

£1/£2 solidarity price

Issue 961

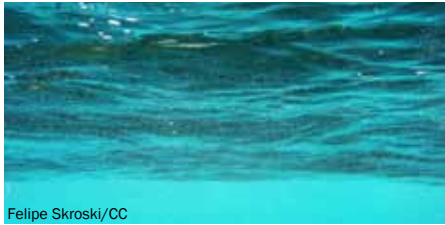
7-13 September 2017



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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**



HURRICANE HARVEY

A tragedy made worse by capitalism
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McSTRIKE MAKES HISTORY

Reports from the picket lines

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photo: Mary Finch

SCHOOLS AND TEACHING

A perfect storm of cuts and workload
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FIGHT COUNCIL CUTS

Back the Brum
bin strikers!



Birmingham Socialist Party members

Birmingham's bin workers once again have had to strike to stop job losses and pay cuts, after the Labour council reneged on a previously agreed deal.

Disgracefully the council has issued 113 redundancy notices to workers and is clearly setting out to try and break the bin workers' struggle.

The council claims it has no choice but to sack bin workers and cut up to £5,000 a year from the remaining staff's pay because of lack of funds. Like every council it has suffered savage cuts in funding from the Tory government, but that is no excuse for inflicting austerity on the council workforce.

In fact, the council has over £100 million in its 'unallocated' useable reserves which it could use to avoid any cuts in public services, jobs or pay and conditions, while building a movement to defeat this weak divided government.

Instead the council has shown it is prepared to spend money - to try and break the strike! It has so far spent £2 million on employing scab labour.

A striker explained: "We're happy to discuss any terms and conditions that the council want to change, but we can't accept a pay cut plain and simple. People have mortgages and they've got families to feed so a cut out of their wages of up to £5,000 a year is just not acceptable.

Together

"What we need now is for the union to organise a rally that brings all the depots together. We need to take this more public now. We've got the majority of public support and we can win.

"We're fighting for our jobs and we're probably the strongest workforce. If we win this, I don't think they can touch any other department. But if we lose this, every single department, and the city's public services, will go downhill."

The Birmingham bin workers are at the forefront of the national battle to stop cuts to local government. Building solidarity should be a vital part of the TUC congress taking place next week. The National Shop Stewards' Network (NSSN) rally taking place before the congress will be demanding coordinated action to stop the cuts and smash the pay cap.

Paul, a striking bin worker, explained why he'll be at the NSSN rally:

"I'm attending because I'm sick and tired of the working men and women of this country having the life squeezed out of their conditions to appease austerity, gross incompetence in management, and fuelling the wages of their fat cat bosses. So I'm making a stand to say enough is enough."

> Continued on page 3

> NSSN rally details: page 16



What we think

Trade unions will converge on Brighton this week for this year's annual TUC Congress at the end of a summer which has seen a wave of strikes – many in defence of living standards.

Unite members in the NHS at Barts Trust in east London, Mixed Fleet cabin crew at British Airways and even Bank of England staff have been fighting against poverty pay. Bin workers in Birmingham had forced their employers to retreat from cuts to terms and conditions and miserly wage rises but have now been forced to resume their action after the Labour council scandalously reneged on an agreed way forward.

Just days before Congress, 40 low-paid workers in the BFAWU bakers' union at two restaurants in Cambridge and Crayford went on strike in the first UK walkout in McDonald's history.

On top of these disputes and others, RMT members have increased the scope of their struggle to keep guards on the trains and PCS members in DWP have been fighting jobcentre closures.

Coming after official statistics showing historic low levels of strike action over recent years, there is a definite rise in the preparedness of workers to fight, mostly out of necessity as average wage rises are lagging behind real inflation by at least 1.5% and 2.5% for those in the public sector because of the Tory pay cap. No wonder that in



A mass struggle on pay by the union movement... could act as a lightning rod for all the many grievances felt by workers



photo Paul Mattsson

TORIES WEAK: TIME FOR THE TUC TO ACT

the general election, Theresa May was confronted by the charge that nurses are forced to go to foodbanks. Such is the anger, the Royal College of Nurses, traditionally a non-strike union, has launched a summer of protests building up to a planned industrial action ballot.

But how can the public sector unions fight against the 1% pay cap and can they win? The right-wing union leaders see the new higher undemocratic voting thresholds for industrial action ballots in the Trade Union Act as an insurmountable barrier to winning ballots for national action.

Shamefully, the same union leaders did virtually nothing to oppose the Trade Union Bill and the TUC has sat on the resolution from the RMT that was passed at last year's Congress calling for "an urgent conference of affiliates to provide a practical forum, including workshops, as to how to best coordinate our legal and industrial response to the Act in line with policy already set by Congress."

At the beginning of the general election campaign, TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady gave a positive response to the Tory so-called pro-worker policies. This was because she was convinced that a Tory majority was certain and was preparing for partnership with the Tories and the employers.

Mass demo

There are seven motions to the congress on fighting the public sector pay cap, giving some indication at least what union members think. Those from PCS, FBU, POA and the Scottish EIS education union call for a campaign of protests and action, including a national demonstration and coordinated industrial action.

If carried and properly implemented, this would represent a real platform for a serious struggle. To attempt to overcome the new voting thresholds requires not passivity but for the unions to properly prepare the ground with workplace meetings, rallies and protests.

A national march called by the TUC, the unions and Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell could mobilise workers in numbers last seen on the massive anti-cuts TUC demonstration of March 2011. It is estimated that up to 750,000 workers filled the streets of London on that day, yet that was before the true ferocity of Tory austerity was felt. Who could doubt the potential of one now called in the name of the unions and the Labour leadership?

Over 100,000 came on the grassroots Health Campaigns Together demonstration in March with not many fewer on the post-election march under the banner of the People's Assembly. It would reach outside the ranks of the unions to the unorganised workers and young people who voted in droves for Corbyn in June for policies such as free education and £10 an hour minimum wage.

That 2011 demonstration proved to be the starting point for the struggle to defend public sector pensions which culminated in the N30 strike that year. Over two million workers walked out together on what was in reality a public sector general strike. Actually, in Northern Ireland, where the transport system is still publicly owned, it was not far from a general strike.

That mass strike could and should have struck a decisive blow against Cameron and Osborne but rather than continue and escalate it, the TUC and right-wing



photo Paul Mattsson

union leaders ended the action after the one day, despite the best efforts of militant unions like PCS in alliance with the National Shop Stewards Network. If anything, it only emboldened the Tories to go on the offensive. But the resultant catastrophic attack on jobs, services and living standards has only built up huge anger within the working class.

In 2011, the Tories vainly attempted to turn private sector workers against the N30 strike by claiming that public sector pensions were 'gold-plated'. But as the massive strike-day demonstrations showed, all workers understood that it was necessary to stand up to the massive cuts offensive. Now there would be even greater support for public sector unions if they take action, particularly if it is on a similar scale.

A real campaign, properly prepared, across the public sector with co-ordinated strike ballots would lift workers'

confidence and could see decisive votes for action. However, if the new 'super-majority' voting thresholds weren't reached, it would expose the undemocratic character of the anti-union laws.

Also, it wouldn't be lost on workers that the weak and divided government trying to outlaw such strikes couldn't win a majority at all and is propped up by the DUP! In a situation where workers' living standards are being squeezed mercilessly, this could be an explosive outcome with defying the laws being posed.

