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NHS in meltdown

- End cuts and privatisation
- Demonstrate on 4 March

Alison Hill

Hospitals are under massive pressure. What shall we do? Let's build more hospitals, train and employ more medical staff, devote more resources to providing a good service...

Or not. If you're a government minister or fat cat health bureaucrat, let's just blame the patients for turning up to A&E. No wonder people are dying in corridors.

A&E departments aren't meeting their targets - let's just change the targets.

Let's attack the [Red Cross for exposing the "humanitarian crisis"](#) which the Tory government and its rich backers are presiding over.

Theresa May and [health secretary Jeremy Hunt squirm and try to lie](#) themselves out of the blame for this crisis.

Yet Hunt has blurted out that, for years, funds have been siphoned out of areas like mental health treatment to prop up the rest of the collapsing NHS. But the best that Labour can do is to accuse the Tories of being in "la la land" and tell them to "get a grip".

Avalanche

The avalanche of privatisation is clear. If you need a test or a scan these days, you're often sent to a private centre - usually an anonymous office block which someone has rented out, probably with grants to buy the equipment. It's a licence to print money, getting shed-loads of cash off the NHS and private patients. Where big business can make an easy profit, it will.

Let's take all those facilities back into the NHS. Let's scrap all [rip-off PFI privatisation](#) schemes and cancel all the health trusts' 'debts'. Why should we waste resources paying, for decades, multinational construction firms for building or running our hospitals?

Then we can expand the NHS to take full advantage of the latest developments in medical science. We can pay all NHS staff a decent wage. We can devote the resources needed to provide healthcare outside hospitals.

More importantly, we can run the NHS democratically for the benefit of us all, not for the profits of big business.

Let's get rid of the humanitarian crisis by having a humanitarian revolution! We need a bit more than "get a grip" - we need a socialist programme to transform the NHS.

NHS in meltdown from spending cuts - demonstrate on 4 March!

Mike Forster, Chair of Hands Off HRI (Huddersfield Royal Infirmary) and steering committee of Health Campaigns Together (personal capacity)

The last 12 months have been the worst in the history of the NHS. It's under pressure like never before. The crisis moment many warned of has arrived. [According to Dr Stokes Lampard](#), chair of the Royal College of GPs, the NHS is facing a 'tipping point'.

Accident and Emergency departments (A&Es) represent an early warning sign that the health service is under pressure. Currently, England's major A&Es are under record strain with 'black alerts' being regularly sounded, and in some instances wards turning patients away.

According to the London Evening Standard, 6,000 patients are being left in the back of ambulances every week and there has been a 30% increase in patients being diverted from A&Es due to a lack of beds.

The Ambulance Service too is under severe strain with an average of 1,000 more calls a week compared to just last year. Consequently, ambulance response times have reached critically low levels, with one third of ambulances failing to meet their targets for life threatening callouts.

Chronic underfunding

The acute care sector is bulging with admissions, particularly from over-75s who are presenting themselves at A&Es. Many should be cared for by the social care sector but that has suffered over £5 billion of cuts since 2009-10.

Massive funding cuts in council services means patients are not being discharged in good time from hospital - either into long-term care or back to their own homes under a care package.

According to the British Medical Association (BMA), patients are spending an extra 200,000 days in hospital beds they no longer need, an increase of 25% on last year!

In the Autumn Statement, Chancellor Philip Hammond was lobbied hard for new funding but came up with nothing. Since then the government has promised councils they can raise council tax by 2% to meet the extra demand, which will not even touch the problem. The BMA has described the additional funding as "inadequate".

There has been a 28% increase in the number of people waiting for emergency treatment in our A&Es for more than the four hours maximum waiting time.

[One patient died after suffering a cardiac arrest on a trolley in the Royal Worcestershire Hospital after waiting 38 hours for a ward bed elsewhere in the hospital.](#)

Chronic delays in treatment have also increased the risk of infection in our hospitals, with cases of novovirus in hospitals now at a five-year high.

Despite placid assurances from the government that they are investing in the NHS, the reality on the ground is completely different. NHS funding has been slashed and next year will see NHS spending increase by just 1%, a massive real term cut.

Yet the Department of Health likes to tell us it is about to spend a lot more money on the NHS. Often headlining the same funds over and over again - which seemingly never actually arrive.

Responding to the government's ten-year budget forecast in 2015, the King's Fund stated: "The ten years up to 2020-21 are likely to see the largest sustained fall in NHS spending as a share of GDP in any period since 1951."

This funding crisis is being realised in both community and social care provision. In the community, general practice is on life support. As more is demanded of it, the proportion of the NHS budget that goes to primary care has effectively shrunk.

Primary care provides 90% of the consultations in the NHS yet only gets 8% of the budget. GPs are leaving, and new entrants are declining to enter general practice.

Chronic underfunding has led to cutting more than 13,000 beds, reducing the capacity of the NHS by five million a year.

The NHS crisis has reached parliament with some Tory MPs breaking ranks to chastise the government for the looming crisis.

Dr Sarah Wollaston, Tory chair of the Commons Health Select Committee, has demanded additional funding for the NHS and social care in particular. She has warned Theresa May that she has "immediate concerns" for the future of the NHS. Yet when the head of NHS England, Simon Stevens, went to see her at the end of the year, he was told to find budgetary cuts in the NHS.

There is a looming crisis for the Tories as more MPs come under pressure from local campaign groups around cuts and closures to hospitals and A&Es.

Private vultures

As the health service's budget faces greater pressure than before, the private sector has moved in for the kill. Last year, £13 billion of healthcare was purchased from non-NHS providers, a 76% increase since 2010. Given that the private sector has a stated goal to make 8%-14% profits from the NHS, can the public really afford this 'choice'?

While the NHS has increased the cash it earns from the private sector by 30% to £558 million last year, waiting lists have soared to an eight-year high. Four million patients are on waiting lists. In effect, NHS patients are being delayed treatment to make way for private patients who can afford to skip the queue.

Under the 2012 Health and Social Care Act, the government's duty to provide healthcare was reduced to that of merely commissioning care. This has opened up the health service to further privatisation.

In November 2016, it was announced that Richard Branson's Virgin Care group had won a £700 million, seven-year contract. This is to provide adult social care, continuing healthcare and children's community health services for the Bath and North East Somerset NHS Clinical Commissioning Group.

Said to be the largest privatisation yet in the NHS, Virgin Care will oversee 200 social service and healthcare facilities. The group was awarded a £126 million contract to run hospitals in Kent earlier in 2016.

Health workers

Morale among health workers has never been lower. Nurses have seen real-term pay cuts since 2010 of over £2,000. Moreover, aspiring nurses will also be denied a bursary to train - this at a time when unfilled nursing vacancies have climbed 600% since 2010. Applications for trainee nursing courses have fallen 20% this year.

The same can be said for junior doctors where the pressure remains intense since the enforcement of a new contract which has included real-term pay cuts.

The introduction of the [STP programme](#) will lead to an acceleration of hospital cuts and closures. However, several councils, to their credit, have refused to sign off on their STP 'footprint'.

Demonstrate

The NHS is now at the crossroads. If we don't stand and fight, it could all be lost. Fortunately, the fight back has begun with community groups like ours spreading all over the country.

The umbrella group 'Health Campaigns Together' has called a national demonstration on Saturday 4 March in London. This couldn't come at a better time and will attract thousands. Already Unite, PCS, Napo, and BFAWU unions along with junior doctors, are backing the demo - as is the National Shop Stewards Network, People's Assembly, Momentum and the National Pensioners Convention.

To its shame the leadership of Unison, the largest health union, has procrastinated and failed to come out in support. We must keep up the pressure to change their minds. Already Unison's North West and South Eastern regions have announced their support.

The demo must be a springboard for coordinated community, trade union and political action to save and properly fund the NHS. Vulnerable to a huge split around Brexit, the Tories are equally as likely to cave in on extra funding for the NHS as they come under more pressure.

