

Honda closure threatened: Corbyn must pledge nationalisation to save jobs

"After really soul-searching on this issue, can I in all conscience say that I want to make Jeremy Corbyn prime minister and the team around him - put them in charge of our national security? At the 2017 general election, let's just be honest, nobody thought that was going to be a prospect. At a future general election, it could be a prospect, and in all conscience I can't do that."

This admission by Blairite Chuka Umunna shows that his reason for splitting from Labour isn't that Jeremy Corbyn isn't electable but precisely that he may be. The splitters hope that their move will sabotage Labour and be a further insurance against a Corbyn government.

The 2017 election showed all the enemies of the working class that [it was possible for Corbyn to win a general election](#).

May gambled on an early election because the polls, along with the council election results, showed her on course for a comfortable victory - which she hoped would provide her with breathing space to push through her Brexit deal.

Almost alone on the left, [the Socialist Party believed that Corbyn could turn the situation around if he put forward a bold left-wing programme](#) - such was the anger within the working class, as well as among many middle-class families, after a decade of austerity.

Corbyn's manifesto didn't go as far as it could have. But it was a [radical departure from the pro-big-business policies](#) of Blair, Brown and Miliband. His policies of public ownership, a £10-an-hour minimum wage and particularly the abolition of student tuition fees transformed the election, denying May her majority and pushing her and the Tories into crisis.

It is therefore crucial that, amid the confusion engineered by the Blairites and fanned by the media, Corbyn goes on the political offensive to differentiate his Labour Party from the right wing. As Umunna and the ex-Tories in the Independent Group wax lyrical about how much they agree with each other, Corbyn should boldly set out a radical, socialist programme.

This will expose the Blairites who are linking up with the likes of Anna Soubry. She is a fully paid-up disciple of Cameron and Osborne and their brutal austerity offensive. Their policies have devastated working-class communities and led to a 'lost decade' of living standards for workers. Cameron was also the architect of the undemocratic (anti-)Trade Union Act, building on Thatcher's anti-union laws.

As part of setting out such a programme, Corbyn needs to unapologetically outline what is needed for [a Brexit in the interests of working-class people](#). Up until now, Jeremy Corbyn has resisted calls from the right and, unfortunately, even some on the left within Labour, to reverse Brexit. He has been encouraged in this direction by Unite the Union general secretary Len McCluskey, for example. There is now widespread coverage in the capitalist media suggesting that Corbyn may be retreating in the face of the Blairites pressure. This would be a mistake - instead he needs to go on the political offensive against them.

The best way to do this is to [expose the neoliberal role of the EU](#), which acts for the benefit of the multi-national corporations, enshrining privatisation and the 'race to the bottom' of workers' rights and living standards by seeking to undermine union negotiated collective agreements. Corbyn should explain that his popular policies of renationalisation would come into collision with EU rules.

Nationalisation pledge

The proposed, devastating 2021 closure of the Honda car plant in Swindon, with 3,500 workers' jobs at risk, is an opportunity for Corbyn to cut through any fog about his policies. He should go to the plant, as he did to

Port Talbot in 2016, [when the town's steelworks were being threatened with closure](#).

Back then, after meeting the unions and the workforce, Corbyn said, "if necessary" ministers must be "prepared to use their powers to take a public stake in steelmaking to protect the industry and British manufacturing".

Corbyn should publicly state that he will support the Honda workers in any action they take to defend their jobs. But this should be on the back of a pledge that a Labour government led by him would take the Honda plant into public ownership to save jobs and the community.

Out of a town of about 180,000 people, it is estimated that 12,000 jobs or more are on the line if component and related jobs are included. A demonstration in Swindon, led by the shop stewards, Jeremy Corbyn and Len McCluskey, demanding nationalisation, would lift the sights of workers and put huge pressure on the Tories to intervene.

In 1971, the Tory government of Edward Heath nationalised Rolls Royce through emergency legislation to save the company. Later the same year, the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in Glasgow went into liquidation. The [shop stewards' committee organised a 'work in' - effectively a working occupation of the shipyards](#). It became the focus of mass solidarity. Over 80,000 marched through the city in support.

Heath was determined to face it down - to send a message that there would be 'no more Rolls Royces' but he was forced to relent and, again, the government had to intervene. The Upper Clyde Shipbuilders' 'work in' was a significant act in pushing Tony Benn to the left.

The Port Talbot steelworks weren't closed in 2016. The National Shop Stewards Network called an [impromptu demonstration in the town centre calling for the works to be nationalised](#). Several hundred took part - but it had widespread media coverage and helped to articulate the way forward when the steel unions were refusing to make the call for nationalisation.

Coming months before the Welsh Assembly elections and the EU Referendum, it proved politically impossible for politicians in both Cardiff and Westminster to preside over such a disastrous closure. Even embattled Tory Prime Minister David Cameron appeared to support at least a temporary, partial nationalisation.

But the fact that Jeremy Corbyn was, by then, Labour leader was an additional factor. The capitalist establishment, which Blairites like Ummunna are agents of, still fears a Corbyn-led government because of the expectations it could raise amongst workers, who the capitalists fear could push him further to the left.

Corbyn's intervention now could transform the fight at Honda and other major threatened workplaces. At the same time, it could expose the real face of his pro-capitalist opponents - both inside and newly outside Labour.

From anger to action to save Honda plant

Roger Thomas, Socialist Party South West

On 19 February, Honda announced it would be stopping production of the Honda Civic along with [plans for the complete closure of the Swindon plant](#) by 2021, with the loss of 3,500 jobs.

Workers expressed horror and shock at the announcement. These plans will have a devastating effect on the local economy - not just in the plant itself but also in the scores of local firms that supply and service it from the surrounding area. Up to 12,000 jobs could be affected in a town of 180,000.

This announcement was not even made directly to the workforce but instead delivered via the media. This shows Honda's contempt for its own employees. One group of workers even learned the news from their sick colleague - who saw it on TV and phoned his workmates to see if they had heard anything.

One worker compared the likely effect of the plan to the devastating impact of the railworks closure in the 1980s. Another pondered what would replace well-paid jobs in a local economy of warehouses rather than manufacturing.

The company also confirmed that it will close a plant in Turkey, moving all of its European production to a factory in Japan. They put this move down to changes in the global economy, the recent signing of a trade deal between the EU and Japan, and the continued uncertainty surrounding Brexit.

Much of the anger of workers was focused on pro-capitalist politicians who seem unable to resolve the climate of confusion and inertia which emanates from Westminster.

The Honda shop stewards have a proud record of defending their members. They have worked hard to build up union organisation at the plant and have been big supporters of the National Shop Stewards Network.

In 2011, Unite convenor [Paddy Brennan won his reinstatement](#) after being suspended by management. Plans are being put in place for a demonstration in Swindon to defend the plant.

The response of the labour movement in Swindon must be firm. Yes, negotiations should take place to try and secure the plant. But a determined campaign to mobilise the workforce and community is vital. This should start with a demonstration through the town - led by the shop stewards and [calling for the nationalisation of the plant by an incoming Jeremy Corbyn government](#).

Indeed, Corbyn must give his complete and immediate support to the workforce in their fight to defend these jobs - placing as much pressure as possible on the government.

Any town-wide demonstration could be as big as the one that took place to defend the Longbridge plant in Birmingham when it was threatened with closure.

Unite the Union needs to put its national resources behind this fight, linking with the local shop stewards and mobilising the entire community and labour movement to defend these jobs and to keep car manufacturing in Swindon.

This could act as a national mobilisation for all workers who face closures or large-scale redundancies, [such as at Ford Bridgend and Airbus in north Wales](#).

Defending the city that dared to fight

Response to the Guardian's Hannah Jane Parkinson on the record of Liverpool City Council and the Militant Tendency

Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party (formerly Militant) general secretary

Over the last 30 years, hundreds and thousands of attacks have been made on Liverpool's socialist-led city council and on the record of Militant, predecessor of the Socialist Party, in the 1980s.

Many pens dipped in much poison have been pressed into service to undermine the record of struggle in the city.

In [her comment](#) responding to former council deputy leader Derek Hatton's re-admittance to Labour, Hannah Jane Parkinson writes not in the usual manner of the Guardian but viperously attacks the left in a fashion more associated with the Daily Mail. More importantly the article is factually wrong from start to finish.

Hannah argues that the Militant era in Liverpool was a disaster from start to finish. But this was not how things were seen by the working class of the city.

The council had mass support. It was never defeated in an election. The Liverpool 47's leadership of the council attracted higher votes than in any election since the second world war.

In other words, when the policies corresponded to the needs and aspirations of the working class, then support was forthcoming.

