

## Building a transatlantic strategy

Joe Guinan 0:40

Hello, good evening everyone, let's get started. Welcome to TWT 2020, and to the session. Building a transatlantic strategy, what have we learned from the last five years. Thank you for joining us for this discussion on a Friday evening, or if like myself in Canada or the United States, Friday afternoon. My name is Joe Guinan. I've got the pleasure of being the moderator for tonight's session. I'm the Vice President of the democracy collaborative, which is a US think tank working on building the democratic economy, and I'm joining you from Washington DC. We've been very pleased to partner with TWT for the past few years, so feel free to visit our virtual stall on the TWT website if you want to know more about us. Before I introduce the session and the speakers tonight, I've been asked to share just a few announcements with you. First, to make the session more accessible, we'll be using a live transcription service called Otter, attendees using Otter will have to follow a link and open the transcript as a separate window. The link will be shared at the chat box by a volunteer. And if you're having any difficulties with that please do message the tech volunteer on the chat. Secondly, as I'm sure many of you are already aware TWT is free for all. But it's only made possible by the contributions of supporters. So if you are able to, please do consider supporting TWT at the [World transformed.org/support](https://worldtransformed.org/support) to help them sustain their important work all year round. Lastly, we just wanted to mention a few principles for the chat. We want everyone to feel welcome in these spaces for everyone's voices to be heard. So please do bear this in mind when you're engaging with chat. Please don't use inappropriate rude or unkind language. And please don't spam. Any participants who stray from these principles may be prevented from further posting in the chat comment box, but lets all make sure that that doesn't need to happen tonight. If you have a question or a comment to one of the speakers on the panel do fire away so we can include them in the question and answer session that we're going to have towards the end of the. So, now to begin. We're here to talk about the experience of the last five years in the United Kingdom and in the United States, to talk about the lessons that we've learned, the long term political strategy and how we bring about socialist change. That might seem a bit daunting at the moment. And given the overall outlook of the balance of forces that we're facing, defeat first of the quarter project, and then at the Sanders campaign. And then what seems like since to have been piling on of multiple overlapping crises, the COVID pandemic, exploding racial injustice, climate change. Given all of this, how do things stand for the left? What have we learned? any what is the way forward? One friend who saw the panel title was reminded of the apocryphal traveller in the Irish countryside who stopped to give directions and was told- "Well, I wouldn't start from here. But here is where we are." There are important lessons that we can draw from the experience in the past few years. You all doubtless have heard that Lenin

quote about there being decades when nothing happens and then decades where everything happens. The last few years and certainly felt like the latter went from a situation in which there was horizontalist organising and a shunning of traditional electoral politics as the norm, to suddenly find ourselves in a position with Corbynism and Sandersism, where a new generation of the left and some older generations flooded back into electoral politics. It was an audacious bet to take hold of not just traditional political parties- the Labour Party and the Democrats- but also to seize state power and bring about radical transformative political economic change. And for a moment like previous occasions when the US and the UK have moved in tandem like Thatcher and Reagan, with a third way of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. It seemed that there might be an opportunity to move in tandem once again on both sides of the Atlantic, this time in the direction of a new economic settlement built on democracy and on a new green deal. It wasn't to be, on both sides of the Atlantic these efforts have run into the sand. So what do we learn from this experience, and from the fact that we ultimately failed. Where did we make advances, where did we fall short. What might we have done differently. What might we face if we had in fact succeeded. Most importantly of all, how do we now move forward. Are we doomed to oscillate between horizontalism and electoralism, or might it be a synthesis? Where does the experience of the last five years leave us? To discuss all of this tonight we're fortunate to be joined by a brilliant panel of speakers. Mary Robertson, Kali Akuno, Laura Smith, and Richard Seymour. Let me introduce you.

Mary Robertson served as a senior policy officer at the TUC, and prior to that was head of economic policy at the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn. In 2015, it was somewhat unclear what a local Labour government might do if it actually achieved state power. But Mary is one of the people who, as much as anyone else, did so much to change that in the intervening period helping develop a radical economic programme which is probably the most advanced of any in the advanced industrial world. It was truly extraordinary to be able to go to the office of the leader of the opposition and encounter a socialist thinker, an economist of her calibre. She's a great friend and I look forward to hearing her insights from the vantage point she had deep at the heart of the Corbyn project. Next is Kali Akuno, Executive Director of cooperation Jackson, and a star of previous years of world transformed where he talked with us about radical municipalism, how he knows a thing or two about moving forward under politically difficult circumstances given his grassroots work to bring about radical economic change of black empowerment to Jackson, Mississippi, surrounded by a sea of white supremacy patriarchy and racialized state violence. The last time I met Kali, was in our collaborative officers here in Washington, when he came to talk about a book that he co-edited, Jackson rising: the struggle for economic democracy and black self determination in Jackson,

Mississippi, which is highly recommended. And we're looking forward to hearing Kelly's views of the current state of the US left of the great struggles now underway and still are. Then there's Laura Smith, former member of parliament for Crewe and Nantwich from 2017 to 2019, and hopefully I daresay, a future MP as well. Laura's a former primary school teacher and longtime activist, and one of those voices that we probably have done well to have listened to, to give us all the warnings that she gave us as to what was to come in the so called Red Wall seats of a Brexit. She's now a counsellor in Crewe South, that contributed to Tribune magazine, and is working on a number of important initiatives including not holding back with John Trickett MP, and also efforts on political education in working class communities together with me and some other colleagues. On a previous occasion at the world transformed she famously used the platform to call for a general strike so the bar has been set pretty high tonight and I'm really looking forward to hearing what she has to say. Last but not least is Richard Seymour. Richard well known to this audience as a writer and author and an indecently political author, who has just brought out book after book in recent years. He reminds me of what the late great medical journalist Alexander Coburn used to say himself which was that he is "faster than anyone better, and better than anyone faster". Richard's been a really important voice of the transatlantic left writing an early book on corbynism: Corbyn, The rebirth of radical politics, and contributing a steady flow of forthright and insightful journalism and commentary. He's founder of the journal Salvage, which when it launched seemed to have a somewhat pessimistic and dismal title given the explosion of hope that was to come, but now seems president, and we're very fortunate to have Richard with us to send through the wreckage of the recent past and the present moment, tonight. So without further ado, we'll go to our panel for opening remarks from each of them, no more than 10 minutes each, and then we'll have some time for discussion, and questions from all of you, Mary, please kick us off.

Mary Robertson 8:45

Thanks very much. Thanks to TWT for organising the event of having me stop by to say a few words about the nature of the defeat, because what lessons we learn depends on what we think just happened. Not just in the election result, but over the last five years. There's a version of events that says that losing the election was a failure- sure, but we succeeded in shifting the debate and pushing the Labour party to the left. I kind of want to be upfront in that, that's not the position I'm coming from. I thinking leaving aside the question of whether the debate really has shift, if we're honest about what was the goal at the time, what we thought we were doing here with socialism, then we

have failed. Not just because we lost the election, that because socialism feels as foreign right now, as it did in early 2015.

So, why what went wrong?