Save our NHS demo

- Saturday 4 March - 12noon, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9EZ called by Health Campaigns Together

The Socialist Party will continue to play its part in building for this demonstration and for a fighting programme to build and protect our NHS:

- For a massive demonstration on 4 March
- For a fully funded, public NHS
- No to cuts. Scrap PFI and all privatisation schemes
- Stop STPs and demand all councils refuse to sign up
- For coordinated trade union action to save the NHS and for decent staff pay and conditions
- Nationalise the profiteering big drugs companies

Sustainability and Transformation plans - a repackaging of cuts

Jackie Grunsell GP

The British Red Cross has described the situation developing in A&E departments up and down the country as 'a humanitarian crisis'. So what has been the response of the government to this crisis?

You'll be delighted to know that over the past year they've been quietly developing proposals under the [deceptively fluffy title of 'Sustainability and Transformation Plans'](#) (STPs).

These plans have been drawn up largely in secret with little involvement or consultation with health staff or patients.

They involve organisations which have previously been told they should compete with each other for resources and contracts, now being told they have to work together in [44 'footprint' areas across England](#).

These footprints combine local authorities, Clinical Com-missioning Groups, hospital trusts and other health bodies from across areas which have previously never worked together and have no legal status or obvious democratic structures.

The areas have finally released outline information about the plans for their patch which are still lacking in detail. The stated aims are to integrate services and improve healthcare in certain key areas like cancer care and mental health.

However, the main objective is they must achieve 'financial balance' and not be in deficit if they are to stand any chance of obtaining some of the funds the government is offering as an incentive.

What this amounts to is a financially driven cost-cutting initiative which will see a further slashing of £22 billion from the NHS budget.

The closures of more A&Es are written into some plans with 'reconfiguration' and 'centralisation of services' being the mantra. STPs will see significant reductions in GP surgeries.

As a result of seeing the STP in their area, a group of over 30 GPs in east London signed a statement calling for an immediate halt to the plans. They state the plans are not possible without severe cuts to services.

The plans to move services out of secondary care into primary care, while at the same time closing GP surgeries and using cheaper, unproven models of care, will leave primary care ripe for private sector takeover.

The NHS and social care are chronically underfunded and struggling to function. GPs will be unable to cope with work being shifted out of A&Es.

But this is exactly the intention of the government - to run down our treasured health service, underfund it, and blame 'lazy, overpaid staff' for failures and difficulties, then award contracts to their private sector friends to run services.

The government is already discussing the idea of introducing [charging for GP appointments](#) or A&E attendances, and asking people to bring proof of identity to access NHS treatment. This is one step away from having to present your health insurance card to prove you can afford your healthcare.

Pressure from campaigners has already [forced councils in some areas not to sign up to the STPs](#). More opposition is needed to stop this final nail in the coffin for the NHS.

Worcestershire hospital deaths expose NHS crisis

Calvin Fowler, Worcestershire Socialist Party

My local county hospital, the Worcestershire Royal Hospital, [made national news on 7 January for all the wrong reasons](#). It's become clear that between New Years' Eve and midnight on 3 January two patients died on trolleys in corridors.

One patient died of a cardiac arrest after waiting 38 hours for a ward bed. The other patient, who suffered an aneurysm, was taken to the resuscitation area but sadly died.

Both these deaths happened in the A&E department of The Royal.

Also at the same time, a third death took place at the hospital. Unfortunately this death was a suicide by hanging.

During this period in other parts of Worcestershire, it was decided to temporarily close four minor injuries units so that nurses could be relocated to the A&E departments of Redditch and Worcestershire hospitals. At this time of year A&Es up and down the UK are usually stretched to bursting.

Worcestershire Acute Hospital Trust has confirmed the three deaths are currently being investigated and Worcester's Tory MP, Robin Walker, is supposedly pushing for an emergency meeting with Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt to discuss the dire situation. The extra strain on the Worcestershire in general is also due to the fact that some services have been cut by the Tories in other hospitals in the county, including Kidderminster and Redditch.

As the national news reported the deaths, Worcestershire Socialist Party ran a 'Save our NHS' stall. We collected many signatures and had some interesting discussions with local shoppers, also making them aware of the [4 March national demo to save the NHS](#).

Football abuse scandal: Reclaim the game for justice and accountability

Matt Dobson, Socialist Party Scotland

Former football player Andy Woodward waived his right to anonymity on 16 November. His story of being sexually abused as a youth player by convicted paedophile Barry Bennell at Crewe Alexandra FC [came out in the Guardian](#).

Significantly, several other footballers then felt encouraged to tell their horrifying stories. Like many victims of child abuse, they have suffered both in their careers and personal lives, carrying the burden of these horrors.

Offside Trust

After giving powerful testimony in the media, players from this group have set up [the 'Offside Trust'](#), an independent organisation to support players and their families who have suffered from abuse.

The actions and campaigning of these survivors have resulted in recognition of the huge scale of the abuse. As of 21 December, the National Police Chiefs' Council knew of 429 victims, ranging in age from four to 20 at the time of the abuse, and 155 potential suspects.

[148 clubs, spanning all tiers of the game, have been "impacted"](#). The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has received more than 1,700 calls to a dedicated football abuse hotline.

Outrageously, the Football Association (FA) and the clubs failed to act for decades, despite being presented with evidence.

As well as the eventual conviction of abusers like Bennell, Channel 4 aired a Dispatches documentary in 1997 which exposed abusers. Deborah Davies, the journalist who made it, has called on the FA to release a 2005 report which she said detailed 250 victims and was potentially related to dozens of clubs.

Abusers exploited the hold they had as coaches over players' futures. Also, struggling working families often lived long distances from clubs.

Bennell forced situations where players stayed with him - with the knowledge of clubs, who it seems turned a blind eye. There is real concern that Bennell and coaches from other clubs coordinated abuse on a wide scale for decades.

The players involved with Offside Trust have expressed frustration with the slowness of the police in interviewing those who have given testimony. The silence from many clubs, and their continuing attempts to cover up their knowledge of past abuse, should be condemned.

Disgustingly, evidence is building that many survivors have been forced to sign non-disclosure agreements with clubs in return for compensation.

As the courageous footballers who have come forward have demanded, all survivors of child abuse need justice and support. The wider 'Independent Inquiry into Child Abuse' continues to be widely mistrusted and rejected by survivors for being linked to the establishment.

Similarly, there is understandable concern at football's governing bodies being trusted to solely run inquiries, given their poor response when presented with evidence in the past.

[Inquiries need to be genuinely independent](#), democratic and accountable - involving survivors' groups, players' union the Professional Footballers' Association, and the wider trade union movement.

They need to be fully publicly funded and have access to all documents held by clubs and governing bodies. The gagging orders must be lifted, and any intimidation of whistleblowers must be exposed and ended.

There needs to be real discussion in football at all levels about safeguarding in the future.

[Football is big business-dominated](#), reflecting capitalist society. In this ruthless profit-driven system there are power imbalances and limited checks on those who wield power. This can be seen in football clubs and at the game's highest levels.

Community

Many coaches who want to contribute to children's development and improve the game are prevented by financial barriers and the undemocratic structures of the game. Fans and players need to reclaim the game.

Football clubs should be democratically run under community ownership. They should be non-profit, as should governing bodies, with the election of all officials and coaches, subject to recall at any time.

- ['Reclaim the Game'](#) by John Reid - a socialist programme for football - £3 plus postage from leftbooks.co.uk

Fiction review: A Very British Ending

Spy drama gives insight into capitalist coup plot

Tony Sauniois

Rarely does a political spy novel contain so much historical fact, written in such a gripping manner as [Edward Wilson's 'A Very British Ending'](#).

Like his other novels, this one, first published in 2015, makes no attempt to mask the author's own socialist political sympathies. For reasons that are self-evident, his novels have received scant coverage in the press and media. They have simply buried it.

This story charts the drama of events which unfolded in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, centred around the attempts of the security services to undermine and overthrow [Harold Wilson's Labour government](#). It is portrayed through the eyes of William Catesby, a dissident MI6 agent, and his boss Henry Bone, who struggle to thwart the plots and coup against Wilson.

Harold Wilson, in 1947, was president of the Board of Trade - the government department in charge of international commerce. He had overseen the selling of Rolls-Royce engines to the Soviet Union, in line with an agreement made prior to his appointment.