Instead the socialist leadership of the council was removed undemocratically by a combination of Neil Kinnock, now a lord and then Labour leader, the right wing in the Labour Party, the press and the Law Lords.

Kinnock started it with his move to expel socialists and the Law Lords finished the job with the penalty fine.

Why has this come up now? Because we had such influence in the trade unions and in the Labour Party. Today those joining the Labour Party would give their eye teeth to have the situation that existed then - monthly meetings of 500 people with democratic discussion and debate.

All decisions of the council were made democratically with opposition allowed to put their point of view.

Hannah's article is a travesty of the truth. Even Lord Reg Underhill, who made the first attempt to expel Militant supporters from the Labour Party, was effusive on the housing record of Liverpool City Council.

That's because the legacy of the socialist-led council is undeniable. It includes: 6,300 families rehoused from tenements, flats and maisonettes; 2,873 tenement flats demolished; 1,315 walk-up flats demolished; 4,800 houses and bungalows built; 7,400 houses and flats improved; 600 houses/bungalows created by 'top-downing' 1,315 walk-up flats; 25 new Housing Action Areas being developed; six new nursery classes built and open; 17 Community Comprehensive Schools established following a massive re-organisation; £10 million spent on school improvements; five new sports centres, one with a leisure pool attached, built and open; 2,000 additional jobs provided for in the Liverpool City Council budget; 10,000 people per year employed on the council's Capital Programme; three new parks built; and rents frozen for five years.

For those who have suffered, suffer or are at risk of homelessness from today's housing crisis, this approach, instead of that taken by Blairite-led Labour councils, should be celebrated and fought for.

There was mass support for the Labour Party in the city - for Tony Mulhearn as its chair, for Derek Hatton as deputy council leader.

Tom Sawyer, at the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party in February 1986, said: "I defy anyone to tell me how you can go to Liverpool and defeat Militant by argument".

Because this was not just a case of what the working class received but workers and young people taking a democratic part in the decision process.

Derek Hatton

Derek Hatton played an important and heroic role. He made sacrifices in the battle. But he moved away from us.

We don't take responsibility for his subsequent actions. But this attack is about trying to discredit the role we and he played in Liverpool council, which has been recognised by the working class in Merseyside and internationally.

But these facts are not of interest to those who wish to denigrate the important lessons of Liverpool.

Hannah writes: "Hatton's nadir came when he hired taxis to deliver redundancy notices to the council's 31,000 staff, on the basis that the council couldn't afford to pay them, as a 'tactic' to extend negotiations of the Whitehall stalemate".

The Labour group decided on the tactic of issuing 90-day redundancy notices to the 30,000 strong workforce.

Yes, this was a tactic - to buy time to balance the books and to put pressure on the Labour leadership to support the council's no-cuts budget strategy. But it was a mistake.

We warned Derek that Kinnock would use it. And moreover it is vital that if you make a mistake you always admit it, in order to correct it.

Derek had to make a decision on the spot - and the workers understood when it was explained. But it is always necessary to visualise how your enemies will exploit things.

In this case Kinnock and Charles Clarke, subsequently a right-wing MP in Blair's pro-war cabinet, were waiting to pounce.

Nonetheless not a single worker was made redundant by Liverpool City Council. Can Labour councils today make the same claim?

What the Liverpool 47 achieved was historic. They defeated Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher. They won £60 million for Liverpool.

And it was not achieved through strong arm tactics, through bully boy methods, but on the basis of open democratic discussion and debate.

Thatcher was fighting on two fronts - Liverpool and the miners' strike. Once she had defeated the miners she turned on Liverpool.

With this the counter-revolution in the Labour Party began in earnest - it started under Kinnock, followed by John Smith, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

And it ends in the 'grotesque chaos', to quote Kinnock, of trying to hold the mighty British labour movement to ransom, always aided and abetted like today by the right-wing press.

But they will not succeed in this - shown by their measures today where the Blairites MPs are hooking up with Tory renegades to cobble together a new centrist-type party.

Oppressed groups

The scandalous attacks on the Militant have zero basis in reality. But truth is not of interest to those who wish to attack socialists.

Hannah claims we had an "opposition to policies that focused on particular oppressed groups". It was Militant supporters who launched the Campaign Against Domestic Violence (CADV) in 1991.

CADV put domestic violence into the public domain. We raised it in our trade unions, organised conferences on it, wrote to newspapers, organised a national demonstration and then simultaneous protests outside prisons around the country to raise awareness on the need for legal change.

CADV aided trade unionists and campaigners in negotiating policies in relation to domestic violence that would look sympathetically on sick leave and requests for transfer, for example.

Many employers and councils adopted these policies. That was an historic victory for women.

Hannah also raises the appointment of Sam Bond as the council's race relations officer. The issues raised by the Sam Bond affair were rooted in the long history of the black communities of Liverpool.

More than any other city in Britain, Liverpool was built on the slave trade. The Black Caucus was self-appointed as the leadership of the black population with no democratic legitimacy in Liverpool 8.

We consulted the community and made clear proposals on the issue of full-time employment of a layer of long-term unemployed, particularly black young people - as a result of the racist discrimination they faced - in deprived areas of Liverpool.

Hannah's attacks have been echoed by John Mann. His lies have been answered by us many times. For instance in May 2016 when he joined in the right-wing attacks of anti-Semitism on the left, Socialist Party executive member Clive Heemskerk wrote in a letter, that the Guardian refused to print, that Mann "was a leading figure in an anti-Militant organisation known as Clause Four and, for two years, the chair of NOLS [National Organisation of Labour Students] (1983-84).

"Within the NOLS, Militant was falsely attacked by the Clause Four group for 'not supporting the Palestinians' because we stood for the right of two states - Israel and Palestine - to exist side by side, which we argued would be possible on a socialist basis.

"The Clause Four-led NOLS, on the other hand, argued that the national rights of Israelis must be subsumed into a single, capitalist state - a 'secular, democratic state in the whole of Palestine'."

In other words Mann has done a 180 degree turn because it suits his political needs.

The re-admittance of Derek Hatton, Liverpool deputy council leader 1983-86, to the Labour Party poses the re-occurring question under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of opening the party up to socialist fighters and the need to transform it into a 100% anti-austerity party.

Now that three Tories have joined the Independent Group with the eight anti-Corbyn Labour MPs the picture is clear.

This is an attempt to undermine Jeremy Corbyn's leadership and to derail the Corbyn revolution which promised an end to austerity and a programme to create jobs and housing and offer a future to young people - including a world safe from environmental catastrophe denied them under capitalism.

Readmit socialists

We hope that now Labour's doors will be thrown open - to the workplaces, the estates, the school students protesting for the planet and all others who have been expelled from Labour for no other reason than standing up for the working class.

In November 2016, 75 expelled and excluded socialists, with over a thousand years of Labour Party membership between them, applied for re-admittance to the party.

This approach was backed by hundreds of signatures of trade unionists and community organisations. The application was rejected by the (then) general secretary Iain McNicol.

[Here is the link](#) to correspondence between the Socialist Party and Jenny Formby, Labour Party general secretary, on our request to affiliate to Labour from September 2018.

We wrote: "We think this [open discussion about Socialist Party affiliation] is particularly urgent given the dramatic stepping up of the war against Jeremy Corbyn's leadership by the pro-capitalist Blairite wing of the Labour Party, backed to the hilt by the capitalist establishment and media.

"We see a very urgent need to organise and mobilise all those who support Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity policies into a mass campaign to democratise the Labour Party, allowing the hundreds of thousands who have been inspired by Jeremy's leadership to hold to account, and to deselect, the Blairite saboteurs.

"These saboteurs have made clear that their priority is not the election of a Labour government but the removal of Jeremy Corbyn at any cost.

"We believe the Socialist Party can play a useful role in the campaign to transform Labour, and would therefore like to discuss affiliation."

The record of the Socialist Party's predecessor Militant in Liverpool is clear. The Militant-led Liverpool City Council built council houses.

It expanded council services. It had apprenticeships for council jobs. This stands in stark contrast to the record of Blairite-led Labour councils today who pass on Tory austerity leading to homelessness, job cuts and increasing child poverty.

This is why Labour needs to be transformed - so that it can fight these attacks on working class people - not implement the current 'grotesque chaos'.

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Tories, Blairites, Independents...

Kick out austerity politicians

Ross Saunders, Socialist Party Wales

Statistics show that austerity has created terrible suffering in our communities.

Life expectancy - stalled. Infant mortality - up. Children in poverty - up. Suicide rates - up.

And now a new report has confirmed that it has also seriously damaged the economy.

The New Economics Foundation has said that cuts by Tory-led governments in the last decade have stifled economic growth by £100 billion - leaving every household in Britain £300 a month worse off.

