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# the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**

MAY 68 - WEEK TWO

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## MIDDLE EAST IN CRISIS



photo Paul Mattsson

Around the world people have watched in horror at the unfolding violence perpetrated by the Israeli state against Palestinian protesters in Gaza. Sixty were killed on 14 May alone, during protests against the moving of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

As we go to press, more demonstrations are taking place on 15 May, marking the Palestinian Nakba (catastrophe) – the forcing out of over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes 70 years ago, when Israel was founded.

The moving of the US embassy is just one of many provocative moves by Trump in the Middle East, where tensions are escalating on various fronts...

Trump's unilateral repudiation of the Iranian nuclear de-escalation deal has plunged the Middle East into a serious crisis.

Like a pyromaniac, he has poured oil on an already inflamed situation with Syria and neighbouring countries already devastated by a war that has lasted longer than World War One.

In its wake, new multifaceted wars and conflicts have broken out. On top of this, the recent Israeli missile strikes on Iranian forces in Syria could be a harbinger of a new war, initially between Israel and Iran/Syria but possibly leading to a new generalised regional conflagration.

There could also be 'blowback' for Europe with a new wave of refugees seeking safety in Europe as well as further terrorist outrages, which could spill over into the US itself.

Trump claims that in ripping up the current agreement this will end the threat of Iran "ever acquiring nuclear weapons". However, the outcome could be the exact opposite: the eventual acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran and others, such as Saudi Arabia, in response to this.

The Guardian wrote: "Mr Trump's invective relies on assertions that reinforce prejudices but have no basis in truth." It completely refutes the claim that Iran was on the "cusp of acquiring the world's most dangerous weapons".

The deal did allow Iran to continue to enrich uranium but "it neither allowed nor [was it] technically able to use this process to produce weapons grade uranium".

Moreover, under the agreement Iran could not reprocess plutonium as an "alternative path to a nuclear explosive". The Guardian concluded that the Trump speech was "estranged from the truth"; a polite way of saying it was a pack of lies.

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- Stop Israeli state slaughter
- Protest against Trump's UK visit on 13 July
- For a socialist alternative to division and conflict

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# TRUMP FEEDS MIDDLE EAST CRISES OVER IRAN DEAL

## No to imperialist interference - only workers' action can win peace



### What we think

Continued from front page

This latest example of overbearing arrogance by Trump representing US imperialism was preceded by an even further shift towards the right in his government, with the inclusion of CIA director Mike Pompeo as secretary of state, and particularly the Cold War warrior John Bolton who served in George W Bush's administration.

A long-term neoconservative, he played a prominent and disastrous role in the invasion of Iraq. His proposal to bomb Tehran was even too much for Bush to contemplate!

In 2000 Bolton said: "If I were redoing the UN security council today, I'd have one permanent member (the US) because that's the real reflection of the distribution of power in the world." The US, through Bolton, is prepared to put the rest of the world on 'rations' - as Trump's economic trade war against rival powers show.

This in turn threatens a generalised tit-for-tat and a world trade war. Moreover, the repercussions of military action can have further negative economic fallout.

The deranged Bolton's foreign policy goes beyond even Trump's "America first" policy. It is a naked assertion of 'America alone', a return to US unilateralism that was undermined by the failure of previous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

### Mass pressure

The US met with ferocious mass resistance worldwide, which had an effect on some governments like Germany and France who were compelled to oppose the US. But Trump is prepared to ignore French president Macron, whose grovelling pleas in Washington went down like a lead balloon in France, with his ratings dropping. Chancellor Merkel in Germany, even Boris Johnson and the squeaks of 'criticism' emanating from Theresa May have all been pushed aside.

This is because Trump and Bolton's ultimate aim is regime change in Tehran, not through military intervention, but savage sanctions which they hope would bring in a new government.

Even the few generals left in the Trump administration - like Defence Secretary General Mattis, who have been a 'moderating influence' on Trump - opposed this strategy which could have "unforeseen consequences" for the US.

They correctly believed that the nuclear agreement with Iran was working. They tried but failed to hold back



There has also been continued open defiance in Iran on issues such as the refusal of women to wear the hijab



photo Paul Mattsson

Trump from feeding the inferno which he has already started.

Even before his latest outrage Trump had stoked up the rage of the Palestinians with the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Already at boiling point, their fury was then intensified. According to Patrick Cockburn, "Israeli and American flags will flutter in the streets and there will be 150 giant billboards with the face of Mr Trump on them".

At the same time tens of thousands of Palestinians have sought to once more try and break through the fence surrounding Gaza, the 'biggest open-air prison in the world', with a large number of protesters killed by Israeli forces.

Trump and the neoconservatives that surround him may not score a quick and easy victory as they imagine. Before his threats, the Islamic hardliners in Iran, and even the 'reformist' Rouhani government, faced a mass revolt, not least from the working class which has begun to reassert itself through strikes. There has also been continued open defiance on issues such as the refusal

of women to compulsorily wear the hijab.

However, Trump's actions are more likely in the short term to cement support for the status quo in Iran. This could push back for a time the movement for an immediate challenge to the Islamic regime through an independent movement of the working class and poor masses.

Even the intensification of sanctions - which undoubtedly would aggravate the already desperate economic conditions of the Iranian masses - would not automatically be blamed on the regime, but the threat posed from outside.

The memory of its war with Iraq is seared into the memory of the Iranian people. British and US imperialism supported Saddam's invasion of Iran, which resulted in terrible suffering on both sides. 300,000 Iranians were killed and countless maimed and injured.

No outside power will be capable of launching such an attack now. But it is possible that Israel - which has in the past bombed alleged nuclear sites in Iran - could, at the behest of Trump and the US, launch similar but more serious bombings on identified nuclear sites.



photo Michael Vadon/CC

The Trump regime is threatening "devastating sanctions" against those such as the European powers who have said they will continue the treaty. There is no honour among thieves. Naked cash calculation - the amount of profit, loot, they can extract - along with their strategic interests is what matters, and not the interests of the people of the region.

Look at the double dealing of Putin who had a cosy meeting, a friendly chat with Israeli prime minister Netanyahu in Moscow, while Israeli jets were bombing the military positions of his 'allies' Iran and President Assad's Syria!

This demonstrates unequivocally that the working masses in the Middle East and elsewhere can only rely on their own forces, and their brothers and sisters worldwide, to show a way out of the nightmare in the region created by capitalism and imperialism.

They must organise and strengthen their own organisations, with class solutions to the problems of each country and the region as a whole.

### End to sectarianism

The current elections in Iraq demonstrate that the masses are yearning for an end to sectarian-based parties, which have only served to compound the enormous problems created by capitalism and imperialism through the monstrous military interventions which have taken place.

The brutal assertion of US interests and the threat of economic retribution will intensify the inter-imperialist rivalry between the US and others, China for instance, which has a considerable amount of trade with Iran, particularly oil.

The US believes that its economic and particularly banking dominance will bring any opposition to heel. But that is unlikely in the short term because sanctions can take a long time to be effective. The US can face economic damage as those who are attacked take counter-measures.

The Iranian regime has declared that if the agreement remains intact they will continue to support it. This is on condition that the original non-US signatories also stick by it.

Undoubtedly true to his word, Trump will attempt to impose "devastating sanctions" on those who continue to support and implement the deal.

No interference by outside powers: let the peoples of each country and the region decide their own fate, with the support and encouragement of the world working class and labour movement.

