

Livingstone suspension:

'Slow coup' against Corbyn

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary

The furore around charges of anti-Semitism engulfing the Labour Party is, in reality, an orchestrated and cynical new stage of the campaign by the right-wing pro-capitalist wing of the Labour Party to try and prepare the ground for ditching Jeremy Corbyn at the earliest possible opportunity.

It is not possible to tell what the timescale will be, but this has all the hallmarks of a slow coup.

Iain Watson, the BBC's Political Correspondent, reports a Labour MP telling him a week before this broke publicly that: "There is a lot more in this anti-Semitism issue - a lot more. And the people we will take out are all close to Corbyn."

Jeremy Corbyn was elected less than a year ago by a landslide; having enthused hundreds of thousands of people with his anti-austerity policies.

The Blairites were trounced and these 4.5%ers were horrified at the prospect of Labour - a party whose leadership had loyally acted in the interests of big business for decades - being reclaimed by the working class.

Backed to the hilt by big business and the right-wing media, they are dedicating all their time and energy into once again making Labour a party that can be relied on to act in the interests of the 1%.

Compromise no solution

As we have repeatedly warned, no amount of attempts to compromise with the right wing that dominates the parliamentary Labour Party will pacify them.

On the contrary it only emboldens them. Nor are there any limits to the levels they will stoop to. MPs like Jess Phillips, who declared she would happily knife Jeremy Corbyn in the front, or John Mann, who has attempted to discredit Corbyn with the most scurrilous lies since the moment his name appeared on the ballot paper, will be prepared to use any means necessary to achieve their goal.

Hence an attempt is being made to equate criticism of the right-wing Israeli government with anti-Semitism and to smear the whole of the left with the charge.

This has included an outrageous attempt to smear the Militant, now the Socialist Party. The slur was made on Newsnight by former leading SDP member Baroness Neuberger.

She has since admitted that she has 'no written evidence' but based her accusation on the reports of 'personal friends/acquaintances'! In fact Militant (and now the Socialist Party) has always fought against anti-Semitism and all forms of racism, and has a very longstanding position of supporting the right of two states - Israel and Palestine - to exist side by side, which would be possible on a socialist basis.

We have a sister organisation in Israel Palestine that takes the same stance and heroically campaigns against the Israeli government.

Unfortunately, this is not the position of many others on the left. We would criticise Ken Livingstone for his crass remarks mentioning Zionism and Hitler, which were greeted with glee by the right wing because they gave them an opportunity to step up their attack.

However, Jeremy Corbyn made a mistake when, rather than just making clear his disagreement with Livingstone's remarks, he acceded to the frenzied demands of the right to suspend him from the party.

No action against John Mann

At the same time no action has been taken against John Mann for his brutal public provocation of Livingstone other than a supposed 'dressing down' by Rosie Winterton, the right-wing Labour chief whip.

In fact, as the capitalist class's mouthpiece, the Financial Times (FT), reported, far from being punished, Mann had "Labour MPs...lining up to pat him on the back".

The FT added that: "One party insider said the row was indeed a proxy for the left-right split within the Labour party. 'You go to party conference and all the leftwingers are at the Friends of Palestine event and the right are all at the Friends of Israel drinks'."

They conclude that: "Mr Corbyn is now under pressure from his critics to make a big speech on anti-Semitism with a promise to stamp it out; for the Labour leader, making good on that promise is the politically dangerous part." The right intend to keep ratcheting up the pressure on Corbyn to denounce all those on the left who have criticised the right wing Israeli government.

Badge of honour

Meanwhile, voting for bombing Iraq or Syria will, in their view, continue to be badges of honour.

It would be a serious mistake for the Labour leadership to retreat in the face of this onslaught. Many of those who were enthused by Jeremy Corbyn's leadership campaign can see this onslaught for what it is and will be eager to come to his defence.

Outrageously, leaders of Momentum, initially set up to organise those very people, have cravenly gone along with the attacks by the right.

Unfortunately this has been the trend - from refusing to campaign for deselection to attempting to exclude non-Labour Party members, including the Socialist Party, from Momentum.

But by supporting Livingstone's suspension and demanding he should permanently "exit politics" Jon Lansman, founder of Momentum, has shown he is incapable of organising a movement to effectively defend Jeremy Corbyn's leadership from the Labour right.

It is urgent that the lessons of this incident are learned. As we have consistently pointed out it will only be possible to defeat the right by mobilising the anti-austerity movement in a mass, democratic movement.

To succeed this cannot be led by those who see the way forward within the narrow and undemocratic constraints of the existing Labour Party and whose approach is for endless compromise with the pro-austerity warmongers that dominate the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Instead it means building a movement - organised on federal lines - that brings together all of those workers, young people and community activists who have been inspired by Jeremy Corbyn and want to see a determined anti-capitalist party. The Socialist Party will do all we can to assist in the building of such a movement.

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Bring down the Tories: organise to fight austerity

Simon Carter

Despite 'Dodgy Dave' Cameron's tax affairs and the government's partial u-turns over cuts to tax credits and disability payments, the Tory austerity juggernaut rolls on.

The latest exposé shows that Treasury cuts to the much delayed and costly Universal Credit benefits system will leave millions worse off, with some families losing £3,000 a year.

Insecure work, low pay and a dire housing crisis have left millions more facing an uncertain future. Young people in particular are under the government cosh - with a lower minimum wage, reduced or no housing benefit to mitigate rip-off rents, and unaffordable tuition fees to study at university.

But these cuts and more besides, over the last eight years, have not led to a booming economy. On the contrary, even the CBI bosses' organisation and the Office for Budget Responsibility have recently downgraded growth in the UK's anaemic economy.

The only group of people to benefit in this age of austerity and capitalist crisis has been the tax-avoiding super-rich and giant corporations.

The majority have had enough. Junior doctors are standing up against Tory attempts to undermine the NHS. Teachers are preparing to fight government-imposed academisation of our schools. Steel workers are demanding nationalisation to save jobs and their industry.

The Tories may be hoping that Labour's right-wing attacks on Corbyn will save them, but the likelihood is that the Tory party will be ripped apart following the June EU referendum.

But we can't simply rely on the Tories imploding. Nor can we wait until the 2020 general election to boot them out. We need change now!

The Hillsborough victims' families showed that a determined and tenacious pursuit of justice can beat the establishment.

The trade unions, representing millions of workers and their families, have the potential - if they campaign, organise and coordinate their actions - to dump this rotten government. The unions should call a national demo in support of the junior doctors and against cuts. This should be used to build for coordinated strike action - the beginning of a serious movement to end austerity.

Doctors and teachers lead buoyant London march

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party

"It's fantastic!" shouted a junior doctor as she marched past Big Ben. As the first day of the 26-27 April junior doctor strike action drew to a close, thousands marched in a London joint demonstration called by the North and South Thames region of the British Medical Association (BMA) and the London region of the teachers' union NUT.

As well as supporting the junior doctors, teachers were keen to link up because they are themselves preparing to ballot for strike action in July on the issue of forced conversion to academies.

This trade union demonstration was supported by the London regions of several other unions, with notable contingents from the rail union RMT, civil service union PCS, lecturers' union UCU, and Unite local government workers, bus drivers and health workers, to name a few.

Nurses fighting to save their bursaries took part.

Socialist Party placards saying "Teachers and doctors strike together" were snapped up. Socialist Party members in the trade unions and National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) worked hard to help this demonstration take place and will continue to help build up the links between doctors and teachers. For example, in Waltham Forest junior doctors have visited schools to discuss with groups of teachers.

Also taking part in the march were Labour Party leaders Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell (see photo below), who both addressed the end rally in Whitehall.

This demo gives us a taste of the response there would be if the TUC called a national demonstration in support of the junior doctors. It certainly helped buoy up the confidence of the picket lines the next day!

[Click here for doctors' strike picket line reports](#)

Video

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 27 April 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Political censorship used against socialist mayoral candidates

Bristol and Liverpool councils have carried out what can only be described as political censorship of socialists contesting mayoral elections on 5 May.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) national steering committee has agreed to formally complain to the cities' returning officers.

