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Formerly **Militant**

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FIGHT THE TORY ENEMY

- End austerity
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Sarah Sachs-Eldridge
Socialist Party executive committee

This Easter break there is one major news story that should dominate all the headlines. Holiday hunger.

How much horror for working class people and their kids is summed up in those two words? In the weeks when children are without school meals charities

report that pressure on food banks doubles.

Why isn't this story on every front page, rather than false antisemitism claims? Why is it not at the top of the news? Why is the entirety of society not consumed with trying to urgently solve this problem?

Because we live in a society where pro-capitalist politicians act in the interests of the richest, defending a system of gross inequality whose symptoms include hungry kids, homelessness and NHS crises. The 10% richest households own almost half the country's wealth while the poorest half of families own only 9%!

The term 'holiday hunger' was

coined in the era of austerity to summarise the poverty inflicted on families by pro-capitalist politicians who bailed out banks saying there is no alternative. There is. Austerity means choosing capitalism, which can only exist by driving down living standards. Socialism would mean democratic planning of resources to improve everyone's life.

Political decisions

These and many other examples of the problems that beset working class and middle class families are the results of political decisions, of the Tory governments, and of the Blairites in government and Labour

councils who have chosen not to use the power they hold to resist austerity and privatisation.

Instead our airwaves have been dominated by attacks on Jeremy Corbyn. Why? Because the popularity of his anti-austerity message shows that people have had enough. Because a swing to Labour at the local elections on 3 May is predicted. Because the Blairites who dominate the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Labour councils fear for their future, having backed and implemented Tory austerity.

It is regrettable that Jeremy Corbyn has not yet acted decisively to clear these pro-capitalist class elements

out of the Labour Party. Now they are attacking again, aided and abetted by the Tories and the capitalist press. Introducing the right to democratic reselection so the members can clear them out is an urgent part of fighting for a working class and socialist Labour Party that can give a political voice to the fight against austerity.

Socialist Party members and other campaigners are standing as anti-cuts candidates in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition against right-wing Labour councillors to help turn Jeremy's anti-austerity message into action.

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Labour movement must fight the right, not accept its false antisemitism smears



Demonstrators at the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street, when communists and Jews defeated a fascist march - speakers included Jeremy Corbyn photo Neil Cafferky

> Continued from front page

The right-wing press has gone into overdrive in its false claims of Jeremy Corbyn's antisemitism and racism. The Sunday Times produced what it called a 'bombshell dossier' - it was more like a damp squib rolled in fake news and topped with a dollop of hypocrisy.

Murdoch's Sunday Times claimed to have spent two whole months on its 'investigation' trailing through Facebook groups to find 'evidence'. Searching groups that have 400,000 members, they found 2,000 "racist, antisemitic, misogynistic, violent and abusive messages".

How many were generated by porn spambots? While every single such message must be challenged, anyone who has spent time on Facebook will know that any discussion can have racists attempt to hijack the debate - but that cannot be taken as representative of all in the group.

The Socialist Party condemns antisemitism and all forms of racism and discrimination. Unlike Murdoch and the Tories, we, Jeremy Corbyn and the labour movement have a record of fighting racism.

Antisemitism is certainly prevalent on the far right, and it is socialists and trade unionists who are at the forefront of countering it, not the Tories or the Labour right.

In the 1990s our predecessor, Militant, was instrumental in shutting down the headquarters of the racist and antisemitic British National Party.

The Tories represent the capitalist system, which is intrinsically unequal and racist. For example, this week it has been revealed that the Home Office is upping the pressure on desperate asylum seekers to return to the war and torture they are fleeing.

Unfortunately Jeremy Corbyn has not been aided by the heads of Momentum, the organisation supposedly set up to back him. Its leadership has produced a statement which gives legitimacy to the false claims.

Christine Shawcroft, one of Momentum's directors, resigned from Labour's national executive committee and allowed Blairite Eddie Izzard to take a seat, strengthening the right wing there.

These events are only a small indication of the attacks that a Corbyn-led government would face. Instead of retreating, Jeremy should call for a mass demo against austerity and all forms of racism and to get the Tories out, with a plan with the trade unions to follow it with united strike action. The university workers in UCU have shown the way, and willingness to fight, that exists.

Corbyn should show his determination to stand firm by instructing Labour council candidates to commit to no more cuts or stand down now for emergency replacement by trade unionists, socialists and campaigners committed to defending working class families and young people. This would show up the lies for what they are and start to challenge austerity and its authors.

Retail crunch: even giants not immune as 21,000 jobs disappear

■ Fight for living wages and public ownership

Iain Dalton
Vice-chair, Usdaw Leeds private trades branch (personal capacity)

Almost every week it seems another retail chain is closing stores. 21,000 retail jobs have gone in the first three months of the year according to the Press Association.

Toys R Us went into liquidation at the end of February, with electronics store Maplin going into administration just hours later. In March, Italian restaurant Prezzo announced it was closing a third of its locations. Fashion retailer New Look has announced closures of 60 locations, just over a tenth of its stores.

The growth of online shopping is a factor, with 90% of people buying at least one item online in 2017. But only around 18% of sales in 2018 are expected to come via the internet, so 'bricks and mortar' stores still remain dominant.

New Look's recovery plan also includes rent reductions and new lease terms on a further 393 locations, the vast majority of its shops. This is a result of high commercial rental prices, much like those in the private housing sector.

Around a decade ago, companies such as Boots, Tesco and others sold their properties to asset management companies who leased stores back to them, many of them on 'upwards-only' rent review terms.

This has led to an overheating of the retail property market, especially in central London, combined with companies increasingly stuck with large, warehouse-type shops rented in better times.



Underlying all of this is that people simply don't have the money to spend!

This is compounded by the delayed revaluation of business rates charged by councils, based on rental prices. So those stores paying over the odds in rent continue to do the same with rates even after renegotiating.

The result is the widespread closures we are seeing now, with whole

town centres beginning to look like ghost towns. In towns like Burslem in Stoke-on-Trent, Dewsbury in West Yorkshire, and Newport in South Wales, around 30% of shop front retail space is vacant, according to the Local Data Company.

But underlying all of this is that people simply don't have the money to spend! This is the result of year-on-year pay freezes for many workers, or below-inflation pay 'increases' if we're very lucky.

Overall consumer spending went down last year for the first time in five years, according to Visa. Retail specifically increased, but growth slowed to just 1.9%, the lowest since 2013 says the ONS.

A very poor Christmas saw retail sales fall 1.4% in December compared to November, and then only 'recover' by a pitiful 1.6% in January compared to 1.5% in 2017.

A recovery in the retail sector requires a recovery in the pockets of ordinary workers. Unless the trade union movement leads a fightback on pay, expect the squeeze to continue. And only democratic public ownership and socialist planning can guarantee workers safety from market forces.



Almost a third of high street retail units are shuttered in some towns

Mark Best
Hackney Socialist Party

Senior members of the right-wing Vote Leave campaign may have broken election law, allegedly breaching spending limits by donating money to another organisation they campaigned with.

At the time, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) - the anti-austerity electoral alliance including transport union RMT and the Socialist Party - called on the Electoral Commission to use its legal power not to designate an official campaign, rather than hand state funding to reactionaries. This position was also officially backed by civil service union PCS.

TUSC made the point that socialists and trade unionists campaigning for a working class, socialist Brexit represented the real opposition to the capitalists and establishment politicians who dominated the Remain camp.

And the RMT, for example, with over 80,000 members, dwarfed the few nationalist politicians, business owners and journalists who backed the right-wing Brexit position of a tiny minority of capitalists.

But the Electoral Commission

rejected TUSC's appeal. Instead it declared Vote Leave the official campaign, awarding it a £600,000 grant, free postage worth £13 million, TV and radio time for referendum broadcasts, and the use of meeting facilities free of charge.

So it was Vote Leave which went up against big business's 'Britain Stronger in Europe' campaign. This cemented the tone we saw in the referendum, with both official campaigns competing to demonstrate who was tougher on migrants, in or out.

The case for an internationalist, socialist Brexit wasn't heard by a mass audience. Nonetheless, class anger against the capitalist establishment was the main driver of the Leave vote.

The allegations against Vote Leave emphasise that in Brexit, as in all things, workers have nothing in common with the bosses and their politicians. We need to keep fighting for an independent, pro-worker Brexit, and a new collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist and internationalist basis.

■ A full account of TUSC's principled socialist Leave campaign, which made no compromises with the reactionary leavers, is available at tusc.org.uk/txt/382.pdf

Gaza: independent mass struggle can end siege and occupation

> Continued from back page

The incitement, demonisation and war against unarmed civilians by the IDF and Netanyahu's government is intended to deter Palestinians from fighting for their rights by drowning their protests in blood.

It is also intended to throw sand in the eyes of Jewish workers and young people and turn them against the Palestinians' struggle for a dignified life.

