

## Editorial of the Socialist, issue 932

# Labour's civil war continues - build a mass workers' party

- Corbyn steps up anti-establishment tone
- Momentum's undemocratic turn

Trust in politicians and all sections of the 'establishment' is falling even further. An annual trust survey ([by PR firm Edelman](#)) shows that trust in the British government has dropped from a low 36% in January 2016 to just 26% now. Only 18% of respondents said they trust political parties in general to "do what is right".

The surveyors themselves say: "If we thought 2016 was bad, 2017 could be far worse. The virus that has understandably destroyed trust among those who feel let down by the system has now obviously spread. Even those who got richer after the financial crisis exhibit declining trust in the key pillars of society - politicians, business leaders, NGOs and the media."

An inchoate rage against austerity and against the rich and their politicians [found expression in the Brexit vote](#) and in the [rejection of the 'lesser evil' Hillary Clinton](#). The incendiary findings of Oxfam that just eight billionaires own the same wealth as 3.7 billion people will add to that mood.

The crisis besetting capitalism is deep - with no way out of an economic quagmire, the rich getting obscenely richer, and a deep political crisis among the main capitalist representatives. As the Tory party openly splits over Brexit, big business finds itself without a party to reliably act in its interests. They fear rebellion.

It is not only in the Tory Party that the erstwhile representatives of capitalism are thrashing around. The Blairite 'project anaconda' to squeeze Corbyn into further retreats continues but they are at this stage unable to remove him due to his popularity.

As part of the right-wing propaganda campaign to slowly crush Corbyn, the [Fabian Society predicts that Labour is heading for defeat](#) in the next general election, and could be reduced to fewer than 200 seats.

The "existential angst" and "deep despair" of some Labour MPs facing "crushing defeat" was expressed by Andrew Rawnsley in the Observer, discussing the resignations of Blairite MPs Jamie Reed and Tristram Hunt. He describes Hunt's "general lament that the left, including the centrist left that he represents, have failed to respond to the challenges thrown up by 'social, cultural and economic forces which have rocked mainstream social democratic and socialist parties' across the democratic world." He concludes, "having devoted a lot of time to thinking about how to renew social democracy for the 21st century, [Hunt] had grown increasingly fearful that he hadn't got the answers to Labour's predicament." He is right to despair - his pro-capitalist position offers no way forward for society.

## Organise

While right-wing forces such as Trump or Ukip can be the beneficiaries of this unrest, it is by no means automatic. What is required is to organise that rage into decisive collective action and for it to find a political expression.

We must fight hard against racism, sexism and all forms of division, but the fundamental need is for a mass working class party - a socialist alternative - as the huge support for Bernie Sanders in the US has shown.

The massive waves of support for Jeremy Corbyn represented a layer of working class and radicalised middle class people seeking their own political voice.

Corbyn's retreats, in a vain attempt to appease the right, have disappointed many, including the capitulation just before Christmas over Tony Blair's role in the Iraq War. It has not gone un-noticed among London RMT members that Corbyn gave welcome support to the [Southern Rail strike](#) but appeared lukewarm on the [tube strike](#), so as not to clash with Blairite Labour mayor Sadiq Khan.

But Jeremy Corbyn has 'rebooted'. Apparently trying to do a Trump, appealing over the heads of a hostile media to the anti-establishment mood, he declared that Brexit and the other political earthquakes of 2016 are due to a political elite divorced from the people they govern. Stating that the economic system is rigged against working people, he said "Labour under my leadership stands for a complete break with this rigged system".

His call for a maximum limit on bosses' pay was met with relief from many working class people, who feel that at last Corbyn is voicing their concerns. Those opponents who ridiculed this idea do so, of course, in order to protect the profits of big business.

He attacked Theresa May over the [NHS crisis](#) saying: "The fact is, this government have repeatedly failed to put the necessary resources into our health service, while they have cut social care and wasted billions on a top-down reorganisation to accelerate privatisation." He pledged to fund the NHS and to nationalise failing care homes.

Labour's poll ratings increased by two points since the relaunch. Imagine what could be the effect if he boldly fought for the programme on which he ran his election campaigns, and fought the Blairites so that it became Labour's programme. On the basis of offering a real socialist alternative Labour could easily win a general election.

Welcome as this change of tone is, the fight to change the Labour Party is far from over. The [Labour Party is still two parties in one](#) - a pro-capitalist, Blairite party and at least the potential beginnings of a party that stands in the interests of working class people. The trickle of resignations could in itself become a method to try to defeat Corbyn, to trigger a series of byelections that the Blairites hope he will lose. A determined fight still needs to be taken to the Blairites.

## Hope

When Corbyn first won the leadership in 2015, we called for all those forces that supported Corbyn's anti-austerity call, both inside and outside the Labour Party, [to be brought together to fight for that programme](#). The surge in supporters and members was not due to a loyalty to the Labour Party as such - Labour spectacularly failed to defeat the hated Tories in 2015 because they offered only continued cuts and privatisation, 'austerity lite' - but a hope for a party that will finally stand up for them.

That necessarily meant taking on and defeating the right wing in the party, who made it clear from minute one that they would fight tooth and nail to maintain the Labour Party as a safe pro-capitalist party.

We [argue for mandatory reselection](#), a mechanism which would enable the democratic deselection of Blairite MPs. We [appealed for 75 expelled and excluded socialists to be readmitted](#) to the Labour Party and call for a structure in which all socialist and anti-austerity forces, including the Socialist Party, can be a part of an anti-austerity federal party. Kick out the Blairites and admit the socialists!

A key part of the Blairite project to keep the Labour Party safe for big business was to strip the unions' power out of the party. Currently, as the RMT's political strategy says, Labour does not have the "structural/constitutional arrangements that would make affiliation in the union's interests." An essential step to changing the Labour Party would be to reestablish a role for trade unions that reflects their importance as the organised, collective voice of millions of workers.

Momentum, had it been established on that basis, could have played a pivotal role. But instead of leading and organising a fight, Momentum has counselled constant appeasement of the right wing. In one poll 69% of Corbyn supporters backed mandatory reselection. Given a lead, many would have fought for it. But Momentum opposed this and instead chose the route of purges and expulsions of the left.

Recently, Momentum leader [Jon Lansman shut down all of Momentum's structures and imposed a new constitution](#), with only a 'take it or resign' option to members and supporters. Overturning the original aim to bring people inside and outside the party together, membership of the Labour Party is now a requirement.

The change is dressed up as 'direct democracy'. The ground was laid by [commentators like Owen Jones](#), presenting this as a battle between new fresh layers of people against "Trotskyist sectarian saboteurs".

'[One member one vote](#)' was a tool of the pro-capitalist right wing in the Labour Party to drown out the collective voice of trade unions and to set inactive, passive members against those who participate in meetings, debates and activity. The Momentum leadership are using it for the same purpose. It sounds very democratic, but in reality this 'direct democracy' means individuals clicking answers in response to questions set by the leadership, while the leadership do as they please with no democratic mechanism to hold them in check.

Momentum trailed this method when they decided their position on the EU referendum. An issue of such importance was decided by people individually sat at home under a deluge of capitalist media, with no alternative being put, no discussion or debate, clicking a yes/no answer.

The worst of the many problems with Momentum's new imposed constitution is the total sidelining of the role of the organised working class. Trade unions that affiliate to Momentum are collectively granted just six representatives on the new National Coordinating Group (NCG). Decisions of the NCG will be made by a simple majority. Thus the Fire Brigades Union, a militant, democratically-organised body representing tens of thousands of people, carries no more weight than individuals, and can easily be outvoted.