At Joe's request, I'm kind of stepping back here, to take an overview here and I'll point to three main lessons. So first of all, I think we surrendered to conventional politics far too much, especially after the general election in 2017. We can see this in a number of ways we turned inward to Westminster to playing parliamentary games around Brexit in kind of winter 2018/19, we put the polite democracy on the back burner and sort of repeated reconciliations with hostile means of the PLP. We put narrow electoral considerations ahead of basic solidarity, for example in relation to immigration, and ultimately our strategy collapsed into winning elections. So, there was no strategy beyond winning the elections. And then in 2019, we proved not very good at that kind of electoral politics, which we saw in a chaotic campaign for non-existent messaging agenda; failure to understand and compare for what had changed between 2017 and 2019. All of these things, I think, I don't want to rehash those electoral lessons because I don't think that they're most important, but I think they will point to the fact that we were far more confident about what we were setting out there, and how we were setting it. Second then, to sort of elaborate on that, second lesson is, I think, a huge over-reliance on policy. I think Joe was very kind and generous about what we achieved in terms of policy development over the last five years, and I think he is right to point to the development of that programme as one of our collective achievements as a kind of academic economist prior to working for Jeremy, doing a lot of work on neoliberalism. I spent zero time thinking about what our alternatives were and so we've put together a very substantial developed contents and very quickly. However, I think one of the key learned lessons has to be good unpopular policies aren't enough, and that was clear from the election result. But I think it's also got enduring significance insofar as essentially I'm sceptical of the significance of claims that we run the argument or we're the ones with all the ideas. Basically, because I don't think politics is about arguments. It's about power and strength. If we sifted the debate, which we did it is very interesting, is because we were seen as a threat, not because our ideas were compelling. If we want our ideas to continue to have a bearing, continue to influence politics in this country, we need to build pressure from below demonstrate strength, not the strength of our arguments, but the strength of our movement. And that leads to I think is the most important lesson, which is really in the criminal neglect of movement building, and our overall strategy and failure to realise that if you are engaged in the project which

as I said I think we were, of trying to build socialism through a conventional political party, you can't do it through conventional political means, and that there are a number of reasons why this is the case. First of all, electorally when you think of questions about how do you come and overcome an incredibly hostile right wing press your answer, can't simply they have better messaging or something like that. It needs to be about building trust having a different strategy, doesn't just rely on the press building trust and relationships in areas where you want people to vote for you, through sustained periods of solidarity building. I think movement building should have been just as strategically important. Indeed, how do you sustain a government- a radical government- once you're in power? To illustrate this, I think it's quite an entertaining exercise to think about how many coups there might have been, if Jeremy, had done what Johnson has done as PM since December. The serious point in that being, when if needed a strategy to rebut that, we would have needed our own forces to overcome the enormous pressure that we would have been under had we won in December 19 and Joe and Christine Berry's book: 'People get ready', is extremely good at setting this out in more detail than I have time to here, so I just refer and encourage people to read that.

Finally what I think is less discussed, not finally actually, but what I think is less discussed is the importance of movement building to implement in our programme, so the policy programme is often dismissed as kind of bog standard social democracy. And I think, on the surface it is. But what this interpretation misses is, excuse my language, but the transformative dialectic that was contained within it. What do I mean by this? So many of the policies in our programme nationalisation, industrial strategy of the scale of intervention that we were proposing, especially in 2019, community wealth building. All of these and more, would involve significant disruptions of the economic model. When you're pursuing pathways that disrupt the current economic model, what emerges in this place, it's really dependent on what there is to build on. And this is where I think movement building will have come into it play. So take economic democracy, as an example, economic democracy was very central to our programme. It's transformative. It's not just something, you know, with a stroke of a civil servant depending you implement it. The very idea is to remake people as agents reform our collective identities. And in doing so, shift how power works in society. But one of these characteristics is working with democracy, which is why we wanted it to be central to our programme, why we made it central to our programme also made it very difficult to meaningfully implement from Westminster, from the top. It would have required having strong foundations of collective activity, as a starting point. And finally, the other reason why movement building is important, is. I think the absence of a strong grassroots movement has hindered the ability of the left to be a group and continue to have influence, since the election. So where does this

leave us? So that's my main conclusion really that all we can usefully do right now is to organise in our workplaces, union, branches, communities, and the useful thing about that is it's true wherever your assessment of what the successes or failures of the project were what the original goals of the project were. Whether it was wise or not to attempt to issue socialism through the Labour Party and so on and so forth, what we should be doing right now is organising a grassroots level. There's lots of questions and challenges around our strategy in relation to this distribution of access across the country, the role of local councils etc etc, but a crucial one- and one we I think we shouldn't be discussing in this session is understanding why movement building was so weak in the last five years. I think part of the answer to that is that we were spoiled under Jeremy and John, who's instinct was very much to adopt to campaign demands and then some. I think the conventional role for advisors such as I was, is to be sent into meetings with stakeholders and activists smile and nod, and find a way to par them off. What we were told repeatedly was find a way to do it. And that's, that's great. That was exciting. But it also sort of excused us from the hard work of movement building and demand campaigning and developing our grassroots strength. I think an honest assessment would also say that the project had a very top down character, there was more emphasis on loyalty, than there was an empowerment. And there were good reasons why this was the case, a characteristic of neoliberalism is the crushed institutions and the squeezed space for collective action and resistance. And this created a long term feeling of powerlessness disenfranchisement. That meant that we often, I think regulated or stifled our own criticism, because we didn't want to jeopardise or felt like our one shot at changing things. But it was also a fatal flaw, you know, for a movement in a project, which is for rebalancing power was meant to be our main aim. Deferring the rebalances of power, I think just doesn't work, and it led to activists shutting up. When, in hindsight, they often have better instincts than those making the decisions, it also meant that we didn't entrench much grassroots power which again is weakened us now. Finally, I think it's led to an enduring, and frankly unhealthy lack of a culture of widespread debate about substantive issues, and lack of a culture of healthy constructive criticism. Now you might be you can't have a healthy movement without widespread political education, understanding, an agency, and in places that we've got quite unhealthy culture in which a few individual commentators often act intellectual arbiters or great gatekeeper, often frankly don't respond well to criticism and have a vested material interest in maintaining that position. So as well as returning to local activism, grassroots activism. I think we need to think seriously about how to democratise debate and ideas formation, within our movement. One of the lessons about branding needs to be to have fewer former Westminster advisors speaking on panels, so that's a good time for me to shut up. Thank you.

Joe Guinan 19:43

Thank you Mary, thanks for taking the time. Lots to dig into there. But before we do, we're going to switch gears and move across the Atlantic to Kali Akuno to give us the view of life in the United States, Kali.

Kali Akuno 19:58

Well, I want to thank Mary for this kind of jumping into it. There was a lot there that I really appreciate and definitely want to hear more of and make a couple of points. But let me just jump into my perspective so folks know where I'm coming from. In offering my comments and giving you a perspective. Number one, I always maintain and continue to maintain that working class and oppressed people have to build their own political organisations and institutions. And we have to represent ourselves in any and every arena of political struggle. The Electoral arena being one, and that we should have our own partisan institution and this is particularly different than I think historically might play out on the other side of the Atlantic. Where in the Labour Party, they kind of had some of that orientation in its history. I think it's been somewhat from my view, is part of I think what happened to defeat someone captured by more middle forces who definitely tried to steer their party in a neoliberal direction, and I'm giving you that contrast to say that I think one of the biggest errors, made in particular by Bernie Sanders was running under the banner of the Democratic Party. I know I may be one of the few folks who you might listen to, who might hold this particular view. Most folks have articulated that if he hadn't won under that banner that he would have had probably no chance of becoming president. But I think it misses the point of what marriage is really illustrated. Are we in this to try to usher in a set of broad kind of populist reforms to the Democratic Party and institutions? Or are we in this to movement build? Because how you answer that leads you to different directions and different interpretations of what your programming strategy might be. I think before looking for to understand- put it this way to understand the last five years, and in this experiment. You really have to go back into the United States, a bit further, I think you'd have to really start this question with the financial collapse that happened in 2008 and then the four years it took to build viable social movements in response. So there was a union upsurge many folks might remember what happened in Wisconsin. Then there was the the Occupy movement, which was also a transatlantic, global movement first starting in Europe, you know, with some of the work that was being done in Greece, in Spain with the indignados and then kind of hopping over the water and taking on an even broader international kind of characteristic from Occupy Wall Street. And then you have to look at some of the other movements that emerge. Like

