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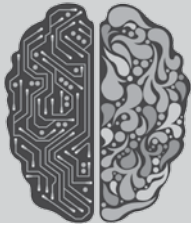
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photo USDay/CC

AUSTERITY NOT ONE MORE DAY



photo Marco Verch/CC

TORIES OUT NOW

Nick Chaffey

Socialist Party national committee

Four million
workers are
living in poverty
- a rise of more than
half a million over five
years, according to
the Joseph Rowntree
Foundation.

Over four million children are also stuck in poverty - and the numbers are rising.

We say: not one more day of Tory austerity. Not one more hungry child. Not one more homeless person. Not one more social care package cut.

These are the real issues enmeshed in the current Brexit crisis. And to solve them requires socialist policies along with mass action by working-class people.

The clock is ticking on the Brexit time bomb which threatens to blow the Tory party apart and pave the way for a new general election. Unable to satisfy her warring Tory

factions, May's Brexit deal is on the rocks.

For the millions hit by this cruel decade of austerity, the question is how to sink May and the Tories?

As weak and divided as they are, the Tories will not go without a fight. Corbyn must turn up the heat and mobilise the millions who were inspired by his general election anti-austerity manifesto.

The trade union leaders must also mobilise the unions' six million members and together, organise a mass national demonstration under the slogans of "Tories out, general election now, end austerity".

The tremors of working-class

anger can be felt around the country on the picket lines of council workers in Glasgow and Birmingham, and the train guards' pickets across the country.

Protests against Universal Credit, a brewing revolt in schools against funding cuts, along with a deeper winter NHS crisis, all add to the pressure on May. What if Labour-run councils instead of wielding the Tory axe, joined the fight and refused to carry out further Tory cuts to our services?

The Socialist Party has consistently argued for a socialist alternative to end Tory rule and austerity. As the anti-austerity protests across France

show (see page 12), the EU bosses' club faces its own crisis.

Events have confirmed the weak and feeble position of the Tories. Now we must seize the time, mobilise around the call for an immediate general election, and drive the Tories out! Join us in this fight!

■ See editorial pages 2&3

Protest against May's Brexit deal
Tuesday 11 December at 5pm
Join the socialist bloc!

■ Meet at Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7GA, next to St Thomas' Hospital, before marching to parliament



What we think

The clock is continuing to tick for Theresa May and the Tories. The stakes are high for everyone - May and the Tories and behind them the British capitalist establishment. But also for the working class and the labour and trade union movement. What happens in the next few weeks can be critical.

May's Brexit deal goes to the vote in parliament on 11 December and as we go to press, it is looking likely that it will fall. This would be a huge setback for big business, who at this stage, despite their Remain position, have reluctantly become reconciled to May's fudged deal.

This is because it is the softest possible Brexit that attempts to retain as much of the neoliberal rules and directives of the EU that they believe they can get away with. As the vote nears, doomsday scenarios from the financial institutions, including the Bank of England, are being brought out to give the impression that May's deal is the only option.

Demonstration

It appears that there will be a TV debate between May and Jeremy Corbyn on the deal. But the danger is that the labour and trade union movement reduce themselves to bystanders, even though this vicious anti-working class Tory government is tottering and nearly off its feet. In a period such as this, the movement must urgently act. We have called for an emergency Trade Union Congress general council that should organise a mass demonstration around the demand of 'Tories Out - for an immediate general election.'

If this had been done, it could have totally changed the situation. However, in the absence of this action, other forces are attempting to fill the vacuum that can divide the working class. Ukip and the far-right Tommy Robinson have called an opportunist and divisive 'Brexit betrayal' demonstration two days before the parliamentary vote on 9 December.

This will be countered by Remainers campaigning for a

CORBYN AND TRADE UNION MOVEMENT URGENTLY NEED TO FIGHT FOR A GENERAL ELECTION TO KICK OUT THE TORIES



photos Paul Mattsson

'People's Vote' - in reality a second referendum - allowing Robinson and Ukip to portray themselves as the defenders of democracy in upholding the 2016 result.

But if there was a mass anti-Tory, anti-austerity demonstration led by Corbyn, John McDonnell and the trade unions, it would have the potential to unite workers against the government. This should have already been called - time has been lost - but plans should now urgently be put in place to call such a demonstration on 15 December if May loses her vote.

Imagine if Corbyn used the TV debate to appeal to workers and their families to come to such a mobilisation, promising that he will table a vote of no-confidence if the deal is lost. He could put forward the anti-austerity programme of last year's general election, explaining how his policies to renationalise the railways, Royal Mail and other privatised services and industries would run counter to EU regulations and May's deal. He could also explain how such a government would link up with workers' struggles across Europe, such as the fuel protests in France against Macron, the poster-boy of many pro-austerity Remainers.

This would immediately change the whole debate - giving a working-class alternative to the Tory and Blairite Remainers and the Tory hard Brexiteers, both of them committed to protecting the profits of big business at the expense of workers.

General election

However, the pressure is being put on Corbyn and McDonnell to retreat. Over the weekend, Sir Keir Starmer, shadow Brexit secretary, has cranked up this message still further. McDonnell's earlier interview with the BBC signalled a passive acceptance that a general election will not be held: "We should have a general election but that's a very difficult thing to do because of the legislation that David Cameron brought forward. If that's not possible, we'll be calling for the government to join us in a public vote."

McDonnell justified this because of the "difficulty" in overcoming Cameron's Fixed-Term Parliament Act. But this poses things in purely parliamentary terms and ignores the potential of a mass movement that he could lead with Corbyn and the unions in fighting for an election. He should remember the protest in Parliament Square in 2016, organised when the Parliamentary Labour Party were meeting as part of the attempted Corbyn coup. It helped to galvanise the campaign to defeat the Blairites. Better still, he should remind himself that despite the Act, there was a general election called last year, just two years into the five-year term. And the result has left May's government in crisis!

McDonnell has also admitted holding secret talks with Blairite spin-doctors Alistair Campbell and Tom Baldwin, now playing a leading role in the People's Vote campaign, allowing sections of the media to strengthen the emphasis on another referendum at the expense of a general election. The People's Vote campaign includes the likes of Tory Anna Soubry and Blairites Chuka Umunna and Sadiq Khan, who virulently oppose Corbyn and his policies.

Pressure

This is a dangerous road, creating a perception that perhaps Corbyn is allying with the neoliberal pro-EU campaigners. The Momentum group are one of the organisations supporting the 9 December Remain demonstration. All this is an anticipation of how he could come under huge pressure if elected into government. Actually, the Blairites see a second referendum as a means to avoid a Corbyn-led Labour government.

Corbyn must stand firm in opposition to any Brexit deal that retains the anti-working class, neoliberal and pro-austerity features of the EU bosses' club. He should whip Labour MPs to vote against May's deal, and should it fail, be prepared to table a vote of no-confidence in order to force a general election. But it should be backed up by a mass mobilisation of the working class through joint action by Corbyn and the trade union movement. This is the urgent strategy needed to force the Tories out and unite workers for a socialist alternative.

PCS AGS election: Where now after the PCS Left Unity conference?



Socialist Party members in PCS

The PCS civil service union's Left Unity conference met on 1 December to discuss the way forward for the left in the union on the many issues facing PCS, particularly next year's pay campaign.

There was also a major discussion about the Left Unity elections, which saw an extremely close result for key positions, including for assistant general secretary. The elected slate will contest the PCS assistant general secretary and national executive committee elections early next year.

There was a heated debate because initially the votes of three Left Unity geographical groups, who had all voted for Socialist Party member Chris Baugh in the assistant general secretary election, were going to be ruled out because of 'clerical errors'. This caused a big number of complaints from Left Unity members, in those and other groups.

