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Editorial of the Socialist issue 975

Brexit deal no solution to Tory rifts

No divorce bill to subsidise capitalist elites of Europe

For a socialist, internationalist Brexit

For a while it looked like Theresa May might be about to crash out of office, as her fractured, divided party, propped up in government by the DUP, seemed unable even to reach agreement on a deal on the 'first stage' of Brexit negotiations. This time, however, the crisis did not prove fatal. A deal, involving numerous concessions by May, and a lot of deliberately ambiguous wording, has been cobbled together and acceded to by the DUP, keeping the show on the road for now. This so-called victory for May's negotiating skills has solved none of the problems that May and her government face; it has only 'kicked the can down the road'.

The most important conclusion for the millions of working and middle class people in Britain is that this government remains extremely weak and can be defeated. For as long as it remains in power, however, the norm will continue to be wage restraint, a catastrophic housing crisis, and endless cuts in public services.

Raised hopes

For the majority of Britain's capitalist class, despite their horror at being represented by a party as dysfunctional as the Tories, the deal has raised their hopes. They now dare to dream that the 'soft' Brexit which would suit their interests might be achieved, despite the hard Brexiteers on the Tory right. After all, the government has acceded to the EU's demands for an [exit bill of at least £36 billion](#), shamefacedly abandoning their previous posturing that the EU could 'go whistle'.

They have also agreed that, in the event of a 'no-deal' Brexit, there would be 'full alignment' between Northern Ireland and EU law. In reality this would only be possible in one of two ways - either a divergence between the laws of Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, which would be unacceptable to the majority of Protestants in Northern Ireland, or remaining in the Single Market and Customs Union: that is, within the EU in all but name.

However, the welcoming of the deal by the Tory right does not mean they accept 'full alignment' by whatever means, but only that they had no choice but to agree it in order to prevent a complete collapse of the Brexit negotiations and hope, Mr Micawber-style, that something will turn up further down the road. It is likely that what will turn up will be the Tories repeatedly being forced to bang their heads against the reality that British capitalism is third rate, and that they have no choice but to make concessions to both the institutions of the EU and any of the other major powers with which they hope to negotiate favourable deals.

The nationalist 'hard Brexiteer' wing of the Tory party, which is fuelled by an utterly utopian dream of a return to Britain's past as a pre-eminent world power, offers absolutely no way forward for working class people in Britain. Brexit on their terms would undoubtedly mean job losses, economic crisis and further steps towards Britain becoming little more than a global tax haven. Nor, however, do the pro-EU capitalist politicians, who represent the interests of the major corporations, have any common interests with the majority of people in Britain.

Jeremy Corbyn should be leading the campaign against paying a penny for a divorce bill that will subsidise the capitalist elites of Europe, declaring instead that the money should be spent on the NHS, raising public sector pay and abolishing tuition fees.

Instead, the pro-capitalist Blairite wing of the Labour Party is campaigning for Labour to adopt - hook, line and sinker - the position of the capitalist class on Brexit. Jeremy Corbyn and those on the left of the party

need to clearly reject this.

It is ludicrous to claim, [as the Blairite Labour MP Chuka Umunna has](#), that the EU single market is, "uniquely, a framework of rules that protects people from the worst excesses of globalisation and unfettered capitalism." It certainly doesn't protect those fleeing war in the Middle East and largely kept outside of the borders of 'Fortress Europe'. They face the unimaginable horror of slave markets in Libya and risk drowning in the Mediterranean. But nor does it protect those already inside the EU's borders from the 'worst excesses' of capitalism. On the contrary, the institutions of the EU have inflicted terrible hardship on the workers of Greece, Spain, Portugal, Ireland and elsewhere. In Greece wages have fallen by an average of a third. In every country, including Britain, EU directives are used as a means to implement privatisation and drive down wages.

Rip up neoliberal rules

If Jeremy Corbyn were to launch [a campaign for a socialist Brexit](#) it would transform the situation. A socialist Brexit would mean ripping up the EU bosses' club neoliberal rules - not in order to create the more isolated and even more exploitative neoliberal vision of the Tory right, but to begin to build a society for the many not the few. It would mean taking socialist measures so that the enormous wealth in society could be harnessed to provide everyone with the prerequisites for a decent life: a high-quality, secure home, a good job, free education, a top class NHS, a living pension and more. Such a programme could unite working class people in Britain, regardless of how they voted in the referendum.

It would also act as a beacon for workers and young people across Europe to take the same road, opening the path to mass opposition to the EU bosses' club - and towards a democratic socialist confederation of Europe. Jeremy Corbyn should urgently use his international anti-austerity authority to help establish a new collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis. Only this approach can cut across the confusion created by the lies of all wings of the Tory party.

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Labour 'purge' furore really just democracy

Momentum leadership not put forward strategy to defeat Blairites

Communities won't take any more excuses from councillors

Labour's "moderates" are being forced out. "An atmosphere of intimidation" has been created. "Bullying campaigns" are being organised. These are just a few examples of the capitalist media's recent 'reporting' on the activities of the Corbyn-supporting organisation Momentum. The pretence which followed June's general election - that there is 'one united Labour party', as columnist Owen Jones put it in a tweet - has been utterly exposed.

The backdrop to this is the lead-up to the 2018 local elections and the selection process for the candidates who will wear a red rosette. Local government remains a bastion of Labour's right. Labour councillors have dutifully administered brutal Tory austerity. They have closed libraries, sacked staff, cut pay, and privatised services. This has often been in the face of organised opposition from community campaigns and trade unions. The so-called moderates are those who have viciously and remorselessly attacked working class people.

'Moderates' in Birmingham council have recently [been defeated by the courageous action of bin workers](#), fighting off the council's threat of over 100 redundancies and attempts to blackmail workers into accepting £5,000 a year pay cuts. This victory came after a lengthy battle in which the council spent over £6 million trying to break the Unite union - including through the courts. It is difficult to think of a better example of

"bullying" than threatening people with the sack unless they are prepared to accept a staggeringly large pay cut.

[In Haringey, 'moderates' have been trying to ram through the Haringey Development Vehicle \(HDV\)](#) - an unprecedented privatisation of public assets. Under the plans, existing estates housing thousands of families are set to be demolished, with no guarantee residents will be able to return. This is a Labour council consciously hitting the accelerator on gentrification and social cleansing.

In some areas, local Corbyn supporters and anti-austerity campaigners have organised to try to select candidates for the elections who will act differently. This has nothing to do with intimidation. In fact, it is basic democracy. As the Socialist Party has argued consistently, Labour members and trade unions should have the right to decide who represents the party at elections.

Councils can fight

If Labour is to be an anti-austerity party, as Corbyn has argued it should, this needs to apply at all levels - in deeds, not just words. Where the Labour Party is in power in local councils, there exists an opportunity to put 'Corbynism' into practice in the here and now.

Councillors have a choice - they can act as a defence against Tory cuts, or they can be May's little helpers. If they were prepared to use their reserves and borrowing powers, they could resist the cuts onslaught, while building a mass movement that could force the Tories to call an election. Corbyn should pledge now that he would support any councils that do this.

With the government in deep crisis, and with the Labour Party now boasting an anti-austerity leader and a substantial poll lead, this choice has never looked starker. Imagine the effect if Labour councils around the country collectively declared that they would not be prepared to implement cuts. Even if only one council did so, it could act as a lightning conductor for the seething discontent within society.

This is a government on the edge of a cliff - if it faced opposition from local councils, backed up by a mass movement, it could rapidly be pushed off.

But while this approach, long advocated by the Socialist Party, has won support from campaigns and trade unions such as Unite, it has absolutely not been the approach adopted by Momentum's national leadership. While the organisation has been credited with the deselection of the majority of the pro-HDV councillors in Haringey, the truth is this was a campaign by local Labour members who organised vigorously, without any direct involvement by national Momentum. And while there have been a few victories for the left in other areas, the reality is that in the vast majority of cases so far, existing, pro-austerity councillors have been selected.

In fact, far from organising a fightback against the right, the approach of Momentum's leadership has instead been to put a lid on discussion about council cuts. Jon Lansman, the organisation's self-appointed leader, has intervened to shut down democracy within the group, imposing a wholly top-down structure, precisely to ensure that questions like cuts and reselection are taken off the table for discussion.

This has included effectively handing control of Momentum's membership policy to Labour's right-wing compliance unit, by making membership of the party a requirement for involvement. Those excluded and expelled for holding socialist views and activism - including Socialist Party members - are de facto expelled from Momentum.

