

## Editorial of the Socialist, issue 968

# Socialists must back Catalan struggle for self-determination

- Stop the Spanish state repression!
- Article 155 is an attack on democratic rights

The dramatic events that have shaken Catalonia and the Spanish state have national and international implications.

The decision of the Spanish government - led by the right-wing PP government under Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy - to [implement Article 155](#) of the constitution and end the autonomy of Catalonia, is an attack on the democratic rights of the Catalan people and a threat to workers in the entire Spanish state.

The [brutal attacks by the Spanish Civil Guard](#) on those who went to vote in the referendum on 1 October left over 900 injured and provoked international outrage among working people.

Such scenes are a warning of the repression that will be turned on workers and young people throughout the Spanish state if they struggle to fight to defend their interests.

This repression illustrates the character both of the PP and the Spanish state machine. Following the transition from the Franco dictatorship in 1978 there was no purge from the state machine of its fascist elements.

The legacy of this remains today throughout the state apparatus. Even the PP itself was [originally founded](#) by six ministers from Franco's fascist government.

In a threat of a return to real methods of the dictatorship, one senior PP spokesman even raised the question of [banning political parties](#) and organisations which oppose 'Spanish unity'!

The Spanish ruling class will not tolerate a threat to its interests which would flow from allowing Catalan independence.

Catalonia accounts for [28%](#) of Spanish exports and over [20%](#) of its GDP. Losing this would be a catastrophe for the capitalist class.

It could also pose the threat of the Basque country breaking away from the Spanish state. Fear of such a development has also terrified the capitalist class throughout the EU, especially following Brexit.

The international representatives of capitalism have revealed breathtaking hypocrisy in their response to the crisis.

While many have been critical of the 'overreaction' by Rajoy, which has only inflamed the crisis further, they have also demonstrated hypocritical double standards.

The EU has dubbed it a '[Spanish affair](#)' - an internal matter for a member state in which it will not intervene.

Macron in France, Merkel in Germany and May in Britain have all refused to oppose Rajoy's government, despite fearing the consequences that may flow from its actions.

Yet the Financial Times in its [editorial on 20 October](#) had no problem demanding the EU intervene in Venezuela and impose sanctions following the recent local elections which saw a certain [rallying in support for the Maduro regime](#) against the right-wing opposition.

The reaction of the Rajoy government has undoubtedly increased support for independence within Catalonia.

Before the attacks on those trying to vote in the referendum and prior to the enacting of Article 155 it was unclear if a majority in Catalonia supported independence.

Some of the most combative workers and certainly the youth did and support for it had been growing. But the attempts of the Rajoy government to deny the Catalan people the democratic right to decide swelled their ranks.

Over [one million took to the streets in Barcelona on 3 October](#) in support of independence and in opposition to Rajoy's threats! Socialists have a responsibility to support the right of self-determination and the right of the Catalan people to hold a referendum to decide their future.

A struggle for a socialist republic of Catalonia could become part of a struggle to defeat the Rajoy government and to fight the austerity policies his government in Madrid is implementing, as well as those implemented by the conservative Catalan government led by PDeCat and Catalan president Puigdemont.

This would not be a struggle against the peoples in the rest of the Spanish state. Socialists fight for the unity of all working peoples.

A socialist republic of Catalonia could be the basis to forge a united struggle of working class people throughout the Spanish state to oppose the PP government, defend democratic and national rights, and oppose austerity and capitalism.

On a voluntary and democratic basis such a struggle would open the way to establish a voluntary, democratic, socialist federation of Catalonia and all those in Spain, Galicia and the Basque country, which would defend the democratic and national rights of all its peoples.

This could be a bridge to appeal to workers and young people in Greece, Portugal and the rest of Europe to come together and form a [voluntary democratic socialist federation of Europe as an alternative to the EU](#) and its pro-capitalist policies.

The de facto coup by the Rajoy government and the repression it has implemented, including the [arrest without bail](#) of two leaders of the independence movement, needs to be opposed by the mass movement in Catalonia and throughout the Spanish state.

The calling of a two-day general strike by the Sindicat d'Estudiants (students' union in Catalonia - see below), which was subsequently backed by the Catalan nationalist student unions too, shows the way. A general strike of all workers in Catalonia needs to be built.

In this struggle no trust or confidence should be given to the capitalist class of Catalonia or their political representatives.

[Over 1,000](#) Catalan companies have now moved their headquarters out of Catalonia as they ally themselves with the Spanish ruling class in Madrid.

As in all struggles to defend the right of self-determination, no trust can be placed in the capitalist class.

As in the struggles in the neocolonial countries against imperialism the ruling classes, tied and enmeshed with the interests of imperialism, are incapable of leading a struggle against the imperial powers to win genuine independence.

[This task falls to the working class](#) and those exploited by imperialism and capitalism. There is an element of this involved in this struggle of the Catalan people for self-determination against Rajoy's PP government in Madrid.

PDeCat and Puigdemont have been no friends of the Catalan working class and have mirrored the austerity policies implemented by Rajoy in Madrid.

One reason Puigdemont has opposed new elections in Catalonia is that PDeCat would probably lose support to more left radical parties like the CUP.

Unfortunately, the radical anti-capitalist, pro-independence CUP, has propped up the PDeCat government rather than strike out and fight to build an independent socialist mass movement of the workers and youth to oppose the ruling class in Catalonia.

The ex-social democratic Psoe, which has lost over half its votes since the economic crisis of 2007-08, has played a lamentable role throughout this crisis and has [acted in cahoots with Rajoy's](#) repressive measures.

The former defence minister in the last Psoe government called for the arrest of all the Catalan leaders of the independence movement, adding: "When there's a drink driver in charge, you have to stop the car and arrest the driver".

Psoe will pay a heavy price for this - the party's death warrant in Catalonia has been signed.

While left party Podemos has opposed the policies of the Rajoy government, it has not turned its words into deeds with a clear call to action either in Catalonia or in the rest of the Spanish state.

At the time of writing it remains unclear how the struggle will develop due to the failure of the left socialist forces and trade unions to lead a mass, independent struggle.

However, the crisis is set to continue providing big opportunities for the working class of Catalonia and the whole of the Spanish state to build an alternative that can struggle for a socialist republic of Catalonia as a part of voluntary democratic socialist federation of all the peoples of the Spanish state.

The Socialist Party, and its Committee for a Workers' International sister parties in the Spanish state ([Izquierda Revolucionaria](#)) and across the world will play an important role in the future battles which are certain to unfold.

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## What is 'Article 155'?

### Francoist repression revisited

### A coup d'état against Catalonia

- The functions of the Catalan regional government, including its president, Puigdemont, are suspended and taken over by the Spanish government. In essence, Rajoy and the PP (which only 8% of Catalans voted for) assume unlimited power in Catalonia.
  - The powers of the Catalan parliament are severely curbed. It cannot debate any issues which Rajoy deems contrary to the constitution or law and order. The parliament is banned from voting for a new president.
  - The Spanish state takes immediate measures to take direct operational control of the Catalan regional police.
  - The Spanish government takes control of the Catalan government's finances.
  - The Spanish government takes control of the Catalan public TV station, TV3, to ensure it "respects the values of the constitution".
  - If Article 155 is disobeyed by Puigdemont, any member of the Catalan government, or even a Catalan public administration worker, they face legal prosecution. If Puigdemont declares Catalan independence, the state has ordered that he be charged with 'rebellion' and face up to 30 years in prison.
  - The government proposes new Catalan elections within six months. Leading political figures, including the leader of the PP in Catalonia, have suggested that parties which don't accept these measures be declared illegal.
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# Students' union calls 48-hour general strike against repression

The [Sindicat d'Estudiants](#) (SE, Catalan students' union) is calling for a two-day general strike on 25 and 26 October of all students in protest against the repression of the Spanish state and declaration of Article 155.

They are calling on teachers' and education workers' unions to support the strike, making it a general strike of the whole education sector.

At the time of writing, the call has had a great impact. Other important Catalan student organisations - the left-nationalist students' union SEPC and the 'Universities for the [Catalan] Republic' organisation - have backed the SE's call to strike on 26 October and supported the Barcelona demonstration called by the SE on the morning of the strike.

