

TWT: Tearing Down Fortress Britain

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SPEAKERS

Rafael Navar, Loup Blaster, Roger McKenzie, Omer, Akram Salhab, Bell Ribeiro-Addy

Akram Salhab 00:23

Hi, my name is Akram. I'm your host for the evening, and I work at migrants organise as the campaigns officer. I just actually began the introduction and then realised that I would be cut off in the middle of it. So anyway Welcome everyone. It's great to be here with you. And it's a shame we're not in person but fantastic work by the TWT team, getting us up and running for the festival this year. And despite the awful circumstances that we've been living through great to still be able to run TWT, share ideas and be on the call, together with everyone. As I said, I work at migrants organise, I'm the campaign officer. I'm going to be introducing our speakers and running us through some of the technical procedural things about this evening, how we can interact in the event, and trying to keep it focused around some of the practical questions that we as organisers, people on the left, people concerned with social justice perhaps need to be thinking about and asking at this time. When political action is so necessary. So, essentially what this evening is about is looking at the title tearing down fortress Europe, tearing down fortress Britain, but of course as part of borders, and what needs to be done about the European European context but what we've seen over the past few weeks is that despite the pandemic and 10s of thousands of deaths. The British government has still found the time to accelerate a moral panic about migration. And it turned a very small number of migrants coming by boat from the French coast into a big national scandal dominating the national newspapers. And all of these attacks that people

have seen often. Many of you will not be familiar with them have been backed up through many years of increasing draconian migration policies that many of us have heard about and know about. And so, and this these are set of policies whose purpose is to deflect from the murderous austerity, that's taking place in the UK by distracting people's attention onto migrant communities, whether that's migrants arriving here, or migrant communities already living in the UK. And so alongside this rhetoric we know we have in the mainstream media, we've had the windrush scandal, which is part of the wider hostile environment. We've had a fascist discourse and policies being espoused and pushed out through the media and through the EU and a whole host of other policies on every level, and in British society they've accelerated and made life unlivable intentionally made life hostile in the UK in order to have our migrant communities, expelled from, leaving the country. And so this this dynamic has created a really an awful situation where most people. And as we've seen in the Windrush, of which the windrush is most prominent example in which many, many communities that literally can't rent a house, can't work in the UK. Can't do many of the most basic things that they need in order to survive. And this, of course, as it happens in the UK it's taking place within an international dimension where hatred for migrants is being advanced by a coalition of right wing states and groups were now united around the common project of persecuting minority groups, indigenous people or migrating, or those migrating across borders. So we see in India, we see the acceleration of Turkish fascism, we see it with the US support for Israel, the policy against the Palestinian people, and we see of course in the relationship between Trump and Boris Johnson, and the way that migrants have become a scapegoat. And the position that that now holds in terms of the politics of this country. And this growing right wing coalition has taught us something here. And it's brought what our sense from the left which the renewed awareness about the need that we have to build on the left an internationalist struggle, which is around International Justice, which is built on migrant justice and which is for open borders. There's also a growing awareness that we need to integrate these struggles into struggles on the left against racism against colonialism and against capitalism, And with a keen awareness of the disaster that they're all bringing to communities and to our planet. And I think that this understanding is not just strategic, it's

also and not just humanitarian or not just moral, it's also an understanding that comes from, from an awareness of the unity that we need. So when we see people fighting against a hostile environment, and no recourse to public funds and public services. We now understand that as a fight against austerity, as much as it is for racial justice. When we see striking migrant workers. We understand that, winning a victory against their bosses we understand that a win and a win for, for everyone looking to challenge the precariousness of workers in the gig economy. So migrant struggles are integral to the struggles that we, today have in life. So what we're going to do in today's event is look, both in Britain and abroad, about how we can continue and strengthen the struggle. And we're gonna be hearing from a number of speakers tonight, both from Britain, United States and from others speaking from the camp in Calais about their work. And in the, in the questions section I'm going to be trying to build, bring the discussion around to some of these practical questions. So, what are the practical struggles in migrant communities, what work are they undertaking. And then also think about how socialists and progressives can contribute to these efforts, what can we do to add to that. And then in that spirit there's two links I want to share with you. I'll just put them in the chat now. One is based on some of the work we've been doing with migrants organise around understanding the struggle for Migrant Justice in terms of wider struggle against colonialism and racism and understanding the need to speak about and organise around these principles at the same time. It's called the firm charter. And the second is a call for a day of action, which is to be organised at the end of October, which I've also sent the link for now. And if there's anybody in their local groups, Momentum, Labour Party or other organisations it would be fantastic if you guys could engage with some of this work, doing some actions around the weekend of action, raising awareness for the hostile environment and beginning to think about what the principal's, activities, and the coordination that is necessary to start to take this forward as a movement. After we've had interventions from our speakers we're then going to be cutting to a film called Motherland, which traces experiences of two young men forcibly returned to Jamaica, after a lifetime in Britain. Along with the story of a Windrush generation man denied re entering the UK. And then as I said we'll return to questions from the audience and there'll be a box, which you into which you can submit those

questions and I'll try and pull them into discussion and try and keep the discussion going amongst our speakers. Additionally, there's a few technical things to mention. So, before we begin to have a few rules of engagement as well. We want everyone to feel welcome in these spaces and everyone's voice to be heard, so please bear this in mind when engaging with chat or comments, during the sessions. And please don't use any inappropriate rude or unkind language and please don't spam and participants who violate these rules may be prevented from further posting in the chat or comment box. Additionally, this, this session will be using a live transcription service called otter attendees using otter will have to follow a link and open this transcript, as a separate window. And then this link will be shared in the chat box by a tech volunteer. So if you're having difficulty please message the tech Volunteer of the chat. Maybe I should have mentioned that one earlier, my apologies. And, and also just a little bit about the world transformed, the world transformed is free for all but it's only possible by the contributions of our supporters. If you're able to please consider supporting us by clicking on the World transformed.org forward slash support, to help sustain our work all year round and we'll post those links again, again, at the end of the session so you can find them when you need them. So I think that's now to speakers. So I've got a very pleasure of introducing Bell Ribeiro-Addy who is the Labour MP for Streatham, she also the co chair of the socialist campaign group of Labour MPs, and she's a former Shadow Minister of immigration.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy 09:48

