

Millions robbed by greedy bosses

Come to the Rally for Socialism 2014

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialism 2014 organising team

Stop thief! Five million robbed every day! It's organised crime.

How else can you describe a situation where workers toil - but still struggle to pay the bills, put food on the table, and clothe themselves and their children adequately? The latest figures show five million workers are on poverty wages (see page 2).

We know who the crooks are. Big business fat cat bosses: the super-rich 1% who keep the luxury goods market booming and hold millions of workers in poverty.

Expenses scandal politicians around the world roll out the red carpet for these capitalist thieves. Care UK workers are striking to stop the theft of 35% of their wages. The boss of the private equity firm Bridgepoint Capital that owns Care UK was recently made a peer.

No wonder in the US a poll found that the millionaire politicians, vital accessories to the low pay crime, are less popular than head lice. Here, Tories, Labour, Lib Dems and Ukip tell us that they're helpless to take effective action - like implementing the Socialist Party demand for a £10 an hour minimum wage now. That could start to allow workers some dignity in their lives.

So it is refreshing that Russell Brand has spoken out. But we also need ideas and organisations to change the world.

Ideas

When Kshama Sawant was elected as a socialist councillor in Seattle last November, many of her 93,000 votes were in support of the demand for a \$15 an hour minimum wage - linked to socialist change. Once elected, she and her party - Socialist Alternative, co-thinkers of the Socialist Party - worked tirelessly to build a powerful and ultimately successful fight for \$15.

In Seattle, a city the size of Glasgow, 100,000 workers will be lifted out of poverty. For a change, the 1% pay - \$3 billion will be transferred from the bosses to the lowest paid. Pro-capitalist politicians may bemoan falling wages, rising inequality, stagnating economies - but they have no solution. Socialists do!

Kshama will be a keynote speaker at the Saturday rally of Socialism 2014 (see sidebar). Like the rest of the weekend, it will provide bucket-loads of ideas and inspiration for the much needed fightback - or your money back!

Socialism 2014

Kshama Sawant won't be the only impressive speaker on the platform at the Socialism 2014 rally on Saturday 8 November.

- As the Socialist marks its 50th year, Socialist Party general secretary PETER TAAFFE argues that the lessons of these decades prove the working class is the most powerful force for the change we need.
- RUTH COPPINGER, newly elected Socialist Party TD (MP) in Dublin, is a leader of the developing mass non-payment movement against Ireland's water tax.
- IAN HODSON is president of bakers' union BFAWU, which has successfully defeated hated zero-hour contracts in Hovis in Wigan.
- BRIAN SMITH (personal capacity) is secretary of Glasgow Unison, and will bring a taste of Scotland's electoral uprising - when the working class and youth used the independence vote to fight austerity.
- MARK SERWOTKA has just been re-elected as the general secretary of civil service union PCS, which has been to the fore of the fight against government cuts.

Rally for Socialism, Saturday 8 November at 7.30pm, Camden Centre, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE. Public transport: King's Cross St Pancras.

Tickets from £5, call 020 8988 8777 or visit www.socialism2014.net - where you can also find details of the workshops, rallies and forums, as well as venue, transport, crèche (book by 3 November) and more.

Editorial from the Socialist issue 831

Capitalism - 'the new mediocre'

"We're the fastest guns in the West - and still losing the living standards battle", was how Stephanie Flanders summed up Britain's economy (Sunday Times 26 October).

It is true that Britain was the fastest growing of the G7 countries in the third quarter of 2014. However, the UK economy grew by a paltry 0.7%, the government deficit increased, and wages continued to fall (see below). As Flanders, concludes: "Alas, this is as good as it likely to get for the foreseeable future. Welcome to what the head of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, has called 'the new mediocre'."

Stagnation - a long period of low growth - is now the best scenario on offer for world capitalism. The OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) has even calculated that low growth - an average of two-thirds of the current very low rate - will continue for the next 45 years!

We would agree, except that the working class will not put up with a capitalist system which means impoverishment for the majority for that long - a democratic socialist planned economy will be firmly on the agenda before then.

In recent weeks, however, there has been a renewed wave of panic in the financial markets at the unfolding of a new stage of the economic crisis that began in 2007. Fears are mounting that stagnation might be too rosy a prognosis for the world economy. World oil prices have plunged to \$85 a barrel as forecasts for world growth have been slashed.

The US, while it is a declining power, still remains the most powerful economy in the world. Yet the return to growth (very low growth) of the US economy has not been sufficient to lift the rest of the world out of crisis. This is despite the vast sums of money that have been pumped into the US financial system since the economic crisis began.

Over the last five years the US Federal Reserve has put nearly \$4.5 trillion into the US economy, via quantitative easing (QE), in a desperate attempt to counter the effects of the recession and prevent the meltdown of the financial system. At the same time interest rates are at historically low levels, making borrowing very cheap.

Similar measures have been carried out in Britain, where interest rates are at their lowest level for three centuries! Yet, in a condemnation of modern capitalism, these huge sums being pumped into the economy have not resulted in a growth in investment.

Zombie system

'The zombie system: how capitalism has gone off the rails' was how an article in the German current affairs magazine Der Spiegel described the situation. Accurately it concluded: "Central banks are also running out of ammunition. They have pushed interest rates close to zero and have spent hundreds of billions to buy government bonds. Yet the vast amounts of money they are pumping into the financial sector isn't making its way into the economy. Be it in Japan, Europe or the United States, companies are hardly investing in new machinery or factories anymore. Instead, prices are exploding on the global stock, real estate and bond markets, a dangerous boom driven by cheap money, not by sustainable growth."

Now the US federal reserve has said it will stop pouring alcohol into the punch bowl. This week the Fed chief, Janet Yellen, is due to make the 'final' QE payment of \$15 billion. Panic on the stock markets as the drugs are withdrawn, combined with the deepening of the economic crisis in other parts of the world, however, may yet reverse Yellen's decision on QE.

Whether now or later, the withdrawal of QE and the eventual raising of interest rates will threaten a bursting of the bubbles and a repeat of the financial crisis of 2008. This time, affecting an organism weakened by years of crisis.

Even those parts of the world that initially seemed to have escaped the crisis are now being hit. Australia's 23 year boom has come to an end and in Brazil growth rates have plunged from 7.5% a year in 2010 to close to zero now.

Both economies' growth has been largely based on selling raw materials to China. China catching cold is now giving them flu. China was never immune from the world economic crisis. It is estimated that the collapse of US demand in 2008 led to 30 million thrown out of work in China. However, the unprecedented, gigantic, stimulus packages pumped into the economy by the regime were able to partially cushion the Chinese economy.

Now, however, China's growth rate is lower than at any time since 2009. Chinese officials have warned that growth of 7% - compared to 12% in the past - is now 'normal' for China.

The regime is worried by the rapid increase in China's debts as a result of the stimulus packages of recent years. The amount owed by the government, companies and households is now 240% of GDP, double the level it was at the start of the crisis. This is still modest compared to some other countries (it is 322% in the US for example).

However, even a period of weaker growth in China could raise the prospect of mass, potentially revolutionary upheavals, a foretaste of which has already been seen in Hong Kong.

In a world of ailing economies it is Europe, however, which is sickest. Germany, the only part of the eurozone that was growing, has now entered crisis. The Economist magazine's front cover this week showed Europe as a dead parrot. The magazine's commentary was barely more optimistic, declaring: "Prices are falling in eight European countries. The zone's overall inflation rate has slipped to 0.3% and may go into outright decline next year. A region that makes up almost a fifth of the world's output is marching towards stagnation and deflation.

"Optimists, both inside and outside Europe, often cite the example of Japan. It fell into deflation in the late-1990s, with unpleasant but not apocalyptic consequences for both itself and the world economy. But the eurozone poses far greater risks. Unlike Japan, the eurozone is not an isolated case: from China to America inflation is worryingly low, and slipping. And, unlike Japan, which has a homogenous, stoic society, the euro area cannot hang together through years of economic sclerosis and falling prices. As debt burdens soar from Italy to Greece, investors will take fright, populist politicians will gain ground, and - sooner rather than later - the euro will collapse."

Deflation is a drag on growth because it makes debt more expensive and leads consumers to postpone purchases in the expectation that prices will be lower at a later date. Given the huge debts throughout the world economy this is a nightmare scenario for capitalism.

Failure

One in five European banks failed the ECB's 'stress tests' on how they would cope with a new stage of economic crisis. Yet the scenarios envisaged were relatively optimistic. Outright deflation, for example, was not even considered. And the correct valuation of German mortgages (German banks all passed) was taken on trust. In reality the number of 'zombie banks' was probably underestimated.

