

Stand with the RMT: unite against Southern Rail and the Tories

Rob Williams, Socialist Party national industrial organiser

The transport union RMT, its members, and many across the union movement are fuming at the proposed [Southern Rail 'deal'](#). It was made with the leadership of the Aslef transport union and presided over by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) - they and the Tories hope it will settle the Southern Rail dispute.

The Tories have bankrolled Southern Rail to the tune of [tens of millions of pounds](#) in an effort to try and inflict a serious defeat on the transport unions. Yet the TUC chaired talks which excluded and undermined one of its oldest affiliated unions - the RMT - and, if accepted, would open up unsafe 'driver-only operation' on Southern and potentially across the country.

The dog-eat-dog approach of Aslef's leaders hasn't been reflected on the picket lines of their members, who have expressed real solidarity with RMT guards and station staff, who have [taken 28 days of strike action](#). We call on Aslef members to reject this offer and call for more coordinated strikes with the RMT.

It is Southern Rail management and the Tories who have been forced onto the back foot by the joint action that has brought the train lines to a halt. Why else have we had Tory MPs calling for a further beefing up of anti-union laws, just weeks before their new repressive and undemocratic Trade Union Act comes into force?

Dividing

This 'deal' has been offered at the same time as the parliamentary transport select committee condemns the government and the franchising of the rail industry. Rather than dividing rail workers from each other, Aslef should be uniting with the RMT to defeat the Tory cuts that will put drivers in the frame for any future accident, and demanding the immediate renationalisation of the rail industry.

This has echoes of the 2011 public sector pensions dispute that was ended weeks after the [mighty two million-strong N30 strike](#) by a lousy agreement between the Tory-led coalition government and the right-wing union leaders, including Brendan Barber from the TUC. Two of those leaders were knighted by Cameron - many union activists believe for services rendered!

Every union member has to stand with the RMT. Send messages of support to the RMT, protest to the TUC, and invite the union to speak at your union meeting. Let's keep the pressure on. Demand from your union that it calls for an emergency TUC general council on the TUC's conduct and then discusses how it can give full solidarity and support to the RMT against the Tory attack.

Southern dispute: Aslef members must reject offer

Tom Woodcock, RMT member

In an attempt to bring to an end the long-running and bitter dispute against driver only operation (DOO), Southern Rail management have [made an offer to drivers' union Aslef](#). Following negotiations brokered by the TUC which disgracefully excluded the RMT, which is equally part of the dispute, it is now being put to the members in a referendum with recommendation to accept.

The Socialist urges Aslef members to vote to reject this deal which, if accepted, will extend and normalise DOO on our railways. Aslef's decision to recommend this shoddy deal is a serious betrayal particularly

considering that Aslef's official policy is against any extension to DOO.

It is disgraceful that after a [massive 28 days of strike action](#) by RMT members along with five days by Aslef drivers, the dispute could end up with the guards being sold down the river - if this deal is accepted.

The consequences of acceptance will affect train-crew of all operating companies across the country, not to mention disabled and vulnerable passengers who rely on them, for years to come.

RMT general secretary Mick Cash has correctly [described the deal as "a shocking and historical betrayal](#) presided over by the TUC of not only the conductor [guard] grade and drivers, but also passengers, including disabled passengers, who have lost the guarantee of a second member of staff on their trains."

The deal being put to Aslef members states that although an 'on board supervisor' (in reality a ticket seller with no safety responsibilities) will be rostered to work on all trains which previously had a proper guard, in various circumstances trains will run with the driver alone.

Southern promises to explore an 'indemnity scheme' to protect drivers in the event of accidents and to recruit those drivers made redundant by freight train companies. But this deal needs to be seen for what it really is: the cost-cutting elimination of an entire grade of rail worker, and a fundamental attack by the Tory government on the RMT, Britain's most militant trade union.

It is absolutely crucial that train drivers and guards stand shoulder-to-shoulder in the struggle against DOO and the continued attacks on railway jobs and conditions. Aslef members must reject this deal and continue to fight for a fully-staffed, safe railway that is usable by all.

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Southern dispute: disappointment and anger - RMT president responds

RMT president Sean Hoyle speaks to the Socialist (in a personal capacity)

Personally I'm disappointed. The deal directly affects our members and in the same position we wouldn't do it. Aslef members are voting on this deal now so the opportunity is in their hands.

The TUC has been complicit in all this. The TUC started talks which we were barred from. But the TUC is supposed to be a body that speaks for all unions. We're a component of the TUC, RMT general secretary Mick Cash sits on the general council and yet the first we heard about the talks was in the media, which is a disgrace.

We must remember this is about safety, it's been about safety from day one. It's not just about safety for the guard or conductor and members of the public. It's also about safety for the driver. When the guard isn't there anymore there will only be the driver. Although Southern says there will be someone else on the train, they won't be safety-critical and there will be many occasions when they won't be there. So the driver will be wholly culpable. The RMT represents drivers too and they have thoroughly rejected going down that path.

From day one this has always been about the safety of the travelling public. Our members are not losing money, they're not losing their jobs. We are concerned about the safety of the travelling public. The changes will be less safe for people. Once we recognise that then it's all about money, and not about money to make fares cheaper, it's purely about money for bigger profits.

Like the public, we want a publicly owned railway, run not for profit, so that people can afford to travel in a greener way. We can renationalise: indeed, other countries' nationalised state railways run most of ours

already and their profit is invested into their own railways, not ours.

#NoBanNoWall #ResistTrump: Solidarity not racism - socialism not Trumpism

A significant victory was won by the international movement against Donald Trump on 4 February as a federal judge in Seattle temporarily halted his travel ban for people from seven Muslim countries and his suspension of the US's refugee programme. The following day Trump's appeal against this was overturned. The legal battles continue as we go to press.

The lifting of the ban shows the pressure being built by the millions who have been mobilised in opposition to Trump's reactionary policies. But this has to be kept up, escalated and linked to the many ongoing struggles of workers and young people around the world.

Even if Trump is forced to accept the scrapping of the ban, massive threats still remain to women's rights, the environment, LGBT+ people and workers' rights, particularly in the public sector. A mass movement must be built to not only resist all of these attacks - and similar elsewhere in the world - but to fight for political parties for the 99% to cut across the right, and to put forward a socialist alternative to capitalism, inequality and bigotry.

Build student walkout against Trump's UK visit

Lily and Nancy Douglas, college students, London

The London anti-Trump demonstration on 4 February was one of the most crowded we have ever been on - and one of the most eventful.

We tried to get students to sign a pledge to walk out if Donald Trump ever does come to Britain - the new 'Day X'.

We were doing this in the tradition of the protests against Tony Blair's Iraq war in 2003, [where thousands of ordinary students walked out of their schools, colleges and universities](#), united against a right-wing force. Even though they did not stop Blair from going to war, they did show the potential strength of a united mass movement.

Every student we asked agreed to sign! We were particularly taken aback with the number of secondary school students signing up as we've sometimes found it hard to get political campaigning going in our schools.

We ran an open mic for people to speak and chant from. The protesters around us loved this. Many took to the mic to spread their solidarity with Muslims and their hatred of Trump.

First time protesters

We met loads of ordinary people who were coming out onto the streets for the first time.

It became even more apparent that the rise of Donald Trump has had a massive politicising effect, in particular on students. Some loved it so much that they joined us behind our Socialist Students banner.

Ordinary people spilled out onto the streets in search of an alternative to the right wing. Socialist ideas were on the tip of lots of people's tongues.

To quote a friend who had previously always insisted that nothing we do can make a difference: "We will protest and resist until we win the struggle."

What you can do:

- Text 'join' plus your name and school/college/uni to 07749379010
 - Organise a meeting in your school/college/uni to start organising
 - Use a 'pledge sheet' to collect names of people who are willing to walk out
 - Create a WhatsApp group for people who want to take part
 - Invite people to a 'Day X walkout' Facebook event
 - Get in touch with Socialist Students for leaflets and posters - socialiststudents.org.uk
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Socialist Students leads school and college walkouts in US

Students here considering organising walkouts against Trump should take inspiration from the success of Socialist Students US on inauguration day. Hanna Burge of Socialist Alternative reports.

On 20 January, thousands of high school and college students at over 40 campuses in cities across the US [participated in walkouts organised by Socialist Students US](#).

In Seattle, a total of 2,000 students walked out of 15 schools, including college campuses, high schools, and middle schools. Many came together for a Socialist Students' organised mass rally at Seattle Central College.

There, Socialist Students member Ezgi Eygi explained how movements of workers and young people had fought for and won most major progressive gains of the past century, including against Republican administrations.