For Netanyahu in particular, the 'war on protest' provides another opportunity to ramp up security fears among the Israeli public in order to divert their attention from allegations of corruption against him, and his government's huge failures.

Moreover, the massacre of Palestinian demonstrators and the continuation of the siege and occupation of Palestinian territories not only removes any prospect for peace, but could also lead to a general escalation in violence in which Israeli civilians will also be harmed.

Therefore it is vital that Israeli workers and young people express their opposition and protest against the bloody policy of the Netanyahu government.

While Netanyahu's government is organising celebrations to mark Israel's 70th anniversary - and, in effect, mobilising nationalism - the rights of the Palestinian refugees and the rights of Palestinians in general continue to be trampled on daily.

Refuge

Almost every week, Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip come to the fence with Israel, mostly seeking refuge from the deteriorating situation - even preferring to be imprisoned in Israel. At the same time, frequent demonstrations and confrontations are taking place along the Gaza Strip border.

The heavy military repression is aimed at thwarting the expansion of the protest movement which threatens the occupation regime. The further mobilisation of tens and even hundreds of thousands could really enable a mass protest outbreak through the siege fences of the Gaza Strip.

On 15 May, 'Nakba' Day - or 'catastrophe', marking the systematic destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages and the forceful uprooting of over 750,000 Palestinians in 1948 - the demonstrations are scheduled to peak in the 'One Million March'.

This scenario not only creates fear in the Israeli government fears but also within Hamas. It is concerned that an independent mass struggle will slip from its hands, and show that the Palestinian masses can do what the military power of Hamas is not really capable of: actually threaten the siege and occupation.

Socialists support the Palestinian protest, as part of the struggle against the occupation and for



The face of protest against the brutal Israeli state occupation of Palestinian territory: 17-year-old Ahed Tamimi photo Haim Schwarczenberg/schwarczenberg.com/CC

peace and socialist change.

This protest needs international solidarity. First and foremost among Israeli workers and young people who understand that Netanyahu's government of big business and Israeli settlements represents the deepest danger also to their own security.

But, while fighting now to end repression and win democratic and social demands, a broader alternative

needs to be offered - a socialist alternative. One which would guarantee equal rights and living standards for Palestinians and Israelis beyond anything that is capable under capitalism.

■ The full programme of Socialist Struggle Movement against the occupation and for Palestinian self-determination is available on socialistworld.net

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

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CATALONIA: NEW FRANCOIST COUP - GENERAL STRIKE NOW!



The Spanish state and its supporting political parties have unleashed a repressive avalanche against the Catalan independence movement photo Robert Bonet/CC

The arrest of exiled former Catalan president Carles Puigdemont has reignited the Catalan independence struggle. His arrest in Germany was on charges of ‘sedition and rebellion’ under a warrant issued by the Spanish state at the behest of right-wing People’s Party (PP) prime minister, Mariano Rajoy. This provoked renewed mass protests on the streets of Barcelona, which were subjected to police attacks. Puigdemont’s arrest - along with the detentions of other former Catalan officials in exile elsewhere in Europe, together with those jailed former ministers - shows the continuing repression by the Spanish state of those in Catalonia seeking self-determination. This repression was evident before and since the 1 October 2017 referendum and subsequent Catalonia elections on 21 December 2017, both of which returned majorities for independence.

The Socialist Party’s sister section in the Spanish state stands four-square for a socialist independent Catalonia and against the reactionary Francoist constitution of 1978 which denies national self-determination.

Below are excerpts from a statement issued by **Esquerra Revolucionària** (CWI in Catalonia) on the latest developments.

■Free the political prisoners!
■For a Catalan republic of the workers and youth!

The authoritarian ‘regime of 1978’ (term used to describe the post-General Franco ‘democratic’ regime in Spain), its state apparatus and the parties which support it (the PP, Ciudadanos, and the Psoe leadership) have carried out a new coup against democratic rights and freedoms in Catalonia.

They have unleashed a repressive avalanche against the Catalan independence movement, reminiscent of that which the Franco dictatorship carried out against the “Republic and communism”

They have eliminated Catalan au-

tonomy, arrested Catalan president Carles Puigdemont and are charging 25 pro-independence leaders, many who have already been jailed without trial or bail.

There is no doubt that the monarchist, Spanish nationalist bloc in power refuses to accept the results of the Catalan elections of 21 December and is willing to crush, at any cost, the pro-republic aspirations of the Catalan people. Catalonia is living under a Francoist state of emergency.

In response, a general strike must be called by the trade union movement and political left now to

demand the immediate freedom of the political prisoners, the end of article 155 (suspending Catalan autonomy) and for a Catalan republic.

The workers and youth in the rest of the Spanish state also have a duty to support the Catalan people, uniting all our forces to bring down the Rajoy government.

Passion

The youth and working class of Catalonia have reacted with great energy to the provocations of the state and Judge Llarena (who is presiding over the case against the Catalan government leaders).

Immediately after the news of the imprisonment of Jodri Turull (the latest candidate proposed for the presidency of Catalonia) and others, hundreds of thousands of people went onto the streets following the call of the Committees for the Defence of the Republic (CDRs).

Despite the violence of the Mossos (Catalan police) who indiscriminately attacked the crowds, the demonstrators acted in an exemplary manner. The slogans “free political prisoners!” and “general strike now!” rang out with irresistible passion.

It is clear that the PP government and state apparatus have decided to plough ahead with repressive measures, trying to definitively muzzle an entire people.

Rajoy, under intense pressure from the mass protests in defence of pensions and the massive feminist strike on 8 March, is struggling more and more to control the discontent which threatens to turn into a new social explosion.

Moreover, with opinion polls predicting the worst possible outcome for the PP, he is prepared to resist at any cost the pressure from the PP’s conservative rival Ciudadanos and its president, Albert Rivera.

His way of trying to avoid this pressure and recover electoral support is to deal new blows to the Catalan people, and play the Spanish-nationalist card to the full. However, this strategy can blow up in his face.

This judicial repression began with the state attorney general filing a complaint on 30 October. This characterised the 1 October referendum and the general strike which paralysed Catalonia on 3 October as a “violent uprising”, in order to justify bringing charges of “sedition and rebellion”. In one fell swoop, the popular sovereignty of the Catalan people was suppressed.

Who was it that used arms and exercised violence in Catalonia? We all know the answer: the regime of 1978, its government and state, which sent over 10,000 police and military police to savagely beat the millions of people who peacefully exercised the right to vote.

This offensive is not only directed against Catalonia. The attacks on democratic rights and freedom of speech have also been extended to the rest of the Spanish state.

Meanwhile, fascist violence, violence against women - which has murdered hundreds, and the corruption of the PP and other establishment parties - has gone unpunished.

The leaders of CCOO and UGT (the two major trade unions) in

Catalonia and throughout the Spanish state, by refusing to organise mobilisations to stop this authoritarian offensive, have given precious oxygen to the PP government and in practice endorsed the application of article 155.

Among the Catalan working class and in the rest of the state, there is a healthy and correct instinct that nothing good can come from the hand of the PP.

However, the current Spanish-nationalist campaign has managed to generate confusion. First of all because the leaders of Psoe have participated in it, without exception, as well as many who in the past called themselves “communists”. They include Paco Frutos the former general secretary of the Communist Party who has now become a pathetic Spanish-nationalist agitator.

The leadership of Izquierda Unida (IU - United Left) and Podemos (left populist party) have also defended a wrong position, which has fed the confusion and given space to the right wing.

Alberto Garzon (IU leader) has scandalously refused to recognise the existence of political prisoners, and referred to the mass movement as a “manoeuvre” by economic elites, precisely at the time when the Catalan capitalist class had joined hands with the Spanish bourgeoisie to crush the movement. Garzon’s has been the antithesis of a revolutionary Marxist position.

Pablo Iglesias (Podemos leader) also refused to lead the movement for self-determination and the Catalan republic. He blamed the Catalan people and their struggle for “waking up the spirit of fascism” and keeps insisting that there must be a deal with the state and PP to agree a “referendum”.

Does Iglesias not realise that the current offensive by the state in itself represents a clear refusal to dialogue?

The leadership of Unidos Podemos (electoral alliance between Podemos and IU) must make a 180 degree turn and end the policy of abstaining in this battle.

Inviting aggression

It’s no accident that these attacks take place following months when the leaders of the ERC and Junts per Catalunya (main pro-independence parties) have suspended the struggle in the streets and focused on ‘building bridges’ with the PP and Spanish state.

After they defeated the reactionary bloc in the 21 December elections, millions of people hoped they would present a clear plan to take Catalonia towards a republic, based on social mobilisation.

Instead, the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois politicians who lead these parties merely insisted that the proclamation of the Catalan republic was only “symbolic”, that they accepted article 155, and that they should not provoke the state - all in the name of “recuperating the institutions”.



