

## Editorial of the Socialist, issue 906

# EU referendum: whatever the result, political turmoil is ahead

The days are counting down to the EU referendum and the polls remain on a knife edge. For the first time the Financial Times 'poll of polls' has put exit in the lead. Cameron's team is reported to be in a 'blind panic'. Project Fear has tried to step up the doom-mongering, with David Cameron declaring that Brexit would mean £40 billion worth of added cuts to public spending, including to pensions and the NHS.

It is incredible, however, the degree to which Project Fear has so far failed. Instead trust in Cameron - already low - has tumbled to just 18% believing his announcements on the EU. As the Socialist predicted, voters - particularly working class voters - are increasingly seeing the referendum as a chance to protest both against Cameron and everything they have suffered in recent years: low pay, zero-hour contracts, benefit cuts, the lack of affordable housing, and public services cut to the bone. One poll shows that 60% of 'blue collar' workers intend to vote for exit.

Had Jeremy Corbyn been prepared to lead a left, internationalist campaign for Leave, that anger would have found a clear expression. Corbyn could have explained, accurately, that he had always opposed the EU because it is an Employers' Union, adding that it is illegal under EU law to nationalise the railways or the steel industry. Many of those who are currently voting Remain because they are repelled by the little Englanders who lead the official Leave campaign could have been convinced to vote for exit.

At the same time Corbyn should have declared that, after the referendum, Cameron would have no right to continue in office, demanding a general election which Labour would contest on a programme of a £10 an hour minimum wage, mass council house building, public ownership of the privatised utilities and more. Such a bold stance would have transformed the political situation in Britain.

### Relying on Labour

But it would have required defying big business, and also the pro-big business, pro-austerity and therefore also pro-EU wing of the Labour Party. Instead, one of Jeremy Corbyn's first serious retreats in the face of the Blairites was to agree to campaign for Remain. And now, as it becomes clear to Cameron that his speeches increase support for Leave, he is standing aside to allow the trade unions and the Labour leadership to try and convince workers to vote Remain.

It is possible that this will have some effect on the referendum polls, but it will also act to discredit the Labour and trade union leaders. Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell are struggling to avoid this; correctly refusing to appear alongside Tory politicians. Most of the Labour leadership, however, have shown no such scruples. It is incredible that Sadiq Khan, after the vile racist campaign run against him by the Tories, is now standing together with them to call for a Remain vote.

And such is the desperation of the Remain camp they are thrusting Jeremy Corbyn into the front line despite his reticence and having poured scorn on him. In the Observer (12 June) David Cameron brazenly declared that he couldn't, "be accused of an establishment stitch-up" because he was "saying listen to Jeremy Corbyn and the Green party." There is a real danger here that - as in the Scottish referendum - Labour could end up being undermined by its role in this referendum as attempted saviour of the establishment.

Deputy Labour leader Tom Watson has openly recognised that outers are voting to get rid of Cameron and pleaded with them not to because 'Boris Johnson would be worse'. We completely reject this argument, which is a new form of 'lesser evilism'. Over the six years that Cameron has been prime minister a ruthless campaign has been run to make working class people pay for the capitalist economic crisis. The interests of the working class are not served by keeping him in power but by launching a mass campaign to force him, and his

government, out of power.

A Brexit vote, and Cameron's subsequent resignation, would lift the confidence of many workers in Britain who would rightly feel they had managed to land a serious blow on the opposition. At the same time it would be a serious defeat for the capitalist class. The potential would be there for the working class to go on the offensive against the endless austerity that has rained down on us. A 24-hour general strike could quickly be posed.

## **Tories in meltdown**

And the Tories - once the most successful capitalist party on the planet - are already in meltdown and in the event of a Brexit vote could face a terminal crisis. Far from a smooth succession from Cameron to Johnson, a vote for Brexit could potentially lead to the shattering of the Tory Party. If Johnson does take over it will be against the background of the divisions in the Tory Party having become a gaping chasm, with the Cameron wing constantly sniping from the back benches.

Even if Remain wins narrowly, Cameron could be forced out. The current Tory government is very weak - carrying out 20 u-turns or partial u-turns in the last year - but the new government would be even weaker. Voters who have been told by Johnson and Gove that Brexit would mean more money for the NHS and better workers' rights will not passively accept a Johnson-led Tory government trying to impose further austerity on the working class.

Whatever happens, in the aftermath of the referendum politics in Britain will be in serious turmoil. The 1%, the capitalist class, will be fumbling around to try and find parties that can act reliably in their interests. At a certain stage the divisions in both Labour and the Tories, who are in reality only held together by the electoral system, can lead to a realignment of British politics.

A split in the Tories and Labour could lead to a new alignment of the pro-capitalist wing of the Labour Party and the pro-EU Tories. It is not for nothing that Janan Ganesh comments in the Financial Times (14 June) "the Tory and Labour moderates newly mingling in the Remain offices rather get on." It is even possible that the capitalist class could shift towards supporting a change in the electoral system to proportional representation in order to try and put such a coalition into power.

## **Political voice**

While the political representation of the capitalist class is in turmoil, it is urgent that the working class fights for its own political voice. The complete absence of a mass working class voice in the referendum has left the ground free for the ex-Tory, ex-stockbroker Nigel Farage to falsely pose as the voice of 'the little people'. In reality, of course, the divisive little Englander ideas of Ukip offer no way forward for working class people.

To cut across them, however, requires a mass party that opposes racism and fights in the interests of all working class people, whatever their country of origin. When the anti-austerity left Syriza government was first elected in Greece over 70% of people who had voted for the far-right thugs of Golden Dawn supported the new government. It was only the betrayal of the Syriza leadership - capitulating to the institutions of the EU and implementing vicious austerity - that left room for Golden Dawn to grow again.

For big business in Britain, particularly against the background of a new economic crisis, a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour government is a nightmare they will do their utmost to avoid. They fear the huge expectations it would raise among working class people who have suffered years of austerity. Therefore once the referendum is over, the offensive will once again start against Jeremy Corbyn. If Brexit wins Corbyn will be blamed no matter how many speeches he makes for Remain in the next week.

As a new round of attacks rains down on Corbyn - from inside and outside of the Labour Party - it is vital that he stands firm and makes no more retreats. It is only the popular support for Jeremy Corbyn which has so far prevented the Labour right moving to oust him, but they still intend to take the first available opportunity.

It is likely that, in collusion with the Blairites, the Tories will put the debate on the replacement of Trident on the parliamentary agenda before its summer break. Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite, has already

said that Jeremy Corbyn has privately promised him that MPs will not be whipped. Given the right-wing character of the Parliamentary Labour Party, that would mean the majority of MPs voting to keep Trident. The right wing Labour backbench defence committee has gone further, demanding that MPs are whipped to vote for Trident, with Jeremy Corbyn being given permission to 'absent himself'!

The replacement of Trident would cost £200 billion over its lifetime. Any further retreats by the Labour leadership would inevitably lead to an ebbing of support for Jeremy Corbyn among those who have been enthused by his stance. Jeremy Corbyn should stand firm against renewal, while at the same time guaranteeing the jobs, pay and conditions of all workers in the defence industry, through a bold programme of nationalisation of BAE, Rolls Royce, Qinetiq and other companies.

## **Strategy to defeat austerity**

He also urgently needs to launch a fight against austerity, with the programme on which he stood for Labour leader as its starting point. This should include making clear that he opposes austerity whoever it is implemented by - Brussels, Westminster, or local councils.

In May's local elections there was a swing to Labour in Bristol, partly as a result of support for Jeremy Corbyn. But the new Labour Mayor has immediately proposed £100 million worth of cuts and appointed a 'rainbow cabinet' including Tories! This - and the vicious cuts carried out by Labour councils across the country - is not the 'new politics' that workers and young people voted for when they gave Jeremy Corbyn his landslide victory. That is better represented by the recent GMB conference, which joined the Unite and Unison local government committees and the Wales TUC in demanding councils set no-cuts budgets.

