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## Editorial of the Socialist

# Don't bomb Syria! War vote reveals two Labour Parties in one

## For workers' unity against war, terrorism and racism

- End the cycle of terror, war and racism: stop all imperialist intervention in the Middle East
- Fight for a Labour Party which stands against war, austerity and privatisation
- Support the building of non-sectarian workers' struggles in Syria and Iraq against Isis
- For a socialist alternative - with public investment in jobs and services, not war

The civil war within the Labour party has reached fever pitch. In the last week, Blairite MPs and right-wing shadow cabinet members openly joined forces with the Tories, attempting to imprison Jeremy Corbyn and secure a parliamentary vote in favour of war in Syria.

The crisis has removed any remaining veil of 'unity' that had cloaked the reality: Labour is essentially two parties in one. There is, on the one hand, the Corbyn-supporting Labour Party. The hundreds of thousands who were enthused by the clear anti-austerity and anti-war message of his leadership campaign. The 75% of members who oppose bombing Syria. The people who delivered Jeremy his historically large mandate in September.

On the other, there are the majority of pro-austerity right-wing Labour councillors, MPs and shadow cabinet members. And between these two irreconcilably opposed political positions, peaceful co-existence is impossible.

This contradiction at the centre of the Labour Party will be made most abundantly clear when, on 2 December (after we go to press), the leader of the opposition and the shadow foreign secretary speak in the House of Commons to put forward diametrically opposed views. While Jeremy Corbyn will advance a case against bombing, Hillary Benn will back the Tories' march to war.

### 'Free vote' mistake

In the view of the Socialist Party, it was a serious mistake for Jeremy Corbyn to grant the concession of allowing Labour MPs a 'free' vote on the question of bombing Syria. Clearly he is hoping this move will stave off an all-out war with the Blairites - who had threatened resignations if he attempted to make them vote against war, even though a majority of Labour MPs indicated they were against the war.

But the truth is that this climbdown will embolden both the Tories and the Labour right. Had Labour taken a clear stand in opposing this latest round of imperialist intervention in the Middle East, the government could well have been forced to retreat.

Instead, Cameron is now pressing ahead with the vote in Parliament, feeling confident that he will get backing of enough Labour MPs to vote for bombing.

The disastrous legacy of recent British interventions - in Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan - has helped to sow the seeds of the deadly chaos that currently engulfs Syria and its people - including the horror of

Isis.

This has made Cameron more anxious to have the political cover of a vote in Parliament, including the support of Labour MPs, before embarking on this latest war. Chastened by losing the vote on bombing Assad in 2013, he has been cautious to make sure the 'parliamentary sums add up' before pressing ahead.

As the Socialist Party argued in last week's issue of this paper, bombing Syria will not stop Isis. Cameron is attempting to use the grief and outrage felt by ordinary people at recent terrorist atrocities - including in Paris, Mali, Beirut, Tunisia and Ankara - to try to build public support for this war.

But his real motivation is not to make Britain's streets safer. In reality, extending British air strikes from Iraq to Syria risks increasing the chances of new terrorist attacks on our shores.

Instead, it is maintaining Britain's prestige as an imperialist power which is a main motivator for this latest push, with the government determined not to be 'left behind' as the US, France and Russia continue their bombing campaign. This instinct is shared by the Labour right.

After all, many of the MPs and shadow cabinet members currently scheming against Corbyn were among the architects and supporters of Blair's bloody wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are biding their time before attempting to unseat Corbyn, and will feel that they have scored a victory this week.

## **Anti-war mandate**

By allowing himself to be 'hemmed in' on Syria, a dangerous precedent for future battles on other key issues has been set. In September, Jeremy Corbyn won an enormous mandate on the basis of a leadership campaign which put forward a clear anti-war and anti-cuts stance.

But now he finds himself perched atop an overwhelmingly hostile, right-wing parliamentary Labour party, whose aim is to remove him as soon as they feel the timing is right.

As the battle over Syria has raged, these malign intentions have been made absolutely clear. It was revealed in the papers over the weekend before the vote that some Labour back-benchers were seeking legal advice over the possibility of excluding Jeremy Corbyn from the ballot paper if a new leadership election was triggered by MPs.

Meanwhile, shadow cabinet members including Tom Watson and Hilary Benn openly broke ranks by publicly declaring their support for the bombing, even before internal discussions on the question had reached a conclusion.

At the same time, a plethora of shadow cabinet members and Labour MPs - some named, but most anonymous - have lined up to attack Jeremy Corbyn in the press, detailing his various heinous crimes such as 'writing to Labour MPs stating his anti-war position'. Indeed, despite Corbyn supposedly striking a deal with deputy leader Tom Watson - whereby official 'party policy' would be to oppose the bombing while MPs would not be 'whipped' - as soon as Corbyn signalled that he was in retreat, the Blairites smelt blood.

At the subsequent shadow cabinet meeting on 30 November they forced him to step back even from this uncomfortable compromise. It is reported that shadow cabinet members refused to leave the room until Jeremy Corbyn agreed that Hilary Benn would be allowed to sum up Labour's contribution to the discussion in parliament from the despatch box - supporting the government's position.

Without a serious strategy to overcome the isolation faced by Jeremy Corbyn and his few allies in the parliamentary Labour party, he could rapidly become completely paralysed as leader and ultimately be removed. This episode has emphasised that it is now of even greater urgency that Corbyn's supporters

are organised with a clear strategy and programme.

## **Tens of thousands respond**

A glimpse of what is possible was shown over the weekend before the vote. Tens of thousands of people responded to calls to write to and, in some cases, lobby Labour MPs to vote against the war.

Over 70,000 people also responded to a survey sent out to Labour party members and supporters - with three quarters declaring their opposition to the bombing. But letter writing campaigns and surveys are not enough.

An almighty struggle is required in order to defeat the Labour right. This means mobilising the hundreds of thousands of working class and young people who back Corbyn, drawing on the strength of the organised workers' movement in the trade unions and bringing in existing anti-austerity campaigns and parties.

The setting up of Momentum was a step in the right direction. But so-far, on a national level this organisation has mainly restricted itself to things like calling for voter registration campaigns and organising for people to assist with canvassing in support of the right-wing Labour candidate standing in the Oldham by-election.

Instead Momentum nationally should adopt the kind of approach taken at local level by some of its groups. A good example is Lewisham Momentum, which has taken a clear anti-cuts stand and is campaigning for Labour councillors to protect local services rather than passing on Tory austerity.

## **Mandatory re-selection**

At an anti-austerity conference in London on 21 November Matt Wrack, general secretary of the firefighters' union FBU, and Mark Serwotka, general secretary of civil servants' union PCS, called for the setting up of a Trade Union Momentum. This could potentially play a very important role.

This week at a special conference, the FBU also voted to re-affiliate to Labour. The Socialist Party has cautioned against this - as affiliation means handing money to the right wing Labour machine, not Corbyn and his supporters.

But what is clear is that, whether affiliated or not, the trade unions must now use their weight to put pressure on Labour councillors and MPs to act in the interests of working class people.

This fight must not be limited to the current, undemocratic Labour Party structures. At an absolute minimum, this means opposing imperialist wars and interventions and refusing to continue to implement brutal austerity measures.

In the Socialist Party's view it was a mistake for Jeremy Corbyn to state that he opposed the mandatory re-selection of MPs. In fact, it is absolutely crucial that Labour MPs or councillors who use their positions to vote for this war - not to mention the destruction of jobs and services through cuts - should be held democratically accountable via a reselection process.

As the Blairites sharpen their knives against Corbyn, it is vital that we are organised to defend him and to fight for there to be no further retreat from the key pledges that saw him elected. The Socialist Party is helping to organise this struggle and to fight for the socialist programme that is needed in order to put an end to war and austerity.

