

One of two editorials in the Socialist, issue 952

Whole establishment exposed for role in Grenfell fire

As more details emerge and the death toll rises, it becomes clearer and clearer what a terrible disaster this is. The fire spread with horrifying speed and witnesses describe heart-breaking scenes as people desperately tried to escape.

It is a huge tragedy for the immediate community. Children have died, three generations of the same family have died. But rather than being torn apart, the community has come together in a remarkable display of human solidarity, supporting each other, collecting donations of goods and money, organising emergency accommodation, coordinating relief.

The heroism, the courage, the self-sacrifice of the emergency services and of local residents is incredible. Who can fail to be moved by the scenes of [the firefighters being applauded](#) as they drove away from the scene.

And there has naturally been a much wider outpouring of sympathy with the residents and families affected, with overwhelming donations of money, clothes, bedding, toys, nappies, etc. The true face of humanity has been shown in this solidarity.

But at the same time there is massive anger. Anger at the council, at the housing management company, at the contractors who did the refurbishment, at the government and at the system as a whole. Many residents are sure that the death toll will be far higher than currently stated and that facts are being hidden.

It is not only the Socialist Party or other activists that say it, the [residents in the local area say it themselves](#): this is about rich and poor, an arrogant disregard for the lives of working class people. This is a diverse community, many of whom are black or Asian, living in a poor working class area alongside immense wealth of the super-rich.

After years of being ignored by the council, some of the tenants who campaigned for fire safety in the block have been killed. [Two women who were threatened with legal action](#) by the council are missing, presumed dead. They faced obstacles in their campaign for safety, including cuts to legal aid which meant they could not afford legal representation. But they have left a legacy in writing.

Council's failings

Anger is huge at the council's apparent arrogance and ineptitude in response to the crisis. For two days after the disaster the council and government were barely present, everything was organised by the community.

Over £5 million has been donated, which is amazing, but it is dwarfed by the reserves held by Kensington and Chelsea council. [According to their accounts](#), they sit on £300 million in usable reserves. They have been running a £15 million annual surplus on housing - taking £54 million in rent and service charges and spending £40 million on housing - adding to reserves. Yet they scrimped to save [£5,000 on the cladding](#) and [£200,000 on sprinklers](#).

This is from a council whose deputy leader and [cabinet member for housing, Rock Feilding-Mellen](#), comes from a family estate in Gloucestershire of 5,000 acres with a 300-foot single jet fountain, the tallest gravity fountain in the world!

The emergency re-housing situation is a scandal, with survivors [scattered in hotels](#). In World War Two, bombed out families were rehoused in 24 hours!

Staggeringly, it is now emerging, [according to David Lammy MP](#), that survivors who do not want to be rehoused around the country, eg in Preston, are being threatened with being declared intentionally homeless!

If this continues, local fury will rightly grow. The council and government are being advised to rip up housing policy, so that no resident is at risk of losing their right to be housed if they refuse accommodation that is unsuitable.

Face of the Tories

The true face of the Tories, as representatives of the profit-seeking capitalist class, has been laid bare. [Theresa May's own empathy-free response](#) is just one element. People are sharing widely the video of Boris Johnson sat in City Hall [scoffing at complaints about fire service cuts](#).

Similarly the article and speech by David Cameron bragging he was going to "[kill off the safety culture](#)" - "I want 2012 to go down in history not just as the Olympics year or Diamond Jubilee year, but the year we got a lot of this pointless timewasting out of the British economy". [As our articles expose](#), Tory housing minister Gavin Barwell, now Theresa May's chief of staff, scandalously sat on recommendations from the Lakanal fire in Southwark in 2009.

It cannot be clearer that austerity kills. But this is more than the last seven years of Tory austerity. It is decades of cuts, privatisation, deregulation, relaxation of planning, lack of democratic accountability. It is money-grubbing cost-cutting, scrimping, short-cuts in the pursuit of 'savings' and profit. [The Times reports](#) that senior Grenfell managers shared £650,000 in pay.

From Margaret Thatcher to Tony Blair to David Cameron, this is rampant neoliberalism.

Council homes

The development of council housing was a huge step forward for working class people; but working class people only have what they have fought for.

[As the Socialist has explained previously](#), the post-World War One government subsidy for council housing was in response to mass rent strikes and the Russian Revolution. The parliamentary secretary to the Local Government Board said: "The money we are going to spend on housing is an insurance against Bolshevism and revolution". The [1945 Labour government](#) created the welfare state, including large scale council house building.

But the rich have never accepted a social responsibility for housing and their political representatives have spent the last 35 years dismantling it. Thatcher's Right to Buy legislation in 1980 forced councils to sell off homes at a massive discount to tenants.

One million houses were sold within ten years. At the same time, spending restrictions reduced new council house building. Then in 1988, Large Scale Voluntary Transfer enabled the moving of housing stock from council ownership into housing association control, which was then massively accelerated under Tony Blair.

It was New Labour who ran with bringing profit into public housing through the Private Finance Initiative and who vigorously pushed '[arm's-length management organisations](#)' (Almos), stripping out democratic control of social housing and handing it over to the private sector. In 2000 New Labour deputy PM John Prescott predicted "the end of council housing". Jeremy Corbyn was one of a tiny number of Labour MPs who [opposed these measures](#).

It results in a lack of accountability and control by tenants or elected councillors over management organisations. They can try to defend themselves by saying there are tenants on the boards, but they have no power. Housing campaigners believe there is a concerted attempt now to derecognise Tenants' and Residents' Associations across London.

Now [the Tories want to effectively end social housing altogether](#), including deregulating housing associations, and to reduce planning controls even further.

The net result is that the conditions of a hundred years ago, of overcrowding in dangerous conditions, in which working class lives are sacrificed for profit, are back.

Tory cuts

In the same week as the Grenfell fire, [it was leaked to the Guardian](#) that Charing Cross hospital, currently treating survivors, faces devastating cuts that would reduce it to 13% of its current size, effectively a clinic.

And as with the [recent terrorist attacks](#), this horrendous event also brings into sharp focus the fact that [the number of firefighters has been cut in London by 550, with ten stations closed](#) and others with appliances reduced. London mayor Sadiq Khan should reverse all cuts to the London fire service.

All this is having a profound effect on consciousness - about housing, but also about the way society is organised. The anger is expressed in terms of 'the rich and the working class'. No wonder Jeremy Corbyn has been so popular in the area - not just because of [his human response](#), but because of [the break he potentially offers from brutal austerity](#) policies.

[Theresa May and the Tories were already in crisis](#), which this fire and the fury of the local community and working class more widely could deepen and bring to a head.

As well as offering our deepest sympathy and solidarity with the residents of Grenfell and the local area, Socialist Party members are also raising ideas about what could be done. We argue that tenant organisation and action, and decisive action by the trade unions, could bring not only speedy justice to the survivors of Grenfell and the community, but win the immediate safety for all residents of tower blocks and mass housing.

The call for a million on the streets on 1st July, for the trade unions to lead a mass demonstration and coordinated strike action, could be decisive in piling on the pressure on the Tories for another general election.

The Socialist Party backs Corbyn's housing plans but they could go much further. As well as abolishing the bedroom tax it is essential to end the benefit cap too.

A [socialist housing policy](#) would mean massive investment in council housing, including rebuilding many existing estates; rent controls that control the actual level of rents, not just increases; and democratic nationalisation of the banks, land and building companies to provide safe, secure, and genuinely affordable homes for all.

Read more - urgent action needed

- [How working class communities can organise to fight for safety](#)
- [Massive failings led to fire - rapid, fully funded action now](#)
- [Unions call for action after Grenfell](#)
- [Anger and grief on moving Grenfell marches](#)

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 20 June 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

How working class communities can organise to fight for safety

Justice for Grenfell and safety for all

- Urgent action needed in Kensington and everywhere

No safety - no rent!

No one should pay to live in a tower block without knowing it is safe. You have a contract with the council; the minimum they provide should be a safe house. Until urgent and thorough fire safety checks are carried out and residents are satisfied that necessary changes have been made, tenants groups across the country should consider organising collectively to withhold rent.

