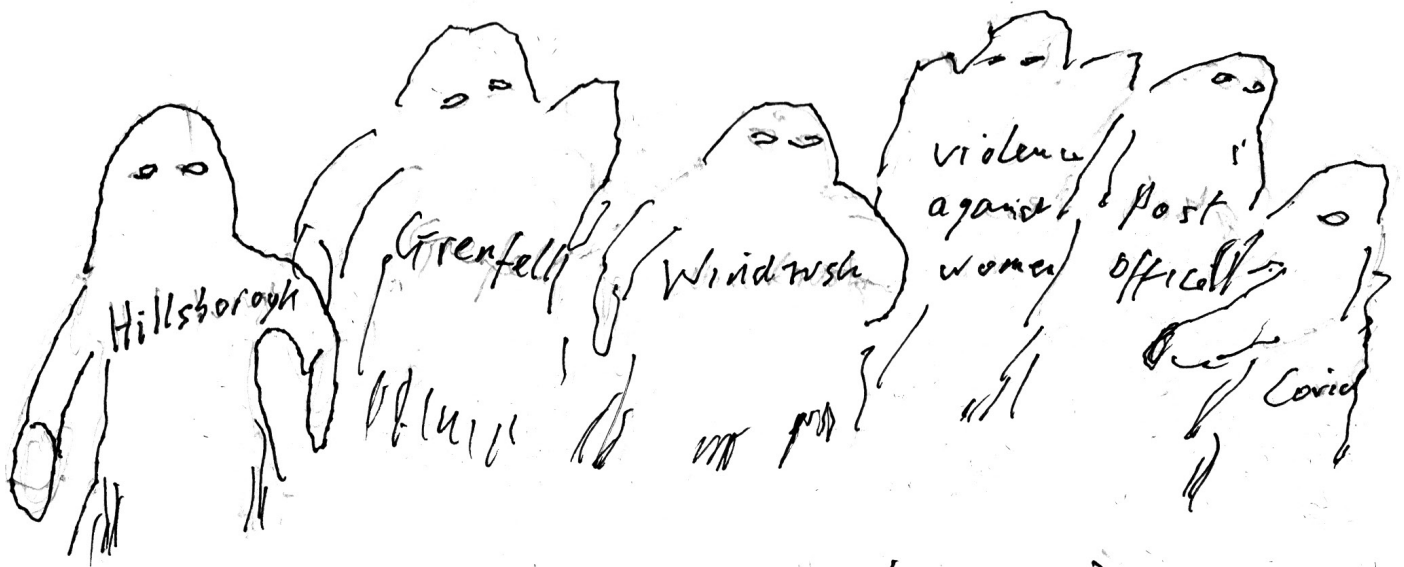


WE'RE GONNA NEED A LOTTA BOTTLE IN 2026!



The Haunters of the Dark

(With apologies to H.P. Lovecraft)

THE GHOSTS of the past continue to haunt the present. Hillsborough, the contaminated blood scandal, Grenfell, the post office scandal, violence against women and girls, Windrush and Covid all point to the ways in which the working class has led the fight to bring about justice over many decades.

At a wider level, working-class communities have been decimated by the closure of the pits and the destruction of the steel industry whilst the selling off of the NHS, the attacks on welfare and the 'academising' of schools have eroded the social wage. What we have must be defended against the austerity of Labour and the Tories and the billionaire's Reform party.

The working class has emerged changed but coherent, present on the terraces, in hospitality unions and independent formations. The strike movement of 2022/2023 indicates that unions are widely seen as essential to the defence of workplace rights but a new rank and file movement linked to political objectives remains to be built.

A socialist agenda is vital but not one that is based in

vanguard parties like the SWP or the now discredited Labour party. A movement must be built that articulates a coherent socialist approach: a movement that distributes thousands of leaflets throughout Britain's towns and cities; a movement that stands candidates on a socialist ticket; a movement that sells national and local newspapers on street corners; a movement that reaches deep into workplaces; a movement that connects with existing campaigns but does not seek to flood them with slogans; a movement that will acknowledge that the new working class is an international working class that is *here and now* and is currently mobilising for Gaza and against fascism. Above all, a movement that speaks to the situation of work: low pay, casual hours, rubbish workplaces (that is if you actually have a workplace), bullying and discrimination- all of which reach into peoples' home lives and families. But a movement that is not averse to saying that global capitalism, originally 'fired' by slavery, is now deep in crisis and must be replaced lock stock and barrel by socialist societies.

