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Labour and the trade unions

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STOP THE TORY



photo Paul Mattsson



photo Rhys A/CC

WRECKERS

Matt Whale
NHS nurse

The official NHS England budget deficit is almost £1 billion - with some analysts putting the real figure closer to £4 billion. The ongoing NHS crisis shows no sign of slowing down.

Increased waiting times, chronic understaffing, underinvestment, pri-

vatization, rock-bottom staff morale, and retention figures through the floor point only one way.

As a nurse, I see every day the struggles facing NHS staff, and the impact that has on patients. The staffing crisis results in skeleton services, nurses moved on a daily basis to cover gaps across hospitals, and unsafe numbers on wards.

'NHS Improvement' reports NHS England is £960 million in the red - or four times that according to the Nuffield Trust thinktank. And we are officially short around 35,000 nurses and 10,000 doctors.

These deficits and the crisis in the health service are no accident. Our NHS celebrates its 70th birthday this year, but it's an anniversary the Tories, Blairites and capitalist class

never wanted to reach.

It was only the struggle of working people, the trade unionists and socialists of yesteryear, that forced capitalism to grant the concession of a National Health Service. Since its conception, profit-hungry big businesses and politicians have chipped away at the jewel in the crown of Britain's working class.

Underfunding and cuts by successive Tory and Labour governments - coupled with the disaster of privatisation schemes like 'PFI' and the EU-backed 'internal market' - have left the NHS in a financial hole.

PFI schemes in particular have crippled the NHS. It sums up the insanity of capitalism that on the one hand you have brand new hospital wards - but on the other, because of

austerity and these rip-off PFI contracts, trusts can't afford to staff and use them.

But all is not lost. NHS workers are prepared to fight for our futures and our patients. The historic junior doctors' strike in 2016 showed us a glimpse of the potential the NHS workforce has if the unions choose to lead a fight.

The number of local NHS disputes and strikes popping up is increasing. Alongside this are the fantastic victories by grassroots campaigns against NHS closures - including at Glenfield, Chatsworth and Huddersfield, where the Socialist Party played a leading role.

What we need is national action from our trade union leaders. Building for serious, coordinated

industrial action could do more than stop the cuts - it could easily end the Tory government.

The Tories, Blairites and capitalist class want to see the NHS broken up and sold to privateers like Virgin Care to run our services for profits, not patients.

Jeremy Corbyn should use the 70th anniversary demonstration on 30 June to renew and extend his calls to nationalise privately run services and invest in our NHS. But he should also make it a launchpad for action: build for mass demonstrations in support of coordinated strike action to get the Tories out!

■ **National march for the NHS - 70th anniversary: Assemble 12pm at Portland Place, London W1A 1AA**



What we think

RMT REJECTS LABOUR AFFILIATION - NOW STEP UP THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The special conference (special general meeting - SGM) of the RMT transport workers' union on 30 May was an important milestone in the battle to re-establish a political voice for workers after the bleak years of Tony Blair's New Labour. The RMT had been formally invited in March to re-affiliate to the Labour Party - from which it had been expelled in 2004 - and a two-month branch consultation took place around a Q&A document produced by party officials responding to issues raised by the union. With the results in from the consultation, the RMT national executive committee decided, by nine votes to three, to recommend to the SGM that the union should not re-affiliate at this stage but instead continue with its current political strategy.

This, the recommended motion explained, acknowledges that Labour "has the potential to be a mass party of the working class" since Jeremy Corbyn's election to the leadership, but that the RMT can best "support, defend and develop the socialist advances that have been made" through its own independent political activity.

This was the position, argued for by the Socialist Party along with others in the broadly-backed Campaign to Defend the RMT's Political Strategy, which was agreed at the SGM.

The current political strategy also includes retaining RMT representation on the steering committee of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), co-founded by the late Bob Crow (then RMT general secretary) with the Socialist Party and others. Since 2016 TUSC has contested local elections only against right-wing Labour candidates implementing Tory policies, making sure that the worst Blairite cutters are not left unchallenged.

Jeremy Corbyn

The SGM decision against affiliation was not a rebuff to Jeremy Corbyn or anti-austerity policies. His occupancy of the Labour leadership is a bridgehead for the working class against the capitalists, including their Blairite agents within the party. Building from this bridgehead is the clearest route, at this point, through which workers could achieve a mass party of our own.

But the RMT was absolutely right not to unconditionally affiliate to an organisation whose structures are still largely those inherited from New Labour, which had neutered the unions' role within the party. The RMT has far greater leverage to fight for working class political representation with its current strategy than it could have achieved by surrendering its political independence and potentially handing £240,000 a year in affiliation fees (for its full membership) to the party machine.

The RMT's decision, however, should be a wake-up call to other left-led trade unions, both affiliated and unaffiliated. They must now urgently discuss with the RMT the concrete steps needed to transform Labour into a workers' party; to restore unions' collective rights and proportionate weight in candidate selection, policy formation, and the administration of the party locally and nationally.



photo Sarah Wrack

Such measures would include mandatory reselection of MPs, with unions having the right to directly nominate candidates onto parliamentary shortlists. Local Campaign Forums, responsible for council candidate panels, should be replaced by a 'district Labour Party' structure, with directly elected union branch delegates.

The National Policy Forum, where unions hold just 16% of the votes, should be abolished and policy-making power restored to the party conference. And all expelled socialists and organisations should be readmitted, in a democratic federal arrangement, including the Socialist Party.

If the Labour Party Democracy Review, reporting in September, doesn't make such a decisive break with Blairism's organisational legacy, the left-led unions cannot just sit back.

They should insist that Jeremy Corbyn presents his own proposals directly to trade unionists, members and registered supporters like he did in the leadership contests and with a similar public campaign. Then affiliation would offer the prospect to fighting trade unionists of real collective control by workers over their political representatives.

But action is also needed now to convince militant workers that a fundamental break with Blairism has been made politically too. The SGM debate revealed how the experience of right-wing Labour-led councils implementing austerity policies is shaping workers' perception of the Labour Party and undermining Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity message.

The RMT has conference policy supporting local councils setting no-cuts budgets by using their reserves and borrowing powers. Yet right-wing Labour councils have now passed three sets of cuts budgets in the period since Jeremy Corbyn was elected as leader.

This was one of the issues the union raised with the Labour Party in the affiliation negotiations but the officials who drafted the party's response would not give a straight answer. But why can't an 'anti-austerity party' unequivocally say that its councillors, mayors, and

assembly members will not implement austerity?

As RMT delegates gathered for their SGM the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), which had re-affiliated to Labour in November 2015 without the negotiation process that the RMT is going through, announced a nine-to-one vote for strike action in the West Midlands in a dispute with the Labour-controlled fire authority over imposed contracts (see page 6). One action - why doesn't the national party suspend these alleged Labour councillors unless they back down? - would be worth a thousand 'alternatives to austerity' policy papers.

Unite's local government section also has policy for no-cuts budgets. The PCS civil servants' union, whose recent conference decided for a new consultation on political strategy, has opposed Labour-led authorities implementing cuts. They too, alongside the RMT, should be demanding concrete action from Jeremy Corbyn and shadow chancellor John McDonnell.

Even a pledge by Corbyn and McDonnell that an incoming Labour government would replenish council reserves and underwrite borrowing undertaken to avoid cuts would transform the situation in local government. How would councillors then justify continuing with austerity policies to council workers and local service users?

It would be anti-austerity politics in action and, if backed up by a mass campaign, could be a potentially terminal challenge to the May government.

The RMT SGM decision was not a rebuff to Jeremy Corbyn but it does contain a warning. The transformation of the Labour Party into New Labour was not one act but a process consolidated over years. Overturning that legacy politically and organisationally and re-establishing Labour as a workers' party will also, obviously, not be accomplished by one act.

