

Shatter the Tories: vote out

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialist Party national organiser

What is missing from 99% of the EU referendum coverage? An independent working class voice, that's what.

In the Guardian Irvine Welsh wrote: "Cameron and Osborne versus Johnson and Gove tempts one to just kick back and enjoy the sight of those blustering, cynical toffs at one another's throats.

"The roll-call of suits droning on about 'business,' 'trade' and 'regulation' drives home that the argument is essentially a neoliberal one: does the EU or an independent UK offer us the best opportunity to rip off our citizens?"

And he certainly has a point. On both sides are politicians who have spent decades fighting for policies that have seen an historic transfer of wealth from working class people to the bosses.

Wages as a share of GDP (total economic output) fell from a 1975 peak of 65% at the end of the post-war boom to 53% in 2008, while profits swelled. And don't we know it!

Opposition

That's why socialists arguing for an exit from the EU do not suddenly drop their opposition and campaigns against governments who are at war with workers and young people. Far from it. But we also have to point out that there could and should be another voice apart from the racist, capitalist elites.

While silenced in the media, largely because most of the trade union and labour leaders have gone behind Remain and the EU, workers are not standing back from the fight against austerity.

While not coordinated or on the scale of the French movement yet, there are a number of strikes in Britain. This is in part inspired by an understanding that the divided Tories 'are for turning'.

Some Tory MPs are now calling for Cameron's fall, in or out. Backbencher Nadine Dorries has said that if Remain loses or wins narrowly Cameron is "toast within days".

A Leave vote will further weaken the Tories and most importantly it can strike a blow against an institution, the EU, that has as its primary role the driving through of the bosses' neoliberal agenda.

See also the editorial of the *Socialist*:

Tories tearing themselves apart over EU referendum: vote leave to get Cameron out

Wales TUC passes motion for no-cuts council

budgets

This afternoon, a composited motion (copy below) calling on Welsh councils to set legal no-cuts budgets was passed unanimously at Wales TUC.

Moving the motion on behalf of Llanelli Trades Council, Socialist Party member Mark Evans pointed out that thousands of jobs have already been lost in Welsh councils but that austerity is projected to go on in Wales until at least 2025.

"I'll let you into a secret", Mark confided, "there won't be any council services left in 2025". That is, if Welsh councils continue to pass on Tory cuts as they have done. Speaker after speaker drew attention to the fact that the majority of those jobs have been lost in councils that are led by parties - Labour and Plaid Cymru - which claim to be anti-austerity.

It's time for those councils and councillors who claim to be anti-austerity to act on their fine words.

In passing this motion, the Wales TUC gives its backing to the only strategy that can save council jobs and services in Wales - refusing to make Tory cuts. Wales TUC now calls for councils to use legal measures such as prudent borrowing, use of reserves and capitalisation to stop the council cuts in Wales and set no-cuts budgets.

Ronnie Job

Wales TUC Conference / Cynhadledd TUC Cymru 2016

Composite E - Local Government Finance

The TUC 'Economic Quarterly' in February reported that 30,000 public sector jobs have been lost in Wales since 2010.

Many of these public sector job losses have taken place in Welsh councils. Thousands more local government workers will lose their jobs or see them outsourced if Welsh councils continue to vote for cuts on the current scale.

The Tories wish on behalf of their rich friends to dismantle, destroy or outsource local government services.

It is not inconceivable that shortly the only services that LA's will be able to run from their budgets are statutory services.

We are systematically losing our leisure, sports, arts and community provision. Services such as Citizens Advice and other charities who relied on core funding from local authorities to draw down match funding from other sources will disappear, leaving the most vulnerable, poor and disabled with no services.

Wales is already a poor country in comparison to other areas within the UK and has more areas qualifying for European funding in West Wales and the Valleys than any other part of Britain.

We cannot allow the Tories to turn Wales into a public sector desert. But many of these job losses and much of the outsourcing in Wales takes place in councils led by parties that claim to be 'anti-austerity'.

Unfortunately the Labour Welsh Assembly Government has meekly passed on these devastating cuts

and to date local authorities have passively implemented cuts that will seriously impact on the well-being of communities across Wales.

The new administration in Cardiff Bay must now stand up to Westminster and demand a better deal for its citizens.

It must revisit its provisional settlements to local authorities and fund them properly because if action is not taken now straight after the election, Westminster will see them as weak and treat Wales with further contempt over coming years.

Recently the way to fight back was shown by both Unite Local Government Committee and Unison Local Government Service Group Executive who have voted to call on such councils, including those led by Labour or Plaid Cymru, to set legal no-cuts budgets.

A no cuts budget is a legal and prudent budget that uses reserves, borrowing, capitalisation, etc to prevent cuts.

While this is not a permanent solution, it buys time for councils to build a campaign of mass resistance with other councils, the Wales TUC, anti-cuts campaigners and local communities.

Conference:

1. Calls upon the Wales TUC General Council to enter into negotiations with the newly-elected Welsh Government immediately on behalf of employees of local authorities to revisit the funding of local authorities and to impress upon them the need to enter into negotiations immediately with the Westminster Government to find a fairer way to fund Wales than the Barnett Formula which is woefully inadequate;
2. Instructs the Wales TUC General Council to publicly state our conviction that council cuts and outsourcing in Wales can be halted if councils take measures including using reserves, capitalising eligible general fund expenditure and prudential borrowing to generate resources;
3. Calls on councils of all parties in Wales that claim to be against austerity to set legal no-cuts budgets, utilising the measures outlined in point 2 above;
4. Pledges support for councillors prepared to vote for this position;
5. Recognises that this can only buy time to build a mass campaign, uniting trade unionists and service users in defence of council jobs and services and therefore instructs the Wales TUC General Council to take steps to build that campaign, including calling an all-Wales demonstration against council cuts and outsourcing.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 25 May 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Jobseekers told: take three-hour commute

Kris O'Sullivan, jobseeker

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is advising jobseekers to "consider roles up to 90 minutes' travel time away".

Getting a job in austerity Britain is not a guaranteed or easy thing. I am a recent university graduate, and have spent the past couple of months job hunting. I can see how hard it can be to get your foot in the door - then we have this ridiculous 'advice' from the DWP.

To suggest a three-hour round trip as a feasible solution just illustrates how out of touch and indifferent this government is. This is just not an option for so many people.

Commuter trains are full to the rafters and cost a fortune. And - with skyrocketing rents (God forbid if you live in London), ever increasing transport fares, more and more jobs offering minimum wage or zero hours, and disappearing public services - we are living pay cheque to pay cheque, struggling to stay afloat.

For young people trying to live independently, a three-hour journey is an extra brutal burden, financially and mentally. As a care-leaver myself, I've experienced first-hand the struggle to survive, to get hold of even basic life necessities on a minimal income.

This government has no real solution to unemployment. The real solution is to take the wealth off the 1% and invest in useful, well-paid, secure employment for all. The Socialist Party's programme - including nationalising public transport, a £10 an hour minimum wage, liveable benefits without compulsion, and reversing attacks on public services - is vital.

Public asset sales will lose us money

Rudi Abdallah

Profit-hungry chancellor George Osborne will damage public finances by privatising the Land Registry and other public assets. A new report has found ongoing income would outstrip the sale's windfall.

Think tank New Economics Foundation, acting for campaign group We Own It, reports that handing the Registry to the private sector will savage public finances in 25 years' time. It also warned that if other assets like National Air Traffic Services were sold, the impact would be felt within seven years.

Supporters of We Own It, who crowdfunded the report, are concerned the government is embarking on the most comprehensive privatisation programme since Margaret Thatcher was in Downing Street.

The group's director Cat Hobs said: "The Land Registry is a profitable, successful, innovative organisation doing a great job - why privatise it? We need to think about the wealth of the next generation, not just a 'quick fix' on the deficit."

Osborne's destructive campaign aims to sell off £20 billion worth of public assets by the end of this parliament. This includes shares in bailed-out banks.

The Tories, determined as ever to sell off every part of the country, breathe in numbers and think in graphs. Those graphs show only the bosses' profits. They will always put the needs of private enterprise before workers.

The Socialist Party opposes privatisation and austerity. We want key industries including the banks and all public services to come under democratic workers' ownership and control - to be run in the interests of all, not just a few super-rich shareholders.

Stop Ryedale fracking

John Sibbald, Wakefield and Pontefract Socialist Party and Frack Free Wakefield District

A Yorkshire council has permitted the UK's first fracking operation since 2011.

