

Solidarity with Catalonia - the people have the right to decide

Shocking scenes of brutal police repression in Catalonia reverberated around the world on 1 October.

Working class and young people watched in horror as voters - from teenagers to pensioners - were shot with rubber bullets, thrown downstairs, pulled by their hair and beaten with batons. All this for peacefully trying to take part in a referendum on Catalan independence.

Amid the police violence, which has left over 800 injured, was also a clear vision of the heroism and solidarity of ordinary people. From 5am hundreds of people gathered outside many polling stations, linking arms together to form human chains in preparation for the attacks.

Despite the police violence and judicial clampdown that people had already witnessed in the weeks leading up to the vote, they were determined to hold the polling stations - which they occupied for days leading up to polling - and keep them open to ensure everyone could exercise their democratic rights. Less than 5% of polling stations were closed by the police's actions.

In several places firefighters stood in front of the voters and protesters to protect them from the police. In some cases the police didn't hold back even then, and attacked the firefighters too.

As our sister party in the Spanish state has written: "The justification that the right-wing PP Spanish government is applying the law cannot mask that the law is unfair, undemocratic and goes directly against the aspirations of millions of Catalans who they are trying to muzzle."

Only after these events, when it was impossible to ignore, did the British establishment press and politicians pay any attention to what has been happening in the Spanish state. Imagine their outraged response had the same been happening in a country outside the sphere of influence of British capitalism.

These events have revealed to a generation, outside Spain as well as in, that no capitalist state is 'friendly' to workers and young people when they organise and threaten the interests of the profit system.

But what the Spanish state and the right-wing government may have hoped to be a show of strength is in fact a massive sign of weakness and desperation.

Workers and young people responded with big shows of solidarity, with sizable demonstrations taking place across the state. A solid general strike then took place in Catalonia on 3 October, supported by all union federations. The repression has only spurred on the movement. The Socialist Party stands in full solidarity with the workers and youth of Catalonia and across the Spanish state in their struggle against this repression and for the right to self-determination. The Catalan people have the right to decide!

Historic general strike in Catalonia - Out with the PP government!

From a statement by Izquierda Revolucionaria [4/10/17)

Continue the fight until we win a Catalan socialist republic!

Catalonia experienced an historic day on 3 October. Millions of workers, young people and citizens paralysed companies, transport, education and administration. They took to the streets crying out against the brutal

police repression of 1 October and threats of more violence against the Catalan people by Spanish Prime Minister Rajoy and Partido Popular (People's Party/PP) government ministers.

The possibility of achieving a Catalan republic through the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses is causing panic among the Spanish ruling class. They know that this victory would open the way to the struggle for socialist transformation of society in Catalonia and in the rest of the Spanish state.

The Catalan political crisis has been transformed into a crisis over the 1978 constitution, which motivated King Philip VI to address the "nation" on the night of 3rd October. Would the king denounce the violence of the police and the civil guard against tens of thousands of families, elderly and peaceful people who only wanted to vote? Would he offer sympathy to nearly 1,000 people injured by the repressive intervention of the Francoist regime? Would the king condemn the leaders of the PP and Cuididanos [Citizens party] who described the general strike and the huge demonstrations on 3 October as "Nazi" and "xenophobic", using the language of civil war? Would the king strongly oppose suspending Catalan autonomy?

We anticipated from the beginning that the king would not do any of these things. The monarchy supported, as expected, the PP government's repressive policy, justifying it as the "defence of the rule of law."

The oppression of the PP government and the state apparatus against the people of Catalonia shows their true DNA and that the legacy of Franco continues within them. And after 1 October, far from retreating, reaction has intensified its nationalist-Spanish propaganda. They present the mobilisation of 16,000 police and civilian police, and future repressive measures, as legitimate actions to defend the "law of the state".

But by what state and by what right? What right does a government, full of corruption and thieves, who plundered the public resources to enrich a minority, have to claim its authority to act in this way? It is the state of the bankers who have their hands full of billions of stolen euros. The "rule of law" drowns us in mass unemployment, precarious jobs, low wages, poverty and misery. The "rule of law" born of the pact of 1978, when the Spanish bourgeoisie and the leaders of the organisations of the left - PCE [Communist Party] and PSOE [social-democratic party] agreed to reform the dictatorship to abort a revolutionary situation, guaranteed the capitalist class control through a monarchical and parliamentary regime that included many authoritarian elements.

Exemplary resistance to savage police violence by the people of Catalonia!

- Down with the PP government!
- For a Catalan socialist republic!

Esquerra Revolucionària [Revolutionary Left], Catalonia, 2/10/17

Catalonia on 1st October saw scenes of a territory under military occupation. Thousands of police and civil guards - sent by the PP government and the State Attorney's office - used savage repression to prevent voting in the referendum and viciously cracked down on tens of thousands of peaceful citizens, families, children and the elderly.

They smashed the glass panes of schools and stole the voting urns as if they were trophies. This indiscriminate violence prevented voting in 400 schools, but what the riot police, the PP government and the state did not count on was the massive resistance of the Catalan people, who exercised their right to vote with determination and courage in thousands of polling stations and undoubtedly defeated a repressive offensive unprecedented in the last 40 years.

Franco's repression

According to the official data of the Generalitat, 844 people have been injured by the police and the civil guard, of which two are in a serious condition in two hospitals in Barcelona.

The photos of thousands of police force deploying all their violent repression to prevent the Catalan population from expressing themselves democratically have gone around the world.

All the international press has reflected it, comparing the actions of the repressive forces of the state with the Franco dictatorship. And it is impossible to deny this fact.

The images of the Franco regime have returned with all their strength from the hands of Rajoy and his government of thieves, reactionaries and national-Spanish.

Pretending to give a lesson to the population of Catalonia, the heirs of the dictatorship have reaped the whirlwind.

The rage, indignation and fury of millions of young people and workers has been transformed into a wall against which the right and its repressive state have crashed.

The political lessons of what happened on 1st October in Catalonia will be recorded in the consciousness of millions of people, both in Catalonia and the rest of the state and internationally.

The justification that the PP (People's Party) and its government are applying the law, cannot mask that the law is unfair, undemocratic and goes directly against the aspirations of millions of Catalans who they are trying to muzzle.

Facts that make even more shameful the capitulation of the leadership of PSOE [Spanish Socialist Party], which has preferred to weave an alliance with the heirs of Franco rather than recognise the right to decide of the people of Catalonia.

The political bankruptcy of the PSOE leadership

After the triumph of Pedro Sanchez in the first of the PSOE elections, and the defeat of those leaders who made possible the investiture of Rajoy as president of the government, there was much hope that something had begun to change in the party of social democracy, that there was a possibility of a turn to the left.

All these hopes have once again been disappointed by the unspeakable behaviour of Pedro Sánchez and the current socialist leadership on the Catalan national question.

The complicity of the current leaders of PSOE with the PP to muzzle the people of Catalonia and prevent them from voting on 1st October will go down in the history of social democracy as one of its most infamous pages.

The intervention of Pedro Sánchez on the same day that tens of thousands of people were subjected to excessive violence, crying crocodile tears for the "police charges" without even daring to call things by their right name, and then reaffirming his unwavering support for the "rule of law, the institutions, the constitution and territorial integrity", that is, the government of the PP and "one Spain, large and free", demonstrate their complete political bankruptcy.

The leaders of PSOE have revealed in these weeks the dire consequences of embracing for years Spanish nationalism and merging with the ruling class in all essential matters.

They have not only abandoned the view of socialism on the national question - which has always defended the right to self-determination of the oppressed nations; but they try to hide their responsibility by rhetorically calling for "negotiation" and "dialogue".

In fact they have placed themselves alongside the Francoists who resort to violence and repression by the state.

The idea that the referendum of 1 October was a "coup d'état" or an "anti-democratic" imposition on a sector of the Catalan population is one of the biggest lies that the media try to sell at the service of the Spanish capitalists.

And an absurd one in itself. If the state, the PP, or the current PSOE leadership are so sure that the 'independentistas' are a minority, why not accept the polls? Why stop the voting? Why in Venezuela is a vote fine but not in Catalonia?

In a democratic vote on self-determination, anyone who does not support independence has the clear choice to vote NO.

The parties that defend the legality emanating from 1978 have a great amount of resources and influence to campaign in favour of their arguments and against independence.

The real reason that explains the attitude of the right and the state is not that they defend democracy, but rather the opposite: they deny that the people of Catalonia have the right to decide and that Catalonia is a nation.

Their position is simply the continuation of a course of conduct that has historically been expressed by the Spanish capitalist class and its centralist state, having frequently squashed by military means the national-democratic aspirations of Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia.

