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photo Dhanuvintna

LOCAL ELECTION RESULTS ARE A WARNING SIGN FOR LABOUR

Hannah Sell
Socialist Party deputy general secretary

The third round of local elections since Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party took place on 3 May. In their wake, inevitably, capitalist politicians of every hue are attempting to use them to attack Corbyn and the Labour leadership.

Rattled by the 3.5 million-strong surge to Labour in last year's snap general election they feared that these elections would be another decisive step forward for Corbyn. When that didn't transpire, with Labour only making modest gains, the cry has gone up, as the Economist commentator Bagehot put it, to declare: "Corbynmania is now officially dead."

Unsurprisingly the Tories, having been prepared for a disastrous night, are trying to paint the net loss of only 33 seats as a victory. But it is not only the right-wing press and the Tories that are trying to use the election results to hurt Corbyn, the capitalist wing of his own party are escalating their latest onslaught on him.

Blairite Chuka Umunna was one of numerous right-wing Labour

MPs who attacked the result and demanded 'an internal inquiry into the party's campaign'. Of course, any genuine inquiry would lay blame at Umunna and friends' role in the run up to 3 May, with their relentless attempts to falsely claim antisemitism is rife in Corbyn's Labour.

This is now being escalated further. The leader of Barnet Labour has laid the blame for failing to win his council firmly at Corbyn's feet, saying voters rightly "felt the Labour Party has failed to deal with antisemitism at a national level".

Unfortunately, there is no doubt that - in a borough where around 15% of the electorate is Jewish - the false charges of antisemitism had an effect, especially given the failure of the Labour left to vigorously rebut them, instead endlessly retreating in the face of them.

The most important lesson of these elections is that the retreats in the face of the Blairites must stop. The capitalist wing of the Labour Party remains determined to defeat Corbyn and will use all means to do so.

The task of removing them - as part of the process of transforming Labour into a democratic, mass working class socialist party - is overdue and now posed extremely urgently.

If, instead, the concessions to the

Blairites continue, there is a real danger that disillusionment will set in among many who were inspired by the radical programme of the last general election as they sense, rightly, that a party that cannot stand up to the capitalists in its own ranks would be unlikely when in power to stand up to the capitalist class in order to fight for a programme for the many not the few.

The TUSC results

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) stood 111 council candidates in 33 authorities in the local elections, contesting 101 wards.



This was the most selective local election stand that TUSC has taken in its eight-year history, following the general re-calibration of its electoral policy after Jeremy Corbyn's welcome victory as Labour leader in September 2015.

There was not a single TUSC candidate on 3 May standing in a direct head-to-head contest with a Labour candidate who had been a consistent public supporter of Jeremy Corbyn and his anti-austerity policies.

The stand-out result was the victory of TUSC national steering committee member Keith Morrell, one of the three Putting People First group of anti-cuts councillors that sits on Southampton council.

on a smaller scale than predicted beforehand. However, Labour's net gain was only 77 councillors nationally, with no change in the number of councils it controlled.

The Tories succeeded in unseating a handful of Labour-led councils in working class areas - such as Derby, Nuneaton and Bedworth, and Basingstoke. According to the BBC's national share of the vote projections, if the local election results were to be repeated in a general election, they would put Labour and the Tories neck and neck on 35% each.

Of course local elections are not the same as general elections, as May learnt to her cost last year when they seemed to point to a Tory landslide in June's general election. One important difference is the much lower turnout in local elections, and in particular that young people tend not to participate. In last year's general election 68.8% of people voted, with queues of young people in

The next best score was recorded in Kirklees council's Crosland Moor & Netherton ward, with TUSC winning 701 votes for a 14.2% share.

The best performance in a single council was achieved in Waltham Forest, with TUSC polling 2,841 votes across the 12 out of 20 wards contested there.

In just under one fifth of the wards it contested TUSC polled five percent or more of the vote. The mean average vote for TUSC council candidates overall was 3.7%.

■ A full results report is available on the TUSC website at tusc.org.uk



photo Huddersfield Socialist Party

Strong TUSC result in Huddersfield

In Huddersfield, with little time and scant resources, we chalked up almost 1,000 votes between us. Nicola Jackson canvassed and leafleted as if her life depended on it. With a strong local following, she chalked

up a respectable 6.5% of the vote.

In Crosland Moor and Netherton, many local Labour Party members openly backed our candidate, Mike Forster, who is strongly involved in the campaign to save the local

hospital. Mike won 700 votes. A clear message has now been posted to Labour councillors: stand up to the cuts, or face stronger opposition next time.

Huddersfield Socialist Party



photo Mary Finch

particular at polling stations up and down the country.

There are not yet national figures on turnout for this year's local elections, but a small minority of wards had a turnout of over 40%, with 30% or less common in working class areas. Without doubt a majority of both young and working class people did not vote in Thursday's elections.

For Corbyn to have convinced bigger sections of them to have voted it would have had to be linked to an active, mass campaign to force May to call a general election to get the Tories out. The TUC trade union demonstration taking place on 12 May has the potential to be a step in that direction, if it is built for as a mass 'Tories Out' demo, although unfortunately it appears to be being built for in an entirely routine way by the right-wing leadership of the TUC.

An essential aspect of such a campaign would be demanding that the 124 Labour-led councils in Britain stop implementing Tory austerity and instead refuse to carry out cuts, using reserves and borrowing powers to plug the gap left by the government's slashing of local authority funding, while building the movement for an end to Tory rule.

Unfortunately, Labour councillors overwhelmingly remain a bulwark of the Labour right. Labour authorities have consistently done the Tory government's bidding, implementing huge cuts to public services, cutting wages, and selling off services and land to private companies.

Haringey, where it increased from 33% to 39%, reflecting the desire of residents to protest against the previous Blairite council's HDV gentrification scheme.

Some in Haringey will have had hopes that the incoming 'Corbynista' Labour council would represent a break from the Blairites that came before.

Unfortunately, however, in a bid to appear 'united' with the Blairites, Haringey Labour candidates did not feature the campaign against HDV in their material. And although they stood on a programme with many anti-austerity policies, they are only promising to implement them in 2022, if Labour wins the general election then, because of an acceptance of the completely mistaken idea that councils cannot successfully refuse to implement cuts now.

■ Continued on page 4



Keith Morrell (2nd right) photo Southampton Socialist Party



photo Nick Chaffey

Southampton: Keith Morrell, anti-cuts councillor, re-elected

Nick Chaffey
Southampton Socialist Party

Sadly it wasn't Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity policies that were on offer in Southampton but his right-wing Blairite opponent, Labour council leader Simon Letts' and his fellow councillors who have cruelly voted to close disabled services.

Despite a heroic campaign by parents, these Blairites consistently turned down calls to save Kentish Road Respite Centre. With the support of anti-cuts councillor Keith Morrell, these parents campaigned long and hard and decided to stand with Keith in the local elections.

Keith Morrell was re-elected on a landslide with 47% of the vote, an endorsement of the consistent stand he has taken. Simon Letts was punished and lost his seat, but so have those on the left who have argued an anti-austerity Corbyn manifesto was on offer. It wasn't!

Southampton Labour Council has cut £120 million from the budget, vital services and over 1,000 jobs. That's implementing Tory cuts. As schools face savage Tory budget cuts, Labour councillors offer support in words then demand schools

cut their budgets.

Significantly the Tories lost their leader too, yet further evidence of the anger and opposition to eight years of austerity. Imagine if Labour had taken up the policy of re-elected anti-cuts councillor Keith Morrell and protected jobs and services.