Studies have found that in other countries, the shale gas extraction method has poisoned water supplies and heightened earthquake risk.

At a two-day meeting of the North Yorkshire County Council Planning Committee, hundreds protested. They were objecting to an application by Third Energy, 97% owned by Barclays bank, to frack for gas in Ryedale.

The first day was taken up with the many objectors giving evidence. The next day was the turn of Third Energy.

Their stooges told us that fracking is completely safe and that health and safety regulations here are far too tough to allow any of the problems seen in America or Australia. They argue that gas has been produced in Ryedale for over twenty years. This is, however, by conventional drilling, not hydraulic fracturing.

Profits

Now, Third Energy and their masters at Barclays have decided the conventional method is not good enough. They want a boost to their profits, which they believe they can only get from fracking.

North Yorkshire Council is dominated by Tories, and none of the planning committee are from the Ryedale area. So it was no surprise they voted seven to four in favour of Third Energy's application.

This decision could open the floodgates to fracking in other areas. Third Energy is already looking to drill another 19 wells in Ryedale.

The Socialist Party opposes fracking, and fights for public ownership of energy and mass investment in green technology. Fracking is destructive wherever it happens. Anti-fracking campaigners must call for a ban on it everywhere - not just, as some prominent activists are demanding, in places of scenic beauty.

- 'Planning for the Planet' - socialism and the environment: £9.95 from leftbooks.co.uk

Blairite baloney

Disgruntled Labour right wingers are producing a new pamphlet trying to explain why they lost the 2015 general election.

The collection of essays includes this insight: "Increasingly the Labour Party was viewed like middle class Ryanair passengers having to stomach a couple of hours' flight with people they shared little in common with. It could be uncomfortable but it got you where you needed to go." Of course, most middle class people would struggle to identify with these capitalist skills' lifestyles too.

The Blairites conclude that their problem is a lost connection with the working class. In the case of the pamphlet's editor, Tristram Hunt, the privately educated son of a baron, the Socialist wonders if there

ever was one.

The answer? Apparently, to stop attacking austerity, and instead patronise working class and middle class people by appealing to our cultural 'identity'.

The fact that Labour actually supported austerity, and didn't address any of the fundamental social problems workers face, couldn't possibly be responsible.

Khan air

The new mayor of London has approved an urban airport's right to buy public land for expansion.

Right-wing Labour stalwart Sadiq Khan overturned the previous objection - from Tory mayor Boris Johnson! London City Airport is right in the middle of an east London residential area.

Khan's approval came around the same time that Johnson's suppressed report on the capital's poisonous air was surfacing (see socialistparty.org.uk, 'Boris hid killer air report'). No to Tories, no to Blairites, no to London City Airport expansion. Fight the cuts - fight for investment in green tech and public transport.

Library lie

A south London borough which closed two libraries to 'save' money is spending more than twice as much on security as it would have cost to keep them open.

Ultra-Blairite Lambeth Council laughed off mass community opposition - and an occupation (see socialistparty.org.uk) - to shut the two sites. Its plan is to convert them into private gyms. The excuse, as ever, was "blah blah Tory cuts blah difficult decisions blah."

A Freedom of Information response gave the private security costs as £2,212 a day. Lambeth's 2014-15 budget said the combined running cost for both was £874 a day.

Most Labour councillors don't pass on cuts because they 'don't have a choice'. They do it because they agree with them. Corbyn should follow TUSC's example and give a fighting lead to those who don't - by calling for legal no-cuts budgets.

Them & Us

Shoplifters...

A police force plans to tackle shoplifting by giving away free underwear and hygiene products.

Cambridgeshire Police have watched a rising trend of young people stealing essentials like knickers and sanitary products. Endless poverty is forcing growing numbers to shoplift just to achieve basic dignity.

This follows Italian judges ruling that stealing small amounts of food is not a crime if you are destitute

and hungry. Italian daily La Stampa approvingly reported that the "right to survival prevails over property."

The real crime is a system which consistently drives people into such desperate situations. It is private property - specifically, capitalist ownership of industry and distribution for profit - which maintains this.

The Socialist doubts the tops of the police and judiciary will look as kindly on a mass movement which wants the economy switched from being bosses' property into workers' property.

... £1,000 Shop

While poverty forces workers and young people to steal to survive, the 1%'s answer to the pound shop is due to open in Mayfair.

The '£1,000 Shop' will offer 'discount' jewellery, watches and fashion to the capital's elite. Everything is knocked down to the low, low price of £1,000.

Poverty is not a joke for the super-rich to play silly little games with. It is the toxic by-product of the outdated capitalist way of organising society, heaped on those who make the capitalists' profits for them.

The bosses mock us at their peril.

Tories out to knife the BBC

Socialists demand democratic ownership and control of mass media

Culture secretary John Whittingdale recently published the government's White Paper plans on the future funding and governance of the BBC.

Ken Smith explains what lies behind the changes and why they must be fought.

The Tories and their big business pals are keen to shrink the public broadcaster to benefit private news and entertainment media, such as the Murdoch empire, and also to exert greater political control over content. To that end a constant stream of black propaganda attacking the 'left-wing bias', 'profligacy' and 'monopoly' of the BBC has been carried by the right-wing media.

Changes to the Royal Charter regulating the BBC will be made by the government in the autumn covering the next eleven years. The governing trust will be replaced by a board, with a number of members appointed by the government - so much for 'editorial independence'. There will be no vote in parliament on the issue.

And although the licence fee will remain, Tory chancellor George Osborne has already decided that the cost of free TV licences for the over 75s will in future be borne by the BBC, not the government. The BBC has already severely cut its budget and staffing levels in a forlorn attempt to appease the government.

Of course Murdoch's Sky business shows no sign of giving up its 'monopoly' over satellite

broadcasting - particularly of sport - even when instructed to.

Many big newspaper companies enjoy a virtual monopoly of print and online news provision in most of Britain's major towns and cities. And, because of cost cutting, the quality of news and service they provide is nowhere near that provided by the BBC.

Values

Socialists do not defend the BBC uncritically. Much of its news service is dominated by the same pro-big business and right-wing establishment values as the rest of the media. Its senior executives and 'stars' earn high pay that is far removed from the reality of most journalists and working people.

However, it does provide programming that the commercial broadcasters do not and never will be inclined to provide.

The corporation is the largest single investor in TV news production; it spends approximately £680 million a year on its radio services, with approximately £120 million on radio news, across the UK. The commercial sector spends only about £27 million on radio news.

The broadcaster receives £3.7 billion income a year. Sky's annual income is nearly double that, but it produces a tiny proportion of original programming.

The BBC accounts for over 40% of the total investment in UK original content. It is the most important commissioner of new content in the UK, spending about £1 billion a year on non-news commissions.

The BBC also spends 76% of its licence fee income on TV content. This is more than any other broadcaster. As a subscription platform, Sky spends 34%.

Having a state broadcaster, even one as politically threatened as the BBC, still represents an enormously valuable and relatively cheap asset for all those who use it.

Ultimately, the BBC needs to be critically defended as a public service broadcaster, against a media where news and entertainment - and there's not a lot to distinguish which is which in the majority of media outlets - is becoming completely dominated by the Murdochs and the Daily Mail owners.

Fight

Media unions have an immediate battle to fight to defend jobs and the quality of programme making at the BBC.

But there is a longer-term campaign also to be fought by working-class people who have a clear interest in defending the BBC to avoid the Murdoch empire tightening its death grip on news, sport and entertainment.

The only way the BBC can be effectively defended is by also raising the question of who controls the BBC and more widely who controls the media?

Control

Socialists argue that all major media companies should be publicly owned under democratic workers' control and management.

Their resources - particularly the printing and broadcast facilities - could then be utilised for the benefit of all sections of society by allowing all groups in society (except fascists) access to media facilities

based on the level of support that group has in society.

Nationalisation of media resources has to be seen as a handing back of the media to the community, to allow journalists and programme makers greater freedom to develop content without fear of offending political or commercial interests.

While socialists argue for defence of the BBC we do not call for state control or a state monopoly of news and entertainment or a continuation of the BBC as it is set up at present.

The BBC should be neither controlled by the government or the metropolitan establishment elite that currently runs the corporation. Instead, a genuine democratic control of the BBC needs to be instituted, with working-class people and media trade unions being properly represented at every level of the organisation.