That is what happened under Franco's dictatorship, and since the Transition any progress in winning these rights has always been the result of mass mobilisation.

The 1978 regime responsible

The mobilisation of millions of young people, workers and citizens of Catalonia has questioned the authoritarian and oligarchic character of the capitalist regime enacted in 1978.

In order to abort a revolutionary situation - in which the working class and youth of all the territories of the state put the Spanish dictatorship and capitalism on the ropes, the Spanish capitalists and the leaders of the organisations of the left (PCE and PSOE) agreed to reform the dictatorship in exchange for legally recognising the democratic freedoms that had already been conquered with the mobilisation of the masses.

In this way the socialist transformation of society was prevented, and the capitalist class maintained control of the situation through a monarchical and parliamentary regime that included huge authoritarian elements.

The constitution of 1978 sanctioned many things: a law that guaranteed impunity for the crimes of Francoism; and the state apparatus, the judiciary, police and military forces remained in the hands of the reactionaries always.

Of course, the economy of the 'free market' and the unquestionable power of the capitalists was assumed, and the right of self-determination of Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia was denied, inscribing in the constitution the dictatorship's maxim: A great Spain, and free.

The current mass movement unleashed in Catalonia in favour of national-democratic rights has placed the debate at an essential point: the denial that Catalonia is a nation - so often reiterated by the centralist capitalist class and the right through repression or simple military conquest - has been combined with widespread frustration at the consequences of the capitalist crisis: mass unemployment, evictions, precarious work and low wages, and the lack of future for the youth.

The struggle against national oppression and class oppression have intertwined, as in other times (1909, 1931, 1934, 1936, 1977 ...), generating a revolutionary potential that has defied the forms of political domination of the Spanish capitalist regime.

The working class and youth of the whole state must understand that the cause of the people of Catalonia is also theirs. "A people who oppress another can never be free", said Karl Marx.

That is why the labour movement throughout its history always inscribed on its flag the struggle for national liberation, for the self-determination of oppressed nations, as part of the struggle for the socialist transformation of society.

Today in Catalonia we are fighting for the democratic freedoms that cost so much to win at the start of the 1970s. If today they act against the people of Catalonia, what will happen tomorrow? The answer is not difficult to give.

Tomorrow they will intensify repression against all those who stand up against injustice and call into question their oppression and their domination. They will approve new gagging laws and more exceptional measures to undermine democratic freedoms.

The Spanish capitalists and their state prepare new blows against the people of Catalonia

On 1 October, there was a turning point in the class struggle not only in Catalonia, but in the whole Spanish state. The government of the PP has shown with its repressive action its extreme weakness and its absolute lack of legitimacy.

Attempts to mobilise its social base in the days before the referendum were reduced to a small minority on demonstrations and dominated by fascist elements who sang the anthem "facing the sun", while raising their arms in the fascist salute. Absolutely pathetic.

As in all the great events of history, it has been the direct action of the masses, their revolutionary intervention, which has changed the whole scenario.

The crisis of the Spanish political regime, of the forms of domination of the bourgeoisie that were maintained during four decades, are being shaken.

The decision of the Generalitat [Catalan government], after a day of historical mobilisations, to present the results of the referendum before the parliament (about 2,100,000 votes in favour, 90% of those who voted), and possibly proceed to declare the Catalan Republic, has set off all alarms bells among the Spanish ruling class.

The crisis is of such a magnitude for the Spanish state that the PP government and other reactionaries now openly speak of a coup against the Catalan institutions, dissolving the Catalan government and ending the autonomy.

The newspaper El Mundo expressed in its editorial what Barrunta said in La Moncloa: "Faced with this flagrant insurrection to legitimate order, and in a revolutionary context that includes the call for a general strike, the government cannot delay in taking the measures necessary to cut short plans for separatism, including the immediate application of Article 155 or the Public Safety Act, in order to preserve legality and place the Mossos under state control ("not a moment to lose against independentismo", 2nd October 2017).

Other sections of the media such as El País, cheering on the PP for weeks and applauding every one of the repressive measures adopted in the days before the referendum, now see an increasingly more complicated situation which requires negotiation between the central government and the Generalitat.

But this, after what happened on 1st October, is not possible given the position of the PP. The state apparatus and its allies are rooted in the denial of the right to self-determination for Catalonia.

It is very difficult to establish a fixed perspective for the events that will develop in the next days. But the confrontation, that is to say, the class struggle, is going to see a great escalation. The PP has already threatened the leadership of PSOE with a new general election if it does not give its unwavering support to defend current legality. That is, support new repressive and authoritarian measures.

The question is very specific. The population mobilised in Catalonia feels strong after the political triumph against the repression of 1 October.

Consciousness has taken a giant step forward. Now is the time to take advantage of this open gap to achieve the immediate resignation of prime minister Rajoy, defeat this repressive onslaught and win in a revolutionary way the Catalan republic. This would represent a brutal blow to the Spanish capitalist regime and its centralist state, and would become a powerful tool in the fight against the policies of austerity, through the socialist transformation of society.

We must respond with massive mobilisation. For the Catalan socialist republic

All conditions are maturing to achieve these goals. The call for the general strike on 3 October, which finally the CCOO and UGT de Catalonia [trade union federations] have been dragged into supporting is a reflection of the enormous pressure of the masses and the critical point that has been reached in the crisis. The strike will be a success without doubt, but it is necessary to go further.

We call on the leaderships of the Catalan left parties - CUP [Popular Unity Candidacy], Podemos [We Can], Catalunya in Comú [The Commons] and ERC [Republican Left of Catalonia] - to establish a combative, left united front, based on the Defence Committees of the Referendum and all organisations that have been emerging in the recent weeks in Catalonia.

These should organise 'committees for the republic' in all centres of work, and coordinate amongst themselves to defend a working class alternative - an internationalist and revolutionary socialist alternative - that drives the mass movement with increasingly bold and massive actions.

We say clearly that the left front must maintain a policy of class independence, it must break any subordination to the nationalist capitalist class, the PDeCAT [Catalan European Democratic Party] and Carles Puigdemont [president of the Catalan Generalitat].

We cannot forget that even though they now suffer the reactionary onslaught of the PP, these political leaders have applied savage social cuts that have caused immense suffering, and defend their own privileges and very concrete class interests: those of the economic elite.

We cannot rule out that these bourgeois leaders, as they have done in the past so many times, again betray the aspirations of the people and try to agree to a beneficial outcome for them with the state and the PP government.

The fighting left, the labour movement and its class unions in Catalonia, today have enormous responsibility to offer a way out of this revolutionary crisis.

That is, to deepen and extend the struggle, preparing an indefinite general strike in the workplaces to resist any repressive action by the state and win the Catalan republic with a left government at the forefront to implement a programme that will meet the needs of the majority of the population and oppose the Spanish and Catalan capitalist oligarchy.

That left government should immediately end the cuts, ensuring quality public education and health; should create millions of jobs with living wages and rights, and end evictions by establishing a public housing scheme with social rentals.

This government should end the dictatorship of the great economic powers by nationalising banking and large corporations, to place wealth at the service of the needs of the majority of society.

A Catalan republic gained by the revolutionary action of the masses would necessarily imply a struggle against the PDeCAT and Puigdemont, against all this political and economic oligarchy that has governed Catalonia applying the same neoliberal recipes as the PP.

It would open the door to the struggle for a socialist republic in Catalonia and a federal socialist republic in the Spanish state based on a free and voluntary union of peoples and nations that make up the Spanish state;

and would gain the active solidarity of the oppressed masses of Europe and the whole world.

It is absolutely necessary to stop defending utopian ideas that are a dead end. Right-wing reactionaries will never grant the right to self-determination to the people of Catalonia because they know that doing so not only represents a defeat of all their politics, but also encourages all workers and youth in all territories to settle accounts with their governments and the system as a whole.

It is time for Unidos Podemos and for Pablo Iglesias to go from words to deeds. We must organise the active solidarity of the population of the rest of the state with the struggle of the Catalan people.

Their triumph will be our triumph, and achieving this will not be done with motions of censorship, nor imploring Pedro Sánchez to abandon the PP.

They need to follow the example of the youth, workers and citizens of Catalonia during these recent weeks: with direct action, with mass mobilisation, with the courage that makes possible the defeat of an adversary that only counts on repression.

Revolutionary Left calls for the building of a massive left-wing alternative that will promote the unity of the workers and youth of Catalonia with their class brothers of the Spanish state in a common struggle for socialism and to end the national oppression of Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia.

