

# 2017: Upheaval and fightback will continue

Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary

2016 was the year when the pent-up anger of the masses worldwide finally spilled over in a series of political earthquakes - a delayed reaction to the [devastating world economic crisis of 2007-08](#). And tremors are still being felt, with serious aftershocks - if not new earthquakes - expected in 2017.

The changed situation was dramatically illustrated by Brexit, with repercussions not just in Europe but worldwide. At bottom, this reflected a [working class revolt against the austerity programme](#) both of the British Tory government and the predatory capitalist EU.

The Socialist Party has consistently opposed the capitalist, imperialist EU from its origins and therefore called for a Leave vote in the referendum, along with the transport workers' union the RMT and many others.

Moreover, it was striking that those who had suffered under the iron heel of the EU - the Greek, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian workers - [hailed Brexit, which they saw as striking a decisive blow](#) against their mortal enemies, the gang of EU robber capitalists.

## Fight the right

We also [fought against the corrosive nationalism of Ukip](#) and other reactionary forces who attempted to seize hold of Brexit as a means of dividing workers against one another. We will stay implacably opposed to the neoliberal EU while at the same time proposing a class and socialist alternative: no to the EU, yes to a socialist confederation of Europe.

It is no exaggeration to say that the leave vote resounded throughout the world. How dare the ignorant untutored masses defy their rulers, reasoned an army of capitalist commentators!

The leave vote upended the Tory cabinet and Cameron was soon consigned to history. Absolute turmoil has ensued, which continues into 2017, plunging the Tory party under Theresa May into an endemic crisis. The capitalist media constantly harps on the split within Labour but from the medium and long-term perspectives, the divisions within the Tory party are much more serious.

[A schism within the Tory party](#), like that over the Corn Laws in the first half of the nineteenth century, is entirely possible. This saw the Tory party out of power for generations.

In Italy, Renzi has followed Cameron, after a [stunning 60% to 40% rejection](#) of his own undemocratic referendum, which sought to consolidate his austerity regime.

But the far right in Europe is still on the march, having been given a lift by the victory of Trump in the US presidential elections. Although the [Austrian far right failed to win](#) the re-run presidential election.

It is not even excluded that at a certain stage some countries - Austria, France, the Netherlands and possibly also Italy - could repeat the successes of the far right in Eastern Europe, participating in right-wing coalition governments.

## Failure

It is the transparent failure of right-wing social democracy in Spain, Greece, Portugal and Britain - trapped within the framework of diseased capitalism and consequently presiding over savage cuts, eye watering poverty, mass unemployment etc - which has provided this opportunity for the right to emerge and threaten past conquests of the working class.

They believe that they have been given a huge comfort blanket by the victory of Donald Trump in the US elections. There are even some on the left who believe that a 'festival of reaction' will follow.

Nothing of the kind is likely or possible. Without in any way minimising the threat from the right - which should be fought - the relationship of class forces is still decisively in favour of the working class and its organisations, although weakened. The fascists could not successfully use today [the methods of Hitler or Mussolini](#), the mobilisation of mass middle class forces to terrorise and atomise the working class.

Coming to power - even partially sharing power in a right-wing, conservative government - would act like a crack of thunder to awaken the working class and particularly the youth into ferocious resistance to such governments and the measures that they would undertake.

Witness the marvellous [resistance of Polish women to the attempt to restrict abortion rights](#). Other powerful mass women's movements have developed in Ireland against strict abortion laws, in Argentina against vile attacks on women, and in Turkey against attempts to legitimise rape.

Look also at the [mass resistance that erupted against Trump's](#) fraudulent victory in cities in the US, in some cases led by our co-thinkers in Socialist Alternative. It is expected that mass demonstrations in the US and worldwide will take place on 20 January at Trump's inauguration. This is just a little payment on account for the mass working class resistance he is likely to encounter in the next years.

Moreover, such right-wing governments with far-right participation would pave the way for a massive swing towards the left among the working class, which would be reflected in the labour movement. This will act to further discredit the right-wing social democrats, who through their failure have paved the way for the right's re-emergence.

The truth is class radicalisation overwhelmingly predominates worldwide. This was shown in the 180 million [Indian workers who demonstrated their power in a mighty general strike](#) against the right-wing Modi regime in September 2016.

Unprecedented mass movements have also broken out in South Korea, which are likely to force the president out on corruption charges.

## **Middle East**

Of course, this has to be balanced against the horrific intractable crisis in the Middle East with its countless victims - a monument to the endless horrors to which humankind will suffer on the basis of outmoded capitalism.

The war in Syria has lasted longer than World War One, and moreover there is an element of that situation in the present conflict with its mutual slaughter. Leon Trotsky remarked in relation to the pre-1914 Balkan war: "Our descendants... will spread their hands in horror when they learn from history books about the methods by which capitalist peoples settled their disputes."

If nothing else, the Syrian war has demonstrated beyond all doubt that none of the capitalist powers - the US, Russia, the European Union - can [provide a solution to the myriad national conflicts](#) within the region.

Indeed, imperialism in all its guises - British, French, US - is the author of the present divisive patchwork divide-and-rule tactics on a massive scale, undemocratically stitched together when these imperialist powers were forced to retreat from direct domination of the region in the post-1945 situation.

A representative of the British spy agency MI6 recently appeared on British television and had the effrontery to quote from the Roman historian Tacitus - "You create a desolation and call it peace" - while attacking Putin's Russia! If so, then Putin learnt well in the school of the British ruling class and MI6. They were the first to pursue a bloody divide-and-rule policy, to carve out their empire upon which the 'sun would never set'.

Only the decisive intervention of the working class and poor in the Middle East region through a programme of class unity and socialism on the basis of a democratic confederation can put an end to this horror once and for all. The first step towards this would be the development of an independent political voice for the masses.

But in the meantime the catastrophic situation which has beset all countries in the Middle East will continue. The [attempted coup in Turkey](#) has led to an [even bigger and more effective right-wing counter-coup](#) led by Turkish President Erdoğan himself. Over 100,000 public sector workers have been dismissed; there has been a clampdown on the media and suppression of democratic rights. Only by determined struggle, and a vision of a new humane, socialist society, will the forces of the right be pushed back.

