Stop thief! Five million robbed every day! It’s organised crime.

How else can you describe a situation where workers toil — but still struggle to pay the bills, put food on the table, and clothe themselves and their children adequately? The latest figures show five million workers are on poverty wages (see page 2).

We know who the crooks are. Big business fat cat bosses: the super-rich 1% who keep the luxury goods market booming and hold millions of workers in poverty.

Expenses scandal politicians around the world roll out the red carpet for these capitalist thieves. Care UK workers are striking to stop the theft of 35% of their wages.

The boss of the private equity firm Bridgepoint Capital that owns Care UK was recently made a peer. No wonder in the US a poll found that the millionaire politicians, vital accessories to the low pay crime, are less popular than head lice.

Here, Tories, Labour, Lib Dems and Ukip tell us that they’re helpless to take effective action - like implementing the Socialist Party demand for a £10 an hour minimum wage now. That could start to allow workers some dignity in their lives.

So it is refreshing that Russell Brand has spoken out. But we also need ideas and organisations to change the world.

When Kshama Sawant was elected as a socialist councillor in Seattle last November, many of her 93,000 votes were in support of the demand for a $15 an hour minimum wage - linked to socialist change. Once elected, she and her party - Socialist Alternative, co-thinkers of the Socialist Party - worked tirelessly to build a powerful and ultimately successful fight for $15.

In Seattle, a city the size of Glasgow, 100,000 workers will be lifted out of poverty. For a change, the 1% pay - $3 billion will be transferred from the bosses to the lowest paid.

Pro-capitalist politicians may be moaning falling wages, rising inequality, stagnating economies - but they have no solution. Socialists do!

Kshama Sawant won’t be the only impressive speaker on the platform at the Socialism 2014 rally on Saturday 8 November.

As the Socialist marks its 50th year, Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taffee argues that the lessons of these decades prove the working class is the most powerful force for the change we need.

Ruth Copping, newly elected Socialist Party TD (MP) in Dublin, is a leader of the developing mass non-payment movement against Ireland’s water tax.

Ian Hodson is president of bakers’ union BFAWU, which has successfully defeated hated zero-hour contracts in Hovis in Wigan.

Brian Smith (personal capacity) is secretary of bakers’ union BFAWU, which has successfully defeated hated zero-hour contracts in Hovis in Wigan.

Mark Serwotka has just been re-elected as the general secretary of civil service union PCS, which has been to the fore of the fight against government cuts.

Come to the Rally for Socialism, Saturday 8 November at 6.30pm, Camden Centre, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE. Public transport: King’s Cross St Pancras.

Tickets from £5, call 020 8988 8777 or visit www.socialism2014.net - where you can also find details of the workshops, rallies and forums, as well as venue, transport, crèche (book by 3 November) and more.

See page 9 for details...
Capitalism - ‘the new mediocre’

W e're the fastest guns in the West - and still losing the living standards battle’, John McDonnell, Shadow Chancellor, told the TUC conference last week. “We have sums up Britain’s economy (Sunday Times 26 October).

It is true that Britain is the fastest growing of the G7 countries in the third quarter of 2014. However, the trend has been driven by a parity 0.7%, the government deficit in creased, and wages continued to fall (see be low). As Flanders, concludes: “This is as good as it likely to get for the foreseeable fu ture. Welcome to what the head of the Inter national Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, has called ‘the new mediocre’.”

Stagnation - a long period of low growth - is now the best scenario on offer for world capitalism. The OECD (Organisation for Eco nomic Co-operation and Development) has even calculated that low growth - an average of two-thirds of the current very low rate - will continue for the next 5 years.

We would agree, except that the working class will not put up with a capitalist system which means impoverishment for the majority for that long: a democratic socialist planned economy will be firmly on the agenda before then.

In recent weeks, however, there has been a renewed wave of panic in the financial mar kets at the unfolding of a new stage of the economic crisis that has been rumbling along mounting that stagnation might be too rosy a prognosis for the world economy. World oil prices have plunged to $52 a barrel as fore casts for world growth have been slashed.

The US, while it is a declining power, still remains the most powerful economy in the world. Yet the return to growth (very low growth) is due to the Federal Reserve’s continued efforts to prop up the economy at a perilously low level.

Panic on the stock markets as the drugs are withdrawn, combined with the deepening of the economic crises in Europe and the United States, companies to postpone purchases in the expec tion that prices will stop falling any time soon.

Even those parts of the world that initially escaped the crisis are now being hit. Australia’s 23 year boom has come to an end and in Brazil growth rates have plunged from 7.5% in 2010 to close to zero now.

Both economies’ growth has been largely based on selling raw materials to China. Chi na is catching cold now giving them flu. China is now more immune from the world eco nomic crisis. It is estimated that the collapse of US demand in 2008 led to 30 million thrown out of work in China. Where an ed, gigantic, stimulus packages pumped into the economy by the regime were able to par ly a recession, the US, by contrast, economic sclerosis and falling prices. As debt burdens soar from Greece to Italy, investors will take fright, populist politicians will gain ground, and - sooner or later rather than the euro will collapse. This is a drag on growth because it makes debt more expensive and leads con sumers to postpone purchases in the expec tion that prices will be lower at a later date. Given the huge debts throughout the world economy this is a nightmare scenario for capitalism.

Failure

The European banks failed the ECB’s ‘stress tests’ on how they would cope with a new stage of economic crisis. The recent C40 summit was not nearly as optimistic. Outright deflation, for example, was not even considered. And the correct reaction of German finance ministers (the banks all passed) was taken on trust. In reality the number of ‘zombie banks’ was probably underestimated. How you got news for us? Phone us on 020 8988 8777 editors@socialistparty.org.uk Fax 020 8988 8777 editor Steve Score, news Dave Car, letters/reviews Roger Shilver, workplace news Bob Reeves, campaigns/party news James lvo, international news youth news Sarah Wait, photography Paul Mattsson DEADLINE: Friday before publication date. Urgent news - Monday.

In panic at the situation in the eurozone a section of the capitalist class is calling for expansionary measures to try and stimulate de mand, combined with a slowing of austerity measures. Meanwhile, however, the dom inant wing of the capitalist class continues to demand ever more austerity.

Martin Wolf, for example, writing in the Fi nancial Times, calls for measures to stimu late the eurozone economy and declares that the ECB’s attacks on the French deficit breaking the eurozone’s rules as ‘absurd’. Wolf states that the ‘threat to stability’ of con tinued stagnation are ‘obvious’, meaning the inevitable uprisings of the working class, not least in France.

