

Anger after violent youth deaths - Communities need public services not cuts

Helen Pattison, London Socialist Party

The Good Morning Britain weatherman made headlines with his passionate on-air interjection to the debate about the tragic rise in knife crime and resulting deaths. Over the years, the Socialist has reported from often emotional meetings of communities in response to violence on the streets.

So far this year, ten teenagers have already lost their lives in London as a result of knife crime. In response to these tragedies, people are rightly demanding action to keep communities safe. Theresa May has received a backlash for bluntly saying there is no link between police budget cuts and rising violence.

It is understandable, particularly with the growing number of young people who have lost their lives this year to violent crime, that working-class people want to see immediate measures to keep their communities safe. Some are calling for extra police on the streets in the hope of discouraging crime.

But measures like these can have a contradictory impact - sometimes making whole communities feeling criminalised rather than protected - especially with police powers like 'stop and search' which disproportionately target black people.

Last year, we said in the Socialist: "Some poor people can, in desperation, turn to crime and drugs to make a living. Decent jobs, housing and benefits can combat that. Young people who, when they think about the future, feel confidence that they will have a good home, job, pay and security for themselves and their family, don't tend to risk throwing such a future away by embarking on a life of crime."

But young people haven't just seen their opportunities at a decent future taken away by austerity and cuts. They have also seen youth centres closed, which in the past were community hubs and places where young people could find support.

We have seen schools privatised, handed over to academy chains, and now the numbers of students being expelled and excluded is on the rise. Staff in education have said they need resources to support students who are struggling.

But school funding has also been slashed and Socialist Students members report that schools feel like exam factories, with extracurricular activities like school plays being some of the first areas to face cuts.

Rather than offering young people a future of poverty, desperation and even potentially crime, we want to fight to reverse these cuts, to bring back youth clubs and support services that can play a role offering young people a positive future.

Austerity is the message that profits, capitalism and this system are more important than the services we all rely on and the lives of working-class young people. That's why we need to fight for a socialist alternative.

Weak Tories must go. General election now!

Iain Dalton, Socialist Party national committee

Yet again, another outsourcing company faces collapse. The latest one is Interserve.

It's been just over a year since construction giant Carillion's collapse. And we are still picking up the debts, estimated at over £150 million. One third of this - £50 million - will be scooped by accountants PwC as 'special manager' in the winding-up process, despite PwC having been an adviser to Carillion!

It's yet another burden heaped upon the shoulders of working-class people after years of rip-off 'private finance initiative' privatisations by successive governments.

On top of this, we have also endured savage austerity cuts to public services, the indignities of Universal Credit, low pay, and all the other miseries of decaying capitalism.

This is the backdrop to the 'meaningful vote' on Brexit taking place in parliament as the Socialist goes to print, which seems set to plunge the Tories into even more chaos.

Capitalist journal the Economist commented: "As so often, Theresa May is in trouble. The prime minister is barely in control of her cabinet, let alone her MPs or her party... She is set to lose a second vote on her Brexit deal... and be forced to seek an extension of the 29 March deadline."

But we can't afford to just wait for the Tories to implode over Brexit, they need to be driven out of power before they do more damage to our communities.

It is this opportunity to lead a struggle against all the misery imposed by a decade of austerity that lies before Jeremy Corbyn now. But to take up this mantle, he needs urgently to end his attempts to placate the defenders of these policies within his own party, the Blairites.

Workers' struggles

It's Blairite-run councils like Birmingham that have been doing the Tories' dirty-work, provoking strikes by bin workers and home care workers.

Corbyn should be standing shoulder to shoulder with these workers - fighting back against pay cuts and austerity and with those facing threats to their jobs such as at Honda Swindon, where the trade unions have now called a demonstration to defend jobs.

On a national scale, along with the trade union leaders, Corbyn should be mobilising the working class to topple this government and force a general election.

Such an election would give the opportunity to come out fighting, with an alternative vision to the Tories' endless austerity, and to make the socialist case for a Brexit that puts the working class, not the interests of the bosses, first.

Them & Us

Billionaire exodus to tax havens

A third of British billionaires have moved to tax havens in the last ten years, between them avoiding billions of pounds of tax.

They include Britain's wealthiest man, Ineos boss Jim Ratcliffe, who held workers and the community at Grangemouth oil refinery to ransom in 2013 - forcing them to agree to a draconian package of cuts to their terms and conditions or face the plants closure.

According to the Times, British citizens in tax havens and their companies have made £5.5 million in political donations since 2009 - with the bulk of that going to their representatives and big business lackeys in the Tory party and Blairite wing of the Labour Party.

Tax havens include the beautiful sun-drenched Caribbean locations of the Bahamas, British Virgin Islands and Belize; for those who prefer the city life there is Monaco; or for billionaires who want to stay closer to home there is the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands where wealthy residents who rent or buy a £1.75 million property can qualify for a 1% tax on income.

The Socialist Party says tax the super-rich! Trade union action to end the cuts to the government departments responsible for chasing unpaid and avoided tax. For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate our economy. Run them under democratic working-class control and management, with compensation only paid on the basis of proven need.

History: Alice Wheeldon - an anti-war socialist persecuted by the state

Ian Hunter, Derby Socialist Party

One hundred years ago, Alice Wheeldon, from Derby in the east Midlands, died in the great influenza epidemic, aged 53. The events of Alice's life were not only important then, but are still relevant today. Alice's story ranks among the most shocking (and political) miscarriages of justice.

Alice Wheeldon had three daughters (Nellie, Hettie, and Winnie) and a son (William). Alice had a shop selling second-hand clothes in Derby and the family lived on the premises. The family was known as supportive towards young men opposed to conscription during World War One.

William was a conscientious objector and, in August 1916, he was sent to prison for a month for 'obstructing' the police who were moving five conscientious objectors from prison to the railway station. William later went on the run from the authorities.

Alice was a suffragist and socialist, active on the left of the local Independent Labour Party and in the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

World War One divided both socialists and suffragists. Being opposed to the war, Alice left the WSPU because of its support for conscription and, with two of her daughters and her son, she joined the No-Conscription Fellowship. Alice, Hettie and Winnie also joined the Women's Peace Army set up by Sylvia Pankhurst and Charlotte Despard advocating a negotiated peace.

The family unsurprisingly attracted the attention of the authorities.

In December 1916, a man calling himself Alexander Gordon came to the Wheeldon home, claiming to be a conscientious objector on the run. Alice arranged for shelter for him at a nearby friend's house.

Gordon returned with Herbert Booth claiming to be an army deserter. Both were undercover agents working for PMS2, a section of MI5, and a treasonable plot had been concocted. Gordon told Alice that the work camps for conscientious objectors were guarded by dogs, and the two also told Alice that there were ways of getting conscientious objectors out of the country. Alice's son William was by this time on the run.

A few days later some packages of poison posted to the Wheeldon house were 'intercepted' by the authorities. It was claimed that the poisons were to be used to kill guard dogs at the work camps.

On 30 January 1917 four members of the Wheeldon family were arrested (Alice, Hettie, Winnie, and Alice's son-in-law Alfred Mason). The charges were eventually escalated to conspiracy to murder the Liberal wartime prime minister David Lloyd George, and the Labour cabinet minister Arthur Henderson.

The initial hearing was held at the Derby Guildhall. This was attended by the attorney general F E Smith, the MP for Liverpool Walton formerly in charge of censorship and pro-war propaganda.

Smith ordered the trial to be held in London at the Old Bailey. There was much public interest as the trial began on 6 March 1917. As the trial began Smith, who was prosecuting, described the accused as "...a gang of desperate persons poisoned by revolutionary doctrines and possessed of complete and unreasonable contempt for their country."

A Sunday Pictorial headline ran, "Sensation in Derby conspiracy case - poison darts for Premier!". This was a reference to the claim by the prosecution that poisoned darts were to be fired at Lloyd George, while he was playing golf, in an attempt to assassinate him. The government was eager to disgrace the anti-war movement.

The prosecution evidence was flimsy and Smith refused to have Gordon called as a witness, or have his true name revealed, or give his whereabouts. Therefore Gordon could not be questioned or cross-examined by the defence counsel in court.

