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Issue 1053

29 August - 4 September 2019



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the Socialist

Formerly **Militant**



IMPERIALIST TENSIONS ESCALATE AS WORLD ECONOMY TEETERS

> p8-9



NORTHERN IRELAND: BREXIT AND THE BORDER

> p14

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WORKERS' MOVEMENT MUST LAUNCH CAMPAIGN FOR A GENERAL ELECTION

> Editorial: p2-3

photo Paul Mattsson

CAPITALISTS CHASE PROFIT



AMAZON BURNS AND

Socialist change can stop climate change

Build for the 20 September climate action

Read more: page 5

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Issue 1053
29 August - 4 September 2019

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Send us reports of your workplace and community campaigns, short letters on working-class issues, or ideas for other articles.

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"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."
Karl Marx

WORKERS' MOVEMENT MUST LAUNCH A CAMPAIGN FOR A GENERAL ELECTION



On 3 September parliament returns from its long summer holiday, sitting for less than two weeks before it breaks again for the party conference season. With 'Brexit day' - 31 October - just two months away the MPs normal relaxing August has been interrupted by fevered plots and speculation about the way forward. Now the different sides face trying to turn their plotting into effective action. Whatever else results, one outcome will be the further discrediting of the capitalist politicians that dominate Westminster.

Unselected Prime Minister Boris Johnson has spent much of the summer 'talking tough'; posturing that he is prepared to carry out a chaotic no-deal Brexit. Britain's capitalist class are highly opposed to this, with its damaging consequences for their profits. They are clinging to the hope that Johnson's bellicose phrase mongering is a tactic and, following a few token concessions from the EU, he will take a new version of May's deal back to parliament. Even were he to do so, however, the weakness of his government and the splits in the Tory Party would make it difficult to get it passed. No deal is therefore looming.

Contortions to stop Corbyn

Pro-capitalist MPs from all parties who want to prevent Brexit - or at least ensure it is a 'Brexit in name only' - are scrambling around for parliamentary devices to stay Johnson's hand. Their own hands are stayed, however, by the one thing they fear more than a chaotic Brexit - a Jeremy Corbyn-led government lifted to power by a popular surge. While Corbyn's programme is actually very modest, the capitalist class and its political representatives are terrified by the enthusiasm it could create among millions of working

and middle-class people who have suffered endless austerity.

Hence the contortions of pro-remain Tories, Liberal Democrats and pro-capitalist Labour MPs who are desperate to defeat the prime minister, but even more desperate to prevent the leader of the opposition coming to power.

It therefore seems possible that they will, at least initially, hold back from supporting a no-confidence vote in Johnson, instead trying to rely on parliament voting to demand that Johnson asks for an extension of Article 50. The rather large problem with this is that it is the prime minister, not parliament, which legally has to ask for an extension of Article 50. Realising that Johnson might respond to such a vote by refusing to ask for the extension and instead 'going to the people' by calling a general election, Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson has switched her attention to demanding that, in such circumstances, Labour should not vote for a general election!

Her excuse for this is that Britain could crash out of the EU while an election is in progress. Yet Corbyn has offered a solution to these 'insurmountable' problems - a successful vote of no confidence in Johnson, then a very short-term minority Labour government extending Article 50 and calling a general election. Swinson and the Liberal Democrats were prepared to be part of a vicious pro-austerity government with the Tories for five years, but won't support a Corbyn government for five weeks!

Fight for a general election

These events drive home the central issue that the Socialist has been campaigning for throughout the summer - the urgent need for the workers' movement to launch a mass campaign demanding a general election and the coming to power of a Corbyn-led government with a socialist programme.

Such a campaign could shatter the parliamentary manoeuvres of all stripes of capitalist politician and transform the political situation. Labour could win by a landslide, provided that it adopted a fighting socialist programme.

The 2017 manifesto could be a starting point. But the manifesto should also include, for example,

The workers' movement can break the Westminster deadlock
photo Senan



reversing all cuts to council services, scrapping universal credit, and a pledge to nationalise Honda Swindon, Ford Bridgend and British Steel under democratic working-class control, along with any other companies who carry out closures and job cuts in the name of Brexit or otherwise.

A pledge to renegotiate Brexit in the interests of the working class - refusing to accept the EU's privatisation, pro-austerity laws - would form an important part of such an approach. This should be combined with nationalisation of the major corporations and banks to really take the levers of power out of the hands of the capitalist saboteurs who would otherwise do all in their power to prevent the implementation of pro-working class policies.

If such an approach is not adopted, however, the current situation - where many workers see no difference between Corbyn and the pro-austerity politicians - could

continue or worsen. There is a real danger that Corbyn's anti-austerity policies, which initially generated huge enthusiasm, are drowned out by the babble of parliamentary manoeuvres.

If this were to happen, Corbyn and the Labour left would bear responsibility for it. In the vain hope of winning unity in the parliamentary Labour Party, they have made repeated concessions to its pro-capitalist wing, not least campaigning for remain in 2016, instead of fighting to lead the elemental cry of rage that was the working-class vote for Brexit in a socialist and internationalist direction.

It has most often been the pro-capitalist Labour MPs who appear as party spokespeople. This is now being compounded by John McDonnell and others seeming to drift to a 'remain in all circumstances' position, rather than arguing that a Labour government would renegotiate Brexit in workers' interests.

Of course, no matter how many concessions are made, the Blairite wing of the Labour Party remain unreconciled to Corbyn and determined to remove him when they get the opportunity. That is why another essential - and well overdue - aspect of the fight for a general election is the launching of a serious campaign to transform the Labour Party into a workers' party.

This would mean transforming the structures of Labour so that it was brought under the democratic control of its working-class members and supporters, particularly via the trade unions and a return to the kind of federal structure Labour had when it was founded.

No to the false 'national unity' road

The immediate starting point of such a campaign, however, is to launch a serious battle for a general election. Every gain Corbyn has made has been as a result of a mass surge from

below. It is mobilising the working class, not parliamentary manoeuvres, that Corbyn should put central.

All attempts to avoid a general election, and instead try to form some kind of longer term 'national unity government to stop a hard Brexit', would be another Tory government in all but name and must be unconditionally rejected. Such a government would be acting in the interests of the capitalist class and would be diametrically opposed to the interests of the working-class majority.

Of course, even if Corbyn stands firm against the false 'national unity' road, this still may not prevent a swathe of right-wing Labour MPs breaking ranks to support such a government. This would be very dangerous for the capitalist class, however, because the splitting away of the Blairites would create new possibilities for Labour to develop as a mass workers' party within which the ideas of socialism could find an



All attempts to avoid a general election, and instead try to form some kind of longer-term 'national unity government', must be unconditionally rejected



photo Chatham House/CC



photo World Economic Forum/CC



There is a real danger that Corbyn's anti-austerity policies, which initially generated huge enthusiasm, are drowned out by the babble of parliamentary manoeuvres



WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Socialist Party fights for socialism - a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also oppose every cut, fighting in our day-to-day campaigning for every possible improvement for working-class people. The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international. The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) which organises across the world. Our demands include...

PUBLIC SERVICES

- No to ALL cuts in jobs, public services and benefits. Defend our pensions.
- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and 'free schools'!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone's health needs - free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!
- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

WORK AND INCOME

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings. Scrap zero-hour contracts.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Scrap Universal Credit. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.

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Socialism - the podcast: on all platforms
facebook.com/CWISocialistParty

- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

ENVIRONMENT

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and un-recycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

RIGHTS

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman's right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.
- For the right to vote at 16.

MASS WORKERS' PARTY

- For a mass workers' party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-racist and anti-cuts campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Fight for Labour to be transformed into such a party: deselect the Blairites.

SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

- No to imperialist wars and occupations.
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses' neoliberal European Union and single market. For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!

Do you agree? Join the fightback!
JOIN THE SOCIALISTS
Visit socialistparty.org.uk/join
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Sean Hoyle photo Paul Mattsson/CC

Interview with Sean Hoyle - left candidate in RMT general secretary election

Fighting for transport workers and socialist policies

As new strikes begin on South Western Railway, in the long running industrial dispute over guards and the result of the transport union RMT general secretary election is announced, the Socialist spoke to **Sean Hoyle**, the left candidate in the general secretary election.

Why is the RMT continuing its strike action on South Western Railway (SWR)?

For everyone travelling late at night or seeking access assistance on SWR it is the view of the RMT that a fully qualified, safety critical guard should be present on every train, working alongside the driver.

For over two years we have attempted to negotiate with SWR to ensure the continuing safety of passengers and staff.

