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After the Syria vote

How can Corbyn and the left win the civil war in the Labour Party?

- Stop the war on Syria
- Kick out all the warmongers

Working class and young people don't want this war. Hundreds of thousands have protested, signed petitions, and written to and lobbied MPs.

Bombing Syria won't make Britain safer. And it certainly won't make ordinary Syrians safer.

Yet the Tories, true to form, couldn't care less about our views or our lives. And shamefully 66 Labour MPs sided with the government instead of their anti-war party leader Jeremy Corbyn and the majority of their constituents.

An urgent discussion is needed on tactics for a mass movement against the war and against austerity, including how we can win a party that represents that kind of a movement at the ballot box, in parliament and in the council chambers.

Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party is at a turning point. On the one side we had the shameful 66 Labour MPs who voted to support the bombing of Syria, thereby bolstering the Tory government. This sparked intense anger from working class people and the overwhelmingly anti-war youth.

It was a serious mistake for Jeremy Corbyn not to implement a whip and parliamentary discipline on such a key issue. The argument that MPs must have 'freedom of conscience' doesn't hold water. The right do not practice what they preach - in 1935 George Lansbury was removed as Labour leader because of his stand on the issue of war and peace. Jeremy Corbyn should have insisted on a whip in order to demonstrate the role of these traitors who've sustained the Tory government.

In the run up to the vote the right made their feelings very clear. They want to try to remove Jeremy Corbyn at the earliest opportunity. Labour MP Frank Field has even suggested that there could be two leaders - one for the parliamentary party and then Corbyn for the wider party, with an obvious view to leave him with little or no real power.

Labour Lord Rooker said in the House of Lords: "We have to get rid of him." These are the views of the overwhelming majority of the right-wing parliamentary party.

We even saw in the House of Commons open congratulations to Hilary Benn from Maria Eagle, who reached across Jeremy Corbyn to pat Benn on the knee. This, for Benn's closing speech for Labour in the bombing debate, arguing against Corbyn and in alliance with the Tories - a speech lauded by the Tories and their press and the people who are pressing for wider war in the Middle East.

It was scandalous that he invoked the traditions of internationalism of the labour movement by trying to associate with the International Brigades - the men and women who went to fight heroically against fascism in Spain. This was the same argument that Blair used to justify the Iraq invasion in 2003. The traditions of internationalism of the labour movement have nothing in common with imperialism's attempt to interfere and compound the problems of Syria and the Middle East.

Lies

Julian Lewis, a right-wing Tory, spoke more truth than these pro-war 'Labour' MPs. He said that the claim that there are 70,000 local land forces who will be the ground troops in Syria was bogus, the equivalent of the 'dodgy dossier' on weapons of mass destruction that was used as justification in the invasion of Iraq.

Patrick Cockburn in the Independent wrote that Professor Joshua Landis, an expert in Syrian politics, "is dismissive of the idea that such a potential army exists, though he says there might be 70,000 Syrians with a gun who are fighting for their local clan, tribe, warlord or village", who are not a unified force.

On the other hand, we had the Oldham by-election, which has given pause for thought to the right wing. The Labour Party did significantly better than was expected and hoped for by the right. But the media immediately claimed it was nothing to do with Corbyn's leadership but instead was a victory for Jim McMahon, the right-wing 'local' candidate who was previously leader of Oldham council which has made draconian cuts.

One senior Labour MP was quoted in the Observer as saying that because of a high turnout from anti-war Asian voters: "The timing was very lucky for him. It was not a vote of confidence in Labour. You should remember this was a campaign in which Corbyn was airbrushed out. It was as if he did not exist."

However, if Labour had been defeated this would have been blamed on Corbyn. This is going to be the pattern of the arguments of the right wing and the media. For them Corbyn is in a no-win situation. If he wins elections, 'it's not him, it's the right's win'. If he loses, then 'it's down to Corbyn's leadership'.

The same thing will be done in the run-up to next year's local elections, particularly in relation to the London mayoral race or any byelection.

The right are conducting a war of attrition. They probably feel that in the wake of Oldham they can't strike immediately, but they hope for death by a thousand wounds. How will Jeremy Corbyn resist this?

The right have made it clear that this is a fight to the finish - they have declared civil war against the left. How should we respond? The issue of mandatory re-selection has correctly received much attention recently. It's not just the left who are demanding re-selection - this isn't just a re-run of earlier battles in the labour movement. This is communities and young people demanding re-selection.

Young people are furious at the idea that their future is being put in jeopardy and that bombings could take place in London because of the criminal responsibility of their 'elders', the capitalist politicians. And people also associate this with austerity, which was the main factor in the revolt of young people that won Jeremy Corbyn the Labour leadership campaign.

But like classical reformists, who in this period cannot carry through reforms, Corbyn and his team irritate the ruling class who want to get rid of them from the leadership of the party, but also fail to satisfy the demands of working people, particularly young people, for decisive action.

This is reflected in Momentum. Tom Watson has used the same terminology that was used in the past

against Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party) and others on the left, that Momentum is a "party within a party" and should be disciplined. What they want is that the right should be organised - as they have made abundantly clear - but the rank and file and the left should not be organised.

How does the leadership of Momentum respond to this? They suggest their own form of a witch-hunt - as shown by the disgraceful attacks of the Momentum leadership on Socialist Party members in Waltham Forest, and particularly Nancy Taaffe, for arguing for re-selection and democratisation of the Labour Party [see: [After the vote in parliament to bomb Syria](#)].

They do not seem prepared to discuss and debate these ideas. Momentum nationally has now stated that Socialist Party members and other non-Labour Party members won't be allowed to take part in Momentum decision-making meetings.

They won't succeed in their attempts to ignore the arguments of the Socialist Party, which reflect the growing demands of the rank and file, because a movement is growing at the base and in the trade unions - inside and outside the Labour Party.

There is a revolt, not just against the bombing of Syria, but also against austerity. There will be demands for Labour-led local authorities to stand up against the £10 billion of cuts that are coming.

No-cuts budgets

These cuts will not primarily be implemented nationally but by devolving responsibility and blame to local councils for the most savage cuts yet seen in Britain. For Labour-led councils to just hold their hands up and say they can't intervene is a scandal and there will be increasing demands for them to resist.

The right-wing parliamentary Labour Party will try to force Corbyn and Momentum to stop the demands for no-cuts budgets at local level.

The Momentum leadership seems to think that the only way we can strengthen Jeremy's leadership is by mollifying the right and, for example, backing away from re-selection. If they continue with this approach there is a real danger that the support for Jeremy Corbyn could ebb and the right wing can choose their time to wield the dagger and force him out.

The potential for this has been there since Corbyn was elected.

This is not the time for prevarication - we must ensure that Corbyn and the left win. That means winning a mass, democratic, open and accountable party, organised on a federal basis and with socialist ideas at its heart. This is the only type of party that would be capable of fundamentally solving the problems facing working class people and offering a different, better future to all.

Video: Socialist Party on BBC 2's Daily Politics show - Nancy Taaffe and James Ivens defend re-selection

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Hilary Benn's pro-war speech

International Brigades fought against

capitalism, not for it

Scott Jones

Hilary Benn's 'electrifying' speech for bombing Syria outrageously invoked the International Brigades in support of imperialist bloodletting.

The brigades fought alongside mass popular resistance in the 1936-39 Spanish Civil War to stem the tide of fascism. Thousands of working class people from across Britain, including many from my hometown Blackwood in south Wales, went in solidarity with the Spanish revolution.

The 'typical' volunteer from South Wales was, of course, a miner. Usually unemployed due to the Great Depression or trade union activities, he would have taken part in many working class and anti-fascist struggles.

From Britain's 1926 general strike, to the 1936 Battle of Cable Street - where trade unionists fought police to prevent fascists marching - with hunger marches and demonstrations in between. South Wales miners formed the largest regional grouping in the brigades' British battalion.

Sacrifice

Their struggle was later immortalised by working class Welsh rockers the Manic Street Preachers. Their 1998 number one record about the Spanish Civil War, 'If You Tolerate This Your Children Will Be Next', features a line attributed to a Welsh volunteer: "If I can shoot rabbits, then I can shoot fascists."