Three of the four accused were found guilty. Alice Wheeldon was given ten years penal servitude and sent to Aylesbury prison, where she went on hunger strike and was later moved on to Holloway prison. Alfred Mason (son-in-law) was given seven years and Winnie Mason received five years. The jury asked for leniency for the youngest two on account of their ages. Hettie was found not guilty.

Three days after the conviction, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers union published an open letter to the Home Secretary demanding that the police spies involved be put in the witness box to see if there might be fresh evidence. The request was refused.

So who was Alexander Gordon? His real name was William Rickard and he was employed by MI5 two years after his release from Broadmoor Prison Mental Hospital. He was a convicted blackmailer and had twice been declared 'criminally insane'.

Dr Nicholas Hiley of Kent University has researched the case and says that Rickard was an 'unbalanced fantasist' and 'spectacularly unreliable'. He was from a section of MI5 under threat of closure and so a plot was fabricated. MI5 records released 80 years later suggest evidence of entrapment and false statements.

All of these events must be seen against the background of World War One. By 1916-17 there had been a huge loss of life and the government introduced compulsory military conscription. The number of conscientious objectors increased during the war and there was a growth of anti-war feeling. MI5 focused on political opposition to the war with agents everywhere and surveillance of pacifists, Marxists, socialists, suffragists, feminists, agitators and trade unionists.

In addition the unfolding events of the revolution in Russia and fear of more widespread Bolshevik activity acted as a further spur to this surveillance activity.

At the end of December 1917 Alice Wheeldon was released from prison 'on licence' at the request of Lloyd George, who obviously had no wish to see Alice die a martyr. In very poor health she died just over a year later, a victim of the worldwide influenza epidemic.

At her funeral, Alice's son William covered the coffin with a red flag. William joined the Communist Party in 1920, emigrated to the Soviet Union in 1921 and became a Soviet citizen in 1926. On Christmas Day 1937 he was shot during Stalinist purges as a suspected supporter of Trotsky.

In 2013, following a local campaign and renewed interest in the case, Derby city council and Derby Civic Society erected a blue plaque as a memorial to Alice at the site of her home. It states: 'Alice Wheeldon, 1866-1919, Anti-war activist socialist and suffragist lived here behindher shop'.

It might also have said: 'Suffered injustice and persecution for her views at the hands of the British state'.

The Socialist Inbox

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, phone 020 8988 8771 or email editors@socialistparty.org.uk.

We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Views of letter writers do not necessarily match those of the Socialist Party.

Militant support

The following letter was sent to the Guardian but not published.

I write in response to your article on Derek Hatton* (20 February), which unfortunately rehashes the usual lies and half-truths about the Militant-led Liverpool City Council in the 1980s.

The article claims that the actions of the council "resulted in a loss of trust with council workers and the public". This is simply not true.

Your report should have mentioned that the public continued to vote for that Militant-led Labour council despite attacks from Labour's leadership and it was only unelected judges who removed them from office.

Council workers also continued to support the councillors after the courts removed them from office and imposed massive surcharges. This meant that the councillors all faced huge fines. The labour movement raised the money collectively to pay the fines.

I was privileged to accompany Tony Mulhearn, the leader of the District Labour Party and one of the surcharged councillors, in meetings organised with the council workforce and I still remember the Liverpool bin workers who all agreed to have an attachment of earnings on their own pay packets to help pay off the surcharge. After filling in the forms, they lined up to shake Tony's hand and wish him all the best for the future.

The loss of trust in the Labour Party by voters was not with Militant but rather the Kinnock-led national party, which despite mass expulsions of those on the left, was unable to gain power for a further 12 years, leaving voters at the mercy of the Tories.

Mike Whale, Hull

- Derek Hatton was the former deputy leader of Liverpool council expelled by Neil Kinnock's Labour Party. He was recently readmitted to Labour after 34 years only to be suspended two days later over sending an allegedly antisemitic tweet in 2012.
-

The following letter was sent to the Liverpool Echo.

False allegations

The Labour MPs who have resigned should now be subject to by-elections (as should the Tories). They were elected as Labour candidates in 2017 on the manifesto of the Labour Party. The electorate who voted Labour voted on the manifesto put forward by Corbyn on behalf of that party.

Those policies saw a huge growth in Labour's ranks to over 550,000 - making it the biggest political party in western Europe. The truth is this massive influx of new members was because of the socialist policies advocated by Corbyn.

The reasonable demands for a living wage of at least £10 an hour, the scrapping of tuition fees and a decent living grant for students, a mass council house building programme to alleviate the chronic shortage of

affordable housing in this country, an end to PFI in the NHS and the outsourcing and privatising of services, are what millions of people would vote for after so many years of devastating cuts. A transfer of wealth in favour of workers and their families needs to begin.

Workers and their families want an end to austerity and the growth in Labour's ranks reflects this. That's why all those who oppose Corbyn and the policies he represents are raising false allegations of bullying and antisemitism, backed up by the Tory media, as a smokescreen for their real intention which is to prevent the election of a Corbyn-led government committed to ending austerity.

Frank Bowen, Liverpool

Opportunist leeches

As the newly formed party of careerists, austerity supporters, backstabbing bunch of low-lifers with no principles, vision, compassion, other than looking after themselves, start to attract more of their ilk, they need to think what most ordinary people think of them back in their constituencies.

Most ordinary people see them for the traitors they really are. Opportunistic leeches really is a nice name for these MPs who should now be made to stand for election in their respective areas.

Cometh the hour, cometh the coward! 'I'm alright Jack f... everybody else' has been the motto of these Labour Party jumpers for years. Corbyn should have got rid of them ages ago. Now is the time to open up the Labour Party and welcome the socialists of the past, socialists of the present and socialists of the future, united as one voice, for the many not the few.

Jeremy Corbyn must act before it's too late. The warmonger Blair stole the Labour Party and filled it full of jelly back careerists. Steal it back or fall with it, the choice is yours, time now to do the right thing.

Rebel with a cause, Rotherham

Editorial of the Socialist issue 1033

Only socialist planning can save the planet: Build a mass working-class struggle to achieve it!

On Friday 15 March, tens of thousands of school and college students are expected to once again walk out of their classrooms to join the global strikes against climate change. The last strike, on 15 February, took place in unseasonal sunshine. This one is due to face winds of more than 50 miles an hour.

While no one individual weather event can be conclusively proven to be connected to climate change, the trend is clear. The increase in extreme weather is a result of global warming. This year, by 1 March, there had been 480 wildfires across Europe. Over the previous ten years the average number by the same date was just 21.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that there are only twelve years left to avoid devastating consequences. No wonder young people are taking to the streets to demand action to ensure a future for themselves and future generations.

Anger

Profound anger at the capitalist politicians fiddling while the planet burns is also fuelled by the miserable existence that capitalism is offering working-class young people. Schools are turned into exam factories, with

relentless pressure on students to achieve and - all too often - those that aren't expected to make the grade excluded in order to make the school's figures look good.

Even for those who successfully jump through all the hoops, and graduate from university, the reward at the end is often a lifetime of debt, low-paid precarious work and overpriced, insecure housing. For those who don't go to university, work is often even lower-paid and more precarious. Wages for 18 to 21 year-olds fell 16% in real terms from 2008 to 2016.

The services that, to some extent, existed to assist young people in the past have been destroyed by Tory austerity. Education Maintenance Allowance - a grant which provided up to £30 a week to 16 to 19 year-olds to help them stay in education - was abolished.

Youth services provided by local councils have been slashed, almost to the point of extinction. Over 140,000 places have been cut since 2010 and many councils now provide no youth clubs at all. Of course, the Tories make no reference to this slashing of youth support services when they discuss the causes of the increase in knife crime.

15 March protests

No wonder young people are angry and determined to demand a future - for the planet and for themselves. Socialists will be taking part in the 15 March protests calling for 'socialist change not climate change'.

In the 2017 snap general election, young people, inspired by Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity manifesto, overwhelmingly voted Labour. If only the votes of under-25 year-olds had been counted not a single Tory would have been elected!

