

Bosses' government, bosses' EU...fight for socialism

James Ivens

An existential crisis threatens the Tories after the [High Court ruling on Brexit](#). The Corbyn movement must now press the advantage.

On one side, the Tories face their friends and funders, the capitalist class. All the major institutions of capitalism were desperate to remain in the EU. Now they'll want their party to block Brexit, or at least stay in the free-trade zone.

On the other side, the EU referendum was a mass expression of anger against all establishment politicians. If the Tories ignore this fiery mood, it will be at their peril.

This crisis creates a [big opportunity for the Corbyn movement](#): to push for a socialist, internationalist Brexit, based on independent working class action.

The Tories won't deliver it. The Blairites won't deliver it. And whatever they decide, the judges won't deliver it either.

The state is not a neutral body. The capitalists designed it, and their lackeys manage it.

One of the judges in the Article 50 case was Lord Justice Sales. He was the highest-paid lawyer in government under Tony Blair. Unsurprisingly, he recently ruled against allowing 130,000 new Labour members to vote in the [leadership election](#).

The workers' movement can only rely on its own strength. Kick out the Tories, kick out the Blairites, and build a party for the 99%.

Fight for a Brexit that defends and extends workers' rights. Scrap the free-market foundations of the EU. For a voluntary socialist confederation of Europe.

- 'Were socialists right to say no to the EU?' - one of the sessions at Socialism 2016 see [socialism2016.net](#)

What we think:

High Court bombshell: Fight for a united, working class approach to Brexit

The decision of the High Court that the government must allow Parliament a say in the issue of Brexit is a bombshell with wide, and perhaps even unforeseen, effects. It could lead to a general election next year which in turn will widen even further the endemic splits within the Tory Party. As shown by the resignation of

Tory MP Stephen Phillips over the government's handling of Brexit and of Zac Goldsmith over the third runway at [Heathrow](#), these splits are already of Grand Canyon proportions!

Moreover, if it appears that the will of the people has been overturned by three unelected judges, and then confirmed by the Supreme Court, that could lead to mass opposition on the streets - which the far right and Ukip will seek to capitalise on. In Ireland in 2008 the population [voted against the Lisbon Treaty](#) of the European Union - only to be sent back to the polls just 16 months later for the ruling class to get the result they wanted! The Lisbon Treaty itself was only created to get around the rejection three years earlier of the EU Constitution by referenda in France and the Netherlands.

However Britain now is not in the same situation as these countries were then. There has been a build-up of massive discontent and such a move would result in mass resistance. The referendum result was not just about the EU but was an expression of mass revulsion at the social conditions that have developed in Britain. There is brewing mass discontent powered by worsening conditions of life for huge swathes of people who are only managing to keep their heads above water by accumulating even more debt. The total household debt in the UK now tops £1.5 trillion.

Hypocrisy

This court case has illustrated the sheer hypocrisy of all wings of the ruling class. The Daily Mail poses as the defender of the people with its headline drawn from Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, 'Enemy of the People,' referring to the three judges.

The so-called 'liberal' press has outdone itself from the opposite perspective, rushing to defend the 'independence' of the judiciary. The Observer denounced the Mail and Telegraph: "Castigating the judges and by extension, anybody who has the effrontery to agree with them, is exactly what the hard Tory Brexiters and their accomplices in the lie factories of Fleet Street have resorted to with a venom, vindictiveness and vituperation remarkable even by their standards."

The truth of the matter is that the judiciary is not independent - it is drawn largely from the rich and powerful, linked to the capitalist class. Any striking worker who has been threatened with an injunction knows this. The 'independent' judiciary jailed the Tolpuddle Martyrs and many of those - including 34 of our own members - who fought against and refused to pay the unfair Poll Tax.

Theresa May has appealed to the Supreme Court to overturn the decision. But if the decision stands, what are its implications? First of all, it will mean a battle in the House of Commons and the House of Lords aimed against a 'hard Brexit' - opposition to withdrawal from the single market and to limits on immigration etc. The majority of MPs supported a Remain vote. If the House of Lords were to help to overturn Brexit, it could lead to a mood in favour of the abolition of that undemocratic body.

May, with her slim majority, could be forced to try to engineer an early general election. This would be welcomed by the Blairites who are, as we have pointed out, 'counterrevolutionary defeatists'. They would hope for a Labour Party defeat to then use against Jeremy Corbyn in a third coup.

As part of their campaign, those who welcomed the decision will once more argue the 'progressiveness' of the EU. Incredibly, this is backed up by the Trade Union Congress which goes along with playing up the EU for allegedly defending trade union rights. In reality, most workers' rights - for example equal pay for women - did not begin from EU legislation but through workers' struggles here in Britain. What's more, even when advances were introduced by the EU, the bosses have found ways around them - for example by cutting full time jobs to get around the maximum 48-hour week enshrined in the Working Time Directive.

The EU remains a neoliberal project which at heart means more privatisations, worsening conditions such as through the gig economy, falling pay, etc. Only the actions of the working class itself, through trade unions, is able to achieve lasting reforms of better conditions and wages. In fact a left Jeremy Corbyn-led government implementing measures in the interests of the working class, like the nationalisation of the railways, would quickly come into conflict with the institutions and legislation of the EU.

Corbyn

Jeremy Corbyn has said that only on the basis of workers' rights and conditions being defended will he allow Article 50 to go through. It is good that he has emphasised defending workers' rights, but it is a mistake to give the impression that he would consider blocking Brexit by voting down Article 50. Tom Watson has flatly contradicted him, and this statement could be used to undermine Corbyn. It is also a mistake for Corbyn to include access to the single market in his demands for Brexit, if by that he means acceptance of its neoliberal rules.

Jeremy Corbyn's position related to Brexit has to be linked to policies and action like those that have brought him victory in two leadership elections. This includes rent control, council house building, a £10 an hour minimum wage, an end to zero-hour contracts. It must also be linked to a radical socialist programme, including the nationalisation of basic industries.

Without this, the Corbyn movement will be powerless, especially in the teeth of a new economic crisis, which is on the horizon. This has been shown in Greece where Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras - elected on a more radical programme than Corbyn has advanced - is [moving further and further to the right](#).

Jeremy Corbyn is correct to say that Labour would welcome a general election and to ignore the sceptics, like Kevin Maguire of the Mirror, who say Labour will be defeated. On the contrary, the Tories are hopelessly divided and these divisions could become even wider. The Labour Party could win with an anti-austerity, socialist programme.

The question of a general election is still in the balance. Originally Theresa May was determined to last it out until 2020. And there are complications, such as needing the agreement of Parliament to have an early general election. But nevertheless she could have no choice if Brexit is dragged out and subsequently watered down by Parliament and there is a growing revolt among working people.

The whole labour movement has to be prepared. Labour must fight on an independent class position in all situations. It is therefore scandalous that in Richmond Park even those supposedly behind Corbyn, like Clive Lewis, said that Labour should not contest the byelection brought about by Zac Goldsmith resigning from the Tories. An independent working class and socialist position is vital for the Labour Party to triumph in the challenges it faces.