Additionally, the working class and the youth worldwide should raise their voices and prepare a new mass anti-war movement to help to thwart the arrogant and dictatorial actions of Trump, Saudi Arabia and Israel. He needs to be given a very hot reception in Britain when he visits in July.

This can help to prepare a movement in the Middle East which, like a giant broom, can sweep all the capitalists and imperialists, the sheiks, princes and sectarian politicians from the stage of history.

For details of local events, join the Socialist Students event on Facebook: 'Walk-out against Trump!' - facebook.com/events/374744106374762



Trump's actions are more likely in the short term to cement support for the status quo



Socialist Struggle Movement (Socialist Party's sister party in Israel/Palestine) joins a protest in solidarity with the people in Gaza photo SSM

## Exclusive: interview with Gazan activist "The more they kill us, the more the anger increases"

The Gaza Strip in recent weeks has seen one of the most important waves of Palestinian protests against the ongoing brutal siege enforced by Israel, in collaboration with Egypt, with unbearable consequences for living conditions.

The protests, which have attracted many thousands week after week, have been met with extreme lethal repression by the Israeli government. At the time of writing, over 100

demonstrators have been killed and 10,000 injured as the Israeli capitalist government strives to prevent a mass movement at all costs. Socialist Struggle Movement (CWI Israel/Palestine), which is in full solidarity with the protests, spoke to 24-year-old Gaza activist Ahmed A-Na'ouq from Deir al-Balah city in the Gaza Strip, about the bloody repression, the devastating conditions and the protest movement.

At one of the first demonstrations Ahmed describes the scene: "That was horrific. I saw protesters who were shot being carried away to the ambulances. The Israelis were fortified behind a hill of sand."

Thanks to a local generator, there was electricity during the conversation we had in the evening. Most of the time there is no regular supply.

"The more they kill us, the more the anger increases. If for instance the Israeli army kills my brother, I will not be afraid and just stay at home. And the Israeli army really killed my brother in the last war."

Over 2,200 people in Gaza died in the 2014 war. Ahmed lost his older brother and some of his friends. He has never left the besieged Gaza Strip.

"My ultimate dream is to travel. I've never been out of the Gaza Strip before. That's really destroying me personally."

The residents' protests in recent weeks are the most extensively organised to date against the siege.

About 25,000 to 40,000 arrived on the first day, and despite the heavy repression the demonstrations have continued. On 14 May, 50,000 mobilised.

The protest movement, called the 'Great March of Return', is scheduled to culminate on 15 May, the 70th anniversary of the Palestinian 'Nakba', when 800,000 residents were uprooted and have never been allowed to return.

70% of the Gazan population are the refugees' families from 1948. Ahmed's grandmother is a refugee from Beersheba.

"We're not demonstrating in the belief that if we just protest we could return to our lands, but we want to remind the world and emphasize that it's our right", Ahmed explains. "The people of the Gaza Strip are the only people currently demonstrating in the 'Great March of Return'."

"There were no parallel demos in the West Bank or Lebanon. Why? Because of the deteriorating conditions we face under the siege."

"For example, the water shortage is terrible, and the sea, which is the only resort for refreshment in the summer, is completely polluted, because there is no electricity to operate the sewage treatment plants", says Ahmed.

Many buildings remain destroyed since the 2014 war. The unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip is one of the highest in the world, around 40% officially, or 60% among workers under 30.

Media reports describe a rise in the number of suicide cases in the last two years. The average daily wage amounts to less than 60 Shekels (£12.30).

All sources of income are being stopped. The Palestinian Authority (PA) is adding salt to the wounds after cutting salaries for PA employees in Gaza - an income that many people depend on. Also, Hamas administrative employees do not receive full salaries.

Continued on page 4

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

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photo Paul Mattsson

## Exclusive: interview with Gazan activist

■ Continued from page 3

"The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees has been facing a devastating crisis since Trump announced the withdrawal of US funding. NGOs (supplying work and services) are collapsing because of a sharp decline in international funding.

"Israel has also stopped transfers of budgets as well. NGO employees who are lucky enough to get paid, get only 30% to 40% of their salaries."

The crisis of the NGOs was reviewed in an article published last month by Ahmed, an NGO employee himself - coordinator of the 'We Are Not Numbers' project, which publishes the daily stories of young Palestinians. Half of the population in Gaza is under 18, about one million people.

An entire generation has grown up in this catastrophic reality. It is from among these young people that the current protests have grown.

"The first demonstration I attended was on the second protest day, 31 March. Thousands of people took part, and what impressed me at first was the positive atmosphere, people waving flags and shouting slogans for freedom.

They were far from the fence, maybe 800 metres away, near the first row of houses. The closer I got

to the fence, and it wasn't much, there were more angry protesters, calling slogans, and the Israeli soldiers shot those people."

In order to paint the opposite picture of reality, Israeli government propaganda branded the demonstrators as the violent factor in the picture. Ahmed asks "who is the victim of violence in this distorted equation?"

The Israeli establishment press, slavishly serving again and again as a government propaganda tool to create security hysteria, highlights damage to agricultural fields caused by 'Molotov kites', while ignoring the extreme organised violence directed around the clock against the residents of the Gaza Strip and their protests.

The protest organising committee made it clear that it was not interested in a direct confrontation with the army.

Ahmed notes that in the face of demonstrations which include "angry young people deprived of any source of normal life," the Israeli army uses lethal weapons including, according to medical teams, particularly damaging exploding bullets (possibly dum-dum bullets).

We asked Ahmed to what extent he thinks people are deterred from participating in the demonstrations. "Most people support the protest, but there are those who say it is

pointless, it will not stop the siege and the crimes against us, and some people are really afraid [to participate] in this situation.

But the majority support it and think it's a great initiative, which helps attract the world's attention to our situation."

The movement is popular, he says, and is not controlled by any of the parties. Even the organising committee, which includes representatives from the different factions of the Palestinian national movement, doesn't control every initiative on the ground. He believes there will be a continuation of the protests even after 15 May.

And he has another message. "On both sides there are victims. Our situation in Gaza is simply catastrophic.

"The Palestinians are suffering a lot. And the Israelis are sometimes suffering from insecurity.

"So we have to find a solution that will work for both sides. Israelis my age should open their eyes more. What the Israeli government is doing is very wrong.

"They should oppose it. If they demand [a change on this issue] from their government, I think we have a chance for a future.

"We should all rise up against oppression and injustice and demand normal life, life that would guarantee equality for everyone"

# TORIES' CONTINUING EU QUAGMIRE IS CORBYN'S OPPORTUNITY

Ross Saunders

No-one is at the helm of the government's plan for Brexit. There is chaos at every level of the capitalist state as it threatens to crash out of the EU.

The government's Brexit plans have been defeated in the House of Lords an unprecedented seven times.

It is not clear that the Lords, whose function it is to safeguard the strategic interests of the capitalist class, will allow the government to get through anything but a 'soft Brexit' or a Brexit in name only - possibly through committing Britain to membership of the "EU lite" - the European Economic Area (EEA).

Those sections of the Tories, and of the other main parties, that are most connected to the strategic interests of British capitalism are working towards the same goal. That would enrage the Tory base and threaten the Tories at a time when they are already mortally wounded by the unpopularity that implementing austerity has brought them.

But the European Union occupies a key part of European capitalism's strategy to compete with the other world powers, by partially overcoming the limits of the nation state that obstruct the further development of the market.

### Capitalist mission

The capitalists will go to great lengths in order to preserve this project, even destroying the political parties through which they currently exercise their power in order to achieve that mission.

