

May facing Brexit vote catastrophe: Corbyn must put workers' movement on a war footing!

Corbyn and unions must call mass action for a general election now

- No support for May's Tory Brexit deal
- End austerity - Tories out, Corbyn in!
- For a socialist alternative to the bosses' EU
- Kick out the Blairite saboteurs
- Nationalise the banks and major monopolies
- For a new collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis

The Tories are at each other's throats - now let's get them out! Theresa May's Brexit deal is finally going to be voted on in parliament, just six weeks before Brexit is meant to take place.

[May's hopes for her deal lie in tatters](#). She had hoped that by being seen to implement Brexit she could hold the Tory party together and win popular support among the millions who voted for Brexit.

At the same time, she hoped to implement a deal which would be in the interests of the capitalist class by remaining aligned to the EU's regulatory framework and neoliberal rules.

And it is true that, while the majority of big business would prefer a deal that was closer to the EU, they could certainly live with what May is proposing.

First, though, May would have to get it passed. Even those commentators who are most optimistic about her chances predict she will lose the vote - the biggest parliamentary rebellion in the post-war era.

What May will do after that is uncertain. The scale of defeat could force her to resign, but it is also possible that she will try and cobble together a 'new' deal and return to parliament, hoping for a different result. The moving back of the deadline - by extending Article 50 - is also possible.

While the Tories tear themselves apart over Brexit, however, [millions of working-class people continue to suffer](#) as a result of this government's brutal pro-big business policies.

There are now more than 4.5 million children in Britain whose parents cannot afford to feed them properly.

It was rage at this endless misery for the majority - while a few at the top line their pockets - which was the [root cause of the 2016 Brexit referendum result](#).

The Tories are a capitalist party, and there is no Tory proposal on Brexit - or anything else - which is in the interests of the working and middle-class majority.

The priority for the workers' movement needs to be to build a movement to kick this incredibly weak and divided party out of government and to bring a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government with socialist policies to power.

Corbyn needs to make clear that any Labour MPs who vote for May's deal, thereby helping to keep the Tories in power, should immediately have the 'whip' - their right to be Labour MPs - withdrawn.

At this stage, however, the majority of the pro-capitalist wing of the Labour Party, the Blairites, frightened of being associated with a lame-duck prime minister and her deal, are continuing to focus their efforts on demands for a second referendum; a so-called 'peoples' vote'.

This is a very risky option for the capitalist class. It would be highly divisive and would risk a dramatic further undermining of the authority of the capitalist establishment which would be seen to have blatantly changed the rules to suit its own interests.

Nor is it even clear if parliament would be capable of agreeing what the question or questions would be! Nonetheless, if the parliamentary deadlock remains, more serious moves towards a referendum cannot be ruled out.

Whatever stance the Blairite Labour MPs take, however, it is clear that they will be guided not by what is in the best interests of working-class people in Britain or internationally, but only by how best they can serve the capitalist class.

The trade unions and Jeremy Corbyn should be organising mass protest action to call for a general election, which would be a real peoples' vote.

Last Saturday's demonstration for a general election, called by the People's Assembly, was a modest size, but this reflects the lack of a clear lead from the top, not the lack of a burning anger against the Tory government.

Parliamentary tactics about when and how to call no-confidence votes are secondary compared to building a movement on the streets to fight for one.

This should be linked to a clear socialist programme, including on the question of Brexit.

'Red lines'

Corbyn's Brexit 'red lines' should be opposition to all neoliberal, pro-capitalist rules. He should demand negotiations are reopened on the basis of [opposing all EU single market](#) and [customs union rules](#) - like those on state aid, 'market liberalisation', or the posted workers directive - which go against the interests of the working class.

He would then be able to [make a call for international solidarity with workers across Europe](#). This would mean seeking to build a European-wide campaign of socialists and workers' organisations to use the talks to tear up the current pro-big business rules of the EU bosses' club.

Backed by popular support in Britain, and with solidarity from workers across Europe, he would be in a far stronger negotiating position than May.

In addition, a Corbyn-led government would be able to use a [programme of nationalisation to take the ability to inflict job losses](#), closures or reductions in pay and conditions out of the hands of any corporations that move to punish the working class under the guise of Brexit difficulties.

This approach would be in the interests of the working and middle-class majority. For the capitalist class, however, a Corbyn-led government with socialist policies and mass popular support is an even worse nightmare than the mess it is in over Brexit.

That is why, while Corbyn is calling for a general election, the Labour right is either not doing it at all or doing it in such a token way as to make clear it has no intention of fighting for one.

Corbyn needs to immediately put the workers' movement on a war footing to fight for a general election.

The 'trigger ballot' process urgently needs to be opened which allows [local Labour parties to select new candidates for a forthcoming general election](#).

An [emergency labour movement conference](#) should be called, open to all anti-austerity forces, including the Socialist Party and non-Labour affiliated unions like the RMT, to discuss how to urgently recreate Labour on democratic, socialist lines.

That would need to include discussion not just on how to win a general election, but also how to prevent the inevitable capitalist attempts to sabotage a Jeremy Corbyn-led government.

Key points would include the nationalisation of the banks and major monopolies under democratic, working-class control and management, in order to pave the way for a socialist plan of production to meet the needs of all.

This should be linked with a new collaboration of the peoples of Europe on a socialist basis - based on working-class solidarity across borders.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 15 January 2019 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in *The Socialist*.

After Grenfell, thousands still in high-rise firetrap blocks

- Cladding off now!
- Landlords and government must pay!

Steve Nally, Lambeth and South West London Socialist Party

Across England, 437 high-rise buildings are still covered in combustible cladding, according to government figures.

Of these 171 are private towers, where people have either bought or rent flats that are now firetraps.

Property developers and landlords are parasites at the best of times. But now they are really showing their true colours.

These blocks desperately need to be made safe. But rather than do the decent thing, private companies and landlords are refusing to pay out, and are instead demanding that leaseholders, and indirectly renters, foot the bill.

For those affected the sums are eye-watering. In one block in Bromley, south London, the landlord is asking families to find £70,000 to rest easy. This will bankrupt some people, and leave crippling debts for most others.

For the block's owner, the cost would be £4 million. A small sum to pay for multimillion-pound private landlords whose only rule is that we work flat-out to pay for a roof over our heads while they sun themselves on some exclusive beach.

Horror

After [the horror of the fire at Grenfell Tower](#), the Tory government pledged to support the removal of all combustible cladding from high-rise buildings so that people could sleep safe at night. The crocodile tears have long since dried, and reality is kicking in.

While landlords, councils and the government argue over who foots the bill, tens of thousands of people living in private towers are at risk of another fire disaster.

After much dithering, the Tories finally signed off £400 million to make public housing safe. We say they should already have made the same commitment in private housing - and all other buildings covered in unsafe materials.

Combustible cladding has been known about for decades, but it was still given the OK for use on tower blocks in Britain.

After Grenfell, we demand that all homes be made safe; that all costs be borne by the profiteering landlords and government; and that all those responsible for the tragedy at Grenfell be brought to justice, including the private building companies.

[Residents can organise to force their landlords into action](#) - if necessary, we say: no safety, no rent.

Socialist Party members support the Social Housing Action Campaign (Shac), which links together housing workers, tenants and residents, particularly in housing associations and co-ops. It campaigns on accountability, fire safety and other issues.

Shac has an open meeting in London on Tuesday 29 January at 6.30pm, at the Diskus Centre, Unite HQ, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8TN.

- Visit shaction.org, email shac.action@gmail.com, tweet [@HAWRNet](https://twitter.com/HAWRNet), Facebook [SHAC](#)
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Universal Credit: robbing the working class

- Tories out - scrap Universal Credit
- Fight for living wages and benefits

David Maples, Lambeth and South West London Socialist Party

What is the real problem with Universal Credit? It's constantly in the news, with politicians criticising [delays in payment and design flaws](#). But most do not address the fundamental issue: austerity.