Labour's 2017 election manifesto included important measures that, if implemented, would have improved the future of young people. These included a £10-an-hour minimum wage, mass council house building, and the abolition of tuition fees. To really give young people a decent future and, crucially, to take effective action against climate change would, however, require more thoroughgoing socialist measures.

Polluting giants

The giant corporations that dominate the economy are responsible for the bulk of carbon dioxide emissions. Since 1988, just 100 companies across the planet were responsible for 71% of all emissions. Up until 2010, only 90 companies were responsible for producing 63% of the cumulative emissions globally since the year 1751!

Individuals changing their behaviour cannot save the planet while these giant corporations continue to wreck the environment. Capitalism is a blind, unplanned system where the only driving force is the need to maximise profits.

IPCC report

The IPCC report estimates it would cost \$900 billion per year to implement the programme it says is needed. Measures it says are urgently needed include at least a fivefold increase in investment in low carbon technologies, such as wind power and solar, and in energy efficiency measures like building carbon neutral homes. The deployment of renewables will have to increase by up to 14 times. In addition, green transportation will have to be introduced, including electric cars. Massive reforestation must be started, since trees absorb carbon dioxide.

There is no prospect of the major banks and corporations that dominate the economy, in Britain and globally, accepting a \$900 billion hit to their profits in order to take the action needed. On the contrary, their urge to maximise their own companies' profits leads to them bending and breaking even the very limited regulations that exist, often with the connivance of the pro-capitalist governments that have introduced those regulations.

Look at the VW scandal in 2015. The world's second biggest vehicle manufacturer had systematically rigged its diesel emissions data. The EU took no action, pressured by governments to back their 'own' automotive

industry. No matter that thousands of people die directly as a result of this pollution. Look at the way the Tories in Britain have encouraged fracking, despite the threat to the environment and our drinking water, in pursuit of quick profits.

Of course, that does not prevent big companies using the environment as an excuse when it suits them. One of the reasons given for the threatened closure of the Honda plant in Swindon is the need to move to electric vehicles. The closure would lead to the devastating loss of 3,500 jobs at the plant, going up to 12,000 including workers including those who work in the supply chain.

Green jobs

The only solution is to take major industry out of private hands in order to enable the development of a democratic socialist plan of production. Jeremy Corbyn should immediately pledge that an incoming Labour government would prevent all job losses by nationalising Honda Swindon under democratic working-class control.

This would not mean having to continue to produce polluting petrol cars. On the contrary, an appeal should be made to the Honda workers to propose alternative, environmentally friendly production the plant could be turned to.

The possibilities for this were shown in the past when, in 1976, the Lucas Aerospace workers produced an alternative plan to show how their weapons manufacturing plant could be turned to making a wide variety of socially useful products, from electric wheelchairs to kidney dialysis machines.

Socialist planning

This is one small example of what would be possible on the basis of democratic socialism. If a Corbyn-led government was to nationalise the 120 major corporations and banks that dominate the economy - backed by the active mass support of the working-class majority - it would be possible to harness the enormous wealth, science and technique that exists in Britain. This could then be used not for the profits of a few, but in order to meet the needs of all - and to begin an effective struggle to save the planet.

It would be possible to immediately introduce measures to offer young people a decent future, such as a real living wage for all, a maximum working week of 35 hours with no loss of pay, and the right to secure housing.

This could be combined with immediate measures to help save the environment, including a major shift to renewable energy, free or very cheap public transport for all, the mass building of carbon-neutral, high-quality council house building, grants to allow homeowners to insulate and improve their homes for free, and more.

Global action

Of course, while an important beginning could be made in one country, to really tackle the danger of environmental catastrophe requires global action. However, a break with capitalism in one country leading to a serious plan to save the planet and meet peoples' needs, would create huge enthusiasm among working-class and young people globally.

The \$900 billion the IPCC says is necessary to limit global warming represents less than 2% of world economic output. It would be entirely possible, as part of a democratically organised socialist plan of production, to implement such spending without dislocating the economy or cutting across the other urgent needs of society.

To achieve this, however, requires a global socialist plan of production. Young people protesting for action on climate change understand that something fundamental needs to change and should join the struggle for socialism as the only alternative to planet-destroying capitalism.

Neither Tories or EU - only fighting trade unions and a Corbyn-led government can deliver workers' rights

Glenn Kelly, Socialist Party industrial organiser

The government's last ditch attempt to bribe enough Labour MPs to back Theresa May's Brexit deal has seemingly backfired - with only a few Blairites prepared to back her.

Not only have they rejected the £1.6 billion bribe for areas who voted Leave - describing it as "wholly inadequate" - but attempts to woo the unions have also been rejected.

While the government has said it will not reduce the EU workers' rights laws already enshrined in UK law, they have refused to give any guarantee that any future improvements will be implemented.

The first two casualties look set to be the directive on 'work-life balance', which guarantees workers paid parental leave for the first time, and the 'transparent and predictable working conditions directive'. which relates to rights for workers in precarious jobs. Both of these were due to come into force next year.

With UK workers already having some of the worst employment rights in Europe, any further fall behind will make the country's employees "the cheapest to hire and the easiest to fire" (as one union general secretary described it).

Trade Union Congress general secretary Frances O'Grady went further when she said that, as there were no legally binding commitments in the withdrawal agreement, "there was nothing to stop a future right-wing government tearing up the existing legalisation altogether".

The refusal of the government to give any guarantees of existing workers' rights - let alone future ones - will only add to the fears of many workers at the prospect of a Tory Brexit deal.

And the latest blacklisting revelations - how the Metropolitan Police's Special Branch helped the illegal blacklisting of trade unionists - further shows that the government can't be trusted to protect workers and our rights.

Workers' Brexit

The question posed for the Labour Party and the trade unions is how do they win a Brexit in the interest of workers? Unfortunately, while trade union leaders have talked tough, they have done little to seek to mobilise union members to force the government into a retreat and out of office.

Instead of launching a fight to win a general election to get rid of the Tories, and for a workers' Brexit - as Socialist Party members in the unions have been arguing for - the trade union leaders have reduced their role to mere commentators and passive onlookers at the parliamentary chaos.

Unfortunately, the trade union leaders see no role for their members and the working class in general in being able to influence and shape the outcome of the current government crisis.

They have refused to back up Jeremy Corbyn's call for a general election, with the demand for a mass demonstration that has the potential to unite both Leave and Remain voters in the fight against austerity. If then the government still refused to call an election, a mass demonstration could have been used to call for a 24-hour general strike to bring the government down.

With many, particularly manufacturing workers, fearing their employers fleeing the UK, this strategy could give confidence to all that there is an alternative to the shambles taking place in parliament.

The only defence against the bosses' attacks is to build independent, strong and fighting unions with a class-conscious membership, which links this to the idea of ending austerity, changing society and fighting for socialism.

- See also ['How the bosses' EU acts against workers and trade unions'](#)
-

PCS union elections: Huge support for Chris Baugh

Marion Lloyd, PCS national executive committee (personal capacity)

The PCS civil servants' union elects its assistant general secretary (AGS) every five years and its national executive committee annually. The ballot for these positions takes place 16 April to 19 May.

At the close of nominations, Socialist Party member and current AGS, Chris Baugh, had received 87 branch nominations. Socialist Party members Marion Lloyd and Dave Semple received nominations for re-election to the NEC.

All three will be standing on a platform which includes:

- Full support for the union's 2019 pay claim of 10% (£2,400 a year cash underpin) and a return to national bargaining on pay and conditions
- Full support for the pay ballot for strike action to support the claim, which takes place 18 March to 29 April
- Union officials to be accountable through periodic election
- All major decisions to be made through the elected lay structures
- Commitment to the removal of all barriers to equality at work, within the union and in society more generally
- Support for the election of a Corbyn-led Labour government, but with the right to support candidates who support us

Before his election as AGS in 2004, Chris Baugh was a leading rank-and-file left activist in the union for many years. He played a direct and major part in democratising the union and fighting the right wing.

Chris has successfully stood three times for re-election as AGS. He stands this time not only on his record as an activist but also on his achievements as AGS. These include green jobs and climate change, challenging discriminatory employment practices and helping to stabilise union finances following Tory attacks on check-off.