Stop the 54,000 yearly maternity sackings

Angie Waller, Barnsley Socialist Party

About 54,000 women a year are pushed out of their jobs within 12 months of returning from maternity leave - that's 11% - according to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

This practice is going unchallenged, as most women cannot afford the costs of a tribunal. In fact only 1% have actually challenged their employers. This is down to the £1,200 charge for tribunals the Tories and Lib Dems introduced in 2013.

It is [costing businesses £280 million a year](#) to hire replacement staff and make redundancy payments. Add this to the cost to the state in benefits for those women who lose their jobs. As well as being clear sexist discrimination, this means losing experienced workers from the workforce.

For those who manage to stay in their jobs, many find their pay reduced, projects they were working on passed to 'more committed' team members, not considered for promotions, and receiving lower pay rises and bonuses.

Frustrating

I had the frustrating experience where, one week after having my first son, my boss announced that there was a team leader vacancy within my team! I was only one week into my maternity leave, and had no knowledge this was on the cards.

I had ten years' experience with the council as an engineer, but obviously the promotion wasn't intended for me. I was 'safely' out of the way for six months.

The EHRC has now called on the government to extend its time limit for tribunals to six months, and is promoting flexible working. By improving the chance of getting to a tribunal, companies can be held to account by more women being able to challenge them.

But we need more than this. The Socialist Party fights for [free childcare](#), adult care and education for all; the abolition of employment tribunal fees; full maternity and paternity pay; and a socialist society that can begin to end all [sexist practices](#) and attitudes. Then both women and men alike can start to see real change.

Build housing for the 120,000 kids without homes this Christmas

Sue Coleridge, teacher

That any children are homeless in Britain, a rich country, is a crime - yet housing charity Shelter predicts there will be 120,000 children homeless this Christmas!

As this is also an increase of 15% since last year, it can be directly attributed to the constant barrage of cuts and sell-offs the government inflicts on working class people.

Horror stories of children disappearing overnight, or being forced onto the streets, are becoming the [norm in most inner-city schools](#). Councils have a duty to find children that have nowhere to live somewhere to sleep. But this results in whole families living in one room, often miles away from relatives, friends and their community - the social networks that families need to rely on these situations.

A child in my class was told last November his family was likely to be made homeless, as they fell into arrears on their rent when dad lost his job. However, as they weren't to be evicted until February, they weren't allowed on the council emergency housing list until after Christmas, leaving four months of worry and stress.

After collecting evidence for court and many sleepless nights, they were finally in the 'lucky' position of being allowed to stay with increased rent and a payment plan for their arrears.

[Temporary accommodation](#) for two separate families is four miles or more away from the school. This creates a long, expensive commute every day for vulnerable children who don't know how long they will remain in the accommodation or in their school with their friends.

Establishment MPs put out statements about the 'true meaning of Christmas', or when decorations should appear in shops. It's hard to tell if they don't know about the thousands of families who are homeless and in substandard housing, or simply don't care. But one thing is for sure - it is up to us to change this system.

Resources

The [resources already exist](#) to do all this. The big home builders control space for 600,000 new homes! They have £1 billion waiting for the most 'profitable' time to invest. This can start to undo the situations which leads to these horror stories.

And those stories are just the ones who are counted as homeless. A family in the school where I teach has two children living with grandparents, while the other five siblings and mum share beds across a two-bed flat. They've been on the council waiting list for over two years.

Another child lives with their mum and sibling in the same community as their abusive dad. A restraining order doesn't mean much to a child. The constant fear that they may see their abuser, on their way to school or when they're out playing, does.

The Socialist Party fights for a society which cares about working class children and families, and provides plenty for all instead of enriching the parasitic super-wealthy.

The Socialist Party says

- Cap private rents, not housing benefit
 - Provide a lifetime guarantee of social housing for all who want it
 - Stop the sell-off of existing council homes
 - Nationalise the housebuilding monopolies - and use their land banks and cash piles to build genuinely affordable homes
-

Pre-crisis wages in spite of rise: unions must act on pay restraint!

James Moran, Coventry West Socialist Party

Low earners have had the "biggest pay rise in 20 years" according to Office for National Statistics figures. At least that's the Financial Times's take on it.

This might have some thinking that workers have never had it so good. The figures point out the impact the [new higher minimum wage](#) has had on the very lowest earners, pushing a one-off rise of 6%. But the newspaper concedes that even this leaves wages below pre-crisis levels.

It will take another decade for average earnings to recover.

What they forget to mention is the increasing precarity of work, with over 800,000 now on zero-hour contracts, and the increasingly desperate plight of those out of work. Not to mention Britain's richest 0.001% doubling their wealth to over £500 billion in the same period!

At my university, the University of Birmingham, we recently saw management abandon its commitments to the Living Wage. This was despite a record surplus of over £45 million, and one of the highest-paid vice chancellors in the country.

Over 500 cleaners and support staff lost out. It is a familiar story.

And while the FT now praises this small rise in earnings, exactly one year ago it criticised the new minimum wage, saying it would cost jobs. We can now reveal that, according to Bank of England numbers, this is not the case.

What the new minimum wage shows is precisely that higher wages aren't responsible for economic crisis. In Seattle, a mass movement where the Socialist Party's US co-thinkers played a leading role won [a \\$15 an hour minimum wage](#). Both employment and economic growth have actually boomed in its wake.

In the UK, [we demand £10 an hour now](#). This would lift people out of reliance on working tax credits, and transfer some of the wealth the bosses steal from workers back into workers' pockets.

To end the theft once and for all, we need public ownership under democratic workers' control and management, with a socialist plan of production to meet the needs of all.

Court slams Tory air quality plans

Only socialist planning can stop toxic air

Simon Carter, East London Socialist Party

It's supposed to be safe but it kills more people than obesity or alcohol - [the air we breathe](#).

Second only to smoking in its harmful effects, particulates (soot) and nitrogen dioxide - emitted largely by diesel vehicles - kill 30,000 and 10,000 people respectively in the UK every year.

Yet the government is doing nothing to curb this invisible killer. Recently a green campaign group won a court judgement which said the environment secretary's 'Air Quality Plan' for cleaner air in the UK by 2020 (2025 in London) was flawed.

This followed a [ruling won by ClientEarth in 2015, in which Supreme Court](#) justices said "immediate" action was needed to address harmful air pollution.

Theresa May and her ministers accepted the judgement, but that doesn't mean any progress on improving air quality. The Tories' decision to press for a third runway at Heathrow will only worsen air pollution in London and the south east.

The car industry is equally guilty. Data on emissions from 'cleaner' exhaust systems were recently found to have been [falsified by the likes of manufacturer VW](#).

The only realistic way of reducing air pollution is to drastically reduce road vehicle traffic. But without a massively expanded, cheap, safe, and fully integrated public transport system alternative, then people have little option but to continue to drive their cars.

To clean up the environment requires huge investment in green technology and transport systems. This is something that capitalists, motivated by the pursuit of profit, aren't prepared to make.

We have to fight instead for a workers' government that would introduce environmentally friendly socialist measures, as part of a democratically decided economic plan.

Them & Us

Poppy profit

A [hedge fund investor made over £2 million](#) in profit from a 2014 Armistice Day installation.

Ben Whitfield profited from the sale of 888,246 ceramic poppies. They had previously covered parts of the Tower of London for the centenary of World War One.

