

## Tories facing electoral meltdown - but only a socialist alternative to austerity can finish them off

With two weeks to go before local elections in 271 councils in England, the Tories are facing the loss of many council seats. An article by journalist Harry Phibbs on the "Conservative home" blog was headlined: "'We're doomed': The mood of Conservative councillors facing the electorate varies from nervousness to despair". Phibbs wrote: "Seasoned campaigners were shocked by the level of anger they encountered on the nation's doorsteps - invariably from Brexiteers who felt betrayed".

The Tories' deep Brexit crisis is repelling much of their support base, but also they are not immune from anger at the ongoing austerity, which has meant huge cuts in services and jobs in local authorities.

Then, just three weeks after those elections, another electoral battering for the Tories looks increasingly likely. Elections for the European parliament are scheduled for 23 May if there is no EU withdrawal deal agreed before then.

Over the last week the Tories have fallen in the opinion polls with the result that Labour has opened up a significant lead. This is part of the political climate in the run-up to the above two elections, and it's a period that could also include a third election at any time, a general election, so urgently needed to sweep the rotten Tory government out of power.

### "Disaster"

Both the local and the likely European elections seem certain to worsen the crisis in the Tories which is already at a colossal level. Media commentators and leading Tories are predicting that the Tories could suffer their lowest ever vote if the European election does go ahead in the UK. Coming almost a full three years after the 2016 referendum vote to leave the EU, it will be seen as farcical and galling by a large layer of voters.

Foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt agreed with a BBC journalist who put it to him that fighting the European election would be a "disaster" for the Tories. Children's minister Nadhim Zahawi went so far as to say that going into the EU elections "would be the suicide note of the Conservative Party".

This prospect was one of the reasons for the scale of the rebellion by Tory MPs against Theresa May asking the EU for a delay in Brexit until the end of June. A majority of the party's MPs, 177 of them, either voted against the extension, abstained or didn't vote, so it was only agreed through the weight of opposition votes. In practise it then became an extension - if necessary - to the end of October, at the insistence of the EU.

If there is no eleventh hour deal to prevent an election on 23 May, a layer of usual-Tory voters will look away from them in disgust, turning instead to the likes of Ukip, as happened in the 2014 European elections when Ukip topped the poll in England and Wales.

Since then, former Ukip leader Nigel Farage has formed his new 'Brexit Party', to which eleven Ukip MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) have defected. Overall Ukip has lost the allegiance of nearly all its MEPs who were elected five years ago - 20 out of its 24 MEPs have left the party. But notwithstanding this degree of collapse, the depth of the Tory crisis is likely to benefit both Ukip and the Brexit Party if the European election goes ahead.

On the 'Remain' side, the new Change UK party, formed by defectors from the Tories and the right of Labour, is hoping it can become registered and also pick up votes on 23 May. European elections being based on a form of proportional representation gives them added hope. But the Lib Dems are also strongly pro-Remain

and this isn't helping their poll ratings. The main advantage Change UK will have over the Lib Dems will be to present themselves as something new, in the way that Macron did two years ago in France. Macron's popularity has halved since then.

Would a European election become a proxy EU referendum? It would no doubt be seized on by both right-wing Brexiters and ardent Remainers to try to turn it into one, inflaming tensions and polarisation. However, a recent YouGov poll indicated that only half of those who voted 'Leave' in 2016 would bother to vote on 23 May, so the result wouldn't reflect the balance of attitudes today towards EU membership.

Neither would it be any indication of the result of a general election; for instance Ukip received 27% of the vote in the 2014 EU election but went on to get only 1.8% in the general election in 2017.

## **Tory turmoil**

As said above though, both the local elections and a European election can throw the Tories into even greater turmoil than they're already in. Conservative Party rules state that following the failure to remove Theresa May in a vote of confidence last December, a new attempt can't take place until 12 months later. But such is the level of infighting in the party that two former chairmen of the Tory backbench '1922 committee' recently said that these rules could be changed in order to bring forward a new move against May.

The Tories are tearing themselves to pieces and this will sooner or later bring to an end their government. This doesn't mean, however, that Jeremy Corbyn along with his hundreds of thousands of supporters in Labour, and millions more outside Labour, can simply wait for this horror story to play out.

Labour re-won its Newport West parliamentary seat in the 4 April byelection, but its reduced majority was a warning sign. In the May local elections Labour-led councils will face great anger at brutal cuts in services which they shouldn't have been making. In a European election some anger will be directed at Labour by working class people if Corbyn doesn't project out a clear, bold, pro-working class Brexit alternative.

Getting out a socialist message in those elections is vital and necessary preparation for Corbyn's Labour to not just win a general election, but to win it with a large enough majority to be able to actually deliver the socialist policies that the overwhelming majority in society so desperately need.

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# **£100 billion for bosses - cuts for us. Fight for the socialist alternative**

**James Ivens**

MPs get extension after extension on their Brexit crisis. But there are no extensions for workers and young people on our suffocating rent and bills.

School workers at the 2019 National Education Union conference say some kids attend having not eaten in two days. More than half of the 8,000 members surveyed reported hungry students.

But the shareholders of British big business are on track to receive £100 billion in dividends for the first time in history this year, says Link Market Services. The top payouts in the first three months of 2019 - over a billion each - came from big oil, big tobacco and big pharma.

Meanwhile, the workers who make the bosses their money are crushed in the vice of Dickensian wages and dizzying living costs. And then there's Universal Credit. Destitute claimants can only hope against hope that their next utility bill won't arrive.

Why should the bosses rake in billions when we can't even pay our rent? Why is there always money for tax breaks for the corporations, but never any for our wages and public services? Why do we go to work at two or three jobs for peanuts while wealthy shareholders 'earn' billions for nothing?

These smouldering injustices lie beneath every explosive development in world politics.

The working-class revolt against the capitalist establishment which was the Brexit vote. The surge for Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity promise in the 2017 snap election. Social movements against sexism, racism, climate change, and all the evils inflicted on us by the bosses and their politicians.

## **Socialism**

As long as the billionaires control industry and politics, this thievery will go on. The Socialist Party fights for public ownership of big business, under the democratic control and management of workers.

Then the working class could plan how to use that £100 billion - for schools, hospitals, wages, homes, green energy and more.

That's socialism. A society founded on democratic, collective planning and solidarity - not competition and division of every kind to enrich the super-rich.

Workers have shown their power through strike victories, like the mass action for equal pay in Glasgow last year. We say Corbyn and the trade union leaders must exercise this power. Call for mass mobilisations, plan for joint strikes, to end this hated Tory government!

That would be the first step towards a movement to take control out of the hands of the capitalists once and for all. If you want to help build it - join the Socialists.

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# **Assange arrest: US and allied governments seeking revenge for exposing dirty wars**

**Dave Carr**

After seven years of self-imposed exile in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was dragged from his place of asylum and arrested by the Metropolitan police. This followed the revoking of his asylum status by Ecuador's president Lenin Moreno.

The US administration, backed by the UK Tory government, is keen to get Assange extradited to the US to face charges of stealing US state secrets - in other words, details of its war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The UK's Tory-led government, a key ally of US imperialism, maintained a seven-year, multi-million pound surveillance outside the embassy in Knightsbridge in its determination to deny Assange freedom.

This was despite a United Nations working group, in February 2016, declaring that Assange had been "arbitrarily detained" for five years by the UK and Swedish governments and should be released immediately, with compensation.

## **Asylum**

Assange was originally granted political asylum in Ecuador's London embassy by former social-democrat president Rafael Correa - a supporter of WikiLeaks.

Correa couldn't contest the 2017 election, which was won by his social-democrat party rival Lenin Moreno. The new president embarked on a sharp rightward shift in the government's political trajectory, including developing closer economic and diplomatic ties to the US.

Moreno declared Assange a "nuisance" and an "inherited problem". Recently Moreno accused WikiLeaks of hacking his private messages, without providing evidence of this. This accusation is against the backdrop of

an Ecuadorian judicial investigation into Moreno over allegations of corruption.

Having conducted a propaganda campaign against Assange, Moreno worked with the US and UK governments to secure Assange's arrest.

After the arrest Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, claiming to be unbiased, declared that Assange is "no hero". However, Labour shadow home secretary Diane Abbott said: "He is being pursued because he has exposed wrongdoing by US administrations and their military forces."

## **Leaked emails**

The US charge refers to the 700,000 confidential documents, videos and diplomatic cables that WikiLeaks obtained from former US intelligence operative Chelsea Manning in 2010, which exposed the dirty war the US government and its allied governments, including the UK, was waging in Iraq and Afghanistan (and still are).

Manning was subsequently court-martialled and jailed for 22 years by the US military but released after seven years on a pardon granted by Barack Obama.

WikiLeaks was also responsible for publishing hacked emails (carried out by Fancy Bear - a pseudonym of the Russian state hackers according to the Mueller investigation) from the Democratic Party national leadership prior to the 2016 US presidential election.

