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Nasty party imploding...drive out the Tories

Paul Callanan, Socialist Party national committee

Theresa May's [2017 Tory conference speech](#) will go down as one of the funniest - or the most humiliating - depending on where your political loyalties lie.

Britain's prime minister has gone from "strong and stable" to spluttering and stuttering in the space of a few short months. And it wasn't just an unfortunate bout of coughing, the crumbling scenery, or being handed a P45 that undermined May's attempt to resuscitate her ailing government.

Starting with an apology, this speech to the party faithful in Manchester was aimed at healing its deep splits. While never explicitly addressed from the platform, the gulf that exists within the Tories over Brexit took centre stage. Leadership rival Boris Johnson had to be ordered to stand up and applaud by fellow cabinet member Amber Rudd.

To working class people who bothered to watch, the attempts to talk up the Tories' record on employment, equality and even anti-racism will have rung hollow. For millions the past seven years of Tory-led government have meant unending austerity, poverty and insecurity.

May's pitch for recasting the Conservatives was a contrived and trite soundbite: ["the British dream."](#) What this actually consists of is watering down and repackaging some of the anti-austerity statements that proved so popular from Jeremy Corbyn at the June general election.

But May's desperate attempts to feint left on some issues - combined with an attempt to make political ideology the main battleground - only opens up more fronts for her beleaguered party. If the unions take a lead and call concerted national action, we can kick the Tories out.

On higher education, we were promised - not the complete scrapping of fees and student debt - but that the proposed increase in fees would be frozen pending a review into student finance.

That might satisfy the Tory membership. But we're not sure it will go down well with those currently starting university, who stand to leave with debts of over £50,000.

On homes, May promised that government would "get back into the business of building houses." But her proposal to pump just £2 billion into building 'affordable' homes - which councils and housing associations must bid for - is a drop in the ocean. [It will only build around 5,000 homes a year.](#) Also bear in mind that 'affordable' means up to 80% of sky-high market rates.

May's call on developers to "do their duty" and build more, rather than hoarding and speculating on undeveloped land, means nothing. Under successive Tory and New Labour governments the developers have been allowed to run riot.

On schools, the NHS and taxes we were offered more of the same.

The 'free school' backdoor privatisation programme will be accelerated. The only mention of the NHS was May's hypocritical tributes to doctors and nurses - the end of marketisation will not even be countenanced. And on tax, she said Corbyn "wants to pile on taxes to business just when we need them to invest."

The real centrepiece of May's speech, and the conference as a whole, was an attempt to rouse her tired and divided party to "win the battle of ideas in a new generation all over again." (Read more in last issue's editorial - 'The nasty party turns on itself... but the Tories must be driven out' at socialistparty.org.uk.)

Markets

She made a rallying call for the Conservative Party to "defend free and open markets with all our might." This is an acknowledgment of the growing popularity of socialist ideas, particularly among those younger voters enthused by Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity Labour leadership.

So while trying to steal Corbyn's clothes, she made a passionate defence of markets, calling them "the greatest agent of collective human progress ever created."

In the past 30 years or so the Tories, and their New Labour echoes, have at times had to defend the neoliberal vision of totally untrammelled privatisation and market competition. But now the Tories find themselves having to defend the very idea of the market - the basis of capitalism - itself.

Earlier the same day, International Development Secretary Priti Patel went even further in her speech, attacking Corbyn's mild anti-austerity programme as a "vile brand of socialism."

In spite of May's claim that markets have pulled millions out of poverty, the reality of life for the vast majority of people on this planet says otherwise. Child poverty in Britain alone is the highest it's been since 2010, and globally eight people own as much as the poorest 50% of the world's population.

While huge steps forward are made in the development of new technology, it is used to make a tiny minority even richer through increasing casualisation and insecurity for workers. It's no wonder the free market model of production and distribution finds itself increasingly under attack.

The speech will be best remembered for comedian Simon Brodwin making it up to the stage and handing May a P45, saying "Boris asked me to give you this." Many will see this as another reflection of how weak May's leadership and the Tory government as a whole is. Anyone can now see that a serious, mass movement of workers and young people, including coordinated strikes, could topple this government.

The fact that the top of the Tory party now feels forced to fight on ideological terrain is a very welcome development. It opens up the opportunity to discuss genuine socialist ideas - and build the fight for real change in society, that could see the Tories and ruling class as a whole all handed their P45s.

Major attacks 'Universal Credit', half a million more face poverty

Even John Major, the Tory former prime minister, [thinks his party's 'Universal Credit' welfare system is wrong](#). The scheme is due to start its roll-out in another 50 districts this month.

Meanwhile another 470,000 people will slip below the poverty line within three years if the Tories don't reverse their welfare freeze.

George Osborne's four-year restraint has further cut benefits in real terms, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Major called Universal Credit "operationally messy, socially unfair and unforgiving."

As previously reported in the Socialist, this flimsy excuse for benefit cuts has put almost half of claimants in rent arrears.

Major's hypocritical comments are another salvo in the Conservative Party's war with itself. Kick them out - and scrap Universal Credit. For a mass programme of job creation, and living benefits for all without compulsion!

IMF helps cause inequality it slams

The International Monetary Fund's warnings about inequality have had no effect on its efforts to worsen inequality.

The United Nations' global loan shark is anxious about rising anger at inequality threatening the capitalist system. It's not alone.

The director of the IMF, Christine Lagarde, has said that "excessive inequality is corrosive to growth; it is corrosive to society."

But - surprise, surprise - this shift in rhetoric has not stopped the IMF forcing massive austerity and privatisation. [A new study by Oxfam, 'Great Expectations'](#), finds that "rapid fiscal and monetary tightening" is still the lender's only prescription.

NHS meltdown - fight the Tory cuts

There's more evidence that the National Health Service (NHS) is in meltdown. [This time it comes from the Care Quality Commission inspectorate](#).

Its report identified: massive staff shortages, with vacancy rates in the NHS rising by 16% over the last two years; hospital bed shortages, with occupancy levels being consistently above recommended levels since April 2012; decreasing numbers of nursing homes beds - down by 4,000 in two years; more people not getting support for their social care needs; a 20% increase in people detained under the Mental Health Act.

This crisis is the result of successive governments' toxic policies of cuts, underinvestment, Private Finance Initiative (PFI) privatisation and outsourcing, rip-off drug prices and medical supplies costs, and several disastrous reorganisations of the NHS into competing trusts.

All this is set to intensify with the Tories misnamed 'sustainability and transformation plans' (STPs). Under STPs a further £22 billion of cuts are being rammed through the NHS by 2020. All trusts - many saddled with enormous PFI debt - will have to clear their accumulated deficits by then. If this happens then more A&E and ward closures with the loss of hospital beds will follow, along with unfilled nursing posts, and cuts to GP services.

Shadow Chancellor [John McDonnell's call to scrap PFI](#) and bring health services back in-house is therefore welcome. However, patients and health workers can't wait for a future Labour government. Industrial action by healthworkers, along with community protests and a mass trade union organised national demonstration, is needed now to stop the cuts.

Them & Us

Lords' expenses...

Unelected peers [have claimed nearly £1.3 million](#) - despite not speaking for a full year.

One in seven made no contribution in the 2016-17 parliament. Nonetheless, these 115 lordly leeches took an average of £11,091 each, according to Electoral Reform Society analysis.

Top offender Professor John Laird voted only twice. It seems he needed £48,000 in expenses to fulfil these duties. That's almost one average annual salary per vote.

Baron Laird, an ex-Ulster Unionist, has form. In 2013, sting operations alleged that he and two Labour peers offered to represent businesses in parliament for private gain.

... young workers' debt

Meanwhile, [half of young workers have to borrow money to make it to the next payday](#).