Thank you, everyone. Thank you so much for inviting me to speak. I want to start by talking about the Windrush generation. I think in the case. In their case, I think, the phrase justice delayed is justice denied is one that that rings completely true because still after this time. They haven't seen the Justice that they deserve. So, everybody knows that when people started to come here from the Commonwealth, or when they were invited at that particular time they were all British citizens. And just a reminder that it's all over the Commonwealth This means people weren't coming just from the Caribbean but from Pakistan from India, from Nigeria from Ghana where my family are from, and they

all came with Britain as the Motherland, working on public services helping to rebuild this country. And when they got here they actually even came with passports which said they were British, you know, fast forward a few years, a few decades, and see just how many different pieces of immigration legislation has been put down slowly getting to a place where in 2012. It got to a hostile environment legislation in 2014, the Conservative government literally pulled the rug out from under the Windrush generation and changed legislation which allowed them to be in this country. And it's not that they didn't know that this would happen I remember very clearly in 2014, Diane Abbott speaking across the chamber to Theresa May, who was home secretary at the time, and saying to her, you know, looking at how this legislation is worded, how do you, you know, can you see that potentially, it will impact people that appear to be as immigrants very very clearly saying it will clearly you know impact black people and they were you know quite adamant that no, it wouldn't and there were only a few brave souls that voted against that legislation, unfortunately. But instances like that that just show how much in this country immigration is synonymous with racism. Now we saw British citizens detained deported dehumanised, and you know, denied their rights just because of the colour of their skin and despite all of the apologies we've seen, it's a disgrace they're still waiting for justice, some people died, waiting for justice, some people were never even allowed back into the country, you know, losing their livelihoods and their home and by Windrush Day this year, which was a day which was put in place, just last year, only 60 people out of thousands that applied had received compensation, I don't think you can ever really put a price on ruining someone's life, especially at the tariff rates that they're offering but at the very least, you know, the government could have set up a system which which you know help people rebuild their lives after what's what's happened. And then you know that's a scandal in itself now they called the review they did into the Windrush scandal the lessons learned review but it seems they haven't learned any lessons at all. Firstly, they've taken time to implement that you know that the very 30 key recommendations I haven't haven't really seen anything but I haven't really learned the broader lessons of Windrush. And you know, this is this is shown by the most recent immigration policy, which they passed, which actually just pulls more citizens, more people in under the under a hostile environment

policy and this time it's 3. million plus EU nationals. And now our relationship with the EU is actually going to be our most important, I think, external economic relationship for years to come. And, you know, we're hearing already that we're heading for a no deal which was a little bit obvious, and it's actually important that we get that right and our immigration system, from a practical point of view should be something that fits into that and not the other way around what we see from the recent immigration bill is that they actually just wanted us to pass legislation which allowed the government to just do whatever they wanted without coming back to check to check with the you know the rest of MPs in the house, and what they call Henry the eighth powers now. I don't understand what democracy, even means if any government are just given the opportunity to make laws that so fundamentally affect people's lives and the economy, with little scrutiny and just completely behind closed doors it's actually a constitutional paradigm and I think any government particularly this government with their track record should be given a blank check and you know that they could redeem any time. Now, immigration policy they brought forward isn't enough. If you just think it in this way that this will be the second time in the past decade that a Conservative government has retrospectively changed the rights of migrants, after they enter the country, you know after they've settled here, had children here, open businesses here, pay taxes here. And instead of making proper reassurances and creating a migration system that is fair and respects human rights, you know, this is what we've come to find that you've got children born here having lived here their whole lives being asked to pay over 1000 pounds, to, to, you know, to have to be British Nationals if they weren't born to British National, and you see families have been split apart because of the arbitrary immigration threshold and they continued with the no recourse to public funds policy, even when the courts have actually said that it's unlawful and due to the coronavirus and the coronavirus has shown that it's inhumane and the Prime Minister didn't even know that it actually existed, and they've been detaining people for months on end, even torture victims of victim to trafficking longer than any other country in Europe, and only to eventually release 70% of them, meaning that private companies like surco and g4 s are quite literally profiting of the misery of people who should be allowed to remain in this country. And, you know, even if they weren't looking at it from a

humane perspective, if they were to look at it from an economical perspective, this new points based system that they're proposing wouldn't even work because 69% of EU nationals already here, wouldn't be allowed to come into the country wouldn't be eligible under these rules, and you know they continue to go along that line of, you know, calling the low skilled. Instead of calling them low paid and I think that's an absolute disgrace. There's no such thing as low skilled work just low paid work, as far as I'm concerned, all work is skilled, as long as it's, it's done well, and just continuing to go down that line is absolutely disgraceful all of those key workers who, you know, low paid but continue to see us throughout the pandemic. Now I know that we made quite a lot of headway in the past few years with Labour's immigration policy you know changing it from a situation with with, you know, those disgraceful mugs and you know from a time when people wouldn't be willing to speak up for migrants, and I never thought that I would get to a time where, you know, you would see a Labour party conference get up and you know give a standing ovation and be and be happy and be pleased right across, across the conference that you know we had voted to close down all immigration detention centres that is not something that I thought I would see. And so we can't. We've come so far. And it's so important that we as members continue to make the point that we shouldn't be rolling back at all. Unfortunately, it can be too tempting when people look at it as a tool, and as a means of winning votes, but you know it is a downward spiral and we're never going to win right so we, we, you know, we need to be very careful about how we're approaching things, particularly with refugees at the moment, you know, during the pandemic migrant workers were amazing and as soon as you know everybody's pointing the finger at the government and rightfully so because of their disgraceful handling of the situation. They've gone right back to what they usually do, scapegoating migrants scapegoating those those particular refugees that are crossing the channel at the moment making some very disgraceful suggestions about what should happen to them. And, you know, we need to be standing up standing clear to making, making it clear to our leadership to our members that we remain a party that supports migrant rights that we believe that refugees are welcome here and that we have to bring a complete end to the hostile environment and stop scapegoating migrants in the way that we have there

were no votes for us to win there, and even if there were, as far as I'm concerned, that's a road that we should not be going down, so we need to be educating people and not pandering to racists in that way. Thank you very much.

