

Rich list thieves

Take the wealth off the super-rich

Lindsey Morgan, Leicester West Socialist Party

The top 1,000 wealthiest individuals and families in Britain are sitting on a record £771.3 billion, up £47.8 billion in a year. This astonishing fact is in this year's Sunday Times Rich List.

At the same time millions of children from working families are living in poverty, more than a third of babies are living below the poverty line, and workers up and down the country are engaged in battles against poverty pay. The accumulated hoarded wealth of the super-rich, stolen from the value created by workers' labour, is beyond unfair.

It is clear that wealth isn't 'trickling down'. In fact, the working class is forced to fight for the scraps from the bosses' table. This is why we need the Tories out!

Under the headline 'Age of uncertainty rattles the super-rich', the Sunday Times details conversations with Rich List grandees. They say the election of Corbyn as prime minister would lead to 'Corbygeddon' - and that some are taking steps to move wealth abroad.

The Times has long been the mouthpiece of the capitalist class. Even the positive but relatively limited demands that Corbyn has proposed have rattled the wealthy.

Tax

In response to the Rich List Corbyn has proposed that the top 1,000 should declare the tax they pay. This is a welcome proposal that would enable deeper scrutiny of the wealth of the richest, and would impact the ability of HM Revenue and Customs to allow so-called 'sweetheart deals' through which the capitalist class avoids paying high rates of taxation.

In research conducted for the PCS union the tax gap equates to a loss of £120 billion a year to the government. To reclaim this could be a huge step forward. A higher tax rate, as proposed by Labour, would also be positive.

But faced with the prospect of paying higher taxes, many bosses will move their wealth abroad. This is why we need to fight for a general election and for a Corbyn-led anti-austerity government, but with socialist policies that include nationalising the banks and major corporations that dominate the economy. We can't control what we don't own.

Wealth inequality is a fact of capitalism. Measures to narrow the gap through reform are seriously limited without mass working-class struggle to fight for more. This wealth that has been stolen from workers can only be won back long term by the organised working class.

We need to unite, strike, and fight together for the socialist transformation of society where big business is owned and democratically planned for all. It is the only true end to the obscenity of wealth inequality here and abroad.

Privatisers sue NHS - kick out the fat cats and fully nationalise our health service!

Jon Dale, secretary, Unite EM/NG32 Nottinghamshire Health

A private company is taking the NHS to court, because its contract to run Nottingham University Hospital's outpatient-treatment centre was not renewed.

Circle had the £320 million contract for eleven years. When the contract came up for renewal, the Clinical Commissioning Group awarded it back to the hospital trust, who put in a cheaper bid.

Circle claim to be concerned the trust will not be able to provide the service at lower cost as staff will benefit from "improved NHS terms" - an admission some Circle staff are paid less!

Circle is clearly so concerned about the NHS's financial state - its court case is forcing the NHS trust to pay £1 million in legal costs. This is the second time Circle has gone to court over the contract.

Nottingham skin patients quickly lost their service when the company first took over the treatment centre. All the consultant dermatologists refused to work for Circle because of its record in refusing to pay consultants for research and training.

Circle also walked away from its contract to run Hinchingbrooke Hospital in Cambridgeshire when they found they weren't making the profit they expected.

The health trade unions should now demand that Circle's finances are open to union inspection. How much profit have they made from the Nottingham contract over the past eleven years? Circle is majority-owned by hedge funds.

All the staff at the treatment centre should be taken on by the NHS at trade union-negotiated rates of pay and conditions of work. Local Unison and Unite branches are campaigning against Circle along with Keep Our NHS Public and the Socialist Party.

Labour is pledging to take privatised services back into the NHS. A good start would be to assure the NHS trust that Circle, and all other profiteering companies, will be kicked out by a Corbyn-led government, so money is spent on patient care not wasted on legal costs.

Workload-related mistakes by GPs on the rise - health unions need to fight back

Matt Whale, Hull Socialist Party

After nearly a decade of Tory austerity and attacks on the NHS, it comes as no surprise that a Panorama investigation found that GPs are making mistakes due to workload. A majority of GPs admit seeing considerably more patients in a day than is considered safe.

Help isn't on the way either. Reports indicate that there could be an almost tripling of GP vacancies in England to 7,000 by 2024.

The Tories are failing our communities by overseeing a targeted attack on the NHS. The pressure of an ageing population coupled with historic understaffing of GP surgeries is causing a crisis.

Simple mistakes, such as incorrect labelling of blood samples, caused by fatigue and work pressure could have potentially serious complications for patients.

Trying to get an appointment with a GP can be tortuous, often waiting times of two weeks or more. As waiting times become longer at GP surgeries, more patients feel the need to attend A&E and get urgent care for ailments that a GP could treat.

The knock on effect from the GP crisis is felt across the NHS. Emergency departments are filled with patients who do not require urgent emergency care.

This crisis is no accident. GPs who raise concerns are threatened with audits and checks - a.k.a a thinly veiled threat which says: "if you raise any problems, we'll shut you down".

The Tories and their capitalist backers see a failing health system not as a problem but as an opportunity.

Private companies, such as Virgin Care, are increasingly taking on failing NHS services - taking public money and making millions in profits. These private firms attack workers' terms and conditions and often offer a poor-quality service, using cheaper less qualified staff.

Despite constant media attacks and bad press, the NHS remains the 'jewel in the crown' of the working class in Britain. Fought for by previous generations, we have a duty to fight for the NHS today.

We've seen glimpses of sensational public support for the NHS over the past few years - the incredible junior doctors' strike, numerous local NHS campaigns and the sight of tens of thousands on the streets of London in 2017. The need for the NHS unions, alongside the Trade Union Congress (TUC), to organise defence of our health service has never been more urgent.

The Tories can't be trusted with the NHS. They've delivered cutbacks - underfunding and privatisation are now the norm.

We need an alternative to the Tories and their big-business pals destroying our public services.

Action led by the unions and Jeremy Corbyn can also force a general election to get the Tories out. And we need to deselect the Blairites in Labour who also back privatisation.

Any victories the workers movement wins under capitalism are temporary.

We need to fight for a publicly funded, democratically run, socialist NHS as part of a socialist economy that nationalises the privatisers, banks and big business under democratic control of the working class.

Knife crime tragedy linked to council cuts

Kristian Sucilla O'Sullivan, Birmingham North Socialist Party

There has been a tragic rise in knife crime.

In my home city of Birmingham there have been over 270 knife crimes so far this year. West Midlands Police report an 87% increase since 2013-2014.

A study published by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime links council cuts to youth services and the increase of knife crime. This is a position working-class people have been putting forward for years!

Areas worst hit by youth spending cuts also saw some of the biggest knife crime rises. Council youth services have been cut by 40% since 2014-2015.

This study was produced by politicians responsible for passing on austerity cuts. It's good to acknowledge the link, but what are they going to do about it?

The chief constable of Birmingham police promised 'more patrols and more stop and search'. Just bringing in more officers doesn't guarantee crime being reduced.

In March, the Socialist Party said: "Measures like [extra police on the streets] can have a contradictory impact - sometimes making whole communities feel criminalised rather than protected - especially with police powers like 'stop and search' which disproportionately target black people."

Police should be democratically accountable to the communities they police in order to ease the tension where it exists.

There needs to be a holistic approach - understanding the social factors behind crime such as poverty. Poverty is increasing every day.