We campaign for the provision of news and entertainment to be taken out of the media profiteers' hands and for culture, news and entertainment to be provided through a genuinely independent, free media, as part of a democratic socialist society.

France: Workers' struggle against government intensifies: vital need for political alternative

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

Far from abating, the battle over France's labour law reform has intensified. The Hollande-Valls government has said it will impose the changes and is digging its heels in. The main trade union federation has said it will fight to the end.

The so-called socialist government has talked of 'softening' the terms of the laws drawn up by Labour Minister Myriam El Khomri. Given his continuing unpopularity, Francois Hollande has begun to worry about his chances of success in next year's presidential election.

But few believe the government is prepared to back down, acting as they are in collusion with the top industry bosses to maintain profits.

The European football championship is due to start in France on 10 June, with matches taking place in stadiums across a gridlocked country. A national protest rally in Paris is due for 14 June when the hated bill goes to the upper house of the French parliament - the Senate.

The mood of combativity that exists in France as a whole has reached its most intense in the northern port of Le Havre.

"The port is blocked, the police dare not take on the workers' blockades and there is a daily general assembly of representatives from every workplace and students as well. It has become, in effect, the strike capital of France", writes a CGT activist and member of Gauche Revolutionnaire (GR - French section of the CWI).

Outside France, the scenes of violent confrontations reach the media. Inside France the government-dominated media attempt to use incidents of battles with the police to discredit the movement.

In spite of everything, still up to 70% of the French people support this monumental struggle which has seemed to be moving toward an all-out general strike. CGT leader Philippe Martinez has now hinted that some deal could be done and negotiations may be organised.

In this situation, as GR explains, it has been the weakness of the trade union leaderships which have dragged out this dispute.

One of the national union federations allied to the 'socialist' government, has accepted the attacks on labour rights from the beginning.

The others - the biggest being the CGT, plus Force Ouvriere and Solidaires/Sud, etc - have opposed it all the way but have proved unwilling and incapable of leading a determined and coordinated struggle up to, and including, a general strike to bring down this anti-working class government of Hollande/Valls.

As in the great sit-in strikes of 80 years ago and the 'month of revolution' in May 1968, such a struggle would pose the question of power and the need for the workers and youth to build fighting, democratically elected bodies from below, up to national level, in order to form a government truly representative of workers and their allies in society.

How can the movement go forward?

Extract from statement by Gauche Revolutionnaire

Genuine general assemblies are needed to bring together strikers, trade unions and all those in action: young people, 'Nuit Debout' (open mic 'occupy' gatherings) activists and others.

Such assemblies would enable a wide-ranging discussion of actions to be taken, involving more people and democratically electing action committees at local, regional and national level than is presently possible just through the trade unions and other organisations.

Many of these debates have as their central theme the need to change society and overthrow capitalism.

The trade union leaders have not been receptive to this movement, even though Martinez, as national leader of the CGT, has spoken out in support at this late stage. If they had done so, it would have been easier to say: 'we're in this fight together, let's go forward to a general strike'.

And when the leading lights behind Nuit Debout simply said: 'we're not making any demands', that didn't help to bring people together in workplaces and working class districts.

There is a pressing need to formulate clear demands to stop the attacks on living and working conditions which come at us like a steamroller, crushing the daily lives of millions.

The movement could start to speak with a single voice if the general assemblies could spread their demands on a national level - such as a 32-hour working week to create jobs for the unemployed, pay increases that would provide decent living standards, an end to redundancies and the taking into public ownership of any companies threatening to close or sack workers.

What's missing is a genuine mass social and political opposition, united in the face of the arrogant Valls, Hollande and all the other ministers. While continuing to build action, there is a pressing need for a mass political force for workers and youth - a new party of struggle against capitalism whose activists and cadres will be precisely those who are involved in action right now.

Such a party would enable a united voice to be heard at national level in opposition to the 100% capitalist propaganda from the parties and the media who serve the bourgeoisie and capitalism.

It wouldn't waste its time manoeuvring with other parties but would resolutely defend the interests and

aspirations of the great majority of the population. Such a party, operating democratically, would help to build the struggle.

More importantly, it could raise the need for a real alternative to capitalism, to unite all those who have had enough of this system and want to do more than just resist: really change society and overthrow capitalism.

- Full statement available on socialistworld.net
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See also:

- Fight attacks on workers' rights and austerity, French strikes show the way
 - France 1936: sit-in strikes showed potential to take power
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France 1936: sit-in strikes showed potential to take power

As we go to press workers across France are stepping up their action against the country's new labour law, with strikes in various sectors and big demonstrations. The French working class has a long history of struggle, including widespread sit-in strikes in May-June 1936.

To celebrate the 80th anniversary of this movement, and to learn its lessons, here we carry an extract from an article written by Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe and published in Militant (predecessor of the Socialist) in 1978. The 1936 strikes were a topic of some interest in the workers' movement at that time because of the revival in discussion on 'popular-front' type governments coming to power in a number of countries.

The article was then printed as an Appendix in Peter's book, the Masses Arise, about the French Revolution 1789-1815.

The titanic sit-down strikes of May-June 1936 stand as a crushing condemnation of the policy of Popular Frontism (a coalition between workers' parties and 'liberal' capitalist parties).

Between 1931 and 1936 the French working class had seen their already meagre wages reduced by an average of 30%. Their growing radicalisation was reflected in the elections of 1936. The Popular Front received over 5.5 million votes compared to the 4.5 million for the right-wing National government.

The revolutionary ferment among the masses was reflected in the capitalist Radical Party's loss of half a million votes, its reduction to third place in votes, while at the same time the Communist Party (CP) doubled its vote to 1.5 million.

Throughout the election campaign the CP leaders covered the Radicals with a revolutionary aura - in complete contradistinction to Lenin, who used elections to unmask liberal capitalists before their middle class supporters. The Radicals openly boasted that they would be a brake on the 'excesses' of the socialist ministers.

The Popular Front's programme promised important reforms such as the 40-hour week but came out only for the nationalisation of war industries and the banks. The suspicion of the masses - and their doubts about the willingness of their own leaders to implement programme - was shown in the events

which followed the election.

On 25 May 1936, half a million workers marched past the spot where the Communards (the workers who briefly took power in the Paris Commune of 1871) were shot "carrying red banners and wearing red flowers, and including many women and children..." The procession was nearly two miles long and lasted from early afternoon till late evening.

Then, in the last week of May and the first two weeks of June, a mighty wave of sit-in strikes was begun by the French working class. Beginning with the metal workers in Paris, all corners of France and all layers of the working class joined in. On the eve of the strike trade union membership stood at 1.2 million - just 20% of the labour force. Yet upwards of three million joined the strike.

Occupied

The Manchester Guardian reported on 11 June: "Coachwork factories in Paris, several cinemas and two or three dressmaking firms which were 'occupied' by the 'midinettes' who went on strike today... the stable lads have 'occupied' the racing stables and several hundred undertaker societies and tombstone manufacturers have joined in the movement... The syndicate of concierges has asked for holiday with pay and automatic buttons for opening front doors at night!"

The loss of production was bad enough, but the occupations and strikes began to affect the stomachs of the rich: "The rather abrupt manner in which the waiters' strike began in some of the restaurants while some of the customers were in the middle of lunch was rather unpleasant."

The Times reported: "The lifeboat men on the Seine have put up a notice to say that they are on strike and forbidding passers-by to throw themselves into the water."

In the ports, sailors marched through the towns with arms linked singing the 'Internationale', and the police fraternised with the workers. Here was a unique opportunity for the French working class to have taken power peacefully! The forces of French capitalism were completely paralysed.

The French working class was looking in the direction of power. One picket commented to a reporter from the Manchester Guardian: "'Our boss has been treating us as dictators. Well I told him that we preferred this sort of dictatorship within the framework of a democratic regime to the dictatorship of Hitler and Mussolini.'"

The leaders of the French workers' parties were terrified by these developments, which had taken them by surprise and were threatening to get out of control: "Several Communist deputies to whom I spoke were visibly embarrassed and alarmed. They declared the strike to be 'untimely', described it as an uncontrollable mass movement, and declined all responsibility for it."

The French army was a conscript army. Demonstrations and upheavals were sweeping through the barracks, with the conscripts demanding among other things the reduction of army service to one year. Any attempt by the French ruling class to use the army against the working class would have resulted in it splitting in their hands.

In a much less favourable situation than this, with the actual armed intervention of imperialism, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were not deterred from taking power in Russia in 1917.