Their clearest-headed political representatives are on course for a head-on collision with right-wing Tory populists who rely on stirring up resentment on social issues like immigration to build a base of support.

And 'hard Brexiters' like Johnson, Gove and Davis are gaining ground: newly appointed home secretary Sajid Javid has dipped a toe in their camp by signalling that he is opposed to Theresa May's preferred option of a "customs partnership" with the EU, preferring maximum facilitation.

Disagreements currently contained within the cabinet could break out into the open at any point, and quickly develop beyond the control of the Tory leadership and the class of billionaires which stands behind them.

Corbyn's Labour Party could drive a wedge through the Tories at these points of weakness and smash them to smithereens, were it not for the fact that Labour is divided by Blairite rebellion.

Figures like Chuka Umunna are



photo Annika Haas/CC

aiming to paralyse Labour, discredit it, and if necessary destroy it, rather than allow it to be used to implement Corbyn's programme.

He is fairly openly preparing the ground for a new political vehicle for the super-rich, meeting once a week with Tory and Lib Dem MPs to campaign for a second referendum on EU membership.

Green MP Caroline Lucas foolishly occupied a seat on the platform at one of Umunna's events, alongside Tory MP Anna Soubry. No-one professing to be trying to end capitalist austerity should join forces with these representatives of capitalism.

### Single market

Umunna is, sadly, not alone. Labour peers, breaking ranks from Corbyn's call for a "jobs Brexit", are instead calling for membership of the EEA and the Single Market, with all the anti-worker restrictions that come with them.

Dogpiling on Corbyn after the antisemitism smears, Labour peers have accused their party's leadership of "paralysis" and "cowardice."

If the Labour right gets its way, the party's autumn conference - still stitched up by the right thanks to the timidity of Momentum's leaders and others on Labour's left - will overrule Corbyn on Brexit and sign up to the EEA.

Brexit did for Cameron and Osborne and finished Ukip off as well - at least for now - but it only created an opportunity which the left must seize. It is not too late for Corbyn to cut through the haze of confusion that the Blairites have created around Labour's position on Brexit.

Corbyn has correctly said that Britain needs a Brexit that puts the interests of ordinary people first. He should spell out that this means fighting to preserve and extend the rights of workers, including EU migrants in Britain, at the same time as removing the obstacles the EU and Single Market place in the way of socialist policies.

If the Blairites are not willing to support that policy - as they have so far shown - then they should be removed by the membership from any positions of power and responsibility. That requires a thoroughgoing democratisation of the party, including the introduction of mandatory reselection for all representatives.

# Royal wedding opulence... during longest pay squeeze in 200 years

**Bea Gardner**  
 Southampton Socialist Party

The cost of Harry and Meghan's marriage will be 110 times that of the average couple - 1,785 times including security - according to estimates by wedding planner Bridebook. This extravagance is a window into the lives of the super-rich who have not suffered the decade of austerity we have.

It should be a national outrage that the taxpayer will fork out £300,000 on just one marquee for the night, when rough sleeping has more than doubled since Harry's brother got married in 2011.

They will move into a grace-and-favour 21-bedroom "apartment" in the grounds of Kensington Palace, says House Beautiful. Meanwhile, two-fifths of their fellow Millennials are still stuck in overcrowded and extortionate private rentals by the age of 30 (see 'Young people trapped in private

rental' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)).

Just a glance at the anticipated costs of the day exposes the bitter reality of class division in Britain. Almost a year's pay on the UK median salary will go on sausage rolls alone.

  
**£300k**  
 The cost of just one marquee, when rough sleeping has doubled since 2011

And Markle - a privately educated celebrity who is soon to be the Duchess of Sussex - is not subject to the fear and insecurity that face most migrants and refugees starting out in Britain. (See 'Royal wedding exposes them-and-us visa system' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk).)

But while many working class

people will be seething at the inequality behind the headlines, the royal wedding couldn't have come at a better time for the Tories. They hope the round-the-clock coverage will distract the public, at least temporarily, from the catastrophe that is their weak and divided government.

Royal pageantry has long been used by the ruling class to divert attention from its problems - weddings in particular since World War One. But the capitalist establishment is foolish if it thinks a wedding is enough to soothe the effects of a decade of austerity.

In 2011, some might still have been clinging to nostalgic notions that we were "all in it together." But we are now in the middle of the longest pay squeeze in two centuries according to the Trade Union Congress.

We all know the super-rich have continued to get richer while we foot the bill. There should be no place in society for freeloading feudal relics. We say: stuff the wedding - abolish the monarchy - fight the cuts!

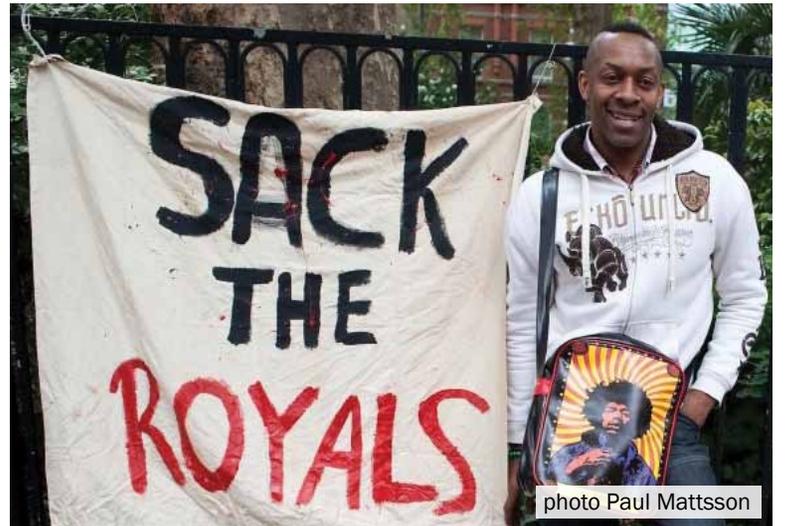


photo Paul Mattsson

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# Sunday Times Rich List 2018: Richest worth £724bn... as 100,000 kids fall into poverty



**Andrew Carss**  
 Salford Socialist Party

£724 billion. This is the combined wealth of Britain's 1,000 richest. The Sunday Times has produced its annual Rich List, and the working class can see who is dipping their hand in our pockets.

The top 1,000 have increased their worth by 10% in a year. In the same time, another 100,000 children fell into poverty - making 4.1 million, about 30% of all kids - according to the Department for Work and Pensions.

  
 Grangemouth oil refinery boss **Jim Ratcliffe** is the richest person in the UK with **£21bn**

The top spot this year has been claimed by spiv-in-chief union-buster Jim Ratcliffe, net worth £21 billion. Back in 2013, the Ineos chair and majority owner used the livelihoods of thousands of workers as leverage to extract £134 million from the taxpayer for his oil refinery at Grangemouth.

In real terms, average wages are still lower than they were in 2007. The Tories have offered NHS

workers a miserly below-inflation pay 'increase'. Wages are recovering slower than even after the Great Depression, according to the Trade Union Congress.

**1 out of 50**  
 In the top 50 political donors in this year's Rich List only one was not a Tory donor

Meanwhile, at the top of the pile, capital gains tax is 28%, and corporate tax just 20% - both lower than the higher rates of income tax! For all their spiel about "making work pay," in Tory and Blairite Britain work is disincentivised for the super-rich.

They ferret away their ill-gotten gains in tax havens, where capital languishes until a profitable investment opportunity opens up for it.

Under Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity leadership, donations to Labour from the very wealthy have almost disappeared. Meanwhile, of the top 50 political donors in this year's Rich List, only one was not a Tory donor.