[That war was a great imperialist slaughter](#). It took place only because the leading capitalist nations had carved up all the world's resources and markets between them. The only way to expand profits - a permanent drive under capitalism - was to battle other imperialist powers.

17 million people died to advance the bosses' profits in that war.

Working class loss

Meanwhile, the working class of all countries sees no benefit - we are just a human battleground for the capitalists.

Businesses had made at least \$138 billion from the [invasion of Iraq](#) by 2013, according to a Financial Times analysis. Over half of this went to just ten big corporations.

Of the soldiers who came back to the UK, 41% have post-traumatic stress disorder. A survey by charity SSAFA found half of working-age ex-soldiers cannot afford basic essentials.

The UN reckons the invasion created around two million refugees, and 1.7 million internally displaced people. It killed around a million, according to pollster ORB - mostly Iraqi civilians.

Their wars. Our dead.

Join the #Nov19 national student march

Build the education fightback

Ben Bolton, Liverpool Socialist Party

Students have suffered greatly under brutal privatisation and austerity measures.

Within the last 20 years, tuition fees in the UK have gone from non-existent to £3,000 and then £9,000 a year, in 2006 and 2010 respectively. Rents to private landlords have skyrocketed so that students are spending huge amounts of their loans just keeping a roof over their heads.

The latest attack on public education is the Tories' 'Higher Education and Research Bill'. This has further increased the cap on fees, allowing certain universities to lift them with inflation. It's another step towards a for-profit education system.

This is exactly why the National Union of Students (NUS) is right in calling a [national demonstration](#) in London against these attacks. However, this is only the first step.

A demonstration alone, while important, will not be enough. This must not just be a token of our anger - let's make the march a springboard for organising a coherent mass movement!

The NUS and student unions should use their huge platforms and resources to do this.

We need a [programme of action](#) at the local and national level, linked with school students, and coordinating with campus trade unions as well.

Take the [school student strike in Spain](#) on 26 October, with over 90% participation, and solidarity messages from around the world.

The Sindicato de Estudiantes (Spanish union of students) has already announced that if its demands aren't met, students will strike again in November, December and so on until they are.

This is the resilience, determination and organisation needed in our NUS. We need a union built from the ground up, fighting for those going through the hardships and struggles of student life.

We demand that tuition fees and the HE bill are scrapped. Build university-owned, student-run halls to break the racket of the private landlords. Reverse all cuts and sell-offs in education and the public sector. And introduce real living grants, so that students can not only survive, but flourish.

If you agree - get involved with Socialist Students, and join the Socialist Party!

- [For more on Socialist Students, see socialiststudents.org.uk](#)
-

- 'Crisis in Spain' - one of many sessions with lessons for education activists at Socialism 2016 see [socialism2016.net](#)
-

Join the demo!

- Saturday 19 November - 12pm
 - Assemble at Park Lane, London,
 - Marching to Millbank, Westminster
-

Read the Socialist

Reading [the Socialist](#) can boost our confidence to fight back. Cover to cover, you can hear working class people in their own words. It's an antidote to the pro-austerity ideas festering in the mainstream media and among establishment politicians.

Below, working class fighters give a glimpse of why the Socialist is important to so many activists. The articles inside have helped guide them through the struggles they've helped lead. The Socialist is present at and supports every strike, protest and movement our supporters are able to reach.

In the last issue of the Socialist, we featured articles on the refugee crisis, the [Spanish student strike](#) and the [Uber court victory](#). Who else gives space for migrants facing oppression but also organising against it to tell their own story? Which paper gave an eyewitness account of millions of school students striking

in Spain? It was ignored by the establishment press. Where can you read a report of gig economy workers fighting back that is celebratory of their success while also clear that legal action alone is not enough? We said organising, campaigning and striking is the only way to win lasting improvements in conditions.

Can you help boost the readership of the Socialist? If you're a Socialist Party member, do you regularly discuss the paper in your branch meetings?

The Socialist isn't just written in an office; it's the tireless class fighters around the country who provide the material in this issue and every other. Anybody, whether you're a member of the Socialist Party or not, can write for us - tell us what you think, what your campaigning for, what's going on in your workplace, college or university.

If you're looking for inspiration for an exciting topic in a Socialist Party meeting, a Marxist discussion group, or just to talk to your friends and neighbours about, look no further than your latest issue of the Socialist.

Jeremy Corbyn has now won two landslide elections - showing the hunger for a party for the 99%. Over the summer, the Socialist had its highest sales for five years - every week clearly explaining how his anti-austerity policies can come to fruition.

The Socialist is a vital tool in the important struggles we're all facing - write for it, subscribe, sell it to others - and make sure you read it!

Ian Pattison, Socialist Party national paper organiser

Why do you read the Socialist?

"In 2010, the Socialist supported the call for student strikes which was crucial in building a mass movement against the trebling of tuition fees. Now, with new fee hikes on the agenda, the Socialist is standing right beside student activists and supporting the United for Education demonstration on 19 November."

Claire Laker-Mansfield, Socialist Students national organiser

"After slaving away all day, working people - typified by the tenants on the Butterfields estate in Walthamstow - have little time or energy for what they call 'politics'. But the Socialist is different. It showed Butterfields campaigners that they were not alone, and that was important. All over the country - and indeed all over the world - working people like them are battling away on different issues and sometimes in different ways, but nevertheless all against the same inhumane system."

Linda Taaffe, Waltham Forest Socialist Party and key campaigner with the victorious Butterfields tenants

"The Wormwood scrubs branch and national POA owe a debt of gratitude to the Socialist paper. It has consistently covered our disputes and workplace news from the perspective of the rank-and-file member and not with the right-wing, union-hating spin tactics of the mainstream media. It has highlighted our struggles and rallied support when other media outlets would not touch us.

It is a vital tool for our members to discover and explore socialist ideas and keep informed about struggles throughout the trade union movement. Wormwood Scrubs POA is proud of our close relationship with the Socialist - long may it continue."

Matt Clarke, Wormwood Scrubs POA Chair

"The Socialist paper is a fantastic tool of international solidarity. It highlighted solidarity by Lisbon Dockers for the Welsh Museum workers, renewing their will to fight."

Joao Felix, Cardiff Socialist Party

"Excellent coverage in this paper has highlighted our struggle to keep jobs and services local, and inspired and given confidence to our members!"

Marion Lloyd, PCS group president for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills

"The Socialist newspaper has played an indispensable role in the development of effective, fighting strategies for workers at Whipps Cross hospital over the past 25 years. In the recent victory to secure permanent contracts, banishing zero-hour contracts and securing the London Living Wage for privatised workers throughout Bart's Trust hospitals, its record and guiding role was an important factor in ensuring a successful outcome to the union's campaign."

Len Hockey, Unite branch secretary in Barts Health NHS Trust

"The real strength of a socialist newspaper is in struggle. During the anti-poll tax campaign, Militant (the Socialist's predecessor) was invaluable in building the mass movement that took place. The reports, the legal guidance, and analysis was critical for the many thousands of people active in the campaign. It gave us invaluable confidence. It would be true to say that the battle against the poll tax would've been harder without a genuine socialist newspaper."