Low-paid and insecure jobs, unaffordable housing and increasing rent, draconian welfare sanctions, rising transport costs of transportation and cuts to youth centres and youth programmes mean future opportunities are being stolen from this younger generation.

In desperation, people can turn to gangs and crime to escape from poverty.

This is a shocking study, but it proposes no action. We need to tackle poverty head on with rent control and council homes, a minimum wage of at least £10 an hour as a step towards a real living wage, free education and living grants so students don't leave education in debt, and fully funded youth and public services.

A socialist society would value the lives of young people. And take the wealth at the top into public ownership under democratic workers' control to start to do this.

Them & Us

Racist Robinson donation rejected

A workers' representative on a workers' wage. Genuine workers' representatives, standing for elections, only accept the wage of an ordinary worker, to help make sure they're accountable to the working class.

Racist MEP candidate Tommy Robinson has twisted this principle of the workers' movement with a cynical populist ploy. He proposed donating part of his MEP salary to child victims of sexual grooming.

Robinson has never opposed cuts to domestic violence and children's services. So he has had his phantom donation refused by 43 women's charities for, as they say, his "factually incorrect messages about grooming... fuel racist hate."

Young v old?

The press has been flooded with news stories aimed at driving a wedge between young and old.

Guardian writer Philip Inman wrote an article 'Britain has favoured the old over the young for too long'. The Intergenerational Foundation suggested means-testing - code for cuts - the state pension.

But in the previous issue of the Socialist, we said: "Attacking pensioners' benefits will do nothing to help young people on low wages, facing unaffordable rents - victims of Tory austerity." And the National Pensioners Convention argued: "Pensioners must stand alongside today's workers in defence of their jobs, pensions and the right to a decent period of retirement."

- See '[Young and old, unite and fight](https://socialistparty.org.uk/young-and-old-unite-and-fight)' at socialistparty.org.uk
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Charitable with trust

The number of people who give money to charity is declining, according to the Charities Aid Foundation. They point out that fewer people trust them.

The Oxfam sex scandal and other outrages have contributed to this.

For example, St Mungo's homeless charity colluded with the Home Office and Theresa May's 'hostile environment' to deport homeless people. St Mungo's workers, in Unite the Union housing workers' branch, had to strike to beat attacks on pay, conditions and union rights.

The report doesn't point out another likely cause in fewer people donating to charity. While the richest 1,000 individuals in the country are £47.8 billion richer, austerity, economic crisis and capitalism mean 3.7 million now live in poverty.

Working-class and poorer people donate most generously to charity. Charities run on a top-down capitalist basis will always have these problems.

The Socialist Party fights for the working class to have democratic control over the resources in society.

Violent private prisons

Private prisons are more violent than public prisons. On average, violent assaults are 47% more likely in for-profit prisons according to data provided to Corbynista shadow justice secretary Richard Burgon.

In 2018, the Prison Officers Association (POA) took unofficial strike action to demand sufficient staff to help alleviate rising violence.

The Socialist Party calls for the prison and probation services to be fully funded and renationalised to ensure the safety of all prisoners and workers. Reverse the staff cuts now.

A democratically controlled socialist justice system would work for protection and rehabilitation, not private profit.

Editorial of the Socialist issue 1042

Bosses fear revolt against capitalism

"There is a real question about whether democratic capitalism is working, when it is only working for part of the population". This was the warning of capitalist economist Angus Deaton launching his review for the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) on inequality in Britain.

Britain, he declared, is one of the most unequal countries on the planet, second on many measures only to the US. Capitalism is indeed working for 'part' of the population - but only for a tiny minority. According to the IFS report, the richest 1% in Britain have seen the share of household income they receive almost triple in the last four decades, rising from 3% in the 1970s to about 8% today. Average chief executive pay at FTSE 100 firms has risen to 145 times that of the average worker, from 47 times as recently as 1998.

Meanwhile the average worker is still about £17 a week worse off, in real terms, than before the economic crisis of 2007-08. The rate of 'deaths from despair' - suicide and alcohol and drug related deaths among the poorest section of the population - have more than doubled over the last quarter of a century.

Deaton's report is trying to warn the capitalists to reform their system or face revolt. He is not alone in drawing that conclusion. Recently the founder of the world's biggest hedge fund declared that capitalism created such inequality it had to "evolve or die" because otherwise they would face "some kind of revolution" and that he would rather pay higher taxes than "face the pitchforks".

Individual capitalists recognising this does not, however, mean that they can change the nature of capitalism - a crisis-ridden system driven by the blind urge to maximise profits. The main capitalist party in Britain, the

Tory party, has delivered endless austerity which is driving the living conditions of working class people into the dirt. This is the fundamental reason that they are now languishing on a pathetic 11% in the polls. Ultimately, the hollowing out in the social base of major capitalist parties on a global basis is a reflection of the misery inflicted by all governments which act in the interests of capitalism. The increasing fragmentation of capitalist politics reflects this.

Deep seated anger

Deaton and others are right to fear revolt, both electorally and in other forms. It was deep seated anger at the way life keeps getting harder for the majority which fuelled the Brexit revolt in the 2016 referendum. It was the same anger that led to the biggest surge in Labour's vote since 1945 in the 2017 snap election. Corbyn's election manifesto gave millions hope that a government which fought in their interests was possible. And it is the same anger which looks likely to lead to Nigel Farage's 'Brexit Party' topping the polls in the European elections by taking advantage of the strong mood among sections of the population that the whole of the establishment is trying to reverse the referendum vote.

The right-populist Brexit Party has deliberately announced it has no policies beyond Brexit. No wonder! Farage's longstanding support for privatisation of healthcare, for example, would be profoundly unpopular with most of those likely to vote for his party. Nonetheless, it seems likely that the party will be used in the European elections as a means to protest against the existing order.

For sections of the working class that will include protesting against Labour. Jeremy Corbyn, launching Labour's European election campaign, declared that: "The real divide in our country is not how people voted in the EU referendum. The real divide is between the many and the few. Whether you're from Tottenham or Mansfield, Stockwell or Stoke here in Medway or Manchester so many of the problems you face are the same."

This approach, of emphasising that the real divide in society is between the majority and a tiny capitalist elite with enormous wealth, has the potential to win workers who voted both Leave and Remain. To do so, however, it has to be linked to a clear and determined campaign to fight for a programme in the interests of the working class majority.

Such a programme could use the 2017 manifesto as a starting point but would also include, for example, reversing all cuts to council services, scrapping universal credit, and a pledge to nationalise Honda Swindon under democratic working class control, along with any other companies who carry out closures and job cuts in the name of Brexit or otherwise. This should be combined with nationalisation of the major corporations and banks to take the levers of power out of the hands of the capitalists, who will inevitably attempt to sabotage a Corbyn government. Linked with a manifesto for a socialist Brexit this approach would be able to enthuse the working class in Britain - both those who voted Leave and Remain - and make a very effective call for international solidarity with workers across Europe.

Unfortunately, however, at this stage Corbyn and the left Labour leadership are not conveying a clear message to working class voters. A central reason for this is their continued mistaken attempts to compromise with the pro-capitalist Blairite wing of Labour - whether that is the local Labour councils cutting public services, or the Blairite MPs fighting for Labour to be seen as the party which defends the EU bosses' club.

Corbyn's approach to the talks with May, for example, should have been to forcefully declare his own red lines - demanding the repeal of all anti-trade union legislation and all neo-liberal pro-privatisation rules, for example, and refusing to countenance any deal which did not include agreement on these and other pro-working class measures. Instead reports from the talks have focused overwhelmingly on the Blairite demand for a second referendum, inevitably giving the impression to many Leave voting workers that Labour is not fighting in the interests of working class people and is instead focused on 'reversing Brexit'.

