

The Plebs News



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And the Covid Shambles Continues: Covid Economic Casualties : The soft underbelly of capitalism.



The Budget of Shame: The Age of New Austerity

The government's insulting recommendation of a one per cent pay rise for NHS workers, who are exhausted after a year of tireless caring for patients during the pandemic, is unacceptable and may be the last straw for many employees.

A decent deal for NHS staff is fair, necessary and affordable. We're calling on the British public to speak up now for the NHS put pressure on decision makers to approve additional investment in health services and funding for a significant pay rise. If we stand #WithNHSStaff, we can tell the government to think again.

After vaccine nationalism come vaccine imperialism as WTO agreement on intellectual property waiver is blocked

On the one-year anniversary of its declaration of a global pandemic, the World Trade Organization stayed the course Thursday and failed, again, to reach an agreement on a proposal to temporarily waive any intellectual property rights for vaccines and treatments related to COVID-19.

The latest meeting of the WTO's Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights ended the same way it did in December and, before that in October, according to a Geneva trade official. The governments of the United States, the European Union and the United Kingdom, among others, objected to a popular proposal to waive provisions of the TRIPS Agreement, a global treaty governing international property rights.

TRIPS is one of the main tools used by the developed nations to prevent technology transfer to poorer nations and the reason that global trade talks failed. Bilateral trade talks such as NAFTA, TTIP and bilateral deals are used to impose trade imperialism across the world.



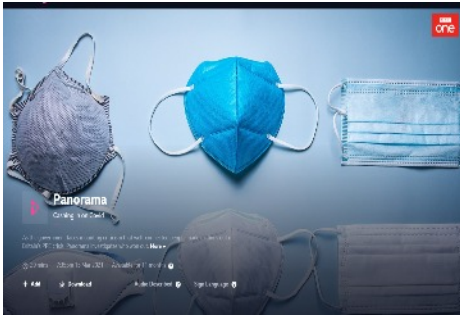
Cleaners and porters infected with Covid at London NHS trust denied full sick pay during winter wave

Exclusive: Supply staff at West Herts Trust reportedly pressured to carry on working even when feared to be infected with Covid-19

Cleaners, porters and kitchen staff at a number of London hospitals are being denied full sick pay for Covid-related absences due to an ongoing dispute between an NHS trust and one of its private contractors, Mitie.

The Covid Inquiry: The blame game starts

The pandemic is not over but the inquiry starting gun has gone led by the BBC. But will it tell us the whole truth.



Cashing in on Covid

As the government faces mounting criticism that well-connected people made millions out of Britain's PPE crisis, Panorama investigates who won out. More than £12 billion was spent in the first six months of the pandemic on contracts to provide personal protective equipment. Reporter Richard Bilton meets one man who made £40 million on a deal and speaks to others who felt ignored in favour of less-experienced suppliers. As the government refuses to reveal the full details of all its so-called VIP deals, the programme reveals the high-profile connections to one lucrative contract.

Covid Confidential

Laura Kuenssberg presents a special BBC News podcast looking back at the past 12 months of the Covid crisis in the UK and how decisions were made at the heart of government. Featuring exclusive interviews with the Labour leader Keir Starmer and the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock.



Lessons on a Crisis

Evan Davis presents a new discussion series exploring key lessons to learn from the coronavirus pandemic, a year after the eruption of the crisis in the UK. In the first episode on preparedness, Evan and his panel of expert guests discuss the UK's readiness to handle a pandemic and compare it with the experience of other countries.

Should the UK have been better prepared, given it had conducted a major exercise in pandemic planning, Operation Cygnus, in 2016? What can we learn from other countries, particularly those in South East Asia, which responded quickly and effectively to the epidemic? Has Covid-19 radically changed our attitude towards risks which threaten the UK and the world?



Experiences of the pandemic from the Sheffield BAME community

A short documentary made with the Sheffield BAME community and Sheffield Contact Tracers giving a view of how the community in Sheffield has been affected by the pandemic.

Why we dont need to pay for COVID

More from Richard Murphy and the Tax Research Unit on why Richi Sunak is trying to fool us all over paying for the Covid crisis. Murphy gives a clear explanation how the Bank of England created over £300 billion pounds to pay for the Covid crisis and how we now owe that money to ourselves.



Trump gone but what can we expect from the French elections in 2022

Over the past few months Plebs News has drawn attention to political events in the USA and hopes for the left after the departure of Trump. But the US situation is not unique with populists winning elections in the face of timid social democrat and liberal opposition to the global neoliberal agenda. Next year will see the French going to the polls to elect a new president with the front runners the existing President Macron, one of the most unpopular Presidents ever and Marine Le Pen, leader of the right wing Front National.