In panic at the situation in the eurozone a section of the capitalist class is calling for Keynesian measures to try and stimulate demand, combined with a slowing of austerity measures. Meanwhile, however, the dominant wing of the capitalist class continues to demand ever more austerity.

Martin Wolf, for example, writing in the Financial Times, calls for measures to stimulate the eurozone economy and declares that the ECB's attacks on the French deficit breaking the eurozone's rules as "absurd". Wolf states that the 'threat to stability' of continued stagnation are 'obvious', meaning the inevitable uprisings of the working class, not least in France.

There is a growing section of the capitalist class who are concerned by this prospect. At a recent meeting on "inclusive capitalism" in London 250 extremely wealthy individuals, from Google Chairman Eric Schmidt to Unilever CEO Paul Polman, gathered in order to fret about the threat to social stability caused by the crisis in their system. The hostess of the meeting, bank heir Lynn Forester de Rothschild, said she was concerned about social cohesion, noting that citizens had "lost confidence in their governments."

Their fretting, however, will do nothing to alter the character of modern capitalism, which is crisis-ridden and increasingly incapable of meeting the needs of the majority, and has inequality at its heart. The result will be exactly what they fear - a growing revolt of the working class and poor against the misery capitalism offers them - and opportunities for a democratic, socialist alternative to gain mass support.

Record numbers of workers suffering poverty pay under the Con-Dems

Simon Carter

The continuing scandal of low pay again hit the headlines last week when the Resolution Foundation think tank published figures showing a record number of workers in the UK on poverty wages.

Over five million workers earn less than two-thirds of the median hourly pay - equivalent to £7.69 an hour - a rise of 250,000 over the last year. And almost a quarter of minimum wage workers (now earning £6.50 an hour) have remained on it for the past five years.

Clearly, the government's continuing pay freeze, as part of its austerity measures to bail out capitalism, and employers using the recession to lower wage rates, have led to a huge drop in workers living standards.

According to the Trades Union Congress (TUC) which, on paper, is committed to a £10 an hour minimum wage, workers have experienced an 8% slump in real earnings since 2007 - the steepest fall in living standards since Victorian times.

Self-employed

Moreover, the five million plus figure doesn't take in account the many workers who have joined the ranks of the self-employed because they had no other option.

Earlier this year the Resolution Foundation pointed out that self-employment had risen from 650,000 five years ago to a staggering 4.5 million, or 15% of the active workforce. But far from becoming millionaire entrepreneurs the average weekly income of a self-employed person is 20% lower than in 2008 and 40% less than a typical full-time worker.

Recently, many public sector workers in the health service and in government departments walked out in disgust at another effective pay cut - and against a backdrop of Tory chancellor George Osborne hinting that such freezes would continue beyond the span of the next parliament.

The trade unions must protect their members' living standards by coordinating widespread strike action to counter the government and bosses' attacks on pay. This action should prepare the ground for a one-day nationwide stoppage to implement the £10 an hour minimum wage as a step toward a living wage.

NHS: More cuts planned

Dave Carr

The National Health Service (NHS) is being ripped apart as a result of an acute underfunding crisis. Inevitably, patient care is suffering as a result.

This cash shortfall is coupled to an accelerating privatisation programme in the form of rip-off Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts and the outsourcing of the bulk of the NHS budget under the Con-Dems' Health and Social Care Act 2012.

In September this year, it was reported that 86 out of 147 NHS trusts, including 33 self-governing Foundation Trusts, were in deficit. Of these, two-thirds are hospital trusts.

In 2012, South London Health-care NHS Trust, crippled by unserviceable PFI payments to for-profit private consortia, became the first trust to be placed into special administration before being broken up.

But instead of scrapping and reversing this privatisation agenda the head of NHS England, Simon Stevens, (former Labour government health advisor and president of US-based UnitedHealth Group private healthcare company) has set out a new five year plan of cuts and charges.

Stevens, while being careful to say that the majority of health services would continue to be met by NHS providers, also argued that the private sector had an important role to play in the NHS.

Indeed, figures from the Department of Health show that non-NHS providers secured £10 billion of contracts or 10% of the NHS budget in England - a figure that inevitably will grow under the government's Health and Social Care Act.

Stevens was more robust in defending the use of PFI contracts developed under the Blair/Brown Labour governments (when he was a healthcare advisor), despite the untenable burden these schemes have placed on NHS resources.

In order to plug an estimated £30 billion funding shortfall by 2020 NHS England wants an extra 2-3% 'efficiency savings' ie cuts, on top of the existing 'savings' being pushed through by NHS managers.

David Bennett, chief executive of Monitor, which regulates the NHS Foundation Trust sector, did not rule out the NHS having to charge for hospital stays or GP appointments if government spending did not increase.

NHS England also wants to merge hospitals, cut 'back-office' workers and to use more volunteers instead of qualified and paid staff. These changes are supported by Labour and the Lib Dems.

Scrap PFI

Yet it was staff shortages, driven by financial targets to achieve Foundation Trust status, which played a critical part in the neglect of patients in the Mid-Staffs Hospital scandal.

In the run-up to the general election the three main establishment parties in Westminster are keen to trumpet their defence of the NHS as a publicly funded and run healthcare provider.

Yet these parties are responsible for the systematic undermining of the NHS as part of their pro-big business agendas and their private healthcare connections.

The Socialist Party, working with its trade union allies in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, will continue to fight for the scrapping of PFI services and to demand that privatised services are reintegrated into a fully funded and democratically run public NHS.

This could be paid for through nationalising the tax-avoiding giant corporations, including the parasitic 'big pharma' drug companies, and imposing a wealth tax on the income and assets of the super-rich. Then, people's health could come first instead of private profit.

Our health is not a game!

Claire Job, Welsh NHS Nurse

The right-wing Daily Mail has continued its tradition of irresponsible journalism recently, with an unprecedented number of articles attacking Labour-managed NHS Wales. It kicks-off an offensive Tory electioneering campaign which basically consists of saying: 'our NHS isn't as bad as your NHS' and 'this is what you get if you vote Labour into office'.

Indeed, the Mail online gratuitously emphasises Prime Minister David Cameron's comment that the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) "was welcome to visit the health service in England to compare it to scandal-hit Wales".

The Con-Dem austerity package has made significant fissures in the health of ordinary people both sides of the border.

In Wales, although the NHS is coordinated and organised centrally (escaping the horrors of privatisation in NHS England) the cuts to spending on healthcare have been considerable.

The Welsh government, instead of fighting the Tory-led government cuts, has overseen a real terms cut of 2.5% in health spending per head of the population since 2009, a bigger reduction than any other part of the UK.

This is because the Welsh government decided not to ring-fence NHS funding in the early days of Con-Dem austerity.

While the Tories in Westminster kick the NHS in Wales, and the Labour Welsh government kicks the English NHS in return, real people's lives are held in the balance.

The NHS on both sides of the border requires major investment, and the privatisation of health services in England must be urgently reversed, if we are to meet the health needs of the population.

This isn't a game! It is ridiculous to imagine that Cameron cares about the health of people in Wales, especially as he seems not to care about the health of people in England. He only cares about rich people, which makes his comments all the more repulsive.

Scottish Labour in crisis: build a working class anti-cuts alternative

Philip Stott, Socialist Party Scotland

The Labour Party in Scotland has been thrown into a deep crisis following the resignation of its Scottish leader, Johann Lamont.

In her resignation statement she called for more autonomy for Scotland and accused Ed Miliband, and other leading figures in UK Labour, of treating Scotland like a "branch office". Other unnamed Westminster MPs were described as "dinosaurs", unable to face up to the changed situation in Scotland following the referendum.

The growing tensions inside the Labour Party and many of its affiliated trade unions have now exploded into the open. Since 18 September thousands of trade unionists have demanded that any money paid from their union subscriptions to the Labour Party is stopped.

Labour's empty "victory" in the independence referendum, rather than strengthen its position, has accelerated its disintegration. Ex-Labour working class strongholds like Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire and Dundee voted Yes.

SNP

Membership of the Scottish National Party (SNP) has rocketed to over 80,000 as tens of thousands of mainly working class people have flooded in, seeking a vehicle to use to hit back at the political establishment and continue the struggle for independence. Although the SNP are in fact passing on government cuts. Meanwhile Labour's support and membership is in free fall, a consequence of its pro-big business and pro-austerity policies.

The Westminster elections in 2015 will likely see a number of Labour seats fall to the SNP. However, a complete wipeout of Labour MPs - an idea raised by some on the left to justify a so-called alliance of independence supporting parties - is extremely unlikely. Even some Yes voters, despite their hatred of the Labour leadership, could still vote Labour to try to ensure a defeat of the Tories.

Lamont's resignation and statement is also a big blow for Labour's UK leader Ed Miliband. Her open attacks on him and the increasingly likely loss of a number of Labour MPs from Scotland will undermine the chances of the election of a majority Labour government.

