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2018: more upheavals loom

Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary

"Biggest fall in living standards for a generation."

"Sharp rise in child poverty as cuts bite."

"700,000 young people and pensioners join ranks of Britain's poor in four years."

"Stoke proposes £1,000 fine for homeless using tents."

"Budget signals longest squeeze on living standards since 1950s."

"OECD: Britain state pension is worst in the developed world."

"Nursing 'in peril' as number of student applications falls below 18%."

"Food banks stock up as reforms to welfare add to fears of cold winter."

These are just some of the recent headlines gleaned from the capitalist press, as they regale us daily with a blizzard of facts, which unconsciously indict their profit-driven system and their callous political representatives, the Tory government of Theresa May.

It is also a fitting testimony to the failures of capitalism in 2017, in Britain and worldwide, as well as a pointer of what is to come unless this system is seriously challenged in 2018, laying the ground for system change to socialism.

Worldwide capitalism is still in the grip of the enduring economic crisis, resulting from the meltdown of 2007-08.

Sure, the capitalist soothsayers seek to reassure us that the 'worst is over', that a 'recovery' is underway which they claim, if not guaranteeing a return of the economic sunny uplands of yesterday, indicates significant improvements in the position of working people.

It is true that some countries have experienced an increase in the number of jobs - such as the US, here in Britain and a few countries in Europe.

But contrary to the propaganda that the future looks rosy, this recovery is not broad-based and certainly has not significantly improved living standards.

They have been largely concentrated in low-paid, part-time and precarious jobs. In Britain this means that the working poor are so low paid, increasing numbers are forced to resort to food banks - a confession of bankruptcy by capitalism.

It is also a criticism of right-wing trade union leaders in particular, who still fail to effectively fight for desperately urgent, substantial increases in wages.

It is no accident that retail trade has been flat - spending is therefore down - because of the limited purchasing power of the working class, in turn due to chronically low wages.

In other words, the working class cannot buy back the goods that it produces, one of the inherent contradictions of capitalism that Karl Marx drew attention to 150 years ago.

The capitalist economists and their institutions - the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank - are actually bemoaning the lack of 'demand'.

They are 'theoretically' urging the bosses to increase wages and, in some instances, even urging the trade union leaders to fight harder for increases.

But individual and groups of capitalists and governments resist this 'advice' and continue to viciously oppose workers fighting even for small increases. Witness the ferocious resistance of Serco, one of the numerous 'privateers' who leech off the NHS, [to Unite hospital workers in the Barts Health Trust for an increase of 30p an hour!](#)

They are not likely to respond to the demand of the unions in the public sector - including nurses and other hospital workers - for wage increases beyond the 1% 'limit' without trade union mobilisation and effective unified action.

So it has always been and will always be under capitalism. Even a wage increase of 2%, given the remorseless rate of increase in the cost of living, will leave most working people with continued reduced living standards.

This requires bold and decisive leadership from the trade unions, which is unlikely to be forthcoming from right-wing trade union leaders.

Their policies amount invariably to 'compromise' and endless postponements of struggle, in the hope that the anger of low-paid workers will be dissipated and resignation will set in.

Yet the anger of working people is at boiling point - as the rash of small strikes indicates. These include civil servants in the PCS, RMT rail workers and more.

They have brushed aside the recent anti-union legislation by taking action after record turnouts and majorities in strike ballots.

This can mean that if the union tops are not prepared to lead, then they can be pushed aside to make way for those militant leaders who are prepared in this urgent situation to fight the government and the employers.

Crisis of system

However, this struggle - as with all the other battles on housing, education, etc. - is closely connected with the current crisis of capitalism.

In the past, the capitalists were prepared to give reforms - crumbs off their very rich table - to the working class.

But those days have gone, with boom conditions having been replaced by an organic drawn-out crisis of capitalism.

In order to safeguard their profits and interests they have conducted an offensive against all the gains of the past.

The capitalists and their governments do not resist demands for change just because they are greedy and cruel - which they are.

They see no alternative but to savage living standards in order to safeguard their system. This means endless poverty - disguised by the anodyne word 'austerity' - which will be inevitably resisted by the working class.

May herself, in the honeymoon period after she became leader of the Tories, appeared to sympathise with the 'left behind' and with poor families, and promised an end to austerity.

But the demands of those she represents, the capitalists, dictate otherwise even if she did 'sincerely' want to lessen misery and suffering.

This is a system based upon production for profit not social need. It is founded on inequality by virtue of the fact that, individually and collectively, the capitalists exploit the labour power of the working class to create

what Karl Marx called 'surplus value' - which is then divided among the different exploiters into rent, interest and profit.

The struggle over the surplus between the capitalists and their governments on the one side and the working class on the other drives the class struggle and is the key to understanding history.

Historically, the capitalists used this surplus value to reinvest in industry, create new means of production - the organisation of labour, science and technique - and drive society forward.

This is largely what happened in the upswing of capitalism, when it was a system which was relatively progressive in laying the economic foundations for a new social system of socialism.

This, Marx wrote, was the historical mission of capitalism - to drive forward the growth of the productive forces.

But today it is betraying this 'mission', failing to invest. The capitalists are now more interested in piling up their own personal wealth through the massively inflated salaries of CEOs, stoking up 'shareholder value' rather than retooling and investing back into industry.

This also undermines productivity - which is static, if not falling, in Britain and throughout the advanced capitalist countries.

In the US for instance, a colossal total of \$2.7 trillion from investments abroad is kept 'offshore' - outside of the US and not invested in US industry itself.

Following [Trump's so-called 'tax reforms'](#) - a bribe to big business, together with the loosening of some state supervision of the banks - some or all of this could be 'repatriated' to the US.

But it is unlikely to be reinvested into industry and therefore will not reward Trump's base of unemployed industrial workers and others with improved job prospects and living standards.

It will inevitably go into the pockets of the rich, pushing up shareholders' wealth, the loot of the 1% and, in particular, the fabulously rich 0.001%; the plutocrats who ultimately call the shots under capitalism. Eight individuals control the same wealth as half the world's population!

This indicates the increasingly parasitic character of modern capitalism in Britain and worldwide. The [earlier Panama Papers](#) and now the aptly [named Paradise Papers](#) - which means hell for the rest of society and heaven for the super-rich - have revealed this in great detail.

The Financial Times aptly described such tax havens as "getaway cars" for the super-rich.

And capitalism has demonstrated beyond all doubt that it is incapable of taking society as a whole forward.

Another economic crisis in the manner of 2007-08 - which only genuine Marxists, like the Socialist Party and the Committee for a Workers' International (the international organisation that we are part of), fully anticipated - could take place at a certain stage.

The timing of such a crisis is impossible to predict but the inevitability of an economic breakdown is inherent in capitalism.