COVID PUBLIC ENQUIRY (A PERSONAL REFLECTION)

RICHARD CHILVERS

SOME OF you might have been following the latest tranche of the Covid Public Enquiry interviews nearing its conclusive phase which included **Unison's Christine McNea** and **Sally Hopkins** who were asked about the discharge policy covering the state's irresponsibility in trying to persuade care homes to accept and not block patients that "all of these patients can be safely cared for in a care home if this guidance is followed"

The present module has been addressing the release of elderly patients from hospital into care homes where 46 thousand patients passed away in the two year period which can be seen permanently on the Milbank shrine of commemoration. It showed that the so called protective ring was just another name for a death sentence for the most vulnerable individuals in our society.

Matt Hancock for the seventh time was interviewed and became very irate when asked whether he knew what was going on in his department and said that the discharge policy was the 'least worse option' due to running out of beds in the acute hospitals. The government decided politically not to commandeer the private hospital sector but instead the state provided a protective financial ring of about 2 billion worth of public money around them (see BMJ report). Various ruses were used to persuade care homes to admit these elderly patients despite knowing that there were no isolation facilities, little access to protective PPE and with staff who were forced to come into work as unable to self-isolate as not in receipt of sick pay.

Finally, the fact that the CQC was instructed not to make inspections just proves incontrovertibly that the state as an institution knew that its guilty of not providing a protective ring which to quote from Hancock's weasel reply to the allegation that he could be said to have been lying in public, but he did concede that the so called protective ring could be so construed as having been just a form of words to allay public fears in the grave circumstances which according to all public accounts found the government completely at sea without a rudder to steer by so much so that it eventually lead to Boris Johnson at deaths door which as we famously know did not stop him from wanting to halt the second lock down.

It just shows that the running down of hospital beds over the previous decade was the main factor in this response: the state knew when it instituted an emergency test run in Operation Cygnus. I can well remember the shrugged shoulders at a CQC meeting in Beccles when discussing the results: the system as then presently constituted would not be able to cope with such an emergency: full stop.

Daniel at that time contacted Matt Hancock at his office to offer the use of the empty hospital ward as an isolation facility but there was no answer but we know they listened to the overtures from the VIP lanes of private corporate interests investing public monies in very expensive track and trace regimes including the building of very expensive nightingale hospitals which were not really used to their full capacity as no staff were available.

Matt Hancock ended his interview by confirming that he knew that care homes could not cope by recommending that care homes should now have isolation wings, permanent caches of PPE and regulating care staff moves between homes as it was one of the main vectors of infectious transfer but then finally rounded off by grandly announcing that nothing has really been learnt during the three years of this enquiry and that we would not be able to cope if and when another pandemic were to arise.

CONCLUSION : VERDICT: GUILTY: SENTENCE

DEATH BY A THOUSAND COMPLICATIONS

IN THE post- World War 1 decade the WAFD independence movement was founded to end British control of Egypt and became the leading party in 1924 under Saad Zaghloul. As this struggle intensified, the British kidnapped and deported Zaghloul to Malta and then to the Seychelles but he returned to become prime minister of the first WAFD government in 1924.

This was a time when the social and political tectonic plates were shifting globally as the so-called 'big powers' were challenged internally by proto- fascist movements internally and by anti- imperialist struggles externally. Today, militarism is on the rise and the USA, formerly the world's leading player, is struggling to hold onto power and threatening Latin American states such as Venezuela, Columbia, Brazil, Cuba and Mexico which constitute a thread to the Monroe Doctrine. The genocide in Gaza represents the highest point to which a client imperialist state will go when faced with an existential crisis. Again, Palestine's children will form the new resistance.

But as the plates shift, complications emerge. The biggest pro-migrant movement in the USA has developed to oppose Trump's own Nazi- style ICE Brownshirts and this moving is part of the working class. Unrest is increasing throughout the global south with strikes and demonstrations as for example in Iran against the theocratic regime. In Europe governments have no solutions to the economic crises that hold down the cost of living and drive privatisation of public services.



Käthe Kollwitz's poster of 1924 says 'No more war'.



From the archive: *Palestine's Children*. Short Stories by Ghassan Kanafani. Translated from the Arabic by Barbara Harlow (1984). Kanafani was a prominent Palestinian novelist, spokesperson, and artist. He was assassinated in a car- bomb explosion in 1972.

JEKYLL OR HYDE?

WHEN A handful of us launched Norfolk for Nationalization of Rail (NOR4NOR) at Norwich station back in 2016, we could not have guessed what a tumultuous future would lie in store. 2026 will mark ten years of campaigning for public ownership but the decade has been about much more than nationalization.

The first thing to say is that a rail system is actually much more than trains, tracks and stations. It is a *social railway*. Despite its origins as a paragon of capitalism, it has come to embody an alternative to it- part of the 'invading socialist society'. This is abundantly clear in the prolonged and sustained struggles of rail workers to maintain jobs and services in the face of John Major's reckless privatization in the 1990s. That meant taking on both governments and private companies (the modern equivalent of the 'razor gangs' of the 1930s) and this had a precursor on British Rail with a series of six nation-wide one day strikes in 1989 over pay consolidation. Picket lines at Stratford depot in London where I worked ensuring that no trains ran on Anglia Region.