Candidates in mayoral contests are entitled to have an election address printed in a booklet distributed to every elector. There are rules about the content of the address. It must not be used for commercial gain, or contain "any material referring to any other candidate".

What the rules don't say, however, is that the candidate cannot refer to "the Tory government's demands for cuts" or state that "Liverpool Labour is slashing our public services"! But those were two of the deletions demanded by returning officers in Bristol and Liverpool.

Choice

The election address submitted by TUSC's mayoral candidate in Bristol, Tom Baldwin, included the following passages:

"Over £100 million has been cut from Bristol City Council by the mayor and his cross-party cabinet that includes Labour and the Greens."

"Some say there's no choice but to implement council cuts. But Jeremy Corbyn was right when he said austerity is a political choice."

"The Tories were forced into a u-turn on disability benefits. By getting organised we can push them back on council cuts too, but we also need representatives who will take them on."

"If elected I will... Propose a budget based on Bristol's needs, not the Tory government's demands for cuts."

Incredibly, the council's election staff 'advised' that no references could be made to the Tories. And that the phrase "Jeremy Corbyn was right when he said austerity is a political choice" should also be removed.

The first passage had to be reworded. It now reads: "Over £100 million has been cut from Bristol City Council" - with no reference allowed to the fact these cuts were implemented by a cross-party cabinet including Labour and the Greens.

If this isn't straightforward political censorship, covering up which parties have voted for cuts, then what is it?

Liverpool's returning officer at least allowed a reference to Jeremy Corbyn to remain in the election address submitted by TUSC candidate Roger Bannister. Presumably, and very reasonably, he interpreted the rule about no references to "any other candidate" as meaning individuals who were actually standing for mayor of Liverpool - not a London MP who is not, in fact, standing anywhere at all this year!

But liberalism has its limits. Roger's original draft included the following passages:

"Liverpool Labour is slashing our public services while selling off our public land."

"I intend to build on Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity campaign which propelled him into the Labour leadership. Jeremy's election has changed the political landscape and given hope to millions, but if local Labour continues to implement cuts, the impact of Jeremy's election will be vastly diminished."

"This year Liverpool's Labour council intends to cut nearly £5 million from children's centres, over £1 million from disabled children and young people, £2 million from disabled adults' day centres, a total of £42 million from adult social care, and £2.5 million from maintaining our parks and open spaces."

TUSC will fight

"Roger Bannister says: 'If Labour refuse to implement any further cuts and campaigns for resources to reverse the vicious cuts made against the old, the disabled, the library services, and the rest, I will immediately withdraw my candidacy... But if Labour won't lead that fight, then TUSC and I will.'"

So what was left after the censor's pen was applied? All references to Liverpool Labour, local Labour and Liverpool's Labour council were removed. And if you can't mention Labour, the offer to withdraw if it is prepared to fight becomes meaningless.

The Liverpool Labour Party holds the mayor's position, and 81 of the 90 council seats going into the elections on 5 May. It can instruct its returning officer, the council's chief executive, to say that black is white.

But does Liverpool Labour really think it can hide the fact that it is responsible for implementing the cuts that are savaging the city's public services?

TUSC won't let these attacks on the democratic right to tell the truth go uncontested.

Ex-TUC chief lines up with David Cameron

Glenn Kelly

Brendan Barber, former leader of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), has co-authored an article with David Cameron backing the European Union (EU).

Even when he was general secretary of the TUC, Barber never inspired any confidence as a workers' leader. He came across more like a middle manager who saw the TUC's role as arbitrator between its own members and the bosses it was meant to be fighting.

When it came to the EU, Barber - like many at the TUC - long ago abandoned the idea that workers could fight and beat the bosses. So instead he bows at the altar of the anti-worker EU bosses' club, and prays for a few crumbs from the table.

While some other union leaders have wrongly come out in support of the EU, what none have done so far is openly join up with the Tories. Barber's joint Guardian piece with Cameron has disgusted many trade unionists.

Cameron is a prime minister with the vowed intention of smashing union members' rights through the Trade Union Bill. A prime minister who has already cut over a million public sector jobs, with the promise of a million more. And here we have a former trade union leader openly collaborating with him.

What now appears to be emerging is that - far from conducting a fighting campaign to defeat the Trade Union Bill - a number of union leaders were willing to do a deal with the Tories.

Rescue

They have come to Cameron's rescue over the EU referendum in return for a couple of concessions on the bill - clauses that even Tory Lords didn't want.

The message these so-called workers' leaders are sending to the Tories is criminal. All the bosses have to do is threaten the unions' funding - and these 'leaders' will come running.

The Socialist Party campaigns for fighting, democratic trade unions based on workers' struggle, not backroom deals with the bosses.

- Read more - 'Trade unions: myths of EU Remain campaign' at socialistcase4exit.eu
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2 in 5 fear rent trap

Kieran Barlow, young worker

Nearly two fifths of renters think they will never escape the rent trap. A poll for the Observer found 37% of renters believe they will never own their own home.

Just over half of those polled declared they wanted more, not less, social housing as a way to ease the ongoing crisis. And 69% agree the country is "in the throes of a housing crisis".

In 2015, the Conservatives announced their Housing and Planning Bill. It will not only redefine 'affordable housing' to try to cover up the housing crisis, but will also hand local planning to private companies.

This isn't fixing our housing crisis, it's worsening it.

The number of under-35s who own their own homes has fallen by 280,000 since the Tories came to power in 2010, according to Labour. Young working-class home ownership has dropped by a fifth.

Compared with a third of 16 to 24-year-olds owning their own home in 1991, only 10% do now. More and more end up stuck with their parents.

Personally, I was forced out of my home by welfare cuts. Thankfully I was taken in by family members.

However, for many it's a different story. Placed in squalid council properties sold off to private 'social' housing companies, or forced into private rental due to council shortages. Landlords continually raising rents without properly maintaining properties.

The Socialist Party calls for trade unions to take the lead and establish a mass campaign to beat the housing bill and end the housing crisis. We demand a mass programme of building decent council homes, and democratic control of private rents to stop the exploitation.

Aston Villa owners threaten 500 jobs

Scott Jones

Fans of relegated Premier League football club Aston Villa will have been pleased the club's end-of-season awards were scrapped - after a woeful season on and off the pitch. But many will be dismayed by management's announcement that 500 jobs will go.

Bosses have told a third of Villa's employees they will lose their jobs. This includes full-time, part-time and match-day staff. The move will be a bitter pill to swallow for workers, many of them low paid, when owner Randy Lerner is worth £736 million.

Lee Barron, regional secretary of the Trade Union Congress and a Villa fan himself, said: "Everybody is just sitting there open-mouthed at the moment."

Though dismal performances by players have contributed to Villa's downfall, the real blame lies with the owners. They purposefully underinvested in the club - looking to make short-term profits, and sell in the long term. American businessman Lerner joined a host of other dodgy billionaire club owners in 2006, looking to get his snout in the trough of Premier League riches.

It's another example of owners sucking clubs dry, leaving fans and the community to pick up the pieces. Lerner shouldn't be allowed to get away with it.

Unions and the Premier League should demand he dip into his own pocket. He could use the 'parachute payments' the Premier League makes to help relegated clubs survive the drop in sponsorship income to safeguard jobs.

But ultimately, clubs like Villa should be owned and run democratically by the legitimate owners: supporters and the community.

- 'Reclaim the Game' by John Reid: a socialist programme for football - £3 from leftbooks.co.uk
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TTIP tip-off

Leaked documents from the European Union's negotiations with the United States over privatisation treaty TTIP have confirmed its neoliberal character.

Climate campaign group Greenpeace got hold of 248 pages of the secret documents. The US wants to downgrade rules requiring firms to prove potentially harmful consumer products are safe. And promised efforts to limit carbon emissions also seem to be absent.

But the central danger is still TTIP establishing unaccountable corporate courts, which can overrule states which act against privatisation. This is, of course, just an extension of the EU's non-reformable, undemocratic, anti-worker treaties and laws.

Voting to leave the EU would set TTIP back, and send shockwaves through the unelected command of the bosses' EU.