Moreover capitalism has not fully recovered from this crisis which, we should recall, resulted in the loss of ten million jobs in the US and Europe alone and the wrecked lives that flowed from this.

As Jeremy Corbyn said at the Labour Party conference - echoing the analysis of the Socialist Party - 2017 was the year when this crisis saw a delayed political expression of the crash.

The political earthquake of the general election, as well as many other recent upheavals such as the Scottish referendum in 2014, Brexit in 2016 and Trump's accession to the US presidency, were rooted in this.

Developments in the US

Subsequently, Trump has rampaged on the US and the world stages, breaking the crockery of world capitalism in the process.

Rather than the usual 'official' role of US presidents as an international 'stabilising' force, he has acted as a firebug, fanning the flames of already inflammatory situations.

His ['recognition' of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel](#) promises to reap a whirlwind in the Middle East and worldwide among Palestinians and Muslims in particular.

He has proved to be a disaster for the American ruling class as he bypasses the normal channels of capitalist democracy, preferring to rule by tweet in a special expression of US parliamentary bonapartism.

Even the New York Times has used unprecedented language by describing him as the "liar-in-chief". The growing opposition to Trump has resulted in an open discussion about his removal from the US presidency, similar to that which preceded the overthrow of Nixon in the 1970s.

Even a right-wing commentator like Anne Coulter can write: "Who isn't in favour of his impeachment?"

The Republican Party is split, which may result in a complete cleavage between Trump and his outriders like Steve Bannon on one side and the Republican establishment on the other.

This could lay the basis for a new right-wing nationalist Trump party and the increasingly alienated 'moderate' Republicans organised in their own party.

The Democratic Party may also itself split between the right wing and the supporters of Bernie Sanders - the 'Berniecrats' with their 'Our Revolution' movement - resulting in a new mass radical left formation.

Socialist Alternative, our cothinkers in the US, has played the role of a catalyst for the left. This was shown by the electrifying effect of the election and re-election of Kshama Sawant - the first socialist councillor in 100 years in Seattle - and now with the [spectacular performance of Ginger Jentzen in Minneapolis](#), who led among working class voters after the first round of the recent election.

Therefore, the US could be faced with an unprecedented four-party set up, which would have colossal repercussions not just in the US but worldwide.

The ideas of socialism are spreading like a prairie fire among young people in the US in particular, at a faster rate than even in Europe at this stage.

The earlier emergence of Podemos in Spain, the Corbynista surge in Britain, a similar movement around Mélenchon in France, and the Sanders revolution in the US are all part of the political awakening of a new, radical generation.

Corbyn surge

In Britain this is tending to fuse with the reactivation of older layers of the left who were discouraged by the previous move towards the right within the labour movement.

It represents a rejection of sell-out Blairite 'social democracy' and is potentially a powerful agent for socialist change.

However, programmatically it has not yet reached the same political awareness, consciousness, as the 1980s Bennite left within the Labour Party - which Militant, now the Socialist Party critically supported - with its demand for the nationalisation of 25 monopolies.

If implemented, Benn's programme from that time would make serious inroads into the power of big business but would not completely eliminate it.

It would provoke the capitalists to mobilise to bring down a left Labour government, similar to the events in Chile with the Allende government in the 1970s.

We therefore proposed the nationalisation, with minimum compensation on the basis of proven need, of the top 200 monopolies and the implementation of a democratic socialist plan of production.

But Corbyn's programme does not even go as far as Benn's proposals for large-scale nationalisation.

Betrayal in Greece

Unless economic and political power is taken out of the hands of the capitalists, they will use this to sabotage any threat to their system.

Is this not the lesson to be drawn today from the experience of Greece, where the Tsipras government raised expectations with the clarion call that "hope is coming"? Instead, all the hopes of the Greek working class were dashed on the rock of the Troika (IMF, European Commission and European Central Bank) and its demands for a further round of savage austerity - cuts in wages and pensions, mass privatisation - which the Tsipras government is presently implementing.

This retreat is comparable to the infamous betrayal of the German social democrats with their support for their own ruling class and the bloody World War One.

The Syriza government had a clear choice. It could bend the knee to capital or break the hold of big business and move towards a democratic socialist Greece; at the same time appealing to the Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and European working class to join Greece in a great socialist confederation of the region, linked to socialism in Europe as a whole.

This same dilemma could be posed before a Corbyn government, maybe as soon as this year, 2018.

Brexit

An immediate collapse of May's Tory government seems to have been averted through the recent negotiations on Brexit.

There were congratulations on all sides of the Tory party when May returned from Brussels with the latest deal consisting of 'studied ambiguity' on key issues like the border between Northern and Southern Ireland and the single market. This represents a colossal fudge.

May has stolen some of the clothes from Jeremy Corbyn, who on all the fundamental issues relating to the EU - the single market, migration, etc. - appeals to both those opposed to the EU and those who wish to remain in it.

The Socialist Party believes that it would still be possible to appeal to both with a class and socialist approach.

This would involve clear opposition to the neoliberal aims of the EU by emphasising trade union rights and opposing policies like the posted workers directive, which furthers the process of a capitalist race towards the bottom for all workers in all countries.

We stand for a socialist united states of Europe as the only lasting solution to the problems facing working people.

The strategists of capital - such as Lord Heseltine - were seriously considering support for Labour and Corbyn, despite his programme, as an electoral alternative to May and the Tory Party, which seemed wedded to a 'hard Brexit'.

They were prepared to consider this despite their fears that a Corbyn government, once in power, could be propelled under the pressure of a politically aroused working class to go much further than the mild social democratic programme on which Corbyn successfully fought the election.

These issues have not been solved by kicking the can down the road, which is what the latest agreement amounts to.

They could return once more and May could yet flounder, with splits within the Tory Party widening and breaking out, resulting in a general election being forced. Labour is ahead in the polls and could be pushed into office this year.

Moreover the radicalisation which we have witnessed internationally will be fuelled further by the underlying continuing crisis of capitalism - more like a series of crises, rather than a sudden collapse, although a repetition of the 2007-08 crisis cannot be completely ruled out.

2017 represented an important stage for the labour movement, for the working class and for the Socialist Party.

In November we had the largest Socialism rally yet - [Socialism 2017](#). We continue to draw some of the best fighters for socialism and the working class into our ranks, particularly of young people and workers.

This has allowed us to forge ahead in all fields, in the trade unions and the daily battles of working class people. 2018 promises to be an equally successful period for the struggle for socialism in Britain and worldwide.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 1 January 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Tory prescription for mental illness: stress and bureaucracy

A disability benefits claimant

As an individual with mental health issues, it has been my misfortune to experience directly just how capitalist society, Britain 2017, treats such people. I can't imagine that my experience is particularly unique.