Here are some ideas on how this could be organised:

- Call a mass meeting of tenants on your estate - [a downloadable leaflet is available here](#). Knock every door. Message all your friends and neighbours. It's summer so they can be open air - at the bottom of your block. Try to include everyone so give yourself some time but start now!
- If you don't have a tenants and residents association, set one up. If you do, sign everyone up to it. You will need contact details - [there's a sign-up sheet available here](#)
- Sign up everyone in a tower who is willing to participate in a withholding of rent should there be any delay with adequate safety measures and a separate list of everyone who is willing to back them up - [here's that sign-up sheet again](#)
- Print off window bills to advertise your campaign - [you can download it here](#)
- Organise teams to go around local streets asking people to sign up as supporters should any action be taken against tower tenants defending their right to safety
- [Get in touch with the Socialist Party](#) if you want to discuss how to go about any of this

Rehouse survivors locally - take over empty properties

There is a real fear of dispersal. Every tenant from Grenfell Tower - and any who have to be relocated from homes nearby - should be rehoused by the council within the borough.

No one should be forced out of their community - which has already suffered huge social cleansing through sell-offs and rocketing rents - as a result of this fire.

Lifetime secure tenancies should be offered for all - not "assured" or other inferior tenancy. Leaseholders should also be offered proper replacements.

Once the recovery operation is completed and the shell of Grenfell is brought down, the land it occupies must remain in public hands and be used for the benefit of the local community.

The borough of [Kensington and Chelsea has 1,399 empty properties](#), the majority owned by rich individuals and investment companies for speculation. As many as necessary should be requisitioned immediately.

As [Jeremy Corbyn said](#) when he supported this demand: "It can't be acceptable that in London we have luxury buildings and luxury flats left empty as land banking for the future while the homeless and the poor look for somewhere to live. We have to address these issues."

Action now - remove cladding, sprinklers in every block

Action to make people safe and to support the victims and those made homeless cannot wait for the results of any investigation. Risky cladding should be removed from all blocks now. An emergency programme to fit sprinklers in all tower blocks in the country should start now. Councils should start immediately and demand the money back from government.

The [London region of the Fire Brigades Union \(FBU\) tweeted](#): "Nobody has ever died in a fire in the UK in a property with an effective sprinkler system fitted. Grenfell Tower had no such system."

This is also an issue that needs addressing in other types of public buildings. In October the FBU wrote a joint letter with the National Union of Teachers to education secretary Justine Greening asking the government to reconsider its decision to abolish the expectation that all new school buildings would be fitted with sprinklers.

Full investigation - a workers' inquiry

There has been much discussion among local residents in Kensington and supporters about what kind of investigation should take place. It is vital in the longer term that all lessons are learnt and that those responsible for this tragedy are held to account. Jail the killers!

Legal experts have put forward different views on [whether an inquest](#) or [public inquiry](#) holds the best, quickest chance of justice. All factors should be taken into account and residents should have a democratic say over what they trust most to investigate and make speedy judgements. Legal representation for the tenants should be paid for.

The Socialist Party calls for a workers' inquiry - an independent, trade union and residents' groups-led inquiry, drawing on experts, which could bring out the implications of spending cuts and make recommendations that do not compromise safety because of austerity.

For example, Unite the Union could provide representatives of housing workers and building workers. If there is no immediate action, Jeremy Corbyn should step in to establish such an inquiry

Kick out the money-grubbing councillors!

- Use the reserves now, end cuts and privatisation

In the local community there is fury at the local council's response in Kensington, which has been so bad that a new response team has been set up to coordinate re-housing and relief.

The call has gone up for the council leaders to resign. A council that represented working class and young people in any area would be fighting the corner of the residents now, ensuring immediate rehousing, emergency aid distribution and that people are getting the answers they need. We vote for local councillors to supposedly stand up for our interests - not hide and evade questions.

This callous, cold council for the rich [has £300 million in reserves](#) - use it now to resolve this crisis!

Kensington Tory council has pursued cuts with glee. That must stop. And we demand that [all Labour councils immediately stop passing on the Tories' deadly cuts and privatisation](#), if they want to avoid the complete loss of confidence experienced in Kensington, and crucially avoid more terrible loss of life.

If councillors are not prepared to invest in our homes and services, if they are not prepared to stand up against government cuts, they should step aside for those who will.

Read more

- [Whole establishment exposed for role in Grenfell fire](#)
- [Massive failings led to fire - rapid, fully funded action now](#)
- [Unions call for action after Grenfell](#)
- [Anger and grief on moving Grenfell marches](#)

Massive failings led to Grenfell Tower fire - Rapid, fully funded action now

- Concerns about safety were raised by residents
- Major investigation needed, independent of government

The [fire at Grenfell Tower](#) in west London spread with horrific speed and witnesses have described heart-rending scenes as residents attempted to escape. This is a terrible tragedy and there has naturally been an outpouring of sympathy and human solidarity with the residents and families affected.

There have been many fatalities and 74 people were taken to hospital; more than 20 ambulance crews attended. Details will come in over time but the courage of firefighters and local residents is immediately clear. We salute the courage of the firefighters, local residents and ambulance crews who responded with self-sacrificing speed.

But as well as huge sympathy and sorrow, there has been a big expression of anger from local people.

Members of the Unite housing workers' branch report that, all over London, residents were approaching housing workers with their fears about the implications. There is real anger that residents' concerns have not been listened to and that the terrible events may have been avoidable.

There has been a history of problems with maintenance of the block and residents have expressed concern at fire safety. [Residents' organisation Grenfell Action Group said](#) they had repeatedly warned the owners of the block, Kensington and Chelsea Tory council, and Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation, which manages the block, about "very poor fire safety standards" in the tower. They claimed their warnings "fell on deaf ears".

Although Kensington and Chelsea is the richest part of the UK, [it includes many working class residents](#). In fact, anger at the housing situation in the borough is one of the factors behind the [surprise victory for the Labour candidate](#), who had campaigned on housing, in last week's general election.

As well as the imperative need to rehouse the survivors, there is the issue of residents in surrounding blocks. They were evacuated because of the fire, but have now been moved back in - although the nearest tube stations are shut due to fears of debris falling on the line.

Many residents are worried that their homes are unsafe. This needs answers. If not safe, these other residents must be immediately accommodated elsewhere. If it is safe, issues such as the lack of hot water - the boiler for some surrounding blocks was in Grenfell Tower - must urgently be addressed.

The borough has [1,399 empty properties](#), mostly owned by the rich.

Advice to residents in Grenfell Tower was to [stay in their flats](#) in the event of fire because fire insulation would give time for emergency services to reach them. Survivors say how glad they are that they ignored this advice given the speed of spread.

Questions on refurbishment

Witnesses speak of the recently fitted outer cladding on the tower catching fire, raising questions about the fire-resistance of the materials - such questions are not new in housing. Notably, the Guardian's [Dawn Foster reports](#) that Rydon, the company responsible for the cladding and retrofitting refurbishments at Grenfell Tower, has scrapped all references to the refurbishment from its website.

Outrageously, according to [an article on the Independent's website](#): "that cladding - a cheap way of improving the front of the building - was added in part so that the tower would look better when seen from the conservation areas and luxury flats that surround north Kensington, according to planning documents".

[Research by the Times newspaper](#) has found that a version of the cladding with a "non-combustible" core would have cost a mere £5,000 more. That would have added 0.0006% to the reported £8.6 million refurbishment cost.

[And Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation papers](#) show they hired a fire risk consultant who "was willing to challenge the fire brigade on our behalf if he considered their requirements to be excessive." Their other consideration seems to be that he offered the "most competitive price."

It was described as an "unprecedented situation" by the London Fire Brigade. Matt Wrack of the firefighters' union the FBU, on Sky, said it shouldn't be possible for fire to develop in this way and the union is calling for a major investigation to be made into the building. A call echoed by the Unite housing workers' branch.

As with the [recent terrorist attacks](#), this horrendous event also brings into sharp focus the fact that [the number of firefighters has been cut in London by 550](#), with ten stations closed and others with appliances reduced. The number of fire deaths has risen over the last year and figures for waiting times in accident and emergency departments and ambulance response times have failed to meet targets. NHS services are at breaking point and facing further cuts.

National implications

The causes of this fire are not yet confirmed but there must be concern that the issues raised point to unacceptable risk around the country.

The All-Party Parliamentary Fire Safety and Rescue Group of MPs has been calling for a review of building regulations for years. Failings were uncovered following [a devastating tower block fire at Lakanal House in Southwark in 2009](#), which killed six people. The failings then included a lack of fire risk assessments, and panels on the outside walls not providing the necessary fire resistance.

Then-housing minister [Gavin Barwell said in the Commons](#) last October that the government will review Part B of Building Regulations 2010, which relate to fire safety, "following the Lakanal House fire". Ronnie King, a [former chief fire officer and secretary to the parliamentary committee said](#) the building regulations "haven't taken account of the Lakanal House fire inquest, or updated recent accredited research" (Inside Housing, 7 March 2017).