What these leaked emails showed was that the Democrats' national leadership was unconstitutionally blocking left-wing candidate Bernie Sanders from becoming the Democrats presidential candidate in favour of Hillary Clinton, who subsequently lost the election to Donald Trump.

WikiLeaks is not a socialist organisation or on the left, nor even a democratic organisation. Assange has entertained some dodgy politicians in his embassy bolt-hole, including former Ukip leader, Nigel Farage.

Moreover, allegations of rape by women in Sweden against Assange - the basis of his 2012 arrest warrant - cannot simply be dismissed as 'fabricated'. The rape allegation should be investigated, but without the threat of deportation to the US.

However, the Swedish prosecution acted very clumsily and slowly in 2010 when the rape and sexual molestation charges were first made. When the investigation was resumed, they had three weeks to interview Assange before he left the country, which they allowed him to do.

In November 2016, Assange was questioned at the Ecuadorian embassy by Swedish officials over the remaining sex allegation. Then, unexpectedly, in May 2017, the Swedish prosecutor's office said it was dropping the rape investigation at that stage.

Notwithstanding its shortcomings, WikiLeaks has exposed and embarrassed the major Western powers, especially over how their military and intelligence forces operate outside of any notional democratic public oversight, often conducting extremely violent and illegal operations, including acts of terror against civilians.

When the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky led the working class and rural poor to power in Russia in 1917, one of the first acts of the new democratic Soviet government was to reveal the secret treaties between the major European capitalist powers to carve up the world and further their geopolitical interests.

Today, like in 1917, the Western powers are determined to keep their dirty laundry hidden from public view. The ruling classes understand that exposure of their anti-democratic and anti-socialist secrets can only fuel working class hatred of capitalism.

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# Labour looks to Bank of England to stall house prices - nationalisation is needed

A Unite housing workers branch member

£400 billion worth of land - about 10% of the land mass - has been privatised since 1979, making it the biggest single privatisation, according to economist Brett Christophers. He calls this process the new enclosure and it isn't helping the provision of affordable housing!

Labour has announced that the Bank of England could be set a target for house-price inflation. Under the proposals, the bank would be mandated to guide house-price growth within levels set by the government, in the same way that the central bank is handed a target to keep general inflation at around 2%.

As rising prices push home ownership out of reach, lack of social housing means that the insecure private-rented sector is the only option for many. Advocates of setting a target to limit housing and land inflation say it would build an economy that works for "those who live off work, not those who live off wealth."

Even this limited proposal has produced a ferocious response from property capitalists, a foretaste of the opposition a Jeremy Corbyn government would face. The chief executive of a major estate agency told Estate Agent Today the idea was "bordering on the insane" given past records of governments 'interfering' with the market.

But for years governments have interfered in markets to support those who own land and "live off wealth", driving up land prices and therefore the cost of housing.

Brett Christophers says land accounted for just 2% of the price of residential property in the 1930s, now it's closer to 70%. It is easy to see why Labour's proposal is attractive.

Establishment economist Kate Barker warned: "A house price target is a difficult one for government. It is totally absurd for the Bank of England unless given control of a whole other range of policies."

Rather than giving yet more power to the Bank of England - made 'independent' as one of the first acts of the Blair government, to the delight of business - all the main banks and financial system should be nationalised and made accountable to the aims of a Corbyn government.

In the financial crisis, the banks were bailed out and some were nationalised but then run on the same old capitalist principles. So the rich have continued to get richer since the crash.

## Howls of protest

The howls of protest show that Corbyn should expect no gratitude from finance for half measures. The way to overcome the deep sickness of capitalism is through a bold socialist plan.

To stop the enrichment of landowners which drives the housing crisis it is time to act. Nationalised banks and house builders could mobilise resources for a mass programme of building genuinely affordable council housing.

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## No-fault evictions ban, but cuts leave tenants vulnerable

Wolverhampton Socialist Party member Nick Hart appeared on BBC News to talk about his experience of 'no-fault evictions'

You know that things have got bad for private renters when even the Tories realise they need to look like they're doing something to stop the chronic exploitation of tenants.

Housing minister James Brokenshire announced that the government would be changing the law to stop no-fault evictions - where landlords can evict tenants without good reasons at eight-weeks' notice.

A few years ago, I was evicted from the room I was renting. The landlord decided to spruce up the ex-council house, told me the builders were arriving in four weeks and I'd have to be gone by then!

When I returned a while after to pick up some post, fancy flooring and furnishings had been installed, an extension added, and the rent nearly doubled for the new tenants!

## **Access support?**

Even if this sort of behaviour is made illegal and tenants automatically have a right to challenge evictions in court, what use is that when councils continue to cut funding for Citizens Advice Bureaux and other places where people can access housing advice?

It was recently revealed that in the last year only three entries have been made into the government's national database of rogue landlords, only 11% of councils in England have fined rogue landlords and just 33% have carried out prosecutions of landlords caught breaking the law.

It's hard to believe that other areas are completely free of landlords exploiting people's need to find somewhere to live by renting out badly maintained properties. Much more likely, this is evidence of local authority housing departments being cut to the bone.

A first step for Labour councils - to stand up for the working class in deeds and not just words - would be to properly fund housing advice and inspection for private tenants.

But they should also go further. They should follow the example of Liverpool City Council - led by the Socialist Party's forerunner Militant - in the 1980s.

They should launch a struggle to win back the funding cut by central government over the last nine years. And fight for the necessary funds to begin building quality public housing on the scale needed to house the roughly one million people currently stuck on council house waiting lists.

We need rent control too. Labour councils could use their licensing powers to begin to implement this now.

One property developer, Persimmon, made £1 billion in profit in 2018. The wealth exists to provide everyone with a decent home to live in.

More and more, capitalism shows itself incapable of providing this basic requirement for life - time to step up the fight for liveable housing and a socialist society based on human need, not private greed.

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## **Cuts drive council tax debt**

During the campaign against the Poll Tax, we used to say that the tax was unfair because a lord in his manor was expected to pay the same as a dustman down the road. This analogy resonated, and the campaign resulted in 18 million people not paying the tax, its abolition and the downfall of Thatcher.

When council tax replaced the defeated poll tax, there was a perception that taxing property was generally fairer than individuals, and for a while it was. However, Guardian analysis has revealed that council tax arrears in England have soared in the last five years by 37%.

Government figures show that in 2017-18 council tax debt stood at £3 billion. 305 people were given prison sentences in the same period with a further 6,278 given suspended sentences, for failing to pay their council

tax.

Council tax bills, in many areas, have been raised by almost the legal maximum, 4.99%, before a legal referendum is due. This is the biggest increase since the tax was introduced in 1992.

Cuts to benefits and council tax allowance and the introduction of Universal Credit, combined with council tax hikes, have pushed a layer of people over the edge. Ruthless implementation of its collection is a result of years and years of austerity cuts by Tories and Blairites.

With notable exceptions, like the Birmingham bin workers and others, there hasn't been any proper fightback at local level by the trade union movement. We've ended up at a place where virtually everything has been closed, privatised or 'regenerated'. One of the only sources of revenue raising for councils, if they don't fight back, is local taxation - council tax.

The hollowing out of council tax departments means that staff, who would have previously helped people avoid going to court, now don't exist in the same way. Voice recognition and other new technology means that people often don't speak to an actual person.

You're in a crude sanctioning process, and can be bounced into the judicial system, without even knowing it. Similarly, the use of private bailiffs means working to crude targets that criminalise people unnecessarily.

The tax is particularly pernicious to women. Women who incurred small debts have ended up with the bailiffs at their door or even been imprisoned, with all the implications this holds for their families.

We demand that nobody is criminalised because they are poor. And that Labour councils have no truck with the handing out of sentences or using private bailiff firms.

If we are not to end up with a Poplar Council situation (1921), we need mass investment in local government.

**Nancy Taaffe, Waltham Forest Socialist Party**

- See 'Poplar 1921: "Better to break the law than break the poor"' at [socialistparty.org.uk](http://socialistparty.org.uk)

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## **My hell struggling with council tax debt**

My council tax debt arose as a result of my son living at home, then taking to the streets to live, being homeless and missing. Debt of £154.

They will not agree a payment plan, because they want it paid before the end of the last tax year. So automatically, I pass to debt collection agents who straight away come to your door, despite me calling and writing to council tax at city council - they won't speak to you.

So long story short, three calls at door by bailiff, I refuse to answer door. Eventually agree a payment plan over the phone of £10 a week i.e. £40 a month.

But some weeks I pay £20 or £10 but always keeping to £40 a month. This wasn't good enough for them because they cannot understand weekly payments, so another bailiff at door.

This time scaring my 15 year old who now won't stay in the house on her own. Our debt is now £545.

I will not be paying their fees. So probably will end up in prison when I finish paying what is 'owed'.

