

# **No to Tory and EU austerity**

## **The EU doesn't protect workers' rights**

**Roger Bannister** , Unison national executive member (personal capacity)

On 6 June ten trade union leaders had a letter published in the Guardian urging their members to vote Remain in the European Union referendum in order to defend rights at work.

At a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) meeting in Liverpool two days earlier one supporter remarked: "When I hear trade union leaders tell us that we have to stay in the EU to protect our rights I feel like saying, 'so what do we pay you for?'"

The EU is an economic and political bloc acting in the interests of big business in Europe. While it is true that, particularly during the Thatcher era, the EU sometimes seemed to represent a softer form of capitalism, and some legal protections for workers were made through it, this era of so-called 'social Europe' is well and truly over. The EU is at the forefront of globally applied austerity measures, and attacks on workers' rights.

The general secretaries naively call for the EU to "move away from a path of austerity," but as millions of impoverished Greek workers could tell them, it is a bit too late for that.

Even as the referendum debate is taking place EU representatives are locked in secret discussions with US representatives over the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, (TTIP).

This aims to eliminate "barriers to trade" between these massive blocs. Such 'barriers' include health and safety legislation and preservation of what remains of the public sector. The King's Fund has recently stated that the NHS could not be exempted from EU procurement or competition rules, meaning it must be privatised.

The trade union leaders' support for the EU on the spurious grounds of defending workers' rights ironically comes soon after they failed to lift a finger to stop the Tory government ripping up the right to strike of millions of British workers with the Trade Union Act. That weakness and indecision is the real threat to British workers, not Britain withdrawing from the bosses' trading club.

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**Editorial of the Socialist, issue 905**

## **Youth must fight for their future - starting with a Leave vote to smash the Tories**

Switched off, disengaged and bemused: these are just a few of the adjectives that have been used to describe the way young people are reacting to the current EU referendum debate. And is it any wonder? The leaderships of both the official Remain and Leave campaigns are

dominated by representatives of the small super-rich elite. Switch on the news and you're usually greeted with Tory politicians arguing over which outcome, Leave or Remain, would work in the best interests of big business.

For young people experiencing the bleak reality of austerity Britain - with sky high tuition fees, rock bottom wages and an impossible housing market - it's not surprising that a debate currently dominated by pro-austerity politicians is not enthusing. Reportedly only 52% of young people are 'definitely intending' to use their vote on 23 June. A recent YouGov poll has shown the depth of the disillusionment with the current public debate. Only 10% of young people said they trust politicians to tell them the truth about EU referendum, just 13% trust the media and 16% trust business leaders.

But, with recent polls suggesting a narrow lead for Leave, panic is beginning to set in among Cameron's Remain camp and the capitalist class which overwhelmingly backs it. Their response has been to further escalate the fear campaign. This week's threat is that Brexit would be like an 'economic bomb'. But it appears the apocalyptic predictions and dire warnings have so far failed. In fact, among working class people they could even be having the reverse of their intended effect. After all, what could be better encouragement to vote Leave than David Cameron (the same man slashing public services, cutting jobs and wrecking the NHS) desperately pleading with you to do the opposite?

Fearful that they could lose the referendum, the leaders of the Remain campaign are relying on right-wing (and unfortunately some left-wing) trade union leaders and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) to mobilise working class voters to support Remain. By allowing themselves to be used by the Tories in this way, the trade union tops are objectively helping to save Cameron's skin.

## **Mass working class struggle**

They justify this stand with the argument that the EU acts to protect workers' rights. But, in reality, the opposite is true. Most EU legislation acts to undermine workers' and trade union rights. In any case, better rights and living standards are never 'gifted' to working class people, instead they have been won, and must be defended, through mass working class struggle.

It is a supreme irony that the TUC leadership, which failed to organise so much as a demonstration to oppose the most vicious anti-union laws in a generation, is now energetically campaigning alongside the politicians who proposed them - all on the basis of alleged concern for 'workers' rights'.

With the referendum result potentially in the balance, the Remain campaign is hoping it might rely on younger voters to help keep Britain in the EU. Perhaps Cameron and his friends are cynically hoping that the instinct of most working class people for international solidarity and anti-racism, which is particularly strong among the young, will make them sufficiently repelled by Farage and co to turn out and vote for the status quo.

It is true that the anti-immigrant rhetoric of Johnson and Farage, which has consistently been mirrored on the Remain side, can be especially repulsive to youth. That's because, perhaps even more than older generations, young people are often keenly aware of the interests they share with other workers and young people in Europe and the rest of the world.

Some are conscious that the fight against brutal austerity and the capitalist system cannot be confined to the borders of one country.

In recent years, a spectacular display of this instinct for internationalism came in the form of the Indignados and Occupy movements, which spread like wildfire across swathes of the continent. This was a movement sparked, in large part, by opposition to the severe, EU-directed austerity being imposed across southern Europe. And it was a movement to which national borders presented no barrier.

Many of the methods adopted during this struggle - including mass occupations of streets and squares - have been revisited in the huge movement currently rocking France, with 'Nuit Debout' protests going alongside a mighty trade union struggle. This fight to defend protections for workers - including collective bargaining and a 35-hour week - is rightly seen as a fight for the future of the next generation in France.

But there is no recourse to the EU for protection for French workers and young people (which you might assume there would be if you believed the rhetoric of many of the trade union leaders in Britain).

The defenders of these rights - themselves the fruits of mass workers' struggles - are to be found on the picket lines and on the streets, not among the bureaucrats of Brussels.

In fact the European Commissioner for the Euro and 'Social Dialogue', Valis Dombrovskis, has given France's proposed Labour laws a glowing endorsement. Dombrovskis has repeatedly stressed the urgent need to address 'rigidities' (ie barriers to the bosses driving down wages and conditions) in the French Labour market.

After all, the real internationalists are not Juncker, Merkel, Lagarde and Cameron. And there is nothing that is genuinely internationalist about the EU. You need only look to Greece, with the social catastrophe of more than 50% youth unemployment, to know that any idea of a progressive, 'social Europe' is a lie. Real solidarity with young and working class people, both in Greece and elsewhere, does not require a 'vote of confidence' in one of the main institutions imposing this penury - quite the opposite.

Socialists and trade unionists campaigning to leave the EU have absolutely nothing in common with the pro-capitalist, xenophobic Leave campaigns being headed by Johnson and Farage. The tawdry nature of the current debate, with ant-immigrant rhetoric dominating the headlines from both sides, highlights why it is so regrettable that Jeremy Corbyn, whose clear anti-austerity stance enthused many thousands of young people during his leadership bid, has allowed himself to be browbeaten by the Blairites in his own party into supporting a Remain vote.

Had Jeremy remained firm in his historically held position and come out for a Leave vote, the whole terrain of the debate could have been changed. If a Corbyn-led Leave campaign was linked with building a movement to break with austerity - including fighting for free education, a £10 an hour minimum wage, rent controls, council house building and the renationalisation of the railways - this could have generated huge enthusiasm from young people.

Instead Corbyn has been forced into a corner - giving the impression of a man distinctly unconvinced by his own speeches. Meanwhile senior right-wing Labour figures - including Sadiq Khan and Harriet Harman - have jumped onto platforms with Cameron, all the while ratcheting up the pressure on him to do the same.

The Socialist Party is urging a Leave vote on socialist, internationalist and anti-racist basis. For young people in Britain, perhaps the most compelling argument for voting to Leave is the opportunity to strike a mortal blow against Cameron and potentially even the Tory government itself. Just witness the escalating civil war within the Conservative Party. With the referendum still weeks away Cameron's own back-benchers are baying for his blood. In the words of Nadine Dorries, if Cameron wakes up to Brexit on 24 June he is "toast within days". The intervention of John Major - a firm 'remainer' - has further escalated the acrimony. The notion that this party can be easily re-united the day after the referendum, particularly if the vote is for Brexit or a narrow Remain, is clearly unrealistic.