Wilson was warned at the time by Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Chancellor Richard Stafford Cripps that this could well become a poisoned chalice. Indeed it did, as Wilson was never forgiven by the CIA, or sections of the British security services, for allowing the deal to go ahead.

Later he resigned from the Labour cabinet in protest at the introduction of prescription charges, which was linked to opposition to increased defence expenditure. For all these reasons, the security services viewed Wilson with extreme suspicion. In fact, as the book explains, they suspected him of being a Soviet agent.

Suspicion

Hugh Gaitskell - the favoured candidate of Labour's right wing, as well as the capitalists, the CIA, MI5 and MI6 - died at an early age, vacating the Labour leadership. This paved the way for Wilson's election as leader.

The real class nature of the Labour right wing is well portrayed in the novel.

In 1956 a house party is hosted by Hugh Gaitskell - or "Gaiters" as his friends called him - in the leafy London suburb of Hampstead. Present is Kit Fournier, CIA agent and labour attaché at the US London embassy, together with other friends from the ruling elite of capitalist society.

"The house was bursting with refined British voices and urbane British elegance... They [the CIA] were grooming the non-socialist pro-American wing of the Labour Party for power - an Oxbridge-led elite that felt comfortable within the traditional ruling circles of Britain.

"There was no way that Washington was going to let its unsinkable aircraft carrier be taken over by mutineers," observes Catesby.

When *Militant* was attacked by the Labour Party right wing in the late 1970s and 80s, we published a pamphlet exposing the links between the CIA and Denis Healey, who was chancellor and then shadow foreign secretary, and the rest of the Labour right.

The novel runs through the subsequent elections which Labour won in 1964, 1966 and again in 1974 under Harold Wilson's leadership. The background to these events was a massive upsurge in class struggle and strikes.

"Enemies of the state"

At the time, a section of the ruling class and state machine was flirting with the idea of overthrowing the Wilson government - by a military coup if necessary. The Times even ran an editorial headlined "Is Britain heading for a military coup?"

These events are centre stage in Wilson's novel. In real life, tanks and army divisions were deployed to Heathrow airport - on two occasions, without Labour's defence secretary even being informed.

A retired general in the novel mobilises a secret "army" to break any general strike or sabotage by the domestic "enemies of the state". In real life, retired general Walter Walker organised such a force, called 'Civil Assistance', as covered in both *Militant* and the establishment press at the time.

Discussions within the clubs of the ruling elite and maverick sections of the "secret state" are well depicted and centre on plans for a coup headed by a member of the royal family. In real life it was subsequently revealed that former navy chief Lord Mountbatten and 'dissident' elements in the state machine had considered such options.

As an unnamed press baron in the novel sates: "There is no constitutional problem involved. The oaths of allegiance taken by the military are to the Crown, not to elected members of parliament."

At the time the majority of the ruling class and state machine in Britain held back. They pulled the rug from under the coup plotters, as they viewed such drastic measures as not in their interests at that time.

This is reflected in the novel when an unnamed member of the royal family storms out of a meeting. A banker later does the same, declaring to the general present: "I am not taking orders from you."

The undemocratic removal of [Edward Gough Whitlam's left-wing Labor government in Australia](#) using the reserve powers of the monarchy, the military coup in Chile, and many other events are all drawn into the drama.

Correctly, Edward Wilson dismisses the idea propagated in Washington and parts of the British secret state that Harold Wilson was a Soviet agent. "He is not even a socialist, let alone a Communist," comments Catesby at one stage.

In spite of this, Catesby is rather too sympathetic towards Harold Wilson. Although he was the candidate of the Labour left, he reintroduced prescription charges, had attempted to introduce the anti-union 'In Place of Strife' legislation, and more.

Significantly, Edward Wilson challenges the CIA's idea that the aim of the Soviet Union was "world domination" through international revolution. Catesby even invokes Trotsky to refute these claims.

Trotsky

"Catesby stared into the fire. The 'Team B' Americans seemed unaware that Trotsky's scheme for world revolution had been rejected long before Trotsky had been murdered with an ice axe.

"Since then, the Soviet Union had turned into a paranoid inward-looking state. Catesby reflected - and not for the first time - what would have happened if Trotsky had come to power instead of Stalin. And what role, thought Catesby, would he himself have played in such an alternative universe?"

This is a dramatic and highly enjoyable novel based on real events. Edward Wilson, a native of Baltimore in the United States, served in the Vietnam War in a special forces unit. Following this he renounced his US citizenship, and eventually emigrated to Britain where he became a teacher and later a novelist.

A Very British Ending does not disappoint. Even as a work of fiction, it gives valuable insight into how the British ruling class will react to defend its interests when it feels threatened.

- A wide range of books and pamphlets is available from leftbooks.co.uk

What we think

Strikes show workers' power - coordinated action on a mass scale needed

After gloating about the decline in strikes to record levels in 2015, just months later, the right-wing Tory press is now frothing at the mouth as workers take action in [on the tube](#), railways and [at airports](#). They would like to go even further than the Tories' restrictive anti-union laws. From a low level, the first ten months of 2016 saw 100,000 more days lost through strike action than 2015 - a 40% increase.

From celebrating the weakness of unions, the press has had to recognise, albeit hysterically, the power of workers when they are organised and prepared to fight. In particular, this was shown by the sight of stations closed across London - including the evacuation of the massive Clapham Junction - because of the effect of the joint RMT/TSSA London Underground station strike on 9 January. Southern Rail accepted that nothing would run when drivers from Aslef and RMT walked out for three days in that long-running dispute.

Outrageously, [Labour London Mayor Sadiq Kahn has attacked the tube unions for the stoppage](#). But the strike is against cost-cutting by TfL that has seen over 800 workers lose their jobs in stations with the closure of ticket offices. As predicted by unions, a review by management concluded that this has made the Underground dangerously understaffed. The threat of action has seen them concede 200 new jobs but this is still totally inadequate.

Nationalisation

As with Southern Rail, workers are taking action to make the transport system safe for themselves to work in and the public to travel on. The Socialist Party welcomes the policy of Jeremy Corbyn to renationalise the privatised rail companies.

But he should go further than his proposal that this should happen when each franchise comes up for renewal. They should be immediately taken into public ownership with no compensation for the fat cats who make profits out of rail workers and commuters while still benefitting from public subsidies. However, we support small shareholders being recompensed.

This is a crucial time for the rail unions and in particular the RMT. Driver Only Operations is the device of the rail bosses, backed up the Tory government to make cuts and more importantly to seek to attack the strength of one of the most important industrial unions. The industrial and political legacy of the late Bob Crow must be maintained. It is an important thorn in the side of the Tories and an inspiration to the rest of the union movement.

Similarly, the strike of the British Airways (BA) cabin crew is vital to defend the position of militant trade unionism at Heathrow in general and particularly in Unite at the airport. The dispute is to improve the low pay of those workers who were employed on an inferior 'mixed fleet' contract in the aftermath of the cabin crew dispute six years ago, despite the willingness of workers to fight management's attacks on jobs and terms and conditions.

But while it's true that there are no final victories for workers as long as capitalism remains, there are also no final defeats. This dispute is a real opportunity for Unite to show the new starters that the union is prepared and able to fight for them. As so many workers know, when there are two or more tiers of pay, management will try to equalise to the lowest. Therefore, the union has to aim to get everyone on the original contract, alongside fighting for a big pay rise.

The BA strike shows why it is essential that the Unite elections result is a defeat for the right-wing general secretary candidate Gerard Coyne, who would take the union backwards industrially, as well as act against Jeremy Corbyn on behalf of the Blairites.

Unite

We believe it is a mistake by Ian Allinson to threaten a spilt of the left vote by standing against Len McCluskey. Ian underestimates the challenge of Coyne, who is backed by the capitalist establishment, as last week's Financial Times editorial shows. Ian also tries to minimise the effect that a Coyne victory would have in Unite and the wider union movement. [We have made criticisms of Len McCluskey but recognise the advances made under his leadership, which would be threatened if Coyne won.](#)

The Tories are now accusing the transport unions of coordinating their action to "inflict maximum pain on commuters". Of course, the unions are taking action to defend themselves and the vast majority of commuters who are workers as well.