Contrast that with the consensus method of the [Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition](#) (TUSC), which means that representatives of the RMT rail union on the steering committee cannot be bounced into accepting any decision that they believe would not be supported by their members or that contravenes the democratic decisions of their annual general meeting.

## Process

But the failure of Momentum does not mean that the process is over. Corbyn supporters could still be mobilised to fight the right. Another attack on Jeremy could trigger another wave of people to get active. Trade union representatives would have a big effect if they were to openly appeal to Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell to fight together with them for measures such as mandatory reselection, and the re-introduction of democratic structures into the party including the collective trade union voice.

Corbyn's biggest Achilles heel is the [Labour councils up and down the country which are implementing Tory cuts](#). Local government cuts are savage and are only going to get worse. Campaigns are rising up to defend homes, libraries and other services. Just as happened in the 2016 local elections, many working class people who support Corbyn will vote for alternatives to kick their local cutting and privatising Labour-led council. Their support is for Corbyn's anti-austerity stance, not for the Labour Party no matter what. We could see anti-cuts campaigners concluding that they have no choice but to stand in elections themselves if the candidate allegedly representing 'Labour' at the ballot box is just another pro-austerity establishment politician.

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## Tories torn in two on single market

- May vows to both leave and remain
- Fight for a socialist, internationalist Brexit

**Paul Callanan, London Socialist Party**

Prime Minister Theresa May has made her long-awaited [declaration of the government's objectives for EU exit negotiations](#). The speech, which had been trailed in advance as the most important speech of her leadership, was notable for its glaring contradictions and May's nervous delivery.

She said the referendum had been "divisive at times" but that Britain is "now coming together." In reality, what was outlined was actually an attempt to paper over the cracks in the Tory party and the capitalist class itself.

[The Tories are split](#). Some want to see a 'hard Brexit' - leaving the single market as well as the EU. Others, including the majority of the capitalist class, would rather Britain didn't leave the EU, but would accept remaining in the bosses' single market.

In the event, May confirmed the negotiating stance that British capitalism would leave the single market. But at the same time, she said she would negotiate "the greatest possible access" to the single market, and "tariff-free trade" through a "comprehensive free trade agreement."

The idea that the governments of Europe will negotiate new trade deals favourable to Britain's capitalists is frankly laughable.

## Contradictory

May's muddled and contradictory speech will have satisfied neither the hard nor soft Tory Brexiteers. The weakness of the government's hand has been illustrated by resorting to threats.

May said in her speech: "I must be clear. Britain wants to remain a good friend and neighbour to Europe. Yet I know there are some voices calling for a punitive deal that punishes Britain and discourages other countries from taking the same path."

She went on to suggest EU access to investment opportunities and the City of London's financial services could be restricted. This follows Chancellor [Philip Hammond's threat in the German press](#) that Britain would be prepared to engage the EU in a trade war - escalating tariffs or quotas on imports.

The speech also offered insight into the government's nervousness over anger from the working class. May again talked 'left', calling for a "better deal for ordinary working people". She also claimed she will incorporate EU 'protections' into British law, saying "we will ensure that workers' rights are fully protected and maintained".

But May is leading a government which will, from April, [implement more anti-worker trade union laws](#). Britain already has some of the most restrictive trade union laws in the world. And EU laws did nothing to stop it.

There is almost nothing in EU law that genuinely protects workers' rights. In fact, its [treaties, directives and court judgements overwhelmingly do the opposite](#).

Neither the EU nor May's government is a defender of working class people.

## Scapegoat

May again took the opportunity to scapegoat migrants. She talked about downward pressure on wages; pressure on public services. But she failed to identify who was responsible for it: big business, aided and abetted by the government, and institutions like the EU, that have all presided over privatisation and cuts to public services.

The [Socialist Party supported the vote to leave the EU](#) on the basis that it is a pro-capitalist, pro-austerity institution, with no real route for reform. We called for a campaign for a socialist Brexit based on opposition to EU directives that opposed public ownership and enshrined privatisation.

May's "[red, white and blue Brexit](#)", as expected, is an attempt to offer more of the same.

She can be stopped - if we build a working class [movement for a 'red Brexit'](#), based on ending austerity, expanding public ownership, protecting migrant rights, and genuine solidarity with the working class across Europe.

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## What is the 'single market'?

Capitalists within Europe's **single market**, which Thatcher signed up to in 1986, can freely move certain goods, money, some 'services' (outsourcing), and workforces, between different member countries.

This gives bosses even more than the **free trade area** inside which they can buy and sell without tariffs.

Among other things, it also allows them to get around trade union agreements, and drive down wages and conditions across the whole area, boosting profits.

The majority of the capitalist class wants to stay in the single market for all these reasons.

The EU is also a **customs union**. This means tariffs on goods imported from outside it are the same for all member countries.

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- No to racism, sexism and attacks on workers' rights

## For international solidarity to...

## Resist Trump

- And fight the right - build a mass alternative for the 99%
- 20 and 21 January: Global days of protest to #ResistTrump

**Socialist Alternative (co-thinkers of the Socialist Party in the US) and Socialist Students US**

The [election of Donald Trump as president of the United States](#) represents an unprecedented danger to workers, young people, and the oppressed, not only in the US but around the world. A ruthless billionaire businessman himself, Trump promises to carry out racist and sexist social policies. He is preparing to escalate attacks on the environment, unions, and workers' rights, as well as vital social services like public education.

His erratic and nationalist 'America First' foreign policy will further destabilise global politics, and risks provoking more bloody catastrophes.

On 20 (the day of Trump's inauguration) and 21 January, [we are joining with others to call for millions across the United States and worldwide to come out in mass demonstrations and student strikes](#) to begin building a powerful grassroots resistance.

The protests on inauguration day could be the biggest demonstrations against the inauguration of a US president in history, and the student strikes could be the biggest since the Vietnam War.

While the biggest fightback will come from workers, women, immigrants, and young people in the US, Trump's election provided fresh confidence to far-right demagogues everywhere. His attacks on Muslims and refugees from war-torn areas like Syria will encourage similar persecution around the world.

And Trump's promise of further deregulation and attacks on workers is part of an international campaign of the ruling class for further austerity. But if mass protests can inflict a defeat on Trump in the US, it will inspire workers around the globe to fight back.

Socialist Students (US), Socialist Students (UK), Sindicato de Estudiantes (Spain), and Sindicato de Estudiantes (Mexico) are joining together to call for global days of action on 20 and 21 January to #ResistTrump.

## Join a protest near you

Here in Britain, [Socialist Students will be standing in solidarity](#) with all those who are fighting to 'build a wall' against Trump and his racist, sexist, pro-1% policies. Email [socialiststudents@gmail.com](mailto:socialiststudents@gmail.com) if your area isn't listed or if you would like to organise a protest yourself.

### London

6pm, US embassy, 24 Grosvenor Square, W1A 2LQ

1pm, Goldsmiths University, 'Build a wall against Trump', outside the library

4.30pm, City and Islington College, rally and meet up point before embassy demo

### East Midlands

12.30pm, West Notts College, Derby Road, Mansfield

6pm, Leicester City Centre, meet at the clock tower

### Wales

4pm, Cardiff, Cardiff University, meet on Park Place

### West Midlands

5pm, Coventry, meet on Broadgate, CV1 1FS

12.30pm, University of Warwick, meet at The Koan

### Yorkshire

5pm, Leeds protest, Dortmund Square

7.30pm-9pm, Leeds public meeting: How can Trump be defeated? O'Neill's, 26 Great George Street, LS1 3DL

5pm, Sheffield city centre protest

6pm, Sheffield Dump Trump gig, West Street Ale House, 52-54 West Street, S1 4EP

4.30pm, Huddersfield, Market Place

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## Inaugurate the resistance

### The case for a united and ongoing mass mobilisation

Patrick Ayers, Socialist Alternative

[Inauguration protests](#) can serve as a launching pad for a massive grassroots resistance to Donald Trump's new administration, which can push back his agenda. But this will require an active ongoing mobilisation linked to a strategy of independent grassroots struggle.

