POLITICAL MINDFULNESS

Fresh Perspectives on Multiple Crises'

edited by Phil Cohen

Compass

PUBLIC HEALTH IS THE TRUE WEALTH OF NATIONS

END ZERO HOURS CONTRACTS!

MORAL ECONOMY NOT MORAL PANIC!

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME WITHOUT STRINGS!

A GREEN NEW DEAL!

A GOOD SOCIETY FOR THE MANY NOT THE FEW!

TO AT LAST CREATE A SITUATION IN WHICH THERE IS NO GOING BACK TO BUSINESS AS USUAL

Published June 2020 by Compass

By Phil Cohen, Ruth Lister, Angela McRobbie, Dick Pountain, Mike Rustin and Valerie Walkerdine

About the authors:

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Dick Pountain grew up in Chesterfield, Derbyshire. Involved in Left politics and the counterculture since the 1960s. He has been a computer journalist (Byte Magazine, PC Pro) and director of Dennis Publishing until last year. A regular contributor to The Political Quarterly and co-author (with Dave Robins) of *Cool Rules: anatomy of an attitude* (reaktion books 2007).

Mike Rustin has written widely about psychoanalysis, culture and politics. He is author of *The Good Society and the Inner World* and his latest book is *Researching the Unconscious* (Routledge 2019). He is a Professor of Sociology at the University of East London and Visiting Professor at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Clinic.

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I would like to thank Angela McRobbie for allowing us to reproduce the piece she wrote about her experiences in hospital with Covid-19. This appeared originally as a blog on the Verso website. Thanks also to Mike Rustin for rising to the challenge of addressing the uncertainties with which we now have to live.

The poem by Emily Dickinson is to be found in her Complete Poems published by Blackwell in 2016. The poem by Abdullatif Laabi gives its title to a collection of his work translated by Donald Nicholson Smith and published by archipelago press in 2017. Thanks to both publishers for permission to reproduce these texts.

Finally, I would like to thank Neal Lawson and Jack Jeffrey at Compass for their support for this project and for steering it through to publication.

Dedication:

This text is dedicated to all those key workers on the front lines of the pandemic crisis, in hospitals, care homes and public services of every kind, including the shop workers, delivery drivers, cleaners and refuse collectors who rarely get mentioned and to all those who have put the health and wellbeing of civil society, especially its vulnerable communities, above the demands of private profit and personal safety. Our heartfelt wish is that the deliberations recorded here may help to ensure that these many small acts of mutual aid, generosity, kindness and courage may combine to contribute to a new political settlement, in which the building of the Good Society, by and for the many, not the few is the first priority.

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About Compass

Compass is the pressure group for a good society, a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We build alliances of ideas, parties and movements to help make systemic change happen. Our strategic focus is to understand, build, support and accelerate new forms of democratic practice and collaborative action that are taking place in civil society and the economy, and to link that up with top-down/state reforms and policy. The question we are trying to help solve, which we explore in the recent document 45 Degree Change, is not just what sort of society we want, but, increasingly, how to make it happen?

Contents

Preface

First there was Brexit. Then the Labour Party goes down to a historic defeat with its most radical Social Democratic agenda since 1945. Then widespread floods across the country presage an environmental apocalypse to come unless climate change is properly addressed. And finally, we have seen the advent of a pandemic on the epic scale of Spanish Flu after the First World War, impacting disproportionately on the poor and BAME communities, to be almost certainly followed by a global economic recession which hits these groups worst. Joining up these very large dots into a comprehensive picture of doom and gloom is relatively easy. It is not that they are not connected and produce multiplier effects. But we also need to be aware of their specificity, in order to trace out their many articulations, where they happen, in civil society, in the body politic, in the hearts and minds and bodies of citizens.

There have been two broad political responses to this multiple crisis. One is based on manic denial of the new reality principles and/or a refusal to recognise any responsibility for them. Nothing has really changed. Labour won the argument at the election and got broad popular support for its policies. The defeat was all down to Brexit and the influence of the Tory press. As for the pandemic, for the Alt-Right it is either fake news, or else we can deep freeze capitalism's assets until it is all over and then resuscitate the existing free market economy as if nothing had happened. The cryogenic option is especially popular with the Trump administration, but it has its supporters in the UK. Everyone else, from the World Bank to World Health Organisation regards it as a strenuous exercise in wishful thinking - which it is. There is also a Left variant of the 'business as usual' argument, namely that pandemics are extremely good news for the giant corporations, especially those operating in the digital and knowledge economy, not to mention the pharmaceutical and medical supply industries which are making a killing out of it. In this view whatever happens capitalism continues to rule (not) OK.[1]

On the other side of the argument are those who believe that Brexit, Labour's defeat, and especially Covid-19 changes everything. The events are not only acknowledged but invested with a positive meaning that goes far beyond their immediate empirical impact, which, to put it mildly is quite negative. Some of this is clearly down to straw clutching, which is an occupational hazard on the Left. You find a cloud, mushroom shaped or not, and there will be someone ready to find a silver living, and even to proclaim it presages a New Dawn. Rebecca Solnit follows Hosea, of Biblical fame, in finding the promise of a better society emerging from communities that have suffered catastrophic loss.[2] Slavoj Žižek predictably goes further and proclaims Covid-19 as an outrider for a new form of communism because of the structural changes its mitigation imposes on capitalism's political economy.[3] Equally there is no shortage of Jeremiahs prophesying the end time for Socialism. Giorgio Agembem

for example, thinks that the pandemic is an ideological construct used to justify the state of exception now being imposed as a temporary emergency measure and this could harden into a new form of fascism. But then of course, every crisis has its Cassandras whose predictions, however apparently crazy, turn out to be true but whose warnings are not heeded.

It is a political cliché that a crisis brings opportunities as well as risks for the key actors and that its outcomes are overdetermined in ways which do not admit of ready prediction. The question addressed by the contributors to this dossier, is how far is the Left, (broadly conceived as a loose network of political organisations, social movements and groups who are campaigning for structural changes to make our society more democratic, equitable and compassionate) how far could this Left become a key player in shaping this country's future direction of travel. Or will we be condemned, as so often in the recent past, to remain spectators on the side lines of history, making excoriating critiques, no doubt, but powerless to influence the actual course of events. The focus here is on the Left's mind set, and how we need to change it to move beyond our comfort zone, opening up our thinking and modes of address to engage pro-actively with the concerns of the many who do not at present share our views, and not just the still relatively few who are already converted to a full blown democratic transformation of our economy and polity.

The electrifying response of BAME communities and their supporters to the pan-endemic racism revealed by the public health crisis is certainly a cause for optimism. But as Gramsci well knew, optimism of the will, left to its own devices can lead to the wishful thinking which characterises the Exiteers and our present muddled transition from lockdown. Equally unalloyed pessimism of the intellect, which sections of the Left are also very good at, leads to the kind of armchair utopianism which has no real skin in the game and offers purely academic consolation for political defeats. We need to find and sustain a balance between these poles, between proper circumspection, avoiding the rush to premature judgement and the urgent need to take practical action, to ensure that Black Lives Matter, and that the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society do not continue to suffer disproportionately from the pandemic.

The pace of recent events has left us all breathless. The papers collected here offer a pause for thought, a chance to get our breath back and avoid reaching for the panic button while addressing the enormous challenges we face. One way of describing that mind set is political mindfulness. Mindfulness is best known as a form of do-it your-self therapy, a mash up of Buddhist meditation with Western cognitive and behaviour science. Whatever its origins, and its often dubious commercial applications, mindfulness as a technique for reducing anxiety and stress, has added an important element to the psychological survival kit of those key workers, many from BAME communities, who find themselves on the front lines of the pandemic as well as those who are still locked down in its backyards.

What we have tried to do here is to extend this approach to a range of

political, cultural, social and environmental issues which constitute the multiple crises we are all living through. How can we be properly mindful of what is at stake in building political alliances, in grasping the dynamics of affiliation and disaffection evidenced in the 2019 election campaign, in understanding the 'other scenes' of everyday life under lockdown or in considering the limits and conditions of Left re-grouping around a Green New Deal? How do we come to terms with the new uncertainty principles that shape our lives and still look forward and make realistic plans for the future?

This is, of necessity a hybrid text born of rapidly changing circumstances. It begins with a proposition about the connection between progressive politics and the practice of mindfulness. This is followed by a section presenting some firsthand accounts of the political and health crisis and life under lockdown. Then we turn to look at the 'fire next time' with a political overview of the environmental crisis and a concluding reflection on the psycho-dynamics of hope in difficult times. The text is framed by two poems, which in their very different idioms articulate principles of hope grounded in mindful experience.

Phil Cohen
Wivenhoe June 2020

Endnotes

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In Praise of Defeat by Abullatif Laabi

Oh losers of all time
the moment for your
humble message
is at hand
Do not take a notion
to write history
Leave that to the victors.
Tell instead
what we have lost
in the labyrinth of blindness.
Do so by means of enigmas
tales, riddles, charades
In little rhymes or prose
Write nothing
But instead recount
Let speech walk in step with breath
and fill your mouth.
Let it pour from your lips
like honey
Restore speech's vigour
to shattered memory
preserve it
And then propagate
pass along the message
Speak beyond hate
beyond rancour,
Cover these with your prophetic voices
With the embers of this planet
which is dying
for want of love.

An Initial Proposition

Mindful 45˚ Politics

Ruth Lister

Ruth Lister draws on personal experience to make links between the practice of mindfulness and the kind of politics Compass tries to practise. She argues against erecting a false binary between the individual practice of mindfulness and collective action and suggests that it can nourish us as we dig in deep for the long haul in building a good society.

In his pamphlet 45˚ Change, Neal Lawson warns that 'in all this demand and pressure for change, it is crucial that we also seek to change ourselves', quoting John Atkinson who counsels that 'change will come when we learn to change ourselves'. In identifying the fault line between vertical and horizontal politics at which 45˚ change manifests itself, Neal argues that 'both sides of the line need to change, to recognise the validity and importance of those on the other side and to engage with each constructively and empathetically'.[1] I want to argue here that 'political mindfulness' potentially offers a helpful path towards such change. Indeed, arguably it could represent a parallel 45˚ hinge between individual and political/social change. In many ways Compass embodies an ethic of political mindfulness in its philosophy and the practices to which it aspires, even if it does not frame it in those terms.