Civil disobedience

Seattle city councillor and Socialist Alternative member Kshama Sawant spoke about the important example of the bold student walkouts, which defied Seattle School Board warnings.

She said more disruptive actions like these will be needed in the age of Trump, because "symbolic protest will not be enough, we need to build mass non-violent civil disobedience."

In Minneapolis, the University of Minnesota Socialist Students walkout started with a rally of 400 people before joining forces with Augsburg College students and then converging with the #NoDAPL and immigrant rights rallies to create a 1,000-strong march to city hall.

Socialist Students organiser Tyler Vasseur addressed the joint rally, calling "to combine our movements for the greatest possible resistance to Trump's agenda."

Socialist Students in New York City organised with a grassroots coalition including Socialist Alternative, the Democratic Socialists of America, Occupy Kensington, and Metropolitan Council on Housing. The joint protest had a crowd of over 1,000 at the Trump Building on Wall Street.

At UC Berkeley in California, a crowd of 2,000 was joined by several hundred Berkeley High students. At UCLA, students held a rally at the campus' main library where speakers from Socialist Students, trade unions, and student groups addressed an electrified crowd.

In Boston, Socialist Students joined with 150 striking dining hall workers from Northeastern University to fight against anti-worker, anti-immigrant attacks. Later that evening they converged with Socialist Alternative's mass rally of 4,000 that called for a united defence of reproductive rights and healthcare.

Despite intimidation tactics deployed by the Worcester school administration, over 100 students walked out from four area high schools, along with Worcester State University and Clark University.

Ohio State University and University of Cincinnati walkouts attracted hundreds of students, becoming the largest political demonstrations organised at both campuses in decades.

Chicago Socialist Students helped organise a walkout with Evanston Township High School (ETHS) on 24 January. Over 400 students marched out.

The anti-Trump walkouts underscore the enormous importance of youth in movements and of radical youth organisations like Socialist Students.

From the [anti-Vietnam War movement](#), to [the Occupy movement](#), to combating sexual assault on college campuses - young people have historically been at the forefront of struggles.

Socialist Students organiser Cole Weirich summed up the rebellion of youth against Trump and the predatory system of capitalism: "There's this saying that the youth will inherit the earth, but that's not true about our generation. If we want this world, we have to fight for it."

Defend immigrant communities

Cora Bergantinos, Socialist Alternative (cothinkers of the Socialist Party in the US)

Trump is sending a clear message against our immigrant brothers and sisters, and it is time to activate the resistance. He has repeatedly promised to deport two to three million undocumented immigrants, threatening to do in months what took the Obama administration eight years!

If Trump keeps his promise, he will need to go back to the tactics used during the Bush years with workplace and neighbourhood raids that rounded up thousands of workers at car washes, meatpacking plants, and grocery stores.

Considering the current climate, this approach could spark massive resistance. It would not be the first time that overreaching by the Republican Party against immigrants led to a tremendous upheaval in society.

In 2005, the Republican-dominated House passed the Sensenbrenner Bill, targeting all undocumented workers for deportation and criminalising anyone giving them assistance.

It led to one of the biggest waves of mass demonstrations in US history, culminating in the historic 'day without immigrants' on 1 May 2006. This included strike action that paralysed important sections of the economy, such as the port of Los Angeles. This courageous movement stopped the bill and pushed back anti-immigrant attitudes.

But the unions tragically failed to bring the native-born working class out alongside immigrant workers, leaving them isolated.

Through workplace raids, especially in industries where organising drives were underway, many were deported, the movement was broken down, and the demand for "equal rights for all workers" was temporarily defeated.

But while Trump wants to implement his agenda in a hurry, this is not the same country it was a decade ago.

A new generation has been radicalised and galvanised into struggle by the immigrant Dreamer campaign, Occupy, the Fight for \$15, Black Lives Matter, and the Dakota pipeline struggle. Millions responded last year to [Bernie Sanders' call for a political revolution](#) against the billionaire class.

Trump's agenda can be defeated, but it will take more than protests and demonstrations if we are going to win. This time, native-born workers and young people must come out in active solidarity with immigrant workers.

The unions have a crucial role to play; not only organising key workplaces but also calling mass meetings where workers can discuss, plan, and organise nonviolent civil disobedience actions, including strike action.

Networks are already being built in a number of cities to prepare mass nonviolent civil disobedience to resist the deportations.

Defending immigrants' rights is not only a question of fairness or justice. Millions feel threatened by Trump's attacks on women's rights, workers' rights, and environmental protections.

Trump knows he will face massive opposition and wants to win quick victories. A defeat of one struggle could send a wave of demoralisation to all our movements. We can't allow one step back! The right-wing agenda can be defeated but only if all of us unite in solidarity and build our social power, the strongest force of humanity.

- [Full article at socialistalternative.org](http://socialistalternative.org)
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Protesting in Britain

London

Once again thousands of people took to the streets of London to voice their fury at Donald Trump's racist travel ban, this time gathering at the US embassy and marching to Downing Street on 4 February. And once again Socialist Party members were out in force to argue for a socialist alternative to the racist, sexist billionaire and the rotten system of capitalism he represents.

Homemade banners abounded, expressing all the issues people were angry about, including war and the environment.

While everyone agreed with the anti-racist message from the official platform, calling for unity and defending refugees, we found a significant number of people looking for more.

Lots of people wanted to know how a movement can be built, not just more demos but what next? We talked about the potential for student walkouts and workers' strikes.

We talked about the necessity of demands that can unite all sections of the working class - for jobs and homes, for decent pay and against austerity. Many people wanted to say more than just "Dump Trump", and donated money for our placards saying "Socialism not Trumpism".

Big numbers of school and college students were on the demo, and the Socialist Students team boldly approached as many as possible with the idea of walking out on 'Day X' - whenever Donald Trump steps foot in Britain.

Paula Mitchell

Leeds

On the third Leeds anti-Trump protest in two weeks, 1,000 people gathered in Victoria Gardens to listen to speakers before marching through the city centre, growing in number as we went. Socialist Party member Amy Cousens spoke about the link between oppression and class, explaining how prejudice finds its root in, and is promoted by, capitalism.

She called for plans to organise beyond demonstrations, including Socialist Students' proposed school and college walkout on the day Trump comes to Britain. Over 50 young people signed up to support this.

James Ellis

Worcestershire

There was an uplifting feeling of solidarity in Worcester as 100 of us came out to demonstrate outside the Guildhall against Trump. Protesters as young as seven took to the megaphone against his outrageous ban on travel, the refugee plan and his ridiculous wall.

Calvin Fowler

Birmingham

For the second time in a week, on 4 February hundreds of Brummies turned out to protest against Donald Trump's 'Muslim ban' and the prospect of him being invited to the UK for a state visit.

Gathering in front of Waterstones, the 500 strong protest then took off on a march, which was filmed, applauded and saluted with raised fists by shoppers. Several of them even joined in as the demo made its way around the city centre.

Socialist Party member Corinthia Ward addressed the crowd, explaining the need for a united, working class fightback against Trump and the capitalist system that he represents.

Over 20 people left their details to find out about joining the Socialist Party.

Nick Hart

Harrogate

The Harrogate protest against Trump may have been organised by a veteran peace activist, but it was young people who dominated the event on 2 February.

Several school students spoke, expressing their opposition to Trump's racist, sexist and homophobic agenda.

Iain Dalton, on behalf of the Socialist Party, highlighted that Theresa May hoped that linking up with Trump would strengthen her, but it could turn out to be her Achilles heel.

Iain called for further protests on 20 February when the two million-strong petition calling for a cancellation of Trump's state visit is debated in parliament. He also called for students to organise and walk out on 'Day X' (the day of Trump's visit) if it goes ahead. Many students pledged to do this.

Harrogate Socialist Party members

SNP and Greens agree cuts budget in Scotland

TUSC and unions call for legal no-cuts budgets

Matt Dobson, Socialist Party Scotland

A Scottish National Party (SNP) government austerity budget passed in Scotland on 2 February [with the support of the Scottish Greens](#).

The Greens have posed as an "anti-austerity" alternative, but for many workers and young people are now exposed. They have supported the SNP minority government in slashing local council funding by around £170 million, and continuing the massive underfunding of the NHS, education and social care services.

Leading Scottish Greens are presenting the £160 million reduction in the [SNP's original cut for councils of £327 million](#) as a big victory.

But for council workers, service users and communities, in a situation where there have been over £3 billion in cuts since 2010, plus the gap that already exists with funding agreements, this represents only further cuts and council tax rises.

