

Butterfields victory: housing crisis can be beaten

Sarah Wrack, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

When we organise and fight back, we can win. That's the lesson of the Butterfields Won't Budge campaign.

When the east London tenants first met at a street meeting on a cold and wet February morning, they agreed to set out with one aim- to stay in their homes. And now it seems that's exactly what they've achieved.

On 8 October it was announced that a deal has been agreed, subject to contract, for Dolphin Living Trust to buy the 49 flats on the Butterfields estate which are still tenanted. This comes ten months after 63 families were first told that their homes had been sold and their new landlord wanted them out.

Evictions halted

Unfortunately 13 have moved under the pressure of the threatened evictions and one disabled pensioner sadly died recently. But the evictions will now cease, along with all court proceedings, and all remaining tenants will be able to stay in their homes.

"Thank you to all involved for making us realise we were not powerless to resist" Adrienne, treasurer of the tenants association, wrote on the campaign's Facebook page on behalf of the tenants. As news spread around the estate and supporters, the mood was ecstatic and emotional. "People really can change things" more than one resident remarked.

They all talked of a weight lifted from their shoulders, many saying they had been increasingly worried, with Christmas approaching, of the insecurity hanging over them. All expressed huge gratitude to the Socialist Party for the unwavering support and guidance offered from the start.

Bucking the trend

We spent the day discussing how we'd got here. Many people commented on how the experience at Butterfields is completely counter to the general trend in housing at the moment.

More than a million people are waiting for council homes. Every week there are new stories of people being housed in temporary accommodation miles away from where they're from because of shortages. In the private rented sector people live in fear of eviction and the average Londoner spends two thirds of their income on rent.

In this context the Butterfields victory is huge. Its lessons must be learnt in every area and every housing campaign. At the heart of the tactics of the campaign was a simple message from tenants - "we're not moving".

This was backed up with successfully demanding a boycott of the properties by estate agents, disrupting auction sales, covering the estate in posters and banners, getting the support of John McDonnell, fundraising to prepare for legal battles, being ready to resist against bailiffs, a social media campaign which gathered donations and signatures in support, and lots more.

All of the work was organised democratically through the tenants' and residents' association which was set up at the start of the campaign on the suggestion of the Socialist Party. All involved agree this should continue functioning to maintain tenant solidarity in the future.

These tactics, of being firmly organised, of not moving, and of bold public campaigning, should be replicated across the country. Similar issues could be faced by thousands, for example, as the Housing and Planning Act is implemented by councils.

The ideas and experience of the Socialist Party, combined with the bravery and determination of these tenants, who are from many areas of the world and overwhelmingly low paid, have been the key factors in securing this victory. We'll continue working together to ensure the contract is signed as agreed and to organise a party on 25 November. Butterfields Won't Budge!

"The Socialist Party raised our voices"

This is a speech made by Anna Palumbo, a leading tenant in the campaign, at a meeting organised by Waltham Forest Trades Council two days after hearing the news.

Good evening everybody. I know we are all involved in many battles - to protect our jobs, to protect our homes, to ensure our kids' education and future. And I am here tonight to testify that if you fight, you have a chance to win.

We achieved a great victory last week. We won our homes back.

I live in Butterfields, a little estate in Walthamstow, whose flats had been sold by a charity to an aggressive developer, who wanted to resell them as vacants to make the maximum profit.

We faced eviction for ten months. We have been threatened with becoming homeless. But we decided to fight. We decided not to budge.

And our lovely Linda and Nancy Taaffe, together with other amazing members of the Socialist Party, embraced our cause. They helped us organise our battle. They led our marches.

They raised our voices through the media. They wiped out our tears when we lost our hope, encouraging us to hold on together and resist.

They sought and obtained political attention - Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell contacted RBS [the mortgage holder] and the local MP Stella Creasy finalised the deal with Dolphin.

And we won! 49 of 63 flats are now in the process of being sold to Dolphin Living Trust.

We are celebrating our victory together. And I hope we can all celebrate together the victory of many other battles.

Tories' £5bn for housing not enough

For a socialist plan of mass council home building

Suzanne Beishon, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

The Tory party conference made its play for our support by appearing to announce £5 billion for a mass house building programme. They gleefully pledged they will be the party to alleviate the huge burden of crippling housing costs on working people.

Chancellor Philip Hammond's speech even seemed to indicate a break from some of Osborne's austerity measures, splashing public cash for the greater good of trying to "solve the housing crisis".

But don't be fooled into thinking this vicious Tory government has suddenly softened up. Far from it.

It is still the same government that last year decided to opt out of legislation stipulating rental properties should be "fit for human habitation". It is still in the same parliament filled with landlord MPs - including 128 Tories, and 50 Labour MPs - who feast off renters to supplement their generous salaries.

So what does this new scheme really mean?

Of the newly pledged money, £2 billion will go on an 'accelerated construction scheme' to free up land for up to 15,000 new homes by 2020. The other £3 billion will go to the 'home building fund' to stimulate 25,000 more in the same timeframe, as part of a long-term plan for 200,000 homes.

The current council house waiting list in England alone is 1.24 million. That doesn't include people not allowed onto the list, and those who despair at even trying. 200,000 mostly private homes will not scratch the surface.

Social housing campaign Shout calculates that building just 100,000 social homes a year would save nearly a trillion pounds in housing benefit in little more than a generation, as well as guaranteeing more safe and secure homes. But the need is greater even than that.

It is only a socialist mass house building plan that is capable of solving the crisis. One that takes the wealth off the super-rich 1% - and uses it democratically to provide secure, affordable homes for all.

Minimum space standards

We were offered a hint of the much darker subtext of Tory plans when Housing Minister Gavin Barwell exclaimed he wanted the private sector to "innovate". But Barwell's unique innovation is that rules on minimum space standards - already the smallest in Europe - should be relaxed. So young people can afford to plunge their meagre savings - if they exist - on uninhabitable boxes.

Barwell even boldly attacked Jeremy Corbyn's pledge to build half a million council houses as being "the denial of people's ambitions and dreams"! He claimed, bizarrely, that it would increase inequality and "widen the divide in society".

These are just slurs aimed at undermining the idea that good quality social housing is a respectable place to live.

The Tories' plans mean developers are made to feel comfortable, building a paltry 40,000 homes over four years, safe in the knowledge the government will shell out for properties that don't sell. Meanwhile, the real and immediate problems of high house prices and soaring rents go untouched.

The government still ignores calls for rent controls. It refuses to block speculators snapping up properties - three in four new builds have gone to foreign investors in recent years. It allows empty homes to keep prices high, and takes no action against overcrowding, slum landlords and more.

It is still the same government that puts the welfare of ordinary people behind the profits of the super-rich. Because ultimately, that's not where Tory interests lie.

They don't lie with ordinary people trapped in a spiralling rental market that means they will likely never be able to afford to save a penny towards a deposit or feel secure in their homes. They lie with big businesses and banks that look to profit from desperate first-time buyers. They lie with landlords excitedly snatching up these new builds to enhance their lucrative rental portfolios.

Kick out the Tories and the Blairite shadows, acting for the big landlords and business owners. Build a party for the 99%.

What we think

Tories whip up division over Brexit...fight for a socialist, internationalist exit

Three months ago the Tories and British capitalism suffered a massive defeat. Similar to the Scottish independence referendum in 2014, the Brexit vote was a democratic uprising - a rejection by millions of working class people of the establishment. It dealt a huge blow to European capitalism into the bargain.

The lack of a left exit campaign by most of the leaders of the labour movement meant that the only mainstream leadership given to Leave was from the racist right wing. Understandably that meant many people were repelled by that and voted Remain to stand against racism and nationalism.

Capitalism's crisis - continued economic disaster, the increasing gap between the obscene wealth at the top and the suffering of the rest, growing discontent, and a crisis in the establishment political parties - is expressed most keenly in the Brexit vote.

During the referendum campaign, the Tory party was split, providing the leadership of both Remain and Leave. British big business found itself without a reliable political party to defend its interests. The Socialist Party raised the likelihood that a Brexit vote would bring the end of David Cameron and George Osborne.