The last ten years have witnessed an unprecedented intensification of struggles to maintain the social railway. If governments believed that the break-up of rail would destabilise the union presence, a belief signalled by the war of attrition waged by Tory governments with Whitehall transport chief Peter Wilkinson calling for a 'punch-up' with the unions and arrogantly declaring that the unions should 'get out of my industry', they had entered a terrain that workers could successfully dominate. This reached a highpoint when the RMT organised a series of strikes to stop guards being removed from trains with six regions being affected in 2018 and, more recently with the successful defence of ticket offices.

But no champagne corks have been popping as private companies have been taken over, most recently Greater Anglia in October 2025. Many railway workers are cautious or sceptical about the new arrangements as, after all, managements remain the same and the experience of Network Rail is not positive witness the situation in the S&T department. The RMT has been in the forefront of the fight for the end of outsourcing

of cleaning and catering. There has been only a limited cap on fares for 2026 and the bizarre ticketing system has not changed, whilst overcrowding remains a problem. The recent Huntingdon attack merely underlines the dangers to staff in on-board catering often threatened by abusive passengers. And Eddie Dempsey has recently said that 'women working on our railways are being failed every day' when a report found that only 3% of overhead line patrol workers always have access to a toilet within a reasonable distance.

The decade has been a watershed in term of the relationship between communities and the rail unions. In East Anglia alone we have seen hundreds of local people joining picket lines, signing petitions and joining rallies such as Enough is Enough's massive demonstration in Norwich. NOR4NOR was part of this upsurge organising two huge public meetings and a rail summit in Norwich and supporting activists who joined picket line in Colchester, Ipswich, Clacton, Lowestoft, Ely and London. The need for a defence of the social railway has been articulated by a new wave of campaigning organisations such as We Own It and Bring Back British Rail.

A new agenda is called for in the coming decade. Already, Chiltern Rail is trying to introduce D.O.O. threatening passenger safety. The rail unions will need to draw up a clear set of policies to press for a new approach to climate change as railways will be in the forefront of changes to weather patterns and workers will face unprecedented changes. A transport commission is an important forum for the unions but should not be dominated by full- timers. Community representation is urgently needed to co-ordinate the various passenger campaigns and this should include disabled groups and advocates for women's safety on public transport. The unions must reflect on a strategy to deal with the transportation of war materials in a decade of more warfare. A Peoples Plan needs to be drawn up to begin the process of knitting together the fragmented rail system and to bring all outsourcing in-house and return freight to public ownership.

GETTING IT TOGETHER

Several of us met for KWU Xmas drinks, which was a very cordial and a merry time was had by all nevertheless before too much beer was consumed we did discuss Your Party. To cut to the chase, will it work? Well maybe. Opinions varied from give it six months to no hope whatsoever. Not all kwu participants think YP is the way forward either. No hope would be a shame because there was so much optimism last summer but it's not looking good.

Let us think of what matters to people right now, the cost of living, housing costs and availability, NHS operation waiting times, doctor and dentist appointments, Job Security, wages and conditions, zero hour contracts, bullying at work, cost of Transport to name a few. So what came out of the recent YP conference? Well a lot of discussion was on rules and procedures but the party was going to be Socialist. That's good because I for one didn't think this would be a stated aim. However the Labour Party was Socialist, and proud of it, from 1918 to 1996 but the MP's and their supporters largely paid lip service to that. Then there is to be a collective leadership. Given two high profile

ex Labour MP's that's strange but given their estrangement, understandable. Dual membership became a bit of a duel but it's dual, for now. And the awful name stays. Lots of speeches from individuals with their particular or peculiar axes to grind. So not a lot of policy decisions on what matters to people and clearly that was the message people got as polling for YP, when measured, has slumped.

Conference was attended by those with the means to individually get to and to stay at Liverpool (the actual result of sortation) or join on zoom as *individuals*. About 10k participated from a membership of 55k. That nobody represented anybody was decided by somebody behind the scenes so that ultra- democracy was really a set of tightly controlled options. Generally then the existing organised left groups won over the organising bureaucracy but is either side good given the soup where in? If the Trade Unions were on board then a voice would be heard from the shop floor, from the workplaces, from the industries and communities. YP then could be a passing phase?

A COMMON TREASURY?

by JOHN SILLETT

LIVING THROUGH the economic recession of 1981/82 it seemed as if society was tobogganing to imminent economic disaster. Mass layoff from all industrial sectors and dramatically rising unemployment, inflation peaking at 20%, rioting in several cities, privatisation and deregulation. Socialism was just around the corner we thought, people aren't going to put up with all this.