## **Donald Trump**

Nowhere is that more necessary than in the US following the [victory of the right-wing demagogic populist Donald Trump](#), who lied and cheated his way to power by pretending to champion the 'working class'. Nothing could be further from the truth.

He lacks any real 'legitimacy' for his right-wing programme. While he won the Electoral College, he was decisively beaten in the 'popular vote' by 2.6 million, receiving fewer votes even than the last defeated Republican presidential candidates Romney and McCain, and George W Bush when he won.

Within a matter of weeks - and without being installed yet as president - [he has shredded most of his promises](#). His proposed government, true to form, is stuffed with billionaires, representative not of 'Main Street' but of Wall Street, which he denounced during the election campaign.

He is recruiting heavily from Goldman Sachs, which after the crash of 2007-08 was described by Rolling Stone magazine as "a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity". Its tentacles are poised to try and further strangle working people in the cause of Trump's pro-big business agenda.

The trade unions face a massive challenge as he seeks to emulate Ronald Reagan in rolling out so-called 'right to work' legislation to weaken them. He will seek to reward Wall Street sharks who supported him by ruthless measures like privatisation and sackings, particularly of public sector workers.

## **Infrastructure and jobs**

He hopes to soften the blatant pro-billionaire agenda by borrowing from capitalist economist Keynes with a promise to increase government spending of at least \$1 trillion on the US's collapsing infrastructure.

However, as welcome as any new jobs would be in restoring the confidence of the US working class to fight back against the bosses and providing the unemployed with work, nevertheless these would not replace the high paid secure jobs which have been lost in the massive deindustrialisation of the US.

An estimated 70,000 factories in the US disappeared during this process, never to return on the basis of capitalism. Since 2010 something like 15 million new jobs were generated in the US but these have been overwhelmingly low paid and insecure, many the equivalent of the hated zero-hour contracts in Britain.

Moreover, the US is already saddled with colossal debt - government, corporate and personal - which is the main reason why enfeebled US and world capitalism has been able to still stagger on.

But will even a Republican congress ratify big increases in public spending, without any overall economic growth and ratcheting up even more debt? Top US tax expert and Congressman Ken Brady has declared: "The greatest threat to our prosperity long term is our growing national debt."

On the basis of capitalism, particularly the parasitic kind which Trump represents, a return to a 'golden age' when today appeared to be better than yesterday, and tomorrow would certainly be better, is over. The 60% of the US population who now consider themselves worse off than before signifies this.

## **Bernie Sanders**

Hence the explosive developments in the US with the rise of the Bernie Sanders movement. [Sanders' call for a political revolution](#) drew mass support from discontented workers and young people and in turn terrified the pro-capitalist Democratic Party establishment.

When he was denied victory in the primaries by the manoeuvres of the pro-Clinton Democratic establishment, [Bernie made a big mistake](#) in not taking to the open road and establishing a new party. He had successfully appealed to the same impoverished and discontented layers of workers and young people to whom Trump was also pitching his message.

If he had stood for the presidency, then if not beating Trump, he would have at least attracted sufficient support to have allowed for the possibility of Hillary Clinton coming to power. This would have been the ideal scenario for the prospects of the further political awakening of the American working class and the youth.

A Clinton Democrat administration, which would have been tested to destruction - much as the Liberal Party in Britain was at the turn of the 20th century - could have created the base for the emergence of a new mass workers' party. Given the economic catastrophe of US capitalism and the desperation of the masses for an alternative, a new mass movement for socialism would have taken shape.

The election of Trump - the whip of counter-revolution - will not halt but ultimately spur on this process. There are features present in the current situation reminiscent of the explosive years in the 1960s and 70s. Socialism is an idea which has already captured the imagination of the new generation of workers and young people.

## **Socialism in the US**

'Trotsky in New York 1917' - part of the avalanche of new books in preparation for the hundredth anniversary of the Russian Revolution this year - while inaccurate about Trotsky's real political views, nevertheless provides valuable insights about the powerful attraction for the American masses of socialism and its leading international figures then.

We are informed that "at least six New York newspapers with more than half a million readers would announce Trotsky's arrival in the city. Three put the story on the front page." There was a vibrant socialist movement and Eugene Debs had stood as a Socialist Party candidate in every presidential election since 1900, receiving over one million votes in 1912, the equivalent of six million today.

Those traditions will be revived, alongside those of the monumental class battles of the 1930s. American capitalism's colossal wealth and power allowed it to soften class relations in the post-1945 situation. Its relative economic decline has now sharpened these divisions, which will be further deepened by Trump.

And this will develop with American speed and elan. The success of our US co-thinkers, with the spectacular growth of [Socialist Alternative](#) and the election of the [first socialist councillor](#) in 100 years in Seattle - Kshama Sawant - is a measure of the changes wrought in the heartland of world capitalism.

As is the [success of the school student union in Spain](#), which chalked up a big national victory against the PP government - the first in five years - when it successfully mobilised two million school students in a national strike which compelled the government to withdraw its attacks on education.

The political force behind this victory, the [Spanish Marxist organisation Izquierda Revolucionaria](#), is in the [process of linking up](#) with the [Committee for a Workers' International](#) (CWI), which represents a great strengthening of the genuine forces of Marxism internationally. This will undoubtedly act as a magnet for other Marxist forces to come together with us to confront capitalism and its agents within the workers' movement.

## **Warnings**

Never has this been more necessary. Even the representatives of the capitalist system, like Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, have warned the class they represent of the inherent dangers arising from the current crisis. Carney warned of the worst crisis for over 100 years with the UK "suffering its first lost decade since the 1860s", when Karl Marx was alive.

He repeatedly referred to the sense of insecurity and frustrations with global trade and technology, which has favoured "the superstar and the lucky... But what of the frustrated and frightened?" [He denounced "inequality"](#) as well as the banks who had been, according to him working in a "heads I win, tails you lose bubble".

Its intent was to warn the bosses who Carney represents of the incendiary economic and social situation in Britain which threatens to blow the system apart. And the examples which he uses are damning indictments of British capitalism, as well as an indication of further seismic events to come.

