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Tories retreat on pay cap



Coordinate the strikes

Steve Score

The government has caved in. It has agreed to lift the 1% public sector pay cap from next year, reflecting the pressure the Tories are under and their real weakness.

Police and prison officers, the last groups to have pay decided this year, will have the cap lifted immediately - although their raises are still below inflation.

The Tories are on the back foot. Concerted action could scrap the cap for other workers now, and force real-terms pay rises!

"Look at us, no mortgage, everybody with a pension and never had more money in the current account." This was Chancellor Philip Hammond's boast to other Tory MPs on 6 September.

What a disgusting insult to millions of people who, under his government, continue to have their living standards slashed.

Public sector workers have suffered seven years of official pay restraint, cutting real wages by thousands of pounds a year. Theresa May famously told nurses "there is no magic money tree," yet found over £1 billion to buy the votes of DUP MPs to keep her in power.

Private sector workers have been hammered by attacks on pay and conditions as well, including those on zero hours and in the gig economy.

Yet there is no pay restraint for the bosses! Since 2000 the pay of top chief executives has risen by 220% to a scandalous average of £4.5 million a year each.

Meanwhile, the battle against low pay is gaining momentum.

In the private sector, we have seen courageous struggles. The McDonald's workers' strike against low pay and zero-hour contracts, privatised NHS workers at Barts Health Trust fighting poverty pay, and the long-running struggle to save the role of the guards on our trains.

In the public sector, Birmingham bin workers have struck against huge cuts in pay and job losses imposed by a Blairite Labour council. And low-paid workers at the Bank of England have won a big victory (see page 4).

Now is the time to bring all these struggles together with wider action to recover what we have lost.

The National Shop Stewards Network, which rallied before the start

of the annual conference of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), has campaigned for national coordinated strike action to scrap the cap and fight low pay.

TUC congress has previously voted to support coordinated action in the public sector. This needs to be put into action now!

Ten years after rich bankers were bailed out after causing the economic crash, working class people are still paying the price. The Socialist Party will continue to fight for a society that eliminates these vast inequalities and guarantees a decent living standard for all.

> More on the strikes: p6-7

NSSN lobby of the TUC 2017: RANK-AND-FILE SOLIDARITY TO SMASH THE PAY CAP

Andy Beadle

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) rally in Brighton on 10 September was the most inspiring yet! The fighting rally is now a regular feature at - and generally stands in stark contrast to - the TUC annual congress which it is timed to coincide with.

We saw a mix of fighting trade union leaders and workers currently active in workplace disputes. The TUC is always busy with its reports of mistreatment of workers and trade union members. The rally demanded action: it's time for change.

Janice Godrich, president of the PCS civil servants' union, opened the meeting and explained: "NSSN has played a tremendous role supporting workers in dispute: holding rallies, lobbies; speaking up for the rank and file."

Steve Gillan, general secretary of the POA prison officers' and allied workers' union, described the "absolute misery on prisoners and staff," particularly physical attacks. "Disturbances on a weekly and monthly basis" resulting from overcrowding and government cuts. He spoke of the obstacles made by the government to try to stop union action.

Weak government

Steve's main point was to: "Smash the pay cap. Public and private sector workers must get beyond-inflation pay rises... Any trade unionists who take action: I will not repudiate that action. This government is weak, make no mistake about it. Together and only together, we can win this battle."

Rob Williams, NSSN chair, explained "the NSSN was initiated by the late, great Bob Crow eleven years ago" and made a series of important points. "Theresa May said there's no magic money tree. But they found £1 billion to do a dodgy deal with the DUP. Where's the magic money tree for the nurses?"

He said to Corbyn and John McDonnell (who was also on the platform): "you have put nationalisation back on the agenda."

Rob said Corbyn's "promise to abolish student fees led to a 'youthquake' in the general election

campaign. "Speaking of cuts in living standards," he added, "it is necessary to get back the 20% lost over the last seven years. This TUC must be a council of war."

Unite the Union general secretary Len McCluskey told the meeting: "Thank you for the work that you do. In Unite and every other union, the shop steward is the face that members see." He added, "if working people have confidence, anything is possible." Len expressed his personal thanks to Peter Taaffe, general secretary of the Socialist Party.

He continued "Unite is proud to be a fighting-back union, afraid of no one... That is why we removed the rule from our rule book preventing illegal industrial action. If bosses want to push us outside the law, so be it."

"Unite have set up a £36 million strike fund... to tell bosses if they think they can starve our members back to work they had better think again." He ended: "It is possible to achieve a better world for our class and our people."

Labour

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell rightly declared, "the role of a Labour MP isn't just to be in parliament, it is to be on the picket line." He supported various strikers at the rally and promised, "when we get into power we will restore trade union rights to the POA." He spoke of the "multi-millionaires on the front benches of this Tory government."

John listed further commitments: "we will scrap the pay cap... a real living wage of £10 an hour when Labour is elected... In the first hundred days of Labour government we'll scrap the Trade Union Act of the Tories."

He concluded: "We cannot tolerate a society which has such great inequalities in wealth and income... We want a society for the many, not the few; a society with respect for trade union rights."

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka pledged PCS support to all workers in dispute. Between 9 October and 6 November, every PCS worker in the public sector is to be balloted, in a consultative ballot, on their support for action against the pay cap.

Mark called for coordinated action

with other unions. "There should be no deserving and undeserving workers. Each and every one of us deserves a pay rise... there should be a minimum 5% pay rise for everyone across the board."

Sean Hoyle, president of the RMT transport union, continued the theme: "RMT will fight the removal of every safety-critical guard on every train... Transport should be run by the people, for the people - whether you're a bus driver, train driver or a guard."

He asked the TUC, "which side are you on?" "Year after year" the TUC passes resolutions but "nothing happens. If you don't organise action, we will".

Sean called for all progressive trade unions to stand together and coordinate action. "Every trade unionist should want to bring down this trade union-hating Tory government."

Councils

Sean went on to comment on Labour councils implementing cuts. "Whether it is Tory or Labour austerity, it doesn't hurt any less... we have a socialist-led Labour Party but it is still no good if Labour councils are carrying out Tory austerity."

He reported on the removal of the guards by Mersey Rail, a Labour transport authority and concluded, "if councillors don't know what colour their rosette is they need to leave" and make room for those who are prepared to fight.

Ronnie Draper, general secretary of the BFAWU bakers' union, came to the platform with Lewis Baker, a McDonalds striker from Crayford. Some young workers are on just £4.05 an hour.

No less important but so numerous were other speakers involved in strikes and struggle who addressed the rally. Solidarity with such workers is the whole purpose of the NSSN. Yet here we only have space to list them and refer readers to reports in various issues of the Socialist previously.

Terry Pullinger, deputy general secretary of the Communication Workers Union, spoke for Royal Mail workers. Amy Murphy, a Tesco worker on the executive committee of shopworkers' union Usdaw, spoke in a personal capacity. Zim



photo Lenny Shail



photo Birmingham Socialist Party



photo Mayola Demmerie



photo Neil Cafferky

spoke for Unite on the BA mixed fleet cabin crew dispute.

Len Hockey is Unite leader of the striking Barts hospital workers in east London. He explained how the Barts strike had brought together long-standing trade unionists alongside recent employees, many who were migrant workers.

The strike was currently suspended pending talks, but solidarity, action and campaigning had already won results including the introduction of the London Living Wage and workers on zero-hour contracts being given permanent, regular work.

Solidarity

Moe, a Unite bus workers' leader, spoke of their rally later in the week. Moe expressed solidarity with the striking McDonalds workers as he used to do that job himself.

Sean McGovern, an executive committee member of Unite, spoke of the campaign of Disabled People Against Cuts. Linda Taaffe, secretary of the NSSN, appealed for union branches to help fund NSSN.

Finally, Hugo Pierre, EC member of Unison (personal capacity), contrasted the anti-union actions of Birmingham councillors with the historic part played by Liverpool councillors who defended working class people.

Hugo questioned what these people were doing in the Labour Party. He explained the important role of the NSSN in encouraging groups of workers to carry on until they win: "solidarity works!"



Huge support for Birmingham bin strike

Birmingham bin workers and the Socialist Party on their way to the NSSN rally in Brighton photo Birmingham Socialist Party

A major addition to and theme of the rally was the ongoing strike by bin workers in Birmingham. When chair of the meeting Janice Godrich announced their arrival, the room rose in ovation. Collecting tins for them were circulated.

NSSN chair Rob Williams warned of the damage Birmingham council could do to Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity message with its attacks on the bin workers, "behaving more like Willie Walsh than Jeremy Corbyn", and the importance of the national Labour leadership pledging the removal of strike-breaking councillors.