## **Potential**

A Leave vote would offer the biggest potential to see the back of this Tory government - the same government which is presently pursuing a raft of attacks which will hit young people hard. Included in these are plans to increase tuition fees and to further privatise and marketise higher education. Incidentally, the drive to turn universities into businesses has itself been enshrined in EU agreements. The 'Bologna process' has been a key part of imposing this model for higher education across the continent.

Far from giving a 'boost' to right-wing, pro-austerity forces - as some have argued is inevitable - a Leave vote would instead leave the Tories in complete disarray, opening up huge potential for the strengthening of anti-austerity forces and the development of mass movements in defence of workers' rights - including the rights of migrant workers. This, in turn, could help to increase the confidence of workers all around Europe in the fight against austerity.

But whatever the outcome of the vote in June, it will remain necessary to build a mass movement to end austerity and fight for socialist change. A Leave vote could offer us a renewed opportunity for this by dealing a death blow to Cameron and the Tories. But it is not an end in and of itself. Young people need to get organised - both to fight the fresh attacks that are in the pipeline and to demand a decent future - one with secure, well paid work, genuinely affordable housing, workers' rights, free education and so on.

Fighting for this means linking up with workers and trade unions both in Britain and internationally. And it means being prepared to challenge the failing capitalist system which demands the misery of working class people across this continent and the world. It means fighting for a socialist society for the 99%, the only society capable of genuinely meeting the needs and aspirations of this generation and the next.

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## **Northern Ireland: Biggest trade union votes to support exit from EU**

**Ten trade union leaders penned a letter in the Guardian committing them to a Remain vote in the 23 June European Union (EU) referendum. They claim the EU champions workers' rights. However, this position is being challenged by many trade unionists. As Kevin Henry, Socialist Party (CWI, Ireland) reports, Northern Ireland's largest trade union voted at its recent conference to advocate voting to leave the EU 'bosses club'.**

The Socialist Party welcomes this decision of Northern Ireland Public Services Union (Nipsa) to oppose continued membership the EU.

Unfortunately, most leaders of the trade union movement have decided to support David Cameron's campaign to stay in the EU.

In Britain, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) leaders have been very vocal in defending the EU. In a 'Better Together in Europe' leaflet, current TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady is quoted alongside right-wing figures such as Virgin's Richard Branson and Bank of England Governor Mark Carney.

Her predecessor, Brendan Barber, went one further and co-authored an article with David Cameron. Closer to home, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions is also advocating a vote to remain.

## **Austerity Europe**

They claim that there is a 'social Europe' but, in reality, it's 'austerity Europe'. Staying in the EU will not defend jobs in the domestic economy. The EU prides itself on the free movement of capital which means bosses searching out cheap labour in Europe (and beyond the EU).

EU competition directives ban governments from saving jobs by nationalising industry. This could have implications for saving the UK steel industry and thousands of steelworkers' jobs.

Other EU employment regulations - such as the Posted Workers' Directive, which allows migrant workers to be paid less than the legal minimum in their host country - are designed specifically to circumvent national workplace agreements.

In 2009, this directive was used in an attempt to undermine conditions and deny employment for construction workers at Lindsay Oil Refinery, Lincolnshire, provoking a series of strikes. However, a rank and file strike committee, involving a Socialist Party member, successfully fought and won extra jobs and prevented division among workers.

Similarly, in December 2007, the European Court of Justice delivered a blow to trade unions when, in the Viking and Laval decisions, it decided that the right of businesses to 'freedom of establishment' must take priority over the right of trade unions to take industrial action to safeguard the interests of their members.

Our rights were not granted from on high by benevolent EU leaders but won from below by workers' struggle. It's misleading for trade union leaders to claim otherwise.

A jewel in the crown of EU employment law is the Equal Pay Directive, which formally guarantees equal pay for women. This was won first by the mass strikes in France after World War Two.

It was only much later that this law was enforced across Europe, again following the heroic strikes of women munitions workers in Belgium, Ford workers in Britain and countless others in the decades that followed.

The Socialist Party believe it's a mistake for trade union and labour leaders to support the bosses' EU and echo the fearmongering of the political establishment. Instead, they should follow the example of unions like the Nipsa and others, that are prepared to tell the truth about the EU.

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## Featured letter: EU referendum

# Bosses founded the EU to help save capitalism

Most of the capitalist class has consistently defended what it originally called the 'Common Market', but tried to develop and make more palatable as the 'European Economic Community' and then the 'European Union'.

Dave Nellist is chair of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which includes the Socialist Party and supports a Leave position. He has recently pointed out that when he was elected as a Labour MP in 1983, Labour's manifesto called for exit from the European Economic Community.

Also, in the past Dave campaigned alongside socialist Tony Benn and union leader Bob Crow against the EU. The ranks of the labour movement have fought for this policy for decades.

The year before I joined the Labour Party in 1957 with the influence of the Socialist Party's predecessors in Socialist Fight (later Militant), the Walton Liverpool constituency Labour Party had submitted a resolution to Labour's national conference. It called for a campaign for a socialist united states of Europe.

However this socialist viewpoint was not received sympathetically by the Labour leadership. A lengthy correspondence ensued. The Walton constituency used this to draw out political lessons, and give socialist ideas the maximum publicity.

3,000 pamphlets titled 'No Retreat' were distributed to every Labour branch countrywide, and to delegates at the 1957 Labour conference. In the hope that persistence would be rewarded, Walton branch had submitted its resolution again.

The pamphlet said: "The Council of Europe [a talking shop for Europe's foreign ministers, founded in 1949] is a ghost without substance or meaning, the Schuman Plan [coal and steel bosses' agreement to coordinate to maximise profit, beginning in 1950] is a disciplined attempt on the part of European capital collectively to exploit the European workers, and to drive down in a concerted fashion the living standards of the people.

"These are examples of attempts at capitalist regulation of a 'European common market'. Far from representing the pattern of socialism in embryo, these are attempts to shore up the decaying structure of capitalism and give a fresh lease of life to the sworn enemies of the working people."

The Labour Party members in Walton were absolutely consistent in putting their position on Europe in 1953, as well as in 1956 and 1957. And again, in 1967, they distributed a pamphlet: 'A Socialist Answer to the Common Market'. This included the following:

"Now, in power three years, they [the Labour leaders] have capitulated to the pressures of big business and the bankers and, on even worse terms than those proposed by the Tories, have tried to enter the Common Market. Foreign policy is the continuation of home policy and having adopted the discredited policies of the Tories, in even harsher form at home, they could not but blindly follow similar policies abroad."

The mistakes of the left Remain camp today are strikingly similar. Socialists should remember the lessons of the past, and the true nature of the EU: vote Leave.

**Keith Dickinson**

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## **The socialist case against the EU: TUSC tour continues**

### **London**

"The Tory government could be brought down if Brexit triumphs" declared Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe to a packed London meeting of 120, part of TUSC's 20-city tour 'The Socialist Case Against the EU' (now in fact 25 cities).

The meeting heard from an array of trade union, socialist and campaigning speakers.

Transport union RMT general secretary Mick Cash explained that his union had "from minute one, day one" opposed the EU.

"As the son of two Irish immigrants who came to London in the 1950s", he hit out at the shaping of the debate in the media as being about immigration.

He explained that the days of the 'Social Chapter' in the EU are "long gone. The EU has moved on. It is neo-liberalism, pro-privatisation, austerity, deregulation. We're pro-European but anti-EU. It's a body for the rich and powerful."

Mick also took on the idea that the EU can be changed. To reform the EU, the capitalist leaders of 28 countries all have to agree.

Peter gave now-famous devastating quotes from Tory MPs as "proof of the chronic weakness of this government. It could be brought down if Brexit triumphs."

"Why are the summits of the labour movement, the trade union leaders, and unfortunately Jeremy and John, throwing a lifeline to the hated Cameron and Osborne government?"

## **Cameron**

"The wheels are coming off the Cameron Osborne chariot." Peter listed the deepening economic crisis, increasing unemployment, the housing catastrophe and revolt on wages, the 20 Tory u-turns and the mini-strike wave currently taking place.