In total, over 2,500 men and women from Britain and Ireland voluntarily travelled to Spain to defend the elected Popular Front government of the Spanish republic against the forces of Franco, Hitler and Mussolini. The 40,000 volunteers from across the globe were an unprecedented example of international solidarity.

They gave up everything. Many literally gave up their lives, including 500 from Britain and Ireland alone.

Benn compares this to the sectarian civil war in Syria, where there is no obvious independent working class or socialist force leading mass resistance.

This is both wrong, and an insult to those who consciously fought against the forces that invented the systemised bombing of civilians, at Guernica. We will now see similar bombings repeated in Syria.

Fighting fascism?

It's also worth noting that the British state did nothing to aid the Spanish Republic in its unsuccessful struggle against fascist invasion.

This is despite Hilary Benn's claims that parliament "stood up against Hitler and Mussolini" and for "justice". On the contrary, it actually attempted to stop International Brigades and other anti-fascist forces from obtaining weapons to fight.

The US-led coalition which Britain is now part of is bombing a beaten and confused population to bolster its prestige and defend its profits.

These bloody imperialist aims are a million miles away from the goals of working class men and

women in the International Brigades who fought alongside the Spanish people against fascism, imperialism and capitalism.

The International Brigades fought for socialism. They embody the true spirit of internationalism which Benn tried to invoke - not RAF Tornados on million-pound air raids for capitalism.

Socialist Party on TV

Defending the right to deselect warmongers on the Daily Politics

The Socialist Party's Nancy Taaffe took on the Tory and Blairite warmongers on the BBC's Daily Politics show on 3 December.

Nancy, a member of the Waltham Forest branch in east London, answered lies about the local community 'intimidating' their MP on a march against war.

There was huge sentiment in the borough against bombing, and right-wing Labour MP Stella Creasy ignored it. Nancy called for mandatory re-selection to take on pro-war, pro-austerity representatives.

And when right winger John Mann MP tried to attack Nancy with slurs, she responded by exposing his politics. "He's a member of millionaire tendency!"

"He represents the past, a rump that existed around Blair. But the new Corbynistas who came in their thousands to represent Corbyn's anti-war message over the summer represent the future."

Less than a week after Nancy, the Socialist Party's James Ivens appeared on the Daily Politics on 8 December to defend deselection of Blairites who are attacking Corbyn.

James, a member of Lambeth branch in south London, rubbished claims the Socialist Party 'hijacked' a Momentum meeting in his borough. Big sections of Labour members, and millions of people outside Labour, see two Labour Parties in one. They want to see Jeremy Corbyn's Labour fight back against the Labour of Tristram Hunt, Hilary Benn, Tom Watson and other Tories in red ties.

Like Nancy, James argued for the Socialist Party to be allowed to affiliate to Labour, just as the Co-operative Party is now. But the Socialist Party will fight for socialism: for a society owned and run democratically by and for the 99%, not the 1%.

Young people accused of extremism for questioning government and media

Lily Douglas, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

I am a 15-year-old who was asked to write about child protection officials' outrageous political attack on young people. A London borough has said youth who question the government or mainstream media may be extremists!

As a young person who is fighting the Tory government - and disagrees with basically everything the media says at the moment - I have to admit... I am not happy with that statement. I think many will be angry, especially the students at my school.

There has been uproar about the decision to bomb Syria. Despite what some people think about us, young people know what happens in this world and we feel the effects like everyone else.

Obviously, right-wing MPs like Stella Creasy do not think so. One of my friends tweeted Creasy the "Miley, what's good?" meme - challenging her to explain her hypocrisy over Syria. Creasy tweeted back telling her to go to the secret 'public' meeting she had called to justify voting for bombing!

Another friend tweeted Creasy that she used to be her role model, but not anymore. Guess what Creasy said back? Nothing. She ignored her.

In our citizenship class the Friday after the vote to bomb, we were being taught about 'British values'. Our teacher was not too happy about my friends' tweets.

We were told 'British values' are democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance. Apparently we have no right to 'bombard' Stella Creasy because we are breaking 'our' British values of tolerance and mutual respect.

But bombing and killing children is OK? Where is her 'respect' for the victims of bombs - or young peoples' views at home? And where is the 'democracy' in her voting for war against the wishes of 75% of her own party's members?

Nationalise rail now! Fares and profits rise as service suffers

Lisa Bainbridge, rail commuter

Rail fares are set to increase by 1.1% from January next year, set by July's 'retail price index' (RPI) inflation rate.

Being heralded by operators as the lowest increase in six years, for those who rely on the railway it's not much to celebrate. It's another reminder that when it comes to wages, pensions or benefits the lower 'consumer price index' (CPI) is considered the measure of inflation. But when it comes to private profits, the bosses insist on the much higher RPI rate.

For people who use public transport, it again means a little bit less left in the pay packet at the end of each month. It's a further reminder of how privatised rail has failed those who rely on it.

Annual turnover at South West Trains topped £1 billion this year. £11 million was paid out to shareholders. And the man in charge received an inflation-busting increase of 13% - lifting his salary to £465,000.

Meanwhile, South West passengers continue to be less than impressed with performance, with just 35% saying their ticket price offered value for money.

Tory election promises to invest are already coming off the rails, with major delays to promised upgrades. Parliament's Public Accounts Committee described the overruns and overspends as "staggering and unacceptable".

Even in the face of these failures, and 58% of the public wanting railway renationalisation, the Tories press on. The Socialist Party fights to make the public sentiment for nationalised transport a reality - with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

Chancellor George Osborne announced in his Autumn Statement that he will sell a further £1.8 billion worth of Network Rail assets.

The Tories are all too ready to use taxpayer money to bail out private firms when it all goes wrong. It seems more zero-risk, dividend-paying investments are on the horizon for capitalists.

Tax-dodging drug firm shuts research facility

Jon Dale

Pfizer has announced the closure of a Cambridge research institute. The world's biggest pharmaceutical company will axe 120 scientists' and support workers' jobs.

Pfizer says it is moving from pain relief research - carried out at Cambridge - to other fields. Only last year it wrote to MPs saying this site showed its "commitment to Research and Development in the UK and around the globe."

It said "the need for significant innovation combined with the sheer size of the potential patient pool ...will ensure pain remains a key target area for [Cambridge]."

Last month Pfizer bought Irish-based pharmaceutical company Allergan for £107 billion. It can now claim it is based in Ireland rather than the USA.

US corporation tax is 35%. In Ireland it's 12.5%!

With 128 subsidiaries in tax havens, Pfizer already registered £46 billion profit outside the USA in 2013.

Pfizer's 2014 profit was £15 billion - 42% of its income. This included a one-off £7 billion from selling its animal health business. Even without that, its profit margin was still 24%.

The NHS is massively overcharged by the pharmaceutical industry. The cost of Pfizer's epilepsy treatment, phenytoin, soared from £2.3 million in 2012 to £50 million in 2013, and remained over £40 million last year!

Pharmaceutical companies' main aim is to make profit, not to research and develop new treatments.

Society must keep scientists' skills and the Cambridge facilities. They should be used to benefit humanity, not greedy shareholders.

Taking the whole industry into socialist public ownership would mean scientists, health workers and governments could democratically plan research to meet real health needs.

The United States has fined Swiss drug maker Novartis £260 million for paying pharmacies to recommend inferior medicines with severe side effects. The US originally wanted to fine the firm £2 billion - it has conceded almost 90% of the penalty. Novartis netted nearly £7 billion profits in 2014.

Them & Us

Carbon inequality

The richest 10% produce nearly half the world's lifestyle-related carbon dioxide emissions.

Not content with living lives of luxury off the back of our hard labour, the super-rich are now literally poisoning us.

Oxfam reports that the top decile of earners belch out 49% of CO2 from lifestyle activity. This seems a lot, but presumably includes frequent flights and SUVs. And the Socialist would remind readers that the west wing of the country pile isn't going to heat itself.