I was due to have my 'work capability assessment' for disability benefits in November. I was lucky enough to have the valued support of a comrade to accompany me. This cannot be understated. It is vital, wherever possible, that claimants enduring this process find someone to accompany them.

My first assessment was cancelled due to the correct healthcare professional being unable to see me. This is due to my having an eye condition that requires I be seen by a specific specialist.

Whether or not that is an optician is irrelevant. This is solely for purposes of liability. It has nothing to do with diagnostic knowledge; it's just that the Department for Work and Pensions doesn't want to be sued.

So, very apologetically of course, I am sent home, along with my companion. That's it. All the waiting is for nothing. All the stress is ignored. You are reduced to a clerical error with no thought for the consequences.

Once again I was able to call on the much-valued support of the same comrade. Unfortunately the second appointment got me no closer to an assessment.

Despite their having my contact details, I learned upon arrival that the appointment had been cancelled. This was because they were or are - who knows - going to offer me a home appointment instead.

So this will be at least three times of being put through the anxiety of anticipating an experience necessary for my continued financial security, where the consequences of failing are devastating.

There are thousands of people, many a lot worse off than I, having to endure this system. It will only get worse with Universal Credit - as if it hasn't already. For the sake of our society we must stop this government.

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.

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

Pension pittance

I have just received a letter from the pension company that my employer uses. It shows me how much I have got in my pension for nine months of work on an annual salary of just under £16,000.

I have earned £128.96 for my pension for nine months of work. I worked this out as being £171.95 for the year.

Just for fun, I worked out how much I would have for a pension if I worked until the age of 60, 65 or 70. I am currently 23. The amounts are £6,362.03, £7,221.76 and £8,081.49 respectively, if the amount paid in every year doesn't change.

How are us youth expected to live a decent retirement if we aren't even going to earn as much for our pension across our whole lives as we would make in a single year?

And this doesn't even take into account that a lot of youth, myself included at one stage, have to work part time, on zero-hour or temporary contracts which don't give us much if anything for our pensions.

The only solution for this is to take pensions away from these private companies who are using this to line their own pockets, and to take the wealth off the billionaires who now collectively own \$6 trillion.

Aaron Bailey, Huddersfield

Benefits burglary

Two years ago at a demo outside Southampton Jobcentre I said benefits will be worth £50 a week before long. How right I was.

£70 a week is now taxable. You are also liable for council tax. If you work a short contract and have to work a week in hand, most of that will be snatched from you - plus the first week's claim is not paid in benefit.

Is that enough? No: after three hours' phoning around I learn the rent support is to be separated from the service charge, so no doubt they can say they are paying the rent, and the service charge - with all the money you have left - can be paid by you, the claimant.

Mike, Southampton

Tory tears

A Tory MP, Heidi Allen, breaks down in tears in the House of Commons following Frank Field's account of the sufferings of some of his Birkenhead constituents. Does she not realise that there are literally hundreds of such cases throughout the country?

People in vulnerable circumstances continue to suffer from benefit cuts, low pay, rising costs for basics, and poor and expensive housing, while the minority rich exploit the taxation system and the housing market.

A young homeless man froze to death on the streets of Birmingham recently. He won't be the last.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has found that since 2012-13, almost 400,000 more children and 300,000 more pensioners are living in poverty.

And the government plans to stop women who are fleeing abusive relationships from using housing benefit to pay for their stay in refuges. Nearly 60% of the income for refuges comes from housing benefit.

Heidi Allen should take a hard look at her own government's brutal policies.

Ian Hunter, Ilkeston, Derbyshire

Quiet Resistance

Alice Merrill's 'Quiet Resistance' is a book to bring home to readers life as a disabled person in a Palestinian refugee camp.

It gives a vivid picture of an everyday life which will be familiar to the British reader and then it brings the reader up short with passages like this:

"We pass a children's playground where families are enjoying the feeling of freedom out in the open space. It is a landscaped area on a slope with swings and roundabouts for the children and grassy banks and flat terraces to play football or sit and have a barbecue.

"There are so few open spaces like this so it can get crowded and it is not always as peaceful as it is today as the soldiers have been known to tear gas it."

The almost casual cruelty of the occupation is portrayed in these pages as a part of everyday life. Any reader who is not burning with indignation and determined to help the Palestinian people after reading this has not been paying attention!

Yet, as the author says, "the world governments turn a blind eye. In what other country would this happen without condemnation?"

The story of survival in these conditions is a story of quiet heroism. Doubly so for someone with a disability.

In places this first-class book is not an easy read, but it is a weapon in the battle for Palestinian rights. It is a weapon of quiet resistance.

Derek McMillan, Worthing, Sussex

Widening wealth gap, increase in poverty... Make the fat cats pay

Helen Pattison, London Socialist Party

Don't put the party poppers away just yet. There's one last thing to celebrate. Fat Cat Wednesday! Well, it's not exactly a celebration if you're working class. In fact it's only the super-rich who actually enjoy the event.

Fat Cat Wednesday marks the point on Wednesday 3 January when chief executives of FTSE 100, the largest businesses on the London Stock Exchange, will have already 'earnt' the average salary of working people for the whole year. According to [research by the High Pay Centre](#) it takes them less than a week to pocket £28,000 median salary in the UK.

It's a stark reminder of the huge void that exists between the living standards of working class people and the tops of society.

Fat Cat Wednesday has become an annual event when the inequality of capitalism is really laid bare. How can Theresa May say with a straight face that there is no "magic money tree" for hard-working NHS staff reliant on food banks when in hours these executives have already pocketed thousands?

Inequality

This huge inequality and the driving down of living standards since the 2008 economic crisis is also seriously affecting people's health. [4.6 million people are living in persistent poverty](#) which is contributing to a rise in poverty-related illnesses such as rickets. Asthma is also on the rise, in part due to the number of children living in temporary and poor quality accommodation.

Parents are struggling, with one in five skipping a meal to feed their children over the summer holidays. The right-wing rags have said that Jeremy Corbyn and anti-austerity campaigners want to take us back in time, when in reality it's capitalism that's taking us back to the social horrors of the 19th century.

Rather than allowing Fat Cat Wednesday to get us down, we should be used as inspiration to fight for a real alternative to capitalism. The wealth is clearly there - it's just hoarded by the super-rich. If that wealth was taken from the 1% it could be democratically planned and used to ensure a decent standard of living for all.

Higher education

Mobilise against rip-off executive pay and marketisation

Fight for free education

Theo Sharieff, Socialist Students national chair

In the new year honours, five 'fat cat' current and former vice-chancellors were rewarded for their 'services to education'.

The national outrage that was sparked before Christmas over the levels of VC pay led to [the resignation of Bath university vice-chancellor Glynis Breakwell](#). So the vast majority of students and staff on campuses will be perplexed and angered over why our university executives continue to be rewarded and praised by the political establishment.