Capitalist politicians tell us that if we stand up to the billionaire 'Masters of the Universe' and demand they pay more, they will simply leave the country, taking thousands of jobs with them. But

working people create all the wealth in society - the bosses just take it.

The Times has lauded the "triumph" of the "self-made" billionaires this year. "94% of most wealthy made own fortunes" in the top 1,000, it claims.

Really? Did Jim Ratcliffe make petrochemical products worth £2.3 billion profit last year himself? Or was that, in fact, the workers whose terms and conditions he battered in 2013 while relaxing on a £130 million yacht?

The answer to billionaire thieves threatening to leave is to nationalise their business empires under democratic workers' control and management. Britain is an enormously wealthy country. There is enough wealth to guarantee every person a decent standard of living - but not while supporting a billionaire class.

The Socialist Party fights for the nationalisation of the banks and top corporations as part of a democratic, socialist plan of production - and heavy, progressive taxes on the stolen fortunes of the super-rich.

**The top 1,000 have increased their worth 10% since last year. In the same time 100k children fell into poverty**

photo Paul Mattsson



photo Paul Mattsson

# PCS ELECTIONS - LEFT SWEEPS THE BOARD

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

This year's PCS election has produced a landslide victory for the Democracy Alliance (Left Unity and PCS Democrats) slate. Re-elected for the 17th time is Socialist Party member Janice Godrich as national president. All four vice president posts have been taken by Democracy Alliance (DA) candidates, with Socialist Party member Fran Heathcote topping the poll as deputy vice-president.

The DA slate completed its election victory by winning 29 of the 30 national executive committee places. Among those elected are five Socialist Party members, including for the first time Dave Semple, who joins Katrine Williams, John McInally, Marion Lloyd and Mark Baker.

The right wing has collapsed in

PCS, offering no candidates in these elections. The ballot decisively rejected the only opposition slate, that of the ultra-left - their single seat on the executive is due to a gap on the DA slate. This is a vote of confidence in Left Unity based on its record and on what it offers taking the union forward.

The first major challenge the new executive will face comes in the shape of this year's pay campaign. The union's 2018 pay claim for a fully funded increase of 5% (£1,200) and a commitment to centralised bargaining has been rejected by the government.

It has been rejected because the government says its budget expenditure limit is 1% and it expects civil servants' pay increases to be kept within it. Talks are ongoing. But if no progress is made we will need to move soon after our conference (22-24 May) to a statutory strike ballot.

Conference is certain to endorse the pay campaign strategy and will, in effect, be its launching pad for the

critical phase we are now entering. A consultative ballot was won convincingly last November, rejecting the pay cap and supporting action. This demonstrated that a basis exists for winning a statutory ballot.

Critical to securing a 'Yes' vote and a 50%-or-more turnout will be the active layer in groups and branches. A yes vote meeting all the requirements for a statutory ballot can be won. Putting pressure on a weak minority government, split into two warring factions over Brexit, can achieve results.

The mere threat of action has achieved limited gains above the pay cap in other areas of the public sector. Think what might be achievable with coordinated strike action across the public sector.

As we go to press, the PCS group election results are yet to be announced.

**See pages 8-9 for an interview with PCS assistant general secretary Chris Baugh - 'Building on the union's militant record'**



photo Aljona83/CC

## Belgium Lidl strike victory

Socialist Party members in Usdaw

A week-long series of strikes by Lidl workers in Belgium has led to increased staff at stores across the country. A strike broke out at one store in Oostkamp over the dismissal of a sales manager, which also raised the issue of workloads.

After a failed set of negotiations, where the company wanted to push for longer opening hours, including Sunday, a number of stores went on strike immediately, but soon began being joined by other less organised stores. By 27 April, 147 out of 302 stores in Belgium were reported as

closed by the company. The strikes forced management to concede an extra 42 staffing hours per store for six months, but this was rejected by the SETCa/BTK unions and the strike continued for a further two days until this was made permanent. Key in winning this was the picketing of the five distribution depots in the country, effectively shutting the company down.

Understaffing is a problem across the whole of the retail sector. The Lidl strike in Belgium shows once again that shop workers do not have to take the attacks of management lying down.

### TGI Fridays strike

Workers at TGI Fridays restaurants in Milton Keynes and Covent Garden, London, will take their first ever strike action on 18 May in a dispute over tips and minimum wage abuses which could cost waiting staff £250 a month in lost wages.

The Unite the Union members voted 100% on a 75% turnout to walk out. The strike will be the first in a series of 24-hour strikes over consecutive Fridays during the summer.

The dispute arose when the company introduced a new tipping policy with only two days' notice, which would see money earned by the waiting staff redirected to top up the low wages of kitchen staff. This was driven by the need to stop the high turnover of kitchen staff.

The move means waiting staff can lose up to £65 a week from their wage packets. There are further industrial action ballots at four more restaurants currently underway, and more planned.

### Cleaners action

Cleaners at Kensington and Chelsea town halls - all of who are migrant workers and members of the United Voices of the World trade union - are set to strike for the London Living Wage of £10.20 an hour. They are currently only paid the minimum, poverty wage of £7.83 an hour.

Stay tuned for strike dates and solidarity actions! Once again low paid migrant and precarious workers are taking the fight to the bosses! See facebook.com/uwvunion

### Wilmington walkout

Unison members at FCC Wilmington, who ended their two-week strike on 14 May, voted to strike for a further one month in the immediate future.

Please send messages of support to Adrian Kennett (secretary of Hull Unison) and Mick Whale (secretary of Hull Trades Council). Email hullnut@hullnut.karoo.co.uk and a.kennett@unisonhull.org.uk



photo David Owens

# STRIKE AT TESCO FOR BETTER PAY

**Scott Jones**  
Usdaw East London retail C026 chair (personal capacity)

Workers at Tesco Dagenham distribution site are striking over pay from 10pm on Thursday 17 May. Following over a year of negotiations between Tesco and the retail and distribution workers' union Usdaw, bosses have refused to improve their initial offer which was worth less than 3%.

Simon Vincent, an Usdaw rep at the site, says: "Our members work in temperatures one degree above freezing with difficult performance targets. Many are agency workers and 53 of them left in April alone as they simply cannot live on the wages offered. They feel exploited, underpaid and overworked."

Tesco announced in April that pre-tax profits for the year ending 24 February were a huge £1.3 billion - up from £145 million the previous year. As Simon points out this is "not about Tesco's ability to pay, it's about their refusal to pay. Another Tesco depot just five miles up

the road pays its staff £1.30 an hour more than in Dagenham."

The money is clearly there. Yet Tesco has slashed terms and conditions, premiums and jobs in stores and call centres in recent years. Striking back against these attacks and for better pay is absolutely correct and necessary and the new Usdaw president, Socialist Party member Amy Murphy, was elected with support for industrial action one of her main policies.

Picket lines are 10pm on 17 May and then 6am and 2pm on 18 May. Simon says: "We would love to see retail, distribution and the wider trade union movement come to our picket line and support our members and show solidarity." The Socialist Party sends solidarity and urges everyone who can to attend picket lines and show support on social media.

Turnout in the ballot was over 70% with 63% voting in favour of industrial action and further strikes could follow.

**Send messages of support to simonvincent69@hotmail.co.uk**



photo Phil Culshaw

## Lively Hull demo against college cuts

A lively demo of over 100 marched in Hull on 12 May in support of staff and students facing redundancies and cuts to Hull FE college. Some demonstrators travelled long distances to voice their opposition to the cuts.

