

Fidel Castro dies: Defend gains of Cuban revolution and fight for workers' democracy

Resist capitalist restoration!

The death of Fidel Castro, aged 90, was announced by his younger brother President Raul, on Cuban state television, late on the night of 25th November. Millions of workers in Cuba and globally will mourn the passing of the leader, who along with Che Guevara, is most closely associated with the 1959 Cuban revolution.

At the same time, the forces of capitalist reaction and imperialism will see Fidel Castro's death as an opportunity to drive for full capitalist restoration on the island. These reactionary forces aim to destroy all the remaining gains of the revolution and planned economy, including the historic achievements in public health and education.

We post here two articles from the archives of the Socialist Party and CWI (Committee for a Workers International).

The first article below is a review of 'My Life - Fidel Castro' by Tony Saunois from 2008.

The second - 'Cuba at a crossroads' is an article from September 2015, written by Tony Saunois in response to the opening up of bilateral agreements and relations between the Cuban regime and the United States.

- [Click here for all the CWI website articles on Cuba](#)
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For more in depth analysis read Peter Taaffe's book: [Cuba - Socialism and Democracy](#). The book includes the following paragraphs that summarise where Cuba stands today after Castro's death and under the threat of further capitalist restoration:

"Under the conditions of new international capitalist crisis, moves towards capitalist restoration can be checked. A mixed or hybrid situation could continue for some time. Initially such gains from the revolution such as the health care and the education system may be maintained although even these have suffered greatly from lack of investment in the recent period. Many obstacles remain to be overcome and some resistance is likely as the reality of capitalist restoration becomes apparent. Sections of the population are already fearful of losing the gains of the revolution and of Cuba being turned into another Puerto Rico.

"The need to build resistance to the developing pace of capitalist restoration and struggle for a genuine workers' democracy and nationalised planned economy in Cuba is more urgent than ever. Such a movement could link together with the working class and youth throughout Latin America which is increasingly moving into struggle to defend its interests and begin to offer a real socialist alternative to capitalism which has fully learnt the lessons of the Cuban revolution.

"These are the urgent steps needed to prevent the tendency towards capitalist restoration, defend the gains of the revolution and begin to build a genuine democratic socialist society based on workers' democracy and democratic control."

'My life - Fidel Castro'

Book review by Tony Saunois, CWI, 2/4/08

The publication of 'My life - Fidel Castro', (in English in 2007) was extremely timely, as Castro was to resign as president only a few months later. Based on over 100 hours of interviews, the answers given by Castro to the French writer and editor of Le Monde Diplomatique, and founder of ATTAC, Ignacio Ramonet, are very revealing and illuminating about the Cuban revolution and world events since 1959. They also reveal much about the political outlook and method of Fidel Castro.

Castro justifiably argues the impressive social gains conquered in medicine, health and education as a result of the revolution in 1959/60. "The life expectancy of Cuban citizens is now almost eighteen years longer than in 1959, when the Revolution came to power. Cuba has an infant mortality rate under 6 per 1,000 live births in their first year of life, behind Canada by a slight margin. It will take us half the time it took Sweden and Japan to raise life expectancy from seventy to eighty years of age - today we are at 77.5".

At the time of the revolution, Castro points out, life expectancy was 60! This was after 50% of doctors fled abroad following the revolution. For every doctor who remained at the time today there are 15!

Free education is open to all who are not employed in a job and over 90,000 students are currently studying medicine, nursing or other aspects of health related studies. All this, despite an economic embargo imposed by US imperialism since 1960 and a severe economic decline which followed the collapse of the former Soviet Union, in 1992, and consequential loss of economic subsidies.

These and other impressive achievements mentioned by Castro give a small glimpse of what would be possible with a socialist planned economy that was democratically controlled and managed by the working class. Another indication of this was reflected in some aspects of Cuba's foreign policy. Apart from mobilizing over 30,000 doctors to work in over 40 countries one of the most impressive achievements was the sending of tens of thousands of "internationalist volunteers", from 1975 onwards, to Angola and Namibia.

In Angola, the 36,000 troops were able to do combat with the South African apartheid army and, for the first time, inflict a military defeat on it. Cuban forces were crucial in freeing Namibia from South African rule. Over 15 years, more than "300,000 internationalist combatants fulfilled their mission in Angola". These struggles were to play an important role in the eventual collapse of the apartheid regime. Cuba was, as Castro argues, "The only non-African country that fought and spilled its blood for Africa and against the odious apartheid regime".

HOSTILITY OF US IMPERIALISM

From the very beginning, the Cuban revolution aroused the wrath of US imperialism which has sought to overthrow it on numerous occasions. Today, following Castro's resignation, US imperialism and its representatives are eagerly hoping for the demise of the Cuban regime and collapse of the planned economy, which they will attempt to use to try and discredit 'socialism'.

The 'Bay of Pigs' fiasco in 1962 is the most well known intervention by US imperialism against the revolution which followed Castro's decreeing the 'revolution's socialist' characteristic.

Castro lists a series of other attacks attempted by US backed exiles, the US security services and other reactionary counter revolutionaries. "In 1971, under Nixon, swine fever was introduced into Cuba in a container, according to a CIA source". In 1981, type II dengue virus was unleashed and resulting in 158 deaths, 101 of them children. According to Castro, "In 1984 a leader of Omega 7 terrorist organization, based in Florida, admitted they had introduced that deadly virus into Cuba with the intention of causing the greatest number of victims possible". Then there have been more than 600 plans to assassinate Castro's.

The social gains of the revolution and brutal hostility by US imperialism revealed in this book, illustrate why Cuba is viewed with such sympathy by many workers and young people internationally, especially in Latin America. The same is true as regards Venezuela, although possibly to a lesser extent because of the failure of the revolution to advance and overthrow capitalism. Both Cuba and Venezuela are perceived as the only regimes prepared to resist the onslaught of neo-liberal capitalism during the 1990/2000s. Cuba won widespread sympathy as the only regime on the left that is prepared to stand up to the colossus of what Castro (and Hugo Chavez) justifiably refers to as the "empire" - US imperialism.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE USSR

Castro's response to a series of questions, especially regarding the 1990s and the collapse of the former Soviet Union, reveal a very well-read individual, who attentively followed the world situation. It shows Castro, following the disastrous experiences of capitalist restoration in the former Soviet Union, is opposed to the same path being followed in Cuba. The fact that Cuba was able to survive without completely breaking up the planned economy and restoring capitalism is a measure of the social roots the revolution had established. It has more recently been assisted in this by the aid it has received from Venezuelan oil. The Cuba regime was also able to maintain more support when faced with the aggressive policy adopted towards it by US imperialism.

Revealingly, Castro exposes the role played by Felipe González, (the former leader of the Spanish Socialist Party - PSOE) in persuading former Soviet leader Gorbachev to support a policy of capitalist restoration. This was carried through when the ruling bureaucracy, as a whole, went over to capitalism. González, along with others, like Manuel Fraga (a former Minister in Franco's fascist regime and President of Galicia) attempted to persuade Castro to adopt the same road in the 1990's. "Fraga is one of those people, along with González and others ...who were part of the group that was so insistent about giving me economic advice when the USSR collapsed. He took me to a very elegant restaurant one night - and he tried to give me formulas too. 'The formula for Cuba is the formula in Nicaragua', he said - that's verbatim..."

Castro rejected this advice. He said the proposed formula "...has led Nicaragua into a bottomless abyss of corruption, theft, negligence...terrible.....they wanted me to follow the Russian formula, the one that Felipe and his elite advisers urged Gorbachev to follow...and there's nothing left. All those men whose advice was to follow the tenets of neo-liberalism to the death - privatization, strict compliance to the IMF rules - have driven many countries and their inhabitants into the abyss".

Yet, why did Castro not oppose similar advice to Tomás Borge and other Sandinista leaders in Nicaragua in the 1980s prior to their defeat?

COLLAPSE OF 'GLOBALISATION' AND THE ROLE OF THE WORKING CLASS

Isolated, and facing a tidal wave of neo-liberal policies internationally in the 1990s, Castro reveals his approach in that period. In essence, Castro adopted a policy of buying time. This was linked with a perspective of waiting for 'globalisation to collapse'. This, Castro anticipated, "would lead to a situation more critical than 1929." Modern capitalism, he argues, has become so monopolized that, "There is no capitalism today, there is no competition. Today, what we have is monopolies in all the great sectors".

A mere 500 global corporations control 80% of the world's economy. Looking at the crisis unfolding in recent years, Castro concludes: "It's no longer just a crisis in south East Asia, as it was in 1977, it's a worldwide crisis, plus the war in Iraq, plus the consequences of huge debt, plus the growing waste and consequent cost of energy...plus the deficit on the part of the main economic and military power on the planet." A system which Castro concludes is resulting in, "The world is being driven into a dead-end street".

Yet, what is the social class that is capable of fighting this system and building a genuine democratic socialist alternative? In this book, Castro also reveals his lack of understanding of how and what class will be able to defeat capitalism and build a democratic socialist alternative. This leads him to adopting contradictory ideas and methods. Throughout the entire book there is no reference at all to the working class and its central role in the socialist revolution. Even when referring to the great general strike of ten million workers in France in 1968, Castro only mentions, in passing, that De Gaulle had gone to Germany to get the support of troops stationed there "to put down any attempt at popular rebellion."

The absence of any reference to the working class is revealing about Castro's attitude towards the Cuban revolution and, in general, to the character of the socialist revolution. For Castro, the working class does not play the central role. As Castro states, referring to the Cuban revolution, "But, for us, guerrilla warfare was the detonator of another process whose objective was the revolutionary taking over of power. And with a culminating point: a revolutionary general strike and general uprising of the populace".

In other words, a guerrilla struggle which was then supported by the mass of the population where the working class played an auxiliary role rather than the leading role. [As the CWI explained in other articles and documents](#), because of a series of historical and subjective factors, the guerrilla struggle successfully unfolded in Cuba and only as the guerrilla army entered the cities did the urban masses come onto the streets.

In Castro's *My Life*, there is some discrepancy between how Castro and the July 23 Movement viewed the revolution, as it began. Castro gives the impression that he had a clearly formulated 'socialist' objective from the beginning. However, as explained in other articles and documents of the Militant/CWI, at the time, and subsequently, we did not believe this was the case. The leaders of the movement, in reality, had the objective of overthrowing Batista and the establishing a "modern democratic Cuba." Che Guevara adopted a different attitude to the other leaders of the movement. As a consequence of the embargo of US imperialism and the pressure from the masses, the leaders were rapidly pushed in a more radical direction, which eventually snuffed out capitalism.

