

Editorial of the Socialist issue 1027

Venezuela: resist the pro-imperialist coup!

Mobilise workers to fight for genuine socialism - against corrupt bureaucracy

The social, political and economic crisis which is currently rocking Venezuela poses crucial questions and lessons for socialists and the international working class.

It is also a stark warning of the threat that will be posed to a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government should it attempt to implement a programme of radical reforms without breaking with capitalism.

The forces of international capitalism have rallied behind the declaration of the Venezuelan right-wing opposition leader Juan Guaidó who has declared himself the self-appointed 'interim' president. Jeremy Hunt, the butcher of the NHS, also wants an election in Venezuela - but not in Britain!

US president Trump, Brazilian president Bolsonaro and Argentinian president Macri, along with a host of other right-wing reactionary governments, immediately recognised Guaidó as president. This was clearly part of a pre-planned, coordinated intervention, led by Trump and US imperialism.

They are clearly attempting to carry through a coup and remove incumbent Nicolás Maduro from power. This brazen intervention by Trump was followed by Theresa May in Britain, as well as other European governments, arrogantly demanding that Maduro call fresh elections within eight days.

Even the so-called 'socialist'-led governments of Spain and Portugal have joined the reactionary pack and are hunting for a 'regime change'. Social Democratic leaders in coalition with Merkel in Germany - behaving like modern-day Noskes or Scheidemanns (Social Democratic politicians who betrayed workers by supporting World War One) - have also joined these calls.

Imperialist intervention

Trump has "ruled nothing out" and hinted at military intervention if Maduro refuses to step aside. By appointing Elliot Abrams as special envoy to Venezuela, the bloody nature of Trump's intervention is made clear. Abrams was convicted for his involvement in arming the 'Contras' - paramilitary forces in Nicaragua in the 1980s.

Socialists and workers should have no truck with, nor lend any support to, the reactionary attempts at a coup carried out by these right-wing forces of reaction.

Should these forces succeed, the repression and attacks Venezuelan workers and socialists are currently suffering will dramatically worsen. Any right-wing regime coming to power to replace Maduro will enact revenge on the working class and socialists.

The hypocrisy of western imperialism knows no limits. They condemn the Maduro government but have collaborated and supported brutal regimes in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This long list includes Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the military dictatorships in Chile, Argentina, Brazil and elsewhere - to name but a few!

Despite opposing these reactionary attempts to carry through a regime change, socialists cannot put any confidence or complete trust in the Maduro regime.

An economic and social catastrophe is engulfing Venezuela. GDP collapsed by 35% between 2013 and 2017! This is a greater collapse than in the US depression between 1929 and 1933, when it fell by 28%. It is slightly

higher than that experienced when the former USSR disintegrated in 1992 and capitalism was restored.

IMF predictions indicate that hyper-inflation will soar to up to 10,000,000% this year, making wages worthless. This is comparable to the economic collapse in the German Weimar Republic between 1921 and 1923.

The economic collapse in Venezuela has resulted in the wiping out of the gains in healthcare, education and other areas that were introduced previously by the Hugo Chávez-led government.

Hunger and starvation have returned, and the social collapse is measured in the soaring crime rate in the major cities. In the largest refugee crisis in Latin American history, an estimated three million people have fled the country - about 10% of the population!

The capitalist class and its political representatives internationally are using this devastating social and economic crisis to claim another 'failure of socialism'.

Venezuela was used in a ferocious campaign in Spain and Brazil to try and discredit socialism. In Britain, it was raised in the last general election against Jeremy Corbyn and will likely be used in the next to an even greater degree. Corbyn wants to 'turn London into Caracas' will probably be the refrain.

Unfortunately, Jeremy Corbyn and most on the socialist left have played into the hands of the ruling class by the uncritical praise they have heaped onto Maduro and the previous governments of Hugo Chávez following his election 1999.

Failure of reformism

The capitalist commentators who attack Jeremy Corbyn, Owen Jones and socialists for their uncritical defence of the Venezuelan government fail to mention the Socialist Party or our international organisation the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI). We always supported the reforms and blows struck against capitalism by the Venezuelan working class and Hugo Chávez. Yet we also consistently warned that if capitalism was not defeated, and replaced with a nationalised and democratically planned economy, then the reforms would be attacked and rolled back.

We warned that, without such measures, economic sabotage and dislocation would inevitably develop and allow the counter-revolution to gain ground.

We consistently argued against the top-down, bureaucratic methods used by the regime and the need for a real system of democratic workers' control and management to be introduced. Only this could combat the corruption and repressive methods that were increasingly a feature of the Chavista regime.

Regretfully, these warnings were ignored by many on the socialist left, who have now provided the ruling class with a weapon to try and discredit socialism.

In Venezuela it is not socialism that has failed but the attempt to introduce reforms in a top-down bureaucratic manner, while remaining within a 'mixed' capitalist economy with a significant degree of state intervention.

This is a warning to any future radical left government and a potential Corbyn-led administration in Britain. A radical left reform programme will meet a ferocious resistance from the capitalist class which will act to undermine and sabotage such a government.

It will only be possible to defeat such a campaign by introducing a programme to abolish capitalism and establish a socialist economy, democratically planned, and based on the nationalisation of the major companies and banks which control the economy.

This was never carried through in Venezuela. The current crisis is a consequence of the failure to do this. Had this been carried through in Venezuela at the height of the revolutionary movement which developed following the failed coup against Chávez in 2002, it would have been possible to then establish a voluntary democratic socialist federation together with Cuba, Bolivia and Ecuador.

This would have transformed the situation throughout Latin America and beyond. Tragically the Venezuelan working class is now paying the price for the failure of reformism to conclusively break with capitalism.

It is not certain that the attempted coup backed by Trump will succeed in forcing Maduro from power. Trump and his leading, hawkish national security adviser, John Bolton, who has led the charge for regime change, appear to have failed to secure the first elementary requirement for a successful coup: ensuring the military is on your side!

Thus far it appears that the military high command is remaining with Maduro. In part this is because the military is fully integrated into the regime with senior positions in the government and having secured lucrative business interests from it - especially in the state oil company PDVSA.

Despite the offer of an 'amnesty' by Guaidó, many military commanders rightly don't trust his pledge. They may well remember the 'amnesty' offered to the M19 guerrillas in Colombia who laid down their weapons only to be massacred by the Colombian government in the 1980s and 90s.

However, the military support for Maduro could change or fracture and divisions could rapidly open up if it appears that the regime faces the prospect of being swept away or imploding.

Guaidó has been able to mobilise not only the middle class but also sections of the working class and poor who had previously supported Chávez and, until recently, were prepared to 'give Maduro a chance'.

Now, out of despair and desperation, when an estimated 90% of Venezuelans live in poverty, sections of workers from former Chávez strongholds like the '23 de Enero' (a working-class district named after the 23 January uprising against the military regime in 1958) have joined Guaidó protests.

Explosive situation

An extremely explosive and unstable situation is unfolding against the background of a social collapse and disintegration. Venezuela could disintegrate and become a 'failed state' - an element of which already exists.

Should the army fracture, which is not excluded, Venezuela could be plunged into a civil war and even collapse into a Lebanese type of partition, with Maduro ensconced in the Miraflores presidential palace and in control of some areas and cities, and a Guaidó regime controlling Altimira and other rich parts of Caracas or other cities.

Should the US directly intervene militarily, which cannot be entirely excluded, this will only make a bad situation more catastrophic. Most Venezuelans and the masses of Latin America are opposed to such an intervention. The history of the US imperialist intervention in Latin America is certain to provoke a backlash from big sections of Venezuelan society and across Latin America.

