacrifices to shield Germany from the worst effects of the crisis.

The SPD meanwhile has not been able to mount a decisive challenge to Angela Merkel’s hegemony in German politics. A brief surge in the polls following their nomina-
tion of Martin Schulz – former president of the European Parliament – as chancellor candidate faded quickly. The ‘Schulz effect’ remained a blip with the SPD not being able to capitalize on it in the Saarland last March. Here – a traditional industrial stronghold – it suffered mild losses and was finally forced to enter a coalition as the CDU’s junior partner. This was followed by defeats in Schleswig-Holstein in May 2017 and North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), Germany’s most populous state and usually an indicator of results in the Bundestag election taking place some months later. Here it lost 180,000 votes to the CDU whereas it could have gained some capital by signalling a degree of willingness to enter a coalition with Die Linke in NRW. Yet, Hannelore Kraft’s outright refusal to consider such an arrangement, as well as the SPD’s triumphalism for ‘keeping Die Linke out’ in NRW and Schleswig-Holstein, are testament to the folly of contemporary German social democracy as well as its misplaced overconfidence in the image of someone like Schulz, who does not offer any real break with the legacy of the Schröder years.

Things even look bleaker for the Greens, whose identity as a ‘post-materialist’ party of alternative lifestyles is increasingly put into doubt by their thoroughly neoliberal outlook, their upwardly mobile, middle-class composition, as well as their increasing number of coalitions with the CDU on the state and communal levels.

Meanwhile, Die Linke has stagnated, being driven (or kept) out of many Western parliaments while its share of the vote has decreased significantly in some of its Eastern heartlands. Die Linke has not profited from the twin state of social and economic polarization. While opinion polls
show the party’s level of support at a consistent seven to nine percent, its renewed failed attempt to enter the state legislatures of the western states of Baden-Württemberg (home of its co-chairman, Bernd Riexinger), Rhineland-Palatinate, Schleswig-Holstein and NRW is of particular concern, given the AfD’s surge in support in all these states. In the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt, where Die Linke ran a highly apolitical campaign which focused on the party’s uncharismatic state chairman, the party lost 29,000 voters to the AfD. This is confirmed in other elections as well. An overwhelming number of former Die Linke voters moved to the AfD – in Rheinland-Pfalz (11,000), Baden-Württemberg (21,000) and Sachsen-Anhalt (29,000)\textsuperscript{37}. Entering coalition governments with the SPD and subordinating programmatic goals to fiscal concerns have time and time again proven to be disastrous for the party. After joining the government in Brandenburg for example, Die Linke lost 20,000 votes to the AfD and more than 115,000 of their previous voters simply stayed at home back in 2014\textsuperscript{38}.

However, Die Linke’s problems are not simply a matter of chance or overstretched resources; their character is also structural and inherently tied up to the party’s evolution in recent years. With few exceptions, it could not anchor itself among disenfranchised social-democratic voters in the West, relying instead upon an older core electorate in former East Germany. This situation has inevitably led to an intense quandary within Die Linke. Founded as a protest party in the mid-2000s, it now finds itself outflanked in that role by the AfD. Die Linke might have succeeded in doubling its share of the vote compared to the previous election, however, it failed to cross the five per cent
threshold needed to enter NRW’s federal state parliament. The party’s results were particularly high in urban centres with a high percentage of students and some degree of social mobilizations, especially protests against the AfD, yet the party was outflanked by the far-right in the former industrial heartlands of the Ruhr. Its share among workers, employees and the unemployed was better than its overall result of 4.9 per cent. However, its failure to enter the state assembly sends an ominous signal for the upcoming national election.

A SECOND COMING OF THE GERMAN LABOUR MOVEMENT?

*Die Linke’s* electoral fortunes are tied to the presence of social justice as a salient feature of public discourse, as framed by the idea of a growing gap between the haves and the have-nots. The Schröder reforms and the Hartz IV protests brought social justice to the fore, thus leading to the emergence of *Die Linke*. Yet since the outbreak of the global financial crisis, social justice has been eclipsed by fears of an economic meltdown, something reinforced by an aggressive media discourse against the ‘lazy Greeks’\(^39\). Appeals by *Die Linke* for solidarity with the European South were ignored by the union bureaucracy, which – following its policy of *Krisenkorporatismus* (‘crisis corporatism’) – engaged in a policy of self-sacrifice and restraint that lead to a record low of strikes in 2010-11\(^40\). Combined with the chronic decline of organized labour and a growing division between permanent and temporary workers, this has rendered social protests and their translations into
victories for the left all the more difficult.

The year 2015 on the other hand, witnessed a surge in strike levels, especially by public sector workers. However, this shouldn’t be overestimated, as strikes still remain at an all-time low (only Switzerland has less strike days than Germany). Furthermore, the limits of purely economic struggles in the current conjuncture have become evident. Strikes by train conductors and Lufthansa airline pilots were widely regarded as actions by privileged special interest groups. On the other hand, preschool teachers that went on strike enjoyed widespread public support, even overwhelmingly rejecting a negotiated settlement, but stopping short, however, of waging an effective political struggle that would’ve challenged ordoliberal establishment orthodoxies like the *Schuldenbremse*. The strike ended with a compromise and ultimately means that pre-school and education workers will not be able to lawfully strike until the contract is up for negotiations in approximately five years’ time. While the root of the conflict remains unresolved, the issues have been buried for the foreseeable future. Wolfgang Streeck’s argument that the strikes could start to tackle wage inequality does not account for the fact that the groups of workers who walked out belonged to organisationally strong sections of the trade union movement and remain in structurally strong positions in the labour market due to the labour shortages in the German economy and processes of production and circulation of capital.

However, there are a growing number of initiatives on the margins of the German labour movement such as the *Erneuerung durch Streik Konferenz* (‘Renewal through strike’
conference) organised by the RLS alongside a number of left-wing trade union officials. This has been able to build class solidarity and highlight several localised conflicts like the one at the Charité hospital in Berlin. Bernd Riexinger has been seeking to develop his party’s profile in these new strike and trade union organizing movements in recent years by launching several initiatives and arguing for the democratisation of strike and trade union culture in Germany. However important this gesture has been in building links with left-wing trade union officials, its impact in the development of the German labour movement cannot be overestimated. After all, only 32 percent of all Linke members are trade union members, let alone activists and the party is notoriously underrepresented in the trade union movement due to its overdetermining electoral orientation. These political strikes, localized strikes, and campaigns on the margins of the labour movement, such as various attempts by new migrant communities to advance their struggle within the labour movement, have not been able to break through and make the kind of significant advances that would indicate that the German labour movement is changing its ways. There is also a documented failure of Die Linke as a political party, to organically link economic struggles with political demands and to offer a way forward for various labour struggles that go beyond simple declarations of support and solidarity.
GERMAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, THE AUTONOMIZATION OF STRUGGLES AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

Notwithstanding the weakness on the front of industrial relations, the last years have witnessed several important moments of social mobilization in Germany. However, these were – with some notable exceptions – indirectly or weakly related to Die Linke’s core agenda of rolling back neoliberal austerity. Examples of such instances of mass mobilizations are the hundreds of thousands who marched against nuclear power after the Fukushima disaster in 2011 (effectively forcing the Merkel government to abandon nuclear power by 2020), the massive and violently repressed ‘citizens’ protest’ (Bürgerprotest) against the Stuttgart21 project in the same year (a massive revamping of the city’s main train station with detrimental effects of public space), as well as various radical environmental mass protests like ‘Ende Gelände’ – protests against a giant open cast mine in the Rhineland in 2015. One notable instance of mass mobilization was the protests in Hamburg in early 2014, in solidarity with recently arrived refugees, which successfully merged with various protests for ‘the right to the city’, including a struggle to defend a historic left-wing social centre. The Blockupy protests against the European Central Bank in Frankfurt in early 2015 also witnessed numerous instances of civil disobedience. Furthermore, there has been astonishing demonstration against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) in Berlin in October 2015 that drew half a million people, making it the
largest single instance of mass mobilization in Germany since the anti-war demonstrations of 2003.

These instances show that Germany is in many ways an exception to more general European patterns. In the European South, the upsurge of general social mobilization has gone hand in hand with the rise of formations of the radical left. As Eva Völpel and Mario Candeias have pointed out, these protests were able to unite different sectors of the population due to their insistence and demand for real democracy. In countries such as France or the UK (Scotland being an exception) on the other hand, the rise of right-wing Eurosceptic populism and the decline of the radical left represents the mirror image of the general decline of social movements like the anti-war movement, or the rise of right-wing social mobilization (for example the massive protests against gay marriage in France).

Germany belongs to neither category. It does share many features with other core European countries – a rise in racism, a detachment of the electorate from established parties, and labour movements with shrinking structural power. But unlike France, the UK or Italy, it boasts a well-established and relatively powerful party of the radical Left. Furthermore, as the previously mentioned examples testify, there have been numerous movements culturally situated on the terrain of the left that are frequently internationalist in their outlook and are united by their insistence on practicing civil disobedience, thus drawing upon themselves the full wrath of state repression. What shall we make of the contrast between an institutionalized radical left and strong established social movements (with a long tradition dating back to the late 1970s) on the one
hand, and a rise of socioeconomic polarization benefiting right-forces like the AfD on the other?