In fact, [research by Inside Housing](#), an industry magazine, found in 2015 that just 1% of tower blocks have sprinklers fitted, in spite of the Lakanal findings.

The issue was that cladding to improve heat insulation undermined fire safety. Inside Housing magazine was unable to get a date for the review from the government at that time. Gavin Barwell, the housing minister responsible at the time the building regulations review was delayed, lost his seat in last week's election and has now been parachuted in [as Theresa May's chief of staff](#).

[A survey by the Department for Communities and Local Government](#) in February found that regulations are "far too complex" to guarantee high-quality buildings. The judge in the Lakanal inquest called them "incomprehensible." But when Barwell was pressed on the matter in March, he was still stonewalling about a review of the regulations.

[Chancellor Philip Hammond has said the cladding is banned in the UK](#) - but the above evidence suggests it could be difficult to tell if this is the case. The manufacturer disputes it, of course.

Either way, members of West London Socialist Party spoke to another Socialist Party member who is a construction engineer. The engineer believes bad practice is very prevalent, particularly among small contractors such as used here - and says that councils' cutbacks mean effective enforcement of regulations is almost non-existent.

Simply changing the building regulations would not be an adequate response as existing buildings would need to be reviewed. The cost implications could be significant but austerity cannot be allowed to delay a response.

- It is essential that the 400-600 people made homeless are rapidly rehoused locally in secure and affordable accommodation. Tenants must have permanent secure tenancies, not assured shortholds or other tenures, and leaseholders must have proper arrangements as well. The government must move fast and no talk of lack of money can be accepted in this situation.
- We need a major investigation into the Grenfell fire and the implications for housing around the country. That investigation must be genuinely independent of government and must be free to draw out the implications of spending cuts and to make recommendations that do not compromise safety because

of austerity. It must be led by trade unions and residents groups drawing on independent expertise. There must be criminal prosecutions where appropriate.

- All councils should immediately inspect safety on every housing estate and invest urgently, with no excuses about cuts, in ensuring safe materials, adequate exits and space, etc
 - Labour councils should [refuse to pass on any further cuts](#). Stop all privatisation of housing, repairs and renovation!
 - London mayor Sadiq Khan should reverse all [cuts to the London fire service](#).
 - The site must remain publicly owned - no concessions to vulture property speculators.
 - Residents in nearby housing must have their concerns over safety near the ruined tower answered. They must be rehoused safely if there is any danger - and if there is not, urgent maintenance and upgrade work must be carried out due to the damage to the estate.
 - The decision on whether to keep or demolish high-rise blocks must lie with the residents themselves. Tower blocks are safe if properly built and maintained. If, however, residents would prefer low-rise accommodation, the council must build it and fight for the funds to do it properly - [like the Liverpool Labour council of 1983-87 did, led by Militant \(now the Socialist Party\)](#).
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The above article was expanded and updated on 19.6.17.

West London Socialist Party member Bob Sulatycki commented:

"It's already quite clear that this isn't a tragic accident but the predicted and criminal result of the policies of cuts, privatisation, lack of democratic accountability and wilful neglect carried out locally and nationally. All tenants in social housing in the area and beyond will be thinking about the importance of what's happened. There are ongoing cuts to NHS provision in the area, including to the A&Es at Charing Cross and other local hospitals that are currently taking casualties but are faced with cuts and closures."

Read more - urgent action needed

- [How working class communities can organise to fight for safety](#)
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 - [Unions call for action after Grenfell](#)
 - [Anger and grief on moving Grenfell marches](#)
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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 14 June 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Anger and grief on moving Grenfell marches

I've not seen anything quite like the march for Grenfell in Kensington on 16 June.

It was led by local working class residents, some of them still trying to find out if their families were dead or alive. They stormed the council building in the capital's richest borough with concrete demands for answers and recompense. They've already won some of them.

There was a universal understanding that [the establishment politicians and company bosses were behind this](#) - that it was about profit, that it was about class. Most of the estate's residents are black or Asian.

One lad took the megaphone and spoke about how the rich were trying to divide them but they were the majority and they all knew each other in the blocks and they could not be divided so they owned the streets and they had the advantage.

They chanted "Tories out - justice in" and "the government is guilty of murder" and "bring down the government."

Passers-by and motorists were unanimous in their support. Some were crying. Marchers stopped to hold them, complete strangers.

Socialist Party placards went in seconds. One local lad, maybe eleven years old, took half of mine to help distribute. Our leaflets, hundreds of them, calling for rent strikes until the blocks are safe - all gone. We signed some people up to find out about organising tenants' associations to fight for safe homes.

The march in Westminster, happening at the same time, observed silences with clenched fists raised.

I don't often get caught up in the moment on marches. But I have to tell you this was different. The anger, the grief, the bursting pride and sense of burgeoning power. [The bosses are on the back foot](#), and these people understood that, and they felt ready to press their advantage even in spite of their grief.

And the tower. It looked like a burnt-out cigarette. It didn't look real.

I struggled to maintain my composure several times. Justice for Grenfell.

James Ivens

I attended a silent march on 19 June to remember those lost in the Grenfell fire. The only sound you could hear was from the Westway - otherwise you could hear a pin drop.

It was moving and the right thing to do. The silence gave folk time to reflect and think.

Following that came the speeches from the newly formed Justice for Grenfell Campaign. They were good - to the point, and graphically highlighting how the [Tories running Kensington had time and time again ignored the concerns](#) of the folk who lived in Grenfell Tower.

Their barrister, Michael Mansfield, also spoke. He pointed out that after [the Hillsborough disaster](#), the initial [Taylor Report](#) forced football clubs to immediately bring in safety measures under pain of not being allowed to compete in the new season, which was just weeks away.

They all complied. So when they want, the powers that be can implement swift safety measures.

The hardest part of the event was seeing folk in the daze of crippling grief, walking around holding pictures of missing family members. They were being comforted by others.

I work near that area. There is always a buzz in that community. That buzz has gone.

But after that night, I sincerely feel the community will serve its lost ones well, and play a part in starting to transform public housing for the better. We all have to do the rest.

Steve Nally

- Steve's tower block in Vauxhall, south London, was refurbished by [Rydon - the same firm which worked on Grenfell Tower](#). He has been organising with other residents to fight for proper fire safety checks since long before the Kensington fire

Read more - urgent action needed

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Unions call for action after Grenfell

Unite the Union housing workers branch LE/1111

We must help those directly affected now - dozens are members of Unite - and ensure no stone is left unturned to prevent this happening again. Unite will be offering full legal support for all victims of this horrific event.

[Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite, said:](#) "We will not rest until the full truth of what has gone on is uncovered, and we will not be allowing the shameful cuts to legal aid to prevent that truth from being exposed. Unite is sending lawyers to the community and has set up a freephone number for anyone needing legal assistance"...

Fire Brigades Union

The thoughts of firefighters from all over the UK will be with the victims of this devastating tragedy and their families.

Firefighters and other emergency services worked through the night to secure the building and to save as many lives as possible. They did a particularly difficult job witnessing brutal and tragic scenes with the professionalism we have come to expect from them...

Meanwhile, the number of counsellors trained to help London firefighters process the traumatic scenes they witness on the job was cut from 14 to just two under former Tory mayor Boris Johnson. He also closed ten London fire stations and removed 13 engines.

[Matt Wrack, general secretary of the FBU, said:](#) "We need more counsellors to look after them, not less"...

Joint statement by education unions ATL, AEP, NAHT and NUT

School is one area of children's lives which can provide them with care and stability. It is essential that children affected by Grenfell continue to attend their own school, with teachers and other staff who know them and can support them and their families.

We know that those who work in education are rising to this challenge. They will need the full support of those around them.

All schools which have on their roll children from Grenfell Tower, and the area around it, must be provided with counsellors and other necessary resources...

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One of two editorials in the Socialist, issue 953

Brexit chaos, DUP agreement, workers' anger

Tories and May stagger on amid crisis - get them out!

Theresa May is fatally wounded but staggering on. Utterly discredited, deeply unpopular and without a shred of legitimacy, she owes her continued premiership primarily to the reluctance of her rivals to take on the unenviable task of dealing with the mess the Conservatives have landed in.

But it is not just May who is discredited. The Tories as a whole, as well as the wider capitalist establishment, have come under the ire of working class people.

[The horrific crime that took place at Grenfell Tower](#) has brought into tragically sharp focus the rotten callousness not only of May and her government, but of the capitalist system itself.

This has been further compounded by the terrible [terrorist attack at Finsbury Park Mosque](#).

In a similar way to the atrocities which took place during the election campaign in [London](#) and [Manchester](#), this has added to the developing sense that far from prioritising safety and security for working class people, Tory and New Labour government policies have instead helped fuel the incidences of hatred and violence in which innocent people are caught up.