This strike is a key development, putting the question of workers' strike action on the agenda and stressing the necessary leading role of the working class in the fight against national oppression and for a socialist Catalonia.

SE wants its strike to function as a lever to help turn the whole workers' movement towards a general strike.

SE's general strike on 28 September against repression was massive - over 150,000 took part in the morning demonstration - and played a key role as a lever to build for the historic Catalan general strike on 3 October.

[Esquerra Revolucionària](#), the Socialist Party's sister organisation in Catalonia, plays a leading role in the SE.

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'What is going on in Catalonia?'

Rally speakers include: Juan Ignacio Ramos, general secretary of Izquierda Revolucionaria (the Socialist Party's sister party in the Spanish state) and Coral Latorre of Sindicat d'Estudiants (students' union in Catalonia)

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](http://socialism2017.net)

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 24 October 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## 1967 Abortion Act reflected social changes

### Fight for the right to choose when and whether to have children

Sarah Wrack

Fifty years ago this month the [1967 Abortion Act](#) was signed into law, coming into effect six months later. The law legalised abortion of foetuses up to 28 weeks gestation (reduced to [24 in 1990](#)) and within certain circumstances. Since that time millions of women have benefited from access to free, safe and legal abortion - lives have undoubtedly been saved and transformed.

Prior to 1968, up to [100,000](#) illegal abortions were thought to take place every year.

Women, who generally had very limited access to reliable contraception, were forced to take desperate measures to terminate unwanted pregnancies. They bought unidentified and often poisonous substances, attempted to self-abort using household objects, or visited 'backstreet' establishments for procedures often carried out by people with no medical qualifications.

Abortion was the leading cause of maternal deaths with hundreds dying each year and [35,000](#) treated by the NHS for often life-changing complications.

The pressure for legalisation of abortion partly came from growing concern about these backstreet abortions and their consequences. But it was also a reflection of wider social changes and struggles that were taking place.

It's no coincidence that many other social reforms, including of particular benefit to women, took place at a similar time. The 1969 Divorce Reform Act made it easier to obtain a divorce. The 1970 Equal Pay Act made it illegal to treat men and women employees differently in terms of pay or terms and conditions. The 1967 Sexual Offences Act decriminalised homosexuality to some degree.

Major changes, such as a ballooning of the number of women in the workforce, were taking place which drove a transformation in social attitudes. Around the world [masses of people protested against the Vietnam War](#), for civil rights for black people in the US and for improved wages and conditions.

These things both increased women's expectations of what life could be like and showed that collective action, particularly through trade unions, strikes and mass protests, was the best way to achieve things.

In many ways the law had been left behind reality and behind social attitudes. For example, the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s and availability of the contraceptive pill had begun to transform many people's view of sex outside marriage.

It's thought that [10,000](#) abortions a year were carried out by qualified doctors prior to the 1967 Act being passed. Recognising the devastating impact of unwanted pregnancies, they chose to risk criminal prosecution and were prepared to defend their actions in court if necessary. In 1938, for example, [Doctor Aleck Bourne](#) admitted to having performed an abortion for a 14-year-old who was suicidal after becoming pregnant as a result of rape. He successfully argued that this was a life-threatening situation, and that this was covered by the existing law.

## Limitations

There were and are still major problems with the Abortion Act. Most notably, the reforms were never extended to Northern Ireland. Outrageously women there still don't have access to abortion in the vast majority of cases and are forced to continue with unwanted pregnancies, [obtain abortion pills](#) illegally or raise the money to travel to Britain for the procedure.

Even in Britain the law is lacking. The need for two doctors to agree that a woman should have the abortion is needlessly bureaucratic and can lead to damaging delays.

A problem from the beginning was that extremely insufficient services were allocated to meet demand. This means that it is still the case that [half](#) of all NHS-funded abortions are carried out by private or voluntary sector providers.

No single law can offer people complete choice over when and whether to have children - where women neither feel they have to carry a pregnancy to term if they don't want to or that they have to terminate a pregnancy that they would otherwise like to continue with.

For that we'd need investment in contraception services, sex and relationships education, fertility treatment, education, well-paid jobs, childcare and affordable housing.

But regardless of these limitations, the 1967 Abortion Act [remains a huge and important step forward for women](#) and the right to choose.

Around the world illegal abortions still result in [70,000](#) deaths a year. So 50 years on from 1967, it's vital to maintain the understanding of the need for a united struggle for social reforms and for the labour and trade union movement to take up the demands of oppressed groups.

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## Ireland: fighting to win the right to choose

Rita Harrold, Socialist Party (CWI Ireland)

On 28 October 2012, the barbarity of the Irish state's attempt to ban abortion was exposed. But five years on from the [death of Savita Halappanavar after she requested and was denied a termination](#) while having a miscarriage, the Irish political establishment is still dragging its heels.

Irish abortion has traditionally been exported to UK abortion clinics where [approximately ten](#) Irish addresses are given every day, but sick women like Savita are unable to make such a journey.

The Irish pro-choice movement has been [organising and protesting for the repeal of the Eighth Amendment](#), the constitutional ban on abortion, before and since then and has significantly grown in the last year. Socialist feminist group [Rosa](#), in which Socialist Party members participate, has been to the fore in calling not for incremental change but full abortion rights.

The [Strike 4 Repeal saw thousands of mainly young women pour onto the streets](#) on International Women's Day this year calling for a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment and last month we saw [over 30,000](#) at the March for Choice. In opinion polls, [68%](#) say they trust women when they say they need an abortion.

The Citizens' Assembly - an advisory body of 100 people - was [set up by the government in an attempt to distance itself](#) from the issue of abortion while bowing somewhat to the pressure to do something.

It was deliberately drawn out to delay progress and excluded anyone who had ever made a public statement for or against abortion, which resulted in one member being replaced after wearing a pro-choice badge to the first meeting.

However, as the assembly discussed the issue and asked questions of the various experts, the members were convinced that the law must be changed not just for the 'hard cases' but to ensure the right to choose as the only way to ensure equality of access for working class, poor and migrant women.

It [recommended broad changes to the law including abortion without restriction](#) up to 12 weeks and in later pregnancy for a variety of specific reasons.

In the days after the Citizens Assembly vote, a senior RTÉ correspondent said the job of the politicians would be to tone down the recommendations to something "palatable" for the electorate.

The Citizens' Assembly's progressive recommendations bear out our experience that ordinary people may have some questions about abortion but are open to being convinced, particularly when exposed to the reality; that abortion happens in every part of the world whether legal or illegal. Irish abortions are later and slightly more complicated because of the delays necessitated by organising travel to a UK clinic and money to pay for the private procedure.

There is now a [parliamentary committee discussing the Citizens' Assembly report](#). Ruth Coppinger, a member of the Irish Socialist Party, has used her position as Solidarity TD (MP) on the committee to broaden the discussion to the reality of abortion as dealt with by the Assembly.

The capitalist establishment favours focusing on one or two "hard cases" in order to excuse a minor change to slightly broader, but by any standard still extremely restrictive, abortion access where, for example, only sexual assault survivors or those with a fatal foetal anomaly diagnosis could access abortion.

A [motion proposed by the government chair](#) of the committee "not to retain Eighth Amendment in full" which passed recently could be misunderstood as a victory. But really it marks the extreme conservatism of the

establishment. They are still considering preserving some kind of "rights of the unborn" in the constitution.

As the obstetrician Prof Peter Boylan [told the committee](#), the "genie is out of the bottle". Abortion pills Mifepristone and Misoprostol are being sourced online through websites like [womenonweb.org](#) and used at home in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Our research shows that more than five people a day in Ireland are requesting pills.

The onslaught of austerity on working class women in Ireland has left many without the hundreds or thousands of euros required to travel. Rosa has done a lot of work in highlighting the availability of abortion pills through actions like the [Abortion Pill Train and the Bus 4 Repeal](#) where we flouted the law to expose its unworkability.

The government's clumsy attempts to deal with this issue could be misinterpreted as signalling an inevitable change. In reality, nothing will be handed to us that we don't struggle for. It is clear that the political establishment has no intention of granting us our rights.