There is a growing section of the capitalist class who are concerned by this prospect. At a recent meeting on ‘inclusive capitalism’ in London 250 extremely wealthy individuals, from Google Chairman Eric Schmidt to Uni ver CEO Paul Polman, gathered in order to fret about the threat to social stability caused by the crisis in their system. The hostess of the meeting, bank heir Lynn Forester de Roth schild, said she was concerned about social cohesion, noting that citizens had ‘lost confi dence in their governments.’

Their fretting, however, will do nothing to al ter the character of modern capitalism, which is crisis-ridden and increasingly incapable of meeting the needs of the majority, and has inequity at its heart. The result will be ex actly what they fear - a growing revolt of the working class and poor against the miseries capitalism offers them - and opportunities for a democratic, socialist alternative to gain mass support.

Record numbers of workers suffering poverty pay under the Con-Dems

Simon Carter

The continuing scandal of low pay again hit the headlines last week.

When the Resolution Foundation think tank recently pointed out the magnitude of the problem and calculated a record number of workers in the UK on poverty wages. Over 8 million low paid workers earn less than two thirds of the median hourly pay - equivalent to £7.69 an hour - a rise of 250,000 over median hourly pay - equivalent to again hit the headlines last week. The continuing scandal of low pay continues to dominate the political agenda.

According to the Trades Union Congress (TUC) which, on paper, is committed to a 12 hour mini mum wage, workers have experi enced an 8% slump in real earnings since the depths of the crisis five years ago. It is estimated that the collapse of US demand in 2008 led to 30 million thrown out of work in China. Where an ed, gigantic, stimulus packages pumped into the economy by the regime were able to par ly a recession, the US, by contrast, economic sclerosis and falling prices. As debt burdens soar from Greece to Italy, investors will take fright, populist politicians will gain ground, and - sooner or later rather than the euro will collapse. This is a drag on growth because it makes debt more expensive and leads con sumers to postpone purchases in the expec tion that prices will be lower at a later date. Given the huge debts throughout the world economy this is a nightmare scenario for capitalism.

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The TUC has calculated the government’s continuing pay freeze, as part of its austerity measures to bail out capitalism, and employers using the recession to further cut rates, have led to a huge drop in living standards.

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NHS: More cuts planned

Dave Carr

The National Health Service (NHS) is being ripped apart as a result of an acute underfunding crisis. Inevitably, patient care is suffering as a result.

This cash shortfall is coupled to an accelerating privatisation programme in the form of rip-off Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts and the outsourcing of the bulk of the NHS budget under the Con-Dems’ Health and Social Care Act.

In September this year, it was reported that 86 out of 147 NHS trusts, including 53 self-governing Foundation Trusts, were in deficit. Of these, two-thirds are hospital trusts.

In 2012, South London Health Care NHS Trust, crippled by unseverable PFI payments to for-profit private consortia, became the first trust to be placed into special administration before being broken up.

But instead of scrapping and reverting this privatisation agenda the head of NHS England, Simon Stevens, (former Labour government health adviser and president of US-based UnitedHealth Group private healthcare company) has set out a new five year plan of cuts and changes.

Stevens, while being careful to say that the majority of health services would continue to be met by NHS providers, also argued that the privatisation of health care would continue to be allowed to play in the NHS.

Indeed, figures from the Department of Health show that non-NHS providers secured £10 billion of contracts in 2013 or 10% of the NHS budget in England – a figure that inevitably will grow under the government’s Health and Social Care Act.

Stevens was more robust in defending the use of PFI contracts developed under the Blair/Brown Labour governments (when he was a healthcare advisor), despite the untenable burden these schemes have placed on NHS resources.

In order to plug an estimated £30 billion funding shortfall by 2020 NHS England wants an extra 2-3% in health spending per head of the population.

This is because the Welsh government (escaping the horrors of privatisation in Wales) has set out a new five year plan of cuts and changes.

The NHS is being bled white by for-profit companies. Photo Bob Sewerin.

Yet it was staff shortages, driven by financial targets to achieve Foundation Trust status, which played a critical part in the neglect of patients in the Mid-Staffs Hospital scandal.

In the run-up to the general election the three main establishment parties in Westminster are keen to trumpet their defence of the NHS as a publicly funded and run health care provider.

Yet these parties are responsible for the systematic undermining of the NHS as part of their pro-big business agendas and their private healthcare connections.

The Socialist Party, working with trade union allies in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, will continue to fight for the scrapping of PFI services and to demand that privatised services are reintegrated into a fully funded and democratically run public NHS.

This could be paid for through nationalising the tax avoiding giant corporations, including the parasitic ‘big pharma’ drug companies, and imposing a wealth tax on the income and assets of the super-rich. Then, people’s health could come first instead of private profit.

The NHS is being bled white by for-profit companies Photo Bob Sewerin.

The right-wing Daily Mail has continued its tradition of irresponsible journalism recently, with an unprecedented number of articles attacking Labour-managed NHS Wales. It kicks-off an offensive to de-value (escaping the horrors of privatisation in NHS England) the cuts to spending on healthcare which have been considerable.

The Welsh government, instead of fighting the Tory-led government cuts, has overseen a real terms cut of 2.5% in health spending per head of the population since 2009, a bigger reduction than any other part of the UK.

This is because the Welsh government decided not to ring-fence NHS funding in the early days of Con-Dem austerity. While the Tories in Westminster kick the NHS in Wales, and the Labour Welsh government kicks the English NHS to return, real people’s lives are held in the balance.

The NHS on both sides of the border requires major investment, and the privatisation of health services in England must be urgently reversed, if we are to meet the health needs of the population.

This isn’t a game! It is ridiculous to imagine that Cameron cares about the health of people in Wales, especially as he seems not to care about the health of people in England. He only cares about rich people, which makes his comments all the more repulsive.

Our health is not a game! Claire Job, Welsh NHS Nurse

The existing ‘savings’ being pushed through by NHS managers. Paul Bennett, chair of Monitor, which regulates the NHS Foundation Trust sector, did not rule out the NHS having to charge for hospital stays or GP appointments if government spending did not increase.

NHS England also wants to merge hospitals, cut ‘back-office’ workers and to use more volunteers instead of qualified and paid staff. These changes are supported by Labour and the Lib Dems.

Scrap PFI Yet it was staff shortages, driven by financial targets to achieve Foundation Trust status, which played a critical part in the neglect of patients in the Mid-Staffs Hospital scandal.

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Unsocial media Chancellor George Osborne told a bemused Tory audience at their recent conference that the government is cracking down on aggressive corporate tax avoidance. Odd then that Facebook’s UK corporation tax bill was only £3,169 compared to its net profit last year of £1.34 billion.