It will be in the shadow of these awful events that May attempts to officially form her government. [When she called the general election](#), it was in the confident expectation that she would be able to substantially increase her majority.

[Superficial polling figures](#) led May and her advisors, but also the vast majority of media pundits, [Blairite Labour MPs](#) and even many figures considered to be further left - [such as Owen Jones](#) - to conclude that the Labour Party led by Jeremy Corbyn would inevitably go down to crushing defeat. [On 8 June they were all delivered a staggering rebuke](#).

May had hoped an increased majority would allow her to paper over the cracks in her own, deeply divided party.

Now she faces the nightmare of attempting to negotiate a Brexit deal that will protect the interests of big business and private profit, while simultaneously holding together her party.

But it won't just be the backbench MPs, many desperate for a so-called 'hard Brexit,' who May is forced to try and placate.

Negotiations with DUP

With no overall majority in the commons, a Tory government will be forced to rely on [the right-wing, sectarian Democratic Unionist Party](#) MPs in order to pass a Queen's Speech and to get legislation through parliament.

This is a deal that could be potentially toxic for both sides. The DUP risks alienating its voting base - which is primarily made up of working class members of the protestant community in Northern Ireland - if they are seen as underwriting brutal Tory austerity.

Similarly, the reactionary position of the DUP leadership on social issues, as well as the block they could be on the Tories implementing many of the most unpopular aspects of their cuts programme, can present major difficulties for a May government.

But perhaps even more problematic than both of these issues will be [the fissures that can open up during the course of the Brexit negotiations](#).

These will be both between the DUP and the Conservatives and within the Tory party itself.

This nervousness has meant that no formal deal between the Tories and the DUP has yet been announced.

Among the reasons some commentators have cited for this lack of an announcement are disagreements within the DUP leadership over whether their leader, Arlene Foster, should stand alongside May in order to announce the deal.

This reflects the lack of any firm confidence that May will survive as prime minister over the course of the next five days, let alone five years, as well as her obvious political toxicity.

Queens Speech and after

Any government which is formed will be exceptionally weak and fragile. The Queen's Speech was [shorn of most of the policies outlined in the Tory manifesto](#) - including the removal of the 'pensions triple lock' and [the hated 'dementia tax'](#).

It is good that Jeremy Corbyn has said [he plans to amend the speech](#) and ask the Commons to back him. We argue he should put forward all of [the hugely popular pro-working class policies](#) that were contained in the Labour manifesto. But the fight will not just take place inside the House of Commons.

As the Queen's Speech is heard, protesters, including many organised by the Socialist Party, will be gathering outside the walls of parliament.

And it won't stop there. A potentially huge demonstration is set to take place on 1 July. Correctly, [John McDonnell has argued](#) that the Trade Union Congress (TUC) should put its weight behind this protest which, if fully mobilised, could see more than one million people on the streets.

The Socialist Party agrees, and would argue that the TUC - which brings together the majority of the trade unions in Britain - should fully take on the tasks of organising and building the event.

Indeed, it is incumbent on the trade union leaderships to help harness the overwhelming mood of workers to fight austerity.

This is a mood that has been strengthened in resolve by the general election result. And it does not stop at demonstrations.

Faced with a mass rebellion, including huge protests, demonstrations and crucially, coordinated strike action, this government could be forced from power.

Corbyn's increased authority

Jeremy Corbyn has emerged from the election in a stronger position. Indeed, the ruling class's fear of a Corbyn-led government and the appetites that it could awake among working class people is the most powerful pressure on May and the Tories to cling to power.

But this strengthening of Corbyn's hand should not be misinterpreted as an end to [the bitter civil war](#) that has been waged over the course of the last two years with the majority of Labour's right-wing MPs, councillors and machinery.

Only this week we have seen further attempts at so-called cross-party unity on the question of Brexit - [with Yvette Cooper and others](#) calling for 'moderates' within all parties to unite in the interests of big business for a 'soft Brexit'.

But the real issue is not 'soft vs hard' Brexit but ['bosses vs workers' Brexit](#). What unites the Blairites with both the soft and the hard brexiteers on the Tory benches is their commitment to protecting the interests of the super-rich 1%, albeit with some differences of opinion on how best to achieve this.

So far, Jeremy Corbyn has rightly argued for a ["jobs-first Brexit"](#), including in his most recent interview with Robert Peston.

But he must now go further. The Socialist Party argues that Corbyn should make his starting point for any Brexit negotiations the implementation of policies which will benefit working and middle class people - [beginning with those in the Labour manifesto](#).

This would mean annulling all EU laws which might stand as an obstacle to this - including those which oppose nationalisation, for example.

It would also mean offering workers much greater protections than those currently offered under EU legislation while [removing all laws which act to protect private profit](#) at the expense of working class people.

As well as outlining a positive programme on Brexit and other issues, it is also vital that Corbyn [mobilises his supporters in order to take on the right-wing saboteurs within his party](#).

This means supporting measures like democratic mandatory reselection of MPs, as the Socialist Party has argued, and opening up the party to all anti-austerity forces to participate on a federal basis.

If you agree, [join us](#) and get involved.

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Finsbury Park attack: no to terror, racism, war and austerity!

Hannah Sell

For [the second time in one month](#) a van has been driven into a crowd in London with the aim of indiscriminate slaughter of innocent people.

This time the terrorist attack seems to have been motivated by anti-Muslim hatred. The van driver was reported to [shout that he wanted to "kill all Muslims"](#) as he drove into a group who had just taken part in evening prayers after breaking the Ramadan fast.

They were standing together to assist an elderly man who had been taken ill and who has now tragically died.

In addition to his death, ten other worshippers were injured by the attack. With incredible self-restraint the group, together with bystanders, captured the attacker and held him, it seems largely unharmed, until the police arrived.

The Socialist Party completely condemns this terrible attack just as we [condemned the Manchester](#) and London Bridge attacks which were inspired by the completely reactionary, barbaric ideology of Isis.

In the wake of those horrific attacks, the worst terrorist attacks in Britain since [the 7/7 bombing in 2005](#), there has been a clear danger of an increase in racist attacks on Muslims, or people who are perceived to be Muslim.

Such attacks are repellent to the majority in society who understand that the overwhelming majority of Muslims are completely opposed to terrorism.

In the one day after the London Bridge attack alone, [London's Muslims raised £18,000](#) for its victims.

The [electoral surge for Jeremy Corbyn](#) in the general election showed how millions of people understood the need for working and middle class people of all nationalities and religions to unite together against austerity, war and racism.

The [horror of Grenfell Tower](#) drives home the urgent need for a united movement to get the Tories out and fight for socialist, anti-austerity policies.

If it had not been for the alarm being raised by Muslims who were awake because of Ramadan and saw the fire, even more would have been killed.

But as it is, residents estimate that at least 150 working class people - of many nationalities and religions - died as a result of criminal capitalist cuts and austerity.

Millions also understand that, as the Socialist Party has consistently explained, alongside opposing the right-wing reactionaries of Isis and their ilk, it is also necessary to [oppose the imperialist wars and interventions in the Middle East](#) and Afghanistan which have created a nightmare for the peoples of the Middle East and inevitably increased the likelihood of terrorist atrocities worldwide.

Little is yet known about the identity of the Finsbury Park attacker but it seems likely that he, like the murderer of Jo Cox, was inspired by far-right racist ideology.

The right-wing media and all those capitalist politicians who have attempted to divert attention from their austerity and warmongering by whipping up racism and anti-Muslim and anti-migrant feelings over recent years, bear some responsibility for last night's attack along with other racist assaults.

Theresa May has responded to the attack by again saying there is a need for more 'anti-terror' legislation. However, there have been [numerous new 'anti-terror' laws](#) introduced in recent decades and none have stopped new attacks. At the same time the Tories' unrelenting austerity drive is making people more vulnerable when attacks occur.

It is essential that the workers' movement puts uniting against racism at the heart of a fight to end austerity, and for decent jobs, homes and services for all.

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French elections: time to build a fighting left alternative

Clare Doyle, Committee for a Workers' International (CWI)

The ['sweeping victory' for La République En Marche!](#) (REM) - party of neoliberal president Emmanuel Macron - in the second round of parliamentary elections on 18 June, is not the resounding victory it might appear.

While REM got 308 MPs out of 577, plus 42 for its allies in the Democratic Movement (MoDem), its vote is considerably short of what was anticipated and it does not hide the fact that the government has only got the support of a minority of the French electorate.