The Universal Credit benefit system is part of the general Tory onslaught against the welfare state. The Socialist Party stands opposed to all these attacks, not just the worst features of them.

And some of the features of Universal Credit have yet to be widely publicised.

After decades of losing 'proper' jobs, many workers have had to resort to some kind of self-employment. They will soon be subject to the 'minimum income floor'. This assumes self-employed workers earn at least the minimum wage - regardless of actual earnings, which are often lower.

Universal Credit also includes punitive provisions aimed at forcing workers to increase their working hours - regardless of personal circumstances such as care responsibilities, or whether the additional work even exists.

Profit

These attacks are about propping up capitalist profit. Between 1966 and 1982, unemployed workers could get an earnings-related supplement to their unemployment benefit - up to 90% of previous earnings.

But having seen the potential strength of the trade union movement in [the big battles of the 1970s](#), Margaret Thatcher's newly elected Tory government had a high priority of creating unemployment to try to weaken union power.

An overvalued pound made it harder to sell overseas. Combined with British industry's legacy of low investment levels - compared with rival capitalist economies like high-tech Germany - this resulted in mass redundancies.

Unemployment increased to three million. Against this background, the Tories wanted to reduce benefits to increase competition for jobs - to help drive down wages and restore profits.

Unemployment and underemployment are inherent within any economy based on market competition. Overall they are the fault of capitalism, not individual workers.

New system

A new welfare system needs to take this as its starting point, and also form part of a programme to replace profit-driven jobs chaos with democratic socialist planning - jobs for all. The Blairites instead pander to Tory 'benefit scrounger' myths because [they defend the capitalist system](#).

A new welfare system must be based on a reasonable standard of living for claimants. Pro-capitalist politicians may criticise elements of Universal Credit. But they don't criticise the derisory level of benefits, exacerbated by the Tories' four-year in-work benefits freeze.

A new welfare system also has to have adequate administrative resources. PCS, the trade union for benefits workers in the Department for Work and Pensions, is calling for an extra 5,000 staff and a freeze on Universal Credit roll-out until its administrative disasters have been resolved.

Funding to advice bureaus, law centres and legal aid must be restored, so claimants can get help to receive their full entitlement.

Most urgently, Labour councils should use their existing financial powers to ensure no one is evicted, cold or hungry because of Universal Credit.

Jeremy Corbyn should promise to reimburse councils which underwrite all Universal Credit losses if he takes power. This could make the system unworkable, hasten the downfall of the Tory government, and prove to working-class voters that Corbyn is serious about fighting for them.

Tories out - scrap Universal Credit - fight for living wages and welfare. £21 billion a year in unclaimed benefits is the real scandal in the welfare system.

30% of English secondaries in deficit: set no-cuts budgets!

Bea Gardner, Southampton Socialist Party

Almost one in three council-maintained English secondary schools were in budget deficit in 2017-18, according to damning new figures from the Education Policy Institute (EPI).

It is urgent that [unions and councils mount a fightback](#) against Tory vandalism of state education.

Cutbacks led to over 15,000 less staff in English secondary schools in 2017 as compared to 2015, says the School Cuts Alliance. But secondary schools in deficit have almost quadrupled from 8% in 2014 to 30% in 2017, according to the EPI!

This latest report comes after warnings from education unions that funding pressures are leading to unsafe classroom sizes, fewer subject choices, increased exclusions from school, and failures to meet statutory responsibilities for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

And this financial year, the number of schools unable to balance their books is set to increase. A survey by the National Association of Head Teachers reveals three-quarters of heads expect to face an in-year deficit.

Teachers, parents and school students don't need statistical evidence of underfunding - they see it every day.

But government ministers refuse to acknowledge the problem. They aim to destroy the idea that ordinary people are entitled to a decent education - as part of a drive to cut tax for big business and disarm working-class resistance.

Jeremy Corbyn's 2017 manifesto pledged a £5.6 billion increase in school funding. But schools can't hold on for a Labour government - they're in crisis now.

Rather than being made to implement further cutbacks, Labour-controlled [councils should help schools to maintain no-cuts deficit budgets](#).

And John McDonnell should promise an incoming Labour government will pay any debts off.

Union leaders are hoping the Tories will increase pupil funding as part of this year's spending review - a recommendation made by the EPI.

The think-tank's report also calls on the government to reconsider rules about redistributing surpluses from schools with money in reserve.

But while there is disparity between different schools' financial situations, all state schools have seen a real-terms cut in funds since 2010.

The only solution is a [fully funded, publicly owned education system](#), responsive to the needs of teachers, students and parents through their elected control.

Under a socialist system, this would be achieved not by redistributing limited funds in a profoundly underfunded system, but by taking the wealth off the super-rich and big corporations and planning it democratically for the benefit of all.

Them & Us

Cancer ward wait

If you've got cancer and a few grand lying around, private health firm HCA advertises bowel surgery in London for just £20,045. Meanwhile, private providers in the NHS cherry-pick easy cases - leaving the impoverished public providers to deal with the rest.

And cancer patients in England face the worst NHS waiting times on record. Over 18,000 suspected cancer sufferers wait longer than the one-month target for treatment, according to new NHS England data.

Outsourcing outpouring

The value of public contracts awarded to vulture outsourcers has exploded by 53% in a year, says general union GMB. After leeching £62 billion in 2016-17, the privateers drained £95 billion in 2017-18!

Readers will recall that the latter financial year concluded with the [total collapse of super-outsourcer Carillion](#).

Its multimillionaire bosses are still at large - while workers ended up in the scrapheap.

Toxic tube

Toxic '[particulate pollution](#)' in London Underground stations could be up to 30 times higher than beside busy roads! The Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants found 492 micrograms per cubic metre in Hampstead, the deepest station, compared to just 16 micrograms at the average capital roadside.

But don't all Londoners have to use the tube? No. Commuting bosses could hire a Mercedes V class from Belgravia Chauffeurs at just £2,495 for a five-day booking! Quite the bargain.

Universal Credit conquest

In another humiliation for the Tories, even the judiciary has come out against part of their [Universal Credit welfare attacks](#).

The High Court ruled on 11 January that the nonsensical system which calculates income monthly - even when paycheques are not - does indeed wrongly cause claimants to lose money.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd has also promised a partial rollback on Universal Credit's two-child limit for child support.

If your kids were born before April 2017, the Tories will now pay you a pittance for each, not just the first two. They try to play us off against each other even as they squirm to make concessions.

Glasgow council cuts: huge turnout to fight closure of Whitehill pool

Dave Semple, Socialist Party Scotland Dennistoun resident and Whitehill user, and Socialist Party Scotland

Over 200 people packed into Dennistoun Library in Glasgow, with others turned away for lack of room. It was a Community Council meeting to discuss the possible closure of Whitehill pool and gym.

Leaked documents before Christmas gave details of the Scottish National Party (SNP) council administration looking to make huge cuts to the Glasgow Life/Club ALEO which runs leisure facilities across the city.

In total, seven pools/gyms are threatened plus libraries, golf courses and bowling greens. So much for the 2014 Commonwealth Games legacy!

Glasgow's persistent health crisis, with low life expectancies in many of the areas where the closures are mooted, will also be exacerbated. Massive housing schemes like Drumchapel will lose their only gym.

The meeting was mobilised for at short notice over the holiday period, with service users, including the Whitehill Swimming Club and disabled children's groups, spreading the word.

Glasgow Life staff and Glasgow Unison union also mobilised. 3,000 signed an online petition against the closure in the days before the meeting.

The mood of the meeting was electric, with a real determination to fight. A commitment to set up a local anti-cuts campaign at another public meeting was given by the majority in attendance.

Dennistoun ward's three councillors attended - SNP, Greens and Labour - and the local SNP MSP Ivan McKee.