Among women aged 18 to 30, some 51% often need loans to cover the gap. Among men it's almost as bad: 45% don't earn enough, says a Young Women's Trust survey.

Lords and MPs on bloated salaries have defended the bosses' regime of poverty pay long enough. Abolish the lords, put MPs on a worker's wage - and bring in a £10 an hour minimum wage without exemptions!

Bank v 'populism'...

Even the bankers are starting to sweat about international ire against inequality.

[A new report by US multinational Citigroup](#) frets that "the long-held belief that there is a fundamental trade-off between inequality and prosperity is under attack.

"This is in part because the mechanism underlying that belief - those all-powerful incentives that would propel societies to prosperity - have often failed."

'Inequality and prosperity in the industrialized world' goes on to worry that "problems in political representation can constitute an opportunity for those outside the political 'establishment'." It fears "the rise of populist political movements."

... banks v migrants

The Tories have ordered banks [to run immigration checks](#) on their account holders from next year.

It's the latest part of Theresa May's campaign to make Britain a "hostile environment" for people born elsewhere. So far, not a peep from the banks opposing this right-populist posturing.

This follows May's notorious "go home" vans in 2013. And her support for the Remain campaign, led by Tories and Labour right-wingers promising to attack migrant rights within the EU.

It's not clear how quarterly checks on Britain's 70 million current accounts would achieve anything. What is clear is that May's party is eating itself, so is trying to rally reactionaries and divide workers.

Airbnb tax dodger

Airbnb revenue - £131m

- Estimate of 2016 UK income - £657m hosts' rent at a 20% fee

Airbnb tax

- [£188k - 0.14% UK corporation tax bill due to registration in Ireland](#)
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We stand with Catalonia

- For a socialist republic of Catalonia!
- The workers can finish what Puigdemont won't!

As this article is being written, a session of the Catalan parliament is underway in which, while thousands of ordinary people amassed outside, [Catalan president Puigdemont asked politicians to agree 'suspending' a declaration of independence for Catalonia for 'a few weeks'](#) to allow 'dialogue' with the Spanish state.

This hesitation and unwillingness to decisively implement the will of the people exposes the nature of capitalist nationalist parties - in reality they are no friends of the movement of the masses that has been taking place in Catalonia.

The announcement followed weeks of intense battles between the people of Catalonia and the capitalist class along with their establishment politicians and parties.

Millions of working class and young people have taken part in mobilisations to demand the right to decide their future - [by turning out on demonstrations, student strikes, a general strike and of course the historic independence voting day on 1 October](#).

In response, the Spanish state has enacted brutal police repression, an unrelenting Spanish-nationalist propaganda campaign and economic sabotage.

It remains possible that the right-wing Spanish government will enact Article 155 to take direct control of Catalonia - probably including elements of a military occupation.

This will not just be accepted. Any attempt at such a shutdown of democracy must be resisted by further mass mobilisations of workers and youth. The mass movement can achieve what Puigdemont is not willing to.

The Spanish, Catalan and European capitalist establishments are terrified by the mass resistance that has been seen in Catalonia - which has a strong revolutionary history.

The Catalan people are fighting for a Catalan republic, but through that want to see a genuine change in their lives.

They will not be satisfied with a continuation of the neoliberal agenda by the Catalan capitalists and their political representatives Puigdemont and his party PDeCat.

This movement can be just the beginning of one which raises the confidence of the masses to fight for socialist change - in Catalonia, Spain and beyond.

Reactionary forces step up response - Continue the fight for a Catalan socialist republic

Extracts from the latest (up to 10 October) declaration by Izquierda Revolucionaria, our sister party in the Spanish state. For latest updates see socialistworld.net.

The rebellion of the Catalan people in the 1 October independence referendum forced the Spanish capitalist regime and the right-wing PP government onto the ropes, opening a revolutionary crisis in Catalonia.

The reactionary forces wasted no time in their response. Using all resources at their disposal, and with an absolute monopoly in the media and the state apparatus, they launched a rabid campaign of Spanish nationalism to mobilise their social base.

On 8 October a demonstration took place in Barcelona - called by the right-wing 'Catalan Civil Society', backed up by the PP, Ciudadanos, numerous small fascist groups and joined by the leaders of the ex-social democratic Psoe and PSC.

It amassed 400,000 people, many of them coming from outside Catalonia. This is a much inferior figure to the historic mobilisations of 1 and 3 October, which brought to the streets millions of youth, workers and Catalan citizens to exercise their democratic right to decide and against police repression.

The class struggle in Catalonia and the Spanish state has entered a decisive phase. The alliance woven between the monarchy, the judiciary, the police and the army, with the PP, Ciudadanos and the social democracy, has been reinforced in by the Catalan capitalists, who fears the mass movement just as much as the capitalists in the rest of the Spanish state.

This is why the two united to exert pressure against the proclamation of a Catalan republic.

Even so, the Spanish-nationalist reaction - which defends the interests of the capitalist oligarchy, the state inherited from Francoism, the most stale and backward elements of Spanish society - has not been capable of winning the majority of the people to their cause, and much less of the working class.

The current crisis in Catalonia has opened the possibility of winning a Catalan republic through revolutionary methods based on the direct action of the people, the youth and workers.

This is what terrorises the Catalan bourgeois, which has quickly given an ultimatum to the masses: abandon your revolutionary pretensions or we will unleash economic chaos and plunge you into misery.

In this they have obtained the rapid assistance of the PP government, which didn't take 24 hours to approve a law to facilitate the transfer of the headquarters of companies out of Catalonia.

A Catalan republic won through revolutionary action would necessarily involve a head-on struggle against the capitalist-nationalist ruling party in Catalonia, PDeCat, and Catalan president Puigdemont, who have governed Catalonia with the same neoliberal policies as the PP.

It would open the door to a government of the left that should immediately end cuts and confront the dictatorship of the Catalan and Spanish economic powers, nationalising the banks and the big companies.

The correlation of forces in Catalonia continues to be favourable to the working class and youth who have shown their determination to reach the end in the struggle against political repression and for a Catalan republic.

It's completely necessary to respond to the state and the PP government with the same audacity as 1 and 3 October, increasing the mobilisations.

Izquierda Revolucionaria calls on the leadership of all left parties, trade unions and militant student organisations in Catalonia to establish a left united front based on the Referendum Defence Committees and on all the bodies that have been emerging in the recent period.

Committees for the republic should be formed in workplaces and factories, neighbourhoods and schools and colleges and coordinate them to boost the movement with increasingly bold actions.

These committees should prepare an indefinite general strike capable of resisting any violent action by the state and winning a Catalan republic with a left government.

This united front must call for the active solidarity of the workers' movement and youth in the rest of the Spanish state.

Failures of the 'left'

There is much confusion at this time. This is because of the absence of a left leadership that poses a class position to give a way out to this revolutionary crisis in benefit of the majority of the population.

The parliamentary left has either openly caved before the right, like is the case with the social democracy, or has called for dialogue and an "agreed and legal" referendum with the same state and the same government that, wrapped in the Spanish flag, plans a new wave of repression.

It can only be concluded that Psoe's leadership has moved fully into the field of reaction. Their leader Pedro Sanchez has crawled behind PP prime minister Rajoy, backing up all his methods and contributing to the continued spread of Spanish chauvinism.

Even those on the left within the ex-social democratic parties have in practice passed to the other side: not only have they appealed to the constitution to suspend the session of the Catalan parliament to stop the proclamation of a Catalan republic, but they called for participation in the Spanish-nationalist demonstration in Barcelona.

We have also witnessed the political wrecking of leaders who are formally positioned to the left of social democracy, such as those of Izquierda Unida.