Many votes for REM in the presidential election were cast only to stop far-right Marine le Pen's Front National (FN) from winning.

At [over 57%, the abstention rate was a record high](#) and greater in working class and poorer areas. Roughly 10% of those going to the polling stations cast blank votes or spoiled their ballot papers.

Nonetheless, with a clear parliamentary working majority, Macron intends to attack workers' rights.

The fear of the ruling class - expressed in the media - is that the main battles of the working class with the government will now open up outside parliament.

The previously ruling 'Socialist' Party (PS) lost about 90% of its 280 parliamentary seats, ending up with just 29! Its first secretary - Jean-Christophe Cambadélis - announced his resignation as polls closed, warning of the terminal decline of the party.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the left formation FI (France Insoumise), was comfortably elected in his Marseilles con-stituency with 59% of the vote in the second round. But his party was only able to field candidates in just over 70 constituencies (one in eight) and had no agreement from the Communist Party not to stand in the same constituencies.

However, with a real remobilisation in many constituencies, FI got a total of 883,786 votes and 17 deputies - enough to form an official parliamentary group.

Immediately after the result, Mélenchon made a call for "resistance" to Macron's plans for attacking the country's labour law, its welfare state provisions and jobs. "Not one metre of terrain in relation to social rights will be ceded without a fight!" he declared.

The Communist Party's vote dropped by nearly two thirds, its final representation remained at ten seats. The FN went from two to eight seats, including Marine le Pen - the FN leader - who got into parliament for the first time.

But Le Pen's right-hand man, Florian Philippot, was not elected and the party does not have enough MPs to form a group in the assembly. The vote for the FN was far less than expected.

Coming to the end of this year's tumultuous electoral battles does not mean a calm period ahead in France. As Gauche Révolutionnaire (CWI in France) has said, the next round will be on the streets.

- [Read the full article on socialistworld.net](#)
- See also [last week's article on France](#)

Kick out the Tories to save the NHS!

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

Uncertainty and instability has gripped the entire establishment and the government. The [Tories' failure to secure a mandate](#) - as well as the Jeremy Corbyn surge - has given huge confidence to health service campaigners up and down the country.

New legislation is not required to continue with the Tories' plans for the NHS but they no longer have the political will or the confidence to push it through. This will not stop proposed closures, cuts or some privatisations but hopefully will slow them down.

The key to our drive to save the NHS will be huge mobilisations on the 1 July 'Tories out' demonstration and also on the NHS 69th birthday on 5 July.

Health Campaigns Together, along with the People's Assembly and Keep Our NHS Public, is now officially working with the TUC to mobilise for both events. This will help maintain momentum and keep the pressure up on the government.

Birthday events

Local areas are now finalising plans for birthday events in every area together with NHS union members. All this will help build local alliances of workers, community campaigns and the public, which can act as a battering ram to keep all hospitals open and safeguard services.

[Hands Off HRI](#) will be mobilising for the 1 July demonstration in London and marching with the health bloc to keep the whole issue of health service cuts to the fore.

Our local clinical commissioning group (CCG) is due to release its final draft business case to shut our A&E and will meet council officers on 21 July.

Not only are we building local protests for the meeting but we have our legal team on standby to pick apart their plans and, if required, take them to court. We have built up a war chest of £50,000 and will continue fundraising to keep that chest topped up.

Ongoing community support remains critical to the morale and confidence of our campaign. Huddersfield continues to offer great support and will fight to the end to save local hospital services.

- Join the Hands Off HRI 'party in the park' at Greenhead Park, Huddersfield, midday-8pm, Saturday 24 June

Tories Out

National Demonstration

Saturday 1 July, 12pm, BBC Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London, W1A 1AA. March to Parliament Square

Inflation: Workers lose out - time for action

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

The general election campaign has shown the accumulated anger at inequality in Britain, the product of years of austerity. The election period began with [the publication of the Sunday Times rich list](#), and it ended with [the tragedy of the Grenfell fire](#).

If more confirmation was needed about how working class people are being left behind, then look no further than the latest evidence of falling living standards from the Office for National Statistics. [Inflation rose](#) from 2.7% to 2.9% last month and year-on-year [real pay levels fell](#) by 0.6% in the January to March quarter.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis in March 2008 the average basic weekly wage was £473, [now it is £458](#) - we haven't experienced a 'lost decade', we've actually gone backwards!

When Trade Union Congress general secretary [Francis O'Grady says in response](#), "Britain needs a pay rise, not more pressure on household budgets", most workers will say yes. But they may also ask, 'when are you going to do something about it?'

The trade union leaders must give a lead to people's frustrations, placing the unions at the head of the 1 July 'Tories Out' demonstration. Not leaving that mobilisation as an exercise to simply let off steam, but as the starting point for a 'summer of discontent'.

When [the Royal College of Nursing is balloting for strike action](#) for the first time ever, every trade unionist should be demanding their union leaders do the same. The [public sector pay cap](#) - which at 1% is less than the pitiful 1.7% average pay increase in the first quarter of 2017 - needs smashing.

But poverty wages in the private sector must be tackled too, especially those workers squeezed by the gig economy and zero-hour contracts.

When the Tories talk about 'strong employment' figures, this includes people with insecure hours and on low pay, and unemployed workers forced into 'non-jobs' that can leave them financially worse off than the dole.

Successful mobilisations of public sector workers will give those in the private sector confidence too, including currently unorganised workers.

The latter can [follow in the footsteps of Deliveroo, UberEats](#) and [other casualised workers](#) of saying no more low pay and job insecurity, demanding the scrapping of zero-hour contracts, and the immediate implementation of a £10 an hour minimum wage.

Open University facing huge cuts

Fight for free education

Caroline Vincent, Leicester Socialist Party

The Open University has announced a technological overhaul, [which will involve making £100 million of cuts](#), nearly a quarter of its £425 million budget. The consequences of this 'streamlining' will inevitably be job losses, and the closure of courses that are not considered profitable enough.

This is despite significant fee hikes. A module which would have cost £700 in 2012 now costs £2,864! The result of such prohibitively high fees has been a drop in the number of part-time students, [which has fallen by a third](#) since 2010.

A vicious cycle is now occurring, where the fall in student numbers is being used as an excuse to make cuts and axe jobs, which in turn results in reduced access to education for adult learners.

In justifying these 'savings' Peter Horrocks, the vice chancellor (who commands an annual salary of £235,000), claimed: "We were disruptive and revolutionary in our use of technology in 1969 and, as we approach our 50th year, we intend to be disruptive and revolutionary again..."! It certainly will be disruptive; to the staff who face uncertainty for their jobs, and to students whose subjects may be culled.

Jeremy Corbyn pledged to make education free. When [interviewed by NME magazine he said](#): "The Open University is the most incredible institution we have, one of the best in this country. I think it's absolutely fantastic and I want to properly fund the Open University as I want to make sure that other adult education colleges are properly funded."

The prospect of accumulating crippling debt is a big deterrent for working class people wishing to continue studying beyond school. Jeremy [Corbyn is right that education should be free](#) and accessible for everybody, regardless of age and background - not just for the privileged few.

The have-yachts and the have-nots

Trade unions must lead fightback

Simon Carter, East London Socialist Party

Anti-poverty think tank the Resolution Foundation has added to an accumulating body of evidence on the ever-widening wealth gap in Britain.

[According to its recent report](#), just 1% of the population own 14% of the country's wealth (and that's just the declared income and assets of the super-rich) or a mind-blowing £1.6 trillion! Yet the poorest 15% of adults own nothing or have negative wealth because of deepening debt.

Low incomes, combined with pay caps and pay freezes, zero-hours employment, benefit cuts and soaring rents, have all played a part in impoverishing an increasing proportion of adults in Britain.

In addition, the collapse in home ownership among the poorest half of the population since [the onset of the financial crash in 2008](#) has dramatically widened the wealth gap.

Overall, the average wealth of an adult has fallen from £99,000 in 2006-08 to £84,000 in 2012-14 according to the Resolution Foundation's report.

[As the Socialist previously reported](#), the richest 1,000 individuals in the UK again saw their total wealth rise - by 14% last year to £658 billion. In contrast, [the Trade Union Congress found](#) that between 2007 and 2015, real wages fell by 10.4%, the biggest decline in the developed countries - matched only by Greece.

Little wonder then that the Tories, with their repeated austerity message, [lost a parliamentary majority](#) in the general election.

Sheffield Jobcentre strike grows in second round of action

Alistair Tice, Socialist Party Yorkshire

About 50 members of civil service union PCS have been taking strike action all through the week of 12-16 June in Sheffield to save the Eastern Avenue Job Centre. Its closure is proposed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) [as part of its national cuts programme](#).