We believe that the German broader radical left – in both its parliamentary and extra-parliamentary manifestations – has been unable to tackle the rise of the far-right so far, not in spite of its relative institutionalization, but because of it. In a time of increasing social discontent, this has allowed far-right forces like the AfD to take up an ‘anti-establishment’ mantle and simultaneously pervert the social question, by framing it as a question of limited capacities and a clash of civilizations. We have already mentioned figures previously that detail the devastating effects joining coalition governments have had for Die Linke. But the party’s relationship to movements has so far been equally problematic. Various leading members of Die Linke play an important part in several social movements as individuals, but the party as a whole has failed to generate what Raul Zelik has called a ‘connecting practice’, leading to the existence of an electoral machine with only nominal ties to the social movements.

But it’s not just Die Linke, which has failed in this regard. The social movements of the last five years have largely failed to produce any sustainable gains. The protests against nuclear power and Stuttgart21 were mostly middle-class in composition and were promptly translated into electoral victories for the neoliberal Greens at the state level. Revelations of the NSA’s spying gave a brief boost to the new net-privacy-themed Pirate Party, which has now practically evaporated from social conscience. Far more radical movement coalitions like Blockupy on the other hand, consciously choose to remain distant from Die
Linke and the organized labour movement in the name of preserving ‘autonomy’[47]. Even the success of the Dresden Nazifrei movement, which blocked the annual neo-Nazi rallies in Dresden in 2010 and 2011 by organizing thousands from all over Germany, cannot obscure the fact that it’s in Dresden that PEGIDA can march virtually unopposed by local civil society in 2016. All these movements have managed to mediate themselves through civil disobedience as actors in their own right, but have failed to draw a connection between their cause and the question of a general lack of democratic accountability and the growing gap between rich and poor.

Finally, movements in solidarity with refugees or with Greece like Blockupy, have often articulated their solidarity in moralistic terms rather than from a standpoint of common class interest. In the case of Greece, this meant avoiding the obvious ‘elephant in the room’, the deeply flawed character of the Eurozone and the capitalist nature of European institutions in general, detrimental to the welfare of both Northern and Southern European workers.

Indeed, the collapse of the SYRIZA-paradigm of rolling back austerity through governments of the left committed to reforming the institutions of the EU, in other words the collapse of what Stathis Kouvelakis has labelled ‘left Europeanism’[48] has had a highly disorienting effect on Die Linke itself, which had tied its fortunes to those of the Tsipras government in the early half of 2015, and had at various critical points in time supported it unconditionally, in the name of solidarity between fraternal parties. This led to an overwhelming majority of Die Linke’s caucus in the Bundestag supporting the 20 February agreement signed
by Yanis Varoufakis, which amounted to an extension of
the bailout terms, in the name of ‘buying time’.

The above mentioned relative upsurge in social mo-
bilizations should not draw attention away from the fact
that, as in other Western countries, the ‘traditional’ mi-
lieus of the movement left, having remained largely self-
referential and unable to politically reproduce themselves.
They are in sharp decline,\(^4\) pointing to the existence of a
growing schism between the organized left and wide lay-
ers of society that voice discontent with the established
political parties and the mainstream media. This has partly
led to the emergence of limited protest movements with
a vague ideological (officially ‘non-ideological’) orientation
like the *Friedensmahnwachen* (‘peace vigils’) that proclaim to
be ‘neither right nor left’, and which have not always been
immune to co-option by far-right elements and conspiracy
theorists (‘End the Fed’, ‘chemtrails’), something also ena-
bled by the highly sectarian attitude of a great part of the
radical left towards them.

Given a weak labour movement and a fragmented so-
cial movement scene, both unfolding on the background
of rising right-wing populism, the immediate tasks of *Die Linke*
become more urgent. But the party is not weak merely
because of the current state of labour and the movements;
it has to a great extent internalized the implicit ideology
of an *autonomization* of different fields of struggle. On the
hand, this concept engenders that social movements must
remain ‘autonomous’ from the state (which includes politi-
cal parties), in order to preserve their independence. While
it is natural that actors from the movements should be the
prime exponents of this view, it does not run against the
political outlook of professional politicians who regard their mission as mostly, if not strictly electoral in nature, thus leading to a division of labour between the political party and the movements, while reinforcing the existing fragmentation of struggles.

Though not explicit, this ideology of autonomization converges with the paradigm set forth in the mid-1980s by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, in which they downplay the primacy of class struggle in favour of an approach that treats it as merely one of many different separate struggles in their own right. The trend of viewing labour struggles as simply one among many is also evident in Antonio Negri’s concept of the ‘multitude’ which has been cited by *Die Linke*’s chairwoman Katja Kipping as a theoretical point of reference. Kipping, who hails from the eastern state of Saxony, is a spokeswoman for the party’s ‘radical-alternative’ tendency which consists mainly of eastern members politically socialized in post-reunification Germany. Their ideological outlook can be described as left-libertarian, with themes such as ecology, internet activism and a critique of the concept of growth playing an important part. Politicians, academics and activists associated with this tendency and the think tank *Solidarische Moderne* have also developed the concept of the *Mosaiklinke*. The main idea here is that of a synergy between institutional actors on the wider left like political parties and trade unions on the one hand, and non-institutional actors like various movements on the other, forming the basis of a new left-wing governmental project, in concrete terms a Red-Red-Green coalition in 2017.
It is not too difficult to locate the material conditions that engender this sort of thinking. *Die Linke* is a highly institutionalized party embedded within the structures of the German state. This fact informs the material incentives that drive many of its career politicians into pushing for participation in coalition governments with the SPD. Besides the material perks, one can also identify the long-lasting effects of the great setbacks suffered by the left on a global level since the late 1970s and the almost purely defensive character of labour struggles ever since. This is what also drives many forces within *Die Linke*, which oppose the institutional pull towards coalition governments and the softening of key positions on neoliberalism and militarism, to also accept the idea that the job of a party like *Die Linke* is to mainly act as a representative of social movements and not as an organic component of them, mostly because the second option appears to many as inconceivable. This is arguably the reason the main left-wing tendencies within *Die Linke*, the Anti-Capitalist Left and to a lesser extent the Socialist Left, have tried to counter what they perceive as a ‘softening’ of key positions within the party strictly from point of view of ‘defending the party manifesto’. The Erfurt Programme of 2011 is indeed very radical in its orientations but like so often in history, a radical manifesto is a poor substitute for radical politics.

The fragmentation of fields of struggle has can be named as one of the main reasons for the weak responses to the refugee crisis from within *Die Linke*, which oscillate – for lack of a better term – between an ‘economistic’ approach (Wagenknecht, Lafontaine) on the one hand, and a purely moral one on the other (the ‘reformers’ and the lib-
ernarians around Kipping). This obscures the fact that both attitudes implicitly share the assumption that refugees are an unavoidable burden one must either accept on the basis of humanitarian concern or restrict due to material interest, thus entirely avoiding the possibility of an approach that highlights the common material interests between local workers and new labour market entrants.

CONCLUSION
In this article, we have tried to illustrate the current dilemmas facing Die Linke in the context of a process of twin crises and polarization. One type of polarization concerns the growing disparity between the haves and the have-nots in German society. Contrary to popular belief, Germany has not been an economic safe haven within a turbulent Europe. Though it has not been affected by the outbreak of the Eurozone crisis in the same way as Greece or Spain, stagnant wages and precarious employment patterns disclose similarities. Even ameliorative measures like the introduction of a minimum wage could not contain the reality of a constant increase in old-age, as well as child poverty. The general decline in living standards in Germany is also a result of the German government’s dogmatic adherence to the policies of the Schwarze Null, which form one of the backbones of German crisis management since 2008. Together with the ground-breaking restructuring of unemployment benefits, the liberalization of the labour market and the decline of the organized labour movement, this has led to a weakened working class.

The general transition from Keynesian to neoliberal capitalism, which was accelerated by the Red-Green gov-
ernment in the early 2000s, has led to a dramatic decrease in social mobility and inequality in wealth, something leading to mounting fears of social relegation, especially among many segments of the middle classes. The founding of the AfD as a right-wing Eurosceptic response to the handling of the eurozone crisis by Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble can be understood as the first political expression of a political re-composition of the middle classes.

On the other hand, Germany is witnessing a growing polarization regarding racism. Islamophobia has emanated from the mainstream, becoming an acceptable feature of public discourse. PEGIDA has not been the first Islamophobic ‘citizens’ movement’ in Germany, but it has nevertheless been the most successful due to its use of Islamophobia as a channel to articulate the grievances of parts of the middle class. The emergence of PEGIDA and its merger with the AfD show how both types of polarizations interact and reinforce each other.

On the electoral level, it can be argued that Germany is experiencing a threefold polarization involving a resilient centre expressed by Merkel’s CDU, which despite facing challenges from the far-right has so far managed to sustain itself, largely due to widespread perceptions of Merkel as guarantor of stability in a turbulent world, as well as the SPD’s inability to offer a convincing alternative.