**Clare Allington Dixon, Coventry**

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# Labour needs socialist policies to solve "climate emergency"

Jane Ward, Southampton Socialist Party

October's UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report said there is only 12 years for global warming to be kept to a maximum of 1.5C to avoid devastating effects.

Another study in Lancet Planetary Health links four million new worldwide cases of childhood asthma each year directly to traffic-related air pollution. And analysis published in Biological Conservation said that insects could be extinct within a century.

The Labour Party has declared a "national environment and climate emergency." They propose to "decarbonise" the economy, with regional consultations between trade unions, bosses, public sector bodies, universities and others to plan it. They've promised high-quality green jobs for people working in high-carbon-emission industries.

Labour calls for some public ownership. They want to nationalise the railways, but have also said that the private operators would be well compensated.

Labour has pledged to nationalise energy transmission and distribution networks. But, regarding the energy suppliers, Labour is only committed to the creation of regional cooperatives that would struggle to compete with the existing massive private-energy suppliers.

They need to go much further to halt climate change.

Since 1988, just 100 companies are responsible for 71% of global emissions. Large corporations' incessant quest for ever-increasing profit means they pay scant regard to the damage they are doing to the environment.

A socialist government would take the largest companies and the banks into public ownership. For a sustainable future, this must include transport and energy-generating industries.

This must be under democratic workers' control and management. The environmental crisis was created by capitalists, but it will be the working classes who will affect the change needed to resolve it.

A socialist plan for the environment should be put in place. This will enable the rapid introduction of renewable sources of energy, the massive expansion of public transport and drastically cut carbon emissions.

Undoubtedly, the way forward is socialist change not climate change.

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## 20 years of the minimum wage: Fight for a real living wage for every worker

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party secretary

On 1 April 1999, Tony Blair's government introduced a minimum wage. It was one of the very few pro-worker steps taken by a right-wing Labour government which otherwise betrayed working-class people with privatisation of housing and public services, and war.

It was opposed by the Tories when it was first introduced and there were howls of protest from bosses who didn't want to eat into their profits.

The Low Pay Commission, an 'independent' body made up of employer and trade union representatives and 'experts', recommends the level of the minimum wage and, on 1 April this year, published a report of its achievements after 20 years.

The commission is proud to report that the minimum wage has boosted pay by £5,000 a year for low-paid workers, affecting seven million people.

They also boast that the minimum wage has gone up each year at a faster rate than other wages. However, the report can't avoid admitting that this achievement is basically because ten years ago the world economy suffered a financial crash, followed by a concerted effort by the bosses of big business and the banks to ensure that the working class paid for that crisis through austerity.

Wages are still below the pre-crisis level and according to the Office for Budget Responsibility are not likely to get back to that level till 2023 - making it fifteen lost years. Workers are suffering the longest pay squeeze in over 200 years.

Just three days before this minimum wage report, new figures for in-work poverty were released. It is at a record high. After housing costs, 57% of people living in poverty are in a working household. For children, that figure is 70% - 2.9 million. What an indictment of capitalism.

In-work poverty is worsened by the cap and freeze on in-work benefits. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation says the benefits freeze has dragged an additional 200,000 people into poverty since 2016.

Meanwhile housing, transport and childcare costs have spiralled. Household debt has also reached a record high.

The Socialist Party welcomed the introduction of the minimum wage, but it is clearly not enough. We call for and strive to achieve mass trade union struggle to end austerity, and for better pay, terms and conditions of work for all.

## **'Living wage'**

Inspired by campaigns of low-paid workers in east London, for example at Whipps Cross hospital led by Socialist Party member Len Hockey, in 2003 a voluntary London Living Wage was introduced, followed with a Living Wage for the rest of the country in 2011.

That advisory figure is currently £9 an hour. Since the Tories changed the name of the top rate of the minimum wage to the National Living Wage, this campaign figure is now known as the Real Living Wage. There are currently 5,200 employers paying the Real Living Wage.

## **The fight for £10 an hour**

In 2013-14 the Socialist Party launched a campaign for a £10-an-hour minimum wage, inspired by the fight for \$15-an-hour in Seattle in the US. This demand chimed with many and was taken up by groups of workers and trade unions.

Socialist Party members raised the demand in the Fast Food Rights campaign and it was fought for by the National Shop Stewards Network. The bakers' union BFAWU adopted the demand for £10 and took it to the Trade Union Congress conference, where it became policy.

More and more groups of workers started to fight for £10 - and some started to win it. Most famously, McDonald's workers took part in strikes and won increased pay - including an increase to £10 an hour for some staff members.

This groundswell provided the push for Jeremy Corbyn's Labour manifesto in the 2017 general election to make the popular pledge for £10 an hour by 2020.

The Socialist Party still supports the £10-an-hour minimum wage demand, with no exemptions - but as an immediate step towards a real living wage.

## **Beat the gig economy**

A big change since the minimum wage was introduced has been the growth of precarious work - zero-hour contracts, self-employment, and the so-called gig economy - as, in this period of crisis, bosses seek to maximise their methods of exploitation, aiming to achieve the ultimate 'hire-and-fire' workforce. Nearly four million workers work in this insecure way.

Workers in this precarious economy have increasingly got organised and fought for better conditions - for workers' rights, for holiday pay and sick pay, for payment by the hour, to keep control of their own tips and so on.

Groups of workers with little trade union knowledge have gone on strike and protested, learning quickly what a union is, and how to conduct a campaign - in some cases through small independent unions, in other cases in battles taken up by the bakers' union, the RMT transport union, civil servants' union PCS and general unions GMB and Unite.

Because of the nature of precarious work and the complexity of working conditions, it is essential that demands for workers' rights for all from day one, and to scrap zero-hour contracts, run alongside the demands for a decent living wage. We also demand a working week of no more than 35 hours, with no loss of pay.

## **Socialist policies needed**

A higher minimum wage will always be opposed by bosses claiming they cannot afford it, and threatening to lay off workers or increase their prices. Really what they mean is they want to keep their profits.

We say, open the books! If any large company refuses to implement an increased wage or threatens to lay off workers it should be taken into public ownership so that decent jobs can be guaranteed and skills preserved.

For small businesses, however, if they would genuinely struggle to pay a higher wage, they should be eligible for assistance from public funds. Tax the super-rich to pay for it!

We have to link the wage demand to other demands which reduce living costs - especially in housing, transport and childcare - and a programme for job creation.

There is enough wealth in society to provide a minimum wage that could give everyone not just a minimum standard of living but comfort and security.

But under capitalism there will always be a struggle between the workers and the bosses, the capitalist class, over the share of wealth produced. Since the economic crisis, while workers have faced vicious austerity and increased poverty, the richest in society have more than doubled their wealth.

This struggle will continue until a powerful enough workers' movement, with a mass workers' party, takes society into its own hands, nationalises the main planks of the economy, and plans and organises society on a democratic socialist basis.

This would not only ensure good wages, but would also enable the creation of good, socially useful, green jobs.

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## **Present minimum wage rates:**

- Over 25s - now renamed 'National Living Wage' - £8.21
- 21-25 year olds £7.70
- 18-20 year olds £6.15
- 16-17 year olds £4.35

- Apprenticeship rate £3.90
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## **London Living Wage: £15 now!**

Currently the London Living Wage is set at £10.55. The Socialist Party is launching a campaign for a £15-an-hour London Living Wage.

The charity Trust for London estimates that, depending on the kind of household, it costs between 15% and 60% more to live in London than elsewhere.

Four in ten Londoners don't reach even the Minimum Income Standard - an amount worked out by the Centre for Research in Social Policy based on what the public generally consider an acceptable minimum standard of living. That's 3.6 million people. In the rest of UK it's three in ten - bad enough.

The London Living Wage is not a legal minimum, it is only voluntary, but has come to be seen as a minimum by a big layer of workers. A series of low-paid workers, including cleaners, security staff and catering workers, have fought for and won the London Living Wage.

There are now over 1,500 London Living Wage employers. But still over 700,000 workers are paid less than the living wage in London, and only 19 of 33 London councils are London Living Wage employers.

Nonetheless, at £10.55 an hour, the current level of the London Living Wage is not enough. This is illustrated by the fact that in Inner London, the lowest pay in local government is now £11.31 an hour.

Several groups of low-paid workers have fought for more than the current level. In the summer of 2017, workers at the Barts hospital trust in East London, already on the London Living Wage, fought a big campaign for an increase.

Cleaners on London Overground, members of the RMT, are currently striking for the London Living Wage, but they are also campaigning for increases in line with RPI inflation. Camden parking wardens are currently striking for more than £11 an hour.

When it was launched, there was initially discussion about setting the London Living Wage at the 'European Decency Threshold', which at that stage was 68% of average earnings. If the London Living Wage were set at that level today, on a 35-hour week it would be £14.70 an hour.

Some groups of workers are already testing out demands for this level of pay. The idea of £15 an hour has been met with enthusiasm by many workers and trade union members when it has been discussed.