Chris is the Left Unity candidate in the AGS election. He faces a challenge from two other candidates, one a member of an ultra-left group and the other a non-Left Unity member and union full-time officer. The 87 nominations for Chris Baugh shows the widespread support he has among the union's lay activists.

They will fight for his re-election and that of the Democracy Alliance NEC slate.

Newark NSK strike: "Even Victorian workers got a day off each week. We're expected to have just one weekend off every three weeks"

24 Unite members in the G2 Finish and Grind department of Japanese company NSK have been on strike since 4 March. Pickets at the Newark factory, making super-precision machine bearings, explained the background to Jon Dale from Mansfield Socialist Party:

In 2016, management imposed a new contract just on this department. A strike was defeated, workers having to accept the contract or be out the door. Banked hours at basic rate replaced voluntary overtime at time and a half.

Within a year, management abused the new system, making split weekend working compulsory without consultation. The afternoon shift week now finishes on Friday at 11.40pm instead of 7.40pm, followed by a week of day shifts starting at 6am on Sunday. Some workers have up to an hour-long commute. Taking a day off at weekends is marked as absence, resulting in disciplinary procedures.

Breaks were cut from 50 to 35 minutes. The average working week is now 48 hours. Whether workers have families or not, whether they are young or older, everyone needs proper time away from work. Senior managers are never seen in the factory at weekends, but might be spotted at the golf course!

Picket line morale is high, although the other 500 workers on site are not in dispute and are still working. All production has to go through the G2 department. Non-stop hooting from passing traffic shows support.

NSK is owned by a Japanese corporation that made £323 million net profit in the last nine months of 2018.

- Send messages of support to andy.shaw@unitetheunion.org

Breaking news: Birmingham bin workers' strike suspended pending new deal

Birmingham bin workers in Unite and Unison local government unions have agreed a deal to end the ongoing dispute which is to be ratified by Birmingham council's cabinet on 15 March.

As previously reported, this is related to payments to other workers who worked during the dispute in 2017. There are other issues outstanding and strikes will continue if the cabinet backtracks.

Unite assistant general secretary Howard Beckett said: "For the first time there is a deal on the table which meets our members' expectations, it is now imperative that Birmingham council's cabinet signs up to the deal."

Birmingham Socialist Party

Workplace news in brief

Liverpool NHS strike

Over 40 cleaning, security and catering staff employed by the private company OCS, but based at the Liverpool Women's Hospital, took a second day of strike action on 11 March in support of their claim for pay parity with staff directly employed by the NHS.

These workers are among the lowest paid staff in the NHS, some of them lagging behind colleagues by as much as £2,000 a year! The strike is solid, and the public sector union, Unison, has organised picket rotas to involve as many strikers as possible.

The picket lines are lively, with pickets distributing leaflets to the public to explain their case, and attracting many hoots from passing motorists!

OCS are acting intransigently at present and refusing to budge, but it is doubtful that this can be maintained in the face of a protracted strike, and it is already known that the NHS authorities are far from happy about the dispute.

Roger Bannister, Liverpool Socialist Party

Woolwich walkout

Unite the Union members have voted to strike on the Woolwich ferry in south east London in a ballot which saw 100% of those taking part vote for industrial action.

The dispute centres around a restructuring of the service following the introduction of new hybrid boats. Workers have also complained of a culture of bullying.

Workers previously won a victory on the ferry against sexual harassment and bullying in 2017.

Council to blame

Hackney council in London is being blamed for four days of planned strikes by drivers and passenger escorts on school buses for disabled children in a dispute over payments for working split shifts.

Unite the Union's 33 members will stage four 24-hour strikes on 19 and 26 March and then on 2 and 4 April.

NSSN conference

National Shop Stewards Network conference - Saturday 6 July, 11am-4.30pm, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1R 4RL

Get all the latest union news from the National Shop Stewards Network at shopstewards.net

Tories out. Scrap Universal Credit. Fight for living wages and welfare!

David Maples, South West London Socialist Party

Universal Credit is hardly out of the news. The suffering and anxiety it has caused is immeasurable - so much so that even some Tory MPs have been forced to highlight problems with its implementation. So how did we end up with such a pernicious system?

In 2006, Lord Freud was asked by New Labour prime minister Tony Blair to review the UK's 'welfare-to-work' system. The Daily Telegraph said that Blair had been "impressed by his [Lord Freud's] role in raising finance for Eurotunnel and EuroDisney" while at merchant bank UBS.

Although initially an adviser to New Labour, in 2009 Freud joined the Conservative Party and, in 2010, he became a government minister with responsibility for 'welfare reform'.

Interviewed in 2012, he said his primary concerns were the "nooks and crannies" in the benefits system where people could "sit for long periods without ongoing scrutiny... all kinds of areas where people are able to have a lifestyle off (sic) benefits".

In other words, he had absolutely no interest in helping people out of poverty.

This warped view of life on benefits led to the inclusion in Universal Credit of conditionality and the minimum income floor.

This means that, as a condition of receiving Universal Credit, claimants can be required to increase their earnings. For many, the only option is therefore seeking to increase their hours of employment. But this can be extremely difficult. For example, think of a zero-hour contract worker, with an exclusivity clause limiting them to working for one employer. Under this system, they could essentially be required to look for extra hours and face sanctions if they fail to find them.

If, in desperation, they look to self-employment there still isn't a way out of this Orwellian nightmare. Because, after 24 months self-employment, a claimant can be deemed to be earning the national minimum wage for 35-hours a week - regardless of their actual earnings!

Universal Credit isn't really about 'welfare'. It's naked class warfare. Many of the staff administering Universal Credit are trade union members who loathe the system they work in. PCS union members report that up to 50% of calls they take are from angry, vulnerable and desperate claimants. They want the tools to be able to help, and the strike in Walsall and Wolverhampton Universal Credit sites is as much about this as about anything else.

Low pay in the civil service means that the PCS has estimated that substantial numbers of its members have been forced to use food banks, and many of those working on implementing Universal Credit are themselves able to claim it.

As the PCS has commented: "The government's arrogant refusal to listen to its own staff, experts, charities, those affected, and even its own MPs shows their aim is not to help people but to simply cut support from those who need it most."

Scandalously, in 2015 during the debate on the Welfare and Work Reform Act, which included lowering the benefit cap, acting Labour leader Harriet Harman whipped Labour MPs to abstain on the vote. Only 48 Labour MPs defied the whip and voted against the bill. Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell were among them.

But this shows the problem Corbyn now faces. Most of the pro-austerity MPs, who voted for these punishing anti-working-class measures, remain on Labour's benches. This shows limited support for Corbyn's anti-austerity programme within the Parliamentary Labour Party.

The benefits advice service 'Entitled To' calculated that, in 2017, 8.6 million families missed out on the benefit payments they were entitled to claim - to the tune of £20 billion. This has no doubt been exacerbated by the fact that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has cut almost 40,000 jobs since 2010, including thousands who worked in DWP Visiting, whose job it was to help the vulnerable claim benefits.

Despite the attempts of right-wing politicians and the capitalist media to blame poverty on the alleged failings of those who suffer it, unemployment and underemployment are inherent within any economy based on market competition. Overall they are the fault of capitalism, not individual workers.

New system

A new welfare system needs to take this as its starting point. It needs to form part of a programme to replace profit-driven jobs chaos with democratic socialist planning: jobs for all. The Blairites are all too happy to pander to Tory 'benefit scrounger' myths because they defend the capitalist system.

They seek to use such myths to divide and rule - pitting workers who don't currently have to rely on benefits against those who do.

But the truth is the only people who gain from this cruel and brutal benefits system are the employers. After all, the harsher the conditions experienced by those on benefits, the easier it is for employers demand workers accept rock-bottom wages.

A new welfare system must be based on a reasonable standard of living for all claimants. Pro-capitalist politicians may criticise elements of Universal Credit. But they don't criticise the generally derisory level of benefits, exacerbated by the Tories' four-year-long in-work benefits freeze, or the levels of poverty pay that force millions in work to claim benefits.

A new welfare system also has to have adequate administrative resources.

As of 2017, 4,000 DWP staff were employed to work on benefit fraud, compared with 500 HMRC staff investigating the tax affairs of high net worth individuals with assets over £10 million.