And yet things could get worse. Uber-Blairite MP Jim Murphy, a former shadow defence minister and supporter of the Iraq war, is emerging as a leading candidate to replace Lamont. Labour MSP Malcolm Chisholm warned that choosing a Scottish leader based at Westminster would "turn a crisis into a catastrophe".

Any left Labour candidate would be very unlikely to win. As Socialist Party Scotland has consistently explained there is little possibility of moving the Labour party to the left. The party is largely empty of active workers, young people and trade unionists.

Trade unions

The events in Falkirk, and the witch hunt of Unite which followed, underline that reality. The affiliated unions should urgently discuss breaking from Labour and helping to launch a new mass workers party.

Despite the huge working class Yes vote, the SNP has introduced a £500 million cuts budget into the Scottish parliament for next year. Labour leaders Miliband and Balls are proposing to continue with Tory austerity if elected next year. The need to stand principled anti-cuts candidates in the Westminster elections is growing by the day.

We would appeal to all those looking for a fighting alternative to come to the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition conference on 1 November in Glasgow (Blythswood Hall, Renfield-St Stephens Centre, Bath Street, starting at 12.30).

See www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk and www.tusc.org.uk

Them & Us

Unsocial media

Chancellor George Osborne told a bemused Tory audience at their recent conference that the government is cracking down on aggressive corporate tax avoidance. Odd then that Facebook's UK corporation tax bill was only £3,169 compared to its net profit last year of \$1.5 billion.

It seems that Facebook simply funnelled its UK sales through its European HQ located in the Republic of Ireland.

Second jobs

Times must be hard when MPs have to moonlight. In the case of 20 MPs their second job, with earnings of over £100,000 a year, will certainly help pay the household bills. These include ex-ministers in the current coalition government.

Raking it in are former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown, who scooped £492,331; Respect MP George Galloway with £265,350; and Tory MP Sir Nicholas Soames on £253,598, to name three.

According to the Guardian, 26 MPs "earned more from directorships, paid employment or shareholdings than they did from their parliamentary salary".

In total, MPs trousered £7.1 million from their outside earnings.

Deeper in debt

Health care was the most common cause of debt collections in the USA last year - accounting for 38% of the total. It underlines the nightmare situation of millions of workers and their families faced with a prohibitively expensive, privately run health care system.

Income drop

Sticking with the US, as the wealth of the super-rich has rocketed the median household (which lies statistically at the middle of the income scale), has become \$50,000 poorer since 2007.

Gender relegation

One reason for PM David Cameron refusing to wear a pro-feminist t-shirt could be because the UK has dropped out of the top 20 most gender-equal countries in the world for the first time. This relegation comes after women's average wages fell by £2,700 in one year.

According to the World Economic Forum the UK was behind 25 countries when it came to men and women having the most equitable life chances in health, work and education.

Child poverty

Since the onset of the world capitalist recession in 2008 the number of children falling into poverty is 2.6 million greater than the number who have been lifted out of it according to a new report by Unicef. The child poverty rate in the UK has risen from 24% to 25.6% in this period.

What we saw

One million refuse to register for water charges

Video of Paul Murphy, Socialist Party TD, Republic of Ireland, ripping up his Irish Water pack

www.socialistworld.net

Lessons from history: 1917

Revolution in Russia

Clare Doyle

The October revolution (7-8 November in the modern calendar) of 1917 in Russia was the greatest event in human history. Under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, it brought into existence the first, and so far the only, workers-led government to hold power for any length of time. With its appeal to the workers of the world to follow suit, it set out to sweep feudalism and capitalism from the face of the earth.

This was the most democratic form of government ever embarked on. The Bolsheviks drew on the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 and of the 'soviets' (committees) that workers had set up during the revolution in Russia in 1905.

All major decision-making was to be done through a system of elected councils - of workers', soldiers' and peasants' delegates - at a local, regional and national level. Any paid representatives were to stand regularly for re-election and receive no more than the average wage of a worker.

By the summer of 1918, Russia was out of the war, its major banks, industries and land were in state hands and under workers' control and a rudimentary workers' management was operating through the country's soviets.

The idea of revolution had spread like wild-fire. By the end of 1918 an uprising in Germany had removed the Kaiser. The following year in Hungary, an attempt was made to emulate the Russian revolution. London dockers refused to load arms for use against the Bolsheviks.

Marxists had generally expected the first successful socialist revolution to take place in an industrialised country with an experienced working class, such as Germany, and later spread to less developed economies. But capitalism broke at its weakest link.

Russia at the time of the February revolution in 1917 was a vast war-drained country. Landless peasants made up 80% of the population. Two million Russian soldiers had been slaughtered in World War One.

Most industry in Russia was relatively modern and foreign-owned. Workers had been drawn from the countryside and concentrated together in large factories in the main cities of Moscow and Petrograd - the country's capital at the time.

The Tsars operated a suffocating police state. Before 1905 all opposition forces were illegalised.

When the first major workers' uprising against Tsarism broke out, at the very beginning of 1905, Russian forces were being humiliated in a war with Japan.

In Petrograd, a peaceful protest of striking workers led by a priest carrying a petition, was fired on by the Tsar's troops on 9 January, leaving hundreds dead.

Strikes spread rapidly across the vast country. A mutiny on the battleship Potemkin in Russia's Black Sea Fleet sparked more mass protests in Odessa, many hundreds were killed. During what became a general political strike, Soviets were thrown up as a new form of representative body with delegates elected to discuss the key issues in the struggle. They were a major threat to the old order.

Eventually, not having found sufficient support in the countryside and in the army, the 'first' Russian revolution was defeated. On 3 December the Petrograd soviet was broken up and its leaders arrested, including Leon Trotsky its president. Many opposition fighters were executed.

After this 'dress rehearsal' for the events of 1917, the workers' political leaders were either in prison, in internal exile or abroad. The workers and peasants bowed their heads to the yoke once more, harbouring enormous resentment against their oppressors but taking time to recover their fighting capacity. In spite of certain democratic rights having been won, a period of reaction set in.

But by 1912 strikes were breaking out in factories and mines across the country.

Split

It was also the year that the main socialist party, the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party, finally split into two separate parties - the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. The Bolsheviks were intent on building a revolutionary party with trained cadres and serious, committed members in the factories, the army and the navy.

The Mensheviks favoured a looser form of organisation. Both, at this time, shared the view that the first stage would be a democratic revolution against feudalism in the shape of Tsarism and the 'landed gentry'. Then, in theory, after a period of development of capitalism, a move could be made towards socialism.

Trotsky began as early as 1904 to outline his theory of 'permanent revolution'. He was arguing, before Vladimir Lenin, that in 'backward' Russia the revolution to overthrow the monarchy and feudalism had to be combined with the socialist revolution under the leadership of the working class.

Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks only in July of 1917 but he was already accepted as one of the revolution's ablest leaders.

The February revolution of 1917 came after months of strikes and unrest. On International Women's Day (8 March in the modern calendar) women textile-workers in Petrograd walked out of their factories. They demanded an end to food shortages and price rises, and also an end to the war.

They were enthusiastically joined by tens of thousands of other workers. The Tsar had shown his inability to introduce reform. He ordered the troops to fire on demonstrations. The workers' appeals to the troops to refuse orders finally succeeded and the rule of the Tsars was over.

The atmosphere was one of joyous celebration. Workers had moved onto the scene of history. They had removed a hated government and held power in their hands, but did not know what to do with it. There was no party with a mass base, trusted by the workers, with a leadership who could indicate the next steps that needed to be taken. The workers took the easier way out of handing power to the apparently 'progressive' politicians.

The Provisional Government was a government of crisis from the very beginning, rivalled by the Petrograd Soviet of workers' and soldiers' representatives in a situation of 'dual power'.

The Petrograd soviet, with at this stage Menshevik representatives in a majority, commanded more support than the government among the population.

Lenin returned from exile on 3 April 1917, urging the Bolsheviks to see that the first revolution had to 'grow over' immediately into the next. He expressed total opposition to support being given to the provisional government by the Bolsheviks inside the country under the leadership of Kamenev and Stalin, who put forward the same arguments as the Mensheviks.

In May, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries (SRs) decided to enter into the Kerensky government coalition. The Bolsheviks launched the demand of 'Down with the ten capitalist ministers' to expose the Mensheviks' failure to push for a government that truly represented the forces that had made the revolution.

Little had changed. The war continued. The provisional government had neither removed the capitalists in industry nor the feudal landlords from power. Often they were one and the same.

The revolt in the countryside spread like wild fire. Estates were seized and stately homes burned down. In the cities, demonstrations against the war multiplied.