It's essential that the pro-choice movement mobilises the huge latent support, some of which is consciously waiting for a referendum date to be announced to get involved, to pressure the politicians in the crucial period.

The [victory against the attempted introduction of water charges](#) in Ireland shows that politicians can be pressured to change their position if a mass movement is organised. Young people wearing 'repeal' jumpers and marching for choice can become a huge thorn in the side of the political establishment.

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Discussions include: 'Women and the fightback - 1917 revolution, 1967 abortion, 2017 against austerity'

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## Kurdish referendum declared illegal

### For a united socialist struggle for self-determination

Paula Mitchell

In just a few weeks the situation for Kurdish people in Iraqi Kurdistan has gone from euphoria to anger and fear.

On 25 September, 2.8 million people in Iraqi Kurdistan, 92% of voters, [voted for independence](#). In the days around the vote, many people were full of hope, some declaring this to be the best time of their lives.

But the government of Iraq immediately called the referendum illegal, and the national Iraqi army, and Shia militias, [moved into the disputed city of Kirkuk](#) and its province.

Thousands fled, with reports of families being forced out and [homes destroyed](#). By 19 October the Iraqi army had control.

It would appear that Kurdish Peshmerga (fighters) in the city under the control of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK - one of two main capitalist parties that dominate the Iraqi Kurdish region) were withdrawn as the Iraqi army moved in, with very little fighting taking place. But fierce fighting is reported in other areas.

## **Arrest**

Iraqi federal courts have [ordered the arrest](#) of Kurdistan officials involved in overseeing the referendum, and now also the arrest of the Kurdish region vice president, for calling the Iraqi army "[occupying forces](#)".

The US and many European governments opposed the referendum, because of the risk of "destabilising the region" and "Iraq's territorial integrity".

Kurdish regional government president Masoud Barzani [made it clear](#) that this referendum would not be binding.

He mainly wants to use it as a bargaining chip in a longer process of negotiating for power with Baghdad, and does not necessarily want to upset the cosy relationships he has fostered with the US and Turkey.

Events are already clearly demonstrating that ordinary Kurdish people in Iraq can have no confidence in the capitalist leaders in Iraqi Kurdistan, or other regional or imperialist powers.

To achieve their genuine national aspirations as well as the decent living standards they have been fighting for, working class and poor Kurds can only rely on themselves and their real potential allies - the workers and poor of the whole region. Independent working class organisation and programme is vital.

The Kurds are the largest stateless nation in the world, with a population of [25-35 million](#) divided mainly between Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey since the post-World War One agreement between western imperialist powers to carve up the region.

Kurds have been oppressed for decades in each country, but in the instability created [since the 2003 Iraq War they developed autonomous areas](#) in Iraq and Syria.

In the last few years, the rise of Isis and the battle against them has raised the possibility of breaking down imperialism's borders, giving the Kurds the opportunity to progress their national aspirations further.

Kirkuk was included in the referendum and is reported to have a [majority Kurdish](#) population (with sizeable Arab and Turkmen populations too), but it is not actually part of the Kurdish government-led region.

It has long been a battleground for control between Kurdish and Iraqi powers, because of its huge oil fields, including moving people to change the make-up of the population.

In the fight against Isis in 2014, when the Iraqi army backed away, Kurdish forces advanced. Oil has been a key element in the substantial autonomy of Iraqi Kurdistan.

They built a pipeline through Turkey to export oil via the Mediterranean, which has provided the main economic basis of the region. Without it, on a capitalist basis, Iraqi Kurdistan will be impoverished.

The Socialist Party and the Committee for a Workers' International fully support the right of the Kurdish people to self-determination including, if they so wish, full autonomous democratic rights within the state they live in, the establishment of independent states, or of a common state of all Kurds.

The very long-held democratic aspirations for national rights is obviously a dominating factor in the Iraqi Kurdistan referendum result.

But the referendum should also be seen in the light of the mass struggle in 2015 and 2016 [against austerity attacks](#).



The region's oil wealth had fuelled big profits, but following the collapse of oil prices, the government and business loaded the crisis on to the working class.

These protests were preceded by demonstrations of youth inspired by the Arab Spring in 2011.

While in the referendum the interests of President Barzani and the working class and poor may appear to have temporarily coincided, for most ordinary Iraqi Kurds independence is about much more than just a new government. Attempts by Barzani to roll back are likely to lead to huge anger.

The two main rival parties in Iraqi Kurdistan are the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Barzani, and the PUK led by Jalal Talabani who has just died.

Both are seen as corrupt, exploiting the oil wealth for themselves, and in the lap of US imperialism. Talabani became president of Iraq with US backing after 2003.

They have [deliberately fostered illusions in imperialism](#). One Kurd is quoted by the BBC saying "we didn't expect the US to be so hostile".

The legitimate aspirations of Kurds will not be secured through battles between nascent capitalist powers, who will all be prepared to whip up ethnic and national division and set people against each other, eg Arab against Kurd, in order to serve themselves.

There are reports of non-Kurds being forced from their homes, which, if true, must be opposed.

Nor will their future be secured through a reliance on western imperialist governments. The different imperialist powers, including the US and Russia, have never had the interests of Kurdish people at heart.

The US was prepared to collaborate with Barzani in 2003 against Saddam Hussein and currently view the Kurdish fighters in Syria as an ally against Isis.

But they are purely interested in their own power and economic interests, and they will support Kurdish aspirations only insofar as they do not conflict with that.

## **George Bush**

This happened most starkly in 1991, when George Bush [encouraged an uprising](#) against Saddam Hussein and then left the Kurds to be massacred. When it suits them, the US will just as readily abandon them.

Neither western powers nor repressive regimes in the region want the determination of Kurds to fight for independence in other areas to increase further, because of the deeper instability that would create, including the potential break-up of Turkey.

Already, as a result of advances made by the Kurdish People's Defence Force (YPG) in Syria (the fighting forces of the left-wing PYD - Democratic Union Party), a big conjoining area in both northern Syria and Iraq is under Kurdish control.

The Kurdish fighters have been extremely brave in their fight against Isis. But many of their gains have been made alongside airstrikes from Russia and the US.

The territories now under Kurdish control are populated by Arabs and Turkmen as well as Kurds. The [Socialist Party has pointed out previously](#) that for the YPG to secure popular support in those areas, it is vital to dissociate itself from imperialist powers and instead appeal to the mass of the population to organise together.

The YPG and PYD in Syria are linked to the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers Party, a guerrilla organisation with mass support in the Kurdish areas of Turkey, which has long fought for greater national rights.

Turkish president Erdogan has meted out vicious repression of Kurds in Turkey in the last two years as part of increasingly authoritarian measures to secure his own power base.

This has included whipping up hatred against the Kurds among Turkish people. The character of Barzani's regime in Iraq is demonstrated by the fact that [he is an ally of Erdogan](#), and won't want to upset him too far, in case he decides to close down the oil pipeline.

It is clearly essential that there are mass Kurdish movements independent of all these capitalist powers.

By standing firm against all imperialist forces and reactionary regimes, and by championing the rights of self-determination, a movement could be built that would reach out to workers and the poor across the whole region.

An independent working class programme, to defend democratic rights, for jobs and homes, for the region's vast resources to be owned and controlled democratically for the benefit of all, could begin to draw together divided populations.

The greatest fear of the rich, big bosses and landowners, and their political representatives, would be the coming together of Kurdish, Iraqi, Turkish, Syrian and Iranian workers in a movement that could challenge local and imperialist governments, and capitalism itself.

A voluntary socialist confederation of the Middle East would enable all people to freely and democratically decide their own fates.

Read [more on Kurdistan at socialistworld.net](#)

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'How do socialists approach the national question?' and 'Will there always be war in the Middle East?'

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](#)

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## Universal Credit chaos: Tories punish the poor

Karen Seymour, Mansfield Socialist Party

Theresa May and her weak, in-fighting Tory cabinet seem hell-bent on rolling out [the hated 'Universal Credit' welfare system](#). But even many of their own MPs don't agree - another fracture in this divided minority government.

The push for rapid expansion is in spite of repeated warnings Universal Credit will be a disaster for those with no choice but to claim benefits.

Already, claimants regularly have to wait six weeks or longer to receive their money. This causes untold hardship to vulnerable people who are unlikely to have savings to fall back on.