# Greece - general strike against austerity sees mass protests

By reporters from Xekinima (the Socialist Party's sister party in Greece)

On 12 November, the first 24-hour general strike in a long time took place - this time the strike was called against the policies of the ex-left Syriza government.

Syriza has transformed itself into a pro-bailout party and introduced a new austerity package.

After the new memorandum was signed by the Syriza government, which previously had given hope for real political change, the mood among workers was inevitably low.

In this climate, it is an extremely positive indication that the general strike on 12 November was relatively big. In Athens, around 30,000 people participated in the protests (the PAME union federation held the biggest), in Thessaloniki over 6,000 took part, and the protest in Volos was one of the most successful ones of the last few years.

The marches, despite being well-attended, were not vibrant. This is because, on the one hand, the working class understands the need to mobilise, but, on the other hand, people's appetite is limited without a plan on how to overturn the austerity policies.

There was also great paradox around the demonstration, as Syriza was calling on people to participate. In other words, the government party that is responsible politically for all the policies implemented is calling on people to participate in protests against them!

Xekinima (CWI Greece) campaigns for a break with austerity and for a socialist programme to meet the needs of the people and not the profits of the capitalists. This includes refusal to pay the debt; controls on capital flows; for the state monopoly of foreign trade; the nationalisation of the banks and the commanding heights of the economy under democratic workers' control and management.

Video of Andros Payiatsos from Xekinima addressing the Sunday rally at Socialism 2015 - see <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21705>

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## Eyewitness to the refugee crisis: a visit to 'The Jungle'

Patrick McNally

In November I visited the Calais refugee camp known as 'the Jungle'. I travelled with the impressive Calais Refugee Solidarity Bristol convoy which consisted of lorries carrying supplies, three minibuses of volunteers and a car of coordinators. The group raised an amazing £10,000 in the run up to the mission.

While in Calais I spent time working at a distribution centre. It's here that donations for the camp are delivered and sorted by volunteers.

### Myth

Right-wing media outlets like the Daily Mail consistently give the impression that the average person is hostile to refugees.

The best antidote to this myth is a visit the distribution centre.

The sight of mountains of donations being sorted by an army of volunteers paints a very different picture. It's only thanks to the generosity of the general public sending these donations that it's possible to feed and clothe a whole community of poverty-stricken refugees.

My final day in Calais was spent preparing food parcels. Part of the work entailed joining a small team to deliver supplies to the camp itself. Visiting 'the Jungle' was one of the most surreal things I've ever done. One moment you're driving through a modern European town, the next you've turned the corner into an impoverished tent city.

It was emotional to see a little girl come running out and give the volunteer I was with a hug. Within seconds of opening the boot of the van a giant line formed.

Despite the desperate situation in the camp we received 'thank yous' and smiles when we handed out packages. Even though the van was filled with food parcels we ran out within minutes. It was deeply upsetting when we had to leave without everyone having been fed.

Sadly, the British government has been consistently unwilling to help refugees despite having contributed to the current crisis through its actions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2014 Britain shockingly pulled out of the search and rescue missions which helped to prevent migrants and refugees drowning in the Mediterranean. And when the crisis hit the headlines the British government simply offered to reinforce French border controls by donating the metal fence used to protect the Newport NATO Summit.

## **Asylum**

'The Jungle' is home to 6,000 people. It would be perfectly feasible for Britain to offer the right to asylum and a home to all these individuals. It is a condemnation of the Tories and their 'British values' that they have not done so. An infinitesimal amount of effort would be required to address the issue of the Calais camp.

Throughout Europe activists must force governments to address this burning issue and demand that some of the billions of pounds that slosh around the European Union are spent on shelter and sanctuary for those trekking across the continent.

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# **Ruling class can't be trusted with 'security'**

**Eric Byl, from the December issue of 'De Linkse Socialist/Lutte Socialiste', newspapers of the Socialist Party's sister party in Belgium**

In Brussels, the metro shut down for almost a full week. Subway stations, schools and universities were closed. All shops in the main shopping street were closed. Heavily armed police and soldiers took to the streets and armoured vehicles were positioned at key locations in the city.

The threat was that Paris terrorist suspect Abdeslam, who's still on the run, would detonate a belt bomb at one of these crowded places. But if the metro was closed, then why not the North-South railway axis that goes underground for miles in the centre of Brussels? If the risk was so high, why were the tram

and bus drivers expected to be running those risks? Understandably, bus drivers from Ninove and Dilbeek refused to drive their buses into the capital.

Many workers are worried. However, we cannot let the right-wing government and politicians dominate the political agenda.

If we consider how this government deals with our wages, our benefits and our job security, we should have no confidence to entrust them with our security.

The Walloon transport minister, Di Antonio, from the Christian Democrats (CDH), called the regional strike in Hainaut on 23 November "inappropriate" in these times of terror and threatened to reconsider the state's subsidies to the public transport company TEC. For the Flemish nationalists who lead the government (N-VA), it is all the fault of the "Islam-socialists".

If government and politicians now call for 'national unity' it is to cover up their own failures and use a smokescreen of racism, stigmatisation of deprived neighbourhoods and suspicion of refugees, to divide working people and their families, in order to weaken them.

If the labour movement does not respond, we can expect a tsunami of reactionary ideas and actions.

In Paris the state of emergency imposed by President Hollande following the Isis terrorist attacks has been used by riot police to break up public protests ahead of the UN climate change summit. Activists have also been put under house arrest, making a mockery of government claims to 'defend democratic values'.

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## Hong Kong election

### Socialist Action wins third of the vote

Sally Tang Mei-ching, candidate for Socialist Action (the Socialist Party's sister party in Hong Kong) contesting Pak Tin ward in the city state's recent district council elections, won 1,152 votes (33%) against the pro-Beijing incumbent Yan Kai-wing - whose vote went down from 2,888 in 2011 to 2,320 now.

Pak Tin is in Sham Shui Po, which is Hong Kong's poorest district. Around 90% of Pak Tin's electorate live in public housing.

Across Hong Kong, the 'Umbrella' factor (the 2014 movement demanding free elections, as opposed to a rigged election model as laid down by Beijing) was unmistakable, with a higher voter turnout (47% compared to 41% in 2011) and losses for pro-government parties.

The pro-government camp, an assortment of parties that are slavishly loyal to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) dictatorship and big business interests, has traditionally dominated these elections with massive resources and a culture of vote-buying and manipulation. All 18 district councils, which have extremely limited powers, are controlled by the pro-CCP camp.

"We decided to stand once again in these elections despite the undemocratic nature of the district councils, because we need every available platform to spread our [socialist] message," said Sally.

Full report on [www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)

# Women: fight for equality, fight for socialism

**Heather Rawling**

It's hard to believe that in the 1990s, articles were appearing asking: "Is the future female?" and "Are we witnessing a genderquake?"

Leading bourgeois feminists like Naomi Klein in her book *Fire with Fire* argued: "Men are seeing their empire crumble. Their world is indeed dying. We must understand that we are in the final throes of a civil war of gender fairness, in which conditions have shifted to put much of the attainment of equality in women's own grasp."

As a single mother, working full-time in the 1990s, this wasn't a world I recognised. For people like Naomi Klein, 'gender fairness' meant business women, rich women, were on the brink of achieving equality with men in the boardrooms and in society. But even that has not happened.

And for working class women, the picture was very different. Not that we wanted what working class men had - we had something far better in mind than the exploitation they experienced!

There had been an enormous change in society. For the first time women made up 51% of the workforce. Women were leaving the isolation of the home, gaining a degree of economic independence and often becoming class conscious workers, active in their trade unions.

They also had more control over their own bodies with the development of reliable contraception. A big shift in attitudes followed. Women were not only demanding rights at work but also social changes to improve their lives.