Those decisions reflect the growing determination of many workers to accept no more austerity. We urge a vote for exit on 23 June, which will strike a serious blow against the Tories and the capitalist class. That, however, is only the first step. Whatever the result of the referendum, the workers' movement needs to go on the offensive against austerity - both by fighting for a 24-hour general strike and for a mass party that stands in our interests.

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## **EU: busting the myths that Remain is best for the 99%**

As we approach voting day for the EU referendum, panic has set in for the establishment and 'project fear' has been stepped up. The official campaigns on both sides have bandied about arguments full of lies and misrepresentations. Many working class people don't know who to believe or feel completely turned off the debate. Here we address three of the concerns workers and young people may have about voting Leave.

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## **Does the EU help us show international solidarity and stand against racism?**

**Paula Mitchell**

A lot of people, young people especially, look at the official representatives of Leave and are - rightly - completely repelled. Boris Johnson, Michael Gove, Nigel Farage and the rest are repugnant right-wing millionaires, spouting nationalist and racist bile. As a statement of anti-racism, and of internationalism against 'Little Englander' isolationism, some people think they need to vote to remain in the EU.

Even some on the left promote their own 'project fear' suggesting that a vote to leave will lead to a wave of popular racism. They point to working class people's concerns about immigration and votes for Ukip, for example in the recent Welsh elections.

It is important to oppose racism. However, the majority of working class people who express concerns about immigration do not do so out of racism but out of fear that there is already not enough to go round. They see the destruction of stable, skilled, reasonably well-paid jobs (for example, currently, in the steel industry) and their replacement by low paid zero-hour contracts. They experience a stagnation in wages, a housing crisis, cuts in benefits and pensions.

This is why the Socialist Party and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition have argued strenuously for an independent socialist Leave campaign. A bold anti-austerity alternative that fought for jobs, council houses and rent control, £10 an hour minimum wage, and an end to cuts and privatisation, would go a long way to cut across divisions, and harness and direct anger against the bosses and the Tories.

Cameron and Osborne, who lead the campaign to remain, are no less racist and nationalist than Johnson etc. They just believe, as does the majority of big business leaders and the banks, that the pursuit of profit for British business is better served in the EU.

But is the EU itself a guard against racism and promoter of internationalism?

We are internationalists - the internationalism of the working class, not of the bosses and the bankers and the super-rich, whose internationalism is in order to maximise the exploitation of working class people across Europe to enrich themselves.

## **Greece**

We stand shoulder to shoulder with the Greek bus workers in Athens who have just won a pay victory. We stand with the French workers engaged in a huge battle against proposed new labour laws. We stand with workers in Belgium on general strike.

None of this internationalism is aided by Britain's membership of the EU - in fact in many cases the action is against EU dictats implemented by willing big business governments. While we stand with the people of Greece, the EU is grinding them into the dirt.

Our support for European workers is no different, or easier to deliver, than our solidarity with miners in South Africa after the Marikana massacre, or in support of Palestinians under the cosh of the Israeli state, or the huge human sympathy and support shown to refugees fleeing war, terror and persecution.

The EU, on the other hand, is clearly no defender of refugees or migrants. The free movement of people within the EU is in order that big business can guarantee a cheap labour supply. For anyone else it is 'fortress Europe'. Refugees are left to drown in the Mediterranean, and rot in squalid camps. In fact barriers are going up within Europe to prevent movement of non-EU people across borders.

To combine resources, skills, technology and production across Europe would be a hugely positive step forward. However, under capitalism it is impossible to fully achieve. Although they established the EU to facilitate trade and move around capital and labour without barrier, in the end capitalists in different nations are in competition and retreat behind national borders and protections when their profits are threatened.

It also suits them to promote national and racial loyalties so they can divide working class people against each other rather than have us all come together against the bosses.

It will only be on the basis of working class action, solidarity, and a socialist fight that this divisive and unjust system can be removed and human and material resources can fully come together on a voluntary basis.

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## **Does the EU protect workers and the economy?**

As the referendum gets closer, the Remain campaign has stepped up its emphasis on the supposed benefits the EU brings to the economy (and thereby jobs, pay and services) and to workers' rights.

We've scandalously had corporate bosses on TV saying 'we are going to cut investment and jobs' in the event

of a Leave vote. Who elected them to decide our fate? Those companies should be taken into democratic public ownership to secure jobs and services.

Prime Minister David Cameron said the Tories couldn't guarantee rises in the state pension if Britain wasn't in the EU. He said that NHS spending would be under threat. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn told us a Leave vote would mean a "bonfire of workers' rights."

This despite the fact that much of the legislation that exists to protect workers was won prior to the UK joining the EU. Equal pay for men and women is often referenced. But British workers had won the right to equal pay in 1970, particularly through the strike by women workers at the Ford Dagenham plant.

In fact there are examples where UK law offers better protections than EU law. We're told to thank the EU for paid holidays, but the EU legislates four weeks while UK law legislates 5.6 weeks.

And it would be very pessimistic to think that workers would sit idly by while the few protections that have come specifically from EU legislation (which are all incorporated into UK law anyway and would need reversing) are attacked.

## **Working Time Directive**

The Working Time Directive, for example, provides limits on the length of the working day and regular rests (although workers - generally at the 'request' of employers - can opt-out). Haven't the junior doctors shown in their magnificent strike movement that when needed and given the chance workers will fight unfair and unsafe changes to working times?

Much more significant than these few crumbs are the number of EU directives that drive down pay and conditions for workers - the Posted Workers Directive, the Temporary Agency Work Directive and the planned Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, to name a few.

The rhetoric about potential negative impacts on the economy don't carry much weight with many workers either. One study showed that while the majority of voters think there may be negative economic consequences if Britain were to leave, only a third think it would affect their personal finances.

This is hardly surprising given that the economy is supposedly now in recovery following the world economic crisis that started in 2007-2008, but workers are still experiencing unemployment, pay freezes and cuts, and attacks on terms and conditions.

An austerity avalanche has taken place in Britain since 2010 - including on the pensions and NHS services Cameron is now so keen to protect - while the EU has observed approvingly. The same is true for the biggest 'bonfire of rights' - the (anti) Trade Union Act - being implemented by the leaders of the Remain campaign. And similar is taking place in EU member states across the continent. More than 35% of youth in Greece, Italy and Spain are unemployed.

Ultimately, Brexit on a capitalist basis will produce broadly the same results as Remain on a capitalist basis - continued austerity, attacks on wages and living standards, cuts and privatisation of public services.

The only way to resist this is for a mass, united working class fightback against austerity - whether implemented by Brussels or the governments of individual countries. Workers should support legislation but legislation can be brushed aside as needed by the capitalist class - it's militant trade union-led action that will really defend us.

## **Poverty**

A Leave vote would open up the potential to kick out this hated, weak and divided Tory government. It would remove one of the many obstacles that exist to make it harder for workers to organise effectively and defend their rights. It would be a kick in the teeth for the same EU institutions impoverishing the working classes of southern Europe.

As Ian Hodson, president of the BFAWU bakers' union, said at the union's recent conference: "The role of the trade union is to protect workers' rights. Anyone expecting Angela Merkel or Christine Lagarde to do it will be sorely disappointed."

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## **Does the EU keep the peace?**

**Judy Beishon**

David Cameron unscrupulously referred to "rows of white headstones in lovingly tended Commonwealth war cemeteries" when arguing that the EU helps to maintain peace in Europe. This is the same Tory leader who has been promoting the bombing of Iraq and Syria, which the Ministry of Defence claims has killed nearly 1,000 fighters but inconceivably not a single civilian.

Also lacking any credibility is the idea that 70 years of peace in Europe has been due to the existence of European institutions. The truth is that it's been - and still is - in the best interests of the capitalist classes across most of Europe to compete for markets and prestige through economic and political means rather than through turning to war.

### **Revolution**

After the second world war they were met with a revolutionary wave across western Europe - mass movements of the working class demanding welfare, jobs and housing. In Britain, the Clement Attlee-led Labour government was elected with huge pressure on it to deliver change. It nationalised failing large industries including coal, the railways and steel. It set up a welfare state - a great gain extracted by working people, which developed further during the post-war economic boom.