Meanwhile, Die Linke has remained stagnant. Given the failure of radical Left parties elsewhere in Europe, this can be considered a relative success. However, it also constitutes a failure given the inability to organically interact with, and lend political expression to, several social mo-
bilizations which have taken place in recent years. These include the movement to welcome refugees, the movement against TTIP and CETA, as well as various localized environmental and other struggles. The difficulty of giving political expression to the struggle against the AfD is compounded by discourses within *Die Linke*, which view anti-racism as a theme of secondary importance compared to the ‘struggle for social justice’, thus unnecessarily pitting the one against the other. The notable exceptions in terms of polling within the party come from exactly those local branches that played a central part in organizing marches against the AfD, such as in Cologne, Essen and Münster. So, while the potential for left renewal does exist, *Die Linke* has so far been unable to capitalize on it. We believe that this is also due to an implicit ideology prevalent among large sections of the party apparatus, which views the role of the party as merely that of a ‘parliamentary spokesperson’ for movement and trade union struggles. This can be attributed to the institutionalization of *Die Linke* within the structures of parliamentarism and the German state in general. Material incentives for professional politicians result in a gravitational pull towards the idea of coalition governments with the SPD and/or the Greens, despite the detrimental effect of such coalitions for the party’s electoral results and membership numbers. This idea of an ‘autonomization of struggles’ is also enabled by the corresponding attitudes of actors within the movement, who fear a co-optation of their struggle for electoral gains. This stands in stark contrast with the example of the AfD, which has effectively fused with the far-right PEGIDA movement, as well as with *Die Linke’s* predecessor parties,
which formed an organic component of the mobilization against the Hartz IV laws in 2003-2004.

Despite this, the main precondition for a strong left, the existence of a socioeconomic cleavage, is as salient as ever in Germany, given the effects of the Schuldenbremse and the policies of the Schwarze Null. The upcoming Bundestag elections are likely to result in a CDU-Liberal coalition, which signals a renewed attack on living standards. Die Linke can re-emerge by combining the pressing fight against the AfD with an anti-capitalist perspective, which anchors itself in trade union and social movement mobilizations in an organic, rather than representative manner.

**Mark Bergfeld** is an activist, writer and PhD Researcher based at Queen Mary University of London.

**Leandros Fischer** is an activist based in Cologne, Germany. He writes regularly for *Jacobin Magazine*.
NOTES


104 TRANSFORM

June 1, 2017.


22 Vorländer, H., Herold, M. & Schäller, S., Wer geht zu

23 Vorländer, H. et al. pp.48-50
25 Mair, P., 2014. Ruling the void: the hollowing of western democracy, Verso., Kindle position 1433


33 Following a court ruling banning male circumcision as a form of child abuse, an overwhelming majority of Die Linke’s caucus in parliament voted against the government’s bill guaranteeing the right of circumcision on the grounds of freedom of religious expression, citing support for the total separation of church and state. Opponents, as well as proponents of the bill
were to be found among both radical and reformist factions. The banning of Jewish and Muslim religious practices like circumcision is also mentioned in the AfD draft party manifesto.

34 Wahlalternative für Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit („electoral alternative for labor and social justice“).

35 Fischer, L., 2016. Zwischen Internationalismus und Staatsräson: Der Streit um den Nahostkonflikt in der Partei DIE LINKE, SPRINGER., pp.185-235

36 See Unkovski-Korica 2016 for a description of the role of the RLF in left-wing politics in the Balkans. Each major party in Germany has its own foundation, whose funding by the federal government is proportional to the associated party’s representation in the Bundestag. Besides engaging in policy research, foundations also hand out scholarships and are seen as vital components of the German educational structure. Historically, German parties have used their foundations to engage in their own foreign policy. For example, the SPD-linked Friedrich Ebert Foundation was instrumental in establishing the virtually unknown Socialist Party in Portugal after the Carnation Revolution in 1974, to counter increasing communist influence. On the other hand, the CDU-linked Konrad Adenauer Foundation has a record of backing right-wing opposition forces in Latin America in recent years.

von-allen-parteien-cdu-leidet_id_5355573.html [Accessed June 1, 2017].


44 bpb, 2015. Soziale Zusammensetzung der Mitglied-
GERMANY

49  For example, the Antifascist Left of Berlin (ALB), one of the most important organizations of the Antifa movement dissolved in 2014.
THE HISTORY AND FUTURE OF THE POLISH LEFT

Czesław Kulesza and Gavin Rae

The Polish left faces an unprecedented crisis. At the 2015 elections the left failed to enter parliament for the first time since independence was restored in 1918. For over two decades Polish politics has been dominated by competing parties from the right, with the left marginalised to the side-lines. In order to understand this situation it is necessary to first examine the historical background of the Polish left. This article provides a brief description of the history of the Polish left, reaching back to the pre-Communist period. It analyses how the left reconfigured after the fall of Communism, the growth and decline of the left in the post-Communist period and the recent attempts to rejuvenate the left in Poland.
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
The history of the modern Polish left reaches back to the pre-war period and runs to the early transition period after the fall from Communism. Poland regained independence in 1918 after being partitioned between three empires (Prussian, Russian and Austro-Hungarian) for 123 years. Although the left played a significant role in winning independence and forming the new state its importance during the interwar period was limited. The major party of the left during this time was the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), with some important figures of the Polish state emerging from this party (e.g. Józef Piłsudski, Ignacy Daszyński and Jedrzej Moraczewski).

The major statesperson during the interwar period was Józef Piłsudski, who came from the PPS. However, Piłsudski soon broke from the left, claiming that he had ‘got out of the red tram at the stop independence.’ Many from the left, including the trade unions, continued to believe that he would return to his left-wing roots. However, these hopes were dashed once he supported the coup d’etat in 1926, which opened up a period of right-wing authoritarian rule in the country. The question of independence had long been a matter of contention within the Polish left. For example, Rosa Luxemburg believed that the aim of independence was a utopian diversion for the Polish left. Also, the Polish-Soviet war in 1920, entrenched strong anti-Soviet sentiments within the Polish left, with the Polish Communist Party remaining a relatively small party throughout the interwar period. The PPS was caught between European social democracy and Soviet Communism, and belonged to
The beginnings of World War Two brought many of these issues to the fore. The country was once again divided after the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. The majority of the leadership of the Polish Communist Party were murdered by the Stalinist regime, accused of ‘Trotskyist’ and ‘Luxemburgist’ tendencies. The different strands of the Polish left played an important role in resisting Nazi occupation in Poland and took part in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. However, the idea that the Soviet Union did not help the Uprising and allowed the Nazis to defeat the opposition and destroy the capital city has remained strong in Polish consciousness and further entrenched anti-Communist sentiments in society.

A new geopolitical situation was formed after the Yalta agreements in 1945. Poland found itself within the Soviet sphere of influence, which was negatively perceived by large sections of the Polish left. This was particularly the case for those sections of the left that prioritised independence, with a part of the PPS organising itself abroad throughout the Communist period. The newly founded Polish People’s Republic (PRL) aroused both hopes and fears in Polish society and the left. A significant part of the left participated in the construction of the new system, whilst others continued to oppose the new reality and questioned the manner in which the new ‘workers’ state’ was being created. Throughout its 45 year history a number of important gains were made by the PRL. These included huge industrialisation, urbanisation and significant social progress that turned the country from an underdeveloped country reliant upon agriculture into an industrialised modern economy. Nevertheless, this
progress was limited and included many contradictions, not least the lack of some basic consumer products and services that contrasted to the situation in most Western European countries.

In comparison to most other countries in the Eastern Bloc, the PRL had many distinct features. These included the relatively low level of collectivisation of land, with small independent farms remaining the dominant form of agriculture. Also the Catholic Church remained relatively autonomous throughout the Communist period and retained large support within society. Also, although the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) had a leading political role, other legal political parties and associations existed creating a certain level of political plurality within the system. The period of Stalinist totalitarianism was ended in 1956 and many political prisoners were released, including Władysław Gomułka who was to become leader of the PZPR.

Many independent left-wingers remained supporters of the PZPR and supported the progressive economic and social reforms enacted by the government. However, in 1968 a number of left-wing intellectuals were expelled from the party and the country, which created a permanent schism within the left. Periodically large social protests and strikes were organised by the working class (e.g. Poznań in 1956 and in the Baltic region in 1970). This culminated in the famous ‘Solidarity’ trade union strikes at the Gdańsk shipyards in 1980 that spread around the country. At this time ‘Solidarity’ was an alliance of the industrial working class with a section of the left-wing intelligentsia. The early ‘Solidarity’ movement was strongly pro-socialist and supported the creation of a self-managed republic based upon
the self-management of factories and workplaces.

In order to deal with this social movement, martial law was imposed in 1981, which defeated and fragmented ‘Solidarity’. After this time, ‘Solidarity’ took on a different form which was removed from its pro-worker/socialist roots. The intelligentsia moved away from the working class and prioritised the need for economic and political changes based upon the systems existent in the West. The PRL was ended at the Round Table talks in 1989, held between the ruling party and opposition. Essentially, the elite from the PZPR and the opposition movement agreed the future course of reform in Poland. During the first semi-free elections ‘Solidarity’ heavily defeated the PZPR. At the beginning of 1990, a new package of radical capitalist economic reforms were introduced known as the shock-therapy reforms. These reforms were supported by this new elite but came at an extremely high social cost. A process of de-industrialisation was instigated and a large section of the working class lost their jobs creating a permanently high level of unemployment, large social inequalities and high levels of poverty.

