

Parliamentary 'Brexishambles' continues

Corbyn and workers' movement must lead fight for general election and socialist alternative to EU bosses' club

Yet again, the immediate future of the plans for Britain leaving the EU remains unclear. Three attempts at passing May's Withdrawal Agreement couldn't resolve it. Two rounds of MPs voting on alternative proposals couldn't resolve it. Seven and a half hours of cabinet meetings on 2 April couldn't resolve it. It's hard to believe that in the next few days either Yvette Cooper's attempt to extend Article 50 or any attempt from May to bring back her proposal for a fourth round will be any different.

This absurdity reveals the complete paralysis of parliament as a result of the crisis facing the entire capitalist establishment and system. It looks increasingly likely that either Britain will leave with no deal on 12 April or Theresa May will be forced to call a general election. There is a huge burden of responsibility on Jeremy Corbyn and the workers' movement to fight to ensure it is the latter.

A second chance for MPs to 'take control of Brexit' through a series of indicative votes was another dismal failure on 1 April, continuing the deadlock just eleven days before the (already extended) deadline to leave the EU with no deal if nothing can be agreed. The usual outraged chaos ensued.

Those MPs supporting the option of remaining in a permanent customs union with the EU (the closest vote, losing by a margin of three) publicly condemned those campaigning for a second referendum for not supporting the proposal as a fall-back option.

Tory MP Nick Boles, who had headed up the 'common market 2.0' option, made an emotional statement following the vote announcing that he was resigning the Tory whip because his party "fails to compromise". Vitriol from right-wing Tory Brexiters - as well as the continuing sharp divisions in the Tory party - was highlighted by MP Marc Francois telling the BBC's World Tonight "If you're listening, Mr Hammond, my fraternal message to you is: 'up yours!'"

The farcical atmosphere was emphasised by 20 minutes of the 1 April debate during which the bare buttocks of Extinction Rebellion climate change protesters faced the chamber from the public gallery, where they had glued their hands to the glass.

Interviewed afterwards, several of the activists highlighted that, while MPs have spent months failing to find any way forward over Brexit, the vital issue of climate change and the future of the planet - which has spurred tens of thousands of young people to walk out of schools and colleges on strike this year - is wilfully ignored.

The same could be repeated on dozens of issues that continue to blight the lives of workers and young people. While politicians snipe and manoeuvre with no success, outside the Westminster bubble the effects of austerity, poverty and inequality are the daily reality for millions. German Europe minister Michael Roth wasn't wrong when he - for his own electoral ends - said that 90% of the Tory cabinet have "no idea how workers think, live, work and behave" and that British politicians "born with silver spoons in their mouths, who went to private schools and elite universities" are to blame for impasse but won't be the ones who suffer the consequences.

This is why it is so vital that Jeremy Corbyn and the workers' movement are clear in linking a way forward for Brexit to the pro-worker policies of jobs, homes and services for all. This is even more important as the prospect of an 'accidental' no-deal Brexit grows. The bosses and the Tories would inevitably try to use the

chaos of such a scenario to attack workers, and Corbyn and the trade union movement must act to prevent this.

That means demanding the opening of the books of big businesses that claim cuts and closures are necessary because of Brexit arrangements, and, where necessary, fighting for their nationalisation under democratic workers' control and management. The voice and potential power of the working class must be brought to bear on all contingency plans and emergency measures.

This can answer workers' anxieties about what Brexit will mean for them, and cut across the far right's attempts to use the issue to divide working-class people along the lines of race and nationality. The workers' Brexit that Corbyn has called for previously has never been more needed to cut through the inability of the pro-capitalist politicians to move forward.

The best way for Corbyn and the trade unions to seize control of the situation is to boldly fight for a general election. This should be done inside parliament, but also outside, calling mass rallies and demonstrations and convening trade union-led meetings to organise the fightback in every area.

Tory annihilation

The Tories recognise the danger for them in this path - senior figures in the party allegedly warned May that they would risk annihilation against Corbyn in an election. One special advisor was quoted as saying that considering this option "is nailed on mad. But the mood in number ten is desperate. They are in a bunker and in denial about how bad things are." The Daily Mirror reports recent polling showing Labour on 41% to the Tories' 36%.

However, this outcome is not guaranteed. Without a clear answer to workers' fears and questions over Brexit, the Tories can potentially pitch themselves as the defenders of the 2016 referendum decision against a majority of Labour MPs trying to reverse it, or get as close as possible to that. In a snap general election campaign which the Tories would attempt to frame as a referendum on this one issue, it's not ruled out that such a campaign would be successful.

And the Tories would be aided in this by the Blairites, who do not agree with Corbyn's workers' Brexit proposals. This again raises the need to take on the Blairites and fight to transform the Labour Party along socialist lines, including immediately triggering the trigger ballot process to give the rank and file a say over who represents the party in elections.

The apparent advantage Labour holds must be pressed home! Corbyn has said that Labour is ready for a general election and that it "would be the chance to change politics in a fundamental way, take on the failed elite who have held back people and communities, and carry out a radical programme of change which truly benefits the many, not the few."

He should boldly assert that parliament has yet again proven itself incapable and that the choice of what kind of Brexit people want should be given to ordinary people through a general election.

Such an election would need to be fought by Labour on an anti-austerity, socialist manifesto - going further than the 2017 one, which won Labour the biggest swing from one party to another since 1945. Bold calls for an increase in the minimum wage to genuinely reflect the cost of living, scrapping zero-hour contracts, huge investment in the NHS and education, an end to all cuts and privatisation and so on, have the potential to galvanise working-class anger at austerity and sweep Corbyn's Labour to a decisive victory.

Such a manifesto would also need to outline what a workers' Brexit would look like. As a starting point, that means the immediate repeal of all EU laws that limit workers' rights or place obstacles in the way of anti-austerity policies. It should be clear that any big company using Brexit to threaten closures or job losses will, where necessary, face nationalisation under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

Combined with an appeal to workers' organisations and left parties to fight for the same approach in other countries, this can begin to build the basis for genuine cooperation and solidarity of people across Europe, on

a socialist basis, in contrast to the neoliberal EU, which only serves the interests of big business and the capitalist system.

Cuts and chaos. Enough. General election now!

Nancy Taaffe, Waltham Forest Socialist Party

There is so much empty noise around Brexit - so much so that Banksy's artwork depicting MPs as chattering monkeys has been put back on public display.

Outside parliament protesters holler through megaphones as the scaffolding upon which political interviews are conducted gets higher and higher.

There's a cacophony of noise. And yet there's a silence.

There's the silence of what should be being said: That now nearly three million children are living in poverty.

That 'survival sex' - essentially sex work - is being turned to by thousands of women as they lose their benefits due to Universal Credit and the imposition of cruel sanctions.

That some schools now don't teach the full week - opening for just four days - because of school budget cuts.

That working-class women are dying 100 days earlier because of austerity - living for eight fewer years than richer women, with the gap widening.

With a few exceptions, there's a screaming silence from the trade union leaders too. They have failed to articulate the desperate situation in working-class communities.

And they have failed to mobilise their members in struggle to get rid of this rotten Tory government, or to fight for a Brexit in the interests of workers - for the socialist alternative to the EU.

Then there's the faint, hardy audible, voice of Jeremy Corbyn. On top of that, there is no doubt that there has been a conscious policy by the capitalist media attempting to turn the volume down on Corbyn and Corbynism, especially as the Brexit crisis has intensified.

We're subjected to endless interviews of Blairite MPs like Jess Phillips praising Tories like Oliver Letwin, or Tom Watson funnelling all calls for a general election down the blind alley of a second referendum.

We say break the silence. We have to fight for a general election now - in the trade unions, the workplaces, the colleges and working-class communities.

A general election is not inevitable in the short term. Pro-capitalist politicians are divided on many things. But they are united in wanting to keep Corbyn out.

Really, they are afraid of all those who stand behind him - of the millions of working-class people who could be mobilised into action if they see the opportunity to fight for genuine, socialist change.

The real aim of all pro-big-business politicians - Leave or Remain, Tory or Labour - is to keep the door firmly shut on that. Nonetheless, the depth of this crisis means we could end up stumbling into a general election regardless of these politicians' intentions.

If one is called, it should be treated as the starting gun - signalling the ending of this establishment-imposed silence and the beginning of the real fightback.