Also in attendance were strikers from the ongoing dispute at FCC Wilmington waste processing plant. A bucket collection was taken to bolster their strike fund. The marchers pledged their

continuing support to both the FCC Wilmington strikers and the University and College Union members who will take strike action at Hull College on 17 and 18 May. **Mike Whale President Hull trades council**

## Harrogate College strike against cuts

**Iain Dalton**  
North Yorkshire Socialist Party Organiser

University and College Union (UCU) members at Harrogate College took strike action, coordinated with their colleagues in the Hull College Group at Hull College, against proposals to axe jobs. 9 May was the first strike day, with two more to follow.

Many workers are worried that the college will be spun off yet again, after being passed from Leeds Met

(now Leeds Beckett) to the Hull College Group several years ago, with the campus now reduced in size. So far management produced no timetable for how or when they are going to implement the proposed cuts in Harrogate.

The strike action was taken in the face of a hostile management who are seeking to undermine the campaign against the cuts in various ways. Students who are backing the strike have been told to delete social media posts and, like at Hull College during their protest against the cuts, subsidised ice cream and pizza was

made available in the college on the strike day. The strike received strong support from students, with many joining the picket lines to support their lecturers and lots signing petitions against the cuts. Local Socialist Party and Labour Party members also came down to join the pickets. UCU members were pleased with the support they received, including visits from local Unison reps who are also balloting their members for strike action. Despite the intimidation, staff are determined to fight the cuts.

## Leeds Acas conciliators walkout

You know the squeeze in the public sector is coming to a crunch when workers for an organisation that was set up to try to prevent strikes walk

out on strike themselves. But that was precisely what happened as conciliators at Acas took strike action on 11 May.

The detrimental changes that management have imposed on staff has been compounded by the defeat the government suffered on their charges for tribunal payments. Pickets from the PCS civil service union outside the Leeds office welcomed the court ruling that has led to the scrapping of the fees. But they pointed out that this is leading to an unsustainable workload at Acas as staff who have retired have not been replaced, leaving a much larger workload on the shoulders of fewer staff.

Many council workers passing by the pickets who took PCS leaflets commented that they are facing the similar workload problems themselves. As one of the pickets commented: "That's why we needed to do something about it and come out on strike."

**Leeds Socialist Party**

**Socialism Today**  
The Socialist Party's magazine

The May issue includes:

- Why 1968 still matters - Lessons from the events worldwide by Peter Taaffe
- Fighting capitalism - Review of 'No is not enough' by Sarah Wrack
- Gender recognition - Taking trans rights forward by Sarah Sachs-Eldridge

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# THOUSANDS MARCH ON TUC DEMO

## Now for coordinated action to kick out the Tories!

Scott Jones

A huge Socialist Party 'Tories Out!' banner greeted 20,000 demonstrators at the end of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) organised march and rally in central London on 12 May.

And if the main demand of the demo had been 'Tories out' instead of the vague 'A new deal for working people' then the turnout would have been huge too - possibly even hundreds of thousands.

Many snapped up Socialist Party placards with the same demand. The Communication Workers' Union - on the back of a massive vote for strike action, backed up by unofficial walkouts, that forced Royal Mail bosses to table an acceptable pay deal - had their own 'Tories out' placards.

Chants demanding this were made throughout by the lively Socialist Students contingent, which was joined by Tamil Solidarity and Socialist Party campaigners.

Pay was the other big issue. A big Usdaw shop workers' contingent was led by new president Amy Murphy, a Socialist Party member, with chants demanding a £10 an hour minimum wage and an end to zero-hour contracts.

Striking McDonald's workers marched towards the front of the demo demanding the same.

The PCS civil service union before the march called for it to be used to build for its upcoming national strike ballot and its contingent was one of the biggest and liveliest, reflecting the mood for action. PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka called for coordinated strike action in the rally afterwards.

The rally also heard from striking workers such as a TGI Fridays worker set to walkout on 18 May in London. Disgracefully though, nobody involved in the massive strikes against driver-only operation by guards in the RMT union was invited to address the rally, despite the action affecting five rail networks and the dispute on Southern Rail lasting two years.

Jeremy Corbyn joined marchers and spoke at the rally afterwards saying the Labour Party would "proudly support" workers who "organise together to improve their lives". This is welcome. However, as Unite general secretary Len McCluskey pointed out in his speech, there are those in Labour who don't agree and have been acting to undermine Corbyn. Labour councils in Birmingham during the bin workers strike and on Merseyside over driver-only operation on the trains have been at the forefront in attacking workers.

The Tories are weak. Coordinated action by the trade unions, linking disputes over pay, pensions and job losses could force them out, giving



photos by Paul Mattsson unless otherwise credited

photo David Owens

photo Sarah Wrack

Corbyn and Labour a chance to win a general election. But trade unionists and workers need all Labour MPs and councils to support them and Corbyn so that a general election really could mean 'a new deal' and not more Tory and Blairite cuts and austerity.

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

**“If the demand had been 'Tories out' instead of the vague 'new deal for working people', turnout would have been huge”**

### New NSSN conference date: Saturday 7 July 2018

The date of the National Shop Stewards Network annual conference has moved to Saturday 7 July so union members can 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.



Rearranged NSSN conference: Saturday 7 July, 11am to 4.30pm at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL  
 ■ Attendance fee £6  
 ■ Open to all trade union and anti-cuts campaigners  
 See [shopstewards.net](http://shopstewards.net)

Tessa Warrington  
Socialist Party  
building fund organiser

As regular readers of The Socialist will know, the Socialist Party is currently under threat of eviction from our national headquarters. We have had a presence in London since the early 1960s and have been at our current premises for over 17 years. We believe that it is essential that our HQ remains based in the capital city, therefore we have launched a building appeal for a new premises.

We do not have any rich backers. Our branches are based in working class communities, among workers, students and young people who have been hammered by austerity, debt and low pay.

But our members and supporters have been prepared to make a sacrifice to ensure that we have the funds we need, with many paying a week's income or more to the appeal. A single parent of two living on continually squeezed benefits has pledged £100 and is donating a proportion from the sale of his car. A new 12-year-old member has pledged a whole week's pocket money of £5!

Together we have already smashed through £150,000 in pledges - an enormous achievement. But we believe there is the potential to go beyond that. We are looking for a building to buy or rent in London, where rents are high; and large enough properties to buy are over a million pounds. We've had some big one-off donations of £10,000 and £5,000 from savings and windfalls, but also a large number of smaller donations.

Your donation, however big or small, will make a difference. Be part of something bigger - donate to the Socialist Party building fund and know that you're part of fighting for a better world.



photo Senan

## Socialist Party building fund

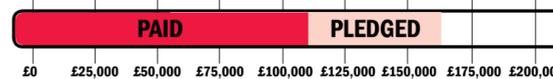
### Donate to the building fund today!

You can make a donation at [socialistparty.org.uk/donate](http://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 building fund



### Save Southall Town Hall legal hearing success

The Save Southall Town Hall campaign won the first round of a legal challenge on 19 April to defend this iconic building, and to preserve it as a genuine public and secular space for all members of our community.

Kate Markus QC agreed that our judicial review challenge should proceed to a full hearing. She accepted that we had legitimate concerns and grounds for reviewing Ealing council's decision and that

the council must explain the failure to consider the community value and use of the building.

The significance of this first round victory should not be underestimated. The claimant, Mr Mohinder Pal, is a local pensioner with no funds to his name who has taken on the might of the council. It resembles a David versus Goliath battle.