We argued, and vigorously fought for, a socialist, internationalist exit campaign, explaining that the EU is a bosses' club. Had Jeremy Corbyn and the trade union leaders taken that bold, socialist approach, that huge elemental anger could have been channelled into a fight against the Tories and for jobs, homes and services for all. It could have brought down not just Cameron but the whole Tory government.

Even though that opportunity was not seized, the Brexit vote still tore the Tories apart. Cameron and Osborne are gone. If the Labour right had not immediately, scandalously, turned on Corbyn, the Tories could have fallen from power. The coup against Corbyn was mounted in haste in fear of an early election.

Tory crisis

So now, temporarily saved by the Blairites, an unelected prime minister sits atop a Tory government with a tiny majority, voted for by only 24% of the electorate.

There is a massive anger, a rage against the rich, who have gorged on increased wealth since the onset of the economic crisis in 2007-8. Inevitably, even despite the woeful role of the majority of the trade union leaders, there is and will be more struggle.

At last week's Tory conference, new prime minister Theresa May posed Brexit as a historic turning point, an opportunity for "a change in the direction of the nation." May described the Brexit vote as a "quiet revolution", an expression of a "deep, profound and often justified" sense that "the world works for the privileged few but not for them." Her aim was to try to abate class struggle. To say to working class people that things will change. "It was not the wealthy who made the biggest sacrifice after the crisis, but ordinary working class families." She used the words "working class" six times in her conference speech.

But she also wanted to say to her party and the bosses, 'we have to rein it in, or there'll be trouble for our system'. She said: "Resentment will grow and divisions will be entrenched". She made pointed attacks on privileged tax avoiders and bosses who pay themselves big dividends while workers' pension schemes collapse.

Fearing the social and economic consequences of their policies, the Tories overturned their economic policy in one fell swoop. Suddenly, in words at least, and with no acknowledgement of the misery imposed for the last six years, gone is the promise of endless austerity and George Osborne's commitment to a budget surplus by 2020, replaced now with talk of government intervention and investment, and reduced austerity. As socialists argued from the very start, austerity does not work, even from the point of view of capitalism. Slash jobs, wages and benefits and people cannot spend money.

Of course, the government's hope is to stimulate the economy in the interests of the capitalists. The latest survey of businesses by the British Chambers of Commerce shows a marked slowdown in the services sector and widespread fears about Brexit. The UK's trade deficit has widened. The recent crisis of Deutsche bank in Germany is a warning of the huge debt crisis that still besets the European economy. Brutal austerity for the majority will continue, along with other right-wing divisive policies such as grammar schools.

Tensions

So in the name of trying to create a united country, the Tories of course sowed division. The racist right and the leaderships of both Remain and Leave camps led campaigns that scapegoated migrants for the vast inequalities of crisis-riven capitalism, and the Tory conference confirms the continuation of that, ratcheting up anti-foreigner rhetoric. It serves the purpose of a dog-whistle to Tory loyalists while stoking up tensions between working class people.

David Cameron's downfall was in his attempt to square the circle: to appease the eurosceptic right of his party with a referendum while campaigning in the interests of big business for Remain. Theresa May faces the same impossibility.

May campaigned for Remain. But now she has stated that Brexit means working towards 'getting back control' over immigration and achieving sovereignty, ahead of access to the single market.

This is not what the majority of big business want. The majority of big business want a 'soft Brexit' - that is, barely Brexit at all, keeping access to the single market, which means free movement of goods, services, capital and labour. 44% of British exports go to the single market. Big business generally prefers to trade and move around capital freely, and to be able to super-exploit cheap labour.

The capitalist establishment needs its political representatives to organise for this outcome. But the Tories' inability to come together to achieve this, and the civil war in the Labour Party, which is about the future of the party as a "second eleven" for capitalism, means there is no clear political representation of this requirement.

While some sections of finance capital look forward to the idea of the City of London as a Singapore-style free financial centre, the majority see that there are risks to London's leading financial position outside of the EU.

It is possible that May hopes that grandstanding like this will force the hand of other European leaders into allowing more concessions on access to the single market. But German Chancellor Angela Merkel says categorically that the UK will not be part of the single market without the free movement of people. French leader Hollande has warned that Britain will have to "pay a price" for Brexit.

Their fear is that Brexit threatens the continuation of the EU itself. Once one country dictates its own conditions in the single market the whole project of trying to draw different European nations into one capitalist trading bloc could start to unravel.

The pound plunged in a 'flash crash'. CBI bosses fear that Brexit will bring the British economy to its knees. Carolyn Fairbairn, the CBI director, warned that a 'hard Brexit' could make things worse for the country's trade, and that a clampdown on migrant labour could "close the door" to Britain remaining an open trading economy.

A 'hard Brexit' is also not what significant sections of May's own party want. The eurosceptic majority in the Tory party oppose the EU at least in part on 'patriotic' ideological grounds, harking back to British imperialism's 'glorious' past. But while Brexit minister David Davis argues that there is no downside to Brexit, chancellor Philip Hammond has come out as leader of a 'soft Brexit' movement. He is joined by former education secretary Nicky Morgan and former business minister Anna Soubry.

In particular, Amber Rudd's speech threatening to name and shame companies that employ foreign labour was disastrous for the government. Even a pro-Brexit former ally of David Cameron, Steve Hilton, called the plans "divisive, repugnant and insanely bureaucratic" - they might as well announce "that foreign workers will be tattooed with numbers on their forearms." After an international outcry the government backtracked within one day.

The conference gave the superficial appearance of a united party, told by May to "stop quibbling". But the only reason she resists a parliamentary debate on any Brexit deal is because she knows she cannot hold her party together, and is currently uncertain what Labour will do. Her party divisions are also one reason why she doesn't go for an early general election.

But in Brexit there is a massive opportunity for a Corbyn-led Labour Party.

Corbyn's opportunity

Immigration was not the key reason that most people who voted Leave did so. The biggest reported reason was for decisions about the UK to be taken in the UK. But for the majority of the 33% who said it was mainly about immigration, in reality that is an expression of the same thing.

The Socialist Party completely opposes racism and racist attacks. But the sentiments expressed in the EU referendum are cries of rage expressing powerlessness and alienation. It means anger and fear about jobs losses, debt, sky-high rents, low pay, benefit cuts. It is a reflection of anger at hospital, library and nursery closures.

A socialist, internationalist Brexit is possible. It means fighting for a £10 an hour minimum wage and the abolition of zero-hour contracts; for a mass programme of council house building and rent controls; for an end to cuts and privatisation in the NHS.

A socialist Brexit would mean a different kind of Repeal Bill - one that annulled all EU regulations which go against working class interests, like the rules restricting state aid or the posted workers' directive which drives down wages.

It would mean repealing anti-trade union legislation, including the Tories' latest Trade Union Act, and enforcing collective agreements. It would mean bringing about real working class control.

All of this necessitates standing up to big business and its demands, and instead defending working class interests. A capitalist economic crisis only means job losses and pay cuts for workers because the bosses of major companies demand it, while continuing to line their own pockets. A socialist Brexit would take such companies into public ownership. Nationalising the banks and the big companies that dominate the economy would protect jobs and livelihoods, and enable democratic planning of resources to ensure decent homes and public services for all. A socialist Brexit would mean building international workers' solidarity and collaboration.

Where next for the BMA - is the junior doctors' dispute really all over?

Glenn Kelly, Socialist Party industrial department

Having called off the strike action and lost the court case, many will be wondering if it's all over for the junior doctors. Will they now be forced onto the new contracts with all that entails for their pay, working lives and the threat to NHS services?

Many junior doctors are angry over the calling off of the action and still want a fight.

Despite the news headlines saying that the game is up, the fact is the court case against the government has revealed a chink in their armour and now a new tactic for the junior doctors and their supporters has opened up.

It has been revealed that the foundation trusts can't be forced to implement the new contracts. There is already some talk that some won't in an attempt to placate their own doctors or to use it to try to poach doctors from other trusts to relieve the staffing shortages.