This needs to be a fight that demands an end to the humiliation of poverty, insecurity and the lack of good jobs - things that could start to be achieved by the election of a Corbyn-led government with socialist policies, and the unleashing of a proper fightback among working-class people.

Break the silence. General election now!

End Tory cold cruelty: life under austerity in Merthyr

Scrap Universal Credit now

Dave Reid, Socialist Party Wales

It's a cloudy March morning in Merthyr and there is a steady flow of people going about their business.

This town has received a bad press as the "benefit capital of Britain". The Mirror newspaper pointed out the average male life expectancy on one of the estates is lower than Haiti's. But it's a friendly town.

We set up our stall against Universal Credit. People start approaching as soon as our posters go up.

Lisa signs the petition straight away. She has a young child and, because her partner is working, doesn't get out-of-work benefits. She's worried that when Universal Credit hits they will lose tax credits. Her dad has been evicted because of Universal Credit.

"He's sofa surfing now" she says "59 and nowhere to live". He lost his flat because the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) held up his benefits for so long that the private landlord lost patience and turfed him out.

Sonya comes up to the stall questioning us. "Scrap Universal Credit?" she asks, "what will people live on?" We explain we want it replaced with benefits people can actually live on. "Right!" she says, and signs our petition.

It turns out Sonya has fallen foul of the strict rules on tax credits. She works for McDonald's and ensured she was contracted for 16 hours a week so she qualified for tax credits to top up her pay.

But then she got a letter from the DWP who had found out that she had a 15-minute unpaid break every day. So, technically, she did not work 16 hours but 13 and a half hours a week, and had therefore never qualified for tax credits. They demanded she return over £3,000 in overpayments. "I couldn't pay that back!" she said, so they settled for £10 a week for six years!

Then Gwyn comes up to sign: "they're cruel bastards" he says as he leans his stick on the stall. Gwyn has worked in Merthyr Vale colliery and then bricklaying after the pits closed. His knees are shot. The Welsh NHS sent him for a new knee to the Bupa hospital but it all went wrong and he has to have another one to replace it. Now the other knee has gone and that will have to be replaced as well.

But he says private company Capita found him fit to work - even though he can hardly walk. The DWP cut off his benefits and then an administrative error delayed his appeal so he had to resubmit it. He and his wife have not had a penny since October. They have held off eviction by the housing association so far, but can only live with their family helping out.

Gwyn is a tough but gentle man: "I'm not religious, but if there is a hell that's where Iain Duncan Smith is going", he says with unsmiling passion. "How can he treat people like this?"

The café owner comes out to clean the tables outside and offers us a cup of tea or coffee. "They're all talking about that inside" she says. "Everyone hates it." Sure enough, as the café empties, a queue forms at our stall. They approach, shaking their heads at the injustice of it all.

And we remind them that the Tories have given the rich nearly £20 billion a year in cuts to Corporation Tax alone, paid for by the suffering of the people at the bottom. They nod when I say the Tories are trying to drive us into the ground. All leave our stall with a copy of the Socialist.

While the Tories are in turmoil over Brexit we should never forget the cold cruelty with which they have had ruined the lives of millions of people. Nor the Blairites who refused to vote against the Welfare Act, or to put up a fight to defend local people in the council chamber.

Universal Credit must be scrapped and replaced with benefits that provide enough to live - paid to all those who need them. And there should be investment in a mass scheme of job creation - providing decent jobs to working-class people, with a minimum wage of at least £10 an hour.

These are policies Corbyn should be loudly championing amid the current parliamentary shambles. This misery must end.

3m kids from working families in poverty: fund homes and childcare

Hannah Davis, Birmingham Central Socialist Party

In the UK, 2.9 million children from working families are now living in poverty, reports the Department for Work and Pensions. And more than a third of babies are living below the poverty line, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

These numbers are linked to spiralling rent and mortgage costs. Many households are having to spend half of what they earn on rent. And the price of private rental properties could continue to rise - by 15% over the next five years - says the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

The relative security the generation before benefited from - earning a decent living, affording a decent home, and putting food on the table for your family - is vanishing fast. It used to be achievable for some with just one parent working full-time, but has now become a daydream even for families with two working parents.

Along with the rise in housing costs, there has been an increase in fees for childcare. The cost for a child under two in a nursery is now, on average, £122.46 a week for part-time and £232.84 a week for full-time care, finds the Family and Childcare Trust.

After these costs, parents are left with insufficient funds for all the other expenses they face. One mum from Yorkshire said that after nursery fees and bills she is left with just £30 a week for food and fuel!

Cuts to free services are pushing working parents into having no other choice than pay up or have no care for their kids.

In Birmingham, the Labour-run council is selling all of its nurseries to private childcare companies. The Blairites are forcing families to either pay extortionate costs for childcare, or leave their jobs to care for their children. Neither of which they can afford to do.

The Tories are saying tackling poverty is a priority. But how can this be the case when they continue to leech away what little families have through ruinous austerity and privatisation, assisted by the right wing of Labour?

Ending austerity means ending the Tory government, and kicking the Blairites out of Labour. Councils should use their reserves and borrowing powers to start building affordable housing for all, while campaigning for the funds from central government.

They should also implement rent controls in private housing, free childcare, and a real living wage for all. That kind of stand could topple this dying Tory government. Corbyn and the union leaders must urgently call action.

Toxic Grenfell fire residue threatens survivors: full health screening now!

Unite the Union housing workers' branch member

Cancer-causing chemicals and other potentially harmful toxins have been found close to Grenfell Tower in fire debris and soil samples, according to the University of Central Lancashire.

The report warns of serious health risks to the surrounding community and survivors of the fire. Professor Anna Stec, who led the independent study, said there was now an urgent need for further analysis of the surrounding area to "quantify any risk to residents" over the long term for conditions such as cancer, asthma and other respiratory problems.

Substances were discovered in quantities that could indicate they resulted from the burning of specific materials used in the fateful 2016 refurbishment of the tower.

The government says the risk to health is "generally very low." But what does it base this on?

On the day of publication, the Grenfell United group tweeted: "Whatever the government promise today they need to realise it's already too little and too late. Testing in the community must start immediately, and by immediately, we mean yesterday."

But the official body Public Health England blandly states: "We have established a comprehensive programme of environmental checks to fully assess the risks and take appropriate action. Professor Stec is part of an independent group of scientists overseeing this work and her findings will inform the checks we are conducting."

Stec was so worried about her initial results, she sent a briefing note to senior staff within the local council and government agencies in February last year, urging immediate action to analyse soil and dust within and around the tower and other evacuated buildings.

In October her early findings found their way into the press. Why were the initial findings not publicised?

"We are trapped here," Andrea Newton, former chair of the Lancaster West residents' association, is quoted as saying. "Public Health England will never tell the truth [because] it will highlight their negligence, place [the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea] in a housing crisis, put central government in a huge financial predicament.

"The big players in housing, industry, property development and related manufacturers have too much to lose. They gain nothing from transparency."

Again we see the disregard for the lives of working-class people in Tory Britain on display here. A full programme of health screening, and following up Professor Stec's work, must be implemented immediately.

If national bodies will not act, the council must, and send the bill to the government. The Socialist Party has previously raised the idea of tenants organising and potentially withholding rent if their safety is not guaranteed. There must be no more deaths from the Grenfell atrocity.

Poor doors, segregated playgrounds: developers and Blarites must go

Andy Beadle, Lewisham and Southwark Socialist Party

Haven't the Tories and Blairites got enough to answer for without barring poor children from playgrounds? An investigation by the Guardian has showed yet another side of life under the 'Nasty Party' and its shadows on the right of Labour.

On 30 March, the liberal daily announced: "Segregated playgrounds revealed: 'We just play in the car park'." The 'poor doors' scandal has not disappeared, but grown.

As well as separate play areas for the children of social tenants and private owners on some estates, further investigation has found segregation of shared-ownership residents, and even pregnant social tenants forced take the stairs because the lift only stops on private floors!

One tenant in Streatham Hill, south London, said: "I'm actually glad I don't look over the gardens: how would I tell my children that they can't play there because I don't have a fat bank balance?"

This followed an exposé of another such estate, just ten minutes' walk over Lambeth Bridge from the Houses of Parliament.

Multimillion-pound property developer Henley Homes was required to include some 'affordable' flats for rent in its 2016 redevelopment of Baylis Old School in the south London borough of Lambeth. Social tenants were told common areas were for all residents.

But after the Blairite council granted planning permission, designs changed to bar poorer kids from the communal areas open only to private renters and owners.