This can only become a reality in this era of imperialist decay if it is firmly united in the struggle for a socialist transformation of society and the overthrow of capitalism.

- Visca Catalunya lliure, republican and socialist!
- Join the Revolutionary Left!

The second piece above was posted on the Socialist Party website on 2 October 2017. Issue 965 of the Socialist carried an extract from it. The part in italics has since been expanded in line with later material produced by IR.

The first piece above was posted on 5 October 2017.

Eyewitness: Irish socialist MP participates in events

Mick Barry, a member of the Socialist Party's Irish sister party and of the Irish parliament, has been in Catalonia as an international observer to the struggle and the repression.

Here we print extracts of the regular updates from his Facebook page 'Mick Barry TD'.

28/9/17 - student strike

This demonstration in Barcelona is absolutely massive. Young people from the age of 12, 13, 14. We've just had scores of Barcelona firefighters arriving to protect and steward the demo. They got a massive cheer from the crowd...

They're also saying no to cuts, no to evictions, yes to jobs - real jobs - and no to the rule of the rich, Rajoy, the bankers and the 1%.

This movement is in tune with the movements on the streets of Paris against attacks on workers rights, with the support across Britain for Corbyn, and with the movements in Ireland against water charges and privatisation.

1/10/17 - voting day

I was at a school in the north of Barcelona at 8am this morning, an hour before polls were due to open. Already there were up to 700 people from the local community gathered to protect the school from the violence of the police.

This afternoon we travelled out to villages and towns north of Barcelona. In one town already at 4pm 70% of those entitled to vote had cast their ballot.

As a parliamentary visitor from Ireland, when I've arrived in these schools, it's been "thankyou" it's been "democracy," it's been shaking hands and rounds of applause. The dignity and determination of the people to vote really has to be seen to be believed.

We've just heard that the leader of the British Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn has criticised the silence of his own government - he might as well criticise the silence of all European governments. But it's not to them we look to for a solution, but to the people.

3/10/17 - general strike

I am with a group of 200 young people. They are touring the city. They are standing outside coffee shops and chanting until they close their doors. They are erecting barricades on the motorways. Other groups in other parts of the city are doing the same thing too.

There is a real determination to close down this city. It is quite quiet, most workplaces seem to be shut and the streets are far from full...

Smaller demonstrations are happening all around and where the main demo is set to take place in two and a half hours, already 100,000+ have assembled.

There are streams of workers flooding into the streets around Barcelona's city centre.

As this movement develops, and in facing down incredible Francoist repression at the hands of the Spanish state, the working class of Catalonia are discovering their strength.

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 965

The nasty party turns on itself...but the Tories must be driven out

"Why would anybody, let alone a normal person, want to become a member of the Conservative Party?" Words spoken not by a Corbynista, but by a Tory! A meeting at the Tory Party conference, hosted by Conservative Home to discuss the general election disaster, seethed with anger. Former minister Edwina Currie blurted: "I'm beginning to lose the will to live."

There can be no doubting the Tories are in an almighty crisis. What a contrast with the days when the Tories arrogantly thought Jeremy Corbyn was a perfect weak opponent. They egged on Labour's right-wing Blairites in mocking and undermining Corbyn, imagining they would secure the un-electability of the Labour Party.

But the early general election was a hideous mistake for the Tory party. It was (for the Blairites as well) a total misjudgement of the mood of the mass of working class and many middle class people, in the [same way the EU referendum was](#).

The EU referendum result was a crushing defeat for David Cameron and the Tory leadership, as the Socialist Party had predicted would be the result of a Brexit vote. Cameron disappeared off to a life of luxurious leisure

leaving a car crash behind him.

The Tories are fundamentally split over Brexit. The main reason for May's general election gamble was to try to increase her small majority in order to be able to see off challenges, in particular from her rabid hard-right backbenchers, and to secure a five-year term that would take the Tories past Brexit as far as possible.

Many others on the left, like commentator Owen Jones, were doom-laden, predicting that Jeremy Corbyn would be a disaster and that the Tories would be strengthened. But the Socialist Party argued that if Corbyn came out fighting, with socialist policies, it would be extremely popular. Again, we were proved correct.

Lame duck

Theresa May is a leader in name only. She has lost control, paralysed by the disunity in her party. We are witnessing open debate among her MPs that she cannot last, and open defiance by Boris Johnson, who she hasn't been able to sack because of the potential warfare that would lead to. Instead May is reduced to suggesting that strong leadership is all about having a team of different voices!

Some Tories might dream of a new leader who can smooth everything over, keep the show on the road, and put Jeremy Corbyn back in his box. But May is only still in place because the party is so riven there is no obvious alternative candidate who could both hold the party together credibly enough to survive another general election, nor reliably represent the interests of big business.

Leading figures attack Johnson - Chancellor Philip Hammond said "no one is unsackable"; former secretary of state of education Nicky Morgan said Boris Johnson "had no place in a responsible government"; Scottish leader Ruth Davidson called for the party to "man up" and stop the leadership "psychodrama". Nonetheless they are all trying to display themselves at their best in readiness for potential leadership challenges.

Meanwhile the pro-Brexit membership at Tory conference flock to hear arch-right-winger Jacob Rees-Mogg at fringe meetings. When asked if Johnson should be sacked, an audience reportedly chanted NO! Andrea Leadsom, former leadership contender, now leader of the House of Commons, called Johnson "fantastic".

Johnson may be the most popular to succeed May among Tory members, but big business views his brand of Brexit with alarm, as do big swathes of the party. In reality the majority of big business want to stay in the [Single Market](#), and would prefer political representatives who will either engineer Remain in all but name, or even rerun the referendum at a later stage to get the 'right' result.

So this is a crisis not just for the main capitalist party, but a crisis of political representation for the capitalists.

May heads a party which is less popular than Corbyn's Labour in every section of the population other than the over-65s, and especially among young people. An Opinium survey found that only 21% of 18 to 29 year-olds support the Tories, and only 15% of 18 to 24 year-olds think the Tories represent "people like me". Only 19% of people aged 18 to 34 think the Tories are on their side compared with 53% for Corbyn.

Research by think tank British Future also suggests that they lost as many as 28 seats due to only 19% of black and minority ethnic people supporting them.

Falling membership

Eric Pickles, former cabinet minister for communities, overseer of savage cuts, decries that they have no campaigners and wants to gather together a young team - 'Activate UK' is a so-far lamentable attempt to do this. The Campaign for Conservative Democracy estimates that their membership is below 100,000.

Just four months after 'winning' the general election, the party of government is reduced to discussing how they can eat into Labour's support!

Desperately running after Corbyn's manifesto, talking about "burning injustice", May has been branded 'Corbyn-lite'. But the weak promises on tuition fees and home ownership will not even begin to address the problems.

More fundamentally still, the Tories find themselves having to fight for the legitimacy of capitalism itself. In a Newsnight debate after Labour's conference, 'Is capitalism out of fashion', no guest challenged the view that austerity was a fatal political decision, or that people are questioning capitalism and looking for an alternative.

The accepted mantra now seems to be that the viability of capitalism just needs to be explained. The argument goes 'the Tories have assumed all the debates were settled in the 1980s but they're not, we need to articulate what we haven't for years'.

So Theresa May argued, in a speech to mark the 20th anniversary of the Bank of England's independence, that "a free market economy, operating under the right rules and regulations, is the greatest agent of collective human progress ever created... That is unquestionably the best, and indeed the only sustainable, means of increasing the living standards of everyone in a country."

She said on Radio 4's Today programme, "Do we want a capitalist economy - which, if you look around the world, is the best way of improving people's lives". How is that a sustainable remark when eight people have as much wealth as half the world's population? People "look around the world" and see poverty, war, terror, and environmental destruction. According to the World Economic Forum, young people ('millennials') in advanced capitalist countries are 43% worse off than their parents.

How can it be argued that capitalism works efficiently when thousands have lost their jobs, and 110,000 holiday makers are stranded, due to the collapse of Monarch airlines, requiring the "biggest ever peacetime repatriation". When Ford Bridgend again faces closure; and when even the majority of Tory voters think that rail should be renationalised!

She might claim to want to "genuinely build a country that works for everyone" but the Tories' problem is that people's experience doesn't match. Productivity has flatlined for ten years. Wages have fallen. A million jobs have gone in the public sector. The housing crisis is immense. Grenfell Tower stands as a horrific testament to all that is wrong with a profit-driven market system. And meanwhile the rich have doubled their wealth.

Capitalism is in crisis and the Tories don't have the answers. As professor of economics Richard Wolff said in the Newsnight debate: "We've tried every form of capitalism, people want something else... Democratising isn't containable within the capitalist shell."

