

Unions must lead fight for jobs and homes, not racism

A mass, trade union-led, socialist anti-racist campaign can defeat the far right

Paula Mitchell, Socialist Party executive committee

Thousands of people are marching against racism and fascism on the unity demonstration on 17 November.

They are marching to resist the attempts of the so-called 'Democratic' Football Lads Alliance, and racist individuals like Tommy Robinson, to form a new far-right street movement.

Thousands are marching to stand up against the racist rhetoric and policies of the Tories, such as Boris Johnson's burka remarks and Theresa May's 'hostile environment'.

Many are also marching because they are fearful about the rise of right-wing populist and far-right figures such as Trump in the US, [Bolsonaro in Brazil](#) and Orbán in Hungary.

The majority of working-class, middle-class and young people completely reject racism.

But ten years on from the financial crash and after eight years of savage austerity, far-right individuals and groups are trying to exploit the anger and alienation, that feeling of being left behind, and take it in a reactionary direction.

Unions

It is therefore good that the Trade Union Congress (TUC) - the body which brings together all the trade unions in the UK - has backed and advertised the demonstration.

But how much better would it have been if the TUC had called it, and marched at its head.

The trade unions organise over six million people. When it moves, there is no stronger force in society than the organised working class.

We welcome the decision of the TUC at its congress this year to launch a 'jobs and homes, not racism' campaign. The unity demo should be the launchpad of that campaign.

Let's build an almighty anti-racist and anti-austerity campaign that fights for the jobs, homes, pay and services we all need.

That would speed up the end of this hated, weak Tory government, and sweep the ground from under the feet of the far right.

The anti-racism unity demonstration on Saturday takes place as the Tory government hangs by a thread.

The main task of this demonstration should be to help slash that thread: call for a general election now and fight for a Corbyn-led government that implements the policies that can cut across racism and the far right.

The Socialist Party thinks that it is essential to have a debate in the trade union and workers' movement about the slogans and tactics, the methods and programme necessary to defeat the far right.

We are told by some involved in Stand Up to Racism, the organisers of the demonstration on 17 November, most particularly the SWP, that the threat of the far right is so great that we have to put all our differences

aside and simply unite.

They argue that, in order to mobilise enough people on the streets, we need to draw together the widest possible spectrum of support - including from pro-austerity politicians, pop stars, footballers, religious leaders and so on - behind the simple call to stop the racists and fascists.

Working class

But, in our view, it is only the working class, organised in a mass fight for socialist policies - for jobs, homes, services and so on - that can draw behind it broader layers in society and wipe out support for the far right.

The battle to undercut support for the far right can only be successful long term if an anti-racist campaign is linked to a campaign for class demands.

Socialist measures are the only ones that can avert the miserable conditions which are the breeding ground for the politics of division.

There is a tremendous anger and revolt under the surface in society, which occasionally finds an outlet in a referendum or an election.

A Tory Brexit is looming, working-class living conditions are still worse than before the financial crash ten years ago and another economic crisis is on the horizon.

In this context, there is a widespread feeling of being left behind and having lost control. There is a distrust of capitalist politicians and a fear of chaos and crisis.

That general, inchoate mood can be led in the direction of reaction. But if a bold lead is given, it can also be drawn to the side of the organised working class and in the direction of a socialist alternative.

On an anti-racism demo we will march alongside anyone who opposes racism. But the problem with offering leading and speaking roles to forces which spend the rest of their time attacking working-class people's lives, is that you run the risk not only of losing the active participation of working-class people, but of greatly reducing the chances of undermining support for the far right. What's more you put out the wrong message on how racism must be countered.

Socialist policies and demands that could mobilise and unite working and middle-class people are 'left at the door' in order to keep the 'liberal' figures on board.

This approach does nothing about the conditions that breed support for the far right. Racist and fascist groups will keep coming back in different forms because the system is rotten and cannot provide a decent life for all.

Undoubtedly, the numbers that have been [mobilised in the name of the 'Democratic' Football Lads Alliance \(DFLA\) are bigger](#) than anything achieved by far-right organisations for decades. But the organised working class is a much, much bigger force.

There are high levels of integration of black and ethnic minority people in working-class communities and trade unions.

The DFLA's pro-Trump demo of around 6,000 in July was dwarfed by the 250,000 who marched against Trump the day before - on a weekday.

Trade unions

In March 2011, [three-quarters of a million marched under the banner of the Trade Union Congress \(TUC\)](#) when they believed the trade unions were going to fight austerity.

The organised working class is capable of bringing behind it the alienated, unorganised, most downtrodden layers.

Our members, and others who agree with our approach, have been [moving resolutions in trade union bodies around the country](#).

It is not a question of waiting for the TUC to act, but of putting pressure on them while mobilising from below.

Organisation at a local level in the unions, communities and among young people can have a big effect on the official leaderships.

Holding this debate, as has happened in Manchester and Waltham Forest trade union councils, for example, is important.

It means that, if the far right attempt to march in those areas, the trade union councils will be in a stronger position to campaign in the workplaces, to provide serious stewarding, and to lead the mobilisations against them.

John McDonnell [called in August](#) for a "new Anti-Nazi League-type cultural and political campaign". But the most decisive way to undercut the DFLA - in addition to counter-demonstrations - is to mount a massive fight to get the Tories out and get a Corbyn-led government in.

This would need to go alongside building a mass movement to ensure it carries out the policies of building council houses, scrapping zero-hour contracts, creating good jobs, stopping the privatisation of the NHS, funding schools and stopping council cuts.

In other words, it would need to go alongside socialist policies. This means nationalising the banks and main parts of the economy so that the vast wealth in society is used democratically in the interests of us all.

Further reading

- [Do we really need a new Anti-Nazi League?](#)
 - [Understanding the far-right threat](#)
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Socialism 2018: Huge confidence in the working class to change society

Socialism 2018 was a festival of debate that focused attendees, new and experienced, on the Socialist Party's perspective that we are preparing for big movements of working class people against the daily proof that a socialist alternative to capitalism is necessary.

That determination was expressed in the £35,000 raised in the financial appeal - but also in the intensity of discussion in the workshops, the throng around [the bookshop](#) at every break and the interest among first time attenders in joining the Socialist Party.

Saturday night rally: Enthusiasm for socialist ideas to change the world

Claire Laker-Mansfield

"The aim of this rally is to provide the ideas to fight back and win for the working class in Britain and internationally. That means the fight for a socialist alternative to the chaos of capitalism". This was how Sarah

Sachs-Eldridge, the Socialist Party's national organiser, summarised the purpose of Saturday night's rally to a packed and buzzing Logan Hall.

Applause interrupted Sarah's opening sentences. This set the tone for the whole event. Enthusiastic clapping, whooping and flag waving greeted every speaker when they described how working-class people can fight back against austerity and capitalism.

Chris Baugh, the assistant general secretary of the civil servants' union PCS, was the first to take the stage speaking in a personal capacity. He is currently [standing for re-election](#) to his position, defending the principles of lay-democracy and fighting trade unionism against a challenge from PCS president Janice Godrich - who is backed by the union's general secretary Mark Serwotka.

Chris explained that this challenge is in reality a "political attack on the Socialist Party, which is damaging to both the left and the union, and which will be celebrated only by the enemies of the union and the employer."

He went on to explain: "We have won support from across the union for our election campaign which is based on our record: on union democracy, on a leadership that's prepared to learn the lessons of the pay ballot - about how we mobilise members to secure the necessary legal mandate for industrial action, how we link the fight on pay with the stream of attacks on jobs and conditions.

And how, on the one hand, we can build through the TUC, as well as work directly with those unions that are preparing to fight, to build the mass action that can defeat an enfeebled Tory government."

Next to address the crowd was Denise Phillips, the secretary of home care in Glasgow City Unison, and a leader of the 8,500 mostly women workers who've taken [historic strike action in the city](#) to fight for equal pay. To a tremendous applause she boldly stated "this is not a bonus, it is money we rightly deserve from a council that has been robbing us for years... If there is no progress we will be back out on strike."

Revolutionary crisis

Juan Ignacio Ramos, general secretary of Izquierda Revolucionaria (IR) which is the Socialist Party's sister organisation in the Spanish state, picked up this thread from Denise. He described the huge strikes and movements taking place there - the failure of the new 'socialist' government to deliver social peace for Spanish capitalists.