Within days, Henley Homes denied there was a ban. "However," reported the Guardian on 27 March, "residents from all parts of the site, both private and social, spent months asking the housing management companies and Lambeth Council to open up access to all children."

All these housing developments are in Labour boroughs, under the Labour-led Greater London Authority and Sadiq Khan. The reality that right-wing Labour mayors and councillors have been cosy up to big landlords and developers seriously undermines Labour's credibility in the eyes of many.

While the Guardian only reports on problems, the Socialist is concerned with solving them. Jeremy Corbyn must stand up for poor and working-class tenants against these powerful interests.

He should start now by ordering Labour councils to begin a mass programme of council home building, based on reserves and borrowing, to be underwritten by a Labour government in power. He should pledge a Labour government to a socialist housing policy, bringing the big property and housebuilding firms into public ownership under the democratic control and management of housing workers and residents.

And he should kick out the money-grubbing Blairites responsible for this mess. Mandatory reselection of all elected offices in the Labour Party and a democratic collective voice for trade unions are essential as part of democratising Labour.

Probation privatisation failure: strike to stop the re-tendering!

Chas Berry, Napo union Kent, Surrey and Sussex chair and national executive committee member (personal capacity)

"Irredeemably flawed" is the verdict of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation, five years on from the break-up and part-privatisation of the service.

The inspector's annual report pulls no punches, describing the supervision of offenders under private contracts as substandard and demonstrably poor. 80% of those inspected were assessed as "inadequate."

This comes as no surprise to probation workers who have been struggling to protect the public against the backdrop of austerity cuts. While the government has bunged an additional £467 million at failing companies, their managements have slashed staff numbers and replaced front-line services with call centres in many areas.

One company, Working Links, which ran three of the contracts, has been completely liquidated. Purple Futures, which runs five contracts accounting for 25% of all cases in the community, is in serious financial trouble despite the government bailouts.

At the same time, the number of serious violent or sexual offences committed by those under supervision has risen by over 20%.

Following pressure from the National Audit Office last year, the government 'called in' all contracts early. There is currently a re-tendering exercise to replace existing probation areas with larger ones that match up with what remains in the public sector in the National Probation Service.

This is throwing good money after bad, and won't fix what is now acknowledged to be a broken model. Napo, the probation and family courts union, calls for all contracts to be scrapped, and for probation to be reunified as an integrated public service.

How likely is the Tory administration to renationalise and fully fund it in a way the public deserves? We can have no trust in Justice Secretary David Gauke or Prisons Minister Rory Stewart to undo the work of their predecessor, the architect of this disaster, the hapless Chris Grayling.

Napo members can only put trust in ourselves and our collective power to bring about positive social change. Further foot dragging and failure to scrap these contracts should be met with national industrial action.

This task has been made more difficult by the failure of the leaderships of both Napo and public service union Unison to defend national collective bargaining when members provided them with an indicative mandate for action two years ago.

As the Tories' and Blairites' privatisation agenda unravels, however, and the government teeters on the brink of collapse, confidence is beginning to return.

A bold call for action across all privatised companies, linked to a campaign within the state-run National Probation Service, can galvanise the memberships of both unions and bring the re-tendering exercise crashing down. This should be the start of a campaign to return the service to the public sector.

This Tory government has been forced to take over a failed rail franchise, and earlier Tory governments have nationalised failing firms. Strikes can force their hand - and joint, mass action by the trade union movement can force them out altogether and usher in a Corbyn-led government, giving us the best chance of saving public services.

Thousands of Honda workers march in Swindon to save their jobs

Nationalise Honda now!

Tom Baldwin, South West Socialist Party

Over 2,000 people marched in Swindon on 30 March in protest at Honda's plan to close its plant in the town.

If the closure goes ahead it would be devastating for jobs in the area, and throughout the large supply chain, but the workers are in no mood to let that happen.

Speaking to the Socialist ahead of the demo the Unite the Union convener for the factory, Paddy Brennan, said: "It doesn't matter what job you do or what union you're in. If our plant closes, everyone will be affected.

"We have to send a message to these multinational companies that you can't just pack up and leave and devastate our communities. We've got no choice but to fight.

"There are many others in manufacturing in our position. Hopefully, our fight will galvanise others to do the same."

Workers from the plant were joined on the march by supporters from across the country. Leading union reps from other Honda sites in Europe such as Ghent in Belgium also fear for the future of their jobs and made the trip over to show their support.

The numbers on the march swelled as it passed through the town centre and passers-by joined in. Others on the side of the street stopped to applaud the march.

One former Honda worker, Brendan, told us that, as well as having worked at the plant himself, three members of his family currently do. He said: "Well they bailed out the banks, so why can't the government help us?"

Speaking at the starting rally the general secretary of the Honda workers' union Unite, Len McLuskey, summed up the fighting mood: "If they think we're gonna simply lie down and allow them to walk all over us then they best think again."

He went on to explain how it was possible to save the plant and that the "world class workforce" in Swindon had "delivered a fantastic profit" for Honda over the last 35 years. He finished by saying that it was just the start of the campaign and stating his confidence that it would end in victory.

Government representatives will be joining union negotiators in a delegation to meet Honda management in Japan. The government needs to be seen to be supportive, but the Tories will not take the action needed to save jobs without a struggle that can force them to act.

The Socialist Party's call for nationalisation of the plant under democratic workers' control went down well. Our leaflets were read eagerly by both workers and onlookers and over a hundred copies of the Socialist were sold.

National Shop Stewards Network meeting - Save Honda Jobs: 7.30pm, Thursday 4 April at the Great Western Hotel, 73 Station Road, Swindon SN1 1DH

Greenwich Unite demands outsourced workers at failing firm are brought back in-house

Greenwich Unite the Union

Unite the Union has blasted Greenwich council for the continuing uncertainty being suffered by over 700 staff at GSPlus/GSS - the company set up by the council to compete for contracts. The company is to wind down after devastating financial failures that left a £2 million hole in its pension funds.

A mass meeting of workers on 14 March, followed by a council lobby on 27 March, demanded that the council and GSPlus open up the books so that everybody can see how, why and who got the company into the financial mess.

The meeting also agreed unanimously to demand that the council immediately take all the workers back in-house as council employees. Workers were originally transferred to the company in 2009.

Councillors and board members also attended the meeting where the resolution was put - after councillors stated that they wished to hear the views of the workers.

Greenwich Unite branch secretary Danny Hoggan stated: "What has taken place is a travesty. The council claim that because they had to follow the law of the land and implement equal pay they were forced to set up GSPlus. Now they are saying that because they had to pay the London Living Wage, the company has gone under.

"The council prides itself on being a London Living Wage employer, yet uses this as a thin excuse to hide the shame of GSPlus failing to pay pension contributions. The council has a responsibility here. It set up GSPlus. Councillors have always been on the board. It can now sort out the mess.

"Our members have given a clear message - take the workers back in-house. The council's failure to do so means that this travesty will be followed by injustice. How dare they blame low-paid workers, how dare they blame this on the need to pay a decent wage."

Well-supported strike against cuts at Bradfield school, Sheffield

Gary Drabble, Sheffield Socialist Party

On Tuesday night, 200 parents packed a public meeting in support of National Education Union (NEU) teachers from Bradfield school in Sheffield, striking to defend their jobs and in defence of education.

The meeting listened to teachers, students and parents opposing the cuts which will see the closure of the sixth form, an increase in class sizes, the loss of 15 teaching posts and a restructuring of the school curriculum that will limit students' choices.

Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary of the NEU, spoke about the national crisis in funding and the role of Private Finance Initiative (PFI) companies in profiteering from education. Bradfield is a PFI-built school.

The school governors and senior management have bombarded parents with emails telling them that the strikes are irresponsible, that the cuts are necessary and that there is no alternative; and that parents should not attend the picket lines.

However, angry parent after parent stood up to condemn the governors and their decisions, telling about how the governors had refused to answer their emails.

A call to support the strikes and picket lines was cheered and there are plans to launch a parents' campaign to bring the governors to account for their actions, and reclaim the school as a cornerstone of the community.

On Wednesday morning, around 80 pickets and their supporters, including parents and students, gathered at the school gates from 6.30am.

While the Executive Consultant scowled at us from her car, the pickets chanted 'Kids not Cuts'. Support staff from the school (who were not balloted for action) showed their solidarity by coming to talk to the pickets and even used a makeshift megaphone in the form of a traffic cone to shout 'strike, strike'.