Labour could have swept the board and begun to build the sort of mass campaign that can win back the stolen government funding Southampton so desperately needs.

The gains Labour made in Southampton are not gains for Corbyn and the left. The new councillors are not Corbyn supporters and will continue to assist the undermining campaign by the Blairite wing.

None of the Momentum candidates won in Southampton. Local left Labour Party members need to draw urgent conclusions from this and adopt a clear anti-cuts manifesto. To build a campaign they should seek to collaborate with anti-cuts councillors locally, the local trade unions, community and anti-cuts campaigns.

Southampton Socialist Party will continue to work with all those opposed to austerity and work towards the implementation of a no cuts policy by Southampton council.

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

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It is a serious mistake that Corbyn and the Labour left have not clearly opposed the false argument that Labour councils have to make the cuts. If the current situation continues and the Tories somehow cling on to power until the next scheduled general election in 2022, local council services will have been virtually wiped out.

Many of those who did vote in the local elections did so to protest against the misery that has been inflicted on them at local level. The capitalist media has drawn a direct link between Labour losing places like Basildon, Nuneaton and Derby and the question of Brexit.

Brexit

But while it is true that these are all areas where a majority voted for Brexit, and also where some who had previously voted Ukip switched to the Tories, it is too superficial to suggest that Brexit was the only, or even the main, issue which motivated voters.

The fundamental drive behind the working class vote for Brexit was an elemental revolt against decades of low pay, poverty and public service cuts.

No surprise that the areas where that anger was deepest, often deindustrialised predominantly working class towns, were also areas where voters wanted to express their anger at their local Labour councils that have implemented cuts.

In the case of Basildon, outrageously the previous cuts-implementing council was actually a Labour-Ukip coalition! However, there is nothing automatic about workers



photo Tsering-Lhamo/CC

who previously voted Ukip moving to the Tories.

In the snap general election it is estimated that around a million people who had previously voted Ukip switched to Labour, showing the possibility of winning them on the basis of an anti-austerity programme.

Corbyn's position on Brexit in the snap election, supporting Brexit on a pro-working class, anti-racist basis, was also a factor in enabling

his anti-austerity programme to get an echo among this section of the working class.

If, however, as was the case in these local elections, Labour is not offering an anti-austerity alternative, it is bound to give reactionary and racist forces an opportunity to capitalise on workers' anger.

At the same time, in inner city areas, Labour's vote tended to hold up or even increase, not least because many workers from ethnic minori-

ties see Labour as a certain protection against the blatant racism of the Tories, which was written large by the Windrush scandal.

While on the surface it could appear that we have returned to the post-war era of two party politics, with entrenched loyalties to both the Tories and Labour, this is not the case. Support for Jeremy Corbyn does not equal automatic loyalty to Labour but rather a searching for an alternative to austerity.

It was therefore absolutely correct that the Socialist Party, as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), stood candidates in these local elections against some of the worst Blairite cutters. We were alone in putting forward a fighting programme for anti-cuts councils and, by standing, were able to reach significant layers of workers and young people with our message, including some of the best activists in the Labour Party (see box on page 2



photo Waltham Forest Socialist Party

TUSC vote up in Waltham Forest but many voters stay away

Waltham Forest Socialist Party

While campaigning in Waltham Forest, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) campaigners encountered rage among people suffering under the right-wing Labour council.

It is a condemnation of these Blairites that there were life-long Labour voters considering voting Tory to punish them. TUSC stood 17 candidates to offer a socialist expression of this opposition to

gentrification and austerity.

Nancy Taaffe stood against the leader of the council and got an increased vote. In fact, overall our per-candidate vote was slightly up on 2014 in the last London local elections.

Significantly it increased the most in the wards around the town square where we play a leading role in the campaign against the building of monster blocks of unaffordable flats on public space and trees.

As Nancy commented: "It looks like many people just chose to stay away

to express their disgust at things.

"Let's see if this current crop of councillors look at the poor turnout and see it as a lesson that they can't just do what they want to us or whether they press ahead with the monster block, as well as intensification of austerity and all that that means for us.

"We will keep fighting the monster block and we call on the new planning committee to consider blocking full planning permission. We will be lobbying the first meeting of the new council on 24 May."

Haringey councillors need to fight austerity now

Haringey Socialist Party

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in Haringey provided a glimpse of what a genuine anti-cuts socialist campaign would look like. We explained to hundreds of people why we need to reopen the youth centres, centres supporting people with autism and nursing homes, build thousands of houses and cap rents.

We made it clear that we would not wait four years to pay carers the London living wage, as Labour's manifesto suggested. It is not enough to 'wait and see', we need to fight austerity now and refuse to implement more cuts.

We pointed to the need for the millions in reserves to be spent to restore our services and alleviate the current emergency for so many in Haringey, while a campaign is waged against the government for more funds.

When knocking on doors, holding numerous stalls and distributing 4,500 leaflets, the response to our anti-cuts ideas and our strategy to make them reality was extremely positive. But although we were standing against thoroughbred



photo London Socialist Party

Blairites, many people voted Labour to support Corbyn.

When we broke the bad news to one woman who had already voted for Labour, she was shocked and saddened, phoning her husband right away to tell him to vote for TUSC!

But while enthusiasm for Corbyn's programme was clear in Labour's vote, the Lib Dems won seats from Labour (see main article).

However, the new intake of Labour councillors have promised to be different to their predecessors and they have raised expectations. TUSC and the Socialist Party are eager to fight alongside all those who campaigned against cuts for Corbyn's manifesto to be implemented straightaway.



photo Lenny Shail

and tusc.org.uk for more).

Brexit did, of course, play a role in the elections, and continues to loom over the Tory Party in their aftermath. The Liberal Democrats were reduced to a tiny rump the last time these seats were contested, in 2014, losing 310 seats and hated for their role in the Con-Dem coalition.

Their resurgence this time (of 75 seats) is therefore still very limited. However, it is clear that the success they had was mainly in middle class

Remain-supporting areas, where a section of Tory voters switched to the Liberals.

May will be hoping that the elections have left her party, and her leadership, in a marginally stronger position than before. At the same time, however, the hard Brexiteers in the cabinet are declaring the results as a vindication of their stance. Ludicrously, Boris Johnson claimed that his stance on leaving the Customs Union was 'key' to the Tories'

election 'successes'.

It is still possible that in the coming days, weeks or months one or more Brexiteer minister will walk out of the cabinet because they cannot swallow May's proposal on the Customs Union, considering it too close to continued membership.

If, on the other hand, they manage to push their own proposal through the cabinet, it is likely to be defeated in parliament, with a section of the Tories voting against the

government.

If May is forced out, it is very difficult to see how the Tories could elect a new leader without their Brexit civil war breaking out completely into the open. So while the Tories could still stagger on for a period, it is also possible that a general election could be upon us within months.

In that situation the Blairites, acting on behalf of the capitalist class, will do their best to sabotage

TUSC stands against Birmingham council's cuts and attacks on workers

Birmingham Socialist Party

On 1 May Birmingham Socialist Party held a successful public meeting about the local elections, the cuts and how councils can fight them.

The meeting was attended by around 30 people, and the discussion was introduced by Dave Nellist, ex Militant Labour MP and current national chair of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

There followed lively and passionate contributions from the floor with people highlighting the role councils could play in supporting Corbyn's policies by refusing to carry out the cuts and working locally with trade unions and community groups to build up an anti-cuts resistance instead.

It was noted this tactic is far from the role Birmingham Labour-led council plays.