But it will require a mass movement consciously organised to champion that goal, prepared to take on the representatives of capitalism within the labour movement at every stage. The RMT has confirmed that it is ready for the fight. Now the other left-led unions, and Jeremy Corbyn himself, must step up to the plate.



The other left-led unions must now urgently discuss with the RMT the concrete steps needed to transform Labour into a workers' party



photo Paul Mattsson

RMT special conference debates political strategy

RMT Socialist Party members

Delegates to the RMT transport union's special general meeting (SGM) have voted to maintain the union's current political strategy and not to affiliate to the Labour Party.

The union will develop its existing strategy of supporting Jeremy Corbyn's leadership but the right-wing grip on the parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) and local councils, together with the absence of real influence for affiliated unions, prevented affiliation at this time.

The different political situation in Scotland also made a proposal for

affiliation extremely difficult.

The SGM debate reflected the understanding, on all sides, that Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader opens up the possibility of Labour becoming a genuine mass workers' party.

The issue of contention was how best to respond to this. The discussion at the SGM was framed by the 2017 annual general meeting where delegates had raised specific concerns.

Not least of these was the question of Scotland. The RMT had been the only union to ballot its members in Scotland before the 2014 independence referendum, coming out for a Yes vote while Labour campaigned for No.

Yet affiliation would mean that the union could only support Labour candidates in Scotland. The majority of Scottish branches and the Scottish RMT opposed affiliation and Scottish delegates explained that, with Labour-led councils carrying out cuts, it is generally still seen to be pushing the same austerity politics as the Tories.

The role of the new 'Corbynista' Scottish Labour leader, Richard Leonard, was also highlighted. He has spoken against austerity but he recently voted with the right in Labour's national executive committee (NEC) vice chair election, denying Corbyn an important ally in the post. He also currently opposes even the right for Scotland to have a second independence referendum.

Other issues outstanding from the 2017 AGM included Labour's attitude to driver-only operation (DOO) of trains and cuts on London Underground and Transport for London (TfL).

Labour councillors have a majority on the authorities that oversee Merseyrail and Northern Rail, who are implementing DOO. Corbyn and the shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, have supported the union's fight against DOO but many SGM delegates wanted them to go further and pull the councillors and Mersey Mayor into line.

London SGM delegates raised similar points about Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan's cuts on TfL. Instead

of publicly opposing cuts and demanding funding from the government, Khan is enthusiastically implementing them. Yet there are no calls from the leadership or Labour left for him to shift his stance.

Can RMT members on the tube really be asked to support, let alone contribute towards, Khan's next election campaign?

The SGM heard from delegates who supported affiliation and, without question, there would be some advantages to be had such as the right of affiliated union branches to vote on whether to run a 'trigger ballot' selection process in local parties (though only after the NEC agrees a timetable for this).

Overblown claims

But most delegates felt the claims of the pro-affiliation campaign were overblown. A seat on the NEC is not guaranteed and the RMT could only expect 16 delegates at Labour Party conference (less if we didn't affiliate our full membership) out of 2,700 or so.

On balance, delegates voted to spend RMT's political fund on candidates who support RMT policy and not dilute that across the PLP and right-wing Labour councillors.

RMT must now unite around the agreed SGM outcome. A serious campaign with other left unions could transform the Labour Party root and branch and open the way for possible affiliation.

But there are also concerns that proponents of affiliation may seek to bring RMT closer to the position of the majority of Labour councillors and MPs rather than seeking to transform the party.

It is noticeable that the union's public pronouncements on Welsh Labour privatising border railways have shifted alarmingly in recent weeks.

In August 2017 the RMT general secretary wrote to the Welsh First Minister and said: "I am staggered to find that it is a Welsh Labour government that is privatising Network Rail's infrastructure and is acquiescing with a Westminster Tory government in the piecemeal privatisation and break up of Network Rail."

But by May 2018 the tone had changed markedly: "RMT policy is for a national integrated railway under public ownership and the Welsh government has made it clear that this is their aspiration as well if they did not have to work under the pro-privatisation legislative straight jacket imposed by the UK government."

Any attempt to soften RMT's own political position to allow for affiliation would be disastrous. This is also true of RMT's industrial position.

A political strategy to deliver a Corbyn-led government must never become a substitute for militant industrial action on DOO, tube cuts, seafarers' rights or any other fight we become involved in.

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

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The Socialist Party's magazine

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- Brazil in Turmoil - by Tony Saunois

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#NorthernFail: 250 rail services cancelled

Paul Gerrard
Salford Socialist Party

Northern rail cancelled more than 250 trains entirely on 29 May. Where trains run at all they have been up to two hours late. And Northern has suspended the entire rail service to the Lake District, just as the holiday season kicks in.

Northern rail introduced new timetables somehow meant to 'improve' service levels by deleting 13% of trains and rescheduling 90% of them on 20 May. Chaos ensued.

Southern, Thameslink and Great Northern services are also affected. Each day, private operators drop about 230 services.

When Arriva Trains, owned by Germany's Deutsche Bahn, took over the Northern rail franchise in April 2016, it promised the earth. But what we have seen has been a steady decline in services - trains delayed or cancelled, two-coach operation instead of three, and so on.

Rail commuters are missing work interviews and appointments, rejigging their schedules if employers are sympathetic - or facing disciplinarys if they aren't. Social media has exploded with #NorthernFail and #FailingGrayling.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling has had to appear in the Commons. His job is on the line - or it would be if May's government weren't already so precarious.

Grayling blames Network Rail and the train companies equally.

It's true that part of the problem lies with Network Rail. Electrification projects such as Blackpool-Preston-Manchester have overrun. This meant timetable changes had very short notice, making it difficult to train enough drivers in time, worsening shortages.

Why is Network Rail so dependent on dozens of outside contractors, including - until recently - Carillion,

and known anti-union blacklists like Keir?

And the corner-cutting of profit-hungry private operators is a major factor. Northern has been reliant for years on drivers working their rest days; drivers are less willing to do so now. It takes a year to train a driver, and once qualified many leave for other companies offering better pay and conditions.

But Grayling's own dithering about major rail projects - cancelled, then reinstated, then 'paused' - hasn't helped.

Andy Burnham, Blairite metro-mayor of Greater Manchester, has rightly criticised Northern rail and called for it to lose the franchise if things haven't improved by August. Why wait?

East Coast

The government has had to take back the East Coast Main Line franchise after its franchisees abandoned it. Why not Northern too?

In any case, Jeremy Corbyn's policy of taking back the railways franchise by franchise as they expire won't erase decades of chronic underinvestment. The advantages of nationalisation - timetable co-ordination, through-ticketing, full staffing, cheap fares - only become apparent when the whole network is in public hands, with rail workers and passengers making key decisions democratically.

In Wales, Labour has just moved to expand rail privatisation. And Burnham's opposite number in Merseyside, Steve Rotheram, is supporting Merseyrail bosses trying to remove the safety-critical role of guards against transport union RMT.

Corbyn needs to listen to the RMT and the passengers, and promote the massively popular policy of full, immediate rail renationalisation. Just ask commuters in Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Hull and Newcastle and they'll tell you!

■ Nationalise rail - don't delay!



Another grey day for commuters photo Paul Mattsson

Socialists defend Lush ad campaign against spy cops

James Ivens

Soap shop Lush dropped a bath bomb on 31 May with storefront displays highlighting abuses by undercover police.

Tories and senior police officers have attacked Lush's #SpyCops 'paid to lie' ads. In response, socialists and other activists involved in the Mitting Inquiry into undercover policing have defended the firm's campaign.

Police spies infiltrated a number of campaign groups over decades. Some even entered into intimate relationships with women activists under false pretences.

The public inquiry looks increasingly like a whitewash. Its chair, Sir John Mitting, even ruled out releasing the real names of officers who deceived women.