Such a development by the Trump regime will severely aggravate relations between the major global powers - especially Russia and China, both of which are backing Maduro as a means of extending their influence in Latin America.

The Chinese regime has loans totalling £38 billion to Venezuela which it fears losing should the Maduro regime be removed. Maduro has also been one of China's closest allies in Latin America. The replacement of Maduro by Guaidó would be a set-back for Chinese interests in the region as it would strengthen Venezuela's links with US imperialism.

This crisis has crucial lessons for the working class internationally. Socialists need to oppose any attempted coup by the right wing and oppose any western imperialist intervention.

Socialists can give no trust or confidence to the Maduro government. In Venezuela, the CWI members in Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left) are heroically fighting for a front of all socialists, dissident Chávistas and workers, to fight for an alternative to the threat of right-wing counter-revolution and for a real socialist alternative based on genuine workers' democracy.

Councils must save domestic violence services

Join the fight to defend women's lives

Amy Cousens, Leeds Socialist Party and Women's Lives Matter campaigner

Already this week, two women will have died due to domestic violence. By the end of the week, there will have been five domestic violence-related deaths.

Women's Aid reports that, in an average week, two women are murdered by a current or ex male partner and a further three women kill themselves to escape abuse.

The effect of domestic violence on victims has been found to be similar to the psychological effect of kidnapping: a living nightmare. Around one in four women experiences this in their lifetime. Since austerity, domestic violence figures are rising.

This is not because perpetrators of domestic violence have suddenly become more violent. It is because austerity has trapped more and more women in abusive relationships.

As Theresa May continues to push through her domestic violence bill, the discussion being had by leading domestic violence practitioners has been centred around educational prevention methods and tougher policing.

Improved funding for preventative measures, like education, is absolutely necessary. But often this discussion is used to distract from the central point: domestic violence victims urgently need access to sufficiently funded refuges and domestic violence services.

Austerity

Theresa May posing as a feminist and pushing forward the domestic violence bill is smoke and mirrors after ten years of Tory-led austerity. Government cuts have devastated women's and domestic violence services. Austerity has left victims incredibly vulnerable.

Since 2010, around a quarter of the total funding for domestic violence services has been cut, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalists. This equates to some areas of the country having no refuge provision at all.

Where do women fleeing violence go when there is nowhere for them? The single biggest reason for homelessness among women is domestic violence. We know women end up on the streets, in emergency rooms and, in all too many cases, dead.

The Women's Lives Matter campaign started when Tory-led austerity cuts caused a 40-year-old specialist women's domestic violence service, Doncaster Women's Aid, to close in 2016.

Doncaster is a town with some of the highest rates of domestic violence in the UK. Its Labour council had not been funding the service for a number of years. Instead, the service ran on a big Lotto grant.

The combination of a lack of local authority funds and unreliable charity funding meant that the service had no reliable source of income. This was devastating for service users.

Doncaster Women's Aid often saw women who might have walked five miles to an appointment. These were women who couldn't afford to get the bus to the next town or city.

On top of this, many out-of-area services were already completely inundated. They were struggling to support women within their own postcode and simply didn't have the resources to support women out of area.

Many women in Doncaster knew the consequences of this austerity blow. They set up the Women's Lives Matter campaign and took to the streets to demand the council save the service.

The campaign - made up of a staff member from Doncaster Women's Aid, ex-service users, community campaigners and local women - held street stalls, protested and went to the press.

The Socialist Party supported the campaign from the outset.

Eventually, after eight months, the campaign forced the council to concede a meagre sum of £30,000 to set up a new Women's Aid: South Yorkshire Women's Aid (SYWA).

Campaign again

But disgustingly, seven months after SYWA was set up, Women's Lives Matter had to go back to the streets again. The council said that, due to Tory cuts, it would not be funding the SYWA past the end of that year. Yet again, it meant the service faced closure.

This time the right-wing Labour council went on the offensive against our campaign. We boldly rejected the councillors' weak argument that their 'hands were tied' over budgets. We showed clearly that the council had the power to use its reserves - an emergency measure - to fund the service.

We also pointed out that Doncaster council was spending just £30,000 a year on the service. At the same time, it was hiring an adviser to the mayor with an advertised salary of £250,000.

But the Labour council was completely unprepared to resist Tory cuts - willing to dutifully pass them on, even at the potential cost of women's lives. Labour councillors viciously attacked our anti-austerity campaign, despite the fact that many of our members are also members of the Labour Party.

The Women's Lives Matter campaign, despite suffering a defeat, has since spread to other areas of Yorkshire and, at its first national meeting on 8 December, attracted fighters from across the UK. A mood to fight fiercely for women's lives came from this meeting, with a list of demands for the labour movement. These include but are not limited to:

- Not one more cut to domestic violence services and refuges. Public funding for the services we need
- No to all austerity - for councils to set budgets based on need
- Stop and scrap Universal Credit, scrap the benefit cap and end the two-child limit. For a benefits system that meets, and collectivises, the needs of all ordinary people
- Mass investment from the government into council housing - both building and regeneration. For rent control now
- Free, flexible and democratically run, publicly funded childcare for all those who need and want to access it

The campaign also demands publicly funded social care to relieve the burden of care for women, a higher minimum wage and a fully funded national health service.

The Women's Lives Matter campaign intends for this to mark the beginning of a national campaign to save lifesaving domestic violence services.

But, more than that, the demands reflect the need for an end to all austerity, because all these measures hit working-class women disproportionately and all make women more vulnerable to abuse.

We call on trade unions to take up this struggle. These are our demands to the labour movement to keep women safe in the immediate sense.

Socialism

But to truly free women from oppression and violence, much wider societal change, in the form of a socialist society, is what is needed.

Rosa Luxemburg, a socialist fighter, was murdered 100 years ago this month for her heroic battle against the capitalist system. She said "women's freedom is the sign of social freedom".

The Tories represent freedom only for their class, the capitalists, to exploit. Women, even rich women (though they suffer to a lesser extent), cannot have genuine freedom from the threat of violence under capitalism.

Theresa May has posed in a "this is what a feminist looks like" t-shirt. But her policies trap women in the home. Austerity helps sustain women's secondary position in society.

Modern capitalism has been pushed by women's and trade union struggles to make legal changes in the direction of women's equality. But this masks reality. Austerity works to cut women off from the public sphere.

With no state-funded childcare, low pay, and a lack of affordable housing, women remain stuck in low-paid roles, struggling to support children on benefits and with vulnerable living situations.

In fact, one of the biggest reasons women often don't leave abusive men is a real fear of being unable to live economically without their husband or partner.

In turn, this lack of ability to be economically independent reinforces ideas about 'a woman's place' in society.

This is exactly the narrative at the root of domestic violence - the idea that women have particular roles within the family and the home, that they are essentially the possessions of men.

This understanding of domestic violence is essential in our battle against it and for equality.

The acceptance of the necessity of austerity by the right-wing majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party, as well as the vast majority of Labour councillors, absolutely cannot be tolerated. It shows a lack of willingness to upset their careers and put working-class women's lives first.

Women cannot simply sit tight and wait for a Corbyn-led government. Corbyn's anti-austerity policies, if implemented, would no doubt improve the lives of working-class women no end. But Labour councils must act now to save domestic violence services - and Corbyn and McDonnell, as well as the trade union movement, should call on them to do so.

Council cuts

Corbyn should guarantee that any council prepared to do this - to refuse to implement cuts and instead use reserves and borrowing powers to save local services - would immediately have its funds restored upon the election of a Labour government.

The Women's Lives Matter campaign, supported by the Socialist Party, is calling for nothing short of an all-out offensive against austerity. This means fighting to kick the Tories out, to demand a general election and a Corbyn-led government.

