

Brazil: Fall of Rousseff unleashes offensive against working class

The impeachment process and historic crisis of the Workers' Party

André Ferrari, LSR ('Freedom, Socialism and Revolution' - CWI Brazil)

Brazil is experiencing its deepest economic and social crisis. Alongside this, a massive political crisis has arisen.

This crisis flows from the undemocratic manoeuvres of the right-wing establishment and big business against workers' rights. It is also a product of the total failure of the conciliatory model of 'class collaboration' adopted by the Workers' Party (PT) during its 13 years in government.

President Dilma Rousseff of the PT was removed from her post on 12 May by the Federal Senate. In her place, the former vice president, Michel Temer of the PMDB (the right-wing Brazilian Democratic Movement Party), has taken over.

The removal of Dilma took place a few days after the Chamber of Deputies voted by a clear majority to start impeachment of the president.

At the time of both votes, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate were being presided over by parliamentarians who are personally implicated in corruption scandals.

Eduardo Cunha (PMDB), president of the Chamber of Deputies, had his mandate as a deputy (MP) removed by the Federal Supreme Tribunal only a few days after the vote to initiate impeachment proceedings against Rousseff!

Under the formal procedure, Rousseff is excluded from office for 180 days before the Senate takes a final decision on her impeachment. The results of the first vote already makes clear that this decision will not be reversed by the conservative, right-wing and extremely corrupt Federal Senate.

Downfall

The fall of Dilma Rousseff was the result of a change in the political position of some of the traditional right-wing parties, supported and egged on by the most important sections of big business. For years many of these parties gave the PT government its majority in the National Congress.

However, the weakness of Dilma's government proved to be too much given the severity of the situation. The worsening economic crisis, with mass unemployment, together with the adoption of recessionary fiscal adjustment policies and attacks on workers' rights, made Dilma one the most unpopular presidents in the history of Brazil.

The passive dissatisfaction in society allowed the right wing to step in and mobilise big sections of the middle class - the first mass demonstrations the right has been able to organise in decades.

From the beginning of this year, the core of big capital - the largest private banks and the Sao Paulo State Industrial Federation (FIESP) - decided to take to the road of impeachment.

Every conceivable type of undemocratic manoeuvre was used, including totally spurious practices by the corrupt Chamber of Deputies president, to guarantee the right result. The formal charge made against Dilma Rousseff was her involvement in corrupt government schemes, presiding over excessive public costs and hiding these in the accounts.

PT's record

Up until the last moment, Rousseff tried to convince the big capitalists that her government would be capable of implementing the neoliberal policies they demanded.

These included opening up the economy to foreign companies for oil exploration and renegotiations of the state debts, which meant brutal cuts, privatisations, etc.

Significantly, one of the last decrees of Dilma was to open a hydro-electrical plant in Belo Monte, in Amazonia. This is nothing short of a monument to environmental destruction.

Despite this, big demonstrations against impeachment took place, mainly driven by the view that a state coup was underway - an attack on democracy.

The PT used this and exaggerated its rhetoric to try and compensate for the fact that it was virtually impossible to defend the Rousseff government's record in office.

At the same time, the undemocratic manoeuvres utilised to remove the government creates a serious precedent which can open the road to harsher, anti-democratic attacks on the rights of the working class and oppressed peoples.

When former PT president Lula, the principle leader of the PT and one of the main historic leaders of the workers' movement in Brazil, was threatened with imprisonment there was a certain radicalisation.

However, this only lasted a few days. At a mass demonstration in Sao Paulo, on 18 March, Lula demobilised the movement by announcing he would join Dilma's government as a minister to "re-negotiate a new pact" with the PMDB to stop the impeachment process.

The main obstacle to fight against the right-wing is the character of Dilma's government and the PT leadership.

Sections of the working class that historically backed PT and Lula now see them as incapable of leading a struggle against the right wing. These workers want an end of the policy of class conciliation that has led to a defeat for the working class.

Temer government

Michel Temer has no social base. The conditions for him to head a stable government are minimal. His name is linked to corruption and he is under investigation.

At the moment, the Brazilian ruling class, along with US imperialism, has put all its cards on Temer's government, hoping it will be able to carry out the deep attacks that it wants.

The first days of the Temer government were marked by an avalanche of policy announcements, ie new attacks against the living conditions of the working class and poor. The Ministry of Health announced that universal access to the public health system as a state obligation will be reviewed, as it was in Greece.

There will be a revision of policies to tackle working conditions that are analogous to slavery, which is something that still exists in parts of Brazil. There will be the opening of a new cycle of privatisations.

The government also announced the cancellation of projects to build 10,000 social houses, which have already begun.

The people's reaction is already explosive. The instability and sharpness of the conflicts will increase in the coming days and weeks.

Such is the seriousness of the situation, it cannot be excluded that the CUT trade union federation and other union federations, after years of doing nothing, will be compelled to call a general strike against Temer's policies.

PSOL and the left

The broad left PSOL (Party of Socialism and Liberty) increased its authority greatly during this crisis. It attacked the policies of Dilma but its members of Congress correctly voted against her impeachment in the chamber of Deputies and Senate.

The building of a socialist left front uniting the parties and social movements that did not participate in the PT governments, is crucial in the struggle for a socialist left alternative.

Other sectors of the socialist left ended up being isolated from the recent processes and struggles. The PSTU, for example, adopted the slogan: "Fuera Todos" ("Out with them all"), including Dilma Rousseff.

In doing so, it failed to differentiate itself from the right that strove for the impeachment of Dilma. The PSTU does not see that the impeachment of Dilma has changed the situation and opened the prospect of even more attacks against the working class.

A new stage of class struggle has opened up. These conflicts will create the opportunities for the building of a new socialist left. The LSR is fighting for the building of such an alternative.

- Full article on www.socialistworld.net

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

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

www.socialistworld.net

Venezuela - on the brink of collapse?

Counter-revolution gaining ground

Tony Saunois, Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

Venezuela is being battered by a social and economic catastrophe. With inflation at more than 500% (the world's highest) and estimated to soar to 750% by the end of the year, living standards have plummeted.

Amid vast food shortages of the most basic staples like rice and beans; power and water cuts; public

sector workers on a two-day week, there is the real threat of a total social collapse. Some commentators are even warning of Venezuela becoming a "failed state".

The scale of the social collapse is reflected in an epidemic of murders and violent crime. Venezuela has the second highest murder rate of any country.

The reforms in health, education and housing of the late President Hugo Chavez's era have all but disappeared under the weight of economic collapse, falling oil prices, bureaucracy and corruption and sabotage by the capitalist class.

Reactionary right-wing forces have capitalised on the situation as support for president Maduro's government has crashed. They have led a campaign to force a recall referendum on his presidency.

They are mobilising to defeat Maduro and pave the way for a right-wing comeback. However, Maduro, with the allegiance of the armed forces, is indicating he will fight such attempts.

The capitalist class is already attempting to present this disaster as another "failure for socialism". Yet this is far from the case. The initial reforms and inroads made against the ruling class initially won massive support as the process of the revolution was taking steps forward.

It was the failure to take this process to a conclusion and break with capitalism which has resulted in the current crisis. Capitalism was wounded but not snuffed out. The absence of genuine workers' control and management and the emergence of bureaucratic, corrupt, top-down methods by the state have also contributed to the current crisis, as the Socialist Party and CWI repeatedly warned.

It remains to be seen how the current crisis will develop but such are the social conditions that a massive social outburst of anger - rioting and looting - similar to that which took place in the infamous Caracas in 1989 is possible.

Socialist alternative

Workers, the youth and middle class have nothing to gain by supporting right-wing leaders such as Capriles, who only serves the interests of the ruling class.