One [recent article in the Sunday Times](#) reported on the comparatively 'low pay' of Harper Adams University's vice-chancellor, which currently stands at £182,000 a year - higher than the prime minister's salary.

And while this may be on the lower end of the scale as compared to other fat cat VCs, it is eye-wateringly high in the eyes of the vast majority of students and workers who have to put up with low-paid, precarious work on campuses and elsewhere.

What's more, these grotesque rates of pay continue at a time when it was reported by the Financial Times that millennials face a pension squeeze, with the government admitting openly that around 12 million workers are currently under-saving for their retirement.

As the furore over vice-chancellor pay has continued, student support for the Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour Party has continued to grow, peaking in December at a staggering 68%. This support reflects his popular policy of abolishing tuition fees and bringing back maintenance grants.

Jeremy Corbyn should capitalise on the protests started by Bath university students and workers last term by harnessing this record level of support and calling for national demonstrations against rip-off executive pay and the marketisation of our universities.

Mass demonstrations, coordinated by the National Union of Students and supported by the Labour leadership, and linked to demands for greater accountability, workers' rights on campuses and free education, could see the end to this rotten Tory government.

Rail: fares up, bosses' pay up - delays and cancellations up

Nationalise rail now!

Paul Callanan, Greenwich and Bexley Socialist Party

Rail companies are ringing in the new year by inflicting yet more misery on long-suffering commuters. Fares have gone up [another 3.4%](#). With wages [only up by 2.5%](#) this means travel continues to get more costly for workers.

Commuters in Britain now pay up to five times as much of our wages in fares as our fellow workers in other parts of Europe, according to the TUC. Since the Tories came to power in 2010 [season ticket prices have jumped 32%](#), Labour has found.

The government and rail bosses claim the increases are to cover the costs of huge rail infrastructure and improvement projects, as well as operating costs.

So, money well spent? No. 48% of all trains were late or cancelled in the five weeks up to Christmas, [the Sunday Times found](#).

Bosses are also attempting to cut costs by removing safety-critical duties from train guards in favour of 'driver-only operation'. As well as trains being late and overcrowded, passengers are asked to pay for a service that is unsafe and inaccessible.

Seen in this light anyone would say that the government's transport policies have been an abject failure. Anyone except the fat cats who run Britain's railways.

Like Rupert Soames, chief executive of Serco, which runs the Caledonian Sleeper and part-runs Merseyrail. Soames stands to get a staggering £5.4 million if he meets performance targets.

Or Martin Griffiths, boss of Stagecoach, operator of East Midlands and partner of Virgin's East Coast and West Coast lines. He is due a huge pay-out of £2.5 million.

The bosses [claim that 97% of fares are reinvested](#) - that just 3% is profit.

Of course, parts of that 'reinvestment' go on leasing trains from private companies and paying interest on debts - making profits for other bosses. And the chief execs' massive handouts count as staffing costs.

But even if the majority of the money goes on maintenance and improvement, why should passengers and railway workers have to foot the bill for decades of underinvestment?

The railways should be nationalised, in full and immediately, with compensation paid to shareholders only on the basis of proven need. Only by taking rail out of the hands of greedy bosses can we end the great British train robbery.

On the basis of public ownership and democratic planning, state subsidies could guarantee cheap fares, good wages and decent service - not prop up 3% profit margins and executive excess for companies competing to run rail into the ground.

Thousands live in tents and sheds - seize the 60,000 empty homes

James Ivens

Over 60,000 homes in England and Wales have been vacant for more than two years. At the same time, 9,100 people live in tents. And in London alone around 9,000 'beds in sheds' fill secret slums.

How much longer do we have to watch the market fail to sort this out? The properties are there! Just take them!

Even the Liberal Democrats, Britain's second-best Tory tribute act, think it's an idea. It's [their research](#) which turned up the empty digs through council Freedom of Information requests.

In five years, only 19 of those councils - less than 8% - say they've taken any of these places over.

They all have the power. After six months they can issue 'empty dwelling management orders' for them. 11,000 have been empty over a decade.

And so the desperate homeless found makeshift cities of tents. Their population is booming. The 9,100 people living there represent a 56% growth between 2011 and 2016, [according to Crisis](#).

The homelessness charity projects 11,000 in tents by 2020. Why?

Rents are up, benefits down. Tenancies are insecure and so is employment. But even families in stable work are now at risk of homelessness, [according to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#).

Losing a tenancy is the growing cause: behind 31% of homelessness in England, says Crisis. It was at 11% when the Tories came to power.

'Beds in sheds'

And it's [the Tories themselves](#) who identified 6,000 hidden 'beds in sheds' across two-thirds of London's boroughs - the majority Labour. They estimate the total number to be 9,000.

But is their real concern for the poor people living in sheds? They couldn't resist linking it to lost council tax receipts, undocumented migration - and benefit fraud.

Of course, getting benefits at all is near impossible thanks to the Tories. [Their 'universal credit' system is a disaster](#). The diminishing amount and extravagant lateness of payments mean four out of five landlords refuse to take claimants, [says the National Landlords Association](#).

The Tories, Blairites and Liberals have made homelessness normal.

Nottingham is trialling [a special vending machine for the homeless](#) dispensing snack food and hygiene products. Keycards allow users three items a day.

Enough! Take those empty homes and put them to use. And build council houses now. Nationalise the land and construction companies - the market won't do it.

After Grenfell [Jeremy Corbyn was right to call on the council to seize empty properties](#) for survivors. That still needs to happen. But now he should make the call across the country.

Heart unit rescued by campaigning saves baby with pioneering surgery

Lenny Shail, Coventry West Socialist Party

The heroic victory of thousands of community campaigners in Leicester to defend their congenital heart surgery unit, [with Socialist Party members playing a leading role](#), was vindicated straight away. [The news arrived just before Christmas](#) that days-old Vanellope Hope Wilkins had been saved there.

Surgeons in the rescued heart centre at Glenfield Hospital carried out a pioneering operation to correct a rare condition that caused Vanellope's heart to grow outside her body, 'ectopia cordis'.

With chances of survival less than 10%, the tremendous skill and dedication of staff at the hospital saved the baby's life in a series of procedures that started within seconds of her birth. They involved 50 staff, three operations, and the construction of an artificial ribcage over the course of a week.

NHS England bosses should be ashamed and embarrassed after their attempts to shut down the unit last year. They only failed because of the tremendous battle by local residents and workers.

Socialist Party member Steve Score, chair of Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre, said: "Incredible skill shown by staff. It's unbelievable that NHS England bosses wanted to close this centre until their recent u-turn.

"The Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre campaign is enormously proud of our role in saving this centre that saves children's lives. People power can win."