It seems that Facebook simply funnelled its UK sales through its European HQ located in the Republic of Ireland.

Second jobs Times must be hard when MPs have to moonlight. In the case of 20 MPs their second job, with earnings of over £100,000 a year, will certainly help pay the household bills. These include ex-ministers in the current coalition government.

Raking it in are former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown, who scooped £492,331; Respect MP George Galloway with £265,350; and Tory MP Sir Nicholas Soames on £253,598, to name three.

According to the Guardian, 26 MPs “earned more from directorships, paid employment or shareholdings than they did from their parliamentary salary”.

In total, MPs trousered £7.1 million from their outside earnings.

Deeper in debt Health care was the most common cause of debt collections in the UK last year - accounting for 38% of the total. It underlines the nightmare situation of millions of workers and their families faced with a prohibitively expensive, privately run health care system.

Income drop Sticking with the US, as the wealth of the super-rich has rocketed the median household (which lies statistically at the middle of the income scale), has become £50,500 poorer since 2007.

Gender relegation One reason for PM David Cameron refusing to wear a pro-feminist t-shirt could be because the UK has dropped out of the top 20 most gender equal countries in the world for the first time. This relegation comes after women’s average wages fell by £2,700 in one year.

According to the World Economic Forum the UK was behind 25 countries when it came to men and women having the most equitable life chances in health, work and education.

Child poverty Since the onset of the world capitalist recession in 2008 the number of children falling into poverty is 2.6 million greater than the number who have been lifted out of it according to a new report by Unicef. The child poverty rate in the UK has risen from 24% to 25.6% in this period.

Paul Murphy, TD (MP), ripping up his water charge pack in the Dáil (parliament). Raking it in are former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown, who scooped £492,331; Respect MP George Galloway with £265,350; and Tory MP Sir Nicholas Soames on £253,598, to name three.

According to the Guardian, 26 MPs “earned more from directorships, paid employment or shareholdings than they did from their parliamentary salary”. Have you got news for the “fishes”? Email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk

...9...
St Mungo’s strikers: ‘our fear has gone’

Paul Northaw
Unite LE111 housing workers’ branch

St Mungo’s Broadway homelessness charity strikers finished seven days of action across London on Thursday 23 October feeling more determined and more confident than ever.
The chief executive continued his eccentric picket line visits. During one, he was challenged about human resources advisors’ pay being increased at the same time as staff contracts are to be cut. He confirmed his priorities when he explained: “I have to pay for quality.”
One picket commented: “The things you fear when this happens to you: that fear has gone.” A members’ meeting will be held to plan future steps in the dispute.
The strike has been solid with a high level of involvement; hundreds have attended rallies, 19 pickets were organised, and two protests per day.

Fawlty Towers

On 22 October, the Guardian carried an article by a striker explaining that the action was in defence of those who have no home. It compared senior management’s attitudes towards workers to that of Basil Fawlty’s.
The organisation relies on local authority contracts so it is significant that some have begun to put pressure on management. Hackney council is “re-evaluating” its relationship with the organisation. Islington has written to management specifically calling on them to honour the union recognition agreement and ask what plans are in place to cut senior management salaries!

Islington North MP Jeremy Corbyn has labelled an early day motion in parliament calling on management to resolve the dispute.
Please donate to the campaign by BACS (account: Unite Housing Workers Branch LE1111, sort code: 00-40639, account: 08-60-01) or cheque (payable to ‘Unite Housing Workers Branch LE1111’ and sent to PO Box 66701, London E11 9PF). Please mark all donations: ‘St Mungo’s Broadway Campaign Funds’.

Sheffield recycling workers to start indefinite action

Thirty Sheffield recycling workers at The Green Company complained about premium pay, welfare facilities and against bullying management with strike action on 25 and 26 October, and have given notice of an indefinite strike from Wednesday 29 November.

GMB union shop steward Jim Rodgers spoke at a Sheffield Socialist Party meeting.

“After our last strike (against jobs and pay cuts two years ago), they forced us to get rid of the bad managers. For the new senior management team (SMT) we brought in.

We got the living wage in April. We services to homeless people opened the sites an extra hour a day. The future is looking good.

Then about ten weeks ago, I rang to speak to one of the SMT only to be told one was on leave (really suspended), one had resigned, and the other on sick!

‘Who am I speaking to then?’

‘It’s Martine Lafstan-Bulder, the boss of the charity!’ That was the first I’d heard of her.

Since then, we’ve found out that over the last four months it’s alleged she has skimmed £80,000 off the contract (to run Sheffield recycling sites, subcontracted from Veolia the private company that runs the council’s waste management services).

The former finance director who blew the whistle has been suspended and the other two SMT left.

So all this has been going on while we’ve been told that there’s not enough money for premium rates for weekends and overtime or for welfare facilities on two of the five sites.

That’s why we are on strike and I’d like to thank you all for your support on the picket lines, blocking lorries.

We want to be taken back in house or for us workers to run it as a cooperative.”

Ritzy workers threatened with redundancies

Lawrence Maples

The Picturehouse cinema chain has threatened more than 20 redundancies at the Ritzy cinema. This comes just weeks after the Ritzy workers won a 26% pay rise through a long campaign of strike action.

Is there a clear attempt to gut the union in revenge for the victory and the Ritzy workers have made? If so, they need to resist this attack. They have beaten Picturehouse house once and with a clear programme of strike action can do it again.

They also point out that this does not arise out of financial necessity, as Picturehouse claim – it is a very profitable cinema chain and Ritzy is frequently the most profitable site.

The Ritzy workers and activists in Lambeth are already working together to develop a solidarity campaign and spread the movement against low pay, linking up with the work done by the Fast Food Rights campaign in the area.

Bullies

Picturehouse’s bullying tactics are a reflection of how much the Ritzy workers have achieved. They also underlines the need for the drive to unionise other cinemas to continue, as part of a wider revolt on low pay.

The THC has voted for a support to pay £10 an hour minimum wage and should follow this up with coordinated strike action to win it, which could draw millions of workers into the unions and bring the bosses to their knees.

Unison: Vote ‘yes’ in Wales college pay strike consultation

Ronnie Job
FE Unison steward (personal capacity)

A postal consultation ballot of Unison and other campus union members has begun in Welsh further education (FE) colleges, on whether we are prepared to take industrial action over Collegau Cymru (representing the colleges in Wales) paying no cost of living increase this year.

Pay freezes and below inflation awards mean that the incomes of many FE workers have fallen by around 18% in real terms in recent years. Unison is recommending that all members vote in support of industrial action to win a pay award.