Two parties in one

This is symptomatic of a wider political strategy, which unfortunately Corbyn also bears some responsibility for. This has been characterised by an attempt to deny that there is a fundamental distinction between the pro-cuts, pro-war, Blairite Labour Party of the past, and the huge influx of working class and young people who joined to back Corbyn. Labour is really 'two parties in one'. On the one hand there is a fledgling anti-austerity party. On the other, there is the Blairite rump that dominates Labour in the parliamentary party and in local government. By and large, it will be this right-wing rump standing in May.

Many people will draw the conclusion that if they weren't removed in the selection process, the Blairite cutters and privatisers should be removed at the ballot box - and that it's much better that anti-cuts Corbyn-supporters stand than that the anger against the Blairites goes to benefit the Lib Dems or even Tories waiting in the wings. Where this is the case, socialists, anti-cuts campaigners and trade unionists will have every right to provide an electoral challenge to them by standing candidates who are willing to say no to austerity: in words, but also in deeds.

Committee for a Workers' International document

A world in crisis, ripe for revolution

A meeting of the international executive (IEC) of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI - the world organisation the Socialist Party is affiliated to) took place in Belgium from 27 November to 2 December. The documents agreed can be read in full at socialistworld.net. Here we print extracts from the 'world perspectives' document.

The world crisis of capitalism - despite the surface impression of 'recovery' - has only got worse since the meeting of last year's IEC. The world capitalist class faces a further erosion of its political 'legitimacy' as the splits within the ruling class have sharpened and become more open.

There is continuing overall stagnation in the advanced industrial countries. In Africa and Latin America the promise of a 'brighter future' has now been dashed as the commodity boom of the previous period has largely evaporated, despite a recent partial increase in exports in some countries.

The fact that living standards of working class people are still under attack despite 'growth' shows that the crisis of capitalism is not over and there is no room for lasting concessions despite the propaganda of a boom.

Tensions between Russia and the US, EU and even to a degree China, continue to worsen. The Kremlin's initial support for Trump has now been forgotten, as the conflict of imperialist interests in Syria, North Korea and elsewhere continues.

It allows Putin's regime to use anti-western rhetoric at home, fuelled by the closure of its embassies in the US and the continuing controversy of the Kremlin's 'trolls' and interference in western elections.

In the neocolonial world, expectations have been lowered with the collapse of commodity prices. The goal of Africa, Latin America and Asia soon attaining 'first world' high-income and status is still far away.

National struggles

National struggles have multiplied, not only in the neocolonial world - [Myanmar's expulsion of the Rohingya](#) - but also now in the heart of Europe, in Catalonia. In the modern era there has been a mushrooming of the national question. Older 'national questions' can be resurrected, while entirely new 'national' issues can be brought to the fore, by economic collapse or war.

This is a key question for the Middle East where the legacy of past imperialist oppression and occupation left a patchwork of states, many of them cutting across the living bodies of groups and peoples, separating them. This has now been enormously aggravated by the recent wars in the region which have resulted in a 'victory' of a kind over Isis but a mountain of victims, massive displacement, devastation and the flattening of cities, as well as the armies of refugees.

Because of Isis's messianic methods it was bound to alienate the mass of the peoples of the Middle East and elsewhere. However, this does not mean that it is finished.

It will now fall back on its original guerrilla tactics in Iraq and other countries in the region. There will probably be an attempt at an intensified terrorist campaign.

Latin America

In Latin America there is also a deepening of the economic crisis, a sharp polarisation between the classes, political crises aggravated by endemic corruption, and the inability of the national capitalist class, insofar as it now exists as a coherent force, to show a way forward for society.

Brazil, the biggest country in Latin America and previously the most prosperous, is presently experiencing a major crisis, which has produced almost a position of political deadlock following the impeachment - a 'soft coup' - of the Workers' Party's President Dilma.

The previous vice-president Temer, who orchestrated her removal and replaced her, has been shown to be implicated in colossal bribery and corruption. He faces massive opposition from the trade unions and the working class, which has already resulted in the unions organising general strikes and calls for his own impeachment!

The capitalist press speculates that public scepticism about the privatisation drive, already milked by the opposition and the unions, could further push Brazil in a 'populist' direction - a further radicalisation of the workers' movement - in the elections.

The social, political and economic crisis in Venezuela has worsened. The ruling class internationally has tried to use this to discredit the idea of 'socialism' as it did following the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in eastern Europe. The crisis which exists is not, of course, a failure of socialism but a consequence of not breaking with capitalism.

The Maduro regime has swung further to the right and is struggling to maintain itself in power to defend the interests of the ruling bureaucratic elite, which includes the main sections of the military. At the same time, the reactionary right-wing opposition has failed to gain sufficient support and momentum to remove the regime.

Trump and the US

Donald Trump's presidential election 'victory' was a delayed reaction to the 2007-08 world economic crisis. We argued that a Trump presidency would turn out to be an unmitigated disaster for US and world capitalism. And so it has proved to be.

Trump has implicitly threatened to eviscerate - through a 'tactical' nuclear attack - North Korea and overthrow its 'rocket man' Kim Jong-un. Trump has now also attacked Iran, thereby putting in jeopardy the agreement on Iran's nuclear facilities as well as upsetting the already delicate balance in the war-torn Middle East.

His policies have brought him into collision, not only with the working and middle classes, but also with significant sections of his 'own side', the congress Republicans. Although he seems to have maintained his support among his 'electoral base', which includes significant sections of displaced and alienated workers.

However, his ratings overall are at the lowest level for any president at this stage. He has also seriously clashed with the dominant sections of the US ruling class as well as US traditional 'allies'.

The 'militarisation' of the US government - with a big increase in the number of generals in the present administration, at the expense of civilians who usually directly wield the power - rather than causing consternation, has actually produced a sense of relief among the US capitalists! They are perceived as more of a check on the out-of-control Trump!

Mass opposition is gathering apace on any number of issues and their combination could force Trump from office even before the mid-term elections in November 2018.

His erratic behaviour, his parliamentary bonapartism, of balancing between his own party, the Republicans, and courting the Democrats - for instance on raising the ceiling for government debt and on other issues - have alienated him from the congress Republicans.

He is obviously flirting with the idea of splitting the Republican Party which, if it was successful, would be the first time this had been done successfully since Abraham Lincoln before the US Civil War. Trump could form his own new 'populist' party.

This could be paralleled with a similar fracture within the Democratic Party, with Bernie Sanders and his forces around 'Our Revolution' splitting from the Democrats and creating some new formation. This could become in time either a new radical left alternative, or even lead to a new mass workers' party.

Political instability

Four major parties would then be in competition for votes and influence. A new mass party or even radical formation would represent a big step forward for the US working class.

Rarely has the world faced a more critical phase, with the crisis tending to infect all areas, all continents, with no hope in sight for the capitalists to insulate their system from serious crises and the resulting mass opposition. The working class has been profoundly affected with the beginnings of an important change in consciousness.

Economic stagnation, with a spluttering economic 'revival' - mostly in low-paid, insecure jobs - in a few regions and countries, has further stimulated growing unease and a questioning of the validity of the system among the mass of the population, particularly those at the 'bottom', the working class and the poor.

This has resulted in virtually permanent political instability, particularly reflected in the recent elections in Europe where the traditional parties have been weakened and both right-wing populist and new reformist left organisations have made headway. But then these forces very quickly lose their popularity.

There has been a speeding up of events with the disappointment of the masses sometimes speedily reflected in the unpopularity of those parties who are seen as the victors.

A new resurgence in the mood of opposition to the capitalist system, of a pronounced anti-capitalism, has also taken hold and has powered the Corbyn movement in Britain, led to developments around Bernie Sanders in the US, and the Melenchon movement in France.

Shaken by these developments the capitalists, their parties and institutions have sought to head this off by presenting themselves as 'agents of change' (Macron in France, Kurz in Austria).

Their mantra includes criticisms of inequality. Whereas following the 2007-08 crisis the search was on for a 'better capitalism', now there is more demand among the working class and the youth for an alternative to the capitalist system as a whole.

The current economic 'upswing' affecting the US and Europe in the main has been fuelled by the injection of liquidity, colossal debt, which in turn has been sustained by low interest rates.

China

Since 2008, China's credit-driven growth has accounted for more than half of global growth. The recent Chinese 'Communist' Party Congress is unlikely to result in any solution to this crisis.

Its main purpose was to cement the authority of Xi Jinping as the undisputed leader of the party and thereby the government. He also made clear that the 'party' - the ruling elite - would continue to control the army, economy, etc.

However, such displays of unrivalled power are not a guarantee of stability but the opposite. If power is centralised it is because of the fear of economic, social and political storms to come in China.

Moreover, by concentrating this power nominally in the hands of one man, the opposition will similarly concentrate on this individual as well as the regime that supports him.

The 'One China' policy and the brutal manifestation of this in the Hong Kong repression, while having the appearance of being successful in the short term, are ultimately destined to fail. You cannot hold a whole people in chains in the modern era of mass communication through social media.