Lame duck government

One of the first national ballots under the Act could be by CWU members in Royal Mail over the next few weeks on pay, pensions, jobs and workload. But already this summer, over a dozen offices have seen the union's members walk out on unofficial action to defend their union reps, the latest one was last Friday in Falkirk.

The vote for Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity programme in June denied May a majority, pushing the Tories into crisis. Workers will be hoping that in just a few months, there will be another election but it would be complacent of the union leaders to rely on this. May's government can stagger on because the alternative would be a Corbyn-led government and the capitalist establishment are terrified that mass pressure by workers could push

it in a direction far more radical than outlined in the election manifesto. But the Tories are weak and divided and can be defeated, on condition there is serious mass action prepared and carried out.

May blurted out that she was prepared to carry on until the 2022 general election but drew immediate rebuttals from all sides of the Tories. Even the most rabid anti-union Murdoch Tory press now seemingly supports a pay rise for public sector workers, at least those 'deserving' ones on the frontline. They are even hinting May might give a few crumbs. But this is a reflection of the ferocious mood that is building.

The TUC must seize on this sign of weakness and press home their advantage for a significant fully funded pay rise for all.

The incredible recent victory by the Glasgow janitors, in a Unison branch led by Socialist Party members, after a struggle lasting well over a year and the retreats won by bin workers in Birmingham and Doncaster, even if only temporarily, show what is possible.

A mass struggle on pay by the union movement over the next weeks and months, which could act as a lightning rod for all the many grievances felt by workers, does have the potential to build a mass movement that lands a decisive blow against the Tories. That is what is needed now.

Step up the solidarity

Time for Jeremy Corbyn to back the bin workers!



photo Rachel Jenkins

continued from front page

A solidarity movement in support of the Birmingham bin strikers is urgently needed. All the council unions, plus other trade union bodies in the city, should be organising workplace meetings to explain what has happened and to hold collections to make sure the bin workers can't be starved back to work.

At the same time the other council unions, GMB and Unison, are also facing job losses as a result of cuts. They should be balloting their affected members, hold workplace meetings and argue the case for strike action.

This should be combined with a major public rally in support of the bin workers, mobilising workers from across Birmingham and beyond.

Strikers are rightly demanding the immediate resignation of the Blairite Labour councillors John Clancy and Lisa Trickett, plus the chief executive Stella Manzie, who have been instrumental in reneging on the deal.

However, the silence from other Labour councillors, and MPs locally and nationally, is deafening. Events in Birmingham show clearly that Labour is two parties in one. Labour councils in Birmingham and elsewhere are implementing savage Tory austerity, whilst at the same time Jeremy Corbyn won popular support in the general election by standing on an anti-austerity manifesto.

Jeremy Corbyn is rightly known in the trade union movement for his long record of supporting workers taking strike action. It was very good that he immediately backed the Mc-

Donald's strikers which then embarrased even some ultra-Blairite MPs to follow suit at least in words.

Unfortunately, however, as yet Jeremy Corbyn has not come out to support the bin strikers or to oppose the strike-breaking, anti-worker, pro-austerity actions of this supposedly Labour council.

In the past right-wing Labour leader Neil Kinnock viciously attacked Liverpool's Labour council (in which Militant, now the Socialist Party, played a leading role) for issuing redundancy notices.

This was a mistaken tactic to buy time, but the council made clear to the workforce that not one single worker was to be made redundant – and none were. On the contrary, the council defied the Tories and succeeded in increasing the workforce, building 5,000 council houses and dramatically improving public services.

Birmingham, by contrast, is laying workers off and attempting to break a strike. It is urgent that Corbyn condemns the council's actions, linked to a campaign to democratise the Labour Party, pledging to remove the cutters from office before next year's local elections, and to stand candidates who are prepared to defy the Tories and refuse to implement cuts.

Unite, and other Labour-affiliated unions, should refuse to give any funding to Labour cutters as part of such a campaign. If this doesn't happen workers in Birmingham and elsewhere are bound to conclude that, despite Jeremy Corbyn's positive policies, Labour in office – at least at local authority level – remains a pro-austerity, anti-working class party.

Have you got news for us? DEADLINE: Friday before publication date, urgent news: Monday

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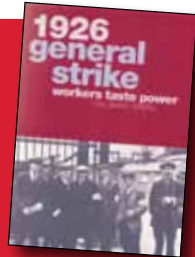


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UN slams Tories for disabled rights ruin

■ Reverse all the cuts now!

'Alan Smith'
PCS union member, Coventry

A damning UN report has criticised the government's attacks on disabled people in Britain. It states legislation has "failed to recognise living independently and being included in the community as a human right."

The report refers to the "segregation" of disabled children who most often end up in "special schools" due to a lack of support and integration in mainstream schools. It also calls for more resources to support individual living for disabled people.

This is not the first such scathing report. In November 2016 another UN report spoke explicitly of "grave or systematic violations" of the rights of disabled people.

Shockingly, back in February last year, the Tories had the gall to claim their party "does proudly" with supporting disabled people with "very generous schemes." This at the time they were cutting another £3.7 billion from disability benefits!



Plans to close almost one in ten in jobcentres will only make things worse

Social security is one of the areas mentioned in the report, which also calls for a review into the vicious system of benefit sanctions. Both reports have also criticised the current system of medical assessments for sickness benefit claimants.

Between December 2011 and February 2014, 2,650 people died within six weeks of their claim ending. All had been declared 'fit for work' by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the private contractors who carry out assessments.

And DWP plans to close almost one in ten in jobcentres nationally will only make things worse. Civil service union PCS has long campaigned against both the punitive benefits regime and the office closures.

Disabled people across Britain have faced relentless attacks in the name of vicious austerity policies.

The Socialist Party fights for:
■ Reversing the benefit cuts - for the right to secure, independent living
■ Increased NHS funding - including more mental health services

McStrike makes history

'If we don't get it, shut it down!'

'Historic' is a word that is bandied around a lot in the labour movement. But it is a fitting description of the action taken by McDonald's workers organised by bakers' union BFAWU on 4 September.

The global corporation has been operating here since opening its first store in Woolwich in 1974. Workers in the nearby Crayford restaurant, along with a branch in Cambridge, have become the first McDonald's workers in Britain to take strike action.

The point has been made on the picket lines and at solidarity protests that action of this kind is exactly what the working class needs.

Young people organising to reject zero-hour contracts, low pay and bullying managers could mark the start of the kind of movement needed to end austerity.

The McDonald's workers have given us a glimpse of what is possible. Workers in shops and fast food chains can and will fight. It is now vital that the example of this strike is built upon.

Crayford, south London

"I believe that we can win" is not a phrase heard very often in sleepy suburban Crayford at 6am. But this was the message being sent loud and clear by 15 young McDonald's strikers.

They were joined by around 50 supporters from the local trade union movement. Shen Batmaz, one of the strikers, spoke of McDonald's workers "all over the country ready to stand up."

Danny Hoggan, secretary of the Greenwich local government branch of general union Unite and Socialist Party member, brought solidarity. He drove home the importance of this strike to the wider movement: "Your victory will be our victory!"

There was a lively protest outside parliament later that morning bringing together strikers and supporters from across the movement.

Paul Callanan
Socialist Party London

Cambridge

"Every single individual that works in that store is a beautiful, wonderful human being and they deserve more" - Tom, BFAWU shop steward and striking McDonald's worker.