Because of its semi-rural location many students arrive by school bus, but bus after bus arrived with only a handful of students on board.

Passing cars honked their horns in support, and many parents on their way to work stopped to offer their support. The mood of the strikers was buoyed by the support of the public meeting and the atmosphere on the picket line was good.

Further negotiations are scheduled over the next week, and the school is about to finish for a two week Easter break. A further two days of strike action are scheduled for the week of the school's return.

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Chesterfield hospital privatisation plans

Elaine Evans, Chesterfield Socialist Party

Chesterfield Royal Hospital is going ahead with plans to introduce a wholly owned subsidiary company - Derbyshire Support and Facilitates Services.

This will mean that 700-800 staff in the IT procurement, clinical engineering estates and facilities will be pushed out of the NHS, leading to a two-tiered workforce with staff being paid lower wages and pensions.

This privatisation will lead to experienced and caring staff leaving which will impact on patient care.

The number of health professionals leaving the NHS has tripled in the last seven years with many citing a poor work-life balance, stress within the workplace and low wages.

We should not be losing trained nurses and vital staff to supermarkets because wages in the NHS are so low that people are unable to support themselves or their families and are forced to turn to food banks for assistance.

The NHS is treating more people than ever and increasingly sophisticated treatments and advancements in healthcare are well beyond most people's individual earnings.

We pay for the NHS through general taxation and national insurance when we are able to - so that it is there for whenever any of us need it. Privatising services for profit or to save money will affect us all. We need health services that are properly funded with staff well paid for their hard work, care, expertise and dedication.

There have been strikes and campaigns against outsourcing via wholly owned subsidiaries at hospital trusts in Yorkshire which have forced delays or abandonment of the plans. A trade union-led campaign is needed in Chesterfield to fight the plans and protect jobs, wages and conditions.

Workplace news in brief

PCS strikers mean business

Outsourced workers at the UK Government Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) are taking strike action on 8-10 April. PCS union members have been taking strike action since the start of the year demanding the London Living Wage of £10.55 an hour and terms and conditions comparable with civil servants who work in the same department.

These workers are on poverty pay - paid below what the Living Wage Foundation calculates you need to earn to live in London - and deserve a pay rise. BEIS and their cut-price contractors Aramark and ISS have refused to meet even this first of our demands. The outsourced workers have been on strike three times to demand a fair wage, and are determined to continue strike action until they win.

So on 8-10 April, Aramark members (catering) will walk out on strike for three days. PCS members are determined to stay strong in the face of intimidating behaviour by their employer (threatening redundancies) and threats to their PCS representatives.

BEIS London and South PCS branch

Rail cleaners' walkout

Members of the RMT transport union - working on the London Overground for Vinci as cleaners on an Arriva Rail contract - will take further 48-hour strike action in April after voting overwhelmingly for a walkout over pay and conditions.

The union has instructed members not to sign on for any shifts commencing between 9pm 4 April and 9pm 6 April.

The cleaners, who formerly worked for Carillion before its collapse and were transferred to outsourcing company Vinci, will also hold a mass demonstration outside Arriva Rail London's head office in Swiss Cottage, north London on 5 April at 10am.

PCS elections: Support socialist candidates to defend PCS as a democratic, lay Member-led, campaigning union

National elections in the PCS civil servants' union start on 16 April and finish 9 May. They are for the national executive committee (NEC), which is elected annually, and the assistant general secretary (AGS) position - elected for a five-year term.

Socialist Party member Chris Baugh is standing for re-election as AGS. He is the candidate supported by PCS Left Unity - the union's broad left. Socialist Party members Marion Lloyd and Dave Semple are standing for re-election to the NEC on the Democracy Alliance slate - supported by PCS Left Unity and the PCS Democrats.

PCS is balloting members for action in support of its 2019 pay claim. Why should members vote yes? What sort of action will be required?

CB: The Tories scrapped national civil service pay bargaining in the early 1990s in a classic divide-and-rule tactic. This has led to deep cuts in living standards, different rates for equal work, discriminatory outcomes and entrenched poverty wages for increasing numbers of members.

The May government continues to treat us as the poor relations of the public sector despite the important contribution civil servants make to society.

After announcing a further 1% pay cap in 2019, it is crystal clear we need to win a decisive mandate in the pay ballot for a campaign of industrial action to force the employer to negotiate on our pay claim and to restore our collective bargaining rights.

Members are tired of isolated one-day stoppages. PCS needs to set out a detailed plan of sustained, national, group and targeted action and build up the fighting fund to support those members taking action on behalf of all of us.

With PCS holding the chair of the British, Scottish and Welsh Trade Union Congresses (TUCs), we need to apply more pressure to prepare the joint campaigns and coordinated action of civil servants and public sector workers to break the pay cap and force an end to austerity.

The Tories are in crisis, hanging by a thread, a serious programme of strike action can force them to pay up.

ML: Chris is right. This is the only way that we are going to get the pay rise we deserve. On top of pay caps and freezes, our pension contributions have gone up, along with the ever-increasing costs of food, rent and fuel.

DS: There is simply no other way to secure a pay rise. We need determined national action across all departments. Rolling action - taking out different regions and different departments - can also maximise disruption while minimising wages lost from striking.

A general election could take place any time. What position do you think PCS should take?

CB: PCS policy, decided at conference and in a decisive membership ballot, is to support those politicians in Labour and other parties who support us. This doesn't mean giving carte blanche to all Labour MPs and councillors or affiliating the union to the Labour Party.

Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell have a good record of supporting PCS members in struggle, and we should support their anti-austerity policies. But we must fight Tory policy and challenge those politicians in devolved and local government who are failing working-class communities by continuing to make the Tories' cuts for them.

Based on the alternatives to austerity developed by the union, PCS has a chance to use its influence to secure clear commitments from the Labour leadership.

These include pledges to increase pay, halt cuts and closure programmes, restore trade union rights, close the tax gap exploited by the super-rich and corporations, scrap and replace Universal Credit, and bring privatised areas into democratic forms of public ownership and control.

But I believe we must independently defend members' interests whoever is in government.

DS: We should back anti-austerity candidates. Candidates who won't just make nice speeches in parliament but who will get out among workers and build the mass movement we need to defeat austerity and the capitalism that drives it.

This means no blank cheque to Labour, Greens or SNP, but seriously considering what those seeking our support have done for our members. We absolutely should not be backing Blairites like Tom Watson or Stephen Kinnock.

ML: I support the election of a Jeremy Corbyn-led government standing on an anti-austerity programme. Like Chris and Dave, I support and argued that we should support politicians who support us.

What do you think is the way forward for workers on Brexit?

CB: I have always stood for a unity of European workers. I voted to leave based on the longstanding objections to the capitalist EU expressed by the late Tony Benn and Bob Crow. But an enfeebled Tory government, propped up by the reactionary DUP leadership, has shown itself incapable of delivering a Brexit deal in workers' interests.

PCS should lend its active support to the call for a general election to break the parliamentary deadlock and for a Corbyn government. Brexit has shown the need for civil servants. The task for PCS is to halt the failed cuts, closure and reorganisation plans and assert the case for a properly staffed and funded civil service.

ML: The EU is not there to support workers. The EU is used to undermine trade union agreements on pay and conditions. Trade unions must organise and unite workers regardless of international boundaries in fighting

back against this.

DS: The EU is a club for the bosses, designed to force through cuts to public services and a 'race to the bottom'. The unions must oppose all EU agreements which act against the interests of workers - including those which could act as obstacles to carrying out key socialist policies such as nationalisation.

What other issues are important for PCS members?

CB: The attacks on pay and conditions have accelerated under austerity. After the financial crash, the gigantic bank bailout of public money going to those who caused the crisis became the pretext for an all-out assault upon the major social gains won by the labour and trade union movement since World War Two.

PCS was a catalyst in mobilising opposition to austerity. But the capitulation of the TUC in the pensions battle simply unleashed even greater attacks upon the civil and public services.

This coincided with the Tories' attack upon union rights in the civil service by massive cuts in reps time, plotting the "organisational degradation of PCS's capacity to represent its members" and unlawfully removing the method of collecting union subscriptions.

It is testament to the union and its members that we were able to ensure the union's survival and continue to fight on.