The town hall is a public asset and an important historical building. It currently houses many charities and businesses, providing advice and support to vulnerable people.

**Save Southall Town Hall campaign**



On 9 May, Socialist Party members who are part of the Save Our Square campaign in Walthamstow, east London, lobbied the annual general meeting of Capital & Regional (C&R).

C&R is the developer that plans to build on Walthamstow Town Square, taking a third of the public space, 81 healthy adult trees and the children's playground - all to build unaffordable flats in monster blocks of up to 29 storeys.

We were joined by Luton Town Football Club supporters, who have their own campaign against C&R.

Most of the shareholders refused to speak to us. But even on a quiet street in central London we met several people affected by gentrification or involved in anti-developer campaigns of their own.



photos Save Our Square



### Socialist Party Fighting Fund

Region	£ target	£ received	April-June 2018	Deadline 30 June 2018
North West	2,100	1,373		65%
Yorkshire	3,300	1,844		57%
South West	1,800	1,012		56%
Northern	750	385		51%
East Midlands	1,850	687		37%
Wales	2,300	962		30%
Southern	1,600	411		26%
West Midlands	2,600	529		20%
Eastern	1,200	219		18%
London	6,100	817		13%
South East	750	15		2%
Other	5,650	856		15%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30,000</b>	<b>8,885</b>		<b>22%</b>



## 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](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk) - or if you're not online, Socialist Inbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

### ■ Gentrification marches on

Readers of the Socialist may remember our letter regarding our next-door neighbour (see 'The Socialist inbox', issue 969, at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)). As a result of austerity and gentrification, all his patterns of life and support fell away and he was left with social services asking us, his neighbours, to feed him. Austerity and gentrification march on.

A couple of months after our letter, we sadly found our neighbour dead in his home. A quick sale followed, and his small two-bed house was bought up by a property developer.

Within weeks it has been transformed, and it is now about to be sold for £650,000! Either that, or rented for a minimum of £2,000 a month.

We and our small bunch of working class neighbours are gradually being more and more squeezed, as elderly residents pass away or move out. No wonder our TUSC local election stand in Waltham Forest caused such a stir

- the press exposed the big numbers of London councillors who are landlords or linked to building firms.

We need rent control and council homes, not deals with property developers while the working class is forced out!

**Paula and Ken  
Walthamstow, east London**

### ■ Corbyn witch hunt

The current surreal campaign to undermine Jeremy Corbyn by tarring him with the poison of antisemitism undoubtedly affected the local election results, with many Labour supporters confused by the disarray in Labour's ranks. What are the facts?

The prosecutors: the Tories, Blairite Corbyn-baiting MPs, the Daily Mail, Daily Express, Telegraph, the Scum, various other right-wing journals - and the BBC, a relentless anti-socialist vehicle paid for by the taxpayer.

Then there is Lord Polak, honorary president of Conservative Friends of Israel, who has sent a letter to the Metropolitan Police chief urging a probe into alleged

antisemitic abuse in Labour.

Their evidence: mostly innuendo, conflating the actions of far-right thugs with Labour, describing democratic challenges to right-wing MPs as creating a 'toxic' atmosphere in party branches.

Mega-publicity is given to the Jewish Leadership Council. This body's pronouncements on internal Labour affairs are treated as the final word of all Jewish people, irrespective of their class position. Until recently it was chaired by Sir Mick Davis, who in June 2017 was appointed chief executive of the Conservative Party.

The defence: hundreds of thousands of Labour Party members, including members of 50-odd years' standing, who have witnessed no institutional antisemitism.

The examples of antisemitism given by the prosecution are: Ken Livingstone's clumsy attempt at explaining the right-wing character of Zionism - and Marc Wadsworth's observation that a right-wing MP, Ruth Smeeth, was working closely with the right-wing press.

You don't have to be Hercule Poirot to detect that there is a prima facie case for a conspiracy to bury Corbyn and his anti-austerity policies with him.

Why, then, in the face of this overwhelming evidence, does Andrew Gwynne, when being badgered by Andrew Marr, declare "Jeremy says there is no conspiracy." This ludicrous posture is echoed by the Momentum leadership!

Those caught in the spotlight of a witch-hunt throughout the ages believe that if you keep schtum or throw the slavering pack a bone it will satisfy them. The opposite is the case: they always demand more.

It is time for Jeremy to declare that it is indeed a strategy by the representatives of capitalism to mortally damage the ideas he espouses. Anything less will, like the deranged prosecutors of Salem, only whet the appetite of the anti-socialist pack.

**Tony Mulhearn  
Liverpool**

### ■ Jailed TUSC agent writes

I would just like to inform your readers after ten and a half weeks in Nottingham Prison I was moved to Sudbury open prison on 27 April. It should have been within first few weeks I was in Nottingham!

Sudbury is so different to Nottingham that my stress levels are already down. Nottingham is the second most violent prison in the country. There had been nine suicides before I arrived, I was told. It has been a bit of a nightmare for me at times, but your readers' letters kept my spirits up.

In Sudbury I can have my meals sat down in a canteen! I have access to showers and phone whenever I want. I have a key to my room and can come and go as I please!

There are no bars on my window. My room is bigger. Am not sleeping on a bunk bed. I can post and collect my mail. My outward letters are not checked and I don't have to put my prison number on the back of my envelope.

The best thing is I can go walking around the massive grounds around here. I have already got a job gardening. It's so good to be out in the fresh air for walks and work rather than being banged up most of the time.

They have some good facilities here to do

education and work courses. The only drawback is the visitors centre. It's too small, with a capacity of 25 - when you have over 500 prisoners!

I am been released on tag on 7 June - this means I will be on home curfew from 7pm till 7am till 27 September. I will have to look for work come June.

I hope, if my health is up to it, to attend Socialism 2018, as we have been to previous ones before.

Once again, many thanks to your readers who write to me. I hope TUSC did well in the elections. Am not allowed to read the Socialist, but am sure people who visit and write to me will keep me informed.

Yours in solidarity,  
**Chris Fernandez**

■ A5447ED, West Wing 5-13,  
HMP Sudbury, Ashbourne Road,  
Derbyshire DE6 5HW

### ■ Lessons of history

The lessons we learn from history will continually appear as flashbacks, until the organisation of the masses brings these lessons to the forefront of all our minds. As activists, it is a responsibility not just to do - but to remember why.

**Denise Tooley-Okonkwo  
Mansfield**

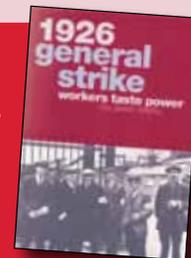
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# Ronan Point disaster 50 years on - fighting for safe, affordable housing then and now

**Bill Mullins**

Lewisham and Southwark  
Socialist Party

**O**n 16 May 1968, 50 years ago, Ronan Point, a high-rise tower block in Newham, east London, collapsed killing four people and injuring 17.

The reason was, as the constructors knew only too well, that the system used to build the 25-storey block was fundamentally flawed.

It was built as part of what was called the 'large panel system' where walls and floor were made off-site and then reassembled into the building itself.

## Cause

The cause of the collapse was a gas explosion (a relatively small one) in the kitchen of a pensioner. When gas leaked from her cooker and exploded Mrs Hodge the pensioner along with her oven were relatively unharmed.

But the side walls of her kitchen blew off and because they were supporting walls, the above four flats collapsed into her kitchen, the combined weight of the collapse went on to collapse all the floors below right down to the ground floor and like a house of cards the whole of one side of the block was demolished.