The Bolsheviks' simple slogan of 'Peace, Bread and Land' accorded with the deepest desires of the mass of the population. It led workers, soldiers and eventually the peasantry to see the need to carry the revolution further. Tirelessly the Bolshevik Marxist workers' party continued its agitation in the factories and at the front.

By the middle of 1917, the Bolsheviks had massively increased their support in the city's central soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies.

Although many workers were supporting the call 'All power to the soviets', the Bolshevik leadership around Lenin advised against a direct challenge for power until all the conditions for a successful revolution had matured.

When a proposal came from below in July for a general strike and mass demonstration against the war and to bring down the government, the Bolshevik leaders felt it was premature. But when it went ahead they gave it their support.

As they feared, it failed to draw the military over to their side or at least neutralise them - an essential prerequisite for a successful seizure of power. The July uprising was put down in blood.

Four conditions

By the end of August, Kerensky was under threat from a different direction - an attempted far-right coup by General Kornilov. The Army's Commander-in-Chief had decided the government was failing to deal harshly enough with the Bolsheviks and the soviets.

It was the mobilisation of workers and soldiers led by the Bolsheviks who then routed Kornilov's forces. Their mass 'sabotage' of the railways, as well as preparedness to defend the government with arms helped Kerensky to defeat reaction. But it enormously enhanced the power of the Bolsheviks in the soviets and gave them an overwhelming majority by the end of September.

The way for a revolutionary overthrow was rapidly being paved. The four conditions for a successful revolution spelled out by Lenin were all maturing rapidly.

The first is a crisis at the top of society. The ruling layer is split, uncertain as to how to proceed - whether to make concessions or employ repression to deal with the developing movement.

The second objective factor in a developing revolutionary situation is a middle class in ferment, not sure which way to turn but beginning to throw in its lot with the organised workers. In Russia in the autumn of 1917 the mass of the peasantry was ready for a fight to the finish against the landed aristocracy.

The forces of the state - the militia, sailors and soldiers - had also lost faith in the parties of the Kerensky regime and were ready to be neutral or take an active part in the revolution.

The working class of Petrograd, Moscow and elsewhere was already on the move, they were prepared to take the fight to a conclusion. This third condition for revolution had also reached full term.

The decisive fourth element necessary for a successful socialist revolution is the existence of a party that has the confidence of a large part of the working class, with a leadership that can see the main line of the march of events and can weigh up exactly what to do at each crucial moment in the struggle.

Having had no more than 3% support in the soviets at the beginning of 1917 and just a few thousand members, by October the Bolshevik Party had hundreds of thousands of worker-members and a majority in the soviets. They had support in the army and navy and set up the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee that would lead the October insurrection.

The leaders of the Bolshevik Party - Lenin and Trotsky - had a clear idea of what was needed, but also a keen sense of timing. They were agreed on the necessity of 'completing' the revolution by removing the capitalist parties from government and the class they represented from power in society. The Bolsheviks' clear slogans, together with their bitter experience, helped the workers, soldiers and poor peasants draw the conclusion that socialist revolution was necessary.

Then the vital role of leadership is to decide on the moment for action once all the conditions have come together. Too early an attempt at insurrection would have led to an abortion; too late would have meant a still birth with reaction triumphant.

The forces of reaction inside Russia as well as those of the German invader were threatening to close the opportunity for the Bolsheviks to bring down the Kerensky government; they had to seize the moment.

The insurrection began on 24 October. The Military Revolutionary Committee sent armed groups to seize the key strategic points. By morning Kerensky had fled and the Red Guards had taken over the

Winter Palace. The seizure of power was swift. Even the tougher 'battle for Moscow' was over in a week.

By the morning of the 25 October an order was issued for the transfer of power to the Petrograd Soviet. That evening, the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets opened.

The first decrees of the new soviet government laid the basis for achieving the three basic demands of the revolution - 'Peace, Bread and Land'. The Decree on Peace meant the pursuit of a cease-fire and peace terms without annexations.

The Decree on Land meant the immediate expulsion of the feudal lords from their estates and the allocation of land to be used by the poor peasantry. The Bolsheviki aimed to gear up the production of modern agricultural machinery to transform productivity on the farms. The small farmers would be encouraged to see the advantages of the cooperative production of food.

Soviet power meant workers' delegates taking over immediate control of banks and industry in preparation for public ownership in 1918 and managing them as part of a completely democratically planned state-owned economy.

Imperialism

Attempts to snuff out the workers' revolution failed. Twenty-one armies were sent in by imperialist countries to back up the reactionary White forces in the Civil War. They were repulsed at great human cost by the heroic forces of the Red Army under Trotsky's command.

There was also enormous economic cost: Industrial production fell to one-seventh of the value of 1913 and agriculture to 60%. Hundreds of thousands of people had been killed and millions died from starvation and disease.

The leaders of the revolution were acutely aware of the vital importance of spreading the revolution to other more industrialised countries, with a stronger working class, in order to rapidly develop the technique necessary to 'revolutionise' industry to establish a healthy planned economy.

In spite of the enormous enthusiasm among the oppressed across the world for the workers-led government in Russia, it was left tragically isolated. Socialist revolutions in Germany and elsewhere ended in defeat. After the death of Lenin in 1924, Stalin usurped the revolution, abolished workers' democracy and exterminated all opposition to his rule.

His counter-revolution did not take the form of the re-establishment of capitalism. (This came much later towards the end of the 20th century). It was a political counter-revolution in the interests of a parasitic caste who had little connection with the revolutionary events of 1917.

Huge advances were made in spite of this development. The economy grew rapidly because of the elimination of capitalism and feudalism and the five-year plans. But all elements of workers' democracy were crushed and its advocates physically annihilated, including Leon Trotsky in exile in Mexico.

A clear understanding of the processes of revolution and counter-revolution is vital for winning the battles ahead.

Revolutionary experiences need to be studied as generals study different battles - to learn from mistakes in order to avoid repeating them. But no two battles take place against exactly the same background and with exactly the same forces engaged.

Heroic mass movements have developed many times into challenges for power by workers and youth taking things into their hands.

In 2011 for example, Tunisia and Egypt saw events typical of revolution - when things move so fast that every day seems like ten years. The masses on the streets, the organised workers playing a decisive role with their strikes in overthrowing Ben Ali and Mubarak - these could have been their 'Februaries'.

But lacking was a Bolshevik or revolutionary party with broad support that could have expressed the unconscious strivings of those who were making the revolution - a party whose leaders could see the need to take the revolution directly on to the task of finishing with capitalism. Without this, there has so far been no 'October' in these countries, and not even any real democracy.

Workers and young people who want to find a way of changing the ugly capitalist world we live in would do well to look at the lessons of the Russian Revolution. The most important conclusion to draw is to get involved in a party dedicated to the cause of workers and poor people and the building of a new mass force for socialism.

Further reading on the revolution

- 1917: the year that changed the world

Lessons of the Russian Revolution for the 21st century.

By Peter Taaffe and Hannah Sell

£3 (pamphlet)

- History of the Russian Revolution

By Leon Trotsky

£22.99

Leon Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution is a classic work by one of the central leaders of the first socialist revolution.

Other titles by Trotsky:

- The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects - £10
- My Life - An Attempt at an Autobiography - £17.99
- In Defence of October - 50p

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Australia: when the Queen's representative sacked a government

Becci Heagney

Gough Whitlam, former Australian Prime Minister, has died at the age of 98. His time in government raises important concerns for the working class about so-called democracy under capitalism.

Whitlam led the Australian Labor Party (ALP) to power in 1972 after 23 years of Conservative government. Despite not being from the left-wing, trade union side of the party, he carried out important reforms under pressure from an increase in workers' struggle.

The reforms included: scrapping university tuition fees, equal pay legislation, the introduction of a universal health insurance scheme and the withdrawal of troops from South Vietnam. He reduced the voting age from 21 to 18 which involved a new generation in politics.

Removed

For all of this, he was undemocratically removed from power by the Governor-General John Kerr. The position of Governor-General is appointed, ironically by the Prime Minister, as the representative of the monarchy in Australia. They have similar 'reserve' powers to the Queen in Britain, including the power to appoint or dismiss ministers, to dissolve parliament and to give assent (or refuse assent) to laws.

The Governor-General is head of the Federal Executive Council, a body which consists of all current and past government ministers and legally enacts the policies of the Cabinet, which actually has no legal power at all. They are also the head of the armed forces.

By 1974, a constitutional crisis was developing. The ALP had a majority in the parliament, the House of Representatives, but the Liberal-Country Party coalition (an alliance of right-wing parties) controlled the upper house, the Senate. The Liberals, led by Malcolm Fraser, were using their majority to block bills.

During 1975 they refused to pass the budget Supply Bill, which meant that the government was not receiving money to function. The deadlock apparently went as far as the government only having enough money to last two more weeks.