During the early transition period a significant section of the Polish left attempted to defend the achievements of the PRL and offer a social democratic alternative to the right-wing governments. Also, the transition to capitalism (and the appointment of a Polish Pope) gave the Catholic Church an increasingly important role in society, pushing the country in a more conservative direction. This provided a new focus of opposition for the Polish left. Unfortunately, the first governments in which the social democrats participated showed that the Polish left did not have a co-
herent alternative vision for Poland and limited themselves to introducing reforms in a slightly less rapid and radical manner than the governments from the right. Subsequent years brought further disappointment as the left moved closer towards neo-liberalism, through copying Blairite, Third Way style social democracy and favouring business interests over those of workers.

**THE OLD LEFT**
The oldest existing political party in Poland – currently celebrating its 125th anniversary – is the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). In 1948 the PPS was ‘united’ with the Polish Workers’ Party to form the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR). The PPS therefore did not exist as an independent party in Poland for 39 years, although it continued to operate abroad. In 1990 some left wing activists involved in the ‘Solidarity’ movement decided to unite with those who were operating abroad. In 1996 the party merged with the Polish Socialist Party ‘Revival’, uniting party members who had decided to work within the framework of the PZPR. This completed the process of unification of different groups of socialists and offered the prospect of a strong socialist party existing in the new post-Communist Poland. However, the PPS was unable to return to its pre-war position of strength. Thanks to its cooperation with the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) (see below), in 1993 the party managed to enter both chambers of parliament and have some moderate although important political representation. However, in 2001 it stood independently in the parliamentary and presidential elections, gaining barely 0.25% of the vote. In 2003, some activists of the PPS decided to leave its ranks and create
a new party – the New Left. This party gathered activists from other socialist circles, although it only managed to survive for eight years. Some of its members in 2014 decided to establish a new political party (the Movement for Social Justice). This party is best known for organising against the eviction of tenants from their homes, particularly in those buildings that have been re-privatised.

The first attempt to create a party uniting activists from the left, whose roots were in Solidarity and the PZPR, was made in 1992 through the creation of the Union of Labour (UP). This party was created by activists from ‘Solidarity of Labour’, the Democratic and Social Movement and the ‘post-communist’ Polish Social Democratic Union. UP managed to achieve considerable electoral success in 1993 – independently winning forty seats in Parliament. Despite this success, the party decided not to enter the centre-left coalition government formed by the SLD and the Polish Peasant Party (see below). UP criticised the conciliatory policy of the government from a left-wing standpoint. However, this position was not understood by voters, with the party failing to enter parliament at the 1997 elections. UP subsequently returned to Parliament as part of a coalition with the SLD in 2001 and took up some important positions in the government from 2001 to 2005. Since then the party has declined in size and influence and has essentially become a satellite party of the SLD.
BETWEEN OLD AND NEW
As we can see in the graph below, the left’s vote rose steadily from 1991 to 2001. The first left coalition government was able to slow the reforms and although they lost power in 1997 they actually increased their vote as people’s living standards rose. The Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) was transformed from a coalition of left-wing parties and organisations into a new political party in 1999. Not all signatories to this coalition decided to enter the newly formed party. The largest group of activists came from the post-communist Social Democracy of the Polish Republic and the trade union confederation the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions – OPZZ. Some individuals from the former anti-Communist opposition were also involved in the creation of the new party. The party adopted a more neo-liberal economic programme and came under the influence of Third Way style social democracy being propagated by Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder within the European social democratic parties.

In 2001, the SLD-UP alliance won over 40 percent of the vote and around the same time its candidate, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, won the Presidency. Despite this huge electoral success, the SLD-UP vote was not enough to form an independent government and its leaders decided to re-enter a coalition government with the Polish Peasants’ Party (PSL). This government implemented a right-wing social democratic programme, which ultimately led to an electoral collapse from which it has yet to recover. The party introduced a series of neo-liberal economic reforms (partly under pressure to implement reforms as part of its accession into the
EU); supported the implementation of a flat-income tax; did not challenge the power and dominance of the Catholic Church (e.g. failing to liberalise the draconian abortion law); and supported the US war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Combined with a series of corruption scandals, the party suffered a dramatic decline in support.

The failures of the SLD-UP government opened up many new conflicts within the left. Some members and leading activists, split from these parties and attempted to create new alternative left-wing parties in Poland (e.g. the Polish Social Democratic Party, the Union of the Left of the Third Republic and the Polish Left). However, these parties were unable to gain much support and rapidly declined in size and influence.
NEW PARTIES OF THE LEFT

The decline of the ‘old’ left has opened up space for new parties and movements of the left to emerge. However, the political character of these parties differs from many parties in Western Europe.

The party that is closest to those in western countries is the Greens 2004, established in 2004. Although many of its activists began their activities in the Group of the Greens that existed in the neo-liberal Freedom Union party, it has since developed a similar programme to many other Green Parties in Europe. It has a clearer left-wing identity and during the last parliamentary elections it was part of a coalition with parties of the old left (including the SLD), partly instigated by the OPZZ trade unions. The party strongly emphasises its left-wing stance on social and cultural issues and has taken part in the pro-democracy movement against the current right-wing nationalist government.

A completely different type of left wing party was the Your Movement party. This was created by the charismatic leader Janusz Palikot (and was originally known as the Palikot Movement), who split from the then ruling centre-right party – Citizens’ Platform. The party won a significant success at the 2011 parliamentary elections, gaining over 10% of the votes and 40 parliamentary seats. Your Movement therefore won more seats than the SLD during these elections, meaning for the first time the left-wing party with the highest support was not a ‘post-Communist’ party. However, although Your Movement defined itself as being left-wing, in fact it was a kind of liberal populist par-
ty. Its economic programme was mainly liberal and prioritised support for businesses and entrepreneurs. Meanwhile it was strongly anti-clerical and promoted moral and cultural liberalism. After one term in parliament, the party’s support in the polls collapsed and – like the Greens 2004 – it ended up participating in the unsuccessful left-wing coalition at the 2015 parliamentary elections. The party now only exists in name and has no notable political presence.

A new opening on the Polish left emerged with the creation of the Together party (Razem) before the 2015 elections. The party was founded on the basis of a protest by different left wing groups, postulating that the ‘pro-social’ left should form a common slate in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. The idea was similar to that which led to the formation of Syriza in Greece, although the different left wing forces and groups are much weaker in Poland. This initiative never came to fruition, and instead a new independent left-wing party was created. The party claims to be anti-austerity and looks for inspiration from parties such as PODEMOS in Spain. It consciously distances itself from the old left, particularly the SLD which it sees as the main obstacle to forming a strong left-wing party in Poland. The party did not enter the above mentioned left-wing coalition at the 2015 elections, but instead ran as an independent party. They successfully managed to register candidates in the whole country and rose to prominence during a televised debate during the election campaign. They were successful in winning over 3% of the vote in these elections, meaning that they now have access to state funding. Critics of the party argue that they helped to split the left vote, resulting in the left having
no parliamentary representation. Despite its overtures to the more radical left-wing parties such as PODEMOS, the party essentially has a classical social democratic economic programme. It has adopted an anti-Communist stance to historical issues and is often critical of the PRL and keen not to be associated with this period or political currents close to it. It has also taken a broadly pro-NATO stance on international issues, refusing for example to take part in the protests organised during the NATO summit in Warsaw last summer.

An association of some left-wing activists that participated in the left-wing electoral coalition at the 2015 elections was formed in 2016: Poland Initiative. Some prominent individuals have helped to form this organisation and they have participated in the pro-democracy movement and women’s protests against abortion (see below). They have a moderate social democratic economic programme and emphasise social and cultural issues.

EXISTING AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS
Outside of political parties there are a number of potential and existing allies of the left. Although the trade unions are politically divided (what remains of the ‘Solidarity’ trade union is allied to the right), large sections of the trade unions can be strategic allies of the left (All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions, Trade Union ‘Forum’, Free Trade Union ‘August 80’). Trade union membership has declined significantly over the past two decades. It is important for the left to organise with trade unions to reach out to those excluded from trade unions – i.e. those working on flexible
insecure contracts, the working poor and the unemployed.

Due to the conservatism of the Polish state, the feminist movement has an important role in Polish society and politics. The Polish left played an important role in reactivating the feminist movement at the end of the 1990s, through organisations such as the Democratic Women’s Union and the League of Polish Women. Last year there were huge demonstrations organised nationwide, successfully blocking the proposal to introduce a complete ban on abortion in the country.

The election of a right-wing authoritarian government and the rise of the far right raises new challenges for the left. The opposition movement against the government has mainly been led by the liberal centre. This protest movement has met many difficulties and the size and frequency of its demonstrations and activities has declined recently. The left has remained divided over whether they should participate in these protests or not. The proposal by the government to introduce a new education reform has resulted in large protests by the main teachers’ trade union, which is allied to the left. Also, the growth of racism and the far-right has led to an increase in anti-fascist activism in recent months.

