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## Editorial of the Socialist issue 1024

# Brexit vote round two: Corbyn must fight for a socialist alternative to the Tory deal and bosses' EU

Parliament reconvened after the Christmas break with no let-up in the government's crisis over the coming Brexit vote. Theresa May's deal with the EU is still opposed by most MPs, most members of the Tory party and most people across the entire country.

She has been desperately trying to create assurances that would enable the deal to scrape through and avoid "uncharted territory", as she called the alternative. But at the time of writing, that still looks unlikely. It would mean appeasing rebel Tory and DUP MPs by coming up with some seemingly impossible guarantee against an indefinite resort to the EU-insisted "backstop" regarding the Irish border.

Alternatively, she can hope that enough Labour MPs would abstain or vote for the deal. But most of the right-wing Labour MPs who have considered this still view it as too great a liability. This hasn't stopped May from continuing to apply pressure, for instance by saying: "MPs of every party will face the same question when the division bell rings. It is a question of profound significance for our democracy and for our constituents. The only way to both honour the result of the referendum and protect jobs and security is by backing the deal."

However, rescuing the Tory prime minister won't, at this stage, help the prime objectives of the pro-capitalist Blairite MPs, which are to undermine Jeremy Corbyn and to further their political careers. So a central drive of a section of them - backed up by parts of the capitalist media - has been a stepped-up onslaught on Corbyn's position of opposing a new EU referendum, a so-called "people's vote".

### 'People's vote'

Highlighted in the Observer on 6 January was the idea of "Labour losing by a landslide in a general election if it does not oppose leaving the EU". This was a subheading on an article by journalist Peter Kellner, who reported on the "biggest Brexit survey yet" - a new YouGov poll of 25,000 people - in which a majority thought the UK should remain in the EU if faced with the alternatives of May's deal or no deal.

He raised the spectre of "electoral catastrophe... if Labour is seen to facilitate Brexit in any form, YouGov's results indicate that the party would be deserted by millions of Remain voters - without gaining any extra support from Leave voters".

The poll showed nothing of the sort. On the substantive question posed in the 2016 referendum of Remain or Leave, this new survey didn't reveal a massive gap between the two today: it showed 54% for remain and 46% for leave. Also, note the extent of unease towards the idea of a second vote, when the researchers asked whether a decision to hold a new Remain-Leave public vote would "begin to resolve public divisions in society": only 26% thought it would, with most of the rest believing it wouldn't, and others not knowing.

The prospect of a Corbyn-led government being elected can't be judged by the present poll gap between Remain and Leave - even taking into account that Labour voters favour Remain by a bigger margin - without bringing into the picture all the other issues which would come to the fore during an election campaign. Manifesto pledges to raise living standards for the many millions of people who are struggling to get by would be enormously attractive, as shown in the 2017 election, as long as Corbyn and those around him get the pledges out clearly and seem determined to deliver on them.

The other important issue is what views on Brexit would be revealed if polls like YouGov's included the question that they don't include? That is, on people's views on a Brexit that would not be based on the

interests of British capitalism or on the ideas of racist right-wing Tories, but rather on workers' interests and on solidarity between working-class people across Europe.

Corbyn must stand firm on the lines he has drawn: rejecting the EU and the aspects of its treaties which, although they could be resisted by a mass movement backing up a Corbyn-led government, would be used to try to legally obstruct socialist measures. And as he has said, he will need to seek a customs union which would enable the continued flow of necessary goods - for people's needs and jobs.

Many capitalist commentators argue that Corbyn fears alienating Leave voters in working class areas if he backs Remain. This is in line with their belief that to obtain votes politicians must inevitably manoeuvre in an unprincipled way regarding their policies.

Without doubt many who voted leave in 2016 would be outraged if establishment-backed politicians succeed in getting a re-run of the referendum in an attempt to obtain a different result. This is certainly one of the reasons why it shouldn't be done. But, in addition, as the EU is essentially a bosses' club, in the context of a binary choice referendum, the right decision - to leave it - was made in the first place. A socialist opposition to the EU is a principled position.

The 'people's vote' that is urgently needed is a general election - so the Tories can be ousted and a Corbyn government brought in. Exactly what deal Corbyn's future negotiators could extract from the EU leaders can't be predicted in advance. In the above YouGov poll a large majority of people said they don't think it likely that Britain will get a good deal with the EU, no doubt reflecting recognition that all the capitalist governments are fighting for their own interests. Corbyn can, though, fight and negotiate in workers' interests, and those of workers across Europe, and in doing so set the best possible arena for workers' struggles against the austerity imposed by EU governments, and promote a socialist alternative.

## **Rising opposition**

As well as the Tory government being extremely weak, most governments across Europe are unstable and are facing economic slowdown and rising opposition. Angela Merkel announced two months ago that she won't be standing again as chancellor of Germany, following a series of bad election results for her party. President Macron in France has been forced down from his ivory tower by the sweeping 'gilets jaunes' (yellow vests) revolt and can no longer boast about his anti-working class policies.

"In moments of crisis the cost is secondary" Macron said to his parliamentary colleagues when explaining the suddenly urgent need for €10 billion worth of concessions to the protest movement.

Much more, including his removal from office, can be gained by the French trade unions - the organised working class - if they enter into mass struggle alongside the unorganised gilets jaunes. They can bring into play the strongest potential weapon against the government and bosses: a general strike.

Likewise in Britain, austerity can be countered and defeated through the mobilisation of the trade union movement with its millions of workers and the further millions who would support it. The anti-austerity demonstration on 12 January called by the People's Assembly will be limited in its impact without such a mobilisation.

Mass workers' action and demonstrations are needed, along with democratic debate and discussion - unfortunately not a feature of the People's Assembly at national level - to arm the struggle with the ideas and activities that can lead to success.

In 2013, when the People's Assembly was set up, Socialist Party members argued for it to oppose cuts-imposing budgets at local authority level as well as nationally; and to call for the building of coordinated national strike action against austerity. Neither of these vital tasks were accepted by the organisation's leaders, who wanted to keep on board so-called 'anti-cuts' councillors who have voted for cuts, and trade union leaders who have never agreed with spearheading coordinated trade union action to end austerity.

But the Socialist Party will be building for and participating in the 12 January demonstration, as will always be the case in all struggles, to make the socialist analysis and demands in our papers and leaflets available to

all who take part, and to add our voice to the event's important call for a general election.

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## **Tories Out. End austerity. Mass working-class action for a general election**

**Tom Baldwin, Socialist Party national committee**

Few things sum up the complete disarray of this Tory government like the 'Brexit ferries' debacle.

The Tories handed a £13.8 million contract to Seaborne Freight to ship lorries in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Yet the company owns no ships, not even a pedalo. And the terms and conditions on their website appear to have been copied from a takeaway restaurant!

This is symptomatic of a government in crisis. Riven by internal divisions and lacking a parliamentary majority, they have difficulty advancing any significant policy.

They are failing even in the main task facing them - negotiating Brexit. The vote in parliament on May's deal was cancelled before Christmas and there is currently no clear prospect of the government winning. Jeremy Corbyn was right to describe May as being "in office but not in power".

If the Tories were just incompetent, this might be comical. But they're still the nasty party.

Recently shown on BBC2, the film 'I, Daniel Blake' shines a light on the cold cruelty of the government's benefit sanctions regime. Over 130,000 homeless children spent Christmas in temporary accommodation.

The Tories continue to dismantle our public services and to hold down wages. They are attacking ordinary working-class people in the interests of their big business paymasters - less for us means more profit for them.

The same anti-worker, pro-big business approach is shown in their proposed Brexit deal. Most of the capitalist class would like Britain to remain in the EU and the deal is aimed at coming as close as possible to that. It means retaining the neoliberal rules of the EU's single market.

We cannot allow this shambolic shower of pitiless politicians to remain in office for a day longer. Corbyn should call for mass mobilisations of working-class people - organised by the trade union movement - to build the fight to kick out the Tories and force a general election.

The 'gilets jaunes' (yellow vests) in France have shown fighting back works - with French president Macron already forced to make €10 billion worth of concessions.

The trade union movement should follow the 'Tories out' demonstration on 12 January with a programme of protests and strike action against Tory austerity - demanding a general election now.

A general election would be a real 'people's vote'. It would pose the possibility of a Corbyn-led government - allowing us to change not only the nature of Brexit but the whole direction of the country.