"We support Jeremy and John in the struggle against the right in the Labour Party but they have made a mistake." Peter argued that "this was a golden opportunity to shipwreck the Tory government, widen the splits within the Tories to Grand Canyon proportions and precipitate a new general election."

Paul Embery, London secretary of the Fire Brigades Union and national organiser of Trade Unionists Against the EU, pointed out: "The EU is rampantly pro-austerity and that approach has caused suffering throughout Europe, a collapse in living standards, the rise of the far-right and the decimation of public services."

## **Democratic discussion**

Other speakers included Nana Asante, former Labour Mayor of Harrow, chair of Africans for Jeremy Corbyn Values; and Sally Campbell for the Socialist Workers Party.

In a democratic discussion, lots of people made points from the floor, any doubts and questions were debated, and all speakers had the chance to reply.

Peter argued: "Only through solidarity and socialism, and the combined actions of the working class of Europe, could we establish real unity, a confederation of socialist states on a European basis."

On the same night, Dave Nellist, the former Coventry Labour MP and Socialist Party councillor and Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary, spoke at the Coventry event.

**See a video of the London meeting here:**

[www.tinyurl.com/londontusceu](http://www.tinyurl.com/londontusceu)

## **Nottingham**

"We've heard endless arguments between old Etonians but not the voice of the labour movement," said Jean Thorpe, president of Nottingham and Mansfield Trades Council, opening a public debate on the EU.

'Remain' speakers, including former Labour MP and Jeremy Corbyn supporter, Chris Williamson, claimed the EU had maintained peace in Europe. Jobs and workers' rights, health and safety at work, air and water quality were all better due to agreements with "our EU partners," they said.



Dave Nellist, TUSC chair, asked: "Can the EU be reformed?" All the heads of government are pro-austerity. They make decisions, not the toothless European Parliament. A Leave vote would weaken an obstacle to socialist change.

Several contributions in the discussion expressed fears a Brexit victory would strengthen racism and Ukip. "The main reason Ukip has grown was Tony Blair," replied Dave.

At the end the 80 trade unionists and campaigners present agreed it had been the best debate on the EU we'd heard. A vote showed an 'out' majority by about three to two.

**Jon Dale**

## **Leicester**

On 3 June, Voluntary Action Leicestershire hosted a discussion on what the EU referendum will mean for the voluntary and community sector in Leicestershire.

The speakers included Tory education secretary Nicky Morgan, Blairite Labour MP Liz Kendall, and Ukip MEP Roger Helmer.

The audience was polled at the beginning and the end to see if they had changed their minds.

Before the debate 14% were for leave, 63% were for stay and 23% were undecided. After the debate 27% were for leave, 62% were for stay and 11% were undecided.

The audience stated afterwards that it was the speaker from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), Steve Score, who trounced the others in the debate.

**Michael Barker**

## **25 city tour- Remaining dates**

### **Cardiff**

7.30pm, Thursday 9 June

Angel Hotel, Castle Street, CF10 1SZ

### **Dundee**

7.30pm, Tuesday 14 June

The No.10 (DVA), 10 Constitution Road, Dundee, DD1 1LL

### **Edinburgh**

7pm, Thursday 16 June

Conference Room, St Augustine's Church, 41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1EL

**Glasgow**

7.15pm, Wednesday 15 June

The Woods Bar (Downstairs, lift available), 29 Waterloo Street, Glasgow, G2 6BZ

**Liverpool**

7.30pm, Tuesday 14 June

Casa, 29 Hope Street, L1 9BQ

**Paisley**

7.30pm, Monday 13 June

Saporito Coffee meeting room, 27 Gauze Street, Paisley, PA1 1ES

**Portsmouth**

7.30pm, Thursday 16 June

Paulsgrove Community Centre, Marsden Road, Portsmouth, PO6 4JB

**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

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# China's 'Cultural Revolution' 1966-67

50 years ago the 'Cultural Revolution' began in China. Here we carry an edited version of article written by Socialist Party general secretary Peter Taaffe for Militant (predecessor of the Socialist) in February 1967.

Within the last month, events within China have taken a dramatic turn. Reports of fierce clashes between forces for and against Mao Zedong, strikes, allegations of 'sabotage', etc. have been splashed across the pages of the capitalist press.

While most reports have exaggerated the picture, what is certain is that the current purge in China is spreading its tentacles to ever more layers of the ruling stratum and indeed is reverberating throughout the whole of Chinese society.

These upheavals are but the latest culmination of the so-called Cultural Revolution. For almost a year now a ceaseless campaign has been conducted by Mao Zedong against the opponents of his 'thought'.

In the process numerous 'heroes' of yesterday have been demoted to 'capitalist agents' today. Thus Peng Zhen, former boss of Beijing, along with a host of other luminaries, has been cast out of the charmed circles of the ruling elite. Even the president, Liu-Shaoqi, is currently under attack.

Alongside this has gone the attempt to deify Mao Zedong to the level of god. Bent on stamping his imprimatur on all things, the 22 million-strong Red Guards have run amok within Chinese cities denouncing anything and everything remotely connected with 'western culture' or that which faintly conflicts with the omniscience of the 'leader'.

## Culture

We have seen the Red Guards, in the most hooligan fashion and in direct opposition to the Marxist attitude towards culture, destroy priceless books and paintings. Shakespeare, Pushkin, Bizet and Beethoven have all been condemned as "ideologues of the exploiting classes".

How to explain these upheavals within China? This cannot be done by mere reference to the personal quirks of one man, (irrespective of how all-powerful he may appear) as is the fashion with the capitalist press. On the contrary, these events indicate a profound social crisis which afflicts the very vitals of Chinese society.

In fact the present regime in China has been one of crisis right from the outset. This is reflected in the periodic eruptions in the state, the bureaucracy, agriculture, industry and all aspects of life. It has been characterised above all by a constant policy of zig-zags, a violent veering from one expedient to another.

Given the march to power, and the birth and evolution of the present regime, this could not fail to be so. Unlike the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution of 1944-49 saw not the working class but the Red - predominantly peasant - Army, headed by Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and their entourage, play the dominant role.

The Chinese Stalinists displayed the fear of the bureaucracy towards any independent movement by the working class. In their eight-point peace programme they unashamedly warned the working class: "Those who strike or destroy will be punished... those working in these organisations (factories) should work peacefully and wait for the takeover."

And true to their word, any independent action by the working class was met with the most ruthless repression. Contrast this attitude with that shown by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution. The Bolsheviks looked towards the working class as the main agent of change and urged "the land to the tillers and the factories to the producers."

Mao Zedong and the Chinese Stalinists trimmed their 'Marxism' to fit the needs of a Bonapartist clique at the head of the peasant armies. They only came to power because of the peculiar combination of forces which came together at that time.

Having learnt his lessons well at the school of Stalin, Mao Zedong, in the fashion of Bonapartism, manoeuvred between the classes and from the beginning constructed a state based in fundamentals on the totalitarian system in Russia.

Nevertheless, the destruction of landlordism and capitalism ensured that the Chinese economy could develop with seven league boots. A tremendous impetus was given to the building of roads, industry, chemicals and all sections of the economy.

In the language of steel, concrete and cement and, to a certain extent, the living standards of the people, nationalisation and a plan demonstrates its superiority over the outmoded system of capitalism; this despite the existence of a parasitic bureaucracy from the beginning.

But given its isolation, the triumph of the revolution was bound to lead to contradictions on a higher plane. The Chinese Stalinists based themselves on Stalin's conception of 'Socialism in one country'.

But from the time of Marx, genuine socialists have always viewed socialism as realisable only on a world scale. It is international or it is nothing and, moreover, must be based on technique and production higher than that achieved by capitalism. Marx himself pointed out: "Where want is generalised... all the old crap must revive."

First and foremost among this 'crap' is the state itself. "Want is generalised" to a great extent in China - and with it the unrestricted growth of the bureaucracy. With the masses denied the right to discuss the aims, methods and details of Chinese economy, all the mistakes of Stalinist Russia have been committed on a monumental scale. This accounts for the ceaseless convulsions of which the Cultural Revolution is but the latest.