NHS England's arguments for closure were flawed from the start. The targets bosses wanted to set - 125 operations per surgeon per year - were arbitrary. Closure of the heart centre would have left the East Midlands as the only region in England without a specialised unit.

Campaign

The campaign involved thousands in a large number of demonstrations and meetings, with 130,000 people signing the petition. It helped 7,500 people engage in a deliberately complicated 'consultation' exercise.

Importantly, community campaigners linked up with the trade union movement, getting backing from local and regional union bodies.

The operations to save the life of Vannellope Wilkins demonstrate even more the importance of fighting to save every aspect of our NHS.

They also give a glimpse of what more would be possible if the NHS was publicly owned and properly funded, with genuine democratic control involving the workers and users of the service.

But of course the war is far from over. The many local struggles need to be linked up - which 'Health Campaigns Together' aims to do. And health union leaders need to listen members and call industrial action.

We need to unite the communities fighting for their local services with each other and with trade unions in the NHS and beyond, and campaign for a national fightback to save our NHS.

NHS in annual winter crisis as Branson creams off £1bn

Claire Laker-Mansfield, Hackney Socialist Party

The NHS winter crisis has become an established part of the calendar, both predictable and predicted. In January last year, the Red Cross went so far as to call it a "humanitarian crisis." Indications are that this winter could prove just as difficult.

One in five patients had to wait over four hours in A&E treatment in the third week of December. This compares to one in twelve in the same week in 2013, according to the NHS and Royal College of Emergency Medicine data.

When you learn that Britain now has third-lowest number of hospital beds and doctors per person in the EU, this is hardly surprising.

Just ask any one of the dedicated workers on the front line. They will tell you our NHS is understaffed and underfunded, health workers are overworked and underpaid, and private sector vultures are making colossal profits while treating staff and patients like rubbish.

Parasitic

One of these parasitic private companies is none other than Richard Branson's Virgin. Last year [it picked up a record £1 billion](#) worth of NHS contracts - despite paying no corporation tax in the UK.

And it wasn't alone. In 2017 privateers won 69% of NHS contracts put out to tender, says the NHS Support Federation.

Yet last year also gave us the huge demonstration for the NHS in March, which Socialist Party members played a key role in organising. This showed the enormous potential there is to build a mass movement.

And the bold strike action of health workers - like outsourced porters and domestics in Barts NHS Trust - indicated what we could achieve if health workers were to strike back together.

That's why the step taken by Royal College of Nursing - traditionally a 'no-strike' union - of organising an indicative ballot for industrial action against the pay cap was significant. With hospital porters in Devon and Exeter NHS trust currently preparing to strike against the imposition of twelve-hour shifts, it's clear there is a mood for action among broad sections of health workers.

It is incumbent on the tops of the trade unions to offer a lead to workers and campaigners. As a starting point, this should include mobilising a huge national demonstration.

It should include organising for coordinated strike action to end years of real-terms pay cuts in the NHS and society as a whole. It should mean waging a serious fight to make 2018 the year we save our health service from the ravages of cuts and privatisation.

Blairite Haringey council 'all ears' to rich property developers

Nick Auvache, North London Socialist Party

For those of you who thought that [the Blairite zombie rump of Haringey councillors who have been deselected](#) would depart the scene history with their tail between their legs, then think again! Although many arch Blairites have either been defeated in the candidate selection for May 2018's elections, or decided not to stand again, they seem to be hell bent on lining the pockets of as many private developers as possible before they hang up their pens.

Not content with getting into bed with multinational union blacklists Lend Lease in the notorious Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV) scheme, Haringey council has, this week, given the go ahead to the aptly named FEC (Far East Consortium) to redevelop the historic Hornsey Town Hall.

This will now be turned into, yes you've guessed it ... luxury flats! 146 flats are due to be built on the site but only 11 have been designated as "affordable" under the terms of the plan.

Astonishingly Haringey council has pushed ahead with this project despite the significant opposition to the plans.

An amazing 600 objections were lodged against the plans and public outrage reached such a pitch at the July planning meeting that the Labour councillor chairing the meeting threatened to exclude the public.

One woman present at the meeting neatly summed up the fiasco when she shouted out: "You could do so much better for Haringey. You could build a decent amount of social rented houses, not line the pockets of a tax haven developer."

It seems that the Blairites running Haringey council are deaf to the criticisms of local people but when it comes to rich property developers they are all ears!

All three sitting Labour councillors for the ward where the development is taking place have decided to withdraw as candidates for next year's council elections.

We say good riddance to these Labour councillors who have all welcomed the measly provision of 11 "affordable dwellings".

This will do nothing to alleviate the misery of the 3,000 families on Haringey's housing waiting list but it will do everything to swell the already healthy bank accounts of the fat cat developers.

We are calling on the newly selected anti-HDV Labour candidates to publicly condemn this scheme and commit themselves to a mass council house building programme instead, free from the profiteering of private developers.

We say no to cuts and the selling off of historic buildings for the benefit of private developers.

Jeremy Corbyn should also condemn this scheme as yet another example of social cleansing. He should commit a future Labour government to annulling these schemes but urge Labour local authorities to act now in the interests of the many not the few!

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 16 December 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Waltham Forest: Stop the rotten redevelopment plan, demand residents

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

What was the point? That's what the hundreds of people who attended Waltham Forest council's planning committee on 13 December will have been thinking when they left - after 10.30pm! What was the point of the three hours in a hot room? What was the point of the well-researched, well-formulated, well-argued objections from ten speakers from the borough? What was the point of electing councillors? The officers basically said that councillors must dance to the developers' tune because Tory legislation and Sadiq Khan's plan for London demand it.

The Socialist Party rejects this 100%. We want councillors who stand up for us - not for the spivs and speculators gathering like vultures over our borough.

Sadiq Khan's London plan means the city has the smell of fresh prey for them. We say that instead we need our elected representatives to end the social cleansing of London's poor and working class. We now have to fight for homes for people, not profit.

The planning committee meeting was farcical but it showed that there is enormous anger in the borough over this plan.

It will reduce the open space at the top of the street market by a third. 81 trees will be cut down from the town square.

Some buildings around the proposed 29-storey monster blocks will get two hours of daylight (deemed good). One report that was cited said that the wind created by these buildings will mean that some seating areas will not be suitable for prolonged sitting! It will be uncomfortable for leisurely strolling.

The children's play area will be reduced (described as an advancement by the officers!).

And in a borough with approximately 2,000 people in housing need, in this development of new homes the councillors voted that only 20% will be affordable. Except it's not even that good! 20% will be available for shared ownership - available to single people or couples with a combined income of up to £90,000! We need homes - council homes.