Meanwhile, the poorest half of the world's population only put out about 10% of the total.

This figure will largely be made up of the world's poorest nations. But working class people of every country have to deal with the effects of climate change.

As we go to press, emergency services in Chennai, India and Cumbria, England are dealing with the effects of extreme weather on ordinary people's homes. But rising sea levels will only lap at the lower floors of the capitalists' ivory towers.

Sun's terror untruth

Terrorists can travel from Turkey to Paris without once facing passport checks. You couldn't make it up! Well... the Sun did.

Rupert Murdoch's Tory tabloid's latest total lie said a reporter faced no border control on his journey. Croatian authorities quickly responded with scans of his passport to prove they'd inspected him.

The right-wing media wants hysteria about terrorism to advance its racist, pro-war agenda. Making workers suspicious of each other is essential to undermine mass movements against the austerity policies which make Murdoch's millionaire mates richer still.

Quiz of the year

It's the quiz of 2015, compiled by the Socialist. The questions are drawn from articles covering events in the UK and internationally during the last year. Good luck and season's greetings.

Quote, unquote

- 1) Who described corruption allegations against him a "witch-hunt"?
- 2) Who was judge Lord Burns referring to when he said: "Not every lie amounts to perjury"?
- 3) Who admitted engaging in "vanilla bland" tax avoidance?
- 4) Who did the IPCC not prosecute "because of the passage of time"?

- 5) Who described disgraced Top Gear presenter Jeremy Clarkson a "friend" and "a huge talent"?
- 6) Whose Great British Bake Off's racist comment caused a media storm?
- 7) Who called for "a proper revolution" on BBC Question Time?
- 8) Who dismissed the all-London bus drivers' strike for equal pay as "ridiculous"?
- 9) Which Tory peer wrote to the Cayman Islands government dismissing the UK government's tax avoidance measures as a "purely political gesture"?

Whereabouts?

- 1) Which country voted to legalise same-sex marriage?
- 2) Where did a public sector general strike take place on 13 March?
- 3) Where did the biggest general strike (possibly ever) take place?
- 4) Where did teachers' strikes, combined with student and parent protests, stop local schools becoming academies?
- 5) Where did steelmaking end after 100 years?
- 6) Where did the death in police custody of black American Freddie Gray spark mass protests and a state of emergency being declared?

Who and whom

- 1) Whose murder triggered a near collapse of the power-sharing Northern Ireland Executive?
- 2) Whose revelations about David Cameron's alleged porcine activities temporarily diverted press headlines from attacking Jeremy Corbyn?
- 3) Whose reward for saving people from a fire was a £9,000 a year pay cut?
- 4) Whose "defeat devices" led to a global fraud?
- 5) Who in the UK got a 10% pay rise?
- 6) Whose secretive private banking arm assisted the super-rich to dodge taxes and conceal billions of dollars in assets?
- 7) Who has been charged with false imprisonment of the deputy prime minister?
- 8) Who won higher pay, permanent jobs and improved working conditions after all-out strike action?
- 9) Who was removed from office by an Election Court judge?
- 10) Name the peer who resigned over a sex and drugs scandal.
- 11) Who lost \$4 trillion in June?
- 12) Name the satirical French magazine whose staff were murdered by Islamist terrorists?

- 13) Name the company which quit running Hinchingsbrooke NHS hospital?
- 14) In October, who lost the shirts off their backs?
- 15) Who, having told Greek workers to accept austerity, turned out not to have paid taxes?
- 16) Who said they wouldn't oppose Chancellor Osborne's welfare cuts?

Playing the percentages

- 1) What percentage of trade union members must vote to trigger a valid strike ballot according to the government's (anti-) Trade Union Bill?
- 2) What percentage of the electorate voted Tory in May's general election?
- 3) What percentage of homes in England was deemed "unaffordable" for an average income family?
- 4) What percentage vote did Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn receive in his successful election?
- 5) In a July referendum, what percentage of Greek voters rejected austerity?
- 6) According to the Office for National Statistics, what increased by 19% last year?
- 7) Whose 55.5% of the vote secured re-election?

In numbers

- 1) How many Syrian war refugees will the Tory government resettle in the UK by 2020?
 - 2) How many MPs are private landlords?
 - 3) How many Labour MPs were elected from Scotland in May's general election?
 - 4) According to Oxfam, 80 billionaires globally own as much wealth as how many people?
 - 5) How long did the PCS union organised National Gallery strike last?
-

Answers

Quote, unquote

- 1) Fifa's ex-president, Sepp Blatter
- 2) Convicted ex-News of the World editor and Cameron spin doctor Andy Coulson during his abandoned perjury trial
- 3) Former Tory party treasurer, Lord Fink
- 4) South Yorkshire Police over assaulting striking miners in 1984 at Ogreave, and perverting the course of justice

- 5) David Cameron. In 2011 Clarkson called for striking public sector workers to be executed
- 6) Daily Mail columnist Amanda Platell. Disgracefully, the Mail later commented that winner Nadiya Hussain, a Muslim, came from Leeds as did three of the 7/7 London suicide bombers
- 7) Writer and broadcaster Coren Mitchell, regarding the current housing crisis
- 8) Transport minister Patrick McLoughlin
- 9) David Maclean, aka Baron Blencathra

Whereabouts?

- 1) The Irish Republic - 61% said yes
- 2) Northern Ireland
- 3) India. An estimated 150 million workers struck against the Modi government's anti-worker policies
- 4) Lewisham, south London
- 5) Redcar. SSI company was wound up on 2 October with the loss of 2,200 jobs
- 6) Baltimore, Maryland, USA

Who and whom

- 1) Ex-IRA member Kevin McGuigan
- 2) Former 'non-dom' and Tory deputy chairman, Lord Ashcroft
- 3) British Airways cabin crew who rescued 170 passengers aboard flight 2276 at Las Vegas airport
- 4) Volkswagen. The world's largest car manufacturer rigged engine pollution tests
- 5) MPs, (plus a £50,000 pension top-up) while imposing another year's pay freeze on public sector workers
- 6) HSBC in Switzerland
- 7) Irish Anti-Austerity Alliance TD (MP) and Socialist Party member Paul Murphy and other anti-water charges protesters, who peacefully blockaded Joan Burton's car
- 8) 117 hospital workers in Dundee
- 9) Tower Hamlets mayor Lutfur Rahman
- 10) Take your pick! In July it was the Lord's deputy speaker, Baron John Sewel
- 11) China's stock markets
- 12) Charlie Hebdo
- 13) Circle Health

14) Air France executives when their board meeting was stormed by striking workers protesting job losses

15) Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund

16) Interim leader Harriet Harman (only 48 out of 232 Labour MPs voted against the government)

Playing the percentages

1) A minimum 40% of eligible members must vote yes

2) 24%

3) 80%, according to homelessness charity Shelter

4) 59.5% first preference votes

5) 61.5%. Only for EU austerity measures to be passed by a majority of Syriza MPs

6) People employed on zero-hour contracts

7) Socialist Alternative's Kshama Sawant in Seattle's city council elections

Numbers

1) 20,000 or around six per constituency

2) 126 - one-in-five. That includes 89 Tory, 25 Labour and eight SNP MPs

3) One - Losing 40 of 41 seats previously held

4) 3.5 billion, 50% of the world's population

5) Eight months (3 February to 2 October), and was largely successful

French elections - Le Pen's far-right FN surges

Governing 'Socialist' Party punished for failings

Clare Doyle, Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

The massive vote for the far-right National Front (FN) in the first round of regional elections in France on 6 December saw them coming top in nearly half of the regions. The party's leader, Marine Le Pen, got 40% in the poorest of France's regions - Nord-Pas de Calais-Picardie.

Over 28% for the FN in this election is more than double the 13.6% they achieved in the last parliamentary election in 2012.

This does not come as a surprise. But nor is it due to the public mood that exists after the atrocities of the 13 November Paris attacks. Support for the FN has been growing under the leadership of Marine Le Pen since 2011. She has taken it onto a more populist tack than her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who

was an outright defender of the heinous policies and crimes of fascism.