The revolutionary crisis that has engulfed Catalonia since the [independence referendum in October 2017](#) has continued to intensify. "The new government has not released the political prisoners...

"The state is demanding 25 years in prison for the crime of putting ballot boxes in schools and libraries". IR has "intervened with all its forces to push the movement forward and push consciousness forward", fighting for self-determination for the people of Catalonia and raising the need for a united struggle with workers across the Spanish state for socialist change.

Once applause for Juan Ignacio's fiery speech died down, Sarah introduced Hugo Pierre, a member of public sector union Unison's NEC, speaking in a personal capacity. Hugo focused on [the Windrush outrage](#) and the fight against racism.

"The hostile environment policy was introduced by a government desperate to drive home austerity and compete with UKIP on immigration" he explained.

He went on to argue for a united struggle of all working class people to [demand jobs, homes and services, not racism](#) - arguing that trade unions must play a central role in this struggle.

The penultimate, keynote speech was delivered by Peter Taaffe, general secretary of the Socialist Party. Peter drew together the threads outlined by previous speakers, outlining the central tasks facing the workers' and socialist movement in the next period.

Describing the situation in Britain and the Socialist Party's approach, Peter said: "It's possible that a general election could be forced within a matter of weeks... There's a yearning by the mass of people in Britain to see

the end of this government, and a growing hostility to anything that stands in the way of a Corbyn-led government.

"But the mood is not entirely uncritical towards Corbyn or McDonnell. There's an impatience now among the more politically developed sections of the working class, who see prevarication at the top and capitulation to the right... The Blairites are a fifth column within the Labour party.

"The only way to counter them now is to [build up a mass left wing, on a clear socialist and fighting programme](#). That's why we've applied to rejoin the Labour party. If the Co-operative party can join the Labour party why can't we, with our history of struggle?"

Enthusiasm

Enthusiastic applause punctuated Peter's speech at regular intervals. The confident mood continued as Sarah Wrack, from the Socialist Party's executive committee, made an appeal to those in attendance to [make a vital donation](#) to help support the party's work.

She explained that the Socialist Party has no rich backers, and relies entirely on the sacrifices made by working-class people for finance. The response to this was tremendous - showing enormous generosity. An incredible £35,000 was raised or pledged.

The rally's final speaker, Socialist Seattle City Councillor, Kshama Sawant, was eagerly anticipated by all in attendance. Fresh from the struggle against Trump - she described the huge [radicalisation of a whole section of young and working class people](#) in the US, and the incredible growth in support for socialist ideas.

"The working class, socialists and young people today have an enormous responsibility on our shoulders. To defeat the right wing, its attacks on women, immigrants, LGBT+ people and crucially on the workers' movement.

"But to do so we will need to build mass movements. But also raise the need for grassroots, working-class parties that are independent of corporate money and corporate power.

"Because time is short. Under capitalism, billions of people are relegated to poverty and misery... We have seen [capitalism's inability to even slow climate change](#) let alone stop it... To do this, we will need a Marxist movement on every continent."

Sunday night rally: The struggle for independent political representation for working-class people

Scott Jones

"A determined lead from Labour and coordinated action from the trade unions could defeat Theresa May and austerity - but Labour councillors not prepared to fight should stand aside", said former socialist Labour MP and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) chair Dave Nellist.

[Three years on from the election of Jeremy Corbyn](#) as Labour leader the theme of the Sunday rally of Socialism 2018 was organising political resistance to austerity.

Tory chancellor Philip Hammond has [claimed that austerity will soon be over](#). But we have seen the worst decade for wages [since Peterloo](#) almost 200 years ago! And local government cuts continue. Yet Labour councils alone have [£14 billion in usable reserves](#) that mean not a single cut needs to be made.

It was to fight Tory and Labour austerity that [TUSC was founded in 2010](#) by Bob Crow, the Socialist Party and others. Jeremy Corbyn himself [attended a conference](#) to discuss working-class political representation which led to the launch of TUSC two months later.

Since then, TUSC has created a force of trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists that have fought against cuts and austerity and electorally has stood 2,500 candidates and polled over 375,000 votes.

However, as Dave Nellist explained, while all component parts of TUSC remain committed to fighting austerity, there is [not agreement on whether this campaign should extend to challenging right-wing Labour councillors](#) at the ballot box in the May 2019 local elections.

Socialist Alternative

Therefore the Socialist Party will stand as Socialist Alternative at the ballot box in local elections to take on the worst of the Blairite cutters.

This is linked to the Socialist Party's fight to transform Labour completely and support for Corbyn in the fight to do that. As Socialist Students chair Theo Sharieff said: "The students and young people who flooded to support Corbyn are the most desperate and impatient for Corbyn's programme. The [Wetherspoon, McDonald's and TGI Fridays strikes](#) are an echo of the colossal political earthquake that was the 2017 general election."

Marion Lloyd, PCS civil servants' union national executive committee member, speaking in a personal capacity, also pointed to the need to fight to implement Corbyn's policies when discussing the battle for the assistant general secretary position in the union: "Our opponents [think that we only need to get a Corbyn government](#). But we also need a movement on the streets and in the workplace."

A reminder of the importance of political representation for the working class, and of what can be achieved by elected representatives, was given by Paul Murphy, a Socialist Party Ireland member and sitting MP as part of Solidarity.

He spoke of how he and other socialist MPs have used their position to "popularise campaigns, such as agitating for the [non-payment of water charges](#), supporting workers in struggle, [fighting for abortion rights](#) and putting forward a socialist programme."

Socialism

Closing the rally was Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary. Hannah described why the fight for socialism, whether on the streets, in the workplace or at the ballot box is so important: "A United Nations poverty envoy is currently visiting the UK and is hearing stories of how people are going days without eating. There is enormous anger and our role is to give that anger organised form.

"When visiting a school in Glasgow a little boy told the envoy that the rich should pay!"

She went on: "We can force the Tories from office but we also need to drive out the Blairites who do not stand for the many but stand for the few."

Paul Murphy said: "For many people it is easier to imagine the end of the world before imagining the end of capitalism. It is not only our job to imagine the end of capitalism but to help others imagine it too and imagine a socialist world."

What you thought

An amazing weekend at the Socialist Party's Socialism 2018 weekend. Two days of discussion, debate, workshops and rallies. The most enthusiastic and combative event like this I've been to in my seven years in the party. Proud to be a Socialist Party member. I've come away energised, enthused and ready to go out and continue my efforts to aid in the building of the forces of international socialism.

Gareth Bromhall, Swansea

So inspiring to hear all the speakers at Socialism 2018, including the fantastic Kshama Sawant from Seattle speaking about the struggles of American workers and wildcat strikes. Something we should definitely import!

Suzanne Muna, Waltham Forest, east London

Fantastic weekend at Socialism 2018 - inspiring to not only have heard about struggles in Britain such as the Glasgow equal pay dispute and the Refugee Rights campaign, but also about the work of our sister parties across all continents!

James Clement, Coventry

Had a great weekend at Socialism 2018. Amazing to hear from solid working class women fighters in our movement such as the Glasgow equal pay strikers. Onwards and upwards.

Tracy Edwards, Southwark, south London

What a weekend, love how even though we were all exhausted we still managed to laugh all the way back to Nuneaton on the train! Great weekend with great comrades, bring on Socialism 2019!

Bernadette Quinn, Nuneaton

Socialism 2018 was inspirational, exciting and of course educational. Yet again all the members in Wales want to thank the comrades for organising our event of the year and yet again all the comrades on the coach back to Wales were buzzing and could not stop talking about the whole weekend - and I can confirm that because they wouldn't let me have even a five minute kip!

Alec Thraves, Swansea

The discussions in the sessions were very inspiring. Hearing stories of ordinary working class people standing together to fight for socialist values has left me feeling hopeful for the future at a time when austerity seems never ending.

Andrew Garrity, Nottingham

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US midterms: Republicans weakened - but workers' fightback needed to end Trumpism

Tom Crean, Socialist Alternative (US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party)

The midterm elections in the US represented a limited 'blue (Democratic Party) wave' and an overall rejection of Trump by the electorate.