Workers and the masses need to take urgent steps to form democratically elected emergency committees to organise the distribution of food and other supplies - building on these to develop a mass movement to break with capitalism.

Then it would be possible to introduce a socialist, democratic emergency plan to rebuild the economy based on nationalising the banking system and key sectors of the economy - under a system of democratic workers' control and management.

Failure to take such bold measures is opening the road to social collapse and the threat of a counter-revolution.

Austria - Hofer defeated, but far-right threat remains

Build a fighting left alternative

Sozialistische Linkspartei (SLP) Austria and CWI reporters

On 22 May in the run-off second round election for Austria's presidency, Alexander Van der Bellen from the Green Party narrowly defeated Norbert Hofer, the candidate of the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ). The margin was a mere 31,026 votes.

Opinion polls ahead of the next general election put the FPÖ on 34% - with the ruling coalition Social Democrats (SPÖ) on 26% and conservative People's Party (ÖVP) on 18% - and the Greens on 13%.

How is it that a party that started out as an organisation for former Nazis could win 35% in the first round and just fail to be elected with 49.7% in the final round?

The main reason is the deep frustration and anger of working class people about the policies of the government and the establishment parties, against the backdrop of a worsening social and economic situation and a large influx of refugees. Yet only 12% of Hofer's supporters said the refugee issue was their main concern.

The anger about the establishment is burning. At the same time the trade unions are passive or at best moderating the job losses and cuts. No fighting alternative is given to reverse the decline in living standards.

The FPÖ used racism but also in the last decade, increasingly, populist rhetoric. In the absence of a left alternative (SPÖ is now, fundamentally, a capitalist party) the FPÖ benefitted from the growing anger and disillusionment among increasing numbers of working class people. Over 60% of blue collar votes went to Hofer.

Hofer has no programme at all to help Austrian workers deal with falling wages, record unemployment, austerity or the general fall in living standards but his election campaign presented refugees as another threat to workers.

Neoliberalism

The FPÖ is a racist party but also a neoliberal party. Whenever and wherever it's been or is in power, it has implemented severe social cuts - tuition fees, slaughtered the pension system, cut youth facilities and elderly care.

Hofer's defeat is a relief but, given the FPÖ's clear lead in opinion polls, it's possible that its leader, Strache, could become chancellor at the next general election. This would mean brutal neoliberal politics combined with anti-women, anti-migrant, anti-LGBTQ and anti-Muslim measures.

This danger was very clearly seen by a lot of people and explains why so many finally voted for Van der Bellen. Just 11% voted for him because they thought he represented their political ideas.

The only thing won on 22 May is breathing space. This has to be filled. Simply calling the FPÖ "Nazi" or stressing its far-right policies is not enough.

A programme that answers the economic and social issues in the interests of working people is needed both to stop the FPÖ's rise and answer the questions posed by increasing numbers of refugees.

SLP, the Austrian section of the CWI, some weeks ago started a campaign "the rich have to pay", which has gone down very well. The breathing space must be used to build a fighting, democratic, left organisation that can offer an alternative both to those who voted for Hofer to kick the establishment and for those who voted for Van der Bellen to prevent Hofer.

- Read full article on www.socialistworld.net
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Mass protests against regime take on Kazakhstan cops

Clare Doyle, Committee for a Workers' International

Hundreds and thousands of people - young and old - set out to join countrywide protests on 21 May against Kazakhstan's vicious Nazarbayev regime.

They were met with an enormous police operation to prevent them reaching the squares for the demonstrations. But, "the people have awoken!" as one campaigner put it. This movement is unlikely to subside any time soon.

It erupted on the issue of land sales (see 'Anger against Nazarbayev expressed on the streets' at socialistworld.net) which is a sensitive issue in Kazakhstan. Land is seen as the primary source of people's wellbeing. It has been held in common over the centuries and is still in state hands.

Discontent has been fuelled by a huge drop in the country's income from oil and uranium. The population is made to pay, while Nazarbayev's clique is mired in corruption. Recent revelations in the Daily Mail have confirmed that Prince Andrew is up to his eyes in dirty deals! Anger against the regime as a whole is boiling over.

In the days before the planned mass protests, dozens of government critics, human rights activists and media personnel were rounded up and given administrative detention for ten days to two weeks. In some cities, tanks and 'special forces' were put on the streets.

The videos and reports that have come out of Kazakhstan show determination to confront the regime and the police. Fear is dissolving as the struggle intensifies to end the 27-year rule of the super-rich dictator Nursultan Nazarbayev.

The urgent need now is for representatives agreed by the demonstrators to draw up plans for new protests and put forward slogans that can build a mass force.

Campaign Kazakhstan has suggested a programme for such a task, and welcomes comments that can assist the workers and young people involved in this crucial fight. Join the protest at the Kazakh embassy, 26 May at 1pm, 125 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5EA (near Trafalgar Square).

- See www.socialistworld.net and www.campaignkazakhstan.org for more
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Canada: fire devastates Fort McMurray

Capitalism equals environmental destruction

Bill Hopwood, Socialist Alternative (CWI Canada) Vancouver

On the evening of 3 May the entire 94,000 population of Fort McMurray was ordered to leave as an out-of-control wildfire swept towards it. Most people had a terrifying drive through clouds of smoke, with flames in sight and burning fragments falling onto the road.

The heroic effort of firefighters - working 23-hour shifts in extreme danger - saved some 90% of the

buildings in Fort McMurray. However, 2,400 buildings were destroyed and much of the city's infrastructure is out of commission.

Response

Amazingly, the only reported human loss of life was two people who died in a road accident.

The response to the fire and evacuation has shown that people, contrary to the ideology that greed and selfishness are good, are capable of enormous generosity and solidarity.

As people fled south from the fire, people along the way provided fuel, drinking water and even diapers for babies.

People opened their doors to strangers, giving them shelter. Food, clothing, blankets, personal hygiene items and money have all flooded in. Recently arrived refugees from Syria raised funds to purchase supplies.

As in most disasters, its impact has not been evenly spread. If this fire had taken place in a poor country, the fatalities would have been far higher.

Even in Alberta though, workers suffered loss of homes and forced evacuation, while the CEOs, on \$10 million a year, and senior management of Fort McMurray's industry, were safe in Calgary.

Fort McMurray's main industry is extracting the bitumen from the tar sands to produce crude oil. The tragic irony of the fire threatening the centre of Canada's fossil fuel industry has provoked both silence and debate. Because of sensitivity about the tar sands, it is deemed an out-of-bounds topic.

Elizabeth May, leader of Canada's Green Party, was widely condemned for saying that the fire was "very likely a climate event". Justin Trudeau, Canada's prime minister, joined in the criticism saying her comments were "neither helpful nor entirely accurate".

Fort McMurray is surrounded by boreal forest, part of the largest land-based ecological zone that rings the northern hemisphere.

Burning fossil fuels, which are the main product of Fort McMurray, causes global warming. The average annual temperature across Canada has increased 1.3°C since 1948, while in Alberta the increase is over 2°C since 1950.

The winters are shorter and warmer, resulting in reduced snowpack and, with earlier spring, the snow melts sooner. In parts of northern British Columbia, next door to Alberta, the snowpack in May was 25% of the historic average.

The summers are hotter, increasing evaporation. An increase of 1°C in temperature requires a 15% increase in precipitation to maintain the same level of moisture on the ground.

When the fire started the temperature at Fort McMurray was 32°C, compared to the historic average temperature at this time of year of 14°C.

Hotter summers mean more lightning, a major cause of fires. Warmer winters allow more insects to survive the winter, weakening trees and increasing the amount of dead wood to burn.