There were about 30 strikers and supporters on the Newmarket Road picket line at 6am.

Considering the restaurant wasn't open, the car park was suspiciously full. A small horde of McDonald's managers descended on the store.

Under their supervision we could see workers inside repeatedly cleaning the same, already clean surfaces.

Outside, spirits were high as strikers and supporters organised a lively street meeting for the duration of the picket.

The energy of strikers was particularly admirable - a little bird told me they'd been up partying the previous night and were shaking up one of the world's richest corporations on one hour's sleep. Work hard, play hard.

Socialist Party members and anti-austerity activists, with representatives from the Fire Brigades Union, teachers' unions, Unite, Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, and the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), came to express their support.

Speaking for the NSSN, national chair and Socialist Party member Rob Williams stressed the importance of bringing the struggles of low-paid workers together to smash the pay cap and end poverty pay.

Ian Hodson, BFAWU president, urged that if any striker is victimised we each return with ten friends to occupy. There was plenty of agreement.

In the words of what may become the chant of the year: "If we don't get it - shut it down!"

Dave Murray
Socialist Party Eastern region

■ Socialist Party members and trade unionists also took part in solidarity actions in Leeds, Hull, Liverpool, Swansea and across the country - read more at socialistparty.org.uk

Join the fightback!
Join the Socialists!

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McDonald's Crayford branch BFAWU rep
photos Mary Finch unless otherwise stated



BFAWU president Ian Hodson



BFAWU's ready to talk - where is McDonald's?



Cambridge picket line
photo Dave Murray



Crayford picket line
photo Paul Callanan



Problem gambling soars by 33%



■ Tories and Blairites behind 'light touch' industry regulation



photo Yamaguchi/CC

Dave Carr

The old adage "there's a sucker born every minute" should be updated to every 20 seconds - after Britain's gambling industry was again revealed to be exploiting vulnerable people in order to increase profits.

If readers don't know, 20 seconds is the average time between bets of up to £100 a throw on 'fixed-odds betting terminals' (FOBTs). They're the modern-day fruit machines in bookies' shops, considered the 'crack cocaine' of gambling.

An estimated £1.8 billion a year is sucked out of the wallets and purses and payday loans of mainly poor punters by FOBTs.

But the latest culprit is an online firm, 888. It has just been fined a record £7.8 million by the Gambling Commission, the state regulator, after a "technical failure" allowed 7,000 problem gamblers to circumvent blocks, access their accounts and continue gambling.

Online gambling is even more addictive - and more profitable - than FOBTs. Last year it accounted for £4.5 billion out of the industry's total income of £14 billion.

The industry likes to promote betting with images of grandad having a flutter on the Grand National or happy punters who put £1 on Leicester City to win the Premier League.

In reality the number of problem gamblers has shot up by 33% in three years - to 430,000. It's the result of easy access, extensive promotional

deals and light-touch regulation. The Gambling Commission also estimates around two million gamblers are 'at risk'.

The cost to these individuals is huge - family breakup, job loss, bankruptcy, jailing and even suicide. The cost to society in health services and criminal justice is, according to the Institute for Public Policy Research, £1.2 billion a year.

Self-regulation has clearly not reduced problem gambling but governments have been reluctant to act. That's not surprising as the gambling industry has enjoyed a cosy relationship with governments and MPs.

It was Tony Blair who liberalised gambling laws in his 2005 Gambling Act and promoted super-casinos to 'create (low paid) jobs'.

In 2012 the Commons culture committee recommended more FOBTs and revived the idea of more super-casinos, despite widespread public opposition. It also blamed 'high' taxation for driving online operators abroad - instead of accusing them of tax avoidance.

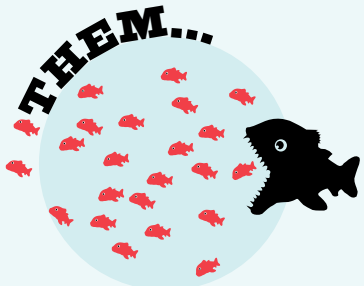
The government has delayed publishing its latest report into gambling - which conveniently ignores online betting - but Theresa May is under pressure to reduce the £100 stake limit on FOBTs to £2. However, the Treasury is no doubt reluctant to take a £1 billion hit in revenues.

The gambling industry is an unequ coastal example of a privately owned industry, run ruthlessly in the interests of private profit, operating against the interests of wider society.

North Korea nuclear tensions escalate

■ Grandstanding by maverick, authoritarian leaders in both the United States and North Korea has increased fears of a nuclear strike.

What do socialists say about the brutal North Korean regime, its conflict with US imperialism and the danger of atomic weapons? Get the next issue of the Socialist to read our special feature on the crisis.



■ £2.5bn for landlords...

Rogue landlords in England get £2.5 billion a year from the government. Owners of unsafe or substandard private rental homes make the sum on housing benefit paid to struggling tenants.

The total cost of this landlord handout - including non-rogue landlords - has leapt £4 billion since 2010. On average, private landlords are squeezing 22% more rent from us than when the Tories came to power.

■ ... 1.4m slums for us

And how many of these shoddy pads are we forced to put up with? 1.4 million - 29% of all private rentals. Even in social housing, council houses have let £25,000 homes slip below decency standards.

Meanwhile, central government is trying to block even very limited landlord licensing schemes. And both Tory and Blairite local authorities continue to sell off council homes.

Figures: Independent analysis of DCLG's English Housing Survey 2015-16

■ £50bn for train firms...

Privatised train firms suck up £50 billion more than nationalised rail, according to a new accountancy study.

Massive inefficiencies include bureaucracy in a fragmented system, costlier carriage leasing and track upgrades - and, of course, private profit.

Dividends alone - never mind executive salaries and clever accounting - registered £228 million in 2015-16.

■ ... -£2,888 for us

But prices for us are going up 3.6% - to an average of £2,888 for a season ticket, says Labour. The latest outrageous hike is in line with 'RPI' inflation - while average wage growth is only 2%.

That's yet another real-terms pay cut for austerity Britain - meaning more money for the bosses.

Figures: 'A very costly industry' (University of Essex 2017), Office of Rail and Road, Labour Party, ONS

■ Uni boss's digs...

A vice chancellor who earns £227,000 a year says his uni should pay for his house.

Craig Mahoney, head of the University of West Scotland, said: "I can't do my job properly because I'm not provided with a house."

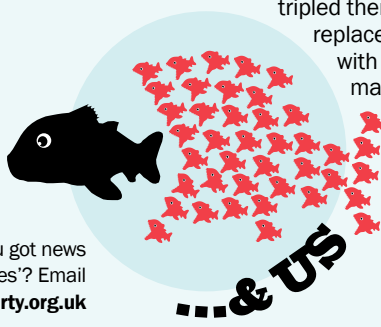
Figures: Telegraph, IFS

■ ... students' debt

Meanwhile the poorest students in England will leave with £57,000 debt - that's £14,000 more than wealthier students.

Students in the bottom 40% of household incomes have higher costs than those in the top 30%.

Why? The Blairites introduced fees, the Liberal Democrats tripled them, and the Tories replaced the living grant with an interest-making loan.



Have you got news for 'the fishes'? Email editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Coordinated rail walkout against driver-only operation

Merseyrail: Labour mayor and councillors must reverse their decision

Hugh Caffrey
North West Socialist Party
regional secretary

Another rock-solid strike on 1 September marked the first of three more days industrial action by the RMT transport trade union on Merseyrail, fighting to keep the guards on trains.