These and the other disputes that are breaking out can be won, which would give huge confidence to other workers who face similar issues that victories can be achieved. The movement developing against the cuts in the NHS, with a national demonstration on 4 March, also has the potential to win.

But unfortunately, as yet action isn't coordinated. But, faced with the massive generalised assault on workers' living standards, jobs and pensions, joint action on a mass scale - posing the idea of a 24-hour general strike - is what is required to face down the bosses and push back their weak and divided government, even get it out of power.

Northern Ireland: socialist alternative needed

'Cash for ash' scandal set to bring down NI government

Edited statement from [Labour Alternative](#), a non-sectarian electoral alliance in Northern Ireland between trade unionists and left activists, including the Socialist Party (CWI Ireland)

The ['renewable heat incentive' scandal](#) has [prompted Martin McGuinness's resignation as Northern Ireland's deputy first minister](#), which looks set to trigger a fresh assembly election.

This sums up everything which is wrong with establishment politics: corruption, cronyism and sectarian sabre-rattling.

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and republican party Sinn Féin - which rule together under Northern Ireland's power-sharing agreement - are slashing jobs, benefits and public services. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions stand to go up in smoke through the 'cash for ash' scheme, overwhelmingly benefitting bosses.

The DUP's cosy relationship with property developers and business owners has been exposed by a series of scandals. But Sinn Féin, and all the other main parties, also buy into the idea that society must be run for profit.

They all support cutting corporation tax, transferring hundreds of millions directly from public services into the coffers of big business. It is out of this political culture that the 'cash for ash' affair was born.

The DUP and Sinn Féin have been happy to work together to implement austerity. When details of the botched heating scheme initially emerged, Sinn Féin's silence was deafening as it sought to avoid criticising its coalition partner.

As the level of public anger became apparent, however, the reaction of both parties was - as always when faced with a united opposition - to inject sectarianism into the debate to attempt to distract from their failings.

Arlene Foster, the DUP first minister, cannot stay in post without a deputy due to the power-sharing system. She claimed calls for her to stand down were driven by misogyny. Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness suggested that his resignation - which automatically forced her out - was, in part, motivated by a desire to defend women's rights.

But both the DUP and Sinn Féin uphold oppressive anti-abortion legislation which has seen women dragged through the courts. While the majority of people here are now pro-choice, none of the main parties support a woman's fundamental right to control her own body.

A fresh election will be an opportunity for working class and young people to pass judgment on the political establishment. [Labour Alternative](#) will be standing candidates in order to provide a cross-community, radical opposition to the parties of sectarianism, austerity and inequality.

We call on trade unionists, community activists and fighters for women's and LGBT+ rights to join us and mount the strongest challenge possible. It's time for a new kind of politics.

May slams 'economic inequalities' Tory policies created

Dan Smart, South East Staffordshire Socialist Party

Unelected Tory prime minister [Theresa May has delivered a speech to the Charity Commission](#) in which she denounces injustices within our society.

While outlining many of the deep inequalities we are facing, she fails to provide any solutions. In fact, the problems she rails against are direct consequences of Tory policy.

She weeps crocodile tears over the fact that if you are poor in Britain you are likely to die "nine years earlier than others," that "if you're a white, working class boy, you're less likely than anybody else in Britain to go to university" and that it's now "harder than ever before to own your own home."

Does our prime minister think we are oblivious to her party's [vicious austerity programme](#) and free-market policies that have made millions poorer?

Have students forgotten that it was the [Tory-Lib Dem coalition that raised tuition fees to £9,000](#), pricing many working class people out of higher education?

And which government is it again that has [allowed house prices and rents to rise exponentially, while only one council home is built for every 30 people on the waiting list?](#) The hypocrisy is astounding.

The Socialist Party campaigns to use the vast wealth, currently in the clutches of the 1%, for the benefit of the majority.

Through public ownership of the biggest companies under democratic working class control, resources could be planned to bring millions out of poverty wages and insecure work.

The NHS, education and public services could be fully funded, and a programme of mass council house building embarked upon.

If Corbyn's Labour put forward decisive policies like this, would May get away with treating us like idiots by claiming she stands against inequality, for a "shared society"?

Let's build a party by and for the working class, that stands resolutely in working class interests - against those of big business and their puppets in parliament.

Blair's multimillion plans to fight 'populism' and spy on Muslims

Fight anti-worker Blairite politics!

Jack Miller, school student

Tony Blair is to inject £9.3 million into a new not-for-profit foundation, the 'Tony Blair Initiative' (TBI). [It will endeavour to counter "the new populism" and make "globalisation work for all."](#)

TBI also aims at "fostering religious and cultural tolerance and advancing peace." As prime minister, Blair sent troops to five wars. Two of them he helped to start, laying part of the basis for the current mess in the Middle East.

Blair's policies at home were to privatise public services and encourage free trade - these destroyed working class conditions to make the super-rich even richer. This is what has led to the rise of populism, left and right, which Blair previously said "I'm not sure I fully understand."

So is this an attempt by Blair to contort his public relations image for his own personal gain?

[Jim Murphy](#), the failed former Scottish Labour leader, has been cherry-picked for the plum job of advising Blair on [spying on Muslims in Africa](#).

This scheme will play off the prior links Blair has built with what one insider described to the Times as "dictatorial states."

A spokeswoman said there was only a proposal to help governments collect "publicly available data." But why, if it's already available?

Blair has clearly caused unrest among his staff. Some think the scheme will backfire, as the comment to the Times shows. Possible testaments to this are his "deal in the desert" for Colonel Gaddafi's oil, or the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland.

No amount of money will make Tony Blair's politics attractive to people suffering austerity.

Workers and young people need a mass anti-austerity party of our own, not pro-capitalist 'initiatives' from warmonger millionaires.

Bosses earn average annual salary in under three days

'Fat Cat Wednesday' - take the wealth off the 1%

Carl Harper, Peterborough Socialist Party

Top bosses had earned more than the £28,200 median salary by around midday on 4 January - ['Fat Cat Wednesday'](#).

According to the figures from High Pay Centre, the average FTSE 100 chief executive now earns more than £1,000 an hour. These bosses now typically earn 129 times more than their average employee.

Figures for 2015 showed that average annual pay for a FTSE 100 boss was £5.5 million, or 401 times that of a minimum wage worker.

The Fat Cat Wednesday calculation is based on bosses starting back at work after Christmas on 2 January, based on median FTSE 100 chief executive pay of £4 million in 2015.

The hourly pay rate of £1,009 is calculated based on bosses working 12 hours a day, including three out of every four weekends, and taking fewer than ten days' holiday a year.

Undoubtedly some bosses do work extreme hours. But so do many nurses in our struggling NHS, doing far more useful work for a tiny fraction of the pay.

And the gulf in pay is undoubtedly larger. Official pay figures downplay the army of workers in insecure, precarious work, since the average is based on those who have been in their job for at least a year.

Frances O'Grady, leader of the Trade Union Congress, [apparently responded by calling for Theresa May to honour her promise to put workers on boards](#). How about building for coordinated strikes against austerity?

And why just token workers on boards? Why shouldn't workers own and control the lot?

As long as super-rich minority owns and controls the top corporations, they'll use them for private profit. Nationalise them under the democratic control and management of workers, so the working class can plan what we make to meet the needs of all!

What we saw

Southern Fail

Britain's [worst train operator, Southern Rail](#), wants to sack all its guards to boost profits. The unions claim the guards have a safety-critical role. Who to believe?

Another London route operated by Southern's parent company Govia Thameslink [failed a counter-terrorism test](#). Staff did not locate a dummy bomb.

Drivers' union Aslef points out the [camera view its members have from the cab is blurry and incomplete](#) (examples above from an Aslef leaflet). Guards also provide essential assistance to disabled and unwell passengers, among other duties. Looks like it's not just a 'row over who presses the button'.

Tube tilt

Management at London Underground sent five - count 'em - emails to commuters about [one day of strike action](#).

Lucky Londoners received an 'Important Tube strike' email on 5 January, 6 January, and then two on 8 January. On 9 January, a fifth email gave 'Tube strike travel advice for this evening'.

In the same period, Transport for London sent just one email detailing network closures for maintenance work. Transport unions RMT and TSSA walked out against unsustainably low staffing levels.