It is impossible to predict how the parliamentary deadlock will be broken beyond the European elections. Clearly a general election is posed. Notwithstanding the current ebbing of enthusiasm for Corbyn among many working class voters, big sections of the capitalist class remain frightened of the possibility of a Corbyn government. They could be right! In the snap election of 2017 it is estimated that a million Ukip voters switched to Labour. This could be repeated on a bigger scale next time. However, this is far from guaranteed.

If Corbyn allows Tom Watson, Keir Starmer and co. to influence the manifesto and the approach to Brexit, Labour might go down to defeat despite the Tory party's profound crisis.

The workers' movement, however, has to urgently organise a fight in defence of the interests of the working class. This includes campaigning to get rid of this rotten Tory government, but also preparing for the challenges of Corbyn coming to power against a background of capitalist economic crisis and dislocation. Even if Labour was to win by a landslide it would be, as things stand, in reality a kind of coalition government - of the Corbynites and the pro-capitalist wing of Labour, whose role would be to act as agents of the capitalist class and prevent any radical measures in the interests of the working class being taken.

Attempts to mollify both the capitalist class and their representatives in the Labour Party would inevitably lead to the betrayal of the interests of the working class majority. However, we should not underestimate the enormous enthusiasm - after a decade of Tory austerity - that would be engendered by the election of a Corbyn-led government and could be mobilised to oppose the capitalist saboteurs and their system.

Mitie workers at Sellafield striking against poverty pay

Brent Kennedy, Cumbria Unite Community

If anyone thinks that "social partnership" - trade unions and bosses working together for supposedly common interests - delivers decent pay and conditions for workers, let them just go to the Sellafield nuclear plant for a reality check.

Here at this multinational, multi-billion pound nuclear site, one of the biggest in the country and backed by taxpayers' money, they will find security guards, cleaners and canteen workers working for a poverty level of pay.

The canteen workers regularly work weekends without overtime pay. Until they recently joined Unite, they weren't even paid extra for working on bank holidays.

Sellafield Ltd uses outsourcing to Mitie to cut costs - to get away with those workers receiving poverty wages, well beneath the decent wage it pays to directly employed skilled workers.

One told me that because the basic wage doesn't cover his regular direct debits, he works all weekdays and all weekends, except for one weekend free a month "just to put food on the table.

Nobody should work seven days a week in this day and age. In 13 years my wage has just gone up from £6 to £8.21 an hour. The fat cats get fatter, the poor get poorer."

The canteen ladies agree. With an eye on the potential health hazards for everyone on the site, and the time taken up by site access, one says: "Everybody who works here should get at least £30 just for going through those gates."

Another points out: "We could get paid more on the checkouts at Morrisons without all the travel time and hassle ... Mitie took two weeks' pay off us, saying they'd give us it back when we leave, but they won't. We've just taken it for too long."

Fighting back

But now these disrespected and exploited workers are rising up. Around 200 have walked out of the GMB union, which they think is too cosy with the bosses, and joined Unite, which is offering a more fighting leadership.

Instead of accepting an offer of just 24p above the minimum wage like the GMB, they voted by 98% on a 70% turnout to strike for a substantial pay rise, recognition for Unite once again, and to have their voice heard.

The Unite branch representing workers directly employed by Sellafield Ltd donated £1,000 in solidarity to their striking colleagues.

Dancing on the long picket lines to keep warm, with open support from contracting workers driving past, you can see how the self-confidence of these men and women is going up.

In the face of the shameless greed and arrogance of their bullying bosses they feel the power of unity, with men and women workers from different services sticking up for each other.

When Mitie tried to divide and intimidate them with techniques used by blacklists, Unite general secretary Len McCluskey sent a video message of support to the strikers and openly warned Mitie to back off or "the whole power of Unite will come down on you."

You can visibly see the power of workers' solidarity outside the main gate. All the construction contractor workers driving in stopped to take leaflets from the pickets and they took some time to inform themselves of the workers' arguments.

Despite the police opening both lanes of the road to the gate, the resulting traffic jam stretched back for several miles, delaying the start of work by about three hours. The over-run projects on the site cost half a million pounds an hour.

That's the power of workers at the point of production, construction or service. What an answer to the sceptics who say workers and unions are too weak to fight! The management has warned the contractors that it will dock their pay if they arrive late on the job, but if it does that then everyone could well walk out. So Sellafield is absorbing the cost - using taxpayers' money to help out the bosses of the private contractors.

Last week over 1,000 construction contractors magnificently walked out on strike for two days, without strike pay, in solidarity with their bullied workmates.

Ryan Armstrong, the Unite full-time officer organising the strike, told me how effective the strike was, with only one of the five canteens on this huge complex still open and the dirt piling up.

Tory MPs tell us "the best way out of poverty is to get a job". No, the best way out of poverty is to strike for more pay. A victory for these workers will inspire low-paid workers elsewhere to fight.

Please send messages of support to Michelle.Smith@unitetheunion.org

The 180 Unite members are currently taking 10 days of industrial action, which began on Saturday 4 May and ends on Monday 13 May. This is the second period of strikes following six days of action which ended on Monday 29 April. Unite has announced a further 10 days of action beginning on Sunday 19 May and ending on Wednesday 29 May.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 10 May 2019 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Stop press: Birmingham home care strikers close to victory!

Birmingham Socialist Party

Just as we go to press, Birmingham Socialist Party members have learnt that the city's home care workers could be on the verge of claiming victory in their 20-month-long dispute against Birmingham Council.

The dispute was over cuts and changes to working hours, with the Labour council effectively trying to make all posts part-time and financially unworkable, to cut costs by pushing workers into leaving the service.

Home care workers organised by public service union Unison have taken over 80 days of strike action during their dispute. This includes a joint strike day with Birmingham bin workers in general union Unite in February of this year.

Tears of joy

If confirmed, a victory for the home carers would be another humiliating defeat for Birmingham's Blairite council, and the third time in two years it will have lost to its workers.

As the information stands so far, a members' meeting was held on Friday 10 May, where the home care strikers were informed by Unison that the council has dropped all proposals, and their jobs will currently stay as they are.

There were tears of joy - but also the understanding that the council cannot be trusted to protect any job, as it continues to carry out the Tories' dirty work of cuts and sell-offs of our public services.

There has been no official statement from Unison yet. When more information is available, we will produce a more in-depth report.

Newham gas workers' strike threat beats Labour council cuts

Newham's Labour council had unilaterally withdrawn call-out payments from gas safety managers. But the east London borough backed down on the eve of strike action.

General union Unite had heard these promises before. So the union waited until the money was in the workers' bank accounts before calling off the strike.

Key to victory was the workers' determination to take action, supported by solidarity from their workmates.

One week before the strike, the managers protested outside their workplace. They were joined by over 30 of their colleagues - housing repair workers - who are also balloting for strike action against pay cuts.

Newham refuse workers, also organised by Unite, could strike as well in a dispute over the grading of their jobs. The council could have stolen over £20,000 from each of them in the last decade.

Determined action by the housing and bin workers can bring them victory. Just like it has for the gas managers this year - and Newham school workers fighting against becoming privately run 'academies' last year, led by Socialist Party member and National Education Union branch secretary Louise Cuffaro.