I write as a founding member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Mindfulness (and also the newly formed APPG for Compassionate Politics) and an active participant in an informal mindfulness group in Parliament. I first discovered mindfulness in my 20s (although it wasn't called that then). In those days I found it difficult to integrate my practice with my political life because they seemed like two totally separate worlds, with no clear channels between them. The very notion of 'political mindfulness' would have seemed strange. It probably still does to many political activists on the one hand and mindfulness practitioners on the other, in particular given the popularity of 'McMindfulness'.[2]

I share the scepticism expressed by many towards the kind of instrumentalist and commercialised forms that McMindfulness signifies. But I also reject the false dichotomy sometimes erected between the individual practice of mindfulness and collective action for social, economic, democratic and environmental justice. The case against such a binary has been developed well in a series of contributions to Open Democracy/Transformation that have promoted the idea of 'social mindfulness as a force for change'.[3] In order 'to avoid individualisation', Paula Haddock suggests we need to pay attention to 'three mutually interdependent spheres: the personal and psychological, the interpersonal and organisational, and the wider social movement and socio-political'. She warns that 'neglecting any one of these spheres, or failing to recognise their interplay, can undermine our struggles'.[4] Similarly, Beth Berila suggests that mindfulness itself can offer a valuable means of integrating intrapersonal, interpersonal

and collective levels within a social justice framework. Quoting Grace Lee Boggs, she claims that it can help us 'transform ourselves to transform the world'.[5]

With Luke Wreford, Paula Haddock describes the work of the Mindfulness and Social Change Network, which works across more than 20 countries to explore how mindfulness can support efforts to promote social justice and sustainability 'at the intersection of mindfulness and social change'.[6] As I suggested above, we might see this as another 45˚ axis. They address the common criticism (voiced at the meeting which led to this pamphlet) that, in its focus on individual well-being and mental health, mindfulness is self-indulgent and can reinforce neoliberalism through an emphasis on individual change.

They cite a network member who has worked for many years on human rights and conflict resolution and who 'finds that mindfulness provides the stability to stay present in the midst of strong feelings of despair and doubt which would otherwise derail his efforts and lead to burnout'. This brings to mind the mindfulness practice of 'equanimity', which, in the words of Jack Kornfield, helps us develop 'balance in our hearts' in the midst of it all.[7] This can be very helpful in times such as the present when we are all in the midst of a pandemic that is frightening and disorienting and that has turned our worlds upside down. Anxiety, illness, grief, isolation, lack of physical contact or overcrowded and cramped contact – all in their various ways are placing us under stress, some more so than others (all too often reflecting and augmenting existing intersecting inequalities). Many thousands worldwide have turned to online mindfulness sessions to help them get through this difficult time. If we are able to develop a degree of equilibrium and balance, as well as compassion for self and others, including during the uncertainties of the gradual easing of lockdown, it is more likely our responses will express solidarity with others, especially those in more vulnerable circumstances than ourselves. As Angela Merkel put it, 'This is a test for our solidarity, our common sense, and our empathy and consideration for one another'.[8] Social mindfulness could help us meet that test.

Wreford and Haddock's reference to burnout is important. Trying to avoid burnout is not self-indulgent. If you are burnt out, you are not much use to others as I know from bitter experience in my 30s (when I had been 'too busy' to maintain my meditation practice but found it then helped me on the road to recovery). Haddock quotes the civil rights activist and inspirational writer Audrey Lorde who, from a position of subjection to oppression, explained that 'caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare'.[9] Haddock draws the lesson that 'shifting the balance of activist cultures to include personal contemplation and psychological inquiry is essential'. Self-care can be supportive of activism not oppositional to it. Labs of Care, a network that explores 'new ways of collaborating, taking care of yourself, others and the most vulnerable' is premised on the belief that 'Care is one of the pro-

foundly transformative central aspects of our grassroots movements'.[10] Its transformative potential operates in each of Haddock's spheres – personal, inter-personal and organisational, and socio-political.

In response to the neoliberalism charge, Wreford and Haddock argue that 'mindfulness can be practised in ways that reveal how our perceptions, thoughts and reactions are conditioned by the world we live in and enable us to break free from limiting beliefs and narratives we've internalised from prevailing ideologies'. A mindfulness for social change course has helped build 'attentional capacity, empathy and compassion and flexibility of views, alongside vital skills such as working through conflict [and] collaboration'.[11] These are all qualities and skills essential for successful deliberation, which according to Diana Warburton is 'about opening up and exploring issues through listening to and learning from each other, thinking about personal initial views and working out where it is possible to compromise on values, preferences and aspirations where these clash with others'.[12] Wreford and Haddock also describe mindfulness work with the Welsh Civil Service, which an evaluation found 'changed management styles and understandings of decision-making processes and bias, enabling more collaborative working'.[13] This suggests that mindfulness could be helpful also in the change required on the vertical side of the 45˚ line.

Compass has always emphasised the importance of how we do our politics – of means as well as ends – as we try to be 'the change we want to see in the world'. This is the main reason it has become my political home and I have come to realise how compatible that is with my mindfulness practice. Instead of factional, tribal politics we have promoted what Sue Goss calls the politics of the 'Open Tribe'.[14] She recognises that tribal politics have a role to play in promoting belonging, shared identity and the motivation to be out leafleting in all weathers. But they are also narrow and stultifying, as witnessed in Labour's refusal to collaborate in the kind of Progressive Alliance type politics that Clive Lewis argued for in his short-lived leadership bid. The idea of the open tribe acknowledges the importance of political tribalism but encourages us to be open to and learn from other progressive 'tribes' and accept that no political party has a monopoly of wisdom. It is a politics of openness, kindness, compassion and generosity. It involves genuinely listening to others and curiosity about what they have to say and where they are coming from.

As noted already, successful 45˚ politics depends on such an approach on both sides of the line. These are all qualities that mindfulness helps to cultivate. In a political context they can thus be justly described as 'political mindfulness'. They also contribute to the emergent idea of a compassionate politics. In an article on a compassionate transition to sustainability, Tim O'Riordan defines compassion as 'the kindness of self-aware generosity and the sympathetic joy of acting morally for the benefit of all. Compassion is linked to deep psychological feelings and embraces attributes such as sympathy, care for well-being, empathy, sensitivity for others' distress and need, and mindful acceptance of the unattainability of the ideal'.[15]

The fate of Jeremy Corbyn's welcome promise of a kinder politics is a warning of what can happen when such talk is not underpinned by personal and organisational change of the kind mindfulness encourages. Unfortunately, a combination of hostility from the outset from many in the parliamentary Labour Party together with a lack of leadership skills and apparent lack of interest in developing them and the different kind of leadership some of us had hoped for meant that far from the kinder politics we were promised Corbynism became associated with the very opposite. That is one reason Compass published a person specification for 21st century leadership drawn up by Sue Goss and myself.[16] Although we don't use the term some of the qualities and skills we outline could be described as mindful political leadership.

Mindful politics and 45˚ politics also bring to mind the kind of politics some feminists developed under the rubric of 'transversal politics'. It is a process of 'rooting' and 'shifting' in which participants remain rooted in their own values but at the same time are willing to shift views in dialogue with those with other identities and values.[17] An example is provided by the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition who pursued what I have called 'a politics of solidarity in difference' in providing a space in which different identities could be named and different voices heard in an attempt to promote women's presence in Northern Ireland's excessively male-dominated politics during the lead-up to the Good Friday Agreement. In a statement that captures something of the essence of transversal politics the Coalition observed that 'we have found that you learn more if you stand in other people's shoes. Our principles of inclusion, equality and human rights help us to do that'.[18] Arguably, political mindfulness does so also.

Neal's 45˚ change pamphlet speaks to quite fundamental questions of what it is to be human, with its emphasis on the failure of old ways of doing things 'to meet our needs as human beings' and on our 'capacity to care and create, not just consume and compete'. It calls for us to 'think and act differently, if we are serious about a world of love, compassion, time, beauty, creativity, honesty, respect, empathy, air we can breathe and a planet we can share with other species and organisms'. I am not arguing that Compass supporters need to practice mindfulness to rise to his challenge. But I do believe many might find it helpful. Nor am I arguing that by itself mindfulness can offer 'the way out of here'. But I do believe that politically and socially aware mindfulness can support and strengthen the Compass approach to politics on both sides of the 45˚ line and that it can nourish us as individuals as we dig in deep for the long-term task of building a good society.

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Scenes from the Frontline

Chronicles of a divided land: some reflections on the 2019 general election

Valerie Walkerdine

In this extract from a work in progress Valerie Walkerdine explores the small everyday observations that might make up the details necessary for working towards a form of political mindfulness. In focusing on the mundane, we begin to notice the issues, differences and divisions that underlie the patterns of dis/affection that became so salient in the years between the 2016 EU referendum and the 2019 general election.

Canvassing Westminster December 2019

Talking to the organiser and another canvasser. The organiser begins to ridicule Leave voters and I bristle and start to talk about my experience in South Wales. All of a sudden, the organiser admits that he voted Leave for Lexit, followed in quick succession by the other canvasser. I am taken aback.

In the Kensington campaign office, the organiser is wearing a Remain T-shirt. I notice that the candidate's Remain preference is stressed. The 30 something man with whom I canvass explains that he cares about the NHS and that he can't get a job as an architect except with a commercial company and his rent is so expensive.

In Westminster local authority flats, it is clear that the wealthy owners are next door to the working and non-working poor, as well as migrants who can't vote and won't open the door. A working class woman tells me she isn't sure about voting and starts talking about the dire housing situation of her grandmother, whose council flat needs serious attention – we've lived here all our lives. I immediately ask if she can give me her phone number so someone from the branch can see if they can help. I pass the number on, hoping that the branch will follow up and that she won't just feel let down by all politicians 'who don't care about the little people' again. I will never know if they did anything.

In London the number of thirty-something professionals campaigning is absolutely extraordinary. Yet I see few who do not at least look professional middle class. I am told to have persuasive conversations but do these ever persuade anyone?