Them & Us

Have-nots and have-yachts

Spotted near the Tower of London: advertising for the 'Superyacht Owners Summit'. Discussions will include "what lessons can the superyacht industry learn from private jets?" and "what considerations need to be made when purchasing, managing and owning a superyacht?"

While bosses muck about on floating palaces, flooded-out workers in the north of England are still recovering from Storm Desmond. About 5,200 homes in Cumbria and Lancashire ended up underwater last year due to cuts and underinvestment in flood defences.

But never mind; the money the Tories 'save' from public services all goes to good causes. Such as tax breaks for superyacht owners.

Thanks to Emily Goulbourne for the superyacht spot

Lordy, lordy, lordy!

John Archibald Sinclair, 3rd Viscount Thurso (left), has been "elected" to Parliament - by three (count 'em) peers. The Lib Dem aristocrat is now entitled to vote on laws, and collect a £300 daily fee, for life.

This, of course, is a perfectly acceptable interpretation of 'democracy' for the capitalists. However, trade unions voting to strike is not.

The Tories' Trade Union Bill will effectively make unions representing some workers count abstentions as votes against in ballots for industrial action. Lords have elections stacked in their favour, unions have them stacked against us.

Thanks to Nick Walters for the aristo angle

Surrey's social split

Two stories, side by side in the Surrey Advertiser (pic above).

County residents in top 12 rich list: "two billionaires with luxury properties in Surrey are among the top 12 richest people in Britain and Ireland".

Winter shelter helps needy: "Paul Mitchell, chief exec of Transform, said: 'This year's winter shelter has again shown that there is a need for services to help local people who find themselves homeless'."

Paul Couchman

1926 general strike: when workers tasted power

Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary

The 1926 general strike - whose 90th anniversary we celebrate this month - was, alongside the movement of the Chartists in the 19th century, the most important event in the history of the British working class.

This alone makes the subject worthy of study and discussion, particularly for the younger generation of workers, in order to learn the lessons of this epochal event and its relevance today.

The Tory government in 1926 - headed by Stanley Baldwin - was determined to inflict a serious defeat on British workers as a means of rescuing their ailing capitalist system. David Cameron - backed up by the 'big butcher' of Downing Street, George Osborne next door - has carried out vicious austerity measures and treads in Baldwin's footsteps today.

The whole period from the end of World War One until 1926 was characterised by a mighty tussle between the working class and its organisations and the government collectively representing the British capitalists.

Tension

A testing of wills took place throughout this whole period when a general strike came very close to breaking out. But both sides - the government and employers on one side and the working class and its organisations on the other - withdrew, sometimes at the last moment.

But so serious was the crisis of British capitalism that it could no longer afford the existing living standards of the working class and indeed demanded savage reductions. Lord Londonderry, a Durham mine owner, vowed to smash the unions from top to bottom. Class relations were explosive which

resulted in Britain coming near to a general strike in 1919, 1921 and in the run-up to 'Red Friday,' 31 July 1925.

In 1919, for instance, Prime Minister David Lloyd George, a consummate representative of big business, declared to the trade union leaders: "If you carry out your threat and strike you will defeat us, but if you do so have you weighed the consequences? The strike will be in defiance of the government of the country and its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance.

"For, if a force arises which is stronger than the state itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the state, or withdraw and accept the authority of the state. Gentlemen, have you considered, if you have, are you ready?"

Lloyd George summed up here the essential characteristics of a general strike, which poses the question of power. An 'either-or' situation exists where either the working class goes forward, takes power and begins to reorganise society on democratic socialist lines, or the official 'leaders' retreat and the working class is defeated.

It is for this reason that before resorting to an all-out general strike socialists and Marxists carefully analyse all the factors involved and rather than immediately launching a head-on confrontation would resort to preparatory measures beforehand.

However, when the issue is posed baldly and a general strike is implicit in the situation, it is necessary to go forward and seize power. The cowardly trade union leaders in 1919 were typified by Robert Smillie, right-wing miners' leader, who declared: "From that moment on we were beaten and we knew we were."

This was not the reaction of the overwhelming bulk of trade unionists and the working class who understood that only the most serious working class resistance to the onslaught of the bosses was capable of ensuring a decent existence for them and their families.

This led to the victory - temporary though it was - of 'Red Friday', which forced the government and the coal bosses to retreat in the face of the miners' intransigence. This was the miners' and the working class' revenge for 'Black Friday' (15 April 1921) when a bitter defeat was inflicted on them.

Interestingly, in the aftermath of 'Red Friday', Baldwin was accused by his own Tory press of an unprincipled retreat by paying 'Danegeld' (tribute paid by the English to Danish Kings in the ninth to eleventh centuries to save land from being ravaged). Thatcher was accused of the same thing in 1984 when she was compelled to give in to Liverpool during the 1983-87 council battle.

Retreat

However, in both 1925 and 1984, the representatives of the government were merely making a tactical retreat, the better to prepare to inflict defeat later.

Baldwin declared later in relation to 1925: "We were not ready." Neither was Thatcher in 1981 ready to confront the miners head-on. She and her cronies built up the coal stocks and took on the miners in 1984-85.

The ruling class prepared very carefully for the inevitable confrontation. In contrast, the trade union leaders' approach was described by one historian as "studied unpreparedness."

Following 'Red Friday', all sides took stock. In the depths of the working class, a steely determination developed that this time the working class would be victorious. There was mass opposition to the repression that was being undertaken by the government, for instance against the Communist Party.

Wherever they went, the miners could feel the groundswell of support among the working class for their cause.

At the same time, the government was also preparing for an extra-parliamentary struggle, while the general council of the TUC was frantically looking for compromises - the basis for which did not exist.

The Minority Movement, which gathered the most combative elements of the trade unions in its ranks, pressed for nationalisation of the mining industry "without compensation and with full workers' control".

The Minority Movement was potentially a massive weapon for the forthcoming general strike. However, it was hobbled by the false policy of the young Communist Party - under the direction of Moscow and Stalin - of not sufficiently criticising the trade union leaders and demanding firm action from them. It was not just the right-wing trade union leaders but some of the so-called left who dragged their feet, not seriously preparing for the coming battle.

The right was openly trying to sabotage the struggle, with the National Union of Railwaymen's leader Jimmy Thomas indicating that they would not oppose wage cuts if "reorganisation of the mining industry was to take place." He confessed: "I... was almost grovelling", pleading with the government for "peace".

No alternative

But the working class was preparing and saw no alternative but to strike. When it took place, all the preparations of the bosses and the government were puny when measured against the colossal response of the working class to the call for a general strike.

A sheet metal worker spoke for millions when he wrote: "Employers of labour were coming, cap in hand, begging for permission to do certain things... to allow their workers to return to perform certain customary operations... Most of them turned away empty... I thought of the many occasions when I had been turned empty away from the door of some workshop in a weary struggle to get the means to purchase the essentials of life for self and dependants."

The general strike was solid and growing by the day. 'Councils of action' were formed during the immortal nine days of the strike. There were approximately 400 trades councils in operation and between 100 and 147 councils of action. An aide of Baldwin confessed: "The workers' reactions to the strike call were much more complete than we'd expected."

In our book '1926 General Strike - Workers Taste Power', we show the colossal sweep and verve of the general strike as the mass of the working class reached out not just for wage increases but for power. In answer to the government's repression, calls for the organisation of defensive formations of the working class and defence corps would have received widespread support.

The tragedy of the general strike was the unpreparedness not just of the summits of the labour movement but also of the young revolutionary forces gathered around the Communist Party.

The general slogan of 'All power to the General Council' acted to screen not just the right wing but also the left leaders who were dragging their feet. Trotsky had come out against this policy when he predicted in 'Where is Britain Going?' that a general strike was posed in Britain.

Sabotage

From day one, however, the general council of the TUC tried to find a way to end the strike. Its very success led them to increase their efforts at sabotage.

The general council called off the strike on 12 May, trooping off to Downing Street to capitulate to Baldwin. What followed was a festival of reaction, first against the miners and then against the rest of the working class.

This was a signal for the bosses to display that cold cruelty - which Osborne today possesses in spades towards, for instance, the disabled, the homeless, etc. - in attempting to impose a dictatorship of capital in the factories.