Despite their manifesto rhetoric, the Scottish Greens did not secure a significantly more progressive taxation of the very wealthy in this budget. They only got the SNP to freeze the threshold for paying 40% income tax at £43,000, when they had planned to lift it to £43,430.

The Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) asks: why did the Greens not refuse to support the SNP's cuts budget, and demand instead that they fully fund public services? We point out that in councils such as Glasgow and Edinburgh the Greens have just proposed alternative cuts budgets rather than put forward a fighting alternative.

Scottish Labour opposed the SNP budget and attacked the Greens, but their alternative was a universal increase in income tax which would have also hit low-paid workers. Their opposition has no credibility when the local authorities they control pass on the cuts and attack trade union opposition.

TUSC supports the Unite and Unison unions' calls for the Scottish government and councils to [set legal no-cuts budgets](#). Our candidates in the forthcoming council elections will put forward a 100% anti-austerity fighting socialist programme, in contrast to the SNP, Labour and the Greens.

We call for councils and the Scottish government to come together, using financial tools including reserves and borrowing powers, and cancelling historic debts, 'PFI' and 'PPP'. TUSC would also use tax-raising powers to shift the burden of income taxation onto the very highest earners.

Such a programme could halt austerity, buying time to build a mass, working class campaign to win the needed funding.

No cuts, no closures, save our NHS!

Steve Score, Leicester Socialist Party and Save Glenfield campaign

The NHS is in crisis. Hospitals cancelled a record number of urgent operations last year, mainly because of bed shortages. One in six A&E departments faces closure or downgrading because of NHS cuts.

So you would think that NHS England (NHSE) would want to defend its success stories like the East Midlands Congenital Heart Centre at Glenfield Hospital - especially when it got 'outstanding' and 'good' ratings from the Care Quality Commission only in the last couple of weeks.

Despite NHSE claiming its proposal is nothing to do with austerity, the background to [the threatened closure](#) is £22 billion of cuts in the NHS budget (England) that are being imposed by the Tory government.

Excellence

Thousands of children's lives are saved by the expertise of staff there. Children born with heart defects could need treatment into their adult lives. To close it will have devastating effects across the region and beyond.

But NHSE's proposals do not add up! It says Glenfield doesn't carry out enough operations, yet the hospital is on track to reach its target number. They say it's about achieving 'standards', but Glenfield has been praised as having "excellent outcomes". It is the leading UK centre for certain treatments.

A massive campaign to save Glenfield has been built - including patients and their families, clinicians and many other people.

Trade unions have also given their support - in particular, Unite, whose general secretary Len McCluskey will be speaking at 11 February demo (see below).

Recently, school students in 25 schools across Leicestershire and beyond took part in a day of action for the heart unit with the support of staff. They came to school wearing red, made posters and placards.

Assemblies were held explaining what the heart centre does and the democratic right to protest. Material was sent home to parents.

130,000 people have signed our petition, either online or the paper version, over the last six months.

We want to make our feelings felt on Saturday 11 February, when we will be marching again through the streets of Leicester demanding the centre is saved. [Last October over a thousand marched](#) - we want more this time!

Many of us will be following this up by going as a Save Glenfield contingent on the national demo to defend the NHS on 4 March.

March to Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre

- Meet at 11am, on Saturday 11 February, at the corner of Granville Road and Regent Road, Leicester, LE1 7PA
- March to Jubilee Square for Rally at 12.45pm

'It's Our NHS' national demo

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

NHS: fight for funding - not passport checks

Right-wing politicians and newspapers are trying to blame the austerity and privatisation-induced NHS crisis on so-called 'health tourists'.

Deliberate 'health tourism' costs a miniscule 0.3% of NHS spending, [according to analysis by the Mirror](#). The Tories are - outrageously - proposing that health workers carry out passport checks on sick people before giving care.

The Socialist spoke to Aislinn Macklin-Doherty, a doctor involved in last year's strikes:

"I am first and foremost a doctor, with my primary and only duty of care to treating patients, not judging who is eligible for treatment. This should not be brought to the bedside.

"The relatively small proportion of costs - less than 0.05% of the £120 billion per year budget - that will be recouped through this mechanism will be outweighed by the financial and resource-heavy cost of implementing it.

"There are other much more serious issues in the NHS with regards to waste and inefficiency that are not being addressed, and dwarf the minor costs of 'health tourism', such as crippling PFI debts, and the waste of running a marketised health system costing the taxpayer up to £10 billion per year.

"Focusing resources on blocking 'health tourists' is another way of the government scapegoating and blaming the cause of the crisis - which is of their own making - on a minority of individuals.

"As a doctor I am worried that this will lead to denying of care inappropriately, and racial profiling in hospitals, leading to inequality of clinical outcomes and risks to patients' lives."

Universal basic income - what do socialists say?

Judy Beishon, Socialist Party executive committee

The idea of welfare benefits being replaced by a 'universal basic income' (UBI) has resurfaced in recent years - a welcome discussion because it raises the fundamental right of everyone to have an income that meets their basic needs. Exact proposals vary but they are all based on the idea of everyone in society receiving an unconditional, tax-free, regular payment, regardless of whether they are working or the composition of their household (see below).

Discussion on UBI is centuries old, but today campaigners point to a new urgency due to the growing precarious nature of employment and the threat to jobs from automation. More and more workers face the insecurity of having no set minimum hours of work or are being paid 'by the task'. Many who do have full-time contracts are not paid enough for a decent standard of living.

The "possible effects on the labour market of robotics" is one of the motivations behind a report advocating UBI that is being [presented to the European parliament in February by a Luxembourg MEP](#). The French Parti Socialiste (PS) presidential candidate, Benoit Hamon, chosen by the party's membership for rejecting the anti-working class measures of present PS president Hollande, calls for an eventual UBI of €750 a month for every adult in France. He aims to partly finance it by a tax on the deployment of robots.

Limited UBI-type trials are being carried out - or are planned - in a number of countries and cities around the world, including in Finland, the Netherlands and Kenya. In Britain, the Scottish National Party and Green Party support the idea of a UBI, and [Jeremy Corbyn has said Labour will look into it](#).

Right-wing motivations too

Ominously, it is not only from the left that support for UBI comes. The UBI trial in Finland, involving unemployed workers, is under a right-wing coalition government. Among right-wing capitalist economists and commentators who have supported some form of UBI (including 'negative income tax') are Milton Friedman and Charles Murray in the US, who argue it would reduce government bureaucracy by axing welfare programmes and open up a bigger 'free market' for private service provision.

In addition, as academic Jathan Sadowski [wrote in the Guardian last year](#): "UBI can, in some ways, be seen as welfare for capitalists. Now more people can drive for Uber and work for TaskRabbit - at even lower wages! - because UBI subsidises the meagre paychecks earned by hustling for the sharing economy. The tech companies take home the profit and face even less pressure to pay a living wage to their non-employee employees."

The UBI proposals of some on the right are regressive rather than progressive, ie they would directly benefit the rich more than the poor. However, despite all these possible gains for the most wealthy, most capitalist representatives have opposed UBI.

Their reasons include its vast potential cost; the undermining of having a pool of unemployed workers who can be used to drive down wages and conditions; and the safety net a UBI would give workers who move to take strike action.

When a referendum took place on it in Switzerland in June 2016, none of the Swiss parliamentary parties supported the idea. A deluge of propaganda helped to defeat the proposal, including slamming it as a 'something-for-nothing' handout and the right-wing Swiss People's Party raising the spectre of a flood of immigrants eager to cash in.

Could UBI be funded?

A [June 2016 study of possible UBI schemes by pressure group Compass](#), with funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, concluded: "In the context of existing tax and benefit arrangements, it is not possible to design a scheme that is revenue neutral, pays a decent sum and withdraws most means-tested benefits without significant numbers of losers."

This finding isn't surprising when looking at the draconian cuts made over years to benefits for the poorest and most vulnerable layers of society, the mega tax cuts for the rich and corporations and the fact that UBI would provide for everyone in society.

Far from moving towards better-funded welfare, successive governments are pushing more and more people into destitution, one of the latest measures being backdoor cuts during the change to Universal Credit. Child Benefit, which once had an element of the UBI doctrine in that every household with children could have it, is now means-tested and its value is falling in real terms.

Not just in Britain but across the globe capitalist-driven austerity is pushing down the protection provided by all types of benefits and subsidies. For decades Alaska's government has used oil revenue to provide every resident - including children - with an annual, unconditional UBI payment, which in 2015 reached a peak of \$2,072. But last year the state governor vetoed around half of the planned payment, reducing it to \$1,022, on the grounds that the state budget deficit was too high.