Thanks to Mary Finch for the tube tale

Them & Us

£500k house party...

New Year's Eve for the exclusive 'Chipping Norton set' cost half a million quid.

Elisabeth Murdoch, daughter of news emperor Rupert, [hosted this year's blowout](#). Her elite Cotswolds community includes axed axeman David Cameron, gutter-press queen Rebekah Brooks and playground bully Jeremy Clarkson.

Murdoch's "theatrical set" house party "with revolving floors" apparently set her back £500,000, according to an Evening Standard diary piece. There were "cocktails on tap and roving graffiti artists spray-painting the toilets mid-party with guests' names."

... 50p for rent

Meanwhile, [in Grimsby, 42 struggling families now have no more than 50p a week for rent](#).

The Tories' new benefit cap came into force on 7 November, causing the dramatic fall in some claimants' housing benefit. Never mind cocktails on tap - you can't even get a space in a homeless hostel for 50p a week.

116,000 households with between one and four kids could suffer from the cap, [according to the Chartered Institute of Housing](#).

And in London, 170,000 people are homeless. 47% of them are working, [says housing charity Shelter](#). Some are even reduced to [sleeping in a warehouse](#), dozens sharing a single toilet.

The Socialist has long campaigned for a national programme of council house building. Cap rents, not benefits.

Haringey: pressure grows as Labour council ploughs ahead with cuts

Paul Kershaw, Haringey and Enfield Socialist Party

Haringey council's 'scrutiny committee' will apparently recommend a delay to a massive social cleansing regeneration scheme. This is a victory for local campaigners and a blow to the local right-wing Labour leadership, who face increasing opposition.

Public-private partnerships always tend to load risk on the public sector while driving private profiteering, and that is the concern of the committee regarding the £2 billion plan.

Campaigners are calling on the council to give residents a vote on the regeneration proposals that mean a net loss of social housing.

The credibility of the council leadership has been further undermined by reports that [cabinet members have enjoyed hospitality worth £770 at 13 lunches or dinners paid for by Terrapin Communications](#), a PR firm linked to controversial proposals to convert Hornsey Town Hall into a 'Boutique Hotel'.

According to the local paper, one senior Haringey Labour source asks: "If these meetings were not to do with Hornsey Town Hall then what were they about?"

The local Labour parties have seen a big growth of membership in response to Jeremy Corbyn's opposition to austerity and his call for a halt to social cleansing.

But the council continues with further privatisation proposals and anti-working class regeneration plans. It has huge reserves but is ploughing ahead with cuts.

Campaign

Two council byelections have led to new councillors being elected as supporters of the left. The local party in Tottenham has voted for a resolution calling on the council to reverse privatisation.

Local branches have supported a [Unison campaign to stop the proposed privatisation of the Ermine Road centre](#), part of the adult social care service.

The council workers' union, Unison, is currently pursuing a legal case against the council because a privatised homecare provider was paying its workers less than the minimum wage - as little as £3.67 per hour.

The argument that the council can manage private contractors to protect services and workers is no longer believed.

If Labour councillors take up a serious fight in defence of their community and against austerity they will get tremendous support in the area.

Simply to halt the privatisation of the remaining Learning Disability Day Centre would be an important start; councillors would be signalling their willingness to stand up to the old council leadership.

Setting a no-cuts budget by drawing on reserves would lay the basis for a massive fightback. Who could deny that truly affordable social housing is needed in inner London?

A budget that built more council homes rather than reducing the number would put the ideas that have drawn people toward Labour into practice.

Conference to debate the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's role and the 2017 elections

- Saturday 28 January from 11am to 4.30pm at Student Central, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY
-

We're sick of sham consultations - give us a real fightback

Letter published in the South Wales Evening Post:

Your report on 4 January claims that just 230 responses have been received so far to [Swansea Council's public budget consultation process](#).

Is it any surprise that the residents of Swansea are refusing to participate in the council's annual consultation, which effectively asks just one repeated question - which services would you prefer councillors to cut?

We have already seen £48 million worth of cuts over the past two years with another £16 million proposed for next year and a further £38 million by 2020.

Yes, Tory central government is responsible for cutting local government budgets but it's Labour councils across Wales, including Swansea, that are obediently implementing the Tory cuts!

Labour councillors shed crocodile tears and claim 'there is nothing we can do' and continue to devastate council jobs, services and the lives of the most vulnerable in society.

Local government trade unions, [along with the Wales TUC](#), have called on Labour councils to refuse to implement these vicious cuts and instead set legal no-cuts budgets and launch a mass campaign to force the government to provide councils with the cash necessary to run our services.

No cuts!

Instead of acting as local managers and administrators of Tory cuts, Labour councillors should be standing up for ordinary people!

If Swansea council's consultation exercise included the question 'would you support a no-cuts budget?' then a positive response of tens of thousands would surely be on the order of the day!

Unfortunately, from past experience, such as last year's consultation where less than 0.6% of the population of Swansea participated, Labour councillors will justify making further cuts by claiming that this is what Swansea residents want. I don't think so!

Alec Thraves, Swansea Socialist Party

Khan should attack bosses, not workers

Sadiq Khan won the London Mayor election in May 2016 on the back of the wave of support for Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity campaign.

Many trade unionists in London voted for Khan to get rid of hated Tory mayor Boris Johnson, who notoriously refused to even meet with RMT representatives.

While understanding this desire, [the Socialist Party warned](#) (in contrast to the uncritical #JezweKhan campaign of Momentum) that a mayor who pledges to be "the most business-friendly" yet, and who wants more millionaires and billionaires, cannot also represent the interests of ordinary Londoners.

Instead of attacking workers and claiming the [recent strikes](#) were "completely unnecessary", Khan should be attacking the tube bosses who have created this nightmare, and should be pledging to reverse the cuts and ticket office closures.

Paula Mitchell, London Socialist Party

London tube strike solid in fight for jobs and safety

The strike of 4,000 station staff between the 8th and 9th January brought London to a standstill on a very busy back-to-work day when up to 4.8 million passenger journeys would have taken place in the capital.

This was a pivotal moment for station staff, who showed their power as a section of workers. It is testament to the fighting strategy of the RMT, whose actions brought over the rank and file TSSA reps and members who revolted against their leaders who had attempted to do a shabby deal with the [strike busting mayor Sadiq Khan](#).

Many train drivers also quite rightly refused to drive their trains on the grounds of safety, as stations, the few that were open, were staffed by untrained and unqualified and unfamiliarised staff.

This strike, on top of the successful overtime ban, which highlighted the dangerous understaffing of the tube and closed over 80 stations when staff refused to work rest days or overtime, will give confidence to this section of workers to take more action if necessary.

Mayor Khan instead of condemning strikes should find the money to fund the hundreds of extra frontline jobs that are necessary to staff the underground, which carries more passengers than the combined numbers of all Britain's other rail networks.

A salary cap of managers at £100,000 a year instead of the £600,000 that some of them get would be a start.

Bringing cleaning and engineering back 'in house' would also save millions. The underground is very soon going to have its subsidy removed, which would make it the only major metro in the world unsubsidised, this must be reversed.

Indeed we call for an increase in funding to provide a fully staffed, fully publically owned service, which would provide a cheap and safe underground for the people who use the service.

John Reid, outgoing RMT Executive Member

Leytonstone

Going along to the picket line at Leytonstone station was energising and inspiring. We listened to station staff explaining their experiences and their reason for striking. The drastic cuts to station staffing on the Underground have resulted in many stations being closed and some very busy stations left running without any staff.

This is causing disturbances to travellers and puts their safety at risk. It is also overworking the very limited staff and they are put under huge pressure. They are told last minute where to drop off the keys to the station because there is no one else to replace them, they are forced to stay behind, and worst of all some of them are left alone to run a very busy station. This puts their safety at risk as well as travellers' safety.

But these workers - in the unions RMT and TSSA - have had enough. They have been pushed to the limit and by striking they are showing the government, the London mayor and Transport for London (TfL) the dangerous route the London Underground service is being taken through.

TfL has enough money to be able to sufficiently staff all stations but it is choosing not to do so. Instead it is wasting money covering gaps in staffing with 'hastily briefed' managers who get paid three times the rate of station staff.

