

Build a movement to save our NHS

Campaign, strike, occupy

- For mass action to defend the NHS, with coordinated strike action at its heart
- Stop STPs and demand all councils refuse to cooperate
- No cuts, closures or job losses in the NHS
- End the pay freeze! Decent pay for all NHS staff. No attacks on NHS workers' pensions or conditions
- Renationalise our NHS! Scrap PFI and all privatisation schemes. Cancel all PFI debt
- Reverse council cuts to social care to relieve the beds crisis. Councils should not be cutting care for the elderly and disabled - Labour-led ones especially!
- Nationalise the profiteering big drugs companies
- For a comprehensive, high quality NHS, under democratic control, with care free at the point of use - a socialist NHS

Hannah Sell, Socialist Party deputy general secretary

As we all know, [our health service is already in a critical condition](#) - driven to breaking point by cuts, closures and privatisation. The national demonstration on 4 March is an important step forward in the battle to save it.

Now we need to use it as a springboard to build a massive movement that can defeat the Tory government's attempt to finish off the NHS.

The government is driving to [cut £22 billion from the NHS by 2020](#), on top of the [£15 billion cut last parliament](#). They are attempting to cover up these latest cuts by hiding them under the guise of 'sustainability and transformation plans' (STPs).

We have to expose the con - [STPs are about nothing more than slashing, trashing and privatising our NHS](#). The King's Fund think-tank has already said [two-thirds of all STP plans will involve cuts and closures of hospitals](#).

But [the Tories are weak](#) and can be beaten. Unelected as prime minister - with a wafer-thin majority in parliament - Theresa May could find the STPs are her 'poll tax'.

Her role model, [Maggie Thatcher, was thrown out of office along with her hated poll tax](#), after 18 million refused to pay it. This movement was led by the Socialist Party (then called Militant).

The anti-poll tax movement brought together wide sections of working class and middle class people, in rural as well as urban areas. The same potential exists for a movement in defence of our NHS.

Campaigns

From the 4 March demonstration we need to build local campaign groups [in all 44 STP areas](#), brought together under a national umbrella, [as Health Campaigns Together has begun to do](#). As a next step, Health Campaigns Together should name the day for a nationwide day of protest, calling on local trade unions to join the campaigns.

We should build 44 massive local demonstrations on the same day to stamp on the STPs! That should be followed by a Trade Union Congress (TUC) national demonstration to save the NHS - mobilised for by all trade unions and by the Labour leadership.

Labour can play a vital role in building this movement. It is good that Jeremy Corbyn plans to address the demo. Now he should use his position as Labour leader to campaign for a mass movement to renationalise the NHS.

Such a stand would help give people confidence to fight back, and make clear to millions the advantages of an anti-austerity Labour leader.

Jeremy should also [call on the 100 or so Labour-led councils to stop making cuts now](#), including cuts to social care, and to reject their local STP; STPs include local authorities. So far a handful has done so, but if every Labour council was to publicly oppose its local STP, the whole thing would become unworkable.

The [heroic strike action taken by junior doctors](#), who had huge popular support, gave a glimpse of the possibility of striking to defend the NHS. Unfortunately, the TUC and the leaders of the other health unions [did not organise the necessary solidarity action](#) in support of the doctors' stand.

The 4 March demonstration has been backed by the major health trade unions - in the case of Unison, the largest health union, as a result of sustained pressure from its members. But that is only a beginning of what is needed.

Strikes

As well as helping to build demonstrations and community campaigns to save our NHS, which can raise the confidence of health workers, health trade unions need to prepare to organise coordinated strikes to break the pay freeze and stop the huge cuts and closures. Occupations to stop closures can also play an important role.

The Socialist Party calls for a comprehensive, high-quality NHS, under democratic control, with care free at the point of use. To do this [we need to take all elements of the health service into public ownership](#), to stop private companies profiting from our ill health.

We need to reverse the Tory privatisation drive, and [scrap the 'private finance initiative'](#) and all other forms of privatisation that New Labour expanded massively when it was in government. The outsourced 'independent sector treatment centres' should be brought back under NHS ownership and control.

At the same time, the social care sector should be brought into democratic public ownership and properly funded. The pharmaceutical companies that make billions from our ill health should also be nationalised. [Pharmaceutical products currently cost the NHS in England about 13% of its budget annually](#), about £16 billion.

Reinstate the bursaries for student nurses now!

Kate Youngs, student nurse, Leeds

The Tories' [scrapping of nursing training bursaries](#) has already led to a [23% decline in university applications](#) for this coming year for all nursing courses, a lot of these being mature students who often bring more life skills to the job.

As a student information officer for nursing union RCN, I approached the Leeds University Union executive. They repeated their "promises to lobby the government, university and MPs to not scrap the NHS bursaries."

Though the scrapping has already happened, the student union has promised "to support all students in any campaigning around this issue." It provided transport for 52 University of Leeds students to voice their concerns [as part of the 4 March protest](#).

Join me and thousands of others in making our voices heard. Let's ensure everyone is cared for in their time of need in a safe environment, where everyone can access the facilities we should all be entitled to, by healthcare staff who are well-trained and fully supported.

If we all fight together then anything is possible.

Grantham: 1,000 march for reopening of A&E

On Saturday, over 1,000 people marched through the centre of Grantham, in the rain, to express their anger and disgust at the continued [closure of the A&E department at Grantham hospital](#).

The message from rally speakers to health minister Jeremy Hunt and those determined to keep the A&E department closed was clear: "We are not going away!" The affection for this hospital was evident as people spoke about the outstanding care they and their loved ones had received.

[Next Saturday's national demonstration](#) in London will show we've wised up to the government's plans for the destruction of our NHS. It must be brought back into public ownership, with all privateers kicked out, so that patients' needs come before profits for the government's rich friends.

Karen Seymour

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 27 February 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

Profiteers behind NHS England missing paperwork scandal

James Ivens

NHS England chiefs [tried to cover up more than half a million missing medical letters](#), it seems.

Internal courier 'NHS Shared Business Services' - a private company - wrongly warehoused them instead of delivering them. The correspondence apparently includes thousands of important test results and diagnosis reports.

Yet again, we find that [private profiteers cannot be trusted with public services](#). Nor can unaccountable senior bureaucrats.

And Tory health secretary Jeremy Hunt also faces accusations of involvement.

Kick out the Tory thieves. Scrap the anarchy of [Blairite Labour's NHS 'internal market'](#). Take the whole health service into public ownership - under the democratic control and management of workers and service users.

Join the protest against heart centre closure consultation 'farce'

Families of heart patients at the [threatened East Midlands Congenital Heart Centre at Glenfield Hospital](#) have condemned NHS England for a "totally inadequate" public consultation due in Leicester on 9 March.

[Only 96 seats were available](#) to the public and patients. People attempting to register on NHS England's website are now being told the event is full.

Campaigners plan to protest outside the meeting at the Tigers' Welford Road ground from 4.30pm onwards on 9 March.

Socialist Party member [Steve Score, spokesperson for the Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre campaign](#), said: "On 11 February 2,000 people marched in Leicester to oppose the ending of congenital heart surgery here, and over 130,000 local people signed the petition that was presented at 10 Downing Street.

"A meeting on a weekday evening makes it difficult for many parents to attend anyway, especially if they work and live a distance away.

"Why have they booked such a small room? The Tigers ground has the facilities for a much larger meeting. As parents, families and members of the public we demand to have our voice heard."

NHS v RBS

Under the Tory government's [misnamed 'sustainability and transformation plans'](#), a massive £22 billion of "efficiency savings" - i.e. cuts - will be rammed through the NHS in England by 2020.

The Tories clearly aren't prepared to tolerate 'loss-making' public institutions, unless the publicly owned body is the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS).

RBS has [reported losses of £7 billion last year](#), taking its total losses since the Blairites' 2008 government bailout to more than £58 billion.

Simon Carter

- Organise against austerity
- Stop Trump - fight sexism
- Russian revolution 1917

International Women's Day

Fighting for liberation and socialism

- Organise to resist! 1917-2017

Tessa Warrington, Leicester Socialist Party

Women are on the move. They're on the move against Donald Trump in the US with [millions on the 'women's marches'](#). They're on the move against attacks on [reproductive rights in Ireland](#) and [Poland with a huge women's strike](#) last year.

They're on the move against the [legalisation of child rape in Turkey](#) with massive demonstrations. And they're going to be on the move again on 8 March - International Women's Day.