Steve Nally, former secretary of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation

"The Socialist was a key to our victory. Without the incredible support raised via the paper we would have struggled to achieve the concessions made by management to protect our members."

Mick Joyce, shop steward at victorious Kone strike

"The paper has been amazing in supporting the protests against the unfair junior doctor contract, with many articles on the subject. Especially good have been those linking the protests to the wider struggle against austerity and calling for all healthcare unions to take coordinated strike action to save the NHS."

Zoe Brunswick, medical student

"The Socialist has carried articles on Jeremy Corbyn even since he declared his run for Labour leader. Each one has set out a clear strategy for how anti-austerity policies can win out against the right-wing."

Martin Reynolds, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

Over a thousand march to fight museums and libraries cuts

"Don't make a bonfire of our culture", read the PCS banner that led the 5 November demonstration against [cuts and privatisation in museums and libraries](#). Over a thousand people marched through central London, including culture sector workers and library campaigners and a contingent of French workers organised in the CGT trade union federation. Greenwich library worker and Socialist Party member Sara Kasab spoke at the end rally in Trafalgar Square:

[Greenwich Unite members in libraries](#) have taken eight days of strike action so far this year to defend the library service. Our policy in Greenwich has always been to fight every cut - no matter how small.

This year we took [action to defend our mobile library](#). This service provides books to schools and nurseries and last year issued 30,000 books - and yet it was seen by Greenwich council to be old fashioned and an easy target.

Our action wasn't just to secure an alternative and protect staff if the council decided to cut the mobile - it was to show councillors that we will fight every proposed cut to our precious library service. I have been a library worker for 36 years and I expect that there are many people like me here today. People who have spent most of their working lives in libraries because they love libraries.

We welcome the news that Jeremy Corbyn supports our movement and it's great that he wants to invest in arts and culture and public services. But we can't wait until 2020 Jeremy. We need Labour councillors like in Greenwich to stop closing and privatising libraries now and we call on Jeremy Corbyn to support that stand.

As well as crucial community campaigning we need trade union action - national action by unions in this sector.

Library cuts: working class kids suffer most

Akila, Birmingham secondary teacher

Walsall council, in one of the poorest areas of the west Midlands, is closing 15 of its 16 libraries. Sadly, this is just one of many examples of ruthless cuts which will deny young people a future.

The way children have been taught to read at schools has significantly changed over the past 20 years. However, it is still children from poorer backgrounds who are more likely to struggle with reading.

Libraries are a free resource which allow children to improve their literacy outside of school, regardless of their background. In cutting funding to libraries, it is children from less well-off backgrounds who will lose out the most.

As a child, most of the books I read were from the library. Without this, it is likely I would not have learnt to read so quickly and, as a result, I would not have done as well at school or got into university.

[Cutting funding to libraries](#) is not the only way the government is preventing pupils from poorer backgrounds from achieving their full potential. It is also cutting the money available to provide teaching assistants to support children who struggle with reading. Schools are required to give evidence of how they help pupils who need extra support to achieve their potential.

Equality gap

However, instead of providing the funding for pupils who need it, the government is making cuts which mean that these pupils lose out and putting pressure on teachers to close the gap. Meanwhile, the proposal to bring back [grammar schools](#) will only widen the equality gap further, demoralising a generation of children and denying them a future.

Labour runs Walsall council in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. This shows that we need [Labour councillors who fight cuts](#), not close libraries.

Momentum left meeting excludes socialists

A Birmingham Socialist Party member

Momentum national committee (NC) members and reps from local groups met in Birmingham on 5 November to "discuss recent events and, most importantly, consider ways to overcome the resulting differences and move forward together". This followed the cancellation of an NC meeting, itself due on 5 November, by the steering committee.

The recent events referred to include not only the cancellation but also the convening of a meeting of the steering committee with less than 24-hours' notice resulting in leading activists like Fire Brigades Union general secretary Matt Wrack not attending.

As reported in the Socialist (['Corbyn movement must seize the initiative or face defeat'](#)), Matt correctly came out in criticism of the leadership of Momentum and their proposals for a conference organised by an online voting process. In a speech on the question, Matt expressed concern that alternative proposals for a delegate-based conference were ruled out at the urgent meeting.

Faced with outrage from Momentum groups in London and elsewhere, it seems that the steering committee had partially retreated from its position by 4 November. However, while a physical conference will now take place, it is still not clear that it will have any decision making powers.

[A report of the Birmingham meeting by Nick Wrack](#) described the meeting as "encouraging and positive". Nick also explained that the meeting discussed how best to build Momentum as a democratic organisation, set up new local groups, get support from HQ and how to improve communication, among others. Nick concludes by reporting that these ideas will be presented to the next NC on 3 December.

Socialists should welcome any initiative aiming to strengthen the movement to [transform Labour into an anti-austerity party](#). Unfortunately, no mention was made in the notice given for the Birmingham meeting of the democratic deficit in Labour and no mention of the crucial question of reselection.

Nor does it bode well for the future of Momentum that I was excluded from this meeting for being a Socialist Party member. I am a member of Momentum and have been trying to bring people together in my area in a Momentum group, yet I was told by Nick Wrack - himself undemocratically excluded from the Labour Party - that I cannot be a member of Momentum and a member of the Socialist Party. When I argued against this I was told it would be put to a vote of the meeting. It was voted down without me even being able to put my case.

For Momentum to become truly democratic it needs to open up, end these arbitrary un-fraternal acts, welcome all those who oppose austerity into Momentum, and [support expelled and other socialists being admitted](#) to the Labour Party and maximise the massive potential that exists to build a party for the 99%.

- 'Labour, Militant and the role of socialists' - one of the sessions at Socialism 2016, see socialism2016.net
-

New Socialist Party pamphlet: Fight racism, fight for socialism

The Socialist Party's Black and Asian Group has produced a new pamphlet called 'Fight racism, fight for socialism'. It is a collection of articles from the Socialist Party and looks at some of these key questions of why racism exists and how to fight it.

April Ashley, Socialist Party Black and Asian Group and Unison NEC black women members' seat (personal capacity), says in the introduction: "The Socialist Party argues that capitalism is the root cause of racism which is used in order to divide and rule working people so that the capitalist system can extract profits for the benefit of the 1% and the detriment of the rest of us. The Socialist Party agrees with Malcom X, that 'you can't have capitalism without racism.'

"The Socialist Party has a long history of fighting racism and fighting the conditions that breed racism. From [confronting the British National Party in the 90s](#) to drive them off the streets of Welling and Tower Hamlets with Youth Against Racism in Europe, to mobilising against the English Defence League."

- The pamphlet is £2 and can be bought from leftbooks.co.uk
 - 'Black Lives Matter - building a movement to end racism' - one of the sessions at Socialism 2016 see socialism2016.net
-

Far-right given short shrift in Darlington

Alan Docherty, Teesside Socialist Party

A handful of fascists from nearby Bishop Auckland had invited Nazi groups from across the UK to march in Darlington on 5 November. The result was a march made up of about 20 members of the north-east and north-west Infidels, the Scottish Defence League and 35 from a national mobilisation of the black shirted National Action. They were confronted by 200 local people.