These trends add up to increased likelihood of fires which will accelerate as global warming continues.

A group of 70 forest fire experts met in 2009 and agreed that fires were bigger and hotter and this will intensify. In the early days of the Trudeau government, Natural Resources Canada staff told the new

minister that wildfires were becoming worse and governments were not providing enough resources to assist communities to prepare.

However, every barrel from the tar sands adds to climate change. It does not matter if the oil is burnt in Canada, China or elsewhere. The world has a global weather system.

Rather than continue an industry that contributes to more disasters and is vulnerable to market instability, why not change? The case for a serious and determined transition to renewable energy and energy efficiency is overwhelming from environmental, health and safety, and economic standpoints.

Jobs

An energy transition will provide far more good jobs than the tar sands and with guaranteed re-training many workers would prefer such work.

With the resources of the energy companies in democratic public ownership, Canada could become a clean energy society with good jobs.

The Canadian government is facing two contradictory ways. At the Paris climate change conference they supported limiting the increase of global temperatures to 1.5°C. Yet they are determined to build a pipeline from the tar sands to the ocean, which will add to global warming.

The campaign to stop fossil fuels in order to stop global warming is linked to the fight for good jobs. It is not a choice between jobs or the environment.

The real choice is between capitalism, with its attendant environmental destruction and mass unemployment, or socialism with good jobs and a healthy planet.

- Full article can be read on www.socialistworld.net

Tories forced back in junior doctors' dispute

Build a mass movement to defend the NHS

Junior doctors are discussing the offer extracted from Jeremy Hunt. The full details will be published at the end of May. The very fact that the Tories were forced back into talks was a victory and was down to the incredible, tenacious strike action taken by 50,000 junior doctors in the BMA over the last five months.

Teachers made the Tories retreat over their plan to force all schools to become academies by 2022, with the National Union of Teachers' threat to ballot all members. However, they intend to still have a strike vote because Education Minister Nicky Morgan still plans to push through her academy programme, which is linked to trying to end national pay and a squeeze in pay and conditions.

NUT members see the possibility of turning a partial retreat into a full-blown victory. Many junior doctors see the possibility to do the same with their dispute.

Also encouraged by the junior doctors' example, the BMA GPs conference has voted to consult members for industrial action over the intolerable work pressures GPs now face.

There is the possibility to inflict a total defeat on what is a weak and divided Tory government. Scandalously, the TUC has allowed the junior doctors to fight alone, despite massive public support

and solidarity from ordinary trade unionists.

On the eve of the last TUC general council, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka spoke from the platform of the joint BMA-NUT London demonstration and announced that his union's national executive committee that day voted to call on the TUC to organise a national day of action to support the junior doctors. That was ignored by the TUC.

Yet there is massive potential to build a mass movement to defend the NHS, headed by the junior doctors, the campaign to protect NHS bursaries and paramedics who are currently balloting for strikes over pay.

All health workers understand that they may very well be next after the junior doctors. Socialist Party members are prominent in the Huddersfield Royal Infirmary campaign that saw 8,000 march in February to fight the closure of their local A&E while 2,000 laid siege to a consultation meeting in April.

This could be replicated on a national basis, especially with NHS England plans to downgrade or close many more A&E departments. The trade union movement must take a lead and link up with the BMA and the other health unions.

The Tories wanted this dispute to be their 'miners' strike' - defeating a high profile group of workers to warn off others from taking industrial action. They have failed in this as the junior doctors are taking on the methods of the union movement and learning big lessons through the experience.

The fact that their recent conference agreed a motion calling on the BMA to work closely with other unions is a reflection of this understanding and their desire to seek solidarity.

Junior doctors are waiting for the detail of the new proposal to decide if it is worth accepting. It appears that the date for the new contract has been pushed back from August while BMA members vote on the offer.

Implementation is scheduled between October and April, depending on speciality. The Tories are arguing that the new offer is 'cost-neutral' - meaning that there is no new money on the table because they want to deny that they have made significant concessions.

No new money

However, if there is no new money, it will be unacceptable to many junior doctors who will realise that one of the central threats to their existing contract remains - making Saturday working up to 7pm part of their 'core hours', which won't attract premium payments.

If the offer is rejected, we call on the BMA to demand an emergency meeting with the TUC general council to discuss the building of a mass campaign of joint strikes and demonstrations - including a national Saturday mobilisation in London - that can build a mass movement to inflict a total defeat on the Tories.

'Socialist case against the EU' TUSC tour kicks off

30 people packed the room at a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) meeting in Leicester on 19 May to hear Rob Williams, Socialist Party executive committee and chair of the National Shop

Stewards Network. This was part of TUSC's 20 city tour to campaign against the bosses EU.

A number of people, some at their first meeting, asked questions to clarify our position. We were able to explain that we are for real internationalism. But that's why we need a socialist Europe, not the 'Employers' Union' that is the EU, with its austerity agenda.

Rob took up the arguments of some on the left who say 'we can't argue for a Leave strategy because it will result in the Tories being strengthened, particularly the right'. But if there is a defeat for Cameron, he could be ejected as prime minister. In fact, it is likely that with a split Tory government there could be a general election, and then a Jeremy Corbyn-led government. The Tories are at each other throats, and a Leave vote would be a major defeat for them.

The previous night Becci Heagney from the Socialist Party national committee spoke at a similar meeting in Derby and answered those trade union and Labour Party leaders who claim that the EU defends workers' rights:

"The most griping one for me is equal pay. Firstly, men and women still don't have equal pay. But secondly the Equal Pay Act was achieved by women workers taking strike action and fighting for it. I am sure many here have seen the film Made in Dagenham, it's not called Made in Brussels!

"Regardless of whether we are in the EU or out of it, working class people need to rely on their own strength to organise to defend our own rights and to fight for better jobs, wages and conditions."

Michael Barker

TUSC - 20 city tour

Socialist case against the EU

Bristol

7.30pm Tuesday 31 May

YHA Youth Hostel, 14 Narrow Quay, BS1 4QA

Cardiff

7.30pm Thursday 9 June,

Angel Hotel, Castle Street, CF10 1SZ

Leeds

7pm Tuesday 7 June,

Dennison Hall WMC, Pinfold Lane, Armley, LS12 3LL

Liverpool

7.30pm Tuesday 14 June

Casa, 29 Hope Street, L1 9BQ

London

7.30pm Thursday 2 June

Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, W1T 6AQ

Salford

7pm Tuesday 7 June

Royal Oak, Barton Lane, Eccles, M30 0EN

Sheffield

7.30pm Tuesday 21 June

Central United Reform Church, Chapel Walk, Norfolk Street, S1 2JB

Stoke

7pm Thursday 16 June

WRVS Centre, 29 Charles Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3JP

Warrington

7pm Wednesday 15 June

Kings Head, 40 Winwick Street, WA2 7TU

York

7.30pm Monday 20 June

New York Club, 22-26 Blossom Street, YO24 1AJ

- Details tbc for Birmingham (1 June), Coventry (2 June), Southampton (16 June) and other cities see www.tusc.org.uk/events

Boris hid killer air report

João Félix

It was recently revealed that the Boris Johnson administration buried a report on London's air pollution problem.

It showed that 433 primary schools in London are in places where levels of nitrogen oxides, gases that may cause acute respiratory illnesses, surpassed EU safety limits.

83% of these schools are in "deprived" areas. No surprise in a city where some high streets breached

the EU's annual limit for number of hours of high pollution in just eight days.

This is the latest in a series of scandals. The World Health Organisation calls it a public health emergency, both in the UK and abroad.

Air pollution causes more than 40,000 premature deaths every year in the UK alone, and more than three million across the world. This is more than HIV and malaria combined, with the worst affected being the youngest, oldest and poorest.