Anger was rightly directed at all these parties. The previous right-wing, Blairite Labour administration was slated for under-investment in the facility.

Establishment parties

However, it reached a pitch when SNP councillor Allan Casey refused to commit to voting against the closure and defended the decision to make huge cuts in Glasgow - saying his hands were tied by the Tories in

Westminster.

After realising he had completely lost the meeting he then cynically tried to say he would go back to the SNP group and say Whitehill should not close, but closing other facilities in the city might be a better option.

Kim Long from the Greens added to people's anger by saying she used the gym personally but that she couldn't promise she would vote against all cuts. Last year the SNP administration passed a cuts budget with the support of the Greens.

Two Socialist Party Scotland members spoke at the meeting and distributed a leaflet calling on the council to use its financial powers to set a legal no-cuts budget and then build a mass campaign to demand back the hundreds of millions of pounds stolen from Glasgow through austerity cuts.

I gave support from the PCS union National Executive Committee, and called on the meeting to mobilise for the [anti-cuts/equal pay strikers'](#) demonstration called by the joint council trade unions on 24 January.

Socialist Party Scotland member Eric Stevenson urged the meeting to oppose all council cuts and not support any closures of facilities in Glasgow.

Eric asked, to huge applause, when were the councillors going to refuse to implement Tory cuts? In contrast he gave the example of the Liverpool socialist council's successful struggle against Thatcher's cuts in the 1980s.

Socialist Party Scotland will be campaigning against the cuts in Dennistoun and is urging people to lobby the local councillors' surgeries and campaigners to organise a massive fightback.

Surrey council cuts: save our children's centres

Surrey County Council has just concluded a major public consultation over a potential [£250 million spending cuts package](#).

This includes the potential closure of 35 out of the current 60 children's centres in Surrey - which would have a devastating impact on parents and families who rely on the services provided by these centres.

Parents, staff and trade unions will be lobbying the council on 22 January to protest against these cuts.

Save our children's centre

Supported by Unison Surrey County branch

Tuesday 22 January at 2pm

County Hall, Penrhyn Road, Kingston upon Thames KT1 2DN

Caerphilly council cuts: right-wing Islwyn Labour councillors fight to impose austerity

Socialist Party Wales

A battle is raging inside and outside the Labour Party in Caerphilly County Borough (mainly covering Islwyn and Caerphilly constituencies) against the cuts that the Labour-run council is inflicting on public services in the borough.

In particular, there has been outrage that the meals on wheels service is being effectively abolished, while [another quarter of a million pounds is being spent on the ex-chief executive](#).

Islwyn Constituency Labour Party (CLP) has [called on the council to set a no-cuts budget](#), drawing on reserves and fighting the Tory government for funding. Even the deputy leader has condemned the Welsh Labour government for underfunding the council.

But the right-wing councillors are fighting back and digging their heels in to insist on carrying out these cuts. A member of Islwyn CLP reports:

"When the resolution of a no-cuts budget was unanimously passed at the November Islwyn Constituency Labour Party meeting, there was hope that Labour-run councils across the UK would now stand up and fight against the austerity policy of this Tory government and force them into a position where they would have to provide the appropriate level of funding to local government.

"At the January Islwyn CLP all-members meeting, controversial Caerphilly council leader David Poole categorically ruled this out as an option and stated, when asked if he would request that officers assemble a no-cuts budget, that his answer was a resounding 'no!'"

"Other councillors, who had refused to attend the November all-members meeting where the motion on the budget was moved, turned up - this time en masse - with one Abercarn councillor shouting 'it's illegal, do you want us sending taxis around giving out redundancy notices!'"

"But isn't this exactly what is happening anyway, with various services being cut? Surely the only option left is to adopt a no-cuts budget which we can confirm is not illegal. It has been proposed throughout the country by various unions who are standing up for the workers they represent. When will the councillors of Caerphilly county stand up for the people they represent?"

Corbyn-supporting Labour Party members in Islwyn are demanding that the councillors support and implement the CLP's call for a no-cuts budget or stand aside at the next election. These members are prepared to deselect councillors that are flouting CLP policy and trying to force through the cuts.

And it may be necessary for anti-cuts candidates to stand against existing councillors if they are not deselected as Labour candidates. The threat of deselection or council election defeat may yet force councillors to step back from further cuts.

Nothing to declare? Dodgy councillors hide vested interests

Nancy Taaffe, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

In 2010, George Osborne pushed his emergency budget through parliament.

He swung the big axe and councils around the country wielded a thousand little axes. Millions of pounds were cut from local budgets - millions of people suffered. A huge remodelling of local government was undertaken, with government grants cut, coupled with a new, intensified emphasis on outsourcing and privatisation.

Soon after the cuts budget of 2010, the Tories pushed through the [Localism Act of 2011](#). These changes go together like a pair.

Just one example of blurring the lines between local government and business interests was the introduction of the rules on special dispensation.

Before 2011, if a vote was taken - say on [school meals being privatised](#) - and if you were a councillor sitting on the committee that was voting on the planned privatisation, and if your husband ran a catering company

that may be interested in bidding for the franchise, you were compelled to declare why you weren't voting on this particular issue.

Indeed, you were compelled to leave the room and publicly register your interests to explain why you couldn't vote.

Dispensation

Our local newspaper reported before 2017's local elections that 59 out of our 62 listed local councillors had claimed special dispensation. The new use of claiming special dispensation allows councillors to remove themselves from the voting process without stating why.

A debate erupted in the local community as to why councillors failed to specifically say why they weren't voting. What were they hiding? Their failure to declare their specific interests rather than the catch all of special dispensation was not illegal according to the Localism Act, but it made the local community ask: "If you have nothing to hide why not declare your interests?"

A similar story emerged in November 2018, and was reported in the Waltham Forest Guardian. A cabinet member who is a known multi-property landlord failed to leave the room or declare his interest when the Landlord Licensing Scheme was being discussed.

An online community blogger has written about numerous councillors failing to keep the online register of councillor interests up to date. He cited some who had partners who ran letting agents and others that owned houses they failed to declare.

Of course, these 'omissions' are always described as 'oversights'. But it makes the councillor register of interests read more like a historical document rather than something that compels public representatives to be open and transparent about their or their family members' business interests. Compare the treatment of these councillors to benefit claimants who fail to declare anything.

Land and property is becoming more lucrative than diamonds in London. This raises the suspicion that those who own it stand to prosper from any so-called regeneration or improvement schemes - which councillors sanction in committees and at local planning committees.

As I explained to the local paper:

"We do not believe that councillors or MPs should be mass landlords as we think, on a general and moral basis, there is a potential conflict of interest there."

That's why we say no mass landlord a councillor. No demolition without consent. No development without consent. All workers' representatives should stand on a workers' wage.

North Tyneside council cuts: march to save our footbridge

Peter Robson, North Tyneside Socialist Party

The second meeting of the Save Borough Road Footbridge campaign took place at the Magnesia Bank pub in North Shields on 12 January and was very well attended by around 40 people.

The [Labour council's footbridge demolition plan](#) will cause serious hardship to disabled and vulnerable people accessing the town centre.

The meeting was convened not only to decide campaign tactics but also to promote the demonstration and march through the town the following Saturday 19 January, 11am, starting at the same location.

What was disappointing at the meeting was that Socialist Party members, who have been active in the campaign from the outset, discovered that a steering group had been set up behind closed doors to exclude us from a role in building the campaign.

When I and another member challenged the chair on this, we were in effect shut down. From the start a lack of democracy has permeated this campaign, which has been run by Momentum and Labour Party supporters who are determined to monopolise it.

However, we proposed helpful suggestions for the march which were well received in the room. Copies of the Socialist were sold, with people coming up to us asking for the paper.