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## **'Fat Cat Friday' shows where all the money's gone: take the wealth off the 1%!**

**Kris O'Sullivan, Birmingham Central Socialist Party**

I hadn't even received my first paycheque of the new year when the average chief executive of a FTSE 100 company had already 'earned' more than my entire annual salary - in less than three days!

Workers can see more and more how much society is rigged against us, and in favour of a powerful super-rich elite.

Top bosses received a staggering 11% hike in their already-absurd levels of pay and bonuses, according to the High Pay Centre. With average wages only rising by 2.6% last year - below inflation - so many of us only have the prospect of wage stagnation, precarious work and pension cuts to look forward to, year in and year out.

The 'fat cat' statistics come out every January. The sheer inequality and exploitation they reveal is truly grotesque. But 'Fat Cat Friday' is only possible because of capitalism.

Fat cat day has become a routine, put in the spotlight once a year by the union leaders and then forgotten. But pay inequality is an issue all year round, and trade union struggle can combat it!

Top bosses earn as much as 133 of their average employees - or 386 workers on the minimum wage. Are they seriously saying that if the boss spent a day on a golf course, it would have the same impact as hundreds workers refusing to do their jobs?

Of course not. If workers didn't come in, everything would stop. The profits taken by the shareholders and execs are produced by the workers, not by themselves.

## Success?

So why do the Tories and Blairites see all this as an acceptable thing - even a success story? For overworked and underpaid NHS staff, teachers and council workers it's not. For the young people on zero-hour contracts and the minimum wage with no prospect of secure housing it's not.

The Socialist Party says workers are the wealth creators - while the fat cats are just the wealth takers. We say the working class should control that wealth, not the super-rich. That's why, to everyone reading this, I extend the invitation to join us.

Not just to point out the flaws of capitalism - but to help us fight to replace it with a society based on collective ownership and planning of wealth for the good of all, not the profit of the elite. A socialist society.

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While the rest of us suffer austerity and choices between eating or heating, the fat-cat bosses were enjoying lavish pay packets in the region of £4 million each last year!

Meanwhile, millions of workers across the UK are still experiencing annual wages £760 lower than they were a decade ago, before the crisis, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

The solution isn't to tweak the overinflated 'incentives' for the bosses, but to overthrow the rotten capitalist system that creates such grotesque inequality in the first place.

**Rob McArdle, Coventry East Socialist Party**

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The average top CEO is paid £133 for every £1 earned by their employees. Twenty years ago, the ratio was £45 to £1. They receive more than £1,000 an hour.

This grotesque greed is justified by self-serving money-gluttons who preposterously claim they are irreplaceable, and so worth every penny of their bloated pay packets! Meanwhile, the wages and conditions of the workers who actually create the wealth are constantly under attack.

These are the fat cats who bankroll the Tories and Blairites.

Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), responded to the findings by calling for "big reforms to bring fat cat pay down to earth." That's OK. But it doesn't go nearly far enough.

Such confirmation of the inequalities rampant in austerity Britain should stimulate mass action by the whole labour movement, including the TUC and Labour councils, to create the conditions for a general election now.

**Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool Socialist Party**

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# **Javid's migrant 'emergency' caused by austerity and capitalism**

## **Fight for jobs, homes and services for all**

**Lawanya Ramajeyam, Refugee Rights campaign**

Home Secretary Sajid Javid declared the rising numbers of migrants attempting to cross the Channel in small boats an "emergency" over Christmas. He held a conference call with officials from the Border Force, Immigration Enforcement, and National Crime Agency.

When he took the job, Javid said he would change the Tories' "hostile environment" immigration policy. He is from an Asian background, but he is a big business politician - so he hasn't changed the Tories' policies.

Many migrants and asylum seekers have been completely scarred by their experiences. Many are not even keen to seek asylum in a country where we have been treated so poorly. But what choice do we have?

Worldwide, over 65 million people had been displaced from their homes due to conflict and persecution. This figure has continued to rise alongside war, poverty, and repressive regimes. Globally, we are experiencing a huge refugee crisis.

But refugees are not the source of the problem. In many cases, we are victims of the imperialist foreign policies of governments that put the interests of their capitalist class ahead of the lives of ordinary people. Yet governments across the globe treat refugees like criminals!

## **Austerity**

Austerity in Europe is worsening the already insufficient jobs, homes and services capitalism provides. It's the profit system which is responsible for taking these things from workers in Britain, not refugees.

In fact, cuts are in turn intensifying the refugee crisis, making it impossible for refugees to have decent living standards in the countries we are fleeing to, even if we survive an often-dangerous journey.

Capitalist governments, including the UK, deny refugees basic rights such as the right to work. They put us in special prisons called 'detention centres', despite our having committed no crime.

This government says that if you seek asylum, it will give you a house or a flat, weekly money, food, clothes and toiletries. But that's only on the website.

The truth is they cut all the ways for refugees to survive and contribute in most cases. Even so, the establishment politicians and media try to use this to say refugees get handouts while workers already here get nothing.

## **Demands**

We demand the right to work for all. We need to be part of society, not out of society. We want all workers and refugees to be treated with respect and dignity.

Refugee Rights is such a campaign. In Britain, young Tamil refugees who face the brutality of this system got together and organised ourselves.

We are already beginning to gain attention and support from trade unions, anti-racist campaigners and socialists.

We fight for jobs, homes and services for all - not trying to play one section of the working class against another to enrich the bosses.

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## **Death in a doorway: struggle can end homelessness**

**Pete McNally, Worcester Socialist Party**

Joby Sparrey died on Christmas Day in the doorway of a shop in Malvern, Worcestershire. Brays is a long-established shop with large doorways so he was probably able to stretch out to sleep.

On 31 October 2018 Remigiusz Boczarski was found dead in nearby Malvern Wells. He had been living in a bus shelter.

Both men had been befriended and helped by local people with food and clothing, with one person washing Remigiusz's clothes for him. Apparently the staff at Brays had known Joby was sleeping in the doorway for some time and tried to assist him.

Homelessness has clearly surged. Not just in Worcestershire, but across Britain. Meanwhile, houses are left empty for months and even years. There were 200,000 unoccupied in 2016, according to government figures!

In Malvern, the council official for housing expressed the usual regrets. The local MP did the same, and pointed to "important advice on the council website."

Ending homelessness will not be straightforward, but is within our power. First of all, councils must fight for funds to build services around the real needs of those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Councils should be able to assist those at risk before it happens, with flexible help available when needed to get those who lose their homes back into accommodation. This also means having the accommodation available: councils must build council homes, seize empty properties, and cap private rents.

In Malvern, local people have said they will volunteer if a shelter for the homeless is found. This shows the instinctive solidarity of ordinary people.

But why should it be left to us? We need a thought-out strategy to end homelessness, including full funding for well-paid and trained staff - and a minimum wage and benefits anyone can live on.

Instead, we have politicians who wring their hands, but will not wring the needed funds from government. Corbyn should hammer the Tories on the housing crisis and homelessness scandal as part of a campaign for a general election - and instruct Labour councils to get moving now by setting no-cuts budgets.

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## **Them & Us**

### **Millionaire Miliband**

Blairite ex-foreign secretary David Miliband received compensation worth £680,000 last year for his charity job, reports the Times.

The privatisation-loving warmonger is now head of the 'International Rescue Committee' which helps victims of war and disasters.

Miliband's basic salary alone is \$708,754 according to the charity's accounts. The minimum wage in Iraq - bombed into dust by his government's policies - is \$2,534 a year, according to the US State Department.

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## **Bankers' boarding cards v millennials' railcards**

The Bank of England has had to tighten its belt after two of its advisers chalked up £390,000 in travel expenses.

One central banker claimed £11,000 for a transatlantic flight, while another spent £469 on taxis... for one meeting. Outrage over the summer provoked a new expenses policy in December.

Meanwhile, hard-up millennials queued online for up to 12 hours to buy the newly introduced 26-30 discount railcard when it was released on 2 January.

Why? Young workers can barely afford a roof over our heads, let alone the train robbers' ransoms.

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## **Queen v music**

The queen's Christmas message to austerity Britain was delivered in a typically tone-deaf setting: her backdrop was a hand-painted 1856 golden French piano.

The publicly funded super-rich sovereign didn't even have the decency to get behind the ivories and tinkle out a tune!