South Wales 2017

Public meeting in a former steel community funded by the Economic and Social research Council.

Passionate support for Lexit, based on a clear sense that we have to look

to ourselves. Neither the local council, nor the Welsh Government, nor Westminster nor the EU cares about us and what we want and need. They give us things we don't want like a large Welsh dragon, a hospital with less beds than the two that we closed, but they don't give us the one thing we want – jobs – industry. They are remote and don't care.

Meanwhile, in a nearby wealthy town, with pockets of extreme poverty, the retired middle class Remainers who attend their public meeting are deeply disdainful of Leavers, who they think are stupid and don't read the arguments which are there to be found if only you look.

Meanwhile on the poor estate, they voted like their neighbours, to Leave and again the only issue on the table is jobs – proper jobs, not zero hours contracts nor seven page online forms to apply to stack shelves at Tesco. Unlike in the steel town, they are marooned and isolated with no heavy industrial heritage, within a sea of wealth where they are despised and feared.

As part of the project, we arrange a meeting of community groups with the Welsh Government, who are 'keen to hear people's views' apparently. Because the public meetings have identified a clear sense of not being heard by poor and working class people, we deliberately set up mixed discussion groups with government and community participants working together on solving issues raised in the community meetings: industry, jobs, facilities.

It seems to go really well and the community participants feed back a strong sense of having been heard by government. It also transpires that some of the steel town participants are planning to take over the county council as independents because of the same sentiment – that the government don't have their interests at heart. In the local elections they win control of the county council.

But we later learn that, while the community participants might have felt heard by the government, the government participants did not feel heard. In a feedback session, they tell us this emphatically. They say how angry and upset they were that no-one wanted to listen to their ideas. It seems that their idea was that what they wanted to hear was what the participants thought of their ideas and not to listen to other proposals.

I admit to despairing – it seems impossible for them to listen, to learn or to be led.

This is further confirmed in a follow-up session in the market town. Here a local theatre has been acquired by a local organisation after county council asset-stripping. They want to be a community hub, led by the leader of the newly Labour led town council. They apparently want to 'help' the estate but estate resident Jamie tells them in no uncertain terms that the estate residents won't feel safe enough to enter the space, that maybe a car boot sale set up outside might work, that there is a huge problem of illiteracy,

including herself, with consequent shame. That people could get work road building but they don't have the £150 needed for a certificate allowing them to work on building sites, and they would like access to computers, to the internet and help with reading.

Yet one middle class couple refuse to come to more meetings as they aren't about Brexit and I get the distinct feeling that the middle class know how to do 'charity' but they have no idea how to be led by the likes of Jamie with her clearly-articulated demands.

My sense of defeat is very strong and I feel that the idea of this kind of work is impossible. I would rather support the working class participants in advancing their own agenda.

Meanwhile the middle class Remainers refuse to believe what Jamie has told them: that the local free paper, with its notices of events, is not distributed to the estate; so I contact them. No, of course it isn't - because no-one from there has any money to buy what they are advertising, I'm told.

South Wales September 2019

Interview with a Leave voter

Mike is a long-distance driver/chauffeur in his 60s on minimum wage, often driving clients across the country. Although he says he often drives Lords, he has a very strong sense that no-one can claim to be better than anyone else and he always looks out for people on minimum wage like him, such as waiters that he meets on his journeys. Mike feels that people like him are left out of decision-making. He emphasises that what he calls the minority don't want the majority to interfere in decision-making and, as if to emphasise the crucial nature of this point, he says again – 'they don't want that!'. People are screaming, he says, because this minority want to stop what people want and that, I understand, is less Brexit than a place in which the majority have a say and are taken seriously, not as the great unwashed and under-educated. Mike is a man with strong opinions but also a man who clearly reads a lot and who cares a lot. I am really struck by his emphasis again and again on fairness. He points out that the local carwash is probably using the labour of modern slaves, that people will have to get used to paying more – that is- paying a fair wage not a poverty wage, more taxes for more services, to end the under-costing of contracts by major companies then demanding massive extra money mid contract.

So his view is that the middle class think that the majority should sit quietly while they are told what to do. What could we do, he says, if we'd had the education!

Recently he drove a man who was concerned about freedom of movement for his holidays after Brexit, telling Mike that he was stupid and ignorant for his views. Oh, the thoughtless privilege. No wonder, he ended the inter-

view saying that the ruling class think they are entitled!

South Wales December 2019

People are listening to Jacob Rees Mogg, but in the end, they couldn't vote Tory. But Corbyn will have to live with being a terrorist sympathiser, a sentiment repeated by a washing machine repair man in London and an Uber driver.

In a small relatively well-heeled town in a rural Tory constituency, a few elderly Labour party members promote their candidate as if she had a chance – she never had a chance.

Witnessing the massive campaigning crowds in London I thought that, despite everything, perhaps I had been wrong, that all the signs that were already there in 2016, that were amplified by 2017 and were screaming by 2019, might even be wrong. Sadly, they weren't wrong and I didn't know how to get people to listen to what I had been seeing and hearing - from good people, impoverished people, people in communities where they had no choice but to try to look after each other. I struggled and largely failed, to get people in metropolitan centres to even begin to see it.

Into a new decade: South Wales January 2020

Rhiannon Morgan's PhD research reveals a lack of ability to dream of a future in young people in a Valleys community, a place with no certainty or continuity, living only from day to day.

In London, a gas engineer reports working typically from 7am to 11pm and driving all over London and even as far as Yarmouth. Just seven engineers cover the whole of London.

By February 2020, flooding devastates Valleys communities already on a knife-edge. Previous highest water levels exceeded for so many communities and rivers. In one small former pit village at the bottom of a steep-sided valley, the community suffers badly in the floods. The local South Wales paper reports the generous acts of electricians, decorators, carpet layers and other trades to help those who have lost everything. The story doesn't surprise me as I've heard many versions of it across so many valleys and so many situations. People who have little, rush to help those who have nothing. This is not charity – it is not donations to help, but self-help. There is no sense here of even trying to wait for the state. Mutual support is what has always happened and what happens still.

By the time it comes to March, 2020 we are in lockdown. Early reports from London quickly reveal accusations against workers using the crowded tube at rush hour. Many people comment on social media that these workers should stay at home. But one early post on London Live, sites a worker saying starkly that if he doesn't go to work, he doesn't get paid.

Everywhere, the self-employed, the much-hyped entrepreneurs who developed their own small businesses in the absence of decent paying jobs, are not sufficient getting government help. They explain that to qualify they would have to make unimaginable profits – whereas most just scrape by. By April we learn that they also find it impossible to contact banks to obtain loans that way and the radio announces that 40,000 small businesses will not last the month.

In South Wales, as everywhere, many workers carry on working if they can, but they are not getting applause from doorsteps, like the NHS. They deliver the post, courier services, food, staffing supermarkets and pharmacies, cleaning and collecting the rubbish, As the manager of the local Co-op tells me, she can't protect her staff and yet no-one thanks them, no-one claps them, In fact, it seems that in supermarkets they are the targets of abuse. Yet, despite this, they still turn up to work and no-one seems to worry about them taking risks without proper protection.

Meanwhile I read, buried in the Financial pages, that the London Stock Exchange had its worst day of trading since 1929.

Getting It - Personal reflections on Covid-19

Angela McRobbie

On Wednesday 18th March, Angela McRobbie was admitted to hospital with what turned out to be COVID-19. Here she discusses her experiences of the virus, and pays tribute to those low paid workers who are at the forefront of efforts to tackle the pandemic.

It is now day 2 of my being discharged from the Whittington Hospital in North London, with a positive test for COVID-19 coming through on Saturday afternoon. The only reason I'm writing this is to reiterate how, as a society, we now have to swivel 360 degrees to properly value those dedicated workers whose compassion has humbled me in ways I can hardly convey.

The first workforce I came into contact with doing long hours, poorly paid, possibly at risk over recent weeks and acting with such professionalism were the cabin crew on the easyJet flights I've taken between Gatwick and Berlin Tegel. I've recently been finalising a research project running between London, Berlin and Milan, but more importantly I've been helping care for a friend who has been going through first chemo, then immunotherapy. Once en route I exchanged glances with the crew when a seemingly agitated woman boarded wearing a large mask and then entirely covering her face by pulling down her woolie hat. I was bang next to her, as was the passenger on the other side, for the 90 minutes looking through the window throughout. Perhaps this was the moment I got infected. A week later, and this time on another flight back to London, I began to feel queasy on board. I was relieved not to have thrown up and managed to get home to North London. This was Thursday 12th March and from that point on I became weaker and weaker by the hour. But with no cough and no temperature, I did not really make the leap to thinking it to be Covid-19. I collapsed on the bathroom floor 3 times, I slept with a kind of hallucinogenic intensity and I ate almost nothing. By Wednesday 18th March my daughter called an ambulance, and when the brave paramedics arrived they could see how ill I was. I so much hope they have remained healthy, as they were unmasked.

They took me to the Whittington Hospital, just 5 minutes from where I live. There was a frenzy of activity in A & E, and I was first given a lung x-ray and told immediately by a doctor that there were signs of infection. I was also given oxygen, which I needed over the course of 4 days. My blood pressure, heart rate and oxygen levels were checked every two hours throughout the night, also by amazing health staff working 12 hour shifts. I was put on two antibiotics and Tamiflu, just in case they worked. Oddly, after 12 hours, I felt they were working – though this could have been merely

my relief that I was in such good hands. I once again collapsed on the bathroom floor and the ward sister so helpfully called my daughter. At least I could eat a little. I was in a ward with terribly ill and mostly patients older than me (I'm 68). Through the fog of my own illness I could see how the doctors and nurses were treating quite confused patients with such compassion, spending up to 30 minutes at a time with them, masked but really risking their lives. I had also become quite deaf during this process and at a certain point I just smiled and nodded. I told the doctor of my travels and that mercifully we were on strike at my university so this had kept me out of personal contact, often one to one, with up to 300 students over the space of 4 days.