PCS is calling for an extra 5,000 staff to be employed and for Universal Credit to be scrapped and replaced.

Funding to advice bureaus, law centres and legal aid must be restored, so claimants can get help to receive their full entitlement.

Most urgently, Labour councils should use their existing financial powers to protect working-class people from losing money because of Universal Credit, ensuring no one is evicted, cold or hungry because of it.

Jeremy Corbyn should promise to reimburse councils which underwrite all Universal Credit losses as soon as a Labour government comes to power. He should call on all Labour councils to take these measures now.

Such an approach could make the system unworkable, hasten the downfall of the Tory government, and prove to working-class voters that Corbyn is serious about fighting for them.

"Cruelty, unfairness and downright dysfunctionality"

Karen Seymour, Mansfield Socialist Party

In my work as a welfare rights adviser in north east Derbyshire, I never cease to be appalled by the cruelty, unfairness and downright dysfunctionality of Universal Credit.

Universal Credit is even more of a nightmare if you happen to have a health condition. One of our regular clients who has mental health issues is absolutely terrified of being put on it, despite our reassurances. The stress is making him ill. He has heard the horror stories.

We've seen several cases of people being threatened with eviction because of delays to payments. We've seen vulnerable claimants risking serious debt because their rent is no longer paid directly to their landlord, and the 'extra money' is mistakenly spent. These are all problems the government was warned about time and again.

Sanctions and delays

Delays, randomly applied sanctions, and poor communication between departments in the DWP are all too common. The government has made a few measly concessions. This is to stop the milk from boiling over - to give the impression that the government's listening and, more to the point, to stop people from rebelling.

The Tories are still stubbornly insisting that most people will be better off with Universal Credit, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

This cruelty must stop! No amount of tinkering at the edges will make Universal Credit fair! Jeremy Corbyn must clearly pledge to scrap it should Labour win the next general election. I don't accept that Universal Credit has gone too far to be scrapped. Its replacement needs to have dignity, fairness and compassion for every claimant. No to inhumane sanctions and compulsion to look for non-existent jobs!

A campaign of benefits staff, who mostly loathe the system, claimants, trade unions and others must urgently be built. We also need a mass job creation programme, a £10-an-hour minimum wage and trade union rights for all.

Under capitalism, which cannot provide even the basics of life for millions, Britain's welfare state and, in particular, Universal Credit, has become a stick with which to beat people, instead of a system that assists and supports those who fall on hard times. It's also a warning to workers not to complain or question, otherwise this is what you can expect if you're unlucky enough to lose your job!

We deserve better than a welfare system that tries to browbeat us into submission.

Join the Socialist Party to campaign for change!

DWP workers demand a humane welfare system and the staff needed to administer it

Clare Wilkins and Dave Semple, PCS member and PCS National Executive Committee member (personal capacity)

There is serious discontent about how Universal Credit is being run. Cuts to staff have resulted in the DWP trying to roll out two new national benefits, Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment, with almost 40,000 fewer workers than in 2010. There has been an explosion of claimants falling through the cracks.

Universal Credit claimants are set to more than double over the next twelve months. More than a million extra claimants will be subject to the full force of Tory cuts, which is estimated to cost working families £2,300 a year, and which will have a major impact on those with illness and disabilities. Many could lose hundreds of pounds a month.

Workers fight back

Socialist Party members in civil servants' union PCS believe that the fightback by workers in the benefit system is intrinsically linked to the struggles of workers claiming benefits. Tory austerity has hit us all together. Union members in the DWP want to be able to deliver a universal social security system, a quality public service that ensures all those in need have enough to live.

In November 2018, the Tories announced a delay in moving claimants from existing benefits to Universal Credit as a result of negotiation and campaigning by the PCS union and other campaign groups.

In January 2019, the government stopped people in receipt of Severe Disability Premium being moved to Universal Credit after pressure from both the PCS and campaigners.

Hundreds of PCS members working as Disability Employment Advisers in Jobcentres had notified the union about the plight of these extremely vulnerable claimants. Socialists in PCS are fighting for everyone else to have their Severe Disability Premium reinstated and backdated.

The unions and the Trades Union Congress have failed to organise action against austerity. This has not gone unnoticed by the tens of thousands of union members in PCS or by millions of claimants.

A strike in several Universal Credit processing sites, with every possibility of growing into a national strike of Universal Credit workers, is an opportunity to demand changes that will help both DWP workers and claimants.

PCS and claimants' groups, including Unite Community and Disabled People Against Cuts need to work together. Over 10,000 DWP staff will themselves be Universal Credit claimants because of low pay and face income cuts.

UC workers striking back

Nick Hart and Josh Allerton, Wolverhampton Socialist Party

On 11-12 March, workers at DWP offices in Wolverhampton and Walsall struck over the excessive workloads being created by the introduction of Universal Credit.

The PCS civil service union is calling for an additional 5,000 jobs to be created nationwide to deal with the current backlog, and an end to the rampant use of short-term contracts.

Strong pickets

Socialist Party members were on the picket line with them. 15 strikers gathered outside the Wolverhampton office, in spite of senior management standing on the gate to tempt people in with promises of chocolate and pizza!

On the picket, there were reports of workers being forced to go back on the phones despite being signed off taking calls due to poor health (made worse by the unmanageable call volume in the first place!). One worker commented: "I've been in the sector for over 30 years and whenever the government tries to simplify anything, it ends up in a mess".

Meanwhile in Walsall over 20 turned out in what one activist described as the biggest turnout he'd seen on a picket in 15 years working there.

Members were looking forward to the prospect of more workplaces joining the action, and linking it up with the union's campaign for a living pay increase of 10% to combat the chronic low pay in the civil service.

The Socialist Party will continue to work to link up claimants with those workers on the other end of the phone lines to build a campaign to defeat this and the rest of the Tories' vicious attacks on the working class.

International Women's Day

Protests say stop cuts to save domestic violence services

London

To mark International Women's Day, the Socialist Party organised a protest outside parliament. We highlighted the impact of austerity on vital services for women in violent relationships.

In the run up to the day, we were invited to speak about the Women's Lives Matter campaign at a number of trade union meetings. Socialist Party members also raised the campaign in their trade union councils and other union meetings.

In the evening, we held actions outside Labour councils who had overseen huge cuts to local women's refuges. Some London boroughs, like Hillingdon and Harrow, have as little as six refuge beds.

And even in areas which have more - the suggested one bed for 10,000 residents - refuges can't cope with demand. One member of civil servants' union PCS said that if women are being turned away from services, then there aren't enough.

This was the first action supporters of Women's Lives Matter organised in London, but it was a great start.

Newham

Jeanette Dye offered this message of solidarity from Newham trade union council on International Women's Day:

"Defend domestic violence services! Domestic violence is a crime and a major problem affecting many women and families. It can have a negative effect on their children too, who experience domestic violence within the family.

"Domestic violence includes many aspects - psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, emotional abuse and so on. Domestic violence includes controlling behaviour and coercive behaviour. It affects all ages.

"The resources in Newham for domestic violence services have to be defended. Statistics show that council funding in Newham for women's refuges has more than halved from 2010 to 2017. And, in the same period, domestic and sexual violence cases heard by Newham's Marac safeguarding body has doubled.

"Newham Council had £519 million in useable reserves at the time of its last financial statement in March. If Newham Council mobilised local unions behind no-cuts budgets to demand more funding from central government, they could stop the cuts and replenish their reserves.

"We call on the Mayor of Newham, Rokhsana Fiaz, to set a real 'people's budget', one which uses reserves and borrowing to end austerity and builds a campaign for funding to provide all the jobs, homes and services we desperately need. Therefore, we ask Newham Council not to axe the funding for domestic violence services in the 2019-20 budget it cut on 18 February, but to increase the funding.

"Defend domestic violence services! Women's Lives Matter! International Women's Day in Newham!"

Hull

The city centre was quiet. Yet we'd hardly set up our colourful Socialist Party and International Women's Day posters on our campaign stall, before we were approached by women and other workers.

