

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 970

Capitalism:

'Paradise' for billionaires

Austerity for us

Fight for socialism!

The world's super-rich own vast sums of wealth and squirrel it away in whatever ways they can find. That's nothing new.

But the revelations [contained in the Paradise Papers](#) have reignited working class people's repulsion at huge wealth inequality and the behaviour of the capitalist elite.

The data shows that the world's biggest multinational corporations - from Nike to Apple - are involved in what the Guardian calls "aggressive tax avoidance".

Leading figures in Donald Trump's administration are involved in these schemes. The Isle of Man and Malta have refunded billions in tax to the owners of private jets and luxury yachts. \$600 billion has been shifted offshore by multinational companies in the last year alone.

The most revealing fact is that almost none of these statements alone would be surprising to most people - [especially after the Panama Papers, a similar leak in 2016](#).

But combined, and held in contrast to the food banks, pay stagnation, and public services devastated by austerity that the rest of us face - not to mention the crippling poverty in much of the neocolonial world - they are the latest on a centuries-old list of reasons why we need to get rid of this cruel, corrupt and crisis-ridden capitalist system.

There is some suggestion that a few of these tax avoidance schemes may be operating outside the law. But more importantly, most are entirely legal.

Appleby, the legal firm at the centre of the Paradise Papers, [said in its response](#) to the leak: "We are an offshore law firm that advises clients on legitimate and lawful ways to conduct their business."

What they mean is that they charge huge fees to the super-rich to find every possible loop-hole and convoluted way to get around the pathetic financial legislation that does exist.

Tory donor Lord Ashcroft hid \$450 million in a secret account in Bermuda - legal. Millions of pounds from the Queen's private estate was invested in a Cayman Islands fund with investments in discredited rent-to-own store BrightHouse, among others - legal. Several actors from the BBC's Mrs Brown's Boys have saved thousands on tax by using offshore trusts based in Mauritius - legal.

We do need stringent regulation and for that regulation to be enforced. The PCS civil servants' union has [pointed out](#) that there is £119 billion avoided, evaded and unpaid in tax every year - the vast majority by the super-rich.

That is money that should rightfully be spent on schools and hospitals. But instead of working to reclaim it, the government exacerbates the problem by [closing HM Revenue and Customs offices](#) across the country.

The number of staff in the department has been cut in half in recent years. These cuts must be stopped and reversed.

But that's not enough. Two billionaires who own bulk shares in Arsenal and Everton respectively made numerous transactions between them which essentially led one to put in all the money for both investments - despite rules that prohibit owning significant shares in more than one Premier League side.

If campaigners are successful in forcing the Premier League to step up the rules to account for such close business ties, will these billionaires give up or will they just pay their advisors to find a new way to achieve the same end? The super-rich will always find ways around the toothless rules and laws that they always have the biggest hand in creating!

Theresa May [wouldn't even commit](#) to Jeremy Corbyn's demand for a public register of offshore companies and trusts and who owns them.

That's not surprising either - how many of her friends would feature on such a list? How many more Tory donors? We must demand the books are fully opened - let the public see where the money is and how much.

Such data shouldn't have to be leaked secretly and then shared between unaccountable news companies. Democratic representatives of trade unions, finance workers, tax inspectors and communities should have oversight.

But the Paradise Papers show that neither introducing laws (which a number of countries did after the Panama Papers) nor knowing what's going on, is going to stop the capitalist class behaving as they do.

We want to put a stop to this giant rip-off! And there's one major obstacle to that which unfortunately Corbyn failed to raise - we can't control what we don't own.

[80%](#) of offshore wealth belongs to the richest 0.1% of the population. They made their money off the hard work and exploitation of working class people.

But it's also working class people who have the potential power to put a stop to all of this and to take back that wealth.

We call for the [nationalisation of the banks and finance companies under democratic workers' control and management](#) to give us a proper view of what wealth exists and the funds to invest in jobs and services.

This would also allow the bank accounts of the rich to be frozen and transactions controlled to prevent them trying send their money abroad (to tax havens or elsewhere) in protest against such progressive measures.

But to really end the corrupt dealings of the capitalist class, a socialist government would have to go further.

The democratic nationalisation of the top 150 companies that dominate the economy would give the basis to begin planning production and the use of resources properly and without interference from the 0.1%. Compensation should be paid only on the basis of proven need.

The Panama Papers [led to the resignation](#) of the prime minister of Iceland. These revelations are more than reason enough for us to demand the same of May and the Tories.

They're already on the ropes with the [sexual harassment scandal engulfing Westminster](#) and [Brexit divisions unresolved](#).

The possibility of a general election at any time remains - and a call for mass action from Jeremy Corbyn could force the Tories' hand even more.

He should organise, with the Trade Union Congress, a massive national demonstration against austerity. The Paradise Papers have again proven austerity completely unnecessary.

This could [spark coordinated strike action](#), student protests and big community campaigns to defend services.

If Corbyn put forward the kind of programme for fundamental change we outline here, he could win huge support.

It's time to boldly fight for a socialist alternative to capitalism which can only ever mean a paradise for the capitalist elite and misery for the rest of us.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 7 November 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Westminster sexual harassment scandal

Rotten establishment must go

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary

Westminster [continues to be buffeted by new waves of the sexual harassment scandal](#). One Tory minister - Michael Fallon - has been [forced out](#), with others barely clinging on.

The collapse of this extremely weak Tory government [could still be triggered by these events](#). As we predicted, however, it has not only been the Tories that have been affected, but all the major parties.

This is no surprise. The majority of MPs in parliament have spent their entire careers acting in the interests of a tiny minority - the capitalist elite - and inflicting misery on the rest of us. Among the hundreds of MPs who have voted for benefit cuts, the savaging of public services, wage restraint and war there were bound to be some who have also used their power and status to sexually abuse or harass women and men with less power than them.

That is not to suggest that it is only right-wing, pro-capitalist MPs who can be guilty of harassment. The oppression of women remains deeply rooted in the structure of society, despite the steps forward that have been won through struggle in recent decades. It pervades all parts of society and must be fought wherever it is found.

It is particularly important it is [combated in the workers' movement](#). As long as we live in a capitalist society where wealth, power and the ownership of industry is concentrated in the hands of a tiny few, it will be impossible to even begin to eliminate sexism, racism and prejudice.

A socialist society, based on democratic public ownership so that society's resources can be harnessed to meet the needs of all, is a prerequisite for overcoming all kinds of oppression, creating the basis for new non-exploitative human relations.

The fight for such a society requires a united struggle of working class people, but that will only be achieved if the workers' movement takes seriously the fight against all forms of oppression, including sexual assault and harassment by individuals, especially those - like MPs - with power and status.

A number of right-wing Labour MPs [have argued](#) that the only way to investigate the allegations that have been made against Labour MPs and senior figures is to appoint some outside 'independent' body. But we reject the idea that the labour movement is incapable of properly investigating claims of assault and harassment in a thoroughgoing and sensitive manner supportive to victims.

Of course, it is vital that anyone making an allegation is given support and backing if they wish to take it to the police.