North Tyneside Socialist Party members will continue to involve ourselves in this campaign, and are confident of gaining support for our programme.

History of the workers' movement

The 1979 'Winter of Discontent'

On 22 January 1979 public sector workers staged a one-day strike calling for an end to low pay and for a shorter working week.

It was the biggest stoppage in Britain since [the 1926 general strike](#). In London, 80,000 workers from the NHS, schools and local authorities marched to parliament to demand the Callaghan Labour government drop its detested policy of pay restraint.

Roger Bannister of Liverpool Socialist Party - an activist in the strike movement - looks back on [the 'Winter of Discontent'](#) 40 years ago.

History is full of ironies, one such being that, in 1969, James Callaghan MP led a successful cabinet revolt against the document 'In Place of Strife', an attempt by Harold Wilson's Labour government to put legal shackles on the trade unions and their right to take industrial action.

The proposals, put forward by the then employment minister Barbara Castle, were consequently abandoned. Had they become law, many of the strikes which, a little under ten years later, became known as the 'Winter of Discontent', would have been illegal, and by then prime minister James Callaghan would have had stronger powers to deal with the crisis!

Formed at the turn of the 20th century, the Labour Party was brought into being by the trade union movement in order to give concrete political expression to the needs and aspirations of working-class people.

However, almost every Labour government since then has lost the support of workers as a result of abandoning this historic mission.

Instead, Labour in office has sought to manage capitalism on behalf of the capitalist class, rather than replacing profit-driven capitalism with a socialist economic system. So it was with the Callaghan government of 1976-1979.

The term Winter of Discontent comes from Shakespeare's play Richard III, but it was used in an interview by Callaghan, and was seized upon by the capitalist news media to attack the trade unions, both then and ever since.

Background

The 1970s was a period of economic stagnation - after years of capitalist underinvestment - and of high inflation, the failure of Keynesian pump-priming government policies, exacerbated by massive increases in global oil prices.

However, the Tories and their media outlets, and unfortunately right-wing Labour MPs, consistently laid the blame for inflation on the working class, and any pay rises they were able to obtain.

In the year preceding August 1975 inflation had risen by 26.9%! UK governments tended to see their first priority as 'dealing with', ie reducing, inflation.

Callaghan tried to ride two bicycles at once, maintaining the confidence in his government of the financiers by acting 'responsibly', while keeping the working class on his side by initially avoiding policies such as cutting public expenditure, which would increase unemployment.

Callaghan therefore approached the leaders of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) in order to secure agreement to "voluntary" pay restraint as a key part of the government's pro-capitalist economic strategy.

The Labour Party leadership were not the only ones at that time to abandon its role of advancing the interests of the working class, because the TUC leaders agreed to this deal with Callaghan!

This was heralded as a historic Social Contract, (soon to be dubbed "Social Con-Trick" by many workers!), under which pay rises were to be held down to levels determined by the government. This commenced in July 1975, and was initially set to last until August 1977.

The Social Contract was never universally accepted within the TUC, and an attempt to abandon it was raised at the 1976 TUC conference - with a call to restore free collective bargaining - but was at that time defeated.

In 1975, pay rises were to be no more than £6 a week, the following year this was reduced to 4.5% with a £4 a week maximum rise, and in 1977 rises were to be held at 10%, as part of what was described by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Dennis Healey, as a "phased return without a free for all" to free collective bargaining. This too was agreed by the TUC.

The government wanted to enforce this policy by applying economic sanctions to any employers that broke it.

But Callaghan stepped outside of the Contract by maintaining the 5% limit beyond 1977, and by this time workers' anger about their pay was mounting.

In 1978, Ford motor company offered a 5% rise to their workers, who responded with an unofficial walkout of 15,000 TGWU (forerunner of Unite) members. Within a few weeks this strike was made official, by which time it was 57,000 strong!

Political opposition

Industrial opposition to the Social Contract was giving rise to political opposition. Around the same time as the Ford's strike was starting, the Labour Party conference was taking place in Blackpool.

A Labour Party Young Socialist member, Terry Duffy, delegate from Liverpool Wavertree constituency and a supporter of the Militant Tendency, (forerunner of the Socialist Party), proposed a motion calling for an end to government interference in wage negotiations.

Terry had proposed this motion at his Young Socialist branch, moved it on their behalf at the Constituency Labour Party, and was now moving it at Labour's annual conference.

The conference was then a more democratic, policy-determining body - a far cry from the structures and operation of the Labour Party introduced in the Blair years and still, unfortunately, largely in place today.

The motion was carried by 4,017,000 votes to 1,924,000 votes, an impressive majority, the significance of which was not lost on Ford's management.

Car workers at Vauxhall Motors had already accepted 8.5%, Ford increased its offer to 17%, which the workers accepted!

Broader political support was also ebbing away from the Callaghan government, when a string of by-elections in Labour seats were lost, forcing him into temporary parliamentary pacts with the Liberals in 1977 and even the Ulster Unionists! These deals enabled the government to survive a number of no-confidence votes.

With the Social Contract in tatters the government tried to impose sanctions on Ford and 220 other employers. But this move was defeated in the Commons.

The government survived another confidence vote, but was incapable of enforcing its pay policy.

Understandably a wave of pay demands were submitted including lorry drivers and tanker drivers, forcing Callaghan to put the army on alert.

Early in January 1979 an unofficial lorry drivers' strike began, and although tanker drivers were not involved, they told the lorry drivers their destinations, so that flying pickets prevented petrol deliveries. Filling stations closed, and pickets were mounted at the main ports.

At the end of January, lorry drivers in the South West accepted an arbitrated rise of 20%, only marginally less than their demands. This became the standard for settlements after that.

What crisis?

Callaghan was at a four-nation summit in Guadeloupe, and held a press conference at Heathrow airport on his return.

In response to a question, he denied that there was "mounting chaos", and the next day the Sun newspaper ran the headline: "Crisis? What Crisis", which although a complete fabrication by that archetypal example of the gutter press, this phrase has now passed into common recollection.

The baton of fighting pay caps was passed from the private to the public sector trade unions, as rail unions ASLEF and NUR (now the RMT), on the then state-run British Rail went on strike.

Ambulance drivers soon joined them, with emergencies being taken to hospitals by army ambulances. Half the hospitals in the country were taking only emergency operations as a result of the actions of the ambulance drivers and ancillary workers. Civil servants joined in, successfully securing an above-inflation pay award.

One headline-grabbing incident was when grave diggers in Liverpool and Tameside (Greater Manchester) also went on strike.

Refuse collectors struck up and down the country, creating huge mounds of rubbish in public parks.

On 21 February local authority workers were awarded 11% plus £1 a week, with the promise of more in a comparability study which was to be conducted.

Camden council in north London paid the claim of their workers in full, and the District Auditor deemed them to be in breach of their fiduciary duty! However, unlike their socialist councillor counterparts in Liverpool six years later, no punitive surcharges were imposed on them!

Eventually the government and the TUC were able to fudge an agreement, but it was meaningless in the face of the events described above.

The strikes demonstrated a movement beyond the control of the TUC, which saw its role to defend the Labour government at all costs, despite what TUC members wanted or thought.

In March the government finally lost a confidence vote in the commons, and [the Tories, led by Margaret Thatcher, capitalised on workers' widespread disillusionment](#) with right-wing Labour and won the subsequent general election in May 1979.

The organised workers' movement had demonstrated its industrial power in the Winter of Discontent. But the right-wing leadership of the TUC and the Labour Party had attempted to place the working class in a political straightjacket.

This contradiction was fought out between left and right with intensity inside Labour and the unions in the 1980s, and it still casts a long shadow down to today's class struggles.

- [Today: auto unions must defend jobs](#)

Roger Bannister led an all-out strike of social workers during the Winter of Discontent, from November 1978 to April 1979, against the right-wing Labour council in Knowsley, Merseyside.