They have also appealed for 'dialogue' 'agreement' and for a referendum which is 'legal and agreed' with the Spanish state and its government.

It's also absolutely clear that the position of the left-nationalist CUP and ERC, giving parliamentary support to the PDeCAT to apply its neoliberal agenda in exchange for being kept in the independence bloc, is a complete error.

But equally wrong, or more wrong considering what's at stake, is that when Catalan president Puigdemont and PDeCAT are completely surpassed by a movement of the masses, the 'left' fails to support this movement with accusations that it is reactionary and implore Rajoy and Puigdemont to settle the problem by sitting down to negotiate.

The struggle for the right to self-determination of oppressed nations like Catalonia is a priority for Marxists; but in this fight we don't subordinate ourselves to the capitalists of the oppressed nation, in this case the Catalan capitalist class, nor to their political representatives, the PDeCAT.

Rather, at the same time as we advocate this right - which obviously includes the right to independence - we link it to the defence of a revolutionary programme for the socialist transformation of society.

In their own words: establishment lines up behind Spanish state

The European Union

- [European Commission vice president Frans Timmermans](#): "That is the rule of law, you abide by the law and the constitution even if you don't like it."
- President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani: [Said that the EU was backing the Spanish government](#) because "on a legal level, Madrid is right".
- Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's spokesperson on Brexit: [Condemned the Catalan government](#) for going ahead with the referendum and called for a settlement based on the "constitutional and legal order of the country".
- [The European Commission](#): "This is an internal matter for Spain that has to be dealt with in line with the constitutional order of Spain... If a referendum were to be organised in line with the Spanish constitution, it would mean that the territory leaving would find itself outside of the European Union... Beyond the purely legal aspects of this matter, the Commission believes that these are times for unity and stability, not divisiveness and fragmentation."

The Spanish monarchy

- [King Felipe VI](#): "With their decisions, they have systematically undermined the rules approved legally and legitimately, showing an unacceptable disloyalty towards the powers of the state -- a state that represents Catalan interests."

The UK government

- [A Foreign Office spokesperson](#): "We want to see Spanish law and the Spanish constitution respected and the rule of law upheld. Spain is a close ally and a good friend, whose strength and unity matters to us."

The French government

- [European Affairs minister Nathalie Loiseau](#): "If there were to be a declaration of independence, it would be unilateral, and it would not be recognised... Catalonia cannot be defined by the vote organised by the independence movement just over a week ago," she told CNews television. "This crisis needs to be resolved through dialogue at all levels of Spanish politics."

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Black History Month 2017

The fight against racial discrimination is tied to the fight to defeat capitalist austerity

Hugo Pierre, Tower Hamlets Socialist Party and Unison national executive committee (personal capacity)

On the morning of 10 October the Tory government announced [it was launching a website to show the widespread racial inequality in Britain](#). To many this will seem like a sick Black History Month joke.

In preparation for the launch, communities minister Sajid Javid was invited onto the BBC's Today programme. Interviewer John Humphrys put to him that the government has known much of this information for a long time; 'shouldn't you have been doing something about it?'

Javid's reply was 'we've put together this website for wider debate because the government doesn't have all the answers'. In reality, the Tories have no answers. They didn't even commission any new research for the website launch but just brought together existing statistics from various departmental websites!

The reality is this Tory government and the previous Con-Dem coalition government have made matters a lot worse. Their austerity drive has widened the wealth gap and increased levels of poverty. This has had a massive impact on black workers.

Black workers make up 14% of the working age population but only 10% of the workforce. Employment for white workers stands at 75.6% while for black workers it is 62.8%.

[A study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) showed that black workers were disproportionately represented in lower paid jobs and twice as likely to be on temporary contracts as white workers.

The 'old' information on the new government website shows that black adults are twice as likely to be unemployed than white adults. Among young people that figure is even higher. And while right-wing Labour mayor of London Sadiq Khan continues to claim that London is a welcoming, diverse city, the capital masks high levels of discrimination.

Unemployment

The unemployment rate for black Caribbean workers is around 20% in places like Hackney, Kensington & Chelsea, Lambeth and Islington when the national average for white workers is 4.8% - this is five times the rate according to a report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Local councils that have refused to fight for more funding from the government are no longer equal opportunities employers as some Labour authorities 'fought' to be in the 1980s.

A survey by the local government trade union Unison through Freedom of Information requests showed a consistent pattern of underrepresentation of black workers in the workforce, overrepresentation in lower-paid jobs, and over-selection for redundancy in local government.

The union's 2017 national black members conference passed a motion that noted high levels of bullying and harassment of black staff and underrepresentation of black staff in senior positions or on NHS trust boards.

Levels of wage inequality are widely reported in many industries, most publicly in the BBC gender pay gap row over the summer. However, there is undoubtedly a wider race pay gap.

Black workers also suffer disproportionately when services are cut: they are often the first to lose their jobs as well as the services provided. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report suggests one of the part of the solution could be to provide better, more flexible childcare. This at a time when local authorities are cutting back nursery places because they refuse to stand up to funding changes imposed by the government.

However, the richest 1,000 people have seen their wealth increase by 100% since 2010 according to the Sunday Times 'rich list'. Their wealth increased by 14% in 2016-17 alone.

It is estimated that the bosses of the UK's biggest 100 companies 'earn' an average of £5.3 million a year - a staggering 386 times the pay of an employee on the government's misnamed 'national living wage'.

However, black workers are playing a significant role in fighting the austerity agenda that effectively has taken money from the poor to give huge handouts to the rich.

The strikes in many public organisations of low paid, privatised workers have been inspirational. Soas cleaners, LSE cleaners, Barts health workers and numerous others where there are high proportions of black workers, show that collective action can fundamentally undermine division and discrimination.

Many studies show that where there are collective bargaining arrangements in place, there is often no race pay gap.

Jeremy Corbyn

[Jeremy Corbyn's Labour election programme](#) for a £10 an hour minimum wage, council house building, renationalisation of the NHS, railways and energy providers, ending student tuition fees, and a return to collective trade union bargaining for medium to large workplaces, was hugely popular.

The anti-austerity platform needs to be put into action and not just promised for the future. Corbyn is seen as a politician with strong principles among wide sections of the working class, including, many black workers.

There is still though, a fear that he will come under enormous pressure from the political establishment not to implement many of the modest demands in his programme if he was elected prime minister. This pressure will undoubtedly come from big business but would most likely be channelled through the right-wing Blairite wing of the party.

Movements

The movements that black workers have already started against low pay, no collective bargaining, privatisation, and other terms and conditions, could be given a massive boost if Corbyn urged all Labour councils to begin discussions on meeting these demands.

If this was mobilised into a movement to end the public sector cuts and privatisation, black and white workers would organise together to support such measures.

As those workers that have started in this direction are already doing, they would see that racism, exploitation and division are the beginning and the end of this rotten capitalist system. The only answer would be to end the grotesque inequalities and bring the whole economy under workers control to plan society in the interest of all not just 1% of the population.

Low pay and exploitation: black workers lead the fightback!

April Ashley, Unison national executive committee black members seat (personal capacity)

"We have raised our head up high. We have achieved something. We have a chance to put our case (in upcoming pay negotiations) and we have hope something will be achieved. If not, we are still strong and we will mobilise our people" - Ebrima Sonka, Royal London Unite rep.

In summer 2017 black and minority ethnic workers were key among those leading a shining, inspiring, example of a fightback against austerity.

Cleaners, porters and catering staff, big numbers of black and migrant women workers among them have taken [24 days of strike action over the summer against low pay at four hospitals in Barts Health Trust in London](#).

In their union, Unite, they took strike action against billion-dollar company Serco which runs ancillary services at Barts Health NHS Trust.