Another feature of that period, outlasting the boom even, was the cold war standoff between the western powers and the Stalinist eastern bloc, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons that was part of that. US imperialism underwrote the security of its western allies, including through spearheading the NATO military alliance.

So, far more overriding processes were at play regarding 'peace' than the economic cooperation treaties signed between governments in Europe. Those treaties were aimed at boosting the fortunes of European big businesses and not at maintaining peace - that wasn't then in jeopardy - between the main western powers.

There have however been wars in eastern Europe, in the Balkans as Yugoslavia broke up and more recently in Ukraine, which the existence of the European institutions hasn't prevented. As the EU is in essence a club of the top European corporations and elites, the peace-making attempts of it and its predecessors have been in their own interests and not in those of ordinary people living in the war zones.

In western Europe today though, with economies barely growing and the resulting tensions between governments, is the EU a vital force for peace and stability as Cameron would have us believe?

Certainly national antagonisms between the ruling classes are rising as a result of capitalism's inability to develop industry and services. The 28 governments that make up the EU are increasingly divided over key issues, from their response to the refugee crisis to policy on Greece's unsustainable 'debts'.

The Eurozone, originally heralded as aiding integration and prosperity, has become a strait jacket for its most struggling members, again aggravating antagonisms. None of this will be any surprise to longstanding readers of the Socialist; it has always argued that capitalist European integration will become shipwrecked on the rocks of economic crisis.

### **Socialism**

This is no reason for doom and gloom, or for hanging onto the coattails of EU institutions, because those bodies have never operated in the fundamental interests of the majority in society.

The only way to build European institutions that would be genuinely anti-war and based on mutual wellbeing and cooperation between the working peoples of Europe, is to do so on a democratic socialist basis. Only socialist ideas can offer a war-free, poverty-free alternative to the impasse and horrors of capitalism.

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## **TUSC anti-EU tour touches down in Wales**

**Ross Saunders and Dave Reid, Socialist Party Wales**

The 'Socialist Case Against the EU' tour held a lively and fraternal meeting in Cardiff on 9 June.

The tour is organised by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), which supports a Leave vote, and includes transport union RMT and the Socialist Party.

The room was packed, in what is likely to be among the biggest meetings discussing the EU referendum in Wales. Discussion was energetic, as those who attended put to the test the lies and distortions the capitalist press pumps into society. We raised an impressive £150 towards campaign costs.

The approach of the Remain campaign in Wales can be summed up by one spectacle on 11 June. Alun Cairns, Tory secretary of state for Wales, climbing the Remain platform at a rally in Cardiff, speaking among Labour and Plaid Cymru representatives - in the shadow of the statue of celebrated socialist Aneurin Bevan!

One wit looked up at the back of the statue, visible behind the speakers, and quipped: "At least he's showing them his arse!"

It could not be more obvious that, on its own strength, the Tory government could not mobilise enough support to keep the UK in the European Union. They're relying on other parties, less hated by the working class, to save their bacon.

### **Employers' Union**

Contrast this shabby scene with TUSC's meeting. We built a united front of speakers from genuine workers' organisations, willing to come together to fight the EU 'Employers' Union'. This included Owen Herbert, regional secretary of transport union RMT; London regional secretary of firefighters' union FBU, Paul Embery, from Trade Unionists Against the EU; and Hannah Sell, deputy general secretary of the Socialist Party.

The animated, friendly discussion was a refreshing change from the rubbish spoken by the official Leave and Remain campaigns. The speakers outlined how the European Union is primarily a capitalist institution that inflicts austerity and privatisation on working people across Europe.

Some questions reflected the concerns of workers and young people that Brexit would mean the coming to power of a more right-wing government, possibly led by Boris Johnson. Hannah explained the Tory party could be devastated by the referendum. Its government is now a weak one, that the workers' movement should go on the offensive against.

But there is no fundamental difference between the Cameron and Johnson wings of the Tory party. Racism would likely rise on the basis of a Remain vote too, unless the unions and Labour leaders take the initiative.

The super-rich 1% might have a monopoly on wealth, the media and the state. But if workers get organised, we can shake them off with a shrug of our shoulders.

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## **BT Brexit baloney**

Unions have joined forces with bosses at telecom firm BT to influence workers to vote Remain.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU), with managers' and professionals' union Prospect, were due to send a joint email with BT management on 13 June. Although not explicitly calling for a Remain vote, the message was to highlight research that Brexit might hit the economy.

In the event of financial ructions following the referendum, it is the job of unions to lead workers to fight for better wages and conditions. More than that - they could put political change on the agenda.

A crisis for the bosses only turns into a crisis for the workers if the workers' movement ignores the opportunity. Unions lining up with the very people they exist to combat only weakens them, whatever their position on the EU. It discredits them in the eyes of many workers. The CWU, at least, should know better.

Brexit could rout the establishment. The opportunities for the left would be huge. But in or out, unions must maintain an independent position, and prepare to fight the bosses.

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## **The Socialist Inbox**

### **Letters: EU referendum**

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#### **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](mailto: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.

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#### **Remainers rethink**

Socialist Party members have been having really good discussions about the EU with people we have met in Southampton. Some of them have already decided to vote Leave and are pleased to at last find an organisation putting forward the same arguments for it as they are.

Others we have talked to are undecided, or voting to remain in the EU. They are often wary of apparently voting the same way as Ukip and some Tories. But they do not for one moment believe the likes of Gove and Duncan Smith are belatedly developing a social conscience.

These people have been very interested when we have explained the socialist case for leaving the EU. Quite a few have said they will now reconsider.

**Jane Ward, Southampton**

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#### **Register reversal**

Cameron, in a seemingly democratic move, extended the EU referendum voter registration deadline by two days. However, his record on democratic rights is shabby.



The current registration system reduced the number of people registered by one million compared with the old system. This was predominately young people who are less likely to vote Tory but whose support Cameron wants in the referendum.

The government also implemented changes earlier than advised by the Electoral Commission - because it wants to reduce the number of constituencies and redraw boundaries to increase its majority.

Rather than putting barriers in place of electoral registration, the Socialist Party believes voters should be able to register up to and including election day.

**David Maples, South London**

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## **Coup conspiracy**

I'm always reluctant to give the Blairites too much credit for foresight or conscious analysis. But it seems to me that one big reason the Labour right wing doesn't want to leave the EU is that it would almost certainly shatter the Tory party - and could therefore propel Jeremy Corbyn into Number 10 before Christmas.

This would be too soon, before they could mount a coup against Corbyn.

So in fact, the Labour right actually wants to keep the Tories in power - until they have managed to wrest back full control from Corbyn and the rank and file.

This 'Strategy 2020', as you could call it, is sadly winning. Corbyn and McDonnell don't fully realise the trap they have been suckered into.

However, the Tories are so weak - and support for Remain is so weak - that Corbyn could still be in Number 10 in months. Workers would gain massively in confidence from this, demanding Corbyn's original anti-austerity programme is carried out in government.

You can see why Cameron, Blair, Hilary Benn, Tom Watson and all the British establishment are crapping themselves right now...

**Tim Wall, Newcastle**

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## **Tory turmoil**

Those in the left Remain camp, alongside trying to prettify the EU, have attempted to rubbish the Socialist Party's argument that the aftermath of a Leave vote could split the Tories. Instead they believe the Tories would be certain to unite around Michael Gove or Boris Johnson.

Yet those reading this week's 'Economist' on Corbyn and the referendum will see the lines: "If Britain left, the Conservative Party could tear itself apart. If there were a snap election, he might stand a chance of forming a Labour government."

Of course, the neoliberal Economist is horrified by the possibility. It exhorts Corbyn to behave like a good pro-capitalist politician and appear on platforms with Cameron, like Sadiq Khan and other Blairites, to secure a Remain vote.

Due to pressure from the Labour right, Corbyn has spoken in favour of Remain, albeit keeping a low profile. But given how terrified the Economist is of even this diluted position, imagine if he had put himself at the head of a pro-worker Leave campaign. It would have blown the Tories and Ukip out of the water.

The Economist's fears are another vindication of the arguments put forward by the Socialist Party.