Leading up to the elections we will try and bring news and opinion on the presidential race viewed from here but also from residents of France. Our first piece is from John Mullen, John is an anticapitalist activist in the Paris region and a supporter of the France Insoumise. His political website is at

<http://randombolshevik.org/>

Who will be the next French president? **John Mullen**



The presidential elections in France are in May 2022. The election takes place in two rounds - the second round a run-off between the two leading candi-

dates. Last time, neoliberal Emmanuel Macron with his brand new party En Marche won the second round against far-right Marine Le Pen of National Rally (previously the National Front). Starting with a series of emblematic statistics, this article tries to clarify the main variables for the coming year's campaign.

75 000 : the number who have died in France from covid, so far.

2 million : the number of demonstrators on the streets in 2019, on the most successful of the seven days of strikes and protests against the government plan to slash pensions.

24.01% the percentage Macron got in the first round of the 2017 presidentials.

7 060 000 the number of votes obtained in the first round last time by Corbyn-like radical Left candidate, Jean- Luc Mélenchon.

6.36% the percentage of first round votes in 2017 for the Socialist Party, the party of the outgoing president, François Hollande.

10 640 000 the number of votes for closet neofascist Marine Le Pen in the second round.

500 000 000 000 euros the increase of the national debt in 2020.

Seventy-five thousand deaths from COVID. Just like in the UK, years of public service cuts, the priority given to keeping companies open, a certain dose of incompetence, and insufficient financial support to workers who should have been self-isolating, killed hundreds of times more people than should have died. But how many will see the deaths as sad but nobody's fault? Will the government benefit from a boost in popularity simply by being the government as the epidemic gets less deadly over the next year?

Two million in the streets and mass strikes over several months in 2019-2020, protesting against the smashing up of a solid national retirement pension scheme. As the pandemic took over the front pages, the pension bill was «suspended» and Macron has not yet dared relaunch it.

Twenty four per cent of the first round votes was enough to propel Macron into the second round and then to an assured victory against Le Pen. The electoral system means then that any candidate wanting to be president in 2022 is thinking about how to get the nine or ten million votes or so in the first round which would no doubt get them through to the second. Obviously the ten million potential voters who stayed home in 2017 could be helpful.

Over seven million votes went to Left winger Jean-Luc Mélenchon in 2017, and his new movement La France Insoumise (France in Revolt) has 17 MPs. The movement's programme, *The Future in Common* includes : nationalization of energy companies, some banks and other services, the end of nuclear power and a move to 100% renewable energy, the establishment of a maximum salary, a shorter working week, a million low-rent houses, retirement at sixty, leaving NATO, free school canteens and a free health service.

It is a little like if Corbyn had left Labour to found a new movement ten years back, and then support for the social-liberal Labour party had collapsed.

A quick look at the maths shows that Mélenchon has an outsider's chance of getting through to the second round, and even winning. Present polls put him around 11%

Of course, huge obstacles remain for those who want change: if the FI did manage to win and then form a government, they might well be allied to people to the right of them and the programme could get watered down. Even more seriously, the whole weight of ruling class media and capital flight would put immense pressure and could break a radical Left government. The smoke from the spectre of the failure of Syriza in Greece can be smelt in the wind.

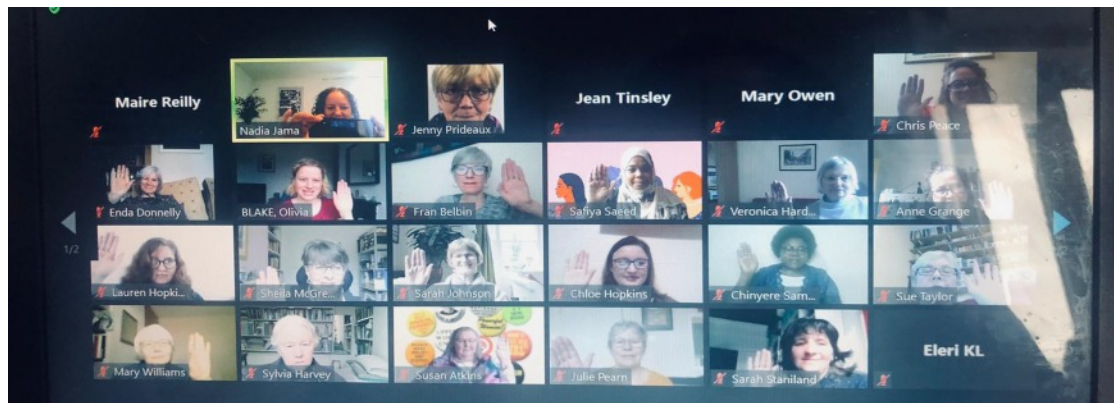
Just over six per cent of the first round votes in 1917 went to the Socialist Party of the outgoing president. Shortly after the election, the PS candidate left the party to form a new one. Is this an absolute historical record low for an outgoing party? Present polls give 7% for the strongest PS candidate and 10% for the most likely Green candidate (who is considerably to the right of previous Green candidates).