The five-day strike, which follows [a one-day strike on 2 June](#), has been solidly supported by PCS members. Six further staff have newly joined the union, with only a handful of the total of 75 going into work.

What's remarkable about this strike is that it's not for more money or simply to save jobs, but to defend a local service in the community which serves some of the most deprived areas of Sheffield. And that the staff were willing to strike - 92% voted in favour - even before the DWP officially confirmed closure after the end of the 'consultation' period.

Indeed, with the Tory government in such disarray, the fight to save Eastern Avenue is looking very favourable. With a fight, the entire cuts programme could be scrapped.

At a well-attended public meeting chaired by PCS DWP group president and Socialist Party member Fran Heathcote, the union's general secretary Mark Serwotka said the chances of a successful campaign were dramatically improved by [the success of Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity election movement](#). This approach was also reflected in a text of solidarity from Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell.

Mark promised the full support of the union for the ongoing campaign. Strikers will meet on 21 June to decide on the next action, but appear resolute on naming more strike dates.

Strikers have also been boosted by big numbers supporting the picket line each morning from other PCS branches, Unite Community branches, Disabled People Against Cuts, Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Centre, the Socialist Party, Heeley Labour Party and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

- Send messages of support to leeds@pcs.org.uk
- Donate to the PCS Fighting Fund: PCS DWP Group, 3rd Floor, Town Centre House, Merrion Centre, Leeds, LS2 8LY - [or at the PCS website](#)

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BA cabin crew calls two-week walkout over blacklisting accusations

Unite members working for British Airways' mixed fleet announced a two-week strike on 16 June, after the airline refused to accept Unite the Union's offer on the outstanding issue of the sanctioning of striking cabin crew.

The strike is set for 1-16 July and Unite has also said it will pursue legal action against British Airways to the "highest court in the land" on behalf of 1,400 cabin crew, who were sanctioned for taking strike action in a long-running pay dispute.

British Airways has formed a blacklist to impose sanctions on striking cabin crew which have included crew seeing bonus payments worth hundreds of pounds taken away and the removal of staff travel concessions.

To date [there has been a total of 26 days of strike action over pay](#). Showing their priorities are to try to break the union rather than pay their staff a living wage, BA management are spending millions of pounds renting out planes and crew from other companies to try to cover for services affected by the strike.

Rather than BA being the benchmark for pay and conditions in the airline industry, it is now paying some of the lowest wages. As another sign that BA is aiming to model itself on the low-cost airlines, it has now replaced free in-flight meals with Marks and Spencer (M&S) food for sale.

A [cabin crew worker previously told the Socialist](#): "We feel we're being paid well below what we should be paid. We're being told we're being paid between £21,000 and £27,000. I personally have never reached £21,000."

Unite estimates that on average 'mixed fleet' cabin crew earn £16,000, including allowances, a year.

Welsh college strike against crippling workload

UCU Coleg y Cymoedd striker

Around 50 UCU further education union members at Coleg y Cymoedd in Rhondda Cynon Taff and Caerphilly attended picket lines on 15 June as we took strike action to defend our members against oppressive workloads and to defend quality education.

Following 20 months of negotiation and a successful ballot resulting in 93% in favour of industrial action, an intransigent management has refused to consider reasonable requests such as a workload study to ascertain how long our duties take us as a starting point to alleviate crippling workloads.

Workers have left the profession and some have taken a reduction in contractual hours as they cannot undertake duties within contracted hours. A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) stress survey we carried out last year identified that education was being damaged by a lack of adequate remuneration for quality assurance processes, inadequate provision for lecturers teaching higher education courses to update themselves on recent subject developments, and inadequate provision for lecturers required to act as course tutors. [We cannot provide quality education on the cheap or on our knees](#).

There was a determined mood on pickets and members were buoyed by visits from trade union councils across South Wales, other local UCU branches and our learners. Several cars turned away in support when we explained our reasons for picketing.

No lecturer wants to take industrial action but we are committed to a rolling programme of action to force management to revisit its damaging work practices. As trade unionists we will defend our members from

stress induced by workload and as educators we'll fight to deliver quality education for our learners.

Manchester housing maintenance dispute steps up action

Paul Gerrard, Salford Socialist Party

In the week after the general election Manchester housing maintenance workers held a two-day mass protest outside Manchester Town Hall. [Their dispute is with their employer Mears](#), but it's the Labour council which has hung them out to dry by passing the contract over to a private company.

At the protest stewards met with the council's head of housing and regeneration for 45 minutes and left him in no doubt about their sense of betrayal, their dispute with the company, and their determination to see successful negotiations.

Mears employees earn up to £6,000 less than workers on the other side of the city. The company claims it wants to see a 'sustainable workforce' yet apprentices are being offered six-month and even three-month contracts on completion. What's next - zero-hours?

Unite the Union is looking to [step up the dispute](#), regularising strike pay and moving to involve other Mears staff who maintain the council's own premises, including the iconic Gothic town hall.

Workers were shocked - but not surprised - by [the events in Grenfell Tower](#), as they work on council housing stock renovation projects. It used to be part of their work to check for potential fire hazards when they visit homes, and either report faults or deal with them while they're there. But nowadays there is relentless pressure to get jobs done, signed off and leave for the next job.

Stewards are rightly angered by the Labour council's actions but welcomed the [success for Jeremy Corbyn in the election](#). One commented that the most encouraging thing was to see young people flooding to support Corbyn in defiance of the "turncoats" in the parliamentary party.

- Send messages of support to Colin Pitt at colinpitt65@hotmail.co.uk

Barts Trust NHS workers vote for action over pay

STOP PRESS:

Barts ballot result - 99% for strike action, 53% turnout

Health workers are ready to defend their rights! In April, [160 domestics walked off the floor](#) at the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel, east London, part of Barts NHS Trust, to defend their morning tea break - [and won!](#) Now cleaners, porters and security workers have begun a ballot for strike action for a pay increase.

In a Unite the Union survey, 98% of 700 workers believe they deserve a bigger share of Serco's profits - which were more than [£82 million for 2016](#).

At Whipps Cross Hospital, also part of Barts Trust, porters are ready to fight Serco's plans to cut jobs, and cleaners are fighting increased workloads.

At Whipps, [Unite members won a fantastic victory in 2016](#), ending zero-hour contracts and winning a 20% pay rise for low-paid workers, bringing them up to the London Living Wage under contractors Carillion.

Carillion was then dismissed and the contract given to Serco. Serco now seems to be labouring under the impression that it can just roll back these gains.

But Unite the Union has been building on the victory at Whipps to show what's possible. Following the Whipps win - of £9.75 an hour, as much as £2 an hour increase for many - this was then fought for and won for all agency workers indirectly employed by Serco, who had in some cases been on minimum rates for six years.

Unite has been building across Barts Trust, organising a pay campaign which - [given the pay freeze in the NHS](#) - is a big issue for all health workers. 1,100 new members have joined the union in recent months.

The failed attack on the domestics' tea breaks was possibly an early test of whether workers and union would fight.

Unison conference: "A sense of change"

Glenn Kelly, Socialist Party industrial department

Unison conference opened on 20 June and immediately reflected the sense of change at the moment. When it was announced that Jeremy Corbyn will be speaking on the final day at the conference on 23 June, the conference erupted with applause.

The first debate of the conference was on [the public sector pay cap](#) and the demand for a £10 an hour minimum wage. Such is the pressure from below, even Unison leadership was forced to say it will 'smash' the pay cap in the next 12 months.

Socialist Party members spoke in the debate, pointing out that [we've heard this before](#) and this time there needs to be a real fight, with Ivan Bonsell saying Unison should be demanding £10 an hour now.

Angie Waller said: "£10 an hour now isn't just desirable but an absolute necessity."

Showing the mood and pressure from below, [Unison general secretary Dave Prentis](#) called on all members to join the 1 July 'Tories out' demonstration. As we go to press 100 copies of the Socialist have been sold.

Militant mood against job cuts at Reading College

Nick Chaffey

On the day before the general election, a taste of the mood amongst public sector workers was evident in force, with dozens of workers at Reading College out on a lunchtime protest against job cuts.

Their protest was lively, noisy and energetic, with chants of: "No Ifs! No Buts! No Education Cuts!" and passing drivers tooting their horns in solidarity.

Unison activists explained their case:

"We are facing 128 job cuts, when we are already over stretched. That means even more work on less shoulders if these cuts go through. This will mean a poorer education for students with larger class sizes, less qualified 'cheaper' teachers and falling standards."