There are some tube managers who earn up to £600,000 a year. The workers told us that some of the top managers' bonuses are more than the workers' annual salaries. The RMT is suggesting having a cap of £100,000 for the wage of senior TfL managers.

The strikers that we met understand that the cuts in station staff are not an individual issue, that the government is attacking all workers and vital services through its austerity plans. However, bosses might think they have power, but the strike today shows once again who has the real power. When RMT members don't go to work - nothing moves. Imagine if NHS staff, teachers, the transport workers and others go on strike together - this pro-austerity Tory government can be brought down and we can fight to improve services and conditions for all workers.

Isai Priya

Barking

Pickets at Barking train station gave out 1,000 leaflets to C2C rail commuters this morning who, with one or two exceptions, fully understood that the strike is about their safety and their service. As Colin Hall, Barking station rep, explained to the Socialist:

"I think people have had enough of austerity. They realise we are all workers together. There's not enough staff on the underground to keep it safe and that's what we are proving. We've proved it today because the service has shut down.

"Before 'Fit for the Future', station staff industrial action didn't stop all services but now, after 'Fit for the Future', management can't run the train service safely and that's what we've shown today".

Pete Mason

Victoria

Having walked passed numerous closed tube stations, I found a lively picket line at Victoria station of around 20 workers from RMT and TSSA.

One striker told me that while working alone on New Years Eve she was sexually assaulted by a passenger. Having another member of staff at the station could have prevented the assault. These are the dangerous conditions that underground staff find themselves working in.

Another striker explained that many stations are operating below minimum staffing numbers and of the staff that are there many are from a new lower grade and are not trained in safety to the same level as before. There was fear on the picket line about what could happen if the station needed to be evacuated.

Many picketers wanted to discuss mayor Sadiq Khan and his disgusting comments on the strike. One said she had never had faith in Khan to be a different kind of mayor to Tory Boris Johnson.

Another striker had hoped Khan would end the staff shortages and reverse the negative impact of 'Fit for Future' plans. He said that while Boris Johnson is gone, London still has a mayor who attacks the trade union movement and strike action.

It is now clearer than ever to workers in London, particularly those on the underground, that Sadiq Khan is not a mayor who will stand up for them or for a safe and well-staffed transport system.

Helen Pattison

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 9 January 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Support BA cabin crews' strike for fair pay

Chris Newby

British Airways (BA) cabin crew members of the union Unite are striking for 48 hours against poverty pay. Following [the heroic battle of cabin crew six years ago](#) to defend pay and conditions, British Airways management led by CEO Willie Walsh forced through new contracts on far worse terms and conditions for all new starters.

This has led to a situation where cabin crew working on the mixed fleet contract have basic pay starting at £12,192, plus £3 an hour "flying pay" totalling an average pay of £16,000, including allowances, each year. Mixed fleet cabin crew work on a combination of long and short haul flights.

A recent survey revealed almost half of new cabin crew had taken on a second job to make ends meet, with some saying they had to sleep in their cars between shifts because they could not afford the petrol to drive home. Two thirds admitted to going to work unfit to fly because they could not afford to be off sick. Yet the parent company of BA, IAG, is forecast to make profits this year of £2.3 billion.

These pay levels are some of the lowest in the industry. Cabin crew are being given no other option but to strike as British Airways management is refusing to engage in any meaningful negotiations. The determination of the cabin crew to win better pay and conditions is shown by the fact that over 800 cabin crew from British Airways' 'mixed fleet' have joined Unite since the start of the dispute over poverty pay. The Socialist Party fully supports cabin crew in this struggle.

Manchester

A very noisy protest took place outside Manchester Airport's Terminal 3 during the BA cabin crew strike. Unite members were chanting "low pay, no way!" and "pay rise, not lies" and getting support from passengers going in and out of the airport, including one who donated two boxes of chocolates!

The press have been reporting that the workers are on £21,000 a year and only interested in "shopping and cocktails". In reality, mixed fleet crew start on £12,000 a year and work incredibly long hours. In contrast, BA forecasts to make £2.3 billion in profit this year.

Union members rejected a pay offer of 2% in December. They are demanding a living wage, an increase of around 8%, and a scheduling agreement.

Mixed fleet staff work both short and long-haul flights and often don't have breaks in between. The protesters were confident and are up for the fight - Unite has just announced another three days of strike action on 19th-21st January. We should all give them our full support - say no to poverty pay!

Becci Heagney

This above report by Chris Newby was posted on the Socialist Party website on 10 January 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist. The report by Becci Heagney was added onto the website on 11 January.

Sham Royal Mail pensions consultation should be met with action

Carl Harper, CWU representative and Peterborough Socialist Party

Royal Mail has announced a 'formal consultation' on the pension plans of its workers, following a national statement with 'proposals' sent to workers' home addresses.

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) has replied with a statement to the company that any non-agreed pension changes will be met with a national strike ballot. Members of my branch supported this position unanimously at a gate meeting on 6 January.

[Deputy General Secretary Terry Pullinger said of the consultation:](#) "We have anticipated [it] for some months... we move from shadow boxing to the ring." In reality, following privatisation, it is less a boxing match and more a strategy of 'death by a thousand cuts'.

A pension dispute is likely to be followed by further cuts as the company looks to claw back the terms and conditions of employment we have won in the past, in search of profits and as an ideological attack on the CWU.

Between the lines in the cover letter accompanying the consultation pack, we see an indication that cost - or more specifically profit - is the driving force behind this attack.

The company states in the letter that any new deal will be in line with other companies' pension plans - signalling a race to the bottom on our pensions, justified in their opinion by achieving a stable return for shareholders.

The unanimous vote by members is a welcome sign that they understand the full significance and potential magnitude of this attack and stand resolutely in opposition to pension changes which have not been agreed by us as a trade union.

Action should link these attacks to the [privatisation of the postal service](#) and a campaign for renationalisation of the company and the wider postal industry.

Unison legal battle looks into allegations 'Team Dave' broke rules during general secretary election

Socialist Party members in Unison

For years Unison activists have suspected that there has been illegitimate interference from unelected officials in the union elections in breach of the rules. As such the 2015 general secretary election was no different, except this time they got caught red handed.

The union had hoped to silence the anger of the members. Unfortunately for them the three left of Prentis candidates weren't going to let them off that easily and now a court will determine if the election was free and fair and if it should be re-run.

Complaints

Unison national executive committee member [Roger Bannister, who was one of the candidates](#), is currently locked in this legal battle with the union. There are three other similar cases also being heard.

Roger has made two complaints. Firstly, that a meeting held in the greater London region for all organising staff [breached the rules by organising for incumbent general secretary Dave Prentis during the election](#), when the rules are clear that no Unison resources should be used on behalf of any candidate.

And secondly that election rules were changed unconstitutionally during the election in order to get around the fact that the Prentis camp were breaking the rules.

All complainants are claiming that there was so much widespread malpractice and breaches of the rules by unelected full-time officials that the election should be re-run again.

In the face of overwhelming evidence, the union is not disputing the key facts. Instead they are accepting that there was some rule breaking, but claiming that this was by a lone "rogue" official - London regional secretary Linda Perks. They claim that once they had found out about the tape of the London meeting, they took action against her (she was initially suspended and then given a final written warning and transfer).

As such, the union wasn't liable for her actions. In addition the problems were contained to London, and such was the margin of Prentis' victory that even if his London vote was discounted, he would have still won. After three days of the hearing on 19-21 December, the outcome is an open question.

The judge is clearly of the view that there was a shoddy and overly restrictive investigation into one official only, when there was clear evidence that there was the open and willing participation to knowingly break the rules by the majority of London officials in the infamous meeting.

At one point she asked a national union official, pointing out that in the tape the regional secretary was instructing staff to lie, "wouldn't this normally result in summary dismissal?" The officer being questioned had no option but to agree.

What also came out in the hearing was the extent of the involvement of senior national officials in 'Team Dave' (his campaign team).

In breach of the rules they organised a meeting of paid officials funded by the union, to launch his campaign. They subsequently intervened to overturn a decision of the union election officer and the Electoral Reform Society by not allowing branches to say why they had nominated a candidate, only the fact that they had.