It was then that the Governor-General struck, dissolved parliament, removed Whitlam from power and appointed Fraser Prime Minister. A vote of no confidence by ALP MPs, who still had a majority in the House of Representatives until a general election, was ignored.

Outrage

Instantly, Australia was rocked by outrage. Thousands of civil servants in Canberra took strike action and a huge protest was held outside parliament in support of the ALP. In Melbourne, dockers protested. Fraser was physically attacked as he left parliament. Unfortunately, Whitlam failed to mobilise this resistance and lost the following election.

The 'reserve' powers of the monarchy and the Queen's representatives in the Commonwealth will be used against democratically elected governments if they think that it is necessary, especially left wing

ones. Whitlam didn't carry out radical socialist policies but he went too far for the Australian ruling class. Revelations since show the involvement of both MI6 and the CIA in the run up to the dismissal, just a couple of years after a violent CIA-backed coup in Chile.

Working class

They weren't worried about what Whitlam was doing, but about the rising confidence of working class people - Whitlam wasn't trusted to hold that back. More recently, in 2008 the Governor-General in Canada suspended a minority conservative government to allow it to avoid a vote of no confidence from the opposition.

The position of Governor-General should be scrapped - along with all other undemocratic 'reserve' powers, they can be used against the workers' movement if it is seen as a threat to their system.

The monarchy and other feudal relics have no place in a democratic society and should be abolished. The workers movement must be prepared to fight for genuine democracy - a socialist society.

Building a political alternative in Seattle

Stephan Kimmerle, Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

"Poll shows Sawant polarising, but with impressive favourable rating" is the title under which a confirmation of the politics of Kshama Sawant and her organisation, Socialist Alternative (co-thinkers of the Socialist Party in the US), was published. The poll, carried out by media research company EMT, reveals that people in Seattle know that Kshama Sawant is responsible for providing an opposition to the Mayor's policies inside City Hall.

Kshama led the campaign that won a \$15 an hour minimum wage in Seattle and has continued to campaign for working class policies - exactly what she promised to do in her election campaign a year ago.

In her district, Kshama achieved the highest approval figures compared to all the other council members in theirs - 61%. This is a huge encouragement to continue the efforts to challenge the big business agenda of the Democratic Party establishment which has dominated the city for far too long.

The latest success of Kshama's efforts in the city council is the renaming of the national holiday Columbus Day in Seattle to Indigenous People's Day. Kshama received national attention with this. She explained: this "is about more than just a name change. It is about educating ourselves and our children, about taking a stand against racism and discrimination."

Every budget season is interrupted for the majority of the council to join a retreat in a luxury resort hosted by the chamber of commerce. "What a brazen display of corporate favouritism", Kshama Sawant argued at a press conference. "It is no wonder that the budget, year after year is completely out of touch with the economic problems faced by ordinary working people." Again she received a wave of media attention for this principled stand.

Jess Spear

At the same time, one of the most powerful politicians in Seattle, state speaker Frank Chopp, is forced into a battle for support of voters in the 43rd District. On 4 November an election will take

place where Jess Spear and Socialist Alternative are again taking on the Democratic Party machine and their big business agenda.

Funded by an army of corporate donors, and backed by the Democratic Party establishment, Chopp has been able to out-spend Jess Spear three times over. However, in the face-to-face debates (which the 20 year long incumbent carefully tried to minimise and shorten) Jess exposed him as the 'corporate servant' that he is. After one of the debates, local media reported Jess as "by far the most impassioned speaker of the day. She answered the moderators' questions, but went further than any other candidate, bluntly calling for more taxes on the wealthy and on Boeing."

Independent media

In the middle of the campaign, the Washington State Supreme Court held that the state legislator has been criminally underfunding education. Pointing to the \$8.7 billion handout for Boeing bosses while Boeing shifted thousands of jobs out of the state, Jess Spear was quoted in the Seattle Times: "It was noteworthy that the state legislature argued that it was easier to pass a tax handout rather than fund education."

This quote was then curiously removed from the article on the website. "This really shows the importance of independent media sources - media outlets that are controlled by working people in the service of working people, rather than relying on media that's owned and controlled by big business and can shut out voices that are important to the discussion," concluded Jess, a subscriber and writer for the paper Socialist Alternative.

Against this wave of money and media power, door knocking and direct conversations are crucial. More than 300 volunteers are helping talk to people in their neighbourhoods, putting up posters and handing out leaflets.

Climate March

During the campaign, Jess - a climate scientist - brought together a coalition of environmental and labour organisations to coordinate the People's Climate March in Seattle on 21 September, the same day as the historic march in New York. This protest demanded jobs and protection of the environment - and ended in blocking the tracks used for oil and gas trains for two hours in an act of civil disobedience.

The yard signs of the campaign for Jess demand "Tax the rich - fund education" and "We need rent control". After the victory of the 15Now campaign (of which Jess was the organising director) in winning a \$15 an hour minimum wage in Seattle, the question of affordable housing is now the most pressing issue in the emerald city.

Through the successes of mobilising 2,000 for climate action, having thousands of conversations on door steps about rent control, and mass flyering to demand taxing the rich, Socialist Alternative's roots in the Northwest have deepened. We are growing in Seattle and nationwide. Future campaigns can build on the experiences and successes of a marvellous effort to chop Chopp.

- For a full balance of the campaign and a detailed review of the election results after 4 November, go to www.votespear.org or www.socialistalternative.org
- Hear socialist Seattle city councillor Kshama Sawant speak at Socialism 2014, 8 & 9 November, Central London - book your place at www.socialism2014.net

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. Email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk or see

www.socialistworld.net

Support FBU pension strikes

Save our fire service

Coordinated action can defeat the cuts

Firefighters in the FBU union are due to strike for four days over pension cuts. The strike marks a big escalation in the dispute, as up until now the walkouts - since September 2013 - have lasted between two and 24 hours. Salford FBU rep Paul Davies spoke to the Socialist about the action.

"We're very, very angry and disappointed about the way negotiations have gone. Not on the FBU's part - it's done a really good job at putting the case across and explaining why we need a revised offer. It's the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Nothing's changed from the start, there's no bend or give from them. If you're a firefighter now you're going to have to work until you're 60 instead of 55.

The threat of being dismissed on the grounds of capability if you don't reach the required fitness standards is still in place. A firefighter in his mid to late 50s is going to have to pass the same medical and have the same level of fitness as a 19-year-old. There's going to be a lot of firefighters who are not going to meet the required standards and will be out of a job.

It's also about the contributions going up - we'll pay more in and get less out.

Four days

This four day strike can't come too soon. The fire brigades could barely cope when we went out for four or eight hours. With this four day one, they're really going to struggle. I just hope that the various chief fire officers around the country can put pressure on the DCLG to get back round the table.

Pensions aren't the only issue. The cuts seem to be never ending. In the last couple of weeks four or five appliances have been cut in Greater Manchester.

My station, Salford, has just lost a fire engine. We're now down to one pump. The neighbouring station in Moss side has lost a fire engine as well.

The chief fire officer is saying that it's because we're taking action short of strike action, that they can't crew those appliances because we won't do overtime in the district. But it's nothing to do with us not doing the overtime. He's not recruited for five years. He's not got enough staff to crew those appliances because of the cuts.

The pay's not going up, the pension contributions are going up, and the jobs are going. There's no good news in the fire service really.

The obvious thing is to coordinate with the NHS staff: two of the emergency services on strike at the same time. Either that or a longer FBU strike. An eight day strike is what a lot of people have been talking about because then we're all hit the same, all the watches lose out."

- Firefighters will lose around £600 of pay due to the strike. The FBU is appealing for support from fellow trade unionists on the picket lines and financial support for its hardship fund (sort code 08-60-01, account number 20034726).

UPDATE: The FBU strike in Wales has been called off due to the prospect of a deal with the Welsh government. The strike will still go ahead in England.

St Mungo's Broadway workers discuss next action

Paul Kershaw and Arti Dillon, Unite LE1111 branch

St Mungo's Broadway strikers finished seven days of action on Thursday feeling more determined and more confident than ever.

New reps as well as long-standing union members were key to the action's success. The strikers were articulate about providing good services, the need to challenge management's proposals and they demanded real consultation.

During the strike the chief executive continued his eccentric picket line visits. During one visit he was challenged about the fact that HR advisors' pay has been increased while at the same time frontline workers' pay is to be cut. He confirmed his priorities when he explained: "I have to pay for quality".

However, one picket commented about the attacks and threats: "The things you fear when this happens to you; that fear has gone".

A Unite members' meeting will be held to plan future steps in the dispute. The meetings of members and reps, the emailing and developing social media presence (Twitter @smbunite and branch facebook group), are creating strong communications between the members.