Yet again, public support for the strike is overwhelming and train drivers in the rail union Aslef refused to cross the RMT's picket lines.

Socialist Party campaign stalls across Merseyside in support of the guards have continued to receive backing from the majority of the public for the guards.

The drivers are opposed to driver-only operation (DOO) because they want to be concentrating on driving the train. When I got to the picket line, two Aslef members were explaining that a driver elsewhere in the country, operating a driver-only train, had been blamed for an accident. In other words, management remove the guards who help to prevent or mitigate accidents and then blame drivers.

Aslef members must urgently compel their national leadership to work with the RMT to defend the guards on Merseyrail and elsewhere.

DOO is a policy enthusiastically pushed by the Tories and the rail employers. On Merseyside, however, Labour metro-mayor Steve Rotherham is overseeing the removal of the guards, implemented by the city region's transport committee which overwhelmingly is made up of Labour councillors.

The Socialist Party supported the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) standing in the metro-mayor elections in May, to provide a genuinely anti-cuts, pro-guards position. Some criticised TUSC for standing but it has been fully vindicated by these developments. Numerous guards have told us they voted for TUSC because of this, as did more than a few Labour Party members!

The determination of Merseyside's relevant Labour representatives to remove the guards shows why RMT activists were and are right to oppose simply affiliating their union to Labour without asking a series of hard questions about what it would mean.

On Merseyside, RMT members would not support it, if it meant the RMT having to fund and support Rotherham at the next election, despite driver-only operation being opposed by the RMT, by the local public, by Labour's national policy, by Jeremy Corbyn, and the local Labour membership.



Merseyrail picket line photo RMT



Leeds picket line photo Leeds Socialist Party

Arriva Rail North: Fighting for passenger safety

Striking RMT member

Brave and determined RMT members have taken their 7th day of industrial action against Arriva Rail North. The mood on the picket lines is still high despite management lies and propaganda - members know full well their jobs are under serious threat.

These strong men and woman aren't just fighting for their jobs but to ensure a safe, accessible and secure railway for the travelling public. The response from the public on the picket lines has been 100% positive, they back us all the way.

RMT members are determined to keep fighting and the anger at the company and its increasing use of underhand tactics such as intimidating lawful pickets is only increasing our resolve - the company are clearly rattled.

The action remains 100% rock solid. Our unity and our strength will win this dispute on our franchise. The same is true for brothers and sisters facing the same situation on Southern and Merseyrail. The issue is also spreading to other franchises such as Greater Anglia and South Western Railway where workers are balloting for action.

Newcastle

Elaine Brunskill spoke to **Craig Johnston**, RMT relief regional organiser:

"This strike isn't about wages, it isn't about terms and conditions or pensions, it is completely and totally about safety, accessibility, security and most importantly for this strike the battle is about passenger service."

"Northern Rail have accepted a Tory government franchise speci-

cation that says at least 50% of services have to be driver-only operated.

"Guards currently have around 30 safety and operational competencies and have to sit bi-annual rules examinations to ensure they have maintained these competencies. The knowledge they need includes evacuations of trains, dealing with fires on trains, train door failures, signalling systems, track systems, and routes. In the event of an incident or accident where the driver is incapacitated, guards are trained to step in, protect trains and other running lines and look after passengers.

"The only way we maintain this is a guarantee of a fully safety trained and operational guard on every train."

Manchester

The Socialist Party visited picket lines outside Manchester Victoria and Piccadilly train stations. The



Southern Rail picket line at Victoria station, London photo Rob Williams

strike has clearly had an effect because Rail North has issued reduced timetables for strike days, with trains and buses not running past 7pm!

Strikers were giving out leaflets to passengers, explaining that their dispute is about safety and asking them to fill in postcards to send to their MP demanding that they oppose DOO. Many members of the public are supportive of the strike and want to keep guards on the trains, particularly in the wake of the Manchester terrorist attack earlier this year which happened next to Victoria train station.

Becci Heagney, North West Socialist Party regional organiser

Leeds

RMT members were solid in their ongoing dispute over keeping guards on Arriva Rail North services. Their determination was reinforced by the company refusing to guarantee they would even have a second staff member on train services, let alone someone with the safety training of a guard.

Strikers were also angry at three organised strike breaking attempts by the company.

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party



photo Iain Dalton

THREE WEEK ARGOS STRIKE ENDS

Iain Dalton
Socialist Party West Yorkshire
organiser

Argos workers, members of Unite the Union, have finished a three week period of strikes over issues around relocation and redundancies.

In Castleford, this is a key issue

as many of the workers have been long-term employees accruing a significant potential redundancy package.

Their fear is that transferring their work to another site out of reasonable commuting distance would rob them of that security.

Strikers were clear that if Argos won't budge then they are more

than prepared to take further action.

The strikers wanted to thank those who have sent them support and concluded their picket line on 4 September by taking a solidarity photo in support of the McDonald's workers, on strike for the first time, over working conditions, zero hour contracts and low pay.

FAWLEY REFINERY CANTEN DISPUTE

Nick Chaffey
Southampton Socialist Party

Women working for caterers Baxter Stanley in the canteen at the Fawley oil refinery near Southampton have voted unanimously to strike over their derisory 12p an hour pay rise.

The Socialist Party visited their picket line on 1 September to give support and solidarity.

Strikers leafleted workers arriving at the site. The tailback of cars caused huge delays but there were smiles and solidarity as 99% took leaflets and gave their support.

Strikers explained their case to us: "I've worked here for over 30 years. We always had a decent pay rise, maybe 4%; Baxter Stanley took over the contract eight years ago and we have had 1% or 1.5%. Last year they promised if we accepted 1.5% we'd get a better offer this year. They think we forgot. Well we haven't!"

"They made six workers redundant recently, they haven't replaced them and now we're doing the work of two or three.

"Just to rub it in, after they told us we were paid the highest in the area, we found them advertising jobs on higher pay than us. We work hard, we deserve a decent pay rise, they've



photo Nick Chaffey

got the money, it's time to pay up."

■ Send messages of support to mick.polleck@unitetheunion

Follow us on Twitter @Socialist_Party

College workers ballot for action in Nottingham

A Nottingham UCU member

Unison and UCU further education union branches at newly merged Nottingham college are in dispute with management over redundancy and reorganisation.

The Nottingham college merger, which brought together the two remaining city colleges, was signed off on 8 June, after a ten month delay. Management almost immediately declared that over 160 full-time equivalent teaching and support posts were at risk of redundancy.

Union representatives asked college management to reschedule the hastily planned reorganisation and to consult properly over changes. Instead, management ploughed on through the summer, when most college staff were on leave. Inevitably, the consultation has been badly organised and ineffective.

The unions are particularly angry at management's refusal to sign a no compulsory redundancy agreement. This seemed to make little sense because 120 new posts were also being advertised.

Despite the difficulties of summer organising, UCU arranged an indicative ballot, with an 87% majority for industrial action.