As a result, Socialist Party members were among around 200 core participants who staged a walkout on 21 March. As Lush says: "Many campaigners have a complete lack of confidence in the public inquiry's approach. We're standing with them to put pressure on the UK government."

Tory home secretary Sajid Javid immediately attacked Lush for "running a public advertising campaign against our hardworking police." No criticism of the undemocratic and sexist actions of the police force, of course, or the blatant shortcomings of the inquiry.

Several outlets have since removed the displays. The company cites "intimidation of our shop staff from ex-police officers." In Peterborough, an off-duty officer attended the store, leading to management taking down posters.

But inquiry participants signed a letter to the Guardian backing Lush's stand. This includes Dave Nellist, Socialist Party member and former Militant-supporting Labour MP; Lois Austin, Socialist Party member and former Youth Against Racism in Europe organiser; and Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary.

Doreen Lawrence, mother of murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence, and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell also signed. Jeremy Corbyn has publicly backed Lush founder and co-owner Mark Constantine.

It is unusual for a business to take a stand like this. Lush made £73 million profit before tax last year, and pays millions in dividends to its small group of owners.

Lush markets itself as an 'ethical' company. But there is nothing

'ethical' about the capitalist model of production, based on exploiting the labour of workers for the profit of the bosses.

The interests of the multimillionaire owners of Lush are not the same as the interests of socialists and the working class.

But the support for the campaign against political policing is welcome, and intimidation for speaking out completely unacceptable.

Ultimately, though, we cannot rely on capitalists or their institutions to deliver truth or justice in

this case - or any real solutions to the urgent social problems working class and young people face.

The trade unions should use their authority and resources to establish a democratic workers' inquiry into undercover policing.

And when it comes to the inequality of the capitalist system, and the role of the police force in defending it, the organised working class has the power to sweep it all aside. The Socialist Party fights for socialism - for a world free from exploitation and oppression.

**Join the fightback!
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Giuliano Brunetti
Resistenze Internazionali (CWI Italy)

Three months after the general election of 4 March, Italy has a government again. On 1 June, the 'yellow-green' government was officially installed. It is headed by the prime minister, lawyer Giuseppe Conte, and the two vice-premiers - the political head of the populist Five Star Movement (M5S) Luigi Di Maio, and the right-wing Lega secretary, Matteo Salvini.

A vote of confidence in the new executive should take place in the next few days in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies. It is, with a few exceptions, the same government that was earlier rejected by the president of the republic, Sergio Mattarella.

The president refused to appoint Paolo Savona as finance minister. The delicate position of finance minister will be taken by professor Giovanni Tria, a eurosceptic, very close to the Lega and appointed on the advice of the same Savona.

The proposal to appoint Savona to the finance ministry had provoked a chorus of disapproval from European chancelleries and a certain panic on international markets. Mattarella, under the pressure of these same markets to take a 'responsible' approach, had made extensive use of his presidential prerogatives to block the emergence of a government perceived, wrongly or rightly, as fundamentally eurosceptic.

Paolo Savona, now Minister for Relations with the EU, provoked the concern of European finance ministries, stock exchanges and rating agencies as someone capable of sending the EU to the devil. Savona is 82 and someone who has a long political career behind him as a representative of the establishment and of the big banks. He was a minister in the Ciampi government, a manager in the BNL bank, and founder of the Confindustria's (bosses' organisation) private university, Luiss. In short, a man totally of the establishment and the big Italian bourgeoisie.

Nevertheless, the controversy over the possibility of appointing Savona to oversee the economy indicates the concerns and fears about the possibility that an 'imaginative' economic policy could push Italy out of the single currency within a few weeks. Mattarella expressed these fears on the part of many within the Italian as well as the European ruling class.

Power struggle

There is a power struggle among the representatives of Italian capitalism. One sector produces essentially for the domestic market and feels crushed by globalisation, wanting to break free from the restrictions of Brussels. On the other hand are the large companies that export and are linked to international capital and therefore look to a greater integration of national economies.

The president intervened on behalf of Italy's establishment, clearly rejected in the polls as expressed in the vote for the Lega and the M5S and in the rejection of the Democratic Party (PD).

ITALIA'S POLITICAL CRISIS IS REVERBERATING THROUGH EUROPE



Unions marching against anti-worker legal reforms - the new government will also inevitably come into conflict with workers photo Emilia Romagna/CC



Luigi Di Maio, political leader of the populist Five Star Movement photo grillinobeach/CC



Matteo Salvini, secretary of the right-wing Lega photo Niccolo Coranti/CC

The suggestion of Savona as finance minister opened up a wasps' nest of controversy and speaks volumes about the state of health of the economy and of the country's credit system.

Italy is plagued with enormous economic problems - one of the highest public debts in the world, anaemic growth and a rotten and deeply unstable banking system. In this state, it threatens the entire single currency and the economy of the old continent.

New government

The new government under Giuseppe Conte will in reality be directed by two consuls - Salvini, the Lega's leader and Di Maio of the M5S - to implement key parts of their electoral programme. Di Maio as labour minister is intent on carrying through measures to supplement the lowest incomes, if not the 'citizens' income'.

Salvini takes on the interior ministry declaring: "The honeymoon is over for illegal immigrants". One day after this inflammatory racist declaration, a Malian agricultural labourer and USB trade unionist, Sacko Soumayla, was killed - shot in the face while collecting planks to build a makeshift home in the shanty-town where he lived.

This is an indication of the climate that exists in the country. Matteo Salvini has declared that the campaign policy of repatriating all undocumented immigrants - up to 500,000 people - will be adhered to.

Salvini is not the only minister in the Conte government to have positions markedly on the right. The new family minister - a Catholic extremist lawyer in the Lega - believes, for example, that homosexuality represents a danger for society and has clearly sexist and anti-abortionist positions.

The 'government of change' can also boast the presence of Buongiorno, formerly confidante and lawyer of right-wing prime minister Giulio Andreotti, as minister of public administration. Moavero Milanesi, a former minister in two governments, will go to the foreign ministry. His colleague at the ministry of education, universities and research will be Marco Bussetti, teacher of physical education in a private school.

At the ministry of the environment will be a general of the Carabinieri police corps, Sergio Costa. In short, the 'face of change' will be a government clearly positioned on the right.

Given the huge vote in March against Italy's establishment and for populist parties, a government of this type will inevitably enter into collision with workers and young people. The repressive wave that will hit activists, workplace union delegates, immigrants and women will generate a powerful reaction from people.

The initial absence of a valid and credible class opposition to this government will underline in the eyes of millions of Italians the need to build a new workers' party to respond to all the attacks.

Resistenze Internazionali will be at the forefront of the construction of such a party.

Sam Morecroft
Sheffield UCU congress delegate
(personal capacity)

The University and College Union's (UCU) annual three-day congress began on 31 May.

With important victories in the last year, a membership increased by 16,000 since last congress and huge struggles looming for our members, it should have been both a celebration of our achievements and a council of war for the struggle to come.

However, as a result of three walkouts by UCU staff organised in Unite the Union, the congress descended into chaos and was eventually shut down early. These walkouts happened because in the view of the Unite branch, motions were raised which could potentially negatively impact the terms and conditions of UCU staff.

However, it was abundantly clear that the only UCU staff member these motions could have had any impact on was the general secretary of UCU, Sally Hunt, who is the union's only elected full-time official.

The three most controversial motions which led to this situation called respectively for a review of democratic structures (Sheffield UCU and Bath UCU), to censure the general secretary for her conduct in the resolution of the USS pensions dispute (KCL UCU), and no confidence in the general secretary calling for her resignation (Exeter UCU).

