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Grenfell: still waiting for justice

- Take the empty homes
- Independent working class inquiry
- Safe, decent housing for all
- Tories out!

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party

The horror of [the fire at Grenfell Tower one year ago](#), on 14 June 2017, will be etched on the consciousness of working class people for a very long time.

None more so than the survivors, and the families and friends of those who lost their lives. But this terrible event is seared into the hearts and minds of working class people across the country, especially in London, where the housing crisis is immense.

From the moment the disaster took place, the anger of affected local people [was expressed in class terms](#). This was about rich and poor. This was the sacrifice of working class lives in the name of profit, especially black, Asian and migrant workers' lives.

[As the Socialist said at the time](#): "It cannot be clearer that austerity kills. But this is more than the last seven years of Tory austerity. It is decades of cuts, privatisation, deregulation, relaxation of planning, lack of democratic accountability.

"It is moneygrubbing, cost-cutting, scrimping shortcuts in the pursuit of 'savings' and profit. From Margaret Thatcher to Tony Blair to David Cameron, this is rampant neoliberalism."

The accounts given to the Grenfell inquiry are heartrending. All the capitalist politicians and media weep.

But it is an outrage that after a year we have to demonstrate outside Downing Street. A whole year, and there is no justice.

Still no one responsible is in prison. Still there is no decent housing for the survivors. Still tower blocks around the country are covered in dangerous cladding, with no sprinklers and broken fire doors.

Still the representatives of the super-rich who created this nightmare are untouched. And still the capitalist establishment acts as judge in its own case, in [Martin Moore-Bick's so-called inquiry](#).

It is an outrage that demands action. Get these people housed. Take over the empty properties. Call an independent, working class inquiry to shine a light on the profit-seekers and their political friends.

And fight like never before to get these Tories out.

Time won't heal capitalism's crimes. Working class action can win safe homes for all.

Rehouse survivors immediately - take over empty properties

Despite Theresa May's promises, [Grenfell survivors still languish in hotels](#). Only around one in four have a new permanent home.

As of summer last year, the borough's Sutton Estate had 159 empty council homes. A council data leak identified 1,652 empty private properties - many simply commodities to be traded on international markets.

At the time, Jeremy Corbyn rightly raised requisitioning empty properties. We said yes - and that compensation should only be paid when there is a proven need: not a penny of public money should go to the bloated mega-rich and their investment companies.

But a year on nothing has happened. Why should survivors and the local community wait any longer?

If the politicians won't act, the community can. The Socialist Party advocates going back to the traditions of the 1940s when working class communities organised mass occupations of luxury housing (see box below).

So many knock-on effects still blight the local community.

Residents of the Lancaster West estate in the shadow of the tower have to pay rent and service charges - despite a fifth of them living in hotels due to maintenance problems months after the event. They still didn't have regular central heating, gas or even water supply. Access to the estate was very difficult - and, incredibly, urgent fire work had not been carried out.

Mental health services are overwhelmed, meaning many who need help for other reasons are put back on waiting lists or have support curtailed.

Disgracefully, it appears that some residents face deportation. Unwittingly, these residents have found that they haven't complied with the bureaucratic small print to extend their leave to remain.

Launch an independent, working class inquiry

Already [it is clear from the inquiry that there was a catalogue of failures](#) - from inadequate government building regulations to failed fire doors and much more.

The Socialist Party completely rejects attempts to blame firefighters who heroically faced a situation in which the failures of management, council, government and profit-driven policies complicated normal assumptions.

But the inquiry cannot be a genuine, independent inquiry that points the finger at the capitalist establishment responsible for this when its chair and key advisers are drawn from the very same circles.

[As we commented at the time](#): "When it was announced that judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick was to take charge of the inquiry, it became immediately apparent that this was the ruling class choosing someone to do a job for itself."

Their interests are to protect the politicians who promote austerity, deregulation and privatisation, and the private companies who profit from these measures.

Lawyer Imran Khan suggests the inquiry should investigate whether institutional racism was a factor. Undoubtedly the horrific events are evidence of racism in the pursuit of profit at the cost of working class lives - but this inquiry is not likely to draw those conclusions.

It is for this reason the Socialist Party has argued there should be an independent community and trade union-led inquiry.

Trade unions are working class organisations independent of all the vested interests. If they worked in liaison with local tenants' organisations, they have the authority and resources to set up their own inquiry, with terms of reference set by those affected rather than the Tory government.

May elections warning: socialist policies and action needed

In Kensington and Chelsea there was a genuine belief that, for the first time ever, the Tories could lose control of the council, particularly after Labour's narrow parliamentary victory in Kensington in the 2017 general election.

But we warned that in order to make gains Labour needed to show it would be a radically different kind of council, one that listens and acts in defence of its working class residents.

The vast majority of Labour councillors in London do not support Jeremy Corbyn's policies. In fact, Labour councils undermine support for Labour every day with their cuts and privatisation.

The Socialist Party has consistently argued that they should refuse to pass on austerity, use reserves and borrowing powers to stave off cuts, and build a mass campaign for the funding necessary.

We said Corbyn supporters in Kensington and Chelsea Labour, together with local tenants, should organise a conference to debate policies a new council should be elected on. For example, rehousing Grenfell victims, using the £280 million in the council's reserves, and requisitioning empty properties.

If a Labour council had been elected on that basis, it could have taken radical steps to bring justice to Grenfell. [But sadly this was not done.](#) Labour gained one extra councillor. An opportunity has been missed.

But this does not mean the chance has gone for justice. Residents' organisation and decisive action by the trade unions, organised around the concrete demands expressed above, could bring not only justice to the survivors of Grenfell and the community, but win safety for all residents of tower blocks and mass housing.

Jeremy Corbyn and the trade union leaders need to call massive national action. The demonstration on Saturday 16 June, correctly led by the Fire Brigades Union with some of the local campaigns, should just be the start of the union leaders mobilising demonstrations and coordinated strikes to drive out the Tories and bring in a government that stands in the interests of working class people.

- Join the demonstration - 12pm, 16 June, Downing Street, Westminster

Workers' tradition of occupying empty homes

In September 1946, returning World War Two veterans arrived home to find a massive housing shortage. Local councils weren't meeting their housing needs.

About 200 families, led by the Communist Party, occupied Duchess of Bedford House on Campden Hill, between South Kensington and Notting Hill, on Sunday 8 September 1946.

It was luxury accommodation and lying empty. So many turned up that they had to find another eight houses.

The occupation was a central part of a campaign that forced councils to find alternative housing arrangements. Similar occupations took place in the 1970s.

Neoliberal model has failed: socialist policies can solve housing crisis

Paul Kershaw, chair, Unite the Union housing workers' branch

Commentators compete to explain that Grenfell sums up what is wrong with Britain and that it must mark a change. But that change means rejecting policies put forward by politicians of all the major parties for decades.

Homelessness has more than doubled since 2010. Over a million families in England were stuck on waiting lists for social housing last year, and a quarter of those have been waiting for more than five years.

Increasing numbers are trapped in insecure, often poor quality, private rented accommodation. Low pay and insecure work, combined with rising debt and decades of house price inflation, mean the dream of buying a home is increasingly distant. Home ownership is at a 30-year low despite the fact that most government spending on housing now goes to supporting home ownership.

Research from Nationwide Building Society shows that a third of people renting privately are left with just £23 to spend weekly. The number of families contacting Citizens Advice about illegal evictions has increased by just over 40% since 2014. This is a growing housing emergency.

Attempting to deflect criticism of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), the council's lawyer James Maxwell-Scott told the Grenfell inquiry that the wealth of the borough was irrelevant as the fire could have happened in other borough with high-rise buildings.

Of course, the point is that penny-pinching on maintenance and refurbishment, and the failure to act effectively to support or rehouse victims, reveal the reality of neoliberalism at its most stark in an area littered with billionaires and empty 'safe deposit box' luxury homes.

But it is true that the failed neoliberal housing model - mass sell-offs; penny-pinching budget cuts; multiple, buck-passing, profit-seeking, outsourced contractors; total failure to listen to working class residents - is universal. Bad conditions and a failure to meet basic safety standards remain a scandal around the country.

Grenfell resident Eddie Daffarn was asked what linked the multiple failures that led to the fire in a Guardian interview. He answered: "Greed, lack of respect, lack of humanity. It is the opposite of everything it should be. This is housing as a commodity to be exploited. It is not only in RBKC, it is what housing has become."

It seems some social landlords are using the government's failure to issue clear guidance as an excuse for inaction. Although the government has now belatedly pledged money for safety work, it is not new money and will come out of existing budgets.

While trying to calm investor concerns that it could follow the path of Carillion, which collapsed earlier this year, Mitie, which provides a range of services to social landlords, reports investment in housing stock has been delayed due to expected post-Grenfell costs.

A campaign for a socialist solution to the capitalist housing crisis could get enormous support. Labour's most recent policy statement on social housing marks a move away from the neoliberal New Labour policies of the past, but still bears the marks of the Blairite right wing (see Socialism Today issue 219, 'Labour's halfway housing plan').