Ian Pattison, East London Socialist Party

Usdaw conference 2019

Usdaw united on need for fightback - now keep pressure on for action

Socialist Party members in Usdaw

The annual delegate meeting of retail and distribution union Usdaw had definitely turned a corner this year (see interim report '[Shop workers demand action on pay, jobs and the right](https://socialistparty.org.uk)' at socialistparty.org.uk).

This was helped by the departure of openly Blairite general secretary John Hannett. Paddy Lillis, his replacement, has tried to position himself as less rigid and more of a 'moderate', like Dave Prentis, the right-wing leader of public service union Unison.

The joint pressures of Deputy General Secretary Dave McCrossen, who identifies with the union's Broad Left group, and Socialist Party member Amy Murphy, Usdaw's newly elected president, are clearly having an effect.

Debates

The debates felt far less restricted this year with Amy in the chair. Under the previous president, Jeff Broome, crucial debates felt stage-managed, with pre-arranged delegates supporting the right-wing leadership's positions picked to speak.

This year's turnout for the Broad Left caucus was larger than last year, with around 30 attending. The Broad Left has met in several regions over the last year ahead of the union's divisional council meetings, with Socialist Party members such as Broad Left chair Iain Dalton being the main driving force.

Jeremy Corbyn addressed the union's conference, and re-committed to many good policies from the 'workers' charter' in his 2017 manifesto.

Unfortunately, he missed the opportunity to point a way forward on the major issues of the day. Corbyn could have used the platform to make his case for a workers' Brexit, and call for trade union action to force a general election and end the Tory government.

One of the starkest differences was that the conference floor and union leadership were largely in sync. Up until this year, motions committing Usdaw to action were largely opposed by the right-wing leadership.

For instance, in a naked attack on the Socialist Party, Hannett even resorted to calling the National Shop Stewards Network a Socialist Party 'front' to defeat a motion to affiliate last year.

This year, Scott Jones and Isai Priya of the Socialist Party put forward motions calling for "struggling" shops to open their books to trade union scrutiny, and calling on Usdaw to support the 'jobs and homes, not racism' campaign.

Not only were these propositions enthusiastically supported by the delegates, but the union's executive advocated support for both, as well as all the propositions reported in the last issue of the Socialist.

Action

However, it is one thing to agree to a position, and quite another to translate it into action. It is clear from the Morrisons pay offer that the union's negotiators aren't firmly putting the £10-an-hour position.

Usdaw's launch of the 'Save Our Shops' campaign and national days of action are important first steps. But the union has been very quiet on nationalisation of closing shops, despite a previous conference calling for that.

Usdaw members will need to continue to pressure the union bureaucracy to turn outwards and develop mass campaigns on these and other issues. By organising public campaign stalls and demonstrations, and preparing

members to take strike action, the union could attract new membership and win the fight with the bosses and this utterly divided Tory government.

NEU conference and ballots 2019

End high-stakes testing in primary schools: build the boycott ballot!

James Kerr, NEU conference delegate (personal capacity)

National Education Union (NEU) members in primary schools will vote in an online indicative ballot from 4 June, towards a boycott of all high-stakes 'summative' testing for 2019-20.

These tests include the hated 'Sats', but also phonics screening, statutory times-table tests, and other pressurised end-of-term exams.

This culture of testing has come to dominate primaries, partly fuelled by the major edu-businesses' attempts to cash in on public services, selling schools packages of tests and accompanying study materials.

The increased stress for staff and students, increased workload for teachers, and a narrowing curriculum as schools teach to the test, have made this a burning issue in our primary schools.

The ballot came from a motion at NEU conference this Easter after years of ferocious debate on the conference floor. The leadership's lack of a clear strategy in recent years had stored up anger among delegates and that exploded in the debate.

Eruption

The union president, in the chair, originally called the hand-raising vote for boycotts as lost. But an eruption from delegates forced a digital vote, with 58% shown to back the motion.

Now the whole union must turn to building the indicative ballot, with meetings of reps happening in the next week, phone-banking and, most importantly, workplace meetings to vote collectively and build the turnout. After this indicative ballot, the union will need to carry out a second, statutory ballot, before it can legally call industrial action.

NEU conference had also voted for policy on pay, with an indicative ballot planned for the Autumn term if the government offer is as derisory as everyone expects it to be.

The key amendment on pay which mapped out what needs to be done was moved by Socialist Party and NEU national executive committee member Nicky Downes. The recent pay victory of the Scottish teachers' union EIS was raised as an example showing bold, combative campaigning can gain results.

Socialist Party member Jane Nellist spoke to a motion in support of the youth climate strikes. And the conference was one of the most open in recent years, with no organisation controlling proceedings to the exclusion of others.

It's time to learn the lessons of the past, avoid repeating the union leadership's mistakes that have brought us to this point, and build a massive turnout in the primary assessment ballot. Speak to every NEU member you know, at the school gates and in your communities, and encourage them to vote Yes!

PCS leadership elections

PCS union officialdom splits vote to remove Chris Baugh - but is still rejected by members

Socialist Party members in PCS

Socialist Party members in civil service union PCS are disappointed to announce that Chris Baugh did not get re-elected to the position of PCS assistant general secretary.

Chris - a member of the Socialist Party and official candidate of Left Unity, the union's broad left group - has an outstanding record in building the union. He has also been an important part of navigating PCS through some of the most vicious anti-union attacks the Tory government has made on any union.

Chris came second with 5,796 votes to John Moloney, candidate of the union's 'Independent Left' grouping, who received 6,211 votes. Lynn Henderson - supported by general secretary Mark Serwotka, the Socialist Workers Party, 'Socialist View', and much of the union officialdom - came third on 5,588 votes.

But importantly, on many key industrial issues, the big differences were between Chris Baugh and John Moloney on one hand, and Serwotka, Socialist View, the SWP and Henderson on the other. For example, Chris and John had similar positions on union democracy, the need for lay control and accountability, and for an open-minded and inclusive approach in shaping the pay campaign and strike ballots.

Rejection

Seen in this light, the combined vote for Chris Baugh and John Moloney clearly represents a massive rejection of Serwotka and his supporters. Moloney must now deliver on his promises. Union members will be looking for him to stand up to what appears to be the leadership's bureaucratic trajectory.

Henderson, in a statement on her blog after her defeat, claimed "the vote is a rejection of the Socialist Party, its control of the AGS post, and Chris Baugh's conservatism." But nothing could be further from the truth.

Henderson forgets she came third in this election. The reality is that Chris and Moloney's vote is a rejection of the approach and methods of Mark Serwotka, Lynn Henderson, and their supporters.

The Socialist Party, Chris, and his supporters consistently argued for an open debate on the issues and strategy for the union's pay fight. This clearly needs to continue in light of the strike ballot narrowly missing the threshold for lawful industrial action after a fantastic campaign.

This was in stark contrast to the dogmatic approach of Serwotka and his allies. And we have also opposed the growing transfer of powers to unelected union officials, among other differences.

Many members of PCS Left Unity are furious that Serwotka and his supporters ran an unprincipled campaign against Chris. They refused to back him when he won the Left Unity nomination, and promoted an unelected full-time official and non-member of Left Unity instead.

This support for Henderson from Serwotka, Socialist View and the SWP split the Left Unity vote and allowed the 'Independent Left' candidate to win.

The campaign beforehand to get Chris, a socialist incumbent, reelected as the official Left Unity candidate exposed the fault lines within Left Unity. Socialist Party members will work with others to reinvigorate Left Unity into an open, campaigning, socialist rank-and-file body that is supportive but genuinely independent of the PCS leadership.