Left radicalisation

Events arising from the crisis have had a profound effect in beginning to change consciousness of the masses worldwide.

We are now seeing the rejection by significant layers of neoliberalism. This has led to a generalised phase of left radicalisation in the workers' movement internationally.

This can be followed by a more distinct left reformism and become an international phenomenon. It will give way under the hammer blows of the events that loom to a more determined class mood and consciousness among the working class and particularly the youth.

Trump's incendiary Jerusalem statement reignites Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Capitalism incapable of solving the national question

Trump's declaration of unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as only Israel's capital, while ignoring the right of the Palestinians for a state with a capital in Jerusalem, has ignited a wave of protest around the world, and has already increased the death toll. The announcement was celebrated by Israel's right-wing prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, at a time when he faces huge public protests over corruption charges. Shahar Benhorin and Yasha Marmer of Socialist Struggle Movement (sister organisation of the Socialist Party in Israel/Palestine), explain recent developments.

So far, four Palestinians killed, many hundreds wounded, rockets on Israel's south, bombardments in the Gaza strip: Trump's arrogant declaration is already stained with blood.

The declaration accepts the demand of the Israeli regime for unilateral recognition of divided and poverty-stricken Jerusalem as Israel's capital only - and in fact recognition of the status quo of continuing occupation in east Jerusalem, while denying the right of the Palestinians to a state with its capital in Jerusalem.

Trump has torn off the fake mask of 'honest broker' in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the face of US imperialism.

Trump's decision ignited justified protests around the world and especially among the Palestinians. Tens of thousands protested in Amman (Jordan's capital), while thousands protested in a whole number of cities in the region and around the globe.

Thousands of Palestinians protested in east Jerusalem in parallel with a declared commercial strike there. Thousands more in Ramallah with protests being organised in several places in the Gaza strip and throughout the West Bank. Within the green line (in Israel), protest marches with hundreds of participants took place in Jaljulia, Kafr Kanna, Umm al Fahm, Qalansuwa, Nazareth and other towns.

The death toll from Trump's move may rise in the coming days and weeks as a result of military repression of Palestinian protesters, Israeli demonstrative retribution bombardments in the Gaza strip, and indiscriminate attacks on Israeli civilians.

Socialists condemn Trump and his right-wing Israeli counterparts for fomenting violence and consolidating the repressive occupation of Palestinian territories. We stand four square for the right of Palestinians to their own state.

25 years after the Oslo 'peace accords' it's clear that the capitalist powers internationally have proved incapable of resolving the Palestinian/Israeli national conflict.

Only a socialist movement in both Israel and Palestine can offer the prospect of a just and permanent solution to the national aspirations of both Palestinians and Israelis, and an end to the mass poverty and economic misery in the region.

The security of ordinary Palestinians and Israelis is of no concern to the Trump administration and its partners in Netanyahu's government. The readiness of the Israeli government to defend the continuation of the occupation at all costs can by itself now open another chapter of significant and ongoing escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and aggravate regional tensions.

Israel's prime minister, president and the leaders of establishment "opposition" parties, Avi Gabbay and Yair Lapid, praised Trump's demagoguery.

The representatives of the settlers-leaning right wing interpret it as a green light for the continued expansion of the settlements and "judaisation" of the Palestinian neighbourhoods in east Jerusalem; for systematic house demolitions, for oppression and expropriation of Palestinians.

Steps that aim to prevent any possibility of establishing a Palestinian capital in Jerusalem have long had silent backing from US administrations, accompanied by only lip-service condemnations.

Trump has turned the silent backup to being vocal and provocative. When he says that his administration will support a 'two-states solution' if agreed by both sides, he makes clear that he is ready to support the idea of the establishment of a Palestinian state only if agreed by Israel's government.

Allegedly, Trump is not taking a position on the boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem. But in fact he gives clear support for the continuation of the violent and unilateral takeover of the east side of the city by the Israeli regime in collaboration with the settlers' organisations.

Reactions

Secretary of State Tillerson, Secretary of Defence Mattis and CIA director Pompeo were among those who opposed Trump's declaration. They are afraid the interests of US imperialism will be damaged as a result of a resurgence of rage against the US on an international scale, damage to relations with regimes in the region, a further deterioration of regional stability, and weakened US influence on the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Trump plans to reveal in the coming months a new road map plan which he claims will solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and he is using his recent move to step up the pressure on the PA to accept all his diktats.

However, applying pressure on the PA in such a public and harsh manner undermines even further any basis for advancement of his "deal of the century". Until the recent declaration, the Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas vigorously ingratiated himself with Trump and even stated in September: "We are on the verge of real peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis."

The PA's elite is in a dead end in terms of strategy. It fears the development of mass popular protest and there's no other imperialist power that would be accepted by the Israeli regime to 'sponsor' negotiations.

As for the leaders of Hamas, they hoped, as was explained at the time by Hamas leader Khaled Mashal, that Trump's administration would provide the Palestinians with a "special opportunity", as it has "greater threshold for boldness" than those before it.

They put their hope in the 'reconciliation process' with Fatah (Abbas's party) sponsored by Sisi's regime in Egypt, but that process has not taken off so far. The PA refuses to lift the economic sanctions imposed on Gaza, and Hamas refuses to disarm.

Without presenting any solution for Gaza, Hamas calls for a new intifada (uprising) in the West Bank territories and Jerusalem, aiming to cover up for its lack of a credible strategy to take the Palestinian struggle forward.

Protest

The idea of a significant uprising against the occupation regime has had widespread support for some time already among the Palestinians in the 1967 territories (lands seized by Israel in the 1967 war). But at the same time, there's heavy pessimism regarding the potential achievements in the struggle.

In July, an uprising of thousands of protesters in east Jerusalem managed to defeat an arrogant provocation by Netanyahu's government - an attack on the freedom of worship and movement in the ancient city, dubbed by the Israeli press the 'metal detectors crisis'.

It's not clear at this stage if these Palestinian 'rage' protests will develop into a wider and prolonged uprising. But wide protest, on a mass scale, that will defy the dictatorship of the occupation and the settlements, is definitely necessary.

Trump and Netanyahu are ready to embroil the region in another bloody turmoil. The appropriate answer is to struggle against them and their reactionary agenda.

Significant protests in the Palestinian territories and throughout the region, and big demonstrations within the green line including joint demonstrations of Jews and Arabs against the occupation and for peace, are essential to block the warmongers and to wreck the efforts to perpetuate the occupation.

The struggle for peace demands a wide struggle against the occupation, and for political programmes in the interests of ordinary people on both sides of the national divide.

Netanyahu tries to seize on Trump's declaration to divert attention, not only from the just arguments of those who oppose the occupation but also from the big anti-corruption protest movement that has recently emerged against his rule, and from a range of social miseries.

But with the background of the international protests and the military repression against the Palestinian protesters, there's a need to mobilise solidarity and widen the protests, including from within the movement against corruption in Israel and the Israeli workers' and student organisations.

As part of the struggle against the occupation and for peace, Socialist Struggle Movement calls for the establishment of two national capitals in Jerusalem, while ensuring a life of wellbeing, equal rights, freedom of movement, freedom of worship and freedom from religious coercion.

In the context of two socialist, democratic and equal states, it will be possible to create a reality that will enable the city to really flourish as a pluralist city without poverty-stricken ghettos, without discrimination and without concrete walls.

- Read the article in full on socialistworld.net

110 years ago: massacre at Santa Maria school in Chile - commemorate 21 December 1907

Tony Saunois secretary, Committee for a Workers' International, and in Chile 1984-85

This year marks the centenary of the Russian revolution when [the working class took power in October](#). It is also the 110-year anniversary of a historical and bloody struggle of workers that is less well-known.

The massacre of striking nitrate miners and their families took place in the Escuela Santa Maria, a school in the northern Chilean city of Iquique.

The battle of the nitrate miners was crucial in the early building of the Chilean workers' movement. Socialists internationally and in Chile should commemorate this important struggle and can draw important lessons

from it.

At the time, sodium nitrate was decisive for the Chilean economy. The nitrate mines were situated in the Norte Grande - the 'Great North' of Chile in the Atacama desert. Most of the mines were owned by British companies and the miners were employed in slave-like conditions.

The Tarapacá province containing Atacama and Iquique had about 110,000 inhabitants. In Tarapacá and Antofagasta, the province to the south, about 40,000 workers were active in the nitrate industry. About 13,000 of them came from neighbouring Bolivia and Peru.

The mining camps were known as 'oficinas'. Everything was owned by the company, including the miners' houses and a private police force.

The miners were not paid in wages but tokens. Tokens that could only be exchanged for goods in the company-owned shops.