Wage restraint hasn’t prevented hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs from being lost across the sector. With the Welsh Government and Collegau Cymru predicting years more of austerity being translated into further cuts, regardless of who wins the general election next year, we need to take a stand.

Linked

Any campaign over pay has to be linked to stopping the cuts in further education. And instead of deciding which part of the public sector in Wales should be hit the hardest by Con-Dem cuts, we demand the Welsh government stop curbing the Con-Dems’ axe and start fighting back.

Unison members have also voted for strike action on pay in NHS Wales. There is a growing demand from Unison members in councils that the suspension of strike action over pay in local authorities be overturned and the pay campaign resumed. We stand a much better chance of winning if we all strike together.

In brief

Swinton High School

Teachers at Swinton High School in Salford, Greater Manchester, were on strike on 21 October. Policies imposed by the headteacher have left teachers with increased workloads and deeply intrusive monitoring. The union has sought to negotiate a new deal but any further progress cannot be made until new, further action will take place on 4-6 November. Messages of support have flooded in. Send your message c/o rachel.righteous@outlook.com

Hugh Caffrey

Secure hospitals strike

Prison Officers Association members working in the NHS took four hours of strike action on Friday 24 October in their struggle for a decent pay rise.

The strike was very well supported with a big picket line outside the Rampton Hospital in Nottinghamshire. These nurses and support staff have already voted overwhelmingly to strike in a highly secure psychiatric hospital.

As well as a pay freeze, they also face under-staffing and attacks on trade union facility time, mainly for health and safety rep.

At the picket line Steve Gillan, POA general secretary, gave reports from the walkouts at Broadmoor and Ashworth hospitals and read out messages of support from various union branches.

Becci Heagney

London buses

Following September’s inspiring demonstration, Unite members in London bus garages are holding consultative ballots on 31 October. If successful, these will soon be followed by a full postal ballot to secure a national victory.

The campaign emerged after the failure of the operating companies to respond to the union’s June 8 ballot, in which thousands voted for strike action.

As a bus driver says, we will do the same job - so why are we on different pay rates?

A London bus driver

Serwotka re-elected

Mark Serwotka has been re-elected unopposed as the general secretary of the socialist-led PCS civil servants’ union. See issue 829 of the Socialist for an interview with Mark.

Reclaim Unison

Following the calling-off of the 14 October strike, work done by government activists in Unison have called a national meeting to discuss the direction of the pay dispute and its implications for the union. Saturday 8 November, 2-4pm. Room B04, Birkside University, 43 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0DP

RMT lobby

Join RMT Northern and Transpen- nine Express members in protest- at cuts and attacks on rail services and safety and jobs on 4 November. A demonstration will start outside parliament in Old Palace Yard from 12.30pm, followed by a rally in committee room eleven at 2pm, and a lobby of MPs from 3.30pm.
Scottish Labour in crisis: build a working class anti-cuts alternative

Philip Stott
Socialist Party Scotland

The Labour Party in Scotland has been thrown into a deep crisis following the resignation of its Scottish leader, Johann Lamont. In her resignation statement she called for more autonomy for Scotland and accused Ed Miliband, and other leading figures in UK Labour, of treating Scotland like a “branch office”. Other unnamed Westminster MPs were described as “dinosaurs”, unable to face up to the changed situation in Scotland following the referendum.

The growing tensions inside the Labour Party and many of its affiliated trade unions have now exploded into the open. Since 18 September thousands of trade unionists have flooded in, seeking a vehicle to use to replace Lamont. Labour MSP Malcolm Chisholm warned that choosing a Scottish leader based at Westminster would “turn a crisis into a catastrophe”.

Any left Labour candidate would be very unlikely to win. As Socialist Party Scotland has consistently explained there is little possibility of moving the Labour Party to the left. The party is largely empty of active workers, young people and trade unionists.

Trade unions

The events in Falkirk, and the witch hunt of Unite which followed, underlined that reality. The affiliated unions should urgently discuss how to replace Lamont. Labour MSPs from Scotland will undermine the chances of the election of a majority Labour government.

And yet things could get worse. Tiber-Blairite MPs Jim Murphy, a former shadow defence minister and supporter of the Iraq war, is emerging as a leading candidate to replace Lamont. Labour MSP Malcolm Chisholm warned that choosing a Scottish leader based at Westminster would “turn a crisis into a catastrophe”.

Australia: where the Queen’s representative sacked a government

Becci Heagney

Gough Whitlam, former Australian Prime Minister, has died at the age of 98. His time in government raises important concerns for the working class so-called democracy under capitalism.

Whitlam led the Australian Labour Party (ALP) to power in 1972 after 23 years of Conservative government. Despite not being from the left-wing, trade union side of the party, he carried out important reforms under pressure from an increase in workers’ struggle.

The reforms included: scrapping university tuition fees, equal pay legislation, the introduction of a universal health insurance scheme and the withdrawal of troops from South Vietnam. He reduced the voting age from 21 to 18 which involved a new generation in politics.

The third ‘industrial revolution’

Peter Taaffe

The position of Governor-General was removed from power by the Governor-General John Kerr. The position of Governor-General is appointed, ironically by the Prime Minister, as the representative of the monarch in Australia. They have similar ‘reserve’ powers to the Queen in Britain, including the power to appoint or dismiss ministers, to dissolve parliament and to give assent (or refuse assent) to laws.

The Governor-General is head of the Federal Executive Council, a body which consists of all current and past government ministers and legally enacted the policies of the Cabinet, which actually has no legal power at all. They are also the head of the armed forces.

By 1974, a constitutional crisis was developing. The ALP had a majority in the parliament, the House of Representatives, but the Liberal-Country Party coalition (an alliance of right-wing parties) controlled the upper house, the Senate. The Liberals, led by Malcolm Fraser, were using their majority to block bills.

During 1975 they refused to pass the budget Supply Bill, which meant that the government was not receiving money to function. The deadlock apparently went as far as the government only having enough money to last two more weeks.

It was then that the Governor-General struck, dissolved parliament, removed Whitlam from power and appointed Fraser Prime Minister. A vote of no confidence by ALP MPs, who still had a majority in the House of Representatives until a general election, was ignored.

Outrage

Instantly, Australia was rocked by outrage. Thousands of civil servants in Canberra took strike action and a huge protest was held outside parliament in support of the ALP. In Melbourne, dockers protested. Fraser was physically attacked as he left parliament. Unfortunately, Whitlam failed to mobilise this resistance and lost the following election. The ‘reserve’ powers of the monarchy and the Queen’s representatives in the Commonwealth will be used against democratically elected governments if they think that it is necessary, especially left wing ones. Whitlam didn’t carry out radical socialist policies but he went too far for the Australian ruling class. Revelations since show the involvement of both MRI and the CIA in the run up to the dismissal, just a couple of years after a violent CIA-backed coup in Chile.