Votes

While conference accepted a proposal from the Left Unity secretary to include the votes of London and Fylde, plus nine of 13 ruled-out postal votes, the votes from the West Midlands - which while known and verified but not received - were still disallowed. These votes would have meant that Socialist Party member Dave Semple would have retained his Left Unity editor's position.

Chris confirmed at the conference that he accepted the Left Unity result. However, the day after the conference, Janice Godrich withdrew as the assistant general secretary candidate on health grounds. This is very unfortunate and of course we send her our best wishes for her recovery.

Many Left Unity members will now expect that the incumbent assistant general secretary Chris Baugh will be now be confirmed as Left Unity's candidate.

Chris won 48% of the vote in what was an extremely closely fought election, in which only he and Janice put their names forward. His selection would allow Left Unity to move forward into the elections and ensure the union is able to best prepare for next year's pay battle.

■ Read more: 'PCS: the real issues at stake' at socialistparty.org.uk

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**PCS
RE-ELECT**

CHRIS BAUGH

#Chris4AGS

Northants council worker

The Tory government has given Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) permission to use £60 million from the sale of its headquarters, One Angel Square, to fund essential services.

Allowing NCC to do this is unusual and clearly a political move to prevent Tory government ministers from having to directly bail out the Tory local authority.

The Socialist Party opposes selling off public buildings like One Angel Square.

But it does show that councils can use capital receipts to refuse to carry through austerity.

The government is weak. A campaign by Labour councils that fights to win the money needed to fund services from the government could be part of the campaign to get the Tories out.

Bankrupt

Struggling NCC was effectively bankrupt at the end of 2017. It has since been subject to two separate Section 114 notices, banning officers from any new spending on anything except core, mandatory services, such as social care.

This cash injection will likely spare NCC the embarrassment of declaring itself insolvent for the third time this year. But it won't spare working-class people the pain of austerity.

A recent damning Ofsted report into the county's failing children's services highlighted numerous issues, including many vulnerable children being left without a social worker and serious cases being left unassigned for months.

NCC has completely failed to address the seriousness of the situation. They have continued along the path of austerity - planned poverty of the working class to pay for the economic crisis.

The Tory government's cuts to local-authority funding have driven this crisis. NCC is not the only council on the brink of financial collapse.

Northamptonshire council crisis continues This small reprieve will not stop austerity - no-cuts budget needed



Northants photo Steve Score

Residents in the county have expressed their anger and there have been numerous protests by Save Northants Services outside County Hall in Northampton. But anger is not enough.

Cuts will continue despite the

£60-million cash injection from the headquarters sale if a mass campaign of the trade unions, workforce and the community to resist the cuts and force extra funding from the government isn't built.

Workers should not suffer from

Tory austerity. We stand by Northamptonshire's residents, putting forward an alternative to the utter failure of the current local authority. Cuts and privatisation must be immediately reversed.

Campaigners are demanding

the council resign and new elections be held to give local people an anti-austerity alternative to Tory cuts. The Socialist Party says that it's vital that any candidates aiming to replace the Tories back a no-cuts budget.

RACIST ATTACK IN HUDDERSFIELD

- Community rejects division
- Cuts only create more problems

Huddersfield Socialist Party

There's been an outpouring of grief and anger as the video showing the bullying incident of Syrian refugee, Jamal, at Almondbury School in Huddersfield went viral.

The video has now been watched millions of times online and resulted in around £150,000 being raised through a funding page to help the stricken family. It has since come to light that Jamal's sister has also been

attacked and had her veil forcibly removed by other pupils.

The incident happened in October and Jamal sustained a fractured wrist from previous assaults. He had written to Ofsted, the Department of Education, councillors, police and his MP asking for help, but still felt unsupported and the family has now decided neither pupil will be returning to school.

The incident has revealed the anger in response to racist bullying. Jamal has spoken out through his

solicitor appealing to people not to harm his attacker, whose home is now under police protection following vigilante-style attacks on it.

Local Muslim elders and community leaders have appealed for calm and asked that the authorities, who have so far failed Jamal, be left to deal with the matter.

But this cannot be a recipe for inaction by working-class people in the community, leaving the field to far-right racist Tommy Robinson intervening with a calculated

provocation. He claimed that Jamal had been involved in an attack on a young female at the school. Her mother has intervened on Tommy Robinson's Facebook post telling him he is wrong and demanding he take the post down.

It seems these racists will go to any lengths to stir-up community tension. Jamal's family is now taking legal action against Tommy Robinson.

In Huddersfield, the local community has shown great support for Jamal, with parents protesting outside the school seeking reassurances about pupil safety and against racism.

This incident has uncovered racist and bullying issues in our schools. These will not be resolved with arbitrary exclusions but require a more coordinated approach.

Education cuts and the decimation of youth services will mean that such incidents are likely to resurface.

Almondbury School has massively reduced pastoral support for

pupils. The school is struggling to maintain pupil numbers and will now face further problems following this publicity. The threat of an Ofsted report and the cuts that can bring in its wake will exacerbate the situation.

The Socialist Party stands with Jamal and his family in solidarity against racist bullying. We are repeating our calls on the local trade unions and the rest of the movement to fight for a reversal of education and youth-service cuts.

Our local schools are suffering from acute underfunding and a whole generation of young people are cut adrift from access to decent jobs, homes and services.

Huddersfield Socialist Party is launching a solidarity campaign with education staff balloting for strike action against school cuts, and we will also now be taking up the wider issues of jobs and homes for all to cut across the whipping up of racist divisions.

ARROGANT LANDLORDS CAN BE BEATEN



photo Socialist Party

Paul Kershaw

Unite housing workers, chair

Housing association bosses gave Theresa May a standing ovation after a speech on housing policy - you wouldn't find an audience of housing workers or tenants do that.

Catalyst Housing boss told

London Assembly (LA) members that his organisation had derecognised unions in order to listen to its staff better! The LA housing committee vice-chair said they wouldn't accept that from a private employer let alone one that gets public funding.

And housing bosses said that they hadn't followed the information commissioner's request that they proactively share fire-risk assessments with residents because

they wouldn't understand them!

Housing association tenants and workers increasingly see these landlords as narrowly profit-focussed and are getting organised through the Social Housing Action Campaign (Shac).

While pressure has forced retreats, the deregulation of housing associations remains.

Associations can now convert social-rented homes to more

expensive tenures without consent from the housing regulator. More than 100,000 social-rent homes were lost in this way from 2011-12 to 2016-17. The rate of these homes being lost has declined somewhat following pressure. But 5,344 were still lost in 2017-18.

Housing Association rents have risen by £60 a week since 2002 - faster than wages - and the impact of Universal Credit is making things

even worse.

Jeremy Corbyn has called for a return to the level of council-house building last seen in the 1970s. He needs to link that to calls for mass action to get the Tories out so he can implement this demand. It must also be translated into specific commitments to fully fund a mass programme of council-house building and Housing Association residents must be given a real say.

Fatal bus crash - an avoidable tragedy

'Tom Woodcock'

Birmingham Central Socialist Party

As a former bus driver I was appalled by the news story about Kailash Chander, the Stagecoach bus driver, whose dangerous driving resulted in the death of two people.

In October 2015, the 77 year old mistook the brake for the accelerator pedal and mounted the kerb outside Sainsbury's in Coventry city centre.

He couldn't stand trial due to his dementia and was handed a two-year supervision order by the court last week. What does this say about Tory benefit cuts and poverty pensions, that an old and disabled man is driving a bus?

It sickens me to learn that Chander had been working 75-hour weeks, and had been the subject of 24 complaint letters regarding his driving standards. A plain-clothes bus inspector reported Chander's poor driving, but despite this, he

continued to be employed. Stagecoach put profit before safety.

The £2.3 million fine handed to the bus company will not make any difference to the families of 76-year-old pedestrian Dora Hancox or little Rowan Fitzgerald, aged seven. Rowan was travelling back from a football match with his grandad on the bus.