Republicans were relieved their losses weren't worse while many progressive workers and youth were disappointed the outcome wasn't more decisive.

In the election campaign Trump sought to mobilise his base by whipping up fear of immigrants and using overt racism while the Democrats focused on "rejecting hate" and defending Obamacare, but offered little that

was concrete to working-class people.

Left candidates

At the same time a number of left and progressive candidates, almost all standing as Democrats, reflected the intense desire of millions to push back against the agenda of the right by refusing corporate money and putting forward bold pro-working-class demands like Medicare-for-All, rent control, a \$15 minimum wage and free college tuition.

A number of self-described socialists won including Julia Salazar who is going to the New York state senate and Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, both heading to Congress.

Tlaib is also one of two Muslim American women elected to Congress, an historic first.

While the Democrats now control the House of Representatives, a vicious and reactionary regime is still in place in Washington and we can't wait until 2020 and the presidential election.

We urgently need to build a mass movement, centred on the social power of working people, that takes on and defeats the agenda of the right and fights to push Trump out.

In the coming months, both the Democratic leadership and the new left candidates elected to Congress and state legislatures will be put to the test of rising expectations and demands to confront Trump and the ruling class.

Polarisation deepens

The last few weeks saw Trump ramp up xenophobic hysteria to a new and horrific level, even for him, trying to whip up fear to drive turnout of his base.

Previously he had used [the Kavanaugh nomination process](#) to the same end. He declared the migrant caravan from Central America which is winding through Mexico to be "an invasion", possibly created by the Democrats or funded by the liberal Jewish billionaire George Soros, and including MS13 gang members and terrorists from the Middle East!

He then ordered thousands of troops to the border to confront a peaceful procession of a few thousand desperate women, men and children fleeing the social chaos created by neoliberal policies promoted by US imperialism.

The Democratic leadership, on the other hand, chose very consciously to focus its attention on suburban districts and particularly on white women "with a college degree" who had previously tended to vote Republican.

On healthcare, mainstream Democrats emphasised defending mandatory coverage of people with "pre-existing conditions", a progressive element of Obamacare.

But this was not combined with any bold proposal, along the lines of Medicare for All, or how to address the massive crisis in healthcare and the ongoing attacks of the Republicans.

Neither did the Democratic leadership attack Trump's corporate tax cuts or answer the collapse of family wage jobs by putting forward demands like a major green public works programme.

Instead, the Democrats used the unprecedented diversity of their candidates as a key selling point.

Out of touch

These approaches by the Democrats were effective to differing degrees but also reveal the party leadership's very limited message in response to the Republican onslaught and the desire of the Democrats' electoral base to defeat the agenda of the right.

Showing how out of touch they are, Democratic Party Congress leader Nancy Pelosi made a statement that they will take a "bipartisan" approach and "seek common ground where we can" with the Republicans. She again reiterated that trying to impeach Trump was off the agenda.

Undoubtedly this weakness helped to embolden Trump to fire Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a move clearly aimed to undermine the Mueller investigation into links between Trump's presidential campaign and Russian officials which is being overseen by the Justice Department.

There was a massive turnout for a midterm election with 30 million more voting than in the last midterm in 2014.

The Democrats gained 32 seats in the incoming House of Representatives, and are expected to pick up four more, giving them a comfortable majority.

The Democrats also made modest gains at the state level where the Republicans had dominated over the past decade.

They flipped seven governor positions including in some key midwestern states like Illinois and Michigan.

Several particularly noxious reactionaries lost including Chris Kobach in Kansas and the infamous union-basher Scott Walker in Wisconsin.

But only flipping eight state legislative chambers was a less impressive outcome for the Democrats, at least partly reflecting the gerrymandering of state districts.

On the other hand, Republicans expanded their Senate majority. But it must be remembered that the Senate is far less democratic in its composition given that every state has two representatives no matter how small its population.

Establishment pushes back

Despite the victory of high profile democratic socialist Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and other progressives at federal and state levels, several outcomes were intensely disappointing to many progressive workers and youth.

This included the narrow defeat (subject to a recount) of African-American Andrew Gillum in Florida's gubernatorial (state governor) race by the out-and-out racist Ron de Santis, as well as the defeat of Beto O'Rourke in the Texas Senate race by the odious Ted Cruz.

The Democratic leadership is now of course claiming that the outcome vindicates their "moderate" approach.

In fact, O'Rourke had an outstanding result in a state where no state-wide race has been won by Democrats in 25 years.

These and a number of other races actually show that the shift to the left seen in big cities and among young people in other parts of the country has spread to the South.

Additional indications of the potential support for bold left policies in many areas of the country come from some of the results on ballot measures.

Florida voters restored voting rights to 1.4 million residents convicted of a felony who served their time. Anti-gerrymandering measures passed in Michigan and several other states.

Three 'red' (Republican) states - Idaho, Nebraska and Utah - voted to expand Medicaid. Other progressive victories included San Francisco passing a corporate tax to aid the homeless while Missouri and Arkansas raised their minimum wage.

There were also significant defeats due to massive corporate pushback and disinformation campaigns including Proposition 10, the California state-wide initiative to expand rent control. Measures to restrict

abortion passed in Alabama and West Virginia.

In terms of 'centrist' Democratic strategy it stands out that powerful conservative Democrat Claire McCaskill lost in Missouri, the same state that just voted to raise the minimum wage and recently overwhelmingly rejected the anti-union so-called "right to work" legislation.

What now?

There is a growing understanding among hundreds of thousands that we need a political force determined to fight for ordinary people as hard as Trump is prepared to fight for the interests of billionaires.

As Socialist Alternative consistently argued, [the project of trying to reform the Democratic Party or push it decisively to the left](#), which has engaged a large number of young activists, is understandable but almost certain to fail.

Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign in 2016 in which he raised over \$200 million in small donations for a pro-working-class programme pointed to the massive potential for what the situation requires - a new independent left party based on the interests of working people and all the oppressed.

Such a party needs to be based on mass social struggle which is the real way the right will be defeated and serious gains won.

Class struggle

This year pointed to the potential for constructing a true, ongoing mass movement with the enormous mobilisations of women, student walkouts against gun violence and the highest number of strikes in nearly 20 years.

The teachers revolt in particular, concentrated in red states, showed the potential of the class struggle to galvanize wider sections of society.

The teachers had bold demands including taxing corporate interests to fund education and reverse decades of cuts that won mass support including among people who had voted for Trump.

In 2019 we will almost certainly see another wave of struggle - this must be combined with the building of an anti-corporate left political challenge to the establishment which will be the beginning of putting Trumpism on the run for good.

- [Read the full article at socialistworld.net](#)

Major private care operator puts thousands of vulnerable people at risk

Caroline Vincent, Leicester East Socialist Party

The crisis in social care continues to worsen, as local authorities are being warned that they should be preparing to arrange alternative provision for 13,500 elderly and disabled people by the end of the month.

The reason for this alarming advice from the Quality Care Commission is that Allied Healthcare - a major private provider of care at home across the UK - looks to be on the brink of collapse.

That this could happen to a company in the care sector isn't a huge surprise - the [demise of Southern Cross in 2011](#) was a worrying portent.

But the current ill health of the care industry began in the 1980s, when it was one of the first parts of the healthcare sector to be handed over to privateers.

Outrageously, Allied Healthcare has responded by stating that this situation has been caused in part by an increase in the minimum wage, and the strain that this has put on its payroll.

I moved in with my dad to care for him during the last months of his life. I was allowed some desperately needed respite - and he was afforded some dignity - by the incredible and vitally important job that home carers perform.

It is beyond despicable for the company to lay the blame for this catastrophe on the paltry pay rise that its staff have received!

When Southern Cross collapsed, it was due to an unsustainable business model that flourished during the property boom, but couldn't withstand the 2007-08 financial crisis.

Now, once again, thousands of elderly and vulnerable people have been put at risk by another greedy, private company that has sought to profit from an ageing population.

The care crisis has been caused by a devastating combination of privatisation, government cuts and underfunding of services.

Bringing services back into public ownership, operated under democratic control, is [the only way to guarantee service users the help that they need](#), and workers the decent pay and conditions that they deserve.

Grenfell - no more cover-ups!

Paul Kershaw, chair, Unite union LE/1111 housing workers' branch

An engineering firm hired by the government to test cladding in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire was banned from criticising or embarrassing Theresa May.