Baldwin was to admit later: "I provoked a general strike in 1926 as a means of demoralising the trade union leaders and breaking up the unity of the unions which had become so manifest in 1925."

The reward for the working class was hunger, unemployment and victimisation of militants. The general strike was a defeat and a serious one at that. 160 million working days were lost in strikes in 1926 as a whole, the highest ever in a single year, and only rivalled by the later upsurge of workers' militancy in the 1970s and 1980s. Afterwards trade union membership fell below five million for the first time since 1916.

However, this defeat was not accepted lying down by workers. The answer to Baldwin and the fainthearted trade union leaders was given at the Bournemouth conference of the TUC in September 1926 from a young miners' delegate, who roared: "We will have another general strike without you, and we'll win next time."

Britain has come very close to a general strike since then. In 1972 when the Pentonville dockers were jailed, the TUC actually went on record for a 24-hour general strike. However, in making this declaration they had already been assured that the dockers would be freed by the 'official solicitor'.

Nevertheless, it indicates that even the most obdurate trade union leaders can be pushed under mass pressure to move in the direction of general strikes.

Today

During the Con-Dem coalition government, three general secretaries - Bob Crow of the rail workers, Lenny McCluskey of Unite and Mark Serwotka of the PCS unions - called for a one-day general strike when speaking at the rally following the anti-austerity demo of 20 October 2012.

That appears now to have dropped off the agenda but, under the impact of the continuing austerity of Osborne and Cameron, this idea will be revised. And not just in Britain but throughout Europe and the world.

Therefore, it is appropriate to re-examine the 1926 General Strike and learn the lessons for today in the battles to come.

Available from Left Books:

1926 general strike: workers taste power by Peter Taaffe

- £9.50 including postage
- Available from leftbooks.co.uk

Hillsborough verdict - a magnificent testimony

to courage and fortitude

The recent verdict of the inquests into the Hillsborough football stadium disaster of 1989, which killed 96 people, has been met with jubilation by families of the victims and working class people generally - especially in Liverpool. The result vindicates the 27-year campaign for the truth, which battled against establishment lies and slurs on the victims.

The cover-up is the closest we have come in Britain to the Dreyfus Affair in France at the end of the 19th century. Then, revelations of a state conspiracy to convict a young army officer of treason led to a revolutionary upheaval.

With the current weak and divided Tory government, the Hillsborough issue has the potential to have the same effect in Britain if the labour movement put itself at the head of a fight for justice for the 96 victims.

Tony Mulhearn, who was an anti-cuts, socialist city councillor in Liverpool from 1984 to 1987, responds.

A group of us were on the junior doctors' picket line outside the Royal Hospital in Liverpool when the news came. The verdicts were announced one by one. Then came the verdict declaring the fans were exonerated from causing the catastrophe. People punched the air in celebration.

Next, the key question of 'were the victims unlawfully killed?' When 'yes' was announced the impact was incredible. People wept at the enormity of this verdict. It was as though an enormous weight was lifted from the people of the city. The years of calumny, of lies, of unfounded denunciation of Liverpool and its people, felt purged.

The verdict spectacularly confirmed the belief held by the campaigners for 27 years that there was a catastrophic failure by those responsible for crowd safety. Following this the victims and their families - and the whole city - were subject to a sustained campaign of lies and vilification by the media, the police and other agencies of the state.

The criminal role of the South Yorkshire Police, both at Hillsborough and during the miners' strike, has been well documented in the pages of the Socialist and its predecessor, Militant. Writing in the Guardian David Conn confirmed our assessment when he wrote:

"The evidence built into a startling indictment of South Yorkshire Police, their chain of command and conduct - a relentlessly detailed evisceration of a British police force... the force had brutally policed the miners' strike, and was described by some of its own former officers as 'regimented', with morning parade and saluting of officers, ruled by 'an iron fist' institutionally unable to admit mistakes.

"The dominance of Wright, a decorated career police officer who died in 2011, loomed over the catastrophe. He was depicted as a frighteningly authoritarian figure who treated the force 'like his own personal territory' and whose orders nobody - tragically - dared debate."

Shocking revelation

But perhaps the most shocking revelation is the role of Wright's placeman, Duckenfield - surely confirmed as one of history's greatest liar. As Conn remarked: "Duckenfield had not familiarised himself in any detail with the ground's layout or capacities of its different sections. He did not know the seven turnstiles, through which 10,100 Liverpool supporters with standing tickets had to be funnelled to gain access to the Leppings Lane terrace, which opened opposite a large tunnel leading

straight to the central pens.

"He did not even know that the police were responsible for monitoring overcrowding, nor that the police had a tactic... of closing the tunnel when the central pens were full, and directing supporters to the sides."

Revealing his baleful outlook, Duckenfield admitted his focus before the match had been not on the need to protect people from overcrowding or crushing, but dealing with misbehaviour.

I went down to St. George's Plateau to view the giant screen that was broadcasting the unfolding events from the jury room in Warrington. The mood of the growing crowd was jubilant. The pictures of the victims' families celebrating their victory encapsulated the mood of exultation that their loved ones had been totally vindicated.

In 2012 I wrote in the Socialist "the report of the Hillsborough Independent Panel had ripped aside the tangled web of lies and cover-up woven by the South Yorkshire police, the government and the army of lickspittles in the press who denigrated Liverpool and the victims of the catastrophe."

But to see the cover-up revealed by a jury, after the longest inquest in British legal history, was like witnessing a hand grenade being exploded at the heart of a rotten, stinking, state-sponsored conspiracy.

Kelvin Mackenzie, editor of the Sun at the time of its 'The Truth' front page (akin in its level of infamy to the Daily Mail's 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts' in 1936) was visibly rattled. He was stripped of his truculence - blabbering that he had been duped by some copy received from a news agency. Thatcher's media hack Bernard Ingham, who had declared the catastrophe was the responsibility of a "tanked up mob," refused to be interviewed as he cowered in his lair.

Casualty

The first casualty of the revelations, chief constable of South Yorkshire Police David Crompton, has been forced out of his job following a wave of public anger over the way his force conducted itself during the inquest.

In an interview with Radio Merseyside Labour's Andy Burnham frankly admitted that nothing would have changed were it not for a memorial meeting at Anfield in 2014. There the 25,000-strong crowd took up the chant started by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate Roy Dixon, 'Justice for the 96!' This stopped Burnham mid-speech. One fan said that chant gave him goose bumps as it resonated throughout the ground. It was a game-changing moment.

Duckenfield's own barrister, John Beggs QC (an advocate instructed by police forces nationwide) persistently dredged up allegations of fan misbehaviour which had already been completely discredited. But he was not alone.

The present-day South Yorkshire Police force and the Police Federation also argued that Liverpool supporters outside the Leppings Lane end could be found to have contributed to the disaster because 'a significant minority' were alleged to have been drunk and 'non-compliant' with police orders to move back. The verdict confirmed that no such incidents occurred, and that there was a complete breakdown in any chain of command in the police.

Conn continued: "Many officers who made such allegations against supporters in their original 1989 accounts, which the force notoriously vetted and altered, maintained that stance under scathing challenge by the families' barristers.

"For periods, these inquests felt like an inversion of a criminal prosecution, in which police officers were repeatedly accused of lying, covering up and perverting the course of justice, while sticking

insistently to their stories." That this web of lies held sway for so long was in large part down to its public endorsement by Margaret Thatcher who declared "the police were doing their job."

Because of its history of working class militancy, Liverpool has long been a target for abuse by the capitalist media. Thatcher deliberately used this catastrophe as a means of continuing the denigration of the city.

She had declared war on Liverpool because the city's Militant-led socialist council had refused to carry out her programme of cuts. The council had been successful in mobilising a magnificent campaign to defend the city, involving tens of thousands showing their support on the streets and in the ballot box. As a result we won back some £60 million from the government.

Thatcher was quoted as saying, after a visit to Liverpool, where she received a cool reception: "These people [the Liverpool councillors] have no respect for my office, and they've got to be put down."