Meanwhile, the super-rich have massively increased their wealth.

There has been no recovery in our living standards since the economic crash in 2007-08, and now [another one looms on the horizon](#).

This is the failed capitalist system that Chuka Umunna and eight other MPs have resigned from the Labour Party in order to defend.

Umunna stood in the Labour leadership election describing himself as "Blue Labour" - ie 'Red Tory' - and said he wants to be "on the side of those who are doing well". Tony Blair explicitly backed him.

As business secretary, Umunna took Labour into the 2015 elections saying "over the next parliament there will need to be cuts."

Angela Smith has always been tinged with blue - she publicly opposed Jeremy Corbyn's popular policy of nationalising utilities to end price rises and profiteering.

Every single one of them stood aside to let the Tory welfare cuts go ahead.

But the Independent Group tipped its hand by shacking up with Tory MPs like Anna Soubry - who thinks former Tory prime minister David Cameron "did a marvellous job" doing the "absolutely necessary" work of cutting public services.

But unfortunately, the nine MPs who resigned from the party aren't the only politicians in Labour who have, in Corbyn's words, "no problem with austerity".

This month, with not a whimper of protest, Labour-run councils passed plans to cut hundreds of millions of pounds more from council services. This is despite sitting on mountains of cash reserves which could be used, as part of a fightback strategy, to pass no-cuts budgets.

Instead, [council workers around the country have had to strike](#) to defend their jobs, conditions and the public services they provide.

Leading Labour right-wingers like deputy leader Tom Watson and London mayor Sadiq Khan have lined up to bemoan the loss of their Blairite comrades. Watson has now called for setting up a 'social-democrat' organisation among Labour MPs to promote the same right-wing ideas as the Independent Group.

Others have already written their resignation letters and are only waiting for the best time to publish them and damage Corbyn.

If his anti-austerity programme is to be implemented, Labour's left leadership must have these saboteurs removed.

These MPs who have split should face immediate by-elections and be challenged by fighting, socialist candidates.

[Mandatory reselection of MPs](#), as part of a full programme of [democratising the Labour Party and opening it up to all socialists and the working class](#), must be put at the top of the agenda.

And Corbyn and the trade unions must call action to force a general election now.

Our communities and our class will be wracked by the failed austerity policies of capitalism until we build an organisation that will fight to the end for the socialist alternative we need.

Socialist change, not climate change!

- Build a movement to challenge the profit system
- Build mass walkouts on 15 March

Gareth Bromhall, Swansea Socialist Students

"We have not come here to beg the world leaders to care for our future. They have ignored us in the past and they will ignore us again.

"We have come here to let them know that change is coming whether they like it or not. The people will rise to the challenge."

This was the rallying cry of 15-year-old Swedish climate activist leader Greta Thunberg, addressing world leaders at the United Nations climate change conference last year.

Since then hundreds of thousands of school, college and university students across the world have joined a [wave of strike action and direct action](#).

Young people are facing the reality that just 100 companies are to blame for 71% of global carbon emissions, and that only 26 individuals own and control wealth equivalent to half of the world's population - some 3.8 billion poor people.

Young people realise that this capitalist hoarding and reckless disregard for the planet cannot last.

And with climate experts claiming we have 12 years left to save the planet, young people are taking to the streets, striking for change.

This movement rocked the UK on 15 February when [tens of thousands of students and young people descended on parliament](#), and thousands more walked out of schools, colleges and campuses across the country on the first #YouthStrike4Climate.

Socialist Students and Young Socialist groups mobilised to take part in what could develop into an important new youth movement, the likes of which we have not seen for nearly a decade.

These strikes, coming just weeks after Socialist Students passed a motion [at our national conference](#) to support climate protests and divestment efforts, have captured the imagination of young people.

Awareness

Placards reading "If the earth was a bank it would have been bailed out by now," and "System change not climate change" have been shared widely on social media, showing that this generation of activists - having known only austerity - is becoming aware of what needs to be done to save the planet.

Given the lack of leadership from the trade unions and Labour Party, it is understandable that some students distrust political action, or look mostly to individual lifestyle changes.

But Socialist Students explains that [challenging the capitalists responsible for greenhouse gas emissions is inherently political](#). And only mass collective action for a socialist alternative can achieve it.

Direct action to shut down roads is a valid publicity tactic. But using the power of the organised working class in the trade unions to shut down the capitalist economy is much more effective.

Socialists also need to explain [impossibility of solving climate change within the limitations of the capitalist system](#), and argue that we need to nationalise the energy industry, infrastructure and the commanding heights of the economy (in order to democratically plan society) if we are to have the chance to stop this environmental catastrophe.

Tory education 'reforms': "a tiny drop in a stormy ocean"

A teacher and National Education Union member

As the Brexit crisis continues to engulf the government in Westminster, we continue to pay for a very real crisis that has unfolded since the 2007-08 crash.

The state of our schools and the impact on young people, [especially their mental wellbeing](#), is a national disgrace. The teacher recruitment and retention crisis inspired an [unprecedented march of a thousand head teachers in the autumn](#).

Education Secretary Damian Hinds has been forced to respond by introducing measures to try to attract more graduates and to keep staff. While any positive reforms should be welcomed, these changes are a tiny drop in a stormy ocean.

The Department for Education proposed slightly increasing bursary payments for new teachers, while shifting some payments to the third and fifth year of teaching, to keep staff.

However, when 40,000 teachers leave the profession over a 12-month period, many down to unsustainable workload and unbearable monitoring regimes, structural reforms are needed.

Teacher contracts still allow for open-ended workloads and many newly qualified teachers are burnt out within a few years and will never see much of their 'golden handshakes'.

Hinds proposes £130 million for training, but when there have been £2.3 billion real-terms cuts, this is papering over gaping wounds in the support that's needed.

If the Tories were serious about saving education, they'd listen to the trade unions that have clearly identified what is needed.

They must reverse all cuts to education to reduce class sizes and boost the numbers employed in our schools. And they should introduce a new teachers' contract which caps teacher working hours and guarantees at least 20% planning and preparation time so we can do our job well within reasonable hours.

There should also be a boost to education workers' pay which has been cut by over £4,000 on average since 2010.

We know that none of this will be gifted to us, and the parlous state of education has come about partly because of a lack of a lead given by the education unions to fight these attacks.

The [recent indicative ballot conducted by the National Education Union](#) (NEU) on school funding should prepare the ground for a serious confrontation with the government. With public sector union [Unison also balloting school staff](#) there is the potential for coordinated industrial action.

The NEU should draw up a battle plan of strikes and a national demonstration on education funding. The education unions also need to be prepared to back up their recent 5% pay claim with action.

There is enough money in society to pay for a decent education for all, but that money is concentrated in the hands of big business and 'PFI' privatisation firms, who bleed our schools dry.

We must link this fight to the need to change society and [build a socialist education system](#) based on the needs of our communities and not the interests of the fat cats and their mouthpieces in Westminster.

Blairite traitor Ian Austin won't be missed - by-election now!

Joshua Allerton, Wolverhampton and Black Country Socialist Party

On 22 February, Dudley North MP Ian Austin became the ninth pro-cuts, pro-war politician to leave the Labour Party in the space of two weeks.

In an outrageous smear, he blamed Jeremy Corbyn for his defection, accusing the Labour leader of "creating a culture of extremism and intolerance".

Since then, Austin has denied any plans to join the new [pro-austerity, pro-EU Independent Group of Tories and Blairites](#) in parliament. That may be because, while he shares their general disregard for the lives of working-class people, he takes a different view to the eight previous splitters on how to best protect the interests of big business and the rich when it comes to the issue of Brexit.

In fact, Austin has supported the Tory government's Brexit plans. In January, he was one of the three Labour MPs to vote for Prime Minister Theresa May's withdrawal deal.

Perhaps revealing one of his motivations for doing so, in a rare candid statement, he recently said that he "could never ask local people to make Jeremy Corbyn prime minister."

Really, Austin should never have been allowed to leave Labour's ranks at a time of his choosing. He should have faced having the whip withdrawn for voting to keep May's government alive by backing her Brexit deal.

Austin's dislike for socialists, especially the Socialist Party's predecessor Militant, has never been a secret. He launched a splenetic attack on John McDonnell for speaking approvingly of Marx. (If only John McDonnell applied Marx's ideas more consistently!)

When Corbyn spoke out against the Iraq war under Blair, Austin shouted at him to "sit down and shut up!"

Austin's defection is proof of contempt for workers and young people in Dudley North, many of who voted for him in 2017 on the expectation that it would increase the chances of a Corbyn government coming to power with an anti-cuts, pro-worker programme.