Changes in legislation in the 1960s made divorce easier and abortion legal, under certain circumstances. The Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts of 1975, combined with industrial action, meant that women under 30 earned 90% of men's wages, although the gap widened again once women began to have family responsibilities. Rape in marriage was made illegal in 1991.

Domestic violence began to be taken up by the trade unions because of the role of the Campaign Against Domestic Violence, led by supporters of Militant (forerunner of the Socialist). Many workplaces adopted policies to support women experiencing and escaping from domestic violence.

## **Workers' struggles**

In fact Militant supporters and other socialists played a vital role in many of the struggles that women were involved in during that period. For example campaigns to save nursery facilities, against attacks on abortion rights, for better pay, against sexual harassment at work, Women Against Pit Closures etc.

Some of the most significant changes were won by women trade unionists taking strike action to further their cause.

The strike by women machinists at Ford Dagenham was instrumental in bringing about the Equal Pay Act and the strike by women workers at Trico's (who made windscreen wipers) was necessary to force employers to implement the Act after it was passed.

Yet women we were still a long way from being liberated. Around 600,000 women a year were victims of domestic violence according to government statistics.

Women were concentrated in the lower paid service and caring industries. They juggled

responsibilities in the home, childcare and holding down a job. Under capitalism, this was a golden era for women! Almost the best we could hope for.

Today the position of women in society has in many ways deteriorated. Cuts in the public sector have wiped out many of the gains that were fought for. They have disproportionately affected women as workers and carers.

In 2014, women's pay was just over 19% less than men's. The gap had narrowed slightly - not because women's pay had increased but because men's pay has worsened as a consequence of deindustrialisation and job losses. 62% of workers paid below the living wage are women. In 2011 the World Bank reported that women globally earn 10-30% less than men.

Misogynist attitudes and behaviours are still very much a reality - fed by the capitalist media and economic reality. It is difficult to object to sexual harassment at work when you are on a zero-hour contract.

## **Domestic violence**

Violence against women is endemic. Around the world, 35% of women experience domestic violence in their lifetime.

Nearly half of all women killed in the UK in 2012 were killed by their partners or other family members. At root, part of the problem is a deeply ingrained idea in society that women should be subordinate to men. The marriage certificate in the UK has the names of fathers but not mothers, implying a transaction between men.

The women's movement in the twentieth century actively campaigned for changes to improve the lives of women and sometimes linked up with the labour movement.

However, following the collapse of Stalinism and defeats for the working class such as of the miners' strike, there was an ideological assault on the idea that collective action could change things and that there was an alternative.

The pro-big business policies of right-wing Labour and trade union leaders led to defeats and setbacks. This was reflected in the women's movement by a turning inwards towards individual solutions to oppression.

International Working Women's Day, born out of the struggle of US women textile workers and proposed by German socialists, has been hijacked by bourgeois feminists.

Christine Lagarde, head of the bosses' International Monetary Fund (IMF), spoke to a 'Women of the World' (WOW) gathering in London on International Women's Day 2015. WOW has the Duchess of Cornwall as its president, and is based on women who represent the super-rich 1%.

## **Theories**

Some feminists have based their ideas on biological differences - men are aggressive and women are caring.

Others blamed women's oppression on social structures like 'patriarchy'. But whatever they see as the root cause, most feminist theories view male supremacy as universal and having existed for all time, regardless of the economic basis of society.

They therefore focus on changing attitudes rather than removing the economic and cultural restraints that oppress women.



Many women would describe themselves as feminists because they want to end their oppression. As women see past gains under attack, they have quite rightly become angry and looked to feminism for solutions.

However 21st century feminism, especially in the universities, has been heavily influenced by a form of identity politics which tends to discuss the behaviour of individuals rather than challenging the root causes of women's oppression (for more on this see 'Unpacking the rucksack: identity politics and the struggle against oppression' by Hannah Sell in Socialism Today, October 2015).

That's not to say that there have been no significant protest movements beyond this. There have been protests against the anti-abortion laws in Spain, against rape in India, the marriage equality referendum in Ireland etc. Slutwalks around the world highlighted the issue of victim blaming and rape.

It is possible and necessary to win many women who wish to end their oppression and describe themselves as feminists to socialist ideas and the need to be involved in politics more widely. Many women, young and old, have been inspired by the election of Jeremy Corbyn to lead the Labour Party.

For Marxists, women's oppression is not inevitable, immutable, ordained by God or flowing from the innate nature of men.

Women's oppression is rooted in class society and stems from the role women are expected to play in the family.

## **Class society**

Capitalism shapes but does not determine our outlook from birth. For many, but not all, the family is where we live with the people we are closest to. But under capitalism, the family is also an institution that is intended to pass on the ideology and culture of the ruling class.

It provides the next generation of workers as cheaply as possible by making women, as Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of the Russian Revolution, described: "the slave of slaves."

One survey revealed that on average women did 17 hours a week of domestic chores (excluding childcare) whereas on average men did less than six.

Neither the 'slave' nor the 'slave of the slave' benefit from capitalism. To end the oppression of women will require ending a system based on profit and exploitation. The working class creates all the wealth in society - which gives the working class the enormous potential power to change the system and create a more equal and fair society. Working class men and women together can end their oppressions.

This doesn't mean that we won't have to fight prejudice and change attitudes in the course of struggle. But for lasting and real change we must fight to build a society based on workers owning and democratically planning the economy.

With this kind of society - a socialist one - we could provide for all the needs of humanity and thereby lay the basis to end discrimination and oppression and ease the burdens of the mass of people - women and men.

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**The Russian Revolution in 1917 made great steps forward for women. Many of the gains were later undermined by Stalinism, but the early days gave a glimpse of what can be achieved by a movement that challenges capitalism.**

**This is an extract from It Doesn't Have to be Like This: Women and the Struggle for Socialism, by Christine Thomas.**

Women's liberation formed a key component of the Bolshevik's programme and the revolution paved the way for radical reforms which went far beyond those achieved by women in the more economically-developed capitalist countries at that time.

Marriage, for example, became a mere civil procedure, while the right to divorce was granted on request by either partner. Legal, free abortions were available to all women who needed them and homosexuality was legalised. The principle of equal pay for equal work was introduced and legislation passed to protect women in the workplace. This included 16 weeks of paid maternity leave, the right for nursing mothers to work no more than four days a week and to have regular time off for breastfeeding...

Day nurseries, kindergartens, public laundries and restaurants were set up and free lunches introduced in schools. In 1920, 90% of Petrograd, the most industrialised city in Russia at that time, were choosing to eat in communal restaurants...

A conscious campaign was needed to change the backward and reactionary attitudes towards women which were deeply ingrained within society.

This included a concerted effort to engage and involve women as active participants in building the new social order. Women had played an important role in carrying out the revolution itself... Now their self-activity was vital for transforming society and achieving their own liberation.

In 1919 a special women's department the Zhenotdel, was established to conduct work amongst women. Women's 'commissions' were set up at every level in order to involve women in the party and in the construction of the new society.

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## **Thatcher resignation 25 years on**

# **How the Iron Lady was reduced to iron filings**

**Steve Score, anti-poll tax campaigner and East Midlands Socialist Party secretary**

Margaret Thatcher, the so called 'Iron Lady', resigned as Tory prime minister 25 years ago. She had been in power for eleven years, winning three general elections, and yet was forced out before her term was over.

She had been credited as having defeated the less hardline Tory 'wets', the Argentinian dictatorship in the Falklands war, and the trade unions - particular their most militant wing, the miners. She massively accelerated the advance of right-wing 'neo-liberal' economics - privatising and cutting public services - which has been followed by every stripe of government since.

She was noted for determined and ruthless pursuit of her right-wing capitalist goals famously declaring: "U-turn if you want to. This lady is not for turning!"

So how did such a seemingly strong leader get defeated? Official histories have often put it down to splits inside the Tory Party over Europe.