Trump is on a [collision course with millions of people](#). He's threatened to deport 2-3 million immigrants and to target Muslim immigrants for "extreme vetting." Women's reproductive health, democratic rights, and workers' rights are all under threat. People are understandably afraid. But also, huge numbers are prepared to resist.

Trump's agenda can be defeated by a strong movement centred on the social power of working class people. Let's not forget that previous generations have faced down and defeated war-mongers, hate-mongers, slave-owners, and billionaires - and have won.

Trump's administration already faces a crisis of legitimacy. His election victory was anything but resounding. Clinton won the popular vote by 2.9 million votes and barely 25% of eligible voters actually voted for Trump. On top of this, Trump is notoriously thin-skinned and erratic. He can be rattled and forced off course.

Trump is gearing up for a 100-day agenda that is intended to deliver a demoralising blow to his opposition. We can't wait until the 2018 midterm elections, and we can't rely on the out-of-touch corporate Democratic establishment. That's why, on 20 and 21 January, we need to inaugurate a powerful resistance from the grassroots and make visible that Trump has no mandate for his agenda of hate.

## **Mass protests**

Mass protests have been an indispensable part of every progressive struggle in history - from winning the eight-hour day to smashing the racist Jim Crow laws. Mass protests can raise the confidence and fighting spirit of movements by visibly demonstrating the depth, scope, and size of opposition. They can also send a warning to the new administration. We want Trump to worry that if he proceeds with his agenda, then he will provoke even further struggle.

When movements are strong enough, even the Republicans have been known to cave. Under Richard Nixon, movements mushroomed and the Vietnam War was ended, abortion rights were won, environmental regulations were conceded.

At the time, the ruling class feared a deeper radicalisation - or even revolution - could take place if they didn't make concessions.

Of course, protests aren't enough on their own, and there is also a long history of using mass protests as a mere safety valve for discontent.

Past successful social movements didn't rely on the Democrats or elections, but on applying the social power of millions of people through radical tactics that involved large numbers of people like mass direct action, boycotts, occupations, walkouts and strikes.

For example the refusal of soldiers to carry out orders in Vietnam, combined with the resistance of the Vietnamese themselves, widespread student strikes in the US and mass protests, made the war impossible to continue.

If Trump's administration is determined to pass its agenda, then we will need a mass movement prepared to take similar radical measures to build as determined a resistance today.

Socialist Alternative is the organisation that got [Kshama Sawant elected to Seattle City Council in 2013](#) as an open socialist. Kshama and Socialist Alternative went on to build the grassroots campaign that [won the first local \\$15 minimum wage in the US](#), which helped spark further minimum wage victories across the country.

Within hours of Trump's victory on 8 November, Socialist Alternative branches around the county helped initiate [protests that saw 40,000 people come out on the streets](#).

We seek maximum unity of all forces who want to fight the right, while continuing the debate about how to win victories and change society. To develop unity after 20 January, the anti-Trump resistance needs democratic structures at the local, regional and national levels to work out the most effective approaches for building the resistance through organised discussion, debate and decision-making.

## The Democrats

We welcome the support of genuine progressive Democrats who offer real support in building the widest possible unity in action in defence of immigrants, Muslims, women, and workers. But [we disagree with directing the energy of movements into building the Democratic Party](#).

The Democratic Party was never a party of working people. It has always been a party representing the interests of big business. We campaign for a new party of the 99% to help build our struggles, and to run our own independent candidates that are accountable to our movement, not the donations of big business.

Defeating Trump's agenda would massively raise the confidence of working people to fight for other demands, including a \$15 federal minimum wage, single-payer healthcare, an end to mass incarceration, and tuition-free college. But victories under capitalism, as in the past, can be reversed.

Globally, capitalism faces a historic crisis that the US cannot escape. The world economy faces an epoch of sluggish growth, while wars, social conflict and environmental catastrophe threaten to engulf the planet.

We believe that the fight against the right must be part of building an independent movement of working people to fundamentally transform society along socialist lines.

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# We can stop Trump's sexist agenda in its tracks

Kelly Bellin, Socialist Alternative

The election of Donald Trump is a call to action for women. His [glorification of sexual assault](#) is an insult to the courageous struggles over the last years to combat violence against women.

At the same time, the Republican sweep of the House and Senate puts attacks on women's rights squarely on the agenda in 2017. And Trump's early appointments confirm that we should expect a fiercely right-wing administration that we need to fight even more fiercely against.

There's widespread recognition in the US that violence against women is a serious and deadly problem. The protests against sexual assault at universities, the outcry against the National Football League's failure to address domestic violence, the #YesAllWomen Twitter storm, and the Slutwalks, are all examples of a growing determination to end the truly endemic violence that women face.

## Democratic failure

The outcome of this election did not represent the majority of Americans agreeing with Trump's misogyny. In fact, a majority reject blatant sexism. Rather, it was a [failure of the Democratic Party](#). Clinton openly represented Wall Street and the billionaire class, and that's in painfully obvious contradiction with representing the interests of ordinary women.

But this is not a new or coincidental problem. The Democrats' loyalty to big business keeps them from squarely fighting the profit-driven policies that consistently drive poverty deeper, slash social services, and reinforce income inequality.

The Democratic Party's defensive approach to women's struggles has allowed the right to define key issues like reproductive rights for decades. For us to fight the oncoming attacks from the right, we need to build mass resistance.

The Women's March on Washington the day after Trump's inauguration shows the immediate potential for this, with hundreds of thousands of people expected to attend. There are also [sister marches taking place in cities around the world](#).

## Reproductive rights

Trump has already promised to nominate a Supreme Court Justice who would vote to repeal Roe v. Wade (the judgement which legalised abortion). We need to build a mass movement to oppose a reactionary appointment. If the Democrats are serious about defending women, they should use every tool in congress to stop him.

The Republican Party has already proven its determination to rip apart reproductive rights, particularly in the Southern states they have controlled for many years. We need determination to defend and extend them.

Unions have a key role to mobilise against Trump's sexist agenda. Young women want to fight back against inequality and the corporate control of politics.

We've been at the forefront of all key movements of the last period, from [fighting for a \\$15 minimum wage](#) to the ongoing [struggle against racist police murders](#).

This is also why a majority of young women supported Bernie Sanders and his campaign's [call to fight the billionaire class](#).

Despite Trump's platform for hateful ideas, fierce movements of working class women are on the horizon. Through a united mass struggle, we can push back Trump's agenda.

Trump's despicable attitudes towards women are a reflection of the vicious sexism that capitalism ferments, and is constantly reinforced by systemic gender inequality. [To truly end sexism, we need to take on the entire system](#) that holds working class people hostage under varying forms of oppression.

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## 'Black alert' NHS: demonstrate 4 March

'Jane Turner', Social care worker

The NHS is in crisis. In just one week of January, [23 hospital trusts declared 'black alert'](#), meaning they were unable to guarantee patient safety.

This figure is increasing, and expected to rise further with the cold weather, which normally results in a spike in emergency admissions for broken limbs and breathing problems.