The fascists were escorted from a pub on the outskirts to the town centre where most pubs closed their doors on them. They quickly organised their short march to an almost deserted square to be confronted by the 200 strong anti-fascist rally. The fascists, surrounded by the police, soon melted away and left demoralised.

Prior to the static anti-fascist rally called by Unite Against Fascism (UAF), 20 activists from Darlington Trades Council, supported by Socialist Party members, leafleted the public in the town centre about the far-right and xenophobia.

We engaged with people to counter the myth that immigrants, refugees and Muslims are to blame for society's problems. To counter '[divide and rule](#)', we put the blame with Tory austerity policies and outlined an alternative of fighting for socialist policies of a £10 an hour minimum wage, job creation, council house building and investment in the NHS and public services.

What was a successful day was spoiled to some extent by the sectarianism of some of the UAF who agreed with the police to a static protest well away from main thoroughfares. The UAF did not contact local labour movement organisations because they, in the north east, have a sectarian policy of excluding the Socialist Party. Socialist Party members in Darlington hold leading positions in Darlington TUC.

[Maximum unity is required to fight fascism](#) and this behaviour of some UAF members is counterproductive.

Obituary: Hilary Mooney 1945-2016

Hilary Mooney, for over 50 years first a supporter of Militant and then a member of the Socialist Party on Merseyside, has sadly passed away at the age of 71 after a lengthy period of illness that she bore with great fortitude.

She was the wife of Ted Mooney, also an intrepid supporter and member of Militant and the Socialist Party, the mother of Jim and Jenny, grandmother to Connor, Arron and Louis, and mother-in-law to Katia.

We will all miss her, particularly her close family and comrades.

Her roots were deep in the Merseyside labour movement. Her mother and father were members of the Independent Labour Party and then the Labour Party.

She hailed from Birkenhead, like me, and participated in the [Labour Party Young Socialists](#) in the town at the same time as I did in the early 1960s.

The labour movement then opposed capitalism - the 'dog-eat-dog' society, the system based upon production for profit and not social need - and looked towards democratic socialism as a solution to society's ills, something that Blair and those who supported him did not!

Ted was also active in the Labour Party Young Socialists in Bootle and the two met and were together for more than 50 years.

He was a leader of the [1960 apprentices' strike](#), in which 100,000 young workers took part. Alex Ferguson, the legendary ex-manager of Manchester United, also took part in that strike. Ted also led the epic sit-down strike at English Electric in the 1960s.

Hilary was herself a trade union representative of the clerical workers at Camell Lairds. She was also variously a member of Birkenhead Labour, Toxteth, Bootle and Walton Labour parties.

She was a consistent supporter of Militant, now the Socialist Party, from about 1961, and supported the marvellous militant [struggle of Liverpool City Council in the 1980s](#).

Both were founding supporters of Militant and Hilary paid subscriptions to the party right up to the day of her death.

Linda Taaffe and I have very fond memories of Hillary with her serene and sunny disposition.

We mark the passing of our dear friend and comrade Hilary for her consistent support for the struggle for socialism.

We send condolences to Ted and their family.

Peter Taaffe

Action needed to defend workers at the sharp end of prisons crisis

A prison officer

The latest national statistics on safety in our prison system were released recently. These quarterly figures have been breaking records and setting new "unprecedented highs" systematically since 2010 - a year which 'coincidentally' ties in with the [culling of 7,000 prison officers' jobs](#).

Currently deaths in custody including homicides, incidents of self-harm and assaults among prisoners are all on the increase, including a 43% rise in assaults on staff in the last year. The POA union of prison officers and allied workers has consistently challenged the government and employers' plans on how to tackle this ever-worsening situation but year on year the stats speak for themselves.

Some individual branches like Holme House, Wetherby and Wormwood Scrubs have [taken action to protect their members](#) from the ever-increasing risk of violence by staging walkouts on health and safety grounds. This is a legal right of any employee, yet all have been branded as criminals themselves and threatened with legal proceedings for their efforts. Prison officers have been denied their right to strike since 1994.

The [true extent of the problem](#) is not known by the general public. Drones flying drugs over prison walls, weapons caches, new psychoactive substance and drug abuse, slashing, stabbings, murder and suicide are all events in an average week for some prison officers. They currently have to work until the age of 68 before they qualify for their now reduced civil service pension.

Action gets results

In response to these latest figures the POA directed its members to hold meetings outside of their establishments on 2 November and mandate local committees to effectively take charge of each prison and its regime unless immediate assurances from local management were given. As always the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) hid behind the courts and cited that this was illegal industrial action.

NOMS and the justice secretary Liz Truss did eventually agree to talks with POA national officials on the condition they suspend their directive. These talks are now underway and will cease on 11 November. Should they not address the fears and concerns of the POA, it will re-issue its directive.

Meanwhile Liz Truss has announced government plans on 'prison reform'. They include an injection of 2,500 prison officers to tackle the issue of violence which has been cautiously welcomed. The reality is that prisons are a 'people industry'.

You cannot mechanise the production line or replace analysts with hi-tech software, you need staff supervising and interacting with prisoners in order for them to be safe - plenty of them! 2,500 will hardly make a dent in the damage that has been caused by the removal of the previous 7,000 and with a starting salary of £19,000 plus a retention rate of virtually zero, the number may as well be 100,000. Log on to the civil service website at any time of day and you will see dozens of jails constantly recruiting but in truth nobody wants to work in prisons now.

As well as the "injection of frontline staff", there are the plans for each prison to become a separate legal entity, like academy schools or NHS foundation trusts. What this will mean for the national collective bargaining powers of the POA, dispute resolution, universal pay structures and HR policies is unclear.

Prison officers and union officials would be irresponsible if they allowed this crisis to continue without taking action so I ask everyone to go out and support your local prisons and POA members when that action takes place.

Courts and tribunal services face huge cuts

Tessa Warrington, PCS Ministry of Justice group executive committee member

Huge changes are afoot in the civil service that will leave jobs slashed and public services a husk of their former selves. Given that 86,000 jobs have already been axed from the civil service over the past five years, this may seem like old news but the scale and scope of the Tories' austerity-driven changes are only now

being revealed.

I work in the county court and it has recently been announced that over the next six years HM Courts and Tribunal Service staffing will be cut by one third. However, the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) puts estimates closer to 50%. I look around my office and imagine half of us disappearing. It is terrifying.

We are being sold these cuts as part of the 'Reform' project, which will leave the justice system almost unrecognisable. Courts will no longer exist as they do now. Instead there will be hearing centres with no admin staff and no specialisation, dealing with every jurisdiction of law.

The recent [court closure programme](#) got rid of 86 courts but another 250 are now slated for closure. All queries will be handled by bulk customer service centres, in reality call centres.

£1 billion is being invested in this transformation, primarily into updating IT so that functions that staff currently perform can be digitally replaced with new programmes and service users doing the work themselves online.

The justice sector leaves a lot to be desired and improved IT is sorely needed but it is the motivation behind these changes that concerns me. The £1 billion has only been agreed in return for ongoing cuts in departmental spending of a quarter of a billion a year.

Staff nationally are being forced to attend workshops called 'One Conversation' where we are pressured by upper management to be subservient and help carry through these changes. One staff member was even threatened with being down-graded on performance for having their arms crossed as this was perceived as negative!