Working class

They weren’t worried about what Whitlam was doing, but about the rising confidence of working class people - Whitlam wasn’t trusted to hold that back. More recently, in 2008 the Governor-General in Canada suspended a minority conservative government to allow it to avoid a vote of no confidence from the opposition.

The position of Governor-General should be scrapped - along with all other undemocratic ‘reserve’ powers, they can be used against the workers’ movement if it is seen as a threat to their system.

The monarchy and other feudal relics have no place in a democratic society and should be abolished. The workers movement must be prepared to fight for genuine democracy - a socialist society.
Lessons from history: 1917

Clare Doyle

The October revolution (7–8 November in the modern calendar) of 1917 in Russia was the greatest event in human history. Under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, it brought into existence the first, and so far the only, workers-led government to hold power for any length of time. With its appeal to the workers of the world to follow suit, it set out to sweep feudalism and capitalism from the face of the earth.

This was the most democratic form of government ever embarked on. The Bolsheviks drew on the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 and of the ‘soviets’ (committees) that workers had set up during the revolution in Russia in 1905.

All major decision-making was to be done through a system of elected councils - of workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ delegates - at a local, regional and national level. Any paid representatives were to stand regularly for re-election and receive no more than the average wage of a worker.

By the summer of 1918, Russia was out of the war, its major banks, industries and land were in state hands and under workers’ control and a rudimentary workers’ management was operating throughout the country’s soviets.

The idea of revolution had spread like wild fire. By the end of 1918 an uprising in Germany had removed the Kaiser. The following year in Hungary, the uprising in Germany had removed the Tsar’s troops on 9 January, leaving hundreds dead.

Stikes spread rapidly across the vast country. A mutiny on the battleship Potemkin in Russia’s Black Sea Fleet sparked more mass protests in Odessa, where hundreds were killed. During its course, General political strike, Soviets were thrown up as a new form of representative body with delegates elected to discuss the key issues in the struggle. They were a major threat to the old order.

Eventually, not having found sufficient support in the countryside and in the army, the first Russian revolution was defeated. On 3 December the Petrograd soviet was broken up and its leaders arrested, including Leon Trotsky its president. Many opposition fighters were executed.

After this ‘dress rehearsal’ for the events of 1917, the workers’ political leaders were either in prison, in internal exile or abroad. The workers and peasants bemoaned their heads to the yoke once more, harbouring enormous resentment against their oppressors but taking time to recover their fighting capacity. In spite of certain political mistakes having been won, a period of reaction set in.

But by 1912 strikes were breaking out in factories and mines across the country.

**Split**

It was also the year that the main socialist party, the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party, finally split into two factions - the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. The Bolsheviks were intent on building a revolutionary party with trained cadres and serious, committed members in the factories, the army and the navy.

The Mensheviks favoured a looser form of organisation. At this time, shared the view that the first stage would be a democratic revolution against feudalism in the shape of Tsarism and the ‘landed gentry’. Then, in theory, after a period of development of capitalism, a move could be made towards socialism.

Trotsky began as early as 1904 to outline his theory of ‘permanent revolution’. He was arguing, before Vladimir Lenin, that in ‘backward’ Russia the revolution to overthrow the monarchy and feudalism had to be combined with the socialist revolution under the leadership of the working class.

Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks only in July of 1917 but he was already accepted as one of the revolution’s ablest leaders.

The February revolution of 1917 came after months of strikes and unrest. On International Women’s Day (8 March in the modern calendar) women textile-workers in Petrograd walked out of their factories. They demanded an end to food shortages and price rises, and also an end to the war.

They were enthusiastically joined by tens of thousands of other workers. The Tsar had shown his inability to introduce reform. He ordered the troops to fire on demonstrators. The workers’ appeals to the troops to refuse orders finally succeeded and the rule of the Tsars was over.

The atmosphere was one of joyous celebration. Workers had moved onto the scene of history. They had removed a hated government and held power in their hands, but did not know what to do with it. There was no party with a mass base, trusted by the workers, with a leadership who could indicate the next steps that needed to be taken. The workers took the easier way out of handing power to the apparently ‘progressive’ politicians.

The Provisional Government was a government of crisis from the very beginning, rallied by the Petrograd Soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ representatives in a situation of dual power.

The Petrograd soviet, with at this stage Menshevik representatives in a majority, commanded more support than the government among the population.

Lenin returned from exile on 3 April 1917, urging the Bolsheviks to see that the first revolution had to ‘grow over’ immediately into the next. He expressed total opposition to support being given to the provisional government by the Bolsheviks inside the country under the leadership of Kamenov and Stalin, who put forward the same arguments as the Mensheviks.

In May, the Mensheviks and Socialists Revolutionary parties (SRs) decided to enter into the Kerensky government coalition. The Bolsheviks launched the demand of ‘Down with the two capitallists’ ministers to expose the Mensheviks’ failure to push for a government that truly represented the forces that had made the revolution.

Little had changed. The war continued. The provisional government had neither removed the capitalists in industry nor the feudal landlords from power. Often they were one and the same.

The revolt in the countryside spread like wild fire. Estates were seized and stately homes burned down. In the cities, demonstrations against the war multiplied.

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The Bolsheviks’ simple slogan of ‘Peace, Bread and Land’ accorded with the deepest desires of the mass of the population. It led workers, soldiers and eventually the peasantry to see the need to carry the revolution further. Tirelessly the Bolshevik Marxist workers’ party continued its agitation in the factories and at the front.

By the middle of 1917, the Bolsheviks had massively increased their support in the city’s central soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies.

Although many workers were supporting the call ‘All power to the soviets’, the Bolshevik leadership around Lenin advised against a direct challenge to the Kerensky government.
The leaders of the revolution were acutely aware of the vital importance of spreading the revolution to other countries

ready for a fight to the finish against the landed aristocracy.

The forces of the state - the militia, sailors and soldiers - had also lost faith in the parties of the Kerensky regime and were ready to be neutral or take an active part in the revolution.

The working class of Petrograd, Moscow and elsewhere was already on the move, they were prepared to take the fight to a conclusion. This third condition for revolution had also reached full term.

The decisive fourth element necessary for a successful socialist revolution is the existence of a party that has the confidence of a large part of the working class, with a leadership that can see the main line of the march of events and can weigh up exactly what to do at each crucial moment in the struggle.

