

Black Lives Matter and the Left

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SPEAKERS

Gargi Bhattacharyya, Annie Olaloku-Teriba, Bianca Cunningham, Dalia Gebrial

Dalia Gebrial 00:02

Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for coming to this event on Black Lives Matter and the Left. Obviously, this has been a huge year for Black Lives Matter and anti racist movements, particularly in North America and Europe. In the middle of a pandemic that has disproportionately been killing black and brown people around the world, we've seen the rise of a young multiracial movement surfacing to highlight another pandemic, which is structural racism and racialized violence. And we also in the UK have seen the rise of a populist Conservative government. Across the pond we are approaching an election, where black working class people are being asked to choose between to paraphrase Joe Biden himself, being shot in the heart or shot in the leg. So electoral movements from the left seem to have really failed as well to anticipate, as has often been the case, the political energy and the dissent that lies within working class black communities and communities of colour.

Dalia Gebrial 01:13

This session asks, is it possible to build meaningful coalitions between anti racist movements like Black Lives Matter and the electoral left? And speakers from the USA and the UK are going to consider some of the lessons that have been learned in the last few months since the killing of George Floyd, and to try and explore what a fruitful relationship between a mass movement and legislative politics might look like. So to address these questions, we have an absolutely amazing panel. We've got Bianca Cunningham, who is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America. We have Gargi Bhattacharya who is a professor of sociology and co-director of the Centre for Migration, Refugees and Belonging at the University of East London, and she's also written a great book recently called Rethinking Racial Capitalism, which, for anyone interested in these kind of questions, I would really recommend having a read. And Annie Olaloku-Teriba, who is a writer and independent researcher based in London, who is the organiser of another massive recommendation, the Black as in Revolution YouTube series. So just an apology in advance that Nelini Stamp was meant to be our fourth panelist but was unable to make it because she is caught up in some fray that it's happening in Kentucky that I'm sure we will find out about soon.

Dalia Gebrial 02:42

So the way that the event is going to work is we're going to have some opening remarks from the panelists for about 10 minutes each. Then I'll warm everyone up with some questions and then open it up to the floor for some questions for our speakers, and also, feel free to write some questions in the chat as you go along and I'll gather them. So if anything pops up in your head as the speakers are talking, just pop them in there and I will make sure to pick them up for the Q&A session. So, we're going to start with Bianca first - I'm not used to chairing events on, on... there we go. Yay. So yeah, Bianca, would you like to go ahead?

Dalia Gebrial 04:17

Okay, so Bianca is on mute, so we're just going to try and get hold of her in order to see if we can get her attention to come back off mute. So I think shall we start with Gargi then instead? Gargi are you ready to go? And we're also going to be swapping out interpreters as well.

Dalia Gebrial 04:50

Oh, okay. We have Bianca back!

Bianca Cunningham 04:57

I'm very sorry! Thank you Dalia! Thank you Akbar for translation, thank you Ali from before. My name is Bianca Cunningham, as Dalia said, I am a member and a spokesperson for Democratic Socialists of America. I'm also a labour organiser - that's how I come to the movement, through labour struggles - and a community organiser based out of Brooklyn, New York. I'm going to address the topic through a USA context, and so I'm so grateful that this conversation is happening. We have so much to learn from one another between the USA and the UK. I'm always learning so much from people who are just in different places than me in the United States, whether they be in the South or the Midwest, we all are coming to this in different contexts. And so it's really important that we build these connections and relationships, so thank you for having me first of all.

Bianca Cunningham 05:55

I wanted to address the first question which is, I believe, can movements like BLM build meaningful coalitions with the electoral left? So I want to say that obviously, I think that's possible - that's happening for sure. In the USA, where mostly on a local level, where we've been able to successfully run Black Lives Matter activists for office most recently Cory Bush, in Missouri - it's a great example of that. But there are also other examples like Jabari Brisport, Khalid Kamau who was the first openly Democratic Socialist BLM organiser to be elected to office three years ago to the city council in Georgia, and so we know that this works. And I know Nelini is not with us but I really want to shout Nelini Stamp out for all her amazing work with the WSP. Obviously they've been building those coalitions and the direction that they're taking the WFP to be black led to be you know, lockstep with the movement for black lives and to really address this question of electoralism from a purely like working class, black and brown context is so important. And so shout out to her for being awesome, and doing that amazing work throughout the years. I also just want to say that kind of bothers me - the question - because it goes with the thinking that these things need to be separate. I actually think that our electoral left, if that's what we claim to be building, needs to be anti racist, and it needs to be an arm of the movement for black lives. It needs to be an arm of the movement. It's one way in which we can affect change.

Bianca Cunningham 07:29

And so what does it look like for an electoral movement to be anti racist? I think first of all, it's finding candidates who are speaking to the material conditions of people in black and brown working class communities. So people who are willing to take on the really polarising issues such as defund the police, you know, willing to have the budget fights to have fully funded education and health care, etc. But it's also finding people within those communities like nurses and teachers and bartenders to run. I can't tell you, my experience in Democratic Socialists of America in New York City, is that from the very beginning, our whole thing has been let's find the person who nobody else would give a second look to, who everybody would say doesn't have the experience, but what are the contents of their character and their heart? And if they're with us on the issues, we're going to run them, we're gonna give them the tools that they need to be successful. And so I just feel like more of that needs to happen on so many different levels. And so I hope that that work continues to happen.

Bianca Cunningham 08:30

I'm really interested today in talking about the lessons that I've personally learned through my organising since the murder of George Floyd and Ahmed Aubrey and Breonna Taylor and Tony McDade and so many others that we can't even name. So I think one of the lessons that I've learned is that our messaging is working. Many of us were involved in the, you know, Bernie Sanders campaign or the Elizabeth Warren campaign, you know, these were progressive campaigns that were most anti capitalist who were calling out the targets and saying like, 'who are these people that have the power to change the type of society that we live in?' Who, you know, where are they? And how can we find them? Right? And I think our messaging is super effective. People like coming out of the streets or talking through an anti capitalist lense, which is amazing. I remember one example of marching with some young people, right whenever the protest was starting, like the second day, and us getting to across the Brooklyn Bridge into the city of Manhattan where there's a lot of shops, and a young organiser, turning to everybody and saying, okay, y'all, so it's corporations only, and we're gonna, like, express our outrage. Right, and we're going to protest, but we're going after corporations - leave the small businesses alone. This is about confronting state power. This is about confronting corporate and consolidated power, and the clarity to which the messages were coming from young people who had never been politically active before was just so striking to me.

Bianca Cunningham 09:59

I really do think our message is working, and I'll also say another thing I think is working is distinguishing ourselves as a left electoral politics from the Democrats. You know, when we first started doing this years ago, we were pointed out as being contrarian, pointed out as trying to sow discord in the party, trying to, you know, just blow everything up. But what we've really seen is that, from everyday people, there's so much distrust from politicians, from government, from these institutions. And so it's really important that we say it's not enough that we're just talking about conservatives and the Republicans, right, but then we also need to address the Democrats, and how they sold their soul to corporations, and how they haven't done very much for working people either, and really present a clear alternative that's separate. And it's really hard for us to do, because we're taking the position that we can, you know, reform the system from the inside out, and so it's a daily struggle, and I feel like a

line that we need to toe every single day but it is really important, and I think it has been really effective so far.

Bianca Cunningham 11:05

One of the second lessons I learned is that it's not an either or with electoral politics and movement making - you can do both effectively. And so Nelini and I were both convening organisers for occupy City Hall, New York City. We occupied the City Hall park in front of our City Hall, where the lawmakers have the power to pass a budget that defunds the police. And so we occupied the space to make that demand and it lasted for nine days. And one of the things that we were able to do is to connect people who were on the streets for the very first time, really upset, coming with all their trauma, coming with all their righteous anger, coming with all their outrage, and say, hey, look, we can address your trauma, your outrage, and do teach ins, but we're also going to teach you who the targets are, and like why it's important. So yeah, you want to confront the police at three o'clock in the morning, right? We're this occupation - that's amazing. Let's take that energy to the council person's house. Let's take that energy to the mayor's house. Let's take that energy, and really use it in a strategic way. And I think that's, you know, one of the ways that we were able to connect the two.