The British Communist Party's Daily Worker, speaking of the effects of the French events in Germany, reported: "The Nazi press at first 'played up' the strikes saying they were an example of the 'chaos' from 'Bolshevik' influence in France. After a few days it became noticeable that workers were beginning to say they saw the huge gains won by the strikers as an example it might be a good one to follow."

Overthrown

If the German workers were inspired just by wage increases gained by their French brothers and sisters, imagine the effect on them of socialist revolution. Both Hitler and Mussolini would have been overthrown. The Spanish workers, who rose and were initially victorious in four fifths of Spain just one month later, would have joined, as would the working class throughout Europe.

The ruling class of France, and of Europe, together with their shadows within the labour movement, were paralysed by fear, some of them believing that the hour of their downfall had arrived. For instance Prime Minister Leon Blum remarked: "I am being spoken of as a Kerensky who is preparing the way for a Lenin."

But there was no Lenin to be found in the ranks of the French Communist Party leaders. The methods, the programme and the tactics of Lenin were a book sealed with seven seals so far as the French CP leaders were concerned. They bent every effort to derail the movement of the masses. In the process, enormous suspicion and hostility towards these leaders developed, at least among the advanced workers.

The Manchester Guardian reported: "The revolutionary temper... is undeniable as may be seen by the extraordinary incident that occurred at Renault yesterday. The local Communist deputy who urged the strikers to resume work on the basis of Monday's agreement... was howled down and driven out of the works. There is no doubt that not only the CGT (trade union federation) but even the Communist leaders have no control and no authority over the strikers of several engineering concerns."

Seeing power slip from the hands of his class and no doubt gnashing his teeth, one worker commented: "It is strange to think that in a few days everything may go back to 'normal' and Renault will come into their own again; and the posters and drawings and flags and wireless set and everything will be gone. Foremen will be able to order you about and glare."

The French capitalists were forced to concede the 40-hour week, at least in words, as the price of getting the strike called off. But what the capitalists gave with the left hand they took back with the right later on. The wage increases were gradually cancelled through inflation. No sooner was the ink dry on the agreement than the individual employers began to resist the implementation of the reforms.

But The Times urged the French capitalists to bide their time: "The general terms of Monday's settlement are being resisted in detail, with the risk that disappointment following apparent victory may produce a fiercer temper in the working class than a period of waiting would have done."

Power for the French working class was there for the taking in 1936, but for the treacherous role of the workers' leaders, particularly the Communist Party leaders.

Hiding behind the Popular Front, the French capitalists prepared their revenge. Later, thousands of militants were victimised. In October 1936 further sit-ins took place and this time the police were used to evict the strikers.

The French capitalists, moreover, heaped on the shoulders of the working class the responsibility for inflation, thereby alienating the middle class from the workers. This shows the futility of attempting to win the middle class on a programme which does not go beyond the framework of capitalism.

By taking power, by taking over the assets of the ruling 200 families and establishing a planned economy, the French working class would have shown in action that it was the only force capable of solving the problems of the middle layers. A planned economy would have allowed for cancellation of the debts of the small people in town and country and the extension of cheap credit and aid.

Instead Leon Blum was forced out of the premiership of the Popular Front government in 1937 and the

Socialists were completely excluded in 1938. The French working class, as with their Spanish brothers and sisters, were thus delivered into the arms of Fascism. The French Popular Front prepared the way for the enslavement of the working class by the Nazis and their French collaborators in the Vichy regime.

In the immediate post-war period, the European capitalists used the Communist and Socialist Party leaders through the medium of coalition government to save themselves from the wrath of the masses. When the danger had passed, however, the CP and socialist leaders were unceremoniously booted out.

The legacy of the Popular Front is one of defeats - sometimes bloody and terrible, as in Chile in 1973.

Stronger

But the 1970s are not the 1930s, or even the 1940s. The Italian, French and Spanish working class are immeasurably stronger than in the past. Stalinism no longer exercises a mesmeric effect on the rank and file of the Communist Parties. On the basis of the great events which impend in Europe, the rank and file will see that only disaster lies at the end of the road of the 'Popular' or 'National' Fronts.

The workers in these organisations will seek a return to a programme capable of giving them victory in the struggle to eliminate capitalism. As a step towards this, the advanced workers must absorb the lessons of past popular fronts in order to prevent catastrophe in the struggles which are now opening up.

Fight attacks on workers' rights and austerity, French strikes show the way

Come to the NSSN conference 2 July

David Semple, Assistant secretary, PCS DWP group executive committee (personal capacity)

Mass strike action has paralysed French oil refineries and nuclear power stations. Rail and other transport links have been severely disrupted, as workers demand that the government backs down and withdraws the hated El Khomri (named after the government minister) labour law 'reform'.

Directly implemented by fiat of supposedly 'socialist' president Francois Hollande - who refused to call a vote in the National Assembly as he believed it would be defeated - the law will allow employers to unilaterally extend the working week, reduce ordinary and overtime pay and make it much easier to sack workers from permanent jobs.

Following months of agitation and smaller strikes, the French union confederation CGT and other unions have finally been stirred into action by the overwhelming anger of millions of workers, who took to the streets through March, April and May to show their outrage.

Violent attacks by the riot police have failed to dam up again the anger felt by workers. An 'Occupy'-style movement, Nuit Debout, has developed since 31 March, in public squares and communities, to give support to demonstrations and strikes against the labour law, and the strikes have held firm.

The contrast with our Trade Union Congress (TUC) in the UK is staggering. The TUC opposed calls by PCS civil servants' union and the Fire Brigades Union for a day of action in support of the striking junior doctors, and opposed calls for coordinated action to defeat the new Trade Union Act, which

attempts to undermine all future strikes.

Like French workers, we must exert the maximum pressure on the leaders of the labour movement to force them to act, if we are to roll back the tide of anti-union attacks and rebuild our unions to fight zero-hour contracts, poverty wages and the bosses' dictatorship in the workplace.

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) was set up by the RMT transport union to bring together trade union activists and community campaigners. The NSSN annual conference is open to all; it will be held at Conway Hall, London, on 2 July, to debate precisely how we can follow the magnificent lead of French workers to build coordinated strikes to defend our rights at work and oppose austerity.

- See shopstewards.net for more on the conference
-

Tories tearing themselves apart over EU referendum: vote leave to get Cameron out

Former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, speaking on the Marr show on BBC television said that people on the left who argue for a Brexit by saying it will shatter the Tories are being 'petty'. He couldn't be more wrong.

Both the Tories and Labour are said to be preparing for the possibility of an autumn general election which raises the potential of a Jeremy Corbyn-led anti-austerity government by the end of the year.

Alongside devastating job cuts, benefit cuts and a war on young people, Tory governments have delivered 343 libraries closures, 34 closures of women's refuges and sent 1,084,604 people to foodbanks in 2014-15. That's while the richest 1,000 people in Britain saw their wealth increase by nearly £78 million a day! Getting the Tories out of power would be a significant victory in the fight against austerity and to take the wealth off the 1%.

Even before the vote the Tories are split down the middle. They have a wafer thin majority and had the backing of only 24% of the electorate in May 2015. Their austerity policies mean they are hated. As the Guardian editorial put it: "the Conservative Party has not got a lot of electoral credit in the bank".

When they sought to enforce academisation, the odium Tory MPs faced in the constituencies was a major factor in the partial u-turn, one of 20 since the election.

Now backbench Tory Brexiteers are saying that even a Remain vote would leave the Tories as a zombie government, too divided to be effective in the interests of the 1% which they are in power to serve. Preparations among some backbenchers are underway for a no-confidence vote against the prime minister, increasing the possibility of an early general election.

Youth vote

Understandably many workers and young people are utterly turned off by the referendum. A recent YouGov poll found that only 10% of 18-30 year olds trust politicians to make the case for either a Remain or a Leave vote. It is also understandable that many people identify with neither the right-wing anti-working class and racist leaders of the Leave nor Remain sides, nor give them any legitimacy.

But it is wrong to argue, as Varoufakis and Guardian writer Owen Jones and others in the so-called left Remain camp do, that a Leave vote will automatically propel the likes of Ukip and Boris Johnson to

power. Even if a Boris Johnson-led government came to pass it would be weak and divided, facing an onslaught from the Cameron wing.

Boris Johnson may have a following among the columnists but not in the workplaces. When he was Mayor of London the city became an anti-Tory city and, as a measure of how he's seen in the northern cities, he is hated in Liverpool after his 'whingers' comments. More to the point the current strikes by workers emboldened by the divisions among the Tories would also be a factor.