Instead the council attacks their own workforce, with the bin workers last year and homecare workers

this year.

This is more damaging to Corbyn's anti austerity message than anything else!

The current ballot by the Fire Brigade's Union in the West Midlands local fire authority was also highlighted.

If there's a yes vote, firefighters will be out on strike against a Labour authority as they continue to change their job descriptions to take on roles which should be done by social care and the NHS (see page 7).

Cuts are having a horrific impact on Birmingham's communities and for some they are a life-and-death situation.

With homelessness on the rise, workers being stripped of their jobs, vulnerable people losing the care they need, and precarious conditions for many families and young people, Birmingham Socialist Party saw no other option than to stand under the banner of TUSC to challenge Labour councillors who believe it is ok to carry out the Tories' bidding.

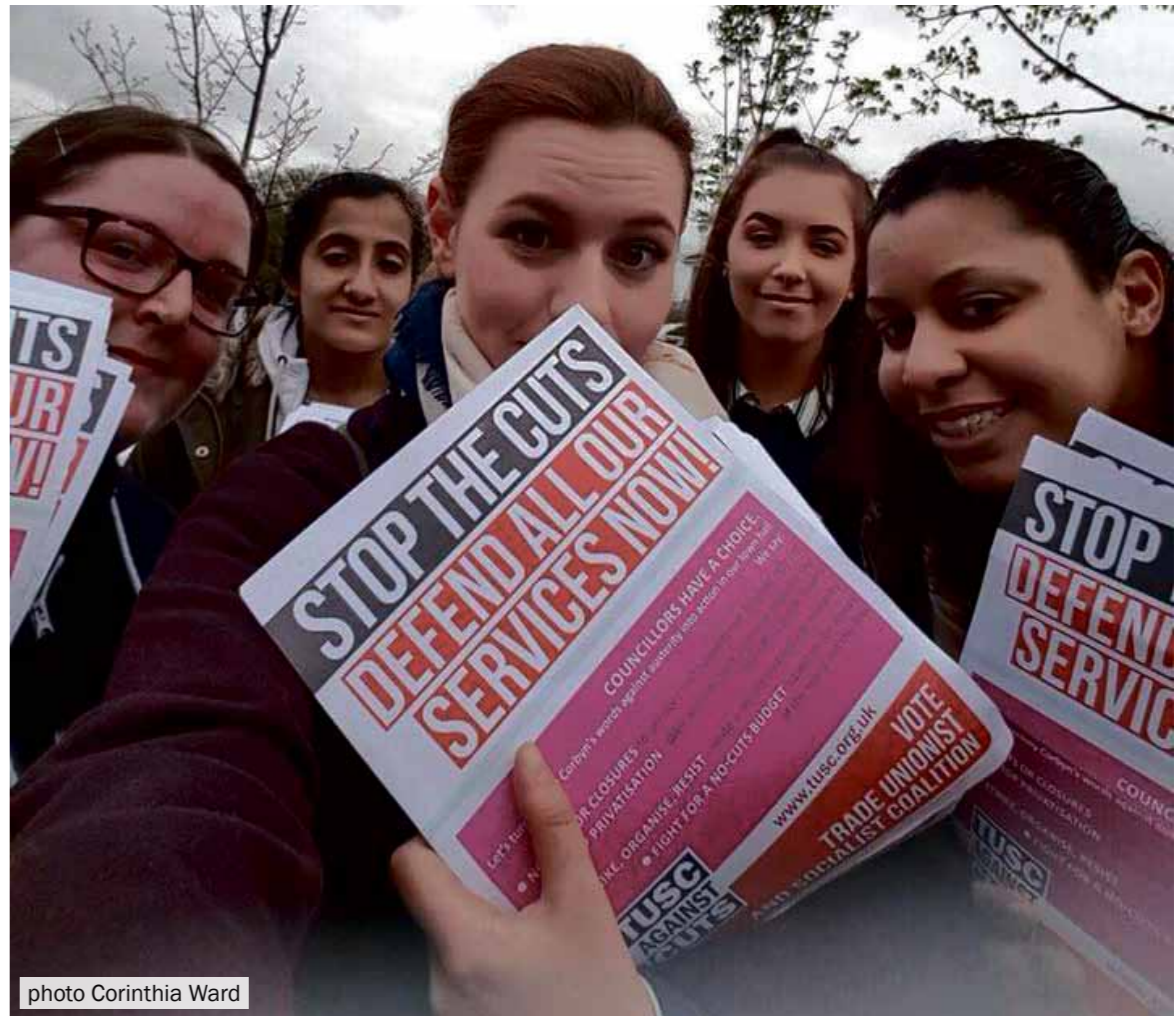


photo Corinthia Ward

a Corbyn victory and, if they fail at that, to assist the ruling elite in trying to prevent a Corbyn government implementing any significant pro-working class policies.

In the post-election period they are already further ramping up their campaign, not least by demanding Corbyn puts a neoliberal, pro-capitalist single market position on Brexit.

One means they have at their disposal is for a section of them to split from Labour and form a new 'centre' pro-capitalist party. At the moment big business Britain has no party that reliably represents its interests.

Mutterings about forming such a party - pro-capitalist and pro-Remain - and involving Blairites and Osbornites, have been rumbling for nearly two years now and may still not come to a head quickly. It is implicit in the situation, however.

Capitalist divisions

Such are the divisions in both major parties that it is impossible to guess whose forces might split first. It is certain, however, that such a process would not be clean and clinical but chaotic and unruly, ultimately reflecting the crisis of British capitalism.

Meanwhile, the support for Corbyn has created the potential for a mass democratic party of the working class, which is desperately needed.

If it is not to be squandered it is vital that there are no more retreats, but instead the start of a determined campaign to transform Labour into a party capable of opposing austerity with socialist policies in deeds as well as words.

Hull Energy Works: Unofficial strike action reinstates victimised workers

Workers at a large £200 million waste to energy plant site in East Hull have taken successful strike action against victimisation by management. **Keith Gibson**, a plater on site and a GMB activist, spoke in a personal capacity about the dispute to fellow Socialist Party member **Janet Gibson**.

On 25 April construction workers, across all trades, walked off Spencer Group's new energy from waste plant, in East Hull, after a catalogue of health and safety incidents. The final straw came when an underground joint to the pipework gave way lifting concrete and spraying debris into the air.

The workforce took matters into their own hands and agreed to implement a safety stand down, the nightshift followed suit. Workforce spokesmen and safety reps pursued the subcontractor company Premier and M+W Group, the main contractor, to investigate the incident.

The following day Unite and GMB union officials arrived. It was agreed that an environmental health officer from Hull city council and a GMB safety official would inspect the site and take up the concerns of the workforce. Construction workers returned to work the following afternoon.

On Friday 27 April the manager of Premier Engineering, my employer, decided to sack the Unite spokesman who had raised the health and safety concerns of the workforce. The manager alleged the spokesperson had a 'bad attitude' and his productivity 'wasn't good enough'.

Smelling victimisation, the whole workforce gathered in the car park. After I addressed them we voted to walk off site for the weekend until Monday. Our demand was clear, the Unite spokesman should be reinstated.

On Monday, Premier's manager took a decision to make all 15 platers, the most vocal group on health and safety concerns, redundant. Premier alleged financial difficulties.

The workers declared a TUPE situation (breaching employment rights) and lack of consultation.

A collective workforce grievance was handed into Premier demanding a written contract of employment. A site meeting was called.

Walkout

I addressed the workforce again and demands for the reinstatement of the Unite spokesman and 15 platers was now the rallying cry. An instant walkout strike was agreed.