Justice?

We know that 'Reform' is not for the benefit of the public but a further degrading of a public service to save money. [Cuts to Legal Aid](#) and the Citizens Advice Bureau have already left access to justice non-existent for those who cannot afford it.

Further reliance on online processing will replicate the 'Digital by Default' scenario illustrated in Ken Loach's new film ['I, Daniel Blake'](#) where those who are not IT literate or can't afford access to the internet are penalised.

However, this is just part of the national picture in the civil service, which across the board is showing a trend towards centralisation on a massive scale.

My partner works in HMRC where they are going nationally from 148 offices to 17 regional hubs. His office is down to close in 2021 and we could both be out of our jobs at the same time.

It's a good job we're both socialists! We should never accept that cuts are a foregone conclusion - workers have the power to stop them in their tracks.

Public sector unions urgently need to come together in joint industrial action not only to defend the civil service but our libraries, schools, emergency services and the NHS, all of which are under attack from austerity. This could be a first step towards a one-day general strike and a strategy to bring down the Tory government.

Newcastle council cuts: opportunity for trade union fightback

William Jarrett, Newcastle Socialist Party

Newcastle residents and council staff have borne the brunt of Tory austerity. £200 million of central government funding has been stripped from the cash-starved council since 2010. An important refuge for women and children fleeing domestic crises is slated for closure.

There are even plans to eliminate residential bin collection. With a council 'living wage' of £7.85, staff pay has been stalled only by national agreements, until now.

With a projected deficit of £30 million for 2017 and a further loss of £70 million from the central government grant by 2020, Newcastle's Labour council announced it intends to slash staff pay by £2.5 million, citing the possibility of 100 redundancies as an alternative.

Some Newcastle Labour councillors are associated closely with [Jeremy Corbyn's successful leadership campaigns](#). The well-rehearsed 'heavy hearts' rhetoric has already been trafficked widely in local media, with councillor Veronica Dunn telling the Evening Chronicle: "This is not something that we want to do at all. Government cuts mean we have to make massive savings to protect services and jobs."

Local workers appear positioned to fight though, with a coalition between Unison, general workers' unions GMB and Unite, and construction union Ucat. Unison branch secretary and national executive committee member Paul Gilroy is playing a leading role in this.

Newcastle residents [frequently communicate their anger](#) about the Labour council to Socialist Party activists.

A common complaint is frustration with Labour councillors all too happy to be identified with left-wing causes, but who demonstrate no understanding of, or concern for, the damage they inflict on the community by unflinchingly passing round after round of devastating cuts.

The council's trade unions now have an opportunity to fight back, to protect their pay and their communities. The experience of [Durham's besieged teaching assistants](#) and their defiant stand against Durham Labour's cuts could and should inspire a new wave of resistance to austerity.

Birmingham's Labour council freezes workers' pay

Clive Walder, Birmingham Central Socialist Party

Trade unions representing Birmingham council workers have reached an "historic agreement" with the council which will mean a three-year pay freeze, instead of reduced sick pay, increased hours, a 1.35% pay cut and other cuts.

Mark New, Unison's regional organiser for the West Midlands said: "Working on the front line, the staff have a real understanding of the [financial difficulties at the city council](#)."

The unions have effectively accepted that here can be no money found to fund decent public services delivered by well paid staff. This is in complete contradiction to the anti-austerity message of Jeremy Corbyn and most Labour Party members and supporters.

Such a surrender never has and never will lead to 'fairer funding'. The route to fairer funding is the drawing up of a no-cuts budget backed up by a campaign of mobilising public support for anti-austerity policies and industrial action if more cuts are threatened. Ultimately, a [campaign like Liverpool City Council's](#) against Thatcher in the 1980s is what is needed, not more knee bending by councillors and union officials.

Council deputy leader Ian Ward added: "This historic agreement between the council, its staff and the trade unions who represent them clearly demonstrates the value of Labour-controlled local authorities. Not only have we been able to deliver a better deal for Birmingham but have secured a fairer plan for the staff who run the city."

What utter nonsense. What use is a Labour council when they carry out job cuts and pay freezes? A pay freeze certainly isn't fair on hard pressed council workers.

This deal can easily undermine the national pay agreements that cover council workers and be a catalyst for widespread pay freezes across the country. [Jeremy Corbyn must take action](#) against these councillors.

Hackney Picturehouse strike

Strikers at Hackney Picturehouse picketed the launch of a new film on 4 November, A Bectu rep spoke to Clare Doyle: "This is the second time that Hackney Picturehouse workers have been on strike this month. We were planning to walk out at 4pm but they have been closed all day. We're striking for a living wage. We believe that the company can afford it and has a moral duty to pay it. They made a profit of £83.8 million last year! We're tactically targeting the busiest film launches. Tonight it's 'Nocturnal Animals'. It would've been a sold-out screening. We will also be targeting the launches of Harry Potter and Star Wars and all the other key moments in which they make all the money. We know this can cost them more than it would cost simply to pay us the living wage. We are willing to do this until we win!"

Turkey: Erdogan tightens repressive screw

Sosyalist Alternatif (CWI Turkey)

During the night of 3 November the homes of several leaders and members of parliament of the left-wing and pro-Kurdish party, HDP (People's Democratic Party), were raided by Turkish police. The two co-chairs of the party, Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksekdag, along with at least nine members of parliament,

were arrested and taken into custody.

The party's headquarters in Ankara was also violently raided. These raids were coupled with the usual state method of shutting down social media - obvious attempts to stop people's angry reactions from spreading. This follows the earlier detention of the two HDP co-mayors of the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir.

Over the last few months, democratically elected Kurdish mayors have been arbitrarily discharged by the government and replaced by appointed administrators. All this is taking place under the cover of the struggle against 'terrorism', a label used at the regime's convenience to silence any opposition voice.

These arrests mark a new stage in the repression taking place in Turkey against anyone that stands in the way of President Tayyip Erdogan and his ruling party, the AKP, strengthening their grip on power.

[The HDP is in the line of fire as it is the main opposition](#) force in the country that has not aligned itself with the so-called 'national consensus' following the attempted military coup of 15 July. The HDP is seen by Erdogan as the main political obstacle on the road to securing the necessary conditions to establish a presidential dictatorship.

Sweeping counter-coup

After this [summer's failed coup](#), a sweeping counter-coup has taken place, with attacks on democratic rights in the country being stepped up dramatically. All voices of genuine opposition are being targeted; many academics, journalists and political activists were arrested, 110,000 teachers and civil servants lost their jobs, and 170 media outlets were arbitrarily shut down.

On 5 November the editor and several staff members of Cumhuriyet, one of Turkey's main opposition newspapers, were detained and charged with links to 'Kurdish terrorists' and to US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, who the regime accuses of plotting July's coup attempt. Over 1,000 people who attempted to march to the newspaper's offices to protest the arrests were attacked by police.

At the same time war is escalated to enhance Erdogan's prestige and regional ambitions. This heightens the risk of more bloodshed and insecurity for all the people of Turkey, Kurdistan and the region at large.

Sosyalist Alternatif, and the whole CWI, condemns these new arrests and demands the immediate release of all HDP representatives.