It is time for the motor of the movement for the national liberation of Catalonia - the masses in struggle, the youth and most advanced sections of the workers’ movement - to take the leadership



Mariano Rajoy photo PP/CC

Carles Puigdemont photo CDC/CC

In the class struggle, weakness always invites aggression. The Spanish and Catalan ruling classes are very conscious that what has taken place in Catalonia is a real revolutionary crisis. So they tried to shut it down via courts and jailings, as well as calling the December elections to try to win a majority.

But the will and determination of the Catalan people are frustrating their plans. Instead they now turn back towards more brutal repression against the leaders of the independence movement.

They are going all out to crush the movement and send a message to the workers and youth of the rest of the Spanish state. But they have gone too far.

On the evening of 25 March, after hearing hundreds of thousands shouting for a general strike on the streets, the president of the Catalan parliament, Roger Torrent, called for the formation of a united front in defence of democracy. He announced plans to speak with all the pro-independence parties, the left parties and the unions to plan a strong united response.

It is clear that, beyond his words, the call of Torrent, as well as the statements by the ERC leaders, have the objective of forming a new Catalan government to ‘stabilise’ the situation and end the struggle in the streets.

It is time for the motor of the movement for the national liberation of Catalonia - the masses in struggle, the youth and most advanced sections of the workers’ movement - to take the leadership of the movement.

Of course we must build a united front in the CDRs, the CUP, the militant base of the ANC and Omnium (mass pro-independence campaigns), Catalunya en Comú (Catalan alliance of Podemos, IU and others) and of the entire fighting trade union movement, left organisations and social movements, to immediately call a 24-hour general strike in Catalonia, accompanied by mass mobilisations.

This general strike should unite all those in struggle against the PP government, from the movements of the feminists and pensioners to that of the students.

It should demand the freedom of the political prisoners, the ending of all court proceedings and article 155, and the fall of the Rajoy government.

A general strike should demand that CCOO and UGT, and Unidos Podemos support it in all parts of the Spanish state, organising mobilisations in support of the Catalan people and against the anti-democratic shift we are seeing in general.

Obviously, a general strike will be a decisive step. But afterwards the struggle will have to be extended, broadened and continued with new strikes and mobilisations until repression is defeated, the prisoners are freed, and all democratic rights of Catalonia are restored, including the implementation of the democratic decision of the Catalan people in favour of a republic.

Working class

Izquierda Revolucionaria also insists that the national liberation movement has a duty to win over the powerful Catalan working class as a whole, including those Spanish-speaking workers from outside of Catalonia.

The immense majority of these workers reject the corruption and cuts of the PP, and thousands joined the mobilisations on 1 and 3 October against repression.

However, many of them still look upon the independence ‘process’ with distrust because of the role played by the bourgeois leaders of PDeCat (right-wing nationalists) and the policies of cuts and privatisation which both they and ERC implemented in the Catalan government.

These sections of the Catalan working class can be won to the cause of a Catalan republic and play a decisive role in the struggle against the right and article 155. However, for this to take place, they must see that this is a fight for a workers’ republic, not one of bosses and the Catalan oligarchy.

If the struggle for a republic is combined with a programme of demands which gives a response to the concrete problems millions of us suffer every day and which breaks with the logic of capitalism and ensures labour and social rights and the future of youth, then we can neutralise Spanish-nationalist demagoguery and defeat the fear campaign. This is the path to victory.

■ Statement can be read in full on socialistworld.net



This offensive is not only directed against Catalonia. The attacks on democratic rights and freedom of speech have also been extended to the rest of the Spanish state



UCU STRIKE: REJECT THE DEAL - KEEP THE ACTION ON

Sam Morecroft
Sheffield delegate to UCU strike meeting (personal capacity)

On 28 March, delegates from striking University and College Union (UCU) branches met to be consulted on a new deal, put forward by Universities UK (UUK) to resolve the pensions dispute.

The deal includes maintaining the current pension scheme for a year and setting up a joint working group comprised of both UUK and UCU representatives to look at how the fund is valued. This is a huge step forward from UUK's decision on 23 January to announce plans to completely scrap defined benefit.

It is a testament to the power of UCU members' sustained industrial action that the employers have been pushed this far.

However, while the UCU Higher Education Committee (HEC) met following the branch consultation and voted by a narrow margin (10-8 with one abstention) to ballot members on the strike, this decision did not reflect the feedback from branches at the consultation.

Overwhelmingly, while there was a real sense that the latest offer demonstrated genuine progress, the majority of branches favoured a 'revise and resubmit' position, asking for more detail and discussion on the offer before it was put to the membership.

There is a lack of clarity around what power the joint working group will have to challenge the methodology used to claim that the USS fund is in deficit and to re-evaluate the scheme collectively, as well as what UUK themselves have committed to.

Consultation

In the branch consultation, an undated letter was produced from UUK CEO Alistair Jarvis claiming that UUK "did not intend" to revert to their proposal for 100% defined contribution pensions in the future. This was used by Sally Hunt, UCU general secretary, as evidence that this was not simply an attempt to buy time by the employers and UUK would approach negotiations in good faith.

However, many delegates expressed frustration at this last minute evidence, and asked how they could possibly know what their members would want to happen when they had no way of discussing the full details of the offer beforehand.

The offer from UUK came out just a few days before the branch consultation and was sent out to members before elected negotiators had any chance to discuss the proposal and respond.

Even worse, while the chair noted in the meeting that many branches favoured a revise and resubmit position, when a delegate requested an indicative vote be taken on this, the chair refused the request and stated that HEC representatives had heard

the views of the branches.

With little or no time for discussion, the HEC then voted on completely factional lines. The right-wing faction - which supports Sally Hunt - voted to support a paper put forward by full-time officials calling for an immediate ballot of members. The UCU Left voted against, and the one unaligned HEC member abstained.

Members will be balloted immediately after the Easter Bank Holiday, again giving no real chance for branches to discuss the offer before the ballot begins.

This is a stitch up by Sally Hunt and full-time officials. Members will understandably want to know why. The reality is that the right-wing favour a form of 'partnership' unionism based on compromise with the employers rather than industrial action.

The scale of this attack and members' anger forced them into supporting strikes, but as soon as a compromise deal became available they were keen to accept, despite the fact that all the momentum in the dispute is with the union and further concessions could be extracted.

Significance

Furthermore, while this dispute is between UUK and UCU, the significance of it is felt well beyond the employers and the union. The strike has taken on a life of its own and has felt like the beginnings of a mass movement against marketisation, privatisation and austerity in education. It has reignited the student movement, with over 20 campus occupations taking place since the strike began.

When the previous offer came out in the middle of the strike, branches were quick to mobilise against it and spoke as one in their rejection of it, with mass meetings up and down the country and a protest outside UCU headquarters sending a clear message.

However, this time there was no demo outside the UCU offices and the message was much less clear. This made it easier for the leadership to claim that no clear position came from the consultation and to push for a ballot.

What is now being offered by UUK is a huge step forward from their attempt to completely scrap defined benefit. But at the same time there are huge questions over what the offer means. At worst it is possible this is just a stalling tactic by the employers that will allow them to regroup and come again to attack our pensions.

We have taken huge steps forward together and pushed the bosses back - but we need to reject this deal and keep the action on until UUK provide further guarantees on what this joint working group really means and what they intend for our pensions after April 2019. Vote no, keep the action on!

■ Read full article at socialistparty.org.uk



Nottingham picket line
photo Gary Freeman



Sheffield protest
photo Alistair Tice



Teachers vote for strike action

Members of the National Education Union (NEU) have voted to ballot for strike action over pay at their conference in Brighton on 31 March. The NEU is demanding a 5% pay rise. Socialist Party member and NEU executive committee member Jane Nellist said the NEU needs a "coherent and determined campaign that must involve industrial action".

"The government is weak and is refusing to halt the huge haemorrhaging of teachers and they have failed to meet their own targets on recruitment." Members of the NASUWT teaching union have also voted in favour of rolling industrial action if the government fails to improve teachers' pay.

■ For full report of the NEU conference see online and next week's issue


NSSN conference
7 July 2018
11am - 4.30pm
Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1R 4RL
shopstewards.net

Rally in Runnymede

End the Public Sector Pay Cap
£10/hour minimum wage
No to austerity!

Time to visit Chancellor Philip Hammond and say...

- End the public sector pay cap
- £10 an hour minimum wage
- No to austerity

Invited speakers include:
John McDonnell
Labour shadow chancellor
Dave Prentis
Unison general secretary
Len McCluskey
Unite the Union general secretary
Jac Berry, Dan Sartin and Diana Leach Unison NEC members

Assemble next to Egham train station, marching to Runnymede memorial Saturday 7 April 2pm

■ For updates go to surreycountyunion.org.uk



BT CAN AFFORD MORE - REJECT PENSIONS OFFER

Socialist Party members in CWU

BT has spent £2.7 billion servicing its pension deficit since 2013 - a third of its market value. In the same period it has handed nearly £5 billion to shareholders.

So it sticks in the craw when BT comes to members of the BT pension scheme and says it can no longer afford to fund the deficit.