NATO troops have recently been stationed in Poland, which is at the frontline of conflicts between NATO and Russia. The Polish left has largely abstained from protests against NATO and the presence of its troops in Poland. However, with the election of Trump in the USA and the growing danger of war in the world, it is both possible and necessary to rebuild a strong anti-war and peace movement in the country.
THE LEFT: QUO VADIS?
The Polish left has a strong historical tradition in Poland and remained a significant player during the first decade and more after the fall of Communism. However, for more than a decade and a half it has been marginalised and divided. Poland remains one of the only countries in Europe, where there is no existent party connected to the European Left Party. The main party of the left remains the SLD, a party that was derived from the ruling party during the previous system. Its major challenger is the Together party, which claims to represent the new left in Poland. Both parties do not cooperate with each other and will struggle in the next elections to cross the 5% threshold (7% for coalitions) necessary to enter parliament. The challenge for the left is how it can reconfigure itself and find an organisational and programmatic framework that can reach out to different social layers and help lead the opposition both to the neo-liberal and conservative right that dominate Polish politics.

Czesław Kulesza and Gavin Rae are members of Fundacja Naprzód (the Forward Foundation) which is a Polish-based observer member of the transform! european network for alternative thinking and political dialogue. At a European level Fundacja Naprzód identifies politically with the European Left Party.
THATCHER AND THE MINERS

REMEMBERING THE 1984 STRIKE

Jim Gibson

When George Orwell wrote his futuristic novel 1984, he had the Authorities in the book systematically changing or erasing unwanted facts. These facts were replaced by wording more compatible with the latest shift in politico/social events. They were changing history, making some people and events non-existent. There was even a ministry, the so-called Ministry of Truth, appointed to apply these alterations. Things have not turned out quite the way Orwell envisaged, for the idea of Big Brother has been subverted into a sleazy TV reality show. However, with secretive organisations like GCHQ, MI6 and the American NSA spying on everyone nowadays, Orwell was undoubtedly on the right track.

When the real year 1984 actually arrived, a Tory government was running Britain and Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister. Whatever some people may think about ‘Maggie’ she was certainly clever. At least this was so in the
early years. After winning the General Election of 1979 she carefully chose a number of slick advisers to aid her decision-making, and the sinister strategy that she and her team evolved related to long-term disablement of the working class as a movement. Some have called this the first onslaught of neo-liberalism on the working classes. Partly her plan dealt with stripping power from the unions and the Labour Party they funded. And it was not a masterplot quickly put together in days. The seed had actually been sown around 1978, when ‘the Ridley Plan’, thought up by northern Tory MP Nicholas Ridley, proposed denationalising the UK’s heavy industries. *The Economist* magazine obtained details of Ridley’s ideas, which were set down in a report, and leaked these into the public domain. The report revealed that hostile opposition was expected from the Labour movement, and it was considered that the coalminers’ union constituted possibly the biggest problem for such a revolutionary programme.

With Thatcher having defeated Labour in the 1979 General Election, there did not seem any big reason not to press ahead with the ideas in Ridley’s report, especially as soon after she saw off trouble at British Steel and union ‘agitators’ at British Leyland. But the complications of politics and the political scene generally at the time meant the Tory mastercoup onslaught couldn’t immediately be addressed with great confidence. Some anti-trade union legislation was introduced, but it was only after Thatcher won a second election in 1983 by a landslide, over Labour and Michael Foot, that she and her team began to get serious about their plan.

Ridley had said that once alerted, the miners would
probably be called out on strike, so to prepare for this the government should previously build up large coal stocks, ‘particularly at the power stations’. He also recommended that plans be made to import additional coal from abroad. Haulage companies employing non-unionised drivers could be offered contracts to help move coal when required, and dual-energy power stations (coal/oil) should be set up as quickly as possible. The non-union drivers would be expected to cross picket lines under heavy police protection, a consideration which also resulted in changes to the law regarding policing and picketing.

After the 1983 thrashing of Labour its leader Michael Foot resigned, and in October of that year a leadership contest was won by Neil Kinnock. More a pacifier than a firebrand for all his bombastic rhetoric, Kinnock took a stance directly opposed to the confrontational one of Arthur Scargill. So when it was suddenly announced early in 1984 that Cortonwood Pit in South Yorkshire was earmarked for closure, Yorkshireman Scargill called for a strike. Considering what Ridley had stated in his report, the announcement of the closure of this particular pit smacked of a well-planned set-up. Kinnock, perhaps sensibly, said he wouldn’t back a strike without a ballot of all the miners, whereas Scargill, no doubt perceiving that some of the big pits wouldn’t back a strike, considered that balloting the men wasn’t necessary. Thus there was a serious division in the labour movement straight away. Where Arthur Scargill ramped up the miners at huge rallies across the coalfields, Kinnock tried to win them over with a call for democracy and calm. Some listened to Kinnock, especially those miners in the Nottingham area who were mak-
130 TRANSFORM

ing the biggest wages. They didn’t think the principle of pit closures amounted to much when their immediate and substantial earnings were at stake. Besides, they didn’t believe their own pits would close any time soon. It was from this area that the breakaway union the UDM emerged, or ‘the biscuits’ as some strikers referred to it. Others termed its members ‘Under Direct Management’, meaning they were controlled by the government and the Coal Board. Which they were. The emergence of the UDM widened the division in the labour movement, and it formed the nucleus of a strike-breaking, back to work strategy, urged by the Board and the government.

Meanwhile, many smaller pits in the north (and in Wales and Kent) had taken note of the ‘secret hit list’ of pits spoken about by Scargill, which was said to total 75 separate pit closures. The loss of mining jobs involved ranged between 64,000 and 70,000; figures which were emphatically denied by the government side. Scargill’s personal bogey-man by now was Thatcher’s appointed ‘hitman’, new chairman of the National Coal Board, Ian MacGregor. This man, an Americanised Scot, was somewhat notorious as a strikebreaker, and he had been responsible for cracking down on disputes at both British Leyland and British Steel. MacGregor rubbish ed the claims of mass pit closures, and along with Thatcher declared Scargill to be lying. A government letter, personally authorised by Thatcher, was sent out to thousands of miners stating that their leader, the president of the NUM, was making allegations which were ‘absolutely untrue’.

Scargill, whatever else some may think of him, was a magnificent speaker at big gatherings, so trying to convince
large sections of rank and file miners that their leader was a liar amounted to a shot in the dark by the government. The ever-selective media, however, took sides and held the government’s accusation up as true. There began a character assassination of the miners’ champion, and indeed of the miners themselves. When Scargill raised his arm during a speech to emphasise a point, it would appear on front pages of tabloids like *The Sun*, and even the supposedly Labour-supporting *Daily Mirror*. A comparison was made with Hitler doing a ‘Seig Heil’ to the German masses, and the photos were captioned accordingly. The reporting which went with such pictures was often way over the top, obvious anti-strike propaganda to anyone who realised what the press were up to. But many people didn’t, and they believed much of the distorted ‘news’ they saw and heard every day. TV reporting was no better than that of the press. The BBC was even accused, rightly, of doctoring some of its footage from the picket lines which showed miners, unprovoked, attacking the police. In reality, the police had first charged into the pickets on horseback, and this caused the pickets to respond. For George Orwell to have written about truth being twisted and distorted so many years earlier, makes one realise that such things were happening even then. Manipulation of truth must long have been a tactic of the media trade.

The Miners’ Strike lasted almost a year to the day, from March 1984 to March 1985, and it changed many mining families’ lives forever. That it destroyed mining communities and families is a fact. Not only did the pit closure programme take away jobs and livelihoods, it put thousands of honest workers unceremoniously onto social security ben-
efits. Today we hear about ‘scroungers’ and ‘benefit cheats’ a lot, but little about the government or system which methodically creates these situations. Thatcher intentionally put willing workers on the dole, with all the stigmatisation that entails. Some men managed to find jobs as bus drivers, or paramedics, or shelf-stackers at firms like B&Q. But there were not that many jobs to find. Margaret Thatcher wasn’t called The Iron Lady for nothing. ‘There is no such thing as society’, she famously once said. She certainly did a good job of erasing the mining part of it.

Though many negatives came out of the strike, there have been some positives. A lot has been written about civil war situations in families and so-called ‘scabs’, where a son or father or brother crossed the picket line and the others thereafter refused all contact. An enlightening book about one particular pit village was written by author Tony Parker. He called it Red Hill, A Mining Community, but the title is fictitious. It is actually about Horden Colliery in County Durham. The book is composed of a series of true interviews Parker did with some of the villagers, and the views of miners’ wives are included. One woman describes how her married sister, who lived in Newcastle, kept telling her how wicked Scargill was and to get her striker husband to return to work. ‘She believes everything she sees on the telly’, was how this lady put it. But she refused to agree with her Newcastle-based sister, whose husband wasn’t a miner.