People eagerly filled in our petitions condemning cuts to domestic violence services and other austerity attacks

Two male street cleaning workers agreed that democratically elected workers' committees could run and plan workplaces far better than the bosses. The idea of socialism was met without the bat of an eyelid.

One young woman who had suffered domestic violence explained how she had lost her home to a violent partner, she just had to leave. I couldn't help notice the mental scar left by her domestic violence ordeal. She stood with pen in hand hesitating before signing our petition: "Oh I'll sign it, he'll never find out will he?"

Janet Gibson Hull Socialist Party

Bristol

Among the over 500 lively protesters, there was a race to read our leaflet - the only one on the demonstration.

For the first time in Bristol, International Women's Day was marked with a protest. Not the usual genteel event with the great and the good in city hall.

This demo had a clear political message. It was advertised for people to "speak out, resist, strike and refuse to work... it's about realising the power we already hold - it is our labour that keeps the world turning and the

profits flowing".

This political understanding obviously attracted a large mixed-gender crowd, who were very clear that a change to the society that we live in is essential, along with lots of support from passers-by.

The Socialist Party leaflet advertised two Bristol meetings about how we can fight women's oppression today. We have to fight for every improvement under capitalism. But we must not limit ourselves to what this rigged system is willing to concede. The socialist transformation of society is needed for true gender equality.

Sheila Caffrey Bristol Socialist Party

Leeds

The Leeds Women's Strike Assembly organised a lunchtime walkout and an evening meeting. Socialist Party members and campaigners for Women's Lives Matter participated, linking women's struggle to ending austerity and fighting for socialism. We also helped to organise the day's events.

Socialist Party member Amy Cousens spoke at the lunchtime rally from Women's Lives Matter. The crowd of 150 nodded and cheered in agreement with the fact that women cannot wait for a Jeremy Corbyn government but need action against austerity now. The University and College Union and others also spoke.

We marched, banging pots and pans, wearing red, shouting chants, and stopping traffic. People on their lunchbreaks joined us as we passed. They cheered us from the streets, taking leaflets faster than we could hand them out. Bus drivers, retail workers, carers and older people clapped, honked and gave us the thumbs up.

Security workers attempted to stop us entering the posh shopping centres, but we were unstoppable. Ten people bought copies of the Socialist and people liked our petitions against Universal Credit and cuts to domestic violence services. 50 people came to the evening meeting.

Leeds Socialist Party plans to renew our efforts in building Women's Lives Matter. We will speak at trade union and Labour Party meetings, hold our own public meeting, and build for a lobby this summer to demand the council reverse domestic violence service cuts.

Nina Brown Leeds Socialist Party

Birmingham

The Socialist Party celebrated the role of working-class socialist women who have led historic breakthroughs, such as Sylvia Pankhurst and Eleanor Marx, at our International Women's Day meeting. We discussed how fighting for socialism and women's liberation go hand in hand. The meeting was well attended by both women and men.

Lily Branchett, from Derby Socialist Party, Mandy Buckley, a senior steward for the striking home care workers in public sector union Unison, and Danny Kilgallon, a Unison steward for the bin workers on strike, all spoke.

Danny displayed solidarity towards the home care workers. He stressed the importance of working-class women and men standing united.

At Birmingham's first Reclaim the Night demonstration, the Socialist Party highlighted the people's outrage that the Blairite council is implementing reckless austerity against the home carers - who happen to be a mainly female workforce.

The public heard chants like "my body, my choice", "whose streets? Our streets!" and "say hey, ho, sexual violence has to go". Leaflets were distributed in abundance and people showed considerable interest in socialist ideas.

The Socialist Party calls for no cuts to domestic violence services, the right to choose when and whether to have children without suffering economic hardship, and an end to discrimination on grounds of gender, race, disability, sexuality, age and all other prejudice.

Only through socialism will we ever find true liberation. So I urge you all to join the Socialist Party today, if you haven't already, and be part of a movement to make a positive difference in the world.

Sana Ulfat Birmingham Socialist Party

Huddersfield

Women's Lives Matter was launched at Huddersfield University at a meeting with the Feminist Society. The Feminist Society explained that women bore the greatest brunt of austerity cuts - from Universal Credit to the closure of Sure Start centres. Huddersfield's female-only homeless shelter closed last year.

Domestic violence survivor Sophie gave a moving recollection of her struggle. She found few options for where to flee. Many were moved to tears and she received rapturous applause.

We circulated the Women's Lives Matter petition to pressure John McDonnell to guarantee a future Labour government will top-up reserves and underwrite borrowing that any Labour council uses to refuse to implement cuts.

The meeting wrapped up with an appeal for volunteers to form a campaign committee. An organising meeting will plan the next steps. The work has only just begun for this determined group of people.

Huddersfield Socialist Party

Manchester

The Socialist Party called for the council to fund domestic violence services and affordable housing on our city centre protest. Our demands mirrored those put forward by Manchester Reclaim the Night a few weeks ago.

Manchester City Council don't fund any refuge services, relying on charities to provide this vital lifeline. Given the millions of pounds the council has in reserves, we call on them to stop the cuts and fund services like women's refuges.

Maddy Steeds Manchester Socialist Party

Cardiff

The Socialist Party campaigned against Universal Credit on International Women's Day. We explained how it can trap women in abusive relationships and is an assault on many ordinary people's living conditions.

At our public meeting, there were people from Cardiff and Caerphilly, and new faces too. Beth Webster reported on the strike for women's rights in the Spanish state. Guest speaker Julia Leonard, from Hillingdon Socialist Party, spoke about the role Socialist Party members play in Women's Lives Matter.

Lucy Cardiff Socialist Party

Sheffield

Sheffield Hallam Socialist Students campaigned against cuts to maternity services in South Yorkshire alongside attempts by the National Union of Students to defund its campaigns and staff for both international

and trans students. It was a huge success, but the campaign cannot stop there!

Ben Buckley, Sheffield Socialist Party

Derby

At an International Women's Day event, the Socialist Party raised the demand for a no-cuts budget to defend domestic violence services and women's refuges. We promoted our public meeting on the issue. We were the only group to raise this demand.

In the Socialist Party, we link austerity with other issues that affect women. And unite the fight for women's liberation with the fight for socialism. We met women who had experienced domestic violence. They liked our ideas, because they knew first-hand the devastating effect of austerity on women's lives.

Lily Branchett Derby Socialist Party

-
- To see Socialist Party meetings for International Women's Day and other issues go to 'what's on' at socialistparty.org.uk
 - Read 'a socialist programme to end women's oppression' at socialistparty.org.uk
 - Check out the International Women's Day statement by the Committee for a Workers' International and read about strikes and protests around the world at socialistworld.net
-

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 12 March 2019 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in *The Socialist*.

For socialist change, not climate change!

Connor Rosoman, Brighton and Sussex Socialist Students

Last month, tens of thousands of young people took to the streets to protest against climate change. With more walkouts set for Friday 15 March, this could be the beginning of a new mass youth and student movement.

This environmental crisis has been caused by big business, which prioritises profit over anything else - including the planet and people's needs. Just the top 100 companies are responsible for 71% of all greenhouse gas emissions.

Although some groups see the climate movement as 'apolitical' or bigger than politics, the struggle against climate change is fundamentally linked to the struggle against capitalism.

Walkouts, as well as direct actions and publicity stunts, are a positive development. But in order to beat the climate crisis we must build a mass movement with the power to end the capitalist system causing it.

The trade unions represent more than six million workers. If the working class stopped working then industry, shops, transport, schools and the whole of society would stop.

This is why the organised working class is potentially the most powerful force in changing society. If the student movement linked up with the workers and the unions, we could build an almighty mass movement against climate change.

Students should also organise student unions within their schools and colleges to fight for the right to protest, and against any reprisals they may face.

Such a movement, united on a programme for 'socialist change - not climate change', would be able to end the environmental catastrophe capitalism is racing toward.

Socialist alternative

The Tory government, like all pro-big business governments, offers no real solutions to halt runaway climate change and has been repeatedly found guilty in court over failing to deal with deadly air pollution. It stands for the interests of the corporations that have caused this crisis in the first place.

The Tories may have signed up to the Paris climate change agreement but those targets are voluntary and not enforceable.