Akram Salhab 18:21

Thank you Belle. And, within it was an April that Priti Patel was saying that she wanted to bring the immigration bill forward that would send the left into meltdown. And so really in Parliament, when, you know, everyone in the left and in our movements and our trade unions and our migrant groups need to be working with our progressive MPs to make sure that we support and challenge work together about each one of those. Each time new laws are introduced and a new bill is introduced we're there and ready to respond. So, Thank you Belle so much. Our next two speakers that many of you we will be familiar with, obviously, Calais, which is one of the sites of what was, and is one of the camps, and we've got two speakers from there today to speak about their work. One is Luke Plaster, who is an audio visual artist and activist from Calais, and her work covers many areas in illustration painting animated film and musical video to visual and musical performances and with her is Omer Rashid, who's a Sudanese poet and migrant who lives between Paris and Calais. And yeah, as I said they'll be joining us together, over to you both. Thank you.

Loup Blaster 19:41

Hi, everyone. So, thank you for having me. So I'm Loup, I'm based in Calais, I'm an artist and activist here. I was born here but I studied away and then I came back, about six years ago in 2014. And since then I've been involved in solidarity and activism. And it was also turning my artistic life as Calais became like the main topic of my work. I documented in many ways, the life things quiet struggles people living in the streets and working on an alternative representation and focusing on the people and the individuals who are stranded here. So, with the years. My perspective and knowledge have changed a lot, because first, what really shocked me was the difference between the major coverage,

the official communication of the authorities with the reality that I met, because I went on the ground and I spent time in the squats and in the jungle, and I saw with my own eyes and talk to a lot of people so I realised there was a lot of lies and manipulation of the public opinion. So, making a very narrowed vision. On the other hand, what I met was a great humanity, and got to meet a lot of different cultures and learn about history, meet other experiences, learn about politics. It's not my background, I've studied art, but from the moment I stepped into this, the world became a lot larger, because I could understand the bigger picture and get to understand the world. Basically, and what was going on, for instance in Sudan, Afghanistan, Ethiopia et cetera. So, also with like recently with anti racist movements and Black Lives Matter, I understood more about the impact of racism and capitalism and I could connect it with our situation. And I understood that racism drives a lot of the decisions but furthermore, it's really used as a tool to justify an extreme representative politic here in Calais, because of the demonization of the people. So it's a circle and the local authorities benefits electorally and materially from this situation to reject a whole population. To give you a little update, about what is going on at the moment there are like about still hundreds of people, both in Calais and in Dunkirk, everywhere on the coast, probably like 2000 people, and the police harassment is permanent. Destruction of tents and belongings happen on a daily basis. So it's a very temporary life, and the people are constantly forced out of their camp. The police wake people in the morning, and ask us to move every morning, I insist it's really every morning around eight o'clock, and over the top like this summer, the, the majors have been looking for spectacular stories to tell. And they were very less interested in showing how is the daily survival for people, including many woman and children teenager who live here homeless in the streets. So it's been very crazy. Also with the death of our brother, Wajit. And it was very weird how journalists keep asking us to get interviewed interviewees from people who plan to attempt the crossing by boat, and it's it became very obscene, and morbid. So, how, how to maintain like life and our sanity, in this situation because homeless people suffer the situation, and also citizens who live here, because we are also victims of oppression and we suffer from the consequence of a militarised city. So, for me as an artist. Like, it's also like a struggle to make our cultural life in like a

very control, control freak city. So our expression is also like controlled. Like what's good or bad for them. So, even if my message as an artist has never been extreme, and just talk about solidarity. The simple fact of our existence is like an act of rebellion. So, for me like art is not like an escape, but it's a way to show to shape an alternative, and to make it real. It's a way to connect different people and to work on the idea of a community. And I know that, like, it has like changing my way of living the city. It also changes its DNA. So, art helped me to represent what what we are and our reality. And to step away from the emergency and to look at like a bigger picture. So nowadays is, it's what I try to do is simply like being an alternative. I'm almost I've said what I wanted to say. Just one last thing we are preparing a mobilisation, and a protest on the 26th of September, so we do, we want to call everyone on the 26th to join us. And, yeah, we're going to do things here so if people want to join the call there in the UK or to come over. We are looking for like speakers and people to support us so it's a call to anyone here. Yeah. And I will let my friend Omer speak.

Omer 26:21

Okay. Hello everybody over there. And my name is Omer, I'm from Sudan. Right now I live in Calais. A jungle, so I'm very proud and very happy to be with you at this moment. And I'm really very happy for inviting me. And share me with really very, you know, important topic concerning refugees. And yeah, so, before say something really I'm very very happy and really thank you, everybody. And let me start by something which is incredible. I did it during the time, our friend which is Wajit when he died in the sea. It's like a short point, but I hope it to be really very effective and insertable for you. And, really, is very very important to look at this site and especially for those young, you know, refugees who might be inside of C. So I said to my friend. Goodbye, friend of mine. Stay well, I became too far from you. My days have been ended. But remember me. On the days we, we spent together in jungle. Yes, this is the life. Sometimes it's sad, sometimes is happy. I hope to see you next time. But I think it's impossible. I have not learned not to cross to go, England. But you don't give up trying to success that line and say hello to help, when we, when you reach there. I would never ever reach my dreams, because my soul

became one of Africa's history, and this is new tragedy, which is has started in new city which is in Calais City, but you don't worry, just prayer for me bro. May God bless my son in peace. It would be enough for me, bye bye friend of mine, my dream shouldn't be achieved. But they have been lost in the sea, with the water. Bye. Bye. Friend of mine. Don't give up trying to success that line. Instead, well, by taking care of yourself. Bye bye a friend of mine. So, this is a short, you know, poem, lecture I did it to our friend who has died. Inside sea. And really, it was very big shock. And, you know, breaking heart and so on. Really, really, you know, and where where God is, you know, full of sadness and so on. So, what I'm going to say is, like, the new tragedy which is started inside you know Calais people trying to cross to go, England. And, you know, Britain's very very difficult. So, that which, you know, affect me too. So, to do so. You know, what we are wearing, you know, and life is very, you know, difficult to live in England and so on. So, and even, you know, it's really heartbreaking. When you hear you know like such a story. And, yeah, it is really really very very you know painful. And yes, so I'm going to say thank you. And, yeah, thank you for everybody.