Referrals to foodbanks, rent arrears and evictions soon follow. Two [south London boroughs have found](#) that Universal Credit actually created further debt for over half of their claimants. One foodbank said its referrals nearly doubled.

The Tories' insistence that Universal Credit is encouraging more people back into work is laughable. What sort of work? Often it's minimum-wage, zero-hour contracts, or other unreliable employment.

Even some Tory MPs have expressed concerns about the system, no doubt under pressure following the surge of electoral support for Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity programme. Even former Conservative prime minister John Major has hypocritically called Universal Credit "[operationally messy, socially unfair and unforgiving](#)."

In two potentially massive climbdowns, the government [recently announced](#) the scrapping of the scandalous 55p-a-minute Universal Credit helpline charge. A reduction to the number of weeks before claimants receive their cash is also being considered.

And in a non-binding Commons vote - which the Tory leadership ordered abstention on, fearing an embarrassing backbench rebellion - pausing the rollout won by [299 votes to zero](#). Nonetheless, Tory MP Sarah Wollaston defied the instruction by voting with Labour.

Unfortunately, Labour's response to the rollout of Universal Credit has not gone far enough. The [Commons motion](#) - moved by Debbie Abrahams, a [former advisor](#) to right-winger Simon Danczuk - asked for the government to "pause the roll-out" while its problems "are fixed."

No amount of tinkering at the edges will make this weak excuse for benefit cuts fair. It needs to be scrapped altogether, and now.

The Socialist Party fights to replace it with liveable benefits, proper support to find work without compulsion, decent jobs with an immediate £10 an hour minimum wage, and an end to the demonisation of benefit claimants.

The Tories' partial retreats - on this [and other issues](#) - show their days are numbered. Mass action, including coordinated strikes, could end their hated government.

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## Fearful Tories mull borrowing to build

### For a mass programme of council house building!

James Ivens

The Tories are considering [borrowing to build](#) homes. It's the government's umpteenth muddlement in a post-election retreat on all fronts.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid says the Autumn Statement could promise up to 300,000 new builds a year. That would be [50% more than Jeremy Corbyn pledged](#) in June's anti-austerity manifesto.

Javid fears the young. Corbyn's pro-worker stand [gave a new generation confidence](#) to fight.

Millennials have to spend three times as much on housing as our grandparents did, [says the Resolution Foundation](#). At the same time, our grandparents - and parents - have had their pensions pillaged.

But it's fat times for property hustlers. The Tories gave £50 million in handouts to "rabbit hutch" flat developers last year, [the Sunday Times has found](#).

Given this mess, new homes are welcome. But what kind?

### Council homes

Corbyn said at least part of his would be lower-rent council or social homes. The Socialist, by the way, says all of that promised million should be council homes - but it's a start.

The Tories, however, need to dream up ever more markets for their paymasters' profits. Thatcher's 'right to buy' [sold off public housing stock](#). Cameron's 'help to buy' only [pushed up prices](#) more. Expect yet another conveyor belt of capital into the bosses' pockets.

The Labour right is no different. Sadiq Khan, Blairite mayor of London, had been on the job a year this May. Total new social homes built? [Zero](#). Total started? Zero.

But right-wing [Labour councils go on levelling working class homes](#) to make way for the gleaming monoliths of billionaire oligarchs.

And hang on - borrowing to build? There's a deficit to pay down, we thought? It's almost as though austerity is one big ruse to move more money from workers to the super-rich...

There's billions idling in the vaults of big business. We say nationalise the big developers and builders, under democratic workers' management and control. Requisition unused homes and land. Build genuinely affordable housing for all.

And Jeremy - [instruct Labour councils to start now](#). Use reserves and prudential borrowing powers to show what an anti-austerity programme means in practice. The Tories are routing: sound the advance.

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'Local government - the next scene of the anti-austerity battle?'

Rally speakers include: Ian Mearns, Corbynista MP

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](#)

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## Kids wait 18 months for mental healthcare

### Kick out cutters and profiteers

James Hunter, South Tyne and Wear Socialist Party

Children suffering from mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, have to wait up to 18 months after referral to access care.

Even then there are further waiting times before children finally receive treatment, indicates a condemning [report by NHS watchdog COC](#).

One in five are told they cannot be seen within a reasonable timeframe, according to Young Minds. This includes [anorexic children in England](#), who can be a dangerously low weight before receiving referral.

Overstretched child and adolescent services force some families to seek out private healthcare in desperation.

### Catastrophic

These catastrophic delays are caused by intentional, chronic underfunding and understaffing of the NHS, as well as privatisation through [PFI schemes](#) and [vultures like Virgin Care](#).

Mental illnesses benefit from early intervention - a collaborative approach that seeks to act as soon as possible before the onset of irreversible damage. Austerity will no doubt have contributed to the spike in the [number of children self-harming](#).

The number of young people admitted to A&E with a psychiatric condition has [more than doubled](#) since the Conservatives took power in 2010. Record numbers now seek help from children's helplines over suicidal thoughts - [up 15%](#) from last year.

The Socialist Party says: kick out the bloodsuckers - scrap all PFIs! No more children to suffer for the sake of corporate profit and Tory greed!

Fund a fully nationalised health service, run under democratic workers' control and management, and free at the point of use. A socialist NHS could provide for everyone's needs at all times - no exceptions!

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'Can NHS privatisation be stopped before it's too late?'

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](http://socialism2017.net)

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## Profit-driven pesticide use now threatens life

Mira Glavardanov, North London Socialist Party

Since 1989, three-quarters of the flying insect population might have disappeared.

The decline of bees and butterflies has been known for some time. But this [new research from Germany](#) is startling.

Insects make up about two-thirds of all life on Earth. Given their important position in our ecosystems, [one researcher warns](#) their decline in German nature reserves means we may be "on course for ecological Armageddon."

Insects are important for many reasons. They pollinate flowers and crops. They provide food for birds and other species - it is not surprising that the number of birds is in decline too. Some are predators on pests. And they also play the role of "Earth's cleaners," as decomposers of dead matter.

Without insects, ecosystems could collapse and advanced life on Earth become unsustainable.

What is killing these most versatile species? Climate change could be a factor. But probably the biggest culprit - itself a driver of climate change - is industrial agriculture and pesticides.

Industrial farmland has no place for wildlife. Pesticides kill the bugs that make the soil live - they kill pests, but also predators of pests. To make up for the loss of soil fertility, more chemicals are applied. Industrial agriculture is one massive treadmill of damaging chemical use.

There are more ecological ways of farming. But capitalism doesn't care about insects, life or sustainability. It only cares about profit.

The chemical giants have been fighting tooth and nail against agricultural chemical bans. Syngenta has been fighting the EU's [partial 'neonicotinoid' ban](#). The [news is just in](#) that Monsanto is suing the US state of Arkansas for limiting use of its 'dicamba' herbicides.

But it's not just farming. Monsanto's herbicide Roundup, against which there is [mounting evidence of harm](#) to human and wildlife health, still sits happily on the shelf in every garden centre for home use. Councils also use it to spray our streets, parks, and schoolyards.

Under socialism, the big corporations - including chemical firms - would be nationalised, and what they produce democratically planned. A socialist model of agriculture, that cares for the real needs of people and the wellbeing of our planet, would have no place for mass application of destructive poisons that only benefit profits.

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'Environmental crisis: a working class issue'

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](http://socialism2017.net)

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# Profiteering NHS counter-fraud firm in alleged case of... fraud

## Fight for a publicly owned NHS

Jon Dale, Secretary, Unite EM/NG32 Notts NHS branch (personal capacity)

A massive consultancy firm paid to run NHS counter-fraud services has just escaped prosecution - for alleged fraud.

PwC is at the heart of many privatisation programmes, often writing reports used by NHS management to justify privatisation. A three-year inquiry by internal investigator NHS Protect found evidence showing restricted workforce data was supplied to PwC, [according to Health Service Journal](#). PwC allegedly used this in the process of winning and delivering contracts with NHS providers.

NHS Protect submitted its file to the Crown Prosecution Service in May. The CPS has now - conveniently - decided there was not enough evidence to prove criminal fraud.