But the key reason was actually the campaign against her 'flagship policy' the poll tax. Mass resistance to this iniquitous tax was led by the Socialist Party's forerunner, Militant.

Her resignation on 22 November 1990 and replacement by John Major as the new Tory leader was followed four months later by the announcement that the poll tax was to be scrapped. There is no doubt

that policy on Europe was a cause of significant division within the Tory Party, as it still is today.

## Europe

On 13 November Deputy Prime Minister Geoffrey Howe resigned in a row over European policy, publicly criticising Thatcher. This gave Michael Heseltine, who had been forced out of her cabinet some time before, the confidence to stand against her for the Tory Party leadership.

Although Heseltine's split was over a Europe related issue, he made scrapping the poll tax part of his campaign.

This wasn't out of concern for the millions of working class people unable to pay it and threatened with court, bailiffs and ultimately jailing.

He knew it had become symbolic of everything people hated about Thatcher and could threaten the Tories' chances of winning future elections.

Although she won the support of the majority of Tory MPs, it wasn't enough to prevent a second round of voting. Their fears of losing their seats at the next general election came to the surface and Thatcher was not confident of winning.

She promptly resigned. Major won the subsequent ballot for Tory leader and appointed Heseltine to work out the replacement for the poll tax.

The background to this was not simply a split at the top over Europe. Thatcher had become profoundly unpopular. An opinion poll in April 1990, the month the poll tax was introduced in England and Wales, showed the Tories 24% behind Labour.

From the beginning, her naked class war policies generated anger. De-industrialisation resulting from her policies and the slashing of public spending resulted in a rise in unemployment.

The City of London was deregulated and some people made themselves very rich. Inequality between rich and poor spiralled.

Thatcher came to power in 1979 with the intention of smashing the organisations of the working class. She singled out the National Union of Miners as the strongest part of the movement, aiming to wipe out the memory of the defeat of Tory Prime Minister Edward Heath at the hands of the miners in 1974.

The destruction of coalfield communities, despite the heroic year-long strike of 1984-85, created a legacy of bitterness.

## Liverpool

It was not the willingness of workers to fight against Thatcher's policies that was lacking: it was the incapacity of the leaders of the TUC and the Labour Party to fight with the same determination as Thatcher.

The same was true in the struggle of Liverpool Labour Council, which, led by the ideas put forward by Militant, took on Thatcher in a massive battle over council cuts. Although concessions were won, the role played by trade union and Labour leaders ultimately allowed the disqualification of the councillors.

Thatcher was given confidence to take on local government once more with the poll tax - replacing the previous system of local rates, based on property values and at least roughly related to the ability to pay, with a flat rate tax, the same for rich and poor alike.

But, as the Militant had predicted, the poll tax became the means by which millions saw they could fight back and win. The fact that everyone was attacked at the same time, and the strategy of mass non-payment led by Militant through the anti-poll tax unions, led to 18 million refusing to pay.

Mass demonstrations including 250,000 on the eve of its introduction in England and Wales reflected the mood.

It was Thatcher's refusal to back down over the poll tax that ultimately brought her demise. In her own memoirs she cited the abandonment of the poll tax as "one of the greatest victories for these people [the working class - especially anti-poll tax campaigners] ever conceded by a Conservative government."

David Cameron's government today is attacking workers' living standards, public services and the trade unions. But a determined fight, uniting all those affected by these attacks in coordinated action could do the same to him as we did to Thatcher in 1990.

## Action needed to save our NHS

Action gets results! In fact, the junior doctors have shown that the threat of action gets results. Their planned strike on 1 December was called off after the government was forced back to the negotiating table. The threat to forcibly impose the new junior doctors' contracts has been temporarily suspended.

As we go to press no deal has been reached and the BMA, representing the doctors in negotiations, has correctly kept the threat of future strike action on the table if no satisfactory changes are made. Any deal should be put to a vote of all junior doctors before being accepted.

The bold, united stand taken by the doctors shows the type of campaign that will be needed to defend our NHS, which is facing crisis. In his spending review George Osborne reaffirmed the Tories' demand for 'efficiency savings' of £22 billion in five years.

A letter in the Guardian signed by 76 doctors pointed out: "hernia operations costing £1,000 now will be expected by the Treasury to cost £815 in 2021 for a similar, if not better, standard. This is a frighteningly unrealistic expectation for a health system already among the world's most efficient. Efficiency savings are fast becoming a euphemism for funding cuts."

Osborne tried to trick us by promising an 'extra' £3.8 billion next year - but that's just frontloading money that was already budgeted for. Services are already at breaking point - unacceptable waiting lists, under-staffed wards and overworked, underpaid nurses.

Trusts are being bled dry by Private Finance Initiative vultures and vital drugs are being taken off of patients because the pharmaceutical companies charge too much for them.

We need a mass, working class movement against all cuts and privatisation. To have success, such a movement would have to be led by health workers in all NHS unions willing to take industrial action to defend jobs, conditions and services.

- Abolish the Health and Social Care Act - no cuts, closures or privatisation
- Support health workers. Reject the junior doctors' contract. End the low pay scandal. United action by all health unions to defend our NHS
- Scrap the Private Finance Initiative and cancel the debt
- Nationalise the pharmaceutical, medical supply industries and all private health providers. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need
- Investment not cuts - for a well-funded NHS, free at the point of use

# Osborne Spending Review climb-down shows austerity can be defeated

## U-turns show Tory weakness but sadistic austerity is still on

**Paul Callanan**

In his autumn spending review on 25 November, Tory chancellor George Osborne announced the government's first U-turns since it won its slim majority in May.

In the review he announced that the government has scrapped plans to abolish tax credits and to cut police funding. Osborne claims this was due to an unexpected £27 billion windfall as a result of low debt interest payments and projected higher tax receipts.

The reality is that these U-turns were forced on the government by the strength of public opinion. In the case of tax credits huge anger was generated over the fact that millions of working families would be losing over £1,000 a year. The climb-down was finally forced when the House of Lords threw it out.

These defeats inflicted on the government have led many commentators to claim that this statement heralds the end of austerity. Unfortunately this is not the case. There is still plenty of pain to be inflicted on working class people to make this an economic manifesto befitting of a Tory prime minister in waiting.

The NHS, already ravaged by privatisation and austerity, is being forced to find £22 billion worth of 'savings', ie cuts.

A number of government departments will have to find a further £21.5 billion in 'savings'. This means more cuts to the civil service and local government services. So the spending review doles out more pain for those reliant on the jobs and services provided by the public sector.

### Gifts for landlords, misery for renters

On the face of it Osborne's offer to allow councils to keep all the proceeds from business rates may seem generous. But the central government grant that goes to local councils will be scrapped, leaving local councils with a £4.1 billion funding shortfall over the next four years.

Local services are already at breaking point having seen their funding cut by 40% over the past five years. Some council leaders are warning that even if they close every local library, children's centre, park and museum they will not be able to plug this gap.

This shortfall is after taking into account Osborne giving permission for councils to increase council tax bills by up to 2% - more pain - to help cover social care costs.

### Unpluggable holes make councils key battleground

In the coming weeks and months details of swingeing local government cuts budgets will come to light. Council cuts could become the biggest battleground against the Tories' austerity onslaught. It's clear that we are not going to save services being lost now by waiting for a Labour government to come to power in 2020. By then, under the current attacks, there will be little left of council services to save.

The unions that organise in local government have to be prepared to lead the fight by taking strike action. This needs to be done in tandem with mobilising the local communities that rely on the services.

For their part, Labour controlled councils can no longer wring their hands and talk of how bad it is that they are being forced into this by the Tory government. They need to join this fightback by setting no-cuts 'people's budgets', using council reserves and borrowing powers initially to help fund them, while helping to build strong local campaigns to demand the funding necessary from the government.