Akram Salhab 31:27

Thank you so much. Thank you very much, for your intervention. And everyone remember how Calais has been one of the ways of measuring and seeing the inhumanity of the British government and their immigration policy that literally an hour from London. Many people even recruited from the UK to be in London in an hour on the train, are been forced to live in a camp by the British and the French government in collaboration with another, and many of the young people I met when I was there as well. Came always from countries that the British had invaded or the British were responsible for selling arms to or the British was responsible for supporting there despotic and racist regime then of course the case in Sudan, where last year, an amazing revolution rose up to demand freedom and justice and dignity, and it was the British state, together with the Saudi government who put down the people's wish to democracy and that's why people are forced to flee, because of imperialism and colonialism that continues today. Anyway, thank you very much for sharing your story. I'm going to now turn to a, to

Roger McKenzie to speak more about here in the UK in the context here. Roger McKenzie is an Assistant General Secretary at unison one of the UK's largest trade unions, with responsibility for organising and recruitment, as well as membership and activists, as a membership an activist in education, and any unison members on the call may want to look out for Rogers name, and thank you very much.

Roger McKenzie 33:14

Thank you. thank you Akram feeling very moved by the last contribution. And the scale of the kind of challenge that we face in terms of not just raising these issues but organising around them. I'm also kind of mindful of Akram's very initial introduction to this evening, where the introduction that he gave could have been my parents, really, when they came from Jamaica, the hostility, that they face, the violence that they faced to not just in the streets and being attacked by racists but also within the workplace. And many of us will know our history, and know about how the trade union movement often. We're not on the right side of history at that time. Thankfully, things have moved on massively where the country that the country's largest trade union, which I'm proud to be an Assistant General Secretary of is now at the forefront of the fight for migrant rights, but also at the front of the fight against racism the Black Lives Matters movements The, the continuing Rise of the far right within this country. I'm, I want to talk more about what we can do. I'm an organiser as Akram said in my introduction, and I'm always looking to see Well, what are the lessons that we can draw internationally, and from this country around how migrant workers have not just waited for somebody to do things for them, or to even show solidarity because that's not always been forthcoming. And in many countries, as we know, but what they've done for themselves to build movements for not just to stand up against the attacks that they're facing in a kind of defence organisations. For organisations that promote migrant rights and assert the rights of migrant workers to be human beings to be treated as human beings and I'm quite often reminded in these sorts of discussions about the Memphis sanitation workers strike of 1968. The, the strike that Dr. King was assassinated, while he was supporting and when many of you remember those

iconic banners that were carried around. That said, I am a man, and it was all men on the display saw those refuse collectors, but they carried those around and it was about asserting their rights to be treated as human beings, because, frankly, all of the evidence that they had. And frankly, pretty well, all of the evidence that migrant workers today have is the, we're not treated as full human beings, not treated as people with rights, not people who are treated as, you know, just being on the same planet as everybody else with the rights and breathe and the rights of needs, the right to drink and the right to have shelter, all of those things, those basic things that many of us take for granted. So, what we see across the world is migrant workers not just waiting for those things to be given to them, but actually organising to try and get those things and it's that that I want to talk about really because that for me is the essence of what needs to happen now. In the UK, what we need to do is to build a movement for not just radical change in society, but we need to build a movement that's going to encompass migrant workers as part of our movements encompass the expertise in organising them many many many migrant workers are bring into the table. Because when I go around a large number of workplaces where we were allowed to physically go around. Many of these workplaces. And I see migrant workers organising for their rights in the workplace. I see during the covid crisis. I've seen for myself, how migrant workers were absolutely deliberately put in harm's way. By this government's number of migrant workers died as a result of being put in harm's way. But I've also seen how so many of those migrant workers that try to fight back have tried to organise, so that they could get some real rights in the workplace. Now many of those workplaces that I'm talking about their workplaces where the trade union movement is isn't as strong as it should be. So I'm thinking, particularly around care homes. I'm thinking about migrant workers who've told us in unison, how they didn't get a choice about whether or not they could be going into kind of residential homes, residential care homes or not, they were told you come in, you sleep into these care homes if you don't sleep in then you lose your job, basically. And we've seen that, time and time again. And what we've had to do is to try and find ways of not as given solidarity as important as that is, but what we can do to work with those migrant workers to build real power within the workplace because at the end of the day, what it comes down to is this in the

workplace. If you haven't got collective organisation. If you haven't got people active on the ground in these workplaces, then these employers who think they can treat people like there's something that's scraped off the bottom of their shoe will continue to win. And we have to stop that. So our job as trade unionists is to give these workers, some sense of their own power, not to do it for them because that's not organising, the golden rule of organising is you never do for people what they can do themselves, because if you do that, it won't be sustainable, it won't last you won't get real power, but what we have to do as organisers is to work with the migrant workers themselves to try and build some sense for themselves of the power that they have. If they organise collectively within the workplace, but also not seeing that collective organisation as something that just sticks in the workplace it's gonna be something that spreads wider into the communities where, where migrant workers are living as well because as we've seen there are plenty of organisations out there who want to take advantage by attacking migrant workers in the hostels or the hotels, where they're living, so our job. As always, is to organise. And it's not always going to be easy, but we need to organise, we need to build power for migrant workers in the workplaces that they are, where they work, but also in the communities where they live. That's our task and when you look across the world, that is what's taking place. And our job is to link up some of these campaigns, learn from some of the best of these campaigns some of these organising campaigns that have taken place in the United States and across Europe and elsewhere, and just see what we can do to learn the lessons and to look at what the trade union movement can do to build real power. Let me finish on this there is an old, old saying that there is no knight in shining armour who is going to come to our rescue, its always down to us. It's always about what we do. We are the ones that we've been waiting for. We are the ones that will help to build power for migrant workers in the workplace and in the communities, and the trade union movement. I am sure will not shy away from that. But what we can't do is just use a slogan that is that we can conveniently use every now and again and do nothing about. This is the time when we have to move beyond slogans. When we have to move to actually doing something that makes a difference for migrant workers, thanks very much for listening.

Akram Salhab 41:37

Thank you so much Roger, really I think the struggle in the next few weeks and months and years around Migrant Justice will really depend on the role of trade unions and trade unionists because as workers people are being targeted. But as individuals forced to implement the hostile environment. That's something that's now also spreading across the trade union movement. And we've seen a lot with the campaign that we work on health care, that doctors and nurses are forced to be immigration enforcement officers in legislation and under guidance that is in contravention with their role as a health care professional. So really I think it's a big role for the trade union movement in thinking about how, how can we support members in order to resist these policies safely and practically on the ground and what would that look like and some of those strategies are really definitely a lot of room and potential for growth in the, in the weeks and months ahead and I also agree that we need to be looking about where we can learn some of these lessons from history, and from of course other places around the world. Which brings me very excitingly to our next speaker, who will be speaking from the United States, where as someone who's done a lot of work on migrant organising we've taken a lot of movement a number of conferences and learned a great deal from the approaches and the extraordinary experience and achievements of the movements there. And now our speaker is Rafael Navarro, who is from the California State, who the California State Director of the Bernie Sanders 2020 presidential campaign, and the former national political director of the CWA union and founder of the campaign an organisation, TWT has been in contact with and done work with before Rafael we're very excited to hear from you. Thank you so much for joining us.