Pay remains the major source of grievance, but PCS also needs to continue to mobilise at national and group level to restore the value of pensions, defend redundancy pay, halt the failed cuts and reorganisation plans, challenge the discrimination embedded in HR and employer policies and, as Brexit demonstrates, fight for a properly funded and staffed civil service.

ML: Jobs and job security, pensions, redundancy rights, office closures, staffing, workloads. The Tories are intent on breaking up the welfare state and reducing publicly funded services including mass deregulation. Our job is to organise to stop it.

DS: All the issues mentioned by Chris and Marion are interconnected because they are being driven by the same attack on public services. The government wants to build a low-wage economy over the bones of our public services. Privatisation is the long-term goal for them. Defeating it must be ours.

What are the challenges that face PCS as a union?

CB: PCS needs to re-assert what made us strong. A vibrant and expanding network of activists, making sure decisions are made by PCS members and power is not concentrated in the hands of full-time officers. Organising and recruiting around the issues that matter to members at work.

A strategy for mobilising members not just on pay but on a range of issues that can help build confidence and restore our right to bargain with government.

PCS also needs to pay more attention and devote more resources to members in the commercial sector and employed by private contractors that are often hostile to unions and offering poverty pay and precarious work.

With the positions we hold in TUCs we need to look outwards to other unions, conducting joint campaigns in communities, devolved areas and against the continued austerity agenda of a discredited Tory government.

DS: We have a job of work to do to really crack union organising in our private sector areas. And now we have an attempt at 'counter-revolution' inside PCS in the form of the attempt by Mark Serwotka and Lynn Henderson to split the left in the union, in order to increase their own power at the expense of the elected lay reps. At a time when we really should be united against austerity, that's unforgivable. The first step to dealing with it is to win the pay ballot and the second is to get Chris Baugh re-elected.

ML: Like the whole of the trade union movement the challenges are many and varied and both Chris and Dave highlight some. I believe we must work to organise and unite members around a bargaining and

campaigning agenda. Through this work we will build the network of activists and members that Chris refers to. The first priority is to win the pay ballot.

Meet the candidates:

Chris Baugh

I have been active in the union since I joined the civil service as a naive but enthusiastic 16-year-old. Holding a variety of elected branch and group posts, I played a leading role in the first national Land Registry strike in the early 1980s which defeated plans to downgrade work and helped win some of the best pay and conditions in the civil service.

I led the opposition to the former right-wing leadership of the union and to the Tories' break up of national pay bargaining. I have unmatched experience as an activist and, as the first elected AGS, in fighting for members' interests and making sure decisions are made by PCS members - so power is not concentrated in the hands of full-time officers. I have led PCS work on climate change and continue to play an important role in building support for a trade union approach to climate jobs and a just energy transition on a socialist basis.

- Read more at chrisbaughpcs.wordpress.com

Marion Lloyd

Since joining the civil service at 16, I have been an active trade unionist. I have been elected to positions at all levels of the union. I was first elected to the NEC in 2000 and I am currently group president for the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy.

As a young woman activist, I was victimised by both the employer and the right-wing led national union for being a socialist and supporter of Militant. But I fought to overcome the barriers put in my way. As the first socialist to be elected to the group executive committee (GEC) I was very quickly compulsorily transferred out of the Ministry Of Defence!

I played a leading role in stopping the privatisation of the Manpower Services Commission, led the Forest Hill dispute to stop the removal of protective screens and, more recently, led the dispute over the closure of our Sheffield office. Together we saved 350 jobs.

I have fought to overcome the barriers to the participation of women - including combatting negative and sexist attitudes and fighting for the introduction of nursery care, flexible working and special leave - helping to win breakthrough arrangements in the Department for Employment.

Dave Semple

My first time on strike was as a PCS member during the mass public sector pension strikes of 2011. After joining DWP in July 2012, I was acting branch sec by October that year. In 2014, I was elected to the DWP GEC for the first time.

I've been a visible presence in all the union's campaigns since then. Most recently, the Universal Credit staffing campaign launched in 2018 was proposed and written up by me. I've done the leg work to support reps and build the confidence of members to strike. I've put forward a strategy to force DWP to make concessions, and I've backed it up by travelling round the UK, holding members' meetings to build support and expand the action.

Solidarity with youth strikes

Socialist change not climate change

Sam Witts, Birmingham Socialist Party

Young people are taking up mass protest action as a means of defending our planet from the ravages of environmental destruction.

Fed up with the decades-long lip service paid by mainstream politicians, institutions and big business to tackling climate change, young people have bravely stood up and decided to fight for their future themselves.

Over the past few weeks we have seen an incredible display of walk-outs, protests and student strikes all over the world. An estimated 1.4 million people have taken part. And with more action planned for 12 April, this fighting determination shows no signs of cooling.

These demonstrations couldn't have come at a better time. Last week it was reported that the five biggest oil and gas corporations have splurged over \$1 billion since the 2015 Paris Agreement on "misleading climate-related branding and lobbying". Moreover, just 100 mega-corporations are responsible for over 70% of all global emissions.

In plain and simple terms, these capitalists would much rather spend eye-watering sums of money spreading outright lies to protect their profit system than to save our planet.

Socialism

The climate strikes are proof that, for many people, this status quo of toothless climate agreements, corporate green-washing and laying the blame on individuals' consumption will no longer be tolerated.

There is a growing recognition that the capitalist system must be scrapped, and the popular slogan of "system change not climate change" is a clear testament to that.

The system change we need is socialist change. It would mean planning production in an environmentally friendly way, based on a democratically run nationalised economy. Socialism would mean gearing resources to human need, not private profit.

Only when working people take the world's vast resources, technology, and human potential, out of the hands of those who exploit us and into our own hands, will we truly be able to steer the planet away from capitalism's destructive course.

Therefore it's vital that the youth strikes continue to build internationally - linking up with the trade unions and the wider working class. Such collective action would hit the bosses where it really hurts - their profits. Then, capitalism and its representatives will really begin to feel the heat!

Devastating 62% cuts in Leicester

Vote for socialist mayor and council candidates

Steve Score, former chair Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre and Leicester Socialist Party mayoral candidate

In Leicester, spending on all council services, excluding social care, has been slashed by no less than 62% in ten years. This has had a devastating effect.

Cuts have particularly hit the most vulnerable. When homelessness has been rocketing, hostels and homelessness services have been cut and council house building has been almost non-existent.

When there has been a dramatic rise in people being forced to go to foodbanks, often because of cuts in benefits, welfare rights services are being cut. Cuts have been made to youth services, children's centres, voluntary services, libraries, community centres and many other services.

At the same time, the mayor has money to hand over £10 million to Travelodge - which has recently announced profits of £122 million - to build another new hotel in the city centre!

The council has had a vindictive approach to the voluntary sector. The Socialist Party was contacted by one mental health support organisation whose previously peppercorn rent has been hoisted from £1 a year to £10,000 a year!

Labour in Leicester has an all-powerful elected city mayor and every council seat bar one Tory and one Lib Dem. Socialist Party branches in Leicester decided we had to challenge those councillors who were doing the Tories' dirty work. So we are standing against the mayor and in ten selected seats.

The mayor takes home over £70,000 a year and has a 'special responsibility allowance' on top of £60,047. Elected public representatives should not be cut off from the living standards of the people they are meant to represent.

If elected, I pledge to only take the average wage of a skilled worker in Leicester, donating the majority of the rest of the salary to the fightback against austerity and capitalism.

We are standing on a platform of using the more than £100 million in useable reserves and borrowing power to set a no-cuts budget.

This could create time to build a mass campaign to force the money needed from the government. We have recent experience of how a campaign that involves trades unions and thousands of local people can win.

Socialist Party members played a prominent role in the Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre campaign which was victorious in reversing NHS England's decision. We could do the same with council services!

NHS marches in Yorkshire and London

Yorkshire: Build on the victories to save our NHS

Campaigners and trade unionists came together to march through Leeds city centre and say that, despite the government's chronic paralysis over Brexit, the Tory plans to destroy our health service are still ongoing.

500 people attended the Yorkshire Health Campaigns Together demonstration on 30 March.

Socialist Party member and chair of the Huddersfield Hands Off HRI NHS campaign, Mike Forster, enlivened the rally by recalling the significant victories won across the region over the last year.

There were plans to reconfigure health services in Kirklees and Calderdale, but now they'll have to go back to the drawing board. Sheffield NHS walk-in centre has been saved.