The 650 St Mungo's Broadway Unite members are part of the wider Unite housing branch LE1111, which includes Peabody, Equinox, One Housing and HCA. It is a large multi-shop union branch that is not just aiming to help organise responsive campaigns but also to express the challenges that austerity for the 99% is imposing on all areas and argue that campaigns for sustained industrial action linked with a political campaign can make a difference.

The strike has been solid with a high level of involvement; hundreds have attended rallies, 19 pickets were organised (and more sprung up) and there were two local authority protests each day.

On Friday the Guardian carried an article by a striker explaining that the action was in defence of services to homeless people. It compared the new senior management's attitude to Basil Fawlty's.

Austerity policies are causing a rise in homelessness and insecurity so these services are vital and for many are both life changing and life saving.

Like many charities and not-for-profit organisations St Mungo's Broadway relies on local authority contracts so it is significant that the targeted local authority protests have begun to put pressure on management as a provider.

Most of these authorities are Labour; the fact that the strikers have to publicly lobby them shows the gap between the Labour Party and activists in the trade union movement. But it has also shown that some councils and councillors can be moved to put pressure on the St Mungo's Broadway bosses as a result of the mass involvement and pressure.

Hackney council is "re-evaluating" its relationship with the charity and Islington has written to the management specifically calling on it to honour the terms of the union recognition agreement and asking what plans are in place to cut senior management salaries!

Jeremy Corbyn MP has tabled an Early Day Motion in parliament calling on the management to resolve the dispute.

Unite has committed that it will be mobilising support through its political department, local councils and its MPs' network. The industrial campaigns do need a political link as we are directly responding to the growing marketisation of the sector.

The LE1111 branch has initiated a campaign for sector standards to challenge and change piecemeal, insecure jobs and services in the sector.

Please donate to the campaign as follows:

- By BACS. Account name: Unite Housing Workers Branch LE1111, Account No: 20040639, Sort Code: 08-60-01.
- By cheque made out to the Unite Housing Workers Branch LE1111, Unite LE1111, and sent to PO Box 66701, London E11 9FB.

Mark all donations 'St Mungos Broadway Campaign Funds'. Please also pass on this appeal to your own contacts.

See more at:

<http://www.housingworkers.org.uk/page/5/news.html>

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 27 October 2014 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Sheffield recycling workers to start indefinite action

Thirty Sheffield recycling workers at The Green Company continued their dispute for premium pay, welfare facilities and against bullying management with strike action on 25 and 26 October, and have given notice of an indefinite strike from Wednesday 29 November.

GMB union shop steward Jim Rodgers spoke at a Sheffield Socialist Party meeting.

"After our last strike (against jobs and pay cuts two years ago), we forced them to get rid of the bad managers. A new better senior management team (SMT) was brought in.

We got the living wage in April. We had more work so could open the sites an extra hour a day. The future was looking good.

Then about ten weeks ago, I rang to speak to one of the SMT only to be told one was on leave (really suspended), one had resigned, and the other on sick!

'Who am I speaking to then?'

'I'm Martine Laffan-Butler, the boss of the charity!' That was the first I'd heard of her.

Since then, we've found out that over the last four months it's alleged that she has skimmed £60,000 off the contract (to run Sheffield recycling sites, subcontracted from Veolia the private company that run the council's waste management services).

The former finance director who blew the whistle has been suspended and the other two SMT left.

So all this has been going on while we've been told that there's not enough money for premium rates for weekends and overtime or for welfare facilities on two of the five sites.

That's why we are on strike and I'd like to thank you all for your support on the picket lines, blocking lorries.

We want to be taken back in-house or for us workers to run it as a cooperative. If things aren't sorted then we are going all-out from Wednesday."

Ritzy workers threatened with redundancy

Laurence Maples

The Picturehouse cinema chain has threatened more than 20 redundancies at the Ritzy cinema. This comes just weeks after the Ritzy workers won a 26% pay rise through a long campaign of strike action.

It is a clear attempt to gut the union in revenge for the victory and the Ritzy workers have made it clear they intend to resist this attack. They have beaten Picturehouse once and with a clear programme of strike action can do it again.

They also point out that this does not arise out of financial necessity, as Picturehouse claim - it is a very profitable cinema chain and Ritzy is frequently the most profitable site.

The Ritzy workers and activists in Lambeth are already working together to develop a solidarity campaign and spread the movement against low pay, linking up with the work done by the Fast Food Rights campaign in the area.

Bullies

Picturehouse's bullying tactics are a reflection of how much the Ritzy workers have achieved. It also underlines the need for the drive to unionise other cinemas to continue, as part of a wider revolt on low pay.

The TUC has voted to support a £10 an hour minimum wage and should follow this up with coordinated strike action to win it, which could draw millions of workers into the unions and bring the bosses to their knees.

Fighting for better pay for workers

Ian Hodson, President, Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union

Tory chancellor George Osborne has evil plans for those on low incomes. Most benefit claimants are actually in work. Osborne's austerity measures are just a programme of wealth protection for the rich. Trusting George Osborne is fatal if you're on a low to middle income.

So why is his rhetoric not challenged? The answer is simple: we aren't being presented with a credible alternative, particularly from the Labour Party.

Just when Labour appears on the verge of some vote-worthy policies - it blows it by announcing a fiscal policy that just continues Tory austerity. Labour believes it can win the election by saying Labour arsenic is less poisonous than Tory cyanide. Good luck with that in May.

Austerity doesn't reach bankers, spivs and speculators. Bonuses skyrocket. The distribution of wealth and earnings gulf between those at the top and those at the bottom is a disgrace, and the time has come to take steps to address this.

£10 an hour

I'm proud to be national president of a trade union that not only fought and beat the use of zero-hour contracts, but is calling for a £10 an hour minimum wage. The taxpayer tops up the incomes of those whose profitable employers are too greedy and selfish to pay properly. That money could sustain the public services that people rely on.

If hugely profitable companies cannot take social responsibility, it should be forced on them. No ifs, no buts. Nobody should be priced out of sending their children to university, freeze through winter in an unheated home, or rely on a food bank or payday loan because of poor wages.

Push harder

Paying people a wage they can live on would cut the welfare bill, improve people's wellbeing and ease pressure on the NHS in one fell swoop.

You won't hear this from the establishment, as it would mean redistributing wealth, and working people enjoying confidence and high self-esteem. That in itself should encourage people to push

harder than ever for better pay and equalisation of income, as well as making different political choices.

Unison: Vote 'yes' in Wales college pay strike consultation

Ronnie Job, FE Unison steward (personal capacity)

A postal consultative ballot of Unison and other campus union members has begun in Welsh further education (FE) colleges, on whether we are prepared to take industrial action over Collegau Cymru (representing the colleges in Wales) paying no cost of living increase this year.

Pay freezes and below inflation awards mean that the incomes of many FE workers have fallen by around 18% in real terms in recent years. Unison is recommending that all members vote in support of industrial action to win a pay award.

Wage restraint hasn't prevented hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs from being lost across the sector. With the Welsh Government and Collegau Cymru predicting years more of austerity being translated into further cuts, regardless of who wins the general election next year, we need to take a stand.

Linked

Any campaign over pay has to be linked to stopping the cuts in further education. And instead of deciding which part of the public sector in Wales should be hit the hardest by Con-Dem cuts, we demand the Welsh government stop wielding the Con-Dems' axe and start fighting back.

Unison members have also voted for strike action on pay in NHS Wales. There is a growing demand from Unison members in councils that the suspension of strike action over pay in local authorities is overturned and the pay campaign resumed. We stand a much better chance of winning if we all strike together.

Salford: NASUWT strike against unreasonable treatment

Teachers at Swinton High School in Salford, Greater Manchester, were on strike on 21-22 October. Members of the NASUWT teachers' union are deeply frustrated at policies imposed by the headteacher leading to massively increased workload and deeply intrusive monitoring.

The union has sought to find a negotiated solution but each time any apparent progress in talks seems to be circumvented and undermined by the headteacher. As a result, 34 NASUWT members, an overwhelming majority of teachers at Swinton High, voted unanimously to strike for two days' in October and a further three in November.

A teacher at the school told me:

These are 34 members who've been at the school on average at least eight years, some as long as 16.

They're the same teachers who got the school good Ofsted's with outstanding features, the same teachers who got record results in 2012, and the things that have been happening and the reasons the results have been dipping are not because these teachers have suddenly turned to inadequate overnight and need checking more.

They're all open to a solution, they just want to be listened to and treated as the experienced professionals that they are who care about our kids.

Once the strikes began, the headteacher offered further talks, due to take place on Wednesday 22 October. If progress isn't made, further strike action will take place on 4-6 November.