This has caused some panic in the government who have threatened trusts that if they refuse to impose the new contracts then they will cut the training grants for doctors.

However, what this reveals is that the trusts do have the power to ignore the government and if they are put under enough pressure they can be forced to give in.

This raises the prospect that local BMA junior doctors committees could now demand from their trust that they will not impose the new contract. If they won't give this assurance then local BMA branches could demand to be balloted for strike against their own trusts.

The junior doctors should be supported by local trade unions and trades councils. They could organise lobbies of the trust boards demanding that they don't impose the new contract.

The Labour Party says it doesn't support the imposition of the contract. If so then we should demand that Labour councils use their scrutiny powers over the local health services and demand they refuse to impose the new contracts - in fact Jeremy Corbyn should put that call out now.

If local BMA junior doctors, with the support of local trade unions, could force a retreat by one trust, this can give confidence to spread the action.

Tories undemocratically overrule council

Say no to fracking!

Nationalise and invest in renewable energy

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

Tory government minister Sajid Javid has given permission for energy company Caudrilla to drill four wells to frack for gas at Preston New Road, Little Plumpton in Lancashire. This is, completely undemocratically, in spite of a previous decision by Lancashire County Council to refuse planning permission.

On another site under appeal at Rosacre Wood, Javid said he is minded for it to go ahead but has left it under review.

This decision comes as no surprise to anti-fracking groups across the country. We have seen how the Tory government has changed or introduced laws to assist the shale gas industry, while at the same time blocking the growth of renewables.

The big fear is that this undemocratic decision could open the floodgates for fracking all over the country. Local councils will not see the point in refusing planning permission knowing that central government will overrule them on appeal.

Dangers

We know of worldwide examples of the dangers of fracking. But Caudrilla claims that it is safe and that health and safety controls are much more rigorous in Britain. This is complete nonsense.

The government has prioritised the energy industry's quest for big profits from fracking and as usual has put profits before people.

If the UK is to ratify the Paris agreement on climate change as promised by Theresa May, fossil fuels must be left in the ground and more resources put into renewables. This would create long term, decent, skilled jobs and not destroy the environment.

As socialists we must campaign to stop fracking and for democratic public ownership of the big energy companies.

"The Tory government has once again come down on the side of big business and ignored the will of the people. Studies have found that in other countries, the shale gas extraction method has poisoned water supplies and heightened earthquake risk", says Kevin Bennett, Socialist Party member and former Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition councillor.

Support the Rotherham 12

Alistair Tice

Chants of "The Rotherham 12 are innocent, Drop the charges now!" and "Self-defence is no offence" echoed outside Sheffield Crown Court today as a community-led protest showed support for the defendants, including solidarity from the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign.

The trial of 12 Asian men, known as the Rotherham 12, started yesterday, Thursday 6 October. The charges relate to an incident which occurred during a far-right Britain First demonstration in Rotherham in September 2015. If they are found guilty they will face lengthy prison sentences. The 12 men have been charged with 'violent disorder' (re section 2.1 of the Public Order Act 1986). In addition to this, one of the defendants has also been charged with carrying an offensive weapon.

But their real crime was simply to stand up to racial abuse and violence perpetrated by supporters of far-right groups who have invaded Rotherham at least 16 times over the last two years.

In 2014, Rotherham, in South Yorkshire, was rocked by the child-abuse grooming scandal. Although the perpetrators of these crimes included a small group of Asian men, unfortunately the whole community has faced stigmatisation. Far-right groups seized on this as an opportunity to parachute into the town to sow divisions and attack 'multiculturalism'.

That year, the Mirror reported: "the town has become a magnet for right-wing groups such as the English Defence League, Britain First and the British National Party". Over the last two years the far right have organised at least 16 intimidating demonstrations where "protesters have arrived in their hundreds, many wrapped in England flags and chanting anti-Muslim slogans".

Faced with this hostility during the demonstrations, the local Asian community lived in fear and were often forced to remain in their homes or close their businesses and community centres.

In August 2015, a Muslim grandfather, Mushin Ahmed, was killed during a racially motivated assault. His tragic and brutal death spurred the local Asian community to join a counter protest to the far right on 5 September 2015. On that day, a combination of poor policing and far-right provocation and violence led to incidents that resulted in the charging of the 12 men.

The trial raises important issues, including:

- The right to live peacefully without fear of racial attacks. Racist incidents against the Asian community and Islamophobia have spiked in the area since 2014;
- The right to protest. In this case the defendants only joined a counter-demonstration to express their solidarity with Mushin Ahmed, an 81-year-old local resident, who was killed on his way to the Mosque;
- The right to self defence when facing violence and threats. Given the background to the events and lawful right to self defence, the 12 Asian men should never have been charged in the first place.

The Rotherham 12 supporters have conducted a marvellous campaign linking up their case with that of the Orgreave and Hillsborough campaigns and once again exposing the role of the South Yorkshire police as a political force used against working class communities and protest. They deserve our full support.

- Email: rotherham12dc@gmail.com
- Website: www.rotherham12dc.org
- Facebook: Support the Rotherham 12

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Suicidal phone calls: fight to reverse tax credit cuts

Corinthia Ward, Birmingham Central Socialist Party

Concentrix, a private US firm used by HM Revenue and Customs to cut tax credit payments, has been receiving suicidal calls from claimants - as a result of losing their payments thrusting them deeper into poverty.

An anonymous Concentrix worker has spoken out against the firm. He highlighted not only the lack of training for its 600 staff, but also the high volume of desperate calls from people who rely and survive on tax credits. "People crying down the phone to you that they're down to their last bag of wipes, have no food in the fridge to feed their kids."

The Tories awarded Concentrix a £75 million contract to investigate potential fraudulent claimants. However, hundreds of low-income households have had their tax credits stopped without being forewarned, and without any time to refute the allegations.

Concentrix call centre staff have been at the receiving end of these highly stressful calls. The same whistleblower reported the company gives them no counselling or support. They are instead told to "have a smoke... you'll be fine" - and then expected to come back and deal with another 40 or 50 calls.

The Socialist Party demands the reversal of tax credit cuts, and of profiteering from public services. All workers should have proper training and support, backed up by trade union recognition to help hold management to account.

A £10 an hour minimum wage will ensure less people need to claim tax credits. And fund real living benefits for all as well.

Reader's comment

Malcolm X: hero of black liberation

Julian Moore-Cook, Socialist Party black and Asian group

After reading 'The Autobiography of Malcolm X' I am left in awe.

I'm upset that I have only read it now at 25 years of age, and have sent a copy to my younger brother. This book is essential reading for the black activist and any socialist. Never have I read words more radicalising, or that have changed my perception of the world around me so much.

Malcolm Little was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1925. He articulates very well key moments of racism in his life - from his house being burned down as a child, to the little comments and judgements black people face every day. He talks of straightening his hair, and how many black people did this because of the deep-seated idea that anything black was bad.

This is what this book has helped me with the most: seeing oppression. Things I had never noticed before I notice all the time. Comments I would have never thought of as racist before stick out and jar against my ear. The book has helped give me the courage and language to respond.

To say the book is radicalising is not an exaggeration. The main fulcrum for Malcolm going from petty criminal to activist is an epiphany he has while in prison. The sum of the epiphany is "all white people are devils". These are extreme words, but they express the profound anger and alienation black people and ethnic minorities can feel in racist capitalist society.

Malcolm retracts this later in life. He has a religious experience praying in Mecca with Muslims of all different races. Most importantly, he comes to recognise that in order to defeat racism, you need to defeat the capitalist system which created it and keeps it going. That means workers of all races and nationalities coming together against our common enemy: the capitalist class.

For me, as a socialist, I realise that racist ideas and behaviours start at the top. They are the result of a capitalist system that needs racism to stay alive, to justify slavery and the exploitation of poorer nations, and to foster false divisions between workers.

But Malcolm's political thought evolved throughout his life, and at the start he favoured black separatism over working class unity.