Investigators allege PwC obtained the data from an NHS employee. It would have used this to win contracts and consultancy work with 20 trusts between 2010 and 2014.

When asked by Health Service Journal, PwC would not comment on which members of its senior management were aware the company was using restricted data improperly.

PwC certainly ought to be expert on the whole issue of fraud. It runs '[Fraud Academy](#)' - "to help prevent, detect and investigate fraud and economic crime in all their many forms."

After years of privatisation of NHS services, PwC is completely embedded in the spider's web of 'public-private partnerships'.

For example, NHS Litigation Authority's local counter-fraud specialist - to whom suspected fraud should be reported - was a PwC employee. This post has since changed hands to the big outsourcing and accountancy firm RSM UK, and the NHS Litigation Authority is now called NHS Resolution.

The chair of PwC's Health Industries Oversight Board [is Alan Milburn](#). He was health secretary in Tony Blair's government. One more reason why Jeremy Corbyn's Labour must completely [break with the Blairites](#), and pledge to bring all privatised NHS services back into public ownership.

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'Can NHS privatisation be stopped before it's too late?'

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](http://socialism2017.net)

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This article was amended on 26 October 2017 to reflect the change in the private firm providing counter-fraud services and the NHS Litigation Authority's name.

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## Them & us

## Prizes for them...

Finance capitalist Gina Miller is Britain's most influential black person this year, [says the Powerlist Foundation](#).

The privately educated hedge fund manager [gained prominence](#) for her legal and electoral campaigns against the EU referendum result. She suffered unacceptable bigoted abuse and threats.

The Socialist is in favour of taking Brexit out of the Tories' hands. We want a socialist, internationalist exit. This must include democratic accountability to the working class.

[It doesn't mean sticking with the reactionary, neoliberal Single Market](#). That would serve Miller and the capitalist class - not Europe's young people and working class.

## ... poverty for us

Meanwhile, nearly a quarter of the EU population is in poverty or at risk of poverty.

EU numbers agency [Eurostat puts the figure at 23.4%](#). That's down from 25% in 2012, though! Slow hand clap.

And the number of EU billionaires rose last year. From 482 to 489, [according to the Sunday Times Rich List](#).

Incidentally - our choice for the accolade that went to Gina Miller? There's plenty of candidates. But the majority-black [workers who struck for decent pay at Barts NHS Trust](#) in east London are real heroes.

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'Can the EU be reformed in workers' interests?'

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](#)

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## Free baths for MPs... bedroom tax for us

Tory MP Tim Loughton has charged [£662 of water bills](#) to public expenses over the last two years.

Loughton is co-chairman of the 'Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group'. He explains his water costs include an hour-long morning bath routine.

Meanwhile, Loughton has [consistently voted](#) to fine council tenants for having spare rooms. Back in 2015, a man from Lancashire [had to have his toes amputated](#) due to frostbite.

He was forced to live in a tent with his father who suffers from neurological disabilities. He was evicted from his home of 30 years for not being able to pay the Conservatives' bedroom tax.

The bedroom tax is a cruel attack on some of the poorest people in Britain. The Socialist Party says: [axe the bedroom tax!](#)

**James Hunter, South Tyne and Wear Socialist Party**

- Have you got news for the 'fishes'? Email: [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk)
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## What we saw: May on Facebook

May gave an interview about Brexit and the EU and on Facebook it was just angry reacts the whole time.

Helen Pattison, East London Socialist Party

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'Can the EU be reformed in workers' interests?'

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](http://socialism2017.net)

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## Aslef members must reject poor Southern Rail driver-only operation offer

Ted Woodley, RMT Midlands political officer (personal capacity)

Train drivers' union Aslef is considering an offer for its members at Southern Rail in an attempt to end its long-running [dispute over the extension of driver-only operated \(DOO\) trains](#).

Despite Aslef's official policy being against DOO, Southern management have talked the leadership into accepting the argument for train guards becoming non-safety critical and for trains to run without them under various operational circumstances.

Fortunately the overwhelming majority of [Aslef members have ignored the recommendations of the leadership and rejected the 'deals' so far](#).

In the latest set of negotiations the set of circumstances where trains can run without an 'onboard supervisor' (guard) has been reduced but still leaves plenty of scope for trains to run driver-only. This has been sweetened with a five-year pay offer which delivers a whopping pay increase of 28%.

Despite the onboard supervisors' role and responsibilities being central to the dispute their union - the RMT - has not been included in the negotiations. The [Trade Union Congress has played a disgraceful role in this dispute so far](#): they brokered talks between Southern management and Aslef earlier this year. The TUC colluded with Aslef and Southern bosses to exclude the RMT from those talks. The drivers correctly rejected [the sell-out deal which emerged from that meeting](#).

The fact that the list of reasons for Southern trains to run without a guard is getting shorter and a bumper pay rise has been offered as a bribe for drivers to accept DOO shows that the bosses want this protracted dispute finished.

However, it's clear the government is using Southern as its battering ram to begin the final destruction of the guard grade on Britain's railways. Any settlement which allows a passenger train to run without the second member of staff under any circumstances will open up a breach in the battle to retain a safety-critical second member of staff on trains.

DOO should be totally eliminated from the railway not extended.

### An Aslef member writes

In line with Aslef policy members around the country are profoundly opposed to any extension of DOO. The deal on offer says that "we will have a second safety-trained person on every train covered by this agreement except in exceptional circumstances. That person will have all the relevant safety competence including the skills to evacuate passengers in an emergency".

The problem is that the exceptional circumstances are not outlined, so a company led by a senior manager who has himself carried out guards' work while a manager is to be trusted not to abuse this clause?



Despite the link to pay, Aslef members on Southern should reject this deal, if they do DOO extension will suffer a fatal setback. But this time, Aslef members must insist that the union joins with the RMT for a joint strategy, including coordinated strike action, to defeat DOO on Southern Rail and in the increasing number of rail operators where it is being proposed.

Even if the deal is accepted local reps should monitor if this clause is abused. If it is, the company will be breaking an agreement, and industrial action can follow.

Aslef is a democratic union - policy and rules are decided by the annual assembly of delegates. If terms or other issues affecting other rail workers are being discussed with employers should the rail unions which represent those workers not be present?

Fatigue and stress due to shift work, shortage of staff, track faults, technical faults on trains, poor communications and destaffing of stations would be added to by any extension of DOO.

The rail trade unions need an alternative plan for a publicly owned and run rail industry providing good jobs, full training and staffing, with decent pay and conditions for us to work in.

#### **Aslef member**

- Get the latest union news...

...with the National Shop Stewards Network bulletin

Available every week at [shopstewards.net](http://shopstewards.net) and by email subscription

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## **Arriva North West bus drivers strike over pay**

### **Becci Heagney**

Bus drivers across 11 depots around the North West took their first day of strike action on 19th October, with another two days planned for 23rd and 30th October. The Unite members working for Arriva North West are fighting for a pay rise and pay parity across the depots.

They accuse Arriva North West of using divide and rule tactics, and an element of 'performance related pay', across the region. There can be up to £2 an hour difference in drivers' pay from depot to depot.

Management are resisting pay rises, or arguing for less, in depots where the service isn't as profitable. It's through no fault of the drivers that fewer people might use a particular route and therefore they should be paid the same wherever they work.

They are not asking for much, just an increase above inflation. And considering Arriva North West is currently making a 15% profit on the service and one boss received a £43,000 bonus, they can certainly afford to give a decent pay rise!

Unite has tried to negotiate, including going to Acas, but it has been reported that the company is refusing to talk in any meaningful way.

The strike has been hugely effective with nearly every depot out and buses not running at all in some areas. In Wythenshawe, south Manchester, only three buses were running, compared to a normal 30 or so during peak times.

Two drivers who at first went into work then walked out and joined the strike, were hugged and had their hands shaken by workers on the picket line.

This strike, along with the dispute between the RMT and Arriva Rail North against Driver Only Operation, highlights the need to take these services out of the hands of private companies. The bus services should be brought back into the public sector where they can be run for the needs of passengers, and drivers can be given a fair deal.