More than a fifth of the UK's population - almost 14 million people - is below the official yardstick for calculating poverty, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. That includes 4.8 million adults and 2.6 million children [in poverty despite living in a working family](#). The numbers in this category grew by over a million in the last decade, symbolising the inexorable impoverishment of broad swathes of the British people.

Stories now creep into the press of how those who come from the middle class can now rapidly sink into a desperate situation. From having a job, to no job, therefore no income, then being incapable of paying the rent and ultimately ending up on the streets. The wheel of progress has gone into rapid reverse towards barbarism, with some [homeless people now found to be living in caves in Wales!](#)

## **Jeremy Corbyn and Labour**

It was these conditions - arising from the complete failure of traditional 'social democracy' trapped within the framework of outmoded capitalism to provide an answer - which lit the flame of populist revolt symbolised in Britain through [the mass movement gathered around Jeremy Corbyn](#). And yet 18 months after this - and with the crushing [defeat of two right-wing Blairite coups](#) - his campaign has now stalled. Jeremy himself seems to be missing in action. Why?

Because a policy of 'peaceful coexistence' during a civil war, which has existed in the Labour Party and the labour movement from the very first day that Jeremy was elected, has been adopted by his closest supporters in the leadership of Momentum. It is [potentially fatal for his leadership prospects](#) and the mass anti-austerity movement around him. This has been successfully urged on him by his closest advisers in Momentum.

There is an element of dual power in the Labour Party at the moment. The right controls the Parliamentary Labour Party - mainly the unreconstructed Blairite right, who display their opposition and contempt for Corbyn and his allies on a daily basis.

These 'Labour' MPs are unmistakably in the camp of the bosses. This was illustrated by Chris Evans, MP for Islwyn - one of the poorest constituencies in South Wales - seeing himself as the 'voice' of the parasitic hedge funds rather than the working class, and proposing a parliamentary liaison committee with these City of London creatures.

This right-wing MP is prepared to get into bed with the financial spivs, who create nothing and who treat factories and workplaces as 'assets' that can be gambled away on the stock exchange. They are the sworn enemy of working people and yet this alleged representative of the workers of South Wales seeks the participation of corrupt, parasitic swindlers who are shunned by even 'respectable' capitalists.

This shows just how politically corrupt large swathes of the Parliamentary Labour Party are - the sooner they are driven out the better. The Labour right have played for time, while the left has dithered and refused to conduct a real struggle, therefore playing into the hands of the right.

This is particularly the role of the leaders of Momentum. They refused to consistently support the one measure that would have mobilised hundreds of thousands of left-leaning workers and youth who joined the Labour Party in great enthusiasm to complete the Corbyn revolution: namely, [subjecting right-wing MPs to reselection](#).

The Socialist Party has offered to further this process, to [join the Labour Party on the basis of a political and organisational reconfiguration](#), leading to a federal form of party. Jon Lansman, the leader of Momentum, unceremoniously refused to support this, while showing touching sensitivity to the right. His tactics have blown up in his face, with Momentum torn apart over forms of organisation.

There have been no systematic protests at the arbitrary and bureaucratic denial of access to its ranks or that of the Labour Party.

Our request for [readmission of 75 supporters of the Socialist Party](#) previously expelled has met a brick wall. This while the right have ruthlessly used their position on the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Labour Party to consolidate their grip.

## Unresolved civil war

The right have a clear plan to expel and marginalise all those on the left who pose a threat to their continued rule. The left under the baton of [Momentum's leadership - organisationally and politically inept](#) - have allowed the right to make a comeback.

All of this could have been avoided if clear direction had been given from the beginning to the hundreds of thousands who rallied enthusiastically to Corbyn's anti-austerity programme and clearly demonstrated the desire to drive the Blairite right out of the Labour Party. The response of Momentum's leadership was to rule out any such political 'confrontation' with the right.

The Labour Party is still composed of two incompatible parties in one. The right from the beginning showed they were absolutely [unreconciled to Corbyn's leadership and would overthrow him at the first opportunity](#). That still remains their goal.

The civil war which has existed from the beginning of Corbyn's accession to the leadership remains unresolved. The right, having failed to remove him in an open coup and afraid of leaving the Labour Party in the hands of the left, have fallen back on a 'creeping coup'. The tactics consist of a war of attrition, constantly seeking to discredit Jeremy and John McDonnell, and marginalising and excluding their supporters.

## Blind alley

There is nevertheless everything to play for in 2017. Capitalism is a blind alley, incapable of taking society substantially forward. All of those parties who accept the system will ultimately fall under the wheels of history.

The movement around Jeremy represents a determined attempt to throw off the outmoded shell of Blairite pro-market, pro-capitalist forces and take to a more radical, socialist road.

The Socialist Party, together with the CWI, will do everything in its power to assist workers and young people to attain the goal of a mass, socialist party fighting for a socialist society in Britain and the world.

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## Book early: Socialism 2017 event

To discuss the ideas in the above article, how to build the resistance against austerity and capitalism and the socialist alternative, why not book now for the Socialist Party's weekend event in November? It will also discuss and debate the relevance and lessons of the 1917 Russian Revolution on its 100th anniversary.

**Socialism 2017 will take place at the Institute of Education in Central London on 11 and 12 November 2017. [Click here to get your tickets.](#)**

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## Fare hikes, delays, overcrowding...

# Nationalise rail now!

- Support the strikes

**Paul Callanan, London Socialist Party**

Christmas has come late as far as Britain's rail providers are concerned. Rail [fares are set for yet another increase](#), this time by an average of 2.3%.

Protests have taken place at stations across Britain against rip-off fare hikes.

And further strikes are due by workers on Southern Rail, as well as staff in London Underground ticket offices.

The price rise, which comes at a time when wages are stagnating, will mean that [on average 14% of pay is going on rail fares](#). Commuters into London pay on average £387 a month. In Paris and Rome, this figure is just £61.

Still, at least all that money is going where it's needed - isn't it? Year on year we are told the money is spent on improving rail infrastructure.

That's why we can all enjoy [journeys on overcrowded trains](#). Cosy. And vintage rolling stock too. Britain's trains are - on average - [21 years old](#).

If you travel on Northern Rail, you can save yourself the bother of showering before you go out. The carriages are [notorious for leaking](#) windows and vestibules.