But it also means building a movement primed to defend Corbyn's anti-austerity policies and push further for gains for working-class people.

Women's Lives Matter is launching a national petition on top of calling for activists and trade unions in towns and cities to campaign for councils to sustainably fund local domestic violence services.

This petition puts the demand to shadow chancellor John McDonnell, for him to stand up for women's lives, use his position and stop Labour councils from carrying through Tory cuts.

For women who are victims of domestic violence, this demand is life or death. Labour councils implementing cuts are responsible for the women who are turned away from underfunded refuges.

Women cannot wait, a mass campaign to save domestic violence services, and against all austerity, is what is needed to save women's lives.

Austerity out, Tories out

Helen Pattison, Socialist Party national committee

"Christmas is only just over and it's already the end of May". That was the comment of one social media user after the government's historic 15 January defeat in parliament on the Brexit deal.

But Theresa May has so far managed to limp on. And there's no guarantee her rotten government will simply fall as some expected.

The Tories need to be pushed out.

As we go to press, May could be facing further defeats in parliament as the House of Commons debates proposed amendments to her Brexit deal.

Yet, despite the chaos, the representatives of the capitalist class in parliament - including Blairites, Tories and (nearly extinct) Lib Dems - still fear a general election and the possibility of a Jeremy Corbyn-led government.

That's why huge pressure continues to be heaped on Corbyn to drop his calls for a general election and instead support a second referendum over EU membership.

Working-class people know we need to get rid of the Tories. But we can't just wish for a general election or hope for austerity to end. The workers' movement has a vital role to play in forcing the government out.

Imagine if Corbyn initiated another vote of no confidence in May's government. And imagine if this time, outside parliament, there were tens of thousands of trade unionists and anti-austerity campaigners demonstrating.

Imagine if they had been called onto the streets by Corbyn and the unions - demanding a general election. Imagine if they were preparing for further action.

This kind of mass pressure could have a decisive effect.

The RMT transport union has given a small glimpse of what could be done. It has attempted make its mark on the Brexit negotiations by calling a series of rallies with its seafarer members.

This initiative was taken after the government made headlines for its 'no-deal Brexit ferry deal' - a deal it struck with a company which owns no actual ferries! The RMT is fighting to secure decent working conditions and wages to stop a race to the bottom for seafarers.

We have all known since the June 2017 election that this government is weak and wobbly. But over the last 18 months working-class people have continued to suffer austerity. It's time to force out the rotten Tories. It's time for them to go.

Tory on homeless: "tear down these tents"

We say: tear down the Tory government!

Ross Saunders, Cardiff Socialist Party

Cardiff Tory councillor Kathryn Kelloway has sparked outrage by calling on social media for the tents of homeless people in the city to be torn down.

Kelloway [challenged Labour council Leader Huw Thomas on Twitter](#) to "tear down these tents" for reasons of "safety", "prosperity" and for "a better image for Cardiff" - sparing not a word for the impact on the homeless people who rely on the tents for shelter.

Her tweet immediately provoked 2,000 angry replies, including from former Wales rugby international players Ian Gough and Gareth Thomas. Many pointed out it is the government led by her party that is driving the housing crisis and compromising our "safety" and "prosperity" with austerity.

Cardiff Tories were forced by the outcry to suspend Kelloway - but almost immediately reinstated her! She is unrepentant, calling critics "virtue signallers," claiming that adequate alternatives to rough sleeping exist - and that anyone on the streets has chosen to be there!

These comments by Kelloway are unfortunately echoes of claims made by Cardiff's Labour council. After Lindy Pring died in a tent in the snow last year, cabinet member for housing Lynda Thorne said "there is no need to sleep outside at night" because Cardiff Council provides adequate support for everyone at risk of homelessness. But it doesn't.

Cuts

Like a lot of opposition-run councils, Cardiff wants to have it both ways. They deny the cuts they have obediently implemented are causing suffering in our communities, while at the same time denouncing Tory austerity in the abstract.

24 new rough sleepers appear on Cardiff's streets every month. Homelessness is up 12% on last year in Wales, according to Shelter Cymru, and up 9% in the last three months. And all experts acknowledge these figures under-report the actual levels of the problem.

Cardiff Council has cut a quarter of a billion pounds of services and 2,500 jobs. They have evicted from council housing the victims of the bedroom tax and other benefit cuts, at the same time as they cut funding for services provided by homeless organisations like the Wallich charity. They even abolished the community alcohol and drug team.

But most importantly, Cardiff Council refuses to take a stand against the government and fight for more funding, despite sitting on £100 million of reserve cash which could plug the gap while a campaign is built.

Big business demanded we put its need to restore profits before our need for housing, and big business politicians like the Tories and Blairites are only too willing to help them. It's not tents we should be tearing down: it's the Tory government and Blairite councils, and the capitalist system they represent.

- Scrap Universal Credit and the benefit cuts!
- No more job losses, no more cuts in public services: set no-cuts budgets, and nationalise workplaces like Bridgend Ford that threaten cuts
- No evictions - cap rents, not benefits - for a mass programme of council house building

Hillsborough trial: cop changes story

Dave Walsh, Hillsborough spectator and Liverpool Socialist Party member

On 15 April this year, it will be 30 years since the [Hillsborough Disaster](#) where 96 Liverpool FC fans were killed in a crush on the Leppings Lane stand at the FA Cup semi-final against Nottingham Forest. Yet only this January did the trial begin of match police commander David Duckenfield, and the venue club secretary Graham Mackrell.

Duckenfield is represented by Benjamin Myers QC. Myers told the court his client did the best he could in very difficult circumstances. He also said he would look at events on that day critically and realistically, but in no way sought to insult Liverpool supporters or their city.

Myers went on to say the tragedy happened "by virtue of bad stadium design, bad planning, some aspects of crowd behaviour, some aspects of police behaviour, mistakes by individuals and genuine human error."

There may well be some truth in Myers' comments. But Duckenfield was warned of the dangers and chose to take no countermeasures. And it is not lost on the people of Liverpool that this was not his defence for most of the three decades since the tragedy.

His defence so far - backed by South Yorkshire Police, Thatcher's Tory government and the capitalist media, most notably the 'Scum' newspaper - was that the fans caused the disaster.

Lies

They said the fans were violent, drunken animals; that we kicked our way into the stadium, and police were powerless to stop us. They also said that, as dead bodies lay on the pitch, Liverpool fans looted their belongings and urinated on police officers trying to do their duty.

Duckenfield hid behind these lies and the huge cover-up that was orchestrated by the British establishment for many years. He is doing now what any criminal would do: he is changing his story in the light of the overwhelming evidence against him.

Unfortunately, the disgusting behaviour of Duckenfield and all those involved in the cover-up is nothing out of the ordinary. We have seen it time and again. The [miners at Orgreave](#), the [residents at Grenfell](#), the [Shrewsbury pickets](#) and many more have suffered similar treatment from the capitalist state.

The ruling class will stoop to any depths to defend its power and privilege. Their judges and officials cannot be trusted to deliver timely or thorough justice.

Independent inquiries by the trade union movement would offer better hope of getting to the truth. But to prevent such future atrocities, the power in society must move from the hands of billionaires and their representatives to democratic control by the working class.

Liverpool Travelodge digger wrecking: union organising is the answer

Roger Bannister, Liverpool Socialist Party

Footage of a disgruntled construction worker, owed £600 by his employer, smashing the reception of a newly built Liverpool Travelodge with his digger has gone around the world. It has attracted humorous comments, condemnation and some sympathy.

Within a few hours, crowdfunding had raised hundreds of pounds - initially to cover the £600, but then to help pay for legal representation in the inevitable court case.