Bianca Cunningham 12:13

The other thing I would say is that it was really transformational for me to see thousands of people convene and occupy a space for the amount of time that it did - so many amazing networks, and infrastructure, and mutual aid, came from that space. But I would also say one of the most striking moments that I'll never forget is us being able to project the city council meeting. They thought they were going to hide on a Zoom call, most people wouldn't get on the Zoom. Well, we projected the Zoom in the park - hundreds of people watching it as if it was a ball game, cheering, booing, learning the players, learning the things and the reasons that they didn't want to defund the police or why they were in favour - seeing the faces. That was such a transformational moment, and I think it's a way to bring everyday people into politics. Make it interesting, when it has stakes, when it feels like we're actually experiencing our own power. And that's really important as well.

Bianca Cunningham 13:06

The third thing I would say is that we should talk about the limits of electoral politics. One of the things that happened, at the start of the summer when the protest started is I remember, you know, we had just come off of a primary here in the United States. And so, you know, there was a contentious primary being held, and there were messages being put out in electoral politics. People in electoral politics were doing the work and being out on the street and having these rallies, and trying to get their message across. Well, what we saw with the protest was that the streets started to talk. And those same amazing legislators like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, or Rashida Tlaib, or Ilhan Omar, honestly said like, we're nothing without the movement that drives us. And we've tried to warn you, and talk about a platform that actually addresses issues that people care about, and that there's actually a lot of support for this on the ground. And you didn't - you weren't responsive to that. So now what you have to deal with is people on the streets. And now you have to answer to that. And I think that's really powerful. Those things need to come together.

Bianca Cunningham 14:06

And we also need to understand, like the limits of what electoral politics can even do, you know, like they can't hold the police accountable in the same way that we haven't been able to hold the police accountable. You know, I can't talk about how many campaigns I've been a part of that were pushing some seemingly well meaning piece of police reform, right? Something that we felt we had to work years for. But then you get it passed - the lawmakers pass it - and the cops just take you to court. I mean, we're in court right now with the NYPD every time we pass a law. That seems amazing, right? That's a piece of reform that takes us in a step towards abolition or towards taking away the power and the money of the police department. All they do is take us to court and then choose not to you know, enforce the mandate. And so, you know, we really do have our work cut out for us and we really do need to talk about the limits of electoral politics, I feel like, in the greater context.

Bianca Cunningham 15:02

The third thing I learned is about infrastructure. I, of course, mentioned all of the amazing infrastructure that popped off from Occupy City Hall. You know, we had the people's bodega, where you could go get sanitary items, PPE, masks, gloves, cigarettes, you know, a charger, you name it, you could get it. We had food groups feeding thousands of people three meals a day, it really became a mutual aid space, where people who had been displaced recently or who were without secure housing were coming because they felt safe to be part of a community where they were going to be well fed, cared for, you know, there was mental health professionals on deck. We had clothing, we had materials to build forts, and protect yourself from the elements of outside. It was a really important space and I've seen so many mutual aid networks pop up, throughout the country and small spaces. Also, shout out to AOC and Jabari. They did an amazing webinar last week about building a childcare collective. I think as we try to think about what it looks like to replace these institutions that we know oppress us, you know, that is really the hard work.

Bianca Cunningham 16:14

And so shout out to all the mutual aid, shout out to all the collective, to that vibration that's happening, that's amazing. But it's also just not enough. Because when people start to say, okay, I kind of agree with you - defund the police. I kind of agree with you - abolition, there's something to that. But then what are we going to do? What are the institutions that we're going to use to fill? What are we going to build? And that is, in a lot of ways, a much harder question. But we need to do more of that; we need infrastructure. The left is very small. One of the things that we've realised is that as inspiring as it is that everybody's been out in the streets - and you know, this is the longest and largest protest in the United States' history, is amazing - we're still really small y'all. And we haven't even convinced everybody that's supposedly on our side, that you know, it's a good thing to defund the police. It's a good thing to have abolition. And that we should be leading and building coalitions with BLM and with other black and brown led organisations. And so that's not even a given in the left right now, and it needs to be and so we need to have those conversations with each other. But more importantly, we need to figure out how to bring new blood, new energy and new people in. I feel like that's always a challenge, building that infrastructure that really matters.

Bianca Cunningham 17:20

The fourth thing I'll say to that infrastructure question is that abolition is messy. One of the things, that we learn really quickly is that bringing thousands of people together in a space and calling it a police

free zone is messy work. Abolition is messy work, it's about creating something different. And it really actually is cultural work. You know, I was talking to one of my friends the other day, she's a trans woman, and she was saying, you know, it's not enough. I'm not trying to defund the police so I can get my ass beat in the street, right? Like, we need to figure out ways to keep each other safe, and that's a real, real consideration that we have to make. And so that being said, we're not even close to being the type of society that we need to be in order to really live up to the spirit of abolition and the principles of abolition. And I think that's cultural work. We need to examine our own hearts and our own minds, how we feel about each other, how we feel about ourselves, how we feel about the world, and really figure out how to come together to try to participate more in collective economy, how to trust each other more, and how to lead with those with those values, as a society. And so I'll just stop there. But thank you again, for having me.

Dalia Gebrial 18:32

Thank you so much, Bianca. That was really, really great to hear. And I think especially as we are, in the UK, recovering from a really big defeat, and it feels a little bit like that relationship between electoral politics and anti racist grassroots movements - you know, the trust is really broken down in many ways. So it's really nice to hear dispatches from somewhere where that relationship, especially between these newer politicians and the kind of more grassroots movements are really seeming to be much more fruitful than than they were here. And I'm sure we'll get into that through the Q&A and also throughout the rest of the panel. So coming up now we have Gargi Bhattacharya, whose internet connection is a little bit fuzzy, so we might have to go without any video, but that just means that you can savour her words even more, with even more focus. Oh, no, there she is! Hello. Oh, amazing. Okay, hi, Gargi. Okay, so yep, Gargi take it away.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 19:43

Okay, I can't hear you. So I'm guessing it's time to start talking. I'm really sorry - my sound is not working here. Thanks so much for inviting me to this, and I'm sorry to once again, be the middle aged person with the technical difficulties - and if I lean over that much all you can see is my breasts, so I'm gonna put it [the camera] a bit further up I think!

Gargi Bhattacharyya 20:04

I wanted to talk a little bit, I hope very briefly - because I think this is the kind of meeting where most people have got things that we're trying to work out together, this is not the kind of meeting where we're trying to tell you a load of answers and then you can go away and kind of revise them until you can say them off pat. As Bianca has already said, there's quite a different context right now, for the US and the UK and Dalia did mention it. But really, I think it's very hard to imagine alliance building across electoral politics and street politics, and especially abolitionist politics right now in the UK. Perhaps other people are going to disagree, but that doesn't feel to me like where we are. And more than that, I just think you just need to know where you're putting your energies and why. But what I do think Black Lives Matter has done for British progressive thinking and the broad left - beyond the left, people who are not strictly the left but progressive forces of other kinds - has been to centre state violence and state racism back at that centre point of our collective political consciousness. I think that's a really interesting moment. And I've really been thinking about the question of this event in a slightly different way, not about whether we can find good candidates. Frankly, I don't think that's where Britain is. And also I don't think

Britain's electoral system works around finding a few good candidates. If there's anything we've learned, it's kind of that.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 21:33