## **Bosses' pay**

The executives are doing all right though. [Private train operators have taken a staggering £3.5 billion](#) for (mis)running Britain's railways over the past ten years.

This means we have been able to reward people like National Express chief exec Dean Finch, and Sir Brian Souter, Stagecoach founder, who received £3.3 million and £17 million respectively.

The most richly deserved reward, of course, went to Go Ahead chief exec David Brown, who received £1.3 million. Go Ahead is parent company of beleaguered operator Southern.

Southern has decided to do away with passenger safety, and attack workers' jobs, by getting rid of guards on trains. All good, unless you are unlucky enough to have an accident boarding the train, or are a disabled person needing access.

While drivers and guards rightly [struck against these attacks over Christmas](#), Southern is still receiving £50 million of taxpayers' money! In truth, this is payment by the government to break the power of the transport unions - in particular the militant RMT, which represents guards.

The railways must be taken into public hands, under the democratic control of workers and commuters, to end the chaos that currently blights the system.

The Socialist Party calls for the joining up of workers' and commuters' campaigns into a mass struggle for a transit network that works for the millions, not the millionaires.

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## **Resist Trump: protest on 20 January**

# Join international demonstrations on inauguration day

Claire Laker-Mansfield, Socialist Students national organiser

On 20 January 2017, a racist, sexist billionaire is set to assume the status of the most powerful individual on the planet.

Donald Trump's inauguration will be a source of anxiety and uncertainty for many working class people, especially those at the sharp end of his bigotry. But as well as fear, there is anger - [and determination to fight](#).

As Trump marches into the White House, millions of protesters in the United States and around the world will be marching on the streets. As he outlines his plans, millions will declare their determination to resist.

Socialist Alternative - the Socialist Party's co-thinkers in the US - along with Socialist Students, is [organising for students to walk out of classes](#) and join protests all over the US on this day.

And on 21 January, hundreds of thousands more workers, young people, socialists, trade unionists and anti-racist activists plan to take to the streets. This includes a huge planned 'women's march on Washington'.

These protests will help lay the foundation for the kind of mass opposition needed to defeat Trump's presidency and all his bigoted, anti-worker policies.

And working class and young people in the US must not stand alone in this fight. That's why socialists in the US have called for this to be an international day of action against Trump.

Here in Britain, the Socialist Party and [Socialist Students will be organising](#) to help answer this call. Evening protests, after-school rallies, lunchtime marches and public meetings are all being planned.

## Organise

We will organise against all reactionary and racist policies - whether they come from Theresa May or Donald Trump. And we will declare our intention to fight austerity policies, which benefit billionaires like Trump at the expense of the rest of us.

Trump's victory was a [symptom of the profound rotteness of the capitalist system](#). Only a positive alternative - one that guarantees decent jobs, homes, services and a future for all - can cut across the divisive and poisonous politics of the hard right.

So we need to link the fight against Trump to the fight for a society that works in the interests of the 99% - for the socialist alternative to austerity, war and racism. Join us and help organise the fightback!

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# Bosses' pay goes up by 82% for nothing

Mark Best, Hackney Socialist Party

Chief executives' pay in Britain's top 250 companies increased by an average of 82% between 2003 and 2014.

They're paid on average £1.9 million, up from around £1 million in 2003, according to [research by Lancaster University Management School](#).

What has this rise achieved? The study found "a material disconnect between pay and fundamental value generation." So nothing.

And top bosses at Sky are looking at starting their year off with a nice bonus from Rupert Murdoch's [planned take-over by 21st Century Fox](#). Chief executive Jeremy Darroch and finance chief Andrew Griffith are

looking at whopping payouts of £24.5 million and £13.7 million pounds respectively!

While we're squeezed by increased travel and housing prices, often stuck in precarious jobs on poverty pay, those at the top aren't just sitting comfortably, they're getting more comfortable every day.

Blue chip company bosses were paid an average of 47 times more than their employees in 1998. In 2014 that had risen to 130 times!

We need to fight this unfair, unequal system. Fight for a £10 an hour minimum wage for all. Fight for an end to zero-hour contracts, and the profit-driven race to the bottom for workers' wages while executives race to the top.

This means kicking out the fat cats who are creaming money off the backs of workers. We need to take the wealth that's there in society into democratic public ownership, starting with the banks and top 150 corporations.

From this we would be able to run society based on planning what's good for the working class, not the bosses' profits.

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## Make Harrods give back stolen tips!

**Helen Pattison, Youth Fight for Jobs**

Harrods is the latest in a long line of employers that has been [outed for stealing staff's tips](#).

Customers have been paying tips expecting the money to go to the department store's restaurant workers, but it has instead been lining the pockets of Harrods' owners. Restaurants Pizza Express, Strada and Zizzi are just some of the others who have been taking a cut of tips.

### Customers

Unite the Union launched a [campaign against Pizza Express](#) last year. The firm was stealing part of tips paid by card.

Trade unionists made appeals to customers in the restaurants to leave any tips in cash to ensure it went to staff, and Pizza Express has since changed its policy.

Now the [United Voices of the World trade union is taking on Harrods](#) for retaining 75% of tips. This amounts to as much as £5,000 for each member of staff.

Every hospitality and catering worker has their own stories from the industry. When I worked for a pub chain, our tips would be confiscated to make up any discretion in the tills.

Last year when the Tories introduced a new minimum wage - the wrongly named 'national living wage' - Eat and Caffè Nero attacked their workers' terms and conditions to claw back the meagre increase in pay.

The only way to stop these attacks and unfair treatment is for restaurant staff to get organised and join a union. 2016 saw a mini-wave of low-paid workers fighting in this way, from cleaners at the London School of Economics [and John Lewis](#), to the [Deliveroo couriers' strike victory](#) against wage cuts.

These workers have shown that if we fight, we can win against unscrupulous employers.

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# Northern Ireland: 'Cash for ash' scam shows need for non-sectarian, socialist politics

Dave Carr

A scandal surrounding the 'renewable heat incentive' or 'cash for ash' scheme has exposed the rottenness of the political establishment in Northern Ireland.

The scheme was put in place by First Minister Arlene Foster of the Democratic Unionist Party in 2012 to encourage businesses to move from using fossil fuels to biomass-burning heating systems.