We have suspended action to engage in meaningful talks, only to be strung along with empty phrases. Our members were forced to ballot yet again due to the Tory anti-trade union legislation and yet again have responded with an increased mandate.

It is my view that the RMT should provide a fighting fund to ensure we can take the decisive strike action necessary to ensure a positive result for our safety campaign.

I stood in this election on the fighting traditions of the RMT that has confidence in our members and our willingness to fight for what we believe to be right.

That is what we need more than ever to resolve this dispute with the high-handed management at SWR.

Can you outline the key messages of your election campaign?

As RMT president for three years, I sought to continue the fighting traditions of our union, a democratic, member-led union, prepared to act when our members choose to and to put their resources, the resources of the union, at their disposal.

In the election of my successor, Michelle Rodgers, as president, we established a nationwide campaign of RMT activists across all regions, industrial sectors and self-organised groups to continue that work.

That has been the strength of my campaign, the members who fight for this union and its members every day at work, defending jobs, pay and working conditions.

Our members want a union leadership which is outspoken, visible and as determined as they are to ensure the RMT is a union that fights for them. Words can come easily to us all but it is what we are prepared to do that counts.

We also need to be a union that seeks to work with others to strengthen the trade union movement. To act in solidarity, shoulder to shoulder with those in other

unions fighting back.

With six million members, the trade unions are the largest voluntary organisation in the country. Potentially we have a strong voice and enormous power if we act collectively, as we did voting for a general strike at the Trade Union Congress (TUC) back in 2012.

The RMT has to make sure that voice is heard within the TUC, and that the TUC is called on to act in our interests. The Trade Union Coordinating Group, TUCG, that consists of ten national unions, is another body that must be prepared to draw together its collective strength if others are unwilling to act.

We are on the verge of a general election, how do you see the RMT's political role at this time?

Whether it's Theresa May or Boris Johnson in No 10, we are fighting the capitalist system and we need to roll up our sleeves and be prepared to fight in the interests of working-class people.

As a socialist trade union, that means the RMT will give support to Jeremy Corbyn's policies that match our union views on rail renationalisation, the restoration of trade union rights and his anti-austerity manifesto, but we will not support those in the Labour Party that seek to undermine Jeremy and the interests of our members.

I will seek to ensure we play our role to the full.

Why Socialism 2019 is a must

'Unprecedented' should be the word of the year.

- The Tories are in an unprecedented mess
- Brexit poses unprecedented problems for business and for workers
- The environmental crisis is at an unprecedented stage
- The drop in living standards is unprecedented in modern times

And that's just for starters!

So no wonder an unprecedented level of questioning is erupting.

- 'What is going' on being a common one!
- Although a close competitor is probably, 'when will this lot just get lost' (or words to that effect)?
- Why is it always us that have to suffer?
- What can we do to end this misery?
- Why is there so much suffering in the world?
- Why is the world so divided?
- Is it worth it to protest/recycle/join/vote/get out of bed?
- Can Corbyn win – or if he has won, can he survive and carry out his anti-austerity programme?

This autumn we will potentially face unprecedented events and eruptions

- a vote of no-confidence in Johnson,
- a snap general election,
- crisis in the EU,
- splits in the Tory party,
- splits in the Labour Party with the potential for a socialist anti-austerity workers party to be born, and movements growing around the world as workers and young people seek a way out
- We will have unprecedented opportunities in recent times to advance the fight for socialism

Ideas are vital for the struggle to change the world. So a weekend of discussion and debate with the sole aim of changing the world is something for you and everyone you know (probably not including your boss)

By November, getting together with hundreds and hundreds of...

- strikers with lessons from their struggle,
- trade unionists with organising experience,
- young workers enraged and ready to fight against their conditions,
- community campaigners fighting cuts,
- student activists for free education,
- climate warriors,
- and people who just want answers to their questions, as well as socialists steeped in the understanding of Marxism, not just from across Britain but across the world, will be just what we need. Don't miss it!

A 20% discount on tickets was in place until 1 September but it will be extended for all who fall into any of the above categories until the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) rally at the Trade Union Congress (TUC) on 8 September (see page 6). Get your tickets now for the political event of the autumn.



For tickets and info, call 020 8988 8777 or visit: **socialism2019.net**



Karen Seymour
Mansfield Socialist Party

The Amazon rainforest in Brazil is on fire. The fires are so extensive they can be seen from space.

The Amazon emits more than 20% of the world's oxygen. Worldwide, trees absorb 2.4 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide each year. The massive Amazon absorbs a quarter of that total.

Brazil's satellite data shows

there's been over 74,000 fires so far this year, up 84%. In July, 2,253 sq km of rainforest were destroyed, a massive increase from 597 sq km in July 2018.

The fires have been burning for around a month - the dry season means they've spread much faster than normal - made worse by the policies of Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro.

During the presidential election he said: "Not one centimetre will be demarcated for indigenous reserves." Big business feels

comfortable destroying the rainforest, because there are few sanctions in place to protect it.

Bolsonaro has cut \$23 million from Brazil's environment enforcement agency. Yadvinder Malhi, an ecosystem professor at Oxford University, says it's been gutted by 95%. This year, fines for environmental violations have dropped by a third compared to the same period in 2018.

An area of the rainforest the size of a football pitch is lost every minute through the destruction.

Brazil's environment minister, Richard Salles, was a pro-big business lawyer, described by the Guardian as a "gofer for agribusiness". Salles has insisted the only way to solve the problem of deforestation is for the private sector to bring in 'development'.

Bolsonaro has his own ideas on how to help the environment. In one interview he told a reporter to 'poo' every other day! He is threatening to impose austerity measures on the Brazilian people to pay for putting out the fires.

It will take decades to regenerate these forests, but only if action is taken now. 68 fires have been registered in indigenous territories and conservation areas.

An indigenous rights campaigner said: "Indigenous peoples... depend on [these forests] for food, medicines, clothing and a sense of identity and belonging." Hundreds of indigenous women occupied Brazil's health ministry on 12 August against cuts to specialised healthcare for their communities.

Under pressure, Bolsonaro has ordered the army to help fight the fires. There is a public outcry over the effects of smoke on people's health in Brazil's cities.

Pro-rich French President, Emmanuel Macron, has declared that France would not ratify the large Mercosur trade deal with South American nations. While Boris Johnson and Germany's Angela Merkel have said Bolsonaro's domestic policies shouldn't affect trade relations.

Macron's opposition to Mercosur pre-dates the recent Amazon fires and is based on its negative impact on French agricultural interests. The EU and other capitalist powers criticising Brazil have terrible track records on the environment.

The EU allows dumping untreated human sewage into rivers. The EU's Water Framework Directive says rivers don't have to be made "good", if the cost is considered to be 'too high'!

Bolsonaro was able to point to deforestation in Germany and whaling in Norway, when those governments suspended aid.

Globally, the extent of the fires has only recently become clear. They weren't even reported widely in Brazil.

Disaster capitalism

Yet again disaster capitalism brings out the profit vultures. Tech giant Amazon cut the price of their Amazon Fire tablet during the crisis. They've been criticised for exploiting google searches of 'Amazon fire' as people try to discover what is happening in Brazil.

Bolsonaro and the capitalist class are only interested in furthering their own national interests and personal profits. Trade unions and other social movements must mobilise against Bolsonaro's policies. We need to build a united front of all working-class organisations to resist Bolsonaro's neoliberal agenda.

Worldwide, since 1988, just 100 companies have been responsible for 71% of greenhouse gas emissions. The energy and corporate giants that pollute and destroy must be nationalised, run by the working class, in the interests of workers and the environment, not for big shareholders or to maximise profit.

Protecting the environment requires international cooperation which can only be possible on a socialist basis, eliminating the profit motive and introducing democratic working-class control and management of the economy. A socialist world will ensure that the environment is protected for generations to come, not exploited for the short-term gain of the rich.

Workplace

Merseyside
Matalan workers walk out over pay deal



photo Neill Dunne

Neill Dunne
Liverpool and District Socialist Party

Workers at a Matalan warehouse and distribution centre in Knowsley, Merseyside have taken strike action against a proposed pay deal.

Members of the GMB union voted with a turnout of over 50% and returned a majority vote to take industrial action against poorer conditions in relation to back pay and the cost of living element. 500 workers walked out for 24 hours on 19 August.

GMB regional officer at Matalan Steven Boden said: "A pay rise offer of only 1.5% for weekend crew, and 2.9% for Monday-Friday staff, are both clearly below the current inflation rate."