An inquiry later concluded that the building regulations were totally inadequate and should be strengthened, including the supporting joints between the walls.

But later on, after the block was rebuilt, with the stronger joints, the council was forced to demolish the block in 1986, and an independent

**Marching for safe homes in Newham in 2017 in the wake of Grenfell** photo Mary Finch



**Ronan Point after the explosion** photo Derek Voller/CC



architect concluded, after a forensic brick-by-brick examination of the demolished block that there were shocking defects in many parts of the building including that mains gas should never have been connected to such a block in the first place.

Ronan Point is part of a sorry list of building disasters including Lakenhall House in Camberwell in 2009 where six people were killed and of course Grenfell Tower.

What runs through all this is the cold cruelty of the ruling class when it comes to the safety and security of the working class in our society. The right to adequate safe shelter is a basic human need. The inability of the present capitalist system to meet this need would by itself justify its removal from the scene of history.

But the story gets worse when we take into account the lack of organised national political opposition to the shenanigans of the bosses. Though there are many successful local campaigns by residents.

Recently in my own borough of Southwark the exposure of past crimes of negligence by the Blairite Labour leaders of the council was starkly revealed by the scandal of the Ledbury estate where four blocks were deemed unsafe because they were built using the same large

panel system as Ronan Point.

The tenants had been complaining for over 20 years that huge cracks had appeared on the blocks and when they were forced to bring in their own independent expert advisors it was revealed that the blocks should never have been connected to the mains gas.

## New measures

But it was not always like this and need not be so today either. The Labour government in 1947 introduced new measures to ensure that a mass council house building programme could get off the round.

For example they ruled that land that was needed to build these homes could be compulsory purchased at their present value - not at what the value would be once planning permission was given.

At the time an acre of agricultural land was worth only one hundredth of what an acre of urban land would cost.

They did this to ensure that when compulsory purchase orders were made of privately owned land then the owners could not make a huge profit. In other words the bulk of spending could go into the cost of the actual building material and labour costs to build the homes themselves.

This is what lies behind the unwillingness of Labour councils to borrow money to build council housing even if they were allowed to borrow money from the finance sector.

Under the post-war rules even the Tory government of Harold Macmillan in 1953 built more council homes than any government before or since.

The Tories later reversed the rules on land values so their mates in the property business could once again cash in on the higher land values.

Thatcher's policies in particular in housing opened up a rich vein of property speculation for profiteering developers with the introduction of right to buy. As a result 40% of homes bought under 'right to buy' are now owned by private landlords and developers.

This was a seismic shift from building homes to meet a human need to instead where homes are only built to enhance the potential profits for developers. So it is no wonder that we have seen continually the private developers seek to cut corners in the actual buildings themselves.

Successive governments, including Labour ones, have made a 'bonfire of regulations' allowing the get-rich-quick developers to cut corners.

In the North East under the 1970s Labour government the scandal hit new heights when corrupt local councils collaborated with shady developers to build council high-rise blocks with, as soon became apparent, many inbuilt problems. This was featured in the BBC drama 'Our friends in the north'.

Council estates have been deliberately allowed to deteriorate so that the media can label them 'sink estates' but there is nothing fundamentally wrong with putting homes into high rise blocks as long as they have the due care and attention to make them safe and secure.

After all, look at any of the blocks were the well-off live, such as the Barbican flats in the City of London. They are well cared for and look entirely presentable to passers-by and no doubt have all the modern safety systems, such as sprinklers, built in.

The issue of safe, affordable housing can only be resolved completely under a socialist society. But we should demand and campaign now for the policies espoused by Jeremy Corbyn, such as a mass programme of council house building. But also, as Corbyn recently indicated, compulsory purchases of land at existing value as a precursor to the nationalisation of all land.

Becci Heagney

On Saturday 18 May 1968, General Charles de Gaulle, president of France, was forced to cut short his state visit to Bucharest. He had wanted to provide a meal for the Romanian heads of state in the French embassy. But the food was never delivered - the French airline workers were on strike.

When he tried to make a phone call, he was told the operator was on strike too. He protested - "but it is for General de Gaulle!" And he received the reply - "and what difference does that make to me? I am on strike for the whole world!"

When de Gaulle returned to France, he was no longer in control. Since the 'official' general strike on Monday 13 May, workers had continued to take action. Not only that, they were taking control of their workplaces and setting up committees to make decisions on running French society.

Examples include prices in shops being determined by elected workers' and peasants' committees. In fact, shops could only trade if they had signs in their window signed by the different trade union federations that said: "This shop is authorised to open. Its prices are under permanent supervision by the unions."

Reactionary 'Committees for the Defence of the Republic' had formed. But a fascist demonstration opposing the general strike was joined by a mere 2,000 people. In contrast, by Sunday 19 May, two million were on strike - including all public transport, the metal industry, all nationalised industry, and even the banks.

Picket lines were placed on petrol stations to ensure petrol only went to those who needed it, such as doctors. Striking footballers occupied their headquarters and demanded sport be run by and for the players and fans: "football for the footballers." News and radio outlets were controlled by the workers.

### Sud Aviation

It was the Sud Aviation metalworkers in Nantes who had been the first to continue striking after the official action ended. They locked their bosses in their offices and played the Internationale, the world revolutionary socialist anthem, over the speakers.

The strike spread quickly to all kinds of workers across the country - even actors and weather forecasters went on strike!

Winning over the middle layers of society to the side of the working class is an important feature of a successful revolutionary movement. So is the willingness of the working class to fight to the end, increasingly apparent in May 1968.

On Monday 20 May, six million workers were out. All the ports and mines, the department stores, and the car manufacturers. The next day it was eight million, including nuclear power plants - more than half of all workers.

By Friday 24 May, two-thirds of the workforce were on strike: ten million workers. Joined by the mass

## France, May 1968: week three

# REVOLUTIONARY EXPLOSION AS TWO THIRDS OF WORKFORCE JOIN STRIKE



protests of the students, it was truly a general strike and a revolutionary situation.

In reality, dual power existed. The official government structures were

floating in mid-air with most decisions made by workers' and peasants' action committees. De Gaulle fled the country. When he tried to

give a speech to the nation, it wasn't aired by the worker-controlled television station.

Throughout the country, discussion and debate had exploded among workers and young people. Factories began to declare they were "on strike indefinitely." Thousands of leaflets and posters were produced daily as ordinary people constantly discussed political ideas.

Despite this incredibly powerful position of the working class of France, the leadership of the trade unions and the Communist Party of France were trying to hold the movement back and limit its demands rather than risk a revolution which could threaten not just

capitalism but the Stalinist dictatorships in the East.

Workers had been increasingly involved in strike action in the run-up to May 1968. Wages had not kept up with inflation that totalled 45% over ten years.

Unemployment had grown, while those with a job were working on average 45 hours a week. Production lines in factories had been policed by employers' armed guards.

So when the general strike began, it quickly grew as workers in every industry saw it as an opportunity to protest their conditions.

The demands of the movement went beyond this as the general strike took on a different character to normal strikes. As they occupied the factories with red flags hoisted above them, the workers' slogans became "the factories to the workers" and "power to the working class."

Workers began to plan production for their needs. For example, in the CSF electronics factory in Brest they produced walkie-talkies to help organise the strikes. Printers either changed hostile headlines or refused to print newspapers attacking the strike.

### Communist Party

Despite the obvious reality, the Communist Party and the leaders of the CGT union federation argued that any attempt to go beyond immediate economic demands was "adventurism."