The Times reports that that a clause in engineering company WSP's contract with the government stated that it must not create "adverse publicity" about the cabinet office or other crown bodies, including the prime minister's office.

WSP was hired to test whether government buildings were likely to comply with building regulations, but it seems the top concern was to dodge mounting criticism of the government in the aftermath of the fire.

Them and us

Grenfell Tower brought home the [brutal class divide](#) in Britain. The [government's response since the fire](#) has shown the callous incompetence of it and the capitalist establishment.

According to Inside Housing (9 November), Dr Bob Docherty, chair of the Institute of Fire Safety Managers, sent an angry email to housing minister James Brokenshire questioning the independence of the government's 'expert' post-Grenfell advisory panel.

In it, Docherty said: "I think you really need to revisit who is on your 'independent expert advisory panel' and maybe take advice from the experts who are 'out there' working in the field, either through contacts with individuals, professional bodies or the Fire Sector Federation.

"Does no one in your department check with the real industry before these notes go out? I just find the whole content of the note and the process of issue totally bemusing."

The Guardian leaked a report (12 October) that showed that contrary to assurances given in the aftermath of the fire 'huge concentrations' of toxins have been found in dust and soil in an area two-thirds of a mile from the tower.

In the aftermath of the fire the Information Commissioner recommended that Housing Associations - which manage the majority of UK social housing - should proactively make fire risk assessments available to residents.

But many are still dragging their feet on this. At a recent meeting of the London Assembly housing committee they told incredulous members they didn't show them to residents because they wouldn't understand them!

Shac, a campaign linking housing association residents supports residents demanding to see fire risks assessments and has [produced a standard letter](#)

New winter crisis looms

Tories out now to save our NHS

Connor Rosoman, Brighton Socialist Party

The NHS is preparing for [another winter crisis](#). According to a recent report by NHS Providers, services are facing a winter even tougher than last year, as hospitals struggle under the effects of years of austerity.

King George Hospital in Ilford has already announced the closure of its chemotherapy ward due to a lack of qualified nursing staff.

Under-staffing has become a serious issue, with 42,000 nursing vacancies in England alone. The Tories plan to couple shortages with more cuts to training for new staff.

Meanwhile, drugs manufacturers are charging vastly inflated prices for basic medications. Private companies steal millions of pounds from the NHS through extortionate mark-ups.

Everyday products like mouthwash are being sold for hundreds of times their original price.

The [recent Tory budget](#) has promised a meagre cash boost for NHS services.

But chronic issues such as understaffing, rip-off Private Finance Initiative contracts, and the rising costs faced by the NHS, mean that this 'increase' is not even enough to maintain services at their current level.

In reality, this means more cuts. But recent local campaigns have shown that if we fight, we can win.

Last year, a [determined community mobilisation saved Glenfield Children's Heart Centre](#). Thousands signed petitions and attended demonstrations to keep the centre open.

Socialist Party members played a leading role and helped to link up the community campaign with the trade union movement. For example, Unite the Union general secretary, Len McCluskey, backed the campaign.

This victory was followed by successful campaigns to [save Chatsworth rehabilitation ward](#) and [against privatisation in East Yorkshire](#).

In both cases, a united struggle of health workers, their unions and the local community was central to scoring a victory.

Now we need to build a movement on a national scale. Health unions should take the lead by initiating mass action.

We can win a fully funded NHS - publicly owned and democratically controlled.

1918: revolution ends World War One - and shakes the capitalist world

Bob Labi, Committee for a Workers' International

The horrific slaughter of World War One has haunted generations. By the time it ended it had put into question the 'right' of the ruling classes to rule, something that helped provoke revolutions and mass struggles around the world.

Just the huge military casualties, around ten million soldiers killed and many millions wounded, led to a revulsion against [a war which many rightly saw as a contest between rival empires](#) and powers, often with no real fundamental differences in character between them.

For many people the current centenary commemorations will be for those who died and were injured in that slaughter, not the governments and empires which fought each other.

None of the main combatant countries were even formally fully democratic. No women and not all men were allowed to vote.

Russia, one of Britain's main allies, was a dictatorial empire autocratically ruled by an antisemitic royal family.

In British propaganda at the war's start much was made of the German invasion of Belgium. But Belgium, while small, was ruled by a ruling class just as imperialistic as its rivals, something witnessed in its brutal rule over the Congo.

In an accidental coincidence, almost simultaneously as the British ruling class was arguing that the new European war was against "German militarism", the British army was crushing protest as it sought to bring the Egba people in western Nigeria fully under British imperial rule.

Cosmetic changes

Faced, especially after the 1917 Russian revolution, with widespread revulsion that questioned the war, the British ruling class itself underwent a mixture of cosmetic changes while also granting some reforms.

This meant that military celebrations of 'victory' were kept more in the background and increasingly official emphasis was put on the horrors that the soldiers faced and their huge personal sacrifices.

Naturally this reflected the widespread popular sympathy, not for the war, but for those who suffered in it.

This was seen now in nearly all of the public ceremonies to mark the 100th anniversary of World War One's formal end.

Significantly, while August this year saw some mention in Britain of the 1918 Battle of Amiens as a turning point, hardly anything is being said as to why the war ended when it did, with the German army still in Belgium and France and, while in retreat, not decisively defeated.

The reason is simple. Both the ruling class and its defenders do not want to explain the part played by revolution, and the ruling classes' fear of revolution, in finally ending World War One.

Certainly by autumn 1918 the German military command had drawn the conclusion that it could no longer win the war.

The failure of that year's Hindenburg offensives combined with the increasing arrival of US troops in Europe was swinging the balance against them.

At the end of September 1918, Ludendorff and Hindenburg, the de facto military rulers of Germany from 1916 onwards, told the German Emperor that they must have an immediate armistice.

In early October they handed over the reins of government to civilians, led by Prince Max of Baden, a cousin of the German Emperor, charged with agreeing an armistice with US president Woodrow Wilson.

The generals hoped this move would also mean that they would not carry the odium of defeat. Quickly the new government wrote to Wilson and, after internal disagreements, on 5 November the western Allies agreed to begin negotiations for a truce and reparations.

However, events in Germany were also accelerating the formal end to the war. It was becoming increasingly clear that the war was in its last stages.

By now the horrors of the war, the mass privation at home and the example of the 1917 Russian revolution had deepened opposition to the war both in Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empire.

Significant anti-war protests and strikes had taken place, particularly at the start of 1918, and these started to increase as it appeared the war was coming to an end.

In mid-October the Austro-Hungarian leaders, Germany's main ally, decided to ask for a separate peace deal as their multinational empire began to rapidly break up amid mass protests and upheavals.

In Germany the spark that set off the revolution was the refusal, on 3 November, of German sailors in Kiel to set off on what they called a "death cruise" - a suicidal last battle against the British navy.

On 4 November, after brief fighting with pro-government forces, the sailors joined with local workers in forming a "workers' and soldiers' council" to run the city.

It was not at all accidental that this name was chosen, they were looking to the example of the Russian revolution where, almost exactly a year earlier, similarly named popular organisations, the soviets, had [taken power in the October revolution](#) and formed a workers' government.

Over the next five days [a revolutionary wave spread across Germany](#), with workers' councils being formed in city after city, local rulers being overthrown, republics declared in the constituent parts of the German empire and, on 9 November, the empire itself collapsing and an all-German republic declared.

That very same evening, 9 November, the British cabinet met to discuss the situation. Already fearing revolution, the events in Germany and elsewhere gave a new urgency to the government's discussions about agreeing to an armistice.

The chief of the imperial general staff, the British empire's senior military leader, present at that meeting, later wrote in his diary that the French leader Clemenceau had written saying that he was "afraid that Germany may collapse and Bolshevism gain control."

"(Prime Minister) Lloyd George asked me if I wanted that to happen or if I did not prefer an armistice. Without hesitation I replied 'armistice'. The whole cabinet agreed with me."

Two days later the deal was done. Simultaneously the eyes of the ruling classes were turning to a growing new enemy - the threat of socialist revolution, summed up in the word "Bolshevism", and they were prepared to jointly fight this threat to their power and rule.