People are having long waits for ambulances as they are delayed for hours, waiting with patients in A&E car parks because emergency departments are full.

On New Year's Eve in Fareham, Hampshire, a woman in her 80s waited seven hours for an ambulance after falling. In Kent I saw reports of a woman waiting three hours for an ambulance lying face down in a car park after being hit by a car.

I work in [social care, which is also vastly underfunded](#). Despite this there is pressure to divert available home care and nursing home beds to facilitate hospital discharges.

This leaves many vulnerable people who live in their own homes and so are 'not a priority' waiting for weeks or months on waiting lists. Inevitably many of them end up in hospital.

I find it frightening that NHS trusts are unable to guarantee patient safety. I find it shocking that the Red Cross, an organisation normally associated with international aid, has found it necessary to [declare a "humanitarian crisis"](#) in the fifth largest economy in the world.

So we need to support the national NHS demonstration on 4 March. We need to campaign to scrap the PFI debt, reverse the funding cuts, and bring all privatised services back in-house. We need to fight for the NHS with everything we have, because people are really suffering now.

## Save our NHS demo

Saturday 4 March - 12noon, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9EZ

called by Health Campaigns Together

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## Eight billionaires own as much as half humanity: take the wealth off the 1%!

Corinthia Ward, Birmingham Socialist Party

The gap between the richest and poorest in the world is growing - and is even worse than originally feared, according to a [report by poverty charity Oxfam](#) released today.

Eight people - yes eight - own as much wealth as the poorest 50% of the world population. That's 3.7 billion human beings. New data regarding distribution of global wealth, particularly in India and China, has provided this shocking statistic.

Last year Oxfam calculated that [62 billionaires owned as much as the world's poorest half](#). However, the new information shows it should have been just nine billionaires. A figure which, one year later, has gone down again.

Driven-down wages, casualised jobs, the 'gig economy' and part-time employment are just a few examples of how extra profit is made off us. One in five men in the UK work part-time for low hourly rates - 20 years ago it was one in twenty, [according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies](#).

Additionally, the government recently disclosed that [687 employers failed to pay their staff the national minimum wage](#), for which they have been fined collectively around £1.4 million. The accumulated back pay for the workers is a whopping £3.5 million.

All this helps put things into perspective at the time of the annual congregation for the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The Davos meeting is where the capitalist elite discusses how to defend the capitalist system and further push profits.

London's Blairite mayor [Sadiq Khan is going to hobnob](#), and deliver a speech on London and Brexit. "London is open" will be his theme. When said to a gang of billionaires, this only means 'London is open for the worker to be exploited'.

It is the workers who make the wealth, and the [big bosses who steal it](#): take the wealth back off the 1%. Nationalise the top corporations, and plan production democratically to end the obscenity of poverty forever.

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 16 January 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## Pollution kills 600: fight for clean air!

Tanis Belsham-Wray, Leeds Socialist Party

For ten days between March and April 2014, levels of poisonous particulates caused an extra 300 premature deaths in the UK, [according to a recent government estimate](#).

This is on top of the expected 300 deaths from air pollution, making a total of 600 deaths that spring.

This is not a one-off incident. This December we had potentially the worst air pollution the UK has ever seen.

In France this spike led to emergency procedures including offering citizens free public transport and implementing restrictions on car usage. The rising levels of cardiovascular and respiratory problems are causing a lot of additional pressure on an already stretched NHS.

The Labour right's solution to this: punish commuters. London's Blairite mayor Sadiq Khan is proposing an additional £10 levy in certain areas of the city. Even [Transport for London predicts](#) this will have little to no effect on rising pollution in the area.

And yet the [Green Alliance think-tank calculates](#) there will be a 95% decline in investment in renewable energy between 2017 and 2020. Despite growing awareness of the issue, priority is given to the protection of profits for big business.

Only a socialist society, one that isn't dominated by the need for profit and exploitation, can organise the mass investment and integration needed to plan for the future.

Nationalise the energy companies and use the money to invest in safe, renewable energy. Nationalise public transport to create an affordable and reliable system that is a genuine option for commuters.

Run them under the democratic control of workers and service users, in the interests of the many, not the super-rich few.

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## Millwall FC move threat: Defend the Den - 'wall not Renewal

**James Kerr, Millwall supporter**

"We fear no foe", emblazoned on the back of the Millwall shirt, originates from an early giant-killing spree in the FA Cup. Despite progression to the fourth round, the real foes have been off the pitch recently.

Millwall's ground, the Den, [could be forced from Lewisham](#), south London, to Kent. A major new development around the ground is being built by Renewal - a company registered in a tax haven, run by a former council officer, and which used to count the former mayor of Lewisham as a director.

The Labour council should call time on this partnership, and ensure the development is built for the community, including sufficient social housing.

The council has to issue a compulsory purchase order (CPO) on land owned by Millwall FC to free it up for Renewal's use. The land includes the Lions' Centre, an important community asset.

The mayor and cabinet were due to decide on the CPO last week, [but again postponed](#). An amended motion was passed at Lewisham Deptford Labour Party against the CPO, showing the splits within local Labour.

When US businessman John Berylson bought Millwall, he made it clear that if he didn't make money out of the football side of the business, his failsafe would be real estate.

While his interests may dovetail with supporters' in keeping the club in SE16, he will make decisions based on his business dealings.

Local MP Vicky Foxcroft declared she wants to get the club, council and Renewal around the table to broker a 'compromise'. Where is the voice of supporters and local residents within this?

The [Association of Millwall Supporters](#) has the potential to play that role and coordinate a campaign to force the council's hand. It has even floated the idea of standing candidates in the 2018 local elections if the CPO goes ahead.

After more than 100 years in Lewisham, it's vital we defend the Den.

- 'Defend the Den' public meeting: 26 January, 7-9pm, Goldsmiths University (room RHB 220), Lewisham Way, New Cross SE14 6NW

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## **Mexico: Mass movement against "gasolinazo"**

### **Towards a general strike against the Nieto government!**

**In recent weeks, mass protests have erupted throughout Mexico following a hike in gas and electricity prices - dubbed the "gasolinazo" - decreed by the right-wing Peña Nieto administration. Here we publish an [edited article from socialistworld.net](#)**

The 14%-20% price hikes are part of the 'liberalisation' of petrol prices, through which the government has been withdrawing completely the state subsidy, bit by bit, since 2012.

In the last four years, petrol prices have increased by 60%. Now, prices will be fixed on the basis of supply and demand, in line with international prices like any other commodity. In February, a new price hike will be proposed, and from then on the price could rise on a weekly, or even a daily basis.

The backdrop is the privatisation of Pemex, the state oil company, which has now been extended to distribution and supply to petrol stations. This is very valuable business - 65% of petrol consumed in Mexico is imported from abroad, and the transport of this petrol will now be in the hands of private companies.

These price hikes are directly linked to the thirst for profit of these private companies. Yet again it is the working class who will pay for the consequences of this privatisation.

Between 2008 and 2014, Mexico's poverty level rose from 44.3% to 46.2%, around 55 million people in a country of 125 million people.

### **Response**

The response of the Mexican working class to the gasolinazo attack has been intense mobilisations and protests. Mass demonstrations in different cities, the blocking of roads, occupation of petrol stations and closures of Pemex distribution centres, are some examples of the actions.

The government is aware of the widespread discontent and since the evening of 3 January, they have planted state provocateurs in the movement to provoke looting and vandalism at service stations and shops. Despite these provocations, and in response to them, the movement must continue, extend itself to more cities, and unite its forces in the coming protests.