Some wives started up Women’s Support Groups, and this happened at Horden too. It became an activity which actually transformed the lives of many of them, turning them into political activists, when before they had done little more than watch soaps or game shows on TV. In a
strange and unexpected way the strike turned out to be a good thing for these women. Some found a voice they never knew they had, getting up on stage to speak about miners’ union history and of how nothing had ever been given to them willingly by the coal bosses and the government. It had been the unions, the much-maligned-by-the-media unions, who had won it for them. Paradoxically, this new working-class phenomenon began to be reported on (in a positive way) in the papers, and on TV. New female identities were being shaped, and some women’s lives were being transformed for the better. So the strike was an Age of Enlightenment in a way. We hear so much now about ‘fake news’ and ‘alternative news’ it is difficult for most of the public to know what to believe. It takes thought and intelligence to overcome this, so it is necessary to learn as these miners’ wives did. Once they felt they understood the situation they travelled about the country speaking to audiences about the real reasons for the strike. And they found that people wanted to see and hear them. These miners’ wives had learned, and they wanted others to understand how they had done so. This is probably the most important reason why the strike of 1984 should never be forgotten.

Jim Gibson was formerly a Northumbrian coalminer and 1984 striker, who went on to study at Ruskin College and Stirling University.
WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE COULD BE

TRANSITIONAL DEMANDS AND ACTIONS

Len Arthur

As radical socialists we have confidence in the potential of people to act together to create a society where wealth is collectively owned and used for need and not profit; is free from oppression; is just; is democratic and addresses climate change. It is seemingly a tall order when seen from our current neo liberal predicament where the world’s richest eight people have the same wealth as the poorest 50%; a misogynist and racist elected as US President and who has pulled out of the modest Paris Climate agreement. Yet here we are, with big ambitions for us humans and the planet, protesting on the sidelines as the world moves in a different direction.

How can we bridge the gap between where we are and
where we know we could be? How do we contest the power and strategies of capital saying no, yet at the same time, as constructive socialists, do something to make the world a better place? It reminds me of when I was teaching what was then called liberal studies to day release apprentices and one of them replied, after I had explained the unequal distribution of wealth, ‘Yes sir, we agree with you but what can we do about it?’

This, of course, is not a new issue for socialists and debate has raged about a maximum or minimum programme; ‘standing on our principles’; offence or defence; or the apparently esoteric need for ‘transitional demands’ for at least the last 200 years. It will continue and you will be relieved to know that this article is not going to claim, eureka-like, to finally come up with an answer. More modestly, it is just going to suggest that actually there might be something of use in the debate about transitional demands, with ‘transitional action’ added on.

TRANSITIONAL DEMANDS

‘Fools rush in where angels fear to tread’. Pope’s entreaty needs consideration when talking about transitional demands bearing in mind the long years of debate that lie behind the idea. So some caveats. There is not a list of transitional demands that suits all circumstances; the term is better seen as signifying a continuous process of development, changing with the shifting balance of contextual forces or terrain of struggle. The processes offer a method of prioritising certain strategies and tactics, linking current grievances and concerns with a challenge to the power of capital over, say charitable concerns that are helpful and
needed but are contained in relation to changing the way wealth is used and allocated in our society. Thus the argument is that not all demands of radical socialists should be transitional but that their development should be emphasised in practice.

So what does a transitional demand look like? Take the current fight against the politics and policies of austerity. Behind these cut backs, wage restrictions, privatisation and deregulation lies a neoliberal strategy of making the working class pay for the 2007-8 banking crisis. The state bailed out the banks by pouring money into them, the bill for the resulting increase in government spending and deficit has been foisted onto workers, the very people who did nothing to create the crisis. These policies have resulted in the almost overwhelming destruction and degradation of public services and social welfare, across the UK and globally and lie at the heart of the criminal decisions that led to the fire and avoidable deaths at Grenfell Tower.

Mobilising to challenge the whole policy direction is daunting yet has been attempted by organisations such as the People’s Assembly and now perhaps the movement against the Tory government. Certainly the overall challenge has been reflected in the successful Corbyn-led Labour Party campaign. Up until this time, the effects of austerity have been experienced by people sectionally and locally and they have consequently often responded at this level. The ability and desire to help locally has resulted in food banks being established; local hospital closures have been fought ferociously; the bedroom tax was mobilised against across the UK. Socialists are often involved in these campaigns and action but for us there is an additional
task: mobilising to challenge the politics of austerity. So, instead of demanding that a particular local hospital stays open with the risk of pushing the cut on to another community, we would argue to link up with other campaigns demanding that NHS cuts are reversed with local trade unions and health boards in support. This would be a transitional demand linking the local with the national. Similarly with council cuts, involvement in a campaign to, say, keep meals on wheels would need to be linked to the transitional demand that cuts do not take place in any other service and councillors should vote against a cuts budget. Again with benefits, whilst those involved with running food banks will understand that many people have to use them because they have been sanctioned, a transitional demand would be to place the priority on fighting the changes that have led to sanctioning.

The radical socialist case is that all of these attacks on the working class are unnecessary and avoidable and are only taking place because the Tory government wishes to prop up the profitability of the capitalist system they represent. So it is for us to find ways of challenging and blocking that strategy and arguing an alternative economic case. Transitional demands start the process of blocking the capitalist strategy, act as a basis for generalising resistance through the experience of solidarity, allow wider access to the narrative against austerity and open up the logic that leads to legitimating a radical alternative: they act as a bridge between where we are and where we need to be.

Of course the question could be asked, ‘Well this already happened in fighting austerity, so what’s all the fuss with a name?’ Well, actually a lot of it didn’t happen and
where it did it was largely the result of socialists making the case. We need to be better and more systematic at naming the process as ‘developing transitional demands’.

There is a reluctance to use the term which is difficult to explain. Colin Barker and colleagues\(^1\) have produced a superb book called *Marxism and Social Movements* that really deserves to be widely read. In this long quote they seem to come close to arguing the case for transitional demands but shy away from the actual words:

In this view, existing forms of activity and organisation (and of passivity and disorganisation) need to be understood as transitory, inwardly contradictory, and open to large- or small-scale transformation. The real problems for Marxists concern how precisely to grasp this in a given situation, and what to propose doing about it. For – as a theory of and for movements – Marxism is only of value as a contribution to the processes of argumentation and transformation within those movements, as an engaged practice that itself develops and learns alongside those with whom it participates in the effort to change the world. It is necessarily ‘critical’, always looking at the distance between what a movement is doing and whom it is mobilising and for what, and the potential to which it might realistically aspire.

Transitional demands are closely associated with Leon Trotsky and his 1938 *Transitional Programme\(^2\)* where he succinctly stated the case:
It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demand and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.

Possibly due to the peremptory wording of the last phrase and the way some followers raised the status of the demands in the programme from relevancy within the context of the time to serving all circumstances, socialists have tried to steer clear of being caught up in a sectarian mess. However, it is important to realise that transitional demands have a long and rich socialist history which is relevant to our current needs.

Marx railed against what he called ‘indifferentism’ in 1873, when defending workers’ fights for wage increases and lessening the working day against anarchists and utopian socialists, who said socialists should be indifferent to these struggles as they did not overthrow capital. It is worth a read just for the invective. Similarly Marx argued that the Ten Hours Bill which limited the hours of work for women and children in British factories was a great victory.

Engels, in 1891 in his criticism of the political demands in the German Social and Democratic Party’s Erfurt programme, argued that many of the demands were ‘opportunistic’ as they failed to relate to the need to overthrow the monarchist government pretending that change
could come through peaceful reforms. Engels pointed out the danger and in doing so made the argument for transitional demands:

In the long run such a policy can only lead one’s own party astray. They push general, abstract political questions into the foreground, thereby concealing the immediate concrete questions, which at the moment of the first great events, the first political crisis automatically pose themselves. What can result from this except that at the decisive moment the party suddenly proves helpless and that uncertainty and discord on the most decisive issues reign in it because these issues have never been discussed?

The Third International, following the recognition that the revolutionary moment had ebbed at the third and fourth congresses in 1921 and 1922, started to support the use of transitional demands and slogans as a way of continuing to build the communist parties in a more difficult situation. August Thalheimer, then leader of the German Communist Party writing in 1928, reflected on the importance of transitional slogans (same meaning as demands in this text) whilst at the same time giving a potted history of the development of the term. He was using this to argue for a process of developing transitional demands:

Moreover, one must see that this period of struggle must be prepared _agitationally, propagandistically, organisationally_, that is, that the transitional slogans
must be propagated before the struggle for power has begun, until and so that they become *slogans of action* in the struggle for power.

When and *which* specific transitional slogans are agitated for and propagated before the immediate struggle for power, depends on the concrete conditions, but must be investigated in each single case. In other words, that is the task of *leading* the masses to the struggle for power.