Hybrid schemes

Searching for a UBI scheme that would be acceptable to big business, some left-leaning think tanks and political parties have proposed hybrid solutions. Any improvements in living standards for the poorest in society - and for the overwhelming majority - would be welcome, and every such scheme has to be judged on its merits.

But all their proposals go through contortions to be as 'revenue neutral' as possible - ie to avoid substantially hitting the wealth of the super-rich. So their best proposals would only benefit some sections of society to a modest extent, while leaving in place parts of the old benefits system to compensate the 'losers'.

The Green Party's proposal for a 'citizen's income' more than doubles child benefit, but people presently living entirely on benefits would only do "a little better" say the Greens, with the rider that at least they wouldn't face the misery of benefit sanctions.

Unwilling to propose raising enough money for UBI (or existing benefits) by strongly taxing the rich and big business and/or by nationalising the top companies, Compass and a number of other organisations propose creating a special 'social wealth fund'.

Compass wrote: "Such funds have been widely used in other countries and would ensure that a higher proportion of the national wealth is held in common and used for public benefit and not for the interests of the few. They are a way of ensuring that at least part of the benefits of some economic activity are pooled and shared among all citizens and cross generations."

Why just "part" of the benefits of "some" activity? Why not all of the benefits from the biggest - and decisive - companies in the country, through taking them into public ownership and deciding democratically how the wealth they produce is distributed?

Otherwise the funds created will be restricted in income and expenditure to the whims of philanthropists or subjected to the needs of the capitalist classes and their governments, as are the social and sovereign wealth funds that already exist across the globe - and as the Alaska example shows.

Compass also suggests that a "more radical" way of funding a UBI than a social wealth fund would be "a small annual charge on the owners of shares".

This isn't a new idea - many left reformists have raised it over decades. The problem they come up against is that a "small" charge wouldn't be enough to fund a UBI that people could live on, and a large charge would be intolerable for the ruling class - whose interests the parliamentary pro-capitalist political parties will not readily defy.

Capitalism vs socialism

The present onslaught on welfare states and the gifts of reduced taxes for the richest in society have not just been for ideological reasons. They also reflect the endemic economic crisis the capitalists face - including their lack of profitable-enough ways to invest their capital.

Why then would capitalist governments agree to a sufficient UBI that would mean much greater taxation for big business and the rich? Clearly they wouldn't out of choice.

Any such 'generosity' could only be achieved by a massive wave of working class struggle, one so great that workers would most likely want to push on beyond the gaining of a 'survival level' UBI, to challenge the capitalists' role and right to own the means of creating wealth in society.

What, fundamentally, do working class and middle class people want and need? Not a future where capitalist-owned robots increasingly displace them from the workplace, the bosses become ever richer and many workers are left to exist on whatever level of benefits or UBI can be extracted through struggle.

A socialist scenario would be entirely different. With the main companies taken into public ownership, automation could be used to reduce working hours without loss of pay. The available work could be shared out so that everyone who is able to can be part of producing the wealth in society and then that wealth be used to provide a good standard of living for all - including those unable to work.

Under socialism it could be democratically debated and decided whether to have a system of good wage levels with a decent minimum, along with excellent benefits for those unable to work, or whether to achieve a similarly high standard of living across the board through a UBI based system, or to adopt elements of both.

Also, a socialist society would be able to provide vastly improved services - including for the elderly and the incapacitated - which would contribute towards a universally good standard of living, along with other measures like low cost housing and transport, and free education.

Capitalism has created enough productive capacity to enable the complete wiping out of poverty and poor living standards.

However, not only will the capitalist classes not do that, they are presiding over the opposite trend - ever-increasing inequality, the enrichment of the richest at the expense of the majority. Eight individuals now own as much wealth as half of all humanity.

It's also the case that they are unable to use anywhere near all of the productive capacity they have brought into being.

A socialist system based on public ownership of the main industries and services and socialist planning could not only use the presently unused capacity but could hugely increase the production of socially useful goods, and in an environmentally friendly way. Automation could be used to phase out the most tedious and 'dirty' jobs and reduce working hours, rather than being the threat to workers' livelihoods it is under capitalism.

Supporters of a 'progressive' UBI say it would:

- Secure everyone's right to a basic standard of living
 - Reward the huge amount of unpaid care and voluntary work
 - End means testing and benefits sanctions
 - Give women greater independence, as they would be paid as individuals rather than as part of a household
 - Mean no financial disincentive to work, as UBI would not be withdrawn
 - Be simpler than the present benefits system
 - Give workers a safety net allowing them to more easily risk switching jobs
 - Make it easier to make ends meet when taking strike action
 - Enable reduced working hours, creating more jobs for others and allowing more time for innovation, leisure, political activity, etc
-

RMT wins important tube jobs and grading victory

John Reid and Jared Wood, RMT members

A strike by 3,500 station staff [brought the tube network to a standstill on 9 January](#). The strike showed that station staff could be as powerful as train operators. It was a game changing strike, showing clearly that RMT is able to close the network without the support of the drivers' union Aslef.

Transport union TSSA also took action, although only after the leadership had attempted to pull out at the last moment. To their credit, TSSA local reps rebelled and the attempted retreat was cut off. At that time only 200 jobs had been guaranteed by London Underground and there was no movement on making the newly created 'CSA2' grade into properly trained 'CSA1s' who are paid £8,000 more.

Immediately following the strike TSSA stated that it would not be naming further strike action and it agreed to enter into a review as London Underground had proposed before the strike.

Strike

In contrast, RMT followed up the strike on 9 January by announcing action for the second week of February, which would have severely hit services for four days.

Management were forced to make an improved proposal. 200 additional jobs became 325, meaning that 533 out of 953 jobs initially cut have been saved as a result of two disputes over three years.

All staff in the CSA2 grade already on the job will get a CSA1 position and the higher salary once they have completed 12 months employment. Further talks will take place with a view to allowing all CSA2s employed in the future to become CSA1 within 12 months of starting.

Recognising the massive progress made, RMT suspended the strike action and overtime ban. RMT will continue to stand by the principle that all jobs should come back and that the all CSA2s should be upgraded into CSA1 positions.

The union will build a political campaign, alongside our industrial fightback, to seek the restoration of the government subsidy for the tube network. It is the withdrawal of the subsidy that lies behind London Underground's austerity drive.

That said, the concessions already won represent an important victory. Militant action can win and this, along with the [recent victory on Tube lines pensions](#), shows that decisive action can win concessions in a time of austerity.

If the TUC organised a public sector general strike instead of making dodgy deals to undercut RMT membership on Southern Rail, we would be able to beat the government back. A coordinated response from the TUC could stop austerity in its tracks.

London Midland victory: RMT forces bosses to withdraw outsourced security

RMT member

Train guards have faced down bosses at London Midland in a dispute over the use of outsourced security guards on trains.

Managers had failed to reach agreement with RMT reps over the introduction of security guards, eventually deciding to introduce them regardless.

Safety and security on trains is a major issue for rail workers. However, these security contractors are poorly trained and non-unionised agency workers. They enjoy none of the hard-won benefits of working for a train operating company such as free travel and a final salary pension.

Casualisation and outsourcing of work was recommended in [New Labour's McNulty report](#) which is the blueprint for the present day attacks on rail jobs and conditions.

This left the union with no choice but to ballot its membership for strike action. In the run up to this management pumped out propaganda in emails and newsletters claiming that safety and security was its number one priority, trying to justify its use of the contractors.

From the day the ballot papers arrived at members' homes management cancelled all paid release for RMT guard reps - they were playing hardball.

Then on 30 January management suddenly announced that following discussions with staff at the depots they had listened to their concerns and decided to remove all security guards from trains with immediate effect.

This once again proves the value of being prepared to strike in defence of jobs and conditions. In this case the mere threat of action was enough to force the bosses into a u-turn.

This willingness to fight will be vital in the upcoming battle against 'driver-only operation' on London Midland.

BA strike: "We're being paid well below what we should be"

Chris Newby, London Socialist Party

Despite increased intimidation from British Airways (BA) management, cabin crew are standing firm in their fight for a living wage. Many are coming straight off flights onto the picket line. Striking workers are being left with no choice but to take action because of their poor wages.

One worker reported they were in overdraft within six days of getting their wages.

BA management claim that the strike is having a limited effect, saying that most staff are turning up. But reports from BA workers say that the staff car parks and staff buses are empty.