While the processes in Cuban revolution did not prevent the smashing of the old Batista regime, it did shape the nature of the state which replaced it. Although the working class supported the revolution, they were not consciously leading it, as the working class did in the Russian Revolution in 1917.

THE CUBAN REGIME

In Cuba, capitalism was overthrown following a series of tit-for-tat reprisals between the new Cuban government and US imperialism. While this represented a big step forward, it did not result in the establishment of a genuine workers' and peasants' democracy, such as was seen in Russia, in 1917, but brought about a bureaucratic regime, (with some elements of workers' control at the beginning which have now largely been eroded), which managed a nationalized planned economy.

The real character of the state is perhaps inadvertently revealed by Ignacio Ramonet in his introduction to *My Life*, when he notes: "While he [Fidel Castro] is there [he] is but one voice. He makes all the decisions, big and small. Although he consults the political authorities in charge of the Party and the government very respectfully, very 'professionally' during the decision making process, it is Fidel who finally decides".

Castro also reveals how aspects of the state function during critical periods. He reveals that when faced with a decision to execute the army chief, Arnaldo Ochoa, for alleged drug trafficking, it was "a unanimous decision by the Council of State, which has 31 members. Over time, the Council of State has become a judge and the most important thing is that you have to struggle to ensure that every decision is made with a consensus of members".

The fact that this decision was taken without dissent says a lot about the character of this body and the influence of Castro, given the extremely controversial nature of the Arnaldo Ochoa case.

Castro also defends the idea of a one party state: "How could our country have stood firm if it had been split up into ten pieces?"

He also then proceeds to confuse this question by attacking the corruption and manipulation of the media in the capitalist west as being not real democracy. Yet this is an entirely different question to the right of workers, youth and intellectuals to form their own political parties, including Trotskyists parties, and to contest elections in a workers and peasants' democracy.

A genuine regime of workers' democracy would ensure the democratic election of all officials subject to recall, that state and party officials received no more than the average wage of skilled worker, and full freedom of expression of views and criticism. Such a regime, especially after nearly fifty years in power, should have nothing to fear from workers', youth and intellectuals establishing their own political parties and organizations that defend the planned economy or agree not to take up arms or resort to violence in opposition to it.

This does not mean to say that Castro's Cuba has taken on the same grotesque features of Stalin's Russia, with mass purge trials, an unchecked cult of the personality around Stalin etc. There are still no portraits and streets named after Castro. There is no evidence of torture being used by the state. However, this does not mean that

bureaucracy and that an element of corruption and privileges do not exist. This has recently been shown in the admission of the Cuban government that 15% of the population own 90% of the pesos held in bank accounts.

CUBA IN ISOLATION

The problem that has faced Castro during the 1990s, following the collapse of the former USSR, has been one of isolation, combined with the limitations imposed by the existence of a bureaucracy and the absence of a real workers' democracy. Measures, such as a partial opening up of the economy and partial dollarisation, were introduced by the regime to try and buy time. These bought their own increased contradictions, especially the partial dollarisation, which vastly increased differentials between those with access to the US dollar and those without, and created a growth of the black market and corruption.

The issue of Cuba's isolation is linked to the defeat of the revolutionary movements which swept Latin America in the 1970/80s. Castro draws no rounded-out conclusions regarding the reasons for these defeats. The Sandinistas in Nicaragua failed to defeat the Contras, he argues, because of compulsory military service. Castro says: "Nicaragua won its victory twelve years after Che's death in Bolivia. That means the objective conditions in many countries in the rest of Latin America were better than those in Cuba". But the central question is why then did the Sandinista's then lose again to the counter revolution? On this issue Castro offers no real explanation. He does not comment upon the failure of the Sandinistas to overthrow capitalism. They held back from taking decisive measure to overthrow the system, especially in 1984, largely because of the pressure of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow, which opposed this being done. Cuba, and Castro, backed up Moscow's pressure and, at one stage, embargoed Russian MIG fighter planes in Havana which were destined for Managua, the capital of Nicaragua.

Commenting on the defeat of Allende, in 1973, the former president of Chile, Castro correctly denounces the role of US imperialism, but he draws no conclusion about the mistakes of the leaders of the Socialist and Communist Parties in Chile, which acted as a break on the revolution. Yet these defeats, and others, were crucial in Latin America during this period, and re-enforced Cuba's isolation and dependency on the Soviet bureaucracy, at the time. Moreover, in a sense, Castro went on to repeat many of the mistakes made by the leaders of these movements in the advice he has recently given to Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. Castro recounts that at the time of the thwarted right wing coup in Venezuela, in 2002, he urged Chávez not to resign. He urged Chávez to "get in touch with some officer with some real authority among the ranks of the coup members, assure them of his willingness to leave the country but not resign."

Former president Allende, Castro argues, had no choice but to lay down his life during the rightwing coup in 1973 in Chile, claiming that Allende did not have the "support of a single soldier". This was not true. Large sections of the army and navy in Chile supported the revolutionary process. It is estimated that Allende had the support of up to 30% of the military, at the time of the coup. The tragedy was that Allende failed to arm and mobilize the working class.

In My Life, Castro states that he advised Chavez, during the 2002 right wing coup attempt in Venezuela, that "trying to meet with the people in order to trigger national resistance...had virtually no possibility of success under those circumstances."! Yet 'national resistance' erupted spontaneously from below and Chávez was returned to power by the masses. This advice is yet another example of Castro not seeing the masses and the working class as the leading force of a revolution but as an auxillary to either guerrilla organizations or sections of the military.

While coming into collision with the Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy, which Castro criticises, on occasions sharply, he did not provide an alternative to it. This again flows from Castro's lack of understanding of and confidence in the working class. As a result, Castro's criticisms ultimately led to acquiescence to the Stalinists. Castro also remained silent, on occasions, during major struggles between the state and workers and youth of several countries.

Concerning Czechoslovakia's 'Prague Spring', in 1968, while initially supporting some of the demands for greater democracy, freedom of expression, Castro concluded: "But from fair slogans there had been a move towards an openly reactionary policy. And we - bitterly, sadly - had to approve that military intervention". Yet, in 1968, support for capitalist restoration was not the dominant idea in the former Czechoslovakia. The consciousness of the masses, in the main, at that time, was for "democratization of socialism" not capitalism.

Undoubtedly motivated by diplomatic and trading interests, the Cuban regime was silent when hundreds of students were massacred by the Mexican government in 1968. Castro says nothing of these events in his book.

By raising the specter of capitalist restoration in Czechoslovakia, at that time, Castro is confusing processes which emerged during the 1990's and not the 1960's and echoes the justification for the intervention given by the Russian Stalinists in 1968. Castro is clearly against a capitalist restoration in Cuba, especially having seen the consequences of it in the former USSR and Eastern Europe. He probably correctly concludes that former Soviet leader Gorbachev, whom Castro describes, at one point, as a "true revolutionary socialist", ended up as a central figure in the process of capitalist restoration, although this was not Gorbachev's original intention. As Castro puts it: "But he [Gorbachev] couldn't manage to find solutions to the big problems his country had."

Boris Yeltsin, who was also central to the process of capitalist restoration, is described by Castro as an "outstanding Party Secretary in Moscow, with lots of good ideas".

Castro identifies some of the crucial problems facing the former Soviet Union; waste, corruption, mismanagement and its failure to develop and to apply the use of modern computers. Yet, he also fails to offer a clear solution to the bureaucratic rule and waste, which lay in the need to remove the Stalinist bureaucracy and to establish a genuine system of workers' democracy. Without this, none of the huge problems he identifies could be resolved.

However, many of these features exist in Cuba, as well. In *My Life*, Castro also reveals some of the conflicts that took place between the Soviet bureaucracy and the Cuban regime. When asked if the Cubans were consulted about the final withdrawal of Soviet troops, from Cuba, in September 1991, Castro responds: "Consult. They never consult. By that time they were falling apart. Everything they took without consultation."

Castro also reveals, in letters published in English, for the first time, the erratic attitude that his regime sometimes adopted. This is especially shown in the book's chapter dealing with the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. As the crisis intensified, Castro shows that he urged the USSR not to leave itself open to a "first strike" nuclear attack and should launch a nuclear attack first in the event of direct offensive action against Cuba by the USA.

"It is my position that once the aggression has occurred, the aggressors must not be given the privilege to decide when nuclear arms will be used...from the moment imperialism unleashed an attack against Cuba, and in Cuba, and therefore against the forces of the USSR stationed here...a response be given the aggressors against Cuba and the USSR in the form of an annihilating attack."

Khrushchev and the Soviet bureaucracy did not accept this proposal.

Today, Castro contradicts his earlier stance and comments, when he is asked if Cuba wants to manufacture a nuclear bomb: "You'll ruin yourself - a nuclear weapon is a good way to commit suicide at a certain point."

STALIN AND TROTSKY

Significantly, Castro is openly critical of Stalin and concludes, "The more intellectual of the two was, without a doubt, Trotsky." However, this is not to say that Castro supported the ideas and methods explained in Trotsky's writings. Castro quite wrongly dismisses any suggestion that Che Guevara was beginning to look for an alternative and had begun to read Trotsky's works or was in any way affected by his ideas. In doing so, Castro brushes aside the evidence to the contrary, as featured by Celia Hart, Jon Lee Anderson and the Mexican writer, Paco Ignacio Taibo.

A striking feature of *My Life* is Castro's attitude to world leaders and the pro-capitalist leaders of the former mass workers' parties. For Marxists, opposing the system these leaders defend is not a personal question. Yet Castro goes out of his way to heap praise on some of these leaders, despite peppering it with critical references to what these leaders did. Former US President Jimmy Carter is described as a "man of integrity". Charles De Gaulle is accredited with saving France "its traditions, its national pride, the French defiance." A Minister in Franco's fascist government in Spain, is, in Castro's opinion, "an intelligent, shrewd Galician". President Lula, in Brazil, is praised as "a tenacious and fraternal fighter for the rights of labour and the Left,

and a friend of our people." And Castro views "the reforms that Lula is implementing very positively". This is despite the fact that the vast majority of Lula's "reforms" have been neo-liberal attacks on the rights of the working class.

Concerning the future of Cuba, Castro is adamant that the revolution will be maintained, with no threat of capitalist restoration. However, despite the strong legacy that remains and support for the gains of the revolution, the threat of restoration is growing. Since the publication of *My Life*, Castro has resigned as leader. Raul, his brother, and other powerful sections of the Cuban bureaucracy, are intent on moving towards opening up the market economy in Cuba. If Castro sees this threat, he evidently was not prepared to play the role of Gorbachev or Yeltsin in assisting this process.