As usual, it hits the working class the worst. More than 80% of the human urban population is now living with dangerous levels of air pollution. The number rises to a staggering 98% in developing countries.

This is nothing new under capitalism. From its beginning, workers in the factories and mines have died of horrendous respiratory illnesses such as silicosis. In many places, millions still do.

Air pollution is also the primary cause of climate change. With the 1°C mark already reached, temperature increase shows no sign of stopping before the 2°C red line. This will have unimaginable consequences.

And what is the answer of the capitalist class to all this?

In a time where the effects of air pollution in human health and global warming are increasingly obvious, the Tory government decides to cut subsidies to renewable energy, green houses and cars, while offering billions in generous handouts to oil and gas firms.

Capitalist companies are worried about hiding inconvenient studies and fudge results, not finding a way of protecting the environment. The climate change cover-up by big oil, and Volkswagen's recent emissions scandal, are just two of the striking examples of how corporations line their own pockets at the expense of the health and lives of workers.

Only a socialist society, with a democratically planned, publicly owned economy, can break this power and allocate the resources to solve this catastrophe looming over us.

Them & us

Kinnocks coin it...

Disastrous former Labour leader Baron Kinnock and his wife Baroness Kinnock have glommed six pensions between them. The apparent amount of their entitlement is - well - baronial.

Big business think tank Open Europe estimates the pair of proto-Blairites could make £185,000 a year from the pensions. No doubt it has its own agenda, and the Kinnocks claim figures are "inflated" - but don't outright deny them.

The fattest estimated payouts are from the bosses' European Union. The baron could receive £83,089 for his nine years as an unelected commissioner. Meanwhile the baroness could get £48,000 a year from Brussels - on top of her House of Lords ministerial salary.

The Kinnocks have plenty of form. As an MEP, Glenys got busted in 2004, along with many others. She would sign on for her £175 daily allowance and then immediately leave for the day.

And Neil led the notorious witch-hunt against Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party. Among other things, Militant-supporting Labour MPs took only the average wage of a skilled worker. Neil couldn't be having that, could he?

...pensioners poor

Meanwhile, nearly one million over-75s are living in poverty, according to charity Independent Age.

The report found one in five - 950,000 - live below its poverty threshold. This was the very meagre £182 a week before housing costs, or £272 for couples.

The study also found women pensioners more at risk of poverty.

The Socialist says: bosses rob workers all our working lives. Stop the theft from pensioners! For a living pension, free healthcare and guaranteed housing for all. Take the wealth off the 1%!

What we saw: 'I, Daniel Blake' and Hunt/'Thick of It' remix

Anti-cuts drama 'I, Daniel Blake' has won top gong at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival.

The pro-welfare polemic by social-realist filmmaker Ken Loach follows a disabled man persecuted by the benefits system. Loach used his Palme d'Or acceptance speech to attack austerity.

'The Thick of It', a comedy following car-crash establishment politicians and their aides, often feels painfully accurate. Especially the other day when Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt was interviewed by Channel 4's Jon Snow.

Hunt squirmed under questioning over his attacks on junior doctors. It really made my day when filmmaker Chris Presswell remixed the interview with a clip from The Thick of It. In it, the aides watch in shock as their boss messes up an interview. The remix works perfectly.

- Watch the mash-up at <http://tiny.cc/pcepby>

Helen Pattison

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 903

EU referendum can bring the Tories down

- Only an independent working class position can defeat the right

"As the debate on the EU referendum intensifies, so do the possibilities for a split in the Conservative Party." This is not a quote from the Socialist or even an opposition politician, but from Tory MP Jacob Rees-Mogg writing in one of the main mouthpieces of capitalism, the Financial Times.

He goes on to compare the divisions emerging in the Tory party today to those that led to chasms within it in the mid-19th century over the repeal of the Corn Laws. Nobody can deny the scale of the crisis facing the Tories as a result of this referendum. And it will be far from an easy task for them to put Humpty back together again, regardless of the result.

Majority of 12

This was always a weak government - voted for by 24% of the electorate and with a parliamentary majority of just 12. And now, unable to function as one party, it is a lame duck awaiting its fate on 23 June.

That explains why they have been forced to retreat, at least partially, on so many issues. Initially determined not to give an inch to the junior doctors, Jeremy Hunt was forced back to the negotiating table. Nicky Morgan's attempt to legislatively force every school to become an academy had to be re-hashed. Cuts to tax credits were put on the back burner until the planned (but much-delayed and far-from-guaranteed) introduction of Universal Credit.

Equally, this paralysis explains why there was very little policy of substance included in the recent Queen's Speech. A continuation of austerity absolutely, but as one Labour MP was quoted as saying: "It was mostly re-announcements of previously ditched policies, and small measures which just tinker at the edges. It shows that this government are completely hamstrung by the referendum."

Cameron is backed into a corner trying to fight off foes from all directions. He faces threats from the right-wing Tories campaigning for Leave - a position which is more popular with the Tory party membership at large. He's forced to talk almost-left on issues like jobs and the health service in an attempt to win over working class people to his Remain position. But he must keep big business on side and never drop the clear fact that it's their interests which he will always put first, including in this referendum.

And then of course, there's Ukip. Nigel Farage has predicted that a third of Conservative Party members could defect to Ukip in the case of a victory for Remain. While this is unlikely to be a scientific assessment, having spent 25 years putting the EU centre-stage of all its politics, Ukip was clearly always going to see this as an opportunity to shine.

And many working class and young people will vote Remain because of an understandable fear that a Leave vote would mainly benefit Ukip and lead to a strengthening of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment and policies.

But Ukip has gained ground and has been expressing its racist politics while the UK is in the EU. The status quo is clearly not working to combat this.

Racism

This is because it's not membership of the EU that is decisive in tackling the growth of Ukip or its politics. In fact the racist policies of the EU - which continues to brutally deport thousands of refugees from Greece to Turkey - are contributing to gains for the right across Europe.

The ground for Ukip to grow is provided not by Brexit but by vicious austerity, repulsion with the political establishment and a deep desire for working class people to take control of their own lives and have the chance of a different type of society.

Ukip doesn't represent this alternative - it is yet another party of big business whose politicians vote for cuts to jobs and services just like the other capitalist parties. But its rhetoric is designed to appeal to a layer of working class people looking for something different.

Polls have consistently shown Ukip voters are more likely than average to support nationalisation of the railways and utility companies and other pro-worker policies. Ukip recognises this base of support. In the recent Welsh elections, where Ukip won seven assembly members, they hardly spoke about immigration at all, instead using slogans like 'save our steel' and 'save our NHS'.

The way to combat this support is therefore to build an alternative capable of actually achieving this kind of policy and answering the fears of working class people about how best to defend their jobs and services. This requires building a strong, united movement against austerity - which could cut across racial division and bring about real change to ordinary people's lives. Why would such a movement opt to give a vote of confidence to an institution that is fundamentally opposed to these aims, as the EU is?

To nationalise the railways, for example, would require a confrontation with the EU, which places obstacles in the way of state intervention and nationalisation. It would be one extra barrier for a left government to overcome.

If a lead had been given to a left Leave campaign by the trade union leaders and Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, any benefit to Ukip could have been cut across. Instead they have, with a few honourable exceptions, fallen into line behind Cameron and the official Remain campaign.

This means that in the mainstream debates no working class voice is heard. Instead we have two sides trying to out-racism each other - as was shown clearly recently in the debate over the possible future admission of Turkey to the EU.

Left alternative

But, despite their mistake, it is still a Leave vote that would present the best chance to kick out the Tories and offer a huge opportunity for Corbyn's Labour to come to power well before 2020. Around the world it has been shown time and again that working class people will favour a left alternative over a right-wing one when this exists and is seen as a serious force.