Mandatory reselection

This episode shows the [burning need for mandatory reselection of sitting Labour MPs](#) by their local parties before each election. This would give party members and trade unions a democratic say in who represents them in elections.

If they are not subject to this challenge, pro-capitalist Blairites such as Austin will continue to undermine Corbyn's attempts to introduce policies that benefit ordinary people and hurt the super-rich - whether they do so from inside or outside the Labour Party's ranks.

Wolverhampton and Black Country Socialist Party took to Dudley High Street the day after Austin announced his resignation from the Labour Party.

We were demanding the people of Dudley North are given the right to a by-election, as well as emphasising the need to get the Tories out of government and the Blairites out of Labour.

Just like the other MPs who left their parties this week, Austin has denied that he has any intention of putting himself before the voters. Dudley News recently held an online poll asking its readers if they think Austin should now face an election.

At the time of writing, 63% of those responding thought he should!

Wolverhampton and Black Country Socialists will continue the fight to force Austin to contest his seat against a candidate that will stand up for working-class people.

If Austin is confident his pro-cuts politics has support among working-class people, then there should surely be nothing for him to worry about!

Cuts councils massage homelessness figures - build council houses now!

How should councils deal with the [deepening housing crisis and the homelessness](#) and desperation it creates?

Begin a mass programme of council house building? Introduce rent controls? Confiscate empty homes owned by rich oligarchs? Allow working-class people to move into them? Fight for a living wage for all workers? Scrap insecure and zero-hour contracts?

Well, according to pro-cuts councils, the answer is none of the above. Because a much simpler solution has apparently presented itself: massaging the figures.

According to the Guardian, in 2018 some 30 councils changed the way they compiled statistics on the number of rough sleepers living in their areas.

After switching from providing estimates - which take into account the fact that those forced to sleep on the streets move around, and are not outside and visible at all times - to providing statistics based on head counts, many councils registered a significant drop in the official homelessness figures in 2018.

Brighton and Hove Council, which has a Labour administration, saw a staggering 85% reduction in official rough sleeper numbers between 2017 and 2018 after changing to this method. It's reported that some councils even conducted their head counts on snowy evenings - probably aiming to minimise the recorded numbers as much as possible.

Whatever figures are officially produced, anyone who spends any time walking Britain's streets knows rough sleeping is certainly not a declining problem.

The Socialist Party says housing is a fundamental right. Instead of finding new ways to make homelessness figures look respectable, councils should be actively resisting its causes.

Huge reserves

Labour councils around the country are currently sitting on 'general fund' reserves totalling around £9 billion.

This is money that could immediately be put to use to begin a desperately needed mass programme of council house building.

Along with passing no-cuts budgets, introducing rent controls, and using their powers to crack down on empty homes owned by super-rich speculators, councils have the power to make a decisive impact on this issue now. The [example of the Militant-led Liverpool City Council of 1983-87](#) shows this.

Corbyn should pledge now that any Labour council prepared to take such an approach would have its funds immediately restored on day one of a Labour government.

Supermarket giants merger: protect jobs and fight price hikes

For democratic public ownership, not fat-cat-owned mega-monopolies

Iain Dalton, chair, Usdaw Broad Left (personal capacity)

A decision which could massively shake up Britain's retail sector is due in April as the Competition and Markets Authority rules on whether or not to allow Asda and Sainsbury's - [the second and third largest supermarkets - to merge](#).

But the regulator announced on 20 February that it was "likely to be difficult" for the chains to "address the concerns" which it has.

Retail workers, along with working-class people who shop in these stores, certainly have their own concerns. These include the potential for job losses, attacks on terms and conditions, as well as the predicted price rises that will follow the merger.

There are crucial issues at stake for Britain's largest retail trade union Usdaw, which represents workers on both sides of the deal. Usdaw organises workers in over half of Sainsbury's stores, as well as in its subsidiary Argos.

It also represents Asda workers in Northern Ireland. General unions Unite and GMB have members in Sainsbury's and Asda respectively.

Already, both Sainsbury's and Asda have carried out management restructures ahead of this deal, in both cases pushing roles and responsibilities onto lower-paid workers. There is a clear danger of a two-tier workforce being created.

If the deal goes ahead it seems that the two companies will maintain a degree of separation. But the unions should be proactive.

There should be joint meetings between Usdaw, Unite and GMB shop stewards representing the workforces to plan a joint campaign to increase wages, and fight to improve terms and conditions.

At minimum, the unions should campaign for all workers to receive the best conditions currently offered across the two stores - and no less than the pay and conditions demanded by Usdaw's 'Time for Better Pay' campaign.

This campaign fights for a £10-an-hour minimum wage and an end to zero-hour contracts. Whether a merger goes ahead or not, these demands must be fought for.

Merger off the cards?

However, it is looking increasingly likely that the merger could be rejected because of the potential concentration of too much of the retail market in one company, which would overtake Tesco in market share. Any merged company would control 2,800 stores.

Ushaw has rightly raised concerns over the Competition and Markets Authority's possible plans to order the closure or sale of stores - possibly up to 629 locations where competition is likely to be lessened.

If the deal does not go through then it seems likely that both companies will try to recoup the 'efficiencies' they expected to emerge from the deal by making further staff cuts, particularly if, as rumoured, Asda is fully or partially sold to a private equity firm.

Ushaw should start preparing to campaign to protect the jobs of workers in those stores and opposing their closure, particularly in the crisis on the high street.

But in its press releases the Ushaw leadership mistakenly makes arguments based on what it considers 'best for the market'.

Fundamentally, the logic of the market is driven by what generates the largest profits, whether by squeezing the wages, terms and conditions of staff, screwing over suppliers and customers, or merging and cutting to achieve 'efficiencies'.

The best way of protecting the jobs of retail workers is to [campaign for bringing the big supermarket chains into public ownership](#), as part of a nationalised, democratic plan of production and distribution of goods and services.

Instead of imposing store closures and job losses where these are deemed surplus to requirements, there would be consultation with workers and the local community about what stores are needed, and any savings through efficiencies should be transferred into a reduction of the full-time working week - with no loss of pay - instead of into the pockets of shareholders.

Birmingham Bin workers and home carers strike on same day

Birmingham Socialist Party

A sea of orange and purple was what passers-by saw on the morning of 22 February as they drove past Perry Barr bin depot in Birmingham.

Council-employed bin workers and home carers held a day of joint action on the bin depot picket lines across the city.

The disputes originate from different issues - the [home carers oppose changes to contracted hours](#) and the [bin workers are fighting against blacklisting](#). But both are attacks by Birmingham Labour council.

The workers' mood is high and determined for victory. The home carers are 18 months into their dispute.

The bin workers are taking their second stint of strike action in less than two years. But this was the first time the workers were able to join their collective strength together.

The Blairite council defends its [mishandling of the 2017 bin dispute](#) - where workers that did not take part in the strike were paid a lump sum of money.

This has been described as a form of ['blacklisting' against Unite the Union members](#) who were on strike.

22 February saw bin workers in public sector union Unison strike for the first time too.

Birmingham Socialist Party visited all four depot pickets and handed out bulletin no. 17 - written by local Socialist Party members. Strikers also bought copies of the Socialist.

Mandatory reselection

Many bin workers think the leading Birmingham Labour councillors would be well suited to join [breakaway MPs in the pro-austerity, anti-union Independent Group](#). Most support mandatory reselection and a workers' wage for MPs and councillors.

The council hopes to wear strikers down, using Tory anti-union laws to break the bin strike and endless Acas negotiations with the home carers.

If the council concedes to the strikers it will inspire workers in other departments in the council to take a stand. The home carers were inspired by the 2017 bin strike victory.

If Labour councillors are not prepared to stand up for the working class, then they should stand down. If they won't go willingly, they should face deselection as Labour candidates.

They should be replaced with real working-class fighters, drawn from across the trade union and socialist movement - fighters prepared to support a no-cuts budget and end all attacks on workers' rights.

The Socialist Party says:

- Continue the joint strikes and pickets by bin and home care workers
- Unite and Unison should build a mass campaign towards further coordinated action across the council workforce in support of the home care and bin workers and against the attacks taking place across every inch of the council
- Mass union members' meetings should be called in every department of the council to discuss and build support
- Unions should call protest lobbies of council meetings and councillors' surgeries
- Unite and Unison should call a joint national demo in defence of the action taken by council workers

University and College Union: anti-union laws frustrate strike ballot again

Socialist Party members in UCU

The result of the higher education [equality and pay ballot for industrial action](#) has been announced. University and College Union (UCU) members voted overwhelmingly to strike - a 70% yes vote for action to defeat casualisation, workload, the gender pay gap and falling pay.

Unfortunately however, the turnout was 41% - around the same as the autumn ballot - and not sufficient to meet the undemocratic thresholds imposed on us by the Tories' vicious anti-union laws.