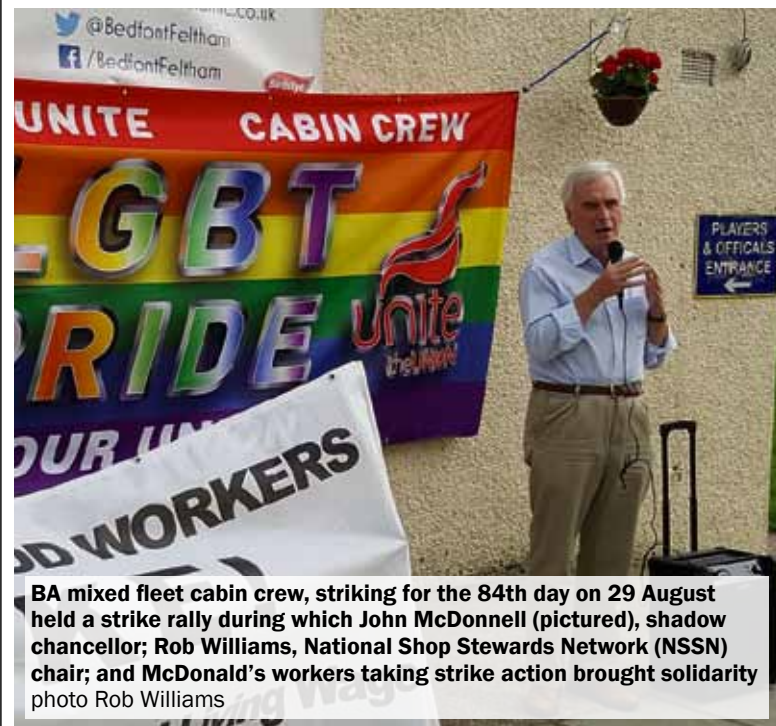
Further education in Nottingham has a recent history of poor management, which has compounded the problems of sector-wide funding cuts.

One of the merged colleges, New College Nottingham, was almost bankrupted by a recent principal, Amarjit Bassi. Bassi, a leading light in the Gazelle Group of Colleges, a controversial further education organisation that championed so-called 'entrepreneurial' learning, later became principal of Cornwall College.

He left that college after it too went into financial difficulties, with a settlement package that made him the highest paid English principal in 2015-16. Former New College staff are anxious that the new regime might be a repeat of the Bassi experience.

We are building a local campaign to challenge both redundancies and the new college vision. As well as balloting for action this includes lobbying local Labour politicians to pressurise the college to pull back on reorganisation, consult meaningfully with the unions, and rethink its impoverished vision for further education.

The campaign will continue as the new academic year begins.



BA mixed fleet cabin crew, striking for the 84th day on 29 August held a strike rally during which John McDonnell (pictured), shadow chancellor; Rob Williams, National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) chair; and McDonald's workers taking strike action brought solidarity photo Rob Williams

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SCHOOLS AND TEACHING

A PERFECT STORM OF CUTS, UNDERFUNDING, EXCESSIVE WORKLOADS AND LOW PAY

Teachers' unions must fight to reverse disastrous Tory education policies

James Kerr
Teacher and Lewisham Socialist Party

Schools return this week for a new academic year with the usual mix of emotions but with the prospect of budget cuts lingering in the background.

Controversy also hangs over some schools, including the exam scandals at Eton and Winchester.

The Guardian's recent coverage of St Olave's grammar school in Orpington, and its policy of removing students who 'underperform' at AS Level, will have been met with shakes of the head from many teachers and parents but it's not a major shock. Partly because it is unsurprising that a selective school would exclude students in order to massage results but mainly because the practice is not that uncommon.

In fact, follow up coverage revealed 20,000 students don't complete their Key Stage 5 studies, some voluntarily but many taken off roll by schools concerned about their results and league table position, including those who are supposedly non-selective.

How many young people have had their education interrupted because of accountability measures? The St Olave's students had the benefit of legal support and press coverage that many students don't have access to.

This is just the latest symptom of a culture where pressure on schools and individual teachers to hit targets drives a system placed under even greater strain by cuts introduced by the Tory government.

There is a crisis in education developing on a number of different fronts and it is vital there is a powerful organised response from the labour movement, parents and students.

For the past year warnings about

cuts to school funding have dominated discussion around education. After the general election a Survation poll estimated that in the region of 800,000 people switched votes on the issue of school funding alone.

The music of the future was heard in schools like Forest Hill in Lewisham, south London, where staff took 12 days of strike action against huge cuts as a result of a £1.3 million budget deficit and numerous staff redundancies.

Class sizes

47% of schools have increased class sizes and reduced their curriculum because of budget pressures. A generation of young people are seeing the things that enrich their lives and inspire them being taken away to balance the books.

The fallout from the general election prompted education secretary Justine Greening to divert £1.3 billion from the Free Schools budget towards local authority schools and academies. But with no injection of fresh cash into the system, cuts will still hit schools hard.

Around the country there have been successful events bringing teachers, parents and students together - like the 1,000-plus rally in Tower Hamlets in May. These can provide firm foundations to build mass campaigns to halt the cuts. As with the Forest Hill campaign, parent and student action will be necessary alongside industrial action by school staff.

The new school year brings the launch of the new National Education Union (NEU), an amalgamation of the NUT and ATL. Now the biggest teachers' union and the fourth largest union in the Trades Union Congress, it potentially has enormous power to lead the fight in defence of education, but only by adopting a clear and bold winning strategy.

At the November 2016 special conference that paved the way for the NEU, Socialist Party Teachers raised opposition to the truncated process to ratify the rule book of the new union and the impact some of the contents of that rule book would have on the union's ability to respond quickly and effectively in mounting industrial action.

We agreed that the NEU could be a 'game changer' but that is not a given and it will need to be not just a big but a fighting union - bringing together the struggles of teachers and support staff on the ground and on a national basis.



This year will be a defining one for the immediate future of education and there will be no hiding place for the new union, which will be tested on the issue of school funding in particular.

When asked about national strike action at the launch of the NEU, joint general secretary Mary Bousted said: "My view is that if you're looking at education funding, the power of information, campaigning and the moral case you can make is extremely powerful. I think for funding that's probably a more effective route."

While a thorough and comprehensive campaign of information can be effective, it would be naive to think that the 'moral case' will defeat a government intent on attacking state education.

Under the new anti-trade union law teachers have much higher thresholds to meet for national strike action. But with the combined resources of the NUT and ATL used in a major campaign, and the kind of expertise put on show with the schoolcuts.org website, then even a high threshold could be obtained.

We should also remind ourselves that in the USA, right-wing legislators have previously set ballot thresholds at a level they were sure teacher unions would not meet and were proven wrong.

Tests

It is not only on funding that urgent action is required. High stakes testing in schools is damaging young people and the teachers who teach them.

This is particularly acute at primary school where young children are dragged through tests that most adults

would struggle with and where the pressure takes its toll. For example, eight out of ten headteachers reported a rise in mental health issues for children during exam time.

Even a House of Commons select committee has acknowledged this, stating in its report: "This high stakes system... is leading to a narrowing of the curriculum and 'teaching to the test', as well as affecting teacher and pupil wellbeing."

A motion at this year's NUT conference agreed a ballot of leadership members this term which could

pave the way for a boycott of the tests in 2018. Taking this forward is an immediate task for the new union.

Testing also contributes to excessive workload for teachers, which is forcing many to leave the profession. In fact, a survey found one in ten teachers had left in a 12 month period with the majority citing workload as the factor driving them out.

In some authorities, like Nottingham and Coventry, Fair Workload Charters are being introduced to try to retain teachers. Campaigning for these to be rolled out across the



photo Socialist Party

Socialism Today

The Socialist Party's magazine

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Alan Jones contributes to the debate on the way forward in the US



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country and ultimately incorporated into a legally binding national contract for all teachers is essential to halt the exodus from teaching.