Rabid media

Her government, supported by a rabid media - including Rupert Murdoch's publications, pensions thief Robert Maxwell and his Daily Mirror - and aided and abetted by Baron Kinnock and his acolytes, conducted a campaign of vilification against the whole city. Their objective was to demonstrate that a city which resists power and privilege and advances a socialist alternative must be collectively punished.

I wrote in 2012: "Not only are the families to be applauded for their courage and tenacity in the pursuit of justice, but a debt of honour is owed to them for showing that working class people, fired with courage and determination, can render the forces of the state accountable."

BBC reporter Mark Easton commenting on the event at St George's Plateau, where an estimated 30,000 paid tribute to the 96 and their families, significantly observed that "the shift in the balance of power towards the people was palpable."

The mass movement in Liverpool has succeeded in exposing one of the greatest state-sponsored cover ups in history. This must now be turned into action against those who have been implicated in the investigations, including senior police officers and politicians - leaving no stone left unturned in pursuing prosecutions of those involved.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 29 April 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

National Union of Students conference: mood to fight education cuts must be turned into determined action

Claire Laker-Mansfield, Socialist Students national organiser

This year's National Union of Students (NUS) conference took place amid a growing mood of anger at austerity in education, and renewed eagerness to fight back. This mood was reflected in the leadership elections and some of the motions passed.

Throughout the conference Labour Students (which remains dominated by Blairites and has, until recently, occupied a leading position within the structures of NUS) found itself unable to challenge the arguments of the left or to effectively block motions calling for action to resist the Tory onslaught.

Perhaps most significantly, a motion was passed by the conference mandating NUS's leadership to organise a mass demonstration in the autumn as part of a 'save our futures' campaign. Every year since 2010, Labour Students has fought a fierce battle to prevent NUS organising a national demo.

It is a measure both of the pressure that exists from ordinary students and of the deep disorientation that has engulfed Labour's right since Jeremy Corbyn's election, that this year not one delegate made a speech against organising a demo. The motion was passed unanimously.

The most dramatic culmination of the shift in mood came when the sitting right-wing president, Megan Dunn, was unseated by Malia Bouattia, the current black students officer, who presented a challenge from the left. Malia's victory was followed by the reelection of three vice presidents who also stand broadly on the left.

A key strategy employed by Labour Students was to attempt to conflate any criticism of the Israeli regime with the very serious charge of anti-Semitism and to try to smear the entirety of the left with it.

Smear

This smear is unfortunately made easier because many on the left do not take the same clear stance as the Socialist Party on the issue - calling for two states, Israel and Palestine, which would be possible on a socialist basis.

Megan Dunn based much of her reelection pitch on the assertion that her opponent would not challenge anti-Semitism. Malia's election was followed by a frenzied backlash in the right-wing press and on social media - a precursor to the crisis now whipped up within the Labour Party nationally.

This backlash has included a right-wing campaign for student unions to disaffiliate from NUS. This is, in reality, an attempt to undermine the possibility of its resources and authority being used to organise effectively against attacks on education.

It is important that students organise to oppose disaffiliation from NUS, while continuing to argue that it must adopt a fighting strategy and organise on a genuinely democratic basis.

The fact that NUS has failed to organise effective opposition in the face of the austerity onslaught will mean that some students who are not on the right may feel tempted by disaffiliation. But we would argue that there remains potential, particularly given events at this year's conference, for NUS to be a vehicle to organise a fightback.

In 2010 the NUS showed this potential when it organised a demonstration against tripling tuition fees which attracted over 50,000 people and kick started a mass movement. Had the leadership of NUS been prepared to build on this and organise an escalating campaign which united with workers - instead of abandoning the struggle as they did - the outcome of this battle could have been different.

One of the few amendments to be seriously contested by the right was raised by Socialist Students. We argued that, in the context of the government introducing a vicious anti-trade union bill, as well as wider attacks on democratic and workers' rights, simply celebrating the work done by student unions is not enough.

We therefore opposed the outgoing NUS president's #loveSUs initiative - instead arguing for a serious campaign to defend student unions, seeking to build links with trade unions and workers to defend the right to organise and oppose austerity. Following a substantial debate this amendment was narrowly

defeated.

Socialist Students

Many other important motions submitted by Socialist Students members unfortunately fell off the agenda. This including one arguing for a strategy to support Jeremy Corbyn's call for free education and to take on the pro-fees, pro-cuts majority of Labour MPs. Another called for a £10 an hour minimum wage.

Nevertheless, there was a big interest in socialist ideas among the delegates present. Socialist Students took part boldly, particularly supporting our candidate for the national executive committee, Zoe Brunswick.

Zoe is a medical student who helped organise student solidarity with the junior doctors' strikes. She used her election speech to argue that the change in direction set by NUS conference must be followed through with the organisation of mass action - that radical rhetoric must be matched with deeds.

While Zoe's speech received a warm reception from conference floor, unfortunately she was not elected despite receiving a good vote.

The most important task now facing our movement is to organise for a huge demonstration in the autumn, which must act as a springboard to an escalating campaign in defence of education. This should involve students in universities and colleges, but must also seek to organise school and sixth-form students fighting brutal cuts and academisation.

Socialist Students will seek to work alongside NUS and others in order to help build this. This conference could potentially mark a turning point for the student movement.

But for this to be true, it must act as a launch pad for a mass democratic movement organised on every campus and linked on a national level. If you want to be part of fighting to build such a movement, join us, get involved and help us to build the fightback today.

- See socialiststudents.org.uk for more

Solidarity with junior doctors: TUC call a national demonstration now!

"By standing up for ourselves, we are standing up for the NHS" said Dr Yannis Gourtsoyannis, a member of the BMA's (doctors' union) junior doctors committee, speaking at London's May Day demonstration on 1 May.

The BMA's junior doctor committee meets on 7 May to discuss future action following the latest, escalated round of strikes on 26 and 27 April which included a full withdrawal of labour for the first time.

The meeting should include a call to the TUC general council to back the junior doctors by calling a national demonstration. This demand was put forward by the civil servants' union PCS and firefighters' union FBU but was scandalously rejected by the TUC on 27 April. The TUC has, at every turn, left the junior doctors' struggle isolated.

The organisation and solidarity required was shown on the first day of the most recent strike action, as

5,000 marched in a London joint demonstration called by the North and South Thames region of the BMA and the London region of the teachers' union NUT.

Rail workers, nurses, civil servants, firefighters, local government workers and others marched in solidarity.

The demonstration hinted at the potential there would be for a huge demonstration in support of junior doctors and in defence of the NHS if one was called by the TUC. We demand the TUC reconsider its position and we call on the BMA junior doctors' committee to demand the same.

Wales museum strike solid

Workers determined to stand up to management bullying and pay cuts

Dave Reid

Workers at six sites of the National Museum of Wales came out on all-out strike today(28.4.16) in protest at management threats to sack the workforce and impose new contracts that will remove weekend working allowances for museum workers. They will strike on Friday and over the weekend before starting all-out action on Bank Holiday Monday.

Some workers are paid just £15,000 a year and work over 35 weekends a year to achieve that level. They depend on the weekend working allowances and are being threatened with the sack if they do not accept the latest threatened contract from management.

The strike was solid across all six sites and workers gathered at the National Museum for an enthusiastic and optimistic strike rally. The morale was high as they heard PCS speakers including general secretary, Mark Serwotka, condemn the Victorian management tactics as 'the museum that imposed pay cuts on low paid workers'.

First Minister Carwyn Jones has promised to intervene after the election on 5th May, but will that be too little, too late?

PCS members are demanding that the National Museum of Wales follows the example of the National Museum of Scotland and settles the dispute: "If it's good enough for Scotland, it's good enough for Wales", declared Mark Serwotka.

Strikers crowded into the PCS Welsh Assembly election hustings after the strike rally where they heard candidates from all the main parties except Ukip and the Liberals. But it was TUSC candidate Ross Saunders who got the loudest applause, for calling for the National Museum of Wales to be brought under Welsh government control from an arms-length status - "they are bloody long arms!" agreed one of the museum workers from the Big Pit mining museum in Blaenavon.