This year's International Women's Day commemorates the 100th anniversary of the [heroic struggle of women textile workers in St Peterburg](#) who walked out in unofficial strike action in 1917, demanding bread and herrings to feed their families. That strike marked [the start of the Russian revolution](#), a struggle against the oppressive monarchy but also against the capitalist system.

100 years later women are still suffering under capitalism. The impact of [austerity has been disproportionate on women](#). We make up the majority of the public sector workforce facing job cuts.

We rely on child benefits, maternity pay and flexible working to maintain a degree of financial independence while raising our children, all of which are now under attack.

Cuts

Access to contraception, safe abortions and safe childbirth are all threatened with the massive [£22 billion scheduled cuts to the NHS](#).

We are the most likely to take on caring for the elderly as public [care homes are closed and privatised](#), and suffer increased domestic and sexual violence as [women's refuges and rape crisis centres are shut down](#). We have many reasons to be angry, many reasons to move into action.

For the first time ever, [women make up the majority of trade union members](#) in this country. Making appeals to women that fighting austerity is necessary to fighting their own oppression is a key task for the trade unions.

The international movements clearly show that many women are open to methods traditionally used by workers' struggles, like strikes, and to socialist ideas. We need those women to [join the Socialist Party](#) to fight for an alternative in the struggles to come.

#DayWithoutAWoman

Protests and walkouts around the world for International Women's Day

This year's International Women's Day is of particular significance. Firstly, we celebrate the [hundredth anniversary of the start of the Russian revolution](#).

Secondly, the movement against Trump, and in particular the [massive 'women's marches' that took place in January](#), show the potential for a new phase of struggle against sexism and the oppression of women.

Coming in the midst of the anti-Trump movement, there are plans in various countries for bigger scale protests on International Women's Day than has been the case in recent years. Importantly, the idea of strike action is being discussed - in part inspired by [last year's 'women's strike' in Poland](#) as part of the successful movement to prevent the implementation of a full ban on abortion.

[Socialist Alternative, our cothinkers in the US, write](#): "In the face of record-breaking, historic resistance and record-low poll numbers, Trump isn't stepping back, he aims to speed up the attacks. We cannot wait until the next election. We need to step up our protests now."

Strike

They point to [an article in the Guardian by Angela Davis and others](#) who wrote: "The massive women's marches of 21 January may mark the beginning of a new wave of militant feminist struggle. As a first step, we propose to help build an international strike against male violence and in defence of reproductive rights on 8 March."

Socialist Alternative says: "This call to action should be taken up and organised by the major women's organisations and the labour movement... Socialist Alternative calls on everybody to support this strike and participate in it where it is possible to do so without risking your job or other retaliation."

Given the short build up to this date however, they also call for it to be used as a springboard for bigger action, if possible a one-day national strike, on 1 May - international workers' day.

In Spain, young people are showing the way, led by [Sindicato de Estudiantes \(SE - student union\)](#). SE has launched a new initiative 'Libres y combativas' (free and combative - a slogan of the Spanish revolution in the 1930s).

They write: "The Student Union has made the call to the whole student movement to walk out of classes on 8 March from 12-1pm and gather in the grounds of the schools and campuses to say: Enough with sexist violence! In defence of women's rights! Down with Trump and all governments that encourage sexism and our oppression!"

Not one less

Big protests and some strikes are expected in Latin America, where, particularly in Argentina, there was a one-hour walkout by many women in October in protest against sexual violence, under the banner 'not one less'.

Members of our sister party in Brazil told us: "Protests are organised around two main slogans - against the pension reforms, which will hit women hardest, and against femicide. There will be some strike action - for example of teachers in Sao Paulo."

Members of our sister party in Ireland tell us: "In Ireland, the call for a 'Strike 4 Repeal' will see school and college students, and some workers, walking out to demand an immediate referendum to lift the abortion ban. There will also be a major march to parliament in the evening.

"Socialist Party activists, as part of the socialist feminist campaign Rosa, will join in these events, and will be part of a bus going to five cities from 6-8 March, defying the abortion ban by providing safe abortions pills in conjunction with Women On Web."

- For updates on these events see socialistworld.net
 - For some of our meetings and other events in England and Wales, see socialistparty.org.uk/whatson
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Lessons of the Russian revolution for women's struggle today

Corinthia Ward, Birmingham Socialist Party

The 1917 Russian revolution was a momentous moment in working class history, in which women played a pivotal and active role. It started with a strike by women textile workers on 8 March (International Women's Day - 23 February according to the calendar in use in Russia at the time).

Not able to take their impoverished conditions and food shortages anymore, they took spontaneous strike action using the slogan "bread and herrings". The women called on the metal workers to join them on their strike, to demand not only food but peace - an end to Russia's part in the devastatingly bloody World War One.

The Bolsheviks (the party which led the movement of workers and peasants to overthrow capitalism and landlordism in 1917) recognised the need to address issues that specifically affected women and to free them from the burden of work in the home. This was made a key feature in the Bolsheviks' political programme.

After the revolution, women experienced life like never before. Within a short time of the fall of the Tsar - under whose rule they had been severely oppressed and subject to a life of drudgery - women were able to access freedoms their counterparts in capitalist countries like Britain and Germany were years away from achieving.

Communal laundries and restaurants began to be established. They provided women with time each day that they had previously been robbed of, opening the possibility of families being able to spend quality time together, and for women to have more independence.

What may seem most surprising to modern audiences is that one of the benefits to come out of the revolution was free and legal abortions. Having control over their own bodies is still an issue many women are fighting

[for](#), even in what are regarded as 'advanced' capitalist countries, such as the US and Ireland.

Under Tsarism it wasn't unusual for women to give birth on the factory floor. The fact that a relatively short time later they had access to safe abortion illustrates what progress can be achieved when workers have democratic control over the running of their society.

Other important gains for women included the right to vote, equal pay for equal work, and the start of free childcare nurseries. Marriage became merely a legal proceeding and either partner could file for a divorce.

The Bolsheviks understood it wouldn't just be about giving women the same opportunities and rights as men but also about changing the sexist attitudes deeply embedded in society. In the cities and large towns, where many women had jobs in factories, the idea of women having lives outside of the family and of breaking from their 'traditional' roles gained support more easily, especially among younger women.

But in the countryside, the still largely feudal structure of society made it much harder to improve the lot of women. The Bolsheviks were determined to solve this by conscious campaigning to engage with women in the countryside, encouraging them to be active participants in creating a new society.

Zhenotdel

In 1919 the Zhenotdel, a special women's department, was set up to concentrate on these issues with women's 'commissions' to ensure women were involved at every level of both the Bolshevik party and society. The Zhenotdel addressed issues such as childcare, housing, public health and prostitution.

The department held conferences made up of working class and peasant women delegates. Young working class women were part of an outreach project with women in remote areas. Women were also seconded to other government departments and party work.

As most women during this period were illiterate, the Zhenotdel had to think up innovative ways to connect with them such as exhibitions, discussions and visual posters - as well as producing newspapers and journals for those who could read.

The efforts of the revolution meant every aspect of Russian life was being transformed, including sex and relationships. Young people began questioning expected personal arrangements and searching for new and meaningful ways to engage in living and relating to one another.

So what went wrong? Why is it that a country where women made important steps towards liberation in 1917, a hundred years later has recently [passed legislation decriminalising domestic abuse](#)?

The leaders of the Russian revolution from the beginning saw it as the first step in the struggle for socialism worldwide. They understood that the Soviet Union would not survive if it was left isolated.

If advanced capitalist countries like Britain and Germany had successful revolutions of their own, the huge resources of these countries could have been planned to meet the needs of all and to aid the development of socialism in the Soviet Union. But despite many big movements of workers inspired by events in Russia, this did not happen, due to the failings of workers' and socialist leaders internationally.

The capitalist classes around the world quarantined Russia in order to starve socialism to death. By 1920 Russia's output of manufactured goods was 12.9% of what it had been in 1913.

The post-revolution civil war and military attacks from capitalist, imperialist countries had ravished most of Russia's wealth and killed millions of workers and peasants. Food shortages meant millions also died from famine - in 1919-1920 alone the figure was seven and a half million.

These conditions started to unravel the hard work done by the Bolsheviks and the working class, including through the Zhenotdel. In the city of Petrograd (St Petersburg) by 1923 58% of those who were unemployed were women.

Even though women were legally able to divorce, many could not afford to leave the 'security' of the family and were therefore forced to stay in unhappy marriages.

Communal restaurants were never opened as widely in the countryside and so remained non-existent for many peasants. And even the ones in the cities were losing support. Food shortages meant the food being provided was of poor quality, making many turn away from it.