Recruitment and retention has become particularly difficult in London schools with the vast majority of headteachers reporting difficulties in recruiting teachers in all areas.

One factor compounding this recruitment and retention crisis is public sector pay. If teacher pay had simply kept pace with inflation, it would be £5,000 a year higher on average.

Pay

While funding may be at the forefront of teachers' minds, pay cannot be ignored and, with the potential for industrial action across the public sector to break the pay cap, demands for an end to performance-related pay and for guaranteed pay progression for all teachers need to be incorporated into campaigns.

This is a weak and divided government. Graham Brady, chair of the Tory backbench MPs' 1922 Committee, was forced to concede in the aftermath of the general election that the flagship plan to roll out new grammar schools was dead in the water. This comes after numerous u-turns by the Department for Education in recent years and shows their vulnerability

when faced with opposition.

It also comes at a time of growing popularity for the policies put forward by Jeremy Corbyn's manifesto at the general election. The idea of a National Education Service, providing free education from cradle to grave, is popular. It has the potential to not only attract new teachers but also win some back to the profession they've left behind.

It would inspire young people who can see a future where their interests, hopes and dreams are nurtured within education, not dulled and dented.

Corbyn must guarantee the 'renationalisation' of education, with academies and free schools brought back under local authority control and an end to the current accountability system which distorts the way schools are run so much.

Next year marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of Paulo Friere's 'Pedagogy of the oppressed' which joined the long tradition of critiquing the way education is run under capitalism. 50 years on many of his observations are more relevant than ever.

Socialist ideas will be vital in providing answers to the big questions students, parents and teachers have, and will come to the fore in the struggles ahead.



photo Socialist Party

How the Single Market blocks socialist policies

Pete Watson
Nottingham Socialist Party

The European Single Market is a major barrier to any incoming socialist or anti-austerity government.

The capitalist establishment across Europe is wedded to privatisation and austerity. And it can rely on Single Market treaties and EU law to impede nationalisation and state investment while ramping up privatisation.

The 2009 Lisbon Treaty is the legal framework that applies to all Single Market member states.

Article 120 of the treaty requires member states to “act in accordance with the principle of an open market economy with free competition” - compulsory Thatcherite economics.

Articles 107-9 bar member states from government aid “which distorts or threatens to distort competition.” This is designed to block substantial public investment.

Labour proposed a £35 billion subsidy to save 4,000 jobs at Port Talbot and prevent the death of domestic steel making. But this would distort competition, and so could breach the treaty.

While socialists would promote nationalisation rather than subsidy, a Corbyn-led government would fall foul of EU law if it wished to prevent sudden closures and redundancies through state support.

The unelected European Commission ordered the Belgian government to claw back €211 million in subsidies given to (unsuccessfully) prevent the collapse of steel group Duferco. The Commission declared the aid “illegal.”

Nationalisation

Articles 101-6 of the Lisbon Treaty require that “services of general economic interest or having the character of a revenue-producing monopoly” be subject to competition.

This is designed to severely limit nationalisation, and compliance generally requires breaking up and selling off what publicly owned industries are left.

It’s the right of the market to rule. Large-scale nationalisation in banking, utilities or public transport, and many major national investment programmes, would breach the treaty.

Some argue that Jeremy Corbyn’s manifesto does not pledge full-scale nationalisation, but partial nationalisation, which EU judges might decide does not fall foul of the treaty. Still, full-scale nationalisation is what is needed.

But in any case, competition rules mean that even if, for example, the rail industry was only part-nationalised - leaving many of the profiteers in place - it would have to be open to “free competition.” Investing in better infrastructure, more



Port Talbot steel workers marching for their jobs - Single Market treaties aim to prevent nationalisation and subsidies which could save them photo Scott Jones

staff and cheaper fares on the state routes would undermine private companies’ competitiveness and so breach the treaty.

‘EU directives’ - laws written by the European Commission and rubber-stamped by the almost powerless European Parliament - also apply to Single Market members.

For instance, the 1991 First Railway Directive requires that member states “guarantee that railway undertakings are afforded a status of independent operators behaving in a commercial manner and adapting to market needs.”

Any one nationalised rail company would come up against this. Increasing numbers of private rail companies operate even in France, a country incorrectly given by some as a model of public ownership within the Single Market.

Large-scale nationalisation would breach the Lisbon Treaty. Small-scale nationalisation would have to comply with competition laws

which make it ineffective, or breach the Lisbon Treaty. Big state subsidies to save or create jobs would breach the Lisbon Treaty.

There are some exceptions. And there are some cases which can be ambiguous.

But both are decided in the European Court of Justice by wealthy judges, drawn mainly from the ruling classes, “in accordance with the principle of an open market economy with free competition.” Unsurprisingly they have a record of deciding that ultimately private profit trumps workers’ interests.

So any anti-austerity or socialist government would face a choice. Stay in the Single Market and capitulate on its policies - like Syriza in Greece - a catastrophe for the working class. Or defy EU and Single Market diktats and implement policies in the interests of the working class.

That’s why we must oppose Britain’s membership.

The Socialist Inbox

Do you have something to say?

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Pensions are back in the headlines with the news that FTSE 350 companies’ pension deficits are equivalent to 70% of their annual profits. For decades, bosses have been closing workers’ ‘final salary’ pension schemes - also called ‘defined benefit’ (DB) - both to new entrants and existing members. DB schemes are based on a percentage of final salary multiplied by the number of years in the scheme. Sometimes they are replaced with a far less generous ‘defined contribution’ schemes or ‘career average’ pensions. In the private sector the number of workers in final salary schemes fell to 600,000 in 2013, from 1.4 million in 2006.

The latest company to scrap its final salary pensions is BT. BT had already closed its DB scheme to new entrants back in 2001.

The Communications Workers Union (CWU) has threatened strike action unless the company reverses course. Recently BMW car workers and Atomic Weapons Establishment workers went on strike to defend their pensions.

Earlier this year Royal Mail said it would shut its DB scheme in March 2018. As a result of closure the CWU said a 50-year-old postie earning £25,000 a year and retiring at 65 would lose £4,392 a year, or more than £100,000 over the course of their retirement.

Companies axing their DB schemes claim that most pension pots - 74% - are in deficit, and the deficit is growing, making them unsustainable. Although top directors continue to have their final salary schemes generously topped up - see TUC’s annual ‘PensionsWatch’ report. However the Pensions Protection Fund, established by the government, flatly contradicts this claim, saying most of the funds currently in deficit will return to health in 15 years’ time. Multinational financial services firm PwC points out the recent rise in equity markets has shaved £20 billion off the overall deficit.

Moreover the government’s recently published green (consultation) paper said that DB schemes are not affordable. It stated that FTSE 350 companies on average paid out five times more in shareholders’ dividends than they put towards their pension pot deficits.

The most notorious example of this practice was of course BHS. Its then owner Sir Philip Green looted hundreds of millions from the company in dividends resulting in the pension fund going from surplus to a £571 million deficit. Infamously, Green was pictured lounging on his £100 million superyacht in the Mediterranean while BHS workers were thrown on the dole.

Simon Carter
Plaistow, east London

We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. Don’t forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.



Magic money tree

It was during a BBC Question Time election special that the public was first informed of the fact that a “magic money tree” did not exist by Theresa May.