When Nancy Taaffe of the Socialist Party said this, it got a big cheer in the hall. A number of objectors who spoke called for a rethink, for homes for those in need, not this "land grab of public space to expand the profit of a private company" as campaigner David Gardner so eloquently put it.

And what was particularly galling was to see Tory councillors, whose leaders launched the sell-off of council homes, whose party has pushed through the rotten to the core Housing and Planning Act, able to appear more radical and more on the side of working class and hard-pressed middle class people than the Blairite Labour councillors who voted 100% for this scandalous plan.

Labour councillors stand condemned by this. Two of the Labour councillors on the planning committee - Marie Pye and Steve Terry - did not even show up to this important meeting, with no explanation offered.

Campaigners and residents came to present their objections in good faith. They and the 948 people who had taken the time to respond to the council's consultation and the 2,015 people who have signed the petition, represent the majority in the borough who oppose this scheme.

As campaigner Jean Duggleby said: "The people who have been to consultations had been gagged". She had spoken to around 5,000 people in the course of her impressive campaign against the monster block plan and had only found around ten in favour.

Labour councillor Jenny Grey, in the chair, defended developer Capital & Regional getting five minutes to speak while objectors received a strict three minutes.

But Nancy told them that the community will not treat them with such deference: "To Capital and Regional here in the hall - this is just the start. We intend to be your worst nightmare."

She also said: "Sadiq Khan is a disgrace for putting forward the London plan and for saying that outer London areas can have up to 45 tall buildings.

"We support Corbyn and we want council housing and we want the money out of the taxes from the rich."

A Socialist Party member shouted out at one point to ask why the council didn't disregard regulations that prevented it building what was needed and listening to the public demands.

A councillor sought advice from the officers on this - big trouble was the answer. That makes things clear - for the campaign to be successful we have to pile the pressure on to the councillors and if they don't recall the vote then they need to be replaced by public representatives who see representing the public as their role.

Nancy talked about the housing rebellions all across the country. She said it's good to have good neighbours and "we have Haringey where Labour councillors have been deselected for pushing through a similar development.

"The May elections are coming upon us. We have the power to vote you in and we have the power to vote you out."

She gave the example of Liverpool socialist-led Labour council in the 1980s that showed how an alternative is possible - it built 5,000 council homes in defiance of Thatcher.

Anger expressed

By the end of the meeting the audience was in full rebellion mode. Angry laughter, heckling and rebuttals of every claim rang out around the room.

Waltham Forest's women were especially vocal. When one of the councillors standing in for Pye and Terry tried to argue that we didn't need to worry about increased pressure on the tube as the development would provide local jobs (only 15% guaranteed for the borough's residents!) people shouted that they would be low-paid retail jobs.

We had had enough of their fudges and lies. At 10.11pm Councillor Keith Rayner asked if the vote even included the tower blocks (planning in outline rather than in detail). The answer was yes - but the developers can work out the detail afterwards!

Committee chair Jenny Grey threatened to take the vote into the back room if people didn't quieten down. "Go then, go into the shadows", was the shout that came back.

A Socialist Party member had earlier made the call for a 'people's vote', which was taken after the councillors voted 4:1 in favour of the rotten pro-profiteer, anti-housing provision plan. Our vote was unanimous in opposition.

People were angry, but also shocked, even in tears at the sense of helplessness that people we elected, in Jeremy Corbyn's party, could ignore so many people with so many good arguments.

As Linda Taaffe, Socialist Party member and chair of Waltham Forest trades council said about the victory of Butterfields tenants a year ago: you only win in the court/town hall what you've already won on the streets. Now the campaign must organise and take the challenge to this pointless council.

Two nights before, local campaigners from the Housing Action Network, set up by the trades council (HAN), and the Stop the Monster Block and others who organised the lobby, also discussed what they would do if the meeting went against us.

We decided to launch an appeal; investigate a judicial review; and build the campaign. The HAN distributed a leaflet inviting everyone who wants to fight on to reconvene on 11 January at 7.30pm in the William Morris Community centre. It ain't over!

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 14 December 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Housing victory for Sussex students

Success has been achieved with regard to the Sussex university student accommodation dispute at high rent Kings Road Hall near Brighton seafront.

Tired of dilapidated, rodent-infested flats with ovens and toilets not functioning, an absence of hot water, scaffolding blocking fire exits, and concerns not being addressed, over a third of the 110 residents staged an indefinite rent strike which was supported by the Brighton Acorn renters' union.

All this in the context of the revelation that former vice-chancellor Michael Farthing was given a £230,000 leaving bonus.

However, a mere four days of action saw the university capitulate. Proposals were outlined to offer each student £515 in compensation, to pledge to complete all repairs at the site ahead of the start of the spring term in January, and to devise an improved accommodation complaints procedure in future. The union said all its demands were met in negotiations.

One Kings Road resident told the Brighton & Hove Independent: "It's a huge victory. I can't believe we've won so fast! The residents of Kings Road are thrilled that our demands have been met in full".

Acorn organiser Duncan Michie was quoted: "This deal is an impressive victory for the union. We're proud to have been able to protect our members' interests and prove that real power comes from organising and taking action".

Andy Barber, Brighton Socialist Party

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 21 December 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Leeds: community opposition wins temporary reprieve for playing fields

Iain Dalton, Chair, Save Fearnville Fields campaign

Community opposition, mobilised through the Save Fearnville Fields campaign, has forced a reprieve. The council has suspended until the New Year the seeking of permission to build a new 'free school' academy on the King George V playing fields.

Despite the council's own consultation showing 69% opposition from respondents, council officers were recommending to push ahead with proposals.

But since the consultation closed, the campaign's online petition has collected around 1,500 signatures opposing them.

With the support of Councillor Catherine Dobson of the 'East Leeds Independents', we took a deputation to Leeds council's 'Inner East Community Committee'.

Our local Corbynista MP, Richard Burgon, has written two open letters to council leader Judith Blake opposing the proposals. He states in his most recent one: "On this occasion I believe this proposal is wrong and the officers are wrong."

This, together with the pressure from below, has meant that the other five local Labour councillors are opposing the proposals. The pressure has forced the council to delay the decision until the New Year.

But we know we cannot rest on our laurels. We need to keep up the pressure to force the council to drop the proposal to build on the fields once and for all.

We're planning a big public meeting in January to help push forward the campaign and elect a formal steering committee, and we'll be holding a demonstration on the fields if the council won't back down.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 21 December 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Bradford protest against children's service cuts

Iain Dalton, Socialist Party West Yorkshire organiser

Demonstrators gathered ahead of Bradford council's monthly meeting to protest proposals in the consultation of an 'early help service', part of the children's services directorate of the council.

The plans propose a £13 million cut mostly by making up to 480 staff redundant. The council also wants to downgrade children's centres across the district, currently used by 22,000 young children, 60% of all under-fives.