"The union is asking for a one off payment to meet 'backdating demands' to an original anniversary date of April, but Matalan's offer is only to July, and is therefore taking from worker's wages to fill shareholders pockets."

The Hargreaves family who own Matalan sit on a fortune of £500 million. Yet they are not even willing to budge for a potentially new ballot. This shows a hardline approach which sees the workers as worth less than a living wage and the rate of inflation.

This comes at a time when staff are concerned at the company's intimidation and a rising bullying culture within the workplace.

The ball is in Matalan's court.



NSSN 2019 TUC lobby

Sunday 8 September, 1pm at the Holiday Inn, Kings Road, Brighton BN1 2JF

See shopstewards.net for more

Iain Dalton
Socialist Party West Yorkshire organiser

Strike action wins privatisation reprieve at Bradford hospitals



photo Unison Twitter

After three weeks of strike action by estates and facilities workers in Bradford hospitals organised in health union Unison - and with an all-out strike looming - management has blinked first.

At talks convened by conciliation service Acas, the trust has agreed to suspend implementation of its plans until at least 15 February. These plans would transfer those staff into a wholly owned subsidiary - a separate private company owned by the health trust. In effect this is back-door privatisation.

The trust has offered Unison representatives to present their arguments to the next board of directors meeting on 12 September with the trust responding to the union by the end of the month.

'100% NHS'

Given the trust's refusal to budge until now, this news will be welcomed by the workers and their supporters, but the only solution to this dispute that should be acceptable is the staff remaining as '100% NHS' staff as their strike t-shirts have put it.

The trust's board meeting should now become the occasion of a mass rally of opposition, mobilising the strikers, other hospital staff, local Unison branches and the wider trade union movement.

The local Labour council leadership should join the city's three Labour MPs and Jeremy Corbyn in coming out publicly against the plans.

But most importantly of all, Unison should prepare for the possibility that the board might refuse to

budge by being ready to proceed as quickly as possible with further strike action.

This should be kicked off by Unison calling a national demonstration in support of the workers and seeking to link the action with other

local disputes and other strikes against privatisation of our NHS.

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BARRY HOSPITAL WORKERS FIGHT TO SAVE WARD FROM CLOSURE

Ross Saunders
Socialist Party Wales

Unison health union members at Barry Hospital have launched a campaign to save the Sam Davies ward from closure.

Cardiff and Vale University health board plans to close the acute rehabilitation ward as part of its latest round of cuts, which it has dressed up as a reorganisation of services for older people.

Ward East 2 in Llandough Hospital is also facing closure as part of the plans, as is Rookwood Hospital in Cardiff.

Sam Davies provides rehabilitation services for older people following a stroke, injury or illness. Patients can spend weeks or months on the ward before they are ready to return home. Ensuring services are local and accessible to families is very important.

The health board says its plans are designed to ensure patients are rehabilitated as quickly as possible and return home, but in reality are driven by the funding cuts demanded by the Westminster Tory government, which the Welsh Labour government has done nothing to oppose.

Small recent increases in Welsh NHS funding have not reversed the huge cuts carried out previously. Hospitals in Cardiff and Vale alone have lost £130 million, according to Cardiff Council.

Healthworkers' union Unison has organised two days of action in Barry and has set up a petition calling on the Welsh government to intervene to reverse the closure.

Support for the campaign has been enormous. The union reports that 5,000 signatures have been collected in just three weeks.

People would turn up to a public meeting and turn out onto the streets to support NHS staff and patients if the union organised a protest march, as they did recently when the Vale council proposed library closures. Unison could mobilise its membership across Wales to attend.

Workers would get huge sympathy, too, if they took strike action against cuts, as NHS staff in Bradford and elsewhere are doing.

People understand that endless cuts demanded by big-business politicians are permanently disrupting our NHS services and could be stopped if workers take action.

See full article at socialistpartywales.org.uk



A lively picket line greeted visitors to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) as caterers and cleaners employed by contractors entered their fourth week of continuous strike action over pay. The workers employed by Aramark and ISS at in London have been locked in a nine-month battle over the London Living Wage and poor working conditions. BEIS receptionists, working for ISS have also voted 100% to strike and will be taking action for five weeks in September photo Isai Priya

POSTAL UNION BALLOTS 100,000 WORKERS FOR STRIKE ACTION



photo Paul Mattsson

Gary Clark
CWU branch secretary (personal capacity)

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has held briefings over terms and conditions, firstly jointly with Parcelforce reps and then with all the senior Royal Mail reps. The mood at both meetings was extreme anger.

The CWU took the decision to ballot all members - up to 100,000 - across the whole group due to the actions of Royal Mail's senior leadership.

Royal Mail is led by Rico Back who has built his reputation in the business world on a non-unionised low-cost model to such an extent that his GLS company was subject to an undercover investigation by a reporter who worked there.

The reporter described slave-like conditions which are clearly Rico

Back's vision for Royal Mail.

But Rico Back has not banked on the CWU in his calculations. He told Terry Pullinger, CWU deputy general secretary (postal), "I am the CEO, I can do what I like."

Clearly he's in for a shock as there is an army of postal workers in the CWU getting ready to take him on.

Under the 'four pillars' national agreement we are due another hour off the working week this October, but they have stated that this will only be given if every office makes 5% 'savings' to a workforce already pushed to its limits, with a culture of bullying management.

This has led to a series of walkouts across the country.

Our hard work

It's very clear that Rico Back was appointed CEO with a 'golden hello' of £6 million, not just to keep a steady ship but to take on and break the CWU for his capitalist friends and the hedge funds. They correctly see the CWU in the way of their making millions upon millions out of our hard work.

It's also clear this is going to be a bitter dispute. But the CWU have now taken the gloves off and we will be addressing every single member in the coming weeks.

We will be preparing for the most massive Yes vote, followed by industrial action, the likes of which we haven't seen for several years.

DVSA workers strike for four weeks over conditions and workload

Gary Freeman
Nottingham Socialist Party

Selected groups of PCS civil servants' union members at the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency are on strike for four weeks. Other members may be called out on strike in September.

After three years trying to negotiate on a number of issues - the imposition of an additional working hour for driving examiners, travel time and workforce issues including insufficient staff - the union was forced to ballot for targeted action and action short of strike.

The union received an overwhelming Yes vote for both - 82.6% and 92.2%. During this time the chief executive failed to meet with the union once.

The largest number of staff called out are in Nottingham and there is a strong, enthusiastic mood and camaraderie on the picket line, with the majority of strikers attending.

Staffing is the main issue in Nottingham and staff providing IT support and the income generating team that supports people wanting to become approved driving instructors are on strike - the only such team in the UK.

The ADI team also have to answer

phones and emails - there were 11,000 phone calls in last year - but this is not classed as part of the job so no time is allowed for it!

Strikers said: "Work is constant all the time" and "there's institutional bullying - staff are looking over their shoulder all the time."

Workers said that approximately 30% have been affected by disciplinaries or grievances.

An example was given of how a new manager on her first day, tried to terminate a member of staff on probation. The union prevented that.

Management have also threatened restricting the access reps have to emails: "So how are we [the reps] supposed to talk to each other about [negotiations on the dispute], health and safety and everything else."

The union welcomes support at the picket line outside The Axis Building, 112 Upper Parliament Street, Nottingham NG1 6LP, Monday-Friday from 7am to 10am.

Donations and standing orders to the strike fund can be sent to:

- Unity bank
- Account name: PCS fighting fund levy a/c
- Sort Code: 608301
- Account Number: 20331490
- Include in the reference DVSA strike fund

Probation hostel rest room win

I work in a probation hostel.

Our employers tried to take away the staff rest room and make it into another bedroom for the residents. This would have generated more income and made us more attractive for privatisation.

Staff at my hostel work a variety of shifts: some are seven hours, some ten hours and some 12 hours over a 24 hour period. The nature of our work means we are unable to leave the building and we do not get official breaks. The rest room is the only place in the hostel without cameras or residents.

Staff were very angry about the proposal and we all signed a petition against losing our rest room. We also contacted our Unison union rep who lodged a grievance. Management were left in no doubt about the strength of feeling. The hostel would not operate effectively without the goodwill and dedication of the staff and this would have evaporated if the proposal had gone ahead.

Management have had a change of heart. The rest room has been saved, thanks to the solidarity of the staff.

When we fight we can win.

Heather Rawling
Probation hostel worker

Harland and Wolff occupation

The GMB and Unite trade unions representing workers at the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast have announced the extension of the unpaid temporary lay-off of staff until 30 September.

Administrators say "they have received a number of non-binding offers to buy the business as a going concern."