Of course none of the experts on that panel would accept that socialism could be the alternative. But the Corbyn phenomenon shows that even a glimpse of a socialist programme holds out huge hope for masses of people. Corbyn and McDonnell's programme is modest, but when announcements are made, such as on PFI, they have an electric effect.

So much so that Tory spokespeople find themselves having to explicitly counter socialism. Chancellor Philip Hammond called Jeremy Corbyn "a clear and present danger" to prosperity. Jeremy Hunt called the prospect of a Corbyn government "probably the most dangerous left-wing government this country has ever seen."

Hammond's conference speech likening Corbyn's policies to Cuba and Zimbabwe (and even North Korea on Radio 4) smacked of desperation - but is an indication of the attacks that a Corbyn-led government would face.

Fear of Corbyn

One of the factors that still holds the Tories together is the threat of a Corbyn government. As Jeremy Hunt said: "All I would say to anyone who might be eyeing a different job is that Jeremy Corbyn is also eyeing a different job. And if they don't swing behind Theresa, who I think is doing a fantastic job in very difficult circumstances, they will just open the door to Jeremy Corbyn".

It would be very difficult to sustain another new leader without calling a general election. That may or may not be enough to stay the hand of Tory rebels, who could decide that enough is enough, and that the risk of a period out of power while they attempt to regroup their party would be preferable to blundering on.

But the actions of their own MPs are not the only determinant of whether they will manage to hold on to power. As a minority government, reliant on the votes of the DUP, the Tories could be toppled at any time

should the pressure from mass discontent - especially if that is organised into a mass movement - become great enough.

[The demonstration outside the Tory party conference](#) was only a small indicator of the mass anger. Imagine the size and effect of a demonstration if it were called by Corbyn, McDonnell and the trade unions, and properly built for with union resources. A national demo as a step to coordinated action to break the pay cap would have huge effect. A movement is needed that clearly aims to replace the Tories with a government in working class interests, with a socialist programme.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 4 October 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Royal Mail workers set for national strike action

CWU activist tells the Socialist why he voted yes

Royal Mail workers have voted for a massive, historic national strike. The CWU postal workers' union announced a huge vote for action in the result of a national ballot of Royal Mail workers in the fight to win the 'Four Pillars'. 89% voted yes on a 74% turnout.

After months of unsatisfactory talks between the business and CWU representatives, the union has now decided to act over the company's attacks on pensions, terms and conditions of employment and working practices.

As part of the 'Four Pillars' of security the union is seeking from the business, the CWU has put forward an alternative 'Wage in retirement' proposal. This is to counter Royal Mail's plan to replace the current defined-benefit pension scheme with a far less generous one.

The other demands are a reduction to the working week, extensions to the legal protections promised after privatisation and a commitment to grow the business.

The strike, set to involve 110,000 workers is also significant as it defeats the government's anti-union, restrictive Trade Union Act which requires strike ballots to have a 50% turnout.

Royal Mail workers and CWU activist Carl Harper told the Socialist: "In my office the only people who had part-time jobs were those who wanted them. There was overtime to boost our modest wages if we wanted it and we looked forward to a half-decent pension. But following the Tory-led coalition privatising the company, there is now a very different ethos.

"A strong and resounding Yes vote flies in the face of the Tories' attempts to scupper industrial action by introducing thresholds. Importantly, it also shows there exists industrial strength which could be harnessed into a political campaign for the renationalisation of Royal Mail."

5.10.17: The CWU has announced a 48-hour Royal Mail strike beginning at 11am on Thursday 19th October.

Unison attacks Barts deal after failing to ballot their members for strike action

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party

Unison unelected officials, not even employed by Barts Health Trust or Serco, have put out a leaflet that attacks Unite the Union and the Socialist Party following [the deal that concluded the recent Barts dispute](#).

After Unite members' meetings on all sites and a democratic ballot, cleaners, porters and catering staff voted to accept the offer made by Serco.

[It isn't what workers were originally demanding](#), but the stewards and workers decided to bank it as a step forward, and prepare for pay talks starting this month on next year's pay.

Make no mistake, it is strike action and bold campaigning that brought Serco to the table.

24-days of strike action brought the brightest of pickets to Whipps Cross, the Royal London, Mile End and St Barts.

Unison should have balloted their members to come out on strike as well in a united campaign, which is what Unite members wanted. Then, more might have been won. Instead, they tried to undermine the dispute while it was going on.

And now, unbelievably, they are asking Unison members to vote no to the offer! Workers must not let Unison's right-wing leadership snatch away what you have won

This underlines why so many porters and cleaners moved over to Unite in the first place. The Socialist Workers Party has once again stated their opposition to this move, on the basis that the workforce was split. But Unite represents the vast majority of Barts Serco employees. Obviously the dispute would have been better if Unison had come out on strike. But if workers had stayed in Unison there would have been no fight at all!

Unison is a big union with over a million members, and huge potential power. [It is vital to campaign to change it into a democratic, fighting union](#). Socialist Party members in Unison have taken a lead in that battle for years and still do.

But it is also important that individual workforces are able to organise and defend themselves. They need to be able to take action when necessary.

And of course, it is vital that workers struggle to maintain democratic control of their own disputes and for a fighting leadership, no matter what union they are in.

RMT strikes against removal of train guards spreads

Further rail strikes took place against driver-only operation across the country on 3 October. RMT members once again walked out on Southern, Merseyrail and Arriva Rail North plus on Greater Anglia for the first time against the removal of guards. And there looks set to be action on the same issue on South Western Railway where RMT members have voted 80% in favour of strike action.

RMT general secretary Mick Cash said RMT members "are standing absolutely rock solid and united" and "the public and workplace support... is nothing short of fantastic".

Determined

In Newcastle Socialist Party member Elaine Brunskill reports that the RMT Rail North guards on the picket line were getting a really good response from commuters who clearly understand the strike is about safety on the trains. The strikers are determined to ensure that safety is put before profit.

University of Leeds workers walk out over terms and conditions attacks

University of Leeds UCU strike committee

Staff at the University of Leeds are taking industrial action in a dispute the University and College Union (UCU) has declared to be of national importance.

UCU members including lecturers and researchers will strike for three days on 11, 12, and 13 October, over threatened changes to their terms and conditions.

The university management wants to make provision to dismiss members of staff on a catch-all basis, known as 'some other substantial reason.' Along with the removal of legally and medically qualified chairs from certain appeals panel, this has left UCU members feeling they have no choice but to take action.

UCU fears staff could be sacked in response to third-party pressure on the university. So, for example, a polluting corporation might take exception to a scientist's work on air quality, and she could find her job under threat. The union says the safeguards the management have offered are not enough.

"The point here is not just that our jobs are becoming more insecure, which is bad enough, it's that the whole nature of universities, as places where people can investigate and ask questions freely without fear of victimisation, is being challenged by the university's management," says Simon Hewitt, UCU rep at the university.

"Capitalism wants universities that supply research and development to companies at tax-payers' expense, and so improve profitability. It does not want universities that ask critical questions about the way the world works. As a trade unionist who thinks that research and education are central to a decent society, I see things very differently."

- You can find out more about the dispute at leedsucu.org.uk
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ThyssenKrupp - Tata Steel merger

Pensions, jobs and conditions cut but no guarantees for future!

Alec Thraves

While the signing of a 'memorandum of understanding' between Tata Steel and ThyssenKrupp was given a 'cautious' welcome by steel union leaders, there is still massive uncertainty over the future of the Port Talbot plant and others across the UK and Europe that will make up the new, merged company 'ThyssenKrupp/Tata Steel'.

4,000 job losses have been immediately announced, to be shared out by both partners, while the new company has stated that its production network would be reviewed in 2020 'with the aim of integrating and optimising the production strategy', which means in English, Dutch, Welsh or German: job losses and plant closures!

These concerns over job losses were highlighted when the steel unions at Port Talbot meekly called for assurances from Tata to stick to its promises of no compulsory redundancies for at least five years.

Meanwhile, the city of Bochum, in Germany's industrial heartland, witnessed more militant action when 7,000 ThyssenKrupp steel workers stopped production after the merger announcement and marched through the city in protest at the likelihood of future job losses.

Big business commentators are clear in reasserting the fundamental theme of the merger - to rationalise future steel operations! The Royal Bank of Canada for example, expects the merged company to reduce upstream steel production, with especially Port Talbot in the firing line and at least one of its blast furnaces shutting down.