Stitch-up

The rushed and superficial consultation, together with the strong push from the general secretary to accept the Universities UK offer without a mandate from the national executive committee, ended this year's magnificent struggle to defend pensions and was rightly described in the Socialist at the time as a "stitch-up".

It was entirely appropriate that branches and delegates wished to use our democratic congress to hold the leadership of our union, and in particular our general secretary, to account.

The first walkout came as a direct result of a challenge to the congress business committee (CBC) made by my Sheffield UCU delegation.

Our motion for a review of democratic structures had been ruled out of order by CBC and we were told that this was because references to the appropriate number of elected officials in UCU and to mechanisms of holding elected representatives to account had implications for staff of the union.

I spoke against this, asking the congress to vote to restore the motion to the agenda and explaining that our branch had no interest in challenging or altering the terms and conditions of our staff but rather in building a stronger, more democratic union, with a properly resourced and more effective national executive committee and mechanisms of holding elected representatives to account - clearly a very relevant demand given what came next.



photos Socialist Party

UCU CONGRESS SHUTDOWN BY STAFF WALKOUTS - FIGHT FOR A DEMOCRATIC, ACCOUNTABLE UNION

I also indicated we would have been happy to accept amendments provided the substance of what we were calling for remained intact.

We won the two-thirds majority required to restore a late motion to the agenda, and I was asked to explain how we would amend the motion by the chair, but as I approached the podium to do so staff at the congress walked out, the general secretary among them, and as she passed me made a hostile comment accusing me of "causing a walk out".

I was asked to meet with the Unite representative for staff - I was informed that the motion could be acceptable and staff would return provided references to the appropriate number of elected staff and mechanisms of accountability were changed.

We agreed to this as we were told that the principle of reviewing democratic structures was not an issue and that the walkout would cease. Even after we had agreed this however, staff did not return to congress, as they did not consider other motions on the agenda appropriate.

Eventually we were able to return to congress as other issues were resolved, but the staff union remained

unhappy about 'Motion 10' (no confidence in the general secretary) and Motion 11 (censure of the general secretary).

Some motions were passed, including the amended democracy review motion from Sheffield and Bath, which passed overwhelmingly.

The democracy review must now go ahead, and UCU members must ensure that it is used to build a more accountable, transparent, democratic and member-controlled union. However, delegates were asked to vote Motions 10 and 11 off the agenda, and following a vote not to do this, staff walked out again.

The higher education and further education sector conferences continued as normal, with important discussions taking place in the higher education conference around defending the future of USS pensions.

We discussed the need to use our campaign on pay in higher education to build coordinated industrial action with further education and with other unions also struggling on pay issues such as the PCS civil servants' union and National Education Union.

There was also a call for a

conference of post-92 universities to defend jobs, terms and conditions. But an emergency national executive committee meeting voted to ask congress again the following day to remove motions 10 and 11.

The following day, after some emergency motions were discussed and passed, including a motion to recall congress, a third and final walkout shut down the congress completely. Some staff then returned to prevent delegates from utilising audio equipment and continuing with congress.

It is not clear as yet how the decision of Unite members who staff our union to walk out was made and it should be noted that congress delegates did not dispute their right to do this.

But it is absolutely clear that they were walking out in defence of the general secretary, and that had Sally Hunt been willing, she could have appealed to them not to do so, defended her record to delegates and prevented the shutdown.

Ironically, the reality is that most delegates did not want to vote to call for her to resign at a time when there are so many crucial disputes going on, although it is likely the motion to censure her for her conduct in

relation to the USS dispute would have passed.

But after this debacle there is no alternative but for the general secretary to defend her record and attempt to show she has the confidence of the membership.

In an email to members on 4 June, Sally Hunt claims that the congress events were based on the "politics of personality" and represented an attempt to remove a democratically elected general secretary just a year after her election, but she refused to address congress and present this argument.

The general secretary has effectively attempted to challenge the sovereignty of our democratic congress and that cannot be allowed. In the trade union movement, we debate out our differences rather than silence dissent through bureaucratic measures.

There will now be a recall congress at some point - and Motions 10 and 11 must be debated. Criticism of an elected official is valid, legitimate and must be heard, and if the members of our union have lost confidence in the cautious, bureaucratic and often opaque leadership of Sally Hunt, then she must resign.



photo Lewis Clarke/CC

West Midlands firefighters vote to strike in massive numbers

Bob Severn
Birmingham Socialist Party

West Midlands firefighters have voted by 90% to take strike action against exploitative conditions for new fire service workers. They are being introduced by the Labour-led West Midlands Fire Authority (WMFA).

The new contracts would force firefighters to take on work outside the agreed role of a firefighter, including acting as taxi drivers for the NHS. The WMFA has imposed these new contracts, which breach national agreements with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), without any negotiation with the union.

The ballot result, nine to one in favour of walking out on an 82% turnout, has smashed through the Tories' draconian minimum vote now needed for legal strike action by emergency service workers.

But who needs the Tories when Blairite Labour councillors are doing their anti-worker, anti-union business for them? Labour members of the fire authority who attack firefighters' terms and conditions should be deselected and suspended. We need representatives who fight the cuts not implement them.

The new contracts are the tip of iceberg under a regime where firefighters face dictatorial and bullying management.

The FBU will now go ahead with industrial strike action, which will affect fire stations across the West Midlands county, unless WMFA backs down and withdraws the new contracts.



photo Paul Mattsson

Civil servants' union PCS launches national strike ballot on pay

Dave Semple
PCS Scotland chair and national executive committee member
(personal capacity)

Workers in the PCS union, representing civil servants across all government departments, have voted overwhelmingly to ballot members for strike action.

Across the public sector, pressure has been mounting on trade unions to act against crushing pay austerity that has seen wages fall by up to 20% over the last decade.

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) also agreed in September 2017 that it would support a coordinated campaign on pay across the public sector, to aim at a 5% minimum pay rise.

Tory ministers like Boris Johnson and Michael Gove, reflecting the weakness of their government, have bowed to the growing mood of defiance and urged the treasury to lift the 1% pay cap.

To keep the pressure on, PCS launched a consultative ballot on pay in late 2017. With 49% of members participating - a record turnout for the union - 99% rejected the continuing 1% pay cap and 79% said they would take strike action against it.

The Scottish government conceded first, in their December budget. Negotiations have been ongoing but

it looks likely that PCS members in the devolved civil service have won rises of at least 4%, with some low paid members getting a lot more.

A major union-led campaign, including a demonstration in the autumn-winter period when pay talks were happening throughout the public sector at the same time as highlighting the disastrous winter suffered by the NHS thanks to austerity, could have put the government on the ropes. This did not happen, and a TUC demonstration was delayed until May. Because of this, it was a fraction of the size it could and should have been.

Despite the prevarication of union leaders, limited concessions began to appear. Local government workers were offered a minimum of 2%. NHS staff were offered at least 6.5% over three years, though this came with strings attached. Police and prison staff received offers over 1% and teachers too seem likely to get an improved offer.

It was a shock, therefore, when the cabinet office admitted to PCS negotiators in May 2018 that they had only budgeted for a 1% rise for the civil service in UK government departments. Any further rises would have to be paid for out of job cuts.

Rightly, the PCS's socialist-led national executive committee put this before the conference in May

and urged an escalation of the pay campaign.

On behalf of members across the civil service, delegates rejected the derisory offer of 1% for what it is - a pay cut of 3%, once rising costs of living are taken into account. The demand was clear: a fair pay rise of 5% now.

Delegates expressed outrage at the irresponsible behaviour of the government, prepared to play departments off against each other by allowing some to go above 1% but not others.

With services already under pressure and more than 100,000 jobs gone in the last ten years, PCS members simply will not accept this.

From 18 June until 23 July, we will have the chance to reject further pay caps, to give the union a mandate for the action we need to force the Tories to concede the pay rise we deserve and need.