USA: federal workers without pay - but immediate mass action can end shutdown

Elan Axelbank, Socialist Alternative (Socialist Party's co-thinkers in the US)

This government shutdown is now the longest in US history. On 22 December, Trump shut down the government, demanding \$5.7 billion for [his infamous 'border wall'](#).

He claims it is the only solution to the "national security crisis". With astronomic healthcare costs, low wages, \$1.5 trillion student debt, and exorbitant housing costs in the big cities, building a wall is hardly the biggest 'security' concern.

On 15 January, workers got their first \$0 pay check. For those making \$500 a week - the average salary of a federal worker according to the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) union - missing a pay check is the difference between making rent or not making rent, full meals or partial meals, medication or no medication.

Out of 2.1 million federal workers, 800,000 are not being paid. 380,000 of these workers are furloughed (permitted to look for other work), while 420,000 are being forced to work without pay.

Mass sympathy for unpaid federal workers, and majority opposition to the wall, has weakened Trump's position.

Trump is now threatening an indefinite shutdown. Although not federal workers, 35,000 Los Angeles teachers started striking on 15 January for better school funding and staffing, showing how to fight back.

Airport security agents have been calling-in sick (call-outs). 150 agents did so from JFK airport in New York and 75 from Dallas-Fort Worth (three times the normal number) on 11 January.

Air-traffic controllers, whose 30-year low staffing level is even further exacerbated by the shutdown, are doing the same.

AFGE union officials have explained the call-outs are not part of an organised action, but are due to workers legitimately needing to call-out in order to find other work that actually pays.

There have been rallies of federal workers across the country and airport security call-outs persist, but they have not yet coalesced into the organised and coordinated mass movement needed to force Trump to end the shutdown immediately.

Socialist Alternative has attended these rallies and we gave out leaflets at airport employee parking garages calling for coordinated workplace action and mass protests to end the shutdown. We are also demanding no border wall, immigrant rights, and immediate back pay for all federal workers.

Meetings of workers in all affected workplaces should be organised right away to discuss how to fight back, and begin to organise action to defend their rights, including being paid for work.

Mass protests

Well-prepared mass protests by thousands of federal employees should be immediately organised in front of every federal building and airport, including mass civil disobedience.

Other unions could mobilise too. Unfortunately, the union leaders have not shown this sort of fighting strategy, although rank-and-file initiatives and action from below could push them to take bolder action.

Escalating mass protests would earn the support of the overwhelming majority of people against the government shutdown. This would crack the Republican 'wall of shame' in the Senate and be a massive blow to Trump.

If federal workers do take action, it's extremely important that all working people support them.

The \$5.7 billion Trump wants for the wall - plus even more if we tax the rich and big corporations - could instead be spent on pay rises for federal workers, jobs, crumbling infrastructure, healthcare and education.

A continuation of the government shutdown is clearly not an option for federal workers. The Democratic Party leadership's tactic so far has been to meet with Trump behind closed doors and then tell the media, not incorrectly, how "unreasonable" he is being.

But this is no strategy to end the shutdown. Since when have Trump and the Republicans responded to reason?

Workers have the power to defeat Trump and his shutdown with coordinated workplace action and mass protests.

We need bold action from below to demand the union leaders mobilise the full power of the trade union movement, the anti-Trump movement and all working people.

We demand:

- End the government shutdown - immediate back pay for all federal workers
- No furloughs, no unpaid work, no wall
- Full restoration of all federal-assistance programs, including food stamps
- Immigrant rights and the right to asylum

[See full article at socialistalternative.org](http://socialistalternative.org)

India: biggest general strike ever

New Socialist Alternative (CWI India)

Why did 200 million workers strike on 8-9 January?

The International Labour Organisation says 18.3 million Indians were unemployed in 2017. 1.3 million young people become unemployed every month. In March 2018, 28 million people applied for 90,000 railway jobs.

India has one of the world's highest suicide rates for youth aged 15 to 29. In 2016, 9,474 students died by suicide - almost 26 every day. Over 75,000 students have died by suicide in India over the 10 years up to 2016.

India's capitalist class has failed to bring an end to the brutal and deeply entrenched caste system. 2,920 'communal incidents' were reported over four years - 389 were killed and 8,890 injured.

They have not only let loose their goons to lynch, kill and terrorise Muslims, Dalits and other oppressed minorities, but even create an aura of great achievements and in that way polarise society on communal and sectarian lines.

The number of millionaires increased by 50,000 2013-2014. A recent report said there could be almost a million millionaires by 2023.

Rural India, home to 66% of the population, still languishes in poverty. The highest paid member of three-quarters of rural households earns just 5,000 rupees (£54) a month.

For more than two years, no concrete steps have been taken to implement a promised £164 minimum wage. We demand a living minimum wage of 25,000 rupees.

Recently, more than 300,000 farmers marched against Modi's failure to provide much-needed financial compensation, the total write-off of farm loans, minimum price for agricultural produce plus cheap and affordable credit.

'Lesser evilism'

The strike is raising hope that [the hated Modi premiership](#) may come to an end in this year's elections.

But communist parties and others are yet again advocating the disastrous policy of 'lesser evilism', and promoting a congress-led coalition as an alternative to the right-wing, authoritarian and communal Modi.

Capitalism has failed to solve problems of poverty, illiteracy, squalor, disease, unemployment, landlessness, housing and climate change. It continues discrimination by caste, class, gender, sexuality and national identity.

Our members distributed thousands of leaflets (and ran out), in English and Kannada, on the days of the general strike.

This strike can help build an independent working-class-led socialist alternative, allying with all the oppressed sections of society.

- For more see ['New Socialist Alternative \(CWI-India\)' on Facebook](#)

France: union-led action and assemblies can defeat Macron

Theo Sharieff, 'gilets jaunes' participant during December

"The year Jupiter plunged from Mount Olympus." That's how news site France24 summed up 'president of the rich' Emmanuel Macron's 2018, after the French presidency was fundamentally shaken by [the eruption of the 'gilets jaunes' \(yellow vests\) movement](#).

Macron started 2019 with an insult to the gilets jaunes and people of France in his new year's address.

Rejecting outright mass calls for his resignation, he went on the offensive against what he termed a "hateful mob" and doubled down on his anti-worker counter-reforms.

Despite this message, eight weeks after the first gilets jaunes protests, 'act nine' of the movement unfolded across France on Saturday 12 January. After a slowdown over Christmas, it seems the movement is back in

full swing.

Saturday 5 January saw tens of thousands out in the streets. Act nine the next week saw official estimates of 84,000 out across France - most likely higher.

Since then Macron has made a new bid to rein in the movement. This time he has penned a 2,348-word 'open letter' in the French press to the people of France, proposing a two-month national debate about the country's future direction!

This comes after his first attempt failed to quell the uprising below him. A €10 billion package including a minimum wage increase - and scrapping the fuel tax which provoked the movement in the first place - rightly emboldened the gilets jaunes.

Cuts

Published on Monday 14 January, the letter's questions include "quelles sont les économies qui vous semblent prioritaires à faire?" - what are the 'savings' (cuts) that you think are priorities! Macron continues to expose himself for what he is - out of touch and totally committed to the interests of the French capitalist class, which is desperate to push on with its austerity programme.

One of the central weaknesses of the gilets jaunes movement - which raises questions over its future - is its lack as yet of formal organisation and democratic structures.

As a spontaneous movement, the gilets jaunes have demonstrated the potential of mass action. But how long this can last without a strategy and determined, accountable leadership is an open question.

Gauche Révolutionnaire, the Socialist Party's French sister organisation, calls for general assemblies in every workplace, neighbourhood, school and university to discuss just this.

We need a strategy for building the movement against Macron, and a political alternative to replace his government.

We argue that the next step in escalating the struggle against Macron needs to be the entry of the organised working class - the trade unions - into the battle, through mobilisations and strike actions.