## EU v TU

With the vote on membership of the EU fast approaching, the question of workers' rights - and how best they can be protected and extended - has been granted a level of scrutiny unusual in the capitalist press.

But welcome though it is, the debate has been posed in misleading terms. The Remain campaigners tell us there will be a "bonfire of rights" should we vote to come out. The Leave campaign points to the increasingly totalitarian role of the EU.

Both groups employ a zero-sum, all-or-nothing logic, which has led to understandable fear and frustration.

As evidenced by the repressive labour laws currently being forced on France, Belgium, Greece, Britain, and elsewhere, neither the EU nor national governments can be trusted to ensure our rights. The organised working class - the trade union movement - is, as it has always been, the only guarantor of workers' rights.

Although we cannot individually control the outcome of the referendum, we can control whether or not we are in an organisation which has a proven track record of defending and advancing our rights.

Join a union and join the international fightback against austerity!

Tom Barker, Leicester

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## Thank EU!

And when I was laid off twice in a month, when trying for a hundred jobs, applying in vain when you're over 45 to be part of the zero-hour army, I thought: "Thank goodness the EU protects workers' rights!"

Mike, Southampton

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## Orlando massacre: working class unity to defeat homophobia, terrorism and racism

**The mass killing of 49 people at an LGBTQ nightclub in Orlando, Florida by lone gunman Omar Mateen has shocked people in the US and worldwide.**

**In cities around the world gay, straight and Muslim people, have spontaneously held street vigils in solidarity with the victims' friends and families and the LGBTQ community. Michael Johnson, Leeds Socialist Party, responds.**

Coming during Pride Month this has been a sobering reminder that despite some legal steps forward in recent years over same-sex marriage, etc, LGBTQ people still face massive oppression due to sexuality or gender identity.

Right-wing people such as Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump disingenuously argue that the Orlando attack, and most threats to the LGBTQ community, are due to the religion of Islam. Trump has repeated his divisive call to stop Muslims entering the US - ignoring the fact that Mateen was born and raised in America.

However, homophobia and transphobia do not come from one section of society. Gay and transgender rights have recently been under attack in the US with several state authorities passing discriminatory laws allowing businesses to refuse to deal with LGBTQ customers on the grounds of "religious beliefs".

Elsewhere states have passed ordinances making transgender people use washroom facilities according to the gender designation on their birth certificates rather than their current gender identity.

Homophobia and transphobia are not an 'Islam problem', they are a problem within capitalist society as a whole.

The capitalist profit system, with its injustices and inequalities, is based upon and generates divisions between and within different social classes. It perpetuates discrimination, bigotry and the scapegoating of minority groups. Overcoming divisions within the working class through a consistent struggle against capitalism is the key task for socialists.

- To get involved with the Socialist Party LGBT group contact Michael on michael\_j\_j@hotmail.com

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## Stand with our LGBTQ sisters and brothers

**Kshama Sawant, Seattle City Council member (Socialist Alternative)**

We were all devastated to learn of the horrific terrorist attack on the LGBTQ community at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Our hearts go out to all grieving, most especially to the victims and their families.

This mass murder did not happen in a political and social vacuum. Indeed, we did not even have time to come to terms with this loss before news broke of another would-be mass killer in Los Angeles. Fortunately, his plans to attack LA Pride were discovered and stopped. But this kind of bigotry and violence will continue unless we fight it through unified mass movements.

For months, Republicans and the right wing all over the country have engaged in the vilification of our transgender community members. This vitriolic and unrelenting campaign has reinforced and strengthened the most bigoted groups and segments of society. We have to organise, mobilise, and stand up to violence, hate speech and the many forms of oppression forced down on LGBTQ people and minorities under capitalism.

We need to build the struggle for a world free from violence and bigotry, for which we need mass movements against this exploitative and divisive system.

**(Published Sunday 12 June 2016)**

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## Jihadism and imperialism

Some mass media outlets have dubbed the massacre 'America's Bataclan' (the rock concert targeted by an Isis cell in France last November).

However, while the killer claimed allegiance to Isis immediately prior to his killing spree, his former partner, who had suffered violent abuse from him, says he was mentally ill.

Some parallels have been made to the 'Isis inspired' stabbings in Leytonstone, east London, by Muhaydin Mire, whose family had warned the authorities that he was mentally ill prior to him attacking bystanders at a tube station.

But Mateen had ready access to automatic weapons, which again raises the debate over gun ownership and control in the US, where mass shootings are a regular occurrence.

The FBI had previously interviewed him for possible terrorist links but concluded there were none. President Obama too has reiterated the absence of an organised link between Mateen and Isis, the reactionary Islamist terrorist organisation.

The authorities cite Isis and al-Qa'ida websites as sources inspiring 'home grown' Islamist terrorists. But why does such propaganda gain traction among a small minority of the population?

People can turn to violent reaction because they're angered by imperialist interventions and bloody wars in the Middle East and from continuing injustices (such as the oppression of the Palestinians by the Israeli state), as well as Western governments' support for rotten, semi-feudal dictatorships such as the Saudi royal family.

Moreover, Western governments have turned a blind eye to how extreme jihadist movements have been nurtured by reactionary Sunni Islam regimes.

As Patrick Cockburn points out in the Independent: "The US and EU states have not wanted to acknowledge the link between the terrorism and their strategic Sunni allies such as Saudi Arabia, the Gulf monarchies, Turkey and Pakistan."

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## France: workers' revolt against labour law grows

**The Hollande/Valls government hoped that by the time Euro 2016 started the months-long strike movement would have run out of energy. But the size and combativity of the 14 June march show that it's still huge. Workers from every section of French industry are here, and every part of France is represented despite the bosses of some coach companies refusing to hire coaches to the CGT trade union to take people to Paris. Naomi Byron reports from France.**

Hundreds of strikes have been breaking out. One thing that connects all of them is that strikers are demanding the scrapping of the new labour law.

We are told this law is to improve the economy, make it more "flexible" so jobs can be created to combat the high levels of unemployment in France, especially among young people.

But the idea that employers are refusing to take on workers because of strict labour laws is nonsense. Last year 85% of new work contracts in France were temporary, and 70% were for a month or less. How much more flexibility do employers want?

In Britain we are constantly told that we must vote to remain in the EU if we want to protect workers' rights. But the unelected EU commissioner for the euro and social dialogue, Valdis Dombrovskis, welcomed the labour law during a recent visit to France: "[It] is an initiative that is intended to address the rigidities of the labour market, which should boost employment".

Unlike French workers, the EU has made no protest against the anti-democratic way the labour law was passed. Failing to win a majority in parliament, the Hollande/Valls government used an obscure part of the constitution, article 49.3, to force the law through anyway.

But the pressure from the streets makes it even less likely that the government will get a majority the next time the law is discussed in the assembly. MPs could use this to put a vote of no confidence in the government - but last time they failed, leaving the battle to the unions and lycée (further education) students.

The trade unions, in particular the CGT, have been ready to call strikes and demonstrations and declared their willingness to fight till the labour law is dropped, but haven't put forward a clear strategy for how this can be done.

Gauche Révolutionnaire, the sister organisation of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, is calling for meetings to organise the struggle, general assemblies to be held in every town and city from 15 June to discuss and agree the next steps for the movement.

In the port of Le Havre, left activists within the CGT have shown on a small scale how this could be done

across France.

Before each day of action trade unionists have discussed the most effective method of building the struggle, and put it into action. There the struggle involves the masses, not only in very effective blockades of the port and the town, but also with general assemblies at each blockade to discuss how best to continue the struggle.

This could not only help defeat the labour law, but help transform this revolt into an organised political opposition to the government, the right and the far-right, based on workers' struggle.

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## **Theatre review: The Government Inspector**

# **Hilarious, innovative satire on state bureaucracy**

**Andy Ford**

This staging of Nikolai Gogol's 'The Government Inspector' is quite simply the best play I have seen in ten years.

David Harrower's adaptation of the classic comedy of errors is brought to life by mixed-ability theatre company 'Ramps on the Moon'. With great gusto they bring out the wicked satire on the bureaucracy, petty corruption and self-serving verbiage that were among the hallmarks of Tsarist Russia.