Workers face super-exploitation from Serco which is engaged in a 'race to the bottom' as the company intensifies harsh working conditions without increasing wages, often leaving black workers at the bottom of the heap.

Enough is enough

Tired and ill from overworking these workers said enough is enough, refused to take this lying down and launched a struggle for decent pay. With big bold and noisy picket lines and a thousand-strong march and rally in east London they joined the battle.

Demands were modest, for an increase of 30p an hour, as they were a newly organised workforce. But the strike garnered widespread interest. National newspapers and Channel 4 News covered the strike as an example of workers suffering under the brutal reality of austerity and consequently why so many workers flocked to Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity message.

But more importantly trade unionists and activists throughout Britain and internationally rallied to support the Barts strikers as they understood we are all in it together - 'an injury to one is an injury to all'!

Other workers taking action in the summer linked up with the Barts strikers, British Airways cabin crew who were on strike and low-paid workers at the Bank of England.

I made a solidarity visit from my Unison branch and met an angry but determined picket line. Strikers were bitter over Barts Unison health workers branch not supporting the strike but felt they had no other choice but to strike on their own.

The strikers have now agreed a deal with Serco which didn't win everything but did get a 1% increase for workers on the original Serco contract and an increase to the London Living Wage for workers on the new contract, as well as non-consolidated lump sum payment.

As Ebrima Sonka said: "We just have to make our mark. We know they're (Serco) not going to give up easily; they're a big multinational company. Nothing is going to be given to us on a platter; we have to fight for it. It is our right to fight for what we need. In 20 years' time there will be people who say those are the people who fought for what we are enjoying."

Oppression of black and minority ethnic people has not gone away

Marvin Hay, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Black history month (BHM) 2017 marks 30 years of the event in the UK. It originally started in the USA to commemorate the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Fredrick Douglas and was coined 'Negro history week'.

It wasn't until 1987, in the aftermath of the inner city riots that erupted across England involving mainly young black people against police oppression, that the first UK BHM begun. But what has changed in the last 30 years?

Theresa May's recently released report shows continuing disparity in opportunities and prospects between ethnic minority groups and white people, with unemployment rates at 8% and 5% respectively and employment rates at 64% and 76%.

[The Guardian's 'Colour of Power Project'](#) showed that in the police, military, Supreme Court, security services as well as the top consultancies and law firms, there are no black leaders at all.

But representatives of a particular race alone can't solve the structural racism that disadvantages black people over their white counterparts. The austerity of the 1980s, like now, still sees black people at the sharp end.

More disturbingly, the leadership of some organisations said to represent the interests of black people do little more than rubber stamp the capitalists' neoliberal agenda. This immobilises movements which could affect real change, not only for black people but the working class as a whole.

Police killings

1987 saw six deaths of black people in police custody (Clinton McCurbin, Neneh Jalloh, Mohammed Parkit, Tunay Hassan, Mark Ventour and Joseph Palombella) - the same number as in 2015. In 2017 we have already seen the number reach four dead.

Alarmingly, the police continue to close ranks around deaths in custody. They have yet to interview the officer who carried out [the fatal arrest of Rashan Charles](#), nor will they give any proper explanation for his death.

Worse still, the Metropolitan Police has not heeded the Independent Police Complaints Commission recommendations that the officer involved be suspended pending investigation. Instead they have chosen to unilaterally apply for an ex parte application for reporting restrictions on their investigations.

A socialist programme of ensuring free education for all, job creation with wage protection, and mass house building and rent control, would be the first steps in levelling out the playing field - an attempt to truly redress some of the inequalities and fears that plague black communities and pit people against each other.

The police has been proven time and time again to only represent the interests of the capitalist political class - Orgreave, Hillsborough, New Cross Fire, Habbib Ullah, to name a few. Not even the mis-named Independent Police Complaints Commission is able to give at least the illusion of accountability.

We must continue to demand democratic control of the police led by trade unions, local people and community groups. Only through solidarity and the mutual understanding of the issues affecting the wider working class and the fight for a socialist alternative can we begin to make demands that can truly eliminate racism.

Royal Mail workers fight court attempt to stop national strike

Rob Williams, Socialist Party industrial organiser

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) is in the High Court [as Royal Mail management tries desperately to stop a 48-hour strike](#), starting at 11am on 19 October.

If they are granted an injunction, the whole labour and trade union movement must come to the aid of the CWU, which will be fighting for trade union rights and the basic right to strike as much as the industrial issues in [their 'four pillars' campaign](#).

The message will be sent to all unions that it's not enough to overcome the undemocratic voting thresholds in the Tory Trade Union Act if companies can get the judges to stop action.

The CWU has waged a tremendous mass campaign of mobilising members over the last few months, resulting in an incredible vote for strike action with a majority of nearly 90% on a turnout of 73%.

Riding roughshod

Management are trying to claim that the union hasn't fully exhausted the external mediation process before taking industrial action, yet it is they who have rode through 18 months of negotiations and now intend to break the promises made at the time of privatisation, in particular by closing the final salary pension scheme.

The bosses can break agreements but the union and their members have to comply with what they rightly consider a non-mandatory procedure.

It's clear that this is a stalling exercise in which Royal Mail hopes to force a re-ballot or other delays to avoid the peak time of the run-up to Christmas.

Actually, it is sign of weakness of the bosses, who have been terrified by the strength of feeling reflected in the vote and the euphoria of postal workers at the result.

There is a [real feeling that this dispute is an opportunity to push the company back](#) at a time when the Tory privatisers are in crisis and Jeremy Corbyn has popularised the idea of renationalising Royal Mail and other privatised sectors such as rail transport.

This militant mood has seen a whole series of unofficial wildcat action at Royal Mail offices over the last few months, which is part of the tradition of postal workers.

The prospect of further walkouts if the official strike is ruled out will weigh on the minds of the judges and also the Tories.

Such a blatant judgement could expose the strike-breaking reality of the Trade Union Act and actually legitimise unofficial action at a time of huge anger in both the public and private sectors on pay.

The best way to ensure that the CWU isn't isolated is for the TUC and the unions to organise practical support and be prepared to call mass solidarity demonstrations and even strikes.

Northern Ireland: Boeing bust-up threatens thousands of skilled jobs

Nationalise Bombardier!

Daniel Waldron, Socialist Party Northern Ireland

A brewing international trade dispute [is threatening thousands of jobs in Northern Ireland](#). One thousand workers at Canadian aerospace company Bombardier's Belfast plant are engaged in building wings for its new C-series passenger jet.

Last year, Bombardier secured a major order for the planes from US airline Delta but that has now been put in jeopardy by a complaint from American aerospace giant Boeing to the US Department of Commerce.

Boeing alleges that Bombardier received 'unfair' subsidies and financial assistance in developing the C-series from both the government in Quebec and Invest Northern Ireland, who supplied £130 million to back the project.

In reality, this is standard practise in the aerospace industry and Boeing itself has been the recipient of huge handouts and favourable loans from the US government.

In many hi-tech industries, research and development is heavily reliant upon public sector support. The massive profits, of course, remain private.

In its initial ruling, the US Department of Commerce has found in Boeing's favour and proposed tariffs on the import of the Bombardier C-series which would triple the plane's cost.

This is reflective of the more aggressively protectionist 'America First' policy of the Trump administration, aiming to defend the interests of US capitalists from foreign competition while still attacking the living standards of American workers.

If these tariffs are ratified in February, it could scupper the Delta deal and threaten the future of the C-series and the thousands of workers employed in building it.

Largest manufacturing employer

Bombardier is the largest manufacturer in Northern Ireland, employing over 4,000 workers and with thousands more jobs directly reliant upon it.