After the second round of voting on 13 December, the FN is likely to take control in at least two regions - the run-down industrial region in the north and in the rich southern Cote d'Azur region, where the more extreme Marion Marechal-Le Pen heads the FN list.

The FN which is patently racist and xenophobic, constantly blames immigrants for the nation's problems. It is in favour of creating homes and jobs... but only for the French.

The FN has been able to make gains against both the ruling PS (Socialist Party) and the traditional right of Sarkozy's Party - the UMP, now known as the Republican Party (PR).

In spite of a rise in the personal popularity of President Hollande, Sunday's vote indicates a collapse of his PS.

The PS has withdrawn from the second round in the two regions most threatened with FN success. It is proposing a 'grand coalition' with the 'traditional' right PR to try and block the FN from taking power in any region.

The same proposal will no doubt arise when it comes to the presidential election in 2017, in which it is feared the FN will score another high vote.

The PR has declared opposition to such a deal, fearing further loss of support by any association with the crisis-ridden PS government of Hollande and Prime Minister Valls.

The vote for these two parties might have fallen even further relative to the FN, if they had not taken on board much of its repressive and nationalistic policies after the Paris atrocities.

The big vote for the far-right party is partially a protest vote, in the absence of forces on the left with a coherent alternative to the cuts and job losses of the incumbent parties. The main danger is that the FN can consolidate its support.

Abstention among those who say they are close to the left was in the region of 47%. The involvement of the 'Communists' of the PCF in government decisions means it has not been able to put up a serious opposition on behalf of workers and young people.

Marine Le Pen has voiced support for the problems of workers and, for her own nationalistic reasons, for retaining industries like transport in the hands of the French state. However, she has also attacked trade union struggles, such as in Air France, where the FN called the workers 'hooligans'.

Workers' struggles

The major trade union federation - CGT - linked with the 'Communist' Party of France, was pressed from below not to accept the prolongation of the state of emergency and the ban on demonstrations after the horrific killings in Paris. (The PCF deputies had supported the measure in the Assembly.)

The CGT membership saw it as a one-sided declaration of a truce in the struggle with the bosses and government that continue with their attacks. The federation leaders felt compelled to call a national day of action on 2 December, against the sackings at Air France and attacks on trade union rights and conditions in workplaces.

There is considerable anger building up among workers and young people on a number of important issues which can explode at any time. There could be outbursts of protest in the schools against the National Front's successes and in the factories against the arrogance of the bosses.

The level of abstentions among workers (62%) and young people (62%) is a condemnation of the failure of the 'traditional' parties to offer any solution to the problems which anger them.

The Left Front - consisting of Melenchon's Parti de Gauche, the PCF, some ecologists and others - has all but collapsed.

Gauche Revolutionnaire (CWI in France) has consistently argued that the only way to defeat the right and prevent the rise of the FN is with a mass campaign against austerity, job cuts and racism.

The FN has stolen the clothes of the left as well as the right and prospered. The workers' movement must reclaim and revive the 'traditional' programme of struggle and socialism in France.

Venezuela elections - capitalist opposition gains from economic crisis

The billionaire-backed conservative capitalist opposition, Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), won a large majority of parliamentary deputies in Venezuela's recent general election. This represents a big setback to the ruling United Socialist Party (PSUV) of president Nicolas Madura and to the 'Bolivarian revolution' legacy of Hugo Chavez.

MUD won a clear majority, heavily defeating the PSUV. It is the left's first major electoral defeat since 1998 when Hugo Chavez won the presidential election. Madura can expect attempts by MUD to unseat him in the coming months.

The ruling party's ebbing of popular support reflects the crisis gripping the economy. High inflation and chronic shortages of basic goods has hit hard working and middle class living standards. The economy, with its high dependency on oil export revenues, has suffered a major contraction with the fall in world oil prices. Petrodollars are vital for Venezuela's social welfare programmes. Corruption in official circles is also widespread.

Maduro has long complained of the economic sabotage by the capitalist class but has not taken decisive measures to take over the commanding heights of the economy and introduce a democratically managed plan of production.

The working class must now regroup around a programme of demands to resist an expected onslaught of austerity and attacks on workers' democratic rights from the capitalists.

Full analysis will appear on www.socialistworld.net

Northern Ireland: movement needed for abortion rights

Daniel Waldron, Socialist Party Northern Ireland

On 30 November, in a landmark case, Belfast High Court ruled that Northern Ireland's archaic abortion laws contravene human rights and that terminations should be permitted in cases of fatal foetal abnormality and where pregnancy is the result of sexual crime.

Up until now, abortion has been all but banned, except in circumstances where the woman's life or long-term health is directly at risk. Around 1,000 women travel from Northern Ireland to Britain every year to access abortions, costing each several thousand pounds.

The case was taken following public outcry against the treatment of Sarah Ewart. In 2013, this young woman found out she was carrying a foetus with anencephaly - a condition where the skull and brain do not properly form - and had no chance of survival after birth.

Disgustingly, Sarah was told that she could not have an abortion in Northern Ireland under existing rules and would have to carry the foetus to term. Rather than go through that unimaginable ordeal, she chose to travel to England for a termination, adding to her emotional distress.

Abortion in Northern Ireland is governed by the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act but even this 154-year-old legislation should have allowed Sarah Ewart to access a termination. It was the guidelines put in place by today's politicians in the local Assembly which prevented medical professionals from giving her the treatment she wanted and required!

All the main parties - Unionist and nationalist - are united in opposing a woman's right to choose. During the negotiations which brought about the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, one of the few things upon which politicians from across the sectarian divide were united was their determination that the 1967 Abortion Act would not be extended from Britain to Northern Ireland.

Unsurprisingly, the Democratic Unionist Party - dominated by religious fundamentalists - remains staunchly opposed to abortion in any circumstances. But even Sinn Féin - which styles itself as a 'progressive' party - has only belatedly come to support access to abortion in cases of fatal foetal abnormality this year, with opposition from some leading figures, and remains opposed to abortion rights for rape victims.

These politicians are out of touch with ordinary people, with polls showing a significant majority in favour of dramatically extending abortion rights.

The High Court's ruling will be appealed by anti-choice groups and face obstruction within the Assembly. An active movement on the streets is the best way to secure this victory and ensure that it is a first step towards winning women's right to control their own bodies.

The fight for abortion rights must be connected to a broader movement for real choice - for secular sex education in a school system currently dominated by the churches; for access to free contraception; for access to free IVF treatment; for jobs, homes and benefits which allow people to provide a decent life for children they do wish to have.

Ireland - defend the Jobstown protesters

#JobstownNotGuilty outside children's court 4 December. Several under 18-year olds are facing serious criminal charges because they protested against unjust water charges when the Tánaiste (deputy prime minister) Joan Burton visited Jobstown, near Dublin, in November 2014.

Socialist Party member and TD (MP) Paul Murphy, along with other anti-water charge protesters, has appeared in court to face 'false imprisonment' charges. The under-18s are in court again in January and adults on 14 December.

Paul Murphy speaks out against austerity and political witch-hunt at Socialism 2015 - see video www.socialistparty.org.uk

Sweden - public housing victory

Members of Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna (RS, Sweden CWI) are celebrating an important victory in the working class suburb Hammarkullen, Gothenburg.

Since 2012, RS has worked against private business being owners of big housing complexes and, at the same time, demanded renovations and public ownership of 890 rundown apartments in the area.

In October, information came that one of the publicly owned rental companies, Bostadsbolaget was interested in buying the houses. This came as a result of our campaign. But the right wing parties were trying to stop the deal in the city council.

We took a public statement with our demands to 16 local branches of the tenant's union. The west branch of the union, with 71,000 members, supported our statement and demo.

After two hours of debate in the city council the decision was taken to make the 890 apartments publicly owned!

Belgium - Party congress success

The 14th congress of LSP/PSL (Belgium CWI), was held recently. Some 130 delegates present discussed among other issues how to end this sick system of capitalism which creates mass poverty, endless wars and the conditions for terrorism to flourish.