It commits the party to return house building to a level last seen in the 1970s before serious neoliberal attacks undermined council housing.

But it only commits to return to the level of spending last seen before 2010 - when building was far too low, and the problem of affordability was intensifying. And rather than building them all as council homes, under the control of a democratically elected local authority, the total is now to include social and private housing.

We need tough rent control and security of tenure across the private sector now, as an emergency measure. Democratic accountability of all landlords - private, social and council - to tenants and the wider workers' movement. And a massive programme of investment in improving - not gentrifying - existing social and council housing, as well as building new council homes.

Civil service pay strike ballot: vote yes! Smash the cap!

The PCS union, which organises workers across the civil service, [launches a statutory ballot for strike action on 18 June](#). After years of real-terms pay cuts, the union is demanding a fully funded above-inflation increase.

Under the Tories' anti-union laws, the ballot - which can only be by post - requires at least a 50% turnout. These undemocratic obstacles are a big challenge. But the UCU and CWU unions have beaten them for national action, as has PCS in specific disputes.

Chris Baugh is a Socialist Party member and longstanding PCS activist who has been the union's assistant general secretary since 2004. The Socialist spoke to him in a personal capacity about the ballot.

Why is PCS balloting for strikes?

This ballot is a vital step to force the government to negotiate with PCS. A decisive 'yes' vote will give us the mandate we need to end the pay cap and secure fully funded pay increases. It will restore our right, as a union, to bargain on behalf of all our members affected by yet another year of Tory pay restraint.

Despite making [pay settlements elsewhere in the public sector above the 1% cap](#), and despite the pay increases won by PCS for our members working for the Scottish government, we find ourselves yet again treated as the poor relations of the public sector.

PCS will continue to work for the widest coordinated action across unions wherever we can. But we can't wait for this to happen. The justice of our pay claim, and the government's vindictive treatment of its own employees, make this ballot one of the most important in the union's 20-year history.

By taking the case into every workplace and every corner of the union, we can win not just the over-50% turnout legally required, but the decisive mandate for action that is needed to force the government to negotiate with us.

Do you think PCS can win the ballot?

Yes. A decade of pay freezes and caps have cut the real value of members' pay. This has caused untold hardship and misery across the public sector, with workers struggling to make ends meet.

Our members are not prepared to put up with this treatment any longer. I am confident this will be expressed in the pay ballot, and support for industrial action if that is what it takes.

The government's hard-line stance - and DWP management [withholding pay rises already agreed under the 'Employee Deal'](#) - will only anger members further. It's our task to translate that huge sense of grievance into a massive yes vote, and confound a government acting with contempt for its own workers.

The consultative ballot we ran in November last year recorded the biggest ever PCS vote for action - in turnout, only a fraction below the 50% threshold. This has given us a solid platform for winning a statutory ballot.

We are applying the lessons of the recent disputes involving our sister unions in Royal Mail and the universities, by working with the union's extensive and committed network of reps to mobilise our membership.

Will talks succeed - or will the union need to strike?

I'm part of the national pay negotiating team. We have patiently and tenaciously argued our case to government and senior Cabinet Office officials.

The 'Treasury Remit' - which sets the parameters for bargaining across the 200-plus areas covered - has yet to be published. But unless the employer indicates a change of heart, the government has effectively closed down serious negotiations around our reasonable pay increase claim - 5% or £1,200 flat rate, whichever is greater, with £10-an-hour minimum protection for our lowest-paid members.

They have yet to give a commitment to negotiate on the content of the Treasury Remit, and have offered only a vague promise of talks later in 2018. It's crystal clear that while we continue to press for serious talks, the priority is to deliver the ballot result - and prepare the ground for the type of industrial action that is going to be needed.

What type of action are you planning?

This is for the union's democratic leadership, the national executive committee, to decide - after close consultation and planning with union groups and activists.

It will be important to demonstrate support across PCS with strikes across the civil service as a whole - as part of a programme of sustained, group-based and targeted action.

Groups organised in all the major government departments, agencies and public bodies have a critical role to play. First in campaigning for a yes vote. Also in challenging offers short of our pay claim. And in identifying the types of industrial action that can best apply pressure - action that has members' support, and has a serious disruptive effect on the employer.

Those members involved in targeted action will need solidarity and support from the whole union, including building up our fighting fund to help give a level of financial support to those taking the action. We shouldn't underestimate the potential impact of this kind of action, and this will be very important in building confidence that we can win.

This can be supported by a range of protests and actions short of strike, as well as a systematic campaign of political lobbying at Westminster, Edinburgh and Cardiff, and in MPs' constituencies.

Civil service workers speak out

The pay campaign is important for me as every month I find myself with too many bills at the end of my pay. As a rep I also hear from my members who struggle with bills - some even spending over 90% of their pay on bills, and that's without children to care for.

I don't know how AO or even EO bands in HMRC, especially with children, manage to make ends meet. This is a result of our pay being held down and capped at 1% for over seven years while inflation, the cost of living, continues to soar. I don't want to go on strike - I need to go on strike.

Jaime Davies, PCS rep, HMRC Wales (personal capacity)

The DVLA branch Facebook group is fizzing with angry comments about the way we've been treated. We've been ignored and taken for granted for too long. All our reps are determined to get a big yes vote in this ballot, and if we are called on to strike, we will deliver.

Dave Warren, PCS rep, DVLA (personal capacity)

This disgraceful decision not to pay what we are due in July is a slap in the face to those working in the DWP, who have long awaited any increase to our low wages. It will be especially painful for those who had budgeted for the promised increases for childcare costs over the summer.

But an understanding of the need to get involved and vote in the ballot is not lost on our members - whose anger at this, and job insecurity, alongside years of pay restraint, will mean we have a real chance at smashing the 50% threshold needed.

PCS rep, DWP fixed-term appointment

PCS members in conciliation service Acas, part of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), have just suspended action as a result of a successful strike.

We delivered a 65% turnout in that ballot and have gone on to win concessions. I am confident we can do the same in this national ballot, and deliver a resounding yes for breaking the cap. More than that, we will show this government we are prepared to knock down all the barriers they put up, including their 50% threshold.

Marion Lloyd, PCS BEIS group president (personal capacity)

Across the culture group, low pay is endemic. Years of austerity mean the majority of our members struggle to afford basic commodities or housing. Each museum negotiates pay at local level and privatisation means there are several private employers paying low pay too. The national campaign on pay is crucial to bring back some fairness on pay.

Years of budget cuts not only mean pay restraints on museum workers employed directly by the government agencies, and on those employed via contractors. It also means privatisation, job losses and cuts in terms and conditions. The pay ballot is a key step to unity across departments and agencies. We need more funding for pay, no question.

We call on all PCS members to take part in the ballot and support industrial action on pay. We need £10 an hour as a minimum for all workers and a decent pay rise for all.

Clara Paillard, PCS culture group president (personal capacity)

With inflation running at 3%, none of us can afford for our real pay to be pushed down any more. The anger of members in our group is directed both at our senior management, who have decided not to pay our contractual pay rise in July, but also at the Treasury for delaying the pay talks and limiting the funding for departments to just 1%.

Now is the year to make real progress on pay - the government has been forced to abandon the 1% pay cap policy. We need to build the largest mandate possible to fight for the extra funding from Treasury for a 5% pay increase for all our members.

Katrine Williams, PCS DWP group vice-president (personal capacity)

In HM Land Registry group, pay is a massive issue, particularly after the 2017 offer that was due in June 2017 but wasn't paid until March 2018. The majority of our members received less than 1%, as the pay cap meant that anomalies in our pay system had to be paid for out of the 1% pot. Importantly, our management publicly stated they wanted to pay our members more and could afford to do so - but weren't allowed under government rules.

It is therefore an absolute priority for our members to deliver a massive turn out and yes vote for action in the upcoming ballot. Only through the leverage that the threat and potential delivery of action will bring can we break the cap. Not only that, but most importantly, release sufficient funding to deliver a meaningful pay rise for our members that not only puts a stop to year-on-year cuts to our living standards, but also will start to address what we have lost since 2010.

Dave Lunn, PCS Land Registry group vice-president (personal capacity)

This government has never been weaker. This is not the time to wait. Not only do we need to strike on pay - we can win.

Nick Doyle, PCS, HMRC (personal capacity)

PCS members in DWP say: Pay up now!

Dave Semple PCS DWP group assistant secretary (pc)

PCS members in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were outraged on Thursday to learn that their employer had decided to delay payment of a previously-agreed pay rise for 2018-19, and would also delay any performance related payments.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union, which represents civil servants across the UK and in the devolved governments, is in dispute with the government over successive below-inflation pay caps, which has meant cuts to our pay.

PCS members in the DWP overwhelmingly voted for [the Employee Deal in 2016 which addressed the endemic lack of pay progression](#) that members had suffered for years for grades up to HEO.