In practice it amounted to an enormous cash cow for any 'entrepreneur', which in some cases led to heating empty sheds, barns or factories to obtain grants.

The Department for the Economy estimates that cash incentives to businesses will [cost the public purse a staggering £490 million](#). The Northern Ireland Audit Office says it could eventually cost over £1 billion.

[Cross-Community Labour Alternative](#) - an electoral initiative between trade unionists and the Socialist Party - has pointed out that "42% of people in Northern Ireland live in fuel poverty and it is much higher among elderly households.

"13,000 are using foodbanks and politicians do nothing, yet public money will pay for the heating of the Northern Ireland Ferrari showroom for the next 20 years."

Before Christmas, Foster, who refuses to resign, survived a no-confidence vote in the assembly. It did not secure the required level of cross-party support laid down in the Good Friday power-sharing agreement.

Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein - while warning the scandal threatens to bring down the executive, of which it is a part - softened its position on demanding a full public inquiry.

Labour Alternative points out that "politics in Stormont [home to Northern Ireland's assembly] is dominated by right-wing and sectarian parties and people know it - a recent opinion poll shows only 28% of people trust Stormont politicians.

"Labour Alternative stands for [building a new party that can genuinely challenge corruption](#) and represent the interests of ordinary people, not special business interests."

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## Tories want donors to 'defeat rise of socialism'

James Ivens

The Tories are advertising for regular donations to "defeat the rise of socialism."

[Their 'Club 2020'](#) seeks "business professionals alarmed by Labour's left-wing rhetoric" and "army of far left-wing supporters." Apparently Labour wants to "abolish our armed forces" and has "openly sympathised with terrorist groups."

Presumably Club 2020 also offers to check under its members' beds.

Tory donor clubs exist because "unlike Labour, the Conservative Party is not funded by the trade unions." Instead, it offers the super-rich and their flunkies the chance to buy influence over policy.

At just £50 a month, Club 2020 donors are the undergrowth of Tory patronage. But they can still find themselves "meeting the party's key politicians at two Club 2020 events every year." On the club's founding in

2015, [the Daily Mail suggested](#) this included Philip Hammond, then foreign secretary.

Perhaps you would like influence over top Tories? There's a range of options.

'Fastrack' for young professionals is £300 a year; the 'Front Bench Club' is £5,000. Members of the £50,000 'Leader's Group' get direct access to the prime minister at private dinners.

At least the Tories are honest about this set-up. For all their millions in affiliation fees, [Labour's structures give the unions almost no influence on policy](#).

Meanwhile, Labour's Blairite right is always eager to [hand peerages to leading business donors](#), just like the Tories. Labour has donors' clubs too.

Are you sick of the capitalists' crony politics? The Socialist Party has no big business backers. We fight for the working class - and decide policy democratically, not by auction.

[Donate today](#) to help realise the Tories' nightmare of the rise of socialism.

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## 12,000% NHS drug price hike: nationalise big pharma!

Another drugs company could face punishment after an apparent 12,000% price hike.

[Actavis raised the price](#) of a pack of hydrocortisone from 70p in April 2008 to £88 by March 2016. The life-saving chemical treats a wide range of conditions. Only last month, the Competition and Markets Authority fined [pharmaceutical giant Pfizer for similar NHS profiteering](#).

The Socialist welcomes this crackdown. But as any good doctor will tell you, it's no good treating the symptoms and not the cause.

Nationalise big pharma under democratic workers' control and management. Then the NHS can control prices and save billions, as well as planning research and production for need, not profit.

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## No to 'Ceta' privatisation treaty stitch-up

The government is [pressing ahead with hush-hush free-trade deal 'Ceta'](#), which will further entrench privatisation and anti-worker practices.

Ceta is the EU-Canada 'Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement'. It is the Canadian equivalent of the [EU-United States 'TTIP' deal](#). Both could allow corporations to sue states in secret courts in disputes over losing opportunities to make profits.

TTIP has largely fallen through - not least due to Britain's vote to leave the EU. But it seems International Trade Secretary Liam Fox has already signed us up to Ceta, without discussion, Brexit or no. Multinationals stymied by TTIP's failure could now work through Canada instead.

The Socialist says no to these privatisers' charters. Scrap the bosses' free-market treaties, and bring public services and major corporations into public ownership.

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## Them & Us

## MP's property empire

A Tory MP has [collected over £25 million of property](#) in the past year and a half.

Nadhim Zahawi's purchases included a six-floor townhouse in swanky Belgravia. He also bought the land occupied by two London bank branches, a WH Smith's, and a former celebrity restaurant in Brighton.

Zahawi will earn hundreds of thousands a year in rent on top of his [generous MP's wages and expenses](#). He also gets £20,125 a month from his directorship at Gulf Keystone, a UK-based oil company drilling in Kurdistan.

The millionaire YouGov founder has applied for planning permission on his Belgravia acquisition. He wants the three flats knocked through into one huge home. And a basement extension. And a swimming pool.

The Socialist can only imagine the pool will go in the basement, filled with all his cash, so he can [dive into it from a height like Scrooge McDuck](#). That would explain why he needs the full six storeys.

## Christmas loan sharks

[Loan shark Smart-Pig.com](#) made a special bid to ensnare young people with high-interest borrowing this Christmas.

The lender for students emailed round on 20 December. "We understand how hard it can be to juggle those expenses, especially near to Christmas!

"Therefore, we're just writing to say that you have up to £350 which you can apply for should you need a little help during this period."

Well shucks, Smart-Pig.com, we didn't know you cared! It's a real Christmas miracle, just like in 'It's a Wonderful Life'.

Except, of course, the whip-round in It's a Wonderful Life came without strings. Smart-Pig.com can't run a business on warm fuzzies. So instead it charges a very reasonable 1,258% yearly interest and fees.

Thanks to Mary Finch for the Smart-Pig scoop

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## Unite general secretary election - fight the Blairites, vote Len McCluskey

The Unite General Secretary election has been brought forward 12 months to run alongside those for the Executive Council which will start in January - the actual ballot will be from 27 March to 28 April.