And within parliament it is absolutely correct that [Labour argues](#) for the establishment of procedures that would allow staff to report misbehaviour by MPs, who are often their employers. A crucial element of that

should be campaigning for all staff in parliament to join a trade union, and for the trade unions to have negotiating rights on behalf of all staff.

At the same time the campaign against sexual harassment should be one part of a campaign by the Labour left to completely [transform the structures of the Labour Party](#).

An essential part of that would be to [make every MP democratically accountable to their local constituency by introducing mandatory reselection](#) contests.

If this would be done it would make it possible for the hundreds of thousands of people who have joined the Labour Party in support of Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity programme to insist that their MP is also anti-austerity, removing the pro-austerity Blairites.

This is crucial to building a Labour Party which defends women's rights. Doing so does not only means opposing sexual harassment, but also fighting for decent public services [including women's refuges](#), mass council house building, a living wage and all the other measures that are necessary to truly empower working class women.

Budget day education shutdown

Walk out against tuition fees!

Ellen Kenyon Peers, Goldsmiths Socialist Students

Budget day is fast approaching, socialists are preparing for walkouts against tuition fees, and the Tories are [scrabbling for pale imitations of socialist policies](#) to placate the masses. With the recent [revelations about sexual harassment](#), [divisions over Brexit](#) and the continued risk of another economic crisis, the world of archaic establishment politics is [looking to be on its last legs](#) - but we must act now to prevent it hobbling along for years to come.

Despite the probability of the next election being defined as a Labour comeback, a Corbyn-led government would not be able to implement a socialist programme [without fierce opposition from all sides of the establishment](#).

Budget day may be an opportunity for the Tories to introduce tepid policies that attempt to pacify young people [angry about exorbitant tuition fees](#), the [lack of affordable housing](#) and decent jobs. But that's not guaranteed, as recent [poor figures for productivity](#) and [the deficit](#) make the Tories' capitalist backers more wary of a 'giveaway' budget. Being active on campuses across the UK and showing that there is an alternative is the first step to building a movement that could be even bigger than [2010, when 50,000 students took to the streets in protest](#).

The right-wing leadership of the National Union of Students may have failed to call for action over tuition fees, but this doesn't mean student unions on individual campuses cannot be activated by Socialist Students groups, and we must demand that they [join us on the day of action on 22 November](#). Students must find common ground with local workers, [such as the McStrike](#), in order to defeat the Tories. The recent struggles for [self-determination in Catalonia](#) and [bin workers in Birmingham](#) have been a testament to the ability to unite students and workers.

Bosses predict 217 years to close gender pay gap...

workers' struggle can close it now!

Tessa Warrington, Leicester Socialist Party

It will now take 217 years before women earn the same as men, [according to the World Economic Forum](#). Even this estimation is a whopping 47 years longer than it predicted [last year](#)!

This is the first time these figures have shown the situation is going backwards. Perhaps unsurprising - as today's generation is also the first since the 1940s to be [worse off](#) than our parents.

It is clear that almost a decade of capitalist crisis and austerity is having a devastating impact on the working class. But especially so on those who rely on the public sector to even the playing field.

[One million](#) public sector jobs have been axed, [and wages frozen for the rest](#), since 2008. This has traditionally been a majority-female workforce due to hard-won benefits such as flexi-time and part-year working, which support women with children staying in employment.

Women forced into private sector jobs are more likely to encounter zero-hour contracts and low pay. Many have had to give up their jobs as work-based crèche programmes are cut and the cost of childcare outweighs their monthly salary.

The gender pay gap is not simply about achieving like-for-like pay for men and women in the same positions. It is also about the ability of women to access higher-paid roles.

Women from wealthy backgrounds can afford a good education and childcare. But the vast majority of women are working class, and we rely upon the state, which is brutally hacking away at this support.

It is therefore outrageous that the World Economic Forum report shows the UK rising five places in global rankings due to what the Guardian calls "improvement in the political indicators after the appointment of Theresa May"!

[Female representatives of the super-rich](#) like May and Thatcher never did anything for working class women.

That's why women made up a majority of campaigners and voters for Corbyn, seeing that socialist policies could improve our lives.

The Socialist Party doesn't believe women will have to wait 217 years for equality. The World Economic Forum is a meeting of the capitalist elite. Organisations like that miss one crucial factor in their calculations: the ability of the working class to fight.

The [welfare state was won](#) through trade union struggle, and can be won again - this time finishing the job.

We need a mass, united struggle of working class women and men - [including coordinated strikes](#) - to overcome austerity, sweep aside gender discrimination and toss the sexist capitalist system onto the scrapheap where it belongs.

We can win the vote at 16!

Theo Sharieff, national chair, Socialist Students

The Tories have once again tried their level best to sabotage the futures of young people in Britain. On 3 November, MPs debated a new bill to lower the voting age to 16 in UK general and local elections, as well as referendums.

However, the Tories [sabotaged the bill](#) by 'filibustering' it, deliberately giving long speeches in the Commons to waste time and have the debate timed out.

In two years' time, today's 16 and 17-year-olds will be able to vote either way. They will remember who blocked them from having that democratic right.

In spite of this, the Tories had good reason to sabotage the bill. It was young people, after all, who were the [driving force behind the Corbyn surge](#) in the June general election.

Up to [67%](#) of 18 to 24-year-olds voted for Corbyn's policies. These included [free university and college education](#), restoring 'Education Maintenance Allowance' further education payments - and, yes, lowering the voting age to 16.

Handing the right to vote to 16-year-olds would ensure the end of their already weak and divided government. And once they're out, what young person would want them back in?

But we don't need to wait for five years to see Corbyn's policies become a reality. Since the general election, the Tories have already been [forced into retreats](#) over a [number of issues](#), and are in the throes of [yet another scandal](#).

School, college and university students should join [Socialist Students' national day of action on 22 November](#). Organise a walkout on your campus in protest against the Tories' sabotage of the democratic right to vote.

Actions like this, starting on budget day, could help build a movement of workers and young people which can force [this already dying government](#) out of office. Along the way, we can win hundreds of thousands of college students their right to vote.

Child poverty set to hit 5.2m - unions and Corbyn must act now

Tom Costello, Lancashire Socialist Party

The Tories' welfare cuts are set to make child poverty soar over the next five years to 5.2 million kids - eleven out of a classroom of 30. The figures come from a [damning report](#) by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS).

Meanwhile, a [separate study](#) by the Child Poverty Action group predicts the 'Universal Credit' system will push 900,000 children into "severe poverty" by the end of the decade.

This marks an alarming increase from [government figures for 2014-15](#), which showed four million children living in relative poverty. The IFS has [further claimed](#) that the 37% of kids in this bracket could represent the highest proportion since records began in 1961.

Tory attacks on benefits are predicted to affect areas such as Wales and north-east England worst - areas that have already suffered most from the effects of austerity.

Unsurprisingly, the government has no answer to the IFS findings. Its spokesperson just repeated the same, tired old austerity rhetoric: "We are committed to supporting families while making the welfare system fair for those who pay for it and those who benefit from it."