But I do think there's something else going on. I think there's an increasing split between the ways in which electoral politics is narrated, especially in the aftermath of the 2019 election when there seems to be that unhappy alliance between the street and electoral politics kind of broken apart now. We were always unhappy bedfellows, and it feels like not much going on between us at all right now. But in that space where people are trying to imagine other ways of living, not beyond parliamentary politics, but kind of just aside from parliamentary politics - a moment when the British state is so actively neglectful, happy to say 'you lot go off and die', happy to say, 'we are not going to do anything, we're going to hide, are not going to follow our own rule'. In that moment, there's something else happening amongst us, amongst us as comrades, about how we think about imagining how the next phase can be, about what a better world can be, and what our alliances with each other are. And that's what I think, for Britain, is the more interesting question.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 22:42

Certainly I think for a long time, British political life, operated as if only a few of us thought about race. I mean, I think something again - I always say how very old I am - I'm a middle aged person and for most of my political life, British politics didn't acknowledge issues of race. Even the quite revolutionary left only came to talk about race if something very bad had happened, and sadly, mainly as a kind of recruitment exercise. The idea that understanding the politics of race and state racism might be at the centre of how we think about an emancipatory project for all of us, that's recent in this country in my experience, and it's partly happened through the global mobilizations against state racism, epitomised by Black Lives Matter. So it's very hard now to imagine a broad ranging emancipatory politics, including the politics of the workplace, which doesn't kind of understand something about the job the state does in terms of brutalising some people more than others, of making some people disposable. so the rest of us are frightened, of saying that some lives don't matter. There's been a shift I think in popular consciousness to understand that, amongst people we might want to work with. Maybe not everyone, but I think it's wider than people acknowledge.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 24:05

Even those stupid kind of statements that all the corporations and all the employers are making about Black Lives Matter, of course they're banal and insincere. But they're also a kind of recognition of a change in the temperature. Something else is going on. Even if they don't believe it, they think they're speaking to someone. And that someone is everyone else, all of our neighbours. People who aren't even on the left yet. And I think that's quite an exciting moment to try to understand what's going on with that. And what is it about the radicalization around state racism that makes something new happen - new street politics and new articulation of the associations between racism and class politics, and labour politics, and climate politics? All of that seems kind of up for grabs for us now, and I hope that some of the conversation we have will be about that.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 24:59

And I kind of think the one thing that I wanted to say, so I hope other people talk about, and I'm really sorry, I'm gonna have to switch off my - I put on my good frock not realising that would be so busty! And now I'm going to have to switch off my picture again after I finish speaking, but the thing that I think I'd really like to talk to other people about more broadly, are the ways in which Black Lives Matter doesn't represent a moment of alliance politics. Black Lives Matter represents something about an expansive claim that can include us all. But it's not about saying 'Black Lives Matter', oh I'm going behind, or I'm being a good ally. It's something about saying Black Lives Matter centres the role of state violence and racism in this particular moment of historically precise crisis. Everyone's living through crisis, always - but for us, our moment's crisis, there's something in the antagonism, that street antagonism, that mass mobilisation, that generational shift that says: when we talk about state racism and violence, we're telling you something about where the fault lines of capital are now.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 26:09

And that means all of you. That when you learn something about policing, you're learning something about how capital remakes itself, you're learning something about how the capitalist state has remade itself in this moment of wherever we are - late, late, late, late, late capitalism. Me and Dalia were in the book - where I was laughing about how many lates we can get in before capitalism - but there's something instructive about that, because it's an emancipatory project for all of us by centering what it means to challenge and dismantle the violence of the state, which is articulated as a racist violence to remind us of the violence of state activity at this moment of crisis, and that's, I think, a better question. It's a question I want to talk about. So I hope some of you will want to talk about it as well. And I hope now, I'm going to switch off my camera, so that I can hear what everyone else has got to say.

Dalia Gebrial 27:04

Thank you so much Gargi. That was again, I think, also a really interesting way of looking at how that relationship to electoral politics is really very different at this particular moment in the US and the UK and I really hope that we can have some conversations, especially in the comments, about what that means going forward strategically. So I'm going to bring in our last speaker, Annie, are you there? Ah hi Annie, amazing. Take it away Annie.

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 27:42

Hi guys, I'm here. I apologise, I'm a bit frazzled - I just put a very cranky baby to sleep. So I'm coming at this I think from quite a similar perspective to Gargi, and it was really great to hear from Bianca at the beginning because yeah, we are in a really strange time in the UK. I guess the starting point for me would be that at the beginning of this year, everybody was sort of really low, depressed after the experience of the 2019 election. And at that point, nobody could have foreseen that something which happened thousands of miles away in America would spark one of the most - well, THE most, there's a Guardian article about it by Aamna Mohdin - the most widespread protests in the UK in centuries. I think that's cause for excitement, I think that's cause for optimism. But I think that can only transform itself into an effective politics when we learn some of the lessons that we needed to learn from the last few years.

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 28:56

So a couple of things I wanted to talk about. Think, Gargi was really right when she said, when we talk about Black Lives Matter, it's telling us something not just about the experience of black people, but it's telling us something about all of us. And I think what's central to that is that in the UK from 2015 to 2019, we laboured under the assumption that - oh my god, that was an unintentional pun. We laboured under the assumption that the biggest threat that Corbyn posed was the threat of anti austerity politics. And that's just not the case. In reality if we looked at the attacks on Corbyn, most of them was centred around the question of anti racism and also also anti imperialism. And I'm not saying that just to be trite, I'm saying it because it tells us something about the way that capital has organised itself in the last few decades, that race has become one of the most important fault lines of politics, where politics elsewhere, politics around money, around the economy has been displaced. And where politics around austerity has been displaced or muted. And you see, for example, the Tory government committing not to impose austerity in the aftermath of Covid. And a lot of our language gets stolen from us. But the one thing that can't be, is the language of anti racism, and I'll talk a bit more about why that's the case.

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 30:33

So I think from that we should take, firstly, that race is central to how we should understand power in contemporary politics. And it's not simply something, as Gargi mentioned, to recruit people to our organisations, to recruit people to a socialist platform, but actually, decades of organising in the 20th century showed us that it's central if we want to be effective in targeting the state - or if we want to be effective in resisting state power. I think the second thing that we need to learn is to treat electoral politics as a vehicle and not a driver. What do I mean by this? For all of my life, political life, one of the mantras of politics has been if you don't vote, then you are losing your right to a say. Well - if you don't vote, you're losing your right to a say - if you don't vote, you don't have a right to complain. But what we're coming to understand is, in the massive mobilizations driven by young people, we've never really had a problem of apathy. I think what we've had is a problem of despondence. And what we've had is a generation of people who've been cut out of electoral politics, don't see themselves in electoral politics, but do have a desire to change.

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 31:54

And I think the role of the left in that instance then, is to come in and build the institutions and the infrastructure that Bianca talked about, in terms of showing people that there is almost an alternative way; in terms of showing people that the vote isn't the only way in which you can affect politics. And I think that's been one of the most inspirational lessons that we've gotten, and one of the most inspirational lessons that we've gotten from what's going on in America. I think the other thing is, when we talk about electoral politics, I think that carries the weight of these certain assumptions about A) who the electorate is and B) how the electorate thinks. And I think that has been really effective in terms of building some kind of mythologies around the left, whereby people feel like there were certain concessions that we just have to make. We just have to make some concession around race. We have to make concessions around imperialism, we have to make concessions around migrants. Because if you don't make those concessions, then we won't be able to do all of these other amazing things, or won't be able to expand the welfare state, we won't be able to improve the NHS. And I think one of the lessons that we've also learned is that actually the electorate is changeable.

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 33:19

In 2017, going into the election, or going into the period leading up to the calling of the election, there was no sense in which there was a hope for Labour to gain any seats, right, we were expecting a massacre. And I think one of the things maybe which has been clouded since the election last year, is the reality that it was conversations with people - it was going out and door knocking, it was mobilisation, it was using people power that was able to shift the electorate, right. The electorate is comprised of people. And those people are people we can speak to; people we can change. I think at the crux of that is a sense in which, if we're going to build a politics of transformation, if we're really trying to transform the world, we also have to believe that people can be transformed. We also have to believe that the most racist person can be transformed through the experience of a particular kind of politics, right? And so, when we move back into periods of despondency, we lose sight of that I think. And that is a deep risk for us. I'm gonna I'm gonna leave it there for now and then hopefully come back on some more of those points in the questions, but I'm really excited to be having this conversation and thank you to everybody.