Ten million votes for the fascist Marine Le Pen in the second round in 2017 is obviously a terrifying statistic, and by far the highest ever for a far-right candidate here. Marine Le Pen has managed to persuade large sections of the population that her party (now called National Rally) is not or is no longer a fascist grouping. She has been helped by enormous media coverage. She has just last month proposed a new law to ban wearing Muslim headscarves in the streets, saying that the item of clothing demonstrates adherence to a "totalitarian and murderous" ideology. A recent poll indicates that, if she were again to be against Macron in the second round, she might lose by only a few percent (it was over 30 per cent in 2017). Macron's neoliberal attacks and recent islamophobic laws have helped Le Pen no end.

Five hundred billion euros was added to the national debt in 2020, as Macron's government scrambled to find plenty of money to help businesses, and rather less to help workers and the unemployed. This debt will have to be paid back, and Macron is determined that this will not involve tax increases for the rich (he has been slashing taxes for the wealthy). This means he wants it to be paid by workers, either working more for less, or having less in the way of public services. The already ferocious struggle in France between neo-Thatcherism and organized workers is likely to continue heating up

International Women's Day event for Central CLP

Constituency support for International Womens Day continues to grow with a number of events being held around the constituency. Because of the pandemic restrictions the events were held online but drew many members to hear from inspirational women. Guest speakers were Olivia Blake MP Chris Peace Orgreave Truth & Justice Campaign activist, Fran Belbin & Safiya Saeed Sheffield council candidates and Chlöe Hopkins Grassroots Labour Women candidate. Speeches were about the theme #ChooseToChallenge .



The meeting discussed motions that we would like to send to the women's conference, women in our movement, who inspires us, the challenges that women face in society. We talked about domestic abuse and how we might affect Labour policy. The speakers identified real life experience of their subjects and the need to build organisation around them.

Nadia Jama (CLP Womens Officer)



MP support for Domestic Violence Charity

The annual film showing sponsored by Paul Blomfield MP was unable to go ahead this year because of the pandemic restrictions. It was replaced by an online event supporting Ashiana an organisation empowering and supporting people from black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee backgrounds whose lives have been impacted by violence – It is still not too late to donate. [Donate here.](#)

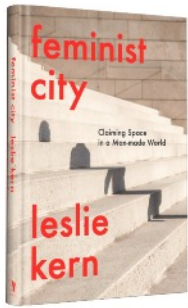
Women in History- Mary Macarthur Labour Activist and Trade Unionist

Exactly 100 years ago, trade union leader Mary Macarthur died on January 1st, 1921, aged just 40. Her early death robbed the British labour movement of the most charismatic female leader of her generation. Had she survived, she would almost certainly have joined Margaret Bondfield as a female minister in the first Labour government. The Times described her as “one of the most striking personalities in the labour movement”. Her support for working class women did not sit well with middle class suffragettes who opposed the extension to the working class as a step too far. Christabel Pankhurst, in particular, despised and defamed Mary Macarthur because her politics were firmly rooted in class rather than gender.



Mary Macarthur addressing the crowds during the chainmakers' strike, Cradley Heath,

“I do not apologise for my sex. It takes a man and a woman to make the home; and I believe they neither can build the ideal world without the help of the other. In the new parliament, where laws affecting every household in the land will be framed, the point of view of the mother, as well as the father, should find expression. I shall also feel entitled to speak for the woman whose work never ends – the woman in the home, who faces and solves every day a multitude of problems – the woman who has been too often neglected or forgotten by politicians”



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Feminist City- Leslie Kern

The answer to violence against women and girls cannot simply be more police. Physical and societal changes are the only way to make an equal world for both women and men. Verso recently offered a free ebook on Leslie Kern's view on how we can design a Feminist City. The book is available to download free until 22nd March or available to buy as a hardback.