Everyone was clear about the payments they are due in each of the four years from 2016 to 2019, which overall are designed to get the maximum number of staff up to HEO level onto the maximum of the pay scale - ie the rate for the job.

Year 3 of the deal was due to be implemented from 1st July 2018, but senior DWP management has now announced a delay. It has cited the excuse that it cannot pay an award agreed in 2016 because the Treasury has not published Civil Service Pay Guidance for 2018/2019. It is absolutely correct for the PCS DWP Group Executive Committee to reject this excuse as completely unjustified.

There is no reason why the agreed Employee Deal pay rises should be delayed pending the talks that will need to take place on performance payments, reviewing the impact of the cost of living rises, reviewing pay for those who have opted out, pay for those already on the maximum and not on DWP terms and conditions and pay for all SEOs and above.

PCS members are rightly angry about the delay to their expected Employee Deal pay rise in July but also the fact that the Treasury has held up negotiations on everything else and are expressing how livid they are in offices in every corner of the UK.

PCS must keep demanding that the Employee Deal pay rises are paid on time while negotiations take place on our pay claim for 5% or £1,200 underpinning and all staff to be paid at least £10 per hour.

Organise against delay

Reps should organise members' meetings to mobilise this anger and clearly demonstrate how livid our members are about this delay.

Glasgow Springburn office has already organised members' meetings and others are following suit. Members are angry that management always wants more from us but cannot keep up its side of the bargain and pay us on time.

PCS members are angry with the way that Treasury has caused unnecessary delays to the annual part of the pay negotiations. And we clearly recognise that we need to fight to force the Treasury to fully fund government departments to pay above inflation pay rises to all our members.

Members are so angry about the delay because every penny of our pay is accounted for and we understand the impact that inflation running at 3% is having on our living standards and making ends meet.

PCS must channel the fury felt by thousands of members in the DWP - let down by the employer - into the national pay campaign.

PCS must continue to explore every legal avenue if management persists in paying the contractual Employee Deal pay rises late. The DWP Group Executive must demand that management implements payments without delay and mobilise a collective response if it doesn't.

Alongside, this helps us to fire up our members to [deliver a huge yes vote for action in the national PCS pay ballot that is due to start on 18th June](#)

All members of PCS deserve the 5% pay rise, on top of the Employee Deal, which branches enthusiastically voted to fight for at our Annual Delegate Conference in May. We can achieve this if we organise and fight back.

We must encourage all non-members to join the union in DWP. We can enthuse all our reps and can recruit a whole new layer of activists to help us drive a massive yes vote and a mandate for action on pay.

Socialist Party members in PCS say smash the cap, vote yes in the ballot.

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How can we fight for trade unions that fight for women?

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialist Party national organiser

The PCS civil servants' union voted at its recent conference to "step up its work to remove barriers to the participation of women in the activities of the union at workplace, branch and group levels". The motion also proposed a year-long consultation on "rule changes that would ensure that at least 50% of the ordinary NEC [national executive committee] seats are filled by women candidates".

The Socialist Party welcomes this opportunity to debate, as well as all measures to increase the participation of women fighters at all levels of the PCS and all unions. We support all measures that place the trade unions at the centre of the struggle against inequality and women's oppression.

However we do not accept - and nor should the PCS - the idea that being a woman automatically qualifies someone to represent women.

Theresa May is the very obvious proof of that. Like Thatcher before her, [her priority is not defending women but the capitalist class and its priorities](#).

Frances O'Grady is the first woman leader of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) but under her leadership the TUC has not given a lead in the fight against austerity.

Women leaders

Last year, under her leadership, the TUC intervened in the Southern Rail dispute by [brokering talks and a deal between Southern Rail and the Aslef union which excluded the RMT](#). How is this representing RMT members, including the many women workers involved in the dispute?

UCU has a majority women membership (51%), a majority women executive body (60%), and a woman general secretary. But the recent conference was dominated by the [struggle being fought against a leadership which is not prepared to lead the struggle demanded by members](#).

In fact the claim that a woman can better defend women can be used as a weapon by the right wing to undermine the left. Jess Philips has levelled allegations of sexism and misogyny at Jeremy Corbyn on the grounds that both he as Labour leader and the deputy leader are men.

False claims of misogyny and sexism, [like false claims of antisemitism](#), are attempts to undermine Corbyn because of the fear of the capitalist elites that a Corbyn-led government elected on an anti-austerity programme could be pushed to take measures that challenge capitalism.

Nonetheless it is understandable that there is impatience in the search for ways to make the unions, especially the tops, more inclusive of women and representative of the working class as a whole. However, no administrative measure alone can resolve this.

For example, would ensuring that at least 50% of the ordinary NEC seats are filled by women candidates guarantee a union will be more able to fight low pay, job cuts, deskilling and privatisation?

No union has gone as far as public sector union Unison down this road. With 78% of its membership and 62% of its national executive women, it has implemented quotas to a greater level than any other union. Looking at the bald figures this can appear impressive but we have to ask what have been the gains for Unison's members?

It's estimated that by 2020 over one million jobs will have been cut in the public sector. A 2014 TUC report found that within local government, job cuts have had a disproportionate impact on women.

Four years into Tory austerity and 96,000 men in full-time posts had gone (21%), compared with nearly 141,000 (31%) who are women. The situation in the NHS is similarly bleak with women NHS workers in England earning nearly a quarter less than men.

However, we do not want to 'even out' the misery between women and men - our task is to build a united working class movement to transform society and end the exploitation of the working class as a whole.

Low pay itself is an obstacle. Low-paid domestic workers, mainly women, at the [Barts health trust in east London went on strike last summer for better pay](#). Many of them worked two or three jobs to get by, which makes participation in trade union activity harder.

However, the greater obstacle was the refusal by Unison to sanction strike action, only possible once [a number of workers had been forced to transfer to Unite](#). Once action was called women workers were often to the fore on the picket lines.

This and a number of other strikes - of [teaching assistants](#), of nursery workers, [of teachers](#) - show that women workers are ready to overcome obstacles to fight when a determined lead is given.

Lack of time impedes women's participation. The demand for a shorter working week with no loss of pay must be fought for.

In Britain in 2016, according to the Office for National Statistics, women did almost 60% more work in the home, on average, than men. Trade unions can take immediate steps to ameliorate some of the impact of these barriers.

Do unions provide crèches at important events? Is there a straightforward process for getting money for childcare so parents can attend meetings where there isn't a crèche?

Trade unions could make a further impact on women's ability to participate by arguing for a sharing out of household work so that both parents can be active, and by fighting for free public quality childcare, etc.

Are resources made available so low-paid workers, of which over three-fifths are women, are compensated for loss of income incurred by trade union activity? Especially above local level, are there measures that can minimise the problems related to the distances trade union activists need to travel and time away from home?

Fighting for the right to hold trade union meetings in the workplace with no loss of income would be a big step towards reducing some of these obstacles.

A number of unions have put on special training programmes for women activists, which can help build confidence to take on roles in the union. But the experience of organising collective struggle, especially national action, is essential. [The PCS's national pay ballot](#) will undoubtedly see new activists, including women, come forward.

Fighting the Tory and Blairite attacks on trade unions will benefit women - from reinstatement of facility time and collective bargaining where it has been lost. PCS members also face a hostile management, which is an added challenge to reps.

Trade union democracy must be defended. The PCS has a very proud record of lay democracy and workplace meetings.

Without doubt, the more members feel they have a say in the unions, the more likely they are to participate in its structures. Building and defending broad lefts, which bring together trade union activists to challenge right-wing trade union leaders, organise solidarity and fight for and defend militant programmes and action is important.

We want more fighting women leaders of the movement - in fact the present Socialist Party executive committee is majority women. [Amy Murphy, a Socialist Party member, was recently elected as the president of the shop workers' union Usdaw](#).

Amy won on a campaign based on giving Usdaw members, 55% women, a fighting and democratic leadership, and standing for policies such as a £10 an hour minimum wage, an end to zero-hour contracts, supporting members who wish to take industrial action and standing up to companies' attacks on jobs and terms and conditions.

Although this debate is specifically focused on getting more women into trade union leaderships, the first task to address is how to draw more fighting women workers into the unions. Since 1981 women's membership of the trade unions has gone from fewer than one in three to today where women make up 52% of trade union membership.

However, the number of women in the trade unions is almost the same as it was in 1981. 55% of workers today have never been in a union. Only one in five 25-35 year-olds are unionised. Therefore recruiting young women workers, women workers in the private sector and part-time jobs, and more workers in general, remain key tasks for the trade unions.

This will require first and foremost that the unions show they are capable of winning for their members. Showing they will fight on period poverty, childcare, the closure of women's refuges and the bread-and-butter issues, especially for those in low paid and part-time jobs, is key to attracting women workers.

Women make up around two-thirds of public sector workers so are at the sharp end of privatisation. 73% of those affected by the public sector pay freeze were women.