The Zhenotdel, which had taken good initiatives in raising women's consciousness and ensuring their needs were addressed by the party and the government, had started to disintegrate. Staff shortages and the effects of civil war meant the women who worked in the department themselves were exhausted and overburdened with work and family responsibilities.

In this situation it was inevitable that a bureaucratic caste would develop and take control, despite the heroic opposition of countless Russian workers, led by Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of the revolution.

Stalinism

A small layer of the government, centred around Stalin, argued that rather than arguing for a socialist world, Russia should focus on developing itself alone. This bureaucratic elite was more concerned with maintaining its own position than working towards the democratic working class control of society.

Horribly, any socialists who fought against this came to be witch-hunted by Stalin and his supporters.

The bureaucracy still presided over a planned economy, but did so in a top-down way instead of soviets (democratic workers' councils) being in control. The economy grew stronger, but the bureaucratic elite creamed off huge wealth at the expense of the majority; and without democracy, the quality of goods and services deteriorated.

The Stalinist regime consciously worked to reintroduce the institution of the home with defined gender roles, in part to condition people into 'knowing their place' and not questioning authority.

The communal facilities and nurseries were deliberately starved of investment and support. Abortion clinics were underfunded to the detriment of women's safety, which was then used as an excuse by the government to make abortion illegal once again.

Where posters had once been made to connect with illiterate women about liberating themselves, and artwork had depicted strong women for International Women's Day, Stalin used propaganda which could be compared to advertisements in the US.

Women were portrayed as beauties holding flowers and International Women's Day was turned into a day to buy the women in your life presents, not to remember the struggles women faced in shaping their society.

But in the early years of the revolution, a glimpse had been seen of what socialism could achieve, including for women. That has important lessons for today.

The recent 'women's marches' against Trump in various countries showed an angry mood against sexism, and also a big sense of internationalism and solidarity among those fighting against oppression. This movement and all struggles against inequality and reactionary ideas must be linked to the fight for international socialism.

We need to criticise the current system and how it effectively places women as second class citizens in order to exploit them.

But what is also needed is to offer an alternative. It is within the very nature of a system divided by class to divide people in other ways and have some groups more privileged than others - women will always be among those who pay a price for this.

Socialist society

A socialist society would involve all people having a say in how their workplace, their town, and their world is run. Through democratic collective ownership of the biggest sections of the economy, we would be able to meet the needs of the majority rather than only the profits of the tiny few. These factors could begin to end all oppression and exploitation.

In order to win socialist change, we need the participation of the mass of the working class. The way forward for all those determined to fight for genuine equality for women must therefore include linking with the workers' movement and fighting to end capitalism once and for all and to replace it with democratic, international socialism.

Further reading

- It doesn't have to be like this - women and socialism by Christine Thomas £6
- The Emancipation of women by VI Lenin, £7.95
- Women and the Family by Leon Trotsky, £8.50
- A love of Worker Bees and A Great Love by Alexandra Kollontai, £18
- History of the Russian Revolution by Leon Trotsky £20
- Ten Days That Shook the World by John Reed, £6.99
- In Defence of October by Leon Trotsky, £1.00
- The April Theses by VI Lenin, £2.00
- National Liberation, Socialism and Imperialism by VI Lenin, £6.95

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Why I joined the Socialist Party

Michaela, Huddersfield Socialist Party

Back in August last year, I attended a [#KeepCorbyn rally in Bradford](#) with my partner. I had recently become interested in current affairs with the Brexit vote and the immediate fallout from the mainstream politicians.

I listened to several speakers and was impressed with what I heard from two Socialist Party members (Tanis Belsham-Wray and Peter Robson).

I spoke to Peter afterwards, and he invited me to a branch meeting a couple of days later. I quickly found a great circle of like-minded comrades and joined the branch soon after with my partner.

Through speaking in meetings, I felt myself growing more confident.

We spearheaded a [campaign to keep a local homeless shelter open](#) after Bradford Council had decided to award a new contract to a lesser provider. Immediately I felt empowered by being a part of something that was striving to stop the council cuts and trying to make a change.

I've now moved to Huddersfield, and while I will be sorry to leave the Bradford branch (and some great comrades!) I am looking forward to getting stuck in and helping to make a difference in the local and national struggles.

I will be attending the [NHS demo on 4 March](#) and I'm really looking forward to it as it will be my first demo!

Film review: Hidden Figures

How black women fought racism and sexism at Nasa

Sarah Wrack

Space rockets and the struggle against racism and sexism might seem an odd combination but Hidden Figures definitely pulls it off. It's an interesting, funny, and moving account - based on a true story - of three black women's struggle to reach their potential in 1960s America.

Katherine, Mary and Dorothy are mathematical geniuses.

They have already overcome huge obstacles. In an early scene, Katherine receives a scholarship to the only school in Virginia that offers education for black children beyond the eighth grade. They become human 'computers' on Nasa's Space Task Group, [in the midst of the space race](#) with the Soviet Union.

But they and the other black computers remain segregated from the white women performing the same role, working in a separate building.

As women, it is deemed impossible for them to have any more advanced role at Nasa - despite them showing time and again that they are some of the organisation's greatest minds. And throughout the film a mainframe physical computer is being installed, threatening to replace all of the women's jobs.

While not a film about the [collective struggle of the civil rights movement](#) or the general political situation in the US in the 1960s, neither does Hidden Figures ignore this context.

Cleverly interspersed throughout the film are real historical TV and radio clips of not only the rocket launches, but also events like the bombing of a Freedom Riders bus, and speeches by Martin Luther King Jr and President John F Kennedy.

Mary's husband, who is active in the civil rights movement, is initially hostile to her applying for the qualifications she needs to become an engineer - no black woman had ever previously been a Nasa engineer - saying: "You can't apply for freedom - it's got to be demanded, taken."

But the film is a reminder that while mass movements are the driving force of change, they are often mirrored by millions of individual acts of defiance - from the everyday to the extraordinary.

Mary goes to court to demand her right to take evening classes at a whites-only high school, which does allow her to go on to become a qualified engineer. Dorothy, who has been acting as supervisor for the black computers without the respective pay, turns the threat posed by the mainframe to their advantage.

She teaches herself, and then the rest of the group, computer programming - and goes on to become a leading expert in this at Nasa.

Katherine, whose calculation skills prove indispensable to the whole mission, repeatedly lists herself as co-author of reports she has worked on, despite being told to remove it every time.

The film gives glimpses - albeit sanitised versions - of the prejudice and abuse black people faced at this time in all fields. We see the backward opinions of several of their colleagues at Nasa.

But it also shows - again in simplified Hollywood fashion - the impact of experience, especially of working together, on tackling some of those attitudes.

Whether you have an interest in this period of social or scientific history, or just enjoy a classic Hollywood beating-the-odds story, this is a well-made and worth-seeing account of one small piece of the puzzle.

Fight like Poplar's women councillors to change the lives of family carers

Sue Powell Gloucestershire Socialist Party

Looking at the history of the [Poplar councillors, imprisoned in 1921 for fighting the Tory government's](#) appalling conditions, it struck me that I have only come across two real-life "Minnies".

One was the socialist suffragette Minnie Lansbury, one of the Poplar councillors. The other was my great aunt.

Both were born around the same time to families with migrant backgrounds in London, both lived hard lives and struggled to the end. The comparison ends there. While the councillor fought for political change, my great aunt spent most of her entire adult life as a carer.

When Minnie Lansbury died - probably due to ill-health brought on by appalling prison conditions - her father-in-law George said: "Minnie, in her 32 years, crammed double that number of years' work compared with what many of us are able to accomplish.

"Her glory lies in the fact that with all her gifts and talents one thought dominated her whole being night and day: How shall we help the poor, the weak, the fallen, weary and heavy-laden, to help themselves?"

It is significant that Minnie Lansbury wanted to help people fight against poor conditions and oppression. She rejected the idea of charity. Minnie Lansbury's life was short but exceptional.

My great aunt Minnie won't go down in history: she scarcely featured in my life as she devoted herself to caring for her brain-damaged son. He was severely affected by epilepsy, frequent head injuries and possibly the medication given in those days.

She and her husband went without a holiday for 40 years; few of their relatives visited. My great aunt cared for his needs, washing, lifting and dressing him with the help of her husband, struggling on without complaint.

Even in the heyday of the welfare state, parents of disabled children received little help, understanding or support. The Tories want to drive us back to the days when family care was the norm.

In my Unite Community branch, we have been hearing many stories of people struggling to care for parents with dementia, sick partners, disturbed and violent grandchildren. So many stories like these are untold.