the movement for Black Lives, in other things intervention, particularly some of the different things from indigenous folks both in Canada but also in the United States, died in a more movement. These were the things that put the wind in the sails of Bernie's campaign and gave you this movement character, leading up to 2016. The campaign. this go around the 2019 2020 campaign, really did not have that movement orientation like the first one. And you can look at a number of different things in terms of how the Times have changed how the elements have went from initial kind of thrust in, in 2016, have been able to come in and usher in a kind of a populist social democratic programme to one which was much more defensive in nature, which had to do with primarily kind of getting out Trump. And I think if we look at that we see that large elements of the kind of movement character what Bernie was building was attempting to build an a force behind him, rally into, you see a major contrast between 2016 and 2020, in terms of the campaign. In this piece around that and I think is most critical from, from my perspective is that the United States the elements of being able to try to move anything towards socialism is only really going to come from concentrated power from below. And that power is well beyond the means of the traditional political force that exists within the United States. And let me tell you why.

Now there's a there's a long standing relationship between the labour unions, particularly the AFL CIO and the Democratic party. That alliance has critically been weakened by just the progression of events in the United States over the past 50 years, so much so that by any good estimate organised labour in the trade unions, only represent somewhere between 10 and 12% of the workforce in the United States, which means it close to 90% of working class people are not in any formal organisation. That is represented within the trade union Federation. So the trade unions federation to be able to kind of say it represents a broader kind of working class perspective for a broader working class membership and base in the United States is extremely limited and has been for some time. And so, they have also been basically surrendered because they don't have the power from the below to really push into the institutional framework, what you have more within the United States now is a is a sector of, kind of a social movement one which is embedded in kind of the nonprofit organising infrastructure and the growing part, which I think speaks more to the horizontalism that was in question, which is outside of kind of their framework and institution which is the dominant thing that I would argue. We are seeing in the United States today in places like Portland or Seattle or Oakland or Atlanta or DC or New York, like that dimension is what is really kind of appearing today and it's drawing in the most energy, the most dynamism is pushing and challenging the question, but it's totally disconnected. In domain, from the more organised traditional sector rather than nonprofits. Now, if we really want to move some things in this, in this country and I was saying from

what are from very articulating. Getting back to the movement, building orientation as the enemy of our focusing industry towards bringing forth the socialist agenda in programme. That has to be our focus, I would argue, and that means de emphasising and this may sound a bit crazy, but we can talk about that in a bit in light of, you know the kind of what I call the Jacksonian challenge that Trump really represents. It means doing the organising and base building work without the kind of the trappings of electoral fetishism which dominate so much of the political landscape in the United States around two year and four year cycles are really prohibit in many respects, long term strategy long term perspective building long term organising. And that is ultimately what we're going to have to get into. If we're going to be able to challenge the growing strength of the right here in the United States but also internationally. They would have to argue even though they don't necessarily represent the numbers that I think that our side of the equation, ultimately represents, but we have to be honest that we are being seriously out organised in almost every facet that you can look at in terms of education, in terms of institutions being built in terms of effective strategies, which are multi layered and reach different sectors of their base in the population. And we have to go back to our organising roots. And we have to do so on the basis of trying to meet folks material needs in the here and now. And that includes from our perspective, from my perspective, doing the critical economic development work on a grassroots level and building the real alternatives that not only build elements of democracy and democratic private practice and democratic subjects in our community, but actually tend to some of the concrete needs that folks have an argument, at least for housing for food security for a level of job security income and increasingly more education and healthcare those things becoming either inaccessible or more and more privatised. And these are the things that we have to get back into and I think one of the things that we've been advancing democracy collaborative has also been advancing this on both sides is really looking at this notion of organising ourselves, organising the working class itself in oppressed peoples on the grassroots level, utilise our own resources skills, energy and strength to build our capacity to do this type of development work which is not just only in the economic realm. But also, definitely in the political realm where we start. I would argue off with the radical kind of political projects that we need to do. And then looking from there, building solid basis, develop strategies where we can look more often in terms of in the United States context, statewide then regional wide, then nationally. That is the critical direction that I think we need to go with and I think it was in many respects, from the perspective of success and failure, when I look at it that way. It was a, he was a mistake for Bernie and a lot of the folks in that camp to try to replicate in 2020, what they did in 2016, when it was very clear that the DNC and the institution of course the Democratic Party were not going to allow Bernie to get anywhere close to securing the nomination. Again, we saw that represented in the broad

nature of the field, that was posed against him from the beginning. And then we didn't we certainly can speak to what I said on my time was wrapping up the way in which people were saying that in March. Bernie made a comeback. That is the absolute wrong analysis he had all of the institutional support that he needed to kind of carry the day and move the election that was pretty much kind of baked in. But now I think the question is, what's the historic mission of the Democratic Party fulfilled in March, I would argue that it is to a large degree, and that this makes the question of the Biden Harris ticket, being able to win kind of the national election and puts it seriously into jeopardy because they have articulated a petition, which does not speak for in a programme, but it does not at all speak to the base if you just look at the green New Deal, or . universal health care, and now, defunding the police. They've all categorically rejected that, and therefore I think rejecting the base, turning out and saying that the the only atom is, and all the reason why folks should turn out is because he's not the other guy he's not Trump, that's not going to be enough. I'll stop there so we can open it up another time. Im sure there will be more questions later but that just to give everybody a kind of an opening field to what I know we have to dive in deep and have a lot of debate discussion about.

Joe Guinan 32:30

Thank you, Kali, so much there and I think we're already getting a sense of not just similarities but differences in the challenges that we face, the union density I think is a really important one, there's still something like a quarter of the labour force in the UK. It's really down to 6% in the private sector. And that's a different basis institutionally for politics so we could dig into some of that into the discussion. Next we'd like to, to turn to Laura, the counsellor for Crewe and Nantwich, Laura.