A number of factors have come together to provoke the present crisis. The severe dislocation resulting from the so-called 'Great Leap Forward' caused conflict within the top echelons of the Communist Party.

### **From the top**

Ordained from the top by Mao Zedong, the Chinese nation was dragooned into the lunacy of "backyard steel production", when workers and peasants were instructed to set up their own furnaces. The result: virtual stagnation in the economy for years.

Such was the case also in the field of agriculture. With the forced march towards complete collectivising of agriculture, they have succeeded in aiming crippling blows at production. Unheeding the lessons of Stalin's debacle in collectivising Russian agriculture, the bureaucracy brought about a standstill here as well.

The 'communalisation' was carried through with the primitive tools used on small plots of land for centuries and without the large scale machines and technique necessary for the working of large units. The peasants reacted to the move with hostility: the consequence being a loss of self-interest and a plummeting of output.

The result of all this has been that grain production is still at the level of 1956 and the bureaucracy has been forced to make a partial retreat in allowing the cultivation of small plots to the extent that the Economist reports: "80% of pigs and 90% of poultry are raised" in this way and "account for more than half of peasant incomes".

Only a real plan of production drawn up by the masses themselves would be able to develop the economy in harmony, bring about the necessary balance between agriculture and industry and demonstrate in practice the superiority of nationalisation.

Added to this has been the collapse of the 'international' policy of the Chinese Stalinists. Despite the demagogy of Mao Zedong, their policy has been based on furthering the national interests of the bureaucracy and not on the interests of world socialism and the working class.

As with the Russian Stalinists, they have attempted to court the support of the national capitalists throughout the underdeveloped world. Thus they were silent at the time of the east African mutinies, which were put down by their friends President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, etc.

In Indonesia, in a situation that was rotten ripe for the overthrow of capitalism, the Chinese bureaucracy instructed the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) to tail-end President Sukarno, the representative of the national capitalists. Upwards of half a million PKI members were slaughtered. The biggest Communist Party in the world outside of Russia and China was sacrificed on the altar of the diplomatic interests of the Chinese Stalinists.

## **Crisis**

These factors among others have provoked the present crisis and are reflected within the Chinese state, among the bureaucracy and in sections of the people themselves. Meeting opposition from a layer of the bureaucracy, Mao-Zedong brought into being the Red Guards as a club by which to beat down and destroy the opposition.

Thrown into a national shell and as the supreme arbiter, he has leaned upon a more backward and younger section of the bureaucracy. As The Times put it: "The conflict... lies between an elite newly established to run the Cultural Revolution, and the old guard bureaucrats entrenched in the Communist Party."

Like Stalin before him, he has issued quite a few denunciations of the worst excesses of bureaucrats against the "restriction of democracy" - all the better to preserve the position of the bureaucracy as a whole. In turn Liu Shaoqi leaned on a section of the workers, utilising their discontent and demands for better conditions which provoked the formation by Mao

Zedong of the Red Rebels (the Red Guards' adult counterparts) and vicious denunciations of 'economism'.

In this is revealed the substance of the Cultural Revolution. With sugar-coated words, Mao Zedong and the bureaucracy are willing to use the working class and the peasantry in the inter-bureaucratic struggle. But let them once advance even their own limited economic demands and this is "sabotage" and is attacked as the "vile road of economic struggle."

Similarly with the question of democracy. It is conveniently forgotten that the Communist Party has held only two Central Committee meetings in four years while the Congresses have been convened only twice since 1949! What hope then is there for the masses to have a say in deciding their own fate under the present regime?

The present massive rallies in Beijing and elsewhere are not socialist democracy. On the contrary, as Leon Trotsky pointed out some thirty years ago, "The democratic ritual of Bonapartism is the plebiscite. From time to time the question is presented to the citizens: for or against the leader."

Genuine socialist democracy means the democratic control and management of the economy and the state by the working class and the people themselves. It means elected delegates subject to recall and with a clearly defined maximum wage, an armed people instead of the standing army, the right of all working class tendencies which accept the nationalised property to be represented in the workers councils, and all the factors which make for real Soviet power.

None of these exist in China at the present time. Hence the convulsions, contradictions and mismanagement of the economy by the bureaucracy.

With the cancer of a bloated and privileged elite battenning itself onto the necks of the Chinese people, the upheavals involved in the Cultural Revolution will be perpetrated and even increased. There is no final solution so long as the bureaucracy maintains its stranglehold. For while it is possible for the Chinese economy to develop despite the blight of the bureaucracy, far from the social antagonisms disappearing they will grow apace with the growth of the economy itself, so long as the present regime exists.

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## **Music review: No to TTIP**

# **Timely anti-EU tribute to Bob Crow and Tony Benn**

**Dave Murray**

Left-wing Brexit campaign Trade Unionists Against the EU has released a 12-song compilation album, 'No to TTIP'.

It seems that Nigel Farage and the right-wing 'Leave.EU' Brexit campaign have organised a pop concert. They are having trouble getting artists to commit to playing at it.

Garage act DJ Luck and MC Neat pulled out because they didn't want to become the world's first Farage act. Singer and TV presenter Alesha Dixon pulled out when it was explained to her that Farage wasn't a genre of home-grown dance music, but a right-wing populist politician. "I'm just an entertainer," they both protested.

## **Bucks Fizz**

In the event on 19 June in Birmingham, Farage will be sharing a stage with Thatcher-era popsters Bucks Fizz and a Hitler impersonator. Sorry, I mean Elvis.

By contrast, No to TTIP is a timely tribute to anti-EU socialists Bob Crow and Tony Benn. Timely because with all the rubbish being talked by Leave and Remain politicians alike, their clear-sighted opposition to the bosses' EU is what the officially sanctioned 'debate' is missing.

Trade Unionists Against the EU hasn't had quite the same problem with artists - perhaps because they aren't fishing in the same part of the talent pool as the Kippers.

It's possible that just as all music is folk music (Louis Armstrong: "You ain't never heard no horse sing a song"), then all music is political - even Bucks Fizz. The difference here is that the No to TTIP artists are consciously so - even when the music is purely instrumental, as is the contribution from fiddle legend Dave Swarbrick\*.

The album is pretty biased in the direction of folk music, but if that is your thing then you will get tunes from big hitters like Swarbrick and Radio 2 Folk Award-winning Fran Morter. You may also discover gems from local heroes and lesser-known acts like Phil Burdett, Adam Rees, Mickey Denny and Brian Denny.

Benn himself makes an appearance in a recording of his collaboration with singer-guitarist Roy Bailey. As Bailey sings in 'Song of the Exile': "They tear down our comrades like leaves from a tree, but the tree still stands."

- *Tragically, Dave Swarbrick of Fairport Convention died on 3 June, aged 75.*

**'No to TTIP' (CD): £12 including postage - visit [tuaeu.co.uk](http://tuaeu.co.uk) to buy your copy - all proceeds go to Trade Unionists Against the EU**

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## **Athens bus workers clean up**

**Eleni Mitsou (Xekinima - CWI Greece) and Apostolis Kasimeris (Board Member of OASA - Athens Bus Workers' Union)**

Austerity-hit Greek workers struck back with a pay victory on 3 June. Athens bus cleaners had already undertaken 15 days of strike action against their contracted employer Link Ap over months of unpaid wages and being underpaid.

However, the contractor reneged on an initial agreement and so the workers took a further eight days of strikes.

The bus cleaners not only had to fight against the contractor but also the new, Syriza-appointed bus company management, which refused to assume their responsibilities to monitor the contractor.

The cleaners only called off the action when the owed money was paid into their bank accounts.

**Read the full article on [socialistworld.net](http://socialistworld.net)**

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## **Exploitation Britain: Unionise and fight for a living wage**

**Danny Williams**

Conditions in a warehouse used by online fashion retailer Asos have been described as "sickening". Workers testified to facing oppressive security, guarded toilets, searches, and a 'flexi-time' system which can demand they work extra hours without notice or force the use of their holiday allocation when hours are not available.