The successful strike ballot in the Mid Yorkshire NHS Trust blocked the establishment of a two-tier workforce via a wholly-owned subsidiary in that trust and Leeds and Bradford as well. All these campaigns had Socialist Party members in the leadership.

It was therefore fitting that Mid Yorkshire Unison branch secretary and Wakefield Socialist Party member Adrian O'Malley was the first speaker to address the rally.

Both Mike and Adrian put central the question of a general election to drive out the Tories and their austerity policies from government, a point taken up by all subsequent speakers. Corbyn and the trade unions should be mobilising the whole labour movement to force them out and put forward a socialist alternative to austerity.

Socialist Party members had a welcome response on the demonstration, raising these points through our leaflet, and had one of the loudest blocks on the march thanks to our enthusiastic Socialist Students members. We sold over 20 copies of the Socialist.

Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party

London: Fury at local politicians over threat to King George A&E

The day before a march and rally to save King George hospital A&E, council leaders in Redbridge, Havering and Barking and Dagenham, together with the chief executive and managing director of the local NHS, put out a statement which appeared, at first glance, to concede entirely the demands of the marchers.

But on closer inspection, despite denials from Labour councillors, it did not repudiate the original review which has clearly put the A&E, once again, under threat.

The 30 March demo was followed by a 50-strong meeting. That meeting agreed to closely examine a demand I moved from the platform, speaking for the Socialist Party, that the review was placed under trade union control. Amendments suggested patients, trade union councils and other bodies be involved.

It was agreed to reconvene to discuss this in more detail. This could constitute a committee to help root the campaign in the community and the health trade unions.

Syed Siddiqi, chair of Barking, Redbridge and Havering health branch of public sector union Unison, pointed out how difficult it is to retain health staff when there is uncertainty hanging over the hospital A&E.

"It's been impossible to have a dialogue with the trust management about this particular issue, because they are generally not in dialogue with any of the health unions."

The meeting demanded the A&E - which the campaign has successfully kept open despite well over ten years of closure threats - is not only kept open but improved.

It overwhelmingly condemned the failure of the local councillors to turn up, demanded the council wave the room booking fee, and largely applauded every mention of Jeremy Corbyn.

20 people bought copies of the Socialist.

Pete Mason, East London Socialist Party

Financing the fightback

Fred Ray, Leicester East Socialist Party

The Socialist Party stands for workers. Unlike the capitalist political parties, we don't take any big corporate donations, meaning that we aren't financially accountable to the bosses and they can't control us.

Socialist Party members from across the East Midlands met on 30 March to discuss the crucial task of financing the Socialist Party.

Ian Pattison, national subs organiser for the Socialist Party finance department, came to the meeting in Leicester to start the discussion. He underlined the importance of our fundraising.

We discussed how we raise money in the East Midlands. Through our campaign stalls, sales of the Socialist paper, donations from members, and more.

In the second part of the meeting we split into two workshops, to discuss the fighting fund and membership subs (regular donations) separately.

Our subs constitute the core money that allows the Socialist Party to operate. We discussed ensuring that new and existing members understand the hugely important contribution they can make.

We're asking members to increase their subs to the Socialist Party, so we have the resources to enable us to reach as wide an audience as possible with a socialist alternative to the Tories' cuts and chaos.

East Midlands Socialist Party members at the meeting agreed to increase their monthly subs by a fantastic £110. You don't have to be a member of the Socialist Party to make a donation - see socialistparty.org.uk/donate

The second workshop focused on the fighting fund, which we use when for campaigning - printing leaflets, banners, transport, and so on - and to fill in any gaps in the day-to-day work of the Socialist Party.

We discussed the importance of keeping finance in our minds when we go to meetings and build movements. Among the excellent suggestions raised was the idea that Socialist Party members should maintain personal targets for fundraising.

The meetings ended with a discussion, led by Leicester Socialist Party member Heather Rawling, on how the Socialist Party can be financially ready when new movements break out. Discussing and understanding finance is an important part of building the Socialist Party in our fight for a socialist world.

- Read about our finance campaign 'Want to oust the Tories and change the world? Then give us the resources to do it!' at socialistparty.org.uk

Discussion and debate at Leeds Trans Pride

Michael Johnson, Leeds Socialist Party

Transphobic hate crimes are going up. Trans people have gained some legal protections but still face high levels of unemployment and around a two-year wait for NHS services.

200 people gathered in Leeds on 31 March for the second annual Trans Pride event. This year also marked the tenth anniversary of Trans Day of Visibility.

There was a clear mood for action on the march to defend trans rights. The Socialist Party pointed out that the Tories, embroiled in infighting, are kicking reform of the Gender Recognition Act down the street. And that cuts to public services, including gender clinics and mental health services, affect the day-to-day lives of trans people.

We need to build a mass working-class movement for trans rights, an end to all forms of discrimination, and the socialist transformation of society - to get rid of the capitalist system that oppression and austerity is based on.

Socialists say we need a workers' Brexit at Young Labour debate

Leicester Socialist Party member Tom Barker put the case for a socialist Brexit at an EU debate, organised by Leicester Young Labour, on 21 March. Blairite MP Liz Kendall and MEP Rory Palmer were due to speak, but unfortunately both backed out at the last minute.

However, the Labour Parliamentary candidates for Loughborough and Nuneaton, Stuart Brady and Zoe Mayou, and De Montfort University politics lecturer Alastair Jones, were on the panel.

Tom was the only speaker to put forward the case for a workers' Brexit. All the other speakers expressed illusions that the EU helped protect workers' rights, and put forward a Remain position.

Most tellingly, when asked if they would prefer a Tory victory with Remain, or Brexit with a Labour government, the other panellists avoided the question.

When it was argued that trade unions were responsible for gains made by workers, rather than these being protected by the EU, the response of Zoe Mayou was to lambast the Tory anti-trade union laws for making it difficult for workers to take strike action.

There was no acknowledgement, other than from the Socialist Party speaker, of the critical role of the working class or that workers can fight back, particularly if given a lead.

The Socialist Party pointed out the strikes by homecare workers and refuse collectors in Birmingham against a Labour council. The bin workers have won £3,500 for every worker, while the home carers are still fighting.

Tom raised the despicable use of false accusations of antisemitism by right wingers in an attempt to discredit supporters of Jeremy Corbyn like left-wing MP Chris Williamson. He was sadly met with comments of "shame", and "anti-semite apologist", but only from a few, more vocal members of the audience. Our socialist arguments got an echo with many of the young people attending.

It is clear, if this meeting represented a microcosm of the Labour Party, that it remains two parties in one. Mandatory reselection of MPs could clear out those who oppose Corbyn's anti-austerity programme.

A real people's vote is not a re-run of the EU referendum, but a general election to kick out the hated Tories.

We need to continue the fight for socialism, through fighting, democratic trade unions, both within and outside of the Labour Party.

Andrew Walton, Leicester East Socialist Party

Reclaim the Game book launch

The largest branch of transport union RMT - London Underground Engineering, this year named the Bob Crow branch to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the death of the union's towering general secretary - hosted the launch of the latest edition of Reclaim the Game.

The book by Socialist Party member John Reid - who has previously been on the RMT's national executive committee - exposes the pernicious role of big business in football. Over £200 worth of books were sold.

Alongside the Bob Crow branch, this edition is also sponsored by Camden No.3 RMT branch.

- Get [Reclaim the Game](http://leftbooks.co.uk) for £5 plus postage at leftbooks.co.uk
-

Mueller report underlines Democrats' weakness

Mass movement is needed to defeat Trump

Tom Crean, Socialist Alternative, USA

The long-awaited key findings of Robert Mueller's investigation into Trump's ties to Russia have been made public. Mueller found no clear evidence of Trump and his 2016 presidential campaign "colluding" with Vladimir Putin. As regards Trump "obstructing justice," Mueller says there is no conclusive evidence but does not exonerate him either.

Trump and his associates are claiming victory, saying he has been "fully exonerated." It is very clear that the 'Russia, Russia, Russia' narrative that the Democratic leadership and the liberal media endlessly promoted for two years has hit the wall. Even leaving aside the very thin evidence of collusion, we have consistently pointed to the absurdity of the idea that a Russian intelligence operation was the decisive factor in the outcome of the 2016 elections.

The Democratic leadership has spent two years demobilising the movement against Trump by telling people to just wait until the Mueller report concludes.

This of course is not the end of Trump's legal problems as other investigations continue into his finances. Also, the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives is set to conduct extensive public hearings on all these issues, ensuring that the saga will continue indefinitely.