Forty years later we're attempting to explain what socialism is to a society once more restless for change. Is it possible for capitalism do a Houdini again? Several factors came into play during the 1980's: the crushing of the trade Unions, the offshoring of manufacturing to the far east but the financial "Big Bang" of 1986 made a giant leap in the amount of money credit available and of speculation at rapid speed. Credit of course being the deferral of payments to the future. That house you want or to buy your council house. That car you want, the holiday, new kitchen, all no problem, the cash is yours, now. You just need an income stream.

Average house prices have gone from £25k then to £275k today. But here's the catch, wages have only risen by about half that! Although median household net worth is about £300k today it's skewed towards the top wealthy ten percent. That figure also includes pension savings. The poorest ten percent of households have nothing or even less than nothing!

The strategy of capital through governments, banks, financial institutions, the wealthy, has been to protect asset values at all costs. So after every financial crisis vast amounts of credit have been pumped into the system to keep it going. Governments are in debt, companies in debt, households in debt. Current stock market indices are inflated by the Artificial Intelligence boom which may or may not be managed down. It's all a house of cards.

The UK is in a real sickly place. Fifty per cent of food needs to be imported. The balance of payments deficit means British assets are being sold off cheap to overseas buyers, China being a big buyer. Nobody feels optimistic or rewarded for the work they do. Everyone is struggling, although some more than others. The cost of living is especially hurting for food, heating and housing costs. You cannot eat those cheap imported electrical products. Restless for change is how I'd describe the mood today. Unveiled, the UK is in a shocking state even before any new financial fallout takes place.

The "Left" are calling for a wealth tax. However it's to be noted that the top wealthiest 1% already pay about 30% of *all* income tax and the better off 50% pay 90% of *all* income tax. It's capital assets that workers need to control to guarantee job security and production for society. These assets are presently guarded by property laws and used by the big accountancy and legal firms. The assets have been amassed over the centuries from plunder and theft, from the Norman Conquest, enclosure of common lands, overseas colonisation, slavery and labour exploitation. It's quite right that they be taken into common ownership without compensation by means of occupation and the debts of these enterprises written off. A common treasury for all is needed.

NEU DELEGATION TO CUBA

BY IAN DUCKETT

IN OCTOBER 2025 I was lucky enough to be part of the NEU delegation of teachers to Cuba, representing Norfolk District. The delegation flew from Gatwick to Jose Marti Airport in Havana, via Madrid as there are currently no direct flights from the UK to Cuba on account of the US blockade of the island.

Schools in Cuba

The delegation visited a range of schools and other providers in Havana, Pinar del Rio and Vinales. These visits included a visit to Antonio de Guitierrez Secondary School in Vinales, which was typical of our experience. The visit began with a tour of the school, showcasing learner work, including images and models of the pre-historic aspects of the Vinales Valley. The school has a roll of 450 pupils across years 7, 8 and 9.

Literacy Museum and Campaign

The whole experience was a wonderful and humbling experience for me, but if I had to choose one highlight it would be the visit to the museum commemorating the literacy brigades and 1961 campaign eradicating illiteracy. As well as a memorial to the 42 teachers who lost their lives in the brigades, the museum is a living celebration of Cuba's pedagogy of tenderness in documenting the Revolution's Literacy Campaign how the literacy rate established within a year of the Revolution had been maintained at the level of 99.7%.

The story 1961 National Literacy Campaign, an effort that mobilized more than a quarter of a million Cubans – over 100,000 of them teenagers – to teach reading and writing to their fellow citizens across the island stands as testament to that pedagogy of tenderness, which is such a far cry from the often heartless soulless system so familiar to too many of us in the us in the UK. Educating people was, from the very outset of the Cuban Revolution, nothing less than human liberation.

It is also at the heart of what I've always thought that what makes the Cuban Revolution stand apart from the other revolutions in modern history and equally what has enabled its survival is that the military aspect was only one strand and that developments like the literacy campaign were and remain at least as important. Most of all the experience put me – and other delegates – in mind of why teaching was a vocation for them.

As a young teacher reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paolo Freire as a crusade for humanity it made me see dehumanization both as an historical reality and as an individual experience in the lives of many of the learners I worked with. This has informed my teaching ever since. In almost all cases problems of this kind exist at the cusp of education and social care. How else can people experience fulfilment as human beings? Questions like this are as vital as ever, perhaps more so. This is what we can really learn from Cuba.

All in all, it was a pleasure and a privilege to see the pedagogy of tenderness close up. I am moved beyond words by how much Cuban teachers achieve with so little.