The many workers who have been underpaid by their bosses will no doubt sympathise, and may even wish they had access to a mechanical digger!

Despite the myths peddled by the capitalist media, British law is overwhelmingly biased towards the employer. It is extremely difficult to prevent an employer from cheating you on pay or other rights in advance, and there are only limited means to seek redress after the event.

According to the government's own statistics, over 9,000 minimum-wage workers were underpaid by bosses in 2018, to the sum of £1.1 million. And in recent years, local councils have had to pay millions for historic equal pay legislation breaches to thousands of low-paid women. Just recently, the heroic 8,000 Glasgow strikers forced their employer's hand on this too.

But reports suggest the worker in question here is not a member of a trade union. This case illustrates an important fact of life under capitalism: workers' rights count for little if workers have no effective method of enforcing them. It is of crucial importance that all workers belong to a trade union.

Unions

Unions can provide legal assistance to pursue non-payment of wages. But more importantly, a well-organised workplace is more likely to prevent these problems occurring in the first place - by stopping the job with industrial action if workers don't consider employers' treatment of them proper.

Union leaderships vary. Some are good, some are bad. Even the best-led unions may vary in effectiveness from place to place, section to section.

It is therefore also vital that rank-and-file workers take control, by electing fighting shop stewards in their workplaces, and combative representatives to their unions' governing bodies. Militant shop stewards can link up with like-minded reps via the National Shop Stewards Network, to learn from each other's experiences, and plan coordinated action where appropriate.

- Find out more about the NSSN at shopstewards.net

Fresh inquest into killer air pollution: nationalise energy and public transport!

Hannah Davis, Birmingham Central Socialist Party

The family of nine-year-old Ella Roberta have been allowed to apply for a new inquest into the wrongful death of their daughter.

Ella died in February 2013 after spending three years in and out of hospital due to seizures and asthma attacks.

If the appeal is successful, she could be the first person in the UK to have air pollution listed as her cause of death. And the fact is that Ella's death is just one of 40,000 early deaths a year linked to air pollution.

Those with existing respiratory problems such as asthma are most at risk. But studies have now linked air pollution to miscarriages, dementia and heart disease.

London's air is now among the dirtiest in Europe. Other British cities on their 'final warning' from the European Commission - no more than a strongly worded letter - for nitrogen oxide include Birmingham and Sheffield.

In Birmingham, the city council has responded by implementing a 'clean air strategy'. This consists of a clean air zone to charge vehicles entering the city centre such as buses, taxis and lorries, and building a cycle path from Selly Oak to the centre as part of a 'cycle revolution'.

But even these small changes put the onus on individuals to change our lifestyles. It can even punish working-class people forced to rely on their cars for work - like the fuel tax which sparked the 'gilets jaunes' (yellow vests) anti-austerity movement in France.

It makes little to no difference when big industry continues to emit spiralling amounts of harmful gases - without any threat of repercussions.

In January, the government announced plans to build 16 new waste incinerators. Incinerators will then account for over 50% of our waste disposal, and ultimately increase harmful emissions.

Though the Tories claim to be cracking down on air pollution, their measures are completely insufficient, and due over many years when we need change now!

The Socialist Party demands an end to the construction of refuse incinerators. Instead, we stand for nationalising energy and public transport, alongside mass investment in safe and clean energy and transit. This could also reduce dependence on private cars, and allow rapid conversion to electric vehicles.

International solidarity with the struggle of the Sudanese people

Sabah Ahmed, Reading Socialist Party

For five weeks, demonstrations and mass outrage have continued in Sudan. This is the largest ever wave of protests against the economic policies and human rights violations of the Omar al-Bashir government.

There have been more than 300 protests in 15 out of Sudan's 18 states since 19 December. 50 people have been killed - most of them under the age of 25, including three children. More than 2,000 have been arrested.

On 19 January, there was a strike of teachers, doctors, pharmacists, dentists and university students.

And there have been more student strikes since.

Security officers went to the Buri neighbourhood to arrest people. Inside people's homes they threw tear gas, used rubber bullets, and did the same at universities against striking students.

Bashir has called protesters "rats and infiltrators".

Regime forces have attacked injured protesters inside hospitals.

The government also deployed armed men with their faces covered in vehicles without number plates to run over protesters, causing injuries and death.

Some arrested women reported experiencing sexual harassment and rape inside detention centres. Detainees were tortured and one student was beaten to death on 24 January.

The chant "the people want the downfall of the regime!" is heard throughout Sudan.

17 feeder marches in the capital Khartoum tried to march on the presidential palace on 24 January. The police and security forces used tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition to stop them. Two people were killed.

The government blamed infiltrators among the protesters.

Bashir tightly controls the media. Those who try to report on events are severely punished and their publications are confiscated.

The state blocked social media, but the protesters are still able to film and post day by day through Twitter and Facebook groups. They use hashtags like #SudanUprising and #SudanRevolts.

Bashir has travelled to Qatar and Egypt to ask for help. The Saudi regime has backed him too as Sudanese soldiers are fighting alongside Saudi troops in Yemen.

Although Qatar hasn't offered financial support yet, these despotic regimes are all supporting this killing and this bloody government.

They do not show any sympathy with the Sudanese people who have been starving under Bashir for 30 years. They fear this movement could inspire renewed protests in their own countries.

The Sudanese regime's links with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and so on are a reason why Trump is not threatening it in the same way he is trying to force regime change in Venezuela (see pages 2-3).

The Sudanese diaspora continues to support the uprising. They gather around the world in squares and in front of Sudanese embassies to condemn the killing and the arrest of peaceful protesters.

Some people also send money home because some children have been left alone with no-one to look after them and no money for food after their family members were arrested. Activists have paid for a student to be treated abroad after he lost his eye when he was shot by state forces.

A march of the Islamist capitalist opposition Umma party calling for Bashir to step down was attacked by police on 25 January. Umma has made pacts with the regime in the past.

The Sudanese Professionals Associations, representing several opposition parties, has called for "the formation of a national transitional government composed of qualified persons, through the consensus of all factions of the Sudanese people, to govern for four years."

But, as the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) said in December, "past revolutionary experiences have shown time and again what can be expected from such a 'technocratic government': the removal of the discredited figurehead of the regime, and its replacement with a nominally civilian rule - but coupled with the preservation of the pillars of the old state machine and of the riches and economic power of the plundering capitalist elite."

The CWI demands:

- Down with the Bashir regime
 - Release all political prisoners
 - Reverse all price rises
 - For a workers' government with socialist policies
 - Build action committees and an independent mass movement of workers and the poor to bring the regime down
 - For a socialist and democratic Sudan, based on the unity of working people and the oppressed
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UK protests

Socialist Party members in London and Birmingham showed solidarity with the Sudanese uprising.

At a lively protest in Trafalgar Square, Paula Mitchell, London secretary of the Socialist Party, spoke in support of workers and young people fighting back in Sudan.

She pointed to the history of the Tory party, Tony Blair and countless other British politicians supporting dictators abroad when it aligns with British capitalism's interests.

And she explained that we have our own fight here - for which we draw inspiration from protesters in Sudan - to get the Tories out.

Mark Best, East London Socialist Party

Brazil: Hundreds die in avoidable dam collapse

60 people have so far been killed and 292 are still missing after a dam operated by mining company Vale collapsed, releasing a wave of iron ore waste. Nobody has been found alive since 26 January.

19 people died when a Brazilian dam collapsed in 2015. That was another Vale operation.

New far-right president Jair Bolsonaro has attacked women, LGBT+ and black people, promising anti-worker policies. In January he reiterated his call to cut red tape. And just three days before the disaster, he announced plans to privatise large sections of the Amazon river.