Also, if the strike is having a limited effect why are BA management increasing sanctions on strikers by threatening to dock two years of bonuses and removing all staff travel discounts for the next year from anyone joining the strike action? Unite the Union estimates the sanctions will cost strikers an average of £850 each.

Showing their priorities are to try to break the union rather than pay their staff a living wage, BA management are spending millions of pounds renting out planes and crew from other companies to try to cover for services affected by the strike.

Rather than BA being the benchmark for pay and conditions in the airline industry, it is now paying some of the lowest wages. As another sign that BA is aiming to model itself on the low cost airlines, they have now replaced free in-flight meals with Marks and Spencer (M&S) food for sale. BA is paying its mixed fleet cabin crew far less than M&S staff selling the same food in stores.

The Socialist Party fully supports these workers in their strike and will do all that we can to build support for their campaign to win a genuine living wage.

A cabin crew worker spoke to the Socialist:

"We're on strike because we feel we're being paid well below what we should be paid. We're being told we're being paid between £21,000 and £27,000. I personally have never reached £21,000.

"They say it's because of bonuses and all kinds of things but we can never achieve the full bonus because they make it so difficult and I can tell you my P60s for the last two years have been for £15,500 and £17,500.

"I think the strike's going well. This is new for a lot of us, we've not been through anything like this before.

"We'd love to see this resolved but the company are going to have to be more realistic and the company are not offering a liveable wage in London which is where they want us to live. [The deal that Virgin cabin crew won](#) has definitely given us a boost."

AWE pension strikers vow to fight on

Nick Chaffey, Southern Socialist Party

Thousands of workers at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) were stripped of their defined benefit pension scheme on 1 February by AWE bosses Lockheed Martin, Jacobs and Serco.

Unite the Union members [have taken six days of strike action](#) and have vowed to fight on, demanding their pensions are defended and transferred to the Ministry of Defence pension scheme.

AWE was privatised by the Tories in 1987 with 'ironclad' promises that pensions would be protected. These changes have been imposed on the unions who have vowed to fight on, determined to defend their pensions from voracious corporations looking to boost their profits.

Unite is well organised at AWE, representing 600 workers at the site. Strike days have seen all work at AWE come to a halt.

AWE is a key local employer, many families work here, and older workers understand that this attack on pensions will be a major hit to younger workers who will lose most from these changes. Unite strikers also recognise that this is the thin end of the wedge with the attack on pensions likely to be followed by further attacks.

Unite regional secretary Jennie Formby told a strike rally: "Recently, carmaker BMW, US multinational Honeywell, Gatwick Airport Ltd, Diageo and the [Post Office](#) have all announced that they are planning to close their defined benefit pension schemes. Unite is pledged to fight the move to the defined contribution option by all these organisations."

Strikers are raising the need to strike together to escalate pressure on companies and the government. Pickets we spoke to see this as part of a wider austerity attack by employers and the government.

Len McCluskey came to support the picket lines in January saying: "Our members feel deeply betrayed. They have Unite's 100% support and solidarity in this dispute."

Workplace news in brief

DWP closures

I spoke at a members meeting in my own office in Paisley on 31 January which was announced for closure. It's not a public office, it's a large contact centre and processing site.

Just before Christmas, Scotch whisky firm Chivas Regal announced the closure of their Paisley base with the loss of over 450 local jobs. The Department for Work and Pensions and the local authority are now the largest employers in what was once a proud mill town. Every other shop is a pound or charity shop. Most members live in Paisley and the surrounding area.

[The loss of these jobs](#) to the community is irreplaceable. At a serious and sombre meeting, members agreed we will fight this closure. Some members like part-time workers only found out about the announcement via colleagues on Facebook, which was disgraceful, as was the threat of disciplinary action to our local reps for speaking to the press.

We will link up with colleagues across the DWP and other government departments facing similar cuts like HM Revenue and Customs to save these jobs and services.

Janice Godrich, PCS president

Picturehouse strike

The [Picturehouse cinema dispute](#) by Bectu members fighting for the London living wage has been escalated with workers at four cinemas taking action on 11 February from 2pm.

The cinemas are Brixton Ritzy, Hackney, Crouch End on Tottenham Lane and Central in Piccadilly. There will also be a joint protest on Saturday 25 February from 12 noon outside the Empire Cinema in Leicester Square.

Deliveroo walkout

Brighton Deliveroo drivers took strike action on 4 February over a £4 drop in pay and have voted to unionise with the IWGB union.

This follows [strike action by Deliveroo drivers in London last summer](#) over pay which forced the courier company to drop plans for a trial which would see them paid £3.75 per delivery instead of the current £7 an hour.

- See iwgbclb.wordpress.com for more.
-

Syria: Is an end to the war in sight?

The military victory in Aleppo by Assad's regime and its foreign backers was a turning point in the war in Syria. It has put the Syrian government once more in formal control of the country's main urban centres. Serge Jordan of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) examines if this is the prelude to a broader peace settlement that could end the horrors inflicted on the Syrian people.

Following the [revolutionary uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011](#), Syria was witness to a mass popular revolt against the brutal and corrupt dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad. The counter-revolutionary responses to that uprising started a chain of tragedies that unfold in Syria today.

The absence of independent workers' organisations able to harness this movement along class lines, and to overcome the religious and ethnic divisions upon which the Assad dynasty had consolidated its power, created multiple openings: for the regime to carry out savage repression; for various sectarian groups to usurp the anti-Assad movement; and for foreign capitalist forces to intervene on both sides in order to exploit the conflict.

Diverse counter-revolutionary forces have fed each other in a devastating war for supremacy which has displaced more than half of the country's population, killed hundreds of thousands of people and reduced this once beautiful country to a gigantic pile of rubble.

An important turn of events came last December when the regime and its foreign allies recaptured Aleppo, the country's most populous city before the war and its economic powerhouse. It allowed them to come back to the negotiating table this year with significantly more leverage than during the previous, largely token, international peace negotiations.

These developments are taking place in the context of new shifts in the Middle East's ever-changing power relations - regional alliances rendered even more volatile in the aftermath of the so-called Arab Spring, that unsettled the ruling elites' long-standing political arrangements.

The peace talks on Syria recently held in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan (ruled by despot Nursultan Nazerbayev), reflect the new realignments. Organised under the sponsorship of Russia, Turkey, and Iran, they testify to the recent decline of US imperialism's influence in the Middle East, and the more assertive geopolitical role played by Russia.

Erdogan and Putin

While the US remains the world's biggest military power, its uncontested domination over world affairs is long gone. This has led to a situation whereby various other regional and international powers are willing to play by their own rules.

A pivotal axis of such a development can be seen in the tentative rapprochement, since last summer, between two opposing camps of the war in Syria: Russia, a long-time ally of Assad's regime, and Turkey, a historical partner of US imperialism and pillar of Nato, that had equipped and financed an array of right-wing Islamist forces in the hope of bringing the Syrian regime down.

The reasons for this diplomatic twist are multiple. Putin's far-ranging military intervention in Syria since the autumn of 2015 helped switch back the balance to the advantage of Assad and his regime.

In these conditions, Turkish President Erdogan's ambition for 'regime change' in Damascus was quietly brushed under the carpet.

The Kurds

Apart from Assad, the main target of the Turkish state's use of jihadist proxies in Syria was the Kurdish fighters of the YPG/YPJ (People's Protection Units/ Women's Protection Units) who, via their political arm the Democratic Union Party (PYD, an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK) had in the summer of 2012 managed to seize power in the north of Syria following the withdrawal of Assad's army.

Despite the many fault-lines in the PYD's political methods, the Kurds living there were granted rights suppressed for decades by Assad's rule, which helped reinvigorate the Kurdish people's struggle against oppression within Turkey and in the broader region.

Erdogan's attempt to use jihadist fighters to tame the Kurdish movement in northern Syria largely turned into a fiasco.

Far from being diminished, there was a prospect of having a PKK-related group of Kurdish fighters controlling a contiguous strip of land on Turkey's doorstep. Erdogan was compelled to re-adjust his priorities.

Pyrrhic victory?

The regime and its foreign backers share with the jihadist armed groups a common interest in preventing a genuinely progressive and grassroots movement for social justice and democratic rights from re-emerging.

Isis, for its part, is still entrenched in parts of Syria's northern and eastern provinces. During the final stages of the battle of Aleppo, the group managed to reconquer the desert city of Palmyra, only months after its recapture by Syrian government forces, backed by the Russian army.

This episode shows that Assad's regime is not as strong as it pretends, and that winning local battles and holding regained ground are not one and the same thing. The regime is now confronted with the need for re-establishing state authority over large swathes of hostile, populated land. This will not be an easy task, since the Syrian army is now exhausted and diminished.

