

**THE NEXT LEFT - Ben Tarnoff: *Away from Brexit and trump Headlines, the revival of socialism in the UK and US remains striking. Can Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders make it count?***

The world is burning. The water is rising. A figure of exceptional cruelty sits in the White House, an inspiration to reactionaries everywhere. The wise men and women of the political centre are bewildered. (The norms are shredded, the civility is gone, fact-checking doesn't appear to have its intended effect.) Disoriented by their loss of legitimacy, they dream of gluing their broken politics back together. They prefer not to reflect on why their politics broke in the first place.

Meanwhile, the long crisis of working-class life continues. Decades of stagnant wages, paired in the US with the soaring cost of housing, healthcare and education, have conspired to make living with dignity a luxury good. This doesn't quite capture the depth of the crisis, however. It's not just a decent standard of living but living itself that is increasingly at stake. Life expectancy in the US and the UK is falling. Climate change is killing people in California and Puerto Rico. Austerity is killing them in Liverpool and Flint, Michigan.

If all of this sounds pretty grim, it should. We are hurtling towards a bad future. Yet that future isn't inevitable - and, in recent years, a growing number of people have been working hard to make it less likely. This is the bright spot in our mostly bleak moment: a rising wave of militancy and mobilisation on the left, particularly the socialist left, in the US and the UK, two countries where the left in general and socialism in particular have been in retreat since the late 1970s. The movements in the UK and US are not monolithic. They are composed of distinct currents and contoured by countless debates.

Socialism is a complex and Glastonbury last year contested tradition, no less so in 2018 than in 1968 or 1918. Still, two figures loom large: Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders. Two new books offer insights into their respective projects. *Economics for the Many* (Verso), a collection of essays edited by Corbyn's shadow chancellor John McDonnell, is an overview of the new economic thinking around Corbynism, and a sketch of policies that a future Labour government might pursue. Sanders' *Where We Go from Here: Two Years in the Resistance* (Biteback) is a memoir of political struggle since 2016, and a roadmap of sorts for progressive advance under Trump.

Whatever your thoughts on Corbyn and Sanders, the movements they have channelled and inspired are at an interesting stage of development: no longer in their insurgent phase, they have succeeded in pushing formerly fringe ideas into the mainstream, but don't yet wield power on the scale required to put those ideas into practice. Even if it were to disappear tomorrow, Corbynism is an impressive achievement. But if Labour were to win the next election, what would Corbyn in power look like?

*Economics for the Many* offers materials towards an answer. **Its 16 essays cover a wide range of subjects, from trade to taxes to tech. They set forth different ways to think about the economy and provide a number of proposals for restructuring it.** Broadly, the common thread is what Martin O'Neill and Joe Guinan have called Labour's "institutional turn": **the ambition to move beyond tweaking existing institutional arrangements and begin generating new ones.** Corbynism aspires to transform the British political economy as thoroughly as Thatcherism did.

What might this transformation look like? Judging from *Economics for the Many*, the desired outcome is a high-wage, high-productivity economy oriented away from finance and towards production. It's one in which public banks, public investment and public ownership play a significant role, along with a large cooperative sector. **An active industrial policy shepherds the transition to a post-carbon society through a "Green New Deal", while increased spending on healthcare, childcare and education sustains a robust system of social provision.**

This arrangement is still recognisably capitalist, but rebalanced on the basis of a new social-democratic settlement that pulls British society in a more humane and egalitarian direction. It's also an arrangement that capital will fight tooth and nail to prevent. McDonnell is aware of this danger, which is why he has been "war-

gaming" different scenarios.

**But any manoeuvres are, at best, short-term tactical moves to create a bit of breathing room while deeper developments are under way. The only force capable of securing a new social-democratic settlement is the same force that secured the last one: large-scale mobilisation from below.** The welfare states of the postwar period were possible because millions of people expected and demanded change. The long postwar boom also meant, crucially, that those concessions could be funded out of growth, not redistribution.

Today, there is relatively little growth. As a result, an even greater mobilisation will be required. Contemporary social democracy will have to cut into capital's slice rather than count on a bigger pie. Winning an election is only the first step. "The really important question," Ralph Miliband once wrote, "is what happens then."

On the other side of the Atlantic, the balance of forces is somewhat less favourable. Nobody is war-gaming capital flight. The American left is more confident and combative than it has been in decades, but its enemies are stronger. In *Where We Go from Here*, Sanders describes the anger he felt on the day of Trump's inauguration. He wanted to work on "enormous problems" like healthcare, inequality and climate change. Under Trump, however, he knew he would be pushed into a different posture: operating "in a defensive mode, preventing bad situations from becoming worse".

In the age of Trump, the left is necessarily playing defence. But it's important to play the right kind. Since the 2016 election, two schools of anti-Trumpism have emerged. The first wants to turn back the clock and restore the status quo ante. It places its faith in norms, bipartisanship and constitutionalism. This is the position of the liberal centre and the Democratic party leadership. It was well articulated by Nancy Pelosi in her victory speech after the Democrats regained the House of Representatives in the recent midterms, when she vowed to restore "the Constitution's checks and balances to the Trump administration".

The other anti-Trumpism, by contrast, emphasises politics over proceduralism. It wants to build a new progressive majority that both dismantles Trumpism and departs sharply from the business-friendly centrism that has long dominated the Democratic party. Sanders is the chief proponent of this vision, and *Where We Go from Here* shows him working tirelessly towards it. In a series of short chapters, we see him running all over the country, holding rallies in town halls.

His book is dripping in class struggle. On the very first page, Sanders takes aim at "the billionaire class and the politicians they own", and it's a theme he returns to repeatedly. This shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone who has ever heard him speak, but it's still a little astonishing to see a leading American politician - one of the most popular in the country - talk this way. Sanders is right to say that Trump's party does not reflect the views of most Americans. In fact, the Republicans themselves seem to understand this: their power rests on voter suppression, gerrymandering and the outrageously anti-majoritarian architecture of the American political system. But if the Republicans are a minority party, the minority they represent isn't tiny. About 47 million people voted for Republican candidates in the midterms, and Republican voters love Trump - his approval rating among them hovers around 90%. Even if progressives succeed in expanding voting rights and making representative institutions genuinely representative, this Trumpist bloc will remain, and may metastasise into something even more sinister.

**It's easy to feed the pessimism of the intellect, but it's important to find sources of hope to keep fueling the optimism of the will. And the best basis for optimism might ultimately be the strangeness of the situation we find ourselves in - a situation strange enough to make two old socialists central players in British and US politics.** There are junctures in history when the elements come unstuck and rearrange themselves into new and surprising patterns. The course of events becomes impossible to predict. Time moves raggedly, in leaps and ruptures. Another world becomes possible, although there are no guarantees •