Thus, while the German army was ordered to rapidly withdraw from Belgium, France and elsewhere, a blind eye was turned to German army units remaining in the east to aid counter-revolutions.

Indeed, the day before the war ended, at another British cabinet meeting, Churchill commented that "we might have to build up the Germany army, as it is important to get Germany on her legs again for fear of the spread of Bolshevism."

But while the world war ended, fighting did not. Instead there were years of civil wars, local or regional wars as empires broke up, new countries were established or, like the British in Iraq, newcomers attempted to establish their own colonial rule.

But what really characterised the immediate post-World War One period were the revolutions and counter-revolutions that swept over country after country.

World War One was not unexpected. Europe had seen different war scares before 1914. Socialists had long debated how to oppose a war between the rival imperialist powers breaking out and what to do if it did.

At the 1907 Congress of the Second International, the body which linked together socialist parties, a resolution on "war and militarism" was agreed which ended by arguing that for

socialists, "in case war should break out anyway, it is their duty to intervene for its speedy termination and to strive with all their power to utilise the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule."

This expectation that war would produce radicalisation and revolutions was completely borne out. The first such event was the 1916 Easter Uprising in Dublin, followed the next year by the Russian revolution, an event which immediately had an international impact.

The [Tsarist autocracy's overthrow in the February 1917 revolution](#) thrust the questions of democratic rights and war aims into the spotlight.

The October 1917 revolution gave the first example of the working class overthrowing capitalism, beginning to run society and appealing to workers internationally to follow suit.

The October revolution's appeal had a growing impact throughout 1918, and when revolutions started to break out throughout Europe in late 1918 it was seen as the example to follow.

Bitter opposition

The revulsion at the slaughter which had taken place and bitterness towards the ruling classes which had been responsible strengthened a deep opposition towards capitalism and, inspired by the Russian example, a willingness to fight for socialist change.

Hence the ruling classes' growing fear of "Bolshevism" and their willingness to fight back.

In Europe, revolutions swept through Germany, Italy and many parts of the former Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires.

Ireland saw intensifying opposition to British rule, and fighting, especially in the south, for independence which, in Limerick, saw a general strike and the formation of a 'soviet' in April 1919.

General or mass strikes were a feature of these movements internationally alongside the formation of committees to organise the struggle, often inspired by the example of the soviets in the Russian revolution and sometimes actually using the same name.

The combination of the effect of the world war and the Russian revolution's impact was felt far and wide.

The newly formed Communist International became the largest organised worldwide revolutionary movement seen so far.

In the colonial world it meant significant boosts for anti-imperialist movements in China, Egypt and India.

In the US, Seattle was gripped by a completely solid five-day general strike demanding higher wages.

Britain in 1919 was not immune from these movements, although they did not reach the revolutionary pitch of Germany.

In Glasgow, January saw a local general strike demanding a 40-hour week being met by the deployment of troops and tanks onto the city's streets.

The government feared that this strike, coming after a series of battles over wages and rents, could develop into something more serious. A similar situation developed in Belfast around the same time.

The British government's deployment of armed troops against strikers and other protestors was not unusual at the beginning of the 20th century, but after World War One the forces of the state were themselves sometimes in revolt.

Fearing revolution, the British ruling class made many concessions, like giving all adult men, and some women, the vote.

But wartime British prime minister Lloyd George's promised "land fit for heroes" never materialised, and by the early 1920s the government and employers launched a counter-offensive which was the background to the 1926 general strike.

These events radicalised the Labour Party. In 1918 it adopted a socialist objective.

However, its pro-capitalist wing worked to ensure that the party would not challenge capitalism and began, in the early 1920s, the first efforts to drive Marxists out of the party and make it 'safe' for the ruling class.

Now, 100 years on from these great events, they have important lessons for today's socialists. While the pre-World War One socialist movement predicted the war and what would flow from it, the revolutionary movements that followed from it did not manage to end capitalism.

"Own" ruling class

A key reason for this was that the majority of the pre-war socialist leaders came to accept the continuation of capitalism and, on that basis, supported their "own" ruling classes in the war.

From there, for some, it was a short step to actively bloodily suppressing the revolution as the German Social Democratic leadership did.

At the same time, the young, relatively inexperienced revolutionaries in the newly formed communist parties were not able to immediately develop the strength or consistently apply the policies and programme necessary to win mass support and complete the revolutions.

While the last 100 years have seen many movements and revolutions, capitalism has been able to continue.

The question of ending capitalism and the horrors that it can bring - wars, poverty, environmental crisis, booms and slumps - lays not only in struggles but also in building a movement with a clear programme and willingness to achieve that aim.

Further reading

- [Germany: 100 years since the November revolution](#)
-

TGI Fridays strike wins control of tips

Helen Pattison, London Socialist Party

After [two rounds](#) of [strike action](#), TGI Fridays staff have won. Bosses gave them just two days' notice of a new tips system which would lose them up to £250 a month.

Enraged by the chief executive's attack on their conditions, members of general union Unite voted to strike.

Workers organised lively protests and picket lines with solidarity from other trade unionists and the Socialist Party.

The victory means workers have more control over distribution of tips through a 'tronc' (pooled tips) committee. They will also get paid for trial shifts and online training.

But the problems are far from unique to TGI Fridays. When I worked in a pub, management used our tips to make up till discrepancies.

There were [protests at Pizza Express](#) and other firms when workers discovered companies keep a percentage of tips from card payments as a 'handling fee'.

It led to a Unite campaign across the hospitality sector for staff to keep 100% of tips.

The TGI Fridays victory is very important. It shows that workers in hospitality can win. Unions should use it to [inspire others to organise and fight](#).

British Gas workers need rank-and-file leadership

Looking out the window on a rainy day, not looking forward to the walk to work, I sit here on my bed and contemplate what next for my household.

I'm currently working a zero-hour contract, worried every week about if I'll have enough hours to cover household bills.

But now, on top of my concerns, I'm worried for my husband. A British Gas engineer who has given the company most of his adult working life, he is now living with fear for his future.

A few weeks ago, British Gas announced proposals to change the pension scheme. The leadership of the GMB union's service and utilities sector originally recommend that engineers vote yes.

A pension calculator showed my husband losing half his one-off payment and half his annual pension. These changes also include British Gas reducing its contributions by nearly half, and the employees paying 3% more. While the pension age increases.

Work longer, pay more, and get less!

My husband and other engineers lost all confidence not only in the company but also their union. So, the engineers started talking to each other using WhatsApp.

They were discussing all the issues they've faced with changes to their terms, conditions and wages over the last few years - which they've felt thrust upon them, without any real leadership or challenge.

Within a week, nearly 3,500 engineers became involved in the discussions. Then several were called into a meeting with senior union officials.

There was talk of general union Unite trying to poach members - which is false. A Unite rep was only asked for advice. Yes, members had discussed leaving GMB, but that was an organic development.

They sat for over five hours with the officials, but left feeling reassured the GMB was listening and would fight for the workers.

Less than 24 hours after that meeting, the members who had started the WhatsApp groups for engineers to openly discuss the issues were threatened with their jobs if they didn't close them!

The groups were closed. Union leadership changes then followed, and there's a slight change in tune in the latest GMB statements.

However, now there is a possibility the engineers will vote no, reject the pension offer and push for industrial action.

The engineers who actually showed leadership to the workers while the union tops failed in their responsibilities will be targeted by the company. This must not be allowed.

Re-elect Chris Baugh PCS AGS

PCS union members: why we're backing Chris

Voting is due to take place in civil service union PCS's broad left grouping, Left Unity, to decide candidates for positions including assistant general secretary (AGS) of the union.

Socialist Party member and incumbent Chris Baugh is fighting to retain the position against a challenge to member-led, militant trade unionism.

The Socialist spoke to PCS members attending the recent Socialism 2018 event about why they're backing Chris, all in a personal capacity.

"I'm backing Chris because I can see an emergent threat in the union, where we want this union to be member-led, but at the moment it looks as though the union's moving towards control by unelected full-timers.

"It looks as though some of the most ardent and best fighters over the years are being excluded. So I think we need to win this for the rank-and-file worker in the union."

Jaime Davies, PCS rep, HM Revenue and Customs, South East Wales

"The reason I'm backing Chris is because I want to see a more democratic union - a union that actually considers the members and puts the members first, rather than just top-down. I want plenty of discussion about how we take things forward."