Global International Womens Day in Pictures



'Don't be harassed' and 'Don't touch' Quito, Ecuador



Women NGO's, New Delhi



Italy : 'Welfare is not the same for all', 'It's not a woman's job', 'Men advance;'



Algeria :Women, one with a poster reading 'Proud, strong, determined, we are the Revolution'



Bucharest, Romania

'Misogyny - The Other Pandemic'



French women's rights activists gather to protest against sexism



Jeddah, Saudi Arabia



Brandenburg Gate, Germany

The Brave Cyclist team, which was formed in 2019 aiming to normalise the sport for women, organise a tour cycling ahead of International Women's Day

As capitalism creates more and more crises, both economically, environmentally and socially there is a tendency for governments, even supposed liberal governments, to resort to more and more control measures to maintain the status quo. This is true today with draconian employment conditions, violence against women and environmental protest springing up across the world. Labour's vote against the Police Bill and other Bills authorising control is positive but we must reject authoritarianism and look for societal change to solve the crises and a new way of living. Karl Polanyi wrote of the crises of market capitalism in the Great Transformation of 1944. A more recent article by Grace Blakely in Tribune followed up the theme.

Capitalism Has Always Been Authoritarian

By Grace Blakely

Tribunemag.co.uk

For a long time, we are told, capitalism has been making the world safer. Ignoring the violent conflicts Western states frequently raise abroad, liberals have maintained that peace between previously militaristic nations—most notably in Europe—has been achieved through their social, economic, and political integration.

But those on the Left, too, have increasingly focused on the role of capitalist ideology, as opposed to the use of force, in securing the legitimacy of the status quo. We analysed how the construction and indoctrination of good neoliberal subjects—whether through the media, the education system, or the workplace—ensured that the average citizen complied with the exercise of state and corporate power.

Ideology is, of course, a deeply significant factor in explaining why people continue to submit to their own exploitation and oppression, as it can render the exercise of power less visible. You might not know why you want to buy a new car on credit, or instinctively distrust any and all forms of protest, or silently agree to the assertion that the government ‘can only spend as much as it earns.’

The subtle but continuous ways in which these messages are enforced make it seem as if they stem from a primitive part of one's own psyche. As a result, any challenge to these ideas comes to appear as a challenge to your own ideas of what is right and logical.

But our focus on the role of ideology has generated something of a lacuna in our understanding of the ways in which material power—whether the direct use of force or other forms of economic power—is deployed to shore up the status quo.

The Left's failure to grasp the ways in which the reproduction of capitalist social relations rests on the repeated use of force has led us to greet the recent authoritarian turn of the Conservative Party with some surprise. We had grown accustomed to seeing our enemies as technocratic liberals, not heavy-handed authoritarians.

But despite their protestations to the contrary, the Conservative Party never stopped being ‘the nasty party’. Ideology is powerful not just for the ways it makes us accept the ideas of the ruling class as our own, but in the ways in which it convinces us that that same ruling class is largely using peaceful methods to achieve its aims. Our society never stopped being governed by force, and once resistance breaks through again in earnest that becomes clear.

In fact, one reason the authoritarianism of the system has been easy to ignore is that its abuses largely took place out of sight, inflicted on those least able to resist. The dark underbelly of globalisation has been the increasingly violent tactics used by states to control and suppress the movement of people across their borders – for instance, the Global Detention Project estimates that the UK was holding 23,970 people in immigration detention centres in 2020.

In the United States, this regime of violent control over surplus populations takes an extreme and somewhat historically novel form. Black men and women are, as is now well-known, incarcerated in the US in numbers unparalleled throughout the world, and many more are killed by the police before they even reach prison.

The shift towards austerity also legitimised the use of economic violence against disabled people, and other groups deemed ‘unproductive’ by the ruling class. In the UK, the government has repeatedly been accused of gross violations of the rights of disabled people. It would not be an exaggeration to describe some of these cases—such as Phillipa Day, who killed herself after her personal independence payments were stopped—as social murder.

The exercise of violence has been rendered even more invisible by the fact that states are outsourcing these tasks to private companies. G4S runs many of the UK’s immigration detention centres, and footage released in 2017 showed its guards ‘mocking, abusing, and assaulting detainees’. G4S has since made the strategic decision to shift its focus from immigration centres to prisons.

Many of the cruellest and most humiliating aspects of the UK’s social security regime are also run by outsourcing companies like Atos. Disabled people are forced to ‘prove’ that they are really disabled in order to qualify for support, a process so unfit for purpose that people with terminal cancer and other long-term disabilities were initially declared ‘fit for work’. Atos and other outsourcing companies, meanwhile, have raked in millions from running these services.