The trade union leadership should call a nationally coordinated day of strike action to shut down the country and pave the way for further action. This would start to pose the key question: who really runs society?

In his New Year's speech, Macron attempted to pass the buck. He argued this anger had been building from long before his presidency.

Macron is right! That's why we don't just want to get rid of him, but the whole system which has created an untenable situation for millions of workers and youth in France - the system of capitalism.

We fight to replace it with socialism - a system in which society's wealth and resources are publicly owned and democratically planned to provide for all.

It is on this basis that we must fight to mobilise the mass of French society - led by the working class - to kick out Macron and to fight for a better, socialist world.

Mexico: police silence on horrific attack on CWI member

Libres y Combativas, Socialist feminist campaign of Izquierda Revolucionaria (CWI Mexico)

We denounce and actively fight against sexist violence. [In 2018, this violence has escalated](#) with the nine registered femicides every day, in addition to thousands of victims of domestic violence, harassment and all sexual crimes - dangers that we face every day.

On 20 December 2018, one of our members was raped, robbed and kidnapped for more than an hour. It was reported to the specialised prosecutor for sex offenses (FDS-5) the same night, after almost ten hours waiting for the entire initial procedure to end.

But 21 days after the application was filed, there is still no report on the videos of the five surveillance cameras that FDS-5 indicates exist around the route and place of the events.

We demand:

- 1) Immediate action. Review the videos of the five cameras. The report is not yet in the investigation folder. This is mandatory procedure.
- 2) We denounce the classification of the crime. The most serious crime that must be prosecuted with greater urgency - and punished with the highest possible sentence - is the crime of rape. The Mexico City attorney general's office intends only to classify it as 'express kidnapping'. This reflects the lack of gender perspective in the institutions that should provide justice. We demand the case is handled from a gender perspective.
- 3) We demand that the process is carried out in a humanised and empathetic manner towards our member, and other victims of sexual crimes.
- 4) We demand a trial and exemplary punishment for the rapists.

People who have signed this statement want to express our support to our member in this tough process. She is not alone! From different areas, solidarity and political support will be evident.

Unions must fight and demand nationalisation to save thousands of car industry jobs

Rob Williams, Socialist Party national industrial organiser and former Visteon (ex-Ford) Unite union convenor

Ford workers in Bridgend, along with their families, are trying to come to terms with the announcement that over 1,000 workers will lose their jobs over the next two years, with the first 370 to go as early as this spring.

This comes at the same time as 4,500 Jaguar Land Rover jobs are on the line in the West Midlands and Merseyside.

In reality, this is [Ford issuing notice of the engine plant winding down](#). The prospect of only around 500 workers being needed by 2021 raises whether the plant will be viable at all.

In Bridgend, there are workers who have transferred from plants closed by Ford over the last two decades in Treforest, Swansea and Southampton. They know full well that Ford often offers 'attractive' voluntary redundancy programmes to shed hundreds of jobs, reducing the workforce to a level where resistance appears futile.

This is why the unions must act now and put forward a fighting strategy that can convince workers that it's possible to fight and win.

It is vital that it is a national strategy involving all Ford UK workers - because another plant closure will make it easier for Ford to close all its remaining UK operations. This is particularly because of the size of the pension deficit.

Militant action to fight for a political solution is required. This is particularly necessary because the unions balloted workers 18 months ago when they first discovered Ford's plans for the plant. But the lack of action called subsequently can lead to a feeling of scepticism.

Plant meetings should be immediately called to reject Ford's plans. There should be preparations to ballot members for industrial action.

An immediate walkout or refusal to go back to work would send a strong signal to Ford that the workers are serious and would raise workers' confidence.

The car industry trade unions should draw up plans for a nationwide campaign of all car workers under threat, including Jaguar Land Rover.

The unions should demand that the Labour-led Welsh Government, with new first minister Mark Drakeford, nationalise the plant to save jobs.

They should also demand from Jeremy Corbyn that a government led by him would promise to nationalise any car plant threatening job cuts, including Ford and Jaguar Land Rover, and establish a national plan for the car industry.

With the Tories hanging by a thread in Westminster, this could raise the sights of workers and pile on the pressure. But action is needed now.

Hundreds join Manc RMT picket line in solidarity after far right attack

Jackie Grunsell Manchester and Trafford Socialist Party

On their 44th day of strike action RMT members were joined outside Manchester Victoria Station on 12 January by hundreds of other trade unionists and supporters in solidarity with the strike to [keep guards on trains](#).

This followed the [recent attack on pickets by a far-right group](#) accusing the RMT of unlawful action and singling out a Sikh picketer for particularly disgusting abuse.

Overwhelming support

Steve Notts, national executive committee member for Manchester and North West RMT, said: "We are overwhelmed by the trade union turnout in support. This is a dispute not over money, but the safety of the travelling public.

"The strike has been rock solid and the union has actually gained members as a result of the dispute. We have also maintained the support of the public throughout the strike."

The strikers are calling for keeping guards on trains while Arriva Rail North are still refusing talks with the union, intent on putting profits before safety.

Tory transport secretary Chris Grayling has disgracefully failed to force the company to the table in a thinly veiled attempt to break the union.

Michelle Rodgers, [newly elected RMT president](#), called for this level of solidarity to be maintained in the coming weeks. She pointed out that the working class need to unite to get rid of the Tories.

Socialist Party members have supported the strike for the past year and will continue to mobilise support for the picket lines. We sold 18 copies of the Socialist on the picket line in Hull.

We call for the trade union movement as a whole to lead a fight against the far right but also for all unions to take action against the austerity, cuts and privatisation of public services which leads to the growth in support for these groups.

Needless to say, despite their threats, the far right failed to show their faces on the day, showing what can be achieved when we fight back.

UCU: Vote Yes and Yes in the higher education pay and equality ballot

Sam Morecroft, UCU Yorks and Humber regional executive (personal capacity)

On 15 January, the University and College Union (UCU) pay and equality ballot for industrial action opened, and will run until 22 February.

This is a national strike ballot, covering 147 higher education institutions. It [addresses four key aspects of our terms and conditions](#) - workload, casualisation, the gender pay gap and general levels of pay.

Despite the fact that workload in UK universities is so out of control that, on average, UCU members are now working the equivalent of two days a week for free, our employers have refused to negotiate.

Zero-hour contracts

Casualisation has become so rife in UK universities that over 100,000 higher education workers are now engaged on some form of casual contract - such as zero hours, fixed term or even casual worker agreements with no employment status at all. Despite this, our employers have refused to negotiate.

Indeed, although the gender pay gap in the UK is the worst of any higher education sector in the developed world at 18.4%, our employers have refused to negotiate.

To add insult to injury, since 2010 our pay has fallen in real terms by 21% according to the retail price index, yet the employers have offered a measly 2% rise.

With the RPI last year standing at 3.2%, that's another below-inflation offer and another real-terms pay cut.

UCU members have had enough of attacks on our pay, terms and conditions - we're being forced to fight back.

This is the second ballot on these issues we've had this academic year - in October we secured a [vote of nearly 70% in favour of strike action](#) on a 42% turnout. That's the highest turnout we've ever secured in a pay ballot in UCU's history.

But because of the Tory government's vicious anti-union laws, we don't have a legal mandate to strike.

That shows how important it is for workers in the UK to get rid of the Tories, elect a Corbyn-led government and make sure he keeps his promise of scrapping the Trade Union Act.

Not prepared to wait

But in UCU we're not prepared to wait - we're balloting again, because we're determined that nothing will stop us fighting back against the employers and because we can't afford to accept the current situation.

Closing the gap and securing a 50% turnout is a huge challenge. That's why UCU branches up and down the country will be organising member meetings, knocking on doors and phone banking to make sure we reach the threshold.