By late Friday I felt a wave of calm that perhaps I was going to survive this. By Saturday a positive result emerged. Again, a wonderful young doctor broke the news but by then I was eating and no longer needed oxygen, and he said I may be allowed home Sunday. They decided to keep me on the antibiotics. He explained that so little is known and that hospital policy was following the guidance from their own microbiologists. My daughter had been allowed short visits and told me staff were worried about running out of masks, the next day she came to collect me bringing with her a box of a 100 that she had pre-ordered a week or so before.

Several staff including one of the cleaners smiled and wished me the best when I was leaving the ward, this was so generous since I was leaving all of them to a future unknown. Since being home I am only able to walk like someone in their 90s. I hold onto doors and walls for support. Any degree of strength seems very slow to re-enter my system but there are some good signs. I feel as though it's going to take weeks, but that's fine. I am lucky to live alone and I have the sun streaming through my windows. I feel full of political fervour to see our dedicated health and care workforce, clinical and non-clinical looked after. Why cannot the military medical corps be pulled in across the country? And cannot this happen now? Essential travel must be made safe and easy for core workers. Sadiq Khan and other mayors have it in their hands to find ways of making this happen. I also hope easyJet is thinking of how it can not only pay its workforce more generously but look after them with the care they deserve. Coincidentally in a forthcoming short book, that I have just finished writing, I rage about how our low pay economy 'incarcerates' sectors of the population with long hours, and near to xero hours conditions, meaning that there is little if any chance for further job training, for day release or for upping qualifications. This is a national pattern for workers, from North to South, who until recently we have given barely more than a second thought to. These are women and men in the checkouts who I often talk to and they tell me they only have higher hopes for their children doing well at school and university. They feel themselves to be trapped in a future of low paid jobs. But this can change now. If social scientists have any role to play (and in the last 2 weeks I have doubted my own professional value indeed in comparison to virologists epidemiologists not to say health staff) then we can clamour loudly for a new world after the virus which permits the service sector to be able to see true improvement in wages, conditions and also opportunity to gain more qualifications.

Postscript (added 08/09/2020)

In the last few weeks, nearly five months after my own experience of Covid-19 pneumonia and subsequent hospitalisation, I have been asking friends and colleagues if they can explain why the news media, regardless of political persuasion, across newspapers and TV and indeed social media, is no longer paying attention to who is dying. For weeks on end, until the middle of June, there were detailed accounts, photographs, obituaries and accounts by loved ones. We also became aware of the social demographics of the pandemic, who was most at risk, who tragically died while caring for others. Then, suddenly, it stopped. Was it that a simple reduction in the numbers of those dying justified a turning away from this ongoing reality, a focus of attention on other things? Yet, full busloads of deaths were occurring every week, indeed plane-loads, without it seeming to merit commentary from public health professionals, and without wider political and public debate.

Was this the result of some sort of moratorium decided behind closed doors? Or was it a media convention that, with the crisis past its peak, some sort compassion fatigue kicks in on the part of audiences and readers such that it is time to move on? Had we all had too much of the suffering and grieving, the hospital documentaries and the relief when those who came so close to death eventually recovered and could be let home? But the need to know goes far beyond the vagaries of human interest. There is a politics that accompanies the rituals of public mourning. Those who died at the height of the emergency were duly acknowledged as deaths that, in many cases, could have been avoided. But what of those dying now, could these deaths also have been prevented with better and earlier public health measures in place? Do they not merit the kind of public recognition accorded to their counterparts from just a few months back?

One personal question that flits through my mind is if I had sought help sooner would I have been spared the pneumonia? Could I have avoided the way the virus seemed to invade my entire body, seeking out from my head to my feet any cells that it could find to rest in? At the time that I got ill, having no cough and no temperature for about 8 days, my symptoms of intense nausea, fainting on the bathroom floor and losing all taste and smell, did not figure as strong indicators that I was in danger. It was only after 10 days of the infection that I was admitted to hospital, fortunately only needing oxygen and not ventilation. From my hospital bed, as I began to emerge from the hallucinations and tremors, I was flicking through Twitter and saw alarming words from my colleague at Goldsmiths, the writer Michael Rosen. Still at home he was experiencing the exact same symptoms that had finally set in for me by the time I was in the ICU ward: intense shivering and trembling limbs from the waist down, and a 40 degree temperature around the face and head and shoulders. I wanted to reply and tell him to call an ambulance, but I did not have the energy.

In fact he was admitted to the same hospital (the Whittington in Highgate North London) on the day I was discharged, and he remained there for 6 weeks. When he was finally allowed to leave, he had to go to a rehab ward at St Pancras to learn how to walk. So we both almost did not make it. Could earlier intervention have left us less impaired? Or was it the case that age, me 69, he 73, and the density of the doses we somehow contracted, were going to inevitably push us down those near fatal pathways anyway? These are questions that have some urgency especially for older people, since no shielding measures can be totally effective, people cannot stay indoors and away from others indefinitely. And here too poverty and inequality exact a toll. Increasing numbers of the over 65s work, often in low pay service sector and in janitorial roles. Will they simply have to give up work and rely on pittance level pensions to protect themselves from infection? And how will older people living in multi-generational families manage to maintain social distancing in the months to come, to say nothing of those already in the retirement homes whose quality of care varies according to the weekly rates paid by the residents? So many grandparents provide free childcare for working parents in a context where the cost of nurseries and after school care are spiralling exponentially. They have had to stop doing this during the pandemic, but when schools do re-open and parents are back at work will grandparents step back into this role?

The question of how the different national media outlets have reported on what is happening beyond their borders also carries enormous political weight for the forms of solidarity we can enact, and for the de-nationalising and de-westernising that it would require. My own experience here is limited to the life I have led between London, Glasgow and Berlin in the last two decades. (And I almost certainly got the virus *en route* in the first days of March). The German press is by and large more wordy and highbrow than the UK, and less visually fixated. In Germany, the response may not have been quite as fast as it seemed to outsiders, but the scientists and medics were less drawn into a political maelstrom than their colleagues in the UK. By the end of March, friends and colleagues in Germany who I had told about my hospitalisation already had information about blood plasma being used, and a whole stream of measures including the use of steroids, that seemed to be in place to reduce the death rate amongst the seriously ill. Likewise, with the lockdown and then track and trace system, the preventative measures put in place have worked more efficiently in Germany than elsewhere. Few British journalists have looked in depth for European comparisons beyond the graphs and the statistics – for instance little is known in the UK about how the retirement care homes (Seniorenpflegeheime) system in Germany seemed to avoid the scenes of distress so widely witnessed in Britain. Have they always had PPE at hand? Are care workers less likely to be employed on a short term or sub-contractual basis? Is there more regulation and inspection?

Amongst my own colleagues and doctoral students in Germany, the swifter and more efficient response to the virus means that they have had little direct experience of the suffering. I'm the only person they know

who has caught it. When I say that, especially in London, we all know of at least a handful of people who have died, and that the country as a whole has been propelled into trauma and national mourning for the health care workers and the bus drivers and those who did not get admitted to hospital in time and so on, there is often an embarrassed silence. In addition, it seems the 'long Covid' as it has been called in English-speaking countries has little or no existence here in Berlin, at least so far. When I report on the many long term after-effects – the respiratory therapy I need three times a week, the extensive loss of muscle even when I have been taking gentle walks for an hour daily still there is dragging on my feet, the lasting damage to my vocal chords, the weak muscles on my neck, the dramatic hair loss which began 6 weeks later and lasted for nearly a month during which time 60% of my hair fell out in clumps as I showered – all of this has prompted first sympathy, and then among a few some suggestion that I was exaggerating or had become very neurotic.

These responses matter not at a personal level but because they also underpin the waves of neo-populism which have emerged across significant numbers of the population. Protests against mask-wearing in Germany have grown in recent weeks, on the grounds that this is an unacceptable erosion of freedom and liberty on the part of an authoritarian state. This too marks the power of the recent neo-nationalisms that blunt, if not extinguish, the possibility for solidarity and for transnational support and empathy. Here too the media has a responsibility. In Britain the downward spiral of circulation for the liberal press as well as cost-cutting at the BBC has limited the number of foreign correspondents over the last decade, and this is offset by the decline of students taking modern language courses and then going onto become journalists. We have subsequently become a nation less curious about others. Throughout the pandemic, this thought struck me often. What about Iran? What about Ireland? What about Jamaica? What about continuous rather than occasional on-the-ground reporting and in-depth analysis of how other countries and their medical experts were responding?

What then does Britain have, if anything, to offer in the field of good practice in times of a pandemic? There have been outpourings of gratitude for key workers, for NHS staff, and for the low paid people behind the counter in the local food stores and those continuing to deliver mail, and this deep affective current of understanding and compassion makes the likelihood of anti-maskers gaining any substantial support minimal. Neo-populism too has almost run its course and been replaced by greater awareness of the chasms between wealth and poverty in Britain today. One senses that the electorate finds the pithy slogans from Number Ten increasingly vacuous. The privileged white men in the cabinet cannot even pretend to show kindness or compassion. There is a sense that civil society has re-discovered itself in this great absence of leadership and its indifference to suffering. This has not just been a matter of community deliveries of food to those shielding, or the volunteering amongst the young and able. It's also apparent in the many

support groups that have sprung up, the C19 patients' activism on so many fronts, something that is quite unheard of at least in Italy and Germany. There has also been most important of all a cross articulation between the politics of race and the scale of the inequalities revealed by the high rates of C19 in deprived communities. For so long the ravages of neoliberalism in British society appeared to be irreversible – who could imagine a more equitable housing market? Who could see a situation where cleaners and janitors and people doing care work with the elderly might find a voice and be listened to? The political priority for now for the Left must be to find ways of maintaining this openness to hear and engage with and make louder the voices of others. And, likewise, the liberal press and media. To abandon coverage of those who are still dying is to swim against the tide of empathy and kindness which amongst ordinary people this crisis has unleashed.

Lockdown: scenes from an ethnographer's notebook

Phil Cohen

Phil Cohen documents some material which gave him pause for thought

We don't want to be heroes, even for one day

We are not heroes. We do not want to be fallen martyrs. All this war imagery makes us very uncomfortable. It distracts people from the reality. We are ordinary people who have chosen to become health workers and carers. We are professionals and highly trained. All we want is to be given the tools we need to do our job properly, to look after people in a safe environment. We need proper protective equipment and we want it now. Your applause is very nice and your support is very moving, but we need the government to do its job so we can do ours. Health Worker Interviewed on BBC Newsnight

There goes the neighbourhood: Dialogue over a digital fence

Harry: I plan on going to the shop tomorrow morning after I've taken the boys to football

PC: Are kids still playing football?