A Labour government led by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell should fight for policies that do not bend the knee to 'big oil' and the other major corporations responsible for pumping out greenhouse gases, but instead put people first.

Such a programme would require a socialist government taking the banks and major corporations into public ownership, under democratic workers' control and management. On that basis, we could fund the massive, immediate investment into green energy we need, and run the economy according to a sustainable plan of production based on people's needs - not profit.

- For more info see socialiststudents.org.uk

Southampton: Socialist stand against council and education cuts

Josh Asker, Southampton Socialist Party

"If you mobilise your community to fight, then you can win!" These were the words of Socialist Party candidate Sue Atkins, standing as Socialist Alternative, at a public meeting on the eve of the Coxford council by-election in Southampton. On 14 March she stands to maintain the trio of anti-cuts councillors in the ward.

Voters in Coxford have a heritage of fighting the cuts imposed by the right-wing Labour council and have had councillors prepared to back them in the council chamber. With one of these councillors, Keith Morrell, standing down, it is important that he is replaced by someone who will vote against cuts when it counts.

Staff, parents and pupils on the other side of the city will be watching carefully. On election day, teachers in the National Education Union (NEU) at Valentine's Primary School start six days of strike action. This is in the face of council bosses determined to force the head to make cuts to children's education.

One Southampton head teacher and NEU member tells the Socialist: "For the last three years, as government funding cuts have hit with rising costs and pupil numbers, our deficit has grown, despite making cuts.

"For everyone in the school working hard to provide for the needs of all our children, we have reached a tipping point. If we are to erase our deficit, as our Labour council is demanding, we will lose all but our teachers and the impact will be devastating on our children.

"It's the same for all schools. 7,000 of us have written to millions of parents to spell out this crisis. It is now for the government to wake up and fully fund our schools. It is time for local councils to join our fight."

Socialist councillors backing up the campaign in the council chamber can help to force the council to change course. One voter remarked: "There is always something they can do! The idea that they can justify doing nothing with things the way they are is a disgrace."

Sue is standing on a program for using the council's reserves and borrowing powers to back the schools, save the care homes and re-open respite centres full-time. This could mobilise workers in Southampton to fight the Tory minority government for the £136 million stolen from the city since 2010.

- This issue went to press before election day, to see the result and analysis see socialistparty.org.uk and next week's issue of the Socialist

No to racism - No to austerity - Fight capitalism - Fight for socialism

Isai Priya, London Socialist Party

Almost a year since the exposure of the Windrush scandal, the Windrush generation continue to suffer from the 'hostile environment'. They suffer abuse, benefit sanctions, sacking and deportation.

Even a Public Accounts Committee report revealed that many are "homeless or having to rely on family members." The promised compensation scheme is yet to start and the urgent hardship fund took eight months to set up.

The treatment of the Windrush generation is a ruthless example of hostile Tory and Blairite policies that affect the lives of the black and Asian workers in Britain.

Black and Asian workers suffer on average higher unemployment and lower wages. Poverty and prejudice trap many workers in unsafe housing - exemplified by the Grenfell Tower atrocity.

After over ten years of austerity and cuts to our services - ordinary people continue to pay for the crisis caused by bankers and bosses.

Former Tory prime minister David Cameron described refugees escaping war and extreme poverty as a "swarm". When Theresa May was home secretary, she pumped public money into vans to drive around telling migrants to "go home".

The Blairites supported the creation of the hostile environment. In fact, a Blairite, Alan Johnson, first used the phrase in 2010, before the Tories.

Far-right groups like the Football Lads Alliance have further fuelled this propaganda while trying to tap into genuine anger - which we all feel - against cuts to jobs and services and deteriorating living standards.

Their street demonstrations raise alarm and fear among ordinary people. The far-right needs to be exposed and opposed. They have no place in our communities.

The Socialist Party argues that capitalism is the root cause of racism. It's used to divide the working class. The fight against racism must be closely linked to a united fightback of all workers against cuts to our vital services.

We demand a general election now so a Corbyn-led Labour government with a socialist anti-austerity manifesto for the millions and not the millionaires can be elected.

The Socialist Party fights for socialism - a different world based on public ownership and democratic planning of the wealth in society, not the enrichment of a few individuals - a society free from exploitation and oppression.

Event: Fascism - What it is and how to fight it

- Saturday 6 April, 3pm-6pm, Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, London, W1T 6AQ

The writings and speeches by Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of Russian revolution, on this topic are brought together in 'Fascism - What it is and how to fight it'. In this pamphlet, Trotsky carefully analyses how fascism came to power and why the working class is the only force in society capable of defeating it.

It is imperative that socialists discuss how any possible growth of the far right can be fought.

This event - Activist with Ideas, hosted by London Socialist Party - will discuss questions like... will the working class be able to put their stamp on the politics of tomorrow and prevent the rise of the far right? And is it necessary to link the fight against racism and fascism with the fight for a socialist alternative to the capitalist system?

Fascism - What it is and how to fight it by Leon Trotsky is available for £4.50 plus postage at leftbooks.co.uk

Memorial to the working-class fighters from Hull who fought fascism in Spain

Harry Gammon, Hull Socialist Party

During the 80th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War in 2016, the International Brigades Memorial Trust asked that areas which have a memorial or plaque to commemorate it by laying a flower or a wreath.

In Hull, our plaque is situated in the Guildhall underneath a staircase in a dark and gloomy part of the building. I wrote to our local paper saying what I was about to do to honour the eight men who had gone to fight in Spain. Thankfully they published the letter.

On the day in question, I went along to the Guildhall and was astonished to find around 60 people there including trade unionists and many relatives - from daughters to great nieces. The small plaque inside was not good enough.

These people required something bigger than this, and their history and sacrifice needed airing. The people of Hull have to know about these brave individuals. So the seeds were sown and the journey to raise money for a proper memorial began.

It would have been impossible without the support throughout of the Hull trade union council and working-class people.

Every penny raised has come from the people of Hull and the trade union movement through its local branches. They have all been incredibly generous with their donations and have supported us every step of the way.

We have a formidable team made up of the trade union council and the relatives. Over the last two years more research has taken place and we now know that there was one more local Brigader.

And we have also uncovered a woman who worked at Hull University who went out with the ambulance service. They will be added to the memorial.

The group decided to put on as many events as possible to put this history back out onto our streets. So we have had plays written and performed across Hull and in Barcelona, as well as talks and concerts.

It's been a privilege and an honour to work with this group and to find out so much about these working class heroes who went to Spain. Before they left every one of them was involved in strikes and disputes across the UK and as far away as Australia.

Most of them were at Corporation Fields where they fought against and smashed Oswald Mosley's fascists when they came to our city.

- Please come and join us on 16 March at 12noon for the unveiling to these working-class, anti-fascist fighters that will never be forgotten.
-

Brazil: The Threats, attacks and contradictions of Bolsonaro's regime

The workers' movement and all the oppressed must build a socialist alternative

Only two months since coming to power, President Jair Bolsonaro has confirmed all the worst expectations in relation to his government. During the recent annual Brazil Carnival many revellers protested against his right-wing agenda. Bolsonaro hit back by tweeting a pornographic video clip from the Sao Paulo carnival, apparently to expose 'degenerate leftists'. However, this has backfired spectacularly on the president leading to his widespread ridicule. Andre Ferrari, LSR (CWI in Brazil) looks at the stark contradictions in Bolsonaro's government and the instability to the capitalist system these are generating.

Bolsonaro has waged war on workers, the poor, women, black, indigenous and LGBT+ people. They are taking rights away, stamping on democratic freedoms, increasing violence, and handing over the country's resources to the multinationals, worsening the conditions of the vast majority.

The government's pensions counter-reform is the peak of this reactionary agenda. The approval of this law is the government's most important immediate and strategic aim.

Previous president Michel Temer did not manage to get that far. He was contained by the contradictions within his corrupt government of coup-plotters, but also by the pressure of the masses, for example through the April 2017 general strike.

The situation today is not the same. The wealthy now have at their disposal a far-right government which is radically neoliberal and which has won an electoral mandate and built a certain social base of support.

To defeat this government we must understand where its social base comes from, examine its contradictions and work to expose them.