The people responsible for the shortcuts and dangerous conditions that allowed this catastrophe must be brought to justice.

There must be an independent inquiry - led by the workers, local community, trade unions and social movements - into what happened.

And these companies, that put safety and the environment last, must be brought into democratic public ownership.

- Go to socialistworld.net for updates
-

Belgium: Movement against climate change grows

School student strikes hit a record high. 35,000 marched through Brussels on Thursday 24 January, triple the size [of the week before](#). On Sunday 27 January, more than 70,000 marched on a national climate change demo in Brussels.

The Flemish environment minister said she "feels encouraged to continue her policies" and "there are now affordable electric cars on the market, they cost only €37,000 (£32,000)." One of the 18-year-old organisers of the school student strikes wondered if the minister even had the slightest idea of what normal people earn.

In our material we respond to the anti-capitalist sentiment among the protesters by explaining we need a planned economy, meeting the needs of the working class and the planet. The movement is still at its beginning. By arming it with collective demands that can involve working-class organisations, it can grow even larger and more powerful.

Michael Bouchez, CWI Belgium

- See more on the climate change protests at socialistworld.net
-

Germany: School student walkouts reject Coal Commission proposals

The Coal Commission, set to discuss the end of German coal energy to meet climate change targets, has presented its results - wait up to 20 years to shut down the last polluting plants while giving billions of euros to big business.

The Commission has met mass resistance. Over several weeks, school student protests - 'Fridays for future' - demanded an end to coal energy as soon as possible.

10,000 school students walked out on 25 January. They describe the commission results as unacceptable, but Greenpeace and the Green Party agreed to it! Sozialistische Alternative (CWI Germany) is part of the environmental movement and the school student protests.

We call for an immediate end to using brown coal, conversion to renewable energy, and guaranteed retraining and work for every job at risk in the mines, paid for by the energy companies. We demand the nationalisation

of the energy companies under democratic workers' control and management as a step to democratically planning energy consumption and economic production for the benefit of all.

Michael Koschitzki, Sozialistische Alternative

Tesco changes threaten thousands of jobs - Usdaw union must fight!

Connor Rosoman, Usdaw shop steward (personal capacity)

Tesco has revealed plans to cut thousands of jobs as part of a new restructuring initiative. The cost cutting measures include removing counters in some stores, overhauling stock control and scrapping hot food provision in staff canteens.

Shamefully, workers first heard about the changes in the press with stories of job losses of 15,000 reported. Tesco CEO Jason Tarry has now written to staff saying the changes would affect 9,000 workers, with "up to half" of these potentially being redeployed in other roles.

This is still a major change, and Tesco workers will rightly be nervous about the news. This is the latest in a series of 'streamlining' processes among British supermarkets. Tesco has already cut 10,000 jobs through not replacing workers when they leave.

Waitrose and Sainsbury's have recently gone through similar shake-ups to the one planned in Tesco. In reality, it has meant putting more pressure on workers.

As a result of stagnating wages and a rising cost of living, consumer spending has been low. For the supermarket bosses, this means less profit, and they expect their workers to shoulder the effects of this.

Udaw, the shop workers union, must act to protect jobs and conditions. Last year saw strikes by McDonald's and JD Wetherspoon workers as well as by Tesco workers in Ireland, which shows the potential there is for similarly low-paid supermarket staff in Britain to take action.

Tesco workers could also link up with customers who will be angry at losing in-store services. Usdaw should call public meetings to win support for the fight against these cuts.

Ultimately, it's only on the basis of public ownership and democratic control can jobs be protected from the pressures of the market.

Amy Murphy, Usdaw union president and Tesco worker, spoke to the Socialist (in a personal capacity):

"Staff at Tesco are shocked and devastated by the announcement of so many job losses. Retail is under pressure but Tesco still makes over a billion in profit and staff played the crucial role in ensuring a good Christmas for Tesco.

"Udaw calls on Tesco to explain the reasons behind these changes and, along with Unite the Union which represents some Tesco distribution workers, we should fight every job loss and cut.

"This should be linked to our 'Time for Better Pay' campaign for £10 an hour now and better conditions and contracts."

PCS Left Unity chooses Chris Baugh - unite behind the left AGS and NEC slate

Socialist Party members in PCS

Left Unity, the broad left in civil servants' union PCS, has voted for Chris Baugh to be its candidate for assistant general secretary (AGS).

Socialist Party member Chris Baugh is the union's current AGS who was first elected in 2004. He will stand for a fourth term in the 2019 PCS election.

The 2019 PCS election has already started with nominations being sought for AGS and the national executive committee (NEC). The closing date for nominations is 7 March. Left Unity, working with the PCS Democrats, under the banner of Democracy Alliance, has a full slate of candidates which can be found at chrisbaughpcs.wordpress.com.

A delay in Left Unity announcing its candidate was caused by a decision to rerun its election. This increases the need for Left Unity members to act quickly in nominating Chris Baugh for AGS along with the rest of the slate.

Chris Baugh has an outstanding record in the union and in building the left. He attended the founding conference of the broad left of PCS's predecessor union in 1977 and later became Left Unity chair. As an activist, Chris played a major role in democratising the union and in making it accountable to its lay rep structures. He was elected as a union vice president and president of the Land Registry Group. His union lay rep experience is unrivalled and his record as AGS and union treasurer is outstanding.

In the PCS election Chris Baugh is likely to be opposed by two other candidates. John Moloney, from the Independent Left and Lynn Henderson, a PCS full-time officer.

Lynn Henderson is supported by PCS general secretary and Left Unity member Mark Serwotka. It needs to be made clear that she has never been a member of Left Unity and has played no part in building the left or fighting the right wing.

Fighting record

This contrasts with every other Left Unity candidate for senior full-time official positions past and present. From John Macreadie, who stood for general secretary against the right wing in the 1980s, through to Chris Baugh (who came through the lay structures), Left Unity candidates have stood on its record and on building the left.

Left Unity members will recall Serwotka's very public commitment at PCS's 2018 annual conference and at Left Unity conference in December 2018 to support the candidate elected by Left Unity members. Serwotka is a member of Left Unity and instigated the challenge to Chris Baugh and who promoted his preferred candidates throughout the Left Unity election process.

To now refuse to accept the result because it did not go his way will be received badly by Left Unity members as it shows contempt for Left Unity and its democratic process.

Chris supports the need for a national pay campaign and national action. He has argued for a tactical discussion within the union at all levels to ensure that PCS gives itself the best chance of reaching the 50% voting thresholds in an industrial action ballot, and that delivers the action needed to defeat the Tories' pay cap.

Chris has made it clear that he will fight for the agreed pay strategy of the union in 2019 as he has always done. Can the same commitment be made to the Left Unity decision-making process by Lynn Henderson?

In the PCS elections there is a need to unite around the Democracy Alliance election campaign and the full slate of candidates.

Leicester college staff strike against low pay

Tessa Warrington and Steve Score, Leicester Socialist Party

Spirits were high on the frosty 29 January morning that striking further education teaching staff gathered outside Leicester College Freeman's Park campus. The strike is over low pay as a result of what workers describe as "sustained underfunding".

16 further education colleges across the country were on strike. Many University and College Union (UCU) members in further education have seen the recent pay rises for nurses and teachers and say this has given them the push to call for action themselves.

The Socialist spoke to a lecturer on the picket line who has worked for the college for more than 20 years: "I am paid less now than I was 15 years ago. On top of that, staffing levels have halved over the past three to four years through redundancies while student intake has remained the same. The workload for the remaining staff has effectively doubled and we just can't cope."