Rafael Navar 43:22

Thank you for having me. Akram. It's a pleasure and an honour to be on this panel with such great folks who are doing global justice fight for dignity. You know, I want to start off say I'm not going to talk about the brutality that we've been seeing in this country, in regards to federally immigration and Trump and

in the rise and I think, you know, that is something we will talk about later but I actually have a story of hope, as you mentioned, Akram. That is rooted in actually my life history in this country. And, you know, one of the things I was born in East Los Angeles, California, and my family migrated from Mexico, and our story is really my story is really tied to this organising and immigrant communities but before I get into the story. I really want to talk about some contextual pieces so that folks can understand maybe folks already know how government power is exerted in the US but I think it's important to ground the conversation in this. So in the US, as some of you might know we have states that have an enormous amount of power and say and how policies enacted for that comes from the federal national government. And so governors and their state legislature actually really can translate what a federal policy will look like so for example when Obama was able to pass the Affordable Care Act. That looks very different in a state like California that is now one of the most progressive states in the country where they really expanded health care you have community health clinics, etc. Versus states in the south and Texas, which completely make it difficult for people to actually have healthcare completely limit and restrict people's access even though you have one federal law, it looks completely night and day in two different states. So it's really important for folks to know because I know in the UK. It's a little distinct right you have a centralised NHS and a kind of all of that decision is made in the federal government mostly and then it's how you see it as pretty centralised here it's very different in the states have an enormous amount of power. The second contextual fact before I get into the story is, California, the state that I was born in is a massive state there's 40 million residents in that state. It's the fifth largest if it was its own sovereign state it'd be the fifth largest economy larger than the UK. And so it's a significant amount of resources and population. And when you combine it with the state of Texas. Both of those states alone have more of a population than the UK and their economies are massive. Now to the stories, California now is a leader in progressive policy California now is expanding not only immigrant rights but is leading the charge to combat the gig economy and exploitation by companies like Uber and lift you might have heard that lift shut down, precisely because of the legislation that was pushed in that state. Now that reality that has currently exists in California is completely different than it

could have been a different future. Had we not organised. When I was in high school in 1995. Essentially, the first or, we always say the first Donald Trump was a governor pete wilson from the state of California. Mexican and Latino population in California and the Southwest is always big but it was really expanding in those years, and essentially a lot of the white power capital structure of the state was trying to curtail our ability, just to have other folks have talked of access of being able to be full fledged. You know citizens being considered a respected as a full human being. And so they did a really grotesque law that was anti immigrant in California. We lost that fight, California actually approved that legislation statewide. And we only defeated it later in the courts, California is also the state that saw the rise of our Margaret Thatcher which was ronald reagan he was the governor of California. So that should tell you of how the right wing tendencies of that state, but in the 90s, there was a decision made, precisely because of these attacks by a lot of not only immigrant rights leaders but also labour leaders who decided to really build and organise in immigrant communities. And you saw essentially within 20 years. California is now as I mentioned, radically different from where we could have been where this right wing's attacks have come and now been replicated across the country. And so for us, it was a really intentional organising you saw the rise of some of the biggest labour organising that was in immigrant communities some of the biggest new organising drive campaigns, which was the justice for janitors which Roger actually one of your current, one of my comrades works for unison Galeria Onsager was a pioneer in and she really cut her teeth in building that movement, but that changed the direction of the state and that allowed us to really, you know, have a different narrative. And when you look at the country now the places that have some of the most progressive policies where we see the actual needle turning the opposite to this rightward trend where you actually see an expansion of worker rights, an expansion of immigrant rights is where we've invested and organised even states in the south like in Virginia. We saw a different, they're moving in a different direction. Obviously this is linked up to the historic organising especially in the south of black liberation struggle which we've learned a lot from as immigrant organising immigrant communities in the US. And so, you know, this is a for us, a critical to actually transform and really drive forward is that you

can build in immigrant communities and it's not just about organising for immigrant rights but a sense of expanding really worker rights and dignity in all cases, and you know, as you mentioned, I'm a founding member of Mijente Mijente was founded precisely to do that organising in Latin x Latino communities in the US, because one of the concerns we had was that this block of people in the US was not could easily become susceptible to white supremacy arguments anti blackness could could easily become reactionary and right wing in this country. And so we've really transformed that and then started to talk more about that work and how they're successful. Thank you.

Akram Salhab 50:03

Smoke alarm going off?

Rafael Navar 50:05

My timer and I didn't know what actually happened. Finishing.

Akram Salhab 50:12

Thank you so much Rafael, and actually all of what you said in the first part of your contribution was something we have learned a lot from because in the UK we have separate NHS trusts, and we have local councils and we have regional government and government in Scotland and in Wales, which is much weaker than the US. The principle we took from that, at least when a lot of the organising discussions we had with comrades, there was that we must mobilise every sector, every group of people we can from the bottom up our neighbours and our communities, our politicians and our local council, even with the weaker legal political framework, how do we mobilise them to bring them on our side because we need mass numbers to win, we need a wide scale resistance so that's definitely one of the big lessons we took from them. Thank you. thank you for sharing a bit more about them. I yes a final part before we move on to our questions is, is wonderful film the opportunity to see this evening, which is a little, I think it's 30 minutes long or so and and the film is called Motherland, which traces