Trade unionists in the council, users of the service and their supporters distributed leaflets produced by the local Unite the Union branch.

David Ward, former Liberal Democrat MP and now an independent councillor spoke to demonstrators opposing the proposals and mentioned the Green Party group on the council was challenging the proposals too.

Unfortunately, the response from the local Labour leadership is to double down on pushing these cutbacks through. Val Slater, the executive member covering the service, told the local press: "Naturally people have a right to protest but until government starts to address our major concerns regarding funding for children's social care, then we have to manage with the limited funding we have." As if the government is going to change its position without huge pressure being exerted on them to do so.

If Labour councillors want to follow through on Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity policies then they ought to be leading the fight to force the money out of the government to fund vital local services, such as this or the library service, which faces a further near £1 million worth of cuts in the forthcoming budget proposals.

Anything less than doing so is a dereliction of duty for those who want to fight the cuts. It should include putting forward a no-cuts budget for 2018-19.

In the meantime, campaigners are planning for a second, larger demonstration to take place outside the council budget setting meeting in February. Socialist Party members will be arguing that this should be opened out to all those fighting against the various raft of cuts being made by the council.

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) conference

Saturday 10 February

Main session: 'Building support for Jeremy Corbyn's anti-cuts policies in the 2018 local elections - should socialist anti-austerity candidates stand in May?'

Student Central, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HY, 11am-4:30pm (registration from 10am)

- [See tusc.org.uk/events](http://tusc.org.uk/events)
-

Equal sick pay rights secured for all staff at Charlton Park Academy

Negotiating committee statement

After months of action including six days of strikes at Charlton Park Academy in south east London, members of general union GMB and the National Education Union (NEU) have gained a well-deserved victory. 'Burgundy and Green Book' conditions have been won for all staff beginning on 1 December 2017.

Since Charlton Park Academy (CPA) became an academy in 2012, new staff were no longer protected by national terms and conditions (Burgundy and Green Book). These staff employed on the new academy contract saw serious reductions in their sick pay entitlements.

Sick pay

Staff became aware of the situation when one teacher who had experienced an industrial injury and was off work discovered she was only entitled to four weeks sick pay and had to pay her rent using a credit card.

Strikes began in July 2017 which involved both NEU and GMB members with over 90 staff at the school taking part. Pickets have been vibrant and determined and have excellent support from the local community.

On 29 November, after three weeks of talks at conciliation service Acas, agreement was reached between all parties to secure Burgundy and Green Book rights for all staff with the proviso of a trial period to monitor its implementation.

We are immensely proud of the unity and dedication of GMB and NEU members and what we have achieved together. We have protected the dignity and rights of all staff at CPA and reminded every education worker that when we stand together we can win. We hope we inspire others to do the same when their conditions are under threat.

We would also like to thank all the NEU branches that sent cheques and donations to sustain support staff during the strike. This vital financial support was key to the victory of this dispute.

Thanks again to all of you who stood with us!

Newham: school strike solid as bosses barge through on academy status

James Ivens, East London Socialist Party

Avenue School was in near-total shutdown on 14 December, its second strike day in opposition to becoming a quasi-privatised 'academy'.

Dozens of teachers, learning support assistants (LSAs), parents and children filled the pavement outside the east London primary. The energy of strikers and campaigners shows no sign of flagging.

National Education Union (NEU) rep Louise Cuffaro, a member of the Socialist Party, is leading the action. NEU members in Newham have just elected her their new branch secretary.

Louise had been at recent negotiations with management. "We got the LSAs in the room, we won that. Management hadn't wanted them in there because they don't have negotiating rights. But we pointed out that there's not anything to negotiate on here. They want the school to become an academy. We don't. There's no middle ground."

Louise also reported that staff at other schools in the borough have contacted her. They are discussing joining the fight against forced academisation.

That evening staff and parents lobbied a meeting of the school's governors. A union delegation led by Louise went in to argue on behalf of the staff and parents. A consultation of staff and parents found well over 100 oppose academisation. The number in favour was in single digits.

Consultants for the 'Eko' academy trust claimed only a minority oppose academisation - because the turnout was under 50%! "This is a travesty of democracy," said Louise.

[Opposition from parents and staff is overwhelming](#). Campaigners are demanding that governors put the decision to a ballot. But management seems determined to push the new status through.

A consultant for the academy chain even took this attitude to the demonstration outside the meeting. After peaceful protesters surrounded his enormous car, they witnessed him barging it into one of them. After the protester crumpled to the ground, the consultant got out and laughed, seeming to think the whole affair was a joke.

Action will continue in the new year.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 21 December 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Fire service staffing victory

At the North Yorkshire Fire Authority meeting on 13 December, the decision was taken unanimously to reverse the decision made three years ago to reduce crewing of 'tactical response vehicles' (TRVs) to just three firefighters. These vehicles will now return to a minimum crew of four.

This is a victory for all those who have been campaigning over this issue for the last two and a half years. Socialist Party members across North Yorkshire played a crucial part in building public opposition to these proposals when they were first announced, particularly in Harrogate where we held stalls alongside local Fire Brigades Union (FBU) activists.

This decision, however, doesn't fully reverse the cuts, as the TRVs themselves were newly introduced in 2015, replacing large, more fully equipped fire engines, as well as following from a reduction of 50 firefighter posts lost between 2010 and 2015.

Nevertheless, FBU members and others involved in the campaign will be celebrating a setback for the austerity agenda in this largely Tory-dominated county.

Iain Dalton, North Yorkshrie Socialist Party organiser

Leeds college pay protests

Following successful [pay protests in November](#) at Leeds City College further education unions UCU and Unison decided to keep the momentum going in December and planned repeat action.

Staff want to show they are serious about receiving a meaningful pay award this year by holding protests every month - until the college shows it is willing to enter a constructive dialogue on the issue. Staff have not received any rise in pay over the last two academic years despite the ever-rising cost of living.

At the Printworks Campus on 13 December, ten staff members braved heavy rainfall to make their presence known outside and show they were not going to back down. The following day at the Park Lane Campus around 30 staff members gathered with placards and flags, sang songs and ate mince pies.

Unison members are also currently being balloted about whether or not they wish to consider strike action over the refusal of Leeds City College to accept the Association of Colleges' recommendation of a 1% pay rise last year.

Leeds City College Unison member

Catalan elections: PP humiliated

Movement mobilises once more for the Catalan republic

Extracts from statement by Esquerra Revolucionària/Izquierda Revolucionaria (CWI in the Spanish state)

The Catalan election on 21 December was a massive defeat for the Spanish nationalist 'bloc of article 155' - the imposition of direct rule in Catalonia - and an even bigger blow to this bloc's main force, the right-wing People's Party (PP) of prime minister Mariano Rajoy.