Clearly not for the 5.2 million children who will have no choice but to grow up in poverty!

But the [Tories have retreated](#) on a [series of policies](#), and are in the middle of [a sexual harassment scandal](#). Trade unionists and anti-austerity activists joining forces through demonstrations and strikes can bring them down.

The Socialist Party's demands are uncompromising. Raise the minimum wage to at least £10 an hour now. Start a comprehensive programme of council house building. [End Universal Credit and reverse benefit cuts immediately](#).

The Tories - and Blairites - are only ever going to be concerned with the worries of the super-rich. For as long as their rule goes on, working people will lose out from capitalism's regime of austerity. The union leaders and Jeremy Corbyn must call action to oust them now.

PFI privateers dodge tax

Top privatisation companies don't even pay taxes on the profits they leech out of public services.

Five offshore 'PFI' firms spent five years paying almost no corporation tax - on profits of nearly £2 billion. On top of this, nine offshore companies now own 45% of total PFI and 'PPP' privatisation project value.

The shock figures on Britain's 735 major sell-off schemes [come from the European Services Strategy Unit](#) think-tank.

Selling state services for bosses' bottom lines is bad enough. Now the vultures won't even let us claw a bit back through taxation.

Scrap all PFI and PPP contracts. Take the lot back into public ownership. Don't pay a penny to predator profiteers. Use their resources to help fund quality services and decent wages.

James Ivens

What we saw

Comedian and former nurse Jo Brand shut down smug public schoolboy Ian Hislop's belittling of sexual harassment on 3 November.

The Private Eye editor dismissed [politicians' sexist acts](#) on '[Have I Got News for You](#)'. He remarked that "some of this is not high-level crime, is it, compared to Putin or Trump."

Brand replied: "If I can just say - as the only representative of the female gender here today - I know it's not high-level. But it doesn't have to be high-level for women to feel under siege in somewhere like the House of Commons.

"Actually, women - if you're constantly being harassed, even in a small way - that builds up, and that wears you down." Women in the audience rightly cheered.

A disgruntled worker silenced Donald Trump's Twitter account for eleven minutes on 2 November.

The employee of a third-party contractor for Twitter muzzled America's 'tweeter-in-chief' on their last day at work. Many have hailed the anonymous saboteur as a hero.

[Trump tweeted](#) that the shutdown shows he is "having an impact." Well, you'd imagine so, given he is - er - president of the United States of America.

But what it really shows is who has the biggest potential "impact" on society. Trump may sit in the Oval Office. But it's workers who make everything tick.

Donald Trump's eldest son, Donald Trump Jr, has threatened to expropriate the ill-gotten riches of... his three-year-old daughter.

Tweeting on Halloween, [Trump II declared](#): "I'm going to take half of Chloe's candy tonight and give it to some kid who sat at home. It's never too early to teach her about socialism."

It seems there is some confusion around the term at Trump Tower. The Socialist is happy to clarify.

Socialism would involve Chloe and all her classmates collectively owning the full fruit of their labour. They would have to seize the means of production - scary costumes and so on - from their parental oppressors. Then they could plan the trick-or-treating and distribution of sweets democratically to satisfy the needs of all.

What Trump Jr is describing - the confiscation of part of Chloe's product to enrich an idle elite - is capitalism. Like, say, inheriting colossal wealth produced by your father's hotel workers without having to lift a finger.

Pay cap decisively rejected by PCS union members in ballot

In the run-up to the government budget, members of civil servants' union PCS have delivered a stinging rejection of the Tories' pay policy, and shown that they are more than willing to take action to overturn it.

[The consultative ballot](#) consisted of two questions:

"Do you agree that the pay cap should be scrapped; and that funds should be made available to provide you with an above-inflation pay rise?"

And "if the government refuse to scrap the pay cap, are you prepared to take part in industrial action?"

On the first question [98.9%](#) voted yes, while on the second question 79.2% voted yes. Overall there was a turnout of 48.8%. This is the union's highest ever ballot turnout, [topping the previous best of 42% in 2004](#).

This result shows the depth of anger about Tory (and previous New Labour) pay policy which has seen [millions of low-paid members suffer real term pay cuts for many years](#).

Combined with threats of job losses and office closures it reflects not only the anger of workers but reflects the discontent with the attacks on public services that communities rely on.

It is a credit to the left leadership, the reps and members of PCS for delivering this strong pay ballot result, and in doing so virtually reaching the 50% threshold needed [under the Tories' anti-union laws](#).

Janice Godrich, PCS president, said:

"This ballot outcome is a collective result and shows our members and reps united in sending a total rejection of the current pay cap.

"Over 3,000 new members joined PCS during this ballot showing that when unions boldly campaign on members' issues it gets results.

"We will use these results to put on maximum pressure in the run up to the budget in advance of our national executive meeting in a few weeks.

"I hope it gives confidence to other unions to join with us and plan a serious, [united campaign of action to reverse this pay cap](#) and give everyone across the public sector a decent pay rise"

BA mixed-fleet workers show strikes get results

Rob Williams, Socialist Party industrial organiser and chair, National Shop Stewards Network

The heroic mixed-fleet cabin crew at Heathrow and Manchester airports have finally forced a settlement from British Airways (BA) that has resolved their long-running dispute.

2,000 low-paid Unite members took a total of 85 days of [strike action, which began in January 2017](#). Their upbeat singing "mixed fleet on fire" and dancing picket lines have been a feature of the struggle.

This year's struggle had its roots in the [bitterly fought BA cabin crew dispute of 2009-11](#). One of the key triggers of that dispute was precisely the bringing in of cabin crew on new inferior contracts.

The mixed-fleet workers have taken action to [raise their basic salary from a miserly £12,000](#) and to end their inferior terms and conditions. Many have felt that BA cynically pitched the contracts at this level with the view of creating a revolving door of new, young starters who move on every few years.

Therefore, in these circumstances, it has been a herculean effort by the union and the reps to forge a fighting force that could take on a vicious employer. Over 1,000 new recruits have been won to Unite during the course of this year's action.

The settlement deal will see workers get a pay rise of between £1,404 to £2,908 by March 2018, and some of [BA's attempted vindictive strike-breaking measures](#) have been lifted.

Those crew who went on strike will have [their withdrawn travel concessions](#) restored, along with being able to fully participate in the airline's 2017 bonus scheme. It will also see the settlement in full of Unite's legal action on behalf of crew who had been sanctioned for striking.

Many workers will believe that more could have been won if more practical solidarity could have been provided by the leadership of the Unite Bassa branch, which organises workers on the original contract and still number over 8,000 cabin crew.

The mixed-fleet workers have also shown that a new generation of younger workers can be won to the trade union movement and mobilised to take militant action.

They quickly realised the importance of seeking and giving solidarity to increase pressure on BA. On 3 August, [they joined with other Unite members on strike in London](#) at the [Bank of England](#) and [Barts NHS Trust](#), with demos and other protests. They were a prominent part of [the summer wave of strikes that saw groups of workers taking action](#), many of them against low pay.

The Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network salute the mixed fleet workers and are proud to have stood shoulder to shoulder with them. We believe that the settlement is a firm basis to strengthen union organisation.

Unite union sector conferences: coordinate action over pay

Kevin Parslow, delegate to Unite not-for-profit sector conference (personal capacity)

Unite's national industrial sector conferences, taking place in Brighton between 11 and 14 November, deal with policy for members in their workplaces. They can be important in setting the agenda to take on the bosses and the Tory government.

The [re-election of Len McCluskey](#) before the general election was a defeat for the Blairites who wanted to use a victory by Gerard Coyne, [McCluskey's main rival](#), to take the union to the right and also attack Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of Labour.

This must now be built on industrially and politically as workers face a [weak and divided Tory government](#).

Pay is the overwhelming issue facing workers, in the face of rising housing costs and prices, following years of pay restraint and cuts.

In the public sector, the key question is [smashing the government's pay cap](#). Unite is involved in claims for both local government and NHS workers which break the 1% increase limit.

There, and in other industries, Unite must lead by proposing effective action to win these claims.

Unite should follow the example of civil servants' union PCS which has [organised a consultative ballot of its members](#) on their willingness to take action to break the cap.

If Unite ballots its members in the public sector, it could galvanise the campaign to end pay restraint. Unite should join PCS in calling for the Trade Union Congress (TUC) to coordinate strike ballots across the public sector. If the TUC leaders won't act then Unite should take the lead in bringing unions together to organise joint action.

This campaign should also be taken into the private sector where, despite the bosses making billions in profits from workers' labour, pay has been held down and redundancies made.

At the same time, private sector pension schemes have also been raided by the bosses, as the examples [at Tata Steel](#) and [elsewhere show](#).

Unite has led some important disputes recently, notably the struggles over pay at [Serco in the Barts NHS Trust](#) and [BA mixed-fleet cabin crew](#).

It has shown itself prepared to take on cutting councils, including Labour-controlled Birmingham council, where [bin workers have refused to accept attacks on pay, terms and conditions](#).

Linking up the battles to come, of Unite and other unions, in coordinated action, can force this hated Tory government out and bring in a Corbyn-led Labour government, which Unite should influence in a socialist direction.

Socialist Party fringe meeting

Tuesday 14 November, 5.45pm or at end of conferences

Fighting back against the Tories!

Holiday Inn, Brighton Seafront, Lancing Room 1

Picturehouse strike: "evil corporations are evil"

Hackney Picturehouse was on strike alongside Crouch End, Ritzy, Dulwich, and Central on Monday 6 November for the London Living Wage, sick and maternity pay and trade union recognition. [The dispute has now lasted over a year](#) with the number of strike days adding up to at least one month.

During the strike eight workers have been sacked, including five reps. Little wonder then that one worker commented "evil corporations are evil". Last year Cineworld, the parent company, made [over £93 million](#) profit.

According to pickets Picturehouse has not replaced anyone who has recently left - putting more workload on those left behind.

They have done this partly to stop new starters joining the union as an attempt to weaken the union.

One new development which could completely expose Picturehouse to ridicule and embarrassment is that the previously stooge Staff Forum has rebelled, with a Bectu union rep elected as president.

There will now be elections in December for all the executive committee positions and if union supporters win most of these, this would remove the fig leaf that management have been using to prevent trade union recognition, and accepting the workers' demands.

Brian Debus, Hackney Socialist Party

Arriva bus strike still solid

Arriva bus drivers and engineers in Runcorn were out in force on Monday 6 November on the Unite-led picket line - [their fourth one-day strike](#).

Supporters of Halton Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition made their weekly solidarity visit and found the pickets in an upbeat mood.

The strike is still 100% solid and the pickets are determined to see it through. 3% across the board and equal pay at all depots is a fair request from an employer that made a profit of [£368 million](#) in 2014-15.

Public support is still high, as borne out by the encouragement of many passers-by and from vehicles beeping in solidarity.

Workers will also be out again on 8 November, coinciding with an [RMT transport union strike on Merseyrail and Northern Rail](#) against the imposition of driver-only operated trains.

United States: Minneapolis Socialist campaign chimes with voters

Socialist Alternative member Ginger Jentzen is contesting a ward in the Minneapolis city council elections - similar in size to UK parliamentary constituencies - on 7 November. Ginger's socialist policies and grassroots support have rattled the Democrat establishment, which has attempted to besmirch the campaign. **Seraphina Cobeen** recently wrote [a report of the campaign for socialistalternative.org](#) - which we reproduce in part below.

Every day volunteers for the Ginger Jentzen campaign are knocking on doors throughout Minneapolis' Ward 3 neighbourhoods, where working people and youth are facing skyrocketing rents and looking for an alternative to the developer-driven agenda that has long dominated city hall.

These volunteers have heard stories of displacement and low wage jobs, along with the fear of Trump's right-wing agenda affecting the city and ward.

One volunteer recently met someone who was moving boxes as she approached their door. They told her that they were moving out of the duplex they had been renting because rents kept rising. Unable to afford the rent in Minneapolis, they had decided to move out of the city. "They told me they had moved every year recently, trying to avoid the rising rents," said the volunteer, "but they were glad to see that Ginger was fighting back so that hopefully their friends would be able to avoid their fate."

The establishment is fearful of the positive reception for our campaign and is pouring corporate 'Pac' (political action committee) money into the race to try to fight against it.

One resident spoke to a volunteer, Tyler, a few days after she voted early. She had voted for Ginger but after having read an article that day in the paper that attacked the Ginger Jentzen campaign was doubting her decision. She told Tyler that she was worried Ginger wouldn't be able to work well with other members of council.

Tyler explained that [the victory of passing the \\$15 an hour minimum wage that summer](#) showed how Ginger and movements of working people could get things done. "Once I told her how the establishment was scared of our movement and that it was movement building that got \$15 passed she started to agree again. It was movement building, working with other activist groups, that pressured city council into almost unanimously passing \$15 despite them being against it at first," Tyler said.

At the end she donated to the campaign, like hundreds of other Minneapolis voters, knowing that those donations were one of the best ways to fight back against the developers and establishment that are trying to scare voters away from fighting back.

Minneapolis is known for affordable housing but developers want to turn it into another San Francisco in order to make huge profits. [Voters are noticing their rising rents](#) and many voters point to recent luxury apartments or nearby planned developments as the cause.

This is why [Ginger's slogan of "not for sale" has drawn in so many volunteers and donors](#) from Minneapolis. Her refusal to take corporate or developer money, and only take donations from ordinary people has inspired voters across the ward.

The developers are trying to buy the election with huge pacs flooding money into races across the city, and against Ginger's campaign. Instead of being scared, voters continue to donate money to Ginger, because they want to donate to the socialist who's fighting back against the big developers.

Students make up a big portion of the ward and are also ready to fight back. They see the connection between the fights against the developers and the resistance against Trump. These students are inspired by former left-wing Democratic Party presidential candidate Bernie Sanders' call for a "political revolution", and are excited that Ginger is another socialist who's not for sale.