Going from £10.55 to £15 would be a 42% increase. Undoubtedly, bosses would scream that they can't afford it. But why not aim high? What is achievable is decided by the struggle. The victory for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage in Seattle represented a massive transfer of wealth and was a 50% increase on the US federal minimum wage.

The Senior Salaries Review Body recommended that judges get a 42% increase. Why is it so outlandish to demand that low-paid workers should have the same?

£15 an hour on a 35-hour week would mean £27,000 annually. As the benefit cap is £26,000 this would genuinely mean 'making work pay'.

£15 an hour, after tax and national insurance, would achieve the Minimum Income Standard for a family.

### **Sadiq Khan**

In 2020 the elections for the London Mayor and Assembly take place. We want to raise £15 as a demand on Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan. Under Corbyn's Labour, the London Living Wage should be set at a level that

means people really do move out of low pay. We demand the same of every Labour council, and of Transport for London.

All the councils and the London Authority have reserves and borrowing powers. It is not good enough to bewail the Tory cuts to local government funding. We say they should use their reserves and borrowing powers to stop all the cuts and pay £15 an hour - and mount a massive campaign for the funding necessary.

Not only would such a campaign help to oust the Tories as soon as possible, but if Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell were to pledge that an incoming Labour government will underwrite any debts incurred, it would mean councils and the Greater London Authority could pay a £15-an-hour London Living Wage right now.

What would it mean for a minimum wage worker? A London retail worker says: "£15 an hour might seem like a big jump from the current dismal minimum wage. However, to myself and other low-paid workers it would make a huge difference.

"Many low paid workers currently do two jobs just to get by. £15 would ease the worry about not being able to pay the rent, or being forced to live in substandard housing as that's all we can afford. It would stop the constant budgeting of every penny. It would mean that many of us would feel we could start a family without the fear that we cannot afford to! We all deserve to earn a wage we can actually live on."

What could it mean for a salaried worker? National Education Union general secretary Kevin Courtney told the Times Educational Supplement: "There are newly qualified teachers who tell us they've worked out how many hours they've worked in a week, and they've divided that by the amount of pay they get per week, and they've come up with numbers which show they are slightly - only around 10% - above the minimum wage with their hourly rates."

A £15-an-hour London Living Wage demand - especially if some groups of workers started to win it - could inspire salaried workers like teachers to fight for better pay increases themselves.

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## **Newham bin workers ballot for strikes over council's £21,000 pay robbery**

Refuse workers employed by Newham Council in east London could have lost more than £20,000 each in the last decade in a dispute over grading.

The Labour council has failed to progress them through the grading structure which should, as agreed, have commenced 12 years ago in 2007-08. Unite calculates the potential loss of pay amounts to £1,760 a year.

General union Unite will ballot the 45 workers for strike action. The ballot begins on 23 April and closes on 21 May.

Unite regional officer Onay Kasab said: "Newham council has repeatedly failed to live up to the agreement it signed more than a decade ago for progression on the national pay scales if the refuse workers had satisfactory appraisals.

"It is a stain on this council's reputation that it has ducked and dived in avoiding honouring this agreement - the grievance complaint that Unite lodged on this issue was not heard until June 2018.

"The council bosses have admitted that they failed to implement the scheme. But, curiously, they have not been able to say why they agreed to it in the first place when they had no intention of implementing it.

### **Back pay**

"We estimate that, depending on individual circumstances, refuse workers could have lost up to £21,000 in back pay - a considerable sum for this relatively low-paid group of workers who are out in all weathers.

"This is an issue of basic trust, and if the employer is allowed to get away with not implementing the agreement, then it will be emboldened to do so again and again - eventually affecting every council employee adversely.

"Time after time, we have asked the council to implement the scheme, but it has continuously declined to. And that's why we're holding this strike ballot, to show that employers can't ride roughshod over freely entered into agreements to the detriment to our members."

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## **Arriva Rail North cleaners fight bosses' punitive pay arrears**

**Dane Yates, Salford Socialist Party**

Cleaning staff on Arriva Rail North have been told by their employer, outsourcer ISS, that they will be forced to work eleven days with pay owed in arrears. Members of transport union RMT protested outside Manchester Victoria station on 10 April.

Currently, cleaners work five days in arrears. But their bosses' unilateral decision to move the pay will mean waiting up to an extra two weeks for their wages in May.

ISS is a global cleaning and facilities company based in Denmark. It holds dozens of major contracts across Britain in both the private and public sectors, including in several major hospitals.

In 2018, ISS posted net profits of £33.5 million. Despite this, it still pays some of the lowest wages in the sector.

It's not just railway cleaners affected. ISS catering staff at hospitals across the country have been forced to use food banks while they wait for pay.

One worker on the protest told us he was advised he could ask the company for up to £300 to tide him over. But then he must begin paying this back from his next wage packet at the rate of £50 a week!

Another reported that he actually worked at Bolton station, but having heard about the protest in Manchester he "just had to come down." This was despite not getting back from work until after 11pm the previous evening, and having had to get up at 5.30am to make the protest, after which he had to jump on a train back to Bolton to start his next shift.

This two-hour protest could develop into further action, with one worker calling on the union to organise an eight-hour walkout in the coming weeks. Five workers bought a copy of the Socialist newspaper.

The Socialist Party demands that private firms are kicked out, and that public transport along with all support functions is brought into public ownership under democratic workers' control and management.

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## **Stop press! School staff demand action on pay and testing at NEU conference**

**Socialist Party members in the NEU**

As we go to press, school workers' anger has been expressed at the 2019 conference of the National Education Union (NEU). This is the first conference of the new union formed by a merger of the National Union of Teachers and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers.

On 16 April, the day the Office for National Statistics announced that wages are 'rising', delegates supported an amended motion that commits the union to a strike ballot if teachers' pay remains stagnant.

This fighting mood had already exploded onto conference floor late on the first day of conference. Delegates overturned the leadership by demanding the union ballot all primary school staff to boycott all high-stakes summative testing.

Union reps and activists must now keep up the pressure to ensure real campaigns are built to win ballots on pay and testing.

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## **Deliveroo workers protest at firm's Nottingham roadshow**

Deliveroo riders and supporters protested in Nottingham on 13 April at the company's 'roadshow' in the city centre.

Deliveroo is spending a fortune handing out free food and vouchers to promote itself. This is an insult when the bosses refuse to deal with the riders' poor pay and conditions.

Greg Howard is the branch chair of the Nottingham Riders' Network, part of the IWGB trade union. He told the Socialist that they were there to make sure their demands were heard.

These demands include a fixed-distance rate of £1 a mile, and paid restaurant waiting time of £10 an hour. A transparent disciplinary procedure is also needed, rather than staff being laid off without valid reason.

**Pete Watson, Nottingham Socialist Party**

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## **PCS union: vital local strikes and a national pay ballot - vote for a fighting leadership**

**Marion Lloyd, PCS national executive committee (personal capacity)**

Huge attacks face workers represented by civil service union PCS. It is vital that the union elects a campaigning leadership, up to the challenge of fighting Tory cuts. National leadership elections start on 16 April and close on 9 May.

As well as the national executive committee elections which take place annually, this year members will vote for the union's assistant general secretary - elected every five years.

Socialist Party member Chris Baugh is standing for re-election as assistant general secretary. He is the candidate of PCS Left Unity, the union's broad left group. Socialist Party members Marion Lloyd and Dave Semple are also standing for re-election to the national executive committee on the 'Democracy Alliance' slate also supported by Left Unity.

Workers throughout the union are showing their preparedness to fight.

Determined cleaners at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, employed by outsourcer Aramark, have taken another three days' action. They are fighting for the London Living Wage and against privatisation. They want to return to direct civil service employment.

**Strike action**

PCS members at HM Revenue and Customs in Ealing have taken three more days of strike action to keep their tax office open. Ealing and Hillingdon trade union councils, the National Shop Stewards Network and others supported the picket lines and a rally held on the first strike day.

The strike committee will now discuss how to increase the pressure on the employer. Hundreds of PCS members' jobs are at risk, and any closure will hit the local community hard, a community already hit by austerity.

HM Revenue and Customs workers in Wolverhampton are now balloting for industrial action to keep their office open. It is crucial that the Ealing and Wolverhampton campaigns become part of a wider strategy of industrial action and campaigning across the union's HM Revenue and Customs group.

And to smash the Tory pay cap, winning the national pay ballot is crucial. With the ballot closing on 29 April, members must vote for strike action.

The Tory anti-union laws mean 50% of all members have to vote for the union to legally launch a campaign of industrial action. Branches all over the country have already met the 50% threshold.

But we cannot be complacent. Campaigning in the next weeks and days is crucial for the majority of branches to go over the 50% turnout.

The ballot result will be announced on 29 April. A resounding vote for action must be immediately supported by a strike programme to end the 1% pay increases of recent years.