The enthusiasm for the party's ideas and methods was reflected in the excellent financial appeal which raised over €14,000. The congress also launched three new books.

Floods reveal effect of government cuts

While the world's capitalist politicians currently meeting in Paris prevaricate over measures to halt global warming, hundreds of thousands of people - from Carlisle in Cumbria to Chennai in India - suffer the misery of increasing extreme weather events.

When floods devastated Cumbria in 2005 people were told it was a 'one-in-a-100 year event'. But the current flood is the third such disaster in a decade.

Last year the government was heavily criticised when floods inundated the Somerset Levels and the Thames Valley for cutting flood defence spending and Environment Agency jobs.

Environment Secretary Liz Truss claims the previous Tory-led coalition government increased real terms spending on flood defences. However, a National Audit Office (NAO) report published last year concluded that flood spending had actually fallen by 10% under the coalition government.

Now, in the current crisis, the Tory government has talked up a multi-billion pound capital spending programme for floods over the next six years. But commentators have reported that it has actually cut £115 million from flood management this year.

Environmental campaigners Friends of the Earth reckon there is a £2.5 billion hole in current flood defence plans.

And in his Autumn Statement, Chancellor George Osborne slashed spending by 21% at the Department for Energy and Climate Change and 15% at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Carlisle - lives and livelihoods devastated

'We're still waiting for investment promised in 2005'

Brent Kennedy, Socialist Party Carlisle

There's an army helicopter hovering overhead, three trees have been uprooted from the sodden ground in my street, one of them into next door's garden. My daughter's school is closed, but at least we've still got electricity this time.

The railway routes and the main roads to the north, west and east of Carlisle city centre are cut off by floodwater. Not only thousands of homes, but also several factories, supermarkets and industrial estates are awash, raising questions about the local economy and jobs when this is over.

The infrastructure has been hit, with power stations out of action, cutting off thousands. The civic centre is flooded again, which will cause disruption and huge costs for months, and the city council is now operating from Penrith, 20 miles away.

Ironically, the local Socialist Party branch had to call off its planned Saturday stall against council cuts to vital local services - one of our slogans being "save our fire stations and care homes".

Cameron has turned up for the TV cameras, but his promises of support will be as empty as John Prescott's 2005 post-flood guff about millions for a "Carlisle Renaissance" which never materialised.

Labour city and county councillors are slavishly refusing to fight Tory cuts to the local government services we now need. They must now stand up for our community or stand aside.

Residents will be homeless for up to a year as plaster and floorboards are ripped out. Instead of the financial and psychological costs of existing in cramped hotel and B&B rooms, the council should immediately requisition the 1,586 empty homes which it has just identified and make these available at fixed rents or charge the insurance companies.

Socialist Party member and textile worker Dave Barton was flooded out for ten months in 2005 in Warwick Road (which you'll have seen on the TV news). "My next door neighbour had to find his own salvage firm and then his own builders. We were held to ransom by the guys who hire out the dehumidifiers."

Martin, another socialist and building worker, was taken on then by one of the many cowboy firms from all over the country which swooped in and made a killing from flood victims. "Of 12 guys working there, I was the only one who hadn't done time. There was also corruption from the council and builders' merchants. Afterwards the residents paid through higher rents or insurance payments."

The much-vaunted new flood defences haven't been adequate against the second or third "one hundred year event" in parts of the county.

Cameron posed as leader of "the most green government ever" until he 'cut the green crap' and dropped measures to fight the climate change from which we are now undeniably suffering.

Capitalism's climate change policy failure

The following extract is from an article in the Socialist (issue 799) by Pete Dickenson published following the winter floods of 2014.

What is a long-term answer to the problem of flooding? First and foremost, this means tackling the root causes of climate change by switching to renewable energy, which could reduce the intensity of weather events, such as storms and floods.

Decisive action in this area, although crucial, will take decades to have an effect, so action is needed now to increase the capacity of the countryside to absorb rainfall, which has been significantly reduced by over-intensive agriculture, as well as strengthening flood defences.

Clearing uplands for sheep grazing has reduced the capacity of the land to absorb rainfall. Research has shown that full reforestation could reduce flooding peaks by 50%.

A policy to increase the capacity of the earth to hold water has been rejected by Cameron, in favour of dredging, but reforestation in the tropics to deal with flooding is a policy supported by his own government through the Department for International Development.

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A week in Walthamstow: Campaigning against our pro-war MP

Nancy Taaffe, Walthamstow

The drama that has played out in the community of Walthamstow, east London, in the last week is a sign of the fault lines which could affect Labour MPs everywhere. In the absence of Corbyn whipping his MPs, the struggle to compel them to vote against bombing Syria instead took to the streets and working class communities.

Many Walthamstow residents thought their letter writing campaign to local Labour MP Stella Creasy meant her 'no' vote was in the bag.

But as Sunday slipped into Monday and the vote loomed on the Wednesday, no news came from Stella that she was definitely going to vote against war. Like the sudden realisation that a love affair may be ending, the posts, tweets and discussions became more and more frantic and desperate.

On the Tuesday a vigil/demo was organised by Labour Party members and other local people. We marched from a local mosque to the Labour Party office. Children held candles in jam jars. The chanting varied from demands for peace, to a call for Stella to vote no. It was a completely peaceful local event.

Jam jars

As the debate began in Parliament on Wednesday morning, press reports began to emerge that the demo had marched to Stella's house. Other reports tried to suggest that jam jar-shaking kids were terrorising Stella's staff (who, it emerged, weren't even in the building). Stella didn't make any clear statement that this was not the case until three days later.

When her vote in favour of war was finally cast, a sense of bewilderment seemed to set in. Despair turned to anger and anger to rage.

Over a thousand people left messages on her Twitter and Facebook - including people who had voted and campaigned for her saying they could never do so again. Over 500 wrote emails - the vast majority to complain or ask questions.

On the Thursday I appeared on the Daily Politics show to counter some of the lies that had been told about the demo, and also to argue that the helplessness felt by this betrayal could be rectified if mandatory re-selection (see page 8) was reintroduced into the Labour Party.

This would make it much easier for the community, in this 'safe' Labour seat, to attempt to remove Stella as their MP and to ensure that she never did this to them again.

Suddenly a tiny number of abusive messages and even death threats - which are wrong and have no place in our movement - were being conflated with threats of re-selection.

We had to argue that, even though the threat of losing their cushy lifestyles and their peerages may feel like death, it is not a death threat - it is a democratic right.

Similarly we have the right to argue for this, whether we are in the Labour Party or not. Socialist Party members are pointing out the process of democratisation that would be necessary to transform the Labour Party into the anti-war, anti-cuts one urgently needed by the working class.

Tom Watson, deputy leader of the Labour Party, appeared in the media to threaten Labour Party members who organise demos like the one in Walthamstow with investigation. There were echoes of suspension and expulsion.

The Socialist Party answered the lies and bullying tactics of the Labour right wing - a right wing which

was furious with the mobilisation of pressure exerted from inside and outside of the Labour Party.

Like the movement to elect Jeremy Corbyn, the anti-air strikes movement did not bother to ask itself whether it was a card-carrying member of the Labour Party before getting organised.

Community

Such was the anger that engulfed the community, Stella was forced to organise a 'public' meeting. Everyone who wanted to go had to apply beforehand with full name and address to be checked against the electoral roll. Then they were supposedly at capacity so started turning people down.

And the venue was only announced one hour before the meeting was due to start - like a 90s rave. It was promised to be a 'central Walthamstow location' but ended up being in a school a 26 minute walk away from the station. How people with disabilities or the elderly were meant to get there is beyond me.

Scandalously her email responding to those requesting attendance said that this 'security' was because of: "the ongoing possibility of alternative political party representatives and campaign organisations from outside our community stating their intentions to disrupt this event".

It became clear this was directed at me and the Socialist Party when I arrived, despite an email telling me I wasn't welcome, and they tried to keep me out - including by physically resisting me entering the building.