Laura Smith 32:59

Thank you Joe and while I pretty much ripped up everything I was going to say because it's been said, far better than I would be saying, both by Mary and Kali, I think you might have posed the question to me, "what have I learned in the last five years?" I have learned so so much, I continue to learn so much. I trust no one else one thing that I've definitely learned over the last five years. And, but look, I think one of the things that was successful was the mass membership that was built up. And you know, we saw it with Jerem, we saw it with Bernie, and they managed to kind of switch something on in people, in a lot of people who felt politically homeless, but I think where it was a success, we also failed because what we failed to do and everybody on the left has to take

responsibility for this really, is developed that political education that was desperately needed, and that kind of studying and the theory behind the things that we want to see and the reason why we want to, we want to see it. And I think it's a real shame and that's what we need to change this time as we move forward. Because the movement here kind of really got going at the time of the financial crash. We saw it building up then we had the Jeremy campaign. And there were lots of different organisations that were really kind of doing so much all over the country, and then Mary's right, Jeremy became the leader nobody was really expecting it. And I think a lot of people kind of thought, well, that's job done. And I think that's one of the things that I've definitely learned and I've obviously seen this from both sides have been having been a member of parliament. We can't rely on parliament to deliver what we want, we just simply cannot and I will go into a bit more detail about that. And what else is positive, look now I'm proud to stand up and say that I am a socialist with socialist values, isn't that long ago that if you said that in a, in a Crewe and Nantwich Labour Party we said, we just wouldn't say you kind of sit in the shadows and keep fairly quiet about that. And so that's positive and these people who want to change, need change, who was so behind Jeremy and the movement at the start, they are still there. And yes, people have rightly feeling really pissed off about the whole situation, but it's up to us we have to find a way to be able to ignite people again, to be able to reignite that spark, because we have to we have to there is no alternative. As far as, as far as I'm concerned, we have to figure it out. So yeah, I think one of the key things that we have to do moving forward is develop that political education. I think also like Mary said not relying on just a small group of people who think that they're really clever and know everything we need to hear working class voices, and we need to make sure that when people feel empowered to be able to be part of that discussion to leave that discussion because actually you can have a parliament filled with the brightest sparks in the whole country, and they absolutely mess, the whole thing up as we see time and time again. And for me being able to get into parliament, it was something that I could never have imagined that I've said this so many times, because I'm a working class person, I'm a primary school teacher, I grown up in poverty in a household with, you know, where we just wouldn't, we would just never have thought something like that happened to me, I managed to get in there and yes it didn't last very long, I was kicked out sort of two and a half years later. But still, parliament is part of it and the way that our system works in this country currently we can't ignore parliament. So, yes, electorally, it does play a part in it. Who we have as representatives does play a part, but for me the biggest thing that I have learned is that it's not the key. You can have plenty of people in Parliament with decent socialist values and I do believe that there are some benefits. But what can they actually achieve? And you can go out and make an incredible story speech in Parliament, but how does that actually impact the lives of the working

person or the person who's struggling in the community, and it's not through anybody, any fault of their own it is the way the system works because parliament is designed to suck your energy, and those people watching parliament, their energy into something that will stop them from organising in a grassroots way, stop them from going out campaigning and speaking to people. And I think this is where the trade unions are going to play such an incredible, such an important part and yes, we're not in the same place we have been we are seeing, we have seen numbers grow recently but we know the trade unions also have many issues that have been going on but if we're going to speak to working people if we're going to organise and empower working people, then the trade unions are really essential in that. And for me, why is the political education side of it so important. I don't think there's a better example actually than the massive mess that was Brexit in the Labour party here, and me, when I entered parliament, I'll be honest with you I started in a place that was completely different with Brexit to where I ended up, in my own head. But why is that, its because I did an awful lot of reading, I wasn't an expert but I made sure I represented people and I made sure that I had the debates, I asked the questions. I did the research so that I really understood how I could fund socialism in the way that I voted, in the direction I was pushing. And the fact is an awful lot of people who are in Parliament don't look at things in that level of depth, and I think we have to demand that out the people who are in Parliament and we can only do that by developing our own political education. And so yeah, I think we need to be looking at how we can develop book clubs, podcasts how we make all these things accessible really kind of go bac. And I think that's the other thing that we were going to have to accept it is going to take an awful lot of work this there isn't a quick fix to it. We want to take calls with an entire system. And we saw Jeremy as a huge opportunity, but it was, you know, I don't know, we weren't ready for it at the same time we just weren't as an organisation, ready for the things that were thrown up by of course it's a system that is designed to make sure that capitalism stays very much and leading the way. Now I think that movement, we started out boldly, we've tapped into a lot of policies, a lot of policies have been developed, but we've got to put the groundwork here again to make people in the public understand why these policies will impact their lives so we need to in a positive way, we need to make it so that somebody at home is sitting there going, you know what, they are absolutely right about a four day week and that should be, that that just makes sense, but we haven't done that yet. And we're going to have to if we're going to get people onside and again that's where this organising the political education, making sure we're deep rooted in our communities that we want to represent, that's where this all comes about. And, you know, we just can't expect people to just come on board with our ideas when they have had for so long, they've got press that is pushing a certain agenda at them as well. And, you know, this has been drip fed for such a long time, we are going to have to find the route to

navigate so that we have our voices heard in it, and you can't just rely on politicians to do that you simply can't. And let's face it, all the left has changed the way that people feel about prejudice, about personal identity, and it has to an extent, expose capitalism's cruelties in those areas. What we failed to change fundamentally and I think this is key, is how wealth of work function in society. We've not really managed to provide a compelling vision and how that should be done. And the left ensure we haven't solved an economic policy that people have been able to get, get on board with. I think if we can do that, then we can win because at the moment privatisation, deregulation, lower taxes, businesses, more power for the employers and the shareholders and less powerful workers, this is all stuff that a lot of people in the public just accept as being inevitable almost, and there of course has been an immense effort to make sure that capitalism appears inevitable and unchangeable, and we have to make sure that we are reaching out but in the same amount of effort into changing people's perception of that and sort of look at things. You know, we've got to take people on that journey workers are going to be experiencing some of the most toughest, most horrible situations coming up, due to what we're seeing across the globe. I hate to even imagine how desperate the situation for people is going to become. And we have to be there with an alternative vision, because, let's not beat around the bush why you want to the biggest reason this has happened is because capitalism cannot look after people you know, it cannot prioritise the health well being of people over over profit and its shareholders and wealth. And so, yeah, I'm not going to speak with too much longer because I want to kind of allow the questions. But yeah, in the in kind of summary. Don't rely on politicians to have the answers, because then they won't. I think we've seen in this in this country and in the states as well, with the Black Lives Matter movement, we've seen it with some of the child food poverty campaigns over here. When the public get behind something and they demand change. That is what makes politicians change, because inevitably when politicians are getting bombarded, left, right and centre and they become very unpopular. They don't particularly like that. So it's up to, if we can get the public to realise the power that they have. And that, I think, you know, and that they can drive change but it is hard, it is a struggle. Then we can kind of move this forward, and we have to just accept where we are too and it's really hard. I find it, you know, day to day is a journey of how I'm feeling because it's a huge disappointment, where we are now, compared to where we were in 2017, when when I was elected, but. As the old saying goes, we are where we are. What else have I learned in the last five years? Well I learned that calling for a general strike at a fringe event, will cause a meltdown, and the vein in Tom Watson's head to practically pop my screen. I've also learned that my facial expressions have caused me masses of problems, so I've been working on trying not to give too much away my face, and fighting for socialism will mess up your life, in many ways, but this is the struggle and we have to, we, we have

to stick together and keep going. There is no other choice, basically, it is either do that or give up, and curl up and let these bastards win. And I for one certainly won't be doing that. Thank you.

Joe Guinan 45:30

Thank you so much, Laura we certainly wouldn't want the vein to pop in Tom Watson's head. Thank you for your words about politicians, we can spend to say that we all want a lot more politicians like you in the mix and I think the political education pipe is really important, as part of closing the gap between that programme that Mary was talking about that we've developed and people being able to see the real material interest reflected in it and we failed in the two electoral tests in which we tried to do this on both sides of the Atlantic so lots to dig into there. But before we do that, let's go to my final panellist Richard Seymour, Richard.