The Socialist Party is supporting Len McCluskey. Under his leadership, the union has taken a more militant stance with a whole number of disputes. It has been far more responsive to rank and file pressure, [particularly in construction](#), which was once dominated by right-wing officials.

On his watch, no repudiation letters have been issued for unofficial action. Actually, some has been sanctioned, such as on [Crossrail in the last few weeks](#). In the summer, Unite members working on Fawley Oil Refinery took strike action to [ensure that migrant workers were paid the agreed rate](#).

We believe Unite can play a far more leading role in arguing for mass joint strike action to face down Tory austerity. It is [supporting the NHS demo on 4 March](#), exerting pressure on the likes of Unison, the biggest NHS union that disgracefully is refusing to endorse the march.

Gerard Coyne, the union's West Midlands regional secretary has announced that he will challenge Len McCluskey. For the Socialist Party, this election is a fundamental clash about the political and industrial strategy of the biggest union in the country. Coyne is the candidate of the Blairites and behind them the capitalist Establishment, who see the election as an opportunity to strike a blow, not just against Len McCluskey but also Jeremy Corbyn in Labour - "Show me your friends and I'll show who you are."

From the opposite standpoint, they share our view that Labour is now two parties in one and are hell-bent on defeating any attempt to consolidate Corbyn's victory by transforming it into a vehicle for workers.

When launching his candidature, [Coyne attacked McCluskey](#), "I believe they (Unite members) want a general secretary who spends less time trying to run the Labour party and more time looking after their interests." But this 'non-political' line hides his true agenda, which is to bolster the Labour right - the Guardian reports that Coyne wouldn't answer questions on whether Unite would continue to support Corbyn if he became General Secretary.

We believe in this election that the left in the union should support Len McCluskey against this right-wing attack. [We have had criticisms of Len](#) and will continue to put forward an independent position but the seriousness of this challenge shouldn't be ignored. We do not agree with those on the left who we believe are too dismissive of the right-wing challenge as justification for standing an alternative left candidate. It is a needless risk to threaten to split the left vote and allow Coyne a bigger opportunity to win which would throw the union back.

To meet the challenge, Len should launch an energetic public election campaign with rallies in the main cities to re-state a left programme industrially and politically. Prior to the Labour leadership challenge of Owen Smith, Jeremy Corbyn's leadership had drifted but the whip of counter-revolution ignited a campaign of mass proportions as not just left Labour members but many outside the party realised what was at stake.

Similarly now, Len should follow this example on a platform of no return to partnership with the bosses; co-ordinated action against the Tories, their cuts and anti-union laws; taking on the Blairites in Labour through the union's policy of supporting mandatory re-selection, moved at Unite's policy conference this summer by a Socialist Party member and recommended by the Executive Committee.

He should also champion the [motion that was passed at Unite's National Sector Industrial Committee](#) for workers in local government, that calls on Labour councillors (the vast majority of whom oppose Jeremy Corbyn) to move no-cuts budgets in Labour councils.

The Socialist Party has four members on the United Left slate for the EC elections (which also supports Len for general secretary). This could develop the fighting influence we are building within the union. Alongside a decisive defeat of the right wing around Coyne, this should be the basis to move Unite to a more fighting position.

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## Post Office workers striking against cuts

Carl Harper, Peterborough Socialist Party and CWU member

Up to 3,500 Communication Workers Union (CWU) members across 300 Post Offices will take five days of strike action next week. This will [include three days in the Crown Post Offices](#), which handle around 20% of total daily Post Office traffic.

The CWU leadership had offered to suspend the strike in exchange for a suspension of the company's Post Office closure and franchising scheme to allow negotiations to take place. The company's refusal indicates that it is prepared to carry on with the scheme and it is right that this is met with industrial action.

The scheme is an [attack on job security and pensions](#) in a programme of cuts which includes a further 2,000 job losses, the loss of thousands of pounds in retirement pay and the ultimate privatisation of 'flagship branches'.

The Post Office is continuing to attack the network and supply chain and in closing down the pension scheme the Post Office is effectively stealing money workers have built up over many years of service. This is despite there being a surplus of over £130 million - making it one of the best funded pension schemes in the country!

In attempts to defeat the first strikes, the Post Office offered staff money not to go on strike, highlighting the desperation to achieve the savings.

With similar cuts being made across Royal Mail there is a desperate need for the CWU to be robust in its negotiations, protecting all terms and conditions for our colleagues. This should include wide-ranging changes which would benefit members, such as demanding the company look into expanding the services, such as the creation of a PostBank similar to Post Offices in other countries, and securing existing jobs and creating new ones.

Coordinated action in defence of jobs, pay and terms and conditions right across the industry is needed and this should be linked up with other unions and workers working in the courier companies, many of whom now face precarious and exploitative employment.

The [National Shop Stewards Network](#) (NSSN), to which the CWU is affiliated and of which I am a member of the Steering Committee, at a rally and lobby of the TUC Conference in September called on delegates (including from the CWU) to demand such action be coordinated right across the union movement. But until then we must support Post Office workers in their action.

More details can be found at the [CWU's People's Post campaign](#).

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## Why prison officers rejected the pay and pensions deal

### A prison officer explains

Now that the offer on pay and pensions for prison officers has been overwhelmingly rejected by the [Prison Officers Association \(POA\)](#), the government and its media lackeys will no doubt do all they can to paint POA members as greedy money grabbers. This is their tried and tested method of breaking public support for unions in dispute. Yet here is the truth surrounding the deal:

The guaranteed three year pay deal of 0.5-1% a year is a fallacy: Neither the government or the national offender management service have the power to implement this.

Since [prison officers' right to strike was removed in 1994](#) an "independent" pay review body was appointed to award prison staff any increase in wages. Each year the employer and union make submissions to the pay review body to be considered. This aspect of the deal was simply a promise from the employer that its submissions would reflect this agreement. It must be noted that prison officers joining the service prior to 2008 have endured a seven year pay freeze at the hands of the pay review body.

A guaranteed retirement age of 65: Hogwash! This was simply a promise that prison officers could retire at the state pension age (SPA) minus three years. If the SPA goes up, then so does prison officer retirement.

Most prison officers had a contracted retirement age of 60 prior to the civil service pension reform. We hold the power of a constable and are subjected to extreme violence on a daily basis and rightly deserve to retire at 60 as our colleagues in the police and fire service do.