Many workers were critical of Welsh Labour for making so many cuts. "I'm a fourth generation miner and we have fought for Labour, but for the first time I am thinking of voting for another party", said one. Another said that Welsh Labour 'doesn't deserve the title Labour'.

The determination of the museum workers deserves the support of all trade unionists. You can make a contribution to the hardship fund:

Bank: Unity Trust Bank

Account name: PCS Amgueddfa Cymru 107006 Branch Hardship Fund

Account number: 20364700

Sort code: 60-83-01

Or via PayPal: <http://bit.ly/26eNhvq>

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Usdaw conference shifts left and demands "backbone"

Socialist Party members at Usdaw conference

Against a backdrop of attacks on supermarket premium payments and retail job losses, the conference of Usdaw, the shop workers' union, took place in Blackpool on 24-27 April.

On day one, conference passed a motion committing the union to fight to keep these premium payments in the future. As one delegate said: "Let them (the companies) try to impose these changes and we'll show them this union has a backbone!"

A backbone that was decidedly missing during recent pay deals when Usdaw negotiated away these premiums for thousands of workers.

The conference was one of the most eventful in recent history and showed a marked move to the left in the union.

This was heralded even prior to conference when the union's executive overturned Usdaw general secretary John Hannett's recommendations on a number of international propositions, including against Trident.

That Hannett at the conference then went on to give his own view of opposition to these, barely paying lip service to the position of the executive council on the matter, sparked outrage among delegates, including those who agreed with the arguments Hannett was putting.

The Trident proposition was lost but Hannett's actions will have repercussions in the union and will help further opposition on the executive council to the union's democratic defects under Hannett. Branches have written to the EC on the issue.

Junior doctors

There was also significant support for the junior doctors' strike as the union was pushed into paying for transport for over 40 delegates and visitors to support the local picket line in a marvellous and unprecedented display of solidarity.

The conference also passed several motions we had written including for a £10 an hour minimum wage

and on the anti-union laws and supported other motions such as on renationalisation and tax avoidance.

We sold 84 copies of the Socialist and raised over £50 fighting fund and held our fourth consecutive conference fringe meeting which was the best attended yet.

Civil service: fighting the pay freeze

Katrine Williams, PCS DWP group vice president

The backdrop of the current pay deal in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is a public sector pay freeze that has lasted years depressing members' living standards.

We operate in a very hostile industrial environment, in large part because of the failure of other union leaderships and the TUC itself to fight back against cuts, privatisation and pay freezes. The Tories have launched vicious attacks on PCS for fighting back against austerity and DWP workers have been at the forefront. This resulted in the withdrawal of the check-off facility and an attempt to bankrupt and smash the union.

The PCS, under a left leadership, fought off this attack and has emerged stronger and more determined than ever.

PCS has been campaigning against austerity for many years including the public sector pay freeze. We have argued that the best way to defeat the pay freeze is to build joint coordinated action across the public sector but despite this being official TUC policy, they and other key unions have failed to build this action. While continuing to press this demand, PCS is campaigning to win settlements that will improve our members' wages wherever possible.

In the PCS DWP group this means campaigning, including a letter writing initiative to MPs which resulted in a debate in Parliament exposing the disgrace of low pay in the department (40% of staff receive benefits to top up their wages) and led to negotiations with management.

PCS has put DWP management under considerable pressure to resolve low pay and the pay differentials between DWP and other government departments.

DWP got permission from the Treasury for pay flexibility to breach the 1% pay cap that would mean 'substantial' increases to 60% of the lowest paid DWP staff but linked to contractual changes which would allow an increase in areas which open to the public in the evening and Saturday.

There is no doubt management aim to bring in these changes anyway. PCS does not accept these changes should be linked to the issue of pay however.

PCS group negotiators have been involved in lengthy talks to discuss pay and management's plans for opening hours which has resulted in an offer which our members will have the final vote on whether to accept in June.

The PCS DWP group leadership discussed the full offer at length and on balance took the decision to recommend the offer to members because of the safeguards that have been negotiated in terms of contractual changes and the large amounts of money available for the lowest paid at each grade in scope, whose pay has been held down for many years.

It is clear that the offer means different things to different people and has the potential to divide our members. In such difficult circumstances any union is duty bound to gain as much as it can to improve living standards for its most poorly paid members and protect as much as it can in terms of changes to

conditions and build the campaign to win further concessions.

The pay part of the offer means that all members in the first four grades in the DWP will be on or make significant progress towards a single spot rate of pay by 2019 - fulfilling a longstanding PCS demand for the rate for the job for each grade. This addresses the significant problems that have existed over pay progression where the majority of our members have not progressed through the pay scales for years since the Labour government introduced pay restraint. The spot rates are set at a level with other government departments which addresses the issue of lower pay in the DWP where members in different government departments doing similar jobs can have a difference in pay of thousands of pounds.

Over half of our members would receive a pay rise of 10 -21.6% over the next four years. We recognise that we were unable to negotiate a similar pay rise for those members at the maximum of their pay scale, but all members receive more than 1% each year in this offer.

There will be full consultation before any changes to opening hours to the public where PCS will thoroughly go through the rationale for change and what genuine demand there is from the public and staffing levels required.

We recognise that while the offer represents some positive elements such as the increase in pay to the rate for the job for our members, it is clear that not everyone gets a lot more than 1% and that the contractual changes would worry many. The recommendation to accept was taken after much discussion but we felt that the safeguards that have been negotiated would be best secured in a collective agreement rather than allow management to simply impose 'guidelines' with no legal status.

Our assessment is that the levels of action required to prevent the changes to working hours are unlikely to be voted for by the significant number of members in line for an increase of over 20% over the four years at the time of a 1% pay cap, and that if we can bank the pay increases and contractualise them, that puts us in the best position to fight the detriment, using the strength gained from having a collective agreement to hold management to account over issues that the whole membership can unite over.

This would strengthen the union's ability to defend members and the pay increases would become a contractual right. We are clear that any attempts by management to breach the collective agreement would result in a strong, united response from PCS and our members in DWP.

Vote for PCS Left Unity candidates in the PCS DWP elections

- President - Heathcote Fran
 - Vice Presidents - Cavanagh Martin, Rochester Annette, Wilkinson Ian, Williams Katrine
 - Assistant Secretaries - Bartholomew Ian, Burke Dave, Cuthbert Chris, Hall Sam, Page Mark, Semple Dave, Swainston Steve
 - Organiser - McDonough Marie
 - Treasurer - Chilwan Bash
 - Editor - Church Tony
 - Group Executive Committee - Evans Louise, Godrich Janice, Grant Angela, Hatwood Glen, Heemskerk Rachel, Lothian Harminder, McCafferty Kevin, McNally John, Nairn Brian, Owens Dave, Pope Ian, Revell Carol, Ruddick Sian, Spencer Sarah, Watkins Carrie-Anne, Watts Rachael, West Steve
 - Ballot papers will be issued from Thursday 28 April.
 - Ballot papers must be returned to the Independent Scrutineer by 12 noon on 18 May
-

Bristol library assistants strike against unviable shift patterns

Robin Clapp, Bristol Socialist Party

When Bristol council's Cabinet of all the talentless advocated a city-wide library consultation in 2014, it was obvious that cuts and closures were on the cards. Smooth words, glossy questionnaires and carefully orchestrated presentations to the public cut little ice with angry Bristolians.

Seeing through sham statements about 'building libraries for the 21st century', local campaigns sprang up in every area. Six of the seven libraries subsequently earmarked for closure after the consultation, were saved, albeit with reductions in opening hours, with the Socialist Party playing a significant role in the campaigning.

Now the vengeful mayor and the cabinet are trying to claw back 'savings' by introducing draconian changes to library assistants' working conditions, prompting a strike on 28 April which closed every library across the city.

Outside Bedminster library, the 20 Unison pickets were joined by members of the public. A continual cacophony of car and lorry horns saluted the enthusiastic strikers, some of whom expressed disappointment that their action had not been able to coincide with that of the doctors.

Unsustainable changes

The council has imposed new contracts on library assistants which oblige them to work their shifts over more days for fewer hours at a time. These shift systems are unsustainable and have impacted hugely on the largely female workforce, many of whom are also carers and thus need stable hours.