The review also delivered more frustration and anger for 'generation rent'. While rents continue to rocket, the government has introduced a further cap on housing benefit. Benefits for social tenants will now be capped at the same rate as those in the private sector.

In response to the housing crisis, the government will hand billions of pounds to its private developer mates.

This will pay for an insufficient 400,000 new homes - most of which will be high-end developments that would have been built anyway as investment opportunities for super-rich landlords.

The very few extra 'affordable' homes will not be affordable for the overwhelming majority because they will go on sale at the inflated rates of the UK property market. In fact, housing associations - which build the majority of cheaper homes - will lose nearly half their funding.

All in all, with the economy growing at over 2% a year at present, many media commentators think things seem to be rubbing along nicely for Osborne. But the Institute for Fiscal studies says that he only has a 50/50 shot of hitting his target of a budget surplus by 2020.

Currently, overall public spending is increasing, while 'unprotected' services fall into dysfunctionality or non-existence.

## **Economic instability**

The Tories' plans could also be derailed by potential economic storms ahead. Britain's much vaunted economic recovery actually amounted to an anaemic 0.5% growth in the third quarter.

This government has boasted time and again of a jobs recovery that is the result of their economic policy. Yet just one in 40 jobs created since the crisis began in 2007/08 is full time. Also, the OBR has revised down projected growth in average earnings by 0.2% for 2016.

A massive fall in the oil price could throw the world economy into turmoil. As a result the price of goods and properties could plummet. While temporarily this would be good for consumers it could see the development of a deflationary cycle and another round of closures and job losses on high streets.

It is clear that this is a weak government whose numbers simply don't add up. The defeats it has suffered over tax credits and police cuts show that it can be defeated.

The trade unions should coordinate action against austerity. A 24-hour general strike could be the start of this. Such action would bring the country to a standstill and demonstrate who really runs society and produces wealth. It's not the Tories and their big business fanboys but ordinary working class people.

This action would also have the potential to bring in behind it all those who rely on national and local services, including the unemployed, people with disabilities, students etc.

An organised mass movement could bring this Tory government and its austerity down. We must not

and cannot wait until 2020.

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 27 November 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## **Student nurses must pay to work**

**Matt Whale, student nurse**

George Osborne's Autumn Statement has scrapped bursaries for nursing students starting in 2017.

This is a huge attack aimed not just at the nursing profession, but the NHS and working class. The health service is already in crisis, with a shortage of over 20,000 nurses.

The logical solution would be to invest in student nurses, and increase funding to incorporate some of the 37,000 applicants turned away. Instead the Tories have priced thousands of future nurses out of a career.

To qualify as a nurse, our regulator, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, requires a minimum 2,300 hours worked on placement. The government is going to make student nurses pay to work for free. It's a disgrace.

According to a survey by the largest health union, Unison, 90% of current nurses wouldn't have been able to complete training without a bursary. A lot of my fellow trainees are parents with young children. They wouldn't be able to afford it either.

The chancellor's proposal would leave newly qualified nurses with upwards of £50,000 of student debt. Nurses start on around £22,000 a year.

Staff are overworked, underpaid and under huge stress. Morale is at an all-time low. But junior doctors have delayed contract changes just by threatening to strike.

Unison and other health unions striking together would be a big step forward in the fight to save the NHS.

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## **Paris climate summit falls short in world's hottest year**

**Pete Mason**

2015 will be the hottest year on record, according to US government scientists, beating the previous record holder, 2014. But world leaders at the UN conference on climate change in Paris show no signs of tackling impending catastrophe.

The slowdown in the warming of global surface temperatures, much-touted by climate change sceptics, has ended. Each of the past four years has been hotter than the one before. A strong 'El Niño' - warm ocean current - is still intensifying, contributing to the record rise in surface temperatures.

## Extreme

As the frequency of extreme weather events intensifies, severe droughts, floods and storms will cause crop failures and food shortages. Low-lying lands will become uninhabitable. The struggle for diminishing resources could result in civil conflicts and even war.

But the giant energy companies' greed for easy, dirty profits from coal, oil and gas is unquenchable.

In 2009 the 'G20' advanced capitalist countries pledged to phase out subsidies for fossil fuel production. In spite of this, the Tory government earlier this year announced a further £1.7 billion in new tax breaks for North Sea oil and gas production.

At the same time Tory chancellor George Osborne announced axing subsidies for renewable energy programmes. In the Autumn Statement, he also slashed £132 million from energy efficiency schemes - on the very day when "excess winter deaths" reached a record high.

Immediate binding international action to curb greenhouse gas emissions is vital to stabilise the climate. But this is unlikely to happen on a capitalist basis, where the cornerstone of a competitive system of production is profit at any cost.

Only democratic socialist planning of industry, based on publicly owned and democratically run economies, can start to mitigate the environmental damage generated by capitalism. To halt climate change, we need system change.

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# London ambulances in special measures due to underfunding

**Steve Harbord, former London Ambulance Service union rep**

London Ambulance Service has become the first in the country to be placed in special measures. Failings have led to the NHS Trust Development Authority taking it over.

England's chief inspector of hospitals, Professor Sir Mike Richards, says putting the trust in special measures is necessary for improvement. He praised frontline staff as "dedicated, hardworking and compassionate" - but said they "were not being properly supported to do their jobs."

## Bullying

Inspectors found a culture of bullying, dangerous staff shortages, missing supplies, dirty equipment and terrible response times.

Dave Prentis, general secretary of health union Unison, said: "This is a shocking indictment of the lack of funding that has gone to the ambulance service over the last five years. This is a particular problem in London where demand has soared."

Well I've got news for you, Dave. The service has been underfunded for many years - including under New Labour - and you have done nothing about it. No wonder the staff are as disillusioned with their own union leadership as they are with management.

About ten years ago, I wrote a letter to Ben Bradshaw - then the health secretary - criticising lack of funding.



I received a reply that made no comment on my criticisms, but thoughtfully provided me with the address and phone number of the service I had been working at for twenty years.

The fact is the service will always suffer under the market mentality of Tories and Blairites like Bradshaw. Big business cannot be trusted with people's health.

It's time to unite all healthcare workers in defence of a free and fully funded National Health Service. Coordinated strikes, with a programme of escalation, can reverse the cuts, improve workers' conditions - and save lives.

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## **Them & Us**

### **Tory bullies...**

The Tories have banned for life a leading activist allegedly responsible for Mafioso-level systematic bullying of members. Mark Clarke also faces accusations of assault, blackmail and sexual harassment.

The 38-year-old father of two was a central 'youth' organiser during the 2010 and 2015 election campaigns. Supposedly, Conservative leaders repeatedly ignored a series of complaints about his abusive behaviour. It took the tragic death of a 21-year-old Tory activist, who Clarke had apparently victimised, before HQ took action.

Sadly, this story comes as no surprise. The Trade Union Congress found this year that nearly a third of workers suffer bullying at work - 72% of which was bullying by management. The Conservatives are a party of the bosses, for the bosses.

### **...union bullies?**

And yet the Tories have the gall to accuse trade unions - workers organising to defend each other - of 'intimidation'.

Part of the justification for their latest anti-union laws is that strike breakers may feel 'intimidated' when crossing picket lines. Another example of 'intimidation' is general union Unite protesting near the mansions of bosses responsible for blacklisting and mass lay-offs.

Collectively withdrawing labour is the most effective weapon workers have to beat bullying bosses. Ensuring a strike is solid means it can be over quicker and get better results for all staff.

Strike breakers may feel ashamed when crossing a picket line - and rightly so.

But members of democratic unions persuading workers to fight alongside striking colleagues is one thing. Unelected managers and owners destroying entire livelihoods at a whim is quite another.