George Lansbury, Minnie's father in law, the leader of Poplar council and later the Labour Party, said: "When a soldier like Minnie passes on, it only means their presence is withdrawn, their life and work remaining an inspiration and a call to us each to close the ranks and continue our march breast forward."

My great aunt was one of millions of kindly, hardworking women who sacrificed their own fulfilment for their loved ones. As socialists, we stand with carers, mothers and grandmothers.

My cheery, lovely aunt Minnie had an abundance of love, but I was too young and inexperienced to ask how she really felt about her life, what she had wanted from it, and how it might have been if more social care was available.

If we want women to be liberated and my great aunt's example to be a thing of the past, [we must fight like Minnie Lansbury and her fellow councillors.](#)

Copeland and Stoke byelections: Break with Labour Blairism wasn't on offer

The dramatic byelections that reached their conclusion on 23 February were initially triggered by the resignation of two [Blairite MPs - Tristram Hunt](#) and Jamie Reed. Each of these men chose to exchange their parliamentary seat for a fat-cat executive job. But it wouldn't be accurate to ascribe personal advancement as the sole motivation for the resignations. Clearly there was also a political agenda at work. Both Hunt and Reed hoped that these contests could provide a fresh opportunity for the Labour right to oust Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party.

In the event the mixed results, with Labour retaining its seat in Stoke Central but losing Copeland to the Tories, do not appear to have given the Blairites sufficient confidence to attempt a further coup at this point. Even so, [Tom Watson's strategy of slow strangulation](#) - attempting to 'hem-in' and paralyse Corbyn with the hope of forcing his resignation - is continuing to intensify.

Over the subsequent weekend, a barrage of abuse was aimed at Jeremy. The whole of the capitalist media, the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party and a range of discredited political figures, have all joined in the chorus of attacks.

A number of right-wing trade union leaders have also jumped on the anti-Corbyn bandwagon. This includes Dave Prentis, the general secretary of Unison, John Hannett, leader of Usdaw, and [Gerard Coyne, who is being backed to the hilt by the establishment](#) in his attempt to oust Len McCluskey as general secretary of Unite the Union.

Indeed, this relentless anti-Corbyn campaign by the Labour right was a big factor in the byelection results themselves. [Tony Blair's personal intervention](#), attacking Corbyn and setting out a case to reverse the EU referendum result, was a deliberate act of sabotage. It was specifically timed to coincide with the final stretch of the byelection campaigns.

Blair's toxic legacy

But in truth it is Blair's own toxic legacy that has led to the steady decline of the Labour vote in these seats, both of which could once have been labelled Labour 'heartlands'. Under the leadership of Blair, Brown and Miliband, [Labour's Copeland majority was reduced](#) from 11,996 in 1997 to 2,564 in 2015. This had already had the effect of turning the seat, held by the party since 1935, into a marginal one.

Similarly, while Labour had retained a more substantial majority in Stoke Central, its margin had [declined on an even greater scale](#) during this period. In 1997 the Labour candidate, Mark Fisher, received 26,662 votes, a majority of 19,924. This fell to 12,220 for Tristram Hunt in 2015, a majority of 5,179; and now Gareth Snell has polled just 7,853 votes in the byelection, a majority of 2,620. It is the gross betrayals of New Labour politicians both at a national and at a local level, where they have been responsible for devastating council cuts, that has allowed a space for the populist right to gain ground.

Ukip's setback

Nevertheless, Labour's victory this week has dealt a significant blow to Paul Nuttall's Ukip, that lost the Stoke Central election despite an 'all-out' campaign in an area in which EU 'leave' voters outnumbered those who backed 'remain' [by more than two to one](#). Nuttall's [alleged lies over his address](#), and more appallingly [over the Hillsborough disaster](#) - which was compounded by the deeply offensive [comments of Ukip donor Aaron Banks](#) - clearly contributed to this.

That said, Ukip's failure to make a substantial breakthrough in Stoke serves as a reminder that the vote to leave the EU was no endorsement of the bigoted politics of Farage and Co. [Overwhelmingly, it was an expression of bitter class anger](#). No wonder that people in Stoke, which has suffered immensely from decades of de-industrialisation, austerity and poverty wages, voted by such a large majority in the referendum to strike a blow against the Tories and the establishment.

That's why Jeremy Corbyn's early concession to the right in his own party, [retreating from his historic position of opposing the European Union](#) on the basis that it is a capitalist club that acts in the interests of big business, was such a serious mistake. Had he stuck to his guns and led an internationalist exit campaign on an independent pro-working class basis, it could have transformed the political situation and severely undermined the bigoted divide-and-rule approach of Ukip.

Despite this, Corbyn's election and re-election as Labour leader showed the deep-going desire that exists for a break with the politics of Blairism. *John McDonnell was correct [when he wrote in an article published on Sunday](#) that the campaign of attacks on Corbyn amount to an attempt at a 'soft coup'*. However, in the view of the Socialist Party, he and John McDonnell have so far failed to draw the necessary conclusions from this.

This is reflected in the fact that John McDonnell [quickly retreated on his comments when they were flagged up in the mainstream media](#) and drew attack from the right. An almost constant sense that Corbyn and his few parliamentary allies are retreating under fire is only serving to embolden their right-wing adversaries who increasingly scent blood.

Surge into Labour

Since [Corbyn's second victory as Labour leader](#) in September 2016, the membership of the Labour Party has swelled to more than half a million people. The vast majority of these were freshly enthused by the anti-austerity, anti-war stance taken by Jeremy and furious at the persistent attempts of the right to undermine this.

Despite his widespread support among the membership, the vast majority of Labour's MPs, councillors and bureaucratic machinery remain implacably opposed to his leadership.

Notwithstanding what will be claimed in the wake of these byelections, this opposition does not stem fundamentally from concern about Corbyn's personal appeal or electability. Indeed, if that were their primary concern, they would not be wasting so much energy in actions which serve to undermine these very things.

The reality is that this is about the far more fundamental question of what the Labour Party is for - in whose class interests it should stand. The New Labour project was designed to break any influence which working class people were able to have over the party - to make it a 'safe pair of hands' for the capitalist class. Corbyn's leadership, and the huge support that it generated, threatens to fatally undermine this project. This explains the vicious consistency of the campaign being waged by the capitalist establishment against Corbyn.

Lack of clarity and appeal

But Jeremy is making a serious mistake [if he thinks that a 'compromise' can be reached](#) with the right within the party. In fact, since his election win, the only compromising there has been has come from the side of the left. This has contributed to the utter confusion felt by a large section of working class people as to what Labour actually stands for.

The very popular policies which Corbyn was elected on - the renationalisation of the railways, a £10 an hour minimum wage, and so on - have been muffled by the right so as to lose their force. The strategy of appeasement, which has characterised Corbyn's leadership, will only demoralise his supporters and further confuse and disorientate the wider working class.

In Copeland, the Tories (despite being deeply divided themselves) were able to exploit this lack of clarity. In particular, they attempted to stoke fears that Jeremy Corbyn's opposition to nuclear power could lead to Labour allowing thousands of jobs to go in an area in which a nuclear power plant is the largest employer. Had Labour advanced a clear programme on the issue - with nationalisation of the energy companies and a guarantee of no job losses at its core - this would have helped cut across this cynical ploy by the Tories.

The fact that neither Gareth Snell, the candidate in Stoke Central, nor Gillian Troughton in Copeland, were supporters of Corbyn is a result of the failure to organise the hundreds of thousands of people who have joined Labour to act effectively against the right.

An effective fight would include [reintroducing mandatory re-selection](#) of MPs, to give Labour Party members a democratic say in who represents them in elections.

The [utterly undemocratic, top-down constitution of Momentum](#), as well as its leadership's policy of excluding socialists [and mirroring](#) the [Labour machinery's witch-hunting policies](#), mean that organisation is not up to task.

These byelection results will be used by the right to attempt to tighten their grip and further undermine Corbyn's leadership. Only a change in course by Corbyn, with a ferocious campaign to drive out the Blairites and re-found the Labour Party on a genuinely democratic basis, would secure his position as Labour leader and enable him to deliver urgently needed anti-austerity and socialist policies.

NB: The sentences in italics are updates that were added to the online version of this editorial on 28.2.17

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Debates on building the anti-Trump movement

Sarah Sachs-Eldridge, Socialist Party national organiser

Protest has been a major feature of the first months of 2017. On 21 January, the day after Donald Trump's inauguration, a [five million-strong surge of resistance](#) exploded on to the streets of 673 cities and towns worldwide. And thousands have marched and protested since.