Efforts by the GMB to unionise against this treatment have failed to be recognised by the employer.

A similar regime of surveillance and dehumanisation has also been revealed at Sports Direct's Shirebrook warehouse, with thousands of temporary agency workers receiving below minimum wage.

Low wages, zero-hour contracts and shift patterns have left millions of workers and their families in a constant state of insecurity and instability.

It is these factors which sustain poverty and desperation and actually increase the potential of the merchandise theft, so feared by these companies.

The nature of these workplaces serves to confirm this. Sports Direct major shareholder, Mike Ashley, agreed to appear for questioning before MPs regarding these revelations only after stating that continued bad press could harm the Sports Direct brand, declaring he had "nothing to hide".

Ashley defended his company's practices before the parliamentary select committee saying: "I'm not Father Christmas". Too true! Scrooge is a more apt description.

The pugnacious billionaire went on to reveal his dictatorial anti-worker mentality: "I can do a better job for Sports Direct employees than Unite."



We disagree. The fight must continue to effectively unionise these workplaces, and protect workers from shameless exploitation by ending zero-hour contracts and bringing in a £10 minimum wage now without exception.

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## **Muhammad Ali 1942 - 2016**

### **A fighter who inspired millions**

World champion boxer Muhammad Ali died on 3 June. As well as his sporting achievements, many will mourn the loss of an activist of the 1960s anti-war and black liberation movements.

Here we carry an extract of an article by Hugo Pierre originally published in 2003 in Socialism Today. The full article can be read at [socialismtoday.org/72/ali](http://socialismtoday.org/72/ali)

The development of a mass civil rights movement, beginning in the early 1950s and lasting nearly three decades, brought to the fore some of the most courageous US black leaders. It inspired workers, youth and the oppressed to struggle, not just in the US but around the world.

One of the most celebrated figures linked to this movement is Mohammad Ali, born Cassius Clay in 1942 to a poor working class family in Louisville, Kentucky. He became probably the greatest heavy-weight boxer of all times. Clay took the name Mohammad Ali when he acknowledged his membership of the black nationalist Nation of Islam in 1964.

In the summer of 1955 a 14 year old Detroit schoolboy, Emmett Till, was brutally murdered for whistling to a white woman cashier in a shop. An all-white jury acquitted the murderers. A mood of determination to defeat segregation and the racist Jim Crow laws gripped Southern blacks.

When in 1955 Rosa Parks, a department store worker, refused to give up her seat to a white man, the Montgomery bus boycott began. The boycott started the mass movement across the South to end segregation.

### **Racism**

Influenced by these events and others, the young Cassius Clay attended a number of civil rights demonstrations. Professional sports, and boxing in particular, had at times reflected and impacted on the battle against US racism.

Before it was professionalised, slave owners often used to pit 'their man' against another slave owner's for sport and gambling. When it was professionalised, the white champions would refuse to fight black challengers.

Cassius Clay had been attracted to the Nation of Islam since his school days. The Nation would have remained a sect, had it not been popularised by its radical leader Malcolm X. The

Nation vehemently opposed participating in the mass civil rights movement, calling instead for self-containment and separation of blacks from 'white' America.

But the mass events taking place had a profound effect on Malcolm X. In 1962 Los Angeles police invaded Mosque 27 and one of its leading members was shot and killed. Malcolm X was prevented by the Nation's leadership from launching a defence campaign. He also supported a union boycott of a firm in New York that refused to hire black workers, against the wishes of the other Nation leaders.

## **Malcolm X**

Malcolm's activism, his support for involvement in the mass struggle for black rights and, especially, his increasing concern with economic and class issues, brought him more and more into conflict with the Elijah Muhammad leadership. He was increasingly critical of the idea of black separation and was moving towards a position of solidarity with the white working class.

In the end, the Nation's leadership organised his assassination, with the collusion of the US law-enforcement agencies. Despite the close friendship that had grown between Malcolm X and Mohammad Ali, the political split within the Nation separated them, with Ali's political inclinations closer to Elijah.

The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1965 but the struggle for more than just voting rights continued. One key issue was the developing war in Vietnam.

In 1965 a poll showed 84% of blacks opposed the war but disproportionately more blacks were being drafted into the army. The youth involved in the civil rights movement under the leadership of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee came out against the war in Vietnam.

In 1966 Ali refused to be conscripted into the army, asserting that he was a conscientious objector on religious grounds. His ringing declaration in response to the draft - "Man, I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong" - catapulted him into the forefront of the then infant anti-war movement.

In 1967 Ali was sentenced to five years in jail for refusing to accept the draft, and the World Boxing Association (WBA) stripped him of his title. Eventually, in 1970, the conviction was overturned by the Supreme Court (which upheld his right to be a conscientious objector on religious grounds), and the WBA had to reinstate him.

The pacifist movement for civil rights which had begun in 1954 with a peaceful boycott was developing into a class war. The more far-sighted leaders had started to conclude that the struggle for black liberation was intimately connected to the struggle of the working class.

## **Symbol**

The youth in particular strove for this understanding and the most determined representatives of the movement, the Black Panther Party, adopted some elements of Marxism.

Undoubtedly the US authorities feared the potential impact of a politically active Ali at this time, following the defeat in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal that unseated the disgraced president, Richard Nixon.

Later, governments tried to use Ali for their own purposes. As a powerful political symbol of black defiance, the state has been forced to incorporate his legend into its re-writing of history.

Despite this, however, when blacks in the US are forced into struggle, the youth and the new leaders who will come forward will continue to take inspiration from Ali's determination. He inspired millions around the world.

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## **Housing: Let's reclaim our right to dream again!**

**Amalia**

Britain's housing crisis affects many but in particular the generations after the 'baby boomers' of the 1950s and 60s.

According to housing charity Shelter, 59% of under-45s give up on marriage, kids or even careers because of the housing crisis. There are those who have no option but to live in a double room in shared accommodation. Housing is a factor of great financial instability- similar to how the feudal lords imposed taxation on the peasants in medieval times.

I share a flat with my partner. Our lease runs out in six months and we have no idea if we will have to move (again) if the landlord wants to sell.

In such an event, a similar property in the same area would see us a couple of hundred pounds worse off. If we stay a similar sort of rent increase is inevitable. Not much difference even if we move to a travel zone further out. In other words, we can't really afford to dream and make plans.

An uncontrollable rent market is not viable for the majority of Londoners. Rent control on private rents is essential but also we need to start to build council homes again and provide Londoners the social housing they deserve. Councils should (they have the powers) take over long-term empty properties to meet local housing needs.

Measures like those would stop the 'social cleansing' of London boroughs and also make it possible again for young workers and couples to dream again.

- Protest Against The Housing Act Saturday 18 June, 12noon Hyde Park Corner, London SW1
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# Nationalise the rip-off drug companies

Nothing quite exposes the rotten and intensely selfish and individualist nature of the capitalist system like the amount of wealth generated by the pharmaceutical industry. It was reported in the Times that a small group of "entrepreneurs" have exploited a loophole on non-branded drugs to inflate the price of them by up to 12,500% - an increase of £263 million a year. This is enough to employ an extra 7,000 junior doctors.

This is a not a new phenomenon - as reported in the Socialist last year, 'pharma-bro' Martin Shkreli bought the patent for a common AIDS drug, Daraprim, and increased its price more than 1,000%.

These are extreme examples, but they are indicative of the global trend of increasing prices in recent years and of the massive disparity between the cost to produce pharmaceuticals and the price at which they are sold to healthcare providers.

The Socialist Party sees that the only solution to this potentially life threatening exploitation is to fully nationalise the profiteering pharmaceutical industry and kick big business out of the NHS.

**Gareth Bromhall, former healthcare assistant and Swansea Socialist Party**

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## Them & Us

### Benefits incentive?

Millionaire and former government minister Iain Duncan Smith claimed that cutting welfare payments and capping benefits would 'incentivise' unemployed people to find work - the Tory equivalent of a cattle prod.