Students can play a hugely important role on campus - the support and solidarity of students can raise the confidence of UCU members and help us to get over the line!

Re-elect Chris Baugh for AGS

The voting meetings are starting in PCS civil service union Left Unity for the [re-run contest for the assistant general secretary](#) (AGS)

nomination. Socialist Party member Chris Baugh has been AGS since 2004. He won over 48% of the Left Unity nomination votes in an extremely close-run election held at the end of 2018 that saw a record turnout of Left Unity members.

The unfortunate [withdrawal of Janice Godrich](#), due to ill health, has meant that the election has had to be re-run.

Chris has secured at least eleven nominations, a majority, and up from eight last time. The Chris4AGS campaign is seeking nominations for Chris and also for Tahir Latif to fill a national executive committee vacancy on the Left Unity slate.

There will now be voting meetings in each Left Unity geographical group. For those who can't attend their meeting, they can vote by post. All votes have to be in by 5pm on Friday 25 January.

- chrisbaughpcs.wordpress.com
-

'Tories out' demo lively - but opportunity for mass mobilisation missed

Andy Beadle, Lewisham Socialist Party

The People's Assembly demonstration in central London on 12 January culminated in front of a great big banner: "General Election Now!"

Members of the Socialist Party, Young Socialists and Refugee Rights campaign marched together into Trafalgar Square.

This bloc made up the liveliest, most determined, and most yellow vested contingent on the march. Our chants of "Tories out - Corbyn in" and "what we need is socialism" were taken up by much of the crowd.

At the end rally in Trafalgar Square, Unite the union assistant general secretary Steve Turner said: "Get all the bastards out of power! Get a progressive socialist government!"

John McDonnell, Labour's shadow chancellor, brought "a message of solidarity and anti-austerity" from Jeremy Corbyn, including "we stand ready to take power!" John said that the greed of the bankers had caused the crisis for working people. "5,000 people will sleep rough tonight... the Tories with austerity are tearing apart the social fabric."

He listed examples in welfare, health and education. "Proud people are standing up and saying 'we won't take it anymore'." He promised a government under Jeremy Corbyn "will end austerity, invest in society... Make the rich pay their taxes!" He ended, "Solidarity! We will win!"

Gilets jaunes

Among other speakers were two organisers of [the 'gilets jaunes' \(yellow vests\) movement](#) who brought solidarity from France.

Between them they showed how they were resisting president Macron and his government, which has consistently taken from working people and made the rich richer.

Despite media distortion it was the police who are violent, not the protesters they said.

The spirited march, down Regent's Street and Haymarket, attracted attention and applause from shoppers and tourists.

This positive reception revealed the potential that existed for this to have been a massive demonstration, rather than the few thousand who turned out, had it been organised under a clear programme putting forward the possibility of mass working-class action to win a general election.

If John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn had issued a clear and prominent public call for people to attend in advance, as well as for the trade unions to act decisively to mobilise for and organise the demonstration, he could have been speaking to a much larger audience.

Indeed, a noticeable feature of the march was the lack of any large trade union contingents - evidence of a real failure on the part of the trade union leadership to organise the fight to kick out the government - even when the Tories are on their knees.

Those I asked agreed our trade unions should be visibly campaigning nationally at the front of the movement to oust the Tories [instead of subcontracting the business to the People's Assembly](#).

The importance of this is only increased by the fact that a very small but threatening far-right presence came to the protest with the aim of intimidating demonstrators.

This shows that it is necessary to have democratically organised, trade union stewarding in order to help ensure safety and boost the effectiveness of the action.

Key task to strengthen Tamil Solidarity campaign in 2019

Tamil Solidarity campaign had a very successful Annual General Meeting on 13 January.

Reports of various aspects of the campaign were presented by the group of young Tamils who are playing a key role in the organisation.

Tamil Solidarity is a unique campaign within the Tamil community in Britain as it links the Tamil Struggle with the workers' movement in Britain.

Since the campaign was launched ten years ago, we have developed a young leadership which is growing in confidence and putting forward boldly the demand to build a common struggle with the working class, young people, and other oppressed communities, to win rights for all.

This opening session was then followed by a political discussion on South Asia, focusing on [the recent political crisis in Sri Lanka](#).

2019 is going to be an important year for the campaign - it marks the ten-year anniversary of the so-called end of the war in Sri Lanka, where over one hundred thousand Tamil civilians were rounded up and [slaughtered by the Sri Lankan government](#).

As Tamil Solidarity pointed out at the time of the war, as well as since then, the brutal war and its end solved nothing.

Working-class people, young people and oppressed Tamils, have not had any 'peace dividend'. Instead their conditions have deteriorated.

The building and strengthening of the Tamil Solidarity campaign is going to be a key task in the coming year - to win over a new layer of young people to socialist ideas.

- tamilsolidarity.org.uk
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Film: Sorry to Bother You

"Socialist film Botox that made me feel young again"

Nancy Taaffe, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

I decided to go and see the film 'Sorry to Bother You' when I saw Boots Riley, the director, being interviewed on Newsnight. It was refreshing to hear him say: "On your own you can't beat corporate, capitalist America". That was enough to make me want to see it.

Sorry to Bother You can accurately be described as a film of two halves.

The first half of the film follows the main character, Cassius 'Cash' Green, a struggling young black man living in his uncle's garage with his girlfriend. She is an aspiring artist who specialises in installations but works most days holding up advertising by the side of the road to make ends meet. They are both struggling to survive in the landscape of the 2007-08 post-crash America.

The very fact that this film opens with a young black couple with dreams of attempting to get the very basics in life, like a home and a job, makes it revolutionary in and of itself.

So much of what we see now on TV or in film is what I like to describe as a 'pretend struggle'. Often the protagonists appear so comfortable that you have a sense from the off that they have no fear of falling through the cracks. Often their petty preoccupations with whatever concerns them leave you cold.

Not so in this film. Cassius is desperate for a telesales job, and you feel the economic and relationship pressures on him to secure and succeed in one.

Once Cassius gets a telesales job he's faced with the joyless grim reality of this modern workplace: broken water fountains and cramped work booths, crass 'team building' exercises and the daily pressure of the modern equivalent of overseers to make the sale.

What is unquestionably revolutionary is the appearance of a young Korean union organiser - a reflection of the new, diverse and young workforce in this sector.

The last time an open union organiser appeared as a character in a film that I saw was in the film *Matewan*, which was over 30 years ago.

Union organisation and union action in this workplace are a backdrop throughout the film and frame Cassius's struggle.

Danny Glover makes an appearance as an older telesales worker who sits in the booth next to Cassius. He sees young Cassius struggling and suggests he put on a "white voice" to make the sale.

Reviewers have commented that this device is used to reflect white privilege in society, and in particular in the workplace.

For me, the most telling example of why the 'white voice' sells is when Danny Glover explains that this voice denotes confidence: a life of security, of debt-free college education, healthcare and mortgage repayments completely within your grasp.

The 'white voice' reflects comfort and makes the customer feel you are not desperate for the sale, and therefore you will sell more.

The second half of the film takes an abrupt turn. Be prepared for a surreal, often-bizarre future fantasy rollercoaster. Topics covered are AI, the use of robotics, union organisation, strikes, workers' solidarity, and losing your integrity in the pursuit of individualism.

Coming out of the film there was a big group of very young people in front of me all arguing about what the film was about. I overheard one young black man saying that it was so obviously about the need for socialism, that everyone deserves to get paid a living wage and have security without trading their soul. Boots Riley has indeed achieved something if he can provoke such a reaction from the next generation.

Go see it, it's a kind of socialist film Botox - it will make you feel young. Even if you aren't already.

- [Album review: 'Sorry to Bother You' by the Coup - also involving Boots Riley](#)
-

TV - Brexit: The Uncivil War

Interesting but inaccurate portrayal of the EU referendum

Ben Robinson, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Channel 4's 'Brexit: The Uncivil War' is an interesting contribution to how the EU referendum campaign is viewed.