The capitalist media try to minimise the magnitude of this defeat by talking about the 'victory' of Ciudadanos (right-wing Spanish nationalist party) but the reality is different. Even if we take only the votes of Junts per Catalunya (JuntsxCat, the list led by self-exiled Catalan president Carles Puigdemont) and ERC (Republican Left of Catalonia) together, they won over 800,000 votes more than Ciudadanos.

This result is even more important given the fact that the electoral campaign was full of irregularities, threats and desperate attempts by the Spanish and Catalan ruling classes to prevent mass support for a Catalan republic being expressed.

After calling the elections, the PP government tried to demobilise the vote in favour of a Catalan republic by stating that even if these parties won and tried to fulfil the mandate of the people, the only result would be the maintenance of article 155 and more repression.

The government has opened up new judicial proceedings against leaders who participated in the 1 October independence referendum, like Marta Rovira, Artur Mas, Ana Gabriel and others.

The campaign of fear promoted by the Spanish and Catalan capitalists since 1 and 3 October (with the withdrawal of companies from Catalonia, threats of economic collapse, and apocalyptic talk of civil war) continued and intensified in the days prior to the election. JuntsxCat and ERC have also been obliged to run their campaigns without their leading candidates (in prison or exile).

Far from representing a shift to the right, these results represent a new impressive mobilisation of the same masses who confronted police batons and rubber bullets on 1 October.

More than two million people have again shouted loud and clear to all those willing to listen, who have not been silenced by fear or by parliamentary cretinism, that they want to break with the repressive regime of 1978 (post-Franco constitution) and will not allow their struggle for a Catalan republic which guarantees real social improvement and change to be shut down.

Biggest loser

The biggest election loser was the PP - the most corrupt party in Europe, inheritors of Francoism, champions of repression and censorship. It lost almost half its votes since 2015, and went from eleven to three seats, not even able to form a parliamentary group.

Ciudadanos won 300,000 new votes but these are votes mostly taken from their rivals, including traditional Socialist Party (PSC) voters. These voters preferred Ciudadanos (who they had still not seen in government) to the promises of "regeneration" from the PSC which is more and more discredited. 165,000 PP voters also switched to Ciudadanos.

Ciudadanos' campaign was based on the absence of any concrete programme (its programme is that of big business, the same as the PP). Inés Arrimadas, its leader, made constant demagogic declarations, calling for attention to be paid to social problems rather than the independence process and using the flight of companies and capital to present a nightmare scenario if independence was declared.

This was all mixed up with lies designed to play on the feelings of wide sections of the Catalan population with origins in the rest of the Spanish state.

This demagogic campaign allowed Ciudadanos to also win a layer of workers from industrial neighbourhoods in the 'red belt' of Barcelona and Tarragona, who have been hit by the crisis and demobilised by the collaborationist policies of the major trade union (CCOO and UGT) leaders, and disappointed by the lack of a strong left alternative.

Mistakes

Incredibly, the leaders of Catalunya en Comu (Catalan electoral list supported by left party Podemos and United Left - IU - whose main component is the Communist Party) and Unidos Podemos (Spanish Left electoral list) refused to put the fight against the reactionary monarchist bloc and article 155 at the centre of their campaign. They didn't link the defence of the result of the 1 October referendum with a mobilisation for social demands.

They even refused to clearly denounce the existence of political prisoners or demand their freedom.

The rhetoric of the Unidos Podemos and Catalunya en Comu leaders repeated the false arguments of Ciudadanos, saying that the referendum was illegitimate or that the struggle for a republic was to blame for the threat of fascism. This all served to strengthen reaction and facilitate Ciudadanos capturing the votes of a layer of workers who were demoralised and affected by the campaign of fear.

The leaders of Unidos Podemos and Catalunya en Comu have behaved like old-fashioned social-democratic politicians, appealing to "love" and "cordiality" to "reconnect" society, at a time when the PP is ruling Catalonia with the police baton, and despite the PP having only three MPs in the Catalan parliament.

United front

One of the results which will have surprised many left activists is that JuntsxCat won more votes than ERC within the independence camp, and that the CUP (Popular Unity Candidacy - a left-wing Catalan independence party) lost votes and seats.

However, it would be mistaken to identify votes for JuntsxCat as political support for the right-wing PdeCat party (led by Puigdemont).

Hundreds of thousands of young people, middle class and even layers of workers who have fought against PdeCat voted for JuntsxCat because they see Puigdemont as someone who has fought against the state and who is denouncing repression and organising a struggle from exile.

The JuntsxCat list campaign was also clearer in its rejection of repression than that of the ERC leaders, who said they would accept article 155 and the constitution.

The results for the CUP also show how it is not enough to merely state that the republic must have a social content in electoral rallies.

The CUP played a key role in guaranteeing the referendum on 1 October and in fighting to respect its result through the Committees in Defence of the Republic.

However, the CUP is paying for its leaders' mistake, in deciding to prop up the PdeCat in government, vote in favour of its budgets and generally tail-end the other pro-independence parties.

Consequences

What will happen now? The PP has sunk in Catalonia and Ciudadanos has swallowed its electoral base. This fact has deep political consequences for the whole Spanish state. It is a serious threat to Rajoy, because the surge of Ciudadanos could be consolidated.

For this reason, it is even more improbable that the government of Rajoy and the state will meaningfully negotiate with the Catalan independence movement, or even agree to a constitutional reform.

If they do something like that, they know they will leave the way open for Ciudadanos to undermine them further. The PP will continue polarising politics around the Catalan national question, and will not hold back.

The judicial processes and the repression will not subside, quite the contrary.

The failure of Unidos Podemos in Catalonia also has great consequences. Without understanding the role of national oppression in the struggle to transform society, Podemos has intervened in Catalonia with a position full of inconsistencies and concessions to Spanish nationalism. The refusal of Podemos's leader Pablo Iglesias to lead the fight for a Catalan republic, his turn to the right in recent months, and the failure of his objective of removing Rajoy through parliamentary pacts with Psoe, are a guarantee for new disasters.

The ruling class have not been able to end the revolutionary crisis which was opened up by the victory of the masses against repression on 1 and 3 October. The political and social crisis in Catalonia will continue and sharpen, and the legitimate aspirations of the Catalan people will not be satisfied by this reactionary state.

In the current conjuncture, it is key that the social movements and parties of the left who have carried the weight of the struggle for a Catalan republic and the right to decide, resume mobilisation on the streets.

This whole process, and recent events, have also demonstrated the need to build a consistent alternative that is not subordinated to PDeCat or to bourgeois and petit-bourgeois politicians who have shown their inability to take the struggle for self-determination to the end, and do not want to break with the logic of capitalism (which is the cause of national and social oppression).

- More articles on Catalonia, see socialistworld.net

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/26645>