Both were killed as a result of unfit-driver Chander being put to work by Stagecoach to cover staff shortages. The fine will barely dent Stagecoach's £123m profits from their local bus operations.

Stagecoach bosses have been let off the hook. They should have been jailed for corporate manslaughter. It was they who ignored the dangers and placed an unsafe driver behind the wheel of one of their buses.

As gross an example as this is, I have been convinced for many years that it would only be a matter of time before the long-hours culture of the bus industry led to a horrific incident.

Readers may be surprised to learn that bus drivers on local routes can work up to 16 hours a day, are entitled to as little as eight-and-a-half-hours rest between shifts, and work up to 19 days without a day off.

My union for transport workers, RMT, has called for bus-driving hours to be brought in-line with slightly more stringent EU hours which are used for coach and lorry drivers. This has been resisted by the employers, citing the impact on their fat profits.

Overworked

During my 10 years on the buses in London and the West Midlands, many drivers worked all of their rest days and booked as much overtime as possible to make up for the low wages. Supervisors were always asking if you would do an extra trip for them or come in on your day off to cover shifts.

Split shifts are the norm and together with highly restricted access to toilet facilities and frequent

abuse from members of the public, bus driving really is a long-hours and unhealthy occupation.

Bus drivers are exempt from many workplace health and safety regulations that the law affords to most other workers.

Bus industry standards need to be urgently improved. Driving hours should be reduced to a maximum of 35 hours a week, wages must be sharply uplifted to a liveable level, and shifts must be compiled and rostered with the safety and wellbeing of drivers in mind. Train driving is seen as an attractive job, why can't bus driving be?

Renationalising the bus service without compensation to the corporate parasites who have been sucking the industry dry for 30 years will be the first and most important step towards this goal.



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VICTORY! GRIMETHORPE DINNER LADIES' STRIKE BEATS JOB CUTS



Angie Waller
Barnsley Socialist Party

The striking dinner ladies, teaching assistants and kitchen staff at Ladywood Primary School in Grimethorpe, South Yorkshire ended their all-out strike on Thursday 29 November. School management has backed down and withdrawn plans to make nine dinner ladies redundant.

The members of public service union Unison reached an agreement with school management which plugs the claimed budget deficit without any redundancies. The strikers have taken - in total - 36 days of action since September.

The dinner ladies and their union had always said the job cuts were unnecessary. The school had hired additional teaching and support staff.

Management's intention was to use teaching assistants to supervise lunchtimes instead, as well as setting children extracurricular activities. An added insult was the head paying to train her own dog from school funds!

Other school workers took the view that the dinner ladies are valued by the children, staff and parents. They were not prepared to see their family, friends and colleagues out of work.

This is a crucial win for all school workers around the country. The strikers have shown that you can't mess with people's livelihoods and not expect a fightback!

The dinner ladies have thanked all those who supported them, and say the solidarity helped keep them strong and determined to win.

Blairite Birmingham steps up union-busting and two workforces plan strikes

- Bin workers ballot over council payments to non-strikers
- Home carers to renew strike mandate over pay betrayal
- Brum Labour plans wholesale sell-off of all nurseries

Birmingham Socialist Party

Birmingham's Blairite Labour council won't get an easy Christmas this year. Two of its workforces - bin workers and home carers - are balloting for strikes. And protests will continue against the sell-off of the city's nurseries.

Bin workers

Bin workers struck to save jobs and beat the Blairite council last year, after three months of action led by general union Unite. But new information suggests the council paid

£4,000 to workers who did not strike - in effect, blacklisting striking Unite members.

Birmingham's Labour council disgusted many by spending £6 million on a strike-breaking workforce during the dispute. It is sinking still further with these payments.

At a Unite meeting, furious bin workers called for fresh strikes in response. The ballot will close on 14 December, and if successful the workers will be out from 28 December.

The workers who received the council's extra payment are represented by general union GMB. We need action to unite bin workers in struggle, not divide them so the employer can pick them off.



photo Birmingham Socialist Party

The GMB has not endeared itself to Birmingham nursery workers and users either. It has agreed the Blairites' plan to privatise or close the 14 remaining council-owned nurseries.

Home carers

As we go to press, Birmingham home carers are also returning ballot papers. Under the Tories' anti-union laws, they must refresh their strike vote every six months.

Their dispute over cuts to hours and pay - up to £11,000 a year for some - has already hit 12 months and 47 strike days. Rank-and-file members have pushed local leaders of public service union Unison to put more political pressure on the Labour council.

Frustrated that councillors have tried to ignore their action - less visible than the piles of refuse during the bin strike - home carers leafleted

key cutters' wards. Council leader Ian Ward's area was fully leafleted in just 90 minutes!

The leaflet asks residents if their councillors, by attacking low-paid women and their service users, represent "Labour values." Councillors promised a meeting with the unions so long as home carers ceased leafleting immediately!

But the council has gone back on its word before. Ahead of May's council elections it promised home carers could trial their own self-rostering system if they called off strikes. As soon as the elections were over, so was the self-roster trial.

Joint action

The bin workers' victory in 2017 was a source of inspiration for the home carers to take on the council themselves. Joint strikes by these workers would strengthen both disputes.

Nursery campaigners could join

up too. They are all fighting the same enemy and the same threat to jobs, pay, conditions and public services.

And as well as industrial pressure, the unions should work together to apply political pressure on the Labour council. Last year, Unite assistant general secretary Howard Beckett rightly told the council: "If you act like Tories, we'll treat you like Tories."

The unions should withdraw support from any councillor who continues to impose austerity. Anti-cuts councillors would instead use the platform to build a mass campaign to win more funding from central government, using reserves and borrowing to set no-cuts budgets in the meantime.

Birmingham workers can lead the way by applying pressure in their unions. Fight every cut, fight for socialist policies!

VICTORY FOR LEFT IN RMT UNION PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Michelle Rodgers has been elected president of transport union RMT in a landslide victory for the left in the union.

Michelle won 7,198 votes, beating the runner-up Steve Shaw by 2,600 votes. This is the result of a magnificent effort by grassroots members and reps around the country.

This is also the first time a woman has been elected to the most senior

lay position in the union.

Michelle's campaign focused squarely on building a member-led, democratic and militant trade union. This clearly inspired a significant number of members who are keen to defend the fighting political and industrial strategy of the RMT.

Socialist Party members in the RMT



photo Paul Mattsson

WHSmith: hands off our Post Offices!

Post Office management has earmarked a further 74 government-run 'Crown' Post Offices to close and franchise out by 2019, in this case to retailer WHSmith. The Post Office announced the closures only days after posting profits of around £35 million. By contrast, WHSmith has issued profit warnings and its future is not secure. Post Offices have already been totally lost after moving into shops

Ipswich

Staff at the site in Ipswich are working from the WHSmith store already, but currently employed and trained by the government-owned Post Office.

Proposed changes would mean WHSmith could run the branch. This will likely mean cuts to services and worsening of employees' terms and conditions in the future.

CWU members gathered with other trade unionists at Westgate Street in Ipswich to support the Save the Post Office campaign.

One local CWU rep said: "If this is allowed to happen then it is another step in the race to the bottom for our members' terms and conditions. The Post Office runs at a profit, so there is no logic in this step.

"Unless, of course, it is the government selling more of the country's silverware to profit-making organisations that want to fill shareholders' pockets while providing less of a service."

The Post Office insists this is part of continuing 'modernisation' of

which then closed.

If staff agree to transfer to WHSmith, then 'Tupé' transfer law protections only apply to their terms and conditions for 90 days. Staff in WHSmith are lower paid than Crown Post Office staff. Readers of the Socialist report on some of the Communications Workers' Union (CWU) protests against closures that took place on Saturday 1 December.



services to meet customer needs. However, the campaign was very well supported by the public, with thousands of people signing petitions and giving full support on social media.