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## **Junior doctors' strike suspended for talks**

### **A junior doctor**

Following the involvement of the conciliatory body ACAS in talks between the Department of Health

and the British Medical Association (BMA), planned walkouts in December have been suspended.

Thousands of junior doctors in England had planned to walk out over a contract that is unfair for doctors and unsafe for patients. Disgruntled medics pushed to the point of burnout were frustrated with a contract that was going to make them work more hours for less pay.

Financial penalties for hospitals who overwork doctors were to be scrapped and those who took time out to have children or undertake research would be financially penalised under the new contract. The new contract would have hit those hardest, in specialties like emergency medicine and general practice which are already difficult to recruit to, threatening the very fabric of the NHS.

An unprecedented 98% of junior doctors on a 76% turnout voted in favour of industrial action and contingency plans were in place for a safe and effective strike up and down the country.

On 30 November, the day before the first strike was planned, ACAS issued a statement to say that "the BMA agrees to temporarily suspend strike action and the Department of Health agrees to temporarily suspend implementation of a new contract without agreement."

## **Vote**

The BMA have confirmed that all members will now be able to vote on a new contract before it is agreed.

Reaction among junior doctors has been mixed. Some are disappointed that we have lost an opportunity to show our unity and strength. The impact of the strike has still been felt as cancelled clinics and elective surgery couldn't be rearranged at such a late stage and this risks making us look weak and divided. Many others are heartened, however, that Jeremy Hunt has been forced to make some concessions. Although the details of the contract are unknown at this stage, union members will now have an opportunity to vote on it.

In over ten years as a medical student and junior doctor I have never seen such a show of strength and unity. The level of support from our colleagues, patients and the public has been overwhelming with thousands signing an online petition to value junior doctors and NHS staff.

A new generation of doctors has been politicised and a new feeling of solidarity is growing among NHS staff. This new level of confidence must be built up as we take on all the Tories' attacks on the NHS - not just the junior doctor contract but the disgraceful removal of bursaries for nursing students (see page 2) and continued funding cuts up and down the country.

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### **A nurse practitioner**

As a nurse practitioner working in a large teaching hospital I was preparing flasks of coffee to take to junior doctors picket lines on 1 December. But at the last minute the junior doctors strike was postponed.

Health minister Jeremy Hunt is a hated person in the NHS and I believe he will soon be going the same way as his predecessor.

We need the doctors to carry on fighting as it will be the nurses' unsocial hours next. Hunt refused to go to ACAS, but was left with no choice in the end.

He tells us that this will lead to a seven day NHS, but then tells us that working Saturdays and late evenings are not unsocial.

We must continue to support the junior doctors as this is the thin edge of the wedge and the dismantling of the NHS. It is time to fight for the NHS.

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## **JCB redundancies mitigated but fight needed**

### **A JCB worker**

As reported in issue 878 of the Socialist, JCB recently announced 290 shop floor redundancies.

Following talks with the GMB union this number was reduced to 250 and it was announced the company would allow voluntary redundancies to mitigate the need for compulsory job cuts. But a redundancy is a redundancy either way.

The numbers who volunteered fell short of the total required. Besides, JCB said it would not allow all those who did volunteer to leave, cynically using the threat of compulsory redundancies to persuade workers to accept poorer terms and conditions.

### **Negotiations**

After further negotiations with the GMB, proposals were agreed to a temporary change in our terms and conditions that the company claims will prevent the need for compulsory job cuts in the near future.

These proposals give us the option of taking a £67.55 a week pay cut for three months or banking hours during the same period. Banking hours means we work a shorter than normal working week for the three months but get paid our normal contracted hours.

Then when production picks up in March as we are told it will - the banked hours are paid back meaning working over and above our contracted hours but only getting paid for the contracted hours.

These proposals are on the table as a result of concession bargaining by the GMB which has failed to put up a fight against job cuts and instead negotiated away our existing terms and conditions.

The proposals were put to the workforce in a ballot starting on 27 November. If they're rejected, then compulsory redundancies will follow. Many said they would vote for flexible working as they did not want to see their colleagues lose their jobs.

### **Offensive**

Either way it is us who are paying for the economic crisis again and again, with the unions not prepared to go on the offensive. GMB claims that JCB workers will not fight but they have never asked us.

If a bold lead was given then we would. JCB workers are no different to any others and workers in several disputes are showing preparedness to fight to defend jobs and existing terms and conditions.

We face further uncertainty even after this situation. JCB says the market for its products could continue to fall across the globe and that it can't rule out further cuts in the future.

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# Open Uni strikers prepared to go the distance

## Bristol

UCU members in the Open University took strike action on 25 November against plans to close the university's regional offices, threatening over 500 jobs.

A former student stopped by at the picket line in Bristol to offer support and explained what the closures would have meant for her.

She said the support from the regional office had been vital to her studies and she would not have been able to travel long distance to events.

The strike was solid and pickets hoped that if further action is necessary UCU members would be joined by their colleagues in Unison who are also under threat.

**Tom Baldwin, Bristol Socialist Party**

## Camden

The lively UCU picket line at the Open University in Camden, north London got a good response from passing motorists. UCU members are determined to fight these plans and further rolling strike action took place on 30 November. Pickets reported good support from Unison members at the Open University despite them not being balloted for strike action.

**Chris Newby**

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# Bus drivers fight bully-boy managers

**Mike Forster, Halifax and Huddersfield Socialist Party**

On 30 November, Huddersfield First UK Bus drivers took one-day strike action in protest at management's decision to tear up a local pay agreement dating back to April.

Originally Unite reached a two-year pay agreement with the company.

However the rise was never paid out as management imposed a unilateral cut to holiday entitlement for certain bus drivers, depending on their length of service.

While the local manager admitted a mistake had been made, the company executives confirmed they had changed the pay agreement and were now imposing new conditions without any consultation or agreement.

Unite the Union balloted members and got a 92% vote for strike action after a 97% turnout.

Despite last minute talks at ACAS with the union offering certain compromise suggestions, the company refused to negotiate.

They then sent a threatening letter to Unite telling the union that it would be fined £500,000 if the

strike went ahead.

This was followed with an individual letter to every driver's home address before the strike, arguing their action was illegal!

Despite these bully boy tactics, the strike was solid with only one driver reporting for work. Pickets were out in force in freezing temperatures.

Further strikes are planned if the company does not relent. Huddersfield was brought to a traffic standstill as most buses were off the road.

**Messages and donations to Phil Bown:**

Unite, 300 Barrow Road Sheffield S9 1JG, phil.bown@unite.org.uk

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## **Water workers protest against pension attacks**

**Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party**

Around 40 water workers and supporters protested outside the Queen's hotel in Leeds on 26 November where the Northern Consumer Council was holding a meeting.

The workers - GMB members from United Utilities, Northumbrian Water, Yorkshire Water and Hartlepool Water - were angry at the rampant profiteering of the companies which have seen debt levels and consumer prices rise and are attacking workers' pensions at two of the companies.

I spoke to workers from United Utilities who told me that after the company conducted a regrading exercise a few years ago they had promised in the future to consult with the trade union and workforce more widely in the future.

Yet as a result of a recent cryptosporidium (a parasite which causes severe diarrhoea) outbreak, the company has had to pay out compensation to 300,000 customers.

### **Understaffing**

Despite union reps raising the issue of understaffing in the company over a period of time, it has taken action by the regulator to force the company to take on the extra staff needed. But to pay for this, United Utilities is planning on closing its defined benefit scheme.

A dispute is also underway at Northumbrian Water where the company is attacking the final salary pension scheme.

Water provision, a vital public service, should never have been privatised.

Socialists argue for the renationalisation of the water companies, under the democratic control and scrutiny of the local and national population.