The publication of *My Life* provides an illuminating insight into Fidel Castro; his role and methods. Above all, it is necessary to learn from the experiences Castro recounts. It shows the vital necessity to develop genuine workers' democracy and socialism.

Cuba at a crossroads

12/09/2015

Gains of the revolution of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro under threat

Tony Saunois, CWI

The Financial Times boasted: "There is a new entry among Cuba's roll of important dates. Alongside Fidel Castro's 26th July movement and the January 1st 1959 'triumph of the revolution', there is now December 17th 2014." (Financial Times June 15 2015).

The Financial Times is confusing revolution with counter revolution. December 17th 2014 was when US President Obama and Cuba's Raul Castro announced a series of historic agreements to normalise bilateral relations. These restored diplomatic relations between the two countries, a relaxation easing on travel restrictions and the first tentative steps signalling the easing of the trade embargo which had been imposed since the revolution in 1959/60. Since then the US has re-opened its embassy in Havana.

These developments represent a decisive shift in the policy of US imperialism towards Cuba. It also, in this context, signifies a further qualitative step by the Cuban regime towards capitalist restoration. The latter has been unfolding for a number of years.

Obama made these announcements as he put it recognising that "You cannot keep doing the same thing (for more than 50 years) and expect a different result". The European ruling classes, the Canadian and much of Latin American capitalism adopted a different approach - one which Obama has now embraced.

Raul Castro made the announcement and urged that Obama be awarded the Nobel peace prize! A "peace prize" for a US president that has carried out more drone attacks than George Bush!

Since the Cuban revolution in 1959/60 US imperialism has enacted a strict embargo and undertaken various attempts - including armed intervention in 1961 - to overthrow the Cuban regime and restore capitalism. Despite the crippling consequences of the embargo - estimated to have cost the Cuban economy US\$1 trillion since its enforcement - this policy has failed. This was mainly due to the deep social roots of the revolution and support for it which has lasted for decades. The trade embargo was a policy which was also geared to winning the political support of the Miami Cuban exiles who had fled from the revolution.

US imperialism is now adopting [a new policy of beginning to move towards lifting the embargo](#). The threat of capitalist restoration to an isolated workers' state can come not only from the threat of military intervention. As Trotsky warned in relation to the former USSR, it can come in the form of "cheap goods in the baggage

train of imperialism". The objective of US imperialism is the same but now they hope to reach it by a different route. Now they hope to flood the Cuban economy with goods and investment with the aim of fully restoring capitalism and exploiting Cuba's resources for themselves. If this is achieved it will end Cuba being identified in Latin America and internationally as being a reference point of an alternative to capitalism.

This change of policy by US imperialism has been facilitated by a generational change and outlook within the exiled Cuban community. While previously wedded to support for the embargo and a struggle to overthrow the regime now, according to some opinion polls, 52% of Cubans living in the USA now support ending the embargo. Sections of the capitalist class like the sugar magnate Alfy Fanjul, have pronounced in favour of the lifting of the embargo no doubt with an eye to the prospects of new markets and commodities to exploit within a new capitalist Cuba.

Cuba faces a devastating economic situation. Many Cubans are dependent on remittances they receive from families in the USA. An estimated 62% of Cuban households now receive support from abroad. According to some economic estimates they sustain an incredible 90% of the retail market.

The dire economic situation in Cuba has meant a disastrous situation for the masses. The massive social gains conquered as a result of the revolution and overthrow of capitalism are being eroded. The collapse of the former USSR and loss of subsidies devastated the Cuban economy. Yet support for the revolution and hostility to capitalism and US imperialism meant that the Cuban regime incredibly was able to maintain the planned economy and bureaucratic regime throughout the 1990s (the 'Special Period') and into the early part of the 21st century. This was despite the fact that the value of wages in Cuba today is estimated to be worth only 28% of what it was prior to the collapse of the former USSR!

The regime and planned economy hung on through this period despite the tidal wave of free market capitalism which dominated the world economy in this period. The regime was also able to sustain itself politically using the US embargo which fuelled hostility to US imperialism. The arrival of Hugo Chavez to power in Venezuela also brought it a breathing space through its supply of cheap petrol and oil. Subsidies from Venezuela are estimated to stand at US\$1.5 billion per annum in an economy estimated at US\$80 billion.

The lack of genuine workers control and democracy and consequential bureaucratic mismanagement and corruption further dogged and aggravated the economic and social crisis caused by the embargo and isolation.

The revolutionary convulsions which swept Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador at the beginning of the century offered the prospect for Cuba to break out of its isolation. A genuine workers' democracy would have seized this opportunity and taken the steps necessary to try and form a socialist federation of these countries. This could have allowed economic co-operation and planning between these countries and could have begun to appeal to the working class of the whole of Latin America to offer an alternative to capitalism.

Unfortunately neither the Cuban bureaucratic regime nor the reformist leaderships of Morales, Chavez or Carrera were prepared to take this step. The latter have remained trapped within capitalism despite initially introducing reforms and taking some measures to encroach on the interests of the ruling class and imperialism. The Cuban regime on the other hand has introduced a series of incremental steps beginning the process of capitalist restoration. These latest developments threaten a further advance in the threat of counter revolution.

Although the easing on travel restrictions will be welcomed other steps represent a threat to the remaining gains conquered by the revolution which. These were already being eroded and dismantled. Any that remain are now under serious threat. The new labour code represents a serious attack on workers' rights. The age of retirement was raised by 5 years in 2008. The introduction of the "dual currency" exchange whereby some workers are now paid in dollars vastly exacerbated inequality between those paid in dollars and those in pesos. The regime created the 'convertible peso' or CUC which is pegged 1:1 with the dollar which is used in the tourist sector and imported products. Local products use the local peso CUP which is equal to about 1:25 of the CUC. The government announced its intention to scrap this dual currency but this has not so far been implemented.

This has inevitably boosted the black market. The government established a target of removing over 1 million workers from the state sector and allowing the establishment of thousands of small and medium sized

businesses - 500,000 licenses have already been issued - "cuentapropistas". However, these have centred on small businesses like restaurants - mainly operating from peoples houses.

The number of workers employed in the private sector has increased from approximately 140,000 to 400,000 since 2007. While this is significant it still represents a minority of the total work force of over 5 million.

A bridgehead for capitalist restoration has been developed in the tourist sector which has been the centre thus far of foreign investment from Europe, Canada, Brazil and more recently Chinese enterprises. Prostitution, banished from society following the revolution is now back on the streets of Havana, especially in the tourist areas.

Special Development Zones have been opened like the building of a new port facility in Mariel Bay - financed by investment from Brazilian and Singapore capitalism. This is viewed with a future eye for the ending of the US trade embargo and to capitalise on the expansion of the Panama canal and the new canal being planned in Nicaragua. Here investors will be given 50 years contracts compared with the current 25 year one. Investors can have 100% ownership. They will be charged no labour or local taxes and granted a 10 year reprieve from paying a 12% tax on profits.

However, despite these developments foreign investors are compelled to negotiate with the government or state run companies. While the Cuban regime still uses some socialist rhetoric, in part reflecting the support which still exists for the revolution, especially amongst the older generation, it increasingly reverts to Jose Marti, the leader of the independence movement against the Spanish colonisers.

The younger generation, desperate to enjoy new freedoms - use of the internet and travel amongst others - have experienced not the gains but the regression of the revolution and economic and social crisis and the stifling dead hand of the bureaucracy

Initially the attraction of the arrival of "cheap goods in the baggage train of imperialism" may hold an initial attraction until the reality of life in capitalist society becomes apparent.

These developments clearly represent an important retrogressive steps in the re-introduction of capitalism. This process is clearly under way in some sectors. However, it is far from completed. Steps towards the "free market" are allowed under continued state supervision, agreement and control. The state still maintains a powerful control and could choke off these steps at any time. Foreign investors still need to negotiate directly with the government or state controlled companies. The decisive sectors of the economy have still not been privatised or sold to foreign capitalists.

As Rafael Hernandez, the Cuban editor of "Temas" (a cultural state published magazine) pointed out: "All of Raul's economic reforms involved decentralisation, which is good, as Cuba needs that. The problem is this ...it has not happened" (Financial Times 15 June 2015).

Even US capitalists, eager to take back what they lost in the revolution, are treading cautiously. As one investor was quoted as saying, "It makes sense. Start small, learn how the system works and then see how it goes".

For socialists and the working class the steps towards capitalist restoration represent a backward step. They will signify the erosion of the gains of the Cuban revolution for the masses. They will also be utilised by the ruling class, especially in Latin America, to try and again discredit the idea of socialism as an alternative to capitalism.

However, this will not have the same effects as the ideological offensive against the idea of socialism which the ruling class unleashed following the collapse of the former Stalinist regimes in the ex-USSR and Eastern Europe. A new phase of capitalist crisis and workers' struggles has opened up internationally. The working class and the masses has passed through twenty five years of the "supremacy of the free market" and is beginning to struggle against it. In Brazil, Argentina, Chile and other countries a new cycle of workers' struggle has begun.

The lifting of the embargo would represent a defeat for the past policy of US imperialism and its' attempt to overthrow the Cuban regime. It will give Cuba more opportunity to trade on the world market. However,

without the existence of a genuine workers' democracy this includes the danger that can threaten the acceleration of capitalist restoration. A state monopoly of foreign trade, controlled democratically by a genuine regime of workers' democracy is essential to help prevent this increasing threat. Socialists welcome the increased freedom to travel.

The transition to a full capitalist restoration in Cuba however will not be a straightforward uninterrupted process. Sections of the regime do not seem to want to go in this direction. Significantly Maiela Castro, daughter of Raul firmly stated as this deal was announced that: "The people of Cuba don't want to return to capitalism".

There are many obstacles still to be overcome for the lifting of the trade embargo. Not least opposition to such steps by the far right wing of the Republicans in the US congress. The question of US\$7 billion claims for compensation from former owners of companies nationalised at the time of the revolution. On the other hand Fidel Castro on his 89th birthday raised the question of "numerous millions of dollars" being paid in damages to Cuba by the USA to cover the costs of the embargo.

Under the conditions of new international capitalist crisis moves towards capitalist restoration can be checked. A mixed or hybrid situation could continue for some time. Initially such gains from the revolution such as the health care and the education system may be maintained although even these have suffered greatly from lack of investment in the recent period. Many obstacles remain to be overcome and some resistance is likely as the reality of capitalist restoration becomes apparent. Sections of the population are already fearful of losing the gains of the revolution and of Cuba being turned into another Puerto Rico.

The need to build resistance to the developing pace of capitalist restoration and struggle for a genuine workers' democracy and nationalised planned economy in Cuba is more urgent than ever. Such a movement could link together with the working class and youth throughout Latin America which is increasingly moving into struggle to defend its interests and begin to offer a real socialist alternative to capitalism which has fully learnt the lessons of the Cuban revolution.