- Messages of support have flooded in, send your message of support c/o rachelknight.nasuwat@outlook.com

Hugh Caffrey

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 23 October 2014 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in *The Socialist*.

Workplace news in brief

Secure hospitals strike

Prison Officers' Association members working in the NHS took four hours of strike action on Friday 24 October in their struggle for a decent pay rise.

The strike was very well supported with a big picket line outside Rampton Hospital in Nottinghamshire. These nurses and support staff work with mentally ill prisoners in a highly secure psychiatric hospital. As well as the 1% pay freeze, they also face under-staffing and attacks on trade union facility time, mainly for the health and safety rep.

At the picket line Steve Gillan, POA general secretary, gave reports from the walkouts at Broadmoor and Ashworth hospitals and read out messages of support from various union branches.

Becci Heagney

London buses

Following September's inspiring demonstration, Unite members in London bus garages are holding consultative ballots on 31 October. If successful, these will soon be followed by a full postal ballot for industrial action. This emerged after the failure of the operating companies to respond to the union's demand, repeated in September, for talks on sector-wide negotiation.

As many bus drivers say, we all do the same job - so why are we on different pay rates?

Serwotka re-elected

Mark Serwotka has been re-elected unopposed as the general secretary of the socialist-led PCS civil servants' union. See issue 829 of the Socialist for an interview with Mark.

Reclaim Unison

Following the calling-off of the 14 October strike, local government activists in Unison have called a national meeting to discuss the direction of the pay dispute and its implication for the union.

Saturday 8 November, 2-4pm. Room B04, Birkbeck University, 43 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PD

RMT lobby

Join RMT Northern and Transpennine Express members in protesting over attacks on rail services, safety and jobs.

On Friday 4 November a demonstration will start outside parliament in Old Palace Yard from 12.30pm, followed by a rally in committee room eleven at 2pm, and a lobby of MPs from 3.30pm.

Leicester holds historic People's Budget talks

Caroline Vincent, Leicester TUSC

"Leaving the Labour Party was a big thing. All my family have always voted Labour. They're no longer the party who stick up for ordinary people. We all need to stick together - the People's Budget marks an opportunity to create something new."

On 25 October around 60 people gathered to participate in Leicester's first ever People's Budget conference.

The event was organised by Leicester Independent Councillors Against Cuts - Barbara Potter (quoted above) and Wayne Naylor, alongside TUSC. The two councillors left Labour this year to join TUSC's alliance of trade union and anti-cuts groups.

A series of public workshops formed the basis of an alternative budget based on residents' needs. In contrast, Leicester's cynical Labour council is 'consulting' on escalating austerity.

Wayne voiced frustration over Labour's pressure to accept vicious cuts. In his ward 800 rely on food banks. He is now adamant that "the city needs councillors who will fight and make a difference. People's needs must go before anything else."

We encourage everyone who contributed with such enthusiasm to the People's Budget to stand for election with TUSC next year.

Southampton's re-elected TUSC councillor Keith Morrell said "it's difficult to stand against the establishment, and can be isolating." Along with his local community, it was TUSC's support that gave Keith much needed confidence.

Support

Also attending was Dave Nellist, former Labour MP and supporter of Militant, forerunner of the Socialist. He subsequently served 14 years as a Socialist Party councillor in Coventry. Dave said "it doesn't matter if the cuts are carried out enthusiastically by the Tories, or with a heavy heart by Labour. When services go, people suffer. TUSC refuses to accept that there is no choice."

For Leicester this is just the beginning. Now work begins on writing the People's Budget - and building the forces that can fight for it!

The Leicester People's Budget work in progress will be publicly discussed on 1 December at the Brite Centre, Braunstone Avenue. For more information, email Caroline Vincent on carol.v@live.co.uk.

Hackney and Islington TUSC met with Diane Abbott MP on 20 October. A letter signed by over 40 local trade unionists had called on her to explain her position on a number of anti-cuts and pro-union issues. Abbott would not put her name to the document - but did at least agree to the meeting, unlike fellow local Labour MP Meg Hillier. TUSC groups up and down the country are challenging Labour candidates to attend similar meetings to explain themselves to the local trade union movement.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an electoral alliance that stands candidates against all cuts and privatisation. It involves the RMT transport workers' union, leading members of other trade unions including the PCS, NUT and POA, the Socialist Party and other socialist and anti-cuts groups.

- www.tusc.org.uk

Southwark Labour demolishes homes

Bill Mullins, Southwark TUSC

No-one would oppose building more council houses. But is Southwark council really going to deliver on its latest promise of "11,000 new council homes over the next 30 years"? Where will they be, will they really be publicly owned, and what will happen to existing tenants?

The Southwark Group of Tenants' Organisations (SGTO) recently organised a meeting on the plans. Over 100 people from across the south London borough heard angry speeches against Labour proposals to break up long established communities.

Southwark is supposed to have the third biggest stock of council homes in the country - and still there are 18,000 on the waiting list. Council plans amount to 367 new builds a year, which hardly scratches the surface of the problem.

The meeting was sceptical of Labour's promise, given its record. Southwark recently demolished an entire estate, Heygate, and is due to knock down a second, Aylesbury. Both were near Elephant and Castle - a prime development area for private landlords.

Property fair

In fact, Southwark advertised its 11,000 new homes at an international property fair as a mixture of public and private. Community campaigners and housing workers organised in Unite campaigned against the fair in London. In some cases they successfully challenged councils not to attend, and closed it down a few weeks ago.

The Heygate redevelopment includes only 79 'social' homes - none of which are actually council homes, which means higher rents and charges. Council tenants were displaced across the borough. Leaseholders were offered sums they had no hope of buying replacements with - and told they could move to Kent for new homes.

On the Aylesbury, 500 social homes are being built - but that means an overall loss of 900 social homes compared to now. Estate residents rejected plans by 73% on a turnout of 75% - but the council is still going ahead!

Steve, an estate resident in the next door borough of Lambeth, related what happened when his Labour council demolished his estate and handed it over to private developers.

"We were promised 300 social housing units by the new developers. But because we were no longer under council democratic control, the problems got worse. The whole scheme was built under PFI. The new company gave electric cookers to the tenants in the new built homes, but would not allow any gas cookers - which meant more expenses, and acted against those who required big pots to cook in. When the cookers broke down the company said residents should be grateful and it was not the company's problem."

Foreclosures

For the previous council leaseholders, the problems were even worse. Some still has £50,000 or more to pay on their mortgages, but the banks refused to accept the new build homes as collateral - and foreclosed on them. The council offered such low compensation that they were forced to leave the area.

Trade unionists and TUSC supporters at the meeting challenged Richard Livingstone, the council's cabinet member for housing, on Labour's policies. He had no answers other than flat contradictions and blatant denials of the facts.

TUSC proposed tenants make an electoral challenge against Labour as well as campaigning in the community. They would be welcome to stand under the TUSC umbrella with other community and housing campaigns fighting the cuts consensus.

SGTO plans to lobby the council on 18 November with a six point programme in response to the council's plans. The group is also supporting a demonstration in Southwark on 31 January.

Donate for socialism!

Ken Douglas, Socialist Party national treasurer

The Socialist Party is asking all members and supporters: can you make a donation to the Socialism 2014 finance appeal at the 8 November Rally for Socialism?

We aim to raise over £20,000 - funds vital for us to maintain our campaigning. This money ensures our programme - for a general strike against austerity and building an electoral alternative to Labour - continues to be raised prominently in the workers' movement.

A record number of workers in Britain are low paid - over five million earn less than £7.69 per hour. In London alone the number of low paid jobs has risen from 45,000 to 640,000 in less than two years.

This will come as no surprise to the tens of thousands of workers on the TUC march against low pay on 18 October. Both public and private sectors have seen pay frozen or cut for at least five years.

The Socialist Party was the most prominent political party on that demonstration - aided by our red flags, gazebos, banners, sound systems, leaflets and newspaper. Our demand for a £10 an hour minimum wage, which would begin to lift millions of workers out of poverty, received an enthusiastic response.

Millionaires

This millionaires' government is overseeing an unprecedented shift of wealth from the bottom of society to the top. A record number of billionaires now live in Britain - 104 of them, with a combined wealth of £301 billion.

The rich and their capitalist politicians have vast resources, including newspapers, television and other media. But we have a mightier force even than that - the resources and sacrifice of ordinary working class people.

Socialist ideas have the potential when taken up by workers to sweep the bosses and their capitalist politicians aside. This was shown by the victory of the \$15 an hour minimum wage campaign in Seattle following the election of socialist councillor Kshama Sawant. Also by the election victories of Ruth Coppinger and Paul Murphy in Dublin.

A proportion of the money raised will go towards the Committee for a Workers' International special appeal to assist in the pioneering work our members are engaged in around the world, including the victories above.