Richie, Unite convenor of the workers, got the biggest cheers of all the speakers and they all got another standing ovation when he got up to speak. He stressed safety: "113 workers have to keep an eye on the rear of the vehicle, which CCTV can't replace." The council wanted

to downgrade the job. "The 113 face a choice... the only real option is to stand and fight. We will take it all the way." He finished, "enough is enough. Labour councillors, fulfil your mandate and say no to austerity."

John McDonnell, Labour shadow chancellor, addressed his opening remarks to the bin strikers. "I do not see your strike as a strike against Labour: it is a strike against austerity." He called on Birmingham council to change its stance.

"We want negotiations to resolve this dispute." Unfortunately, he did not call for the removal of the Labour councillors implementing austerity.

But the day after the rally, due

to the workers' campaign and the public support, the council leader was forced to resign. This should be a warning to all those Blairite councillors attacking jobs and services around the country. However, the councillors who have pushed the strike breaking and the council chief executive remain in place, for now.

■ As we go to press TUC congress has voted unanimously for a Unite emergency motion in support of the Birmingham binworkers and condemning the council reneging on the deal agreed at Acas. Speaking at the congress, Unite assistant general secretary Howard Becket said that if labour councillor act like Tories, we will call them Tories and treat them like Tories. See socialistparty.org.uk

Thousands march in Bristol - mayor needs real anti-cuts strategy

An estimated 6,000-8,000 people marched in Bristol on 9 September in an anti-cuts protest called by the Labour mayor, Marvin Rees, in conjunction with Bristol People's Assembly and Bristol Labour Party.

Badaca made a good intervention and, with the help of Bristol Socialist Party, gave out dozens of placards and thousands of leaflets pushing the messages of 'no to all cuts, and 'set a legal no-cuts budget now'. These are messages we feel mayor Rees will need to take on board if he is going to successfully campaign for more money from central government.

Rees and the other core city Labour leaders (Glasgow, Newcastle, Leeds, Sheffield, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Birmingham, Cardiff and Bristol), are in Westminster this week to present their 'green paper' to the government.

Although we support the initiative of lobbying the government, Badaca is disappointed that the document is not more explicitly anti-austerity and doesn't set out a clear strategy to beat the government. We hope that the Tories do make concessions in the budget but knowing them, it may take more pressure.

Labour's shadow chancellor John McDonnell said at the National Shop Stewards Network rally in Brighton on 10 September that he doesn't see the Unite bin workers' strike in Birmingham as a strike against the Labour council, but a strike against austerity.

But we believe that McDonnell, Corbyn, Rees and the core city leaders will need to halt the cuts in order to mount a credible and successful campaign to end austerity in local government.

Matthew Carey, Organising secretary, Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance (Badaca)

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020 8988 8777 editors@socialistparty.org.uk @socialistpaper

Editor: Sarah Wrack

News/letters: James Ivens
International: Dave Carr

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Sales/layout: Ian Pattison

Photographer: Paul Mattsson
Website: Judy Beishon

Rate of black imprisonment worse than US

■ Fighting against racism means fighting capitalism

Marvin Hay
Socialist Party black and Asian group

Black people are even more overrepresented in prisons in England and Wales than their American counterparts, according to the Lammy Review published on 8 September.

Black people make up 3% of the general population and 12% in prison - compared with 13% and 35% respectively in the US. And the Ministry of Justice's exploratory study published on 1 September found that young black people are nine times more likely to be jailed than young white people.

To say this Cameron-commissioned review into the treatment of ethnic minorities in the justice system is long overdue is an understatement.

Meanwhile the government continues to hold back a Home Office report into deaths in police custody, commissioned by Theresa May in 2015, that will likely further evidence black, Asian and minority ethnic inequality.

This latest review was chaired by black Labour MP David Lammy. However, like the reviews before it - Scarman 1981 on the Brixton riots, Macpherson 1999 on the Stephen Lawrence murder - it highlights the oppression faced by black and Asian people without addressing its key causes.

Lammy's recommendations include sealing criminal records, reviewing gang prosecutions, deferring prison sentences, positive discrimination in prison and judiciary jobs, and a 'rate your judge' system.

If implemented, some of these proposals undoubtedly would help. But they still don't get to the root of the problems - and in some cases may actually exacerbate them.

For instance, positive discrimination as proposed leaves hiring in the hands of the capitalists and their senior managers to appoint leaders who share their outlook and will protect their interests. It can also cause resentment and division among workers.

Lammy takes the view - in a similar vein to 'Out of the Ashes', his book



photo Paul Mattsson

about the 2011 riots - that "communities must take greater responsibility for the care and development of their people." He falls short of pointing the finger at the state for deaths in police custody, or at the profit system for trapping black and Asian youth in a cycle of poverty and crime.

There have been many reviews into racial inequality over the years by establishment politicians. What is missing is a review by the community, led by the trade unions, with recommendations that can truly take the ruling class to task.

The causes of overrepresentation in prison go deeper than institutional racism in the justice system. Both reflect a system that exploits and oppresses whole swathes of society in order to enrich a few.

Fully overcoming racial inequality means linking the campaign against bigotry and oppression to a socialist programme.

Take the wealth out of the hands of the super-rich and invest in education, employment, public services and homes. Remove the right to appoint judges, police officers and prison bosses, and all the power of the state, from the capitalists and their political representatives.

**Join the fightback!
Join the Socialists!**

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photo Sarah Wrack

Victory:
low-paid
workers
beat Bank
of England
bosses!

Kirk O'Hara
Trade union organiser

Unite the Union members at the Bank of England have won a historic victory.

Their campaign included strike action being taken for the first time ever at the prestigious Threadneedle Street site in central London.

Union members - including staff in security, reception and maintenance, as well as legal and financial services - voted to strike after the bank decided to scrap collective bargaining.

Instead, management alone would decide the total amount of any pay increase - but would generously allow negotiation on how it would be distributed. In reality, even this act of 'generosity' was a sham.

The bank uses an internal performance process, overseen by managers, to decide if individual workers deserve a raise. As a result, the imposed, below-inflation 1% pay increase was not even payable across the board.

Actual bankers, of course, continue to be paid generously despite bringing the financial system to its knees. No such financial squeeze was

felt by the current governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, who backs Tory pay cuts.

In addition to his salary, Carney receives a taxable rent allowance of £4,800 a week! Incredibly, his wife said she was finding it difficult to find somewhere to live on this meagre subsidy.

The campaign gained international media coverage. But the win came because of the three days of strike action.

Following negotiations at conciliation service Acas, the bank agreed to reinstate collective bargaining, award increased annual leave this

year, and begin pay negotiations in a few weeks' time with an opening position of raises for the lowest paid.

This gives Unite an excellent foundation on which to build at the bank.

Unfortunately the role played by the trade unions in the sector has been largely to manage the decline, with no confidence in the ability and willingness of members to fight. This makes this union victory all the more important.

The strike and the victory must be used as an example to workers, and the unions which organise in the finance sector: militancy wins!

Beth
Nurse, Wales

There are 40,000 unfilled nursing vacancies across the country.

Experienced nurses are quitting because of the strain and there's a 6% drop in students taking nursing degrees this September. With fewer nurses training to take their places, the crisis can only intensify.

So thousands of members of nurses' union RCN converged on parliament on 6 September to protest against the 1% public sector pay cap.

Despite innumerable SOS-calls to successive governments, the nursing profession is in worsening crisis. This is against a background of an NHS in meltdown and society-wide austerity. Since 2010, nurses have seen a 14% real-terms cut in their pay.

If the figures appear bleak, the reality on the wards is bleaker still.

Nurses can seldom provide safe care. Wards are often staffed primarily with agency nurses. As an agency nurse, I have been placed in charge of wards without defibrillators.

The crisis has become so acute that there aren't enough agency nurses to fill vacant shifts. Wards frequently close because of short staffing.

Working in palliative care, I comfort relatives who cannot be with their dying loved ones because they cannot afford transport or time off work.

Relatives sit at loved ones' bedsides already worrying about affording their funeral. Patients' last wishes, to die at home, go unfulfilled because there are no district nurses to take on their care.

The Tory government has shown its weakness and promised to end the pay cap (see page 1). But lifting the cap - although vital - will not be enough.

The protests are not just about pay. Fundamentally, they are about a profession failing under the weight of a collapsing health service.

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt and his ilk lie about the severity - at times even the existence - of the crisis. May has been derisive of our plight.

By contrast, Corbyn's promise of

40,000 unfilled nursing vacancies

"I've been placed in charge of wards without defibrillators"

■ Kick out all the cutters and private profiteers



photo davidmbailey photography

investment to help close the NHS funding gap is a good start. To really solve the problems he'll also need to kick out the private profiteers and nationalise big pharmaceuticals.