He writes, for example, of white people going to black bars - and, when drunk, saying clumsy things like: "I want you to know I'm not better than you, we're the same." He speaks of the arrogance of believing black people need to be told by white people we are equal.

It's true that in the current system, even some well-meaning people are sometimes going to exhibit racist behaviour. But capitalism exploits white workers too. Only by patient explanation - and most importantly, fighting side by side against capitalism and racism - can we overcome these mistakes, and tackle their real cause.

I cannot recommend this book enough. As a black person fighting racism it has left me with a sense of pride and dignity I never had before.

Martin Luther King Jr said being silent is sometimes the worst thing you can do. Malcolm X's autobiography can give you some of the understanding to start breaking that silence. To speak up, and rail against the bosses, those responsible for oppression and injustice in every form. You can apply that teaching to race, gender, sexuality - and definitely the class struggle.

-
- The Autobiography of Malcolm X

£9.99 plus postage from www.leftbooks.co.uk (or call 020 8988 8789)

Union campaign strikes blow against Bromley Tories

A Unite member

Unite the Union members are celebrating another victory against the privatisation plans of the vicious Tories who run Bromley Council. The council had plans to hand eight libraries over to charities to run with volunteers only.

The remainder were to be privatised as part of a joint attack along with the Tories on Bexley Council. The two councils planned to do one tendering exercise in order to minimise the cost of the tendering process - never mind the cost to the service, jobs or the pay and conditions of library workers.

First, a determined union-led campaign forced the charity "Bromley Community Link" to pull out. Now in a dramatic turn, Bexley Council have said that they are not proceeding with plans to privatise their libraries.

This is another big victory for the long running campaign and leaves Bromley council totally discredited.

Despite this, Bromley Council have issued a statement saying that they are going to go ahead on their own and privatise all their libraries!

They certainly are on their own - 80% of residents who responded to the council consultation exercise said that they do not want their library services privatised.

The union believes that organisations such as Carillion are lining up to take over the service. This is the same blacklisting company which, when not victimising trade union members, took over libraries in Croydon and immediately imposed redundancies.

In an attempt to hide the fact that the company would run the service based on making a profit rather than the needs of residents, the council have publicly stated that this is not privatisation - but is in fact "outsourcing".

But this crude propaganda fools nobody. Unite is now preparing to target a campaign against Carillion and has promised that further strike action will follow in defence of libraries.

This campaign has won victories because it is a trade union-led campaign - community campaigns are vital, but just as vital is that the trade unions representing the workers in libraries take the lead.

This has also been the case in Greenwich where Socialist Party members in the Unite branch have led and won campaigns stopping library closures, defending permanent jobs and halting casualisation while protecting pay and conditions.

The message is clear - trade unions have the power to save our libraries as demonstrated by Unite members in Bexley and Greenwich.

Sheffield bin workers' strike - "about more than just pay"

Alistair Tice

Sheffield bin workers are on a one-day strike today, 5 October, fighting for a better pay rise. Veolia, who have a 35 year contract to run Sheffield council's waste management services, has only offered a 3% rise over the next two years. GMB union members had voted 70% for strike action.

There had been a few rumblings of discontent about the strike so a gate meeting was held at 6am. After a strong appeal by the GMB officer Pete Davies for workers to stick together, no-one wanted to suspend the strike. Around 100 strikers then picketed outside the Lumley Street depot.

GMB members had taken a one-day strike in April this year against management bullying and 'spy in the cab' technology, their first strike for 17 years.

Paul told me:

"That strike made me feel empowered. Since then they've stopped pulling people into the office and the cab cameras are turned off. We need to get back some of that pre-1980s workers' dignity. I don't know if we'll win a better pay rise but if our strike helps bankrupt Veolia so the council has to take us back in-house, then it will be worth it. It can't be morally justified for a big corporation like Veolia to be getting council taxpayers' money when all they're interested in is profit, not putting money back into the city."

Mick said:

"It's about more than pay. Veolia want us to start earlier, work longer. They're bringing in more and more agency workers (many who were used to scab on the strike). We want the council to take them back in-house but this Labour council is like a Conservative one with all the cuts and privatisation."

Pete Davies said that this wouldn't be the last strike and the union may re-ballot to widen the demands of the dispute and sections involved.

Update on 10.10.16:

A Veolia Unite rep in Haringey, London, tipped off the GMB in Sheffield that a letter was posted on their noticeboard and had been sent to a number of Veolia regions asking for drivers and loaders to come to Sheffield at the weekend to clear up the dropped bins not collected due to the strike, including offering overnight hotel accommodation!

This angered the Sheffield bin workers so much that they've called a second strike for Monday 17th October.

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AMEY = A Massive Empty Yard

Alistair Tice

"AMEY = A Massive Empty Yard". That's how one of the 'bright' sparks (electrician) described the effect of the GMB union's strike at the Amey depot at Olive Grove in Sheffield, because so few had gone into work.

Over 200 GMB members took one-day strike action today, Monday 10 October, to protest at Amey's threat of compulsory redundancies from their misnamed Streets Ahead team.

Sheffield council privatised its Highways and Street Lighting department four years ago under a £2.2 billion 25-year Private Finance Initiative deal with Amey.

At the time of the staff transfer (under the TUPE protection of terms and conditions), the council staff were assured in an official briefing: "There are 480 people currently on the transfer list and we will need every one of you for the full 25 years."

Now Amey, having completed the first phase of installation, is saying that TUPE-ed workers face the sack with the street lighting team being reduced from 108 down to 21. Those kept on will be on Amey's reduced terms and conditions.

After voluntary redundancies, five face compulsory redundancy which Amey is refusing to budge on because further job cuts will follow among employees who are resurfacing roads and footpaths.

Yet Amey is sub-contracting around 250 jobs to external contractors, mostly from out of town, to effectively do their work. So this strike has centred on "Sheffield jobs".

Joined by strikers from the Ecclesfield depot, around 30 demonstrated outside Olive Grove depot before marching into the city centre to protest at the town hall. As Patrick said: "We need to sort this council out, they're the ones that privatised our jobs and gave the contract to Amey".

Another striker said that since Amey took over he'd never seen so many Mercs in the managers' car park. Senior GMB steward, Jake O'Malley, said: "They're getting a big slice of the cake and all we get is crumbs. They won't even negotiate on pay!"

Another strike is planned for next Monday, 17th October.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 10 October 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Ritzy strikers walk-out and rally

Ritzy strikers followed their picket line on 7 October with a rally outside the British Film (BFI) Institute festival and march to Leicester Square.

Workers asked: if BFI can pay its staff the London Living Wage, why can't Picturehouse? The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) supported the march from London's South Bank to the West End's hub for UK film premieres.

On arriving in Leicester Square, strikers rallied outside an Odeon - surrounded by celebrity-spotters staking out the red carpet for 'La La Land'. Their huge red flag, wide banner, drums and chanting for the living wage attracted a lot of interest.

There will be a joint strike between Ritzy and Hackney Picturehouse cinema workers on 15 October from 12noon.

James Ivens, Lambeth Socialist Party

Workplace news in brief

Southern strike

Socialist Party members joined RMT strikers at London's Victoria station on 11 October, the first morning of a three day walk-out on Southern Rail. The long-running dispute has been stepped up with further action planned on 18 October and dates in November and December. Mick Cash, the RMT's general secretary, said: "Despite all of the threats and bullying from the company, RMT can confirm that the strike action is rock solid and determined again across the Southern Rail network."

William Hill wage axe

Managers for William Hill bookmakers across the country are set to lose up to £6,000 from their salaries as the company undergoes a restructure. While shop floor staff have been brought up to the Tory 'living wage' of £7.20, the companies' top managers seem to believe that this justifies sacrificing the pay of long-serving staff as the gambling market, like retail, is being squeezed.

This move has seen Unite the Union respond with a series of protests outside William Hill stores across the country on 7 October. In Leeds, protesters leafletted outside the shop on Boar Lane.