Workers who continue to occupy the yard and their unions have called for its nationalisation which the Socialist Party supports.

In 1971, workers in Upper Clyde-side Shipbuilders in Glasgow undertook a working occupation, supported by a demonstration of 80,000 trade unionists, and forced a Tory government to intervene to keep the yards open.

We say nationalise the shipyard under the democratic control of the workers!

Liverpool port protest

Members of the RMT union protested against Seatruck at the Port of Liverpool on 19 August, adding to the protest months ago to stop the exploitation of agency and foreign workers to undercut local workers who have made collective bargaining agreements in line with the national minimum wage.

RMT national secretary Darren Procter explained: "Seatruck is a notorious employer operating on the Irish Sea. Seatruck abuses EU rules, paying migrant workers as low as £3.78 per hour with deployments of eight weeks on, four weeks off."

See full article at socialistparty.org.uk



photo Gary Freeman

Robin Clapp
Socialist Party national committee

In a special report that scrutinised the increasingly tense breakdown in geopolitical and economic relations between the United States and China, the Economist sombrely concluded on 18 May that the world has entered "a new kind of cold war."

While trade between the two reached \$2 billion a day in 2018, Trump's 'America First' policy has slapped harsh tariffs on Chinese imports. This has prompted reprisals from Beijing against "naked economic terrorism, economic homicide, economic bullying."

The epoch of globalisation, around 25 years up to 2007, which demanded completely open, largely unregulated markets, has decisively ended. Geopolitical relations have not been this disturbed since the era of the Great Depression in the 1930s.

Lubricated by unprecedented levels of unrestricted speculative finance capital, the boom contained the seeds of its own destruction. The bursting of the bubble in 2007-08, and the severe world recession that followed, lit the fuse for today's slow unravelling of the great neoliberal convergence.

Doom-laden capitalists peer myopically into a future they describe as a 'post-global world'. One where regulatory harmonisation is breaking down, global supply chains are seizing up, and cross-border investment is slowing - already dropping by 20% in 2018.

A fragmenting world economy is one more manifestation of changed capitalist global relations since 2008. Trump's punitive tariffs are mainly aimed at China, which he decries as a "currency manipulator." But he has threatened or applied them increasingly indiscriminately, against Mexico, the European Union, and other nations seen to threaten America's economic interests.

Economic tsunami anger

The anger of working and middle-class people suffering this economic tsunami have not in general turned into victories. This is a result of the unpreparedness, and in many cases unwillingness, of workers' leaders to coordinate struggles and argue for socialist policies.

Hundreds of millions continue to protest against capitalism's consequences, but feel utterly disenfranchised by the established parties that claim their support. Where left-wing leaders use class language to condemn capitalist austerity and advance even a limited vision of a socialist alternative, their message is embraced enthusiastically.

Witness the swing to Jeremy Corbyn in 2017, and Bernie Sanders' campaigns for the Democratic nomination in 2016 and today. Into these charged conditions, a new breed of right-wing populists has emerged.

They feed on workers' alienation towards politicians who bailed out the bankers but consigned ordinary people to a diet of austerity. They seek to capture the ground vacated by these discredited parties to refashion capitalism for this new age.

Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil condemns ineffective rivals and has a special venom for the Workers Party, while

claiming to be the friend of ordinary people standing up against the rich. Yet he has given the keys to the precious Amazon rainforest - the lungs of the world - to rapacious capitalists hastening its destruction (see page 5).

He lambasts other Latin American leaders and the UN, who plead with his government to halt - or at least slow - this reckless destruction. Brazil's economy minister contemptuously asserts that other countries should pay Brazil for oxygen produced there and used elsewhere!

The arch-right-wing populist Trump government, not content with economic conflict with China, tries to bully an incredulous Denmark to sell it Greenland! Its valuable minerals are now more extractable, due to faster melting of permafrost resulting from climate change.

Another breakdown

In another breakdown of international relations, the US administration has announced it will leave the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty signed with the then Soviet Union in 1987. Trump barely conceals his contempt for the western capitalist military alliance Nato, condemning erstwhile allies for not paying more to relieve the US of its 'burden.'

The US has now begun to unilaterally test a new generation of cruise missiles. This has prompted condemnation from the Russian state, and a warning from the Chinese regime that further testing could lead to "another round of the arms race" with a "serious negative impact" on global security.

Trump's stoking of nationalism and interference in free trade has been condemned by the boss of BHP, the world's biggest mining company. He warns that deteriorating relations between Washington and Beijing will do inestimable damage to world relations and the global economy, unless both sides pull back.

Similar warnings are heard in boardrooms across Britain and the EU, as the clique around Boris Johnson seems to be hurtling towards an acrimonious 'no-deal' Brexit. This would cause further economic chaos for business at a time when the spectre of another recession looms large over the world economy.

The EU wants to avoid the UK crashing out without a deal. Brexit is just one symptom of the growing centrifugal forces in the EU.

Right-wing populists in eastern Europe increasingly ignore Brussels' entreaties. In Italy, Matteo Salvini ridicules EU institutions, while crudely attempting to breach laws that have been pivotal to maintaining this club of capitalists for over 60 years.

In Asia too, old rivalries have once again exploded into life. Japan and China are locked into an unresolvable struggle over disputed ownership of the Senkaku Islands, rich in oil.

Now Japan in seeking to flex its muscles against South Korea, has taken a leaf out of Trump's book by restricting exports of three specialist chemicals used to make semiconductors and smartphones.

Japan accounts for 90% of global production of these commodities which are integral to South Korea's ability to manufacture memory chips.

In turn, as South Korean firms produce most of the world's memory

IMPERIALIST TENSIONS ESCALATE AS WORLD ECONOMY TEETERS



chips, Japan's move will not only curtail production and therefore profitability, but also have a destabilising impact across global tech supply chains.

China likewise threatens to restrict rare earth elements going to the US, designated as critical for sectors including national defence by the US Geological Survey.

The World Trade Organisation is supposed to settle disputes of this sort. But it seems an impotent relic of a bygone age, when multilateral trade agreements and supra-national institutions like the IMF, World Bank, UN and Nato were partly able to smooth the progress of production, trade and investment.

It is clear that the US ruling class sees China as its most threatening economic, political and military rival. China's regime cannot afford to be frozen out of the US market, but faced with mounting economic difficulties of its own, cannot either acquiesce to Trump's bullying.

Trade war blow up?

Even if Trump pulls back from further tariffs, this is an unpredictable era. There is no guarantee that the trade war won't extend into a full-blown technological cold war after his threats against Chinese tech giant Huawei.

The credit rating agency Moody's estimates that such a conflagration would hit real GDP in the US by 1.8% in the first year and reduce growth rates throughout Asia by 1% or more.

These figures would be sobering enough if capitalism was otherwise in rude health. Given the unresolved economic hangovers from 2007-08, however, such a precipitous curtailing of productive forces would have a calamitous impact, far greater than so far predicted by the soothsayers of private enterprise.

Already, investment bank JPMorgan Chase has suggested that global capital spending is slowing, and survey after survey illustrates business investment confidence collapsing.

In the rarefied world of the international bond markets, investors are spooked by the appearance of an 'inverted yield curve'. Traders now think that debt due to be paid back in the short term is so risky that they will pay more to have their money inaccessible in ten or 20-year bonds, an inversion of the normal relationship.

All these phenomena, and many more indicators beginning to flash red, show that capitalism is likely heading towards imminent recession, but with far fewer tools for combatting slowdown than in 2008.

Then, central banks cut borrowing rates aggressively; pumped cheap money into their economies through 'quantitative easing'; rescued collapsing banks with taxpayers' cash; permitted larger budget deficits in most countries; and crucially, cooperated across international borders to resuscitate the economy.

The IMF warns that growing numbers of homes in both China and the US are teetering on the brink of a price slump, the UK economy has contracted in the last quarter by the largest amount since 2012, and Germany seems set to enter recession.

Brazil is weakening as a result of reduced demand from China for raw materials. Economies from Singapore to Australia are affected by blowback

from the US-China trade war.

This, and social and political instability in Hong Kong, are draining confidence from the world's money markets.

One inevitable consequence of the next recession, whatever its character and depth, will be a further escalation of imperialist rivalries.

Even now, Japanese capitalism is contemplating risking US wrath by devaluing the rising yen against the dollar. This would make Japanese exports to the US better value relative to US imports to Japan, precipitating another phase in world currency wars.

Trump has announced new 10% tariffs on \$300 billion of Chinese goods. Although he subsequently postponed some of them until December, they hang over a weakening Chinese economy. In response, the Chinese state bank has let its currency value fall in an attempt to offset tariffs making its export less competitive.