The marchers are predominantly young. For this generation, hit hardest by student debt, lack of housing and unemployment, austerity has been the status quo their whole lives.

In response to the bigoted billionaire's divisive policies, the marchers, largely mobilised through their need to act rather than any specific organisation, raise slogans of solidarity, fighting racism and sexism and defending all our rights. Internationalism is a feature of the movement.

The ideas of [mass civil disobedience, including strikes](#), are starting to be debated in the movement and there is enthusiasm for [Socialist Students' call for school, college and university walkouts on 'Day X'](#), when Trump dares to visit.

The Socialist Party's bold socialist slogans found an echo with an important section of this incipient movement. They want an alternative to the capitalist system that Trump, Clinton, May and the Blairites represent and ideas about how to fight them.

Bernie Sanders

In the US the movement to support Bernie Sanders, a self-declared 'democratic socialist', showed the enormous enthusiasm that exists for an alternative to big business politicians. That's why Socialist Alternative (our co-thinkers in the US) [called for Bernie to continue his run for president](#) when he failed to win the Democratic nomination.

Here in Britain the [support for Jeremy Corbyn's leadership challenges](#) revealed the appetite for a break with austerity and Blairism. Socialist ideas - democratic planning and public ownership of key enterprises to meet

the needs of all, and the crucial role the working class can play when organised in changing the world - are needed.

However, there are two rival groupings vying for the leadership of the new potential movement, neither of which offers a clear way forward. On the one hand you have Guardian columnist Owen Jones [attempting to build the Stop Trump Coalition](#).

The list of names Owen has gathered for his coalition includes Tim Farron MP, now leader of the Lib Dems which formed the vicious Con-Dem government with the Tories.

Establishment politicians see the widespread anger against Trump as an opportunity to try to rebuild their authority, proposing a fair capitalism - [but no such thing exists](#). That just eight billionaires own more wealth than half the world reveals the inequality at the heart of capitalism.

In 2003, then Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy spoke to the millions-strong 15 February anti-war demo. But it has since been made clear that neither he nor his pro-capitalist party was anti-war. [Against the objections of the Socialist Party representatives on the Stop the War Coalition committee](#), the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and its allies unfortunately pushed the decision through the committee to give a platform to Kennedy without any public criticisms.

They also refused to allow any speaker on behalf of a socialist organisation. This undoubtedly helped to build up the Lib Dems' 'radical' image, contributing to Cleggmania and the formation of the Con-Dem Coalition.

While 'Farronmania' is unlikely, it is a mistake to give these anti-working class politicians an uncritical platform, especially while arguing as Jones does, that Stop Trump is exciting "because it isn't dominated by any groups or sects for their own interest".

Ideas

Leading a movement should mean helping the most effective ideas that get thrown up become widespread and organising to realise them. Owen Jones has already proved himself incapable of this - [he called for Sanders supporters in the US to switch to Wall Street candidate Hillary Clinton instead of building a party of the 99%](#).

When the second wave of support to defend Jeremy Corbyn against the Blairite coup last summer started to coalesce around the call for deselection of Blairite MPs, something the Socialist Party had been putting forward as invaluable in the civil war in the Labour Party, [Owen Jones attacked and belittled the idea](#).

The [SWP-dominated Stand Up to Racism](#) is the other campaign attempting to control this new movement. But the SWP, in practice, does not put forward a bold socialist programme and shows itself incapable of a democratic method of organising.

We in the Socialist Party stand for the right of all left trends and ideas to have the chance to be heard and for genuine debate. We have a tradition of allowing other left groups to speak in our meetings.

In the [Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition](#) - with the Socialist Party, the SWP and the RMT transport workers' union as the constituent organisations - the Socialist Party is a stalwart defender of democratic decision-making methods. These groupings of Owen Jones and the SWP offer no such opportunity.

It is usual for Socialist Party members to be excluded from speaking at meetings the SWP have organised. In the current anti-Trump movement they have taken that method further by attempting to physically block Socialist Party activists from distributing our leaflets, papers and placards. They will not succeed in this but their methods are utterly wrong and, like Owen Jones's, will not be of use to the new movement rising.

"I worked from 9am to 11.30pm with only one break"

A zero-hour contract worker speaks to the Socialist

The number of workers employed on zero-hour contracts is [set to rise to over 1 million for the first time](#). The Socialist spoke to Hannah, who is 'employed' on one.

The Socialist: Where did you work?

Hannah: I worked for a bar and restaurant over Christmas.

How many people were employed there?

There were 20-30 of us although I could never be completely sure - I often didn't see some of the other employees as we worked very different shifts.

When did you start work?

I started working in November 2016 and was there for about a month and a half. There was no mention of work stopping, I just had my last shift on New Year's Eve and then nothing. I know at least one other employee has had no shifts since then.

Have you contacted the employer about getting more shifts?

I called a week after New Year's Eve and they said they would contact me if any more work became available. I then called them two weeks later when I hadn't heard anything and they said they would probably not need me until Mother's Day!

Had anyone considered joining a union?

No, I just wanted to walk into an easy job and not have to worry as I have my studies to think about. I just didn't see the point of joining a union as they [the employers] would just see you as a pain rather than a positive to the company.

What were the conditions like at work?

At times it could be pretty draining. For me, the worst day was when we had a wedding reception booked in. We had to work from 9am to 11.30pm and I was only allowed one cigarette break throughout that entire time. Near the end of the shift one of the chefs offered to make us sandwiches because he could see how drained we were.

Are you still considered to be an employee even though you're getting no hours?

I am, although I've just got a new job because it's clear I wasn't getting any hours. I've been very up front with my new employer and told them not to screw me around on hours but it's another zero-hour contract because that's all I could get.

Would you want to see [zero-hour contracts scrapped](#)?

Absolutely. They are just a way to give the workers no rights

Would you join a trade union if your union helped you and your colleagues to organise effectively against zero-hours contracts?

Yes, it's something I'm actually thinking about now as I'm about to start a new zero-hour job.

Warehouse workers walk out over pay and pensions

Isabelle Grant, Leeds Socialist Party

GMB members at Spectrum for Arcadia in Leeds are on strike over pay. Over 70 joined the picket lines on 24 February.

The employers are using the excuse of the introduction of [the Tories' 'living wage'](#) to refuse to give any increase to those members of staff on that rate.

Not only that, but these staff are also not allowed to pay into the higher contribution pension payment scheme even though some of them have been working in the warehouse for over 30 years.

The Arcadia group were the former owners of BHS, [and asset-stripped the retail chain](#). Some of the same mistakes are being made again - merging of brands, underfunding of equipment and staff being expected to fix it when it breaks. Additionally the work is actually operated by logistics contractor DHL, which, like many distribution centres, uses agency labour, often on a much more insecure basis than permanent staff.

And for these failings it won't be Arcadia group owner Sir Philip Green that will pay the price - [like at BHS, it will be the workers](#).

The Socialist Party calls for an end to low pay at Spectrum, no to a multi-tier workforce, giving agency staff the right to a permanent contract and the same pay, terms and conditions as the permanent workforce.

- Donations to the strike fund can be made at gmb.org.uk/topshop

Derby teaching assistants continue fight against £6,000 a year pay cut

Ian Hunter, Derby Socialist Party

Derby's teaching assistants and support staff are striking at schools across the city for five consecutive days from 27 February. This follows two days of action following half-term and a 24-hour vigil outside the council offices.

The campaign has gathered momentum and [strike action has escalated](#) since June 2016 when the council imposed new contracts with severe cuts in hours and pay for many. Local government union Unison says that staff are on average £94 a week worse off.

The campaign has garnered much public support. The council, which recently announced another £14 million of cuts and a 5% council tax rise, seems intent on sitting out the dispute. But this intransigence has only fuelled the commitment and determination of the workers.

Support for the strikers and requests to the council to end the dispute from Jeremy Corbyn have been ignored.

Unison rejected a £1.1 million 'package' and in response the council has rejected a Unison suggestion of a 'settlement' costing close to £5 million.

Until June 2016 level two teaching assistants in Derby received £21,000 a year, but after a cut to term time-only working now receive £15,000 a year - a reduction of almost 30%.

As one of the teaching assistants commented: "[We've lost 25% of our pay](#), we're all struggling and we need to reverse the council's decision."