We have to deliver a clear message that if pay rises can be managed in the NHS, or the Scottish government, then they can certainly be managed in the UK civil service.

A massive Yes vote will do that. Socialist Party members in PCS will be fighting to deliver the vote, and will be ready to strike should the government not listen to reason or to the clearly expressed view of their staff in the civil service.

■ Breaking news!

Marion Lloyd, PCS NEC and PCS Left Unity chair says "strike action by Acas conciliators in PCS has secured an extra 40 jobs, protection of the role and commitments from management on reaching agreement with the union on future plans.

"Through strike action, the employer has felt the strength of feeling among our members following the decision to scrap tribunal fees and has had to accept the need for extra resources.

"In addition, Acas management has agreed to make the case to the government for additional resources, if necessary.

"This dispute shows we can win on jobs and protecting public services, securing major concessions from employers. This campaign should be publicised widely across the movement and used as a template to encourage other groups of workers to stand up to increased workloads, job insecurity and a driving down of standards.

"We will be monitoring closely proposals from the department on future job redesign proposals. However this action has placed PCS members in Acas in a strong bargaining position going forward.

"Building on from this action, our reps and members will confidently go out and campaign for a yes vote in the upcoming national action ballot on pay."

East London housing workers fight privatisation of pay

Tower Hamlets Socialist Party

Tower Hamlets Unison members started strike action for fair pay on 4 June.

They work for Tower Hamlets Community Housing and are walking out for two weeks.

The workers deserve fair pay from an increasingly uncharitable employer which behaves more like a private landlord.

According to Unison's Tower Hamlets branch, the new pay deal will depend on "market intelligence" from a private consultancy company to decide the rate of pay

for each role, instead of staff being paid according to nationally agreed trade union and local government rates.

Rates will be "market tested" every two years with details on the range of salaries and pay for other roles deemed "commercially confidential" and hidden from staff.

Unison also claims promises that some staff would receive pay rises failed to sway workers, who voted to reject the scheme earlier this year.

■ Send messages of support to john.mclaughlin@towerhamlets.gov.uk and protests to philip.sullivan@thch.org.uk



NSSN conference 2018

- Saturday 7 July, 11am to 4.30pm at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL
- Attendance fee £6. Register on the day, or by email to info@shopstewards.net, or write to NSSN, PO Box 54498, London, E10 9DE
- Open to all trade union and anti-cuts campaigners

See shopstewards.net



photo Socialist Alternative

Fighting for equal pay today

Tessa Warrington
Leicester Socialist Party

“The gender pay gap for full-time workers is entirely in favour of men for all occupations”. This is the first line of a report from the Office for National Statistics on the results of the governments’ gender pay gap survey, released earlier this year.

Since 1970 and the passing of the Equal Pay Act into law, it has been illegal to pay women less than men for the same job, but in practise it still happens.

Recent high profile cases of women actors in Hollywood and at the BBC have highlighted the issue of unequal pay with their male co-stars, but these merely reflect women with a platform representing a problem in all workplaces.

The survey figures, covering 10,000 sizeable employers, show an average gap of 9.8% but stretching to as much as 70% in some individual workplaces.

Last year the World Economic Forum announced that it will take 217 years before women earn the same as men, a whopping 47 years longer than predicted the previous year. It is clear that the situation is getting worse for working class women, not better.

One million public sector jobs have been axed and wages frozen since 2008. This has traditionally been a majority female workforce due to benefits such as flexitime and

part-year working, which support women with children staying in employment.

Women now being forced into private sector jobs are more likely to encounter zero-hour contracts and low pay.

The gender pay gap is not only about achieving like-for-like pay for men and women in the same positions but also about the ability of women to access higher paid roles. Women from wealthy backgrounds can afford a good education and childcare but the vast majority of women are working class and they rely upon the state.

Working class

In this way, working class women have much more in common with working class men that they do with female representatives of the super-rich. That is why we look to trade union action and workers’ solidarity to change things today, just as the Ford Dagenham workers did 50 years ago.

The strikes in McDonald’s and TGI Friday’s as well as the upcoming pay ballot of civil servants by the PCS union show the potential for building a mass movement against low pay.

But the Socialist Party doesn’t just fight for women’s equality with working class men who also suffer exploitation and attacks from the bosses. We fight to shake off the shackles of inequality created by capitalism completely - not to settle for second best but fight for a socialist world.



Juliette Fogelman
East London Socialist Party

This year, 7 June marks the 50th anniversary of the start of the strike by women sewing machinists at Ford Motor Company’s Dagenham plant in east London.

The strike by 187 women workers was one of the triggers for the 1970 Equal Pay Act, which made it illegal to pay men and women differently for the same job and was the inspiration for the 2010 film ‘Made in Dagenham’.

In the Labour Party’s manifesto for the 1964 general election they had proposed a charter of rights including: “the right to equal pay for equal work”. However, Harold Wilson’s Labour government had not taken any action on this until forced to, in part, by the 1968 strike in Dagenham.

The Labour MP Shirley Summer-skil acknowledged the role of the strike when speaking at the second reading debate of the Equal Pay bill: “We must acknowledge in this debate a group of women who played a very significant part in the history of the struggle for equal pay.

“I refer to that small group of women machinists at Ford who went on strike for their beliefs and their rights... those women had to take really forceful action to achieve this principle.”

Due to the importance of the strike in women’s struggle for equal pay it can be easy to forget that the strike was also about how the strikers’ work was classified.

Profits

Companies like Ford were making huge profits, but still did what they could to keep wages low. There were often separate lower pay grades for women workers, especially in the private sector.

In 1967 there was a regrading exercise at Ford which introduced a new ‘grading structure’ for production and craft jobs. Sewing machinists - which included the largest group of women production workers - were graded as a ‘B’, less skilled production jobs, and they were paid 15% less than men who were graded as A.

The women machinists at Ford, who had to be a machinist for two years and take a test before being able to get a job in the plant, were furious as they felt that their jobs should be

classified as ‘C grade’ - more skilled production jobs. However, management refused to alter the grade.

Gwen Davis was one of leading strikers and said, when interviewed for a project by the Queen’s Theatre in Hornchurch in 2016: “We always put in a wage claim for all the extra money and the grading which is what we were fighting for - the grading to be the same as the men and of course Ford wouldn’t acknowledge us, they kept saying, ‘B grade is semi-skilled. Women are semi-skilled.’”

Not all trade union officials at this time, unions that now make up Unite the Union, were supportive of women receiving equal pay to men. It’s reported that the shop steward for the women workers, Lil O’Callaghan, had to originally push the union convenor Bernie Passingham into supporting the cause.

However, he did then fully back them. Another striker interviewed for the Queen’s Theatre project, Theresa Taylor, explained that Bernie ‘gave us the courage to get up and say, ‘come on, get up!’... It was Lil and Bernie that got us all going.”

This shows the importance of being backed by your union but also that sometimes they need to be pushed by

their rank-and-file members.

In 1968, before the anti-trade union laws, a legal postal ballot was not required and neither was two-weeks notice. So the women held a meeting, stuck their hands up to vote to strike and then downed tools!

Restricting workers from being able to vote on action in this collective way has removed the strength and confidence that can be gained from seeing workers all around you putting their hands up for industrial action.

The workers were on strike for three weeks and their cause gained momentum as other women workers could identify with their cause. There was solidarity action by men but it was complicated.

For years companies had been using divisive tactics to try and justify paying women less, so among some male workers there was the idea these women were only working for ‘pin money’. But they weren’t!

The women workers and their families needed the wages to get by. However, the Dagenham strikers were united and determined.

Even though it was the first time they’d gone out just for themselves, they had gone out many times when

the male workers were on strike. They were also later joined on strike by women workers at Halewood plant in Merseyside which added to the pressure on Ford.