Richard Seymour 46:06

So, I think a defeat can be an underrated experience. It can be quite enriching in some ways. In particular, the longer you go on powered by hubris without attending to your fundamental service, the longer people can believe that those weaknesses don't exist. The longer they are exacerbated, the worse the ultimate strategy to be, will be. So we should take the defeat as an opportunity, first of all to destroy our illusions, before I go on to, you know what, what resolutions might be, from my perspective, I do want to say, I think it's important to register the left has made some progress since 2015. It inherited an enormous weakness in his organisation to which, there wasn't really much organisation to speak of. Certainly, the liberal left didn't seem to have much of an organised presence in national political life. It was hard to believe the political left even existed at that time or the extra labour left was organised in schools that were falling apart. There were very few publications that registered or made a difference. There were a handful of articles about people who you know necessarily would be pulled somewhat over to the right by the surrounding culture. So there weren't many organic intellectuals, as Gramsci would say. There was very little in terms of a sustained media presence, and there was also, it has to be said very little social depth in the labour movement, which, although it's not in as policy condition as the United States has been losing density and activity, year on year. What I mean is, you know it's, you know, it's very good that we have such strong union representation in the public sector, but the problem there is that nine out of 10 private sector workplaces, never see shop steward, let alone a picket line. So that matters to people's consciousness as to how people have standard politics, they may have a sense of their own

class position but without some sort of organised force that can give them, that can subjectify them and give them a sense of their role in politics then nothing will come of that. So that was a huge instance. And as you said that some of those instances have been improved on. I don't think the position of trade unions has improved except in regard to internal liberal party politics.

But nonetheless, we have more publications, we have the world transformed, we have momentum. We have some fairly successful organisations like Nevara which has exploded in recent years. You know I don't want to exaggerate all this, but these are real, real organisational forces that matter for us. They're all material to work with to some extent. So what's the number one lesson that I would say we've learned from all this? Because we've made more progress in the last five years than we have previously notwithstanding that we experienced a huge momentous defeat. First of all parties matter, Vanguardism is avoidable, I'm sorry to use the Leninist idiom but actually it's not really even a Leninist appointment. Rodrigo Nunes, his book about social movements and networks talks about this. And to some extent you know wherever you have an organising or you have a small group of people, a minority, taking the initiative and setting priorities, and that's just unavoidable, actually seem to work quite well. The anti party prejudice, notwithstanding the fact that labour is not necessarily the best example functioning party, there's all sorts of problems. However, parties can be quite useful, the anti party prejudice that we inherited from the end of the Cold War. I think was misplaced. However, the fact that, you know- we see this as a kind of contrary top down organising given what we've heard about the necessity of grassroots organising. I'm not against top down organising at all. The problem there is however, it can, let's say, lead to certain forms of substitutions. What I mean by that is small groups of people, imagining that they act on behalf of the wider movement, and thus the wider costs, the attendance, or whatever. And that could lend itself to all sorts of hubris. Another thing is the brand matter, not standing up to political currents abroad. The Labour brand is still incredibly powerful, much more so than I would have expected because I remember campaigning in 2019 with people who, you know- young people, I don't mean to sound like an old fart, but young people wearing labour badges and hats and scarves and being really proud of it. When I was being politicised as a student, no young person would have touched the Labour Party. It was something to be regarded as yeah okay get them in, you know, but, you know, nobody would want to identify with them that way, and certainly after that is gone so the liberal brand still remains surprisingly powerful. That said, potential for a rupture was missed. Obviously, since 2014, the scholarship dependence referendum, Corbyn's leadership victory, Brexit result of the 2017 General Election, there's been evidence or gathering forces towards some sort of political rupture in the United Kingdom. That rupture was missed by the left. That's the great tragedy, we will not be

able to shape it in the direction we wanted. And so therefore it has been won by the forces or what I'm calling disaster national, sort of death wish right. But, why, why did the right seize the initiative on this, more than the left did. I think Labour economists of traditional labour economists have actually won the day here, leading to innovation and passivity on a number of prominent and important issues, I think it's significant that it we can think of the issues where Jeremy Corbyn and his allies, the leadership was deemed ideologically the weakest- Scotland, anti-semitism, police, free movement, all that stuff. You know there were the least likely to take an aggressive combative stance, those are issues that have to do with the state nation and race, traditionally areas where labour has been weakened where the UK left I think had quite an inability to recognise the Brexit, in whatever complex ways, condensed issues that were class issues, constitutional issues or class issues, doesn't matter whether you're leave or remain, I don't pretend they're any simpler answers that but when Jeremy Corbyn was putting out leaflets saying 'lets bring the country together', the country didn't want to come together. That was a completely the wrong message to send, but it reflected the hope that all of these divisive issues that were orthogonal to the traditionally perceived left/right divide could be sort of shunted aside, marginalised, so we wouldn't have to fight through them, we wouldn't have to fight. For example, in the case of anti semitism allegations for full complexity of the truth. I'm not saying, you know, just by decree labor's name against the absurd charges of course I'm saying, the two concrete realities of the situation, including an element of acknowledgement that yes there are there are some forces of anti-semitism existing on the left, even they dont characterise the majority, and so on. Okay.

There's another problem here, which is that we've had faith in leaps, it's one thing to take a leap of faith, but because so much of what happened to the left in the last few years, happened seemingly out of nowhere, and we formed quick, contingent analyses of you know why that all happened, these analyses of course quickly went out of date because conditions change. But when you don't understand, you know, why these things are happening, you only have a dim intuition, it can appear almost miraculous. So we developed a faith where we can take sudden leaps and that led to a certain hubris. I think we also overestimated the salience of the number of members that we have to, again, provocatively site Lenin 'the better few are the better sometimes', because the majority of membership, I'm not saying we should want to get rid of them, I'm saying the majority of the messaging membership was mostly passive, not doctrinally to the left, looking to the left, but not, you know, educated or indoctrinated in that way, particularly, broadly speaking, there was very little effort to politically educate the mass of the membership. There was a low quality of discussion on key issues like Brexit, for example, and that contributed to some of the defeats of the membership,

particularly on membership democracy. And that's important, given that the membership the, you know, the majority of the Corbyn membership was is his large base, it was his biggest strength. When he couldn't rely on that, well, naturally he relied on more conservative trade union bureaucrats. Class powerlessness, you know, for the active minority members being defeated and losing the battle of membership democracy, led to some hubristic backlash I think some of that was visible in 2019 conference. You know I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't have bought the green New Deal etc but we should recognise that the policies that were won at the 2019 conference, pushing the Labour Party further to the left than it had been. We won by a small minority of activists and didn't really represent any groundswell shift in society and that was a problem in the general election. I should wrap up so final thing. We are in a volatile euro, which means that, although it's dangerous and terrifying. And the forces of disaster nationalism are abroad. There's a lot of apocalyptic feeling on the right, a lot of them are armed and ready to cut people down as we've seen in the United States, but it won't just be in the United States. However, it's also, to that extent also kind of fertile terrain for new configurations and new possibilities and we should pay close attention to that. But this enjoys upon us, the experience of to be honest three things. One, obviously its reliability so when I talk about the illusions that were shattered. Often these were violations. So I think we should start from that position. We've all been very very wrong proven very very wrong in the last few years, at one point or another. Second, experimentalism because we don't know what was going on. There's a huge area of the unknown. And that's actually a hopeful thing there is hope in life in the unknown. Finally, and this is a sort of opaque thing I suppose, but I just want to finish on this. I would like to foster in us, what sometimes is called a tragic consciousness. What I mean by that is a certain scepticism about, you know, manic pleas from optimism and creativity and go out there and build it and so on, and a recognition that people are what they are, and that includes people being bored, and that includes people having unlimited energy that includes all sorts of things. And it also would mean that we would be less inclined to pursue some of the more extravagant forms of woke politics, which can degenerate into absolute online debacles, and it probably would be less inclined to spend our time on the internet, you know, trolling Matt Chroley or some other numpty that we have taken a dislike to, this is all displacement activity. We should be aware that we are all human, which includes, you know, everything that goes with being human and perhaps that would lead us to take a more cautious approach to sort of talk.