The wave of looting spread from the north of Mexico City to places like Ecatepec, Naucalpan, Atizapán, Tecámac, Huehuetoca, Tultitlán and elsewhere. Some media reports have told of how the PRI (Nieto's party) government of Mexico state paid lumpen bands to lead this looting. And, that police joined in the looting of stores.

It is no accident that these acts have taken place in the part of Mexico City which has seen the most intense and numerous protests, where petrol stations and major motorways have been shut down by protesters.

The looting has attracted a layer of the most downtrodden in society, who see it as an opportunity to momentarily alleviate their misery. Once the provocateurs have managed to draw enough of these elements

into the looting, the police arrive and make arrests in big numbers. This is in order to give some legitimacy to their tactics, and conceal that it is really the state which is behind this looting and vandalism.

The media is complementing this dirty work of the government, creating a climate of panic and hysteria, trying to equate these mass protests with senseless violence.

On the other hand, they also open the door to state repression, creating an atmosphere in which the intervention of the police and army can seem more justified, not only against looters but against the movement as a whole.

It is fundamentally necessary to denounce the government as absolutely responsible for the looting and vandalism. For many years the government has been creating groups of thugs in universities (called 'porriles') which carry out all sorts of violent acts in order to damage the prestige of the left student movement. They are now repeating the same methods, but in the city communities.

## Tactics

It is important that the "informative brigades", which during the street blockades concentrate on winning the sympathy of working people for the struggle, are maintained. It is also important to identify all the elements which are inciting looting and vandalism and to isolate them; to explain to all that these are not useful methods, which only bring repression and discredit the movement.

There should be no aggression whatsoever towards workers during protests at Pemex sites - these workers are part of our class to be won to the struggle and not our enemies.

Finally, we should work to build a national, coordinated movement against the gasolinazo. This struggle must be built as an example for all other sectors, and for the left, to take up the fight against the government.

Ultimately, the protests should converge in a general strike against the cuts, privatisations and anti-worker policies of the Peña Nieto government.

- To the streets against the gasolinazo!
- Form local committees!
- The unions and left must join the struggle!
- For a general strike against the privatisation of the oil and energy companies!
- Down with Peña Nieto!

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## USA: Seattle activists win housebuilding programme

Adam Ziemkowski, Socialist Alternative (US co-thinkers of the Socialist Party)

Housing activists in Seattle, organised into the 'Coalition to Build 1,000 Homes', have scored a major victory, winning \$29 million for affordable housing in the 2017-2018 council budget. They pushed through a final unanimous vote in the city council, despite fierce opposition from the city's Democratic establishment.

Seattle [city council member and Socialist Alternative activist, Kshama Sawant](#), who spearheaded the effort, celebrated the movement's victory and explained: "Let's be clear. We won this because we built our coalition and a movement. We made it impossible for corporate Democratic politicians to ignore our proposal."

### 200 new homes

The additional \$29 million will allow the city to build nearly 200 homes for low-income residents, and it sets an important precedent for using city bonding authority to build desperately needed affordable housing.

For working people in Seattle, especially communities of colour, this is a big deal. Seattle is experiencing an economic boom and an unprecedented wave of development, but as luxury condos and office space are built, they often replace older, more affordable units.

Rents are rising faster in Seattle than anywhere else in the country, and more than 4,500 people are living on the streets without shelter. Seattle family doctor and coalition member Libby Loft observed: "If I could write a prescription for housing, it would be far more powerful than any medicine at my fingertips."

The 1,000 Homes movement emerged out of a victory by Black Lives Matter and other activists, who successfully blocked construction of a new \$160 million police precinct. Kshama's office then reached out broadly to service providers, activists, unions, faith communities, housing advocates, and social justice organisations to fight to use that same funding to instead benefit ordinary people and communities of colour.

In the end, hundreds of activists and more than 70 organisations joined the coalition. Many also saw spending the money on housing as the best way to permanently block the new police "bunker".

1,000 Homes coalition members again and again packed City Hall for budget meetings and public hearings. Hundreds of people made phone calls, sent emails, and signed petitions to council members.

We plastered the town with posters, and progressive Democrats from Seattle legislative districts passed resolutions supporting the 1,000 Homes demand. Coalition activists also organised 'stand-outs' on street corners and attended events to demand other council members vote yes on Kshama's 1,000 Homes amendment.

We compelled the mayor and city council members to respond to our demand, which they had so desperately wanted to ignore.

First, they said it was impossible to build housing with the police precinct money. After Kshama presented a detailed report from city staff explaining exactly how the money could be reallocated, the Democratic establishment changed its tune and instead claimed the proposal was "fiscally irresponsible".

## **Priorities**

But community members kept hammering them with a simple question: why did the bonds make fiscal sense when proposed for the most expensive police precinct on the continent, but not for affordable housing?

Ultimately, the council rejected the full \$160 million proposal, voting instead for a much smaller \$29 million package and leaving funding available for a new police precinct in the future. While celebrating their victory, coalition activists were understandably outraged by the council's serious weakening of the measure, given the gravity and urgency of Seattle's housing crisis.

In mid-December 2016, coalition members helped Kshama pass ground-breaking tenant rights legislation, capping move-in fees and requiring landlords to offer payment plans - over howls of opposition from the real estate lobby.

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## **1917revolution.org website to launch**

- The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) [launches new website](#) (20 January) celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution

It was a socialist revolution in which the working class, through the Soviets (democratic councils of action) and under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, overthrew the absolute monarchy and capitalist class.

The revolution, which continues to reverberate internationally today, is rich in lessons for Marxism and the wider socialist movement.

The critical events of the revolution and its aftermath, including the Stalinist counter-revolution, will be explained and analysed on this new site.

- Read more at [1917revolution.org](http://1917revolution.org)
- 

## Billions in profit for Tesco, cuts and job losses for workers

Isai Priya, Tesco worker and Usdaw shop steward (personal capacity)

Britain's biggest retailer, Tesco, [reported that it had its best sales growth](#) at the end of last year's quarter for over five years. This profit was further boosted by the Christmas sales meaning that Tesco is on course to deliver a profit of "at least" £1.2 billion for 2016-17.

But this news brings no cheer to Tesco workers as the profits are kept away from them. At the same time, 1,015 Tesco workers will lose their jobs as Tesco [announced that it is closing two distribution centres](#) in Hertfordshire and Derbyshire. By this restructuring plan Tesco is planning to reduce the number of staff by about 500.

Last year hundreds of staff at Tesco lost out as a result of the [pay deal which caused pay cuts in overtime, weekend and night premiums](#). Cuts in payroll budgets also meant that more and more retail workers were overworked. These cuts - with the added pressure from the managers to deliver the best customer service - meant that workers were squeezed until they had no more to give.

It is not a coincidence that Usdaw, the union that organises in retail and distribution, is the fourth largest union with over 450,000 members. More and more retail workers are joining the union.

At Usdaw conference in 2016, [delegates from various retail stores called on the union to do more](#). These overworked and underpaid Tesco workers are not simply going to accept that there will be no pay rise or better conditions and Usdaw needs to back them up.

Tesco, by only giving a massive pay rise to the big bosses is increasing the anger of the workers.

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## Liverpool dockers and drivers protest "appalling lack of facilities"

Neill Dunne, Liverpool Socialist Party

About 75 dockers and drivers protested on 13 January [at the port of Liverpool](#) about the facilities available to them, or the evident lack of.

Unite the Union is helping organise this dispute and has asked huge multinational company the Peel Group to "provide proper facilities for their dockers and to provide a dedicated area, with toilet or rest facilities for visiting drivers".