However, it is thoroughly applicable to modern times. More and more workers live under the threat of the dreaded inspection from head office, or any of the 'quangos' successive governments have inflicted on the public sector.

And of course, the reaction of modern bosses is very much the same as the hapless Russian managers. At the interval I heard someone declare: "So that's Liverpool City Council, then."

Teachers experience the same from Ofsted; nurses have their inspectors, the NMC and CQC. Even supermarket workers can have a laugh at store managers running around to fix everything before a visit from the regional manager.

The mayor and his colleagues are so panicked that they mistakenly identify a penniless visitor, Khlestakov, as the dreaded Inspector. They shower him with attention, the best food, alcohol, bribes - disguised as 'loans' - and he even ends up engaged to the mayor's daughter.

A classic scene where Khlestakov gives a hysterical drunken speech to the credulous officials, believing his own lies, reminded me very much of vintage Tony Blair. David Carlyle's performance as the mayor is truly outstanding, with echoes of John Cleese and Rick Mayall.

The cast includes actors with various disabilities alongside able-bodied performers. This gives the play an unexpected strength. The whole performance is signed by actors taking part in the action, adding to the physicality of the comedy.

The play is also subtitled for deaf audience members. As some of the actors are profoundly deaf I found this useful to get clarity on some lines - as well as the Russian names!

It is a fantastic achievement - fast paced, very funny, innovative and inclusive. The closest description might be a lost episode of Fawlty Towers - from 1836.

- The final leg of The Government Inspector's UK tour is at the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield, from 17 to 25 June - visit [www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk](http://www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk) to book
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# Unison conference 2016: fighting leadership needed more than ever

## Socialist Party members in Unison

Delegates to the national conference of public sector union Unison gather in Brighton at a time of increasing challenges for the union. Figures produced by Unison show £11 billion has been cut from local government budgets in the last six years. In total half a million jobs have been lost in local government since 2010.

In the health section, our members have seen attacks on pay through down-banding and now threats to unsocial hours payments. Higher education and police and justice members are under constant threat from outsourcing.

To shore up the success of the onslaught on workers we now have the passing of the (anti) Trade Union Act, making it harder for members to take strike action.

## Opportunities

Now more than ever the union needs decisive leadership to face up to the employers. There have been a number of opportunities this year to mobilise Unison members.

The government's dispute with the junior doctors has been hugely damaging for the Tories. An opportunity existed to coordinate Unison health members' pay dispute with the junior doctors and pile pressure on the Tories. Unfortunately this was missed and the health leadership has conceded to a four year pay limit of 1%.

An even bigger opportunity to strike back was this year's local government pay dispute. Following a derisory offer from the employers, a Unison branch consultation overwhelmingly voted to reject. The National Joint Council (NJC) formally requested a ballot for strike action from the Industrial Action Committee (IAC).

However on the advice of the national secretary Heather Wakefield, the IAC turned down the request. It is a poor reflection of member-led democracy in the union when an unelected official like the national secretary can intervene and scupper a request for strike action by a lay body representing the biggest service group.

The role of Heather Wakefield and the 13 members of the NJC who voted to accept the deal against the wishes of the members will quite rightly come under scrutiny at conference with emergency motions from Manchester branch at local government conference.

While member-led initiatives for strike action are thrown in the dustbin, democracy at the very top of the union now has massive question marks hanging over it following the scandal surrounding the recent general secretary election. A leaked recording from the Greater London region led to allegations of interference by senior paid employees of the union in favour of the incumbent, Dave Prentis. This was followed by leaked emails from assistant general secretary Cliff Williams.

The leaked emails, if they prove to be authentic, seem to indicate Williams directing operations for the campaign to re-elect Dave Prentis, known as 'Team Dave'. An internal investigation is only focused on one person implicated in the scandal.

With doubts over the union's appetite for a fight with the employers and its national democracy in the spotlight, it is little wonder that many members have little confidence in the national union to mount a serious fight. It seems some members have drawn the conclusion that they are being left to fight branch by branch. This is one of the motivations for branches to seek a larger share of subs. If the union nationally will not fight, more money needs to stay in the branch where it can be used more effectively.

## Unite

Recent developments all point towards a desperate need for change at the top of the union. The general secretary results - despite returning Dave Prentis - also point in this direction. For the first time in Unison's history, the winner got less than 50% of the vote. If a single anti-Prentis candidate could have been achieved (as the Socialist Party attempted to do in the run up to the election) then the union could have already begun to change.

However the divisions in the opposition camp may finally be coming to an end. The 'Raise the Profile' meeting on 21 June will see representatives of all those looking to change the union sharing a platform for the first time. The Socialist Party began the call for uniting the opposition to Dave Prentis and the bureaucratic machine surrounding him during the general secretary election with a call for a single candidate to challenge him.

This meeting is a further step in pulling together those forces which can open up our union and prepare it for action to fight on the issues facing our members. We hope it can be the beginning of the fight to give this union the fighting leadership it needs and its members deserve.

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## **GMB backs no-cuts budgets and steel nationalisation**

### **Taste for socialism at union's 2016 conference**

**Charlie Taylor, GMB conference delegate (personal capacity)**

General union GMB's 2016 conference in Bournemouth reflected the changed situation sweeping Britain and the globe: the resurgence of socialist ideas - at least in words. Conference passed key motions on no-cuts budgets and steel, but unfortunately backed Trident renewal and the EU Remain campaign.

Socialist Party delegates decided to count how many times the word socialism was mentioned. By the third day we had lost count. Members have had enough of austerity, and are looking for an alternative.

#### **Budgets**

A landmark motion moved by a Socialist Party member passed calling for Labour councils to set legal no-cuts budgets. Such budgets spend their reserves and use prudential borrowing measures to stop austerity now, while building a union-led industrial campaign to win the money back from the Tory government.

The union's ruling central executive council, while supporting the motion, raised qualifications in an effort to undermine it.

One was the idea that councils pooling reserves to help finance no-cuts budgets would lead to combining services, and ultimately job cuts. But cutting councils already combine services to shed jobs. It goes without saying that a 'no-cuts budget' would not make job cuts: the clue is in the name.

The second qualification was that some councils already spend from reserves, which are meant for emergencies like flooding, and cannot do so indefinitely. But the death of council jobs and services is an emergency. In any case, reserve spending is a temporary measure - the strategy aims at winning the money back.

Jeremy Corbyn addressed conference's opening day. He said a Labour government under his leadership would repeal the Tories' Trade Union Act. Tim Roache, the GMB's new general secretary, said the union was fully behind Corbyn. He demanded an end to the Labour right's attacks on him.

Several motions passed called for public ownership, including the railways. In the manufacturing section conference, one delegate said we should "not be afraid to use the N-word" - nationalisation.

A motion passed on steel called for an emergency meeting of shop stewards across the industry to organise a joint conference and mass campaign. Tata must open up accounts for inspection by workers. Steel must be nationalised, and all job losses stopped.

## EU

On the EU referendum, the union's leadership took a Remain position a while back and reiterated this throughout. The leadership said it was for an 'angry Remain'. There is no 'angry Remain' on the ballot paper.

There was no real debate on the issue. A statement by the executive supporting Remain passed almost unanimously.

GMB also recommitted to supporting renewal of Trident. Leaders said thousands of members' jobs were at risk if not. But Trident workers could be redeployed - at first decommissioning nuclear weapons, then transferred to socially useful work such as wind energy.

Socialist Party members held a successful fringe meeting that saw new people attend. The hard work starts now in campaigning for key policies, like no-cuts budgets and steel nationalisation, to be implemented.

- Read more on the GMB's no-cuts budget debate: <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/22995>

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## Pennine Foods strike forces bosses back to the table

Chris McAndrew and Joe Diviney

Strike action has scored a victory at Pennine Foods in Sheffield.

Bosses have suspended implementation of new contracts, and agreed to backdate a 2% pay rise for all workers to last August. Negotiations are still ongoing, with bakers' union BFAWU saying parent company 2 Sisters is making "major moves in our direction."