Nine out of ten workers in Britain who work in bars, restaurants and hotels report sexual abuse from employers, managers or the public. Zero-hour contracts and other attacks on workplace rights make women more vulnerable and less confident to challenge harassment and discrimination.

These attacks are the result of Tory government austerity and pro-big business measures. Right-wing Labour councils have played their part by, [instead of taking a no-cuts position and fighting the Tories](#), passing on austerity and privatisation.

But right-wing trade union leaders have not mobilised the enormous potential power of the trade union movement against austerity.

The trade unions can play a vital role in defending workers against the bosses' attempts to drive down pay and conditions. Women who are members are paid on average 30% more than those who are not.

Fifty years ago, [women members of the National Union of Vehicle Workers who produced car seat covers in Dagenham went on strike](#) to demand the end to their unequal pay by the Ford car manufacturer. Their strike inspired support from male trade unionists and their victory paved the way for equal pay legislation.

United working class struggle like this is the most effective way of advancing women's wages and conditions and improving public services. The PCS has a strong record of defending trade unions as fighting bodies of the working class.

This includes organising resistance to Tory attempts to bankrupt the union through removing check-off, and fighting privatisation, for example of the land registry.

Workplace issue

The trade unions can also show in action that they can play a vital role in the fight against sexism. In the early 1990s the Socialist Party spearheaded the Campaign Against Domestic Violence (CADV) which fought for domestic violence to be seen as a trade union and workplace issue, not only a personal one.

This meant trade unions adopting policy and fighting for workplace rights for victims of domestic violence - when time off was needed for example. This showed women workers they were valued by the trade unions, that the unions were not tolerant of domestic violence, and that they could win greater rights for workers.

This could not be based on women members alone but required a united struggle to overcome prejudices, and the maximum unity of the working class in action to win improvements for workers.

CADV won the support of hundreds of trade union branches as well as the backing of national unions. Many employers and councils also adopted these policies.

Today [women's services, including refuges for those fleeing domestic violence, are being shut](#) - including by women-led Labour councils.

Like all forms of sexism and oppression that exist under capitalism, this affects working class women. Trade unions must be central to the struggle to fight back.

Five reasons to walk out on 13 July

Number 1:

No to Trump and Tory racism

Theo Sharieff, Socialist Students national chair

Trump's election campaign in 2016 generated anger across the working class internationally for his use of racist and nationalist rhetoric, including calling for a [ban on Muslims entering the United States, and calls to construct his infamous Mexican border wall](#).

It's no surprise then that since his election in November 2016, the forces of the far-right in America have become emboldened - organising demonstrations and rallies across the country.

One such rally was organised by 'Unite the Right' on 12 August 2017, when [neo-Nazis, fascists and white supremacists descended on Charlottesville](#) in Virginia.

Thousands of counter-protesters turned out to make sure their communities were defended against any possible attacks on minorities perpetrated by the far right.

The ensuing confrontation between both sides culminated in the death of one counter-protester after a neo-Nazi drove his car into the crowd of anti-fascist protesters.

Trump's comments in the immediate aftermath of the murder, condemning the 'violence of both sides', provoked outrage, while being praised by at least one white nationalist website.

Sowing division

But a deliberate purpose lies behind each of Trump's inflammatory statements. As inequality continues to skyrocket globally, racism and nationalism are tools in the hands of the capitalist class to disarm a potentially united working class movement which can challenge their greed and power.

Trump's talk about building the border wall, and his fearmongering about immigrants generally, is designed to divide the working class along racist and nationalist lines to prevent a united fightback against the crisis-ridden system of capitalism.

Only by building a working class movement, with a political programme which unifies workers in the fight for things like housing, jobs and services, can we mobilise the majority of society to defeat racism and the far right in all its forms.

That's why we want to send Trump a message on 13 July: as young and working class people we will mobilise in our thousands to let it be known that we will tolerate neither his bigoted agenda, nor the racism and [the 'hostile environment' created by our own Tory government](#).

- See the rest of our 'Five reasons to walk out' in upcoming issues of the Socialist

City vultures make millions from Carillion chaos

Workers left unemployed and NHS projects on hold

Caroline Vincent, Leicester Socialist Party

The [collapse of the building giant Carillion](#) may have caused chaos, but it hasn't been bad for everyone involved. It transpires that some are set to benefit from the company's liquidation. Accountancy firms and lawyers will be making a killing, raking in some £70 million in fees. And who's footing the bill for the disaster? Taxpayers, that's who, to the tune of an eyewatering £150 million.

Despite this there are projects that have ground to a halt. Disgracefully, in the middle of the ongoing NHS crisis, construction of Royal Liverpool University and Birmingham's Midland Metropolitan hospitals are on hold.

Accountancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has already earned £17 million in fees for advising Carillion over the past decade. Given the outcome you could hardly say that this was money well spent! Yet having advised the company to the point of failure, PwC is now expected to earn a further £50 million for managing the insolvency. Another £20 million of the costs will be pocketed by lawyers.

Carillion's senior bosses have emerged unscathed, managing to hang onto their huge bonuses. It's a different story for the 2,332 workers who have been made redundant. And there are 3,000 staff still working for the remnants of the company whose jobs are hanging in the balance.

All of this highlights the problems that arise through privatisation and outsourcing, and the need to [fight for nationalisation and democratic socialist planning of the economy](#).

The Carillion fiasco has been described as "disaster capitalism". It's certainly not been a disaster for the companies who've been able to turn the misery and insecurity of workers into a quick buck. For ordinary people who struggle to make ends meet on a daily basis, the profit-driven system can't be described as anything other than disastrous.

Retail crunch: more giants on their knees - nationalise them now

Ryan Aldred, Plymouth Socialist Party and Usdaw rep (personal capacity)

House of Fraser plans to close 31 of its 59 stores nationally, leading to the loss of 6,000 jobs. Likewise, it has also been announced that discount retailer Poundworld has appointed administrators, putting a further 5,100 jobs at risk.

House of Fraser [joins a growing list of retailers](#) such as Toys R Us, BHS and Maplins which are either scaling back or in many cases disappearing completely from the high street.

As small retailers cannot easily afford the rent and business rates of large shops in prime locations, this is resulting in more and more town and city centres resembling ghost towns. House of Fraser chief executive Alex Williamson has cited the rise of online shopping as one of the challenges which has led to the decision to close 31 House of Fraser stores.

However, years of pay freezes, below inflation wage rises and increased casualisation are also having an impact as eye-watering austerity is negatively affecting consumer spending power.

After the collapse of BHS, retail union Usdaw passed a resolution at its 2017 conference calling on the government to bring companies in a similar situation into public ownership. The union needs to make good on this call and lobby the government to take steps to bring House of Fraser into public ownership and rescue 6,000 jobs from being lost.

This needs to be linked up with a more generalised campaign by all unions to build a coordinated fightback on pay to end the squeeze which is seeing the demise of the high street.

While coordinated action on pay would go some way to reverse lower standards of living and boost consumer spending, it is only democratic public ownership and planning which will ultimately protect workers from the damaging effects of the market economy and its current climate of collapsing retail giants.

Pay rises of 283% needed for most to afford London homes

Mass council house building programme needed now

Emily, East London Socialist Party

As a worker in London who earns just under half the average London wage, I would need a payrise to £134,000 a year in order to afford a mortgage in the city. In other words, 283% more than the average London salary of £35,610, or over 400% more than what I and many others earn.

In 26 of 33 boroughs, more than £100,000 is needed to buy a home with an 80% mortgage according to a National Housing Federation report. Even in the seven 'cheaper' boroughs like Newham and Redbridge, a wage of between £87,000 and £98,000 is needed to buy a home. This is far beyond what most working class and young people earn, showing that the prospect of owning a home in London - where the average price of a home is £585,000 - is unattainable.

But everywhere, not just in London, housing and home ownership for working class and young people is getting harder and harder to achieve. Due to low wages, insecure contracts, decreasing council housing and astronomical property prices, most are forced to rent privately - normally at rip-off rents - or stay living at home.

Even 'affordable' housing schemes such as shared ownership, which enables you to purchase a percentage of a property instead of buying outright, incur huge solicitors and agent fees, as well as monthly rent, mortgage and service charge payments, so the cost of even owning a share of a property is beyond what most can afford.

The report also points out the shortage of housing in London. Between 2012 and 2016 there were of 177,590 fewer homes than needed. The shortage of affordable housing has become desperate with the homelessness crisis and the increased use of food banks by working class families.

We need higher wages in the short term so we can afford rents and mortgages, but businesses are not going to give us all pay rises of 283% or more. We need a massive council house building programme so that we have affordable, secure homes for all without having to earn six-figure sums.

Them & us

Eight job Osborne...

Former Tory chancellor George Osborne, one of the architects of austerity, has taken on his eighth job since he left the cabinet after he and David Cameron were defeated in the EU referendum two years ago.