There are more than 800 members of Unite, dockworkers and lorry drivers, who are affected by the totally inadequate facilities at the port facility terminal.

Unite says: "Peel Group have failed to act on any of the requests and failed to provide basic facilities". Peel ports are claiming to build "a dock for the future", and construction on a new super cruise liner terminal in the city centre is about to begin.

The brand new 'Liverpool2' deep sea terminal also opened in November 2016 costing £400 million, proof that these companies spend plenty of money on ways to increase profitability while leaving workers to fend for themselves.

## **No consideration**

Facilities for self-employed drivers who have to park miles away are appalling at best. The sandwich vans are only available until 3.30pm, Monday to Friday - no consideration has gone into providing for the important workers keeping trade flowing around the clock. There are no direct facilities for women drivers or dockers.

Peel Ports also outsources its recruitment process, diluting terms and conditions like guaranteed hours, holiday and sick pay, compared to directly employed workers.

The Socialist Party and the local trade union movement are supporting the fight against companies unwilling to provide basic conditions for workers while making millions of pounds.

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## **Manchester: BA cabin crew pay strike**

**Becci Heagney, North West Socialist Party regional organiser**

A very noisy protest took place outside Manchester Airport's terminal 3 during the BA cabin crew strike on 10 January.

Unite members chanted "low pay, no way" and "pay rise, not lies" while 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 profit this year.

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 protest was confident and these workers are up for the fight - Unite has announced another three days of strike action on 19-21 January. We should all give them our full support - say no to poverty pay!

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## **London: Taxi drivers gridlock City of London over closure plans**

**Dave Wallis, Vice chair, RMT London taxi branch**

London taxi drivers gridlocked the City of London on 12 January in protest at the closure of Bank junction to taxis, ending a 360-year-old trade in the area.

Our vehicles are built to enable people with disabilities to access places other vehicles can't get to. Especially with buses stuck in gridlocked traffic and the tube dangerously overcrowded during peak hours.

It is time that black cabs were recognised and supported as a mode of public transport. It is time that cuts to the tube were reversed.

Our [previous mayor Boris Johnson attacked our iconic trade](#) and Transport for London currently spends nothing on the 5% of people with disabilities traveling by wheelchair. It's a disgrace.

After our protest, if Transport for London and the City don't want to negotiate then there will be more action to follow.

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## Southern Rail strike continues

The Southern Rail strike continues on 23 January by trains guards and station staff in the RMT. This follows a [second wave of action by Southern drivers in Aslef and RMT](#).

The action is part of the long running dispute and strike action over the removal of guards on Southern trains.

There were buoyant pickets of drivers at London Bridge station on 10, 11 and 13 January as they joined the action, wiping out almost all services. The union is also distributing [images on leaflets and online showing the obstructed view drivers have of the platform](#), a view they would have to rely on if they are forced to operate doors if guards are removed. Far from just a dispute about who presses a button, this is about whether the service can be operated safely or not.

Another photo emerged of a passenger being dragged along a platform with her hand stuck in the door last summer on a service operated by drivers only.

The next wave of action by drivers has been called off for talks but Socialist Party members will show solidarity again during the next RMT strike date on 23 January.

**Socialist Party reporters**

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## Unite the Union elections

Four Socialist Party members are standing on the [United Left slate](#) 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

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## PCS national executive elections

PCS national executive committee elections will soon get under way. Branch annual general meetings (AGMs) will be asked to nominate a slate agreed between [PCS Left Unity](#) and PCS Democrats - working together as the Democracy Alliance.

The [current PCS leadership is widely regarded as one of the most effective](#) campaigning leaderships in the trade union movement. Our consistent political opposition to the Tories' austerity agenda has been backed up with action to defend members' jobs and conditions. In this we have sought maximum unity with other unions individually and through the TUC.

AGMs will take place between late January and March 2017. We are calling for continued support from AGMs by nominating the Democratic Alliance slate (see below).

**Marion Lloyd, PCS group president for BIS (personal capacity)**

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## The Socialist: read it, write it, sell it

**Ian Pattison, the Socialist campaign organiser**

Two thousand more people snapped up the Socialist on the streets over the last ten issues of 2016 than the same period in 2015. The number of copies that drop on the doormats of our subscribers has gone up too.

A study by Oxfam shows [eight individuals now own as much wealth as half the world's population](#) - 3.7 billion. After years of austerity - while the rich have got richer - 2016 saw the beginning of a working class revolt against the establishment.

It's becoming clearer and clearer that capitalism is incapable of providing a decent standard of living for the vast majority of people. A socialist paper is essential at a time like this to offer an alternative.

The Socialist has shown how over decades the Tories and New Labour have run down the NHS, preparing it for privatisation. Theresa May says 'crisis, what crisis?' But our NHS articles, [written by health workers themselves](#) in their own words, set out clearly what the problems are - and the solutions. We're backing the 4 March NHS national demonstration.

### Subscribe

The Socialist needs your support. Can you subscribe to our paper? And get a friend to do the same? You can do so at [socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe](http://socialistparty.org.uk/subscribe).

The Socialist is written by workers, for workers. Can you write for the Socialist? If you're angry about something you've seen in the news or you're a student campaigning on campus, let us know what you think, jot it down and send it to [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk).

If you read an article you like in the Socialist and can think of someone who will enjoy it as much as you, make sure they get a copy. Can you become a seller of the Socialist? You don't have to be a Socialist Party member to sell it.

If you'd like someone from the Socialist paper to speak at a meeting about the role of a revolutionary paper, please contact us.

2017 is the [100th anniversary of the Russian revolution](#). The capitalist media will be full of articles denigrating the achievements of the revolution. The establishment will use this centenary to shoot down any idea that things can be different. The Socialist paper will challenge that bias, whether it's directed against workers 100 years ago or today.

The Socialist is a beacon for the idea that ordinary working class people can run society in our own interests.

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## Protesters surround Sheffield's cutting council

**Jeremy Short, Sheffield Socialist Party**

A thousand protesters surrounded Sheffield's town hall on 7 January in the latest action against Amey's tree-fellers operating under a PFI contract with Sheffield council. Anger continues to grow [after the arrest of protesters in November](#), fuelled by Labour councillors dismissing the demonstrators as 'middle-class Lib Dems'.

## Split

The local Momentum group is split on the issue, with many seeming to share the attitude of the right-wing councillors. But increasingly Sheffielders are agreeing with us on the link between Amey's profit-maximising tree-felling and the failure of the Labour council to stand up to the Tory government over budget cuts and outsourcing. At the town hall demo, we distributed 250 copies of our leaflet, based on the previous Socialist article.

However, there is growing opposition within the Labour Party too. A motion to Walkley ward Labour Party calling for the immediate resignation of cabinet member Bryan Lodge was defeated, but only with a large number of abstentions.

Stag (Sheffield Trees Action Groups) are now extending the campaign to all areas of the Amey PFI contract - including roads and pavements. They are collecting evidence of contract breaches in response to council leader Julie Dore's admission that these could end the contract.

This campaign will undoubtedly be spurred by developments in [Veolia's waste and recycling contract](#). The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) has been campaigning to end the outsourced 35-year contract, but been told that it would be difficult for the council to end it. Miraculously officers have now produced a report to cabinet recommending exactly that!

But the aim is to save money and sack workers. Most work will remain outsourced into smaller contracts, with only some staff brought back in-house. Disgracefully, the report argues against bringing all work back in-house because it might trigger equal pay claims!