- [Socialist Party leaflet on Castro's death here](#)

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 26 November 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Worst decade for living standards since 1920s

Time to fight low pay

Dave Gorton, Chesterfield Socialist Party

This is the worst decade for living standards since at least World War Two, and probably the 1920s, [according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) (IFS) think-tank.

Years of pay freezes, rises in living costs and benefit changes mean family incomes are growing more slowly now than during the immediate post-2008 crash. Millions have never had a decent pay rise.

This is set to continue - unless challenged - with the IFS predicting workers will earn less in real wages in 2021 than we did in 2008. The biggest losers will be lower-income families.

Real average earnings - which include rising inflation - are forecast to rise by less than 5% over the next five years. Even that is a full 3.7% lower than was projected in March. The chancellor claims the government is preparing for a "rainy day". For vast numbers it's already pouring down. For young workers in particular, it's reaching flood levels.

Not everyone suffers. [Recent Trade Union Congress research](#) shows the average corporate FTSE 100 chief executive is paid 123 times the average full-time salary. Directors' pay rose 47% between 2010 and 2015.

Unions need to do more than research. Claiming workers are more interested in jobs than pay only means some union leaders are admitting failure in their ability to campaign for both.

Pay rises aren't handed out by benevolent employers or governments; they are fought for. Newly organised sections of workers such as ['gig economy' couriers demonstrate workers will fight](#) if they see a chance of winning.

This government is weak. Now is the time to fight. Unionise the unorganised sections of the workforce; build for coordinated industrial action; fight for a £10 an hour minimum wage with no exemptions.

Stop the Tory cuts

Hands off our NHS!

Sean Brogan, Exeter Socialist Party

Exeter will be the scene of a major county-wide demonstration by campaign groups against the huge government cuts to the National Health Service (NHS) On 3 December.

As well as billions of pounds of cuts - rebranded as "efficiency savings" in England - the Tories' misnamed ['Sustainability and Transformation Plans' will force through billions more cuts](#), with closures to A&Es and other hospital services.

Okehampton, in west Devon, will lose its community hospital. In the south, Paignton will see its hospital close. In the east the proposal is to close Honiton hospital.

The district hospital at Barnstaple, in the north, will lose its maternity and stroke services, leaving a pregnant mum a trip of over an hour - and that's on a good day. These - and many other cuts - mean the loss of hundreds of beds and the downgrading of services.

This is all part of a grand plan to replace these massive losses with 'social care'! The latter is supposed to be supplied by local authorities. But central government grants to local authorities have been cut by a third. And in the recent Autumn Statement there was not a whisper of extra funding for this vital service.

In South Devon, the 'preferred' private group to provide this service has been found to be totally unable to meet this care. It was inspected by the Care Quality Commission and they found a raft of failings: failure to turn up at clients' homes; no idea of the clients' care plan; not listening to clients and their relatives; staff untrained and demoralised as they rush from one client to another.

In the rest of Devon, those who have attended 'consultation' meetings are beginning to see how inadequate all the 'options' are as set out in glossy reports. There's a public groundswell to oppose cuts and closures and to reject the proposals, as they have more to do with money-saving than our health services.

In the background to the cuts sit the vultures of the privateers. The NHS in Devon is already sending patients for operations in private hospitals in Torbay and Exeter.

[Virgin is poised to take over even more health services](#). This is putting the profit motive before our needs. How much longer will it be before we pay for GP appointments?

Those with the wealth can already jump queues for operations taking place in our NHS hospitals. Once we lose our community hospitals we will never get them back!

- Hands off Huddersfield Royal Infirmary

- 4 March 2017 national NHS demo - London
-

Hunger strikes, suicides - end detention now

Nick Chaffey, Secretary, Southern Socialist Party

Hunger strikes and suicides have increased dramatically in British detention centres.

A [Freedom of Information request showed](#) that out of an estimated 7,500 detainees over three months, 218 were on hunger strike. 109 had attempted suicide, with 649 on suicide watch.

Capitalist [wars and economic turmoil have created an unprecedented refugee crisis](#), with 65.3 million people forced from their homes, over ten million under 18.

This human catastrophe has seen [right-wing governments hypocritically scapegoat immigration](#) as the source of shortages in housing, health and education. Meanwhile, their friends in business exploit migrants for cheap labour to boost their profits.

Far from being a refuge for those fleeing war and poverty, British governments have used increasingly draconian powers including refused entry, detention and forced removal.

The Socialist Party stands clearly for the right to asylum and an end to racist immigration laws. Over half the removals in 2015 were to Asian countries. Detention centres should be closed down immediately.

The plight of refugees and migrant workers is a product of the same economic crisis impacting the lives of working and middle class people in Britain. A united campaign to end austerity, led by Jeremy Corbyn and the trade unions, linked to a socialist programme for housing and public works, could cut across the racist poison pedalled by pro-capitalist politicians.

The continued wars in the Middle East supported by the Tory government and their Blairite allies in parliament must be opposed. So too must the arms deals with dictatorial regimes such as Saudi Arabia, carrying out its murderous war in Yemen.

The appalling crisis in British detention centres exposes the fading liberal façade of British capitalism. The horror of the capitalist crisis experienced by millions around the world condemns this system.

It is the task of socialists to show there is a way out through the mass struggle of the working class in Britain and internationally, for a new world society that works for the 99%. Where the huge wealth and resources of society, in public ownership, could be planned to meet the needs of all, to end war and poverty.

Women bear 85% of benefit cuts

Lift the benefit cap, end austerity

Caroline Vincent, Leicester Socialist Party

By 2020 women will have shouldered 85% of the burden of changes to the tax and benefits system, [claims a new report by campaign group 'A Fair Deal for Women'](#). It highlights the disproportionate effect of austerity.

The UK has a female prime minister. You may think this means things could start getting better for women. You may think this heralds an end to gender inequality.

Theresa May thinks otherwise. She leads a government whose sexist policies continue to negatively impact on women's working and family lives, and increase the gender gap.

This impact can have tragic consequences. [Two thirds of women's refuges are potentially facing closure](#) due to the housing benefit cap.

Junior doctors have also been enraged by the overt sexism in the new contract the Tories are trying to force upon them. The government states that "any adverse effect on women is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate end."

Discrimination against women in the workplace is rampant, [with sexist dress codes commonplace](#), and a pay gap that will take an estimated 62 years to close!

It's bad enough to arrive at work knowing [you will be earning around a fifth less than your male counterparts](#). Insult is added to injury if you're sent home to change into high-heeled shoes!

The effect of benefit and tax cuts on women illustrates that fighting sexism is a class issue, and cannot be separated from the fight against the Tories' unrelenting agenda of austerity.

The way to improve women's lives is through the reversal of austerity, creation of secure jobs on decent pay, affordable housing - and free education, adult care and children's care. We need a mass workers' party to help draw women into the fight against inequality in all its forms.

Fight to make letting agent fee ban reality

Mary Finch, Private tenant

The Tories' 2016 Autumn Statement [announced plans to ban letting agent fees in England](#) - a move which young people and workers will surely welcome.

Resistance to Tory government and Labour council attacks on housing has been building for years - from the [Focus E15 mums](#) to the more recent [victory on the Butterfields estate](#). Undoubtedly these campaigns have played a part in this decision.

But so has the weakness and unpopularity of the Tories in the aftermath of the Brexit vote. As housing campaigners and other groups such as the junior doctors have shown, the mood is turning against them.

Workers are getting organised, and the Tories see the danger of these pockets of resistance coming together to form a mass movement against austerity.

May calculates that a rhetorical shift towards populist policies could undercut this - and it is purely rhetorical. Both Philip Hammond, the present chancellor, and Theresa May, [voted against a proposed law in 2014 that would have made letting agent fees illegal](#).

No date has been set for the abolition of letting agent fees. And there's been no mention of rent controls, or any other intervention to make renting affordable and stable. The Tories have no real intentions of improving the lives of workers.

But that's no reason to despair: we have the power to change that situation. This announcement shows the Tories are weak, and the wrangling over Brexit shows they are divided.

A united movement of workers and young people, including protests and strikes, could easily force them further back. With clear demands for rent controls and a mass programme of council house building - we can win!

- Fighting the housing crisis - a toxic issue for the Tories
-

Hospital admissions for malnutrition rise threefold

Resist Victorian living standards!

Aaron Bailey, Halifax and Huddersfield Socialist Party

Hospitals have come under a new wave of pressure as the number of patients admitted with malnutrition has drastically increased.

[Department of Health figures reveal](#) that last year, 184,528 days of hospital bed use were filled with people suffering from malnutrition - up from 65,048 in 2006-7.

This is completely unacceptable in one of the richest countries in the world.

This is what endless cuts and sell-offs from Blairite and Tory governments are doing to this country. I myself used to have to live off less than £20 a week for food due to the cost of my bills and the low wage I got at the time.

This is exactly why the demand for a £10 an hour minimum wage is so important. It would help lift millions of working people in this country out of poverty, and help them be able to provide more and higher quality food for themselves and their families.

On the other hand, some people don't have jobs, and have to rely on the [ever-depressing and ever-failing benefit system](#) to survive. Lifting the benefit cap would go a long way to helping these people avoid malnutrition.

At the same time, there are thousands of homeless people on the streets who struggle to survive day after day.

Giving them a place to stay, and making sure they have the opportunity to work if they're able, would help alleviate pressure on the overburdened NHS.

Them & Us: Autumn Statement special!

Rise in over-25 minimum wage

+30p an hour - not even enough to hit the Tories' pathetic target of £9 an hour by 2020

Projected cut in low-paid income due to slowdown

-40p an hour ([Resolution Foundation](#))

'Work allowances' benefit cut reversal

+£700 million, reducing 'taper rate' cut from 65p to 63p a pound ([IPPR](#))

Overall 'Universal Credit' benefit cuts

-£3 billion (IPPR)

Housing Act: 'pay to stay' for social tenants

Dropped - unless you're already earning above an earlier threshold

Housing Act: effect on council homes

[Up to 200,000 council homes will go](#)

Investment in 'affordable' homes priced at 80% of market rate

£1.4 billion, for 40,000 (un)affordable homes

Increase in council home construction

Zero

Letting agent fees

To be banned in England

Schedule for introducing ban

Non-existent

Total big business tax giveaways

£8.5 billion ([GMB](#))

'Just about managing' income

[£2,500 a year less by 2020](#) (Policy in Practice)

Extra investment for business

£23 billion

New investment for the NHS

£0

Corporate profits

Highest on record - £103 billion in the third quarter of 2016 ([ONS](#))

Real wages

Below 2008 levels for at least the next five years (IFS)

Number of billionaires

Highest on record - 120 in the UK (Sunday Times Rich List 2016)

Workers in poverty

Six million earn below the Living Wage ([KPMG 2015](#)), seven million are in insecure employment ([Guardian 2016](#))

2017 growth forecast

1.4% ([OBR](#))

Reduction in growth forecast

-36% (March forecast was 2.2%)

- [Read the Socialist Party's response to the Autumn Statement here](#)
-

What We Saw

Julie Ward, Labour MEP for North West England, [tweeted support for US socialist Kshama Sawant](#).