Roger Thomas, PCS Bristol planning inspectorate, South West regional committee

"I'm backing Chris because since 2004 he's done a superb job as our AGS. He's showed himself to be fully electable, elected three times.

"He's done absolutely nothing wrong in that role, and I think it was a massive mistake for Janice Godrich to stand against him and split the left."

Dave Warren, PCS DVLA Swansea branch executive committee, former Department for Transport group vice-president

"I'm backing Chris because not only is he the best candidate, but this is the principle of democracy here. What right has Mark Serwotka to tell PCS Left Unity who its nomination should be for AGS candidate?"

"Chris is the best for the job, fighting for the best position, fighting for democracy in the union."

Dave Bartlett, PCS Ministry of Justice group executive committee

"I'm supporting Chris Baugh to be the PCS Left Unity candidate for AGS because of his brilliant record fighting for PCS members.

"There is a lot at stake for our union now, and we need to ensure that PCS can stand as a democratic, fighting union - despite the divisive moves of others which have split the left."

James Clement, PCS Coventry

"Chris Baugh represents one of the finest full-time officials within the PCS. His record speaks for itself.

"He's spent 40 years battling the right wing within the civil service unions. He's established his position as an outstanding officer, completely basing himself on the aspirations and the wishes of the rank and file.

"It beggars belief that he should be challenged at this stage by someone who's been a member of Left Unity and the Socialist Party.

"I can only assume it's the doing of the general secretary of the PCS, who unfortunately regards Chris as somewhat of a nuisance.

"The nuisance being a man who continually raises the issues with the leadership of what is in the best interests of the rank and file.

"He's got my total support, and I believe with the kind of support he enjoys, he'll emerge victorious."

Tony Mulhearn, PCS ARMS North West, former leading member of Liverpool anti-cuts councillors

"Chris has been absolutely, fervently backing devolution for Wales, supporting reps, and developing the strategy and the industrial demands to take on Welsh government. But also to build the union in Wales - where we already have a Labour government.

"That is an ongoing campaign. We haven't necessarily had the support within the structures in Wales to take that forward.

"But Chris has pursued that and made sure it continues to be on the agenda of the union.

"Now we're taking strides in Wales to make sure the Wales committee is leading that fightback, with the support of Chris."

Katrine Williams, PCS Wales chair and national executive committee

Campaign latest

- chrisbaughpcs.wordpress.com
 - facebook.com/ChrisBaughAGS
-

Victory for democracy at CWU 'redesign' conference

Socialist Party members in the Communication Workers' Union (CWU)

The ['redesign' conference of the Communication Workers Union](#) (CWU) on 3-4 November held vibrant debates on invigorating the union's impact on the new world of work and the gig economy.

A major proposal by the union's national executive committee was to move both the general and industrial conferences from yearly to every two years.

The executive promised that, where needed, 'policy forums' could be called if major issues arose.

Conference delegates opposed this. They understand the need for fundamental democracy, where the members' voice is heard, and the leadership can be monitored and evaluated by reps annually.

The right to call policy forums already exists. The move to biennial conferences could actually lead to more expense for the union from these. Democracy ruled, and annual conferences were maintained.

Plans to take 50% of all branch funds also fell. But changes will continue to ensure the union has extra funding at the top to invest in organising and recruitment.

One area of concern was the proposed sale of Alvescot Lodge, a residential training centre in Oxfordshire owned by the union.

The CWU has said that during the union's redesign there will be no compulsory redundancies.

However, staff at Alvescot, organised by general union GMB, rightly protested outside the conference. It is quite clear there would be no job options for many of them in that area.

The motion calling for no sale was lost. But another calling for a proper financial review of the sale, plus costs of booking other facilities, was carried.

Hopefully the national executive committee will recognise it makes sense to develop Alvescot and maybe offer it out to the wider trade union movement.

The equality section was very lively. Women activists argued for retaining regional women's committees, while the executive proposed blending all the various committees such as women's, LGBT and black, Asian and minority ethnic into one equality committee.

The executive's position was carried. But at least if it doesn't assist the equality work, branches will have the opportunity annually, not just every two years, to argue for change.

The CWU needs to develop its organising and recruitment programme to build a strong membership in unorganised workplaces such as Amazon, courier companies and call centres - which the union has real experience in.

This would reinvigorate the union, increase its membership, and help tackle the super-exploitation of these workers.

National Education Union: vote for action on funding

The National Education Union (NEU) launched an indicative ballot on 15 November for [industrial action over school funding](#).

At the same time, Socialist Party member James Kerr is standing for election to the Inner London seat on the NEU's national executive committee.

- Vote yes for action in the indicative ballot over funding
- Vote James Kerr #1 in the NEU elections to make sure there are representatives on the executive who will see this through

James says: "A vote for me means teachers will have a fresh, new, young voice in the leadership of our union. I will argue that we push forward until we have won our demands in the funding ballot.

"Once the consultation ballot is won, there must be no delay in moving to a ballot for action if the government refuses to back down.

"This campaign is critical to us defending education and protecting our members. This time we have to get it right and need a leadership with a clear strategy to win.

"We can't keep having one-day strikes and then no follow up. We need teachers to be genuinely involved in deciding exactly how to step up the action."

Haringey's 'Corbyn council' must refuse to make cuts!

Nick Auvache, North London Socialist Party

Joe Ejiofor, leader of [Haringey council in north London](#), wrote to all Labour Party members recently, informing them the council would "have to" make 10% cuts in its budget - on top of 40% already inflicted by the previous administration.

When socialists stood as Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidates in the local elections this year, we said we wanted to work with Corbyn-supporting councillors to defeat the cuts and kick out the privateers.

When asked by TUSC candidates to clarify their opposition to implementing cuts, Labour candidates publicly told voters that they "should read between the lines." Six months later that clarity has been provided.

This bombshell has shocked Labour Party activists who had [deselected the previous pro-cuts administration](#) only last year.

The new council, led by two Momentum national coordinating committee members, Ejiofor and Ermina Ibrahim, was widely seen as a 'Corbyn council' - a test case for Corbynism in power.

It is urgent that anti-austerity councillors and the local trade unions call a conference of all those inside and outside the Labour Party who want to end austerity.

This cuts policy is a betrayal of hopes and every effort must be made to prevent it. It is imperative that the local council unions, especially Haringey Unison, discuss this change of policy as an emergency.

Council leaders have raised the spectre of financial collapse, leading to officials taking over the council and the Corbynistas being blamed for bringing it to bankruptcy.

But if this council inflicts £23 million further cuts and misery on the working class of Haringey, it is that which will discredit the Labour left in Haringey and the Corbyn project nationally.

No alternative?

The council leadership claims that there is no alternative. But, according to the council website, there is £14 million in the council's unallocated general fund reserves, and over £100 million in usable reserves overall.

This, along with borrowing, [can be used to buy time to build a campaign](#) to force the government to return the £140 million stolen from the council each year, and provide the funds required to meet the needs of the borough.

The council should involve the council workers' unions in planning a campaign of action. The national local government committees of unions Unison and Unite, as well as the GMB general union's national conference in 2016, have all agreed support for no-cuts budgets.

They could hold public meetings in every part of the borough, and workers' meetings in every major workplace. They could call a major demonstration in support of a fighting council policy.

The huge demonstrations of the Glasgow equal pay strikers (see 'Glasgow's equal pay uprising shows power of working class' at socialistparty.org.uk) give a hint of what would be possible in Haringey if all the workforce and community came together in such a struggle.

Do these Momentum council leaders really think that this crisis-ridden, weak government will send in the commissioners in the face of such local community and trade union defiance? Do they really think that this would discredit Corbyn?

This approach would be greatly strengthened if John McDonnell committed the next Labour government to replenishing reserves and underwriting all debts incurred by councils opposing cuts.

It could spearhead a national fight and help bring a swift end to the Tory government. In the six months since the new council took office, it has not done anything to build such a campaign.

Neither the council nor the Labour Party have issued a single leaflet or organised a single meeting, never mind a demonstration.

Instead, some prominent councillors and Labour Party leaders are proposing that the financial shortfall is filled by a rise in council tax.

They propose to make council tax more 'progressive' by giving rebates to residents on the lower bands.