He's already the editor of the London Evening Standard paper, adviser to city spivs Blackrock, chair of the Northern Powerhouse partnership, and speaker and academic at the McCain Institute in the US, the Stanford business school and Manchester Uni. He will now also chair a partners council overseeing £10.5bn company Exor.

All of which takes the future baronet's personal wealth to over £4 million. All right for some.

...no jobs for us

Gaining employment at city firms and academic institutions will probably come harder for the latest load of workers being made redundant at the moment.

As well as 11,000 retail job losses at House of Fraser and Poundworld (see '[Retail crunch: more giants on their knees - nationalise them now](#)') Rolls-Royce - the luxury car of choice for Osborne and his mates - are laying off 4,000 workers (see '[4,000 Rolls-Royce jobs at risk: unions must start campaigning now](#)').

The company, hailed as a success story by Osborne in 2014, is attempting to increase profits by cutting middle-management posts.

Brown v Corbyn

Former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown has labelled Jeremy Corbyn and the surge of support for him a "phase". He said "nobody goes on forever". Well, he should know. But he misses entirely the reason why there is support for Corbyn.

Years of cuts, privatisation and austerity have left millions of working class and young people angry, low paid and insecure. To the point that the Inequality Briefing has found that nine of the ten poorest regions in northern Europe are in the UK.

And the research shows the blame for this is with successive governments since the 1980s, including Labour's 13-year stint in power when Brown was either chancellor or prime minister.

This has left millions hungry for socialist and anti-austerity ideas shown in Corbyn's Labour leadership victories and general election performance in 2017.

Whereas Gordon Brown never had to fight an opponent to be elected Labour leader, was never elected to be prime minister at all - and was [soundly defeated in his only general election in 2010](#).

Back to the dustbin of history Gordon.

Universal hunger

Analysis by the government has found that up to 2.6 million children could have their [free school meal taken away](#) by 2022 because of the Tories' changes to the eligibility criteria under Universal Credit.

Universal Credit has already been a disaster, with claimants regularly having to wait six weeks or longer to receive their money. This causes untold hardship to vulnerable people who are unlikely to have savings to fall back on.

The Socialist Party fights to replace it with liveable benefits, proper support to find work without compulsion, decent jobs with an immediate £10 an hour minimum wage, and an end to the demonisation of benefit claimants.

Tory's Russia hypocrisy

On the same day that Theresa May was telling the country that Russia was responsible for [the poisoning of former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter](#), the Tory party accepted a £50,000 donation from the wife of one of Russian leader Vladimir Putin's aides.

But this is just fraction of the even bigger sum of £820,000 that is estimated to have flowed into Conservative coffers from Russian oligarchs. When challenged, Tory chancellor Philip Hammond refused to return the money because he did not want to tar the oligarchs "with Putin's brush".

However Putin is 'flesh of the flesh' to these gangster capitalists. Instead of ineffective, tokenistic Tory sanctions on Russia because of its alleged involvement in the poisoning, we call for effective workers' sanctions against this obscene plutocracy in London and elsewhere. To begin with, all empty property - estimated by the think tank IPPR to be 216,000 homes in England empty for six months - should be immediately taken over to house the Grenfell survivors (see '[Grenfell: still waiting for justice](#)') and other homeless people.

Nationalise rail now!

A new poll by the Independent has found that two thirds of people support renationalisation in the wake of [privatised chaos added to by disastrous timetable changes on Govia Thameslink Rail and Northern Rail](#). The government has had to [take back the East Coast Main Line](#) franchise after its franchisees abandoned it. Why not take back others too?

But while Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn is one of the two thirds who back bringing the railways into public ownership, in Wales, Blairite Labour has just moved to expand rail privatisation. Corbyn needs to listen to the RMT rail union and the passengers, and promote the massively popular policy of full, immediate rail renationalisation.

Health unions accept divisive NHS pay deal - but fightback could have won much more

Socialist Party health workers in Unison

All but one health union - 13 of the 14 - announced on 8 June they had voted to accept the government's NHS pay offer. Only general union GMB voted to reject it.

After [the shock general election result](#) in which the NHS crisis was a key issue, it was a deal the Tories were desperate to settle. The offer was proudly endorsed by Jeremy Hunt - along with many trade union leaders.

Some of the latter called it the end of low pay in the NHS, proclaiming there would be 29% pay rises for some, and a pay cap-busting 6.5% for all. As ever, and as the Socialist Party warned, the devil's in the detail (see '[NHS pay: reject the Tories' divide and rule offer](#)').

In reality, the pay award will be stretched out over three years, with staff receiving a 3% increase this year followed by 1.7% in the two years after. This is still below the predicted rate of inflation over the next three years, so still a real-terms cut.

On top of the cost of living award, it's true there are bigger pay awards for the lowest-paid workers. But this is actually because pay has fallen so far in the NHS that it was in danger of not meeting the over-25 minimum wage - or 'National Living Wage' [as the Tories have falsely renamed it](#).

The government has also agreed to accelerate workers up their pay grade, giving some additional pay increases.

Pay cap

And clearly the deal - in the first year - has broken the 1% public sector pay cap. It is Westminster's biggest offer to any group of public sector workers to date.

However, Socialist Party members in the health service described the deal as divisive. More could have been won for all by a determined fight of the 14 unions.

We warned that 6.5% over three years is still a pay cut. And 52% of NHS workers won't see a penny out of accelerated pay increments, as they are already at the top of their pay band.

Also, the deal is a further shift towards performance-related pay - so what is given with one hand today can be taken with the other tomorrow.

So why was the deal accepted - in Unison, the biggest health union, by 84% of the minority of members who voted? There is no doubt that after years of pay restraint, even 3% this year can seem a welcome release - let alone the extra for newer and lower-paid staff.

Many members, after years of nothing, have lost faith in the union leadership to deliver any more.

The fact that 13 of the unions - all using the same material - were calling on members to accept, clearly had an impact. At the same time, union leaderships tried to frighten members into thinking that if they rejected, it was back to the 1% cap via the NHS Pay Review Body.

The unions put massive efforts into persuading the members to accept the deal - with the open support of NHS managers.

There were reports of management giving reps time off to travel the wards with a laptop to get members to vote online. At the same time, workers report that management, and the likes of the Unison bureaucracy, made threats of disciplinary action against activists trying to organise a reject vote.

Despite all this work, Unison could still only muster 25% of its members to vote for the deal.

The fact that 87% of voting members in GMB, one of the smaller health unions, rejected the deal shows what could be achieved had there been a united campaign to reject. Instead health unions have signed off for three years just as other public sector workers are gearing up to fight.

However, members could still press for action for a better deal during this time. They may feel emboldened to do so if industrial action for better pay, [such as the coming battle in the civil service](#), gets results.

NHS workers plan coordinated strikes across West Yorks against outsourcing

Stop press!

Mid Yorkshire Unison has voted 97.4% in favour of striking on a 57.8% turnout - smashing the Tories' undemocratic anti-strike ballot thresholds! "The message to the trust board cannot be clearer - we are 100% NHS!"

Adrian O'Malley, secretary, Unison Mid Yorkshire health branch (personal capacity)

Four Yorkshire branches of health union Unison [are balloting simultaneously](#) for strikes against plans to transfer estates and facilities workers into separate companies - owned by NHS trusts, but outside the NHS.

Calderdale and Huddersfield, Bradford, Leeds, and Mid Yorkshire plan coordinated strikes across West Yorkshire if the trusts do not back down.

Up and down England, NHS workers are organising against similar plans. The companies are called '[special purpose vehicles](#)' or '[wholly owned subsidiaries](#)'. Trusts use them to avoid paying VAT and employ staff outside nationally agreed terms and conditions.

Unison members [struck for 48 hours at Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Trust](#) on 23 May against transfer into a company called WWL Solutions. Hundreds attended the picket lines outside the hospitals, determined to fight to remain in the NHS.

NHS bosses thought they could move the staff over into new companies under 'Tupe' transfer law without a fight. They have been taken by surprise by workers' determination to retain NHS employment.

Mass meetings, petitions, lobbies and indicative ballots have been held across the country. They have attracted support from other health workers and community groups, who rightly see this as yet another step towards the privatisation of the NHS.

The struggle is showing that low-paid workers are prepared to fight for their terms and conditions and their status as NHS workers. The lesson from Yorkshire is that we are stronger when we organise together and fight together.

As the Yorkshire NHS staff are saying: "We are 100% NHS and will fight to remain so!"

- National march for the NHS - 70th anniversary - Saturday 30 June, assemble 12pm at Portland Place, London W1A 1AA

4,000 Rolls-Royce jobs at risk: unions must start campaigning now

Charlie Taylor, Derby Socialist Party

Press leaks suggest Rolls-Royce in Derby is set to announce another 4,000 job losses. This follows 5,500 [jobs already cut at Rolls-Royce](#) over the last three years.

Alongside the ongoing cuts to council jobs and services this will have a devastating effect on workers and their families.

Derby has seen the demise of tens of thousands of skilled jobs over several decades, particularly in the rail industry. These latest proposals must be fought.