Ukip and the right-wing Brexiteers seem to be aware that they cannot appeal to working class voters with their true position and this is reflected in the left mask they have donned for the referendum campaign.

Cameron is a prime minister who is of the 1% and for the 1%. The Panama Papers provided ample evidence - as if it were needed. But this is now being used by another cabinet minister, Priti Patel, who suggested Cameron was too rich to care about ordinary people's concerns.

Similarly Ukip campaigned in the Welsh valleys on the NHS and steel - not immigration. That Patel, a vile representative of the 1% who has always voted for higher university fees and lower benefits, is forced to make such an attack is a reflection of the limited audience for her, Farage's and Johnson's anti-working class position.

Labour

It also shows the potential for an independent working class position on the referendum that opposes the bosses' EU and the bosses' parties. What's more, if a lead had been given to a left and working class Leave campaign by the trade union leaders and Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, any benefit to Ukip and Johnson et al could have been cut across. Again the potential for a left out voice to gain an echo is revealed by the half of Labour voters who thought Jeremy Corbyn had that position!

Instead we see the right wing in Labour trying to take the upper hand. London Labour mayor Sadiq Khan shared a Remain platform with Cameron, willing to put the Tories' racist attacks on him to one side to defend the interests of the bosses in the EU. He is already pitting Blairite ideas against the anti-austerity ideas Corbyn has raised, saying he is a mayor for all Londoners and the most pro-big business mayor ever. But you cannot defend both the interests of the working class and the bosses.

Socialists have a duty to fight for an independent working-class position and this will include the battle for Labour's programme to be a working class and socialist one. It should start with a £10 an hour minimum wage, rent control and investment in council housing, free education and no academies and nationalisation of the steel industry, the railways and the banking system to start to run society in the interests of the 99%.

PCS conference takes serious approach to key political and industrial questions

Rob Williams, Socialist Party industrial organiser

Virtually one of the last motions to be moved at this year's conference of the PCS civil servants' union was to give full support to the BMA doctors' union. General Secretary Mark Serwotka called on the TUC to organise a national day of action in support of the junior doctors and the NHS.

PCS has been to the fore in resisting government cuts and attempting to bring together all public sector

unions in coordinated action. For this it has been specially targeted by the Tories.

This was the first conference since the government had withdrawn 'check-off' (the collection of union subs through wages). A monumental campaign in getting members to transfer to direct debit has staved off financial ruin with up to 90% signing up in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the HMRC tax office and 96% in Land Registry.

This attack has been removed from the Trade Union Act for other public sector unions. PCS had won a legal victory in the courts on the eve of conference ruling the removal in DWP illegal. The union will now be looking for damages.

The left Democracy Alliance, which includes Left Unity, has confirmed its leadership of the National Executive Committee (NEC) in the annual union elections, with Socialist Party member Janice Godrich winning her 14th successive presidential vote.

In 2011 the public sector pensions dispute, including the 2 million-strong strike on 30 November, was ended by the TUC, Unison, GMB and right-wing union leaderships. Then in 2013 the pay strikes fell away. Since then PCS has been continuing to lead its members against the brutal cuts.

Conference celebrated successful disputes in the last year in the National Gallery and Scottish Museums while showing solidarity to current strikes in the National Museum Wales and in the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) against the closure of the Sheffield office, led by Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd.

On the final day of conference, members were giving in a 230,000-strong petition against yet another drive to privatise Land Registry after PCS had defeated an earlier attempt.

But the lack of coordinated action across the public sector, especially against the pay freeze, has meant that the union has had to negotiate hard to ensure members in the DWP have safeguards in the group pay offer.

This includes significant pay rises for lower paid members but does include extended opening hours on Saturdays and evenings. DWP conference saw a passionate debate but agreed to recommend the offer for a membership vote.

Labour

As well as the industrial debates, conference saw the union grapple with the monumental political developments of the last 12 months. Both Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell spoke at conference. Their pledge to repeal the Trade Union Act and restore national pay bargaining was enthusiastically welcomed.

But in the debates on political strategy and affiliation to Corbyn-supporting group Momentum, delegates showed that at this stage, it is not automatic that support for Corbyn's anti-austerity message means support for the Labour Party as it is still constituted, politically and organisationally.

Members instead want to soberly weigh up options as the struggle within Labour develops. Delegates were not convinced that the Blairite right have been decisively defeated, nor that the official left, including Momentum, have the necessary policies and organisation to defeat them.

The NEC's motion for a review of the union's political strategy, keeping a variety of possibilities open, was agreed rather than one calling for an immediate ballot for Labour affiliation.

Similarly, the motion to affiliate to Momentum was decisively defeated by a margin of three to one. This was also a reflection of many delegates' doubts about it due to its retreats on issues such as re-

selection, Labour councils cuts as well as renegeing on its original plan to bring together anti-austerity forces both inside and outside Labour.

A Merseyside delegate explained that she and other PCS reps have been excluded from Momentum meetings for questioning the leadership's approach.

It is also clear that among Scottish members, despite warmth towards Corbyn's policies, there is still a legacy of mistrust towards Labour after decades of right-wing leadership which reached its nadir in the 'Better Together' alliance with the Tories in the 2014 independence referendum. This isn't helped by Corbyn's continued mistaken approach to Scottish independence.

Socialist Party members were prominent in the conference, both from the platform and the floor. Many delegates bought our paper, while £900 was raised in the collection at our fringe which was addressed by Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe, DWP president Fran Heathcote and Geraint Parfitt, National Museum Wales striker.

Could it be 3 strikes and you're out at 2 Sisters?

Alistair Tice

"More for less" is the slogan of 2 Sisters Food Group. That means more for billionaire owner and chief executive Ranjit Singh Boparan, and less, much less, for the workers.

Boparan is known in the business as the 'chicken king'. According to the Sunday Times Rich List he, together with his wife, has a personal fortune worth £1.35 billion. 2 Sisters is the largest food company in the UK owning brands like Fox's Biscuits, Goodfellas Pizza, Holland's Pies, Harry Ramsden's fish and chip shops and supplying ready meals to Marks and Spencer.

Living wage

Using the excuse of implementing the National Living Wage, Boparan is following the trend of private sector employers attacking the premiums and terms and conditions of workers at site after site, in particular cutting premium pay for weekends and bank holidays. One couple, both working weekends at the Pennine Foods factory in Sheffield told me that they would lose £14,000 a year from their household income!

But workers are fighting back. Last summer, over 400 workers, members of the BFAWU bakers and foodworkers union, at the 2 Sisters owned Gunstone's factory near Sheffield, went on strike for the first time ever to win a pay rise.

Two weeks ago, on 19-20 May, 500 BFAWU members at Pennine Foods also struck for the first time ever against the imposition of a new contract removing all premium pay. They will strike again for another 48 hours on 5 June.

Pennine workers have been boosted by news that 400 of their BFAWU colleagues at 2 Sisters owned RF Brookes factory in Rogerstone, Newport, South Wales are starting 48-hour strike action against 20-25% pay cuts on 2 June.

Dai Mort, BFAWU branch secretary at Brookes, explained that workers are striking against a cut to night shift allowance and overtime rates. Some workers could lose nearly £3,000 a year and workers under 25 years will be paid 50p an hour less. Pennine workers will be sending a car down to the RF Brookes picket line in solidarity.

And 440 Unite union members at the Pizza Factory (also owned by 2 Sisters) in Nottingham are currently balloting over a pay claim, with the result due on 6 June.

So, in the next few weeks, workers at three 2 Sisters factories could be taking strike action together.

Coordinate

Shop stewards should coordinate strike days and use these disputes to build a 2 Sisters shop stewards network.

That would stop management from being able to transfer production, and especially hit Marks and Spencer who are supplied by both the Pennine and RF Brookes factories. Strike action plus a leverage campaign of picket protests at M&S stores can win a victory for the workers.

- Please contact john.higgins@bfawu.org or haroon.rashid@bfawu.org at Pennine Foods and Dai Mort at Brookes on 07792945231 and ccbdfs11@yahoo.com with messages of support and donations.

Welsh Government under attack at Wales TUC conference...and museum strikers close to victory

Ronnie Job, Swansea Trades Council secretary

Socialist Party members, striking workers and real life helped spoil the love-in between the leadership of the trade union movement in Wales and the Welsh Government that the general council had planned for Wales TUC on 24-26 May.