Tuesday 1 May saw over 200 workers picket the site gate - scaffolders, electricians and mechanical trades brought the site to a standstill.

Tuesday also saw the beginning of the third series of strikes by workers at FCC Wilmington waste processing plant for equality in sick



Hull Energy Works - where workers safety concerns were met with sackings by management photo Paul Harrop/CC

pay. Their picket line is situated just across the road. In a show of workers' solidarity the FCC strikers marched over to join the construction workers' picket line. Construction workers then marched to join the FCC picket line!

After hastily inquiring as to where

the construction workers had gone M+W management, on our return, offered toilet facilities to construction workers and entered into talks with a Unite official and the spokesmen, including me.

It took 15 minutes to negotiate the reinstatement of the 15 platers. The

Unite spokesman was suspended on full pay pending an investigation. Management wanted an immediate return to work. The workforce decided to go home.

We would return on Wednesday, the following morning, with a victory under our belt!

Defend Hull FE College - defend our city!

Mick Whale
President of Hull trades council

On 12 May striking lecturers and students from Hull College will be demonstrating together with the wider labour and trade union movement in Hull against the proposed axing of up to 400 jobs across the college. Further attacks on the pay, terms and conditions of support staff are expected.

Staff, students and the wider community will not accept management's so-called 'Fresh Start' rescue plan, which includes £10 million worth of cuts.

At a time that vicious cuts are being proposed, management seems to have pots of money to pay for consultants to 'manage' the process. Rumours are rife about possible vested interests lying behind some of the proposals.

Already, the University and College Union has organised two days of strike action and declared a vote of no confidence in the



Hull University and College Union members have already taken two days of strike action against cuts photo Phil Culshaw

management of the college. Unison union is also balloting its members. Hull trades union council has demanded that college management open the financial books so that staff and students can see the true situation.

Despite management intimidation of students and staff, there is a growing determination to stop the cuts package. The more clumsy

management are in trying to stop opposition to their proposals, the more confident union members are that management is rattled.

The attacks, particularly on art and creative subjects, make a mockery of Hull's Year of Culture in 2017. People are asking why last year art was promoted but this year it is under attack?

The college stands as a monument



At a time that vicious cuts are being proposed, management seems to have pots of money to pay for consultants

to failed corporate mismanagement and government cuts. The trades council has made a clear call for the cancellation of the cuts and for the proper funding of the further education sector. However, a central demand of the campaign is to bring the college back into public ownership, where it can be run democratically in the interest of the community as a whole.

■ 12 May demonstration and rally. Assemble 12noon outside Hull College, Queens Gardens, Wilberforce Drive, Hull HU1 3DG



NSSN conference - 7 July

The date of the National Shop Stewards Network annual conference has been moved to Saturday 7 July in order for union members to support NHS 70th anniversary events on 30 June. NSSN affiliates are urged to do all they can to build these protests against continuing Tory health cuts.

■ Details of the rearranged NSSN conference: Saturday 7 July, 11am-4.30pm at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. The attendance fee is £6 and it is open to all trade union and anti-cuts campaigners. See shopstewards.net

VICTORY AGAINST ACADEMISATION AT AVENUE PRIMARY SCHOOL, NEWHAM

Now step up the fight for well-funded, democratically run education

After 19 days of strike action National Education Union (NEU) members at Avenue Primary School in Newham, east London, have successfully forced the headteacher and the governing body to withdraw their plans to turn Avenue into a quasi-privatised academy.

The strength and depth of support for the strike was shown by the new ballot (required by the anti-trade union laws) which closed on 2 May and had a 95% yes vote on a 75% turnout.

Throughout the dispute staff had overwhelming support from parents. A recent meeting of around 70 parents voted unanimously to demand that the academisation proposal be withdrawn.

At the same time a group of parents have pursued a judicial review over the headteacher's complete failure to meaningfully consult them over the proposal. Even in the governors' own consultative survey 132 parents objected to academisation while only four stated they

were in favour, yet still the academy plans remained until the movement against them became unstoppable.

Martin Powell Davies, NEU London regional secretary and Socialist Party member, explained: "The lively rallies on the school gates on strike days, always supported by dozens of local parents, left governors in no doubt that the campaign showed no signs of weakening. The determination and unity across the school community shown at Avenue School over the last six months of action will be an inspiration to other campaigns organising to stop academisation in their schools."

Fight continues

However, it is not the end of the struggle either in Avenue or across the borough. Across Newham the Labour council, having presided over widespread academisation in recent years, voted just before the May elections to oppose further academisation.

The new Labour mayor, Rokshana Fiaz, has also said she will oppose new academies. Both moves

are welcomed. However, Louise Cuffaro, newly elected Newham NEU secretary and Socialist Party member, explained: "It is vital that the new council does not leave this policy just as words on a piece of paper, but actively campaigns against academisation. This has to be linked to providing local schools with the resources they so desperately need."

It is the scale of the cuts facing schools which has been a factor in pushing some schools to become academies believing, mistakenly, that it offers an escape from the endless cuts. Local councils have the power to underwrite school budgets to stop cuts for at least three years. Newham should use that power now.

This should be linked to the incoming Labour council declaring that they will not preside over any more cuts to public services in our borough, but will instead set a no-cuts budget - using reserves and borrowing powers to do so - as part of building a movement to defeat the Tory government.



photo PJuliette Fogelman

West Midlands firefighters ballot for action to stop undermining of fire service

Bob Severn
Birmingham South East
Socialist Party

'Congratulations on becoming a firefighter - now go and pick up a hospital patient and cross your fingers that no one needs a fire put out while you're at it'

That is the barmy future planned for firefighters by the Labour-led West Midlands Fire Authority, but a future that won't be accepted by firefighters and emergency control operators, who are now balloting for

strike action.

The planned contracts would mean new firefighters having to take on non-fire service duties - like those you'd expect NHS workers to be employed to do.

In fact, it's already happening - loss-making 'care contracts' signed by the fire authority have already taken fire staff and engines off front-line duties.

These changes come under what firefighters describe as an anti-union, bullying management that is also introducing flexible working - that's flexible for the bosses of

course, changing working hours at short notice.

Dial-a-firefighter: the gig economy for trained emergency staff, implemented by a Labour-led fire authority which is also suspending employees for union campaigning. No wonder Fire Brigade Union (FBU) members have had enough!

On 30 April, the day before balloting began, FBU general secretary Matt Wrack spoke to many union members at meetings in Solihull and Dudley.

Socialist Party members gave support to the firefighters at the



photo Roger Thomas

PCS: A fighting strategy to defeat the Tory pay cap

Marion Lloyd
PCS national executive committee member and PCS Left Unity chair (personal capacity)

The PCS civil service union pay claim for a fully funded pay increase of 5% or £1,200 minimum and a commitment to centralised bargaining has been rejected by the Tory government. Talks are ongoing but they are refusing to lift the budgeted 1% spending limit on civil servants' pay.

PCS members, in common with the rest of the public sector, have had a pay cut in real terms over the last ten years. But although very limited concessions beyond the pay cap limit have been made in health and local government there is, at this point, nothing more on offer for civil servants. This contrast in treatment is magnified by the offer to PCS Scottish government members of about 4%.

This is the background to the debate on pay which will take place at PCS conference on 22 May. The Democracy Alliance leadership (Left Unity/PCS Democrats) is proposing to carry forward the union's pay campaign to a statutory ballot

of members, soon after conference. This will be in support of the union's pay claim and in the absence of significant progress in talks with the government.