This will be a bitter disappointment to many members, especially given the work branches have done to get the vote out.

Many have organised phone banking, door knocking and members' meetings to drive up the turnout.

There are reports, however, that some right-wing branch leaderships, unwilling to take action themselves, have deliberately discouraged members from voting.

That is scandalous. For all the positives we can take from our organising work, there are still branches which are in dire need of new leaders to step forward.

It was right to take the step of re-balloting, this time on an aggregated basis, in order to attempt to meet the threshold.

While this is a setback, it should be noted that in these two ballots, we have seen the most member engagement and highest turnouts in any pay dispute in our union's short history.

We cannot be discouraged, but should continue to put forward local demands on the gender pay gap, workload and casualisation, which the employers refuse to negotiate at national level.

Sally Hunt has resigned as UCU general secretary, unfortunately for health reasons. Socialist Party members in UCU send greetings to Sally Hunt at this difficult time.

We will write more soon about what this means for our union and how the left should respond.

Manchester posties strike against bullying

Dane Yates, Manchester Socialist Party

It was a red-letter day for 40 workers, from the Communication Workers Union (CWU), on their picket line on 22 February at the Royal Mail delivery office in Wythenshawe, Manchester. They struck again three days later.

CWU members have struck against "two instances of unacceptable use of the conduct code." The local CWU rep Phil Tickle says they "are just two specific examples of widespread, historic and continuing, unacceptable and unnecessary, behaviour of management towards staff."

Victimisation and unfair use of disciplinary action against two staff members were cited as the catalysts for the current action, which 88% of union members voted for.

One staff member was allegedly disciplined for calling in sick with stress, while another reportedly faced action for allegedly posting a complaint of management bullying on social media.

It was reported that one worker was given a suspended dismissal and both were given forced transfers.

Many workers outside the gates lamented management's totally unacceptable attitude towards staff.

One worker said that staff had "finally had enough" and that the company "needs to realise that it will be easier to replace the small management 'regime' than it will be to replace the entire workforce."

One CWU member said there are now "39 statements from staff about the [management's] unacceptable behaviour, which have never been addressed."

The picket was lively and Socialist Party members were warmly welcomed - six striking workers bought copies of the Socialist, stating: "If you support us, we're going to support you".

The solidarity shown from the rush hour traffic meant a lot to the workers. They were particularly buoyed by shouts and 'sirens of solidarity' from two fire engines - budget cuts could see six fire stations close.

The manager sneering from beyond the depot gates, while they waited for other managers from across the region to arrive, did not dampen the workers' spirits. One worker made the point that "if it's this easy to get managers over here at short notice to cover us, what are they doing the rest of the time?"

Kieran Regan, CWU area delivery rep, said: "Our comrades are stood here today against the bullying culture still practised by some management within Royal Mail. Nobody should go to work to be bullied!"

PCS union: help us win the elections and pay campaign

The election process for civil servants' union PCS is underway.

Socialist Party member Chris Baugh is the candidate of Left Unity - the union's broad left -for assistant general secretary. He needs 15 nominations to stand for re-election.

Regrettably, some in Left Unity - Socialist View and the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), are refusing to recommend and campaign for Chris. This is [despite a clear obligation to do](#) so under Left Unity rules.

Opposition to Chris was decisively defeated at the National Gallery branch annual general meeting. SWP member Candy Udwin declared her support for Lynn Henderson, a PCS full-time official, who has never been a Left Unity member.

Knowing she could not win support for Henderson, she proposed that the branch make no nomination. Elected branch officials argued for Chris, who supported the National Gallery strike and led negotiations to settle the dispute - which included Candy Udwin's reinstatement.

Members backed Chris Baugh 31 votes to one.

There is clear evidence of widespread support for Chris, with nominations from all areas of the union.

Alongside PCS elections, the union is launching its pay campaign. [A statutory strike ballot will run from 18 March to 29 April.](#)

The ballot is in support of the union's pay demands of a 10% raise with £2,400 underpinning and restoration of national bargaining on pay and employment conditions.

We urge all Left Unity members to nominate Chris Baugh for assistant general secretary, and the Democracy Alliance national executive committee slate, before nominations close on 7 March.

Union branch annual general meetings can nominate now. We must unite to maximise the vote for the whole Left Unity slate in the elections which start on 16 April, and secure a threshold-busting vote in the pay ballot.

Marion Lloyd, PCS national executive committee (personal capacity)

- [Read more and the full slate at chrisbaughpcs.wordpress.com](http://chrisbaughpcs.wordpress.com)
-

South East Unison annual general meeting votes for no-cuts budgets

A motion calling on all [councils to pass no-cuts budgets](#) should be on the agenda at the conference of public service union Unison.

Paul Couchman, a Socialist Party member and branch secretary of Surrey Unison, proposed the resolution at the annual general meeting of the South East region of the union.

At the meeting, the anti-cuts initiative topped the poll out of seven motions.

Another motion from the Surrey branch calling for Labour's Blairite defectors to face by-elections passed overwhelmingly, but only unofficially.

Nine attendees bought copies of the Socialist and the left consolidated its position on the union's regional committee and in key regional positions.

Socialist Party members in Unison

Seattle's socialist councillor Kshama Sawant:

"Let's use Bernie's 2020 campaign to launch a mass, working-class fightback"

Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative Seattle city councillor

Bernie Sanders has formally launched his 2020 run for the US presidency, vowing to mount "an unprecedented and historic grassroots campaign that will begin with at least one million people from across the country."

In the first 24 hours, he had already raised \$5.9 million in donations and has more individual donors than all other current presidential candidates combined.

Certainly, Bernie's new campaign has a far higher starting point than when the Vermont Senator first [called for a "political revolution against the billionaire class"](#) in the spring of 2015 and was overwhelmingly ignored by the corporate media.

Sanders' video announcement began with the declaration: "Real change never takes place from the top on down, but always from the bottom on up."

I fully agree. And that is why Socialist Alternative (the Socialist Party's US co-thinkers) and I will be working with others to launch grassroots campaigns in communities, unions, schools, and workplaces across the US to build a mass working-class fightback around Sanders' campaign.

There is a great deal at stake in this election. Trump urgently needs to be driven out, and socialists and the left must take full advantage of the potential to organise alongside the millions already moving into struggle and who now will be mobilised around Bernie.

But we should also heed the lessons from 2016, when [the Democratic primary was rigged against Bernie](#): with the Democratic National Committee (DNC) actively organising against him, manoeuvres in a series of state caucuses and primaries, the threat of the undemocratic 'superdelegate' system, and with the corporate media and "progressive" Democratic figures leading waves of blistering attacks.

Workers' party

Working-class people need our own party, independent of corporate money and power - that fights alongside our movements rather than against them.

I think Bernie should [run as an independent socialist, as I have](#), and use his campaign to launch a new mass party for working people, instead of running inside a corporate party whose leadership is determined to stop him at all costs.

Bernie has unfortunately made his decision and is running in the Democratic primary. But it is not acceptable that our political movement becomes imprisoned in this process.

The 2016 election had terrible political consequences. Prior to launching his first campaign four years ago, Sanders said he was considering running either as an independent or as a Democrat and that he wanted to hear what people thought.

This time he has bypassed that discussion and is making a fundamental mistake.

While it is certainly true that Bernie will gain an enormous platform in the Democratic primary, declaring now that he was running as an independent and using his campaign to lay the basis for a new party would create a massive earthquake in American politics.

In a column in the New York Times entitled "[Is America becoming a four-party state?](#)", Thomas Friedman attacks the new left around [self-described democratic socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#). But he correctly points out that "political parties across the democratic world are blowing up" and that there is the basis for a real left party as well as a far-right party.

If the Democratic establishment succeeds in once again blocking Bernie, he should continue his run as an independent candidate all the way to November 2020.

History doesn't offer an unlimited number of opportunities to build the kind of political force working people need, and we must learn from the past. If the Democratic leadership again succeeds in ramming through another status quo candidate, there is a risk Trump could win re-election in spite of his deep unpopularity and poor standing in the polls at present.

Certainly, an establishment candidate may also be capable of defeating Trump. Many such candidates [won in last autumn's midterm elections](#), which were essentially a referendum on the administration's right-wing agenda.

But we do not in any way accept that the bankrupt corporate politics of rival candidates Joe Biden or Kamala Harris are an asset in defeating the right. Nor do they represent the views or needs of working people - quite the opposite.

Popular policies

Sanders is currently the most popular politician in the country, and the working-class demands at the centre of his 2016 campaign - Medicare for all, free public college (university), and a federal \$15-an-hour minimum wage - have been thrust to the centre of American political discourse.