The union needs to set out a detailed plan of sustained, national, group and targeted industrial action, and build up the fighting fund to support those members taking action on behalf of all of us. PCS must also urgently talk to other public sector unions about balloting their members so we can have joint action across the public sector to end years of pay restraint.

All these campaigns show why it is crucial to have leaders prepared to fight. If you want to fight all austerity, vote for Chris Baugh for assistant general secretary.

Chris has a record second to none in fighting cuts and privatisation, such as the attempted and defeated privatisation of the Land Registry. He has helped PCS resist vicious attempts to crush the union by the Tory government, such as the attack on 'check-off' union dues.

PCS members will receive our ballot papers in the next few days. Make sure you vote Chris Baugh for assistant general secretary, Marion Lloyd and Dave Semple for the national executive committee, and for all other candidates on the Democracy Alliance slate.

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## **Unison union: right wing tries to block campaigning - elect a socialist leadership**

1.3 million ballot papers are going out to members of public service union Unison to elect their national leadership.

Unison members have seen their working lives devastated in the last decade or more, with over 700,000 jobs lost, a fall in living standards of at least 15%, and rampant privatisation.

Despite this, there has been no national fightback from the leadership. Instead, branches are left to fight alone in the hope of holding back the tide of the government and employers' onslaught.

That is why it is crucial that the union elects a leadership that is willing to take a stand and fight. There are nine Socialist Party members standing for election alongside 32 other fighting candidates.

Incredibly, the current right-wing leadership has tried to make electing fighting, socialist candidates even more difficult by banning so-called "outside organisations" from campaigning in the election.

Not only are members of political parties like the Socialist Party denied the right to campaign as Socialist Party members and have the support of their party. The union bureaucracy has gone even further, describing an "outside organisation" as any group which consists wholly or partly of Unison members and is not provided for in Unison rules!

This has meant that for the first time ever, Unison Action, the union's broad left group, is banned from campaigning in the election under the threat of disciplinary action.

Incredibly, the justification for the new rules is the fact that a senior unelected full-time official was caught cheating in support of the right wing in the last general secretary election!

The truth is that the current leadership is genuinely fearful it will lose its grip on the union this year. It hopes that by trying to ban effective campaigning, it will be able to hold on to power.

All those in the union who want an end to weak and timid leadership must do all they can to ensure the members get a genuine democratic and fighting leadership - a socialist leadership.

- This article has been produced without the permission of the candidates
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## **Sudan: No to rule of the generals!**

- For a government of the workers and youth
- For a democratic, socialist Sudan

### **CWI reporter**

After 30 years of dictatorship in Sudan, historic mass protests have achieved the fall of President Omar Al-Bashir in a forced 'palace coup' by the generals. Following this, a 'transitional military council' was established, with defence minister Amhed Awad Ibn Auf sworn in as president.

He is part of the old regime and a brutal army general who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for genocide in Darfur. But the protests continued, with protesters chanting: "Revolutionaries, we will continue our path!"

A day later Auf was forced to step down, replaced by a supposedly 'less controversial' general Abdel-Fattah Burhan. This did not satisfy the masses, who are demanding a complete end to military control.

The masses in Sudan have ousted three 'leaders' of the old regime in as many days, and still the mass protests go on. Thousands of protesters dance and chant "freedom!" Protesters want a 'New Sudan'. But the key question they face is how is that possible? Which force in Sudanese society can achieve it? What kind of new Sudan do we want to create?

### **'Arab Spring'**

These are questions that are posed in many parts of Africa. Just a week before, we saw the fall of Bouteflika in Algeria. The regimes in the region are in fear of a new 'Arab Spring' - a new wave of revolutionary uprisings.

This is a critical moment in the unfolding revolution in Sudan and discussion about its direction is vital.

Burhan presents himself as one of the generals who went to meet protesters and listened to their views. The military clearly hope to create illusions that they want a 'dialogue' with protesters.

But protesters know that in reality this is the regime trying to save itself. They declare they will continue protesting until they have achieved a 'civilian government'. Initial interaction of the protesters with the military is with the low-ranking officials and soldiers who came to protect them against the brutality of the national intelligence and security services.

At no time had the masses any illusion that military control of the country will be the best outcome.

The regime has been in panic and is divided, but they are also determined to hold on to power. The announced three-month emergency and two-year transition periods are an attempt to buy time. They know that masses of people cannot stay in the squares forever.

A senior army officer said on state TV "our key responsibility is to maintain public order" and "we will have zero tolerance for any misdeed in any corner of the country". Serious danger of a brutal clampdown of the movement still exists.

Potential power at the moment lies with the masses in the streets. But a mass movement in the streets by itself won't take power. If the workers and youth don't take the next steps to seize and consolidate power, then they will lose it.

Workers and poor people in Sudan have faced savage deteriorating conditions. With around 70% inflation, hundreds queue for fuel and food. In the cities, people suffer overcrowding, poor housing, violence and crime. People say "governments have stolen our money and run away".

Mass protests began on 19 December against the overnight tripling of bread prices. Beginning in Atbara, historically where the Sudanese trade union movement began, the protests spread over the next days to other areas, including the capital Khartoum.

School students protested about increased costs of school meals. Protesters set fire to the offices of the ruling National Congress Party, local government headquarters, and attacked offices of the security services. Reportedly, pro-regime Imams were removed from mosques in some areas.

Doctors and medical staff launched an all-out strike on 27 December, later joined by journalists. The protests escalated on 6 April, when, responding to a call for a general strike, thousands began a sit-in outside the defence ministry in Khartoum.

Quickly the mass movement gathered strength. It is this strength that is now achieving demands that were unthinkable in the past, including the release of political prisoners which was a result of people marching on the prisons.

The workers and youth have shown heroic courage in the face of a brutal regime that carries out arrests, torture and killings; where if you go on strike you lose your job. Showing great defiance, young people have circumvented the closure of social media.

An association of Sudanese doctors said 26 people had died and more than 150 had been injured since the sit-in began, following many deaths in the preceding months.

In further signs of the revolutionary potential, soldiers are among the dead, killed protecting the demonstrators from attack.

Protesters are very aware of the Arab Spring in 2011 and consciously say that this movement is not the same - in other words, they are aware that following those mighty revolutions, elements of the old regimes came back to power, and they don't want that to happen in Sudan.

This means it is essential to learn the lessons. The Arab Spring did not, at that stage, lead to the workers and poor taking power, because of the lack of an independent mass party of the working class with a revolutionary leadership, fighting for the next steps to take power, with an independent working-class programme.

The main opposition group in Sudan is the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), which involves the trade unions, the Women's Union and other groups. The SPA has shown brave resistance.

Even putting forward basic democratic demands and declaring that they will fight on till they win is extremely courageous. They say: "Our endeavour towards getting rid of the regime will continue until the legacy of tyranny is liquidated and its leaders brought to justice."

But to achieve this they need to go further than their current "Declaration of Freedom and Change". Drawn up by the SPA on 1 January, it has been signed by a long list of organisations and protest groups, including pro-capitalist parties.

The declaration calls for the replacement of Bashir with a four-year national transitional government of "qualified people based on merits of competency and good reputation, representing various Sudanese groups and receiving the consensus of the majority", to rule until "a sound democratic structure is established and elections held".

## **Demands**

While there are many good demands - such as ending civil wars, economic freefall, discrimination and oppression of women, and ensuring health, education, housing and social and environmental welfare - this declaration does not distinguish between the different class interests. It is important to take a class position, as calling for democratic elections alone will not result in meeting the demands that are now put forward.

Who will be standing in the election and with what policies? The danger remains that the ruling party of Bashir, the National Congress Party, will regroup to come back to power if the opportunity and time is given.

There must be no illusions in pro-capitalist parties and leaders. While they say they want democracy, they will only go so far. Any new capitalist government would face the same pressures that the Bashir regime faced. In the end it would just mean replacing one set of exploiters with another.

Sudan faces a major economic crisis. The immediate trigger of this uprising was the removal of state subsidies on flour, leading to a tripling of bread prices. This was at the diktat of the IMF. Sudan has \$55 billion of external debts. There will be pressure to pay back \$8 billion outstanding debt to the IMF.

In reality, as long as the new government is not prepared to stand up to the capitalist powers, and as long as the main parts of the economy are left in the hands of the profiteers, what would any capitalist government do differently?

What would they do about the paramilitaries that terrorise the country and threaten civil war? What would they do about the religious divisions in the country, with sectarian groups that are supported by regional powers, ready to exploit those in their own interests? What would they do about the conflict that exists over sharing the oil wealth of South Sudan?

It is not an accident that the US government has said the Sudanese government should "exercise restraint and allow space for civilian participation within the government". The state department spokesman told reporters: "The Sudanese people should determine who leads them ... and the Sudanese people have been clear and are demanding a civilian-led transition." Similarly, the EU and UK have urged the army to carry out a "swift" handover to civilian rule.