The protest got strong support from passing members of the public, several of who stopped to help us leaflet other people passing by. One former William Hill worker, who while passing offered their support, simply told us: "they're an awful company to work for." Workers in bookies like William Hill are put under a lot of pressure, handling large sums of cash sometimes with just one person in the store.

The Socialist Party supports Unite's attempts to organise these workers and gain a decent wage and working conditions.

Poland: Mass movement stops total ban on abortion

Women demand a real choice

On 6 October women in Poland won a crucial victory as proposed legislation to impose a near-total ban on abortion was overwhelmingly defeated, writes Tessa Warrington.

An estimated 140,000 women in over 60 cities took part in the national 'women's strike' opposing the ban on Monday 3 October. As a direct result of this mass movement, the Polish parliament, having initially voted to consider the proposed ban, has now been forced back, voting 352-58 against it.

This climbdown represents the first major setback for the ruling (in coalition) conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party, proving that mass action can take on governments and win.

However, even before the ban Poland already had one of the most restrictive anti-abortion laws in Europe. Abortion is only permitted in the case of incest, rape, a serious threat to the health of the mother, or deformation of the foetus.

In the following article Paul Newbury of Alternatywa Socjalistyczna (CWI in Poland) describes the strike action and charts the way forward for the pro-choice movement in Poland.

Plans to impose a total ban on abortion have sparked a massive explosion of anger in Poland. On Monday 3 October a strike of Polish women was called, inspired by the example of Icelandic women, who held a nationwide strike in 1975.

The 3 October protests were easily the biggest ever protests in defence of abortion rights in Poland, far exceeding those in 1993 when the current ban on abortion was introduced.

The first wave of the movement started in spring 2016 with the announcement that a right-wing pressure group had collected over 100,000 signatures (finally they collected 400,000), required to submit a draft law to the Polish parliament which would impose a total ban on abortion. Violating it could result in punishing women with up to three years in prison.

The barbarity of the proposals is illustrated by the fact that all miscarriages would be treated as suspected abortions and would be subject to criminal investigation.

Poland already has one of the most restrictive anti-abortion laws in Europe. Moreover, abortion is often prevented by doctors who exploit the so-called 'conscience clause' and impose their own religious beliefs on patients by refusing vital treatment.

This law was forced through at the beginning of the 1990s, when Poland was undergoing capitalist restoration: an economic and social counter-revolution alongside a few democratic reforms.

But the sham of the democratic reforms is shown by the fact that despite the opposition of the overwhelming majority of society (over 70% of the population was against an abortion ban and supported abortion for "social reasons", which basically meant abortion on demand) the anti-abortion law was forced through.

At the same time, religion was introduced in schools and the concordat was signed, which gave the church enormous material and political privileges. Politicians of all the parties called this a 'compromise'. However, it is not a compromise but a national disgrace and it created a hell for women.

Spontaneous movement

In response to the proposed ban this spring, a massive spontaneous movement was created on social networks. This led to a series of demonstrations around the country, each involving several thousand protesters.

One of the initiatives focused on collecting over 100,000 signatures in order to submit a "citizen's initiative" draft law that would liberalise the abortion law, allowing abortion regardless of the reason for up to 12 weeks.

Despite many voices within the movement calling only for the defence of the current, extremely restrictive law, the idea of a citizen's initiative was finally embraced by the wider movement, which managed to collect over 250,000 signatures and present its draft law to parliament.

At the end of September both the draft laws were presented to parliament on the same day.

A second wave of struggle began with so-called 'Black Protests' (Czarny Protest) which were organised all over the country. Men and women dressed in black to mourn the death of women's rights.

Demonstrations were held in many towns and people posted photos of themselves dressed in black on social networks with the hashtag #CzarnyProtest and #BlackProtest.

Predictably, parliament rejected the draft law liberalising abortion rights, while allowing the draft law introducing a total abortion ban to go through to the committee stage. At the same time it was announced that in vitro fertility (IVF) treatment may be banned, as well as access to emergency contraception.

This unleashed widespread anger at the arrogance and contempt that politicians and the church have for women and activated wider layers to get involved in protests than previously.

Women's strike

Around this time the idea was raised of organising a strike of women. This idea came from within the movement by women who had no previous trade union or strike experience.

However, due to the anti-trade union laws and the difficulty of organising a legal strike, even by a trade union, women were not encouraged to actually strike but rather to take a day off work on what was nicknamed Czarny poniedziałek (Black Monday).

Many women were prevented from taking part in this strike because they have poor work contracts and have no right to a day off on demand. For example, the Lidl supermarket chain threatened to sack staff who took a day off on Monday.

Finally, on the day of the strike, OPZZ (one of the three major trade union federations) expressed its support and pledged to defend its members from victimisation, should they decide to participate in the protest. Thanks to this, many public administration workers, particularly in local government, were able to strike.

A number of theatres and small businesses announced they would close that day to allow their staff to participate. Many more women, who had no option but to work, dressed in black to express their support for the strike.

The support of OPZZ probably also emboldened many teachers, who organised group photographs with pupils - all dressed in black. In many high schools, school students organised their own strikes, leaving school during the first lesson, often with the support of their teachers. There were some reports of young women being threatened by groups of men and spat on for participating in the strike.

In Warsaw, several thousand gathered early in the morning outside the offices of the ruling party, Law and Justice. Later in the afternoon they marched in the rain through the city centre to Castle Square, where roughly 50,000 people gathered - predominantly young women, students and school students. There was a very angry, lively mood and lots of home-made placards.

Unfortunately, the speeches were dominated by celebrities and mainstream political parties, such as the liberal party, Nowoczesna, and the pro-liberal democracy movement, KOD.

Both of these are political organisations that have jumped onto the bandwagon. They have opposed calling for abortion on demand, arguing that the movement should limit itself to defending the current anti-abortion law.

Scandalously, representatives of feminist organisations and pro-abortion groups were not given a platform. Fortunately, the organisers had only planned for a demonstration of about 5,000, so most people could not hear the speeches, anyway!

After some time, protesters started to shout that they should march on parliament, and soon the sea of umbrellas moved off, leaving the organisers behind.

The march was now illegal, but police wisely decided to allow it to continue, only policing the crossroads as protesters marched through the city centre, choosing their own route and stopping all the traffic during the rush hour.

Around 10,000 gathered outside parliament in the rain. There were no speakers, but the mood was loud and angry. There were rumours that several thousand protesters marched to Teatr Polski, the theatre where Jaroslaw Kaczynski, leader of the ruling party Law and Justice, was having a meeting.

The church reacted to the strike of Polish women and Black Protest by condemning it as a 'carnival of the devil', showing how out of touch it is with reality.

What now?

Due to the scale of the movement, Law and Justice has reacted by announcing that it will prepare its own compromise draft law, which will probably allow abortion in the case of rape and a threat to the life of the woman, but not in the case of a deformity of the foetus.

This, of course, is not a compromise at all, but represents a further tightening of the ban and is completely unacceptable. However, it shows that the government is beginning to feel the pressure.

This is a clear signal that the pressure must be maintained and the struggle for abortion rights must continue. However, Nowoczesna and Civic Platform (the previous ruling party), aided by KOD, are attempting to take political control and derail the movement.

On the other hand, it is a mistake to introduce a 'no logo' policy that bans all political organisations from intervening. This will allow the compromised politicians in through the back door, while preventing smaller, more radical organisations from being able to get across their ideas and proposals for the movement.

The strike of Polish women on Black Monday was the high point, but it has unleashed new forces that have, so far, not been present in the movement: thousands of young angry women who are only just entering into struggle. An immediate task of the movement is to help them get organised.

What is lacking is democratic structures on the ground at a local level, involving activists from all the different initiatives that have sprung up. Such local democratic committees should link up on a national level to coordinate activities and plan the next major action. There should be full democratic accountability of all national representatives of such committees.

Only a clear programme can achieve victory. We need to explain the need for the right to free, safe abortion on demand, which will save the lives of numerous women. This should be linked to the need to fight for decent, good quality, free healthcare provided by well-paid professionals and not religious fanatics who block treatment.