The RCN has promised to ballot

for industrial action. Nurses must vote to strike. We need coordinated strikes across trade unions.

Scrap 'PFI' privatisation schemes, and bring the whole health service into public ownership under the

democratic control and management of workers and service users. To make these changes complete and permanent, healthcare workers and the wider working class must fight for a socialist society.

Tories 'flouting duty' on poison air, says UN

"The UK government continues to flout its duty to ensure adequate air quality and protect the rights to life and health of its citizens," says the United Nations.

The UN's 'special rapporteur' condemned the Tories for doing nothing to tackle toxic air.

Air pollution contributes to 40,000 premature deaths a year, the Royal College of Physicians reckons. In the capital alone, long-term exposure chucks up nearly 9,500 a year, according to King's College London.

And every year, parts of London break European Union limits on annual hours of heavy pollution - in days. The EU takes no action.

Parliament's environmental audit committee has warned Brexit could



make EU eco-regulation into "zombie legislation" with no effect. So what was it before?

The EU and Single Market won't clean our air for the same reason the Tories won't. Their reason for being is to defend private ownership and market competition.

Public ownership of energy and transport is fundamental if we're to sort this out. Only a democratic, socialist plan of production can guarantee the investment and compliance needed save our cities from suffocation.

**What's your
view? email:**
editors@socialistparty.org.uk

Barts hospital workers force Serco to negotiating table

Paula Mitchell
London Socialist Party

As we go to press, talks are under-way between Unite the Union and Serco over the long-running Barts hospitals dispute. 24 days of strike action, with bold pickets, rallies and demos, have brought the greedy profiteering company to the table.

The low pay and back-breaking over-work of cleaners, porters and catering staff in the NHS has been given a national platform as a result of the magnificent strike in four east London hospitals.

Long-standing trade union activists have fought alongside migrant workers, women and men. Hundreds of workers across the trust have joined a union for the first time. Workers have found a new confidence in standing up to their bosses.

When we look at the NHS we see patients, hard-working staff and a vital public service that we all value. Serco see pound signs and bulging pockets. They have spent weeks trying to confuse and demoralise workers and to break the strike with agency workers.

The union members themselves

will democratically decide what is an acceptable offer. But make no mistake - it is action that has got the campaign this far.

Mixed signals from Labour

Strikers were delighted that John McDonnell came to their demonstration in July and passed on support from Jeremy Corbyn. Strikers are also grateful for the curry-night benefit laid on by Corbyn-supporting Labour members in Leyton and Wanstead. But they need to have a word with Walthamstow Blairite Labour MP Stella Creasy.

On the same night as the benefit, where strike leader and Barts Unite branch secretary Len Hockey was guest speaker, Creasy's Labour Party branch, while pledging support for the strike, turned Len down as a speaker. It "wouldn't be appropriate" on the basis that Len, a Socialist Party member and Corbyn-supporter, had stood in an election as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) against right-wing Labour!

Another example of Labour being two parties in one. Kick out the Blairites and bring in the strikers! ■ See socialistparty.org.uk for updates after the talks and members' meetings



photo Paul Mattsson



TUC congress

PUBLIC SECTOR PAY - “TIME FOR ACTION”

Janice Godrich
National president PCS
(personal capacity)

Workers' anger at the seven-year pay cap was reflected at the annual TUC conference. Union general secretary Dave Prentis said the cap was "inhuman" and that "we need joint ballots for joint industrial action" but only if "rallies and demonstrations fail".

For a number of years now resolutions from the PCS civil servants' union have been passed calling for joint coordinated action to defeat the pay freeze but the TUC has done nothing to implement them.

While applauding the many

positive points made by Prentis, Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary, said the time for just passing resolutions had passed and it was "now time for action". He outlined the PCS strategy, designed to pressure this "weak Tory government... (with) no mandate", with the launch of a consultative ballot of members on whether to take industrial action to scrap the pay cap.

PCS would then analyse the ballot results and put in additional resources to areas they were required to win a statutory ballot for strike action. The government's vicious anti-trade union act deliberately sets a high bar for winning ballots, but building activity and confidence in workplaces can ensure a successful ballot.

Unity in action will be required

The TUC reckons that public sector workers have lost between £2,000 and £5,000 in real terms as a result of successive government pay caps

if we are to prevent the Tories succeeding in their strategy of dividing public sector workers into the "deserving" and "undeserving". All public sector workers deserve at least a 5% pay rise and the Tories must provide the funding as well as scrapping the cap.

Mark called on other unions to join PCS in holding similar consultation ballots to build the pressure. Joint campaigning, joint ballots and joint action can win.

Delegates demand TUC take the lead over protests

The most crucial decision of this year's TUC congress was the passing of a composite motion on scrapping the public sector pay cap.

Speaker after speaker from public sector unions, including the prison officers' POA assistant general secretary and Socialist Party member Joe Simpson, backed the motion, with it passing unanimously.

But turning this motion from

words into action means going far further than the TUC's lobby of parliament in October.

It means implementing the proposals for "a national demonstration in support of our demands" on a Saturday. This followed the call from Communication Workers Union general secretary Dave Ward in a previous debate that the TUC itself should take the lead on this rather than passing

responsibilities off to others.

But crucially it also means "taking immediate steps to develop a coordinated strategy of opposition to the pay cap within the public sector".

Such bold action could not only smash the Tories crumbling pay policy, but could bring this wobbling government down altogether.

Iain Dalton, TUC delegate
(personal capacity)

BUS SAFETY: WE WON'T BE DISTRACTED FROM PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

Andy Beadle
Unite Battersea bus branch

Twenty-five deaths and nearly 12,000 injuries have been caused by buses on the capital's streets in just two years. The lethal pressures heaped on bus drivers are shown in a new report 'Driven to Distraction', by the London Assembly's Transport Committee.

Unite's bus workers are demonstrating at City Hall to demand the report's fine words are translated into action. This is a scandal that stands alongside the deaths and devastation from Britain's privatised trains. The same companies, like Arriva, First and Stagecoach, operate London buses.

"Long periods of intense concentration and a system run on stressful, barely achievable targets inevitably have consequences for the industry", says the report.

If we do our job properly, we will be pressed with demands from the controllers and reports to our manager for being late. We will be punished with being forced to finish late and shortened meal breaks.

From drivers to directors, everyone knows this and understands the consequences. But everyone has rewards for turning a blind eye to safety.

If you take shortcuts, like quickly filling all the tickboxes without physically doing all the checks (which frankly is all we get time for) then you get no hassle. Of course, if you have an accident as a result, the company will make you a scapegoat.

Driven to Distraction gives some

brilliant examples in "A day in the life of a bus driver" and shows a big range of distractions we face at every moment. It's worth a look on london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/driven-to-distraction-final.pdf

However, the report shows effects but not causes. After more than two decades of privatisation and neglect even London's pro-austerity, pro-capitalist politicians have been forced to respond. But what will they do?

The report admits, "TfL [Transport for London] cannot realistically expect bus operators to give safety the priority it deserves without financial reward." Socialists would struggle to find a better reason to bring buses back under public ownership with democratic control by bus workers and users!

TfL faces massive cuts from central government (see the Socialist issue 887). Yet the report calls for measures including "performance-related payments" to senior staff (515 TfL staff are already on over £100,000 annual pay). They want more driver training, better fleet maintenance, probably more drivers and a whole load of other things. How is it all going to happen?

They "are concerned that the working day is too long for drivers". So are we! But we don't work rest days and overtime because we love driving so much. Shorter hours must mean no loss of pay.

■ **Unite bus workers demonstration: Thursday 14 September, 9.30 am, at City Hall, The Queen's Walk, London SE1 2AA**



photo Tom Page/CC



photo Alistair Tice

CWU members prepare for industrial action at Royal Mail

Carl Harper
CWU activist and
Peterborough Socialist Party

On 6 September, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) served notice to Royal Mail for a strike ballot.

After months of unsatisfactory talks between the business and CWU representatives, the union leadership has now decided to act over the company's attacks on pensions, terms and conditions of employment and working practices.

As part of the 'Four Pillars' of

security the union is seeking from the business, the CWU had put forward an alternative 'Wage in retirement' proposal to address Royal Mail's plan to replace the current defined benefit pension scheme with a far less generous one.

A reduction to the working week, extensions to the legal protections promised after privatisation and a commitment to grow the business make up the other 'pillars'.

Following the privatisation of Royal Mail by the earlier Tory-led coalition government, the company's approach has become one of minimising cost and maximising

shareholder return.

This has led to attacks on members' pensions and terms and conditions.

With 'gig economy' practices now commonplace in postal, courier and delivery companies a 'race-to-the-bottom' has opened up, which Royal Mail wants to be part of.