At the Abbey campus the picket line had support from students, a UCU member from Leicester University and council workers tooting their horns on their vans.

The strike is due to resume again on 31 January with a further three days planned in March. With two colleges already gaining concessions before even taking any action the mood is hopeful that the reasonable demand for a 5% pay rise will be met.

Teachers vote 83% for strikes - not a time to take a step back

The recent indicative ballot of 82,500 teachers in England in the National Education Union (NEU) saw an overwhelming 85% vote for strike action.

This vote reflects the growing anger against the Tory onslaught on our schools and colleges. One third of secondary schools are now running deficit budgets. So short of cash are they that job cuts, increasing workloads and falling living standards have become the norm.

The strike vote comes on top of the recent 2,000 head teachers marching on Downing Street on a Friday in what was effectively an unofficial strike.

Local councils continue to come under massive pressure from parents and workers in local battles against cuts and academisation with victories in Newham and Lewes. Even some Tories are demanding more funding and the right to bring academies back in-house.

It is vital that the strike vote must now be used to step up the campaign to force what is a weak Tory government into retreat and out of office.

The NEU national executive will now meet on 28 February to decide what next. But there are already rumours that the leading officers of the union, along with some of the 'left' national executive members will be recommending doing nothing and will hide behind the anti-union laws.

The turnout in the indicative ballot was 31.4% and some are claiming that the union can't proceed to a formal ballot as it didn't show we could reach the 50% threshold that would be required in a statutory ballot.

To do nothing now and simply retreat into more lobbying would miss a golden opportunity to take on a government that's on its knees. A formal strike ballot would also give a boost to public sector union Unison members who have just started their own consultative ballot of over 150,000 school support workers.

Does it have to be a case of all or nothing in the NEU? No, we do not simply ignore the turnout and the obstacle of the Trade Union Act. However, it would be entirely feasible for the union to ballot the 3,000 plus schools and sixth-form colleges across England that got 40% or higher turnout in the consultative ballot. This would open up the potential for national action. The NEU members could then be joined later by Unison and the University and College Union who are currently balloting 74,000 university workers.

In the current explosive situation in education, this action alone could force the government to back track.

Unison union campaigns for school support staff action

Hugo Pierre, Unison national executive committee (personal capacity)

Unison has started a six-week consultative ballot of 150,000 school support staff in England for strike action against cuts to jobs, pay and conditions.

The Tories have inflicted all this on schools through budget cuts. The consultative ballot includes asking members whether they are prepared to take strike action.

The Tory attacks on school funding have led to school support staff losing their jobs. Many of these staff provide support to children that teachers cannot.

As special schools have closed and more children have been integrated into mainstream classes, these posts have become a vital support to helping students with behavioural problems. Cutting these posts leaves schools without this specialist provision.

Unison members have resisted this in a number of schools around the country with campaigns and industrial action. Strike action has been effective in slowing down these attacks, but left to a school-by-school approach, members' determination is not backed by the support needed to win.

In Labour councils, councillors sit on their hands and claim they have nothing to do with the amount of money the government give schools. But there is nothing to stop them using council reserves to top-up school budgets in crisis, while backing a campaign of school governors, trade unions and staff demanding the Tories put more money in.

Unison members will fight to defend their jobs and pay and will be campaigning in schools for a massive Yes vote so that the official ballot for action can begin.

Trade unions successfully protect rail workers' picket line in Hull

Mick Whale, chair, Hull trade union council

More than 150 trade unionists and activists rallied to Hull and District trade union council's call to defend the transport union RMT's picket line on 26 January. After the recent harassment of the Manchester and Leeds picket lines by far-right activists trying to attach themselves to the 'gilets jaunes' (yellow vests) movement, Hull trade union council took the potential threat seriously.

It was just as well because about half a dozen far-right members, identified from Manchester and Leeds, did turn up in Hull. The size of the trade union rally at Paragon station meant that they would have been stopped if they had tried anything.

Councils can fight cuts!

Mick Griffiths, Wakefield and Pontefract Socialist Party

Two years ago, Wakefield district's council declared that it could no longer guarantee service provision for even the most needy.

A report by the Centre for Cities has highlighted that Wakefield is one of the five cities and towns that have suffered the largest cuts in spending.

It sits among several northern towns and cities that made the 'top ten'. The worst affected areas are Barnsley and Liverpool. But a number of inner-London boroughs also rank highly on this dubious leader board.

This 'hardest hit' status will come as no surprise to Wakefield residents.

The Labour council has dutifully implemented Tory cuts with no resistance being offered.

The consequences are all too real. A recent council report pointed to a significant rise in homelessness applications. Health and social care budgets have been cut to the bone.

These cuts compound the crisis in our NHS. The Tories' 'sustainability and transformation' plans aim to push our health service further into private hands.

A recent council health scrutiny committee raised that funding was only really available for emergency and acute services - with little to nothing left for preventative measures!

Local government is under immediate threat. The government aims to reduce councils to being no more than administrators of contracts for private profiteers.

No-cuts budgets

Council budgets are currently being set. As of October last year, Labour councils around the country were sitting on £9.3 billion in general fund reserves.

Jeremy Corbyn's welcome declaration that Labour is now an anti-austerity party is seriously undermined while Labour councils continue to meekly impose central government cuts.

Councillors have a choice. They could use their reserves and borrowing powers to fund no-cuts, needs-based budgets. This would make 'for the many not the few' more than just a slogan.

Corbyn should call on councils to take this road. And he should pledge to restore the funding of any council which does - as soon as a Labour government is elected.

If Labour councils stood in solidarity with trade unions and communities to fight to defend our services, a mass campaign could stop these cuts. What's more, it could play a major part in building a movement that could force the Tories out and bring about a general election.

But if Labour councillors are unwilling to refuse to implement government cuts, they should stand aside for those who will.

Pro-cuts councillors should be prepared to meet a challenge from anti-cuts candidates at the forthcoming local elections, which the Socialist Party will be part of.

Join us to help build the anti-cuts struggle. If we fight we can win!

- Listen to this week's Socialism podcast: 'Are no-cuts budgets possible?' Available on all major apps and on the Socialist Party's youtube channel
-

Coxford ward byelection: No to cuts - defend our vital services

Following the resignation of independent anti-cuts councillor for Coxford Ward, Keith Morrell, Southampton Socialist Party has selected Sue Atkins to contest the forthcoming byelection. Sue is a longstanding community campaigner and is prominent in the Southampton Fair Funding for Schools campaign.

"I call for Southampton Labour council to implement a no-cuts budget on 20 February, save Glenn Lee and Holcroft House nursing homes, open Kentish Road respite centre 24/7, fully fund our schools, and fight for the restoration of the £136 million stolen by the Tory government since 2010", says Sue.

"We will be told that councillors must be 'responsible'. I agree, but responsible to who? The bankers, the government which is dismantling our local services? Or responsible to the people who elect them, the vulnerable, the hard working, the poor - all of us in our community who rely on the council to protect our badly needed local services.

"That is why I am standing, to continue and build on the principled policies that Keith always stood for."

Southampton Socialist Party supports Southampton council workers and their trade unions - Unite and Unison - which oppose Labour's cuts budget. Head teachers, the NEU education union and parents are also calling on the council to use its powers to defend school budgets. They have our full support.

Anger into action

This mood must be turned into action. A united campaign linking all those affected by cuts in Coxford and across Southampton, including strike action by council workers, can force the right-wing Labour council to withdraw its cuts budget.

The election of Sue Atkins as a champion of such a fightback will help to build pressure on the council and support for an end to cuts in Southampton.

Socialist policies are needed to build affordable council housing for all, re-open youth centres and elderly care homes, fund schools and libraries and restore weekly bin collections.