Kshama is a member of Socialist Alternative, co-thinkers of the Socialist Party. She is a twice-elected councilwoman in Seattle, and spearheaded the successful [campaign for the city's \\$15 an hour minimum wage](#).

Ward heaped praise on Kshama for fronting the protest movement against Donald Trump. She hasn't responded to our email about [letting the expelled socialists back into Labour](#) - yet...

Prince William, like all of us, is [concerned by rising homelessness](#). He is calling for donations to a new helpline.

The Socialist understands [his grandma might have a few spare rooms](#)? She owns two enormous stately homes, and the government gives her the use of another two.

Alternatively, the [£369 million the Tories are handing over](#) for refurb the queen can easily afford could build 3,690 homes.

The housing crisis - a toxic issue for the Tories

Almost everyone acknowledges there is a major housing crisis in the UK. As Paul Kershaw (Unite the Union housing workers branch LE1111) explains, a chronic lack of affordable housing has been made worse by the government's attack on social housing. Millions of households find themselves at the mercy of the private sector, where landlords and property developers are making vast sums. Worse still,

as the two companion articles show, is the plight of homeless families. But workers and tenants are fighting back and have forced some concessions out of the Tories.

The government has [retreated from enacting the 'tenant tax' or pay to stay proposals](#) of their misnamed Housing Act. This is a relief for social housing tenants who could have been pushed out of their homes and represents a real victory for campaigners.

In a further sign of weakness the government has also delayed 'right to buy' for housing associations until at least 2018. It's clear that the hated housing act is in deep trouble.

The Tories understood that the housing crisis is a toxic issue for them. House building is at an historic low, private rents continue to rocket upwards and homelessness is rising by any measure and the benefit cap is clobbering families.

The potential for a grass roots movement resisting pay to stay around the call 'can't pay, will stay' is dangerous for them.

Unaffordable

However, many damaging measures in the act are still moving forward. No new secure tenancies will be issued for council homes creating more instability in working class communities. And changes to planning regulations will make life easier for property developers.

In an important move housing associations will be deregulated 'freeing' them to serve the banks and investors without restraint; tenants beware!

Housing associations own a majority of social housing in England. Deregulation means they will now be able to sell social housing on the market or change it to market rent without seeking 'consent' from a regulator.

In the Autumn Statement they pledged an extra £4.7 billion for affordable housing. For most of us that sounds like a lot of money but it is hopelessly inadequate for people struggling to find an affordable home.

The Tories have slashed spending on 'affordable' housing in recent years and only £1 is spent on affordable rented homes for every £20 spent on subsidies for home ownership initiatives such as the misnamed 'help to buy'.

[Help to buy is unaffordable to most young people](#), although Tory MPs have used the scheme to buy investment properties. It pushes up house prices and acts as a support to private house builders.

In 2012 there were almost 40,000 social rented homes completed in England, a terribly low figure in historical terms, but in 2016 just 950 social rented homes were started.

Last year housing associations actually transferred 4,406 social rented homes out of the sector, and that is before deregulation. Associations justify their record surpluses of £3 billion last year on the basis that surpluses help them build homes; but what kind of homes?

The new Clarion housing association, (a merger of Circle and Affinity Sutton housing associations), announced a £1.1 billion land buying programme to build 50,000 new homes. But they say that the proportion of affordable homes built will fall from 85% or 90% now to just 65%

'Affordable' can mean unaffordable home ownership schemes such as 'help to buy' or rents as high as 80% of market rent.

For decades investment in social housing has been cut. Private builders were supposed to fill the gap but this has not happened. Big house builders have been increasing their profits (see fact box) but not the number of homes built.

Meanwhile they say that they cannot afford to meet local authority requirements to build a proportion of social housing in new developments. On top of this, they complain about a shortage of skilled labour.

They are concentrating on 'high end' homes and pleasing their shareholders, not on building desperately needed affordable homes and not on investing in decent apprenticeships.

Profiteering house builders are part of the problem not the solution. They should be nationalised and re-organised to provide quality affordable homes and train directly employed workers.

Mass council housing

A significant part of the enthusiasm generated by Jeremy Corbyn's first leadership campaign came from his call for mass council house building.

But Labour's right wing shadow housing minister John Healey commissioned Peter Redfern, boss of house builders Taylor Wimpey, to produce a report on house building. Not surprisingly the report does not identify the house builders as a problem and he calls for a 'bi partisan' approach to housing.

Far from making Labour more electorally attractive Labour is missing opportunities to apply an anti-austerity approach to housing.

Labour local authorities should halt ['social cleansing' regeneration schemes](#) that result in reduced social housing. They could use reserves to set legal 'needs budgets' and build council homes. They should also demand no loss of social housing through housing association disposals or tenure transfers.

Opinion polls show overwhelming support for rent controls. Labour should link with private tenants to campaign for real rent controls, setting a realistic level for rents not just restricting the rate of rent increase.

There can be no housing crisis solution that does not start with a massive programme of council house building. This call should be a central demand. The casino banks will not be an adequate source of funding for this; they must be nationalised.

- Buy to let landlords earning returns of 1,400% since 1996 outperformed shares and bonds
- The average landlord can expect almost £60,000 a year from rent payments, more than twice the average wage of £27,174
- Over the past three years the revenues of the top nine housebuilding firms grew by 76% and profits by 200% and profits for the five biggest firms rose from £372 million in 2010 to over £2 billion by 2015, a 480% increase
- Almost half of this went to shareholders rather than being re-invested and just eight directors working for major house builders together 'earned' £230 million in the last five years

Butterfields Didn't Budge

[How tenants on one east London estate saved their homes](#)

Pamphlet by Waltham Forest Socialist Party on the lessons of the victorious anti-eviction campaign by tenants of the Butterfields estate in Walthamstow. £2.50 (inc postage).

Special offer for Socialist Party branches - 10 pamphlets for £10 to be sold or distributed in local housing campaigns, trade union branches, tenants' associations and anti-cuts committees.

- email sarahwrack@socialistparty.org.uk to order

Homelessness - capitalism is destroying people's lives

My partner and I are living in what's known as emergency accommodation. It's a small room which costs the council £150 a week. The building is old and falling apart. It's dusty and often we have to wipe the walls with bleach to get rid of black mould.

The only reason we have been housed is because my partner is pregnant, otherwise the council would have no responsibility to help us.

The cramped conditions aren't very good for her and we have been suffering ill health for the last two months. Whenever she needs to rest I take my books and read in the communal kitchen, otherwise I'd make too much noise and wake her up.

Yet I consider us extremely fortunate. Why, you might ask? Because it could be worse. I have seen the poor mental health and desperate situations of other residents in the same building.

One tenant, a pensioner, who has severe chest problems and can barely walk, has been told he must leave next month because he is deemed not to be a priority any longer.

A couple have just been told by their council that they have until January to find their own accommodation. He suffers multiple mental and physical problems and his wife is still recovering from a recent brain tumour. I asked where will they go. The answer I got was that they will live in their car.

Keeping positive in all this is difficult. We could be on the streets. That's not so unlikely, with the demand for housing, even emergency housing, much higher than the supply, I am under no illusion that our situation is secure at all. I prepare myself every day for the worst.

What is the cost to fix this? Councils spending billions on emergency accommodation is a huge waste of money, unless, of course, you're a landlord.

I won't tar all landlords with the same brush. Some are decent, some are not. But in general, it's become a big investment pot for property owners. Many of the politicians who carry through austerity cuts have properties and gain in this way.

It's clear that the majority of politicians have no answers for our problems. We need policies and a party that will fight for working class interests.

I am living in a situation where I can see the effects of neoliberalism, of capitalism, literally destroying families and single people. A fightback is now more important than ever. And it can be won. United, we are stronger than those that oppress us.

Fight the cuts - victims of domestic abuse depend on it

After my mum's first abusive partner, we had to move. But before you are eligible for council housing you have to be living within the region of a local authority for some time. For domestic violence victims this is a dangerous rule.

Those fleeing abuse need to be able to move away from a perpetrator otherwise they are likely to remain trapped in a cycle of abuse.

Fleeing is also a time when women and children are most likely to be killed by partner or ex-partner.

Like many women with children we were not street homeless, we were put up by a family member - a single room and a single bunk bed which we had to share for six months.

This is 'hidden homelessness' and is often not acknowledged as homelessness. However, it carries many physical and psychological effects. It's hard to get into schools, you don't have your own possessions, and

can't have control your life.

This is where my mum met her second abuser. He was in the army and therefore was entitled to low priced, good quality housing on the army barracks if he is married.

Looking back it is clear he took advantage of our situation.

It took us three and a half years of hell to escape. In this time, the battalion had also moved over to Northern Ireland and so physically we were cut off from support networks.

My mum had contacted a women's shelter in England but it could only offer us an emergency bed for a few days because of the financial strain on their services. I know now this strain had come from a Labour council.

At this stage my mum tried twice to end her life. We had nowhere to go and yet again we did not qualify for any social housing.

A relative kept us off the streets until we qualified for council housing.

At this point me and my sister were teenagers but they still put us in a small two bed flat, where we lived for two years with cardboard boxes for curtains and no carpets - safe but with our food being provided by the salvation army and mostly without heating.

We need affordable social housing, services that can offer both refuge and therapeutic outreach services to help survivors rebuild their lives. Instead we are met with complex and soulless procedures.

The call for Labour councillors to fight the cuts, or stand aside if they won't, could not be more urgent.

My family survived by lucky acts of kindness, but every week two women do not.

Disgustingly, local authorities are leaving women and children's lives to chance and they are dying at the hands of their cuts. Alternatively they are being left trapped in abuse and if they get out they are left with not much of a life at all.

Editorial of the Socialist, issue 927

Brexit spin: demand a real workers' exit

Tory Chancellor Phillip Hammond's Autumn Statement estimated the cost of the Brexit vote to public borrowing as £59 billion. Despite his change of tack in delaying when the deficit must be paid off, he still intends for it to come out of the pockets of working-class people. This is on top of the more than £100 billion cuts already unloaded onto the poorest in society.