experiences of two young men forcibly returned to Jamaica after a lifetime in Britain, and it's alongside the story of a Windrush generation man denied re entry into the UK, and through the personal accounts of those who've had their questioned by the state Motherland kind of explores, what it really means for someone to quote unquote go back home. And the film is directed by Ellen Evans, an award winning filmmaker whose work is screened with international film festivals including Sundance and sx SW South by Southwest. The film was released in June 2020 as part of the uncertain kingdom, anthology, and got positive reviews from the Financial Times Evening Standard in The Guardian, and it's available now on the bfi player curzon home cinema and others, I think we should have the link in the description for you, so you can see. And for copyright reasons we're not able to stream the film, but it should be easy for some everyone to click the link now and watch the film, through the link and yeah so just under 30 minutes long, and then you open in a new tab, and after 30 minutes. You should come back, and then we can we can come back to things we'll keep our keep eyes open and open a tab next to it. And when we come back we'll have time for comments and questions, please think about them and we'll start collecting them for that section. Yeah, the film we just showed really powerful explanation of what deportation actually means in practice, and the impact it has on people's lives. And the way it's structured in order to essentially destroy people, and give them, and there's no accountability from the state or the home office. And a lot of the work we're doing in the UK to bring that accountability to a keener focus by working around cases, or strengthening that in terms of building a movement which takes from those examples and explains what structural change we need in order to end the heinous crimes of which you just saw a few small examples. And so now we're going to try and move into kind of question and answer session. So do get putting in your question and I'll try and read them out. And I'm going to start. We are going to come to the fix and we're going to screen are we still gonna. So basically I'm going to be pulling some questions out from the conversation that you. Some of the questions that you guys are putting forward. And then any of the speakers can just put up their hand unless I'm specifically aiming towards one or the other. So I think probably the first question is, aimed at Loup, which is around asking someone quite practically Where can they see some of your artwork or

other artwork which is done by migrants, or do you want to say something about that. I think you're on mute.

Loup Blaster 1:08:14

Hi. Um, I have I'm on every social media I have an Instagram and Facebook I post my stuff on Tumblr as well, more for illustration, and my short film is also online on Vimeo on YouTube so people can check that and follow the link, they will find about my, my art.

Akram Salhab 1:08:43

Anyone who'd like to pick this up much of the migrational state have been transferred into the private sector corporations like surco, are being paid billions of pounds by the government to house people seeking asylum in squalor and indefinitely, how can we hold these corporations to account?

Roger McKenzie 1:09:05

I don't think you can hold these companies to account I think the whole point is that these properties these this work needs to be bought back under democratic control. I mean that's the that's the issue. You can't. All you can do with these private companies is fight them, frankly, because they're only interested in one thing and that is profits. And we have to fight against the profit motive being part of this work its just fundamentally wrong. So the whole of this work needs to be bought back under democratic control.

Rafael Navar 1:09:47

If I can just add something to, I think, you know, we had this launch the campaign against palantir, palantir is a massive IT company who's basically managing a lot of the essentially, the raids and deportations of immigrants, but it's also actually a part of building up the surveillance state. And one of the things that was interesting for us as the campaign has expanded, is that we've actually seen.

There's been some folks across the spectrum, who are anti immigrant on the right side but care about surveillance, who have now started to actually join into actually rein in companies like palantir so I just wanted to add that I think it's important to see these moments of unity even if there's a massive, massive opposition to the values of those folks but that there is actually some things that can actually build momentum and and have unity with folks who are not normally aligned, that we've been trying to do, but I also absolutely agree with Roger This is the bigger strike of the bigger task of actually taking on power and exerting power both at the state for us and the federal level,

1:11:00

And Rafael can you say how you, how are you able to do some of that?

Rafael Navar 1:11:06

Sure, has done an amazing job of actually doing a corporate traditional corporate campaign, palantir, basically everywhere they showed at one point, but where the company was at so they'll sponsor at universities to try to recruit students to actually their company we actually put up massive art installations of essentially babies in cages, and that they are directly responsible so really making that the visual case and they've lost a lot of sponsorships University refused their sponsorships they've actually been losing money. We've actually seen that the problem here is they've lost some other clients that we've been able to move, but they're actually being sustained by the federal government, the federal government is actually expanding their services, that's where their primary and so it's been a difficult fight to get them, you know, removed or to get them to back off from their work but we've definitely seen some inroads and again the biggest piece is that raising consciousness and awareness of what palantir is what it does and how it's actually helping to jail babies and children here in the United States.

Akram Salhab 1:12:15

And I think that there's been some discussion in the UK about G4S accommodation. Now provided by Surco. And sometimes when the company is so large, it's difficult because you don't know where to begin in terms of challenging, but actually it also means that it's weak and in many different places and the potential for building solidarity in the weeds is much greater. So, yeah, I think, definitely some of those approaches would be relevant. And there's another question from Andy, who's asking. Much of the narrative set out by the right wing media and the Tory party's misleading hyperbolic or just plain false. Why isn't labour leadership doing more to challenge this, and I, I guess it was worth, you know, maybe this is one for you Belle is also working on contextualising how, you know, on the one hand, labour under Jeremy Corbyn was able to make huge advances and leaps forward in the kind of policies towards migrants, at the same time there's enormous pressure exerted by the media I remember seeing, Diane give one of her speeches on migration law into one of the papers you were delivering, and the first five questions were from the right wing media attacking her and she was slandered and misrepresented at every turn. So what kind of narratives and stories do we need be telling about, I guess class solidarity as part of it, that will be useful for this moment and how can you bring that to the fore. Interesting.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy 1:13:41

Firstly, one of the things I'm working as part of Diane's team before I became a member myself that we did in terms of shifting labor's attitude obviously the changing leadership at the time helped, but it wasn't just that it's sometimes you've just got to tell people, again and again and again until they get it. And I think part of the issue has been that when people try to make those positive cases about migration because of the backlash, they get they all of a sudden think they need to change tack, or you know, you know, think about a slightly different approach and that is the absolutely wrong thing to do. If you know that you're right about something you need to keep beating the drum about it as loudly as you can until you get to a place where others come along with you and I think, and when I spoke earlier describing what a change it was to get to labour party conference and be able to have a policy, that

passed by the entire conference unanimously that we would close down, immigration detention centres that's because by the time we got to there, you know, that members that may have, you know, voted slightly differently also said something slightly different, but we're confident that this was the direction of the party. And we're confident that it would have the backing of labour members across the country, and it's something that we could articulate and that we could defend and we just shouldn't I think bow down every time we hear a slightly negative comment and I think far too often with politics and politicians for both sides. That's what we do. You hear people saying things such as oh well. It's not that people are racist they're just really concerned you need to look at, you know, their concerns about how maybe their High Street has changed. Because there's a Polish deli or because they have more West African neighbours than they used to. And there's a cultural shift you need to look at the cultural issues, and why they might find that a problem that is always been always been the case that people have used the presence of migrants in a way to scapegoat them. And I think if we were, we did a lot more myth busting being clearer about what the situation is for migrants in this country not that they're necessarily getting everything that people say they are not that there's all this free housing available to people, not that they're taking away because that is a very key point of racism in itself when you see how it's played out the idea that to give somebody that looks like me something is taking away from somebody who is white. That's it. Any, any mentioned even to say something as simple as Black Lives Matter That idea is something that we need to break down, it's going to take education but mostly it's going to take the political will to stand fast against, you know, these far right populist ideals.