On campus many students took whiteboard photos with their own reasons for supporting Ginger. Some say that they're on #TeamGinger because "she is not a corporate puppet" or that "we need rent control."

These students recognise Trump as the 'developer-in-chief' and are making the connection between the billionaire-backed administration in the White House and the profit-driven agenda of big developers in Minneapolis that is raising rents for them.

They're tired of the status quo, of 'politics as usual', and are excited by the idea of an activist in office, a socialist who rejects corporate money, and can actually fight back against the establishment.

- More articles and the election result at socialistalternative.org

Ireland: rail workers demand share of 'recovery'

[Rail workers in the Irish Republic walked out on 7 November](#) for 24 hours, the second stoppage in their demand for a 3.75% pay rise.

More and longer strikes are planned (14 and 23 November, 8 December) in the run-up to Christmas by unions representing members in Irish Rail. Many workers say they have not received a pay increase in the last ten years and that the pay demand is in line with settlements won by transport workers in Luas (tram) and Dublin Bus.

Irish Rail management proposals effectively propose a wage cut of €60 or more a week for many workers. They are also demanding increases in 'flexibility' and attacks on the workers' pension scheme. In total, there are no less than 18 conditions attached to its derisory 1.5% wage increase proposal.

Strikers are angry over the recent dismissive comments of Taoiseach (prime minister) Leo Varadkar [who said](#) the strike will end in a deal that "will be no different than if there'd be no strike at all".

Irish Rail has shed up to 5,000 staff in the last ten years. The yearly state grant is still €90 million below what it was in 2008. Yet passenger numbers are going up year by year - from 2.3% in intercity services to as much as 7% in Dublin Area Rapid Transit services in 2015 alone.

Irish Rail management and this right-wing government continue to drive home an agenda of underfunding, outsourcing and privatisation.

A bold industrial strategy by the unions should be linked to the demand for government investment to develop a public transport system that respects its workers and delivers an integrated service for people.

From Socialist Party Ireland material with additional reporting

Support from Solidarity/Socialist Party TDs (MPs)

"Government to blame for rail strikes. No pay increase for railworkers in ten years. Support their stand for pay justice."

Mick Barry TD

"I was on the picket lines this morning at Connolly Station supporting workers who are against the race to the bottom and wage restraint... We are meant to be in recovery, so it's time for a recovery for workers and not just the billionaires."

Ruth Coppinger TD

Ireland: dangerous ideas for the ruling class

The Socialist Party in Ireland hosted its second 'Dangerous Ideas' event on 3 and 4 November in Dublin. It was a great success with a lot of interest in socialist ideas and the Socialist Party. Around 350 people attended.

There were four major debates involving Socialist Party members discussing with representatives from [the Repeal movement for abortion rights](#), the left, the media and the capitalist establishment.

There was also a wide variety of discussion including on the lessons of the Russian revolution and a packed session on how socialism would work. International speakers included Eljeer Hawkins from the US, Oleg Knyazev from Russia and Hannah Sell from the Socialist Party in England and Wales.

Spain: Madrid rally celebrates October revolution

On 4 November, 250 workers and youth attended a vibrant rally to celebrate [the centenary of the October Russian revolution](#) in Madrid. Taking place in the context of the ongoing [revolutionary crisis in Catalonia and the Spanish state](#), the meeting emphasised the relevance of Bolshevik ideas in the current battles to do away with capitalism and change the world.

The meeting was addressed by Peter Taaffe (above centre), Socialist Party general secretary; Irish Socialist Party and Solidarity MP Paul Murphy; Barbara Areal, leading member of Izquierda Revolucionaria (IR) and socialist feminist platform 'Libres y Combativas'; Juan Ignacio Ramos, IR general secretary; and the general secretaries of the Sindicato de Estudiantes (Students' Union) in Catalonia and the Spanish state, Coral Latorre and Ana Garcia.

Peter Taaffe underlined the importance of the Bolshevik struggle in opposition to national oppression, which remains a key weapon in the arsenal of Marxists today in Catalonia and elsewhere, in the struggle to build a mass revolutionary international.

This successful rally is the second major Russian revolution centenary organised by IR and the CWI in the Spanish state this year, following [the historic rally attended by over 600 people in Barcelona](#) in July. These have been the biggest rallies held to commemorate the Russian revolution in the Spanish state this year.

- [Articles on Catalonia crisis - see socialistworld.net](#)
-

Sweden: 'Revolution2017' success

Revolution2017 took place in Stockholm on 4 November and was a great [celebration of the Russian revolution](#) and the linking up to today's class struggles. 180 people attended the event which included seminars, panel discussion, art, music, poetry and a great rally.

Among the speakers was Ruben Fernandez, Izquierda Revolucionaria (Spain) Clare Doyle, Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) and Sascha Stanicic, Sozialistische Alternative (Germany). The appreciation of the audience was reflected in the financial appeal which reached 100,000 Kronor (over £9,000), the highest ever for Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna (CWI Sweden).

Health campaign discusses strategy to save NHS

Jon Dale

Over 400 health campaigners and trade unionists attended Health Campaigns Together's (HCT) conference on 4 November - more than double its last conference.

HCT called the [250,000-strong demonstration against NHS cuts on 4 March](#), which helped derail Theresa May at the June election.

The conference heard from campaigns that have won victories, like North Devon's campaign to save Barnstaple District General Hospital. Every victory helps inspire campaigners elsewhere, even if battles keep having to be fought again.

Socialist film director Ken Loach focused on dentistry. Stories of DIY tooth extraction, abscess lancing and even tooth filling show the horrors following privatisation and charges.

Ken welcomed Jeremy Corbyn's changes to Labour but was disappointed with the election manifesto. [It said](#) Labour would "reverse privatisation" and make the NHS the "preferred provider" instead of clearly calling for an end to all privatisation.

Workshops brought together campaigners fighting for mental health, for safe staffing levels, busting the pay cap and defending immigrants among other issues.

Rounding the conference off, Dr Gurjinder Sandhu, an A&E consultant, was cheered for attacking the Tories' ['McKinsey model,' reorganising the NHS with hospital closures, mergers and so-called community care](#). "This emperor is stark bollock naked," he said. "There is no evidence for it and a huge amount of evidence against."

The loudest cheers of the day went to Jacqui Berry, a nurse and Socialist Party member, who followed. "I'm a socialist because I'm a nurse and a nurse because I'm a socialist," she said. "We're not powerless." The [junior doctors' strikes](#) and 4 March demonstration showed the possibilities for national action to save the NHS. [Pay strikes need to be built for](#).

"What we have to do is bring down the government - and not replace it with MPs who just wear different colour ties but those who will carry out a completely different programme."

Chatsworth neuro-rehab ward still open - unions join the campaign

Jon Dale, Mansfield Socialist Party

Patients and former patients joined staff recently to celebrate that Chatsworth ward is still open. In [July Sherwood Forest Hospitals Trust announced this Mansfield Community Hospital ward would close](#) in early November. It didn't!

Staff, patients and family members had [launched a campaign within days](#), getting massive support from local people. With TV, radio, social media and press publicity, the trust directors and clinical commissioning group (CCG) asked to meet with the campaign.