When Greek party Syriza was presenting a left stand against austerity, it was propelled to power by the working class (before later capitulating to the EU and continuing to implement its austerity memorandums). At one stage, when seen as most radical and serious, Syriza was supported by more than 60% of those who had previously voted for the far-right Golden Dawn.

A Labour Party standing on the programme that won Corbyn such huge support in last summer's Labour leadership race - for a £10 an hour minimum wage, against privatisation and cuts, for free education and so on - could undoubtedly triumph against the Tories and Ukip.

The crisis in the Tory party is not a unique phenomenon. All over the world the traditional parties of capitalism are disintegrating. In Spain, a new general election has been called after only six months, because no government could be formed after the last one. The main capitalist party, the PP, lost 3.6 million votes. In Portugal the last government collapsed after only weeks in power. The fault lines are shifting and an entirely new political landscape is possible - shown this time in Britain. This referendum could lead to major splits - not only in the Tories but also in Labour and even in Ukip itself.

The approach of looking purely for the 'lesser evil' cannot defeat the right. In the US, the establishment 'left' would like working class people to fall into line behind Hillary Clinton, raising the prospect of a Donald Trump presidency as a whip. But workers in the US are sick of the same old politics of the super-rich 1%. Which is why it's not guaranteed that Clinton would win such a race.

In fact several polls have shown that Clinton's left-wing challenger, Bernie Sanders - with his call for a 'political revolution against the billionaire class' - would stand a better chance of defeating right-wing anti-establishment candidate Trump.

Because ultimately only a socialist, independent working class position can defeat the right wing. That means building parties everywhere that can represent the mass movements that will be necessary to change our futures.

The current weakness of Cameron and his Tory government offers a unique opportunity for workers to press this home. Imagine the opportunities that would face the labour and trade union movement if Cameron was forced to resign (as he would be in the case of a Leave victory) and the more so if a general election was called. Fighting for a strong working class Leave vote on 23 June can contribute to achieving that.

Link the strikes - come to the NSSN conference

Rob Williams, Chair, National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN)

NSSN supporters have been racing around picket lines and strike protests as a succession of workers have taken action. In Sheffield, PCS members at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) were on strike to stop their office being closed, while across the city hundreds of BFAWU bakers' union members were on picket lines, day and night to stop their employer, Pennine Foods, imposing new inferior contracts.

Solidarity

In London, we supported the Unite strike at the Homes and Communities Agency as well as giving solidarity to the picket and protest of RMT members at Southern Rail.

In Glasgow, the ongoing 'Justice for Jannies' dispute saw striking Unison members protest outside the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh and Glasgow City Centre. PCS Welsh museum workers have been continuing their indefinite strike.

Members of the UCU lecturers' union in higher education are taking national action at the same time that the National Union of Teachers is balloting for action. Steelworkers marched in London on 25 May to save their plants, jobs and communities, the same day as Bectu cinema members in Hackney are striking.

Every week sees more workers taking action - whether it is against their private sector employer or increasingly against what they see is a government that is weak and divided.

The question is how do we bring these struggles together, to make a breakthrough against the bosses' offensive and the Tory cuts and their new anti-union laws?

The teachers pushed the Tories to make a partial retreat over forced academies and now want to win further concessions. The junior doctors' tenacious action forced Jeremy Hunt to the negotiating table. BMA doctors' union members will now decide if enough has been won and if they need to take further action.

But if, as the NSSN has argued, the TUC had organised mass solidarity action, as called for by the PCS and the Fire Brigades Union, the Tories and their planned imposed contract could have been totally defeated already, opening up the possibility of a major crisis for the government and even its removal.

It is no accident that the recent BMA's junior doctors conference called for the union to work closely with other unions. If the new offer is rejected, we encourage the BMA to demand to speak at the TUC general council about a united struggle to support them, the campaign to save the NHS bursary as well

as defending the NHS.

United

The NSSF's 10th annual conference is in London on 2 July. Hundreds of union reps and activists alongside anti-cuts campaigners will be meeting together to discuss the multitude of disputes and campaigns.

We will be providing a platform to every strike that is going on to build solidarity as well as learning the lessons from the ones that have taken place. But it will also be a 'council of war' to discuss how the rank and file of the union movement can put maximum pressure on the union leaders to call the mass co-ordinated action that is needed to defeat the Tories.

Sheffield: PCS BIS staff strike against office closure

Alistair Tice, Yorkshire Socialist Party

Around 150 PCS civil service union members working for the government department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) took strike action today - 19 May - to save the Sheffield BIS office from closure. The Tory government wants to move this department - which is responsible for the Northern Powerhouse - and 250 jobs, to London. You couldn't make it up!

Around 30 PCS members attended the picket line at St Paul's Place. A union delegation door-stepped Minister of State for Skills Nick Boles at a Skills Summit but he refused to take a leaflet.

His boss, Business minister Sajid Javid, is also refusing to talk, even to his own staff in BIS. The strike was called to coincide with Javid's visit to Sheffield to attend the Cutler's Feast, the annual gathering of Sheffield business people, where he is due to give a speech on ... the Northern Powerhouse. Javid also refused to meet with Sheffield's council leader who to her credit supported the pickets this morning and is boycotting the Cutler's Feast tonight.

PCS will be turning up at the Feast, at least on the outside, where it intends to give Javid a hard time. Two years ago Nick Clegg was the headline speaker at the Cutler's Feast: look what happened to him! PCS members hope that the same fate awaits Javid.

If Javid won't talk, then Sheffield BIS workers will take three days of strike action next week.

- Please send messages of support to Marion Lloyd (President of PCS BIS group):
marion.lloyd@ic24.net
- Sign the petition: bit.ly/bisSheffPet

Donate to the strike:

- Cheques made payable to the PCS BIS Hardship Fund can be sent to the BIS group treasurer at 9 Medina Way, Upper Stratton, Swindon, SN2 7NW
 - Or money can be transferred to Unity Trust Bank Account 20240992 sort code 60-83-01
-

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 19 May 2016 and may

vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Pennine Foods - Strikers persuade delivery lorries to turn away

Alistair Tice, Yorkshire Socialist Party

Pickets sang "Where's your veg gone, where's your veg gone, far far away" after a wagon driver refused to cross the bakers' union picket at the Pennine Foods strike in Sheffield this morning.

Hundreds of BFAWU bakers' union members began a 48-hour strike at 6am against the company (part of the 2 Sisters group) imposing a new contract on all the workers which will cut some wages by as much as £80 a week.

Pennine Foods supplies Marks and Spencer, so one homemade banner read: "This isn't just any strike, It's an M&S strike!"

In recent years, the bosses have employed new starters on new contracts paying no weekend, bank holiday or unsocial hour enhancements. Now that the workers on the older contracts (paying premium rates) are in a minority of the workforce, the company thought that it could get away with forcing a new contract on all the staff, removing all premium payments.

But, even though the newer contract workers would get a pay rise of £30 a week, they showed impressive solidarity by refusing to accept the new contract and voted to support their colleagues. In the ballot for strike action 85% voted in favour.

Over 100 new members have joined the union in the last week in this very multicultural workforce - around a third of the workers are black and Asian and another third eastern European.

Around 150 have stood on the picket lines. By early afternoon six delivery lorries had refused to cross the picket lines, boosting the confidence of these workers who are striking for the first time ever in the firm's 28-year history.

At first the wagons weren't stopping because management and security were coercing them in. So one young lad crossing the road in front of an approaching lorry stopped to tie his shoelace, and then the other shoe, forcing the driver to stop, allowing pickets to surround the cab and persuade the driver to drive on. This worked a second time! Then the police arrived and started inspecting shoelaces!