Dalia Gebrial 34:49

Thank you so much Annie. It's really horrible not being able to applaud when these amazing talks are done - and feel everyone just being like, yeah, yeah. People in the comments are expressing that, so that's good at least. So yeah, as we're just collating some questions, I have a couple that I would really like to know how the speakers sort of think about that. So I'll ask those as we're collating some of the questions.

Dalia Gebrial 35:19

So I think that, one thing that has sort of really come to the fore, is this sense of, particularly in the UK, left electoral politics really missing the mark on political power and especially like, what kind of communities you need to mobilise and have invested in your projects in order to win through an insurgent campaign, and often taking for granted, actually, working class communities of colour. That they will vote for them because the alternative is always so much worse. So an example is Biden's 'if you don't vote for me, then you ain't black.' And also with Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party, the biggest concession that we saw was around policing - around, not only not arguing for a critique of the police, but actually arguing that we needed to fund it more than the Conservatives funded the police, and also the border industry. But then, a few months later, we see the biggest multiracial mobilisation of working class people happening around that very issue, that Jeremy's Labour Party conceded under.

Dalia Gebrial 36:41

So I think in that context of that feeling taken for granted, especially I'd like to hear from you as well Bianca, in terms of how this is working in the US, in terms of that tradition of being taken for granted by the kind of centre left parties (and even within insurgent campaigns within those centre left parties), and how can we both work within electoral politics, or work in awareness of electoral politics, whilst also knowing that history? In other words, like how do we not only think about our own relationship to electoral politics, but think about what we even want electoral politics' relationship to be with us as anti racist organisers?

Dalia Gebrial 37:27

Bianca is it okay if I bring you in to answer that first question? Just because I feel like we want to have some some optimism about how it's going for you guys!

Bianca Cunningham 37:42

I've taken myself off mute. Okay. Sure, so the question about what the kind of contexts have been, feeling like we're being taken for granted. I mean, I think that people have felt like that in United States for so long, particularly by Democrats. Black women make up the largest electoral part of the Democrats, they vote at higher rates than anybody else and they're the strongest supporters. But so many times what it's looked like here to address their concerns has just been to book black faces in high places, which now I feel like we're realising the limits of... like, representation is definitely necessary. And it's important. And it's sad that in 2020, we're still talking about a first black whoever, in whatever city around this country, but that is where we're at. And so I think as that change starts to happen, then we can get into the deeper analysis of, like, not just putting a black woman as a mayor of Chicago. It's the fact that Lori Lightfoot wants to close community schools - close schools in some of the poorest districts - in favour of opening up police academies so that people can become police officers.

Bianca Cunningham 38:53

Like that in and of itself, examining people on their actual policy and where they stand, and not just on their identity I feel like is a journey that we're taking right now as a country. And I think that you see a lot of that which is really promising - with even the nomination of Kamala Harris, as the first black woman to become the vice president. We want to feel good about that, but we can't - because she's top cop, and we know that she doesn't stand with us on the issues. And I think that seeing the lack of support for Kamala Harris - although we know that we need to get Trump out in November, that goes without saying - but this is just to that point, now we have to hold our nose and vote. We should we be excited for this black woman, but we can't be. She's not on our side. And I think that those deeper questions and people starting to really question, are just - is it enough that she's a black woman? It's not. And I think that we are, you know, there as a country, and we'll see what happens here in November.

Bianca Cunningham 39:49

But I just want to talk about why I really love doing politics on a local level, and why I love doing politics, in the context of being accountable to a collective or group. The Democratic Socialists of America, you know, we have a lot of autonomy, we're a big tent organisation, a multi tendency organisation - we all don't agree on all of the things. But that's okay, because we find ways to consolidate our resources (small resources!) and our small power to make significant changes. And so we're looking local for local races, we're looking for number one: can we find a candidate? And that's oftentimes the hardest thing, because we're trying to retrain people what it means to be a politician, like it doesn't mean that you need to go to law school, it doesn't mean that you need to put on a suit every day, it doesn't mean that you need to be the most well spoken in the room. But for us, what it means is that you share our analysis and our theory of change in the world, that you're committing to anti capitalist values, that you're committing to anti racist values, and that you're going to use your power, your platform, your position, - if given - to do everything you can to push that change and to help us.

Bianca Cunningham 40:57

So I feel like being able to operate on a local level, once you find a candidate that's good, a working class candidate, it has been really great because we don't have to decide - like we can decide, this race is not worth our time. And that's okay, because we're not the machine. And we don't feel compelled to do all of the things. We know that we can't do all of the things. We are allowed to be principled, we're allowed to pick the underdog and stay with the underdog, and say, this is not even about winning, because we're not even really running in these elections all the time to win. Now we've won and it feels amazing, right? And now we need to have a conversation about what it looks like to hold those people accountable to the collective, because there's really no way to do that, again. Sometimes I'm like, we just need to primary somebody that we put in office just to prove that it's not about an individual or personality. But it really is about the work, about the movement, about the collective, and about all of our collective goals.

Bianca Cunningham 41:51

And so, I'm really blessed to be able to just like speak, heavy with my chest, saying who I support, say where I stand, on issues of imperialism. Recently, we just really got rammed, I'll just say real quick, in New York City. Two things that came out with us, that we had to work through: number one was black politicians that were establishment politicians, black women, telling us that defund the police was a coloniser demand, that DSA was a white organisation and that we didn't have the authority to call for the defunding of the police. Because we weren't 'of those communities' according to them, and really trying to like weaponize their identity, even against black and brown people that are on the left - because there are just not enough of us and so they can erase us so easily. So that's number one, and so we had to really go even to war with them publicly in a way that we felt weird about because in black and brown communities we're about respecting our elders, waiting your turn - you know, it's kind of uncomfortable for us. And we know that even though these people don't agree with us on the issues they have to deal with so much vitriol and racism and hatred, and misogyny, from all sides - so it's this instinct that we want to support them, and we want to protect them and shield them from that. But we also want to hold them accountable and tell the truth about what they're doing.

Bianca Cunningham 43:10

And so I see all of these things happening... recently we got in trouble for BDS - we have a candidate questionnaire when you want to run for office here in New York City. There's a long questionnaire with like over 100 questions. One of them is will you/do you support BDS? And will you not go to Israel, like really actually boycott Israel? And there was some significant outcry about that question, saying that we were anti semitic, trying to pit us as the enemy of the Jewish community, even though we have many Jewish comrades. And so it's just like, we're working through those things. But those are the kinds of things that come up whenever you have like a well oiled established machine and power, who can weaponize all these forms of identity at any given time. And that's why we can't play that same game of identity and like, you know, personalities. We can't play that game, we really have to just be principled - this is principled struggle - and really be able to be able to stand firmly in what we believe in, what we're trying to change, and to use it as a way to get our message across. Like it's okay - we ran a gubernatorial candidate, Cynthia Nixon for Governor years ago, long shot, she was never going to beat Cuomo. We never thought she was going to beat Cuomo - sorry if you're watching this Cynthia, but we didn't! But we said this is a really important race for us to be involved in, and this is a way that she's

going to carry our message so that we can get our ideas front and centre, and we're able to do that effectively. And that's the win right? Not the fact that she got the Governor's seat.

Dalia Gebrial 44:47

Thank you so much, Bianca. I think we also have really been moving through, I would say something of a contradiction - that for a long time representation was the main framework through which we were able to articulate our politics, and obviously we did try, and we did things outside of that, but the thing that we were always told was, it's okay, we're going to diversify, whatever. And now we're sort of moving through that contradiction of representation is nowhere near enough and sometimes, if it's in the wrong place, it can be actually quite damaging. So that's a really interesting thing to hear from your perspectives. Gargi can I bring you in to maybe pitch into that question as well?