Having no more than 3% support in the soviets at the beginning of 1917 and just a few thousand members in the party, the Bolshevik Party had hundreds of thousands of worker and peasant members and a majority in the soviets. They had support in the army and navy and set up the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee that would lead the October insurrection.

The leaders of the Bolshevik Party - Lenin and Trotsky - had a clear idea of what was needed, but also a keen sense of timing. They were agreed on the necessity of completing the revolution by removing the capitalistic parties from government and the class they represented from power in society. The Bolsheviks' clear slogans, together with their bitter experience, helped the workers, soldiers and peasant poseau draws the conclusion that the country. The confidence of a large part of the population - the landless peasantry - was rapidly being paved. The forces of reaction inside Russia as well as those of the German invaders were threatening to close off the opportunity for the Bolsheviks to bring down the Kerensky government, they had to seize the moment.

By the morning of the 25 October an order was issued for the transfer of power to the Petrograd Soviet. That evening, the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets opened.

The first decrees of the new soviets government laid the basis for achieving the three basic demands of the revolution – Peace, Bread and Land. The Decree on Peace meant the pursuit of a peace line fit and peace terms without annihilation.

The Decree on Land meant the immediate expulsion of the feudal lords from their estates and the allocation of land to be used by the poor peasants. The Bolsheviks aimed to gear up the production of modern agricultural machinery to transform productivity on the farms. The small farmer would be encouraged to see the advantages of the cooperative production of food.

Soviet power meant workers' and peasants' committees taking immediate control of banks and industry in preparation for public ownership in 1918 and managing them as a part of a completely democratically planned state-owned economy.

Imperialism

Attempts to snuff out the workers' revolution failed. Twenty-one armies were sent in by imperialist countries to back up the reactionary White forces in the Civil War. They were repelled at great human cost by the heroic forces of the Red Army.

There was also enormous economic cost. Industrial production fell to one-seventh of the value of 1913 and agriculture to 60%. Hundreds of thousands of civilians had been killed and millions died of starvation and disease.

The leaders of the revolution were acutely aware of the vital importance of spreading the revolution to other countries, with a stronger working class, in order to rapidly develop the technique necessary to 'revolutionise' industry to establish a healthy planned economy. In spite of the enormous enthusiasm among the oppressed across the world for the workers-led government in Russia, it was left tragically isolated. Socialist revolutions in Germany and elsewhere ended in defeat. After the death of Lenin in 1924, Stalin usurped the revolution, abolished workers' democracy and exterminated all opposition to his rule. His counter-revolution did not take the form of the re-establishment of capitalism. (This came much later towards the end of the 20th century.) It was a political counter-revolution in the interests of a parasitic caste who had little connection with the revolutionary events of 1917.

Huge advances were made in spite of this development. The economy grew rapidly because of the elimination of capitalism and feudalism and the five-year plans. But all elements of workers' democracy were crushed and its advocates physically annihilated, including Leon Trotsky in exile in Mexico. A clear understanding of the processes of revolution and counter-revolution is vital for winning the battles ahead. Revolution's experiences need to be studied as generally study different battles - to learn from mistakes in order to avoid repeating them. But no two battles take place against exactly the same background and with exactly the same forces engaged. Heroic mass movements have developed many times into challenges for power by workers and youth taking things into their hands.

In 2011 for example, Tunisia and Egypt saw events typical of 1917 - when things move so fast that every day seems like ten years. The masses on the streets, the organised workers playing a decisive role with their strikes in overthrowing Ben Ali and Mubarak - these could have been their 'Februarys'. But lacking was a Bolshevik or revolutionary party with broad support that could have expressed the unconscious strivings of those who were making the revolution - a party whose leaders could see the need to take the revolution directly to the task of finishing with capitalism. Without this, there has so far been no 'October' in these countries, and not even any real democracy.

Workers and young people who want to find a way of changing the ugly capitalist world we live in, would do well to look at the lessons of the Russian Revolution. The most important conclusion to draw is to get involved in a party dedicated to the cause of workers and poor people and the building of a new mass force for socialism.

Further reading on the revolution

- History of the Russian Revolution
  - Leon Trotsky
  - £22.99
  - Leon Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution is a classic work by one of the central leaders of the first socialist revolution.

- 1917: the year that changed the world
  - By Peter Taaffe and Hannah Sell
  - £10

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Leicester holds historic People’s Budget talks

The Socialist Party was the most prominent political party on that demonstration - aided by our red flags, gazebos, banners, sound systems, leaflets and newspaper. Our members are engaged in building an electoral alliance of trade union and anti-cuts groups.

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Building a political alternative in Seattle

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**JESS SPEAR**

At the same time, one of the most powerful politicians in Seattle, state representative Frank Chopp, is forced into a battle for support of voters in the 43rd District. On 4 November an election will take place where Jess Spear and Socialist Alternative are again taking on the Democratic Party establishment, Chopp and his big business agenda.

**Stephan Kimmerle**

Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI)

Poll shows Sawant polarising, but with impressive favourable rating, the title under which the campaign of the politics of Kshama Sawant and her organisation, Socialist Alternative (co-thinkers of the Socialist Party in the US), was published. The poll, carried out by media research company EMT, reveals that people in Seattle know that Kshama Sawant is responsible for providing an opposition to the Mayor’s policies inside City Hall.

Kshama led the campaign that won a 31% (sharply rising) minimum wage in Seattle and has continued to campaign for working class policies - exactly what she promised to do in her election campaign a year ago.

In her district, Kshama has achieved the highest approval figures compared to all the other council members in Seattle - 61%. This is huge encouragement to continue the efforts to challenge the big business agenda of the Democratic Party establishment which has dominated the city for far too long.

The latest success of Kshama’s efforts in the city council is the resumption of the national holiday Columbus Day in Seattle to Indigenous People’s Day. Kshama received national attention with this. She explained: this is “about more than just a name change. It is about educating ourselves and our children, about taking a stand against racism and discrimination”.

Every budget season is interrupted for the majority of the council to join a retreat in a luxury resort hosted by the chamber of commerce. “What a bizarre display of corporate fantasy” Kshama quipped at a press conference. “It is no wonder that the budget, year after year is completely out of touch with the economic problems faced by ordinary working people.” Again she received a wave of media attention for this principled stand.

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Pandered by an army of corporate donors, and backed by the Democratic Party establishment, Chopp has been able to out-spend Jess Spear three times over. However, in the face-to-face debates (which the 20 year long incumbent carefully tried to minimise and shorten) Jess exposed him as the ‘corporate servant’ that he is. After one of the debates, local media reported Jess as “by far the most impassioned speaker of the day. She answered the moderators’ questions, but went further than any other candidate, bluntly calling for more taxes on the wealthy and on Boeing.”