With what could be a bitter dispute looming, CWU and other trade union activists must link the dispute to calls for Royal Mail to be renationalised as an initial step to a publicly owned postal and delivery industry, democratically run by workers and customers.

'McStriker' addresses Greenwich trade unionists

Paul Callanan

On 6 September local trade unionists from Unite, PCS and NUT unions, as well as the local trade union council in Greenwich, gathered to hear from Lewis Baker a striking McDonald's worker from Crayford. The meeting was called on the initiative of Socialist Party members in the Greenwich Unite branch.

The recent 24-hour strike at two branches of McDonald's (Cambridge and Crayford) was the first official union strike at the company in Britain.

Lewis explained how staff at the restaurant have suffered years of low pay, bullying and abuse from managers. The final straw was the arrival of a new manager.

Numerous grievances had been taken out against this bully, which

were then completely ignored by the company.

Lewis gave examples of horrific instances of abuse, including holding workers in the back office in order for bosses to obtain the names of all members in the union branch!

But Lewis also outlined how these workers organised, and made history, by fighting back. Speaking about the strike's importance to working class struggle, he said: "McDonald's sets the benchmark for other companies setting poverty wages - if we can shift them, we can also help thousands more workers too".

A Fast Food Rights day of action is being organised in Woolwich on Saturday 16 September, 2pm. Campaign supporters should get down to the McDonalds on Powis Street, SE18 6LQ.



Lewis speaking at the NSSN lobby of the TUC
photo Neil Cafferky

READMIT THE SOCIALISTS - FOR A FEDERAL LABOUR PARTY

The Socialist received a letter over the summer from a reader questioning our application to work with the Labour Party in an inclusive federation. Socialists always welcome serious debate on the strategy and tactics we should employ, and so we asked **Dave Nellist**, the former Labour MP who is now a member of the Socialist Party national committee, to make a contribution.

The editors,
As a Labour Party member who subscribes to your newspaper, I must take issue with page 4 of issue 952. "Readmit the socialists with the right to organise in an inclusive federation." The above is a party within a party and exactly the reason Neil Kinnock expelled Militant [forerunner of the Socialist]. I would love to have my socialist friends as members of the Labour Party on the understanding that their drive and ideas further the interests of the Labour Party, which is at a point on the left not seen since Michael Foot. Labour is now popular and relevant to voters. A fact for which we must be grateful. Please rethink your policy?
Adrian B Rimington, Chesterfield

The Socialist Party wants to see the battle against Tory austerity strengthened, and socialist measures taken to improve the lives of millions of working class people. It was for those reasons we welcomed the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour Party leader. In addition to the welcome changes Jeremy started to make in Labour Party policies, particularly during the general election, we think there are organisational changes needed if Labour is to be transformed into a party that represents the interests of the working class. One of those should be the expansion of Labour's federal structure to invite affiliation of organisations such as the Socialist Party. Adrian is worried that our campaign for affiliating the Socialist Party to Labour would be creating "a party within a party" and that's why "Neil Kinnock expelled Militant". Even with the space of this article, it's not possible to explain fully the background to the 20-year battle big business and its supporters in the press and the Labour Party itself waged against Marxist and social-



photos Socialist Party, unless otherwise stated



photo Mary Finch



Former Labour leader Neil Kinnock is heckled by Labour supporters

ist ideas, which had been part of Labour's structure and history from its very foundation. We would seriously recommend a reading of "The Rise of Militant" by Peter Taaffe which covers this in detail. **Expulsions** The attack on Militant supporters was fundamentally ideological, not organisational. It was started by the Observer newspaper in 1975, when Harold Wilson was party leader, and was because of growing support for socialist and Marxist ideas in the Labour Party - in particular for the idea of widespread public ownership, and of workers having greater control and management of publicly run industries. This was a challenge to the control of society by big business and its supporters. The first expulsions, of the paper's editors in 1983, were the beginning of a fundamental change in Labour towards becoming a party that would be sympathetic to, and eventually representative of, big business. Labour's right-wing leadership also thought that if Neil Kinnock could show the press he could take on the

left, he could then be trusted by the establishment as a prime minister capable of taking on the trade unions in the interest of that establishment. Militant was just the beginning, and as we forecast the real target was much wider: the establishment wanted the exorcism of socialist ideas from Labour. In fact the day after Labour's national executive took the decision to begin proceedings against myself and Terry Fields (as Militant-supporting MPs) the London Evening Standard published photographs of 30 more Labour MPs (including Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn) and demanded that Neil Kinnock now take action against those as well. The irony was, of course, in relation to the right-wing view that expulsions would be 'electorally popular' that, having achieved a 24-point lead in the opinion polls in April 1990 (a week after the so-called Poll Tax riot in Trafalgar Square and yet based on the huge antagonism against the Thatcher government by millions of ordinary working class people fuelled by the imposition of the Poll Tax), Labour threw that lead away by spending two years attacking Marxists

and socialists and incredibly lost the subsequent 1992 general election! The Labour Party is already a federation - of individual members, and of affiliated trade unions and societies. Groups such as the Fabians have their own membership, policies, and conferences - and yet are allowed to affiliate and take those politics into debate within the Labour Party. Other groups on the right - Progress for example - certainly have external funding, and policy discussions (some open and some not). Journalists such as Paul Mason have argued in the Guardian that Progress, Momentum and others should be allowed to affiliate to Labour; his colleague, Zoe Williams, has argued that the Greens "need structures and organisations within Labour, from which to pursue their agenda." She has further suggested that it should be possible to stand as a joint candidate, Green and Labour, or Women's Equality Party and Labour. Why, then, not the Socialist Party? One party has had precisely that relationship with Labour for 90 years. Since 1927 Labour and the Co-operative Party have had an agreement

to stand joint candidates for parliament. At that point both were "united in their aim to displace capitalism with common ownership." In the 2017 general election 38 MPs were returned who are joint members. Why shouldn't a similar arrangement work on the left? The original founding of the Labour Party (as the Labour Representation Committee) came about from a successful motion at the 1899 TUC congress moved by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (today's RMT) to invite cooperative, socialist, trade unions and other workers' organisations to set up a party of Labour. **Federal** At that first congress, on 27 February 1900, trade unions representing 545,000 members, the Independent Labour Party 13,000, the Social Democratic Federation (an influential, though essentially sectarian, revolutionary organisation) 9,000, and the Fabian Society 861, discussed the setting up of a party. The party that was founded was to be a federal body of those organisations

(and later others). We think that model could work today with a broader body which expands on the remnants of Labour's existing federal structure and brings together all those organisations who want to fight cuts and austerity - clearly Labour would be the biggest component of that, but there are many thousands of good activists who could be drawn into a democratic federal relationship, including socialist, anti-cuts campaigners, a range of single issue campaigns (such as anti-fracking) and ourselves. That should include those who have opposed right-wing Labour in the past, not least those many hundreds of active trade unionists who have stood for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition at local and general elections. Under the rule of the Blairites, defectors from Tory to Labour such as Shaun Woodward have been welcomed with open arms, even with cabinet positions, yet workers who have stood in elections to oppose austerity are currently barred from Labour Party membership! The proper proportionate influence

of the trade unions should be restored in Labour Party decision-making, so the Labour Party can become a real vehicle for the organised working class. Jeremy Corbyn should put his full weight behind a programme to democratise the Labour Party. Just as in the general election he appealed to Labour's membership and to the working class over the heads of the right-wing party machine, he should do the same on these issues. He should put his own democratic constitution to a referendum of all Labour Party members - full and associate - which would have at its heart mandatory reselection and the replacement of the bureaucratic machine, with power resting in the hands of the membership, particularly new members and the trade unions. Adrian says we should only join "on the understanding that (their) driving ideas further the interests of the Labour Party"; well, up to a point. We are first and foremost socialists, who want fundamental change in society, to one run for the millions not the millionaires. A society that would use the resources and wealth of this,

the fifth richest country on the planet, for the benefit all. We want to work with others to make that happen. Jeremy Corbyn is attracting large numbers of people who have seen a glimpse of a different society - of a £10 an hour minimum wage, of an end to tuition fees, of public ownership in rail, post and energy, of taxing the rich to make society fairer. **Success** We fight for all those demands and would like to do so as members of the Labour Party - but the strength we would bring is not just with individual records or experience, but the collective experience and understanding we have, not least from successful battles such as the socialist council in Liverpool, and against Thatcher's Poll Tax. Adrian says that "Labour is now more popular and relevant to voters" - well, again, to a point. A substantial section of the working class support Brexit, their support for Labour could be weakened if the right-wing trajectory on that issue, spearheaded by Keir Starmer, continues. And while millions look favourably