In the context of a weak, low-wage economy with mounting poverty and high youth unemployment, significant losses of skilled and relatively well-paid jobs at the plant would be a major blow, not just to the workers and their families, but to future generations. This cannot be allowed to happen.

Unite and the GMB - the trade unions which represent Bombardier staff - [have called on politicians locally and at Westminster to put pressure on Boeing](#) to withdraw its complaint, a call echoed by Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party.

Perhaps reflecting its reliance on the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Tory government has indicated that Boeing's contracts with the British military could be reviewed in response to its complaint and the threatened tariffs.

The role of the trade union and labour movement isn't to take a side in a spat between two sets of profit-hungry capitalists but to fight to ensure that jobs and pay are defended.

Instead of accepting the diktats of the so-called free market, which mean an endless race to the bottom, the labour movement must demand that manufacturing firms which threaten to throw workers on the dole are brought into public ownership, with investment in retooling and retraining where necessary.

The mass support for Jeremy Corbyn's plans to renationalise Royal Mail, public transport and other industries shows that working class people increasingly see public ownership is a viable alternative which can serve the interests of the 99%.

This demand would be especially understood given the significant public investment in developing the technology behind the C-series and supporting jobs and skills at Bombardier.

To refuse to fight for nationalisation is to accept a continuous erosion of jobs and conditions in manufacturing.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 6 October 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Who's watching who?: The fight for justice, trade union and democratic rights

Dave Nellist, Coventry Socialist Party

For almost 100 years a secret ban was operated to deny jobs to thousands of workers involved in trade union activity.

In 1973, 24 workers were charged and six imprisoned for alleged 'conspiracy' during the previous year's building strike - [some files from the case are still closed "in the interests of national security"](#).

In the 1980s, Special Branch spied on a number of left-wing Labour MPs, including myself in Coventry. And secret government files recently released show that Margaret Thatcher's government directly meddled in the internal affairs of the predecessor of the PCS civil service union.

In 2014 Theresa May, then home secretary, set up a judicial inquiry after it was revealed that undercover police officers duped a number of women into sexual relationships to infiltrate law-abiding political groups.

What links these stories is the extraordinary lengths to which the 'secret state' will go in trampling over trade union and democratic rights, to defend the establishment.

On 14 October victims and campaigners on these issues will speak at a day-long event organised by Unite Tom Mann branch and Coventry Trade Union Council, including:

- Ricky Tomlinson, today best known as an actor and star of BBC's The Royle family - but 45 years ago he was sent to prison for two years for trade union activities.
- Dave Smith has documented the [history of blacklisting](#). His work led to a parliamentary debate in September.
- Helen Steel, of the McLibel Two, conducted the longest case in British legal history, defending themselves against a libel charge by McDonald's. The police sent an officer from the undercover Special Demonstration Squad to become Helen's partner.
- Chris Baugh, assistant general secretary of the PCS, which [is calling for a public enquiry into the monitoring of trade union activists](#).

Saturday 14 October, 11am Methodist Central Hall, Warwick Lane, Coventry CV1 2HA. Facebook event at: <http://bit.ly/2fHAbYA> . There will be live streaming of the morning's main speeches.

Workplace news in brief

PCS takes the wheel!

2,000 Public Commercial Services union (PCS) members, in the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) which includes driving examiners and vehicle inspectors, have voted 85.1% for strike action on a turnout of 70% to oppose flexibility resourcing.

This allows for operational staff to be deployed anywhere without notice. It forces workers to travel on their own time and without insurance, incurring the equivalent of an extra day's work a week without pay. Also opposed are plans to increase testing targets.

The Socialist Party supports the PCS' fighting strategy and demands the DVSA stops these unscrupulous attempts and decisions to make staff work more for less, sooner rather than later, otherwise they may just be in for a bumpy ride!

James Hunter, North East Socialist Party

BAE job cuts

Britain's biggest defence contractor, BAE Systems, [has announced it is to cut nearly 2,000 jobs](#). Unite the Union has said it will fight the decision.

Unite assistant general secretary Steve Turner said: "These planned job cuts will devastate communities across the UK who rely on these skilled jobs and the hope of a decent future they give to future generations."

Cinema strike

Picturehouse cinema workers in London are to strike for eight days at venues during the BFI London Film Festival. Staff at the Hackney and Central cinemas will strike from 5pm on 6-8 October and from 11-15 October. Hackney strikers have said: "We will be outside the opening night event of the London Film festival in Leicester Square on 4 October from 5.30pm. We will be picketing our workplaces each evening for the rest of the strike days. You can join our picket lines at Hackney and Central cinemas from 5pm. The London Film Festival will make a lot of money for Cineworld at a time when many are taking part in a boycott of our cinemas. It is also a very clear message from the BFI and the industry as a whole that they are willing to turn a blind eye to low pay and the sackings of trade union representatives."

Housing crisis: Corbyn's positive measures blanked by Labour's right

Paul Kershaw, chair, Unite LE1111 housing workers branch

A standing ovation greeted Jeremy Corbyn's [pledges on housing at Labour's conference](#): to stop 'social cleansing' regeneration schemes and give residents a vote on regeneration proposals; to build more council homes and to control rents.

That response was echoed outside the conference. In the past Labour had little to offer on housing for workers and young people; the idea that Labour could really change things has been electrifying.

But Labour is still two parties in one and right-wing Labour councils are pressing ahead with destructive and unpopular regeneration schemes. The Labour council in Haringey, north London, responded to the housing resolution from Tottenham Labour Party - in its own area and adopted by conference with no opposition - by rejecting it outright!

It argued that balloting people affected 'oversimplified' the issues. Labour's leadership must ensure that democratic decisions are carried out and the threat to homes across Haringey is lifted (see ['Hundreds march against Labour council's development plan'](#)). It would be a scandal if the pro-austerity Liberal Democrats, who have opportunistically opposed the Haringey regeneration plan, were to make electoral gains because of the Blairite-led council.

Jeremy did not give details of plans for rent controls but the very idea of intervening produced howls of anguish from the establishment, unfortunately including the housing charity Shelter.

It is argued that making rents truly affordable would cause landlords to sell up, thereby reducing the supply of rental properties. But with evictions rising and housing insecurity blighting the lives of a generation, real rent control is a vital emergency measure that would attract huge support. It's estimated for example, that 25% of households of private renters in London spend more than half of their income on rent!

Clearly, since private landlords are unable to meet the need for secure and genuinely affordable homes we need a massive programme of building secure, good-quality, council homes.

Jeremy raised the need for rent controls when campaigning for the Labour Party leadership but the idea was watered down in the party manifesto by Labour's right wing to merely restricting the rate of rent increase landlords could impose. Jeremy is right to raise it again, but now we need clarity.

Until recently housing association bosses and senior Tories suggested that social housing led to a dependency culture and were moving to wipe out social housing. Funding for social housing has virtually ceased and what funding remains for housing goes to 'affordable', ie largely unaffordable, home ownership.

Unfortunately Jeremy Corbyn's message has been blunted by the right-wing housing shadow minister John Healey, who set a priority of promoting home ownership when he took up his position. He commissioned a report from the boss of the private house builder Taylor Wimpey who came up with the conclusion that no fundamental policy change was needed!

Tories

In her disastrous Tory Party conference speech Theresa May felt she had to make a gesture of support for social housing because of the wave of support for anti-austerity policies - reflected in Labour's electoral surge in the general election. She pledged £2 billion extra spending toward a "new generation of council houses". However, it was revealed that this meant building as few as 5,000 council homes.

This is a trivial amount given the scale of the housing problem and its significance can be gauged by the fact that the government has also committed to an extra £10 billion support for house purchases.