No wonder then that when BT proposed during the pension consultation that members in the pension scheme would have to pay more for less, there was so much opposition that the Communication Workers Union (CWU) was able to use this as leverage to extract more concessions from the employer.

For retirement saving scheme members, BT will now increase the employer contribution. For those leaving the pension scheme and joining the proposed hybrid scheme, BT will pay transitional payments for ten years. All welcome.

Concession

The concession for enhanced payments recognising those members who may be considering retirement is to be supported. Again, welcome.

But, the truth is that for all the talk of these concessions, it's hard not to feel that the CWU could have won more. This is the sum of concession based bargaining where first the final salary, then the career average and now the BT pension scheme in its current form has been lost.

In its place is a proposed hybrid scheme that may not be comparable or have as its target the same terms and conditions as what currently

exists.

And the new scheme would be linked to the lower CPI inflation model, not the higher RPI, leaving any scheme more exposed to inflation and periods of rising costs.

So CWU members will see a further reduction in their terms and conditions again. And there is no guarantee that even the defined benefit element of the hybrid scheme would not be attacked in the future if BT was to decide it was "unaffordable". BT has, after all, got form.

CWU should have pressed for an industrial action ballot to defend all pensions and used the mandate to extract further concessions like a fully funded and unified BT pension scheme for all employees.

But why not also go further, to pressure BT to reduce share dividends to the major shareholders and use the savings from this campaign to reduce the pension deficit?

Privatisation

It's clear that, as in other utilities and services, the privatised telecoms model is driving this on relentlessly. The CWU must demand Corbyn-led Labour supports CWU policy and commits to renationalising BT to stop the race to the bottom.

It was only the tremendous strike ballot result by our members that forced Royal Mail into concessions that also included a pay rise of over 12% over three years and a reduction in the working week by two hours. We have to fight now.

Only the threat of industrial action will force the employer back - as we are currently seeing happening in the universities because of the University and College Union strike.

Bromley library workers walk out



Bromley libraries
picket line 3 April photo
London Socialist Party

Workers at all 14 of Bromley's libraries started indefinite strike action on 28 March over a "paltry and insulting" pay offer.

The strike by the 36 workers comes after the breakdown of pay talks between Unite the Union and Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL), which runs the library service on behalf of Bromley council.

Unite regional officer Onay Kasab said: "This is the best response to the Tory anti-trade union laws, a 100% yes vote which smashes the

threshold target for turnout but even more importantly says that we will stay out until we win.

"GLL are the worst kind of employer. Appalling terms and conditions, harsh financial penalties for sickness absence and a history of using zero-hour contracts. Unite members are out to win this dispute and will do all that we can to use it to highlight that social enterprise organisations are not a soft option to privatisation."

A Unite member

RMT walkouts



Poplar DLR
picket line
photo Tower
Hamlets
Socialist Party

Northern Rail

In Newcastle train guards on Northern Rail took their 17th day of strike action on 29 March.

The strike is in opposition to plans to axe guards in favour of driver-only operation, which would threaten passenger safety in order to maximise profits.

One of the strikers underlined how they were, "absolutely going to keep up the pressure." He went on to explain that the guards haven't taken strike action lightly, "but the withdrawal of labour is the only tool at our disposal."

All of the strikers felt the mood of the strike was swinging in their favour. One highlighted how their public support was impacting local MPs who were clearly listening to passengers who want guards on the trains.

Social media has also played an important role in the support they are gaining: "On Twitter and

Facebook people are backing us - we can't be silenced."

Elaine Brunskill

DLR

RMT members working on the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) in east London took strike action for two days on 28-29 March in defence of their terms and conditions.

There was a strong picket at Poplar DLR station where Brian, one of the strikers said: "We are not on strike to gain anything but to defend what we already have. For example they have introduced a roster programme which has increased our hours by over five a year without any respective pay rise. And at the same time they are trying to run down departments to bring in contractors through the back door."

More strike action is expected to coincide with the London marathon on 22 April.

Amalia

Niall Mulholland
Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

April 2018 marks the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in Belfast. This was the formal ending of the 'Troubles', the euphemism for decades of sectarian upheaval and armed conflict that wracked the north of Ireland.

Key figures involved in the negotiations that produced the GFA, such as Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams, the Ulster Unionist Party's David Trimble, former US president Bill Clinton and former prime minister Tony Blair, are due to congregate in Belfast to celebrate the 'model peace process'. But given that Northern Ireland's power-sharing executive remains collapsed, the festivities will be conducted with some embarrassment and even despair.

Months of deadlock between the former governing parties, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin, underlines the fact that the agreement never lived up to its billing as bringing long-term peace, stability and prosperity to Northern Ireland. Twenty years since its implementation, the GFA stands on the brink, with its definitive breakdown potentially on the cards.

The establishment's narrative is that the 1998 agreement brought to an end a seemingly irrational tribal war. However, when the Northern Ireland civil rights' movement exploded onto the scene 50 years ago, it attracted not just mass support from Catholics but also initially layers of Protestant youth.

Socialist leadership

With a determined socialist leadership, the possibility existed of fundamental change. But as sectarian bigots and nationalist and unionist political parties attempted to sow divisions among workers and to derail the movement, the labour and trade union leaders failed to present a class alternative.

Due to anger at brutal state repression and deep frustration at the failure of 'politics' to end discrimination and poverty, many working class Catholic youth turned to the Official and Provisional IRA in the early 1970s.

From the start, the Socialist Party (CWI Ireland) and its predecessor Militant argued that the republican armed campaigns would prove counterproductive, dividing the working class further and failing to defeat the might of the British state while providing it with the justification to increase repression.

At the same time, Loyalist paramilitaries carried out indiscriminate, deadly attacks against innocent Catholics.

In conditions of daily bombings and shootings, heavy state repression and polarisation, those, like Militant, advocating for the unions to resist sectarianism and repression, to organise the defence of working class communities and to build a workers' political alternative, often seemed like lone voices.

Nevertheless, Catholic and Protestant workers remained united in shared workplaces and in the unions.

Not one strike was broken by sectarianism, despite the best efforts of bigots on both sides.

By the 1980s the IRA's campaign had run out of momentum. While the British state could not defeat the IRA, it was able to contain the Provisional IRA's campaign with military means and intelligence.

During the 1990s many on the left were also disorientated by the developing 'peace process' in Ireland and the role of Sinn Féin. The Gerry Adams/Martin McGuinness leadership wanted to cut a 'power-sharing' deal in the North, without achieving their long-stated goal of immediate British withdrawal and a united Ireland. In the 20 years since, they have accommodated themselves to administering capitalist austerity in the power-sharing executive.

All sides had to make significant compromises to reach a deal. Prisoner releases, paramilitary arms 'decommissioning' and British 'demilitarisation' were just some of the highly contentious issues that took years to carry out.

The GFA also enshrined the ending of institutionalised discrimination - a process already underway largely as a result of working class Catholics' implacable opposition to a return to any form of Unionist misrule.

Capitalist status quo

But it was Sinn Féin that gave most ground leading up to the signing of the GFA in 1998. The collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Russia and Eastern Europe sped up the process of movements like the ANC in South Africa, PLO in Palestine and the IRA coming to terms with the capitalist status quo.

In the North, after two decades of conflict, and apparent military stalemate, there was also 'war weariness' on all sides. Between 1969 and 1998, some 3,289 people were killed as a result of the conflict - the equivalent ratio of victims to population in Britain would have seen 100,000 people killed.

The Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 - whose main provisions were very similar to that of the GFA - had proved unpalatable to the "extremes" (Ian Paisley's DUP and loyalist groups, whose 'Ulster stoppage' brought Sunningdale crashing down, and the Provisional IRA who denounced it as a "partitionist" sell-out). But 25 further years of sectarian deadlock, paramilitary campaigns and state repression, as well as rejection of violence by the working class, forced an agreement.

Establishment politicians perpetuate the myth that 'peace' in the 1990s was achieved largely from above. But the yearning for an end to the conflict was expressed most forcibly and consistently from below. This was indicated by the Socialist Party's slogan, 'No going back!' which caught the imagination of many working class people.

As paramilitary organisations moved towards shaky ceasefires, many thousands of Catholic and Protestant workers went on protests - often initiated by Militant/Socialist Party supporters in trades councils and unions - against a slide back to sectarian conflict. And the party's initiative, Youth Against Sectarianism, rallied thousands of school students from both sides of the divide across the North.

We pointed out that the peace



20 years since the Good Friday Agreement

NORTHERN IRELAND: PEACE PROCESS ON THE BRINK

One of the Belfast 'peace walls' dividing Protestant from Catholic areas photo Nick/CC

process and GFA would not bring about lasting peace and prosperity, as many claimed. It institutionalised

sectarianism, including with the stipulation that Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) officially state they

are 'nationalist' or 'unionist' or 'other'. Nevertheless, the Socialist Party called for a critical 'yes' vote during

the referendum held on the GFA, North and South. Relative peace would, at least, give the working class

a much better opportunity to develop class politics. From the start, the institutions

created by GFA were beset by instability and crisis. Events on the ground, such as disputes over parades,

threatened to bring down the power-sharing executive. After a suspension of the assembly, a new deal, the St Andrews Agreement, was painfully put together to restore power-sharing in May 2007.