My supposed threat to disrupt the event was that we intended to move a motion to the audience at the meeting.

Apologise

This called for Stella to apologise, issue a statement against bombing, get behind Jeremy Corbyn and if she refused, that we would call a vote of no confidence in her as our MP.

I eventually got into the meeting. And despite all those who were excluded, around 200 other people turned up - really impressive considering the clandestine conditions. I sat for an hour with my hand up and never got called in to speak or move our motion - despite other people in the room calling for me to be allowed to.

As the Socialist Party has explained, unless we can hold our political representatives to account in between elections, then they are free to betray us again and again. The Walthamstow community learnt something this week.

The Socialist Party was bold under pressure and steadfast in our politics. There will be political ramifications of this vote and we will play our part in struggling for a mass workers' party which has the right, not only to re-selection of candidates at election time, but to recall its MPs at any time.

Interview with new RMT president

Sean Hoyle, seafarer and Portsmouth RMT member, has been elected national President of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union RMT. He spoke to the *Socialist* about his victory.

What are the main tasks facing the RMT?

The Anti-Trade Union Bill is unfair, how can we respect the law of the land when it's one law for politicians and one law for the rest of us? As part of the TUCG [trade union coordinating group] we will be voicing our support for coordinated strike action by all trade unions to defend our rights at work.

Across our membership we are under attack. 20,000 jobs are under threat from the McNulty report, commissioned by right-wing Labour and implemented by the Tories, to get rid of the guard on every train and undermine passenger safety.

Similarly on the London Underground, where a passenger was stabbed in Leytonstone this week, half the staff face redundancy.

At sea we face low pay and deregulation, on the buses cuts to subsidies and services and offshore in the oil industry massive job losses and attacks on terms and conditions. Offshore workers currently do two weeks on, three weeks off but now face an increase to three and three which we oppose.

What is your view towards the election of Jeremy Corbyn?

We backed Jeremy Corbyn's election campaign but we need a socialist front bench alongside him and John McDonnell. That won't come by appeasing the right wing and giving the floor to Hilary Benn and those who voted for war.

I have spoken out against the bombing of Syria and the suffering it will mean. We didn't leave the Labour Party, the Labour Party left us. Bring back Clause 4, welcome all back into the party, we would support that tomorrow.

Labour councils must oppose all Tory cuts, if you want to carry through cuts, you are no friend of ours.

We continue to give support to the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition and to anti-cuts councillors like Kevin Bennett in Warrington, Keith Morrell and Don Thomas in Southampton, who back RMT policy. The debate will continue at our AGM next year.

What would you like to say to your supporters who helped with your campaign?

That the socialist left in the RMT is alive and well to continue the work of outgoing president, Peter Pinkney.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 8 December 2015 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Unison general secretary election in crisis

Neil Cafferky

The Unison general secretary election, and the union itself, were thrown into disarray last week with the release of a secret recording of a meeting of the London regional staff. In the meeting, held on 21 October, regional secretary Linda Perks can be heard organising staff to campaign for general secretary Dave Prentis.

Under Unison rules, the use of union resources by any candidate to promote their campaign is strictly

forbidden. This includes any paid employee of Unison campaigning on behalf of a candidate.

To understand the seriousness of what this recording alleges, it would be like David Cameron and the Tories using civil servants to campaign for them as part of their paid employment during a general election.

Serious rules broken

Speaking about the nomination process which had just concluded, Linda Perks congratulated staff members for securing Prentis nominations in the London region: "We have got almost 50 nominations here so that is excellent and thank you very much, Dave is very pleased and has asked me to relate this to you personally."

At the very least, the general secretary was aware of serious rule breaking occurring in the London region in support of his campaign.

The response from activists has been swift. Complaints to Unison president Wendy Nichols have flooded in from across the union.

As a result an investigation has begun, headed up by assistant general secretary Roger McKenzie. Linda Perks, a key figure in the high profile witch-hunt against four Socialist Party activists in the London region, has been relieved of her duties while the investigation takes place.

However, doubts remain about the appropriateness of Roger McKenzie as assistant general secretary, in effect investigating his boss, general secretary Dave Prentis.

Speaking to the Socialist, Unison general secretary candidate Roger Bannister said:

"It is clear the complaint is against the general secretary, among others. I do not believe that it is appropriate that Roger McKenzie investigates this complaint.

"This is not a criticism of Roger's integrity or competence. It is simply that as an assistant general secretary Roger is in a subordinate position to the general secretary, and any findings he makes will inevitably be judged in this light.

Investigation

"I have asked Unison to end the current investigation in favour of one conducted by a reputable, competent person, from outside the union and one agreed by all candidates in order to demonstrate neutrality and even-handedness."

Roger Bannister and Socialist Party members in Unison have also submitted complaints to the Electoral Reform Society (ERS), the body that oversees the election. However, some Unison activists privately raise concerns about the neutrality of the ERS Returning Officer following a recent ruling where the Prentis team were breaking procedures.

Given that Dave Prentis is clearly implicated in this scandal Unison activists are calling for him to stand aside during the investigation. A lobby of the Unison NEC will take place on 9 December with this demand.

A mass campaign among the membership will be necessary to bring to light rule breaking within the union. Alongside this, all avenues of investigation should be explored, including a complaint to the trade union certification officer.

Trade unions must join the fight for steel nationalisation

Matt Dobson, Socialist Party Scotland

The consultation period over the threatened Tata steel plants in Motherwell, Clydebridge and Scunthorpe has come to an end. Despite Scottish government taskforces meeting the threat of closure is not over.

There are rumours in the media that Tata has found three buyers who are bidding for the Scunthorpe steel plant.

On 7 December Scotland's Daily Record reported the SNP Scottish government are considering a short term subsidy for the steel plants in Lanarkshire. The SNP also claim they have buyers interested.

Christmas

While this subsidy over Christmas, if agreed, will be a relief to workers and communities with the immediate prospect of mass redundancies being avoided, it's not certain how long this subsidy can be paid and what strings are attached.

The workforce at both Motherwell and Clydebridge have been on short time working since early November and under the subsidy it seems this will continue, but why can't the Scottish government pay full wages to the steel workers? Why has the SNP government continued to drag the crisis on by insisting their preferred option is a private buyer?

The crisis over the closure of the Forth road bridge due to failing steel structures, which were contracted to Chinese companies, has again raised the issue of why Scotland's steel industry should be under public ownership and used for the necessary infrastructure projects.

Economic conditions show that even if private buyers for the plants are found, the factors causing the crisis in the industry are long term. National manufacturers' organisation EEF found that the steel industry is leading the fall of manufacturing in the UK.

Questions about the nature of private buyers have to be asked. The bosses are refusing to invest in manufacturing industry, investment is needed to protect the terms and conditions of steel workers and the long term future of the UK industry. There is a risk asset stripping can take place.

Public ownership

Trade unions at all the Tata plants and in the steel industry beyond, should convene an emergency meeting of shop stewards, across the industry, to organise a mass campaign.

This should draw in support from communities for nationalisation and to demand that no loss of pay and conditions takes place during short time working and consultation periods, over the future of plants, or if private buyers come in.

The trade unions cannot rely on taskforces involving the bosses who have mismanaged the industry to protecting the interests of the workforce. A discussion needs to take place among shop stewards and steel workers about tactics.

This should include occupations and industrial action to force the issue of nationalisation and a

fightback to protect terms and conditions, in the event of a private buyer, onto the agenda.

Mass support for nationalisation and a fight-back to save jobs exists in communities and Socialist Party Scotland has been to the fore, calling on the Scottish government to nationalise steel plants. At the Scottish Steel Taskforce we handed in a petition supporting nationalisation with 2,000 signatures, collected on street stalls locally.

Jeremy Corbyn

The case for nationalisation could have been made more clearly and energetically by Jeremy Corbyn. This would give confidence to trade unionists, workers and communities and the forces who support him in the conflict with the Blairites in Labour.

It's vital in the coming Scottish parliament election that candidates stand in Lanarkshire calling for nationalisation of the steel industry by the Scottish government and opposed to all cuts from Holyrood. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is willing to be a part of this.