Unemployment in the US is at a 50-year low. But storm clouds are unmistakably present for those with eyes to see beyond Trump's Twitter account.

Business investment is declining, despite a 2.1% annual growth rate in the second quarter of 2019. And the Federal Reserve has cut interest rates for the first time since 2015, in a sure sign that policymakers anticipate choppy waters ahead.

Never harmonious

So-called 'globalisation' never described a harmonious world economic and social order. It was a euphemism to disguise the modern intensification of the struggle between capital and labour, leading to a spiralling polarisation between the poor and the super-rich.

The present economic and social crisis reveals the contradictions inherent within the capitalist system in this new era of more aggressive imperialism. Old alliances are fracturing.

Proxy wars to secure territorial and geopolitical interests can in the future boil over into outright military exchanges, as is latent between India and Pakistan in the dispute over Kashmir.

There cannot be a stable integrated world system resting on market forces, any more so than when Lenin traced the rise of modern imperialism.

The unipolar domination of US imperialism after the demise of the Stalinist Soviet Union in 1991 has given way to an unstable, multipolar world.

Politics is concentrated economics, and decaying imperialism is the essential manifestation of modern capitalism.

It is only the working class internationally that can liberate the world from what Lenin correctly called capitalist "horror without end."



Storm clouds are present for those with eyes to see beyond Trump's Twitter account



It is only the working class that can liberate the world from what Lenin correctly called capitalist "horror without end"

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One law for them...

The Victorians were famous for draconian use of penal policy against the working class. But class law still applies in 21st century Britain.

Two cases of benefit fraud. Two entirely different outcomes.

A landlord in Pembroke Dock who received rent from the four houses she owned also claimed £30,000 ESA benefit without declaring the income from her tenants. A working-class woman in Runcorn fraudulently claimed her dead father's benefits and ESA. The women were of similar ages but they received entirely different sentences.

The woman from Runcorn was told by the judge: "The message has to be sent out to you and others like you that if you steal from the public purse, not only is imprisonment inevitable but a substantial sentence must be passed." She was imprisoned for five years and ten months.

Evidently the other judge did not get that message, because the landlord in Pembroke only received a suspended sentence. And the judge told her: "I find that, a woman of your age and character, that there is sufficient punishment for you to have this hanging over your head."

There is little sympathy among working-class people for people who fiddle benefits, mainly because it is so difficult for genuine claimants to access benefits. But the law is applied differently depending on what class you are in.

Dave Reid
Cardiff

Trade unions key

It was with great pride and satisfaction that I learned of the reaffirmation, at a special conference of the Socialist Party (England and Wales), to recognise the working class and their trade unions as the indispensable area of work for any organisation claiming to stand on the shoulders of Leon Trotsky.

The vote of 173 to 35, with zero abstentions, clearly indicates an overwhelming majority for that position, and heralds a fresh start for the Socialist Party in developing its forces in preparation for the stormy events which lie ahead. Fundamental to this will mean

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the continuation of patient and painstaking activity in the trade union movement and other organisations of the working class.

The following modified extracts are from a statement I submitted to the special conference. They underline the validity of our policy.

It is my opinion that the views of the majority of the Socialist Party represent a clear defence of the Marxist principles and methods on which we have always based our work: putting the working class at the centre of our activities; involving ourselves within the organisations of the working class, in particular the trade unions; and fighting to win workers to the ideas of socialism.

It is these ideas and these methods that sustained the stand of the 47 councillors in Liverpool during their successful campaign for additional financial resources for the city from the Thatcher government in the 1980s, when a number of councillors supporting the Militant newspaper provided the backbone and leadership to that struggle.

Similarly, the commitment of our former comrade Terry Fields, who was won from the firefighters' union into this tradition, enabled him to gain the Broadgreen seat in 1983 when Labour was defeated at a national level.

The fundamental element in this success was the support we had established in the local authority trade unions. On two occasions, 30,000 local authority workers, and thousands in the private sector, took strike action in support of the council.

That support didn't drop out of the sky. It was the result of many years of systematic work in the unions, overcoming bureaucratic obstacles and sabotage from the trade union leaders, which enabled us to build massive support for the ideas of Militant among the mass of workers.

Trade union work is not a bolt-on extra. It is a fundamental tenet of the ideas of Trotskyism on which the party has always based its activities.

Trade union work is never easy, and to rationalise the absence of consistent trade union work on the grounds that it is difficult, or even a waste of time, is to look for shortcuts to the masses. History is littered with the corpses of 'Trotskyist' groups who sought such shortcuts.

Tony Mulhearn
Liverpool



The law is applied differently depending on your class
photo USAF/CC



Britain's steel industry is in crisis



Liberal-Tory coalition criminal Nick Clegg
photo Chatham House/CC



Sound as a pound?

The trade unions are an indispensable area of work for the Socialist Party
photo Paul Mattsson



British Steel sell-off

What could better demonstrate the state of British capitalism than the news that the once-mighty British Steel is to be sold off to Oyak, the Turkish military pension fund?

This, along with the undemocratic crowning of Boris Johnson as head of the British government, surely demonstrates that the British ruling class has lost the plot! "Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad" seems so apt in 2019.

Ataer Holdings is the investment arm of the pension fund. Their bean-counters are now going through the books, and the official receiver is in discussion with Oyak.

The Socialist has always argued that firms which put jobs at risk, or claim they cannot afford decent wages and conditions, should be required to hand their accounts over to the trade unions so that their claims can be investigated. The bosses routinely deride this idea, of course, on the grounds of 'commercial secrecy'.

Of course, if jobs can be saved in Scunthorpe and on Teeside, those workers will be elated. However, this still leaves jobs at risk at a time when serious commentators in the Financial Times agree that a world 'slowdown' is in the offing.

The question is not if but when will a recession strike? Then we will see just

how safe jobs are in many industries, including steel.

Ataer already owns 50% of the Turkish steel industry, which is dependent on the infrastructure projects, like major roads and railways, which have protected the Turkish economy by providing jobs when other industries, like tourism, have been in the doldrums in recent years.

As Chinese and Russian investment dries up in a new recession, these projects must be put in doubt. Will the Turkish capitalist government risk the anger of Turkish workers to protect British jobs?

Ataer and the Turkish government have been criticised for "lack of accountability." This will leave a bitter taste in the

mouths of Scunthorpe workers. When has the management ever been accountable to them?

The Socialist Party has argued that an important industry like steel should not be subject to the gambling of the stock market and financial services. Instead, we say the government should nationalise it, and we fight for it to be run under the control of the people who really understand steel: the workers who make it!

Of course, steel is just the latest in a long list of industries where 'the market' has failed us all. Like railways, electricity, gas and water, privatisation has led to real hardship both for the workers whose jobs are at risk and consumers who depend on them.

Liberal coalition criminals

It was galling to see the Liberal Democrats' leader celebrating their win over the Conservatives in the recent Brecon and Radnorshire by-election.

It is only a few years since they were in coalition with the Tories they now paint as their enemy. And it was not as though the Liberal Democrat vote rose massively: only from 12,043 in 2017 to 13,826 in 2019, while Plaid Cymru polled 1,299 in 2017 but did not stand this time in order to maximise the remain vote.

When they pretend to be on the left, we should remember remember the Liberal Democrats for what they are: the coalition criminals.

Pete McNally
Welland, Worcestershire

Spiralling sterling

In November 1967, the Labour government announced a 14% devaluation in the pound sterling. Jim Callaghan, the chancellor of the exchequer, resigned, and Prime Minister Harold Wilson appeared on TV to explain this catastrophic failure of his government's economic policy. He assured viewers that "the pound in your pocket" would not be affected, but of course it was, thereby destroying his own political credibility.

The succession of Boris Johnson to Tory party leader and prime minister, and his commitment that Brexit will happen on 31 October "do or die" even if it is a 'no deal', has led to a sustained devaluation of sterling. But there have been no ministerial resignations or appearances on TV.

A sterling devaluation can result in an increase in the wealth of the very rich, because "most of the biggest companies in the FTSE 100 generate most of their revenues overseas" (Times, 6 August). Consequently if "the sterling value of profits made from foreign assets goes up, the sterling value of dividends paid follows suit, as does the sterling value of the assets."

The decline in the British economy has been borne by the working class and sections of the middle class through the loss of comparatively better-paid jobs and a lowering of living standards, while these overseas revenues have provided 'the few' with rich recompense.