[The meeting was held on the ward](#), with patients in wheelchairs, a bed-bound patient, staff and family members. A successful demonstration marched through town.

The CCG launched a full review of neuro-rehabilitation services in the area. Meanwhile, the ward remains as busy as ever.

Over recent weeks staff and patients have met the review project manager several times. The preliminary report is expected at a CCG public meeting on 14 November.

Although there is cautious optimism, the campaign is producing its own plan for neuro-rehabilitation. Pressure will need to be maintained to get the plan implemented, as the CCG is strapped for cash. From the start, the campaign made clear Chatsworth ward must be saved - [but not at the expense of cuts elsewhere](#).

Unison, the union with most members on Chatsworth ward, has now given its official backing to the campaign, joining Unite and the nurses' organisation RCN. It has taken time and pressure from below to achieve this. It is a further blow to Sherwood Forest Hospitals Trust's senior management, who have been used to so-called 'partnership working' with some trade union officers.

Chatsworth ward workers rightly expect their unions to support their campaign to defend [the vitally needed services they provide](#).

Housing campaigners ask Corbyn to instruct Labour council regeneration ballots

Waltham Forest Housing Action Network has sent the following letter to Jeremy Corbyn following [his conference speech in which he called on Labour councils to hold ballots on regeneration schemes](#), something which other housing campaigns could replicate.

Dear Jeremy Corbyn,

We are writing to you to request that you instruct Labour-controlled councils, and particularly London Labour councils, to act upon your Labour conference speech about holding ballots on regeneration schemes now.

Losing your home or your child's play space is something that can't wait until an election is called - more importantly, we believe it is within Labour councils' power to help slow these schemes down.

We appeal to you to act upon your words at Labour conference and instruct Labour councillors to hold ballots that would support tenants to defend their homes.

Generally there is a deep cynicism among people regarding 'public consultations' which too often are seen as tick box exercises that are ultimately ignored.

Your conference speech brought people to their feet when you echoed this sentiment.

We very much agree that genuine consultations are required, ones that have binding outcomes.

We too are calling for public consultations that end with binding ballots. We believe that this would restore trust in many Labour areas, where, as you rightly said, "tenants and leaseholders feel ignored and not listened to."

At a recent 'Homes for all - axe the Housing Act' meeting we heard reports from activists from Haringey to Southwark where majority Labour councils were continuing with the kind of demolition, regeneration and the social cleansing you so strongly condemned in your speech.

Please act now by issuing a statement to Labour councillors to initiate ballots and binding referenda to stop the onslaught of ruthless property developers, to stop tenants from being forced out and the stock of council properties being reduced.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Nancy Taaffe (on behalf of Waltham Forest Housing Action Network)

Thousands march in London for Palestine

Philip Taylor

Several thousand protesters gathered in central London on 4 November to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the [Balfour declaration](#) and to protest against the ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people.

This was not the only poignant anniversary for the Palestinians to take place this year - it is 50 years since [the 1967 war which saw the Israeli state occupy the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem](#). Furthermore, it is now the tenth year of [the horrific blockade of Gaza](#) whose residents have been subject to three murderous assaults by the Israeli military since 2008.

The [situation facing the Palestinian population continues to be intolerable](#), and this was pointed out by all speakers at the rally who described the reality of life under the occupation - a life of arbitrary arrests, settlement building, house demolitions and checkpoints. However, the solidarity movement urgently needs to discuss the way forward in terms of how the occupation can be defeated and the just desire for a viable Palestinian state can be realised.

As we pointed out in a Socialist Party bulletin produced for the protest: "We have consistently [pointed to the first Intifada](#) (mass uprising of Palestinians in the 1980s) as a key reference point as to how the Palestinians can organise to fight the occupation of their land. And more recently to the [mass protests in July 2017](#) that forced Netanyahu's government to remove metal detectors and cameras from around the Al Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem."

A real democratic and just solution to this brutal and horrendous conflict can come into existence through a coordinated movement of Israeli Jewish and Palestinian working people removing the rotten and repressive Israeli ruling class and, along with their brothers and sisters throughout the Middle East, organising society along socialist lines. We fight for an [independent and equal, democratic and socialist Palestinian state](#).

[alongside a democratic and socialist Israel](#), as part of the struggle for a voluntary, socialist confederation of the Middle East and regional peace.

Opposition to new academy school being built on Leeds playing fields

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Consultation will shortly be ending on the proposals by Leeds council to build a new academy on the Fearnville (King George VI) playing fields.

This would represent a vital loss of recreational space to the community, as well as increasing traffic in an area with already poor air quality and vulnerable to flooding. At present the fields are held in a trust which would require the council to get a change in their use, so the current consultation focuses on this issue.

With the recent collapse of Wakefield City Academy Trust, many local parents and residents are apprehensive about a new academy being built in an area with five academy secondary schools that are [already underperforming](#). Essentially the proposals mean that the council will fund building the school, then hand this over to an academy chain we have no real local community control over.

The council's [consultation document](#) points out there will be a secondary school places shortage in the area in the near future and that the Department for Education's current guidelines for building a new school require it to be a free school or academy.

But [that doesn't mean the council should just accept the diktats of the Tory government](#) which endanger our children's future education. The council should instead be challenging this, mobilising the community, teachers and trade union movement locally.

At community events some local residents have also put together a petition against this and [set up a Facebook group](#). Local Socialist Party members will be adding their weight to the campaign and arguing for a real solution to the school places crisis which doesn't worsen our environment.

Orgreave campaigners' Halloween 'Death of Justice' march

Alistair Tice, Yorkshire Socialist Party secretary

Chants of "by Amber Rudd and Theresa May, justice was killed a year to the day!" reverberated around the streets of Sheffield on Halloween night, 31 October.

The vibrant, colourful, noisy march of 300-400 was [organised by the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign \(OTJC\)](#) on the anniversary of [Tory Home Secretary Amber Rudd's refusal to hold an independent public inquiry](#) into the events of the "Battle of Orgreave" on 18 June 1984 during the year long miners' strike.

It was at the Orgreave coking plant on the outskirts of Sheffield that mounted police, batons drawn, [charged into the crowd of striking miners who were holding a mass picket](#).

Armoured, shield-wielding police officers beat people, causing serious injuries and broken bones.

After miners were beaten up, they were fitted up and locked up on false police statements by some of the same South Yorkshire police that lied about the Hillsborough disaster just five years later.

Despite [the collapse](#) of the subsequent trial of 95 miners who were charged with 'riot' and 'serious assault', and the evidence of police brutality and of perjury, no officer has ever faced disciplinary action for their role or faced charges.

OTJC was set up to fight for an independent public inquiry that will reveal the truth about the role of the police and of the Thatcher government, and get justice for the ex-miners who were beaten up and falsely accused.

Amber Rudd refused an inquiry because she said nobody died, but truth and justice died. The Halloween demonstration was a real life nightmare for the Tories - led by a 'death of justice' coffin and the fantastic PCS civil service union samba band, with many dressed in scary monster and zombie costumes wearing Thatcher, May and Rudd masks.