We say Left Unity needs to encourage maximum policy debate; support Corbyn and his anti-austerity programme - but without compromising the union's political independence; and fight for democratic lay structures at all levels to control the union and determine its priorities.

Fighting

Chris's election campaign was very much to his credit. He campaigned for a fighting programme to deliver for members on pay, and defending terms, conditions and the public sector from austerity and privatisation.

Chris did this despite personal attacks on him, and lies and distortions about his track record as assistant general secretary. The fact he was not re-elected shames those who split Left Unity, and took part in a campaign to slander his record, in order to defend their own rejected approach.

At the same time, Socialist Party members Marion Lloyd and Dave Semple have won re-election to the union's national executive committee. Socialist Party members and supporters at all levels of the PCS will continue the fight to build a principled united left inside the union, and a fighting PCS capable of winning for members.

Honda bosses confirm Swindon closure: Unite must signal it will fight

Rob Williams, Socialist Party industrial organiser

As we go to press, car workers in Swindon are reeling from the news that Honda bosses have confirmed the closure of the Wiltshire plant in 2021.

Over 3,500 workers directly employed by the factory are facing redundancy. But in addition, over 12,000 employed in component and related companies and industries are affected. This is a catastrophe for Swindon in particular - a town of 180,000 people - and must be fought.

General union Unite had put forward an alternative plan to Honda that could have been the basis to safeguard the plant, but this has been rejected by senior management.

Impressive demo

Inevitably, there will be shock within the workforce. But the impressive demonstration of thousands in the town at the end of March shows the potential to build a fight that can challenge and potentially overturn the closure decision.

On that demonstration, Unite plant convenor Paddy Brennan, speaking alongside his shop stewards, said: "This is the fight of our lives."

Socialist Party members have raised the need for Jeremy Corbyn to boldly call for the plant to be nationalised, to put Theresa May's weak and divided Tory government under pressure to intervene.

Corbyn could easily be prime minister before the plant closes in two years' time.

He should give a guarantee that under a Labour government led by him, the factory will be taken into public ownership to protect jobs, and demand that May gives the same commitment.

But industrial action will be necessary to build the pressure on both Honda and the Tories. Unite needs to signal now that the closure will be fought to the end.

Prepare

The union needs to prepare the ground for a stoppage or a strike ballot that would show that workers will not accept the closure and will fight. Ultimately, the idea can be raised of occupying the plant to really raise the stakes.

In 1971, a previous Tory government nationalised Rolls-Royce, and months later was forced to intervene when workers at the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders conducted a working occupation and 80,000 marched in solidarity.

The union and the shop stewards have shown the workforce that they have been prepared to negotiate to save the plant. But Honda's decision has taken the fight into a new stage.

This now can only be won by a mass struggle, centred on the Honda workers, linking up with all the other workers who are dependent on the plant, and the whole community.

Revolution and counter-revolution in Sudan

Weizmann Hamilton, Workers' and Socialist Party (CWI South Africa)

The overthrow of Omar al-Bashir by the Sudanese masses on 11 April is one of the most momentous events in the modern history of the country, the continent and the Middle East. It has simultaneously inspired the masses throughout Africa and instilled fear in despotic regimes in the region.

A Financial Times journalist wrote: "One cannot know for sure what Russia felt like in 1917 as the tsar was being toppled, or France in 1871 in the heady, idealistic days of the short-lived Paris Commune. But it must have felt something like Khartoum in April 2019."

Purse strings

Regional despotic regimes, like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), rushed to prop up Sudan's transitional military council, fearing the contagion of regime change.

The Guardian reported that "within days of the removal of Bashir, Saudi's purse strings loosened. Along with the UAE, it pledged a \$3 billion aid package to prop up Sudan's economy and thus the transitional military government... Gulf News ran a profile of the current head of the transitional military council saying that "during the war in southern Sudan and the Darfur region, he served on [sic] important positions, largely due to his civic manners and professional demeanour".

The fact that Bashir had been able to overcome several crises before had led to delusions of invulnerability. This uprising was different. Whereas brutality had preserved his regime before, this time, despite the widespread repression (including the arrest of activists and 60 dead), the masses would not be deterred.

Showing courage and determination, the masses took the revolution directly to the seat of his dictatorship, the military complex that housed his residence, where the masses have set up camp ever since. Within five days, Bashir's 30-year reign had ended.

The movement was precipitated by the Bashir regime's decision to follow the advice of the International Monetary Fund by cancelling fuel and wheat subsidies.

Only 3% of the national budget is allocated to education and even less to health. Expenditure consumed by the cost of dealing with insurgencies in the South Kordofan, Darfur and the Blue Nile regions, meant the burden of these measures fell directly onto the working class and poor in the cities and countryside.

The economic situation had deteriorated significantly since the independence of oil-rich South Sudan in 2011. It meant the loss of oil revenue. Accelerated by the devaluation of the Sudanese pound on IMF advice, inflation soared to 72%, the second highest in the world after Venezuela.

The economic crisis was aggravated by rampant looting by state officials. Suitcases loaded with more than £5.2 million (Sterling) and five billion Sudanese pounds (£85.5 million) were found at Bashir's home.

The IMF-dictated measures served as the straw that broke the camel's back. But in these circumstances, the movement was not going to end, as in so many other countries, as just another 'IMF food riot'.

This is the longest, most widespread and sustained movement of the Sudanese masses in the post-colonial period. Starting in mid-December in Atbara, about 180 miles from Khartoum, it spread across the country.

Panic

The intensity of the protests caused panic within the coalition of generals, security chiefs and Islamist politicians within the ruling National Congress Party. The hardliners pressed for a brutal crackdown, but army commanders argued for restraint.

These internal conflicts were reflected in the intervention by rank-and-file soldiers in the army to protect the crowds when militia forces and units of the feared National Intelligence and Security Services fired tear gas and bullets at protesters.

Fearing revolution the military took action to head off the movement and carried out a coup, forcing Omar al Bashir from office.

Under the hot breath of revolution, the military was compelled within 24-hours to replace al-Bashir's replacement, lieutenant general Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf, rejected by the masses as too close to al-Bashir's regime, with general Abdel-Fattah Burhan.

At the time of writing, the stalemate between the masses and the military that resulted from the revolutionary uprising continues.

The military has set up an interim transitional council, headed by lieutenant-general Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Burhan, who has promised to "uproot the regime," vowed to restructure state institutions, and end the night curfew.

The army suspended the constitution, dissolved the government, declared a three-month state of emergency, imposed a one-month curfew, and closed the country's borders and airspace. Burhan also announced the release of all political prisoners.

The standoff between the organisation which called the masses into action, the Sudanese Professional Association, and the military is over the composition of the transitional council. The SPA is demanding a 15-member council with eight civilians and seven from the military. The military's counter-proposal is a ten member council with seven for the military.

Arab Spring

The experience of the 2011 'Arab Spring', especially in Egypt where a repressive regime has now taken power after the military was able to posture as the 'people's army', has left its imprint on the consciousness of the Sudanese masses.

The Arab Spring has taught the masses to be completely distrustful of the military. The military's immediate aim is to ride the revolutionary wave, portray itself as a neutral, independent arbiter sympathetic to the democratic aspirations of the masses, wait for exhaustion to set in, and then to move decisively to re-establish 'law and order'.

The Sudanese incarnation of the Arab Spring is determined to avoid the fate of that magnificent uprising. Protests have continued with the masses demanding that the military hand control back to the people.