The PM was responding to a member of the audience who naively believed that the fact her “wage slips from 2009 reflect exactly what I’m earning today” was down to political ideologies and not to horticultural developments.

Yes, there was £130 million to spend on a failed general election designed to give her a landslide victory. Granted, the government then found £1 billion down the back of the sofa to buy back that lost support to give May a majority. Agreed, there is money to give the Queen an 8% pay rise.

But there is no magic money tree! In fact, those who think one exists are just “selfish” according to David Cameron, a man who spent £25,000 on a shed.

So those workers can just explain to their landlords that although they haven’t got this month’s rent, the PM values them. And Tesco is bound to accept the PM’s value in payment for food, right? If not, there’s always those food banks the

Tories are “really pleased” exist.

Some experts in horticulture, such as Chancellor Phillip Hammond, recognising the absence of money trees, say that MPs need to be “brave” and resist the urge to pay workers enough to feed themselves.

However, some Tory ministers have now flirted with the idea of ending parts of austerity, clearly concerned about the terrible hardships suffered by their poll numbers.

Boris Johnson is one such compassionate MP, calling for end to the pay cap. He said he wants this done in a “responsible way.” We therefore shouldn’t expect to see him anywhere near this issue.

The majority of Tory MPs, however, are still wedded to the idea of austerity and ‘saving’ money. Every penny counts.

Yes, it would have cost the same as just five pairs of Theresa May’s leather trousers to make Grenfell Tower’s cladding non-combustible, for example. But as we know, there is no magic money tree.

Carl Harper
Peterborough

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Non-fiction review: Pride Warts-and-all account of class war and the struggle for LGBT+ rights

Michael Johnson
Socialist Party LGBT group

‘Pride’ tells the story of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM). The group struggled alongside miners and their families in south Wales during the 1984-85 strike, as brought to popular light by the 2014 film of the same name.

The film was an unexpected hit around the world. Especially, as the book reflects, for a film about “vegan lesbian activists and a coal mining dispute.” It showed the power of working class solidarity during the miners’ strike along with the radical history of LGBT+ people fighting for their rights.

It also had a significant impact politically, at least within the LGBT+ community. LGSM and supporter groups experienced a resurgence in popularity and inspired debates on the repoliticisation of pride marches.

Tim Tate’s book, made up mainly of contributions and anecdotes from LGSM members and south Wales mining families, goes beyond simply retelling the film.

Instead it expands the story of LGSM to explore the political and social context that made the actions of the group and the miners significant even today.

It explores the industrial struggles in Britain running up to the 1984 strike; Thatcher and the Conservatives’ preparations to crush the “enemies within”; the role of the National



LGSM members in 2015 photo Fæ/CC

Union of Mineworkers in the strike and its eventual defeat.

It also explores the state of LGBT+ rights following the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967 - and the weakness of the organised labour movement in the struggle for LGBT+ liberation at that time.

Indeed, the book lays out the political battles around the events of the film warts and all. It details the

controversies, setbacks and even political divisions within LGSM and the wider movement hinted at in the film.

Pride explores a tumultuous period of British politics through the personal stories of those involved. It firmly demonstrates the power of solidarity in struggle in battling prejudice and fighting for the rights of the whole working class.

Non-fiction review: Six for the Tolpuddle Martyrs ‘Let the producers of wealth unite - and what can withstand them?’

Sean Brogan
Exeter Socialist Party

Every year thousands of trade unionists descend upon the small village of Tolpuddle in Dorset to commemorate the struggle in 1832 of farm workers to form a union.

These were times of change and unrest, of ‘Captain Swing’ and the Luddites, falling wages, poverty and a cruel class establishment in transition from the old aristocracy to the rising capitalist class.

Alan Gallop uses original materials and imagination to paint the struggle to organise.

Initially the ‘Tolpuddle Six’ farm workers, having formed a union, were arrested for swearing “illegal oaths.” The ruling Whig party, with Lord Melbourne as home secretary, even contemplated trying them under the 1797 Mutiny Act.

Local landowners had used spies to infiltrate the movement and then

testify against the organisers. They were tried by a hostile judge and jury who had decided their guilt in advance.

The illegal oaths they were charged with were of the sort taken by the Orange Order and Masonic Lodges for decades. It was rightly seen as one law for the rich and another for the poor.

The Tolpuddle labourers were sentenced to seven years’ transportation - manacled and worked in Australia in slave conditions for wealthy landlords. Their wives and children were denied poor relief.

At home there was a massive reply from the organised workforce. Thousands demonstrated and organised petitions all over the country - until they were pardoned under pressure from below.

What is striking about those times is how similar the tactics are to those used today by employers and governments. The dirty tricks used in the Shrewsbury Pickets trial. The

undercover police spies in Youth against Racism in Europe and the Socialist Party.

And although this is about conditions in 1830s England it foreshadows the repression and jailing of trade unionists in Iran, Kazakhstan, Belarus and elsewhere today.

George Loveless was an inspirational Tolpuddle leader, living in the same conditions as his members. He showed an important shift in consciousness, groping towards socialism - although not an understanding of the ruthless nature of the capitalist state - when he wrote:

“I believe that nothing will ever be done to relieve the distress of the working classes unless they take into their own hands...”

“Nothing but union will or can accomplish the great and important object, namely the salvation of the world. Let the producers of wealth unite firmly and peaceably their energies - and what can withstand them?”

Hurricane Harvey

A TRAGEDY MADE FAR WORSE BY CAPITALISM

In the following article Socialist Alternative members (US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party) report on the devastating impact of Hurricane Harvey and the failure of establishment politicians and capitalism to prepare for such increasing extreme weather events, let alone adequately respond to the aftermath, nor address the underlying causes. In a companion piece, Pete Dickenson looks at the accumulating body of scientific evidence on human-induced climate change.

Houston, the fourth-largest city in the US with over six million people, has been devastated by record-shattering rainfalls. At least 47 people have been confirmed dead, and many more are feared drowned. At least 100,000 homes have been destroyed forcing tens of thousands to seek temporary shelter in convention centres and much less certain shelter in the medium term.

Only 20% of people have flood insurance and even that programme is severely underfunded and will need to be renewed by Congress in September.

Hurricane Harvey and its flooding was a natural disaster made far worse by capitalism. Two 80 year-old reservoirs, chronically under-maintained by penny-pinching governments, are leaking tremendous amounts of water, flooding many homes that would otherwise have been spared by the rain.

Chemical plants, under-prepared by profit-driven corporations, are leaking dangerous chemicals into the water, sparking explosions and fires.

In the town of Crosby, floods knocked out power to a peroxide plant, causing the plant to explode, and the CEO has refused so far to provide much information.



The working class, in large part, is being rescued by the working class

New York Times

A toxicologist for the Environmental Defence Fund “expects a million pounds of toxic chemicals will be released around Houston just as a result of the storm and floods. Many of them are carcinogenic”.

When the waters rose and trapped people in their homes, it became clear that government and non-profit organisations’ rescue efforts were woefully inadequate. The entire Texas National Guard was not called out until several days after the disaster began. Authorities even failed to provide enough cots and bedding for evacuees, relying instead on the generosity of ordinary Houstonians less impacted by the storm.