Real choice

Many unwanted pregnancies can be avoided if contraception is made more easily accessible. Nowadays contraception is too costly for many young women.

Meanwhile, under-18s can only visit a gynaecologist with their parents' consent, which prevents them from being able to get a prescription for contraception. That is why we demand universal access to free contraception. We also demand sexual education instead of religion taught in school by Catholic priests and nuns.

Above all, women want a real choice - not only whether to have a child or not, but also to have a child when they want to have one. That is why we support free IVF fertility treatment, but also a guaranteed place in free public crèches, and nursery schools for every child.

But wider social and economic issues also affect a woman's choice. It is necessary to fight for cheap good quality, state-owned social housing and a decent minimum wage, as well as job security. All poor working contracts should be abolished and replaced with permanent job contracts, so that becoming pregnant will not mean losing your job.

Fighting for such a change will require linking up with the working class organised in the trade unions. The movement should also reach out to public administration workers and health workers who supported Black Monday's strike.

Such a struggle will also mean a confrontation with the economic system, capitalism, which is incapable of guaranteeing decent homes, jobs and rights for ordinary people.

- Full article can be read on socialistworld.net

South Africa: The battle for free education

University students have resumed their battle from last year against tuition fees hikes and for free education. In doing so, they have taken on South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) political establishment. Workers and Socialist Party (Wasp, CWI South Africa) activists explain what's at stake.

The Fees Must Fall protests are taking place in conditions where the government, after its humiliation in the local government elections, is determined to restore its significantly diminished political authority.

In an attempt to break student unity, it is using divide and rule tactics and also wielding the stick of repression.

It is becoming more and more evident that the arson on campuses is being perpetrated not just by student hot heads who mistake this kind of action for revolutionary militancy, but by agent provocateurs organised by intelligence agencies to provide the state with a pretext to step up repression.

Students must actively oppose the burning of buildings. It undermines public support and student unity and does not advance the struggle one inch.

At the same time we condemn state violence and the conversion of universities into militarised zones. We demand that all private security and police must keep out of campuses, as university students demanded of the apartheid regime, and for our right to protest peacefully to be upheld.

Free education

The demands of this year's protest wave have centred on a clear call for free higher education for all, accompanied by the demands to drop any legal charges against students arising from previous Fees Must Fall protests.

The ANC government's proposal to exempt only the poor and 'missing middle' (students who are deemed too rich to qualify for government support, but too poor to afford tuition fees) from the 8% fees rise was treated

with contempt. It is a political ploy aimed at three things; dividing students, shifting blame from government to university management, and quelling the wave of protest.

The government's opposition to free higher education comes from the ruling ANC party's commitment to neoliberal capitalism. Therefore the demand for free quality education is a struggle against capitalism itself.

This year's protests have revealed the degree of discontent and outrage not just among students but in wider society.

More importantly, from the point of view of the future of the movement, they have posed much more sharply the question of a coherent national programme and a national leadership to carry it through.

The absence of a unified programme and leadership has resulted in the reproduction of last year's random protests without any campus-to-campus coordination. This problem will have to be urgently addressed.

Leadership and programme

A further consequence of this weakness is that it has left the movement unprepared for the more sophisticated tactics used by the state and management to divide, derail and destabilise the movement.

Forces opposed to free education can lean on the understandable frustrations of many students to mobilise for mass meetings and push through decisions against continuing the struggle.

The lack of national leadership simultaneously feeds into and from the lack of programme. The campus protests have emerged with their own local leaderships which have so far laboured to sustain the protests with more or less success. Where protest has been sustained it is overwhelmingly due to the willingness of the student masses to fight.

In some areas this has opened up competition among the campus leadership for dominance or control of the protest by the adoption of extreme methods just to demonstrate to other leaders they are more radical than them. Meetings tend to degenerate into a competition in radical posturing producing empty shells instead of resolutions with a clear way forward.

The state has been able to take advantage through agent provocateurs and the ANC-aligned student formations.

In what was clearly the result of a well-planned strategy, the government prepared its propaganda about its obligations to the poor and missing middle, lining up ANC affiliates Sasco (South African Students Congress) and Cosatu (Congress of South African Trade Unions) to immediately issue statements of support.

Way forward

If the struggle for free education is to be sustained and triumph, political and programmatic coherence needs to be achieved.

Provincial meetings must be convened as a matter of urgency. These should be followed by a national meeting, from which the institutional programmes must be consolidated into one coherent national programme which will guide and coordinate the movement into national action.

This will assist it to effectively transcend divisions incurred from lack of programme and leadership.

Gauteng Free Education activists have already begun with this initiative, planning to bring labour and civic movements to act in concert.

The Free State Free Education Movement is in the process of organising such a provincial gathering. If repeated nationwide, it would enable the student movement to link up with workers and communities to organise to resist the neoliberal onslaught on education rights.

Israel/Palestine:

Shimon Peres - a wolf in sheep's clothing

Most mainstream media obituaries described Shimon Peres, the recently deceased former president of Israel, as a 'peacemaker statesman' who constrained the settlerist, nationalist policy of prime minister Netanyahu's rule. In reality, Peres was a wolf in sheep's clothing.

From Israel's foundation in 1948 to the present he defended every military action and war the Israeli state, both at home and abroad, undertook.

As a politician he signed off on numerous attacks on the living standards of the Israeli working class. His neoliberal economic policies contributed to the creation of unprecedented inequality and poverty alongside an elite of super-rich capitalist families.

As Haaretz journalist Gideon Levy said: "This man had done almost nothing to bring an end to the occupation [of Palestinian territories]... he was the 'beautiful face' of Israel abroad - but behind this face, unfortunately, was hidden not a small amount of fake".

Peres was involved in planning the 1956 Sinai war unleashed by Israel, Britain and France against Egypt as a response to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by Nasser. French imperialism paid back Israel with a secret agreement to build the nuclear reactor in Dimona, which was signed in October 1957.

Peres is considered the "father" of the agreement which established the Israeli military nuclear programme - a programme whose existence is still routinely denied by the Israeli state.

30 years ago, after receiving a direct order from Peres, the Prime Minister at that time, Mossad agents kidnapped from abroad the nuclear whistle-blower Mordechai Vanunu.

It was Peres as prime minister who pushed in 1985 the decision to establish the "South Lebanon Security Belt" that led to the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, with catastrophic results, for another 15 years.

For years, Peres enthusiastically promoted the "Jordanian Option": putting the areas of the West Bank populated by Palestinians under Jordanian sovereignty while annexing the settlements, the Jordan valley and East Jerusalem to Israel.

After the first Intifada erupted (1987-91 - the heroic mass uprising of Palestinians in the 1967-territories against the occupation and for national liberation) the Israeli ruling class changed tack and sought a one-sided agreement with Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO).

Smokescreen

Despite the huge hopes that arose in the beginning among the masses from both sides of the conflict, the 1993 Oslo accords between Israel and the PLO were in reality a smokescreen for reinforcing the settlements and a sophisticated way of rebuffing the possibility of establishing a truly independent Palestinian state.

Peres explained in the Knesset (Israel's parliament) after the signing of the first accord: "This agreement is about Gaza and Jericho. Regarding what's next, I oppose a separate Palestinian state."

In January 2005 he led his Labour party back from 'opposition' into Ariel Sharon's second government, to assist in passing the 'Disengagement Plan' from Gaza.

The IDF pull-out from Gaza was used in fact to turn Gaza into the largest prison in the world and to bolster the settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It paved the way for the horrible rounds of war in recent years.

Peres never promoted or pointed to a practical way to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The policies that he conducted in this regard, including during the Oslo years, intensified the conflict significantly.

- This article is based on a more detailed obituary by Shahar Benhorin and Yasha Marmer of Socialist Struggle Movement (CWI, Israel-Palestine) which can be read on socialistworld.net
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Lambeth working class demo against cuts and gentrification

James Ivens, Lambeth Socialist Party

Working class campaigners glitter-bombed council steps and marched against Blairite gentrification and austerity in Lambeth, south London, on 8 October.