In a country in which more than 60% of the population is under 25 and around 20% is between 15 and 24 years old, it is youth that have been to the fore in the movement. Significantly, an estimated 70% of demonstrators are women.

Reflecting the deep suspicions of the masses the SPA, thrust into the leadership of the movement, has stepped up the pressure on the army. Responding to threats by the army to put an end to the 'chaos' the SPA called for a "million strong march" on 2 May to break the deadlock over the composition of the transitional council.

A trial of strength between revolution and counter-revolution is being played out. But his stalemate cannot endure indefinitely.

The Sudanese uprising is a resounding confirmation of one of the foundations of Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution (see article on socialistparty.org.uk) - the complete incapacity of the colonial capitalist class to carry through even the most basic tasks of the capitalist-democratic revolution, much less fulfil even the most modest aspirations of the masses.

The post-independence elite has not only presided over economic dislocation, the failure to keep Sudan together as a single state, but also allowed the country to become the playground of competing regional powers in the Gulf and their imperialist masters.

History

In determining the way forward, the Sudanese masses will not only use the experiences of the Arab Spring, they will also reopen the pages of their own rich history of struggle.

This is the sixth military coup since independence. Importantly, from the standpoint of the way forward for the revolution, three of those coups were in fact carried out to cut across and suppress the mass uprisings.

But the lessons of the 1964 'October revolution' and April 1985 'intifada' were that both succeeded against the military. The former ousted the Sudan's first military regime, the latter the second.

The Sudanese Professionals Association is an umbrella association of 15 different trade unions first formed in October 2016. Under its umbrella are the Forces of National Consensus, the Sudan Call and other political parties including the Sudanese Communist Party.

The communist party campaigned for the introduction of a minimum wage and participated in protests against the rising cost of living in Sudan. Prominent in the SPA are lawyers, doctors and university lecturers.

The SPA proposals for a transitional council that will include the military suggests that it has not drawn the lessons of either the Arab Spring, or the earlier uprisings in Sudan.

They reflect the middle-class character of the SPA leadership and the inclination to find an imaginary middle way between the Bashir dictatorship and a genuinely democratic regime based on the working class and the poor.

The military includes general Auf who is a graduate of the Cairo Military Academy and maintains close links with Egyptian strong man president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

The military is led by Durhan, responsible for Sudan's operations alongside the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. The deputy leader - Mohammad Hamdan aka Himeidti - is the commander of the Rapid Support Forces, a private military force which was partially integrated into the military and security services. The unit is regarded by many as a re-branded version of the Janjaweed militias of which Himeidti was himself a part, which carried out massacres in Darfur in 2003.

He has 7,000 troops stationed in Yemen on the Saudi Arabian payroll. It also includes the ruthless and ambitious chief of the intelligence services, Salah Abdallah Gosh, who controls powerful forces in the capital, and has close links to intelligence services, including the US CIA, and has recently been particularly associated with the United Arab Emirates.

It is enough to set out these facts to recognise the grievously mistaken approach of the SPA. Nor does the Sudanese Communist Party offer a way forward. It calls for "freedom, peace, justice" and goes on: "The Sudanese Communist Party and all the opposition forces are adamant in their resolve to continue the fight

until the establishment of a civilian government that represents the masses and implements the democratic alternative programme accepted by all the forces, the Professionals Alliance, and the armed groups."

This position is drawn directly from the class collaborationist policies of Stalinism that have aided counter-revolution in many countries. It is the direct opposite of the policy of Lenin and Trotsky in the 1917 revolution who opposed joining any government committed to working with capitalism and campaigned to win majority support for a workers' and peasants' government that would break with capitalism.

Capitalist government

Reflecting the close cultural ties between the SPA leadership and the Sudanese elite, it issued a call for a cleaning campaign in which women should be in the forefront: "because you care more about it". It was met with outrage and an apology from the SPA.

Among the repressive measures against women are compulsory dress codes for the violation of which they are flogged. There is no gender equality in the mainly Muslim country, where female genital mutilation is still widely practised.

The SPA, while opposing military rule, is attempting to form a civilian led capitalist government.

But such a government, even if called "transitional", would by its very nature not break the grip of the ruling class and imperialism.

Sooner or later it would pose the threat of counter-revolution, something seen before in Sudan and in other revolutions.

The masses need to establish their own power, counterposed to that of the same regime that continues without Bashir and even to the SPA upon which pressure must be exerted to break completely with the military.

The fraternisation between the rank-and-file soldiers and masses that occurred when the hardliners were preparing to crackdown in April shows the potential power of the masses themselves.

The action committees in areas such as in Atbera, where the uprising began, must be replicated throughout the country as a step towards laying the groundwork for the independent power of the masses.

The basic steps of organisation that have been taken at the mass occupation outside the military headquarters - including the establishment of committees to feed people, for security, to control traffic, even a clinic - must be taken into the rest of the country, to take control of workplaces and economic production.

Workers and poor

Linked together these committees, including local unions, workers, and other forces of the revolution, can provide the basis for an alternative state structure that can seize power from the military and form a government led by representatives of the workers and poor.

Sudanese society can overcome the impasse of capitalism only through a socialist revolution. This requires a mass party of the working class on a socialist programme.

Such a programme must include the idea of a planned economy, democratically controlled by the working class and the poor.

To win affordable prices for food and fuel, wage rises and a shorter working week, it is necessary to fight for nationalisation of the major industries and the land of big landowners, under working-class democratic control and management.

On the basis of a socialist plan it would be possible to invest in job creation, decent housing, health care and education.

It must call for:

- Defence of democratic rights
 - The immediate scrapping of all discriminatory laws oppressing women
 - Freedom of religion and a separation of church and state
 - Repudiation of foreign debt
 - Withdrawal of troops from Yemen and the cessation of military repression of oppressed nationalities and the recognition of the right to self-determination
 - A government led by democratically elected representatives of the workers' and poor
 - For a socialist Sudan united on a federal basis
 - [Full article on socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)
-

Trump UK visit: Protest against the billionaire bigot

Josh Asker, Southampton Socialist Party

Portsmouth will not be welcoming President Trump for an official state visit on 5 June. And where the leader of the richest capitalist nation in the world is not met with hatred or despair then he is met with ridicule.

And rightly so. Trump is a sexist, racist bigot, hell-bent on engineering an environment for him and his wealthy mates to get even richer. To top it off he claims that the biggest threat to our planet - capitalist-induced climate change - is a hoax!

Thousands of young people across the world have walked out of their classrooms in recent weeks to defend our planet's environment. Trump's objective is to continue to ruthlessly exploit workers and the planet. We say: build the student walkouts to stop him!

Last year Socialist Students led student walk-outs and joined thousands of other young people protesting Trump's visit to Britain. This time school students have already got a taste of the action in the youth strikes against climate change.

Socialist Students calls for the formation of school students' unions to coordinate the struggle, develop the demands and continue to build the movement. They could play a vital role in defending the right to protest using our collective strength.

Trump is a representative of a capitalist system that is failing to provide for the working class and youth in the US, Britain and worldwide. It is for that reason that he and his counterparts around the world sow division and hatred, to stop fingers being pointed at them and the system they represent.

But the fingers are already pointing in that direction! Many on the tremendous youth strikes this year have raised the slogan "system change, not climate change!"

Well, that system is capitalism and the alternative to it - which can protect the environment, achieve sustainable production and put wealth and power into the hands of the working class - is socialism. That's why we call for "socialist change, not climate change".