The cuts are being carried out by Activate Learning who run colleges in Reading, Oxford, Banbury and Bicester. This squeeze on public sector workers, the militant mood on their protest and the noisy support from passing motorists goes a long way to explain why the Tories lost in Reading East.

Reading Socialist Party members joined the protest in solidarity and got a warm response to our "Tories Out, Corbyn In!" leaflets. The [defeat of the Tories locally and the loss of their majority](#) nationally is certain to give a boost to union members at Reading College and the view that these cuts can be stopped.

This fight should be linked up to all those facing cuts in education, health, local government and the private sector, in a national demonstration to oppose all cuts.

The Socialist Party gives our full support to this campaign and calls for an end to the privatisation of education, with all FE colleges returned to the public sector and provided with full funding by central government to restore jobs and pay and improve educational standards for students.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 16 June 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

NSSN cancels conference to support July 1st 'Tories Out' demonstration

A statement from the NSSN:

As our supporters and affiliates will know, this year's conference of the National Shop Stewards Network (our 11th) is [due to take place](#) in London on Saturday July 1st. Hundreds of [trade union and anti-cuts campaigners will be preparing to take part in discussions](#) and debates about the crucial struggles and disputes facing working people.

Of course, a prominent issue would be how we organise a [mass movement to take on a weak and discredited Tory Government](#). The NSSN is not affiliated to any political party but we unapologetically campaigned for Jeremy Corbyn's pro-worker manifesto in the General Election and we will continue to support his anti-austerity programme.

Over the last day, we have been made aware that [the People's Assembly](#) has called a national 'Tories out' demonstration in London on July 1st - the same day as the NSSN Conference. It is welcome that such a protest has been organised, and in fact we have been pushing for the TUC and the unions to call one. It is vital that everything is done to make this a massive demonstration as the starting point for a movement of protests, marches and strikes that is needed to build the pressure to push out May and the Tories.

To maximise the demonstration's authority, size and reach as well as the action that needs to build afterwards, we believe that if it hasn't already been done, the TUC (including the Scottish and Wales TUCs) and the unions should be approached and offered the opportunity to put the march under their banner.

Therefore, the national steering committee of the NSSN has decided to cancel this year's conference to support the demonstration and to concentrate our efforts to build it. We apologise to those who were looking forward to our conference but we encourage them, their union branches and trade councils to come on the demonstration and mobilise for it.

We will be organising a NSSN contingent on the march, which we will be sending information out about. We will also be requesting that the NSSN be allowed to have a speaker on the platform.

The NSSN will also play its part in mobilising for the Tories' Queens Speech next Wednesday. We will be staging a platform outside Parliament, open to all others, from 4pm

Next year's NSSN Conference will be on Saturday June 30th 2018 in Conway Hall. We thank them for being prepared to move it without financial penalty. The annual NSSN rally at the TUC Congress will take place in the Holiday Inn in Brighton from 1pm on Sunday September 10th.

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The Pentrich uprising: revolution and counter-revolution in 19th century Britain

Jon Dale, Mansfield Socialist Party

The pretty Derbyshire village of Pentrich shows few signs today of its industrial past. But on 9 June 1817 over 200 armed workers marched from there towards Nottingham. Miners, quarrymen, ironworkers, knitters, farm labourers - they believed they were part of a national uprising to overthrow the government, win universal votes and install a provisional government that would feed all.

Workers in 1817 had many reasons to rebel. Discharged soldiers and sailors roamed the country, penniless and homeless. The British ruling class had used them while threatened by the French revolution and Napoleon's armies. Once no longer needed, ex-servicemen were treated abominably.

Mechanisation of agriculture and common land enclosure was turning farm workers into day labourers - paid if there was work, starving if there wasn't - the zero-hour contracts of the time.

Machines in factories were displacing knitting frames in workers' homes. Overproduction slashed pay. The Framework Knitters Union, formed in 1812, won minimum wage rates in 1814 and campaigned against 'truck' payment - workers paid with goods sold (for a profit) by their employer. Three union leaders were then sentenced to a month's hard labour.

The Luddite movement smashed factory knitting frames during 1810-16, including in Derbyshire villages around Pentrich. 3,000 attended the funeral of an executed Nottingham Luddite. Six more were executed and three transported to Australia. The Framework Knitters Union leader pleaded for their lives and was himself imprisoned from April to November 1817.

A massive volcanic eruption in Indonesia made 1816 "a year without summer". Bread and potato prices doubled. Huge protest meetings called for parliamentary voting rights.

Class struggle

The government sent more troops to the Midlands and North than the Duke of Wellington had used in the Peninsular War. Tory Prime Minister Margaret [Thatcher similarly sent thousands of police into the coalfields](#) during the 1984-85 miners' strike.

Lord Liverpool's Tory government stood for "tranquillity and harmony" - aristocracy at the top of society and poor at the bottom, accepting their lot without complaint.

Britain is often claimed to be the oldest parliamentary democracy. In 1817 fewer than 3% of the population had the vote. Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds had no MPs. One 'rotten borough' of 32 people had two!

'Hampden Clubs' were set up from 1812, campaigning for votes for all householders and annual parliamentary elections (instead of seven-yearly). Like many other industrial towns and villages, Pentrich had its own Hampden Club.

A national petition gained 500,000 signatures. It was handed in at the opening of parliament in January 1817 - and ignored. The Prince Regent's coach was then attacked and a window broken.

Encouraging the demonstrators was William Oliver, a government spy and agent provocateur.

The 1789 French revolution still terrified the British ruling class. The Seditious Meetings Act of March 1817 banned public gatherings over 50 unless officially authorised. Parts of this act remained law until Thatcher's 1986 Public Order Act, which still gives a senior police officer power to restrict numbers taking part in a public assembly.

On 5 May Oliver told a delegates' meeting in Wakefield that 70,000 Londoners would support an uprising, urging those present to organise for 9 June. Other delegates estimated they could turn out 150,000 from Birmingham and 90,000 from Manchester.

In fact some 'delegates' at the meeting had no authority to be there and these figures were totally made up. Home Secretary Lord Sidmouth planned for the 9 June uprising to justify further repression.

Oliver went back to the Home Office and then to Sheffield, where he tried to incite an uprising at a meeting with claims that 140,000 Londoners would join them if they did.

Deception

At a Nottingham meeting on 6 June he argued: "They were ready to rise in Birmingham, Sheffield and many parts of the North, and that if Nottingham, Derby and Leicester did not rise, they would deceive the other parts." In fact, the deception was all Oliver's.

The Pentrich committee chose framework knitter Jeremiah Brandreth to lead the march to Nottingham. Addressing a meeting on 8 June, he urged every man "must turn out and fight for bread. The time is come you plainly see, the government opposed must be." The following night in heavy rain, the marchers set out armed with scythes, pitchforks, sticks and a few guns.

The next morning the Light Dragoons were waiting to arrest them. A report described a "picture of despair and wretchedness, none of them seeming to be above the rank of labourers or working mechanics."

A grand jury - of landowners, slave-owners and industrialists - decided the prisoners would face charges of treason. Oliver's role was covered up. Trial juries were packed with country gentry.

Three leaders were executed by hanging and then beheading. The Prince Regent 'mercifully' decreed the dead bodies should not then be quartered. Others were imprisoned and 14 transported to Australia for life.

[Margaret Thatcher once said:](#) "The idea that all are equal under the law is deeply rooted in our democratic systems and nowhere else." The Pentrich uprising showed the opposite, [as did Thatcher herself](#). All the forces of the state protected the ruling class's interests against growing working class demands for democratic rights.

The capitalist state still defends big business. Agent provocateurs and undercover police have been used in anti-capitalist demonstrations, anti-racist and environmental campaigns and socialist organisations. But the working class today is far stronger than the Pentrich workers 200 years ago.

East Midlands Socialist Party

- 200 years since the Pentrich revolution - lessons for today for the struggle for democratic and trade union rights
- Rebellion - Then and Now
- Speakers: Dave Nellist, Coventry Labour MP 1983-92 and Socialist Party national committee
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Why I joined the Socialist Party

"Austerity hurts and the only alternative is socialism"

Lindsey Morgan, Leicester West Socialist Party

It's relatively easy to talk about austerity in terms of numbers. [3.9 million children living in poverty](#) in the UK, the [poorest tenth of the UK population seeing a 38% decrease in their net income](#) and the richest tenth losing the least.

When a paper like [the Financial Times runs a story](#) with the headline "UK reaches socially acceptable limits of austerity" it is evident that the Tory agenda of destroying the welfare state is underway.