Harry: Well, yes, definitely although the virus is still just as deadly outdoors if you happen to breathe in particles from someone who has got the virus

PC: I thought they did a study which showed that unless someone actually sneezes in your face while outdoors the risk is minimal ˚

Harry: Even runners and cyclists if they have it without knowing are most likely to spread it as they are breathing heavily and releasing huge amounts of harmful particles. Unfortunately unless people start to follow the guidelines more carefully this situation won't be going away for some time yet.

PC: There is a lot of political pressure on the government to lift some of the lockdown restrictions so that schools and small businesses can reopen, but what is happening right now is very confusing and chaotic.

Harry: Yeah there is a lot of pressure from folk that don't see the bigger picture. Schools can in no way re-open while abiding with the social distancing rules, even heads in the strictest schools said its impossible. It certainly won't be normal for everyone for the rest of the year sadly.

PC: Perhaps schools could run on reduced numbers with some kind of shift system?

Harry: Many teachers are saying that it is impossible to organise social distancing even on a reduced intake. Children mingle – it's what they do! We all know that schools are a breeding ground for viruses. There will be more waves of infection to come, especially in the winter months. Unless there is a miracle cure or a vaccine, there is little they can do to let children safely back into school, or re-open public places.

PC We just don't know how things are going to pan out. The scientists don't know yet how things are going to develop, we will just have to learnt to live with uncertainty!

Harry: I just say it how it is. A vaccine takes time to develop and test, and there is still a ridiculous amount of folks dying each day in Colchester with the wards full up. I know because my wife works there. People need to understand what social distancing means and not take unnecessary risks. People seems to think Wivenhoe is safe from the virus because it's a village buts it's not. People have died here too. It's not safe when people are going round friend's houses, having cups of tea, or gathering outside the Rose and Crown down by the river. Then those same people go shopping in the Co-Op touching all the items, then coughing which spreads the germs through the whole aisle onto the next one, helped on by the air conditioning. It isn't making for a safe environment.

PC: Aren't you being a little bit paranoid here? Unlike many big Supermarkets, the Co-op here has wide aisles and only allow ten people in at a time. You just have to observe social distancing, wear a mask and wash your hands after shopping.

Harry: You do realise a cough in a shop from someone with the virus will travel much further than 2 metres? It's not paranoid, it's common sense lol. I've been studying the coronavirus since Wuhan, before the government ever took notice. I have a wife working in the NHS whose colleagues are getting sick from people who think they are immune to it. Masks only help a bit. Many of the staff on the front line are dying whilst using the proper PPE so it goes to show if you are exposed to the virus, you cannot be fully protected, I have a funeral to go to in a few weeks time which will easily be the worst time to have one.

PC: Yes, it's a bad time to die. Everyone is doing it, it's no longer a special event!

Harry: And then we have bastards like Dominic Cummings, flouting the rules he made up and getting away with, aided and abetted by the Prime Minister. As far as they are concerned, we are just guinea pigs they are experimenting with. OK so let's see what happens if we lift the restrictions, open the schools, and get people back to work so we don't have to go on paying their wages. Then let's see how many of them get infected and die.

If it's not too many, then it will have been worth it…

Walter Benjamin's Berlin Lockdown Diary

"People smile and wave at me when I go for a walk. They see an old man and think to themselves 'look he is out and about despite the regulations. Remarkable for his age, and without a stick too. But shouldn't he be safe indoors?

Niceness can be a way of killing people. Slowly but gently letting them know that their existence doesn't really count any more except to be a receptacle of other people's kindness and generosity. They wave at me expectantly as if I should wave back to show my gratitude. I am drowning in other people's sympathy, while they wave at me from altogether different and safer shore."

For Walter Benjamin, that most conservative of revolutionaries, the secret charm of the bourgeoisie lay less in their ostentatious and often hypocritical displays of public virtue, than the private vices and phobias which lay so openly concealed in their broom cupboards and bedside lockers. He would have delighted to see in the elaborate etiquettes of social distancing, the moral anatomy of class distinction laid bare. And he would have detected in the response to an enforced slowdown of economic and social activity the seeds of resistance and even revolt against the ever increasing speed-up of everyday life and labour under advanced capitalism.

We'll meet again? Virus Everywhere Day 2020

So they came out in droves, all of them infected with the same virus of national nostalgia promoted by the government, singing along with Vera Lynn to celebrate victory in a war none of them had lived through and at best could remember only at second or third hand through watching old 1950's movies, or listening to their grandparents' reminiscences.

Easy then to be cynical and the Left is used to being a party pooper. Yet as Frank Gallaher, the lowlife anti-hero of Shameless memorably put it 'What is Democracy if it's not everyone's right to paaarty". And after nearly two months of lockdown who wouldn't want to have a party – any excuse to get together and talk about something other than Covid-19. Yet that doesn't entirely explain all the union jacks and the red, white and blue bunting. It surely was influenced by the Tory Press's invocation of the wartime spirit, straight out of the Boris Johnson Churchillian playbook. A useful smokescreen to hide the ever more visible social inequalities which the pandemic has revealed. But there was something about the gusto with which people were singing 'We'll Meet again some Sunny Day" that had to do with something much more visceral than one nation Toryism: a longing for the kind of uncomplicated community of rejoicing evoked by the original VE day celebrations. Nostalgia, don't forget, is a special kind of homesickness, a desire for something we never had, masquerading as a retrieval of something we have lost. The flags and bunting are accessories not affordances

of collective memory work. It is up to us to paint them green and red.

‘In dreams begin responsibilities’ W.B.Yeats

After the Prime Minister’s first announcement of measures to combat Covid-19

I am with Boris Johnson in his garden. He is in very ebullient mood after making his speech to the nation and being very patronizing to everyone around him. I am furious and point out that some people don’t have enough food to eat. He gestures at a slice of toast and what looks like the remnants of a vegetarian pie which is lying on the grass. Then he kneels down and starts eating the pie and the grass, like a dog, to demonstrate the fact that there is enough for everyone. I feel enraged at this shameless piece of grandstanding but powerless to do anything about it.

It is a time of crisis and people are coming up with all kinds of creative ideas about how to survive. One thing they are doing is taking over large public buildings and turning them into experimental ‘cabarets’ or ‘boites’, rooms which they rent for a short time to put on various kinds of performance. I am given a guided tour of one such place, each ‘boite’ has a different name, after famous singers, or writers I have never heard of, except de Sade. My guide tells me that all kinds of meetings go on here, and says it in such a tone of voice as to indicate that he doesn’t entirely approve of some of the goings on.

After the announcement that the Excel Centre in the Royal Docks is to be converted into a temporary emergency hospital for Covid-19 patients and on hearing that one of my friends nearly died from the virus but is now on the long road to recovery.

A pop-up convalescent home is planned for Covid-19 patients. It has been decided to locate it in the back garden of our house, but it will also extend to neighbours’ gardens on either side. This will involve knocking down fences and concreting over our gardens. I feel very ambivalent about this. It will be good to be doing something to help but I am resentful of the government’s interference in our lives, and the destruction of all that creative gardening work. The structure is pre-fabricated, made out of sections and assembled on site. It seems to be designed to be demountable but I am still not sure how it is going to work or what the neighbours will think. Will they blame me, as if it was my own idea?

Before hosting my first Zoom meeting

I have caught the virus but not badly and have easily overcome the illness. I am even glad I got it so that I will be immune and can resume normal relations with people, hugging them and walking in crowded streets. Then I am meeting with a group of people with whom I am planning to collaborate in carrying out some research into the social impact of Covid-19. This will involve face to face interviews. The group are all wearing masks and we

discuss the cost of providing masks for all the interviewers and informants. The meeting comes to an end and I have to establish a time for the next one. I am anxious to give a display of professional competence and give clear instructions on when and where to meet, but I have no idea how to do it.

After the lockdown rules are announced

There is a regime change in the way sanitary material, including toilet paper, is distributed. It seems the government are issuing everyone with nappies irrespective of age. Only the nappies don't fit and, worse, don't work. People are shitting themselves all over the place, especially if they break the social distancing rule. Jean wakes up and jumps out of bed. It is a bright sunny morning and she says 'let's go swimming'. It seems like a very impulsive act. I point out that all the swimming pools are closed as part of the lockdown. But she won't take no for an answer. I follow her through near empty streets, with police drones buzzing overhead tracking everyone's movements. We get to the swimming pool and go down into the basement car park, which is dark and with no cars in it. Suddenly a large group of primary school children file in. They are all huddled together and it is clear that none of them is socially distancing. I shout at them to go home because the swimming pool is closed.

Feeling the Familiar Strangely Good

I am a reporter whose job is to find 'feel good' human angle stories in the midst of the pandemic. The paper is going to do a feature about a very old lady who has been in the Girl Guides over 70 years. She looks a bit like my life partner Jean (who actually was a Girl Guide and whose 80th birthday is just coming up) but she is very difficult to find and then when I do, not very co-operative. I am increasingly anxious that I won't get the interview, and even if I do, she won't say the right 'feel good' things. I get distracted by another story in which a field dentist pulls out a young man's tooth with a pair of pliers (my dad in his memoir which I am just editing describes his own father as 'the family dentist' who was handy with pliers). The tooth is enormous and the young man, covered in blood, is very proud of it as he shows it to me– he wants me to write a story about him but I cannot see what is 'feel good' about it. Finally, I manage to organize a ceremony for the old Girl Guides in which Jean can be thanked for her long service.