Pension scheme

In addition, there is bitter resentment among many past and present workers about the closure of their British Steel Pension Scheme (BSPS) which has allowed this merger to proceed by offloading Tata's so-called 'pensions liability'.

That £15 billion 'liability' will now be paid for by the 130,000 members of the BSPS who have been conned out of their deserved pension rights and will each lose many thousands of pounds during their retirement.

Tata played on the threat of redundancies for its 8,200 UK employees and the closure of its Port Talbot plant in order to pressurise the workforce into accepting these devastating pension cuts.

Without a determined and fighting alternative from the leadership of the steel unions and the Welsh government, a majority of workers saw no alternative but to reluctantly concede to Tata's demands in order to try to save jobs.

Socialist Party members and National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) supporters working in the Port Talbot plant argued from the outset that the demand for nationalisation of Tata steel, under democratic workers' control and management, was the only guarantee to secure their jobs and save the BSPS.

In April 2016, the NSSN organised a protest in Port Talbot calling for Tata UK to be nationalised, which attracted hundreds of local people and helped ensure that the idea of public ownership became a key demand in the campaign to save plants and jobs.

If this increasingly supported alternative - nationalisation - had been campaigned for by the trade union and Welsh Labour government leaders then steel workers would not be facing the prospect of this big business highway robbery of their pensions!

The merger is the beginning not the end of the struggle to retain steel production in Port Talbot and across Europe. A united struggle of all ThyssenKrupp/Tata Steel workers over coming years will be necessary to confront the inevitable attacks on jobs and conditions.

The demand for workers' unity and nationalisation must be to the fore in such a struggle.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 28 September 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Che Guevara 50 years on - revolutionary socialist and fighter

Fifty years after his death, the image of Che Guevara is familiar to most people. A fashion statement for some, for many others it is a political declaration. They identify with the legacy left by Che Guevara as a symbol of struggle, defiance, internationalism and a better, socialist world.

As Tony Saunois, secretary of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) wrote in 2007, Che Guevara is justifiably viewed as a principled revolutionary fighter.

"Shoot, coward, you are only going to kill a man". These, according to some accounts, were the last words of defiance uttered by Che Guevara before his execution on 9 October 1967 in Bolivia. He was 39.

If Felix Rodríguez, a CIA adviser with the Bolivian army who carried out his execution, thought that by killing Che he would also bury his appeal and inspiration he could not have been more wrong.

On the anniversary of his execution it is apt to salute his struggle against oppression, and also to draw lessons from his experiences, positive features and mistakes. These are important for the battles of the working class in Latin America and internationally.

As an Argentinean medical student Che Guevara undoubtedly could have secured a comfortable life. Yet, like the best of the left-wing radical middle class, he turned his back on such comforts and committed his life to fighting capitalism.

He was drawn into political struggle, mainly as a consequence of the poverty and the struggles he witnessed during his two famous odysseys in 1952 and 1953-4, depicted in the book and film, 'The Motorcycle Diaries'.

As well as his encounters with socialists in Peru, communist copper miners in Chile, the magnificent Bolivian revolution and a host of others, he was deeply affected by his visit to Guatemala. Here he witnessed the struggles under the radical left-leaning populist government of Jacobo Arbenz.

By attempting to introduce some relatively limited reforms without breaking from capitalism, Arbenz was trapped, giving the counter-revolution time to plot and organise, which they did. Arbenz failed to act and put his faith in the "democratic constitutional loyalty" of the armed forces and refused to arm the masses.

This government was eventually overthrown by a CIA-backed coup.

Based on his experiences in Guatemala and discussions about Cuba, Che was repelled by the Communist parties, whose approach he found too 'conservative' and 'orthodox'.

In fact they did not have the objective of fighting for socialism but of firstly strengthening 'parliamentary democracy', developing a national industry and economy and passing through a stage of capitalist development before it was possible to move towards the working class taking power.

As a result in many countries the workers' movement was effectively paralysed and disarmed. Che rejected this approach, although he had not developed a rounded out alternative. He was drawn towards the struggle unfolding against the Batista regime in Cuba and joined the '26 July Movement' in Mexico.

The 26 July Movement (named after the doomed attack on the Moncada barracks in 1953 led by Fidel Castro) was at that stage quite a wide-ranging organisation. It included a liberal democratic wing but Che emerged as a prominent representative of the movement's more radical elements.

It was on 2 December 1956 that a small, badly organised group of 82 guerrilla fighters, including Che Guevara and Castro, landed in Cuba and began what became a two-year guerrilla war. Culminating in the downfall of the hated Batista dictatorship, it led to the Cuban revolution.

Che's heroic role was made all the more so by his life-long struggle with asthma. Every obstacle, hardship and pain necessary to endure fighting a guerrilla war was exacerbated by his condition. Revolutionary determination precluded letting his health prevent him from playing a decisive role in the struggle.

Ebbing and flowing, the war progressed and the guerrillas won increasing sympathy from the peasants. In the cities the anger and hatred against the Batista regime also approached boiling point. As the regime collapsed, the rebels entered the cities on New Year's Day 1959, and were greeted by the eruption of a massive general strike.

But the process that unfolded meant that the working class in the cities played an auxiliary role to the guerrilla war. The absence of a conscious, organised movement of the working class in the leadership of the revolution had consequences.

In the early stages of the revolution, when Castro and Che Guevara entered Havana, it was not yet fully clear how far events would go. While Che was a committed socialist, at this stage Castro was limiting himself to a more 'liberal' and 'humane' capitalism.

Capitalism overthrown

From 1959 the revolution in Cuba was driven forward, following a series of tit-for-tat blows with the USA, until three years later, capitalism and landlordism were eventually overthrown.

This process was possible at that time because of a combination of factors, especially the massive pressure from the workers and peasants. US imperialism refused to even attempt to embrace and influence the regime and instead imposed a boycott which has lasted until today.

Another crucial factor was the existence, at that time, of centralised planned economies in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Although these were ruled by vicious, bureaucratic dictatorships they appeared to offer an alternative to capitalism.

These factors meant a nationalised centrally planned economy was eventually introduced. Such a tremendously positive step forward had an electrifying effect across the world. Che Guevara played a crucial role in this process.

From the outset he was pushing for the revolution to take a more 'socialist' road and stressing the need for it to be spread internationally. He played an important role in drafting what was known as the Second Declaration of Havana which makes inspirational reading even today.

Among other things it answers the question of why the US responded with such ferocity to the revolution on a relatively small island: "[The USA and ruling classes] fear that the workers, peasants, students, intellectuals and progressive sectors of the middle strata will, by revolutionary means, take power... fear that the plundered people of the continent will seize the arms from their oppressors and, like Cuba, declare themselves free people of America".

Che undoubtedly aspired to the idea of the international socialist revolution, but his greatest weakness and the greatest tragedy was his lack of understanding of how this was to be achieved. He had been drawn towards the guerrilla struggle as a means of winning the socialist revolution. At that stage he had not yet understood the crucial role the working class must play in transforming society.

Even in countries where the working class in the cities comprised a minority of the population its collective role and the consciousness, which arises from its social conditions in the factories and workplaces, means that it is the decisive class for spearheading and leading the socialist revolution. This was the experience of the Russian revolution in 1917.

In practice the capitalist classes in the neo-colonial countries are tied to both landlordism and imperialism. On this basis they have demonstrated that they are incapable of developing the economy or industry, of building a stable democracy or of resolving the national question. These tasks were solved by the democratic bourgeois revolution in the advanced capitalist countries, such as Britain or France.

However in the modern epoch, in the neo-colonial world, these tasks cannot be resolved by the weak capitalist classes. Fulfilling them is linked, as Trotsky pointed out in his theory of permanent revolution, to the socialist transformation of society on an international scale.

Because of the rottenness of the Batista regime and the political vacuum in Cuba, it appeared that guerrilla struggle offered the way forward. In reality, even there it had come together with the eruption of a general strike after the war was effectively won as the guerrillas moved into Santa Clara, Havana and other cities.

Based on his experience in Cuba, Che wrongly attempted to replicate this, first in Africa and then in Latin America. Conditions were entirely different and the working class was in a much stronger position with more revolutionary traditions and experience. The lack of a rounded-out, conscious understanding of the role of the working class in the socialist revolution was undoubtedly Che Guevara's biggest political weakness.

Gains

Even today, ravaged by both the loss of economic subsidies, as a consequence of the collapse of the former Soviet Union, and the effects of the US imposed boycott, the gains of the Cuban revolution are to be found in the form of one of the best health systems in the world, free to all. Within years illiteracy was abolished. One teacher per 57 inhabitants makes the teacher-pupil ratio one of the best in the world. The same can be said of doctors.