On December 10 a strike broke out in the Tarapacá region as the 'jornaleros' - day labourers - demanded pay of 18 pence a day and improved working conditions. This struggle became known as the "18 pence strike" - "la huelga de los 18 peniques."

This struggle in 1907 was the last in a series of battles by workers which had rocked the country from 1902. Most notable of these - until the battle of the nitrate miners - were the general strike in the port city of Valparaiso in 1903, and the "meat riots" in the capital, Santiago, in 1905.

Following the outbreak of the strike on 10 December 1907, thousands of miners and their families marched through the desert to Iquique, the provincial capital. They carried flags denoting the mixed-race workforce from Chile, Argentina, Bolivia and Peru.

The strike rapidly spread to the other northern provinces, culminating in a general strike of the Norte Grande.

The government, under the presidency of Pedro Montt, was terrified of this movement. Production and commerce across the Norte Grande was at a standstill. The government declared a state of emergency.

Additional regiments were dispatched to back up the two regiments already deployed in the region. Montt appointed General Roberto Silva Renard to control the situation. He was under confidential orders from the minister of the interior, Rafael Sotomayor, to "use all means necessary" to force the miners back to work.

Thousands of workers descended on Iquique to petition the government to intervene on their behalf. They negotiated with the acting intendant of the Tarapacá province, Julio Guzman García. In a similar way, workers in Russia had initially petitioned the Tsar to help them prior to the 1905 revolution.

Pedro Montt had given a free hand to the nitrate companies and had no interest in the conditions and lives of the miners.

As the miners negotiated with García, on 20 December workers at the Buenaventura nitrate works tried to leave. But the state of emergency suspending all constitutional rights was in force.

They were attacked and fired on by the army. Six workers were killed.

The following day the funerals of these workers took place. An estimated 15,000 miners and their families had occupied the Santa Maria school.

They were ordered to leave and relocate to the Club Hípico - a horse-riding club. The workers, fearing an ambush, refused to leave the school. General Renard told the strikers they had one hour to leave the school and return to work or they would be fired upon.

The strikers and their families heroically stood firm and refused to leave. The slaughter then began.

The strike committee was assembled on the roof of the school. They were the first to fall under the hail of machine gun fire.

Then - as miners, their wives and children rushed towards the soldiers, attempting to flee - machine gunners and riflemen opened fire indiscriminately.

As the victims fell, the army rushed forward into the school shooting and killing. They stormed into classrooms and slaughtered the occupants. The survivors were rounded up and marched back to work by soldiers with sabres and rifles.

How many were slaughtered on that day is not fully confirmed. The government ordered that no death certificates be issued. The bodies were dumped into mass graves.

However, the estimated number of victims starts at 2,000 - and the highest estimate is 3,600.

This heroic struggle and horrific slaughter played a crucial role in laying the foundations of what was to become one of the strongest workers' movements in Latin America.

Two years later in 1909, the trade union Federación Obrera de Chile (Workers' Federation of Chile) was founded. This was under the influence of the towering figure of socialist leader Luis Emilio Recabarren alongside the nitrate miners.

In 1912, Recabarren, together with the nitrate miners and others, formed the Partido Obrero Socialista (Socialist Workers' Party). This later evolved into the Partido Comunista (Communist Party), which built a mass base among the working class.

Recabarren played a central role in these developments. He travelled to the first congress of the Communist International in 1918, where he met with Lenin and Trotsky as he reported upon his return to Chile.

The Chilean ruling class tried throughout history to erase the details of this horrific massacre. For decades it was buried.

Yet it became part of the history of the Chilean workers' movement. It was particularly commemorated [under Salvador Allende's left-wing Unidad Popular \(Popular Unity\) government of 1970 to 1973.](#)

The dramatic use of folk music by bands such as Quilapayún became a hallmark of all the workers' protests and meetings during the 1970-73 revolution. In 1970, Quilapayún produced a dramatic narration and song commemorating the heroic struggle of the nitrate miners.

The Pinochet dictatorship again tried to erase it from memory. Yet the narration of Quilapayún could be heard playing in the poor areas of Santiago and other cities during the mass protests against the Pinochet dictatorship.

On the centenary of that struggle in 2007, the government of President Michelle Bachelet was compelled to recognise it with a national day of commemoration. This did not prevent her Partido Socialista ('Socialist' Party) government carrying out brutal repression against the students and the Mapuche people.

Socialists internationally have a responsibility to salute this and other struggles from the history of the workers' movement. It is from such struggles that lessons are drawn for future battles, and powerful workers' parties and organisations can be built.

Underfunded, understaffed, under attack

Save our NHS

Steve Harbord, former NHS ambulance worker

It's the NHS workers and patients who bear the brunt of the inevitable winter pressures - combined with underfunding, understaffing, low pay and low morale.

The chair [of a major NHS trust in the capital quit on 10 December](#). It seems the rats are deserting the sinking ship.

But don't feel too sorry for the poor NHS execs. If things get too hot they can bail out on fat pensions.

Lord Kerslake resigned as chair of King's College Hospital Trust citing the unrealistic financial approach of the government towards the NHS.

He will be replaced by Ian Smith, formerly of building firm Taylor Woodrow - and General Healthcare Group, the owners of BMI Healthcare, which runs 59 private hospitals and clinics nationwide.

The oddly named body 'NHS Improvement', which oversees spending within the health service, had allowed the board at King's to set a deficit budget of £38 million for the year.

But as with most NHS trusts, government cuts mean there will be a massive overspend. The board now [expects the deficit to be more like £92 million](#). Under the government's 'sustainability and transformation plans', trusts must eliminate these deficits by 2020 - meaning more massive cuts.

The Tories and Blairites attack funding and working conditions in the NHS hoping things will get so bad that we will welcome in the privateers and spivs. But all they want is to siphon off a profit. Nobody's falling for that.

Professor Stephen Hawking [has added his name to a lawsuit](#) trying to prevent Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt establishing 'accountable care organisations' (ACOs) within the NHS.

The name and function of ACOs come from the US health system. They represent a further entrenchment of privatisation.

The fact is healthcare, education and public services can be funded and managed properly. But it will take socialist policies to achieve this.

Kerslake's resignation followed the collective resignation of Theresa May's Social Mobility Commission. It takes place during her ongoing Brexit crisis.

At the same time, community campaigns are beating Tory attacks on the NHS - like [the victory against the closure of Glenfield children's heart centre](#), where the Socialist Party played a leading role.

So now it's time to up the pressure on this hated Tory government. Unite the trade union and community actions across the public and private sectors to defend jobs and services and beat back austerity. That kind of action could force the Tories out now.

Two in five 'right to buy' homes now for let

Scrap Thatcher's right to buy

Build council homes now

James Howlett, Southampton Socialist Students

Over 40% of ex-council houses sold under Thatcher's 'right to buy' scheme are now part of the private rental sector, [according to Inside Housing](#).

Right to buy allows council tenants to buy the house they live in at a large discount, starting at 35%. Nearly two million homes have been sold under the scheme since 1980.

When my parents announced we would be purchasing the house we were living in back in the early 2000s, I thought it sounded like a great idea. Who wouldn't want to own the place they lived in?

No longer was owning your house just for the wealthy. Now working class people could become homeowners. Well, fast forward to 2017 and you will find me and my brother still living at home with our parents.

With the average house price more than tripling in 20 years, more and more people are living with their parents well into their 20s - [almost 3.4 million 20 to 34-year-olds in fact!](#)

The thought of owning our own homes is nothing but a pipe dream now. So much for the "independence" and "self-reliance" Tory cabinet minister Michael Heseltine spouted it would bring back in 1990.

Under right to buy, house building - especially council house building - has slowed to a crawl. That has lifting house prices far above my generation's reach, and pushed rent to incredible heights too.

It's not surprising that speculators have latched onto this opportunity for extracting further profit from something as fundamental as the shelter we need for survival.

But it doesn't have to be this way. The Socialist Party demands the neoliberal right to buy scheme be abolished. In its place we need a mass programme of council house building.

Corbyn should instruct Labour councils to start building council homes now, and promise to reimburse them from government. Rents - not benefits - should be capped. We want genuinely affordable homes for all.

Retail sector crunch: nationalise to save jobs

Iain Dalton, vice-chair, Usdaw Leeds private trade branch (personal capacity)

Toys R Us plans to close a third of its stores. Asda wants to downgrade hundreds of shopfloor supervisors. Britain's largest tobacco distributor Palmer & Harvey has gone into administration.

These recent announcements will ring alarm bells for retail workers worried for their futures amid signs that consumer spending in general is slowing down.

The closure of at least 26 Toys R Us outlets [threatens 800 jobs](#). Asda's pay cut would [affect 842 'section leaders'](#). And the administrators [have already made 2,500 Palmer & Harvey staff redundant](#), with a further 900 threatened.