Meanwhile, cuts and restrictions on the curriculum have meant falling numbers of music teachers and music GCSE entries. An 8% drop in each between 2010 and 2015, says House of Commons research.

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## **What we saw**

A Southampton primary is refusing to make further cuts and calling for more support from the city council. The Socialist Party plays a leading role in the campaign, which was featured on BBC South news on 3 January.

This follows front-page press coverage for the campaign in the Southern Daily Echo in December. And in November, the Echo ran a prominent article on Southampton Socialist Party under the headline 'Socialists attack city council care closures.'

Meanwhile, in the capital, Waltham Forest Socialist Party member Nancy Taaffe appeared on BBC London news on 2 January. The borough's Blairite council wants to privatise the town square and throw up an imposing and unwanted new development.

The Socialist Party is part of the leadership of the campaign against the 'monster block'. If the council sends in bulldozers to start removing the square's trees, protesters plan to physically defend them. As the BBC correspondent put it, to "put their neck on the lymes."

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## **PCS Left Unity assistant general secretary election rerun**

## **Socialist Party members in PCS**

Chris Baugh is standing for the PCS Left Unity assistant general secretary nomination in a rerun of this election.

When news broke that ill health had caused previous nominee, Janice Godrich, to stand down, the reaction of many Left Unity members was to call for the only other candidate and current assistant general secretary, Chris Baugh, to be the Left Unity candidate.

These calls were rejected by the Socialist View majority on the Left Unity national committee, despite the fact that Chris had won over 48% of the votes in the ballot held in 2018.

Following a meeting of the committee before Christmas, a statement was issued to members by the Left Unity national committee majority which set out arrangements for the rerun election.

This called for nominations by 11 January 2019, with a ballot closing date of 24 January. The statement went on to attack Chris and his supporters in the Chris4AGS campaign - an act which reminded many PCS members of the anti-democratic ballot interference of the old union right wing.

Socialist View have decided a candidate in this rerun. Apparently, this will be Stella Dennis, a PCS senior full-time officer.

Socialist View had previously justified their decision to challenge Chris Baugh by supporting Janice Godrich on the grounds that she was a rank-and-file candidate, 18 times elected as national president, supported by PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka and someone who they claimed was the most high profile woman in the trade union movement.

None of these arguments support or justify their decision to stand Stella Dennis.

## **Mark Serwotka**

At the same time as arrangements were being made to rerun the election, another PCS senior full-time officer, Lynn Henderson, announced she is standing for assistant general secretary against Left Unity and with the support of Mark Serwotka.

This turn of events has shocked many Left Unity members who recall Mark Serwotka's promises, repeated as recently as December, that he would support the Left Unity candidate no matter who it was.

Mark Serwotka initiated the campaign to get rid of Chris Baugh and led a campaign of smears against him. His decision to support non-Left Unity member Lynn Henderson shows contempt for Left Unity and is a vote of no confidence in Stella Dennis.

The question all Left Unity members will be asking is this: is Stella Dennis a credible candidate and are Socialist View serious about standing a candidate in the PCS elections against Mark Serwotka's choice - Lynn Henderson?

Chris Baugh is standing as the incumbent assistant general secretary, having held the position since 2004. He is the three-time Left Unity candidate for the position and a consistent supporter of Left Unity and the Broad Left for over 40 years of union activity.

The Chris4AGS campaign is seeking nominations for Chris and also for Tahir Latif to fill a national executive committee vacancy on the Left Unity slate. The campaign is also calling for assistant general secretary candidates to be allowed to be present at the ballot count.

Chris Baugh, we believe, can and will win this rerun election and Left Unity will be expected to support and campaign for his election along with the rest of the Left Unity slate.

On this basis, Left Unity can emerge from this difficult period with its reputation restored as the biggest, most democratic and inclusive left rank-and-file organisation in the trade union movement.

# Far right attack on Manchester rail workers' picket line - trade union fightback needed

Becci Heagney, North West Socialist Party organiser

Far-right protesters, wearing yellow vests, verbally abused the RMT transport union picket line at Manchester Victoria station on 5 January.

The Socialist Party sends its solidarity to the RMT members, who we have been standing shoulder to shoulder with for over 12 months during their strikes to keep guards on Arriva Rail North trains.

A group of people, seemingly from various organisations, attacked the striking guards as well as holding protests outside other Manchester buildings, including Greggs, to oppose the new vegan sausage roll!

## Organise

Despite this laughable attempt to hijack the gilets jaunes (yellow vests) movement in Britain, any attack on trade unionists organising and attempts to threaten and intimidate, including with racist language, must be condemned and organised against.

It highlights the need for trade unions to take a lead, not just in opposing the far right, but also in the anti-austerity movement.

The Trade Union Congress should throw its full weight behind the call for a general election, mobilising its members to fight for one. This would help cut across the tiny numbers of far-right activists that are trying to intimidate left-wing and trade union fighters.

## Solidarity

Paul Rafferty, assistant secretary of Manchester Trade Union Council (personal capacity) said: "Manchester Trade Union Council condemns the attack on the RMT picket line by far-right activists.

"In response to this attack we have organised a solidarity protest at Manchester Victoria on 12 January at 8am. We believe that the trade union movement should be at the forefront of the fight against the far right and are proud to support the RMT's fight to keep guards on the train. We urge all trade unionists who are able to attend to take their union banners along to the protest".

We support this call for a huge mobilisation in solidarity. We will show that strikers will not be intimidated.

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# Grayling's attacks on rail workers wages 'un-fare'

'Martin Pryor', striking RMT rail guard

The government continues to claim that Britain's economy is doing great and that everyone's wages are sky high.

But transport minister Chris 'failing' Grayling this month was happy to announce that railway staff shouldn't be allowed pay rises as they are the direct cause of rail fare increases.

It's now obvious what the Conservatives truly believe and are doing. They claim that wages are rising, but use any worker getting a pay rise as an excuse for their failing policies - truly having their cake and eating it too.

In this case, they use their own fare hike as another stick to try and beat the safety-critical railway staff with.

The government has been attacking the rights and wages of staff at the cost of public safety since 2010.

This is a not so subtle attempt at an attack on RMT conductors, guards and drivers who are striking for public safety because the government is obsessed with reducing the cost of staff and breaking one of the strongest fighting unions.

The government would have us believe that if they were successful in removing guards from trains then they would reduce ticket prices immediately.

But more likely the money saved would be swallowed up by directors' bonuses and by the shareholders - all the while not mentioning the real costs of this inept privatisation which takes money away from improving services and puts it into fat cats' pockets.

For example pre-privatisation, all rolling stock (the actual trains in the network) was bought and paid for and put into service. Then, in 1994, all the stock was sold off to three companies for £1.8 billion.

But in a report from 1998, the stock was said to have had a value of £2.9 billion. So rather than train companies owning their own trains and each franchise being organised with set routes and trains, these rolling stock companies now lease the trains to the companies, bringing a new cost which is passed onto the passenger.

The cost of leasing these trains for 2016-17 hit £1.8 billion. The amount the government received in a one-off payment is exactly how much the companies now charge for one year's use of them.

This is one of the many drains that takes money from the public as we bear the costs while being stuck with all the risks and drawbacks of privatisation.

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## **Solid strike by Teesside Arriva bus drivers**

650 bus drivers, members of Unite the Union employed by Arriva, commenced a week-long strike on 6 January in a dispute over low pay. Drivers based at Darlington, Durham, Redcar and Stockton believe they are the second-lowest paid Arriva bus drivers in the country.

The drivers are seeking a £1-an-hour pay rise to bring them in line with other bus drivers. After protracted negotiations they have overwhelmingly rejected a pay offer of 75p an hour to be phased in over two years in four instalments.

Arriva County Durham Ltd made about £5 million in profit last year but are claiming they can't afford the pay rise.

Arriva bosses, instead, have embarked on spreading disinformation about pay and are trying to break the strike by running a handful of free bus services and colluding with other transport operators. Despite this, there is strong support for the strike from the public and this is reflected on social media.

Striking RMT guards at Arriva Rail North have sent solidarity to the Arriva bus workers. The response from the bus drivers is a massive turn out of hundreds of strikers on the picket lines. Morale is high!

**Alan Docherty, Teesside Socialist Party**

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## **Ferry workers protest against £2.45 an hour pay**

The scandal of low pay by profiteering shipping lines is being fought by a sustained campaign of the RMT transport union.