Eventually car production at Ford ceased as without the car seats that the women machinists produced, no cars could be made. This caused the dispute to become a national news story.

Ford was losing over £1 million a day but instead of just conceding and paying the women the few extra pence they were asking for, management did what they often do - blame the workers!

Lay offs

Bill Batty, the Ford group’s managing director hinted that the strike could eventually put 40,000 jobs at risk. And he did lay off 9,000 Dagenham workers - although they were all later reinstated.

To stop further unrest the Labour government’s secretary of state for employment and productivity, Barbara Castle, stepped in and met with eight of the women strikers.

A deal was agreed that the women would immediately get a pay rise to 92% of the male workers’ rate for

‘MADE IN DAGENHAM’ FORD MACHINISTS PAY STRIKE 50 YEARS ON



Review: Made in Dagenham

Fantastic introduction to the trade union movement

When it was released in 2010, Made In Dagenham had cinema audiences laughing and crying. It managed to brilliantly capture the strength and humour of working class women. As **Mary Finch** describes in this review to mark the 50th anniversary of the events portrayed in the film, it also provides valuable lessons for the fightback.

Mary Finch
East London Socialist Party

‘Made in Dagenham’ is a fantastic introduction to the trade union movement. It’s an exciting depiction of the strike at Dagenham Ford factory in 1968.

The all-women machinists downed their tools and walked out when management refused to negotiate over their pay. Their enthusiasm is infectious, and it’s inspiring to watch working class women characters transform into political leaders and ultimately win against a vicious employer.

It doesn’t shy away from the more complicated issues that surrounded the strike - the role of men, for example, is depicted with impressive nuance.

The shop steward who leads much of the negotiations with the union is a man - more than just supporting the strike, he actively encourages it and pushes the women to label their pay a feminist issue at a stage when they aren’t yet confident to.

The film doesn’t hide from the misogyny of some working class men - the central character Rita finds her husband patronising at best, and angry at worst, about her involvement in the strike. But it also answers the more difficult question of how it can be overcome - solidarity is forged through struggle.

It’s abundantly clear that those men who are brought around to the cause of equal pay do so because they’re workers who understand that

the machinists are attacking a common enemy - the bosses.

Rita reminds her husband that the women machinists always supported the men on strike because struggle isn’t drawn along gendered lines, but along class ones.

The bosses who paid women less than men may have started to do so out of sexism, but they refused to raise their wages because it would impact for their profits. Ford wouldn’t be the only one to suffer - women workers everywhere could be given the confidence to demand equal pay.

Karl Marx

The trade union bureaucracy who attempted to sell out the strike aren’t let off the hook, either. In a blatantly cowardly attempt to avoid leading struggle and hold back the progress of women workers, a union bureaucrat falsely uses Karl Marx to try to justify ending the strike.

The leading shop steward quotes back at him: “Didn’t Marx also say that the progress of any given society can be measured by the position of the female sex? Or was that a different Marx?”

It’s a shame that all the central characters of the film are young, glamorised versions of the actual Dagenham machinists, who were overwhelmingly middle-aged.

It’s an indicator of the new kind of sexism women face, and how far we have left to go. But an education in the struggles of our predecessors, like those in Dagenham, is the best way to kick off new movements!



Nonfiction - 12 Rules for Life: an Antidote to Chaos

ALT-RIGHT GAINS EXPOSURE - BUT TEDIOUS CLICHÉS BETRAY LACK OF IDEAS

Ross Saunders
Cardiff West Socialist Party

The publication in January of Jordan Peterson's '12 Rules for Life', with recent appearances on British and international television, represent an advance for tired but dangerous arch-conservative ideas.

Peterson is a Canadian psychology professor who has become the darling of the 'alt-right' - the new, mainly internet-based political fringe. He has earned this place through vocal online opposition to progressive causes.

In an interview for Vice, he describes the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment and assault as "outraged mob activism." Peterson ludicrously asserts that makeup is "sexually provocative," and women who complain about sexual harassment but wear makeup are hypocrites.

This is nothing but the old, crude, false argument that the victims of sexual harassment and assault are to blame, rather than the perpetrators - that appearance is a green light for aggressive sexual advances, and worse.

In other interviews he says "abortion is just wrong" - and suggests "getting married" as the alternative.

Arguably Peterson's most outrageous statement to date is in response to the mass murders committed by men associated with the misogynist online 'Incel' subculture. Incel stands for 'involuntary celibate' and is based on the deeply sexist idea that men are entitled to sex from women.

Several 'incel' men, most notably Elliot Rodger in 2014, have engaged in killing sprees to punish women. Rather than condemn the misogyny and alienation of capitalist society which breeds these atrocities, Peterson says society must practise "enforced monogamy" of women to supply wives for abusive men!

And the book itself attempts to rationalise the pay gap between men and women with pseudoscientific

claims that differences between genders suit men to work which Peterson considers worthy of higher pay.

It is a great shame we can't simply ignore such backward ideas. Such reactionary ideology is still on the margins of society. But as the leaders of new left movements fail to find a clear way forward, more can turn in frustration to reaction against the growing movements of women, oppressed groups and the wider working class.

The Spectator describes Peterson as "one of the most important thinkers to emerge on the world stage for many years." As well as receiving funding from right-wing sources like Ezra Levant's website The Rebel, Peterson's huge publishing deal managed to propel 12 Rules into the position of a number one international bestseller.

Torture

But the interest in Peterson's book will amaze anyone who is not already a fan. It's torture.

Time and time again it meanders around a topic before coming to rest on bland clichés dressed up as forgotten wisdom. It's peppered with tedious recountings of dreams Peterson and his wife have had that he supposes are significant. It swings between false humility and comical grandiloquence.

He claims to be wrestling with the source of crisis in modern societies. It is no accident that figures discussing this topic are emerging now, when capitalism has been mired in crisis for a decade and still has no strategy to exit the impasse. There is terrible suffering of working class and young people worldwide.

Peterson's prescription is simply to accept that suffering, "to shoulder the burden of Being and to take the heroic path." Anyone who looks for its source, the way society is set up, he tells to "set your house in order before you criticise the world."

Throughout, Peterson claims to be against ideology in general. In truth this means he is backing up the status quo.

He is a declared opponent of what he calls Marxism, which he manages to detect in ideas few Marxists would recognise as their own. His libertarian capitalist ideals leave him with no real ideas about how to tackle society's problems, other than for individuals to try harder in some undefined way:

"Your suffering can be left at your feet, because you are not everything you could be and you know it... We have no idea how fast we could multiply that if people got their act together and really aimed at it."

We can solve inequality, global crisis, alienation, the lack of a future for billions by having enough isolated individuals "really aiming" to improve themselves. These are not ideas, but the absence of ideas.

What content does exist in the book amounts to no more than 'common sense' platitudes about how to get the best personal advantage - "Stand up straight with your shoulders back" is the name of one chapter.

This is what Leon Trotsky had to say about 'common sense' in his infinitely superior work 'Their Morals and Ours':

"When that same common sense attempts to go beyond its valid limits into the arena of more complex generalisations, it is exposed as just a clot of prejudices of a definite class and a definite epoch. No more than a simple capitalist crisis brings common sense to an impasse; and before such catastrophes as revolution, counterrevolution and war, common sense proves a perfect fool."

In order to realise the catastrophic transgressions against the 'normal' course of events, higher qualities of intellect are necessary, philosophically expressed as yet only by dialectic materialism," the scientific socialist method of Marxism.

■ '12 Rules for Life: an Antidote to Chaos' by Jordan Peterson - £20, published by Allen Lane
■ 'Their Morals and Ours' by Leon Trotsky - £11 from leftbooks.co.uk



The Socialist Inbox

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■ Jailed TUSC agent released

By the time you print this letter I will be released on tag on 7 June. I will be on a home curfew from 7pm till 7am till 27 September. Sadly it does not include my garden.