Thank you so much, Richard, that was fine words. Things that are too bad and it's far too late for pessimism as the phrase goes and certainly that can oriented up so now I think there's so much on the table here, that maybe we'll take a few minutes and see if the panel of got questions or things they want to discuss with each other based on all that we've heard so far the, the surrender to traditional politics, the failure of movement building and the need to really go back and build our own institutions at the grassroots whether it went to parties or, or other institutional forms we can dig in on that, the role of unions has come up and we'll turn to some of those questions maybe in the q&a as well, but also the political education potential to work at the local level. Now that we're running into, into difficulties at the national level. The fact that our economic policy programme didn't really speak to people and that there's a gap there that we really need to close so maybe what I'd like to do is just go through you all and determine in which you spoke and just give you an opportunity for a minute or two to reflect on anything that anyone else has said or add anything to your remarks, based on having heard everybody, and then we'll go to some of the questions that are coming in through the chat, Mary.

Mary Robertson 1:00:52

Thanks to everyone. Really great contributions. And surprisingly large amount of agreement as well. I don't have much to add I guess the one thing that I'd like to add especially after living to everyone else, is a bit of a note of optimism. I think that my contribution was quite pessimistic, I think that's, I think in many ways it's important, given the given the scale of defeat. But I think, I think it was Richard who said this, but forgive me if i am disremembering that, we are in a time at the moment where it feels like the world is more in line with a particularly vulgar form of Marxism, and is overwhelming and scary as that can be sometimes, I do also think that opens up opportunities, and opens up opportunities very quickly. And if I could sort of reframe my concluding words in a more positive note, rather than sort of deriding the state of the movement, I think what I am saying is actually really positive, insofar as it's a call on people to have more faith in each other and themselves in our collective power, and to take matters into our own hands. I think the hardest thing about learning those lessons, the lessons that we're all in different ways, encouraging people to learn is that it does imply things are much harder. The appeal of winning the leadership of a major party, it does make it feel like change can happen very quickly. And what we're talking about movement building, let's focus on organising our areas, and in that way we implement our economic programme and build socialism. Really we're saying we've got a lot of hard work to do before we're in a position to get to where we felt like might be close might be quite close in December, and

probably wasn't as close as he thought it was. But movement building initially means small incremental changes, it means focusing on signal issues and building code in local areas and building coalitions initially that support them and hoping that those coalitions can firm up into something stronger. It means fighting particular battles in workplace, it doesn't mean bringing down the government straightaway. It doesn't mean rolling out an entire socialist economic programmes straightaway. So that's the kind of, that's the challenging side but positive side is, I think, at the core of what we're doing is having more faith and confidence in ourselves.

Joe Guinan 1:03:49

Thanks, Mary, Kali, any mean reflections

Kali Akuno 1:04:01

I'll say this based on what I've heard. I don't think we draw enough from the lessons of the 20th century. I think a lack, a large part of our kind of, lack of confidence that Mary spoke to has been largely framed over the last 2025 years is trying to either ignore what happened in the 20th century, you know, both on the relative to the Soviet experience but also to the social democratic experience in, in most of Europe and other parts of Latin America, etc. And I don't think we use the hard lessons, learn from that experience but enough to really shape. Going forward, and as a result, I think we tend to try, we tend to make and have been making I think the last 10 years, many of the same mistakes in the social democratic experiments of the early 20th century we kind of repeated those. We were really ready to engage, really the forces of capitalism grew through a kind of a weakened position relative to the state. And we didn't have enough of our own base consolidated in organising, I just want to reiterate that there is no substitute, and there is no way around us organising our own folks and organising them around their own interest in having folks and understand that, and then be ready to act upon that think a lot of times, I know I can share my experience I think it's some of the things we did here and here in Jackson relative to the electoral arena, even though we actually, you know, won some city council seats we won the mayor's election. We actually did a bit of leapfrogging, then we got a little bit further ahead than where the actual base was, and was prepared to do. And then as a result, once the forces of capitalism struck back the compromises were in their favour and not in ours. You know, because it was, it was hard to get us to stay in the level that got people elected. And then they would often kind of breathing a sigh of relief that now our elected officials want to handle, you know what the what we couldn't do in the movement or,

you know, we work so hard to get them there, we can kind of sit back and relax, that's not wasn't going to win the day, when I hear that replicating some of the things here. And then the last thing I'm speaking, you know, just say, on some of the questions. There's a set of things that we call, we're calling now more from our build and fight programme. You know practices of positionality, the things that we need to do to build our dream, over time. We've got different demonstrate you know better ideas which are more democratic, more egalitarian, more inclusive, but actually demonstrate in practice how they work. Right. And I'd love to speak to some of those a little bit better but that is where I think going forward as I see it, I think we need to reposition ourselves in the next decade or four. There will be multiple challenges for us as well because there's a concrete need for our side to have power in very soon. I'm just not gonna lie, I just got to cut to the chase on that, because we're facing some major calamities coming down the pipeline, and the right's response is basically to let the vast majority of us wither and die and they think that they want to just live, either in a hothouse planet or go to Mars and that's because pollution, when clearly it is not.

Joe Guinan 1:08:00

Laura, bringing you in I don't know if there's anything you want to highlight or add or maybe even also to respond to that point of Kali's and the sort of vacuum that the right is stepping into and we're seeing all manner of conspiracy theories and anti mask stuff and so on exploding across the board, and in some ways that's the vacuum that we've left by not doing some of that political education work you were talking about. Do you want to bring anything in at this point?

Laura Smith 1:08:23

Yeah, I agree with a lot of what Kali was saying then, and then and I think also, when, when Richard was saying about the amount of time we waste, kind of on social media and we're all guilty of it, I am as well. And I think the other thing the left has been really good at is just talking to itself. So it's great to go to an ace rally and have loads of support, but nothing's going to change if you're just talking to the same people, and I think people have to accept as well if I take for example, my hometown of Crewe, it's a held back community, we have had an awful lot of shit to put up with here, lots of job losses over a long period of time, a lack of investment and lack of educational attainment, and the result of that is that you might hear some things off people you don't particularly like, or you don't particularly relate to, but that's their lived experience and you've got to find a way of being able to talk to them without making them feel like shit, which to be quite frank, I think a lot in the Labour

Party have been quite good at doing sometimes. You've got to start at a place where you're willing to listen to them, and then get down what it is you're saying, and bring them on that journey with you. So, yeah we got to stop talking to ourselves, basically, I do think that it's totally normal for us to be in, you know, we can, we need to analyse what went wrong we need to understand it, we need to do that work, and properly. But I think also, you know, like Kali says a lot of this stuff has happened before, if you go back and read what was happening in the 80s in in British politics, a lot of the stuff that has come up now came up, then, and we need to start learning the lessons because we are seriously running out of time on this. It is quite time critical.