A recent protest took place in Portsmouth, where Darren Procter, RMT national secretary, outlined the problems that seafarers face: "Our campaign was launched in 2012 to expose the practice by Condor ferries of paying £2.45 an hour for 12-hour shifts, seven days a week on two month rosters.

"This is compared to an equivalent merchant seaman grade earning £27,000 a year, working 'week on, week off'."

This is despite the fact that Condor ferries run to the Channel Islands from Portsmouth, a council-owned port in UK waters, but avoid minimum wage legislation through the EU posted workers directive, where workers can be paid under the terms of their country of origin.

Darren explained: "The RMT is fighting to ensure all workers on Condor ferries are paid according to proper industry standards with 'week on, week off' contracts, to create jobs and ensure safer passage." As well as fighting for better pay, conditions and union recognition, the RMT are demanding the company agree binding targets for seafarer apprentices over the lifetime of the next contract.

"Condor have a monopoly on the service to the Channel Islands under a tender that ends in 2019. In a survey, 81% of islanders said the service was 'unsatisfactory' as a result of rising fares, safety issues and cancellations."

Under private ownership by Australian Macquarie bank, Condor ferries are run for profit not people.

If these services cannot be run with safe, well-paid crews, providing an affordable and reliable service while in private hands, then an incoming Corbyn-led Labour government should nationalise these and other ferry services.

- A protest has been called for 12 January, 7am at Portsmouth International Port, George Byng Way, PO2 8SP

**Nick Chaffey, Southern Socialist Party secretary**

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## **UCU Wales suspends FE strike action**

UCU members in Wales have recently won some important concessions from management and the Welsh Government by balloting with a big majority for strike action.

If accepted by members via e-ballot, lecturers pay will rise by 2-3.5% and management has agreed to discuss workload.

[Click here for the continuation of this report from Clare Gibbs](#) (on the Socialist Party Wales website)

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 13 December 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## **100th anniversary of the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht**

## **Heroic martyrs of German Revolution**

**Robert Bechert, CWI International Secretariat**

January 15 marks the 100th anniversary of the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, two of the outstanding leaders of the German and international working-class movements. They are figures who still today symbolise uncompromising opposition to capitalism and imperialist war and who fought and died for a socialist future. They left an important legacy and stand as symbols for socialism.

As with all symbols of opposition to capitalism, there are attempts to neuter them. Apologists for capitalism try to use Luxemburg's private criticisms of aspects of Bolshevik rule in Russia in 1917 and 1918, writings which she never published in her own lifetime.

But those who use these private writings do not mention her opening praise for the Russian revolution as Rosa Luxemburg writes "Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary far-sightedness and consistency in an historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and all the other comrades have given in good measure ... Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honour of international socialism."

She ends her comments by saying "What is in order is to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, the kernel from the accidental excrescencies in the politics of the Bolsheviks. In the present period, when we face decisive final struggles in all the world, the most important problem of socialism was and is the burning question of our time.

"It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the first, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the only ones up to now who can cry with Hutten: 'I have dared!'"

Luxemburg and Liebknecht died at a critical stage in the history of the international workers' movement. It is quite justifiable to say that their early deaths helped open the way to the horrors of the last 100 years as lost opportunities and defeats for the workers' movement allowed capitalism to remain, Stalinism to develop in the 1920s and the later victory of Hitler's fascism.

At the end of 1918 and start of 1919 Germany was at a central point of the international wave of revolutions that both helped finally end World War One and also put on the table the question of whether capitalism itself would survive in Europe.

In many countries deep distrust, hostility and often open hatred of the ruling classes, combined with the international impact of the 1917 October revolution in Russia, fuelled a popular surge to the left, enormous growth in workers' organisations and an urge to follow the Russian workers' example.

**Fear of revolution**

Empires, dictatorships, authoritarian regimes tumbled, workers gained confidence and the capitalists' and ruling classes' fear of revolution increased.

They were determined to fight to prevent the spread of socialist revolutions and also try to overthrow the Bolsheviks' revolutionary government in Russia.

And this did not only mean a political fight, but armed struggles as revolutionary Russia was invaded by 21 imperialist armies and, in country after country, military forces and armed counter-revolutionary militia sought the opportunity to crush revolutions.

For a time Germany was the key to what would happen. Despite its military defeat Germany still had the largest population in Europe. While at the end the war it was Europe's second largest economy, Germany retained enormous economic potential having been the biggest European economy pre-1914.

But also significantly Germany had historically the strongest workers' movement in Europe with traditions of struggle which were being reborn in growing socialist anti-war protests and exploded into mass struggle in the

November 1918 revolution.

In a matter of days the German Empire, the Kaiser and the government were overthrown. Workers, soldiers and sailors were, following the example of the soviets (councils) created in the Russian revolution, forming councils across the country which challenged the existing state power, often effectively governing areas.

This not only shocked and scared the German ruling class and military leaders, but also the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and trade union leaders who, in 1914, abandoned socialist principles to support German imperialism in the war.

This support for German capitalism naturally extended to bitter opposition to revolution. Thus as the November revolution unfolded Ebert, the SPD chair, warned that "if the Kaiser doesn't abdicate, the social revolution is unavoidable. But I don't want it; indeed I hate it like sin".

Using the prestige of the SPD, then still seen by many German workers as 'their' party, the SPD leaders strove to win time for the stabilisation of capitalism. The SPD leaders were open to overtures from the military high command.

On November 10, the day after he became German Chancellor (prime minister), Ebert accepted the offer from the new army chief, General Groener, of a "common front against Bolshevism." In other words Ebert and the central SPD leaders were preparing from day one of the new republic the possible use of the military against the revolution.

At first this threat was kept in reserve, the SPD leaders used radical gestures to try to placate the working class. Thus the day after Ebert made a deal with General Groener the SPD formed a government which adopted the name 'Rat der Volksbeauftragten' (RdV, 'Council of People's Commissars'), almost an exact translation of the Bolshevik government's name in Soviet Russia.

To try to control the growth of the left they brought into the government the newly formed left and anti-war Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), a party whose membership ranged from reformists to revolutionaries. But, while the government's name was virtually the same, there was a fundamental difference between the SPD working to save capitalism and the Bolshevik government striving to end it internationally.

The SPD particularly feared the impact of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Liebknecht, the son of one of the SPD's central founders, had a prominent position as a left and anti-militarist before 1914. This was consolidated when he became the first SPD MP to vote against the war.

## **Anti-war symbol**

After Liebknecht's jailing for four years hard labour for making an anti-war May Day speech, over 55,000 Berlin workers struck in protest in June 1916 in the first political anti-World War One strike in Germany. Rapidly Liebknecht became a major symbol of opposition to the war, enjoying widespread popularity.

Rosa Luxemburg had for many years been a key leader of the revolutionary left in the SPD and, after 1914, of the opposition to the war.

However for a long time, unlike the Bolsheviks in their struggle between 1903 and 1912 for revolutionary policies in Russian Social Democracy, Luxemburg had not drawn together the Marxist wing into a coherent, organised opposition that systematically fought both for its ideas and to build support.

While Luxemburg and others had formed in early 1916 the loosely organised, and repressed, Spartakus group, it was only as the revolution began to unfold that steps were made to bring together and organise the revolutionary forces into a party. The end of 1918 saw the formation of the Communist Party (KPD) with Liebknecht and Luxemburg being seen as its main public leaders.

Already as 1918 drew to a close the SPD leaders started to take action to curtail the revolution, especially in Berlin where the revolutionary wave was strongest. Berlin was a key battleground. It was then the fourth most populous city in the world and, internationally, the largest industrial city.

Fearing further radicalisation and growing support for the left, the SPD leaders moved to reassert control. 24 December saw an SPD-ordered military attack on the People's Naval Division, a force that originally had been sent to Berlin to safeguard the SPD but which had become increasingly radicalised. While this attack was repulsed it led to a crisis in the government and the departure of the USPD ministers.

They were replaced by SPD representatives including Gustav Noske who, becoming responsible for the army and navy, quickly began organising the military forces of counter-revolution, the Freikorps militia (many of whom joined the Nazis later in the 1920s).

By the end of 1918 the SPD had begun to deploy Freikorps units near Berlin in preparation for a blow against the revolution.