The Sheffield Socialist Students contingent made a big impact on the night, marching down from the university to join the demo, and leading the chanting on the march.

All the speakers welcomed the Labour Party's [commitment to hold](#) a public inquiry once in government, but the biggest cheer of the night came when ex-miner John Dunn called for revenge against the system by not just fighting for a Corbyn-led government but for a socialist society.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 3 November 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Sheffield trees campaigner sentenced to prison

Sheffield Socialist Party

Sheffield trees campaigner Calvin Payne was sentenced to three months in prison, suspended for one year, on 3 November for [breaking a High Court injunction obtained by the Labour council](#) to try to prevent direct action.

On 27 October, Green Party councillor Alison Teal was found not guilty of breaking the High Court order and costs of £64,000 were awarded against the council. A third named protester did not appear in court after signing an undertaking not to undertake further protests.

The council applied for £32,000 costs against Calvin but the judge only awarded half against him. These legal proceedings alone have cost Sheffield council taxpayers £80,000 plus all the undeclared costs of surveillance, evidence gathering, private detectives and so on.

And for what? To try to intimidate campaigners from [carrying out peaceful civil disobedience](#) against private finance initiative (PFI) contractor [Amey's profit-driven felling of roadside trees](#).

It really is a comment on the role of a right-wing Labour council carrying out cuts and privatisation that Calvin feels that he was treated more fairly by a High Court judge than Sheffield council!

Calvin recently [wrote an article in the Socialist](#) about the council's threat to campaigners.

Brum meeting celebrates centenary of 1917

Birmingham Socialist Party branches organised a public meeting at the end of October to mark the [centenary of the Russian revolution](#). Peter Taaffe, general secretary of the Socialist Party, was the main speaker. Over 50 attended, including many young people.

Peter explained the tsunami effects around the world of the first workers' state to be established and the influence of socialist ideas led by the Bolshevik Party.

Against the hostility of world capitalism, it inspired workers in the advanced capitalist, as well as the colonial countries that they could throw off the yoke of exploitation to build a world free from war, inequality and starvation. At the same time, planning resources on a world scale could ensure the welfare of the planet.

Peter also spoke about the right to self-determination of countries that had been dominated by Russian imperialism. The Bolshevik Party raised this during the revolution, which in the majority of cases won over the populations of these nations to the revolution.

The Soviet government immediately granted full independence to Finland. Peter linked this to what is happening in [Catalonia's struggle for independence today](#) against the capitalist Spanish state and [the repression being implemented](#).

Finally, Peter drew out the lesson that capitalism today can no longer develop science and the productive forces. [Eight billionaires have as much wealth as the poorest 50% of the planet!](#) Only workers can once and for all solve the crisis of world capitalism by building a socialist society.

Bill Murray, Birmingham South East Socialist Party

Obituary: Derek Robinson, car workers' leader, 1927-2017

Bill Mullins, former senior steward at British Leyland and Socialist Party industrial organiser

Derek Robinson, one of the most famous trade unionists of the 1970s, has died aged 90.

He was the convenor of [the Longbridge car plant in Birmingham](#) and chairman of the British Leyland shop stewards' combine committee at the same time.

He was seen by the capitalist press as the most influential shopfloor leader in British industry. They dubbed him "Red Robbo" - though he was never known as that by his members.

He was sacked by Michael Edwardes, the managing director of British Leyland, in September 1980. This was after he opposed Edwardes' plant closure plans in a pamphlet published on the authority of the combine committee.

Over 50,000 workers across British Leyland immediately came out on strike, including the 20,000 workers at Longbridge in Birmingham.

Factories that stopped work included Canley in Coventry, the Castle Bromwich body plant, and the Bordesley Green plant in Birmingham.

My own plant in Solihull, where I was the senior steward on the Rover SD1 line, also came out on strike. ['On the Track'](#), the Socialist Party publication about workers' struggle at British Leyland in that period, gives more details.

Edwardes, in his book 'Back from the Brink', spends many pages describing how he and other bosses planned Derek's sacking for a long time.

He writes at one point about a pay dispute that broke out across British Leyland. "After a mass meeting [at Longbridge] the entire 20,000 came out on strike... the convenor [Derek Robinson] talked the men out, my estimate is that 80% did not back the strike... but were too frightened to reject the 'out of the gates' call... militant hoodlums had put barbed wire across the main gates at Longbridge."

Later on, after he sacked him, he says: "I went on television to give the facts on Derek Robinson's 30-month stewardship at Longbridge - 523 disputes, with the loss of 62,000 cars and 113,000 engines worth £200 million."

In fact, Derek could not physically have organised 523 disputes in 30 months. These figures reveal instead that on any day, one or another of the many groups and sections in the huge Longbridge plant were involved in action - often long before the convenor or the works committee knew anything about it.

Despite the slurs of Edwardes, the shop stewards movement was the most democratic organisation in society.

All shop stewards, including Derek, were subject to regular election and instant recall. The strikes that took place were a result of genuine grievances on the shop floor, and in the majority not 'planned from above'.

This was at a time when [a new Tory government had come to power under Margaret Thatcher](#), sworn to curb the power of the unions.

Michael Edwardes - appointed by the previous Labour government after part-nationalisation of British Leyland in 1975 - took that as his cue.

When it came to the actual sacking, Edwardes was far from sure that he would get away with it. But he was also lucky that around the same time, the right wing in Derek's union, the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW - now part of general union Unite), had won control.

The Transport and General Workers' Union (now also part of Unite) was the biggest union in British Leyland. It had begun to give official backing to the spontaneous strike when it first broke out.

But Terry Duffy, the new president of the AUEW, instead announced the union would set up an inquiry into Derek's sacking, and ordered his membership back to work! This came as a terrible shock - to Longbridge workers especially.

Les Kuriata, a supporter of Militant (now the Socialist Party) working at Longbridge, wrote in the Militant newspaper (forerunner of the Socialist) that "the shattering news created a double blow in view of the fact that in that morning's strike committee report to the picket lines, sacked convenor Derek Robinson, after being in contact personally with Duffy, told pickets he was confident that the strike would be made official by his union."

Five months later, after the 'inquiry' - during which time Derek had been kept out of the plant - the union finally said yes, he had been sacked unfairly.

But it said only that this was a breach of procedure, and nothing about how this sacking was aimed directly at undermining the confidence of the whole workforce and the shop stewards organisations.

It came as no surprise to us that after months of vilification by the media, especially the Birmingham Mail, a mass meeting voted against coming out on strike.

But the bosses weren't so sure what was going to happen.

The Times, in its editorial, wrote on the day of the mass meeting that "British Leyland now promises to become the most serious industrial crisis since the war.

"It will also be a test of fire for the industrial policies of the government." Edwardes records in his book that earlier, the Sunday Times had "described the five working days from the 11th February to the 15th as follows: 'five days that shook the world'."

The events around Derek's sacking were a culmination of a whole historical period - not just in British Leyland, but throughout society.