Gargi Bhattacharyya 45:40

Absolutely. Can you hear me okay?

Dalia Gebrial 45:42

Yeah, yeah, yep. All good.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 45:45

Excellent. Right. I'm, again, I'm going to say a bit of historical stuff about Britain because I'm a kind of living history person. But how I think electoral politics has played black and brown communities in the last 30 or 40 years in this country has really relied on a way of thinking of communities as discrete; as based around quite static ideas of ethnicity with clear boundaries between groups of people, and by kind of sanctifying certain people to speak for us. Everyone kind of knows about that stuff. And that's the generation before me - it comes from a first generation migrant way of building organisational spaces and interacting with the local and the national state, through those conduits of your local organisation. And your local organisation is often your religious organisation, or if not it's a breath away from that.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 46:46

You can see that what's happened through that is that when we've been given previously a kind of electoral nod, it's been around really quite culturally conservative claims. They're not claims that don't exist in the community, but they're like almost our easiest claim. So ones around cultural recognition, the ones around them small amounts of space and localities. And I have to say that's also about historically what was needed when. But they're all based around an idea that 'oh Bengalis they want this, speak to Mr. Head Bengali', 'Jamaicans, they want this, go this place' - that way of organising. And I don't think that any of the main electoral parties have yet understood that that won't run in the same way anymore. One of the things I think, has happened despite them, partly because of mobilising around state violence, but also because other things happen in people's lives, is that you cannot speak to black and brown communities electorally in that country anymore. The Labour Party clearly tries to keep doing that, but I don't think that's reaching any younger people. And younger is even like under 40, perhaps even under 50. So there's something else going on, around how people are articulating their experience of racism and looking at what electoral politics is doing.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 48:11

So I think there's a space for us in Britain to try and organise around what would be a non community, discrete communities, focus of mobilising to make anti racist claims, not least, because everyone who's not already well into middle age, is already living like that. And I think that's the kind of alliance we're already seeing in the streets, around police violence and other state violences - also actually around the violence of the border. And that there's something that can't be captured by the 'Oh, let me have tea with someone who wears a turban and someone who does this, someone who does that' - which I think is how sadly both the Labour leadership and certainly the Tory leadership is still playing it. But I don't think that that's so solid any more, and I think part of our job is to open up that fissure some more. So that that idea of speaking for communities and their most conservative claims can't be the end of electoral claims for anti racists. You know, I always feel very hopeful - things are never as stable as the dominant people think. So it's those bits of uncertainty - that's our opening. And that's me done.

Dalia Gebrial 49:32

And so I have one more question that I'm going to ask before I move on to the commenters' questions, of which there are lots of great ones. So when you look at the history of anti racist movements, both in the UK and in the US, it feels like - and I don't know if maybe this is me romanticising the past - but it feels like there is more of a connection to the impacts of imperialism abroad. We're both, whether you're in the US or in the UK, we are operating and organising from the centre of historic and contemporary empires - and that implicates us, and gives us a certain position that maybe we don't reflect on as much. So thinking about, historically, the Black Panther Party and the influence of connecting with, the Algerian and anti liberation struggles and how that was really an acknowledged strategic exchange. And, you know, obviously here with our relationship to the Empire, and how the presence of people of colour in this country means that we have that connection always to what is happening abroad. And I think, despite us being more connected than we've ever been, through through the internet, etc, we seem to be really working within the nation state as our main frontier. Do you agree that that's what is happening now? And why do you think that is? Why has that changed? And how do we recover an internationalist approach whilst still working within those frontiers, and sort of agents of change, whether it's the state - well, I don't think that's an agent of change, but you know, vehicles like electoral politics - how do we reconcile that and recover that internationalist conception of what we're fighting for? So I'll start with you, Annie, if that's okay.

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 51:38

Okay, I've remembered to unmute myself now. So, I definitely have been thinking about that as well Dalia. I can't really speak to the historical perspective from personal experience, but certainly in my research, I think one of the things which is interesting is seeing in the late 70s, through the 80s, and producing the world that we have now, a retreat of anti racist horizons, or I should put it as - a retreat of anti imperialist horizons into anti racist horizons. What do I mean by that? What I mean is that 40 / 50 years ago, because we had a large, vibrant, left, which was speaking to questions of imperialism, and connecting them to the domestic experience - so, for example, the Panthers, as you mentioned, had an analysis of black America as a colony within the mother country. So an analysis of black America as experiencing the same processes of colonisation, their policing, etc, that were being experienced by people who were experiencing the brute force of imperialism abroad. I think part of that has been yes, the collapse of the left as a sort of significant force in national politics. But I think also, part of that has

been the way in which, if we have a structural analysis of the way that the oppressive structures, the way that neoliberalism has shaped us as being, we can see how material the experience of neoliberalism was in the 80s as something which was foisted upon not just people in the Global South, but also within the West, the experience of the consolidation of politics in the West around centrism, which increasingly narrowed the scope of what was seen as acceptable politics.

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 53:53

Suddenly, because there was so little it seemed to fight for, people's horizons became narrower and narrower, and it became 'if only we could just get some black faces and power.' 'If only we could just get some anti racist or subconscious bias, or implicit bias, training for police officers, then the world would be better.' And I think that part of the impact of that has been to lessen our capacity to cut through what has been pushed upon us as the discrete identities that Gargi talked about. But in a sense that when our horizons are so narrow, what we think of as fighting for doesn't seem worth it. Somebody asked me a while ago, you know, if white people have all this privilege, then why on earth would they want to forego their privilege and build a new world? And the response I would give, or have given, is that, whether or not there is a relative privelege to whiteness from a transformation of the way that the world works, we have all the world to gain, right? And I think that retreat from international into the national has coincided with people not believing that, or understanding the gravity of that in the same way.

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 55:16

I think the other thing to note is that the way in which politics works at the moment, we live in an ironic moment where 60 / 70 years ago, you didn't have the ability to just log on to Twitter and see what was happening around the world, but weirdly that generation seemed to be more global than we are, in a way that I think we only really understand the struggles that are happening outside of Britain and the US in moments in which it becomes front page news. I think what we need to do as the left is develop and cultivate habits of connecting with, building links with, building alliances with - so for example, the experience of BLM and the Dream Defenders when they went on that trip to Palestine. Those kind of material connections that can't be replaced simply by conversations on Twitter need to also be a focus of the left as well. I'll leave it there.

Dalia Gebrial 56:17

Thank you so much, Annie. Bianca, I'll bring you in next if that's okay?

Dalia Gebrial 56:25

Great.

Bianca Cunningham 56:27

Is it the same question to me?

Dalia Gebrial 56:31

Yes, yeah. Do you want me to repeat it? Or...

Bianca Cunningham 56:33

No that's ok, I think I got the gist of it.

Bianca Cunningham 56:36

Yeah, I think this is the some of the hardest, you know, things to think of. When I was listening to Annie speak about the fact that there was so much international solidarity in the 60s and 70s, and how it really died, I'm actually thinking about that was around the time that I think that capitalism became like, truly global and unregulated on a different level, particularly here in the United States. And so I think that certainly has something to do with it. And I also feel like people realised the limitations of the black power and civil rights movement, COINTELPRO and, obviously, other government ways to break up the momentum and organising and really make an example out of so many of those freedom fighters that were doing that work back then.