However, on a personal level, austerity hurts. I [joined the Socialist Party](#) because I realised that none of the main parties genuinely represented change and that austerity and capitalism were both in part to blame for my misery. After my partner of eleven years died and I became a single parent to a grieving child, I expected the welfare state to provide for me and my daughter in our time of need.

Benefits stopped

Instead [all of my benefits were stopped](#). My partner died just before the renewal date for tax credits, leaving me on an income of £20 child benefit a week. I was not entitled to bereavement allowance or widowed parent allowance because we were not married.

There was no longer the ability to get crisis loans to fall back on. I put a claim in for Employment Support Allowance in November which did not pay out until February.

All of my partner's savings were spent on sustaining me and my daughter but because we had savings I couldn't get a funeral payment, leaving me with a large debt.

Prior to his death I had been a struggling student with mental health issues, desperately trying to keep going. When I needed the state the most, after his death, it abandoned me.

I was found fit for work after a [dreaded work capability assessment](#), despite being in the depths of despair with depression and anxiety. A man from the council visited my home only a few months after his death to check I hadn't moved someone in just so I could continue to get housing benefit.

Austerity hurts. Austerity kills. The only alternative to austerity long-term is an alternative to capitalism and that lies in socialism, socialist parties, and the reinvigoration of the working class.

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.

Grenfell - a monument to this rotten system

The [horror of the Grenfell Tower fire](#) - in the area where I was born and where my sister still lives - has left me sad but also very angry.

I grew up there in a squalid slum, four families sharing one bathroom, an outside toilet and no hot water. It was one of the poorest areas in the country. A mile up the hill lived some of the richest people in the world.

Lancaster West (where Grenfell Tower is) and Kensal New Town estates were built to clear awful slums, I remember them being built. But locals said at the time that they were just building new concrete slums.

I joined the Labour Party Young Socialists and Militant (now the Socialist Party) because of my class hatred for the system which benefited the rich and condemned us to poverty.

Grenfell Tower is a monument to decades of cuts under Thatcher, Blair, Cameron, etc. It is a man-made disaster, a slaughter of working class people, killed because of the quest for corporate profit.

It is 40 years since I left that area yet North Kensington/Notting Dale is still one of the poorest areas in Britain - nearly 60% child poverty - while the super-rich still live at the top of the hill and are even richer.

Don't get angry, get even. Let's ensure that those responsible for these deaths are jailed. But also it is the whole rotten system of capitalism that's to blame.

Let's sweep away this system and build a new socialist order, based on the type of human solidarity that the people of North Kensington have shown in response to the deaths.

John Reid, Lambeth Socialist Party and RMT union rep

Portugal fire disaster - no more cuts!

[More than 60 people dead in a huge forest fire in Portugal](#). They say it was unforeseeable and unavoidable, but year after year these tragedies are repeated.

Fire and emergency services have been depleted and cut to the bone through years of austerity, with brave firefighters being left to fend for their communities with a surreal lack of resources.

The lack of agrarian reform has left vast swathes of rural areas in the hands of private interests which are only about profit, not about maintaining and taking care of the forest to avoid this.

Every year tragedies like this happen in Portugal and we mourn the firefighters and ordinary people that perished and lost everything to the flames.

Every year the same empty words from capitalists and every year nothing changes. We need to mourn, but we need to organise to stop this happening again and again and again.

Solidarity with the people of Pedrogão and Figueiró, and with all the firefighters currently fighting the blaze. No more cuts in fire, emergency and civil protection services.

João Félix, Cardiff West Socialist Party

Corbyn hope leads to 'youthquake'

"The landscape of politics in the UK has changed for ever" is how [the editorial in the NME](#) describes the situation in Britain after 8 June. "Sometimes defeat can feel like victory... a new hope spread across the UK".

The main cover of the previous issue had a kindly and confident Jeremy Corbyn looking into the camera and the words: "We offer hope". In that issue, the editor-in-chief, Mike Williams, admits to having changed his mind about Corbyn. Among other things, "his silence during the Brexit campaigning annoyed me".

But "when he calls for a better funded NHS and more support for teachers, and says he's scrapping tuition fees and zero-hour contracts, he's promising us exactly what we want: a fairer and more inclusive country".

The post-election edition declares: "Two-thirds of young voters moved to reject the establishment - no wonder they're calling it a 'youthquake'".

In the pre-election editorial, Mike Williams quotes Bob Dylan's famous warning that "the times they are a-changing!" For some of us in the older generation, we can only greet with enthusiasm the "youthquake" and look to a far brighter future to follow, as the new generation takes up the struggle for socialism.

Clare Doyle, Hackney Socialist Party

A dystopian vision

Watch ['The Handmaid's Tale' \(Channel 4\)](#) if you get the time. It is a dystopian vision of [a DUP-style government](#) transferred to an American context. Yet the original Margaret Atwood book was written in the 1980s. Prescient fiction or a warning?

In the series, the religious right have seized power using terrorism as a pretext. Jack London's book 'The Iron Heel' warned against this possibility.

Moreover the Nazis used the burning of the Reichstag as just such a pretext. I won't give any more spoilers. Just watch it and see how a patriarchal homophobic agenda works out in practice.

Derek McMillan, Brighton Socialist Party

- [The Iron Heel](#) by Jack London, £6
- [The Handmaid's Tale](#) by Margaret Atwood, £9

leftbooks.co.uk

Protests around the country demand: Tories out!

London

Over the course of the day, thousands joined in the protest in Whitehall against May's attempt to stay in office by [getting a deal with the reactionary DUP](#) on 17 June.

The combination of being buoyed up by the advance of the Corbyn-led Labour Party and the deep anger and bitterness after the effective murder of scores of people in Grenfell Tower made for a lively protest, dominated by young people and with a strong presence from women.

The overwhelming mood was to fight back and remove the Tory government. This was reflected both in many of the speeches and the reception which Socialist Party members received.

The combination of our call for concrete action against the Tory government - building for a massive 1 July demo and a 24-hour general strike - attracted much interest. People keenly took our leaflets after reading its headline and at least 65 bought copies of the Socialist.

Bob Labi North London Socialist Party

Hull

Hull's rally in support of Jeremy Corbyn and against the Tories brought together around 100 protesters in Victoria Square on 17 June.

The event was dominated by the horrific news from London of [the Grenfell Tower fire](#). The rally stood for a minute's silent tribute to all the victims and survivors.

Hull Socialist Party members Mick Whale and Matt Whale spoke from the platform alongside other labour and trade union movement speakers, and were well-received by the crowd. Our members sold 80 copies of the Socialist at the event.

Paul Spooner Hull Socialist Party

Cardiff

A protest against the Tories and for justice for Grenfell gathered dozens of people in a showing of class solidarity in Cardiff on 17 June. What struck us was not as much the people coming to the protest, but the outpouring of support from passers-by and bystanders, ordinary people who realise the price that we are all paying due to cuts and austerity.

The Socialist Party was an integral part of the protest, talking to people and underlining the role of capitalism and austerity and what we need to do to stop it happening again. We had a very good response, with more than 60 copies of the Socialist sold and a determined response to our demands.

João Félix Cardiff West Socialist Party

Young socialists share ideas at London meeting

Elliott Codrington Hillingdon Socialist Party

In the wake of [Jeremy Corbyn's electoral successes](#), a meeting of young socialists on 15 June in central London highlighted the potential of a motivated, inspired youth movement. And their desire for real socialist policies.

The meeting was attended by 35 people and had great participation. It was encouraging to see confident, young people stand up and put forward their ideas for how we could shape a movement following the Corbyn campaign and what issues it should cover.

People were more than willing to listen to these ideas and contribute their own. I have no doubt that, if these meetings continue, more people will get involved and contribute their own ideas.

The meeting showed that there is real potential in seeking out young people who have been alienated and disenfranchised by the system as it exists today and letting them know that we can change things for the better.

There is a great desire for change among young people and this meeting was a promising first step in harnessing that desire into fighting for a socialist future. I am very interested in seeing this movement grow and develop and I thoroughly enjoyed being a part of its germination.

Canterbury pride

Canterbury Pride was held on 17 June and the new Labour MP Rosie Duffield spoke to the hundreds who came to support the event.

There was a real carnival atmosphere not just because it was Pride but as one person said: "It's like a weight of nasty politics is off my shoulders." The former MP, Tory Julian Brazier, was [anti-gay marriage](#), anti-abortion and pro-hanging, and the town and its thousands of students had had enough of this out-of-touch man.

Rosie is a single mum and teaching assistant and spoke very passionately about her support for LGBT+ rights. People were yelling with support and many are absolutely elated. There is a clear mood for change!

Delia Hazrati

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/25691>