to Jeremy changing Labour at the top, many millions' only direct experience of Labour is actually on a local level. And it's there that little has changed in the last two years, particularly with Labour councillors implementing Tory austerity. If the Socialist Party were allowed to affiliate, campaigning within Labour for serious resistance to Tory austerity would be one of our main priorities. One of the key jobs is to change the composition of councillors representing Labour to those who will stand up to the Tories' austerity agenda, not implement it on the government's behalf. In Birmingham, in order to head off any possibility of internal challenge against those councillors implementing such cuts, Labour's Birmingham board decided that no member of the Labour Party could take part in selection meetings for council candidates for the 2018 municipal elections unless they had been a member before July 2015 (two months before Jeremy was first elected leader). That position has now been changed (following Jeremy Corbyn's

intervention) to a waiting period of six months. However, as yet Jeremy has not come out to oppose the strike-breaking actions of Birmingham Labour councillors, or to pledge that they will be barred from standing next year and replaced by anti-cuts councillors. The Socialist Party would also campaign for the return of mandatory reselection of MPs (a democratic procedure won by the left in the 1980s) to make Labour more reflective of a new, anti-austerity membership. Indeed, we already have been doing so - it was a Socialist Party member who moved the successful resolution at Unite's annual conference to commit that union, Labour's largest affiliate, to support mandatory reselection of MPs. **Socialism** If Labour were to win an early general election it would face gigantic pressure from the establishment and big business desperate to retain the business-friendly government policies of the last 40 years. That Labour government would face a choice - break with big business or be broken by it. And the more Jeremy were to challenge austerity - the more he were to push the boundaries of what the capitalist system would allow - the more he would need a serious movement from below capable of mobilising millions. It's not enough just to support the Labour leadership's welcome (though still minimal) steps in a socialist direction. Such is the scale of the last 40 years theft from working class people, the scale of poverty, the housing crisis, the lack of decent employment, that what is really needed is a fundamental change in society: from capitalism to socialism. That is going to have to be fought for and it will require much stronger forms of organisation in the Labour and trade union movement than currently exist. Key to that will be restoring the Labour Party as a vehicle for the organised working class.



Dave Nellist and Jeremy Corbyn

Interview with leader of students' union in the Spanish state

"WHEN WE FIGHT - WE WIN!"

On 25 November the Spanish government of conservative prime minister Mariano Rajoy - under pressure from the mass student strikes of 26 October and 24 November organised by Sindicato de Estudiantes (SE - Students' Union) - scrapped plans to reintroduce 'revalidation' exams, first used in Franco's dictatorship, and a way to discriminate against working class students.

As many students head back to university here, Gareth Bromhall of Socialist Students Wales spoke to Ana Garcia, the general secretary of SE, about this successful student movement and the lessons learned.

We've been following closely the student strikes in the Spanish state over the past year, can you tell us about the successes you have had? And the lessons learned?

In reality, last year's student strikes were only part of a bigger struggle against government attacks to destroy public education. This began in 2012 when Partido Popular (People's Party - a right-wing party) took office.

Since then we have organised 25 days of student strikes which have been very successful. We are fighting against the cuts to public education and against the government's new education laws.

These laws are based on the educational model of the Franco dictatorship (1939-75). They mean that people with little money cannot continue to study. We cannot accept such a measure which means that working class youth do not have the right to quality public education.

We had some important victories last year: we defeated the worst part of the Francoist education law, the reválidas franquistas (exams which were going to be used to justify the expulsion of thousands of students from the educational system with no qualifications).

The lessons we learned are very clear. When we unite and organise to struggle in the streets with the support of workers, we are strong enough to defeat any measure levied against the majority of the population.

That is a useful example for the working class in every sense, in every struggle: "Sí se puede" (yes we can)!

What issues have inspired these young people onto the streets and into struggle?

Working class youth who are now studying in high schools and universities have lived all their conscious life affected by a huge economic crisis. They have not experienced the 'good times.'



Ana Garcia

photos SE

Everything they have known is cuts, attacks against the majority and the lack of an optimistic future. This is what capitalism has to offer us.

This is why class struggle is understood in such a natural way. We have no choice. If we don't fight there is no future for us and that is what we are seeing all around the world; in the United States, in Europe, and elsewhere. People are becoming more and more conscious of the need to change things.

In the Spanish state the struggle in defence of public education has been a catalyst for all the anger and discontent in society.

Can you tell us about the Libres y Combativas campaign?

Libres y Combativas is a new socialist feminist platform created by the Students Union and also Izquierda Revolucionaria (the Socialist Party's counterpart in the Spanish state). We launched it last March with protests and action in universities and high schools across the whole state against male chauvinist violence against women.

The results were great, much more than we expected. The key to that is the class perspective that we put forward. We cannot say that every woman is in the same situation and lives in the same way under oppression and sexism.

Working class women suffer in a deeper and disastrous way because of right-wing government cuts to public services that puts the care of the elderly, children and domestic tasks on our shoulders. Because of the super-exploitation we suffer in our jobs and because of a system which deprives us of economic independence, this creates the basis for violence against women.

We link the struggles of working class women to the struggle against the system. We really think that this is the only way to end women's oppression: we need to fight against the system which creates that oppression, ie capitalism.

Lots of women, young women and female workers are looking for a revolutionary way to change their situation and that is what we are going to do.

As students return to classes for another year, what are your goals, as an effective student-based organisation in the next period?

Our goals have not changed. We want the government to scrap all its class-based educational laws; we want back all the resources this government has stolen from our education to use it in their own benefit.

We have proven that when we fight, we win, so if the government continues its attacks on the living standards and conditions of the majority then we are going to answer with mobilisations, strikes and protests.

We are not stopping until we reach what we want: the right of everyone - it does not matter the area you live, the job your parents have or the money you have - to have a decent public education.

socialist students

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NHS

Boost to Chatsworth campaign

Jon Dale
Mansfield Socialist Party

Campaigners fighting to save Chatsworth neuro-rehabilitation ward in Mansfield have been encouraged by two recent developments.

Firstly, Jeremy Corbyn, speaking at a Labour Party rally of 2,000 in Mansfield, saluted their brave campaign and said it needed to succeed.

The campaign has previously told Sherwood Forest Hospitals Trust's senior management they should not be making cuts but wait - a new government could soon be in power, with more money for the NHS. Jeremy Corbyn's speech confirmed this.

Following his remarks, hopefully local Labour councillors and party officers will step forward and help build the fight to save this vital service. So far they have been noticeable by their complete absence.

Secondly, the #WeAreAllChatsworth campaign lobbied Mansfield



photo Michael Barker

and Ashfield Clinical Commissioning Group's (CCG) annual general meeting. Five out of eight questions asked by the public concerned the threatened Chatsworth ward closure.

The CCG admitted they had not been given advance warning of Sherwood Forest Hospitals Trust board's decision to close Chatsworth. The only reason the CCG put forward to support closure was difficulty in recruiting a specialist doctor.

This point doesn't stand up. The trust only offered the previous consultant a six-month contract. They haven't advertised the post - so how can they say they can't recruit?

The campaign is building support against all NHS cuts in central Nottinghamshire, calling for local MPs and councillors to publicly support it.

Support from the public is growing all the time as the message gets across that if Chatsworth closed today, there will be somewhere else in the firing line tomorrow.



Socialist Party Fighting Fund

	£ received	£ target	July to September 2017					Deadline: 2 October 2017				
North West	2,507	2,100										119%
East Midlands	1,674	1,850										90%
South West	1,581	1,800										
Yorkshire	2,486	3,300										75%
Northern	508	750										68%
West Midlands	1,660	2,600										64%
Souther	992	1,600										62%
Wales	1,263	2,300										55%
Eastern	572	1,200										48%
London	2,330	6,100										38%
South East	172	750										23%
Other	334	5,650										6%
TOTAL	16,079	30,000										54%

are you asking these questions?

100 years since the Russian Revolution:
 ▶ what really happened?
 ▶ was Lenin a dictator?
 ▶ are Trotsky's ideas still relevant?

Capitalism in crisis
 ▶ 10 years since the world economic crisis: is there a way out?
 ▶ Trumpism, nationalism and war - what's the alternative?

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 ▶ What are the lessons of the school students' movement in Spain and France 1968 for us?

Labour and the trade unions - how do we forge a powerful, fighting movement?

join the debates

How do we beat low pay?

Marxism - is there a need for theory in our movement?
 ▶ how do Marxists understand the state?
 ▶ what is dialectical materialism?
 ▶ is Marx's contribution to economics still relevant in the era of the gig economy and the rise of robots?



photo Elaine Evans

Union protest at Sports Direct meeting

Unite union members reminded Sports Direct boss Mike Ashley, on the day of his company's AGM (6 September), of three broken promises by holding up placards depicting lots of sad faces.