Joe Guinan 1:10:27

Critical in many ways, the populist right on the march and then climate change is rearing its head ever more clearly, the skies around San Francisco have gotten kind of Blade Runner red at the moment, absolutely terrifying. Richard, let me bring you back in and you're free to respond to any of that but also I want to start feeding in questions that we're getting from the chat and one of them, I think speaks to where you are going with the end of your remarks. 'In what ways do you think the culture war contributed to the failures of the left and how can the left change the terms of the culture war going forward?'

Richard Seymour 1:11:04

Well, there are a few issues here. First of all, to some extent culture wars are unavoidable, because you know, one of the patterns in this (...unrecognisable).

I mean, if you regard sexism, transphobia and racism as cultural issues, then, we can't really avoid that. But it seems to me that rather than address those things with terms of class analysis, if you like, or at least material analysis. What we get caught up in is certain kinds of tribalism. And that's very visible on the internet, it's very visible on what I call the social industry, you know, where our social life is turned into data generated profits, you know, basically, which means the industries are getting outraged and going on and typing a lot of stuff. Why don't we type a lot of stuff in order to define ourselves against bad things, you know, defend ourselves against transphobia, sexism etc?

None of this in my mind, necessarily, contributes to the act of destruction or dismantling of systems of oppression and hierarchy. So there's a problem there, but it's not the it's not a problem of, one where we can just ignore culture war terrain. We have to see through that. You know, the struggle over trans rights is a material one. It's to do with healthcare, state power, it's to do with your rights as a you know in a sort of democratic society. These are all issues that we choose to recognise as class issues, however, you know, trolling JK Rowling, who I don't doubt is a transphobe, but that doesn't really advance it, it doesn't get us anywhere. So, it's that kind of culture for that I think is a problem. And I think that the social industry which accelerates that it's in a way it's a cultural accelerator it produces little tribes of people who, you know, ossify, and harden in their stances through battle with one another. And every time you get one of these big furys like GamerGate or Birthergate or one of these things, there is a new form of reaction that comes out of it, MRA, Trumpism or whatever. So that's something that we need to be very wary of, but I think you know, fundamentally, I'll go back to it. I agree with what Mary Robinson said, We don't do enough organising.

Joe Guinan 1:14:17

Next we want to take a question on on leadership, and the gerontocracy, as it's been described which I think we will understand if we look at the fact that the leaders that we have to turn to one both sides of the Atlantic to these movements. Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn are both advanced in their years, shall we say, and so the question is about how to support young leftist politicians. And where is the next generation of leaders coming from? Actually I'm gonna direct this one to to Laura, and to see if you've got thoughts about how we identify and grow those leaders from the movement and from our communities and then next we'll go to California with a question about local government.

Laura Smith 1:14:58

Yeah, so I think you have to be out there speaking to people in a big range of ways. I'm involved in this no holding back initiative we did a zoom tour all over the country. And we've been listening to trade unionists to people in the party. Lots of different people they didn't have to be in the party and and hearing what they have to say and naturally, those people kind of start getting involved, they you, you can spot people who do have potential. There's loads of potential out there. Listen If you want an example of how things can change in 2017, I was the primary school teacher, school cops

campaigner, and I held a couple of protests in my hometown, that I managed to organise get quite a lot of people there. That was February 2017 and by that, that election that year in June, I've managed to go from part time teacher pissed off at the world to in Parliament pissed off to the world. So it can be done through, through organising and really how did it happen? I don't know people, people obviously did spot something in me that made me do it. And I think I know people say to me all the time are you going to stand against parliament? Maybe my constituency party won't want me to stand there's plenty of people who, who could have that who could go and have that voice. So, yeah, you've just got to, again it's just it's the same thing for me it's through organising history linking up trade unions, getting working class voices in there. I personally don't want my politicians to be just coming through this school of Parliament. I want my politicians and people who are speaking to represent the places that that they're from, I want them to understand real life experience. I don't think that's too much to ask, but if you look, currently I think at our parliament, we have the smallest number ever like 7% or seven people I think it would come from traditional working class backgrounds, we've got more Tories now who are from ex-mining backgrounds, than we have Labour MPs I mean, something's gone seriously wrong in my head with that.

Joe Guinan 1:17:22

Thank you Laura. And so turning Kali to the question that you raised really in in your comments about building power from the bottom up, and about the different institutional forms, and approaches we can take to that thinking of the work that cooperation Jackson has been doing. And also, you mentioned I work at the democracy collaborative around community wealth building which is now unfolding on both sides of the Atlantic. There's a question about how local government can be reconfigured to really start to build upon some of the responses that we've seen including to COVID mutual aid groups, direct forms of participation and other ways of prefiguring the kinds of societies that we want in terms of social relationships so what are what are some of the ways that we might move forward at the local level.

Kali Akuno 1:18:09

Well, I'm glad, you'd mentioned, what's happening with COVID-19. Because you know I'm not as fully aware of what's happening on the UK side. But here in the United States there was a tremendous flowering of mutual aid work that just took off. In March, April, May, and I thought this was one of

the most critical developments, honestly, everybody in here in an audience on the US side. Really in about 20 years, if not even longer, because what it really pointed to was social Security isn't dead.

Despite neoliberalism which I see as a deep reactionary cultural project, Richard was talking about. This time, people still had within themselves to seek each other out and to support each other in critical times of need and that is something that we have to build upon. I think in a systematic way. I think some of the things that we've been trying to identify around the building fight we're saying that it really has to start with this mutual aid work because that is concretely, at least on this side of the equation. That is where literally millions of people are at. And in the, in the foreseeable future with so many millions of people in the United States are being unemployed, it's where we're going to have to go in a critical way in our organising model to be able to meet meaningful basic needs, you can see the ongoing continuation of that need in the just any major food giveaway that happens out in the United States in any major city, there are lines around the block that happens here in my community in almost everyone that I see. And there are layers of working class people that are there. And they're not being for the most part, engaging in any sustained political dialogue or conversation, and they absolutely should. We need to be having real conversations ascertaining how people are seeing this moment, you know, whether their needs outside of the food needs because you know if ever food needs to see a medical need or the housing need, etc. And they started having conversation that we can enable folks to take an active role in helping us in us, covering ourselves to move forward towards more productive ends, of that not just the receiving end. And that is where you know i think that the work that's happening in a lot of different communities where there's already a you know a tonne of community gardens or connections. I think the folks have been tied into some of the suburban and rural farms, particularly in the United States. And then the work of the Solidarity Economy and all the costs have been emerging. We need to be politicising that work. It starts with being in concrete dialogue around meeting people's objective needs so in the United States, I can tell you like in a place like Mississippi, the little things that we've been able to do you know which hasn't been the scale because of COVID-19 to the degree that we wanted to, but we've been able to reach you know just to our some of our basic work in this arena to reach many of men for who we've been able to move off of some right leaning orientation, just from basic human contact and sustain conversation. And the fact that the fascists are not the only people talking to them is of major critical importance and be of some critical life and death in our environment. In the weeks and days ahead. So I just want outline that, and that's the other piece. Really, where and how municipalities can get involved. That really depends on the strength of the social movements as in your area. You got to put that first, I would argue rather than necessarily what the municipality can

do. And I'm saying that because if there isn't a strong movement and we've learned, when our movement is weak. The state government can come in and just slap off all kinds of restrictions on us. When the movement is strong. They still try to do that but there's a fight back and there's a push and we find creative ways to get around the restrictions the federal or the state government in our case, tries to impose upon us meaning direct needs. And then once we have that policy creativity flows very easily. You know without it, people tend to stick well I can only do it this way or this is what the book says as opposed to, you know, in our case where there's some some things that remarkable things that have happened in my view and in a municipal level in the context of COVID-19 is the city has found a number of different ways to make public spaces, be it the police stations or the fire stations that enable civil society groups to come in and do some of the work that the state has prohibited them from doing so they can say you can't just deliver mass, which is something they've been seeing here in Mississippi, because the government the municipal government was trying to ban that, so we get around that by saying okay we can just make the space available, and allow the civil society groups for them to come in and do the same work. That's the way we've been able to kind of reach scale for this because of the growing strength of the social movement, kind of leaning back on the rise here, and I just want to put that out to folks clearly understand like where I think at this juncture the road, our side of the equation needs to be centred is focused energy and attention.