The Toys R Us closures are partly due to large store sizes becoming less competitive after the rise of online shopping. But both Toys R Us and Palmer & Harvey have had problems with suppliers.

The tobacco distributor struggled to receive payments in time to pay down debt obligations. And some of the toy shop's suppliers were unable to get 'credit insurance' for providing goods on account.

Consumer spending fell 2% this October compared to last, according to Visa. That's the fifth monthly drop in the last six months, and included a 5% drop in high street spending. This reduced income will affect most those companies which are heavily indebted.

Like the run-up to last year's collapse of department store BHS, a management buyout of Palmer & Harvey left a wake of suspicious dealings. The 2008 takeover was leveraged with debt which reached a net amount of £48.6 million in April 2016.

Yet since the buyout, the Guardian estimates there has been around £70 million in shareholder payouts. Former chairman Christopher Etherington and his wife will have received about £2.5 million in dividends since 2009 alone.

Usdaw

[The BHS collapse](#) meant the loss of a high street icon, and the jobs of many members of retail and distribution union Usdaw. So the 2017 Usdaw conference passed a resolution to call on the government to bring companies in a similar situation into public ownership.

The union has made two statements on Palmer & Harvey on its website so far. But nowhere in either does it call for nationalisation. Instead the administrator, financial services giant PwC, has been allowed to sack 2,500 workers unanswered.

Uni market 'failure', two-year degrees - end cuts, scrap fees!

Hannah Davis, Birmingham Socialist Students

Less than a third of higher education students think their course offers value for money [according to the National Audit Office](#). Its chief says universities would be accused of "mis-selling" if they were banks. This comes as no surprise!

University fees are skyrocketing, leaving students with debts at an eye-watering [average of £50,000](#). In the meantime, course quality gets left behind as universities splurge.

There are pointless vanity projects like the [University of Birmingham's Dubai campus](#). Or bumping up the already overflowing wallets of fat-cat vice-chancellors like David Eastwood - who 'earned' £426,000 this year, plus a university-funded mansion and chauffeur.

As if this wasn't enough, the Tories are now pushing on their plans to introduce intensive two-year undergraduate degrees - costing £11,000 a year.

These courses come with reduced holiday periods, meaning many [students won't have time to earn as they study](#). Because the Blairites and Tories replaced free education and maintenance grants with fees and loans, work has become essential for many students to get by.

How will students find time for this on an intensive course - with even higher annual fees? It is obvious this is a move to pander to the greed-driven elite, not to benefit students.

The Tories claim students will save in the long-run because the overall fee is smaller and we can enter the workplace faster. They assume we are walking out of university and straight into a well-paid graduate job. In fact we are falling head-first into the gig economy.

Staff will also have to work extra hours, yet there is no offer of a pay increase to make up for this. In reality, this means pay is being cut.

Socialist Students called on Labour's shadow education secretary Angela Rayner to move a free education amendment to the last budget. This would have been an opportunity to mobilise students and push for the scrapping of fees. It was missed.

Socialist Students demands student fees and debt be scrapped, education cuts and sell-offs reversed, and a living grant for all introduced. We also fully support the members of lecturers' union UCU who are balloting for strike action against attacks on their pensions.

Them & Us

Live reindeer...

London's super-rich are spending up to £80,000 this Christmas - [just on decorations](#).

Just a tree and wreath from a top-end florist could set you back £1,500 according to the Guardian. Events company Theme Traders reports the capital's capitalists have even had live reindeer.

It seems the £80,000 job involved installing an ice rink in the drive and flying in French figure skaters.

... lumps of coal

Meanwhile, London's poorest kids will receive less at Christmas than the average family pet.

700,000 children living in poverty [could get presents with an average value of £19.55](#). Families who can afford it will give pets around £22 of gifts, according to the Childhood Trust.

The study found almost half the 25,000 London kids poverty charities work with say they don't enjoy Christmas. Of these, four in five give poverty as the reason, and three in five cite anxiety and stress.

Children aren't responsible for poverty at Christmas. Nor are their parents or guardians. Capitalism is.

Property trillions...

The value of Britain's housing stock has broken the £6 trillion mark, [says Halifax](#).

In 2007 the bank's estimate was £4.1 trillion. That's a 50% increase in ten years - for nothing.

Britain's gross domestic product - all the stuff we make in a year - is around £2 trillion. It would take three years just to make stuff equivalent to the market value of the country's homes.

The value of the top 100 companies on the stock exchange is also around £2 trillion. Britain's homes are worth three times the total value of the top 100 companies on the stock exchange.

That's a hell of an early present for landowners and property speculators.

... eviction notes

Nurses at the private London Clinic are getting a different early Christmas present: [an eviction notice](#).

The Harley Street employer owns bedsits in Primrose Hill, which it leases to staff at an affordable rate. What a waste!

One nurse told the Camden New Journal in November: ""They just issued us with a section 21 order a couple of weeks ago that has given us two months' notice to leave.

"They are within their rights to do this, but it came completely out of the blue. They have said if we do not move they will get a court order." Merry Christmas!

Local government pay: fight for the 5% claim, fully funded

Glenn Kelly

Over a million council and school workers have been waiting to see if there would be any relief from their constant falling living standards as they have watched their pay fall by 21% in real terms since 2010.

After a decade of little or no pay awards and the unions not delivering more, it is entirely understandable that there will be union members who will think that the 2% now being offered is ok.

But the brutal truth is that it is in reality yet another pay cut and one that can't be recommended.

Last June Unison, Unite and the GMB submitted a claim for 5% for all (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) with the promise that they would fight to smash the pay cap.

After the general election result the government came under increasing pressure to break the pay cap across the public sector and even the local government employers were supporting the claim for higher pay.

Last week (5th December) the local government employers announced their pay offer to the unions, breaking the 1% pay cap.

All workers earning over £10.27 an hour are being offered a 2% rise this year and 2% next year. However this is just 20p an hour increase at the bottom of the grades, before tax and national insurance deductions.

With the RPI inflation rate currently running at 4%, once again workers are being asked to take another year of pay cuts and this offer will do nothing to make up for the thousands of pounds lost in a decade or more of pay cuts.

For those local authority workers who have been privatised or shipped off to the voluntary sector or academies, they may not even benefit from this pitiful rise.

The offer is being praised by the Labour leader in the Local Government Association (and by some trade union leaders) because there will be pay rises of up to 16% over two years for the very lowest paid.

In fact only 3,485 workers would benefit from this level of increase of 72p an hour next year. While this is obviously to be welcomed, what they fail to mention however, is that the real reason why they have had to increase the rate of those earning as little as £7.78 an hour by more than the 2% offer is because the pay of the lowest paid council workers has fallen so far that local government employers were in danger of falling foul of the Tories' own legal Living Wage figure of £9 per hour that must be introduced by 2020.

As if the deal wasn't bad enough, there is no additional funding being offered to fund it. It is estimated to put 5.8% on the pay bill over the next two years.

Without extra funding it is not an exaggeration to say that we could see councils and schools giving pay rises on a Monday only to hand out redundancy notices on a Friday to pay for them.

Heather Wakefield, the head of Unison in local government, said: "The government must now come up with the cash to fund local government properly so councils have the money to give their staff a wage increase that doesn't put more services or jobs at risk."

The question many Unison members will ask is: what is the union strategy to force the government to fund even this pitiful offer, let alone fight for the full claim?

The national local government Labour Party leader, Councillor Nick Forbes, was called "a hypocrite" by his own local union leaders in Newcastle when he said: "We unreservedly welcome the local government employers' decision to recognise the hardship faced by council workers in recent years, to offer 2% for the next two years".

That is because Newcastle council, where he is the council leader, has only budgeted for a 1% increase in staff salaries for 2018, and its Director of Resources made a point of briefing staff that any increase beyond 1% would put an extra £2 million on the council's staffing budget and would have to be paid for elsewhere.

The unions are considering their response to the offer. Already there is talk of accepting it and just campaigning for the government to fund it.

Socialist Party members in Unison and Unite have been arguing that the local government unions should join with the PCS civil servants' union and start a real fight for the full claim, fully funded, by beginning national consultative ballots; and for the TUC to bring forward the national demonstration it has called for 12th May.

PCS has correctly used its consultative ballot result to call for the public sector unions to come together as they did [in 2011 on pensions](#), and coordinate strike ballots.

But it rightly will also continue to prepare its own members to ensure that they are ready if and when it is necessary to move to a statutory industrial action ballot.

Members and activists of unions in local government and the NHS must link up with those in PCS to ensure that some union leaders do not stop the public sector pay battle before it has even begun.

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Strikers rally in Liverpool

Roger Bannister

Workers on strike in three separate disputes held a joint rally in Liverpool city centre on Monday 4 December, bringing together members of four different trade unions.