**Independent media**

In the middle of the campaign, the Washington State Supreme Court held that the state legislature has been criminally underfunding education. Pointing to the $8.7 billion handout for Boeing bonuses while Boeing shifted thousands of jobs out of the state, the court held that the state legislature argued that it was easier to pass a tax handout rather than fund education.

This wave was then curiously re-moved from the article on the web-site. “This really shows the importance of independent media sources - media outlets that are controlled by working people in the service of working people, rather than relying on media that’s owned and controlled by big business and can shut out voices that are important to the discussion,” concluded Jess, a sub-jector and writer for the paper Social-ist Alternative.

Against this wave of money and media power, direct knocking and direct conversations are crucial. More than 300 volunteers are helping talk to people in their neighbourhoods, putting up posters and handing out leaflets.

**Climate March**

During the campaign, Jess - a climate scientist - brought together a coalition of environmental and labour organisations to coordinate the People’s Climate March in Seattle on 21 September, the same day as the his-toric march in New York. This protest demanded jobs and protection of the environment - and ended in blocking the tracks used for oil and gas trains for two hours in an act of civil disobe-derence.

The yard signs of the campaign for Jess demand “Tax the rich - fund education” and “We need rent control”. After the victory of the 15Now campaign (of which Jess was the or-ganising director) in winning a $15 an hour minimum wage in Seattle, the question of affordable housing is now the most pressing issue in the emerald city.

Through the successes of mobilising 2,000 for climate action, hundreds of conversations on door steps about rent control, and mass fanning to demand taxing the rich, Socialist Alternative’s roots in the Northwest have deepened. We are growing in Seattle and nationwide. Future campaigns can build on the experiences and successes of a marvellous effort to chop Chopp.

For a full balance of the campaign and a detailed review of the election results after 4 November, go to www.votespear.org or www.socialistalternative.org/

**The Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated. CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and organised groups against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3888, London E1 1YE. Email: cwi@workintoc.org.co.uk or see www.socialistworld.net**
the Socialist postbag

Do you have something to say?

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A party for us

This letter from Paul Gerard of Salford against Cuts was published in the Independent (21 October).

Your correspondent Yasmin Alibhai-Brown calls Russell Brand a ‘distractor’. But he challenges the status quo and stands for those on the sharp end, like the women in Newham. So he strikes a chord with thousands of young, and older – people. Does anyone think that a poke by Ed Miliband, who can’t even bring himself to support strike action by teachers and nurses, would fly off the shelves like Revolution?

Alibhai-Brown is a pumped Brand won’t vote. Yet millions will abstain in the general election next year. Why? Because there’s nothing to choose between the policies of three, now four, pro-big-business parties.

We need a party for people who aren’t part of the corporate elite, for trade unionists, NHS workers, pensioners, the low-paid, immigrants and young people who need decent jobs and homes. When there’s a choice, there’s a chance to make a difference, you’ll get high humour, and if we saw in Scotland’s referendum.

Nobody I know is sitting around ‘awaiting the revolution’. We’re defending services, fighting cuts, striking for a living wage, standing in elections as anti austerity candidates for the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), offering an alternative. We got 10% in Salford last year. If we had PR we’d have a councillor or two.

Without a majority, political ‘ouster’ of parliament won’t bring them flocking to voting stations – but a clear stand and a socialist alternative is a breath of fresh air for the disenfranchised.

Ian Hodson

President, Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union

Labour and equality

One is five children in Caribbean poverty. Lee Shelton. Labour’s PPC for Carlisle, rightly calls for higher wages and less inequality. But a Labour government, afraid of the rich and powerful, will give neither.

Even the government’s commission on social mobility navigates ALL political parties for having secretly abandoned their legal obligation to halve child poverty by 2020. Its chair, Alan Milburn, even shows Labour’s pledge of an £8 minimum wage by 2020 is 23p lower than the current rate of increase.

Everyone is now ‘against’ inequality – even the IFS, CBI and Institute of Directors, whose members enjoyed a 21% salary increase this year – but none are willing to act. Here are two titanic tests for Lee Shelton: Labour-led local government employers just rejected a modest demand for a £1 an hour wage rise and offered Labour-unions Union, Unite and GMB a rotten deal which would extend another real wage cut until 2016. Will she challenge that?

And Ed Miliband refused to support the low paid women care workers in his Doncaster seat exploited by an American private equity company which cut their wages by 25% when “caring” was too selfish to pay properly. That money will be used for middle class loot. Will Ms Shelton give them their public support?

Brexit Kennedy

Red Dylan Thomas

Welsh poet Dylan Thomas once said he was a socialist, but a different kind of socialist. Those who knew him were aware of his consistent, ardent favour of a socialist society.

From discussing the ambivalence of the ruling classes with his communist friend Bert Tricker, through his anti-Fascist activism in Information in World War Two advocating and explaining the future welfare state, to his lectures, line of charge to the USA’s Communist Party in his last days, Dylan always did what he thought was his bit to further the cause.

The Marxist nature of his work is not always as evident, but it is there. From his obvious 1930s work and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbag, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, or phone 020 8988 8771, email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk. We reserve the right to shorten letters. Don’t forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

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Red Dylan Thomas

and the classic The Doctor and the
Film review

On the streets of Belfast in 1971

Bill Mullins reviews the film

71

This film, on general release, shows what it was like for a newly sent over British soldier during a few days in Belfast in 1971. He finds himself in a nightmare situation, lost in the city's back alleys after his unit was forced to withdraw from their first venture onto Belfast's streets.

The British army was sent to Northern Ireland, not to defend beleaguered Catholics but to defend private property and the interests of British imperialism. ‘71 does not explain why things happened as they did in Northern Ireland at the time, but it is an extraordinary film.

Private Cook, the central character, is a Yorkshire lad who has no idea what he is going to do when his infantry unit is sent to Northern Ireland. 1971 was a time of great changes in the north, which is partly captured on the film. It includes the start of the split between the official IRA (the stickies) and a new generation of the IRA who quickly became the Provisional IRA, especially after Bloody Sunday in Derry in January 1972.

In an early scene the company commander tells Cook and his fellow soldiers they were being sent to Belfast “because of the developing situation.” The officer told them that Belfast was “in the UK” and therefore not an overseas posting. As one soldier says “I thought we were going to Germany”.

In Belfast the squaddies, with their equally raw lieutenant, are introduced to the streets on their second day to “back up the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)” who were conducting house-to-house searches in the Catholic areas. They were conducting house-to-house searches in the Catholic areas.

The RUC’s sectarian nature quickly becomes clear to Cook as they ruthlessly search houses and beat up men and women, all the time screaming “Fenian bastards.”