A big chunk of the latest fighting has been carried through by Shia paramilitaries from Iran and Iraq and by the Lebanese Hezbollah, with Russian air support. All these people will want their share of the spoils of war, laying the ground for a country extremely difficult to administrate, torn apart by infighting and by a continued, although less intense, civil war.

Also, unless a movement emerges to rebuild a unified struggle across communities, the widespread resentment against the murderous regime of Assad could well be translated into new spikes of sectarian bloodshed and terrorist attacks in regime-controlled areas.

The desperation and alienation in the impoverished Sunni population, who have been at the receiving end of Assad's violence for years on end, will continue to provide extremist armed groups with a recruiting tool to carry on their activities.

The country is in ruins and has several hundred thousand internal refugees. This and the reconstruction will require enormous resources, something which Russia and Iran will probably be far less keen to provide than military assistance. In short, Assad's victory in Aleppo may still prove to be a pyrrhic victory.

What future?

Western imperialist powers have largely been sidelined from the talks on the future of Syria, their diplomacy being largely reduced to gestures aimed at not losing face.

The military balance on the ground implies that for now, Assad's regime and Russian imperialism have the upper hand on the battlefield, and Western powers have been forced to acclimatise to that reality.

It is also clear that Assad's army is not strong enough to initiate a new violent war of attrition against the Kurds. Yet the capitalist regimes' interests to restore a balance of power in the region might well be done at the eventual expense of ordinary Kurdish people.

Espousing a programme that unapologetically campaigns against imperialist meddling in the region's affairs will be essential for the Kurdish movement to find open ears among the working classes and poor communities in the rest of Syria and the region.

Similarly, the legitimate right for self-determination of the Kurds needs to be incorporated into the demands of the labour movement and the left - to cement the objective community of interests that exists between all the workers and poor, against all their capitalist and imperialist oppressors.

New movements for change will need to arm themselves with the lessons of the Syrian tragedy. A strong political party armed with socialist ideas could have united the workers and the poor in a revolutionary struggle against dictatorship, sectarianism and imperialism. The lack of such an alternative left the masses' struggle hijacked and crushed by various counter-revolutionary forces.

Competing militias and corrupt capitalist regimes have caused Syria to enter a process of advanced fragmentation, involving sectarian massacres, mass internal displacements and forced demographic changes.

In these conditions, the end results of the 'peace' talks are likely to entrench a de facto 'cantonisation' of the country.

However, importantly, each time the guns have fallen silent, demonstrations, albeit limited in scope, have re-emerged in various parts of Syria, against the regime, against the fundamentalist right-wingers, and against

foreign intervention.

Although such resilience under the most adverse situations shouldn't be exaggerated, these examples remain an encouraging sign that the rivers of blood spilled in the last six years have not been able to completely silence the masses' thirst for change.

Whereas the Syrian masses have experienced a critical defeat, the situation in the broader Middle East will inexorably lead to new revolutionary upheavals, which will offer new opportunities to change the course of history and heal the open wounds of the Syrian catastrophe.

Romania: mass protests against corrupt Social Democrats go on

[Mass protests](#) - which forced the ruling Social Democrats in Romania to drop their executive order decriminalising some official corruption - have continued.

The scale of the street protests has not been seen since the overthrow of the Ceausescu dictatorship in 1989. The decree would have made official corruption a crime only punishable by jail if the sums involved exceeded 200,000 Romanian lei (£38,000).

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) is the global socialist organisation which includes the Socialist Party. As CWI members in Romania say:

"With this executive order, the Social Democrats proved once more that they are not a left-wing party, who represent the interests of the working class and of oppressed social groups, but a party for the corrupt oligarchs and bureaucrats, a party whose minimal social measures are taken for the benefit of domestic capital."

- [Full analysis at socialistworld.net](#)
-

Labour Party members in Cardiff expelled for calling on councillors to refuse to make cuts

Support Cardiff's no-cuts three!

A Cardiff Against The Cuts (CATC) press release

Cardiff Against The Cuts has learned that three members of the Labour Party in Cardiff have been expelled shortly after calling on the Labour council to refuse to make more funding cuts to jobs and services.

Cardiff Against The Cuts will support anyone who takes a stand against the brutal cuts that this and previous councils have carried out. We believe councillors should represent their constituents by fighting cuts to the important services and facilities for which they are responsible. CATC expresses its solidarity with the members and supports their campaign against expulsion. Their appeal letter is below.

Yours, Ross Saunders, Secretary, Cardiff Against The Cuts, 0777 221 5281

Dear brothers and sisters in the labour movement,

We are appealing to you to support our campaign against our expulsion from the Labour Party.

We believe that we've been targeted because we've called on our councillors to stop making the cuts the Tory government is demanding.

Thousands of new members have not flooded into the Labour Party to see councillors, AMs and MPs carry on and slash jobs and services like they did before Corbyn was elected: we all want to see the Labour Party take a new path and oppose austerity in deeds, not just in words.

The voters won't let the status quo stand either: we believe that if Labour doesn't prove beyond doubt that it's against austerity cuts and the big-business establishment, then we will lose ground to Plaid, the Lib Dems and even Ukip in the elections this year, none of whom will stand up for ordinary working-class people.

Please read our story below. Whether you live in Cardiff or not, whether you are a member of the Labour Party or not, if you believe Labour members should have the right to call on representatives of the Party to fight funding cuts to public services, please email us at NoCutsCardiff@gmail.com to add your name to support the campaign against expulsions.

It's not just us of course: many Labour members are still suspended or expelled as a result of the pre-Corbyn Labour machine's crackdown on his supporters.

We're organising a public meeting at 7.30pm, Thursday 9th February, upstairs in the Andrew Buchan on Albany Road in Cardiff. Please come if you want to hear more or help support our campaign.

John, João and Rich

Support Cardiff's No-Cuts Three!

Three young socialists have been expelled from the Labour Party in Cardiff for the crime of calling on councillors to fight Tory cuts.

John Williams, João Félix and Richard Edwards - all three in their twenties - joined Labour after being enthused by Jeremy Corbyn's victory in Labour's leadership election contest, hoping that this was a chance to create an anti-austerity, anti-cuts, socialist party on a massive scale.

John and João proposed a motion to their local Labour Party branch in Plasnewydd, Cardiff, on 17th January, calling on the council to refuse to make the £19 million cuts demanded by the Tory government and the Labour-led Welsh Assembly this year.

Two weeks later, on 31st January, both woke up to find a letter informing them that they had been expelled from the Labour Party.

Rich got the same letter too, after having publicly stated he was going to do the same at the next meeting of his branch in Cathays.

The motion, which called for councillors to refuse to make any cuts this year and instead spend some of £54 million in general and earmarked reserves, complies with the policy that the highest trade union in Wales, Wales TUC, adopted at its conference last year.

A legal no-cuts budget should be adopted, with the council spending the year building a campaign demanding more funding from the Westminster government, the three argued.

Supporters of Momentum in Wales (called Welsh Labour Grassroots) agreed at their Cardiff AGM on 16th January to back the call.

Last year, rather than spend emergency reserves, Cardiff council actually increased its cash stash by over £6 million! The council's own budget proposals note that over 1,600 jobs and £120 million of funding have been

cut while Labour has run the council.

The Lib Dems and Plaid made cuts too, but Labour should demonstrate that it's different.

All three have pledged to appeal the expulsion.

Rich said: "The excuse given in each of our letters is that we've been associating with activists in other socialist organisations.

"What's wrong with that? Labour should be throwing its doors open to community campaigners, activists and socialists to build as broad a united campaign against Tory austerity as we can."

João said: "The real reason is that we've challenged the councillors, and we don't regret that one bit. Representatives should be accountable to the members of an organisation."

John says: "It's my 21st birthday this Thursday - I got expelled just a couple of days before. Labour should be welcoming young people who want to get politically active, not booting them out."

This is the motion we moved:

We note:

- the terrible damage done to public services in Cardiff as a result of Tory austerity. £105 million has been cut in the three years since the last election, and £200 in the last decade. According to the Echo, a third of jobs in social services have been cut.
- that the policy of Wales TUC, Unison, Unite, GMB and many other organisations is to call for councils to set legal no-cuts budgets to allow time for a campaign to be built.
- that Cardiff council's draft budget proposes a further £19 million of cuts to services this year and an above-inflation increase in council tax.
- that Cardiff's council's reserves stand at over £50 million.
- that rather than spend these reserves, Cardiff council increased them by £6 million last year.