In November 2017 the union convincingly won a consultative ballot rejecting the pay cap and in support of action. A statutory ballot can be won and conference needs to agree a strategy which will put the union in the best possible position to win the vote. This means one which is based on the maximum involvement of the activist layer in the union, in groups and branches, campaigning for and delivering a 'yes' vote. Also, our strategy must include linking up and coordinating with other unions prepared to fight on pay.

The pay campaign will unleash the anger and resentment felt by members on pay. It will also bring to the fore the many other grievances of our members on a whole number of issues ranging from office closures to attacks on pensions and redundancy pay.

■ Vote for Democracy Alliance/ Left Unity slates in the PCS NEC and Group Executive elections which close at noon on 10 May and 15 May respectively



Judy Beishon
Socialist Party executive
committee

The 70th anniversary of the 1948 foundation of the Israeli state is being marked this month in Israel. For Palestinian refugees, however, it marks only their 'Nakba', the Arabic word for catastrophe, when over 750,000 were forced from their towns and villages to become homeless and impoverished.

A further 300,000 Palestinians were forced from their homes in the 1967 six-day war. Since then Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have lived under an increasingly unbearable and brutal Israeli occupation.

In the run up to a large protest march planned for this year's Nakba day, 15 May, anger and frustration have been expressed in weekly protests - initially over 30,000 strong - near Gaza's perimeter fence, demanding the right of return for refugees. Fearing these escalating, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu sanctioned soldiers to shoot to kill, with the horrific result that over 45 protesters have so far been killed and thousands injured.

Adding fuel to the fire of the mass anger is the moving of the US's Israeli embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on 15 May. This is a strong signal to Israel of US president Trump's support for its domination of that city and a huge rebuff to the Palestinians' demand for their own state with its capital also in Jerusalem.

Trump has also cut US funding to the UN agency that assists Palestinian refugees, further worsening the already dire conditions in the occupied territories. The densely populated Gaza strip suffers shortages of electricity, tap water and basic goods and 50% of its workforce is unemployed.

Palestinian residents across the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza face land confiscations, house demolitions and regular

incursions by Israeli soldiers during which killings and harming of Palestinians are obscenely normal.

In addition, right-wing Jewish settlers often harass or attack Palestinians, and these 'hate crimes' are on the rise at present according to Israel's intelligence agency Shin Bet.

Detention in harsh conditions is also a commonplace tool of the occupation - over 6,000 Palestinians, including children, are currently held.

These include 17-year-old Ahmed Tamimi whose case spread in the news internationally after she was jailed for slapping and kicking an Israeli soldier who wouldn't leave her family's courtyard. The incident took place just after Ahmed heard that her cousin had been shot in the face by the Israeli military.

Mass action

In the face of the deadly actions of Netanyahu's government, the Palestinians' struggles clearly need to be very well organised; and democratically run, assessed and escalated to achieve the maximum potential impact and success. Mass actions aimed against the occupation can be very effective, as the first intifada (uprising) - which broke out in 1987 - showed.

Last summer, when the Israeli authorities placed new restrictive checkpoints around the Jerusalem Al Aqsa mosque compound, mass sit-down protests of Palestinians in the east of that city forced a government u-turn.

Initially the protests near Gaza's border during recent weeks also took the form of mass mobilisations, under particularly repressive conditions. Developing this type of struggle is the way forward, and not so acts of desperation like a return to the individual or group terror attacks against Israeli civilians that were a mark of the second intifada.

Those methods were counter-productive, aiding the agenda of right-wing politicians in Israel. While socialists fully support the Palestinians' right to arms for

70 years on from the foundation of Israel SOCIALISTS FIGHT FOR PALESTINIAN LIBERATION AND WORKERS' UNITY



Socialist Struggle Movement in action all photos SSM

defence and struggle, at the same time we call for a concerted appeal to be made to ordinary Israelis, explaining that they are not the target, rather it is the removal of the brutal occupation and blockades.

Class divide in Israel

On neither side of the divide do working class or middle class people have anything to gain from the conflict, or from the poor or precarious living standards that the pro-capitalist political parties offer.

In Israel, the minority Palestinian population suffers the highest levels of poverty but it's also the case that around 20% of Jewish children are in poverty and a large layer of Israeli Jews face endemic low pay, insecure work, a massive shortage of affordable housing and overall a struggle to make ends meet. Israel has one of the highest costs of living of the 35 OECD group of advanced and

developing economies, and yet disposable income after government intervention is the second worst in the OECD, with only Mexico being poorer.

It is a class society like others across the globe with one of the worst gaps between rich and poor - a small number of 'tycoon' families at the top control the economy. Israeli workers are regularly forced into struggle. Last December for instance, workers at Teva pharmaceuticals occupied a Jerusalem factory and demonstrated against 1,750 job losses, and were supported by a half-day general strike.

The following months saw demonstrations in Tel Aviv of tens of thousands of Israeli Jews and asylum seekers - mainly African - against forced deportations of refugees. There have also been weekly demonstrations - at one point tens of thousands strong too - against corruption at the top of government. Many MPs and

officials are under police investigation, including Netanyahu, who the police have recommended be indicted.

National conflict

However, regarding the national conflict, with none of the mainstream political parties offering a solution, a majority of the Jewish population presently falls prey to the reactionary mood propagated from above.

Israeli governments are not new to whipping up fear of attacks by Palestinian militias, individuals or neighbouring states - especially Iran - and Netanyahu's coalition is no exception. Ministers created a barrage of propaganda during April in response to the Gaza protests, with defence minister Avigdor Lieberman declaring there are "no innocent people" in Gaza and "everyone's connected to Hamas" there.

The national conflict is in an impasse with no meaningful

negotiations taking place. Netanyahu faces opposition in his Likud party and the collapse of the government coalition if he makes concessions, in particular due to the presence in the coalition of the pro-settler Jewish Home party.

His right-wing government has been putting divisive laws through parliament to curb NGOs that assist the Palestinians' cause and to reduce the rights of the 1.8 million Palestinians in Israel, including by declaring Israel to be the nation state of the Jewish people.

But the occupation status quo is also a great problem for the Israeli ruling class and it is divided on what to do. Some at the top advocate concessions to the Palestinian Authority to try to buy a period of more stable coexistence. The occupation and repression is expensive - the military takes up 13% of the state budget - and Israel faces criticism and a

degree of isolation globally for its brutality in the territories.

In addition, although Netanyahu continues to create geographical 'facts on the ground', expanding settlements and Jewish-only infrastructure, Israel's ruling class faces a demographic problem regarding its national base because the Palestinian population in all the areas it controls will soon outstrip the Jewish population - if it doesn't already.

One state or two?

Due to the failure of the mainstream political parties to deliver a two-state solution and the extent to which the settlements enterprise has broken up the West Bank, minorities exist on both sides of the national divide that believe that only a one-state solution is now possible.

On a socialist basis - whether early on or at a later stage - a single state meeting the needs and aspirations of both Palestinians and Jews could be democratically agreed and brought about. But from the starting point of today, the mistrust following decades of bloodshed and the fear on both sides of becoming a discriminated-against section of a single state (as Palestinians inside Israel are today) mean that a one-state solution isn't contemplated by most.

This view is strong among Israeli Jews as a result of living in a state which they were told would protect their interests following rounds of persecution of Jews in eastern Europe and beyond, and then the horrors of the holocaust. Today the wars raging in neighbouring Syria and the support of the masses across the Middle East for the Palestinians' cause add to a 'siege mentality' for Israeli Jews and defence of the Israeli state.