## Competition

Labour councillors have disappeared. Unlike last year, there have been no public consultations on the budget. TUSC tabled questions on contract termination and penalty payments which the council refuses to answer on grounds of 'commercial confidentiality'.

To release this information could impact on Amey and Veolia's ability to compete for business in a competitive market because the specific information refused may benefit a rival company - why should we care!?

With right-wing Labour councillors increasingly isolated, a joined-up mass campaign could surround them like the tree campaigners did to the town hall!

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# Fracking protest in Sherwood Forest

On 7th January, with only a week's notice, over 300 people came together to protest against plans by chemical giant INEOS to carry out seismic surveys in Sherwood Forest - a move which marks a clear intent to frack in the area. The rally at the Major Oak on a cold winter's day brought together environmentalists, socialists and even Robin Hood himself to make their voices heard.

The Tory government has introduced laws to assist the shale gas industry while simultaneously blocking the growth of renewable energy. [Fracking has now been approved](#), but not yet begun, at three sites in England, however Sherwood Forest is the first forest to be targeted.

Fracking is destructive, causing damage to properties and polluting the water table. Members of the Socialist party from Mansfield to Coventry attended the protest to share our call for investment in clean energy - to create decent, skilled jobs, and to protect the environment - and for democratic, public ownership of the energy industry.

**Jane Crowter, Coventry Socialist Students**

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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 12 January 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

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## **Residents protest at plans to close nine community centres**

Hyde Housing Group announced plans to close nine community centres in the run up to the Christmas break. Two of the centres earmarked for closure by Hyde are in Lambeth and support 870,000 visits a year.

The buildings, their maintenance and the promise to keep them for the community were part of the stock transfer deal from Lambeth Council to Hyde around 20 years ago. Hyde now looks to be breaking its promises to residents by closing them down in its endless search for ever higher profits.

Hyde, like other housing associations, are now big business property developers more than providers of social housing. It has an [operating profit of 27% and £95 million in the bank](#), but doesn't want to pay the £170,000 (or 20p a visit) annual operating costs for the two Lambeth community centres.

Instead, Hyde plans to bulldoze the Kennington Park Community Centre for luxury flats and lease the Stockwell Community Resource to a new provider - with absolutely no guarantees that its present service will be accommodated in the new deal.

Lambeth Council, with some of the highest areas of deprivation in the country, has delivered Tory [cuts totalling a 56% reduction](#) in spending since 2010. Predictably this has meant the closure of local services, including half of the libraries in the area. Now Hyde is following the council's lead.

Residents lobbied the head office of Hyde on 6 January and are demonstrating again on 21 January. Gather at Stockwell memorial gardens at 2pm and say no to Hyde. Show your support for our community centres before we say goodbye to what is left of local facilities.

Keep our centres open!

**Lisa Bainbridge, Lambeth Socialist Party**

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## **Anger at south east Kent Momentum meeting**

**Seth Cruse, East Kent Socialist Party**

There was real anger from the 14 people who attended the south east Kent Momentum annual general meeting (AGM) on 14 January, at the change in the Momentum constitution that threatens the democracy of the movement (see pages 2-3).

After the usual AGM business, including the election of officers, a discussion took place regarding the [change in constitution and what many see as an abuse of power](#) recently orchestrated by Momentum chair Jon

Lansman. The attendees agreed to produce a 'mission statement' for the group and a declaration strongly opposing the steering group's decision.

South east Kent Momentum wishes to continue with the openness and diversity of previous meetings, that includes the support of socialists, community activists and trade unionists, and encourages the continuation of the campaigns the group has generated around local and national issues.

Supporters want the 'new kind of politics' that originally inspired them to become active in their community, and to work with people and groups together to continue the support for socialism and Jeremy Corbyn.

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## **Socialist Party national committee agrees document for congress**

The Socialist Party's national committee met on 14-15 January and after thorough discussion voted on a British perspectives document that will go to the national congress in London on 11-13 March. This has now been circulated to branches, which should make plans to discuss it and have a report from the national committee meeting.

The deadline for submitting branch resolutions and names of delegates is 24 February. The deadline for submitting branch amendments and letting us know visitors names is 3 March.

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## **Why I joined the Socialist Party**

### **"I witnessed the effort and commitment displayed by members"**

**Richard Edwards, Cardiff East Socialist Party**

I joined the Socialist Party after I witnessed the effort and commitment displayed by members in the streets of Cardiff. As someone who has long been interested in Marxism and disillusioned with Labour, it was inspiring to meet members on a stall who could match actions to the words.

The Socialist Party can point to any number of campaigns, support for strike action and numerous other actions which make a material difference to the struggle that so many hard-working and exploited people are going through right now. The regular meetings, constant encouragement to take action and learn more, and passionate and friendly members are the perfect antidote to the antipathy which I had begun to fall victim to.

Some of my generation are frustrated, angry and upset with the Tory government and the way the whole world seems to be heading. I say to them that the Socialist Party is an organisation in which you can actually witness the difference your actions can make to the political environment in which we live, and to the living and working conditions of ourselves and those around us.

The Socialist Party is a ready-made network of contacts, activists, allies and friends - [I would recommend membership](#) to any of my friends or family, and I would encourage anyone reading this and considering giving us a go. Come down to a meeting - you won't be disappointed!

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## **Theatre review: The Seven Acts of Mercy**

## **High art and savage poverty in Bootle**

**Mark Baker, Bristol North Socialist Party**

A new offering from left-wing playwright Anders Lustgarten might seem a surprising choice for the Royal Shakespeare Company to stage, but it's well worth the effort. 'The Seven Acts of Mercy' is a painting by the revolutionary artist Caravaggio, and this play explores its relevance to modern day Bootle.

Two Cities, two timelines, tied together by the lurking presence of the Catholic Church. Caravaggio (Patrick O'Kane) himself is holed up in the Pio Monte church, where the painting is still housed today. It is the Naples of 1606, following a brutal duel in which he has killed a man.

One part of the story concentrates on his cynical view of the world and his burgeoning relationship with his prostitute model Lavinia, while the political establishment seeks to silence his radical message. The other looks at the life of a retired docker with a terminal illness, Leon (Tom Georgeson).

Leon rails against modern capitalism while teaching his grandson Mickey to appreciate art and Everton FC. There's [plenty to rail about in the world of food banks](#) and the bedroom tax, but it is the question of housing that comes to the fore. They face eviction at the hands of property developers carrying out their work in the name of working class "aspiration," as one New Labour apparatchik describes it.

Amid this savage environment, neatly juxtaposed with the violence and brutality of seventeenth century Naples, Mickey sets out with his mobile phone camera to recreate the Seven Acts of Mercy. Visit the imprisoned, feed the hungry, refresh the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick, shelter the homeless, bury the dead.

He hopes to show his grandfather that these seven acts exist in real life, not just art - with mixed results.

Caravaggio's work is full of action and energy, often emphasising working class characters. In 'The Crucifixion of St Peter', your attention is drawn to the sweated labour of those bearing the cross rather than the crucifixion itself. Lustgarten expresses the social conscience of the working class of Bootle with the same raw energy.

As the story develops, Leon's errant son and father to Mickey, now a "self-made man", returns to the fray, and his role in their recent life experiences becomes revealed. Among other scenes, their family divisions are exposed while watching the Merseyside football derby on TV, and a particularly funny episode where Leon compares all of the leading teams to various political parties.

The production has moments of great pathos as well as humour. There are strong messages about social housing and poverty, but also the violence and corruption inherent in class-based society both then and now.