Germany then still faced a situation of dual power. On the one hand the revolution had swept from power large parts of the old regime. For a few weeks at least many workers', soldiers' and sailors' councils held real power, but this was not consolidated.

From the beginning of the revolution the SPD leaders were working with the capitalists to neuter the councils and restore normal capitalist government. But the SPD had to move very carefully because the revolutionary tide had not ebbed.

Nevertheless, as happens in most revolutions, there came a time when sections of workers felt that their power was slipping away and the capitalist order was being re-imposed.

In many cases, as in the 'July Days' in the 1917 Russian revolution, this can lead to spontaneous attempts to stop the revolution being rolled back. The SPD leaders were aware of this and moved to try to provoke the more radicalised workers into taking premature action, premature because the mass of workers had not yet drawn the same conclusions as they had.

In December the SPD government decided to organise a provocation in Berlin. Having gathered counter-revolutionary Freikorps troops outside the city, they ordered the removal of Berlin's police chief, the USPD member Emil Eichhorn on 4 January.

The Berlin USPD, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the newly formed Communist Party called a mass demonstration for 5 January to defend Eichhorn's position. Around 200,000 participated.

The success of that protest convinced some of the leaders that it was possible to overthrow the government and an 'Interim Revolutionary Committee' was established.

In this committee, Liebknecht, supported by the later East German leader Wilhelm Pieck, argued in defiance of KPD policy that it was now "possible and necessary" to overthrow the SPD government.

The next day, 6 January, Berlin saw a bigger demonstration of around 500,000 workers, many armed, but they waited for hours in the rain before dispersing, as the Revolutionary Committee was unable to give any proposals on what they should do.

This attempt to seize power was premature, falling for the SPD leaders' provocation, who could picture it as an attack on the government, against the majority of workers and soldiers' councils and the forthcoming national assembly elections.

It is probably the case that, on the 5 January protest, agent provocateurs encouraged the occupation of the offices of the SPD and capitalist newspapers, not the most important immediate targets for a successful revolution, but a suitable target for the Freikorps troops.

Although the revolutionary workers were probably strong enough to rule Berlin alone, this was not the case in much of the rest of Germany, where illusions and hopes still existed in the SPD government. As was seen in other German cities in the following few months, at that time a victorious insurrection in Berlin would have probably been isolated and open to counter-revolutionary attack.

## Counter-revolution

On 8 January, Noske's troops began their offensive, politically dressing it up as a fight against 'terrorism'. In a statement Noske, claiming to be defending the SPD's history and workers' unity, said that he, "a worker, stands at the peak of power in the socialist republic".

The reality was brutally different. Noske was not joking when he said just before this battle "if you like, someone has to be the bloodhound. I won't shy away from the responsibility".

Noske helped organise the Freikorps as a counter-revolutionary force, one of whose tasks was to attempt to behead the revolution by killing the most well-known Communists - Luxemburg and Liebknecht - and suppressing it in the capital, then one of the most radicalised areas.

The SPD's propaganda prepared the way for this. Two days before Luxemburg and Liebknecht were killed, *Vorwärts*, the SPD's main daily newspaper, carried a poem calling for their assassination which ended with the words:

Many hundred corpses in a row -

Proletarians!

Karl, Radek, Rosa and Co -

Not one of them is there, not one of them is there!

Proletarians!

Liebknecht and Luxemburg were murdered in cold blood after their arrest by Freikorps officers on 15 January, three days after the fighting had stopped.

This was not accidental. At a memorial meeting in Petrograd a few days later, Leon Trotsky, one of the central leaders of the October Revolution, drew parallels with 1917 and spoke of how the German "bourgeoisie and military have learnt from our July and October experience" and acted to try to behead the revolution.

As the fighting in Berlin was coming to an end a council republic was proclaimed in Bremen and, after finishing in Berlin, Noske ordered Freikorps units to crush the movement there.

But this in turn provoked mass strikes and fighting in the Ruhr, Rhineland, Saxony and, at the beginning of March, a general strike and more fighting in Berlin. In other areas like Hamburg and Thuringia there was also a near civil war situation, while in Munich the council republic there was one of the last to fall in early May.

However, even when initially bloodily defeated with thousands killed in 1919, the movement was strong enough to prevent the counter-revolution crushing all democratic rights. Hand in hand with bloody repression the counter-revolution was forced to take a partially 'democratic' form, even sometimes dress itself in 'socialist' phraseology - for the time being.

## **Rise of the KPD**

But the SPD paid a huge price for its role, millions of workers turned away from it in disgust. Having won a record 11,509,000 votes in the January 1919 election, 18 months later the SPD's vote slumped to 5,617,000.

At the same time the left USPD saw its vote more than double from 2,317,000 to 4,897,000, alongside 442,000 votes for the KPD. A few months later, in October 1920, a majority at the USPD's Congress in Halle voted to merge with the KPD.

This gave the newly unified KPD a mass base and the opportunity to learn from the experiences of the November revolution. Although capitalism survived this first round, the German revolution was not over, as millions of workers moved to the left, stopped supporting the SPD and, by the end of 1920, made the KPD a truly mass force.

The tragedy is that when, after a series of heroic struggles, the KPD was able to get majority support amongst workers for some months in 1923, it let the opportunity slip. This had the disastrous consequence that, instead of the world being completely transformed, there was the rise of Stalinism, and then Hitler's later victory, with all that those events meant for humanity.

- See Germany: 100 years since the November revolution 1918 [at socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net) for more
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## **Disruption of Leeds Socialist Party meeting shows need for unions to lead real struggle**

### **Leeds Socialist Party**

Leeds Socialist Party's branch meeting was harassed by individuals calling themselves 'Antifa Watch' on the evening of Monday 7 January. They entered our meeting place, filming, and threatening our members and supporters verbally and physically.

Socialist Party members did not rise to the provocation, and bar staff assisted by escorting the disruptive group out of the venue. No one was hurt during the incident.

During their interruption of our meeting, they pushed and threatened to assault our members. They also accused us of campaigning against women and children who are victims of abuse, calling us "paedophiles" and "nonces."

As one of our members correctly pointed out during the incident, we are in favour of people who have committed these crimes being punished accordingly. This did not appear in the edit of the video 'Antifa Watch' released online.

### **Campaigns**

In fact, Leeds Socialist Party actively campaigns against the bedroom tax, closure of specialist care homes, cuts to emergency accommodation for people fleeing violence, and cuts to social services. We fight for no-cuts council budgets to guarantee the facilities that allow vulnerable people to escape abuse.

Conversely, 'Tommy Robinson', founder of the far-right racist English Defence League (EDL), was charged with contempt of court for potentially sabotaging the effective prosecution of alleged perpetrators of grooming and child sexual exploitation. Robinson is a figure we are sure this small grouping follows.

Sexual exploitation is a very serious and complex crime, rooted in the prejudices and power imbalances perpetuated by capitalism. But establishment media and politicians have tried to distract from this reality by selectively highlighting the ethnicity of some of those alleged groomers who do come to court.

It is clear that far-right figures are not interested in taking real steps to tackle this important issue, as compared to the constructive campaigns of the Socialist Party. This is also shown by the attempted intimidation of striking rail workers, organised by transport union RMT, by a group mobilised by the EDL in Manchester on Saturday 5 January (see page 6).

Incidents like these show what the far right is really about. Far from being anti-establishment, its leaders seek to attack and divide the working class - a gift to the capitalist establishment. The Socialist Party seeks to unite the working class in struggle against our true enemy - the super-rich bosses and politicians who defend capitalism, who are attacking our jobs, homes and services for profit.

### **Give a lead**

The Socialist Party will not be intimidated by the actions of this group or any other right-wing group.

But this incident underlines the importance of the trade union leaders and organised working class taking the lead in the struggle against austerity, the capitalist establishment and the far right.

Without a clear working-class programme and action to transform living and working conditions, a minority can turn in desperation to the far right.

We will continue to campaign alongside working-class people in fighting for vital public services, homes for all, and good jobs with good pay and conditions. We link this to the fight for a socialist society led by the working class, owned and democratically planned by all, in the interests of the 99%, not the billionaires.

Leeds Socialist Party thanks the staff at the Pack Horse Pub for their response to the incident, and we thank the trade union and socialist movement for the solidarity already shown.

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## **Bringing socialist ideas into movements on women's rights**

Over 40 women members of the Socialist Party met on 5 January to discuss the important work we do in fighting the attacks on women and raising socialist ideas with women and men who are becoming politically active on these issues.

Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party, introduced the first discussion on political perspectives for 2019. Hannah invited the meeting to discuss the processes burrowing beneath the surface of society.

Capitalism's inability to offer a way out of the misery is building up enormous reserves of public anger. But at this stage people don't have a mass outlet.

### **Mass anger**

Internationally, the emerging movement and mass anger against women's oppression are important developments and the Socialist Party is organising to participate fully.

The discussion looked at how the understanding of what sort of struggle is needed is developing, under the hammer blows of austerity, including within the 'gilets jaunes' (yellow vests) movement where workers can begin to see the need to build unity. The Tories are not confident to launch a frontal attack on women now but austerity attacks through a million ways.

In her reply to the discussion, Hannah pointed to our role in providing ideas to fight.

For example, we should call for Labour councils to commit to using their existing powers, reserves and borrowing potential to prevent those affected by Tory Universal Credit suffering hardship while building a mass campaign to get the Tories out.

In the afternoon, Sarah Sachs-Eldridge and Amy Cousens introduced discussion on how we put our ideas into action.

The Women's Lives Matter campaign to defend domestic violence services and refuges, which originates in the campaign to save Doncaster Women's Aid from closure, is a key campaign that we want to help build.

The central demand of the campaign is to fight all cuts and it has adopted the demand for needs budgets.

A petition calling on John McDonnell to guarantee that an incoming Labour government would replenish any reserves a Labour council used to avoid cuts to these services now, and underwrite borrowing made for the same purpose, is being launched.

The lessons of the Socialist Party's key role in the historic Campaign Against Domestic Violence were brought out in the discussion too.

All Socialist Party branches should get political and organisational reports on this meeting.

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## **Tremendous effort sees Socialist Party smash fighting fund target in 2018**

**Ken Douglas, Socialist Party Treasurer**

Socialist Party members and supporters raised £44,171 in the final three months of 2018 - 147% of the target of £30,000! Because of this huge effort we also surpassed the annual fighting fund target, raising £130,632 altogether.

That means last year, alongside the Building Fund total of £159,000 paid in so far, we raised nearly £290,000. We have achieved this through the hard work, dedication and self-sacrifice of members and supporters. The Socialist party has no rich backers.

This dedication was evident at the beginning of the year as members campaigned in the snow, supporting the UCU strike and also battling cuts and privatisation in the NHS.

Members tapped into a huge mood of support for the NHS, with the 70th anniversary celebrations in the spring and the NHS demo. At the same time we helped secure notable victories with campaigns that saved Glenfield children's heart unit in Leicester, Chatsworth ward in Mansfield and Huddersfield Royal Infirmary A&E.

We also celebrated one of our own anniversaries with issue 1000 of the Socialist. Our campaign to sell an extra thousand copies of that issue was so enthusiastically taken up that we sold nearly double that amount and raised a lot of fighting fund at the same time.

Members also raised big amounts from parties, social events and festivals throughout 2018. Burns night in Carlisle, curry night in Gateshead, music night in Salford, plant sales at local festivals in Sheffield, book sales and car boots in Swansea, a 'Beef fest' BBQ in Southampton, the Tolpuddle festival in the South West, and Christmas meals in London.

Now we need to prepare to make sure that 2019 is as successful as 2018. We need to raise the finance necessary to ensure we have the means to get our socialist ideas out to as wide an audience as possible.

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## **NHS funding crisis: Tory 'super-plan' is a super-con!**

**Alison Hill**

Theresa May has been trumpeting an increase in spending on the NHS and a ten-year 'super-plan' for NHS England. But this is not what it seems.

For a start, the "extra" billions promised - reaching an extra £20 billion a year by 2023 - is actually less than the increases in spending before the Tories' cruel austerity policies really kicked in. Funding increases used to be about 4% a year, this works out at just over 3% - barely enough for the NHS to stand still.

If you bear in mind that hospitals are missing every target - for A&E waiting times, cancer treatment and routine operations - that increase will be rapidly eaten up. And if you consider that many hospitals are sinking under crippling 'debts' to the big construction companies from rip-off Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes, this is even less impressive.

There are about 100,000 vacancies for NHS staff at the moment, so the existing staff are having to struggle to keep the system going. How can the proposed improvements in things like cancer diagnosis, maternity care and mental health treatment be delivered without a real increase in spending on training, wages and recruitment?

The biggest gap in all this is social care. The government was supposed to publish a discussion paper on this some months ago but this potato is obviously too hot for them.

Local authorities are having their budgets cut. But rather than confront the government they try to cut what they pay for social care. Care homes rely increasingly on very low-paid workers and are going out of business.

The result is that elderly and vulnerable people end up in hospital for extended periods of time and the waiting lists grow.

Much of this ten-year plan talks about important public health measures like tackling obesity and helping people to give up smoking. But these are the types of services which local authorities are already cutting.

Vandalising the NHS has been one of the government's main objectives - they just see it as a source of profit for their big business backers. And what else are they going to cut to pay for this crude attempt to divert attention from the Brexit fiasco?

### **There is no time to lose:**

- Reverse all cuts and privatisation to guarantee the needed funds.
- Labour councils should stand up to the government and refuse to implement cuts, including to social care.
- Urgently train more NHS staff and pay them all a real living wage.
- Nationalise all the big companies leeching off the NHS, cancel the PFI 'debts'.
- Run the NHS under democratic workers' control as a real public service.

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## **Linking LGBT+ rights to the fight for socialism**

**Fred Ray**

The growing Socialist Party LGBT+ group held its first national meeting of the year on 6 January.

Around 20 of members met in London to discuss how we can fight for LGBT+ rights and build a mass movement against oppression.

The meeting started with a general discussion on perspectives in the era of capitalist crisis.

We talked about the issues facing LGBT+ people and the importance of linking the struggle for LGBT+ liberation with other movements of the working class and, ultimately, to the wider fight to end the capitalist system which props itself up on our suffering.

Members reported back on their positive interventions at local prides.

A common theme was that our message - "pride is political" - was well received by members of the public who are tired of corporate attempts to turn pride into an apolitical celebration without the potential to bring the real change we need.

In the afternoon we discussed how the group can build the Socialist Party and laid out ideas for producing more material for the LGBT+ movement, including a new pamphlet and articles for the Socialist.

We talked about the key role of the party branches in LGBT+ campaigns and agreed on taking the discussion back into the branches. This will help to develop ideas around LGBT+ rights and give members the confidence to take part in our interventions around pride and other LGBT+ movements.

It's clear from the enthusiastic mood of the meeting that the LGBT+ group will continue to grow, develop and help to fight for socialism!

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## North Tyneside Campaigning to save our footbridge

Following an initiative of the North Tyneside Socialist Party, a 60-strong public protest took place on 29 December against Labour-run North Tyneside council's plan to demolish the historic Borough Road footbridge in North Shields' town centre.

Demolition would undoubtedly cause serious hardship to disabled and vulnerable people accessing the town centre.

The event received local media coverage, with Socialist Party branch secretary Will Jarrett interviewed for Look North and radio stations. 20 copies of the Socialist were sold at the protest.

Notwithstanding a failed attempt by pro-council cuts Labour Party members to hijack the campaign and exclude us at a meeting on 5 January, we will be attending another protest meeting at The Magnesia Bank pub (NE30 1NH) on Saturday 12 January, 11am.

A march through the town centre to save the bridge will take place on 19 January which, undoubtedly, will get a huge response from the community.

**Peter Robson, North Tyneside Socialist Party**

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## Carmarthenshire council: Unison demands no-cuts budget

Just before Christmas, Carmarthenshire county Unison union branch sent a letter to councillors demanding they set a no-cuts budget to prevent more job losses and further reduced services.

The letter points out that "the local authority now has to make another £28 million cuts in three years with £9 million this year alone."

It calls on the Plaid Cymru/Independent-led coalition council to stop saying its hands are tied by the Labour-led Welsh Assembly Government implementing Tory austerity budget cuts.

"We are calling on Carmarthenshire County Council to make a stand before it is too late. Unison (LGSGE), GMB, Unite (local government) and the Wales TUC all support the setting of legal no-cuts budgets. Use the time a no-cuts budget gives you to call on other councils to do the same. Build a mass campaign of resistance starting in Wales that could be the beginning of the end of the Tories."