Palestinian Authority

For Palestinians, on their part, abhorrence of repression and victimisation has become strong having endured a denial of basic rights by the Israeli regime. But the political parties in power in the Palestinian Authority show no more of a way forward than do those in Israel.

Support for Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of Fatah, has plummeted as living standards fester and his strategy of pleading with the world's imperialist powers to deliver a Palestinian state repeatedly fails.

Those powers view their commercial and geopolitical links with Israel as far more important. And in any case they can't simply override the refusal of the Israeli ruling class to concede a genuine Palestinian state on its doorstep.

The right-wing Islamist party Hamas, tenuously in power in Gaza, has no choice but to adopt a more anti-imperialist stance than Fatah as the US and EU label it a terrorist organisation.

But it too has no strategy to advance the struggle for Palestinian liberation. It will never contemplate the only possible

path towards fully realising it - that being democratically organised struggle based on a socialist programme - as it would mean the removal of its positions and privileges.

To cling onto some of these elite 'entitlements', and in response to pressure from the Egyptian and other Arab regimes, it has tried to reconcile with Fatah, agreeing to formally give up its leadership in Gaza, but the deals haven't stuck so far.

A poll taken early this year indicated that over 50% of people in Gaza and the West Bank don't trust any of the current political or religious factions. In Israel, in the last general election only 16.7% voted for Netanyahu's party Likud. The largest section of the electorate was the 27.7% who didn't vote at all.

Working-class alternatives

New, independent workers' organisations need to be built on both sides of the divide, democratically run and controlled and able to attract support by acting in the interests of ordinary people.

The only ideological path to gaining that support is through the adoption of socialist programmes, as only a socialist solution can end the insecurity, wars, inequality, dispossession, discrimination and poor living standards that are all rife under capitalism in the Middle East today.

Our Marxist forerunners opposed the creation of the Israeli state in Palestine 70 years ago, foreseeing that it would not bring security for Jews and that it would bring suffering to the Palestinians.

However, in the decades since then, Marxists have had to recognise that an Israeli national consciousness has developed, a large majority of the population is now Israel-born and a ruling class exists with one of the strongest, heavily armed military forces at its disposal on the globe. Crucially though, we also recognise that a millions-strong Israeli working class exists with the potential power to challenge and remove their capitalist exploiters.

Opposition to Zionism, the Israeli right and Israeli capitalists is not in any way antisemitic opposition to Jewish people, or to the Israeli working class and middle class (see page 13).

Our sister organisation in Israel-Palestine, Socialist Struggle Movement - like us, part of the Committee for a Workers' International - has branches in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa which support the struggles of Israeli workers, Jews and Arabs, and argue the need for unity in a new workers' party.

They actively protest against the occupation and the blockade of Gaza, supporting the right of return of the refugees, and the call for two socialist states with full rights for the minorities within them.

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A protest in London against Israeli state attacks on Gaza photo Paul Mattsson



photo Mary Finch

Use TUC march as launch pad for action on pay

Rob Williams
 Socialist Party industrial organiser

If the Trade Union Congress (TUC) hadn't organised a demonstration on 12 May, given the weakness of the Tories, we would be calling for it.

The Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) were campaigning for such a march in the summer and autumn last year. One of the main demands of the NSSN's rally at September's TUC congress was for the "TUC to name the date for a pay demo".

During TUC congress, the government announced a slight relaxing of the pay freeze for the police and prison officers. This was a reflection of the pressure and anger of workers who have faced a lost decade in terms of living standards.

This was the perfect time for the unions to use the TUC congress to map out a strategy of using a mass demonstration in the autumn as a platform for coordinated strikes across the public sector. This would have fed into the wave of strikes that

have developed over the last year.

The massive votes by members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) in Royal Mail, and the University and College Union (UCU) in pre-1992 universities have shown that the undemocratic voting thresholds of the Tory Trade Union Act can be overcome. National strike action is possible, on the condition that the unions build a real fighting campaign for it.

The scale of the CWU yes vote, backed up by a series of unofficial walkouts, forced Royal Mail management to table a deal acceptable to postal workers. UCU members pushed back the employers' assault on their pensions after 14 days of strikes.

There have also been many other strikes on a local or individual basis, often over pay, with many weeks of action being taken, such as by Mears housing workers in Manchester and now Unison members in FCC Wilmington. Usdaw members in Tesco distribution in Dagenham have won a strike ballot and are due to walk out on 17-18 May.

May Day saw the second strike by

McDonald's workers. Also, the RMT transport union is in its third year of fighting driver-only operation, with strikes in five different train companies.

The TUC has finally called a demonstration. But in the meantime, local government unions have settled their pay claim and NHS workers are now voting on theirs.

PCS has called on its members to march to build for its national strike ballot that will be launched at its annual conference from 21 May. Teachers in the National Education Union have agreed a strategy to fight for an inflation-proof pay rise and UCU members in further education have already started taking action on pay. On top of this, there is the continuing crisis in the NHS.

The Windrush scandal that has claimed Amber Rudd is further evidence of the crisis within May's Tory government. Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and the trade union leaders must mobilise behind the banner of 'May out! Tories out! General election now!'

■ See election analysis pages 2-5



Armies of women baking cakes and going on runs have increased breast cancer awareness and spending into research and palliative care photo Evo Flash/CC

Breast cancer screening scandal - more funding to stop deaths needed now!

Sue Powell
 Gloucestershire Socialist Party

Tory ministers seldom apologise. Women over 70 - the most likely to die of breast cancer - are still not routinely screened, just as young women are not screened for cervical cancer.

Yet Health Minister Jeremy Hunt tweeted: "My thoughts today with the thousands of women and families affected by failures in our breast cancer screening programme", claiming a computer glitch in 2009 has meant that 450,000 women aged 68-71 had not been invited to screening since then.

He says 270 women may have died as a consequence. Experts dispute his conclusions, saying his figures do not add up and there are bigger issues around cancer care and women's health.

Massive lobbying was required before May agreed to an inquiry into faulty vaginal surgical mesh implants. According to three-yearly studies the UK has poor cancer survival rates compared to most developed countries, for example a third lower than Sweden.

People in the UK attend screenings less frequently and are reluctant to visit their busy, overworked GPs with early symptoms which

GPs often fail to see, or diagnose too late. In deprived areas, patients are more likely to arrive in hospital with late-stage cancers, that are harder to treat and less likely to be survivable.

An estimated 10,000 more lives could be saved if UK performance equalled the best in Europe.

Diagnosis, forms of treatment and survival rates vary across the country and tend to be better for the rich. Parliamentary committees scrutinising cancer services in different areas found there was no uniform system for monitoring performance - if any!

Armies of women baking cakes, going on runs and so on have increased breast cancer awareness and spending into research and palliative care. Charities step in where public funding is cut.

The UK spends 1%-2% less of its GDP on health than its neighbours and has lung cancer survival rates only slightly better than Bulgaria. Since 2009 the NHS has received 3% less each year than it needs.

The NHS lacks the funding to tackle the multiple known causes of cancer or pay for better cancer drugs, research or public health. Tens of thousands of people are dying early.

We don't need apologies from the arch privatiser Jeremy Hunt - we need funding!



France, May 1968: week two

HISTORY'S GREATEST GENERAL STRIKE ERUPTS

Lenny Shail

The legacy of the French revolution of 1848, the second time France overthrew a monarchy, played an important part in the escalation of the demonstrations and street fighting in Paris.

The streets of the capital had been reorganised on the order of the police in the wake of that revolution, to counter any attempt at setting up barricades in the future. Wide cobblestoned boulevards replaced tight-knit streets.