Strike in support of suspended headteacher

Alistair Tice, Yorkshire Socialist Party

Members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) at Listerdale Primary School in Rotherham have taken two days of strike action, on 2 and 3 December, against the unjustified suspension of their headteacher.

The head was suspended by the Academy Trust in September at 8am one morning without union representation. The reasons for the suspension still haven't been made clear, even the head himself doesn't know!

The school was "academised" last year and is in budget deficit and the suspicion among staff is that the head's suspension is related to this.

NUT members began action short of a strike in late October against job cuts and reduced hours of teaching assistants and the increased workload due to the head's suspension. But the Academy Trust has refused any negotiations and stated that "the services of Acas are not required".

Most parents are supportive of the action - they weren't even informed that the head had been suspended until after half-term. 75 people, mostly parents, attended an NUT public meeting on 3 December.

One striking teacher told me: "Just out of interest I googled 'teachers strike' and was shocked by how many are going on around the country. But then felt re-assured that it's not just us."

The strike action forced the trust to meet the union at Acas on 4 December where they flatly rejected proposals to suspend strike action. Rotherham NUT secretary Fred Sprague said: "It seemed clear to us that the employer attended the Acas talks only under pressure from parents but with no intention of entering into any real discussion about how this dispute could be resolved."

Strike action involving the majority of teachers at the school has resumed again for three days on 8 December.

- Messages of support to Fred Sprague, email: secretary@rotherham.nut.org.uk

NSSN action in the North East

William Jarrett, National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) North East

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) in the North East organised two days of fighting action on 4 and 5 December, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Gateshead.

Working alongside an organiser from the bakers union (BFAWU), 4 December was spent at a massive shopping centre in Gateshead.

Staff were highly receptive to the call for a £10 an hour minimum wage and an end to zero-hour contracts.

Managers at a fast food chain expressed an interest in joining the union. But at another global restaurant chain, we had to inform the managers that it's workers who decide whether to join a union, not bosses deciding on their behalf.

We were back in action again on 5 December in Newcastle city centre. One sandwich chain employee was so enthused that he agreed to sign up to BFAWU on the spot, declaring his admiration for Seattle socialist councillor Kshama Sawant, and insisting that the Fight for 15 movement would work in the UK.

Later, the NSSN, BFAWU, and Unite the Union converged on Sports Direct. The horrors of employment in the retail chain's Shirebrook warehouse have had extensive press coverage (see issue 870) and a national Unite campaign.

Mike Ashley

Dozens of trade unionists with megaphones demonstrated and Unite petitions were quickly filled in and leaflets calling for an end to boss Mike Ashley's reign of employment terror were enthusiastically accepted by passers-by voicing their support for workers.

The weekend concluded with a public NSSN meeting. Speakers from affiliated unions the CWU, BFAWU, PCS and RMT, gave rousing calls to action. A local Unison branch chair insisted that efforts could be expected to change the fact that his union's logo isn't on the NSSN banner.

The NSSN has ambitious plans for 2016 and you can follow the NSSN North East on Facebook and Twitter: @NSSN_NE.

Workplace news in brief

Aspirations action

NUT members at Tech City academy in Islington, north London, are taking two days of strike action on 8 and 9 December and have planned a further three day strike in the following week. The college has been run by the Aspirations Academies Trust since 1 September - a Trust that runs 12 academies altogether. The management has refused to address the concerns of the teaching staff, despite these being raised by the NUT in a number of meetings. The teachers are requesting an agreed performance management policy which would include a limit of three lesson observations per year and to have

reasonable notice of them. The NUT produced a leaflet to give to the students to explain the reasons for the strike and to ask for their support.

Usdaw ballot

On 3 December Webhelp UK confirmed the closure of the Aintree and Bolton call centres that provide services for Shop Direct, which will result in the loss of over 700 jobs across both sites. The company originally said the closures are a result of customers preferring to shop online rather than ring call centres. However, Usdaw has discovered that the real reason is to move jobs to a South African call centre where staff are paid just £2.39 an hour. Usdaw is holding a ballot of all members working for Webhelp UK at the Aintree and Bolton sites to ask whether they want to take industrial action to oppose the closures. The result is due on 11 December.

FBU demonstrates

On 2 December firefighters from across London demonstrated outside city hall against proposals by the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority to scrap 13 fire engines and cut 184 frontline jobs. Firefighters told Mayor of London Boris Johnson that the plans would lead to deaths, warning: "Cuts will kill." Ian Leahair, a member of the Fire Brigades Union's national executive, told the protest: "Can you really believe the timing? For 13 appliances to be taken away from London in the wake of the Paris attacks that have just occurred? If we had those events in London, a series of events at one time, we would not cope. Taking 13 appliances away now is absolutely absurd."

Eleanor Marx: A life of struggle, solidarity and socialism

Celebrate the 160th anniversary of the birth of Eleanor Marx who played a pivotal role in the development of the trade union movement, the birth of the Labour Party and as a tireless fighter for working class people, especially women, all over the globe. The event will include speeches from Rachel Holmes, Author of Eleanor Marx: A life (Radio 4 book of the week) and Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party. Performances by Townsend Productions and an exhibition of photographs entitled 'Women in

struggle'. All the family welcome. Refreshments available. Hosted by Lewisham Socialist Party on 16 January from 2pm at Venner Road Hall, Lewisham, South London, SE26 5EQ

TV Review: Tomorrow's Food

Huge potential to change lives, limited by capitalism

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Tomorrow's Food is a new BBC One documentary series hosted by comedian Dara O'Briain which aims to look at future trends in the food industry.

In its first few episodes we see futuristic farms, robot waiters and chefs and miracle pills. The potential

of some of these innovations could be huge - one high-tech farm had a 400-500% increase in the yield of tomatoes grown and in an environment that used minimal, if any, pesticides.

Socialists welcome any advance in technology that can make the lives of working people easier and help provide to meet people's needs alongside better utilising the resources of the planet. Undoubtedly, some of the ideas showcased could massively impact on people's lives.

Jobs destroyed

The second episode looks at the wide use of robots in Ocado's online order warehouse. Miles of conveyer belts are operated by a handful of human workers in a vivid encapsulation of the increasing concentration of, as socialist thinker Karl Marx would have described it, 'fixed capital' (buildings, machinery etc) as opposed to 'variable capital' (human labour).

Rather than the destruction of jobs and increasing long-term unemployment, in a socialist society this could reduce the working week without loss of pay.

It also demonstrates how the supermarket companies collect huge amounts of data from their sales which can be used to predict stock levels. It would only be a tiny step to use such technology to meet the needs of humanity as a whole rather than to carve out market share and greater profits.

Disappointingly, many of the segments of the programme only take a skin deep look at some of these developments. There are critical questions that need to be asked, but aren't, about food additives and also 'processing aids' which do not have to be listed as ingredients.

The programme is also uncritical on the use of genetic modification. Socialists should be sceptical about 'wonder-foods' created in such a way that haven't been fully tested. We should also recognise that often these are making up for dietary imbalances which are themselves caused by low pay and other problems endemic to capitalism.

Food fraud

The limitations imposed on food quality by capitalism are most aptly demonstrated in the segment on food fraud in the second episode. They showcase the implementation of scientific technique to spot food adulteration that works in seconds identifying cheap cuts of fish, or whether sunflower oil has had colouring added and been resold as olive oil with a significant mark-up.

Yet this is the logic of capitalism to maximise profits. They speak to a government scientist whose aim is therefore limited to make food fraudsters 'take it somewhere else' outside the UK.

Only by taking the big players in the food industry into public ownership under democratic workers' control and management will workers have any real control over the quality of our food, and the low pay that exists from rural workers to supermarkets.

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.

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.

Let them eat bushtucker

This year's 'I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!' is attracting more interest than usual. This is due to the behaviour of 'Lady C', the aristocratic ex-wife of Lord Colin Campbell, son of the eleventh Duke of Argyll.

Among the usual cast of retired sports stars, soap actors, TV presenters, and aging pop stars, Lady C has injected class war!