A fairer tax would be welcome. But in law, a significant rise in council tax requires a referendum of residents, and this referendum can only ask them to approve an across-the-board percentage rise.

The council would need to convince the residents on lower bands to trust the council to provide them with rebates.

If the majority of residents had their net council tax frozen, then the universal rise would need to be very high, with figures as high as 100% mentioned.

One can imagine the headlines in the national press if a Corbyn council proposed such tax hikes.

The [council should set a needs budget](#), fulfilling the policies decided in the February 'Haringey Manifesto' conference, including reopening youth centres closed by the previous regime, ensuring that all social care staff are immediately brought back in-house and paid the London Living Wage, and ending all regeneration projects involving privatisation and expensive housing.

It is not too late for the council to change course. Such a campaign would show that Labour under Corbyn is serious about doing what is needed to end austerity.

Deepening Scottish health funding crisis

NHS Tayside facing massive job cuts

Alan Manley, health worker and Socialist Party Scotland, Dundee

NHS Tayside in September discussed plans to axe 1,300 jobs - 10% of the entire workforce! It will mean longer waiting times, poorer services and a devastating increase in workload on the already overworked and underpaid staff. In the four years up to 2018, 600 posts have already gone.

These cuts need to be stopped. The health unions, who knew this was coming, need to develop a response that puts the need to protect service provision front and centre by fighting for more NHS jobs.

Crisis

This is a public emergency. It highlights the consequences of a Scottish National Party (SNP) government imposing Tory austerity in the health service, when the need for full funding is clearer than ever.

Last winter was one of crisis throughout the NHS in Scotland, along with the rest of the UK. Operations were cancelled and treatment delayed, as cuts and closures affected all health disciplines. One year on and this winter will be no better.

Audit Scotland, the country's public spending watchdog, published a report in late October, stating that NHS Scotland faces a huge funding crisis.

Despite the SNP government's promise to increase spending by £500 million above inflation in real terms, NHS funding fell last year by 0.2% - failing to match costs and inflation. Health boards made unprecedented cuts of almost £500 million in 2017-18.

The backlog of repairs is valued at £899 million. Eight health boards have forecast deficits of £132 million by the end of the year. Some have claimed emergency loans totalling £102 million to balance their books.

Scotland's NHS remains mired in debt. The obligations to private companies under rip-off Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes is one factor, as is the spiralling costs paid to drug companies - which have jumped by 19% in five years.

[Another winter of crisis](#) following a year of underfunding is inevitable. The recent UK budget announced an increase in funding for the Scottish government but this will not cover the costs in health, let alone other public services.

The need for a fully funded NHS, the nationalisation of the drugs companies, the scrapping of all PFIs and a reversal of all spending cuts, is more pressing as each day passes.

It's long past time the NHS trade unions launched a mass campaign to defend the NHS. This funding emergency requires nothing less.

Mansfield: keep our park open!

Mansfield Socialist Party

On 10 November, at only four days' notice, over 250 people joined a protest against the closure of Berry Hill Park in Mansfield.

A local resident learnt of the plan by the parks' trustees and called the protest on Facebook.

Berry Hill is owned by the Coal Industries Social Welfare Organisation (CISWO) - a charity miners contributed to from their wages every week.

For many years the park hosted major events. It still provides sports and athletics facilities and it is an important green space for dog walkers, family picnics, a youth football club and so on.

CISWO claims the park is too expensive for it to maintain but it is selling off assets it acquired when mining was a nationalised industry.

Just weeks ago, it closed the Derbyshire Miners' convalescent home in Skegness. It's as if former miners and their families no longer exist!

CISWO is acting like a property company instead of a welfare organisation.

Mansfield Socialist Party is calling for the district council to take over the park and put in the necessary investment to maintain and upgrade its facilities.

The council should demand the money needed from the government, who have taken £3.5 billion from miners' pensions since British Coal privatisation.

Newham by-election: We need anti-austerity councillors

East London Socialist Party

Labour's Moniba Khan won the Boleyn ward by-election in Newham, east London, on 1 November following the resignation of a councillor.

Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader has opened up the possibility of Labour becoming a truly anti-austerity party. We want to know what Moniba and the Labour Party will do about a number of issues.

The biggest campaign that has happened in Newham in the last year is the struggle against school privatisation.

Teachers at Avenue primary school, for example, took 19 days of strike action. They were [successful in stopping academisation](#) alongside other schools. Unfortunately some schools have become academies.

Newham council passed an anti-academy motion earlier in the year, but the Labour executive is yet to ratify it.

It's becoming unaffordable to live in Newham or the rest of London. London's average rent is £1,271 a month.

Housing charity Shelter says one in 25 people in Newham are officially homeless. Eight have died so far in 2018.

But councils have the power to bring in rent controls and caps to help make it genuinely affordable to live in the borough.

The Tories have drastically cut council grants. Councillors can succumb to Tory austerity [or stand with the community and fight back](#).

Will Moniba support the use of reserves and prudential borrowing powers to legally stave off cuts? This tactic, used by Liverpool's Labour council against Thatcher, can successfully buy time to build a mass campaign before a Corbyn government can fully reverse Tory and Blairite austerity.

Newham needs councillors who will be part of the fight to end austerity by standing up to the Tory government and Blairite policies. The Socialist Party wants to work with anybody willing to do so.

Leeds meeting backs striking rail guards

It was standing room only as around 80 people attended a packed meeting in Leeds organised by the RMT transport union in support of the long-running [dispute to maintain the safety-critical role of the guard on Arriva Rail North](#) services.

RMT general secretary Mick Cash opened the meeting saying the union will take whatever action is necessary to win this dispute with strike dates planned until the end of the year.

He highlighted the way the government is backing the employers in the dispute with the Department for Transport covering Arriva's losses from strike action.

But he also demanded firmer support from Labour councillors who make up 'Transport for the North' which had co-sponsored the current contract for rail services.

This includes a clause committing to 50% driver-only operation on services. The RMT has approached both Transport for the North and Arriva to jointly seek the removal of this clause as a step towards settling the dispute.

Leeds East MP Richard Burgon gave a fiery speech where he reiterated not just Labour's pledge to renationalise the railways and end driver-only operation proposals, but also raised the need for much wider nationalisation proposals.

Joanne Thomas, Yorkshire and Humber Trade Union Council chair and Usdaw divisional officer, spoke about how employers in many sectors, including retail, are trying to cut back on safety measures to boost profits.

Two local Labour councillors spoke in support of the dispute. One, from Wakefield council, asked to work more closely with the RMT to challenge those Labour councillors on Transport for the North who are reluctant to support the union.

There was a lively discussion from the floor about how further support could be built. The mobilisations by Leeds Trade Union Council to the picket lines and the 'public ballot' activity on 5 November - both initiated by local Socialist Party members - were given praise.

The meeting was closed by local RMT branch secretary John Stewart reminding those present that guards weren't striking for a pay rise but to preserve rail safety.

He explained guards will have lost £5,000 to £6,000 in pay if every strike day fell on one of their working days.

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Welsh Socialist Students campaign and meet in Swansea

Student activists from universities in Swansea, Aberystwyth and Cardiff gathered in Swansea on 3 November for a all-Wales Socialist Students meeting.

We started the day with a campaign stall in the city centre, calling for [an end to Universal Credit](#) and demanding a [general election to kick out the Tories](#).

This was followed by a meeting held at Swansea University which kicked off with Socialist Students national chair Theo Sharieff speaking.

Over the course of the afternoon we discussed the current political landscape: Brexit and the call for a general election, as well as reports from each local society on their experiences on campus, of meetings and on protest activity.

The meeting also came the day after I was elected as a delegate to the National Union of Students national conference on our socialist platform, a step forward for Socialist Students' work in Wales.

It was agreed that societies in Wales would endeavour to work together more closely when possible and that we should meet again to discuss continuing to build the student movement and the reach of our ideas.

Gareth Bromhall, Swansea Socialist Students

Non-fiction: The Candidate - Jeremy Corbyn's improbable path to power

Engaging book about Corbyn's rise doesn't provide answers on how to change Labour

Paul Callanan, London Socialist Party

'The Candidate - Jeremy Corbyn's improbable path to power' is among the first full works on the Corbyn phenomenon written from a wholly sympathetic standpoint.