If the company doesn't withdraw the imposition of the new contract, three more dates for 48-strikes have been set.

- Please send messages of support to: john.higgins@bfawu.org or haroon.rashid@bfawu.org
- Donations: Make cheques out to BFAWU and send to Pennine Strike Fund - BFAWU, Stanborough House, Great North Road, Welwyn Garden City, Herts AL8 7TA.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 19 May 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Train conductors strike to keep their role

Sarah Welch, Portsmouth Socialist Party

Southern Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) conductors picketed on 18 May outside Barnham station.

The reason why they are striking is the removal of conductors from trains. This is a prime example of a company putting profit before safety.

A conductor provides a vital role on our railways. Passenger safety is paramount to them. The conductor ensures everyone is safely on the train. They play a vital role should the train be involved in an incident.

If the driver was incapacitated the conductor would take control to ensure that all the safety requirements are met.

They also perform many other non-safety customer-focused tasks such as ticketing, dealing with enquiries and helping prevent anti-social behaviour. The conductor provides the travelling public with a sense of security on their journeys at all times of the day.

There are many people who won't use the trains in the evening for fears over personal security. As rail companies reduce staff this problem becomes exacerbated.

Also, if this goes ahead, disabled people who need assistance on and off the trains will be asked to give 48-hours' notice before travelling.

Talking to the strikers, their concerns are not just over safety but also the bullying tactics used by management. Letters have been sent out which have quite blatantly told the staff just to accept this.

During the picket one of the managers came out and said that there were to only be six pickets and that the rest of us should go as we were 'blocking the pavement'. If we did not do so he would call the police. The strikers were defiant and the police were not called.

The general mood is that they are prepared to fight on, but they need public support. They feel that the public need information about the reasons why they are striking.

They now await the outcome of the drivers' ballot. They may choose to work-to-rule or go for a strike. The conductors hope they choose to strike. United they could win this fight.

Workplace news in brief

Tesco petition

A petition which currently has over 78,000 signatures is demanding a reversal of the cuts to pay and premiums implemented by Tesco in response to the government's new living wage being introduced. The petition called 'Living Wage Should Not Mean Pay Cuts For Loyal Tesco Workers' was started by a shop floor worker of 14 years in response to the loss of hundreds of pounds of pay that the changes will mean, as reported in the Socialist. This comes at the same time as Tesco CEO Dave Lewis was paid £4.6 million in the last year. One of the signatories, Lee Corke from Liverpool, commented on the petition, rightly pointing out the role (or lack of it) of shop workers' union Usdaw: "John Hannett our Usdaw leader believes in 'keeping Sunday special'. Explain to me how does this tally with the Sunday

premium cut that has been accepted by the same union that he leads. Therefore, making Sunday much less special for many Tesco Usdaw members. I am not affected by the cuts however I am disgusted at the way the long-serving staff of Tesco are being treated by Tesco and Usdaw."

- Sign the petition here: <https://www.change.org/p/living-wage-should-not-mean-pay-cuts-for-loyal-tesco-workers>

HCA strike

Unite members at the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) took strike action on 19 May for fair pay and proper pay negotiations. Two more strike days are proposed on 15 and 16 June so the strikers are therefore urgently appealing for donations to their strike fund to assist those on strike and minimise hardship. You can contribute as follows:

- By cheque made out to "Unite Housing Workers Branch LE111", sent to PO Box 66701, London E11 9FB.
- By BACS to account name Unite Housing Workers LE/1111 Branch, account number 20040626, sort code 60-83-01

Fight to win: join the Socialists!

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialist Party national organiser

Where working class women and men defend their rights, it's where you'll find the Socialist Party.

We bring solidarity and support - but the Socialist Party also aims to discuss a socialist strategy to end Tory austerity with campaigners.

Look at the housing crisis. In evidence submitted to a parliamentary inquiry on rising homelessness, the east London borough of Waltham Forest identified the main factors for the increase as low pay and high rents. Yet its Labour-run council courts developers at the expense of affordable homes and implements Tory cuts.

The Socialist Party fights for a £10 an hour minimum wage, rent control and a programme of building council housing. These demands have been prominent in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's no-cuts stand in elections, which we are a key part of.

We fight within trade unions and communities for a mass united working class struggle to win. Against social cleansing we raise the slogan of organised united resistance, 'we won't move'.

Jeremy Corbyn won the Labour leadership with an anti-austerity programme. Yet the new Labour London mayor Sadiq Khan recently told the BBC he does not favour rent controls in the capital.

There is a civil war in the Labour Party. Corbyn and the anti-austerity members are on one side. Those, like Khan, who do not want to see Labour become a party that stands for the 99% and taking wealth off the 1%, are on the other.

We want a party that stands for the working class - so we say what is required: a fightback against the Blairites. For example, we argue for Labour to be opened up in a democratic and federal way to the anti-austerity forces outside the party to help take on the Blairites.

Some readers may be thinking about what party to join, or whether to join a political organisation at

all.

We would urge you to read some of our articles on how an anti-austerity Corbyn government can be achieved (see socialistparty.org.uk), and the campaigning work we are involved in that helps to build a movement towards achieving it.

Then join us.

Join the Socialist Party!

- Visit www.socialistparty.org.uk/join
 - Call 020 8988 8777
 - Text 07761 818 206
-

We won't move! Mass resistance can defeat the Tories' housing act

Paula Mitchell Socialist Party London regional secretary

The Tories' Housing and Planning Bill is now an Act, to be implemented in April 2017.

After months of lobbying lords and MPs, a few minor concessions have been made. Pay to stay (in which higher-earning council tenants will have to pay market rents) will now kick in at a slightly higher income level. The length of tenancy councils can offer has been increased to up to ten years from five.

But the essence of the bill remains. Through a series of measures (including enabling rents to rise to market or near-market levels, ending lifetime tenancy, deregulating housing associations, demanding councils sell 'high-end' homes and demolition) they aim to end social housing.

The Tories' vision is for housing to be entirely private - ownership and rent - with only a tiny amount of council housing as a temporary safety net for those in extreme need (of course, homelessness is increasing even before this social crime takes place).

The Kill the Housing Bill campaign set up last autumn is now renamed Axe the Housing Act. Another national demo has been called for 18 June.

A 100-strong meeting of housing activists met on 21 May to debate what needs to be done next.

Socialist Party members have long argued that the Tories' housing plans can be beaten by mass resistance. At the meeting, we referenced the anti-poll tax campaign in the late 1980s and early 1990s - a campaign of mass civil disobedience in which 18 million people defied the law and refused to pay the poll tax, led by the Socialist Party (then known as Militant). We explained that the victory was due to working class organisation at a local level, through anti-poll tax unions, going up into regional and national organisation in the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation; and a clear lead - "we won't pay". The slogan 'can't pay, won't pay' was popularised.

In the Socialist Party in London we have raised the idea of 'we won't move' around which mass resistance can be organised. When the rent goes up, we say 'we can't pay, but we will stay'. When they come to demolish or socially cleanse our estates, we say 'we won't move'. There is a year ahead to popularise the idea of 'we won't move' and encourage people to get organised on their estates and

streets.

This was well-received among housing activists in the meeting, but it hasn't been adopted as a key slogan of the Housing Act, so Socialist Party members will continue to popularise the idea. We will go large with 'we won't move' on the 18 June demo and have called a We Won't Move meeting on 21 June for anyone who wants to discuss it further and start to get organised. See <http://wewontmove.blogspot.co.uk> for more.

There has been ongoing discussion in this body about the role of councillors. Socialist Party members have consistently argued that the campaign should put demands on councillors.