Paid just above the minimum wage, some workers have second jobs, which will have to be sacrificed to comply with the new shift patterns. The contracts have already led to some staff having to leave much-loved jobs. But management, egged on by their political bosses who are still licking their wounds from the defeat of their 2014 closure plan, have been totally unresponsive to the union's attempts to talk.

These women feel devalued and angry. They want to provide the best service possible, but understand that the real intent behind this spiteful action is to lay the ground for a further assault on Bristol's library provision in the future.

However, councillors had better think again. The strikers included experienced workers who had never been on a picket line before, but action like this can quickly change consciousness and bring ever greater numbers into the struggle to defend jobs, conditions and services.

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Society of Radiographers conference: "We may be small but we are going to fight back!"

Socialist Party reporters

For the first time the Socialist Party took part in the annual conference of the Society of Radiographers. In 2014 radiographers took industrial action over pay for the first time since 1982 with the brilliant slogan "no raise means no rays"!

The loudest and longest applause during conference was for Socialist Party member Delia Hazrati when she moved a motion from the South East region on trade unions and the need for recognition in the private sector.

She talked of how having a rep has made a difference in her workplace, introducing proper lunchbreaks and reducing the working day to 12 hours as well as defending members at disciplinaries. Delia ended her contribution by saying: "this government wants to crush trade unions, it wants to crush our union, to stop us from having the right to strike.

"We need to send a message: we may be small but we are going to fight back!"

We handed out plenty of 'support the junior doctors' stickers, as well as Socialist Party pamphlets on the NHS. We arranged for about 30 delegates to join the junior doctors' picket line on 26 April to hearty cheers and thanks from the doctors on strike at Leeds General Infirmary.

Delia gave a short interview to a local news channel explaining why the radiographers saw this as their fight too as we will be next in line if the junior doctors do not win!

Workplace news in brief

Blacklisting victory

Britain's biggest building companies have agreed to pay millions of pounds compensation to blacklisted workers. Construction unions GMB and Ucat accepted the £250 million payout on behalf of almost 300 trade union activists who were targeted. Steve Acheson, chair of Blacklist Support Group and blacklisted electrician from Manchester commented: "For more than 40 years, they were blacklisting us with impunity. It was the hard work and tenacity of rank and file activists that has brought this human rights conspiracy into the political discourse. What has already been achieved is a massive victory for the trade union movement but the fight is not over yet. Blacklisted workers may have won compensation but this is a long way from justice." As part of that fight the Blacklist Support Group paid tribute to the tremendous campaign by the families and supporters of the 96 football fans who lost their lives at Hillsborough saying: "The Hillsborough campaigns are an inspiration and prove that when we are steadfast in our fight for the truth, even the rich and powerful will be brought to account in the end."

Leicester teachers

At a recent City of Leicester NUT meeting young teachers came to hear a junior doctor talk about their dispute with the government and also to get organised for coming battles against the education white paper. After listening to the junior doctor, it was striking how much teachers and doctors have in common in defending their service and dealing with a virtually impossible workload. There was strong support for joint action with the doctors and to oppose the government plans for academisation. A series of meetings will be held in the next couple of weeks to brief NUT school reps on the white paper. The battle lines are being drawn. Doctors and teachers must win.

Heather Rawling (retired NUT member) and Simon Robinson (supply teacher organiser Leicester City branch)

POA conference

The NSSN will hold a lunchtime meeting on how we get rid of the Tories at the conference of the prison officers' union, POA, in Southport at the Victoria Pub, 42/43 Stanley Terrace, Southport, PR9 0DS on 10 May.

France protests: build a general strike movement!

Naomi Byron reports from Paris

Striking workers from the railways, car factories, supermarkets, hospitals, offices and banks joined students and youth in mass demonstrations across France on 28 April. Led by lycée (further education) students, the Paris march was 60,000 strong, according to the CGT union federation.

This was the latest day of action in a growing movement against a labour law proposed by the misnamed 'socialist' government of President Hollande. It makes it much easier for the bosses to lay off workers and reduce redundancy payments. It would also make it easier to increase the working week by reducing overtime payments (France's statutory working week is 35 hours).

The El Khomri law (named after the labour minister) has triggered an explosion of anger from below, particularly from the youth, who have the most to lose from it.

There is a deep anger and disgust against not only the proposed law, but the whole political system as well. There were around 70,000 on the May Day demo in Paris, significantly more than last year.

Egalité, the paper of Gauche Révolutionnaire, our sister party in France, calls for the politics of the government to be thrown into the bin. This got enthusiastic agreement from the vast majority of people we spoke to; from lycée students to trade unionists and people who have been drawn into political life through the 'Nuit Debout' - a movement which first appeared in the Place de la République in Paris.

It has echoes of the Occupy and Indignados movements: a public space for discussion where every voice can be heard, with regular 'popular assemblies'.

Nuit Debout has spread to many other towns and cities, and is being organised in the banlieues (big housing estates on the outskirts of a city) in Paris.

Though some on the left have criticised the Nuit Debout, for example for having very long meetings without sufficient direction, Gauche Révolutionnaire has pointed out that every movement needs time to find its feet. The space for discussion and debate, when there is such ferment in society, has to be welcomed with open arms.

In fact, the unions and the wider movement can take many ideas from the Nuit Debout. Not interminable discussions of course, but to call general assemblies in every workplace, lycée, university, school and estate, to discuss how best to defeat the El Khomri law, and all the other questions which face French society.

General strike

The law will be presented in parliament on 3 May, so it is an urgent question. But to defeat a government that is determined to force their unjust laws through, a strong and determined general strike is needed.

Unfortunately the leaders of the trade unions have hesitated for months. Under pressure from their activists and the lycée students movement, the CGT - the most militant trade union federation - has called for national days of action, including strikes.

Its congress recently voted for general assemblies to be called in every workplace to discuss and decide to take "renewable" strike action. But this would have been much more concrete if it had also named a date to begin such a strike.

The strikes and demonstrations of 28 April were angry and powerful, but many who participated are still to some extent uncertain as to how to achieve a general strike.

The same evening, the Nuit Debout invited the unions to an assembly at the Place de la République in Paris. This was a major step forward, both in beginning to bring these different sections of the movement together, and also because when Philippe Martinez, the CGT general secretary, spoke, he had to concede that he was indeed in favour of a general strike when someone in the assembly asked the question.

If so, then he should name the date! Many activists expect such a call, and there are new strikes and struggles breaking out all the time.

The 28 April demonstrations were smaller than the last big day of action, and there is much discussion about how to involve wider layers. By encouraging everyone to discuss not only how to defeat the El Khomri law but how a general strike can be organised and what other things the movement should be fighting for, thousands, then millions, can be drawn into the struggle.

Police violence

There is much enthusiasm to discuss alternatives to capitalism. Gauche Révolutionnaire points out that a general strike is not just a powerful stoppage. The organisation that it requires by the working class can create the very beginning of a new society run by workers, for workers.

Despite the presence of many tens of thousands of trade unionists across the country and a mainly very peaceful day, violence between police and some demonstrators was the main news story in the capitalist media.

Police violence and repression has been used regularly, especially against the youth. Teargas was used against demonstrators in several cities, and shocking videos of the CRS (riot police) dragging people out of the Nuit Debout at the Place de la République and beating them up in massive cloud of teargas, have been all over the internet.

France is still officially in a state of emergency after the November Paris attacks and the following attacks in Brussels.

Le Parisien quoted a gendarme police officer shocked by the anger against the police: "A year ago, after the Charlie Hebdo attack, the French were applauding us." How quickly things can change!

Ireland: Campaigners celebrate suspension of

water charges

Enda Kenny, Fine Gael's acting Taoiseach (prime minister), has been forced into a humiliating climbdown over the imposition of unfair water charges. The suspension of the hated levy is a victory for anti-water charge campaigners, particularly the Socialist Party (CWI Ireland) and its strategy of building a mass non-payment campaign.

Paul Murphy, Irish Socialist Party member and Anti Austerity Alliance TD (MP) commented:

Remember when they said you couldn't get away with not paying? Remember when they said that we would lose in the end as we always do? Remember when they said we were 'leading people to the top of the hill and would then abandon them' (Alan Kelly, environment minister)?