It's unlikely this work will get the same exposure as ['I, Daniel Blake'](#), for example. But for those who do get the chance to see it - the voice of the dispossessed speaks loud and clear, and the desire to rid the world of capitalist exploitation once and for all rings out for all to hear.

- The Seven Acts of Mercy is on at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, until 10 February - tickets available from [rsc.org.uk](http://rsc.org.uk)

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## **Comment: John Berger, 1926-2017**

# **Remarkable art of a contradictory socialist**

**Niall Mulholland**

John Berger, who has died aged 90, was one of the most influential arts and cultural critics of the last half-century.

A self-avowed Marxist, Berger made waves in the 1960s with his book 'The Success and Failure of Picasso', about the artist and the effect of capitalist commercialisation on his work. Berger's greatest impact was 'Ways of Seeing', a hugely influential book, and the 1972 TV series for BBC examining visual art.

He argued that Western art tradition since the Renaissance has been intertwined with the interests of the ruling classes and of capitalism. Capitalist social relations meant oil painting served as a status symbol of power and wealth. The depiction of women in art, in particular, was as objects to be possessed.

Berger came across Marxism while studying at art college, and these ideas richly informed his subsequent remarkable body of work, as art critic, novelist, poet, essayist, and writer for stage and film. He won the Booker prize for his novel, 'G', in 1972, and as a protest at the sponsor's origins in the slave trade, gave away half of his prize money to the [Black Panthers](#).

Living for decades in a remote area of the French Alps, Berger wrote sensitively about the marginalisation of rural workers in an age of industrial capitalism, on the disastrous consequences of neoliberalism, and on the Palestinian struggle, among many subjects.

Berger's Marxism was not fully rounded out or linked to a clear socialist programme for the fundamental change of society. He presented some contradictory and confused ideas. He appeared to support [Stalinist Russia's crushing of the 1956 Hungarian workers' uprising](#), but he sided with the 1968 'Prague Spring' revolt.

Not surprisingly, Berger's ideas fell out of fashion with prevailing 'postmodernism' in academia. But he did not renounce his ideals. To the end, he produced a valuable, radical, materialist critique of art.

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## Socialist artists invite others to exhibit work

**Peter Harris, Blackburn**

The [first edition of the 'Bad Art' magazine](#) was produced in July 2016. It signalled the creation of a new project aiming to build from the ground up in working class neighbourhoods, to challenge capitalism's attacks on working class artists and the arts.

Many of the originators of 'Bad Art' are members of the Socialist Party, and its sister parties and co-thinkers around the world. But from the outset, we want all artists who want to fight back to take part. We believe an inclusive approach to be essential.

[We fight for access to the arts for all](#). We want to protect art's freedom to be itself, whatever genre it falls into. But above all we fight for a world where art, artists and all working people can truly flourish; for us that is genuine socialism.

As part of the many events to commemorate the [centenary of the 1917 Russian revolution](#), shows and art exhibitions are being organised in various regions. One such is in the Skipton area of Yorkshire, in October and November. We encourage the organising of similar events around the world.

'Bad Art' supporters in the north of England are appealing to all artists who want to join the fight to consider displaying their creative work in our exhibition. Whether it be painting, drawing, photography, collage, sculpture, poetry, drama, music, or any other medium, we would like to see what you can offer!

The work on display can be for sale, or not - but very importantly the exhibition organisers want to show as many varied types of creative work as is possible. The content does not have to be explicitly political, and we particularly want to encourage people who are not professional artists and have not exhibited before to submit their work.

If you could send me a few examples of your work, or even your ideas and a brief few words about yourself, please email [peterfharris1950@gmail.com](mailto:peterfharris1950@gmail.com).

- More about socialism and the arts: [badartworld.net](http://badartworld.net)
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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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## Reader's comment: Top capitalist economist says his profession failed

Laurel Fogarty, north Wales

The Bank of England's chief economist has [blamed the failure of capitalist economic models](#) on ordinary people behaving in a way that was "deeply irrational."

The top economist said that standard models were built in a time when people behaved 'rationally,' causing the models to blunder time and again - largely failing to predict the 2008 crash, and the economic impact of the Brexit vote.

However, it is clear that capitalist economists are out of touch with the motivations and needs of the ordinary people on which their models rely.

Marxists, including those in the Socialist Party, had long predicted a [crash following growth based on rapidly ballooning debt](#).

We maintained that such growth could not continue indefinitely, even as most capitalist economists and politicians heralded the end of 'boom and bust' economics. Ultimately, their economic models continue to flounder because they cannot grasp or accept the fundamental relationship between labour and capital, or the motivations and actions of ordinary workers.

The failure of their models may leave many economists red faced. But workers pay the real price in the form of falling pay, poor housing, unemployment, cuts to public services and other attacks as recessions worsen. Unplanned and chaotic capitalist economies will remain prone to crises, plunging more workers into poverty.

Only a planned economy under the democratic control of ordinary people, where production is geared to meet social need, can ensure that the capitalist cycle of boom and bust comes to an end. A socialist society would mean the working class as a whole claiming the wealth produced by its labour, putting an end to the fragile, mismanaged, and deeply irrational capitalist system.

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## Fenton festivities

I was delighted to read the piece in issue 927 about the Unison benefit gig at the Fenton pub in Leeds ([Young workers in Leeds socialise and mobilise at Unison young workers gig](#)).

I recently read the excellent book 'Rip It Up and Start Again' by Simon Reynolds, which charts the post-punk movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Reynolds mentions in this book that the Fenton was something of a left-wing hotspot during this period, where band members from local big hitters such as Gang of Four, The Mekons and Delta 5 would mix with regular punters, and where many young Leeds socialists cut their teeth over lively conversation.

This had got me thinking what became of the place; I had assumed that it was likely to have long since closed, or at best been converted into a soulless chain bar. So it was great to hear that not only does it still exist but that it still seems to be something of a socialist hub popular with Leeds youth and maintaining links to the workers' movement.

That saved me some research and ensured I'll be making the short train journey over from Manchester at some point to have a look at the place, soak in the socialist vibes, enjoy a pint or two and hopefully be able to stick 'Mind Your Own Business' on the jukebox.

**James Hinchcliffe, Manchester**

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## **Brexit bind**

Before [her big Brexit speech](#), online petitioner Avaaz had sent around an email with a petition calling on Theresa May to reveal her Brexit plans.

The simple reality that they and many of the left don't see is that the Tories are at each other's throats over Brexit, and May didn't dare say anything concrete on the matter in case it shattered them.

By pressurising, really pressurising the Tories on concrete policies, Corbyn's Labour Party and the trade unions could quickly find themselves on top.

**Geraint Thomas, Nottingham**

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## **Castro cant**

The [death of Fidel Castro](#) brought out the usual vitriol from the likes of Donald Trump.

Cuba is an undemocratic, one-party state. But Castro also helped give its people free healthcare and free education, something Trump will never ever give the American people.

It's a concept beyond his understanding. Trump, like the Tories, was elected by a minority, such is the nature of the respective voting systems. The crimes of the vicious dictatorship in Saudi Arabia are swept under the carpet because many grubbers like him are making billions of dollars from arms deals.

That's their idea of freedom and democracy, 'democratic' election by a minority and the freedom to kill, maim, and exploit for their god, profit! Trump wants Cuba to be playground of the rich again.

The Socialist Party is building to help the workers of the world rise off their knees and rid themselves of all forms of dictatorship, and usher in a democratic socialist world of peace and harmony. To quote John Lennon from his great song Imagine, "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one."

**Bill Buchanan, Nottingham**

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<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/24234>