As Mark Evans pointed out in the debate on public services, the Welsh Government the trade union leadership defends is now a 'Lib-Lab Government'.

The Welsh electorate punished the Liberal Democrats in May for propping up Cameron for five years by virtually wiping them out. But Welsh Labour is giving the sole remaining Lib-Dem assembly member the Education Ministerial portfolio.

Socialist Party members delegated to conference from PCS, Unison, Cardiff, Swansea and Llanelli Trades Councils made a significant contribution, intervening in debates on the steel industry, trade union rights, fighting council cuts, defending public services and the EU referendum.

Exposed

But we weren't the only ones exposing the Welsh Government. In the debates on public services, local authority cuts and education, workers gave example after example of cuts to services, job losses and attacks on pay, terms and conditions by either the Welsh Government or Labour councils.

The gap between the claims that are made on behalf of the Welsh Government and the reality of working in public services in Wales was starkly illustrated at Wales TUC by the attendance of Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum Wales PCS members. They are on indefinite strike and came to collect for their hardship fund. They also heard fellow striker Tony, move a motion on payments for

weekend working and demand the Welsh Government resolve this dispute.

It is a scandal that the Welsh Government has allowed this dispute to go on for over two years; they demand the UK government intervene on steel but have failed to do the same in a devolved public service.

One of the most significant debates of the conference saw the Wales TUC give its unanimous backing to the demand for councils and councillors who claim to be anti-austerity, to stop voting for council cuts and instead set and vote for legal no-cuts budgets.

Victory in sight

Dave Reid

The courageous all-out action by PCS members at National Museum Wales has entered its fifth week. Workers picketing the museum's Battle of St. Fagans re-enactment on 28 May were confident victory was in sight. The museum's board of trustees had met to discuss a possible deal but refused to report the meeting's outcome before the directors went on holiday!

The Welsh Government has been forced by the massive campaign of the museum workers and the solidarity they have received to intervene and roll back some of the cuts to the museum's funding to facilitate a resolution of the dispute.

The museum workers have been bowled over by the solidarity and ovations they received at PCS and Wales TUC conferences and the thousands of pounds collected and donated by trade union bodies including the £159 collected by the National Shop Stewards Network outside Cardiff Queen Street station.

University lecturers strike for fair pay

UCU members were out in force on picket lines at universities on the first day of UK-wide two-day strike action against a paltry 1.1% pay offer from university employers.

Cardiff

"Comrades, this strike is all about respect", declared the president of Cardiff university UCU. Vice chancellors are receiving four times the wages of lecturers and universities are investing huge amounts in facilities and buildings. "But what do students remember about university years later - is it how modern the buildings were, or the experience and support that lecturers provided?"

Lecturers have experienced an average fall in real wages of 14% in the last six years while university vice chancellors' salaries have gone through the roof.

In Cardiff university the vice chancellor is paid £270,000 a year and lavished with perks, expenses and first class travel while many lecturers who actually deliver education to students have to get by on part time contracts.

Strikers from the National Museum of Wales joined the picket line to show solidarity along with members of Cardiff Trades Council.

UCU members will be taking action on Thursday as well, followed by work-to-contract action and further days of action until a decent pay offer is forthcoming. Other unions are invited to support their picket line.

Dave Reid

London

UCU strikers from City university gathered a great crowd at lunchtime to march around central London. They were joined by a group from London Met, and then marched to SOAS, UCL and Birkbeck, gathering up more strikers as they went.

One of the organisers was UCU rep Chris Flood, a former Socialist Party councillor and TUSC candidate, who addressed the demo and passed on a message of support from Janice Godrich, president of PCS.

The strikers were supported by SERTUC, Unison members and students. City UCU sent a message of support to the steel workers' demonstration taking place on the same day.

Paula Mitchell

Liverpool

Jo McNeill, president of University of Liverpool UCU branch, and NEC member, spoke to Hugh Caffrey:

We're out on strike today because of our pay. There's a massive perception that people in this sector are very well paid and have got permanent and secure positions. That's simply not the case anymore, it's a highly casualised sector.

We're fighting not just to increase our pay, it's not just about more pounds and pence in our pockets anymore, it's about fair pay and having the right to a pay increase every year.

Our vice chancellors have just been offered a between 6% and 10% pay increase nationally, and our offer was 1.1%; and we just think that's outrageous.

With the massive gender pay gap and the increase in casualisation, we've got academics on zero-hours contracts, early career researchers who are consistently receiving redundancy notices because they're on such short-term contracts... We think there should be more permanency in the sector. We're charging the students £9,000 a year, and we think that our pay should be reflective of the service that they want us to provide.

Leicester

One of the issues in this strike is the gender pay gap. The gap at Leicester university is one of the very worst in the country. Yet they hypocritically take part in a UN equality initiative called 'HE (Higher Education) for she'!

Steve Score

Leeds

A sea of pickets greeted commuters along Woodhouse Lane in the north of the city centre as UCU

members picketed entrances to three of the city's four Higher Education institutions which lay along that road.

As Socialist Party and Socialist Students members toured the picket lines, we found that pickets were in a buoyant mood, in sharp contrast to the overcast weather. Throughout the morning pickets had grown, and noticeably a number of post-graduate students who are often on a casual basis employed to teach joined the picket lines.

At lunchtime around 150-200 joined a march and rally into the centre of the city, with a noticeable delegation of Unison members in Higher Education joining the march who are also currently balloting over the same pay offer.

Speakers from the UCU branches on strike, including UCU anti-casualisation NEC rep Vicky Blake, outlined that as well as striking because of the decline of pay in relation to costs of living, there were also big issues over the gender pay gap as well as the rampant usage of casualised working conditions that especially affect newcomers into academia.

Sarah Gillborn, Leeds Beckett SU welfare officer, also spoke in support of the strike and brought solidarity from students. Leeds Beckett SU's student council recently unanimously passed a motion, moved by Socialist Students member Amy Cousens, to back the staff trade unions in this dispute.

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Iain also sent a report the following day from Bradford:

A dozen UCU were picketing in Bradford on the second strike day when Socialist Party members locally visited the picket line. Many of the pickets talked about ongoing job reviews at the university which they believe are designed to cut staff pay, by making job descriptions more vague. Other pickets talked about how through the union they had challenged this procedure, in some cases forcing the university to recognise additional duties they were undertaking and increase pay!

Tish, one of the UCU reps at the university, spoke to us about her concerns over education in general, including her local school which has been turned into an academy. The common theme in all the Tories' plans for education, is increasing marketisation of the sector.

Sheffield

The 48-hour strike by UCU members in Higher Education saw strong pickets at both the University of Sheffield and Hallam, despite the fact that the timing of the strikes meant teaching at both institutions had largely finished.

There was a mood of determination; we know that we will need to take much more action to recover some of the 15% of our pay lost to freezes and cuts in recent years, but we've also seen the impact of the junior doctors' strikes, an inspiration to all trade unionists.

On Wednesday, the first day of the action, Sheffield UCU organised a 'teach in' which brought together around 150 education workers and students to discuss the marketisation agenda, the gender pay gap and casualisation, and how workers and students can fight these attacks together.

Conveniently, on the second day of our strike, Hallam university was inaugurating its new vice chancellor in Sheffield cathedral, so members from Sheffield and Hallam UCU decided it would be

nice to pop along and pay our respects.

Various attending dignitaries were greeted with chants of "We'll be back to bother you later - until we get fair pay!" as they filed in for the ceremony, and Hallam's management apparently felt the need to ensure two police vans were in attendance to deal with our dangerous group of academics and students.

Afterwards we joined with striking workers from the Business, Innovation and Skills department who were also out on a 48-hour strike, and held a joint rally with speakers, who included Marion Lloyd, president of PCS BIS group. Also speaking, from Hallam students union were Hassan El Zafar, education officer, and Luke Renwick, education officer elect, who were invited to attend the inauguration, but told strikers they'd rather be outside with them!

In Sheffield we've kicked off the pay campaign with visible and disruptive industrial action, and shown the way forward by organising with other workers in struggle locally. That's how we'll build the generalised strike action we need to get rid of the Tories - not by waiting for the TUC to take a lead but by showing the way forward ourselves!

Sam Morecroft, Sheffield UCU Anti-Casualisation Officer

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 25 May 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Thomas Cook cabin crew to strike over breaks

William Jarrett, Unite member

In a fortnight of headlines littered with outbreaks of industrial disputes, 25 May didn't disappoint. Thomas Cook cabin crew in Unite the Union voted by 74% to enter in to dispute with their employer.