Well, we refused to be scared. We stuck together, we built confidence to triumph over the propaganda and fear and a majority didn't pay. The result is now seen in the outlines of a proposal to suspend water charges for a period of months. It is seen in the sore loser speech of Kelly in the Dail (parliament).

We know that they are going to do everything possible to maintain Irish Water and put water charges on a life support machine. The commission's job will be to find a way to save the project of the commodification of water. So our work is far from done.

We have to demand that Irish Water and water charges are immediately abolished. We have to demand an immediate halt to the metering programme - if they don't, we have to halt it ourselves. We have to demand that the arrears are all now scrapped and those who paid under pressure are refunded.

But as well as organising for total victory, it is also worth taking stock of the likely suspension of water charges that we have forced.

This climbdown is not the result of Fianna Fail (the other major capitalist party - who agreed to water charges in the first place), it is a result of our mass movement. Above all it is a vindication of the thousands of people across the country who actively campaigned for and built non-payment.

The lesson is so clear that it is terrifying for the establishment. Whatever majority they cobble together in the Dail can be defeated by a majority outside the Dail if we have the strategy and tactics to win, and we're not afraid to engage in mass civil disobedience.

Paul is still facing ludicrous criminal charges of 'false imprisonment' over the Jobstown anti-water charge sit-down protest of 18 months ago. He was on a peaceful demonstration that temporarily blocked the car of Labour's Tánaiste (deputy prime minister) Joan Burton. Paul, along with 18 protesters in a politically motivated vendetta by the establishment, was subsequently charged.

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.

Views of letter writers do not necessarily match those of the Socialist Party.

Delighted doctor

I received a very nice comment from one of the striking junior doctors, Jeanna Strutinsky-Mason, who we have been coordinating with over the past few months.

"A fringe benefit of this whole debacle is that my political side has been reawakened. And that I've met so many awesome people... there's such a community out there that I just didn't know existed."

Tom Barker, Leicester

Barack v Brexit

Barack Obama sees the European Union, with its commitment to neoliberalism, as an instrument of American foreign policy - and TTIP as the goose that lays the golden egg. He is concerned that Brexit could jeopardise that arrangement, hence his audacious comments backing Remain.

Leaving will not result in a bonfire of workers' rights. That's already happened under Tory (and Blair) governments.

UK membership of the EU has not prevented the enforcement of the most illiberal labour laws in the developed world, nor the most savage cuts in social provision for 100 years.

Greece learned in a most brutal fashion that the notion that the EU protects workers is a myth.

Blair was crazy Bush's poodle. Now Cameron is Obama's poodle. The time is ripe for us to slash the poodle's leash.

It's not too late for Jeremy Corbyn to face down his right-wing blackmailers and oppose the fat cats' club -and join the campaign for a socialist Europe based on workers' internationalism, not neoliberalism.

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool

Brexit bad for Ukip

A number of lefts campaigning to stay in the EU seem to be using the idea that the right, especially Ukip and Nigel Farage, will be strengthened by an exit vote.

Let's leave aside the fact that Cameron and Osborne represent a much bigger force on the right, and would be strengthened by a Remain vote.

Surely one of the consequences of a close Remain vote would be to make Nigel Farage an even more permanent feature of shows like Question Time, as he has been for the last few years. He would be arguing that Corbyn betrayed 'British workers' by saving Cameron's skin in this referendum.

Also, if Leave won, wouldn't he and other Ukip MEPs no longer be MEPs anymore - cutting off the millions they have received from the EU in salaries and expenses? If anything, it would make them and

their xenophobic ideas less relevant than ever.

Of course, the main reason they are so prominent in these elections is the failure of the trade union and Labour leaders to adopt a class-based position, and build a mass party of the working class capable of leading a full-blooded struggle for our rights.

It is the efforts of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), starting from a principled position of opposing the bosses' EU and fighting for a socialist Europe based on workers' struggles, that is pushing in the direction of building such a force. Only this can effectively marginalise the reactionary views of Farage and Ukip.

Iain Dalton, Leeds

Victorian conditions

While selling the Socialist outside my local post office last month, I met a firefighter. Some of his colleagues are now forced to sleep "on the job" beside their vehicles for several consecutive nights of the working week, due to the lack of affordable homes near their place of work, and fire station closures.

This puts their situation disturbingly close to that of Victorian factory workers, obliged to sleep at the foot of their looms. The spiralling cost of both mortgages and private rented accommodation, plus the lack of council housing, mean that many workers have to travel many miles into work from homes located in cheaper areas. This has sadly predictable effects on mental and physical health.

I have also been struck by the intervention of Heidi Alexander - shadow health secretary and ex-deputy mayor of Lewisham, the London borough where I live - in the junior doctors' dispute.

Alexander has, in fact, tried to throw a lifeline to Tory health secretary Jeremy Hunt. She called for proposed changes to contracts to be piloted in a few select locations, before being imposed across the board.

This would have been a veritable Trojan Horse: a way to achieve the Tories' aims by stealth and subterfuge. Piloting the contracts would change nothing. They would still not work, and once they were up and running would be more difficult to turn back.

Junior doctors recently struck again, and held a joint demonstration in London with teachers' union NUT. Teachers also face a fundamental challenge to their pay and conditions in Education Secretary Nicky Morgan's plan to universalise academies.

Like the firefighters, both these groups are public sector workers under sustained attack from this heinous government.

The Tories are like playground bullies - they cannot be appeased. And there is only one language they understand: that of strike action.

It would be a real step forward for teachers, doctors and firefighters all to strike together; to be joined by other public, private and third sector workers; moving towards a 24-hour general strike, followed by longer actions if necessary.

Susanna Farley, Lewisham

Nationalise care

I recently spent three incredibly frustrating hours going through three years of a low-paid woman's pay slips in order to prove to her employers they had underpaid her by more than a grand in that period.

This wasn't frustrating because it was an arduous task - even though it was. Nor was it frustrating because my time could be better spent doing other things - even though it could.

It was frustrating because I know full well that the large private care company that insisted I do this will already know it owes her the money. But it will not admit it until the very last moment necessary to avoid a legal penalty - in the hope that she gives up, like so many do.

I guarantee I will never vote for another council candidate who does not promise - in their election manifesto - to bring social care under public ownership.

I've said it before and I'll keep saying it. For service users and workers - it is a national scandal. And your taxes pay for it.

Steve North, Salford

Protesters' rights

Political activity led to me being monitored by the police. As an anti-cuts and LGBTQ activist in Brighton, I have made a video about protesters' rights which I believe will be useful to other activists reading the Socialist

The monitoring I experienced from Sussex police in relation to my political organising is explained in the video. This makes it particularly interesting that the police agreed to be questioned by me in it.

- Watch the video at www.bit.ly/ActivistFAQ

Beth Granter, Senior UK Campaigner, Care2

We need a party

It was a shame to see Paul Mason's arguments when on the BBC's daily politics debating the Socialist Party's Peter Taaffe.

Of course, in only a few minutes on TV, it may not always be possible to fully explain your ideas. But Paul did argue against parties as a vehicle for working people and youth to organise to change the world. He used the word "fossilised" and said "you can do more with a cellphone than you can with a party".

While they would have been a fantastic help in our mobilising work at the time, I'm still trying to work out how by cell phones alone, and without being organised, Militant (the Socialist Party's predecessor) could have beaten Thatcher's Poll Tax.

But more to the point, I wonder what Paul will make of reports that Nigel Farage, in the light of challenges to him from within, may relaunch Ukip and have it as "an internet based party which would enhance the leader's power"? (Independent 20 April 2016)

This shows that loose online networks, moods and 'movements' in and of themselves leave a glaring weakness - where are their democratic structures for accountability of leaders?

The political parties of the establishment are rotten to the core. But that does not mean those of us who

want to change the world do not need a democratic instrument to organise through: a party of our own.

Dave Griffiths, Coventry

- Watch the debate between Paul Mason and Peter Taaffe www.socialistparty.org.uk/videos
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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/22735>