Firstly, how accurate is this figure? The government's estimates have hardly a great track record. The same Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) that came up with the £59 billion figure last week, said George Osborne had an extra £27 billion a year ago giving an unexpected sheen to public finances. These figures have now been quietly forgotten!

Now a report commissioned by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) for an alliance of pro-EU Tory, Lib Dem and Labour MPs, including Blairite Chuka Umunna, is warning of damage to all sectors of the economy if there is a 'hard Brexit'. In reality, this is the thin edge of the wedge towards arguing for a re-run referendum.

Blow

The ultimate defender of neo-liberalism, Tony Blair, has also entered the fray. Millions of workers saw the referendum as an opportunity to strike a blow against the capitalist elite and its austerity that Blair is very

much a part of. Their spin is that those who voted for Brexit fell for the right-wing racist populism of Farage, Johnson and Gove and will be responsible for plunging the economy into crisis.

The Socialist Party argued for a vote to leave the pro-business EU which has enshrined the vicious austerity that has been meted out to the likes of Greece and Ireland as well as de-regulation and privatisation which seeks to undermine workers' wages and rights. As we predicted, the vote was a massive defeat for the capitalist establishment and its political representatives, including the Blairites in Labour.

The chief architects of Tory austerity, Cameron and Osborne are history and May's administration is racked by divisions over the implementation of Brexit. These splits would be revealed if the terms of Brexit were put to a vote by another referendum or an early general election. In fact, it is the main reason for her reluctance to call one, although it may become unavoidable.

The attempted coup against Jeremy Corbyn was part of this political crisis, with the Blairites acting on behalf of the establishment to try and depose Corbyn before a possible general election. They still have nagging doubts that despite Corbyn's mistaken retreats, including campaigning for Remain despite his historical opposition to the EU, in the heightened atmosphere of an election he can be a threat.

However, his position in the EU Referendum was a missed opportunity and meant that the Labour leadership wasn't able to exploit the Tory defeat. It gave the populist right the chance to assume a leading role. Farage now intends to continue this by exploiting the genuine fear of many workers that the establishment is attempting to delay Brexit or even have a second bite of the cherry.

Corbyn now needs to take the initiative but this won't be possible by merely echoing the arguments of the 'soft Brexiters'. On Sunday's Andrew Marr programme, Labour's shadow foreign secretary Emily Thornberry, who is seen as a close ally of Jeremy Corbyn, argued that access to the single market is the priority for Labour in the Brexit negotiations.

But this is mistaken if it means accepting its neo-liberal rules. Many working-class communities know that - to the cost of industries such as car, steel making and shipbuilding - the capitalist single market doesn't act in the interests of workers but the multi-nationals, who want to protect their profits by manufacturing in the lowest-cost economies.

Labour must break with this consensus and demand a real workers' Brexit. This means a programme based on repudiating the anti-worker posted directives and privatisation rules that oppose nationalisation of companies and industries, demanding a minimum wage of £10 an hour with no age exemptions and enshrining rights to trade union rights, including to collective bargaining.

It should also not be confined to this country but on these policies reach out to the working-class across Europe who are suffering from the EU's austerity offensive.

This would illuminate the class character of the EU and differentiate Corbyn's Labour from the pro-market opponents inside and outside his party. It would also be a weapon in exposing the pro-capitalist reality of Farage in the eyes of pro-leave workers and lay the way for real workers unity to defeat the anti-immigrant right-wing populism of Ukip. This is the basis to fight for a government that can challenge austerity capitalism in the UK and throughout Europe.

London Crossrail workers walk out

Rob Williams, NSSN national chair

Hundreds of electricians walked off construction sites on the massive Crossrail job in London on 25 November demanding that management adhere to the Joint Industry Board (JIB) agreement on the payment of a second tier productivity bonus.

They protested outside Crossrail's head office, in the belly of the beast of capitalism itself, Canary Wharf. They then went en masse to the Oxford Street office of one of the major contractors - Laing O'Rourke/Crown House - near the Tottenham Court site.

Members of the Socialist Party and the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) supported the workers and suggested taking the demonstration inside the office, which saw the reception crammed with protesting electricians chanting "Crossrail pay up!" Workers found out afterwards that the Farringdon had been locked down by management because they thought they were next for a visit!

I spoke at the Oxford Street protest, reminding workers about the 2012 victory over the Besna contract that would have seen wages cut by 35% and this year's £75 million compensation won from bosses by blacklisted workers. I also called for the immediate reinstatement of the suspended Unite shop steward at the Bow site.

The stoppage was a timely warning as Unite launches a campaign of demands they want from Crossrail and the electrical contractors. A consultative industrial action ballot will start this week.

Safety

As well as the second tier payment, workers are calling for project-wide agreements on a safety committee, redundancy terms, stewards committee and full and unfettered access of union officers to workforce, and a working party on working hours.

As the trade union movement marks the fifth anniversary of the massive two million strong 30 November public sector pensions strike it also awaits the implementation of the Tory Trade Union Act. This action, along with the unofficial walkout of prison officers two weeks ago, is a sign of the potential power of the organised working-class!

Durham teaching assistants determined to win

Alan Docherty, Teesside Socialist Party

Durham teaching assistants (TAs) successfully took another two days of strike action on 23 and 24 November. A hundred schools were picketed. On 23 November over 1,000 teaching assistants descended on Durham with public street protests and a march. The TAs are continuing industrial action by working to their contracts.

Despite these strikes the Labour council remains adamant that it has no choice but to cut the TAs pay by 23% in order to prevent the costs of equal pay claims which they say would amount to millions of pounds and cause hundreds of redundancies. The council has been employing new TAs on the reduced contracts since June 2016 and it boasts that it has had no problems filling these posts.

The council has now agreed to meet with Unison who have made it clear that Durham council must commit to meaningful negotiations and abandon its plans to sack and re-engage the TAs, before it will cease industrial action. Further strikes have been announced for 1, 6, 7, and 8 December.

The TAs have received massive public support which has been carried over into the Labour Party. Despite attempts by the council's Labour group to suppress debate, Durham City Labour Party has unanimously passed, at an all member meeting, a motion in support of the Durham TAs.

It asks Durham council to seek a solution to the dispute which involves a pause to the threat of dismissal and a collective regrading where no TAs are left in a worse financial position.

Similar motions have been passed by other Labour Party branches and constituency Labour parties. It is still not clear what the official negotiating position of Unison is.

There appears to be a reluctance to press for the reopening of job evaluation to regrade the TAs because of an acceptance of the council's negotiating position of a fear that increased salary costs could result in job and

service cuts elsewhere.

Despite Tory central government cuts, Durham council is running a budget surplus this year of over £2 million and has useable reserves in the region of £300 million. The council can afford to pay the TAs more. It should not be accepting Tory austerity to bash the workforce, but instead be fighting the government to demand adequate funding for local services.

Strike action across London and South East rail network

Combined strike action by up to 400 train drivers and other rail workers is set to bring Southern and London Underground to a standstill.

There will be further Southern strike action, which will coincide with disruption to the Piccadilly and Hammersmith & City lines on the tube.

Drivers in Aslef voted 87% in favour of joining the dispute on Southern with the strikes to take place on 13, 14 and 16 December. Another three-day walkout by Southern RMT guards is planned for 6-8 December.

The RMT has also announced 24-hour walkouts by train drivers on the Piccadilly and Hammersmith & City lines from 9.30pm on 6 December.

Mick Whelan, the Aslef general secretary, said: "Our trade dispute with the company is that there should be no introduction and or extension of new driver-only operated routes on Southern without the agreement of Aslef."

Both the Piccadilly and Hammersmith & City line walkouts follow a breakdown in industrial relations.

The RMT reports "heavy handed and aggressive management" on the Hammersmith & City line, and "ripped up" policies and procedures on the Piccadilly line.

TSSA station staff on London Underground have also announced action, over staffing levels, voting 67% in favour of a strike.

Protest to demand pay rise for Sheffield

Alistair Tice, Sheffield Socialist Party

Sheffield is the city region with the highest proportion of people on low incomes. Between 2010 and 2014, Sheffield's average wage was £50 a week lower than the UK average.

When the misnamed government living wage was introduced in April, it was estimated that 28% of the city's workforce would get a pay rise by 2020, more than in any other large city and twice as many as in London.

That's why Sheffield Trades Council, on the initiative of the bakers' union BFAWU and with the support of Unite, GMB and Usdaw trade unions, has launched its Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise (Snap) campaign and is building for a demonstration in the city on 17 December.

With the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) reporting that average wages in the UK will be lower in 2021 than they were in 2008, Sheffield's Snap campaigns to end zero-hour contracts, for a £10 an hour minimum wage and recruiting people to trade unions. It is generating an enthusiastic response from local trade unionists and unorganised workers alike.

Over 200 attended the Snap launch meeting last month, held while Veolia bin workers were taking strike action for a pay rise. Since then, volunteers have been touring stores and shops in the city's high streets to map out the area and introduce the campaign to mainly young and almost always non-unionised workers.

Enthusiastic

Gareth Lane from the bakers' union explained the enthusiastic response from two stores. At a women's fashion store, the manageress said that workers already knew about the demo and had been discussing it on their internal email.

At Iceland, leaflets were eagerly taken by staff who promised that while half of them would be working on the day of the demo, they'd make sure that the other half were all there.

BFAWU members at Pennine Foods took two rounds of 48-hour strike action earlier this year to stop the company making massive pay cuts. Now shop stewards there are actively promoting the Snap campaign among the largely migrant workforce.

New shop steward Florin said: "Our campaign on the Pennine site has had excellent feedback, very positive and enthusiastic from most of our workers. Monika [another steward] is doing a great job discussing with people, especially with the Polish and Slovakian workers. And I'm trying to bring our Romanian community from Sheffield and surrounding areas onto this demonstration."

The recent victories of Deilveroo and Uber workers in London shows the potential for low paid workers to get organised and win pay rises. The Sheffield campaign is tapping into that mood and is the sort of action that should be rolled out by trade unions across the country.

- Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise demonstration: Saturday 17 December 2016. Assemble 1.00pm at Devonshire Green

Young workers in Leeds socialise and mobilise at Unison young workers gig

Kieran Herbert, Leeds Socialist Party and Unison member (personal capacity)

Around 50 people turned up to enjoy a Unison-sponsored gig for young and potential members at the Fenton pub in Leeds on 25 November, an event which was about more than just music and comedy.

This evening was filled with entertainment, speeches, and political discussion. Starting the night off was comedian Mabel Flattery, followed by acoustic acts Rose Kincaid and Dan Noble, and then rounded off with the bands Toodles and the Hetic Pity and the Daves.