While long popular, these policies now have overwhelming support in the polls - massively increased as a result of Sanders and grassroots forces backing them. Many establishment Democratic Party politicians have had to at least pay lip service to them.

In 2016 and since, Sanders's self-identification as a "democratic socialist" has played a big role in creating a mass discussion about socialist ideas, a process primarily driven by the failure of capitalism and its inability to provide decent living standards for the working class or a future for young people.

As Sanders pointed out in his recent response to Trump's State of the Union address, in the US working people are making less than they were in 1973, adjusted for inflation, and 80% of Americans are now living pay cheque to pay cheque.

Now polls show a majority of millennials view socialism positively.

In recent months, Sanders joined Ocasio-Cortez in the call for a 'Green New Deal.' This enormously popular demand has the potential to rally millions of young and working people, in the face of a string of new reports emphasising the looming climate catastrophe.

When asked by CBS how his new campaign would be different, Sanders responded: "We're going to win." But as Socialist Alternative has emphasised, none of these working-class demands - nor Bernie Sanders himself - are at all acceptable to the ruling class.

Their ferocious opposition can only be met by a programme to break their power, based on public ownership of the major corporations under the democratic control of workers and communities.

The mixed economy models Bernie Sanders referred to in his launch are not the answer.

Sanders will face an uphill fight every step of the way. All sorts of manoeuvres and vicious tactics will be deployed if they are considered necessary to stop him from winning the Democratic primary.

The echo for Bernie's call in 2016 for a "political revolution against the billionaire class" caught the Democratic establishment and ruling class by surprise. Entirely out of touch, they expected him to be totally marginalised.

Socialist Alternative was one of very few organisations which recognised the potential to build the working-class politics Sanders represented. But this time, if Bernie's campaign gains momentum, he will face a more immediate and decisive pushback from the elite.

What will really be needed to win our demands and defeat the coming onslaught of the ruling class against Sanders is a broad, independent campaign of millions of working-class people, with grassroots democratic structures, independent of the Democratic Party, and aimed at mobilising the strongest possible force.

As a city council member in Seattle, I have fought alongside social movements and trade unions to help [win a \\$15-an-hour minimum wage](#), millions of dollars for affordable housing, and a series of landmark renters' rights victories.

Democratic establishment

All of these gains were won in spite of the fierce opposition of the Democratic establishment, which has long run Seattle City Hall. Socialist Alternative has been the backbone of these progressive victories.

Even the most well-meaning of the Democratic Party council members bow to huge pressures from big business and the leadership of their own party, as we saw again with their betrayal of working people in [capitulating on Seattle's Amazon Tax last spring](#).

Rather than wait and see what's in store in the Democratic primary, let's start now. Let's begin building independent grassroots campaigns in our communities and workplaces, introduce resolutions in our unions to support Bernie's campaign, and launch student groups on our campuses. Let's use this historic moment to launch an all-out working-class fightback.

To really defeat the right, and win the struggle for a society based on the needs of working-class people and a sustainable environment, we need to fight for a socialist alternative. So I hope you will consider joining the Socialists.

With the political establishment furious over the Amazon Tax and other progressive struggles, we will face a huge battle this year over who runs Seattle - Amazon and big business, or working people - so please give your full support to our re-election campaign!

- [See full article at socialistalternative.org](http://socialistalternative.org)
 - [Join the Socialist Party today at socialistparty.org.uk/join](http://socialistparty.org.uk/join)
 - [Support Kshama's re-election campaign for Seattle City Council kshamasawant.org](http://kshamasawant.org)
-

Kirklees: Labour and Green councillors refuse to fight the cuts

Cormac Kelly, Huddersfield Socialist Party

Kirklees Council's finance director, Eammon Croston, told a public meeting on 22 January that it plans £10.9 million of cuts this financial year.

More cuts will follow between 2020 and 2022. And no one knows what is going to happen after that.

Kirklees is a working-class area including Huddersfield, Dewsbury, Batley and surrounding areas in West Yorkshire. It has four Labour MPs, and Labour narrowly controls the district council.

The council claims it is going to spend more on adult learning. Also on child protection, following the recent conviction of the Huddersfield grooming gang. It is not clear if this is new money, or where exactly it will come from.

Socialist Party members challenged Kirklees councillors. We called on them to use reserves and prudential borrowing powers to stop the cuts, while building a campaign to win the money back from Westminster.

At the time of its last accounts in April, Kirklees had useable reserves of £185 million.

Instead, their policy is that reserves will be increased after 2018! Shabir Pandor, Labour leader of the council, claimed reserves would run out in a few weeks if the council was not careful! The leader of the Green group also argued strongly that reserves mustn't be touched.

After all, as councillors pointed out, there might be a snow storm leading to gritting, or someone might dump dangerous chemicals and then clear off. £185 million is a lot for gritting and chemical removal.

The Tory group leader reported the council's "cheap" bins contract with Suez is up for renegotiation, and it would cost a lot more for a new contract. The increased cost - doled out not to bin workers, but to fat cats at Suez - would have to come from reserves!

With the Socialist Party playing a leading role, the mass [campaign to save Huddersfield Royal Infirmary's A&E has pushed back the NHS cutters](#). Meanwhile, the Labour administration, backed by the other parties, has avoided pressure with '[salami slicing' tactics of cutting here and there](#).

Socialist Party member Mike Forster is standing in this year's local elections, on a platform of ending all cuts and fighting for the money we need, appearing on the ballot paper as Socialist Alternative.

Leicester: cuts passed in record time - use the £100m reserves!

Tom Barker, Leicester Socialist Party

In less than 30 minutes, Leicester's Labour city council voted through a series of massive cuts to local spending on 20 February - destroying lives in record time.

From 2010 to 2020, the city council's cuts will have totalled 62% of its budget, excluding social services.

Leicester Socialist Party helped organise a lobby of the budget-setting meeting, where we called on the council to instead use reserves and borrowing powers to launch a fightback against all cuts.

[Leicester Socialist Party is contesting May's mayoral and council elections](#), on a platform of using the city's reserves of over £100 million to set a legal no-cuts budget.

This would buy time to build a mass movement of Leicester trade unions and residents, and put pressure on a very weak government to give us more money.

Worcestershire: save the nine libraries

Ruthie McNally, Worcester Socialist Party

The local library in St Johns, Worcester, is under threat of job losses, shorter hours and possible closure, [along with another eight across Worcestershire](#).

On 12 February, the Socialist Party held a public meeting in a full room in the library. The speaker pointed out it isn't just libraries under threat, but all county services, with the Tory administration looking to 'save' millions over the next few years.

A lot of people spoke in the discussion and were very keen to help. We arranged a planning meeting to really kickstart a campaign of action.

E-subscribe to the Socialist today!

Chris Newby, The Socialist national sales organiser

The Socialist Party is launching an e-reader version of the Socialist newspaper.

In this age of capitalist crisis and austerity, we want as many people as possible to have access to the clear analysis in the Socialist, the socialist programme we put forward, and how we can build the struggle for a socialist alternative.

We regularly report on the struggles of workers and campaigners in Britain and around the world - by people who are actively involved in the struggles, whether it's the [battle of the Birmingham care workers](#) or the [mass strike movement in Sudan](#). Where else can you get this sort of coverage and analysis?

And the Socialist doesn't just describe what's wrong with capitalism. It provides a clear strategy for how the working class can get rid of capitalism and replace it with a socialist society. So it is vital we get the Socialist into the hands of as many people as possible.

New subscribers can take out an e-subscription at £2.50 a month. We are asking existing subscribers of the Socialist who want to read it on their e-reader to continue their subscription at the current rate as a solidarity price.

It is also vital all our members and supporters still take supplies of the Socialist to sell on local activity, or to colleagues, friends, neighbours or classmates.

Socialist Party members can get supplies of the Socialist from their local meetings.

If you are not able to get to a meeting, let us know - we will still post the Socialist so you can help increase our sales and reach.

- [Subscribe today at socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe](http://socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe)
-

Tommy Robinson BBC demo: socialist fightback needed to undermine far right

Paul Gerrard, Salford Socialist Party

Supporters of Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, AKA 'Tommy Robinson', gathered at the BBC's Media City studios in Salford to protest against Panorama's documentary on his far-right activities on Saturday 23 February.

The BBC had planned an exposé of Robinson, believing an aggrieved associate of his could be trusted to gain them access. But she passed BBC footage to Robinson, who made his own film entitled 'Panodrama' to embarrass the BBC. The demonstration displayed this on a giant screen - though a poor-quality link made much of it unviewable.

Many trade unionists would not see the point in [defending the establishment media](#), whose bosses routinely ignore major demonstrations, and whose well-heeled presenters interrupt and harass left activists and Corbynista MPs.