Management tried to make workers pay for Tory chancellor George Osborne's new National 'Living Wage'. Some staff faced losing up to £5,000. BFAWU, which has 400 members at the factory, staged two 48-hour strikes against new contracts.

After the first stoppage, bosses sent a letter to strikers saying how "disappointed" the company was, and claimed it had not affected production. This did not stand up to reason during the next strike.

A hundred-strong picket line ensured no lorries got in or out for the duration, shutting down the factory. The strike cost the company thousands.

After seeing off attempts by South Yorkshire Police to escort lorries across the line, a mass meeting voted for a week of strike action. Faced with a whole week of lost profits, management returned to the negotiating table.

BFAWU members will want to remain vigilant and ready to strike again if bosses try to make savings in the new contract. Workers remain enthusiastic. One said they are "ready to go at a moment's notice."

This victory shows the importance of bold and resolute strike action.

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## Hospital porters and domestic staff claim jobs and pay victory



Domestic staff and porters at Whipps Cross Hospital in east London have won a significant pay increase and job security. The pay rise - over 20% - and permanent contracts - follow a sustained campaign by general union Unite.

One worker described how the success would affect her: "This will mean a real improvement in my living standard and importantly some security through a permanent employment contract."

The overwhelmingly female migrant workforce had, in some cases, been working on 'bank' - zero-hour contracts - for up to four years. Their employer, outsourcing firm Carillion, had been paying the minimum rate. Permanent workers are paid the higher NHS 'Agenda for Change' rates.

The union's success will see pay rise from £7.20 to £9.40 an hour. Agency domestic and portering staff, also on minimum rates, are set to benefit too: casual jobs will convert into permanent employment contracts.

Unite branch secretary and porter Len Hockey, a member of the Socialist Party, said: "This is a huge success story for these workers. The union has campaigned determinedly for over two years to achieve this.

"Now these workers, who are integral links in the chain of care delivered to every patient at Whipps Cross Hospital, have, through their union, secured permanent employment contracts at the London Living Wage pay rate."

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## Six day strike at Argos depot against contracting out of jobs

Steve Score, Leicester Socialist Party

A six day strike by over 400 Unite members at the Argos Lutterworth depot in Leicestershire began just after midnight on 7 June. Warehouse and admin staff are out alongside drivers. 96 drivers are being transferred by the company to Eddie Stobart Ltd. They are demanding that the company cancels the transfer, which is meant to happen on 12 June. Argos gave very short notice, allowing the union little time to organise a ballot.

Stobart's has a bad record on workers' terms and conditions and Unite members believe that they would be under threat if the transfer goes through. In 2012 for example, as reported in the Socialist, 183 Tesco drivers in Doncaster were transferred over to Eddie Stobart, yet within one month were all given notice of redundancy.

Larry McGlinchey, Unite steward in the warehouse, spoke to *the Socialist* on the picket line:

"We had a ballot and got a 75% vote for a strike. We have a national agreement with the company around changes in terms and conditions, but they decided to ignore that and just go ahead and Tupe our drivers over with the minimum legal notice.

"If it does go ahead, we asked Argos to build remaining on the same terms and conditions for the next three years into the terms of the transfer. They refused. We asked them details about what will happen in the warehouse, because we believe that the warehouse will go the same way. We asked them to offer the drivers decent severance if they decided not to transfer over to Eddie Stobart. Argos wouldn't give us any guarantees.

"This is an important issue. The only reason the strike is limited to six days is because the jobs are due to get transferred over to another employer - so the legal ballot doesn't stand. A lot of these drivers have been with the company 20 years; the least they could have done was to speak to us. They didn't."

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 9 June 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in *The Socialist*.

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# Buses parked three deep in Leeds strike

**Iain Dalton**

"They make £11 million in profits in Leeds alone, and all their offer adds up to is around half a million. It's a shame it has to come to this to get them to give us more." Those were the words of one of many Unite the Union members picketing the two First Group bus depots in Leeds on 13 June.

Over 100 pickets were at the Hunslet depot, while around 30 were outside Bramley. The latter was shut completely for the day. Buses were parked three deep at Hunslet around 8am. By that point the depot would usually be largely empty.

Management had prepared for the strike, sending buses to the disused Cherry Road depot and offering higher pay and bonuses to scabs and managers. But the number of buses operating was far less than the hundreds that usually run, probably not enough to run even the skeleton service that First tried to provide.

Drivers in Leeds are paid £2 an hour less than those in nearby Halifax. Bosses offered drivers a 3% raise for the year, half not be paid until January. Meanwhile managers have had an increase of up to 5% in pay and bonuses.

One worker explained that "in the past the union has just recommended to us what management has offered us, but this year they put it to us to decide whether we wanted to push for more." This more militant attitude reflects drivers winning a series of disputes in the last year or so.

Given the substantial disruption, most drivers were confident the company would be forced to come back with an improved offer. But even if Leeds drivers win a substantial increase, a logical next step would be for First drivers across West Yorkshire to push for a higher, unified rate of pay across all sites.

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# Durham school support staff mobilise against slashing of pay

**Elaine Brunskill**

Around 400 angry teaching assistants (TAs) packed into a meeting called by Durham Trades Council. The meeting was called to support this group of workers whose terms and conditions are under attack by the Labour controlled Durham County Council.

The predominantly female TAs are furious at the council's controversial decision to sack 2,700 support staff then rehire them on worse pay, by only paying them during term time. This will leave many of these workers with up to a quarter of their wages slashed.

TAs told how staff at some schools have been 'banned' from joining the Facebook support group. Others have been warned to be careful regarding what they say on social media as they could be sacked with no reference. They have been warned not to contact local councillors, nor to discuss the issue in the staffroom. They have even been warned not to take it out on the children!

This group of dedicated workers are facing an uncertain future. In some cases where two members of the same household are TAs they face losing around £5,000 a year. It was reported that one woman has already sold her home because she feared it would be repossessed as she would no longer be able to keep up her mortgage payments. One woman told the audience that she has cried every single day since the decision was made.

There was a groundswell of anger that a Labour dominated council was attacking workers that they believed it

should be defending. One woman pointed out: "This isn't what the Labour Party is supposed to be about". The Labour council has dutifully agreed to cut services; and it is estimated that the attack on the TAs could save in the region of £3 million a year.

Calls for the Labour councillors to stop being managers for the Tories and instead to stand up and fight the cuts received enthusiastic applause.

There was also frustration at the lack of fightback from the union Unison, which has not yet balloted for industrial action. There was a feeling that Unison is in a cosy relationship with the Labour council and unwilling to put its members' interests before that of the Labour Party.

There was an understanding within the workforce that it was important to be in a trade union, but one woman in the audience asked: "Where are they tonight?" No union officers attended the meeting. Unison officials had instead tried to pressure the trades council to cancel the meeting.

The perceived inactivity of the unions Unison and GMB has led the TAs to organise their own campaign to defend their conditions.

The TAs can win this dispute if the level of anger and activity can be maintained. It is important that they orientate their campaign into their unions, particularly Unison, to democratise them and make the unions work for them.

The key demands of the TAs should include that the unions organise workplace meetings and recruit union stewards in every school, in order to ensure the workforce is fully informed and engaged, to win a vote for strike action.

Following the meeting many TAs are interacting with the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), which organises mutual solidarity across both private and public sector workers.

- [Click here for details of the NSSN 10th annual conference, 2nd July 2016](#)

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 13 June 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## **Uber drivers strike against unfair fares**

Around a thousand taxi drivers for multinational private hire firm Uber struck for 24 hours on 6 June. Strikers also protested outside Uber's Birmingham office at midday.

The action, backed by drivers' association United Private Hire Drivers, highlighted issues such as reducing passenger fares without consulting staff.

If they refuse to pick up a fare - for instance, if the distance is too far - bosses can also take drivers, technically 'self-employed', off the books. This means drivers are forced to take on jobs even if they will not earn a real wage from it.

A spokesperson for the drivers said:

"The fare deductions have forced us to do more fares for less money. Uber continues to insist drivers are earning more, but only states gross takings without even basic deductions for insurance, fuel and other running costs."