The balance was actually tilted further away from council housing. Spending on supporting house purchase schemes - 'help-to-buy' - simply pushes up prices rather than helping people into owner-occupation; good for private house builders and banks, not for workers.

While the Bank of England is starting to panic about levels of rising personal debt, particularly as it plans to raise interest rates, government policies only draw more people into greater debt by getting them to take on ever larger mortgages.

Clearly, the need for a comprehensive socialist housing programme has never been greater.

The Socialist says:

- Rent control now! Democratic rent councils to decide fair levels in each area
- A mass programme of council house building and renovation to meet demand
- Hands off our homes! End the privatisation of social housing. Stop 'social cleansing' redevelopment schemes
- Housing benefits that reflect the real cost of renting
- Councils should compulsorily purchase long-term empty properties and use them as council housing
- Nationalise the banks and biggest corporations. For a democratic socialist society that puts the needs of the majority, including decent, genuinely affordable housing, before the profits of the super-rich

No more fire deaths - ensure safety now!

Stoke Socialist Party

In the early hours of Sunday 1 October [a fire broke out on the ground floor of a three storey block of flats in Ringland Close, Hanley](#). A mother and two daughters were rescued from their flat above and rushed to hospital suffering from smoke inhalation - others were moved out of their homes for safety reasons.

Local people were shocked by this horrific event but quickly rallied round with donations, etc, for all the families affected. Stoke-on-Trent city council provided accommodation for all those who had to move out of the block.

Tragically, less than two days later, 36 year-old mother Zainab Adam lost her fight to recover and days later her six year old daughter Tafaoul Fadoul also passed away. Zainab's six-month old daughter, Tamunni, remains in a critical condition.

Just days after that fire, a near miss for residents in a fire in a six storey block in Burslem makes even clearer the urgency of measures to ensure fire safety. If neighbours had not alerted residents in the block by banging on their doors then more lives could have been lost.

In response to the horrific Grenfell disaster, Stoke-on-Trent council said they would install sprinklers in all tower blocks across the city. Stoke Socialist Party has been campaigning for this work to be started immediately - 1,500 people have signed our petition so far.

Afford

Some will say we can't afford to install sprinklers. But on 11 July 2017 the city council voted to find money to increase the pay of assistant directors and senior managers by around £5,000 taking them up to £69,000 and £96,304 respectively a year.

Our last Labour council borrowed over £50 million to build a new council HQ which was not needed. Now the current council is spending many thousands of pounds to promote a so-called 'City of Culture'.

If necessary, the council should demand government money to pay for installation of sprinklers. When banks were going bust in 2008, billions of pounds were 'found' to bail them out. If they can bail out rich bankers, then why not protect ordinary working class people?

Ringland Close resident and Stoke Socialist Party organiser Andy Bentley speaking on Midlands Today about the fire deaths said: "It makes me angry because sprinklers could save any number of lives. So why isn't it being done?"

There should be no delay. Sprinklers must be fitted in all tower blocks, whether council owned or privately owned, before any more lives are lost.

It is also vital that the council works with Stoke-on-Trent Housing Society and other owners of blocks of flats to take the necessary measures to ensure the safety of all residents, whether high rise or low rise.

Tories renege on tower block safety funding

'Money is no object' said Tory communities secretary Sajid Javid addressing councils' fire safety concerns over high rise tower blocks in the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell disaster.

Now it seems the government is backtracking by refusing to stump up the cash for councils to retrofit tower blocks with sprinkler systems - including Kensington and Chelsea council where Grenfell Tower was located.

The Tories were already exposed in the wake of the Grenfell disaster for reducing fire safety inspections and encouraging the relaxation of building regulations to exclude sprinklers in order to benefit property developers, as part of its 'cutting red tape' policies.

Since 2007 residential buildings above 30 metres in England obliged to have fire retarding sprinkler systems (which prevent 97% of fires spreading). But only 2% of social housing tower blocks have a full sprinkler system and there is no obligation to retrofit them.

London Fire Commissioner Dany Cotton said: "The tragic fire at Grenfell has thrown fire safety into the spotlight and while we are not pre-empting the findings of the [Grenfell] Inquiry, now is the time to remind

government of life-saving recommendations we have been making for years. We are calling for residential tower blocks to be retrofitted with sprinklers...".

Residents will be demanding that landlords carry out this work without delay and bill the government. If landlords fail to provide safe homes tenants should discuss withholding rent in protest.

Don't wreck our rec! Campaigning to save green space in Standish

Shari Holden, Merseyside Socialist Party

Standish is a former pit village on the outskirts of Wigan, where for some months now residents have been campaigning against proposals to put a car park on the local recreation ground, which was bequeathed to Standish in 1923 for the purpose of a children's playground.

Over the years it has been used by local children for play, football games and by groups such as the Cubs and Brownies.

The car park proposal has come from the local 'neighbourhood forum', misleadingly calling itself [Standish Voice](#), an organisation that many residents believe is more concerned with promoting the interests of local businesses, rather than ordinary residents.

One of the main functions of a neighbourhood forum is to produce a neighbourhood plan, detailing the use of land in the area.

Although Standish Voice is technically open to all Standish residents, at times it behaves in a thoroughly undemocratic manner, and has expelled at least three people with no notification, hearing or appeal. All three have been prominent in campaigning against the car park proposal!

Consultation

The results of at least one consultation exercise conducted by Standish Voice have never been published, presumably because they did not endorse the aims of Standish Voice.

In response to the threat, a 'Don't wreck our rec' group has been formed, which has organised a public meeting, a petition, Saturday street stalls, and has lobbied Standish Voice, Wigan council and the Wigan Labour MP, Lisa Nandy. Organisations like Sport England have also been contacted in order to get advice, and to alert them to the threat to the recreation ground.

This [excellent example of local campaigning](#) has put pressure on Standish Voice, to the extent that they have now published the draft neighbourhood plan for public consultation, which has dropped the car park proposal, in favour of putting a park on the recreation ground.

However, elsewhere in the plan it seems to suggest that the car park proposal could be revived in the future. Future campaigning will therefore focus on welcoming this climb down, while alerting people to the continuing threat, in order to encourage a robust response to the consultation, making it clear that the recreation ground must remain a green space.

Carlisle NHS campaigners hand in petition to MP

Brent Kennedy, Carlisle Socialist Party

Since the early part of the year, members of Carlisle Socialist Party and the Cumbria branch of Unite Community union have been active in the campaign to 'Save our NHS', organising support firstly for [the national demonstration in London on 4 March](#), and subsequently for the two rallies in Carlisle on 8 April and 4 June.

Almost every week between 11 March and 4 June, and with a final session on 1 July, we held campaign stalls in Carlisle city centre, inviting the public to sign a petition in support of the programme agreed by Cumbria Health Campaigns Together: "Save our NHS! No cuts! No privatisation!"

The petition has been signed by more than 2,350 people, half of them living in Carlisle, and a quarter elsewhere in Cumbria, particularly around Brampton, Wigton, Maryport, Workington and Whitehaven, where the proposed cuts to NHS services would be especially harmful.

People from outside Cumbria are also keen to support our campaign as they rightly see the attack on our local services as part of a national plan to destroy the NHS, and many told us of their involvement in their own local campaigns.

Impetus

Added impetus was given to the latter part of the campaign by the announcement of the general election, as people realised the political nature of the proposed cuts, and that the NHS and social care were the principal issues on which the election ought to be fought.

Unfortunately, the election result locally did not replace the MP for Carlisle, who has consistently failed to defend the NHS and is a loyal supporter of the government's STP ('slash, trash and privatise') programme, with one who would support the demands of the people of Cumbria to stop the cuts and closures. Nevertheless, we have decided to present to him the views of a large number of the electorate on this issue.