The newly formed 'Stand Up to Lambeth' has the backing of nearly 30 different campaigns. These include estates the right-wing Labour council wants to demolish, and libraries it wants to turn into private gyms. The local branches of trade unions Unison and Unite also support the campaign.

Angry but upbeat marchers wore pink boots, tops and even wigs. The campaign's symbol is a pair of pink Doc Martens standing up to the Blairite council. The march threw pink glitter at the town hall's entrance as it passed.

Involvement

This effort to draw together the various campaigns against Blairite council attacks is an important development. Lambeth Socialist Party supports it fully, and takes part in organising meetings.

We joined around 200 others on the demonstration. This was a great turnout for the campaign's first event.

Speaking at the opening rally, we called for kicking the Blairites out of Labour and letting socialists back in. Then we can take on the Tories effectively, and push for mass investment in homes, jobs and services for all.

Unfortunately, Jeremy Corbyn has so far not responded to the campaign's appeals for support. This is a mistake. The Corbyn movement must push for unity with working class fighters, not Tory shills still clinging to Labour.

Appeal: Don't let the banks wreck our finances!

Naomi Byron, Socialist Party finance department

HSBC shut down the main Yorkshire Socialist Party membership subs account on 12 September without notice and without telling any of the signatories! We only found out the account was shut when members contacted us asking why their subs had been paid back into their account!

HSBC is a byword even among banks for dodgy dealings. From the financial crash of 2008 where they were fined \$470 million by US regulators for "abusive mortgage practices" to allowing millions of dollars of suspect transactions through their accounts in the Fifa bribery scandal.

They only escaped criminal charges in the US in 2012 for allowing terrorists and drug dealers to launder millions of dollars after George Osborne and the UK banking regulator pleaded that this could trigger another "global financial disaster".

Like other big banks HSBC has a campaign to shut down smaller accounts that aren't making them enough money - by any means necessary it appears. At the moment they are still refusing to reopen the account.

We immediately started collecting the subs that had been returned, and are setting up a new account for people to pay their money into. But we are appealing to every member to donate to help us make up any losses caused by HSBC's actions.

In particular if members can increase their regular membership subs, we need every penny of regular income to help us expand our resources and respond to the twists and turns of this exciting new political period.

The re-election of Jeremy Corbyn is a historic opportunity to reclaim the Labour Party as a mass anti-austerity party for the 99%.

The Socialist Party's ability to organise and win mass support for our ideas, our experience of building mass movements and taking on the right wing within Labour and our fighting socialist programme are essential to help reclaim Labour.

We are proud to have no rich backers - all the money to fund our campaigning comes from our members and supporters. If you can't increase your regular donation at the moment, please consider making a one-off donation to our fighting fund.

Momentum should show Blairites the door, not Socialist Party members!

Mark Evans, Llanelli & West Wales Socialist Party

The Socialist Party sold the Socialist and leafleted outside a Momentum (or Welsh Labour Grassroots as they're known in Wales) meeting in Swansea Council chambers on 8 October.

Our leaflets and paper were well received and we had a friendly response from the 70 attendees who we informed that it was our intention to attend the meeting.

The three of us sat at the back and after about 40 minutes were asked to leave the meeting. We were the only ones asked to leave even though there were members of other parties present. Given that no one was on the door it was also quite possible for right-wingers to be present.

As we left someone else left with us as and told us she couldn't understand why we were asked to leave.

Another approached us outside and queried the decision. It's not the first time I have been asked to leave the council chamber but the last time we had occupied the chamber protesting against the actions of a right-wing Labour council implementing the Poll Tax.

Before we were asked to leave, a speaker from Unite mentioned the witch hunt in the Labour Party but the irony of asking us to leave was lost on those leading the meeting.

The speaker from Unite unfortunately repeated the myth peddled by most union bureaucracies that the Labour leadership in Wales is not right-wing, claiming Labour First Minister Carwyn Jones would work with Jeremy Corbyn.

But this is not true and, along with throwing Socialist Party members out, shows the leadership of Momentum do not have a strategy to defeat the Blairites - the real ones who should be shown the door.

Lobby in Sheffield to keep vital day centre funding

By Sheffield Socialist Party members

"If it wasn't for MHAGS, I'd be dead" was how Stewart shocked the council chamber. He explained that when he suffered his mental breakdown he would not leave his house, but after the help and support he got from Sheffield Mental Health Action Group here he was addressing the city council from the public gallery.

Around 25 service users came to protest and lobby the council over its decision to withdraw funding to MHAGS from April next year, threatening the continued existence of the group's day centre which provides companionship, food, activities and trips for around 250 people every year.

The Friends of MHAGS campaign has been started to fight these cuts. At the lobby outside the town hall, service users described what the group meant to them, and speakers from Unite Community and Momentum gave support.

Inside, MHAGS founder and Socialist Party member Tim Jones gave an impassioned speech in presenting a 700-signature petition demanding the restoration of the meagre £10,500 annual grant, £3,500 of which is paid straight back to the council in rent.

Tim accused the council of marginalising MHAGS over the years by cutting its funding and now locating its day centre outside the city centre and up a steep hill making it inaccessible to many would-be service users.

In reply, Jack Scott, the Labour council cabinet member, acknowledged the work that MHAGS does, admitting that its volunteers save the council and the NHS hundreds of thousands of pounds a year. He also admitted that the council had it in its power to restore MHAGS funding but said that it would be unfair on other voluntary organisations.

In other words, because the Labour council passes on the Tory cuts, voluntary organisations have to compete against each other for a shrinking pot of money.

Service users left the town hall proud of their impact and determined to continue their campaign until the councillors' weasel words are turned into hard cash to keep MHAGS open.

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

Bradford day centre campaigners meet to fight closure

Iain Dalton, Socialist Party West Yorkshire organiser

"This is about the council trying to move the poor out of the city centre to create an image of prosperity and recovery in Bradford. But it's an illusion, the council are trying to make us believe that poverty doesn't exist here".

This summed up the perception of Bradford Council's decision to cut funding to the Edmund Street Day Centre at a public meeting of 25 people on 6 October.

The 'Save Edmund Street Day Centre' campaign has been initiated recently by Bradford Socialist Party members, receiving significant coverage in local print and radio media.

The meeting was attended by service users, people involved in the voluntary and community sectors as well as anti-cuts activists.

Disgracefully, despite being invited, not one of the councillors for the ward that the service is based in turned up to the meeting, to the anger of numerous service users.

Peter Robson, Bradford Socialist Party branch secretary, opened up the meeting, putting the closure of the day centre in the context of Bradford Council passing on the Tory austerity agenda to the people of the city.

Ron, a service user, explained the worries many have that the facilities to be offered at the Salvation Army centre will be able to provide.

He also pointed out that the Salvation Army is a mile and a half away up a steep hill from Edmund Street, and that service users have worries regarding the Salvation Army's attitude to the LGBT community.

A campaign planning meeting will take place this week and we will lobby the upcoming council meeting on the 18 October.

Fight to save care homes in Carlisle

Carlisle Socialist Party

Cumbria County Council is planning to close three care homes and replace them with another building which only has 60 beds instead of the current 117. Another four homes will be closed in West Cumbria. Only those suffering from dementia and the most complex needs will get a place. But what about respite care? What about family carers?

Why don't the council put up a fight against the Tory government cuts instead of just passing them on to the most vulnerable? For six years the Blairite New Labour councillors have colluded with the local Tories, and now the Liberal Democrats, to faithfully impose on Cumbria cuts to our vital public services.

The councillors are being dishonest and cynical in deliberately manufacturing a false impression about the necessity of these homes. They claim they are half empty, but this is because they have recently been turning needy people away and not employing enough staff in order to justify their plan to cut costs.

Their other excuse sounds nice: caring for old folk longer in their own homes. But the reality will be a carer finding an 'independent' incontinent old person lying face down on the floor after a fall in the night suffering hypothermia.

"Care in the community" means abandoned in the community. These cuts will be fatal. They, and the cuts to the NHS and Cumbrian schools, must be abandoned now.

Carlisle Socialist Party have started a campaign against these closures and have collected over 300 signatures to our petition already.