Rolls-Royce is a profitable company and this is nothing more than cutting staff to increase profits even more.

The company says the losses will not affect frontline engineering jobs, after striking an agreement with unions last year to protect 7,000 jobs. This is clearly an attempt to split the workforce. Any action to fight the losses must include the whole workforce.

The unions must act now! Immediate meetings of the entire workforce should be organised to discuss how to fight the proposed losses.

When Bombardier was under threat in 2010, [the unions organised a march of thousands through Derby](#). This should happen again. It will raise the confidence of workers to take further action if the company does not back down.

A march would be the start, and would also bring the whole community together, raising the confidence to fight all cuts in Derby - not just at Rolls-Royce.

Unions and the Labour leadership should demand the renationalisation of Rolls-Royce - even Ted Heath's Tory government carried this out in 1971.

But this time it should be with compensation only the basis of proven need, under democratic workers' control and management, [as part of a plan to keep it permanently publicly owned](#).

Transport for London to lose central grant: bus workers must prep for action

Mo, London bus driver

By 2020 there will be nil central government funding to Transport for London (TfL). Cuts will further affect bus workers' conditions, with a rise of safety-critical issues.

Bus operators, when the recession occurred, gave the excuse that due to the economic situation they could not give pay rises - [and workers took action](#). We must be prepared for the same excuse from operators, who may say again that they will freeze pay on the buses.

It's crucial to demand that Labour mayor Sadiq Khan - [who got votes from bus workers by promising to represent us](#) - does not implement these cuts. The mayor runs a £16 billion budget and has the same borrowing powers as councils.

The local government committee of Unite, the union which also organises most London bus workers, [has the position that Labour councils should not implement cuts](#). Instead they should use reserves and borrowing powers and build campaigns for funding.

London bus workers should put the same demand to Khan. We should also call on Jeremy Corbyn to pledge to reverse the cuts to TfL once a Labour government is elected, and underwrite any debt incurred fighting the cuts beforehand.

Fellow transport union RMT has policy opposing cuts to TfL. Imagine the effect if the mayor convened a public campaign, with the transport unions, against the cuts and against the Tory government. It could mobilise support from huge numbers of workers and members of the public.

Unfortunately, as a Blairite, Khan is not likely to listen to these demands. To fight the cuts we need to use every means we can, including preparing for industrial action by bus workers across London, and coordinated action with other TfL unions.

Bus workers protested outside City Hall in September 2017, successfully pressuring the mayor to introduce £6 million towards building toilets for bus drivers. However, on around 30 bus routes, drivers are still forced to pay around 50p a time to use the toilets.

This is collectively costing bus drivers around £500,000 a year while we suffer a below-inflation pay 'rise'. Bus workers should also call on the mayor to open up all Underground toilets for bus drivers to use.

Housing strike against individualised pay enters week two

A Unison organiser

Tower Hamlets Community Housing workers are in their [second week of strike action](#) organised by public service union Unison. The housing association has imposed a new pay structure on the workers, and Unison members have rejected this.

The housing association was formed from former council estates in 2000 as a charity. But as land prices in the borough shoot up, it is increasingly looking to act as a commercial organisation.

The new pay structure that is not negotiated with the unions, but based on 'market testing'. Staff will not know which companies' information is used, what jobs they are compared to, or what other posts in the housing association are paid.

Strikers have rightly asked: if we don't know what other jobs are paid, how do we know our pay is fair?

With individualised pay, the company could get away with increasing the gender pay gap or paying black workers less for the same job. Tower Hamlets Community Housing will not even guarantee that future 'market testing' won't drive pay down!

The strike has increased the determination of Unison members to fight for fair pay. Selma, one of the strikers, said: "I would love to be able to support our residents. We're not able to do that because of the market mentality of the private sector.

"It's not why we joined Tower Hamlets Community Housing. We joined as a public sector organisation to serve our community and we're not being allowed to do this.

"This is not what is happening at the moment. Our residents are not happy and we're not able to assist. We don't want this situation to continue."

Vote Mike Rolfe for Napo general secretary

Chas Berry, Napo national executive committee (personal capacity)

As the ballot for general secretary of [probation and family court union Napo](#) gets underway, members will recognise that change is needed at the top to restore confidence and lead the fightback.

Taking up the challenge is Mike Rolfe, former chair of the POA, the prison, correctional and secure psychiatric workers' union.

Mike made headlines during the 2016 prisons crisis by risking imprisonment himself by [threatening strike action in defence of his members](#) whose safety was at risk. His stand helped secure a reversal of staff cuts and a pay deal that broke the Tory government's pay cap.

Probation and family court workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have suffered four years of crippling workloads, staff shortages and deteriorating conditions.

The chaotic part-privatisation of probation services has taken what was once a highly motivated profession and transformed it into a demoralised and de-skilled workforce, spread across 24 separate companies.

Our union, Napo, has survived. But it is struggling to make a significant difference to the working lives of members who have had pay frozen for nine years, and are now expected to pay more and work longer for pensions that are worth less.

Mike is a Corbyn supporter and stood for Labour in last year's general election. He has previously stood for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). His election would undoubtedly give confidence to activists who have been battered relentlessly as they struggle to represent members with dwindling resources.

Mike promises to defend the primary role of the branch as the democratic lifeblood of the union against an increasingly corporate model of organisation. In five years, the incumbent, Ian Lawrence, has been unable to

stop a decline in membership, and it is time for him to step aside.

Ballot papers must be returned by Thursday 28 June.

Venezuela: Neither the capitalists nor regime can solve the crisis

Izquierda Revolucionaria (CWI Venezuela)

On 20 May there were presidential elections in Venezuela. Incumbent Nicolás Maduro won with 6.2 million votes, ahead of Henri Falcón (a general and ex-state governor who went from 'Chavismo' to the opposition in 2010) with 1.9 million. Turnout was 46%.

US and European imperialism and right-wing governments in Latin America launched a hysterical campaign, denouncing the results as 'not valid' and presenting themselves as champions of democracy. People like Donald Trump, who has treated democratic rights with disdain and who was elected with almost three million votes less than his opponent, show the real character of US capitalist 'democracy'. Temer, the Brazilian president, was put in place by a parliamentary coup.

And the European ruling classes rule through unelected EU bodies and national governments which are more and more corrupt and discredited and impose harsh cuts and attacks on democratic rights.

MUD weakened

This reflects the problems that imperialism has in getting its puppets in the MUD (right and extreme right-wing coalition) into power in Venezuela. The MUD emerged very weakened and divided from its [attempt to boycott elections to the national constituent assembly and its attempts to take power through violence in 2017](#).

Imperialist governments and their media try to present the high rate of abstention in these elections (53.9%) as support for the MUD. They hope that this campaign of attacks, together with the economic collapse and increasing discontent with the policies of the Maduro government, will help bring their followers back onto the streets.

Despite this manipulation, the record abstention in these elections confirms that, compared with the massive support which the Hugo Chávez government had (due to the progressive measures and reforms which it applied in response to the masses) Maduro's bureaucratic government - with its policy of managing capitalism, seeking an alliance with sections of the Venezuelan ruling class, as well as attacking the revolutionary left - has alienated many.

This scepticism among the masses, together with the deep crisis Venezuela is going through - with inflation out of control, shortages and the paralysis of production - is being used by the capitalists inside and outside Venezuela to present the country as another 'failure of socialism' to strike a blow against any mass movement which questions austerity and privatisation.

The reality is that in Venezuela socialism has not failed because socialism has never been implemented. The reforms, and social policies applied by Chávez won him mass support, but he stopped halfway, without taking the necessary steps to move towards socialism, such as expropriating the banks and big companies and putting them under the direct control of the working class.

So the measures which improved the living conditions of the people inevitably clashed with the interests of big business and the bureaucratic control of the state. This had already led to a loss of electoral support in the last years of Chávez's presidency. After his death, and the turn to the right of Maduro, we have seen a total collapse of the economy and of the morale of the masses.

With the government campaign putting forward no alternative to respond to the needs of the working class in this deep economic and social crisis, the campaign of Henri Falcón won votes from a discontented and desperate section of the population, but was received with distrust and scepticism by the vast majority.

Reflecting his turn to the right, the Maduro government organised a closing campaign rally on Bolívar Avenue which showed the collapse of his authority among the masses - a low turnout, an apolitical atmosphere, and a crowd that did not even stay to listen to the speech of Maduro. It was also significant that the Maduro leadership has not only eliminated any concrete reference to socialism but also to Chávez's legacy.

The results of the elections speak for themselves. The streets and neighbourhoods of the country expressed themselves with a deafening silence.

Until now Maduro and his government have manoeuvred, resting on the incapacity of the leadership of the MUD to mobilise the social discontent. The only objective they have is to maintain control of the state through a wing of the bureaucracy, isolate the critical left, and negotiate with sections of the ruling class to continue in power.