Joe Guinan 1:24:11

Thanks Kali, got a question for Mary and I think we'll just go to our closing minute each for the panel and Mary I know you've got corporate general strike because you work in TUC. But there are a couple of questions that we've had on trade unions, one of which was really about whether the unions could have played a different role in the period between 2017 and 2019, and really mobilising to bring down the government or work some of the issues that they faced similar to some of the problems that we talked about in, in the corporate project. And then the other question on trade unions that came in was really about their role in COVID, and what could they be doing more proactively in terms of defending workers rights and building the movement in response to the COVID challenges so I think you want to say on either of those within your personal capacity otherwise.

Mary Robertson 1:25:01

I'm very wary of setting myself against Laura so you might want to bring afterwards to disagree with me. But because I think my simple answer is to weaponize trade unions could or should have mobilised between 2017 and 19 to bring down the government is no, they couldn't have, and therefore they shouldn't have. Which, by which I mean typically the popular support, I think for that kind of intervention didn't exist, and it's would have been foolish to set the trade union movement against the last of popular opinion. And I think that sort of reflects the relative, the limitations of the movement more generally. I don't think it follows that there therefore beset by exactly the same challenges as labour and I think this just sort of leads us into what's happened under COVID, where, again this kind of question of why couldn't the trade unions bring down the government if labour couldn't do it, is is sort of seeking a quick fix, in a way that is just typical of our politics actually works unfortunately and frustratingly, you know, what we've seen during the COVID crisis is trade unions playing an incredibly valuable role in winning sick pay, protection and PPE, better health and safety in workplaces across the country. But often through, not through sort of grand mobilizations, but through having being well organised in their workplaces you know in the workplaces that are unionised have been much safer and done much better during covid. Workers who are in a union have been safer during COVID. And I think that's an illustration of the really valuable kind of local grassroots or locally based organisation that trade unions are really good at, in the areas where they are strong, as Richard said, trade union representation in the private sector is far lower than it should be and that's a huge challenge. I think I have answered everything there.

Joe Guinan 1:27:14

Thanks, Mary. So I think we're coming up on time so just want to give the panellists so each minute each for final reflections of the stark Richard with you. Any, any last thoughts you want to leave people with all these broad questions you've been digging into.

Richard Seymour 1:27:30

Yeah. I mean, I want to say something about the importance of political leadership. When Jeremy Corbyn for all his immense strengths, his historical consciousness, his unflappability, his resilience, all of that. On some key issues he wasn't leading. It's unfortunate in many ways that we live in a period of time in which personal leadership, really matters. I wish I didn't, I wish we were much stronger than this and to that effect, I think, sort of, follows on from that is that the mistake that Corbyn made was one. One of the mistakes that he made, and one we should avoid making, which was in

line with this so called politics of kindness. He who was called a populist, I think this is wrong. He was not a populist, he is a peacemaker. He believes in democracy he believes in decentralising, he believes in you know uniting people if possible, so its not something that insights popular division, which is really frankly what we needed a bit more of what Sanders was sometimes willing to do. And we need a bit more aggression. And I think that if we want to think about how we build political power in the future we can't, I don't think we can avoid the leadership, or what kind of leadership, do we need. Unfortunately, we have to take into account things like charisma, national media, and we have to be more aggressive, strategically and tactically aggressive.

Joe Guinan 1:29:41

Thanks, Richard. Laura, final thoughts.

Laura Smith 1:29:52

Oh God I did that really awful thing that always happens on these things, by not unmuting myself. How embarrassing. And, yeah, so I I really do think that so much of this has to just go back to the grassroots, and I understand and I do agree you know we have obviously have to identify leaders and it is really sort of great if you get somebody who's able to deliver a really good speech and can deal with the press and all of that, but I personally just feel that we've we've got so much reconnecting to do in communities like the one that I live in. It's got to be far or just based on the organiser. And to be honest, just to clarify, when I did call for general strike. I was fully aware that that wasn't going to happen in this country.

And what we do need to do moving forward, is, you know the trade unions do have to join together, we do have to create these campaigns fighting as one. We have to get our key focuses we've got massive things hurtling down the road is the end of furlough we've got the evictions that people are going to be facing a second wave of COVID we've got nurses who are out looking for, you know there's a 15% pay rise and they're not the way that being treated is terrible we've seen teachers who are being sent into schools with, with no protection, my kids they're in a school and that you know, how would you keep these children in a bubble you can't. So there are massive issues that we can be organising and building that public support as one. And I think we just have to, to an extent, on the left, I personally think we need to take our heads out of the space that it's been in which has been

very London centric- and it has been politics often I found difficult even being in London for part of the time when I was a politician, and I think we have to really take on the challenge and understand the scale of it, get out there into communities where we need to reconnect and realise that the power lies in the people that politics is everything and everything is politics. Thanks.

Kali Akuno 1:32:18

I'm gonna go back to the title. Why don't we learn the last five years, I want to encourage us to recognise maybe in an accelerated way that this last five years has taught us once again the limitations of social democracy in certain kind of aspects of trying to democratise capitalism. And the bad end that that's going to ultimately run us into, and that we begin to pivot our orientation towards organising ourselves in our communities at the base, in organising a lot of our own self interest to build up our strength is going to take a long hard arduous unglamorous and unglorious work, got to find common contradiction. And, you know, crazy ideas that have infiltrated into the working class the last 50 or so years but we have to do that patient work in an accelerated way to beat the future. And there really is no substitute around doing that grind and doing that work.

Electoral politics, parliamentary politics, you know, that is going to be the way that we are going to usher in socialism, it may be a route that we have to go through, but ultimately we have to build the power and capacity to exceed that to get the the institution of Western capital investing, out of the ways that we can meet our basic needs.

Joe Guinan 1:34:00

Just learned that the hard way, Mary you've got the last word.

Mary Robertson 1:34:05

Okay so, its already been said. All right, well we learned in the last five years. In summary, there are no quick fixes. And right now things look pretty bleak. And I think people's decisions and actions now should be guided by, what do we need to do to build a strong foundation so that we can take on the next opportunity. And that is going back to basics, essentially, I guess the other thing I'd add is. It's

been really hard, and taken an enormous personal toll on probably everybody involved. So the other thing we should take away is Look after yourselves. Be nice to each other.

Joe Guinan 1:34:50

Mary, Kali, Richard, Laura, thank you for all it's been a really rich discussion. Thanks to everyone for joining and listening. And thank you to the world transformed for hosting us and if you can support the world transformed, do please do so, and we'll see you in future sessions Thank you.

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