Join our fight against the cuts and come to our public meeting on 17 October at 7pm at the Club Britannia, 35 Lowther St, Carlisle

Cable Street 80th anniversary demo

The Socialist Party joined thousands of others at the Battle of Cable Street 80th anniversary commemorative march and rally on 9 October in east London, selling over 50 copies of the Socialist paper. The march celebrated the victory over fascism in 1936 when an alliance of workers, Jews, dockers and socialists stopped the Blackshirts marching into the East End.

- For more on the Battle of Cable Street see issue 918 of the Socialist:
socialistparty.org.uk/issue/918/23638

Attack on young people's health and social care: urgent fightback needed

Youth mental health crisis: unions must strike to fight cuts

'Harriet Ryman', NHS nurse, London

Record numbers of children are ringing helpline Childline with suicidal thoughts. And the Guardian reports that the number of children attending A&E with psychiatric conditions was up 8% - to 18,673 - in 2014-15.

One in ten children suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder. One in every 12 inflict harm on themselves by cutting or burning their skin, punching or hitting themselves, poisoning themselves, deliberately starving themselves, or abusing drugs and alcohol.

The number of young people being admitted for harming themselves has risen in the last five years, according to charity Young Minds.

The Mental Health Foundation charity says some of the key risk factors associated with the development of mental health problems in children are living in poverty and growing up in care. With the increase in benefit cutbacks, and the rise in homelessness, the number of children requiring mental health care will only increase further.

The new Children and Social Work Bill (see story right) will only make this worse. It gives councils the choice of opting out of legislation designed to protect children in care. These children will be more vulnerable than ever to physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and material deprivation.

NHS data covering just three in every five mental health trusts shows 235,000 children are receiving mental health care in England alone. But there will be many more children who suffer mental and emotional disturbances and cannot access any services unless and until they get a clear diagnosis.

Bosses are cutting child and adolescent mental health services (Camhs) in the face of escalating need. A Young Minds investigation last year found more than half the councils in England had cut or frozen Camhs budgets between 2010-11 and 2014-15. And a recent poll by the Royal College of Nursing found 70% of specialist nurses think Camhs provision is "inadequate".

Teachers are struggling to support troubled children. A primary head speaking to the Guardian said "the challenge for us is there's a very high threshold for children and families to access services. If we are concerned about a child's mental health we would make a referral straight to Camhs but we very often are told 'this does not reach the threshold'."

The ongoing policy of cuts to the NHS, public services and benefits is creating a toxic situation. It is hitting us all - but the youngest and most vulnerable the hardest.

All trade unionists must fight the so-called NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plan. This is a fancy term for even more drastic cutbacks to the health service.

The National Shop Stewards Network has produced a model motion calling on the leaderships of all health unions to draw up campaigns to fight Sustainability and Transformation Plans. This means action up to and including strike.

Coordinated strikes could push this vicious but weak government back - and if spread and escalated, even bring it down.

The Socialist Party says

- Scrap the 'Sustainability and Transformation Plans' - reverse all NHS cuts and sell-offs
 - Stop the Children and Social Work Bill - keep the laws protecting children
 - For a £10 an hour minimum wage, living benefits, and the reversal of all cuts to education and care
-

Stop the 'Children and Social Work Bill' blitz

'Jane Hannigan', NHS worker, Devon

The government's Children and Social Work Bill is currently under discussion in the House of Lords. If passed, it will allow councils to opt out of many of the laws protecting vulnerable children and young people.

These laws have been adopted over the last eight years following horrific cases such as Victoria Climbié and Baby P. The power of 'choice' for local authorities would be at the command of the secretary of state for education, who could allow three-yearly trials of different approaches, leading to an experimental postcode lottery of child protection.

Also worrying is the potential opening of the back door for privatisation, for companies such as Richard Branson's Virgin Care. The current laws prohibit profit-making companies being involved in child protection.

Virgin Care has become one of the biggest private providers of community healthcare. This year alone it has won six multimillion-pound bids on providing NHS community services around the country.

In 2012, commissioners chose Virgin Care for a £130 million contract to provide core NHS and social care services in Devon. The plan was to take over, 'integrate' (cut), and exploit for profit various children's services.

But although they got health workers, Virgin Care was prevented from including social workers due to legislation now under threat from the Children and Social Work Bill.

With council budgets still under attack from this austerity government, the offer of private companies running these services will look very appealing to councillors unwilling to stand up to Tory cuts.

Children's services have already seen unprecedented cuts. Commissioning for public health, moved from NHS to council responsibility, has faced £200 million in budget cuts from central government. This year, routine nasal-spray flu immunisations for five and six-year-olds are being provided in schools by pharmacists working for tax-avoiding chemist Boots.

These cuts to social work and public health funding and regulation - by the unelected prime minister Theresa May - will leave children and young people at higher risk of abuse and neglect.

A coordinated campaign across the public sector, including joint industrial action and a socialist political voice for workers, really is needed. Only this can protect the most vulnerable in society, our future, and our children and young people.

The Socialist inbox

Liverpool FC and the fight against racism

Liverpool-born black footballer Howard Gayle wore the red shirt of Liverpool FC during the 1980s. I have been a Liverpool supporter for over 50 years, and of course, for me, players like John Barnes and Howard Gayle were sporting heroes.

Very rarely during that period would you see a black face on the Kop, due to the racial divide in the city during the 1960s, 70s, and early 80s.

This segregation started to come to an end during the period when the 47 Labour councillors led by Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party, controlled the council. They united many sections of the Liverpool community against the Thatcher government's attacks on the working class.

Howard Gayle very recently refused to accept an honour from this Tory government, because of his principles as a black person with knowledge of the history of the Tories and the rotten honours system.

I have, in the past, shared a 'Show Racism the Red Card' platform with both Howard and John. They have worked hard to raise the anti-racism campaign within both the football and local communities. Sadly, very few star footballers, black or white, have been prepared to put their principles before their celebrity status.

It is now 2016, and at Anfield you will see Liverpool fans from various communities and countries singing "You'll never walk alone" in unison. Quite often, a current Liverpool team could have at least six black players on the field cheered on by their fans.

Raph Parkinson, Liverpool

"There is no question that the campaign initiated by the 47, which united all sections of the working class, was a factor which gave leverage to the campaign against racism. The 1985 Liverpool v Everton cup final was an example, when most fans wore the blue and red stickers which declared: 'We support the Liverpool socialist council!'"

Tony Mulhearn, former Liverpool 47 Militant councillor

Guardian gripe

'What we saw' in the last Socialist (issue 919, page 4) was spot-on. The Guardian certainly is the house newsletter of the Labour right. It flags up all the injustices of capitalism only to attack the fight for an alternative when the time comes.

In the front line of the attack against Jeremy Corbyn - and therefore the fight against the very austerity she denounces on a weekly basis - is Polly Toynbee. In a recent column, "Why can't I get behind Corbyn, when we want the same things? Here's why", she attacks every move to resist the right wing. She is firmly on the side of 'Project Anaconda' and opposes transforming Labour into a party of the 99%.

Toynbee also refers to the false claim that Stella Creasy was attacked by a peaceful anti-war demo against the bombing of Syria outside her empty constituency office: "If he meant peace and unity, he could stop dead all talk of deselected MPs, and protect MPs such as Walthamstow's Stella Creasy and Brighton's Peter Kyle, threatened by bullies acting in his name."

But this wasn't enough for the Guardian. A hyperlink takes you to an article which says of the vile abuse that Creasy has faced: "The Walthamstow MP Stella Creasy has had to put up with years of abuse: in 2014 a man was jailed for 18 weeks for bombarding her with messages threatening to rape her."

The Socialist Party condemns these and all such threats to women politicians. But we also condemn the Guardian for linking Jeremy Corbyn with attacks that took place at least a year before his first election.

This is just an indication of the lengths to which the representatives of big business in the Parliamentary Labour Party and the establishment press will go to maintain Labour as a party of the 1%.

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Waltham Forest, east London

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/23764>