The first steps towards this are to kick-out the leaders of this rotten system like May and Trump by building fighting democratic organisations of the working class and youth; and, to fight for a socialist system capable of uniting the working class and saving the planet.

Join the walkouts in June to make it happen!

Palestinian solidarity demo

London Socialist Party reporters

Several thousand protesters including Palestinians, Muslim organisations, the Socialist Party and other left-wing groups marched through central London on 11 May to mark Nakba Day.

'Nakba' is the Arabic word for catastrophe. During the violent upheavals that accompanied the establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948, over 750,000 Palestinians were forced from their towns and villages, becoming homeless and impoverished.

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

Palestinians in the 'open prison' of Gaza for over a year now have been protesting at the Israeli military's border security fence, against the Israeli government's blockade of the Gaza Strip, and demanding to be able to return to their lands before they were displaced. Nearly 200 Palestinians - the overwhelming majority civilians - have been killed by live ammunition during these protests.

The London march rallied opposite Downing Street and speakers included Labour shadow home secretary Diane Abbott.

The star speaker was 18-year-old Ahed Tamimi - a Palestinian from the West Bank whose case spread in the news internationally after she was jailed for slapping and kicking an Israeli soldier in December 2017 who wouldn't leave her family's courtyard. The incident took place just after Ahed heard that her cousin had been shot in the face by the Israeli military.

"I don't want to speak today about our suffering. We choose to suffer for freedom and justice. Injustice is everywhere," said Ahed.

However, while Ahed spoke for only a few minutes the Palestinian ambassador to the UK, Dr Husam Zomlot, made a very long but vacuous speech.

Many left groups present demanded a 'free Palestine' but without explaining how this could be achieved in the context of a crisis-ridden capitalist region. The Socialist Party, in contrast, argued that Palestinian self-determination - given the starting point of acute distrust between the two communities in Israel/Palestine - can only be won by a working -class struggle both within the Palestinian enclaves and within Israel for a socialist Palestine along with a socialist Israel.

Socialist Party members distributed hundreds of leaflets advertising our forthcoming meeting, sold the Socialist and engaged in some very positive conversations with Palestinians.

Profit system rapidly destroying environment

Dan Gilmore, Newcastle Socialist Party

On 6 May, one of the most ambitious reports into climate change ever undertaken - the United Nation's Global Assessment Report on biodiversity - was released.

It paints a damning picture of the failures of global capitalism and its destruction of our planet in pursuit of profits, with some alarming statistics about the scale of the destruction and the time we have left to reverse course.

Almost one million animals are under threat of extinction in the next few decades, with almost one in four plant and animal species at risk. In some regions there are 75% fewer insects than 25 years ago, dealing a

massive blow to crop yields and increasing starvation risks.

Unsustainable farming and fishing, as well as rampant deforestation and pollution, are to blame - with the profits derived from the exploitation of workers and the environment going straight into the pockets of the billionaire bosses.

Here, as in the rest of the world, we also see a massive increase in flooding caused by the increasingly frequent extreme weather events, in turn the result of unsustainable global warming.

By 2100 we could see a global rise in temperature of up to 4°C, which would demand an extra £1 billion a year of flood defence investment in England alone.

The Tory government is contributing to this growing crisis having given the green light to companies to frack for oil and gas, despite massive public opposition.

But government rules that pause fracking drilling operations - if they cause earthquakes - are too restrictive for tax-avoiding, multibillionaire boss Jim Ratcliffe of petrochemical company Ineos who wants the limits on tremors lifted.

Missed targets

Even after these stark warnings by the UN, governments around the world have failed to even meet the modest targets put forward in 2011, with 13 of the 20 'Aichi' biodiversity targets not being met, especially around sustainable production.

We cannot wait for the bosses and their political representatives to act against their own self-interest.

Even the UN report itself agrees, saying that these targets can "only be achieved through transformative changes across economic, social, political and technological factors".

The recent student strikes and actions by Extinction Rebellion show there is anger and a realisation that climate change is a growing threat. It's possible to reverse course.

However, we must demand socialist change to achieve this turnaround.

This requires the nationalisation of giant agribusinesses, 'big energy' and public transport, under the democratic control of the workers in those industries. Fossil fuels could then be quickly replaced by green energy and sustainable production as part of a planned economy.

The trade unions should be stepping up their demands for a massive expansion of jobs in environmentally friendly technologies to replace employment in the fossil fuel industries.

A united struggle of students and workers organised around a socialist programme could break the toxic grip of capitalism on our planet and secure a better future for all.

Socialist policies needed to halt climate disaster

Simon Carter

After the United Nations said last year there is only 12 years left to avert a global climate catastrophe, people are rightly demanding that government and councils take immediate measures to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

MPs and increasing numbers of councils have declared 'climate emergencies' to achieve net zero emissions - by 2050 in the case of the UK parliament, while some councils aim to be carbon-neutral by the 12-year deadline of 2030.

Many people will be rightly cynical over these declarations when successive Tory governments have slashed taxes and increased subsidies worth billions on North Sea oil and gas companies (£26 billion in 2016) while ending tax breaks on renewable energy.

Indeed, hypocrisy doesn't appear to be in short supply. Leeds Labour council declared a climate emergency in March while committing to spend a reported £100 million on the expansion of Leeds Bradford airport - despite aviation being a significant source of carbon dioxide emissions.

So what could local councils do to help stop catastrophic climate change? To start with they could disinvest their £9 billion worth of pension funds from companies engaged in the fracking industry. At the end of 2017 councils had investments of £16.1 billion in fossil fuel industries.

They could also implement policies on transport and housing that could make a huge difference - for example, replacing diesel buses with electric or hydrogen fuel powered buses.

Moreover, public transport services should be frequent and cheap to encourage people to reduce car usage. But this would mean bringing public transport back into public ownership and reversing cuts in council subsidies.

A programme of mass council house building using energy efficient materials and insulation would reduce energy consumption. Cheap housing near where people work, and likewise schools and health services, could significantly reduce travel time and hence people's carbon footprint.

Council cuts

These measures and more beside could make a huge difference in addressing climate change.

However, councils have suffered huge spending cuts by governments over the last decade and even longer. And instead of resisting these attacks and setting no-cuts budgets - by using their reserves and borrowing powers as a temporary measure and mobilising the support of council workers and the community to resist - they have, including all Labour-run councils, capitulated to Tory-led austerity governments.

The inescapable conclusion is that the Tories need booting out and an incoming Corbyn Labour government must implement socialist policies to fund green alternatives.

This means nationalisation, under democratic workers' control, of the big energy corporations, public transport, major construction companies and the banks, and so on. Then it would be possible to draw up an economic plan of production to meet people's needs on a sustainable basis and seriously tackle climate change.

May 1649 - the Last Stand of the Levellers

Dave Nellist

In the latter part of the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century, the hopes of those who wanted the war against the king and the great landowners to bring fundamental change for the mass of ordinary people were being dashed.

Some groups took direct action - such as the Diggers, who planted food on common land, and argued for common ownership, prefacing later developments of more concrete socialist ideas.

Rank and file soldiers, who had fought for the parliamentary 'Roundheads' against the King's armies, wanted an end to enclosures of previously common land, religious tolerance, an end to church taxes and for democratic rights such as extended suffrage. But the class nature of society was still reflected in the New Model Army.

As Geoff Jones introduction to the classic Dudley Edwards pamphlet 'The Last Stand of the Levellers' explains: "While army leaders were doing very well out of the war, buying up land of defeated Royalists and raising rents, common soldiers who fought the battles weren't getting paid."