I was moved from HMP Nottingham, which I found out once inside is Britain's second most violent prison, to Sudbury open prison after ten and a half weeks. I have met prisoners here that I know who arrived in Nottingham after me, but were transferred to Sudbury before me. Yet they're doing the same sentence as me!

I was investigated by the immigration department and Border Agency and their report came back 'all clear'.

I was stopped from reading the Socialist as it was not on the approved reading list. However, after complaining, they let me read it - then stopped it - and now at Sudbury I am reading it but it arrives late. All the above games were to wear me down, but they had the opposite effect. Also people's letters and cards kept my spirits up. I have received, as of 16 May, 90 letters and 15 cards.

One thing I have learnt in prison is that it should be named a labour camp. The stories that other inmates have told me, how prisons all over the country exploit prisoners. One prisoner told me of a prison which transports prisoners to a chicken factory. Once all the work is done - and it's hard work - the factory owners transport the chickens to Asda, Sainsbury's, and so on. The prisoners get paid well below the minimum wage.

I like Sudbury better than Nottingham as I have more freedom. I work in the market garden here, inside and outside the polytunnels. They have customers arriving in coaches to buy flowers, veg and fruit.

The prisoners - and there are a lot working in the market garden - work six hours a day, Monday to Friday, and we are on 25p an hour! You can imagine - there are 83,000 prisoners in Britain, and the majority who work are working for such a slave-labour wage, no matter what job it is.

Each prisoner - and there's two to a cell - has to pay 50p a week for their TV, which goes to the TV owners, which must bring in millions of pounds. It's the same with the phone companies as prisoners pay so much to use the phones.

The prison limits prisoners on how much they can spend! The prison food you get, portion-wise, is not enough. Prisoners then have to make a choice between food or credit to phone their family. There has been a lot of angry letters in the prison newspaper from prisoners on that issue. There are many people I have observed who should not be in prison. People with mental health issues and homeless people.

The staffing issues are a health and safety issue in all prisons. I have heard this and have seen it myself in Nottingham, which some prisoners have told me is like a volcano waiting to go off. I could feel the heat myself when I was there. Most of the media portray prison as a holiday camp. I can assure you it is not. At the age of 60, my first time ever in trouble with the law, I was sent to prison. I went there with my head held high and will leave with my head held high.

I don't regret showing people an old petition from TUSC's campaign against Moorways swimming pool closing. Labour in Derby later closed it, and then recently lost control of the council. I was proud of Derby TUSC's campaign. I am not broken by my incarceration and will still campaign against cuts. Once again, thank you all for your support.

Chris Fernandez
Derby



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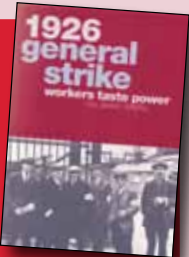


photo Paul Mattsson

■ Liberal press shallow

Reporting from across the pond, the liberal New York Times published a lengthy article on 28 May on the horrors the Tories have inflicted on working and middle class people in Britain.

"After eight years of budget cutting," it begins, "Britain is looking less like the rest of Europe and more like the United States, with a shrinking welfare state and spreading poverty." It speaks volumes about the shallow politics of liberalism that newspapers like the NYT - and the Guardian in this country - are capable of producing such withering criticisms of austerity, while failing to support - even smearing and attacking - those fighting against it.

The NYT was a constant champion of the pro-austerity warmonger Hillary Clinton in the race for the Democratic leadership in 2016. Similarly, the Guardian has relentlessly sought to undermine Jeremy

Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party - at the same time as lamenting the horrors of austerity. Bernie Sanders received similar treatment in the US.

But the liberal press does not just attack socialists. They also write us out of history altogether! In this 4,000-word study professing to be about austerity, the NYT did not once mention the fact that the Labour Party now has an anti-austerity leader!

This sentiment was reinforced by their characterisation of poverty-stricken workers living in Britain passively accepting the cuts:

"A wave of austerity has yielded a country that has grown accustomed to living with less, even as many measures of social wellbeing - crime rates, opioid addiction, infant mortality, childhood poverty

and homelessness - point to a deteriorating quality of life."

No mention of the unprecedented NHS demonstration that took place last year, which the Socialist Party had a key role in achieving, or the one upcoming on 30 June. Or the spate of campaigns that are currently forcing the government into retreats. Or the massive gains made by Corbyn in the 2017 election.

The truth is that the liberal establishment may shed a tear over the effects of austerity - but as they are so completely wedded to the interests of big business, for them there is no real alternative.

As for the rest of us: If capitalism cannot afford to give us a decent standard of living, then we cannot afford capitalism! Tom Barker
Leicester

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



Fiction: The Spinning Heart

Rich, raw tale of financial crisis's impact on rural Ireland

Ian Hunter
Derby Socialist Party

I have only recently caught up with Donal Ryan's wonderful, inventive 2012 debut novel about the brutal and shattering effects on a rural Irish community following the financial meltdown of 2007-08.

When a local building firm collapses the effects on the local community and its inhabitants are traumatic and devastating.

Each of the short 21 chapters tells the story, in monologue form, of individuals caught up in a bewildering and unprecedented - for this generation - economic crash. The 21 individual accounts starkly document how each person is affected as they search for meanings, truths and explanations.

They are a community and generation that expected better. They find

themselves let down by establishment politicians, EU bureaucrats, and financiers as the 'Celtic Tiger' is vanquished.

The free market system and the ideology of economic liberalism, with its promise of prosperity and a land rich in milk and honey, has ended in inevitable failure. The dream - or rather the illusion - is dead, and the sting in the tail will be the years of harsh austerity to follow for people who had no hand in this financial disaster.

The narrative is rich, often raw, and sometimes humorous. Not surprisingly the style and form have drawn comparisons with Dylan Thomas's 'Under Milk Wood'. Ryan's novel is larger than fiction; it's a tale of the times.

■ 'The Spinning Heart' by Donal Ryan, published by Doubleday Ireland, £7.99

JORDAN: WORKERS AND YOUTH REMOVE PRIME MINISTER AND DEMAND END TO AUSTERITY



A general strike and huge demonstrations of an unprecedented scale have shaken the Jordanian kingdom, against the backdrop of a steep rise in the cost of living and government corruption. The struggle has succeeded in cancelling some of the government's austerity decrees and has removed the prime minister. The continuing struggle represents a new hope for the region. **Shahar Benhorin**, Socialist Struggle Movement (CWI Israel-Palestine), reports on the growing rebellion.

The scale and intensity of the current movement has exceeded previous anti-government protests like above photo Isam Bayazidi/CC