Operating in ten UK aviation hubs by providing package holiday deals, the company's revenues for six months up to March were a staggering £2.7 billion.

These eye-watering margins haven't translated into gains for workers though, whose terms and conditions are under attack. The basis for the dispute is health and safety, as breaks have been reduced from two to one for every 12-hour shift worked.

All cargo is precious, not least the human cargo aboard these flights. A cursory examination of Aeroinside, an industry publication documenting safety incidents, reveals that, not unlike other operators, Thomas Cook relies heavily on its flight crew to ensure the safety of passengers. Flight crew deliver vital safety guidance and provision of specialist emergency management during incidents. In the same six month period to March, Thomas Cook returned to profit for the first time in five years, generating a pre-tax profit of £50 million. So, why is a company that is returning to financial health attacking its frontline staff?

To answer this question, the Socialist urges Unite to table a request at Acas for the management to open its books to the democratic scrutiny of Unite convenors and stewards at the company, to gain a clearer understanding of which salaries may require review.

With airline flight staff salaries averaging only £14,824 a year, we doubt strongly that these expenditures, or the two breaks for every 12 hours worked suggested by the government's regulator the Civil Aviation Authority, are the source of the underlying financial problems at Thomas Cook.

BIS office closure: Anger and determination to fight on

Alistair Tice

Confirmation of the Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Sheffield office closure was made by intranet at 11am on Thursday 26 May. For the civil service workers whose jobs are being moved to London this decision was not unexpected but there was always a hope that the tremendous campaign they've conducted over the last 3-4 months had changed the government's mind.

Disappointment quickly turned to anger and determination to fight on. Around 60 PCS union members picketed the office on Thursday, their third day of strike action. The BIS Permanent Secretary and his board members were forced to walk sheepishly through the pickets. But they had to cancel their meeting with staff because they were all out on strike!

Ironically BIS is the government department responsible for picketing guidelines, including the limit of 'only six'. Well there were ten times that number picketing the BIS office. So much for the anti-union laws.

With the BIS bosses holed up inside the building, the strikers held a union meeting in front of the main entrance. Marion Lloyd, PCS group president for BIS, gave an impassioned and defiant speech proposing another two days of strike action on 2-3 June which was unanimously voted for.

The campaign to save Sheffield BIS isn't just about these 250 jobs. Sheffield has been devastated by announcements of job losses in the last six months: HMRC 500, the council 400, HSBC 600 and Polestar 600.

As PCS industrial officer Lois Austin said: "This decision affects not just BIS Sheffield and the regional offices but also the city of Sheffield as a whole, where jobs are being ripped out across the public and private sector. It will be reduced to a 1980s ghost town if the government has its way."

These workers have the support of the whole PCS union which voted unanimously at its annual conference to support the campaign, with over £1,000 in donations made for the hardship fund. Over £200 was collected in buckets during the last two days of strike action from colleagues working in the same office building for another government department.

- 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 27 May 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Workplace news in brief

Taxi trouble

Taxis flying Unite the Union flags led over 200 marching Nottingham taxi drivers with more taxis bringing up the rear. They were joined by Nottingham Pensioners Action Group and disabled people. The drivers were protesting against Nottingham City Council moving the main Station Street rank further from the railway station, along with other restrictions on taxis. In response, drivers have joined Unite and formed a new branch. On the march, Imran Idrees told Jon Dale: "The city council has moved the taxi rank three or four times in the past couple of years. People now have to walk 500 metres from the platform. People with disabilities, the elderly, pregnant women, young children struggle."

Nat Sharpe

Socialist Party video

Over 400 steelworkers marched in London on 25 May to demand government action to 'Save Our Steel'. The Socialist Party and the NSSN joined Unite, Community and GMB members. Steelworkers and trade union leaders on the demo spoke to the Socialist Party:

- <http://tinyurl.com/steelworkersspeakout>
-

Property speculators target Butterfields tenants

Property asset-strippers Butterfields E17 Ltd have declared war on the tenants of the Butterfields estate in Walthamstow, east London, again.

During negotiations between the current owners and Dolphin Living Trust, there had been a short truce between the landlord and the tenants. Eviction orders were, to everyone's relief, temporarily set aside.

But that has now ended. Dolphin, a large and expanding housing charity, has stated that negotiations have stopped. It appears that Butterfields E17 Ltd walked away, reverting to their previous policy of no-fault evictions in order to turf more than 50 tenants out of their long-term homes and onto the streets.

Eviction notices

They have now sent both the secretary and chair of Butterfields Tenants' and Residents' Association (TRA) a new eviction notice, along with two other households. TRA Secretary Nicole Holgate commented: "It seems clear that they want to intimidate people. They want to undermine our campaign to stay by bullying and scaring vulnerable tenants into leaving voluntarily. They want to divide and conquer, driving out our leadership first, and then moving on to the next group of us. They'll then walk away with their profit, an estimated £3 million."

But the residents' association, the local Housing Action Network, and their supporters, will keep fighting. At a packed meeting on 25 May, the Butterfields Won't Budge campaign was unanimously re-affirmed, and new actions to resist the evictions were planned.

Linda Taaffe of Housing Action Network and the Socialist Party asked for anyone fighting a similar fight, whether a group or an individual, to come forward and join a campaign of mutual support for

renters everywhere: "The landlords may have the law stacked on their side, but we have justice, and we have increasing support. The law must be challenged with collective action."

Ordinary people have had enough of being treated like their lives don't matter, their jobs don't matter and their children's schooling doesn't matter. These attacks are a form of social cleansing, and it is happening all over. Enough is enough. It's time to put a stop to it together.

Campaigners take Kent council to judicial review to save threatened Pent Valley school

Kelly Griffiths, parent of a year 10 student at Pent Valley, is taking legal action against Kent County Council.

Public Interest Lawyers have since filed an application for permission for judicial review on behalf of Ms Griffiths.

This is arguing that the consultation on closing the school was unlawful, that commitments made by the council to keep the school open gave rise to a substantive legitimate expectation, that the council failed to provide adequate reasons for closing the school and that the council did not take into account the future demand for school places and lack of capacity.

The school, Pent Valley Technology College, is due to close substantially in September 2016 and completely in September 2017. This is despite a commitment in June 2015 that the school would be supported by the council and kept open. Parents both at Pent Valley and from other schools are opposed to the closure.

The alternative schools to which it is proposed pupils are moved are understood to be full or over-subscribed. The council itself supports the idea of a new school opening for pupils just 12 months after Pent Valley is due to close.

"The threat to close Pent Valley by the education department at Kent council tramples over the hopes and aspirations of young people in our local community" says Bethany Smith, a Pent Valley student.

Seth Cruse, Unison education convenor in Kent local government, said: "This is a further attack on our community, Unison members are facing redundancies, hardship and an uncertain future."

Eric Segal, secretary of South East Kent Trades Union Council and Unite the Union branch secretary, said: "The legal challenge is an integral part of our trade union and community-led campaign to halt the threat to close Pent Valley school and shows that we will not be silenced."

Furious parents and staff campaign to fight academisation

Ian Pattison, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Parents of pupils at George Tomlinson primary school are furious. They fear their east London school could become an academy. Academy company Lime is on an expansion drive and has installed its own staff at the school.

Over 60 parents and supporters were at a public meeting on 25 May, unhappy with the changes this has brought to the school.

60 joined a protest two days later outside the school gates, before marching to Leytonstone tube station. Parents held another protest the same evening. Academisation can be beaten - as has been shown recently at John Roan School in south London after teachers voted for strike action.

The teachers and support staff at George Tomlinson are considering taking strike action too. With the backing of parents and the local community behind them, this can mean we can win.

The local Waltham Forest Labour council was held out for particular criticism by parents. They've used none of their powers to block academisation.

Local Labour councillor Clyde Loakes celebrated that 'only' a third of Waltham Forest primary schools are academies. The other two local Labour councillors - Jenny Gray and Marie Pye - attended the meeting but refused to do what parents asked or even attend our protest. The council welcomes academisation and privatisation.

The NUT teachers' union is ideally placed to coordinate a campaign in the borough. This campaign needs to involve the whole local community, with strike action and parents at its heart. Waltham Forest Trades Council has invited teachers, support staff and parents to come to its next meeting with a view to taking a more active role in helping to stop the threat of academisation of the whole borough.