We believe:

- that Cardiff Labour should resist all cuts.
- that council services will be severely reduced if the cuts continue to be made.
- that if elected again, the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru will not lead a fight to retain services.
- that for Labour to retain control of Cardiff council at the next election a change of direction will be needed to win back support.

We therefore resolve:

- to call on the Cardiff Labour group to alter their budget plans, scrap the funding cut of £19 million, and instead adopt a budget which funds all current services, spending reserves and if necessary borrowing money carefully in order to meet the gap in funding while a city-wide campaign for more funding is built.
 - to then appeal for support from the electorate as the only clearly anti-austerity party.
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This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 2 February 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Campaign forces Surrey council to back down on fire station closure

Paul Couchman, Save Our Services in Surrey secretary and Socialist Party member

After weeks of protesting, [a massive demo outside the fire station](#), petitions and lobbies, Surrey council was forced to organise a public meeting to explain why it needed to axe Staines Fire Station.

When they realised that possibly a thousand people were going to turn up, angry and determined, and ready to come to the lobby organised for 23 February, they backed down and dropped plans to close the station.

This shows that serious and determined campaigning by a united community can win. The council still intends to close both our local stations when it opens the new one - with half the number of fire engines and firefighters.

Watch this space! The battle for Staines has been won, but there is still the overall war to save our fire services to win.

Some local Tory councillors and our local MP are belatedly trying to claim credit for the u-turn, but this is hard to stomach when they all belong to the same austerity-driven, neoliberal, anti-public sector Tory Party.

The credit for this victory belongs entirely to the firefighters and their supporters within the community who were prepared to stand up and be counted. Save Our Services in Surrey is proud to have been a part of that.

Regional Socialist Party conferences discuss Brexit, Corbyn and the socialist fightback

North West

Over 40 members of the Socialist Party from across the North West left our regional conference feeling confident about our analysis of tumultuous events in Britain and worldwide and the socialist solution needed.

This was reflected in the excellent finance appeal by Salford branch treasurer Sally Griffiths, which raised over £425 for the fighting fund at the conference in Liverpool on 4 February.

Judy Beishon, national executive committee member, introduced the discussion on Britain, tackling the issues of Brexit, Jeremy Corbyn and the future of the Labour Party, and the need for struggle to save the NHS.

After a report back from the [Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition \(TUSC\) conference](#), we broke up into workshops which discussed a whole range of issues from the role of women in the Russian revolution to lessons of [last year's Spanish student strike](#), to the role of branch secretaries and finance organisers.

The conference ended with Judy reporting on the inspirational work of our sister parties around the world. Members in the North West are now more enthused to build our forces in 2017.

Becci Heagney

Southern

Members from seven branches met together in Basingstoke on 5 February to discuss political developments in Britain, introduced by editor of the Socialist paper Sarah Wrack.

The discussion focussed on the key questions of Brexit and its impact on consciousness among workers and young people, the challenge facing trade union activists in resisting austerity, and how the battle in the Labour Party will be resolved.

New members attended, including Sal from Malawi who joined at the conference. We made important plans for the weeks ahead and an excellent financial appeal from our regional treasurer, Sue Atkins, raised £483, reflecting the confident and determined mood.

We are looking forward to an exciting year, building the fightback and the Socialist Party.

Nick Chaffey

Make some noise for Orgreave!

Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign

Orgreave campaigners were shocked and outraged on 31 October 2016 when new home secretary Amber Rudd announced there would be no form of [inquiry into the events of 18 June 1984](#). The government had been making all the right noises to the campaign and even Theresa May had talked about tackling the "poison of decades-old misdeeds".

May also told the Police Federation that forces needed to address "difficult truths, however unpalatable" and along with Amber Rudd had met with the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign.

During the 1984/85 miners' strike the National Union of Miners called for a [mass picket outside Orgreave coking plant](#) near Sheffield on 18 June 1984.

The police were well prepared and the South Yorkshire force had drafted in thousands of police officers from all over the country. In a move that has been described as similar to the mass 'kettling' of demonstrators today, the miners were penned in and the police unleashed a savage beating on the pickets.

It is a wonder no one was killed. Miners who were arrested were refused medical treatment for their injuries and resorted to bandaging one another with t-shirts. Gareth Pierce was a solicitor in June 1984 and recalls "walking through blood and vomit" in the police station before she insisted medical help was brought for the injured miners.

95 miners were charged with unlawful assembly and riot, a sentence which potentially could result in a life sentence.

Eventually 15 miners, all charged with riot, appeared at Sheffield Crown Court in what was intended by the prosecution to be the first of a series of trials. The trial collapsed after 48 days of hearings.

It became clear as the police witnesses trooped in and out of the court that many officers had had large parts of their statements dictated to them, and that many of them had lied in their accounts. But no police officer has ever been disciplined for the lies or violence they were involved in that day.

We are [planning our biggest and noisiest demonstration](#) on Monday 13 March at 2pm at Unit 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF.

We are hoping to show how angry our community feels about the decision, so have billed the demonstration as a "noise protest". Let's tell the government we won't be silenced!

Canterbury Socialist Party attends 'I, Daniel Blake' film night

Delia Hazrati, Canterbury Socialist Party

Socialist Party members recently organised a film night instead of our usual branch meeting - the film was ['I, Daniel Blake'](#). Beforehand we sold 17 copies of the Socialist outside the venue.

In the film we see Daniel have to jump through surreal hoops to get his 'employment and support allowance' appeal. Stats show that 55,900 people have successfully won their appeal against their ESA being denied. It was a great film, very real and splattered with dry humour.

The film was accompanied by a Q&A with local Green Party, Labour Party, Momentum and Socialist Party members involved. Questions were asked as to why Labour councils are carrying out cuts and we discussed on how charities are picking up the pieces.

Non-fiction review: Lenin on the Train

Tense, lively prologue to events which changed the world

Niall Mulholland

When the [February revolution broke out in Russia in 1917](#) and the Tsar was overthrown, Vladimir Lenin was living in exile in Switzerland.

Given his implacable opposition to the imperialist World War One, it was always going to be a major feat for the Bolshevik leader to return to Russia across countries at war, to lead the principled socialist opposition to the new capitalist Provisional Government.

In 'Lenin on the Train', Catherine Merridale gives a lively narrative of Lenin's efforts to get back to revolutionary Russia - "a journey that changed the world" - despite her condemnation of the Bolsheviks once they were in power.

She brings out the crucial role of Lenin, from abroad and on return to Russia, in politically re-orientating the Bolsheviks, so that they were able to go on to lead millions of workers, soldiers and poor peasants and take power in October.

Caught unawares

The Tsarist regime and British diplomatic sources were largely caught unawares by the February revolution, which broke out over food shortages and as seemingly endless war exacted a huge death toll. And they were in denial.

"The striking feature of the British diplomatic and intelligence correspondence at this point was its refusal to accept the finality (let alone legitimacy) of the February Revolution as a whole," Merridale notes.

Lenin urgently looked for a way back to Russia and explored several options. He was approached indirectly by the notorious intriguer and former Marxist thinker, Alexander Helphand (also known as Parvus), who suggested striking a deal with the German regime to allow Lenin and other socialists to return to Russia in a 'sealed' train across German territory.

The German generals, looking over their shoulders as the USA prepared to enter the war, gambled that the return of Lenin and other revolutionaries would worsen Russia's turmoil, forcing the country out of the war. They got much more than they bargained for - a socialist revolution in Russia which inspired the overthrow of the Kaiser and a revolution which threatened the existence of German capitalism.

Merridale shows how Lenin was extremely hesitant about taking up this offer, as he correctly feared it would be used by his political enemies to denounce him as a "German agent." But faced with no other viable option to get back to Russia, Lenin very reluctantly went along with the scheme.

However, he insisted at all times on his full political independence from German imperialism and its interests.

Lenin continued to write and publicly speak on how he opposed all the imperialist warring nations, including Russia and Germany.

He insisted the revolutionaries travelled by third-class coach in the train and that a chalk line drawn across the floor of the carriage separated the Russians from their German military 'minders'.

Merridale discusses in detail the allegation made by Lenin's enemies in 1917, and ever since, that he received "German gold". She concludes that "instead of proof there were only probabilities and lies" to back up this claim which is used to try to discredit Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and to airbrush the role of the masses in the revolution.

Furthermore, she comments that Lenin was no more an agent of imperialism than Georgi Plekhanov, the 'father of Russian Marxism', who was sent back to Russia with the aid of imperialist Britain. For Plekhanov, "though a Marxist, was a sound man on the war, a patriot who could tell other socialists exactly where their duty lay."