Rather than bringing the two communities together, the institutionalisation of sectarianism led to the opposite extremes of the political spectrum, the DUP and Sinn Féin, supplanting the 'moderate' nationalist and unionist parties.

The decade of power-sharing rule of these two parties saw an intensification of the policies of privatisation, education cuts, health cuts and a failed attempt to impose water charges. While content to work together carrying out Tory government austerity cuts, the DUP and Sinn Féin conducted sectarian mud-slinging against one another on outstanding Troubles-related issues. This also served the useful purpose of averting attention away from their unpopular policies and to bolster their sectarian support.

For many of their voters, however, the power-sharing relationship produced no 'peace dividend'. Over 25% of children live in poverty, public services are slashed, miles of 'peace walls' still divide Catholic and Protestant working class communities, and basic rights, such as same-sex marriage and a woman's right to choose (which both Sinn Féin and the DUP oppose) are denied.

'Cash for ash'

Scandals and sleaze surrounded the executive. The DUP leadership was embroiled in the Renewable Heat Incentive 'cash for ash' scandal that could squander up to £700 million of public money for the benefit of their big businesses friends. Sinn Féin was slow to take up this scandal and it was only widespread anger among Catholics that forced the party to call time on power sharing.

Since the collapse of the executive, new factors, such as Brexit, have destabilised the situation further. All the parties oppose a return to a 'hard border'. Not only would it most likely lead to economic dislocation but it would present a powerful propaganda weapon to republican dissidents.

The Tory government advocates a free trade deal with the EU or a 'high tech customs system' that does not require a hard border. Quite how this can work, with over 200 border crossings, remains to be seen.

Theresa May acquiesced to the EU demand for a 'backstop' arrangement which would somehow keep Northern Ireland in the Customs Union if no other option can be found. Although what the backstop entails is left purposefully ambiguous. The DUP, supported by the pro-Brexit faction of the Tory party, would fiercely oppose any 'exceptionalism' for Northern Ireland.

In this fraught atmosphere, Sinn Féin campaigns for a 'border poll'. Gerry Adams blithely comments, "the Good Friday Agreement... allows for Irish reunification in the context of a democratic vote: 50% plus one."

Lurking behind the concrete issues of controversy in the current crisis are factors and changes of greater magnitude and impact, such as the demographic shift taking place, with

Catholics set to become a majority in Northern Ireland in the near future. This threatens one of the pillars - an in-built Protestant majority - of the state's very foundation, underlining the instability and fragility of the GFA.

Northern Catholics have long held valid national aspirations and, of course, have a right to decide their future. But Sinn Féin's crude 'majoritarianism' will not deliver the peaceful, stable, prosperous united Ireland they yearn for.

Sinn Féin dismisses genuine Protestant working class fears of becoming second-class citizens in a capitalist united Ireland and the fierce reaction to moves towards it.

Dublin-based commentator Fintan O'Toole argued in the Irish Times that it cannot be assumed that southerners, who must also hold a referendum to decide the border, will vote "...for a form of unity that merely creates an angry and alienated Protestant minority within a bitterly contested new state".

Two decades on, the Good Friday Agreement's institutions are suspended and its provisions, based on the assumption of endless sectarianism, only aggravate divisions. In many ways, we see a continuation of the Troubles "by other means", like the sharply contentious question of implementing an Irish Language Act.

And the GFA has not brought universal peace and justice. Low-level paramilitary attacks and punishment beatings continue in many deprived areas, as does British state repression.

The DUP's leader, Arlene Foster, calls for a period of direct rule from London. This is strongly opposed by nationalists, especially as her party props up the Tories. They call for a period of 'joint direct rule' between London and Dublin, which, in turn, is vehemently opposed by Unionists.

It is more likely that the current situation, a 'light' form of direct rule, will continue for some time before the British and Irish governments attempt another deal, a St Andrews Agreement Mark 2.

None of this resembles the peace, stability and prosperity promised 20 years ago. An absence of a deal opens up a dangerous vacuum on the ground. And any restored power-sharing executive will only be on the basis of unprincipled fudges on many issues, preparing the way for more instability and crisis.

United working class

Only a united working class struggle, with socialist policies, can show a way out of austerity, poverty, injustice, and sectarian divisions.

Genuine 'power-sharing' from a socialist perspective entails working class people, Catholic and Protestant, coming together to democratically agree on new arrangements. A socialist society, based on people's needs, would see the ending of all coercion against either of the communities, overcoming historic fears and distrust.

This is the power-sharing solution - the basis for a new, socialist Ireland - that the workers' movement should take up in Ireland and Britain, linking it to a voluntary, equal socialist federation of these islands and Europe.

National Union of Students conference 2018

Students protest as NUS restricts debate

Theo Sharieff
National chair, Socialist Students

The annual conference of the National Union of Students (NUS) met in Glasgow from 27 to 29 March in the midst of an almighty fightback on university campuses.

But thanks to the actions of the right-wing NUS leadership and bureaucracy, the conference was notably devoid of any serious political discussion on what many students understand to be the most important issues facing the movement.

Conference this year was smaller compared to previous years. Delegates only cast 691 votes in the presidential election, redelivering Blairite Shakira Martin to the union's presidency.

Socialist Students made a fantastic and bold intervention at the conference, arguing for a fighting and socialist leadership of the NUS.

We ran a candidate in the national executive council (NEC) elections. A Socialist Students delegate also submitted a motion demanding the leadership mobilise members for a national demonstration for free education.

Unfortunately, however, that motion - and many other crucial discussions, such as on the recent University and College Union pension strikes - weren't heard, thanks to bureaucratic restrictions on delegates' rights to discuss.

On the second day of conference, the right-wing bureaucracy, acting through the chair, cut the discussion on the struggle for abortion rights in Northern Ireland. Around 150 delegates spontaneously occupied the stage to express their outrage at the official procedures of conference as determined by the right wing.

Solidarity

Socialist Students participated in and gave full support to the occupation, with a Socialist Students delegate from Belfast speaking to the crowd.

On the last day, we organised a protest in solidarity with the student movement in Catalonia.

Socialist Students used the opportunity to allow delegates from



Northern Ireland to explain why they'd protested. We put out a call to any other students angry at the lack of real leadership from the NEC, encouraging them to speak.

The student movement needs this kind of democratic, combative approach if it is to become a serious factor in the struggle against cuts and privatisation in education, and effective in supporting the workers' movement in the fight for socialist change.

■ Full report on the 2018 NUS conference in a future issue of the Socialist

Bristol and Bath students join detained asylum seekers' protest

■ Close Yarl's Wood! End detention! Grant the right to work!

Robert Alexander
Bristol North Socialist Party

Just outside a sleepy Bedfordshire village lies Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre. Bristol and Bath Socialist Students organised a coach of students, socialists and ex-detainees to join protests at the racist and inhumane system Yarl's Wood epitomises.

Detainees are mainly women and families who have escaped repression or war in their native countries. They have not committed any crimes, but are locked up without sentence until the state grants asylum. Britain is the only EU country which does not have a limit on detention length.

They protest through collective non-cooperation and hunger strikes, and solidarity actions are important to help them keep up their strength.

Detainees waved back after protesters chanted, drummed and kicked on the metal fences. The mood became more solemn as current detainees spoke and led chanting from within via loudspeaker.



Their actions have rippled out to Westminster, with parliament now conducting another inquiry into detention.

We must pressure parliament's Home Affairs Select Committee to listen to the voices of refugees over the private corporations, such as Serco, Capita and G4S, that profit from their incarceration.

Socialists Students demands the closure of detention centres. Those

seeking asylum must have the right to work and education so they can take part in society rather than living in limbo.

We demand a £10-an-hour minimum wage without exemptions - and jobs for all, workers already here as well as migrants.

The Refugee Rights campaign encourages refugees to join trade unions as part of the fight for jobs and decent pay and conditions.



Leeds NHS delays staff privatisation plan - but keep on fighting

Iain Dalton
Leeds Socialist Party

Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust decided on 29 March to delay becoming the fifth in Yorkshire to move support staff to a trust-owned private company.

It is as a result of the growing opposition to these companies being established across the country that Leeds, the biggest trust in Yorkshire, has delayed its proposals and attempted to offer some sweeteners to existing staff.

NHS trusts in Barnsley, Airedale, Harrogate and recently York have all established 'special purpose vehicles' or 'wholly owned subsidiaries', effectively private companies owned by the trust. They plan to transfer staff including estates, facilities, domestic, cleaning, portering and others into them.

While 'Tupe' legislation would protect staff conditions initially, moving out of direct employment leaves staff more open to future attacks. The trust has offered some additional guarantees on this front.