In England's Green Unpleasant Land

PICK GETTING OUT OF THE HOUSE. PICK RAIN, PICK SHINE. PICK FRUIT AND VEG. PICK TIRED LIMBS AND ACHING MUSCLES. PICK EARLY MORNINGS AND BLEARY EYES. PICK A HARD DAYS GRAFT. PICK THE SUN ON YOUR BACK AND DIRT UNDER YOUR NAILS. PICK PUTTING MONEY IN YOUR POCKET. PICK PUTTING FOOD ON YOUR PLATE. PICK PUTTING FOOD ON OTHER PEOPLE'S PLATES. PICK RISING TO A CHALLENGE. PICK BEING A KEY WORKER. PICK BEING PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER. PICK FOR BRITAIN. BRITAIN NEEDS 70,000 FRUIT AND VEG PICKERS *Advertisement from the Pick for Britain Campaign*

This first time I came to do the picking I was just 20, I came with two friends from my village. They told us we would have a good time, working alongside other young people and earn a lot of money. When we arrive at the farm, it was different. We had to sleep in a kind of barrack, four to a room. There was no privacy. We had to use a toilet which didn't work properly and was disgusting. We worked six hour shifts and the work was back breaking, we were bent over all day, some of us got breathing problems, I think from the pesticides they use. The farmer, he didn't care about us, a few times he made us do a double shift, twelve hours in the boiling sun, because he was worried he was going to lose his crop. The English food was terrible, we preferred to cook our own meals. The farm was a long way from the town and there was no proper transport. Once a week we would go in on a bus. The local people didn't like us. They called us gypsies, and used bad words against us. They said we were thieves, we were stealing English people's jobs. They wanted us to spend money in their shops, but they did not treat us like we were human beings. They would not let us go in the public house to get a drink if we tried, they got angry, so we had to buy beer and wine in the supermarket to take back with us. This was my first experience and I said that I would never go back, but then I needed the money, there is no work in Romania and my parents are quite old , and my father is sick and need money for medicine, so I went back. What else could I do? *Interview with Romanian Fruit Picker*

The Fire Next Time?

The Peoples Flag must turn the deepest green or hard rain's gonna fall

Dick Pountain

Dick Pountain looks at the impact of the environmental crisis on the health of our body politic. He argues that the Green New Deal was possibly the only plank in its 2019 platform that is likely to survive as common ground from which to address the crisis of global heating and the impact of automation in potentially making large sections of the workforce redundant. But at the same time we need to be mindful of the constraints imposed by the wider political context in which any such strategy has to play out.[1]

The climate crisis played only an indirect part in Brexit, but it's now changing the entire political landscape, making a return to 1945-style social democracy both unfeasible, and perhaps no longer a vote-winning strategy for Labour. Indeed, even preserving democracy itself may prove to be a challenge, not only because of its temporary suspension during the pandemic, but because tackling the disastrous consequences of global heating will demand sacrifices of Western living standards that exacerbate the current populist reaction that gave us Donald Trump and Boris Johnson.[2]

Trump's apparent impunity to impeachment in the USA marks the completion of a "populist turn" in world politics unseen since the 1930s and which could end almost as badly, by preventing – for another five, perhaps ten years – any effective measures to mitigate global heating, if those measures affect the employment prospects or personal autonomy of populist voters. And the scientific consensus is that we don't have that long.

Labour's December 2019 defeat was particularly bitter when so many were hoping for a surprise win comparable to the 1945 victory that founded the welfare state. But Attlee's government achieved power on the crest of a wave of social solidarity engendered by the collective experience of fighting and provisioning World War Two: capital and labour were prepared to compromise for their common interest in reconstruction, and to avoid the threat of Soviet-style expropriation. Such solidarity can no longer be relied upon, not only because we've forgotten that war experience, but because ever since 1979 a succession of Conservative governments has embarked on a deliberate, tenacious and effective 40-year campaign to eradicate it. In particular the Right of the party, which favours American-style unregulated capitalism, devised policies – selling off council houses, maliciously neglecting heavy industry to weaken trade unions, and promoting roads and car ownership over bus and rail transport – which tend to undermine collective solidarity in favour of competitive individualism. Owning one's own home and driving a car confer a sense of autonomy that was once a privilege confined to the upper classes, while driving a wedge into Labour's core support between those who bought and those

who didn't. It also triggered the property price inflation which enriches the 'baby boomer' generation, increases exploitative renting and homelessness, and widens the generation gap since only the children of boomers who expect to inherit can now afford to buy.

Property also drives the populist turn directly – people can be encouraged to see immigrants as competitors for both jobs and homes – and sets metropolitan dwellers, who have adequate public transport, against country/small-town dwellers whose public transport has been decimated, making them unwilling to give up car ownership as a step toward a zero-carbon economy (indeed making many into self-interested climate deniers).[3]

The post-1945 social-democratic consensus depended not only on an unprecedented level of social solidarity but also on a Kenyesian economic order of continuous growth, shared out more fairly as both wages and welfare. The neoliberal reaction of the 1970s put a stop to that, and justified the imposition of austerity we've suffered for the last decade. Labour's problem now is that promising a return to fairly-shared growth is no longer credible when faced with the drastic measures required to slow climate change. Adopting a 'Green New Deal' that credibly promises to create some new jobs building the vast new power generation and transport infrastructures that would be needed, is a start, but its stress on public ownership and unionisation looked to too many voters like old Labour. Putting their fingers in their ears they chose 'business as usual' under Boris. It will take more than a manifesto promise to get people to make sacrifices this big in peacetime, if indeed it's possible at all.

If too many people keep voting for business as usual – for example if Trump wins a second term – then we'll face a bleak prospect. Western nations will close their borders against the flood of migrants displaced by drought, flood, fire and famine as global heating increases, and ferociously suppress internal climate protests that become equally violent. These authoritarian states may eschew the flashy uniforms of 1930's Fascism, and instead pretend to be 'protecting democracy' using the baleful array of modern surveillance technologies. At worst this could deteriorate into world war, were Russia and China to rally the nations worst affected by climate change against this sealed-off West, into an authoritarian axis that sought to impose climate mitigation measures by coercion.

It's hard (and pointless) to estimate the likelihood of such grim outcomes but that's no reason to stop speculating. Such scenarios might be averted thanks to the generation gap. Young people have far more to lose from climate disaster than their elders, which is driving them to militancy across the globe, and they're equally furious at being excluded from the 'property ladder' their parents have monopolised. Unfortunately their militancy tends to be leaderless anarchistic, and ever more disengaged from traditional party politics (one thing they do share with their parents).

And as they disengage, the giant digital and social media corporations are becoming ambitious to provide real-world as well as virtual services. Ama-

zon, Google, Microsoft, Facebook and Uber don't hide their desire to penetrate the healthcare, education and transport sectors with innovative and 'disruptive' services based on the powerful infrastructures and AI capabilities they've invested so heavily in (which are indeed, in many cases, more efficient than state equivalents).[4] These corporations tend to be more progressive on climate matters than fossil fuel corporations, but are still commercial, unelected enterprises committed first of all to shareholders, and whose incentive is to displace rather than create jobs.

So a third dystopian scenario might see these companies gradually take over services from a shrinking state, investing in promising carbon-reduction technologies while also creating mass unemployment. Shrunken states might then employ the same technologies to integrate welfare, security and taxation – as is already happening with India's Aadhaar system, Singapore's 'Smart Nation' and Alibaba's cooperation with Chinese local government to run the Social Credit system. Though there are serious questions over how effective these systems really are, what's beyond question is that they grant the state a sinister degree of extra power over citizens, when participation in political protest can be punished by loss of benefits.[5]

Enough of the doomsday scenarios though: such techno-democracy could also provide a new model for social democratic/liberal/green alliances (always supposing they can sink their differences and unshackle themselves from the past sufficiently to reverse the populist tide and get elected). This new model would deploy a spectrum of regulatory and fiscal measures that range from outright nationalisation/socialisation, through state regulation, redistributive taxation, to state/private partnerships of a more robust kind than the ruinous finance-led systems adopted by New Labour. Different 'packages' of these measures would be constructed for different sectors – armaments, fossil fuels, pharmaceuticals, automotive through to medicine, education and care – according to an assessment of their social value, each precise mixture being negotiable to provide the leverage the state needs to impose a new 'historic compromise'.

The digital titans aren't yet too big to be regulated (though ironically enough it's the EU that has been most effective). Rather than merely raise taxes on the digital companies, accept some payment in free public use of their services; make all companies pay a levy toward a Universal Basic Income (UBI) fund, again graduated by their assessed social value; gradually reduce the statutory working week to share a diminishing pool of commercial jobs and create a pool of paid voluntary state labour for climate mitigation programmes (on the lines of Roosevelt's Public Works Administration).

This is of course pie-in-the-sky so long as the Left can't win elections, and if the digital companies choose instead to team up with fossil fuel companies, of which there have been worrying signs like Amazon's recent deal to put BP's refinery and prospecting data into its AWS Cloud. This is happening just when the transport, automotive, power generation and even the

military are starting to take seriously their own vulnerability to climate change and becoming willing to investigate solutions, both technical and legal. Any new Left alliance will need, as a matter of urgency, to encourage such divisions – 'divide and rule' has always been Right's strongest tactic while we've been prone to dividing ourselves instead. A recent New York Review of Books article by Bill McKibben notes that banks and investors are becoming jittery about the future value of fossil fuel reserves (worth nothing if not extracted) which means that divestment from fossil fuels and legal threats of reparation for climate damage might be weaponised in the way they were against Big Tobacco.[6] On the other hand, trying to reach zero-carbon by 2030 using solar and wind power alone would be impossibly disruptive, so the Left may have to moderate its deeply-ingrained historic opposition to nuclear power, and even embrace its replacement by a new generation of smaller, cleaner, safer thorium reactors.

It doesn't have to be all gloom and sacrifice. A continually shrinking working week, together with UBI plays well with 'post-work' ideas that have been circulating from Marx to Keynes to modern protagonists like David Graeber's rant against 'Bullshit Jobs' and Peter Fleming's 'Death of Homo Economicus'.[7] Deriving much of one's personal identity from a job already looks far less prevalent among a younger generation who tolerate (some of whom even welcome) the casual 'gig' economy that's anathema to older labour activists. If the younger generations are good at one thing, it's finding new and creative ways to have fun in leisure time.