Picturehouse strikers blockade Leicester Square

Clare Doyle

Strikers from Picturehouse cinemas in [Brixton](#), [Crouch End](#), [Hackney](#) and Central, gathered in Leicester Square on Saturday 25 February to make a big noise about the way their demands are being ignored. They are mostly young and very angry that their employer, [Cineworld, which makes tens of millions of pounds of profit a year](#), refuses to pay them the London Living Wage (£9.75 an hour) or cover sickness and maternity leave. The company's boss is on £1.2 million - £575 an hour!

The cinema workers are members of the union Bectu, which is now part of the union Prospect, and a number of union officials joined other supporters on the demo. The Empire in Leicester Square was chosen as a target for the demonstration as [Cineworld has just found a cool £92 million to buy the chain](#) that this prestigious cinema belongs to.

At one point in the afternoon, a lively march with whistles and flares made its way around the block to the headquarters of Cineworld and past another couple of its cinemas (including Central where managers were struggling to keep the place open). It came noisily back to the square through China Town.

The message of the strikers was conveyed to as wide an audience as possible with live-streaming of the whole event. There were placards and leaflets, music and drums, as well as chants and speeches. When John McDonnell, Shadow Chancellor, made it to the demo, his expression of full support for the strikes - from himself and Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn - was warmly received. The struggle goes on.

Picturehouse strikers demonstrate

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Ford workers demand answers to Bridgend plant sourcing questions

Rob Williams, former Swansea plant convenor and National Shop Stewards Network chair

Ford workers in Bridgend, south Wales, want answers to the lack of sourcing which is putting the whole future of the Bridgend engine plant in doubt.

When the sourcing plans came out for UK plants, there was investment announced for Dagenham, Halewood and Dunton but there is virtual silence for Bridgend. Two contracts at the plant are finishing soon, while new projections for production of the Dragon engine have been cut in half.

Ford is saying that the 1,850 jobs are 'unaffected' but workers aren't stupid, they know that sourcing for engines has to be secured immediately.

[Workers in Swansea](#) and [Southampton know what it's like](#) when Ford lets a plant die. All of a sudden they become vague about future plans. The union is correct to demand answers now. In 2000 there were over 50,000 workers employed in Ford UK, now there are just around 10,000! It's clear what the trajectory is.

Unless the company confirms sourcing that maintains the present workforce on nationally agreed pay, terms and conditions and pensions, the unions must build a campaign for industrial action. But it must be national - the closures happened when plants were left isolated. If Bridgend closes, it will mean the other plants are left in a weaker position and closer to the end.

[Alongside Port Talbot steelworks](#), this plant is absolutely crucial to Ford workers and their families but also the communities and wider Welsh economy. Last year, [a tremendous campaign made it politically impossible to close the steelworks](#).

The Socialist Party unapologetically called for the works to be nationalised and taken into public ownership to save the jobs. If the steel unions had built a mass campaign on that demand, linked to the threat of industrial action, it could have been achieved.

The Ford unions must put pressure on the Labour Welsh Assembly to commit to nationalisation if Ford threatens to pull out.

Hearing into alleged rule-breaking by Unison ends

Unison members

The [hearing into rule breaking by public sector union Unison](#) during the 2015 general secretary election ended on 22 February.

Complaints have been made by three candidates in the election - [Socialist Party member Roger Bannister](#), Unison local government head Heather Wakefield and Barnet branch secretary John Burgess.

The fourth complainant is Jon Rogers, a greater London executive member.

Most of the complaints centre on a staff meeting held in London in October 2015 which, [contrary to union rules, was used to organise support for incumbent general secretary Dave Prentis](#).

This last day was set aside for summary statements, and had a more legalistic focus than the first three days in December, when a number of Unison officials made some surprising revelations about behind the scenes machinations in the union, and were clearly uncomfortable under cross examination.

Towards the close of the hearing, Judge Mary Stacey announced her intention to include in her ruling a "finding of fact" on whether or not Dave Prentis had any direct connection with the meeting in question.

A finding that he had such a connection would be extremely damaging to Prentis's reputation.

Of key importance to all parties is whether or not the judge orders the election to be rerun.

The ruling is not expected for several weeks.

Leeds: Protest against tip stealing

Unite activists demonstrated outside Malmaison hotels to fight [against tip stealing](#) and workplace bullying. In Leeds, Malmaison was hosting a wedding fair to show what facilities it had as a wedding venue. Activists went into the wedding fair and pretended to be planning their weddings. A photo was then taken in the wedding fair holding up Unite the Union signs.

On seeing the signs, staff asked us to leave and one member of staff tried to take the phone off one of the protesters. Despite the attempts of management we managed to get some pictures before peacefully leaving.

We then set up speakers and flags outside Malmaison and handed out leaflets telling people about the mistreatment of staff as well as informing staff members of their right to unionise.

We call for [all workers to be given 100% of their tips](#), an end to workplace discrimination and [a real living wage for all staff](#).

Maddy Steeds

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BA Mixed Fleet cabin crew announce more strike days

"BBC where are you?" was chanted by a lively and very loud Unite protest of striking British Airways cabin crew outside the Corporation's London HQ on 23rd February. They then jumped on the tube to ITV's studios on the South Bank to wave banners and flags as 'This Morning' was being broadcast live!

The low-paid workers are furious that the main terrestrial broadcasters have virtually ignored their dispute. The crew finished a four-day stoppage on Saturday 25th February; The next planned strike - seven days from 3rd March - will take the number of strike days up to 26 this year.

The [workers on the newer Mixed Fleet contract are on just £12,000](#) a year basic pay, with terms and conditions also totally inferior to the original agreement. Crew talk of having to sleep in their cars because they can't afford to drive home! Yet the response of 'British Airways' is to withdraw staff travel entitlement and bonuses rather than properly negotiate with Unite.

To make the point about [BA's intimidation tactics](#), the protest moved on to Acas to call out the company. Yet BA's parent company IAG [increased its profits last year by 64% to €1.4 billion and infamous CEO Willie Walsh earned €8.8 million!](#) Isn't this yet more evidence that BA should be renationalised?

But these workers aren't going to be bullied. Nearly 1,000 new members have joined the union since the start of the action, taking the membership to nearly 3,000. Management continues to refuse to talk properly to resolve the dispute. Rob Williams from the National Shop Stewards Network and Helen Pattison from Youth Fight for Jobs joined the protests to give solidarity and support.

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RMT plans protest against 'driver only' Merseyrail trains

On 7 March 2017 at 9.30am the RMT union will be staging a protest in Derby Square, Liverpool, against the introduction of ['driver only operated' trains](#) on Merseyrail.

I intend to support this protest to show my support for this campaign and my solidarity with the RMT. Driver only trains will result in a loss of conductor jobs and an increase in risk to rail passengers.

Studies indicate that accidents getting on and off trains would increase if there is no conductor on the train,

and passengers feel more secure if there is a conductor on board trains to deal with problems such as anti-social behaviour, crime and on-board accidents of one sort or another.

Labour's role in this is disgraceful - councillors are pushing it through, local MPs are making no comment. As TUSC metro-mayoral spokesperson I will continue to hold them to account on this.

I believe Merseyrail, and the wider public transport network, should be returned to full public ownership and run under democratic control including by trade unions and the travelling public.

Roger Bannister, Trades Unionist and Socialist Coalition Liverpool City Region Metro Mayor spokesperson

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Southern Rail strike continues

The RMT Southern Rail guards picket line was out again in force outside Victoria station for the latest strike on 22 February. RMT members were buoyed up by [the vote of Aslef drivers to reject the rotten deal](#) as well as by the continuing public support they are getting from rail users and passers-by.

See socialistparty.org.uk/articles/24653 for more on the dispute.

May Day greetings in the Socialist

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Salford: Unions demand that Corbyn-supporting mayor protects services

Steven North, Salford City UNISON branch secretary (personal capacity)

Approximately 100 people attended a lively demonstration on Wednesday 22nd February outside Salford City Council's budget meeting. Their collective demand was that the Labour council, led by Corbyn-supporting city mayor Paul Dennett, should refuse to make cuts that would negatively affect the lives of people in the 24th most deprived locality in the UK.

The bulk of the protesters were drawn from a community campaign to save Salford's only disabled children's home and from the city council's Regulatory Services department, which despite providing essential services dealing with environmental health, rogue landlords and anti-social behaviour is facing a cut of just under half a million pounds.

The other central reason for the lobby was to demand that [£140,000 of cuts to the Health Improvement Service](#) (passed last year but not implemented) should be written off due to the vital nature of the service.

At the protest, workers commented that relations with the council had greatly improved since Paul Dennett replaced the much-despised Ian Stewart last May. This meant that the trade unions had access to the requisite information to put forward an entirely legal alternative budget that would protect the most vulnerable.