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# Protests continue to rage in Sudan

Serge Jordan and Sabah Ahmed, Committee for a Workers' International

Sudan has been rocked by extensive anti-government protests since 19 December.

People in the diaspora have come out in large numbers outside Sudanese embassies to show their solidarity. In contrast, most media outlets in neighbouring countries have been silent.

State subsidies on flour have been removed in River Nile state, tripling the bread price overnight, and provoking the biggest protests in this part of Sudan for years.

After school meal costs were more than doubled, school students and hundreds of other people marched in Atbara. Protesters set fire to the main office of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and local government headquarters and ransacked the offices of the notorious NISS security services.

Protests continued into the night and spread to other towns. A state of emergency and curfew was declared in Atbara and all schools were shut down in the city.

## Protests grow

On the second day, demonstrations continued in all River Nile towns, despite the state of emergency, and spread to the far east of the country. By 21 December, five states had declared night time curfews.

The government banned all social media apps, shut down the internet, suspended classes, and closed all universities and schools. From the next day, western parts of the country started to rise up in protest.

Sudanese doctors and medical staff launched an indefinite strike on 24 December, calling on other professions to join them. This was followed by a three-day journalists' strike.

A march to the presidential palace on Christmas Day, organised by professional unions and opposition parties, demanded al-Bashir step down. The security forces used brutal beatings, tear gas, rubber bullets, mass arrests and live ammunition. Al-Bashir left the capital Khartoum in fright ahead of the march.

On New Year's Day, 22 political parties withdrew their limited representation in government, called for parliament to be dissolved, and for al-Bashir to step down.

Two days later, al-Bashir said he would increase public sector wages and improve health insurance benefits and pensions. It unlikely to deter the people's will to fight.

Al-Bashir sacked his health minister not long afterwards, trying to blame him for medicine prices and scarcities.

On 6 January protests were the biggest yet, particularly outside the capital where security is less dense and the army rank and file, often from poorer peripheral regions, are no zealous defenders of the regime.

In Khartoum, security attacked demonstrators. They also blocked hundreds of lecturers from Khartoum University from joining a protest outside the university, trapping them inside.

At least 37 people have been killed so far and hundreds wounded. Scores of protesters have been detained and tortured. The repressive actions by regime forces have so far only helped the movement to propagate and radicalise.

Soldiers have been captured on smartphones mixing with protestors, and even protecting them from the police, NISS and regime militias. But even the police stepped aside more than once.

The military command made a public statement in support of the country's leadership, but did not mention al-Bashir, keeping open various political scenarios.

The main leader of the Rapid Support Force, a vicious pro-government paramilitary unit, was filmed telling several thousand troops that they should show "solidarity" with the Sudanese people and that the government was to blame for the inflation that sparked the protests.

## **Dire economy**

Inflation is almost 70% according to government data - some economists put real inflation at double that. The Sudanese pound has plunged in value.

The end of US economic sanctions in 2017 has not improved life for ordinary Sudanese. Instead, with sanctions removed, the regime has no one else to blame.

People sleep in their cars for two days waiting to fill up on petrol and queues of hundreds of people line up to buy bread or withdraw cash from the banks.

In the capital, there are no jobs, even as people migrate from other parts of the country to look for work. It's overcrowded, there is a lack of affordable housing, and violence and crime are rampant.

The protests are explicitly against the regime. Imams calling for obedience to the authorities have been removed from their mosque pulpits, and demonstrators in Al-Nuhud and Al-Gadarif stormed the depots of the Zakat chamber and claimed the stored food for themselves.

Some independent professional unions have called for a general strike, but this hasn't materialised yet. They shouldn't wait.

Now they should start a mass campaign calling on students, young people, poor farmers, unemployed and small traders to join in a mass show of strength to bring down the current regime.

Official workers' unions are tightly controlled by the government and remain silent. The removal of pro-regime union officials from workplaces, their replacement by genuine workers' representatives, and the creation of independent workplace bodies and trade unions are burning tasks.

Popular neighbourhood committees have emerged in some places. If spread to all communities, workplaces and the rank and file of the army, they can help coordinate the resistance against the regime and its repression, maintain order, and organise vital supplies.

They can provide the backbone for an alternative power structure based on the will of the revolutionary people that can seize power from the al-Bashir regime.

## **Fear of mass movement**

Many political parties and opposition forces actually fear a mass movement of the workers and poor as something that can threaten the capitalist system they defend. Some of them, like the National Umma Party, have compromised into alliances with the regime before.

The call by the Sudanese Communist Party to "unite and work together to coordinate the movement" is welcome.

However, as it's addressed to "all opposition parties", it unfortunately fails to draw a line with those sections of the opposition keen to see al-Bashir ousted, but which do not represent a break from big business - their interests are opposed to the class interests of the forces involved in the uprising.

Such a 'technocratic' formula, a military coup, the recycling of old political faces, the involvement of 'fresh' figures from the pro-capitalist opposition, or variants of the above, won't address any of the fundamental problems facing the Sudanese masses.

Building an independent left force that will provide a powerful campaigning instrument for the interests of workers, women, peasants and all poor people in struggle is urgent.

A workers' government is needed, armed with a programme for taking over the assets and wealth of the corrupt ruling clique, nationalising Sudan's major industries and large farm holdings, and drawing up a democratic socialist plan of production to put the needs of the majority at its heart.

- This is an updated and edited extract. To see the full original check out '[Sudan: long-simmering rage of the masses explodes on the streets](#)' at [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)

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## UK protest backs Sudanese movement

The UK protest backing the movement in Sudan began in front of Aljazeera TV who support al-Bashir - before continuing outside the Sudanese embassy in London until well after dark. There were speakers from different parts of the UK who expressed their support for the uprising in Sudan. I spoke to send solidarity from the Socialist Party and condemn the arrest of peaceful protesters. We met two protesters who wanted to join the Socialist Party.

Sabah Ahmed, Reading Socialist Party

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## Blocked for years, but the Socialist Party of Nigeria is now standing in elections

Ibukun Omole, Democratic Socialist Movement, CWI Nigeria

After years of campaigning to be officially recognised, the Socialist Party of Nigeria (SPN - launched by the Democratic Socialist Movement and others) is able to stand in elections.

Presidential and national elections will take place on 16 February. With state and local elections on 2 March.

120 people came to Hassan Taiwo Soweto's election rally for Ogun State House of Assembly in the Ifo constituency on 15 December.

Soweto called for a popular movement to fight for the development of road infrastructure, electricity, public education, healthcare and jobs.

He will stand against all anti-poor policies and serve as a bold voice for workers and youth. He will continue to live in the constituency and will not collect more than the salary and allowances of a skilled civil servant.

Olaogun town Chief, Bamigbose, spoke after him, saying that the constituency is larger than six local governments in the state, yet it is the most underfunded. SPN national secretary, Chinedu Bosah, said the Ifo contest was inspiring.

The SPN Lagos State chair, Rufus Olusesan, lamented that Nigerians can no longer beg around to feed themselves, and concluded that "enough is enough of capitalist politicians".

Falilat Jimoh brought solidarity greetings from the Campaign for a Workers' and Youth Alternative. Ayo Arogundade raised the idea of a politician living on minimum wage in the community, a demand that SPN is raising.

The local Tailors' Association chair, Olaoyenikan, encouraged people to vote for a grassroots activist. A local elder, Jegede, said he was inspired by the speech of the candidate at a Community Development Council meeting.

A representative of the Olambe town described the candidate as a David that could overcome the Goliath he is confronting. Mamakofoshi expressed her happiness that an activist is contesting the election.

An election fundraiser raised N45,000 in pledges and N11,500 in cash on the spot. A march and vehicle convoy followed the rally with people pasting up posters and leafleting passers-by.

- Read the full article ['Nigeria elections - main parties offer no alternative'](#) at [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)
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## Theatre review: Women of Aktion - the heroic story of how World War One was ended

Nigel Smith, York Socialist Party

Women of Aktion by the Bent Architect Theatre Company tells the story of the women and men whose heroic actions brought World War One to an end.

It does this by looking at how Joan Littlewood, the most influential left theatre director during the inter-war period, engaged in a creative struggle with Ernst Toller. Toller was an anarchist playwright who had written the play 'Draw the Fires' about the Kiel mutiny by the German navy in 1918, but had failed to include women characters that were anything but caricatures.