At present though they do this despite, rather than because of, the competitive pressures placed upon them by social media and celebrity culture – pressure to afford the latest gadgets and clothes, to have the right 'look' so you always get swiped right rather than left. Depression, anxiety, addiction and mental illness (also among the not-so-young) are a growing menace that even Tory governments are now being forced to acknowledge. If we do finally decide to actually tackle the climate disaster, it's possible that what now look like deprivations might prove better for the mental health of all of us, by instilling a sense of common purpose and common action not unlike that of war-time. As water, food, travel and living space become no longer abundant enough to squander the way we now do, we'll have to relearn the value of the commons, of sharing equitably, of safeguarding and preserving, else we will certainly perish.[8]

Maybe we'll all have to learn to let go and cultivate our (sustainable) gardens.

Endnotes

1. This article was written immediately before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, which looks certain to drastically change the circumstances of all of our societies in ways that are not predictable at present. Since

my arguments revolve around social solidarity, its construction in wartime and its deliberate erosion by neo-liberal ideologues thereafter, I prefer to leave it as is, adding only the observation (and fervent wish) that the COVID-19 crisis may be educating those ideologues in the need to restore it...

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3. Dorling, D (2019) 'Dying Quietly: English Suburbs and the Stiff Upper Lip' in *The Political Quarterly*, 90: 32-43

4. Stewart Fry of BP Talks About Working With Amazon Web Service on Its Cloud Transformation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=O328YISNP9k

5. Mitchell, T (2010) *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, Verso

6. McKibben, B (2020) 'A Very Hot Year' in *New York Review of Books*, Mar 12 2020

7. See Graeber, D (2018) *Bullshit Jobs*, Allen Lane and Fleming, P (2017) Death of Homo Economicus Pluto Press

8. Doran, P (2018) 'McMindfulness: Buddhism as sold to you by neoliberals' in *Queen's Policy Engagement*

Living with Uncertainties

Mike Rustin

Michael Rustin examines the uncertainty principles informing the current conjuncture and explores some of the concepts and approaches which may help us develop a mindful approach to the challenges they pose to our existing ways of doing politics.

This collection exploring the idea of political mindfulness, and its editor, suggested that I might make a contribution from a "strategic" overview perspective. However, although I greatly value such perspectives, like others who have been influenced by the writings of figures such as Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, I find that it is exceptionally difficult to think in that way in the midst of a crisis such as this one. The recorded rise in the rate of Covid-19 infections began in Britain only around March 16. On a personal note, I am over 80, and the statistical risk to me from infection by this virus seems to be considerable. The lockdown was imposed a week later, on March 23. This, at the time of writing, is only about a month ago. In the course of these weeks an enormous disruption to the previous state of "normality" has taken place, in terms of the scale of suffering, the disruption to everyday lives, the degree of risk, the imposition of sudden poverty and even destitution, the overturning of previous economic orthodoxies by Conservative government, and the prospect of lasting damage to the economic prospects of many individuals, businesses and other institutions. Geopolitical disruptions are taking place, for example in the risk, even likelihood, of economic and social catastrophes in what we describe as the developing countries, and in the balance of powers between different nations and ideologies. And there is the notable contrast to consider between the capability of some nations and regions (for example China, South Korea, and some other south-east Asian nations, and in Europe, Germany and Austria) to respond competently to the crisis, and the inability of others to do so. In the midst of all these fast-moving events how can one hope to formulate coherent political strategies, which must after all always depend for their feasibility on a knowledge of actual facts and tendencies?

Many people in this disorienting and fearful situation are anxious to discover its meanings and implications. As Phil Cohen's article points out, many ideas have already been put forward, often by writers who are used to providing explanations of these kinds to their publics. Such ideas may draw on their writers' presuppositions about the state of society, and extrapolate these forward into the new situation. No doubt such literature produces valuable ideas about what might be happening, or be in store, whether these be utopian or dystopian in mood. But it seems to me that in present circumstances such formulations can only be hypotheses, since we live in the midst of such huge doubts about what may happen next. One can identify some of these. For example, will President Trump be re-elected, or not, in November 2020? However radical or otherwise an

administration of Joe Biden might prove to be, there can be little doubt that it will not pursue the exceptionally disruptive path, both within the United States and in global terms, which has been followed by Trump. Even more basic is the question of whether or when an effective vaccine for this virus will be found, to enable the restoration of normal kinds of social interaction. Crises and catastrophes, even when they have a "natural" origin, can bring about deep though unforeseen changes to societies, amounting to the emergence of a new social order. These were the effects of earlier plagues, and of both the World Wars of the twentieth century, the Great War giving rise to the era of Fascism and the anti-Fascist struggle, and the Second World War to the managed capitalisms of the social and Christian democracies of Western Europe and their New Deal analogue in the USA, as well as the State socialist regimes of Eastern Europe. How is it possible to predict at this point what processes of change will be accelerated or held back by the new Great Depression which seems likely to be the effect of this virus? For example, will the growing dominance of the digital corporations and their communications systems over the economy, and their "creative destruction" of other forms of production, distribution and employment, be accelerated by the crisis, bringing forward the development of this new economy, dominant in the way that the petroleum and motor-car has been in recent decades?

Another uncertainty concerns the graver crisis of climate change. Will the disruptions taking place in response to the pandemic lead to greater awareness of this other crisis, or will it merely push it out of mind? Most governments have responded, although sometimes with hesitation, to the human priority to limit infection and to save lives, over the competing priorities of economic normality, and it is possible that this ethical response may spill over into other kinds of collective action. These are some of many uncertainties – one would say "known unknowns" and "unknown unknowns", if Donald Rumsfeld, who gave currency to these telling phrases[1], was not himself so discreditable - that it is difficult now to formulate a definite view of "what is to be done". What needs to be done is to think through these complex realities and interconnections, and try to arrive at a clear-enough understanding of them. Political programmes and strategies can only be formulated, piece-by-piece and revision-by-revision, in the light of such thinking. One can see that getting back to the pre-existing order, but with an enhanced capacity to respond to epidemics, could even be an achievement in itself.[2]

Psycho-social perspectives on mindfulness

In 1965 a prescient paper, The Causal Texture of Organisational Environments[3], was written by the two leading social scientists of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR), Fred Emery and Eric Trist. This paper formulated four distinct types of organisations' relation to their environment. They called these (1) the placid, randomised (2) the placid, clustered (3) the disturbed-reactive environment and (4) the turbulent field. The first three of these models correspond broadly to the economists' models of perfect, imperfect and oligopolistic competition, which

model the different degrees which organisations and their interactions are able to shape the environments in which they exist. The fourth "turbulent field" is of a different kind, since in this the "ground" or the environment is itself in an unstable state, disabling the rational goal-seeking strategies of the organisations which inhabit and try to control it in their own interests. Climate change is one major source of such "turbulence" in the modern world. Three main phases of the TIHR's social scientific research are reported in a three-volume anthology[4], presented respectively as the socio-psychological, the socio-technical, and the ecological perspectives, the third of these was led by Fred Emery. Their argument was that an appropriate response to a turbulent environment needed to be based on values shared by all actors. Only common actions based on these could mitigate disruption and chaos. The attempts to formulate a binding programme to contain the Coronavirus, and to reduce carbon emissions, are examples of such intervention, which needs to be based on "global values." A fifth "causal texture" termed the "vortical", based on the idea of an idea of a "vortex" was later added to this typology, referring to the possibility of a total loss of control and ensuring catastrophe. In this work the TIHR social scientists anticipated the significance of complexity theory for the understanding of the modern world.

These formulations are valuable for understanding our present predicaments. One of the problems is that capacities for understanding, and for rational decision-making, are themselves liable to be disrupted by the complexity and rapidity of changes. It is so difficult to know what exactly is happening. For example, which of so many reported social happenings are to be understood as representative of the wider condition, and which are merely particular? It is not possible to have a comprehensive understanding of a society of 60 million people, of which every form of description – whether by journalist, academic, novelist or film-maker - gives only a partial and subjective glimpse. The internet gives access to millions of new voices to the public dialogue, but while this augments democratic "voice", it also provides space for the projections of anxious, deluded and paranoid states of mind. It seems that policy makers and governmental institutions are sometimes overwhelmed by their inability to map and understand the complexities they face. One response to uncertainty and threat is the demand for the imposition of some kind of authority to restore order, however irrational and fear-driven this may be.

This complex situation brings one to the idea of mindfulness and its relevance, a central theme of this symposium, and a practice which Ruth Lister writes about persuasively. One is reminded of several precedents to this project of bringing a deeper psychological and relational dimension to political life. The feminist movement's commitment to "consciousness raising" as a strategy, and its insistence that the "personal is political" (and the political personal) was one of these, not without its influence on current ideas. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a "turn" towards psychoanalysis among some of those previously active in the political ferment of those years, of which the annual conferences "Psychoanalysis and the Public Sphere", and the journal Free Associations, were an expression.

Individuals such as Bob Young, Stephen Frosh, Barry Richards, Karl Figlio and Margot Waddell were among those prominent in this activity. An academic revision of the disciplines of both sociology and psychology into the synthesis of "psychosocial studies" was linked to this development. Richards' discussions of the significance of a modern "therapeutic culture" are relevant to current developments.[5]

One may ask to what "problems" these various "turns" to the "mindful" or "feelingful" are felt to be a solution. In the case of the move towards psychoanalysis (which has had the greatest significance for me) one problem was the unsustainability of the states of mind induced by the earlier states of political urgency, and another was contradictions which were being exposed within the practices of the radical movements themselves. These had more negative aspects than their utopian ideologies were prone to admit - the feminist movement was also influenced by its members' experience of such contradictions. Not only the "Summer of Love" of San Francisco, but also the violence of Woodstock in 1969, needed to be understood.

There are different theoretical frames in which the possibilities of a reflective, respectful and feelingful approach to politics can be conceived. There is no reason to believe that any one of these (for example, mindfulness, or mentalisation, or a psychoanalytic approach) is uniquely fitted to this purpose. In a similar way, it seems that psychotherapies based on relationships between therapists and patients can be helpful to individuals even when these are underpinned by different theoretical beliefs.