Finally, a more recent assessment of the relevance of the process of developing transitional demands, together with an update of historical references, has been produced by Ed Rooksby where he concludes:

Indeed, I have argued that once the necessity of transitional demands is admitted – and it is hard to think of any other method of bridging the gap between day-to-day struggles and revolution – the strategic perspective that emerges also implies the necessity of some sort of left government. This need not be a problem, however, for those operating within the Leninist tradition because, as we saw, the workers’ government perspective of the early Comintern seems to provide the justification of historical precedent in this regard.
TRANSITIONAL DEMANDS

SUMMARY

Transitional demands are about offering political leadership within campaigns. It is not a dishonest or parasitical process as it involves openly making a bridging link between the problems people are experiencing and a trajectory toward a socialist alternative. Radical socialist parties need to consider adopting the process of developing transitional demands to try to ensure the arguments about the need for socialism are put. However the process is just that and is free and open to all to use.

THE POSSIBILITY OF TRANSITIONAL ACTIONS

Transitional demands are about a trajectory to help develop resistance against the power and strategies of capital; shifting the balance of forces in our direction. The intention is to grow the mobilisation to such an intensity that there is an actual possibility of taking power collectively and transforming society in a socialist direction. The demands are directed at those who currently have power to change direction and, if they don’t, developing sufficient countervailing power to remove them. Gramsci in his writings between 1929 and 1935, later collected in the Prison Notebooks, developed a useful distinction between the ‘war of movement’ where the capitalist state is under direct revolutionary threat and the ‘war of position’ where, like siege warfare, neither the working class nor the capitalist state, can strike decisively against each other. Transitional demands thus relate very much to collective organisations
and campaigns that rely for their effectiveness on generalisation and mobilisation such as trade unions, anti-war and anti-cuts campaigns.

Historically the working class, and people drawn to resist the power and oppression of capital, have also developed broader forms of ‘repertoires of contention’ that rely more on developing power now and prefiguratively, creating alternative and possibly radical social space, which by their very survival, can come to challenge the power of capital. Classically, workers and consumers cooperatives are an example and as Roberto indicates\(^8\) were praised by Marx in his address to the First International in 1864. Both Marx and Engels continued to recognise the role of cooperatives and, similarly, their role was recognised in the early first congresses of the Communist International in the early 1920s.

Since the 1960s social movements that emphasise building alternative power, now ‘building the future in the present’ have taken many forms and have been theorised as ‘autonomism’, ‘horizontalism’ and ‘intersectionality’. All three emphasise non-hierarchical flat organisation, which is a political and social alternative both to capitalism and traditional working class structures such as parties and trade unions. They emphasise the links between different exploited, oppressed, and excluded groups and their unity in acting directly to address these problems as opposed to relying on representative democracy. Acting and organising these alternative spaces, developing clear boundaries between themselves and the capitalist state. That such resistance is happening and being organised in this way has been seen by some as a sufficient political endpoint in it-
self, such as by Gibson-Graham\textsuperscript{9}.

Prefigurative politics have attracted criticism from the left largely in that they create ‘islands in a sea of capitalism’, that they exist but are contained by the overwhelming power that surrounds them. An article on John Holloway (a supporter of prefigurative politics), by Paul Blackledge\textsuperscript{10}, recognises that Holloway usefully places an emphasis on the link between socialism and human self-activity and criticises the idea that the capitalist state can be used to bring about socialist change. Blackledge agrees with Holloway, and, indirectly with the autonomist and horizontalist case, about the necessity of having a criterion of what a change to an alternative – socialist – society means. Blackledge goes on, however, to identify serious flaws in Holloway’s arguments by exploring his central idea of the ‘scream’, making the case that there is a real limitation to just producing ‘use values’ and attempting to separate these from their marketable ‘exchange values’, as a way of overcoming alienation. Blackledge argues that, under capitalism, the need for capitalists to realise surplus value as money – ‘exchange value’ – through sales of products as commodities in the market, feeds back and determines what is produced as ‘use values’, thus blocking the scope for alternative spaces to exist. Holloway, in turn argues, that the outcome of trade union struggles just perpetuates the exploitative and alienated relationships.

So out of this debate a dichotomy has developed between, on the one hand, socialists who argue for the privileging of collective generalisation and mobilisation, and on the other, social movement-type organisations that emphasise prefigurative alternative space. This is an unhelpful
dichotomy that tends to divide the opposition to capitalism, does not fully recognise the role that alternative social movements can, and could play, and actually goes against the grain of the history of socialist practice. The core problem seems to be a conflation of organisational form with the political agency, debate and self activity of the people who make up these different forms of resistance. So it is not that a cooperative, as such, challenges capital but the political and strategic trajectory that it may take – either toward being an integrated business or an alternative and mutual social space. Similarly with trade unions. A union is not by virtue of its organisational existence anti-capitalist, it is the outcome of the internal political debates that make it more or less so. In both types of organised resistance there can either be a trajectory toward being contained or one toward transgression and socialism. The key in both is whether there is leadership present in the organisation to argue for the left trajectory. In the case of forms of resistance that depend on collective mobilisation the key bridge is the process of developing transitional demands. In the case of social movement prefigurative forms of resistance, the key bridge, it is argued here, is the process of developing transitional actions.

Comrades in Transform Europe in early 2016 held a Production and Commons workshop covering similar issues. Roberto Morea\textsuperscript{11} in summing up made this observation:

The interventions dealt with the question how, nowadays, workers’ takeovers of companies are always taking place from a defensive position: they happen to save jobs. However, these recuperations
show that working without bosses and shareholders is not a utopia. In addition, workers’ co-ops are more resilient than other companies, and, on average have greater success. This presents an immediate possibility to bypass capitalism. Therefore, we should see these takeovers as a practical way to get rid of capitalist companies. But the question remains: how to move from a defensive mode to an offensive one to end capitalism? [my emphasis].

What is proposed now is to explore the role transitional actions could play in addressing the question asked in the final sentence.

Transitional actions are about using the collective power we already have to take forward decisions that challenge the strategies and power of capital. They are about making that island in the sea of capitalism bigger and linking up with other islands. So, in the case of cooperatives instead of competing on the same basis as a business in a market, the emphasis is on trading with other cooperatives; on Fair Trade; on sharing control and resources with the local community, using green energy and joining in consumer boycotts. Ultimately the aim should be to link transitional demands and actions together in a movement of movements. That, in Gramsci’s terminology, they can also move from being part of the shift from a war of position to a war of movement.

The interconnection between movements of mobilisation and social movements and the dangers of drawing a dichotomy between them is increasingly being recognised in academic studies in this area such as in Barker et al.
Hence, whilst the difference between making demands on someone with power, as opposed to implementing changes with the power that people currently control remains, transitional demands and actions – the trajectory toward a socialist transformation – need to be embedded in both. Some more examples about how this has and can work more effectively helps to make this point.

First there are actually organisational similarities between movements based on collective mobilisation and those on alternative space. Tarrow\textsuperscript{12} recognised that there are cycles of contention where some types of resistance predominate over others; where movements build and go forward and then reach the maximum of their power and fall back. In some ways this echoes Gramsci’s wars of position and manoeuvre. As Gramsci suggests, alternative forms of hegemony, in terms of both ideas and organisation, are required to sustain the ‘war of position’, and critically he points to both Italian history and revolutionary history more generally, to indicate how difficult it is to move back from a ‘war of movement’ to one of ‘position’. Moreover, he argues that a war of position is not easy to sustain and ‘is concentrated, difficult, and requires exceptional qualities of patience and inventiveness’ [my emphasis]. In a trade union context, for example, going forward and developing the momentum of a struggle is easy compared with having to compromise and fall back. The latter part of the struggle is always difficult, with accusations of selling out. Two key aims are essential in assessing whether a compromise needs to be reached with the employers. First: are the members affected fully and truthfully informed of the current state of play in the negotiation and level of resistance, and are they in democratic control.
TRANSITIONAL DEMANDS

of the decision making process? Second, do the terms of the proposed agreement take forward the benefits and the control of the members over their work and contracts and, if not, does the agreement still allow for a resumption of the struggle at a later date?

An example from my own experience relates to the early 1990s when, at the end of a two-year struggle to sustain our existing contract in higher education, the employers wanted all members to sign individually to accept the new contract. As a union branch we argued that we would sign on behalf of the members and they would just sign to say they had received it – making the point that the agreement remained a collective and not an individual one. This may seem like a small point and some representatives, keen to get an agreement, couldn’t see the problem but it would have meant that the employer could argue, disingenuously, that the members had signed – not us, as a union. However, what was at stake was the chance to come back: by signing as a trade union, we preserved the collective agreement and retained our collective control over policing and interpretation. It was clear that we could have re-started the dispute over the principled issue of recognition and under this threat the employers backed down. Small, difficult, but important in the longer run, and the argument came from our wider socialist understanding of the longer-term strategy and the balance of forces.

Goodrich, writing in 1920, described such an outcome as a ‘frontier of control’: the line at which the battle had temporarily stopped. In the case cited above, the collective agreement and contract described in detail the terms of employment and associated procedures, form-
ing a boundary between the rights of the employer and those of the workers. In this case, the boundary, or frontier of control, is another way of expressing what is meant by the ‘war of position’. It represents a temporary outcome of an ongoing process of resistance, struggle and contention. It forms an essential part of sustaining the possibility of a war of movement and transformation and in many respects resembles an alternative space covered by a collective agreement where the power of management can continually be challenged. The agreement represents the frontier and the boundary between the area of control and no control but a process of developing transitional actions and demands can re-start a trajectory toward challenging the employer’s power.