Furthermore, in a welcome change of tone from that of Stewart, mayor Dennett and many Labour councillors came out and spoke with protesters for some time - listening to their concerns and promising to "look into" matters raised.

Unfortunately, despite the warm words from the mayor and the efforts made by the unions to propose an alternative budget, Dennett and his colleagues [passed cuts of almost £16 million](#), to be made over the next 12 months. When moving the cuts, Dennett made clear that the budget could be amended and that reserves could be used if further talks with unions and service users led to agreed outcomes.

The submission from the unions shows that a legal budget that protects key services is possible if the council is prepared to use its reserves. Reserves can only be spent once though, so along with Salford Unison, Socialist Party members argue that Salford City Council should use the next 12 months to campaign for the replacement of those reserves by central government and for an end to the austerity that is blighting working class communities like Salford.

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Bristol cuts: the fight goes on

Protester bitten by private security!

The [£33 million of cuts in the budget passed on 21 February](#) by the council are not acceptable to the people of Bristol. We hear the excuses from the Labour Party that they have no alternative and the Tory government made them do it. But if this is really true, then why do we even bother electing local politicians?

Labour councils could legally choose to [use reserves and prudential borrowing to suspend the cuts and join the fight for more money](#). A united campaign of ordinary people, anti-austerity groups, the trade unions and Labour councils would put huge pressure on the Tory government to capitulate and properly fund local government.

'Transparency'

Bristol's Labour mayor, Marvin Rees, addressed the budget meeting, claiming "transparency is a key commitment". Minutes later the public gallery was cleared by security staff, leaving councillors to discuss the cuts behind closed doors!

Unaccountable private security staff were again deployed by the council as an anti-cuts protest gathered outside city hall

In a shocking incident, Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance (Badaca) campaigner Mike Luff was bitten by security staff as he tried to gain access to the meeting. The violent attack drew blood and the victim was later treated in hospital. Complaints will be followed up against the council.

Badaca spokesperson Tom Baldwin said:

"We saw disgraceful behaviour from Bristol city council. This was not just a vicious assault on one individual, it was an attack on local democracy and on the right to protest. Disgusting as the biting incident was, the most

violent act committed that night took place inside the council chamber itself. Councillors have voted to devastate services that many Bristolians rely on."

Tower Hamlets: There is an alternative, Mr Biggs

Amalia , Tower Hamlets Socialist Party

Just days before International Women's Day, Tower Hamlets council voted through millions of cuts in children's and youth services.

[£58 million of cuts in total were passed](#) by the council - headed by Labour's executive mayor, John Biggs.

Tower Hamlets is a very poor east London borough with the highest percentage of child poverty in the country. If these cuts proceed the problem will just deepen further.

Over 100 protesters filled the council chambers.

Very prominent among the campaigners were women, especially young mums. Presenting a petition, 'Tower Hamlets Mums' said parents in the borough have no idea what will happen to children's centres after 1 April. Many staff will be made redundant.

They also explained how important these services are, not just for their children, but also for them as new mums. Through children's services they are able to meet up and network with each other and get much-needed support.

There was also a group of young people holding slogans against cuts in youth services.

Socialist Party members had a strong presence both outside and inside the council meeting. Hugo Pierre - who previously stood for mayor as a no-cuts TUSC candidate - co-presented a petition against the rise in council tax.

Hugo made it clear that the council should not make any cuts but use its reserves, while building a campaign to demand its cut funding back from Tory central government. Also, [councillors of the Independents Group](#) presented an anti-austerity budget motion.

Mayor Biggs said that he doesn't want to make any cuts but he has to balance the budget. We say we need a peoples' budget and that there is another way - [the way of socialist councillors in 1920s Poplar and 1980s Liverpool](#).

Mayor Biggs and those who voted in favour of the budget should have to face the full force of a mass grassroots campaign from residents who can't afford to pay more and whose lives depend on these vital services.

The Socialist Party will be hosting a public campaign meeting on 30 March, 7.30pm (contact towerhamlets.sp@gmail.com).

- For a detailed guide on how to propose a no-cuts budget [see the TUSC briefing](#)
-

Spelthorne: 'Why we need socialist councillors'

Paul Couchman, Staines Socialist Party

Almost every available Spelthorne firefighter and several from across Surrey joined Fire Brigade Union (FBU) reps, other trade unionists and anti-cuts activists outside Spelthorne Borough Council (SBC) on the

evening of 23 February in Staines.

They were at a lobby organised by Save Our Services in Surrey (SOSIS), calling for a commitment from SBC to stand up against Surrey County Council and defend the current fire service provision of two whole-time, fully crewed fire appliances in the borough.

The lobby was part of [an ongoing campaign by SOSIS](#) which has seen large public meetings, [a demonstration of 200 at Staines fire station](#), a growing petition and a lively day of action in Staines High Street on 18th February. Our campaigning had already led to a U-turn over the planned immediate closure of Staines fire station.

Until yesterday, we had the support of the firefighters, the FBU, Labour Party, Greens, Lib Dems and Socialist Party, in a united call for no cuts in fire service provision.

This sadly appeared to change at the council meeting last night. Cries of "Shame!" and "Betrayal!" were shouted from the packed public gallery and firefighters walked out in disgust - not because of the Tories but due to the turnaround by the Lib Dem and Labour councillors.

Labour councillor Susan Doran had a motion on the agenda, due to be seconded by Lib Dem Ian Beardsmore. This motion would, if passed, clearly commit Spelthorne to a no-cuts position in terms of the fire service - a position unanimously agreed by campaigners. Doran even stopped to speak to the protesters on her way in to the meeting, asking us all to stay for the meeting and to 'back me up'. Neither Doran or Beardsmore nor any other councillors actually attended the lobby.

Defections to Ukip

The [council meeting](#) got off to a bizarre start. Apart from the ceremonial pomp, the singing of the national anthem and prayers, a handful of Tory councillors used the 'minutes' section of the agenda to announce they were leaving the Tory Party and joining Ukip! Allegations of bullying and intimidation by the ruling Tory group flew around the chamber and the animosity between the defectors and their ex-colleagues was palpable. It was like a nest of vipers, biting at each other.

Then came the important motion - what the vast majority of the packed public gallery had come to hear. Councillor Doran moved the motion. The Tories had a prepared amendment which took out the specific call for both fire appliances to be fully staffed - effectively neutering the motion. Doran and Beardsmore were asked if they would accept this and ... they agreed!

'Abject betrayal'

This was nothing less than an abject betrayal of the firefighters and the people of Spelthorne who had put their trust in these individuals to lead the charge against the cuts. In the end it was left to the new Ukip group in typical opportunist fashion to oppose the amendment and vote against the eventual motion because they were opposed to any cuts!

With friends like these who needs enemies? The people of Spelthorne deserve more than being treated as the poor relations of Surrey.

This fiasco shows how important it is to elect principled socialist and trade unionist councillors who will stand firm against the cuts. Many were saying, after the meeting, that SOSIS should stand anti-cuts candidates itself. [This is something that may have to be considered.](#)

We have the County Council elections in May. It would be good if we have one or two TUSC (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition) candidates in Spelthorne.

And we need to build the Socialist Party in Staines and Surrey to make sure there are worthy working class leaders willing and able to defend public services, combat racism and discrimination and support workers in struggle. We can also plan ahead for the next Spelthorne elections in order to give Spelthorne residents a real anti-austerity, socialist choice at the ballot box.

Press release from the local Fire Brigades Union:

Council agrees to maintain two fire engines in Spelthorne

At the Spelthorne Borough Council Meeting on 23rd February, a motion calling for maintaining two fire engines in the borough if the plans to build a new fire station go ahead, was agreed.

This was an improvement on the Surrey County Council decision taken in 2014 to replace the two existing 24/7 Whole-time crewed fire engines at Staines and Sunbury, with one Whole-time and one On Call in a proposed new fire station at Fordingbridge. SCC made its 2014 decision in total disregard to the responses it received to its own Public Consultation, to which 92% of the responses demanded no reduction in fire and emergency service provision within the borough.

Importantly, the provision of the On Call fire engine was subject to the viability of recruiting sufficient On Call firefighters which has since proved unachievable without extending emergency response times by approximately 12 minutes. Hence, the second fire engine option has since been dropped.

So the agreed Spelthorne Borough Council position was a step forward as it gave no option to cut the second fire engine under any circumstances.