But these only extend to current staff. The new company, like in Keighley, would undoubtedly seek to 'save' money by employing new starters on worse pay, conditions and pensions.

Moreover, the proposals include plans to seek outside work to generate income for the trust. This desperate move is the result of year-on-year 'efficiency savings' - cuts to you and me - which even the local chief executive has stated are "not sustainable."

These proposals will further break up the NHS. Trust bosses have been

at pains to say this measure "is not about privatisation" dubbing it "an alternative to traditional outsourcing"!

But establishing a private company separate to the NHS is precisely a step towards privatisation, regardless of the fact that the trust board will control it initially.

TUSC challenge

Labour MPs in Leeds have written to the trust - although only Richard Burgon, Corbynista MP for East Leeds, submitted questions to the board. But Leeds Labour councillors seem to have raised no challenge so far.

However, through the council's health scrutiny committee, they could play an important role in challenging the plans. Candidates for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) - the anti-austerity electoral alliance including transport union RMT and the Socialist Party - pledge to use these powers if elected.

Socialist Party members in Leeds collected several hundred signatures opposing the proposal. I handed these in as TUSC candidate for the ward containing St James's Hospital. In the course of our campaign in the local elections we plan on collecting hundreds more.

Both Unison and Unite union reps at the board meeting, as well as local campaign group Keep Our NHS Public, challenged the proposals. There are plans to ballot staff in both unions for industrial action if a private company is established.

The decision to defer buys time to build opposition. But staff must remain fully prepared to escalate the campaign if these proposals are to be defeated.

London tenants and workers protest against social housing auction

Outside the upmarket Marriott hotel, council tenants, private renters and residents of Notting Hill Genesis housing association protested against an auction by estate agent Savills - including Notting Hill Genesis homes.

One tenant said over the megaphone that his house has no market value "because I'm living in it!" A Socialist Party member spoke about how difficult it is to be young and renting in London, and how council

and social homes need to be saved and built for the next generation, not sold off.

Housing workers organised in Unite the Union's LE/1111 branch also protested. Branch chair Paul Kershaw said "the same housing associations that derecognise unions and cut staffing are also alienating residents and anyone concerned at the deepening housing crisis."

Helen Pattison
East London Socialist Party

Sheffield: TREE FELLING PAUSED AS BULLYING LABOUR COUNCIL FEELS PRESSURE

Mark James
Secretary, Unite Community South Yorkshire branch (personal capacity)

The 9,000 supporters of the Sheffield Trees Action Group are celebrating the latest pause in the escalating battle over the future of the city's street trees.

On the BBC's Daily Politics show on 26 March, a journalist suggested Labour council leader Julie Dore had caved in to pressure and was finally willing to open meaningful negotiations.

However, within a few hours, a council press release suggested fellingings had stopped only because a review was ongoing into how to fell trees given the "dangerous tactics" of protesters.

For four years campaigners have fought the council's £2.2 billion 'Streets Ahead' private finance initiative (PFI) contract. It has meant outsourcer Amey cutting down healthy street trees because it's cheaper than maintaining them and repairing the pavements.

The campaign shifted dramatically in the autumn. The case against Alison Teal, a local Green councillor alleged to have breached a High Court injunction not to enter the

felling exclusion zone, collapsed.

Campaigners realised the stakes were getting higher. This made us even more determined to resist the cuts!

Direct action against the fellingings escalated. Campaigners patrolled the streets against 'vampire arbs' attempting to fell trees in the middle of the night - even trees decorated with lights fundraising for a local hospice.

The 'No Stump City' campaign started to lobby Labour Party meetings, arguing "axe PFI, not trees." Pressure was building on the council leadership from grassroots members. Ward and constituency branches passed motions critical of the Labour group, and now the local trade union council has as well.

Thuggery

In January the fellingings paused - after physical assaults of protesters sufficiently alarmed local Labour MP Louise Haigh for her to call the fellingings and security arrangements "unsustainable." They restarted a month later with renewed vigour.

When protesters were faced with 30 Amey security guards and 30 South Yorkshire Police officers, tensions inevitably rose. A number of protesters were hospitalised.

There have been increasingly bizarre arrests. These include a

woman who seems to have been playing a sparkly pink recorder, a trainee vicar with a tambourine - and everyone's favourite, a woman who played a toy trumpet into a police officer's ear.

Local MPs had had enough, calling for talks to start mediated by a shadow minister.

Anger rose when a Freedom of Information request revealed that Amey's contract suggested that far from the target of 6,000 trees to be felled, the number might be as high as 17,500 - half of all the street trees in the city.

The council sought to rebuff that figure, suggesting it was a cushion against unforeseen "catastrophe." But no one was convinced and trust diminished even further.

At the time of writing, nothing has happened. Sheffield Council seems to have retreated into its bunker. Are they genuinely worried about the upcoming local elections? The leadership of Julie Dore is looking increasingly tenuous.

What started as a campaign to save trees and protect the environment in a heavily polluted city has come to be part of the general fight against austerity and privatisation.

Perhaps more tellingly, it has raised the debate about how to respond to Labour councils implementing Tory cuts and



neoliberalism. In London that has played out over housing; in Sheffield, where housing is still relatively cheap, it has played out over trees.

Sheffield Council claims it has no choice. It claims it cannot afford to take the service in-house or pay for the extra engineering to save the trees, because that would eat into statutory provision like the social care budget.

Yet local residents are finding it difficult to see where the council is actually fighting any cuts. In fact, Amey workers themselves are currently balloting for industrial action against cuts to jobs and conditions.

So we are left with the feeling that rather than fight cuts, Sheffield Council would prefer to make cuts, both to jobs and trees.

May Day! The Socialist needs you! Final deadline 11 April!

Ryan Aldred
Socialist Party South West

What have Hinkley nuclear plant construction workers, over a million feminist demonstrators in the Spanish state, and young gun violence protesters in the US all got in common? All of their struggles have recently been supported by the Socialist!

The capitalist media does its best to blot out the real experiences of workers, whether it be small victories gained in individual workplaces or the international events which can involve millions taking collective action. The Socialist is proud to report on these issues, give a voice to the labour movement, and tie together the local, national and international struggles of workers.

May Day, or International Workers' Day, is an important celebration of solidarity and workers' struggles across the world. You can help make sure this May Day is celebrated prominently in the pages of the Socialist by getting in May Day greetings for our special issue of the paper.



Donate to the building fund today!

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

■ call 020 8988 8777

■ speak to your local Socialist Party organiser to arrange to meet

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



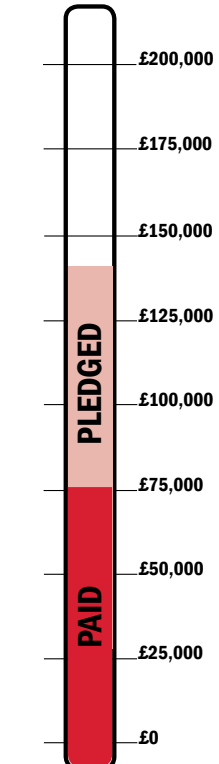
Socialist Party Fighting Fund

	£ received	£ target	January-March 2018	Deadline : 6 April 2018
North West	3,129	2,100		153%
West Midlands	3,369	2,600		130%
East Midlands	2,254	1,850		122%
Northern	914	750		122%
Wales	2,760	2,300		120%
South West	1,882	1,800		105%
Yorkshire	2,998	3,300		91%
Eastern	1,040	1,200		87%
Southern	1,111	1,600		69%
London	3,810	6,100		62%
South East	181	750		24%
Other	1,231	5,650		22%
TOTAL	24,770	30,000		83%

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Socialist Party Building Fund



Obituary: Lorraine Dardis 1965-2018

Lynn Walsh

Lorraine Dardis, a founding member of our US co-thinkers, now known as Socialist Alternative, has tragically died, aged only 53. She conducted a determined struggle against a malignant, aggressive brain tumour, but was eventually defeated.

She died peacefully on 22 March. Even for those who have long been aware of her illness, including her parents, her death has come as a profound shock.

Lorraine had outstanding abilities and there is much, much more she wanted to accomplish. She was a wonderful person, a true friend to many comrades and friends. She had the extraordinary gift of connecting with people in a few minutes - sometimes becoming a life-long friend.

At the same time, Lorraine was a steely class fighter who never believed in giving up. She will be deeply missed - but never forgotten.

Internationalist

Lorraine developed an internationalist outlook from an early age. Her father, from a working-class family in Newark, New Jersey, was in the army. The family regularly moved from one base to another across the US and West Germany. Her mother is from France.

Lorraine's entry into anti-capitalist politics came through the international peace movement. She dropped out of studies at Boston University to visit the women's peace camps at Greenham Common and Faslane nuclear bases in the UK. Later, Lorraine travelled round Europe, meeting people in Ireland, France, Netherlands and Germany.