Ashley - under a media spotlight over Sports Direct's exploitative workplace practices - promised last year "to ensure that all staff are treated with dignity and respect".

But instead of keeping his promises, workers, before clocking on, are asked to tap a smiley or sad emoji.

Tap the sad emoji and workers are asked to think about it and if they do not then choose the smiley emoji they are taken for a meeting with management.

Thousands of workers at Sports Direct's warehouse in Shirebrook are working on temporary agency zero-hour contracts with only 336 hours a year guaranteed according to Unite.

A year after promising guaranteed hours to shopfloor staff in its stores Sports Direct is still advertising for casual staff. This leaves workers with the prospect of weeks without work.

Sports Direct chairman Keith Hellawell defended the company's use of zero-hour contracts and rejected an independent review of its working practices, instead claiming "a huge proportion of workers are happy to retain the flexibility".

Earlier this year Sports Direct workers illegally paid less than the minimum wage had still not received their back pay. Sports Direct blamed former employment agencies for this.

Elaine Evans

Donate today!

If you agree with what you read in the Socialist, consider making a donation to the Socialist Party's fighting fund:

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photo Becci Heagney

Young Socialists launched in Greater Manchester

Seraphina Jones
School student, Salford

We held a Young Socialists rally on 2 September in Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester. It was to encourage young people to get more political and to sign up to Young Socialists.

Most people came over to sign the petition about university fees.

People felt strongly about the issue. A lot of college students aged 16-18 came to have a chat and most people were supportive. A good start to the Young Socialists campaign!

We are now building for a huge turnout on our Young Socialists 'red bloc' contingent on the demo outside the Tory party conference on 1 October in Manchester.

a weekend of political discussion and debate in central London on 11&12 November
 info, tickets, speakers, etc: socialism2017.net

Memoir: Che, My Brother

INTIMATE INSIGHT INTO A REVOLUTIONARY ICON



Che Guevara

Scott Jones

Anyone interested in Che Guevara, the Argentinian socialist and hero of the Cuban revolution, is spoilt for choice when looking for books about his life and exploits. But a new book, ‘Che, My Brother’, written by his sibling in the run-up to the fiftieth anniversary of Che’s death, is a welcome addition.

Juan Martin is Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara’s youngest brother. He was himself a political prisoner for eight years in the late 1970s and early 80s under the reactionary Argentinian junta. Fitting given that Che, before his death, told a fellow fighter he considered Juan Martin, of all his siblings, his spiritual heir.

It was a visit to the tiny village of La Higuera in Bolivia, where Che was executed by US-backed forces in 1967, that prompted Juan Martin to write. It’s mainly personal recollections of their youth and

the impact of Che’s ‘legend’ on the Guevara family.

The book features some interesting insights into what made Che the revolutionary he would become. The stories Che told his family about poverty and struggle when he returned from the trip around Latin America that became ‘The Motorcycle Diaries.’

Struggle

50 years ago Che was in the Bolivian mountains courageously fighting a guerrilla war against the country’s military dictatorship. Sadly, his brave efforts were misguided in that they circumvented workers’ struggle. They failed to initiate revolution and Che’s resulting defeat was to prove fatal.

Despite his self-sacrifice, the methods of guerrilla struggle - which in the specific conditions of Cuba had successfully overthrown capitalism, if not installed genuine workers’ democracy - did not have the same effect. But Che’s life is rightly an inspiration and his

position as an icon of struggle is justified.

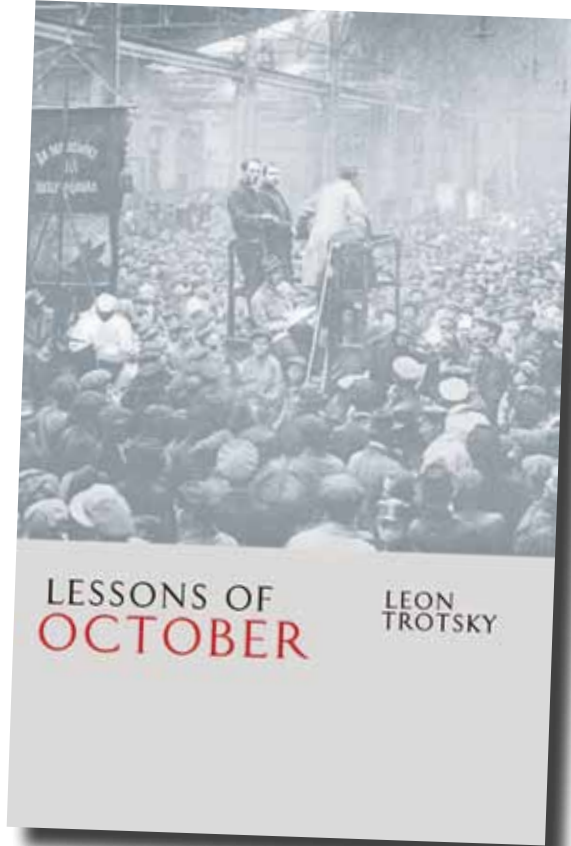
The Socialist Party would point to the experience of another great revolutionary, Leon Trotsky, a leader of the Russian revolution a century ago.

Trotsky argued that the working class, even when in a minority, must lead the struggle against capitalism - not isolated bands of guerrillas. Works by Trotsky were found on Che when he was captured and killed.

And what does his brother make of it all? Juan Martin writes: “Do we need someone exactly the same today? A guerrilla? No. A man with a beret living up in the mountains? No.

“But a man with ideas for change, with principles, who won’t exchange them for money and fame and power? Someone with Che’s characteristics? Yes, we need that.

“The world has not become a better place from when Che was alive. It has become worse. We must fight to make things better.” I agree.



New publication: Lessons of October

Trotsky’s “insightful and frank examination” of revolution out soon

Ben Robinson
Socialist Books

Socialist Books is proud to announce that our second publication will be ‘Lessons of October’ by Leon Trotsky.

This book opens with “we met with success in the October revolution, but the October revolution has met with little success in our press.” On the centenary of the Russian revolution, Socialist Books argues the importance of the Russian revolution has only grown.

Order now

You can order Lessons of October now, and receive your copy when it is returned from the printers on 26 September.

This fresh edition comes with a new introduction from Judy Beishon, a member of the executive committee of the Socialist Party and a member of the international executive committee of the Committee for a Workers’ International.

The Russian revolution of 1917 removed the brutal tsarist dictatorship and saw workers and peasants take charge of their own destiny. The impact was felt around the world, inspiring a wave of revolutionary movements throughout Europe and beyond.

While the new workers’ state successfully defended itself from the invading armies bent on snuffing out workers’ rule, subsequent revolutionary movements tragically failed and Russia was left isolated.

In Lessons of October, Leon

Trotsky - a leader of the revolution together with Vladimir Lenin - sought to draw out why the Russian revolution had succeeded while other revolutionary moments had been missed.

In particular, Trotsky looks at the role of the Bolshevik party. He offers an insightful and frank examination of the difficulties and successes of developing a political programme offering a way forward in the midst of the tumultuous and fast-moving events of 1917.

Writing to aid the fight for international socialism, Lessons of October provoked a series of attacks from the developing bureaucracy around Stalin, whose past mistakes Trotsky was exploring.

Lessons of October is essential reading to understand the real history of the Bolsheviks and the October revolution, as well as the first-hand experience vital for the fight for socialism today.

■ Lessons of October, published by Socialist Books, available for £5 from September 26. Order now to receive free postage and packing - socialistbooks.co.uk - 020 8988 8779 - PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD - Make cheques payable to ‘Socialist Books’

■ Socialist Books is also pleased to announce we have published ebook versions of both ‘The Rise of Militant’ and ‘From Militant to the Socialist Party’ - both are available for £10 from socialist-books.co.uk and the Amazon store worldwide

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NEW DOCUMENTARY ASKS WOMEN HOW THEIR BODIES ARE SEXUALISED AND POLICED

Helen Pattison
East London Socialist Party

A new production, Tits, by Lily Levin and Tristan Bell, is a series of interviews filmed with people discussing body image, personal experiences and their feelings around their top halves. The Socialist spoke to Lily, producer and Socialist Party member, about the project.

“Tits is about body image. And the way that bodies are portrayed in the media. And whether that’s OK or not.”

The documentary, which Lily and Tristan are still working on, sees a number of people interviewed topless but without showing their faces. It includes women who have undergone mastectomy, transgender women and transgender men.

For Lily it was important the interviews took place topless, despite Facebook and other social media sites having banned images of women’s nipples. “Yes, that was the point - me and my friend Tom can go walking down the street topless and I would get arrested and he wouldn’t.”