None of these gains would have been possible without Cuba's planned economy and the revolution. The Committee for a Workers' International supports all the gains of the Cuban revolution yet, at the same time, the initial form the revolution took had consequences for the nature of the regime that was established.

The government led by Castro and Che after the revolution enjoyed overwhelming support. However, the absence of the organised working class consciously leading the revolutionary process meant that a genuine workers' and peasants' democracy was not established.

Although elements of workers' control existed in the factories there was not a genuine system of democratic workers' control and management. Consequently a bureaucratic, top-down regime developed.

Che was instinctively against any privileges being taken by any government official or representative. In Cuba he was very harsh with those in his department who attempted to take even the most minimal perk.

Travelling to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, he was repelled by the lavish lifestyles of the bureaucrats and the contemptuous attitude they adopted towards the working class. Bureaucratic features present in Cuba increasingly frustrated him.

Searching for an alternative

Despite reacting against the horrific, monstrous bureaucratic dictatorship in Russia and Eastern Europe, which on one occasion he described as "horse-shit", he did not develop a clearly formulated alternative to it or see how to fight it. But he was undoubtedly searching for such an alternative. He was later denounced as a Trotskyist by the Soviet bureaucracy.

According to some reports Che was carrying *Revolution Betrayed* by Trotsky in his knapsack in Bolivia. In fact he had earlier been introduced to some of Trotsky's writings. The Peruvian former air force officer, Ricardo Napurí, who had refused to bomb a left-wing uprising in 1948, gave Che Guevara a copy of *Permanent Revolution* when he met him in Havana in 1959.

A willingness to discuss and explore different ideas and opinions was a feature of Che's character. Unfortunately, despite reading some of Trotsky's writings by the time of his premature death, Che had not drawn all the necessary conclusions to develop a coherent and rounded out alternative.

To do so required a massive leap in understanding. His isolation, without the contact, discussion, and exchange of ideas which are part and parcel of membership of a party, along with the absence of a broader international revolutionary experience to draw on, made such a leap extremely difficult.

Had Che lived and experienced more international struggles of the working class, and further debate, he would probably have drawn the right conclusions.

The deficiencies in Che's understanding had tragic consequences for his own life and in the flawed model of guerrilla struggle. Yet, his positive features and lasting legacy as a symbol of uncompromising, self-sacrificing, incorruptible struggle serve as a source of inspiration today. If the lessons of his mistakes can also be learnt, then his determined struggle for an international socialist revolution will be achieved.

Labour Party conference

Action against capitalist establishment sabotage still needed

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary

The mood of confidence and unity at the 2017 Labour Party conference has been widely reported. It is estimated that around 8,000 people attended either the conference or the parallel Momentum event 'The World Transformed', the biggest Labour Party conference in many years.

Jeremy Corbyn's speech covered much of the same positive ground as the general election manifesto. His pledges included bringing the privatised utilities back into public ownership, scrapping the public sector pay cap, and abolishing fees for higher and further education.

On the vital issue of housing he went further than the election manifesto. He railed against the gentrification and social cleansing of cities and pledged that tenants would get a vote on the redevelopment of their social housing and that, where it took place, all existing tenants would be guaranteed homes on the same terms as before. He also promised the introduction of rent controls.

These and other policies in the speech are very popular with millions of people.

Cynical right-wing commentators, such as Simon Jenkins in the Guardian, have suggested that the huge poll lead Labour now has among young people is based on "the biggest bourgeois bribe in British electoral history": the abolition of tuition fees.

For the generation that have grown up in the age of austerity, a revolt against paying for their education with a lifetime of debt was undoubtedly a factor in the Corbyn surge.

It was far from the only issue however. The huge burdens of completely unaffordable housing, low pay and insecure work are just as important, probably more so.

Failings of capitalism

Corbyn was right when he declared: "2017 may be the year when politics finally caught up with the crash of 2008", or perhaps more accurately is beginning to.

While Corbyn said his policies were 'socialism for the 21st century' May was declaring capitalism to be "unquestionably the best means of increasing the living standards of everyone in a country."

This is not going to convince the 41% of young women whose pay cheque cannot be made to stretch until the end of the month.

As even the Tory MP George Freeman understood: "Why would you support capitalism if you have no prospect of owning any capital?" By which he meant not shares in a multinational company but somewhere to live!

It is anger at the increased inability of capitalism to meet the needs of the majority - while the richest 1,000 have doubled their wealth since 2010 - which is driving increased electoral support for Corbyn.

It is also this which fills the capitalist class with dread that a Corbyn-led government would massively raise the expectations of workers and young people, who could then push such a government into going much further than Labour's current, modest programme and threaten the existence of their crisis-ridden capitalist system.

Nonetheless, recognising that a Jeremy Corbyn-led government might be a real possibility, the capitalist class are working to ensure it remains in, from their point of view, safe channels.

The lead article in *The Economist* on 23 September summed this up, speculating that most of the policies in the manifesto would be bad (from the point of view of the capitalist class), but "would set Britain back years, not decades". It added that if Labour combined them with a business-friendly approach to Brexit they might even be "less batty" than the Tories.

It goes on, however, to express fear that Corbyn could not be trusted to remain within those constraints, and could react to a new financial crisis as "Act One in the collapse of capitalism". In other words, take serious socialist measures instead of acting to help rescue capitalism and inflict austerity on the majority as New Labour did.

It is absolutely clear that the capitalist class would do all they could to prevent a Corbyn government implementing serious radical measures in the interests of the majority. So when John McDonnell raised in a conference fringe meeting that the party had to prepare for when 'they come for us', he was correct to do so.

The experience of the Syriza government in Greece and the Mitterand government in France in 1981, which retreated from a left programme under the assault of the international markets, are two of many examples of how the capitalist class would behave.

Determined movement

This does not at all mean that socialist policies could not be implemented. With a determined movement of the working class and a clear-sighted leadership, the capitalist class would be unable to prevent a socialist government implementing its policies.

Just as in Greece the outcome could have been entirely different had the leadership of Syriza not capitulated but shown the same determination as the Greek working class and poor.

However, it would urgently pose the need for more thorough-going socialist measures, including nationalising the 100 or so major banks and corporations that dominate Britain's economy, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need in order to be able to introduce a democratic socialist plan.

This would allow a socialist government to begin to manage the economy in a planned way under democratic workers' control and management - that really would be "for the many, not the few."

To succeed in building a society for the many not the few it is necessary to first transform Labour into a party that fights for such a society.

At the moment the capitalist class have a dual approach to Labour, to try to prevent a Corbyn-led government being elected, while simultaneously trying to surround Corbyn and pressurise him to retreat.

And within the Labour Party they have many reliable campaigners in their interests. It was disguised at this year's conference, as the right felt they had to stay quiet or claim to be converts, but nonetheless Labour remains two parties in one: a new anti-austerity party in formation around Corbyn, and a Blairite pro-capitalist party.

Back in 2016 this was blatantly revealed on the conference floor. Deputy leader Tom Watson's speech was a clear attack on Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell.

Praising Tony Blair he warned against the shift left under Corbyn, decrying that the party had "ended up sounding like we are anti-business" and pleading that "capitalism is not the enemy".

This year he wore a Jeremy Corbyn scarf and led one of the many renditions of "oh Jeremy Corbyn". London Mayor Sadiq Khan has also gone from open attacks on Corbyn to falling over himself to praise him.

At the same time the World Transformed event had become largely incorporated within the party machine, with many Labour MPs - right as well as left - speaking on the platforms.

Surface unity

Rightly desperate to get rid of the Tories and enthused by Jeremy Corbyn's election manifesto, it is inevitable that many people will feel relieved that unity appears to have broken out in the Labour Party.

Hopes will now be raised that the whole of the Labour Party will come behind the election of Corbyn as prime minister and the implementation of a radical programme, in the interests of the many not the few.

However, a surface display of unity, if it leaves the Blairites in their positions of power, will not assist such an outcome but wreck it.

Already, at every stage, they are attempting to dilute any positive policies put forward by Corbyn and McDonnell.

On the conference floor McDonnell put forward the bringing back in-house of PFI contracts - which have allowed private profiteers to make a fortune from the public sector and were massively expanded under New Labour. However, after McDonnell's speech Labour spokespeople all emphasised that the policy was actually to 'look at PFI contracts' as there might be some good ones!

Above all on Brexit, the right are trying to steadily push Labour in the direction of supporting the position of the majority of the capitalist class - remaining in the EU or as close to that as can be achieved.

Labour councils

The dangers of compromise with the right are posed particularly sharply in relation to Labour councils.