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## **Workplace news in brief**

## **Blacklisted action**

The Blacklist Support Group is holding a blacklisting day of action on 7 December starting with a 'photo opportunity' at 9am outside Royal Courts of Justice on the Strand, London before the High Court blacklisting litigation which is open to the public. The day in court is followed by a Blacklist Support Group parliamentary meeting at 6pm with speakers including MP and shadow chancellor John McDonnell, Chris Stephens MP, John Hendy QC and blacklisted workers.

## **Youth ignored**

Shop workers' union Usdaw has ignored views of its own Young Workers Committee and nominated two Progress supporting candidates for the chair and NEC of Labour Youth. At a recent Usdaw Young Workers Committee meeting, those attending were told that 'it would be inappropriate' for them to discuss the issue. This follows occasions when motions to the TUC Young Workers conference which Usdaw delegates were expected to move, are put through without consultation. The selection of two Progress supporting candidates by Usdaw's leadership, as opposed to the left candidates favoured by the Young Workers Committee, also shows that they are part of the campaign to undermine Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party by placing those hostile to him in positions of power.

## **EDF strike**

A week-long strike by EDF energy workers carrying out smart meter installations, due to start on 30 November, was suspended for talks through the conciliation service, Acas. About 70 staff at EDF headquarters at Bexleyheath, Kent and Canning Town, east London were due to strike from midnight on 30 November until midnight on 4 December. Unite regional officer Onay Kasab said: "While there is a list of grievances, the most important one for our members is working hours. The company wanted later working and increased Saturday working." Unite members had voted by a margin of 85% for strike action and 92% were in favour of industrial action short of a strike.

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# **Review - The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2**

## **Tense revolutionary finale ignores mass democracy**

**Mary Finch, Leeds Socialist Party**

The final instalment of the Hunger Games movie franchise, Mockingjay - Part 2, was a tense and exciting end to the series. Where Part 1 focused almost exclusively on love triangles and rebels making propaganda films, as filler for lack of plot, Part 2 goes headfirst into a revolutionary war.

But the struggle to defend the gains of the oppressed Districts' revolution doesn't just stem from the dictatorial Capitol they rose up against.

The film centres on a fight for democracy within the revolutionaries themselves. Their unelected leader, President Coin, has no accountability and receives no input from the working class rebels of the Districts.

Rather than fighting to defend a mass revolution, she quickly begins to see the war in terms of her own

individual power. To this end, she uses the same brutal tactics of the Capitol - bombing children and civilians - rather than minimising violence as much as possible.

She prevents Katniss, the film's protagonist and symbolic leader of the revolution, from fighting in battle. Instead she's used as a propaganda figure from the safety and comfort of headquarters.

Katniss's frustration with these tactics is immediately obvious. She sneaks onto an aircraft to join the front lines. Once there, she makes an appeal to the supporters of the Capitol rather than attacking them. "The only fight we have is the one the Capitol gave us!"

The same has happened in real revolutions. When 21 capitalist armies invaded Russia after the 1917 revolution, the Bolsheviks appealed to working class soldiers to fight against the capitalist class instead of for them.

The Bolsheviks also organised their military on a democratic basis, under the elected control of soldiers and workers. They defended the revolution on the basis of the whole working class, not individual leaders like Coin.

The battle against President Coin is also portrayed on a wholly personal basis. Katniss manoeuvres against her alone, making no effort to organise the masses of the Districts.

She makes plans to assassinate President Snow, the dictator in the Capitol. As if this will be enough to end the war - as if the entire system centres on Snow alone.

Killing individual rulers will never create lasting change in society: individuals can be replaced. We have to fight capitalism on a systematic, class basis, and replace it with socialism, bringing the government and economy under democratic workers' control.

This is the only way to break the cycle of oppression, poverty, and war. This is what the Socialist Party fights for.

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## A socialist Christmas gift guide

**What does a Socialist Party member buy their loved ones at Christmas? Certainly not rolling in money; unlikely to have loads of time to go shopping... Dave Gorton provides a few Xmas gifts suggestions.**

### Reading

Only one real place to start - the well-deserved 2015 Man Booker prize winner. Marlon James' *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is a phenomenal piece of literature mostly set in Jamaica with the infamous shooting of Bob Marley as its theme.

But the narrative is not about reggae; its backdrop is the intense rivalry between Michael Manley's People's National Party, which introduced massive reforms in the 1970s and Edward Seaga's right-wing Jamaica Labour Party. The violent gang warfare that split on party lines tore Jamaica apart at the time.

Also on the Man Booker shortlist was an excellent debut novel from Chigozie Obioma, *The Fishermen*. Set in Nigeria, reviewers have linked the style and atmosphere of the novel to Emile Zola, or, more recently, Cormac McCarthy.

The Book People are selling all six novels on the shortlist in hardback version for £30.

In non-fiction form, it's probably unsurprising that books about the reactionary, right-wing Isis abound. With any number to choose from, Patrick Cockburn's *The Rise of Islamic State: Isis and the New Sunni Revolution*, is probably the best read.

For something bridging entertainment and politics, Stuart Cosgrove's *Detroit 67: The Year That Changed Soul* is a wordy look at just one year in a momentous decade in US history.

While there is an argument that Detroit music at the time extended further than the boundaries of Motown, this is an unashamedly biased look at the music and its place in the struggles against the Vietnam War and the civil rights movements.

For the teenage reader a copy of Deborah Wiles' *Revolution*, set in mid-60s USA at the time of the Freedom Marches and civil rights movements and narrated mostly by a 12-year old, is a must.

## Listening

There have been some amazing compilation albums issued over the past year. Island's collection of 22 Reggae Discomixes is a double album set featuring the likes of Steel Pulse, George Faith, Burning Spear and Circle.

Virgin's own discomixes double album features Prince Far I, dub-poet Linton Kwesi Johnson (famous for his poems on racism and police brutality during the Thatcher years), Big Youth and Gregory Isaacs. Both of these are retailing at around £6. Both labels have also released Roots and Dub compilations.

2015 also saw a three-disc box set of punk poet John Cooper Clarke recordings, "Anthologia" featuring, of course, the still incredibly relevant "Beasley Street".

## Watching

There are some fairly obvious choices like *This is England 90*, or the second series of *Arne Dahl* and *The River* but the pick of this year could well be *The Detectorists*, McKenzie Crook's intelligently written, subtly funny and beautifully filmed comedy series set in the unlikely world of metal detecting.

Or why not take the opportunity to delve back a few years and (with Jeremy Corbyn's election) revisit *A Very British Coup*. It's based on the book by Chris Mullin in which the ruling class plot to overthrow a left-leaning Labour leader who wants to carry out unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Also very reasonably priced these days is *Our Friends In The North* (first screened in 1996) which covers, among other important historical events, the 1984-85 Miners' strike.

There is also Ken Loach at the BBC box set which features, among others, the ground breaking drama on 1960s homelessness, *Cathy Come Home*.

## Wearing

The expansion of the logo'd t-shirt industry has brought many horrendous, and some incredibly chauvinist, designs in recent years but there are good ones worth hunting out online. Try Comrade Apparel, where among more obvious offerings you can find rather appealing Battleship Potemkin and Factory Records shirts at under a tenner.

Over at Red Molotov, you can become almost certainly the only person down your street with a



Tatlin's Tower shirt, celebrating the designed but never built Constructivist headquarters of the Comintern after the Russian Revolution.

A bit more expensive at Philosophy Football, but your gift of a Bandiera Rossa or a The Band Played Waltzing Matilda shirt will surely be appreciated.

Finally, as a stocking filler, why not the Corbyn Colouring Book?!

- For more gift ideas, visit [www.leftbooks.co.uk](http://www.leftbooks.co.uk)
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## Letters

### Do you have something to say?

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

We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

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### Tax attacks

Recently everyone in work received an income tax statement for 2014-15. On the reverse side was government propaganda attempting to justify their dismantling of the welfare state. It was a breakdown of "how your tax was spent".