But the straightforward portrayal of breasts has another purpose. “They are out because it stops them being sexualised... If you are sitting there in a bra, a lacy, sexy bra, then they are more sexualised than sitting there without a bra.

“You’re sexualised more by the clothes you wear than by the clothes you don’t wear. And I think if people go ‘here it is, what’s the big deal,’ it’s when the proper conversations can start.”

There are so many contradictions in a society which both polices and sexualises women’s bodies. Lily brought up Caroline Lucas’s stunt in the last parliament, wearing a t-shirt saying ‘No more page three.’ “She can’t wear a t-shirt in parliament, but they can bring in page three.”

Lily thinks everyone should watch Tits when it is finished. Especially “young people, teenagers, people going through puberty. Because those are the people going through turmoil about their body shape.”

■ To find out more and to support the project, visit titsdocumentary.com

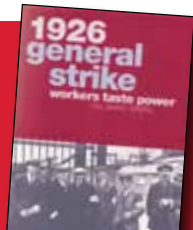


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■ ‘Valuable community assets’

The Labour council in Bury, Greater Manchester, is closing ten out of its 14 libraries. So far, so typical, you might say.

But they made the mistake of asking people if they had ideas about turning former libraries into “a valuable community asset” - like they weren’t already? Hundreds of people flooded the council’s Twitter account.

Asam Yasin was first to reply. He suggested: “A book shop. One that lets you take books for free for a period of time as long as you return them. With a fee if you don’t.”

Another commented, tongue in cheek: “Is that a library, Asam?” To which came the response - “No, no. It’s a shop. If you call it a library they’ll only close it down again...”

Steve Fletcher wrote: “A book/magazine short-term lend-and-return-type facility sounds good. Could do with a snappier name, I suppose.”

They got a lot of other witty responses. Unfortunately it’s no laughing matter for the residents of Bury, especially for the disabled users of the specially adapted library at Whitefield, which is one of those slated for closure.

Come on Jeremy, when are you going to call a halt to cuts that are making Labour councils a laughing stock?

Paul Gerrard
Bury

■ Asthma attacked

I was recently watching the film ‘The Lorax’ (based on the book by Dr Seuss) with my five-year-old daughter. The main theme is the plight of the environment as a result of the search for profits.

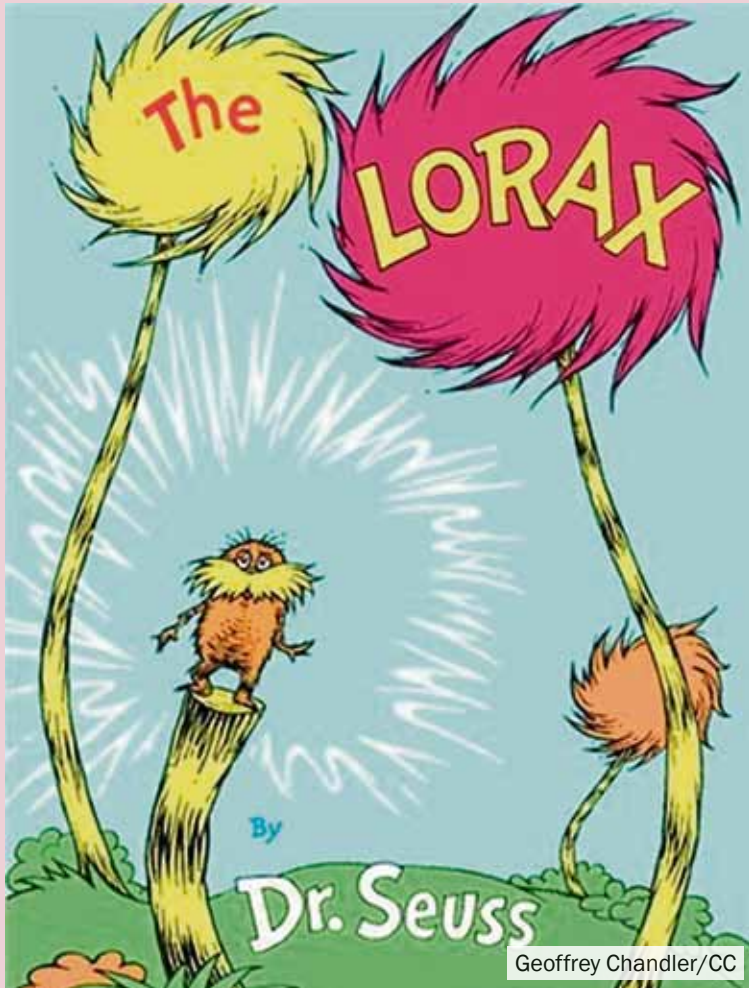
However, another aspect of the story was of particular interest to me. Due to the destruction of trees, residents of the fictional town in the story need to purchase their air - from a sinister tycoon-type businessman who has systematically monopolised this industry - in order to breathe.

But as an asthma sufferer, what is best described as a ‘breath tax’ is already a dangerous and potentially costly reality. Britain has some of the highest asthma rates in Europe. Asthma UK says there are around 5.4 million people in the UK with asthma: 4.3 million adults - one in every 12 - and 1.1 million children - one in every eleven.

Asthma isn’t just some innocuous ailment that kids used as an excuse to get out of doing PE at school. It is an incurable disease affecting the lungs and airways, with the most severe symptoms manifesting through ‘attacks’ and leaving the sufferer with a terrifying inability to breathe.

Every ten seconds someone is having a potentially life-threatening asthma attack in the UK. 185 people are admitted to hospital because of asthma attacks every day, and a child is admitted every 20 minutes.

In 2015 (the most recent data available) 1,468 people died as a result of the disease. That means that every day, the lives of four families were



devastated by the death of a loved one due to an asthma attack. Outrageously, many of these are preventable.

Unlike in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, those with this debilitating disease in England have to pay for their non-emergency treatment by way of prescription charges. This can include steroid-based medications, usually in the form of preventative and emergency inhalers.

Prescription charges are currently £8.60. Some people have several prescriptions and sufferers have gone without collecting their medication for this reason.

This ‘breath tax’ is a direct result of the economic system in which we currently live, one of profit over the needs of ordinary people. The privatisation that has been systematically introduced into the NHS, coupled with the monopolistic nature

of the pharmaceutical companies, means that vital funds are siphoned off into the pockets of a few individuals.

Technology such as ‘smart inhalers’, health apps and remote monitoring already exist and have the potential to improve the care delivered by healthcare professionals. They could also improve self-management for the 5.4 million people with asthma in the UK.

Under a socialist economic system, the NHS and big pharmaceutical companies would be publicly owned and run under the democratic control and management of staff and service users. Planned production could quickly roll out new technologies like this on a mass scale, and ensure the healthcare needs of all are met.

What the bosses currently take as profits could be reinvested to make treatments free, pay healthcare workers a real living wage, and expand technological research and development.

Carl Harper
Peterborough



The Socialist Inbox

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Korean peninsula: Is nuclear war likely?

Only strong international working class opposition can halt military aggression

Niall Mulholland
Committee for a Workers'
International (CWI)

The North Korean nuclear bomb test on 3 September, the most powerful yet, and the bellicose reaction of the US administration, underlines the volatile and dangerous situation in the peninsula and entire region.

Hours after the bomb test, South Korea, with US backing, held military exercises and missile launches in a simulated attack on North Korea.

Many people in the region and across the world are understandably fearful that the aggressive actions of the US and North Korea's arms programme can lead to armed conflict, by design or accident, and even nuclear war - costing untold lives and environmental destruction.

Appalling as North Korea's weapon programme is, it is nothing compared to the 7,000 nuclear warheads the US superpower possesses.

And while Trump condemns North Korea's threat to "world peace", it is the US that has unleashed over 6,000 bombs in several countries, so far, in 2017.

Bellicose threats

The Trump administration gave a chilling response to the North Korea bomb test. The US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, declared that North Korea's president Kim Jong-un was "begging for war" and called for an end of all economic links with North Korea.

This is a direct threat to China's interests, which is the main trader with North Korea and its primary oil supplier.

China and Russia's 'freeze for freeze' proposals - the US and South



US and South Korea defence chiefs meet amid growing tensions on the Korean peninsula photo DoD air force staff sergeant Jette Carr/CC

Korea to stop massive military exercises on North Korea's borders in return for Pyongyang stopping nuclear and missile testing and for talks - is dismissed out of hand by the White House.

Both China and Russia border North Korea and are vying with the US in the Eurasia region. They criticise Pyongyang's nuclear arms programme partly because it gives US imperialism the pretext to vastly increase its military power on the Korean peninsula.

At the same time, China and Russia steadfastly oppose severe sanctions, including oil embargoes, as they could lead to social chaos in North Korea or even the collapse of the Pyongyang regime, with millions of refugees entering China and even Russia.