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## Runcorn

Arriva drivers in Runcorn staged a 100% walk out today in support of their fight for a living wage. Unite Shop Steward Ste Cunningham stated: "Drivers are only asking for 3%, in line with inflation, but management keep coming back with lower offers. We've been in negotiations since April, but management refuse to make an offer we can recommend to our members."

The strike is solid across Merseyside and Cheshire, Ste informed us, with managers attempting to run one service in Winsford, without much success.

Many passengers were unaware of the strike, as Arriva has done little, if anything, to inform them. Runcorn has a dedicated bus route around the town which is heavily used and by failing to communicate with passengers, Arriva has failed in its duty to them. Public support in Halton is high for the drivers, and the strikes planned for the next few weeks are expected to go ahead.

**Ste Armstrong**

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## Merseyside

Socialist Party members in Liverpool and Birkenhead visited the pickets to show support, which was warmly received by the drivers. At the Birkenhead picket, the idea of coordinating strikes on the buses with [the RMT action on the railways](#) was strongly supported by strikers who know a common thread is the Arriva company.

Arriva is trying to boost the profits it repatriates to Germany by [getting rid of train guards](#) and holding down bus drivers' pay. Unite and RMT reps as well as officials should jointly discuss dates of future strikes to coordinate for maximum impact.

Recent protests in Liverpool against the withdrawal of bus services on some routes show the need for the full return of public transport to the public sector with all the cuts to staff and services reversed. During the metro mayor election campaign on Merseyside earlier this year, TUSC candidate Roger Bannister put forward this policy, explaining that the metro mayor position could be used to push forward these kinds of anti-austerity pro-socialist ideas.

Labour in local government on Merseyside has been showing no intention of adopting these kind of ideas. The Socialist Party and TUSC supporters will advocate them at every stage and support workers like the bus drivers and rail guards who are, together with the travelling public, those paying the price for the privatisation racket.

**Hugh Caffrey**

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 19 October 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## Shop stewards solidarity meeting brings together workers in struggle

Clive Walder, NSSN steering committee

If the TUC won't coordinate disputes and put pressure on the bosses then we will. That was the message from the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) solidarity meeting held in Birmingham on 21 October.

Around 80 trade unionists met to build solidarity and strengthen existing networks to support the growing number of long-running and bitter disputes that have taken place such as the [Birmingham bin workers](#), [British Airways cabin crew](#), [Barts health workers](#) and the [Mears housing workers](#) in Manchester.

The meeting opened with Rob Williams, chair of the NSSN, giving an overview of the industrial situation and stressing that the mood of workers is changing in that they are fed up with never-ending austerity that produces no economic improvement.

Unions are being forced to reflect that pressure and where unions are providing leadership, workers will respond with action. Rob stressed that [we have an incredibly weak Tory government that could be overthrown by concerted industrial action](#). There is no shortage of potential disputes to coordinate - the TUC itself should be organising that.

Darren Glebocki from the postal executive of the Communication Workers Union reported that, though postal workers were livid at [the blatant interference of the courts in preventing the two-day strike](#) taking place, they are still determined to see the back of Royal Mail's attacks on pensions and job security.

He said that they may have won an injunction but that [the union still had a 90% vote for industrial action](#) which meant big problems for Royal Mail. The terms of the injunction mean that strike action may take place in six to eight weeks, possibly just before Christmas.

## Bin workers

Howard Beckett, Unite assistant general secretary, paid tribute to [the resolve of the Birmingham bin workers](#) and was confident that the interim injunction preventing redundancies taking place will be upheld at the full court hearing on 27 November. He stressed that the chief executive of Birmingham council was in effect appointed by the Tory government and said: "The council couldn't give a monkey's about safety. This was about downgrading workers' jobs."

Birmingham bin workers convenor Richard Beddows also spoke and from the floor Ted Woodley mentioned that Socialist Party members had been on the picket line virtually every day of the dispute and produced eleven bulletins and are now producing bulletins for the postal workers.

Katrine Williams from the PCS executive spoke about their [consultative ballot over action to secure a pay rise of more than 1%](#).

Jane Nellist from the newly formed National Education Union, spoke about [the issues affecting teachers such as pay and workloads](#) and the need for a national ballot.

Annette, a Unite rep from Rolls-Royce in Derby, gave an emotional speech about [the campaign to save the Derby Womens' Centre from closure](#) by a Labour council with millions in usable reserves.

In closing the meeting Linda Taaffe, NSSN secretary, reiterated the point that the TUC should be encouraging and coordinating these disputes and that we shouldn't need the NSSN because the TUC should be the NSSN.

But if they won't, we will.

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'Workers v bosses: Who will win the low pay war??'

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](http://socialism2017.net)

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# Manchester lecturers walk out

Lecturers at the University of Manchester held a successful rally, supported by students, on the first day of their strike action on 23 October. UCU members are fighting 140 job losses in three departments.

Management give the reason for the job cuts as being financial but the university made a surplus of £36 million last year and is sitting on reserves of £1.5 billion.

There was a packed-out rally after a morning of strong picket lines at various buildings on campus. Staff are determined to fight these cuts and there is support from many students as well.

Students, in groups including Save Our Staff and Socialist Students, built support for the strike by leafleting and postering in the week running up to the strike to explain why attacks on staff mean a worse deal for students.

There has been an ongoing dispute over job cuts at nearby Manchester Metropolitan University and many students are campaigning for free education and against attacks on education, showing there is the capacity for coordinating action. United, these cuts can be defeated!

**Manchester Socialist Students**

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## Hear from socialists involved in struggles the world over at the Socialism 2017 Saturday rally

**Charles Wheeler, Leicester Socialist Party**

Labour's election surge. \$15-an-hour campaigns sweeping the US. Catalan independence. There have been few times in history when socialist ideas have held such immediate relevance and so much international potential - and Socialism 2017 will see key figures from these struggles gathered under one roof.

Along with talks, forums and workshops covering innumerable subjects, [the Socialist Party's annual weekend of discussion and debate](#) centres around the energetic evening rallies. This year's flagship Saturday rally features speakers involved in struggles the world over, bringing the wealth of their knowledge to London - and redistributing it!

We'll hear from one of the only [elected socialists in the US](#), Seattle councillor and Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant, on her [successful fights for a \\$15-an-hour minimum wage](#), a [tax on the super-rich](#), and [easier voter registration](#).

Kshama also backed [Bernie Sanders' challenge to the establishment in last year's presidential election](#), opposing both the reactionary bigotry of Donald Trump and the capitalist apologia of Hillary Clinton.

We'll also be joined by Juan Ignacio Ramos, general secretary of Izquierda Revolucionaria (IR) in the Spanish state.

In July, IR, along with sister parties in Mexico and Venezuela, [voted to reunify with the Committee for a Workers' International](#) (CWI), bringing new energy to all our struggles.

IR has been at the forefront of the Catalan independence campaign, [arguing for a Catalan socialist republic](#).

And in the wake of [Jeremy Corbyn's socialist platform yielding Labour's best election result in years](#), Labour MP and Corbyn supporter Ian Mearns will speak too.

The rally will also feature speeches from Tamil Solidarity and Refugee Rights Campaign activist Isai Priya, PCS union assistant general secretary Chris Baugh, and Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe. Socialism is back on the agenda - get involved in the discussion at Socialism 2017!

- Socialism 2017

Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 November

Institute of Education, Bedford Way, WC1H 0AL

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](http://socialism2017.net)

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## Angry east London residents organise against threat to leisure centre

Claire Laker-Mansfield, Hackney Socialist Party

On 23 October, 50 local residents packed out an angry meeting in Hoxton, east London, to organise against the threatened closure of the area's leisure centre.

The plans, which have been laid out by Hackney's Labour mayor and council, include the demolition of the existing Britannia Leisure Centre, with its site then used to build three 24-storey tower blocks containing 400 luxury flats, as well as an academy secondary school run by the private City of London Academies Trust.

Verbally, the mayor and councillors have said that they plan to replace the existing leisure centre with a new one, built on an area currently occupied by tennis courts on the nearby Shoreditch Park.

But there have been no guarantees given as to either the size or scope (in terms of facilities) of this new centre, with many residents expressing the view that it may not even be built.

### Fury

Local people at the meeting expressed fury at the plans - which are correctly understood in a wider context of gentrification, the privatisation of public land and the destruction of council run services.