On returning to Boston, she worked various low-paid jobs. She was involved in some of the struggles of a militant local branch of the United Autoworkers union which organised a variety of workplaces. In one of the jobs Lorraine met Jeff and Martha, who were working to establish a US organisation that would work with the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI).

Lorraine was more than ready for such an organisation. In fact, she complained they had not involved her sooner. For the rest of her active political life, she devoted her considerable talents to building Socialist Alternative and the CWI.

Lorraine joined the organisation in 1985, a year before the founding conference. When Labor Militant was launched, she helped edit the paper. She was an intrepid paper-seller. Later she worked as a full-time worker for the party in Chicago and Boston.

Joining our organisation at that time was an enormous step. There were no more than about 40 members (with four or five branches) in a vast country. The political climate was not favourable. Ronald Reagan



had been elected president in 1981, implementing ultra-free-market policies and launching an offensive against the unions.

Lorraine was inspired by our socialist aims, and her commitment and enthusiasm inspired others. She recently wrote: "Having already come across a range of political groups with different approaches and principles, I was attracted to [what was to become] Socialist Alternative for two main reasons: Its support for creating a genuine democratically-run and grassroots-controlled socialist society internationally; and its member-based, democratic, and anti-bureaucratic structure and functioning."

Lorraine passionately believed that Marxists should be in the forefront of the fight for real equality for women and fight for socialist policies to protect the natural environment.

While she could not be active in recent years, she was overjoyed by the successes of Socialist Alternative in Seattle and Minneapolis. She felt the growth of the membership and of Socialist Alternative's broad influence vindicated the undramatic, pioneering work of the 1980s and 1990s.

Condolences that have already poured in testify to Lorraine's extraordinary qualities. Tenacious in defence of political objectives, she was at the same time a very sociable, unusually sympathetic person, very loyal to her many friends. She had a joyful sense of humour. No one who met her will forget her.

Served in January 2014 with a terminal diagnosis of 12 to 18 months, Lorraine was determined to fight the malignant brain tumour (Glioblastoma multiforma). She was told that it was treatable but incurable. Her strategy was to hold out until a cure was found. "I'm a fighter," she said: "I won't give in."

Fighter

Radiotherapy, chemo, and Lorraine's determination kept the tumour at bay for three years. Then it began to grow again, while successive rounds of chemo became less and less effective. She still refused to give up the struggle. Only in the last few days did she admit to me: "I may not make it." No one could have fought harder or longer.

I have done my best to be objective, but I must declare a personal interest. For over 20 years Lorraine and I have been together. In 2000 she moved to London so we could live together. She was my best friend, my inspiration, the love of my life.

■ The Socialist sends our condolences to Lorraine's mother and father, her five brothers and from wider Dardis family. Condolences also to Lynn Walsh and Lorraine's acquired family, Daniel and Irina, Mateo and Emma. We share the anguish of the many comrades and friends who knew Lorraine.

■ Lorraine's funeral will be at Eltham Crematorium (Falcon Wood) at 1pm on Wednesday 18 April, followed by a reception nearby.

Plastic pollution

Before the 2012 London Olympic Games, US comedian Rich Hall remarked on the condition of the River Lea Navigation (canal) which runs alongside the main stadium (now home to West Ham FC). He said: "You can't kayak there, but you can develop your camera film in it!"

Yes, factory chemical waste and discarded shopping trolleys didn't make it a great place for anglers. But after millions of pounds of public money was spent cleaning up the site we now hear from Manchester University researchers that our canals and rivers are filled with microplastic waste - the worst plastic-polluted waterways in the world. Isn't capitalism wonderful!

Simon Carter, east London

Solidarity with Chris

Chris Fernandez was TUSC agent in the 2016 Derby City Council elections. He was given an unjustified and vindictive sentence of 15 months' imprisonment after being found guilty of 'electoral fraud'.

I would just like to thank everyone for their messages of support. I received 50 posters, A4 size, with the message 'Solidarity with Chris - Socialist Party' (see photo below). What brought a lump to my throat was the messages on the back of those posters which were held up by members of your party at your conference!



I received a letter from my Polish father-in-law, a retired professor of law, which my wife translated and sent to me in English: "As a lawyer, I am ashamed of this type of case in the Crown judicial system. It rather reminds me of the jurisdiction in Stalinist Russia. "Good job that I don't have to teach students anymore and lecture them about the cradle of modern democracy, which according to textbooks is supposed to be England. Because the example of your sentence proves that this is complete fiction."

"I think that your experience will not change your ideological views and that you will remain the same tough mountain man from Asturias. Take care of yourself, from a tough mountain man from the Tatra mountains."

Asturias in Spain is where my father came from, a place called Mieres near Oviedo. My dad fought against Franco and escaped to France.

Am now in full-time education which gets me out of my cell. I get paid £10 a week. Am putting that aside towards your building fund. I know it's not much, but I hope it will help.

Yours in solidarity,

Chris Fernandez, Nottingham Prison, number: A5447ED, wing: E4-07

The Socialist Inbox

Do you have something to say?

■ Send your news, views and criticism in no more than 150 words to editors@socialistparty.org.uk - or if you're not online, Socialist Inbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

Boris Johnson has called for a boycott of the World Cup in Russia in the summer
photos kremlin.ru/CC



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.

Corbyn witch-hunt

Wild accusations, alternative facts, special prosecutors - the Salem witch trials of 1692 had it all. Sound familiar? Witch-hunts from Salem to McCarthy have been deployed by powerful people who ruthlessly exploit fear and prejudice to demonise their adversaries. The current antisemitism hysteria, generated by a toxic mix of Tories, Blairites, right wing self-styled representatives of the 'Jewish community' - cheered on and encouraged by a feral media - meets all the classical traits of the witch-hunt. The latest shock, horror headline is 'Sir David Garrard ditches Labour over anti-semitism.'

Garrard exemplifies the forces being mobilised to undermine Corbyn. A follower of Tony Blair, he was listed by the Sunday Times Rich List with a fortune in excess of £100 million.

Following the discovery of a loan to Labour in the course of the 'cash for honours' political scandal, Garrard withdrew his nomination for a peerage. When Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party, he immediately called for the loan to be repaid.

The truism that 'no ruling group ever leaves the scene without a struggle, and that means a struggle with no holds barred' is confirmed.

Individuals who may criticise Israel should not be sacrificed in the hope that this will assuage the appetite of the beast - it will never be satisfied until Corbynism is buried.

Labour's response should be to call out the lies for what they are, intensify the campaign against austerity and promote the socialist alternative to the brutal anti-working class policies of the Tories. McCarthy and the Salem witch-hunters were eventually exposed as charlatans. The current onslaught will suffer the same fate.

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool

TUC and bosses' EU

On 24-25 March I was among a number of trade unionists in Harrogate for the Trade Union Congress regional annual general meeting. Among the various panels was one discussing the question of Brexit which did little to develop the way forward for working class people, but consisted of a national TUC officer and Labour MEP pointing out the obvious deficiencies of the Tory buffoons negotiating with the EU.

However, the TUC officer's comments were very revealing. To them, the only options on offer in the Brexit debate were a choice between "continental capitalism and British capitalism". When it was pointed out that maybe what we should have is something other than capitalism, such as a socialist society, she responded that it wasn't realistic, that we live in a capitalist society and all we can do is "tame it, smooth it out around the edges!"

In reality, such right-wing reformists have no vision of a different way of organising society, and therefore their desperation drives them into collaboration with the pro-EU multinational bosses. The same TUC officer also defended the Single Market on the basis that "in practice it delivers jobs". It leaves them clinging to as much as possible of the bosses club that is the EU, despite its method of 'protecting jobs' being driving down wages and living conditions as much as possible to protect profits.

It's up to real socialists to point out that instead of tying ourselves to the interests of the bosses and their profits, we should be taking that wealth off them through bringing into democratic public ownership the key sectors of the economy. Given that the EU's neoliberal rules bar such a path, we need to cast it into the dustbin of history and appeal to workers across Europe to do the same and join us in a voluntary socialist federation of the continent.

Iain Dalton, Leeds

Cuts and pay rises

Labour's shadow foreign secretary Emily Thornberry MP was in Huddersfield recently putting in a good word for Kirklees Labour councillors who have just proposed a swingeing cuts budget. She told the Huddersfield Examiner: "Understandably communities are angry at the local councillors who they see and they're angry at them. But it's really not their responsibility, it's central government."

It must be tough for Labour councillors doing the Tories' dirty work. But they are not so traumatised that they forgot to vote themselves a 2% pay rise out of the 6% increase in council tax they've imposed.

Kirklees people deserve better than this. That's why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is fielding two candidates in the May council elections

Derek McMillan, Worthing, West Sussex

photos Mary Finch



to challenge Labour's austerity regime and fight to protect services, not councillors' allowances.

Paul Dennett, Huddersfield

Boris v Russia

War with Russia? Napoleon couldn't do it. Hitler couldn't do it but don't worry we've got Boris Johnson. I don't know if he frightens the Russians but by God he frightens me.