Save our Post Office!

Adam Mitchell
CWU Suffolk Amal area delivery rep

Nottingham

Queen Street, Nottingham is a very busy Crown Post Office due to close

and move into WHSmith in January. Grantham, Mansfield and Solihull are also earmarked for closure in the Midlands.

26 people, mainly CWU members, protested against the closure outside the Post Office on 1 December. WHSmith services will be smaller with fewer staff and less expertise.

Nottingham CWU branch secretary Mark Harper said: "I collect 60 to 70 bags of post, collected at least six times a day, from Queen Street. It is one of the busiest Post Offices outside London.

"It is in a central location near to bus and tram stops. The are 12 to 15 staff on the counter, and it has 12 to 15,000 visitors every day - and twice as many as we get close to Christmas."

A visitor who signed the petition said: "The staff talk to me and help me fill in forms. The Post Office is a vital part of the community."

Clare Wilkins
Nottingham Socialist Party

Bradford College joins #FEfightback strike for decent pay

Iain Dalton
West Yorkshire
Socialist Party organiser

Bradford College was one of six colleges where workers took strike action for decent pay on 28-29 November.

Since the Tories have been in power, pay 'rises' in colleges have been below inflation - at 1%, or even zero. This year's announced pay rise of 1% hasn't even been implemented in two-fifths of colleges!

Members of the University and College Union were in good spirits on the picket line, with Bradford

College's flagship David Hockney building shut for the day by the strike.

At the strike rally, speakers made clear not only that college staff deserve decent pay, but that this is linked to the wider issue of further education funding. The Socialist Party fights for the reversal of all cuts.

The government has slashed funding in recent years. College managements have passed on widespread cutbacks, despite high pay rises for principals and spending on new college buildings.

■ Please send messages of support to
g.evans@bradfordcollege.ac.uk



[News in brief]

■ Shelter strike

Over 400 members of general union Unite working for housing charity Shelter are due to strike over pay. The 72-hour walkout from 11 December is in response to real-terms pay cuts. Workers demand a 3.5% increase.

■ Beefeater beef

Workers at the Historic Royal Palaces organised by civil service union PCS are balloting for strikes against pension cuts. The employer wants to close the

'final salary' scheme and move 120 staff to an inferior 'defined benefit' scheme.

■ Cammell Laird continues

Unite has extended its rolling strike action and overtime ban at shipbuilder Cammell Laird after bosses refused to suspend 291 redundancies for talks.

■ Buses bust-up

Bus drivers organised by Unite are due to strike for higher pay in Durham and Keighley. The 650 workers in the north east demand a £1-an-hour raise, and workers in West Yorkshire demand 50p.

Get all the latest union news from the National Shop Stewards Network at shopstewards.net

The growth of Artificial Intelligence technology

Its negative impact under capitalism and its revolutionary potential under socialism

Robin Clapp
Socialist Party national committee

In a warning laced with ironies, former warmongering US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger - who presided over many of the atrocities of the Vietnam war in the 1960s and 1970s - warned in an article in Russia Today in July that: “We are in the midst of a sweeping technical revolution whose consequences we have failed to fully reckon and whose culmination may be a world relying on machines powered by data and algorithms and ungoverned by ethical or philosophical norms”.

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), machines that do not just carry out pre-programmed instructions but learn more new programmes and instruction by experience and by new situations, does pose fundamental questions for capitalists and the workers’ movement, with some AI advocates arguing that algorithms will soon surpass the intelligence of humans. They call this the ‘singularity’ moment.

Yet for socialists, there is nothing intrinsically revolutionary about these new technologies while they remain restrained by the capitalist mode of production that needs human labour power to generate profit.

Indeed, in every previous historical epoch there have been new technologies, but their ownership has lain just as firmly in the economic grip of the ruling class of the day.

Robots and more highly developed forms of AI do not change the exploitation of humans by other humans and cannot solve the fundamental contradictions of capitalism. The productive forces long ago burst asunder the boundaries of the nation state, but this process cannot be completed by capitalism.

Many AIs exist principally as digital entities, but in other applications the intelligence is embodied in a

robot that augments human work. In manufacturing, robots are evolving from potentially dangerous and ‘dumb’ industrial machines into context-aware ‘cobots’.

The technology is already used widely, to provide speech and face recognition, language translation, and personal recommendations on music, film and shopping sites.

Calculating and predicting more quickly and accurately than has ever been possible what the likelihood is of a particular outcome, is the fundamental advance which AI brings.

In the future, it is claimed that AI could deliver driverless cars, smart personal assistants, and intelligent energy grids. Yet in austerity-ridden capitalist society, even the filling of potholes is a task beyond this system.

Jobs risk

As long as capitalism is in the driving seat, a planned and coordinated rolling out of AI is impossible in a manner that creates well-paid jobs and new opportunities for workers displaced by machines.

The economist Robert Gordon predicts 47% of jobs in the US, most of them semi-skilled, will disappear in the next few years, while an in-depth study by Citi and Oxford University predicts that 77% of all jobs in China are at risk of automation and 57% of all jobs across the OECD (a grouping of advanced capitalist countries).

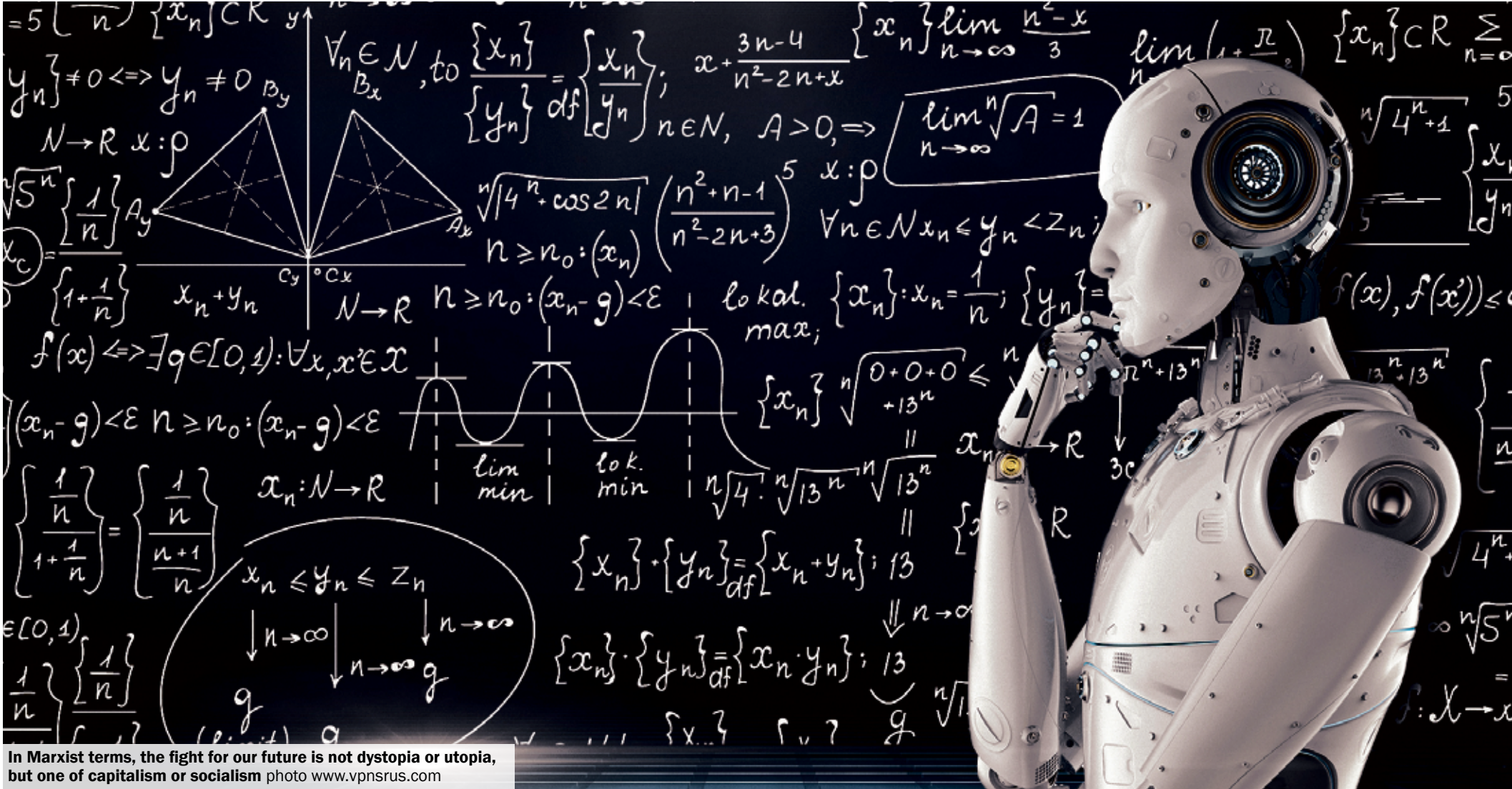
The responsibility for combatting this dystopian view of the future lies with the workers’ organisations and left parties. But the leaderships have not put forward clear ideas for the organised working class to see its role in changing society.