Councils have resources and communication systems which means they can reach masses of residents and could use that position to help build up a mass campaign. It is good that a couple of councils in London (Islington and Camden) have called big meetings - when they do, because of their authority, hundreds of people come.

But we argue that we must put demands on these councillors to refuse to implement the act. In the poll tax battle, there were delegations, lobbies and even mass invasions of council chambers calling on Labour councillors not to implement the poll tax. But they did, dragging thousands of people through the courts. We don't want that to happen again - don't implement the act, join with us and help build mass resistance.

We are very pleased that the meeting on 21 May agreed to put demands on councillors and to call on them not to implement the act. It was also agreed to write to new Labour London Mayor Sadiq Khan to call on him to use his position to coordinate resistance of councils.

Housing associations could be the first scene of a fight, as the imposition of 'pay to stay' is voluntary for them. About 60% of social housing in England is housing association. Pressing them not to use 'pay to stay' must start now.

Leicester drives out Britain First

Tom Barker, Leicester Socialist Party

Like much of the East Midlands, Leicester is well known for its multi-ethnic communities. Narborough Road, for instance, has recently been named as one of the most multicultural streets in the country.

It is perhaps for this reason above all that the vile far-right organisation Britain First thought that their ideas might resonate here.

But what they did not reckon with was Leicester's proud history of fighting racism and xenophobia in all its forms.

Having arrived unannounced in Leicester sometime around midday, Britain First, protected by a police cordon, were forced to abandon their stall and leave Leicester by mid-afternoon.

Socialist Party members who had been doing our regular campaign stall became aware of the Britain First presence. We felt it was important to mobilise numbers to protest. This included shoppers and people from a march taking place in the city centre against badger culls.

We played an important role in getting passers-by to stop.

One Socialist Party member addressed the crowd on a megaphone: "Britain First are a racist

organisation who are here today to fuel hatred against Muslims. In the past Leicester has seen off the National Front, the BNP, and the EDL by organising on the streets, so join the demonstration to make it clear that they are not welcome in our city."

Mettle

Leicester has received a lot of media attention in recent weeks, chiefly because of its unexpected (but much deserved) success in the Premier League. But today, the people of Leicester showed their mettle once again in fighting racism.

What was intended to be an event to stoke up racism and division, in fact ended up bringing the people of Leicester closer together against the common enemy of racism.

Coventry sees off EDL

Kris O'Sullivan, Coventry East Socialist Party

The far-right English Defence League (EDL) came to Coventry on 21 May.

They came with the agenda of dividing communities by trying to scapegoat ethnic and religious minorities for the ills in society, trying to turn worker against worker.

However this did not happen. The people of Coventry would not allow it to happen.

A counter protest was called by local anti-racists, supported by trade unions, local communities, the Socialist Party and others. Attendance at the #WeAreCov gathering vastly outnumbered the EDL march. We won a victory by denying the EDL access to Broadgate Square in the centre of the city.

Members of the Socialist Party built for the demonstration in the weeks beforehand. We highlighted the connections between racism and capitalism.

This socialist analysis really struck a chord with many participants looking for solutions both to racism and the capitalist system.

Campaigning for a people's plan for Waltham Forest

On 21 May, 35 people attended a meeting in Waltham Forest, east London, to discuss the council's 'Walthamstow Master Plan' for regeneration.

The meeting was called by the Waltham Forest Housing Action Network, a campaigning arm of the Waltham Forest Trades Council.

Real alternative

Socialist Party member Nancy Taaffe said: "The meeting was unanimous in a feeling that the council consultation was a sham.

"The Waltham Forest Housing Action Network wants to work with others across the borough, including trade unions, to develop a people's plan as a real alternative in the interests of the people who live here, not the developers and big chain store bosses.

"These plans are an onslaught. We all agree that we need housing - but what kind of housing? We also want an expansion in amenities, schools, health, parking, in a planned, sensible coordinated fashion. We want the cuts to stop.

"We've had enough of land 'giveaways' when we have 20,000 on the housing waiting list and 2,000 in temporary accommodation. The meeting decided to ask local MP Stella Creasy and the Labour-controlled planning department to honour Sadiq Khan's pledge that 50% of all new builds would be 'affordable'.

"Our starting point is that we will not move, we will not be kicked out of our borough to make way for council-led gentrification plans."

Chorley A&E battle

Jackie Grunsell, Lancashire Socialist Party

150 bikers blocked the road outside Chorley and South Ribble Hospital, revving their engines in time with the chants of a further 400 protesters, stood outside on 21 May.

They were there for the sixth week in a row since the trust's announcement it would close the A&E department due to a shortage of doctors.

Campaigners have been told this is temporary and that the trust is attempting to recruit new staff.

However, with the government's plans to close A&E units nationally, this is being seen as a way of presenting the public with a fait accompli. Neighbouring Preston A&E is struggling to cope with the increased numbers.

The area is not alone in suffering the brunt of a rapidly spiralling crisis in the NHS. The Tories' plan to dismantle and sell it off must be fought at every turn. The fightback at Chorley and South Ribble is an example of the persistence needed.

Campaigners plan to be outside A&E again on 28 May, and have organised a demonstration for 11 June.

Featured letter: EU referendum

Greece crisis - please vote Leave

Bethan Roper

Last summer my mum was on holiday on a Greek island and had the misfortune to be bitten by a poisonous snake.

She was quickly rushed to a Greek hospital by panicked locals and spent several worrying days

recovering before being allowed to travel home. (She's fine now.) While in these Greek hospitals - first a rural hospital, then a large hospital in Athens - she experienced first-hand the impact of the cuts the European Union (EU) had forced on Greece.

The doctors she spoke to hadn't been paid in six weeks, but kept going to work out of hope they would be, and sheer duty. Patients relied on friends and family to wash, change and toilet them, as well as bring them water which was not provided.

When my mum asked a doctor about the hospital's condition, she was told all the money available after the cuts were imposed had been spent on as much medicine as the hospital could afford.

Thinking over my mum's experience, and reading of the behaviour of the EU over the past decade, it's confusing to me how so many on the left who oppose Tory austerity support staying in the EU. It's an organisation that has imposed even harsher measures upon our European neighbours - Greece, Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Latvia, Romania, Cyprus and others.

In 2010, at the EU's demand, the Spanish government enacted harsh austerity measures leading to attacks on workers' rights, pension freezes, public sector wage cuts and privatisation. Almost as high as Greece's 25% unemployment rate is Spain's at 20%.

The austerity measures imposed on Greece and other member states have not helped their economies or their people. Almost all the money used to bail out Greece went to private creditors, including French and German banks. The aim of these measures was to benefit not the people of these countries, but the banks working hand in hand with the EU.

If your reaction is that this may be happening to our European neighbours but would never happen to the UK, I say this. Just because it is not happening here, is it acceptable to prop up an organisation - and thus be complicit in its acts - which treats workers in such a way?

Stability

Also it is naive to suppose the stability of the UK is unwavering, and we would never be in a position which causes the EU to impose even harsher austerity on us.

It seems many on the left feel that essentially the EU is a left-at-heart organisation. That it may help prevent the rise of far-right groups, as a centre-left or even right-wing bastion against extreme-right ideas.

Not only is this untrue, but it's partly in response to the EU that right-wing groups have been able to gain sway. The fascist Golden Dawn in Greece increases its popularity in reaction to the harsh measures of the EU. Ukip is a party fixated on the EU - without that crutch, would it have the same relevance?

The European Parliament has only marginal power. Your own MEPs' power to impact EU laws is practically non-existent. Reform from the inside is utopian at best.