I have found psychoanalytic perspectives to be most valuable in approaching these issues because of the extent of the understandings at which they have aimed. These dimensions include attention to the nature of personality development, from infancy onwards, which has given rise to approaches to childcare and education which further human development. They include the understanding of psychopathologies - for example extreme responses to anxieties, obsessional and paranoid-schizoid states of mind - which can disable individual and institutional existences. One of Melanie Klein's additions to this field of understanding was her insistence that the impulses both to love and hate were innate in human beings, and that what mattered was how a benign balance between them could be achieved. W.R. Bion, following Klein, contributed the recognition that the impulse to know and understand was as fundamental an element of the mind as those of love and hate. There are perhaps links between this discovery of Bion and his idea of the importance of "reflective space" for both individuals and institutions and broader conceptions of mindfulness and mentalising. I've suggested elsewhere that there may be a distinctive form of anxiety which arises in response to the desire to understand and its frustration, which I have termed "epistemic anxiety".[6] This may be relevant to understanding the new political divisions which have emerged between populations which have had more and less formal education. This may be an element in resentment of the power, privilege and condescension of the educated, which are referred to in Angela McRobbie's article. I don't know if the par-

adigm of “mindfulness” has explanatory ambitions as large as those of the psychoanalytic tradition.

Valuable uses have been made of psychoanalytical insights to explain social processes - examples are to be found in the writings of Fanon[7], Žižek[8], and Adorno, whose essay *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda* (1951)[9] has acquired a new relevance in Trumpian times. A relevant text may now be the Mitscherlings’ *The Inability to Mourn*[10], which is about the manic-defensive response in West Germany (the celebration of its ‘economic miracle’) to the devastation and guilt of the Second World War. We will soon be facing the necessity to mourn both the unavoidable and avoidable losses of life and well-being of the Coronavirus crisis. Unconscious states of mind which underlie British commitments to Brexit are brilliantly characterised in Fintan O’Toole’s *Heroic Failure*.[11]

It cannot be said, however, that any systematic synthesis has yet been achieved between psychoanalytic and sociological understandings of societies and their processes.[12] Although psychoanalytic psychotherapists have been able to make their understandings accessible and useful to patients in community mental health work, and in support of the work of other professionals, there are significant barriers to the take-up of these ideas. One can recommend their value to those who may be drawn to them, but they provide only one kind of illumination to our present-day problems.

The Political Dimension

Finally, I will offer some reflections which came to mind soon after Labour’s defeat in the 2019 general election, but before the onset of the Coronavirus crisis. My view is that the likelihood of nearly five years of Opposition, although the outcome of a great setback, also provides an opportunity for radical politics to be rethought and conducted in a way different from that of conventional Labourism. Elected office cannot be achieved soon, and therefore there must be a different political purpose. This should be to change the agendas of aspiration, and to seek to bring into being a new political “common sense”, in Gramsci’s famous term. From this perspective, it does not matter if Labour or the Left puts forward ideas which turn out to be taken up by others, or even which a Tory government then adopts for itself (this fear of having its best ideas stolen has recently inhibited Labour). It matters more where the centre of political gravity becomes located, than which party (one hopes temporarily) presides over it. What is most important is that crucial issues, such as climate change, the imbalance between North and South, the consequences of de-industrialisation, the incapability of the State, the deficiencies of the NHS and especially of the system of social care, (and many others) become recognised to be primary in the attention and remedies they demand. If such a movement of understanding can be brought about through pressure from below, and by the Labour Party and its allies, and policies follow from this, this will in any case later create more favourable ground for more radical programmes. The Left does not necessarily do better in a deteriorating and degraded social environment. Of course, exerting pressure must also

involve attacking the government's failings and inadequacies, and seeking to make untenable the position of its most incompetent and reactionary members. The Coronavirus seems already to be providing many grounds for such attacks on failures.

The question then is, what does a political party and its members have to do to exercise such pressures? Manifestly this has to be more than to wait about until a distant general election offers its opportunity. This delusion that only governmental office matters was the essence of Ralph Miliband's critique of "Parliamentary Socialism"[13] - we can just as well call it Parliamentary Labourism - for having too narrow a conception of power. There need to be wider and different forms of political action, than preparing for and awaiting elections.

Paul Addison, in *The Road to 1945*[14], described the many movements and alliances that made possible the eventual election and significant achievements of the 1945 Labour government. These evolved (in the practices of education in the conscript army) during a period of Coalition Government in which Party activities were greatly restricted. Members of the Labour Party now need to make such broad alliances, in "civil society" itself. These can be over specific, often local, issues and concerns, and their effect should be to place Labour as a core element of a wider progressive movement. The aim should be the advance of "hegemony" - a new social and moral consensus - and not merely the acquisition of governmental office. This practice needs to involve actions in society, as well as advocacy and vote-winning. These will sometimes be of protest, sometimes of actual provision and service to communities. How far can party members contribute to the rebuilding of adult education in a community, for example? Would it be possible to survey the use of energy in an entire town, identifying all the flat roofs on which solar panels could productively be installed, all the houses which need to be properly insulated, and all the routes on which an adequate bus service should be provided? Where might it be desirable and appropriate to set up Citizens' Assemblies on specific issues, as Compass has advocated. How can the needs of the social care sector be made visible?

It seems to me that this involves a change in the standard routines of a political party (not only that of Labour) from those of merely formulating "lines" and positions, devising programmes for a future government, and maintaining an election-winning apparatus, to a more active practice of political citizenship. It might be that a distinctive leading role needs to be designated within each constituency party, that responsibility for wider initiatives in its community. The Labour Party needs to regain its link to the mutualist and co-operative tradition that was important at the time of its formation, but which its Parliamentarism largely displaced.[15]

Compass has long advocated that Labour should engage in broad political alliances. It has principally meant by this, electoral pacts to support the election of progressive candidates, where this might not otherwise be feasible. This is to be supported, although the conception of "alliances"

which I am proposing is more than electoral. I suggest that Labour should seek to form coalitions of movements and groups in pursuit of particular goals in local communities, whose purpose is not merely instrumental or electoral. Nor should this strategy of alliances be only the domain of localities, but also of broader "sectors" of activity, such as education, social care, health and the environment. The question from citizens which a progressive party needs to answer is, what can these people do for us when they have no early prospect of being in office? How can we trust them even when they acquire power? It is the lack of such "organic" links between party and people which the election defeat of 2019 so brutally exposed. This is a problem to which I think "mindful" solutions now need to be sought.

Endnotes

1. They were terms then current in risk analysis. They derive from the work of two American psychologists, Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham who used them in the 1990s as a technique to help people better understand their relationship with themselves as well as others.
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“Hope” is the thing with feathers by Emily Dickinson

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

Further Reading

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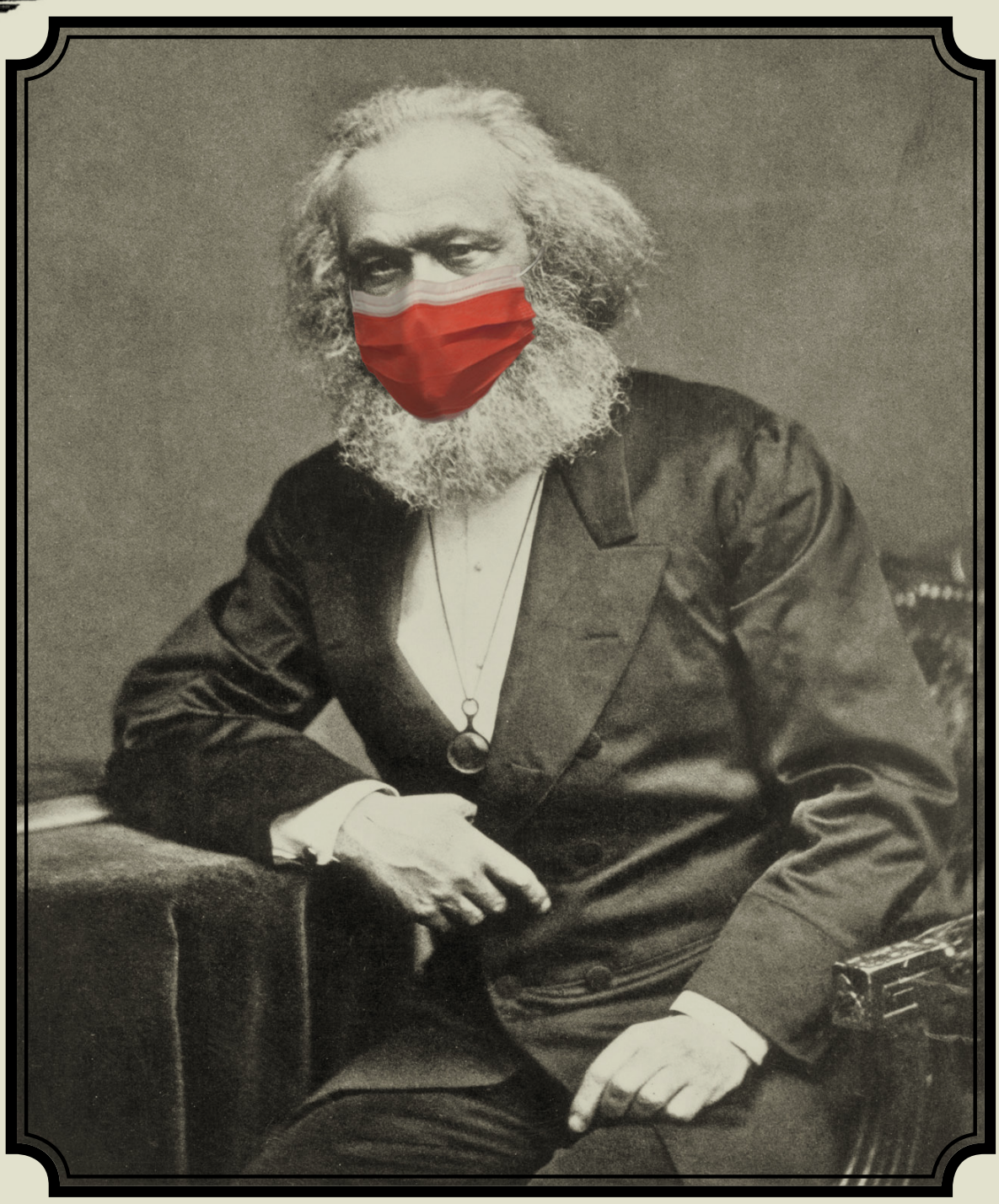

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