The Socialist Party says schools belong to the community and shouldn't be run commercially.

Birmingham Labour council takes credit for Tory privatisation

Clive Walder, Birmingham Socialist Party

Birmingham City Council's troubled children's services are to be handed over to an 'independent' trust. The department has been in special measures for eight years following a string of high profile failures resulting in the deaths of vulnerable children.

It is clear from the constantly vitriolic comments by school's inspector Ofsted chief Sir Michael Wilshaw (such as saying that Birmingham was "the worst place in the developed world for children to grow up in") that the government has for a long time been preparing to use the serious problems facing the department as an excuse for privatisation. At this stage it is unclear whether the council will retain control over its children's services.

A local journalist has revealed that there has been pressure from Cameron himself for this course of action to be taken. Unbelievably, Labour council leader John Clancy will claim that this is the council's idea! It is hard to find a better example of the degeneration of Labour than falsely taking the credit for Tory privatisation.

Birmingham has one of the highest rates of child deprivation in the country which is the root cause of the considerable number of challenging child protection cases.

Poverty, underfunding and a Labour council which refuses to stand up to the Tories are at the heart of this problem.

Profit seeking private trusts will not be prepared to invest the vast sums of money necessary to turn this

situation around.

Peterborough PFI palaver

Peterborough Socialist Party

On 24 May the Peterborough and Stamford Hospital Trust agreed in principle a merger with Hinchingbrooke Hospital.

This merger allows particular services such as the A&E to be transferred between sites, or even cut altogether.

The document proposing the merger makes it clear that mergers or takeovers have been considered for the past few years, all because of financial problems. Nowhere in the document, however, are Private Finance Initiative (PFI) payments mentioned. Any reader of the local press or magazines like Private Eye would know that the trust is being required to pay a sum in the region of £2 billion for work costing around a quarter of that sum.

Yet such considerations are not apparently being considered by the people paid a small fortune to manage the result.

Cambridgeshire needs to fight for all its hospitals. Roll on the days of opening the books with full and democratic control of the NHS.

Jeremy Corbyn needs to say that the next labour government will cancel all PFI debts.

This simple announcement would alter such calculations up and down the country and stop in their tracks these types of cuts. How about it, Jeremy?

Get a copy of the Socialist from a workplace near you!

Phil King and Alistair Tice, Sheffield Socialist Party

It's a sunny Monday morning, two Socialist Party members stand outside Sheffield's Moorfoot council office building.

With a smile on our faces and the Socialist's anti-Tory front page held out for all to see, we make a cheery invitation to staff walking in to work: "Morning. Can I interest you in a copy of the Socialist newspaper?" An hour and a half later and we have sold 15 copies of the Socialist. And we learnt a few first names to continue conversations next time. Times are a changing. It's worth trying a workplace sale in your city or town.

Lisbon dockers victory

João Félix, Cardiff West Socialist Party and Socialismo Revolucionário (CWI Portugal)

The Lisbon dockers strike, which started on 20 April, ended in a significant victory to the dockers!

The agreement reached, which included 23 casual workers in the collective contract, won an increase in pay and automatic career progression.

The dockers also forced the employers to stop using the parallel company created to hire casual workers. The threat of collective lay-off, a desperate move by the bosses, was also dropped.

This is a stunning victory against a brutal attempt by the Lisbon Port private companies to impose zero-hour contracts, cut pay, force casualisation and attack workers' rights.

During the strike, dockworkers were relentlessly attacked by the capitalist class and the media. The fact that they held steadfast is a testament to their courage, but, more importantly, shows the importance and the power of the organised working class, internationalism and class solidarity.

The Lisbon dockers are organised in the International Dockworkers Council, and were supported by important sections of other workers and trade unions, both home and abroad.

The dockers trade union is democratically run, and has been calling for the nationalisation of the port sector.

They have always supported workers' struggles and called a demonstration on 16 June against 'precarious employment'. Even after reaching the collective agreement, they have stepped up the call for the demonstration, making the point that it was to fight for the rights of all the working class.

The victory of the Lisbon Dockers is a prime example of how an organised and militant trade union can defeat the bosses.

Solidarity with protesters in Kazakhstan

Protesters from Campaign Kazakhstan and the Socialist Party delivered a letter to the Kazakhstan embassy in London condemning the actions of the Nazarbayev regime. There were chants of "Free all political prisoners" and speeches of solidarity with protesters fighting against land privatisation and for democratic rights against the corrupt regime.

The embassy locked the doors as soon as the protest arrived and refused to accept the letter, and someone was sent out to take photos. It clearly rattled them that people will continue to expose the nature of the Kazakhstan regime and protests will continue in Kazakhstan and abroad.

Mark Best

For an article on the CWI website about the large demonstrations taking place in Kazakhstan go to:

[Massive police operation confronts demonstrators](#)

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

Film: Money Monster

Engaging attack on finance capitalism and journalism

George Bailey

Boxing similes abound in Jodie Foster's 'Money Monster', and ultimately it pulls its punches.

Nevertheless, for a major Hollywood film it is a pretty devastating exposé of capitalism. Particularly the corruption of finance capitalism, and the continuing decline of serious journalism that allows it to go unchallenged.

It is tragic, comic, frantic and farcical in equal measure and has a flow that keeps the audience gripped and engaged.

The storyline follows cynical, self-serving TV presenter Lee Gates (George Clooney). He presents the 'infotainment' programme Money Monster - an over-the-top financial puff show for big corporations and his own ego.

As it gets underway, Gates is taken hostage by Kyle Budwell (Jack O'Connell). He has lost \$60,000 on one of the show's share tips, on behalf of the Ibis corporation. His financial loss, and that of thousands of others, followed an instantaneous 'loss' of \$800 million through a computer "glitch" (look out for that word, it crops up a lot in the film).

He then makes a desperate bid to get to the truth of how his and other investors' money was lost. He ends up finally getting the answers, but with a tragic conclusion.

In between, we see how so-called news organisations and former 'serious' reporters have ditched any pretence of integrity in covering news to become mouthpieces of big business. We also get a hard-hitting exposure of the incredible corruption and disregard for 'legality' of one wing of modern capitalism.

We see also how the unfolding events themselves become a piece of live TV theatre which grips an international audience - reminiscent of the OJ Simpson car chase - but which immediately becomes personalised and trivialised by the media's coverage.

The film has strong performances from Clooney, O'Connell, and Julia Roberts as Patty Fenn, the show's director who has marginally retained some pretence of being a credible investigative journalist.

I never expect to come away from a Hollywood film pleasantly surprised that it has called for the overthrow of capitalism - and Money Monster didn't do that.

But I think anyone who is outraged and wants to take action will feel, having seeing the film, it did a good job of exposing capitalism and the decline of investigative journalism.

Definitely worth seeing.

Obituary: Simon Gomery 1968-2016

Members of the Socialist Party in Plymouth were saddened to learn of Simon Gomery's sudden death in May.

Simon spent much of his adult life in the Labour Party, but joined the Socialist Party in 2014. He had become increasingly disillusioned with a Labour Party he felt was detached from the working class, and was proud to have been formally expelled for nominating a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate in his ward for the 2014 elections.

Simon was a skilled photographer, often documenting the demonstrations that took place in Plymouth, and displaying his works at exhibitions. He was keen to showcase the determined struggles of working class people.

Simon championed disability rights, and was the disabled workers' officer for his branches of public sector union Unison and teachers' union NUT. One of his proudest moments was an article he wrote on the devastating effects of benefit cuts to disabled people making the front page of the Socialist last year (see 'Killed by benefit cuts' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Determined to see an anti-austerity alternative on the ballot paper he stood for TUSC against the pro-cuts Labour council candidate in his ward last September. He felt immense pride that he was following in the footsteps of those who dared to take on Thatcher and won.

Simon was determined to see an end to the misery caused by capitalism, and was a passionate advocate for the socialist transformation of society. He will be deeply missed.

Ryan Aldred

Letter

Parcel farce

Trying to get a parcel delivered has reminded me why we need a socialist planned economy.

Firstly, a second parcel is going to be delivered by a different delivery company at the same time to the same address, showing how wasteful capitalist competition is. But I can also track the driver's delivery route - which shows them five streets away from the delivery address, driving in the opposite direction, because they have to make another 60 deliveries before mine, causing extra pollution for no reason. It really shows how wasteful capitalism can be.

Helen Pattison, London

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.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/22942>