By far the largest section was on welfare. In reality this does nothing more than illustrate the failure of a system which allows the super-rich to place so many people in poverty - through mass exploitation, making themselves even richer. Meanwhile, ironically, many of them pay no income tax whatsoever.

**Jon Elvin, Hillingdon**

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### Classroom cuts

At a local state school near Bristol, the headteacher has sent a letter to all parents asking them to donate money to pay for three teachers and other shortfalls due to cuts.

The parent-teacher association is used to being asked to help fund one-off projects, but never to pay for teachers and general running costs. Is this the way things will go under austerity?

We should demand all schools are properly funded by the government and parents should not be asked to contribute to running costs. All schools should be brought back into local authority control and democratically run. Jeremy Corbyn must make this commitment loudly and clearly.

**Alan Marshfield, Bristol**

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## Rail fail

Aslef, the train drivers' union, has produced the 'Rail Franchise Handbook 2015'. It's essential reading for trade unionists and campaigners to get some facts and figures about the effects of privatisation.

The booklet includes details of which companies are involved, subsidies received and profits. "But," I hear you ask, "what about the pay for directors? Do they get enough to scrape by on?"

Well, just about. The highest paid director would appear to work for Southern, and in 2014 got "emoluments" of £485,000. That is a lot of overtime even by rail industry standards.

Further info on [www.aslef.org.uk](http://www.aslef.org.uk)

An Aslef member

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## Pressure power

The recent tax credits u-turn of sorts from Gideon the Greedy proves that the seemingly inevitable does not have to be so. So how can we mobilise working people to stand up for themselves?

It cannot simply be about winning elections. This is not to say that giving people an alternative on ballot papers is not important. Indeed, it is why I hope to stand as a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in next May's local elections where Labour cannot give assurances they will actually oppose austerity in both word and deed.

This is hardly asking much of them - it was, after all, the platform upon which Jeremy Corbyn was overwhelmingly elected as their leader.

The Labour Party is all about fighting elections. As a recent ex-member before joining the Socialist Party, I know this only too well. They are convinced that if you knock on enough doors, and deliver enough leaflets, then you will win.

However, "we're not the Tories" is not an alternative when you have accepted their political narrative. Aligning themselves with measures started by Thatcher, continued under Blair and Brown, and accelerated by the Con-Dems, has ended up with two general election defeats against a very unpopular Conservative Party.

Our fight must also be on the ground - taking our message to working people in workplaces and local trade union branches.

Tax credit cuts were not a fait accompli. The House of Lords would never have voted against the bill without pressure and opposition from below. Proof to Labour - if ever it were needed - that you do not have to be in power to effect change.

Richard Price, Gloucestershire

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## Christmas 'collectathon': 8 to 17 December

Ken Douglas, Socialist Party national treasurer

We are appealing to all our readers and supporters to help the Socialist Party hit our target of £35,000 for the final quarter of the year, enabling us to achieve a record fighting fund total for 2015.

Socialist Party members have already set a record in raising over £30,000 for the recent Socialism 2015 appeal. A quarter of that total is going towards the Committee for a Workers' International special appeal, so we still have some way to go to reach £35,000.

We are calling for a ten day collectathon from 8-17 December to help boost our chances of hitting the target. We are asking branches to extend their Saturday campaign stalls and plan one on

the Sunday too as there will be plenty of Christmas shoppers about.

Christmas is also the time of parties - you can enjoy yourselves and raise some funds for the Socialist Party!

Wirral branch has been leading the way on campaign stalls - members have raised over £1,300 since the beginning of October campaigning in Birkenhead. Dave Jones reports:

"On the past two Saturdays we've campaigned against NHS cuts for two and a half hours raising about £140 each time. We then did another stall on zero-hour contracts for 90 minutes with two new members, raising about £50."

Socialist Party members have also been hard at work campaigning in support of the action by junior doctors to defend their terms and conditions; supporting the demonstration against climate change and opposing the bombing of Syria.

That's why the fighting fund is so important - it helps finance all our campaigning work; it enables us to produce leaflets and posters, placards and banners for these demonstrations, building support for socialist ideas. We also recently lost six of our striking red gazebos to the wind, which need to be replaced.

Every donation and every pound raised will help us get to our target and enable us to go into 2016 with the resources to face the battles ahead.

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## **Karl Marx Walk**

See the places where he worked, lived and drank in Soho and Covent Garden and hear about his revolutionary life.

Saturday, 5 December, 2.30pm. Meet next to Eros statue, Piccadilly Circus, W1. £7 (£4 concessions)  
Tour will last about an hour and a half. Contact: Pete 07866 438779

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## **Workers snap up the Socialist!**

In the run up to the Waltham Forest 'Homes for All' march on 21 November (see issue 880), sellers of the Socialist sold copies for £5, £7, £10 and £20!

The Socialist newspaper is indispensable when campaigning. For just £1 you can pick up anti-austerity news.

But many people are happy to pay a lot more like those who were particularly impressed by our bold

front page condemning the vicious Paris terror attacks as well as any pro-war or racist backlash.

The Socialist relies purely on donations from working class people like this.

Also, in recent weeks over 400 copies of the Socialist have been sold in Scunthorpe to workers and people in the community who agree with our analysis of the steel crisis and that nationalisation is the best way to save jobs.

**Ian Pattison, the Socialist campaign organiser**

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## **Protesters demand system change not climate change**

Protesters around the country marched on 29 November, to demand action to tackle climate change. Organisers claim 50,000 demonstrated in central London with thousands more on the streets in Cardiff, Bristol, Edinburgh, Belfast, Southampton and more.

The protests coincided with the start of a United Nations climate change summit in Paris (see page 3) with campaigners claiming that a total of 785,000 people marched in 2,300 cities in 175 countries. This included hundreds in Paris itself who were tear-gassed and arrested by police as the recent terrorist attacks in Paris were used to ban the proposed demonstration there.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn spoke at the London demonstration and received the best response but not one speaker called for public ownership or planning as a way to stop global warming.

In contrast, Socialist Party members called for 'System change, not climate change!' with leaflets, a special edition of Socialism Today on saving the environment. 50 copies of the Socialist were sold. They also met many protesters interested in the ideas and activities of the Socialist Party.

**Scott Jones**

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## **Demonstration against the war**

On Saturday 28 November Socialist Party members participated in the protest against the bombing of Syria. The Socialist Party linked the need to oppose the bombs with the need to organise resistance to Labour's right-wing. In Waltham Forest, Socialist Party members leafleted mosques calling for lobbying of local MP Stella Creasy to oppose war. The leaflet said voting with the Tories would be "a gross act of betrayal and will play its part in the continuing violence."

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## **FBU fights the cuts in Yorkshire**

**Malik J Rafidi, Selby Socialist Party**

Selby Socialist Party is supporting the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in their campaign against fire service cuts in North Yorkshire, collecting 248 names to add to the FBU petition online that has

gathered over 2,600 signatures.

Proposed cuts will put residents, workers and firefighters at risk across North Yorkshire with response times, crew numbers and available equipment all jeopardised.

North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service is currently consulting on £1.2 million worth of cutbacks. These include plans to reduce crew levels and equipment at six fire stations, as well as replacing some fire engines with smaller 'response vehicles'.

The FBU has raised concerns that fire engines, which are usually mobilised within two minutes during the day, will be delayed for five to nine minutes as a result. The FBU brigade secretary says in some areas the response times will even increase by eight to 15 minutes!

## **Dangers**

Further cuts to Selby and the support station at Tadcaster will have a massive effect, particularly in the event of a large fire. Dangers were highlighted through a fire at a nearby salad factory in September, when it was necessary to deploy firefighters from seven surrounding stations.

The decision regarding the cuts will be made on 9 December, with the FBU holding a rally and protest at the North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service training centre in Easingworld.

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21842>