But socialists do defend BBC workers in media unions who are trying to do their jobs, and who face harassment by supporters of the far right.

A joint Media City workforce statement from the National Union of Journalists and technicians' union Bectu, issued in advance of the demo, denounced the intimidation, threats and violence of the far right, especially targeting photojournalists.

It also rightly encouraged members not covering the event to attend the counter-demonstration.

The Robinson crowd included EDL and Ukip supporters. Ukip's leader Gerard Batten spoke in support of Robinson, who he has taken on as an adviser to Ukip.

In the event, although much smaller than last summer's mobilisations in London, the pro-Robinson demo seriously outnumbered the counter-demo. This dangerous development makes it urgent for the trade unions to take charge and mobilise behind a clear programme to improve working-class lives.

Instead, [organising was left to 'Stand Up to Racism'](#), led by the Socialist Workers Party. As usual they provided plenty of speakers who told us we must oppose racism, but put forward no answers.

That was left to Socialist Party member Steve North, secretary of the Salford branch of public service union Unison.

Workers

"When was the last time you saw this lot stand on a picket line with workers? When was the last time you saw them standing up for nurseries, or a decent NHS?"

"Even for the people they pretend to support, the so-called white working class, they have no solutions.

"They don't fight for houses, they don't fight for jobs and services, they offer nothing but division."

In the vacuum left by Jeremy Corbyn and the trade union leaders failing to lead a fight to end Tory and Blairite austerity, the far right is trying to regroup.

The Socialist Party calls on Corbyn and the union tops to build for urgent mass action to force a general election, for a Corbyn-led government with socialist policies, which could decisively undermine the far right.

Nottingham Labour Corbyn rally: Independents out - Blairites out!

Nathan Sharpe, Nottingham Socialist Party

Nottingham has two MPs in the [pro-austerity Independent Group](#). Chris Leslie, previously Labour, and Anna Soubry, previously Tory.

The Labour Party in Soubry's constituency, Broxtowe, called a rally in Beeston with hundreds attending on 22 February.

Soubry won the seat from New Labour in 2010, and held it with a slim majority of 863 in 2017.

Broxtowe Labour's parliamentary candidate, Greg Marshall, correctly called on Soubry to "do the right thing and call a by-election."

But most of the parliamentary speakers talked about how "saddened", "shocked" and "disappointed" they were at seeing MPs who had consistently voted for cuts leave Labour.

Nottingham Socialist Party thinks it should be "cheers not tears!" This is no time for timidity. But there was no call from the platform for [mandatory reselection to boot out the rest of the Blairites](#).

Jeremy Corbyn's closing speech talked about "class lines" and rightly said "the environment is a class issue."

On the school strikes against climate change, he thanked students "for educating all of us that day."

Corbyn promised a Labour government would scrap tuition fees, but made no call for action. However, the [enthusiasm for this pledge in the 2017 snap election](#), and the [recent climate strikes](#), show the potential for building a mass student movement to fight for free education.

We sold 14 copies of the Socialist, and chatted with many people about our ideas.

PCS union branch opposes cuts to women's services

Helen Pattison, East London Socialist Party

The [Women's Lives Matter campaign](#), which fights cuts to women's services, was invited to speak at the annual general meeting of the East London Metropolitan Police branch of civil servants' union PCS, representing civilian staff.

Their members work with people escaping domestic violence. They can see austerity and government policy have put women in a worse position.

I spoke about cuts to domestic violence services in Newham. The borough has the highest level of homelessness in London, and one refuge turned away 46 women in a year.

It definitely clicked with union members. One member linked it to [the roll-out of Universal Credit](#), which increases the power of abusers to exert financial control over partners with just one payment per household.

A PCS member will address the next Women's Lives Matter protest organised by East London Socialist Party. Friday 8 March at 6.30pm, outside the Old Town Hall, 29 The Broadway, Stratford E15 4BQ.

International Women's Day meetings & other events

Just some of the events fighting for women's liberation, and an end to domestic violence service cuts, austerity and capitalism, with the Socialist Party and [the Women's Lives Matter campaign...](#)

London

Date and time: Friday 8th March, 12 noon

International women's day protest as part of the Women's Lives Matter day of action

Protest: Stop cuts to domestic violence services

Venue: assemble at Parliament Square

East London

Date and time: Friday 8th March, 6:30pm

Protest: Newham against cuts to domestic violence services

Venue: outside Stratford town hall, London

Date and time: Thursday 7th March, 7.30 to 9pm

Event: Socialist Party public meeting. International Women's Day and the struggle for women's liberation

Venue: Sylvia's Corner, 97 Aldworth Road, Stratford, London E15 4DN

Hackney:

Date and time: 7.30pm, Wednesday 13 March

Event: Socialist Party public meeting on Women's Lives Matter

Speaker: Julia Leonard, activist with Campaign Against Domestic Violence

Venue: Cafe Z Bar, 58 Stoke Newington High Street, London N16

Haringey

Date and time: 5:30pm, Friday 8th March

Event: Protest as part of WLM day of action

Place: Haringey civic centre

Waltham Forest

Date and time: 6:30pm, Friday 8th March

Event: Protest as part of WLM day of action

Place: Walthamstow town square

Date and time: 7.30pm, Thursday 7 March

Event: Socialist Party public meeting on Women's Lives Matter

Venue: William Morris Community Centre, Greenleaf Road, London E17

East Midlands

Leicester

Date and time: Saturday 16 March, 2.30pm

Event: Public meeting - Women's Lives Matter - fighting for a no-cuts budget

Venue: The Phoenix

Speakers: Amy Cousens, WLM, and Leicester mayoral candidate Steve Score

North West

Liverpool

Date and time: Tuesday 5 March, 7.30pm

Event: Socialist Party public meeting - International women's day - Women's Lives Matter

Venue: Casa pub (downstairs), 29 Hope Street, Liverpool L1 9BQ

Manchester

Date and time: 8 March, 5.30pm

Event: protest

Venue: Outside Central Library, St Peters Square, Manchester M2 5PD

Warrington

Date and time: Wednesday 6 March, 7.30pm

Event: Socialist Party public meeting

Venue: Lounge Room, Bold Street Methodist Mission, Palmyra Square North, Warrington

Wirral

Date and time: Thursday 7 March, 7.30pm

Event: Socialist Party public meeting

Venue: Stork Hotel, 41 Price Street, Birkenhead CH41 6JN

South West

Bristol North

Date and time: Tuesday 12 March 2019, 7.30pm

Event: Socialist Party public meeting - Fighting women's oppression today

Venue: Malcolm X Centre (small building), 141 City Road, Bristol BS2 8YH

Call/text 07986 951527 for more info

Bristol South

Date and time: Thursday 14 March 2019, 7.45pm

Event: Socialist Party public meeting - Fighting women's oppression today

Venue: Steam Crane, 4-6 North Street, BS3 1HT

Call/text 07986 951527 for more info

Southern

Southampton

Date and time: Thursday 7 March, 7.30pm

Event: Socialist Party public meeting

Venue: University of Southampton, Avenue Campus Room 1011

Wales

Cardiff

Date and time: Thursday 7 March, 7.00 pm

Event: Socialist Party public meeting - "Celebrating International Women's Day by organising the fightback"

Venue: Rummer Tavern, (opposite Cardiff Castle)

Speakers: Julia Leonard (Women's Lives Matter) and Beth Webster (reporting from the general strike in Spain for women's rights)

West Midlands

Birmingham

Date and time: Wednesday 6 March at 6.30-8.30pm

Event: Socialist Party public meeting

Speakers include: Birmingham Homecare striker and Birmingham bins striker

Venue: The Victoria, 48 John Bright Street, Birmingham B1 1BN

Yorkshire

Barnsley

Date and time: 8 March, 5.30-6.30pm

Event: Women's Lives Matter vigil

Venue: Barnsley Town Hall

Huddersfield

Date and time: Thursday 7th March, 6pm

Event: Launch of Huddersfield Women's Lives Matter

Venue: Huddersfield University, Oastler building, Floor 7, Room 27. Creche facilities available

Leeds

Date and time: Friday 8 March, 12 noon

Event: Protest - walk out and join us!

Venue: Briggate

Wear red and make lots of noise!

Join the Women's Strike Assembly public meeting at 4.30pm

Sheffield

Date and time: Friday 8 March, 12 noon

Event: Protest

Venue: Outside Owen Building, Sheffield Hallam University

Date and time: Tuesday 12 March, 7pm

Event: Women's Lives Matter public meeting

Venue: Central United Reform Church, Chapel Row, Norfolk Street, Sheffield

Speaker: Amy Cousens, Women's Lives Matter

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 26 February 2019 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Five years on - and still no justice for Zane

Paul Couchman, Staines Socialist Party

Parents, friends and supporters gathered outside Zane Gbangbola's home on 8 February, the fifth anniversary of the seven-year-old's tragic death during the terrible [Thames flooding of 2014](#).