Cardiff Socialist Students confront 'Parasite' Jacob Rees-Mogg

Richard Edwards, Cardiff East Socialist Party

Jacob Rees-Mogg, aristocratic, misogynistic, homophobic, billionaire landlord and current pin-up boy of the Tory right, was invited to speak at a venue in Cardiff on 29 September. Young Socialists and Socialist Students made sure there was a crowd of working-class activists and campaigners there to give him a raucous reception and confront him regarding his voting record.

The prospect of a visit by a class enemy such as Rees-Mogg invigorated the campuses of University of South Wales, Cardiff Met and Cardiff University. Stalls and Freshers work helped to build a crowd of over 40 activists, students and young people arriving an hour in advance of the vile Tory's visit to hand out placards, talk to passers-by and fill the air with chants and slogans shaming him for his record of supporting austerity and refusing to vote for making private rented properties fit for human habitation.

Anger

Anger against the MP was already sky-high among the working class of Cardiff as he was rightly seen as a perfect representative of the type of parasitic billionaire landlord and legislator responsible for the tragedy at Grenfell Tower - which resonated broadly and deeply throughout the working class in Cardiff.

This anger was then magnified and amplified when Rees-Mogg outed himself so proudly as a regressive misogynist with his vile views on abortion. Abortion rights campaigners from Cardiff joined the protest.

Rees-Mogg arrived to a loud and hostile reception, and was confronted by a number of Socialist Party members and other attendees of the rally. He stood and addressed one or two questions from the assembled crowd, but to his shame his answers were like him - a cruel and unfunny caricature of the worst of our racist, misogynist and reactionary past.

Questions

He answered questions regarding abortion with "I believe life begins at conception" and a follow-up query regarding the lives of children at Grenfell with "I believe Conservative policies are what is best for the poor."

Rees-Mogg shuffled inside to an appointment with the 'great' and 'good' of Cardiff, escorted by more than a dozen police officers. A Socialist Students activist was threatened with arrest.

Following a few more chants and a cheer for the work done, the crowd dispersed before reconvening for a celebratory night of music and comedy put on at the Grange pub - a gig which had been chased out of other venues.

Manchester rally discussed unionisation and nationalisation

Tom Costello, Lancashire Socialist Party

Crowds poured into Manchester Cathedral on 2 October to see the shadow chancellor John McDonnell at a free event. The audience was first greeted by various trade union speakers, including representatives from the transport union RMT, Communication Workers Union and public sector union Unison giving their perspectives on ongoing industrial battles and the growing fight encapsulated in the march against Tory conference the previous day.

But perhaps the highlight of the early speakers was Shen Batmaz of [the McDonald's strikers in the bakers' union BFAWU](#). Batmaz ended her address with some of the most striking words of the night: "Young people around the country are angry. They're ready to unionise. But they're waiting for the trade union movement to stop saying we're 'un-unionisable' and for them to help us in organising."

Following this, McDonnell took to the stage facing rounds of passionate applause from the attendees before delivering the anti-austerity message seen in Labour's election manifesto. The event transitioned to a one-on-one interview with Guardian journalist Gary Younge. They discussed issues such as renationalisation, fighting cuts to health and education, guaranteeing the rights of EU nationals to remain in the UK following the Brexit negotiations and banning fracking.

The event was rounded up with a very apt summary of what socialists should all stand for: "We don't believe in just instituting a few reforms here and there. We believe in changing the system so we will never again have to pay for the crisis that they created."

Join the Orgreave Halloween rally

Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign

The Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign has called for our supporters to gather in their hundreds this Halloween night (31 October) in Sheffield. This will mark the first anniversary of the Tory government's shameful decision not to launch an inquiry into the police riot at Orgreave in 1984 when 95 miners were beaten up, fitted up and locked up.

The Orgreave campaign sees it fitting that this decision was made on Halloween as we all know it's the monsters of the Tory past that denied us justice then and continue to deny us justice now. Like skeletons in the closet or monsters under the bed the evil Tory dogma of the past is still glued to the present conservative ideology. We aim to expose this horrible doctrine and its champions with a terrifying procession through the streets of Sheffield.

The night aims to be action packed with a spooky samba band and coffin leading the protest. We also have fire juggling and a terrible giant. Demonstrators will also be entertained with political speeches from a variety of justice campaigns all finished off with an after party with DJ and political poetry.

Come along and join the call for justice and help rid ourselves of this zombie government.

Support the #Deathofjustice rally at 5.30pm 31 October, Halloween Night assembling at Devonshire Green, Sheffield and marching to Sheffield Law Court

- See <https://otjc.org.uk/> for more

Too much to cross the Mersey

TUSC members and supporters in the borough of Halton in Cheshire are campaigning against the payment of tolls on the soon to be opened Mersey Gateway crossings.

The toll system will be run for profit by the French arm of Spanish conglomerate Abertis and will do immeasurable harm in an area which is among the most deprived in the UK.

Workers and families across the region are already struggling with the effects of Tory austerity. The last thing they need is another drain on resources which are already stretched to the limit.

The geography of the area means that crossing the Mersey is the only way to access goods and services not available in one or the other of the towns that make up the borough. Runcorn, for example, has one men's clothes shop. It has no walk-in NHS centre.

The plans for taxi customers reclaiming the additional cost on journeys are ill-conceived and unworkable, according to local cabbies canvassed by TUSC.

Local economy

Small businesses will suffer the consequences of customers being put off from travelling across the Mersey due to the increased cost.

The area's entertainment, restaurant and pub industries will face similar problems. Larger businesses will either pass on increased costs to customers, creating a new source of inflation in the region, or absorb the cost and make savings by cutting jobs or wages.

Businesses will also face the loss of skilled or experienced workers who will be forced to bear the brunt of additional outlay on their journeys. 40% of workers at one local manufacturer face the prospect of paying between £60 and £90 a month in tolls, because they live outside the borough.

NHS workers employed across the local trusts, struggling to make ends meet under the constraints of the unjustifiable Tory wage cap, will now have to fork out more money just to go to work.

David Boyden of the NUT told us that he has "genuine concerns for the recruitment and retention of quality teaching staff" at the various schools across Runcorn and Widnes.

TUSC in Halton stands with workers, trade unions and community groups in opposing these charges, and will fight any attempt to prosecute those who can't or won't pay. We say: no to the tolls, and no to the profiteers!

Stephen Armstrong

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 5 October 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Biography: Harry Constable in his own words

Poverty, repression and fightback on the docks

Bill Mullins, Southwark Socialist Party

This book is about Harry Constable, a leading activist in the struggle of the dock workers from before the war until the end of the 1950s.

It is told through a series of transcribed tapes he made 20 years ago with Bill Hunter, a member of the 'Socialist Labour League' in Liverpool.

Harry Constable was born into an East End family in London in World War One and grew up in poverty and struggle. His father and grandfather had been dockers and Harry became one after World War Two when he left the army.

His tale is one of obviously heroic struggle against not only the employers but often against the right-wing leaders of his own union, the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU - one of the main forerunners of Unite).

Harry, along with other left-wing dockers, was instrumental in setting up what became the unofficial dock workers' strike committees. They organised national strikes against the employers because too often the right wing in the union refused to take action.

Strike

At one stage the union expelled him - which under the system at the time meant he could not be a registered docker and was not entitled to work. The other dockers waiting in the "pens," the holding areas where they were called by the foreman to work, refused to "come out" until Harry was given work.

The book explains how the docks became organised over a number of years that led to many strikes, sometimes local and sometimes national, all led by the unofficial dockers' committees.

In 1951, Clement Attlee's Labour government ordered the arrest of Harry, along with other unofficial leaders, for calling a strike in contravention of 'Order 1305'. This was part of the undemocratic government regulations set under emergency wartime powers, and forbade strike action.