Corbyn's correct call for tenants to be given a vote on any plans to redevelop their homes was immediately opposed by Haringey Labour council that decried a 'yes/no' vote! No wonder, it is one of the many London Labour councils that is carrying out major social cleansing in the teeth of massive opposition - it knows full well what the outcome of any vote would be.

But it is not alone: Sadiq Khan has issued guidance to London councils warning against ballots over regeneration.

Council leaders have complained that they have no choice but to carry out these policies due to lack of funds following government cuts.

This is nonsense - but Corbyn could immediately crush this argument, which is used to justify regeneration projects and inflicting massive austerity, by promising that every Labour council that used reserves and borrowed in order to stop cuts and build council housing would be fully refunded by an incoming Labour government.

This should be combined with pledging that a precondition for being selected as a Labour council candidate would be to pledge to oppose cuts.

As Howard Beckett of Unite put it when he spoke to Labour Party conference in support of the Birmingham bin workers, it is "not good enough for Labour councillors to hide behind talk of Tory budgets" and "each councillor, each MP has to say not in my name, not in our name. Austerity will not be carried out in the name of Labour".

Unfortunately, Howard Beckett's points were not repeated from the platform. But if austerity continues to be implemented by Labour at local level, Labour's national opposition to austerity will sound hollow to many workers.

The layer of Corbyn supporters who have become involved actively in the party structures isn't yet predominantly working class, which will be vital for its future success. As one working class conference delegate put it in a World Transformed meeting: she did not feel welcome, she "walked among you" but was not "part of you".

Opposing austerity in deeds, and being part of the struggles of working class people to defend their living standards from attack, is essential to achieving this.

There were some measures towards democratising the party agreed by the conference - that only 10% of MPs and MEPs' nominations are now needed to stand for the leadership, and an increase in the membership of the NEC.

All other issues, however, have been delayed for a review, which it has been reported is not going to consider the vital question of mandatory reselection of MPs.

It is now urgent that Jeremy Corbyn puts his full weight behind a programme to democratise the Labour Party. To go into a general election with the party machine and Parliamentary Labour Party dominated by the right, would be to hand a huge weapon to the capitalist establishment.

He should appeal to the party's membership and to the working class over the heads of the right wing party machine to ensure that a new democratic constitution is put in place. This would have at its heart mandatory reselection and the replacement of the bureaucratic machine, with power resting in the hands of the membership, not least new members and the trade unions.

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Capitalism and human progress

Simon Carter

How appropriate that Theresa May's speech insisting our interests were best served by free market capitalism - "the greatest agent of collective human progress ever created" - came in the same week as budget airline Ryanair cancelled over 700,000 passenger flights and bankrupt Monarch Airlines left 110,000 holidaymakers without a flight back home, along with 860,000 cancelled future bookings (see article below).

Undaunted, the prime minister continued her defence of capitalism, adding: "We should never forget that raising the living standards, and protecting the jobs, of ordinary working people is the central aim of all economic policy."

Unfortunately for May the capitalist International Monetary Fund (IMF) has produced a report pointing to slowing productivity growth, income inequality and low wage growth for putting the brakes on the UK economy - the product of neoliberal economic policy embraced by the Tories.

The report's author, Tao Zhang, says income inequality is weighing down overall global consumption, reducing it by about 3.5% over the last 15 years. "This represents an important headwind to aggregate demand," says Zhang. And whereas real wages in the UK have fallen over 10% on average since the financial crisis, the richest 1,000 individuals have doubled their wealth since 2010.

Of course, May has lauded the UK's headline unemployment figure - the lowest in 42 years. So how come poor wage growth?

According to the IMF, the capitalist 'gig economy' - with its precarious jobs, zero-hour contracts and lousy employment rights - has allowed companies to peg back pay.

So, capitalism is not so much the agent of collective human progress, but rather collective human misery.

Monarch abdicates responsibility to workers

On its 50th anniversary, UK-based Monarch airline has nosedived into administration leaving hundreds of thousands of passengers stuck abroad and many more losing future flights without compensation.

Some 2,100 workers will lose their jobs.

Bringing back stranded passengers - 'the biggest ever peacetime repatriation' - will cost £60 million, partly funded through a passenger levy.

Budget airline Ryanair (run by anti-union boss Michael O'Leary) - which spectacularly screwed up its pilot rosters and was slammed by the authorities for holding back compensation to passengers whose flights were cancelled - is eyeing up redundant Monarch pilots to plug its staffing gaps.

Struggling Monarch was taken over in 2014 by venture capital firm Greybull Capital which specializes in acquiring 'distressed companies'. The new owners demanded employees accept hundreds of job losses, a 30% pay cut and inferior working contracts to secure the airline's future - a promise which turned out to be false.

Bending the knee v Trump

Dave Carr

Having alienated most of the US population (and the world) with his vile, bigoted and threatening comments, US billionaire president Donald Trump has now railed against North American football players.

Last year, Colin Kaepernick, then with the NFL San Francisco 49ers, began refusing to stand for the Star-Spangled Banner before matches in protest at shootings of black people by police. Around 700 people have been shot dead by police in the US this year.

The continuing NFL players' protests have infuriated the racist Trump, who demanded the teams' owners sack them. In response two dozen NFL players went down on bended knee during the US national anthem at the recent high profile match at Wembley Stadium, London, between the Baltimore Ravens and Jacksonville Jaguars.

In a further spat, Trump withdrew the traditional White House invite to the current basketball champions the Golden State Warriors after their star player, Stephen Curry, said he would be reluctant to attend because of the president's policies. In response to the withdrawn invite, Cleveland Cavaliers star LeBron James called the president a "bum" and Buffalo Bills' LeSean McCoy called Trump an "asshole".

Socialist Alternative (US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party) members have been to the forefront of fighting Trump and the rise in racism, the far right, and the oppression of migrants and minorities.

In a statement they say: "We stand with athletes like Michael Bennett, Colin Kaepernick, and all those who joined in the protests... and have courageously used their positions to highlight the plight of oppressed people and stand with movements like Black Lives Matter against racist police violence and discrimination."

- See socialistalternative.org

A recent US court verdict acquitted former St Louis white cop Jason Stockley of the homicide of black motorist Anthony Lamar Smith, despite overwhelming evidence of it being a racist murder. The verdict triggered days of protests on the streets of the Missouri city.

Tories wreck our NHS

Caroline Vincent, Leicester East Socialist Party

The NHS crisis is escalating as the Tories continue their mission to 'slash, trash and privatise' our health service.

Thanks to sustainability and transformation plans (STPs), hospitals are facing a bleak winter. Alarming, despite the fact that there are already too few inpatient beds for hospitals to cope, [proposals have been made to cut back even further](#).

Last winter saw major alerts called across the country, with accident and emergency departments forced to close, as they could not endure the strain placed on underfunded services. Further cuts will be catastrophic.

Unbelievably there are now half as many hospital beds as there were 30 years ago.

A reason given is that patients with mental health issues can be cared for in their communities. Yet mental health services are another area in crisis, having faced devastating cuts.

And provision for care in the community to patients who are leaving, or at risk of going into hospital is woefully insufficient, only meeting half of demand.

This dire situation is compounded by [closures of GP surgeries throughout the UK](#), with 202 practices having closed or merged in the year to June 2017.

There is now a serious shortage of GPs as a result of under investment in primary care.

Stress and rising workloads have led to an exodus of family doctors, which in turn puts pressure on A&Es, as people who can't get a doctor's appointment don't know where else to turn.

Patients, doctors and health workers all deserve better than this. The Tories see the NHS as an opportunity to line the pockets of their fat cat friends. That's why we need to fight back - for public health, not private wealth!

Socialist Party demands:

- No cuts, closures or job losses in the NHS
- Stop STPs and demand all councils refuse to cooperate with the plans
- End the pay freeze! Decent pay for all NHS staff
- Renationalise our NHS! Scrap PFI and privatisation schemes. Cancel all PFI debt
- For mass action to defend the NHS with co-ordinated strike action at its heart
- Reverse council cuts to social care to relieve the beds crisis
- Nationalise the profiteering big drugs companies
- For a comprehensive, high quality NHS, under democratic control, with care free at the point of use - a socialist NHS

£11,000 raised in three weeks for fighting fund

Ken Douglas, Socialist Party national treasurer

Socialist Party members made a herculean effort to reach the target for the summer July to September quarter, raising over £11,000 in the final three weeks of the campaign.

The fighting fund underpins the campaigning work of our party - we have no rich backers, all our funds are raised through the hard work and sacrifice of our members and supporters.