Why would the powerful and unelected EU Council of Ministers - able to design and propose laws without the cumbersome gaze of national parliamentary scrutiny, or amendment or counterproposal from the European Parliament - ever hand power to more democratically elected officials?

Certainly not because of any half-hearted attempt by a UK government - one country among 28.

Please vote to leave the EU.

- Read more about the socialist arguments for leaving the EU at www.socialistcase4exit.eu

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.

Socialist inbox

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Register to Remain?

Young people are more likely to vote to stay in the EU because they are rightly repulsed by the focus on immigration by the official Leave campaign. It comes as no surprise then that the media is pushing for the seven million predominantly young people who are not registered to vote to get registered. I bet they won't be so enthusiastic to get them to vote in the next general election.

Martin Reynolds, Waltham Forest, east London

Brexit bonfire?

Bumbling Boris Johnson, sanctimonious Iain Duncan-Smith, racist Nigel Farage, egged on by Rupert Murdoch and the Daily Express, and the grotesque spectacle of Ed Balls rubbing shoulders with Cable and Osborne, are equally repellent.

The Remainers fear that Brexit will lead to foreign capital relocating to the continent at the expense of the corrupt stock exchange. The Brexit capitalists dream of an even less regulated 'Square Mile'. Both groups favour continued austerity for the millions.

The bonfire of workers' rights flagged up by Remainers, unfortunately given legitimacy by Jeremy Corbyn, is a fiction; the bonfire has already happened. After decades of EU membership British unions are shackled by the most draconian anti-union laws in the developed world with the consequent nosedive in wages and conditions.

For socialists there can be no unity with either group. The voice for a socialist alternative may be drowned out by lurid headlines and vacuous debates in the media, but we will continue to campaign to replace the bureaucratic capitalist EU with a socialist Europe.

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool

Mason's mistakes

The "radical social democrat" Paul Mason is correct that the Labour Party "has to make hard choices", but Labour's new leader can at least make such decisions from a position of strength, as Mason recognises: "Corbyn has the firm support of most unions, tens of thousands of new and active members." Mason concludes: "His enemies are isolated."

But if we recognise that the majority of Labour MPs actually stand firmly opposed to most of Corbyn's refreshingly socialist ideas, then, if anything, it is Corbyn who is isolated within his own party.

This is because the majority of Corbyn's supporters presently have next to no democratic means of redressing the Blairite domination of the parliamentary Labour Party. Although Labour's democratic deficit could be overcome quickly if Corbyn took a principled lead on this matter.

More accurately then, if Corbyn's enemies are isolated from anything it is from the democratic will of the majority of Labour Party supporters, and this is a major problem.

Having misidentified the issue, Mason's response is to propose that Corbyn must disown the decidedly anti-Blairite policies he campaigned on during last year's Labour leadership contest, and "make an explicit offer to the right and centre of his party". Mason calls this "an obvious solution," but it is not a new solution as Corbyn is already travelling down this route.

This leads Mason to suggest the need for Corbyn to make an about-turn on "urgent policy issues" like defence. Apparently, Labour "needs to bury its differences on Trident around a solution that involves both wings compromising on their principles."

Although Mason says no more about Trident in this Guardian article (March 21), he soon put more flesh onto the rotten bones of this argument in a nasty YouTube video, "The left-wing case for nuclear weapons" (Guardian, 6 April), which might alternatively be interpreted as Mason's debut into the world of satire.

Evidently Mason has no faith in the ability of the mood of the working class to change, and for the mass of humanity to swing behind the type of socialist politics that are necessary to bring an end to the violence of capitalism. This is a shame.

On the contrary, Mason seems ashamed of the long history of anti-war campaigning that has been and continues to be waged by the grass roots of the Labour movement.

Michael Barker, Leicester

Year of the underdog

Professional sports like football certainly mirror capitalism in the establishment of an elite who are 'rewarded' with 'pots of gold' while the less successful - without big money sponsorship - barely exist. In this sense Leicester City's success is more than a rags-to-riches story.

Yes, at the beginning of the 2015/16 season they were one of the favourites for relegation, yes they were 5,000-1 outsiders to win the Premiership, yes they were a team without any 'big stars' and a new manager who was dismissed by the press and pundits as the 'Tinkerman'.

But these were the ingredients of an anti-establishment candidate: Jeremy Corbyn struggling to get enough nominations for the Labour Party leadership election and Bernie Sanders 'crowd-funding' rather than corporate funding his campaign for the Democratic Party nomination for president.

When another Premiership manager championed Leicester's cause (Tony Pulis of West Bromwich Albion), when home supporters applauded the away team Leicester City, and when over 200,000 thronged the streets of Leicester to cheer their champions, this is the rejection of the 'elite' ethos. With Leicester's success, Bernie Sanders' campaign and Jeremy Corbyn's hold of the Labour Party, in 2015/16 we have witnessed the beginning of the 99% finding its voice.

John Merrell, Leicester

Board lord

Pandemic is probably the most popular cooperative board game around. Players act as agents of the US Centre for Disease Control, to work together to try to cure four diseases while the game mechanics spawn new outbreaks across the world.

Its latest iteration is in a legacy format where previous games alter the board and even some of the rules themselves. Secret packages contain new game elements that are opened after a certain number of plays.

Pandemic Legacy simulates the outbreak of a super-disease in a capitalist world. Just like the emergency services have faced recently, every time you seem to have situations under control your funding gets cut (as clearly there are 'efficiencies' to be made), whereas when you are overwhelmed you belatedly get the funding you desperately needed.

The game probably wasn't designed as a critique of the capitalist system (as the game Monopoly was based on was), but you cannot help seeing the parallels as you play, including an object lesson in the role of the state. This follows a trend of recent films which have had increasingly revolutionary or anti-capitalist themes.

Pandemic Legacy is not the cheapest board game, but there are reasons why in reviews it is being called the best board game ever!

Iain Dalton, Leeds

Michelle Bridge, 1973-2016

Socialists and campaigners in Warrington and St Helens were stunned and saddened by the premature death on 16 May of Michelle Bridge, a leading campaigner against welfare cuts from Runcorn.

I first met Michelle in 2013 at the anti-bedroom tax protest she organised outside Runcorn Town Hall, where 150 people seemed to come from nowhere in a rebirth of working class activity in the town.

I vividly remember her speaking to the crowd saying that it was the first time she had spoken in public "Except for singing 'I Will Survive' at the karaoke". Nevertheless she gave a great speech, denouncing

the inhumanity of the Tories latest attack on working class people. Her words seemed to me to show the entry of fresh voices into the movement.

Michelle continued with her activities against the bedroom tax and benefit cuts and sanctions, which made her a well-known figure across Merseyside. She was also a staunch supporter of anti-cuts Warrington councillor Kevin Bennett.

Michelle was only 43 when she died and her sudden death was a terrible shock to campaigners across the region. She really cared. She will be greatly missed.

Andy Ford, Warrington

Obituary: Jenny O'Sullivan (1988-2016)

Jennifer O'Sullivan died unexpectedly on 15 May at the age of 28.

Jenny was a former member of the Socialist Party in Dudley and east London, active in a number of our campaigns. Comrades who fought alongside her recall her huge passion and dedication to struggle.

This dedication eventually became too much for her, which is perhaps the main reason she later left membership. She retained, however, her unbending opposition to capitalism, and remained sympathetic.

Friends will remember Jenny for her selflessness, intelligence, wit and drive; her well-resourced imagination, relentless curiosity and astonishing eloquence. She is survived by her partner, and her parents Mark and Sherry.

Readers of the Socialist who knew Jenny and would like more information can contact me at james.iven@gmail.com. Some of her writing will be available at www.machinehundert.com.

James Ivens

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/22904>