Akram Salhab 1:16:29

Yeah, And I think that's that's where the debate. You know, that's where I think from to mind the biggest advancements have been made because in the party views have shifted considerably that wasn't always the case. And a lot was done around education and you know you talk about the motion of the Labour Party conference, it was three or four other motions about internationalism about the causes of migration about anti racism that all tied into those same themes. At least the many party members had

a much clearer picture of what it was they were talking about and why migration wasn't just some dispensable position that could be written on a marble Ed stone or whatever it was but that actually it was central to our values of the party and i think i think that point of education is precisely. Yeah, really crucial one. And that's something we need to definitely build on going forward in the past. And that kind of links to what Sonali's asking here which is why oh why the UK left so resistant to centering anti racist struggle. And what can we do to redress this. You know, one of the, Yeah, you know one of the discussions we've had with, you know, actually organising unison, talking about building work there they say that you know of large number or section of our membership are Daily Mail readers. And it's actually you know different views within our unions, we need to work with a lot of our members around this kind of thing so what kind of could be some of the challenges that he faces.

Roger McKenzie 1:17:54

Well, I think we have got to get away from this idea that just because you're in a trade union that there's some how, some kind of rank and file socialists kind of ready for the revolution type thing I mean it's just not the case. You know people join unions for lots and lots of different reasons. And a lot of it is that they need some help and support in a workplace because they got a bad boss, but they often don't put that equate that across to activity within their union, and they don't often put that across to wider politics within you know wider society and stuff. And that's just that end of the equation. but I have to say something needs to be said about. Even some of our activists across the trade union movement because I am fed up actually of a lot of people who seem to be really comfortable with slogans. And really comfortable with just gestures. But when it comes down to actually doing something, they can't see that there any different. So for example we, there's politicians there's, you know there's trade unionists who will quite happily take a knee and say Black Lives Matters remember George Floyd and and all of that, right, they'll turn around and go back into the workplace and do some real harm to black workers, real harm. Right. So slogans. You have to separate off the sloganising. And, and, and what people say they're going to do and what people say they believe, you have to separate that off from

what actually happens. And I have to say, one of the reasons why for so many black workers at the moment the whole language around Black Lives Matters is so, so important is because our experiences to so many people whether they're inside the labour movement loads within the within our labour movement but also loads outside of the movement the evidence for us is that our lives don't matter. Right. And that's and that's the fact of it. So, we have to part of the organising, for me, is about shifting people, that's what you got to do so I mean you can, we can talk with people who agree with us forever. That mean that's great, right, it's really comfortable but it doesn't actually shift too many people unless those people we're talking about who actually agree with each other, go out and do something to shift somebody else that's the only thing that changes. So as an organiser, and we're all organisers on this call, we have to think about what is it that will shift somebody from A to B, right, whether they're in the trade union movement, whether they're in the Labour Party, Bell we'll have plenty of examples of people within the Labour Party who need needed to be shifted. When I was in the Labour Party black sections years ago we had to shift the whole party to even think about the idea that black people should have a voice within the Labour Party right when when we are looking at this, we cannot fall into the trap cannot fall into the trap of organisers of thinking that everybody is right on. And that everybody is on side, because the evidence is there not our job of organisers is to shift people, whether they claim to be progressive or socialist or whatever, right, we have to shift a load of people whose attitudes, frankly, sometimes and I'll put it really politely because I'm in polite company here, leads a lot to be desired, if I put it that way. Right. But I think I think there's work to be done within our movement for sure.

Akram Salhab 1:21:35

You know who I think one of the, I'll come to you next Rafael. I think one of the things that we've seen with Black Lives Matter is the pace at which awareness can be created. The difference from May to now is extraordinary. And that's come about through you know just pulling down statues in Bristol suddenly began this debate which people have been pushing advancing for years, but hadn't been

taken seriously in the way that we might have hoped. And I guess there's more structured ways of doing as well Rafael that you might be able to.

Rafael Navar 1:22:07

I can't agree more with what Roger said and I think it's the reason we are in this place in the US is because labour unions have been part of enforcing the white supremacy racist structure in this country, and even internally, not done enough to actually transform the consciousness of the workers within the union in an aggressive way, one of the things I was at begin CWA which is Communication Workers one of the most progressive unions in the country we endorsed Bernie. And I was there seven years and I developed the training programme precisely to actually combat one of the first pieces we had was both immigration and racial justice within our membership and I remember distinctly how, you know, we would have, people who were Trump supporters who came into the room why we're training Trump supporters, and because we finally were giving an analysis saying, you know, hey, it's not like you're taking jobs, it's not, you know, x, x, y, z, they would they and they actually gave them a real villain and the real villain was corporate power in america that's been exacerbating inequality in the country they're the ones driving the policies that are shipping jobs out that are destroying unions, etc. That was the transformative but it was a struggle. It was a struggle because a lot of members would literally I mean I have one activist who now is leading Black Lives Matters protests in the south in remote Southern part and he's a white working class person who was came in and he says the first day was kind of wanting to just throw the table over and reject what we were kind of arguing but you have to do. This is the unfortunate thing and Roger Williams said, you have to do the day to day work to actually have those conversations those trainings, it's not going to happen with, you know, one, a newsletter, it's not going to happen. It has to be deep organising a lot of folks, sometimes reject that as it's what's too It's not to scale it's too costly. But the reality is, I always see that as exponential growth because when you actually start to transform leaders within an organisation like labour, they have massive reach much more than anybody else and so those, they become the centres of resistance. And I think we're just it's

just, it's a painstaking slow birth work but if we don't do it we are going to have the situation where they're siding with right wing demagogues who actually going to destroy their jobs, quicker than anybody else was but they believe Trump is here to help them, because they see Mexicans as, our black folks as a problem and, and honestly I wouldn't when I said, I would if I was a white worker in the US. And I had not been, I would, I would hate Mexican's too frankly, because everything that they see in their entire reality is telling them these people are just here to take your jobs. And that's a it's a different narrative when we have to do that deep work.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy 1:24:58

And I'm just gonna add to that just following on from both Roger and Rafael that it has to be a very active thing, it's, it's too often, that people think because they have a certain type of values or other things, they're progressive they are on the left that they automatically get to call themselves an anti racist. I don't even think a black person who experiences racism automatically gets to call themselves an anti racist because you're not actively doing something to counter that racism and more so than anybody I think because we on the left hold these values true every single person on the left, black and white needs to stand up to the challenge and be actively doing something questioning their own behaviour. All of these things are very much learnt, learned behaviours things that have been brought to us by how society, behave and making a point to actively challenge them, it's not attending a march it's not hot voting for emotion is not just saying that you're anti racist saying that you know you've got black friends saying that you've got a black pass for black kids. It's an active thing that you have to do and you have to do it every single day.