Western powers are keen for a cooperative regime that will pay back debts, prevent any further development of the revolution and reduce the chances of uprisings spreading across the region. Workers would soon find a new capitalist government will repress further mass action for lower prices or decent jobs and pay - as has been the experience in Tunisia and Egypt.

The only way to unite the working class and poor across the country and to achieve the desires for a decent standard of living, jobs and homes, genuine democracy, freedom to follow their religion and so on, is for the movement of workers, youth and poor to take control themselves.

The workers' organisations need to establish a mass workers' party urgently and fight for a government based on the working class.

Protests and sit-ins in central Khartoum have been powerful so far but now the trade unions should call for a strike, to take the battle into the workplaces, and pose the question of who controls the factories, the means of production. It is essential to fight to rebuild the unions, and remove leaders, at any level, who are supporters of the regime.

In some areas, such as Atbera, action committees have been set up. In the encampment, basic steps of organisation have begun, with committees to feed people, for security, to control traffic, even a clinic. But this needs to be more organised, on a political basis.

These committees should include local unions, workers, and other forces of the revolution with the view of continuing until all the demands are realised. Linked together, on a local, state-wide and national level, workers' committees can provide the basis for an alternative state structure that can seize power from the military.

## **Programme**

The programme is essential. To win affordable prices for food and fuel, wage rises and a shorter working week, it is necessary to fight for nationalisation of the major industries and the land of the big landowners, under working class democratic control and management.

A socialist plan would be able to begin to invest in job creation, decent housing, health care and education. A workers' government on this basis would be able to appeal to mass movements in the region to take the same action and come together in close economic cooperation including with South Sudan.

Hence we argue for the creation of a democratic socialist Sudan, as this is the only way the masses can realise their hope to create the new Sudan that they want.

A democratic state of the workers and poor would also be able to ensure religious and national rights, and real justice for the old oppressors. For example, the transitional military council has announced they will not send al-Bashir to the International Criminal Court but will try him in Sudan.

This is because they in reality are all guilty of the same war crimes. But a democratic justice system run by and in the interests of the workers and poor in Sudan would genuinely be able to try war criminals and administer justice.

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Socialist Party members have participated in weekly protests in London and around the country in solidarity with the movement in Sudan and on 13 April held a public meeting attended by Sudanese activists to discuss how to take the movement forward.

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# **Labour councils must act now to save our schools!**

**A Southampton NEU member**

A new Ofsted report shows that educational support for vulnerable children is failing. The report outlines how thousands of children are being taught in alternative provision, often in very poor conditions with no qualified teachers.

Deregulation and privatisation has fuelled this crisis. But at its root is a funding hole that has tipped schools over the edge. Real-terms funding per child has fallen by 8%.

Our school, Valentine primary, is open during the Easter holidays to feed children and families and provide food parcels for those who can't make ends meet. And we will be open for 'Easter school' to prepare year six children for the onslaught of SATS tests.

It is the perfect storm of devastating austerity and its impact on working class families. Alongside this, support services have been cut to ribbons and schools are judged by an intense testing regime and league tables.

All of this has pushed teachers beyond the limit at a time of excessive workloads and falling wages.

Exclusion levels have hit the roof. As the funding squeeze hits, teaching assistants on temporary contracts are made redundant, class sizes rise and the teachers are left struggling to meet the needs of all their children.

Children with special needs, instead of getting the support they need, are seen as part of the problem. Increasingly, they are taken off-roll, excluded or resort to truanting. These are the brutal consequences of cuts.

## **"Enough is enough"**

Here at Valentine school, over 100 teachers and parents met to tell our local politicians, "Enough is enough. Find the money or we will go on strike." They didn't but we did. We stood on the picket line together with parents, children and campaign supporters.

May's council elections give Jeremy Corbyn a critical opportunity to call on Labour councils to use their powers to protect school budgets.

Southampton parents and campaign supporters at our school are supporting anti-cuts, socialist candidates to boost support for our campaign and to increase pressure on our Labour councillors to deliver the vital funding, using reserves and 'licensed deficits', and support our school's needs now.

It is essential that the National Education Union steps up its campaign. The indicative national ballot must be built on to deliver national strike action on funding, pay and workload.

Rallies and demonstrations can mobilise our members and build support. This is a decisive battle line against a weak and divided Tory government. We can win.

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# **Council elections - an opportunity to present a socialist alternative to cuts**

**On 2 May council elections are taking place in England, along with six directly elected mayors. The Socialist Party is contesting around 40 seats across the country, as well as the mayoral election in Leicester, under the electoral name of Socialist Alternative.**

**Below, Stephen Armstrong explains why he's contesting the Halton Brook Ward in Runcorn, Cheshire, as the Socialist Party candidate.**

"I'm standing because of the damage austerity is causing in my community and to oppose the Labour councillors who are passing on the Tory cuts instead of protecting local public services.

Council tax has risen again in Halton, and a precept has been added to our bills in order to pay for the Liverpool city regional mayor. This is despite the Labour mayor Steve Rotheram sitting on an £80 million underspend!

Last year the Labour-run council increased council tax, cut Special Education Needs funding and added 10p to the price of school meals, while sitting on a cash reserve of £4.2 million.

We should also be scrapping the tolls on the Mersey Gateway Bridge and reducing allowances for cuts-making councillors.

As in many areas, housing is in short supply and many young people, stuck on low wages in zero-hour contract jobs, cannot afford to buy homes or rent from a private landlord.

The Socialist Party's policy of building council houses to create real jobs and homes for young people, and generate income for the council through rents, would be a massive success in Halton Brook.

Austerity has also impacted massively on the lives of working-class women. Wages, opportunities, pensions and services for women have all been cut drastically in the last nine years.

We must reverse these cuts, so women can have access to services that improve their lives, such as Sure Start, childcare and domestic violence support.

Knife crime and drugs are creating real problems both nationally and locally. Sadly, two teenagers have recently been convicted of killing another in Runcorn. Cuts to youth services, the lack of life chances and austerity in general, have created a perfect storm of disaffected young people.

We should be ploughing money into youth services, to create positive alternatives to drugs and crime for young people.

I have seen the real benefits our party's programme delivered to working-class people of Liverpool when I was growing up in the 1980s.

By standing on that programme, I believe we can overturn the establishment lies told about that period, create real interest in socialist politics, and raise the profile of our party in working class communities which have been abandoned by the Blairites in the Labour Party."

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## **Activists rally in fight for more council housing and against high rents**

**Terry Pearce, Defend Our Community Services**

At a well-attended public meeting in Bracknell on 8 April local activists, including Socialist Party members, met to discuss building a campaign against homelessness, high rents and the lack of council housing in the area.

Patrick Young from Unison union gave a good presentation with many useful statistics. For example, in Bracknell the average first-time buyer's house price in 2017 was £285,828, requiring a 15% deposit of £42,874. In the case of an NHS cleaner this would be 13.9 times their salary.

Clearly, house purchases are out of the question for many young people living in our area. A similar situation applies to renting. Very few council/affordable dwellings are available, but all around our area luxury houses and flats are being built.

Niall Mulholland, Chair of the Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC) spoke about its work in London. SHAC links the housing associations, housing co-operatives and Unite the Union activists, to help in fighting the problems faced by tenants and residents.

Niall talked about the changing role of some housing associations who now sell properties and have highly paid chief executives.

As chair of Bracknell Defend Our Community Services I outlined the aims of the East Berkshire and Reading housing campaign.

More meetings were planned around the area, and people were urged to sign our petition and join our campaign.

Speakers from the floor highlighted the problems many local people face with unaffordable rents and mortgages.

With local elections looming local council candidates should be quizzed about their policies to increase council housing, as very few are being built.

A collection of £50 was raised for future activities and room costs and it was agreed to continue and develop the campaign, building on this successful meeting.

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## **Alternative housing awards**

Recently, the UK Housing Awards website said its annual event at the plush Grosvenor Hotel, Park Lane, London on 1 May would be hosted by comedian Romesh Ranganathan.

SHAC chair, Niall Mulholland, wrote to him asking him to pull out, and explaining why SHAC would be picketing outside - to name and shame housing associations for poor performance as landlords and employers.

Now the UKHA website no longer shows Romesh hosting but says, "Hosted by a surprise guest celebrity". Result!

**Suzanne Muna, SHAC Communications Officer**

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## **'Reforms' hollow out the NUS**

National Union of Socialists (NUS) conference met this year in Glasgow to decide the future of the union. The so-called 'turnaround motion', drawn up by the leadership in response to a financial black hole in NUS accounts, was passed.

It contained proposals which included swingeing cuts to full-time officers and campaigns, moves towards online voting for 'consultation' on NUS's political direction, and cuts to the National Executive Council.

Amendments were submitted which slightly curbed some of the attacks to NUS democracy. Some self-described 'left' delegates argued that with enough of the amendments passed, the reform motion should be voted for as it represented a chance to 'save' the NUS.