King Abdullah returned urgently from a visit to Albania and fired prime minister Hani al-Mulqi in an attempt to calm the social upheaval in Jordan. 33 trade unions announced a nationwide strike on Wednesday 30 May and opened the dam of workers' anger. Despite the Ramadan fast, tens of thousands of demonstrators have stormed the streets of Amman in recent days. On 2 June the demonstrations in various locations reached a peak,

with the overall number of demonstrators estimated at more than 200,000. The demonstrations continued during the night between Sunday and Monday, major intersections in Amman and other cities were blocked, and in several locations there were also reports of protesters at government offices and corporations. In addition, incidents of shooting at police were reported. Jordan has been considered one of the most 'stable' countries in the Middle East. Even the demonstrations of thousands in 2011-12,

at the height of the 'Arab Spring' revolutionary wave that swept the region, did not reach such a scale. In fact, the current protest is unprecedented in scale and intensity, even in comparison to the successful protest of 1989 against economic decrees and the government. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided the kingdom with a loan along with diktats for a series of neoliberal moves to reduce the budget deficit and public debt, which climbed to 96% of GDP. The state budget, approved in January,

includes a series of austerity measures, led by a sharp rise in the tax burden on the working class. A new purchase tax hiked-up the prices of basic goods, including water and fuel. But the IMF demands have met with strong and growing resistance. **Fuel boycott** Last year, protests began against the cost of living and a popular boycott of buying eggs was organised, with the participation of hundreds of thousands. This time, in the gas stations protesters put on placards

saying: "Brother citizen, I don't want to prevent you from filling your tank, but I plead with you to boycott the gas stations for three days." The social media networks are raging, along with the streets, and protest slogans are flooding them against the "thieves' government" and more. The trigger for the general strike and the mass demonstrations was a new law pushed by prime minister al-Mulqi, in response to the IMF, raising tax not only on corporations but also on employees, and applying

it to the more impoverished layers in the working class. The tax exemption floor will drop from \$17,000 a year to \$11,000 a year. The Jordanian government arrogantly assumed that it could overcome the 'background noise' of protest and decided to raise fuel and electricity prices for the fifth time this year! This decision intensified public anger and was met with increased mobilisation for demonstrations at the end of the Friday prayers (1 June) and the next day. King Abdullah intervened and announced the cancellation of the last raise, but the unions and the demonstrators were not satisfied. The king hopes that, like previous political crises, changes in the government will ease and stabilise the political situation, but this will not be enough. The main requirement of the movement is the repeal of the new income tax bill. On 2 June, a vague agreement was signed between the government and the unions, including the establishment of a committee to examine changes in the legislative steps on the agenda, but without any agreement regarding the law on income. However, it is likely that the law will be frozen, especially after dozens of MPs have already been pushed to express their opposition to it. But in the demonstrations, especially outside the capital Amman, there are calls that go further, demanding that the government and parliament must go. Even calls for the king's removal were reported. **Another general strike** The unions, representing both public and private sector employees, announced another nationwide strike for 6 June. At present, the initiative is still in the hands of the unions and organisers of the demonstrations in the various centres, and the regime is in a position of defence and response, but the developments have not completely departed from its control. The Crown Prince, Prince Hussein, arrived on the scene to greet the policemen and to urge them to refrain from killing demonstrators. At this stage, the Jordanian regime would risk a bigger explosion if it tried to crush the struggle with police force. It has already managed to provoke the established middle classes, who are under growing economic pressure, as well as tribal leaders who the regime has relied on in the past to help it curb social struggles. Now these middle layers have joined the demonstrations. If the king gambles - as the prime minister has done - to comply with the IMF by continuing to implement the new economic decrees, the movement against the cost of living could turn into a revolutionary movement to overthrow the regime itself. The regime's dilemma is that even if it makes concessions, it may spur the collapse of the 'fear barrier' and build the self-confidence of the masses, and then face a more determined movement. The ruling classes in the region have reason to fear this dramatic escalation in the Jordanian class struggle. It could help re-establish

self-confidence and a fighting spirit in the masses in other countries and promote the end of the 'Arab Winter' (the retreat of the 2011 mass movements), which enabled the ruling classes, reactionary forces and imperialist powers to lead destructive counterrevolutions and plunge the whole region into bloody conflicts and growing distress. **A bankrupt system** If the regime abolishes the austerity measures to quieten the masses, it will need an alternative economic plan to try to stem the development of a more severe crisis in the faltering capitalist economy. It is possible that the IMF, under the pressure of developments, may moderate its diktats, and perhaps there will be proposals for economic 'aid' from the capitalist powers. But these will not be enough to deal structurally with the debt problems, the cost of living, high unemployment - swelled by the refugee crisis - and the growing anger over inequality. Women in Jordan suffer from huge gender disparities, and despite one of the highest levels of education in the Middle East, only a small number of them find employment. The capitalist regime will probably try to postpone some of the decrees, but will continue to try to solve the structural problems in the economy by means of a neoliberal policy aimed at making it easier for the Jordanian and foreign capital owners to exploit Jordanian workers as they wish. The Muslim Brotherhood, which has managed to exploit waves of demonstrations and previous political crises to enlist support, while supporting the monarchy and advancing a right-wing pro-capitalist agenda, is not playing a central role in developments this time. Workers' organisations and young people are leading the demonstrations. This reinforces the potential for building a more effective struggle

against austerity measures, poverty, corrupted politics, repression and inequality - while promoting an alternative plan that will represent the real interests of workers, the poor and young people. That would be in contrast to the vague calls by some middle-class circles to establish a 'national salvation government'. However, any 'alternative' government that would try to solve the crisis on a capitalist basis, even if it prioritises concessions to quell mass rage, would sooner or later have to abide by ruling class demands for pro-capitalist and anti-working class measures in an attempt to stabilise the system. A true 'salvation' government will have to directly represent workers' organisations, youth movements and community organisations, and consist of genuine representatives of them. It will face the task of leading a fight against the rich royal family, the wealthy capitalists and imperialist corporations in order to eradicate poverty and unemployment and establish a genuine democracy, on the basis of a policy of socialist change. The developments in Jordan are a source of hope, along with the awakening of the popular mass protests of the residents in the Gaza Strip, for a return to the path of the struggle that is needed throughout the region against corrupt elites, oppressive governments and bankrupt regimes.



King Abdullah is facing an anti-austerity revolt photo WEF/CC

“ ” **If the king gambles to comply with the IMF, the protests could turn into a revolutionary movement to overthrow the regime itself**



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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Voice of America/CC

NO TO TRUMP'S TRADE WAR



Build for 13 July walkouts



photo Paul Mattsson

Gareth Bromhall
Socialist Party Swansea

Donald Trump, in re-booting his presidential campaign slogan to "Make America Great Again" is attempting to do this on the backs of the rest of the world, by introducing tariffs on US imports.

Alongside worldwide overproduction of steel, the ramping-up of US tariffs on steel products to a whopping 25% will negatively impact steel workers' jobs in the UK. Some 31,000 still work in the industry even after the plant closures and redundancies in 2015-16 by billionaire steel

magnates. Towns like Port Talbot, the largest steel site in the UK, could be economically flattened.

An even bigger blow could be car exports to the US - the next likely target on Trump's protectionist 'America First' list of tariffs.

Beset with deepening domestic political problems - over his election campaign team's links to Russia; gun-control; supporting far-right racists; sexism and sex scandals; and threatening world war, to name a few things! - Trump is spreading 'fake news' to US workers that his economic protectionism will restore jobs.

However, his trade tariffs have provoked tit-for-tat retaliation from affected countries, which will

rebound on US jobs.

The EU has published a ten-page list of products of its counter-tariffs in response - worth €2.8 billion annually.

EU tariffs on symbolic American products - like bourbon, largely produced in Kentucky, which is represented by Senate majority leader Republican Mitch McConnell, and motorcycles, largely produced in Wisconsin, represented by speaker of the House of Representatives, Republican Paul Ryan - will further aggravate divisions within a fractured Republican party.

Trump's protectionism also risks further alienating the White House from its traditional allies in North America and Europe. This rift could

open up the field for geopolitical rivals like China and further weaken US capitalism as the predominant world power.

Workers' jobs cannot be safeguarded by protectionist measures advocated by Trump. And neither can they be secured through 'free trade' - advocated by Theresa May and other capitalist representatives - as redundant steel workers in both the US and Britain can testify to.

For socialists it does not matter so much where production is situated in a global economy but which class in society controls production.

The only way for workers to protect jobs and conditions is by conducting militant industrial struggle that forces the bosses to concede

better wages and conditions. And they'll always try to claw those back - that's why we need to fight for a socialist world where working class people democratically control production and services.

This is the message that the Young Socialists, along with Socialist Students and Socialist Party members will be delivering through school and college walkouts and protests when Trump lands in the UK on 13 July.

■ See
**socialist
students.org.
uk for more
on 13 July
protests**

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