Right populism

It is true that the electoral victory of Bolsonaro was marked by manoeuvres and repression, including the imprisonment of Lula da Silva (the former president), the candidate who was leading the polls and the main opposition to Bolsonaro.

However, this doesn't explain everything. The social layer which is most consolidated in support of Bolsonaro is made up of mostly the reactionary elements of the middle classes, fed by the politics of hatred, violence and reactionary values - elitist, racist, sexist, LGBT-phobic, and so on.

However, the victory of Bolsonaro came about as a result of the broadening of his base of support, especially among sections of the poor population understandably dissatisfied with the situation in the country and who were attracted by the apparently 'anti-system' profile of Bolsonaro.

The fall of the PSDB (traditional capitalist party) in the midst of the political crisis, made worse by its participation in the Temer government, allowed a reorganisation of the right wing on a more extremist basis. The political space of the PSDB was taken by Bolsonaro.

The same reorganisation did not take place on the left which remained under the hegemony of Lula and the PT (so-called Workers' Party) with its legacy of class collaboration and total adaptation to the capitalist political system.

The rhetoric of "change" with an anti-PT, anti-left emphasis, against corruption and defending an "iron fist" on public security, allowed Bolsonaro's support to grow and him to win the elections.

However, Bolsonaro did not wage his campaign based on an ultra-neoliberal agenda. Datafolha polls indicate that 60% of the population are against privatisation and 57% reject the labour reform, despite the campaign of lies that it will create jobs. As well as this, 66% disagree with the prioritisation of relations with the USA. 71% support political discussion in schools and 54% support sex education.

Bolsonaro's victory provoked much confusion and a retreat in consciousness but this is not irreversible.

Bolsonaro was not initially the 'Plan A' of the most conscious sections of the Brazilian ruling class - who have a more strategic vision and would prefer a less unstable and unpredictable candidate.

However, none of the 'sober' bourgeois candidates was able to get 57 million votes like Bolsonaro. The ruling class was able to adapt to this situation and try to take as much advantage as possible.

The expectations and illusions in Bolsonaro will clash with reality. The rhythm of this process will depend on various political, economic and social factors, but mostly on the ability of the organised workers' movement and all the oppressed to take the initiative.

This includes the reorganisation of the left on a more combative, radical, anti-system basis - rooted in the working class.

As a political phenomenon which arose without an organic link to bourgeois Brazilian politics, 'Bolsonarism' brings great instability and risks.

This was clear during the government's first big crisis which led to the fall of minister Gustavo Bebianno - who coordinated Bolsonaro's election campaign and was the fourth most leading figure in government - after it emerged that Bebianno had siphoned money from a publicly financed electoral fund.

The firing of Bebianno produced friction in the government's parliamentary base of support. On the eve of the announcement of the pension reform (which needs a two-thirds majority) Bolsonaro suffered his first defeat in Congress.

The government decree which restricts the 'law of access to information' was defeated, in a clear sign that the life of the government will not be so calm as it seemed.

The corruption scandals in the Social Liberal Party (PSL - Bolsonaro's party) go well beyond Bebianno.

With Bolsonaro as president, a new layer of corrupt figures and people linked to the world of crime and militias rose to power. The new instability and explosiveness that this provokes will be seen more sharply in the future.

Dangerous

Beyond the careerists and proto-fascist figures, the government is also made up of other groupings, in a mixture of forces which are not always compatible with each other.

There is a more ideological wing made up of the disciples of the ex-astrologist Olavo de Carvalho and right-wing religious fundamentalists. The minister for the environment, Ricardo Salles, is a mixture of right-wing ideologue and pragmatist in the service of profiteers who destroy the environment. Alongside him is the minister for agriculture Tereza Cristina, chosen by agro-business bosses.

These elements are very dangerous and are pushing forward attacks on women's rights, LGBT+ people, black people, indigenous people, peasants, students and teachers. As well as this, there's the alignment of the

government with the attacks of imperialism against Venezuela.

The most conscious representatives of big finance capital work through Paulo Guedes, the super-minister of finance. He is the key figure in the government - the bridge between the government and the banks and the guarantee that, despite the peculiarities, the Bolsonaro government can be trustworthy and useful for the big capitalists.

If Guedes is not able to deliver what he promised to big capital, starting with the pension reform, this could lead to a new level of crisis and instability in the government.

The military

The role of Sergio Moro as super-minister for justice and public security is also vital for the government and interests of the ruling class.

The illusions that a big part of the population have in Sergio Moro as a judge who fought against corruption and crime - a totally false idea - helps to create expectations in the Bolsonaro government.

Moro, by ignoring the corruption scandals in the government and Bolsonaro family, shows that these illusions cannot last long.

However, despite this, Moro has a significant task in relation to public security, which was a key element in Bolsonaro's campaign and a grave social problem.

The so-called "anti-crime" package defended by Moro would represent a big step backwards. It would, in line with Bolsonaro's campaign promise to give police a licence to kill and increase the shooting of poor black youth.

The pretext of the fight against crime and organised crime can allow the government to militarise society even more and worsen the criminalisation of poverty and social movements.

Together with Paulo Guedes and Sergio Moro, the other element which gives a more solid base to the government is the wing of military chiefs who are gathered around Bolsonaro.

There are at least 46 soldiers in at least 21 different parts of Bolsonaro's government. The hardcore of this military wing is made up of generals who work directly from the Presidential palace. We must now add general Floriano Peixoto Neto who replaced Bebianno as general secretary to the presidency.

Left alternative

The most important and immediate task for the organised working class and all oppressed sectors is to organise resistance to the attacks of the government and its allies in the state and local governments.

However, this task can only be carried out effectively if it is linked to the building of a left alternative to the crisis.

In the event of a deeper crisis for the government, which could also result from working-class resistance, we have already seen how the ruling class can build new alternatives within the reactionary camp, qualitatively increasing the Bonapartist and repressive elements which already exist in the situation.

Unity in action against the government must be complemented by the construction of a new radical, combative, anti-capitalist and socialist left, built from below.

Obituary Joan Beale - Labour women's activist and Militant supporter

Nikki Wilson

An active supporter of Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party) in Lancashire in the 1970s and 80s, Joan Beale sadly passed away last month. Although her health had not been good in recent years, her death was sudden and unexpected.

Persuaded by Militant's Marxist ideas and programme, Joan joined Chorley Labour Party in 1974 and was politically active for the next 12 years at both branch and constituency levels.

In the early 1980s she became secretary of Chorley Labour Party Women's Section, working closely with Susannah Jackson (Equal Opportunities Commission staff member), Virginia Jones (NHS trade unionist and today a leading activist in the Chorley Hospital Campaign) and Rita Aspinall (well-known 'Miners' Wives' organiser in Lancashire). Together they built a fighting organisation of working class women in central Lancashire.

Joan often spoke at local and regional Labour Party meetings on behalf of the local Women's Section, which played a decisive role in setting up the Chorley and Coppull Miners' Support Committee in May 1984. The latter's main aim was to supply striking miners' families with weekly food parcels throughout the many arduous months of the 1984-85 national miners' strike. It raised £26,000 for this purpose in 12 months.

During this time, Joan with others strongly supported the newly-founded Chorley Well Women's Centre - still going strong today and now known simply as the Chorley Women's Centre.

She also put her excellent dress-making skills to use by making some impressive labour movement banners. These included: Chorley Constituency Labour Party, Chorley Labour Party Women's Section, Chorley and Coppull Miners' Support Committee, Chorley and Coppull Miners' Wives, and the Trades Union Councils of Chorley, Preston and Lancaster.

After the 1984-85 miners' strike an attempt was made to expel Militant supporters from Chorley Labour Party, including Joan. Although it failed, any further effective involvement in the Labour Party by Joan or the others was no longer possible - and disgracefully Chorley Labour Party disbanded its women's section not long after this!

Although Joan's political activity covered a relatively short period of her life, she nevertheless had a significant impact on the labour movement in this part of Lancashire in arguing for a genuinely democratic socialist society, in supporting striking miners and their families, and in campaigning for the rights especially of working class women. Such important contributions of the kind Joan made, and in difficult and demanding circumstances, must not be forgotten.

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/28844>