Thousands of ordinary working people spontaneously leapt into action to pull their neighbours from the flood waters. The New York



photo Texas Army National Guard/CC

Times reported that “airboats, jet skis, motorised fishing boats have rushed to the aid of people trapped in their homes, steered by welders, roofers, mechanics and fishermen wearing shorts, headlamps and ponchos. The working class, in large part, is being rescued by the working class.”

As the true scale of the crisis becomes clear, the mood for urgent action is likely to grow. The first concern will be making sure that the people of the Gulf Coast get the help they need to survive and rebuild. It is the working class, people of colour, and the elderly - who often don’t have the immediate means to evacuate or rebuild their lives - who are suffering the most.

The memory of Katrina, the

Superdome, the racist military occupation of New Orleans, and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) camps is seared into the consciousness of our nation. We cannot allow another unfair relief and reconstruction effort like Katrina.

Katrina

Over \$100 billion was spent on Katrina in federal disaster relief, and it was not enough. People were still living in FEMA trailers ten years later, and over \$40 billion in lawsuit money was paid out to 55,000 people from Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, and Mississippi because the trailers were found to be toxic!

We should have no faith that Trump, the Republicans, the

Democrats, or corporate America will provide for the full needs of all those affected by this tragedy.

We also need to demand a massive public works programme paid for by taxes on the rich to rebuild the dams, reservoirs, roads, bridges and other important parts of the region’s infrastructure wrecked in the storm - and to ensure everything is built to withstand future intense storms.

Our corporate-dominated government has a history of grotesque bureaucratic failures in the face of emergency situations. For these reasons, all those who are being affected by this storm need a real voice in how aid is allocated. We need to set up democratic committees, with real decision-making power and resources, to ensure that aid is

allocated where it is needed.

Clearly, not enough was done to prepare for a hurricane despite the stark warnings of climate scientists. Although climate change did not necessarily cause this specific hurricane, it has created warmer oceans and a warmer planet leading to more water vapour in the air, increased intense rainfall, and more powerful hurricanes.

The Trump administration and Republicans in Congress have completely opposed addressing the breakdown in the climate. The main obstacle is ‘Big Oil’ which blocks any meaningful discussion or action on the breakdown of the climate.

We can expect corporate bosses to resist any attempts to make them pay for the crisis they created,



Biting the hand that feeds you

Hours after US secretary of state Rex Tillerson thanked the Mexican government for sending aid to flood affected Texas, president Trump announced the awarding of \$3.6 million to four construction companies to build prototypes of an anti-immigrant wall along the border with Mexico.

Meanwhile, a spending bill going to the Republican-controlled House of Representatives will cut \$876 million from Federal Emergency Management Agency’s disaster funds to help pay for Trump’s \$1.6 billion wall.

whether through taxes, fines, or regulations. The key to rooting out their power to block meaningful action is to take the fossil fuel industry into public ownership. That way their resources could be redirected to clean up the environment and transition the economy to renewable energy, with compensation only on the basis of proven need, new union jobs, and retraining for energy workers.

Another key factor was the way establishment politicians in Houston from both the Republican and Democratic parties enabled and encouraged a massive amount of unregulated economic development in recent decades.

Developers

Houston’s total lack of zoning and its developer-friendly policies allowed huge parts of prairie lands to be paved over with concrete, leaving nowhere for rain to go but inside people’s homes.

The alternative to the chaos caused by capitalism and the greed of billionaires is socialism - democratic planning to replace the profit-driven anarchy of the market system.

We need to build the socialist and workers’ movement around the central demand of taking the top 500 corporations into public ownership under the democratic management by working people. This would lay the basis for establishing a rational, democratically planned society based on meeting the needs of people and the planet, not profits.

■ **Full article on** socialistalternative.org

Extreme weather events and global warming

Pete Dickenson

In the aftermath of the devastating monsoon floods in Northern India and Bangladesh and Hurricane Harvey in the Gulf of Mexico, the question is being asked if these events provide the final proof that global warming is contributing to make extreme weather events such as these worse than they would otherwise be.

Climate scientists up to now have been reluctant to link a specific hurricane or cyclone to human induced climate change. This is partly because there is a lack of reliable data on hurricane or cyclone intensity, a problem that is particularly true in poor regions of the world like South Asia.

Despite uncertainty linked to this lack of data, Michael Mann, a climate scientist from Penn State University in the USA, has now come forward to say that ‘climate change worsened the impact of Hurricane Harvey’.

Stefan Rahmsdorf, from the prestigious Potsdam Institute of Climate Change Research in Germany, has also said that: “Harvey was not caused by climate change, yet its impacts - the storm surge, and especially the extreme rainfall - very likely worsened due to human caused global warming”.

It will become clear in the coming months, as research is carried out, if Harvey will provide a definitive answer. What is absolutely clear now is that global warming has caused a 25 centimetre rise in sea levels over the past 100 years that makes the effect of extreme weather

systems originating over the sea worse as they hit land.

The storm surge that they produce is more likely to overwhelm coastal defences, such as happened with Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005.

Kerry Emanuel, a climate scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has said that Hurricane Sandy, that devastated the Wall Street area of New York in 2012, would probably not have flooded Lower Manhattan without the rise in sea levels. It is also true that the present terrible death toll in India and Bangladesh would have been lower.

Heatwave

If there is still some uncertainty over the link between climate change and hurricane intensity the same is not true for other climate change effects. Research has shown that global warming made the deadly European heatwave in 2003 twice as likely.

A more recent study has shown that the risk of ‘extremely hot summers’ is now ten times higher than it was in 2003. Also, the floods in Britain in 2012 were made 25% more likely by climate change.

It is important that we do not run ahead of the science in making claims about the detailed effects of climate change, any errors would only be exploited by the climate change deniers appointed by Trump to his government. But the overall picture is already clear, that global warming is a mortal threat to the planet which in the long term could threaten all life on the planet. Time is rapidly running out to take decisive action.



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photo Air National Guard/Daniel Martinez/CC



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.

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.
- 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.

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.

MASS WORKERS’ PARTY

- For a mass workers’ party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental, 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!

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!

Join the fightback! Join the Socialists!

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STRIKE TOGETHER FOR BETTER PAY



photo Paul Mattsson

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NSSN lobby of TUC 10 September

This summer has seen a wave of strikes. Now we need determined co-ordinated action across the public sector to smash the pay cap and fight for a £10 an hour minimum wage for all.

The National Shop Stewards

Network (NSSN) is again organising a rally at the TUC Congress in Brighton on Sunday 10 September. Over five million public sector workers have seen their income plummet because of the Tory pay cap.

The rally will bring together the leaders of some of the most militant

unions with union reps and activists from the many disputes that have broken out this summer.

This action shows the support that pay strikes across the public sector would get from workers everywhere who are suffering at the moment. It's time to fight together!



Fight together to scrap the Tory pay cap!

National Shop Stewards Network rally at TUC Congress

Sunday 10 September at 1pm, Arundel Suite, Holiday Inn, 137 King's Road, Brighton BN1 2JF - all welcome

Speakers: **John McDonnell**, shadow chancellor; **Len McCluskey**, Unite general secretary; **Len Hockey**, Unite Barts NHS Trust branch secretary; **Mark Serwotka**, PCS general secretary; **Steve Gillan**, POA general secretary; **Ronnie Draper**, BFAWU general secretary; **Sean Hoyle**, RMT president; **Amy Murphy**, Usdaw southern division EC member and a striking **Birmingham bin worker**. Chaired by **Janice Godrich**, PCS president
Email info@shopstewards.net if you need transport