John Merrell
Leicester

Knife and gun crime a product of poverty and austerity



Restoring council youth services would help address the roots of the problem

A rise in recorded knife attacks in Coventry mirrors growing concerns about violent crime across the country.

Jane Nellist from Coventry Socialist Party looks at what is behind it and how we can stop it.

Incidents in Coventry involving knives and guns seem to be on the increase. There have been several fatalities and serious injuries. The most recent attack in The Burges, where a 15-year-old was shot and seriously wounded in a drive-by attack, has left people horrified.

The deaths of Emmanuel Lukenga from a knife attack in Tile Hill, and Patrick Hill in Earlsdon, are just two of the 28 knife attacks in Coventry in the first seven months of 2019. In the whole of 2018, official statistics recorded 16. Parents understandably fear for their children.

The response by the police was to state that they would put more armed officers on the streets. Increasing the number of armed police will not deal with the underlying causes of gun and knife crime, and risks raising tensions.

We need a much more holistic response to get to the root cause of this. Policies to deal with growing poverty and alienation must be prioritised.

For the last nine years, austerity cuts have hit our city hard. Local politicians have failed to mount a serious campaign to win more

resources for our communities. Instead, youth clubs, Sure Start centres, community wardens, and other services that we relied on, have been slashed or disappeared altogether.

Young people see their families struggling in low-wage, precarious work, often taking more than one job to survive. Benefits are being slashed or disappeared altogether. Reliance on food banks is growing. Food and fuel poverty affect thousands.

Add homelessness and overcrowding with the lack of affordable homes, and you have a toxic cocktail where young people feel increasingly alienated.

If young people feel that they don't have a future, a small number will find gangs more attractive. As we know only too well, this can ensnare them in a life of misery and violence, exploited by others.

Measures like extra police on the streets can have a contradictory impact - sometimes making whole communities feel criminalised rather than protected - especially with powers like 'stop and search' which disproportionately target black people

and create more tensions. Democratic community control of police policy and hiring could start to address this - but much more is required.

Our younger generation must feel they have a future. They need a guarantee of free education or high-quality training, and a job at the end with living rates of pay.

We desperately need a huge injection of resources into our city. The money is there - it's just that it's in the wrong hands. While the rich are getting richer, squirrelling away their money in offshore accounts and refusing to pay their contributions in taxation, our city is being squeezed.

Instead of investing millions of pounds of our money into a luxury hotel, councillors should be fighting for resources for the city's residents and workers:

- Demand that the government starts to invest in our communities and pays back the money we should have had, and ask other councils to join this campaign
- Open well-funded youth and leisure centres that provide free sport opportunities including free swimming, gym membership and other activities
- Train more youth workers and mediators to work with those caught up with gangs
- Restore Education Maintenance Allowance
- Build council homes
- Support trade union struggle to raise the minimum wage to at least £10 an hour and end zero-hour contracts, beginning with all council employees and contracts

If young people in Coventry are to have a decent future, we need a socialist society that values the lives of young people. One where the resources of this wealthy country are democratically planned to provide for the majority, not spent on the billionaires.

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STOP THE LATEST TORY ATTACK ON OUR PENSIONS

Terry Pearce
Thames Valley
National Pensioners' Convention

Pensioners are under attack. The Centre for Social Justice, a right-wing think tank, is proposing that pensioners should in effect work until they drop. Led by former Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith, an architect of vicious welfare cuts, the think tank wants pensioners to continue working until they are 75 from 2035, with pension age rising to 70 by 2028. UK pensions are currently among the lowest in Europe.

This will mean that many pensioners will die before they retire. For example, in Glasgow, the average male life expectancy is only 71.6 years. Women, on average, could only expect three years of retirement.

For the first time ever, life expectancy is beginning to decline, thanks to austerity and rising poverty. This means more people dying before they get to pensionable age.

The pension age is already rising. Next year it will rise to 66, by 2028 it will be 67, and 68 in 2046.

Pensioners, youth and trade unions must unite to defeat this reactionary proposal.

Recently, the BBC decided that

they would no longer subsidise the TV licence, meaning that pensioners must find extra money just to watch the TV (see 'Defend free TV licences for over-75s' at socialistparty.org.uk).

Tory policies make pensioners work longer, receive lower pensions, lose their TV licence subsidy and suffer a general deterioration in living standards. For too long pensions have been seen purely as a pensioner's problem, but socialists recognise that it is a class issue - most pensioners are workers no longer at work.

Pensioners taxed

Many pensioners continue to pay tax upon retirement and are subject to the financial pressures facing other workers, such as price and rent rises. Many pensioners are also unpaid carers and are forced to work part-time to make ends meet.

The National Pensioners Convention seeks to unite pensioners and young people under the banner of Generations United, to present a united front against exploitation of both youth and pensioners. The trade unions need to play a bigger role in defending pensioners and pensions, they will all be pensioners one day.

The 2011 public sector strikes against pension cuts were the single biggest day of industrial action ever

in Britain. And young people were their biggest supporters.

We need to build unity and solidarity among workers, youth, pensioners, students, tenants and trade unionists to oppose these Tory attacks on workers. We need an immediate 50% increase in the state pension as a step towards a living pension.

Free TV licences must be retained, and the 'triple lock' - where pensions rise in line with inflation, 2.5% or average earnings, whichever is higher - must be protected, along with free bus passes and the winter fuel allowance.

We must reject any increase in the pension age and in fact campaign for a lower pension age so that pensioners can enjoy more years of retirement, if they wish.

The Socialist Party campaigns for a minimum wage of at least £10 an hour, as a step towards a real living wage. We fight for rent controls, an end to zero-hour contracts and against all cuts to health and social care.

Like many other issues under capitalism, pensions will never be secure as long as the 1% cream off the profits while the 99% are left with the crumbs. A Corbyn-led Labour government with socialist policies must pledge to protect pensions from right-wing think tanks and Tory attacks.



Workplace pensions have been hammered in recent decades photo Gary Freeman

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Lincolnshire health visitors' solidarity rally

Lindsey Morgan
Leicester Socialist Party

As reported in the last issue of the Socialist, Lincolnshire health visitors are planning further strike action after a failure to increase pay in line with other health visitors equates to a loss of about £2,000 a year. The workers are also on strike due to the erosion of their professional responsibilities which would adversely impact vulnerable families (see unitetheunion.org/news-events).

Unite the Union arranged a solidarity march and rally on 17 August in Lincoln - attended by nearly 300 people - where a series of speakers discussed the importance of health visitors, the history of trade union struggle, and the political context of further cuts to vital services such as the NHS.

The most inspirational speakers were the strikers themselves who spoke of a heavy workload and a heavy responsibility and who had been forced to strike by the intransigent Tory-run Lincolnshire County Council.



photo Lindsey Morgan

Socialist Party members attended from across the east midlands. We brought our banners on the march, and spoke with a range of people angry at the treatment of the health visitors. We also gave solidarity greetings from the National Shop Stewards Network.

Many spoke at the attack on health visitors' terms and conditions within the context of the all-out assault on the working class by capitalist austerity measures.

We sold around 25 copies of the Socialist and met a number of

people interested in finding out more about the Socialist Party. The paper sales were aided by the article in the paper on the health visitors' strike.

The attacks on the NHS and council services must end. These battles in public services need to be linked more cohesively through national strike action. This could unite all public service workers against cuts and privatisation and move us closer to the generalised working-class action needed to push out the pathetic Tories!

Bangladeshi campaigners fight mining giant for justice

Helen Pattison
East London Socialist Party

Shouts of "GCM, shame on you, Gary Lye [Chief Officer], shame on you" rang out around the square outside the London Stock Exchange on 22 August.

Over a decade ago Global Coal Management (GCM - then called Asia Energy) planned an open coal mine in Phulbari, Bangladesh. The company originally got permission for the mine from the government, despite the huge impact it would have. It would have displaced around 130,000 people, destroyed farm land and jeopardised water supplies.

Killings

In 2006 mass peaceful protests of tens of thousands of people and strikes against the destruction of the area were met with paramilitary violence and three teenage bystanders lost their lives, along with three adults.

Given that GCM had its mining

rights removed in Bangladesh and people were killed during the movement against the mines, campaigners want the London Stock Exchange to refuse to allow GCM to trade through them.

Despite many examples of clashes between mining companies, strikers and ordinary people, a company has never been de-listed from the LSE either for the death of protesters or the destruction of the environment. Lots of speakers focused on the drive for profit by big business, destroying people's livelihoods and health in the process.

13 years after the movement began, campaigners are still worried that GCM wants to mine in Bangladesh. In 2009 US officials tried to pressure the Bangladesh government to reopen the project with GCM.