Low turnout

It was pathetic to witness the leaders of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) claiming to be the victors with 68% electoral support - based on the difference in votes between themselves and the opposition candidates - attempting to mask the fact that only 46% of voters participated in the elections. They could not achieve their objective of winning ten million votes, which they argued would be a victory demonstrating the popular support they still enjoy.

In his speech on election night Maduro reaffirmed his political approach during the campaign, leaving behind the ideas and image of Chávez, making constant calls for reconciliation to all sectors, especially to the bosses and right wing. He promised to end the 'economic war' and after making all sorts of promises during the campaign, basically just told the people they needed to suffer in silence, as 'results' would not be seen immediately.

Maduro is making it increasingly clear that the government is seeking to stabilise capitalism based on maintaining a strong state sector controlled by the bureaucracy (and especially by the army high command whose weight in the government is constantly increasing).

Together with this, he is attempting to consolidate a political regime which, in the face of declining support, increasingly persecutes critical sections of Chávez supporters and the revolutionary left.

The government maintains its position at the moment due to measures such as subsistence payments and 'Clap' bags of food sold cheaply to supporters. However, these measures are more and more limited and have no impact in solving the crisis of uncontrolled prices and paralysis of production.

Another factor which has helped the government is the lack of a mass left alternative which is clearly distinguished from the bureaucracy, and with a clear socialist, anti-bureaucratic and anti-capitalist programme. The discontent with Maduro and the bureaucracy has been expressed in a surge in critical voices and forces within the Chavista movement. In the constituent assembly elections last year, and in local elections, many critical candidates stood.

'Broad front'

The right wing wants to remobilise its base through the organisation of a so-called 'broad front'. They are on the offensive in certain areas and calling on 'civil society' to lead the protests, diminishing the visibility and role of the right-wing politicians. It will not be easy for the right to rebuild its capacity to mobilise on the streets, but it is not impossible either. The bankrupt policies of the government can create the conditions for it.

It is clear that the activity of the broad front will be combined with foreign intervention, which will continue by other means following the refusal to recognise the elections. Economic aggression and media attacks will

increase. There will be no 'social peace' as long as the current crisis continues.

The goal is the economic asphyxiation of the Venezuelan state, which will have a big impact on the population and exacerbate the difficulties of the government to obtain currency, making the imports crisis even worse in relation to medicine, the financing of public companies and public services.

The working class and poor are suffering the highest level of aggression from capitalists and bureaucrats in living memory. The government has been shown incapable of controlling prices, scarcity, or guaranteeing the basic needs of the population, with even wages of state employees not being paid in some cases.

This grave situation, and the increase in protests which it can provoke, could explode into a revolt at any time. If a revolutionary leadership is not built, such a revolt could lead to power falling into the hands of the far right or of sectors of the army officialdom who would accelerate the pro-capitalist and bureaucratic degeneration underway.

The most important immediate task for revolutionaries, working class activists and activists from popular social movements is to build an alternative which unites the most conscious, left-wing sectors of the workers and youth and the critical left sectors within Chavismo to debate and decide on an emergency programme and plan of action.

This must incorporate the demands of the working class against both the right wing and the bureaucrats. Izquierda Revolucionaria believes that we should fight for all political and economic power to pass over to the workers and poor to end the crisis.

- [Read the full article at socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)

Eyewitness report from Gaza: "Razan was killed in front of my eyes"

Young Palestinian medic shot dead while giving first aid to wounded protesters

Razan al-Najjar, a 21-year-old volunteer for a medical team in Gaza, was shot dead during a protest near Khan Yunis on Friday 1st June. She was killed while trying to give first aid to the wounded protesters during the now weekly March of Return.

Her horrific cold-blooded killing brings the death toll of Palestinians killed since the beginning of the protests on 30th March to over 120, with thousands more wounded by live fire.

MR, a press photographer from Gaza spoke the following day with Socialist Struggle Movement in Israel-Palestine (part of the CWI - Committee for a Workers' International). He knew Razan and was present at the protest during her killing: "Razan was killed in front of my eyes".

MR was born and grew up in Gaza. "I am one of the refugees living in one of the camps. I have been suffering the consequences of being a refugee since my birth.

"I worked in journalism for seven years but now I work on documentaries. For some time, me and my colleagues have been documenting the events of the Great March of Return in Gaza.

"I met Razan at the March of Return camp in Khan Younis. She was one of the first volunteers to help the wounded.

"When we talk about volunteering here in Gaza, this means working without any money. She gave her life to aid the peaceful wounded who took part in the return marches.

"She was present daily from early morning until the end of the confrontations in the evening. She has given her life to teach the world that there are people who are fighting for their just and peaceful cause".

MR describes the horrific situation on the ground: "Yesterday me and my colleagues were at the March of Return camp in Khan Younis on the border.

"We did our job as usual. The soldiers were targeting everyone, whether with 'nerve gas' (a mixture of tear gas and other poisonous gases that affect a person for weeks) or internationally banned exploding bullets.

"One of the young men was injured, and the paramedics went to help him, and the heroic Razan was part of the crew.

"Then the soldiers deliberately shot her knowing that she was wearing the white uniform of a nurse. She was sniped with a bullet in her chest. The bullet ripped her chest and caused a large wound. I was very shocked and could not go on with my work as a photographer.

"Razan did not carry a weapon or anything that could be an excuse to target her or kill her, and she was focused on making every effort to aid the injured", MR says to us, and emphasised: "to make it clear, the Israeli soldiers can see very well who they shoot with binoculars with which they can see everything in front of them.

"They deliberately kill unarmed people, children, journalists and paramedics. They do not follow any laws. Razan, the beautiful girl, went without a return. Her death will not discourage our people from continuing their peaceful March of Return.

"They believe that killing people can intimidate others and prevent them from completing the return marches - but they are wrong. Killing innocents increases the enthusiasm of our people to demand their rights, the most basic rights guaranteed by international standards.

"We want to live freely - freedom of movement, travel and fishing - and to [end the unjust siege on our oppressed people](#)".

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 4 June 2018 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

15,000 on far-right march

Build an anti-racist workers' movement

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party

Social media and the press are full of images of clashes with police and Nazi salutes from the 9 June 'Free Tommy' Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) march. It was called in support of jailed former-EDL (English Defence League) leader Tommy Robinson.

Many people are very alarmed at the size of their demonstration, with estimates of 15,000. The counter-demonstration called by Stand Up to Racism, which faced them on Whitehall behind police lines, was small.

There is no question that when any far-right organisation tries to get a foothold they must be countered. Where they organise they can give confidence to a racist minority to carry out racist attacks. Following a DFLA march in Leeds, a mosque and a Sikh temple were set on fire.

Tommy Robinson's jailing for contempt of court - filming defendants and posting comments while a trial was in progress - is potentially pulling together racists and fascists. They had been in disarray after defeats of the British National Party (BNP) electorally and by community mobilisations against the EDL.

But the people demonstrating were not all 'fascists'. A lot of them are football fans, some thugs, but a lot of them are also angry young working class men, deeply alienated by austerity and by decades of capitalist neoliberal policies of cuts and privatisation, low pay, poor housing, and a hollowing out of decent jobs.

Where there were well paid manufacturing jobs in the past, there are now zero-hour contract, minimum wage service jobs. Where there were council homes there are now high-rent private sector homes.

They have been betrayed by all the establishment politicians. In particular abandoned by the betrayals of Blairite New Labour that has pursued pro-capitalist policies of cuts, privatisation and austerity-lite in councils up and down the country and in government.

Fight austerity

As rail union RMT assistant general secretary Steve Hedley correctly said on the counter-protest, it is essential to build an anti-racist workers' movement that fights for jobs, for council homes, for pay, benefits and decent public services. A programme to unite and mobilise working class people.

Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto began to do that job. A million previously-Ukip voters switched to vote Labour in the 2017 general election.

But as long as Labour councils continue with Tory austerity, slashing essential services, large numbers of working class people will feel nothing has changed. Similarly, it is essential that Corbyn supporters organise to deselect the Blairites who continually undermine Corbyn in order to strangle his policies. These are the same politicians responsible for the betrayal over the last years.

Many people who have seen the social media coverage will be alarmed at the size of the Free Tommy demo. They could be put off participating in small counter-protests that rely on the police for their defence. Police who on other occasions have been used to kettle students, snatch protesters from crowds, and force anti-racist protests off the streets to allow the far right to march.

However, if the far right attempt to invade a local community, rather than just skulking in city centres, it is essential that we fight for a massive mobilisation of the community to defend itself. [The Socialist Party has played an important role in organising such community protests against the EDL](#) in Waltham Forest, Leicester and elsewhere.

The protests played an important role - not just in protecting working class communities but in demoralising and defeating the EDL. The same was true of the defeats of far-right organisations such as the BNP and National Front.

The trade unions can be crucial in this. With an energetically built campaign in the workplaces they can mobilise members. They can provide crucially-needed stewarding - [instead of just relying on the police](#) to keep people safe.

Workers have power. Imagine the effect if transport workers closed stations and refused to drive transport.