We support grassroots mass mobilisation and protests and to not fall into the trap of responding to the state's provocations by individual actions of violence. Such acts undermine the building of an effective movement of united opposition to [Erdogan's rule](#).

More than ever, what is needed is working people's unity and solidarity against repression, terror and war. The workers' and student movement and the rest of the left, on both sides of the ethnic divide, need to come together to discuss an urgent response to the Turkish state's onslaught.

Mass demonstrations and strikes should be organised across the country, assisted by actions of international solidarity, to build a sustained struggle capable of challenging Erdogan's policies.

- Free all HDP MPs and leaders immediately

- Reinststate the democratically elected mayors
 - End the state of emergency and all persecutions against dissenting voices
 - For full democratic rights, including the right to organise and protest
 - For freedom of expression, of the press and media
 - No to new wars and occupations, bring the troops home
 - For united protests across Turkey and internationally, as a starting point to build the fightback against Erdogan's rule
 - Down with Erdogan and the capitalist AKP regime
 - Please send letters of protest the Turkish Ministry of Justice at: info@adalet.gov.tr, with copies to cwi@worldsoc.co.uk
-

Ireland: Gardai strike threat

Pay deal acts as spur to other workers

Planned for Friday 4 November, the first of three days of [open strike action by Gardai \(police\)](#) in the history of the Irish state was only averted at the last minute following concessions from the government. But in making such concessions other workers are now determined to win back pay that was cut following the 2008 capitalist crisis. Conor Payne from the Socialist Party (CWI Ireland) reports on the gathering political storm.

The strike threat posed a significant crisis for the government and the state. An order from Noirin O'Sullivan, Garda Commissioner, to report for duty was due to be ignored by the vast majority of Gardai, with only 300 senior Gardai and 950 student Gardai listed for duty the night before the strike, according to the Irish Times.

The action would have been in violation of the ban on Garda strikes and represents an unprecedented split in the state apparatus.

Prior to the strike right-wing journalist Stephen Collins noted in the Irish Times: "The upholders of the law are threatening to break the law in pursuit of their own self-interest... The challenge to the authority of the state is one the government simply cannot afford to bow to on a point of principle, apart altogether from the financial implications."

The question of how to respond to this would have caused enormous problems for the government. This is illustrated by the reports that the introduction of Martial Law was threatened during talks with Garda Representative Association (GRA) officials.

But the concession only opens up new problems for Taoiseach (prime minister) Enda Kenny's fragile minority government.

After years of austerity and crisis, workers in both the public and private sectors are demanding their share of the much vaunted economic 'recovery', while the government pursues a policy of wage restraint.

[Strike action by bus and tram drivers in Dublin](#) won significant gains for those workers, showing that a militant stance brings results.

The government is currently in conflict with teachers who are locked out of secondary schools across the state. It is also facing demands for restoration of pay that was cut during the crisis from workers across the public sector.

In this context the concessions won by the GRA, worth around €6,000 a year to Gardai, are significant.

Minister for Finance Michael Noonan says the government cannot afford to extend the pay deal offered to gardaí to all public sector workers. However, the deal is a spur to action by other workers and can put pressure on the trade union leaders. Already five public sector unions have come out calling for pay increases for their members.

Meanwhile there were significant divisions in the GRA on whether to accept the deal offered or go ahead with the strike, and it remains to be seen if the Gardai will accept it in their ballot - which ends on 28 November.

The Socialist Party supports the right of the Gardai to organise and to strike. A victory for them significantly strengthens the hand of workers fighting for pay rises.

However, there is a contradiction in GRA members going on strike against austerity while allowing themselves to be used to impose austerity on working class people as they have during the water charges movement and on many other occasions.

This raises the fundamental question of who controls [policing and whose interests it serves](#). We need policing which operates under the democratic control of working class communities, rather than defending the interests and rule of the capitalist class.

South Africa: State victimises #OutsourcingMustFall activists

Two leading activists of the [#OutsourcingMustFall movement](#), both members of the [Workers and Socialist Party \(WASP, CWI South Africa\)](#), are facing legal harassment for their role in supporting the struggle for free education.

Austin Mofya, also an organiser for the Tshwane branch of the GIWUSA union, faces trumped-up charges of "public violence". These are old charges relating to Mofya's role in supporting a strike of outsourced workers at Tshwane University of Technology at the start of the year. The charges were dropped at the time, less than 24 hours after they were laid.

Mametlwe Sebei has been ordered to present himself to the Sunnyside police station. Sebei was the co-convenor of the student march to Union Buildings that took place on 20 October. The police declared the march illegal in advance but allowed it to proceed when students, workers and other supporters of free education assembled in numbers. The march was overwhelmingly peaceful, with the organisation of marshals to ensure discipline.

Austin and Sebei, alongside #OMF, Tshwane GIWUSA branch and WASP have played an important role in mobilising workers and working class communities in solidarity with the struggle for free education. This included uniting the strike of Sheraton Hotel workers for decent wages with the student march to Union Buildings. This is why they are now being targeted.

Workers will be mobilised to defend these activists. It is an attack on the whole movement.

Horror of health-wrecking toil for Polish migrants

Agnieszka, NHS interpreter

I am working as an interpreter for the NHS. I see Poles in hospitals and clinics who have problems with health. There are thousands of cases and there is no way to describe everything that I see every day.

Polish woman came from Greece to England. She couldn't survive there any longer. No work, no money. She has three children. Her boys did not speak English, only Greek and Polish.

Older boy did not cope at English school very well. He is now working on a construction site. The younger boy has developmental problems, goes to psychologist. The youngest daughter is one year old. Her aunt from Poland looks after her.

The woman has problems with her weight and her knee. She works in a recycling factory, sorting garbage. Her knee is getting worse, but all she gets is stronger and stronger painkillers from the doctor. She goes to work, because she is afraid to lose it if she is sick.

Polish shop assistant in the Polish shop. She was pregnant but still worked 12 hours a day. There were deliveries of goods. She had to carry boxes. She was induced at seven months' pregnancy. Gave birth to a dead child.

Another woman was bullied at work by her manager at the hotel. She had a nervous breakdown. She got medication and went off sick. She went to see the assessment committee. They stated that she is suitable for work. She needs to go back to work, little benefits only make for modest survival.

Another man worked in a chicken factory. He stood in the freezers for 12 hours a day. He didn't feel very well in himself. He was limited in time because of 12 hours' work every day and he couldn't go to the doctor.

Injuries at work

He fainted at work. He is in hospital. His kidneys stopped working and he has dialysis, but the kidneys still don't work. He is waiting for a transplant.

A lot of people have swollen hands, fingers, because of cutting several tons of vegetables a day. They have bone injuries, head injuries after accidents at work. Factory work is very hard work, outside human limitations sometimes, and is a cause of many diseases and injuries.

A lot of Polish people have degeneration of the joints of the hands because of work. They do not go to the doctor because they are frightened to lose their job. They try to cure themselves by home remedies.

Some Poles don't like to go to the doctor because they don't know the language.

It is hard to find a new job because job searches take a long time without English language skills. People need the money to live on. They are afraid they would not find a new job and they are afraid they will lose their job and they will have nothing to live on. It takes long time to wait for benefits and people have to pay for everything.