From the Marikana massacre in South Africa, Bolsanaro in Brazil, to Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in Tamil Nadu, India... under capitalism, the drive for profit will always come before ordinary people's livelihoods and health.

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Worcestershire: Stop the fire cuts!



photo Paul Mattsson

Pete McNally
Worcester Socialist Party

On 21 August, over 80 people attended a protest at Bewdley fire station in Worcestershire against its closure. The protest was called by Save Bewdley Fire Station Campaign, which has collected over 2,000 signatures on its petition against closure.

We linked arms around the Fire Station and then held a public meeting. Neil Bevan of the Fire Brigades Union said: "We have a ten-minute

attendance time and we only make that on 54% of the time, so by moving the appliance to Kidderminster and extending that by another two and a half minutes, that is going to be massively detrimental to the local community."

Service under strain

The population in the county is up by 40,000 but the Fire Authority plan is four appliances overnight, where a recent incident required six. Cover was being reverse-aligned to meet financial constraints.

There are 86 fewer firefighters in

Hereford and Worcester than five years ago. In the recent dam incident in Derbyshire the crew stationed in nearby Kidderminster was sent there. Cover was provided by goodwill and overtime.

From the audience it was pointed out that other local services had closed, there was no bank, library, and the bus service was poor - a pattern of rural rundown. Every time a service is 're-configured' there was supposed to be an improvement, but it never happens.

Plans are being made to continue the campaign.

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Notts child abuse scandal

Socialist Party demands action programme to prevent future cases

Mansfield Socialist Party

The decades-long Nottinghamshire child abuse scandal and cover-up shows the need to fight public service cuts and for a society that values people, not private profit.

Many vulnerable children had appalling experiences while looked after by Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottingham City Council over many years.

Why did this happen and how can any future repeat be stopped? Mansfield Socialist Party discussed these vital issues on the night of the report's recent publication.

For the past ten years all public

services have been cut. Fewer staff with increasing workloads, reduced supervision and less training gave abusers less chance of being exposed. Also, management, under instruction from elected councillors to cut budgets, allowed abusers more scope to go undetected. Privatisation of public services has also reduced public accountability.

Mansfield Socialist Party calls for the reversal of all cuts. Councillors should set budgets to meet the needs of local people and demand the money from government - or make way for councillors prepared to fight for local services.

Capitalist society, where the rich and powerful dominate and

exploit the rest of us, distorts human relationships. Abusive behaviour is rooted in this and targets the weak and vulnerable - children and disabled adults in residential care. Abuse also occurs within the home by family members.

Democratic accountability

Abused children were not listened to by those in authority, including the police. Mansfield Socialist Party calls for democratic, working-class control of workplaces including residential care homes, council services and the police.

Strong trade unions are needed to give whistleblowers confidence to speak out. The local community

must have representatives to assure children and staff the right to have their voices heard.

Cuts in Sure Start, social services, mental health services, drug and alcohol services and council housing, all increase the likelihood of family crises. Young adults leaving care when 18 years old need continuing support with education, training and decently paid jobs. A socialist society would prioritise all these to help prevent children needing residential care.



BREXIT AND THE BORDER IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Will there be a return to the 'Troubles'?

Brexit has started a hare running over the consequences for the integrity of the UK. In a series of articles the Socialist explores how Brexit will impact Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales as far as the 'national question' is concerned. In the following article **Niall Mulholland** of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI - the socialist international organisation which the Socialist Party is affiliated to) examines Brexit and the border in Northern Ireland.

The Brexit crisis finds its most acute expression over the so-called 'Irish backstop'. The 300-odd mile border running across Ireland represents the only land border between the UK and the European Union (EU). If a 'hard Brexit' happens, Northern Ireland would end up with different rules and standards to the Republic of Ireland.

The EU insists that if the UK leaves the customs union and single market there must be border checks somewhere to protect its trade interests.

Former prime minister Theresa May negotiated the backstop with the EU to avoid border checks in Ireland. But this entailed potentially keeping the UK in an EU customs union, until a trade deal permanently avoiding the need for checks is agreed.

This was intolerable to many right-wing Tory MPs and was one of the factors that eventually led to Theresa May's resignation as prime minister.

In Northern Ireland, a majority voted to remain in the June 2016 EU referendum.

Division

The vote was largely cast along sectarian lines, with most Protestants voting leave and a majority of Catholics opting for remain.

However there are also class divisions. Most middle-class Unionists are more likely to be pro-EU, while working class Protestants and 'traditional unionists' are more pro-Leave.

Middle-class nationalists are strongly pro-EU but parts of the most deprived working-class Catholic areas of Belfast and Derry had some of the lowest turnouts for the 2016 referendum.

Most working-class Catholics voted to remain not due to any big illusions in the EU bosses' club, but fearing that being cut off from the EU would remove a buffer to outright British rule.

This was exacerbated when the Brexit-supporting Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Tories agreed a deal that saw the DUP keep the weak Tory government in power.

Following its shock at the EU referendum result, Brussels used alarm over Northern Ireland slipping back to conflict for negotiating leverage; to attempt to stop the UK leaving or fully departing the EU, and to show any other member states considering leaving what sort of a mess they too can end up in.



Campaigners in Northern Ireland against a 'hard border' photo Sinn Féin/CC

Yet real fears around the economic and political consequences of a 'hard border' have increased on the ground in Ireland.

Trade disruption - Northern Ireland exported almost £3 billion of goods to the Republic of Ireland in 2017 - puts tens of thousands of jobs and families' livelihoods in border counties at stake.

Boris Johnson infuriated many people in Ireland by stating that the border was no different from counties bordering London. Yet many people in Ireland remember the border during the Troubles as heavily militarised zones, with long traffic delays at army checkpoints.

In the 1950s, the IRA waged a 'border campaign', often targeting customs posts and police barracks. 'Operation Harvest' was a military failure and lacked popular support. But today's Republican advocates of 'armed struggle' believe they have the wind in their sails given the widespread uncertainty and fears around Brexit and the possibility of a hard border.

For them, any physical manifestations of a border vindicate their argument that Northern Ireland and the Republic are 'illegitimate partitionist states', and border infrastructure would become potential

targets. Police and British army personnel stationed to protect border checks would themselves become targets, widening conflict.

As a foretaste of what could come, the Continuity IRA, purportedly, recently carried out a bombing in the border county of Fermanagh.

But it is not just a question of what the small armed Republican groups may do. Any hardening of the North-South border is regarded by many Catholics as a threat to their national aspirations.

Local communities in border counties warn that they will meet the imposition of new border checks with fierce resistance, including physically tearing down infrastructure.

'Border poll'

In the context of the Brexit crisis, Sinn Féin campaigns for a 'border poll'. This refers to the provisions in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that allows a poll, held North and South, under certain circumstances, to decide the future constitutional status of Northern Ireland. This is already ratcheting up sectarian tensions.

Boris Johnson said a revised Brexit deal must include "the abolition of the backstop". He proposes

"alternative customs arrangements" to be put in place in the two years of EU withdrawal 'transition'. So far, Johnson has not come up with any new ideas. He rehashes so-called technical solutions which are dismissed by the EU and many experts.

Previously the EU proposal of checks on goods crossing the Irish Sea was strongly opposed by the DUP. This so-called East-West border is regarded by most Protestants as a threat to the union between N Ireland and Britain.

It remains to be seen if any workable fudge can be agreed between Brussels and London.

But what the Brexit crisis unambiguously underlines is that on the basis of capitalism there is no permanent or even medium-term solution to sectarianism and the 'border issue', despite the hype that surrounded the Good Friday Agreement. The Stormont power-sharing executive has collapsed since January 2017.

Only a united working class movement in Ireland, North and South, with a bold socialist programme, and allied with the organised working class in Britain, can successfully contest the Tories of all stripes and overcome the divisions in society.

Italy: Governing coalition fractures as Salvini looks to capitalise on crisis

Christine Thomas

After just 14 months in power, the populist coalition government of the far-right Lega and Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy has collapsed. Matteo Salvini, Lega leader and interior minister, pulled the plug by demanding a vote of no confidence in the government led by the 'non-party' prime minister Giuseppe Conte.

Conte has now resigned, opening up the possibility of another period of political and economic instability whose repercussions could spread beyond Italy to the European Union itself.

The coalition was riven with contradictions from day one. With the two establishment capitalist parties, Forza Italia (FI, Silvio Berlusconi's party) and the Democratic Party (PD, formerly led by Matteo Renzi) trounced in the 2018 general election, the populist parties won nearly 50% of the vote.