Instead of simply bowing to the ‘inevitable’, the trade unions must formulate a programme for jobs that includes the demand for an immediate struggle for a shorter working week without loss of pay, sharing out the work without loss of pay and a real living minimum wage.

These demands must be linked



Today has parallels with the 1930s rather than with the post-war boom years, meaning AI is curtailed by capitalism, just as new technologies were stymied in the inter-war years



In Marxist terms, the fight for our future is not dystopia or utopia, but one of capitalism or socialism photo www.vpnusrus.com

to public ownership of major industries under workers’ control and management, in order to facilitate democratic socialist planning.

The capitalists themselves at their annual hideaways in Davos, Switzerland, have begun to ponder this question of how to deal with displaced workers and the social risks that will be triggered by large-scale surges in unemployment.

Traditional ‘middle class’ jobs will be threatened too and as Karl Marx warned 170 years ago, the continuation of capitalism leads inevitably to the growing pauperisation of the mass of the population.

Therefore it is incumbent on socialists not to settle for the idea of a ‘universal basic income’ as advanced by many on the utopian liberal left, but instead to fight for the full socialist transformation of society, which alone can take full advantage of the dazzling potential latent in AI.

On the basis of a socialist revolution and common ownership, the distribution of the output produced by the robots can be controlled and distributed to each, according to their needs. If society operates through maintaining the private ownership of the robots, then the class struggle for the control of the surplus must continue.

The use of robots has grown exponentially since the 1950s. An industrial robot costs about £4 an hour to operate, compared to average total EU labour costs of about £40 an

hour or £9 an hour in China.

Pepper Robots which engage in basic interactions and monitoring with elderly people are used in thousands of care homes in Japan. They communicate through speech and with gestures, moving independently and picking up signs that someone is unwell. With 25% of Japan’s population now aged 65 or over, on present trends, there will be a shortfall of 380,000 care workers by 2025.

The UK will need up to 700,000 more care-working roles by 2030. Pepper robots are being trialled here too and recently one performed before a parliamentary select committee. What impact will this have on the quality of social care?

Robotics

China is now the world’s biggest operator of industrial robots, according to the International Federation of Robotics.

One company, which exports 1,500 kitchen sinks a day, has spent over \$3 million on nine robots that do jobs formerly done by 140 workers. The boss comments: “These machines are cheaper, more precise and more reliable than people. I’ve never had a whole batch ruined by robots. I look forward to replacing more humans in future.”

Robots are employed in abattoirs and butchery and can cut fat off meat much more efficiently than humans, because of the use of cheaper and more responsive sensors.

Another boss boasts: “It’s becoming economically feasible to use machines to do this because you save another 3 or 4% of the meat - and that’s worth a lot on a production line, where you can move quickly.”

The payback period for a welding robot in the Chinese automotive industry dropped from 5.3 years to 1.3 years between 2010 and 2017, according to analysts at Citi.

China’s rising labour costs may be an indirect silver lining because they are driving technological advancement, but simultaneously, immense social problems are being stored up, where massive and constant displacements of workers is leading to a rash of bitter industrial strikes, a questioning of the regime and tomorrow, even revolutionary movements.

Technology is never a neutral factor in production in a class society. The internet is a valuable means of communication for the workers’ movement, but can also be used to undermine democratic debate and spread misinformation. In extremis, right-wing governments have shut it down!

Prior to the financial crash of 2007 which triggered the ‘great recession’, the gurus of high finance boasted that their wizardry with algorithms had assured them there was almost no risk to the ‘skyscraper on chicken’s legs’ that was the volatile, speculative and largely fictitious derivatives market.

They were soon to learn that

financial algorithms are not infallible. Others continue to be hypnotised by the get-rich-quick crypto-currency market, powered by algorithms and destined once again to end in tears for the parasitic ‘coupon clippers’ (wealthy holders of interest-bearing bonds).

At best the applications of AI can be rolled out only unevenly by the private sector. Historically the much-derided state has taken the risk in advancing science and AI, with the algorithm that led to Google’s success coming from a grant from the US National Science Foundation.

The iPhone would not exist if not for previously developed public technologies - the internet, GPS, lithium-ion batteries, microprocessors, multi-touch screen, SIRI, click-wheel, liquid crystal display, and so on.

Planning

A major technological innovation is unfolding around nanotechnology - the manipulation of matter on an atomic, molecular and supra-molecular scale.

This requires cooperation and co-ordination among a variety of disciplines, including physics, chemistry, materials science, engineering and computer simulation. So far, it has been governments that have been primarily financing this research.

Today has parallels with the 1930s rather than with the post-war boom years, meaning AI is curtailed by



Instead of simply bowing to the ‘inevitable’, the trade unions must launch an immediate struggle for a shorter working week without loss of pay...

capitalism, just as new technologies were stymied in the inter-war years. The capitalist economist JM Keynes argued that the application of these technologies in the 1930s could even then reduce the working week to 19 hours. Yet investment and production seized up as economic depression spread like virus.

Marx and Engels explained through the law of historical materialism that the motor force of progress is the development of the means of production - industry, science, technology and technique. The development of the productive forces is a process of humankind’s mastery over nature, of harnessing the forces bequeathed to us by our surroundings.

Those forms of AI that are presently conceived as most important include transformative developments like gene-sequencing technology, broad reach forms like the internet, economically lucrative breakthroughs like advanced robotics and potential game-changers such as energy storage technologies. 3D computers, once just a Star Trek fantasy, have opened up limitless possibilities.

In healthcare, AI can multi-scan cancer patients, allowing for adaptive radiotherapy where scanning, image mark-up and beam planning are done before every treatment session. That way, the radiotherapy beams are sculpted to the tumour’s size and shape on the day, not when it was first imaged.

AI enthusiasts dream that the economic impact of these technologies - from falls in price and diffusion and improved efficiency, could be between \$14 and \$33 trillion a year in 2025. AI technologies cannot, however, be harmoniously rolled out, due to the contradictions of capitalism. Capitalism can never give finished expression to the eco-

nomie trends within it.

In Marxist terms, the fight for our future is not dystopia or utopia, but one of capitalism or socialism. The real ‘third revolution’ will be the socialist one which, linked to the internet of things can connect everything with everyone in an integrated planned global network.

People, machines, natural resources, production lines, logistic networks, consumption habits, recycling flows, and virtually every other aspect of economic and social life will be linked via sensors and software.