Alex Nunns charts the rise of the Labour leader from the aftermath of the party's crushing [2015 general election defeat](#) and subsequent leadership race right up to the [2017 general election](#).

Nunns had access to those around the Labour leadership and the interviews reveal the thoughts and emotions - mainly surprise at their own success - of those in Corbyn's team. This makes for an engaging and sometimes interesting read.

But for those looking to understand the social forces behind Corbyn's meteoric rise and how that might be built into a movement that can challenge capitalism, this work is of limited use.

As with many commentaries of Corbyn and the Labour Party the main weakness in Nunns's analysis is what it fails to say rather than what it does.

In talking about the social forces that drove Corbyn, almost against his own will, into the leadership, Nunns quite rightly points to the mass anger and burgeoning movements against austerity within communities, as well as to the trade union movement.

Expression

Though he doesn't go as far as talk in terms of working-class political representation, it is true that - in Corbyn's anti-austerity rhetoric and programme - the anti-austerity movement did find a political expression.

Nunns then claims: "The defining characteristic of the Corbyn phenomenon was that it was participative... The campaign encouraged this shared sense of endeavour by incorporating an element of crowdsourcing into its policy development and emphasising the restoration of internal party democracy as an objective". And: "Paradoxically, the grassroots vibe came right from the top".

But unfortunately the experience of those who have subsequently joined Labour and Momentum to fight for a Corbyn government will have been very different to the picture Nunns paints.

Momentum has adopted a completely top-down structure. Its main strategy is to mobilise working-class and young people to go out canvassing for elections or attend rallies during election and leadership fights.

But within Momentum they are given no real opportunity to debate the way forward, make democratic decisions or organise the crucial struggle against the right wing that remains dominant both in the parliamentary Labour Party and many local Labour Parties.

Indeed, there has been no attempt to mobilise this potential in the fight for a democratic, working-class and socialist party.

The major shortcoming of Nunns's analysis is his failure to join the dots. He gropes at some of the correct conclusions but never quite gets there.

Speaking of the 2017 general election he writes: "Despite being leader, Corbyn had never been in control of the party. His efforts to chart a new course had been met with continuous internal obstruction".

He goes on to point out that: "Labour effectively ran two campaigns in parallel", one around the anti-austerity leadership of Corbyn and John McDonnell, which cost the Tories their majority, and one around the Blairite MPs who attempted to stymie and water down the radical aspects of that programme.

Nunns here doesn't draw the obvious conclusion - that the Labour Party is two parties in one: a nucleus of a new anti-austerity workers' party around Corbyn and McDonnell and a Blairite one that holds a majority in parliament, local councils and party machinery. The right will stop at nothing to ensure that is safe for capitalism.

It is the failure of the leadership around Corbyn to build a genuinely "participative" movement within Labour, and to [mobilise this force against the Blairites](#) who continue to work to undermine and obstruct him.

If he were to win an election, they would undoubtedly continue this campaign potentially even seeking to prevent him from becoming prime minister and certainly attempting to block him from implementing a radical programme in favour of the working class.

Since Corbyn became Labour leader in 2015, the hundreds of thousands of people who have joined also have, in the main, not become actively involved in the party.

There has been no real attempt to engage people by leading the fight that is needed for mandatory reselection of MPs and for the opening up of the Labour Party to all anti-austerity forces on a federal, democratic basis.

That fight against the forces of capitalism inside and outside of Labour for a socialist programme will be key to all those who want to see Corbyn in Number Ten and his policies implemented.

- Available from Left Books at leftbooks.org.uk, 020 8988 8789, email bookshop@socialistparty.org.uk or write to Left Books, PO Box 24697, London, E11 1YD 020

Theatre: The Last Seam - a lasting tribute to Mary Jackson

Nigel Smith, York Socialist Party

The Last Seam is a piece of theatre with a script based on interviews that relate the story of a Yorkshire pit community throughout the national [miners' strike of 1984-85](#) and afterwards.

It recounts the struggles subsequent to the defeat of the strike and the massive effect this had - and is still having - on such communities.

It does this by following the lives of a list of characters, using their actual words to frame the drama.

It has been performed across Yorkshire and the north east, mostly in mining communities, to packed audiences.

The success of the piece is derived from its authenticity and the insight it shows into the lives of the people of Stainforth, near Doncaster, and the surrounding area. It illustrates well the struggles of miners and their families.

It shows the way the women came to prominence - taking the action forward across the numerous localised strikes and occupations that followed the national strike.

It also tells the stories of individuals from those communities who were affected by the events, but were not miners.

It deals with the issue of austerity and its consequences: poverty, crime, drug problems, mental health problems and suicide.

The defeat of the miners' strike is seen as a catalyst for the economic degeneration of these communities, but the play also highlights the continuing strength of working-class culture, in spite of the pressures austerity brings. It is also, at times, very funny.

Coming right up to date, the play frames the [socialist case against the EU](#) through the character Julie - her speech met by cheers in some performances.

This fine piece of theatre hopes to find funding for a further tour or a move to TV. I hope it is successful - there are stories enough for a major series!

The play was dedicated to Mary Jackson and Sandra Lanaghan. As many of will know, Mary was a member of the Socialist Party and was a prominent campaigner throughout the miners' strike and right up to her sad passing in January this year.

- Follow the play on Twitter: [@TheLastSeam](#) for future updates
- See Mary Jackson's obituary: [Red Mary - a force of nature](#)

The Socialist inbox

Letters to the Socialist's editors.

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to editors@socialistparty.org.uk, or if you're not online, to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD.

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.

Leicester leadership

Since the inception of the Premier League - the money bags version of a football league - to choose to support a club outside the 'top-six' is to choose adversity gift-wrapped.

That was certainly the experience of Leicester City supporters when Thai billionaire Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha bought the club in 2010.

Soon after, he bought back the fairly new stadium that had been sold off to a US pension fund, and renamed it the King Power Stadium - his company's name.

There was further investment in the training and sports science facilities along with player acquisitions.

Within four years the club won promotion to the Premier League after a ten year absence and, in their second season, won the Premier League title - a once in a lifetime achievement. Next season Leicester City reached the quarter finals of the Champions League.

Since then, the club has returned to 'the norm' of mid-table, but the investment has continued: expanding the stadium capacity and building a state-of-the-art training facility.

So the supporters' outpouring of grief and tributes following the owner's fatal helicopter crash, is entirely understandable and while the press and media coverage has been welcomed there does appear to be an underlying motive.

In the wider picture of football club ownership the demise of 'good cop' Vichai is being used to offset the damage done by the many 'bad cop' owners: the ruination of Portsmouth FC, the Glaziers' debt-laden takeover of Manchester United and the under-investment by Sports Direct Mike Ashley of Newcastle United, are but a few.

John Merrell, Leicester

Brum council cuts

In common with every other city that hosts an international sporting event, Birmingham's Blairite Labour council is trying to hide begging and rough sleeping from overseas visitors to the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

The council will ask the Tory government for additional powers to remove homeless people from the streets and to take tougher action against 'aggressive begging'.

While it may sound helpful to refer rough sleepers to benefit and housing advice, the reality is that emergency services for the homeless have themselves been severely restricted due to public spending cuts. If that were not the case there would be far fewer rough sleepers.

Also to be targeted is street urination. Birmingham council actively promotes its night-time economy and there are no shortage of bars - just a shortage of public toilets. Every public toilet in the city centre is in a bar, restaurant or shopping centre.

The Commonwealth Games bid is in reality a vanity project and ego trip for leading councillors and officials.

The council still has to find £180 million to stage the games and they haven't started to build the athletes' accommodation yet.

Local government finance experts are predicting that Birmingham could go the same way as Northamptonshire and become insolvent. The financial albatross of the Commonwealth Games will just make matters worse.

Birmingham's Blairites haven't opposed a single cut and the problems they want to hide from visitors to the Commonwealth Games are the result of both Tory austerity policies but also the Labour council's refusal to fight them.

Instead of harassing the victims of austerity policies they should be harassing the culprits - the Tory government.

Clive Walder, Birmingham

Audio version of this document

[To hear an audio version of this document click here.](#)

What the Socialist Party stands 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), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

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.
- 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.
- Reject 'workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- 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 unrecycled 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, 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!

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