Campaigners hold firm to the fact that [Zane was killed by hydrogen cyanide](#), probably pushed up from landfill during the floods. Three separate sweeps by Surrey Fire Service detected it on the night Zane died.

The commemoration was an emotional and moving event celebrating Zane's life by candlelight, with music and video, photos projected onto Zane's family home - and fireworks, which Zane loved.

The newly formed Truth About Zane committee took the fight for truth and justice to Westminster on 13 February.

Speakers included Lee Belsten, secretary of Surrey Fire Brigades Union, and the Socialist Party's Chris Baugh, assistant general secretary of civil service union PCS.

Local Tory MP Kwazi Kwarteng hosted the meeting. But he made it clear he would not challenge the coroner's verdict.

[Like Hillsborough](#), the campaign for truth and justice for Zane is proving to be a long haul. But his still-grieving parents have been joined by trade unions, the Socialist Party and others, calling for an independent panel inquiry.

- [More info at truthaboutzane.com](http://truthaboutzane.com)
-

Non-fiction: 'Unhealthy Profits: PFI in the NHS - its real costs and consequences'

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

Over the last 25 years and more, what is now Mid Yorkshire Unison branch, led by Socialist Party members, has been at the forefront of the fight against attacks on the NHS and its workforce.

This book is a product of that fight, written to chronicle their struggle, show what a fighting trade union leadership in the NHS can achieve, as well as provide a wealth of evidence around [the disaster that is the Private Finance Initiative](#) (PFI).

While PFI was first dreamt up by the Tories, it was implemented with gusto by Tony Blair's New Labour government. By using financing from the private sector, rather than cheaper public sector borrowing, these costs appeared off the state finances.

While the spiralling costs of PFI contracts have provided bumper profits for the companies involved it has drained NHS finances, leading to cuts, mergers, downgrading of services and attacks on the pay, terms and conditions of NHS staff.

The book is at its liveliest when discussing the battle against the PFI-financing of a new hospital, first at Pinderfields in Wakefield, and later additionally in Pontefract. And flowing from this, the fight to defend jobs and services across the Mid Yorkshire NHS trust, including the battle against down-banding of the pay of medical secretaries in 2013 and the victory against plans to transfer some staff into a 'wholly owned subsidiary' last year.

Reading some of these accounts you sometimes want more detail of these struggles, which can be found in back issues of the Socialist.

One example of the problems caused directly by the new PFI hospital projects was at Pontefract. The new hospital opened in 2010 with inadequate rest facilities and staff told that their departmental fridges and kettles couldn't be brought in because they were 'health and safety risks'!

The book chronicles the reluctance of most local Labour politicians to rock the boat against the PFI proposals in Wakefield. Therefore it's welcome to hear from shadow chancellor John McDonnell that a future Labour government would seek to bring PFI contracts back in-house.

While this proposal hasn't been developed further, the final chapter of the book explores how this could possibly be done, coming down in favour of measures that would renationalise those contracts, suggesting this could be done via an act of parliament which could also decide on compensation. (The Socialist Party argues that compensation should be paid only on the basis of proven need - with none paid to the fat cats who made big money from PFI deals.)

But this is posed in a largely legalistic framework which doesn't go beyond the immediate issue of the PFI projects. But the question of public ownership of the banks seems to be posed as well, considering the Mid Yorkshire PFI contract was previously largely owned by RBS and now by an offshore arm of HSBC.

But linked to this is the question of mobilising throughout the trade union movement to make this a reality which, unfortunately, is not discussed - although undoubtedly Mid Yorkshire Unison will be at the forefront of taking this forward.

Nonetheless, this is a useful book for any NHS campaigner or trade unionist, particularly those fighting against the consequences of their own local PFI scheme.

Mid Yorkshire Unison branch should be commended for producing this resource.

Art exhibition: 'Unobtania' - a body of work by Peter Robson

A prodigal and returning north east son was warmly embraced in North Tyneside on 7 February. [Artist Peter Robson](#)'s recent return to his home region has reconnected him with a social landscape which shapes his work and brought him into activity with North Tyneside Socialist Party.

Imaginative and powerful, invoking themes familiar to working-class people anywhere, Peter's art challenges viewers with a bombardment of vivid colours and life-like images, but offers uncomplicated content matter.

There's an implied and omnipresent reference to the military industrial complex and horrors of war in many pieces. All are vivid, and offer sprawling views of larger-than-life protagonist subjects, like artillery, boots, and parachutes.

The evening exhibition preview at The Exchange in North Shields saw over 50 people enter throughout the night, with Peter on stage to give an explanation to the audience about his work.

County Durham singer-songwriter Steve Pledger provided distinctive left and socialist sounds which the audience revelled in and which complemented Peter's subject matter.

Artists' Union England organiser Theresa Easton attended too, hailing the evening as "fabulous". Labour lefts, trade unionists, socialists, and the community generally benefited from accessible and working-class art which asks difficult questions of the status quo and capitalism's unending chaos and crises.

William Jarrett, North Tyneside Socialist Party

- Exhibition runs until 6 March
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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.

Forward march

The political [awakening of thousands of school students in Britain](#) and across the globe is very inspiring indeed. These young people need to be encouraged, not patronised.

They've had enough of the ruling elites offering them nothing but the gig economy, zero-hour contracts, low wages, sexism and racism. Not to mention inequality and division. They will gravitate to a democratic socialist society based on human solidarity and unity.

Let the ruling class tremble at the spectre of these young brigades on the march. The winds of change are blowing and the genie is out of the bottle. The future is theirs. Let them embrace it with our full support.

Bill Buchanan, Nottingham

No planet B

(By text) I've just arrived in Westminster (15 February), which is [gridlocked by thousands, maybe tens of thousands](#), stretching far as I can see - of striking school students, walking out against climate change. They're chanting "save our planet", marching on Downing Street.

Enormous support from passing workers... Huge anger and enthusiasm coming off in waves of deafening cheers... Homemade placards: "There is no planet B", "End fossil fuel subsidies" and many imploring the establishment to "wake up".

The Socialist Party is here in support of the school students' demands, to argue for an end to the system responsible for stealing their and our futures - the profit system, capitalism - and the necessity of workers' action as the only force capable of creating the alternative, socialism.

James Ivens, East London

Defectors Ltd

The [Independent Group of Labour \(and now Tory\) MPs](#) is backed up by a company called Gemini A Ltd, which was registered at Companies House on 16 January this year.

I used to work with a company that helped companies set up with Companies House. It takes approximately a fortnight and that will be its incorporated date, then usually two to three working days to add a director to that company. Gavin Shuker MP is the listed director.

So, considering those timescales, it would've been around Christmas when the forms were originally filed, so considering that the Labour defectors are stating Corbyn's openness to a deal over Brexit, and the latest slurs of antisemitism in the Labour Party, both of these happened after the forms would've been filed.

Kind of shows they had this intention to break away all along!

Matt Hirst, Huddersfield

- Instead of registering as a political party, the Independent Group, as a private company, doesn't have to declare its financial backers - editors.
-

No regrets

It says a lot about the politics of Labour's backstabbers in the Independent Group having whole-heartedly embraced the three Tory MP defectors.

One of the three is Anna Soubry, who when quizzed by reporters about having any regrets over implementing austerity said: "I believe we did the right thing in the coalition government in particular," and that the coalition did "a marvellous job". "I think the things we did to the economy were absolutely necessary at the time, I don't have a problem with that," she added.

By their friends shall ye know them!

Simon Carter, East London

Pale riders

Multi-millionaire Tony Blair once had a vice-like grip on the Labour Party. Internal democracy was destroyed. Labour's socialist objective was erased from the constitution, an orgy of privatisation followed, and

a vicious imperialist war against Iraq led to thousands of civilians losing their lives.

To have the support of seven traitors is not all that magnificent in comparison. To read the Sun and the Daily Mail you would think this was the death of the Labour Party. On the contrary, to coin a phrase, 'better out than in'.

And any socialist would curl up and die of shame to be supported by the right-wing press and fawned over by the BBC.

The honourable course would be to stand for re-election and see if the voters really want these defectors. But they are not the people for honourable courses.

Chuka Umunna's volte-face on the issue of antisemitism is a case in point. He said three years ago there was no evidence of antisemitism in Labour but now chimes in happily with the gutter press chorus of anti-socialism.

Derek McMillan, East Sussex

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!

Audio version of this document

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

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/28760>