Bianca Cunningham 57:25

But I have to say that it's one of the hardest things to figure out as a person on the left, a person that was new to the left, trying to figure out what can I possibly do that would have an impact on my comrades across the water, you know, like, how can we connect these struggles and make it more meaningful than just like a solidarity picture, or even an event where people who already agree with us come and we talk to one another, and I think all of those things are definitely necessary. But to Annie's point, we do need more examples of real, working class people from the United States and from other countries visiting real working class people who are doing that. I find that the kind of folks who are able to do these kind of international exchanges and meet and greets are oftentimes, and no offence, very well educated, in a particular socio economic status, and you may not even think there was poverty in some of these countries based on the folks that are going to represent. And so, I really do think like taking the NGO factor, you know, they've got kind of gotten this area dominated about what international exchange looks like, we've got to be a lot better about that.

Bianca Cunningham 58:36

One of the things that came out of even us here in Occupy City Hall which I will say is like what was number one, we were always trying to figure out ways to bring in the story and the narratives from the UK, and having you all's protests, and like, in solidarity with people in Palestine, who were also protesting for Black Lives Matter and for liberation and trying to connect those dots for people. And so one of the high moments of Occupy City Hall - we were having a standoff with the police, we were taking over One Police Plaza, which is like one of their main headquarters, and had crowds of people outside and they actually took down the American flag and put up the Palestinian flag. And that's promising to me. That's thousands of people cheering for the Palestinian flag, cheering for that struggle and understanding that this is all connected.

Bianca Cunningham 59:25

We also met up with some Chilean comrades who were talking to us about the occupation that they're having in Chile right now. They're having a struggle around their own constitution and the possibility that they're going to be able to vote to rewrite their constitution. I think that's super dope. I actually heard one protester in Minnesota on a video say, 'we're out here to demand a new constitution, we need to portray the Constitution, but then we also need to change it and make it more inclusive for people who look like us.' Right? And I think that's such a strong demand, and even if it's not coming

from a collective or doesn't have a lot of momentum right now, seeing the comrades in Chile being able to occupy and struggle around such a transformational demand has been really strong. They call themselves the Primera Linea - they're the first line of protesters, they keep the other protesters safe. And they also make it their business to break curfew, to go outside to confront the police at every cost, and to make sure that the momentum stays in the midst of this global pandemic and Covid.

Bianca Cunningham 1:00:25

And so, I know I'm here as the optimist and Gargi is probably gonna come in and lay down all the truth. But here I have to say we can do a whole lot better. I think Capitalism is organised globally, and we have to keep up - they're like way ahead of us. They're able to even adjust their messages - even with Black Lives Matter, they can make a black square, or say 'we're committed to diversity training', or committed you know, to having this much of our board be black and brown folks. But why don't we as the Left think that we need to adjust to anything that we're doing, when capitalism is in such a strong position and they still see the utility in that is beyond me, but we gotta do better. And so I'm really encouraged by even these conversations happening and I want to continue to figure out ways that we can support each other and really lift up the global struggle against state violence.

Dalia Gebrial 1:01:25

Thank you, Bianca. Definitely - that point about how capitalists really know how to do global solidarity very, very well with one another, and we are way behind in that. And I also think one thing that has been really concerning to me has been, actually that the far right have become a lot more effective at building those networks between each other, particularly across Europe and North America. So really, we have to really up our game, if we're going to outflank that. And so Gargi, I'm going to bring you in to answer that question as well just on the question of internationalism.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:02:14

I'm so sorry Bianca that you think that I'm misery guts. Please don't mistake being old and knackered for being miserable. I'm very optimistic, and I take so much energy from younger activists and what is happening - it's all opening up. I know every generation feels like it's all opening up, but it's true - there are these fissures, which we are all entering into, of all generations, and it's all up for grabs.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:02:38

And I do think that also there's something about... we forget how quickly we've come so far, even in terms of popular narrative. I've said to lots of people that even 10 years ago, you could hardly say 'capitalism' in any in any public forum, including on the left - only on the very revolutionary left you'd quietly say to each other 'oh, yes, capitalism is the problem'. There was a whole anti capitalist movement happening then, but it's not seeped into all the other spaces. Now that's absolutely central to how people speak. Even capitalists have learned how to pretend they're embarrassed about being capitalist, and talking about caring capitalists - the more, kind of, corporate responsibility. That's partly a sign of us moving the goalposts.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:03:27

And I do think that we're also better at being internationalist than we realise, but we've lost some of our languages. So we all need to rebuild some new languages, don't we - of what is international solidarity,

not only in the anti colonial moment, but now in this new kind of moment of imperial violence. How can we build across that? How can we use some of these terrible techniques of having to meet remotely to allow us to be in the moment instantaneously having those conversations? That's suddenly possible. You could imagine an international strand in The World Transformed next year, couldn't you? Because now we're all used to doing this, which we were not before. So I think there's something opening up there. But it's true, we need to build on it a bit more. And also, to remember that earlier moment we're talking about, was very much peopled by people who themselves were core to the anti colonial struggles of their back homes. They were a generation who had feet in more than one camp, didn't they, they were either pushed out of places or mobile for different reasons not in their control, and went back and forth and struggled in those ways. Things are a little bit different now because of things around bordering, about containment, about struggles which are anti colonial but perhaps are more nationalist in the way, perhaps the idea of nation is not even available, or it's not the right frame for everyone who's struggling and an anti colonial context now. So there's something that we all need to learn to adapt with each other. But I can't imagine that that's not almost on the cards for some of the reasons that Bianca is saying. It's a kind of anti imperialist common sense that's floating around in these spaces of hope and opportunity.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:05:14

It's not quite got a whole story with it. Maybe people aren't reading the same books, but people are getting something about it. So I think that's something to build on and to think about how we can build on that, and maybe not build on it in the way that the NGO style of politics does - to sit and say, 'oh, how sad, your life is so sad, and we'll listen to you' - instead of thinking about simultaneous parallel struggles in many places. Which all the speakers have said is almost where we're at - that's almost happening. So what could we do together to just push it forward a little bit more? That's me done again. Sorry, you can't see me step away so you don't know I'm done! Now I'm done.

Dalia Gebrial 1:05:56

Thank you so much Gargi, there's so much conversation and enthusiasm in the comments, for the chats that are happening right now. So I'm going to go to the comments now to get our next questions. So Maxine Sadza is picking up on, I think what Annie was saying, this idea that in order to believe in transformation, we have to be able to believe that people can be transformed. She asks, yes, I do agree that people can be persuaded to change their views. And that can be done by campaigns. But how do we counter jingoism and nationalism that the Tories focus on to engage the electorate? So Annie, shall I go to you first?

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 1:06:43

Okay

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 1:06:46

I'm going to be really annoying and use an example that I always use. So there's this video on YouTube - it's called American Revolution 2 with Bobby Lee, and it's a Panther going in to organise a group of poor whites from uptown who use the Confederate flag as their symbol. And Bobby Lee was a member of the Black Panther Party. And what's so striking about that video is, the minute they stop talking about race - you know, they push that question to the side, and he just asked them 'what's going on in your

life' - the stories they start telling are exactly the same stories that the Panthers were organising people in Chicago around beforehand. So stories of police brutality, stories of really bad housing, stories of poverty. And the point is that part of the impact of conceptualising ourselves or understanding ourselves as these discrete identities, has been to assume that people who we don't know very much about aren't interested in, or having the same experiences as we are.

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 1:08:03

And that enables capital to make us think that we're existing in silos and to make us think that what's happening to us is unique to us, when the reality is actually, when you push the abstractions aside - and I noticed somebody made a comment about abstractions like nationalism - when you push abstractions aside and we ask people 'What's going on in your life?', 'What other things that worry you? What are the things that concern you?' you'll find we actually have a lot more in common than we think. And, and I think that's what the 2017 manifesto was able to capture, from the Labour Party, and that's why it managed to cut through in the way that it did. Because aside from any disdain that people might have for minorities, or any kind of traction that nationalism can get, first order questions, concerns, problems, are always centred around things that happen in people's day to day lives. And if you can touch on that, if you can speak to that, then I think you can move beyond the divisions which have been constructed between us.