Through this we were able to bring the gazebos and produce the placards, leaflets and posters that made us the most visible presence on the demo at the Tory conference in Manchester on 1 October and enabled us to get our ideas across to as wide an audience as possible.

As well as selling the Socialist and forming the liveliest contingent on the demo, branches put in a lot of effort to raise funds. For example, Leeds branch raised £130 selling 'Tories out/Corbyn in' badges and Coventry East

raised £103 selling a combination of badges and cakes.

Members in the North West ran a 'collectathon' fortnight (see below) leading up to the event, with extra campaigning stalls throughout the region.

Cardiff West branch held a successful gig protesting against the visit of Tory throwback Jacob Rees-Mogg to the city, raising £70 with a collection. In London, Hackney branch raised £113 from a clothes party and Waltham Forest raised £68 selling soup!

So now we go into the final quarter, we need to match the record amounts raised over the last two years to ensure that we maintain our finances. We can guarantee that by building for a bumper finance appeal at Socialism 2017.

Socialism is back on the agenda, with Theresa May forced to engage in the hopeless task of defending capitalism.

'Collectathon'

Socialist Party members in the North West ran extra street stalls towards the end of the financial quarter, to raise extra money and sell more copies of the Socialist. In total those stalls sold 77 copies of the Socialist and raised £730 fighting fund, on top of our other activities.

We will do our usual fortnight of fighting fund action in December. In past years we have led our campaigns for this on issues like renationalisation of the gas and electricity companies.

This could be a busy autumn, so we will start planning ahead soon to ensure we have a well-prepared fundraising drive.

Hugh Caffrey, North West Socialist Party

Why I joined: "I wanted to stand up, protest and change things"

Catherine MacLennan, Leeds Socialist Party

It was Donald Trump who, indirectly, prompted me to join the Socialist Party. I went on an anti-Trump demo in Leeds earlier this year.

It was great to see so many people who were willing to get out and protest against racism and bigotry. All ages, genders, ethnicities and sexual orientations were there that day - strangers chatting to strangers, posing for photographs, united in a common cause. At the demo I bought the Socialist paper.

Buoyed up by this, I went on the NHS demonstration in London on 4 March and listened to speeches and marched with placards (and a balloon!) surrounded by those who worked in the NHS, had reason to be grateful to the NHS or, in a few cases, remembered the birth of the NHS and wanted to save what they'd loved and believed in for so long.

I bought a copy of the Socialist again, read it, thought about it. Then I realised that I wanted to be one of those people who stands up and protests about what is unfair, works to change things for the better and meets those who I can learn from and exchange ideas with.

The best way to do this, I felt, was to join the Socialist Party.

Chatsworth ward campaign replies to Tory MP's intervention

We are all Chatsworth campaign

Mansfield was one of the few places the Tories gained from Labour in the general election. The new MP, Ben Bradley, had an article in the local paper recently about Chatsworth ward. The campaign sent in a reply:

We read that Ben Bradley has twice visited the clinical commissioning group (CCG) and discussed Chatsworth Ward in Mansfield Community Hospital. He repeats their points of view, but what about the patients, their families and the staff? Aren't our views worth listening to?

It is astonishing no local MPs have visited Chatsworth Ward since its closure was announced ten weeks ago.

Mr Bradley says Chatsworth "can't carry on as it is because it doesn't have the specialist consultant it needs to manage it."

Has he asked the CCG and Sherwood Forest Hospitals Trust why the excellent consultant we had was only offered a six-month contract - and understandably then moved elsewhere? Why hasn't the trust advertised for another consultant? It's clear this is a manufactured excuse to try and close Chatsworth.

Mr Bradley writes that there is now a review "to establish what we need, as well as what the trust can safely provide."

While welcome that a review is taking place, why wasn't this done before the closure was announced? The question should not be "what the trust can safely provide" but 'what do local people need for their care?'

It cannot be safe for Chatsworth's patients, families and friends to travel many miles to another unit. It certainly isn't safe to have a long waiting list. The tragic death of a local disabled man in a house fire three weeks ago shows the dangers disabled people can face.

Is Mr Bradley asking questions of his government? Is it safe that NHS funding has been squeezed for years? Why can't the local district hospital fill its nursing vacancies? Why is the NHS facing yet more reorganisation benefiting profit-making companies wanting NHS contracts?

We suggest he comes to Chatsworth ward and finds out why thousands of his constituents have signed petitions to save it.

- Campaigners attended the annual general meeting of the hospital trust, wearing printed t-shirts, and questioned the directors. They are preparing for another public meeting with the CCG at which questions will be put on the future for the neuro-rehabilitation service.
- Send solidarity messages to weareallchatsworth17@gmail.com

Surveying Labour councillors - will they fight cuts?

Jeremy Corbyn's Labour conference speech was greeted with predictable hostility by big business representatives like the CBI. But also by many councillors from Labour's still powerful Blairite wing.

Councillors in Haringey, north London, for example, pushing through a 'social cleansing' redevelopment plan, immediately opposed the newly announced policy for tenants' and leaseholders' ballots before such schemes can go ahead.

So how many Labour councillors will back Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity policies? The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) has launched a survey to find out.

During the autumn councils start drawing up next year's spending plans, which are finally agreed at budget-setting meetings in February or March. This includes public consultation events and discussions with the council workers' trade unions.

This is certainly a time to bring into the debate the TUSC policy of 'no-cuts people's budgets' - of councils using their reserves and borrowing powers to set budgets that don't pass on Tory cuts and using the breathing space provided to demand that central government makes up future shortfalls.

There are 124 Labour-led councils and their combined spending power is greater than the state budgets of 16 EU countries! If they declared that they will set no-cuts budgets next year - in the expectation that they would be reimbursed by a future Labour government - what could the Tories do? Councillors could play their part in forcing May's government out of office - but will they?

The TUSC questionnaire asks local groups to find out the main outlines of their council Labour group's initial proposals for the 2018-19 budget and, if there are elections next year, when will the local party's council election manifesto be agreed? And where candidates have been selected, have right-wing Blairites been replaced?

Gathering this information will help TUSC decide how best it can act to build support for Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity policies into the new year.

- The questionnaire is available on the TUSC website, along with a briefing document 'Preparing a no-cuts people's budget,' at www.tusc.org.uk/txt/355.pdf and the report, 'How much reserves have they got?', at www.tusc.org.uk/txt/402.pdf

Leeds Socialist Students marks 'International Safe Abortion Day'

Leeds Socialist Students and affiliated groups came together to mark International Safe Abortion Day on 28 September.

As Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have not yet afforded the right to legal abortion, Leeds Socialist Students placed this particular group of women at the forefront of the protest.

Speakers included Amy Cousens of the Women's Lives Matter movement in Doncaster, and Tanis Belsham-Wray, member of the Socialist Party and former women's officer at Leeds Trinity University.

Amy spoke of the need for a more progressive approach by the Labour council in Doncaster towards other relevant issues, such as domestic violence.

Both Tanis and Amy spoke of the struggles undertaken by Irish women in their search for a legal right to abortion.

It is possible to travel to Britain to receive treatment. However, the NHS only covers the cost of abortion for Northern Irish women, and not for women travelling from the Republic of Ireland. Thousands of women have to pay out of their own pockets to receive treatment.

This right is fundamental. Leeds Socialist Students extends its solidarity not just to the women suffering across the water, but to women all over the world who have not yet been afforded this right.

Eleanor Noyce, Leeds University Socialist Students

Protest outside Ukip conference against German far-right speaker

Socialist Party members from Torbay and south Devon stood alongside Labour and Momentum members to protest outside the Ukip annual conference in Torbay, south Devon. The target was the invitation to an AfD (Alternative for Germany) member to speak.

[As reported in the Socialist \(issue 964\)](#) the AfD recently won 12.6% of the total vote in the recent Germany parliamentary election.

The AfD is a racist and anti-immigrant party and such an explosion in their vote once again shows the instability of capitalism in Europe. Each election is throwing up unexpected results.

All of the media were outside at the demonstration - the Press Association, ITV, BBC, Sky, the Mail Online and others. However there was very limited reporting by the press on the reason for the protest.

The Ukip leadership contest turned out to be a damp squib for their sensationalism as the members of Ukip voted for a 'safe pair of hands' in Henry Bolton, an ex-Lib Dem member, former military and a policeman.

Socialist Party members stress the need not to only have slogans such as 'hope not hate' but the need to have a programme of unity for workers. A programme of decent jobs, houses and defence of the NHS to counteract the lies that migrants are responsible for the crisis rather than capitalism itself.

Sean Brogan, Exeter Socialist Party

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/26230>