Realm of freedom

This is the outline for a socialist world, in which humankind will be transformed. Engels once said “the invading revolution” is before us. All capitalist institutions proceed from the belief that the capitalist system is permanent, yet the epidemic of chaos and crisis that is their system, creates social explosions out of which we can build the forces to change society completely.

The very future of the planet, from the struggle to eradicate disease and poverty to the protection of Earth from the horrors of climate change is a question that will be settled by the living struggle between class forces.

In the memorable words of revolutionary socialist Leon Trotsky: “For the first time mankind will regard itself as raw material, or at best as a physical and psychic semi-finished product. Socialism will mean a leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom in this sense also, that the human of today, with all their contradictions and lack of harmony, will open the road for a new and happier race” (In Defence of the October Revolution, 1932).

■ What do readers think about AI?



Under capitalism millions of jobs could be lost to automation in the next few years photo Paul Mattsson

Join the march through Woking against austerity



Fighting the cuts in Surrey photo SOS Surrey

Save Our Services in Surrey

Save Our Services in Surrey, supported by the Surrey Fire Brigades Union, the RMT transport union and public sector union Unison, has called for a major display of public anger against Tory austerity.

Already cuts in public services have compromised public safety - fire services have been cut to the bone. Closures of fire stations are still planned. The proposed removal of guards from our trains is yet another example of a callous disregard for public safety. Local health services have been cut.

The scale of local authority cuts across all services has already been disastrous yet Surrey County Council are now consulting on millions of pounds of further cuts in children's centres, waste management, libraries, concessionary bus fares and children with special educational needs.

If councillors wanted to represent

working class people they would be standing up to the government and saying no. But they don't. We cannot take any more cuts. We need a reversal of the cuts and a massive injection of public funding to restore our much-needed public services.

We will have speakers at the rally in Jubilee Square from the trade unions involved in organising the event and the independent residents groups. The Socialist Party and Save Our Services in Surrey will call for an immediate general election and an end to austerity.

We call on anyone concerned about the state of our public services and who is willing to help fight back against austerity to join us.

We will gather outside Woking council offices and march around the mainly pedestrian areas to Jubilee Square for the speeches. Bring home-made banners and placards and be ready to make some noise.

■ Join the protest Saturday 15 December at 11am outside Woking council offices.

Socialist Party Fighting Fund

	£ received	£ target	October to December 2018										Deadline: 2 January 2019									
Wales	5,374	2,300																				234%
West Midlands	5,327	2,600																				205%
Northern	1,433	750																				191%
South West	3,143	1,800																				175%
Eastern	1,859	1,200																				155%
East Midlands	2,294	1,850																				124%
Southern	1,921	1,600																				120%
Yorkshire	3,545	3,300																				107%
North West	2,002	2,100																				95%
South East	670	750																				89%
London	4,562	6,100																			75%	
Other	2,462	5,650																				
TOTAL	34,592	30,000																				115%

Ross Saunders
Cardiff Against the Cuts secretary and Cardiff Socialist Party

Cardiff's Labour-run council plans to short-change Cardiff schools by another £3.5 million in real terms, as well as slash £19.4 million of funding from services. Council tax will rise by an inflation-busting 4.3%.

Councillors are following up the privatisation of leisure centres by washing their hands of more sports buildings as well as the New Theatre. The propaganda about the community running facilities can't hide the truth that many of these places will close without the resources that comes with public ownership.

Despite their claims to the contrary, Cardiff Council is brutally cutting back funding for schools in the city - and not for the first time. Last year Cardiff's schools lost almost £2 million in real terms.

Refuse to make cuts

The council must relieve the pressure in our schools and other services by refusing to make more Tory cuts. They should defy austerity and demand more funding. This weak government wouldn't be able to resist a campaign that won the support of everyone who relies on these services or provides them.

Cardiff is set to be Britain's fastest growing city, thanks in large part to the Welsh government's failure to stop the jobs slaughter in the rest of Wales. 10% of Wales' population lives in the city already. If Cardiff Council made a stand against the cuts it would set a powerful example to other councils in Wales and beyond.

It's simply not true that councillors have no alternative but to pass on the cuts the Tories demand. Collectively, British councils have greater spending powers and assets than some European countries. Cardiff Council for example is sitting on a pile of cash reserves of £76.1 million.

We are all paying for the cowardice



Children fighting the closure of their play centre in Grangetown, Cardiff in 2016 photo Socialist Party Wales

Fight Cardiff Council's school cuts

of our councillors. According to their own documents, a quarter of a billion pounds of services has been cut in Cardiff in the last ten years by Labour, Liberal and Plaid-run councils. At least 1,600 full-time jobs have gone from a city in desperate need of secure work in the last six years, and 2,500 over the decade.

This cannot go on. If councillors won't fight the cuts of their own volition, we've got to rise up and make them.

Since austerity began, ordinary working-class Cardiff residents have shown time and time again that they are willing to fight. Playcentre campaigners from Grangetown, Splott and elsewhere have blocked

the road and invaded county hall to protest at the damage being done to their communities. Over 100 protesters from the Star centre marched in Splott.

Libraries campaigners and many others have taken action all over the city and shown they won't let the services and facilities they care about close without a fight. Lansdowne Primary School fought off not one but two plans to shut their school.

We need campaigns just like those again for our schools and the other facilities targeted this year.

Islwyn Constituency Labour Party recently voted to call on Caerphilly Council to oppose cuts (see 'Islwyn

We were keen to point out to the audience that this was not a criticism of firefighters who have commendably taken strike action in recent years over similar issues but more directed at the management and politicians, who if they have their way, will close the Washington New Town station with the nearest some five miles away!

Finally, it was disclosed that the fire authority, who were ominous by their absence, have £28 million in reserves. We should not even be having these consultations as one person pointed out. When we pointed out that no cuts at all are necessary there was a good response.



Leeds TUC conference to organise fight against austerity

Kevin Pattison
Leeds Trade Union Council vice-president

Leeds Trade Union Council organised a successful anti-austerity conference on 24 November. It is part of our campaign to show the damage austerity is doing to local services, and to raise alternatives.

We started with reports from groups affected by austerity such as the successful Fearnville Fields campaign to save playing fields and Keep our NHS Public discussed the attacks on the NHS. Disability Empowerment Action Links reported on their successful struggle to keep funded transport for teenagers with

Fighting NHS and fire services cuts and closures in Merseyside

Jack Yarlett
Wirral Socialist Party

Wirral Socialist Party organised a meeting on 21 November along with members of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), Wirral Trade Union Council and Defend our NHS to build a campaign to defend local public services. Five walk-in centres on the Wirral, Merseyside are currently faced with closure, in addition to a local fire station which is under threat of being reduced to daytime operation only from the beginning of 2019.

Sixty people attended including trade unionists and many ordinary people coming to a meeting of this kind for the first time, reflecting the outrage among people on the Wirral

against these vicious cuts.

The meeting was called under the name of the 'Whoops' campaign: Wirral hands off our public services!

Five walk-in centres across Wirral are set to be closed relocating services to Arrowe Park Hospital. This will make 'walking in' to these vital services not possible for many people. Four walk-in centres are also under threat in Liverpool.

These cuts are being carried out by a clinical commissioning group, under the guise of 'simplifying' healthcare provision and making it 'less complicated' for people to see a doctor and be treated by putting all services in one place. In reality this is the same justification used up and down the country to cut health services and make them ripe for

privatisation.

Mark Rowe, FBU regional secretary, emphasised the connection between the fight to keep Wirral's walk-in centres open and the fight to protect fire stations from overnight closure. Socialist Party member Dave Jones linked the need for solidarity between the struggle against NHS and fire service cuts, with local industrial disputes, such as at Merseyrail and at the Cammell Lairds ship-building plant in Birkenhead.