The war against unions declared by Thatcher took its most acute form first in the attempts by Edwardes to attack the wages, jobs and conditions of British Leyland workers, and then in [the attack on the miners, culminating in the 1984-85 strike](#).

Militant supporters at British Leyland, particularly in the Solihull plant where I and others were shop stewards, were able to pose what should be done to beat the cuts policies of bosses backed by the Tory government.

This included many resolutions to the British Leyland combine committee from our stewards committee.

A winning approach would have required a political outlook, not just an industrial outlook, from the leading stewards, including Derek Robinson, that just was not there.

This in no way detracts, of course, from the great personal courage of Derek and other shop stewards in that period, when the whole of official society was slandering trade unionists as "militant hoodlums."

Derek was a long-term member of the Communist Party. The Communist Party saw the developments in British Leyland following Labour's part-nationalisation as an opportunity to prove the firm could be made to work successfully within a capitalist framework.

But they knew, as we did, that the fundamental problem with British Leyland was years of underinvestment by bosses who preferred to drive down the wages and conditions of their workforce to maximise profits.

At the time, the average European car worker had three or four times the investment behind them of the average British Leyland worker.

In the case of the Japanese car firms, they could have anything between seven to 17 times as much.

The Communist Party's utopian outlook of making British Leyland successful as some kind of island of socialism within capitalism was a cul-de-sac. Unfortunately it led to major problems for the workers.

The main one was the development of what were called "participation committees." Derek had advocated this as part of what he thought would be a [kind of workers' control](#) at British Leyland. In fact it turned out to be the Achilles' heel of our shop stewards organisations.

We in Solihull, with 8,000 workers including 4,000 on my SD1 line, totally opposed participation, because it undermined the independent actions of the shop stewards committees. But we were in a minority.

The participation committees were used by the company to get shop stewards to go along with its plans to introduce a massive programme of plant closures and job cuts.

At one infamous meeting the convenors gave support to the company's plan to cut 12,500 jobs. Derek Robinson defended it as a rear-guard action, claiming it would not have been possible to take a traditional trade union position and fight the bosses' attacks.

There were many other issues where we had a difference of opinion with Derek and his fellow Communist Party shop stewards.

But nevertheless, the death of Derek Robinson will be mourned by many of my generation who experienced [a time when the mass of workers fought tooth and nail against the employers' offensive](#), including the tens of thousands of workers at British Leyland.

- Derek Robinson's funeral will take place at 1.30pm on 22 November at Stourbridge Crematorium
- 'On the Track' - an account of trade union struggles at British Leyland in the turbulent 1970s, by Bill Mullins - [available from leftbooks.co.uk](http://leftbooks.co.uk)

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 3 November 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Theatre: The Cherry Orchard

Welsh update of Chekhov an engrossing tale of 1980s class conflict

Scott Jones

The Cherry Orchard is set in Pembrokeshire, Wales, in 1982. Yes, that's right. It's a modern retelling of the original written by Anton Chekhov just before [the first Russian revolution in 1905](#). And it's brilliant.

Action revolves around an old manor house on the west Wales coast, home to farms, orchards, a wealthy family and the estate's workers. But there's trouble ahead. The bank is threatening repossession, forcing the family to find a solution or lose everything.

The supposed head of the English landowning family is Rainey, the perfect embodiment of her class. She is arrogant, lazy, with complete contempt for her staff, the poor, the Welsh, even her own family. She is forced to return from living it up at the Dorchester in London to address the crisis.

As the family argues, the dialogue is hilarious and peppered with references - both musical and political - to 1982: music and the class conflict of Thatcher's Britain.

The latter is injected by bolshie locals Dottie, the manor's housekeeper played brilliantly by Alexandria Riley, and Ceri, an unemployed socialist who falls in love with one of the family's daughters.

Both are funny, passionate and angry; quick to defend their local council estate, and remind the family of some home truths.

There are numerous examples of the difference between these two worlds. But the most striking is death and grief.

It affects everyone, of course. But Dottie rages at the fact her first day working at the manor, at the age of 16, came the day after her father died.

She was forced to work to keep food on the table. Meanwhile Rainey, after her own loss, set herself up in a posh London flat and went on a ten-year bender.

I've not seen the original, but a glance at its plot shows the themes remain the same. An out-of-touch upper class; gross inequality; the masses and poor increasingly confident - all set to the backdrop of [great change around the corner](#).

Part of 'R17', a series of events by arts organisations in Wales to mark [the centenary of the Russian revolution](#), this play is worthy of the connection - as well as being a laugh-out-loud funny, engrossing, thought-provoking drama in its own right.

- R17 is holding arts events throughout Wales until December - [visit r17.wales](#)

Obituary: Paul Randall, 1959-2017

Mike Forster, Huddersfield Socialist Party

Huddersfield Socialist Party is very sad to announce the passing away of one of our long-standing members at the age of 58.

Paul Randall was a former sheet metal worker and founding member of our Huddersfield branch in the 1980s. He was active in the Labour Party Young Socialists, and played an important role in building support for our ideas across the area.

Paul was an active participant in the anti-poll tax struggle, helping to build [the non-payment campaign which led to the defeat of the hated tax](#).

Even in more difficult times for the branch, Paul remained loyal to our ideas, and played an active part in some of the town's social movements.

Tragically he suffered a vicious assault the following decade and suffered ill health and a long-term disability thereafter. This limited his ability to commit to activity.

More recently he had been more active in his Unite Community branch and its regular activities outside Huddersfield jobcentre. From 2015, Paul was a regular on our campaign stalls in town, and played an active part in our general election campaign as well as standing for TUSC in the local elections in the Newsome ward.

Paul was especially active in '[Hands Off HRI hospital campaign activities](#)', and turned out twice a week for our stalls until ill health caught up with him.

Even after being hospitalised, he would return to our stalls, not heeding our advice to rest. He always turned out even if it was to collect his weekly copy of the Socialist.

Paul will be remembered for his commitment, dedication and dry sense of humour. His funeral will take place on 13 November, 2pm at Huddersfield Crematorium in Fixby. The collection will go towards [the Hands Off HRI legal challenge](#).

The Socialist inbox

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, phone 020 8988 8771 or email editors@socialistparty.org.uk.

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.

Militant erased

As Stalin consolidated his power he rewrote history and erased Trotsky from photographic records of the revolution. 100 years after the 1917 revolution, it seems Andy Beckett, in his Guardian article '[Abbott, Corbyn, McDonnell: the wilderness years](#)', attempts a literary equivalent.

In his recording of the events of the late 1970s and 1980s he erases from the record the role of Militant (now the Socialist Party) [in the poll tax](#), the [struggle of Liverpool City Council](#); or any mention of Terry Fields MP who was imprisoned for non-payment of the poll tax, [Dave Nellist MP or Pat Wall MP](#); or Kinnock's initiating of [the witch hunt against Militant](#).

Militant was central in these and other struggles in the Labour Party at that time. Even if you are opposed to the ideas defended by Militant, surely trying to artificially erase it from the history books is not quality journalism.

Tony Saunois, Labour Party national executive committee 1979-81

- This letter was also sent to the Guardian
-

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/26420>