

## Editorial

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# Ways of resisting

**M**any people have wondered where all the support for Corbyn suddenly materialised from - where had all those people been before they had Corbyn to coalesce and organise around? One answer to that question is in all the many places where politics take place unnoticed by the mainstream media - often outside what is conventionally thought of as politics. One of Jeremy Corbyn's most important achievements has been to create the conditions for an emergence into the mainstream of some of these many radical currents. This issue of *Soundings* explores some of the ways in which people carry out their own forms of resistance.

Tony Hall, director of the Lordstreet Theatre Company of Trinidad and Tobago, has argued that the spirit of the Caribbean carnival can be succinctly summed up through the words 'dance and fight'.<sup>1</sup> Emily Zobel Marshall, Max Farrar and Guy Farrar further explore carnival as a resource for cultural resistance, and discuss the ways in which the mas band to which they belong has sought to reproduce the anti-authoritarian energy of Trinidad's mas bands in the annual Leeds Carnival. Their aim is to maintain a focus on this resistive element, so that as well as a celebration of culture and identity, carnival remains also a site of more overt political challenge.

Rhian Jones looks at the continuing role of popular music within radical culture. She argues that the radical tradition in music has never gone away. As the music business has become ever more dominated by money, marketing and profit-seeking, people have found new ways of creating and circulating their music, and popular music has continued to offer a space for artistic expression by groups excluded from the mainstream. Its traditions of DIY, innovation and counterculture, together with the diversity on which it thrives, have recently once more come into their own in the mobilisation of Grime4Corbyn. Grime is produced by black (mainly) but also white working-class young people and raises issues that concern them closely but are often absent from the mainstream - police harassment, employment conditions, access to housing, educational inequality. Corbynism has created a space in which these issues can be heard, thereby enabling new connections to be made.

## Editorial

Not all places of politics are new - the workplace has been a crucial site of struggle since the beginning of the industrial revolution. Mark Lyon was involved in one of the most well-known disputes of recent years, the battle at Grangemouth, when billionaire James Ratcliffe threatened to close down the whole site unless workers accepted reduced wages and conditions and a three-year no-strike deal. Current law makes it very difficult for unions to fight back against such management. However, Mark Lyon, the convenor for Grangemouth Unite throughout this period, who we interview in this issue, continues to do so. He now works for the International Transport Workers Federation, and is involved in developing their strategy for hub organising - which promises to be a creative new way of industrial organising. And there are (at least) two other notable aspects of the Grangemouth dispute in thinking about places of politics: firstly there is the way in which the strength of the whole Grangemouth community both derives from and contributes to the strength of the union; and secondly there is the different climate of industrial relations in Scotland: if employment law were to become a devolved power, it is likely (particularly in view of the Scottish Fair Work Convention) that future disputes would be conducted within a changed balance of power.

Mark Langhammer makes the case for the centrality of workers' control to any future post-neoliberal industrial policy. His argument is that workers' voice should be seen as one element within an industrial policy that is focused on a 'high road' to prosperity that places the workforce and its skills at the heart of any given enterprise. He also argues that trade unions need to prioritise the issue, and thereby put themselves into the centre of debate over the economy - something that is currently being strongly advocated by Frances O'Grady and the TUC. Mark argues that in Scotland and Ireland (including the North) there is much more openness towards the European idea of workers being involved in 'running things'.

A long way from the shopfloor and industry, Kirsty Capes takes us to a place where the personal and the political are deeply entwined - in the ways 'looked-after' children are represented both in popular culture and in government discourses. She shows the slippages involved - from seeing children with disrupted childhoods as likely to have 'poor outcomes', to a neglect of the effort needed to help them break out of the circumstances in which they find themselves, and then to the apportionment of blame for any consequent poor outcomes onto the individuals themselves: as adults they can become seamlessly subsumed into the world of the

## Soundings

undeserving and poorly behaved underclass. An understanding of the obstacles 'looked-after' children face, instead of leading to a major effort to overcome them, slowly dissolves, as the blame is shifted from the social to the individual. Meanwhile, in popular culture notorious murderers in the news are routinely represented as having been formed by their dysfunctional childhoods, and comic book villains almost always feature backstories of childhood abandonment or worse. Kirsty argues that we need different stories to sustain children living through disruption, and a different understanding of the ways class intersects with the problems they face.

Amy Villajero argues for a greater optimism of the will for those engaged in the media, whether as practitioners, critics or critical consumers. Drawing on an analysis of Stuart Hall's work for television she discusses effective ways of drawing attention to media practices that work to construct and maintain dominant common sense; and she shows how Stuart's television series on the Caribbean engages in the very Gramscian task of making an inventory of the historical processes that have deposited their 'infinity of traces'. She argues that we all need to find our own ways towards the kind of attentive listening that was such a strong element of Stuart's work, on and off television.

Tendayi Bloom's interrogation of some of the faultlines in liberal thinking on citizenship is an illuminating example of precisely this kind of careful unpicking of dominant assumptions and the historical traces they bear. The importance of her argument is that it provides an historical and theoretical underpinning for people engaged in battles about the way migration is understood.

Two further articles in the issue look at the historical contexts of current pressing dilemmas, with a similar aim of informing public debate. The crises in North Korea and Catalonia, in their very different ways, each have their roots in a history which any current solution cannot ignore.

In the case of North Korea, as Glyn Ford argues, if you 'forget' the role of the United States in the bloody division of the Korean peninsula, its unrelenting hostility to the North Korean regime ever since, and its continuing Joint Military Exercises designed to intimidate the regime - as well as the recent fate of other regimes portrayed by Bush as part of the 'axis of evil' - then you won't understand the simple drive for survival that underpins (however mistakenly) Kim Jong Un's pursuit of nuclear capability. The history points to the solution: good faith negotiation allowing a mutual de-escalation.

## Editorial

Recent events in Catalonia are also the product of a long history: the current crisis stems from the Popular Party's undermining of a previous agreement on autonomy made by the PSOE government in 2003, which had the unsurprising effect of increasing support for complete independence. The Popular Party has acted provocatively throughout, but the response from the pro-independence coalition has also been irresponsible. Nora Räthzel, who is currently living in Catalonia, has written an account of the crisis in a spirit of sharing the understanding she has gained from being a close observer of the events as they have unfolded.

Efforts to understand and analyse events in ways that contest dominant representations are clearly an important part of political resistance, and this is the main role of a political journal such as *Soundings*. Within this, the *Soundings Futures* series commissioned by Mike Rustin has set itself the specific task of analysing the effects of the neoliberal system as a whole on a range of major institutional sectors (housing, health, regional policy, etc), where the aim has been for complete reconstruction and reorganisation in accordance with neoliberal norms. The idea is to then counter-propose an equally radical alternative programme for these sectors, and a similar reimagining of our whole society. In this issue Myra Barrs and Mike take on the first part of such an analysis of our school system. Their re-imaginings will appear in a second article in 2018.

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In September 2017 we held the first meeting of our editorial advisory board, which we hope will help us to expand and deepen our efforts. A list of the new board members appears on p.ii.

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### Notes

1. Quoted in this issue from Tony Hall, 'Mas Interventions', paper presented to the International Conference on the Caribbean Carnival, Leeds, May 2017.