Already our campaign has created so much pressure that Wirral Borough Council has announced its opposition to these closures. We plan to protest on 8 December, outside the Miriam walk-in centre in Birkenhead at 11am and march to the town hall.



Socialist Party building fund

The Socialist Party is currently under threat of eviction from our national headquarters.

We have had a presence in London since the early 1960s and have been at our current premises for over 17 years.

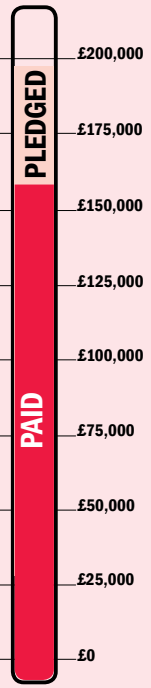
We believe that it is essential that our HQ remains based in the capital city, therefore we have launched a building appeal for a new premises.

We do not have any rich backers. Our branches are based in working class communities, among workers, students and young people who have been hammered by austerity, debt and low pay. But our members and supporters have been prepared to make a sacrifice to ensure that we have the funds we need.

We are looking for a building to buy or rent in London, where rents are high, and large enough properties to buy are over a million pounds.

Your donation, however big or small, will make a difference. Be part of something bigger - donate to the Socialist Party building fund and know that you're part of fighting for a better world.

You can make a donation at socialistparty.org.uk/donate and include 'building fund' in the comments.



Coverage of Southampton Socialist Party's fight against council cuts in the local newspaper. See more at 'Southampton: Join the pledge to resist cuts' at socialistparty.org.uk



Leeds Socialist Party supporting striking train guards photo Iain Dalton

Clare Doyle
International secretariat, CWI*

After three weeks of increasingly angry mass protests, president Emmanuel Macron of France has suspended the massively contested tax on diesel. Whether this will defuse the mass movement calling for his government to resign remains to be seen.

On Monday 3 December, when the French prime minister, Edouard Philippe, met opposition party leaders, the movement was still broadening to include new layers of the population hit hard by the policies of this 'government of the rich'.

100 schools were blockaded by students protesting against Macron's education 'reforms'. Paramedics blocked the approaches to the National Assembly in protest against changes in their working conditions with at least 100 ambulances. Facebook has shown firefighters protesting outside municipal headquarters.

The "citizens' protest movement", as it has been called in the press, far from subsiding after last Saturday's (1 December) dramatic demonstrations had expanded. There were more and more anti-government demonstrations at barricades on roads, at fuel depots and elsewhere across France.

Even now, this movement is not yet over! The leadership of the main trade union federation - the CGT - has announced a national day of action on 14 December. It would have been better sooner, to build on the momentum of the movement and the retreat of the government. But it still may be taken up enthusiastically by workers and young people who remain angry at the government and keen to push forward, taking advantage of the government being on the back foot.

Third weekend

On Saturday 1 December, the 'gilets jaunes' (yellow vests) protests against the Macron government escalated in Paris and across France. It also spread beyond the country's borders to Belgium and the Netherlands. Thousands converged on the Hague in an angry demonstration. In Brussels there were burning barricades and street fighting.

Paris saw tens of thousands of protesters face water cannon, police batons and tear gas. Barricades were built, paving stones were thrown at riot police, attacks were made on the shops of the super-rich and demonstrations broke out at the steps of the Paris stock exchange.

This eruption of anger was described by Sky News as the worst rioting in France in five decades and by the BBC, the worst since before the current president was born!

Since it erupted three weeks ago, the wave of protests against the tax on diesel fuel had become a massive anti-government force. It was the



One protester's yellow jacket in Paris read: "I was here in 1968 and I am still here fighting!"

straw that broke the camel's back coming after a spate of cuts in social spending - including on pensions and a big increase in unemployment (with ten million unemployed or under-employed). This was at the same time as the bosses were given massive new tax breaks.

On 1 December alone, as well as the events in the capital, there were demonstrations and blockades at nearly 600 different places around the country, some also involving clashes with state forces. There have now been protests at more than 2,000 different locations in France since the movement broke out.

Tragically, three people have died in road accidents as a result of the protests but a fourth person - an 80-year-old pensioner - died after being hit by a police tear gas canister. More than 130 have been badly injured, hundreds of demonstrators have been arrested and over 300 held in custody.

There was talk in the media of a state of emergency being introduced to deal with the escalating security 'threats'. But the Macron government has already incorporated into law many of the provisions of the two year-long state emergency imposed by its predecessor, Manuel Valls. This includes the power to ban demonstrations.

Macron could have done little more to increase policing powers; the army and police are already stretched to breaking point. Rather than cowing the demonstrators, the very declaration of a state of emergency would have inflamed the situation.

How far could this movement have gone?

Many, young and old, were speaking of 'a new '68' - a repetition of the revolutionary events that came very close to ousting the president of the time, General de Gaulle, and opening the way to socialism on a European and world scale. The slogan on one of the current protesters' yellow jacket in Paris read: "I was here in 1968 and I am still here fighting!"

The origins of the struggle are very different from that of May 1968. Neither students nor organised workers were at the forefront in the beginning. But that was beginning to change.

Most of the people at the road blocks initially were from country areas, dependent on using their cars daily for work, for shopping and for leisure. Many have been relatively comfortable in the past; now they say their living standards have been



Gilets jaunes flood the historic Champs-Élysées in Paris in scenes reminiscent of the May 1968 general strike
photo Kris Aus67/CC

driven down to intolerably low levels.

The Macron government has been regarded as the 'government of the rich' almost from its inception. But this movement, the expression of accumulated anger, brings together many who have voted very different ways in recent elections - right, left and centre, or not at all.

Workers' representatives

Last year in the presidential election, the leader of France Insoumise (FI - France Unbowed), Jean-Luc Mélenchon, came close to getting into the second round to face Emmanuel Macron, when he got more than seven million votes in the first round. He has spoken of the current movement being part of the "citizens' revolution" that he has long advocated and calls for the dissolution of the Assembly and new elections.

A similar call has been made by Marine Le Pen of the far-right Rassemblement National (formerly the National Front). The leader of the main party of French capitalism - Les Republicains - feels moved to call for a referendum on the government's tax. The result is already plain from the depth of this anti-government upsurge.

For the first time since the movement began, and very late, the leadership of the CGT called on workers to demonstrate against austerity and unemployment at the same time as the third Saturday mobilisation of the gilets jaunes.

But the movement is very diverse. It has some 'leaders' who had talks with the prime minister, but they have 'organised' online and have no structure with which to pursue the struggle. A part of the movement in some regions is rejecting 'representatives'; some others are organising elections on the blockades themselves.

A workers' party based on socialist policies would advocate the immediate setting up of a revolutionary constituent assembly on the basis of democratically elected representatives at every level. Assemblies in the workplaces are vital for developing the protests from below.

Macron, resign!

Eight out of ten French people said they support the present protests on which the slogan 'Macron resign!' has come to predominate. In the last month the president's ratings have dropped to an all-time low - worse than Francois Hollande at a similar stage of his presidency.

Macron has already 'lost' seven ministers since coming to power in 2017, either embroiled in some form of corruption, violence, or, at best, disillusionment. At least half the members of his party - the LREM - have stopped going to meetings and the party itself is said to be splintering. There is a crisis opening at the top of society.

It was always possible that the

government could move to postpone the diesel tax rises - a reform to prevent a further mass uprising. But its moratorium does not seem to be calming things down.

The discontent of many has come to the surface and can find expression in new strikes and mass protests, including a renewal of the general strike movement of two years ago against changes in the labour law under Hollande.

Members of Gauche Révolutionnaire (CWI in France) report that strikes continue to break out on a local or sectoral basis

The movement

The idea of blockading the motorways as a form of protest is not new. But initially many left forces did not want to support this particular movement as it had elements of Poujadism - a movement of small businesses - rather than a working-class character.