In fact, they would shortly begin negotiations with a government that had no power and could have been swept aside. By doing so, they actually strengthened the position of de Gaulle and legitimised his regime.

The Trotskyist left had only small forces, such as the Internationalist Communist Party (PCI, French section of the Fourth International), which was calling for unity between Trotskyist parties. The PCI demanded rejection of de Gaulle's proposed referendum on limited reforms to defuse the movement, and any negotiation with the all-but-defeated government and employers.

Instead they put forward demands for linking up the various workers', students' and peasants' committees, and the formation of a workers' government. However, the PCI hadn't built a base among the working class and wasn't able to influence the decisions made by the action committees in the factories.

If, like the Bolshevik Party had done in the run-up to 1917, the Trotskyists in France had consistently built in the factories, then with the correct political programme they could have won the leadership of a working class already on the road to revolutionary change.

Without this leadership, the Communist Party and the CGT were preparing to betray the movement.

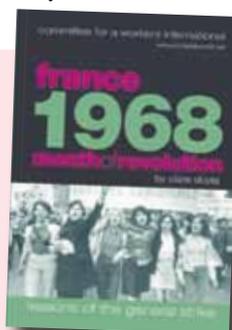
■ Read more in the next issue of the Socialist: May 1968, week four - union and 'Communist' leaders hand power back to defeated bosses

### 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](http://socialistparty.org.uk)

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

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



Twitter: follow events as they happened @France68LIVE

# Spain: Student general strike against sexist, capitalist 'justice' system



photo Sindicato de Estudiantes

## Sindicato de Estudiantes (Students' Union)

The general student strike on 10 May, called against the shameful light sentencing of the 'wolfpack' rapists, was a great success. More than one million students emptied classrooms and more than 100,000 attended over 60 demonstrations organised by the Sindicato de Estudiantes (SE - Students' Union) and Libres y Combativas platform of SE and Izquierda Revolucionaria (CWI in the Spanish state).

Madrid city centre was filled by over 20,000 young people with an exceptionally combative atmosphere; the same in Barcelona where over 40,000 filled the streets of the Catalan capital.

In the Basque country, thousands marched in Bilbao, Gasteiz, Donosti and Iruña, as well as in all provinces of Andalucía, Valencia, Galicia,

Aragon, Extremadura, etc. Tens of thousands of students shouted loud and clear: "It was rape!"; "Sister, we are your 'wolfpack'!"; "I believe you!" and "Down with sexist 'justice'!"

It was an extraordinary day of struggle in which students expressed their support and solidarity with the victim of the wolfpack as well as rejection of all such savage attacks, which we will not allow to continue, despite the 'justice' system protecting perpetrators.

We showed that the feminists who defend a programme of struggle and anti-capitalism are widening their influence. This is a feminism which is not afraid to call things by their proper name, does not hesitate to denounce the justice system which protects rapists. A feminism which fights the reactionary policies of the People's Party (PP - the main ruling party of prime minister Mariano Rajoy), Ciudadanos and all others who pretend to be feminists while sus-

taining the capitalist system which oppresses and kills us.

The sentence handed to the wolfpack is part and parcel of the misery which the capitalist system and this corrupt right-wing government forces millions of women, young people and workers to experience on a daily basis.

They wish to send us a clear message: while there is persecution of those who struggle, there is impunity for sexists and corrupt politicians and bosses.

We made history once more in the struggle for freedom. But we cannot now let our guard down. From Libres y Combativas and the Sindicato de Estudiantes we call on all young people to continue to mobilise against all oppression and invite you to join us in building a revolutionary, anti-capitalist feminist movement.

■ **Read statement in full on [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)**

## Sweden: Socialist elected leader of 77,000-strong tenants' union

Kristofer Lundberg, a leading member of Rättvissepartiet Socialisterna (Socialist Justice - CWI Sweden), was recently elected as leader of the 77,000 member tenants' union in West Sweden with 60% of the vote from delegates to the union's regional council.

Never before has a regional election in the tenants' union received such attention, both before and after the election.

Kristofer, who made no secret of being a member of Rättvissepartiet Socialisterna, stood on a platform to: "Rebuild the Tenants' Union into a fighting organisation."

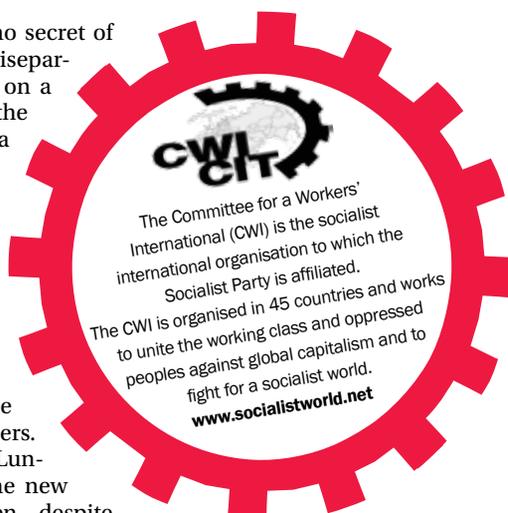
The newspaper, Göteborg Direkt, that reaches all of the city's households, with a circulation of 1.2 million, wrote that Kristofer: "...wants to make the tenants' union an organisation of struggle and mobilise members. This weekend Kristofer Lundberg was elected as the new chairman of West Sweden - despite

opposition from the union tops."

■ **See [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net) for full report**



Kristofer Lundberg



### What we stand for

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

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

Our demands include:

#### PUBLIC SERVICES

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

#### WORK AND INCOME

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

#### 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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# 'WHEN WE FIGHT, WE CAN WIN' CAMPAIGN HALTS HOSPITAL CLOSURE



photo Mary Finch



**Mike Forster**  
Hands Off HRI campaign chair

Local campaigners fighting to save hospital services in Huddersfield have won an important victory. We were delighted and surprised by an announcement by Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt on 11 May.

He said of the NHS bosses' proposals for Huddersfield Royal Infirmary (HRI) that there are a variety of failings in their case. The proposals lack consistency, there is widespread scepticism, there is no evidence of adequate out-of-hospital care, the loss of beds is unjustifiable and there is no evidence of capital finance being available.

Hunt correctly concludes that the proposal to downgrade HRI is "not in the best interests of the people" of Kirklees and Calderdale. He has ordered the

clinical commissioning group (CCG) to develop new proposals which take into account these misgivings. Their initial plan is dead in the water.

This outcome has completely vindicated the long and relentless campaign waged by Hands Off HRI over the last two and a half years. We've had mass demonstrations, lobbies in London, local organising groups and a huge fundraising effort.

It also supports the findings of the courts that ordered a full judicial review, which is currently scheduled to go ahead in June. There is little doubt that that decision to allow a legal challenge to the proposals has concentrated minds.

The judge identified five counts of public law which could be tested. Hands Off HRI commissioned three professional clinical, financial and building experts to scrutinise the proposal in preparation for the court

hearing. Their findings completely bear out Hunt's observations.

Where does this leave the future of HRI? While delighted with this decision, Hands Off HRI recognises that this is not the end of the proposal to shut our hospital. It is the same CCG which is being asked to think again.

Hunt has ordered the relevant authorities to develop a new plan over the next three months. Hands Off HRI will be engaging with this process by submitting further evidence.

However momentum is now with our campaign and the whole town is lifted by the decision. There is renewed confidence that we can see this through to the end.

If you stand up and fight, you can win. It's only a done deal if you do nowt.

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