We live in the sixth-richest country. That wealth should be in the hands of the 99% - not the super-rich 1%. Public ownership of the banks and big monopolies could guarantee an end to inequality and deliver services to meet the needs of all.

Walthamstow: Hands off our public amenities

Keep profiteering developers out!

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

'We aren't going away'. That was the mood of the public meeting of around 60 people organised by the Save Our Square campaign on 26 January.

The meeting to organise resistance against the destruction of 81 mature deciduous trees in the town square heard two testimonials from brave activists - Calvin Payne from the campaign to defend 17,500 trees from Blairite council vandalism in Sheffield, and Melanie Strickland, facing a prison sentence for action to prevent unfair deportations (the Stansted 15).

The anti-tree atrocity is part of the right-wing Labour council's widely opposed plans to hand over the town square to private developers to build four tower blocks of unaffordable apartments of up to 29 storeys. Our campaign fights to defend our trees and public spaces - and for council homes for the families and young people in housing need.

Calvin's report was invaluable, demonstrating how organised and determined campaigning can stop the tree felling (13,000 saved).

Attempts to intimidate, arrest, serve injunctions and charge activists using anti-trade union legislation, were almost entirely defeated.

However, Melanie's report of how the Stansted 15 were found guilty under anti-terror laws is a warning of how this legislation will be used against activists organising peaceful and effective solidarity.

The campaign has taken every form of action to appeal to the council to halt the destruction of the square and the trees - from winning the argument at the planning meeting, to protests, mass petitions and an occupation of the square, and more. The council is in no doubt about the huge extent of opposition to their plans.

This meeting was preparing the next step - to be ready to physically prevent our trees being destroyed.

Almost the entire meeting signed up to join the Tree Defenders Whatsapp list to be both the eyes and ears of the campaign, letting everyone know if contractors move in. But most importantly, this is a step to building up a network of people ready to do what's necessary to stop our trees being destroyed.

The Stansted 15 will be sentenced on 6 February in Chelmsford. Please attend the court in solidarity or send solidarity messages via Waltham Forest Trades Council: wfradescouncil@googlemail.com

A strategy to fight the far right

Leeds Socialist Party

Around 20 people attended a public meeting in Leeds on 21 January to discuss 'how to stop the far right - build a movement against the Tories and austerity' - a topic on everyone's minds since a group calling itself "Antifa Public Watch" [tried to disrupt a Socialist Party meeting earlier in the month](#).

Many Socialist Party members spoke and shared their experiences on dealing with the far-right threat. It was generally agreed that, despite our politics and those of the far right being drastically different, the underlying anger of those looking towards the far right stems from the harsh economic environment facing working-class people, which could equally push people in a socialist direction.

A few days earlier, a far-right group was involved in a protest in Leeds - co-opting the pro-working-class imagery of the French 'gilets jaunes' (yellow vests) movement, but with added xenophobic rhetoric - one protestor was even photographed doing a Nazi salute!

Some people may turn to the far right as a result of low pay and poor material conditions inflicted by the Tory government. In the absence of a visible left-wing movement, working-class individuals can fall victim to the divisions enabled by the ruling class, placing the blame on scapegoats like migrants instead of the true culprits, the exploitative capitalist establishment.

The general conclusion was that, to stop the emerging far right, we need to not only combat its demonstrations, but also to step up campaigning to alleviate the material conditions that fuel the far right.

Crucially this means presenting a viable socialist alternative in the interests of the working class.

Want to oust the Tories and change the world? ...Then give us the resources to do it!

Ian Pattison, Socialist Party national subs organiser

We're asking members to increase their subs to the Socialist Party. We need the resources to enable us to reach as wide an audience as possible in the developing political crisis. The Tories are at the heart of this crisis and there could be a general election at any time.

Unlike the Tories, we have no rich backers. But our members make such tremendous sacrifices, so much so that the Socialist Party's membership subs are around two-thirds of those of the oldest capitalist party in the world!

Compare the clarity in the Socialist on the key issues facing working-class people to the fog generated by the capitalist politicians over Brexit. We have a clear programme that shows how to fight the cuts and end austerity.

The Tories, who represent big business and the super-rich, got £13 million in donations from just 64 wealthy individuals in 2017. We can't match that. But our members and supporters raised almost £290,000 in 2018 for the Fighting Fund and Building Fund, in addition to the regular subs, to help us in our search for a new national headquarters.

Our members have been hit hard by Tory austerity but understand the vital part that their support plays in our fight for socialism. One member who is a rail worker has already agreed to increase their subs by over £100 a month. Another member who is unemployed has quadrupled the amount they give to the party.

Of course, the fight for socialism is necessarily international, and a portion of every member's subs also goes to support the pioneering work of our socialist international - the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) - organising in over 45 countries.

You don't have to be a member of the Socialist Party to take part in this campaign to boost our finances. You can make a regular donation at socialistparty.org.uk/donate.

Every extra pound goes towards the fight for the socialist transformation of society - to harness the world's wealth to meet the needs of the 99% and solve the big problems facing humanity, such as global warming.

Socialist Party Wales conference - prepare for mighty class struggles

Dave Reid

The Socialist Party Wales conference opened in Cardiff with an emotional minute's applause for the contribution of [Beth Roper, chair of Cardiff Young Socialists](#), who died in tragic circumstances in December. Beth epitomised all that was best in the new generation of fighters who have joined the Socialist Party in Wales and are preparing for the battles ahead.

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary, opened the conference discussion on 'Where Britain is going', and pointed to the huge class struggles that will open up in 2019. While the 'Brexit fog' had obscured the big class divisions in society, the anger against austerity could explode into big battles this year.

The key word at the conference this year was 'prepare', and Socialist Party Wales is certainly preparing for these battles. Above all, it means preparing politically, with clear ideas on how to fight austerity and the attacks of employers.

The position that the Socialist Party has as the unofficial left opposition to the right-wing trade union leaders in Wales will be invaluable in the struggles ahead. Socialist Party members in key unions are renewing the fighting and socialist traditions of the Welsh labour and trade union movement.

Even though 2018 was relatively quiet for trade union struggle, members recalled the battles that they had led, participated in or supported - especially the University and College Union pensions strike.

Socialist Party members are also playing a prominent role in making the Cardiff May Day march a central date in the labour movement calendar.

Preparing for class battles also means preparing for extra party resources. Even though huge sacrifices had been made by members in collecting over £12,000 last year in Wales for the Socialist Party building fund, members dug deep to achieve a brilliant conference fighting fund collection of £1,130.

East Midlands conference: Getting ready for the big upheavals in 2019

Clare Wilkins and Sebastian Motley

34 delegates attended in the recent East Midlands Socialist Party conference in Nottingham to discuss the political situation and prospects for building the party in 2019. It was lively and full of discussion and debate, many giving their views and reports of what they've done - a great way for members to connect.

Rob Williams from the executive committee introduced the morning discussion on political perspectives - in which he touched upon the developing crisis in Venezuela, the 'gilets jaunes' (yellow vests) movement in France, the slowdown and contradictions in the world economy and, not least, the crisis in British politics over the Brexit impasse. This latter crisis could go on for weeks and months but we need to prepare for an early general election.

Rob emphasised that the worker's movement must lead movements against the Tories and austerity or else this can leave a political vacuum for the populist right to exploit.

Regional organiser Tessa Warrington introduced the afternoon session on party building and regional secretary Steve Score summed up the discussion.

Tessa praised the party branches' involvement in local community campaigns, and their interventions in Pride events, anti-Trump protests, Corbyn rallies, and industrial disputes, including the UCU strike.

Successes

The number of party public stalls has increased and we raised 187% of our fighting fund target in the last quarter. The conference financial appeal raised a magnificent £531.16.