Following weeks of negotiations the unthinkable happened and the M5S, the then dominant force electorally (32%) embraced the Lega (17%) in an opportunist alliance aimed at assuming power at whatever cost. And the cost for the M5S has been very heavy, seeing its vote almost halve while the Lega has more than doubled its support.

In the 'honeymoon' phase the two parties were able to paper over the cracks, with the M5S mainly going along with Salvini's hard-line policies on immigration, 'law and order' and 'sovereignism' (nationalism) which dominated the government's agenda.

Media-savvy Salvini was able to use those issues as a springboard to extend the Lega's support beyond its traditional base among small businesses in the north, mainly at the expense of FI. But the M5S was seen to be reneging on its electoral promises, especially regarding its opposi-

tion to environmentally damaging infrastructure projects like the 'TAP' gas pipeline in the south.

The M5S managed to pass its flagship policy of the 'citizen's income', on the promise of which it had swept to victory in many constituencies in the south during the general election.

But although the payment will make some difference to the very poorest, it has become nothing more than a time-limited, conditional unemployment benefit set at subsistence level. While it might be enough to retain some votes in the south, M5S support is haemorrhaging even there.

As the months went on, the cracks between the coalition partners became ever wider over many issues.

It was against this backdrop, and his crushing victory in the European elections, that Salvini, together with his business backers, decided to move to capitalise on the Lega's high support in the polls and to ditch his unreliable allies in the M5S.

The M5S is by no means an anti-capitalist party and it has no clear class base. Aiming to bridge the divide between 'left and right', 'workers and employers', it is a very unstable political force.

Support

In a situation where Berlusconi's party has been cannibalised by the Lega, and the PD is paralysed and languishing at or below 20% in the polls, even sections of big business have given conditional support to Salvini, albeit suspicious of his anti-EU rhetoric.

In reality, in the two 'showdowns' with the EU over the budget deficit and debt levels, both sides ended up making concessions and their hope is that another compromise will be possible this autumn when the next budget is due to be agreed.

In calling for no confidence in the government, Salvini (in language reminiscent of Hitler and Mussolini) demanded 'full powers' for himself.



Far-right demagogue Matteo Salvini

Salvini is not a fascist, although he has been friendly to neofascist parties and is likely to ally himself with the Fratelli d'Italia party of Georgia Meloni, which has neofascist origins. But he has promoted authoritarian policies, especially with regards to repressive measures against public protests and immigrants. Part of his appeal has been his persona as the 'strong man' who gets things done.

At the time of writing it is not clear what will happen next. It is up to the president to decide whether to call elections or whether to look instead towards cobbling together a different government.

Neither is it totally clear what Salvini himself wants. He seemed to backtrack on his declaration that he could no longer work with the M5S, demagogically offering a 'bribe' of 50 billion euros in investment and

tax cuts, but M5S's leader Luigi Di Maio has ruled out patching up the coalition with Salvini 'the traitor'.

Some commentators have speculated that Salvini would prefer to be temporarily in opposition to avoid the hot potato of passing a cuts budget in the autumn, of at least €23 billion, to prevent automatic increases in VAT.

Salvini certainly doesn't have complete control of the process, as was shown when the M5S and the PD combined in the Senate to inflict Salvini's first defeat by thwarting an immediate no confidence vote.

New alliance?

Could that alliance be extended to forming a government? They have the parliamentary numbers but there are many obstacles to this option. Ex-PD leader and ex-prime minister Renzi had proposed himself to lead a PD-M5S government. But Renzi is so politically toxic that it would most likely be a step too far for Di Maio, however desperately the M5S wants to cling to power.

The current leader of the PD, Nicola Zingharetta, had for some time opposed a coalition with the M5S but appears to be softening under pressure.

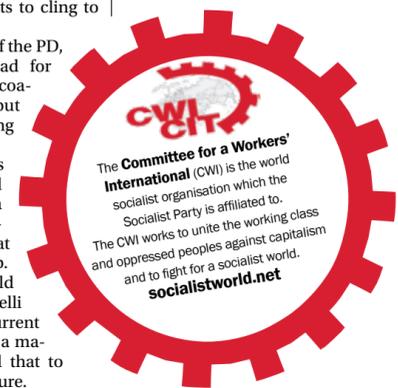
If an election is called Salvini could decide that the Lega will fight to win a majority alone, but that would be a risky step. More likely he would ally himself with Fratelli d'Italia, which on current polling could net him a majority, or even extend that to Forza Italia just to be sure.

A right-wing government with Salvini as prime minister is the most likely outcome of an early election. But given the weakness of Italian capitalism such a government could be the spark that unleashes the mass social and industrial unrest which, despite accumulating anger and frustration, has been on hold for some time now.

Eleven years after the world financial crisis, Italy has been through three recessions. The economy is now virtually stagnant and the OECD is predicting another recession this year. Real wages are still below their pre-crisis level, per capita income is less than it was in 1999 and over 30% of young people are without a job.

These are the explosive ingredients that could combine to provoke mass struggle, despite the role of the trade union leaders and the absence of any real political alternative for working people and youth. In fact it will be only on the basis of struggle that such an alternative can be built.

“Real fears around the economic and political consequences of a 'hard border' have increased on the ground in Ireland”



The populist Five Star Movement has lost support under Luigi Di Maio (above, centre) photo Revol Web/CC

RETAIL WORKERS FIGHT BACK AGAINST SCROOGE BOSSES

■ United strike action needed to stop 'race to the bottom' over terms and conditions



GMB union members in Asda have rejected attacks on pay and conditions photo Sheffield Socialist Party

Faced with a profits squeeze, big retail bosses are attempting to make workers pay by closing outlets, axing jobs and worsening terms and conditions of employment. However, as the Socialist reports below, this offensive is being resisted. The retail workers fightback will be a major theme at the rally and lobby of the Trade Union Congress conference on 8 September, organised by the rank-and-file National Shop Stewards Committee.

Alistair Tice
Yorkshire Socialist Party

In return for being forced to work bank holidays, paid breaks being scrapped, cuts to holiday entitlement, slashing of night shift pay, and shifts being changed at four weeks' notice, Asda workers are being 'bribed' with a wage increase to £9 an hour. They report being threatened with the sack if they don't sign up.

But tens of thousands haven't signed. 3,000 staff could end up £500 a year worse off under this pay 'increase'!

In any case, the minimum wage is supposed to reach £9 an hour in 2020. £8.21 basic, the minimum wage, this is what's paid by Asda, part of the Walmart empire, the biggest company in the world that made £129 billion profit last year!

In response, around 1,000 Asda workers, members of the GMB trade union, marched on Asda House in Leeds on 14 August chanting "No ifs, no buts, no Asda cuts", against the imposition of this new 'Contract 6'. This is mockingly called the 'Martini' contract by Asda workers as it allows bosses to force staff to work "any time, any place, anywhere".

The demonstration was noisy and

angry, but this anger and militancy of the workers has unfortunately not been matched by their union leadership.

The door to the imposition of this Contract 6 was opened last year when the union leaders did not oppose the introduction of a

very similar, supposedly voluntary, contract called Your Choice.

Most workers, 87%, did not take the £1 an hour 'bribe' but all new staff are started on the new flexi-contract. Then, of course, Asda bosses used that wedge to make the new contract compulsory for all staff, rolling six old contracts into Contract 6 "to make it fair"!

While the GMB has negotiated a few concessions from the original contract offer, in its consultative ballot 93% rejected accepting the new contract.

But with only three months to go to the imposition of Contract 6 in November, the union has not even started an industrial action ballot of its 30,000 members.

The GMB must urgently and energetically campaign for a big strike vote in an industrial action ballot.

A serious union struggle could enthuse staff who have signed under duress or who are already on this contract, to join the union, especially if it was linked to a £10 an

hour minimum wage across-the-board pay demand.

While only 20-25% of Asda workers are in the union, many stores have 80-90% union membership where a ballot for strike action could be won. In the cut-throat world of supermarket wars, it wouldn't be long before Asda was losing customers and profits and could be forced to back down.

Given that the 'Big Four' supermarkets are all cutting thousands of jobs and are imposing similar flexi-contracts, the GMB should approach Usdaw and Unite unions for a joint campaign in retail, including future coordinated industrial action, to stop this 'race to the bottom'.

■ See also
'Merseyside Matalan workers walk out over pay deal'
page 6



**NSSN 2019
TUC lobby**

**Sunday 8 September,
1pm at the Holiday Inn,
Kings Road, Brighton
BN1 2JF**

**See shopstewards.net
for more**

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