RMT members employed by Merseyrail, in a protracted strike to retain the guards on the local trains, joined PCS members in dispute about health and safety for DVLS staff with the proposed changes to the Driving Test, and Unite and GMB members employed by the Arriva bus company, who are striking for a decent pay award.

The rally, characterised by an optimism based on determination, was addressed by speakers from each affected union explaining the details of their respective disputes and emphasising the need for broader solidarity across all trade unions.

Tony Mulhearn, one of the Liverpool councillors who won additional finances for Liverpool in the 1980s by refusing to implement cuts, and supporting what was at that time an 'illegal' deficit budget, was also invited to address the strikers.

It is now important that the national union leaderships take note of the success of this local initiative and discuss future joint action, joint protests and lobbying activities.

On 7 December a lobby of the local Transport Committee, convened by the Labour Metro Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, Steve Rotheram, has been called to support the case of the Merseyrail guards.

Throughout his election campaign in April and May, Rotheram clumsily sidestepped the issue of retaining the guards on the Merseyrail network, but now he is in power, with responsibility for public transport in the City Region, the chickens have come home to roost!

The leaders of the TUC and most of the main trade unions appear to be responding to the latest round of Tory anti-trade union legislation by assuming that the game is up as far as strikes are concerned. The mood of Merseyside's strikers shows that the opposite is the case.

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Unite day of action against blacklisting

London

Hundreds of construction workers took part in the national day of action against blacklisting on 6 December called by Unite the Union. Protests took place across the country, including lobbies of parliaments in Westminster and Edinburgh.

Workers are determined to show that blacklisting still exists despite the tremendous victory 19 months ago when eight building companies paid an estimated £75 million in compensation to blacklisted workers. One of the companies is Skanska and London workers and supporters kicked off the day with a protest outside their HQ in the City of London, which then moved into their foyer!

As Skanska managers started to panic, phoning the police, Dave Smith from the Blacklist Support Group explained that Unite has discovered evidence that points to current systematic blacklisting of workers for the crime of being trade unionists or even just pressing for safe working practices.

Rob Williams, chair of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), brought solidarity: "Six years ago, the magnificent struggle by construction workers that defeated the 'Besna contract' that would have cut wages by 35% has given workers confidence to fight and brought a new generation into activity."

Brighton

Being on the blacklist has meant workers being met with significant hardship when trying to find work.

It has "destroyed people's livelihoods", said Unite members protesting at Balfour Beatty's construction site at the University of Sussex. Local students joined the protest in solidarity with the affected workers.

The Consulting Association, which carried out the blacklisting, has a longstanding history with files being kept for over 50 years, and is supported by major construction companies such as Balfour Beatty and Sir Robert McAlpine.

Unite is calling for a full public inquiry into blacklisting, new laws to make blacklisting a criminal offence, and public procurement rules to prevent blacklisting companies from bidding for public sector contracts.

Connor Rosoman, University of Sussex Socialist Students

Leeds

"End the blacklist, jail the criminals" rang the chant of one construction worker taking part in Unite's Leeds protest.

Socialist Party members and NSSN supporters joined Unite members on a highly visible protest, with leaflets about the campaign been eagerly snapped up by commuters coming out of the nearby train station.

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Brighton victory

Academic staff at the University of Brighton [who walked out to defend two members of staff threatened with redundancy](#) on 23 and 24 November have won! The compulsory redundancies threatened by the university have been withdrawn.

A UCU statement said: "We can rightly feel proud that we stood firm in defence of our threatened colleagues. The support we won from large numbers of students indicates that they understand that their education is impaired by a management which attacks its staff and treats them as a disposable commodity."

Anti-DOO lobby of Liverpool's transport committee

Today, 7th December, a lobby gathered at the Cunard Buildings, Mann Island, ahead of a meeting of Liverpool's Transport Committee.

The lobby, which was called for by the RMT, was to display to the councillors on the committee the overwhelming public support in favour of guards remaining on the trains.

The committee has a majority of Labour councillors who have the power to settle the Merseyrail 'driver only operation' (DOO) dispute if they so wish.

A statement from the RMT read: "The RMT believes that in the interests of public safety we need to keep the guards on our trains."

The RMT is firmly against the planned driver-only operation, in the interests of the public and workers' safety.

The lobby was held before the meeting took place and was attended by over 40 people including RMT members and supporters.

Michael Long, Liverpool Socialist Party

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Teachers strike in Sheffield

Members of the National Education Union (NEU) went on strike today (6.12.17) at Westways primary school in Sheffield.

Teaching staff have been forced to take industrial action due to the imposition of a new executive head who is imposing massive changes in work and teaching practices, causing additional workload and stress for staff and a narrow curriculum and "teach to the test" for children.

NEU members voted 78% in the ballot for strike action. Staff have massive support from parents who have already gathered 600 signatures on a petition.

If negotiations this afternoon produce no results then the NEU will be striking again tomorrow, and for two days next week.

Alistair Tice, Sheffield Socialist Party

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Newham anti-academies strikes

Strike action at Avenue primary school in Newham, east London, against turning the school into an academy continues on 14 December following a mass picket of 80 teachers, parents and children [during the previous strike on 29 November](#).

Socialist Party member Louise Cuffaro is playing a leading role in the dispute and has recently been elected NEU branch secretary.

There is a further anti-academies walkout taking place in Newham at the Royal Docks School on 13 December.

Tory plan to hold dinner at coal mining museum defeated

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Local residents and ex-mining families were outraged when news came through that Dewsbury Conservative Association was intending to have their annual dinner at the National Coal Mining Museum at the former Caphouse colliery in Overton near Wakefield.

It was planned for 10 March, just days after the anniversary of the end of [the 1984-5 miners' strike](#). Given the role of the Tory party under Thatcher in running down the mines and forcing the 1984-85 dispute in order to break the power of the miners - then the most combative and best organised union - many local people saw this as an insult to the whole point of a museum commemorating the industry.

But also, the last deep coal mine in Britain [at Kellingley on the other side of Wakefield, closed by the Tory-led coalition](#), is a more recent reminder of the contempt the Tories hold the industry in. They are prepared to bring coal in from places such as China to fuel local power stations.

In a matter of days almost 2,000 people joined a Facebook group set up to protest the event and e-mail and ring the museum demanding they withdraw the event.

At first museum management put up a defiant statement that they would be going ahead as they had to be 'politically neutral!!' But just a day later they were forced to cancel the event after the catering company withdrew.

This is a victory for local working class communities and groups such as the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign which had planned to picket the dinner if it went ahead.

But it also raises questions around why the museum management thought accepting the booking was a good idea.

Totnes MP uses coffin controversy to distract from brutal NHS cuts

Alex Moore, Torbay and South Devon Socialist Party and chair Save Our Hospital Services South Devon (personal capacity)

A 300-strong march against cuts and privatisation of the NHS in the small town of Totnes on 2 December was organised by South Devon Save Our Hospital Services (SOHS) - launched by Torbay and South Devon Socialist Party - and supported by Totnes Labour Party.

Devon clinical commissioning group (CCG) is required to make a further £400 million cut to NHS services under a 'capped expenditure programme'. This is on top of the £100 million in 2017, which has already seen the closure of four community hospitals. We invited our MP Sarah Wollaston to receive our 3,000-strong petition but she declined, agreeing instead to meet me at her surgery on 8 December.

On the march a mock coffin bearing the slogan "120,000 deaths linked to Tory austerity" was left outside the Conservative Party office by protesters. Sarah Wollaston reacted by evoking the murder of Labour MP Jo Cox and accusing the organisers of threatening a woman and her family by sending her a coffin.

This was widely reported in the press and on regional TV and resulted in some real threats and abuse being sent to a female Labour Party member. It has also been met with some anger and frustration that the serious questions over the NHS had been deflected.

On 8 December SOHS organised a small lobby outside the Conservative club. Along with Totnes Labour we refuted Sarah Wollaston's allegations and publicised ten questions about threats to local hospitals and services which I collated to raise with the MP.

I took the petition and questions in to the meeting. I suggested to Sarah Wollaston that, given the controversy over the mock coffin, I would just give her the petition and questions and she could respond in her own time.

The threat to our district hospital, Torbay, is very real. On the same day I went to see Sarah Wollaston the Health Service Journal reported that Torbay and South Devon Foundation Trust is offering up to £100 million (funded by the sale of its capital assets) to a private company to "help finance its future clinical model".

The report goes on to say similar schemes in the North West were scrapped over "the preferred bidder's link to... Grenfell Tower".

South London health bosses' cover-up

Bill Reed

The six south west London CCGs - statutory NHS bodies responsible for the planning and paying for healthcare services for their local area - recently held a joint meeting.