Uber has also recently come under scrutiny for tax avoidance (see Uber and Facebook tax dodge scandal). Mistreatment of staff and the race to the bottom in wages is just another example of how big business exploits workers to pump profits into the 1%.

The Socialist Party fully supports strike action by Uber drivers. Scrap phoney 'self-employed' casual contracts - for job security and flexibility on our terms, not the bosses'. For collective bargaining rights and a guaranteed living wage for all drivers.

**Corinthia Ward**

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## **Lorry stoppage paves the way to victory**

Lorry drivers at Marshalls paving suppliers are striking across the country because of the firm's refusal to honour an overtime agreement. All other sections of the workforce earn 'time and a half' - including forklift operators, who sit in the cab next to drivers earning a third less than them!

There was good morale on the picket line at the St Ives, Cambridgeshire depot on 13 June. The strike began at 4am and went on until 7pm. Spirits were high. Drivers have refused to work on Saturdays on four previous occasions.

Marshalls has sites across the UK and is a major supplier for public and corporate bodies, as well as households.

Workers are incensed, particularly as the firm appears optimistic about its prospects in the annual report to investors.

There was also a concern at the St Ives site that some managers had not been taking the grievance seriously, but instead had resorted to bullying.

**Bob Cossey-Mowle**

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## **Solidarity with victimised bakers' union rep**

After months of intimidation, Leicestershire-based food giant Samworth Brothers has sacked popular bakers' union BFAWU rep Kumaran Bose. Workers are fighting pay restructuring at the firm.

George Atwall, BFAWU regional organiser, said: "Kumaran has worked for the company for twelve years with neither a blemish to his name or his work record; but since the dispute began, he has been subjected to a severe campaign of bullying from his managers.

"Kumaran's only crime has been his outstanding success in convincing more than 50% of the workers in his factory to join the Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union. What his managers particularly disliked was his brave decision to stand up for his rights and refuse to accept that he and his fellow workers should be treated so appallingly, and that their families should be denied a decent standard of living."

Reports state that presently management is disciplining another union rep.

**Mike Barker**

- Messages of protest to Samworth Brothers: paul.davey@bradgate-bakery.co.uk, Tesco: kris.comerford@uk.tesco.com
  - The National Shop Stewards Network and BFAWU have called a public meeting on Saturday 18 June, 6.30pm, at Secular Hall in Leicester to demand Bose's reinstatement
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## **Come to National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) conference**

Saturday 2 July 2016, 11am to 4.30pm

Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL (Tube: Holborn)

Kumaran Bose will speak, alongside a trade unionist from the France strikes, BMA junior doctors, BFAWU, FBU, RMT, PCS, POA - come talk about your dispute too!

[www.shopstewards.net](http://www.shopstewards.net)

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## **Action to defeat the Housing Act: we won't move!**

**Nancy Taaffe, housing campaigner**

Disgracefully, the Tory government's Housing and Planning Act 2016 became law on 12 May. Pressure from housing campaigners forced some concessions but the central intention of this act - to eliminate secure low cost housing for working class people - still remains.

It will 'cleanse' our inner cities of workers - the very people who make cities function. It will force us onto cramped, privatised transport, spending our time and our money for the privilege of working. Or it will mean that the only way we may live near our work is to squeeze into overcrowded homes.

The Socialist Party has a proud history of campaigning to defeat bad laws and scoring victories against Tory governments. We forced Thatcher's ministers to stump up extra funding for Liverpool's socialist council in the 1980s, which built thousands of new council homes. We led a mass non-payment campaign in the early 1990s which defeated the unjust Poll Tax and helped bring down Thatcher. More recently our sister organisation in Ireland, with its strategy of mass non-payment, forced the government to retreat over implementing the hated water charges.

We intend to do the same with this spiteful Housing Act. We will be organising around the defiant strategy of 'I'm Not Moving', and bring together people who want to make this Act unworkable.

- No to 'pay-to-stay' rent rises. We say to local councils, housing associations, etc, that we have no intention of paying extortionate rents for homes that many of us have lived in for years.
  - If any arrears accrue because we are too poor to pay - we will not move!
  - If our estates are threatened with demolition from bogus plans for 'regeneration' - we will not move.
  - If councillors don't actively oppose this act and make it unworkable, then we will encourage tenants, residents, and campaigners to stand against them in local elections.
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See also: [The Housing Act - Landlords and developers set to profit](#)

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- 'We Won't Move' all-London public meeting, Tuesday 21 June, 7.30 at The Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, W1T 6AQ
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# Axe the Housing Act national demo

Saturday 18 June, 12noon Hyde Park Corner, London SW1

[www.wewontmove.blogspot.co.uk/](http://www.wewontmove.blogspot.co.uk/)

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## Housing Act: landlords and developers set to profit

Paul Kershaw, Chair, Unite LE/1111 housing workers branch

The new housing act will help property developers and landlords make profits but it will do nothing for people who need affordable secure homes.

Unless resisted, it will mean the end of what we know as social housing. Working class communities will be smashed up and the housing crisis will get worse. More people will be driven into expensive insecure private renting.

Recently, the Financial Times reported that buy-to-let assets hit a staggering £1.2 trillion and rental income reached a record level, much of it coming from the government through housing benefit. There is overwhelming popular support for rent control but no such move in this act.

There will be a 'tenant tax' on council tenant households. As soon as two people have a combined income above £31,000 (£40,000 in London) they will be hit by rent increases of 15p in the pound for every pound they earn, until they reach market or "near market" levels.

This 'pay-to-stay' policy is intended to push people into taking up 'right-to-buy' but would force many to move or drive them into poverty. Many tenants are already saying "can't pay, will stay" and councils should commit to not implementing this means test and not evicting tenants.

There is no legislative requirement for housing associations to introduce means testing; many will be planning to do so but campaigners and local councils should demand that they don't.

Secure tenancies will go, replaced by fixed-term agreements for new tenancies. Councils should commit to continue to give security to tenants. It is good that Islington council has given this commitment. All councils must take the same stand.

Council homes in 'higher value' areas will be sold off as they become empty. The money raised - or an equivalent levy - will subsidise the extension of the right-to-buy to housing association tenants. This will drastically reduce the supply of social housing for rent by an estimated 75,000 homes over the next five years.

Private developers will no longer be obliged to provide social rented housing on new sites, instead, they'll build publicly subsidised 'starter homes' that will cost up to £250,000 (£450,000 in London). Such prices are unaffordable to most workers.

Councils will be required to compile a "brownfield register" of all development sites sufficient for five homes or more. This would include open space on council estates, 100 of which have been described as "sink estates" by David Cameron.

Combined with a weakening of planning controls making it harder for communities to challenge developers, it is clear that council estates are being targeted for clearance as untrammelled money making opportunities for developers.

Housing associations, which now manage about 60% of social housing in England, will be further deregulated. They will be free to sell off homes or switch them from social rent to market rent without seeking consent. They are increasingly driven by undiluted commercial motives; some have already declared their intention to move away from social housing. Many are also moving to cut jobs and services.

In April, three big housing associations agreed to join the trend to mega-mergers of what were once small local social housing providers. L&Q, Hyde and East Thames will be worth £30 billion and will manage 135,000 homes. They boast they will be one of the biggest house builders in the UK but they aren't planning to build social rented homes. Homes for sale and market or near market rents are their priority. Last year, East Thames told tenants to either buy their homes or leave. For remaining social tenants their message is blunt. Elaine Bailey, who will be number two in the new organisation, says housing associations have been responsible for a "dependency culture" and, in future, they will be doing less for tenants.

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## **Generation rent demands affordable housing**

**Helen Pattison**

It came as no surprise to read young people spend around half their wages on rent. I moved to London four years ago and here the housing crisis is particularly bad. I've lived in six different places, mainly because unscrupulous landlords have wanted to drastically increase the rent.

So when London's Labour Mayor, Sadiq Khan, called for "genuinely affordable homes" in his election manifesto, you would be forgiven for thinking he was going to tackle the housing crisis.

But now Khan says Londoners will have to wait two or three years for his "affordable" housing because of Boris Johnson's spending legacy. But playing the blame game doesn't help young people cover the rent.