Furthermore the employer completely excluded operational support grades/auxiliary officers in this part of the deal with no reduction in their retirement age whatsoever, which was frankly unacceptable. The POA have a live mandate to secure a reduction in pension age to 60. SPA-3 would just not cut it.

Most importantly this deal was only offered in the hope that the POA would fully accept the prison reform White Paper which in essence would mean the 'academisation' of the prison service.

Finally, the POA NEC did not "approve" or "recommend" this offer. It simply acknowledged that it was the best that could be achieved through negotiations. Read between the lines!

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## Support mounts for Picturehouse strikers

Clare Doyle

The young workers at the Picturehouse cinema in Hackney chose last weekend for more days of strike action as it saw the launch of the [new Star Wars film - Rogue One](#). One of the pickets, Louis MacGillivray, regails the public and keeps up the spirits of his striking colleagues by singing out their demands to the tune of Star Wars (see video below).

Managers have been mobilised from other cinemas to try to keep the Picturehouse open, but few film-goers seemed prepared to go in. Support from the public is actually mounting, with passers-by handing over £20 notes to get the freezing pickets some teas and coffees or to put in the strike fund.

The workers are still angry. They say [their employer](#) must be losing thousands of pounds now, and could easily afford their modest claim for a living wage and proper maternity and sickness arrangements.

The strikers told me that the company bought the cinema - in the centre of Hackney - for just £1, and last year the group had a profit of over £83 million. The struggle goes on!

### Video of chanting on strike

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#### Additional report, 22.12.16, from Brian Debus:

Dozens of Picturehouse workers in Hackney started their five-day strike for a living wage on Thursday 15 December.

On the [previous six days of strike action](#) Picturehouse management had been forced to close the cinema down. This time they had brought in managers from as far afield as Oxford to try to break the strike.

Workers reported that staff on probation were forced to do double shifts on strike days under the duress of facing the sack.

Management had also served a threatening legal letter on Bectu, the workers' trade union, to restrict the picket line to six members and force the other strikers onto the other side of the road.

Management normally only employs one security person, but on each strike day there were four, being paid up to £20 an hour for shifts of between 8 and 12 hours over the five days.

Money is no problem for parent company Cineworld that made £83.8 million profit in 2015, except when it comes to increasing its workers' wages by 98p an hour to match the London Living Wage of £9.75 an hour.

This did not prevent the mainly young workforce from creating one of the most lively protests in recent times. With a percussion band, music centre, megaphoned rhyming chants, dancing and mass leafletting of the public they definitely caused a stir.

With the launch of the new Star Wars movie an appropriate placard on the picket line said 'Don't cross over to the Darkside'.

Many potential patrons turned round at the picket line and went elsewhere, and many more with pre-booked tickets went inside and claimed a refund and came back out to congratulations from the pickets.

At the end of the five days the strikers were in good spirits and looking forward to their next strike on Thursday 22 December.

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## CWU members strike against post office closures and pension cuts

**Iain Dalton, Leeds Socialist Party**

After headlines describing post office strikers as bringing '[Christmas misery](#)' or '[ruin](#)', striking post office workers were in an angry mood outside St John's Centre Post Office in Leeds.

A real anger existed at the [destruction of the Crown Post Office network](#) which has been [going on for around a decade](#), with post offices in major cities now found in shops such as WH Smiths and Wilkos, some even stuffed out of the way in basements.

Strikers that I spoke to saw this as symptomatic of the direction society is being taken in: "It started almost 40 years ago when Thatcher got in, and it carried on under Blair, he was a capitalist too."

Parallels were drawn with the steel industry, the railways and other areas that were publicly owned, which have now either been privatised, closed down or both. Several strikers told me they had voted for Brexit because they wanted a change to this, while another commented that many of the areas which had a majority 'leave' vote had seen whole industries destroyed.

Strikers worried about their own futures too. The Post Office wants to [close their defined benefit pension scheme](#) and transfer it to a defined contribution scheme, potentially losing workers thousands of pounds. Yet research commissioned by the CWU said the pension scheme was still viable.

Similarly, there was worry about what jobs would remain as more Crown Post Offices are closed and transferred into other shops. While some staff have transferred, their jobs are only guaranteed for a year or two; meanwhile new starters fare much worse. "They're on zero hour contracts, and on minimum wage", I was told.

Strikers also made reference to other strikes taking place amongst workers on Southern rail, airport baggage handlers and others. As one put it: "None of us that are striking are asking for more money, we just want to defend our jobs and terms and conditions - it says a lot that they're not prepared to give us that."

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Film review

# Rogue One: awesome allegory for imperialism catches Star Wars spirit

Scott Jones, East London Socialist Party

It's clear from the off that Rogue One: A Star Wars Story, a spin-off from the main saga, is a little bit different. Welsh director Gareth Edwards, who said Star Wars is the reason he became a filmmaker, has dispensed with that most 'Star Wars' of traits - the opening text 'crawl' to kick off the film.

And despite brilliant cameos from some of the bigger names in the Star Wars universe, and nods to the original trilogy, the film focuses on the rank and file of the Rebel Alliance, fighting to end the Galactic Empire's reign of terror and oppression.

Other aspects of the fight are looked at in detail for the first time too. The film tells us the story of the spies and scientists behind the battles and weapons seen in the original trilogy. We catch glimpses of the labour camps used by the Empire, and the dynamics and politics within the Rebel Alliance are laid bare.

London actor Riz Ahmed, star of Four Lions who plays a defector to the Rebels in Rogue One, has said this is probably the most political Star Wars film to date. Referring to his character, Ahmed says: "His planet has been invaded and he knows what it is like to live under occupation and collaborate with the occupiers just to make a living."

One of the key locations in the film is the desert planet of Jedha, clearly inspired by the Middle East and Arabic culture. The planet is occupied and exploited by the Empire, which is harassed by a group of local fighters.

One of the leaders of the Rebel Alliance criticises them because they use terrorist and guerrilla methods to fight back.

Their leader, by the way, is called 'Saw Gerra'. I have a guess which [real-life rebel inspired that name!](#)

The whole scenario is an allegory for American [imperialism and intervention in the Middle East](#), and the insurgency it has created.