The buffoonery of the foreign secretary is a signal of a much deeper malaise in the Tory party and by that token in British capitalism. The divisions over Europe have so far prevented May sacking Johnson and time and again she has had to cope with the consequences of having a loose cannon on deck.

His most recent fulminations about Russia and the BBC's disgraceful attack on Jeremy Corbyn - after he drew attention to the amount of dirty money the Tories in general and Johnson in particular have acquired from Russian 'businessmen' in the McMafia mould - have made Johnson an even bigger embarrassment to the government, if possible.

Labour could capitalise on this if there were fewer quislings in the parliamentary party. It should encourage socialists to push for the removal of this ramshackle government.

End the housing crisis We can't wait till 2022! Labour councils must act now!

Paula Mitchell
London Socialist Party secretary

Grenfell Tower stands as a terrible monument to a totally failed model of providing housing. The fire was the result not just of Tory austerity, but of decades of cuts, privatisation, deregulation, relaxation of planning, and lack of democratic accountability.

The treatment of the survivors and community since is further proof, if it were needed, that council services run on the private business austerity model fails people's most basic needs.

The housing crisis is everywhere, but it is at its sharpest in London. 'Social cleansing', 'gentrification', 'the London clearances' - call it what you will, 100,000 households have been forced out by high rents, impossible house prices, and the regeneration policies of councils.

London tenants pay 72% of wages on rent! Just 24% of new homes completed in 2015-16 in London were "affordable". Government-defined 'affordable' housing is actually unaffordable to the vast majority of working class people. New buildings go up but only the highest paid and millionaire speculators can buy them - and leave them empty to keep the value high.

In fact 5% of all homes in London are empty. Meanwhile the number of street homeless has tripled.

Regeneration

Regeneration of council or housing association homes means working class people's homes are taken over by greedy property developers and replaced by luxury accommodation, with the original tenants having little right of return.

Blairite mayor Sadiq Khan's London Plan aims to build 66,000 new homes a year in town centres and transport hubs. But this will often mean handing public

space to private companies.

It entails high-density development - great looming tower blocks of expensive flats, with only a small proportion "affordable". The loss of public space includes grass and trees, libraries and youth centres.

Labour councils see the Tories' plan to end the central government grant in 2020. Councils will then be self-funded from council tax, business rates and other income. Rather than put up a fight, they seek to maximise their income from selling land and property, and enticing well-off residents.

Jeremy Corbyn shook up the debate on housing when he declared that there must be an end to this social cleansing. He said there should be residents' votes on any regeneration schemes, and that, where it took place, all existing tenants should be guaranteed homes on the same terms as before. He said empty homes should be requisitioned to house the homeless.

Social cleansing

Jeremy Corbyn should instruct Labour councils to immediately stop all projects that involve social cleansing, and carry out ballots on any regeneration projects.

London's Labour councils have enough reserves to build 80,000 council houses now. They should do that, on lifetime tenancies and social rents. They should take over empty properties for council housing.

They could register private landlords, in order to ensure decent standards, and tackle overcrowding. They should bring in rent controls that cap the level of private rents, establishing democratic rent tribunals.

The issue of fire safety applies everywhere there are blocks - not just on the crucial issue of removing cladding, which still remains, but also retrofitting sprinklers and other fire safety measures such as effective fire doors. It is an outrage that the Tories are refusing funds, but Labour councils shouldn't wait. They should carry out fire safety checks and make the results public, do the work and send the bill to central government.

Councils could ensure decent pay, conditions, and safety for all housing and construction workers, including stopping the use of blacklisting firms and enforcing collective agreements.

Councils could begin to transform the situation - if they have the will to stand and fight.



Use your vote to deselect monster block Blairites in 3 May local elections

Nancy Taaffe
Waltham Forest Socialist Party
and Save Our Square chair

The campaign to defeat the proposed 'monster block' in Walthamstow, east London, is a clear example that the Labour Party is indeed - as the Socialist Party has described it - two parties in one.

On the one side you have the people who oppose this development. Stall holders in the market, shop keepers, parents of children who use the children's playground,

and the people who love the trees. Alongside Labour Party members - virtually every Labour Party ward has passed a motion of opposition and now so has the general management committee of the local Labour Party.

Councillors

On the other side you have the right-wing Blairite councillors. And that's about it. It's hard to find anyone who actually supports these plans.

The line has been drawn. Quite literally, a group of artists chalked out the land we are set to lose to

illustrate the land grab.

And why such a swell of opposition to these plans? There is the loss of land and space and skyline. But the biggest objection by far is the lack of affordability of the 500 units which will be built.

With 47% of the borough being classified as earning on or below the London Living Wage, and with two bedroom flats in this new development expected to start at £350,000, it's clear to everyone that these homes are not for us. The scheme epitomises social cleansing.

The campaign has used every tool in the box to try and stop this development. The council received nearly a thousand letters of objection prior to the planning meeting.

500 people turned up to lobby the planning committee. 150 people came to a Save Our Square public meeting.

600 rallied in the square. Hundreds wrote to Sadiq Khan, London's Blairite mayor, urging him to block these plans.

After exhausting every avenue it's become obvious that the Blairite politicians in London are not going to help us stop this development. Not the councillors, not the mayor and not the Blairite MP, Stella

**TUSC
AGAINST
CUTS**

www.tusc.org.uk



The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an anti-austerity electoral alliance including transport union RMT, the Socialist Party, leading members of other trade unions and non-affiliated socialists and community campaigners.

Corbyn council will be put to the test

Nick Auvache
North London Socialist Party

Haringey looks set to be the first Corbynite council after the May local elections. This is eagerly anticipated and Haringey may be featured heavily in the media in the run-up to election day itself.

This will be a real test for those who are hoping that it could represent a turning point. Services have been slashed and workers sacked over a period of years.

However, when the hated Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV) 'regeneration' and privatisation scheme was recently delivered a series of near-fatal blows, confidence grew that change was possible.

Claire Kober, the Blairite council leader, was the main driver of this vicious piece of social cleansing. Her unpopular policy has forced her to not stand for re-election.

Many old pro-HDV Labour candidates have been deselected,

which could pave the way for a left council, and this presents great opportunities to implement a no-cuts budget.

However, some Blairites remain and it is important that they are not given one inch.

In the Seven Sisters ward where Kober was a councillor, three right-wing pro-HDV councillors are standing for Labour. This is why the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) has taken the decision to stand a team of candidates in that ward.

TUSC in Haringey believes that it will be the only political force in the Seven Sisters ward to fight on the policies that Jeremy Corbyn represents. We are campaigning alongside those in the Labour Party who are fighting against the ghost of Blair.

We will set out a clear socialist programme and use the elections to explain how we can defeat austerity in Haringey and make no cuts whatsoever.



What we stand for

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

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

Our demands include:

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

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

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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GAZA - PROTEST IS NOT TERRORISM!

- AN INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO THE KILLINGS
- SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE
- LIFT THE SIEGE, END ISRAELI OCCUPATION
- FOR A SOCIALIST SOLUTION TO THE NATIONAL QUESTION



photo Paul Mattsson

Walking in your own land is not generally considered a crime, but for two million Palestinians imprisoned in Gaza such action is viewed as a threat to the state of Israel by right-wing prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

His armed forces killed 18 Gazans and wounded over 1,500 on the Palestinian 'March of Return' walk to the Gaza/Israel border to mark Land Day (commemorating Palestinians killed on 30 March 1976 protesting against the expropriation of their land by Israel), and to demand the lifting of the current siege of Gaza by Israel and Egypt.

Most of the wounded were hit by live ammunition and others from rubber-coated bullets and tear gas grenades fired from circling drones. Hospitals in the Gaza Strip reported a shortage of blood units.

As usual, the propaganda machine of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and Israel's coalition government has blamed the border clash on "terrorism" orchestrated by Gaza's Islamist Hamas regime.

Yet film footage shows desperate and angry Palestinian civilians being shot as they fled the carnage, including 18-year-old Abd al-Fattah shot in the back of the head by an IDF sniper.

"The world must understand that we live in

a big prison, every citizen in Gaza feels it in his own flesh and wants to convey this message", one member of the organising committee told Haaretz newspaper.

"The march is for the sake of return, it is supposed to convey to the world a message: 'Enough with the siege, enough with the occupation', he explained in response to Israel's claim that Hamas was forced to "hire" demonstrators for payment.

The protest rallies did not threaten the security of anyone. But the Israeli government propaganda machine typically turns the reality upside down and labels any Palestinian protest as "violent". In other words, daily

military aggression and a siege that strangles two million people are not considered violent, but mass protest against their situation is!

Socialist Struggle Movement (the Socialist Party's sister organisation in Israel/Palestine) calls for protests against the incitement, oppression and massacre of unarmed demonstrators, and to express solidarity with the mass march against the background of the brutal siege imposed on Palestinians.

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