There is an acute housing crisis, while luxury flats and new buildings are going up everywhere. So why can't new council houses be started now?

In the private sector landlords need to be controlled. A rent cap could help stop them charging rip-off prices, making housing actually affordable to young people.

The real worry with the housing crisis is its lasting effect.

Many of today's younger generation spend the majority of wages on rent, have to leave home later and share housing for longer.

The impact is a generation forced to postpone their lives because they can't afford suitable housing.

Young people have waited long enough. We want the housing crisis tackling now.

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## **Re-open Chorley A&E - end the staff shortages**

**Becci Heagney**

Residents have been protesting weekly outside Chorley and South Ribble Hospital A&E department since it closed suddenly in April because of staff shortages. The campaign called a mass protest on Saturday 11 June to demand it is reopened.

Despite torrential rain and the Health Trust CEO, the night before, assuring us it was only a temporary closure, over 3,000 people joined the march.

Nobody is convinced the A&E will re-open in August, as is being suggested. Nearby Wigan and Preston Hospitals are feeling the strain, telling people to stay away.

The demo was made up of families in the main, with the whole community coming together. Hundreds of bikers headed up the march, revving their engines and making plenty of noise. As the sea of people dressed in yellow with homemade placards and trade union banners made its way through the town centre, people

stopped and applauded.

Unity was shown from the Hands off HRI campaign as Huddersfield campaigners (see below) joined the protest.

The campaign has pledged to protest every week until the A&E re-opens. The NHS is under attack but people are fighting back. There needs to be a linking up of the local NHS campaigns into a national network.

The health trade unions and the TUC should call a mass national protest to defend the NHS, uniting with junior doctors and student nurses.

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## **Hands Off HRI campaign grows from strength to strength**

**Mike Forster, Chair, Hands Off HRI (personal capacity)**

It's almost six months since the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) announced it was intending to close Huddersfield A&E Department. Over 100,000 people have signed petitions demanding the CCG reverses its decision, and there have been countless rallies and protests all over the town.

The CCG's 'consultation' comes to an end on 21 June and the HandsoffHRI campaign group is now in full swing to ensure local people fill in the survey forms. Our target is to get more than 10,000 filled in. After that, we will have to wait for at least another four or five months to hear the outcome.

### **Young people**

A public meeting on 20 June to launch the next stage of the campaign will be addressed by other campaign groups from around the country, including Chorley, Lewisham and Shropshire.

Huddersfield Socialist Party has been proud to continue playing an integral role in this hugely important struggle, initiating many of the activities and setting up the Youth for HRI Group.

- [www.handsoffhri.org](http://www.handsoffhri.org)

### **Public meeting**

Monday 20 June 7.00pm at Huddersfield Methodist Mission, Lord St, and a follow-up Socialist Party meeting at the Huddersfield Irish Centre, Thursday 23 June, 7.15pm to be addressed by Dr Jackie Grunsell 'CCG Hear us Say, HRI is Here to Stay'

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## **Systemic failures hurt kids in justice system**

**Chas Berry, National Vice-Chair, probation and courts union Napo (personal capacity)**

Investigations into two separate incidents involving children held in custody reveal a youth justice system in crisis.

A report just published by the Independent Police Complaints Commission heavily criticises Sussex Police for its treatment of an eleven-year-old disabled girl. Police hooded, handcuffed and detained her for 60 hours without access to an appropriate adult in 2012.



Such techniques amount to child abuse. Eleven officers and one staff member now face misconduct charges.

Earlier this year, BBC Panorama also uncovered shocking abuse at the Medway Secure Training Centre in Kent. It is run by infamous outsourcing firm G4S, and houses up to 75 children aged between 12 and 18.

Footage showed excessive force used against a child called 'Billy', and officers boasting about the physical and emotional abuse they regularly use against 'disruptive pupils'. Equally shocking were scenes showing the systematic falsification of evidence to protect staff. This may explain why six of the eleven arrests so far are only for 'misconduct in public office'.

Too many children in England and Wales are held in custody. Socialists are right to question whether those as young as eleven or 12 should be detained at all.

When detention is used, however, youth justice agencies have a duty to protect those in their care. Interestingly, Billy's mother told local press that the centre shouldn't close, but "there should be a lot more training for staff to deal with the mental health issues that these kids have."

Individual abusers must be dealt with. But these incidents also show systemic failures that the increasingly under-resourced and privatised criminal justice system is incapable of addressing.

Kicking out the privateers - and funding proper training, job security, and decent pay and conditions - would help with some of these problems. Democratic accountability of the police and justice system to working class communities is also essential.

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## **Them & Us**

### **Student sharks**

Students paying £9,000 a year tuition fees finally have an escape from chronic pennilessness: a loan shark especially for students!

Wonga-style lender 'Smart-Pig.com' - tagline 'loans for students' - advertises rip-off credit arrangements on beer mats. Even the Advertising Standards Authority has slammed the firm for inciting vulnerable students to borrow for booze.

The regulator also criticised ads which exploited the housing crisis. Posters seemed to encourage students to take out extortionate loans for a chance at winning a term's rent.

Smart-Pig.com makes much of being a "student start-up", and claims more humane savagery than other payday lenders. But it still has its nose in the trough of financial misery - and what a trough! The pig-sharks advertise their 'representative APR' - yearly interest and fees on borrowings - as a succulent 1,084%.

### **BHS burglary**

Department store BHS will close, at a loss of 11,000 jobs, confirm administrators Duff and Phelps.

MPs are now questioning Mike Ashley, workhouse-master of retailer Sports Direct, who allegedly bid on the failing enterprise. No doubt he'd have used his wealth and influence to save BHS jobs and pensions.

Sorry, we meant to write: "No doubt he'd have used his wealth and influence to disembowel BHS jobs and pensions, like the frenzied, profit-hungry asset stripper he is." The Socialist, in contrast, called for nationalisation.

While workers ready themselves for the cruel gauntlet of job seeking, previous owner Philip Green recently bought his third superyacht.

## Having a Giraffe

Supermarket Tesco is selling its restaurant subsidiary Giraffe to Ranjit Boparan. If that name sounds familiar, it's because Boparan owns 2 Sisters - which recently tried to slash pay at Pennine Foods in Sheffield (see [Pennine Foods strike forces bosses back to the table](#)).

While Giraffe staff face uncertain futures in the hands of another vicious anti-worker bully, Tesco returned to profit this year. Its pre-tax profits were £162 million for the year to February, after posting its first loss in two decades in 2015.

Giraffe workers would do well to follow Pennine Foods: join a union and be ready to fight.

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## Socialist Party fundraising: punching above our weight

**Caroline Vincent**

The Socialist Party is funded differently to capitalist political parties - we don't receive our money from big business. Rather, it comes from members' and supporters' donations.

For this reason, it is vital that we develop effective finance organisers in every party branch. With this in mind, around 50 members from across England and Wales attended the Socialist Party national finance meeting on 11 June.

Deputy general secretary Hannah Sell provided a political backdrop to the tasks we face, opening the meeting with a discussion on the political situation in Britain.

The EU referendum has been dominated in the mass media by right-wing arguments on either side, but Hannah pointed out that a significant layer of workers agree with our socialist reasons for exit - when they hear them.

Many people are seeking a political alternative to the establishment parties - providing an opportunity for building the Socialist Party. But without money, we would achieve nothing! We need to make sure that the Socialist, Socialism Today and our other publications are read as widely as possible. Posters, placards, leaflets are also essential for us to get our ideas out there.

The Tories' cuts have affected our own members; some have lost their job or had pay or benefits cut. We have responded to these challenges over the past 12 months by aiming to increase membership subs, fighting fund and sales of the Socialist and Socialism Today.

This has paid off with significant improvements to our income. For example, in the first three months of 2016 an impressive £36,281 was raised in fighting fund - a record for the first quarter. The meeting discussed innovative ways in which branches had fundraised - from fun runs to badge sales - as well as how we can increase income from the subs and sales of the Socialist.

We are a small party relative to the tasks at hand, but as national treasurer Ken Douglas commented, "our influence is out of all proportion to our size". A serious approach to finance will allow us to continue to punch above our weight.

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