Unfortunately for the architect of the hated bedroom tax, a year-long study in Oxford has found that taking away people's benefits actually made them less likely to find work.

According to the study's authors: "Higher benefit losses may correlate with higher rent and larger families, and financial hardship; as childcare and debt are established barriers to work, it is perhaps unsurprising that customers with higher benefit losses are less rather than more likely to get into or back into work."

### Hunt payout...

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt is keen to get his 'cost neutral' pay and conditions offer accepted by junior doctors. Meanwhile, Jezza has shot to the top of the cabinet earnings league table having trousered a £853,000 dividend payout from Hotcourses, a company he co-founded.

## **...and Hunt cuts**

Any contrition by Hunt over the junior doctors' dispute quickly evaporated as it emerged that he plans to slash £170 million in funding for community pharmacies, jeopardising 3,000 high street chemists. Charities reckon this will hit the frail and elderly, with an estimated extra one million people a month having to visit a GP to seek advice.

## **Cause for celebration?**

Closing hundreds of London Underground ticket offices has increased safety concerns and frustration for the travelling public, as well as slashing jobs. Yet, according to the RMT transport union, these appalling cutbacks were "celebrated" by managers who "spent an enjoyable evening in the luxurious setting of the RAF club in Piccadilly".

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# **Link the strikes - come to the NSSN conference**

## **Workers strike back!**

**Sam Morecroft, Sheffield UCU anti-casualisation officer (personal capacity)**

"This isn't any strike - this is an M&S Strike!" That's what the banners read on the picket lines at Pennine Foods strike, where pickets have been hundreds strong again at their second 48-hour strike on 5 and 6 June. Not a single lorry was able to enter the factory to collect the ready meals produced for Marks and Spencer, and strikers were in a jubilant mood, joined by activists from the National Shop Stewards Network and members of the public.

But it's not just at Pennine Foods that workers are showing their power - in Sheffield we've seen a real strike wave in recent weeks. Both universities in the city have been on strike as part of higher education union UCU's national industrial action for better pay in May, and at the Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) office they've now taken six days of strike action in response to plans to move the 'Northern Powerhouse' department to London.

It's no coincidence that here and elsewhere these waves of determined local and national strikes are developing - workers everywhere are refusing to accept austerity any longer and what's more we understand that we cannot afford to wait until 2020 to get rid of the Tories.

But how do we bring together all of these workers' struggles and co-ordinate action to build the strike wave we need to drive this weak, divided Tory government out of office?

On Saturday 2 July trade unionists from across the country will meet at the tenth annual National Shop Stewards Network conference to discuss exactly this. Come along, join the discussion and let's unite to drive out the Tories!

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# Momentum Youth and Students: Witch hunts won't take movement forward

**Young Socialist Party members**

Momentum held the launch of its youth and student organisation on Sunday 5 June. Momentum was initially set up to organise the thousands of people inside and outside the Labour Party who were enthused by Jeremy Corbyn's Labour leadership campaign.

When there is a massive onslaught on young people, including attacks on pay and attempts to raise tuition fees, is Momentum capable of being at the head of a movement of young people fighting back? If Momentum Youth and Students continues on the trajectory set at this meeting, the answer is no.

## **No opportunity**

The approximately 150 attendees at the conference were given next to no opportunity to debate and discuss the political situation in Britain and the strategy needed to defeat austerity and the Tories.

Only 45 minutes was given in the original agenda to discuss 'campaigning priorities' - the closest thing to a discussion on how we can beat austerity politicians. This was cut from the agenda due to the event running behind time.

Bowing to pressure from the right wing in the Labour Party and the capitalist media, the leadership of Momentum has made a number of retreats and climb-downs. They have rejected the Socialist Party's call for a federal, democratic organisation and instead have moved to exclude various socialists and anti-austerity campaigners, including the Socialist Party.

Socialist Party members present made the point from the floor that if Momentum Youth and Students is an autonomous part of Momentum then it can and must reject these restrictions on membership.

Many young people are searching for an anti-austerity alternative, some of these may have voted for the Green Party and then Jeremy Corbyn and see no contradiction in this.

To engage and build a campaign to fight the Tory attacks and fight for an improvement in young people's lives, an organisation must be open and willing to take the fight to the right wing.

The Labour Party has the shadowy Compliance Unit that deals with expulsions and suspensions. Momentum has its own Compliance Unit in the form of its founder Jon Lansman. We challenged him on this.

After speaking and making clear that we were members of the Socialist Party, the Labour Party and Momentum, the room was whipped up by multiple speakers calling for our expulsion.

In attendance were two self-proclaimed Trotskyist groups - Socialist Appeal and the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL). Both groups have recently been targeted by the Labour Party and have received suspensions and expulsions. However neither of them spoke out against the same witch hunt against the Socialist Party in Momentum.

In fact, one member of the AWL proclaimed that he "was not and has never been a member of the Socialist Party" and that there was no place for the Socialist Party in Momentum.

These groups, by their silence, have sided with the right-wing compromisers in Momentum and are complicit in the witch hunt. They offered no strategy or programme for fighting the civil war in the Labour Party, as the Blairites will continue to fight to keep it a party which acts in the interests of the 1%.

The complete lack of democracy in Momentum was shown when Jon Lansman personally voided my Momentum membership via a text to Momentum's office.

He said I was guilty of belonging to a party hostile to the Labour Party. The Socialist Party isn't hostile to Jeremy Corbyn and those that have joined Labour to fight for his policies. We are, however, hostile to Blairite MPs calling for the bombing of Syria, and local councillors implementing Tory cuts.

Another Socialist Party member refused to give his name so Lansman took his photo! Are we to see 'wanted posters' of known Socialist Party members at local Momentum meetings?

The political outlook of the Momentum leadership was summed up by a contribution that said: "The main way to support Jeremy Corbyn is to vote Labour." Momentum, by uncritically canvassing for Blairites, has given no warning to the role those such as London Mayor Sadiq Khan will play in attacks on Corbyn's leadership.

## **Open and fighting**

As the Socialist Party wrote in our leaflet, in order to succeed "Momentum needs to be an open, fighting campaigning organisation, fighting for an end to zero-hour contracts, for scrapping tuition fees, and for an immediate £10 an hour minimum wage.

Shutting out socialists and uncritically campaigning for Blairite mayors and cuts councillors will turn off those young people searching for something different to the politics of old.

"We need to kick out the Blairites at all levels of the Labour Party and campaign for mandatory re-selection.

We call for Momentum to be a democratic organisation, open to all socialist and anti-austerity forces." Without a fighting programme such as this Momentum is unlikely to be a pole of attraction to those young layers drawn into struggle.

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## **Tamil Solidarity Day**

# Fighting oppression and for workers' rights internationally

**Bharathi Subramanian**

An intense and energetic fightback against oppression. That best describes this year's Solidarity Day - organised by Tamil Solidarity at the Unite headquarters in London, on 4 June.

Three packed sessions saw a wide range of discussion and exchange of ideas. It brought together a very diverse audience: activists from numerous ethnic backgrounds fighting for the right to self-determination, trade unionists, socialists and many Tamil youth.

The day had a kick-start with a discussion on the Vaddukodai Resolution (VKR) - on the 40th anniversary of when Tamil groups in Sri Lanka united to call for a secular, socialist Tamil homeland and an end to exploitation. This was driven by radicalised youth, under the influence of mass workers' and anti-colonial struggles internationally.

Significantly, the guest speakers included a journalist and activist from the majority Sinhalese population of Sri Lanka, alongside a Tamil participant at Vaddukodai.

This session not only discussed the VKR's historical importance, however. It addressed what we can learn to help take the fight for the right to self-determination for Tamil people forward today.

Following some excellent Tamil food, another unique line-up took to the platform. Akther Khan spoke on the land grab taking place in Bangladesh, where thousands of people are being driven off their land by a government in league with US and UK coal-mining multinationals and the Chinese regime.