Mutiny

This led to the mutiny of several regiments, who became known as the Levellers - not a term that all would have used to describe themselves, but more used "by country squires and London merchants" as a term of abuse.

The mutinies were defeated and their leaders were shot, imprisoned or exiled. The last mutiny, of two cavalry regiments based in Salisbury, set out on a march to Burford in Oxfordshire.

Cromwell's forces caught up with the 1,500 mutineers, engaged, captured 340 and imprisoned them in Burford Church, where one of the troopers carved his name on the font - 'ANTHONY SEDLEY 1649 PRISNER' - and it's still there today.

Cromwell executed three of the leaders on 17 May, and their names are commemorated on a plaque on the church wall, unveiled by the late Tony Benn.

The detail of the mutiny, its defeat and lessons for the modern working class, as one of the episodes in our history of militant struggle against exploitation, are contained in Dudley's pamphlet.

The classic pamphlet was written 70 years ago to commemorate the 300th anniversary by Oxford engineering worker, Dudley Edwards, and can be viewed online at <http://bit.ly/LastStandLevellers>

The Socialist Inbox

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, phone 020 8988 8771 or email editors@socialistparty.org.uk.

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.

Tommy Robinson humiliated

On 3 May, Tommy Robinson, as part of his campaign to be elected as a North West England MEP, appeared in Middleton, Greater Manchester.

Middleton has a strong working-class community, many of whom have borne the brunt of the living standards crisis. Robinson's supporters will have felt the mood was ripe for his rhetoric.

Robinson speaks about the working class being ignored, mocked and side-lined by the elite. He regularly speaks of the betrayal by politicians of those working-class people who voted to leave the EU.

However, this is where his 'sympathy' towards the working class ends. He quite deliberately tries to pit working-class people against one another, including with his racist attacks on Muslims.

Local Labour Party members only heard about his appearance in Middleton the evening before it happened. One of the local Labour councillors, Kallum Nolan, was with me at the side of the crowd.

Suddenly, Robinson and a crew of his well-groomed henchmen (with cameras) appeared out of nowhere, demanding the councillor give him an interview. This usually is where Robinson attempts to belittle the interviewee.

I was stood directly in front of Kallum, but we were significantly outnumbered, with only three of us being in the close vicinity. The crowd was hostile and at one point Kallum was threatened with a beating.

The experience was frightening, and I had serious concerns for our safety. Kallum had no choice but to accept Robinson's request.

We stood firm, and Kallum calmly dismantled Robinson's carefully choreographed questions. He took Robinson's false argument about defending the working class and turned it against him.

Kallum stated he is a working-class lad from Middleton, he'd voted Leave, and was against a second referendum. He didn't see the fundamental division as being between races or nations, but between the working class and the ruling class.

He kept the argument to class struggle, and all Robinson's lines of attack were neutralised. His supporters started a lacklustre chant of "Tommy."

The attempt by Tommy Robinson to regain a profile presents a challenge to the workers' movement. He exploits the utter disillusionment that decades of neoliberalism and austerity have created. The trade unions should initiate a struggle for jobs, homes and services to win workers to a real alternative.

Above all, Labour councillors need to stop passing on Tory cuts, which have cost Labour dearly in the recent local elections.

Councillors should mobilise a trade union and community fightback to win back the billions stolen from us. In the meantime they should use reserves and borrowing powers to protect services, and build that fightback by showing what an anti-austerity programme means in practice.

This could fund new council housing, cash-strapped schools, youth services, well-paid jobs, and more. The council could fully pay for public services and housing, taking them all back into public ownership under the democratic control of workers and service users.

John McDonnell should pledge an incoming Corbyn-led government to reimburse councils who use reserves and borrowing in this way.

We need to loudly and boldly deliver a positive message to our class, that we need unity behind a socialist programme to deliver for workers. As always, actions speak louder than words.

A Labour Party member, Middleton

'This is England'

9 September 1991 was not like any other day on the Meadow Well Estate in North Shields. Three days earlier two young lads in a stolen car had been chased by the police, crashing on the coast road and killing these two teenagers in what could only be described as an inferno.

There was rage because of the perception that the police had forced these two young men off the road intentionally. It took three days for a further explosion on the estate to arrive, shops were looted and buildings were set on fire.

A youth centre, fish and chip shop and electricity substation were all destroyed. The police and fire service on attendance were unfortunately attacked by an estimated 400-strong crowd, with these services retreating for their own safety in the end. The Meadow Well - which still to this day remains one of the most deprived areas in a region that is the most deprived in the UK - is attempting to rid itself of this reputation.

However, life expectancy in the area is eleven years lower than the next ward just 1,500 yards away. Until six months ago there were no play areas on the estate, the residents along with the community centre which rose from the ashes of the riots, raised cash that they could not afford and got some very basic facilities on a grassed area. So, for a population on the estate of 11,000 there is just one play area. There are also still major challenges on the estate, with families struggling to cope with economic deprivation, the government's austerity measures, welfare reforms and bedroom tax and of course, Labour councillors who have been totally ineffective to say the least!

There are many on the estate that rely on the food banks at the Meadow Well 'connected centre' where I attend from time to time with an art project. Statistics now show that over four million children and 14 million adults are living in poverty. This is a disgrace and the draconian Universal Credit system is making people in areas like the Meadow Well even more vulnerable.

So with all the rhetoric from Tory ministers, they should climb down from their ivory towers and actually pay a visit to the see for themselves, but of course they won't. We are often accused of being the merchants of doom, quite the contrary we tell it as it is. This 1930's housing estate will be recognised up and down the land and sadly, is waiting to explode again; it just needs a match!

Peter Robson, North Tyneside

BT bullies

The article 'France Telecom: Privatisation in the dock following suicides allegedly caused by the bosses' in the Socialist issue 1040 on the spate of suicides in France Telecom will come as no surprise to Communication Workers Union activists in British Telecom (BT). It was already known many years ago.

While the consequences of the privatisation of France Telecom may have been particularly brutal, the broad thrust of bullying management and attempts at eroding workers' dignity and self-confidence also happened to a large degree at BT.

Any union rep who had members in stats-obsessed customer facing units can tell stories of union members breaking down in tears in union offices as a result of sustained and intense pressure from management aimed at 'managing people out of the business'. It was always wise to keep a large box of tissues in the office.

Many workers were signed off with stress, many had difficulty sleeping, and virtually all dreaded coming to work. Some did indeed contemplate suicide.

Managers in BT tried to convince workers that they weren't up to their job and perhaps they should think about leaving.

A favourite tactic was managers 'bumping into' targeted workers in the car park and trying to convince them that they ought to leave. They particularly liked to do this as a worker was going on leave so they spent their whole family holiday worrying about work.

They would often 'convince' workers to sign a confidentiality agreement waiving their rights to an employment tribunal in return for three or four months' salary. There may not have been so many suicides in Britain but the psychological destruction inflicted by managers was the same.

It is welcoming that the senior managers at France Telecom are to face criminal charges arising from their management methods and it is an example that Jeremy Corbyn should follow if he becomes prime minister.

If it can be proved that management bullying was directly linked to the death of a worker, that manager has committed manslaughter just the same as if a worker had been forced to use dangerous machinery and should be charged accordingly.

The real solution, however, is to take these industries back into public ownership and drive these managers out of the workplace and off our backs.

Clive Walder, Birmingham

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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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