Socialist Students' delegates campaigned and spoke both at caucuses of left delegates as well as from the conference floor, highlighting that even with all the 'progressive' amendments passed, the final reform motion would still represent a huge attack on democracy within the NUS, as well as diminishing its ability to play a leading role in future mass student struggles - reducing its role to a think tank.

### **Alternative**

Socialist Students delegates highlighted the potential solutions to the financial crisis which are available to the NUS on the basis of a fighting and democratic leadership conducting a political campaign among its members.

Of course it is impossible to say exactly how these reforms will take shape over the coming weeks and months. Socialist Students is calling for the convening of emergency student meetings, dedicated to discussing the task of building the democratic and fighting national student union we need.

Out of this could come an extraordinary national conference of all students and campaigners. Such a conference could democratically discuss the way forward in the aftermath of this reform motion.

These meetings and conference, even if acted on by only a handful of student unions initially, could decide whether or not to continue the fight to save the NUS in its current form, or to begin to take the steps necessary to found a new national student union.

- See [full statement](#) by Socialist Students at [socialiststudents.org.uk](http://socialiststudents.org.uk)
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## Youth climate strikes: Democratic organisation and socialist policies needed

For a third time in successive months, young people, mainly school and college students, took to the streets in cities and towns across the UK on 12 April to protest against the lack of action by government and big business to halt potentially catastrophic climate change.

The walkouts and protests were noticeably smaller than those on [15 February](#) and [15 March](#) - partly reflecting the Easter holidays, but also the absence of a coherent programme to tackle climate change caused by capitalism, and the lack of campaigning strategy and organisation to develop the movement. Below, the Socialist carries some reports on the 12 April action.

Socialist Party members and Socialist Students have helped build for and participated in all three days of protests. We call for and are assisting students to establish democratic student unions and to link up with workers organised in trade unions - whose potential industrial muscle can achieve political change - together in a united campaign.

At the same time we fight for a programme of socialist measures - including public ownership of public transport, major industries and agribusiness, in order to globally plan production in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way.

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### Brighton

Students marched through Brighton to protest against climate change. This time, they held a sit-down protest on the main road in town, which has been listed as Britain's seventh most polluted street outside London.

Socialist Students explained that by reaching out to the working class and trade union movement, we could shut down not just one road, but the entire country!

Many young people were keen to discuss socialist and Marxist ideas, despite reluctance from the official organisers to politicise the event. But the mood of the school students themselves was clear. There was huge support for the idea that to fight climate change, this system - capitalism - has got to go. And that starts with kicking out this rotten Tory government.

Unfortunately, the protest was much smaller than previous months, which made our calls to get organised and build the movement more important than before. This means forming groups in the schools and colleges for a democratically organised, mass movement against climate change.

**Connor Rosoman, Brighton and Sussex Socialist Students**

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### Nottingham

The Facebook announcement for the Nottingham climate strike on 12 April said that the event would go ahead, but there would be no organisers there!

People wanted to know why no organisers were there and this was a good way to start a conversation about how a movement should be built and organised democratically and with accountability.

Nottingham Socialist Party branch secretary, Geraint, spoke about the need for socialist change to solve climate change and our ideas to take the momentum around the strikes forward.

At a meeting afterwards we organised future leafleting and a meeting to build for the next climate strike, as well as a plan to approach local trade union branches to get support from workers. This includes approaching the National Education Union.

The dissatisfaction with establishment politicians and the lack of activity from the Trade Union Congress and union leaders has led some campaigners to adopt a 'non-organisation organisation' model. This has the consequence for organisers of making them unaccountable.

They also do not have a programme to bring about meaningful change. One of the demands of #YouthStrike4Climate is to get councils to declare a 'climate emergency'. Nottingham and other cities have done this, but it does not mean anything without binding environmental policies.

They also think that youth regularly demonstrating will move big business and capitalist governments to act. It will not.

We need to organise school and student unions and organise among trade unions and workers. The movement needs to be democratically led and accountable and have a proper programme to stop climate change - pointing to an end of capitalism and the socialist transformation of the world.

**Clare Wilkins**

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## **Manchester**

Upwards of 500 confident and galvanised school students met in central Manchester to protest the Tory government's abysmal efforts to counter impending ecological disaster.

The school strike had a positive and militant atmosphere which culminated with a spontaneous mass sit-down protest on a busy main road. (continued right)

The crowd had a mixed character, including some liberal elements, who unfortunately limited themselves to vague and abstract calls simply for politicians to "take action on climate change".

However it was the Socialist Party's calls for the nationalisation of the banks and top companies on the basis of democratic workers' control in order to fund alternative 'green' energy production which resonated most clearly with the protesters - with 23 protesters signing up to Socialist Students.

**Andrew Carss**

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## **Leeds**

The third round of climate strikes took place in the middle of high school students' Easter break. With around 400 gathered on the steps of Leeds Town Hall the turnout was smaller than on the previous two strikes. However, considerable developments were made towards achieving a greater level of autonomy and unionisation for the striking students.

Meanwhile, Leeds City Council intends to double the number of passengers using Leeds Bradford Airport despite councillors passing a climate emergency declaration!

**Morgan King, Leeds Socialist Students**

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## **Newcastle**

Young people were out in force for the demonstration which began at the Newcastle civic centre and marched through town until reaching the Monument in the heart of the city, where Socialist Party members ran an open mic.

Many protesters highlighted issues around pollution and environmental damage caused by big business and placed emphasis on the vital need for system change.

The young people in attendance, who were mainly teenage girls, showed a vital understanding of the critical need to dismantle the current system which places profit before people, if we are to succeed in halting climate change.

The ideas and passion of these young people will surely only lead to even better strikes in the coming weeks.

**Emma Dawson**

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## **London**

School holidays might have cut across the turnout on the third day of action against climate change. But, as usual, the demo was loud and angry. We marched up to Oxford Circus where students filled the road and sat down.

On previous demos Socialist Students held an open mic, allowing students to discuss a way forward for the movement. Learning from this initiative, the organisers on this demo turned the sit-down protest into a mass student assembly allowing any student to speak.

A member of Socialist Students spoke on the need to build school student unions which can defend students from punishment by school management. We have organised a meeting about how to launch school students unions.

Some students are starting to raise the idea of a 'Green New Deal'. One student also linked it to the need to fight for climate jobs with decent pay.

We discussed how any Green New Deal will have to include socialist demands of taking ownership and control out of the hands of polluting companies, which dominate the economy, and put them under public ownership and the control of workers and young people.

**London Socialist Students**

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## **York**

Over 150 young school students gathered in the centre of York to protest against climate change. There were speeches and music and they marched around the city centre twice.

I spoke at the beginning of the rally and my promise of safe spaces for students to meet, which had been agreed by the York Trades Union Council, was met with enthusiastic applause.

The numbers on this rally were down on the previous one, with exam pressures and school staff training days being cited as possible reasons. The age demographic was also younger and there was a clear majority of female protesters.

I spoke to a lot of protesters about building teams of like-minded students in their schools and linking up between the different schools. I left information for them to contact the local trade union council and the

Socialist Party to assist them in building a campaign that includes planning and discussion groups. I am also building an increasing list of contacts who I can email directly.

**Nigel Smith, secretary of York Trade Union Council**

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## **Non-fiction - Socialism: Utopian and Scientific**

# **Engels' classic essential for understanding socialist ideas old and 'new'**

**Mary Finch, East London Socialist Party**

As Tony Saunio points out in his foreword to the new Socialist Books reprint, 'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific' remains one of the best introductions to Marxist ideas.

It was the first Marxist text I read after joining the Socialist Party seven years ago. Admittedly, a lot of it went completely over my head! But there were lessons I took from it on my first reading which have drawn me back to it again and again.

One of the most valuable things about this pamphlet by Karl Marx's co-thinker Friedrich Engels is its clear and concise explanation of dialectics, the science of change, and how it applies to the real world.

Engels lays out the transition from feudalistic societies and economies to early capitalism. He concretely explains the forces at work behind this process, and how it changed the relationships between classes. Understanding of these forces is an essential building block for understanding and organising in the working class today.

Its continued relevance has also been shown by the recent revival of 'new' utopian ideas and reformism, which imagine an end to capitalism without the need for workers to fight for power.

Engels describes some of the huge struggles, like the French Revolution, which took place when capitalism was still in its infancy. At that time, the limited development of the new working class held back its consciousness of its own role, and the strength of its movements for change.

There was only a glimpse of the potential power of organised workers in fighting capitalism and building a fundamentally different society.

As a result, what Engels calls "utopian socialists" drew the conclusion that workers are unable to fight for ourselves, and need other forces - 'benign' capitalists or the middle classes - to make change on our behalf. Utopians like Robert Owen tried to build 'islands of socialism' which they thought could convince profit-driven capitalists to create a rational, fairer economy.