Far from discussing the crisis in the health service, with its scheduled funding cuts, and how they would combat this, the highlight of their discussion was a debate on what angle your ears must stick out before you qualified for surgery on them!

One more serious item was the necessity for hip pain to be 'severe' ('moderate' would not be enough) before you would qualify for hip replacement!

Meanwhile, plans to close one or more A&E departments, at St Helier or Epsom (or both!) hospitals have been announced by the hospital trust. As purse holders, the CCGs are responsible for this sort of decision.

Socialist Party member Pauline Gorman asked why CCGs were not involved in campaigns against health cuts and hospital closures instead of discussing backdoor cuts through standardisation. Long-standing campaigners in the audience also questioned the impartiality of the CCG members, some of who also work in the private sector. But this is not part of the health professionals' agenda.

The list of 'accepted' procedures (cuts in service) also look like a statement of basic delivery options, on the US model, for a privately contracted company to deliver to the NHS in the future.

The NHS is on the brink of total privatisation but it has overwhelming public support. NHS workers, local councillors and residents, must be mobilised in campaigns and the Labour Party must be held to its promise, to reverse all the different areas of privatisation and outsourcing.

Movement growing against fracking giant Ineos

Jon Dale, Mansfield Socialist Party

The movement against fracking is growing across north Derbyshire, South Yorkshire and north Nottinghamshire.

These former mining areas have been targeted by Ineos, the giant chemical company. It has been awarded licenses to explore for shale oil and now has machinery carrying out seismic surveys in fields near towns and villages.

This involves drilling holes and setting off explosive charges below ground to measure sound waves travelling back from the rocks below.

With this information, Ineos will decide where to site its fracking rigs, which will bring noise, heavy traffic and environmental pollution. The underground aquifer supplying the whole area with water is at risk.

Ineos has been allowed to bypass planning procedures with elected councillors, going instead directly to the government. The limited democratic controls that do exist are being brushed aside, as allowed by rules the government passed in 2015.

Anti-fracking groups are being set up in many ex-mining towns and villages. Bright yellow 'Fracking No Way' posters are in many shops and houses. 160 people attended a meeting called by the campaign in Bolsover.

One person not supporting local campaigns is former North East Derbyshire Labour MP Natascha Engel, who lost her seat in June to an anti-fracking Tory (in his constituency, not in principle!). As well as Engel's Blairite record, a factor in her defeat was her defending fracking.

She has now taken this a step further and is being paid by Ineos to write a booklet that will "explain shale exploration and development," according to Ineos. It will also explain more about "combating climate change, energy needs, and the positive impact on jobs, training, industry and community benefits."

Ineos is owned by billionaire Jim Ratcliffe, who spends much time on his 78-metre luxury yacht. Ineos should be nationalised, along with the gas and electricity industries so that sustainable energy production can be democratically planned instead of being run for profit.

Six months on - still no justice for Grenfell

Paul Kershaw, chair, Unite union LE/1111 housing workers branch

Dozens of families that survived the fire at Grenfell Tower face Christmas in hotels and only a small number have been permanently rehoused. A hundred protesters gathered outside Kensington Town Hall to demand action from the council on 6 December.

Speakers exposed the failure of the council and brought solidarity, including a heartfelt speech from Kate Osamore, Corbynista Labour MP for Edmonton.

Suzanne Muna brought solidarity from the Unite the Union executive council and echoed many speakers in expressing concern at the narrow focus and lack of community involvement in the conduct of the official inquiry. She assured the crowd that Unite would stand by the community if it became necessary to run a parallel "people's inquiry" to expose the truth.

The Socialist Party's latest Grenfell leaflet

Six months on from the Grenfell fire, it is beyond scandalous that there is still no justice for the survivors and local residents. The text below is based on a leaflet being distributed by Socialist Party members in the area.

If you were to rely on the mainstream media, you would believe that everything is getting resolved now for the survivors of Grenfell - people are being rehomed, getting money, and the inquiry will get to the bottom of what went wrong. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Rehouse survivors locally - take over empty property

Still only a very small number of households have been housed in acceptable temporary accommodation. Survivors are being offered homes that are too far away, in squalid conditions, and too small.

It is reported that there are over 1,800 properties standing empty in Kensington and Chelsea. However, this is not about granny's flat that hasn't been sold yet. This is land 'assets' mainly belonging to investment companies, hedge funds and oligarchs, traded on international markets to make millions for their owners.

Jeremy Corbyn initially said these houses should be requisitioned, and it's time to put that into action. Jeremy should hammer this point again and again. Residents and the local labour movement have the right to demand such properties are used as homes for those in need.

In the 1940s, the community occupied luxury houses. It is to those traditions local people will need to return to build an effective fight against the super-wealthy elite which caused this disaster, and which will cause others if its rule is left unchallenged.

Community control over financial appeals

While the rich only think about themselves, ordinary working class people have been extremely generous, with over £20 million being raised through the Red Cross, the Evening Standard and others. But scandalously, after three months only 15% of the money raised had reached residents. Families were trying to survive on £25 a day. Now it would seem that some money is finally getting through.

Why should survivors and local residents accept that money donated in good faith to support them is left in the hands of unaccountable organisations? Why should trade unions hand their members' money over to charities and lose all control over what happens to it? Just as a trade union sets up a solidarity hardship fund when they go on strike, so could residents and the trade union movement locally set up and democratically administer their own appeal for financial support. With full democratic control and accountability, that is the only way to ensure that all money donated goes to where it is needed most.

Spend the £300 million council stash!

Meanwhile there is the continuing scandal of the £300 million languishing in the council's reserves while homeless survivors are stranded. The main purpose of Kensington and Chelsea's housing income surplus was not ensuring safe, well-maintained council homes, but providing the richest private residents with huge council tax rebates.

The council now intends to spend some of this hoard on acquiring social housing, but we demand that the £300 million is immediately used!

And we have to demand not just that council leaders resign, but that we don't want Tory appointed technocrats to run the council either. We want elections. Local residents and workers need councillors who fight for them. Councillors not willing to do so should stand aside for candidates who are.

For a genuinely independent workers' inquiry

When the government announced that judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick was to take charge of the inquiry, it was immediately apparent that the ruling class was choosing a safe pair of hands for itself.

Rightly the community has no confidence in him. The class responsible for this crime cannot be trusted to investigate it.

The Hillsborough stadium disaster campaigners' 28-year struggle for justice has led to widespread understanding that the establishment's overriding concern is to cover its own back.

In this situation, only the trade unions, working in liaison with local tenants' and residents' groups, have the authority to establish a meaningful investigation.

For example, general union Unite which organises housing and construction workers, and the Fire Brigades Union.

The unions should use their resources to initiate a genuinely independent workers' inquiry, with far-reaching terms of reference set by survivors and those immediately affected. Jeremy Corbyn could also step in and use his huge authority to start this process.

Cladding off and sprinklers in - NOW!

Towers around the country have failed combustibility tests. But the cladding is still there. Only 2% of blocks have sprinklers and progress on this is also extremely slow.

Clearly the government should pay. But instead of endless wrangling about that, councils must act now to make working class homes safe. They should spend reserves to fund emergency maintenance work and 24-hour fire watches for all tower blocks, and send the bill to central government.

No safety - no rent!

Where safety checks are happening, they reveal broken and missing fire doors, gas problems, and inadequate fire alarm systems and escape routes - aside from the fact that only 1% of blocks have sprinklers. Jeremy Corbyn is absolutely right to demand that the Tories allocate £1 billion to fit sprinklers. As he says, it is obscene the government will not commit retrofitting funds while failing to tackle tax avoidance.

How do we know if an estate is safe? Tenant organisation is vital - trade unions should help build joint action. Demand immediate fire safety checks and for all information regarding materials and checks to be made public.

If this is not forthcoming, we need to fight - including being prepared to withhold the rent.

Demolition, regeneration and social cleansing

Some people, understandably including some directly affected by the Grenfell disaster, want tower blocks demolished.

But we have to be wary of those calls being backed by property speculators who see an opportunity. The experience of 'regeneration' is usually social cleansing. Land is handed over to the private sector, existing tenants and leaseholders are shunted out with little right of return, and working class areas become gentrified.

Grenfell-area residents have rightly demanded that the land remains in public hands.

In the 1980s, the socialist city council of Liverpool led by supporters of Militant (now the Socialist Party), in defying Tory cuts, democratically asked residents what they wanted. As an absolute minimum there should be a moratorium on all regeneration until safety is assured and open to public scrutiny, and until residents have the right to vote.

North Kensington: a history of struggle for housing

In the 1960s, tenants and labour organisations fought against local slum landlord Peter Rachman, a campaign involving many socialists. Even before that, in the 1940s, Communists in North Kensington lead a campaign of occupation of luxury houses. These early examples of squatting attracted huge support and interest from working people across London.