Poles do not want to collect benefits, for many it is humiliating. They are proud, many will not take benefits. In Poland there are big difficulties in finding a job, especially for older people. Many don't belong to the unions because of the cost.

The Socialist Party says

- Organise migrant workers! For a unionisation drive to fight for decent pay and conditions for all workers, wherever they are from
 - No to poverty pay and grinding hours! For a £10 an hour minimum wage now with no exemptions, a maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay, and living benefits without compulsion
 - Reverse all NHS cuts and sell-offs! For a fully funded, publicly owned and run NHS, free for all at the point of need
 - Invest in education! For free education for all at every level, including free classes in English as a second or other language
-

Documentary: HyperNormalisation

Arbitrary selection of ideas to confirm feelings of powerlessness

Sofia Wiking, Leicester Socialist Party

The most [recent creation](#) of documentary-maker Adam Curtis revolves around the idea of "hypernormalisation", which he applies to recent history.

The term, he tells us, was coined by a "Soviet writer" to describe the situation towards the end of the Soviet Union. Everyone could see that what their leaders told them wasn't true, but, according to theory, they went along with it anyway because they saw no alternative.

Similarly, Curtis poses, the leaders of the Western world are creating a simplified version of the world to suit their needs. His narrative sweeps over a multitude of events, starting in the 1970s, from the affairs of Donald Trump, Hafez and Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and Colonel Gaddafi in Libya, in their relations with the USA, to the creation of the internet, UFOs and the [Occupy movement](#).

Change?

In some of Curtis's earlier work there is more of an emphasis on issues like the growing inequalities in society. But while 'HyperNormalisation' does make the point that our politicians are corrupt, the emphasis is on the general idea that nothing can be changed.

This is the fundamental problem with the documentary. It is about the feeling of powerlessness, the failure of 'democracy', the lack of hope for the future, and the blurring of fact and fiction in official narratives. The way that this is conveyed is through a complete embrace of it.

He gives us a cursory glance at what seems like a rather arbitrary selection of events and ideas, explaining how they confirm his argument, without providing any hints as to alternative ways of looking at things.

Social media

While Curtis is correct that the Occupy movement suffered from its lack of an end goal, he fails to see its social significance, and explains it simply as an expression of the "original dream of the internet." Similarly, in the [Egyptian revolution](#), people are described as "organised by the internet" and summoned to protests by Facebook, completely dehumanising the movements.

That 'the internet' should have been the power behind these uprisings is, of course, absurd. While phenomena like social media may be useful means of communication, that is still what they are - means of communication, used by people to organise themselves. In fact, in response to revolutionary tensions, the Egyptian state actually shut the internet down. The movement went on regardless.

In the end, Curtis' vision of a 'hypernormal' world just confirms the feeling of powerlessness many feel.

But the rise of new political struggles, like the movement around Jeremy Corbyn, shows people are unwilling to 'go along with it' anymore. Rather than trying to drag politics back into the doldrums, the task is to point a way forward - as the Socialist Party does.

Socialist inbox

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, phone 020 8988 8771 or email editors@socialistparty.org.uk.

We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Views of letter writers do not necessarily match those of the Socialist Party.

Suez strife

[Niall Mulholland's article on the 1956 Suez crisis](#) graphically explained the large-scale opposition there was - among not just people in the neocolonial world, but also in the nations participating in this military adventure.

My father was in the second batch of troops sent over. They were only sent as back-up in case the first wave of troops encountered large-scale resistance from the local population.

He was confined to barracks for the duration of his stay, and was expressly forbidden to fraternise with the local population. The military top brass was petrified that if troops fraternised with the locals they may disaffect or mutiny. In part this mood would have been driven by large-scale opposition in Britain.

It is interesting to note that Suez was the last military escapade which actually went ahead where there was a difference of policy between the two main political parties. This shows that even parliamentary opposition can provoke movements that limit the capitalists' room for manoeuvre.

Clive Walder, Birmingham

Blake benefits

It was packed at our local picture house for the showing of the latest Ken Loach movie '[I, Daniel Blake](#)'. I had heard mixed reviews and was interested in how it compares to my own experiences and those around me.

I was very sceptical when I sat down, but was immediately drawn in. I remember when my mum was deemed fit to work despite nearly collapsing in the assessment. I remember seeing her gradual loss of weight from stress and sickness while she was going through appeal.

Like many others, the original decision was overturned and she got reinstated with her benefits. But that was after months and months of stress, trying to look for work while knowing full well she was not well enough.

I also remember a guy coming into our local Unite Community centre, deemed fit to work as he managed to walk his children to school each day, despite the fact he could then not move for the rest of the day.

I had the embarrassment of when a fellow trade unionist gave me a fiver as I didn't have enough food to eat and couldn't afford sanitary products. I was on a zero-hour contract and my employer had refused to pay me. The DWP refused to give me benefits that week as I had admitted I had done work.

This is the real situation for many people every day. Rising rents, electric, gas and food costs with no increase in wages. I was one of the in-work poor. It was very difficult to combat my employer as if I stopped work I would be sanctioned and lose everything.

We need a minimum wage of £10 an hour so people can actually live without relying on benefits despite being in work. We also need a benefits system that does not condemn the poor and disabled, and provides enough that you can actually live off.

Suspension apprehension

The report into Wallasey constituency Labour Party is a masterclass in distortion, and weighted naturally in support of the Blairite wing of Labour, which is protected by Wallasey's continued suspension, with any candidate selection process to be implemented by regional mini-McNicols.

The report rebukes members with: "It appears that meetings in Wallasey have been increasingly adversarial and challenging for some time."

It is not in dispute that bullying is unacceptable. But if challenging MPs or councillors is 'bullying', then the bullying of Jeremy Corbyn by the 170 Blairite MPs suggests the parliamentary Labour Party should have been suspended long ago.

Horror of horrors, some members are accused of demanding that Labour - yes, Labour - councillors should refuse to carry out cuts. As that is the policy of the Wales Trade Union Congress, Unite the Union local government, Unison local government, the RMT union, the Fire Brigades Union, the POA union and many others, should the whole labour movement be suspended?

In 1985, a similar report was published by Neil Kinnock's witch-hunt committee into the Liverpool district Labour Party. We challenged it in court, and the judge threw it out on the grounds that it was based on tittle-tattle, gossip and innuendo, and therefore totally unreliable as evidence.

Unlike then, the tide of history is flowing against the Blairites. A mass response of all those committed to anti-austerity and internal democracy is now essential to force this discredited right-wing bureaucracy to retreat.

The working class needs a leadership which fights the Tory attacks on the poor and needy, rather than attacking its own membership.

Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool

Tax trouble

When Tom Watson said at Labour Party conference that capitalism is not the enemy, and that big firms pay the taxes that fund our public services, he was wrong all the way round. [Google avoided their taxes for eleven years, paying a paltry sum.](#)

There is an answer. The government manages to collect tax and national insurance from me and about 30 million other workers on a weekly or monthly basis.

Why can't they do the same with big business? They pay some tax each month, and if they think they have overpaid at the end of the year, they can claim it back - as lots of others have to do.

Pete McNally, Worcester

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/23912>