## **Marxism**

These failed, but their pioneering examples were key to developing a more thoroughgoing socialist understanding. The "scientific socialists" - the Marxists - exposed the impossibility of the ruling capitalist class voluntarily dissolving itself, and looked at the inner workings of capitalism to find that only working-class struggle could overcome this.

Today is a very different context to that which Engels lived in. Capitalism is a fully developed world economic system.

In capitalism's current crisis, though, the working class is yet to decisively put its stamp on events. After ten years of devastating austerity without a successful mass movement of workers against it, there is confusion

about which force in society can achieve change.

Many workers and young people are encouraged by the idea that we can make tweaks and changes to the capitalist system. But without taking the economy and society out of the hands of the super-rich, reforms on their own can never be complete or permanent.

There is, similarly, a search for forces other than the working class which can temporarily seem more radical and willing to enter struggle. But it is workers who keep the economy going, the basis for all society on top of it - so it is the working class which is uniquely placed to seize democratic control of it.

The capitalist class will always act to preserve its system, no matter the cost. It's not enough to challenge capitalism - workers have to remove it, and replace it with a socialist world.

Only the working class can achieve socialism, whether based in the factories and mills of Engels' time or their modern equivalents today. 'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific' is essential preparation for the urgent tasks facing workers and socialists today.

- [Socialism: Utopian and Scientific by Friedrich Engels](#) - £5 from [socialistbooks.co.uk](http://socialistbooks.co.uk)
- 20% discount for bulk and reading group orders - use the code 'BULK' at checkout

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## Real life on Universal Credit: "As soon as I get billed for my electric, I'm finished"

Hi. I'm Luke. I live alone and I'm on Universal Credit.

I also worked in the Grimsby Jobcentre Plus for seven weeks as a volunteer guiding people through the sign-on process. Helping them use the computers; making sure they got to speak to the people they needed to speak to; and doing everything I could to help them get what they were entitled to.

I was asked to speak recently about my experience with this system. Why it's bad; why I'm worse off on Universal Credit than I would be otherwise.

That's a hard topic for me to tackle, however, since I've never personally been on any other kind of benefit. My parents lived on benefits for nearly my entire childhood, and I was well aware we were poor, but they didn't share the exact financial details with me.

So if you were to ask me if I'm worse off on Universal Credit, the only honest answer I could give you is "I don't know."

I can tell you something else though. Let me go through some quick maths with you all. I receive a grand total of £554.01 a month.

Out of this, I pay £367.99 a month in rent and heating - a figure which I've been informed will be rising soon. I pay £27 for my water. I pay £22.50 for my internet - essential for keeping up with the 35-hours-a-week job-searching quota you are expected to meet on Universal Credit.

My council tax currently stands at £63 a month, which I've been assured by friends who are also on Universal Credit is an error. I've been attempting to get that resolved for the last seven months, but who knows if it ever will?

I spend £10 a month on phone usage, which is essential for job-searching, communicating with work, reporting repairs, and sorting out bills like the aforementioned council tax.

And I currently have no idea how much I'm paying for my electricity! I've been back and forth between the electric company and the housing association many times, and am yet to get a straight answer on that front.

So if we add up all the monthly bills we know for sure, it comes to £490.49. If we assume I'm paying £40 per month on electricity, this goes up to £530.49.

How much does that leave over? If we take £554.01 and cut away £530.49, I'm left with £23.52.

£23.52 per month is just under £5.43 a week. This is what I have left over to cover food, clothes, sanitary items, household essentials, bus travel and emergencies. I'm only still able to get by because my electric bill hasn't turned up yet - and because of my dear mother, who is also in great financial hardship right now, buying me frozen food sometimes.

As soon as I get billed for my electric, I'm finished.

So yeah. I can't tell you if I'm worse off on Universal Credit, but I can tell you it's not enough. I can also tell you from my experience, both claiming for myself and from working at the job centre, that this system requires claimants to claw and fight for everything they get.

It took me three months to get my rent paid. Three months of near-daily back and forth between my housing association and the job centre - including throughout the time I spent working in the job centre - to finally secure the housing element of my Universal Credit claim.

During this time I received two eviction notices. Had I been dealing with a private landlord, I would have been made homeless.

If someone like me who knows this system well is struggling this hard, I can only imagine how anyone less advantaged than me is surviving.

**Luke, Grimsby**

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## **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](mailto: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.

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### **Miner praises Socialist**

A man bought the Socialist on 14 April, paying solidarity price. This is what he said: "You've got to read the truth somewhere. I was a striking miner in Notts, and it was the Socialist Party [called Militant at the time] who got us going here."

**Clare Wilkins, Bingham, Nottinghamshire**

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### **Gilets jaunes solidarité**

"Aware that we have to fight against a global system, we consider that it will be necessary to leave capitalism." The gilets jaunes (yellow vests) protest movement's 'assembly of assemblies' in France has released a statement calling for an end to capitalism.

The Macron government's efforts to stifle the protests, such as the so-called "Grand Debate," have been rightfully recognised as damage control, an effort to obscure the intentions of the government. Protests continue despite repeated instances of police brutality.

However, it is a weakness of the assembly's approach to declare itself independent from the trade unions. In France the trade unions are numerically weaker than in Britain, but draw significant layers of workers into struggles including strike action, which will be vital in taking the movement forward to win its social and economic demands.

Leeds Socialist Students stands in solidarity with the movement of the gilets jaunes, and welcomes the recognition that the problems of workers in France cannot be fully resolved under capitalism. There has so far been little published in English on this declaration, so we hope that we can raise awareness among English-speaking supporters...

**Andrew Saxon, Leeds University Socialist Students**

- Read the full statement at [leedssocialiststudents.wordpress.com](https://leedssocialiststudents.wordpress.com)
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## **Corbyn in the crosshairs**

The British army has been in the headlines after Parachute Regiment soldiers were filmed apparently using posters of Jeremy Corbyn for target practice. Last year, a soldier was convicted of being a member of banned neo-Nazi terrorist group National Action - which had been trying to expand in the army.

In the military in this and most countries, the overwhelming number of enlisted personnel are working class. In crisis periods such as this, many of them and their non-commissioned officers are beginning to ask difficult questions of this criminal capitalist system.

Inherent in the character of armed forces' ethos are some of the worst aberrations of capitalist society, including reactionary political ideas. Meanwhile, elite units like the Parachute Regiment are nourished on the idea their World War Two legacy is untouchable.

Officers and brass aren't representative of the wider enlisted majority. Their concerns aren't the same or shared. 10,000 homeless veterans, pensions under attack, and other deteriorating terms and conditions of soldiering mean nothing to the boss class in the military.

A socialist government would ensure working-class people have opportunities which would eliminate the need to serve as a mercenary for the exploitative, predatory, and insatiable capitalist killing machine.

**William Jarrett, North Shields**

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## **National Action action**

Just weeks after the massacre in Christchurch, far-right terrorism is again in the headlines, following the end of reporting restrictions on the trial of a group of suspected members of the proscribed neo-Nazi terror group National Action.

Jack Renshaw, former youth organiser for the racist British National Party and one-time spokesman for National Action, has been found guilty of attempting to groom teenage boys on social media. Renshaw had previously pleaded guilty to plotting to kill right-wing Labour MP Rosie Cooper.

Renshaw planned to kill both Cooper and the detective investigating his sex offences with a sword, before goading police to shoot him dead. It was a desperate attempt to go down in history as a martyr for fascism rather than a convicted sex offender. His plot was thwarted when a former National Action member tipped off the Hope Not Hate charity.

This case highlights on the one hand the threat posed by the far right, even when manifested in small fringe groups. Unless the workers' movement can show a way forward, we must be prepared to face the threat of right-wing violence as the capitalists continue to stir up racism.

So the most important lesson is still the need to organise a mass, working-class resistance to the far right. We cannot rely on the forces of the capitalist state to prevent fascist movements growing and carrying out attacks.

Renshaw's plot was just days away from being enacted. Yet the police were none the wiser until the tip-off.

This lax approach stands in stark contrast to the scale of infiltration by the state into all manner of workers' and socialist groups, including Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party. The police, like all arms of the capitalist state, fundamentally exist to protect the capitalist order, and the property and profits of the 1%.

To halt the threat, the trade unions must take the lead, mobilising counter-demonstrations with pro-worker demands to oppose every attempt by the far right to hold demonstrations.

This is what humbled National Action on the two occasions it tried to march in Liverpool, including the memorable incident when a small group of its members were forced to take shelter in the lost luggage room of Lime Street train station behind a protective cordon of police while being pelted with eggs and bananas.

Linked to this must be socialist demands to undercut far-right narratives which aim to divide the working class: genuinely affordable housing for all, a £10 an hour minimum wage without exemptions, and fully funded jobs and public services, publicly owned, under democratic workers' control and management.

**Jack Yarlett, Wirral**

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## **Audio version of this document**

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

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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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## **Audio version of this document**

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/28994>