It is to those traditions local people will need to return to build an effective fight against the super-wealthy elite which caused this disaster, and which will cause others if its rule is left unchallenged.

Capitalism kills

This terrible tale of profit before working class lives is an indictment of all the policies of privatisation, cuts and deregulation pursued by Tory and New Labour administrations at national and local level.

All those right-wing Blairites who gleefully pursued the policies of their Tory masters - of sell-offs of housing, privatisation of public land, demolition and regeneration leading to social cleansing, replacement of council control with 'arm's-length management organisations' - should hang their heads in shame.

We demand a million new council homes, under democratic control.

No demolition or regeneration that leads to privatisation or social cleansing - we demand a residents' vote.

We demand rent controls that cap the level of rents. We demand the end of the bedroom tax, benefit cap and 'universal credit'. Scrap the Housing and Planning Act.

A socialist housing plan would include nationalising the banks, land and building companies under democratic working class control.

Bradford campaign to save children's services launched

A good start was made to the campaign to save council-run children's services in Bradford at a public meeting on 5 December, with representation from service users, trade unionists and community campaigners.

The stark facts were laid out - cuts being made to children's services of £13.3 million are likely to see up to 480 jobs go, and will also affect children's centres which will be brought into the new service. The workers' Unite the Union shop steward (who helped organise this meeting) has also been victimised over the issue.

The meeting made it clear that we need trade union action, as well as involving parents and service users to defeat this brutal cut.

Plans were made for immediate action to be taken, starting with stalls in the city centre on Saturdays, a protest on 12 December outside the next Bradford council meeting and a further public meeting on 19 December, 7.30pm at Bradford Deaf Centre.

But socialists, community activists and trade unionists have made it clear the devastating impact these cuts and job losses will have, and will be battling the council all through the festive season.

Tamil Solidarity and Refugee Rights activists meeting

Tamil Solidarity's annual general meeting took place in London on 9 December followed by a public meeting titled 'South Asia and Britain - lessons to learn from struggles'. Speakers included Siritunga Jayasuriya and Jagadish G Chandra, socialists from Sri Lanka and India respectively, as well as Socialist Party members and Tamil activists in Britain. The photo shows solidarity with refugees and school students organising resistance to deportations in Sweden from Socialist Party, Tamil Solidarity and Refugee Rights Campaign.

The Socialist's 2017 quiz

How attentive to the news have readers of the Socialist been in 2017? Here's the test as drawn up by the paper's editors in this year's quiz. The answers are at the end.

Season's greetings and a happy New Year.

Questions

- 1) In November, who resigned after 37 years in the job?
- 2) Whose renewal heat incentive sparked an election?
- 3) Which group of workers won after 85 days of strike action?
- 4) Which group of workers won after nearly two years of industrial action?
- 5) Which Labour council obtained legal injunctions against peaceful environmental protesters?
- 6) Who had to pay back
£32.4 million in unpaid wages to 37,000 workers?
- 7) Why did an estimated five million people, mostly women, demonstrate around the world on 21 January?
- 8) Why did up to 250,000 people march through central London on 4 March?
- 9) What achieved its lowest level since the Napoleonic Wars?
- 10) Who was cleared of "false imprisonment" charges?
- 11) Which trade unionist's re-election was a setback for Labour's right?
- 12) What percentage vote did French left presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon secure in the first round election?
- 13) According to the Sunday Times Rich List, what is the collective wealth of the 1,000 richest people in Britain. A - £476 billion, B - 593 billion, or C - £658 billion?
- 14) Which group of US sportswomen won a favourable contract after threatening strike action?
- 15) Where did an estimated 40 million workers strike on 28 April?

- 16) Who said: "Karl Marx has a lot to teach today's politicians"?
 - 17) Whose gamble to be "strong and stable" spectacularly backfired?
 - 18) Which group of low paid workers voted by 99% for strike action in June?
 - 19) Who withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement in June?
 - 20) Who was booed; and who was cheered at the Grenfell Tower fire disaster site?
 - 21) Who was fined \$2.8 billion for cheating tests?
 - 22) How many seats did Jeremy Corbyn's-led Labour win on 8 June?
 - 23) Whose 12 weeks of strike action forced a Blairite-led council to dump its job and pay cuts diktat?
 - 24) Who called who "rocket man"?
 - 25) Who said: "You can't understand the capitalist system without reading Marx's Das Kapital"?
 - 26) Who was murdered by a neo-Nazi in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August?
 - 27) Which MP did Labour's Vicky Foxcroft report to the police?
 - 28) Who in the UK paid 50% less tax this year compared to last year?
 - 29) Who made history by walking out in August?
 - 30) What historic walkout took place at the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street?
 - 31) Whose failure to roster workers' holidays caused thousands of cancellations?
 - 32) Who was "terminated and removed" by Trump in May?
 - 33) Name the far-right party that won nearly six million votes in Germany's general election.
 - 34) Who invoked article 155?
 - 35) What did former Tory PM John Major call "operationally messy, socially unfair and unforgiving"?
 - 36) What is the average pay of bosses in the UK's biggest 100 companies?
 - 37) Who was handed a P45 redundancy notice during a faltering speech?
 - 38) What did the Tory government say it will ban in 2040?
 - 39) Following the Paradise Papers, how much in profits had multinational companies shifted offshore in the last year alone?
 - 40) Which event shook the world 100 years ago?
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Answers

- 1) Zimbabwe's dictator, president Robert Mugabe - after an effective military coup.
- 2) The £1 billion 'cash for ash' scandal, initiated by the DUP's leader Arlene Foster, led to a collapse of the Northern Ireland executive and assembly elections in March.
- 3) BA mixed fleet cabin crew.

- 4) Glasgow school janitors.
- 5) Sheffield council whose costly PFI contract is destroying urban trees.
- 6) Retail giant Argos (owned by Sainsbury's) after paying less than the minimum wage.
- 7) To protest Donald Trump's inauguration - particularly his sexism, racism and policies of inequality.
- 8) To stop the latest Tory cuts and privatisation of the NHS.
- 9) Pay growth in the current decade according to the Resolution Foundation.
- 10) Six Jobstown anti-water charges protesters in the Irish Republic - including Socialist Party elected reps Paul Murphy, Mick Murphy and Kieran Mahon.
- 11) Unite general secretary Len McCluskey.
- 12) 19.58% - compared to Le Pen's 21.3%.
- 13) C - up 14% since 2016.
- 14) US women's ice hockey team.
- 15) Brazil - against the anti-worker policies of the illegitimate government of president Michael Temer.
- 16) The capitalist journal the Economist.
- 17) Theresa May after losing the government's majority in the 8 June general election.
- 18) Barts NHS workers employed by multinational Serco.
- 19) The pro fossil-fuels US president, Donald Trump
- 20) Theresa May was jeered and told to resign, whereas firefighters received rapturous applause.
- 21) Car giant VW after it rigged 11 million of its diesel cars' exhaust emissions.
- 22) 262 MPs (up 30) - 40% of the popular vote.
- 23) Victorious Birmingham bin workers.
- 24) Trump's insult of North Korea's dictator Kim Jong-un, in an escalation of the peninsula's nuclear crisis.
- 25) Labour shadow chancellor, John McDonnell.
- 26) Heather Heyer. Trump initially blamed "hatred on many sides" instead of racist white nationalists.
- 27) The fictitious left-wing 'Ana Key MP', created for a student art project website by Socialist Party member Ellen Kenyon Peers. The neighbouring constituent MP Foxcroft took umbrage over Ana Key's socialist policies.
- 28) Amazon. Despite the company's turnover rising by 54%.
- 29) Unionised low paid McDonald's workers in Crayford and Cambridge.
- 30) Low paid Bank of England workers took successful three-day strike action - the first BoE strike for 40 years.
- 31) Europe's largest airline, Ryanair - run by anti-union boss, Michael O'Leary.
- 32) FBI director James Comey who was investigating the US president's campaign ties to Russian officials.

- 33) The racist and xenophobic AfD (Alternative for Germany).
 - 34) Mario Rajoy, Spain's right-wing PP prime minister, who imposed direct rule over Catalonia.
 - 35) The Tories' Universal Credit benefits system.
 - 36) £5.3 million or 386 times the minimum wage.
 - 37) The hapless Theresa May was handed the form at the Tory conference by a comedian, cheekily claiming that Boris Johnson had told him to do it!
 - 38) New diesel and petrol engine cars and vans (not trucks). This belated headline policy comes after it was revealed that air pollution has led to 40,000 'excess deaths' in the UK.
 - 39) An estimated €600 billion.
 - 40) The Bolshevik-led October 1917 socialist revolution.
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