Faria Attique gave a moving account of the national oppression in Kashmir -occupied by India, Pakistan and China. Campaigner Indira Prasad and writer/activist Meena Kandasamy detailed the brutality of the caste system, and the oppression which is prevalent in South Asia - but also in diaspora communities, including in Britain.

Solidarity Day was rounded off with a rally for youth and workers' rights. Among the speakers were Ian Hodson, national president of the bakers' union (BFAWU), and Dave Semple, PCS activist - from two unions leading the struggle against low pay and austerity. Their message hit home with young Tamils at the sharp end of the poverty pay onslaught.

Rosie Isaac, a junior doctor - and Tamil Solidarity founding member - joined us by skype and outlined the ongoing battle to defend the NHS.

It was an inspiring event. The three sessions complemented one another, and summed up the aims of the Tamil Solidarity campaign. That is, to link up the struggle for Tamil rights with the organised workers' movement and with other oppressed people internationally.

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# Student nurses march to oppose bursary cut

**Len Hockey, Unite member at Whipps Cross Hospital**

A lively vocal demonstration against Tory plans to remove bursaries from student nurses and allied health professions took place on 4 June in London.

The threatened students were joined by teachers, health workers and junior doctors in the march from St Thomas' hospital to NHS HQ at Richmond House.

Placards decrying Jeremy Hunt's funding starvation of health services as well as poverty pay plans for all NHS staff were carried together with the demand that private companies be 'kept off our NHS'.

The demo received support and applause from the public and shoppers along the route with some joining us when seeing its demands for adequate funding being raised.

The attack represents a potentially devastating blow. Students are being forced to take on tens of thousands of pounds in debt against the backdrop of the exodus already taking place as burned out, exhausted and demoralised staff leave. Insufficient numbers of new entrants are replacing them.

A rally took place at the end with speakers including National Union of Students president Malia Bouattia, fashion designer Viviane Westwood, Royal College of Nursing (RCN) president Cecilia Amin and Natalie Bennet from the Green Party along with health student campaigners and NHS users.

Everyone on the demo agreed with linking together the junior doctors' and nurses' campaigns, but our leaflets argued that the major health unions, including Unison, Unite and the RCN, should launch a national campaign against the attacks on the NHS, including strike action. Socialist Party placards saying "health workers strike together" were popular.

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## Pensioners fight ageist Tory cuts

**The National Pensioners Convention (NPC) will hold its annual 'Pensioners' Parliament' from 14 to 16 June in Blackpool. NPC activist and Socialist Party member Val Pearce explains some of the issues facing pensioners in austerity Britain.**

At a previous Pensioners' Parliament, NPC general secretary Dot Gibson said: "This idea that the country's economy is struggling because an army of millionaire pensioners are joyriding with their free bus passes is absolute nonsense." Dot, how right you were.

Pensioners have been under constant attack for the last six years. We even had the now-retired MP Chris Huhne, previously a failed Liberal Democrat leadership candidate, writing that "someone needs to fight the selfish, short-sighted old."

It is about time we stopped being the whipping boy for the Tories' austerity policies. We, the members of the National Pensioners Convention, should fight for the truth to be told.

Pensioners, like every other group in society, are made up of individuals with different views, different shapes and different needs. We are not a group of people who have passed their sell-by date and become non-contributors to our families and society in general.

During the month of May, two reports were published that showed some of the reality of what it means to be old in Britain today.

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman published 'A report of investigations into unsafe discharge from hospital'. This looked at a number of cases and showed in graphic detail how hospitals were wrongly discharging some old and vulnerable people.

## **NHS**

They were sent home alone, unable to cope, and often ended up back in hospital only hours or days later. The reasons for this were the lack of home care plans, relatives and carers not being informed, and in some cases discharge without being clinically fit to leave.

A research report from the charity Independent Age was published only a day or two after. This report showed nearly a million pensioners aged over 75 are living in poverty.

Their average income is £59 a week less than younger pensioners. An estimated 750,000 over-75s are entitled to 'pension credit' benefits but do not claim them.

Within this age group, 23% of women, 24% of single pensioners and around a quarter of private renters are living in poverty. This shows the myth of wealthy pensioners is just that: a myth. There are huge variations of incomes, with hundreds of thousands of older pensioners living below the poverty line.

Far from being a burden, pensioners every year add £49 billion more to the economy than we receive in pensions, care and benefits. We pay tax either on our income or indirectly, and no account is taken of our hours of unpaid work. We volunteer to maintain essential local services threatened by cuts, or help to look after grandchildren and other family members.

The time is right for pensioners, workers and young people to stand together. Let's fight for a living wage, living pension and living benefits for all; for decent, genuinely affordable council housing for all, and rent controls in the private sector; and against Tory and Blairite cuts to services and jobs.

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## **Dangerous, dirty and damp: the unseen world of temporary accommodation**

'Shelly'

I am a single mother with two children under five. I am fleeing domestic violence, rape and financial abuse from my ex-partner. As a result I have been forced into homelessness.

After I made a homelessness application, my council (Hackney in east London) placed me in stage one temporary accommodation - a bed and breakfast, the Balfour in Ilford.

I think our lives are at risk in this property. We are vastly overcrowded - families are piled into tiny rooms, forcing some to sleep on the floor. 22 families share one inadequate kitchen full of vermin and a few tiny, filthy shower rooms monitored by CCTV.

We have no fire exits or fire doors. The general state of the property is dire with damp, broken banisters, large cracks and holes in the walls, carpets of very poor quality with faeces smeared into them.

We have open electrical wires within children's reach, wiring that appears to be hazardous, causing light bulbs to frequently explode, fuses to blow, and electric shocks. None of the tenants have a front door key. The premises is unmanned and unlocked 24/7, allowing anybody to walk in.

Because of the housing crisis, most of us are in this accommodation for much longer than the six week legal time frame. The accommodation is filled entirely with homeless council tenants. The private bed and breakfast earns upwards of £600,000 a year from the council (with additional charges to the vulnerable homeless tenants for cleaning and utilities). We are being exploited for profit.

Referrals to bed and breakfasts by councils are up 12% since 2014. According to a House of Commons briefing paper, there are currently 69,140 homeless applicants in stage one temporary accommodation. We have few rights and can face eviction if we complain - like I am currently.

To highlight this issue, using ourselves as an example, I have started the Balfour campaign. See [thebalfourcampaign.moonfruit.com](http://thebalfourcampaign.moonfruit.com)

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## **RF Brookes walk out over pay cut**

### **Rogerstone BFAWU workers take action to defend pay and conditions**

**Dave Reid**

Over 80 workers, members of the BFAWU bakers' union, rallied at the picket line at RJ Brookes in Rogerstone, Newport, this morning supported by members of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), Youth Fight for Jobs and strikers from the National Museum of Wales.

They are on a 48-hour strike against the company, owned by 2 Sisters, cutting shift allowances, overtime payments and discriminating against young workers. The dispute has arisen as the company attempts to cut pay as the National Living Wage is introduced.

Agency and temporary workers have been brought in to work through the stoppage but with core workers on strike it is unlikely they will have much work to do. Despite management intimidation on the picket line a number of workers refused to cross, with strikers cheering and clapping as they turned away. Most delivery lorries refused to cross picket lines as well.

As pickets spoke to drivers to dissuade them from crossing the picket line, one driver turned off his engine and walked into a nearby superstore leaving his car blocking the road for half an hour, causing quite a blockage!

When the driver of a waste lorry that had been previously turned away attempted to force his way through - endangering the lives of pickets - over 100 strikers blocked the road completely.

Workers have remained defiant in the face of a management which has been attempting to bully the workforce into signing new contracts.

One worker has been suspended for asking a colleague if she was going into work. Workers from abroad have been told that if they don't sign the new contract they will be sacked.

A delegation from Pennine Foods is travelling down to support the strike. They, and workers at Pizza Factory in Nottingham, are also in dispute with 2 Sisters over cuts to premium pay, with Pennine workers ready to strike again on 5 June following a well-supported two-day strike two weeks ago.