The judge was also clearly unhappy that when a complainant raised that this was a breach of the rules, he was served with a lawyer's letter threatening him with libel by Prentis, seeing this as an attempt to silence complaints.

Team Dave

The decision to only investigate one official was taken by the president (a member of Team Dave); the investigating officer appointed was a member of Team Dave and the panel hearing the case were members of Team Dave!

Whatever the outcome of the case, it won't be good for the union leadership. They could be forced to re-run the election, and/or initiate further action against other officials in London.

In the meantime, the left in Unison needs to let rank-and-file members know exactly what is going on.

Through the newly-formed Unison Action group, we must assemble slates of candidates for this year's NEC elections to ensure that an anti-Prentis majority is elected.

Workplace news in brief

Harrods demo arrest

Hundreds of protesters descended on plush west London department store Harrods on 7 January in protest at the company retaining 75% of its waiters tips, [as reported in the last issue of the Socialist](#). The United Voices of the World (UVW) trade union is taking on Harrods and organised the demo. After it ended, the union's general secretary Petros Elia, along with other union members and protesters, was arrested. [After his release Petros said](#): "I was kept in a cell for around 17 hours at Belgravia Police Station and released without charge along with other UVW members and other protesters. Needless to say that the allegation against me is 100% false, not that the police were interested in evidence at the point of arrest. Despite there being not a shred of evidence against me I have been released on bail and prohibited from going within 50 metres of Harrods. The police have therefore temporarily banned me from representing members of UVW at Harrods or from protesting outside their store. On a side note, the demo was fantastic and we will now be escalating the campaign with a run of demonstrations and other actions at Harrods until 100% of tips go to staff."

Cinema strike

Hackney Picturehouse workers have held [a series of successful strikes](#) including on New Year's Day. To widen and increase the pressure on management, all Bectu members were balloted at Picturehouse cinemas at the Ritzy (South London), in Hackney and Piccadilly Circus, with turnouts of 75%, 85% and 60% respectively. The vote for strike action was a huge 93%, 100% and 100% majority at the three sites. Despite this, following a threatened legal challenge by Picturehouse owners Cineworld, the strike planned for 13 January has been called off. There may be protests taking place at all three sites.

Brian Debus, Hackney Socialist Party

Unite the Union executive elections

Four Socialist Party members are standing on the United Left slate (unitedleft.org.uk) in the Unite executive elections that take place at the same time as the union's general secretary ballot.

Suzanne Muna has been on the executive since 2015 and is again standing for one of the London & Eastern territorial seats, while Jamie Concozza is on the list for Scotland.

Former anti-cuts councillor Kevin Bennett is up for election in the General Engineering, Manufacturing and Servicing (GEMS) sector and Jimmy Tyson is standing in construction.

Nominations are from 16 January - 17 February and voting is between 27 March - 19 April

Build the resistance against Trump

Join international day of protest on 20 January

Helen Pattison, London Socialist Party

As [Donald Trump is sworn in as US President](#), Socialist Alternative, our US co-thinkers, have put out a call for people to take to the streets in protest against his racist and sexist ideas. When a similar call was made on the day of the election, [40,000 people protested in a matter of hours](#).

This time there will also be solidarity protests around the world organised by socialists fighting for an alternative to the reactionary ideas of Trump and the misery ordinary people have faced over the last eight years of capitalist crisis. Eight years marked by the destruction of decent, skilled jobs and their replacement with minimum wage, precarious work.

Trump's election took place against the backdrop of a broken capitalist system, unable to provide a decent standard of living for ordinary working class people.

But rather than a stunning endorsement of Trump and his ideas (Trump lost the popular vote), in reality the presidential election was a failure of the two-party system and the Democratic Party establishment.

The primaries were dominated by a massive mobilisation of working class people around Bernie Sanders' campaign calling for a 'political revolution'. Even in London classrooms, student members of the Socialist Party report that while people despise Trump, no one liked Clinton either.

[Bernie Sanders' campaign](#) showed that many workers and young people not only reject the reactionary ideas of Trump, but also believe in the need for an alternative to the rule of Wall Street and big business. His popularity showed the scope for a new party of working class people which could put out a call for jobs, homes and services for all. A party with these demands could start to undo the divisive impact of Trump's ideas.

The protests against Trump's inauguration must just be the beginning. A serious fight is needed against war, racism and austerity. We must build mass movements in the interest of the 99% and for a socialist alternative to the misery of capitalism.

- See socialiststudents.org.uk for protest details

Socialist Party national women's meeting: Russian revolution and the fightback today

Lucy Nuttall, South and West Lancashire Socialist Party

Beginning with an important talk on the pivotal role of women in the [Russian revolution](#) and the lessons we can learn from this 100 years on, 50 Socialist Party members from around the country attended a national women's meeting in London on 7 January.

The revolution was triggered by a demonstration of women textile workers, and it transformed women's lives - freeing them from the drudgery of endless domestic work with communal restaurants, laundrettes and accessible childcare. Abortion and divorce rights allowed women to participate fully in society.

This was only made possible by a feminist movement that unified women in struggle on a class basis, recognising the fundamental cause of their oppression as the divisive capitalist system. Unfortunately most of these gains were undone under Stalinism.

There were also discussions on how we can encourage women to take leading roles within trade unions, in the student movement and in community campaigns.

The final session of the day, on abortion rights under attack and the fightback across the world, highlighted the growing radicalisation of women by movements for reproductive freedom.

Abortion

[In Poland up to 140,000 marched in response to restrictive abortion laws](#), and [in Ireland the campaign demanding the repeal of the Eighth Amendment](#) - which the Socialist Party's sister organisation is playing an important role in - continues to grow.

Even in the UK, 50 years after the Abortion Act, NHS cuts seriously undermine abortion access. It is essential to continue the struggle for these basic rights and link up struggles internationally.

In the current political turmoil capitalism has shown it is increasingly incapable of providing even the most basic rights for women across the globe. Fundamentally, socialism is the only way forward for women's emancipation.

- All Socialist Party branches should aim to have reports from this excellent meeting.

2016: A record-breaking fighting fund year!

Ken Douglas, Socialist Party national treasurer

Socialist Party members and branches raised a record-breaking £140,535 in 2016. This is £17,000 more than we raised in 2015 (which was itself a record year) and the most we have raised in a year since the early 1990s.

The Socialist Party relies entirely on the financial support of ordinary working class people and our fundraising success shows the backing for our implacable opposition to austerity.

Often our members are the only ones out in town centres putting forward a concrete strategy for fighting back against the cuts in the NHS and council services. We have shown in practice, for example with the [success of the Butterfields housing campaign](#), that together, workers are strong enough to defeat the bosses' agenda.

The fighting fund is vital to help maintain our profile and ensure our ideas reach as wide an audience as possible. More and more people are also visiting our website, possibly following a discussion with one of our members, and making a donation.

Determination

12 branches raised over 200% of their target and six branches raised over £1,000, with Liverpool once again topping the charts on £2,756. In total 57 branches - from Cornwall to Caerphilly and from Chesterfield to Carlisle - hit their target, their determination to do so contributing to our record success.

Alongside fundraising on campaign stalls, many Christmas parties and fundraisers helped us reach the total. Kate Jones reports on a successful initiative in Swansea branch selling second-hand books: "Lots of our members have [Marxist and radical books](#) they don't need any more, or duplicate copies - our literature organiser Roger sells these to new members, students and others who are interested in joining. Since September he's raised around £100 for the fighting fund, as well as raising people's political level!"

So we have a big task in 2017 to make sure that it is as successful as 2016! James Hinchcliffe in Manchester reports that their branch has already got off to a good start: "First Manchester town centre Saturday stall of the year. Excellent response - £20 fighting fund raised."

- You can help by raising funds for us or making a one-off or regular donation to the fighting fund
- Do you want to become a seller of [the Socialist?](#) You don't have to be a member - contact us to arrange a supply of papers on a sale or return basis

Closing of the children's centres could cost lives

Samira Kamaly-Fard, Liverpool Socialist Party

[Children's centres in Liverpool](#) are at risk of closure with many unsure about their future. With the government making cuts to a much-needed service, do they not realise how detrimental it could potentially be to parents and children?