But rather than prevention, the heavy cobblestones became ideal tools, with the initiative of the mobilised workers and students, to help form the barricades of 1968. The night of 10-11 May became known as the Night of the Barricades as demonstrators threw up over 60 around Paris's Latin Quarter.

Witnessing a growing movement in comparison to its own diminishing strength and support, the state responded with truncheons, smoke bombs and CS gas at 2.15am. Local residents poured water from their houses to help the students affected. The CRS riot police prevented the Red Cross coming in to pick up the injured.

The increasingly brutal repression by the state created more anger. Seeing the gathering storm, Prime Minister Georges Pompidou conceded to demands to reopen

Twitter: follow events as they happened @France68LIVE

Sorbonne University and withdraw the police. But the attempt to retreat slightly in the hope it would satisfy the movement failed.

Instead it acted as a lightning rod, encouraging workers in their millions - they saw that strikes and occupations for their own demands could also win. The students had helped give confidence to the mass movement of workers that had been brewing for many months before May.

Furthermore, after Pompidou's u-turn the police felt they had been made to look like fools. A section was already in dispute with the government over expenses.

A police union petition criticised the government. Some cops even began to sympathise with the students and workers. Splitting or neutralising the forces of the state is an important part of a successful revolutionary movement.

Contagion

Meanwhile, the union and Communist Party leaders had to flip their previous contemptuous position on the movement. The Stalinist leadership was reflecting the fears of the parasitic bureaucracy in the Soviet Union.

A mass movement was also unfolding in Czechoslovakia,

threatening to develop into a political revolution that might overthrow Stalinism's bureaucratic dictatorship and implement workers' democracy within a planned economy.

A successful revolution in France, with workers' democratic structures already in place from the growing general strike, would threaten not only the existence of capitalism in Europe, but would in turn embolden the discontent of workers under Stalinist rule.

The Communist Party needed to regain control. On Saturday 11 May its leaders and the union federations were forced by the pressure to call a general strike for 13 May. They hoped this would let them steer the movement away from revolution and dissipate the anger.

Georges Marchais, a leading member of the Communist Party's central committee and later its general secretary, opposed even the call for a 24-hour general strike! But it went ahead - and was not to stop after 24 hours.

On the huge strike demonstrations, a million people in Paris, 60,000 in Lyons, 50,000 each in Marseille and Bordeaux, and 40,000 in Toulouse, to name but a few, had a taste of what could be achieved.

After the demonstrations, students again occupied the Sorbonne and its Censier Annexe. They opened the university up to striking workers and anyone wanting to be part of discussions on how society could be transformed. Almost all of

their action. They occupied, locked up the management in its offices, and formed an action committee to spread the strike.

General Charles de Gaulle, president of the French Republic, had remained silent. The same day he left for a state visit to Romania as if nothing had happened.

Deadlock broken

But the huge workers' demonstrations had broken the deadlock in a deeply dissatisfied society. Once the movement began, it rapidly grew into an irresistible force.

On Wednesday 15 May, strikes and occupations spread to Renault car plants, shipyards and hospitals. The Loire Atlantique area, around Nantes and the Sud Aviation factory, came under the control of an elected council of workers, peasants and students.

By Thursday 16 May, all 60,000 Renault car workers had stopped work and occupied the firm's six plants. Vast strike meetings of 4,000 workers were held daily. At the Flins Renault factory near Paris, picket lines regularly included 3,000 workers.

The Renault workforce at Rouen had not taken much part in the 13 May general strike. Most of them were new, drawn recently from the countryside. But seeing the movement rise, they joined the strike. When the plant director refused to meet them, they imprisoned him in his office.

At the Citroën plant, only about 200 workers were in a union, of a total staff of 18,000. The workers were frightened at first by the bosses' armed guards, the 'house cops'.

There were house cops in many factories, but Citroën was the worst - known as the 'factory of fear.' But after hearing the guards trying to defend management's position, workers were so angry that they voted to strike on the spot!

The maintenance facility at Orly-Nord airport hosted daily meetings of the 'Inter-Union Strike Committee'. General assemblies of workers each morning attracted up to 3,500 to discuss the next steps in the strike and organise services and supervise work.

This was the emergence of 'dual power' in France, a struggle between the old capitalist state and the emerging factory action committees, workers' councils and university assemblies. The question now was: who runs society?

■ **Read more in the next issue of the Socialist: May 1968, week three - revolutionary explosion as strike spreads to two-thirds of workforce**

France's universities were soon occupied.

Meanwhile, workers returned home from the giant demonstrations on 13 May considering all the implications of the huge show of strength. In some cases within hours, and in most cases within days, they would be back on strike and challenging for power in society.

On Tuesday 14 May, the morning after the one-day strike, just 200 workers were still out. One week later it was ten million. The young metalworkers of the state-owned Sud Aviation aircraft factory in Nantes became the spark that ignited the historic all-out general strike.

Already engaged in a series of daily 15-minute stoppages against job cuts, they had been inspired by the revolutionary spirit of the student protests and the sense of enormous power they had felt during the general strike the day before.

Instead of returning to work on 14 May, they decided to prolong

Further reading

■ For an overview, 'France 1968: when workers were on the brink of taking power' - and the previous weeks' commentaries - visit socialistparty.org.uk

■ 'France 1968: Month of Revolution' by Clare Doyle - £7.50 from leftbooks.co.uk - or free with a Direct Debit subscription to the Socialist at socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe

■ Socialism Today: May '68 special 40th anniversary edition, issue 118 (May 2008): socialismtoday.org



Sri Lanka: United Socialist Party defies ban on May Day demonstrations



Spanish state: Hundreds attend Izquierda Revolucionaria conference. Tens of thousands at mass feminist demo



Tens of thousands attended another mass feminist demo in Madrid on 4 May. They were protesting the light sentencing of ‘La Manada’ - five men accused of raping an 18-year-old woman during the Pamplona bull-running festival two years ago – see socialistparty.org.uk ‘Spain: “We don’t want to be brave, we want to be free!”’. Izquierda Revolucionaria (IR) and Libres y Combativas (the feminist campaign of the students’ union and IR) were out in force. There was a lot of rage against the sexist corrupt system. The students’ union has called a student strike for 10 May photo IR

Hong Kong: Stop political persecution



20 countries, including the UK, hosted solidarity actions demanding an end to political repression in Hong Kong on 4 May. The Xi Jinping dictatorship is ramping up repression. Leung Kwok-hung, ‘Long Hair’, has been undemocratically disqualified from the Hong Kong legislature. He faces jail on completely fabricated charges photo SRIHK



TEACHERS REVOLT IN TRUMP COUNTRY

Alan Jones
Socialist Alternative

Militant strikes and mass demonstrations of tens of thousands of teachers, students and community supporters have spread like wildfire across West Virginia, Kentucky, Arizona and Oklahoma since the end of February.

Other teacher actions, demonstrations, and one-day strikes have taken place in New Jersey and Puerto Rico. Recently the threat of walkouts spread to Colorado state.

The movement started with a nine-day strike by 20,000 teachers across West Virginia at the end of February. The outcome was that the teachers and all 75,000 public employees won a 5% raise.

When the state legislature attempted to lower the raise to 4%, teachers threatened to occupy the capitol building, vowing to remain until their demands were met.

Inspired by the victory in West Virginia, 30,000 Oklahoma teachers went on strike at the beginning of April.

For nine days, 20,000-30,000 laid virtual siege to the legislature at the state capitol.