Dalia Gebrial 1:09:18

Yeah, Bianca, would you want to come back on that as well to talk about that from your perspective in the US? Obviously, that jingoism definitely exists in the US as well right now, and has been a really key organising principle of Trump's popularity, and I'm sure he's going to continue with that same strategy in the upcoming election. So would you like to give us a little bit of your insight from your position as well about, from your experience, that sort of countering of jingoism and that sort of racial identity politics that is mobilised by the right? How we can push the parts of the electorate that really appeal to that, but who might have the same class interests as working class black and brown people? And how do we counter that through our organising?

Bianca Cunningham 1:10:17

I agree with Annie, I think people can be transformed. And I think it's really, for me, education - that's the way that I counter that. As I mentioned, I come out of the labour movement, and the American labour movement has many of those same elements of jingoism and nationalism amongst its members. And not always, like, a really pretty history on race - but that's the truth, right? And part of what I do is I talk to people, not about race, but sometimes about race, but about economics, and I talk to them about CEO to average worker pay and say - okay, well, you believe in this labour movement, what does that actually mean and who makes up the labour movement? And how is this nationalism or this racism that you're displaying right now - this American flag patriotism crap that you're displaying right now - how is that harming our ability to have solidarity as working class people. And I think oftentimes people do the opposite, where they want to not talk about race and say you know, that's too much division, it causes too many issues. We just want to stick to the facts at hand, we just want to stick to the issues, and just fight around these issues, fighting the boss, etc. But actually, we do ourselves a really big disservice. You need to be talking to those people about how they can come over to this side and about how they're actually harming the labour movement with those views.

Bianca Cunningham 1:11:40

The other thing I'll say is that last year I went on Fox News, and it was a personal decision, in the same moments that Elizabeth Warren and others were saying that they wouldn't go on Fox News because they didn't want to give any platform or shine to the news station. We know that it's the largest news station here in the United States, they have the largest viewership of any other news station. If you're not familiar with Fox News, they're disgusting - and racist - and they play into all the jingoism and nationalism, and all of the isms. But I made a decision to go on Fox News. With a lot of preparation, we did a town hall on capitalism versus socialism. And I spoke on the socialism side against their, like, Fox and Friends people. And one of the reasons that I did that is because, believe it or not, Fox has the most viewers but also their viewers are more likely to vote for Bernie Sanders - at the time that he was running - than anyone else.

Bianca Cunningham 1:12:42

And I think that we leave stuff on the table when we just don't want to talk to people who we assume are different or we assume have malicious intent. And many of them do; obviously, we've seen the disgusting vitriol being spewed by some of these people. Even most recently with the shooter up in Kenosha, I mean, this is all completely disgusting, and I don't want to downplay that. But I just always come back to this experience that I had personally, which was: I was in a union drive in Mississippi, which is the very conservative South - and the very poor South. I was door knocking for the union drive and there was a Confederate flag and Klan flag outside of this door - and I didn't want to knock on the door, but I was like, we have to knock on everybody's door, and my partner was pushing me to do it, and we were scared! They answered the door with a shotgun, then they invited us in for lemonade and let us do our spiel. So it's like, Okay, do you hate us or do you not hate us? Are you confused? I've spoken to people who have been raised in this type of culture and environment, and what they say is that they wanted to get far away from it. But also so much of it is like hive mind in the same way. They have a collective, you know, they feel like they have a community. There's a lot of fear and hate and things that drive these folks and I think that we do have a lot in common. And we just have to keep trying to have those conversations, figure out who the twos are - that's union speak! The ones are with us, the twos can be convinced, the threes we leave alone. I think there are way more twos than there are threes.

Dalia Gebrial 1:14:17

Yeah, that's really interesting to hear. I'm gonna actually - before I bring Gargi in, I'm gonna bring in a question that came in the comments that's really related to this. And Bianca and Annie already answered it to an extent in that that answers. So before I bring you in Gargi, I'm going to just add a little bit here, which is - does anybody have experience of projects or organising formats that aim to organise and create more white anti racists? There are some areas in the UK with few people of colour and stuck in a culture war - is Fred Hampton's approach relevant?

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:14:58

Okay.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:15:01

I'm gonna start by going back to what Annie was saying about 'you're not a progressive if you don't think people can be transformed.' Transforming the world is transforming ourselves, isn't it? And each other. I'm not hoping that in the world where I'm free that I'm still working through the night and knackered all the time and all the other things that are in my life. It's transformational for me and for others. And that the wages of whiteness, of course exist. But they're poor substitute for becoming human. The wages of whiteness, say to white people, the best you can hope for is that your life is at least in your imagination, slightly less shitty than these other people's. It doesn't even manage that a lot of the time. But it's far away from saying your life will be your own, and free, and adventurous, and full of joy and everything a human being can be. That has to be the prize, and we need to think about ways of organising that articulate that prize to all different kinds of people.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:16:08

And I have been running with this thing - it's a good job you can't see me because it's really been making people annoyed when I say it elsewhere, but I'll say it here - but I wonder if as anti racists, we need to stop talking about anti racism as the core of our politics, or our claims, and instead, embed what it means to do anti racism in something which talks about justice, freedom, mutuality, liberation. Of course, you can't do any of those things without killing the beast of racism. But it makes it a slightly different project than what the project of anti racism has become.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:16:46

And I know that some other people have put in the comments - how do we distinguish ourselves from those corporate performances of anti racism, from the black square folk? And I think what makes it different for us is it's not just today's brand for us. It's part of the way of being that can make us all human. And actually, I think you can do anti racist politics without talking about race at all. And perhaps that's what people are meaning when they talk about the Fred Hampton novel, what would it take for us all to be free? Certainly, a state which doesn't kill people. Certainly a people-led challenge to the forces of violence that degrade all our lives. Certainly ways of seeing our commonality rather than a kind of false identification with the powerful who never see us. These things are common across many groups of people. And I always think, they're there. They're available. Of course, there's challenges to articulating them. But people are not resistant to that story, it's about how we make sure that conversation happens in all the places it needs to happen with the partners it needs to happen with, in a place where, frankly, most people have to spend all of their waking hours just trying to put food on the table. That's a big challenge for us. That the conversations for how we can imagine our shared humaneness are limited by the material constraints of staying alive. Well, that's common for all of us.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:18:16

And again, I'm stepping away now.

Dalia Gebrial 1:18:21

Thank you so much! So we have two more questions in the chat that I'm gonna sort of put together, so I'll ask them both together, and then you guys can just answer them together as well.

Dalia Gebrial 1:18:37

And so the first one is, Gargi sort of touched on that, but I guess it's looking at how there's been a scramble, amongst corporations especially, to show themselves as amenable to the Black Lives Matter message. So, you know, Nike and Colin Kaepernick - that sort of advertising campaign, or I recently saw a billboard that Uber did, that just said, 'if you tolerate racism, delete Uber'. And my work actually looks at how the platform economy exploits black and brown workers, so that was quite a gross thing to see. So I guess (and someone else has mentioned here), when you look at some corporate and centrist anti racism trying to crowd out leftist anti racism and shift the conversation away from structural issues - what should our strategy be around that? Should it be one of disengagement, or of dismissal? Or is it something that we should be actively engaging with?

Dalia Gebrial 1:19:38

And then we have another one from Theodora Polenta, which says that the state is characterised by biosurveillance, police violence, prison industrial complex, and institutional racism, should Labour - or I feel maybe my question could also be the Democrats - if anti racist, recalibrate its position against the state. So, Annie, I'll start with you, if that's okay, and give the other two a little bit of a break.

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 1:20:10

Those are good questions! And so on the first question, I guess what I would say is, it's really funny to say... I mean, Bianca said something very early on, which is that it shows that our messaging is working, so that's a good thing. It's good to see that the bounds of what has been conceptualised as acceptable are changing - in some ways, and in some ways not - but broadly in our direction. But I think, going back to that conversation about internationalism, one of the really big opportunities here, when these corporations come out, is to use it as an entry point into talking about an internationalist politics. So Nike can come out and say black lives matter, Adidas comes out and says black lives matter, but who makes the clothes that they're selling? Who are they exploiting for their profit? Those are questions about international structures of race rather than simply a flat national framework. And I think the ability to invisibilise, or render invisible, those dynamics of exploitation is a form of blackwashing, and I think it's really important for us to call that out.