Second, within workers’ cooperatives, especially where all workers are members, alternative democratic power can be seen to exist, survive and be a radical example of what is possible. I was involved in a research project for four years at Tower Colliery in South Wales\textsuperscript{14}, where we were able to show just how alternative this experience was. The colliery was the last deep mine in South Wales and as a cooperative was under worker control of the 300 miners from 1996 through to 2011 when accessible reserves ran out. In that time a profit was made every year, the miners had the best pensions and pay in the UK and there was not one fatal accident. There were six directors and two had to stand for election each year, so democracy was continuous, there was 100\% trade union membership and collective bargaining continued. Solidarity donations were and still are made, to groups in the local community and the example of this colliery became internationally famous with weekly visits
from people around the world and even a French film and an opera were inspired by the experience. Ownership of the land together with the minerals and no external debt obligations meant that the workers truly owned and controlled all the income.

Transitional actions having the strategic political trajectory towards developing the collective power we already have and finding ways of increasingly challenging the strategies and power of capital can, in practice, help to unite different forms of social movement. The key is not downgrading these forms of resistance due to their organisational form but recognising that the internal political debate has a critical influence on whether the resistance becomes contained or has a trajectory toward being part of a socialist transformation. Transitional actions act as a bridge between where organisations like cooperatives are and could be; they need to be part of these internal debates. For this to happen requires socialist leadership and intervention in the same way as taking forward transitional demands. In turn that requires radical socialists to reject the prioritisation of one form of struggle over the other and return to the socialist tradition of working within a wide range of repertoires of contention.

CONCLUSION
Hopefully the case has been put sufficiently for socialists to start to take the process of developing transitional demands and actions seriously again. The issue of how could a transition to socialism take place cannot any longer be discarded with ‘we don’t agree with blueprints’ type quips. For many people, particularly the young, being hammered
by austerity, losing their EU citizenship, facing a world where racism is constantly being legitimated by the media, how we bridge the gap between where we all are and a viable, meaningful and radical socialist alternative, is a pressing need. The trajectory toward this aim needs to be built into the campaigns and actions that people care about.

Putting into practice the process of developing transitional demands and actions is simply providing leadership in trying to ensure the appropriate questions are asked. When developing the aims of a campaign the question must be put: what demands do people care about and how can they be worded so they appeal beyond the campaign and directly challenge the power and strategies of capital? Then in terms of transitional actions the question is then posed: how best can we use the power and resources currently available to us to create an alternative and radical space that similarly challenges the power and strategies of capital and at the same time inspires others to do the same? Basically, the answer to the question, if I were a rich Tory what would really get up my nose and worry me.

Finally, sustaining such a political process and trajectory does require a socialist party to prioritise the process of developing transitional demands and actions. Moreover, a radical socialist party is required to develop a manifesto incorporating these demands and actions and help to coordinate the transition to power at all levels and through electoral and direct action strategies.

**Len Arthur** is a former economics lecturer and political activist in Wales.
NOTES
1 Barker, C, at al 2013 *Marxism and Social Movement*, Leiden & Boston, Brill. https://docs.google.com/file/d/0Bz3wUg3e6r_4bG5kUkRwb0F1ISI/edit
3 Marx, K, 1873 *Political Indifferentism*. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1873/01/indifferentism.htm
10 Blackledge, P, 2012, *In Perspective: John Holloway in Inter-
national Socialism 136.


REVIEW

RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: HOPE, TRAGEDY, MYTHS

AT THE BRITISH LIBRARY UNTIL 29TH AUGUST 2017

Joseph Healy

What does one expect to find at an exhibition on the Russian Revolution – photos of Lenin, heroic paintings of Red cavalry charges, original copies of the ABC of Communism? Well only the photos of Lenin are present here, but the interesting aspect is that this exhibition does not actually start with 1917. It gives a lot of space to the history of Tsarist Russia and the build up over the decades which led to the Russian Revolution, clearly demonstrating that Russia had been a powder keg for decades and that 1917 was in many ways the only logical conclusion for settling those issues.

One would also expect at the British Library a rather critical view of the Revolution and that does exist, but it also demonstrates the impact of the Revolution on the ordinary lives of Russians. One criticism I would make of the exhibition is that although it is rich in original material – some of which is fascinating like the propaganda pictures produced by the White forces during the Civil War – there is not a great deal of analysis.
The exhibition opens with a large section dedicated to pre-revolutionary Russia stretching back to the 1860s. Two large early twentieth century maps at the entrance highlight the size of the Russian Empire, geographically the second largest at that time after the British Empire. These maps also illustrate the undeveloped nature of much of Russia, particularly Asiatic Russia where, before the construction of the Trans Siberian railway, it could take months to travel from Moscow or St Petersburg to the Pacific coast. There are some beautifully illustrated maps from the 1860s showing the varied nationalities of the Empire decked out in colourful folk costumes – the multinational nature of the Empire would become a central issue in the Civil War.

There is also some fascinating film footage of the celebration of the Romanov’s third centenary celebrations and the idea is introduced that the vast armies of peasants regarded the Tsars as their lord and master – a painting of priests blessing the soil drives home the idea of the connection with both the land and the Orthodox Church for the peasantry.

The buildup to the Revolution is clear in the Russian propaganda postcards from the Russo-Japanese War where the Tsarist empire was humiliated by Japan, as well as details from the 1905 revolution including shackles used on political prisoners sent to Siberia. One of the most interesting artefacts is a souvenir cup from the celebration of the coronation celebrations of Nicholas II in Moscow where a mass stampede to get them resulted in the death of 1,389 people and the royal couple attended a ball on the same night, resulting in Nicholas earning the sobriquet ‘Bloody Nicholas’. This was a portent of what would lie ahead.
World War I clearly acted as a huge catalyst for the revolution and there is original footage of the war being announced from the balcony in St Petersburg and the enthusiastic soldiers marching off to the front. This reminded me of the scene in Dr Zhivago, where the Bolshevik character watches the peasants, now soldiers, marching to the front in their new boots and remarks that when the boots wear out and the rations end is when the revolution will begin. There is also film footage of the protest marches in St Petersburg in 1917 and the fall of the Tsar.

The section on the Revolution itself is quite small. There is a map of Petrograd indicating all of the major strategic points and a sailor’s uniform from the battleship Aurora. Some fascinating artefacts include an original copy of Order Number 1 from the Petrograd Soviet ordering soldiers in the new Soviet army to no longer salute officers and to form soldiers’ committees/soviets etc. There are also some dramatic photos from the Illustrated London News showing scenes from the Revolution including barricades with machine guns in the streets of Petrograd.

The section on the Russian Civil War is much more detailed and extensive. A computerised map of Russia shows the ebb and flow of the various armies between 1918 and 1923 in all the spheres of operation. These include the Whites, the Allies, the Anarchists and of course, the Soviets. This map gives an indication of how close the Revolution came to being defeated in 1920 when the Soviets controlled only the area near Moscow, and Ukraine looked as if it might fall into the hands of the Poles and Ukrainian nationalists. Specimens of both White and Bolshevik propaganda are interesting and indicate the audience which each side was
appealing to. A White painting entitled ‘On to Moscow’ indicates a White general, probably Denikin, with sword in hand gesturing to his advancing troops. There is also the famous poster of Trotsky as the Red Devil presiding over a collection of human skulls. A Budenovka hat (the famous Red Army hat with the red star) I discovered, was based on a design from early Slav helmets and there is one here.

Quotations on the wall from the Soviets call for more bourgeois blood and there is a fascinating illustration of an arrest by the Cheka of an enemy of the state from Boris Zvorykin’s book History of the Soviets (1922). There are also fascinating illustrations of performances by a workers’ theatre group, The Blue Blouse Theatre (1928) which demonstrate the importance of the arts in Bolshevik propaganda.

A final section of the exhibition deals with the impact of the Revolution globally with books by John Reed and HG Wells among others recounting their experiences of visiting early Soviet Russia. There are also excerpts from Soviet films about the Revolution and the Civil War including, of course, Battleship Potemkin. One of the most interesting for me was ‘Chapaev’, an account of the military career of the famous Red Army cavalry commander in the Civil War made in 1934 and which apparently was Stalin’s favourite film which he watched 30 times!

This exhibition works because it sets the Revolution firmly in the flow of Russian history demonstrating that it did not appear from nowhere. The Civil War section in particular is very rich in original material, some of which is quite surprising, such as the 1000 rouble note issued by the White regime of Yudenich. It also sets the Revolution strongly in an international context demonstrating how it influenced
other revolutions such as those in Berlin and Budapest.

One of the most interesting items for me was a copy of Oscar Wilde’s play ‘The Nihilists’ (1880) about the anarchists in Tsarist Russia with the typical Wildean line: ‘Nothing is impossible in Russia except reforms.’ There is even a copy of Lenin’s application to become a reader at the British Library in 1902. This is a veritable treasure trove of original materials on pre-revolutionary and Bolshevik Russia – well worth seeing.

Joseph Healy is an expert on Eastern Europe and Chair of London Irish LGBT Network.