Speeches by Leeds Unison young members officer Ben Mayor, and Iain Dalton from the Yorkshire and Humber TUC Youth Forum added to the political debate.

The main focus of the evening was to promote the need for people to join trade unions particularly for young people.

With more jobs being based on zero-hour contracts and exploited self-employed workers, unions are very important for young workers to fight back for their employment rights and fair pay.

Events such as this gig are great opportunities for young workers to socialise and mobilise.

Support the campaign to readmit expelled trade union militants

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary

For months the Labour Party National Executive Committee (NEC) 'away day' on 22 November, 2016 had been billed as a meeting to discuss the Labour Party's currently undemocratic structures. Momentum (Corbyn support group) ran a campaign called 'Your Party', spearheaded by Fire Brigades Union general secretary Matt Wrack, for the away day to agree to increase the number of NEC members representing the Labour Party membership.

Unfortunately, the meeting on 22 November did not discuss party democracy. One NEC member described the meeting as "tranquil" with "nothing faintly controversial on the agenda". However, this surface calm does not hide the fact that the Blairites remain determined to undermine and remove Jeremy Corbyn. In order to consolidate his leadership victory it is urgent that action is taken to democratise the Labour Party and end the Blairites control of the party machine.

Essential

An essential part of this is campaigning for the re-admittance to the Labour Party of all expelled or excluded socialists. Earlier this month a joint application for Labour Party membership was submitted to the Labour Party NEC. It was from 75 people, with a combined Labour Party membership of over 1,000 years. A petition in support of their application has been signed by hundreds of trade unionists and activists.

All the applicants have previously been expelled or excluded from the Labour Party because of their socialist ideas. Among them were many leading figures from the trade union movement including Chris Baugh, PCS assistant general secretary, Jane Nellist, NUT national executive and Roger Bannister, Hugo Pierre and Dave Auger, all members of Unison's ruling national executive committee. Trade union representatives on the Labour Party NEC should urgently argue their case.

Chris Baugh explained why he had joined the collective application: "From my teens I was a Labour Party member for over 20 years before being expelled in 1995. For PCS members, Blair and Brown meant widespread privatisations, job cuts and attacks on pay and conditions. Blairism nearly destroyed Labour as a voice for working people. The election of Jeremy Corbyn is a chance to change things. In a personal capacity and alongside those who were unfairly expelled for our socialist ideas, I hope the Labour Party will agree our application to rejoin."

Roger Bannister added: "I want to be re-admitted to the Labour Party so I can help transform Labour into a party that opposes cuts at national and local level. Since 2010 almost 700,000 local government workers, including many Unison members, have lost their jobs as vital services have closed. That is why Unison's local government service group executive has now called on Labour council's to implement no cuts budgets.

"I was one of those expelled from the Labour Party in the 1980s because I had the temerity to support the struggle of Liverpool City Council against Maggie Thatcher, which succeeded in forcing the Tory government to give £60 million worth of extra funding to the council. Today, Liverpool and other Labour councils are implementing eye-watering cuts.

"I hope that trade unionists on the Labour Party NEC, particularly the Unison members Keith Birch and Wendy Nicholls, will support our re-admittance to the Labour Party in order to further the discussion on how the Labour Party can best defend local government jobs and services."

- Sign the petition to readmit the expelled socialists here:
socialistparty.org.uk/main/readmit_expelled_socialists
-

Conference to debate TUSC's role now and the 2017 elections

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) national steering committee has agreed the agenda for the TUSC conference to be held in London on 28 January.

The main session will be a forum about TUSC's role now and the 2017 elections, to explore how TUSC should operate in the welcome new political situation opened up by Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party.

There will also be a conference session on TUSC's campaigning tasks in the battle against council cuts, as local authorities prepare to set their 2017-2018 budgets.

The conference is on Saturday 28 January from 11am to 4.30pm at Student Central, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY.

What We Heard

Labour Party branch votes for reselection

Last week, the Socialist reported that a motion backing the mandatory reselection of Labour MPs passed at Chingford Labour Party branch. We are pleased to report that at a meeting on 25 November the Leyton and Wanstead constituency general committee also voted to endorse mandatory reselection, this time proposed by the Wanstead branch:

Wanstead Labour Party branch welcomes the reelection of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour Party leader as a reflection of the general mood in the Labour Party against austerity.

MPs have not got 'jobs for life'. They represent their constituency but ultimately they are selected by and accountable to their Constituency Labour Party. To ensure democratic accountability and the rights of party members to select candidates that reflect their views, this branch supports the need for mandatory reselection of Labour MPs in each Parliament as essential.

We call on the General Committee of Leyton & Wanstead CLP to support a rule change to the Labour Party rulebook to reintroduce mandatory reselection of MPs before each general election.

Southampton Labour councillors vote through more cuts

Southampton Socialist Party

Southampton Labour Party recently held their AGM as the councillors in the cabinet voted through a further round of budget cuts.

Southampton Socialist Party members leafleted the meeting calling for Labour councillors to fight cuts or resign. Labour Party members who attended the meeting said:

"What is the role of the left in Labour? Surely it is to mobilise the thousands of new members around Corbyn's anti-austerity demands and organise to take control of the Labour Party.

"But Momentum in Southampton have excluded experienced fighting socialists from meetings and refused to work with local anti-cuts councillors, Keith Morrell, Don and Tammy Thomas."

Speakers put questions to council leader Simon Letts about the impact on Labour voters if they continued carrying out Tory cuts and demanded a campaign to oppose cuts, to applause from members.

Sheffield for sale!

Jeremy Short, Sheffield Socialist Party

Residents of Rustlings Road in Sheffield were awoken by the chainsaws of Amey contractors at 5am on 17 November, protected by police. They were cutting down eight trees as part of a £2.2 billion PFI contract. Residents were told to move their cars or have them towed away.

Three protestors were arrested - under the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act!

Only five days later, the council announced a plan to allow a Chinese developer to turn the much-loved 90-year-old central library into a 5-star hotel, ruining the public space of Tudor Square.

These closely followed the closure of 'consultation' on new flood defence plans, involving damming river valleys much used by local walkers, and flooding major parks in the city in order to release land elsewhere for development.

All these events stem from the Labour Council's failure to stand up to Tory Government cuts and their desperation to get money from the private sector.

The council proposes a £40 million cut next year and a total of £120 million over the next five years. This is after £352 million of cuts and 1,000 job losses since 2010. The council admits it cannot balance the budget by slicing percentages off departmental budgets. Instead there will be the closure or privatisation of whole chunks of council services.

Last year, TUSC gained the support of local unions such as PCS, GMB and the trades council and others to develop an alternative legal no cuts budget linked to a national campaign. Despite no elections in 2017, we will be mounting the same campaign in 2017.

Hands off HRI charts way forward

Mike Forster, Chair of Hands off HRI (personal capacity)

Despite a deluge of torrential rain, over 120 people turned out to our latest Hands off Huddersfield Royal Infirmary public meeting in Huddersfield town centre.

The meeting was initially addressed by our solicitors who went through in detail the chances of a legal challenge to the hospital management proposals. Although the session lasted for an hour, you could hear a pin drop as residents hung on every word, hopeful we can beat them in court.

Around 20 questions were asked from the floor, reflecting an intense and detailed understanding of this tortuous process. We were all reassured that the solicitor felt we have a 'more than reasonable success' of victory. However a legal challenge will not be launched until the full business case for closure is drawn up which could take another nine months.

This presents the campaign with the challenge of maintaining momentum for another year and raising more money for legal costs. So far, over £43,000 has been raised.

However, the route to victory has many paths. The meeting was also addressed by local GP and Socialist Party member Jackie Grunsell. She explained that the local GPs' union, the LMC, is seriously considering a vote of no confidence in the local management board (the CCG). If this is carried the management could be forced to abandon its plans.

Likewise the campaign is lobbying local scrutiny councillors who have the power to veto the proposal. We will also be leafleting local NHS staff in the run up to Christmas, offering support and solidarity in the event of staff cuts.

The meeting was also addressed by a local ambulance worker, where there is a plan to cut back on local provision. The campaign continues to offer support to these workers.

The looming threat of the STP plans were taken up in the debate afterwards and everyone was urged to join the national NHS demonstration on 4th March 2017 in London. 51 people put their name down for the demo and almost £300 was collected for the Hands off HRI campaign.

Overall there was a feeling of optimism and determination that this battle can be won. Campaigners have drawn up a timetable of events and activity until June next year.

We will also be playing our part in assisting the growing movement of resistance to NHS cuts across the country which could undo this government that's intent on cuts and privatisation. 2017 will be even hotter!

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 26 November 2016 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Reclaim the Night solidarity march

Fifty determined women and men marched through Leicester on 24 November as part of international action in support of the 'Reclaim the Night' campaign.

This was organised locally by the University of Leicester Feminist Society to raise awareness of the prevalence and normalisation of rape in society. Enthusiastic students took part, marching through the streets chanting 'yes means yes, no means no!'

Many young people are drawing socialist conclusions and seeing the link between the global crisis in capitalism and worsening conditions for women.

Socialist Party members took part in the march by distributing leaflets and selling the Socialist, the only political material on offer, and were welcomed by demonstrators.

Tessa Warrington, Leicester Socialist Party

Repeal the 8th protest for abortion rights

Helena Byrne, Camden Socialist Party

The Socialist Party in London organised a demonstration outside the Irish embassy on 26 November in solidarity with a protest in Dublin to 'Repeal the 8th' amendment to the Irish constitution restricting abortion rights.

The demonstration was called as this was the first time that the newly convened Irish Citizens Assembly met to discuss the possibility of proceeding with a referendum to repeal the 8th amendment.

This was a delay tactic employed by the current government in Ireland to block any debate on the issue for at least another year. Meanwhile, people are forced to endure more undue financial stress and trauma for having to procure an abortion outside of Ireland.

Attendees at the demonstration signed a petition calling for support for the referendum which was handed into the embassy. The demonstration marked the beginning of a series of solidarity events that will take place in 2017.

Leicester playground protest

Leicester's adventure playgrounds are used by over 10,000 children citywide. They provide children and young people with supervised access to play, sports, and arts facilities, as well as providing educational support.

Around 100 campaigners, including parents and children, lobbied Leicester City Council on 24 November to oppose cuts to the adventure playgrounds across the city. Many, particularly poor, families depend upon these services.

At the lobby, the noisy protestors chanted "save our playgrounds" and carried placards reading "say no to Tory cuts"! However, will Leicester's Labour-led council heed this sensible advice?

Leicester recently saw over a 1,000 people take to the streets in defence of a local heart unit and mass opposition also recently saved a library from the chop.

If the local council was prepared to take a lead in building a campaign against Tory cuts, it would receive widespread support across the city.