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 1:21:30

On the second question in terms of the relationship of the Labour Party to the state. A lot of the powers that the Tories are using now are powers that were given to the state and deep state by the Labour Party. That's something we have to reckon with. That's something we have to think through, especially as we understand our relationship to the Labour Party itself, but also our relationship to electoral politics. And I think part of the problem is that the question of national security is a question that the left hasn't historically done well at finding an answer to. And what do I mean by that? What I mean is that in the last ditch attacks against Corbyn in the first leadership election in 2015, we had all these female candidates or women candidates coming to the fore and saying, Corbyn, you wouldn't press the red button you wouldn't bomb people back, use second strike capabilities with the nuclear weapons. And I think one central aspect of being able to create the space for Labour and left Labour, and if that is going to be possible anytime soon, to recalibrate its relationship to the state, or its attitude to the state and state power, is to start pushing back on arguments like that. It's to start trying to get people to reconceptualize what security looks like, what safeness looks like. And reconceptualize what community is. Who are we protecting ourselves from, how do we relate to the rest of the world? And I

think those are questions that we do really need to do some thinking around and I don't think we've done enough yet.

Annie Olaloku-Teriba 1:23:20

I'll leave it there because I'm sure that Gargi and Bianca are going to say everything else that I was thinking. But yeah, those are the two things that strike me first based on those questions.

Dalia Gebrial 1:23:32

Thank you Annie. Bianca, shall we go to you next?

Bianca Cunningham 1:23:39

Sure, I forgot the second question, but I'm gonna...

Dalia Gebrial 1:23:43

Shall remind you of it?

Bianca Cunningham 1:23:44

Yeah

Dalia Gebrial 1:23:44

So the second question was around... so it was the state is characterised by police violence, prison industrial complex, institutional racism. The question says, should Labour, but I guess it could be for the Democrats or the kind of progressive wing of the Democrats, should it recalibrate its position against, or towards, the state.

Bianca Cunningham 1:23:48

So my position is that the Democrats, in my context, are the state. And so I don't feel like you can pull them apart. I mean, I think that's the simplest way to put it.

Bianca Cunningham 1:24:20

The other thing I'll say is about corporations co-opting BLM, I think it's the same thing - to be talking about this and presenting this as a matter of individual versus collective or structural solutions, right. I agree with everything that Annie said about, you know, Amazon - I mean, how people are in the streets because they're upset with the inequality, the racial violence, they're sick of the murder with no accountability, but they're also on the streets because our government has completely botched the response to the coronavirus pandemic. They're also in the streets because they see the the big contradictions. And you know, Jeff Bezos running ads to say how happy Amazon workers are to be able to serve all of us during this time, while not getting hazard pay. while not getting sick leave, while not even providing the most basic standard of living for his employees, who I'm sure mostly are black and brown.

Bianca Cunningham 1:25:19

And as a matter of fact, we know that even some employees in the Amazon warehouse here in Staten Island were fired for speaking out against, in the very beginning of the pandemic, the fact that they

didn't have masks, they didn't have hand sanitizer, people were catching the virus on the line. And the company was saying absolutely nothing to people, and it was just spreading. And those workers were fired in retaliation for speaking up and trying to form a union and trying to fight back against that. So how infuriating it is to be called a national hero through the media, on commercials, through your elected officials, through your boss. And then them not actually give you what you actually need to survive and thrive during this pandemic and keep you and your family safe. So I really do feel like this is about exposing those contradictions, and exposing individual solutions like arrest the cops who murdered Breonna Taylor, you have to understand that we're making those demands because of the current system that we live in. But that black lives are still going to matter whether they arrest those murderers or not, right?

Bianca Cunningham 1:26:22

Them arresting her killers is not going to take me out of the streets, because that doesn't spell justice to all of us. And what we're really trying to look for is structural and systemic justice, structural equality, we're looking for equity in this conversation, not just for you to say something nice. Not for you just to bow in Kente cloth, like you see our congress members, it's so embarrassing! Bowing in Kente cloth but can't even pass a second stimulus check, let alone a policy that would benefit black and brown communities that are really hurting. And so I just think that continuing, we should use every opportunity that we can to expose those contradictions as much as possible, and really steer people towards understanding the difference between these individualistic types of solutions, these band aids and reforms, and something that's about a world transformed, or recreating society, and really fighting for systemic change. And that and that includes economics as well. So yeah, I agree with everything that Annie said, and I'll leave it there.

Dalia Gebrial 1:27:24

Amazing. Thanks, Bianca. So for our final comments, shall we go to Gargi before we... and we're gonna make it just on time, so that's great.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:27:39

Did you just ask me to talk? You cut out for a moment.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:27:46

Okay, I'll try to be quick, cos I know it's really time to go.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:27:50

Again for the British context, I'd just say, as well as rethinking what the national state is, the pandemic has remade people's sense of their localities, and mutuality and non mutuality within their localities. And that there's a whole battle to be waged in this country about what the role of the local state is, there's certainly interventions that can be made - you don't have to wait for the next general election. It's not even about who's elected. But there's kind of spaces in that about what the infrastructure of the state means to people in their everyday lives and it's not always the national state. And many of the things we think about both in terms of penalty and in terms of support happen locally in terms of the structures of UK Government. So I think there's a return to that conversation that needs to be had. And again, showing my age I'm sorry, I'm always talking about the past, I've come to that stage. But the

generation just above me, through the long Thatcher years - I'm a child through Thatcherism and come of age just as she ends - redirected energies to what could be done in the local state. So for London, that's the GLA years, but it's also in the kind of remaking of other key British cities around a local agenda that can make wins for people's everyday lives through using some kinds of accommodations of local infrastructure. So we also need to expand what we think of as the state in different ways.

Gargi Bhattacharyya 1:29:16

And I think people have already said what we ought to do about corporate blackwashing - it's an opportunity, isn't it? If these people have got the platforms, then it's an opportunity to push our analysis a little bit further, to push the contradictions a little bit further. And actually, I think lots of those statements have expanded the ability of lots of different people to talk about things such as labour conditions, and transnationally to talk about labour conditions. There's a whole, now unstoppable, conversation about how rubbish working conditions here also based in rubbish working conditions there, about commodity chains - who would have thought it? You know, that you can now talk about commodity chains in mainstream news programmes and lots of people know what you mean. All of those things are an opportunity for us. Every time they come into our terrain, we get to talk some more, and that has to be part of the game as well. And I'm done, and it's only 3 minutes past.

Dalia Gebrial 1:30:18

Thank you so much, Gargi. And thank you so much to all of our panelists. It's sad that we couldn't be there together in person, but judging from the comments section it sounds like everyone really gained something from that. I also think what I really got from that was that it can often feel like we have so far to go. But in many ways we've also come so far, and so many parts of this conversation and the ways that we spoke about anti capitalism and anti racism would not have happened in a format like this or in a platform like this, you know, five years ago. So demands like defund the police - I never thought I'd see something like that, let alone in the middle of what feels like a very reactionary time. So organising works. This kind of work has its impact.

Dalia Gebrial 1:31:09

And yeah, so thank you so much to all of the panelists for talking us through that. And I know in the comments, there's a link there that TWT have posted, which if you join the community link, you can continue this discussion amongst yourselves, which I really hope that you do, and be sure to keep in touch with the work that TWT do, and any other local organisation that might be relevant to this - to continue that organising work, because as you can see from the talks that we've had today, it does bear fruit even if it's quite a long way down the road. So thank you very much to all of our panelists and I hope you all have a really great Sunday evening!