This led to a national strike of 45,000 dockers. The Labour government's answer was to send in 22,000 soldiers to do their jobs (which they couldn't).

At the subsequent Old Bailey trial the unofficial leaders, including Harry, were acquitted.

Harry went through many experiences including the [1926 general strike](#) and [the battle of Cable Street](#) against Oswald Mosley's fascist Blackshirts.

All in all the book is well worth reading to give the modern generation of class fighters an idea of the rich history of class struggle in the docks.

Reader's Comment

Theresa May, Frida Kahlo and turning women into wares

Meena Kandasamy

[Theresa May's Frida Kahlo bracelet at Tory conference](#) caused a lot of reactions for a lot of people, but it left me feeling cold, and a little anxious.

It was certainly off-putting and tasteless for a Tory politician to try to pull off a radical/human/progressive face. But to me, it was worrying because of what it signals for the woman artist and how all of us are at the risk of commodification.

Frida Kahlo - in terms of the oeuvre of her artwork and how much it resonates to those who are queer, disabled, feminist, artistic, migrant, outspoken - speaks to everyone.

She was fiercely and unapologetically socialist, and this is where I see how easily all of the boxes that she checks can be appropriated and commodified while consciously throwing her politics away.

A Theresa May can wear her image to try to get feminist credentials. It becomes possible over time to create an apolitical icon out of a very political female artist. That's frightening to say the least.

I think of Kahlo especially because I've been thinking a lot about Sylvia Plath as well. This month her collected letters were released - featuring a bikini-clad Plath on the cover - and this has sparked an entire debate about marketing.

I'm torn on this issue. I think if an artist is living it is so much more clear-cut.

Either the woman agrees with or subverts the system through a certain portraiture of herself: she decides how she can be looked at, or controls the gaze and how her work is approached. Or, she can veto that and reject the gaze altogether.

Inspiration

In the case of an artist who is no longer alive, all kinds of questions arise. Capitalism has made Plath, like Kahlo - so inspirational and powerful, and she means so much to young women - into the artistic equivalent of Che Guevara t-shirts.

By the way, on approaching Kahlo: yeah, yeah, she dated Trotsky. But as much as his political ideas had a profound influence on her, let us also stop looking at women politically through the sole prism of being politicised by the men who are their lovers.

She was a political individual before that. She was anti-capitalist and revolutionary before he waltzed into her life. And no, men are not the fount of all knowledge and the spring of the revolution!

TV drama: The State

Shocking insight into Isis

- Spoiler alert

Derek McMillan, Brighton Socialist Party

The brutal finale of the Channel 4 drama about Isis, 'The State', came as no surprise.

One major character watched her son kicking around the head of an enemy with other children as part of their training for Isis. On escaping to Britain, her son was put into care, and she was forced to spy for the security services.

Another main character refused to execute a man who had become his friend. The friend was executed and the ending gave a clear hint that his fate would be the same.

Although this is a harrowing series to watch, its excesses of violence are not fiction. They are based on the testimony of people who have fled Isis.

The writer, Peter Kosminsky, portrays the way the illusions sown among the dispossessed by Isis propaganda give way to the realities of the situation.

One character is a qualified doctor who goes to Syria to help, but in scenes which echo 'The Handmaid's Tale' she faces restrictions at every turn because "there is nothing you can do which the men can't do better." That is a statement from a female character who acts as an aunt to the new recruits and instructs them to rejoice when their loved ones die in battle.

The similarities with The Handmaid's Tale are striking. Religion is the pretext for controlling women in both. These women are encouraged to go to Syria to help out, but see other women and children treated as slaves.

The series does not emphasise the role played by Bush and Blair in creating the conditions for Isis to flourish. The slaughter of civilians played right into the hands of the right-wing religious fanatics who promoted jihad as a path to revenge.

Young recruits, and children as young as ten, were thrown into the front line. In the series and in the testimony of former Isis volunteers, they are used as cannon fodder just as if Isis leaders were World War One generals.

The phrase "Islamic State" is not used much. This is partly because of the media insistence that it be referred to as the "so-called Islamic state," which would sound odd in the mouths of volunteers. It is partly because the war is waged against Shia Muslims as much as anyone else.

The State series does not tell the whole story and does not claim to do so. It is nevertheless a shocking insight into the nature of an extremism which uses religion as a cloak.

The Socialist Inbox

Cult conference

Local leaders summoned at short notice to a national meeting to discuss "poor performance"... two of them sacked the week before ("obviously in the minds of people but not discussed")... those present encouraged to chant loudly "we can do this!"

Donald Trump's support team? Kim Jong-Un's military commanders? No - NHS trust and commissioning leaders at a meeting about the need to improve emergency performance.

One source told Health Service Journal the event offered the gathered leaders "nothing new" to learn from - but cost some people more than £500 in last-minute train fares.

Jon Dale, secretary, Unite EM/NG32 Nottinghamshire Health Branch

Procter problems

Procter and Gamble (P&G) is an American company with long-established connections in British manufacturing. Its Newcastle Innovation Centre was opened in the 1950s, following its acquisition of a local detergent brand.

Employment at the site hasn't always been precarious. P&G staff who supported scientists, and even those working in facilities maintenance and security, used to enjoy the benefits of P&G's generous remuneration package designed to prevent trade union organisation.

Those historic perks have fallen by the wayside, with remaining directly employed non-scientific staff 'Tuped' to other corporate partners, and a new wave of agency subcontracting.

One such agency is an in-house arrangement, known as PG Assist. This lucrative firm operates at the Newcastle Innovation Centre, at a facility in Egham in Surrey, as well as at P&G's continental operation in Belgium.

The firm's owners are well-to-do, with one living in an affluent dormitory suburb. One of its worst practices is withdrawing workers' £500, twice-annual 'bonus' for incidents of exaggerated 'disciplinary offences', or even lateness and sickness, while no sick pay is offered.

Staff complain that insecure employment arrangements through such agencies prevent trade union organisation, create uncertainty and an inability to plan due to the nature of the contracts, and offer limited scope for advancement. Two such young and frustrated PG Assist staff members furtively explored trade union organisation - until their contracts were abruptly terminated following aggressive supervision.

They have since joined the Socialist Party, and lent solidarity to local industrial campaigns.

P&G is lauded by fellow business community elites, and recently garnered praise from campaign group Girl Effect and even Sesame Street for its supposed championship of gender equality.

The Socialist Party knows the real effect of P&G's practices and their impact on low-paid women workers who languish in insecure employment while receiving poverty pay for their work as caterers, cleaners, receptionists, and security guards at P&G's UK operations.

William Jarrett, Tyneside

Ryanair nosedive

Why do people such as the chairman of Ryanair, Michael O'Leary, believe they can act like some kind of 19th century mill owners towards their employees and customers? Answer: capitalism!

Mr O'Leary would be wise to ask some of those customers who had their flights cancelled at last-minute notice - due to his company's mismanagement, and what is clearly from Mr O'Leary's reaction contempt for his employees - how these customers feel about him and his company.

Just imagine Mr O'Leary waiting in an airport to fly back home after a holiday, only to be told "your flight's been cancelled due to your company's mismanagement, but the good news you can be put on the next flight to Manchester, although your car happens to be in a car park at East Midlands airport where you originally had flown from at the start of your holiday, take it or leave it!"

To the boss of Ryanair, Michael O'Leary, and those bosses who think of nothing and no one except themselves: it's time for people like you to stop thinking that because of your wealth you can crap on anyone you like and get away with it.

The only way to hurt people like the O'Learys of this world is in their pockets and those of their shareholders.

'Rebel with a Cause', Rotherham

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/26271>