With plenty of classic Star Wars humour, awesome all-guns-blazing battles, and classic character cameos the film perfectly captures the Star Wars spirit. It does the saga, especially the original trilogy, proud.

But the film can very much be watched and enjoyed as a one-off, as well as an accompaniment to the main Star Wars story.

The force is with this one.

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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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## No cuts - stand up to the Tories

Six years and £650 million worth of cuts later, and it seems that finally Birmingham's MPs are starting to take notice.

During a debate in parliament before Christmas, Steve McCabe, Jack Dromey, Jess Phillips and Roger Godsiff took it in turns to denounce the massacre of local services that has taken place in Birmingham since 2010.

Unfortunately, it doesn't look like they'll be using their position to call on Birmingham City Council to resist the cuts to local services that the Tory government is demanding.

Despite the years of cuts, the council retains £389 million in reserves. These, along with the council's borrowing powers, could be used to set a legal no-cuts budget that meets the needs of the city.

This would provide an opportunity to build a campaign of residents and council workers to force the Tories to reinstate the funding stolen from Birmingham over the last six years. [Liverpool City Council did just this successfully in the 1980s](#), under the leadership of Militant, the Socialist Party's predecessor.

Instead, Birmingham City Council's Labour group have demonstrated that they have been only too willing to carry out hundreds of millions of pounds of brutal cuts without firing a single shot in defence of the city's poor and vulnerable. Shame on them!

**Nick Hart, Birmingham**

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## Poverty barons

Just days into the start of the New Year and the right-wing Daily Mail has launched another front page [article attacking 'foreign aid'](#), replete with pictures showing queues of poor people in Pakistan. The clear implication is that these are 'underserving people scamming the taxpayer', and that 'charity should begin at home'.

However, there's no reference to the "fat cat foreign aid contractors paid millions by the taxpayer" [carried in its Mail on Sunday stablemate](#) on 3 December.

That article followed up an earlier exposure by Global Justice Now of the Thatcherite Adam Smith International (ASI) trousering £329 million of overseas aid government contracts, doubling its profits and paying its directors "six-figure dividends". Many projects were identified as being of questionable benefit to the poor.

Facing parliamentary criticism over its profiteering ASI boss Peter Young (former head of the reactionary Federation of Conservative Students) briefed his staff to submit bogus testimonials from foreign agencies and government officials praising ASI's overseas work!

If the obscene levels of wealth hoarded by tax-dodging corporations and super-rich people were liberated for the majority then living standards could be massively raised both here and abroad.

**Simon Carter, east London**

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## **Narrow thinking**

As a retired teacher, I thoroughly enjoyed reading the excellent [feature on education in the last centre pages](#). Some of the proposals James Kerr made about making the curriculum less abstract and more meaningful reminded me of how I used to teach humanities before the introduction of the national curriculum.

I was trained as an Integrated Humanities teacher which meant we took a thematic and inquiry based approach to learning. One of my favourite topics was the Caribbean. The children were led to discover the art, poetry, music, food, history and geography of the region. I was free to develop certain aspects according to the interests and needs of any particular class. Group activities worked best, encouraging social skills and cooperation.

The national curriculum changed this way of learning and humanities teaching became more rigid and based on individual learning from the teacher imparting their knowledge. Children most definitely became more disaffected and I even got the impression that bullying increased.

Integrated Humanities encouraged young people to think and question for themselves. Not something the Tories would want to encourage - they might challenge the capitalist system!

**Heather Rawling Midlands Retired Members' Forum NUT (personal capacity)**

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## **Call centres - unionise and fightback**

I fully endorse the points Ned Hancock makes in his [article in the Socialist about call centre workers](#).

Most call centre workers will have known nothing other than the experiences that Ned described and think that workers have always been treated with such contempt, and are constantly one mistake or one careless comment way from the dole queue.

Those workers who were at work when unions exercised their power more need to teach younger workers that it hasn't always and doesn't have to be like this.

Employers aren't safeguarding their businesses or customers by intimidating workers, they are getting away with what they can because of the low level of unionisation in the call centre industry and the constant refusal of union leaders to stand up to the bosses.

Unionisation is important but forging a new, fighting union leadership is even more important

**Birmingham call centre worker**

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## **Revolutionary lessons**

With the 100th [anniversary of the Russian Revolution](#) this year, it is inevitable that the capitalists will move might and main to stop workers from drawing the real lessons of 1917.

For the most part, this is likely to take the form of slanders including drawing a straight line from the revolutionary regime of Lenin and Trotsky to the degenerated Stalinist bureaucratic regime.

But the January 2017 issue of the BBC History magazine tries a different tack. In a feature on five key anniversaries in 1917, it simply isn't mentioned!

Instead the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire the same year is mentioned, completely ignoring the fact that it was the Russian Revolution which had a massive impetus to national liberation movements, a factor the Bolsheviks recognised with their convening of a Congress of the Peoples of the East.

The revolution had massive ramifications for the world, but it is only publications like the Socialist where a serious analysis of those effects and their relevance today will be read.

**Iain Dalton, Leeds**

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## **Care crisis - socialist measures needed**

**Letter (extracts) to the Observer from Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool**

Yet another investigation in addition to at least ten similar reports this year (Observer 11/12/16) confirms what everybody with a smidgeon of awareness knows - that there is a crisis in social care.

This crisis was inevitable since this fat cats' government seized on the banker-induced economic crash of 2008 as an excuse to slash expenditure on social provision.

Local authorities like Liverpool have butchered social care by complying with Tory cuts, and a further cut of £90 million is promised which in the words of Mayor Anderson could see Liverpool council unable to provide even statutory provision for deprived children and the elderly.

The solution proposed in your comment page merely fiddles with the problem. Reversing the cuts in inheritance tax is a start, but what about collecting the taxes being dodged on an industrial scale and increasing the taxes of the top 1%. The immediate cancellation of all PFI payments would yield millions for the NHS and social care.

These measures could be given teeth by 6,500 Labour councillors refusing to carry out any further Tory cuts, supported by a massive programme of industrial action to be initiated by the TUC in defence of those in society who are least able to defend themselves.

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/24155>