The local population launch bricks at the soldiers, who begin to grasp the hatred towards them from the Catholic population they are sent to oppress and the sectarian nightmare they are involved in.

Undercover soldiers

Their barracks has a special unit of undercover soldiers dressed as civilians. Cook sees them give a homemade bomb to the local UDA (protestant militia) and encourage them to blow up a catholic social club. Instead the bomb goes off prematurely and kills everyone in a protestant bar.

The plot then swings between the younger IRA members searching for Cook, who was left behind by his unit, and the older official IRA man trying to call them off.

At one stage he is picked up, injured after the bomb went off, by a Catholic father and daughter from the Divis flats area. The young woman is dubious that this is “collaborating with the enemy” but her father says he had been in the British army for 20 years himself as a medic.

Saying to the soldier that the army is nothing more than “puss c…, telling thick c….. To kill poor c…..” it is him who contacts the local official IRA leader.

In the end the SAS, with the collusion of the local Official IRA commander, trap the dissident group and shoot nearly all of them (including trying to kill Cook because he saw them handing the bomb to the UDA). The SAS officer tells the leader Quin that he expects him to work with the army “from now on.”

Don’t expect to see a worked out explanation of “the troubles” but ‘71 is well worth seeing.

The British army was sent to Northern Ireland, not to defend beleaguered Catholics but to defend private property and British imperialism.

An Irish socialist’s comments

The alienation, bitterness, fear and claustrophobia of 1971 in Ireland are captured convincingly in this film which is well worth seeing. But the film portrays the ordinary squad as somehow neutral, in contrast to the partisan RUC and the manipulative, murderous special army unit, the Military Reaction Force.

In reality the British Army’s regular regiments were to the fore in the fierce repression dealt out to the Catholic working class. The result was a rising tempo of violence as the year progressed. Catholic workers and youth were rebelling against a regime that had held them down for 50 years.

Cul-de-sac

The tragedy is that they were taken down the cul-de-sac of individual terrorism which had no prospect of success and only divided the working class. It didn’t have to be this way. In the months covered by the film, Northern Ireland’s working-class groups were taking part in the largest industrial movement since the 1926 general strike. In a postal workers strike in January 1971 only eight of 2,000 postmen turned up for work. Between 30,000 and 40,000 workers in the North took part in two day strikes in protest at the Industrial Relations Bill. The strikes demonstrated the power of the working class but the leadership was weak and laced any semblance of class understanding. This remains the case today.

We must strive to build organisations of the working class with the resolute, far-sighted and socialist leadership to change history.

Ciaran Mulholland

Obituary: Bill Webster 1941-2014

William (Bill) Webster died in August after a long illness, aged 73.

Bill was a prominent member of the Socialist Party in Ireland from the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s. Originally from Liverpool, Bill joined the Militant Tendency, the Socialist Party’s forerunner in 1971 in south London.

Bill’s father was a courier for the Communist International. Like his father, Bill went to sea, serving in both the merchant navy and the Royal Navy. When he came into contact with Militant, he was full-time organiser for the General Municipal Workers Union now the GMB.

Bill left his union position to work for Militant in London, and after meeting his comrade Eileen Cullen, moved to Derry, where they married in 1975. It was a very difficult period for socialist activists. 1975 and early 1976 saw an upsurge in sectarian killings.

The working class responded with Trades Council organised strikes and demonstrations in Derry, Newry and Lurgan.

Bill was a Derry Trades Council stalwart for decades and a regular delegate to Irish Congress of Trade Unions and ICTU Northern Ireland Committee conferences.

Class unity

Bill never wavered in his efforts to build working class unity. He stood up when others on the left in and the union movement kept their heads down or bent towards one sectarian camp or the other.

He fought tirelessly for a political voice for the working class through efforts to build Derry Labour Party, and through chairing the Labour and Trade Union Group.

Bill offered unstinting support to workers in strikes and with other comrades courageously intervened in factories and other workplaces in opposition to the 1977 Loyalist stoppage.

His comrades remember his humanity, energy and warmth. He inspired many young people who came into contact with socialist ideas during his years of activity. He was an immensely talented and unrelenting class fighter.

Bill was survived by his wife, Eileen, his daughters, his son and his sisters.

Ciaran Mulholland

Socialist Party Northern Ireland
Coordinated action can defeat the cuts

Firefighters in the FBU union are due to strike for four days over pension cuts. The strike marks a big escalation in the dispute, as up until now the walkouts - since September 2013 - have lasted between two and 24 hours. Salford FBU rep Paul Davies spoke to the Socialist about the action.

“We’re very, very angry and disappointed about the way negotiations have gone. Not on the FBU’s part — it’s done a really good job at putting the case across and explaining why we need a revised offer. It’s the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Nothing’s changed from the start, there’s no bend or give from them. If you’re a firefighter now you’re going to have to work until you’re 60 instead of 55.

The threat of being dismissed on the grounds of capability if you don’t reach the required fitness standards is still in place. A firefighting role requires a certain level of fitness, and a 19-year-old there’s going to be a lot of firefighters who are not going to meet the required standards and will be out of a job. It’s also about the contributions going up — we’ll pay more in and get less out.

Four days
Four this four day strike can’t come too soon. The fire brigades could hardly cope when we went out for four or eight hours. With this four day one, they’re really going to struggle. I just hope that the various chief fire officers around the country can put pressure on the DCLG to get back round the table.

Pensions aren’t the only issue. The cuts seem to be never ending. In the last couple of weeks four or five appliances have been cut in Greater Manchester.

My station, Salford, has just lost a fire engine. We’re now down to one pump. The neighbouring station in Mosside has lost a fire engine as well.

The chief fire officer is saying that it’s because we’re taking action short of strike action, that they can’t crew those appliances because we won’t do overtime in the district. But it’s nothing to do with us not doing the overtime. He’s not recruited for five years. He’s not got enough staff to crew those appliances because of the cuts.

The pay’s not going up, the pension contributions are going up, and the jobs are going. There’s no good news in the fire service really.

The obvious thing is to coordinate with the NHS staff: two of the emergency services on strike at the same time. Either that or a longer FBU strike. An eight day strike is what a lot of people have been talking about because that’s all we’ve all the same, all the watches lose out.”

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, pay, 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.

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as a step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.

- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.

- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.

- Reject ‘Workfare’! For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.

- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker’s wage.

- Support the National Shop Stewards Network.

- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

- 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!

- Support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as an important step towards this.

- For a new mass workers’ party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

- Trade unions to dissociate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers’ party! Support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as an important step towards this.

- From workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.

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