There was particular disgust that - despite [Jeremy Corbyn's speech at his party's conference about the need for democratic ballots to stop so-called 'regeneration' projects being used as a smokescreen for gentrification and social cleansing](#) - this is being pushed through by a right-wing Labour mayor using executive powers.

So far, the plans have not even been taken to a full meeting of the council - let alone a ballot of affected local residents and centre users.

There was also disgust at the failure of a single Labour councillor to attend the meeting, with plans to send specific invites and build pressure for them to attend a future one.

The Socialist Party will be fully participating in this campaign - raising the demand that Labour councillors must stand up to these outrageous plans.

Should they refuse, local residents could also consider directly challenging them in the upcoming council elections in May 2018.

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'Local government - the next scene of the anti-austerity battle?'

## Trade unionists march to defend 650 local jobs

Mark Emmerson, Teesside Socialist Party

Members of the civil service union PCS, Fire Brigades Union, Communication Workers Union, general unions GMB and Unite and public sector union Unison attended a march and rally organised by the Northern Trade Union Congress (NTUC) and the local PCS branches.

The event, held on Stockton High Street on 21 October, was organised in response to the government's proposals to strip 650 civil service jobs out of the heart of Teesside, an area that has already seen thousands of jobs lost as part of the failed austerity plan led by the Tories and the coalition before that.

The event was also used as part of the wider campaign to smash the public sector pay cap.

Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary, Clare Williams, Unison regional secretary, Rehana Adam, GMB, Davie Howe, FBU and Beth Farhat, NTUC regional secretary, spoke alongside local Labour MPs.

The plan to close the tax offices in Stockton and Middlesbrough is part of the Tories' wider plan to close hundreds of tax offices across the UK and concentrate operations in a handful of larger offices. The impact will leave many local communities bereft of quality jobs and a massive loss of income into the local communities where PCS members live and work.

PCS believes that as a result of these plans, it will be much more difficult to tackle the £120 billion tax gap, money desperately needed to fund other public services.

PCS members will also be impacted as thousands of jobs losses are expected and those that stay will be required to travel to new locations adding excessive hours per day in extra travelling, and at their own expense. PCS members in Stockton will lose £400 a month and travel an extra two hours each way to attend their job, a job that many have dedicated their lives to as they serve the public!

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## Bad Art's Leicester event showcases local anti-capitalist artists

Michael Barker, Leicester Socialist Party

With this year marking the [100th anniversary of the Russian revolution](#), reflections upon [the relationship between art and emancipation](#) are once again at the forefront of our minds. This is why last Leicester was proud to be part of the inaugural [Bad Art world tour](#).

The fight for the right to freely express ourselves and to have the time and energy to do so is critical to any revolutionary project! So, the organising of the Bad Art 'Protest Showcase' served an important function in bringing together some of the many anti-capitalist local artists for an inspiring evening of entertainment.

Reflecting both the hope and anguish that dominate our lives, local poet Jodie Hannis passionately exposed the depths of sexual exploitation that is happening all around us, demanding that we act to prevent it, while Drew Walton alternatively used rhymes to orchestrate a rising crescendo of laughter as he lambasted [David Cameron's alleged pig incident](#).

The Beatles' famous 'Paperback Writer' was reimagined by Drew and elevated from a song that pleads for a publisher to read a wannabe writer's book, to an attack on injustice and a celebration of [the successful](#)

[collective action taken by Deliveroo riders against their bosses.](#)

Even the stage decorations were political, with Nick Barrett's 'Offshore Bunting' which depicted the flags of [the corporate elite's favoured tax havens](#). While James Ivens, the dynamic MC for the night, weaved a tight political and comedic line between all the acts.

Experimental dub-reggae outfit Pale Blue Dot lifted spirits, and citiZen bXtr performed a live improvised score to accompany Jane Lawson's film which revealed the deep rotten state of neoliberalism which she did by using time-lapse photographs to illustrate the literal decomposition (or detoxification) of Milton Friedman's book [Capitalism and Freedom](#).

Powerful words from Charles Wheeler examined his experiences of the Kafkaesque nightmare of living on benefits, and Cynthia Rodriguez waxed lyrical about her lived daily oppressions at the hands of the British immigration system.

This rounded off a beautiful night of diverse and always political art. But most of all as the organisers of the event made clear: "Bad Art isn't just about saying what's wrong. It's about fighting to change it."

- Read more about art and the struggle for socialism at [badartworld.net](#)
- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'Can art and literature provide a voice for the left?'

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](#)

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## **Storm Brian cannot withstand working-class anger**

On 21 October, Cardiff Socialist Party held three stalls in the city, defying [Storm Brian which brought intense winds](#) of more than 50 mph and rain showers to south Wales.

Workers and passers-by responded enthusiastically!

In Canton, even with the majority of people running for cover and our stall blowing off three times, the courageous Cardiffian working class who braved the weather stopped at our stall [demanding that nurses, teachers and other public sector workers are given a pay rise!](#)

Scores of people signed our petition and talked to us. We sold more than a dozen copies of the Socialist and got some hefty donations.

If a storm cannot discourage the working class fightback, capitalism doesn't stand a chance.

João Félix, Cardiff West Socialist Party

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## **Film: The Death of Stalin**

## **Well-deserved ridicule of Stalinism is impressive, funny but flawed**

Caroline Vincent, Leicester Socialist Party

'The Death of Stalin' is the latest offering from Armando Iannucci, the acclaimed writer and producer behind an impressive canon of comedies including the political satires 'The Thick of It', 'In The Loop', and most recently 'Veep'.

Based on the graphic novel by Fabien Nury and Thierry Robin, it examines the period immediately preceding and following the demise of the despot, and the effects on his sycophantic entourage.

The events provide plenty of dark humour - much to the disgust of historian Richard Overy. His [inexplicable review for the Guardian](#) bemoaned both the plot's historical inaccuracies, and the fact it is played for laughs! Perhaps somebody should have told him he was reviewing a comedy.

While there's no doubt artistic license has been taken, the inspiration comes from real events - some of which were truly farcical.

Stalin suffers a stroke and lays undiscovered for hours as his personal guards are too scared to enter his office and disturb him.

No one knows which doctor to call as most of them have been rounded up and imprisoned due to Stalin's paranoia.

And there is reluctance to use a respirator as it is American-made - a detail that has been recounted in both Nikita Khrushchev's and Stalin's daughter Svetlana's real-life memoirs.

There is an impressive ensemble cast. Notably Jeffrey Tambor as Stalin's deputy Georgy Malenkov, Michael Palin as diplomat Vyacheslav Molotov, a menacing Simon Russell Beale as spymaster Lavrentiy Beria, and Steve Buscemi as Nikita Khrushchev, "the reformer."

The plot revolves around Beria and Khrushchev's struggle to succeed Stalin, while simultaneously managing his lavish state funeral.

Fans of 'The Thick of It's' lampooning of New Labour will notice parallels. The Stalinists, like the Blairites, are egotistical buffoons, completely isolated from the experiences of the working class, seeking guidance from equally clueless advisors.

Without a doubt there are many laughs to be had. But this is not without flaws - at times the humour is disappointingly base, misogynistic even.

The 2017 release coincides with [the centenary of the Russian revolution](#). But while the ridicule of Stalin's savage regime is well-deserved, it goes nowhere toward clarifying the important role played by the old Bolsheviks under Lenin in freeing Russian workers and peasants from the tsarist regime.

Indeed, the timing of the theatrical release is likely to fuel the media's conflation of workers' democracy with [the brutal, counterrevolutionary dictatorship of Stalinism](#).

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'Was Lenin a dictator?' and 'What is the legacy of the 1917 October revolution in Russia?'

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](#)

- Read more about the Russian revolution at [1917revolution.org](#)

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## Film - Dennis Skinner: Nature of the Beast



# The class struggle and parliament: Dennis Skinner's ayes and nays

Tony Mulhearn Liverpool Socialist Party

This biopic on Dennis Skinner, directed by Liverpool's Dan Draper, portrays the whole individual.

In addition to his celebrated political abrasiveness when baiting the Tories and their institutions, his love of nature, singing - he's a natural for a good karaoke - and his love of walking in the great parks is brought to life.