Littlewood challenges Toller's paternalistic approach and the artistic conflict between Toller and Littlewood is a major theme. The conflict mirrors the struggle Littlewood faced in establishing a left theatre company as a woman.

As this conflict rages we see it juxtaposed to the political and personal struggles of the women of Kiel.

We are taken through the terrible losses of loved ones that they had to endure. We also learn about the privations they had to suffer.

More significantly, however, we are taken on a journey of political awakening. We see how these women grasp the need for revolutionary action to end the war.

We see how their actions link to the mutinies in the German fleet and German army. We also see how revolutionary councils were set up across Germany - all the major factors in ending the war.

We also see how one young woman sees further than many of the leaders around her. She grasps the need to prosecute the revolution decisively, while others compromise and vacillate.

This hesitation proves the revolution's undoing. It allows the Freikorps and other counter-revolutionary forces time to counter-attack even though the Kaiser is forced to abdicate.

Women of Aktion is an important piece of political theatre. It clearly voices with positivity the need for socialist struggle and brilliantly makes the point that you can't compromise with capitalism.

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Letters to the Socialist's editors.

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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.

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## 'Stupid people'?

The banal is elevated to serious political discourse by the anti-Corbyn cabal. Ruthless cuts go on unchecked while the chattering classes of the media rant about Corbyn muttering that May is either a 'stupid woman' or the Tories 'stupid people'.

I can understand why he said 'stupid people', though I would differ with Jeremy on the grounds that far from being stupid, May leads a callous, calculating political arm of a greed-driven boss class who are determined to shift even more wealth from the poor to the rich.

This latest alleged 'outrage' by Jeremy, and the Brexit blather, is a diversion from continuing savage Tory cuts - with inequality, child poverty, homeless deaths and suicides reaching unprecedented levels, all aided and abetted by 6,000 'Labour' councillors who, without a whimper of opposition, implement these deadly measures.

The sooner the Tories are booted out, the quicker a Corbyn-led government can get on with the job of rebuilding the public services currently lying in ruins.

**Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool**

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## Fire service cuts

Matt Wrack, leader of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), recently attacked ongoing Tory austerity which since 2010 has dismissed 9,000 fire and rescue service jobs in England, including almost 6,500 full-time firefighters.

"Fire and rescue services in England are expected to do more with less, putting public safety at risk. Firefighters have been ensuring the service delivers, but it is at breaking point", he said in the Times newspaper on 28 December.

The response from the Home Office is that there has been a substantial fall in the number of fires over the past decade (down 46%), and fire prevention work had been a "real success". This is a government that cannot escape from the long shadow of Grenfell, and whose 'successful' fire prevention work has not removed the risk of fire from tower blocks housing tens of thousands of residents, with similar cladding.

I'm sure the whole labour movement supports Matt's statement and the efforts of his truly brave members - with one exception: the Blairite councillors who implement those Tory cuts. Regrettably the FBU's reaffiliation to the

Labour Party has not brought an end to the Blairite implementation of Tory austerity. Another welcome FBU stance was their support for mandatory reselection at last year's Labour Party conference, but the policy was defeated.

Now the real and welcome prospect of a Jeremy Corbyn-led government is being threatened by the election of a substantially Blairite parliamentary Labour Party.

Labour movement activists must redouble their efforts to commit their trade unions to the overdue democratisation of the Labour Party - especially Unite the Union with its executive support for mandatory reselection (2016) - to ensure a newly elected Labour government delivers 'for the many not the few'.

John Merrell, Leicester

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## Capitalism's ghosts

In summer of 1991 a North Tyneside community was gripped by unrest. Two unemployed young men had stolen a car for joyriding.

A police pursuit of the vehicle on the Coast Road resulted in a collision which ended the lives of Dale Robson and Colin Atkins. Prosecutors noted that the community was "gripped by a hatred of police".

The toxic mix of poverty, an absent welfare state, and chronic youth unemployment led to chaos when guilty verdicts were returned against young people involved in the theft. Up to 400 people were involved in nights of unrest across the North Shields estate which damaged lives and infrastructure.

The riots featured prominently in the media, and the then Tory prime minister John Major condemned them. Following the routine questions and reviews, the state determined that an austerity-busting £66 million would be spent to improve conditions in Meadow Well.

The government reasoned that people's material circumstances must improve in order to maintain harmony and trust. It took a riot for the government to realise it.

17 years on, my bus driver stopped abruptly on a busy Newcastle road recently, asking if anyone needed to access Byker Metro station. I said yes.

He informed me that the route will no longer travel through the area. He said youths have put bricks through the windows of numerous buses, and that the company will no longer risk its property.

As I walked along the brief route I observed evidence of damage, smashed paving stones, and bus stops with no windows remaining. Capitalism's ghosts and unlearned lessons wander aloofly across a restive north east.

The implementation of Universal Credit marches unabated. Food bank use soars.

Young people, like Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition supporter and my good friend Glenn Dixon, tragically commit suicide due to insecurity and lack of access to quality mental health services.

The role of cuts-making Labour councils means the party continues to estrange itself from communities which should form its core of support, who view the party with deep suspicion, associating it with cuts, closures, privatisation, and bailiffs.

Only one spark is required to tip an unsettled situation into chaos. One more cold and hungry night, one more suicide, or one more instance of police misconduct could determine whether Labour figures will finally understand.

Warnings are everywhere. Too few in power care to heed them, and they may not appreciate just how dangerous our situation is until after the burning begins. Labour is sowing the seeds of misery across our region.

William Jarrett, North Shields

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## Universal Credit chaos

Campaigning for an end to Universal Credit and a different social security system is the correct approach.

Many of the problems that arise from Universal Credit are also part and parcel of the benefits it replaced, most notably being required to attend interviews, prove extensive work searches, the sanctions regime and

'work capability assessments'.

On 13 December 2018 the last Jobcentre rolled out its Universal Credit 'full service'. Now the only benefit people can claim as a new claim or after a change of circumstances is Universal Credit. Over one million people now get Universal Credit and this could rise to seven million.

It has been 'tweaked' a number of times, including by the coalition government and the Tories. Initially these changes lowered rates of benefit and increased time delays for payments. Administrative costs were originally set at £2 billion but delays and other problems mean they have now spiralled to £16.8 billion.

As awareness about the benefit grew and more people claimed, pressure mounted to ameliorate the issues with delays. This has continued.

There are over seven million people on the 'old' benefits. They are due to be moved to Universal Credit between July 2019 and 2023.

As usual with benefit changes, some people think that the easy answer is for Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) workers to refuse to do their jobs.

I worked as a benefit processor in social security offices and then as a work coach in a job centre for 38 years. For most of that time I was a CPSA/PCS trade union rep.

Whenever there were benefit changes I tried to work with claimants' groups. Some of these also thought the answer was for DWP workers not to process the benefits. When I said this meant we would be sacked and claiming benefits ourselves, I was told that that was preferable.

In my view this is not the solution for a number of reasons. Most DWP workers want to help people and make sure they get the best experience they can of the minefield of the benefit system. Most do not issue sanctions.

We also advise people about how to appeal decisions. Work capability assessments are carried out by Maximus, a private company under strict instructions from the Tories. DWP staff have no control over this process.

People who say it is up to DWP workers not to do their jobs also say they will support them in this. The problem is that if we were not doing the job, none of the over one million people in receipt of Universal Credit would get any money.

It is estimated that one-third of DWP workers are also in receipt of Universal Credit or working tax credits. Their jobs are relatively low paid with most workers getting an annual salary of between £20,000 and £25,000.

If someone refuses to do their job they could be sacked. If the union ballots for strike action, legally there has to be a more than 50% turnout and a majority for action.

We need a campaign that gets DWP workers on board and does not vilify them because of the actions of a minority of workers. DWP workers are subjected to relentless propaganda from the department. This is ramped up every time there is criticism about Universal Credit.

To have a social security system that is fit for society, we need to get rid of the Tories and have a general election and a Corbyn-led government as a start.

The working class, working and not working, has to be united to fight for a socialist world.

Clare Wilkins, Nottingham

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# What the Socialist Party stands for

The Socialist Party fights for socialism – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working class people.

The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

## Public services

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

## Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Reject 'workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

## Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

## Rights

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

## **Mass workers' party**

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Fight for Labour to be transformed into such a party: deselect the Blairites!

## **Socialism and internationalism**

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

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