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 2 June 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## **Pennine Foods strike: "Business NOT open as usual - Again!"**

**Alistair Tice, Yorkshire Socialist Party**

"Solidarnosc" replied the Polish waggon driver when told by pickets that there was a strike on at Pennine Foods in Sheffield. His mate parked up and both joined us on the picket line waving BFAWU bakers' union flags, and for a coffee.

"The workers united will never be defeated" rang round the picket line when the artic cab that had been parked up for four hours waiting to get into the factory to take two deliveries out, finally turned round and left. The cab driver didn't want to cross the line that he described as

a "war-zone" (a bit of an exaggeration for a peaceful but resolute picket which was never less than 100 strong).

This gave victory to the pickets whose determination had faced down the 2 Sisters company bosses and a nervous South Yorkshire police throughout their second 48-hour strike (5-6 June), meaning not one lorry went in or out of the factory. The 'sweet-talking' police liaison officer told us that the management "have given up" trying to move anything.

Polish strikers had spoken to Polish drivers. A Romanian striker spoke on the phone to a Romanian driver. This strike involving 400 English, Eastern European, Asian and African workers has been a marvellous celebration of workers' solidarity in action against the common enemy of a billionaire boss imposing pay cuts of up to £5,000 a week on low paid workers through cutting premium payments. Even a few agency workers have walked out in support.

This strike has cost the company thousands of pounds in lost and wasted production. After the first strike, management sent employees a letter saying how disappointed it was, but that the strike hadn't affected production. Well, after this strike the 'amended' "Business NOT open as usual" sign on the factory gates tells it as it really is.

This is the first strike in the site's 28-year history but workers have learned fast in struggle. They voted unanimously on the picket line to escalate the next planned two-day strike into a week-long strike commencing on Thursday 16th June. The first two days will coincide with a second 48-hour strike by BFAWU members at the RF Brookes factory (part of 2 Sisters group) in Newport, South Wales.

Both these factories supply Marks and Spencers with ready meals so the BFAWU will be calling for trade unionists and socialists to 'protest picket' M&S stores around the country as has already happened in Sheffield. Such a 'leverage' campaign as an adjunct to escalating coordinated industrial action and determined picketing can score an inspiring victory for the BFAWU and all workers suffering at the hands of millionaire bosses.

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 7 June 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## **Junior doctors' dispute: New offer falls short**

**Rob Williams, Socialist Party industrial organiser**

Junior doctors are being consulted by their union the BMA over the government's offer to settle the longstanding dispute over the new contract.

The Tories have been shocked by the incredible campaign of strike action that has seen picket lines of hundreds of junior doctors and peaked on the last two-day walkouts at the end of April which were escalated to the removal of emergency cover. This resulted in consultants covering for striking staff but they were overwhelmingly supportive with some reportedly telling junior doctors to make sure that they were on the picket line!

On the first night of that strike on 26 April, over 4,000 junior doctors marched with teachers and other trade unionists and health campaigners to the Department of Health. This was in stark contrast to the TUC and the majority of the union leaders, who have allowed the BMA to fight alone, even though many health workers understand that they would be next if junior doctors are defeated.

## **Day of action**

Indeed, on the second day of the strike, the TUC general council ignored the call of civil servants' union PCS and the Fire Brigades Union for a national day of action in support of the junior doctors.

Tory Health Minister Jeremy Hunt was forced back to the negotiating table and had to reverse his threat to impose the contract. Therefore, the new concessions made by Hunt are as a result of the action. But Hunt has made it clear that the offer is 'cost-neutral' in that there is no extra money on the table. This means that the concessions are paid for in other parts.

Basic pay would increase by an average of 10-11% instead of the 13.5% in the previous proposed contract. The offer still removes premium payments for Saturdays; a main grievance of junior doctors, and in addition will remove premium payments for Sundays too. Instead they will be paid an allowance of just 3% of basic pay if they work at least one weekend in eight, rising to a maximum of 10% for working one in two.

Also, the premium for night shift working is reduced to 37% from the 50% in the previous contract that Hunt attempted to impose. The new contract still discriminates against junior doctors working part-time, many who will be women with care responsibilities or doctors with disabilities.

Concerns about unsafe hours being worked and staff coverage would remain. This will be monitored by a 'guardian of safe working hours' but they would be appointed by and accountable to the Trust Board and junior doctors would be rightly suspicious of their powers.

This new inadequate offer should be rejected by junior doctors because it can be defeated if determined action is continued and escalated. A new programme of strikes should be called.

But we also 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. This can be a spring board to a mass movement to inflict a total defeat on the Tories.

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# **PCS campaign against Land Registry privatisation**

**Dave Lunn, PCS Land Registry group vice president (personal capacity)**

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union campaign against Land Registry privatisation has stepped up a gear. This follows a unanimous endorsement of our strategy and campaign by the entire PCS conference.

Conference pledged further practical and financial support up to and including the use of industrial action to defeat the government's ill-conceived plans.

This has not only given our members a massive boost, but also sends a clear message to management and the government that we will do whatever it takes to defeat privatisation once and for all.

Public opinion is also clearly against what is planned and nearly 300,000 people have signed a 38 Degrees petition against Land Registry privatisation - the largest response it has ever had to a petition of this type.

The petition (so far) was handed into the Department for Business, Industry and Skills (BIS) on 26 May, the day that the public consultation ended.

This event was attended by a large crowd including PCS members, conveyancers, other pressure groups and MPs. However, neither Sajid Javid (minister for BIS) nor any other BIS official was prepared to collect the petition in person.

We have also been campaigning politically, getting our members involved in lobbying their MPs; and PCS reps have been meeting with MPs to set out the reasons for opposition.

Interestingly, around a third of MPs who have met with us have been Tories who are uneasy with what is being proposed. Even the right-wing press has come out solidly in opposition, describing it as "a privatisation too far".

With this level of opposition it is hard to see how Chancellor Osborne can proceed with his plan, as he appears to be the only person who thinks that it is a good idea. Clearly, if he were to be removed from office following the EU referendum, the likelihood of defeating privatisation would be increased.

Either way, PCS is organised, determined and ready to do whatever it takes to defend our members jobs, offices, and terms and conditions, and the vital public service we provide.

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## **Workplace news in brief**

### **Royal Mail fightback**

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) missed an opportunity to link a dispute between Royal Mail managers and the privatisation of the company by the 2010 Tory-led government. Around 4,900 managers, members of Unite the Union, voted to go on strike in a dispute over pay and conditions. The managers, having rejected a 1.3% pay offer for the year starting September 2015 in a consultative ballot, then voted by 78% to take strike action and 93% for 'industrial action short of a strike'.

Unite members are also facing continuing threats of compulsory redundancy, with more than 530 redundancies across the organisation already this year. After a period of 'working to rule', a walkout was planned for 24-hours from 31 May to 1 June but this was postponed as the business agreed to further talks.

This is a victory for the managers - as long as the union leadership does not capitulate at this stage. Following the election of a new CWU leadership, this dispute presented an opportunity to raise a class position against cuts to workers conditions, promote the case for renationalisation as well as unite and encourage the whole workforce against the big bosses and capitalist investors.

The sale of the Royal Mail, which saw shares severely under-priced and the taxpayer short-changed was followed by the need for it to cut costs and raise product prices such as stamps for returns to faceless capitalist investors. Workers, including middle and lower management, will continue to bear the brunt of those cuts in their pay, terms and conditions unless a fight back is organised. I encourage all CWU members to attend the NSSN conference where we can discuss such issues with other unions.

**Carl Harper, CWU activist**

## **Metsa Wood walkout**

About 50 GMB members from Metsa Wood, which produces timber products for B&Q, were on strike on 26 May, with a picket in place at the depot in Ditton Road, Widnes. George Patterson, GMB full time officer, explained to me that the strike was in protest at the company offering a meagre 0.8% pay rise despite making a £390 million profit. One of the workers told me that it used to be a great place to work but that over the last five or six years it has all been totally changed with profits for the shareholders being put way ahead of treating staff properly.

**Andy Ford**