It is true that the far-right Rassemblement National of Marine Le Pen, which has overtaken Macron's LREM in voting intentions for the European elections, lent its support early on in the protests. But more and more people who voted for Mélenchon and the FI and other lefts have been on the streets, along with disappointed one-time Macron supporters and workers and young people who have not voted at all in recent elections.

It has been a lack of struggles led by the unions that has seen the gilets jaunes movement articulating the pent-up frustrations of all layers in society.

The situation that has opened up raises urgently the need for a left party to adopt a programme that channels the dissatisfactions of every layer of society behind socialist demands - the impoverished middle class, the workers whose jobs and wages are threatened and the young people who now leave school with no guarantee of higher education or jobs.

A Gauche Révolutionnaire representative reported on the special features in the present movement. There are not only blockades on roads and roundabouts, but pickets at the toll booths are very popular with motorists who are waved through without paying! As much as half of the participants are women - the ones, who more often than not, have the responsibility of balancing the household budget.

In their leaflets on all the demonstrations that they can reach, Gauche Révolutionnaire argues for a day of action to be called on which the whole economy is brought to a standstill through strikes and blockades.

"It is through a struggle of all workers together - a strike in every sector of the economy - that Macron can be defeated... Gauche Révolutionnaire fights for a truly democratic, fraternal and cooperative society - for socialism. Join us!"

Donate today!

Agree with what you read in the Socialist? Help us fund the fightback with a donation to the Socialist Party's fighting fund

■ socialistparty.org.uk/donate for card or recurring donations

■ call 020 8988 8777 to donate by card

■ cheques payable to Socialist Party, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD



Midwives go on strike in New Zealand

Around 1,150 midwives in New Zealand, employed by District Health Boards (DHB), have taken strike action for better pay and staffing levels.

Members of MERAS, the midwives trade union, have been taking two-hour strike action, twice a day, from 22 November to 5 December. 540 strike notices have been issued. This follows a 90% rejection of the DHB's pay offer on a 80% turn-out.

MERAS is fighting for improved salary scales that recognise midwives skills and responsibilities, which will attract and retain staff.

The DHB's own Midwifery Workforce Information Report in September recognised the severe understaffing in maternity units around the country.

This is due to fewer midwives and more babies being born. Workplace stress means midwives have a very high rate of sick leave and turnover of staff. Almost a third of midwives are over 55 and will retire

in the next ten years.

MERAS committed to providing Life Preserving Services (LPS emergency cover) during the strikes but the fact that some DHBs have requested more staff for LPS than would normally be rostered, shows both management hypocrisy and the severe staff shortages, as explained by Anna Fielder, a midwife and mother of three:

"When there is industrial action in hospitals, DHBs (and in this instance we're talking about maternity units) are expected to have the bare minimum staff working and available to ensure that LPS are maintained..."

"However, what's becoming apparent through this industrial action is that the level at which some units are expected to be staffed during the two-hour strikes (the level of LPS), is actually higher than at other times. I find that astounding, and what it suggests - if it doesn't make blatantly clear - is that some maternity units are understaffed the

majority of the time.

"A related issue is that if the number of midwives needed to provide LPS simply cannot be found, a strike cannot go ahead..."

"Our midwives are stuck between a rock and a hard place. They need to strike to be taken seriously, but often they're not able to precisely because of the very reasons that they need to strike."

"This situation needs to be resolved, and resolved quickly, so that there are always enough midwives to safely staff our maternity units."

"It's not just midwives who deserve this, but those who are pregnant, our babies, whanau (extended families) and the future generations of Aotearoa (Maori name for New Zealand)."

"We need midwives. And at the moment, they really need us to stand by them too."

■ Send messages of support to : jill.ovens@meras.co.nz



photo "Dear David, Aotearoa needs Midwives" Facebook

West Midlands Socialist Party women's meeting

Our role in changing society



photo Corinthia Ward

Jade Jenkins
Birmingham Socialist Party

Following our regional conference earlier in the year an initiative aimed at developing the role of women members in the party culminated in a Midlands Socialist Party women's meeting, open to all genders, on 24 November in Birmingham.

We had members attending from Coventry, Stafford, Worcester and Leicester. Socialist Party national organiser Sarah Sachs-Eldridge opened the event by initiating a discussion on 'women, socialism and identity politics'.

With a multitude of issues to

discuss in such a short time, everyone was engaged and participated in the discussion.

Members felt comfortable to raise questions on terminology and add extra historical context to the debate. A new 12-year old member felt confident to ask questions and get involved in such a meaty topic.

Marxism

Commissions were held on revolutionary socialist Rosa Luxemburg and on Marxist economics - with an interactive session, allowing a complex subject to be accessible to all levels and abilities.

A commission on the history of women in workers' struggles showed

that the root of women's oppression lies in class society. This class oppression can only be overcome through a fight for socialism, and working-class women must be part of this struggle to change society.

The event closed with a session on 'the role of women in a revolutionary party'. It brought together everything learned over the course of the day. It helped cement our central role as a driving force for change.

With the energy in the room fit to burst, it was clear to see how positive the day had been. The more people understand socialism, the greater the prospect of real change. That is when the revolution will truly begin.

Women's Lives Matter national meeting

■ Saturday 8 December, 10.30am to 4pm, St George's Centre, Great George Street, Leeds LS1 3DL

■ Crèche places available - search 'Women's Lives Matter national meeting' on Facebook



Socialist Students conference is set to take place in Birmingham on 9 February 2019. Last year's conference, held at the University of Birmingham, was attended by over 100 students from all across the country. This year's meeting is set to feature discussions on the fight against the far right internationally, the centenary of the German revolution and the upcoming strikes against women's oppression in Spain. Get in touch with the Socialist for more information on how you can come along.



Socialism Today

The Socialist Party's magazine

December/January issue includes...

- Socialist feminism - ideas that are ever more relevant
- Brexit - May's 'me or chaos' deal



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What we stand for

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

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

WORK AND INCOME

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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



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Health bosses move goalposts on A&E waiting times

MORE FUNDS FOR OUR NHS NOW!



photo Paul Mattsson

Andrew Bromhall

Unison health rep (personal capacity) and Swansea and West Wales Socialist Party

It is with much anger and disbelief that I read the latest incredulous ideas from NHS England. NHS bosses plan to change their long-promised target of all A&E patients being seen within four hours of arrival.

Under the plans being considered, people with non-urgent medical needs would be advised to seek

help at a GP surgery, walk-in centre or pharmacy instead - or face a possibly longer than four-hour wait in A&E. But on page 11 we report on the closures of walk-in centres!

This is at a time when overstretched A&Es and their dedicated overworked, underpaid staff are struggling to meet the basic needs of their patients. And the annual winter crisis is on the horizon.

This is a case of the NHS bosses, unable to meet the targets of providing quality care within a realistic timescale and, instead of tackling the problems of chronic staff shortages

and underfunding, they simply move the goalposts which allow an unwanted statistic to be ignored.

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine (RCEM), which represents A&E doctors, has signalled its opposition. It has warned that asking some patients to seek care elsewhere or wait a lot longer than at present would not deter those with minor injuries and illnesses from arriving.

Dr Taj Hassan, RCEM president, said a "woeful lack of resources to adequately staff and support emergency departments and increasing

demand, combined with lack of acute bed capacity, has led to the present mess, with awful crowding in emergency departments." This will only get worse under proposed plans.

We demand a properly funded and resourced NHS in which staff can care for their patients in a safe, patient-focused way. They should be able to offer effective care and not need to worry about meeting unattainable targets.

NHS workers' trade unions should lead a fight against these plans and for more funding and staff and to

kick out the weak Tory government.

We need an NHS that is fit for purpose, free at the point of use, and operated under democratic working-class control. Kick out the privatisers and save our NHS!

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