It concentrates on the official right-wing Vote Leave campaign and its director, Dominic Cummings. This narrow focus means there is an overwhelming emphasis on the inner workings of the leadership, with little attempt to understand what really drove people to vote Leave.

David Cameron is only portrayed at the end of a phone call, Corbyn is mentioned in passing - a reference to his 'Bennite' historic opposition to the EU - and even when working-class people are present, they tend to simply provide a foil for the main actors.

This is 'House of Cards' analysis, not 'Our Friends in the North'.

However, this portrayal of the referendum campaign is interesting in how it differs from the narrative that has been established so far.

Farage and Banks are portrayed as sad figures on the sidelines, useful idiots for Vote Leave who concentrate on racist rhetoric, allowing Cummings and co to keep their hands relatively clean.

Boris Johnson and Michael Gove are frontmen who need to be carefully shepherded.

At the heart of this drama is Cummings, presented as a maverick intellectual and rebel against the establishment, who views politicians as a necessary evil.

In a sense, the drama comes from his struggle to sum up the campaign in a slogan. 'Take back control' is first mentioned in the final third of the drama, and the struggle to boil down their message to one slogan holds the whole thing together.

The main Remain campaign is very clearly the establishment, offering politics as usual, and in a very shallow sense that is the reason given for its ultimate defeat.

None of this is to say, however, that it is an accurate portrayal, or even a good drama. There are definitely moments where it slips into self-parody.

There is probably fully five minutes of the 93-minute production which is just Cummings staring angrily at the Houses of Parliament.

A balloon sadly deflating in the Remain campaign HQ as the results are announced - set to weepy music - is more reminiscent of American Beauty and the innumerable parodies than a real moment of heartfelt reflection.

But perhaps the most far-fetched moment is when Cummings and his counterpart in the Remain campaign, Craig Oliver, share a weary pint towards the end of the campaign.

Oliver worries about what kind of future they are preparing for their children.

As Downing Street's director of communications for almost all of Cameron's premiership, Oliver span tuition fees increases, massive attacks on pensions, unprecedented austerity and a ramping up of anti-immigrant propaganda from the government.

The idea that these die-hard Westminster-bubble political hacks are kept up at night worrying about anything other than their own careers and the wishes of the wealthy is surreal.

In a sense, the working-class history presented in Our Friends in the North is still [a better guide to understanding Brexit](#) than this production.

Despite finishing in 1995, it portrays the growing sense of alienation, the dismantling of industry and stability, and the anger at the establishment, far more clearly than Brexit: The Uncivil War.

The latter offers a marginally more subtle analysis of the referendum than is frequently portrayed, but still falls seriously short in capturing the real drama that unfolded.

- [Corbyn must fight for a socialist alternative to the Tory deal and bosses' EU](#)
-

The Socialist Inbox

Letters to the Socialist's editors.

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to editors@socialistparty.org.uk, or if you're not online, to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD.

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.

Views of letter writers do not necessarily match those of the Socialist Party.

Keresley responds to police shooting

Below we print a letter (sent also to the Guardian) from Natara Hunter, a member of the Keresley Village residents' association in Coventry.

It follows the shooting dead, during a police operation, of Sean Fitzgerald. This has left many questions being asked by people in the area. An utterly scandalous and as usual unrepresentative report has appeared in the Sun newspaper.

People are aware that not all the facts are known, but the Sun referred to a candlelight vigil "descending into chaos" in "the worst road in the UK" - laughable to anyone who knows Coventry.

This clearly outraged the writer and her friends who want to restore some balance to the portrayal of the family.

The shooting of unarmed Sean Fitzgerald, a miner's son, by Coventry police on 4 January shocked the people of Keresley.

Sean Fitzgerald, 31, was raised in Keresley Village, a celebrated 'all-out' mining community. Sean came from highly respected mining stock.

His father, also Sean Fitzgerald, was our community caretaker during the 1980s and early 1990s while Coventry colliery was still in operation. He then went on to become the landlord of the Golden Eagle, our village pub.

Sean's grandfather, Gerry Fitzgerald, was a former Labour councillor, National Union of Mineworkers trade union official and a famous combined services boxing champion.

He was one of the first miners to move to Keresley Village. Gerry initiated the Keresley Village residents' association, securing many of the facilities and services still available to our community.

Sean Fitzgerald and his family are highly respected in our community. We are disgusted at the Sun newspaper's reporting of the vigil that took place to celebrate Sean's short life.

The portrayal of the youth that attended to pay their respects does not reflect the respectful and compassionate unity in grief that took place.

Sean's death is another indication of the reckless management of police operations and typifies yet more of the indirect consequences of pit closures and austerity measures initiated viciously by both Labour and Tory party policies.

These have led to unemployment and drastic cuts to essential youth services, the closure of our colliery club, our local pub, youth clubs and nurseries, and cuts to sports facilities and many other essential community and health services that offset crime and enabled inter-generational community engagement.

It is with great sadness we mourn as a community for Sean. We are angered at the lack of prospects and opportunities available for young men like him.

As a grieving and angry community, we request a thorough, independent investigation into why armed police killed an unarmed young man.

A 'drugs bust gone wrong' or the production of cannabis does not warrant the death penalty in modern-day Britain.

For the residents of Keresley Village, we send our sincere condolences to the Fitzgerald family.

Capitalist crash

Socialists in the capital will know that it's not always good for the blood pressure to read the London Evening Standard. But the business pages are often of interest.

The Standard on 8 January, for example, reveals that although debt is often cited as the cause of [the crash in 2008](#), debt today, as a percentage of world GDP, is almost 20% higher. The cause of much of this is the quantitative easing (QE) - printing of credit - pursued by most countries in the last ten years.

It quotes a banker who describes QE as "like an aeroplane which may be theoretically sound, but no one actually knows how it will fly. It has got into the air but now it has to be landed. No one knows where the airport is, nor how long it is before we get there. And the pilot has never flown before."

The last part of this could be a description of the capitalist system, in its current crisis of overproduction. In this metaphor, as in reality, another crash is inevitable.

Bill Green, Blackpool

Workers' rights

My recent experience of employment tribunals leaves me sceptical about their effectiveness particularly in the absence of effective trade union action.

I took BT to an employment tribunal when they sacked me in 2015. The case was dismissed because procedural errors meant that the fee (applicable at the time) wasn't paid. I was allowed to resubmit my claim which was by then outside the legal time limits.

BT was granted a preliminary hearing to get my case struck out for that reason. As they refused early conciliation an extra month is added. This meant that it was then considered as submitted in time - a point accepted in the written judgment.

When fees were abolished I resubmitted my case. BT used the same argument to strike the case out. They were again granted a preliminary hearing on the same spurious grounds.

BT sent me an email three days before the hearing saying that they would ask the tribunal to make a 'deposit order' meaning I would have to pay up to £1,000 in order to continue the case! And that if I lost they would make an application for me to pay their costs! I read this on a Tuesday evening and their deadline was midday Thursday the same week! I felt I had no choice but to withdraw the claim.

It was accepted by the original judge that my application was submitted in time yet the tribunal continued to allow BT to pursue a fundamentally dishonest case. All an employer has to do is prove it has applied its own procedures, and applied a reasonable penalty. A tribunal is expressly forbidden to substitute its own judgment for that of the employer.

It's no surprise then that every prime minister from Margaret Thatcher onwards has boasted about Britain's weak employment protection law. But a Corbyn-led government must legislate for positive rights that will genuinely protect workers.

The best guarantee of workers' rights, however, would be to drive the capitalists out of the boardroom and ensure that hiring, firing and discipline are in the hands of workers.

A former BT worker

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What the Socialist Party stands 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.
- 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 unrecycled 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, 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!

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/28512>