But as they already have largely taken impeachment of the president off the table, the Mueller report looks set to end any chance the Democrats will actually seek to bring Trump down.

The Democratic establishment has chosen to focus on completely secondary issues rather than mobilise working people and the oppressed, on the issues they care about, against this vicious regime.

The real crimes

Here is a list (by no means complete) of Trump's actual 'high crimes and misdemeanours':

- Threatening the health care of millions of people, especially those near or below the poverty line. He and the Congressional Republicans have worked overtime to roll back the expansion of Medicaid. And despite repeatedly promising not to cut Medicare and Social Security in 2016 this is exactly what his new budget proposes to do. Meanwhile, he and his billionaire cabinet have promoted massive tax cuts for big business and the rich.
- He has given the Christian right everything they've asked for. In particular he has put two reactionary judges on the Supreme Court who will attack voting rights, LGBT+ rights and abortion rights, which are already under severe attack at state level.
- Emboldening white nationalists and actively stoking racial division. This contributed directly to the Charlottesville neo-Nazi mobilisation in 2017 and to the Pittsburgh antisemitic massacre in 2018.
- Promoting attacks on union rights, including last year's 'Janus' Supreme Court decisions (see 'US unions facing new challenge after Supreme Court ruling' - the Socialist, 4 July 2018). Though it's clear that a strong labour movement is the only effective way to push back against the massive increase in inequality.
- Finally, instead of acting to avert climate catastrophe, Trump pulled out of the limited Paris accord and has sought to rip-up environmental protection regulations.

Where now?

No other president since World War Two has had disapproval ratings over 50% - virtually since the day he took office. How is it that the Democrat establishment is managing to let this outright reactionary (whose policies were again rejected by a clear majority in the midterm elections) off the hook?

It's not just their focus on Mueller's investigation as 'the way' to harm Trump. The Democrats also failed to take advantage of the government shutdown which led to Trump's highest disapproval ratings, by not challenging his narrative of an "invasion" at the southern border and refusing to mobilise ordinary people in the streets.

The corporate media sought to give Nancy Pelosi (Democrat and Speaker of the House of Representatives) credit for bringing the shutdown to an end. But it was actually the action of air traffic controllers and flight

attendants which threatened to lead to a full-scale shutdown of the airports which brought Trump to heel within hours.

The bottom line is that the Democrats, even if they formally oppose reactionary policies, refuse to mobilise ordinary people to fight back. The establishment also resists any significant reforms that would affect the corporate bottom line.

They answer to their corporate donors who completely oppose Medicare for All and the 'green New Deal'; proposals that have been popularised by left-wing Democrats Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and are enormously popular in the voting base of the party.

The outcome of the Mueller investigation was largely predictable. But it urgently poses the question: how are we going to fight back against the endless attacks by the right?

In the past year young people have shown the way in the mass student walkouts demanding action on gun violence and climate change. Women have shown resistance to Trump's appointment of reactionary judge Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court.

But most significant is the teachers' revolt. By fighting alongside working-class communities and reclaiming the strike weapon, they have won significant gains from West Virginia to Oakland. They are showing the way to build the type of sustained mass movement we need.

This movement also needs a political expression, which is why we need a new party that fights for the interests of working people, not the billionaires.

We support Bernie Sanders' campaign for president because its programme points in this direction despite the campaign being stuck inside the Democratic Party.

This is why the ruling class would rather Trump win again than let Bernie near the White House. At this moment it's critical that Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez give real leadership and call for mass mobilisations and escalating action against this dangerous regime.

- Full article on socialistalternative.org

40 years after Three Mile Island disaster

- Nuclear fission - dangerous, dirty and expensive
- Socialist policies for safe, clean and cheap energy

Martin Powell-Davies, Socialist Party national committee

On the morning of 28 March 1979, pumps feeding water into the steam generator at Three Mile Island's No.2 (TMI-2) nuclear reactor near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, failed. Emergency shutdown systems appeared to have worked correctly - but they hadn't.

Like all nuclear power plants, TMI-2 used the heat energy produced by nuclear fission reactions to turn water into steam.

Just like a power station burning coal or gas, the steam pressure then turns a turbine that spins the electrical generator. However, nuclear fission doesn't just generate energy. It also produces dangerous waste products like radioactive caesium, iodine, strontium and plutonium. Some remain highly radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years.

Unlike the later disasters at Chernobyl and Fukushima, a major release of radioactivity was avoided at TMI-2 - but only just. For 16 hours, plant operators struggled to make sense of their instrument readings. A faulty

control panel meant they didn't realise that a safety valve had jammed open, allowing coolant to escape and the reactor core temperature to soar.

By the time they had worked out what was wrong, half of the uranium fuel had melted. The damaged TMI-2 unit had to be permanently closed. It took 14 years and \$1 billion to decontaminate the plant by removing two million gallons of radioactive water and putting over a hundred tons of debris and fuel into secure storage.

The nuclear power industry claims nobody suffered health effects from the radioactivity that was released during the TMI-2 incident. However, that is disputed by local cancer sufferers who blame the accident, and the government's attempts to play down the dangers at the time, for their illness.

What's certain is that the Three Mile Island accident dealt a severe blow to the idea that nuclear fission could provide safe, clean energy. The US government was forced to introduce more stringent construction and safety regulations. This put a further squeeze on the profits that could be made from building hugely expensive nuclear power stations.

The 1986 Chernobyl disaster, when a fire in the graphite core of a nuclear reactor released radioactive plumes for ten days, fuelled public opposition further. In the USA, over 100 orders for new reactors were cancelled and no new plants were approved until 2012.

'Green' energy?

The advocates of nuclear power then tried to reinvent fission as 'green' energy since, unlike burning fossil fuels, it does not generate the greenhouse gases that cause climate change.

However, the 2011 Fukushima disaster then provided another deadly reminder of the disastrous consequences of systems failure in a nuclear power station.

The disaster at Chernobyl was a product of an impatient, unaccountable Stalinist Soviet Union bureaucracy pressuring technicians into a reckless experiment aimed at speeding up repair times.

Fukushima was the product of a reckless private operator, the Tokyo Electric Power Company, ignoring the risk from tsunamis and earthquakes. But could these risks be avoided if nuclear power was part of a nationalised energy system under workers' management?

A genuine safety culture could reduce risks but, just as at Three Mile Island, the chance of human error and mechanical failure is always present. Even if an accidental release of radiation is avoided, every radioactive reactor eventually has to be decommissioned, at huge cost, when the power station closes.

They can't just be dismantled like an old factory. The radioactive material has to be safely and securely stored for many thousands of years before its contents could be safe to release into the environment.

A 2018 government report estimates the cost of cleaning up just the UK's 17 nuclear sites could be over £200 billion.

Many of the UK's nuclear power plants are already operating beyond their originally planned lifetimes as it is. The Hunterston B reactor in Ayrshire has been out of action ever since 370 hairline cracks were found in its ageing graphite core. They can't be mended so EDF, its private operator, has applied for permission to increase the safety limit to 700 cracks instead!

The fact that only one new UK nuclear power station is under construction, Hinkley Point C in Somerset, is because the economics of nuclear power is now so clearly flawed.

This white elephant, a legacy of New Labour's Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's support for the nuclear industry, will, if its technical flaws are overcome, end up being the most expensive power station ever built. The cost will be met by bill payers through a deal that guarantees that EDF will be paid about twice the actual going rate for the new reactor's electricity output.

Not everyone has struck lucky like EDF. Hitachi and Toshiba have pulled out of their plans to build other new nuclear power stations planned for Wales and Cumbria. In Pennsylvania, the remaining Three Mile Island No.1 reactor is itself facing shutdown this year - not through any accident but because it's been making a financial loss.

Socialist policies

Instead of continuing to subsidise risky and expensive nuclear power, urgent investment is needed in the further development of wind, solar and other renewable sources while rapidly improving energy efficiency.

Energy generation and transport industries should be part of a nationalised environmental plan of production. This is the only solution to urgently tackling climate change while also providing skilled jobs, particularly for those presently employed in the nuclear industry.

Austerity-ridden capitalism is unable to make the investment needed to rapidly and safely phase out nuclear power, far less the global plan needed to tackle global climate change. For that, socialist change is needed.