31 people joined the party in the region last year and branches must ensure that new members are fully integrated into the party campaigns and structures.

Examples of party initiatives aimed at encouraging young people to join were given, which included the establishment of Young Socialists and Socialist Students groups.

The gilets jaunes movement has shown that struggles against the capitalist system can arise at any time. We must be ready. We have the commitment, consciousness and dedication to build the Socialist Party in the East

Exhibition: Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms: Art, Word, War

Cathryn Gathercole

As we left this engrossing exhibition at the British Library my friend said: "there is nothing new under the sun".

The things which were not new in this case - patterns of political influence, exercise of power, the language of diplomacy and the impact of dominant narratives - are repeated throughout history and across continents.

This exhibition charts the period from the 5th century when groups of Saxons, Angles and Jutes came over the North Sea and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms emerged, up to 1066, by which stage the now united and wealthy kingdom of England was conquered by Duke William in the Norman conquest.

Impressive texts

Unsurprisingly (it is the British Library after all!) these stories are told through an impressive collection of original texts.

The manuscripts highlight the dominant influences: Celtic patterns from Ireland and Iona, illuminated gospel-books reflecting Roman connections and the spread of Latin literacy alongside Christianity.

It was King Alfred and his successors from the 800s who set in motion the political unification of the kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons.

Alfred was an advocate of the English language and during his reign he sought to achieve parity between written English and Latin, apparently out of a desire to make knowledge accessible to a wider population.

It isn't too big a leap to see in these exhortations the early idea of nationhood and Englishness which has continued to this day, serving different political masters and different political ends.

It also occurred to me that giving a layer of the population access to knowledge, and valuing the language they spoke, would have won him valuable allies in the unification process, enabling him to become the first king and ruler of all the Anglo-Saxons.

Inevitably, the artefacts which remain are those of the elite. History is written by the victors after all, and the victors are usually male and rich.

There are some clues as to the role of women, including examples of powerful women owning property and wielding significant influence in their own right. It was more often the lot of noble women to be married off to cement political alliances.

Emma of Normandy was married to two kings, and was mother to two more. She commissioned a biography called 'In praise of Queen Emma' which unsurprisingly portrayed her in a flattering light. This would be more impressive if a second copy hadn't been discovered recently giving a different ending.

The idea of changing and editing texts came up surprisingly often in the exhibits. Translating from one language to another led to changes in nuance, reflecting changing morals and contemporary thinking.

Highlights

One of the highlights of the exhibition is the Codex Amiatinus - the only remaining copy of three huge bibles made.

The story goes that one copy was being taken from Wearmouth-Jarrow to Rome as a gift, but unfortunately Ceolfrith who was taking it, died en route.

The dedication page was scraped and Ceolfrith's name was replaced by another - a forgery not discovered until 1888. It seems not even the victors have their own way all the time.

- Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms: Art, Word, War is open at the British Library in London until 19 February. See bl.uk/events/anglo-saxon-kingdoms for details

Fiction: Tombland "The power of common people fighting for justice in the 16th century"

Derek McMillan, Brighton Socialist Party

Tombland is the latest novel in the Shardlake series by CJ Sansom. It is a murder mystery set in the 16th century. There are no spoilers in this review about who the murderer was. The story is set against the real historical background of the Kett rebellion in 1549.

In the reign of Edward VI (when real power resided with his uncle, the Duke of Somerset, who reigned in his name) the gentry and yeoman farmers had taken to enclosing land and giving it over to sheep. They forced small farmers off the land which was also given over to sheep farming.

Not only did people lose the use of common land for their own sheep but agriculture was devastated.

As a result of a disastrous war with Scotland and the debasement of the currency, prices rose out of control while wages stagnated.

One Norfolk yeoman farmer, Robert Kett, was approached by rebellious commoners who demanded he remove the enclosures he had made.

Not only did he do so but he ended up leading the rebellion in Norfolk which became the largest of its kind in the country.

16,000 rebels

An estimated force of 16,000 rebels set up a massive camp on Mousehold Heath to the north of Norwich. Under Kett's leadership, the rebels stormed Norwich and took the city.

The workers in the city sympathised with the rebels and assisted the takeover. The forces of the aristocracy thought the rebels would be a walkover and sent an army against them under the Marquess of Northampton. He was comprehensively defeated.

The rebels, however, had faith that the government genuinely intended to deliver on its promise to end illegal enclosures. That is a bit like expecting the 1% to act in the interests of the 99%. Instead, the king's army under the Earl of Warwick was sent to massacre the rebels with the aid of 1,200 mercenaries.

The story is a useful antidote to books and TV series about the pomp and ceremony of the Tudor court and the intrigues of the aristocracy.

The flip side of that coin was the unimaginable brutality with which aristocrats like Warwick treated the commoners. He only stopped because the gentlemen did not fancy putting their own hands to the plough - so repentant commoners were spared.

The book has a valuable lesson. Not only does it show the power of common people to fight for justice but also the perfidious nature of the upper classes.

- Tombland, part of the Shardlake series, by CJ Sansom [is available from Pan Macmillan](#)
-

The Socialist Inbox

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.

Grayling fails history

Transport minister Chris 'Failing' Grayling was quoted on the front page of the Socialist on 24 January as saying: "The moderate politics we've had since the end of the English Civil War could be under threat".

The English Civil War ended in 1649, so that's 370 years of uninterrupted "moderate politics" is it? In the 18th century there was unrest and uprisings in support of the French Revolution.

In the 19th century the Luddites smashed machines and even assassinated mill-owners. What about Peterloo in 1819, with 16 deaths at the hands of the soldiery?

Nothing to see here, according to Grayling. The 20th century saw a general strike and battles against fascism, major confrontations with the state in the miners' strike and the anti-Poll Tax movement.

Grayling studied history at Cambridge (I know, hard to believe, but true). Is this the history they dole out there, where nearly everybody, at least anybody sensible, has 'moderate' views? Sadly, so-called moderation doesn't get you anywhere and it never did.

Grayling has failed at the Ministry of Justice and continued to fail at the Department for Transport. Now he's even failing at history too.

Paul Gerrard, Salford

TV licence concession

For many years the free TV licence has been part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) remit. Quite rightly it has been seen as part of government's wider welfare role in tackling social isolation among the older generation.

Successive governments have avoided improving the state pension, and instead have offered older people individual concessions, such as the free TV licence for the over-75s.

In 2015, the government withdrew from directly funding the scheme. Now the BBC is threatening cuts to it.

According to the OECD, the UK state pension is the least adequate in the developed world. Removing this concession, without addressing the value of the state pension, is therefore grossly unfair.

In any democracy, access to information is crucial to enable citizens the opportunity to be informed and make decisions.

Loneliness among older people is now regarded as a growing problem. One in four pensioners view TV as their main form of companionship.

The provision of such a concession should therefore be seen as playing a vital role in tackling this problem.

As such, the concession is clearly funded from general taxation by society as a whole. This correctly reflects the obligations that we all have - including tax paying pensioners - to make a contribution towards benefits and services which we deem to be worthy.

Around 6.5 million older people have an income of less than £11,800 a year. The TV licence - as a proportion of income, therefore represents quite a considerable amount. I have no doubt that, if the concession were to be removed, many would simply be unable to pay.

Means-testing a benefit costs far more to administer than it being paid universally. Experience shows that it is often those who need such benefits most who tend to be the ones who don't claim.

The BBC also needs to look at its other areas of expenditure, such as the salaries paid to some of its top executives and on-screen talent, before it makes a decision to cut this concession.

Claude Mickleson, Lydney, Gloucestershire

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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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