They fear the end of the North Korea 'buffer' would see a US-dominated 'reunified' Korea, with weapons of mass destruction on their doorsteps, pointed towards them.

The regime of Kim Jong-un appears to have speeded up its nuclear arms programme to act as a 'deterrent' against a US-led attack.

The grisly fate of Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Libya's Colonel Gaddafi, after they gave up their 'weapons of mass destruction', will have concentrated minds among the ruling elite in Pyongyang.

Whatever sanctions might be

brought to bear on North Korea - for which working people will suffer the most - the Pyongyang regime regards nuclear weapons as its only real bargaining chip and chance to survive.

The North Korea regime's bomb and missile testing certainly compounds the risk of conflict but the main culprit for creating this dangerous situation in north east Asia lies with the aggressive, reckless Trump administration.

It was the US that introduced nuclear arms into the Korean peninsula in 1958, until they were pulled out following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since 1991, the US has carried out regular flights of nuclear-capable bombers in South Korean airspace.

In response, North Korea embarked on the long road to nuclear capability. It used the threat of nuclear weapons and its huge conventional arsenal to force the US superpower into negotiations. The regime needed economic concessions to avoid collapse and sought an end to the strategic siege imposed by the US.

US president Bill Clinton initially considered using military force against the North but the human and economic cost involved caused a swerve in US policy and a negotiated 'Agreed Framework' with North Korea.

The hawkish George W Bush administration ditched the Agreed Framework and declared North Korea to be part of an "axis of evil". 'Six Party Talks', begun in 2003, failed under a welter of mutual suspicion and distrust between the US and North Korea.

Limited options

Under the Obama administration, despite the toning down of war rhetoric, there was no major change in policy towards North Korea. The coming to office of the aggressive, reckless Trump administration has seen, once again, a dangerous ratcheting up of tensions.

Yet Trump faces the same limited options as previous US presidents, even more-so now that North Korea appears to be on the brink of possessing nuclear armed missiles (which Pyongyang claims will reach the American mainland).

After the 3 September North Korean bomb test, Trump accused South Korea of "appeasement" and raised doubts about continuing a US-South Korea free-trade agreement - a highly provocative statement that the White House soon backed away from.

South Korea's president Moon Jae-in faces domestic pressure having come to office after huge protests forced the impeachment of his right-wing predecessor.



Dictator Kim Jong-un sees North Korea's nuclear bomb programme as his sole bargaining chip with the US

He pledged to repeal repressive 'security' laws, to develop reconciliation with North Korea and that his regime will adopt a more independent foreign policy from the US.

While Moon Jae-in is under intense pressure to agree to take more US missiles, it is reported that his government is considering developing its own nuclear arms programme.

The White House sends out contradictory statements on how it intends to deal with North Korea, reflecting not only the unstable character of the Trump presidency but the intense debates and divisions taking place within US ruling circles.

The New York Times warns that Trump needs to start talks with Kim Jong-Un, "before design or miscalculation leads to war".

However, a gung-ho editorial in the Wall Street Journal (owned by Rupert Murdoch) called for the deployment of nuclear weapons in South Korea and encouraged North Korean "elites to defect or stage an internal coup". It callously went on: "withholding food aid to bring down

a government would normally be unethical, but North Korea is an exceptional case".

Armed conflict on the Korean peninsula would provoke huge anti-war and anti-imperialist protests across the world, even revolutionary movements - not least in the US against the already deeply unpopular Trump administration.

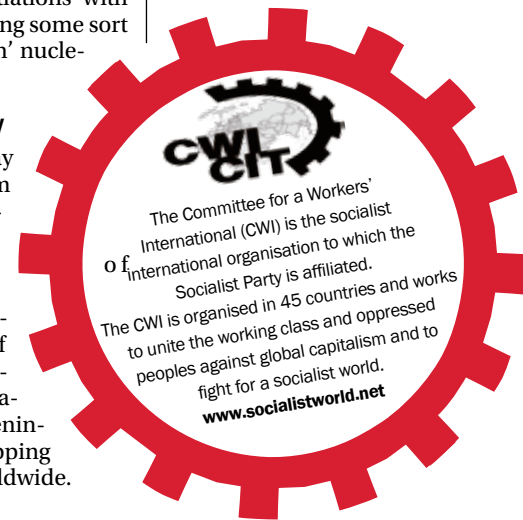
In the long run, however, the US will most likely have to face the prospect of entering negotiations with North Korea and reaching some sort of deal to try to 'contain' nuclear-armed North Korea.

Peace and stability

However, the only way to ensure long term peace and stability in the region is for the development of strong international working class opposition to the aggression of the Trump administration, against militarisation of the Korean peninsula and for the scrapping of all nuclear arms worldwide.

Linked to this, is the struggle to fundamentally change society - run for people's needs not profits - by the working class across the Korean peninsula, the region, the US and the world. The unification of Korea on a genuine socialist basis, and the creation of a voluntary and equal socialist federation in the region, would see an end to class exploitation and wars.

■ Full article: socialistworld.net



North Korea - The hermit state

The North Korea regime is a particularly grotesque form of Stalinism but its development has been strongly influenced by the decades-long military threat from US imperialism.

At the end of World War Two, fearing a complete takeover of the peninsula by Korean Communist Party-led guerrillas and Soviet forces, the US chose the 38th parallel to divide Korea and 25,000 US troops established a brutal military government.

Full-scale war broke out on 25 June 1950. Under the banner of the UN (including 60,000 British troops) the bombardment of the North caused two million civilian deaths and massive destruction of the country's infrastructure.

The war ended in 1953 with the border where it started, without a formal peace treaty and with the US refusing to recognise the 'Democratic People's Republic of Korea'.

The war and decades of US military threat resulted in North Korea becoming an increasingly isolated, monolithic form of Stalinism.

Kim Jong-un is a hereditary leader of a regime notorious for its xenophobia, cult of personality

and bogus 'Juche' (self-sufficiency) ideology.

The totalitarian regime holds hundreds of thousands of political prisoners in labour camps.

Like all Stalinist states, top-down, bureaucratic rule undermined the achievements of the planned economy and became a fundamental barrier to its further development. The military apparatus is a massive burden on the economy.

The economy was hit very hard by the collapse of the Soviet Union after 1990, which deprived North Korea of cheap imports. This was compounded by flooding in 1995-96 that led to famine.

Both formal and informal markets have grown, as well as private enterprise. The South Korean central bank stated last month that the North's economy grew in 2016 by 3.9%, the fastest pace in 17 years. Capitalists throughout East Asia are keen, of course, to exploit North Korea's cheap labour.

Only genuine workers' democratic control and management, at all levels of society in North Korea, could see the full potential of the planned economy realised. This entails overthrowing the despotic Kim Jong-un regime and linking up with the working class of South Korea in their struggle against capitalism and imperialism.



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.

■ Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!

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-biz 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!

www.socialistparty.org.uk

02089888777

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The Korean War (1950-53) ended without a formal peace treaty between the US and North Korea

KICK OUT THE TORIES

FIGHT FOR FREE EDUCATION!



photo Isai Priya

Theo Sharieff-Winston
Socialist Students

Millions of university students are returning to their campuses to begin the new academic year. Yet in the short few months since students were last at university, the political situation across the country has been transformed beyond recognition.

When university students were finishing their exams the 8 June general election, at lightning speed, propelled the political expectations of millions of students and young workers to a higher level.

Jeremy Corbyn's manifesto - which argued for free university and college tuition and the

reinstatement of maintenance grants, a £10 an hour minimum wage, an end to zero-hour contracts, and more - convinced young people that if they get organised they would have a future worth fighting for.

Since then students who supported Corbyn have witnessed the internal political chaos and turmoil within the Tory party, and glimpsed the collective blow we as a movement could strike against their rule and their super-rich backers.

Fightback

Yet it is crucial that we don't just sit on our hands waiting for the next general election. A revitalised movement which surpasses the level of struggle against tuition fees waged by students in 2010 is well within reach.

Thousands are now searching for a way for-

ward, not only to win free education but to collapse this rotten government altogether.

However, if we are to secure decent living standards on a permanent basis we need to get organised for a fundamental transformation of society along socialist lines.

Socialist Students is a campaigning organisation which not only fights against the Tory government but against the capitalist system as a whole: join us to build a movement which goes beyond the limits of capitalism to unite students and workers in a struggle not only to win free education, but to transform our society.

Socialiststudents.org.uk

■ Interview with Spanish student union leader >page 10

- Fight for free education
- Living grants for college and university students
- End privatisation and the commercialisation of education
- Minimum wage of £10 an hour, with no exemptions
- Scrap zero-hour contracts - fight for workplace union rights
- Rent controls to secure affordable accommodation
- Votes at 16

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