Corporate capitalism jeopardises air safety

Dave Carr

On 10 March, shortly after take-off, an Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 Max passenger jet slammed into the ground, killing all 157 on board. Months earlier another 737 Max, operated by Lion Air, crashed in similar circumstances, killing 189 passengers and crew.

A coincidence? US flight attendants' trade unions called for the planes to be grounded and told members they wouldn't be forced to work a 737 Max flight. Many airlines worldwide immediately grounded their 737 Max fleets.

Only several days later did the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which oversees air safety, ground the plane operating in the US - having earlier defended US airlines for continuing to fly their 737 Max fleets.

Boeing, the aircraft's manufacturer, denied there was any common underlying fault. But the Wall Street Journal reported that both crashes were due to the same software problem.

Boeing is a huge US company that generated \$100 billion in revenue last year. Its economic weight in US and global markets gives it enormous political clout. It employs lobbyists in Washington DC to obtain lucrative government contracts and makes large political donations - \$827,000 in February alone.

Former Boeing executive Patrick Shanahan also sits in Trump's cabinet as acting secretary of defence. Embarrassingly for the president (if it's possible to embarrass Trump) the Pentagon's office of the inspector general last month began an investigation into allegations that Shanahan tried to enhance Boeing's contracts with the government.

Flawed

The roots of this air disaster go back a decade when Boeing's 737 series' main rival, Airbus, announced the fitting of new, fuel-efficient engines on its 320 series. This put Boeing under big financial pressure to catch up with its competitor. But re-engineering the 737 with similar engines was, technically, far more complicated.

Instead of building a new plane - a lengthy and costly process - Boeing opted to modify its existing 737 design to maintain its customer base.

With Boeing desperate to get the 737 Max flying, the FAA's top management reportedly pressured its safety engineers to let Boeing approve the aircraft themselves.

The FAA, by allowing Boeing to effectively self-certify its planes, is open to the charge of compromising air safety to satisfy the business model and hence profits of this multibillion dollar corporation.

The installation of larger, heavier engines altered the 737's aerodynamics and made it prone to stall. To compensate, a 'manoeuvring characteristics augmentation system' (MCAS) software device was installed - which in flight automatically forces the nose of the plane down to prevent stalling.

Prior to the Lion Air crash some pilots had no idea MCAS existed. The cockpit voice recorder recovered from the Lion Air plane indicates that the pilots immediately before the crash were frantically trying to figure out why the plane's nose kept on pushing down despite their attempts to correct the angle.

'Angle of attack' sensors fitted in the nose of the plane - showing how far the plane is pointed up or down - had given false readings.

A cockpit indicator light to notify of faulty sensors was not fitted as standard by Boeing but sold as an \$80,000 optional extra. Neither Lion Air nor Ethiopian Airlines had purchased this warning light.

Boeing's share price plummeted after both crashes - dropping 10% in one week after the Ethiopian Airlines crash. The company is now desperate to get the 737 Max fleets airborne and has announced a fix to the software fault.

But how can the public have any confidence in air safety when regulators and aircraft manufacturers collude to ensure profits?

Survivors' families of the crashes are pursuing legal action. But there must also be an independent inquiry, led by the trade unions and involving passenger groups and others, to thoroughly examine the role played by Boeing, airlines and governments in this disaster.

Moreover, public ownership of the aviation industry under democratic workers' control and management is the only way to remove the profit motive and enable air safety to be the top priority.

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.

Racism in football

The Merseyside Pensioners Association has deplored the abuse being levelled at black footballers, disgustingly displayed at the England v Montenegro match on 25 March.

We believe this abuse should be stamped out immediately. If it is not dealt with in a serious way, it could embolden the far right - whose presence continues to pose a threat and act as a diversion from the real causes of society's problems.

We also condemn the racist language aimed at an Asian family at the Liverpool v AC Milan 'Legends' game on 23 March, reported in the Liverpool Echo.

We reaffirm our belief that shortages in housing and social provision are caused, not by people whose religion or origins are perceived as 'different', which is the message of the far right, but by an economic system which gives priority to the maximisation of profit irrespective of the social consequences. This is exemplified by the relentless Tory cuts. This situation can start to be remedied when a Corbyn-led government is elected.

We support the statement of the both the Liverpool supporters' group Spirit of Shankly and the Everton fans' organisation which condemned the racist behaviour.

We believe that the minister for sport and her shadow, and the Professional Footballers Association, should work together with the Trade Union Congress to stamp out this obscene presence in the 'beautiful game'.

Tony Mulhearn, Merseyside Pensioners Association

The following letter was printed in the Liverpool Echo on 26 March

Implement a no-cuts budget!

Those of us urging Liverpool's Labour council to use its reserves and borrowing powers to implement a legal no-cuts budget don't "fully understand the gravity of the situation we, as a city, have been put in" by Tory cuts, writes Bernie Hunt ('Not enough in fund', Liverpool Echo, March 20).

In fact, it is precisely because we understand the gravity of the situation that we advocate such action.

Bernie, on the other hand, cautions that the council's reserves can be used only in "emergency situations" - as if we're not currently in one.

Yet, since Mayor Anderson's 2012 prediction that "people will die" due to his council's cuts, more than 60 homeless people have died in the city. If this is not an emergency, what is?

And in any case, Bernie's claim that reserves can be used only in "emergency situations" is itself debatable.

For example, in 2008 two Lewisham Socialist Party councillors proposed that 'general' reserves be used to avoid cuts. The borough's chief financial officer accepted - without reference to the supposed need for an 'emergency situation' - that the funds could in principle be used "on a once-off basis to support service provision."

Moreover, Liverpool Council documents state that 'controllable earmarked' reserves can be "used on a short-term temporary basis for other purposes" - like avoiding current cuts - "provided the funding is replaced in future years".

Taken together, the above points suggest that Liverpool's council could use its 'general' and 'controllable earmarked' reserves - which total £51 million - to reverse its recent council tax hike and avoid the up to £21 million of cuts it reportedly plans to make by April 2020. The time bought could be used to launch a mass campaign to win the money back from central government.

As for Bernie's question about what will happen if this strategy is adopted: the answer, in my opinion, is that it will force this weak Tory government to retreat.

The alternative is the council's current approach of carrying out the Tories' dirty work. Over time this is virtually guaranteed to completely destroy vital council services, as Samih Kalakeche, the council's former adult social care director, warned.

Alex Smith, Liverpool

Sydney climate change march

The 15 March climate change demo in Sydney city centre was very big, lively and well informed. Lots of 'old-uns' like me were there cheering and clapping the youth on.

Young people are well-informed on the environment, which is higher up the political agenda than in the UK.

Australia's many extreme weather events are bringing home what environmental destruction and climate change really means long term. The political class is under real pressure over this issue and the youth on the move are rattling many cages.

The Greens and independents like the Animal Justice Party may make electoral gains but neither directly challenges capitalism.

Australia hasn't had a recession like in the UK but many people haven't had a wage rise for years and it's expensive to live here.

The environment is the touchstone for many issues affecting the youth and working class here.

Steve Nally

Honda and Lucas

The terrible situation at Honda in Swindon has got me wondering on the future of workforces in particular industries throughout the UK.

In 1978, the Lucas Aerospace shop stewards committee came up with an alternative plan that advocated the production of socially useful products.

Shouldn't we be talking to the workforces at Honda, BAE Systems and Trident, for example, to see how their skills could be used in a more positive way - rather than for manufacturing weapons of mass destruction or making cars that can damage the climate?

Alongside these conversations we should act proactively - fully supporting the workers in the fight to save jobs - while encouraging and participating in the development of ideas of how the skills these workers have can be used for the benefit of all and not just in the pursuit of their bosses' profit. I believe this is important enough to warrant serious discussion and planning.

Harry Gammon, Hull

Oxford uni imperialist?

The i newspaper reported on 22 March that Oxford University, the educator of British imperialists and the establishment for generations, is hiring a researcher to study whether the university had a role in colonialism and British imperialism.

This follows the campaign against the statue of arch-imperialist Cecil Rhodes and his links to the university by students. They are clearly in denial! They could just admit their role and spend the money on something else!

Clare Wilkins, Nottingham

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What the Socialist Party stands for

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

The organised working class has the potential power to stop the cuts and transform society.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

Public services

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

Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards a real living wage. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension.
- Reject 'workfare'. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker's wage. Support the National Shop Stewards Network.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.

- A democratically planned, low-fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

Rights

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

Mass workers' party

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

Socialism and internationalism

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

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