The state was able to get away with many of these abuses because, for a long time, the opposition seemed to be on board with them too. The failure to challenge arguments for austerity by successive Labour leaders after the Financial Crisis meant that the widespread abuses of the rights of disabled people and migrants came to be seen as an acceptable price to pay for ‘improving’ the public finances.

After a relatively more progressive interlude under Jeremy Corbyn, Keir Starmer did not simply revert to business as usual – he has set out to prove that the Labour Party would be even more loyal to the coercive arm of the state than the Conservatives. He failed to oppose the government’s Covert Human Intelligence Sources Bill (known as the Spy Cops bill) and the Overseas Operations Bill. In Tribune, Shami Chakrabarti described these pieces of legislation as some of the most ‘dangerous’ attacks on human rights she had seen.

The most recent piece of legislation in this vein—Priti Patel’s Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill—seeks to impose tougher sentences on those who vandalise statues than those who commit rape. In effect, it is a further step towards criminalising dissent by an authoritarian Conservative Party increasingly comfortable with the overt use of force.

It is a relatively good sign that Labour intends to oppose this today, but utterly remarkable that things had progressed to such a degree in the party’s slide into accepting Tory authoritarianism that it had initially planned to abstain. These are not incidental issues – attacks on civil liberties and political freedoms will come to define this government, and be used to repress social movements for years to come. Opposition to this agenda is the bare minimum we should expect.

But this progress towards overt authoritarianism on behalf of the Tories is not novel – and it is important that the Left recognises this. Capitalism has always reproduced itself through violence, and specifically force utilised in defence of property and power. These trends are obvious in many parts of the Global South, at capitalism’s periphery, where exploitation is harshest – but they are also increasingly visible at its core.

Authoritarian capitalism is not new, but the use of force does is becoming more overt, which is why it is all the more important that the Left exposes and resists the appalling treatment of the most marginalised. What is legitimated at capitalism’s fringes will soon progress to its core. Or, as the late Tony Benn once said, ‘the way a government treats refugees is very instructive because it shows you how they would treat the rest of us if they thought they could get away with it.’



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Culture and Media News

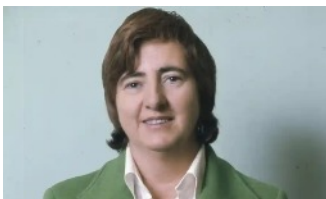
Boiled Rabbits of the Left?

George Orwell chastised the "boiled rabbits of the Left" for disliking what he called "the spiritual need for patriotism". He was writing in 1940 during Hitler's Blitz of London and other British cities. But Orwell also poses a challenge to those on the Left today who find patriotism redolent of flag-waving chauvinism, uncomfortably at odds with their cherished internationalism and an unwelcome diversion from other priorities.



Billy Bragg meets Owen Jones: Is progressive patriotism possible?

Billy Bragg meets Owen Jones: Is progressive patriotism possible? Billy Bragg is the most famous political singer songwriter of our time. From Thatcherism - when he played a pioneering role in the leftwing 'Red Wedge' musicians alliance - onwards, he's been a musical icon and a formidable campaigner. We speak about whether a 'progressive patriotism' is possible: will it always be about jingoism and empire, can it be inclusive of minorities, and how can our other history - of people struggling for rights and freedoms - be remembered?



Maureen Colquhoun, the UK's first openly lesbian MP, dies aged 92

The former Labour politician represented Northampton North during her five years in parliament between 1974 and 1979 and was a prominent campaigner on access to abortion, gender balance, and protection for sex workers. She saw off efforts by some party members in her constituency to deselect her as a candidate for the next general election after the Daily Mail revealed she was in a relationship with a woman. In an article for Gay News in 1977, Colquhoun said her sexuality had "nothing whatever to do with my ability to do my job as an MP". She said she had always been open about her relationship and that "gay relationships were as valid and as entitled to respect as any other relationship".



Stan Newens – Lifelong campaigner for internationalism and justice 1930-2021

The veteran socialist parliamentarian Stan Newens, who died on March 2, was a lifelong campaigner for socialism, internationalism, and justice. Newens was a pillar of the Left — and proof that spending years in Parliament doesn't have to strip left politicians of their radicalism.



Remebering Robeson and the Peekskill Riots

A new radio play by Tayo Aluko based on events surrounding Paul Robeson's concert in Peekskill, New York in 1949, and the racist, anti-communist riots that came before and after it, drops on Paul Robeson's birthday -- April 9th -- and it seems more timely than ever.

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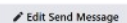


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