And the trade unions can not only mobilise people to counter a far-right march, but crucially they can hold out hope and an alternative to those small numbers of people who may be attracted to far-right ideas.

Up to 15,000 marched to 'Free Tommy' on 9 June. But in March 2011 [750,000 marched under the banner of the TUC when people believed the trade unions were going to fight austerity](#).

If the trade unions mobilised with energy and with clear demands to fight for jobs and homes and to kick out the Tories, we'd have hundreds of thousands on the streets.

Many trade unions donate money to Stand up to Racism. But instead of franchising the struggle out to other campaigns, it is time for the left trade unions to act.

Angry at the injustices of capitalism? Enthused to fight the cuts? Then help us sell the Socialist

Nick Chaffey, secretary, Southern region Socialist Party

[For approaching 1,000 issues over 21 years](#), the Socialist has provided the most consistent analysis of events in Britain and internationally, reporting on the many struggles of workers and young people. We have reached huge numbers of people, angry at the injustices of the capitalist world and won them towards a socialist view by selling them a copy of the Socialist.

Many have joined us and now contribute to producing the Socialist. Everyone who has done that should be proud of that achievement.

What the Socialist needs to ensure it continues to play that role is sellers. More sellers who are confident in socialist ideas and determined to reach new readers keen to hear our views.

That is our chief plan for the 1000th issue sales week in Southampton and across the Southern region. We to encourage every member to be part of their branch team and be active selling the Socialist.

To build our team of regular sellers who organise our stalls on Saturdays across the city and our regular stalls at the local hospital. To help take the #StopTrump message to schools and colleges. To build solidarity with PCS civil service union members starting their strike ballot to smash the Tories' pay freeze.

No one is born a Socialist seller, over time everyone grows in confidence, through experience and success. What helps to get new sellers started is support and encouragement from those who are more established at it.

Over 20 members, many for the first time, took part in Southampton meetings and campaign activity during the recent local election campaign. They were enthused by our stand in fighting cuts.

Now we want them to take part in our 1000th issue campaign week and become regular sellers. This will strengthen support for the ideas of the Socialist Party and the Socialist.

Our plans need to make sure we organise to bring a new seller out on every activity and turn our extra sales into regular sales. That can ensure this campaign week marks a sustained development in the sales and influence of the Socialist.

Don't delay, buy issue 1000 today

Cait Mallon, Stoke Socialist Party paper organiser

Stoke Socialist Party has decided to do as many town centre campaign stalls as possible in the weeks leading up to issue 1000. On all of them between now and 21 June ([first day of issue 1000](#)) we will be asking people if they want to pay for their copy of issue 1000 now and we will deliver it to them in that week.

We're using the front page of the paper as our unique selling point. We tried this Saturday 9 June in Hanley with a copy of the front page mounted on a placard. It drew people to the stall, and many bought a paper. 25 copies were sold. The bar has been set!

We plan to visit people we know and ask them to buy a copy of issue 1000 and take out a direct debit subscription. New direct debit subscribers get to choose from a range of free books when they sign up.

We intend to do some door knocking on local council estates. Many residents will remember us standing Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates, our past campaigns and support for many local strikes over the years.

We'll sell the paper outside workplaces like [McDonald's](#) and [TGI Fridays](#), where strikes have taken place nationally against low pay. We won't forget the colleges, two universities, Royal Stoke Hospital and Stoke station.

On 23 June there is a local protest Hanley - Stand up for our NHS. Our intention is to set up as many campaign stalls as possible at the event.

The following week after issue 1000, 28 June, we will be holding a public meeting. We'll invite anyone we have met during the campaign who wants to find out more about the Socialist and the Socialist Party. We'll advertise the public meeting along with the issue 1000 campaign through press releases, leaflets and a facebook page to further spread the word.

Sheffield Labour council "happy" to jail trees protesters

Calvin Payne, Sheffield trees campaigner

The [long-running campaign over tree felling in Sheffield](#) has been continuing apace. As a result of a secret £2.2 billion PFI contract between the Labour council and construction giant Amey, thousands of healthy street trees have been chopped down. But thousands more fellings have been prevented by protests.

Last summer the council gained a high court injunction against direct action on the streets. Since the new year there have been over 20 arrests for more and more farcical reasons (including for demonstrators playing plastic toy musical instruments). Increasingly chaotic scenes on the streets have led to a suspension of the felling programme since March.

In several council wards the issue was decisive in May's local elections. Labour lost seats to both the Green Party and Lib Dems in four wards directly affected by the controversy.

One Green councillor who was arrested at a protest as well as taken to court by the council - and cleared on both occasions - saw their majority rise from just eight to 1,394 votes! Following the election, the council cabinet member responsible for the policy was replaced by a Corbyn supporter. In public he talked about compromise and finding a solution to the issue.

The [suggestion that there may be a change of approach by Sheffield council](#) lasted just days. Four large city centre trees were felled at 6am on a Sunday morning. A few days later it was announced that four further cases from six months ago would be brought to court.

These proceedings were accompanied by stories in the local press about alleged violence by protesters. These stories were widely seen by campaigners as planted by the council with sympathetic local papers.

To date not a single protester has been convicted of any such offence. The Corbyn-supporting councillor now overseeing Sheffield's tree felling is under pressure to prevent the attempt to imprison peaceful campaigners.

In response council leaders have insisted that legal decisions are the responsibility of unelected officers and do not come under the job description of cabinet members. But in court council leader Julie Dore confirmed, via her legal team, that she was "happy" with the application before the court to imprison four people.

A three day hearing saw 100 supporters in attendance outside and many more in the public gallery. The actions of protesters in delaying or preventing felling were examined in court.

Scenes of security guards manhandling often elderly members of the public while police watched on were shown and debated. What was really being decided on was the right to protest. For the third time the high court found broadly against the campaign.

One charge, which hinges on the defence of going to the rescue of a female member of the public who was being forcibly removed from the work area, was delayed for further consideration. One convicted person was discharged without any punishment while two others had their two month prison sentences suspended.

The issue and controversy remains unsolved. Despite their public statements, a Labour council is still using South Yorkshire Police and the high court to criminalise and break anti-privatisation campaigners.

It is clear that any attempt to resume the fellings policy would lead to further mass action and a serious escalation. Campaigners have called for the national Labour leadership to get involved to change the attitude of the council leaders, and ultimately for the use of PFI contracts to run public services to be ended.

In the words of Amber Rudd, "no one died at Orgreave"

Tim Jones (Sheffield North Socialist Party) and Kate Flannery (secretary, Orgreave Truth & Justice Campaign)

In October 2016, the then home secretary [Amber Rudd announced that the Conservative government would not hold a public inquiry](#) into what took place at Orgreave on 18 June 1984, telling the House of Commons "no one died at Orgreave."

Orgreave was the site of the British Steel coking plant that [striking miners were mass picketing during the 1984-5 miners' strike](#). On that day the miners were ushered into a field near the plant by police. It was a change from the normal practice of blocking access routes and turning miners away from picketing.

They were surrounded by police on horseback and police dressed in riot gear, banging their truncheons on their riot shields. The state sent in the police in order to carry out orchestrated violence against these miners who were defending their livelihoods, communities and future generations.

Many of those miners have lived with mental scars and physical marks of brutality, not to mention criminal records which they were forced to declare to potential future employers. They have been branded by the state as thugs.

On that stifling hot June day the pickets were wearing t-shirts, jeans and trainers, they were no match for the police ranks in visor helmets. The media reporting of Orgreave gave the impression that police violence was a response to unprovoked violence from the miners' side.

This was propaganda used to demonise the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the trade unions that has had lasting implications. No police officer is understood to have been disciplined for anything arising out of Orgreave, for either the alleged assaults on miners or the allegations of fabricated evidence.

[An inquiry into the policing of Orgreave and the miners' strike](#) should clarify why, how and who made the decisions to police the miners' strike in the way it was policed. This will help to ensure that the miners and mining communities get the truth and justice they deserve.

Michael Mansfield QC, who represented a number of miners at Orgreave, stated that "the blatant unaccountability and virtual immunity of officers on that day cannot be allowed to continue." Mark George, a criminal barrister said it was "not unacceptable at the time for officers to pool their recollections" to ensure accuracy. However, he added "when the copying is as blatant as it was in this case it smacks of manufacturing an account that suited the narrative the police wished to present. If that was the case and it was an untrue account, it amounts to perverting the course of justice."

Today the area around Orgreave has undergone redevelopment. But so toxic is the name 'Orgreave' the housing development there has been called 'Waverley'. The Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign organises a march every year to commemorate what happened at Orgreave and demand a public inquiry.

Come along and support the annual Orgreave rally this year commemorating the 34th anniversary. Saturday 16 June, 1pm, Orgreave Lane, Sheffield, S13 9NE. Please bring banners, placards, drums, whistles, friends and family! Let's show the government we won't be silenced! Led by the Unite brass band.

Audio version of this document

[To hear an audio version of this document click here.](#)

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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