Can you give £5, £50 or even £500? Can you ask other members and supporters who won't be attending the rally to donate? Every donation, no matter how small, will make a difference - and all of it will go to building support for socialist ideas.

You can pay through our website at www.socialistparty.org.uk/donate, over the phone on 020 8988 8777, or send a cheque or postal order (payable to "Socialist Party") to PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD.

Film review: On the streets of Belfast in 1971

Bill Mullins

This film, on general release, shows what it was like for a newly sent over British soldier during a few days in Belfast in 1971. He finds himself in a nightmare situation, lost in the city's back alleys after his unit was forced to withdraw from their first venture on to Belfast's streets.

The British army was sent to Northern Ireland, not to defend beleaguered Catholics but to defend private property and the interests of British imperialism. '71 does not explain why things happened as they did in Northern Ireland at the time, but it is an extraordinary film.

Private Cook, the central character, is a Derbyshire lad who has no idea what he is going to do when his infantry unit is sent to Northern Ireland.

1971 was a time of great changes in the north, which is partly captured on the film. It includes the start of the split between the official IRA ('the stickies') and a new generation of the IRA who quickly became the Provisional IRA, especially after Bloody Sunday in Derry in January 1972.

In an early scene the company commander tells Cook and his fellow soldiers they were being sent to Belfast "because of the developing situation". The officer told them that Belfast was 'in the UK' and therefore not an overseas posting. As one soldier says "I thought we were going to Germany".

In Belfast the squaddies, with their equally raw lieutenant, are introduced to the streets on their second day to "back up the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)" who were conducting house-to-house searches in the Catholic areas.

The RUC's sectarian nature quickly becomes clear to Cook as they ruthlessly search houses and beat up men and women, all the time screaming "Fenian bastards".

The local population launch bricks at the soldiers, who begin to grasp the hatred towards them from the Catholic population they are sent to oppress and the sectarian nightmare they are involved in.

Undercover soldiers

Their barracks has a special unit of undercover soldiers dressed as civilians. Cook sees them give a homemade bomb to the local UDA (protestant militia) and encourage them to blow up a catholic social club. Instead the bomb goes off prematurely and kills everyone in a protestant bar.

The plot then swings between the younger IRA members searching for Cook, who was left behind by his unit, and the older official IRA man trying to call them off.

At one stage he is picked up, injured after the bomb went off, by a Catholic father and daughter from the Divis flats area. The young woman is dubious that this is "collaborating with the enemy" but her father says he had been in the British army for 20 years himself as a medic.

Saying to the soldier that the army is nothing more than "posh c....., telling thick c..... To kill poor c....." it is him who contacts the local official IRA leader.

In the end the SAS, with the collusion of the local Official IRA commander, trap the dissident group and shoot nearly all of them (including trying to kill Cook because he saw them handing the bomb to the UDA). The SAS officer tells the leader Quinn that he expects him to work with the army "from now on".

Don't expect to see a worked out explanation of "the troubles" but '71 is well worth seeing.

An Irish socialist's comments

The alienation, bitterness, fear and claustrophobia of 1971 in Ireland are captured convincingly in this film which is well worth seeing.

But the film portrays the ordinary squaddie as somehow neutral, in contrast to the partisan RUC and the manipulative, murderous special army unit, the Military Reaction Force.

In reality the British Army's regular regiments were to the fore in the fierce repression dealt out to the Catholic working class. The result was a rising tempo of violence as the year progressed.

Catholic workers and youth were rebelling against a regime that had held them down for 50 years.

Cul-de-sac

The tragedy is that they were taken down the cul-de-sac of individual terrorism which had no prospect of success and only divided the working class.

It didn't have to be this way. In the months covered by the film, Northern Ireland's working-class were taking part in the largest industrial movement since the 1926 general strike.

In a postal workers strike in January 1971 only eight of 2,000 postmen turned up for work. Between 30,000 and 40,000 workers in the North took part in two one day strikes in protest at the Industrial Relations Bill.

The strikes demonstrated the power of the working-class but the leadership was weak and lacked any semblance of class understanding. This remains the case today.

We must strive to build organisations of the working class with the resolute, far-sighted and socialist leadership to change history.

Ciaran Mulholland

Red Dylan Thomas

Welsh poet Dylan Thomas once said he was a socialist, but a different kind of socialist. Those who knew him were aware of his consistent, ardent favour of a socialist society.

From discussing the annihilation of the ruling classes with his communist friend Bert Trick, through his work for the Ministry of Information in World War Two advocating and explaining the future welfare state, to his lectures, free of charge to the USA's Communist Party in his last days, Dylan always did what he thought was his bit to further the cause.

The Marxist nature of his work is not always as evident, but it is there. From his obvious 1930s work about the depression, to more subtle influences in his later work and the classic *The Doctor and the Devils* (a fabulous demonstration of class society).

Introduced by Geoff Jones, *Red Dylan* features superb essays by the late Vic Gollightly and the late Victor Paananen about his work and commitment to socialism. Plus an article with a modern take on discovering Dylan Thomas' socialist history by Scott Jones.

Anniversary

It is an essential antidote to the material appearing in the capitalist press commemorating the 100th anniversary of the writer's birth. He was praised by princes and capitalist politicians alike but don't let the ruling class rob him of his radicalism. Read Red Dylan and discover Dylan the red.

Rob Owen, Llanelli/ West Wales Socialist Party

Red Dylan, Dylan Thomas and socialism. £2 plus 10% postage.

Available from Left Books, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD

020 8988 8789

bookshop@socialistparty.org.uk

www.leftbooks.co.uk

Obituary: Bill Webster 1941-2014

William (Bill) Webster died in August after a long illness, aged 73.

Bill was a prominent member of the Socialist Party in Ireland from the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s.

Originally from Liverpool, Bill joined the Militant Tendency, the Socialist Party's forerunner in 1971 in south London.

Bill's father was a courier for the Communist International. Like his father, Bill went to sea, serving in both the merchant navy and the Royal Navy.

When he came into contact with Militant, he was full-time organiser for the General Municipal Workers Union now the GMB.

Bill left his union position to work for Militant in London, and after meeting his comrade Eileen Cullen, moved to Derry, where they married in 1975.

It was a very difficult period for socialist activists. 1975 and early 1976 saw an upsurge in sectarian killings.

The working class responded with Trades Council organised strikes and demonstrations in Derry, Newry and Lurgan.

Bill was a Derry Trades Council stalwart for decades and a regular delegate to Irish Congress of Trade Unions and ICTU Northern Ireland Committee conferences.

Class unity

Bill never wavered in his efforts to build working class unity. He stood up when others on the left and in the union movement kept their heads down or bent towards one sectarian camp or the other.

He fought tirelessly for a political voice for the working class through efforts to build Derry Labour Party, and through chairing the Labour and Trade Union Group.

Bill offered unstinting support to workers in strikes and with other comrades courageously intervened in factories and other workplaces in opposition to the 1977 Loyalist stoppage.

His comrades remember his humanity, energy and warmth. He inspired many young people who came into contact with socialist ideas during his years of activity. He was an immensely talented and unrelenting class fighter.

Bill is survived by his wife, Eileen, his daughters, his son and his sisters.

Ciaran Mulholland, Socialist Party Northern Ireland

Obituary: Ronnie Sookhdeo 1946-2014

For almost 40 years, Ronnie Sookhdeo was a comrade in Militant and then the Socialist Party. Unfortunately, ill health in recent years prevented him from being active. However, he always gave generously to the Socialist Party and kept abreast of developments through our paper.

He emigrated from what became Guyana with his family as a young boy and lived in Islington. Later, he married Viv and they moved to the same street as us. Our families became good friends, starting with our children playing together. We soon realised we had common political ideas. His father had been a trade union organiser involved with Cheddi Jagan and the People's Progressive Party (PPP).

Anti-racist

After a few discussions he quickly joined Militant. He was particularly eager to participate in our anti-racist and anti-fascist work. He played a leading role in the formation of the PNP Youth in Britain alongside others and later of Panther UK. This group organised the biggest indoor meeting of black and Asian youth in Britain, addressed by Bobby Seale, the well-known US Black Panther leader.

He was also a talented scientist, having been a chemistry lecturer at Kingsway College for many years, where he was also an active trade unionist. He read widely and avidly on politics, science and history, particularly black and Asian history; he also delved into the history of Ancient Greece and the Far East and was always keen to discuss what he had read. He also taught himself Russian.

He had a very sunny disposition and his infectious good humour touched many people. However, this did not prevent him from leaving the Labour Party in disgust when socialists were expelled. He could not tolerate the right-wing deserters of socialist principles.

He will be sadly missed, and our heartfelt sympathy goes to Viv, his wife, his five children, many grandchildren and all his family.

Linda and Peter Taaffe

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/19597>