Leicester's Labour-led council is currently consulting on whether funding for the adventure playgrounds should be cut by 50% over the next four years. Socialist Party members supported the lobby, and leaflets advertising a public meeting on how Labour councils can resist all Tory cuts were well received.

Tom Barker, Leicester Socialist Party

- Leicestershire Against the Cuts public meeting: Can Leicester's Labour council oppose Tory cuts? Saturday 3rd December, 2-4pm at St Matthews Community Centre, Malabar Road, Leicester.
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Readmit expelled socialists: a proven record of fighting back

Eric Segal, East Kent Socialist Party, expelled from Labour 1991, Labour Party member from 1976

I've been asked why socialists like me should be readmitted to the Labour Party now Jeremy Corbyn has been elected leader.

I became involved in the campaign to save the local hospital in the 1970s, and local left-wing councillors invited me to join the Labour Party. I subsequently became a supporter of Militant, a Marxist newspaper which organised to defend socialist ideas in Labour.

I became the Labour Party youth officer in Folkestone, and we had one of the largest and most active branches of the Labour Party Young Socialists in the South East. This was true wherever Militant supporters took the lead.

We stood shoulder to shoulder with workers on strike. We built support for Liverpool's socialist Labour council, which won tens of millions back from Thatcher, creating thousands of homes and jobs.

Together with other socialists, I campaigned in Brighton Kemptown for Labour's Militant-supporting parliamentary candidate Rod Fitch, under the banner of 'a workers' MP on a worker's wage'.

Our campaign did not win the seat - but it was the only constituency in the south to hold the Labour vote. Liverpool and Brighton Kemptown cut across the lie that socialist policies don't win votes!

We organised and campaigned to build support for the miners in their 1984-85 strike. The Kent branch of the National Union of Mineworkers sent me to Holland and Belgium to resolve problems that arose concerning picketing.

We built local, national and international support for seafarers during the bitter P&O dispute. We drew attention to the weak and ineffective national - and, with some honourable exceptions, local - leadership of the National Union of Seamen.

Poll tax

During the campaign to build mass opposition to Thatcher's poll tax, which Militant organised and helped lead nationally, I was elected as secretary of the Kent Anti-Poll Tax Federation. The Folkestone anti-poll tax union alone had a membership of 2,400.

The local Labour Party leaders, together with help from Peter Mandelson MP, began the process of expelling lefts who were embarrassing Neil Kinnock's failed leadership. Kevin Blake, my wife Robbie Segal and myself were targeted. The process destroyed the local Labour Party.

I was one of the 34 Militant supporters imprisoned for refusing to pay the poll tax, and was sacked a few weeks after coming out of prison.

I had to retrain, and studied law. I worked for ten years in criminal law, then ten years at the Refugee Legal Centre, and became senior shop steward. We fought hard during those 20 years to defend the continual and conscious cuts to legal aid by successive New Labour and Tory governments.

The South East Kent Trades Union Council, of which I am secretary, was set up with the support of the late Bob Crow of transport union RMT. We have built a strong, campaigning, autonomous and vocal trades council.

We have campaigned in defence of Sure Start centres, care and respite centres, traffic control at schools; for workers' rights at Sports Direct, for a £10 an hour minimum wage, to unionise Saga; and most recently, the magnificent campaign to defend Pent Valley School.

It's time for all socialists to stand up and be counted. This is not the time for compromise and 'partnership', but for bold, clearly defined socialist policies, carried out by determined representatives of our class.

- [Sign the petition to readmit the expelled socialists here](#)

The 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.

Tram tragedy

The recent Croydon tram derailment killed several passengers. It was a further major tragedy since privatisation of public transport.

The media have rushed to blame the driver who seems to have fallen asleep. Now another man has been suspended after video evidence showed him sleepy while driving a tram. Public attention should focus on policy, not just the failings of individual drivers.

Unite the Union recently conducted a safety survey aimed at all London bus drivers and received thousands of responses. The results are still being collated, but it is already clear that fatigue is a big concern. In some senses bus driving is a routine job. But a half-second lapse of concentration can spell disaster.

Croydon trams are operated by First Group on behalf of Transport for London. Trams are few nationally, but about five firms, including First, run the bulk of buses and trains for profit.

My experience as a bus driver is that shift work, including very early starts and some finishing after 2am, is compounded by long hours at the wheel. Many drivers work overtime to bring home enough wages for their families.

Safety regulations, such as up to five and a half hours driving before a thirty-minute relief or minimum overnight breaks, are seen more as targets than extremes to be avoided as far as possible! If you show them the Highway Code recommendation of a tea or coffee break after two hours driving, bus drivers laugh.

If Jeremy Corbyn's call for renationalisation of the rail companies was developed into a rounded-out public transport policy it would be a clear winner.

Bus driver, Lewisham, south London

Bully bailiff

A local friend contacted me on the morning of 14 November, and was clearly upset. His elderly parents were alarmed, he stated.

Wearing only a jacket with the word "ENFORCEMENT" on the back of it in oversized print, someone was prowling the family home, stalking from front to rear, peering through and rapping on windows, pounding on doors, and shouting.

Why became clear only after this mystery character left the premises, much to the relief of my friend's parents. They discovered something in their post box.

It was a demand notice from a company called Marston Holdings. A quick search of Marston Holdings on Twitter yielded an account, @MarstonGroup, describing itself as follows: "The UK's largest judicial services group with c. 2,000 staff & self-employed agents recovering £300m+ per year on behalf of taxpayers, businesses & individuals."

So, who was the company collecting for? Newcastle City Council is named as the client on the document discovered at the door following the unhappy episode.

I asked my friend how he and his family felt about the situation. He said: "They obviously have no concept of empathy for the alarm and distress they are causing. If this is a local Labour council's way then God help us all."

Even though the demand is for someone else, and was served mistakenly at the wrong address, he added: "I pity the poor sod who's next."

William Jarret, North Shields

Waiters' wages

Class struggle is everywhere every day, even in a seemingly idyllic holiday destination. Meeting and observing three waiters while on a week's holiday in northern Italy brought home this truth.

One night we met a 22-year-old American, Tom, from Michigan. He had just finished working for a restaurant back home where he was paid \$3.50 an hour - that's around £2.85. He spoke eloquently about the strain on waiters each working day, wondering whether they will make enough in tips to pay the bills.

Tom was interested to hear of the election and re-election of Kshama Sawant in Seattle, and the \$15 Now campaign which had won a \$15 minimum wage in that city and others across the USA.

Arriving at Genoa Airport for the flight home, we noticed a woman serving at a snack bar, doing the jobs of three people. With unbelievable good grace, panache and a good grasp of several languages, she took orders, made the coffees, warmed up the food and served it up while the queue grew and grew.

After touching down in the UK, we encountered another barista at a motorway services. Again, he was doing the job on his own while the queue snaked back towards the door. In contrast to our Genoa Airport woman, he seemed ground down by it - maybe having had to endure these conditions for longer.

All three waiters were young, full of life, full of potential and - unless the working class organises in its own interests, facing a future of low wages, insecurity and exploitation.

Rob Rooney, Cornwall

Super seventies?

I am fed up with the BBC constantly referring to the 1970s as grim. It wasn't like this at all.

My great grandfather used to eke out a living in the pre-war years in Bristol selling stores to ships on the river, while his sister-in-law was forced to live in a caravan on a fairground site or be in the workhouse. That was the 1930s, with workers being told to know their place.

In the 1970s, on the contrary, the unions had the bosses by the short and curlies. In 1980 I obtained an apprenticeship at Rolls-Royce, who offered free training. This was gained by the unions, as previously you had had to put up £100 to be an apprentice, out of your own pocket.

The 70s were good years for the poor compared to today, and there was nothing wrong with being down the pit, on the docks or in a factory which put hard cash in your pocket.

I have complained to the BBC about its constant decrying of this decade and the unions. The specific complaint was about the 'Coast' programme. The presenter had said that the unions manipulated their workers into strikes.

I pointed out that this was complete fantasy, as before the unions and the National Dock Labour Board, workers had to stand in a cage and be picked for work. The woman at BBC complaints, who lived in Scotland, said the system of zero-hour work is reminiscent of that era.

Mick Comys, Bristol

Stop Sainsbury

Lord Sainsbury has donated over £20 million to the Labour Party over the last two decades. But as well as donating to the Labour Party, since 2004 Lord Sainsbury has been effectively bankrolling the Blairite faction of the Labour Party, Progress, to the sum of £260,000 per year.

Progress claims to be Labour's "moderates", but its members have played a leading role in the undemocratic coup against the current leadership.

This is not the first time that Lord Sainsbury has used his enormous wealth to steer the development of the Labour Party, however.

Back in 1981 - when, much to the chagrin of Labour right wingers, Michael Foot was the leader of the Labour Party - David Sainsbury (not yet a peer) used his financial resources to bankroll the Social Democratic Party (SDP) - a right-wing split from Labour.

The key objective of the SDP was to keep a left-wing Labour Party from power by splitting the left vote. They succeeded in this task, and Sainsbury, who donated £750,000 to the SDP between 1981 and 1987, played no small part in this.

Given his history of funding the right, maybe it is about time the 'compliance unit' took Lord Sainsbury's membership under review?

Tom Barker, Leicester

I, Daniel Blake

'I, Daniel Blake' finds Daniel (played brilliantly by Dave Johns), a 59-year-old joiner, recovering from a major heart attack. His consultant is concerned that Daniel's heart may begin to beat irregularly, and tells him he is at risk if he continues to work.

Daniel can do light work and is eligible for a few points towards the 'employment and support allowance' benefit. But unfortunately, his points do not tally up enough for him enough to qualify, and he is declared fit to work.

I won't give anymore of the plot away. I found the film very poignant. It shows the day-to-day struggle of people who, through no fault of their own, are systematically being failed by a government which puts up every obstacle to stop the working class from getting a decent life.

Meanwhile, they let the bankers get ludicrous bonuses, instead of building affordable houses and helping hard-working people who are willing to graft like they used to but injury and illness prevents.

Calvin Fowler, Worcester

Spain: militant struggle by Students Union succeeds

On 25 November the government of conservative prime minister Mariano Rajoy - under pressure from the large-scale student strikes of 26 October and 24 November organised by Sindicato de Estudiantes (SE - Students Union) - has withdrawn the reactionary LOMCE decree that includes big education cuts (see the Socialist 2 November).

It has also scrapped the revalidation exams. These exams introduced under General Franco's dictatorship were used to discriminate against working class students.

However the SE remains vigilant. If the government reneges then the Students Union will take to the streets again.

- More in a future issue of the Socialist
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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/24025>