The film is at its most riveting when it portrays his unequivocal rejection of Toryism, capitalist hypocrisy and inequality, and his identification with workers in struggle.

Standing firm with the dockers imprisoned in Pentonville for defying Tory prime minister Ted Heath's 1971 Industrial Relations Act.

Giving unequivocal support to the Clay Cross councillors when they defied Heath's Housing Finance Act.

Declaring in the Commons that he would be on miners' picket lines and donating his wages to the struggle. And implacably opposing the expulsion of Liverpool's socialist councillors.

Dennis used the parliamentary platform to expose to millions the crimes of capitalism and the virtues of socialist policies.

In one revealing clip he explains he never went on any all-party 'fact finding' foreign junket, saying the prospect of mixing socially with Tories and Liberals appalled him.

This seems like a man who never lost touch with his class. A miner who took the values of class solidarity into Westminster.

The film was mostly shot in 2014, before Jeremy Corbyn assumed his current authority. The absence of any reference to him gave the film an added strength.

Unlike many right-wing 'converts' to Corbynism, he maintained his radical statements even when the establishment considered it 'unpopular'.

However, without the checks and balances of party democracy - ripped up by former Labour leader Neil Kinnock and his acolytes - even some good class fighters can lose their socialist compass.

This is shown by [a report in the Independent on 26 September 1998](#), headlined "Meet Tony Blair's newest new best friend: Dennis Skinner." It went on: "Tony Blair has found a new best friend.

"Dennis Skinner, the left-winger nicknamed the Beast of Bolsover, has become a surprising confidant of the prime minister.

"Downing Street has let it be known that Mr Blair would be delighted if Mr Skinner is, as expected, re-elected to Labour's ruling national executive committee this week.

"The MP for Bolsover, Derbyshire, a former miner, has become the unofficial link man between the prime minister and the so-called 'awkward squad' of left-wingers in the Commons.

"Mr Blair regularly telephones him for advice and invites him for tea in his parliamentary office. 'They get on very well,' a Downing Street source said. 'The prime minister has a very high opinion of Dennis - he's got a soft spot for him like we all do.

"The Dennis Skinner of 1998 is not the Dennis Skinner of 1988 or 1978. He's become a lot more constructive in his outlook and approach'."

Subsequent events revealed to many on the left that any trust in Blair was a calamitous misjudgement.

Nevertheless, [if Labour's 600,000 members are empowered to select parliamentary candidates of their choice](#), they could do worse than candidates who embrace the best of the values Dennis Skinner has defended for decades.

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'Labour and the trade unions'

Rally speakers include: Ian Mearns, Corbynista MP

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](http://socialism2017.net)

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## New musical on life of Castro

The new musical 'Fidel' will premiere in Covent Garden on 16 November. The first part of two on [the life of Cuban leader Fidel Castro](#), it covers his early life - from national liberation fighter opposing brutal dictator Fulgencio Batista, to marching into Havana in 1959.

Writer Denise Baden is known for appearing on BBC news after Castro's death to challenge the one-sided portrayal of the Cuban revolution.

Baden said: "There are elements of David and Goliath as this tiny country held off US aggression..."

"In a letter to Fidel, Che Guevara said that a true revolutionary is guided by great love. We want this to be a fun and exciting journey for all involved."

- 'Fidel' - 16 November at the Iris Theatre, London - tickets £15 (£10 concessions), special rates for schools - [iristheatre.com/event/fidel](http://iristheatre.com/event/fidel)
  - Read more - 'Cuba: Socialism and Democracy' by Peter Taaffe - [£8 from leftbooks.co.uk](#)
  - Get your copy free by taking out a [Direct Debit subscription to the Socialist](#)
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## The Socialist inbox

### Do you have something to say?

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We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Views of letter writers do not necessarily match those of the Socialist Party.

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## Featured letter: obesity epidemic

The alarming spread of obesity was well highlighted by Stephanie Hammond in the last Socialist ('[Obesity epidemic: end food market anarchy](#)'). Her short article rightly blames the capitalist system - not individuals, as governments and establishment media do.

There wasn't space in her article, but other factors cause the obesity epidemic as well as poverty and inequality.

Obesity is becoming more common among better-off people in countries like China and India.

Most people now live in towns and cities. Giant agricultural, processing and supermarket companies control food production and distribution. Farmers taking fresh food to local markets are squeezed out.

These corporations maximise profits by creating demand for highly processed foods. Cheap ingredients - such as starch and fat - are turned into easily packaged and advertised products. High sugar, salt and additives make them palatable with longer shelf lives.

Most women, particularly in the more advanced economies, are now employed rather than spending all day as unpaid domestic workers, including preparing meals. Long hours have contributed to a rise in convenience foods and takeaways, often high in fat and sugar.

Many more jobs are now sitting down, as is travelling to school or work. Capitalism makes money from leisure too, encouraging us to sit with a screen or game box instead of getting exercise.

A socialist society would cut the working week, allowing everyone more time to exercise and to cook with fresh ingredients if they wish.

[Good quality canteens, local cafes and restaurants could serve low-priced, healthy meals.](#)

Big corporations would be nationalised, with food production and distribution democratically planned so that everyone could eat well and healthily.

Enough food can be produced to feed everyone on the planet well. Does that mean meat two or three times a day? Possibly once or twice a month, in my opinion - but that's another debate!

**David Johnson**

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## **World shaken!**

I've just heard the last episode of '[Ten Days That Shook the World](#)' on Radio 4. If you want to listen to the whole series - I recommend you do - [it's on iPlayer](#).

If you're not sure, listen to the last part first. You'll hear what a real workers' government does straight away - no messing.

Just a small point about the very last minute, which listening to BBC I was expecting. I read John Reed's book about a month ago. I'm sure I can't remember anything about Joe Stalin right at the end.

**Andy Beadle, Lewisham, south London**

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## **Democracy de-not-cracy**

Democracy at Labour Party conference still has a long way to go. The only way that a constituency Labour Party (CLP) was able to send a motion to this conference was either as a "contemporary" or as an "emergency."

An emergency motion had to be on a matter which had arisen since 21 September. A contemporary motion could only be submitted if the issue had not been not discussed by the national executive committee or the national policy forum!

It's not surprising the CLP motions chosen were not controversial and went through unanimously.

**Pete Watson, Nottingham**

- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'Labour and the trade unions'

Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](http://socialism2017.net)

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## Customer isn't right

Jobcentre attendees are not 'customers'. That is a Tory word.

Also I do not think it is a good thing that there is near full employment - as it's not true. Two million people on only 20 hours, for example, would be equivalent to one million unemployed.

Benefit sanctions now are more brutal and can stretch to three years. People on sanctions are removed from the figures, as are all trainees, volunteers etc.

I have looked for work or training and there is nothing, just agency jobs which either do not exist or are repeated ad infinitum.

In the present system jobs are the past. If you have not got in-demand skills, you've had it.

**Mike, Southampton**

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## Monarchy menace

Socialists were given a timely reminder of how the capitalist state uses the residue of the feudal past to protect its interests when under attack.

I refer to [the wheeling out of King Felipe VI of Spain to oppose the movement of Catalans](#) defending their democratic right to self-determination.

I believe that in his television address Felipe made no mention of the brutal way the police attacked voters at the polling booths and on the streets, leaving hundreds injured.

Behind the velvet glove lies the iron fist of the state - and ultimately, "special bodies of armed men" as Lenin pointed out in '[State and Revolution](#)'.

Some regard the retention of the monarchy as a tourist attraction - harmless. However its role in the [dismissal of the democratically elected 1975 Labour government of Australia](#), and the so-called 'royal prerogative' should be looked at with great suspicion.

Papers and correspondence relating to the action of the monarchy in Australian dismissal case are conveniently stored away until 2027! Socialists support the right to self-determination and are against state repression. Solidarity with the people of Catalonia!

**Sean Brogan, Teignmouth**

- 'State and Revolution' - [£8 from leftbooks.co.uk](#)
- Socialism 2017 (11 and 12 November, central London)

Discussions include: 'How can a Corbyn-led government avoid sabotage?'

**Find out more and book tickets at [socialism2017.net](#)**

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