The original motion was proposed by the Lib Dems to Spelthorne Borough Council but it was extremely disappointing to then witness the Lib Dems and Labour councillors accept an amendment from the Tories which removed the requirement in the original motion for both fire engines to be crewed 24/7 with immediately available Whole-time crews, which was a U-turn on their position they told the campaigners they were supporting outside the council chambers immediately prior to the meeting taking place.

"Party political bun fighting is certainly not a recognised, robust or risk based approach to community safety or to secure emergency fire and rescue service provision."

The final decision will now be made by Surrey County Council in March where we hope to see councillors do right by their communities, rather than capitulating to the Tory cuts driven majority.

The FBU urges residents to consider prior to the elections in May if they want councillors who will stand up for their communities rather than ones that lack the strength of character to stand their ground in council chambers.

This version of this article was first posted on the Socialist Party website on 24 February 2017 and may vary slightly from the version subsequently printed in The Socialist.

York University: socialists prevent far-right hate speech

Katie Smith, University of York Student Socialists chair

In December 2016 University of York Student Socialists first became aware of a campus society wishing to host [Tommy Robinson - ex-EDL member](#) and current leader of the Islamophobic organisation Pegida in Britain.

Immediately a campaign group was created on social media platforms and the society urged fellow York students to boycott Robinson's guest lecture on "free speech" which would undoubtedly turn into something

far more sinister.

I met with members of campus security staff, following releasing a statement to the Huffington Post regarding plans for a protest on campus. The university was willing to allow us to protest and provide staff to ensure our safety from Robinson and his supporters. But after this meeting Robinson's invitation to speak at the university was withdrawn as the original society which suggested hosting him had pulled out.

This event is an example of why it's always important to contest the presence of the far right: especially when they threaten to spread hate on university campuses. [International Women's Day is about standing up for all women](#) of all backgrounds, and despite Robinson's supporters going on to harass me on Twitter, this will always be a victory I am immensely proud of.

Socialist Party Wales conference report

João Félix, Cardiff Socialist Party

A combative mood was expressed throughout a well-attended Socialist Party Wales 2017 conference.

The first session was introduced by Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary. Peter detailed the [eventful political developments of last year](#), not just in the UK but around the world. In the US, mass resistance has forced Trump to "perform more somersaults than a circus gymnast," he said.

The [growth and political work of the Committee for a Workers' International](#) (CWI - the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated) was also outlined, with a special mention to the brilliant [reunification with our comrades in Spain](#) from Izquierda Revolucionaria.

Contributions from the floor ranged from insights on British and international political developments, to reports of the fight for an anti-austerity alternative in the Labour Party, and analysis of the current situation in Wales, with the possibility of the right wing populists, Ukip, posing a real threat in the valleys.

The afternoon was dedicated to organising the fightback in Wales; including reports on resisting the council cuts, the fight against the closure and relocation of jobcentres, and contesting union elections.

The preparation and role of the Socialist Party and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) in the forthcoming council elections was discussed.

It was also noted that we are the most impactful left-wing political force in Wales, with the Socialist Party's political and practical approach attracting great working class fighters.

An excellent £1,300 fighting fund was raised. It seems the Socialist Party in Wales is well equipped to face the struggles ahead!

Cardiff Socialist Party public meeting

International Women's Day meeting

Thursday 9 March, 7.30pm

'Women and the Russian Revolution'

Speaker: Heather Rawlings, Socialist Women

Old Market Tavern, Trinity Street, Cardiff CF10 1BH

Northern region Socialist Party conference

Our Northern regional conference set the tone for our work in the next period. The main [political discussion on Britain](#) was introduced by Socialist Party executive committee member Ken Douglas.

Party members from Cumbria, Durham, Teesside and Tyneside discussed how we can impact on events in our region, Britain and beyond.

We raised £274 in a fighting fund collection and another £100 on the sale of food and raffle tickets.

Elaine Brunskill

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.

Worse-off women

In London, the [number of people sleeping rough has risen every year](#) since the government began publishing figures in 2010.

Westminster, where [the average price for a flat exceeds £1.3 million](#), has both the largest homeless population in the UK and the most planning applications to build luxurious basements - where the super-rich are now storing their cars, installing their home cinemas, wine cellars and swimming pools.

These aptly named 'iceberg homes', with more space below ground than above it, are sought after by the super-rich. Developers are increasingly choosing to extend the size of existing properties rather than building new ones, which means no pesky 'affordable' housing laws to contend with.

Although land is at a premium in London, purchasing vast swathes of it outside the city is still a popular hobby of the UK's billionaires - inventor James Dyson owns more than the queen!

The Tories like to kid themselves that giving us our two female prime ministers is some kind of magical feminist feat. It has done nothing to improve the lives of ordinary women.

If May was really a champion of women's rights, she might start by addressing the fact that women are disproportionately affected by benefit cuts, shouldering 85% of the burden [according to one estimate](#).

I'd like an underground swimming pool, Theresa, but I spend 70% of my wages on one room in a flat (and I can't swim). Take the wealth off the super-rich 1% - because no one needs a private waterfall in their basement.

Ellen Kenyon Peers, Lewisham, south London

Farm fiends

When is a union not a union? When it's the National Farmers' Union, [according to a report from the 'Ethical Consumer Research Association'](#) - which describes it as an "English agribusiness lobby group."

According to the report, "as food production has globalised and the environmental movement has grown, consensus about how our food should be produced has broken down. Over the last 20 years... the NFU has hardened into an anti-environmental, free-market lobby group."

Using the term 'union' suggests an organisation where members have an equal vote, working in the interests of all workers in the sector. Not so the NFU, which actually works for the short-term interests of a small number of large-scale farm owners, directly against those of smaller farmers.

For example, by supporting mega-dairies which are driving small dairy farmers out of business. The owners of big farms, mostly in the South and East of England, have used the millions they get from EU subsidies to undercut and buy out small farms while outbidding them for any land that comes on the market.

They have also resisted any regulation, especially that favouring conservation, wildlife and the environment - unless big subsidies are attached! Meanwhile small farmers struggle to survive and are driven out of business by even short-term cuts in the price they get from supermarkets for their milk, lamb or vegetables.

But as well as representing the interests of Britain's biggest farmers, the NFU apparently has a structure which allows corporate members, but does not disclose who these are. The Ethical Consumer report raises concerns about a perceived relationship with multinational companies that determine the shape and future of British agriculture and food production - the agrichemical industry and the big supermarkets.

Agrichemical giants like Syngenta, who make the neonicotinoids that are killing bees, and big supermarkets like Tesco, apparently don't just lobby the NFU for support, they could be much closer to it than that. They can - and do - use their relationship with the NFU to put pressure on government, working against smaller farmers, against environmental campaigns, and ultimately against consumers.

Kate Jones, Swansea

Trotsky and Poland

In Poland under Stalinism, many people realised it was totalitarianism, not socialism.

Elections were falsified. The government bureaucracy was saying that power was in the hands of the people but it was not like that at all. It was a perversion of Marxism.

That is why Trotsky was so popular among youth in Warsaw, because he fought against the hypocrisy of Stalinism and the departure from the true ideals of socialism.

In the 1960s, Trotsky's writing became popular among young people discussing underground in Warsaw. The most famous group was centred around Adam Michnik, who at that time considered himself a Trotskyist.

Youth near the city who were studying in Warsaw created a group around Henry Szlajfer. These groups issued an open letter based on the ideology of Trotsky to the ruling Polish United Workers' Party. They were arrested, isolated from society and humiliated. In the late 1960s, some began to move away even from genuine Marxism because they were persecuted.

We all exactly saw the distortion of socialism, everyone saw what was happening around us. Only Trotsky did not betray the true idea of revolution.

Everyone wanted socialism as Trotsky described it. Young people believed in his ideas, and Trotsky was a hero for them. They thought there must be built up a new system based on Trotskyism.

100 years after the Russian revolution, that country lives under Putin's authoritarianism. Real democracy does not exist in Russia. [But the ideas of Trotsky are still remaining.](#)

Agnieszka Ford, Worcester

What we saw

Guardian 'arts critic' Jonathan Jones [nearly exploded with outrage](#) (1 February) that the RA in London is putting on an exhibition of Russian revolutionary art.

His confusion and lies about 1917's socialist revolution were both outrageous and unoriginal. (See '[Smearing socialism by attacking the arts](#)'.)

Surely, then, the far right must be even more beyond the pale? But [Jones has rushed to the defence](#) (22 February) of a small gallery in Hackney, east London, which has been hosting 'alt-right' speakers.

To be sure, he says their politics "repel" him. But apparently not quite so much as socialism.

<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/24799>