As well as the Provisional Government, the February revolution threw up the soviet (council) of workers' deputies, a "dual power" rivalling the capitalist administration. But on the day Lenin's train pulled out of Zurich station, 27 March, the Provisional Government declared, with "an endorsement in the name of the soviet," it would continue the war.

Lenin insisted that the Bolsheviks must resolutely oppose the treacherous Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries at that time leading the soviets.

Merridale describes Lenin's growing exasperation with the vacillating leadership of the Bolsheviks in Russia, particularly Kamenev and Stalin. In the pages of the party paper, Pravda, Kamenev argued that Russia "would still have to fight and win its war, albeit mainly to defend the gains of the revolution..."

Although Kamenev was "censored" by the local party ("and Stalin silently abandoned him"), confusion reigned inside the Bolsheviks until Lenin's return. Lenin's "telegram of early March had been explicit: no support for the Provisional Government, no cooperation with other parties... for a transfer of power from the bourgeois to a workers' militia or to soviets..."

"The whole line ruled out any coalition with the Mensheviks. The war, he had insisted, was a bloody capitalist adventure, and not what Kerensky was now calling a fight for revolutionary self-defence."

Jubilant

On reaching Finland Station, Petrograd, Lenin told a large jubilant crowd to prepare for socialist revolution. "His slogans felt like a sudden electric shock... a call to life, a blinding glimpse of futures some had privately begun to doubt," Merridale writes.

The last chapter brings out Merridale's political hostility towards Lenin. She claims the October revolution was a "coup" that led to "dictatorship." In doing so, Merridale dismisses a genuine revolution involving millions and conflates the early years of working class rule with later Stalinist counter-revolutionary tyranny.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the October revolution marked the first time the working class came to power successfully and started to carry out the socialist transformation of society against enormous odds.

- 'Lenin on the Train' - hardback £25 or £10 paperback due in April. Order from Socialist Books, PO Box 24697, E11 1YD, bookshop@socialistparty.org.uk or leftbooks.co.uk
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Smearing socialism by attacking the arts

James Ivens

The Russian revolution a hundred years ago is still a terrifying calamity - for billionaire thieves, warmongers and their political defenders. But for the working class, it meant a boom in living standards, freedom and imagination.

Some of the most spectacular evidence of this is Russian revolutionary art. [Guardian arts columnist Jonathan Jones considers it "undoubtedly some of the most powerful of the 20th century."](#) But he also attacks the coming exhibition 'Revolution' at the Royal Academy of Arts (RA). Apparently it sanitises a "call to merciless violence" which "anticipated Nazism."

This characterisation of the revolution is gibberish.

Democracy

Through 'soviets' - elected workers' councils - democracy escaped the unaccountable, capitalist-bought parliament, extending to every workplace and community. Soviets planned production to try to meet the material needs of all, not fatten the profits of the super-rich.

No wonder so many new and exciting artistic movements exploded. Workers and peasants finally had the possibility of the time, resources and control to make and enjoy art fully.

There certainly was "merciless violence," though. Generals loyal to the old regime, fresh from gunning down peaceful marches for bread, watched their power and prestige vanish overnight. Backed by 21 invading armies from various capitalist governments, they initiated a hellish civil war.

Death and famine were the results. A bruised and largely illiterate surviving population struggled to control a rising backward-looking bureaucracy carried over from the Tsar's administration. The bureaucracy only triumphed because later international revolutionary movements failed, often consciously held back Stalinist officialdom.

Russia's inspirational revolutionary art reflects all these developments. Electric optimism and innovation, then mortal danger. Only after the avoidable isolation and decay does it finally reflect suffocation by a bureaucratic dictatorship.

Jones is unlikely to know the exhibition's actual political stance, writing well before it opens. But in fact, the RA's own material seems to take a similar line to his.

'Propaganda'

Publicising the exhibition, [the RA ran an article by Martin Sixsmith](#), a former adviser to the Blair government. He claims that Vladimir Lenin, one of the leaders of the revolution, had this attitude: "I'm no good at art. Art for me is just an appendage, and when its use as propaganda - which we need at the moment - is over, we'll cut it out as useless: snip, snip!"

This second-hand personal aside, reported by the portrait artist Yury Annenkov, is used to conflate Lenin's artistic liberties with Stalin's smothering censorship. But the groundswell of free artistic expression and engagement the soviets funded under Lenin - including movements he and others disliked, such as director Vsevolod Meyerhold's 'biomechanics' and political rivals in 'Proletkult' - contradicts it wholly.

Stalin later had Meyerhold executed. He banished Lenin's co-leader Leon Trotsky.

Trotsky, though, fought a tireless battle against Stalinism, including writing the '[Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art](#)'. The Socialist Party stands proudly in this tradition. As the 'Manifesto' concludes:

"Our aims: the independence of art - for the revolution; the revolution - for the complete liberation of art!"

- More on the revolution's real history: 1917revolution.org
 - More on how art flourished in the revolution in a future issue of the Socialist
 - 'Revolution' at the RA: 11 February - 17 April 2017, tickets from royalacademy.org.uk
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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.

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.

Roger retires

The North West region of Unison council met on 4 February in Huyton, Knowsley. The meeting discussed and agreed a number of progressive motions. It was the last regional council meeting for Socialist Party member Roger Bannister who is due to retire from work.

A number of verbal tributes were made to Roger from both Regional Secretary Kevan Nelson, and Paula Barker, the regional convenor. They both gave examples of how during the last 40 years Roger has been a leader at branch, regional and national level on behalf of Unison members.

A standing ovation from the whole meeting greeted Roger when he came to the platform to accept his gifts from his union. Roger gave a powerful and emotional speech which was greeted by another standing ovation from the whole meeting.

Jeff Bowe, the incoming branch secretary for Knowsley Unison, paid tribute to Roger the principled socialist. Roger led and won disputes in his branch, he always rolled his sleeves up and conducted the day-to-day case work alongside raising the banner of socialism within his trade union. Respect, comrade.

Rachael Potter, Merseyside Socialist Party

Ambulance alert

The North West Ambulance Service has just been inspected and [found to be "requiring improvement."](#) The biggest worry is lack of staff, with the service carrying nearly 6% vacancies. Whistle-blowers have told the BBC that often so-called 'emergency medical technicians' are sent out instead of fully-trained paramedics.

Now, to add to their woes - and our worries - the ambulance station in Rawtenstall, Lancashire has had its rent hiked by over 1,500%, from £1,300 to £19,945 a year. And their landlord is another part of the NHS!

The rent at the ambulance station is controlled by the misnamed 'Community Health Partnerships', a company owned by the Department of Health, which sets up 'public-private partnerships' and manages the NHS estate. Russ McLean of East Lancashire Patient Voice commented: "It's diabolical that companies would seek to make money off the back of people seeking to provide life-saving services."

Unable to afford the rent hike, the ambulance service is relocating to a police station in a nearby town.

This is what financial pressures, privatisation and fragmentation are doing to the NHS - greedy landlords forcing the eviction of front-line services.

Paul Gerrard, National Union of Teachers, Bury

Strike solidarity

A strike of agency workers working for Sri Lanka Telecom, demanding parity of pay and conditions with directly employed workers and permanency of employment, has been going on for more than a month. They have been camped outside the main building, but the employer has won a court injunction ordering them to move.

In Britain, the Communication Workers Union has had a long-running dispute with BT over employing agency workers on permanent jobs for the last decade or so. The main provider of BT agency workers is the same - Manpower. The similarity of the two disputes shows how the bosses organise globally. Workers need to organise in the same fashion.

Please send messages of support to srinathusp@gmail.com.

Clive Walder, former BT employee

Play praise

I was very impressed and inspired by the theatre review of ['The Seven Acts of Mercy' in issue 932](#).

I had seen an advert for the play and had wanted to see it but am unable to go to the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. I was hoping it might come to Huddersfield or Leeds later.

I was so happy to read Mark Baker's review. I got out my art DVD on Caravaggio and saw the paintings for myself and I found one of my little books written by a priest friend of mine on The Seven Acts of Mercy.

I had seen 'I, Daniel Blake' and was deeply moved by the film, so the reviewed play must be absolutely tremendous as described by Mark. Thank you for the opportunity to get a glimpse of the play through Mark's eye. Excellent review!

I do hope many more people will be able to see this play, where "the voice of the dispossessed speaks loud and clear" with "the desire to rid the world of capitalist exploitation."

Mary Rodwell, Huddersfield