As in West Virginia, the teachers enjoyed massive support from the community. Free food was delivered daily by local businesses. Hundreds of thousands of dollars was raised nationally to support them.

Construction workers refused to do any work in the capitol while the

teachers and their supporters were there protesting. Alongside the teachers, over 100,000 Oklahoma state employees began to mobilise to demand wage increases.

A poll at the end of the strike showed that 72% of Oklahomans supported the teachers’ walkout “until all of their demands are met.” These are astonishing numbers, for a state considered to be a right-wing bastion.

The reactionary Republican state government conceded a \$6,000 yearly wage increase for the teachers.

There were also huge protests, sickouts and walkouts by teachers in Kentucky when the Republican-dominated state government tried to cut pensions programmes and education funding. The 10,000-strong crowd at the state capitol forced the Republican governor and legislature to abandon their plans.

Massive protests

Meanwhile in Arizona, on 12 April, Governor Ducey was forced by a month of massive protests to concede to demands for a 20% pay raise for teachers by 2020. Teachers have voted to walk out on 26 April if Republican lawmakers refuse to reverse \$1 billion of education cuts.

Much of the American liberal left concluded that the working class in states like West Virginia, which voted 68.7% for Trump, should be dismissed as one reactionary mass. Socialist Alternative explained the

contradictory reality and the need for the labour movement to take a stand and build a movement that spoke to the common interests of all working people while also boldly fighting racism, nativism and sexism.

The West Virginia teachers, less likely to vote Trump than the state as a whole and also inspired by the emerging women’s movement, point precisely to the class contradictions in ‘Trump country’.

The teachers won the support of the mass of the West Virginia working class in a fight with a reactionary, Republican-dominated legislature.

Trump and the Republicans in Congress have passed massive tax breaks for the rich while attacking healthcare, especially for poor Americans. Republican state governments have done the same.

The teachers who moved into action are forced to have two and

three jobs. They are unable to pay their student loans and face ever-increasing healthcare and living costs. These experiences are shared by a large section of the US working class, even during this supposed economic “upturn.”

The demand for change and frustration with the existing state of affairs was shown by the outstanding votes received by Bernie Sanders. Bernie won all counties in West Virginia in the primary election against Hillary Clinton in 2016.

He called for a “political revolution” against the billionaires, taxing the rich and big business, free education, and a national healthcare system.

Anti-union laws

The anti-union laws did not defeat the strike. As one teacher in West Virginia said: “If the strike is illegal, all that means is that we don’t have to play by the rules they made for us.”

The strategy of the existing union leadership and local Democratic politicians was not to prepare for strikes or militant actions but to try for some sort of a deal. This was completely rejected by the rank-and-file teachers.

But this autumn, the Democrats are likely to be major beneficiaries of the teachers’ struggles in these states as people seek to “throw the bums out.”

A developed expression of working class political independence may not materialise before this November. But teachers already realise through their own experience that they cannot rely on the word of politicians. They will have to keep their movement going to win their full demands.

Full article at socialistworld.net

CHINA: IMPRESSIVE, COORDINATED AND DARING CRANE DRIVERS’ STRIKES

Crane drivers in China’s construction industry have taken strike action in dozens of cities across the country. It is quite simply the most impressive, coordinated and daring action taken by any group of workers in China for many years.

On 1 May, Labour Day, the workers called for a nationwide strike after a week filled with rolling strikes in different regions. Although May Day is a legal holiday in China, large numbers of workers are required to work, often without extra pay.

This is China - where strikes are illegal, organising is illegal, and protests are illegal.

The strike embraced 20 of China’s provinces. A striking worker in Chengdu, just one city in one province on strike, told The Global Times newspaper, “There are at least 10,000 crane operators in Chengdu appealing for a salary raise.”

The strike faces the world’s most powerful dictatorial state.

The crane drivers have organised themselves online like many other workers in China, setting up closed chat groups on instant messaging apps such as QQ. These forums are attacked and blocked by the cyber police but regroup to maintain contact.

China’s crane drivers, like almost all construction workers, are mainly migrants from poorer rural regions. Like most migrant workers they are hired casually, without job contracts, pensions or medical

insurance. Crane drivers work under extreme pressure, on long shifts, without toilet breaks or rest periods.

Construction sites in China famously work around the clock. “If we are required to work for eight to nine hours, and then work more overtime at night, there will be no extra pay,” one crane driver from Henan told Radio Free Asia. “You can work overtime until two o’clock in the morning, and the boss won’t care. You can still have to work tomorrow as well.”

The crane drivers are demanding a minimum pay of at least 7,000 yuan (\$1,100) a month. Their wages have stagnated for a decade.

We are witnessing the stirring of a giant. Half the world’s construction sites are in China and its construction workforce numbers around 60 million. It is a major contributor to China’s GDP.

Chinaworker.info declares our full solidarity with the striking crane drivers, to fight for the realisation of their demands in full. We deplore the state repression against these workers and call for international workers’ solidarity with the strikes, and the release of the arrested strikers. The need for independent workers’ unions is once again underlined by this struggle, which also shows the enormous potential power of China’s working class.

Full article at chinaworker.info



South Africa: Strike to block new anti-union laws

The ANC government is pushing through a new Labour Relations Act that will do away with a show of hands to start a strike. It introduces secret strike ballots and strike notices to employers. New picketing rules will require the boss to agree about picket line rules (which they never will), and an unelected commissioner to enforce these. And worst of all strike settlements will be imposed on workers. The Saffu trade union federation organised a strike against these attacks on 25 April. The Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) played an important role in campaigning for the action to go ahead. WASP member Mametlwe Sebel spoke at the enormous strike rally photo Mametlwe Sebel



What we stand for

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

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

Our demands include:

PUBLIC SERVICES

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

ENVIRONMENT

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

RIGHTS

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

MASS WORKERS’ PARTY

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

WORK AND INCOME

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

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

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

Join the fightback!
Join the Socialists!

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■ US president suggests gun control to blame for London knife deaths

PROTEST AGAINST TRUMP AND MAY ON 13 JULY



photo Paul Mattsson

Beth Webster
Cardiff West Socialist Party

We need to organise against reactionary US president Donald Trump when he comes to Britain on 13 July. In one speech to the National Rifle Association (NRA), Trump not only showed contempt for the hundreds of thousands demanding gun controls in America; he also used an unprecedented increase in

fatal stabbings in London to justify it.

In a speech at an NRA conference on 4 May, he likened a London hospital to a war zone following a spate of stabbings, ludicrously implying that the cause was strict gun controls. At least 36 people have been fatally stabbed in London already this year.

Since 2010, the Tory government and Labour councils have slashed funding for youth services by over £750 million. There are at least 20,000 fewer police officers on the streets. Getting rid of the Tories and properly funding public services would be a first step to reducing violence.

Trump's latest comment comes after mass mobilisation of young people and workers following the Parkland school shooting in February. Yet NRA funding is more important to Trump than school children's lives. By inviting him here in July, May is endorsing his disgraceful and callous behaviour. That's no surprise - she's cut from virtually the same cloth!

In answer to his visit, on 13 July Socialist Students is calling a student strike. And workers should join students in mass protests against Trump's racism and sexism, his prioritising of profit over lives, and the entire

capitalist system he and May represent.

We need to show solidarity to those in America fighting for gun controls and women's and workers' rights. We need to show May what we think of her appeasement. The mere threat of mass protest saw Trump off in February - it can do so again. And this time, May with him.

■ See socialiststudents.org.uk for more on the planned walkouts and to get involved

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