According to Lady C, we, the viewers are "oiks". Anyone who dares to challenge her opinion in the jungle is relentlessly attacked. She has called Tony Hadley from Spandau Ballet a "moron" and dismissed others as "assholes"!

After trying to humiliate two of her fellow jungle contestants into acting as servants - quite rightly, they refused - she has refused to take part in any of the trials which would bring food into the camp.

Maybe she took a wrong turning somewhere, because she could very easily have been a character in Downton Abbey.

Mick Whale, Hull

Benn's bombs

The definition of a demagogue: "a political leader who seeks support by appealing to popular fears, desires and prejudices rather than by using rational argument."

Hilary Benn is the darling of the right-wing media right now, and basking in the approval of the most right-wing Tory government since World War Two. The Murdoch press, Daily Mail and the rest, including right-wing Labour, will promote him as the man to replace Jeremy Corbyn.

His resort to flag-waving jingoism is the device used by demagogues throughout the ages. Benn's reference to Labour 'internationalism' - and to the International Brigades' fight against Franco (see comment page 9) - to buttress his support for international capitalism - were totally unscrupulous.

He implied that opposition to Western military action constituted less than total opposition to the monstrosity of Isis. The millions who oppose bombing, which will result in the slaughter of the innocents, need no lessons from Benn. He enthusiastically supported the invasion of Iraq which unleashed today's sectarian madness.

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool

Stop the Tory cuts

Fight to save our NHS

Juliette Fogelman

The last few weeks has shown what can be achieved when workers stand together. Health secretary Jeremy Hunt was forced, at least temporarily, to abandon his plan to impose unfair and unsafe new contracts on hard-working junior doctors because of their determination to take strike action.

Junior doctors genuinely care about providing the quality of care that we, the public, need. So Hunt should watch out if he tries to force through these contracts at a later stage. Junior doctors have shown they are prepared to fight to save our NHS!

Student nurses

Next in the Tories' firing line are the student nurses who our understaffed NHS so badly needs.

Osborne has lifted the cap on recruitment but is introducing what can be described as a 'nurse tax'. Bursaries are going to be scrapped and new student nurses will have to pay for their own training through loans.

Nurses are underpaid for the life-saving work they do and now they will begin their career in debt, if they are not put off training altogether!

In his Autumn Statement George Osborne committed to increase NHS funding. However, this actually represents the largest sustained fall in NHS spending as a share of GDP (economic output) since 1951! Moreover, Osborne wants £22 billion 'efficiency savings' ie cuts, by 2020.

There has also been spending cuts to the Department of Health budget affecting vital public health services such as sexual health, vaccinations, etc. This shows the stupidity of Osborne's approach as cutting prevention or early intervention services leads to further pressure on our NHS in the future.

Last year the NHS faced a huge winter crisis with delays to operations and increases in waiting times. Unfortunately this winter it will be the same, or worse.

Social care

The lack of spending on social care is also a huge factor compounding the NHS crisis. Lots of people, many elderly, are stuck in hospital because there aren't the social care packages in place to allow them to leave. This leads not only to a lack of beds but means people remain in hospital when they want to be at home.

The government is keen to privatise our NHS services to their profiteering corporate friends. But in Cambridgeshire, a five-year £800 million NHS out-sourcing contract has ended after just eight months because the company running it said it was not "financially sustainable".

The Tories are out to destroy our health service but health workers, unions and the public must fight together to save it.

Thousands march around the country against the bombing of Syria

Following the decision by Parliament to join the US led bombing of Syria, thousands demonstrated on consecutive days in Parliament Square to oppose it. On the night of the vote on 1 December and then

again on 2 December the Socialist Party joined the young, angry protesters.

The Socialist - featuring analysis of the conflict and the demand for workers' unity against war, terrorism and racism - was snapped up with 265 copies sold. Over 50 signed up to find out more about the Socialist Party.

On 3 December, 250 people attended a demonstration in Leeds against the bombing.

Huge anger

There was huge anger at the actions of Leeds Central MP, Hilary Benn, who has acted as a figurehead for those Labour MPs who wanted to support Cameron in bombing Syria.

It was ridiculous that he, as a pro-war MP, summed up the debate on behalf of the majority of anti-war MPs. In Walthamstow, east London, hundreds demonstrated outside the constituency office of MP Stella Creasy after she voted to bomb Syria (see page 11).

The Socialist Party also took part in protests in Leicester, selling 40 copies of the Socialist, and many other towns and cities across the country.

There is a national demonstration against the bombing called by the Stop the War Coalition in London at 12pm on 12 December.

Socialist Party members

Confronting the far right in Derby

Charlie Taylor, Derby Socialist Party

Derby Socialist Party members arrived to do our weekly campaign stall on 28 November when we noticed around ten supporters of the far-right group Britain First with their own stall nearby.

We continued with our stall even though we did not have as many people present. Within a couple of minutes one of their supporters approached us and started to tell us that socialism would not work and is a bad idea.

Another two of their lot then joined in and another began to film me. I asked him to stop as he had no right without my permission and he swore at me.

There were other activists in Derby at the same time including from the People's Assembly who were campaigning against George Osborne's autumn statement as well as junior doctors drumming up support for their contract dispute (see issue 881).

A number of people gathered to challenge Britain First and a standoff ensued for a short while before a scuffle broke out with an anti-racist having his nose broken when punched by a Britain first supporter.

The recent attacks in France have emboldened the far right to blame all Muslims as terrorists.

The fact that these people feel bold enough to set up a stall in a multicultural city like Derby is something that anti racists, socialists and the trade unions have to react to.

Derby Socialist Party members continued with our stall, campaigning against the bombing of Syria and

exposing the roots of Isis as well as showing our support for the doctors' strikes.

We had an excellent response selling many copies of the Socialist and raising over £20 fighting fund. One person gave us a tenner.

Subs campaign: have you increased yours yet?

Naomi Byron, Socialist Party finance department

Can you increase your membership subs? Many Socialist Party members have already said yes, pledging an extra £4,700 a month to help fund our campaigning work. If you haven't already increased, can you join them?

We are campaigning right up to Christmas, asking every member. At the moment, with the political situation changing so quickly, sometimes from hour to hour, never mind day to day, we need every penny we can to produce campaigning material and respond to events.

The Socialist Party has no big business backers. All our donations come from members and supporters - working class people and the 99%.

Our clear socialist answers to the attacks by the right wing of the Labour Party; our opposition to the bombing of Syria and support for the deselection of MPs that voted for bombing: all these things inspire people to give generous financial support.

Some have increased their membership subs by large amounts, from £50 to over £100 a month. Others have made smaller increases because that's all their financial situation will allow - around one third of increases are between £1 and £5 per month.

But all have made a big sacrifice to help fund our work.

North West fighting fund week of action!

Hugh Caffrey, North West Socialist Party secretary

During our quarterly fighting fund week of action in the North West, we raised £1,318 and sold 156 copies of the Socialist. We held 12 'extra' campaign stalls across the region.

Combined with regular campaigning we eventually raised around £1,500 and sold over 200 papers. Our 'week of action' stalls were about the NHS - on the Wirral campaigning against cuts to the local Arrows Park hospital and elsewhere leading with "Support the junior doctors! Save our NHS!"

The tremendous solidarity which working class people give to any group of workers in struggle, especially the inspiring junior doctors, is proven by the response we received.

We will use these funds to strengthen the one party in Britain with the necessary ideas and methods to overthrow a corrupt ruling class hell-bent on destroying our NHS and over-working junior doctors, and millions of other workers, into an early grave.

The Socialist Christmas schedule

This issue of the Socialist is our last of 2015. The next issue, 883, is out on Thursday 7 January 2016. The editors would like to wish all of our readers and supporters a merry festive season and happy new year. For updates during the break, please check www.socialistparty.org.uk

Socialist Party national committee meeting

A Socialist Party national committee meeting took place on 5 and 6 December. Branches should arrange a report back from national committee members who attended. Contact your branch or regional secretary for more information.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21895>