Centres offer a lot of services free of charge, such as family solicitors, national careers service, along with courses for better parenting and confidence building. They also offer first aid courses and baby massage, which can be quite costly, if not impossible for working class families otherwise.

New parents

In addition, children's centres offer play sessions every day, for various ages up to five. This is somewhere where parents can come along with their children to interact without the distractions at home.

The centres are an essential part of the community, they especially play a big role in the prevention of mental health issues. Many new mothers may have postnatal depression, or just be scared with a new baby.

The centres offer support in how to deal with difficult issues. They can be a sanctuary for many women.

The staff in the children's centres are trained to see developmental delays in children. There is safeguarding in early childhood which can be addressed promptly, and help reduce abuse and childhood mortality. The centres also help advise parents how to get back into work when their children go off to school, if not maybe before.

The centres are a great place for integration which can help in the fight against racism. Especially in a multicultural area such as Toxteth, where lots of different ethnicities use the service, whether Somali, Eastern European or of Asian background, everyone helps each other and has formed a beautiful community.

There have been many marches to oppose the cuts, yet [more needs to be done](#) to protect this vital service.

Palestine/Israel: Everyday life under occupation

Discussion at Socialism conference in Tel Aviv

Just before Christmas the United Nations security council symbolically voted 14-0 declaring Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank as illegal. The United States abstained, [denying a veto sought by Netanyahu's right-wing coalition government in Israel](#) and US President-elect Donald Trump.

A week earlier, [Socialist Struggle Movement](#) - the Israel/Palestine section of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) - hosted its annual Socialism conference in Tel Aviv where the major themes of debate were: the fight against Netanyahu's right-wing government, racism and the occupation. There were also discussions on the extreme right, trade unions, the environment, women and LGBT rights, and more. In the following report Per-Åke Westerlund of Rattvispartiet Socialisterna (CWI Sweden) - an international guest speaker - gives a flavour of this highly successful event.

With close to 150 participants and a record number of Palestinian speakers, the conference was a great success.

Four days before Socialism conference was held, Mohammed Abu Hummus, member of the al-Issawiya popular committee in occupied East Jerusalem, was shot in the leg with a rubber-covered bullet. Yet he arrived, with a cane as support, to talk about the fight against the settlements and the occupation of East Jerusalem.

"I'm always filming the conduct of the army, border police and police. I have over 500 films on violence, abuse, and more. This time they had blocked off a street. I filmed and they lied about why they blocked the road. Then I was shot", said Mohammed.

In summer 2014 he was shot in the leg with live ammunition during a protest against the war and slaughter in Gaza. He was hospitalised, but did not report it as the police would not have investigated.

In January, his cousin's 12-year-old son was shot in the head with a rubber bullet. The soldiers claimed that he had thrown a stone at them. The 12-year-old ended up in a coma, but survived.

Settlements

Mohammed explained how Israeli state violence and repression has increased with more and more settlements in East Jerusalem.

"Before the occupation in 1967 my village, Issawiya, was 12,500 square kilometres. Now it is 2,000 square kilometres. A large part is used by the military.

Most recently, land was seized for a highway to the Jewish settlement of Maale 'Edomin and a new landfill. Another large area of 440 square kilometres is said to become a national park."

Maale 'Edomin is one of the three largest settlements that together have 150,000 inhabitants. New and expanded settlements are now to be legalised as part of the right-wing government policies.

"When a court explained that the Israeli government has no right to take our land, the government responded that they have not taken anything, but only 'built the park'," said Mohammed.

"Police and soldiers act in East Jerusalem to create the wars and conflicts they say they are there to prevent. We can see how 30-40 soldiers chase a child along a street. The aim is to intimidate. There are children who do not dare go to school.

"The brutality is clearly shown on a film in which an Israeli soldier kills a Palestinian, and then plants a knife on the victim."

When the border police seize a Palestinian for 'administrative arrest' they do not have to show any charges or documents to imprison anyone for a period of six months - the arrest can be prolonged for further periods of six months indefinitely.

A few years ago a hunger strike among the prisoners meant that several were released and the numbers arrested fell. But since January 2014, the number held without charge has increased from 155 to 720, including three members of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

400 children under 18 years are kept in detention. The total number of political prisoners, as estimated by the organisation Adamir, is 7,000.

More and more Palestinian houses are being demolished. Both in East Jerusalem and in "Area C" (areas not directly under the Palestinian Authority since the Oslo agreement in 1993) more houses and buildings were destroyed in the first half of 2016 than during all of 2015. The demolitions are the worst in 20 years, according to the NGO Ir Amim.

"The government destroys houses where families have lived for 55 years, claiming they are 'illegal'," says Mohammed.

Control

The description of East Jerusalem was confirmed by Ron Zaidel from the organisation Breaking the Silence, which consists of former Israeli soldiers against war and occupation.

"The state's behaviour in the occupied areas has spread to East Jerusalem and into Israel itself. It is about control. They show presence to underline who has the power. Houses and homes are searched, but they never say why."

"When they have made a raid, they finish by throwing hand grenades. The Palestinians are treated as enemies who should live in constant fear."

The panel also included Amira Hass, well-known journalist on the newspaper Haaretz, who lives in Ramallah in the West Bank. She emphasised that it is about both the occupation and a colonial regime.

The Israeli state exercises control over two different systems: in Israel itself and in the Palestinian Authority areas, which in practice is an Israeli 'protectorate'. Also, in Israel democratic rights are increasingly restricted.

"The colonisation has deepened. Israel's rulers are trying to eliminate the Palestinians' collective existence. Gaza is a prototype, an enclave separated from the world. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem they create tiny Gazas. The Palestinian nation is at its lowest point," said Amira.

Yasha Marmer from Socialist Struggle Movement (Tnu'a't Ma'avak Sozialisti/Harakat Nidal Eshtaraki) also underlined how Netanyahu's government has become even more brutal.

"More than 500 Palestinian homes were demolished in 2015. This year it is already double that. The number of arrests and killings is also increasing."

Yasha continued: "The Oslo agreement came about as a response to the first Intifada, a mass uprising against the occupation. Direct military rule was supposed to be replaced with some autonomy in the fragmented Palestinian areas. However, the occupation continues and deepens.

"At the same time, Netanyahu is on a collision course with history. In the year 2011, with the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, and hundreds of thousands in the streets of Israel in over two months against price increases and the housing crisis, support for the government plummeted. The counter-revolution in the region and the lack of alternatives in Israel has led to its recovery."

Yasha described that since the election of Trump in the US, far-right elements of Netanyahu's government speak openly of the annexation of the West Bank and imposing an apartheid-style regime on Palestinians living in this area.

But the majority of the Israeli capitalist elite fear that any significant move in this direction can provoke a new mass uprising of Palestinians - an uprising that is indeed necessary as Yasha stated.

Teachers' strike

"Repression is also a sign of the regime's worry. For example a 'code of ethics' that the ministry of education wants to impose on universities in Israel prohibits students and teachers from talking about what is happening in the occupied territories."

Yasha and other speakers recalled last year's teachers' strike in the West Bank, which was directed against both the Palestinian Authority and the occupation. The strike was hardly reported in the Israeli media and did not get the attention of the teachers' union in Israel.

Socialist Struggle Movement stands for struggle against the occupation and against the oppression of the Palestinians in response to any notion of normalisation of occupation and racism.

The nationalist-racist reaction in Israel is not based on any economic interest of the Jewish working class. The on-going expropriation of the Palestinian masses on both sides of the 'green line' goes hand-in-hand with neoliberal attacks on workers and poor people in Israel and 'divide and rule' policies.

It is security/existential concerns that allow for the ruling class to control workers and others.

Socialists need to support dialogue and common struggle, especially working-class struggle, for Palestinians and Jews in order to emphasise their common interests against Israeli capitalism, and for democratic socialist societies without national oppression.

It means [standing up for a socialist Israel and a socialist Palestine](#). Today, to advance the slogan of a common state would not answer the national inspirations and big concerns for safety of both sides, while a two-state solution on a capitalist basis would mean a Palestine vassal state of Israel.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/24212>