Roger McKenzie 1:26:05

Can I just jump back in again, because that is so important what Belle's just said that we really can't lose that because that reminds me so much of that brilliant book that's been out recently it from X Kendi. Professor Ibrahim's X Kendi's book on how to be an anti racist. I think is, I think it's just so

important that people look at that and start challenging themselves because I just see too often across the labour movements in the Labour Party in the trade union movement where people just think they bought a pass, really, by saying, well, I'm in the Labour Party. I'm in the trade union, whichever trade union, it doesn't matter. And therefore, I cannot be an anti, how can I be racist. Right. And then, and then then, and then the evidence of their behaviour is somewhat different. Right. And, and I just think, you know Rafael's contribution around that training. It would be great if you could send us some of that training stuff right because we're looking to revamp in unison our training around anti racism around migrant workers stuff. We need to link up brother, and look at what we can do to to get some of that work done together. And that's exactly why events like this are so important because it puts people together and then we can start to get some work done and it's not just a talking shop because actually get some real solid work done together and so looking forward to working with you.

Rafael Navar 1:27:32

Likewise there's a lot to share. We actually specifically put Creative Commons, a lot of members of union trainings are like made, where you only members can access, we actually posted it online, we said we wanted anybody to use it, take it cut it up, do whatever you want with it that's how we're going to grow the movement we can't be restrictive. So absolutely, and I'm very excited to share that and and continue to have that discussion.

Akram Salhab 1:27:55

And I think that, you know, in the left and in society more broadly. A lot of the time is around migration that the discussion about race becomes legitimised, because people use it as a euphemism for something else, or even if they don't think of it as such they end up saying, you know, I'm not a racist but the legitimate concerns line of argument. And I think there's a way we can, as you have both Rafael, Roger and Belle spoken about understanding how people come to that conclusion without legitimising their position and saying this permissible within the within the something we have to accept

probably something that we have to challenge around migration. And that ties into the next question, and I bought five more minutes so that we can just get to this final one, which is what practical steps steps we take to shift public attitudes in a pro migrant direction, I guess, maybe Loup you have something you want to say on this one, because your experience of being in Calais is going to be quite starkly different to what most people in Britain, with very little knowledge or understanding and just read some of the right wing newspapers, understand about migration. What was it for you was some of the most Stark shocking things you saw or at least. What do you think are some of the important things that you tried to do as an artist to shift that public understanding of what takes place in the camps around migration.

Loup Blaster 1:29:26

Um, one thing I'd like to say about this is to people to not just to like humanitarian work, but try really to like go to talk to people and stuff because we have like a lot of volunteers who come to Calais for like a week or two and they just you know they distribute stuff, but we stay in this circle of like a very, like, I don't know, I don't have the word but like a circle of just like distribution. And as like an activist we want to fight for like making people more have more autonomy, because, for example, like, a few years ago between 2015 and 2016. In the jungle, people like cooked for themselves, and they could, like, there is some actions that I can like, give them more autonomy and more voice, but I think that the first thing is to go and talk with people and. And notice, like, and in like humanitarian doesn't. Sometimes it's not it's not enough. I think for for us like we need to see beyond like the emergency and to think about like political actions and things So, but like as an artist, I would say like, it's really yeah like just spending time with people and talking and enjoy and also enjoy small moments sharing music and anything that's, that's really humanising people like sometimes it's just creating a bubble and a place where we can share, just like church share a moment moments you know is sometimes also this necessary. I'd say,

Akram Salhab 1:31:19

Yeah, thanks so much the. One final thing is I've just shared a final link out to an organisation of funding hate to do kind of corporate challenging work you know it's always this question about what can we do about the media. It's a Fed accompli they're so dominant. Actually we think Rogers gonna go play rugby run over, and thanks so much for joining us. It's a fait accompli that we can't change the media but actually one of the campaigns stop funding hate work on it to try and get companies to withdraw their advertising in the in right wing publications and they've had a lot of successes in challenging them because you know not one way we can actually talk about just on the level of media narrative. What we can actually do about pushing, pushing back on them. And, but we've sadly run over our time so I'm going to have to draw to a close. Thank you everyone. Rafael Loup Belle Roger who's no longer here and all the technical team behind the scenes who really put together really smoothly and really sorry we kind of got a little cut short. And, but thank you all. Also, the attendees for joining us. And so, to continue to the discussion we've set up a dedicated space on the TWT community forum. So if you already set up your account you can click the link that should be posted in the chat now. And to find a relevant discussion thread to this event. And if you're registered for the festival check your email for the signup link to the forum. And remember that, there is loads of events at TWT 20 and that's coming up very quickly so be sure to register for anything you'd like to attend as quickly as possible. And you can make sure you've registered for the festival at The World transformed org forward slash register and then go to the individual when you'd like to register for the programme. And just a reminder from the, what I was saying at the start is. If you've enjoyed the session, and would like to work, help maintain to support TWT's work during the festival and beyond, please go to www dot the world transformed org forward slash support and consider supporting the world transformed and to find links I sent earlier there's a day of action. October link will go around one more time, please consider joining, there's a really good chance we can build a strong weekend of events and action that will be really influential and part of that work is built around this firm charter big list of organisations and groups and individuals, struggling to overturn immigration policy in the fullest sense, including its

colonial and its Imperial roots. And that should also be being sent around. Now as well. So please consider taking action from this event, and hopefully the speakers and everything is spoken about and everything that comes today will give you some ideas and inspiration for how to go forward. Thank you very much for joining.